REACHING OTHERS: THE RHETORIC OF PROSELYTIZING AND COMMUNITY OF A CHRISTIAN CAMPUS ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the proselytizing rhetoric of a campus religious organization (CRO) using a combination of rhetorical, ethnographic and autoethnographic methods. In order to do this, the study first places CRO within historically and doctrinally within the framework of the Restoration Movement. Secondly the study describes the ways in which proselytizing can be done in a sensitive manner. Seven criteria are proposed in order to gage the sensitivity of proselytizing rhetoric. Next, the study explains how the tools of rhetorical theory and criticism can be applied to a community such as CRO by appropriating some of the tools of an ethnographer. These tools include participant observation and depth interviewing in order to gain access to the rhetoric of a community. An explanation is included in this description as to which communities can be studied as rhetors. Once this is done the worldview into which the rhetoric of CRO attempts to inculcate in others during their proselytizing is described. The study then critiques the techniques used for swaying others toward that worldview using the combination of ethnographic tools and rhetorical criticism in order to evaluate the rhetoric of CRO with regards to sensitivity. This critique shows that according to most of the criteria, CRO’s proselytizing rhetoric is alternatively sensitive and insensitive. Finally the study autoethnographically examines the writing process itself and the limitations of rhetorical criticism and ethnography as tools of studying phenomena with strong spiritual components.
"For song can never bring the Holy Spirit,

but the Holy Spirit does invariably bring a song."

(Tozer, A. W. 1950, p. 70)
DEDICATION:

This study is dedicated to my father, Pastor Walter K. Cline, who instilled in me from my birth his own love of God and a love of language without which I would never have pursued this type of work. I love you, Dad.
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Chapter 1

Placing CRO Historically and Doctrinally

This dissertation will examine and critique the proselytizing rhetoric of a campus religious organization (CRO). Such examination and critique requires some immediate attention to the history of the organization and my relationship as critic of and participant in that organization. Leff (1986) wrote that rhetorical criticism involves “the analysis of the historical and bibliographical circumstances that generate and frame [the rhetoric’s] composition” (p. 380). Such historical contextualization is the primary purpose of this initial chapter.

There is also a secondary purpose for this chapter. That purpose is to introduce the reader to the ways in which the study will progress. This chapter will explain the reason why such a study is of interest and will lay out a roadmap to serve as a guide for the rest of the study.

Furthermore, this chapter will examine some past studies of college student religion and spirituality. This will place the group being studied as well as the study itself in a particular historical context.

CRO is a campus ministry with a history tied to that of the Restoration Movement. This is a Christian movement to review and consider itself before CRO’s place in that movement will be explained. The history of the Restoration Movement is convoluted to say the least. While a decisive date of its inception cannot be agreed upon, most sources place it at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century (Conkin, 1997; Murch, 1963; Osborne, 1953). Most writers put the origin of the movement in the United States; however, even this is occasionally contested (Roberts,
1939). Nonetheless, it was certainly during the turn of that century that the most prominent of the restorers began to share their message and spread it to sufficient numbers to call it a “movement.”

This message was necessarily simple. The reason that simplicity was necessary was that to a large extent, simplicity was the message. Early Restorationists believed that Christianity and the Gospel message were simple and that uneducated, un-ordained people were perfectly capable of understanding it. They believed that the gospel was simply good, commonsense “In the tradition of Locke and the commonsense philosophers” (Conkin, 1997, p.21). They believed that it was complex machinations of humans that convoluted the sacred, perfect teaching of scriptures. Because of this, they rejected all human creeds and cherished

a historic bias against theology, their attitude being set forth in three familiar slogans: 1) ‘Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent; 2) ‘in faith unity, in opinions liberty and in all things charity;’ 3) ‘no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the divine.’ (Osborne, 1953, pp. 389-390).

These slogans seemed to outline a belief that the Bible is all one needed for all things pertaining to physical and spiritual morality.

The Restorationists saw the Bible as being the only thing necessary, but they set the New Testament far above the rest of it. One of the earliest Restorationists, Thomas Campbell, wrote: “The New Testament is the proper and immediate rule, directory and formula, for the New Testament church and for the particular duties of Christians” (Quoted in Murch, 1963, p.50). They believed that the New Testament provided the
correct model for Christians the way that the Old Testament provided a model for the Jewish people. The Old Testament, to Restorationists, was simply a group of stories, useful for instruction, but not the model by which God would have one live today. Their goal was the “restoration of the original New Testament Christianity” (Taylor, 1981, p.7). Their goal was to restore the Church to exactly the way it was in the New Testament, before the coming of Romanism. Thus, they called their movement, the Restoration Movement.

These Restorationists saw, in the New Testament, a simple plan for salvation. They found that the New Testament focused on a few essentials: “preaching, hearing, believing, repenting and being baptized. The Apostles preached, the people heard, then believed then were baptized, then went on their way rejoicing” (Power, 1899, p.46). There were few variants in this simple plan. Some also stressed confession and some stressed the reception of the Holy Spirit (Conkin, 1997).

The Restoration Movement has undergone many schisms since it began. Some groups differ in their opinions as to what it means to “speak where the scriptures speak and be silent where the scriptures are silent.” To the far right, politically speaking, one has the non-denominational, Churches of Christ, which are sometimes called A Cappella or Non-Instrumental. These groups believe that since the New Testament makes no mention of instrumental music during worship that “being silent where the scripture is silent” means, among other things, not using instruments in worship. Their basic rule of thumb is to not allow any “doctrine or practicice that was not specifically [emphasis mine] approved in words of Scripture” (Murch, 1963, p.215).
To the far left one can see the Disciples of Christ, a formal denomination. They tend to follow the exact opposite practice. If a doctrine or practice is not disapproved by the Scripture, they allow it in their churches.

Ranging within this continuum are the various and sundry denominationally independent churches that generally (but not always) go by the names of “Christian Church,” “Church of Christ,” or “Christ’s Church.” In these one can see a range of notions on issues in the interpretation of the New Testament.

Binding all of these together, however, remains a strong desire to restore the church to New Testament teachings. Across all of these varying churches, meetings, sects and denominations, the Restoration Movement still follows the plan of salvation “discovered” in the New Testament early in its history. Because of this commonality of understanding the scriptures, a common bond exists between them that may not always be obvious to outsiders.

For instance, my father went to a nondenominational Restoration Movement bible college, Platte Valley Bible College. He was ordained in a denominationally unaffiliated Restoration Movement church. His early pastorates were in Restoration Movement churches that were not denominationally affiliated. His last two pastorates, however, have been in Disciples of Christ churches. Movement between the various sects of the Restoration Movement by pastors is not common, but is an accepted practice.

For the individual layperson, such as myself, intra-movement churchgoing is even more common. It is common that if one is in a town that does not have a church that is exactly the same as one’s home church; one will go to another church in a branch of the Restoration Movement. I have often sat in on A Cappella services, Disciples of Christ
services, and services of other branches within the Movement. At any of these services I can expect to be served communion, and hear a sermon that will generally end with a call for baptism for the remission of sins.

In the city where I did my graduate studies there are several churches that were part of the Restoration Movement where one can attend Sunday services. Besides these churches I discovered, I came across CRO, a campus ministry within the movement. CRO proved to be exciting because of my desire to find a community of college students who shared many of the beliefs I maintain. I called the campus minister, introduced myself and began attending some of CRO’s events.

CRO defines itself as “a non-denominational Christian community that encourages and challenges students to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ” (Home). In other words, the primary purpose of the organization is to proselytize and indoctrinate those who already have begun to believe. There is a claim that this sort of indoctrination is different than the indoctrination of many other religious organizations:

It seems like everyone has their own idea of what Christianity should be. And with that comes a lot of different ideas of what being a Christian is all about. We were tired of everyone telling us what a Christian was supposed to be and what a Christian was supposed to believe, so we turned back to the original source for the answers to our questions. We studied long and hard to discover what the Bible said about being a Christian, and found out some interesting things as we began to study what God had to say (Who We Are, 2003).

In some ways, CRO desires to proselytize even those who already identify themselves as Christians: “Check us out. What have you got to lose but your idea of what Christianity
Simultaneously interacting with CRO and while studying literature which was necessary to get a master’s degree, and pursuing a doctoral degree, brought the experiences with CRO mentally into dialog with the theoretical and philosophical texts that are necessary for graduate work. In especially stark relief are the proselytizing efforts of the people in CRO. Such interaction begins to raise questions as to the morality of this proselytizing rhetoric. Thinking about this raises questions as to the relationship between proselytizing in particular and rhetoric in general. Such interaction makes one wonder whether or not (or to what extent) the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO hurts people. One needs to understand how such hurt could be limited or perhaps even halted while compromising this theology to the least extent possible.

All of which leads to a single important question which is the primary purpose of this study: Are the proselytizing methods of Campus Religious Organization sensitive to those who they are trying to convert and indoctrinate? This question leads to six others. Can proselytizing rhetoric be done in a sensitive way at all? If not, what are the implications, not just for religion but for communication in general? If so, what would the criteria have to be for deciding what is sensitive, and how would those criteria be developed? How can one go about the process of applying those criteria to CRO? What would be different about the study of the rhetoric of a community, that is, to see a community, specifically CRO, as rhetor itself, instead of simply a collective of individual rhetors? What artifacts can function as units of analysis for the rhetorical study of a community? To what extent would my own biases and ethics affect such a study.
In rhetorical studies there are good reasons for these questions. First, there is the potential usefulness to those wishing to proselytize in a sensitive way. Second proselytizing rhetoric, as an extreme case of persuasion, has implications generally for rhetorical theory and practice. Third, examining the rhetoric of a community such as CRO provides a new and different challenge for rhetorical scholars which will provide new insights that much traditional rhetorical scholarship has left behind.

In common parlance “proselytization” and its grammatical variants have become dirty words. We often associate them with overbearing evangelists telling us that we are going to Hell: “He was on campus again today, proselytizing.” We have brought them together with the evils, slavery and dehumanization of colonization: “You are trying to westernize, proselytize and otherwise dehumanize these people.” We think of the annoying Jehovah’s Witnesses who bother us at home on a Saturday afternoon while we are trying to quietly drink a beer, watch T.V. or read a book: “No soliciting or proselytizing.” Within our everyday conversation, proselytizing has become a bad thing to do.

Beyond this, our academic discourse has also labeled proselytizing as offensive. Thangaraj (1999) has placed the idea of proselytizing in a context of “coercing others to accept membership in a group” (p. 337). Heideman (1996) has explained that the word is associated with an attitude which is “arrogant and lack[s] respect,” is “disruptive of peace” and also disrupts “cultures and personal relationships” (p. 11). Copley (1997) agrees that proselytizing is “a threat to traditional way of life” (p. 4). All of these concepts are tied up with the contemporary use of the word “proselytization,” and it is in
this less sensitive manner that should inform any discourse about the sensitivity of proselytizing.

After all, a word’s meaning does not exist in vacuum. It is part of a historical and social construction which often has little to do with its etymology. There is strength, passion and conviction on the part of the proselytizing orator that one may have difficulty imagining in any other mode or genre of address. Furthermore, perhaps the historical baggage that this word carries can help practitioners of proselytization protect themselves from falling into its historical ethical traps, just as contemporary discussion of “empty rhetoric” becomes the warning sign for contemporary rhetoricians. In the case of the proselytizer, perhaps she or he will be able to engage in this vocation with a certain amount of sensitivity which has been lacking (to say the least) in the past and that basic ethics demands. Thus, this writer is led to the seemingly oxymoronic construction of the sensitive proselytizer who practices a sensitive form of proselytizing rhetoric.

Proselytizing is an essential part of many world religions. In fact, the method whereby they became world religions and maintain their status as world religions is due, in large part, to their proselytizing efforts. In Islam, for example, there is the important tenet of the da’wa which Ali Köse (1996) described as “spreading of Islam” (p. 25). He goes on to say that in an active da’wa the members will have “seminars, lectures and the like . . . arranged in mosques, schools and Islamic organizations to draw different kinds of people” (p. 28). He says that Muslims must recognize the da’wa “as the center of Islamic life” (p. 29). Without proselytization, it is not Islam.

The same is true of many forms of Christianity including those Christian churches associated with the Restoration Movement. According to this interpretation of scripture,
one of the last and most important commands that Jesus Christ gave was to “go and make
disciples of all nations: baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew
28:19-20). This passage, known as the Great Commission, sets forth the goals for
Christians and the reason for being Christian. Christians who believe in an omnipotent
God share the belief that God could have easily taken the reformed to Heaven the
moment they accepted grace, but that God chose to leave them on Earth to share the
Christian message with others. Those with whom the message was shared would then
share the message with even more people. This Commission, and the proselytizing that is
associated with it, are seen as the primary reason to the Christian who accepts these
premises for continuing to exist in material reality after their acceptance of the religion.

One finds similar commands in multiple religions throughout the world. Even if a
religion were to not contain such impetus explicitly, it is certainly implicit in those that
believe in some sort of reward or punishment after death, something which a majority of
Americans regardless of particular religion believe (U.S. Public Opinion Polls on
Religion, 2003). In fact, it must be. If a person has found the way to escape an afterlife or
next-life of torture and torment, and that person keeps it a secret, this would be morally
unconscionable! Even among those groups who believe in a “level of reward” afterlife
system, with no punishment, failing to attempt to convince the other person is to deny her
or him that reward. We are not only talking about matters of life and death when we
discuss religions for those who believe in this type of afterlife, but of something far more
important both individually and collectively. We are talking about eternity. For those
persuading from this position it is clear that faculties of argumentation and intentional
alteration of worldviews by symbolic means should be functioning at their most efficacious level.

Furthermore, even where there is not a statutory and moral imperative toward proselytization, it would still occur because it is a part of human nature. If I find a car that gets 156 miles per gallon, seats 18 people comfortably and costs less than a thousand dollars, I am going to tell my friends, neighbors, students and colleagues. I am going to do my utmost to convince them that, not only is this the car for me, but for them as well. To many people the religion which they have just accepted as their own truly seems to be something as wonderful. Even in less extreme situations, however, people naturally persuade. This is clear to anyone who has ever felt frustration with a friend or colleague who has not tried a restaurant that one has gloriously recommended.

Religion is no exception to this general desire to persuade. Köse quoted one convert to Islam as saying, “I can’t imagine any one reason why anybody should reject Islam if they really understand what Islam is all about. It is something perfectly reasonable and rational” (1996 p.28). In another instance, the reverend Samson Occom, a Native American minister towards the end of the 18th century, wrote that as soon as he became a Christian, he “had an uncommon Pity and Compassion to my Poor Brethren According to the Flesh” and “used to frequently talk with our Indians Concerning Religion” (1994 p. 57). This was before he could read or had heard about the Great Commission. When a human being has something which that person considers great, the one who has it wants other people to know.

There is another important reason why those who study rhetoric should be interested in proselytization. That is the extent to which all rhetoric is, in a way,
proselytizing rhetoric. Indeed, an important part of my own desire to undertake this project stemmed from a passage by Copley (1997) where he discussed the history of proselytizing in India. In the first chapter of that book he wrote: “No liberal intellectual can feel at ease with the arrogance and intolerance inherent in any [italics mine] attempt to bend the minds of others to a new set of beliefs” (p. 3). This phrase seemed surprising because there are those that argue the primary function of liberal intellectualism is and always has been to “bend minds.” If we are not working to change minds, then what are we working to do? Is the function of rhetoric not “adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas” (Bryant 1954/1953 p.282)? Copley’s argument seems to reject such adjustment of people.

Perhaps one could argue that Copley’s comment should be read as limited to religious persuasion. Perhaps he is not spelling the doom of rhetoric, merely of religious proselytization. This reasoning is partially arguable because Copley specifically says any attempt to sway people’s minds. Still, due to the over-all context of the book, one could suppose that in a moment of slow wit one could grant the assumption that he was referring exclusively to religion. Even if this were the case, the case of proselytizing rhetoric has major implications for rhetoric in general.

Clearly a rejection of all proselytizing would be the rejection of rhetoric when one considers Veenstra and Kooi’s (1978) arguments. They asserted is that “religion is not to be separated from communication and all that is persuasion is religious” (p. 43). They do this by arguing for a more broad definition of religion which is not limited simply to blatantly theological discussions, defining it instead as a “world- and-life view—Weltanshaauung. Religion is not to be confined to instituted churches or the views of cults
or sects. All people have a religion—are religious. Whatever a person uses as a basis for
decisions, for his [sic] value system, for his views of himself and in relation to others, for
his estimation of truth is to be considered his religion” (p.43). When viewed this way, it
is impossible to consider non-religious communication. Rather religion “influences,
determines, guides everything a person says and does, including communication.
Therefore, it is impossible to distinguish between ‘religious’ persuasion and persuasion
per se” (p. 44). Viewed this way religion is akin to Brown’s (1978) conception of
ideology which applies to

[A]ny symbolic construction of the world in whose superordinate ‘name’ human
beings can comprehensively order their experience and subsume their specific
activities. By ‘ideology’ therefore, I do not mean a pejorative ‘false
consciousness.’ I do intend to indicate with the term an affective charge not so
clearly suggested in a name such as ‘categorical framework.’ Which to me would
direct attention away from the interpenetration of symbols and values and which
would—should the reader require such—serve as a polar term for ideology. To
me, an ideology is requisite to any worldview (p. 124).

While I would not go so far as to say that Veenstra and Kooi’s definition of religion
would mirror Brown’s definition of ideology, it is clear that Veenstra and Kooi’s concept
of religion as being the core values from which one communicates enables religion to be
seen as a case of or type of ideology.

Religion becomes, in this context, the central worldview from which all people
persuade, whether theist, atheist, or agnostic. Essentially there is that central, religious
tendency that guides us. Religion understood in this way informs all discourse. If religion
is seen as limited to a number of religious rituals one observes, separated from an ideology and worldview, this might not be the case and other studies could proceed from such a definition. On the other hand, to the extent that religion and ideology are closely related, language and religion are related:

We are all of us preachers in private or public capacities. We have no sooner uttered words than we have given impulse to other people to look at the world, or some small part of it, in our way. Thus caught up in a great web of inter-communication and inter-influence, we speak as rhetoricians affecting one another for good or ill. That is why I must agree with Quintilian that the true orator is the good man [sic], skilled in speaking—good in his formed character and right in his ethical philosophy. When to this he adds fertility in invention and skill in the arts of language, he is entitled to that leadership which tradition accords him (Weaver, 1970 p. 224).

When a person begins to claim, however, that proselytizing is immoral, she or he can no longer preach. They can no longer rhetoricize. They can no longer communicate. They are caught up in a post-modern paralysis where they are unable to act in even the smallest way.

This does not, however, give us the right to trample on others. The negative conceptions of proselytization have arrived for a reason. Horrible atrocities have occurred. People have been more interested in getting bodies to act a certain way than in getting minds to think in a way. Because of this, there has been coercion and not rhetoric which has often passed for proselytization. For that reason, we must endeavor to our utmost to engage in proselytization in a sensitive manner.
The choice of CRO as a site for investigation of proselytizing is partially one of convenience. The relationships which I have built over the past few years with both the membership and leadership of CRO are invaluable in obtaining access to various archived primary source data as well as interviews and direct observation. Second, that CRO has openly shown themselves to be actively involved in encouraging others “to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ” (Home, 2003), means that they clearly attempt to proselytize. Because this is blatantly one purpose of their rhetoric, they make a strong case study for a study of proselytizing rhetoric.

CRO provides an excellent opportunity for expanding the artifacts of rhetorical criticism. I would not be simply studying the discourse of individuals. Instead, I would be studying the rhetoric of a community. This is an extension because rhetorical theory and criticism have been concerned with the exercise and understanding of public address. To serve the purposes of this present study, a rhetorical analysis must appropriate certain methods of the anthropologist to gain access to the persuasive messages of a community. This study can provide a model for future rhetorical theorists who wish to change their units of analysis from the rhetoric of individuals to those of community.

This study would be primarily a rhetorical analysis. Some ethnographic procedures will be used for a portion of data collection and some auto-ethnographic methods will be used to discuss my bias, but rhetorical theory and methods will be the primary heuristic tools that will be used to understand this data.

Methodology

In order to make this a viable possibility, the first portion of this study will inevitably consist of theory and method construction. There are several novelties in a
study such as this one that require that the first procedures deal with the articulation of new rhetorical theory. These novelties exist both in the test which is to be performed and the unit of analysis on which it will be performed. The first process which this study must undertake is the examination and articulation of the possibility of a sensitive rhetoric of proselytization. At least as an abstract possibility, a sensitive proselytizing rhetoric will have to be developed. The process of designing such a form will consist of an examination of previous theories of rhetorical sensitivity as well as theories of conversion and analysis of various conversion narratives. These will be used in order to construct a theory whereby one can gauge the sensitivity of proselytizing rhetoric against the ideal of the sensitive proselytizer.

