FALWELL AND FANTASY:
THE RHETORIC OF A RELIGIOUS AND
POLITICAL MOVEMENT

DISSERTATION

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By

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To Jim, who always believed.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE RHETORIC OF THE MORAL MAJORITY

"Everyone is an expert on two subjects; religion and politics. Long hours of social conversation are given to roasting preachers and grilling politicians. Such discussions usually produce substantial heat but only faint light."\(^1\)

Jerry Falwell, a Fundamentalist minister from Lynchburg, Virginia, made his first organized venture into politics in June, 1979. In that month, Falwell and a group of associates formed a special interest group which they named The Moral Majority.\(^2\)

Prior to the late '70s, Falwell was known as minister of the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg. From humble beginnings in a Donald Duck bottling factory, Falwell's church today boasts attendance of more than 17,000 and his Lynchburg empire includes Liberty University of which he is chancellor.\(^3\)

His path from minister of that Virginia congregation to outspoken advocate of American Fundamentalism required skills previously of little use to Fundamentalists -- political savvy and networking ability.

Admittance to this exclusive club was gained by Falwell and associates by forming the Moral Majority.
The rise of the politically conservative Moral Majority occurred both at the local and national levels. Characterized by the use of "hit lists," members of the Moral Majority were accused of targeting liberal politicians such as Senators George McGovern and Birch Bayh for defeat while their leadership deftly raised and maintained a $2.5 million operating budget for their impressive "victories" in the 1980 elections.⁴

Those who had not heard the term "Moral Majority" prior to the 1980 election rapidly became acquainted with this new political force.

Some analysts insisted that the role of the Moral Majority and the religious right in the 1980 elections was exaggerated. Richard Pierard, among others, argued that the religious conservatives "rode rather than created the anti-incumbent, anti-liberal wave" in the election.⁵ Conservative spokesperson William A. Rusher, commenting on the religious right's impact wrote:

"In any event, by 1980, the religious right had been brought fully on line as a member of the political coalition sustaining the conservative movement. It is far from representing politically, in and of itself, a 'majority' of the American electorate, despite the claim implicit in the catchy title of Jerry Falwell's organization. But it is a new distinct and powerful force on the national political scene and will unquestionably continue to make its influence felt in both local and national elections henceforth."⁶
Since 1980 and the initial impact of the movement, their impact on the socio-political landscape has appeared to wane, but not dissipated. In two crucial elections, 1982 and 1984, the influence of the Moral Majority and the larger New Religious Right continued to be evident, though admittedly not with the force of their debut.

Though the Moral Majority has no formalized statement of ideology and no definite parameters of membership per se, the emergence and persistence of this organization resulted in the existence of a dramatic political force. In 1986, Falwell renamed the Moral Majority Liberty Federation and it continues to be a strong political and social force.\(^7\)

The rhetoric of the Moral Majority merits study for several reasons. First, the Moral Majority has been the most recognizable social movement organization of the larger New Religious Right, at least for the past eight years.\(^8\)

More than a loosely-affiliated group of people sharing the same connection, the Moral Majority is but one of the organizations coming out of the larger New Right movement. Other organizations include The Religious Roundtable, the Conservative Caucus and the Heritage Foundation, to name a few. While these organizations have differing goals and leadership; they share an affiliation with the New Right.
Secondly, the Moral Majority with its rhetoric has been effective in linking evangelical Christianity, the mass media and single-issue politics, the art of raising dollars to use to target many "liberal" candidates for electoral defeat and for the effort to defeat liberals the Moral Majority would call much attention to its causes. Rhetoric is instrumental to the goals of the Moral Majority.

As a student of rhetoric, one must have questions about the nature of communication involved in a persuasive effort of this kind. As James A. Wechsler wrote in the introduction to Thunder on the Right: "What must be asked is why a well-organized, well-financed combination of primitives has been able to impose its will in too many places by crystallizing discontents?" 9

Many have asked this question: historians, political scientists, theologians and social scientists. But, as James Golden wrote: "Notwithstanding the abiding concern psychologists and sociologists have in movements, and despite the pioneering contributions they have made to this field, it is the communication theorist who is best qualified to handle the rhetorical elements always present in this type of response."

This statement brings about the final reason the rhetoric of the Moral Majority merits attention. It is indeed, a rhetorical response to an perceived exigence. Both the Moral Majority and the larger New Right movement
itself were generated as a protests to social conditions which their leaders saw as undesirable. And, both used rhetoric to "crystallize discontent" in order to communicate a shared reality and to attract converts.

In a recent monograph, Simons et. al. stressed the importance of the interface between rhetoric and the movements. In offering an alternative definition of the term rhetoric as it applies to social movements, the authors noted both the analysis of factors "that impel and constrain movements' actors and reactors" and the "interplay of movement and establishment rhetorics in shaping social constructions of reality."

As a movement which was generated in response to a perceived exigence, it is beneficial to analyze Moral Majority rhetoric as a response. Not only can the critic examine the movement's rhetoric, he or she can look at the interplay as Simons suggests. The critic can begin to see the construction and promulgation of a social reality as it is generated and shared by rhetors who participate in that social reality.

When Wayne Brockriede encouraged expansion from the single speaker approach in rhetorical criticism to the "emphasis on people interacting in a situation", he stressed the need for attention to the revolutionary movements which were occurring when he wrote, and to the kind of social movements that have dominated since the late
The Moral Majority is an excellent example of a new kind of social movement impacting on the political and social landscape today. Neither solely revolutionary nor innovational in nature, the Moral Majority is a social movement reflecting one group of people's attempt to redefine morality and restore the nation to a position of former greatness. As such, it merits attention from rhetorical theorists because it is exemplary of a new kind of social movement.

With the advent of the New Right, new material for rhetorical study became available. Since it has been said that the tenor of the times dictates the type of social movement upon which rhetorical critics focus their attentions,\(^{14}\) then a conservative shift in the socio-political climate indicated appropriate changes in the material available for rhetorical study.

**Purpose and Methodology of the Study**

The intent of this study is to analyze the rhetoric of the Moral Majority in an effort to contribute information primarily to knowledge of the rhetoric of movements. To achieve that purpose, the study focuses on three questions:

1. What rhetorical situation did Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority address?
2) What fantasy themes and rhetorical visions are portrayed in the Moral Majority rhetoric?

3) How well did the Moral Majority meet its rhetorical potential in response to the demands of the situation?

The method for this study comes from two key essays which concentrate on rhetorical principles significant for the study of a social movement: the rhetorical situation of Lloyd Bitzer and the fantasy theme analysis of Ernest Bormann. Additionally, the concept of effect is analyzed using the work of James Andrews, Robert Cathcart and John Patton.

Bormann's fantasy theme and Bitzer's rhetorical situation can be combined as a dual method because of the emphasis each theorist places on the situation from which the message originates, the nature of the rhetoric which is created, and the dissemination of the message to the intended audiences.

Three other scholars provide the framework for the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Andrews, Cathcart and Patton write about the critical function and the responsibilities of the rhetorical critic.

The most challenging step in the critical process is assessment. It is here, argues Cathcart, that the critic "makes a contribution to theoretical art and theory." Andrews agrees that judgment is an essential part of the
critical function. "The rhetorical critic does not judge a speech on the basis of quick impressions . . . It remains to reach a defensible conclusion on the quality of the speech."16 The study of the Moral Majority cannot conclude then, without an evaluation of the likely effect of the movement's rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism involves more than descriptions of discourse and accounts of how it came into being and functioned, according to Bormann. The "critic needs also to evaluate and judge the discourse and provided added discourse into how it works."17

Correspondingly, then, this study will focus on the research questions presented above in terms of the situation which called the rhetoric into existence, the message which was generated in response to that situation, the dissemination of information to the groups of people who were participants sharing a rhetorical vision, and the study will examine the effectiveness of their rhetoric as a response to the situation and in meeting the rhetorical potential. What emerges from this study is a composite picture of a singular worldview -- the efforts of a group of people to redefine morality and restore the entire nation to that morality.

The Rhetorical Situation. When a critic asks questions about the rhetorical situation, he or she is concerned with the context in which the rhetoric was brought into being. In his essay, Bitzer argues that the rhetorical situation be
treated as a "distinct subject in rhetorical theory."  
From a critical perspective, analysis of the situation which called rhetoric into existence is fruitful and contributes to the building of rhetorical theory.

Bitzer argues that "situation is the source and ground of rhetorical activity . . . and therefore of rhetorical criticism."  
He defines rhetorical situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence."  

Each rhetorical situation contains three constituents: the exigence, the audience and the constraints. "The exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done."  
The rhetorical audience consists of those people "who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change."  
Constraints are made up of persons, events, objects and relations which are part of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence.

The rhetorical situation invites a response which is fitting; exhibits structures which are simple or complex; and rhetorical situations either mature and persist or mature and decay.
Rhetorical Vision. In 1972, Ernest Bormann introduced this critical perspective in "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality." In that essay, Bormann argued that groups of people create a social reality through the sharing of fantasy themes. "... fantasies are shared in all communication contexts, that there is a connection between rhetorical visions and community consciousness, that sharing fantasies is closely connected with motivation, and is an important means for people to create their social realities."25

Bormann was influenced by the work of Robert Bales, who discovered the process in which zero-history groups remove themselves from the "here-and-now" by engaging in the creation of fantasy themes. He argued that these fantasy theme dramas are not confined to small groups, but have application for larger groups hearing a public speech. A rhetorical movement then could demonstrate fantasy themes and a larger rhetorical vision which catches up many participants in the vision.

The fantasy theme approach views groups like Moral Majority as a collective bound together by a shared symbolic reality. It is a useful means of examining 1) the emergence of the vision shared by this group of people, 2) the content of the specific fantasy themes and fantasy types, and, 3) the growth, persistence and/or decline of the vision. The composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a
symbolic reality are the rhetorical visions.

The Rhetorical Response. James Andrews, when writing on the critic's responsibility to judge the effect of a rhetorical act, wrote that the basic question a critic needs to ask is more than, "What was the immediate effect of the speech?" The crucial question should focus on the interaction between the speaker's message and the total context.26

Also writing on the role of the rhetorical critic, Cathcart said the critic, though usually not a part of the movement or event evaluated, is ideally in a position to make an assessment of rhetoric based upon level of expertise and careful attention to the rhetorical act.27

Taking the position that there are standard tools of rhetorical analysis and recognized principles which can be related to particular rhetorical acts, Cathcart argued that it is the responsibility of the critic to assess the rhetorical effectiveness of a particular rhetorical act by comparing the rhetorical act with a rhetorical ideal or suitable model.

"The critic of public discourse is not an objective or impartial observer," he writes. "The critic has values, a point of view and personal desires the same as any communicator... Our task is to tell the reader something which will enhance understanding and appreciation of the
rhetorical act. As critics, we try to convince the reader through the soundness of our analysis and the validity of our judgements that we have achieved a valuable insight into the process of human communication."

If we consider rhetoric as "the human effort to induce cooperation through the use of symbols" as does Kenneth Burke, then we, as critics, must be prepared to deal with evaluation of the rhetorical act. As the intentional use of language and other symbols to influence or persuade selected believers to act, believe, or feel the way the communicator does, the study of rhetoric has a very pragmatic dimension. Inherent in this pragmatic nature is the need to ask, "How well?" For this study of the Moral Majority, each theorist has something important to contribute in response to the question "how well."

Andrews urges critics to look beyond the acts of the rhetor and audience(s) to take into account the total context in which the rhetor functioned. Cathcart emphasized the role of the critic as judge and the importance of comparing the rhetorical act with a rhetorical ideal.

Bitzler argues rhetorical discourse obtains "its character-as-rhetorical from the situation which generates it."²⁰

He continues to say the situation calls the rhetoric into existence -- thus the rhetorical situation. The discourse is rhetorical, he writes, "insofar as it functions
(or seeks to function) as a fitting response to the situation which needs and invites it."\(^{31}\)

According to Bitzer, there is room for a subjective critical decision regarding the fittingness of the rhetorical response. "The exigence and the complex of persons, objects, events and relations which generate rhetorical discourse are located in reality, are objectively and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience, are therefore available for scrutiny by an observer or critic who attends to them."\(^{32}\)

This approach will allow emphasis to be placed both on the rhetorical choices and methods of the social movement and also at the outside factors which inspired the movement.

Research for this Study

Data for this study were collected from books, magazines, newspapers, Moral Majority pamphlets, letters and two primary Moral Majority publications, The Moral Majority Report and The Fundamentalist Journal.

Particularly helpful was a May, 1982, seminar in Charleston, West Virginia, with speakers including former Senators Birch Bayh of Indiana and Thomas MacIntyre of New Hampshire; Anthony Podesta, then executive director of People for the American Way. This seminar proved invaluable in terms of information about the New Right and the Moral Majority from the perspective of liberals.
Material collected from this seminar included transcripts of speeches, lectures, and pamphlets and books. The seminar was titled, "In Defense of the Constitution: The Threat from the New Right," and represented the first organized attempt on the part of liberals to mobilize resources and organize against the Moral Majority.

Additionally, I made frequent donations to The Moral Majority Inc., "The Old Time Gospel Hour" and People for the American Way to be placed on the mailing lists of these organizations. From the Moral Majority mailing list came fund-raising letters, solicitations for support, brochures and booklets and Moral Majority publications. I attempted to trace the evolution of the Moral Majority ideology as communicated through Falwell's nationally syndicated television program, "The Old Time Gospel Hour."

Published interviews with the Moral Majority's leader, Jerry Falwell were obtained from a number of news sources including Newsweek, Christian Life, Christianity Today, The Fundamentalist Journal and Time.

Two books were particularly useful in providing information about the Moral Majority and Falwell: Listen America!, by Jerry Falwell and Jerry Falwell: An Unauthorized Profile, by Goodman and Price.

Access to national, daily and weekly newspapers was obtained through NewsBank, a topically arranged microfilm service. This information allowed the author to trace media
coverage of Jerry Falwell's "I Love America" rallies during the early months of the movement. This information was usually not found in national newspapers such as The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times.

Magazines regularly surveyed for this study included: Newsweek, Time, U. S. News and World Report, Atlantic Monthly, The Moral Majority Report, The Fundamentalist Journal. They provided updates on the activities of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority from which I was able to gain valuable secondary source material for this study.

Additionally, I had conversations with a former employee of "The Old Time Gospel Hour" who provided me with information about the organization and the day-to-day workings of the ministry and the Moral Majority. These conversations were useful to verify information I had previously accumulated and to show me where I was making incorrect assumptions.

REVIEW OF PERTINENT LITERATURE

The Rhetoric of Social Movements. After more than two decades of research on the rhetoric of social movements, no predominant paradigm has gained acceptance. Questions continue to be asked concerning the role of theory building in social movement studies and approaches to the study of
movements have been widely debated by rhetorical theorists. The main argument among rhetorical critics is between those who argue for a rhetorical theory of movements and those who feel that such a definition does not and should not exist.

Making the claim that the nature of rhetorical criticism "seems uncertain and unclear", Brock and Scott describe many of these efforts by critics as "pre-paradigmatic."\(^{33}\)

Beginning in 1940 with Herbert Wichelns, rhetorical scholars were encouraged to turn their attention from "great orator" studies and "undertake research into such selected acts and atmospheres of public address as would permit the study of a multiplicity of speakers, speeches, audiences and occasions."\(^{34}\)

Leland Griffin responded to the need for studies of movements. Suggesting four approaches for study, he presented five questions and answers for the student of social movements. Encouraging a focus on movements he called for the undertaking of research "into such selected acts and atmospheres as would permit the study of a multiplicity of speakers, speeches, audiences and occasions"\(^{35}\)

He suggested that "the rhetorical movement" within the historical movement should be the focus of movement studies and he identified three phases of development in the progress of a movement: a period of inception, a period of rhetorical crisis and a period of consummation. Movements,
he said, may be divided into two classes; the pro movement "in which the rhetorical attempt is to arouse public opinion to the creation or acceptance of an institution or idea" and "anti movements . . . in which the rhetorical attempt is to arouse public opinion to the destruction or rejection of an existing institution or idea." 36

Building upon the initiative provided by Griffin, rhetorical critics and theorists shifted attention to the study of movements. Faced with the problem of how to define a social movement, each scholar seemed to have a preference. Early studies and definitions of movements reflected the confrontational tone of the times. 37

Thirteen years after Griffin's seminal piece, Edwin Black recognized movements as a distinctive genre of rhetorical criticism. He observed that only three movement studies, in addition to Griffin's "Rhetoric of Historical Movements", had appeared in the national journals. His recognition of the study of movements as a distinct genre certainly contributed to the subsequent increase in movement studies. 38

Making the argument that "the standard tools of rhetorical criticism are ill-suited for unraveling the complexity of discourse in social movements or for capturing its gradual flow", 39 Herbert Simons in 1970 proposed a "leader-centered conception of persuasion in social movements". He identified the rhetorical requirements and
problems for the movement's leader. In a sociological approach to movements, he noted: "The primary rhetorical test of the leader -- and, indirectly, of the strategies he employs -- is his capacity to fulfill the requirements of his movement by reducing or resolving rhetorical problems."\(^{40}\)

Thirteen years after Griffin's piece, Edwin Black noted the lack of uniformity in rhetorical criticism. "There is less uniformity in the techniques of rhetorical criticism and in the sorts of subjects deemed appropriate to it, less agreement on the proper role or its ideal condition, more contention, more experiment, more confusion, more vitality."\(^{41}\)

Disagreements over definition involved the nature of the movement. Is a movement reformist or revolutionary in nature as Simons noted? Is it characterized by a confrontational rhetorical style as Cathcart would later propose? Or, is the study of movements to include all rhetorical styles -- from confrontational to innovational?

With the work of Griffin, Black and Simons, a rationale had been established for the study of social movements.

In an attempt to stress the rhetorical nature of movement studies, Robert Cathcart in 1972 proposed a definition of movements that was rhetorical in nature and that recognized confrontation as its identifying form with the main function of movements being "dialectical enjoinderment in the moral arena."\(^{42}\)
Cathcart sought an approach to the study of movements which would call attention to the exchange between the movement's supporters and the advocates of the status quo. He described their exchange as a "dialectical tension growing out of moral conflict." The confrontation "dramatizes the symbolic separation of the individual from the existing order (and) is the central identifying form of a movement, according to Cathcart.

In response to Cathcart, Wilkinson (1976) argued that the primary concern of rhetorical critics should be "languageing strategies." He defined movements as: "languageing strategies by which a significantly vocal part of an established society, experiencing together a sustained dialectical tension growing out of moral (ethical) conflict; agitate to induce cooperation in others, either directly or indirectly, thereby affecting the status quo."

In contrast to Cathcart, Smith and Windes maintained that social movements need not be characterized by confrontation to be classified as movements. Preferring to view movements as innovational campaigns, Smith and Windes described the role of the leader as working for improvements in the existing system, rather than seeking to attack and destroy the existing system.

They maintained that the term movement has "traditionally been construed to include a wide range of
collective action seeking social change" and argued that "change to a more restricted usage can have negative consequences." 47

Their solution was to recognize the broad usage of the word movement and "make careful distinctions among various types of movements." 48

One of these distinctions is the innovational movement . . . "distinct from the establishment conflict movement in that the latter calls for a reconstitution of society's values, it's perceptions of worth and its class arrangements; whereas, the former acts with the expectation that the changes it demands will not disturb the symbols and constraints of the existing values or modify the social hierarchy." 49

Smith and Windes identify three strategies used by the leaders of an innovational movement: First, spokesmen for the movement must deny the existence of conflict between their proposed innovation and the values of society. Second, the innovational movement must emphasize the weakness of traditional institutions and the strength of traditional values. Third, the innovational movement must create a dialectic between its scene and purpose. 50

Smith and Windes conclude that the innovational theory has intrinsic and extrinsic merit. Intrinsically it has merit by contributing to "understanding patterns of public discourse used by groups to improve their society through
innovation."^{51}

Extrinsically, Smith and Windes maintain "this special theory of innovational movements is a forward step in constructing a general theory for movement analysis."^{52}

While Simons, Smith and Windes and Cathcart argued over the relative merits of their respective theoretical approaches, Sillars (1980) urged students of movement studies to examine different forms of discourse in an effort to "cast the widest net." He expressed concern over the number of articles theorizing about a rhetorical definition of movements without being followed in practice by criticism. According to Sillars, these theories exhibit four types of problems: 1) They assume movements are linear phenomena, 2) they emphasize cause and effect analysis, 3) they are too dependent upon intent as a basis of critical judgement and 4) the definitions of movements proposed are excessively rigid.^{53}

He condemned Cathcart particularly as "an unabashed advocate of a narrow definition." He continued: "But, Cathcart's approach is only the extreme version of what other theorists have said. It is illustrative of a general problem. Smith and Windes argue that to have a movement one has to have mobilization appeals. Charles Wilkinson requires that 'a significant vocal part of an established society' experience 'together a sustained dialectical tension growing out of a moral (ethical) conflict (and) agitate to induce
cooperation in others . . .'

Simons found reformist and revolutionary movements to exist 'outside the larger society's conceptions of justice and reality.' David Zarefsky, while proposing no solution, worries that there may be no difference between rhetorical movements and persuasive campaigns, thus requiring a search for 'theoretically significant categories or types under the broad rubric, movements'.

As an alternative to approaches bound by linearity, Sillars suggested that critics cast the widest net. "The base point of such an approach would be that there are an infinite number of acts that may be put together in an infinite number of combinations. These combinations, which we call movements, are continually changing. For purposes of analyses, a critic may choose to isolate some acts and see relationships among them and not choose others. This is a human choice."

Sillars suggests that critics of movements "will thus focus on messages of all shapes and forms: verbal and nonverbal, interpersonal and public, spoken and written, direct and electronic." This interpretation allows the critic to view movements as "collective actions which are perceived by a critic."

This eclectic approach suggests that students of movements should examine and analyze social movements more in general, with less argument over definitions,
particularly rhetorical and restrictive.

Concurrently, in a second study Sillars and Riches took a reflective look at movements studies and, after examination of 101 studies, concluded "rhetorical critics are not in agreement about how a study should be defined; critics share no overriding theoretical framework and; a wide array of methodological approaches have been utilized in the studies that were done."\(^{57}\)

They commented: "The rhetorical movement study appears to be in an undifferentiated and near infant stage, pushing out, although hesitantly, in new directions . . . At the moment it would seem there is no such thing as a movement study. What are currently called movement studies represent no clear definition, form or methodology. At the moment, a study is a movement study when its author or reader finds it useful to so identify it."\(^{58}\)

In the Winter, 1980, issue of The Central States Speech Journal, Griffin, McGee, Cathcart, Lucas and Zarefsky continued the debate over the concept of a rhetorical theory of movements. They addressed the following question: do social movements constitute a distinct rhetorical genre. Rather than formulating any new revelations regarding social movements, the tone of this symposium was pessimistic, with little agreement on any point, save that much research needs to be done and new approaches should be considered.\(^{59}\)
Again in the Spring of 1983, Central States Speech Journal devoted space to an argument over the nature of rhetorical movements. This symposium contained summaries on the best approach to the study of movements.\textsuperscript{60}

Cathcart continued to advocate a rhetorical theory of movements. McGee and Stewart espoused the case study approach, with the latter stating that comparative studies would increase knowledge and understanding. Andrews took a historical approach stating that "... the patterns, meanings and significance of behaviors within a specific context are what the rhetorical scholar studying historical movements seeks to explain."\textsuperscript{61}

Though the two symposia solved no methodological or theoretical problems for student of movements, the debate served as proof that interest in the study of movements continues despite the paucity of the literature.

Herbert Simons, Elizabeth Mechling and Howard Schreier provided a critical review of social movement criticism in a book chapter written in 1984. Titled, "The Functions of Human Communication in Mobilizing for Action from the Bottom Up: The Rhetoric of Social Movements," this lengthy review gives a perspective heretofore not advanced by rhetorical critics.\textsuperscript{62}

Simons et. al. reflect Stewart's functional approach, combining the work of rhetoricians, as well as historians and social scientists.
After providing a discussion of social movement organizations, a definition of social movements and discussion of typologies, the authors make key observations about the progress of social movement studies.

From Griffin's 1952 article, through Burke and Bormann, bottom-up collective action is examined. Much of what is written goes into more depth than is required for the study at hand, but some observations, particularly regarding strategies and long-term effects are applicable.

The analysis of social movements provided here necessarily reflects the observations of Simons et. al. Their greatest contribution is in providing a realistic look at the status of social movements and an up-to-date progress report.

This article re-examines the old problems and questions, summarizes the literature and, after an exhaustive review, makes important conclusions about the study of social movement by communication scholars.

In the last five years, the social and political values of the nation have changed from the revolutionary ideals of the 60s and 70s to a concern for more conservative morals and values. Both Bormann and Simons write of a rhetoric of restoration.63 This rhetorical genre, while not a new one, is a dramatic shift from the confrontational rhetoric of the 60s and 70s. It is appropriate for the study of the New Right and the Moral Majority. A goal of the present study is
to contribute toward our knowledge of the rhetoric of
restoration.

