ABSTRACT

“MODERN DAY HEROES OF FAITH”:
THE RHETORIC OF TRINITY BROADCASTING NETWORK AND THE
EMERGENT WORD OF FAITH MOVEMENT

by Kathleen Mahoney Hladky

This thesis uses Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) as a case study for the exploration of religious broadcasting in America and the emergent Word of Faith movement. TBN is investigated as a challenge to the scholarly and popular understandings of religious broadcasting by considering it as a media-based church facilitating religious experience and community through technology. In order to understand TBN and its theological tenets better, the connection between the Word of Faith movement and Trinity Broadcasting Network is demonstrated through statistical and visual analysis of the flagship TBN program *Praise the Lord*. Additionally, this thesis examines the unique role of technology in TBN’s end-times theology and in the development of Word of Faith. Finally, the political investments of TBN are explored, paying attention to the way that encoded visual texts subtly point readers to a socially conservative, American, and properly Christian, but distinctively TBN, identity.
“MODERN DAY HEROES OF FAITH”:
THE RHETORIC OF TRINITY BROADCASTING NETWORK
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Introduction

When Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) purchased their first television station in Southern California, they professed that, “one of the greatest secrets hidden in the Bible for centuries is the miracle of TV and radio.”¹ Calling TBN’s partners “God’s modern day heroes of faith,” Jim Bakker, Tammy Faye Bakker, Paul Crouch, and Jan Crouch joined the dozens of Christians recognizing the political and evangelical power of communications technology.²

Following the trend of Pat Robertson, who purchased his own station, CBN, in 1959, the Bakkers and Crouches purchased KJTV in Costa Mesa, CA to broadcast continuous Christian television.³ Since its beginning in 1973, TBN has grown to become the most successful and widespread Christian television ministry in the world. TBN’s website touts that TBN is “the most watched Faith Channel,” a claim TBN says is supported by Nielsen Ratings.⁴ Today, Trinity Broadcasting Network is a part of an umbrella organization run by the Crouches called TBN Networks. TBN is the first of six networks started by Jan and Paul Crouch: JCTV provides youth programming (ages 13-17); The Church Channel broadcasts twenty-four hours of Church services; TBN Enlace USA offers programming for Spanish speakers, The Healing Channel provides programming in Arabic, and Smile of a Child TV airs children’s programming.⁵

Throughout this thesis, TBN refers to the specific channel contained under TBN Networks. As a whole, Jan and Paul’s ministry includes satellite, broadcast, and cable presences as well as the

¹ Trinity Broadcasting Network, Praise the Lord, October 1973 in Trinity Broadcasting Network Thirtieth Anniversary (2003). Trinity Broadcasting Network Thirtieth Anniversary is a three-volume bound collection published by TBN containing all newsletters published between 1973 and 2003. Viewers could receive the collection by giving a substantial financial donation to TBN in 2003, but the collection is otherwise and currently out of print. I was able to purchase the collection from a private owner through an Internet auction, but it currently seems to be unavailable at libraries, and TBN does not offer it for sale.
² Ibid. Throughout this thesis I will use the term “Christian” to speak generically about doctrines and movements that self-identify as Christian. Though the majority of this document deals with conservative evangelical Christians, religious broadcasting has always had a significant minority presence of non-evangelical, mainline, and liberal Christians. Likewise, I use the term Christian to speak generally of a broader culture and context for TBN and Word of Faith.
³ After a falling out between Paul Crouch and Jim Bakker, Jim and his wife Tammy Faye left TBN to begin the PTL Club. After years of changing leadership, today Paul and Jan Crouch are, respectively, President and Vice President of TBN. MinistryWatch, “MinistryWatch.com Donor Alert Trinity Broadcasting Network,” http://www.ministrywatch.com/mw2.1/pdf/MWDA_031805_TBN.pdf (accessed 6 July 2006).
⁵ It is my assumption that JCTV stands for Jesus Christ television but I cannot find a statement of this in TBN’s literature.
The popularity and prevalence of television-based ministries like TBN have made an impact on the practice of religion in America. Today, there are dozens of programs and networks dedicated to spreading the Christian gospel. As a group, scholars refer to these broadcasting ministries as the electronic church, a phrase created to respond to both the integration of media into local churches (PowerPoint presentations, films, websites) as well as religious television and Internet broadcasting. As a part of the electronic church, TBN provides news and offers alternatives to secular television with game shows, talk shows, films, sitcoms, and even a Christian version of WWE wrestling. Through TBN, Jan and Paul Crouch utilize television, film, and the Internet, to package and articulate their message of Christianity and global evangelism to the world. Though TBN is a part of a large movement of evangelical Christian use of communications technology, Trinity Broadcasting Network diverges from other ministries because of its proliferation and monetary success. While Pat Robertson was the first to purchase a twenty-four hour Christian television network, Jan and Paul Crouch have expanded TBN beyond the scope of CBN financially and geographically. Though Robertson has become a household name, CBN no longer exists as a twenty-four hour Christian network. Robertson sold CBN to International Family Entertainment in 1990. In an implicit criticism of Robertson, Jan and Paul laud TBN for avoiding the trend of selling Christian stations to secular buyers and purchasing time from secular networks. In the past decade, as Jan and Paul have started to pass their ministry to their sons Paul and Matt, the Crouches have often noted on TBN that legal

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6 I informally refer to the Crouches as Jan and Paul in deference to the conventions set by their television programs.
8 John M. Higgins and George Winslow, ”Top 25 Station Groups at a Glance,” Broadcasting and Cable, April 24 2006. TBN’s website offers a slightly different interpretation of this statistic. By reordering Broadcasting and Cable magazine’s rankings by total coverage instead of FCC coverage, TBN publishes that the network is the seventh largest broadcasting company. This statistic, though cited properly by the network and based on a factual reordering of the information, misleads the reader of TBN’s website about the actual Broadcasting and Cable ranking.
9 For example: Schuller’s Hour of Power, Falwell’s The Old-Time Gospel Hour, LeSea Broadcasting, EWTN, and Three Angels Broadcasting Network.
measures have been taken to ensure that TBN can never be sold, run by a secular power, air commercials, or broadcast non-Christian programming.¹¹

The proliferation of Jan and Paul’s ministries makes them an excellent case study for understanding the appeal and importance of religious broadcasting. Additionally, because little scholarship has considered the Crouches or TBN, this study will add to the academy’s understanding of Christianity in general and religious broadcasting in particular. In addition to its fiscal success and the ubiquity of its broadcasting outlets, Jan and Paul Crouch and the guests on their programming make claims about TBN that have not been adequately explored in previous scholarship.¹² For example, the Crouches claim that TBN is a television church and plays a role in bringing about the end-times. Furthermore, TBN is interesting because it is an institution for an emergent approach to Christianity called Word of Faith.¹³ In consideration of this evidence, this thesis will argue for an understanding of TBN as a Word of Faith church that has established technology as central to its theology and identity.

Before exploring this argument, it is necessary to establish a proper historical background. There are two important parts of this background. First, TBN must be understood as a part of American religious history. This conversation will place TBN in particular, and the electronic church in general, in the context of Scripture and the history of evangelical Christianity, urban revivals, and Christian radio. Next, because TBN is a product of the visions of founders Jan and Paul Crouch, it is necessary to explore the background of the couple. In order to discuss TBN as a historical phenomenon, the sentiment that underpins the Christian evangelical spirit must be understood.

I. The Great Commission, Urban Revivals, and Religious Broadcasting

At the root of the evangelizing spirit that motivates religious broadcasting is the idea that scripture mandates that Christians share their beliefs with others. Christian evangelicals often point to a passage in Matthew, referred to as the Great Commission. The passage reads:

¹¹ Spring Praise-a-Thon (Trinity Broadcasting Network, April 2005), Television Program.
¹² When discussing the claims of the network I will interchangeably use Jan and Paul Crouch and TBN as entities when discussing an insider understanding of the network.
¹³ Jan and Paul Crouch are not the only religious broadcasters who espouse Word of Faith ideas. Indeed, many popular religious broadcasters unexamined by the academy are a part of Word of Faith. For example, T.D. Jakes, Juanita Bynum, Benny Hinn, and Paula White are all major leaders in Word of Faith and broadcast regularly on TBN.
Therefore 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 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.\(^{14}\)

For obvious reasons, this passage has acted throughout Christian history as evidence to believers that there is a divine mandate to spread the Christian gospel. The importance of evangelism has therefore translated into the use of available technologies that might aid in spreading the gospel. Tzvetan Todorov’s book *The Conquest of America* offers evidence that even Columbus’ journey to the Americas was partly motivated by a desire to evangelize the world.\(^{15}\) Columbus used available nautical technologies to expedite evangelism. Similarly, today’s Christians interpret the use of secular media technologies as necessary because they accelerate the process of “making disciples of all nations.”\(^{16}\) Though some Christians were wary of the potential complications that could, and did, result from the use of television, a secular medium controlled by government agencies and private enterprise, the mandate of the Great Commission largely overrode these concerns. Indeed, the history of Christianity in America is scattered with examples of religious creativity designed to advance the ideals of the Great Commission. For example, religious innovator Dwight L. Moody offers evidence of a historic willingness to re-imagine and package Christianity to make it palatable and desirable for the public. Indeed, Moody’s urban revivals have directly influenced the style and form of electronic church broadcasters including TBN.

During the late 19th and early 20th century, a shift in the character of religious revivals took place. Dwight L. Moody, now known as the most famous preacher of the 19th century, converted to Christianity during his time selling shoes in Chicago. Moody’s keen business sense afforded him a tremendous amount of success as an evangelist. This was, in part, due to Moody’s unabashed use of secular advertising techniques as well as his collaboration with Ira D. Sankey, a musician and songwriter. Before coming to a town for a revival, Moody set the stage for success by recruiting pastors and laypeople to “create a buzz” around his arrival. During the revival itself, Sankey led songs and played music to arouse anticipation and create effervescence before Moody came on stage and continuing while he preached.\(^{17}\) Finally, when Moody entered

\(^{14}\) Matthew 28:16-20 (NRSV).


\(^{16}\) Mt 28:16-20 (NRSV).

the arena, his message was not one of theological complexity but a simple message of salvation impregnated with emotional stories of conversion and redemption. Dwight Moody’s revival of the revival, if you will, combined business savvy and the evangelical message. His innovations re-imagined the long-standing tradition of the revival to appeal to urban sensibilities.

In today’s electronic church, religious broadcasters still operate as entrepreneurs, employing business strategies and advertising techniques grounded in Moody’s legacy. For example, Moody was the first to incorporate music systemically into the revival. Today, the strategic use of music to create anticipation and excitement demonstrably survives into the programs and revivals of the electronic church. Indeed, the prevalence of Christian music with secular formats is a result of Moody’s shift to accommodate secular conventions for audience appeal. In much the same way, Moody has influenced the electronic church’s emphasis on secular celebrities. Today’s electronic church draws on a number of minor celebrities, similar to the status of Billy Sunday, a baseball player and famous urban revivalist, to help popularize their message. 1980s television star and former professional wrestler, Mr. T, former rapper M.C. Hammer, and actresses Tia and Tamara Mowry make regular appearances on TBN. These celebrities lend validity and relevance to the Christian message. Moreover, virile male celebrities like Hammer and Mr. T synthesize popular notions of masculinity with deep Christian faith. Celebrities such as Hammer and Mr. T popularize Christian manhood and demonstrate the contemporary Christian bumper sticker cliché that “real men love Jesus.”

Christian radio broadcasting, the most obvious predecessor of the contemporary television and Internet-based electronic church, also modeled Moody’s revival style. In 1920, religious radio ministries flourished and both mainline and minority religious groups had access to the airwaves. However, the establishment of the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) in 1927, led to a series of regulation changes that limited free airtime (called sustaining time) once readily available to religious groups. This decision led to fierce competition over these coveted slots. In an effort to mediate the competition, radio networks negotiated airtime with organizations representing major mainline Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant denominations. The resulting

19 Williams, America’s Religions from Their Origins to the 21st Century, 247-48.
monopoly forced fundamentalists and other religious minorities to purchase airtime in order to broadcast their programming.\textsuperscript{21} The shift to paid broadcasts necessitated a change in programming formats. Under the model of sustaining time, networks offering broadcasters airtime regulated content heavily. Broadcasting equipment was often outdated, having been borrowed or donated; and program formats, concerned with offending networks or listeners, were colorless. Because airtime was free, there was little pressure to innovate programming. In contrast, broadcasters who did not use sustaining time had to wrestle with the reality that their radio ministries could only exist through listener contributions. Instead of merely broadcasting to whoever might happen to listen, religious broadcasters had to work to innovate their formats to attract audiences interested in contributing to their ministry. The shift to paid airtime is crucial to understanding that much of the content of the electronic church is a consequence of the pressures of fundraising. To understand these shifts more clearly it is helpful to examine the most successful paid-time radio show: \textit{The Old Fashioned Revival Hour}.

In 1934, Charles E. Fuller began the \textit{Radio Revival Hour}, the program that became \textit{The Old Fashioned Revival Hour}. Fuller’s program focused on personal conversion and combined gospel music performed by a choir with fiery uncomplicated preaching. The resulting program had vast popular appeal, geographic spread, and, consequently, fundraising potential. Indeed, the financial pressures of paid radio ($35,000 per week in 1943!) motivated Fuller to tailor programming to listeners.\textsuperscript{22} During each broadcast, Fuller aired the letters and testimonials of listeners touched by the radio ministry or led to salvation. This practice of evidencing the efficacy of programming set a standard for listener supported ministries and today’s electronic church.\textsuperscript{23} The exaggerated emphasis on conversion was central in legitimizing the existence of an expensive radio ministry. While Christians may see entertainment or biblical education for the Christian insider as important, believers might be hesitant to send hard-earned money to a ministry that simply entertained. An emphasis on conversion, however, was a more “fundable” pursuit. By focusing on divinely mandated conversion, Fuller legitimized the investment of his listeners. The Great Commission evidenced a divine command to evangelize, and therefore

\textsuperscript{23} Goethals and Phillip, "Religious Broadcasting," 7711.
Christians were compelled to support such activities. Essentially, it was God’s divine will that listeners send money to Fuller’s ministry. There is, of course, no similar divine directive to be entertained.

The *Old Fashioned Revival Hour* never made it to television. However, during the 1950s many radio ministries began to use this new technology. One of the most prominent figures in this transition was Billy Graham. Billy Graham had a popular weekly radio program called *Hour of Decision* and in 1955, Graham pioneered religious television by taping the first televised crusade. Two years before Billy Graham’s nationally broadcast crusades, Rex Humbard, a Pentecostal minister broadcast the Sunday services of his Calvary Temple on a local television station in Akron, Ohio. 24 One year later, in 1954, Oral Roberts, also a Pentecostal, began to broadcast his healing ministry. These ministers, along with Graham, exemplified the content of the electronic church into the late 1960s. These men produced broadcasts explicitly intended to deliver the gospel to the world. Their programs were tapings of work done in localized contexts (i.e. church services or revivals) and though certainly constructed to move a viewer, were not produced in a studio with the sole purpose of televised distribution. However, by the 1970s the genre of religious broadcasting began to develop. Just as religious radio, like the *Old Fashioned Revival Hour*, had developed programs to specifically appeal to its listeners, as opposed to simply broadcasting the audio of a church service, Christian broadcasters began to develop programming targeted at a television audience. Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker were at the forefront of Christian television innovations, joining Pat Robertson and CBN to produce their Christian variety show. In 1973, as discussed earlier, the Bakkers joined Jan and Paul Crouch to begin TBN. This essay will now turn to a more personal history of the Crouches.

Jan and Paul Crouch both grew up in the Assemblies of God (AOG) tradition, the largest Pentecostal denomination. As a part of the Pentecostal tradition, missionizing and charismatic religious experiences were paramount to Christian identity. As a child, Paul Crouch spent time missionizing with his immediate and extended family in Egypt—both his grandmother and father were Pentecostal preachers. 25 Indeed, Paul’s father, Andrew Crouch, was one of the founders of the Assemblies of God. Likewise, Jan’s father, Edgar Bethany, was a famous AOG preacher and

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Jan spent her early life traveling to tent meetings and revivals with her family. During one camp
meeting in Rapid City South Dakota, Paul Crouch met his “stunning southern belle,” Jan. Paul
was so swept away by Jan’s charms that he does not remember any of the sermon from that
night! 26 After they married, Jan and Paul remained active in the AOG during the early days of
their marriage and ministry. Indeed, they even served as assistant pastors at First Assembly of
God in Rapid City, South Dakota. Though today Jan and Paul do not identify with Assemblies of
God, as they have vowed to keep TBN free of any denominational affiliation, the Pentecostalism
of their childhood influences their ministry. Most obviously, the focus on conversion in the
Assemblies of God tradition and the Crouches’ missionary childhoods, directs the central
undertaking of TBN—global evangelism. Furthermore, Jan and Paul’s Pentecostal background is
evident in the religious practices and beliefs they forward on TBN. Jan’s and Paul’s Pentecostal
theological presuppositions easily facilitated their transition to the distinctly Pentecostal Word of
Faith movement, a theology of which they are now among the leading proponents. Though there
are many critics of Word of Faith that come out of the Pentecostal tradition, it is undeniable that
there is significant resonance between the claims of Pentecostals/Charismatics and Word of Faith
advocates. Indeed, critics themselves point to these similarities as the fundamental danger of
Word of Faith. D.R. McConnell, a defender of Charismatic Christianity says of Word of Faith:

> The tremendous appeal of heresy is that it looks and sounds like the real thing!
> Consequently, the demarcation between heresy and orthodoxy is rarely clear cut.
> The most dangerous heresies lie in the gray area, a shadowy place of both light
> and darkness… all heresies have one thing in common: their threat to the church
> is directly proportionate to the degree in which they appear orthodox. 27

This quotation, though critical of Word of Faith, speaks very clearly to the close relationship
between the theology of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity, and Word of Faith. Critical
voices like McConnell also serve an informational end, evidencing the way that scholars and
Christians have received TBN, Word of Faith, and religious broadcasting in particular. Finally,
the critical voice presented here and throughout this work introduces an important theme of this
thesis: that the work on Word of Faith and, less frequently, religious broadcasting has to date,
been apologetic and polemical.

26 Ibid., 18, 23.
In the book *Christianity in Crisis*, written about the shortcomings of the Word of Faith movement, Hank Hanegraff, whose work is characteristic of a larger body of literature discrediting Word of Faith, questions Word of Faith beliefs through a comparison of Word of Faith to New Testament Christianity and “cultic” religions.\(^{28}\) Each chapter explores a different way that Word of Faith falls short of New Testament Christianity and meets the standards of Cultic religions.\(^{29}\) In the article “Interpreting Glossolalia and the Comparison of Comparisons,” James Constantine Hanges suggests that comparisons such as Hanegraff’s conform to a four-part structure constitutive of apologetic comparison. In apologetic comparison, two groups, called the “comparanda,” are evaluated with regard to two evaluative models called “referenda.”\(^{30}\) In Hanegraff’s case the comparanda, Word of Faith and “true” Christianity are juxtaposed with two referenda, New Testament Christianity and cultic religion—valued positively and negatively respectively. The apologetic structure of Hanegraff’s comparison reveals two important conclusions for this study. First, apologetic comparison: “functions with the process of group self-definition, and is dependent on the proximity of the group making the comparison to the group(s) from which it intends to distinguish itself.”\(^{31}\) In order for a persuasive apologetic comparison to be made, the two groups that are compared must share a referential framework. In the case of Word of Faith, both Hanegraff and Word of Faith Christians agree that New Testament Christianity is a Christian ideal and that cultic religion is fundamentally antagonistic with Christianity. Both would agree that if a movement is proven to be outside of the New Testament ideal it would be theoretically flawed. Furthermore, both comparanda abhor the idea of conforming to “cultic” theology. Ironically, this shared value system, used by Hanegraff to “prove” that Word of Faith is not Christian, acts as evidence for the profoundly Christian nature of Word of Faith. The attention paid here to the critical voices surrounding Word of Faith and TBN are necessary because they offer evidence of shared Christian practices and vocabulary and

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\(^{29}\) Hank Hanegraff, “Christianity in Crisis” The term cultic is used by Hanegraff in reference to traditions that are commonly agreed to be cultic by practicing Christians and therefore distasteful to the Word of Faith practitioner who believes themselves to be Christian. Obviously, his use of the term is negative and based on preconceived ideas of religious truth and not scholarly category.