Next, a method must be developed whereby the study of the rhetoric of a community can be developed. This will include an argument for the use of anthropological techniques, specifically the open ended interview and participant observation in order to gain data to be analyzed using rhetorical criticism. Differences between common anthropological data collection and data collection using similar methods but for rhetorical criticism must be explained. Specifically, the interview and the observation will be seen as examples of drawing out a community’s rhetoric. Once this is accomplished, data collection will be possible.

The data consist of rhetorical artifacts and performances from a variety of sources all generated in some way by the CRO community. Much of the data are publicly available. The publicly available information includes the CRO website, the weekly emails sent out by CRO to anyone who signs up for them, the Campus Connection newsletter published weekly by CRO, and the public worship services performed on
Wednesday nights by CRO. The public nature of these artifacts and performances makes them easy to obtain, and they are readily understood by common types of rhetorical analysis.

I will make use of some data not readily accessible to the public. These include archived power-point presentations used in the worship services, emails sent only to the student-leaders of CRO, and interviews with both the leadership and membership of CRO. Some data, specifically the interview, will be invitations for community members whose rhetoric is not generally publicly performed to contribute this work.

Because of the relationship discussed earlier regarding the relationship between religion and ideology, the analysis will begin with the use of Brown’s concept of ideology as a communication process (1978; 1982; 1986; 1987) to break apart and examine the rhetorical goal of the community. It is clear that any attempt at proselytizing would, by definition, center on what Brown would call an “attention shift” the necessary components of which are:

(1) at least two patterns or interpretive ‘templates’ [must] always be potentially involved in our sizing up a situation; (2) each pattern itself [must] be capable of rendering the situation coherent; and (3) movement from one to another—with a consequent restructuring of the situation—[must] be necessary before a ‘switch” will have occurred (Brown, 1982 p. 18).

While this is clear that this is taking place, precisely what template is being switched from and which template is being switched to will have to be decided. Brown’s theory helps importantly what metaphors and methods are used to switch from what template to what other template.
Once this is accomplished a further analysis of the data is possible. This task uses the modes and methods of template switching discovered using Brown’s concepts to apply the test of sensitivity, developed from the theories and analysis completed earlier.

This work contributes to other studies that explore the religiosity of college students. For instance, in her book Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning (2000), Sharon Parks explores a psychological development model of “normal” spiritual developments of the 18-25 year old age group. She discusses a “natural” progression from an authority-bound dualistic notion of morality through complete relativism to what she refers to as “tested commitment” in which some values are held sacred. Parks goes on to discuss how people in administration and educational capacities at colleges and universities can foster an environment which is conducive to spiritual growth. Jon Dalton has referred to the period that Parks discusses as “a time of great potentiality and vulnerability in development, when concerns about individual purpose, meaning and commitment interact with forces of cognitive development, maturation, and social expectations” (2001, p. 18).

The various and sundry ways that different colleges and universities deal administratively with this period of growth are discussed in four phenomenological ethnographic accounts by Conrad Cherry, Betty a Deberg and Amanda Porterfield (2001). They look at a large land-grant institution in the western United States, a historically African American public college in the southern United States, a Jesuit university in the eastern United States and a small liberal arts college in the northern United States. Being primarily phenomenological, this book is far more descriptive than
prescriptive. None-the-less implicit in the thick description are narrations about what works for which students and what is being left out.

Given this ethnographic and psychological study, several authors have developed concrete prescriptions for student affairs and residence life workers for helping students develop spiritually. In a single volume edited by Margaret A. Jablonski (2001), several authors from various disciplines create prescriptions such as these.

The administrative aspects of the college and university are not the only groups about which academic discourse regarding spirituality on campuses has begun. Astin and Astin (1999) have explored the ways in which faculty members have been willing but limited in discussing their faith. Nash (2001) writes that college professors, even at state universities, must also be functioning to help their students develop spiritually. Miller and Ryan (2001) have recommended a number of ways that faculty and staff of the university can acknowledge student spiritual needs, including pointing them to religious organizations.

This is a sampling of the academic work which explores spirituality and religion on campus. What appears to be missing from these studies is a careful understanding of the rhetorical role of a campus organization. In attempting to assess the sensitivity of the proselytizing work of a campus religious organization, this study will begin to fill that void.

Organization

The study is organized in the following ways

1. The first chapter (this chapter) of this work explains the nature and purpose of this study. It introduces CRO through a historical discussion of the affiliation of CRO.
Then it explains that this study is about exploring the rhetoric of the proselytizing efforts of CRO for sensitivity and briefly explains why this is important. The literature regarding current academic discussion of college student spirituality is briefly discussed.

2. The second chapter goes into careful detail explaining the criteria whereby proselytizing rhetoric can be gauged as sensitive or insensitive. This is done through an examination of academic discussions of sensitive rhetoric, rhetorics of conversion and of past conversion narratives. These theoretical perspectives will be brought together in order to theorize a heuristic lens that can be used to examine proselytizing rhetoric.

3. The third chapter examines the possibilities of using a community, rather than the individual rhetor as the unit of analysis for rhetorical study. This examination will include a discussion of when a community can be seen as functioning rhetorically as a community. It will include an explanation of what anthropological tools, especially participant observation and the interview must be appropriated by rhetoricians in order to perform a study at this unit of analysis.

4. In the fourth chapter, CRO is shown to constitute a case in which a community can function as a unit of analysis for a rhetorical study. This chapter explains the ways in which CRO does not merely function as a group of autonomous rhetors working to alter each others’ worldviews, but as a community creating its own worldview and proselytizing others. Brown’s (1978, 1982, 1986, 1987) concepts of ideology as communication process plays a large role in ascertaining and
articulating the worldview that is espoused by this community and discovering the dominant methods and metaphors that work to create and maintain it.

5. In the fifth chapter, CRO’s metaphors and methods identified in chapter four are scrutinized using the heuristic lens described in chapter two. This process exposes cases of insensitivity in CRO’s rhetoric as well as pointing out the aspects of the rhetoric that are functioning sensitively. Possibilities of improving the sensitivity of CRO’s rhetoric are explored.

6. The sixth chapter examines the limits of this study. It examines my own biases and articulates the personal ethic which shaped this study. It includes a discussion of the writing and thought processes that factors into making the choices and the decisions made as I worked. These choices will be critically examined and my own process of ideologizing will be exposed. Furthermore this chapter will examine the limits of rhetoric itself in studying spiritual matters.

7. This chapter concludes the study and discusses the possibilities that a study such as this opens. It will discuss new directions which are possible in rhetoric given the possibility of a community functioning as a rhetorical unit, other possible applications for testing of sensitive proselytizing and the importance of recognizing the ideology of the writing when examining ideologies using methods such as Brown’s.
Chapter 2

In order to begin to analyze the rhetoric of the CRO community for the sensitivity of that rhetoric, one must first understand the possibility of a sensitive proselytizing rhetoric. In order to do this, criteria must be developed which can be used to examine proselytizing rhetoric for sensitivity. Such a list would imagine a sensitive proselytizing rhetoric, to apply discourse identified as proselytizing rhetoric to it. This sensitive proselytizing rhetoric would be offered as standards as a concept a critic can use in assessing artifacts that are within the bounds of proselytizing rhetoric.

This chapter will examine rhetorical theories that deal with sensitivity and theories which deal with conversion or proselytizing in order to construct a sensitive proselytizer. The definition constructed from these theories will become the working definition of sensitivity for later portions of this study. Imbedded in this definition are criteria whereby proselytizing rhetoric can be judged as sensitive or insensitive.

These criteria are not meant to be universal in that another definition for sensitivity in general and sensitive proselytizing in general could be described. Rather they are to be considered complete. The definition and resulting criteria function as an ideology in themselves that provides a mechanism for making examining proselytizing rhetoric for sensitivity.

Certainly there could be definitions of sensitivity which differ from this one. If the readers maintain the notion discussed in the previous chapter that any attempt to sway people’s minds is in and of itself insensitive, the definition proposed for this study will not function for them. The problems with such a worldview were addressed in the previous chapter, and to argue that point again here is unnecessarily redundant. Because
the argument has been made that sensitive persuasive communication and by extension sensitive proselytizing are possible, I can begin to define what constitutes sensitive proselytizing. The definition and criteria being proposed in this study is a way of rendering the sensitivity of proselytizing coherent.

Of course this coherence only exists within a particular cultural milieu. The concept of sensitivity described in this study can be understood as what Troup (1999) describes as a “charitable” reading of a proselytizing act (p. 58 and p. 129). This means that the proselytizing rhetoric needs to be approached epistemologically in the way that it is understood by the rhetors and auditors engaged with the proselytizing rhetoric at the time and place in which the rhetoric takes place. Descriptions of “sensitivity” in general and “sensitive proselytizing” in particular vary depending on the exigent realities in which the rhetoric takes place. The criteria and definitions described in this study are understood and explained within an American tradition of pluralism and a rhetorical tradition which emphasizes the dialogic. Outside of these traditions, other definitions and criteria of what would be “sensitive proselytizing” would need to be outlined. All descriptions of sensitive and insensitive acts on the part of the participants are sensitive or insensitive only in a particular social and historical moment.

In order to construct a method of sensitive proselytization, one must begin with those theories of rhetoric and conversion which already exist. Conversion narratives are an example of a person’s recounting their enlightenment. They are examples of successful proselytization. They have become a genre for rhetorical study and some of these studies can inform our discourse regarding ways to proselytize. Furthermore, there have been numerous rhetorical theories of conversion that take an epistemological or
phenomenological view of the process. A study of these is necessary in order to make the rhetoric I discuss applicable. Finally, the discussions of sensitivity in rhetoric which have come before must become an important part of the sensitive proselytizer being constructed in this work.

The number of conversion narratives that has been studied by academics is considerable. Although a meta-analysis of these studies would be a useful tool, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, representatives are discussed which serve to inform the overall goal of the construction of criteria by which one can judge the sensitivity of proselytizing, especially proselytizing as done by a community such as CRO. Descriptions of the genre as a whole have also been rather ubiquitous, and quite often contradictory.

In Fenggang Yang’s (1999) ethnographic analysis of hundreds of conversion narratives from Chinese converts to evangelical Christianity, he observed three primary factors. One factor was the contextual changes that the people had undergone. In a way, they were off-balance and a change of religion became much easier than it may have been at other times.

The second major factor was the decline in the perception of Western imperialism:

Today this political stigma has been largely removed for several reasons. First, Christian evangelists and preachers have made painstaking efforts to deconstruct modern Chinese history and uncouple Christian evangelism from Western imperialism. These efforts have been effective to a great extent. Second, Western imperialism in China has been gone for many years. The Japanese invasion and
Chinese alliance with the United States in World War II further superceded the historical memory or Western imperialism. Third Christianity has taken on a “Chinese look” with the increase in the numbers of Chinese evangelists, Chinese pastors and Chinese Christian believers. Fourth, for many Chinese, after decades of ‘modern education’ or indoctrination of Marxist universalism, ‘foreignness’ is no longer a problem. And finally, most of today the most advanced societies are “Christian countries” with Christian traditions (p. 93).

The final reason is that it is a response to postmodernism. They feel disconnected and out of place, and so they go to a place where absolutes are preached.

The separation between religion and nationalism, or imperialism, is also important in other accounts of successful conversions. Coleman’s accounts of Russian conversions from the Russian Orthodox religion explains that modernization of Russia made “religion an individual choice, rather than a birthright” (2002 p.95). Being Russian was no longer tied to being Orthodox, and the Baptists were able to convert many people before suppression under the Bolsheviks.

A similar situation is said to have occurred in South Africa during the 1870’s. During some missionary work among the Xhosa “genuinely adopted certain aspects of the European tradition, while at the same time they retained many of the deeply held values of their own African culture” (Thompson 2000 p.169). They were able to hold on to some parts of their former identity, while willingly accepting other aspects.

This partial change which appears to be inherent in conversion narratives sometimes has caused certain critics to speculate about the “realness” of the conversion. For instance, both McLennan (1996) and Griffin (1990) have examined separately the
conversion of the former advisor to President Nixon, Charles Colson. For both of these authors, the conversion was suspect because of the extent to which Colson maintained his right-wing politics following the conversion and perhaps was forgiven for his earlier political and legal blunders in order to reenter politics because of his conversion.

This suspicion of apparent change after conversion is problematic. Colson never claimed that his political affiliation had changed. The Russian Baptists and Christian Xhosa never claimed that their nationality had changed. Yang’s Chinese Christians still hold tightly to their Chinese identity. What they had claimed changed in each of these situations was their religious affirmation. Expecting changes that are not necessarily a part of the identity which the narrator of these conversion narratives has not claimed to change has caused significant problems in the past.

For instance, in Keely McCarthy’s (2001) discussion of Samson Occom’s conversion narrative, he explains to us that for Occom, this negotiation was not easy. Occom “could convert to Christianity, but in the eyes of whites he would always remain Indian” (p. 354). This type of critique, that Occom had not become European and therefore must not have totally embraced Christianity, caused Occom no end of stress. He was certain of his conversion and of his new god, but his new “brothers and sisters” were not sure of him. The fact that there is a new identity does not necessarily mean that everything will change. Still, according to *gestalt* philosophy, a change in one aspect of one’s worldview is bound to change other aspects. That initial change in worldviews is the substance of conversion.

Golden, Berquist and Coleman (1989) have identified three parts towards converting to a new worldview: “(1) awareness of a problem; (2) repentance and
acceptance or the decision stage; and (3) indoctrination or the education stage” (569-570). The end result is a changed worldview: a changed person. The first two stages are the most important to this study. According to their view, whenever a conversion takes place the proselytizer’s first “rhetorical task is to make real a problem in the lives of his [sic] congregation or target audience” (570). In order to do this the speaker must use “a variety of inartistic proofs—especially vivid testimony. Coupled with concrete and forceful language that has the power to evoke images within the listeners and a mixture of artistic proofs—especially heavy doses of pathos—the evangelist goes about his [sic] work” (p. 571). The hearer is supposed to see the experience in a concrete clear way.

The next process is the decision stage. In order to accomplish this, Golden et al do not accept simply, a “yes, I was wrong” in order to constitute a conversion. A mere intellectual assent to the proselytizer’s rhetoric does not constitute a conversion. A decision must be made on the part of the individual that demands action in order to fulfill the need that the proselytizer has created. This action must be one that “symbolizes for the convert both the death of a former life and the rebirth into a new reality” (p. 572). In Christian circles, this may be accomplished by baptism, or coming forward and confessing. At this point, however the proselytizing community has something required of it:

The role played by the congregation or the community cannot be overemphasized. Since the congregation is itself composed of converts, the neophyte can easily identify with them. In turn the community provides comfort, courage, and social support for its members (p. 572).
In the cases of the Russian Baptists and of the Chinese Christians, acceptance into this new community was obvious. For Samson Occom, however, that support was never there. Although, having read Occom, I believe that his conversion was real, I am not convinced, for this reason, that the proselytizers who reached out to him initially were being sensitive. They did not create a new community for him to join. Rather they asked him to leave his old life behind, but could not accept him fully into theirs. There was division without identification, to place it in Burkean terms. Any definition that we design regarding sensitivity in proselytizing, therefore must contain the creation of the new community to go along with the new paradigm.

There is certainly more to being a sensitive proselytizer, however, than providing a community for one’s converts. Overall, the sensitive proselytizer must be a rhetorically sensitive person. A theory of rhetorical sensitivity was developed by Hart and Burks (1972). According to them, the rhetorically sensitive person

(1) tries to accept role taking as part of the human condition, (2) attempts to avoid stylized verbal behavior, (3) is characteristically willing to undergo the strains of adaptation, (4) seeks to distinguish between all information and information acceptable for communication and (5) tries to understand that an idea can be rendered in multi-form ways (p. 76).

These can be valuable steps in creating a sensitive proselytizer. But they do not tell the whole story.

There are several places here where their theory appears to be inadequate to the development of the sensitive proselytizer. First of all “Hart and Burks have recast the concept of instrumental communication by emphasizing relational over pragmatic
rhetorical goal seeking” (Ward, Bluman, & Duria 1982, p.1). This could become problematic because in many ways, creating a convert or converted audience is, to a large extent, a pragmatic goal.

Second, Hart and Burks do not adequately focus on the dialogical and dialectic aspects of rhetoric (Fulkerson 1990). This is a problem because in creating a sensitive proselytizer it is obvious that such a person must be aware of the dialectic that is taking place. The proselytizer must be aware of the fact that she or he is taking a side of the issue and the other person may have another side. To reduce all the varying religious discourses to simply being different ways of articulating the same message is demeaning to many of those who accept their religion as central to their worldview. There is a great deal that can be accepted from Hart and Burks’ theory, but because of its more general focus on sensitive rhetoric instead of proselytizing rhetoric in particular some additions resulting from the theories of conversion and conversion narratives must be made.

Construction of a Sensitive Proselytizer

To begin constructing our sensitive proselytizer we will see what can be and adapted from the rhetorically sensitive person noted by Hart and Burks, and concretizing what has been discovered from looking at theories of conversion and conversion narratives. Using these ideas a definition of seven parts for sensitive proselytizing begins to develop.

First, Hart and Burks’ notion of accepting role taking as part of being human can help proselytizers in several ways: it can help them to understand that they are fulfilling a role in proselytizing; they can know that their role as converter is not the only role with which they interact with the other person; they can come to understand that the person
being proselytized is fulfilling a role both before and after, but only one of many roles. This will help the proselytizer recognize the proselytizing act as performance and allow the drama of the event to unfold, instead of forcing unnatural scene-act ratios\(^1\).

Kenneth Burke in presenting his metaphorical framework of dramatism, the application of dramatic concepts to situations one may not think about as drama, wrote that “it is a principle of drama that the nature of the acts and agents be consistent with the nature of the scene” (1962 p. 3). For the purpose of the definition toward which we are striving, this is to say that there is a time and a place for proselytizing, and certain modes and methods of proselytizing. Across a table, eating lunch, is not a time for a sermon anymore than standing at a lectern before an audience is the appropriate scene for a one-on-one conversation. When a person is fulfilling certain scripted social roles, for instance in an occupation, open proselytizing is probably not appropriate to the situation at all.

The first part of the definition of a sensitive proselytizer, then must include a sensitivity to the role that they are to be playing within a particular scene. The sensitive proselytizer is sensitive to the role that is being played as a proselytizer and recognizes that there are times not to play that role. When this study turns to the rhetoric of CRO in later chapters, one of the aspects which I examined is the extent to which CRO engages in role taking and encourages role taking among its members.

Hart and Burks also recommend attempting to avoid stylized behavior for a sensitive rhetor. This can be applied to a sensitive proselytizer but is slightly problematic: all behavior is somehow stylized. Nonetheless, it is important that the proselytizer speak to those she or he is attempting to proselytize at their own level. This should not be done

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\(^1\) A ratio between scene and acts is a possibility developed by Kenneth Burke as part of his pentad. For extended treatment of the concept of the pentad see Burke (1962).
in a condescending way. Rather jargon used only among in-groups of the faith, for instance, to speak to each other should be avoided. The sensitive proselytizer must remember that the person to whom she or he is speaking is not yet part of this in-group. Learning the lingo can wait until the stages of conversion, indoctrination, discussed earlier after the decision process has already happened.

This means that a sensitive proselytizer should not only be sensitive to the role in which they are functioning at the moment, but should also be sensitive to the level of experience, knowledge and faith of those they are attempting to proselytize have regarding the new worldview. Certainly, initiating someone into any worldview is to initiate them into the vocabulary of that worldview. The use of that vocabulary previous to initiation, however, could easily result in verbal trickery rather than a functional change in worldview. This study examines in chapters to follow the rhetoric of the members of CRO both individually and collectively in order to ascertain the extent to which such vocabulary previous to initiation takes place.

Hart and Burk’s notion of the sensitive rhetor being willing to undergo adaptation can probably be assumed in the case of the sensitive rhetor as well. The proselytizer should be willing to undergo adaptation. The person who she or he is trying to proselytize is being invited to undergo a massive change. This is, however, where it starts to become somewhat problematic. As Fulkerson (1990) points out, this can cause problems with a rhetor’s message: “They [Hart and Burks] use the terms ‘contradictory behavior’ and ‘inconsistent behavior’ interchangeably and contrast both the straw-man concept of ‘total consistency’” (p. 8). The proselytizer needs to maintain a consistent message. Of course, there is no such thing as “total consistency.” The proselytizer might ask to be excused to
use the restroom, admit that she or he is uncertain about something, or sometimes fail to be a perfect picture of what she or he is attempting to portray. Because proselytizing is carried out dialectically, the proselytizer needs to be willing to put his or her arguments to the same tests as the arguments stemming from the worldview that is being changed. The rhetoric of CRO has been examined for its willingness to adapt.

Sensitive proselytizers must be aware at all times of other aspects of *kairos* as well and not all information needs to be given to all people at all times. What I eat for lunch, for instance, is irrelevant to my readers’ understanding this study. For that reason, a sensitive proselytizer must eagerly answer questions in as concise a way as possible. A potential convert to Islam does not have to know the number of times the proselytizer has been to Mecca. They might not even need to know why going to Mecca is important. If they ask, however, they should be told.

