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THE ROLE OF PROPHET IN THE ABOLITION RHETORIC
OF THE REVEREND THEODORE PARKER
1845-1860

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

* * * *

The Ohio State University
1974

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Reverend Theodore Parker (1810-1860) was an outspoken, independent, and often-maligned individual who unceasingly preached the "word" of God to a frequently unappreciative society. Born in Lexington, Parker early became a prolific student of literature and philosophy.

Parker's early accomplishments reveal the drive and ambition he was to exhibit throughout his life. By the time he was eight, after only four short terms in school, he had read Homer and Plutarch; and he was already known as one of the most voracious readers in Lexington. He later recalled that during his first years in school he studied the New England Primer from which he derived his first notions of God, Satan, and eternal damnation. No doubt many of his contemporaries retained these ideas for life, but Parker would shed them before he entered the ministry. His preparation for that vocation started when he was ten years old as he began the study of Latin and Greek. A year later he was ready to read Vergil and Cicero, and to begin to study by himself natural philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, and rhetoric.

By eight, Parker was writing poetry, a habit he continued throughout his life. By ten, he could
memorize poems of five hundred to one thousand lines after one reading; he remembered after one hearing songs and hymns.¹

When he was twenty years old, Parker began taking courses at Harvard; because he could not afford tuition, he did not receive a degree until 1841, when he was awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree. In 1831, Parker moved to Boston and began teaching in a private institution. In 1832 he established his own school in Watertown. While in Boston and Watertown, Parker met three individuals who greatly influenced his thinking and life's direction. In Boston, Parker often heard the powerful Calvinist preacher, Dr. Lyman Beecher. Although not impressed with Beecher's theology, Parker admired the oratorical talents of this well-known preacher. While teaching in Watertown, Parker became acquainted with Rev. Convers Francis—a Unitarian clergyman who was also a disciple of transcendentalism and who may have influenced both Parker's decision to preach and to champion abolition.

Francis, the first scholar of theology Parker had met, knew Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and German; and he owned a large library of German books at a time when few were to be found in any American library. Doubtless, Convers

Francis was in part responsible for Parker's decision to enter the Harvard Divinity School after two years in Watertown. Furthermore, Francis must have shown the younger man An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Citizens Known as Africans, the work of his sister Lydia Maria Child. Published in 1833, the pamphlet converted Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Charles Sumner to antislavery. Perhaps Parker's name should be added to the list of Abolitionists converted by that book.2

Finally, the third person Parker met during these years who influenced his life and thinking was Lydia Cabot—a student in the Sunday class he taught in Watertown. In 1837 they were married.

In April of 1834, Parker officially entered Harvard Divinity School and was ordained June 21, 1837. At Harvard, Parker was further introduced to Unitarian theology. However, he was also attracted to the lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who frequently discussed transcendentalism. So, during these early years, Parker constructed a philosophical system founded on Unitarian and transcendentalist assumptions. McCall summarizes the central ideas of Parker's philosophy.

Concerning the leading ideas that motivated Parker's behavior, our first observation is that his whole philosophy was based upon his renunciation of the prevailing sensational ideology and his complete dependence upon conscience, or intuition, as the 'last standard of appeal' beyond rational processes. . . .

Out of this rational-intuitive subsoil grew the following beliefs: (1) God is everywhere and always present; (2) God is infinitely powerful and perfect; (3) God reveals himself to man through nature, through

2Ibid., pp. 21-22.
reason, but most often, and most clearly through the conscience; (4) man's purpose upon earth is to improve himself physically, intellectually, morally, spiritually, that is, in 'God-consciousness;' (5) since God operates always by natural law, revealing himself to all through natural channels, it is the preacher's function as a teacher of religion to break down false conceptions of theology and to build from the 'emotional germ' of 'feeling' and the 'intellectual blade of thought' a rational religion of intellect, conscience, 'good deeds' and 'moral fruits,' which shall not end in the church but shall extend to every act of life and to every branch of social relationship.\(^3\)

As will be discussed, Parker's unique blend of transcendentalism and Unitarianism was not accepted in New England during this period in history. Nevertheless, Parker remained loyal to his theological positions and behaved or acted out his life accordingly. The first major consequence of his philosophy was the preaching of "A Discourse on the Transient and the Permanent in Christianity," May 19, 1841. This controversial sermon propelled Parker into the center of a theological "battle" with the Unitarians. Eventually, he left the Unitarian Association when his friends founded the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society in 1846 and installed him as their pastor.