The Moral Majority is a social movement which employs
the restoration rhetorical form. Study of the Moral Majority
shows that there is still room for research and
investigation into the area of movements in general. This
study will show that the rhetorical aspects of social
movements -- be they called languaging strategies or
symbolic convergence, can add to our knowledge of movements
previously dominated by historians and sociologists.

When viewed from the perspective of a communicator, the
actions of the Moral Majority take on a different
interpretation. As Golden noted, the communicator can
isolate and analyze the rhetorical elements in a movement;
whereas they would not be the prime concern of a researcher
from another discipline.

The rhetorician can provide the needed insights on the
dialectic exchanged between the movement and the
countermovement and the rhetorician can make us aware of the
various personae occupying positions of prominence in
the movement's drama.

One dominant trend is beginning to emerge related to
the study of social movements -- symbolic convergence
theory. Ernest Bormann writes:

"The symbolic convergence communication
theory is a general theory that accounts for
the creation and use of special theories. The
basic communicative dynamic of the theory is
the sharing of group fantasies which brings
about symbolic convergence for the participants
... I found that the analysis of shared group
and community fantasies based on the social
scientific communication theory of symbolic
convergence provided a critical key to open up
the way of communication under study worked to
create a shared consciousness.

Stewart, Smith and Denton refer to the symbolic
interactionist perspective when discussing three
perspectives from which to study social movements. "Symbolic
interaction", as Stewart, et al. discuss, comes from the
Burkeian interpretation and method of analyzing symbolic
acts in order to understand human behavior, whereas
Bormann's "symbolic convergence" stems from his attempts to
draw explanatory power from his fantasy theme analysis.

Despite their differences, both perspectives stress
an important shift in the area of social movements -- the
shift toward establishment of a theoretical framework. Both
Burke and Bormann share the same basis in the dramatistic
metaphor. Dramatism, for Burke, is grounded in the symbolic
nature of humans.

Rather than remain preoccupied with definitions and
spitting hairs over perspectives, students of movements are
beginning to make progress toward the establishment of a
theoretical framework, concerning themselves with meanings
that people attach to symbols and their interpretation of
those symbols and the nature of created social realities.

When studying any movement -- including the Moral
Majority -- it is critical to concern oneself with the
nature of the communication generated by the leaders and members of the movement. Particularly with the Moral Majority, a group which has no visible membership, no specific meeting places and no visible organization, the study of how people become associated with the group necessarily must relate to the symbolic reality communicated to them. In this case when face-to-face interaction is not always possible, the media was the primary channel for the dissemination of that image.

Gusfield (1981) writes of the role of the media in the construction of a movement. The significant role that mass media play comes from their monitoring function. He writes. "They tell us what is happening and, alternately, do not tell us what is happening. In the telling, they put together individual acts into general patterns; turn particular acts into movements."66

He cites the "hippie" movement of the 60s as an example. "Here no organization existed to provide a program; no highly dramatic events occurred to provide demonstrative confirmation of a direction toward change."67

This function of the media is more important when movements are less organized. "The very fluidity of such movements may elude their recognition. Perceiving their fluidity enhances them and generalizes them into something with a name and a direction. . . . Putting together a variety of specific responses to changes in abortion, homosexuality
and sexual openness in the form of 'the moral majority' provides the spectators with a wider sense of sharing in a more general movement."\(^{68}\)

After review of the literature, it is apparent that some studies are more useful than others. For the purpose of this study, studies by Cathcart, Wilkinson, Golden, Bormann, Bitzer and Simons, are most pertinent for answering the research questions.

The ideas of Cathcart and Wilkinson were particularly useful for answering the question, "What is a social movement?" Simons' initial essay about the requirements for a leader of a social movement is useful because of Jerry Falwell's position as the most visible spokesperson of the movement. Consequently, in this study, Simons' requirements are used as a basis for judging Falwell's potential effectiveness as leader. This study makes the assumption that Falwell was in the role of primary leader for very deliberate reasons, and that the dual perspective of Falwell as religious persona and Falwell as political personna is intentional. One cannot judge the rhetorical potential of the Moral Majority without a careful consideration of Falwell's rhetoric.

Fantasy Theme Analysis: A Review of Selected Studies

Since Ernest Bormann's 1972 study, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social
"Reality," a number of studies have been published. The most notable ones have been done by Bormann and his former students.

With Bormann's latest work, *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream*, comes perhaps the most in-depth development of the fantasy theme approach. While a number of fantasy theme analysis studies have been published, of particular value to this study is Bormann's recent work.

*The Force of Fantasy* is the culmination of Bormann's 15 years of work with the fantasy theme analysis method. The book employs fantasy theme analysis in an in-depth application to four different periods in American religious history. The book is significant because it provides the first lengthy application of the method to rhetorical data. In that respect, it stands as a model for others using fantasy theme analysis. By carrying through with fantasy theme analysis in a work of this proportion, Bormann is able to establish fantasy theme analysis as a significant rhetorical theory. Additionally, the book establishes the link between fantasy theme analysis and the symbolic convergence theory of communication. Bormann intended that his rhetorical vision and fantasy theme analysis add explanatory power to rhetorical theories not previously provided.
Cragan and Shields, writing in *Applied Communication Research: A Dramatistic Perspective* (1981) explain Bormann's intent:

"Thus for us (Cragan and Shields) Aristotelian based theoretical explanations of speaking phenomena did not providing a very satisfying explanation of why tens of thousands of people would cheer hysterically when Alabama Governor George Wallace said, 'By God, if one of those long-haired hippies laid down in front of my car, it would be the last time'; or why many thousands of people still get teary eyed when they hear a recording of John F. Kennedy saying, 'Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country'; or Martin Luther King relating, 'I had a dream last night.'"

Upon publication of his essay on the release of the American hostages in Iran and the Reagan inauguration, Bormann's theory was more developed. The subject of this article, was the simultaneous inauguration of a president and the announcement of the hostage release. The "intertwined" coverage of the return of the hostages and the swearing in of the president was, for Bormann, an opportunity to examine the medium of television and the usefulness of the fantasy theme approach in examining television. This study is significant for an analysis of the Moral Majority because the Moral Majority also depends on the medium of television for the dissemination of the fantasy theme.

Bormann's work culminates in the publication of his latest work -- the most in-depth analysis thus far of the fantasy theme approach.
The Rhetorical Situation:  
A Review of Selected Studies

Three essays regarding Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation were important to this study. In separate essays, Vatz, Cosigny and Patton responded to and applied Bitzer's original work.

In "The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation," Vatz criticized Bitzer's analysis because of the lack of clear provisions for perceptual processes.71

Meaning is not intrinsic in events, Vatz argued. Situations are rhetorical rather than rhetoric being situational, he argued. The process of interpretation being what it is, each person's evaluation of a situation will differ from another's.72 In contrast to Bitzer's position that the response is a direct outgrowth of the situation and, as such, is prescribed by it, Vatz saw rhetoric as a "cause not an effect of meaning."73

As an example of his position, Vatz explained: "When political commentators talk about issues, they are talking about situations made salient, not something that became important because of its intrinsic predominance . . . . It is only when the meaning is seen as the result of a creative act and not a discovery, that rhetoric will be perceived as the supreme discipline it deserves to be."74

Vatz emphasized the creative role of the rhetor, which he feels has been overlooked by Bitzer. In doing so,
however, he failed to note that Bitzer did take into account the variations in perceptions of each rhetor.

In fact, it was that perceptual difference which underlied much of Bitzer's work. In his discussion of the audience, exigence and constraints, Bitzer continually made reference to the individual perceptions of rhetors.

Scott Cosigny took issue with Bitzer over the existence of ready-made compelling situational problems. He found statements by both Bitzer and Vatz to be accurate; maintaining that "Bitzer and Vatz together pose an antinomy for a coherent theory of rhetoric."\(^7^5\)

While he felt Vatz correctly treated the rhetor as creative, he felt Vatz failed "to account for the real constraints on the rhetor's activity."\(^7^6\) The rhetor, he said, "cannot create exigencies arbitrarily, but must take into account the particularities of each situation in which he becomes actively engaged."\(^7^7\)

Bitzer erred, according to Cosigny, when he construed the situation as determinate and prescribed a "fitting" response. Cosigny argued that the "antinomy of rhetor and situation can be resolved by the notion of rhetoric as an art; specifically an art of topics."\(^7^8\)

This treatment of rhetoric as an "art" allows the rhetor to make decisions to isolate and resolve specific issues "by interacting with the situation, revealing and working through the phenomena, selecting appropriate
material and arranging it in a coherent form."\(^79\)

The final criticism of Bitzer was written by John H. Patton. His essay sought primarily to clarify and elaborate the situational theory. Patton recognized that Bitzer may have left himself open for criticism because of the ambiguity of some statements in his original essay and the emphasis on the "controlling function" of situations.\(^80\) However, he felt the objections to Bitzer's work were, for the most part, unfair.

Despite the number of criticisms directed toward Bitzer's theory, the theory has continued to serve rhetorical criticism as a sound approach to understand discourse from a situational perspective.

Wayne Booth recognized the significance of Bitzer's contribution when he said "in a practical subject like ours we greatly need, without further delay, as many concrete analyses of rhetorical situations and of pieces of rhetoric as possible."\(^81\)

Golden, Berquist and Coleman found Bitzer's work so essential to their perspective on Western rhetoric that the essay appeared in the introductory part of their text, The Rhetoric of Western Thought. The value of Bitzer's contribution, they felt, was the application of the situational approach not only to communication theory, but to public address and criticism.\(^82\) If the utility of a theoretical approach is measured by its ability to generate
criticism, then Bitzer's is useful indeed. Bitzer's work has served as the basis for an extension of the situational perspective from public communication to situational discourse. 83

These applications of the theory and the extensions of it evidence the validity of the rhetorical situation as a tool of rhetorical criticism.

Rather than debate with any of Bitzer's critics, this paper will apply the key ideas of the rhetorical situation theory to the rhetoric of the Moral Majority with the goal of offering new insights and contributions to understanding the role of rhetoric and change in society.

Review of Selected Literature: The Moral Majority

Two particularly important studies have appeared in the communication literature regarding the Moral Majority. Both were relevant to this study.

Charles Conrad examined the rhetoric of the Moral Majority and its relationship to romantic form. 84

Conrad argued that the appeal of the Moral Majority was, in part, a function of its romantic form. He suggested that romantic rhetors invite auditors to participate in an idyllic world of simplified moral constructs and provides them an opportunity to simultaneously elevate themselves above the morally imperfect world. 85 His position is certainly reflective of the Fundamentalist worldview which
forms the basis for Falwell's Moral Majority perspective. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the Fundamentalist philosophy calls for a polarized approach to the world -- everything either falling into the realm of God or Satan.

In a later study, Michael McGee examined the Moral Majority in terms of the rhetorical strategies used by Jerry Falwell to create a group consciousness for the consumers of culture industry productions. McGee's study was different that anything written about the Moral Majority to date. He argued that the critical theory of mass communication should focus less on critical paraphernalia than on descriptions of "group consciousness."

In this study, he identified the technique of radical reflection as the technique of using a historical incident to interpret current events. For example, when Falwell refers to the Book of Judges in the Bible and the lack of authority in Israel at that time, and compares that situation with current affairs in the United States, he relates Biblical interpretation to present events and uses Biblical interpretations of events to re-define current circumstances.

McGee theorized that radical reflection may be the engine that makes dramatism run because it lets people arrive at moral knowledge. The Moral Majority did this very well. McGee provided support for critical analyses of social movements such as the Moral Majority from other than
quantitative perspectives. Though he argued that there is a need for substantiation of group consciousness, he acknowledged the validity of criticism used to lead to an understanding of group consciousness.

**The New Right: A Historical Perspective**

The New Right has been called the Old Right with computers and a new religious twist.

If Jerry Falwell, Phyllis Schlafly and Richard Viguerie are representative of the New Right, then William Buckley, Barry Goldwater and Billy Graham were the old guard.

The New Right, according to author Alan Crawford, himself a conservative, "calls itself the New Right, a designation chosen by close associates of Richard A. Viguerie to distinguish its leadership from what they believe to be the slightly effete conservative leadership of the East Coast -- for example William F. Buckley, Jr., and his *National Review.*"\(^8\)

New Rightists employed strategies which the Old Right had not employed. Grass roots organization, direct mail solicitation, computerized fund-raising and the unity of heretofore unrelated single-interest groups contributed to the success of the New Right in the '70s and early '80s.

Three tools of the New Right deserve special mention: 1) the use of the media, particularly television; 2) the New Right's emphasis on backlash politics and 3) the effective
use of political action committees (PACs) by the rightists.

Jerry Falwell personifies a growing trend on the part of Fundamentalist ministers and laypersons. Through the voice of Moral Majority, he has created a different interpretation of the meaning of Fundamentalist.

"From tiny rural chapels where true believers seated on rickety folding chairs profess 'born again' faith, to handsome stately churches like Falwell's with membership the size of small towns, Protestant Fundamentalism has become a powerful, confident and important force."88

The dissemination of this message is dependent upon the mass media. This is not a new trend. Religious entities have successfully used the media since its inception. What is new is how the Fundamentalists and other non-mainline denominations came to dominate the religious broadcasting schedule. Television for them became available when the Federal Communications Commission released, in the early 1960s, a programming statement in which they concluded, under a great deal of pressure: "that no public-interest basis was to be served by distinguishing between sustaining time programs (those broadcast on free air time) and commercially sponsored programs in evaluating a station's performance in the public interest."89 For the stations, this meant that religious programming need no longer be offered exclusively on a sustaining time basis. Station managers could also make air time for religious broadcasters
who were willing to pay for that time.

As mainline denominations lost membership and, in general, began a decline that would last for many years, the Evangelical groups, willing to pay for television time and exposure to the public, started a surge in popularity. Unlike mainline denominational broadcasting which had, in some instances, been nothing more than a "talking head" or a televised church service; Evangelical broadcasters, according to Horsfield, were more than willing to adopt to the pre-existing format of the medium.

Altheide and Snow refer to this pre-existing format as the "media logic," referring to the need for the programming, no matter what the content, to fit the accepted format of television, which is entertainment. Pat Robertson's "700 Club" and Jim and Tammy Bakker's "PTL Club" were prime examples of the new breed of slick religious programming.

It is this concept which explains why religious programs such as Robertson's "700 Club" and Bakker's "PTL Club" and others were so successful at attracting and maintaining viewers and, thus, raising the dollars they needed to stay on the air.

Oral Roberts, a long time broadcaster, recognized the need to put his message in more palatable format. When, in 1967, Roberts felt that "television was a different medium which required a different approach from the one he had been
using and that brought him controversial fame on radio," he redesigned his television program format. Two years later, his new program appeared looking more like a Hollywood variety show than a church service.  

Jerry Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour", though broadcast from the auditorium of the Thomas Road Baptist Church and following the traditional Protestant Sunday morning church service format, is quite different than the service most Americans know.

Conway and Siegelman explained the difference:

"Close up, on the weekly television show that provides him with a national pulpit and power base, he appears larger than life, venting his spleen at liberal politicians, public educators, pro-abortion 'murderers', homosexuals, 'smut peddlers,' atheists, 'humanists,' 'godless communists' and his critics in the media."

Conway and Siegelman estimated that Falwell must generate an estimated $1 million per week to keep his television and radio programs on the nearly 400 television and 500 radio stations which carry it. To do this, Falwell needed to raise a great deal of money. They described him as the "supreme religious huckster of the era."

"Jerry Falwell will sell you anything to float his various fundamentalist organizations. He may give you, absolutely free and without obligation: two bronze 'Jesus First' lapel pins, a 'Faith Partner Pocket Secretary Appointment Book,' a 'memorial brick' in one of his buildings in Lynchburg, or a copy of his latest book. For the same price, he will send you a 'Congressional Petition on Moral Issues,' a beautiful parchment reproduction of his 'Christian Bill of Rights,' and for your other lapel, an 'Old Glory' flag pin. The gimmick works. In 1980, Falwell claimed to have
taken in more than $60 million, putting him right
up there with electronic church industry leaders."

The goal of Falwell's televised program is to make
money, the money needed to keep the program on the air so
that Falwell can continue to attract supporters and promote
his worldview. It is a never ending cycle.

The second tool which the New Right has used
effectively is the emphasis on backlash politics. By
positioning itself as the trampled underdog, the New Right
is viewed as the forgotten God-fearing segment in a Godless
society. By promoting this image to the public, the leaders
of the movement hope to gain sympathy and support.

Witness the language used by Falwell:

"I am seeking to rally together the people
of this country who still believe in decency, the
home, the family morality, the free-enterprise
system, and all the great ideals that are the
cornerstone of this nation. Against the growing
tide of permissiveness and moral decay that is
crushing our society, we must make a sacred
commitment to God Almighty to turn this nation
around immediately. I know that there are millions
of law-abiding, God-fearing Americans who want to do
something about the moral decline of our country."

Falwell positions his "moral majority" as the savior of
the nation. Faced with an uphill battle against the almost
insurmountable challenges of secular humanism and the extant
evils of a crumbling society, they must restore the nation
to its once and former greatness.

One tool the New Right uses to achieve political goals
is the political action committee (PAC). PACS were
originated, according to Conway and Siegelman, when
post-Watergate election reforms and a loophole in a 1976 Supreme Court ruling permitted unlimited expenditures from groups not officially connected with candidates. PACS, they maintain, introduced the concept of the attack into politics.

Terry Dolan's National Conservative Political Action Committee, or NCPAC as it became known, was noted for the use of "hit lists." In Target '80, NCPAC selected four liberal senators: George McGovern, Birch Bayh of Indiana, John Culver and Alan Cranston of California, for defeat. All but Cranston were defeated. Though the Moral Majority was not officially connected with the NCPAC, it was the Moral Majority's reinforcement of the groundwork prepared by the PAC that helped make the difference in several key elections.

The beginnings of NCPAC were founded in 1974 by the giants of the New Right -- Joseph Coors, Paul Weyrich and Richard Viguerie in the form of the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress. NCPAC was not the first PAC, but it was the first time that a majority of PAC contributions went to candidates other than Democratic incumbents and officeholders. 95

Terry Dolan, with assistance from Viguerie, founded NCPAC in 1975. The group was successful in the 1978 elections assisting in the defeat of Democrats Dick Clark of Iowa, Floyd Haskell of Colorado and Thomas McIntyre of New
Hampshire. Then, Dolan and NCPAC began preparations for 1980. By December of 1980, almost every active American voter had heard of the National Conservative Political Action Committee. And, though Jerry Falwell and his Moral Majority rode rather than created the rush to conservatism that was demonstrated in the 1980 election, Falwell did lend his support to the cause of Dolan's NCPAC and other conservative causes. Their ability to join forces and the role the Moral Majority played in persuading thousands of Americans to join them is the story of this study.

**Chapters in the Study**

Chapter Two of this study examines the rhetorical situation which was faced by Falwell and Moral Majority. It answers the question: what was the nature of the rhetorical situation which called the rhetoric of the New Right and the Moral Majority into existence. Dealing specifically with the elements of Bitzer's model, the chapter answers questions regarding the nature of the exigence, audience and constraints.

The third chapter is concerned with the nature of the symbolic reality shared by the members of the Moral Majority. Operating from the perspective of symbolic convergence theory, this chapter answers the question: what is the nature of the rhetorical vision created and shared by
the members of the Moral Majority?

Taking concepts from Bormann's fifteen years of research on this topic, the chapter deals specifically with the scenarios, heroes, fantasy themes and types and the rhetorical vision in the movement's rhetoric. Additionally, the chapter deals with methodological development of Bormann's work from 1972, when the original article was published in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* until 1985 when the latest work in this area was published.

The fourth chapter focuses on the effect of the rhetoric of the Moral Majority and addresses the question: How effective was the rhetorical response of the Moral Majority in meeting the demands of the situation, in sustaining the vision shared by the movement's members and in meeting the rhetorical requirements of a movement's leader. This chapter is based on a mix of theoretical approaches. The notion of immediate effect in the study of rhetoric has long been a concept with which critics are uncomfortable. Short of conducting exit polls after a speech, the rhetorical critic is often theoretically unable or unwilling to make any serious generalization about the effect of one speaker or one movement upon the attitudes and beliefs of the larger audience. Andrews said that the critic must take the dimensions of purpose and possibility into account in order to understand effect. Consideration is given in this chapter to an understanding of the purposes
Jerry Falwell may have had when speaking on behalf of the Moral Majority and how well he was able to meet the rhetorical potential of the Moral Majority. Drawing from the work of Cathcart, who urged that rhetorical critics become comfortable with the notion of evaluation, the chapter answers the question of effect in regard to the rhetoric of the Moral Majority. Specifically, the chapter answers these questions: Has the Moral Majority been successful in meeting the goals originally outlined by Falwell at the movement's inception in the early 1980s? Did having only one identifiable leader have a negative impact on the rhetorical success of the movement? Chapter four will implement work by Andrews, Cathcart and Patton to answer the research questions.

The fifth chapter summarizes the earlier chapters and draws conclusions which have theoretical and social value in the field of rhetoric.
NOTES


7 The Moral Majority continues to exist under the new umbrella organization, The Liberty Federation. In a lengthy statement before the Press Club in Washington, Falwell explained that Moral Majority leadership needed to continue to focus on moral issues, while the Liberty Federation leaders would be free to tackle new issues such as foreign policy, a policy on nuclear war and other matters not of a moral nature. "Falwell Forms Liberty Federation to Carry Flag," *The Columbus Dispatch*, 4 January, 1986, p. 9A and "New Name, Same Agenda," *Newsweek*, 13 January, 1986, p. 33. See also transcript of Falwell's remarks to the Washington Press Club, 5 January, 1986.


11 Simons et. al., p. 796.

12 Ibid. p. 796.


14 Joyce Swayne, "Anti-Busing and the New Right: A Rhetorical Criticism of the National Association for Neighborhood Schools", The Ohio State University, 1981.


16 Cathcart, p. 25.


21 Ibid.

22 Bitzer, p. 7.

23 Bitzer, p. 8.

24 Bitzer, p. 9-10.


27 Cathcart, p. 6.

28 Cathcart, p. 7.

29 Ibid.

30 Bitzer, p. 3.

31 Bitzer, p. 6.

32 Bitzer, p. 11.


35 Ibid.

36 Griffin, p. 185-186


38 Leland Griffin, pp. 184-188.


40 Simons, p. 2-3.


43 Cathcart, p. 87.


48 Ibid.

49 Smith and Windes, p. 143.

50 Ibid.

51 Smith and Windes, p. 152.

52 Ibid.


55 Sillars, p. 27.

56 Sillars. p.30.


58 Riches and Sillars, p. 287.

59 *Central States Speech Journal*, 31 (Winter 1980).


62 Simons, et. al, pp. 792-867.

63 Both Bormann and Simons write of a rhetoric of restoration.


65 Stewart et. al. p. 87

66 Gusfield, p. 327, 1981

67 Ibid.

68 Gusfield, p. 328

69 Notable studies prior to this book included Bormann's own analysis of the Eagleton affair (The Eagleton Affair: A Fantasy Theme Analysis) and his 1982 article, "A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Television Coverage of the Reagan Inaugural and the Hostage Release" (Quarterly Journal of Speech, 68 (1982)), pp. 133-145. The essay on Eagleton was Bormann's first detailed example of how he intended the new method to be used. Additionally, Cragan and Shields (Applied Communication Research: A Dramatistic Perspective, 1981) provided an in-depth application of Bormann's theory.


72 Vatz, p. 154.

73 Vatz, p. 160.

74 Vatz, pp. 160-161.


76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.
78 Cosigny, p. 185.
79 Cosigny, p. 179.
82 Golden, Berquist and Coleman, p. 17.
85 Conrad, p. 160.
87 Crawford, p. 7.
91 Horsfield, p. 9.
92 Conway and Siegelman, p. 81.
93 Conway and Siegelman, p. 82.
95 Crawford, p. 45.
CHAPTER TWO

THE MORAL MAJORITY AND A RHETORICAL SITUATION

Introduction

The story of the religious right in America prior to the 1970s appears to be a patchwork of seemingly unrelated single interest groups. In Thunder on the Right, Alan Crawford, a right-wing journalist, summarized pre-1970 right-wing political action:

"Until 1960, there had been almost no relevant right wing organization in America; rightists could be found in non-ideological groups such as the Republican Party or the National Association of Manufacturers, but there were no ideologically conservative groups as such . . . "¹

By the late 1970s, the American public's image of the right had undergone serious restructuring. A major part of this rethinking of the right was because of the New Right and the Moral Majority.

Crawford described the new image portrayed by the right as a transformation "into an institutionalized, disciplined, well-organized movement of loosely-knit affiliates."
Collecting millions of dollars in small contributions from blue-collar workers and housewives, the New Right feeds on discontent, anger, insecurity and resentment, and it flourishes on backlash politics.\(^2\)

Characterized by organization, unity of purpose and a highly effective method of financial support, the New Right has been reasonably effective in addressing the threats they perceive from their greatest enemies -- liberals.

