SYMBOLIC TERRORISM: THE IMPACT AND CULTURE OF CHRISTIAN
CONFRONTATIONAL EVANGELISM

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By
Jennifer Adrienne Delaney, B.A.

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Master’s Examination Committee:
Dr. Tanya Erzen, Adviser
Dr. Hugh Urban
Dr. Maurice Stevens

Approved by

Adviser

Graduate Program in Comparative Studies
ABSTRACT

This research investigates Confrontational Evangelism, a thirty-year-old Christian movement dedicated to publicly rebuking "sinners" and calling for their repentance. Confrontational evangelists are often found on college campuses or large public events, with large signs and bullhorns, eagerly arguing with passers-by. This paper theorizes Confrontational Evangelism as symbolic terrorism, modifying Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, and using Mark Juergensmeyer's comparative conclusions about religious terrorisms. Narrative and modern history of the movement, as well as a discussion of media as primary instruments of terror are also included.
For my precious daughter, who is my light against any darkness.
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VITA

October 5, 1975........................Born, Florida, USA

1999........................................B.A in Elementary Education, Stetson University

1999-2003.................................Public School Teacher
                                      Jackson Heights Middle School, Oviedo, FL
                                      Milwee Middle School, Longwood, FL
                                      London Middle School, London, OH

2003-present ............................Graduate Teaching Associate,
                                      The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Comparative Studies
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Confrontational evangelism is certainly not a household term, but for anyone who has ever spent any amount of time on a college campus or at large cultural or political events, it is a highly noticeable religious movement. At any time in the Autumn or Spring, a confrontational evangelist may be found in the free speech area of campus, making quite a racket. Popular culture events, such as Nascar races, Spring Break, and football games are fair game all year round. There may be banners with controversial messages on them, such as “Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Steve” or “Homo Sex is Sin”. There may be very modestly dressed women and children sitting nearby. There may be a man wearing a sandwich board that lists a myriad of sins from the New Testament. Or, there may just be one man, completely alone, save for his bible and maybe a megaphone, calling down hellfire and damnation at passers-by.

Almost inevitably, they draw a crowd. In the crowd are some just curiously taking a peek at what all the commotion is about. Some sit down with their lunch to watch the entertainment. Some are pulled in because they are minding their own business and suddenly find themselves the recipient of a personal biblical rebuke. Some are there to debate the preachers’ logic, or theology. Some are Christians who are
extraordinarily upset about what they consider hateful and intolerant words in the name of Jesus. And some come to try to beat the preachers at their own game, through counter-protests or staging elaborate performances to rival the preacher’s own.

There are many different results of this preaching method. The crowd is usually as outspoken as the preachers are, but sometimes it gets physical. The preachers have ended up covered with food, excrement, and various body fluids. They have been hit with rocks and fists. Their belongings and religious literature have been stolen, modified, or set on fire. The occasional person will take their clothes off, or try to rip the preacher’s off. Angry crowd members will try to rip the Bible or Koran or banner out of their hands. Often the police are called in, and occasionally, a crowd member or the preacher will be taken to jail.

However, not all reactions are inherently physical, or even as negative as they would seem. In fact, this evangelistic approach simply does not work without hecklers, and the preachers know it. Brother Jed Smock’s daughter Evangeline once told a reporter, “Hecklers are an essential part of the ministry. If you don’t have a heckler, if you don’t have interaction, then you’re not going to have a crowd. So the thing is, we do try to play them up.”¹ They keep a crowd’s attention this way, and gain more onlookers by ensuring that there is loud commotion for hours at a time.

The most critical step is to get the first person or two to stick around, because people are not generally willing to sit or stand there alone in front of someone they suspect is a bit mad. One of the things campus preacher Jed Smock does to draw a

crowd is to arrive just before noon as classes are letting out, and to start yelling some of his favorite phrases to see which will “stick”:

“"You know what you boys and girls need? You need a good spanking. You need a good spanking with my black leather Bible," or, "I hear that there are homosexuals on this campus!"

Sometimes he will simply stand there thumping his bible as a visual play on the fundamentalist stereotype. He may address a young woman walking by, and point out that perhaps she is dressed too immodestly. That is usually a sure bet to get a reaction. And the day begins.

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\(^2\) ibid.
CHAPTER 2

OVERVIEW

Section one of my research will center on the history and theology of confrontational evangelism. It is not just a scholarly overview, but a history that specifically resonates with those preaching in the confrontational style today. They not only seek to understand but to actually embody the ideals of the prophets and saints of the past. In this way, despite being a small minority within the world of Christian thought, in their view, their position is strengthened, because they see themselves as continuing a tradition that goes back to the Hebrew prophets of old. For them, it is the proud tradition of the “voice calling out in the wilderness”\(^3\) that they carry on today.

The history continues, with the New Testament Apostles and disciples of Jesus, as well as with Jesus himself, as exemplars. They are exemplars not just in the content of their preaching, but the perceived confrontational method, as well. This is, perhaps, the biggest surprise to members of mainstream Christianity today, although it is centrally

\(^3\) From Mark 1:2-3, KJV. “As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”
important to confrontational evangelists, and even comprises a portion of their sermons. Using this narrative history serves to centrally place them in the perceived cosmic war between God and Satan with Earth as the central battlefield.

Once Christianity was established as the official religion of the Roman Empire, confrontational evangelists tend to see it as having to become illegitimate “Churchianity” instead of true “Christianity.”\(^4\) Therefore, their own exemplars do not emerge again until the Protestant Reformation and the revivalists of the Great Awakening. However, the confrontational evangelism movement itself did not emerge until the 1960’s. Many of the preachers headquartered on the West Coast were once “Jesus Freaks.” It is in this era that the outrageous performances and the protest tactics familiar on the college campuses of the time were put into practice by the preachers themselves.

I will argue, however, that confrontational evangelism is not simply a protest movement; it is a unique form of religious terrorism. Using Mark Juergensmeyer’s comparative sociological study of terrorist religious groups I will show that the culture, tactics, and goals of confrontational evangelism are in direct correlation with religious terrorisms around the world. I will expand Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence from that which is covert and unconscious, to include that which is loudly overt, breaking into the conscious experience of everyday people. Together with the goals and tactics of religious terrorisms in general and this movement’s in particular, I will argue that confrontational evangelism is symbolic terrorism.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Surprisingly, even though confrontational evangelism is ever-present on college campuses, a survey of the literature reveals that no academic work has been done on this movement. There is much literature on revivalists through the turn of the century, and Billy Graham does continue on that tradition, in a way. However, the traditions part ways when we get to “Holy” Hubert Lindsey, who, according to various (unsubstantiated) reports\(^5\), was preaching with Mordecai Ham at the revival in which Billy Graham was saved in 1934. Lindsey is the man who began using the combination of methods, language, and fundamentalism that distinguishes confrontational evangelism from the revivals of the past.

It was on a college campus as an undergraduate in 1993 that I first encountered Brother Jed Smock. Like most students, I was genuinely surprised and angered at the message. It wasn’t until the autumn of 2003 that I encountered him again, 1000 miles away, as I was walking across the campus of The Ohio State University. This time, I was studying and teaching comparative religions, so my response was one of curiosity and

fascination. I spoke to Jed on one of his breaks, and to my astonishment, he was a soft-spoken, thoughtful, intelligent man—nowhere near the seemingly anachronistic lunatic that I had just witnessed. After I introduced myself, the very first question he asked me was, “Are you a Christian?” I answered him, and before I knew it, he had me telling him my religious history.

I realized very quickly that, in researching confrontational evangelists, I would have some careful ethnographic considerations. Obviously, my own positioning can not be neutral, as, for these men, their first concern is for my “soul.” As the preachers’ intimate personal histories are a part of their ministries in the form of personal testimonies, it is inevitable that many of my questions will be personal and probing. Therefore, I determined that it must go both ways, as while my interest is in researching them as people and as a movement, their interest is to try to convert me to Christianity. While I believe my primary purpose is to gather information, they believe that I have been led by God to them so that I can be saved and spread the word of their ministry. If I am truly a believer in the humanity of another, then how can I put my concern over theirs? So, while I do not imagine that my conversion is imminent, I do make it a point to answer all of their questions with the same honesty. And I let them know that, honestly, I am not planning to convert, because I do not want there to be any question of whether I am purposefully dangling it as motivation for further participation in my research. However, I do suspect that as long as I am breathing, they do hold out that hope.
Despite this, I have tried to be a part of their “community”, and they have graciosly obliged. The logistical problem for a researcher is that these preachers are scattered throughout the United States. Their primary place of community enactment is over e-mail lists, web pages, and Jed Smock’s online bulletin board, and I, along with other preachers, Christians, Pagans, and atheists, do discuss various matters of politics, current events, and theology with them.

It is especially in matters of politics and theology that the preachers and I differ. They are theists; I am not. They are socially conservative; I tend to be more socially progressive. We both voice belief in showing love to our fellow humans, but with the preachers, it manifests itself (to a secular perspective) as hatred, bigotry, and intolerance. They envision their love as a “tough love,” one that a father (or their God) would show to a defiant child (or an unrepentant sinner). And I believe that, for those readers who do not share their worldview, this is perhaps one of the most important things to understand about most of the preachers’ self-reported motivations: they believe that they are doing this out of love. Ruben Israel, a confrontational evangelist who preaches both at popular culture events and college campuses, gave me one of the most powerful understandings of this conception of love:

Just think about 9/11. You had everyday men and women in the towers where the fire was, and they made this terrible choice. They chose to jump out of the windows, even though they knew that they were going to splat at the bottom. They knew they were going to die, but they chose to jump rather to endure thirty more seconds in the fire! If being burned for thirty more seconds is so physically
unbearable as to lead someone to jump to their deaths, then isn’t it the most loving thing that I can do to try anything I can to keep them from burning for all eternity?\textsuperscript{6}

This is a very powerful statement, which illustrates an implication of belief based on a literal interpretation of the Bible.\textsuperscript{7} It also helps to illustrate a key difficulty of this research—a question of epistemologies. I approach this research from a secular perspective, one of intellectual curiosity and logical explanations; I take for granted neither the presence nor absence of a god or gods. I try to understand what I see to be logical contradictions through observation, friendly debating, independent verification, and asking more questions. However, confrontational evangelists’ perspectives are entirely different. They not only believe in the bible as God’s perfect revelation for his people on Earth, they also consciously seek to embody the teachings and lifestyle that they believe God is trying to impart to them through scripture. Nearly every decision they have made in the way that they live and their daily actions, they have done believing that it is what God wants for their lives. The Bible is their life’s instruction manual. So, while I have a fairly good working knowledge of Biblical teachings, apologetics, and interpretations, I seek to understand logically why they do what they do. This is more difficult than it seems, as all of their (carefully considered) logic is derived from an English translation of the Bible. If it is in the Bible or in their own interpretation of it\textsuperscript{8},

\textsuperscript{6} Interviews with Ruben Israel, October 8-14, 2004.

\textsuperscript{7} For those preachers, like Jed Smock, who admit the possibility of the flames not being literal, they still believe that the pain in hell would be as great.

\textsuperscript{8} It is important to note that the preachers involved in confrontational evangelism do not accept my suggestion that the meaning of Biblical scripture is in any way derived from their personal interpretation. Instead, they believe that when one is truly “saved” (born again), they are able to understand the meaning of God’s words that are written in the Bible.
then it is, for them, True and Good. Since I do not personally accept the Bible as any form of divine revelation, then we often find ourselves approaching a subject from opposite sides of a wall that cannot be completely breached by either of us.

Although our personal understandings of the world may differ, I would like to suggest the use of Susan Harding’s “narrative belief” in order to partially compensate. In her book, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, Harding describes the difficulties of her own ethnographic positioning:

...I began to acquire the language that...pastors and church people spoke to me. I came to know what it meant to have a soul, a sin nature, a heart; to say “God spoke to me” and “Satan is real; to see God’s hand in everyday life and the daily news; to know that there is no such thing as an accident, and that everything, no matter how painful or perplexing, has a purpose. I did not convert, but I was learning their language of faith....For years, I stood at the crossroads...others fashioned for me, in between being lost and being saved, listening....Standing in the gap between conscious belief and willful unbelief, in a place I call “narrative belief,” opens up born-again language and makes available its complexity, its variety and creativity, and its agile force.9

While Harding’s formulation of narrative belief is useful, her actual use of it was less than satisfactory, as she positions herself many times as an ethnographer, but often leaves her analysis only one-sided; in other words, she may have represented her ethnographic subjects in a way in which they either would not recognize or would not agree with. That, in and of itself, does not seem to me to be a problem. However, when one is doing ethnography, it is incumbent upon the ethnographer to make a note where one’s perceptions or analyses would differ from one’s subjects’. This is what I plan to do, as it is an important component of true understanding, for the researcher, the reader,

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and the subject alike. I do not pretend to share their worldview or outlook; however, understanding and documenting their humanity and reasonableness is vitally important.

It is vitally important at a time in which America seems to be unable to bridge a wider and wider gulf between religious and secular culture and values. There is talk of a culture war being waged by both sides, and the rhetoric is highly tense, hinting at the doom and devastation to come, should the other side prevail. As I first wrote these words, the results of the 2004 presidential election in Ohio were being contested in a last-ditch effort to overturn the retention of an overtly religious president. As I listened to radio and TV broadcasts and personal conversations, I was a bit disturbed by some of the assumptions being made on all sides. There seemed to be an a priori belief of some kind of mental instability or deficiency on the part of one’s opponents. And, while I do not always pretend to exhibit perfect understanding or patience with those with whom I disagree, I feel that this kind of dehumanizing is dangerous. Once someone denies another the full humanity he would ascribe to himself, then the stage has been set for hatred, oppression, and violence. In fact, it is difficult to perpetrate these things when one has the full understanding of another’s personal worth as a human being. And one cannot have a full understanding without seeking to understand. It is a wonderful thing, and I believe this understanding is being sought both by me and the confrontational evangelists I am studying.
It is toward this understanding that I seek to focus my research. I will show not only the technical and controversial aspects of confrontational evangelism, but the reasonable, intelligent human beings behind it. It is my hope that this will shine through in the words to follow.
CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE HISTORY

4.1 ANCIENT

It is difficult to understand the present-day phenomenon of confrontational evangelism without understanding their narrative history. Indeed, the history of confrontational preachers is intimately bound up in their present incarnation—they see themselves as embodying an ancient tradition begun by the Hebrew prophets of old. What follows is their history as they conceive of it — taken from English translations of the Bible, it uses specific exemplars from both the Old and New Testaments, and pioneers of Protestant open-air preaching during the Great Awakenings and in 20th century America. They see their calling as both ordained and commanded by the God of the Christian bible, and they interpret their role to adhere to biblical commands and examples. This is a narrative history that resonates with confrontational evangelists, helping to give them purpose, justification, and identity.

The Old Testament prophets were people who were on the outside of the religious establishment. They were not priests. They wandered through the streets, proclaiming a message that people did not want to hear. They called their society to repentance and
predicted dire consequences for Israel if they did not, such as the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem (in Isaiah and Jeremiah). In Lamentations, the Hebrews wept over the destruction of Jerusalem and their subsequent exile, essentially agreeing that the prophets had been correct, and attributing the destruction to the sins of their people.