Moving into Boston again, Parker was exposed to the

inadequate social conditions typical of the large city.

Gradually, he became involved in social reform.

About the time that Parker began preaching regularly in Boston, he commenced new reform work. He was, after all, a reformer in all his interests. Working from his principles, he set out to convince others of the current wrongs and the appropriate remedies. His reform work was to him always part of his effort toward the realization of absolute religion--his name for the religion he preached and practiced--but he also recognized that new opportunities were offered by the pulpit in Boston. From this time, half of his sermons were on reform.¹⁴

He lectured on such subjects as the Mexican War, poverty, politics, drunkenness, education, and women's rights.

Parker's attitude on reform is well expressed by Commager.

Nothing was beyond the province of the Church, nothing foreign to its interest or exempt from its control. Its jurisdiction embraced the morals of the State as well as the morals of men, its purpose was the salvation of society as well as the salvation of the individual. Its liturgy was social welfare, its sacraments good works, its creed the perfectibility of man. There was no responsibility it could evade, no duty it could ignore. Every beggar, every pauper, was a reproach, every poorhouse, every jail, a disgrace, and it was hypocrisy to pretend to a religion of love and tolerate the injustices of man to man. For nineteen centuries the Church had preached the doctrine of Brotherly Love; how could it explain the persistence of brutal crime and vengeful punishment, of iniquity committed in the name of Property, and murder sanctioned by the State? Too long had the Church been silent in the face of these evils, too long concerned with dogma and sectarian strife, too

¹⁴Albrecht, op. cit., p. 72.
long the refuge of the powerful and the sanctuary of the strong. What, indeed, had the Church been doing all this time that the almshouses were crowded and the jails full and harlots walked the streets of Boston? What had the Church been doing that slavery was tolerated and war glorified and labor exploited and woman oppressed and the rich suffered to lord it over the poor? five

Perhaps the issue, though, which occupied most of Parker's energy from 1845-1860 was the slavery question. Being an avowed abolitionist, Parker preached hundreds of sermons and lectures on this national sin. However, he also moved beyond rhetorical discourse.

But these great rugged encyclopedic sermons did not exhaust his passion nor did the pulpit circumscribe his labors. He organized Vigilance Committees and harbored fugitive slaves in his house. He fomented rebellion against wicked laws and offered to lead attacks upon the Court House and the jail. He was indicted for 'offending against the peace and dignity of the United States,' and so welcomed the indictment that the Judge did not dare let the case go on trial. He helped inspire and finance the Kansas Crusade; he was one of John Brown's secret committee of six privy to his plans; he incited slaves to insurrection, the disciple of the Prince of Peace counseling violence and bloodshed.

Previous Research and Present Concerns

Further details of the history, life, and ideas of Theodore Parker will appear in the following pages. However, now we must consider the treatment given Rev. Parker from

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6 Ibid., pp. 199-200.
scholars in the speech-communication field. MaCall concludes that, "During the twenty-two years of his ministry Theodore Parker wrote 925 sermons and preached approximately 1500 times." McCall adds that Parker also lectured eighty-one to a hundred times each year in New England and most of the Northern states during the last decade of his life. Any individual engaged in public discourse as heavily as was Parker deserves attention from the communication scholar.