\(^{30}\) James Constantine Hanges, “Interpreting Glossolalia and the Comparison of Comparisons” in *Comparing Religions: Possibilities and Perils*, Numen Book Series 113: Studies in the History of Religions, ed. Thomas Athanasius Idinopulos, Brian C. Wilson, and James Constantine Hanges (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming, September, 2006), 2 (references to this essay are given according to the manuscript copy supplied to me by Professor Hanges).

establish the perspective of this thesis that Word of Faith believers are most fruitfully analyzed when they are considered to be fully Christian.

The second important characteristic of apologetic comparison is that the content of the two referenda used to evaluate the comparanda, Word of Faith and true Christianity, are always determined by the comparer, in this case Hanegraff. Indeed, the meaning of New Testament Christianity and the boundaries of New Age religion are not set in some ontological reality but rather are fluid ideas constructed by Hanegraff in a way that necessarily excludes Word of Faith. There is the assumption before comparison begins that,” the two primary elements, the comparanda, are fundamentally different and that this difference is a matter of value.” The polemical, value-laden, and politically driven construction of the referenda makes apologetic comparison an exercise of power by the comparer over its closely related rival. By relating Word of Faith to a negatively valued other, cultic religion, Hanegraff devalues the connection between the movement and “true” Christianity. However, the content of the comparison itself reveals important data about the relationship between comparer and compared. By evaluating the specific locations of controversy in Hanegraff’s writing—the Gospel of Wealth and Health, Positive Confession, and the relationship of God and man—scholars can locate these issues as important differences that delineate Word of Faith as distinct while also locating Word of Faith on the historical and contemporary continuum of Christianities.

Considering the information that such critical voices provide, it is clear that Jan and Paul’s background in the Pentecostal Assemblies of God tradition is important for understanding their eventual move into Word of Faith and their motivation to begin and sustain TBN. To this end, chapter two will elaborate the connection between Word of Faith and Trinity Broadcasting Network. First, this project must be located within the current scholarship on Christian television broadcasting in America.

II. Religious Broadcasting: An Introduction to the Literature

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, scholars of religion made a considerable effort to make sense of Christian evangelical use of television media. Scholarship on religious broadcasting after 1970 responded to the rise of the Christian right in America and their use of radio, television, movies, and literature to create a strong Christian subculture and spread the

32 Ibid, 5
33 Ibid, 7
Christian gospel in America and around the world. The body of scholarship produced has focused primarily on the religious and political significance of figures such as Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, and Pat Robertson, each of whom has been outspoken in the public sphere and/or subjects of controversy in the media. As stated earlier, scholars coined the term electronic church to refer to the phenomenon of religion on television. However, it is important to note that this label is misleading, since the same scholars assert that religious television does not actually constitute a church. Up to this point, scholars have imagined religious broadcasting as a supplement to the localized congregation.

This project enters into the above scholarly conversation over terminology and the significance of religious broadcasting. This essay first diverges from previous discussions of American Christian broadcasting because it does not consider the most prominent and vocal media figures in evangelical culture. Instead, it will focus on a silent giant, Trinity Broadcasting Network. Although this ministry—founded by Jan and Paul Crouch—has existed since 1973, and has exploded in its power and scope while other ministries collapsed, TBN has received no specific or significant scholarly analysis. Though TBN may be mentioned by scholars as yet another media “powerhouse” in Christianity, the network and its founders are treated as if they are indistinguishable from their broadcasting contemporaries. This treatment of TBN as indistinguishable from other evangelical ministries is partly due to inadequate scholarly attention to Word of Faith theology, a key component of TBN’s ministry. Indeed, Word of Faith has only recently been recognized as an emergent religious movement. Milmon Harrison points to this problem saying the Word-Faith movement has “received a considerable amount of attention in the popular Christian press while, for some reason, scholars of religion have left it relatively

untouched.” Continuing to treat TBN as if it is simply a version of other evangelical media ministries ignores their distinctive claims and positioning in American Christianities.

TBN’s origins separate it from other religious broadcasters. For example, as discussed earlier in the context of Roberts and Humbard, most religious broadcasters began by televising the activities of their local congregations. This trend continued into the seventies with major media figures like Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggart. In contrast, Jan and Paul found little success in local ministry and designed TBN’s programming, such as the variety talk show *Praise the Lord*, explicitly for television. Jan and Paul also set themselves apart from other Christian broadcasters by minimizing their participation in the conservative political movement led by figures in the electronic church such as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and James Dobson. In contrast, Jan and Paul wanted to provide a space on television for evangelism and the maintenance of Christian faith. Though they share the political convictions of the new religious right, the Crouches are not outspoken. Instead, as will be shown later, TBN uses its network as a platform for figures within the American conservative political movement while also imbedding political messages, both visually and verbally, in the texts of its programming.

Finally, as discussed earlier, Jan and Paul diverge from other Christian television ministries by maintaining a commercial-free, all-Christian, 24-hour network, which integrates technology into their theology and understanding of the end-times, actively identifies as a television church, and relays through television a technologically-driven emotional life. Indeed, the differences embodied in the network establish TBN as a new set of evidence that potentially undermines or calls for the reinterpretation or qualification of previous scholarship.

Due to the scope of this project, it is not possible to consider all of the complex factors involved in TBN’s identity as a network. Therefore, I have chosen to highlight some of the most important aspects of TBN’s identity in order to challenge previous scholarly ideas about religious broadcasting and explore TBN’s distinct theological claims. To this end, chapter one will contend that TBN should be understood by scholars as an actual television church. To demonstrate this, chapter one reviews current scholarly understandings of religious television.

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broadcasting and puts these understandings in tension with TBN’s claims about their own identity. Chapter two will build on the argument that TBN is a church by exploring the ways that TBN is invested in the new religious movement, Word of Faith. Chapter two will begin by exploring TBN’s claim to nondenominational identity. After delineating the theology of Word of Faith, evidence from the TBN’s flagship program Praise the Lord (PTL) will undermine TBN’s claim to nondenominational identity by demonstrating a clear investment in Word of Faith theology. Finally, chapter three will investigate the ways that TBN has established technology as central to its ministry. This centrality will be demonstrated through evidence found on PTL, newsletters published by TBN, and the content of the twice-yearly fundraising campaign called the Praise-a-Thon (PAT). Chapter three will first explore the way that technology facilitates an understanding of Word of Faith and religious broadcasting as potent and effective. This conversation will extend into a specific exploration of TBN’s ideas about the role of religious broadcasting in the end-times. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Word of Faith as a theological accommodation of the pressures and opportunities of media technology. Finally, throughout this thesis, some basic methodological and theoretical tools, discussed in the following section, will be employed to help analyze TBN’s texts.

III. Theory and Method: Semiotics and Statistics

The exploration of the visual elements of Trinity Broadcasting Network requires the use of semiotic analysis to understand the meanings and arguments expressed in the imagery, architecture, and editing styles presented on TBN. The main bodies of evidence used in this analysis will be the daily talk show and worship program Praise the Lord, and the twice-yearly Praise-a-Thon, a week-long fundraising marathon. These two bodies of evidence offer different levels of visual meaning. For example, during the Praise the Lord program, broadcasts are not heavily edited, instead meaning is constructed through the visual imagery of the set and manipulations of the camera. The texts of PTL are therefore in contrast with the texts discussed as a part of the Praise-A-Thon. Because this event is a fundraising campaign there are frequent “roll-ins” aired that discuss various aspects of TBN as a ministry. These clips are generally between 1-3 minutes in length and are montages of images, music, and narration. These segments are interesting because they are carefully constructed and edited in ways that are not possible with live TV like PTL. In this way, each detail of each segment aired on the PAT is significant as the editors made deliberate choices on color, lens filters, music, angles, and overall
content. This is of course not to say that PTL is not carefully planned and composed, but to point out that the nuanced meanings within montage pieces are rather significant.

To explore these bodies of evidence, two types of analysis will be used. The first is a basic statistical analysis using data culled from June 8th to 25th 2005. Through a careful watching of the PTL programming during this time, information was gathered on the guests and content of each program as well as data about key themes and their frequency. In addition to this information, which is only used to discuss the Praise the Lord program in Chapter Two, semiotic analysis will be applied to visual texts. Loosely, semiotics involves studying signs which can be broken into two parts for the analysis of meaning: the signified and the signifier. The signifier refers to the actual image, word, or bit of music. The signified is the mental concept induced by the signifier. 39

To use an example from TBN, one sign used in their programming was an image of crosses rising out of the fog on a hilltop. In this example, the signifier is the image itself, while the signified are the ideas inspired by this image: perhaps most obviously, the idea that Christianity is appearing through the fog of a world that rejects a proper Christian worldview. In many instances, multiple layers of signification will determine meaning. In the example of the crosses just discussed, the clip includes music, spoken narrative, and imagery, as well as a greater context and sequence of the clip that all suggest meanings. In the language of semiotics, TBN’s programming is a complex sign: a sign consisting of many other signs. 40 Considering this complexity, syntagmatic analysis, which considers the positioning of signs in a visual text, will allow for a consideration of these signs as a meaningful whole. Though syntagmatic analysis uses spatial, conceptual, and sequential relationships, for TBN it is most useful to focus on latter, sequence, as illustrative for the systems within these particular texts.

Using these techniques together will allow for an exploration of Trinity Broadcasting Network’s polysemic texts and the shows varied audiences. The plurality in both the text and its audience allows for manifold layers of meaning and signification. The complexity of the signs, at times, over-determines the claims that are set forward; in other words, a message may be apparent at multiple levels. However, these layers also allow TBN to direct meaning at particular insider and outsider audiences. Often, for controversial and/or political claims, the many layers

of meaning offer opportunities for TBN to subvert convention and the legal constrictions put on federal non-profit organizations. Instead of straightforwardly verbally advocating for a political candidate or theological position, TBN often relegates these elements to the more subtle and subjective visual culture of the program.

The synthesis of image and word allowed by television makes Trinity Broadcasting Network a rich case study for understanding the intersection of media and religion. Indeed, TBN is especially illustrative for understanding the politics and theology of religious broadcasters in Word of Faith. TBN is distinct from the evangelical media corporations that appeal to white suburban evangelicals who have been the focus of scholarship to date. TBN is different and interesting because Jan and Paul Crouch claim that it is a television church, because it is part of the Word of Faith tradition, and, because the network holds technology as integral to its theological and ministerial identity.41 The task of authenticating these assertions begins by examining the hypothesis that Trinity Broadcasting Network is a church.

41 I will return to the issue of race in chapter two as a distinctive part of Word of Faith, and therefore TBN, as not only a reason why scholars have ignored the ministry but also as a crucial interpretive framework for understanding the appeal of Word of Faith.
Chapter One: Trinity Broadcasting Network as Church

I. Introduction

When the electronic church first became a force in the Christian world in the 1970s there was a mix of excitement and trepidation in its reception. On one hand, enthusiastic evangelicals embraced the idea that the gospel might be broadcast all over the world. Mixed with the excitement for the mass conversion of heathens, however, was a concern for the potential negative effects of media on Christianity. Some Christians worried about the unchecked power of televangelists and what they deemed “unconventional” (often Charismatic) theology. Others were concerned for the local church, worried that the allure and glamour of television ministries might entice loyal flocks away from church and onto their couches.\(^{42}\) The wonders and fears of new technology captured Christians in the 1970s and now, over thirty-five years later, much of the frenzy around religious broadcasting has quelled. Scholarship on religious broadcasting has shown that while televangelists touted the possibilities for conversion, the reality is that the audience for religious television is primarily Christian and churchgoing.\(^{43}\) Though scholars cannot deny that some people are touched by on-air broadcasts, the potential effects of television were overstated. Worldwide conversion—though still proclaimed by televangelists, including Jan and Paul Crouch—has simply not occurred. Not all prophecies were false, however. Indeed, the events of the late 1980s confirmed some early fears about the electronic church. Today, one cannot address the issue of televangelism in the public sphere without talking about the disgraces of Popov, Swaggart, or Bakker. In these cases, hypocrisy, and the quest for power and money played a role in the movement of the electronic church. Indeed, the very idea of an electronic church, and its threat to churchgoing Christians, has largely been put to rest by scholars who have shown, through quantitative study, that people are not leaving their churches for their televisions. Indeed, this effect, along with the denial of many broadcasters that their programming should be a substitute for churchgoing, has led scholars to conclude that religious broadcasting never did comprise an actual church. I shall begin by challenging this assertion.


For many scholars and religious practitioners, the claim that religious broadcasting constitutes a literal church may seem preposterous. Indeed, the most common ideas about churches are those of magnificent cathedrals or groups of people physically coming together in worship. When most people think about attending church, they do not imagine sitting back in an armchair and flipping on the television. The very profanity of this situation seems to contradict conventions of worship. Often people dismiss the idea that a religious television program could function as a church for these visceral reasons alone.\textsuperscript{44} The rise of religious broadcasting, however, has forced scholars and religious practitioners to begin to consider the possibility that religious broadcasting may actually indicate a shift in the way that Christians worship. Though some religious broadcasters have avoided calling themselves pastors or their broadcasts churches, almost all encourage viewer participation in their programming.\textsuperscript{45} Further, though there has not been a dramatic shift away from conventional worship in this country, research has also shown that some people use religious broadcasting as a substitute for local churchgoing.\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, one only needs to watch a few hours of religious programming on Trinity Broadcasting Network to hear viewers describing experiences of euphoria and religious ecstasy achieved from television viewing. For these individuals, television has the ability to transmit a sacramental life. These media-based (“mediated” in the scholarly literature) religious experiences let us know that religious broadcasting deserves our exploration. Current models in the humanistic study of religion do not account for mediated religious experiences and communities and there have been few attempts to examine media and religion from the perspective of the humanistic study of religion.\textsuperscript{47}

Despite the lack of scholarship from the perspective of religionists, many scholars in Communications have attempted to make sense of religious broadcasting. This is not surprising since televangelism is, at least in part, a media phenomenon. Naturally, these scholars brought

\textsuperscript{44} Another example of the popular attitude that religious broadcasting does not constitute a church can be found in Philip Yancey, "The Ironies and Impact of PTL," \textit{Christianity Today}, (September, 1979), 21.

\textsuperscript{45} This may be as simple as addressing viewers as part of their audience during the programming or as direct as asking viewers at home to place their hands on the television to receive healing or prayer. These practices are popular with Pat Robertson and Ernest Angley.


\textsuperscript{47} I define the humanistic study of religion to be, simply, the study of religion from a human-centered perspective. The study uses interpretation, history, and human intellectual tools to answer questions about the practice and experience of religion and is concerned with the human aspects of religion and not the question of god/s or ultimate truth.
their own concerns to the material and produced valuable analyses of audience demographics, the effect of the television medium on religion, and the political and social implications of broadcasting. Their work has focused heavily on the ministries of Swaggart, Falwell, and Robertson and their contributions are invaluable to an understanding of religious broadcasting. However, scholars in communications and other fields outside of the study of religion have not engaged any significant discussion of religious experiences or innovations in religious practices that have risen from religious broadcasting. These scholars have also come down soundly to say that religious broadcasting is not a church, but rather a phenomenon ancillary to the local church. This conclusion is, at least in part, a result of the academy’s failure to explore the claims of Jan and Paul Crouch and Trinity Broadcasting Network. TBN presents a body of evidence that is different from the typical “major players” in the field of televangelism. This chapter will explore TBN’s relationship to current scholarship in order to argue that Trinity Broadcasting Network is at least one example of religious television operating as a church. Furthermore, the chapter will explore the way that, as a church, TBN benefits its viewers, provides religious experiences, and offers a visual expression that models a domestic sacrality for people who worship in their home.

One of the problems with talking about “church” has to do with the ambiguous way that the term is used in both scholarly and popular literature. For some, “church” may simply be an “I know it when I see it” phenomenon. This is likely to be true for many who look at religious broadcasting and say it is not a church because it is on television. For these folks, church and television are simply seen as mutually exclusive. However, as scholars, we are forced to push our ideas past such conventions. Just as we struggle to define religion to include all the phenomena that we see as religious, we also struggle to define “church” to include the various ideas about church found among religious people. This chapter will explore four different definitions of church found inside and outside discussions of Christian television broadcasting. The first is presented by Stewart Hoover, a prominent scholar in Communications who studies religious broadcasting. He has produced one of the largest bodies of work on the subject and his work lays the groundwork for understanding religious broadcasting in the field. In addition, definitions of church in the study of religion and American government will be explored. Finally, the materials of Trinity Broadcasting Network will speak to the insider understanding of the ministry and offer another definition of church for evaluation. This evidence will come together to conclude that
TBN constitutes a church and that the designation of religious broadcasting as a “church” opens up new ways to approach and study televangelism.

I. Stewart Hoover and the “Electronic Church”

The book Religious Television: Controversies and Conclusions, edited by Stewart Hoover and Robert Abelman, claims to contain works by the authors of “every major recent book on the electronic church.”48 In this significant volume, both Stewart Hoover and Quentin Schultze make plain their stance that religious broadcasting does not constitute a church. Schultze says that “the electronic church is neither a church nor a broadcast style,”49 and Hoover adds that “religious broadcasting is neither entirely ‘electronic’ nor is it really a ‘church.’”50 These claims rely on unstated definitions of church. Therefore, the complete discussions surrounding these assertions are ripe for exploration.51 Though both Hoover and Schultze profess that the electronic church is not really a church, Hoover’s discussion is richer because it is a more lengthy and scholarly evaluation of the question. Schultze’s exegesis is interesting, but laden with theological presumptions that will be important later as appropriate definition of church is considered.

In the article “Ten Myths of Religious Broadcasting,” Hoover lays out many of the ideas that have arisen around the electronic church, exploring them as myths, which he defines as “as a set of ideas and symbols surrounding social and cultural practice.”52 One of these ten chosen myths is the myth of the “electronic church.” While Hoover himself uses the term in his own work, he explains, as we have seen above, that the electronic church is neither entirely electronic nor is it a church. Hoover’s first assertion, then, points to the fact that all large electronic church ministries are based in the world, and therefore not “electronic.” Indeed, religious television organizations often dedicate themselves to mission work that involves physical interaction between convert and evangelist, health services, children’s ministries, and help for the hungry. He argues, rightfully, that the electronic church does not merely exist in programming but also provides a number of “parachurch” activities that ground the ministry in the real world.

50 Hoover, "Ten Myths," 37.
51 Another definition of church exclusive of religious broadcasting can be found in: Frankl, Marketing Religion, 7-8.
52 Hoover, "Ten Myths," 29.
Hoover’s second contention, that the electronic church is not a church, deserves more of our attention, though it gets less of his. Hoover spends four paragraphs demonstrating that the electronic church is not electronic (a rather uncontroversial contention) but spends only the last two short paragraphs talking about why broadcasting is not a church. This disparity in treatment indicates that Hoover does not perceive a need to defend his idea aggressively. Hoover’s brevity indicates that embedded definitional assumptions, either personally or within the field, veil potential nuance. Two pieces of evidence offer insight.