This is not always a physical asking. Sensitive proselytizers must be aware of nonverbal communication too. They must watch for a face that asks a question and for a look that says the other party is uninterested or confused. They need to watch the eyes and mouth and know when to pause or stop; otherwise they may lose the opportunity to try again with this person.

In later chapters the rhetoric of CRO as regards this aspect of rhetorical sensitivity and *kairos* will undergo a more thorough treatment. Is their rhetoric being expressed in easily understood and digested amounts, or is it being “shoved down the throat” of the potential convert? Conversely, are adequate and sustaining portions given when necessary to the potential convert or is important information withheld.
The final aspect of rhetorical sensitivity which can be adapted to a sensitive proselytizer, is understanding that there are different ways of saying the same thing. The sensitive proselytizer must understand that sometimes she or he has convinced the person, or the person is already convinced, but saying the same thing differently: they may be using the same definition for different terms. On the other hand, the sensitive proselytizer must be aware when there are important differences that sound strikingly like similarities. Being sensitive to both similarities and differences simultaneously may be the most difficult skill for a sensitive proselytizer to acquire. It is, however, absolutely vital. Wrangling over terms is ludicrous. Leaving ideas alone is dangerous.

The extent to which CRO’s rhetoric is simply inviting a change in terminology has the potential to be a fascinating aspect of my examination of CRO’s rhetoric. Is CRO really converting anyone or are they merely arguing with those who already believe about the particular use of a terminology?

Even with these important adaptations of Hart and Burks’ theory, we still have not fully articulated the sensitive proselytizer. The sensitive proselytizer is not just present for the conversation and the “conversion” but he or she must be willing to be there in one form or another for the long haul.

A sensitive proselytizer must be able to provide a new community with the new paradigm. If a person convinces another to leave a former life, he or she needs to be able to enter a new one that is indeed, a new life. Occom’s sad life as a Native American convert to Christianity illustrates this point perfectly. He was never accepted among the white, English Christians because he was neither white nor English. They asked him to join them, he accepted, and then they refused him entry. No sensitive proselytizer would
ever force his converts into a life of isolation and misery. Until a sensitive proselytizer could get her or his in-group to accept the new people, she or he would not offer them acceptance.

This study considers the extent to which CRO provides an alternative lifestyle, complete with a community for support to those who are giving up their old worldviews. Are listeners being pushed away from their old rhetorical communities without giving them a place to go, or is CRO opening the door to the newly converted in order to provide a place for them? Does CRO do well transferring from some communities and not others? The study will examines the extent to which CRO provides or fails to provide a community to its converts.

Finally, sensitive proselytizers must decide exactly which identity it is that they are attempting to change. People act out their lives in a host of roles which are all equally a part of their identity. A sensitive proselytizer would not try to change a person’s political affiliation, for instance, in order to accept that they have changed their religious identity even if the two are somewhat related. A sensitive proselytizer would not expect a switch in religious affirmations to necessarily coincide with a change in one’s sexual orientation even though the two are often coincidental. A sensitive proselytizer would not expect a person who has stopped drinking to necessarily stop smoking. The sensitive proselytizer would recognize that there is one part of the person’s worldview that they are attempting to alter. They would know that other parts may alter as a result of that change, but they would not worry about some specific part that is only marginally related remains at the margins of that change.
The sensitive proselytizer would meet at least seven characteristics: 1) he or she would recognize the importance of role-taking; 2) he or she would avoid stylized behavior and consider the level of understanding of the potential convert; 3) the sensitive proselytizer must be willing to undergo adaptation and recognize that he or she is being converted as much as converting; 4) sensitive proselytizers will be aware of *kairos* and only give the appropriate amount of information or persuasion at the appropriate time; 5) the sensitive proselytizer will understand that there are different ways of saying the same thing. 6) a sensitive proselytizer must provide a new community to go with the new worldview to the extent that the new worldview will ostracize the convert from his or her previous communities; 7) a sensitive proselytizer must focus only on the identity that he or she is wishing to change in the convert, with the knowledge that other identities may change as a result of the conversion.

Because these criteria were developed primarily from Hart and Burks’ notion of the sensitive proselytizer and Golden *et al*’s concept of the rhetoric of evangelism, both of which envision rhetoric as the CRO of a single rhetor, not of a community or group, they are not enough to critique CRO as an community. The next chapter we will examines the ways in which rhetorical theories that envision rhetoric as an individual act can be adapted to the study of communities through the adoption of some anthropological techniques.
Chapter 3

This chapter is an extension of the application of rhetorical theory as it is generally understood in the field of communication. It argues that rhetoric need not only be conceptualized as the work of single rhetor in which one person persuades or identifies with another but also functions in a community in which people try to convince others and keep themselves convinced. This extension will make it possible to study the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO as a community.

This is an extension because in the field of Communication Studies, rhetorical theory and criticism have been traditionally concerned with the exercise and understanding of public address. In fact it is easy to argue that the separation of the field of Communication Studies from the English departments owes itself in large part to essays such as Wichelns’ landmark essay written in 1925, “The literary criticism of Oratory,” (2000). Wichelns argues that public address be considered equal to, or, indeed, a genre of, literature and as such should be afforded equal treatment by critical writers. Out of the desire of academic rhetoricians to understand and teach public address, the organization which eventually became the National Communication Association developed. Departments of Speech began to appear in colleges and universities throughout the United States the primary function of these departments being to investigate, publish studies and teach rhetoric and public address.

While the practice and criticism of public address has not been, nor should it ever be, abandoned by rhetorical scholars, rhetorical students have also developed a tradition of branching out. Like the ivy that covers the buildings of America’s campuses, rhetoric has wrapped its leaves around nearly every discipline even when it could not fully
penetrate the structures. It is not uncommon for a rhetorical scholar to comment, with varying degrees of levity, to a colleague whose training comes from outside the rhetorical tradition that what she is “really” doing is rhetoric. Besides the occasional quip in a faculty discussion, this has been done in a variety of ways in publication as well. Some, such as McCloskey in her work on the rhetoric of economics, do this by examining the rhetoric that pervades the publications of the various disciplines. One of McCloskey’s most influential attempts at viewing economics through rhetorical theory is The Rhetoric of Economics (1998). Her audience for this book is the group of economic social scientists who McCloskey worries are not adequately informed that their arguments are arguments which exist only in the minds of the writers and readers.

McCloskey hopes to point out to economists that they are engaged in an CRO of persuasion when they write. She hopes to show that the facts do not simply speak for themselves. Rather, the economist is a narrator and the facts are characters developed by the economist and they speak or do not, much as the characters in a book speak or do not, according to the will of the author (pp. 9-10). This does not mean that the economists are just putting in numbers willy-nilly. Rather, the numbers are set up to create valid arguments.

Of course, as with all valid arguments, the conclusion can only be reached by those who already accept the premises. The basic premises with which the rhetor/economist begins are those of “scientific” rules of evidence and statistical significance. McCloskey points out that these mathematical rules and models are metaphors (pp.40-48) which the economist/rhetor uses to prove what she or he already believes. Luckily, other economists also believe them and those who have faith become
persuaded (p. 124) in the standard “believe that ye may know” routine that rhetoricians such as Kenneth Burke have shown exists in all communication.

McCloskey’s goal is not to cause the economists to disbelieve each other. She is not looking for people to throw out the law of demand, for instance. Rather she recommends reflexivity in economic theory which can be derived from the tools of rhetorical theory. She wants the economist to understand that “the efficacy of equilibrium, simultaneous equation, three-stage least squares methods of fitting complete systems of demand equations depends on the authority of traditions about error terms or the appeal of symmetry as an aesthetic principle of specification” (p. 27). She wants the economist to understand that what rhetoricians have understood about all discourses for centuries (namely that they are circularly dependent on themselves and self-replicating) is also true of economic theory discourses.

Another way in which rhetorical scholars have branched out is in the colonization of theory. Rhetoricians have been known to use the works of theorists who would not necessarily consider their work to be a study of rhetoric. A synecdoche of this phenomenon would be the appropriation of Foucault by Cooper and Makay (1988). Although Foucault never considered himself to be a rhetorician, Cooper and Makay make use of his theory in as part of a pluralistic practice of rhetorical criticism. They apply Foucault’s theory of an interconnection of power, discourse and knowledge construction to a series of lectures given by Freud. That is to say that they applied Foucault’s ideas to public address and thereby allowed it to function as a rhetorical theory to extend knowledge of the rhetoric of science.
This chapter continues both traditions and will argue that the study of rhetoric could be informed by ethnographic methods and theory. This expands rhetorical study beyond public address into a study of the discourses of a community. Furthermore, it appropriates certain methods of the anthropologist to gain access to the persuasive messages of a community. In order to accomplish this, this chapter first establishes the concept of a “rhetor community” which functions as the subject of inquiry for an ethnographic version of rhetorical criticism. The chapter delineates some of the differences between traditional rhetorical criticism, ethnographic study, and the rhetorical ethnography.

The Rhetor Community

What truly makes this form or rhetorical criticism different from other forms of rhetorical criticism is the unit of analysis. In general, the individual rhetor, or a rhetorical artifact or set of artifacts produced by that individual rhetor, has been scrutinized by scholars in the past. That is not so much different here, except that instead of an individual rhetor, the community, specifically CRO, is seen as a corporate rhetor. A community which corporately produces rhetoric either for maintaining relevant aspects of the worldviews of those who are part of the community, proselytizing of those outside the community or both would be considered a rhetor community.

The concept of the rhetor community should not be a huge epistemological leap for rhetorical scholars. Burke, after all, pointed out that that rhetoric is primarily a function of identification of a person with a group. Kenneth Burke began to discuss of the implications of identification and division as he worried about Nazi atrocities previous to World War II. His examination of Hitler’s Mein Kampf has become a
Reaching Others

A seminal and often anthologized essay into examining the motives that lie at the heart of identification and division (1973).

Burke discusses, in this essay, the way in which Hitler built identification of the German people. This is based in a normal human desire for unity: “The yearning for unity is so great that people are always willing to meet you halfway if you will give it to them by fiat, by flat statement, regardless of the facts” (1973, p. 205). This is especially true if the group is also able to perceive a division, a scapegoat, from whom the unified whole can divide. For Hitler, this scapegoat came in the form of the Jewish people. He was able to separate the ills of the country by “deflecting the attention from the economic factors involved . . . Hence by attacking ‘Jew finance’ instead of finance, it could stimulate an enthusiastic movement that left ‘Aryan’ finance in control” (p. 204). To take it to a less concrete level, the group with which one identifies inevitably becomes pure only through division from less worthy wholes.

As Burke continued to contemplate this concept of identification and division throughout the rest of his life, he began to understand that this concept is central to the whole or persuasion and rhetoric: “You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying [italics Burke’s] your ways with his” (1962, p. 579). Burke pointed out the ways in which this is commonly done: “For instance, imagine a passage built about a set of oppositions (‘we do this, but they on the other hand do that; we stay here, but they go there; we look up, but they look down’ etc.). Once you grasp the trend of the form, it invites participation regardless of subject matter [all italics Burke’s]” (p. 582). The “we” inevitably becomes the good, pure “us” and is separated from the impure, bad “them.”
Burke did not see the concept of a rhetor community, per se, however. He continued to perceive rhetoric as primarily an individual action in which a rhetor worked to cause an audience to identify with the addressed. Later rhetorical theorists who have used his work have also not focused on the work of identification by a group. Rather, they have been used to examine particular rhetors’ works and explain “historical and sociological back-grounds in order to bring into sharp focus the similar attitudes held by audience and speaker which allow the speaker to identify his purpose with that of the audience, and account for the dissimilar attitudes that frustrate the identification” (Holland, 1953, p.444). A speaker-audience delineation is almost always present. When the speaker and the audience become conflated, however, as happens at CRO a different unit of analysis, specifically the community needs to be examined.

The concept of rhetor community seems to be almost teleologically seated in the Burkean notion of identification. One of Burke’s earliest disciples in rhetorical theory and criticism, Hochmuth, seems to have foreseen it when she lauded Burke’s theory of identification claiming: “The classical notion of clear persuasive intent is not an accurate fit, for describing the ways in which the members of a group promote social cohesion by Acting rhetorically upon one another” (Hochmuth, 1952, p.136).

The rhetor community then would not only be those who identify with each other, but especially those with whom one community separates from other groups or communities. A rhetor community would see itself as somehow different from other communities and derive a social morality from this state. That morality could be used as a narrative within the group in order to ensure conformity. It could also be used to appeal
to those outside the group to forgo their previous impure, out-group notions and identify themselves with this group.

Certainly a single rhetor can help to bring such a group into being, but ultimately it is not the rhetoric of an individual that maintains the cohesiveness when that rhetor is not present. Rather the individual members of the group must make the rhetoric their own. In order for a rhetor community to exist, the members of this community must identify with the rhetoric to the extent that they also become rhetors. It is at this point where one can begin to study the rhetoric of a community like CRO, wherein indoctrination has become so strong that one of the potential audiences is always the other rhetors.

The concept of identification also takes place in a narrative which Bormann refers to as a “rhetorical vision” (1972/2000) which is “subjective worlds of common expectations and meanings” (p.251). Bormann recommended examining group interactions for these themes and using them to “examine the social relationships, the motives, the qualitative impact of the symbolic world as though it were the substance of social reality for those people who participated in the vision” (p. 252). Bormann sees the importance of these stories to help groups understand norms and values and to enlighten the rhetorical critic of a group about the ideologies of that group.

He comes short, however, of discussing the concept of the rhetor community that I am proposing here. He talks about how, in a rhetorical vision, the narratives, which he refers to as “fantasy themes,” tend to “chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication” (p. 250).
Thus the themes become fill-in-the blank stories for overall life in the world. He does not discuss a community’s investment in such narratives. He does not explain the power of the narrative to identify members of a group as exclusive and purifying.

Bormann may have come to a concept similar to my concept of rhetor community if he had expanded his concept of the fantasy theme to come closer to Fisher’s concept of a narrative paradigm. For Bormann, the fantasy theme from which a rhetorical vision is derived “consists of characters, real or fictitious, playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the hear-and-now” (p. 248). This limitation on the fantasy theme seems to exclude the way in which the hear-and-now, so to speak, is narrated. Fisher’s concept of narration is more complex. Walter Fisher wrote, “narratives enable us to understand the actions of others” (1984, p. 8). It would not be stretching Fisher’s narrative paradigm to say that these narratives also explain to one about oneself. For Fisher, people are essentially storytellers. They are “authors and coauthors who creatively read and evaluate the text of life” (Fisher, 1985, p. 86). Neither Fisher nor I are simply referring to stories in the traditional sense. We are not talking about tales that begin, “Once upon a time.” Rather we assume that “all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories” (Fisher, 1989, 57). All communication has characters, plot and setting. That includes communication outside of the restrictions that Bormann would see in his fantasy themes, specifically it also includes the narration of the here-and-now.

Such stories, then, are not merely iterated by a rhetor community. Rather the narratives become a type of hermeneutical device whereby reality is interpreted. And it is this story-telling for which later chapters will search when examining CRO’s rhetoric.
Fisher proposed the criterion of coherence, for analyzing narratives. Fisher identified three parts to a narrative’s coherence: the structural coherence, the material coherence, and the part of coherence that Fisher was the “key difference between the concept of narrative rationality and traditional logics,” characterological coherence (Fisher 1987 p. 47). Characterological coherence is simply every person playing his or her part. Sometimes a rhetor community will have to define a person in a particular way to make sense of their actions.

The structural coherence of a narrative is quite simply the way it holds together. If the narrative were self-contradicting, for instance, the narrative would not have structural coherence. This is probably of little importance to a rhetor community and more important for individual rhetors.

Material coherence is when a person compares and contrasts “stories told in other discourses” (Fisher, 1987, p. 47). It is the material coherence that of the rhetor community that drives its construction. The rhetor community processes input through the narratives that they have already accepted. When new input either from “nature’s” tendency to “intrude upon our fantasies” as Bormann puts it (p.256), or from the input of new narratives a comparison must be made. In a rhetor community, such comparisons are often made verbally. The members of the rhetor community ask each other, how do we make sense of this given what we know? The input is then altered to fit within the narratives of the community. The rhetor community works together to present a comprehensive worldview to its constituents. Every member works rhetorically on every other member to process data in keeping with the epistemology of the group.

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2 Knowledge being the total epistemology of the rhetor community’s accepted narratives.
It is important to remember that when we discuss the rhetor community that we are discussing the epistemology of the group. Not just an epistemology, however but an entire ideology is maintained (and sometimes developed) by a group. A single rhetor can work on an audience to create a particular ideology. Maintaining that ideology in the face of new data, however, is better managed by a group who have all accepted this ideology. Brown posited a process whereby ideologizing occurs. Brown (1978, 1982, 1986, and 1987) claimed that this process was central to the creation of the worldview of humans because of our propensity toward symbol use. According to Brown, “ideology is grounded in the abstracting process of all symbol-making” (1978 p.125). There are three aspects of the necessary abstraction that force ideologies to come into being: “(1) by our very senses, (2) by our reification of some ‘kinds’ and not others, and (3) by the tacitly agreed upon rules for constituting ‘kinds’” (Brown 1978 p. 125). The basic concept that Brown attempts to deliver in this argument is that human abstraction leads to a necessary generalization. This generalization is necessary because the human senses cannot possibly take in all the data of the world around them. Even what they can collect is divided into rhetorically/socially constructed categories within the mind. Those categories, themselves, are dictated by a previously constructed framework. This framework selects which categories can even exist.

In a rhetor community, each of these is done discursively in groups rather than on an individual level. A rhetor community will attune its members to notice particular sensory details and to ignore others. It will construct through narratives a division of the universe. A continual retelling and reapplication of those narratives will reify and reinforce those narratives and give them strength. When a particular member strays from
the ideology, the group will work together with the fallen member to replace that member’s experience within the overall structure of the group’s narrative.

This abstracting and categorizing continues until it reaches “the abstracted dimension of ultimacy, the carrying to its nth degree the principle of perfection available through language symbols” (Brown, 1978 p.126). This final dimension of ultimacy is ideology: “that category of experience on which one is willing to bet the meaning of one’s life” (Brown, 1978 p. 126). Just because one has reached this stage of ultimacy in one’s abstraction does not mean that the process of abstraction, and therefore of ideology creation has stopped. Different forms of rhetorical interventions constantly take place that either affirm or alter the ideology. The next chapter uses Brown’s concept of ideology formation in order to reconstruct the ideology to which CRO is actively maintaining in its members and those ideologies in which it features anomalies.

A rhetor community exists to constantly affirm the ideology of its participants. Outside narratives constantly work to cause the individuals within a group to identify with other groups. This alternate identification would cause a separation from the group with which the participant previously identified. Rhetorical communities exist to reaffirm that connection and to keep in balance the constant ideological shift that is taking place in the individual members. This way the ideologizing system of the individual is kept from being shifted by “every wind of doctrine” so to speak but is still able to constantly receive new input and avoid stagnation.

According to the Brown, a rhetor can work in one of three areas in order to affect a change in ideology. These are the three sub-cycles of social intervention: “the needs sub-cycle, the power sub-cycle and the input switching sub-cycle” (Brown, 1978 p. 135).
The “input-switching sub-cycle” is also quite commonly referred to as the “attention sub-cycle” (Brown, 1982; Gonzalez, 1989; Huang, 1996; Leroux, 1991; Stoner, 1989), because it shifts the attention of the receiver from one data organizing framework to another. If the individual rhetor functions to change a worldview, the rhetor community functions to maintain one.

These three sub-cycles are best viewed holographically. Instead of all three functioning independently, all three are “simultaneously functioning sub-systems” (Stoner, 1989 p. 28). The key to understanding these systems is to constantly remember that their primary attributes are “simultaneity, interrelatedness, and interdependency” (Huang, 1996 p. 10). That is to say that the whole is contained in each of the parts.

An example to explain the working of the ideology-process might be necessary here for clarification. One can consider Melville’s fictional character of Captain Ahab in the well-loved classic Moby-Dick. At some point previous to the beginning of the book, Captain Ahab had a run-in with a white-colored whale which removed his leg. That act (although it could hardly be considered rhetorical in nature) caused a shift of Ahab’s attention. That shift of attention (the attention sub-cycle) changed so that he built up in himself a rhetorical need (the need sub-cycle) to have vengeance on the whale. At the same time, it caused him to ascribe power shares (the power sub-cycle) to whalers and ship personnel who could help him meet that need. Going about this process served to further shift captain Ahab’s attention (attention sub-cycle) towards the white whale. This served to further increase his rhetorical need (need sub-cycle) as is evident when it even surpassed his rhetorical need for money: “whosoever of ye raises me a white headed whale . . . shall have this gold ounce.”
As anyone who has read this book knows, the story of Captain Ahab did not end well for him. This cycle of ever increasing attention, need and power built into an unstable ideology, causing the system to run down. This happens when a “deviance-amplifying state” is induced in which “all omissions and inconsistencies, and contradictions are . . . amplified” (Brown, 1978 p. 135). The rhetor community functions not to amplify these contradiction, rather it functions to maintain an ideology in its members by creating a format to deal with them. In order to explain this, each of the Brown’s sub-cycles should be discussed and their relationship to the rhetor community explained.