American right-wing ideology did not begin with the Moral Majority or Jerry Falwell. The fifties and sixties saw the emergence of groups such as The John Birch Society, but, as John P. Roche, dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University argued, "the 'menace' from the right was in effective political terms (a) mythical bogey, a vapor of the fervid liberal imagination."\(^3\)

Theologian Peter Horsfield traces the emergence of the modern evangelical movement to 1976, a national election year. Evangelicalism had always been an element in American religious life and had been growing in strength for several decades; the "candidacy and election of a self-proclaimed 'born again' Southern evangelical as American president brought the phenomenon to widespread public attention."\(^4\)

Fundamentalism is traditionally defined as religious conservatism, practiced by those people who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible.\(^5\) Fundamentalists, say
Conway and Siegelman, elevate the Scriptures to a position of supernatural authority over all matters of faith, knowledge and everyday life.

Evangelicalism, in contrast, is a more moderate version of Biblical conservatism. Basically, the Evangelicals are conservatives who were embarrassed by the Fundamentalists' narrow interpretation of the Bible.

Mainline churches had used the mass media for 20 years before the Fundamentalists and Evangelicals became a strong force. Horsfield explains the dominance by the mainline churches as a result of FCC policies which required networks and local stations to provide "sustaining time" or free time for religious broadcasters.

The networks dealt primarily with reputable and mainline religious groups, according to Horsfield. "The practice of the networks was to produce religious programs, either by making the production facilities, technical services and some budget resources available to the religious groups for the production of their own programs, or by using these religious agencies as consultants on their own religious programs. These programs were then fed to affiliate stations for airing on 'sustaining-time' or public service time. Local stations often acted similarly, producing religious programs in association with local church bodies or representative councils."
This mutually beneficial arrangement worked well until the independent, audience-supported Southern Fundamentalists and Evangelicals began to dominate the airwaves in the 1960s and 1970s. The smaller religious organizations were willing to pay for what had previously been free airtime dominated by the larger churches. They realized the power of television in building the religious empires they sought.

By the time the Moral Majority had emerged in 1979, television preachers such as Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart were generating millions of dollars annually and becoming politically involved. Recent reports estimate that although contributions to televangelists are down, the top ministers still collect nearly one billion a year in donations.\(^9\) The secular world began eyeing their religious counterparts in a different light.

This chapter will analyze the rhetoric of the Moral Majority from the perspective of the rhetorical situation. Using Bitzer's theory as a base, the chapter will address two questions:

1) What was the nature of the rhetorical situation which was faced by the Moral Majority?

2) How has this rhetorical situation persisted and changed in the last five years?
In an effort to answer this question, this chapter will provide:

1) A brief description of the method to be used,
2) application of those criteria to Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority,
3) a discussion of the application, and;
4) a final summary.

The Method: The Rhetorical Situation. In his essay, "The Rhetorical Situation," Bitzer called for a critical approach that would treat the rhetorical situation as a "distinct subject in rhetorical theory." 10 "Those rhetoricians who discuss situation do so indirectly -- as does Aristotle, for example, who is led to consider situation when he treats types of discourse. None, to my knowledge, has asked the nature of the rhetorical situation. . . " 11

As Bitzer described it, the rhetorical situation is a "natural context of persons, events, objects, relations and an exigence which strongly invites utterance; this invited utterance participates naturally in the situation, is in many instances necessary to the completion of the situational activity, and, by means of its participation in the situation, obtains its meaning and its rhetorical character." 12

The rhetorical situation presents a problem -- the exigence. According to Bitzer, this exigence, which may be
actual or potential, "can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence."\(^{13}\)

Bitzer identified the central elements of a rhetorical situation as the exigence, the audience and the constraints. The exigence he defined as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be."\(^{14}\)

The exigence becomes rhetorical in nature "when it is capable of positive modification and positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse."\(^{15}\)

The second constituent of the rhetorical situation is the audience -- those persons "who are capable of being influenced by discourse and being mediators of change."\(^{16}\) Key here is the idea that the audience "be capable of serving as the mediator of the change which discourse functions to produce."\(^{17}\)

Finally, Bitzer describes constraints as "persons, events, objects and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence."\(^{18}\)

The general characteristics of the theory can be summarized as follows:

1) Rhetorical discourse is called into being by the situation,
2) The rhetorical situation invites a response that is fitting to the situation,

3) The situation itself prescribes the response that fits,

4) The exigence, the audience and the constraints which make up the situation are located in reality,

5) Rhetorical situations exhibit structures that are either simple or complex, and

6) Rhetorical situations come into existence, then either mature and decay or mature and persist.

Birth of the Moral Majority:
The Exigence.

The exigence becomes manifest when a rhetor, in this case Jerry Falwell, perceives a condition which "arouses fear, anger, hope or some other need and which may be modified through the vehicle of discourse."\(^{19}\) Patton writes that the exigence results in a rhetorical strategy, a response, on the part of the rhetor. The rhetor seeks to modify the exigence through discourse, thus the power of the rhetoric.

As a problem to be solved -- a problem which exists for the rhetor -- the exigence demands a response. That response may be a social movement, which can be an essential element of the rhetorical situation. It is the task of the movement's leadership to communicate the nature of this
exigence to people who will share that vision and help alter the perceived reality.

The exigence sometimes takes the form of a threat as it did for Jerry Falwell. He admits in 1969 he had no desire to become politically involved. As the minister of the growing Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, he saw his charge as working for the salvation of souls and the baptizing of new converts.

As his theme at the time he stated: "Nowhere are we commissioned to reform the externals," he told his congregation. "We are not told to wage wars against bootleggers, liquor stores, gamblers, murderers, prostitutes, racketeers, prejudiced persons, institutions or any other existing evils as such."²⁰ By the 1970s, Falwell had changed his mind. America, in his opinion, was morally bankrupt. When he decided to take action, the mechanism for revival was already in place.

Jerry Falwell Addresses the Exigence. During the 1960s and 1970s, events occurred which, according to Falwell, helped alter his perspective. He became discouraged with the moral state of the nation. The turning point in his mind was 1973, the year the Supreme Court legalized abortion in Roe vs. Wade. "That (event) turned a lot of us around. Thousands of preachers are now for what we were against -- political involvement."²¹
When Falwell is asked about his mandate to get into politics and the separation of church and state he is apt to respond as he did here: "Our reaction is where were they (critics) when William Sloan Coffin, the anti-war activist, Berrigan Brothers, the Eugene Carson-Blakes, the Martin Luther Kings, when these gentlemen used the pulpit to advocate their political views? . . . Moral Majority is a political, not a religious movement. We support principles, not people or parties. We not only have the right to speak out, but the duty as well. We will continue to do so despite threats and criticism." 22

State and Local Issues. Local and state issues were Falwell's first campaign. He became involved in a 1978 Virginia referendum on pari-mutuel betting and worked on the short-lived crusade of entertainer Anita Bryant against gay rights. 23

His rationale for involvement he described by a quote from Alex de Tocqueville's Democracy in America: "America is great because America is good, and if America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great." 24 He began to work on a national profile. Through the vehicle of public appearances situated on the grounds public buildings, he began to formulate his rhetorical stance.

Rallies Across the Nation. One of the first of these rallies was held in Washington, D. C., on Capitol Hill.
"The time has come to fight the pornography, obscenity, vulgarity and profanity that under the guise of sex education and 'values clarification' literally pervades the literature that children read in public schools."\(^{25}\)

America, Falwell felt, was rapidly ceasing to be "good". In the terms of Bitzer's rhetorical situation, the invitation to create and present discourse was there.

Falwell needed a means to carry his message of moral redemption to the audience targeted to act upon the issues. Although he was well-known in religious circles and among those who were frequent viewers of his nationally televised "Old Time Gospel Hour", he realized the need to broaden the base of his support. He also needed to protect the tax-exempt status of his church and affiliated groups.

**The Moral Majority is Formed.**

When the Moral Majority was formed in 1979, Falwell named four salient social issues:

"First, we are pro-life. We believe human life is valuable and deserving of legal protection, whether it be born or unborn, black or white, rich or poor, handicapped or normal, old or young. Second, we are pro-traditional family. While homosexual couples should be free to live together if they wish, we oppose any law that would grant to homosexual couples the status of 'family' or qualify them as a legitimate minority. They are not a legitimate minority because theirs is a chosen lifestyle. Third, we are pro-morality, meaning that we oppose the illegal drug traffic and the spread of pornography. Fourth, we are pro-American and that means we stand for a strong national defense believing that freedom is the ultimate moral issue."\(^{26}\)
The Audience. Falwell's campaign to return America to "moral sanity" needed more than the fervent beliefs of a handful of followers. Transforming this belief into action required careful planning, political action and money -- lots of it.

The financial support first came from other Fundamentalists and Protestants through an aggressive direct mail campaign. Falwell enlisted the services of Richard A. Viguerie, of Falls Church, VA. Viguerie was known in political circles as master of direct mail fund raising for conservative causes.

Viguerie's system is a departure from the awkward methods previously used by conservatives. "Unlike the older benefactors of the right, Viguerie's power is unrelated to his personal or family wealth. Rather it flows from the system of computers operated by the Richard A. Viguerie Company of Falls Church, Virginia. Huddled in its memory banks are the names of 25 million Americans, approximately 4.5 million of whom are known supporters of right wing causes."27

Not overlooked in the quest for financial support were the 17,000 members of Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church. But perhaps the real meat of Falwell's support comes from his expertise with television. The size of Falwell's media audience has been estimated at between 18 to 50 million people.28 A more conservative estimate by Anthony Lewis put
the size of the audience reached by all television ministers at near 30 million. 29

Between 1978 and 1980, Falwell used his television audience and direct mail to increase his earnings from $34 million in 1978 to $60 million in 1980. 30

If you received a letter from Falwell during this time period you may have read something similar to this:

**IS OUR GRAND OLD FLAG GOING DOWN THE DRAIN?**

Dear Friend:
I have bad news for you. The answer to this question is yes: our grand old flag is going down the drain. Don't kid yourself. You may wake up some morning and discover that old glory is no longer waving freely.

Just look at what's happening in America. Known practicing homosexual teachers have invaded the classrooms and the pulpits of our churches. Smut peddlers sell their pornographic books --under the protection of the courts.

And x-rated movies are allowed in almost every community because there is no legal definition of obscenity. Believe it or not, we are the first civilized nation in history to legalize abortion -- in the late months of pregnancy! Murder! How long can this go on? . . . 31

Each letter stressed similar themes and all were unified by the idea of the moral decline in America.
Letters generally included an appeal to the reader for a monetary contribution. Some letters took the form of a "survey" using loaded questions and emotionally charged language to construct the questions.
Through this aggressive direct mail campaign and media campaign strategies such as the "I Love America" rallies held in almost every state, Falwell was able to "plug into" a pre-existing audience comprised primarily of Fundamentalists and conservatives. He was able to use them as a base upon which to attract a larger, more diverse audience. The efforts of these people and their financial contributions enabled Falwell's Moral Majority to make the transformation from an unknown entity to a household word by late 1980.

Maintaining this audience while attempting to attract newer supporters required different rhetorical and persuasive strategies.

**Ideological Support.** The other kind of support needed by Falwell was ideological. While dollars and cents guaranteed the movement's survival through dissemination of printed material and the media message, long-term growth was possible only with a larger base of support than Falwell initially possessed.

To achieve this goal, Falwell needed to broaden the agenda to include secular as well as religious themes. This was accomplished by:

1) establishing the Moral Majority as a political lobbying organization which, as mentioned earlier, also protected the tax-exempt status of Falwell's church-related activities.
2) establishing a strong moral/political agenda which centered around a theme of the return of America to traditional values, such as the pro-life, pro-family, pro-morality and pro-America goals mentioned earlier.

Social researcher Daniel Yankelovich identified the unifying theme espoused by the Moral Majority:

"We see immediately that the Moral Majority draws its vitality from a concern shared by millions of Americans for whom the Moral Majority is otherwise anathema. The organization's connection with this concern gives the Moral Majority its plausibility and claim to attention as a potentially significant social movement. . . . What is this concern? It is that Americans are growing ever more uneasy about the influence of the prevailing moral climate on their children." 32

Said Falwell:

"The Moral Majority has touched a sensitive nerve in the American people. Many Americans are sick and tired of the way their government has been run. They are sick and tired of being told that their values and beliefs don't matter and that only those values held by government bureaucrats or liberal preachers are worthy of adoption in the area of public policy. Our people are the previously inactive, turned-off voter who believed that who wins an election doesn't matter." 33

To many people, the Moral Majority worldview fulfilled their need for structure. Their "right/wrong" approach to the world was a welcome relief from the sociological mayhem of the 60s and 70s. In the Moral Majority, they recognized clear cut answers to what they perceived as increasingly complex problems of life. The Moral Majority ideology, in this respect, mirrored the Fundamentalist ideology upon which it was based.
Political Support. Finally, the Moral Majority needed political support. To achieve this goal, the movement needed to align itself with a dominant political party. The logical choice was the Republican Party.

Moral Majoritarians provided strong support for Ronald Reagan in both the 1980 and 1984 elections. In turn, Falwell has been able to use the connection with President Reagan as a sanctioning power which he hoped would transform his moral/political agenda into legislation. Lewis noted the alliance between Reagan and the Moral Majority and commented on the fact that Reagan "has given political legitimacy, and power, to religious fundamentalists who want to make America into their image as a 'Christian nation'."^34

The audience capable of modifying or removing Falwell's exigence needed to have strength in all three of the above areas. While the most consistent and stable support has come from Fundamentalists and Protestants who already shared his concern for the moral condition of the nation, the Moral Majority has been able to cultivate political and ideological support also.

Conway and Siegelman dispute the base of support Falwell claims to have. "... with so little real support, his band of Fundamentalist foot soldiers may be his only source of power over local communities, liberal and minority groups, state legislators and other officials. In the end, however, the illusion of power may continue to be his
greatest weapon."\textsuperscript{35}

Estimates of the number of members the Moral Majority varied from 10.6 million to more than 50 million once claimed by Falwell.\textsuperscript{36} However, the Moral Majority appears to have successfully recruited an audience extending beyond the boundaries of those originally affiliated with the movement.

What Falwell has been successful at is creating an image of an organization more powerful than that which exists in reality. Bumper stickers proclaiming "The Moral Majority is neither!" became common during the zenith of the movement. These bumper stickers represented an awareness of the movement and rejection of it by liberals.

Disputes over the size of the movement notwithstanding, the measure of success for Falwell appeared in the printed page, on the television screen and over the airwaves. For every mention of Moral Majority, Jerry Falwell and the crusade issues of pro-American, pro-family, the battle lines between Moral Majority and the secular world became more clearly defined. Even Falwell's alleged conversation with former President Jimmy Carter, in which Carter confessed and endorsed the presence of homosexuals on his senior staff resulted in strong support for Falwell.\textsuperscript{37}

Those who had never heard of secular humanism rallied 'round its cause, seeking to ban its proponents from the public schools; yet, at the same time, not clearly
able to define the term. Those who had sought a banner for the traditional American values that they saw slipping from the social landscape, found in Jerry Falwell a hero. Those new to the cause, and those for whom it was merely a restatement of old ideas under a new banner, joined forces in a tidal wave of conservatism the likes of which the country had not seen since the 1950s.

The result -- they were noticed. And, in the end, since political scientists and statisticians will forever squabble about any movement's impact upon any such election, that was the result which counted.

Constraints. From the beginning, the Moral Majority was not without opposition. Beginning as an "anti-movement" itself, the proponents protested what they perceived as the moral decline of the country. Moral Majority rhetors utilized highly-charged language which quickly offended its targets.

In the August, 1982, issue of Moral Majority Report, bold headlines proclaimed, "Reagan must move now on moral issues." On the same page, this headline, "Nuclear freeze movement: The Blackmail of America." 38

The January, 1985 issue of Moral Majority Report was a special issue "dedicated to the memory of 15 million unborn children destroyed since the Roe vs. Wade decision January 22, 1973." 39 In an accompanying article headlined, "She'll go home again, home again, jiggity-jig," the author, Ted
Derrick, described access to abortion clinics for teen-age girls. "There is even a price war among the clinics advertising in New York's Village Voice. One ad featured stylish type and a $275 sticker price. Other simpler ads told of $125 abortions. And one bare-bones ad blurted out '$79' but if one desired to have an anesthetic, the costs increased."⁴⁰

Wrote Moral Majority spokesperson Cal Thomas:

"Television producer Norman Lear has done it again. This latter-day political activist who heads the left-wing 'People For the American Way' has bought a series of newspaper ads . . . to attack Moral Majority . . ."⁴¹

The response to the movement was slow to emerge. One group which was first to come out in opposition to the rhetoric of the Moral Majority was People for the American Way (PAW), mentioned above. The movement, designed specifically to counterattack New Right groups and the Moral Majority, was formed by television producer and self-proclaimed liberal Norman Lear.

In 1982, then PAW Executive Director Anthony Podesta wrote to PAW supporters:

"The Gabler's (Mel and Norma) censorship base in Texas is the hub of a national censorship network which includes the Moral Majority, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and dozens of other right wing groups. Richard Viguerie even praises the Gablers in his autobiography, saying ' . . . Mrs. Gabler has forced several textbook companies to rewrite their text in the entire country'."⁴²
Podesta's letter clearly shows that by 1982, the Moral Majority was being recognized as part of the conservative movement and the Moral Majority was, either correctly or incorrectly, being credited with much of the book-burning, right-to-life, hit list activity carried out by all conservatives, whether a part of the Moral Majority or not.

The Moral Majority was becoming a synonym for the new conservative religious right. This would be both an asset and a liability, as Falwell would come to see.

Church and State. A primary constraint to the activities of the Moral Majority came in the form of the law, specifically, the law regarding separation of church and state. Guaranteed in the First Amendment to the constitution, the separation of church and state is viewed by some scholars as not quite the solid distinction most Americans think it to be.

Theologian Martin E. Marty explained: "... the First Amendment, the only formal legal statement to set the tone for separation of church and state itself is part of a very fluid tradition. In interpreting what the phrase 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...' means, the courts and the Supreme Court do keep an eye on the population change and they also read the ballots."43

What Marty so aptly identified is the tension which exists in American society regarding separation of these two
estates. Writing in The Political Pulpit, Roderick Hart noted the same tension. Civil religious rhetoric, he said, "has now become a rhetorical institution in America . . . an institution that . . . unless the American people suddenly choose not to accommodate through public ritual, or to recreate and promulgate through their national myths, or to continue to honor . . . will continue to distinguish the cultural and symbolic landscape of the United States."

Hart continued to say that the separation of church and state should be termed more a "guise" of a separation. It is not actually a separation, as in a removal of the two institutions from each other, but actually a "contract" between the two parties -- the religious and the civil.

The uneasy coexistence is a result of this "contract" which is maintained with each party aware of the duties and of the other and being careful to pay the appropriate lip service to the other.

It was into the boundaries of this coexistence that Falwell's Moral Majority marched in the early 1980s. And, it was the tradition of separation of church and state which served as the major constraint in the minds of the American people.

Expressing his view on the separation of church and state and the activities of the Moral Majority, Falwell wrote in Listen America!: 
"Our founding fathers separated church and state in function, but never intended to establish a government void of God. As evidenced by our constitution, good people in America must exert an influence and provide a conscience and climate of morality in which it is difficult to go wrong, not difficult for people to go right in America. . . .

"I believe that God promoted America to a greatness no other nation has enjoyed because her heritage is one of a republic governed by laws predicated in the Bible."46

**Political Considerations.** To achieve their purpose, the movement needed a tool. The message must be delivered to the highest offices of the government.

An early promotional brochure clearly articulates where the founders of the movement hoped to go:

1) Mobilizing the grass roots of moral Americans;
2) Informing the moral majority of Americans about what is going on behind their backs in Washington;
3) Lobbying intensively in Congress to defeat left-wing, social welfare bills that would further erode our previous freedoms;
4) Pushing for positive legislation which will insure a strong, enduring and free America;
5) Assisting local communities to fight pornography, homosexuality, obscene school textbooks and other issues;
6) Recruiting and training moral American men and women to run for political office.

Each goal has one thing in common -- a political end. From the local and state to the national level, it was clear
Falwell's intent was to make, and leave, a mark on the American political landscape.

The election of 1980 was the first real test of the political clout of the Moral Majority. Although an October, 1980 Lou Harris poll indicated that a majority of Americans responding did not agree with the Moral Majority's conservative stance on issue as abortion; the conservative sweep in the polls in November was due, in part, to the efforts of thousands of Conservatives, many of them members of the Moral Majority. 47

Falwell claimed to have registered 4 million new voters and reactivated 10 million voters who were previously inactive. These voters, he claimed, played a role in the defeat of liberal politicians and the election of Ronald Reagan. 48

While it is impossible to gauge the effect the Moral Majority may have had on the 1980 election; the group almost certainly played a role in the Republican's move to gain control of the Senate.

Through a series of "I Love America" rallies held throughout the country from Salem, Oregon, to Lansing, Michigan, crowds of potential supporters who gathered on the lawns of state capitols heard Falwell's message. Touching on subjects from gay rights to Equal Rights, he condemned that nation for its lack of moral character. "This nation has gone into a moral tailspin because we have a group of dirty
liberals who tell us Christianity and politics don't mix ... the Hugh Hefners and the Jane Fondas and the Larry Flynts, who weave their amoral philosophies into the moral fabric of this country . . ."\textsuperscript{49}

Beyond the Initial Years. After the first years of the Moral Majority's existence, the movement did not disappear as many hoped would happen. Through a series of well-executed rhetorical strategies, to be discussed later in this chapter, the movement created a strong image among Christians and political conservatives and has been successful in reducing the original negative image. Part of this was due to Falwell's ability to appeal to a broad segment of the American public and his ability to continue to maintain a flamboyant image.

Writing in \textit{Holy Terror}, Conway and Siegelman describe Falwell as "the prince of power of the air."\textsuperscript{50} Of his contact with the members of his audience they write:

"Close up, on the weekly television show that provides him with a national pulpit and power base, he appears larger than life, venting his spleen at liberal politicians, public educators, pro-abortion 'murderers,' 'godless Communists' and his critics in the media. With the changeover of power in Washington (1980), he became bolder and more explicit in his televised remarks. Unlike (evangelist) Pat Robertson, Falwell has no income producing satellite empire. To maintain his image, to keep his 'Old Time Gospel Hour' on nearly 400 television and 500 radio stations . . . Falwell needs to generate a constant flow of more than $1 million per week. While much of this sum continues to pour in through his television
show and direct mail appeals, without the national publicity he receives for his Moral Majority crusade, in all likelihood, Jerry Falwell would be back in Lynchburg to stay now."51

This is one change that made the difference for Falwell and the Moral Majority. From a relatively obscure status as a Baptist minister in a medium-sized Virginia city, Falwell gained a national image as a guardian of the morals of America.

Moving from the limited range of influence he had in the 1970s, he now commands a larger and much more diverse audience. Access to this audience has guaranteed the support Falwell needed for survival of the movement. The supreme cap to his quest to be elder statesman of American Protestantism came in the spring of 1987, when took over the scandal-ridden PTL empire of Jim and Tammy Bakker.

The ideological appeal of the Moral Majority lies in its nature as the champion of traditional American values. Consider these points. The person who aligns with the Moral Majority, whether it be through contributing money or working at the local level in a chapter, is a person who often feels they are a part of a persecuted minority.

Never has there been a time when the Moral Majority was actually a majority of the American public. Yet, the "underdog" status of the group is what brings about most of the appeal. Falwell positioned himself as the ordained disciple of God battling obstacles including a nation full of homosexuals, divorced parents, working women,
abused children, drug users, smut peddlers and child abusers. Perhaps the biggest enemy of the new right was the secular humanist.

Clearly made the enemy, the secular humanist is the archetypal enemy and chief villain of the New Right. While the family and traditional family values represent the ultimate goal, the secular humanist represented the hub of the decay attacking the moral fiber of the nation. Yet, for being placed in such a position of prominence, the secular humanist is never clearly defined by the leadership of the Moral Majority.

Perhaps the closest example of the Moral Majority conception of the secular humanist can be seen by examining Moral Majority literature. This example comes from Falwell's magazine, The Fundamentalist Journal. Secular humanism is defined:

"... as a system in which the individual human being is the central notion. ... This must mean that God, while still the Creator, is neither, is neither the Controller of the universe nor the Savior of man. The universe runs by mechanical laws, it has no further need of God, and there are no miracles, just as a watch, once it is wound, has no further need of the watchmaker. Nor does man need a savior." 52

While the opposition continued throughout the early 1980s to deny Falwell's contention that the Moral Majority really is a majority, the group continued to receive extensive media attention. There were two reasons for this media attention: 1) As a member of the "electronic church,"
Falwell is extremely skillful in the creation of media events. Altheide and Snow term this expertise "media logic." Falwell's "I Love America" rallies during the late 70s and early 1980 clearly demonstrate his ability to make the nightly news.