The first and only major dissertation completed on Theodore Parker from a communication perspective was composed by Roy C. McCall in 1936 at the State University of Iowa. McCall's study is titled "The Public Speaking Principles and Practice of Theodore Parker" and is neo-Aristotelian in emphasis. "The present study proposes to investigate the Public Speaking Principles and Practice of Theodore Parker,--to determine in so far as possible (1) the rhetorical principles by which he worked, and (2) the nature and effectiveness of the rhetorical results." Accordingly, McCall focuses on invention, ethos, logos, pathos, style, the process of preparation,

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7McCall, op. cit., p. 238.


9Ibid., p. 1.
audience adaptation, and effectiveness. Thus, he is concerned with providing a comprehensive descriptive study of Theodore Parker's rhetorical efforts. In 1943, McCall published an essay, "Theodore Parker," in the first volume of Brigance's *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*. In short, this essay is a condensation of McCall's earlier research.

In 1936, Clarence Rezek completed his M.A. thesis at the University of Wisconsin titled, "Theodore Parker: A Study in Persuasion." A final study from the communication perspective was written by Richard Margan (1968, M.A. thesis, Florida State University) and titled "A Study of the Emotional Proofs used by Theodore Parker in his Abolition Speeches Attacking Daniel Webster." Apart from these major efforts, the discourse of Theodore Parker has been largely ignored by speech scholars. Of course, researchers in other disciplines have completed several studies including Henry Steele Commanger, *Theodore Parker: Yankee Crusader*; Robert Albrecht, *Theodore Parker*; John Chadwick, *Theodore Parker: Preacher and Reformer*; John Dirks, *The Critical Theology of Theodore Parker*.

All these studies are valuable biographical descriptions of Parker's life. However, lacking is a comprehensive study
from a rhetorical perspective which moves beyond description, attempting to consider the rhetorical motivations in Parker's life and his sub-role in the anti-slavery agitation. Furthermore, how did Parker relate to the social interaction on the leading social issue of his time? What generalizations about genres of public discourse does Parker's career suggest? In brief, focusing on discourse as our primary data, what rhetorical insights are apparent?

To address these major questions, this study will focus on Parker's abolition discourse, which was issued primarily during the last fifteen years of his life, 1845-1860. In this regard, we are interested in the reasons or rationale for Parker's rhetoric and behavior during this period. In short, how did Parker's discourse prompt and sustain his relentless battle with slavery? How did he manipulate language and symbols to wage war with the "slave power?"

My assumption, then, is that a consideration of the source's use of language is a central study for the communication scholar--for it is only after such an inquiry that one can begin to explain rhetorical behavior and, hence, offer a proper critical judgment.

Thus, I have chosen to study Parker's discourse for several reasons. First, my personal interest in religious
communication and protest rhetoric led me to Mr. Parker. Second, further study revealed that Parker was engaged in significant social interaction, being a noted public figure throughout his life. Third, Parker was unique because he acted as if he was playing a role and it was the acting out of the role which determined his social behavior. So, perhaps Parker can provide insight into the communication process highlighting the determining factor that roles have on human interaction. Also, prophetic rhetoric as a genre of public address has not been examined from a communicative perspective and such an orientation may enable generalizations to other rhetorical settings. Finally, by discussing the above mentioned issues, a new historical interpretation of Theodore Parker will ensue which will enable the reader to understand the rhetorical behavior of this complex individual.

Briefly, my position is that the major rhetorical influence in Parker's life and his relation to social interaction was his serious commitment to playing the social role of "prophet." Parker defined his place in society by assuming the prophetic role from a Judeo-Christian perspective. Believing that he possessed the "truth" and was aware of God's law and will for contemporary man, Parker waged an unceasing
struggle to make the Word of God manifest in nineteenth-century America. The prophet, emphasized Parker, is an individual who senses the urgency of the moment and is motivated to express the will of God—attempting to alter the future of his country. This is the role Parker assumed and acted out. However, before considering his prophetic role as the major variable in his rhetorical behavior and social interaction, we must first consider the methodology to be utilized in the present inquiry. Since preliminary research has suggested the importance of the prophetic role in Parker's life, the inquiry will proceed by focusing on role analysis.