The tradition of the Old Testament prophets seems to end with John the Baptist, signaling the shift from calling for repentance of an entire nation to individual repentance: “John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” ¹⁰ He called the Pharisees and Sadducees that came to him for baptism a “brood of vipers,” a confrontational message, to be sure. ¹¹ It was for proclaiming sin that he was imprisoned, namely for proclaiming that Herod Antipas was living in sin for consorting with his brother’s wife, Herodias. Herodias’ daughter asked for John’s head on a platter. Herod complied, and John, the first proto-Christian confrontational evangelist, became the first proto-Christian martyr. ¹²

Jesus, of course, preached out-of-doors to the people of Galilee (in Matthew, Mark, and Luke) or Jerusalem (in John). There were no churches, of course, and he very rarely preached in a synagogue. He, like John, preached in a confrontational style, and the preachers seem to draw a great deal of inspiration from him, as evidenced in one street preaching website:

¹⁰ Mark 1:4, NASB
¹¹ Matthew 3:7 & John 3:7, NASB
¹² Matthew 14:1-12
Look in the pages of the gospels and you will find that Jesus called individuals names and condemned people. He called the King a "fox." He called two of His disciples "devils." He referred to a Gentile woman as a "dog." He exposed the unbelieving Jews as "children of the devil." He called the religious leaders of the day "vipers, snakes, hypocrites, blind guides, fools, and whitened sepulchers." Not only does Jesus rebuke and condemn individuals and groups but he declares his generation to be "faithless, perverse, and adulterous." 

And, of course, the story of what happened to him because of his preaching is the basis upon which much of Christianity itself is based. Imagining the punishment that he went through has often been strong incentive to be willing to experience the same for the sake of preaching His word. In fact, preachers have expressed to me that they regret that they only have one life to give for the sake of spreading the gospel. Their empathy for the suffering of Jesus and enthusiasm for sharing his suffering approaches that of the Franciscans in the early 1300s. Jesus, however, is the Perfect Ideal of who to be and what actions are permissible and encouraged. Not one preacher I have spoken to insinuates that they have the perfection of Jesus, because Jesus’ divinity is absolute and unattainable. As Jed Smock, veteran campus preacher, told me, “A widely acknowledged definition of a Christian is one who is Christ like [sic] in character.” Although I am aware that this particular definition may not be as widely acknowledged as he asserts, it is an important insight into the Holiness doctrine in which many of these preachers believe. However, for confrontational evangelists, there are other powerful exemplars.

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14 Personal Interviews, October 8-14, 2004.

For true exemplars of how Christian disciples can and should be, they often look to the Apostles. I would suggest that they identify even more fully with the Apostles than Jesus himself, as they were dedicated followers of Jesus who preached his controversial message and suffered for it at the hands of those to whom they preached. Confrontational preachers cite the Apostles’ messages as being almost as confrontational as that of Jesus, and ordained by God himself:

The Apostle Peter called men "wicked" and charged them with murdering Christ in his great Pentecostal message. The Apostle Paul called men " whitened walls" (Acts 23:3) and "children of the devil" (Acts 13:10). And finally, the Bible itself uses every descriptive tool of language in depicting men as sinful and evil. Remember, the Bible is God's mind revealed to man. The thoughts expressed therein are what GOD WANTS MEN TO KNOW! If God sought to inspire such terms to describe sin why shouldn't we?\textsuperscript{16}

The stories of the Apostles’ ministries, such as the one above, are often cited as powerful examples by those who “cry out in the wilderness” today.

The Apostles were common men. “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.”\textsuperscript{17} According to confrontational preacher Ruben Israel, being a “common man” definitely resonates with them: “Knowing Hebrew or Greek can be a plus or give you a big head, but the Bible was given to the common man to feed himself and not be in bondage to religion.”\textsuperscript{18} Not only were they common


\textsuperscript{17} Acts 4:13, NIV.

\textsuperscript{18} E-mail communication from Ruben Israel, September 25, 2004.
men, but they were absolutely committed to spreading Jesus’ message, even in the face of persecution. When the temple priests decided to punish them for their ministry in Jesus’ name,

...they [the priests] flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:40-42).\(^{19}\)

The disciple Stephen understood his own ministry as being a continuation of a long line of persecuted prophets. Right before Stephen was stoned to death by a group of Jews that did not like the content of his preaching, he proclaimed their sins, saying

You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it (Acts 7:51-53).\(^{20}\)

Paul’s ministry is instructional here, as well. According to the Bible, he was a Jew known as Saul who had been assigned to persecute Christians. At one point, he had what today could be interpreted as a “born-again” experience\(^{21}\), and believing that he’d had a vision of Jesus, spent the rest of his life preaching about Jesus and converting Roman gentiles to Christianity. The instances of his persecution were many and often; in

\(^{19}\) NASB.

\(^{20}\) NASB

\(^{21}\) Acts 9:1-19
fact, his first threats of death came only days after he began preaching the message of Jesus.\textsuperscript{22} Of course, Paul and Peter both did end up imprisoned in Rome, and in all likelihood, executed there.

Both the eagerness for persecution and even martyrdom, and the cheerful persistence of their preaching in the face of enormous resistance can be seen in the confrontational evangelists of today.

4.2 MODERN

Confrontational evangelists differ in their awareness of the following history; some have studied it a good deal, and some receive it as oral history from other preachers. These names are often invoked by these preachers in conversations about their role models.

The significant precursors to the present day confrontational evangelists began with the great Calvinist preacher Jonathan Edwards, a major figure of the First Great Awakening in the United States. Edwards was born in Connecticut in 1703. He earned a Masters in Theology from Yale in 1722, and by 1729 was pastor of the First Church of Northampton, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1934, he started a powerful revival in Northampton. In his essay, “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Works of God,” Edwards defends his revival against those

\textsuperscript{22} Acts 9:19-25

who would denounce it. Interestingly, it is the sudden appearance of Arminianism (a
revision of Calvinism, popular with today’s confrontational evangelists, that rejects the
notion that a sinner can do nothing himself to be saved) that he cites as helping to spark
the revival:

About this time began the great noise, in this part of the country, about
Arminianism, which seemed to appear with a very threatening aspect upon the
interest of religion here. The friends of vital piety trembled for fear of the issue;
but it seemed, contrary to their fear, strongly to be overruled for the promoting of
religion. Many who looked on themselves as in a Christless condition, seemed to
be awakened by it, with fear that God was about to withdraw from the land, and
that we should be given up to heterodoxy and corrupt principles; and that then
their opportunity for obtaining salvation would be past.24

Arminianism is now a core component of most confrontational evangelists’ theology
today, and as such, they reject those portions of Calvinist doctrine that hold the sinner can
do nothing to effect their own salvation. If a sinner could do nothing to effect his or her
own salvation, then the raison d’etre of these preachers would disappear; it would be
useless to call for sinners’ repentance.

Edwards was a staunch believer in the importance of holiness—the way of life for
any “true Christian”—that many confrontational evangelists in the Midwest and on the
East Coast strictly adhere to today.25 According to his essay entitled “Religious
Affections,” Edwards cites Christian conversion as not simply being a repression of all of
a person’s former appetites, but a complete transformation of the nature and appetites of
the person, guiding them to live the life of a saint:

24 “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God”. At
Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.—I mean, they have that influence and power upon him who is the subject of them, that they cause that a practice, which is universally conformed to, and directed by Christian rules, should be the practice and business of his life. This implies three things: 1. That his behavior or practice in the world be universally conformed to, and directed by Christian rules. 2. That he makes a business of such a holy practice above all things; that it be a business which he as chiefly engaged in, and devoted to, and pursues with highest earnestness and diligence: so that he may be said to make this practice of religion eminently his work and business. And 3. That he persists in it to the end of life.\textsuperscript{26}

Edwards was a powerful preacher and theologian, but he did not engage in the demonstrative, theatrical type of preaching that would become the hallmark of revivalist preachers to come.

Although we can point to Edwards as being the primary instigator of the First Great Awakening in the Untied States, the phenomenon was not at all limited to North America. Across the Atlantic, in England, his contemporary John Wesley began a ministry that is perhaps the most influential for today’s confrontational preachers. Although they both believed in the power of the revival, their doctrine and methods were noticeably different. Edwards was a Calvinist; Wesley, who rejected important aspects of Calvinism, was the founder of Methodism.

John Wesley was born only three months after Edwards in 1703. He was a member of the Church of England, earned a Masters degree from Christ Church College, Oxford, in 1727, and was ordained an Anglican deacon.\textsuperscript{27} In 1729, Wesley returned to

\textsuperscript{26} ibid.

finish his studies at Oxford, only to find that his brother, Charles, had started what he called the “holy club.” Wesley quickly found comfort in the methodical life of diligence and obedience to which they adhered.

In 1738, as he was listening to a sermon that included a reading of Martin Luther’s doctrine of “justification by faith,” he had what we today would recognize as a “born-again” experience or an “infilling of the Holy Spirit”: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins.”²⁸

Area churches, though, soon would not allow him to preach, due to the emotion and forcefulness of his message. As it turned out, George Whitefield, another member of the “holy club” at Oxford and fellow Anglican preacher, received the same cold shoulder from area churches, for the same reason: this new evangelical style was too “in your face” for the conservative Anglicans. When these men opened their mouths to speak, people listened, and flocked to see them.

At the height of his newfound popularity in England, Whitefield made his first trip to the colony of Georgia to try to continue the ministry Charles Wesley had started there. John Wesley decided to spend his time in smaller ministries in England, as more and more, the Church of England began to see him as a liability. When Whitefield returned from the colonies, he preached in the churches to masses of people who were nearly rioting just to get the chance to hear him. Soon, of course, Anglican churches began to close its doors to him, as well.

²⁸ ibid.
In 1789, Whitefield decided to go to Bristol, an area home to poor miners which had no church building. According to the rules of the Church of England, if there were no building, preachers were permitted to preach in the open air. The first day, he had 200 people. After that, he was called before the head of the diocese, who forbade him to speak there again. The next day, he was back at it, this time gathering a crowd of 2000. Within a month’s time, some estimates put Whitefield’s crowd at over 20,000. Finally embracing this method of lay preaching, Whitefield said, “I believe I was never more acceptable to my Master than when I was standing to teach those hearers in the open fields...I now preach to ten times more people than I should, if I had been confined to the churches.”

Whitefield invited Wesley to accompany him to Bristol and speak, but Wesley was exceedingly reluctant, as he related in his personal journal:

In the evening I reached Bristol, and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church.... What marvel the devil does not love field preaching. Neither do I: I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome pulpit. But where is my zeal if I do not trample all of these underfoot in order to save one more soul?


32 Smock, 62.
Wesley was convinced. Charles Spurgeon, influential preacher of the Second Great Awakening, wrote that “When Wesley stood and preached a sermon on his father’s grave, at Epworth, because the parish priest would not allow him admission within the (so-called) sacred edifice, Mr. Wesley writes: ‘I am well assured that I did far more good to my Lincolnshire parishioners by preaching three days on my father’s tomb than I did by preaching three years in his pulpit.’”

This disdain for the niceties of church preaching is very common among confrontational evangelists today. It is not that they view preaching in churches as unnecessary, as many of them often are guest preachers in their travels (receiving a portion of the offerings), and occasionally, they do minister to their own small local “flocks”. They just do not see that the soul-winning potential is as great in a closed church building of professed Christians. They would rather go out to meet the “sinners” where they are, like the prophets of old. Also, like Wesley and Whitefield before them, their fire-and-brimstone message of repentance is often not well-received in churches.

Their ministries were so successful that Wesley and Whitefield remained as open-air lay preachers. Whitefield helped to spur on the Great Awakening in both the colonies and in England. Wesley remained mostly in Europe, but allowed Methodist preachers to be ordained as a separate Christian denomination in the colonies.

There was a rift, though, that grew between them, as Whitefield was a strict Calvinist, believing in predestination and the total depravity (original sin) of man.

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33 ibid.
According to Wesley, predestination made God seem “worse than the devil.”\textsuperscript{34}

Whitefield ended up establishing the Calvinist Methodist church, otherwise known as the Presbyterians.

Wesley’s theology, though, represents more than just a departure from his friend. I would suggest that Wesley has created the theological framework within which most confrontational evangelists work, live, and worship. Wesleyan theology recognizes four sources of authority for doctrine. The primary, and most important, source is the Bible. The second is early church tradition, and for the confrontational preachers I have spoken to, this means the early church up until around the time of the Council of Nicaea in 325, as they generally recognize later church tradition as having drifted away from “true Christianity.” The third source is reason, as it is considered God-given, and is necessary to help understand scripture. They believe that if reason is used correctly, then it cannot diverge from God’s revelation. The fourth is personal experience, which is incredibly important in reinforcing the power of “heart knowledge;” the claim that there are absolute truths that all people, no matter what they say they believe, know deep down (“in their hearts”).\textsuperscript{35} It is these four sources of authority taken together that create what they consider to be the fullness of God’s revelation. Without any one of them, a person is in danger of misunderstanding or misrepresenting the Truth. It is the Holy Spirit that acts to tie all of these sources of authority together for an individual.


According to Wesley, there are also several steps an individual takes on the path to eternal salvation with God. The first is justification by faith. It is “a divine supernatural, evidence or conviction, 'of things not seen,' not discoverable by our bodily senses.” Furthermore, “justifying faith implies a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for [our] sins, that He loved [us] and gave Himself for [us].”

This justification becomes the foundation for one’s life as a Christian, but for Wesleyans, it is by no means the only necessary step for salvation. This is where Holiness doctrine comes in. Holiness, “Christian perfection,” or “sanctification,” is considered essential for salvation by those preachers who adhere to it. It is sometimes referred to as “baptism by fire”, “baptism by the Holy Spirit”, or “second blessing” and it manifests itself through gifts of the Spirit (healing, speaking in tongues) along with an aversion to sin. It is, essentially, an individual reversal of Original Sin:

To fulfill all righteousness describes the process of sanctification. Wesley insisted that imputed righteousness must become imparted righteousness. God grants his Spirit to those who repent and believe that through faith they might overcome sin. Wesleyans want deliverance from sin, not just from hell. Wesley speaks clearly of a process that culminates in a second definite work of grace identified as entire sanctification. Entire sanctification is defined in terms of "pure or disinterested love." Wesley believed that one process that culminates in a second definite work of grace identified as entire sanctification.

It is what I refer to as the “sinless doctrine” when speaking with confrontational evangelists, and it is by far one of the most controversial aspects of their ministries. The


37 Ibid. Emphasis in original. Also see “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection” by John Wesley.
preachers that practice Holiness are concentrated in the Eastern and Midwestern United States. The “Westies” (confrontational evangelists on the west coast of the U.S.) generally scoff at Holiness claims.

Inevitably, in the course of preaching, a member of the crowd will either quote Matthew 7:1 (“Judge not, lest ye be judged”) or John 8:7 (“He who is without sin, cast the first stone”). And it is then when a preacher, operating from a Holiness perspective, will proclaim himself a saint and claim that he does not sin. The crowd usually goes nuts. This is not an aspect of Christianity that one regularly hears of today. From crowd reactions, it is apparent that the mainstream understanding of Christianity is that a Christian will inevitably and regularly sin, and must simply ask for forgiveness. This is part of the “once saved, always saved” doctrine, one with which most confrontational evangelists vehemently disagree. The doctrine of sanctification, or Holiness, holds that when a person is truly sanctified, he or she is free from any will to sin, hates sin, and simply will refuse to sin. A person can “backslide” by sinning, but it must be extraordinarily infrequent, and if it does happen, a person must wholeheartedly rededicate themselves to God in order to regain their salvation.