2) Flamboyant statements made by Falwell also have a way of turning up on the front page. Write Conway and Siegelman: "Falwell knows how to play the media. He knows how to catch their eye standing proudly in his dark vested suit with an American flag nearby. And he knows how to catch their ear. He has a million punchlines. On homosexuality: 'God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!' On his political affiliation; 'I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican. I'm just a noisy Baptist." On national defense: 'Jesus was not a pacifist. He was not a sissy.'

The Expanded Audience. The average person who watched the nightly news between 1980 and 1984 was likely to see the Reverend Jerry Falwell appear as the spokesperson for the Moral Majority without being aware of his additional role as minister and college president. Therefore, Falwell was able, through the use of the social movement, to reach a previously un_reached audience.

In keeping with this expanded appeal, his message was now focused in two directions -- church audience and the general public. Example: While the Moral Majority has always claimed to be a political rather than a
religious organization, much overlap occurs. The movement, lacking any identifiable national spokesperson other than Falwell, became synonymous with his name.

In 1976, Falwell digressed on the subject of Christians in politics: "The idea of religion and politics don't mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country. If any place in the world we need Christianity, it's in Washington. And that's why preachers long since, need to get over that intimidation forced upon us by liberals, that if we mention anything about politics, we are degrading our ministry." 55

Here, the reasoning for Falwell's belief that Christians have an obligation to become involved in politics: The country was founded on Christian principles, therefore, it belongs to the Christian people. The content of Falwell's messages was not radically different than messages delivered by preachers through the ages. Abraham Lincoln used the same appeal for restoration, when he appealed to the citizens of Springfield to wash to robe of the republic "in the spirit, if not the blood of the Revolution." 56

Yankelovitch described the broader appeal of the movement in the following manner: "We see immediately that the Moral Majority draws its vitality from a concern shared by millions of Americans for whom the Moral Majority is otherwise anathema ... What is this concern? It is that
Americans are growing ever more uneasy about the influence of the prevailing moral climate on their children.\textsuperscript{57}

Speaking at an April, 1982 conference in Charleston, West Virginia, Sen. Thomas McIntyre echoed this theme:

"... the self-anointed Christian Right somehow projects an image, (a) more convincing image of righteousness and respectability. Beyond that, the Christian Right has succeeded in focusing widespread attention on two causes for grave concern among millions and millions of Americans -- many of them who do not agree with what the movement's politics are. What is crucial is the fact that these are concerns that the general public -- rightly or wrongly -- believes liberals and moderates have ignored. I speak of a perceived decline in respect for ethical religious values and the effect that this could have on the moral welfare of American children."\textsuperscript{58}

Without sacrificing his stance on the issues outlined when he began the movement, Falwell has been successful in attracting a different kind of audience through a very deliberate set of rhetorical strategies. So much has he broadened his appeal that some observers were prompted to view him as a potential successor to Billy Graham, the symbolic leader of evangelical Christianity in America.

Falwell's obvious desire to align with Ronald Reagan is reminiscent of Billy Graham's friendships with former Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon.
In a 1978 *Esquire* article, Mary Murphy concluded that Falwell was already viewed by many as the next Billy Graham.59

A indication as to the change in the rhetorical strategy of the Moral Majority can be seen by a comment from Falwell regarding the selection of Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro in 1984 as the Democratic vice-presidential candidate. Her selection, Falwell said, was "long overdue." Quite a change from the Fundamentalists minister who viewed women as the little woman and felt their only true function could be as a helper to their husbands and mother to children.60

Several reasons exist for the change in strategy of the Moral Majority. 1) Initial negative response to the movement's aggressive tactics resulted in a backlash or counter movement spearheaded by People for the American Way, and television producer Norman Lear.

Television specials attempted to educate the public on the dangers from the New Right and the Moral Majority. A 1982 conference titled "In Defense of the Constitution: The Threat From the New Right" met in Charleston, West Virginia. This session combined several anti-Moral Majority groups and liberal organizations to discuss method of combating the threats from the Moral Majority and other New Right groups.

This umbrella organization included speakers such as Anthony Podesta, then executive director of People For the
American Way, former Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, targeted for defeat by the New Right, former Senator Thomas McIntyre of New Hampshire, also targeted for defeat by the New Right.

This represented the recognition by liberals and those in opposition to the Moral Majority that the New Right had scored some hits in the late 1970s and early 1980s and that mobilization of resources must be accomplished to combat the attack. An educational effort was launched to discredit the efforts of the Moral Majority and other New Rightists.

Partly as a result of this backlash, the New Right was not effective in social legislation in the 1982 elections. Led by Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, the New Right attempted to effect change on national policy on abortion, busing and school prayer. An August, 1982 Senate vote ensured that Helms and his conservative allies would be unable to get the Senate to table a liberal amendment. Later in 1982, the New Right struck out once again, managing to have anti-busing bill passed by the Senate and later be buried in the House Judiciary Committee. In the 1982 elections, the Republicans lost 26 seats in the House and were defeated in 20 of 33 Senate races.

The ideology of the New Right which was heavily embraced by candidate Ronald Reagan during the 1980 presidential election, was history in 1982. Reagan continued during his first term to regard the approval of the New Right and the Moral Majority as necessary, but he did not
actively court the Fundamentalists and the Evangelicals as he had prior to his 1980 election.

Sensing that Reagan, once seen as an acceptable alternative to other choices, was not the only alternative for the New Right, leaders began to develop a more independent ticket calling their strategy populist conservatism or Pop Con for short. More importantly, they began to shift the focus of their platform from moral and social to economic issues. Moral issues had alienated a segment of the public necessary if the Moral Majority was to effect the broad social and moral reform they sought. Falwell's 1986 statement announcing the formation of the Liberty Federation acknowledged the need for separation of the Moral Majority and the moral issues from the broader, political goals of the Liberty Federation such as nuclear disarmament, famine.

Additionally, as the leaders of the New Right gained political savvy, they realized that alliance with Reagan would not bring all the goals they desired -- Reagan, they reasoned, may win reelection in 1984, but his blessing was not strong enough to bring what they needed to have to effect social change -- control of Congress.

A July, 1981 phone call from Reagan to Falwell prior to the announcement of Sandra Day O'Conner to the Supreme Court generated much negative feedback from mainline religious spokespersons.
New Right conservatives have been openly critical of Reagan's moderation in foreign policy matters. Reacting to his handling of the Korean airliner incident in late 1983, Howard Phillips, chairman of the Conservative Caucus and one of the founders of the Moral Majority, stated: "This was Ronald Reagan's Falklands crisis and he did not respond appropriately."^64

Commenting on Reagan's performance, Connaught Marshner, a leading political operative of the New Right, observed: "There's been a lot of good rhetoric, no question about that. But beyond that, its nebulous."^65

A less than enthusiastic view of the Reagan administration was also shared by NCPAC director Terry Dolan. "We constantly hear nonsense about how conservatives are running everything. If that were true, we wouldn't have the President in China, we wouldn't have the biggest budget deficits in history, we wouldn't have a preoccupation with arms control agreements, we wouldn't be talking about gender gaps, and the most massive increase in social spending in history."^66

But, all of the major leaders of the New Right supported Reagan's election. Having reached a legitimization in status through their recognition as a force in the American political process, a change in strategy was mandated. The liberals were beginning to react to the strategies of the Moral Majority and the New Right. Knowing
that liberals had played politics far longer and far more successfully than had religious conservatives, the Moral Majority leadership wisely initiated a change.

Heading into the 1984 election, political observers had little doubt that religion would play a role. Several factors guaranteed this. First, was the introduction of race and religion into the election in the person of the Rev. Jesse Jackson. Making a bid for the Democratic nomination for president, Jackson had the same effect on thousands of Blacks that Carter had had on Evangelicals in the 1976 election.

In September of 1984, Reagan and Mondale, the chief contenders for the president’s job, squared off with back-to-back speeches at the B’nai B’rith convention on “the proper role of religion in public life.”

Reagan easily won reelection; the Moral Majority did not effect a sweep at the polls as in 1980. However, Moral Majority support definitely factored in the election.

By the end of the 1984 election, Falwell and the Moral Majority faced a much different situation than in 1980. From the emergence of the movement, through a period of backlash and defensive rhetoric, the Moral Majority has progressed to achieve prominence in the political and religious arena. Moral Majority is still not a majority. Yet, in terms of addressing the rhetorical situation, meeting the exigence and facing constraints, Falwell has been successful with the
Moral Majority. Though his responses were sometimes reactive instead of proactive, he was able to transform what may have been a rhetorical disaster into an enduring social movement.

**SUMMARY**

"Rhetorical situations," Bitzer wrote, "come into existence, then either mature or decay or mature and persist -- conceivable some persist indefinitely. In any case, situations grow and come to maturity; they evolve to just a time when rhetorical discourse would be most fitting . . ."⁶⁸

In a political campaign, there is a time for generating an issue and a time for answering a charge. Every rhetorical situation in principle evolves to a propitious moment for a fitting rhetorical response.

After this moment, most situations decay; we all have the experience of creating a rhetorical response when it is too late to make it public. Some situations, on the other hand, persist; that is why it is possible to have a body of truly rhetorical literature."⁶⁹

Re-evaluation of the rhetorical situation addressed by the Moral Majority as rhetor seven years after formation of the movement, reveals not only the shift in strategy, but the persistence of the rhetorical situation -- at least in the mind of the rhetor.
While Moral Majority rhetoric does not appear, on the surface, to contain the enduring qualities of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or the Apology of Socrates; it is, the product of a persisting rhetorical situation.

With the persistence of the original rhetorical situation, Moral Majority rhetoric displays a tendency to respond to an enlarged version of the original audience and has been forced to deal with new constraints. The exigence, seems more political than social and moral. More political avenues are being pursued to reach the movement's goals.

Bitzer does not provide much insight into how one judges what is fitting. The critic may assume a fitting response would be the effective response on the part of the rhetor. The response that meets the demands of the exigence, mobilizes audience resources and provides alternative courses of action to counter the exigence.

In this respect, the Moral Majority did and did not provide a fitting response. I would argue that their response was functional, in the sense that it gained considerable media exposure for them and made the name Moral Majority familiar to people.

Yet, in the long run, the Moral Majority has not been able to achieve the goals established in the manifesto articulated by Falwell in the late 70s. Wisely, they have shifted priorities, changed goals, compromised, as in the comment on Ferraro's selection as the vice-presidential
nominee and Sandra Day O'Conner's nomination to the Supreme Court.

Different audiences have been targeted, new constraints have been challenged and different media channels have been employed. However, the group still struggles with the same basic agenda -- using different terms and communicated in different ways.
NOTES


2 Crawford, p. 5.

3 Crawford, p. 4.


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Horsfield, p. 3.


11 Bitzer, p. 2.

12 Bitzer, p. 6.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Bitzer, pp. 7-8

17 Bitzer, p. 8.

18 Bitzer, p. 8.


21 Michael Clark, "Early 70s Issues Sent Falwell 'Walking Point'," Memphis Commercial Appeal, 10 September 1980, p. E1. Newsbank. This reference was obtained through Newsbank, a microfiche collection of newspaper articles collected from 190 newspapers throughout the United States. Newsbank is a service of NewsBank, Inc., of Greenwich, CT. Hereafter it is cited as Newsbank.

22 Goodman and Price, p. 42.


28 Horsfield, p. 58.


30 Conway and Siegelman, p. 82.


34 Anthony Lewis, "Religion No Longer on the Fringe", Charleston Gazette, October, 11, 1984, p. 4A.
35. Conway and Siegelman, p. 88-89.
36. Yankelovich, p. 5.
37. Conway and Siegelman, p. 85.
40. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Falwell, pp. 19, 15.
50. Conway and Siegelman, p. 81.
51. Ibid.
54. Conway and Siegelman, p. 83.
55 Goodman and Price, p. 91


57 Yankelovich, p. 5.

58 Tape recording of Senator Thomas McIntyre's speech at May, 1982 conference in Charleston, WV.

59 Goodman and Price, p. 43.

60 Ibid.


62 Statement by Jerry Falwell on the formation of the Liberty Federation, National Press Club, Washington, D.C., 3 January, 1986, 10 a.m.


66 Judis, p. 18.

67 Shapiro, p. 15.

68 Bitzer, p. 23.

69 Ibid.
CHAPTER 3
FANTASY THEMES AND THE RHETORICAL VISION

When Jerry Falwell formed the Moral Majority, he had a specific idea in mind. Recognizing the size of the group in relation to America's population placed the Moral Majority far from being an actual majority, he chose the name to reflect his desire for America's restoration as a moral nation based upon Christian values. Moral Majority was formed to give focus to the desire for religious-based political conservatism.¹

This chapter will focus on the question: What rhetorical strategies were employed by the Moral Majority to create a rhetorical vision as a response to a rhetorical situation. The chapter includes: 1) a brief description of the method outlined by Ernest Bormann; 2) a description of the structure of the Moral Majority; 3) a description of their rhetorical vision as a response to the situation; and 4) an analysis of the fantasy themes created by the Moral Majority.

The Method: Fantasy Theme Analysis.

The very act of labeling the movement the Moral Majority and the identification of that movement by that
name signals the presence of what Bormann calls a rhetorical vision.

His 1972 article "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," proved to be the impetus for a considerable body of research called fantasy theme analysis. Cragan and Shields wrote that Bormann's original article resulted in "some fifty pieces of research during the 1970s".2

Drawing upon the dramatistic metaphor and the work of Bales, Bormann argued that "a rhetorical vision is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a given society."3

"... the explanatory power of the fantasy chain analysis lies in its ability to account for the development, evolution and decay of dramas that catch up groups of people and change their behavior. A rhetorical movement contains small groups of fantasy chains, public fantasy events, and a rhetorical vision in a complex and reciprocal set of relationships."4

According to Bormann, the rhetorical vision formed a symbolic world or social reality for those participating in the rhetorical vision. The utility of the fantasy theme analysis from a critical standpoint occurs "... if the critic can illuminate how people who participated in the rhetorical vision related to one another, how they arranged
themselves into social hierarchies, how they acted to achieve the goals embedded in their dreams, and how they were aroused by the dramatic action and the dramatis personae within the manifest content of their rhetoric . . . " 5

The fantasy theme approach begins with the assumption that people use words and meanings to create social realities and those words and meanings become reality for the people who participate in that movement. The rhetorical vision is constructed from the fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions and in mass media broadcasts. The social reality reflects the consciousness of the group at that time. The group can use the social reality to dramatize about their relationship to the external environment and the happenings here and now.

In the years since Bormann's original article, much research has utilized the fantasy theme approach, notably, Hensley's Disciples of Christ study, Bormann's analysis of the Eagleton affair and Cragan and Shield's book, Applied Communication Research: A Dramatistic Perspective. Writers have argued the significance of Bormann's theory and its heuristic value. 6

Cragan and Shields describe the theory "not as a method for doing fantasy theme analysis, but as a metatheory for constructing rhetorical visions . . . Just as general
systems theory has served as a metatheory for building systemic theories in a number of disciplines, so Bormann's metatheory can be used to build rhetorical theories that provide explanations of communication phenomena.\(^7\)

The debate between Bormann and Mohrmann is representative of a larger schism that exists in the field of communication and rhetorical theory. Bormann's emphasis upon the sharing of a common experience and social reality may well be the binding tie that the method needs to save it from being cast aside as another taxonomical device.

In his most recent work, *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream*, Bormann amplifies the idea of a symbolic convergence theory of communication. He writes: "The scholar's main task in making fantasy theme analysis is to find evidence that symbolic convergence has taken place, that groups of people have shared a fantasy." Once created, the rhetorical vision is not static, Bormann said. It grows, enlarges, matures, persists or dies according to the support it receives from those who share in it. The task of the critic utilizing the fantasy theme analysis became to evaluate how well the rhetoric was able to accommodate the community to the changes in its unfolding history.\(^8\)

Additionally, he expands the concept of fantasy type. An intermediate level in the fantasy theme method, fantasy type refers to the repeated, stock scenarios that reappear in fantasy theme analysis. In *The Force of Fantasy*, he
gives an example of restoration fantasy type which sees America as a nation in a time of trouble and seeks to restore and return America to its original foundations.

In *The Force of Fantasy*, Bormann attempts to deal with criticisms of the fantasy theme as simply a descriptive method by linking the fantasy theme approach to the theory of symbolic convergence. "Fantasy theme analysis is a humanistic approach to the rhetorical criticism of human communication. . . . fantasy theme analysts use the symbolic convergence theory as part of their basic scholarly perspective when studying communication events. . . . Once the rhetorical critics document the presence of rhetorical visions, communities and consciousness, they can make a humanistic evaluation of the quality of the rhetoric and the social realities of the people who share the reality. A critic needs to evaluate and to judge the discourse and to provide added insights into how it works." 9

**Structure and Organization of the Moral Majority**

Perhaps the biggest myth about the Moral Majority was that it was the sole creation of Jerry Falwell. Falwell likes to promote the idea that the movement grew out of his increasing concern over the moral condition of America. He tells audiences that when he finally could not take what he perceived as the declining moral condition of America, he helped create the Moral Majority. Actually, the
groundwork for the Moral Majority had been prepared years earlier.

Paul Weyrich, a Catholic and former journalist, is called the "architect of the preachers into politics movement." A 1971 alliance with multimillionaire Joseph Coors produced the Heritage Foundation, a New Right think tank. In 1974, they formed the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress. They were assisted by Richard Viguerie's direct-mail machinery.

The year 1976 saw the election of Jimmy Carter, who publicly identified himself as a "born-again" Christian and his presidency seemed to generate a new interest in politics by Southern Baptists and Evangelicals. In 1978, the New Right had its first election triumphs and more money began rolling into the coffers. By the time Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority came onto the scene in 1979, the New Right had been quietly active for several years.

There are several accounts of how the Moral Majority actually came about. The name Moral Majority was selected for a reason. But, the Moral Majority was not the sole creation of Falwell; in fact, Falwell had to be persuaded by several leaders of the New Right to make the move into the political arena.

Another of the biggest inaccuracies about the formation of the Moral Majority was that the organization developed a unique moral agenda and singlehandedly set out to save
America. There was a specific moral agenda; however, Falwell and the other Moral Majority leaders inherited much of this agenda from the men and women active in the New Right who had carefully investigated the feasibility of a Conservative entry into politics for at least a decade before 1979.

The organization was the product of a meeting arranged between Falwell, whom McAteer knew from his traveling days, and the New Right team of Weyrich and Phillips. In fact, it was Weyrich, not Falwell, who coined the name "Moral Majority."\textsuperscript{11} Weyrich also gave the group its first executive director, Robert Billings.

In addition to Falwell; Weyrich, the Reverend Robert Billings, a fundamentalist and former Maryland public school principal; Ed McAteer, a Christian lay leader from Memphis; and, Howard Phillips, a conservative Republican and founding member of Young Americans for Freedom who served in the Nixon administration, were instrumental in forming Moral Majority.

The Heritage Foundation and the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, had by now sprouted a number of the organizations and included groups such as the Christian Voice, formed early in 1979 as an openly political Fundamentalist organization; the Conservative Caucus, a lobbying organization founded by Phillips and Vigerie in 1975 and patterned after the liberal group Common Cause; and
Christians for Reagan, founded in 1980 and having a budget of $1 million. These ventures were just learning experiences and actions to lay the groundwork for the "hard core" units of the movement yet to come. The Moral Majority was one of the hard core units. Other hard-core units were the Religious Roundtable, with the same leadership as the Moral Majority and the National Conservative Political Action Committee, headed by John "Terry" Dolan.

Jerry Falwell was persuaded to serve as the front for the New Right's entrance into politics. The Moral Majority was created as the vehicle by which Falwell could gain the attention and support of the audiences needed to achieve the political goals of the New Right. Just as the New Right used Ronald Reagan and affiliation with the Republican party, through the Moral Majority they created a social movement to respond to a rhetorical situation and to address an exigence. The Moral Majority was run by a executive board of directors who met regularly to determine the position of the organization and the content of the publications, namely The Moral Majority Report, a monthly newspaper.

Early Moral Majority brochures demonstrate Falwell's strong attempts to classify the movement as anti-religious.

"What is the Moral Majority? The answer is simple --Moral Majority Inc. is made up of millions of Americans, including 72,000 ministers, priests and rabbis, who are deeply concerned about the moral decline of our nation, and who are sick and tired of the way many amoral and secular humanists and other liberals are destroying the traditional
family and moral values upon which our nation was built.

"We are Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Mormons, Fundamentalists -- blacks and whites -- farmers, housewives, businessmen. We are Americans from all walks of life united by one central concern -- to serve as a special interest group providing a voice for a return to moral sanity in these United States of America."

A person could become a member of the Moral Majority by responding to the organization's Washington, DC address. A contribution was not necessary, but welcomed. Members received The Moral Majority Report, a monthly newspaper full of the organization's viewpoints on abortion, family life, the women's movement, drugs and pornography.

Moral Majority staff members, including Cal Thomas, Moral Majority vice-president; Harry Covert, editor; and Ron Goodwin contributed articles to the newspaper. In addition, each issue generally contained a commentary by Falwell.

The Rhetorical Vision as a Response

Fundamentalist Christians have traditionally not taken an active role politically. Prior to the 1970, Christians voters were often portrayed as ignorant and anti-intellectual. Results from a 1985 Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN)-commissioned Nielsen study dispute this conception, showing that 21 percent of the nation's TV households tune in to Christian TV for at least six minutes in a week and 40 percent for at least six minutes in a
month. In a forthcoming book, authors Jeffrey Hadden and Anson Shupe provide evidence that show over half the persons called Evangelicals now live outside the South, over a third have family incomes over $30,000 or more, and the number who have attended college has risen to over 20 percent. A study done in the early '80s in the Dallas-Fort Worth area found 60 percent of the supporters of the Moral Majority had white-collar jobs. Fundamentalists and Evangelicals such as those responding to these studies defy the traditional image of them as rural and uneducated hillbillies.

By the 1980s, the nation had what some considered a fourth political force behind the two major political parties and organized labor -- the New Right. Neither entirely Christian nor conservative, the New Right had learned to use two important skills -- the art of direct mail fundraising and its related skill -- computerized networking, and television. Both skills were already in use by the Fundamentalist and Evangelical ministers of the New Right. Jerry Falwell, like other television ministers, depended upon financial support from his viewers to keep his "Old Time Gospel Hour" on the airwaves. Recent estimates are that he needs $100 million a year just to keep his ministry going.

New Right ideology is rooted in the myths of frontier America. Crawford suggests the Old West is the supreme archetypal metaphor for the New Right.
similar to the ones dramatized by John Wayne are admired and emulated in the political heroes of the New Right. The macho character of the cowboy embodies the positive characteristics the New Right values. Admiration for this type of personality may be why the New Right often looks to larger than life television ministers for leadership. Ministers such as Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker and Oral Roberts are often seen as second to God in the eyes of their believers.

Moral Majoritarians openly state admiration for the values of the founding fathers and the ruggedness of the old west. Like the founders who settled in search of religious freedom with an American dream to worship as they pleased, to obtain an education, to earn a good living and to participate in the democracy of a free country, unrestrained by any foreign power; the Moral Majority vision included the restoration of American to Christian principles and values.

Issues which the New Right feels threaten this way of life, i.e. secular humanism, busing, feminism, abortion, pornography, all became objects for defeat.

How can the fantasy theme analysis provide insight into the rhetoric of the Moral Majority? First, one must understand the nature of the rhetorical vision shared by the members of the group. Operating on the assumption that groups do create and share a symbolic reality, and that this reality influences their perception of the world and their
responses to that perception, the fantasy theme is a legitimate tool for criticism. To the extent that the fantasy theme analysis is useful in explaining in nature of the symbolic reality created and shared by the Moral Majority, the approach has heuristic value.

The political campaign of 1980 is important when considering the emergence of the New Right and the Moral Majority. The act itself of referring to the conservative political and religious forces as the New Right validates, for Bormann, the existence of an emerging or emerged rhetorical vision.

"Such labels as the 'new south', the 'new deal' and the 'new left' are short hand ways of referring to rhetorical visions which have emerged clearly enough so that people can refer to them and understand the basic elements of the vision when they are so characterized . . . . A critic can often locate the period in history when a new rhetorical vision is emerging by searching for commentary relating to the meaning of labels such a 'Black Power' and the 'new left.' Once the vision has clearly emerged and is well understood, the discussion of definitions tends to die out." 18

The appearance of the term "Moral Majority", though not accurate, served to indicate the existence of a vision that many people could identify with. People on the New Right computerized mailing lists began receiving copies of The Moral Majority Report in the mail on a regular basis. They received letters from Jerry Falwell and membership cards were distributed to each person who became a Moral Majority supporter. The organization's position was clearly spelled
out in each communication. The Moral Majority had emerged as an organized social movement with distinct goals.

By the early part of 1981, post election, the rhetorical vision shared by the members of the Moral Majority had clearly emerged. The question "What is the Moral Majority?" was changed to "What effect did they have on the 1980 election?"