First, Hoover says that broadcasters themselves undermine the idea that religious broadcasting is a “church” by specifically not calling their programs “churches” or referring to televangelists as pastors. From this evaluation, we see that for Hoover, self-identity, or the informant’s worldview, is central to his understanding of what it means to be a church. Had Hoover come across ministries that self-defined as churches it is possible to assume that either Hoover would grant their claim or turn to additional evidence to further his argument. Later, materials attesting to TBN’s self-identification will be marshaled.

Hoover’s second piece of evidence demonstrating that broadcasting is not a church is that televangelists encourage viewers to attend local congregations. Hoover points to Jerry Falwell’s thoughts on the subject. “We tell them [viewers] to go find a Bible-believing church and join it.” Indeed, this sentiment is common in religious broadcasting, including TBN. Unlike the first claim, that religious broadcasters do not claim to be churches or pastors, clearly rebutted by TBN’s body of evidence, the idea that churches do not encourage their members to attend other churches deserves scrutiny.

There are three assumptions within this second claim. First, a church must have a membership; second, an organization that is a church must not tell its members to attend another church; and last, individuals cannot attend both a broadcast church and a local church at the same time. Without even considering alternative examples within religious broadcasting, all these contentions are problematic. These problems will be demonstrated by considering the realities of institutions that scholars unquestionably consider churches. First, not all churches have memberships. A great many “churches” existing as museums all across Europe are popularly recognized as churches, but have no membership within them. Additionally, there are many

53 Ibid., 37.
54 Ibid.
denominations, such as the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana, that reject formal memberships. Second, the claim that an institution identified as a church will not send people to other churches demands evidence. Superficially, anecdotal evidence indicates that there are circumstances in which a church would tell its members to attend other churches. Some examples might include congregants or churches moving, special religious needs (support groups available at other churches) or availability of services.

However, even if we assume that Hoover would not see these exceptions as parallel to broadcasters encouraging viewers to go out and find local churches, there is a problem with equating their encouragements to the conclusion that religious broadcasting is not a church. First, consideration for the social pressures put on the “electronic church” by local congregations must be given. Because local churches continue to be concerned about television luring people out of church, broadcasters overcompensate to rebut this criticism. The emphasis on encouraging members to go to local churches should therefore be viewed as a response to pressure as opposed to an admission that broadcasting is not a church. Indeed, broadcasters share Hoover’s sentiment that local church attendance is ideal. However, there is a non-competitive role for the television church: communities of people without the ability or desire to attend a local church. Quite simply, context makes it clear that television church status is not threatened by recommending the local church. This sentiment, exemplified by TBN, will become clear later.

Finally, it is not true that people can, or do, only attend one church. One of my family members enjoys weekday masses not offered at her local parish. She travels to another parish during the week and goes to her local parish on the weekend. There is simply no reason why religious broadcasting could not operate the same way for its viewers. Though they may have a local congregation, they may also feel that they attend a television church as well. What seems to be at stake in this claim is a tension between an imposed scholarly understanding of religious life and the realities of popular lived religious practice. Hoover’s assumption is undermined by knowledge of the way that people already operate in the world, and tells us that electronic churches can coexist with the local church.

While Hoover’s ideas do not appear to be theologically grounded, it is important to note that there are scholars who approach religious broadcasting from an apologetic or theological perspective. What sets the theological perspective apart is that it cannot be compelled to consider religious broadcasting as a church even if it could be shown that it fits into an existing scholarly
definition. For apologetic scholars the scholarly definition of church is unable to capture the “essence” of what it means to be a church. Instead, their imagining of church comes with a value judgment about validity and theological coherence. Quentin Schultze is one example of a scholar studying and publishing on religious broadcasting who maintains an apologetic understanding of church. Schultze claims that religious broadcasting cannot be a church because local churches (real churches) are “animated by spiritual values, such as love, compassion, and sacrifice” while religious broadcast ministries “thrive on the principles of professional marketing and management.” This value-based understanding offers little room for contention or discussion.

By stating that churches are characterized by love and compassion, conversation that allows for an understanding of church not based on theological ideas of truth is closed. Indeed, Schultze’s comments fit into Hanges’ structure of the apologetic and polemical comparison. Schultze makes a comparison between two *comparanda*, religious broadcasting and “true” churches, by using two *referenda*: “spiritual values” (love, compassion, and sacrifice) and business values. Since both religious broadcasters and “true” churches would agree that spiritual not business values should be the essential motivation of a church, Schultze sets up a typical apologetic comparison. In the framework of this apologetic argument, it is impossible to evaluate the value-laden *referenda* without bias. This is because the *referenda*, spiritual and business values, rely on the assumption that Schultze is on the positive side of the comparison. In short, before comparison begins, Schultze assumes that religious broadcasting cannot be a church. Schultze falsely presumes that there is one way to understand his *referenda* and that he has mastered this understanding. For this reason, definitions such as Schultze’s are anathema to the humanistic study of religion. Instead, the definitions useful to this study accept a different set of values: a humanistic approach to the study of religion that values the perspectives of informants, uses categories for understanding as opposed to identity creation, and engages in the study of religion rather than its practice or promotion.

Hoover’s ideas are important in evaluating the possibility that Trinity Broadcasting Network is a church since his work represents a significant school of thought on religious television. Even if the definition of church Hoover uses is ultimately inadequate, his claims deserve considered exploration. As already discussed, TBN fits Hoover’s first criterion for

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55 Schultze, “Defining the Electronic Church,” 42.
church identity, the principle of informant self-definition. TBN calls itself a church and Jan and Paul Crouch call themselves its pastors. Hoover’s second contention, churches do not recommend attendance at other churches, merited an exploration that revealed additional context and interpretive possibilities. On one hand, we might assume that Hoover would accept these criticisms and nuance his argument with consideration of new evidence. After all, TBN has an informal and formal membership, and while it does encourage viewers to attend a local church, this encouragement is not necessarily in tension with church identity. However, operating with the assumption that Hoover would be steadfast in his evaluation, the discipline of religion provides other possibilities for defining church that allow for the phenomenon of religious broadcasting.

II. More Definitions: Academic and Governmental

The academic discipline of religion has not yet responded to Hoover. However, scholars of religion have struggled to create inclusive definitions for religious phenomena. The problem of definition is, of course, not unique to the study of religion. Even the American government struggles to offer a definition of church. The IRS tax code explicitly states that it offers no definition of church, though it does offer a set of fourteen criteria to which churches may or may not conform. However, religionists do offer some helpful understandings of “church” because, like the IRS, they are sensitive to the nuances of the term and its manifestations in the world. The definition of church offered by Peter W. Williams in his book, America’s Religions is useful and representative of the approach favored by scholars of religion. He says a church, may indicate a material place for worship, a local congregation, a regional or national institution, or the totality of the membership, past, present, and even future, in a religious community.

This understanding of religion, free from concerns of legitimacy or doctrinal accuracy is one that includes religious broadcasting. If a church can be the entirety of membership throughout time, there is no reason to believe that physical closeness is required for a group of individuals to see themselves as a church. Furthermore, insofar as many Protestants have already moved the understanding of church away from physical locations for their import, there is no reason for us to preoccupy ourselves with the idea that church has any necessary locative component. People

56 See Appendix I for the IRS’s official statement.
57 Williams, America's Religions from Their Origins to the 21st Century, 4.
worshiping in the studio during a PTL taping and people worshiping at home can be understood to worship together. Indeed, the Christian understanding of church as “wherever two or more are gathered in my name” is salient here.\(^{58}\) Scholars must allow for the changing contexts of technology in order to understand religious broadcasting as constituting the \textit{virtual} gathering of a church.

III. Trinity Broadcasting Network as Church

While Hoover’s evaluation of religious broadcasting is salient with regard to Jerry Falwell or Pat Robertson, Jan and Paul Crouch are engaged in a different project with TBN. They claim that: “TBN is more than a TV Network—it is FIRST and FOREMOST A FULL TIME CHURCH!”\(^{59}\) On one hand, this quotation is emblematic of their self-definition. However, for TBN church identity is about more than simply attending services through television—TBN views itself as a place where people can achieve religious experiences. The issue of religious experience through media will receive full consideration later. For now, it is necessary to explore TBN as a “FULL TIME CHURCH!”

The outright assertion of church identity has come at a cost for religious broadcasters like TBN since many Christians criticize religious broadcasters for offering an alternative to local church attendance. Voices of concern were particularly vociferous during the 1980s when many Christians felt that TBN and their broadcasting contemporaries would replace traditional churchgoing or take tithe money away from local congregations.\(^{60}\) These critiques were in fact potent enough that, in 1984, TBN specifically responded to the concerns by joining with other broadcast groups to conduct a survey of those who view religious television. Their findings, published in TBN’s monthly newsletter, concluded:

\begin{quote}
NOT ONLY ARE TELEVISION PREACHERS NOT STEALING SHEEP AND OFFERINGS FROM THE LOCAL CHURCH, BUT THE REPORT SAYS THEY ARE ACTUALLY DOING JUST THE OPPOSITE.\(^{61}\)
\end{quote}

\(^{58}\) Mt 18:20 (NRSV).
\(^{59}\) Trinity Broadcasting Network, \textit{Praise the Lord}, June 1984 in \textit{Trinity Broadcasting Network Thirtieth Anniversary} (2003). Emphasis in the original. The use of italics, bolding, and capitalization is used exhaustively throughout TBN’s publications in order to draw the reader’s attention to the many important points made by the author. Additionally, the frequent use of grammatical emphasis simulates the experience of a sermon through written word.
\(^{61}\) Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
Considering TBN’s history of controversy and the fact that they infrequently respond to critiques, it is important that the network took the opportunity to address this assessment of their ministry. Though the network used the survey results to unify TBN with the local church, in the same article they also subtly maintained the necessary role of religious broadcasting as providing a space for Christians who do not have a local congregation.

Our Lord has children in some places that often surprise us, providing a witness that otherwise might not exist. Broadcasters need to feed and encourage these people as much as they need to preach the gospel to the unconverted.62

While offering consolation and reassurance to Christians who feared that TBN would detract from their congregation, this article also acted to preserve the possibility that viewers could attend church and receive spiritual nourishment through TBN’s programming. Indeed, the statement indicates that maintaining the faith of people in these “surprising places” is just as important as evangelism itself.

Nine years later, a sustained commitment to church identity is evidenced by the publication of an advertisement in TBN’s July 1993 newsletter. This ad offered viewers official admission into Trinity Christian Center Church.

If you do not have a home church, or consider Trinity Christian Church (Trinity Broadcasting Network) to be your main source of spiritual nourishment we would like to invite you to consider becoming a member of Trinity Christian Center Church.63

The advertisement featured Trinity Christian Center Church pastors Jan and Paul Crouch and promised that new members would receive certificates indicating their official membership in the church congregation. The language of the text clearly echoes the sentiments found in the 1984 survey where the use of the phrase “feed and encourage” resonates with the claim that spiritual “nourishment” can be received through TBN. Indeed, the advertisement targets members of the viewing audience that were without a home church or, for whatever reason, find the network to be their “main source of spiritual nourishment.” Indeed, this text openly admits the fact that Jan

62 Ibid.
and Paul promote Trinity Broadcasting Network as a legitimate church with a global congregation. If TBN merely offered information to its viewers or allowed them access to a variety of spiritual goods, this advertisement, explicitly offering a self-definition of Trinity as a church, does not make sense. Despite the variety of Christian and scholarly voices that claim that religious experience cannot or should not be achieved through television, it is clear that TBN has an investment in maintaining this possibility.

Much like Hoover, this advertisement tells us more about TBN than its investment in church identity. The document offers a definition: churches have a membership, act as the main source of spiritual nourishment for its members, and have pastors. In the advertisement Jan and Paul and depicted as “your pastors” and membership in the church comes with a status-confirming mail order certificate. Here we not only find a definition of church congruent with Williams’, but one that fundamentally undermines Hoover’s denial that the “electronic church” is an operational church. Indeed, that advertisement even attends to Hoover’s concern that the electronic church encourages people to attend other churches. Here we see clear evidence that TBN envision itself as a church intended for those who “do not have a home church, or consider Trinity Christian Church (Trinity Broadcasting Network) to be your main source of spiritual nourishment.” At once, we see an assertion of church identity and a policy of not interfering with the local church. TBN is a church, but not a church trying to steal believers from the local congregation.

III. Religious Experience

As discussed earlier, the claim that TBN is a church is not simply an assertion of identity; rather, the idea comes with consequences about the way that people experience religion. During church services participants experience religious community, participate in worship, and may have ecstatic or profound religious feelings. The experiential component of religious community is emphasized in the context of TBN because viewers, broadcasters, and guests are primarily Pentecostal or Charismatic Christians. Within this particular tradition, religious experience is paramount to relationship with God and the validation of Christian identity. It is not surprising, therefore, that people on TBN believe and testify that television provides religious experience. TBN presents evidence that viewers engage with the television programming, join in ritual, and receive the benefits of religious practice—healing, financial blessing, and miracles—through technology. For example during an episode of “PTL,” Dwight Thompson, a preacher and
frequent host of the program, asked viewers to touch their televisions as they prayed together. Later in the show, he encouraged viewers to place their hands on the TV to receive the healing sent over the “television waves.” Similarly, during the networks bi-annual *Praise-A-Thon*, Judy Jacobs, a prominent female preacher and vocalist, told the audience about the healing she received while watching TBN. Jacobs described at length her despair after having lost her baby. Jacobs turned on TBN and immediately heard Juanita Bynum say that someone who had just turned on their television was going to receive healing in their heart for their loss. Immediately Judy felt her burden of sorrow lifted. Similarly, viewers are often asked to join in singing, dancing, raising their hands to the Lord, or simply praise together with people in the studio. Indeed, the fact that religious television performs these sacramental functions, often achieved through the church, may be the very reason critics find religious television so distasteful and threatening to local congregations.

As discussed earlier, little attention has been paid to the way that religious television engages audiences in religious experiences. However, the study of religion on the Internet has offered scholars interested in religious television new ways to think about the collision of religion and media while giving credence to religious experience. Lorne Dawson and Douglas Cowan’s book *Religion Online* examines the ways that religious groups have used Internet technology. In the introduction to their book, Dawson and Cowan distinguish between two categories used by scholars of Internet religion that describe the way that religion has manifested itself online: religion online and online religion. Religion online is described in much the same way some scholars have understood the function of religious broadcasting to this point. Religion online is cast as a “provision of information about or service related to various religious groups and traditions.” An example of “religion online” might be a website on a religious organization offering information about the beliefs and practices of Buddhism. Religion online does not attempt to offer spiritual nourishment but is informational and supplemental to real-world religious expressions. In contrast, online religion invites, “Internet visitors to engage in religious

65 *Praise-a-Thon* (Trinity Broadcasting Network April, 2005). Television program.
practices."67 One example might be a website that displays Buddhist meditation rooms intended to welcome worshippers.

Though religion online and online religion are used to explain Internet religious expressions, the sentiment of these categories is helpful in validating and contextualizing TBN’s claims to religious experience through technology. Like practitioners of online religion, Trinity invites their audiences to “engage in religious practices” through technology.68 Indeed, the benefits of the Internet detailed by these authors are applicable to television. Both offer constant access to religious resources, an ability to customize the length and content of a religious experience, access to a larger global community, the ability to be a part of a religious event in another geography, and increased opportunity for choice and exploration. The quotation below evidences the perception that TBN provides access to a “virtual” global community. This viewer’s life is enriched through her television travels:

Dear Ones,

I am one of the little grandmas who would never be able to get to any of the Revivals or Camp Meetings if it were not for the “Holy Beamer.” Words fail me to express what these trips mean to me. So even though I contribute for the Holy Beamer each month I just feel like maybe I want to give a little extra to make up for the Joy I received going to the Anaheim Convention Center for the Kenneth Copeland Crusade. No crowds to get lost in, no miles to walk. Just sat in my easy chair and was Blessed beyond measure.69

A couple ideas stand out in this passage. First, the viewer describes her viewing experience in language expected of a physical attendee. The “Holy Beamer” (a satellite on a truck used to broadcast live events around the country) is credited for this opportunity as if it were a relative who drove her to the event. Indeed, the viewer does not describe her experience as inferior to physical attendance at the event. Indeed, this grandma benefits by avoiding crowds and excessive walking. This sort of evidence suggests that the electronic church might actually be considered superior, in some contexts, to the local church. After all, a local church cannot offer you twenty-four hour sermons, teachings, and entertainment. In two hours, a local church cannot take a

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
congregant from one corner of the world for a revival in China to a women’s conference in California.

Like religion on the Internet, viewers can choose their viewing environment, alone on the couch or with friends, clothed or naked, anything goes! Likewise, the viewer may experience greater autonomy when watching, since they have the power to shut off programming at any time. Finally, TBN simply offers access to experiences impossible without technology. Indeed, TBN’s monthly newsletter often boasts viewers’ accounts of the benefits of technology.

I haven’t traveled much, nor spoken “in person” to multitudes, yet—as a TBN partner—I preach the Good News of Jesus Christ, 24 hours a day around the world, without leaving my living room! I know as I support “my TBN,” my voice joins this MIGHTY VOICE, shouting the Good News to everyone, everywhere: “Jesus SAVES—Jesus HEALS—Jesus is COMING AGAIN!”

In this quotation, a viewer perceives that credit for individual evangelism is possible through TBN. Christians do not have to go out of their homes to share the gospel. Instead, with their monthly contribution, TBN (a much more effective institution) evangelizes on behalf of its partners.

As the evidence has shown, scholarship on the interplay of religion and the Internet offers insight into the perceived benefits of religious television as well as additional evidence for TBN’s claim that religious experiences occur through technology. Furthermore, the ability to convey a sacramental life through television offers additional evidence that TBN is a church. Religious reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin held that the church was defined by proclaiming the Word of God and transmitting the sacraments. TBN fulfills the first part of Luther and Calvin’s “church” very clearly since they are always proclaiming the Word of God on their programming. Additionally, evidence of the transmission of sacraments, understood as

71 Interestingly, even the field of Internet religion may have something to gain through an examination of TBN’s claims to mediated religious experience. Dawson and Cowan specifically note in Religion Online that interactivity sets the Internet apart from broadcast media. They claim that interactivity is one of the reasons that religious experience is not possible through television. TBN offers proof that television programs have this capacity as well, however this is a matter for exploration in another venue. For more information about theoretical models that suggest dialectical or interactive model of television see: Laurence A. Rickels and Samuel Weber, "Theory on TV: After-Thoughts," in Religion and Media, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 94-111; Jenny Slatman, "Tele-Vision: Between Blind Trust and Perpetual Faith," in Religion and Media, ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 216-226
mediation of the divine to the individual, is also found. Through television, TBN can offer viewers healing, atonement, spirit baptism, and salvation. The divine power of salvation might be communicated through the viewer placing his/her hands on the TV set as the preacher reaches out to the camera to pray for the audience. TBN presents these activities as powerful conduits of God’s healing grace therefore presenting a clear sacramental life through television. It is clear that TBN’s church identity is multiply determined. Having now firmly established TBN as a church that conveys a spiritual life to its viewers, it is interesting to explore the way that this identity translates into the visual elements of TBN.