The difficulty I have encountered with this doctrine, and the preaching of it, is twofold. First, it is very difficult to pin them down on the definition of sin. A usual answer is “The Ten Commandments, and love you neighbor as yourself and God above

38 “Judge not, lest ye be judged.” KJV. More importantly is the next verse, which the “unrepentant sinners” in the crowd overlook, “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

39 In part, it reads, “He who is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” KJV.

40 I refer to confrontational preachers in the masculine, because there are relatively few women who do this.
ali others.” When I have asked about which version of the Ten Commandments\textsuperscript{41} to follow, I am told it is the intention of God, not the letter, or that knowledge of sin which resides in the “heart of man.”\textsuperscript{42} This becomes a bit too vague for a researcher trying to understand specific theology. However, as far as particular sins to be avoided, there are several lists in the New Testament (of those who will not inherit the Kingdom of God) to which non-Christians are frequently referred. These lists represent the entirety of the sins against which they preach: fornication (generally understood as sex outside of marriage), impurity or uncleanness (usually meaning lustful thought, but also referring to wasteful living), covetousness (greed), filthy speech (profanity), whores (women who are sexually promiscuous), whoremongers (men who have relations with whores), idolaters (those who worship anything other than God; money is an example), adulterers (those who have sex outside of their marriage), effeminate men, homosexuals (“abusers of themselves with mankind”), thieves, extortionists (swindlers), revilers, drunkards, murderers, sorcerers (ones who practice the magic arts), and all liars.\textsuperscript{43}

The Holiness doctrine, message of exhortation and open rebuke, along with the emotionally charged nature of the preaching itself, made Wesley and Whitefield the targets of what confrontational evangelists would consider “persecution”:

On numerous occasions, the meetings of the Wesley brothers, George Whitefield and many itinerant preachers were attacked by drunken, brawling rabbles armed with such formidable weapons as clubs, bricks, stones, stink bombs and rotten

\textsuperscript{41} Exodus 20 or 34, or the lists of punishments for breaking them in Deuteronomy 5

\textsuperscript{42} E-mail communication with Ruben Israel.

\textsuperscript{43} Ephesians 5:3-5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; and Revelation 21:8. There is another list in Galatians 5:19-21. Note that I will be using the King James Version of the bible when I refer to the specific preaching of confrontational evangelists, as this is the English Biblical text they most often accept as authoritative, and is primarily the language they use when decrying specific sins. There is another list in Galatians 5:19-21.
eggs. On occasion, the mob would procure a bull and drive the tormented beast into the middle of an open-air congregation, while sometimes they contented themselves by making a noise with bells, horns, drums and pans to drown out the preacher's voice. Frequently, when goaded by a violent leader, the people in the mob resorted to every available means of attack. Sometimes they expended their fury in burning or tearing down the houses and destroying or stealing the furniture and possessions of Methodist followers. It is known that John Wesley himself was in grave danger of being killed while at the hands of mobs in Staffordshire and Cornwall. His brother Charles narrowly escaped with his life in the town of Devizes, in Wiltshire, and Whitefield - said to be "covered with blood and on the point of falling" - was rescued in the nick of time from the brutal fury of an Irish crowd in Dublin.\footnote{From the United Methodist News Service, \textit{"At the Roots of Methodism: Early Followers Knew Persecution"}. At \url{http://www.inhymn.com/Articles/Commentary/comment_00000122.php}. Accessed December 5, 2004.}

Whitefield also evidences the almost gleeful acceptance of negative reaction to his preaching, just as the early disciples did: "I was honored with having stones, dirt, rotten eggs and pieces of dead cats thrown at me."\footnote{Quoted in \textit{"A Metaphoric Analysis of the Religious Rhetoric of John Wesley and George Whitefield"} by Joy Stone. At \url{http://www.uttvler.edu/meidenmuller/contemporaryrhetoric/StudentWork/metaphorofwesley&whitefield.htm}. Accessed December 1, 2004.} These stories of crowd persecution sound as if they could have been written by today's confrontational evangelists.

The Second Great Awakening of the 1800's seems to have improved the art of revival preaching, and Charles Finney lead the way. Jed Smock calls Charles Finney "one of America's greatest evangelists."\footnote{Smock, 65.} He evidenced the vibrant charisma of today's confrontational preachers. He built upon the personal experience of God that Wesley had advocated by referring to God in personal and informal ways.\footnote{"The Second Great Awakening: Jubilee and Social Change." At \url{http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/journey_2/p_3.html}. Accessed December 1, 2004.} It was wildly effective.

He also concentrated on those he referred to as "professing Christians," preaching the
necessity of Christian Perfection (holiness). This rhetorical strategy of denying the self-definition of others as “true” Christians is something that confrontational evangelists use today, as a part of their open rebuke of sinners. In fact, I would argue that the focus of confrontational evangelists’ ministries is not non-Christians, but to those former Christians and “professing Christians” they view as “wayward” or “backslidden.”

William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, was a revival preacher at work in England, and a contemporary of Finney. He, too, was an open-air revivalist, and suffered at the hands of the angry crowds. His wife wrote that he would “stumble home night after night haggard with fatigue, often his clothes were torn and bloody bandages swathed his head where a stone had struck.” His movement didn’t really catch on until he made an interesting rhetorical move, changing the name of his ministry from the Christian Mission to the Salvation Army.

The idea of an Army fighting sin caught the imagination of the people and the Army began to grow rapidly. Booth’s fiery sermons and sharp imagery drove the message home and more and more people found themselves willing to leave their past behind and start a new life as a soldier in The Salvation Army.

The image of the soldier doing battle for God against the forces of sin is one that motivates confrontational evangelists today.

Charles Spurgeon and Dwight L. Moody were also well-respected revivalists of the 1800’s, though more Calvinistic and less prone to the use of emotion to effect

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50 ibid.
conversion, even though Moody did begin to realize the possibilities of using advertising
techniques, and Spurgeon did not mind the occasional use of emotional appeal through
appearing persecuted:

"I am somewhat pleased when I occasionally hear of a brother's being locked up
by police, for it does him good, and it does the people good also. It is a fine sight
to see the minister of the gospel marched off by the servant of the law! It excites
sympathy for him, and the next step is sympathy for his message. Many, who felt
no interest in him before, are eager to hear him when he is ordered to leave off,
and still more so, when he is taken to the station. The vilest of mankind respects a
man who gets into trouble in order to do them good, and if they see unfair
opposition excited they grow quite zealous in the man's defense.\textsuperscript{51}

Billy Sunday, however, took the emotional appeal to a whole new level. Sunday
was the first of the revivalists to move into the media age. Billy Sunday (1863-1935) was
the ideal of the emotive, fire-and-brimstone, fundamentalist preacher. He was one of the
first of such preachers to use the medium of radio, and the first to have been videotaped.\textsuperscript{52}

There are many extant audio recordings of his sermons. He spoke out, among other
things, against adultery, gambling, theatre, dancing, and especially, alcohol. In fact, he
was one of the main proponents of Prohibition.

Sunday was a master storyteller, and spoke in such a "plain folks" kind of way
that he seemed accessible to the common man. He told stories of everyday people
struggling with sin, and urged repentance.

So you cross the line and God won't issue any extradition papers. Some of you
want to cross. If you believe, then say so, and step across. I'll bet there are
hundreds that are on the edge of the line and many are standing straddling it. But
that won't save you. You believe in your heart - confess him with your mouth.
With his heart man believes and with his mouth he confesses. Then confess and

\textsuperscript{51} Quoted in Smock, 94.
\textsuperscript{52} It seems, though, that there is only one surviving videotape of his sermons, lasting six minutes long.
receive salvation full, free, perfect and external. God will not grant any extradition papers. Get over the old line. A man isn't a soldier because he wears a uniform, carries a gun, or carries a canteen. He is a soldier when he makes a definite enlistment. All of the others can be bought without enlisting. When a man becomes a soldier he goes out on muster day and takes an oath to defend his country. It's the oath that makes him a soldier. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile, but public definite enlistment for Christ makes you a Christian.\(^{53}\)

It was not just what he said, though, but the way he said it. He gestured grandly to make his points, and used vocal intonation to its fullest. He didn’t just speak of conversion in the abstract; he pointedly spoke to a person’s hesitation and sin. He was the picture of conservative manhood. These are things that confrontational evangelists emulate today.

There were many preachers who preached in the revivalist style. However, confrontational evangelism as it appears today was started by a man named “Holy” Hubert Lindsey (1914-2003). Holy Hubert was a Holiness preacher who dedicated himself to confronting sin wherever it occurred. During the course of Hubert’s ministry, first in Louisiana, and then on America’s college campuses, he claimed to have been stoned, beaten, shot, stabbed, and that the severed head of his song leader was once found in a ditch, with a note left in his pulpit, stating, “You’re Next.” He was a fixture on the UC Berkeley campus and elsewhere in California in the late 1960’s, and preachers have told me that he was beaten by the Hell’s Angels, the Manson Family, and the Black Panthers. The beating by the Black Panthers left him blind, but he did not stop preaching.\(^{54}\) Several sources refer to him as “the father of the Jesus Movement,” but I


suspect that this designation circulates mostly only among today’s confrontational evangelists, as I have found no occurrence of this claim outside of the preachers themselves. As Jed Smock writes,

Hubert, "Holy Hubert" as the hippies called him, was notorious for running into a demonstration of thousands and taking away their microphone system, and preaching to the radicals. Things like, "Do you want a Revolution? I said do you want a revolution? I can't hear you radicals do you want a revolution?", by this time he would have all the hippies and socialists listening and would go on to say, "...You don't need a revolution on the outside, NO!!!, You need one on the inside, and the greatest revolution you will ever have is when Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God comes into your hearts."

It was Hubert’s humor and steadfast dedication to the winning of souls that gained the admiration of a hippie convert named Jed Smock in the early 1970’s. Jed Smock, now known to many of his fellow preachers as “The General,” has perhaps done more to proliferate the confrontational evangelism movement than any other. He began his ministry with Max Lynch, a professor in his hometown of Terre Haute, who had been kicked out of Indiana State University for proselytizing in class. Lynch and Smock soon joined forces with Hubert Lindsey, and this triple threat named themselves “The Destroyers”. They made quite a stir, preaching on numerous campuses and in several countries. As other confrontational preachers that have gone before, Smock calls out the “Church,” self-proclaimed Christians, and open sinners alike, in a personal, satirical, biting way. There is no middle ground with Brother Jed. Either you are saved, or you are hell-bound, and he will do his best to cut his listeners to the quick with his words:


56 “‘Holy’ Hubert Lindsey Biography”.

57 Chuck Spingola has told me that he gave Jed this nickname.
TOO LONG Christians have been ministering one to another in the confines of the church building while their children are reveling in the streets, cruising top speed toward HELL. WAKE UP CHRISTIANS! Get stirred in your spirit. Drive out the devil. Cry out against SIN. Get activated. Be bold and courageous. God is sick of this mealy-mouthed, rubber-necked, chicken-hearted, banana-backed, jelly-bellied, limp-wristed, weak-kneed and flat-footed so-called Christianity. Rise up against evil and let us go forth to BATTLE, tearing down Satan's strongholds by calling people to righteousness and holiness.\(^{58}\)

Indeed, as I suggested before, the ministries of today’s confrontational evangelists are not primarily aimed at non-Christians, but at Christians who they consider “wayward” or “backslidden”.\(^ {59} \)

Brother Jed, I believe, is largely responsible for the explosion of confrontational evangelists today; in fact, he claims to have coined the term “confrontational evangelism” in response to the “confrontational politics” of the 1960’s. When he first began, it was only he, Lindsey, and Lynch. Soon, his future wife Cindy, a former heckler, joined them. Jed named his ministry “The Campus Ministry, USA” and as time went on, trained many apprentices (as did Holy Hubert), who then trained their own. One of the most notable is a Kentucky preacher named Jim Gilles, (now split from Smock) who has been preaching for over twenty years on campuses throughout the United States.

Another man who is responsible for the growth of confrontational evangelism is Ruben Israel, a preacher out of Los Angeles, California. He was inspired by his own conversion and the ministry of Smock, Lindsey, and Lynch, and started his own group, called “Bible Believers,” with two friends in the late 1970’s. Israel’s ministry is mostly at popular culture and religious events, using large, controversial banners and

\(^{58}\) Smock, 93. Emphasis in original.

megaphones to get the message across. He preaches at Mardi Gras in New Orleans, the twice-yearly meeting of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake City, New Year’s revelry in Las Vegas, the Oscars and Grammy awards, political conventions, parades for feminists, gay pride, peace, and any other cause he perceives to be non-Biblical. He has been known to drive around with a bullhorn, scaring startled sinners with a loud message of repentance to break into their everyday lives—something he and other preachers jovially refer to as “drive-by preaching” or just “a drive-by”. He is now on The Campus Ministry, USA’s board of directors, and works long distance with Jed Smock and others to help provide a network of support for confrontational evangelists preaching at the local, regional, and national level across the United States. He is sort of a chameleon amongst confrontational evangelists, a preacher’s politician who can be everything to everyone, avoiding theological bickering in favor of coordinating preachers all over the United States to get together in person to preach against “sinners”.

At this time, it is estimated by some that there are between 200-250 confrontational evangelists active in the United States. Some, like Zach Baxter in Atlanta, preach every day at a street corner in their hometown. Others travel from place to place, close to home. Still others, like Smock, Israel, and Gilles, make national preaching their almost full-time concern.
CHAPTER 5

SYMBOLIC TERRORISM

I would like to suggest that Confrontational Evangelism is not a simple matter of
the exercise of first amendment rights, or a performance of their worldview that should
primarily be understood as one that “create[s] and contest[s] representations of self and
other”\footnote{Dickey, Sara. “Anthropology and its Contributions to Studies of Mass Media,” International Social
Science Journal 153 (1997), 413-427.}, but a performance that inflicts and incites violence by design.

Bruce Lincoln sees the religious violence in the post-colonial era as a reaction to
the past colonial imposition of Western Enlightenment models of secularism. While the
focus of most recent religious terrorism has been aimed at undoing secularism within
government and society in general,\footnote{Lincoln, Bruce. Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 2003.} the nature of the violence of confrontational
evangelism is non-physical, and aimed at individuals. Similar to the way that the “born-
again” conversion (and subsequent “sanctification”) is an individual reversal of Original
Sin, these preachers are trying to effect rejections of secularism one person at a time.
They advocate using the Bible as a “field guide”\footnote{Term used by Ruben Israel} for any situation in life—Christianity
is not a religion to be followed on Sundays, but a way of life to be completely infused
into one’s daily existence. Likewise, the politically charged preaching events are largely
centered on applying God’s commands (or their interpretation of them\textsuperscript{63}) to individual
politicians’ lives and political decisions. For the most part, I think that these preachers
distrust the notion of a Christian theocracy, as one never can be sure whose
interpretation\textsuperscript{64} of theology would be enforced—it is unlikely to be their own, as each
preacher holds a theology that is marginal among Christians today.

While the goal is the individual reversal of the Enlightenment project, the means
of doing so is squarely founded in Enlightenment-style debate. They claim the accuracy
of the Bible as the inerrant, inspired word of God, using this as a basis for “proof” in all
debate. Even amid accusations that the accuracy of the Bible cannot be proven, biblical
scripture is used to “prove” that accuracy. It is what Foucault would call their
“episteme”: “a world view, or paradigm of thinking that ‘defines the conditions...of all
knowledge.”\textsuperscript{65}

Logical debate is not the only Enlightenment influence of their methods. They
regularly use elements of the American secular state to advance their agenda.\textsuperscript{66} For
instance, the First Amendment serves them well. They only preach in public spaces—

\textsuperscript{63} These preachers believe that they are guided by the Holy Spirit in their understanding of the Bible, and,
therefore, that they do not regard their understanding as their own “interpretation,” but accurate
assessments of the mind of God as revealed through scripture.

\textsuperscript{64} Most of the preachers differ on various aspects of theology, and I think that they recognize that anyone in
power would, as well.

\textsuperscript{65} Foucault, Michele, quoted in Mark Juergensmeyer. \textit{Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of

\textsuperscript{66} for a thorough discussion of this, see \textit{Jihad vs. McWorld} by Benjamin Barber.
ones which are funded by the taxpayers, such as public universities, public sidewalks, outside of public or religious buildings, and anywhere else others are allowed to publicize their own agendas, identities, or beliefs. They regularly use police, who are required by law to protect them as they exercise their rights. And they use the courts to ensure that their rights are upheld.