For a rhetorical critic to be able to effectively use the fantasy theme approach, he or she must be able to identify the social reality the vision conveys. The heroes, villains, scenes, sanctioning agents and plot lines are the essential constructs of the vision. The critic must be able to isolate these within the rhetoric of the movement.

Bormann writes: "For the scholar, at any rate, to view motives as embedded in the rhetorical vision rather than hidden in the skulls and viscera of people, makes it possible to check the critic's insights by going directly to the rhetoric rather than relying on inferences about psychological entities unavailable for analysis."^{19}

Consistent with what Bormann has said regarding the emergence of a rhetorical vision, such a vision did exist for the Moral Majority.

The Rhetorical Vision. The rhetorical vision for the Moral Majority was that of a strong, family-centered nation, strongly grounded in the values upon which the nation was founded 200 years ago: belief in God, the work ethic, the
role of the traditional family, the value of human life and love of country.

In the vision, the country would enter a most productive and harmonious period since the days of the founding of the nation because the nation collectively would respect God and God would, in turn, honor America. There would be no need to fear nuclear war with the Soviet Union or the threat from Communism because America's military supremacy would be at its peak and she would be recognized as the strongest nation on earth.

For American families, the vision specifically called for the recognition of the traditional man-woman-child family unit as the appropriate form for the family. Equal Rights legislation, as was proposed in the 70s, would never exist nor would any legislation recognizing homosexuality as an accepted lifestyle and a recognized minority. Abortion would no longer be legal; instead children would be provided for, along with the mothers, in state and church-funded homes and child-care centers. Because drugs and pornography contributed so heavily to the decline of the morality of the nation, strict legislation would exist for offenders of these two crimes.

In the schools, children would be allowed to pray voluntarily and many children would have the right to attend the flourishing number of private Christian schools. Forced busing would be eliminated from the American educational
system. In public schools, textbooks would reflect the emphasis on Christian values and beliefs. Creationism would be taught, along with evolution.

Conservative and New Right political action and special interest groups would continue to have a significant impact upon the nation's politics. Conservatives would gain equal footing and prominence with liberals in terms of elected and appointed office and the conservative lobby would be recognized as a major force in American politics.

Church, home, government and school would be the key elements in a society based upon traditional Judeo-Christian ethics.

Falwell and his supporting members participated in a vision which saw the re-establishment and restoration of one nation under God in the United States. The vision found ideological support in a Fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible.

In a 1981 interview, Falwell articulated his concept of the shared symbolic reality:

"I am fully expecting that between now and the coming of the Lord, that this world is going to experience a spiritual awakening unlike anything in the past. There is going to be an invasion of God on this planet, and changing of lives; real Biblical evangelism. There is going to be a terrific harvest of souls somewhere between here and the rapture. I believe God's role for America is as a catalyst, that he wants to set the spiritual time bomb off right here. If that's the case, America must stay free. And for America to stay free, we must come back to the
only principles that God can honor: the dignity of life, the traditional family, decency, morality and so on."

The Dramatis Personae

The Protagonists. The key protagonist of the movement is Jerry Falwell. Though the Moral Majority claimed to have organizations in all 50 states and each of those state organizations had a chairman, Falwell assumed the role of national spokesperson and appeared on television and news programs and in the print media. Though the state leaders may have played an active role at their respective levels, and Moral Majority literature made numerous references to state and local leaders, it was Falwell who represented the movement at the national level. As of 1982, the Moral Majority claimed to have over 900,000 contributing members who provided the grassroots support, but were rarely heard from or identified in the publications of the Moral Majority or in the national press.

Because the issue of Bible-based morality is central to the rhetorical vision of the Moral Majority, the contributing members of the Moral Majority are also central protagonists because they are able to act on Falwell's programs. The protagonists contributing members are those Christian Americans who share love of God and country, and respect for the traditional family unit and the work ethic. They support the vision of the Moral Majority financially
and by working legislatively to effect social and political change.

They are portrayed as honest, hardworking, ordinary Christian people concerned with ridding their nation of its moral corruption. They perceive the drug, abortion, pornography problems of the nation to be like an illness waiting to be purged. After the purging, the nation will stand redeemed, restored to a clean and pure state. Jerry Falwell often spoke of "bringing the nation back to moral sanity" likening the state of the nation to a mental illness. In another letter, Falwell compared the immorality with a physical illness "destroying the moral fiber of our nation."  

The protagonists feel the own the nation, not only by virtue of citizenship, but, more importantly, by virtue of the Christian heritage of the nation. Fundamentalist theology often makes reference to the promised land where the toils and tribulation of this wicked life will be over for the faithful. The Moral Majority vision has reclamation of this country for the faithful in the here and now. Therefore, when the supporters of the Moral Majority sought to exercise authority in the political process and are criticized for their attempts to mix religion and politics or to impose their Fundamentalist viewpoints on all of society, they were able to respond with two arguments:  
1) The nation was founded on Christian principles as one
nation under God; therefore, what they were trying to do was
to restore those principles; and 2) they could take
political action because liberal ministers had been doing
the same thing for many years. Liberals could not argue with
the second point.

The average viewer of "The Old Time Gospel Hour" has
never met Jerry Falwell nor even seen him in person. He is
even less familiar to those people who are infrequent
viewers of religious television programming. To build and
maintain a national image for Moral Majority, Falwell felt
he needed to convince the person who contributed $25 or $50
to his Sunday morning program to "buy into" the rhetorical
vision of the Moral Majority. Since he did not have the
opportunity to talk to each of these people personally, he
depended upon the media to help create an image.

His most controlled media situation was the weekly
broadcast of "The Old Time Gospel Hour." In the sanctuary of
his own church, being filmed by his own television crews,
the minister is at his finest and is able to convey a
careful image to the approximately one million viewers of
the program.

Strober and Tomczak describe the church service:

"The Old Time Gospel Hour television program
thrives on its sincerity and identity. People
who tune in like to feel they are at a Sunday
church service . . . They see a church service
with cameras looking on instead of a production
with an audience looking on . . . 'People who
are hurting don't want to see a show,' says Jerry,
'They want to see something that is real.'"26
While media stereotypes of the protagonists were not generally positive, "middle to lower-class Americans, rural, low education" this was not consistent with their image of themselves. They felt themselves to be the salt of the earth. "More than ever before in the history of humanity, we must have heroes, those men and women who will stand for what is right and stand against what is wrong, no matter what it costs. Today we need men and women of character and integrity who will commit themselves to letting their posterity know the freedom that our Founding Fathers established for this nation."27 The protagonists in the Moral Majority vision are those heroes.

In another instance, Falwell described the protagonists:

"In Matthew's gospel, chapter 5, Jesus, in verses thirteen through sixteen said, 'Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? . . . Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on the hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven'."28

Other recognized protagonists in the Moral Majority vision are: Sen. Jesse Helms. Jerry Falwell is lavish in his praise of Senator Helms. Regarding the conservative legislator from North Carolina he said:

Wouldn't it be great to have 535 Jesse Helms around? Wouldn't it be great? You know,
someone asked me the other day from the press, what do you think of Jesse Helms. I said I love him and respect him."

Helms was a useful connection for the Moral Majority. Always a crusader for ultra-conservative causes, Helms was said to have been one of the first in government to lay the groundwork for a Fundamentalist right-wing "shadow" government. A former Raleigh, North Carolina, editor and broadcaster, Helms used his skill in propaganda later on as a senator. He forced bills to the Senate floor on sensitive social issues such as school prayer, busing, abortion, sex education and capital punishment. When he re-re-elected to his senate seat in 1984, Helms relied upon support from that state's fundamentalists, many of whom felt it imperative to return Jesse to Washington so he can help return the nation to morality.

Another protagonist of the New Right is President Ronald Reagan. His alliance with the New Right and the Moral Majority is mutually beneficial. Most Americans fail to associate Ronald Reagan with the Moral Majority and the New Right. Actually, the Moral Majority played an important role in the election of Reagan in 1980 and Reagan has been, when needed, equally attentive to the conservative lobby. Jerry Falwell has appeared both at the White House and on the program of the Republican National Convention. Before President Reagan made the decision to appoint Sandra Day O'Conner to the Supreme Court, he first consulted with Jerry
Falwell. Reagan has been continually mindful of the need to court the Fundamentalist lobby and he has been appropriately aloof during non-election years.

Falwell continued as the dominant spokesperson for the movement and placement of him in this role was an intentional move designed to create a specific image. An experienced orator, Falwell is adept at "using" the media to create images and to promote both his personal goals and the goals of the organization.

When confronted with this dual role, Falwell often sidestepped the issue, as in this 1981 interview:

"Do you speak for Moral Majority or as a preacher? Whatever they (the audience) want. Because I am there as a private citizen I discuss anything. And I can share the Gospel there."

Symbolic Cues

For Falwell and the Moral Majority, the decision to become politically involved was an imperative rather than a choice believing as they do that America is suffering from serious moral decline. How can this "moral decay" be evidenced? One can look, for example, to the social events which prompted Falwell's involvement: abortion, women's rights, homosexuality, drug abuse, pornography -- all of which he believes are in conflict with the dignity of life which is desired."
A symbolic reality was conceived "in which meaning, emotion and motive are present are present in the rhetoric and which focuses on the message as opposed to the situation or speaker." 34

According Bormann, the presence of symbolic triggers within the discourse is one of the best ways to determine that groups of people have shared fantasies. When sharing of fantasies takes place, Bormann believes that symbolic convergence has occurred. 35 Examples of a symbolic trigger are the inside joke or allusion to a previously shared fantasy through code word, slogan, nonverbal sign or gesture.

The Moral Majority presents a somewhat different situation than most social movements because of the presence of only one predominant rhetor -- Jerry Falwell. Thus, the critic must rely upon the rhetoric of Falwell for the symbolic trigger which indicates the presence of a shared fantasy.

Jerry Falwell goes to the Bible to find much of the material for symbolic cues. The Bible is a text considered sacred by many of the true believers. The Bible, in fact, provides the mandate for Falwell to become active in politics and to activate other Christians:

"Our reaction is where were they (these people) when William Sloan Coffin, the anti-war activist, Berrigan Brothers, the Eugene Carson Blakes, the Martin Luther Kings, when these gentlemen used the pulpit to advocate their political views. And beyond that,
believing if they were wrong, the Bible says that those of us in Moral Majority who are Christians, are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world . . . The Moral Majority is nothing more or less than another special interest group that is active. We feel we are the salt of the earth."38

Consider the following example from a 1982 fundraising letter. Asking for continued financial support for Moral Majority Falwell said:

"I'm still fighting to make your voice heard here in Washington to let your representatives know how you feel about the corruption, secular humanism and a moral legislation and regulation that are destroying our country."39

From another letter asking for a vote on whether or not to disband the Moral Majority, Falwell again provided evidence that, despite arguments that Moral Majority was really grounded in conservative political ideology, his definition of moral was based on biblical principles:

"America desperately needs a social/moral conscience . . . As long as there is a struggle between militant homosexuals and the rights of children, the militant homosexuals are going to say we are bigots . . . When I started the Moral Majority, I wanted to unite moral Americans in a fight against the moral cancers that were destroying our great land. . . My personal feelings are to keep the term 'moral majority' in front of the public despite what the liberals would have people think about the term. 38

Perhaps the Biblical foundation of the Moral Majority was most clearly expressed in this statement by Falwell:

"I would like to see the Moral Majority become a very powerful and positive movement
for morality in this country. And I would hope that in this decade we will be able to bring the nation back to an appreciation of the traditional values and moral principles that really have been the American way for 200 years . . . I think American is great, but not because it is a Christian nation; it is not a Christian nation, it has never been a Christian nation, it is never going to be a Christian nation, it is not a Jewish nation. It is a nation under God, and a nation in which for 200 years there has been absolute freedom to preach whatever religious conviction one might have without ever impinging upon the liberties and freedom of others."

From the pulpit of Thomas Road Baptist Church, Falwell proposed to bring the nation under the Scriptures:

"God doesn't use dirty instruments. Not only must you be saved by the New Birth experience, trusting Christ as your Savior, but day by day in your Christian life you need to use God's detergent, the Word of God, as a cleansing agent. Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Meditate upon it. Hide it away in your heart. . . I wish for all of our Congressmen and the leaders in government and our President and all the pastors of the land that we could learn so much Scripture, memorize so much Scripture, that in the great decisions that face us in the leading of the nation and the leading of our people, God will be able to bring to our mind, to our memory, to our attention at the right moment, the right Scripture, the right truth, to give us the wisdom and guidance we need to perform our God-given task."40

The Meaning of Morality. The basis of the Moral Majority vision was the concept of morality. The family represented the ultimate morality for those who participated in this vision. The family operated in a context of morality. The morality was sanctioned by God, a supernatural authority. Because of their Fundamentalist worldview, Moral
Majority members regarded this morality as absolute. Thus, for example, when a woman considered abortion as a means to save her unborn child from acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) virus she was carrying, Moral Majority believers have no choice but to avoid the greater sin of the two -- abortion.

One can better understand the Fundamentalist tendency to polarize by looking at the roots of Fundamentalism:

"Bible-centered preaching and devotional life had been especially strong among Puritans, but it gained renewed significance in the revivalist movement of the nineteenth century, sparked by such prominent figures as Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Dwight, Lyman Beecher, and especially Charles Finney.

"The revivalist believed that the universe is divided into the realm of God and the realm of Satan, the righteous and the unrighteous, the saved and the lost . . . Many Protestant Fundamentalists, who form the core of the religious 'new right' are evangelicals in the revivalist tradition."

Antagonists. The rhetorical vision of the Moral Majority also dramatizes antagonists -- or villains. While Jesus Christ is the ultimate vision of the protagonist, the Devil is the epitome of the enemy. Satan is represented by his forces on earth -- the organizations or people who are despised by the Moral Majority because their Godless, immoral ways are destroying the moral fiber of the nation.

The chief antagonist was the secular humanist and the majority of the conflict is between this agent and Falwell's
forces of good. The Moral Majority vision saw the secular humanist as the enemy of Christianity and all religion. McBrien suggests the Moral Majority's secular humanist was a revitalization of the conspiracy theory that Fundamentalist Carl McIntire had promoted in the 1940s and 1950s.42 McIntire, a militant Fundamentalist, made constant attacks on the politically liberal National Council of Churches, the Catholic Church and his supreme enemy, Communism.

Taken loosely from the humanist doctrine, which states that humanism is a "way of life centered on human interests or values; a philosophy that asserts the dignity and worth of man and his capacity for self-realization through reason and that often rejects supernaturalism," secular humanism became the archetypal enemy in the Falwellian vision.43

"Christianity," Falwell stated, "is ruled out of humanism and is said to be an obstacle to human progress and a threat to its existence." Therefore, since humanism advocates situational ethics, freedom from any restraint and defines sin as man's maladjustment to man, then certainly the riotous and anti-moralistic behavior of the twentieth century America must be humanistic.44

The term secular humanist appeared frequently in the literature of the Moral Majority as in the following example from the brochure "What is the Moral Majority?"

"The pornographers are angry. The amoral secular humanists are livid. The abortionists are furious. . . ."45
Secular humanists were personified in an organization formed specifically to fight Falwell and the Moral Majority -- People for the American Way.

Enraged by the efforts of the Fundamentalists to mandate school prayer, censor television programming and censor textbooks, television producer Norman Lear founded PAW. Executive Director Anthony Podesta implemented PAW's fight for cultural pluralism. A nonprofit membership organization, PAW sought to "protect the First Amendment rights to think, worship and speak freely." 46

PAW sponsored educational programs, television spots, leaflets, articles and brochures, all to target Falwell and other right-wing television producers whom Lear felt were undermining the peoples' right to religious freedom. 47

Lear later produced a commentary "I Love Liberty" that directly attacked Moral Majority viewpoints. Falwell responded that the commentary was directly negative to the Moral Majority and announced he would seek equal time from any television station airing Lear's program. 48 Falwell called the program typical of the "dishonest, irresponsible type programming that has become vintage Lear." 49

Fantasy Themes of the Moral Majority

Dramatic materials generated by the Moral Majority contain evidence to support three major fantasy themes, each being essential to the rhetoric. These themes are metaphors
that comprise the rhetorical vision.

Bormann defined fantasy as a technical term in the symbolic convergence theory that means "the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or rhetorical need." He further defines fantasy themes as "the content of the dramatizing message that sparks the fantasy chain." Scholars find evidence that groups of people have shared fantasy themes when similar dramatizing material, such as wordplay, narratives, figures and analogies crop up in a variety of messages. These were identified as fantasy themes of the Moral Majority because Moral Majority rhetoric contains numerous references to these particular metaphors, images and phrases.

Materials generated by the Moral Majority provide evidence that these fantasy themes existed. Each theme was essential to the rhetoric.

1) The traditional man-woman-child family unit is the only acceptable family unit if America is to be restored to moral prominence.

2) Human life should be preserved at all costs. Any attempt to end human life was seen in direct opposition to the will of God.

3) The nation should re-instill the implementation of the Judeo-Christian ethic of morality into the legislative, judicial and executive branches of
government. Though the founding fathers separated church and state in function, they never intended this to be a nation without God.

Family is the Central Issue. The Moral Majority and the larger New Right were instrumental in fashioning a definition of family that was one of the central themes of the 1980 election. The Moral Majority was able to wield considerable power regarding the definition of family in the 1980 election because of default, according to NOW organizer and feminist Betty Friedan. Friedan said Fundamentalists were able to gain control over the definition of the concept because of lack of action by the Carter administration regarding the White House Conference on Family scheduled to begin in 1979. Wrote Friedan:

"Consider, for instance, that the original White House conference on 'the family,' supposed to have been held in 1979, was suddenly canceled as too 'controversial' when the experts assembled to plan it began facing facts about American families today.

"The flak started when participating Catholic priests discovered that the eminent black woman coordinating the conference was herself divorced and raising her family as a single parent and when the Government's own statistics revealed that fewer than seven percent of Americans are now living in that kind of family to which politicians and churchmen are always paying lip service . . ."52

The desired rapprochement between Conservative Right to Lifers and the feminists never occurred. The media reported polarization among the feminists at the conference because of a last minute resolution crafted by a radical feminist
lawyer lumping together language including the terms ERA, "sexual preference' and abortion. All three White House conferences on family were polarized in the same manner, reported Friedan, leading to one inevitable outcome.

"At the same time, representatives of the Carter administration quietly nixed a bill before Congress on tax incentives for child-care centers. By the third conference in Los Angeles, the polarization on 'family values' had become a given of the 1980 election campaign. The Democrats' fearful retreat and the feminists' paralysis in fixed, defensive positions had handed 'the family' to the far right -- the so-called Moral Majority".

Family is the central theme of the Moral Majority. Almost every issue on their agenda can be broken down to this key theme. Homosexuality, drug abuse, the skyrocketing divorce rate, feminism -- all of which Jerry Falwell staunchly opposes -- contradict his concept of the traditional man-woman-child family as the only acceptable living unit if America is to return to moral and political greatness.

At almost every opportunity, Jerry Falwell offered his opinion on the decline of the family in America and his vision for the restoration of family.

In *Listen America!*

There are only three institutions that God ordained in the Bible; government, the church and the family. The family is the God-ordained institution of the marriage of one man and one woman together for a lifetime with their biological or adopted children. The family is the fundamental building block and the basic unit of our society, and its continued health is a prerequisite for a healthy and
prosperous nation. No nation has ever been stronger than the families within her. America's families are her strength and they symbolize the miracle of America.

An evaluation of all the New Right's "anti" issues reveals that almost every issue is somehow related to the destruction of the traditional family. anti-busing, anti-welfare, anti-gun control, anti-abortion, anti-feminism, anti-gay rights, anti-sex education and anti-pornography are the major issues the Moral Majority opposed. Their "pro" list was much shorter: pro-family, pro-America, pro-life and pro-God.

To add his own personal experience to his family rhetoric, Falwell often used his own family as an example. He and his wife, Macel, are the parents of three children. Macel, who worked as a teller in a local bank during the early years of her marriage to Falwell, resigned that position upon the birth of their first child.

Falwell is quite fond of telling the story of how he met and married his wife and makes it clear in all his discussions that he feels the wife's place is in the home with her children.

"The second weapon against the family is the feminist revolution... Many women are saying "Why should I be taken advantage of by chauvinists? I will get out and do my own thing. I will stand up for my rights. I will have my own dirty magazines." Feminists are saying that self-satisfaction is more important than the family. Most of the women who are leaders in the feminist movement promote an immoral lifestyle. In a drastic departure from the home, more than half of the women in our country are
currently employed. Our nation is in serious
danger when motherhood is considered a task
that is 'unrewarding, unfulfilling and boring'.
I believe that a woman's call to be a wife
and mother is the highest calling in the world.
My wife is proud to be called a housewife. . .
We have been living in a distorted and decaying
society where women are made to feel a loss of
self-esteem and a loss of status when they choose
to be full time housewives."55

Falwell has further admonitions for the roles of men
and women and their families:

"The answer to stable families with
children who grow up to be great leaders in
our society . . . will come only as men and
women in America get a right relationship to
God and His principles for the home. Statistics
show that couples who profess a born-again
relationship have much happier, healthier
marriages. . . Scripture declares that God
has called the father to be the spiritual leader
in his family. The husband is not to be the
dictator of the family, but the spiritual
leader. . . Good husbands who are godly men
are good leaders. Their wives and children want
to follow them and be under their protection. . .
Until men are in right relationship with God,
there is no hope for righting our nation.
Because we have weak men who have weak homes,
and children from these homes will probably grow
up to become weak parents leading even weaker
homes."56

On the Equal Rights Amendment, Falwell, who opposed it,
was fond of saying that he was for superior rights for
women, not equal rights.57 In a brochure, "What is the Moral
Majority" Falwell outlines the official position on the
Equal Rights Amendment:

"We support equal rights for women.
We agree with President Reagan's commitment
to help every governor and state legislator
to move quickly to ensure that during the
1980s every American woman will earn as
much money and enjoy the same opportunities for advancement as her male counterpart of the same vocation."

Notice the difference between Falwell's earlier statement on the roles of men and women and the family, and this equal rights statement, designed for a larger, less sympathetic audience. Both statements were made within one year.

He continued:

"We believe the ERA is the wrong vehicle with which to obtain equal rights for women. We feel that the ambiguous and simplistic language of the amendment could lead to court interpretations which might put women in combat, sanction homosexual marriages and financially penalize widows and deserted wives."

Falwell supported equal rights, but it was equal rights Moral Majority style. He felt the ERA was an attack upon the family since it resulted in women being away from their homes and children and could lead to divorce, abortion, and problem in rearing children. Yet, he realized that while he could safely say he opposed the amendment, it was not popular to oppose the concept of equal rights. Therefore, he supported the concept of equal rights with his own definition.

Just as the term "secular humanist" was used to conjure a specific negative emotional reaction from audiences, the term ERA was used the same way by Falwell. Consider this example:

"Now ERA is an attack against the family. Text books today in the public schools and
private schools, too, often illustrate the husband washing the dishes and doing the house chores while the wife is up mending the roof or doing some chore that man would normally do -- the idea being to create a unisex philosophy for boys and girls. That is a very dangerous thing, and I would say that this attempt by sociologists now to create federal nurseries and federal day care units, is a dangerous thing. The idea is to get mothers out of the home and get the children away from the families, away from the parents. Get them under federal instruction. The bureaucrats want to teach our children. The sociologists and liberals want to train our children. And Dr. Spock and his vintage would like to teach our children. And that is a disaster by anybody's description. So the ERA delusion is a very dangerous one."

A 1980 publication by Patricia Pingry called Jerry Falwell: Man of Vision, devoted one chapter to "The Vision of Family." Stating that "a Christian family begins with a strong Christian man and a dedicated Christian wife" the chapter builds an argument for the traditional family as the ideal family. The requirement for the ideal family is prefaced with the qualifier "Christian" and, it is clear that Jerry Falwell intends Christian to be the only acceptable religious choice. Therefore, his advice is not for Christians only and to be ignored by the secular world. "Non-Christian" is not acceptable in the world of the Moral Majority.

Using his own home and family as an example, Falwell discussed the threat of broken families, working mothers and rebellious and undisciplined children and how those events can gradually lead to the moral decline of a nation.
His conclusion is clear: The family is the basis for moral stability in the nation, and, as such, Christians have the responsibility to preserve the traditional family.

**Human Life Preserved at All Costs.** Part of the success of the New Right and Moral Majority was the ability of New Right leaders to identify single interest issues that would motivate large numbers of the public to become involved in their overall campaign. Abortion was quickly identified as one of those issues.

Conway and Siegelman wrote that the abortion issue was "a live grenade, an unprecedented force for rousing individuals to social action." Abortion fit into the New Right's "pro-family" campaign perfectly. And, Jerry Falwell and other New Right leaders sincerely did not believe in abortion. But the most important factor was that abortion was a highly emotional issue and the discussion of abortion was likely to generate much media attention for Falwell and Moral Majority. Falwell began sending out letters to potential supporters in which he discussed the "biological holocaust" of millions of unborn babies every year. In Lynchburg, he established a home for unwed mothers and through broadcasts of "The Old Time Gospel Hour" raised money to support the establishment and operation of the home. Abortion was perhaps the most important single issue addressed by the Moral Majority because it would destroy the family and destruction of the family would tear apart the
base of morality Falwell sought to establish.