IV. Modeling the Domestic Church

One consequence of TBN’s identity as a television church has been that people, however few, attend church in their homes. In short, because TBN claims to be a church, Jan and Paul have a stake in the domestic space. Additionally, assuming that TBN is a television church encourages careful attention to the visual environment that programming is filmed against as well as the images that are offered in edited montages during the *Praise-a-Thon*. For example, an advertisement aired on November 10\(^{th}\) 2005 during a *Praise-a-Thon* depicted a short scene where an injured old woman ecstatically praised God in her armchair.\(^{72}\) Though the image lasted only a couple seconds, it is evidence provided by TBN that it is acceptable for viewers to worship in their homes. Further proof can be found on *Praise the Lord* the flagship program of Trinity Broadcasting Network and a direct product of TBN’s founders Jan and Paul Crouch. The four sets that hold tapings for *PTL* are all architecturally similar and were designed exclusively by Jan until the past decade.\(^{73}\) Considering the couple’s involvement, it is significant that TBN’s sets mimic the conventions of Victorian homes from 1840-1920 as described by Colleen McDannell in her book *The Christian Home in Victorian America*.

Specifically, the *Praise the Lord* set is modeled after a Victorian parlor. According to McDannell the parlor was a room intended to reflect the piety, religiosity, and status of the homeowner.\(^{74}\) At first glance, the garish presentation of the *PTL* set is almost shocking in the

\(^{72}\) Fall *Praise-a-Thon* (Trinity Broadcasting Network November 2005), Television program.

\(^{73}\) A conversation with a TBN employee while touring their Hendersonville, Tennessee facility, Trinity Christian Music City, revealed that Jan still has the final approval on all new set designs. The tour guide was quite clear that Jan’s tastes dictated the modeling of the sets and both Jan and Paul were still very involved in every detail of the ministry.

way it emphasizes material prosperity. This most obvious characteristic is, first, a convention of
the Victorian home. However, this ornate visual presentation is also important to the theology of
Word of Faith discussed later. To achieve the image of the Victorian home, TBN stocks their
parlor with items reminiscent of the style, including an unused “library,” which, according to
McDannell, demonstrated the prosperity and education of the family in the home. Additionally,
the large pointed gothic arched stained glass windows, plants, and crosses tie the PTL set to the
Gothic revival style of the time. 

Even the presence of an unused Bible on a foot-high pedestal at the front of the stage is explained by the two-fold identity of scripture during the Victorian era. It was a convention of the Victorian home to have one Bible set aside for use while another occupied a room to instill a sense of reverence and sacrality.

Indeed, even for the viewer without the knowledge of this specific architectural style, the
presence of staircases, bookshelves, and the living room setup of the stages indicates that TBN’s
sets are intended to evoke homes. The combination of TBN as a church and the visual placement
of this church within a home reinforce the idea that viewers can experience church from the
comfort of their own homes. Colleen McDannell’s work supports this contention as she points to
a long Protestant tradition of domestic sacrality, and in her article “Creating the Christian Home”
points to a contemporary trend within Christianity seeking to recapture the sacred domestic
space. Using the language of semiotics, the appeal to the Victorian home is an iconic signifier.
The connotations that come with the ethos of the Victorian home are conducive to unifying
domesticity and sacrality. The visual presentation of the Victorian home offers another level of
evidence for the argument that TBN envisions itself as a church. Just as TBN’s teachers worship
in their domestic space, those without a home church can worship with them from their own
living rooms. Moreover, the specific presentation of the Victorian home brings forward historical
authenticity and meaning that compels audiences embracing domestic Christianity. A discussion
of these meanings will resurface in chapter two.

75 Ibid., 39.
76 Colleen McDannell, Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America (New Haven: Yale
University Press, 1995), 68.
77 Colleen McDannell, "Creating the Christian Home," in American Sacred Space, ed. David Chidester and Edward
V. Conclusion

The evidence presented by TBN has made a compelling case for considering their ministry as a television church. Clear statements of self-identity were defended from criticism, and TBN’s church identity was shown to challenge and conform to pre-existing definitions. The benefits of a television church identity were explored to conclude that a television church allows religious people access to resources and ideas beyond the capabilities of the local church. Finally, this chapter explored the way that the visual representation of the Victorian home on the *Praise the Lord* sets offers viewers a domestic church identity.

As the chapter concludes, it is important to note that though there is clear evidence that Jan and Paul believe that Trinity is a church, their claims do not necessarily imply that their viewers agree. It may be the case that viewers do not see themselves as congregants of Trinity Christian Center Church. Though much of the viewer mail published in the monthly network newsletters points to individuals who use TBN as a church, we have no way to confirm these assertions without conducting a viewer survey. Indeed, even if it were the case that viewers rejected the idea that TBN was a “church without boundaries,” the proliferation of this claim in the face of its inaccuracy would itself represent significant data worth analyzing. Despite the lack of information about audience reception, TBN’s claims to a church identity cannot be ignored. By articulating a vision of technology that allows for religious experience, and positing a potential viewership that uses the network as their home church, Trinity places the achievement of religious experience through technology as a central component of its identity.

Returning to definitions, Hoover’s understanding of church has been demonstrated to be inadequate for an understanding of Trinity Broadcasting Network. Though his understanding is coherent for other ministries, TBN is different. Instead of denying or ignoring the church identity of ministries like TBN, scholars should embrace this categorization for its implications for the field of religion. For example, a rich body of evidence exists for those who study church history and architecture to explore the connection between the churches of religious broadcasting and the megachurch. Indeed, the definitions of church operating in religion—with their emphasis on self-identification and plurality—already account for TBN’s claims. The problem for the humanistic study of religion is not with existing definitions, but with a failure to recognize religious broadcasting as a continually important field of inquiry. As scholars, we must maintain a constant vigilance over our definitions and assumptions so that we do not fail to recognize
religion innovations due to our own bias or the epistemological limitations of our own categories. Furthermore, the disproportionate attention paid to the ministries of Falwell and Robertson is problematic because their viewership is largely upper middle class white folks. TBN’s audience, in contrast, has a significant population of people of color. Scholars must deal with the fact that we have ignored the religious broadcasts of people whose pastors and congregations are primarily of color and poor. A discussion of the interracial Word of Faith movement, religious innovation, and visual rhetoric will now consider the ways that TBN represents a Word of Faith church.
Chapter Two: Trinity Broadcasting Network as a Word of Faith Church

The appeal of Trinity Broadcasting Network to Christians of many denominations and approaches to Christianity has been a widely touted characteristic of TBN since its inception. Indeed, in the “About Us” portion of their website, the Crouches point out TBN’s nondenominational appeal as one of the most important and unique characteristics of the network. This, of course, occurs only after pointing out TBN’s most important statistic: TBN is America’s most watched faith network and world’s largest religious channel. As is common in evangelical Christianity, Jan and Paul Crouch overtly claim to reject the idea that there are fundamental differences between Christianities. Instead, TBN is based on a nondenominational model in which the founders claim that no particular approach to Christianity is advocated. Jan and Paul sought to free TBN from denominational affiliation in order to craft programming attractive to the basic instincts and needs of many kinds of Christians. Additionally, having a nondenominational identity allowed TBN to be marketed to a wider audience of potential Christian supporters and converts as well as avoiding the control of a Christian denominational institution.

However, a nondenominational identity did not always characterize TBN or its founders. As discussed earlier, when Paul Crouch began the ministry, he was an ordained minister in the Assemblies of God tradition. Paul and Jan had worked briefly in local ministry, but felt called to be pioneers in radio and television. Indeed, throughout his life Paul sustained an interest in communications technology, and worked as a ham radio operator since his youth. Despite Paul’s love for the Assemblies of God, he believed that denominational affiliation would only hurt Trinity Broadcasting, and, in 1974, the ministry officially separated from AOG. Indeed, the controversy over this decision was so considerable that Paul Crouch was asked to leave TBN for his resistance to affiliating with a local AOG church. In the end, Paul’s conviction that no earthly institution would control TBN’s programming proved to be a smart business decision. By allowing ministers from a number of different traditions to purchase time on TBN, the network was able to grow continuously and did not have tremendous problems filling and selling airtime. Indeed, TBN has often aired programming of controversial and discredited ministers, like Ken

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79 Ibid., 75.
Hamm or Peter Popoff, to the dismay of many Christians. Considering the hardships encountered by other religious broadcasting networks, such as CBN, Paul’s choice to open the network to the many ministers wanting to broadcast services and programs has been instrumental in TBN’s growth and success.

Today, many different denominations are represented in TBN’s daily lineup. Though most of the programs are hosted and produced by evangelical Protestants, one can also find charismatic Catholics and Messianic Jews on the station. Despite the prevalence of a socially and theologically conservative evangelical Christian worldview on the network, to this day TBN remains nominally nondenominational. Their website proudly proclaims that, “TBN offers 24 hours of commercial-free inspirational programming that appeal to people in a wide variety of Protestant, Catholic, and Messianic Jewish denominations.”80 To the same end, hosts on Praise the Lord excitedly assert that, “I don’t care if you are Pentecostal or AME! Baptist or Messianic Jew! We all come together tonight to worship!”81 Claims such as these indicate that Trinity Broadcasting Network does not seem to envision itself advocating a particular brand of Christianity, but rather as possessing a palatable, unspecific, and accessible theology that appeals to all those who agree that Jesus is Christ.

Further evidence of the network’s attention to establishing a generic Christian identity can be found in its statement of faith. The statement asserts a belief in the infallibility of scripture, the Trinity, salvation through Christ, the second coming, the presence of the Holy Spirit in true believers, and the belief that the Christian church is composed of all those who have been “spiritually regenerated by the indwelling Holy Spirit.”82 None of these tenets are specific enough in their parameters to exclude the majority of Christians, though certainly there are Christians who fall short of this mold. By crafting an imprecise statement of faith, TBN acts to both define what it means to be a true Christian and to create a definition broad enough to allow for various valid theological interpretations. For example, a Pentecostal reading Trinity’s statement would likely read, “We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells those who have received Christ for the purpose of enabling them to live righteous and godly lives,” to indicate glossolalia,

81 Praise the Lord (Trinity Broadcasting Network June 2005) television program.
entire sanctification, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{83} However, since the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can be understood differently by non-Pentecostal Christians, this phrase does not limit itself to one understanding of how the Holy Spirit manifests itself. This generality characterizes TBN’s statement of faith. Though the statement does exclude some Christians, it certainly does not unequivocally implicate any tradition.\textsuperscript{84}

As the evidence demonstrates, the overt claims of TBN consistently resist denominationalism. However, despite the assertion that TBN is unaffiliated with any particular brand of Christianity, the evidence provided by the network’s own programming undermines the possibility of nondenominational identity. Trinity Broadcasting Network is more than a generic Christian church; TBN is a Word of Faith church that consistently advocates an understanding of Christianity particular to the theology of Word of Faith. By contending that Word of Faith is central to TBN, this essay points to a tension between the stated position of the ministry and the actual content of the network’s flagship programming. Indeed, though Jan and Paul may not come out and explicitly assert a Word of Faith identity, as they want to avoid denominationalism, their teachings and worldview are distinctly Word of Faith.\textsuperscript{85} In order to understand better the ways that Word of Faith is expressed on TBN, it is necessary to first explore the historical context surrounding the emergence of Word of Faith and the approach to Christianity articulated by people who are a part of the tradition.

\textbf{I. What is Word of Faith?}

Prosperity Theology, positive confession Theology, Faith-Formula Theology, gospel of Wealth, Word-Faith, Word of Faith, and Faith Movement are all labels used by scholars, critics, and believers to describe the religious movement developed in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century and popularized by Kenneth Hagin during the 1960s. Insiders claim Kenneth Hagin as the “daddy” of the movement and believe he received divine revelation guiding him to the ideas of Word of Faith.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{84} See Appendix II for TBN’s full Statement of Faith

\textsuperscript{85} As an emergent movement, Word of Faith has not achieved popular distinction as an established denomination like Lutherans or the Assemblies of God. However, Word of Faith represents a loosely organized network of churches and organizations with identifiable beliefs and religious expressions. For the purposes of this essay, it is not important to demonstrate that Word of Faith qualifies as a definitive denomination. While there is substantial evidence to support a scholarly understanding of Word of Faith as a denomination, or at the least, an emergent denomination, the usefulness of the term or its definition is not the thrust of this work. Instead, this thesis challenges TBN’s assertion of non-denominationalism by proving that the spirit of the claim—espousing a universal and generic Christianity—is inaccurate.
Faith. However, Word of Faith did not occur in a vacuum and the movement has historical roots in New Thought Metaphysics, Christian Science, and Pentecostalism. Indeed, the writing and teachings of E.W. Kenyon greatly influenced Hagin’s writings, leading some authors to conclude his sermons and writings were actually plagiarized. Briefly, Word of Faith is a distinctly Pentecostal movement, in which believers claim the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the importance of being born-again, and the centrality of scripture. However, Word of Faith believers go beyond traditional Pentecostalism by emphasizing divine healing and financial prosperity as a right of the believer as well as the doctrine of positive confession, in which believers confess God’s scriptural promises in order to receive divine blessing. As stated earlier, Word of Faith has received tremendous critical attention by Christians in the past three decades. Particular concern has been raised by Pentecostal and charismatic Christians who fear that Word of Faith will become confused with their, rather similar, beliefs. This interesting tension will be important later when laying out the particulars of the development and ideas of Word of Faith.

Any discussion of Word of Faith is exceptionally complex and must first consider the problems and complexities fundamental to the movement. For example, it is only in the past two decades that the label Word of Faith has become popular among believers. In the past decade, it has even become common for churches to identify themselves as Word of Faith by using the label in their name. However, there is still a significant contemporary resistance to labels, and a historical understanding of Word of Faith is complicated by the difficult task of discovering who exactly is a part of the tradition. Indeed, the contemporary willingness of Word of Faith believers to identify themselves, as well as growing networks of churches and ministries, helps make a case for Word of Faith as an emergent Christian denomination. However, assigning denominational identity to Word of Faith is complicated by two factors. First, there is no governing body or central administrative authority. While there are organizations such as RHEMA and the Inter-City Fellowship of Word of Faith churches, none of these acts to bind together the movement as a whole. Second, as is so common in evangelical Christianity today, attempts to assign Word of Faith a clear denominational identity are thwarted by the fact that many leaders and adherents, like Jan and Paul Crouch, are tied to nondenominationalism and resist labeling. Often, instead of identifying forthrightly as Word of Faith, believers call

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86 Word of Faith received its name from the Word of Faith magazine published by Hagin’s ministry RHEMA.
themselves Pentecostal, spirit-filled, charismatic, evangelical, born-again, or just simply Christian. Of course, all these labels accurately describe the Word of Faith believer; however, none clearly identifies a person within the tradition. Indeed, even on Kenneth Hagin’s website, the founder of Word of Faith, the materials of the ministry do not fully indicate the ways that Word of Faith is different from other Christian groups. For example, the Tenets of Faith on the RHEMA website does go beyond the basics of born-again Christianity to establish Word of Faith as charismatic and premillennial with beliefs in the possibility of healing through Christ, sanctification, full immersion adult baptism, and spiritual baptism in the Holy Ghost. However, the tenets of faith do not include the actual divergences from mainstream Christianity that set apart Word of Faith, namely the practice of positive confession and Prosperity Theology. This commitment to the expression of Word of Faith in the most generic terms poses challenges for the scholar attempting to discuss the Word of Faith movement as a whole. Scholars must not only deal with the ambiguities that Word of Faith ministries intentionally present because they are invested in nondenominationalism, but also with the fact that many people who adhere to Word of Faith ideas do so without acknowledging their commitment.

This is likely the case because believers see Word of Faith ideas as a result of a self-evident literal reading of Scripture: Word of Faith is not one way to understand Christianity, it is true Christianity. Indeed, the tension between adherent self-identification and actual commitment to Word of Faith is a continual research obstacle. In order to proceed, a body of “indicators” has been developed to recognize Word of Faith ministries. These criteria will be introduced in the relevant section.

A discussion of the central theology of Word of Faith will now be offered in order to later demonstrate the connections between this tradition and Trinity Broadcasting Network. Kenneth Hagin Sr.’s ministry RHEMA, a foundational institution of Word of Faith, will provide evidence

88 RHEMA, “Tenets of Faith,” http://www.rHEMA.org/about/tenets_faith.cfm (accessed 6 July 2006). For the complete RHEMA Tenets of Faith, see Appendix IV.
89 The dynamism we find in labeling within the community makes it difficult to pin down the size, prevalence, and quality of Word of Faith. Scholar Milmon Harrison, one of the only scholars writing on Word of Faith from an academic perspective, offers a similar evaluation of the difficulties in identifying Word of Faith adherents and suggests that Word of Faith consists of at least “2,300-2,500 churches, ministries, fellowships or television networks in the United States and in more than 60 countries abroad.” Harrison, does not offer an estimate for the number of believers in the movement, a far more difficult statistic to ascertain. Harrison, Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion, 18.
for this analysis. RHEMA is a rich resource for a number of reasons. First, Kenneth Hagin and RHEMA are unequivocally Word of Faith. Hagin is the acknowledged founder and “daddy” of the Word of Faith movement and Hagin began RHEMA. Considering the difficulties of pinpointing Word of Faith believers, mischaracterization or confusion is avoided by turning to RHEMA. Second, RHEMA publishes Word of Faith magazine (the periodical that gives Word of Faith its name) and many of Hagin Sr.’s original sermons are published there. Indeed, I rely heavily on the magazine for information about Word of Faith belief and practice since it is intended to explain and sustain Word of Faith ideas for its readership. In short, RHEMA is simply the most reliable and authoritative source available for understanding the claims of Word of Faith. Without substantial scholarly work on Word of Faith to turn to, these primary materials, combined with the lens of Christian critics to bring difference into focus, are an excellent starting point for the evaluation of Word of Faith.

The many critics of Word of Faith are impossible to ignore, and create a profoundly different picture of the teachings and history of Word of Faith. Indeed, the conversation surrounding Word of Faith is dominated by, on one hand, Word of Faith apologists and, on the other, vehement Christian critics that seek to dissociate Word of Faith from their own theology calling it cultic, misleading, and dangerous. The tone of many of these books and articles is one of apocalyptic doom. Hank Hanegraff writes:

Under the banner “Jesus is Lord,” multitudes are being duped by a gospel of greed and are embracing doctrines straight from the metaphysical cults. While

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90 RHEMA, now run by Kenneth Hagin Jr., was founded in 1974 after Hagin Sr. had been in ministry for over a decade. After a successful career in preaching and teaching, Hagin created RHEMA in “response to the need for a school that would teach the principles of faith to those preparing for the ministry.” Hagin’s bible college taught students about God’s principles of healing and has become a premier educational institution for ministers in Word of Faith. Throughout the years, RHEMA has become an international organization that includes a monthly publication entitled, “Word of Faith,” television programming, radio, books and CDs, crusades, a prison ministry, and mission work.

91 On RHEMA’s website the ministry claims that the Word of Faith magazine goes out to 250,000 homes each month. The magazine is a source for biblical teaching, events and conferences within the Word of Faith movement and RHEMA, as well as an outlet for the teachings of Kenneth Hagin Jr. and His life Lynette. Each month the teachings of both ministers are featured.

92 While looking to religious authorities for doctrinal truth is necessary and helpful to our understanding of Word of Faith, believer’s ideas about Word of Faith obviously have varying levels of conformity to the doctrine. However, since so few scholars have paid attention to the claims of Word of Faith, I believe that it is crucial that I explore the religious claims being made by the authorities before any project concerning lived religion might be carried out.

93 The critics of Word of Faith come from all parts of the Christian community, however, the strongest voices arise out of the evangelical Protestant tradition.
convinced that what they hear is the real thing, they are in fact turning on to nothing more than a cheap counterfeit. Eternal truths from the Word of God are being perverted into bad mythology—and all the while Christianity is hurling at breakneck speed into a crisis of unparalleled proportions.  