Methodology

To place role theory and the approach of this study in perspective, it is first necessary to consider a few basic assumptions relevant to my immediate purpose. The first is that man is basically and fundamentally a symbol-oriented being.

Man creates and manipulates signs in an effort to relate to and control his environment. The complex symbol systems known as languages represent a collective attempt on the

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part of a group, sub-culture, or culture to codify "reality" and hence to understand and control its world of experience. Language, then, is symbolic behavior which enables men to interact with one another in the construction of social relationships and social institutions.

Some authors are willing to posit that man's basic need is that of symbolization. Langer begins with that premise. In her *Philosophy in A New Key*, Langer considers the fundamental nature of symbolism.

For if the material of thought is symbolism, then the thinking organism must forever furnish symbolic versions of its experiences, in order to let thinking proceed. As a matter of fact, it is not the essential act of thought that is symbolization, but an act essential to thought, and prior to it. Symbolization is the essential act of mind; and mind takes in more than what is commonly called thought. Only certain products of the symbol-making brain can be used according to the canons of discursive reasoning. In every mind there is an enormous store of other symbolic material which is put to different uses or perhaps even to no use at all—a mere result of spontaneous brain activity, a reserve fund of conceptions, a surplus of mental wealth.

The brain is following its own law; it is actively translating experience into symbols in fulfillment of a basic need to do so. It carries a constant process of ideation.\footnote{Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: a Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art* (New York: Mentor Books, 1951), pp. 45-46.}

If we assume that symbolization is a basic human need and that man creates and manipulates symbols in an effort to
control his existence, then we can agree with Duncan who states, "Symbols, then, create and sustain beliefs in ways of acting because they function as names which signify proper, dubious, or improper ways of expressing relationships."\textsuperscript{12}

As symbols and languages provide men with communicative potential, one must recall that symbols have a distinguishing feature: they are not reality.

Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but vehicles for the conception of objects. To conceive a thing or a situation is not the same thing as to 'react toward it' overtly, or to be aware of its presence. In talking about things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly 'mean.'\textsuperscript{13}

Because symbols are not reality, they have the power to transcend everyday experience.

Language bridges different zones within the reality of everyday life and integrates them into a meaningful whole. The transcendences have spatial, temporal and social dimensions. Through language I can transcend the gap between my manipulatory zone and that of the other; I can synchronize my biographical time sequence with his; and I can converse with him about individuals and collectivities with whom we are not at present in face-to-face interaction. As a result of these transcendences language is capable of 'making present' a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally, and socially absent from the 'here and now.'


\textsuperscript{13}Langer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61.
Ipso facto a vast accumulation of experience and meanings can become objectified in the 'here and now.' Put simply, through language an entire world can be actualized at any moment.\(^{14}\)

Symbols or words, then, are not "reality," but rather abstractions of reality. Through language, man can transcend the immediate "here and now." Language therefore enables man to build "symbolic realities" in interaction with others.

Man not only constructs objects but also builds his own symbolic world. These worlds vary (or are indemonstrably identical) for each individual and cultural group. Yet, a frame of reference that is collectively constructed allows members to coordinate their behavior in ways which would never be possible without such common understanding.

Humans are continually constructing images of the present, images of the future, and images of the past—and tying them together and sharing them by symbols. This is the reality to which they respond. In brief, reality is what you make it.\(^{15}\)

Berkhofer considers the importance of man's symbolic world in the analysis of historical events.