"If we expect God to honor and bless our nation, we must take a stand against abortion. . . We as a nation must take a Bible position on morality and begin to teach it everywhere. beginning in our homes, in our schoolrooms, in our communities and in our states. We must teach the children from kindergarten on up how precious life is and how important it is to preserve life."  

The Ohio Moral Majority followed the same course of action prescribed by the national level. In 1982, the state group lobbied the Ohio General Assembly to pass legislation requiring girls 16 years old and younger to obtain parental consent before getting an abortion.

The Moral Majority position was established. The traditional family represents morality according to Biblical principles. Abortion, the destruction of the family, is murder, is against the Bible and is immoral. Since America was founded on Judeo-Christian principles, America must honor God by refusing to allow abortions. The Supreme Court ruling of 1973 must be revoked.

**The Judeo-Christian Morality**

Jerry Falwell made it very clear to those who listened that he intended to bring America back to morality. And, he made it clear what that morality should include. Chastising Christians for remaining silent for too long, he urged a stand "on certain moral issues."
The moral issues were centered in abortion and included the Equal Rights Amendment, the feminist revolution, the homosexual revolution -- all of which threatened the family. Additionally, Falwell felt that America needed to regain prominence by military and economic supremacy in the world. He used Biblical support for America as God's chosen nation.

Taking a stand on these issues meant active participation in politics through voting and political action. "Through the ballot box Americans must provide for strong moral leadership at every level."65

What should the morality include? The morality referred to is a biblical morality. "Our founding fathers separated church and state in function, but never intended to establish a government void of God. As is evidenced by our constitution, good people in America must exert an influence and provide a conscience and climate of morality in which it is difficult to go wrong and not difficult for people to go right in America."66

Morality for the followers of Falwell was the "right" choice; the current state of America was wrong. So simple was the distinction for Falwell that he found it easy to distribute the message to the rest of America. If America would simply turn to the Bible and follow the principles in it, the prescription for morality would be easily found.

Can morality be legislated? Falwell apparently felt so
and looked to the absolute morality of the Bible for guidance in achieving legislated morality in America. Because abortion was the most prominent issue treated in the rhetoric of the Moral Majority, particular attention to the Moral Majority view is appropriate here.

According to Falwell, America has enjoyed such a positive history because no other nation was founded on the same principles. "It is right living that has made America the greatest nation on earth, and with all of her shortcomings and failures, America is without question the greatest nation on the fact of God's earth."67 Because the Founding Fathers believed that America has a special destiny in the world and because they established the country as "one nation under God," a covenant was established with God.

Falwell was fond of interpreting American history with reference to the special covenant between the holy fathers and God. The suffering of the Puritan Pilgrims for religious freedom, the presence of religion in the colonial life and the references to God in the nation's historical documents -- all had a special place in the rhetoric of the Moral Majority. All pointed to the need for the restoration of America to a positive union with God. As evidence of a decline, Falwell needed only to point to the decade of the 60s.

The Moral Majority shared several characteristics with the Old Right. One was the loathing for and fear of
Communism. Falwell sometimes sounded like Billy James Hargis, the televangelist of the 50s and 60s who railed against communism.

In his manifesto on the Moral Majority vision of America, *Listen America!*, Falwell discussed the decline in America's military supremacy:

"We must face the facts: America is in serious trouble today; she has, both economically and militarily, lost her prominence among the nations of the world. Now that America is in such a weakened position and at the threshold of destruction or surrender, our leaders are finally realizing what many have tried to point out for years -- that the Soviets are liars and cheaters; that they are determined to conquer our free country and to infiltrate the American people with godless communism." 68

Note the emphasis Falwell placed on the fact that America had lost prominence indicating, in congruence with other Moral Majority positions, that America needed restoration to its former position of power and wealth. Also note the reference to Soviets and communism as godless. In Falwell's legalistic, moralistic interpretation of the world, the term godless is the most damning. To be godless is the antithesis of everything that is holy and everything the Moral Majority purported to stand for.

How did America merit such a position of godliness and prominence in the world? This again, returns to a common Moral Majority theme. America was great because America was founded on biblical principles. Therefore, God had blessed America and caused its people to prosper. This foundation on
Biblical principles and this recognition of the nation as a God-fearing nation gave America its position of authority.

What was Falwell's solution for the decline in America's defense? There was hope, he maintained. "God will again bless us if we turn back to him as individuals and as a nation. . . . If God is on our side, no matter how militarily superior the Soviet Union is, they could never touch us. God would miraculously protect America." 69

The reference to a miraculous salvation of tiny America from the giant and evil Soviet Union makes reference to another popular Protestant theme -- the tiny underdog nation trusting God to help win the battle. Protestant literature is replete with versions of this theme. 70 It is not surprising that Falwell relied upon this theme.

Summary

The rhetoric of the Moral Majority can be seen to have a rhetorical vision with three specific fantasy themes. The vision is a rhetoric of restoration of America to its former greatness as a nation based upon Biblical principles.

As a dramatic portrait of the Moral Majority, the vision is comprised of three themes: 1) Family as the central issue; 2) the preservation of human life; 3) the return to a Judeo-Christian ethic of morality.
Though the Moral Majority continues to be a multi-issue social movement, these themes were especially prominent during the early years of the movement. Since 1985, the agenda of the organization has expanded to include famine relief and textbooks for public schools; however, even these issues fit in under the earlier fantasy themes.

Additionally, Moral Majority rhetoric is centered around the use of a restoration fantasy type. As a reoccurring drama, the restoration fantasy type of the Moral Majority calls for the return of the nation to an earlier, better time. Often, Falwell made reference to the founding days of the nation as a model for this ideal time. Interestingly enough, the word fantasy may have more than one meaning in its application to Moral Majority. Fantasy has the meaning as defined by Bormann, as has been demonstrated above. But also, if one considers another meaning of the word fantasy, an additional insight into Moral Majority rhetoric can be gained. Consider the following example: Falwell continually makes reference to an earlier period in American history when social conditions were better, family life was stronger and the nation as a whole, was a more religious nation. In this reference, he makes the assumption that the nation should return to an appreciation of these values.

What Falwell failed to take into account is that in searching for an ideal time, he may have not recognized that
his ideal time was not entirely ideal.

For example, while not entirely perfect, the current time reflects economic and social advances for women and other minorities. Falwell's ideal time, his fantasy, is patterned on a time in American history when these minority groups were radically oppressed. The fantasy theme may truly be a fantasy. The ideal time that Falwell longs to restore may never have existed.

Examination of the rhetoric of the Moral Majority as evidenced in written and oral rhetoric strongly supports the notion of a rhetorical vision shared by true believers and comprised of specific fantasy themes.
NOTES


4Bormann, p. 399.

5Bormann, p. 401.

Bormann's theory was not without critics. Mohrmann (1978) strongly criticized Bormann in the following manner: 1) The fantasy theme analysis is not a logical extension of the theoretical base from which the author contends it is derived, i.e. Bales and Freud; 2) Published critiques utilizing the fantasy theme approach tend toward circularity in their application.

Mohrmann argued that Bales' interpretation of fantasy, differed from Bormann's. "For Bales, fantasy chains in small groups are unique; they are transactionally imperative, created only in the interpersonal context of the group; they substitute for and counter the reality of nature and the world about; they function only in their group of origin; in isolation, their manifest content is not an adequate basis for predictions about relationships to overt behavior."

Bormann defended his theory. Much of the analysis, he said is aimed at a research model that only resembles fantasy theme and thus misses the mark. However, he contended Mohrmann did have a point when he (Mohrmann) asked for a more methodological development of fantasy theme approach. He admitted that fantasy theme researchers may have devoted too much of their time to doing studies and not enough time to indicating how their conclusions related to one another and in spelling out the theory that is emerging from their work.
Bormann responded: "The fantasy theme drama, when shared, is a key to social reality. It is not by itself the social reality. My position is that during the process of sharing a fantasy theme drama, the participants come to share an interpretation of the drama, the emotions, meanings and attitudes of the drama toward the personae and action. They come to share a common view of an aspect of their common experience. To my mind, this is a good definition for social reality."


9 Bormann, pp 3-4.

10 Conway and Siegelamn, p. 110.

11 Conway and Siegelman, p. 114.

12 Moral Majority brochure, 1981.


15 Ibid.


21 Ibid., p. 21.

"Cast Your Vote" letter from Jerry Falwell.


There are frequent references to this: See Acts 14:22 for an example.


Conway and Siegelman, p. 347.


"An Interview With the Lone Ranger of American Fundamentalism," p. 27.

Ibid.

Cragan and Shields, p. 31.


Goodman and Price, p. 42.

"Fighting to Save America" Letter from Jerry Falwell.

Moral Majority letter, July 1, 1982.

Excerpts from "The Old Time Gospel Hour," broadcast
McBrien, p. 106.
Ibid.
"What is the Moral Majority," brochure, 1981.
"Smiting the Mighty Right," Time, 3 November, 1980.
Ibid.
Bormann, The Force of Fantasy, p. 5.
Ibid.
Betty Friedan, The Second Stage, p. 110.
Ibid.
Falwell, Listen America!, p. 104.
Falwell, p. 110-11.
Goodman and Price, p. 133.
"What is the Moral Majority," brochure, 1981.
Goodman and Price, p. 135.
Ibid.
Conway and Siegelman, p. 123.
Falwell, Listen America!, p. 155-156.
64 Falwell, Listen America!, p. 17.

65 Ibid.

66 Falwell, p. 19.

67 Falwell, p. 17–18.

68 Falwell, p. 84.

69 Falwell, p. 92.

70 See Psalms 33:12: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." King James Version.
CHAPTER 4

EVALUATING THE RHETORICAL EFFORT

To respond critically to a message, according to James Andrews, is "to be able to distinguish between what is relevant and what is irrelevant in that message. It is to know what the speaker was trying to do, what the speaker said, and what the speaker meant."\(^1\)

By Andrews' standards, functioning as a critic is more than listening critically to a single message. The role of the rhetorical critic requires observations, analyses and judgments about the choices made by the rhetor(s).

Andrews urges that critics develop two skills. First, the critic must understand the kinds of questions that can be appropriately raised about a rhetorical message and, second, the critic must provide a systematic way to answer those questions.

Unlike the critic who evaluates a speech or a single, rhetorical event, the critic of social movements is confronted with months, possibly years, of ongoing, rhetorical data. He or she may also be confronted with one or more rhetors. It follows that the questions he or she asks about a social movement must necessarily reflect those
differences in situation.

This chapter will analyze the rhetoric of the Moral Majority from the perspective of rhetorical potential. Using Andrews' text, *The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism*, the chapter will address and answer the following question:

How well did the Moral Majority meet its rhetorical potential in response to the demands of the situation it faced? In an effort to answer this question, this chapter will provide: 1) a brief description of the method to be used; 2) application and discussion of that approach to the rhetoric of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority; 3) and a final summary.

**Method**

A primary function of the rhetorical critic is to evaluate the choices made by the rhetor. One aspect of this evaluation is effect, i.e., the causal relationships that may or may not exist between the message and the actions of the audience which followed the message.

Rhetorical critics since the days of Wichelns have struggled with the concept of effect. Traditional studies of rhetoric have focused upon the words of the speaker and measured the outcome of his or her speech in terms of the attitudes/beliefs and action of the audience. As the focus of rhetorical studies shifted from the single speaker to the
various rhetors and messages of social movements, so did evaluation of effect shift from judgment of one orator and one speech, to many speakers on many different occasions before many different audiences.

Evaluating the rhetoric of a movement, then, invites concern for more than short-term effect. Many rhetors may speak to many different audiences in diverse situations under the broad rubric of one social movement. While their messages may occur face-to-face, or in small groups or public settings, it has become increasingly likely the communication is disseminated through the electronic media or printed page.

The Moral Majority is certainly an example of the latter. From the inception of the movement in 1979, until the present time, it is estimated that the majority of those who called themselves members of the Moral Majority have not met Falwell in person. The contact most believers had with Falwell, and the movement came through mass media or printed material, such as direct mail.

"There is no doubt," states Dudley Clendenin, "that the Moral Majority borrows much of its strength from Mr. Falwell's television ministry and its computerized list of contributors' names."² For that reason, it is not considered satisfactory to leave the critical function solely to an examination of one speaker and one speech. Nor, can one evaluate effect in the traditional manner.
How can the effect of a movement's rhetoric be judged? Andrews maintains that critics must adapt their tools to the particular movement they wish to study. This means critics must ask different kinds of questions with the intention of obtaining different information. He suggests the basic question is more complex than the effect of a particular speech. Instead, the critic should consider rhetorical potential and ask this kind of question: "What potential did the message have to influence what audience or audiences in what ways."\(^3\)

"To understand rhetorical effect," he writes, "it is crucial to understand the dimensions of purpose and possibility. A speech functions within a larger context and happens because of things that are happening in the world."\(^4\)

Beyond the concept of effect, Andrews said the critic who attempts to deal with effect, must try to determine the purpose of the message, i.e., what effect was desired by the rhetor.

To answer this question, the critic needs to consider more than analysis of speech content. He or she must also reconstruct situational factors that may have produced the speech, consider the speaker's choice of that particular time to speak, the speaker's intended purpose and any unstated purposes.

With it's influence on the speaker, the situation, the context and the interaction between audiences and speaker,
Andrews' approach is a legitimate rhetorical tool for those who study social movements. By asking questions, such as the ones above, the critic can go beyond a taxonomical classification of speech content to reach generalizations about the relationship of the speaker to the audience, the movement to the context in which it functions and the rhetorical potential of the movement in a particular set of circumstances.

Tools which were once functional for the study of single orators can no longer provide the depth of information required to make significant findings about the study of social movements. Patton recognized this when he described the critical function:

"... the critic should be concerned with evaluation in the sense of assessing the significance (emphasis added) of relationships between rhetoric and perceptions exigences and audiences, constraints and values operative within the entire context of the communication phenomena."

Other rhetorical critics have expressed similar ideas about the critical function. Cathcart took the position that standard tools of rhetorical criticism do exist and it is the critic's task to identify and apply these tools to the selected subject. Cathcart feels the critic is responsible for an assessment of the rhetoric, rather than being an impartial observer with the application of critical standards to a speaker and situation resulting in a basis by which to judge the "most effective" or "ideal" choice.
According to Cathcart:

"Given the nature of rhetorical discourse . . . there is not now and probably never will be anything like a list of scientific standards for measuring any given discourse. There is no formula or blueprint that can be laid over a rhetorical discourse to determine adequacy or fitness, because rhetoric by its very nature is situational and transitory. Rhetoric is always advising us about decisions, beliefs, or feelings in particular circumstances, but circumstances change. Therefore, rhetorical transactions must always be judged in the light of new situations. This is where critical judgment comes in. The critic applies standards of excellence, derived for the most part from successful past performances, to each new situation."

Attempting to determine the basis for effectiveness -- the good or ideal, the speech that generates a response from the audience, the moral speech -- all these standards of effectiveness were derived, in part, from the types of speaking situations occurring at the time. For the study of social movements, it is no longer appropriate to rely solely upon these. New standards of effectiveness must be devised and, when selecting those standards, the critic must consider the situation in which the movement functions. In that respect, the tools of criticism and basis for evaluation are appropriate to the movement being studied.

For example, a critic of the Moral Majority would not attempt to apply the same criteria for effectiveness to this movement as would a critic analyzing the rhetorical potential of the environmental movement or a critic studying
the nuclear freeze movement. The situations are not similar, thus the critical products must reflect those differences.

Andrews, Patton and Cathcart all present assumptions important for this study. First, as Andrews suggests, it is important for the critic to consider the choices made by the speaker(s), the speaker(s) purposes in attempting to determine the rhetorical potential of the movement. In this way, the critic is adapting the critical tools to fit the demands of social movements and other forms of rhetoric.

Second, as Cathcart suggests, the critic must consider the situation from which the rhetoric emerged and in which the movement functioned.

Finally, Patton advises the critic to look at the relationships between rhetoric and perceptions. In this way, the critic can take into account the entire context of the communication phenomenon, he says.

Together, Andrews, Cathcart and Patton provide a useful perspective from which a critic of social movements can evaluate the effectiveness of a movement such as the Moral Majority in meeting its rhetorical potential in response to the demands of a situation.

Rhetorical Potential

When a social movement comes into existence, some person or a group of people perceives a need to either, 1)
propose a change in the status quo, or, 2) oppose a change to that status quo.

Stewart, Smith and Denton suggest that a movement can be identified by the change it seeks. Correspondingly, they identified types of movements based on the different situational variables and obstacles encountered and the use of different channels of communication and persuasive strategies.

Just as the single orator is evaluated for the types of choices made in organizing and delivering a message, so the leader of a movement can be judged on the basis of how well he or she responds to a situation.

The ability of the social movement to effect or prevent change can be determined to be successful based on how well or if the movement is able to achieve its goals. This is a movement's rhetorical potential. Naturally, the potential of one social movement will not be the same as that of another social movement; yet, the value of this concept is that it allows generalizations to be made between similar types of social movements and leaders who faced similar obstacles. Comparisons and contrasts can be made and the rhetorical critic will have one more unifying thread in the quest to generate knowledge about the rhetoric of social movements.

As Stewart, Smith and Denton point out, taking these factors into consideration shows not only what the social
movement is, but how it attempts to achieve its program of change. The how is the rhetorical potential. Given the resources of each movement, i.e. finances, followers, leadership, sanctioning agents, the rhetorical potential can be defined by how the movement's leaders choose to use those resources to achieve the goals of the movement.

Overcoming obstacles, recruiting new members, gaining from new people, raising money, getting exposure in the media, encountering opposition, all potentially could halt the progress of the movement and prevent attainment of goals.

Thus, it is not adequate for the critic to define the nature of a social movement without judging the potential of that movement to effect the desired change. Furthermore, the rhetorical potential of a movement may be evaluated differently during the inception of the movement than during the course of a movement and, different still, after the movement has ended. As the movement functions as an ongoing entity, so must evaluation of its rhetorical potential reflect that continuance.

Additionally, the assessment of rhetorical potential of a social movement is not a question asked only by one person or one group of people. A movement may be evaluated from several different perspectives. The perspective utilized in this study would not be the same as the perspective of a historian or a political scientist or a sociologist, though
similarities do exist.

Rhetorical potential is defined as the ability of a social movement leader or leaders to utilize persuasive strategies to encounter opposition, remove constraints and achieve the desired goals of the movement. If the observations made by Andrews, Cathcart and Patton are significant, then those ideas too can apply to an consideration of rhetorical potential. The critic must consider the choices made by the rhetor, the situations faced by the rhetor and the ongoing relationships between the movement, the movement's rhetors and the community in which the movement functions.

The value of rhetorical potential is that is takes into consideration the ongoing nature of both the social movement and the context in which the movement functions and the interrelated relationships. Furthermore, rhetorical potential also takes into account the need for the leaders of the movement to be flexible, to adapt to different constraints, to respond to new and different challenges and to persist in achieving the goals of the movement.

For the critic to make use of this concept, he or she must do more than look at the content of the rhetor's messages. The critic must take into consideration the context in which the social movement originated, function and ultimately, succeeded or failed. Thus, the critic, as Andrews said, must know what the speaker was trying to do,
what the speaker meant and what the speaker said.

To isolate only the social movement and look at it removed from the context and the influences upon it does not allow for the holistic approach that analysis of social movements today must provide. In this case, with the religious New Right and the Moral Majority, the critic must know the larger movement from which the Moral Majority came, the movements that had gone before it and the events which, in the mind of Jerry Falwell, led to the inception of the movement. The critic must understand not only what Jerry Falwell said and to whom he said it, but also, why he delivered that message, what he actually intended to do as a result of that message and who he aimed to reach. In terms of Jerry Falwell as chief spokesperson of the Moral Majority, it becomes necessary to evaluate why he served in that role and assess his rhetorical potential in that role.

In the review of social movement literature in Chapter One of this study, Herbert Simons' article on leader-centered persuasion in social movements was briefly discussed. This chapter will discuss the effectiveness of the Moral Majority in terms of rhetorical potential by applying the concept of rhetorical potential both to the movement as a whole and to Jerry Falwell as a leader.

To evaluate rhetorical potential of the Moral Majority, it is felt one must consider two key elements: 1) the emergence and chronology and context of the movement, which
has been discussed at length in previous chapter and will only be reviewed briefly; 2) the context in which the movement functioned; 3) the rhetorical potential of Jerry Falwell and the rhetorical potential of the Moral Majority. Correspondingly, the next section of this chapter will review each, followed by discussion and summary.

In light of these perspectives, this chapter will show that a different Moral Majority emerged than the one most people saw on television or read about during the early 1980s. What appeared to be a single-issue organization, limited in scope, actually emerged as a complex, multi-faceted organization, carefully structured, addressing many audiences and disseminating many messages. Why and how those perspectives differed is the story of this chapter.

**Application to the Moral Majority**

**Emergence and Context of the Moral Majority.** Because the Moral Majority was one of the first organized examples of the "preachers into politics movement", on the part of the conservatives, Falwell's message, initially, seemed unique. Coming at the end of two decades of societal unrest, Jerry Falwell seemed unrelenting in his quest to organize the Moral Majority in every state.

Backed by the computerized networking skills of Richard Viguerie and the organizational prowess of the New Right, the Moral Majority was quickly able to capture the attention
of the press and America. The name Moral Majority caught people's attention. Falwell spoke aggressively to the media and public statements seemed designed to appeal to the majority of the middle class. Like many other Fundamentalist and evangelical ministers, Falwell built his empire primarily through television; his weekly program was already in place by the time the Moral Majority was formed -- and by an aggressive direct mail, direct contact campaign.\textsuperscript{10}

"Do you approve of homosexuality being taught in the public schools as an acceptable lifestyle?" demanded one Moral Majority letter? Falwell hoped the answer would be no -- and that "no" would lead the reader on.\textsuperscript{11}

A letter sending a membership card to a supporter stated:

"We cannot let the liberals gain any in Congress!

And I believe that the overwhelming majority of Americans feel the same way you and I do about this. . .

Homosexual teachers who are flaunting perversion have invaded the classrooms of our schools and the pulpits of our churches. . .

Smut peddlers sell their pornographic materials under the protection of the courts of our land."\textsuperscript{12}

After Falwell gained the attention of the public and the media, he was able to get to the real business, constructing an agenda of social issues heavy on emotional appeal. His agenda included a stance against women's rights, against abortion and against any form of family life other
than the traditional man-woman-child unit. It was guaranteed to provoke the ire of Falwell's favorite target populations -- feminists and gays.

Falwell's arguments were not without contradiction. One of his greatest inanimate enemies yet at the same time, his greatest tool, was television. He loved to tell audiences how television was responsible for helping communicate moral decadence to the youth of America.

Consider the following example from *Listen America!*

"We hear much about child abuse today. But moral Americans fail to realize that one of the greatest and most dangerous forms of child abuse is to pour dirty, filthy words and pictures into their minds; these words and pictures eventually ruin them and wreck them for life. This is what television is doing to many of our children. . .

If we do not control television, it will control us. The sinful and immoral condition of our society is the source of the despicable state of television. I believe that an indifferent moral majority in America is the cause." 13

He even participated for a time in 1981 with the Reverend Donald Wildmon in a campaign protesting the sex on prime time television programming, forming the Coalition for Better Television. 14

Interestingly, it was television which helped boost Falwell's Moral Majority into national prominence. Before and after the 1980 election, it was television that helped spread the word about the stunning "victories" the Moral Majority had helped create in the 1980 election.
According to Benjamin Armstrong, the man who coined the phrase "electronic church" and the director of the National Religious Broadcasters, Inc., "studies show that 47% of the American people watch a religious program or listen to one at least once a week. "Television evangelism has come of age in the last five years. It used to be a Bible belt phenomenon."\(^{15}\)

An interesting thing happened to the content of Falwell's message between the 1950s and 60s and the 1980 election. The tone changed dramatically due, in part, to Falwell's changing perception of the situation and his belief that different strategies were needed to make an impact.

In 1976, during a special church service commemorating the Bicentennial, Falwell had sounded a bit like some of his right-wing forefathers. Speaking out against the threat he perceived from communism he said:

"I would vote for the candidate who would take a courageous stand against communism... We have taken, by choice, a position of subservience to those monsters in the Kremlin... I'd rather be dead than Red and I believe that every American ought to take that same position."\(^{16}\)

During the same service, he hinted at the need for political involvement by Fundamentalists:

"The idea of religion and politics don't mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running their own country. If any place in the world we need Christianity, it's in Washington. And that's why preachers long
since need to get over than intimidation forced upon us by liberals, that if we mention anything about politics, we are degrading our ministry."