In some ways, these categorizations of Word of Faith are unhelpful because the bias of these theologians overwhelms their work and resists a critique of their own worldviews. However, the words of critics are helpful for locating the areas of contention that exist between Word of Faith Christians and other evangelical and mainstream Christians. By focusing on the areas of disconnect one can see the innovation and difference clearly, both through the eyes of the Word of Faith believer and the critic. Though I have allowed the claims of RHEMA and Word of Faith magazine to explain the tenets of faith, the data that these antagonistic works have provided about the points of departure have helped me locate areas of critical difference: positive confession, and material prosperity and physical health as constitutive of Word of Faith.  

Positive confession, also labeled by detractors as “Name it and Claim it,” or, more amusingly “Blah it and Grab it,” references the Word of Faith belief that people can receive gifts from God (i.e. glossolalia, healing, money, children) by speaking words about themselves that God has spoken about them in the Bible. By confessing God’s own words, the believer harnesses the power given to them through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. This confession of God’s desires for his people allows believers to make God’s promises a reality. For example, Word of Faith believers see prosperity as a divinely ordained right. Using positive confession, believers might confess that they are financially blessed, even if their current financial situation is not one of abundance. By confessing their blessing, the believer can signal their faith and call on God to fulfill his scriptural contract. The importance of the spoken word to the spiritual and physical state of the believer is made evident when we consider not only the importance of

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95 My own evaluation of Word of Faith’s central theological claims departs slightly from the work of Milmon F. Harrison. In his evaluation of Word of Faith he locates three core theological claims that distinguish Word of Faith: knowing who you are in Christ, positive confession, and material prosperity and health being the right of every believer. In my reading of the primary sources, I understand “knowing who you are in Christ” to be subsidiary to the functioning of positive confession and best understood as a unique approach because of positive confession. Simply “knowing who you are in Christ” is characteristic of many Christian traditions; it is the fact that this knowledge leads you to positive confession that is important to Word of Faith. Furthermore, the critics of Word of Faith never mention, “knowing who you are in Christ.” Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 8.
96 The turn of phrase “Blah it and Grab it” is generally used by detractors of Word of Faith theology. An example of its use is available at: http://www.blessedquietness.com/journal/housechu/rHEMA1.htm
positive confession, but also the dedication to avoiding negative confessions, which are seen as being equally powerful. For example, when asked the question: how are you? A believer should not respond sick or struggling, but instead, blessed or on the top and rising.\textsuperscript{97} For the believer invested in the logic of positive confession it is not only crucial that you harness your divine right as it is articulated in scripture but believers must also avoid undermining God’s plan for them with negative thinking and speaking.

In the Word of Faith model, God is required to respond to the believer’s positive confession. An article that appeared in the January 2006 issue of “Word of Faith” concretely demonstrates the practical application of the rather abstract idea of positive confession. This article describes a daily program for a positive confession to receive healing. First, believers are instructed to read seven passages from the Bible about faith. After reading each of the passages, the article directs the reader to ask God for guidance in understanding their faith, the meaning of each verse, and the “reality of receiving by faith.” Finally, the reader is instructed to take action through a confession that will reinforce God’s Word. They are instructed to confess:

\begin{quote}
I am a doer of the Word, not just a hearer only. The Word of God says, ‘By Jesus’ stripes, ye were healed.’ Since I \textit{was} healed, then I \textit{am} healed.” The Word of God says all things are possible to him who believes. I am a believer. All things are possible for me because I believe God’s Word.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

Here we see the formulaic nature of positive confession. First, a passage about the healing of believers from scripture is identified. This passage alerts the believer to God’s desire that all his children be healed. Next, evidence of healing in scripture is understood as a contractual relationship between the believer and God. This contract guarantees healing. Finally, by naming the gift that God promised in scripture and claiming aloud the gift for him-/herself, the believer becomes “a doer of the Word, not just the hearer only.”\textsuperscript{99} Indeed, the power of positive confession, extends beyond enacting a contract between God and believer. Harrison says of this, “In the Biblical account of creation, God spoke and there was light. The Faith Message teaches believers that the same world-creating power is theirs as born-again Christians, and that it is a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[97] Harrison, \textit{Righteous Riches}, 10.
\item[99] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
spiritual law that the spoken word sets creative (or destructive) forces in motion.”

All things contained in scripture are possible for the believer once they harness the creative power of the spoken word.

According to Hagin, positive confession can never fail for the true and faithful believer, though it may prove ineffective for the unfaithful or doubtful Christian. However, the formula is not as simple as it first appears to be. When the true believer confesses knowing that they will receive, they are guaranteed results—*as long as they have the proper relationship with God.* Believers must not only know that the Bible is a contract between God and born-again believers but must also have genuine faith that they deserve God’s graces. In this model, abundant life through Christ is not only a blessing but the right of the believer. Moreover, Hagin claims that faith and believing are the only way that believers can receive from God. Abundant life cannot be achieved with intellect. “And it’s with our heart, not our head—our intellect or our physical senses—that we believe.” In Word of Faith, the knowledge of the proper relationship with Christ is gained through direct revelation between God and the believer. The spiritual confidence to claim your godly inheritance is attained through scripture, prayer, or through the influence of the Holy Spirit. The knowledge required for positive confession is not a product of education. Indeed, the authority of experience is always more essential than the authority of formal training.

The second claim distinguishing Word of Faith as a movement is the belief that material and physical prosperity is the divine right of Christians. The doctrine is known, inside and outside the movement, as the gospel of wealth and health or Prosperity Theology. This idea works in conjunction with the premises of positive confession since believers must first recognize that health and material prosperity are acceptable ends. Since the mainstream perception in Christianity is that Christians should not crave material excess, it is not possible for Word of Faith Christians to harness prosperity unless they leave behind these ideas. To this end, the movement, claims that characterizations of Christ as impoverished are misled. Instead, preachers in Word of Faith describe Jesus as wealthy and even as having worn “designer”

\[101\] Ibid.
In order to be prosperous, believers must fundamentally change their way of thinking about Jesus.

Material prosperity and health are both harnessed by the practice of sowing your seed—a metaphor for tithing. Under this worldview, believers are encouraged to give money to Christian ministries as an act of sowing their seed for God and are promised a multiplied reward in return. The benefits of sowing your “seed” not only manifest in financial reward, but can result in healing sickness, conversions for loved ones, emotional repair, and any other necessary changes in the life of the giver. RHEMA generally focuses its teachings on healing and health rather than the importance of financial prosperity. However, financial prosperity is a consequence of positive confession and considered the divine right of the believer. Testimonies in RHEMA such as “Since I became a Word Partner, my annual income has doubled,” speaks to the belief that it is God’s desire that his people be prosperous.104 As this testimony attests, participation in Word of Faith ministries results in financial prosperity. For Word of Faith believers, healing is also often spoken of in reference to money. For example, on one episode of Praise the Lord, Jan shouted, “Your wallet is going to be healed in God’s name!”105 Often, the discussion of prosperity is understood by believers to be a part of God’s total healing of his chosen people.

The gospel of wealth and health is by far the most controversial element of the Word of Faith theology because critics see the doctrine as misleading and dangerous. Critics point to the many stories where believers have given money without the promised returns, or to the encouragement of believers to give money they do not already have in order to demonstrate their faith in God to get more reward. On Trinity Broadcasting Network, preachers frequently ask viewers to send money to receive blessings. Paul Crouch, in particular, is notorious for encouraging viewers to pledge money beyond what they have in order to demonstrate their faith in God.

If you will make a faith promise to God, a pledge and say God I don’t know where I’ll get a thousand dollars I don’t know where I’ll get ten thousand, some of you business people your businesses are in trouble why don’t you try pledging

103 Harrison, Righteous Riches, 12.
105 Carol McGraw and Kim Christensen, “Television has built TBN into a power,” Orange County Register (31 May 1998).
fifty thousand dollars and just see what God will do, I dare you I double dog dare you in Jesus’ name.106

Pointing to encouragements like these, critics of Word of Faith argue that Prosperity Theology is manipulative and deceptive. However, even in the face of these vehement critiques, Word of Faith Christianity continues to meet with success. One of the reasons Word of Faith seems so attractive is the volition it guarantees the believer. If a person is able to come into proper relationship with God, material and physical prosperity can be attained. There is not only no need for intellectual tools in Word of Faith spiritual advancement, but there is also an anti-intellectualism in Word of Faith, similar to the trends in the larger Pentecostal movement, that casts suspicion on any attempts by the head to rule over religious experiences. Indeed, throughout the history of American Christianity the appeal of prosperity movements was not only based on promises of wealth but also on the control and sovereignty that the religion offered its adherents in a world perceived to be out of control and oppressive. The prevalence of African Americans in Word of Faith may be explained by the natural attraction between people who are marginalized and a religious message of empowerment. Indeed, Harrison suggests that this is the proper evaluation of the appeal of Word of Faith to African Americans and the other members of low social and economic class that the movement attracts.107

II. Statistical Analysis

Now that the premises of Word of Faith are clear, we return to Trinity Broadcasting Network. What is the relationship between TBN and Word of Faith? On one hand, authorities on TBN assert that the network is nondenominational and intends to further ideas that unite evangelical Christians. On the other hand, it has already become clear that there is overlap in the beliefs and rhetoric of TBN founders Jan and Paul Crouch and the theology of the Word of Faith movement. Both Jan and Paul have advocated the ideas of the Gospel of Wealth in working to raise funds for their ministry. However, the beliefs of Jan and Paul Crouch alone do not dictate the theological stance of TBN as a whole, though they certainly indicate an initial bias. In order to evaluate accurately the prevalence of Word of Faith on TBN, statistical analysis of Praise the Lord was conducted based on a taping from June 8th-June 25th 2005.

106 *Behind the Scenes* (Trinity Broadcasting Network, 17 March 2005), Television program.
Assertions about the presence of Word of Faith theology on TBN were derived by researching the affiliations of the churches and pastors discussed on TBN’s daily program *Praise the Lord*. While watching the programming, guests and ministries featured on *PTL* were noted. Evidence fell into three categories: the hosts of *PTL*, the guests brought onto the programming, and the churches represented by audience members. However, shortcomings with the data on audience members made the data set collected on the church affiliations of the audience members insubstantial and not adequately representative.\(^{108}\) In the two-week sample period there were nine different hosts of *PTL* (normally ten distinct programs would air during a two-week period but one episode was cancelled to show a film). Though hosts of *PTL* generally return frequently to lead programs, it is common that hosts will not repeat within a two-week period; it was not surprising then, that from June 8\(^{\text{th}}\)-June 25\(^{\text{th}}\) each night of *PTL* featured a new host. In the early years of TBN, Jan and Paul Crouch hosted *PTL* regularly; however, with their forthcoming retirement, recent controversies surrounding Paul Crouch’s sexuality, Jan Crouch’s battle with cancer, and the passing of hosting duties to their children Matthew and Paul, Jan and Paul now rarely host *PTL*. In the two-week period, I observed neither Jan nor Paul on the programming as guests or hosts. For each two-hour program of *PTL*, there are generally four to five guests. Loosely, guests fell into three categories: pastors of churches, musical guests, and Christian professionals (doctors, nutritionists, television news anchors). Every program had at least one musical guest. Audience demographics and size varied on each program. While audiences were always interracial to some degree, the location of the studio often reflected the audience demographic. For example, the two tapings done in Miami, Florida, had almost completely Latino audiences, while the tapings done in Atlanta were primarily African American. While the demographics were certainly not fixed by the location of the taping, it is not surprising that the geographic demographics are reflected in *PTL* audiences. Additionally, since Pentecostal and Word of Faith ministries are very often interracial, most often dominated by people of color, and it is not surprising that the live audiences at *PTL* tapings reflected this ministry demographic.

\textbf{a. Method of Data Analysis}

\(^{108}\) Only about half the programs I taped even discussed the churches represented in the audiences and even with this information there was no way to evaluate the numbers present in the audience. Additionally, of the churches that were mentioned, only one quarter had any information about their church or beliefs available online. I have therefore chosen not to include this tentative and incomplete data.
As information about the denominational affiliation of the participants on *Praise the Lord* was gathered, the difficulties in identifying Word of Faith became salient. Though adhering to the principles of the gospel of Wealth and Heath and positive confession defines the movement generally, Word of Faith is fluid. Members are drawn together not in a stringent affiliation but rather in a network of churches, broadcasting companies, and pastors, and often it is difficult to discern whether an individual espouses Word of Faith. While the affiliation of Shirly Caesar, the Pastor of Mt. Calvary Word of Faith, was not hard to ascertain, some churches and individuals defy definitive categorization. Milmon Harrison speaks to this difficulty and, using the perspective of the insider, attempts to uncover “signals” insiders use to identify Word of Faith churches. Characteristics Harrison’s subjects isolated were: a fashionably dressed minister, churches adorned in blues, golds, and burgundy, continual references to “the Word,” an interracial congregation, the importance of using scripture during services, and the use of key words like prosperity, faith, healing, seed, and confession. In addition to looking for these markers, more concrete evidence was explored. For example, RHEMA, The Fellowship of Inner City Word of Faith Ministries, and the International Convention of Faith Ministries list Word of Faith churches on their websites. Since the guests on TBN were often from large and prestigious churches, many published their ministries on these online databases, clearly identifying the ministries as part of Word of Faith. For further evidence of denominational affiliation, critical sources were examined. Many anti-cult Christian websites have created listings of the “dangerous” preachers of Word of Faith. While a critical categorization did not immediately affirm Word of Faith identity, that evidence, combined with other Word of Faith markers—close readings of brochures, sermons, and other literature of the ministry for Word of Faith teachings, demonstrations of prosperity, and links to Word of Faith websites—allowed for an affirmation of association in a few cases. Finally, website links to and from known Word of Faith ministries were used as markers. Since Word of Faith is a network rather than a denomination, Internet nexuses offered strong evidence when combined with other indicators.

Using this combination of indicators, it was possible to determine, in many cases, that a ministry was clearly Word of Faith. However, for the purposes of accurate evaluation of the guests on *PTL*, mischaracterization of denominational affiliation have been avoided by not

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109 Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 40-49 Interestingly, the color scheme of TBN is also generally blue, gold, and burgundy.
labeling individuals or ministries as Word of Faith unless the affiliation is essentially indisputable. In deference to this concern, four categories for the guests and hosts of TBN have been created. The first group consisted of guests and hosts that were clearly Word of Faith. Next, a number of guests were set aside who were likely to be involved in Word of Faith but did not lend themselves to confident categorization. For a third group, I isolated individuals who made no claims about their views on Christianity to suggest an identifiable “approach” (this is generally true for musicians or Christian entrepreneurs on the programming). Finally, there was a group of ministries and individuals that were clearly identifiable as part of another Christian denomination.

b. Results: Program Hosts

Researching background information on each of the nine hosts of PTL was not an arduous task, since all the hosts of the program have elaborate websites and are considered celebrities in many evangelical Christian circles. Out of the nine hosts of the program, four were African American and five were white. Five hosts were explicitly affiliated with Word of Faith: Richard Hogue, Donnie McClurkin, Rod Parsley, Juanita Bynum, and T.D. Jakes. Of the five hosts involved in Word of Faith, two were white. The remaining four hosts, Natalie Grant, Charles Billingsly, Ron Luce (also an advisor to the Bush administration), and Dr. Scott Hannen, cannot be definitively identified as part of Word of Faith or any denomination. These hosts simply represent themselves as nondenominational. The public lives of each of these hosts may lend some insight into why there is little information about their approaches to Christianity. Both Natalie Grant and Charles Billingsly are Christian musicians, a profession that seems to have an investment in not discussing the particulars of Christian faith. Additionally, Ron Luce, the founder of Teen Mania, and Dr. Scott Hannen, a Christian health specialist, have large Christian organizations that they, like Jan and Paul Crouch, claim are nondenominational. While a close exploration of each individual and ministry would likely reveal a religious preference, this is simply not within the project’s scope. Suffice it to say the bias is significant, if not complete. In just this two-week period, a predisposition for specifically Word of Faith hosts is evident. The difficulty in identifying the approaches to Christianity espoused by the other four hosts, however, makes this statistic less satisfying.
c. Results: Program Guests

When examining the demographic breakdown of the guests explicitly named on TBN we again meet with problems of identification. Of the forty-nine guests on the program, only twenty-two (45%) are clearly Word of Faith. Another seven (14%) guests are likely to be Word of Faith, nineteen (37%) are unidentifiable and two (4%) claim a denominational affiliation (AME and Southern Baptist). Even if it is assumed that none of the churches determined to be denominationally unidentifiable are actually Word of Faith, which is unlikely, it remains significant that a large percentage of guests on Praise the Lord are specifically affiliated with Word of Faith. Though this statistic indicates the strong influence of Word of Faith over any other category, the statistics are still almost equal to the number of guests who are simply nondenominational Christians—the worldview TBN claims to espouse.

However, a deeper exploration of the types of guests on the programming reveals a startling trend. Of the nineteen pastors brought onto the program, eighteen are Word of Faith. This is perhaps not as surprising when one considers rumors that accuse TBN of recommending only Word of Faith churches to people who call their “Prayer Partners” to ask about acceptable churches in their area. Indeed, the fact that 95% of the guest pastors on the programming were from Word of Faith churches demonstrates an overwhelming bias for Word of Faith. Considering the vast proliferation of churches in the country, this cannot possibly be accidental. Additionally, the strong Word of Faith representation is not a result of special programming during that time. The taping occurred over Father’s Day and the programming actually seemed to reflect a more strongly nondenominational lineup as many different kinds of Christians were brought onto the programming to talk about shared values of family and fatherhood.

Evidence from programming has shown that Word of Faith represents a clear dominance of pastors, guests, and hosts on Praise the Lord, the flagship program of TBN. The information demonstrates a clear bias for Word of Faith ministries and guests on the network’s most frequently aired program (the two-hour show airs four times a day). Instead of presenting a nondenominational lineup, Jan and Paul Crouch have used Praise the Lord as a platform for Word of Faith ideas. Indeed, every single program aired had at least two people affiliated with the movement. Jan and Paul themselves are unequivocal adherents of Word of Faith. Both

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110 My breakdown of guests and their affiliations can be found in Appendix V.
frequently talk about “Pop Hagin” on the programming and preach regularly on the gospel of Wealth. In particular, the connection between monetary giving and prosperity is emphasized during the Praise-a-Thon fundraising campaign. However, the investment of Praise the Lord in Word of Faith ideas goes beyond the people that grace the stages of the program. Word of Faith ideas manifest themselves in the physical representation of the stages and sets of the shows.

III. Visual Presentation and Prosperity Theology

Considering the importance of visual rhetoric to our understanding of TBN, it is valuable to turn to Praise the Lord to see how the doctrine of Prosperity Theology is articulated and validated on the sets of the program. At first glance, one can see that TBN’s sets are ornate, filled with artifacts, gold, and expensive furniture. Randall Balmer described TBN’s set as a cross between a 1930s funeral parlor and trailer park chic.\(^{111}\) Despite all the expense of the set, cameras never seem to approach any element long enough for the audience to make out the scenes of the stained glass, nor to admire the detail and artistry of the crosses that line the hearth. This “glossing over” indicates that the individual detail of each object is not the reason for its presence on the stage. If the objects had a particular theological symbolism or consequence contained in their distinctive detail, the cameras would indicate this significance by focusing on the objects individually. Instead, the artifacts cover the stage as a way to demonstrate the unfailing efficacy of Prosperity Theology. The excess of the stage indicates the fact that Prosperity Theology has worked for Jan and Paul and offers evidence that God’s blessing can work for the true believer.