Man can be asked about reasons for his own actions, and certainly interviews and other evidence gathered from verbal behavior can help determine situational interpretations. For historians, documents provide clues to the situational interpretations of historical actors. Symbolic communication conceived broadly is a map to subjective states. Whether used in the training of


the young in ways of a family, in the linguistic categories used by society to conceptualize its physical and social environment, or in the very personal communication of an artist or writer pouring out his inner feelings, symbolic behavior is indicative of their situational interpretations individually or collectively.16

The situational interpretation discussed by Berkhofer is essentially the individual's interpretation of reality—his symbolic reality as it relates to the "action" in which he is engaged.

The situational interpretation of human behavior postulates a connection between the conscious definition or interpretation of a situation and the action in that situation. The action is presumed to be partly, if not wholly, caused by the situational interpretations. The situation is thus a complex combination of objective and subjective reality. The objective reality of the actor's environment is perceived by him. His actions result from his assessment of the situation as he defines it. In other words, the actor brings attitudes and beliefs to the situation that structure his perceptions of the situation and even define it. Furthermore, his reality is seen as his definition of the situation.17

With this background, Berkhofer indicates that the major task of historical research is "the study of the actor's situation, his interpretation of the situation, and his actions in the situation."18 Berkhofer, then, advocates that the historian consider the symbolic realities of the actors involved in the


17 Ibid., p. 38.

18 Ibid., p. 67.
particular historical drama being studied. Klapp summarizes.

The idea of social construction of reality (that people not only make social structure but the reality—meaning—that goes with it) is only an implication of the symbolic world point of view: All that we call reality is some kind of meaning; all meaning as retrospection, is created by memory and its processes of symbolization. Every object that a human responds to is a symbolic construction, made by designations, references, and definitions that are inherently an interaction (or feedback) from others.¹⁹

Therefore if we are to understand human behavior, we must first attempt to reconstruct his image of reality. Accordingly, man's subsequent behavior should be correlated with his image and interpretation of the world. One way of approaching the symbolic reality of an individual or group is to study the rhetorical behavior or message-related activity, which begins to reveal the symbolic reality underlying human action.

Bormann discusses these ideas in relation to the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago.

The words supplied meanings for the speakers, writers, listeners, and readers. The words structured their world, gave them a self-image and a group to identify with, provided them with icons fashioned from meanings to love and to hate. The words stimulated by the chaos of Chicago gave people a picture of what they called 'reality' and enabled them to distinguish the reality (their rhetoric) from the descriptions of the world they found in the enemy's rhetoric. The enemy's rhetoric could then be discounted as 'mere

¹⁹Klapp, op. cit., p. 99.
words' while their own rhetoric was sanctioned because it told it 'as it really was' or because it was a description of 'reality.'

In a more recent publication, Bormann extends his ideas when discussing "rhetorical visions" as "the composite dramas which catch up large groups of people in a symbolic reality." Furthermore, the rhetorical vision "is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television programs, and in all diverse settings for public and intimate communications in a given society." What, then, is the function of the rhetorical critic in relation to the rhetorical vision?

A critic can take the social reality contained in a rhetorical vision which he has constructed from the concrete dramas developed in a body of discourse and examine the social relationships, the motives, the qualitative impact of that symbolic world as though it were the substance of social reality for those people who participated in the vision. If the critic can illuminate how people who participated in the rhetorical vision related to one another, how they arranged themselves into social hierarchies, how they acted to achieve the goals embedded in their dreams, and how they were aroused by the dramatic action and the dramatis personae within the manifest


22 Ibid., p. 398.
content of their rhetoric, his insights will make a useful contribution to understanding the movement and its adherents.23

The critic who assumes the existence of symbolic realities and rhetorical visions can develop a dynamic model for the understanding of rhetorical behavior. Furthermore, if the critic views the influence of "actors," "society," and the "plot," he can begin to establish a useful and insightful perspective for the study of communication.

Goffman utilizes the basic assumptions mentioned above. In The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, he discusses the importance of the "definition of situation."