Jerry Falwell perceived no choice in the situation. He felt mandated to speak out on politics and advocate the Fundamentalist approach to life, foreign policy and social issues. He believed that as long as America refused to turn back to God and the principles upon which the nation was founded, the nation could never again prosper.

Goodman and Price describe his rationalization:

"Falwell says in spite of this dismal picture of an America declining in morality, there is hope: "God has not finished with us as a nation' because there are millions of Americans who love God, decency, and Bible morality. Furthermore, America is the only hope for Jews in today's world and America is the last logical base for world evangelization. . . Who is going to step into the breach to save America? Is there someone who is able to rally the 'moral Americans who still believe in decency, the home, the family, Bible morality, the free enterprise system, and all the great ideals that are the cornerstone of this great nation to make their voice (sic) heard across this land and in the halls of Congress and the White House?' The answer is not long coming in the Moral Majority brochure. Waiting in the wings is a man who has recognized the 'impending crisis' and man of proven leadership and true vision'."

Falwell's response to the impending crisis, was the formation of the Moral Majority and identification of the enemy. He even had a name for the enemy -- secular humanist.

Falwell angrily blasted the unseen secular humanists. Calling secular humanists, homosexuals, drug dealers and feminists a "godless minority," he attacked in fund-raising
letters, pamphlets, interviews on television, and books, including *Listen America*!

With this increasingly hostile assault, came a strong effort to influence national politics. Prior to the 1980 election, Falwell and the Moral Majority worked aggressively to spread their preferences for candidates to every registered voter. Perhaps their strongest feat was the registration of two million previously unregistered voters. More than one political analyst conceded that this maneuver contributed heavily to the conservative sweep of the polls. Falwell called the election the greatest day for the cause of conservatism in his life.

Goodman and Price noted the change in Falwell by comparing his pre-election rhetoric when he referred to the Democrats in power as a "godless minority of treacherous individuals," to a characterization of Falwell written in 1980 by Patricia Pingry. "No one ever hears Dr. Falwell say anything derogatory about any person, no matter what the differences." Clearly, Falwell went on the offensive first, identifying and marking "the enemy" and verbally provoking them. This is important in terms of rhetorical potential because it helps create a different climate in which the rhetor functions. By observing how Falwell was or was not able to respond to challenges, the critic can again measure the rhetorical potential of the social movement leader.
Falwell and the Moral Majority, buoyed by their political successes, pressed forward failing to note the growing resentment the Moral Majority aggressiveness was generating. The media, never quite enchanted with Falwell, delighted in reporting the details of National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) "hit lists". The problem for the Moral Majority was that most Americans, convinced that Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority was the New Right, mistakenly gave the Moral Majority full credit for the establishment of and successes of the "hit lists." Thus, Falwell began to be the target of hostile feedback from those people who blamed the Moral Majority for NCPAC action. Additionally, the politicians who lost elections due to the efforts of NCPAC, became more convinced that action needed to be taken to stop the Fundamentalists. An example of this reaction was the May, 1982 conference in Charleston, West Virginia where the Moral Majority more often than not, was singled out as the entire new religious right.\(^{22}\)

At times, Falwell seemed to want to encourage this hostility. When he made statements like the following from the pulpit of Thomas Road Baptist Church, he knew the media would pay attention. Listeners were unable to make a distinction between Falwell the minister and Falwell the founder of the Moral Majority:

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to have 535 Jesse Helms around? Wouldn't it be great? You know, someone asked me the other day from the press, what do you think of Jesse Helms? I said, I love
him and respect him. How much do you trust him? I said, if my wife and I were called out to heaven today, and I knew it was going to happen, I'd be willing to trust my children to Jesse Helms. Now that's a lot of trust. 23

Falwell frequently used the Thomas Road pulpit as an opportunity for his views on politics and morality in addition to the Scriptures. The comments he made, however, were not always just for the present audience. More often than not, the comments were directed at an expanded audience watching on television or reading the comments in the newspaper. These were the people Falwell felt were essential to have as followers if his movement was to succeed. "How it thrilled my heart to hear our President in his inaugural address say, this is a nation under God," he said in a morning service. 24

By late 1981 and 1982, the liberals and Democrats were regaining composure and were ready to fight Falwell head-to-head. The 1982 elections, failures for Falwell and the New Right, clearly showed that the Moral Majority had alienated many people. Clearly, the Moral Majority had not responded appropriately to the situation and had not maximized the existing rhetorical potential prior to 1980. While the "hit lists", affiliation with NCPAC and the inflammatory statements made by Falwell gained considerable media attention and made many people aware of the existence of the movement, in the end, these acts were detrimental to the movement, at least as far as the 1982 elections were
concerned.

After 1982 elections and the poor showing of the conservatives, many people mistakenly assumed the Moral Majority was politically dead. Overtly, Falwell did nothing to dispel this notion; yet, covertly, operations were as strong as ever. Sensing the errors of the first three years of the movement's existence, Falwell began a shift of strategy.25

Realizing the need to maintain good relations with the White House and President Reagan, the conservatives continued to "court" the president. In return for his implicit approval, the New Right promised their support in the 1984 election. Prior to the 1980 election, the promised support of a group of Fundamentalists Protestants would have not been a tantalizing reward. In the period between elections, the religious movement possessed a substantial bargaining chip. Lewis verbalized the significance of Fundamentalist support of the Presidential election and, in turn, Reagan's affiliation with the New Right. Referring to the alliance as Reagan's most profound achievement as a politician, Lewis commented:

"He (Reagan) has given political legitimacy, and power, to religious fundamentalists who want to make America into their image as a 'Christian nation'. . . .

"Of course we are aware of the rise of Protestant evangelism, the success of Jerry Falwell and other right-wing television preachers. But many of us in New York and Boston and Washington still
think of it as a religious phenomenon on the fringe of politics. It is not on the anymore."

With Reagan's re-election, the Moral Majority seemed content to pursue congressional and public approval of their social agenda. While the topics of homosexuality, pornography, prayer in schools, feminism and foreign policy continued to dominate their rhetorical agenda, the Moral Majority operated with different rhetorical strategies than before. Still stinging from the attacks of liberals, the Fundamentalists realized there was fence mending to take care of.

Additionally, there were internal struggles among those affiliated with Moral Majority. Many Christians resented the abrasive tactics of Falwell and many, including long-time evangelist Billy Graham, spoke out against their tactics. Protesting the dangers from television evangelism, Graham added himself to the growing list of prominent evangelists who opposed the new surge of political activism by the Christians.27 Evangelist Pat Robertson, anticipating his bid for the presidency in 1988, began to distance himself from the Moral Majority.28

Clergy of the mainline denominations, many of whom had suffered reductions in membership when parishioners stayed home to watch television evangelists such as Falwell and Robertson and suffered reductions in income when these same people sent money to television evangelists, resented being
lumped in the same category as Falwell and the Moral Majority.

Finally, Falwell realized the name Moral Majority was no longer representative for what he felt the movement still needed to achieve. In a reassessment of rhetorical potential, he announced a restructuring of the movement. Once again, his move was reactive rather than proactive. Claiming the press had "bloodied and beaten" the name of the Moral Majority, Falwell announced early in 1986 that he would merge the group into a new organization with broader goals and a less controversial name.\textsuperscript{29}

Realizing the Moral Majority had played a major role in the surge of conservatism, Falwell said the Moral Majority would continue to exist but would no longer be the flagship organization for Falwell. He said he was incorporating the Moral Majority into the Liberty Federation, "as a parent organization, including not only the Moral Majority and its 'strictly moral' issues, but also such far-ranging subjects as President's Reagan's space-defense proposal, budget-balancing plans and the international fight against Communism."\textsuperscript{30}

Clearly, Falwell's incorporation of the Moral Majority into the Liberty Federation was designed to divert public attention from the Moral Majority image. The move gave a new name to an organization with the same social agenda as the Moral Majority. Falwell had realized, too
late, that the Moral Majority had alienated many people and had generated much negative publicity and he sought to rectify this by changing the name --switching the attention of the public to another organization with a fresh image.

The Moral Majority's rhetoric achieved what its leaders hoped it would. It gained the attention of the media and provided a vision to inspire and guide the Fundamentalists to action in politics. Journalist Dudley Clendenin wrote: "In organizing to arouse a particular electorate, to shape the way it views issues, to register its members to vote, to give it a common language and means of communication, to use it to influence law and policy at state and national levels, to raise funds to support certain candidates and to select and train other candidates for public officer, Mr. Falwell has created something overly similar to a political party." 31

Millions of previously unregistered voters were registered to vote and the Moral Majority was successful in targeting for defeat several political candidates -- most notably Sen. Birch Bayh of Indiana and Sen. Thomas MacIntyre of New Hampshire. Yet, the organization did not respond effectively to the rhetorical potential that existed.

Chapter Two has already presented the argument that Falwell was persuaded to become politically active by situational factors, including the 1962 and 1963 Supreme
Court rulings against school prayer and Bible reading and the 1973 Supreme Court ruling legalizing abortion.

To understand the effectiveness of this social movement, the critic must take the situation into consideration. Not only must the characteristics of the situation be described, as was done in Chapter Two; the situation in the mind of the rhetor must be part of the evaluation of the rhetoric.

Correspondingly, the choices that were made by the rhetor(s) can be examined as responses to the situation and the critic may evaluate the appropriateness of those responses. In this way, the critic can attempt to get inside the mind of the rhetor, using rhetorical data as evidence to support claims about what the speaker's purpose(s) may have been. More than categorizing, it allows the critic to make comparisons between responses made by the rhetor(s) and choices that could have been made based upon the situation.

In this way, the critic is not isolating one factor — such as the audience or the content of a speech for example. The critic considers each of these variables: speaker, audiences, text, context, in terms of their reciprocal relationships. To further extend the effectiveness of this method, Patton's notion of the holistic approach, i.e. the entire context of the communication phenomenon, is the overriding model for this analysis.
Moral Authority:
The Rhetorical Potential of Jerry Falwell.

Herbert W. Simons provided a leader-centered conception of persuasion in his essay, "Requirements, Problems and Strategies: A Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements." Simons said a social movement leader must fulfill functional requirements. He focused on the intentional, symbolic acts of the movement's leader and that person's ability to solve rhetorical problems via rhetorical strategies.

Simons' theory is insightful for a consideration of the rhetorical potential of Jerry Falwell. Falwell was so closely linked with the Moral Majority and was the movement's only major spokesperson that a consideration of his abilities as a leader is almost invariably the same as the rhetorical potential of the movement. Where Falwell excelled, so did the Moral Majority. Correspondingly, his failures belonged to the movement. This "dual personality" is extremely significant when considering Moral Majority rhetorical potential and is the reason both the movement's rhetorical potential and Falwell's are discussed in one section of this chapter.

A critic cannot consider the rhetorical potential of a movement without attention to the rhetorical potential of the movement's leader.

The following questions will be addressed: 1) Why did Falwell function as the only visible leader of the Moral
Majority? 2) What did Jerry Falwell gain rhetorically as the Moral Majority founder and president?

Simons says the three main requirements for the leaders of movements are to attract, maintain and mold workers into an efficiently organized unit; secure adoption of their product in the larger structure; react to resistance generated in the established order.

He says the leader's greatest challenge is to continually balance conflicting demands on his position and the movement he represents. The key is to evaluate how the leader adapts the demands and the basis for evaluating his or her performance.

Jerry Falwell is an intermediate leader. His intent has never been to revolt; rather, he has sought to privately influence a return to high moral standards on the part of Americans. Yet, he can be classified as intermediate rather than moderate because of his tendency to display militant techniques. An example is his effort to distance the Moral Majority from the status quo -- a militant characteristic. Consider this example:

"The hope of reversing the trends of decay in our republic now lies with the Christian public in America. We cannot expect help from the liberals. They certainly are not going to call our nation back to righteousness and neither are the pornographers, the smut peddlers those who are corrupting our youth."33

Falwell was an effective choice as the single leader of the Moral Majority for several reasons. First, he was not a
political persona (prior to 1980) and he could therefore, espouse a conservative ideology without being tied to one particular party. Although Falwell and the Moral Majority have most closely identified with the Republican Party, the Moral Majority was sold as a non-partisan organization and Falwell needed to have contributions from people of all political parties.

His status as a television minister allowed him to bring along his existing television audience and to have access to the skills and technology needed to reach thousands of other people through the mass media. For the Moral Majority to be successful, the organization needed to solicit small sums of money via direct mail from many thousands of people on a consistent basis. Falwell was able to do this.

Another aspect of his position as a minister was that he was fervent on the topic of morality and had a rhetorical style dominated by the use of emotional proof. He held the Fundamentalist worldview that relied upon stark contrasts -- good versus evil, right versus wrong and Christian versus sinner. The topic of morality seemed to natural and who better to express it that a person with the sanctioning power of God. Falwell received his credibility from the fact that he was a minister and the fact that he alone held the answer for salvation of society. To introduce other key characters spokespersons into the scenario would only serve
to confuse and possibly distort the important message Falwell wanted to convey.

Finally, one must accept the possibility that Falwell truly believes what he said and was driven to communicate those truths to people. This would also explain his reluctance to let anyone else direct the Moral Majority and share the spokesperson role.

The Rhetoric of Moral Authority. The word morality connotes goodness, purity, the right: godliness. The name Moral Majority was deliberately selected to convey that impression. 34

To understand the Moral Majority message and how it was effectively conveyed, it is necessary to first understand the Fundamentalist worldview. In this section of the chapter, that worldview will be briefly outlined in an attempt to describe the concept of moral authority and the relationship of that concept to the social movement's ability to persuade and maintain true believers and to win new converts.

To the Fundamentalist, the Bible is the literal manifestation of God's word. To be a Christian, the Fundamentalists believe one must be "born again," i.e. to publicly confess Jesus Christ as their Savior and to ask forgiveness of their sins.

The process of conversion, i.e., the change from the old life to the new life, is usually very dramatic involving
the abandonment of sinful, human behaviors and the
demonstration of a more Christlike demeanor. For born again
Christians, it is to forsake the old life for a new one.

Fundamentalists look to the Bible as a blueprint for
life. Most believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible,
meaning the Bible is completely accurate as written and
modern interpretations and translations detract from its
truth and relevance. 35

McBrien describes the fundamentalist movement:

"The revivalist believed that the
universe is divided into the realm of God and
the realm of Satan, the righteous and the
unrighteous, the saved and the lost. Ambiguity
was rare and transitions were never gradual.
The conversion experience involved a sudden,
radical transformation from one condition
to its opposite." 36

Fundamentalists emerged from the modern revivalist
movement in the late 19th century. McBrien says the movement
took shape after World War I with the Scopes trial of 1925
its first major battle.

Beginning with radio and then television,
Fundamentalists became expert at using the media to reach
thousands of people. By the 1940's, according to McBrien,
the most popular radio program in the country was the "Old
Fashioned Revival Hour" with Charles E. Fuller. Falwell has
admitted to being influenced both by the strategy and
theology of Fuller. 37

The chronology of Fundamentalists and television has
already been described in an earlier chapter. Although
Falwell was not the first conservative minister to speak out on politics; it was not until Falwell and the New Right produced the Moral Majority that conservative Protestant opinions on politics were taken seriously.

Clearly, the movement was not a "majority"; however, morality, and its connotations were, next to family, the ultimate God terms in the Moral Majority movement. Morality was clearly and repeatedly operationally defined by Falwell in terms of its antithesis. The supreme antithesis was the secular humanist. Falwell's treatment of the concept of morality fits in well with Fundamentalist theology, i.e. what is moral is good, what is not moral is bad. Morality is Christianity. America has ceased to be moral, therefore America is bad. The moral is clearly in the realm of God; the immoral belongs to Satan.

By establishing standards for morality under the name Moral Majority, a supposedly political movement, Jerry Falwell defined clearly in Christian terms how the moral person ought to live. If a person was to be moral, he or she should be a Christian, a Protestant Fundamentalist Christian, according to Falwell. This moral authority -- supposedly political in nature, relied upon the literacy of the Bible. Thus, the sanctioning power of the movement, its moral authority, was Judeo Christian and religious in nature -- not political and moral.
The final proof of the true religious nature of the movement came in 1986, when Falwell announced that Moral Majority would be known as the Liberty Federation. Falwell was successful in meeting his rhetorical potential in that he was able to create and communicate a unique brand of morality to his public and gain acceptance from an expanded audience. He was able to maintain and enlarge his audience and he gained "converts" thus broadening his base of support. In a measure, he was even able to gain acceptance as one of the elder statesman of American Protestantism. This was demonstrated clearly by his role as "savior" during the scandal involving the PTL ministry in the spring of 1987.39

In this respect, Falwell was successful in achieving his rhetorical potential. He was able to sustain an audience who had believed in him throughout the Moral Majority campaign and he was able to go from relative obscurity to national prominence among the American public. Though it is true that his image was not always communicated positively to the public (especially in the early 1980 after the Moral Majority had aggressively played a role in their first presidential election) he was able to adjust and produce an altered image which found more positive response from the general public.

In terms of legislative and judicial reform, Falwell was not as successful. At least for the time being the 1973
Supreme Court Roe vs. Wade decision stands and abortions are still legal in the United States. School prayer is unconstitutional and the moral condition of the nation is not significantly different than when he first began his campaign. Yet, despite his inability to achieve these specific reforms, the Moral Majority must to be counted a success in terms of political clout. Because of the New Right and the Moral Majority influence in the last two national elections, Fundamentalists are a significant and substantial voting block. It will be interesting to see how this block is courted by presidential candidates in the 1988 election. Though religion may not be a central issue of this election as it was during the last two; the Fundamentalist vote will most certainly play a major role.

The very fact that the organization encountered opposition from liberals, in the form of People for the American Way and other liberal lobbies, is evidence that they were considered seriously as a potential agent of social change. However, this was not in itself sufficient to meet the rhetorical potential. In fact, Falwell often felt the movement was not fulfilling its rhetorical potential to the extent that he changed rhetorical strategies and sought to change the image of the organization, witness the 1986 name change of the Moral Majority to the Liberty Federation as a dramatic example of an attempt to modify the image by changing its name.
Falwell made and continues to make many attempts to restructure his public persona. After initial negative reaction, some of it hostile, he attempted a subtle modification of style. He still was outspoken and he still was antagonistic; however, he had realized that more dignified behaviors were demanded.

What had initially been his biggest asset -- his dual role as minister of a powerful electronic church and leader of the Fundamentalist political crusade -- now was working against him. When the New Right was charged with using dirty politics -- Falwell was held responsible.

Much of the problem the Moral Majority had in becoming involved with politics stems from the fact Fundamentalists were not traditionally active in politics. Nor, were the Fundamentalists welcomed to the political arena. Certainly, ministers had played a role in politics before Falwell and certainly they will in the future. But, for the Fundamentalists, a movement of the proportion was the first of its kind. Certainly Falwell was accurate when, lashing out about the negative reaction given the New Right by the liberals, he said when liberal preachers decide to speak out in politics no one objects.

The major problem may have been pointed out by Richard John Neuhaus in his book The Naked Public Square. Writing on the role of the Fundamentalists, he supported their raison d'être; yet, maintained, the "Moral majoritarians must be
admitted but they must play by the rules."40

What surprised liberals, was that the Fundamentalists
not only did not play by the rules; they created their own.
And, that is where the hostility began. The Fundamentalists
utilize their pre-existing network of support and hoped to
capitalize on the strength of this audience while attracting
a new and larger one.

So, for one very basic reason, the Fundamentalists
could not have been expected to demonstrate the political
savvy of a seasoned lobbying organization. However, because
of their expertise with the electronic media and networking
ability, they seemed to be able to bypass some of the
fundamental rules of politics. In doing this, they
gained the hostility and resentment of the established cadre
of lobbyists. Second, the lobbying effort of the
fundamentalists -- the Moral Majority -- was unlike many
other traditional lobbying entities.

The Fundamentalists weren't really sure what direction
to go. Not unlike many other PACS, they were based on
ideology -- an ideology that described a nation overcome
with sin and in need of restoration.

In contrast to many politically active groups, the
Fundamentalists were driven by dual motivations -- the need
to have a voice politically. Also, they were persuaded to
believe that a gift to the Moral Majority was not so
different from a tithe to their local church. Somehow, they
felt their money achieved two purposes.

For Fundamentalists, political involvement once would have been considered sinful. In order to overcome the belief that politics was a dirty business and no place for Christians, Falwell had to communicate to audiences an compelling reason for donating. To achieve this, he had to make it seem natural for the Christians to become involved.

Salvation was a word with which most people in Falwell's church and television audience were familiar. If Falwell could link the idea of salvation of one's soul with the salvation of a nation -- if he could be successful in communicating that analogy, then the concept could work. After all, he would be asking them to do the same thing he had asked them to do all along -- send money.

Where the Moral Majority failed was in letting true believers see too much of politics and too little of the flag-waving glory of the salvation of America. True believers of the Moral Majority were enthusiastic until Falwell began looking less than credible on national television. They did not quit listening to him or sending money to the Thomas Road Baptist Church. They did start to question, was his extensive involvement in the Moral Majority. That is when the movement began to fall apart.

The movement could withstand opposition from the outside; internal opposition began to tear at the seams.
Where Falwell once counted it an advantage that he could disseminate so much information via the electronic media; he now blamed the media for destroying the Moral Majority. The relationship, once tolerable, was now adversarial.

A third reason the Moral Majority failed to maximize its rhetorical potential was that responses by the movement's leadership were, for the most part, reactive instead of proactive. Falwell hesitated too long before modifying his antagonistic rhetorical stance after the 1980 election. A careful analysis of his audience prior to the election would have provided information that changed his rhetorical stance.

However, whether he did or did not have this information is of little interest. The fact remains he waited too long to distance the movement from the more abrasive factions of the New Right, notably NCPAC.

A move by Falwell to focus attention on the positive aspects of Moral Majority instead of demonstrating how far removed the Moral Majority was from the mainstream of American life, may have salvaged the movement. By distancing his politics, thus those of the movement, from the mainstream of America, Falwell alienated the movement and created ideological barriers between the true believers and the people he had hoped to convert.

Finally, the Moral Majority relied too heavily upon a source of authority not accepted by many of the people
they hoped to convert. When Falwell outlined the drama he felt would take place, when he offered choices for a course of direction to the audiences, he relied upon the audience's acceptance of the same fundamental beliefs he held.

Certainly, he made attempts to separate the Fundamentalist Christian perspective from the ideology of the Moral Majority. Consider this early statement about the Christian roots of the Moral Majority: "We formed (Moral Majority) for the explicit purpose of preventing a violation of that principle (separation of church and state). It is a totally political organization where we (religious people) as private citizens can participate."41

Fundamentalists rely upon a Biblical interpretation and the Bible for direction in the course of everyday choices. They believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. Often they refer to themselves as "Biblical moralists."42

When the Fundamentalist mind encounters a decision-making situation, the natural tendency is to do what is in accordance with Biblical teachings. The "moral authority" advocated by Falwell, and the basis for the ideology of the Moral Majority, came from Fundamentalist, Biblical principles.
Summary and Conclusions

This chapter focused on the question: How well did the Moral Majority meet their rhetorical potential in response to the demands of the rhetorical situation it faced? Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority were not entirely successful in meeting the rhetorical potential of the movement.

To achieve success, the work of the Moral Majority required Falwell to constantly adapt to the demands of aggressor rhetors as well as inflexible or hostile situations. When Falwell finally achieved some status as an elder statesman of Protestantism, he did so as the result of the misfortune of a fellow minister.

The most effective rhetorical strategies demonstrated by the movement related to the concept of moral authority. The concept of moral authority as practiced by the Moral Majority is crucial to an understanding of the Moral Majority worldview. In some respects, it is the Moral Majority worldview.

When Jerry Falwell was able to communicate the rhetoric of moral authority to a significant audience and maintain that audience, he met the rhetorical potential of the Moral Majority.

The times Falwell failed, for example with the early aggressive tactics of the Moral Majority, were largely due to his inability to respond proactively. One recent newspaper account referred to Falwell as "Puritan turned
statesman.\textsuperscript{43} That assessment is largely accurate. I would maintain that Falwell's intent has always been to be regarded as a statesman; he needed to develop the political skills necessary to survive. He has achieved this.

Other times Falwell failed to maximize his rhetorical potential, thus the potential of the Moral Majority, were when he relied too heavily upon his Fundamentalist background and supplied religious arguments in the name of a political movement. The abortion issue is an excellent example of this. When an argument for incorporation of moral values into to public life is made that is not necessarily the same as an argument for incorporation of religion into public life. Falwell did the latter under the name of the former. Since abortion is not primarily a religious issue, to offer religious solutions in the name of moral philosophy is highly suspect. Falwell erred when he called his movement the Moral Majority, an ostensibly political movement, and offered strictly religious answers for moral problems.
NOTES


4 Ibid.


8 Ibid.


11 Moral Majority letter

12 Moral Majority letter


17. Ibid, p. 91.


20. Ibid.


30. Ibid.


33 Falwell, p. 18.


36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 McBrien distinguishes between religion, politics and morality in the following manner: "Working from the general to the particular: there is, first of all, the fundamental relationship between morality and moral values, on the one hand, and politics, on the other. Then, there is the somewhat narrower relationship between religion and politics --- 'narrower' because it is possible to have moral convictions and behave morally without being religious. . . Thirdly, there is the relationship between a specific religion and politics. . . Fourthly, there is the relationship between religious professionals (for example priests, ministers, rabbis, nuns, mullahs) and politics." (McBrien, p. 27) This distinction is useful in understanding the ambiguity of Jerry Falwell's references to morality. It is my argument that Jerry Falwell really meant religion --- Fundamentalist religion, when he urged followers to return to moral principles. His rhetoric of moral authority is certainly theology specific.