The way in which they deal with governmental authority is quite secular. When police officers or public administrators hassle them and try to make them leave, which has happened in my presence on many occasions, they explain their rights to the police officers or administrators, appealing to the authority of the Constitution and case law. In these discussions, any appeal to a transcendent authority (i.e. God) is notably absent from the conversation. This deference to United States law may point to a secular aspect of their ministry. Or, it may simply be the logical consequences of adhering to Romans 13:1: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”

In the case of Romans 13:1, the line between secular and religious authority blurs, and this seems to go hand in hand with their embrace of civil religion. A great example of this is a sign Ruben Israel uses to counter peace protestors: written across the top are the words, “TRUST BUSH,” and across the bottom, in smaller letters, are the words

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67 Romans 13:1, NIV.
“TRUST JESUS”. In between are the silhouettes of a fighter jet, a tank, a missile, a bomb, a handgun, a military helicopter, and anti-aircraft artillery. It has the effect of backing up their religious exhortations with the threat of state violence.\footnote{Even more telling is that this sign is reserved for anti-war demonstrations against the “War on Terrorism”. Not only does it give a state-sanctioned dimension to the religious preaching, but it also gives the impression of a religious sanction to the war against “terrorists.”}

In his discussion on force and discourse, Bruce Lincoln defines force as “the exercise or threat of physical violence.”\footnote{Lincoln, Bruce. \textit{Discourse and the Construction of Society}. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. 3-5.} It is used by government and other groups to “compel obedience and suppress deviance”.\footnote{ibid.} Confrontational evangelists regularly use the threat of force to do just that. However, it remains legal because the physical violence that they threaten crowds with is not their own, but that of either the police, who are legally bound to protect them, or that of an avenging god, who will kill their listeners in various gory ways during the Apocalypse (which could happen at any time), and cast them into Hell to literally burn for all of eternity. The stories of Revelation and the Old Testament stories of God’s vengeance are often cited as what awaits the crowds of “sinners” at whom they preach for the specific sins they are either displaying or admitting to in conversation. Many of the signs they use warn of hellfire and God’s “judgment,” which is a euphemism for eternal, physical torture for those who do not conform to the preached behavioral standards. Ruben Israel often wears a sandwich board that reads: “WARNING TO ALL: Drunkards, Idolaters, Fornicators, Atheist [sic], General Heathen, Sodomites, Witches, Liars, Abortionist [sic], Adulterers, Satanist [sic], HELL AWAITS YOU!”, while another sandwich board gives a different list that interprets sin in light of

\footnote{ibid.}
perceived contemporary behaviors: “WARNING: Sex Addicts, Baby Killers, Sports Nuts, Racists, Atheists, Rebellious Women, Liar [sic], Drunkards, Two-Faced People, Money Lovers, False Religions, Lewd Women, Child Molesting Homosexuals, Thieves, Witches, Pencil Neck Weak Kneed Gutless Men, Pot Smoking Little Devils, and Mormons...God’s Judgment is coming!” Another often used sign is one that poses the question, “AIDS: Judgment or Cure?” and declares on the reverse: “Sodomy: It’s To DIE For.” Yet another declares: “Wrath & Anguish, Tribulation & Indignation Upon All Who Obey Unrighteousness, Romans 2:8-9. REPENT!” with pictures of a bloody, crucified Jesus on the back. All of these signs overtly threaten those who disagree with them with physical pain.

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is vitally important to understanding the mechanism through which the trauma of confrontational evangelism is both perpetrated and received. Bourdieu defines habitus as “a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures.” “The ‘choices’ of the habitus...are accomplished without

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71 Interestingly, this sign belonged to a preacher who stated to a group of preachers that interracial marriage is wrong.

72 This board was worn by Matt Bourgault in September of 2004 on The Ohio State University campus in Columbus, Ohio.

73 Carried by Matt Bourgault in September of 2004 on The Ohio State University campus, and at various locations around Atlanta in October of 2004.

74 This sign was carried by Dick Chrisensen at various locations around Atlanta in October of 2004.

75 Bourdieu, Pierre, quoted in Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God.
consciousness or constraint, by virtue of the dispositions which, although they are unquestionably the product of social determinisms, are also constituted outside the spheres of consciousness and constraint."

Those in whom trauma is most violently induced occupy much of the same habitus as the preachers; those people already accept, either consciously or unconsciously, the biblical cosmological framework as their habitus. The notion of symbolic power is important here. Bourdieu makes it clear that symbolic power is that which is concealed within the structures of the habitus—taken for granted, and not recognized for what it is. Bourdieu, citing Kant, clarifies that the power of the minister is translated into a violence:

Kant...notes that a church founded on unconditional faith, and not on rational faith, would not have any ‘servants’ (*ministri*) but ‘commanding high officials’ (*officiles*) who give the orders and who, even when they do not ‘appear in hierarchical splendour’, as in the Protestant Church, and even when they ‘protest verbally against all this...actually wish to feel themselves regarded as the only chosen interpreters of a Holy Scripture’, and thus transform ‘the service of the Church [*ministerium*] into a domination of its members [*imperium*] although, in order to conceal this usurpation, they make use of the modest title of the former’. The mystery of ministry only works if the minister conceals his usurpation, and the *imperium* it confers on him, by asserting that he is just an ordinary minister. It is possible for such a person to confiscate the properties associated with his position only in so far as he conceals himself—that is the very definition of symbolic power. A symbolic power is a power which presupposes recognition, that is, misrecognition of the violence that is exercised through it. So the symbolic violence of the minister can be exercised only with that sort of complicity granted to him, via the effect of misrecognition encouraged by denial, by those on whom that violence is exercised.\(^\text{78}\)


\(^{77}\) *ibid*, 209.

\(^{78}\) *ibid*, 209-10.
Bourdieu’s covert symbolic violence can be seen in the ways in which senior preachers minister to other sincere Christians, new preachers, and to their own small congregations (often composed of other preachers and their families).

Since their lives revolve around personally knowing and following the Bible, it is inevitable that differences in interpretation arise. These differences are almost always disputed openly amongst the preaching community, whether in person or over the Internet. Since the Bible, to them, is the infallible and perfect word of God to his followers, there is only one correct understanding of it. Therefore, competing interpretations produce fault lines and rivalries within the community, and bring into question the salvation of other preachers. After all, if you are truly born-again, God would not incorrectly guide your understanding.

There is more going on in confrontational evangelism than merely covert symbolic violence. The symbolic violence perpetrated by confrontational evangelists is also overt: they openly do violence to the symbols and identities which are held most dear by others. It is a violence done against the entire worldview of another person by subsuming it (disrespectfully) within the preachers’ own belief systems. Confrontational evangelists seek to violently destroy and remold all competing belief systems, thereby to constrain the habitus of their listeners. I use “worldview” to mean the conscious way in which they view the world, and “habitus” in Bourdieu’s sense, meaning the subconscious framework and “world of all possibilities” for a particular person.

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79 Remember that the preachers regard my suggestion that their own human interpretation of the Bible determines their understanding as erroneous or offensive.
This symbolic violence can only be perpetrated on someone who believes in the biblical framework, whether they believe they believe it or not. As Bourdieu notes, “...[I]n adult life, preaching reactivates the memory and experience of the childhood Christian upbringing.” The preachers are aware that, ultimately, debate fails. “At the end of the day, we can’t convince anyone of anything...it all comes down to faith...we can only try to rekindle the faith in others,” said Ruben Israel, who has been preaching in the confrontational style for over 25 years. It is the spectacle (or performance) that will generate the violence, re-imposing, whether totally or as a trace of “guilt” (what preachers call “coming under conviction”), the notion that repentance and biblically-based living is necessary, both for salvation and to avoid physical punishment. The spectacle of debate and judgment that, ostensibly, is meant to logically “convince” is merely a cover for their true goal: to rekindle a stronger faith in the Biblical worldview and activate a conscious awareness of the habitus by reasserting the preeminence of the Bible itself. So, although the symbolic violence that is perpetrated by confrontational evangelists seems to be overt, the true power behind it is the covert violence that is committed: the reassertion of the Biblical habitus as a framework within which to constrain the listener’s way of conceiving of the world around them.

They aggressively go after those they call “backslidden Christians”. What these preachers are doing is more than symbolic violence; it is symbolic terrorism. The actions of the preachers are carefully crafted with the purpose of inducing a trauma within those...

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81 Preliminary phone conversation with Ruben Israel, 6-6-05.
they target. They mean to induce a trauma because (according to most testimonies), it takes a final trauma to put the sinner on their knees, crying out to Jesus to save them. Their experience is one of necessary trauma for conversion; therefore, they mean to effect this in others.

They are flamboyantly performative, in-your-face, and unavoidable. You cannot change the channel, turn the page, or simply look away to avoid the message. It is loud and bold, targeting groups and singling out individuals alike. It cannot completely be ignored—the preachers make sure of this. From central locations, they will unfurl their banners with biblical threats of violence, desecrate the holy objects of other religions, and hurl biblically-based insults at individual passers-by. Terms and phrases such as “rebellious woman,” “whore,” “whoremonger,” “prostitute,” “liar,” “sinner,” “effeminate [male],” “fornicator,” “sodomite,” “abomination,” “God hates you!” and other derogatory comments are taken directly from an English translation of the Bible and are aimed at individuals in front of their peers, usually to the embarrassment, indignation, or fury of the recipient.

Careful scouting of the location is done to make sure that the preachers occupy the space where the largest number of people will be forced to come in contact with them. For instance, during the annual New Year’s celebration on the Las Vegas strip, sometimes over a dozen preachers take their places at the largest intersection, next to the Bellagio and MCM-Grand casinos, where over 100,000 people are bound to pass by. On college campuses, they will occupy the main thoroughfare or crossroads during and after lunchtime, where many students must pass in order to eat lunch in the cafeteria or to get
to their next class. At a University of Georgia vs. Tennessee Volunteers college football
game in October of 2004 that drew over 50,000 people, the preachers first drove around
on the area streets lined with tailgate parties, and preached at them over a bullhorn as
they went slowly by (the preachers call this a “drive-by”). They then set up at a location
on the street, which had been closed off to vehicle traffic, in front of the only entrances to
the stadium. Everyone who wanted to watch the game had to first pass the preachers.
Once the game had begun inside the horseshoe-shaped stadium, the preachers stood at the
open end of the horseshoe with their large signs visible right behind the end zone for all
to see, and as the tired, drunken fans filed out, they once again had to run the preachers’
gauntlet of harsh rebuke.

The strongest evidence for the terroristic nature of their endeavor is the reactions
they get. Some blankly stare at the signs and shouting preachers. Some people walk by
with puzzled looks on their faces. Many laugh at the spectacle of what they see as
religious fanatics making fools of themselves, and people with cell phone cameras can be
seen taking pictures, sometimes involving a friend posing gleefully in front of a sign
promising hellfire. Most of the time, though, these are only initial reactions. A great
number of people return to ponder what is going on, and it is rare that this leads to
friendly agreement. Usually, the initial laughter or puzzlement turns into ridicule or
anger. I have often witnessed people shaking with anger and tears. Many who occupy a
portion of the same habitus feel that they are being personally attacked (they are, of

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82 In my experiences at preaching events, there may be only one or two people out of hundreds or thousands
over several hours whose initial reaction is to congratulate and/or thank the preachers for what they are
doing. Even more rare is the random crowd member who feels compelled as a Christian to join the
preachers and hold a banner or contend for their faith.
course) and do their best to inflict an equal amount of trauma on the preachers. I have watched crowds (who are under the mistaken impression that the “sins” themselves are traumatizing to the preachers) enact as many of those sins as possible in front of the preachers. Inebriated crowd-goers chug beer in front of the preachers or douse the preachers with alcohol; those who insist on offering the preachers a drink quickly find their beverage poured out onto the ground. Women bear their breasts in the preachers’ faces, men and women “moon” them, lesbians, gays, and heterosexuals kiss passionately and grab one another in front of them, and gay men kiss or make sexual advances on the preachers themselves (which, by putting the preachers in a feminine position, is one of the only behaviors that truly challenges the preachers on a personal level). Preacher Matt Bourgault suggested to a heterosexual male that if he was so in favor of gay rights, he should allow a gay man next to him to “sodomize him.” I watched as the heterosexual man pulled his pants down, bent over, and allowed the gay man to stick a finger into his rectum. The two young men then made a theatrical effort to further “traumatize” Bourgault by smelling the finger in front of him. It is truly shocking to see just how far people are willing to go to “counter” the message of the preachers in this way. They simply do not realize that, in doing so, their role of the “unrepentant sinner,” is not at all counter to the message of the preachers, but overtly places the protesters back within the habitus which they both inhabit, and strengthens the preacher’s own sense of righteousness.

The crowds often vent their anger in more direct ways; the preachers themselves are often attacked. Things are thrown at them: beer cans and bottles, various beverages,
and other readily-available projectiles. They are often spit on. Ruben Israel reports that he has been urinated on and even ejaculated on as he preaches. He has watched as another preacher has had an entire large bucket of day-old, sun-brewed urine, feces, and vomit poured over him as he walked with a banner.

Preachers' signs and props are often attacked by individuals who recognize them as instruments of trauma. I watched as a young man grabbed a vinyl sign, ripped out the PVC stabilizing rod from the bottom edge, and then hurled it at the preacher as a spear, barely missing him. Preachers are physically attacked: their clothing is purposefully ripped; they are punched, slapped, and knocked to the ground. Ruben Israel claims that militant HIV-positive AIDS activists once ganged up on him and another preacher en masse, trying to bite them. Ruben's wife, Colleen, (ironically) reports that "the people who have beat him up the worst have been Orthodox Jews and nuns who whipped him with rosary beads...they are the most 'righteous' and indignant because they feel God is behind them." Ruben continued the story:

"Every May [in Ruben's hometown of Los Angeles], the Jews celebrate Israel becoming a nation. If you want to preach to them, that's the time, and that's what we did. Guys from the Jewish Defense League—after it was over and I was going back to my car, I saw them out of the corner of my eye. There were five or six of them, and they pounded the crap out of me. There is a point at which the body just shuts down and goes numb...but you still hear the punches. There was another Jew that was over me taking punches too, trying to stop them and yelling that the others weren't really Jews."

After a little while, Ruben said, he was able to get up and move to the safety of his car.

As he got in, he made one more attempt to forcefully pull his still-outraged attackers into

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83 Preliminary phone conversation with Ruben Israel and wife Colleen, 3-6-05.
84 ibid.
his own cosmological framework. He yelled, “You know, you guys just have it in your blood to kill...you killed the prophets, you killed your messiah, and now you want to kill me!” This is a great example of a preacher actively subsuming an opponent’s actions into his own framework.

Every instance of anger, frustration, tears, and physical violence is interpreted by the preachers as the perpetrators “coming under conviction,” meaning that they can feel Jesus convicting them of their “sins” (note that they are saying that this is not caused by the preachers actions, but by God himself). The preachers, who once came under conviction themselves, recognize it as the first step necessary for conversion. They view any “guilt” as being brought on by the unrecognized constraints of the habitus, and their own lives and experiences being forcefully reshaped and redefined within those constraints.