Regardless of the particular objective which the individual has in mind and of his motive for having the objective, it will be in his interest to control the conduct of others, especially their treatment of him. The control is achieved largely by influencing the definition of the situation which the others come to formulate, and he can influence this definition by expressing himself in such a way as to give them the kind of impression that will lead them to act voluntarily in accordance with his own plan. Thus, when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interest to convey.24

The actor's discourse helps him to define the situation. This activity has a distinctive moral character, according to

23Ibid., p. 401.

Society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in an appropriate way. Connected with this principle is a second, namely that an individual who implicitly or explicitly signifies that he has certain social characteristics ought in fact to be what he claims he is. In consequence, when an individual projects a definition of the situation and thereby makes an implicit or explicit claim to be a person of a particular kind, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon the others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner that persons of his kind have a right to expect. He also implicitly forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be and hence forgoes the treatment that would be appropriate for such individuals. The others find, then, that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they ought to see as the 'is.'

Goffman begins to demonstrate the importance of a person's role on the definition of the situation or his symbolic reality. We must now briefly consider the major characteristics and contributions of role theory in our analysis.

An individual's symbolic reality influences behavior and actions; thus, one's image of reality somewhat determines the role or roles a person assumes. One's assumption of a role, in turn, affects his image of reality. So, a dynamic interaction occurs between role and symbolic reality. In short, the acting out of a role is essentially determined by

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\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 13}.\]
one's perception of his world, including the reactions of significant others to his behavior. Furthermore, the acting out of the role affects that perceived "reality."
Thus, assuming the powerful effect that a symbolic reality has on a person's life, we must briefly discuss the concept of "role" which helps to shape that symbolic reality in a major way.

Because the role of prophet is such a major variable in comprehending the rhetorical behavior and life of Theodore Parker, the dramatistic model in role theory will be followed in this study. If we can cast the rhetor in the role of an actor and consider his discourse in terms of role location, adaptation, and enactment, a dynamic model of communication can be developed accounting for the interaction process of communication.

A further reason for selecting the dramatistic approach is an inherent sensitivity to the element of time. Since the prophet uses his public discourse to define and maintain his role in society, his message behavior is the primary data for this study. Thus, the rhetor's messages are viewed in continuous interaction with society and the environment, making the concept of feedback relevant.
Role theory, then, allows the investigator to perceive the process of communication and role definition or enactment as they evolve in a campaign rhetoric through time. Therefore, role theory presents a conceptual orientation consistent with contemporary theories of communication and permits one to move beyond description into a dramatistic realm where causations, explanations, and probabilities may be posited.

Summarizing, the dramatistic perspective accounts for the phenomenon of interaction which underlies the study of human communication. In this regard, the rhetor's role interacts with and depends on the roles enacted by his audiences; the rhetor's enactment is dependent on contingent audience roles. Therefore, I have chosen role analysis as a theoretical framework because (a) I believe that the role of prophet is the major variable accounting for Parker's rhetorical behavior, (b) the dramatistic orientation permits a dynamic consideration of communication sensitive to the time element, and (c) the interactional aspect of communication is made apparent. Hopefully, such a focus will be heuristic and suggest implications for role theory itself.

Definitions of "role" usually depend on the metaphor of the theater.
Role, a term borrowed directly from the theater, is a metaphor intended to denote that conduct adheres to certain 'parts' (or positions) rather than to the players who read or recite them. . . . The current term developed out of several earlier forms, roll, rolle, and rowle, the reference for which was a sheet of parchment turned around a small wooden roller . . . for convenience of handling. The sheet of parchment carried the written script or 'part' from which the actor recited. The antecedent to the writing, and later reciting and acting, of such parts was (and is) the conduct of real-life men and women struggling to make their way in imperfectly organized societies. Thus, the metaphorical continuity is from real life to drama, and from drama to a psychological theory about people enacting real-life dramas.26

A role, therefore, is a set of behaviors which influence a given individual's position in society by prescribing a "way of acting." All people perform various roles throughout their daily lives. If we view society as an integration of various roles, several implications are apparent. First, roles are not performed in isolation, but in relation to other actors. As Znaniecki says, every role is played in a "social circle within which the individual performs it, that is, a set of agents who accept him and cooperate with him. If no such circle exists, the individual cannot actually perform a social role, though he may imagine that he does. . . ."27 The


audience, then, becomes an important concept in role theory.