39 Falwell's approval rating was significantly affected by the spring, 1987, PTL ministry scandal. First, Falwell was able to make the appearance of a knight in white armor, stepping in to rescue the soiled and tarnished ministry from the iniquities of the Bakkers. However, as a 13 July, 1987 Newsweek poll indicates, only 38 percent of those surveyed ranked Falwell favorably. His constant appeals for money, both for the PTL Club and his own ministry, evidently left a negative impression on the minds of most viewers.


CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Moral Majority is a significant social movement reflective of today's conservative rhetoric. An organization formed to involve Fundamentalist Christians in politics, the Moral Majority demonstrated a broad social and political agenda. Issues reflected the desires of this segment of the population to "restore America to moral sanity" and included the traditional man-woman-child family unit as the archetypal metaphor in the rhetorical appeals for restoration.

The Moral Majority merits study because it is a contemporary movement reflective of a new conservatism in American politics and because, its leader, Jerry Falwell demonstrated use of both successful and unsuccessful rhetorical tactics and strategies previously not used by Fundamentalist Christians. Additionally, the movement merits study because it failed to realize its greatest rhetorical potential. I am not making the claim that the Moral Majority completely failed as a rhetorical movement. The movement was highly successful in calling attention to a powerful segment or subculture of American society. Some have called it the most significant social movement of the 20th century.¹

¹
The Moral Majority was organized in 1979 by Jerry Falwell, a Baptist minister with the assistance of leaders in the larger New Right movement. Falwell assembled the organization with the intent of providing a vehicle to express Fundamentalist Christian views in politics without loosing the tax-exempt status of "The Old Time Gospel Hour," his television ministry.²

Though he had been a minister since the 1950s, Falwell had never considered becoming involved in politics until, as he says, he was driven to it by the societal unrest of the 1970s and the Supreme Court decision prohibiting school prayer and finally, the 1973 Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. For Falwell, that was the precipitating factor needed to move him to action.³

The New Right, also, had been waiting in the wings. Stalwarts of the New Right, including Richard Viguerie, had helped Jimmy Carter become elected president in 1976. Interestingly, it was this same lobby, demonstrating considerably more political savvy, who contributed to the solid defeat of Carter in 1980 by heavily endorsing Ronald Reagan.

Carter apparently fell from grace because conservatives were not particularly fond of his stance on key moral issues. When Conservatives began making loud noises over the airwaves in disagreement with the President, Carter lost considerable votes. Carter took a pro-stance on abortion --
perhaps the biggest social issue for the New Right. Therefore, the New Right and the now-formed Moral Majority, were at least partially responsible for registering previously unregistered voters and bringing Reagan to the White House.

The election of 1980 was their most dramatic victory. And, since it was also their entrance into the world of politics, it took many liberals by surprise. It was almost one year before the liberals could institute a response to the Moral Majority and the New Right. ⁴

Meanwhile, riding high on the wave of their successes, Falwell and the Moral Majority became openly critical of liberal policies in general. Secular humanism became their devil and while Falwell never clearly defined it, he linked the term to the name of any liberal politician he wanted to discredit. ⁵

It wasn't long before the Moral Majority had enemies. Two things were happening. First, the movement was being realized by liberals as significant enough to defeat and members of the movement discovered they were not really a majority. Though Jerry Falwell was successful at attracting many "converts" to the ranks of the Moral Majority, he was also finding out exactly what the Moral Majority's association with the NCPAC in 1980 had cost him.

By 1984, many people assumed Moral Majority was no longer effective. The 1982 elections had been less than
successful for the Conservatives who hoped to see much stronger social legislation passed in Congress. Going into the 1984 election, they were low-key; not nearly in the newspapers and on television as much as they had been prior to 1980.

Then, religion, and, along with it, the Moral Majority were catapulted back into the headlines. Both major 1984 presidential candidates, Walter Mondale, and incumbent Ronald Reagan, became engaged in an open debate over the role of religion in politics. Additionally, the Democratic choice for vice-presidential candidate, Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro made controversial statements regarding abortion. Jesse Jackson, a black minister, ran on the Democratic ticket as a candidate for president.

By the time the election was over, the issue of religion had been thoroughly dissected by all candidates. The significance of this, when considering the impact of the Moral Majority, is that the movement again was instrumental in bringing about a wave of conservativism that had not been seen to date in American politics. And, though the movement was not entirely successful in implementing the social and political change its membership desired, the way was paved for other religious groups to have equal voice in influencing the outcome of an election.

What went wrong with the Moral Majority was that the movement began to represent an unacceptable point of
view. Because Falwell and the other members of the Moral Majority (and the New Right) so vehemently felt their way was the only way, they alienated citizens who may have accepted them. For example, Falwell publicly presented a strict Fundamentalist perspective regarding the role of women.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the rhetoric of Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority in an effort to contribute information to the knowledge of the rhetoric of social movements. This study is a rhetorical criticism of an ongoing social movement, a movement which may or may not achieve all its goals.

An eclectic methodology was employed and the study centered on two key rhetorical theories. "The Rhetorical Situation" by Lloyd F. Bitzer and "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," by Ernest Bormann were selected for the first two chapters. The final chapter applied essays by Robert Cathcart, James Andrews and John H. Patton to answer the question of rhetorical potential.

The study focused on three primary questions: (1) What rhetorical situations have the leaders of the Moral Majority addressed? (2) What fantasy themes and rhetorical visions are portrayed in the Moral Majority rhetoric? and (3) How well did the Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority meet their rhetorical potential in response to the demands of the
situation? Before discussing the results and claims of this study, it is appropriate to briefly review each of the preceding chapters.

Chapter I (Introduction) established the significance of the Moral Majority as a social movement. The chapter traced the path of Jerry Falwell from minister of the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, to president and founder of the Moral Majority, Inc., a political lobbying organization founded in 1979. Today, Falwell is still in control of the Liberty Federation, the new name he gave the Moral Majority in 1986. Additionally, he still serves as chancellor of Liberty University and continues to appear on his nationally syndicated program, "The Old Time Gospel Hour." Since March 1987, he has been chairman of the board of Jim Bakker's former "PTL Club." Falwell took over the ministry after Bakker stepped down as the result of a sex scandal. Falwell is still very much in the spotlight; the addition of Bakker's PTL network has given him a new audience to promote his Fundamentalist beliefs and the Liberty Federation.

Background data relevant to the formation of the Moral Majority were presented. The Moral Majority evolved to represent larger religious New Right and the movement became the first organized political effort on the part of Fundamentalists and Evangelicals.
Major questions upon which the study focused were raised and the methodologies used in the study were described. Additionally, the literature pertaining to social movements and the New Right was reviewed and information about material collected for the study was presented.

Chapter II (The Rhetorical Situation) addressed the question, What rhetorical situations have the leaders of the Moral Majority addressed? Using the rhetorical situation of Lloyd Bitzer, this chapter applied Bitzer's criteria for a rhetorical situation to the Moral Majority and discussed the elements of audience, exigence and constraints as they operated in the situation faced by Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority.

The chapter argued the perspective that, for the leaders of this social movement, the situation played a dominant role in the formation of and the continuance of the movement. The ability of Falwell to respond to the situation and to operate within the situation are central to the outcome of the movement.

The primary exigence being faced by Jerry Falwell is the moral decline of the United States. Falwell frequently cited several precipitating factors which for him signaled the end of his role as only a minister and the beginning of his voice in politics. 8

The primary audiences addressed by Falwell are those people within the American public who are already
Christians and who already respond favorably to his social/political agenda. More specifically, he sought and successfully registered many previously unregistered voters. When these people went to the polls in 1980, the result was a Conservative sweep sending a "message" the liberal establishment that the votes of Christians could be of as much significance as the votes of liberals.

The primary audiences Falwell sought to motivate consisted of mostly white, middle class, conservative individuals who were able to contribute both financially and politically to help transform the Moral Majority into a significant political force. In this respect, the Moral Majority did meet its rhetorical potential. Falwell transformed his local and state support into a national power base and began a campaign that operated not only at the national level, but in state and local elections also.

Legislators comprised a second audience. His goal was to transform the Moral Majority agenda into legislation. School prayer was an example. In response to his belief that prayer should be allowed and encouraged in the nation's public schools, Falwell and conservative Senator Jesse Helms from North Carolina worked for legislation which would permit school prayer. This legislation was not obtained. Another goal was to repeal the 1973 Supreme Court decision regarding abortion. To date, this has not
happened. In these respects, the Moral Majority was not successful in meeting the rhetorical potential of the movement.

A third audience is the executive branch of the government led by President Ronald Reagan. This audience had perhaps the most visible power for the Moral Majority but was least able to deliver results for the movement. Despite this, the Moral Majority's alliance with Reagan provided tremendous sanctioning power and legitimacy. It is no secret that Jerry Falwell was extremely pleased with the selection of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980. Despite the fact that Fundamentalists and Evangelicals supported Carter strongly in the 1976 election, Carter lost favor with them and Reagan became their "golden boy" in the next election. For him, the Fundamentalists delivered a significant audience who helped to put him in the White House. For them, he was a strong ally in word, if not in deed. Falwell's frequent visits to the Oval Office and conversations with President Reagan established a legitimacy that Protestants had not possessed since Billy Graham consulted with Presidents on a regular basis.

Constraints imposed on the movement by the situation included the constitutional separation of church and state. Though the separation has always been regarded as tenuous, people tend to have strongly held attitudes toward both religious and political issues. When Falwell, a
minister, became deeply involved in politics, he violated some perceptions of the role of clergy.

The Moral Majority also experienced financial and ideological constraints. Financially, they were dependent on the supporters for contributions to disseminate their message. Raising money through direct mail was costly, also. Therefore, Falwell was forced to turn many times to his primary audience and ask for funds necessary to continue the day-to-day operations of the Moral Majority. Several times, the national media reported the movement was in financial trouble. Non-sympathetic viewers often took a dim view of what has been called Falwell's annual "going out of business sale".11

Fund-raising is done by almost every organization, political or not. What made the Moral Majority's challenge unique? First, Falwell stressed a clear distinction between the Moral Majority and his religious empire. However, he frequently used the pulpit of his church to solicit funds for the Moral Majority making it difficult for viewers to distinguish the ministry from the Moral Majority and vice versa. Although the two were separate entities, the average viewer may not have been aware of the distinction.

Second, Falwell was the most visible spokesperson at the national level for the organization. If he alienated a potential donor, that person could not readily identify with another spokesperson and thus, may have stopped
contributing. Although the Moral Majority had state and local organizations, they were not as visible as the national organization and all fund-raising letters were originated from Lynchburg or Washington under the signature of Jerry Falwell.

Ideological constraints were a major obstacle. Either a person accepted the Moral Majority worldview or he did not. Falwell personally was unable to accept deviation and his political empire reflected that dogmatism. Though studies have shown that this approach is comfortable for some people who are seeking meaning in the contemporary world, this perspective alienated some who sought a more permissive doctrine. Though the Moral Majority was ideally to have very little connection to Falwell's ministry, nothing could have been further from the truth.

The Moral Majority sought to restore the nation to a time of moral decency in the United States. A multi-issue social movement, its leaders sought to effect change through the electoral process and legislation. The Moral Majority was unique because it functioned as a multi-issue contemporary movement and because it was one of the first organized Fundamentalist and Evangelical movements. Jerry Falwell, the movement's chief spokesperson, remained adamant that the Moral Majority was political, not religious in nature, yet, he continued to mix his role as minister and his role as Moral Majority spokesperson.
Chapter III (The Rhetorical Vision) focused on the question, "What fantasy themes and rhetorical visions are portrayed in the Moral Majority rhetoric?" When Jerry Falwell became discouraged with the decline of morality in the United States, he saw the Moral Majority as a means to restore that morality. The rhetorical vision of the Moral Majority is the return of America to a nation that honors the principles of God, family and the work ethic. The traditional man-woman-child family became a central metaphor in the rhetorical vision of the movement.

Falwell and the members of the Moral Majority participated in a rhetorical vision which saw the establishment of "one nation under God" in the United States. This vision found ideological support in a Fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and God-ordained roles for men and women.

Fantasy themes in the movement are centered around Falwell's hope that the nation would return to a God-centered way of life. During the 1960s and the early 1970s, Americans lived a way of life that Falwell felt was unacceptable. Issues such as feminism, gay rights and abortion became popular and liberal social legislation gained acceptance in the Congress. When, in 1973, the United States Supreme Court allowed that a woman could have a legal abortion, Falwell was enraged. Six years later, the movement was born and the explicit goal was to become active
politically to protect the status of moral values and family life.

The fantasy themes which emerged from the Moral Majority rhetoric are centered around this goal. The three specific fantasy themes were: (1) the traditional man-woman-child family unit; (2) the preservation of human life; and (3) the return of the Judeo-Christian morality into government.

The rhetorical vision of the Moral Majority was disseminated by means of newsletters, pamphlets, brochures, the electronic and print media.

Chapter IV (Evaluating the Critical Effort) addressed the question, "How well did the Moral Majority meet its rhetorical potential in response to the demands of the situation it faced?"

This chapter dealt with the critical function and the role of the critic in evaluating effect of the movement. Rhetorical potential was discussed in terms of the need to evaluate the effort of social movement rhetors. This chapter analyzed the rhetorical potential of the Moral Majority and the potential needed to effectively respond to the situations it faced.

A contemporary movement, such as the Moral Majority, is called into existence because a group of rhetors perceive a need to a change in the existing situation or because they oppose some change to the situation. The ability of the
social movement to effect or prevent the change is
determined by how the movement is or is not able to achieve
its goals. The leadership of the movement must assess the
situations they face and prescribe a strategy for the
movement to achieve the desired outcomes.

Jerry Falwell was successful in identifying
the situation and targeting the audiences. He was less
successful in achieving the long-term political action and
legislative change needed to effect the changes he desired.

When his initial strategies failed and the Moral
Majority began to attract opposition; Falwell was reluctant
to adopt new rhetorical strategies until 1986 when he
formally changed the name of the organization from Moral
Majority to Liberty Federation. 13

After completing the research and writing of this
study, several concluding claims are noted.

"Rhetorical criticism," wrote Ernest Bormann, "involves
more than the descriptions of discourse and the background,
emergence, growth and decline of a public consciousness... A critic needs to evaluate and to judge the discourse and to
provide added insight into how it works." 14

Foss, Foss and Trapp see the study of rhetoric as still
being formulated. Identifying six major questions about the
study of rhetoric, they said, "We have phrased these in
question form to serve as a reminder that answers to them
are still being formulated by those involved in the
conversation about rhetoric."^15 Though scholars of rhetoric strongly desire a theory of rhetoric, such a theory has not yet emerged.

The study of the Moral Majority contributed to the "ongoing conversation" about political and religious rhetoric in the texture of movements studies and makes five claims:

This study of the Moral Majority reaffirmed the importance of a consideration of the context in which a social movement exists.

Social movements and other communication phenomena, require the rhetorical critic to take the context or situation into consideration. Rather than isolate the movement from its context or the speaker from the situation, the critic needs to study the context with as much fervor as he or she evaluates the rhetorical object. The critic should seek to know not only about the rhetor's communicative behavior, but why those rhetors perceived that social movement or that communication as necessary.

It is impossible to completely know what another person or group of people think, but it is possible to make some assessment about what a leader and the membership thought and believed based on the statements made and recorded at a particular time. Too often rhetorical critics seem to stop short of this holistic assessment of a critical
event or social movement. Particularly in the area of social movement studies, theorists have preferred to define and categorize movements rather than evaluate.

Jerry Falwell was quite clear about publicizing why he thought formation of the Moral Majority was necessary. Certainly, he may have had a hidden agenda and the critic should take that into consideration. Nevertheless, this study of Moral Majority rhetoric considered the significance of situation to the inception of the movement, the development of the movement and as the context influenced Falwell's rhetorical choices. It is my argument that Falwell's consideration of contextual factors significantly affected his decisions regarding the future of Moral Majority. For example, in 1986 when he decided to create Liberty Federation from the Moral Majority, he openly stated that the increasingly hostile and apathetic reactions to Moral Majority were major reasons for the change.

A second claim reached is that public response to the movement was highly influential in shaping the rhetorical strategies of the movement. For example, when Norman Lear and People for the American Way became vocal in criticizing the Moral Majority, their criticism dramatically altered the context in which that movement operated. Until that time, the Moral Majority had operated without major organized resistance.
Taking advantage of that absence of organized resistance, Falwell had aggressively pursued the media. He traveled the country urging the boycott of network television programs, banning of textbooks and battling with the publishers of Penthouse over an interview with him the magazine sought to run. The result of this was just what he intended -- publicity.

Essentially, Falwell had no challenger, no competition in the media until People for the American Way began a vigorous confrontational campaign. The May, 1982 conference in Charleston, West Virginia, was actually the first organized resistance to the New Right and specifically, the Moral Majority. For instance, members of PAW were fond of pointing out that what was referred to as the Moral Majority was not actually a majority. Later, the PAW supporters became more vocal in their arguments, questioning the ethics of the Moral Majority attempts to legislate morality and emphasizing the restrictive nature of the Moral Majority worldview. One area in which they were particularly successful concerned the restrictive role the Moral Majority prescribed for women. Falwell recognized this resistance and Moral Majority literature after 1982 and 1983 portrayed a more modern role for women. Additionally, I would argue that Falwell's move toward modification of his moral worldview was, in part, a response to major organized resistance from groups such as PAW.
A third claim about the Moral Majority is that, when considered as a whole, the movement was not successful in fulfilling the rhetorical potential available as a response to the demands of the situation it faced. Though the movement may have been successful at meeting part of its rhetorical potential, a scholarly overview strongly suggests that it did not succeed.

When comparing the early goals of the movement's leaders with what has been accomplished to date, the movement has not achieved the hoped for status in "moral" legislation. Falwell still campaigns for a Supreme Court ruling against abortion and while recent Supreme Court appointments have resulted in a conservative court, it is not likely to see that ruling in the near future.

In 1982, Senator Jesse Helms attempted unsuccessfully to push school prayer legislation through the Senate. He was not successful. Considering these measures then, the Moral Majority lacks in achieving goals.

The successes of the movement, however, cannot be overlooked. Fundamentalist Christians have political clout they did not possess prior to 1980. The New Right has emerged as a significant political force. Aided by people like Richard Viguerie and Terry Dolan, the Fundamentalists learned to network and combine their resources to achieve elevated status. Therefore, in this respect, the Fundamentalist political lobby is likely to be treated with
respect by all major political candidates. Even those who do not support the theology and ideology of the Liberty Federation have to support the rights of its membership to appropriately voice their opinions. This is the biggest gain made by the Moral Majority.

A fourth claim focuses on the role of Jerry Falwell as the primary spokesperson for the Moral Majority. Essentially, Jerry Falwell is the Moral Majority. Because of the limited organizational structure, Falwell's role as leader is necessarily a more visible one than the leaders of the women's movement, for example. Among his peers, Falwell remains the central leader of the movement. No other religious leader who was involved in the foundation of the Moral Majority has spoken out on the Moral Majority or has the "face value" that Falwell does. Therefore, when Falwell traveled from state to state spreading the message about the Moral Majority his name and face frequently appeared on the front pages of newspapers and magazines and on television. Because of Falwell's strong "ownership" of the movement, the Moral Majority "personality" bore a strong resemblance to Falwell's own personality. For example, in the early years of the movement, when Falwell was not as skilled in politics, Moral Majority rhetoric reflected this lack of skill. Falwell often made antagonistic and controversial statements about other religious groups, other ministers and public figures.
As Falwell learned that antagonism would not bring him the political or financial gains he desired, a noticeable change occurred in Moral Majority rhetoric and in his own personal image. His public discourse during the recent PTL Club scandal is a clear example of how dramatically he has altered his role from the bellicose newcomer to an elder statesman of Protestantism. I would argue that Falwell's leadership of the Moral Majority has clearly been a reflection of his unique perspective and personality traits and that Moral Majority rhetoric reflected this "personality."

The fact that he was an established minister of the Thomas Road Baptist Church when he formed the Moral Majority was of considerable importance, conservatives felt. Such a position gave him immense antecedent ethos and would help in his fund-raising duties as Moral Majority chief. Falwell's strong belief in causes and his enthusiasm was always evident when he addressed crowds of people.

There were, however, some disadvantages to this style of leadership. Those who became alienated with Falwell lost their identification with the movement. When Falwell received negative publicity in the media for his antics with Moral Majority, the criticism carried over to his role with the church and vice versa.

A fifth claim turns to the perspective of this study. The study of the Moral Majority supports the symbolic
convergence theory advanced by Ernest Bormann. Bormann describes symbolic convergence as a social scientific communication theory. Symbolic convergence theory, he said, provided "a critical key to open up the way of (sic) communication under study worked to create a shared consciousness."  

My argument is that it is the creation of this shared consciousness that distinguished the Moral Majority, now Liberty Federation from other social movements. Likewise, it is this shared consciousness which, for the rhetorical critic, shows most promise for generalizability among critical studies. When Jerry Falwell formed the Moral Majority and, when he persuaded thousands of supporters to send him money, buy his literature, register to vote and, finally, adopt his worldview, a strong symbolic reality had been communicated. When attempting to go back and trace the evolution of any movement, such as this one, it is the rhetorician who is uniquely qualified to examine public discourse of the movement for cues about the feelings, thoughts, beliefs of the true believers. Therefore, the symbolic perspective is a fruitful one.

Although Bormann used symbolic convergence theory to apply to his fantasy theme analysis, its utility serves more than one method. It is applicable to an eclectic study because it allows rhetorical criticism to involve "more than the description of discourse."
Using symbolic convergence theory as part of the perspective from which one examines a speaker or a movement requires that the critic make a "humanistic evaluation of the quality of the rhetoric."\(^{21}\) Certainly, this study of the Moral Majority is humanistic in nature, yet the study does more than classify or record data.

Adopting the symbolic convergence theory of communication to this particular study allows the critic to tie in to the larger explanatory power of general theory. This is important for several reasons. (1) if social movement studies in particular, and rhetorical studies, in general, are going to reach the generalizability theorists desire, these studies must begin by seeking general perspectives and theories, such as the symbolic convergence theory. Individual studies will determine the validity and utility of each theory. This is not to say that the existence of a symbolic convergence theory or any other theory should determine the direction of a study. However, in the case that observations of rhetorical behavior correspond to existing theories, those theories should be tested; (2) The application of the symbolic convergence theory to this case combines one of the most significant social movements of the 20th century with the thinking of one of the most prolific rhetorical theorists. If the study of rhetorical theory is to advance, historical studies of movements must willingly apply new theory to new movements,
old theories to new movements and examine all possible combinations. The field of rhetoric cannot depend primarily upon Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian approaches to the study of contemporary events. This study combined several different methods in an effort to illuminate the similarities between them as well as the differences among them.
NOTES


2 "Falwell Strives for Role as Political Kingmaker," Washington Star, 3 July, 1980, p. B 10-12. This reference was obtained through Newsbank, a microfiche collection of newspaper articles collected from 190 newspapers throughout the United States. It is a service of NewsBank, Inc. of Greenwich, Ct and is hereafter cited as NewsBank. NewsBank does not cite page numbers; the numbers cited are for the microfiche on which the article was located.


4 This assumption is taken from several sources, most notably the proceeding of a May, 1982 conference which I attended. The conference, called, "In Defense of the Constitution: The Treat from the New Right," was primarily sponsored by People for the American Way, a liberal lobby formed specifically in response to the Moral Majority. The conference was held in Charleston, WV, in May of 1982.


7 Ibid.

8 Clark, p. 51.

9 Using the computerized networking of Richard Viguerie, the conservative direct mail expert, Falwell relied primarily upon these sources for major funding for his Moral Majority.
The recent nomination of conservative lawyer Robert Bork to the Supreme Court may signal a serious effort on the part of President Ronald Reagan to influence the direction of the court on social issues such as abortion and school prayer. Although it is still too early to determine what influence Bork might have on Supreme Court decisions if his appointment is ratified by the Senate, it is expected that the Supreme Court would, at most, turn the decision on abortion back to the states for individual jurisdiction.

Goodman and Price, p. 17.


Statement by Jerry Falwell, National Press Club, 3 January, 1986, 10 a.m., Washington, D.C.


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Bormann, p. 3.

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