Interestingly, ornate visual presentation is partly explained as a convention of the Victorian home discussed earlier. McDannell describes the Victorian home as one that was designed to evangelize and create an emotional response from outsiders to the success of the family. It was intended to draw the outsider in.\(^{112}\) This understanding of an evangelizing force of wealth, corresponds with TBN’s stated goal of world evangelism. Operating under the theological rubric of Prosperity Theology, which makes financial status and health indicative of God’s blessing, the excess of the set can be understood as a means to impress outsiders with evidence of the blessing upon Trinity Broadcasting Network and Jan and Paul Crouch. TBN

catches the attention of its viewers, forcing them to ask: how can TBN be wrong if they are so clearly blessed? Each artifact is put forward to represent the success of TBN, to instill an emotional response to the overwhelming evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of Prosperity Theology, and to exhibit the blessings that are upon Jan and Paul Crouch’s ministry. One viewer notes this effect: "The fruit of God is on their life. If they weren't prospering, I'd say, 'Wait a minute. I don't see any evidence [of God's blessing] in their life." By directly correlating social and financial status with divine status, TBN architecturally indicates the superior position of Jan and Paul in the eyes of God, while at the same time offering unfailing evidence that Prosperity Theology works.

When one looks critically at the *PTL* text, we find an investment in Word of Faith ideas both in the visual presentation of the sets and the ministries invited onto the show. TBN is not nondenominational; it is a Word of Faith ministry. While it is undeniable that TBN has many guests on the programming that do not explicitly espouse Word of Faith teachings, the clear investment of the guests, pastors, and visual culture of TBN in the Gospel of Wealth further implicates the hosts of *PTL* in sympathy with Word of Faith. Indeed, the visual presentation of the sets alone might be an offense to a Christian who felt strongly that God asks his people to be humble and poor. Therefore, the visual culture of TBN makes it unlikely that the hosts of *PTL* are individuals whose beliefs fall outside Prosperity Theology.

**IV. Conversion**

Perhaps just as significant to the stated purpose of TBN as nondenominational is the goal of conversion for the network. As discussed in the introduction, an emphasis on conversion develops in religious radio because of the pressures of validating and fundraising for expensive media ministries. It is possible to go farther in challenging TBN’s stated identity. TBN does not simply engage in their stated mission of conversion with the bias of Word of Faith. Instead, the content of *Praise the Lord* reveals that TBN is a church acting to sustain the faith of its already Christian viewers and not a ministry primarily directed at gaining non-Christian conversions. Though there are certainly aspects of *PTL* that focus on conversion, a call to conversion each

114 In this way, TBN resonates with the intentions of Victorian architecture. Though excessive consumerism and the display of icons and expensive furnishing seems to contradict Victorian ideas about piety, by the 1860s the Victorian home had grown away from a model that emphasized pragmatism and modesty. Obvious consumerism became both fashionable and theologically coherent. McDannell, *The Christian Home*, 50.
show, the visual presentation of the set as visually indicative of God’s blessing, and the tally of souls saved that graces the set, these conventions appear to sustain the already committed viewer. Statistics show that the majority of the viewers of religious programming (65%) regularly attend church services.\textsuperscript{115} This majority also accounts for 95% of the contributions to religious programs.\textsuperscript{116} What these statistics show is that the religious programming is not reaching unprecedented numbers of unsaved people and must appeal to a loyal and, most likely, theologically-similar, Christian contingent in order to fundraise. These already Christian viewers watch for entertainment, for education and for spiritual experiences. They give their money to witness the changing power of the ministry they support on the lives of people who need to hear about Jesus.

For example, an individual who is a Word of Faith Christian may look to the \textit{PTL} set’s ornate presentation and see an inspiring abundance that they wish to pursue. The prosperity of the \textit{PTL} set is most likely to be theologically inspiring if one already holds the assumption that wealth is indicative of preferred spiritual status. For a viewer who does not hold this assumption, the set presentation is likely to be confusing or disconcerting. Perhaps a better understanding of TBN’s visual representation of prosperity is that it offers compelling evidence for those who already understand prosperity to be divinely sanctioned—it is compelling to the insider.

Indeed, further support for the claim that TBN is a Word of Faith church come from the insider content of interviews, sermons, and commentaries on the programming. In this body of evidence, there is a clear assumption that viewers are familiar with Christianity in general and Word of Faith in particular. While this familiarity may be simply a familiarity with American culture or a resonance with the structures of Christianity, the insider content of \textit{PTL} makes the program best suited for producing religious experiences for the already dedicated Word of Faith Christian while, at the same time, offering material that is likely to be less powerful for the unconverted or unfamiliar viewer. For example, one would expect that a network devoted to converting unsaved people to Christianity would spend much of its time explaining who Jesus was and talking about the fundamental truths of the Christian Bible. You would expect, as one

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
TBN preacher puts it “just giv[ing] the simple gospel.” Indeed, considering TBN’s presence in India, Africa, China, and the Middle East where people watching the programming are more likely to be unfamiliar with Christianity, one might even expect shows that explain basic Christian vocabulary and practices. However, examination of the content of *Praise the Lord* and the *Praise-a-Thons* shows that almost no explanation of Christianity can be found. This absence is particularly significant since *PTL* is sent over to countries that are predominantly non-Christian without alteration beyond translation. If different programming was sent to China, it might be possible to think that the content of that programming was different and perhaps more educational and culturally relevant. However, TBN prides itself on simply sending the same programming viewed in America to countries around the world emphasizing the idea that the programs offer an opportunity for people around the world to praise together. Therefore, the discovery that TBN’s programming is not particularly aimed towards conversion is problematic for the reflective viewer.

One example of the assumption of Christianity is found in an episode of *PTL* aired on June 11th. In this episode, host, Richard Hogue, and guest, Prophet Kim Clement, discussed the tension in the Christian church over the apostolic and prophetic roles of church leaders for a full 6 minutes of the 15-minute interview. The other nine minutes of the interview involved Kim testifying about the revelation that he was a prophet, a discussion of the upcoming Apostolic Prophetic Convention along with an invitation for viewers to attend, and a conversation about Clement’s recent prophetic messages. Clement claimed God told him about the Bush 2000 election victory through the divinely ordained intervention of the Supreme Court. Clement also asserted that he prophesied September 11th. The conversation on the American political situation ended with Clement calling George W. Bush a prophet. To a viewer in China it seems likely that this conversation would not be particularly compelling as it is American-centric and provides little basic information for understanding the theological elements of the conversation. Even for an educated outsider very familiar with Christianity, the insider discourse about the tension of apostolic and prophetic was difficult. This discussion was not only intended for an individual within Christianity, but it amounted to a conversation sealed to anyone outside the American Word of Faith community.

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Combined with discussions of insider religious ideas and trends is the continuous presence of American conservative political messages on PTL. Conservative political ideology is a part of Word of Faith that concerns itself with issues involving the separation of church and state, marriage and family, sexuality, abortion, and gender. During the two-week period, PTL was taped for this research project, the issues of family, homosexuality, and gender comprised no less than 50% of the total conversation on the programming. While it must be noted that this emphasis came as a result of the taping period occurring over Father’s Day, it remains significant that the discussions on TBN were focused on the way that American men and women could influence legislation, reclaim traditional social roles, and uphold patriotism by embracing the Christian heritage of America. Furthermore, during Kim Clement’s visit to PTL, the perspective he shared not only assumed Word of Faith theological sophistication but that the PTL live and viewing audience supported President George W. Bush, was informed about the American political situation, and would be able to attend an English-speaking religious conference in America. Finally, while TBN’s full network lineup of programming is denominationally diverse, every program aired on TBN shares the conservative political investments of Word of Faith and Jan and Paul Crouch. The consistently conservative social message aired on TBN points to the ideology that TBN cannot comprise. Though theological nuance can be tolerated, social dissent cannot. Indeed, the continuous stream of American political concerns on PTL, PAT, and the network’s programming as a whole demonstrates that TBN is a not only a Word of Faith church, but a socially conservative American Word of Faith church.

As with most ideas on TBN, the conservative political ideas of the network are also reflected in the visual rhetoric of the programming. Instead of verbally advocating for a political candidate or worldview, TBN often relegates controversial elements to the more subtle and subjective visual culture of the program. Two themes are frequently found in TBN’s imagery: the endorsement of President Bush and conservative social issues as well as the antagonism, achieved through stereotyping, between Christianity and Islam.\textsuperscript{118}

A commercial aired during a Praise-a-Thon in November 2005, detailed the profound impact of TBN on the world. The clip also offered examples of the covert endorsement of President Bush and American social conservatism through imagery. The narrator of the piece

\textsuperscript{118} Appendix III contains a full transcript of the two commercials discussed in the following section.
discussed the ways that the world is in turmoil and conflict, offering TBN as the answer to people in chaos who need answers to spiritual questions. As the clip continued, images were shown of people in need, including an image of a teenager at a rally. The young girl was shown holding a “Drop Bush Not Bombs” poster and the narrator said, “to a teen looking for direction.” The implication of this juxtaposition is clear.\textsuperscript{119} The teen in this clip is to be seen as misled and in need of TBN for proper guidance. Furthermore, the placement of this image in a clip about the horrors and wrongs of the world makes a politically powerful statement that not only denounces the girl for not supporting Bush but can also be read as a conservative critique of her participation in a political protest that undermines social order and patriotism. A similar interruption of social order, an image of Palestinians burning an Israeli flag, was included in the commercial as an example of global chaos and offers an implicit political endorsement of Israel. The deliberate choices made in compiling the brief montages aired on the \textit{PAT} cannot be overemphasized, and the absence of any images that could be understood to advocate for progressive political causes is stark. The use of visual imagery to articulate these political arguments is also important to TBN as a non-profit and tax exempt organization. The non-profit status of TBN prohibits the network from advocating for political candidates; careful visual expression of these arguments is, of course, far less likely to result in successful prosecution.

The marginalization of Arab people and Muslims is also a popular theme during \textit{Praise-a-Thon} in the past five years. Indeed, the impact of 9-11 spurred the launch of an “Arab Healing Network” in 2005. The network translates and delivers TBN programming into the Arab world. During the same November \textit{PAT}, another commercial, partly discussed in the introduction for its image of crosses rising out of fog, was aired addressing the launch of the Arab Healing Network. During the clip, a letter from a Muslim convert was read aloud as images were shown on screen.

Syntagmatic analysis allows for the consideration of the context of each representation, while also considering the sequencing of words and images. As the commercial is analyzed, disturbing ideas about Islam and the global role TBN imagines for itself are revealed.

The first image shown to viewers is a picture of a mosque in what appears to be a sandstorm. As the mosque is shown, the narrator says, “I grew up in a very different faith.” The image immediately switches to a militant Muslim walking in sandy and dusty streets with an

\textsuperscript{119} Fall \textit{Praise-a-Thon} (Trinity Broadcasting Network, November 2005), Television program.
automatic weapon accompanied by the words “but I am now not convinced of the reality of that faith because of its brutality.” In this quick image manipulation, the juxtaposition of the mosque and a militant, the viewer sees the conflation of all Muslims with violence. The reader goes on to say:

Yet I had deep peace in my heart when I watched your program. I have decided to convert to your religion because of the love, kindness, and giving of Christianity and their support to the oppressed. I am hoping you can help me convert to Christianity, and receive the words of the Lord Jesus, the Savior.¹²⁰

During this narration, the Arab Healing Channel logo, a church, and food and supplies coming off a truck are flashed onto the screen. The images not only reinforce the claims of the letter’s author, but the clean and vibrant images establish Christianity as the opposite of the dark and sandy images used to represent Islam. Finally, the image of three crosses rising out of a fog appears and the narrator reads the final words of the letter:

I am hoping you can help me convert to Christianity, and receive the words of the Lord Jesus, the Savior. I now testify there is no God but God and that Jesus is His Word and Spirit. I pray that God will unite me with you and other believers in Jesus Christ.¹²¹

The choice of this letter, as potent enough to share with the entire TBN viewing audience, and the images shown as each word is read, come together to create a powerful and potentially persuasive message. Indeed, the images shown as the letter is read are formulaic in their argument. Mosques and militants are indistinguishable. The Arab Healing Network in particular and Christianity in general are benevolent. Add Christianity to Islam and the result is crosses rising out of a fog. Christianity is represented by the powerful large crosses; Islam is the fog that first covers the crosses but dissipates. In summation, the piece establishes TBN as effective in its mission of conversion and entices viewers to support the important task of their ministry. Their dollars not only support the conversion of Muslims, but also protect the world from terrorists produced by the “brutality” of Islam. The piece advocates the superiority of Christianity theologically and politically, while reinforcing common stereotypes about Islam and its people.


¹²¹ Ibid.
Abundant examples like these, typical of both Praise the Lord and the Praise-a-Thon, focus on the sustenance of an already politically conservative and Christian viewership. The focus on TBN’s mission of conversion is not reflected in the content of the programming, but instead acts as a powerful rhetorical claim that appeals to the already Christian, conservative, and American audience. These churchgoing Christian audience members compose 95% of the financial base of religious broadcasting ministries and are the targets of TBN’s programming.¹²² They are an insider, conservative, American, churchgoing, Word of Faith-based audience, and PTL and the PAT are designed to entertain and educate them. Though it is certain that some people, especially those familiar with Christianity, have indeed been moved to conversion by the television programming, the assumption of a familiarity with Christian language and theology indicates that the audience must already be Christian. The frequent calls to salvation on PTL are not evidence against the claim that people are not being converted en masse as TBN claims. Even without sweeping conversions, TBN continues to call people to salvation. TBN’s identity, expressed by PTL and the PAT, is invested in reminding viewers that conversion is the purpose for the ministry even when the content of the programming clearly reflects an already Christian audience.

V. Conclusion

As the evidence has shown, many factors come together to demonstrate that TBN is a Word of Faith church. Statistically, large percentages of the guests and hosts of the programming are affiliated with Word of Faith. Those who were not did not come onto the program to discuss specific theological ideas; instead, these guests and hosts provided musical entertainment, updates on large nondenominational Christian ministries, or came to sell their products (books and audiotapes). Moreover, the Word of Faith doctrine of Prosperity manifests itself on the sets of PTL. This ornate visual presentation reinforces the identity of the sets of PTL as a Christian home, while at the same time offering evidence for the specific understanding of Christianity forwarded on the programming. Finally, the identity of TBN as a Word of Faith church is reinforced by the programs focus not on material to produce conversion, but on theological and political concerns particular to American Word of Faith believers. While much of the spoken content of the programming is explicitly political, controversial, and potentially illegal messages

are also translated into visual rhetoric that allows TBN to walk the boundaries of party and candidate advocacy prohibited by their non-profit and tax-exempt status. The importance of political ideology is also clear on TBN because denominational allegiance is only subsumed in deference to the shared conservative political ideology of other Christians. Having now considered Word of Faith, a discussion of the centrality of communications technology to TBN’s identity and theology is possible.
Chapter Three: TBN as a Word of Faith Church with Technology Central to its Identity and Theology

When examining the content of TBN’s newsletters and website, it quickly becomes clear that communications technology is a central component of the ministry’s identity. Like many other evangelical Christians, Jan and Paul Crouch believe that, while technology may cause moral decay, their Christian message can transform technology into a sacred tool to save souls for Christ in the end-times. Simon Coleman, a scholar who has done extensive work with a Word of Faith church in Sweden speaks to this phenomenon, “mass media are significant… because they illustrate an ability to reach out into the world, appropriating profane technology and, with God’s help, saving souls as well.” In their efforts to revitalize the nation, Jan and Paul Crouch embraced technology to propagate their message. TBN is a reflection of Jan and Paul’s excitement over the possibilities of technology. This chapter will explore the way technology has become a central framework for Jan and Paul’s vision for TBN. Technology has played an important role in the way that TBN imagines the end-times, has allowed for a presentation of the ministry as effective and potent, and has influenced the growth of Word of Faith.

One place where the importance of technology is vividly illustrated is TBN’s official website, tbn.org. TBN uses its “About Us” webpage, where one might expect to find a statement of faith, to display its extensive technological prowess. Notice the use of impressive technical vocabulary:

TBN is on the cutting edge of technology with our state-of-the-art Virtual Reality Theaters… The 50-seat theaters present visitors with an incredible experience combining high definition digital video technology and an exclusive 48-channel digital audio system.123

Similar content is present on self-released videos detailing their ministry, such as “25 Years of TBN.” These videos spend more time detailing the progression of technological innovation and the spread of the ministry than discussing Christianity. Those innovations are not limited to the hi-fi audiovisual equipment discussed above. Indeed, it is Christian space technology that most excites Jan and Paul:

Today's satellite technology has opened up opportunities for the gospel as never

before imagined—and TBN is at the forefront of utilizing this mighty tool to reach people around the world! Currently carried on 33 international satellites, the following is a partial list of TBN's great satellite network: Europe and the Middle East are being reached through Eutelsat Hotbird 6 and Intelsat 906; Eutelsat W4 covers Central Africa with direct-to-home service; the Express 6A satellite is providing Russian language programming to the Russian continent; Spain and Portugal are being reached by Hispasat; Intelsat 701 broadcasts to Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific islands and Southeast Asia; Intelsat 702 covers Taiwan; Palapa C-2 reaches India, Indonesia and Southeast Asia; TBN broadcasts Portuguese language programs to Brazil on Brazilsat B-2; and PanAmSat 9 blankets all of Latin America and Spain.124

Though the Great Commission compels Jan and Paul to use technology in general, the use of satellite technology was mandated by Paul’s 1974 vision.

In the vision, the ceiling of Paul’s office turned into what he described as a giant television screen displaying the radiation of satellite beams throughout a map of the world. At the end of his vision, God spoke to Paul saying only “one ringing, resounding word to my spirit—‘SATELLITE’”!25 Because of the extraordinary nature of this event, Paul sees media technologies as divinely ordained. As the founder of TBN, and therefore an architect of the website (Jan and Paul are well-known for their meticulous involvement in every aspect of their ministry), it is not surprising to find a strong emphasis on the technological offerings of TBN. Paul believes that technology is divinely ordained, not only by his vision but by scripture itself. Furthermore, Paul believes that technology is a sign of the end-times and will play a role in the second coming of Christ.

I. Centrality of Technology to End-of-Times Theology

Since Word of Faith Christians who firmly believe in Christ’s imminent return control TBN, the network strives to expedite the second coming. TBN believes that technology is vital to this endeavor, with the importance of technology in bringing about the end-times articulated in two main ways. The first is the idea that technology sacralizes the air of the world in order to prepare it for Christ’s return. The second is that satellite technology is part of the end-times

124 Ibid.
125 Paul Crouch, Hello World, 120.
schema. The network points to scriptural references where they believe that technology appears. By tying technology into end-times events, TBN establishes technology as necessary for the second coming, thereby granting the network a central role in God’s divine plan and making the worldview espoused by believers reliant on technology.