Secondly, roles are learned and culturally determined or patterned.

Individuals in society occupy positions, and their role performances in these positions is determined by social norms, demands, and rules; by role performance of others in their respective positions; by those who observe and react to the performance; and by the individual's particular capabilities and personality.28

Thus, every actor's role has been somewhat determined by the society or social group in which he participates. Also, because every actor brings certain strengths and weaknesses to his role, no two individuals play the same role identically.

As previously stated, the role-theory perspective was chosen for this study because Parker was committed to acting out the role of prophet and because the dramatistic perspective is consistent with the interactional assumptions of communication. Moreover, this study further narrows role theory by focusing on the major constructs of role enactment, expectation, location, self-role congruence, and the audience. These constructs were selected because they are relevant and scientifically "rich" for a rhetorical inquiry.

Role Enactment

Of major interest to role theorists is the study of

"role enactment" or the actual "playing of the part" as a dependent variable. In real life, as on stage, the actor can define his role only in relation to other actors and things on the stage—his environment and symbolic reality. Therefore, any consideration of role enactment must take into account "environmental" factors and the interaction with significant others. With this in mind, Sarbin and Allen list three major questions requiring consideration by the critic-observer in relation to role enactment.

1. Is the conduct appropriate to the social position granted or attained by the actor? That is, do his performances indicate that the actor has taken into account the ecological context in which the behavior occurs? In short, has he selected the correct role?

As will be demonstrated, Theodore Parker's role was appropriate to the members of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society.

2. Is the enactment proper? That is, does the overt behavior meet the normative standards which serve as valuational criteria for the observer? Is the performance to be evaluated as good or bad?

Parker's enactment, as we shall see, corresponds with the Judeo-Christian norms for prophetic behavior.

3. Is the enactment convincing? That is, does the enactment lead the observer to declare unequivocally that the incumbent is legitimately occupying the position?²⁹

Parker's enactment of the role, as will be established, was "convincing" only insofar as the prophetic role generally is

²⁹Sarbin and Allen, op. cit., p. 490.
convincing. This will lead later to conclusions heuristic for role theory.

Related to the role enactment variable are three relevant issues: "(1) number of roles, (2) organismic involvement (effort), (3) preemptiveness (time)." In relation to the number of roles an individual plays in life, the authors state, "It is obvious that the more roles in an actor's repertoire, the better prepared he is to meet the exigencies of social life." The assumption here is that flexibility in roles enables the individual to adapt to new or complex social situations. For Parker, "flexibility" was inconsistent with his role of prophet, however.

The second dimension, organismic involvement, refers to "engrossment" or the level of intensity the actor exhibits in his role. Organismic involvement is important. "For every role enactment, the observer has a set of expectations of the proper range of involvement. If the involvement appears too much or too late, the enactment may be judged as unconvincing, and may be declared negatively valued." For Parker, his commitment was the "key" to his prophetic role.

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30 Ibid., p. 491.

31 Ibid., p. 491.

32 Ibid., p. 496.
The final dimension of role enactment is the preemptiveness of roles or "the amount of time a person spends in one role relative to the amount of time he spends in other roles." The observer of an actor's role must note the time an actor devotes to playing any role. In summary, if we view role enactment from the dimensions of number, involvement, and preemptiveness, "behavior, in addition to specifying the contents of roles, serves to provide cues for observers and interactants constructing inferences about the appropriateness, propriety, and convincingness of role enactments." The construct of role enactment is applicable to our study of Parker who attempted to act out his prophetic role in an appropriate, proper, and convincing manner. Interestingly, he maintained the prophetic role for fourteen years—a remarkable length of time.