In using the phrase symbolic terrorism, I am using the term “terrorism” quite literally. For further explication of this concept, I look to one of the most thorough studies of religious terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer’s Terror in the Mind of God:

Terrorism is meant to terrify. The word comes from the Latin terrere, “to cause to tremble,” and came into common usage in the political sense, as an assault on civil order, during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution at the close of the eighteenth century. Hence the public response to the violence—the trembling that terrorism effects—is part of the meaning of the term.86

Juergensmeyer does a comparative analysis of five major religious terrorist groups based respectively in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, and Buddhism. His

85 ibid.
86 Juergensmeyer, Mark. Terror in the Mind of God. 5. Emphasis mine.
analysis of the "logic of religious violence" is striking, and his conclusions on the cultures, tactics, and motivations of the religious terrorist groups so closely parallel confrontational evangelism that it demands closer attention here. I will discuss media as the primary instrument of symbolic terrorism, and then I will analyze confrontational evangelism along Juergensmeyer’s characterizations of cosmic war, the making of martyrs and demons, warrior mentality, and the theatre in which all of these characteristics are played out. I will then argue that confrontational evangelism is a unique form of terrorism, because the injuries inflicted are most often non-physical.

\[87\text{ ibid. } x.\]

\[88\text{ ibid. } x.\]
CHAPTER 6

MEDIA AS PRIMARY INSTRUMENTS OF SYMBOLIC TERROR

“EXHORT, v.t. In religious affairs, to put the conscience of another upon the spit and roast it to a nut-brown discomfort.” --Ambrose Bierce

Tying together the history, theology, and symbolic terrorism of confrontational evangelism is the media the preachers use to enact it. They use many types of media to promote their agendas, perform their beliefs, and sustain community, including books, tracts, videos, stickers, buttons, signs, websites, discussion boards, and e-mail lists. These media allow them to embody and perform biblically-patterned living in a very public way.

Before we look at the different types of media used by confrontational evangelists, it is necessary to understand that media is the very source of the world of confrontational evangelists.

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6.1 THE BIBLICAL ABSOLUTE

Their ordering of the world is that of Biblical order. For them, it is that simple, and absolute; in other words, my reference to it as a "worldview" and analysis of it as such would be both offensive to them and evidence that I do not truly understand. It is unacceptable because they see it as a form of relativism that is indicative of the postmodernist point of view; a tool of Satan that would lead men to fall away from God's Plan. Using the term "worldview" implies that there are other, equally plausible "worldviews" held by non-Christians.

The Bible, which one preacher refers to as the "field manual," is the ultimate source of instruction on how life should be lived, which is why they often refer to themselves not by denomination but as "Bible-believing Christians." The Word of God (both in human and book forms) is central to their lives. What we may see as anachronistic living practices are, to them, simply obeying God's timeless plan for their lives. The answers to life's most important living decisions are found therein: they know how to be good children (by honoring their parents), parents (by raising them as Christians and teaching them appropriate gender and sex roles), families (praying and fellowshipping together), Christians (living Biblically and exhorting others to do the same), spouses (man is the head of and loves woman as Christ is the head of and loves the Church; remaining faithful; and some believe that they can engage in penile-vaginal sex only, and only if both are able to procreate), citizens (being outspoken advocates for Biblical living within society, through legislation if necessary), men (by being
heterosexual, active in the faith, strong, virile, and tender), or women (by being heterosexual, active in the faith, modest in dress, and quiet in spirit).

They know what they must do to be “saved” from their sins so they can spend the afterlife with God and Jesus in Heaven. Almost any action that a person can do in life is contained in those 66 books, and these preachers believe, in true Protestant tradition, that God gave his Word to the common man, and that common men can read and interpret God’s Word correctly. The Bible is the key to legitimating their worldview, as it is God’s Word. However, understanding a bit of the history of the mediation of what they conceive of as God’s Word in unmediated form is important, as it has allowed confrontational evangelism to exist in its present form.90

Christianity was originally an oral tradition within Judaism; it was one of many sects of Judaism in the first century91. It wasn’t until 30 years or so after the crucifixion of Jesus that the oral teachings of Christianity began to be written down, in Greek, which was the language of the common Roman, not the Aramaic language of the Palestinian Jews who were being written about. Christianity was so varied that probably hundreds of gospels, letters, and apocalypses were written and circulated (most lost to us today). Over time, certain writings were more often used and accepted than others, but by the early- to mid-300’s, those Christian and Jewish writings that were traditionally used by the early church fathers, and that agreed with what became the normative Christianity of the time, were first canonized as authoritative and inspired by God. The issue of the

90 Note again that confrontational evangelists do not believe that God’s word has been mediated in any way.

91 Among others were the Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians, Essenes, and Zealots.
canon, however, was revisited many times in councils and synods, even up to the Council of Trent in 1545, as a counter to the Protestant Reformation.

The official Bible of Catholic Christianity was the Latin Vulgate, which was translated from the Hebrew and Greek. This Bible was the first large-scale product of Western mass media, thanks to Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press in 1450. Putting the ancient scriptures into this form made the Protestant Reformation possible, as Bibles were no longer only available to the Catholic Church hierarchy. In 1517, Martin Luther published and widely disseminated printed copies of his 95 Theses against Church practices, and subsequently printed and distributed the earliest examples of mass-produced Christian tracts. Men such as William Tyndale and others made English translations of the Latin Vulgate Bible, and they were persecuted by the Catholic Church for doing so, as the Catholic Church only recognized the Latin Vulgate as God’s Word.

In 1611, the official King James Version (KJV) of the Bible (all 80 books) was printed en masse, mostly translated from manuscripts in the original Hebrew and Greek, and occasionally from the Latin Vulgate where the originals were not available. To confrontational evangelists, the King James Version is usually seen as the divinely inspired Word of God; it is often a standard by which other translations are judged. Many of the preachers even believe that the KJV is the only divinely inspired English version of the Bible, even though modern Biblical scholars have shown fairly conclusively that the KJV is full of translation errors, omissions, and additions to the
original manuscripts\textsuperscript{92}. Beginning sometime in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the 14 Apocryphal books were purged from the KJV, and it is still printed without them. It has been revised over ten times since 1611. I would argue that the tendency towards belief in "KJV-onlyism" is a key legitimating action. There is a danger of viewing the Bible, which is the core of their worldview, as socially constructed. The authority of the Bible lies solely in the fact that its contents are understood to be external to man; it was not written by men but by God through men. In addition, for the literal interpretation of the Bible to remain tenable, every instance of canonization and subsequent translation that led to the Bible a preacher uses must be understood as being divinely inspired, as well. God transcends humans and human social order completely. Should there be any hint of human mediation significant enough to change the meaning of God’s Word, then the very foundation of the worldview cannot stand. It must be as transcendent, immutable, and unassailable as God himself.

While many of the preachers only use the KJV (believing it to be as inspired by God as the original text), some do not, and some use other translations to make sense of the archaic language it contains. Regardless of which translation is used, though, they make the a priori assumption that the Bible is inerrant, divinely inspired, and free from contradictions. They read the instruction inside as being just as appropriate today as it was 2000 years ago. They do not accept arguments that Biblical commandments are based on ancient cultural traditions and knowledge and are therefore outdated. The fact that it was written by different men in different places over a thousand years does not

\textsuperscript{92} Two examples are the end of the Gospel of Mark, known as the Marcan Appendix (Mark 16:9-20), and the Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7).
matter; each word is purposeful, and all God-ordained Biblical exemplars are to be emulated. The New Testament is understood as the New Covenant, meaning that it often revises God’s Old Testament (Old Covenant) requirements for mankind. They believe that the English translation (usually the KJV) retains the same meaning and nuance as the original Hebrew and Greek, as it is still the divine Word of God. Therefore, all translation and canonization decisions (usually as of the 1611 KJV) are also looked upon as inerrant and directed by God. They believe that all seeming contradictions can be reasoned out if studied well.

6.2 WRITTEN INTO ORAL LANGUAGE

The King James Bible, because it was officially sanctioned by the head of the Anglican Church, and because it was mass-produced in print, became the most widespread Bible in the English-speaking world. The language used in this version became, for Protestants, the language of the Bible. The KJV was translated into a form of English that was old-fashioned even for the time, as it was seen to be more dignified and fitting for such a holy book (for instance, the word “sky” was grandly translated as “heaven” or “heavens”). Therefore, what was once written by translators and made real by the sheer popularity of the translation was then internalized as proper, dignified, biblical language by most early Protestants.

Language itself imposes its own order and cultural understanding on those who use it. This can have an interesting effect when confrontational evangelists preach the
“God’s Word” they are familiar with to crowds. Many times, they will have to define what it is they are preaching against; fornication, idolatry, and sorcery are often terms which puzzle “sinners” who are not sure whether they apply to themselves or not. One fascinating example of this conflicting language occurred after an angry drunk man was confronted with the six-foot banner reading, “HOMO SEX IS SIN”:

Young Man: “Do you have a Bible? That man [pointing to another preacher] says Romans chapter one has a rule about where you can and cannot stick your penis. This is fucking ridiculous. I am sorry for saying this, but I will stop bothering you if you can show me where it says that you can’t stick your dick in another man’s ass.”

Preacher: [Reading from his Bible in an authoritative tone] Romans 1:26-27: “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet’, meaning destruction.”

The preacher looked at the young man expectantly, believing to have proven his point conclusively. The young man looked at the preacher, confused, more angered and convinced that the Bible did not speak of men having sex, and said, “But that’s just your interpretation!” He argued feebly for a few more seconds, and then became disinterested and wandered away.

It is not only specific Biblical language that is absorbed into the everyday lives of the evangelists, but the metaphoric structures, as well. They are often used as technologies of identity, either encompassing the actions of their own lives or the sinners against whom they preach.
Jed and Cindy Smock, in the promotional video "The Campus Ministry, USA," explain what they see as the Biblical role of the ministry:

Jed: "‘You’ve got to break up the ground,’ as one of the minor prophets said. And fallow ground is ground that has not been plowed. And you have a lot of fallow ground on college and university campuses. So you might call us God’s Plowmen. We go forth and we plow the fields so they will be ready to sow the seed. And you have...so many evangelicals going forth and sowing seed on fallow ground...that has not been plowed. So that seed is not going to take root and not gonna germinate. But some of the seed we sow does germinate—does take root; often maybe not for years." [Here, a converted sinner’s videotaped testimony is inserted.]

Cindy: "‘No one person as a rule leads one person to the Lord. The Bible says some plant, and some water, and God gives the increase.' So we think that we’re one of the many influences that usually leads [sic] a person to get converted.”

However, the act of confrontational evangelism itself is, I would argue, primarily the central performance of their worldview and identity that serves to strengthen and sustain it, and that this performance is not only for the sinner, but for the preacher, his fellow preachers, and his God. The preacher is performing actions that he believes Jesus commanded through the Great Commission, and further legitimized through the examples of the prophets and Apostles, and Jesus himself. When one of the preachers is confronted by a “sinner” who doubts the success rate of their evangelical approach, they say that they are 100% successful because they are obeying God. As Hubert Lindsey said

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93 Hosea 10:12
94 1 Corinthians 3:6-7.
95 Matthew 18:19-20 and Mark 16:15-20.
in his autobiography, “I explained that I didn’t save any man. That was the work of Jesus Christ. I merely preach the Gospel.”\footnote{Lindsey, “Holy” Hubert. \textit{Bless your Dirty Heart}. New Jersey: Logos International, 1973. 111.} In this way, they are able to refuse to justify their actions by “human” standards.

At the same time, they are quite eager to boast of their conversions (referred to as “fruit”)\footnote{for example, see Brother Jed Smock’s web page entitled, “Ministry Fruit,” at http://www.brojad.org/fruit.html.}, the number of people they were able to witness to, and the intellectual and physical hardships they endured for the sake of Jesus. Their view of the cosmos is one that is all-encompassing and real. The identity of the confrontational evangelist is expressed not only through their message of repentance and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior, but in the medium through which they disseminate this message. It is often the medium, as well as the message, to which people object. People are offended that the performances are loud and set up to confront people in public places. They are also offended about the signs and banners used. These signs are created for maximum impact and offense, with what the preachers represent as Biblical messages. Using this medium ensures that the message will be seen, whether the members of the crowd wish to see it or not. As I indicated before, this has much more impact than books, tracts, or videos, which the recipient must choose to view. Some examples of signs are:

REPENT!” (on the reverse of this 6-foot tall banner are images from the movie “The Passion of the Christ”, depicting a bloody, crucified Jesus, with additional close-up shots of his hands and feet)

- “WARNING TO ALL: Drunkards, Idolaters, Fornicators, Atheist [sic], General Heathen, Sodomites, Witches, Liars, Abortionist [sic], Adulterers, Satanist [sic] HELL AWAITS YOU!” (this is a sandwich board sign worn on a preacher’s body; on the reverse, it states, “JESUS SAID: ‘YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN’”)

- “SODOMY: IT’S TO DIE FOR!” (six-foot banner; on the reverse it declares “ADAM AND EVE, NOT ADAM AND STEVE; AIDS…JUDGMENT OR CURE?”)

- “ONLY TRUE believers are not condemned. BUT FALSE BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS ARE CONDEMNED TO HELL FIRE! JOHN 3:18” (and on the reverse: “HELL FIRE FOR ALL SINNERS, IMMORAL PEOPLE, ADULTERERS, FORNICATORS, DRUNKARDS, AND HOMO-SEX PERVERTS. REVELATION 21:8”)

- “SUPPORT PRESIDENT BUSH” (on the top of this six-foot banner; in the center are silhouetted images of a fighter plane, a tank, a machine gun, a bomb, a hand gun, a fighter helicopter, and anti-aircraft missiles; on the bottom it reads, “TRUST JESUS”)

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• “MORMONISM Is Worse Than Child Molesting HOMOSEXUALS” (seen at the 2003 LDS Easter pageant in Mesa, Arizona)⁹⁸

It is through such visible performance and the use of signs and banners that helps to reveal the origin of the term “confrontational evangelism”. Jed Smock claims to have coined the term in response to what was called the “confrontational politics” of the late 1960’s. It is my contention that this movement arose as almost an “equal and opposite” reaction to the college demonstrations in favor of peace in Vietnam and racial, sexual, and gender equality. It began as an identity protest movement, centered on a particular literal interpretation of the Bible, and focused on the undermining of other identity groups whose legitimacy as viable identities defy the very core of the confrontational evangelists’ own worldview and threaten to render it a “point of view” among many. The absolute nature of the cosmology does not allow for relativistic or inclusivist ideologies; as theorized by Peter Berger, for confrontational evangelists, acknowledgment of these as anything other than the work of Satan would destroy the very framework on which they stake their world order and their own identities themselves:

“It is not only that the individual loses emotionally satisfying ties in such cases. He loses his orientation in experience. In extreme cases, he loses his sense of reality and identity. He becomes anomic [disordered] in the sense of becoming worldless….the fundamental order in terms of which the individual can ‘make sense’ of his life and recognize his own identity will be in the process of disintegration. Not only will the individual begin to lose his moral bearings, with disastrous psychological consequences, but he will become uncertain in his cognitive bearings as well. The world begins to shake in the very instant that its sustaining conversation begins to falter….Anomy is unbearable to the point where the individual may seek death in preference to it. Conversely, existence within a

nomic [ordered] world may be sought at the cost of all sorts of sacrifice and suffering—and even at the cost of life itself, if the individual believes that this ultimate sacrifice has nomic significance."

Hubert Lindsey, the man who began this movement on the campus of the University of California at Berkeley in December of 1965, recounts many instances where he responded in kind to “radical” protests. He saw them as attempts to degrade or destroy the God-ordained establishment (and I would argue, by extension, his own Biblically-based identity). In one instance, he claims to have organized a pro-war march to city hall in response to an anti-war rally. He claimed to have stolen most of the people there for the anti-war rally and led them in his own march. He reports being threatened by the Students for a Democratic Society for loudly and purposefully interrupting several of their rallies with his own message. He writes about opposing a Neo-Nazi demonstration outside of a Stokely Carmichael lecture by joining it with his own homemade sign:

“Quickly I made a sign and began walking counter to the line of the march, holding my sign high for everyone to read: ‘NOT BLACK POWER! NOT WHITE POWER! CHRIST’S POWER!’ I began shouting, ‘Christ Power! Christ Power!’ Many began laughing, and the humor of the situation lessened the tension. Some man came on the scene with a sign which read, ‘Electric Power!’ He marched with me. Humor reigned, and the Nazi rally died aborning.”