The first sub-system to consider is the attention sub-cycle. The only reason that this cycle is chosen first is that it was the first one about which Brown published a separate article (1982). One can begin with any of the cycles, and this one is not “first” in any but a chronological sense. This cycle describes where one gets the data from which one builds one’s world view.

In order to stop a self-destructive cycle, a rhetor may focus on this method. The rhetor making the social intervention “shifts” the view of the person or group from one source of data to another. Before one can say that this is accomplished, three prerequisites must be in place:

(1) at least two patterns or interpretive ‘templates’ [must] always be potentially involved in our sizing up a situation; (2) each pattern itself [must] be capable of rendering the situation coherent; and (3) movement from one to another— with a consequent restructuring of the situation—[must] be necessary before a ‘switch will have occurred (Brown, 1982 p. 18).
If all of these are in place, a rhetor can attempt to shift “the attention of an audience from one specific issue or belief to ideas that subsume the original issue” (Leroux, 1991 p. 36). According to Brown, one can change between varying modes of epistemology, axiology and ontology (1982, p. 22). One does this through “conceived-anomaly-masking and –anomaly-featuring” (p.22). This is done by “shifting levels of interpretation, changing metaphors, and so on” (Stoner, 1989 p. 30). The end result is that a new system of accepting input (either in how one knows (epistemology), how one values (axiology) or how one perceives her or his being (ontology)) develops. Just as in the theory as a whole, each of these parts is effected by the others. A new system of values changes what one views oneself to be, and what sources are acceptable as knowledge. A new system of knowing makes changes in one’s values and one’s sense of who she or he is. A new concept of who one is, brings about new methods of knowing and being. Each of the parts affects and is affected by the other.

Although the working of a rhetor community can also be seen as proactive, it is probably more easily understood if seen as reactionary. When a member of a rhetor community encounters rhetoric which offers an alternative template for examining the world, there is the possibility of undergoing an attention shift. In such a situation, the purpose of the rhetor community is to explain how the previous narratives actually function to make sense of the anomalies that the rhetor had featured. The community functions to re-shift the attention back to the sense making patterns that the participant had used.

The rhetor community, at the same time, can fulfill a proselytizing role. While shifting the attention of the community’s own back, it also has the opportunity to alter the
worldview of the other people who had been affected by the rhetor. Thus new adherents can be brought into the rhetor community and can learn from the new ideology.

A fascinating aspect of Brown’s theory is that a change in the attention cycle also creates a change in the other two sub-cycles. Gonzalez takes it a step further. He posits that, “because these sub-systems are interrelated, the attention switching strategy . . . may be accompanied by a power strategy” (1989, p. 401). What that means is that a rhetor can intentionally work on more than one part of the ideological process at one time, and thus speed up or increase the results.

The second sub-cycle to consider is that of power. This is perhaps the most important of the cycles when explaining the concept of rhetor community. The power sub-cycle develops because “the self is only meaningful in relationship to others” (Stoner, 1989 p.29). A person’s worldview therefore is partially composed of what other people decide about one’s life. For purposes of this theory, Brown defined power as “the collection of shares which individuals or groups have in picking a version of any scenario to be fleshed out in the future” (1986 p. 184). The power sub-cycle deals with ways in which those shares are apportioned. Like the other two sub-systems, the power sub-system is not stagnant but is the “interaction of processes leading to stability and alteration in society” (Brown, 1986 p. 184).

According to Brown, there are four major actors among whom power shares are apportioned. The first one Brown calls “social disorder” (1986, p. 188). This part is a break from community. These seem to be the power shares that one holds in the face of social coercion, values, and structures.
The second is known as the “State” which is whoever has a monopoly on violence (1986, p188). Although in the examples that Brown uses to explain this actor refer to literal use of violence that need not be the case. For instance, an instructor with the ability to fail a student could be seen to be in the state role.

The third actor to whom Brown refers is that of the “Church’ that consists of those taking the role of social arbiters” (1986, p. 188). These are the ones which seem to define social values. They are the people who decide the “shoulds” and “should nots” of a group.

The fourth actor is that of the “Government” (1986, p. 188). Once again, this does not need to be a literal government. This actor is the person or group who gives or fails to give legitimacy to what the other three actors decide. According to Brown (1986), Power is attributed to these four actors to a greater or lesser extent. In this cycle, a rhetor can work to effect any of the four actors.

Although it would be tempting to describe a rhetor community as merely being one of the four figures in the power sub-cycle, I do not believe that this is the case. Rather, the rhetor community functions, as in all cases, as a rhetor. Depending on the advantage of the group, the group may advocate expressing originality, giving power over to others, accepting or denying the legitimization of outside authorities, and accepting or denying the moralities of others. All of this will function to maintain the overall attention that the group advocates.

The final sub-cycle in which a rhetor can work is the need cycle. Huang writes that the need cycle “involves the process of an intrapersonal activity of abstraction and symbol making” (1996 p. 76). According to him, “[w]hen the need is developed and
articulated, the advocate expects and desires a favorable response from the powerful audience so the need can be met” (p. 78). It seems that according to Huang, there are three stages to the need cycle: development, articulation, and response.

Without rhetorical intervention, there is a vicious circle even within the system. According to Huang, “in the deviance amplifying needs cycle, perceived growth-and-survival needs can never be met, and advocacy continues to increase” (1996 p. 78). In such a case, people would feel a need, advocate that need, and then not have it met. This would make that person feel the need that much more acutely.

Huang believes that the only way to compensate from this vicious circle is “through input from the interpersonal power cycle” (1996 p. 78). One is tempted when reading Huang’s description to come to the conclusion that the needs cycle should not really be considered part of the cycle at all. It appears that the need cycle is so dependant on the power cycle that it really is just a part of that. Then one considers that this is a holographic theory. Because of that, all of the cycles are interdependent. Each one is contained in the others, and so the needs cycle is contained in the power cycle.

The rhetor community can often maintain its power by continually articulating needs which can be met by that community. By articulating these needs and then providing them, the group is also able to maintain the attention focus of the group members. Thereby, a rhetor community functions to maintain the ideology of its members.

To sum up our description of a rhetor community; it is a community with whom its participants identify; with whom they can call themselves “we.” This community is rhetorical because it attempts to maintain an ideology in its members and/or to alter the
ideologies of those outside its borders to identify with the community. This is done through shared story-telling and performing in order to create a particular weltanschauung in its participants.

Rhetorical Ethnography

As has been illustrated above, a community can function rhetorically. Because of this possibility, there are clear advantages to studying communities as rhetors. In general, however rhetorical methodologies are not designed to study or critique entire subcultures. This is the reason that this study appropriates of some of the ethnographic methods for supplying data to be analyzed rhetorically in order to study the ideology creation and maintenance process in which CRO engages.

Currently, there is a strong and growing relationship that exists between rhetoric and ethnography. Fabian says that “ethnography is, as the fashionable saying goes, ‘rhetoric’” and he claims that he believes that his “interest in theories of performance is also rhetorical” (1990 p.xiv). Still, in his examination of the performance of resistance by a theatre in Zaire, rhetorical theory as an understanding the discourse of the rhetor community is conspicuously absent. Furthermore, the maintenance of ideology on the part of the group is ignored and the representations of power in the performance are, as is typical in ethnography, seen as resistance rather than as proselytizing. They are seen as attacking the power structures, which they do, but they also invite those who are guilty of being up, as Burke would say, to identify with those who are low and therefore purify themselves. The nuances of a rhetorical analysis of CRO would go beyond reducing all interactions to power, but would examine the corporate acts of purification by which a community keeps itself symbolically pure.
For other ethnographers rhetorical theory is not so conspicuously absent, but does not function as an overarching theme. Conquergood, for instance claims that “rhetoric, performance and ethnography join forces” in that they are all interested in “resistance to totalizing thought” (1992 p. 81). He has also noted that “the linguistic and textual bias of speech communication has blinded many scholars to the preeminently rhetorical nature of textual performance—ritual, ceremony, celebration, parade, pageant feast and so forth. It is not just in non-western cultures but in many so called ‘modern’ communities that cultural performance functions as a special form of public address, rhetorical agency” (1991 p. 188). Still, while Conquergood advocates the view of performance as public address and occasionally punctuates his ethnographic work with a rhetorical theorist’s writings, he is not really looking at the rhetoric of people groups. Instead, he is looking at their resistance not as a mode of identification and worldview creation or maintenance, but as a means of biting the hand that slapped them. While advocating an understanding of the rhetorical nature of performance, Conquergood tends to forget about the rhetorical function of “adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas” (Bryant 1994/1953 p. 282). The performance seems to be without auditor for Conquergood. No one is convinced either internally or externally.

Goodall also places the occasional rhetorical theorist into his ethnographic script but his view tends to fall short of a rhetorical ethnography. I think that in his own writing it is possible to ascertain the reason for this. Goodall describes himself as having taken an “ethnographic turn” (2000 p.45), and this turn moved his writing away from traditional academic rhetorical analysis. Goodall believed that in traditional academic writing of rhetoric he had lost something: “Everything I had done to win tenure, every word I had
written to gain promotion, no longer seemed worth it to me. I had won a place in academe, but had lost my soul” (p. 46). The turn toward ethnography, for Goodall was a turn away from something else: away from traditional rhetorical writing. This is why even though once in a while Goodall may see the application of a rhetorical theorist to an ethnographic situation; his work is not really rhetorical ethnography. He studies groups and their discourses now and specifically looks at how power is construed in those discourses. He is not especially interested in the identification and persuasion of groups.

Goodall and Conquergood are excellent at what they do. What they do is ethnography of discourse, and they should continue doing it. Their work is mentioned here, not to discredit them; rather it is here to differentiate between ethnography as it currently stands in Communication Studies and the rhetorical ethnography that will be used in this dissertation to study CRO. This group is important for this study because of its construction of worldviews and their work as rhetors. The task is not to insert a citation from occasional rhetorician into ethnography, rather to writing in such a way that the principles of rhetorical theory become the framework into which all the ethnographic data flows.

This task varies a great deal from other ethnographic discourse. First of all, it functions under the assumption that worldviews are created through symbolic (including but not limited to language) interchange. It assumes that groups can function persuasively. For traditional ethnography, such assumptions are problematic:

Most fundamentally, the mode of inquiry [ethnography] is investigative. First and foremost it responds to questions about particular communication practices. It does not begin with an assumption or assertion about the basic determining
structures of those practices, but does begin with what gets said and done in some
social life and what people who perform within it say or think they are doing

In other words, the assumption of persuasion and identification of groups would run
counter to the basic rules of traditional ethnography. This study of CRO cannot, then, be
seen as a traditional ethnography. Rather it must be treated as a rhetorical criticism of the
rhetoric of a group wherein some ethnographic methods are used to be in order to gain
access to that rhetoric, but ethnography is not the framework of the study.

There are many methods that can be purloined by the rhetorician from the
ethnographic process: the observation of performance, immersion in a culture in order to
aid understanding, construction of field notes, reflexive writing, etc. All of these speak to
the problem of studying a full culture. The knowledge then can be analyzed as rhetoric.
The groups analyzed can be seen as functioning rhetorically. That will be the function of
this rhetorical ethnography; an enterprise that would study the discourses and
performances of a rhetor community.

All of these methods have been used in this study in order to understand the
rhetoric of the culture of CRO. Although there is certainly some reliance on the products
of the culture, that is the archived teachings and publicity tools of CRO, a great deal of
the analysis of this study comes from the field notes taken while observing this
community in action in a myriad of circumstances including their public Wednesday
night services, various birthday celebrations, baptisms, parties etc. Although I was a part
of this group previously, I did not begin formal observation until spring of 2003 and
continued until the winter break of 2004. While I did not attend every single event on
their calendar (for instance due to problems in my own schedule I only went to their Sunday night “Prayer, Praise and Communion Service” twice), during this year of observation I did, however, attend every genre of event, with the single exception of the women’s Monday night Bible study from which I was excluded by nature of my gender. Besides observing the CRO’s scheduled events and rituals, I was able to become friends with many of the members and engage in social activities with the community that were not formally planned events, such as going to see Spiderman 2 with a large group. I never made a secret about the fact that I was studying the group and would occasionally even remind them by pointing out that some things that were done or said would be interesting for my dissertation. I argue that my presence as a researcher had no more effect on the actions of the group than my presence as a male graduate student would have had.

Besides engaging in the various and sundry activities of CRO, I also verified the accuracy of my observations through 25 interviews conducted in the fall of 2004. The interviewees were self-selected but the participants represented a broad spectrum of points of view. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 years old into the late forties and the amount of time spent in the organization ranged from figures of days to decades. These interviews combined with the observation and the static text of publicity and teaching scripts are the rhetorical artifacts that will inform the analysis in the next pages of observation.
Chapter 4

Accepting CRO’s Description

This chapter begins the process of studying the rhetoric of CRO. The first stage in this process is to ascertain exactly toward what rhetorically constructed worldview CRO is attempting to sway its auditors. Once this is established, it is possible to see the methods that CRO uses to sway its audience in that direction. This will set the ground for the next chapter in which we will examine the sensitivity of those methods. The purpose of this chapter is not to expose “secret” or “latent” rhetorical constructions of worldviews in which CRO is engaging. As Eco said, “any interpretation given of a text can be accepted if it is confirmed by, and must be rejected if it is challenged by another portion of the same text” (1992, p 65). Of course the “text” to which Eco was alluding is a literary, or at least a written text. I do not think that it is out of line to impose this limit on other forms of rhetoric as well.

Looking for “secret” or “hidden” meanings in rhetoric is all well and good when it exposes the arguments that construct us. However, one can find “secret” meanings anywhere, and force an interpretation that is silly. Any interpretation from which my criticism derives must come ultimately from within the context of the rhetoric itself. A researcher must not construct “secret” meanings that cannot be logically supported by other things that are actually said and done. In support of similar suppositions Condit (1993) argued that to a large extent a rhetorical critic when searching for the persuasive goal of rhetoric should take the rhetor at his or her word. She claimed that rhetoric was not something done in secret but “is a conscious, externally projected, public phenomenon” (p.188). People communicate intentionally. So as the first portion of this
chapter is to ascertain what worldview CRO is attempting to inculcate in their adherents, perhaps the best thing to do is to find out what worldview CRO says that they are attempting to inculcate.

In the summer of 2004 I was standing on the back porch of the CRO house before a hot grill listening to the meat inside hiss and the voice of one of the students who was heavily involved in CRO. The scheduled events in the summer are small and somewhat informal because most of the students leave town for the season. We were there for a Bible study on the book of James, but the Bible study hadn’t begun yet. The advertisements for this Bible study asked the participants to “bring your own meat: chicken, beef, spam. And bring something to share with others: chips, salad, fruit” (Bible Study Cookout, 2005). The high-protein diet craze of that year had brought beef prices beyond the range that I could afford so I had some pork bratwursts laying on the grill beside an assortment of other meats.

Our minds and our discussions however were not on the meat on the grill nor on the chapter of the book of James that we would soon be retreating to the air-conditioned comfort of the house to discuss. Instead, we were discussing the Iraq war, a subject about which we are concerned because several members of the organization were either there or going to be mobilized to go. “You know, Benji,” the student said shaking his head after talk of the causalities reaching ever closer to 1,000 Americans, “I really think that so many of these problems would be solved if the Christians in this country, just the Christians, I’m not thinking of anyone else, really, really, realized that it isn’t about who has the weapons or where they’re hidden or what country who is from. What it is really about is who has Christ. Then we might not be so focused on killing people. We have no
right to send people to Hell like that.” He went on to explain his own anti-war stance came from a point of view which was concerned about all the people who would be dying without first becoming Christians: in his opinion, sending them to Hell.

I understood what he meant. He had been with me probably every Wednesday night listening to the same sermons. The previous semester a series of sermons ranging over the entire semester were preached during the main Wednesday night service. This series was titled: “Developing a Christian Worldview.” I had almost danced when I saw the title. This was the information that I needed for my research, what the organization felt was and is a Christian worldview.

This sermon series began with the first sermon by positing that there were two possible ways of viewing the world: one view was called “ethnocentric” and the other possible way was called “theocentric.” According to records received later from the organization’s archives (Developing a Christian Worldview, 2005), this sermon characterized an ethnocentric worldview as “belief in the superiority of one’s own ethnic group, culture, nation, political system” and viewing “groups or cultures in terms of one’s own group or culture” (p. 1). This was contrasted with the “theocentric” view of the world in which can be described as: “a. Having God as the center of our world view, b. Having God as the focus of our interest, c. Opening oneself completely to God and His purpose, d. To see the world as God sees it” (p. 3). Recognizing that these were still abstract terms the sermon went on to explain the way these two different worldviews would play out in a person’s life. The ethnocentric christian “1). Accepts the basic message of salvation, but whose lifestyle, priorities, concerns reflect a self-centered pre-occupation. 2). Looks to scripture as personal blessings, prays mostly for immediate, personal needs, and sees
faith as a way to get God on his/her side. 3). Asks the question, ‘What can I get out of this?’” (p.2). On the other hand the sermon posited, a theocentric Christian “1). Sees things from God’s perspective 2). Has ‘our hearts broken by the things that break the heart of God’ 3). Is a child of the Kingdom; by calling belongs to a universal fellowship, by conviction proclaims a universal message, by commitment owes allegiance to a universal King – Jesus Christ, by vocation, is a part of a universal movement” (p.2).

The possibility of two separate worldviews as described in these sermons meets the prerequisites for a study of an attention shift as discussed by Brown (1982). That is the “two patterns or interpretive ‘templates’” which both must “be potentially involved in our sizing up a situation” (p.18). The sermons which followed in the series articulated the theocentric worldview more thoroughly while pointing out potential flaws in the other worldviews rhetorically conflated into ethnocentrism. This was not simply the rhetoric of the top person, handed down from above, but also became the conversational rhetoric of the organization and the basis for their proselytizing effort and showed up often in the interviews.

The sermon series explained that the theocentric worldview could be summed up by the answers to five rhetorical questions. In the following sections, each of these questions will be described in order to understand the form of the worldview toward which CRO is attempting to move its auditors.

Question 1: Who Is Jesus?

The first question that needed to be answered is: “Who is Jesus?” The sermon attempted to answer this question following a relatively common method in evangelical
circles: that is the “trilemma” or “Lord, Lunatic or Liar” approach. This approach is usually credited to the apologist C. S. Lewis and certainly appears in his recently reprinted book *Mere Christianity* (2001). This particular argument for the special divinity of Jesus became even more popular after Josh McDowell’s (1972) publication of *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* which he popularized through multiple speaking engagements, Christian radio interviews, and college tours. In this book McDowell dubs the argument “the trilemma” which is common shorthand for the “Lord, Lunatic or Liar” argument in most evangelical circles today. For those students who had long term relationships with evangelicalism, the argument of that sermon would have been old hat.

The basic argument is that a person has to make a decision as to who Jesus is to him or her. The following diagram (figure one) was presented to the students of CRO as a way to understand the possibilities as to who Jesus might be:
The argument functions by creating a number of dichotomies and using them to describe which worldviews are possible. The first dichotomy is that either the things Jesus said, specifically about himself, and most specifically that he was the one and only way to God (Jhn. 14:6), were true or false. If they are false, another dichotomy is described. Either Jesus knew they were false, in which case he was a liar and could never be described as a good man or a moral teacher because he was deliberately leading people to false-hood. If the claims were false, but Jesus did believe them, then he was simply insane. In that case, the things that he taught cannot be accepted as good, moral teachings but the ravings of a madman. Returning to the first dichotomy, if one believes that the things Jesus said about himself are true, then one still has two choices. One can believe that Jesus truly is God, Savior and Lord and accept Jesus’ will or not. A person can believe that he truly is God and decide that if God is a god like one described in the Bible, he or she would rather be thrown into hell than to accept his rules. On the other hand one can believe that what Jesus said about himself was true and accept him as Lord and be saved.

The interviews and observations in which I engaged mostly pointed out that, while the trillema might not always be the method used, a belief in Jesus as God as a logical choice regularly showed itself. One instance that I clearly remember was when a discussion over Mormonism was going on. Mormons are seen as members of a cult by most of the members of CRO because, by their definition a cult is any group who claims they believe in Jesus, but they don’t believe he is who he said he was. Because the Mormons do not believe that Jesus was fully God, this fits their definition. The discussion was no on this dynamic, however, but on the inspiration of the Book of Mormon. One young man, a fairly recent Christian, I will call Jim said “I mean, we can find all the stuff
in the Bible by archeology and stuff. Those cities in the Book of Mormon, they never existed, those people, there’s nothing showing that they ever were there. I mean, I have faith, but I don’t have blind faith. I couldn’t believe in Jesus if he like, lived in an invisible city or something.” Such sentiments that there are logical reasons to believe in Christ also showed up in my interviews. One woman explained: “it’s not us that are going to make people become Christians, but it’s the evidence of Christ and what he’s done that will convince you.”