The claim that Trinity Broadcasting Network fulfills end-times prophecy is particularly potent, and it is therefore emphasized during fundraising events. For example, during their winter 2004 Praise-A-Thon, the following commercial was aired several times throughout the week, detailing the powerful and real way that technology is physically making a space for Jesus to return:

Do you know the most important and powerful element on earth is not the earth itself but it is the air? Satan is called the prince of the power of the air. Why? Because the air has the most crucial power in existence; it affects everything we hear, see, or feel. The radio waves or television waves control the world. Who controls the air controls the entire development of mankind. That is why today it is important that we support TBN cause [sic] TBN is filling the airwaves with the truth-- with the gospel of Jesus Christ. What we see, what we hear everyday determines what we think and as a man think it so is he. [sic] So when you support TBN and the programs on this powerful station around the world you are also supporting a change of the environment and a change of the earth. Jesus Christ said when we comes he will meet us in the air. That means we’ve gotta take the air before he comes.[sic] So support TBN as we spread the good news of the kingdom of God around the world in Jesus’ name.126

In this clip, TBN suggests the construction of a space in the world as satellite beams change the air. The air is sacralized through contact with the purifying power of satellite beams that carry TBN’s programming. Jesus demands pure air for his return, and TBN has undertaken the task of providing it. The importance of the purifying the air is emphasized when we learn that although TBN’s satellite signals cover the world, they are not always received by the stations. However, the network constantly highlights the fact that their satellites send signals all over the world. By taking over the air—the realm of Satan—TBN pleases God with their ministry and expedites the

126 Praise the Lord (Trinity Broadcasting Network, 4 November 2004). Television program.
return of Christ. By arguing that it is necessary for TBN’s broadcast signals to sacralize the air to make it suitable for the return of Jesus, technology is not only a tool for evangelism, but also necessary for the second coming.

Technology has been fundamental to the structure of TBN from its inception and, through various religious rationalizations, TBN has protected its divine sanction. Jan and Paul consistently advocate for the Biblical foundation of media technology as intentional and prophetic. For example, Paul and Jan point to passages in Revelation that speak about angels, asserting that “angel” is a metaphor for satellite. “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.”

By reading this passage as directly supporting the efforts of their ministry and prophesying the use of satellites, TBN legitimates its decisions in scripture. This creative exegesis, contested by other Christians, is important because it legitimizes the ministry in the foremost Protestant authority—scripture. Insofar as Protestant fundamentalist and evangelical Christians believe in the authority and infallibility of scripture, the biblical text acts to grounds Trinity authoritatively.

The claim that TBN is preparing the way for the second coming is not typically discussed on Praise the Lord. Though other preachers will mention the importance of TBN’s satellite presence in sacralizing the sky, it is infrequent. This claim is much more likely to come from Paul Crouch, who is constantly talking about the role of technology and the end-times when he speaks on PTL or at a PAT. Paul’s readings often extend beyond manipulating current events to fit into prophecy as is typical of contemporary biblical exegesis. Instead, his interpretations suggest that the Bible directly refers to TBN and their actions as a ministry. For instance, Paul Crouch interprets a passage from Zechariah as directly referring to a satellite launched by TBN in 1995:

Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll! And he said to me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its breadth ten cubits".  

Despite the previous “unconventional” reading of Revelation, the application of the text remains in line with traditional methods of Biblical exegesis which utilize malleable symbolism to

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127 Revelation 14:6 (NRSV).
accommodate current events within eschatology. For example, Hal Lindsay’s correlation of the formation of the European Union with the Beast in Revelation. However, Crouch’s reading of Zechariah extends beyond manipulating current events to fit into prophecy. Instead, his interpretations suggest that the Bible directly refers to himself, TBN, and the specific actions of the ministry. By stating that this passage gives the exact dimensions of the shuttle that took up TBN’s satellite in 1995, Crouch departs from convention. While, on one hand, there is certainly question as to how he might know the exact meaning of “cubit” in the Biblical sense, it is also significant that he simply does not view the Bible as only a historical document with prophecy that might apply to contemporary events. As a whole, the Bible seems to operate as prophecy, even within passages that are traditionally non-prophetic. Furthermore, unlike other Pentecostals, Crouch believes that these “prophecies” directly refer to TBN’s ministry and his family’s lives.

Yet another example of the use of scripture in support of the activities of TBN occurred in 2005, a week before the bi-annual Praise-A-Thon, in an episode of “Behind the Scenes.” Behind the Scenes is a program created by Paul Crouch to inform viewers about the activities of TBN. Here, Paul again connects technology to the end-times. During the show, Paul cited the “fact” that God’s temple needed to be rebuilt before Jesus could return. He then noted that Jesus said that human beings are temples and that by converting people to Jesus Christ TBN was in fact building temples around the world to bring about the return of Christ:

We are the temples of the living God he wants more temples and we can build them! As we send this gospel and this message to the ends of the earth by the fastest most important means available to us, the Internet, satellite, TV, cable…. I don’t know….and if they invent something else we’ll buy it too! And we’ll use it to present the gospel of Jesus Christ and lift Jesus high.

By claiming that TBN builds the temples required for Jesus’ return, Paul not only ties technology to the coming of Christ but, again, grants the network a central role in the second coming. By repeatedly emphasizing these themes in their programming, TBN sets technology as necessary for the return of Jesus.

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129 James Constantine Hanges, Miami University, Conversation, 2003.
When Paul does not appear on TBN to verbalize ideas about technology and the end-times, visual rhetoric does the “talking” for him. For example, satellites attached to pulpits often share the stage with TBN’s preachers. The image of a satellite on a pulpit creates an ambiguity about the relationship between the satellite and a preacher. The satellite is the model for Christian communications; the preacher and the satellite perform the same function, their roles and functions collapsed into each other. The satellite-pulpit is a polysemic signifier intended to be ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations. Some might imagine that the satellite represents the spreading of the gospel, while others might understand that the satellite affirms TBN’s ability to replace a local preacher, and numerous other interpretations are certainly possible.

Similarly, during the 2005 Fall Praise-a-Thon, an advertisement aired that talked about the expansion of TBN. Each time home satellite dishes were shown in the clip, the lens used on the camera made only the area directly surrounding the satellite dish clear. The rest of the picture was muted and fuzzy. The image produced by this filming technique acted as a signifier that there was something important and central about the satellite dish itself. What is signified is the idea that the satellite dish literally produces a visible change in the environment through its presence on a rooftop. Obviously, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not evident to a viewer without knowledge of the divine sanction of technology or the belief that satellite beams literally change the air. This image sends a message to the insider viewer. Indeed, this is a useful technique since the idea that satellites sacralize the air to bring about the coming of Christ is not a common theological belief. By relegating these controversial claims to the visual aspects of the ministry, TBN shows some deference to the conventions of mainstream Christianity. However, it does not leave its claims behind. Instead, by incorporating less popular claims into visual rhetoric, TBN preserves its unique claims for those who have eyes to see them.

II. Effective Ministry

The claim that TBN believes that it is an effective Christian ministry—that is to say the network believes it is converting people and playing a substantial spiritual role in the world—seems to be an overly obvious one with little relationship to technology. One would expect TBN to present its ministry and, indeed, Word of Faith theology as unproblematic and effective. TBN is funded by viewer donations, and signs of fallibility, weaknesses, or wrongdoing do not bring in funding. The need to provide constant evidence to the efficacy of TBN is made salient when
we consider that Trinity Broadcasting is an extremely controversial ministry. It has come under fire for its Word of Faith theology of healing and prosperity, received allegations of financial misconduct, and, in September 2004, Paul Crouch was accused of being gay. By typing in “Trinity Broadcasting Network” on a Yahoo search, one catches a glimpse into the popular understanding of TBN, and the dozens of websites that deride and analyze TBN and mock founders Jan and Paul Crouch. This section will explore the ways that TBN uses technology to react to criticism and provide a constant demonstration of truth and efficacy in a visual text of first, the Praise-a-Thon and then, Praise the Lord. Throughout, attention will be paid to the ways that technology allows for and shapes these characterizations. Finally, an examination of Word of Faith will show that the historical development of the movement alongside broadcasting ministries has led to a reflection of the pressures and advantages of media technology in Word of Faith ideas.

a. Visual Rhetoric: Praise-a-Thons and Praise the Lord

TBN establishes itself as an attractive and effective ministry by using visual cues to indicate the superiority of their worldview and the benefits of conversion. This technique is particularly evident in the edited film clips aired during the Praise-a-Thons. In “Film as Social Practice,” Graeme Turner points out the way that advertising has used signification to transpose the positive associations connoted by the signifier to their product. In demonstrating the efficacy of their ministry and its success, TBN has made a similar move. In their own “advertisements” aired during the twice-yearly Praise-a-Thons, TBN has created clips that advertise the ministry and ask viewers to send money. In all of these montages, images, music, and narratives have been carefully constructed to associate positive signifiers with Trinity Broadcasting Network while creating negative connotations for the worlds and worldviews in tension with TBN’s beliefs and culture. These constructed texts are made possible through technology and exemplify one of the ways that TBN relies on technology to articulate its message.

This dualistic signification is evident in an advertisement for the network’s new “Arab Healing Channel” aired during the Fall Praise-A-Thon 2005 on November 25th. After moving past the initial distaste of the network’s name, “The Healing Channel,” which suggests that Arab

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132 Fall Praise-a-Thon (Trinity Broadcasting Network November 2005). Television program.
people have something in need of healing, the clip goes on to delineate a contrast between Christians and Muslims. This contrast is not an overt verbal claim, however. Though TBN is not known for its politically correct messages, the network is generally wary of overtly denouncing entire groups of people, particularly those that are ripe for conversion. However, the visual rhetoric of the clip makes sweeping generalizations about the Arab and Christian worlds. By not coming out and verbalizing this tension, the clip is open to the interpretation of the images. However, nearly all the visual imagery in this particular clip acts to create a divide between “Arabs/Muslims” and “Christians.”

The clip opens with six images of Arab people. The images are divided into segments creating a broken image. This visual imagery not only suggests to the viewer that the Arabs depicted are not whole people, but also gives each image a jailed appearance. The six images shown behind bars are: a veiled woman, an Arab infant, a man wearing a turban praying, a woman with her head covered gazing into the distance, an Arab man preaching, and a child grinding at a stone. As we view their faces, the narrator reads:

Never in the history of man have we seen an hour like this hour. The atmosphere is ready, the nations of the world are open as never before, and that is why we cannot miss this golden opportunity to get the gospel to these millions.

The narrator’s words indicate the urgency of Arab conversions. Further, the jailed images indicate the status of the Arab world, a world where women are oppressed, Islam reigns, and innocent children are victims. This imagery is particularly potent when one considers the absences in the text. For example, none of the people in the images are happy and there are no depictions of westernized or Christian Arabs, working women, doctors, or Universities. TBN has chosen images that are poignant to the viewer as images of oppression and want. If these images alone were not compelling enough, the message is determined further by the stark contrast of the images of Christians offered just seconds later. As the narrator talks about the many programs TBN offers on the Arab Healing Channel, dozens of images of white preachers, male and female,

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133 It is important to note here that the terms Muslim and Arab are conflated by TBN. Though it is evident that figures on TBN recognize that not all Arabs are Muslims, there is the tendency to treat the two interchangeably and at the very least talk about the entirety of the Arab world as in need of healing and TBN. In the clip described below the narrator talks about the Arab world while only showing images of Muslims clearly leaving out the nuanced realities of religion in the Arab world.

134 Fall Praise-a-Thon (Trinity Broadcasting Network November 2005). Television program.
scroll across the screen. The preachers are well-dressed, attractive, happy, and charismatic. The colors on the screen are vibrant, and viewers are shown images of audiences responding to the preacher’s powerful message. Paul Crouch is shown next to impressive technologies, Jan Crouch sits on a golden throne in a TBN studio praying for unsaved souls, and jubilant music plays alongside these triumphant and lush images. For the viewer, there could be no more stark contrast between the depraved and oppressed life of the Arab/Muslim and the plenty of the Christians shown.

One particularly compelling feature of the commercial for the Arabic language network is the race of the preachers shown during the commercial. Every single preacher, with the exception of Nazarene Benny Hinn, is white. This trend is particularly significant when we consider the fact that TBN has a large African American audience and about half the preachers on TBN are black. Indeed, TBN generally goes out of its way to focus on the interracial composition of its ministry. Considering TBN’s trend of including racial diversity whenever possible, the absence of people of color suggests that this advertisement depicts white preachers to make starker the contrast between the Christian and Arab worlds; the images of Arabs/Muslims are exclusively dark-skinned while the images of Christians are light-skinned.

The one exception to this ethnic trend remains telling. Benny Hinn is a very popular and controversial Word of Faith teacher whose claim to fame is his birthplace of Nazareth. Though there is controversy over whether or not Hinn is Arab, he grew up in the Arab world. Hinn claims that his childhood in the Middle East created a special place in his heart for Muslim people. As a driving force behind the development of the Arab Healing Channel, Benny Hinn acts as an example what might result from TBN’s efforts at conversion. Benny is a happy, rich, and light-skinned man, and his presence in the text signifies that conversions can happen in the Arab world—a fact that is more potent when considering his potential Arab descent. Other images of Muslims/Arabs offer the same hope. For example, there are two instances in the clip when Muslims are shown praying. Both occasions show the Muslims standing up during their prayers when the narrator talks about the gospel. Visually, it is as if the Muslims hear the

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135 Benny Hinn claims to have been raised Greek Orthodox in Palestine/Israel by non-Arab parents. However, some critics say that both his parents were Arab. While I am uncertain about what is at stake in this controversy, a discussion of Benny’s parentage can be found at: Personal Freedom Outreach, “A History Lesson for Benny Hinn,” BelieversWeb, http://www.believersweb.org/view.cfm?ID=686 (accessed 3 January 2006)
narrator speaking of the gospel and immediately come up to attention, standing ready to hear the word. Even more interestingly, the transition from lying prostrate on the ground in prayer to standing when the narrator talks about the gospel gives the image that Arab people are rising from an oppressive position into empowerment. Finally, by the end of the clip a happy dark-skinned Arab is shown. He is depicted wearing a red-checkered turban and smiling into the sun as John 3:16 is read in Arabic. This clip as a whole sends a very clear message: the only happy Arab is one receiving the gospel. Additionally, the image of the converted Muslim at the end of this clip reinforces the efficacy of TBN’s ministry by visually representing the reality of conversions through their television programs.

For TBN, the portrayal of racial and cultural divides demonstrates the attractiveness of the Christian lifestyle, the effectiveness of conversion through TBN, and the superiority of the Word of Faith worldview. However, this is not the only way that technology is used to present an argument for the effectiveness of TBN. Indeed, as we have already seen, the sets of PTL offer evidence for the truth of the claims of Word of Faith Prosperity Theology. The many expensive-looking items on stage tell viewers that TBN is financially blessed by God. This visual presentation not only helps convince viewers that Prosperity Theology worked for Jan and Paul and can work for them, but becomes potent and effective when used in conjunction with technology. Other ministries, whether local or traveling, ground similar beliefs about Prosperity with Biblical verses and experience of the Holy Spirit. However, without the filtering capacity and global reach facilitated by communications technology, they are simply unable to provide consistently the same message with its exponential corroborating evidence. In an average-sized local ministry, there is the inevitable problem of congregants realizing that good people are not receiving these benefits. While congregants may see Prosperity Theology at work for their pastor, it is inevitable that a lack of reinforcement will impede the growth of the Word of Faith concept. Milmon Harrison discusses this problem in Righteous Riches and details the concerns of many congregants in a local Word of Faith megachurch that good people are not receiving prosperity and healing. While it is likely that the scale of a megachurch offers an increased opportunity to sustain the claims of Prosperity Theology, Harrison documents the difficulty of sustaining these claims in the local context. Not surprisingly, most Word of Faith churches are

137 Harrison, Righteous Riches, 131-146.
138 Harrison, Righteous Riches, 68-80.
megachurches and the large community of believers inevitably provides a few congregants who have experienced material increase to encourage the community. While the presence of some people who see the effects of the Gospel of Wealth does not guarantee that all congregants will believe, the success of some helps members of the Word of Faith community continue in their faith and pursue the doctrine. However, even in the setting of a large Word of Faith church there cannot be full protection from evidence that might undermine Word of Faith. Indeed, without contact with continual success stories it is difficult to avoid discouragement and lose faith. The combination of these claims with media technology allows for a stream of continual evidence, made possible through technology.

Evidence for the efficacy of prosperity theology not only comes in the form of the visual culture of the programming, but also constant verbal articulations that Prosperity Theology can work for any true believer. Paul and Jan frequently read testimonials from believers who offer their own accounts of success. During the Spring Praise-a-Thon, Paul recounted to the audience the story of a partner who received a miraculous healing just that day. He says, “Now listen there’s a key here! There’s a seed here! Listen! This happened after my husband agreed to plant our seed!” By connecting the sowing of a financial seed to physical healing, Paul demonstrates to the audience that Prosperity Theology works. Indeed, twenty-four hour programming allows for a filtering of information so that evidence of the efficacy of Prosperity Theology is constant and infallible. While other ministries making similar claims have failed to substantiate themselves, Jan and Paul provide consistent, unfailing evidence. Indeed, the viewer is left to assume, through a careful watching of TBN, that Prosperity Theology always works for the sincere believer. By encouraging their viewers to watch TBN all day every day, the network moves to ensure that viewers are not exposed to any evidence that would suggest that the ministry is fallible. Additionally, even if a viewer does expose herself/himself to critics, TBN is there 24/7 to offer refutation. As a constant television presence, Trinity not only offers an omnipresent rebuttal to criticism, but can also filter out any potential contradictions or challenges to its message.

139 Ibid., 62.
III. Word of Faith and Technology

While media have benefits for validating Prosperity Theology and presenting compelling visual arguments for TBN, the use of media technology also requires televangelists like Jan and Paul Crouch to participate in secular culture. Just like any other television broadcaster, the Crouchers have to follow FCC regulations, pay fees, and attract audiences in order to maintain their ministries. Moreover, with the intensified financial commitments necessary to stay on the air, broadcast ministries have to fundraise effectively to survive. Similar to the pressures found in religious radio discussed earlier, the need for fundraising is central to understanding TBN and other religious broadcasters. The concern for financial stability has influenced the use of the secular and religious in order to create programming, which appeals to tithing viewers. Additionally, the centrality of rhetoric about conversion gives the electronic church identity and legitimacy despite the demographics of the TBN audience—Christian and churchgoing. Going beyond the way that technology influences the content and format of programming, we find that there are corresponding theological innovations in the electronic church that have helped to satisfy their increased financial need created by technology. The Word of Faith movement has developed alongside religious broadcasting as a way to make religious sense of the shifts in emphasis required by the use of media.

There are three main theological responses to media that have occurred within Word of Faith religious broadcasting: an emphasis on conversions, the gospel of wealth and health, and positive confession. The first two responses, an emphasis on conversion and the gospel of wealth and health, are primarily driven by economic pressure. Positive confession, on the other hand, develops as an emphasis on the spoken word in response to the limitations of television as a visual and oral medium. Since the centrality of the rhetoric of conversion was discussed in chapter two, a focus on understanding the gospel of wealth and health and positive confession is appropriate.

The affinity between broadcasting and the gospel of wealth and health is multiply determined. First, the gospel of wealth and health adds another incentive for gift-giving, since tithing is said to result in exponential financial rewards, healing, conversions for loved ones, emotional repair, and any other necessary changes requested by the giver. Since media technology is expensive, the gospel of wealth and health is a way to encourage viewers to donate money regularly. Preachers promise spiritual and financial outcomes to viewers that require no
financial investment from the ministry itself. Next, the gospel of wealth and health responds to audiences of religious broadcasts by offering expressions of power and autonomy. In Prosperity Theology, it is understood that God is contractually bound to reward the gifts of the faithful. The opportunity for personal enrichment through gift-giving appeals to people who are economically and socially disadvantaged. Both Word of Faith believers and the audiences of religious broadcasts in general are overwhelmingly members of lower socioeconomic classes or people of color.\(^1\) Since one of the limitations of technology is pressure to draw an audience and raise money, the gospel of wealth and health develops to accommodate these needs. Finally, the gospel of wealth and health takes advantage of a benefit of media already discussed, the appearance of incontrovertibility. The unfailing success of “sowing your seed” can be sustained in a media environment where testimonials are consistently offered and detractors are unacknowledged. These burdens and benefits of media come together to produce a religious innovation that validates the materialism of American society and accounts for the cost of media technology.