It is interesting to note that, in each of the above examples, Lindsey portrayed his counter-protests not just as performing his own identity and worldview, but as dismantling the effectiveness of the opposing group’s performance of identity by

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99 Berger, The Sacred Canopy
100 Lindsey, Bless Your Dirty Heart, 85.
101 ibid, 146.
102 ibid, 156.
reconstructing it into his own worldview. This is often done with the same satirizing humor that he displays throughout his autobiography. This biting, satirical humor, which Douglas Wilson defends as following Biblical example\textsuperscript{103}, and which is the hallmark of confrontational evangelism even today, also serves to undermine the identity and worldview of another through pointed humiliation, “exposing” it as utterly ridiculous within God’s established order. The fact that this order is framed as Biblical is very powerful in a country such as America, where Christianity is the dominant religious framework. A “preach report” (an autobiographical report on the results of a preaching event) written by Jed Smock and posted to his online discussion board\textsuperscript{104} praises fellow preacher Jim Webber’s ability to destroy the worldview of a student:

By 3 PM, my group has died out and Jim has been engaged in an intense conversation with an atheist anthropology student, who fancies himself as quite an intellect. Webber has shifted into the apologetic mode and so successfully pulls this man [sic] life foundation out from under him, that he leaves saying that he is going to seek God.

In December of 2004, I had the opportunity to visit the home of “Bible” Jim Webber in Las Vegas, Nevada. His office and garage double as a multimedia workshop used to make many of the signs, banners, t-shirts, and buttons used by confrontational evangelists across the United States as the primary instruments of symbolic violence. His work is an ideal example of “democratic-participant” media; it is that which is inexpensive and available to amateurs to produce.\textsuperscript{105} In his office is computerized sign-


\textsuperscript{104} http://www.brojed.org/newboard/BulletinBoard.html

\textsuperscript{105} Dickey, Anthropology and its Contributions to Studies of Mass Media"
making equipment, and in his garage are many large print-making machines to make the large banners and signs used by fellow evangelists. There is also silk-screening equipment to make t-shirts and caps. He has equipment to make buttons and stickers, as well. He told me that the amount and quality of the machinery would rival any average professional print shop.

Even though he has fun making some extremely controversial signs, it seems that, by far, his most ubiquitous message is the simple phrase “Trust Jesus”. He puts it on all manners of media, and quite often wears it himself on shirts and caps. He says that he has distributed these “Trust Jesus” signs across the country, and that they are probably nailed to roadsides all over the United States. He very self-consciously describes it as branding, “just like Coca-Cola or McDonalds.” He seeks to compete in a culture that is used to advertising—another idea in the marketplace of ideas. The use of these and other signs and banners is also like outdoor advertising because their target audience is forced to read it—it is in their faces. It is even more confrontational than books, tracts, or videos, because one does not have to choose to read or look at it. They have taken an “aesthetic and narrative convention”\(^\text{106}\) of secular society and made it their own, in an effort to contest what they see as the secular nature of American society itself.

Confrontational evangelists easily recognize that the world is a different place than it was 2000 years ago. One cannot simply travel from synagogue to synagogue as Paul did in Acts to convert people. Even standing in the middle of a town square yelling, as Paul also did, is not enough. There is much competition vying for the attentions of

\(^{106}\) ibid, 419.
their intended audience. Media and advertisements are everywhere, and take many forms, such as radio, TV, print, signs, and websites. They believe that they should use any form of medium they can to retake the public square in the name of Jesus. As with the larger Christian community in general, confrontational evangelists make use of media of all sorts. They have warmly embraced it, as it serves them in their efforts.

Jed Smock, a campus preacher, presents an excellent example of using multiple types of media to support The Campus Ministry, USA. He has written several books: an autobiography entitled *Who Will Rise Up?: A Call to Confrontational Evangelism*, three scriptural exegeses on sinlessness, God’s judgement, and predestination,\(^{107}\) and a defense of South African apartheid\(^{108}\). All are available for purchase on Amazon.com. He uses these both as sources of income and (except for the last one) witnessing tools for his ministry.

His autobiography was formerly subtitled *A Fiery Preacher Compels You to Radical Christianity*. According to the cover page, there are 25,000 copies in print. It is not just a simple life story. It is an extended Christian born-again testimony and polemic, detailing his early days growing up in a Christian household, to his young adult years spent as a drugged-out hippie, his time as a university History professor\(^{109}\), his born-again

\(^{107}\) *Walking in the Spirit, Grieve Not the Spirit, and The Mystery of Christ Revealed: The Key to Understanding Predestination*


\(^{109}\) After contacting Human Resources and the History Department at the University of Wisconsin by both phone and e-mail between March 8-10, 2005, I have been informed that there is no proof of employment for George Smock in the fifth-floor archives of the History Department, and that Payroll has no record of him ever being employed at the University of Wisconsin. I sent an e-mail to Mr. Smock on March 10, 2005, and I am awaiting clarification on this issue.
conversion in the fall of 1972, and his subsequent war against unbiblical behavior on college campuses across America. His book details how his ministry began and grew, detailing the theology and methods of his ministry. He includes in his book stories of significant people who influenced him in his life and ministry, who also exemplify the Holiness lifestyle. Interestingly, he literally had to “stop the presses” on one printing of his book to remove a portion of the book dedicated to the life of a fellow preacher, when he learned that the man had had a sexual “fall.” In Jed’s theology, Holiness is not to be represented as something that is too difficult to live by. Including this fallen preacher in his book would have been unacceptable, as the book is used to convince “sinners” that they can gain and retain sinless perfection.\textsuperscript{110}

Also included in the preface of his book is an interesting note about the revisions made in the second edition: “On occasion, I have deleted names to save certain individuals embarrassment over sins that have long since been forgiven.”\textsuperscript{111} It would seem as though his first edition also has served as a way to publicly embarrass acquaintances with their sins until they repent – a form of symbolic violence.

Jed gives out a lot of copies of his autobiography. It is usually given to students who show interest in his ministry for one reason or another. His three scriptural exegeses are more complex, and are not aimed at a casual audience. As the back of his book \textit{Walking in the Spirit} reads, “This is the book the intellectually curious and those who

\textsuperscript{110} Matthew 5:48: “[Jesus said] Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.”

truly hunger and thirst after righteousness have been long awaiting." 112 These books are obviously reserved for an audience that earnestly wants to know more about the theology Jed preaches. I believe they are mainly used for those that are "under conviction"—in other words, those that are feeling the weight of guilt for the sins Jed has proclaimed to them and want to know how they can live their life in line with God's commandments as Jed understands them.

His other book is the seeming odd man out in his collection. Published in 1987, two years after the first edition of his autobiography, Gold in the Furnace: South Africa on Trial was written after Smock's trip to South Africa. The surprising excerpt from the back cover reads:

Do only racist fascists dare to support the white-dominated government of the Republic of South Africa? Does South Africa still practice apartheid? Why won't South Africa give one-man one-vote rights to its native tribesmen? What about Afrikaners' claims of a God-given right to the strategic tip of Africa with its agricultural riches, its diamonds, gold, chromium & other resources vital to U.S. military defense? Must whites turn South Africa over to the blacks who migrated into an empty land at about the same time European pilgrims were carving out a new nation in the African wilderness? American university lecturer & noted author George "Jed" Smock explores these controversies in this proving look at the U.S. ally attacked as one of the most racist nations on earth. 113

Regarding some passages in this book posted by The Pagan Wolf (TPW) on Jed's discussion board, Jed had this to say:

TPW: [quoting Jed's book] “They know the Afrikaner is a warrior who practiced the Old Testament law of eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth and perhaps the rest of the body just for good measure. This simple but just and effective policy saved many lives in the long run and brought law and order to a continent ravaged by militant despots and witch-doctors”

113 Smock, Gold in the Furnace
Smoock: I have not looked at my book in years. I will have to check the context of this quote.

TPW: Isn't it what they said about how they treated Native Americans on THIS continent?

Smoock: I am not one to give a blanket condemnation of my forefathers who cleared the wilderness and tamed the wild savage in America so that we can today enjoy the fruits of our fathers [sic] labor and courage.114

TPW [a self-identified half-Native]: You know what this wild savage tells you? That you don't think highly of your wife and daughters’ heritage, since they have native blood in them.... And here is the VERY QUOTE FROM YOU!!

ATTEND!! “I have traced my family linage back to the 17th century and we have no Indian blood. Please lets [sic] keep this just among friends here on the BB, but Cindy does have a small amount of Indian blood in her. I am dark, but that is mostly from being out in the sun almost daily.”115

This book is absent from Smock’s own website store. In response to my question on the discussion board, Smock wrote,

The reason that I do not advertise the book is that it has been out of print for a good many years....I am not ashamed of the book. In many respects, I am more proud of it than other books that I have written because of the extensive research. I have not read the book in years, but as far as I can remember, I stand by what I wrote, although I am sure some of my projections were in error, as will be the case when one attempts to predict the future. I must acknowledge that I have not kept up on S.A. over the last decade or so.116

It would seem that Smock, like Lindsey before him, is very strongly pro-establishment, as long as the establishment is perceived as God-ordained. The establishment and maintenance of this godly order is far more important than any secular humanitarian concerns.

One of confrontational evangelists’ more regularly used mediums is now the Internet. It is used in many ways. They have sites on which they sell sermons and

exegeses on tape and in print, and solicit donations. They link to digital promotional videos, sermons, video of preaching events, and exegeses for the ministry to gain approval converts or apprentices. They link to their own Biblical commentaries on their ministry methods and messages. And, of course, they exhort any web-surfing “sinners” to repent and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, both in print, and in audio and video files.

The Internet has also provided a real ability for these preachers, who are scattered across the nation, to have a sort of community. There are public discussion boards, such as Jed Smock’s, that allow for anyone to join in and discuss anything tangentially related to Christianity or preaching. Preachers, believers and unbelievers alike join in, and it is an interesting mix of personalities and points-of-view. It is another tool for confrontational evangelizing, as the conversation, even with Pagans and atheists, always seems to revolve around the Christian perspective.

There are also private e-mail cc lists. These allow for a preachers-only discussion forum, and as such, seem to be the perfect way for increasing community and fellowship across great distances. They discuss current events, upcoming preaching opportunities, report on their activities, and discuss the Bible. However, according to Jed Smock’s daughter Evangeline, e-mail lists such as The Octagon (which includes many of the preachers whom I am studying) actually do more to factionalize and sow discord than to promote fellowship, due to the nature of the medium. People sit by themselves and type out messages to others they rarely or never see in person. They can quickly type out their thoughts and hit “send,” allowing their hastily composed messages to be seen by others,
with very little time spent considering the outcome. The result is some of the most
sharply worded invective and ad hominem attacks I have ever seen from those who
identify themselves as fundamentalist Christians. For example is one recent post by one
preacher to another, referring to an incident in which the preacher writing had actually
pounded Ruben Israel to the ground with his fists during a preach event:

Some cons have said "there is no finer joy than a fat butt boy" and "I rather hear a
fat boy fart than a pretty girl sing". Ruben would soon be named Ruby and given
certain clothing and chores to ware [sic] and do. Many of the S[an] Q[uentin]
chaps would not only drop Ruben like a 100lb homo but upon looking at his soft
helpless form, dazed and crying to the police for help could, if so inclined, take
liberties which Ruben could not resist with mere talk. A grim prospect, having
already failed the physical test. I can say this in truth because I, if so inclined,
could have taken liberties while Ruben was helpless at my feet in Washington
DC. A product of his smart mouth. True religon [sic] will gain you favor with the
upright while a smart mouth will get you...well the possibilites [sic] are endless.
To my brothers in Christ you have (by the grace of God) my unwavering
fellowship\(^{117}\).

Confrontational evangelists also do not agree on what the Bible instructs; in fact, I
do not believe that I have met two of them who completely agree on the totality of the
Bible’s teachings. But since the Bible instructs Christians to use reason and debate,\(^{118}\)
they do so, whether with “sinners” or with one another. This results in many marvelous
Biblically-based exchanges on The Octagon, as well. For example is this portion of a
lengthy exchange between confrontational evangelist Jim Webber and anti-abortion
preacher Adrian Horien about what happens to aborted fetuses:

**Webber:** Adrian, Adrian, who in world have you been hanging around....The
topic is Depravity in reference to the unborn.

\(^{117}\) Personal e-mail communication from The Octagon, March 8, 2005.

\(^{118}\) Hebrews 5:14; 2 Timothy 4:2; Jude 1:3

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Horien: Not the way you (mis)define "depravity". Specifically, the question is about whether we are born sinful or not. Define your terms: sin - transgression of law (1 John 3:4). To suggest that "depravity" applies to babies begs the question (i.e. it presumes the answer in the assertion).

Webber: How can the unborn admit guilt? If you say... they can't, that's why they go to Heaven, then truly the Abortion Doctors are doing them a favor.

Horien: Even still; God says thou shalt not murder. Therein lies the reason that heaven is not even part of the equation, nor is it relevant to the question about sinful nature. It is just simply irrelevant.

Webber: Because as you know if they were to live almost all of them would not admit guilt and would burn in the lake of fire.

Horien: So what? God says, "thou shall not murder".

Webber: So why not at least given the Abortion Doctors some credit for being the Greatest Evangelists in the History of the World.

Horien: That's just plain old stupid and not even worthy of a retort.

Webber: What group of people do you know that has ever been more responsible for people getting to heaven than the Abortion Doctors. {From your Theology}

What denomination-what Church???

Horien: God is not pleased with these babies being murdered - it is He who commanded "thou shall not murder". Their admittance to heaven has nothing to do with the original question, nor does it have any bearing on anything regarding my theology or evangelism.

Webber: If you want to turn your back on the bottom line go ahead. But Jesus came to save. And from your point of view that exactly what the Abortion Doctors are doing.

Horien: You're either not listening or you don't have the mental horse-power to connect the dots. Maybe you're just so committed to your opinion that you will not see anything differently. Life is not about US going to heaven nor is it about helping anyone avoid going to hell. It is about the guilty admitting their guilt and God showing merciful favor to them and GOD GETTING what He deserves.

In this exchange, Webber and Horien are each protecting their own respective ministries (and identities within each). Webber is primarily a confrontational evangelist. Horien is primarily an anti-abortion preacher. They both agree that aborted fetuses have

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119 Personal e-mail communication from The Octagon, January 17, 2005.
souls, and that abortion is wrong. However, if Webber admits that babies go to heaven, then he must also admit that doctors who perform abortions have ensured more people have gone to heaven than Webber himself ever could through his ministry. The focus of Horien’s life work is against abortion. If Horien admits that babies (or fetuses) automatically inherit Original Sin and would go to hell if they did not have the opportunity to repent, he is admitting that God is fundamentally unfair. His life’s work is predicated on God’s commandments and His righteous judgment for noncompliance—His fairness. If he admitted that God cares more about how many souls get to heaven, then his life’s work would be for nothing.