The common thread is not just that Christ existed, or even really that he was God. The bottom line is that to accept the rhetoric commonly used among them members of CRO is to accept that it is not just true that Jesus is God, but that it is logical to believe this. Some people are deluded, but those who understand the logic and fail to become Christians are simply written off. Those who do not believe either do not understand or choose to be damned.

Of course, Brown (1978) points out ideologies come into being through “reification of some kinds and not others” and by agreed upon “rules for constituting kinds” (p.125). By putting forth the rules for constituting kinds, the apologist who gets his or her auditor to accept the trillema as a mode of constituting kinds has largely already won her or his argument. The purpose of the trillema is to feature a deviance amplifying state in the minds of the out group auditors in which ““all omissions and inconsistencies, and contradictions are . . . amplified” (Brown, 1978 p. 135). But these are only the omissions and inconsistencies and contradictions of the previous ideology. The ideology to which the rhetor is converting must remain pure it must remain perfect, as Burke implied when he pointed out that human beings are “rotten with perfection”
Burke explained that: “The principle of perfection is central to the nature of language as motive. The mere desire to name something by its ‘proper’ name, or to speak a language in its distinctive ways is intrinsically ‘perfectionist’” (1966 p.16). When moments happen that show that perhaps we are imperfect, a powerful spell must be cast to once again perfect us.

Such was the case, Burke shows us, when Hitler cast his spell over Nazi Germany. “Crude magic,” Burke calls Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, “but effective” (1973 p.192). The magic was effective in purifying and perfecting Nazi Germany. And in this case, as in all cases where imperfections, flaws or sins are noted, the purifying magic can only be accomplished with a sacrifice. Of course, it should be the ones who have shown themselves imperfect who should be sacrificed, but since they are the ones who need purification, this is impossible: “whereat we next come to upon the ideas of redemption [italics Burke’s], and thus finally of victimage via the principle of representation, personage, vicarage” (1970 p.242). On one level or another, this sacrifice must be a blood sacrifice. Only death can heal our imperfections.

Not just any death will do. The sacrifice must *perfectly* embody the imperfections in the sacrificer. That way one can put to death the evil which is embodied in the one to be sacrificed while leaving one’s own body in tact:

And where there must be simultaneously a dying and a not-dying, what is more plausible than the paradox of substance to figure here, in providing symbolic devices whereby a man can ‘substantially’ slay himself through sacrifice of another who is consubstantial with him? (Burke,1962 p.790).
This is why, essentially there must be those who believe but still reject within the dichotomy. Those are not the people to whom the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO is aimed. Rather those people are (both symbolically and literally) damned to Hell by this rhetorical method. They are the “lost” In the diagram shown in figure 1.

Questions 2 & 3: Do I believe in Heaven? Do I believe in Hell?

Questions of perfection and vicarage also hold obvious implications in the second and third questions that were explained in the sermon series. The purpose of the sermons was to show that these places do exist and that every person will go to one of them.

The argument made by CRO for the existence of heaven and proceeds from the answer to the first question: “Heaven’s reality is based on one issue—Jesus and what I believe about Him” (Heaven, 2005). The logic is relatively simple:

\[ P_1: \text{Jesus talked in Heaven and Hell.} \]
\[ P_2: \text{I believe in what Jesus said.} \]
\[ \therefore \text{I believe in Heaven and Hell.} \]

The sermon series spent most of the time while arguing this point on the specific premise: that is that Jesus talked about Heaven and Hell. The general premise, a belief in what Jesus said is basically argued under question one. Several points were discussed showing that Jesus believed in heaven:

He told us to pray to our Father who is in heaven. He told us to store up for yourselves treasurers in heaven. He said he had all authority even in heaven. He said he was going to return to heaven when he left here. He also said that he is in heaven preparing a place for each of his followers (Heaven 2005 p.3).
Discussions of Heaven were ubiquitous during my observations of the communication of CRO’s participants. I remember one point watching two people who I will call Jack and Amber talking. Amber had strong personality clash with another member of CRO and was telling Jack that she just planned to avoid this other person.

“Here’s the problem with that” Jack explained. “You are both going to Heaven when you’re done here aren’t you?”

“Well, I am.” Amber replied. Then relenting she said, “She is too, I suppose, it’s not her doctrine that I have a problem with. It is that she is just so . . .”

“Well, imagine,” Jack said, “that you manage to avoid her most of the time. Imagine that you are able to only spend one second every thousand years with her. You know what, happens?”

“What?” Amber asked, clearly confused.

“You still end up spending infinite time with her.” Jack smiled and threw out his arms out wide to indicate a vast expanse. “That’s the way heaven works. That’s the way eternity works. So, you are going to be spending infinite time with her so maybe you should try to work it out.”

“I think that also means we have forever to work it out.” Amber replied. “So I’m going to avoid her for a while.”

In my interviews, the existence of Heaven was also assumed. When I asked one of my interviewees why she thought it was important to share her opinions of Christ with others she told me “that’s the reason why I’m here. If I’m not witnessing for the Lord and telling other people about Christ, then, I should have gone to heaven, I should have been put to sleep and gone to heaven already.” A comment like this is typical of discussions of
heaven among the members of CRO. It is rare that an argument might be made. Heaven is assumed.

Discussions and sermons about Hell have been similar. They are ultimately based in the fact that the scripture and Jesus himself discuss Hell and so, if you believe in one you must believe in the other. One sermon that discussed Hell explained it this way:

Just listen to the terms used in Scripture to try to make us understand the terror of the place…

- everlasting fire — Matthew 18:8, 25:41,
- “hell fire”—Matt 5:22, 18:9, Mark 9:47
- unquenchable fire — Matthew 3:12
- everlasting punishment – Matthew 25:46
- everlasting chains — Jude 1:6
- eternal damnation — Mark 3:29
- “damnation of hell” Matt 23:33
- eternal judgment — Hebrews 6:2
- mist of darkness is reserved for ever — 2 Peter 2:17
- “outer darkness” Matt 8:12, 22:13
- the blackness of darkness for ever — Jude 1:13
- “Where their worm dies not” Mark 9:44, 46, 48
- “wailing and gnashing of teeth” Matt 13:42, 50

It is important to remember that for the members and staff of CRO, Hell is not a metaphor. The “fire,” the “worms,” or the “darkness” might be metaphors for the
indescribably horror, but Hell is a very real place for them. Not a physical place, so all
physical words are metaphors, but a spiritual place: a place where the spirit is eternally
tortured. I remember one point where a woman, who I’ll call Laura, was crying because
her roommate had said that Laura had no right to condemn the roommate to hell.

“I was not condemning her.” Laura told a group of comforting onlookers. “I
warned her. What I was doing was the opposite of condemning.” I can still see in my
mind’s eye the red puffy face and the tear making a wet patch on the sleeve her university
sweatshirt where she continually wiped her eyes. “I was trying to save her from Hell. I
love her so much.” Sobbing she repeated, “so much.”

Discussions of Hell as the impetus for proselytizing also showed itself in my
interviews. In fact, in one interview, the respondent moved from asking people to have a
relationship with God to saving them from Hell rather quickly when I asked her why she
felt that proselytizing was important:

That’s why Jesus came here, was to be our savior and to establish a relationship
with the Lord and that was his mission in life . . . uhh . . . while he was here on
earth and then he left so that we could continue the work he started one day we
will be reunited with him Christ, so . . . umm . . . it’s important because it’s the
work that he started and if we truly believe in the Lord then we need to follow
him and do as he did. We don’t want anyone else to have to have eternal
damnation. We want everyone to be given the chance to have an opportunity to to
have that relationship with the lord and then it will be their choice whether or not
they refuse to accept it but no one should be able to say when they get to Heaven,
in front of the Lord and then, ‘well, nobody told me about all this.’ You know
they have to have at least heard it at least once if not more. Umm, and that’s part of my responsibility as a Christian.

Besides these examples I remember multiple times when members would ask other members for prayer because they had a relative near death “who does not know Christ.” This becomes an even greater concern near death because of the commonly held belief in Hell.

**Question 4: Does Christianity Matter?**

As with the answers to the other questions, the answer to this one builds on the answers to the previous answered questions. If Jesus is who he says he is and if Heaven and Hell exist, then Christianity matters. If Jesus is not who he says he is or if heaven or hell do not exist, then according to one sermon:

If Christianity doesn’t matter, let’s quit all of this waste

- waste of billions of dollars on facilities, salaries, programs
- waste of time, energy, and resources
- Let's get those stupid missionaries out of these foreign countries. What good are they doing, but destroying the religions of others (Does Christianity Matter, 2005 p.3)

However, if Christianity does matter, then there are also some potential implications. There would be some responsibilities on the part of the Christian who truly believes that her or his faith matters. The sermon explaining that question said that if Christianity does matter: “then we must integrate our faith and our lives then we must become involved as an agent of change... Agents of Hope” (Does Christianity Matter, 2005 p. 7). This
integration into the community and the attempt to create change was prevalent throughout
the observations and the interviews.

One woman was interrupted several times during her interview by her cell phone. She was a person of high rank in her sorority and explained the way in which she saw her sorority activities as a ministry opportunity:

You know to get those girls to come over to the CRO house and ask questions about Christ, there’s no way that ninety-nine point five percent of them are ever going to do that. But having a person who’s willing to go to their house and hang out with them get to know them learn what’s important to them and then ask them questions like well, have you ever thought about spiritual things, what’s your view on Jesus? And learn what they have to say and where their coming from and be a witness that way instead of instead of not meeting where they’re at and expecting them to come to us kind of deal.

Another person explained to me that one of the things that he felt people got out of being a part of CRO was:

They have come to a greater understanding of what Christianity is as far as a relationship with God or a relationship with Christ. They have captured uhh, a concept of uhh serving. They have captured the concept of missions or of wanting to be involved in missions. Umm. And a lot of them have had their whole view changed as to what the church is all about. Uhh from a more traditional, more cultural things that help define that. Denominational things that helps define that. To coming down to wanting to again have a relationship with God and being a part of the body of Christ.
When the respondent told me that several of the students who were a part of CRO had “captured the concept of serving” I knew that he had almost told me word for word what had been discussed when we were told to act as agents of hope in the world. That is to say that the students of CRO consider it important to have a Christianity that matters in the world where they live.

**Question 5: Does God have a purpose for my life?**

“This sense of the greatness of the task and responsibilities and the sense of our littleness,” according to one Wednesday night CRO sermon, “has pushed many Christians into becoming ‘functional agnostics’” (Purpose 2005 p.3). This was a warning against becoming functional agnostics. In the final sermon of this series we learned that God has a plan for each person’s life. A full argument is never made for this considering that the previous sermons all built a syllogism by which one could arrive at this concept. Instead an assumption that God does indeed have a plan for each of person’s life permeated the sermon.

Instead of an argument, five qualities were explained in order to show what would be necessary in the individual adherent’s life in order for God to use them. The first quality is that of availability. This involves making oneself available to God and allowing him to use one’s life. As an example of this, the story of the calling of the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6) and his famous statement, “here am I Lord! Send me.” Was used to illustrate a person’s willingness to be used by God.

The importance of this willingness to submit to the will of God was evident throughout my interviews and observations, but never so evident as toward the end of the spring semester at the Monday night Men’s Bible Study. The purpose of the study was to
look into Biblical definitions and descriptions of masculinity as models for our own lives. One of the most beloved portions of the Bible study was a corporate prayer time in which each of the men brought forward whatever areas he wanted divine intervention in his own life. Each person would be prayed for individually by one of the other men while the rest agreed silently or with a softly spoken “yes, Jesus” or “thank you, Lord.” Typically, this ritual involved prayer specifically for help in whatever area of Biblical masculinity had been discussed during that particular study. However, as plans were being made for summer, increasingly requests for help in discerning “God’s will” for each person’s life took on an increasing urgency. As the men looked at their various summer employment, service, schooling and travel options foremost on each of their minds was doing or being whatever God would have them do or be. They operated under a corporate assumption that God did, indeed, have a plan for their lives and the attempt to make themselves available to that plan.

Many of the members of CRO expressed in their interviews a belief in a specific plan for their own lives and in the life of the organization. During one interview the respondent told me that understanding this particular will is one way that CRO is able to keep from offending people in their proselytizing:

You know [the campus minister] is very big on praying about things and making sure that what we do, whatever it is, is the Lord’s will and that nothing as far as our strategies, or what we decide to do if it’s not working, if it’s not fulfilling our mission statement if fulfilling the Lord’s will for CRO then he has no problems scrapping it.
Another interviewee told of how through a worship time at CRO she had been shown God’s purpose in a very special way:

And during the worship time while we were singing [begins singing] and let what we do in here, fill the streets out there [back to talking] and we’re saying “I’ll do everything, I’m yours God.” And he said “will you do that would you go up to somebody?” And he told me to run outside and I’m like “Uhh?” and he’s like “Will you run, I want you to run for me.” I didn’t have my shoes on, I had taken my shoes off and but I did, I ran out. Eventually, it took me like ten minutes of standing there, [laughs] someone’s going to look at me, but I was out there. And God told me to sing. And, uhh, you know, I did, I was really wavery and scared, but I did, I started to sing, people were starting to look at me, you know. I got on my knees. I’m out there singing. Everyone else is in there not knowing I was out there but there were people outside walking, obviously seeing me. And then God told me to go up to somebody and say hi and, you know “my name is [Sara] do you . . . believe in Jesus. Do you know God personally.” And I was like, I can’t do it. I followed this guy down sidewalks. God pointed out the person he wanted me to talk to. I followed him around and I could not ask him. But [laughs] that’s [shrugs shoulders].

This knowledge that God has a will for each person’s life and that each person can find out what that will is prevailed throughout the organization.

Each of the other four qualities ultimately derived from the willingness to submit oneself to God’s will. The second quality that was suggested given that God has a plan for each of our lives is was that of understanding that God wants to use our life
experiences. The scriptural basis for this was Romans 8:28 which explains that God uses everything, no matter how bad it is, to the ultimate good. The third was taking time to pray. The fourth was recognizing even God’s ability to use the pain of the follower to help in fulfilling God’s will. The final quality is faith that God will give the person the strength and ability to do God’s will no matter how difficult.

CRO’s Worldview in a Nutshell

This chapter prepared for the discussion of the sensitivity of CRO’s proselytizing methods by explaining what the ideology is to which they were attempting to sway others. In order to do this, the chapter explained that probably the best way to understand the purpose of a particular rhetorical act is to find out what the rhetoric itself claims is its purpose. To that end, the worldview that CRO says that they advocate as the worldview toward which they are swaying others was explained. From this explanation we have seen five particular goals that CRO claims are the purpose of their proselytizing rhetoric. The first among these is an understanding that Jesus is who he claimed to be in the Bible. The second and third are beliefs in Heaven and Hell. The fourth argument is that this does in fact matter. The final aspect toward which CRO’s proselytizing rhetoric aims itself is to sway its auditors into believing that God has a specific purpose for their life. In each of these cases the official rhetoric preached in a sermon series entitled “Developing a Christian Worldview” was confirmed both through participant observation and through individual interviews as the direction toward which CRO is directing others. The next chapter will determine the extent to which the worldview described in this chapters is advocated sensitively based on the criteria discussed in chapter 3.
Chapter 5

This study initially began by explaining the historical development of CRO as part of the Restoration Movement, exploring the basic impetus of that movement in general and focusing in on CRO in particular with an eye toward proselytizing. This led to the question: Is CRO’s proselytizing rhetoric sensitive to those whom they are attempting to indoctrinate? This is the ultimate question which organized the chapters of this study. The second chapter focuses the importance of using proselytizing rhetoric in a sensitive way and coming to understand certain criteria which can be used to evaluate proselytizing rhetoric. Before these criteria can be applied to the rhetoric of CRO, however, it was necessary to explain the ways in which the rhetoric of a community rather than an individual speaker could be studied as rhetoric which was done in chapter three.

Chapter four explains the worldview constructed in CRO as the rhetorical vision to which CRO members and like minded others attempt to convert other people. It is the invitational message to serve their persuasive purpose. In Chapter Four, CRO was taken at its word and explained what, according to their own rhetoric (discovered using both traditional rhetorical textual analysis and ethnographic data gathered through observations and confirmed by interviews), CRO members are attempting to convince people to believe. This chapter further draws together these divergent paths and in this chapter, the proselytizing rhetoric described in the previous chapter will be analyzed according to the criteria presented in chapter two.
Sensitivity to role playing

The first aspect of sensitive proselytizing discussed was that of being aware of a sensitivity to the role that religious rhetors are to be playing within a particular scene. The sensitive proselytizer is sensitive to the role that is being played as a proselytizer and recognizes there are times not to play that role. In the time spent with CRO, I observed both positive and negative acts of sensitivity to role playing.

Perhaps the clearest example of sensitivity to role playing I observed was at the Food Giveaways. These events are held during the warmer months when the university is still in session. The CRO house is located on the walkways students use to travel from residence halls to most of the town’s bars. For those with proper identification, the bars are often the primary place of recreation, socializing, and networking among the students. Foot traffic on warm weekend nights, therefore, is very high. In order to discourage binge drinking among the students, the members of CRO set up grills on the sidewalk on these nights. On these grills they cook hamburgers, hot-dogs and sometimes bratwurst. There are also often non-alcoholic fruit flavored beverages or other soft-drinks available. This food and drink is handed out completely free of charge to everyone who passes by, and donations are not accepted. No one is asked to listen to a sermon or take a tract. They are simply given as much food to eat as they want.

The vast majority of the students take their food and continue down the street to their originally intended destinations. Some do not take any food at all. Others may, stay and converse with the students in CRO and others who have also chosen to hang around. Among these students who stay and converse, there is a temptation for the members of CRO to attempt to directly proselytize, but for the most part, they do not. The only time
members talk about their views on God, the Bible, salvation, Heaven and Hell or any other theological issue, is when they are directly asked.

The reason this behavior is pointed out as a positive area of sensitive role taking is that CRO and the members of CRO recognize that this social period is not a time for preaching. The students walking toward downtown from their residence halls are simply looking for a way to escape the stresses of student life and have an enjoyable evening and in all likelihood, none would be interested in having their flaws or “sins” pointed out. Most of passers by are not interested talking about God and being saved. I suspect most of the students who walk by are more interested in being “saved” from another night of writing papers, reading textbooks, and sitting in front of a computer than being “saved” by a Christian commitment. Sermons, tracts, or even intense discussions are not attractive to a pedestrian audience. The method of persuasion is imbedded in the acts of providing food and friendship and providing nutritional insulation from the effects of alcoholic beverages.

So the action of CRO is a proselytizing one that is appropriate sensitive act motivated by faith. The members of CRO also think that it is a proselytizing role that works. One long time member of CRO, a person who became involved long after college and had an extensive memory of the organization told me “We get letters all the time from people who become Christians later. They weren’t, like, involved in CRO or anything like that. All they did is walk by one night and we maybe gave them a bratwurst or something. They write and they say, like, ‘that showed me what Christianity could be’ or something.” Furthermore, multiple members of the CRO community were first introduced to that community through the food giveaways. Food giveaways are examples
of proselytizing in a way that is sensitive to the role being played at the time and might result in bringing some students into the fellowship when a spiritual need is recognized.

Unfortunately, not all roles played were appropriate roles for the scenes in which people were involved. For example on one warm night in early October 2004 I was with several members of the organization at the CRO house. The house is a comfortable space and against each wall of the main room are soft, home-built couches with large pillows that are sometimes used as backs for the couches or even used as furniture for relaxation. The walls are lined with various and sundry kitschy religious art and collages of photos of activities and mission trips full of college students smiling at the camera. It is a place where people can sit, talk and basically enjoy each other’s company.

Discussions were flowing over a myriad of topics. One topic was the upcoming presidential election which included the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another topic included discussion as to whether or not God has one particular person in mind for another person as a life partner or if he just has some general rules to deselect certain people. This led to discussion how rich or poor someone would have to be in order to no longer be middle class. Eventually the discussion turned to a lost and dying world.

It was during this last discussion that one young man expressed a desire to be doing more. He said, “I feel like we should be witnessing. We should be out there doing it right now, not in here where we are safe.” He stood up and headed to the door. “I am going to go onto that campus and tell every person I meet about Jesus. Who’s with me?”

My initial reaction was to follow him out the door. Several others did follow him. I hung around with the others who stayed behind for about fifteen minutes. It seemed as if the group that remained was about to break up for the evening, so I decided to leave as
well. First, however, I needed to stop at my office and drop off the papers I graded during the discussion.