The doctrine of positive confession reflects a different sort of theological accommodation. Instead of operating as an economic response, positive confession accounts for the limitations of media to oral and visual stimuli while also offering an alternative to religious experience through community. In positive confession, people receive gifts from God by speaking words about themselves that God has spoken about them in the Bible. Like the gospel of wealth and health, positive confession posits a direct relationship between God and believers in which believers can assert control over their lives through proper faith. However, also central to positive confession is an emphasis on the spoken word. Words are not meaningless or trivial but are loaded with life-changing power. One of the disadvantages of media is that it is fundamentally unable to create physical community. Of course, one can understand religious broadcasts to collect believers into a global community. In fact, each episode of *PTL* opens with the assertion that “you are now part of the world’s largest prayer and praise gathering!” Despite the potential benefits of participation in a global community, it remains that local congregations are the locus for religious experience in Christianity. Religious broadcasters uphold this idea by encouraging, when possible, viewers to find and attend a local congregation. While positive

\(^{141}\) Harrison, *Righteous Riches*, 132.
confession does not replace the local community, nor does it necessarily allow viewers to achieve a similar religious end, positive confession allows viewers to achieve religious experiences through television. In a system where words and images are the only stimuli, words have achieved an exaggerated import. The emphasis on words can be understood as an accommodation to media and yet another way that religious broadcasters, like TBN, can make their messages useful and attractive to viewers.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that technology is an essential framework for understanding TBN. TBN reifies technology by imagining that it is the key to unlocking all-important end-time events. This process occurs by linking the secular (technology) with the religious (scripture), thus transforming technology into a vital part of TBN’s religious worldview. Although Word of Faith theology developed as a fertile environment for TBN’s technology-based message, Paul Crouch’s idiosyncratic fixation on technology is equally responsible for TBN’s reification of technology. Unlike Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, Paul Crouch does not simply see technology as a means to an end. Technology is, rather, fully integrated into TBN’s religious worldview via its sacred character and divine origin. TBN has worked technology into its ministry in other secondary ways as well.

Media technology has allowed TBN, as well as other media ministries, the ability to craft its message in a persuasive way. TBN is able to sustain controversial positions by failing to acknowledge critics verbally and by offering ongoing evidence to viewers of its effective divine mission. The portrayal of TBN as attractive and successful both materialistically and spiritually reminds viewers that its ministry works. TBN is made to look attractive and successful by creating carefully edited and placed visual imagery. Several visual texts demonstrated this method for establishing TBN’s identity by juxtaposing the Christian ministry with its non-Christian opponents. Because TBN is able to carefully control and manipulate visual rhetoric, it is here where critics are addressed. TBN and its supporters are portrayed in bright colors as empowered, happy, and successful; all others, including opponents and critics, are depicted as impoverished, depraved, and oppressed. It is only through the use of media technology that TBN can design these carefully crafted and subtle messages to compel their viewership.

In conclusion, technology has proved to be crucial to understanding TBN. Because it developed in the late 20th century and has a significant broadcasting component, Word of Faith
has made a space for theological innovations that accommodate the successes and shortcomings of technology. TBN has not only adopted that theology, but has exploited the possibilities opened up by combining mass media technology into Christian evangelizing. The unique visual possibilities of mass media, especially television, have allowed TBN to communicate messages to viewers in ways that create and maintain audience and network identity.
Conclusion to Thesis

It has been rewarding to work on this project, and as it ends, I realize that I have only begun to explore the many ways that TBN can help us attain a better understanding of contemporary religious expressions in America. This conclusion has the double task of looking back at what has been accomplished in the course of my project, and looking forward toward future avenues of exploration, as well as suggesting some of the project’s implications.

Chapter one presented TBN as a challenge to the scholarly and popular category of church. By demonstrating that TBN is a church, common-sense and widespread notions of church were undermined, forcing a critical reexamination of how the term is used. Additionally, the chapter suggested some ways that TBN evidences genuine religious experience through electronic media and the possibilities of achieving technologically-mediated community. Finally, the first chapter explored the visual presentation of TBN as a Christian home along the lines of American Victorian standards. This discussion further illustrated TBN’s transmission of church identity through the sacrality of the home and domestic worship. Chapter two began by tracing the history of the Word of Faith movement, which arose in the 1960s and developed alongside religious radio and television broadcasting ministries. The chapter explored TBN’s claimed identity as a nondenominational entity by ultimately exploding that self-description through statistical and visual analysis. Chapter three explored the way that technology plays a role in TBN’s theology of the end-times and in the development of the Word of Faith movement, also emphasizing political and social uses of TBN’s visual texts. Finally, chapter three argued that technology is central to TBN’s identity, producing encoded visual texts to subtly point readers to a properly Christian, but distinctively TBN, identity.

Some Thoughts on Definitions

Throughout this thesis, I have advocated a revision in the scholarly understanding of the category of church as inclusive of religious broadcasting. I realize that this argument has implications that are greater than this thesis. My approach to definitions in this thesis exemplifies my own understanding of the tasks and challenges of the humanistic study of religion. Scholars of religion seek first to understand, second to create positive change in their own scholarly communities, and finally, if we are lucky, change in the world outside of the academy. Seeking a better definition of church, necessarily meant rejecting those, like Schultze, seeking to make a
theological point. Rather, I suggest that scholars employ the category of church as yet another lens through which religious broadcasting, and in particular Trinity Broadcasting Network, can be viewed. While this reevaluation of our scholarly definitions is attractive, since it includes insider perspectives and allows for multiple understanding of religious vocabulary, the fluidity of academic definitions is also problematic. The definition of “church,” or even “religion,” is so contested that including all possible understandings of the word renders it moot.

If any thing can be a church then the term becomes unhelpful, as it is no longer a way for scholars to think about particular religious phenomena. In the humanistic study of religion, then, definitions do not speak the final truth, but are rather a temporary and pragmatic place to stand. A definition is a tool to help us think and not a final answer. While we recognize that our definitions are always inadequate, never inclusive or exclusive enough, they are necessary for thinking, which why I have attempted to play with the definition of church in this thesis. This was evident in chapter one where multiple understandings of church were used to evaluate the data of TBN—this exercise allowed for a discussion of the differences in working definitions of church but also highlighted TBN’s differences as a broadcasting ministry. Scholars of religion need definitions to begin our conversation, but we cannot let them dictate our conclusions. Indeed, one of the things that distinguishes academic discourse is our willingness to play with definitions, to challenge the boundaries of our discipline, and to allow for all possible outcomes.

**Where Do We Go from Here? Religious Broadcasting in the New Millennium**

Academics are constantly pressed to consider adequately all the important religious phenomena that occur in the world, and it is, of course, impossible to consider all the aspects of religion that are interesting and important. However, a case must be made for the continued exploration of religious broadcasting in particular and religion and media phenomenon in general. Media technology has overtaken American culture and is influencing the development and expression of religions. The transport of this transformed media religion through technology has tremendous implications for global religious expressions and the reception of American religions. Furthermore, though people dismiss the power of religious broadcasting because they do not see evidence that it is converting millions, religious broadcasting is acting to feed the lives of the most dedicated and to make them increasingly fervent members of their communities. It is for this reason, rather than academic pretensions about the significance of my own work above
all others, that religious media must be explored. While religion and media are pressing scholarly issues, Word of Faith communities specifically deserve the microscope as particularly illustrative of the trends of religious broadcasting, especially in work that considers the global impact of broadcasting.

TBN, however, is often overshadowed in its influence by bombastic and political media personalities like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. It is, of course, undeniable that these figures represent one important part of the electronic church; however, TBN and Word of Faith demand more attention. While TBN does not outspokenly advocate for political causes, nor do its preachers appear as political commentators on Larry King Live, TBN sustains a religiously, socially and politically conservative viewership. TBN may not be converting millions around the world as it claims, it is attracting and socializing fervent and active socially conservative Christians. Extending the tradition of the urban revival and other media ministries, TBN effectively combines the secular and religious by using Word of Faith theology. This potent dynamic allows TBN to carry out its conservative political agenda while avoiding the microscope of mainstream media and scholarly attention.

Here and there, this thesis attempted to tease out the political implications and configurations important to TBN. This kind of work is especially important to ongoing discussions about the fate of politics in the United States, the relationship between church and state, the influence of television on civic life, as well as various other aspects of the relationship between religion and politics. I have suggested that TBN’s political agenda is conservative not only in its emphasis on supporting a particular political party, but also because of the high value placed on social control and quelling social dissent. TBN’s prosperity theology might be understood as an attempt to maintain the status quo, and their general religious viewpoint expresses a deep mistrust of human ability to improve the world. These orientations might have important political implications that are yet to be explored, but this project attempts simply to lay the groundwork for understanding the multiple messages that TBN communicates. I hope that this contribution begins to make it possible for others to engage in discussions about the importance of TBN and religious broadcasting in general.

In considering the religious phenomenon that is TBN, I have always been perplexed by the idea that TBN merely translates their American programming into foreign languages and believes this to be an effective means of conversion. However, I also take TBN’s mission quite
seriously, and I know that they legitimately desire to convert people. Though I think that it is possible that TBN is so caught up in their own American identity that they simply do not realize that American idiosyncrasy might simply not appeal to people living outside America. Perhaps however, TBN is not ignorant of their global cultural irrelevance, but instead see the visual components of their ministry as the most potent aspect of their message. As I have argued, the ministry has a deliberate and careful focus on visual presentation. The founders Jan and Paul Crouch have let no detail pass their inspection, and they certainly mean to compel the unsaved with images of grandeur and excess that come with their idea of Christianity. Perhaps, then, the export of the American consumer identity survives translation. The appeal of conspicuous consumption may just be the appeal of TBN. Important work needs to be done to explore the way that American ideals of materialism and excess are imparted through religious television—synthesized with the salvific message. In many ways, the role of TBN seems to act as a continuing colonization of the other. TBN’s broadcasts civilize with Christianity while also exporting the values of American consumerism.

Word of Faith is not the first American religious movement to emphasize the importance of consumerism and prosperity. The field yet lacks a comprehensive study of the history of prosperity movements in American religion. Such a work is needed in order to fully understand the appeal and uses of prosperity theology and its forebears throughout American history. As a movement that has begun to characterize the phenomenon of the megachurch, as well as an economically and racially diverse community, Word of Faith offers an exceptional body of data for understanding popular religious expressions, the function of religion in the lives of Americans, and potential evidence for an investigation of the “selling of religion.” An understanding of the history and contemporary expressions of Prosperity Theology will uncover the reasons that Prosperity Theology is amenable to American culture, and is certainly one religious phenomenon shaped by consumer ideals.

I hope that this project has suggested some future directions for research about TBN. I am convinced of the continuing importance of an ongoing conversation about TBN and Word of Faith that both takes them seriously, and probes their actions with a critical eye.
Appendix I

Internal Revenue Service, “Definition of Church,” Internal Revenue Service.

The term church is found, but not specifically defined, in the Internal Revenue Code. With the exception of the special rules for church audits, the use of the term church also includes conventions and associations of churches as well as integrated auxiliaries of a church. Certain characteristics are generally attributed to churches. These attributes of a church have been developed by the IRS and by court decisions. They include:
Distinct legal existence
Recognized creed and form of worship
Definite and distinct ecclesiastical government
Formal code of doctrine and discipline
Distinct religious history
Membership not associated with any other church or denomination
Organization of ordained ministers
Ordained ministers selected after completing prescribed courses of study
Literature of its own
Established places of workshop
Regular congregations
Regular religious services
Sunday schools for the religious instruction of the young
Schools for the preparation of its members
The IRS generally uses a combination of these characteristics, together with other facts and circumstances, to determine whether an organization is considered a church for federal tax purposes.
Appendix II


We believe that the Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible, and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and precept.

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe that man was created in the image of God, but as a result of sin is lost and powerless to save himself.

We believe that the only hope for man is to believe on Jesus Christ, the virgin-born Son of God, Who died to take upon Himself the punishment for the sin of mankind, and Who rose from the dead, so that by receiving Him as Savior and Lord, man is redeemed by His Blood.

We believe that Jesus Christ in person will return to earth in power and glory.

We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells those who have received Christ for the purpose of enabling them to live righteous and godly lives.

We believe that the Church is the Body of Christ and is composed of all those who, through belief in Christ, have been spiritually regenerated by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church is worldwide evangelization on the one hand, and the nurture and discipline of Christians on the other.
Appendix III


The Healing Network

B: Benny Hinn
N: Narrator
P: Paul Crouch
AN: Narrator with an Arabic accent
B: Never in the history of man have we seen an hour like this hour. The atmosphere is ready, the nations of the world are open as never before, and that’s why we cannot miss this golden opportunity to get the gospel to these millions.
N: What began as a dream in the hearts of Benny Hinn and Paul Crouch… to reach the Arab world with the gospel in their own language…has become a reality.
P: The good news, I can’t hold it any longer, the good news is that the healing Arabic language channel is on the air.
B: Amen, Praise God.
N: Now 300 million Arabic speaking people can watch Christian programming twenty-four hours a day seven days a week.
P: And by the way the tapes we play right here in Tustin are being fed by fiber optic right clear across the water to Madrid Spain and up to the satellite from Madrid and all over Europe and the Middle East on a completely separate channel network all in the Arabic language.
N: The healing channel features informative talk shows, worldwide crusades, health and nutrition shows, children’s programming, and films for the entire family. This new and exciting channel becomes our sixth network, beaming the gospel to Europe and the Middle East.
B: We’re hearing good reports, everybody is enthusiastic and full of joy they say that that special channel has its own identity.
N: And viewers are responding to the message.
P: This is from a young man, he says:

AN: Dear Brothers,
I am one of the viewers of your Arabic language program. I grew up in a very different faith but I am now not convinced of the reality of that faith because of its brutality. Yet I had deep peace in my heart when I watched your program.
I have decided to convert to your religion because of the love, kindness, and giving of Christianity and their support to the oppressed.
I am hoping you can help me convert to Christianity, and receive the words of the Lord Jesus, the Savior.
I now testify there is no God, But God and that Jesus is His word and Spirit. I pray that God will unite me with you and other believers in Jesus Christ.
P: Benny I will make you a copy of that but I’ll tell you that if that’s the only letter we ever get from the healing Arabic language channel it’s worth every effort.
N: Never before have we seen this hour, never before have nations of the world been more open to the gospel.
AN: [reads John 3:17 in Arabic]
N: Your love gift or telethon pledge will help TBN touchbillions now.

**World in Turmoil**
Minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, the sun rises and sets on a world in turmoil and conflict. As billions of people go about their lives in search of answers to spiritual questions… 24 hours a day TBN beams the light of the gospel around the world. To a mother comforting her child… a father searching for food… a family racing to freedom… and a teen looking for direction. From California to New York, London to Cape Town, Moscow to Baghdad, Calcutta toShanghai, and Sidney to Buenos Aires. TBN is Touching Billions now.
Appendix IV


We Believe....
THE SCRIPTURES - The Bible is the inspired Word of God, the product of holy men of old who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. The New Covenant, as recorded in the New Testament, we accept as our infallible guide in matters pertaining to conduct and doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Peter 1:21).

We Believe....
THE GODHEAD - Our God is one, but manifested in three Persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, being coequal (Deut. 6:4; Phil. 2:6). God the Father is greater than all; the Sender of the Word (Logos) and the Begetter (John 14:28; John 16:28; John 1:14). The Son is the Word flesh-covered, the One Begotten, and has existed with the Father from the beginning (John 1:1; John 1:18; John 1:14). The Holy Spirit proceeds forth from both the Father and the Son and is eternal (John 14:16; John 15:26).

We Believe....
MAN, HIS FALL AND REDEMPTION - Man is a created being, made in the likeness and image of God, but through Adam's transgression and fall, sin came into the world. The Bible says "...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God," and "...There is none righteous, no, not one." (Rom. 3:10; 3:23). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was manifested to undo the works of the devil and gave His life and shed His blood to redeem and restore man back to God (Rom. 5:14; 1 John 3:8).

Salvation is the gift of God to man, separate from works and the Law, and is made operative by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, producing works acceptable to God (Eph. 2:8-10).

We Believe....
ETERNAL LIFE AND THE NEW BIRTH - Man's first step toward salvation is godly sorrow that worketh repentance. The New Birth is necessary to all men, and when experienced, produces eternal life (2 Cor. 7:10; John 3:3-5; 1 John 5:12).

We Believe....
WATER BAPTISM - Baptism in water is by immersion, is a direct commandment of our Lord, and is for believers only. The ordinance is a symbol of the Christian's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Matt. 28:19; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12; Acts 8:36-39). The following recommendation regarding the water baptismal formula is adopted; to wit: "On the confession of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by His authority, I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

We Believe....
BAPTISM IN THE HOLY GHOST - The Baptism in the Holy Ghost and fire is a gift from God as promised by the Lord Jesus Christ to all believers in this dispensation and is received subsequent to the new birth. This experience is accompanied by the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues as the Holy Spirit Himself gives utterance (Matt. 3:11; John 14:16,17; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:38,39; Acts 19:1-7; Acts 2:1-4).

We Believe....
SANCTIFICATION - The Bible teaches that without holiness no man can see the Lord. We believe in the Doctrine of Sanctification as a definite, yet progressive work of grace, commencing at the time of regeneration and continuing until the consummation of salvation at Christ's return (Heb. 12:14; 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Peter 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 Cor. 1:30). We Believe....

DIVINE HEALING - Healing is for the physical ills of the human body and is wrought by the power of God through the prayer of faith, and by the laying on of hands. It is provided for in the atonement of Christ, and is the privilege of every member of the Church today (James 5:14,15; Mark 16:18; Isa. 53:4,5; Matt. 8:17; 1 Peter 2:24). We Believe....

RESURRECTION OF THE JUST AND THE RETURN OF OUR LORD - The angels said to Jesus' disciples, "...This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." His coming is imminent. When He comes, "...The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..." (Acts 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:16,17). Following the Tribulation, He shall return to earth as King of kings, and Lord of lords, and together with His saints, who shall be kings and priests, He shall reign a thousand years (Rev. 5:10;20:6). We Believe....

HELL AND ETERNAL RETRIBUTION - The one who physically dies in his sins without accepting Christ is hopelessly and eternally lost in the lake of fire and, therefore, has no further opportunity of hearing the Gospel or repenting. The lake of fire is literal. The terms "eternal" and "everlasting," used in describing the duration of the punishment of the damned in the lake of fire, carry the same thought and meaning of endless existence as used in denoting the duration of joy and ecstasy of saints in the Presence of God (Heb. 9:27; Rev. 19:20).
### Appendix V:
Denominational Affiliations of TBN Guests Appearing Between June 8th and June 25th 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word of Faith</th>
<th>Likely Word of Faith</th>
<th>Unknown Affiliation</th>
<th>Other Affiliation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barb Vogel</td>
<td>Steve “Sting” Borden</td>
<td>Tommy Ford</td>
<td>John Bryant (AME)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark Anderson</td>
<td>Cindy Trimm</td>
<td>Harold Pierce</td>
<td>Jay Strack (Southern Baptist)</td>
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<td>Donald Battle</td>
<td>Tony Evans</td>
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<td>Dale Bronners</td>
<td>Anthony Oak</td>
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<td>The Isaacs Singers</td>
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<td>Alvin Slaughter</td>
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<td>Thomas Weeks</td>
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RHEMA. “Tenets of Faith.” RHEMA. http://www.rhema.org/about/tenets_faith.cfm