It is clear that confrontational evangelists are proficient producers of media, and that they are quite adept at mediating their message in a variety of ways. What is also clear is that they do not accept the prior mediation of the message that has formed their own raison d’être, nor are they perhaps aware of (or want to admit) some of the inherent side-effects of the mediation of their messages. It will be interesting to see how these media, and new technology to come, will be used by (and perhaps change) them in the future, and whether it will sustain or factionalize them further.
CHAPTER 7

SOLDIERS IN THE COSMIC WAR

“Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.” - Psalms 139:21-22\textsuperscript{120}

In Mark Juergensmeyer’s comparative study of different terrorist groups from different religious traditions, he found that each group believes that there is a war going on between righteous believers and treacherous unbelievers that is merely the earthly extension of a cosmic war between transcendent powers of good and evil.\textsuperscript{121}

Confrontational evangelists are no exception. They believe that there is a war going on between good and evil, and that every person chooses to be either a tool of God or a tool of Satan. For these preachers, a person who is a tool of Satan can be identified as anyone who does not follow their accepted translation and interpretation of the literal word of the Bible.\textsuperscript{122} And, for them, following the literal word of the Bible has specific implications

\textsuperscript{120} KJV

\textsuperscript{121} Juergensmeyer, Mark.  \textit{Terror in the Mind of God.}

\textsuperscript{122} Keep in mind here that they do not believe that there is any human mediation between them and the inerrant Word of God; that the translations and interpretations they prefer are inspired directly by the Holy Spirit. When two or more of them disagree on an interpretation, there is often spirited, friendly debate, which often is never fully resolved. On occasion, there is an assumption made by one or more sides that the other side does not have the Holy Spirit behind them. Sometimes it degenerates into questioning whether the other person is even “right with God” or is actually acting as a “mouthpiece for Satan.” There have been a good number of permanent schisms arising amongst preachers as a result.
for your actions. It is those whose actions clearly fall outside of these parameters who are targeted as “God-haters.” They allow no middle ground here—a person is either one or the other. The preachers target areas in which this “sin” is performed visibly in public, and these opposing performances become ground zero in the culture war.

For these preachers, the cosmic framework is so powerful because it is transcendent—not dependent on any one person or group of people, but on the Truth of the universe itself. Their own roles to play are, therefore, divinely ordained and aided by the power of an anthropomorphic, personal, and all-powerful God. As we have seen before, the preachers can find plenty of Biblical precedent for their actions. In addition, they adhere to a variation on Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s view that Christians should commit violence for a higher purpose. In this case, the higher purpose is to counter the efforts of Satan and his followers in public, thereby making it possible to “save souls” that would otherwise be headed for eternal punishment. Their violence is non-physical. The humiliation that they dish out is biblically-based and state-sanctioned.

An audience is necessary, otherwise the preaching is pointless. They need hecklers, and they need people to be upset in order to draw them into the biblical framework. Their actions are tailored for media coverage, and, as they are usually where all of the action is happening, the media almost invariably obliges. They not only commandeer the physical public sphere, but the virtual public sphere as well, using them as instruments through which to impose God’s judgment. In fact, they are even counting on this very publication to add to this effect.
To be a confrontational evangelist, it is not necessary to have specifically premillennial or postmillennial beliefs; both provide a basis from which to focus both on individual conversion and conversion of society as a whole. For postmillennialists, who believe that Jesus will only return after the Kingdom of God has been created for 1000 years on earth, transforming society to one based on biblical rules is of the utmost importance, and individual salvation is one means to that end. For premillennialists, who believe that Jesus will return to usher in and rule over the 1000-year reign of the Kingdom of God on earth, the salvation of the greatest number of individual souls is most important, to prevent them from going to Hell when Jesus returns. Transforming society is one means to that end, by providing a habitus within which individual, permanent conversion is made more probable. To this way of thinking, the more “non-biblical lifestyle choices” that are openly put forth as alternatives to the biblical habitus, the greater chance a potential saved soul will be seduced away from its heavenly reward. It is the very existence of a carefully delineated habitus that is at stake in either view, and any expansion of that habitus is regarded as an act of cosmic violence which requires like response.

Integral to the images of cosmic warfare is the terminology that is ever-present among confrontational evangelists—terms wrapped up in the metaphors of warfare. It peppers both their public and private speech, and helps to shape the very framework within which their lives and activities are carried out. They often use the terms “doing battle,” and call preaching the “front lines”. In fact, Ruben Israel, who has been a confrontational evangelist for over twenty years, has been giving a sermon about the call
to confrontational evangelism almost as long. He repeatedly uses military imagery, and
the image of a “line in the sand” that men must cross if they aren’t totally up to the
challenges and hardships involved.\textsuperscript{123}

Their own performances at a preaching event will be critiqued, satirized,
mythologized, and usually, in pious tones and with much back-slapping and good humor,
accepted by their fellow preachers as a fine example of a Christian laboring for the sake
of Jesus. The stories promote the type of camaraderie common among soldiers, and are
often framed with the imagery of warfare: “I am a Christian soldier. And there is a battle
between the righteous and the unrighteous!”\textsuperscript{124} This provides social cohesion within the
group within a common worldview, and a re-affirmation of their identity as a righteous
Believer within that world.

\textsuperscript{123} Sermon given by Ruben Israel at the Open Bible Tabernacle in Marietta, GA, October 12, 2004.
\textsuperscript{124} Lindsey, \textit{Bless Your Dirty Heart}, 16.
CHAPTER 8

MANUFACTURING SAINTS AND SATANS

For confrontational evangelists, the tradition of valorizing those who have sacrificed the self as a form of greater redemption goes back to the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets. Of course, this sort of sacrifice, depicted in the passion story of Jesus, is the very core of Christianity itself. Subsequently, a tradition of heroic martyrdom began, from the traditional killings of Peter, Paul, and James at the hand of the Roman government, to the intermittent and sometimes spectacular persecutions of Christians in the early Roman Empire. By at least the year 300, the valorization of martyrs seems to have been well established among Christians; Eusebius details a great many of them, from the time of Jesus until the reign of Constantine, when persecution ended\textsuperscript{125} and Christianity was made the favored religion of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{126} Interestingly enough, confrontational evangelists reject the brand of Christianity that arose once the persecutions ended; they understand it as having been contaminated by Pagan elements and by too many compromises with state power.

\textsuperscript{125} The persecutions ended in 313 CE with the Edict of Milan, a proclamation made by Constantine and Licinius, which decreed that Christians should be allowed to worship unharmed, and provided for the return of all property previously confiscated from Christians.

I would suggest that this persecution is integral to their worldview; their very identity depends on being an unacceptable challenge to mainstream culture. In fact, I have been told by many confrontational evangelists that they know that they are not being effective if no one is arguing with them. The “persecution” and resistance that they receive from offended crowd members serves to reinforce their own belief that what they are doing is right and good, because they believe that sinners are loudest and most violent when they are “under conviction” for their sins. In other words, they believe that crowd members respond violently out of shame and guilt because Jesus has powerfully convinced them that they are hellbound sinners. And, because they receive violent treatment as they believe the prophets and Apostles did, it reinforces their own self-identification as modern-day prophets. The crowd does not know it, but the crowd is the most important part of this performance of the confrontational evangelists’ identity and worldview. Without their reaction, the performance would be a failure. In fact, many “preach reports” have been written that talk about such failure as disappointments.

As stories of true martyrdom (involving death) within the contemporary confrontational evangelism movement are unavailable, there are other forms of martyrdom discourse that are deployed. These involve physical, legal, economic, and social suffering “for the sake of Christ.” Physical suffering is probably the most common concern, as the preachers’ audience quite often responds by physically trying to hurt or humiliate them (in ways previously detailed). Legal suffering is also quite common, as law enforcement officers often seek to keep them from preaching in highly controversial situations. This can lead to arrest, and some preachers claim, physical mistreatment by
officers behind closed doors. Since the late 1990s, however, there have been well-funded pro-bono Christian law firms waiting to represent them in criminal and civil suits.

Economically, preachers have had to contend with legal issues surrounding their preaching, as well as jobs being put at risk when their controversial preaching is made known. Many preachers, believing that God provides, have foregone regular jobs and lived off the donations and kindness of others. Preacher Clarence “Bro” Cope of Pennsylvania often relates the story about the first year he felt “called” by God to preach: “There were only two rules. The first was that I could only live off of what God provided. The second was that I could not ask anyone else for any help.” He lived in a small car throughout the year, including through the harsh winter, and says that, despite only having lived off of $700 that year, he always received the food, water, and shelter that he needed.

Socially, of course, there is a stigma surrounding those who preach in this way, even amongst other Christians. Often, the preachers’ immediate and extended families disapprove. Sometimes their tactics and beliefs completely estrange them from family and friends. Sometimes the estrangement is only partial, and if this is the case, it offers the preacher an opportunity to demonstrate the Christian value of longsuffering by continuing to minister the gospel to them over the years in the hopes that they will convert before death. Either way, the situation lends itself to martyrdom discourse.

The language of martyrdom is one of victimization, bravery, and righteousness. “‘[T]here’s no doubt’ that within ‘every terrorist’ there is the conviction that ‘he is the
victim’…this allows the terrorist to justify his action ‘morally within his own mind.’”

According to Juergensmeyer, martyrdom is understood as righteous sacrifice while fighting within the context of a cosmic war.

The word martyr comes from the Greek term for “witness,” such as a witness to one’s faith. In most cases martyrdom is regarded not only as a testimony to the degree of one’s commitment, but also as a performance of a religious act, specifically an act of self-sacrifice. This dimension of martyrdom links it to the activity that some scholars see as the most fundamental form of religiosity: sacrifice. It is a rite of destruction that is found, remarkably, in virtually every religious tradition in the world. The term suggests that the very process of destroying is spiritual since the word comes from the Latin, sacrificium, “to make holy.” What makes sacrifice so riveting is not just that it involves killing, but also that it is, in an ironic way, ennobling. The destruction is performed within a religious context that transforms the killing into something positive. Thus, like all images of sacrifice, martyrdom provides symbols of a violence conquered—or at least put in its place—by the larger framework of order that religious language provides.

This also ties in with the born-again testimony of these preachers—it is a way of metaphorically sacrificing (making holy) oneself. Those born again bravely declare that the way of living and thinking, the very identity that they have built their lives on has been wrong, and must change. I use the term “bravely” because among the men in this hyper-masculinized group, admitting fault and that you are wrong is a loss of control.

They then resolve to follow all of God’s expectations as set forth in the Bible. This is often referred to as “dying to the world” and being “reborn in Christ,” denoting the sacrifice made.

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127 Billy Wright, a convicted terrorist and member of the Protestant Ulster Volunteer force, as quoted in Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God.* 170.

CHAPTER 9

OFF- OFF-BROADWAY

The location, or theatre, of the confrontational evangelists’ preaching performance, is the key to its effectiveness. I am also using Juergensmeyer’s term theatre to stress that what the preachers are producing is a “theatrical display of violence” involving costume, props, and setting.\textsuperscript{129} It is meant to be an exaggerated demonstration; for the time that they are preaching, they take on the roles of hellfire-and-brimstone fundamentalist preachers or prophets. “The very adjectives used to describe acts of religious terrorism—symbolic, dramatic, theatrical—suggest that we look at them not as tactics but as \textit{performance violence}.”\textsuperscript{130}

The costume is specific. The men always wear what could be coded as definitively masculine clothing, and some wear this everyday apparel while they preach. The few women who preach usually overtly code as modest and female while preaching, often in skirts or dresses with much of their skin covered, although less modest pants, skirts and tops are sometimes worn in day-to-day life. Some of the men dress in a way that evokes the image of the old-fashioned Victorian patriarch while preaching: short,

\textsuperscript{129} ibid. 122.

\textsuperscript{130} ibid. 126. Emphasis in original.
neatly combed hair, suit pants, dress shirt, suspenders, and tie, in any weather. Others wear shirts and/or hats with religious messages (and many of them do on a daily basis, which I would argue is also performance). Still others wear wooden sandwich boards, which are two signs facing in opposite directions, connected by straps at each corner to be worn over the shoulders. (I have been told that the sandwich boards double as effective body armor in violent situations.)

Perhaps the most radical costume is often worn by Ruben Israel when he preaches at ISKCON parades—it is a black and white, full-body cow suit, complete with pink udders that cover Israel’s groin area. Israel happens to be a large man, and fills out the suit, adding to the bovine effect. The udders are often suggestively pulled by passers-by.

Deceptive costume is also, less commonly, used. Sometimes there will be “shills” in the crowd, dressed as other crowd members are, to serve as backup or witnesses if violence should occur. A preacher may dress up to assume the identity of another group and engage in behavior embarrassing to that group. Some preachers who preach against the Mormon Church dress up as Mormon missionaries during important Church events in the hope that their scathing tracts will be graciously accepted by unsuspecting Mormons walking by.

Ruben Israel has told me, “Ezekiel [the prophet] was a prop man! What he did was almost street theatre!” And as with any good theatre, there are props involved. Ruben uses large electrical plugs to demonstrate to homosexual groups that the two male

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131 Preliminary conversations with Ruben Israel.


133 Phone conversation with Ruben Israel, June 8, 2005.
ends or the two female ends will not fit together correctly. After the Michael Jackson trial, he added a very small plug to demonstrate against same-sex child molestation. Cindy Smock will call for a condom from the crowd, unroll it, rip a big hole in it, and shake it around while chiding the students for being gullible enough to rely on it to prevent pregnancy and STDs. Often, campus preachers such as Jim Gilles or Jed Smock will carry a somber looking briefcase filled with biblical exegeses and tracts to the preaching location, and only have his Bible in hand as he preaches. Almost all preachers carry Bibles with them, although it is always a dispensable copy, as they are often damaged during preaching events. Some preachers have thrown a copy of The Living Bible on the ground to protest groups such as Promise Keepers that they see as corrupted, effeminate Christianity.\(^\text{134}\) Many other props are actually holy objects from other religions. Sometimes, campus preacher Jed Smock will hold a Qur’an in his left hand (respect for the Qur’an is shown by holding it in the right) while preaching on the evils of Islam.\(^\text{135}\) Other preachers have waved rosary beads at Catholic gatherings while preaching against the “Pagan” adoration of Mary.\(^\text{136}\)

A good example of the power of this desecration has occurred when preachers preach against Mormon beliefs. Ruben Israel (along with other confrontational evangelists) regularly goes to the twice-annual Mormon General Conference in Salt Lake-

\(^{134}\) The Living Bible, in this case, is not considered to be a “real” Holy Bible, as it is not a literal translation. The Promise Keepers are seen by the preachers as being too willing to compromise with society on notions of toleration and diversity and internalize non-Christian values. The fact that men usually cry and hug at Promise Keeper rallies is coded as effeminating.

\(^{135}\) This has resulted in Smock being attacked by Muslims who were trying to prevent the desecration of their holy book by taking it away from him.

\(^{136}\) Preliminary phone conversation with Ruben Israel, 6-9-04.
City. The General Conferences are the worldwide assemblies of the Church of Latter-Day Saints. The preachers were having some trouble getting the Mormon crowd to respond, so Israel managed to procure Mormon holy undergarments from ex-Mormons. These garments were described by a Mormon journalist:

Like a variety of religious garments, it is worn against the skin. It is a type of underclothing. They don't talk about it. They don't show it to people. They keep it sacred. Like virtually all religious clothing, it is a specific reminder of promises made to God. Like virtually all religious clothing, it is precious and significant to the people who wear it.\(^{137}\)

The very fact that the preachers had possession of these garments, and that they were being shown in public, was highly offensive. The journalist described what happened next:

\[\text{...[O]ne supposed minister of the gospel was wiping his backside with them,}\]
\[\text{laughingly treating them like toilet paper as thousands who held them sacred}\]
\[\text{walked by.... He also draped them around his neck, and pretended over and over}\]
\[\text{to sneeze into them. And loudly blow his nose into them. While families and}\]
\[\text{children walked past.... And, oddly, two worshippers were taken away in}\]
\[\text{handcuffs. One man, dressed in his church clothes, walked past in the crowd, saw}\]
\[\text{the insults and desecrations, and grabbed the piece of clothing. To protect it [sic].}\]
\[\text{He was charged with robbery and taken to jail. Half an hour later another}\]
\[\text{worshipper similarly grabbed a molested garment and attempted to take it away.}\]
\[\text{He was unsuccessful and waiting police stepped in to take him into custody.}\(^{138}\)}

Once again, the preachers were on a public sidewalk, preaching to a captive audience—a line of people who were waiting to enter the conference site: men, women, young and old, entire families waiting to participate in an important religious event. The symbolic terrorism perpetrated by the preachers was, as is often the case, enforced by the threat

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\(^{138}\) Ibid.
(and actuality) of state violence. “...[T]hat's the world we live in. You are harangued for your beliefs and arrested for defending them,” wrote the Mormon reporter of his outrage, violation, and sense of powerlessness.\textsuperscript{139}

The most ubiquitous prop amongst confrontational evangelists, besides the Bible, is, of course, the sign or “banner”. While elsewhere I have analyzed the content of these signs, the physical nature of these signs is notable. Their presence often takes on the aura of battle flags (the larger, the better)\textsuperscript{140}, carried proudly as they walk through a crowd or stand to the side. The banner itself is made of canvass covered in vinyl. On the top and bottom edge of the banner are pockets for small-diameter PVC or metal piping bars, for stability. These bars are then connected to a vertical extension pole that can be lengthened while stationary, to extend to the ground, or shortened for mobility. While mobile, a preacher carries the bottom of the pole in a flag harness, centered at his waist, which gives the bizarrely appropriate illusion that the banner is an extension of his own phallus.\textsuperscript{141}

Last, but not least, is a truly utilitarian prop nicknamed “the truth horn.” It is the bullhorn carried by preachers so that they can be heard during “drive-bys” and within

\textsuperscript{139} ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} This was well illustrated by preacher Jeremy Sonnier in New Orleans during Mardi Gras in February of 2006. He very proudly showed to the other preachers his new banner, which he described as the largest banner ever made to be carried by one preacher. It was shown to the other preachers with all of the enthusiasm of a man showing off his new sportscar.