The building which houses my office has a large floor to ceiling window on its bottom floor. This window looks out on the green space between the campus buildings. From my view, I saw the students who had gone out to “witness” earlier walking up to other students to engage in persuasive conversation. My background with nonverbal communication easily revealed the annoyance in the body language of the students being approached. There seemed to be a pain of rejection in the nonverbal expression of the proselytizing students as they were quickly dismissed by those students who they interrupted.

What exactly was communicated is unknown and whether anyone was led to Christ or to CRO because of those students’ attempts at street preaching to a pedestrian audience is doubtful. Apparently the proselytizing students’ only goal was to carry a heavenly portrayal of Jesus to unsaved souls as possible. As young Christians, they were even willing to endure painful personal rejection in order to accomplish this. The motives may have been pure, but the method fell short. This is not unusual because even when various other preachers appear on campus to speak to passers by they are met with a mixture of indifference, heckling and spiritually curious listeners.

This method fell short in several of the criteria which were described earlier for sensitive proselytizing. The one that seems to stand out the most is the criterion of role-taking. The students strolling across campus that evening, enjoying one of the last warm evenings of the year, were put face to face with another student playing a role that was probably out of place. There may be a time and place for even confrontational methods of
proselytizing. Ambushing the unprepared students with a message of God’s justice and Christ’s love is not the time or the place. Instead the act revealed is a complete disregard for the setting that made the method insensitive. Sensitive proselytizing, as described earlier is sensitive to appropriate times and places for appropriate methods: the act should fit the scene, the attention shift must be geared to what the intended audience can recognize as a need.

Refraining from Jargon

The second criterion of sensitive proselytizing is that of refraining from the use of jargon with out-group members. Once again there are some areas wherein the members of CRO fulfill this criterion excellently and others where they fall significantly short. I was told second-hand a humorous story which involves a common phrase used in Christian circles called “holding a person accountable.” In one of the interviews one person explained the concept of holding people accountable as it is used in CRO:

If I lets see wanna be a better witness in my classes like pay attention more or take it easy on professors by doing my homework or turning it in on time, you know. Then, I tell someone else and be like please hold me accountable to this and so that person will ask me periodically hey, Are you being a good witness by turning your papers in on time? Or Are you paying attention in class, it can be things from really long time struggles, big struggles in your day to day life but it’s just someone who basically checks up on you and gives you tough love with some grace too.

This tough love was also described by that person.
Tough love would be if I was hanging out at the CRO house and it was time for class, they would be like, ‘you need to go to class now. I’ll walk you there to help you get there. You know, the next time you ask me for something I’m just not gonna help you because your not you know I need you to be able to help yourself, like I can’t help you if you don’t wanna be helped you know.’ I was struggling in a class that I wasn’t attending it was, you know, it’s like well, you know if you if you really wanna do well or if you really want some help, go to class and then I’ll be able to help you more.

One CRO woman involved in a sorority on campus told one of the other women in that sorority that the CRO woman would be willing to “hold accountable” her sorority sister. Of course, sorority sister who was not a part of an evangelical community understood those words differently. Specifically, she understood that the United States had recently “held Iraq accountable.” This had been done with the use of bombs and troops. The sorority sister who was not a part of CRO thought that the one who was in CRO had something threatening in mind. The situation was resolved and later all the involved parties laughed over the experience.

Using in-group jargon with members outside of one’s group is an easily done. A graduate student, for example may employ many technical terms to explain what their research entails to a family member who is not versed in the academic and theoretical vocabulary. Certain ideas correspond to certain words in one’s head and this happens in proselytizing. Certain religious and theological ideas naturally relate to religious or theological words which are not used or take on different meanings in other contexts.
For the most part, CRO makes every attempt to be sensitive in this area. One of several things that CRO members do is use *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Patterson 2002) in their public services. This book attempts to translate the Bible into the idiom of the average American. Words with different meanings in Christian circles from outside such circles are either not used or carefully explained.

This is not the only way in which CRO is careful to avoid jargon. Certainly part of any indoctrination is an introduction to the vocabulary of the indoctrinating group. To create meaning, at certain times in Bible studies or in services, particular theological concepts such as atonement or the trinity are explained. In general, however language is carefully chosen to achieve meaning in the largest possible number of listeners. Even in small groups the individuals are careful to explain words that are unique to the in-group without even considering that, at times, all members are part of the in-group. Defining what CRO members mean by religious terms is part of the culturally specific grammar of this group and concern about jargon usage is inculcated early in coming to be a member of CRO.

After a Wednesday night service early in November 2004, I witnessed one student talking to another about ethical concepts. She was explaining to the other student that one of the problems with many of the lectures on ethics which occurred on the campus stemmed from the professors’ lack of absolutes. Without the appearance of conscious thoughts she immediately defined absolutes. I sent a text message from my cell phone to my email address containing her definition: “those things that we learn directly from God, through the Bible, about what’s right and wrong.” Because of this explanation, the somewhat in-group terminology, “absolutes” was immediately clarified. This, of course
is an explanation shared primarily by conservative Christians who ground their belief in the Bible as the authority for absolutes. Those outside such circles would have a different understanding of what “absolute” might mean. Therefore it showed sensitivity that the woman immediately defined the term in a culturally accepted way.

Willingness to undergo adaptation

The third criterion that can be used to discuss the sensitivity of the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO is that of being willing to undergo adaptation. There are certainly stories that can be told that show the ways in which they have been sensitive in their willingness to undergo adaptation. One example is that of some members who were willing to meet with two Mormon missionaries. As explained earlier, the students in CRO see Mormonism as a cult because it teaches that Jesus Christ is not fully God. Nonetheless some of the students met weekly with these Mormon missionaries over two months.

During an informal phone conversation in early March 2004, I asked one the students what he had been studying with the Mormons. “Right now,” he told me, “I think that they are wrong on a lot of stuff. They don’t understand who God is, who the Devil is, or who we are in relationship to them. But how could I say that I really believe the things that I say I believe if I don’t know what the alternative is? I mean, I have faith. I think that I am right, but if I am wrong I’d rather know this side of death.”

Ultimately, neither the Mormon missionaries nor the students who spoke with them were able to successfully persuade each other. Yet this situation is one example of sensitive proselytizing. Certainly, in the meetings with the Mormon missionaries, the members of CRO were trying to attract the missionaries to the CRO’s view of God. They were also willing, however, to listen to the Mormons’ belief about who God is and take
those arguments into consideration. This consideration of alternative arguments not only shows a willingness to undergo adaptation among the CRO students, but in the Mormon missionaries as well.

Willingness to undergo adaptation, however, was far from universal in my observations of CRO. I remember one incident in which the Imam from a nearby Islamic center appeared on television during a newscast while I was at the CRO house. One of the members jumped up and turned off the television declaring that “we don’t need to listen to that demon worshipper.” While I did not observe any other members express the opinion that Muslims are “demon worshippers,” the refusal to hear anything from an opposing point of view was symptomatic throughout my observations.

Similar incidents were reported throughout the time of my observations. CRO members have proudly declared to each other about walking out of biology classes where the theory of evolution was being presented. One member seemed excited to tell others that he had left philosophy classes that were teaching alternative modes to those of the CRO members of approaching morality. In one case a student dropped one of our basic communication courses because she was concerned that the teacher appeared be a feminist, which the student assumed meant that the teacher rejected God. At times students actually changed majors so as to not be subjected to arguments not consistent with their beliefs.

Extreme lengths such as those just outlined to which the students would have to go so as not to adapt is probably the single areas wherein the greatest rhetorical insensitivity occurred during my time with CRO. While all other areas of insensitivity seemed marginal, refusal to listen to alternative points of view seemed endemic.
There are clear exceptions to this generalization. Besides the story of the interaction with the Mormon missionaries described above, other students made clear attempts to be sensitive. One student began an email correspondence with a person who had written an editorial against evangelical Christianity in the campus newspaper. The student who carried on this conversation said that he just wanted to understand where the other student was “coming from.” Others could be seen exploring other religions’ fundamentals in various classes and engaging with more liberal and liturgical sects in order to better understand each other. These were the exception, however, not the rule.

*Kairos*

The Greek word *Kairos* is one of the Greek words that is sometimes translated “time”. It is different from the Greek concept of *Kronos* which is more akin to the concept of time as it is used in the English language. *Kairos* could be said to be like our English word “timing” as in “I could have made a mint in online candy selling, but my timing was off.” Even this does not quite carry the concept of *Kairos* as it was used by the earliest Greek rhetorical theorists. *Kairos* also has to do with appropriateness, doing the right thing in the appropriate moment. Sensitivity to *Kairos* is very much related to the more contemporary rhetorical concept of responding to the rhetorical situation.

Bitzer (1968/2000) referred to the rhetorical situation as “the situation that calls forth discourse” (p. 60) and an appropriate response to meet an exigence so strong as to “constrain human decision or action” to alter the situation (p. 63). Sullivan (1992) explained that *Kairos* is “a special time when inspiration occurs producing logos” (p. 320) Both *Kairos* and the rhetorical situation are the empirical, physical things that happen that call forth discourse. Bitzer explained that “rhetorical situations either mature
and decay or mature and persist” if the rhetor chooses not to act on them at the moment of maturity (1968/2000p. 67). Sensitivity to the maturity of this situation is similar to Kinneavy’s (1986) description of *Kairos* as right timing and proper measure (p. 85). Both of these ideas involve understanding when the situation calls for symbolic action and engaging in that action and not other symbolic actions.

Perhaps the best way to explain the concept of *Kairos* is to explain where it is done well or poorly. The reader may recognize significant portions of the interview that will illustrate this point as reported an earlier chapter. This choice was made because this exchange was illuminating enough to use it once more as a clear example of good attention to *Kairos*. The person claimed that the purpose of CRO was to be sensitive to the *Kairotic* moment, although she did not phrase it that way:

Student: Well, I feel, and this is kinda a little clichéd, but I will quote parts of the mission statement. To have to meet people where they’re at and help them get to know Christ and develop their relationship with Christ and those that are already Christians, We want them to become productive leaders in God’s Family, you know because I [pause] I don’t know what I was going to tell you. I like to see people who say that they’re Christians live as best they can like a Christian and help the Church to be as strong rather than to umm not think strongly concerning Christ and bringing down by not by just giving lip service to Christ.

Interviewer: What does it mean to ‘meet people where they’re at.’ That’s what you just said is ‘meet people where they’re at.’

Student: Oh, that’s so exciting! To, well, for in my sorority, for instance.
Interviewer: Hmm-hmm

Student: You know to get those girls to come over to the CRO house and ask questions about Christ, there’s no way that ninety-nine point five percent of them are ever going to do that. But having a person who’s willing to go to their house and hang out with them get to know them learn what’s important to them and then ask them questions like well, have you ever thought about spiritual things? What’s your view on Jesus? And learn what they have to say and where their coming from and be a witness that way instead of instead of not meeting where they’re at and expecting them to come to us kind of deal. You know, I think that the biggest struggle for campus ministries in general is being confident enough of you’re of being in Christ to do that to reach out to them where they’re at to be more concerned about other people than your own current walk with the Lord. I that makes sense?

This is an example which reflects sensitivity to *Kairos* because the student explains that she asks these questions at the appropriate time and place. She uses time itself; time spent in relationship, to create a space in which the proselytizing can happen in a sensitive way.

Overall, most of the proselytizing narratives encountered in this study in some way dealt with creating and making use of the appropriate *Kairotic* moment. For instance in another interview. The student was describing how proselytizing actually takes place at CRO:

Not anything like organized per se but I think that on an individual basis people talk to other people on campus and if they have any questions you know. And
they know that their involved in CRO and . . . they go up to them and their like
‘Hey, I have a question about Jesus,’ or ‘what do you think God would say about
this?’ or whatever. And just randomly one of those people that you meet and think
like, you know sitting in the union and. You know, one of our girls she reads the
bible every day and this guy came up to her and was like ‘why do you read that?’
. . . she was able to say that you know, ‘I’m a Christian’ you know, she had, we
had an opportunity there.

Students used items such as clothing, jewelry, tattoos, specific public performances
including mealtime prayers and Bible reading and leading phrases and questions to create
a moment when their proselytizing was appropriate. These arts were rhetorical tools that
functioned to make proselytizing part of a social conversation, rather than an external
interruption of the *Kairotic* moment.

Such sensitivity to the *Kairotic* moment was not always evident. In fact, some
students completely lost opportunities to proselytize by being insensitive to the moment
and overstepping the bounds of *Kairos*. One of the students involved in CRO during the
time of my observation was a student in a member of one of our classes which required
public speaking. The instructor gave the class an assignment that required them to cite a
certain number of sources. The student had the required number of sources, but they all
were taken from the New Testament. The student was adamant that the New Testament
contained 27 books, each of which should be a considered a separate source. The student
failed to make proper use of the *Kairotic* moment because she assumed more power than
the moment properly granted her by the rhetorical situation; she used discourse other than
that for which the situation called.
Different ways of saying the same thing

Another aspect of sensitive proselytizing is to understand that there are different ways of expressing the same concept. A sensitive proselytizer knows when he or she does not actually need to convert the other person because the other person already agrees but phrases it differently. This is important in religious discourse especially because often a nuance in phrasing is the only distinction between denominations.

At CRO every effort is to made to control the tendency to wrangle over terms. In fact one community member who worked with CRO for several years explained it this way;

[O]ver the ten years, there’s only been one time, and it wasn’t even significant, where doctrine became an issue of people not being able to worship together, pray together, love one another and serve one another, and you know, umm. You know, coming back to the issues of Jesus and scripture and how that has been able to knock down a lot of the barriers and walls. It sounds idealistic, but it’s worked for about ten years. And and it’s seeing that sense of community, uhh, where students are looking at themselves as Christians and not much beyond that and then they are beginning to talk the possibility, the potential, of what would happen if all the different Christian groups on campus would drop the titles and just come down to that oneness that can be in Christ.

The culture of focusing on scripture as the absolute and perfect word of God has inculcated interactions in which sensitivity to variation in terminology is not only possible, but is cultivated. This may sound like a contradiction to someone outside the culture who could see the absolutism of the culture as functioning divisively. They would
Reaching Others

be partially correct because the culture in which the Bible is seen as absolutely correct does divide the people of CRO from the liberal denominations who see the Bible as “inspired” by God the way that a beautiful woman can “inspire” a poem rather than as literally “breathed in” by God. The concept that scripture was revealed in the breath of God is essential to disciplining the borders of the group. The liberal denominations, therefore become what might be called in Burkean terms a scapegoat: “Here the scapegoat is the ‘essence’ of evil, the principle of the discord felt by those who would be purified by the sacrifice” (Burke 1962 p.407). Once this border is defined, variations of terminology within the framework of literal inspiration are purified by the exclusion those who would not accept this hermeneutic.

“Debatable issues” can then arise within the framework of the absolutist hermeneutic. In the case of CRO, one example would be frequent discussions over the issue of predestination. Such debate has divided denominations for some time.

For those who have not studied the theology of predestination, the problem can be explained through the examination of three scriptures. The first is Romans 8:29-30: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed into the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called he also justified; those he justified he also glorified.” This seems to say that God chooses certain people into Heaven. This however must be pared with other verses which say that God “is not wanting anyone to perish” (II Peter 2:9) and that God will in fact send “the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, and those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars” into “the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death” (Rev 21:8). So, to sum up the problem, it
seems that God’s will chooses who can be saved, but God doesn’t will that anyone not be saved, but many people are not saved.

Liberal denominations are often divided on which of these three things they believe to be true. Some simply believe that God desires to send some people to Hell. Others believe that there is no Hell. Still other liberal denominations believe that God has no influence over the outcome, that people make choices and are sent to Heaven or Hell based on those. All of these deny the inspiration of one of the three scriptural principles.

Fundamentalist groups, such as CRO do not have these options. Because the Bible is believed by such groups to be absolutely true, all three principles must be true. Thus, the debate is not over whether or not this or that scriptural principle is true, but what is meant by that principle. So long as the basic assumption of the absoluteness of scripture exists, debate is possible. When this basic assumption is left out, the enthymematic basis for creations of syllogisms break down and argument tends to deteriorate to “I am right and you are wrong.” Because of the shared enthymemes of the community, dialectic and discussion is possible. The focus then becomes not over the words that are used, but in the ideas behind them. This allows CRO to get to root ideas and not focus on using the “proper” terminology.

Still, there are exceptions to this rule. For example I became involved in a protracted discussion about the concept of wisdom. Some in this discussion believed on the basis of Ecclesiastes 2:21 that wisdom is meaningless. Other participants in the discussion argued that due to certain verses in Proverbs that wisdom was of value. The debate raged long after both sides came into complete agreement.
Providing a community

The sixth criterion whereby one can assess the sensitivity of proselytizing rhetoric is that of the provision of a community to go along with the ideology. Most of the interviewees thought that this was a strong point in CRO’s portfolio. One interviewee described it like this:

That sense of fellowship, that sense of community, what scripture talks about, that sense of Koinonia, where people really care for one another, when there, you know, where they [pause] I’ve seen people sit there and cry as they’re talking about the struggles. You know and and wanting to know what they can do to help one another. You know it it’s it has developed much more than just coming together on a Sunday morning and saying ‘hi, how ya doing’ and then walking off without even waiting for the answer. It’s beginning to see that take place. . . and coming around again and having something like a communion with Christ being the central event or the central celebration that brings people together.

Others also talked about how the community was important in building her up and helping her to proselytize

The biggest thing I think I’ve learned is the value of other woman friendships because before I came to CRO, I had better friendships with guys and my other friends who were probably women were, you know, just not really Christian things, we tore each other down and that type of thing and then not having a real [pause] of not understanding the closeness and bonding that happens between woman to woman and I was shown that through the women’s Bible study, ummm particularly I think it was a Bible study on dating you know, umm, so, and then, I
also learned like the value of investing in a person, with [another woman] becoming a Christian, like, I really, really wanted her to stay a Christian, you know because I had heard these stories of where people become Christian and then that’s it, nothing happens, they don’t grow in their faith, or they end up in the churches, and like they call themselves a Christian but nothing has really ever changed. And I didn’t want that to happen to her so I made a real effort to spend time with her, encourage her, make sure she’s doing ok and just uh maybe through what’s become of that friendship and umm seeing that that happened, that’s just amazing and I think that CRO gave me that opportunity.

Glowing descriptions such as these permeated the interviews and the observations that I made.

Sometimes, however, the affectations of community seemed a bit contrived. This was especially apparent to me during the Wednesday nigh “coffee house” times. For example after the Wednesday night service when the campus house was open to those who had just been at the service, coffee, tea, and hot-chocolate along with some sort of desert were available. The purpose of this time is to begin to acclimate new initiates into the culture of CRO and allow a scheduled time of bonding between current members. Bonding with people, new or old, however does not really happen at scheduled intervals and the communication is often forced and uncomfortably ritualized. Newcomers are repeatedly asked their majors and forced to engage about some sort of dialogue about school. The introductory questions are repeated by different individuals and are almost scripted in their similarity. Sometimes, this similarity creates an impression of insincerity that could push initiates away from interaction in the community.
Furthermore, the community, for some reason does not seem to envelope all newcomers. One of the few somewhat negative reports on the CRO community came from a woman who had been there just over a year:

I’ve gone for a year, there’s still people that you know, I, I don’t mean this against them at all it’s just kind of they don’t know me and they’re like, Oh, are you new? I’m like, no, I’ve, well, I’ve been here a year [laughs] you don’t know? And I’m still reintroducing myself to people. I still have a hard time remembering people I’ve met and I just don’t feel like I’m in the community.

Later, she described the community that she could see from the outside, but never really felt a part of:

People just hang out at the campus house all the time. Between classes they’ll go there and you know I can really see how other people they make really, I mean, they’re really good friends with each other. I mean there’s a core group of people at CRO that, umm . . . I mean they have a great time and I think a lot of it is just the camaraderie and you know to be with other Christians really helps them out. I think that’s what other people get.

Her description of what “other people get” never really applied to her. It seemed to be something that went on around her but of which she was never really a part. CRO is sensitive to the need of a community and works to provide that. This woman provides proof however that this sensitivity is something that can still be improved so that fewer people, especially people like her who desire community, slip through the cracks.
Focus on Identity

The final aspect of gauging the sensitivity of a particular community’s rhetoric is that of focusing only on the identity that they want to change. A change in a particular epistemology necessarily produces a change in ontology. Before a rhetorical intervention, an auditor might understand the world primarily through her or his senses and be a sensualist. After the intervention one might understand (epistemology) the world through a Christian theological system and be (ontology) a Christian. Furthermore, all aspects of identity are related and a change in one identity can easily create a change in another, but not necessarily.

For instance, one member who took a leadership role in CRO during the time of my observation was a biologist. As a biologist, he took what was a decidedly minority point of view within CRO about the theory of evolution. He not only believed that all life on the planet did evolve from less complex organisms, he also thought that those who disagreed were (while more amusing than dangerous) insane. He would argue at length with any takers about this subject. Most of the community thought that he was wrong about this, but most of them also believed this argument it was not the most important argument. Neither did the biologist. “It is not essential for salvation,” was a phrase often uttered by both sides after discussion with him. What this agreement basically meant is that it did not change the answers one would give to the five questions outlined in chapter four.