\textsuperscript{141} See Stephen J. Ducat, The Wimp Factor: Gender Gaps, Holy Wars, and the Politics of Anxious Masculinity. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004. “While all anatomically intact males have a penis, no one has a phallus – the mythic, permanently erect archetypal monolith of masculine omnipotence that signifies untrammeled growth, invulnerability, and freedom from all dependency. One who appears to possess the phallus is seen as lacking nothing and no one. He seems to wield a talisman that protects against all feminine danger, especially that which rises from within (2).”
loud crowds. It ensures that, no matter how many people are yelling at them, the preachers' message will be conveyed loud and clear. Most city noise ordinances state that they can use amplification to match the sound level of the “ambient noise”. This works to their advantage in situations such as a “Gay Youth Rally” that took place on the steps of the Atlanta, Georgia state courthouse in October of 2004. Because the organizers of the rally had a permit to use amplification, the preachers were allowed to stand across the street and use the bullhorn to preach against them, resulting in an almost complete disruption of the rally, as the youths’ messages of tolerance were peppered by the preachers' offensive terminology and x-rated accusations of poor sexual health practices. In response, many crowds have found that dumping their alcoholic drinks into the “truth horns” will silence them (subsequently resulting in the preachers prophylactically covering the horns in plastic wrap).

The strategic symbolic terrorism inflicted by confrontational evangelists and their props present such a nightmare for many groups that these groups often devote a great deal of planning time and large amounts of money to counter them. Forcing groups to spend precious resources on combating the evangelists’ tactics is one of the street preachers’ goals, as it drains resources that these groups would otherwise be able to use to propagate their own messages, and helps to weaken their organizations. Below are two examples of such efforts made in Philadelphia and Salt Lake City.

Organizers of Philadelphia’s OutFest in October of 2004 discovered that the preachers and their props could be effectively, albeit momentarily, neutralized. Trying to insure that their celebration would not be ruined as in years past, they improved upon a
sign-blocking method that had been used in partially blocking the signs of anti-gay preacher Fred Phelps during his picketing of Matthew Shepard’s funeral.\textsuperscript{142} They made what they called “Pink Angels” (carved angels on the top of 4’x8’ pink insulation boards), and brought about 50 whistles to counter the sound of the bullhorn. When the group of confrontational evangelists (calling themselves Repent America) unfurled their banners and began preaching their message over a bullhorn, twenty OutFest volunteers surrounded the preachers with the “Pink Angels” and blew their whistles, moving as the preachers moved.\textsuperscript{143} The leader of Repent America, Michael Marcavage, became frustrated and complained to police that his first amendment rights were being violated. He then ignored police direction not to block the sidewalk in front of vendors, and instead, sat down in the middle of the crowd to read his Bible. All eleven evangelists were then arrested and charged with felony hate crimes under Pennsylvania’s new laws,\textsuperscript{144} but all charges were dismissed several months later.\textsuperscript{145} On October 21, 2005, the eleven members of Repent America who were arrested in 2004 filed suit against the city of Philadelphia, OutFest, and individual officials in federal court for alleged civil rights violations under the First, Fourth, and Fourteenth Amendments and the constitution of


\textsuperscript{143} Phone conversation with Franny Price, Executive Director of Philly Peace Presents (which organizes OutFest) in December of 2004. Price did say that a few people initially tried to block him, but were not OutFest volunteers. According to Repent America’s website at www.repentamerica.com, Marcavage characterizes the “Pink Angels” not as insulation boards but as a “militant mob of homosexuals,” and alleges that it was official Outfest volunteers that formed the initial blockade.


Pennsylvania. They are seeking actual, compensatory and punitive monetary damages, as well as attorney’s fees, from all involved, in both their professional capacities, and as private citizens. 146 Here, the threat of harm is not physical, but financial, and again, is state-sanctioned.

Interestingly, Ruben Israel, who protested Philadelphia’s OutFest in 2003, the year before Marcavage’s group was arrested, thought he had a good working relationship with the police department there, and had been shocked by the arrests. He felt that it was necessary to go to the 2005 OutFest, to personally determine who had been the problem in 2004—either Marcavage or the police—and to “out” the offender. He was troubled by reports that Marcavage had told a reporter earlier that year that homosexuals should be executed. 147 As a secondary motive, he wanted to shut down the effective counter-measures that OutFest had implemented the year before. As he often does before a “preach”, he contacted the Philadelphia police department and held a meeting with them before OutFest began. He told them that his group would be there for only two and a half hours of preaching, and that if the OutFest volunteers blocked them, “the clock stops,” and they would preach an additional amount of time equal to the blockage. The police apparently negotiated with the Outfest volunteers, and they did not use the “pink angels” around Ruben’s group—they convinced them to leave the angels on the sidewalk and allow Israel to preach. Israel, determining that Marcavage, and not the police, had been

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146 Civil Action No. 05-05287, filed in The United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

147 “Jesus Geek Superstar.” Online at http://citypaper.net/articles/2005-02-03/cover2.shtml. Accessed 11-12-05. In a response to the article, Marcavage says that these were “off the record” comments taken out of context. The editor notes that they stand by the accuracy of their reporting as written.
the problem the year before, told the Philadelphia police chief that he would be happy to testify against Marcavage in the civil suit that is still pending against them. In this instance, Israel offered to support the police, even against another confrontational evangelist, to ensure that symbolic terrorism could continue to be backed up by the more immediate potential of state violence instead of the distant possibility of it through the courts.

In Utah, the Church of Latter-Day Saints bought the Main Street Plaza, a beautiful downtown central park area adjacent (on the east) to the walled Temple Plaza, from Salt Lake City in 1999 for over $8 million, allegedly to restrict opposing speech there. The ACLU, representing a variety of groups, including evangelicals, with vested interests in exercising free speech in this historically public square, filed suit in November of 1999. The lawsuit went back and forth on appeals for six years, during which time the Church bought an adjacent public easement for $5.3 million more. In 2005, the Church of Latter-Day Saints finally won the lawsuit on appeal, effectively shutting down opposing speech in Main Street Plaza.

In the meantime, in addition to the calmer evangelicals handing out tracts and giving gentle exhortations, confrontational evangelists were descending on the Church’s most important General Conferences in April and October of every year, beginning in 2001. The Conference schedule makes it necessary for thousands of attendees to move

148 Phone conversation with Ruben Israel, November 2005.
149 "Main Street Plaza Suit Rejected." Online at http://deseretnews.com/tn/view/0,1249,615155272,00.html. Accessed 11-11-05. The $5.3 million was in the form of offsite land and a community center for Salt Lake City.
150 Phone conversation with Ruben Israel, November 2005.
from the Temple north to the Conference Center (built in 2000) and back, throughout the
day on Saturday and Sunday. To do this, they must leave the walled Temple Plaza
complex through the north gate, and cross North Temple Street, a seven-lane major
thoroughfare through downtown Salt Lake City, to the Conference Center on the other
side. In order to understand the lengths to which the Church of Latter-Day Saints have
gone to combat confrontational evangelism, it is necessary to know about the tactical
innovations undertaken by confrontational evangelists since 2001.

It was 2001 that the confrontational evangelists, led by Ruben Israel, first
descended on the Salt Lake City Church of Latter-Day Saints. Coming in right before the
February 2002 Olympics was a strategic move, so that they would have established
operational and relational precedent with the Salt Lake City authorities before denigrating
Mormonism as Satanic and non-Christian in front of a world audience. In that way, they
could assure that the authorities could not just legally shut them down, because they
would have already allowed them their First Amendment rights in previous meetings, and
they would know that they weren’t a physical threat. The preachers carried many large
signs through the international crowd:¹⁵¹

- "STOP. Ask about MORMON CULT."
- "JOSEPH SMITH was a FALSE PROPHET"
- "Book of MORMON says BLACKS are CURSED"

- "The MORMONS ATTACKED my CHURCH"

Accessed 11-12-05.
• “MORMON JESUS is DEVIL’S BROTHER”

By October of 2002, Israel’s group had acquired the sacred Temple garments which they desecrated in front of General Conference attendees.

At the April 2003 General Conference, in addition to the banners, garment desecration, and denunciations of Mormon belief, Israel drilled a hole through the middle of a copy of the Book of Mormon tied a rope through it, and then repeatedly threw it to the ground away from him, dragging it back over the concrete sidewalk, as if he were fishing. Knowing that police were always nearby, he yelled to the Conference-goers, “I tell you what, if you put a Bible on the ground, I’ll be in your face in a New York second! Here’s your bible! Here’s your sacred writings right here! Come and defend it!”

According to Israel, in the entire two-day period in which he used that tactic, only one person came up and asked him to stop. It was an elderly lady. So, Israel immediately complied, and then began yelling that the Mormon men had not been man enough to do it themselves.\(^1\)

It was in October of 2003 that two worshippers were arrested for attempting to retrieve the holy garments as they were being desecrated, at that point, by multiple preachers.

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\(^2\) Phone conversation with Ruben Israel, November 2005.
Israel related all of the counter-strategies employed by the Church since 2000:

One year, we preached on the broad sidewalk between the Temple and the Conference Center. The next year, they had planted trees in the middle of the sidewalks to block the signs. So next time, we parked pickup trucks on the street there overnight, and the next morning, we stood on the bed of the pickup trucks and preached at them as they walked to the Conference Center. By the next Conference, there was no parking at all allowed at that location—there were permanent “No Parking” signs there. Also, they designated the sidewalks on both sides of the street “free speech zones,”\(^{154}\) which means they can then control time, place, and manner of any speech there. I refuse to stand there, because I often go after blacks [by telling them about the Mormon Church’s historic belief in segregation]. About a year ago [April 2004], I said, ‘Let’s show them how much chaos we can cause if they don’t let us stay on the sidewalk. Let’s split up and hit all of their churches,’ and we had police all over the city. That was the game plan. We hit thirty of their churches. I think they figured out that it is better to have us contained to the temple area. Ever since that move was made, we’ve had more access and freedom on the sidewalk [between the Conference Center and the Temple].\(^{155}\)

The setting of preaching events, as I indicated earlier, is anywhere in which people are publicly enacting their own identity, agenda, or beliefs.

Legally, the preachers are only allowed to preach in public areas: in public parks and other public land, on college campuses, and on public sidewalks which happen to be in front of government buildings, rock concerts, adult novelty stores, sporting events, clinics that perform abortions, and exotic dance establishments. They do their best to negatively effect businesses they believe are “sinful”—even during Mardi Gras, while preaching at the scantily clad drunk folks, they make an extra effort to shut down the tarot card readers, many of whom may be people in poverty who make the bulk of their

\(^{154}\) Also see “Judge Upholds Buffer Zones for Preachers.” Online at http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,595053280,00.html. Accessed 11-12-05.

\(^{155}\) Phone conversation with Ruben Israel, November 2005.
yearly wages during that week.\textsuperscript{156} Public sidewalks are especially useful, as they usually position the preachers in places where they can be seen and heard easily. They do this in front of religious edifices of all types. They will even take up space on sidewalks in front of Christian churches with which they disagree (such as All Saints Episcopal Church in Atlanta, who had welcomed Gene Robinson to speak in October of 2004).

The location and timing of the preaching event always has symbolic significance.\textsuperscript{157} For instance, the confrontational evangelists found it unacceptable that Mormons would be in the world media, characterizing themselves as Christians, during the Olympics. They are often seen at marches, parades, protests, celebrations, and rallies that advocate an identity, behavior, or political view with which they disagree, such as gay pride events, Mardi Gras, political conventions, automotive and motorcycle events, women’s marches, atheist/humanist events, peace protests, and Hollywood awards events. They strategically position themselves in places and at times that will result in the largest involuntary audience.

\ldots[T]he control of territory defines public authority….religious conflicts are not only about space, but about the centrality of space. Such central places…are symbols of power, and acts of terrorism claim them in a symbolic way. That is, they express for a moment the power of terrorist groups to control central locations—by…terrorizing and assaulting them—even when in fact most of the time they do not control them at all.\textsuperscript{158}

“Terrorist acts, then, can be both \textit{performance events}, in that they make a symbolic statement, and \textit{performative acts}, insofar as they try to change things….When

\textsuperscript{156} Private e-mail from Lady Babylon, a former New Orleans tarot card reader, October 20, 2004.

\textsuperscript{157} Juergensmeyer, Mark. \textit{Terror in the Mind of God}. 133.

\textsuperscript{158} Juergensmeyer, Mark. \textit{Terror in the Mind of God}. 134.
we who observe these acts take them seriously...the purposes of this theatre are achieved.\textsuperscript{159} The consequences of symbolic terrorism are very real. They cost municipalities a lot of money in law enforcement expenses, and concentrate more officers into one location instead of dispersed throughout the city.\textsuperscript{160} They cost municipalities and individuals a great deal of money in legal expenses, sometimes specifically threatening to do so while preaching. The physical ways in which onlookers often respond results in criminal records for many. They affect the lives and livelihoods of people, and fill people with a sense of dread when planning for what are often moments that are designed for spiritual fulfillment or to overcome or deal with a traumatizing life event or circumstance.

I would argue that, despite the seemingly small numbers, the confrontational evangelism movement has had a proportionally larger impact than many new religious movements, simply because their primary concern is to do just that, whether physically, emotionally, financially, or otherwise. Unlike televangelism, which reaches an audience who consciously opt to watch a particular program, these preachers go to where the sin is happening, breaking into sinners' everyday lives. There are few people on college campuses or at public events who have either not heard of or have not encountered a lone preacher in the middle of a free speech area or public sidewalk shouting down hellfire and damnation onto unsuspecting students. Although they may be small in number, their influence has been wide reaching, whether for better or worse. Many have been inspired

\textsuperscript{159} ibid. 127-8. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{160} Ruben Israel has shown me a stack of business cards from police and FBI agents. He told me that these officials request that he call them whenever he is planning to preach in their towns so that they can mobilize the manpower needed to create effective crowd control.
to decisive action based on the actions of confrontational evangelists, whether it be
praying a sinner’s prayer or dancing next to them in their underwear to undermine their
effectiveness. They have a surprising ability to bring out the best and worst in their
listeners, and whether you love them or hate them, you’ve got to respect them for their
single-minded perseverance.