In this case the people of CRO were sensitive to the fact that a change in this student’s identity from a secular person to a Christian did not necessitate his change in identity from a traditional scientist to some fringe group of the movement. Some of the
difference might have been in the biologist's own attitude too. It appeared as if he really did not really care whether or not people agreed with him.

Not all cases however were as pleasant. One student who I knew from another context (the local bar scene) but who was also at CRO was homosexual. I knew this person when an introduction was made to me at another social function through the student’s same gendered partner. The student showed obvious fear upon realizing that it was me with whom the student was shaking hands. “If anyone else at CRO finds out about me,” the student warned, “I’ll be dead.”

I seriously doubt that there would be any physical violence on the part of the members of CRO. Violence in its physical manifestations does not seem to typify the normal actions of CRO members. Still I do not think that this student’s fears were without foundation, because in many ways, the student would be spiritually “dead” to the community. The members of CRO would not believe that the student really had all the correct answers to the five questions mentioned earlier. This person would be seen at best as a potential convert and at worst as an apostate. This identity simply would not be allowed.

Examination

In each of the criteria for sensitive proselytizing examples where the criteria were being met and where they fell short were presented. Undoubtedly this could result even if the members of CRO were to read this study and implement structural changes based on what they learned, there would still be cases of success and failure in the area of rhetorical sensitivity. Nonetheless these stories are stories of hope, even where failure is apparent. In these cases, the failure can be seen and as the leadership of the organization
grows, I anticipate that the rhetoric will move toward increased sensitivity. Change may
be is the highest purpose of rhetorical criticism: that critique is offered with an eye
toward improved rhetorical practice, not just more criticism.

Thus far this study has explained the criteria that CRO’s proselytizing rhetoric
probably needs to meet for this rhetoric to be sensitive. It has explained how the tools of
rhetorical criticism can be applied to the study of a community such as CRO and
explained the worldview into which CRO is trying to lead its members. Finally, the
criteria was applied to consider ways in which CRO is sensitive and where it tends to fall
short of that ideal. In the next chapter we will discuss the impressions and limitations
imposed by the community, method and reveal more of the voice and subjectivity of the
author.
Chapter 6

Incorporating the Spiritual

It was a typical Wednesday night service at CRO. The auditorium was dark except a small light over a music stand in front of the worship leader and the light of the computer screen projector which displays the lyrics of the songs we are going to sing. An acoustic guitar began to introduce the chords of a well known praise song with a steady trap set keeping the rhythm in the background. My voice rose with all the others singing:

- *How lovely is Your dwelling place,*
- *Oh Lord Almighty*
- *My soul longs and even faints for You*
- *For here my heart is satisfied,*
- *within Your presence*
- *I sing beneath the shadow of Your wings* (Redman 1998).

The sounds of the voices and the guitar were joined by two electric bass guitars. The volume of the singers increased. My volume increased. I closed my eyes to concentrate on God and on the power of His Holy Spirit which is about to fill me. I raised my hands in worship and receptivity, standing on tip-toe to reaching out my entire body length for God as we reached into the chorus

- *Better is one day in Your courts*
- *Better is one day in Your house*
- *Better is one day in Your courts*
- *Than thousands elsewhere*
I felt God’s presence fill the auditorium. I did not feel it in any tangible way, not in anyway that I could describe empirically without resorting to metaphor. In fact even the word “feel” is a metaphor for what was happening. Suddenly my sense of God’s presence was broken as a thought passes through my mind. How can I convey what is going on here to the readers in the study on which I am working? This sense of God is both a reason for and a method of proselytizing that is used by CRO. Since I was engaged in a study that examines CRO’s proselytizing rhetoric I should not leave this aspect out.

I sit down in the darkness. If I were going to examine this sense fully, I was going to have to write a chapter which is different from all the other chapters in the study because this chapter would not simply explore CRO and its proselytizing rhetoric. It will have to explore the ways in which spirituality informed the discourse, the difficulties in putting something spiritual down in writing and the greatest difficulty of all—that I am the one writing such a chapter. As the lyrics moved to the bridge, God’s presence overtook me. I forgot my concerns. I stood up and I sang:

*My heart and flesh cry out,*

*For You the living God*

*Your spirit's water for my soul*

*I've tasted and I've seen,*

*Come once again to me*

*I will draw near to You*

*I will draw near to You*

I did not really listen to the sermon given after the song service. Instead I started to think again about how to put the experience down in writing. Such a chapter would
explore the author who writes about the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO; me. In order to do this I must escape from the traditional modes of writing that have been described as “boring, esoteric and parochial” (Ellis & Bochner 1996, p. 27). For that reason I would abandon the retreat into the third person omniscient that had protected me from implicating myself throughout the rest of the study. I had to do this because I am the writer, I am not omniscient, and it is my spiritual experience as much as the experience of the participants about which I would be writing. In this chapter I would have to stop cowering behind the passive voice which reneges responsibility for my own interpretive acts by claiming that phenomena “were observed” instead of admitting that “I observed” them. Instead of hiding my uncertainties and fears behind authoritative academic style, I would have to foreground them in this chapter.

I would have to use a different method, both of research and of writing in this chapter. I would have to use a more colloquial style. The style is part and parcel of the critical method, autoethnography, which is “a form of ethnography in which the researchers examine their own life experiences and fieldwork” (Frey, Botan & Krepps 2000, p. 261). It is a work “produced by an ‘insider’ or ‘native’ observer of his or her own cultural milieu” (Reed-Danahay 2002 p. 423). Ellis and Bochner (2000) provide a concise methodology for the autoethnographic process: “I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I’ve lived through. Then I write my experience as a story” (p. 737). Even in this definition, the third person is left behind and the first person embraced in order to tell a story. By writing in a colloquial mode “[a]utoethnography introduces the cultural informant's own
voice, rewriting and reclaiming authority from the genre of anthropological participant observer ethnography” (Chiu 2004, p. 44).

The story of this chapter would be about me coming to terms (both figuratively and literally) with a number of difficulties that I encountered while writing about CRO’s proselytizing rhetoric. This story would be the sixth chapter in the study and would take place in the days and weeks following the writing of the fifth.

The Limits of Rhetorical Criticism of the Spiritual

As I walked to the campus house from the auditorium after the service I retreated into my mind and considered the writing that had been done so far in the study. After pushing the last keystroke of the fifth chapter of this study, I felt I had said enough for a rhetorician to say. I had drawn up a method whereby one could examine the sensitivity of proselytizing rhetoric. I had explained how a community’s rhetoric could be studied by applying the data collection techniques of an ethnographer. I showed the worldview into which CRO, the evangelical religious community I was studying, was attempting to draw converts. I gave examples of where they met those criteria for sensitivity. I also talked about how in some times and some places each of those criteria were not met. I had engaged in rhetorical criticism with an eye toward improving the sensitivity of the rhetorical practice of religious proselytizing and ultimately of rhetoric in general.

I was proud of this work and yet a knot sat in the pit of my stomach. It is the same knot that has come at the end of any work that I have done but one that feels especially tight when I study religious communication. Clifford (1988) described such a feeling in researchers as:
a pervasive condition of off-centeredness in a world of distinct meaning systems, a state of being in culture while looking at culture, a form of personal and collective self-fashioning . . . It is perpetually displaced, both regionally focused and broadly comparative, a form both of dwelling and of travel in a world where the two experiences are less and less distinct (p. 9).

It is a knot tied by the part of my mind that understands the limits of what I have done. I mean more than whether or not my colleagues and peers approve of my work. Even when I express this tension, my confidence in the work remains firm.

The feeling of inadequacy came from my role as a researcher and my role as a member of the spiritual community where I conducted research and seeing the displacement encountered in trying to live out these roles. Dealing with such paradoxes in embodying certain roles is the purpose of autoethnographic writing: “autoethnography seeks to make sense of the often contradictory relationships between self and culture that so acutely mark the postmodern predicament” (Lau 2002, p.244). These contradictory relationships had occurred in several areas during my time studying CRO but none so striking as the contradiction between studying the rhetorical acts of a spiritual community but ignoring the spiritual nature of those acts.

When I got to the CRO house after that service for the “coffee house” time, I felt this displacement keenly. I smiled and made small talk with the various people a made a list of the contradictions that were upsetting me in my personal digital assistant (PDA).

The first contradiction that tightened the knot in my stomach came from the fact that the tools of a communication researcher are designed for studying empirical phenomena, embodied performance, and rhetoric embedded in time and space. Whereas I
I am studying a culture where much of what happens is spiritual, disembodied and assumes that time and space are themselves imbedded in eternity. The second contradiction further tightens the knot because writing and communication themselves are limited media for transmitting spiritual thought. One has to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalms 34:8), it is not enough to be told. Even if it were the goal of the study, it is impossible to convert all of my readers to evangelical Christianity in order for them to understand what I was talking about. The third contradiction makes the knot even tighter because ultimately, all of the observations that I have made are my perception of those events and my perception is limited. Even if I could get my understanding of spiritual phenomena across to my readers, that understanding is partial. The purpose of this chapter could not be to explain away those inadequacies or mask them with some theoretical band aid. The purpose of that chapter is to dig into each of these inadequacies and explore them. This is also the purpose behind the autoethnographic method.

I got home late from the CRO house, after 2:00am. I had wanted to return sooner to do some writing before I going bed, but I had fallen into conversation with several of my friends/participants. So I found myself too tired by then to write.

The next morning I woke up late. It was Thursday and I had no classes to teach on that day this semester. Thursday was my writing day so I pulled out my PDA and started to think about the problems I had considered the night before. I could see the problems easily, but if I had known of any solutions the night before, they were lost to me now. The problem of studying spirituality as a rhetorician seemed huge. St. Paul explains that spiritual things have to be discerned spiritually: that if one wants to know something about something spiritual one cannot look at it through natural means. If anyone does this
“they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:17). One of the people I interviewed for the study agreed with Paul: “It is the Holy Spirit, not us that gets people to become Christians. We’re supposed to witness, but nothing we say or do will change anyone’s mind. Only God can do that.” The knot in my stomach comes from trying to understand spiritual things rhetorically.

I got up from the computer and went outside to smoke because this activity to help me contemplate the tension between the roles I play as researcher and member of this evangelical community. However I hated the fact that I wanted to smoke because I hated the fact that after quitting for so long, I had gone back to it. Smoking didn’t make sense in my role as an academic who examines things rationally. Rationally no one would smoke, it can lead to cancer, heart disease and other health risks. Smoking also did not make sense in my role as an evangelical Christian because few of evangelicals smoke and most do not approve of smoking.

However, I was contemplating these two roles as I stood outside my door and smoked. Over the course of the two years I spent actively observing CRO, the hours spent in interviews with the members, and the hundreds of emails, advertisements and sermons I read in their archives, I examined the steps and missteps in the organization’s proselytizing rhetoric. I found a number of areas where the members of CRO seemed to be insensitive in their rhetorical attempts at proselytizing. When I saw the campus street preaching, my rhetorical analysis pointed out that the members were playing inappropriate roles for the time and place. I problematized using in-group language with out-group members when the sorority woman told her sorority sister that she was going to “hold her accountable” and the way in which this was misconstrued as a threat. My
rhetorical assessment attacked the foolish refusal of certain community members to listen to alternative points of view. I pointed out the error of the woman who misread the *Kairotic* moment and wrote a speech for a class using only the New Testament as a source. I critiqued the foolishness of arguing over the value of wisdom between two members, when in fact they agreed. I described the realities that forced one student in the community to feel the need to hide homosexuality. Over and over again, I found what appeared from my perspective as a rhetorical critic to be foolishness. I was not examining these things spiritually however. I was examining them rhetorically. This is what pulls tight the knot in my stomach. Were these phenomena as foolish if one considered that God’s power, not human performance, was the ultimate rhetorical agency?

I flicked the cigarette away and went back inside, sat down at the computer and thought more about this difficulty. Examining something rhetorically is certainly different than examining it spiritually. The study of rhetoric is “concerned with the use of symbols to induce social action” (Hauser, 2002, p.3), not finding eternal spiritual truths. The truths that rhetoric finds “are social truths, addressed to others, justified by reasons that reflect cultural values” (Campbell and Huxman, 2003, p.5). If there is a truth that is absolute, which needs no justification and which is true even if contradictory to cultural values, that truth is beyond the scope of what is described by rhetorical criticism. Still, the assumption or denial of eternal and absolute truth, plays an important part in one’s rhetoric. As Veenstra and Kooi pointed out, “religion is not to be separated from communication and all that is persuasion is religious” (1978, p.43). So if the methodological assumption of rhetoric which is of a temporal, social truth is used to try
to understand a spirituality which assumes an eternal, divine truth, the result may well be the foolishness that St. Paul describes.

The reason for this result is that when one takes a performance, such as any of those described above and uses theoretical apparati to examine them, they are to a certain extent decontextualizing them: “a text, deeply moving when embodied in its own world may seem childish, naïve, simply quaint when carted off to a context unbelievably remote from its own” (McHughes & Crouch, 1984, p. 95). The academic context of a rhetorical criticism is far from the spiritual context in which these rhetorical acts took place for the participants. I certainly tried to bring enough of the context into the writing in order to make it understood, but all my descriptions of the culture ultimately come down to empirical phenomena. Empirical phenomena can be used anecdotally to describe some of what can happen in a spiritual community, but they cannot impart to the reader that spirituality itself which is necessary to fully understand the community and the actions thereof.

The community that I studied, CRO, defines itself as a spiritual community. They are a community focused around a set of beliefs about an ultimately spiritual being. I can and have described those beliefs: that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, that there is a literal Heaven and a literal Hell, that all of this matters, that God has a plan for each individual life which can be accepted or rejected, and that all of this is thought of as logical. I can look at the literature and history from which those beliefs are derived. I can look at the implications of the beliefs in everyday practices. These beliefs which are at the core of everything that is done in the culture I have described in this study, however, can only be
fully understood spiritually, not by describing them: “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Romans 8:16).

The descriptions I had given were enough to provide the ground to offer my critique. It is enough that my reader can gain an appreciation for the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO and other groups like it. Still, the performance of proselytizing rhetoric is an empirical result of what CRO members believe is a spiritual phenomenon. Using the tools at my disposal as a rhetorician and ethnographer, I can either choose to ignore these invisible phenomena, or ascribe them to the group a-contextually. I can say that my participants believe in them, but I cannot offer them to my readers for their scrutiny. I can only offer their results.

When I recognize my inability to elicit spiritual truths from ethnography and rhetorical criticism, I experience being “let down” by the study. I remember my undergraduate communication classes where I would get goose bumps as my friend and I would discuss what we had learned in our textbooks and lectures. We would get bodily chills at the understanding of the way language constructs so much of the world in which we lived. That understanding would lead us to questions that were answered by our faith. These were questions such as: what would the world be like without our verbal filters? How can we overcome destructive communicative constructions? I believed that the study of rhetoric could lead me not just to faith, but through faith. This way I could know, and not just believe. It was an illusion, and now I am disillusioned. That disillusionment is one thing that tightens the knot in my stomach.

I decided to call that same friend that evening to see what he thought about my problems. He is in a graduate program in another state which is more specialized than the
generalist communication program I am completing. He is behind me in the doctoral process, but because his entire program specializes in rhetoric, sometimes he has some ideas that I find helpful. He is also an evangelical Christian. I shared my problems doing rhetorical study of a spiritual community.

“Maybe what you should think about” he told me, “is the temporal nature of Christianity. Jesus stepped into time and interacted bodily with humanity. That is what separates us from Judaism.”

“And now we are the ‘body’ of Christ.” I agreed with him. “But that still leaves something out. The incarnation is a movement between the eternal and the temporal. I do not think that I am doing a bad job focusing on the physical acts and on the temporal aspects of the rhetoric. The problem is that we’re looking at rhetoric here, which means we’re looking to a certain extent at effects. If I think that ultimately the Holy Spirit needs to be acting in order for proselytizing to work, I feel like I am telling only half the story”

“Maybe,” he told me, “that is the half that you can tell. You can talk about the rhetoric embodied in a certain time, a certain place and for certain people. You can talk about how these utterances interact with other utterances throughout time. If there is more to it than that, well, like our undergrad rhetoric teacher used to always tell us when we asked some of the questions that bothered us: ‘that is theology, not rhetoric. That is not my field.’”

The phone call did not really help. Simply saying this was “not my field” felt like a cop out. Still, what more could I say? The Spirit testifies to the truth. Without the Spirit, all I am talking about is what people do, not why they do it or how it works. There is always mystery in spiritual communication that can be discussed but never understood
through rhetorical criticism of that communication. Perhaps this is a fact that should be
explored, but ultimately it needs to simply be acknowledged as a scholar. As a Christian I
am frustrated by the fact that my criticism cannot bring my readers to the understanding
that comes from faith. As a critic, that is not my goal.

In order to do rhetorical criticism and ethnography of spirituality, I employed a
sort of methodological agnosticism to the other chapters I had written. The reason for this
is that rhetoric and ethnography are both agnostic methods. If God is working in the
rhetoric or the performance observed, which my participants and I both believe, then that
is outside the realm of observation and beyond the scope of a critique. Perhaps I needed
to quit seeing this as an inadequacy in the study and more as a limitation. Studies always
have limitation and that one of my limitations was that I was at the limits of rhetorical
criticism might actually say positive things about my work. I still did not feel perfectly
happy about it. On the other hand, maybe I do not have to be happy about the work. I just
need to see it as what rhetorical criticism and ethnographic observation can become.

The Limitations of Writing

I spent the next few days furiously writing my contemplations about the limits of
rhetoric when discussing spiritual communication. I took brief breaks for eating, for
Church, to plan my lessons and teach my classes. During those breaks I was distracted
and eager to get back to my computer. Before the next Wednesday evening service at
CRO took place, I had written a gut-wrenching tirade against the usefulness of using
rhetoric to examine spiritual communication. I gave it to a senior scholar who has done
some scholarly work in rhetorical criticism of spiritual texts and was familiar with the
study on which I had been working. He had helped me a great deal in reading and
critiquing the other chapters and I had learned to expect certain things from his critique. I expected some pointers from him about things that I had missed. I also expected that he would point out the silly typos that I tend to miss when I get excited in my writing. Overall, I expected him to like it, however. That expectation was dashed when he returned the work to me.

The first few pages were covered red ink. It looked worse the worst I had ever seen on an undergraduate paper. Then, a few pages into the chapter was the most extreme and most disheartening comment I had ever read: “I stopped reading here.” I put the paper into my desk drawer and walked home from the office. I had not planned on going home for several hours, but did not see any point in staying.

I spent the next two weeks engaged in frivolities in order to attempt to escape from the depression. I went to movies. I talked on the phone with friends from undergraduate school. I sat in local pubs and listened to local bands play with varying degrees of skill, generally with a beer in front of me, but not really drinking. I have learned to seriously limit my drinking when I am depressed. Finally, I decided to quit wallowing and tackle the problems in the writing. At 4:00 am on a Friday evening, I walked from my apartment to my office and pulled out the chapter I had written and examined the comments.

Many of the comments were stylistic. I had attempted to write the chapter in an autoethnographic mode, but not really justified that decision nor had I explained what that decision entailed. This was a case of me seriously not considering the audience. I was certain that autoethnography was the best way to look at these limitations. After five chapters of a more traditional academic style, the colloquial first person stood out. I
needed to explain why I was writing the way I was writing. That would be easy enough to do: plenty of justifications had been made for this style in autoethnography and the use of autoethnography for examining conflicting roles within the researcher. Secondly, I needed to find a way to explain why the work I had been doing previously mattered in light of what I was writing here. I had framed the problem in terms of my own inadequacy, which made sense because that was how I had felt. I needed to explain more about how this was a limitation of rhetoric, not a personal failing. I needed to explain why even with this limitation, I had still engaged in a good study, just a limited one. I also needed to better explain why the spiritual aspects of the rhetoric are so ineffable. That was my biggest problem: I needed to use language to explain why language was not enough.

I walked home from my office to the sound of birds greeting the rising sun. It was beautiful, and just like the movement of the spirit, ultimately indescribable. It made me start to considered whether or not language is ever enough to describe anything, not only those things which are spiritual. Even if rhetoric were better equipped to understand spiritual things, or if I found some method of understanding the spiritual and engaged in that study instead, I know I would still get knots from the limitations of the work. I would feel that the work was limited simply because it had to be written: it had to be made into a story. It has been abstracted and made into words, which are not the things they symbolize. As Weaver said

The explanation would be that the cosmos is one vast system of analogy, so that our profoundest intuitions of it are made in the form of comparisons. To affirm that something is like something else is to begin to talk about the unitariness of
creation. Everything is like everything else somehow, so that we have a ladder of similitude mounting up to the final one-ness—to something like the unity in godhead (1970 p.214).

When we put something into words, we put them into categories. When I say that CRO is “Christian” or “evangelical” or “fundamentalist” or “a part of the restoration movement” I am putting it into a category that will necessarily bleed. There are differences between CRO and other Christians, other evangelicals, other fundamentalists. There are differences between the individual members of CRO. There are differences between a single person involved in CRO at one point in their lives and that person at another point.

When I apply any term or label to the people in this group I am oversimplifying because ultimately any use of language is oversimplifying. Language puts things or people or ideas into groups which causes those things or people or ideas to lose their individuality. I am saying this thing is like this other thing, and in so doing I am masking very real differences:

The fact that not all appendicitis patients nor all babies nor all Negroes are alike, even though we say they are, is something that we do not seem able to take into account very easily. The similarities, however slight, impress us much more than do the difference, however great, once we have stressed the similarities by naming them (Johnson, 1946, p.27).

So, this is a way that all application of labels, including putting things into words, breaks down. They break down in that every name and every category has differences between individual members. Therefore, categories can either break down through raising the level of abstraction and showing similitude between categories or by lowering the level
of abstraction and discovering the dissimilarity within categories and declaring that this is a difference that makes a difference.

So with language I created categories. I called some rhetorical acts sensitive and other rhetorical acts insensitive, knowing that a careful investigation will show that these categories bleed because careful investigation always shows that any categories bleed. I put individual narratives forward as representative anecdotes fully comprehending that other examples would show deviance because no anecdote can ever be fully representative. I created monoliths with my terms that one might generally find to be true, but if one looks at them closely they are a bit general, because the abstract nature of language makes it generalize.

I must be comforted by the fact that this generalization is no worse in my work than in anyone else’s. In fact some part of me wants to pat myself on the back and applaud the precision with which I have defined and applied terminology. Some part of me believes I should be proud of the fact that the description of CRO falls neither into the errors of hagiography nor demonizing. I did not paint CRO with a broad brush, but even the narrowest brush blurs on the closest examination. On the other hand, in one area I used a fairly wide brush. I say that certain aspects of the rhetoric are “spiritual.” A widely contested term that I have to say is the narrowest and most precise word available.

Of course, I know what I mean by “spiritual” and the members of CRO would mostly have a very similar understanding but would be equally tongue tied in describing it. The problem is that my readers may not necessarily have the same understanding that we do. I know that my readers cannot possibly capture everything in my mind via my writing for their interpretation and understanding. Barth claimed that there is no real
author, but rather “the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as the predicate” (2001, p.1468). The empirical person that I am with my fingers tapping the keyboard is irrelevant. The meaning that you as a reader receive from your experience with a text has little to do with this keyboard-tapper. The reader, rather, in her or his mind creates the meaning from what he or she has experienced in completely different contexts: “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is a place where this multiplicity is focused and that is the place of the reader” (p. 1469), not the author. The reader’s experience, the reader’s context (real or imagined) and the reader’s conceptions are the sum total of the meaning of the text. What I read when I look at it is not what another person will read. The reader is god, the author is dead.

I can tell my readers about the deep love that the members of CRO feel for those who they believe are going to Hell. If the readers’ experiences have shown only hate from those who see them as damned, no matter what I say will explain what I have seen. The readers’ own experiences will interpret this work. The readers’ own understanding of faith, spirituality, religion and community will be the lenses through which they view everything I say about this religious community.

When I finally got home the sun was fully up. Luckily I did not have to be anywhere until 7:00 that evening and I would get some sleep. As I lay in bed, however, I continued to consider the problem of conveying such a broad term as spirituality to my readers. I must accept that the readers construct their own narratives from the materials that I give them and the materials already forming a context for the work in their minds.
Fiske (1987) informs us that “any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledge is brought to bear upon it” (p. 108). The readers bringing to bear their own distinct knowledge on a text and rendering the text, based on those texts the reader has already absorbed, is known as intertextuality. Roach-Jameson defined the concept as “the human phenomena of making connections between texts” (p. 48). Some of these cases are cases of the author being influenced by another author: “writers have actually listened and talked to one another across the cultural and linguistic rifts and abysses which till recently described our socio-political landscape” (Van Wyk Smith, 1996 p.75). This is what authors such as Bloome (1992) have described as “genuine” intertextuality. However some authors have taken a more liberal approach to the term simply using it to mean “‘the process of interpreting one text by means of a previously composed text’ (Cairney, 1992). No matter how intertextuality is understood, however, it still remains that my readers will interpret my texts by the means of their own life experience.

This does not mean that my text cannot influence them, however. The reader may continue to see all proselytizing as evil, despite my arguments to the contrary, but they will also be bringing my arguments into dialogue with other texts.

This writing then, becomes as much the influencer as it is influenced. I have put forward my arguments, and then they are made useful to the reader in whatever way the reader wishes. My readers will certainly bring their own experiences to bear on my writing and, of course they will certainly abstract. My categories are not perfect but, they are the categories that I put forward and the act of categorizing itself becomes the text which the reader will have to interpret and assess.
As I start to realize the power of my text, the way that it will call out to be interpreted, I start to feel less impotent as a writer in the hermeneutic process. Push at my categories and they probably will break down, but the reader will have to wrestle with these categories to break them. The reader will have to deal with the realities that I present. In that realization I regain some of the agency that I had earlier ascribed to my readers. This text I have created becomes more powerful. I become more powerful. The knot in my stomach slowly loosens as I realize that the text I am writing in this study does not lack as much influence as I had feared. I was too excited to sleep. I got up and started writing, feeling freed by the knowledge that I still have agency within my point of the hermeneutic circle.

The Limitations of Observation

I spent the next several days correcting my work. On several occasions I felt like I was near completion, but I knew I needed something more. At one point I thought I was finished. I had rewritten the work to more fully explain the limitations as limitations, and not inadequacies. I had included many more citations in order to justify my use of autoethnographic style. I explored the limits of writing and described the ability that I still had as a writer to draw a compelling, if limited, set of categories for my readers. I was still slightly nervous as I finished, however.

One evening I was on the phone with one of my colleagues. She had received her Ph.D. from the institution where I was working to earn mine. I described the problems and the process of dealing with those problems of this chapter to her. I respected her opinion, and the way that she generally gave her critiques in a positive and upbeat
manner that led me to correct my errors, rather than dwell on them. Somehow, over the
course of the discussion, the conversation included me reading the entire chapter to her.

“That sounds good, Benji.” She told me. “I can understand why you are dealing
with the problem and why it is important. There is one serious flaw that I can see,
however.”

“What is that?” I asked her.

“I am listening to this and waiting to hear the autoethnography that you promise at
the beginning.” She replied.

“What do you mean?” I asked her.

“I hear a lot of theory here.” She said. “What I am hearing doesn’t really have the
narrative, it doesn’t tell the story of your writing and your thinking. Autoethnography has
to have that. It has to have the little things you do in it, or it isn’t really autoethnography.”

She was correct. I spent the next several days expanding the narrative within the
chapter and drawing more on my own experiences. I considered what I was doing at the
time and where I was when I thought certain things. I expanded the extent to which the
story was a story of writing, as autoethnography should be, and not just the writing itself.
Doing this made me consider other aspects of my role as researcher and other problems
that were entailed in writing about spirituality of a community. It made me consider what
it meant that the spirituality of this community was my own spirituality.

My purpose of using an ethnographic method of data collection was to fully
experience the rhetoric of the community:

The ethnographer’s method of collecting data is to live among those who are the
data. He or she tries to learn the subjects’ rules for organizational life, to interact
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with them for a frequency and duration of time ‘sufficient’ to understand how and
why they construct their social world as it is and to explain it to others (Rosen,
2000, p.45).

The ethnographer is admonished to not see the world as “self evident and familiar, and
rather to conceptualize it as a strange place” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p.167). The
ethnographer cannot place his or her cultural assumptions on the culture which he or she
is entering, no matter how similar to the ethnographer’s own world it is. Yet we cannot
see the world as too strange because ethnographic explanation must be plausible against
the way in which we believe the world works (Douglas, 1975).

I do not see CRO’s world as strange. Even the extremely spiritual aspects of CRO
seem normal to me. I recognize it as different from the academic world I also inhabit, but
not strange. I see CRO’s world as home. The fundamentalist, evangelical and spiritual
assumptions of the culture of CRO are much closer to my worldview than the secular and
empirical assumptions of the academy. I can say that the five primary beliefs of the rhetor
community that I described in this study (divinity of Christ, literal Heaven and Hell, that
all of this matters, God’ plan for each individual life, and the logic of all of this) are my
own beliefs. The world which the members of CRO inhabit is my world.

The extent to which I see this culture as my own culture raises in me a serious
question as a researcher. To what extent am I telling a story about CRO and to what
extent am I telling a story of myself? Have I taken my own reality and placed it on them?
Who is this story really about? Does it matter?

I went to great pains to make sure that the members of the community had their
views voiced. I had more than enough information from two years of observation to write
the study. This coupled with the organization’s archives could have written hundreds of such studies. Still, I did nearly 25 hours of interviews and transcribed them so that I could phrase as much as possible in the words of the people about whom I am talking.

At one point one of the CRO students asked me: “Why are you doing all of these interviews? You know perfectly well what CRO is like.”

“I just want to make sure” I told her semi-jokingly, “that what I see is not a hallucination.”

Even still, what I have seen is only my own perception. Even the parts of the interviews that I chose to include are the ones that I think are important. The questions that I asked are the ones I chose. Other questions would certainly have gotten different answers. Other people examining the culture would have picked up on different things as being important.

This is especially important because the study was discussing sensitivity in proselytizing. This includes being sensitive to seven elements: playing the appropriate role for the scenes the proselytizer encounters, using appropriate verbiage for the audience member, willingness to undergo adaptation, awareness of Kairos, recognizing when different words actually mean the same thing, providing a community to go along with the ideology and focusing only on the identity the proselytizer wanted to change. Each of these seven elements are subject to the opinion of the observer. Where I might see an unwillingness to undergo adaptation, another person may not and vice-verse. So, then it is my opinion of the rhetoric that I am explaining to the reader. It is an informed opinion. I explain why I have this opinion. Still, it is my interpretation of the world that I see.
The more I considered it, the more I realized that writing from my own interpretive standpoint was not a flaw in my observation or in the study at all. I am writing from my point of view. These are my claims of truth and in such truth claims are generally “entangled, conflictual, and co-constitutive. In the contest of postmodernity, the slippage between the real and fiction, between invention and recovery, is marked” (Sturken, 1997, p. 43). The fact that other observers may have observed something different than what I saw is not problematic because while “[t]here may be an objective world . . . because of the self organizing nature of perception and consciousness, knowledge of this world is determined by the coordination of the knower not by the characteristics of the known” (Lannaman, 1991, p. 181). So, I do not present what I have found here as empirical facts even though they can easily be verified with the participants. Rather I recognize the fact that I am telling a story. I can say along with Hall (1993) that my story, like his, is told “not because it is the truth or the only way of telling history. I have told it many other ways before; and I intend to tell it a different way later. But just at this moment, for this conjecture, I want to take a position . . . for the purpose of opening up some reflections . . . in a very particular way” (p.98). The position I am taking was outlined in earlier chapters which described my views on the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO.

Others may have focused on other incidents at CRO but that is irrelevant because the incidents that I described and the interpretation of those phenomena are my way of telling this story right now. I see the food giveaways as a way of being sensitive to role taking and the street preaching as being insensitive because one is proselytizing in a role that I see as proper for the context and the other I see as improper. I see the jargon of
“holding someone accountable” as insensitivity to the uninitiated, and the use of The Message as being sensitive to the uninitiated. I see the young men speaking with the Mormon missionaries as a sensitive willingness to adapt and shutting off the television because the Imam was speaking as an insensitive unwillingness to adapt. I see the attempts of CRO to “meet people where they are at” as a clear attempt at being sensitive to the Kairotic moment and the use of only the New Testament in a speech as insensitive. I could continue with the examples, but it is unnecessary. The descriptions of the events and the interpretation of those events are the way I see them. In each story I explain why I see them that way. Even still I know that my interpretations, my perceptions, are just a few in a cacophony of perceptions informing my readers as to proselytizing, evangelicalism and rhetoric. Mine are not the only possible interpretations, but they are clear ones which add to the social dialogue. So I decided to rewrite the chapter without considering my lack of omniscience a flaw. Instead I display the views that I have had of CRO as my way of coming to understand the proselytizing rhetoric if CRO.

Working Within the Limits

After rewriting the chapter again I reread and considered the works. I realized that I had worked through some very difficult concepts. Rhetoric is limited in the study of spiritual communication because of the fact that the aspects of the communication that the rhetorical critic critiques are decidedly not the spiritual aspects. I had explained that the abstract and slippery nature of language itself limits the ways in which writing limits the ways in which spirituality can be described. I had thought about the role that the perception of the researcher plays in deciding how research could be told.
This had not led me to the conclusion that rhetorical criticism of spiritual communication was impossible. Rather, it led me to explain the limits of that criticism. I realized that by acknowledging these limitations the study overall was stronger. The acknowledgement of the limitations contextualized the study and made it clear that the study was not discussing more than it really could.
Chapter 7

Review of the Study

This study has examined the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO, a campus religious organization. In order to do this the study the first chapter of this study situated CRO as a religious organization ministering to college students and part of the Restoration Movement. The history of that movement was briefly described from its beginnings at the end of the 18th or beginning of the 19th century, through its various incarnations ending with a brief description of the movement today. This description emphasized the three basic tenets of the restoration movement: “1) ‘Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent; 2) ‘in faith unity, in opinions liberty and in all things charity;’ 3) ‘no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but the divine’” (Osborne, 1953, pp. 389-390). A description of those basic tenets as it applied to CRO was described.

Next the study discussed the necessity of proselytizing for organizations that are a part of that movement. This discussion also included some comments on proselytizing in general which included interrogation of proselytizing as a statutory and moral imperative and as a part of our nature as symbol using animals. Following this discussion, the study argued that proselytizing as “any attempt to bend the minds of others to a new set of beliefs” (Coply 1997, p.3) is too near to every other form of rhetorical practice to be ignored by the scholarly community.

Finally the first chapter of the study set forth a justification for the use of CRO as a site to examine proselytizing rhetoric and began to discuss the possibility of studying a community as rhetor.
Chapter two developed a set of criteria whereby the sensitivity of proselytizing rhetoric could be discovered. These criteria were developed through examination of conversion narratives, the use of contemporary rhetorical theories of sensitivity and rhetorics of conversion and the use of the classical concept of *Kairos*. The end result was the following set of criteria: 1) The proselytizer must accept role taking; 2) The proselytizer must not use in-group jargon to confuse the ones they are reaching; 3) The proselytizer must be willing to undergo adaptation; 4) He or she must have an overall awareness of *Kairos*—acting appropriately for the situation; 5) The sensitive proselytizer must understand that there are different ways of verbalizing the same concept; 6) A sensitive proselytizer must provide a community to go along with the new paradigm; 7) A sensitive proselytizer must remain focused on changing only the identity that they are wanting to change. These seven criteria became the method whereby the rhetoric of CRO could be judged.

A problem still remained in finding a method whereby the rhetoric of a community could be examined. This difficulty was addressed in Chapter three where the argument was made that some communities do, indeed function as rhetors. Those communities that can function as rhetors would need to have several characteristics in common. They would need to have a shared sense of identification and agree on what divides them from others. They would need to have shared narratives that constitute them. They would need to have a shared ideology that exists through shared attention. Such communities would exist in order to maintain their ideology in the face of constant input through outside forces and function as mechanisms to understand alternative narratives. The maintenance of this ideology would probably be the primary area wherein
proselytization could occur. While adjusting opposing ideologies to fit within their own paradigm for the benefit of those already a part of the community, such rhetor-communities would also attract those adherents to the alternate points of view into the rhetor-community. The rhetoric of these rhetor-communities could be studied using a combination of anthropological techniques especially participant observation and the depth interview for data collection and rhetorical techniques for analysis. Once this was done a description of how these techniques were applied for data collection in the present study was outlined.

In the fourth chapter those techniques were used to ascertain the ideology into which CRO was attempting to sway proselytes and hold adherents. This ideology was described using five aspects. The first among these is an understanding that Jesus is who he claimed to be in the Bible: the literal son of God and completely human. The second and third are beliefs in Heaven and Hell as literal residencies of the eternal soul. The fourth argument is that Christianity does in fact matter. The final aspect toward which CRO’s proselytizing rhetoric aims itself is to sway its auditors and hold its adherents is a belief that God has a specific purpose for their life.

The fifth chapter discussed the methods whereby CRO attempted to sway potential converts to the belief structure outlined in chapter four. These methods were evaluated using the criteria discussed in chapter three for sensitive proselytizing. This chapter discussed areas in which each of the criteria were met by the organization and also described areas wherein the rhetor-community failed to meet those criteria.

The sixth chapter used an autoethnographic method in order to discuss the limitations of the study. An argument was made for the use of autoethnography for this
type of study. This chapter discussed the limitations of rhetorical criticism and ethnography as empirical methods for studying religious organizations which are have significant spiritual aspects that are difficult to define empirically. It also discussed the limitations imposed by writing itself in conveying such spiritual sentiments. Finally the chapter discussed the limits imposed by observation itself in gaining a full understanding of a group.

Implications

This research has a number of implications. The study found both sensitivity and insensitivity in the proselytizing rhetoric of CRO. This implies that sensitivity itself is not a monolithic label that can always be ascribed or denied to a rhetor. Rather, rhetorical criticisms that judge the sensitivity of rhetoric should consider that even within a particular criterion, the rhetoric could be sensitive in some aspects and insensitive in others. This should warn critics against the description of insensitivity as a kind of ad homonym attack on the rhetoric they are studying. Rather the critic needs to describe in what way the rhetoric is insensitive and should also be willing to describe areas in which otherwise insensitive rhetoric is behaving in a sensitive manner.

This finding also has implications in the rhetorical practice of proselytizing. A proselytizing rhetor needs to be sensitive at all times and in all places. It shows that it is possible to be sensitive in one moment and insensitive in another. This should serve as a warning to the proselytizing rhetor that they need to be cautious against insensitive rhetoric whenever they are engaging in any type of proselytizing.

A third implication is drawn from the sixth chapter of this study. When studying communication which has a strong spiritual component, there are limits to the extent that
such phenomena can be observed, described and critiqued. The spiritual aspects of the communication, which may be very important to the rhetor and to the listeners, may not be readily accessible to the critic. For this reason criticism should go forward with an increased humility and the admonition that what the critic can critique may not be all there is to the rhetoric.

Finally, the argument made in this study that proselytizing can be done in a sensitive or insensitive manner has vast implications. This argument can function as a starting point for academic conversations about religion. This is essential given the current cultural and political climate. As Stanley Fish recently (2005) wrote:

To the extent that liberalism's structures have been undermined or at least shaken by these [various philosophical] analyses, the perspicuousness and usefulness of distinctions long assumed -- reason as opposed to faith, evidence as opposed to revelation, inquiry as opposed to obedience, truth as opposed to belief -- have been called into question. And finally (and to return to where we began), the geopolitical events of the past decade and of the past three years especially have re-alerted us to the fact that hundreds of millions of people in the world do not observe the distinction between the private and the public or between belief and knowledge, and that it is no longer possible for us to regard such persons as quaintly premodern or as the needy recipients of our saving (an ironic word) wisdom (p. C4).

Fish goes on to ask:

Are we ready? We had better be, because that is now where the action is. When Jacques Derrida died I was called by a reporter who wanted to know what would
succeed high theory and the triumvirate of race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion (p. C4).

If religion is once again being recognized as a viable epistemological system by our culture, then it is essential that this culture find a means of discussing proselytizing and engaging in proselytizing which maintains its stability. The arguments outlined in this chapter are certainly not the end of such discussion but produce one method, that is sensitivity, whereby this could be discussed.

Recommendations for Further Research

The possibilities for further research after this study are nearly limitless. The most obvious place for future research to go would be to examine other religious organizations that function as rhetor communities and see in what ways their proselytizing rhetoric is similar or different as regards sensitivity. The research would not have to end there. This study opens up opportunities to study other rhetor communities whether they are religious in nature or not. Once such community is found the rhetoric of that community could be brought into dialogue with any number of rhetorical theories in order to learn more about rhetoric or more about that community. Another potentiality derived from this research is the study of sensitive proselytizing rhetoric in a myriad of circumstances. There is no need for the rhetor to necessarily be a community. These criteria for sensitivity could easily be used to study the proselytizing rhetoric of an individual or a corporation.

Further research could go into the criteria themselves. The criteria could be adapted in order to study the sensitivity of proselytizing rhetoric in particular situations. They could also be adapted to discuss sensitivity in areas of rhetoric besides proselytizing. So long as the critic goes forward with adequate humility, recognizing the limitations outlined in
chapter six, there is no reason that the ideas presented in this study could not be used in any number of creative ways to further human knowledge.
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