Role Expectations

The first independent variable is "role expectations" or "those rights and privileges, the duties and obligations, of any occupant of a social position in relation to persons occupying other positions in the social structure." In other words, "Role expectations, then, are collections of

\[\text{Ibid., p. 496.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 497.}\]
cognitions—beliefs, subjective probabilities, and elements of knowledge—which specify in relation to complementary roles the rights, duties, the appropriate conduct, for persons occupying a particular position."^{36} Obviously, role expectation is directly related to prescribed behavior.

The occupant of a social position ought to do particular things in specified ways, and ought to hold certain beliefs instead of others. In role enactment an individual is 'expected to behave in particular ways' in the sense that others believe he ought to do so. The ought aspect of role expectations implies that approval or disapproval by other people is contingent on the nature and quality of one's role enactment. Role expectations can be said to define the limits or range of tolerated behavior. In short, role expectations are specifications for adherence to group norms.^{37}

The construct of role expectation is also important in Parker's role behavior. Because Parker refused to conform to the expectations accorded the nineteenth-century Unitarian minister, he was criticized by the larger Boston public. However, because Parker did fulfill the role expectation of the prophet, he was accepted by a smaller but no less important segment of society.

Role Location

Another independent variable in role theory is "role location." In this regard, the authors are concerned with roles that are appropriate to the situation in which the actor finds himself.

^{36}Ibid., p. 498.

^{37}Ibid., p. 501.
For effective participation in a culture, man must locate himself efficiently in a number of distal ecological systems. These ecological systems represent specific differentiations of the all-encompassing concept of environment, and they may be seen as convenient ways of portioning the world of occurrences which give rise to sensory events, some of which may function as inputs. We can identify five distal systems, each of which provides the occurrences that the actor must instantiate (make sense of). He must locate himself in the self-maintenance system, in the space-time system, in the social system, in the normative system, and in the transcendental system.38

The construct of role location is an essential element in our study. This variable permits a perspective where the role of prophet is enacted over time and where it is possible to view Parker locating his role in quite different "ecological systems," ranging from New England orthodoxy to mainstream Unitarianism to the growing abolition movement to his own band of disciples.

Self-Role Congruence

Another independent variable relevant to a critical study of Parker is "self-role congruence." Sarbin and Allen relate role to the more general concept of "self." "Self' refers to the inferences the person makes about the referent for 'I:' It is a cognitive structure and derives from past experience with other persons and with objects. We define the self as the experience of identity arising from

38Ibid., p. 507.
a person's interbehaving with things, body parts, and other persons. As an independent variable in relation to role enactment, the self-role congruence is an important consideration. This is especially true when assessing the extent to which Parker's allegiance to the prophetic role pervaded his everyday behavior and social interaction. More specifically, this dissertation will show how Parker's sense of self was shaped by the congruent role of prophet, leading to a re-interpretation of Parker as rhetor.

Audience

Finally the "audience" as "social others who are significant features of the role-enactment context," is an important concept in role theory. Audience feedback performs four functions: the provision of consensual reality, cues, social reinforcement, and role maintenance.

By accepting role enactment as appropriate, the audience provides validation for the enactment and serves as public confirmation of the reality of the role. Observers create social reality for the role by their presence and attendance during the role enactment, and by accepting the role enactment as interpreted by the performer.

The cue property of the audience . . . refers to discriminative responses that guide the performer's role enactment . . .

A third function of the audience is social reinforcement. An audience has many methods of demonstrating approval and acceptance, or disapproval and rejection, of role behavior.

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39 Ibid., pp. 522-523.

40 Ibid., p. 528.
Public praise or censure can be given, for example, by applause or jeers from an audience at a stage performance. . . .

A last important function of the audience is to contribute to the maintenance of role behavior over time. Role behavior appears to be fairly constant over time and at different times and places. Role enactment over a long period of time without major deviations from expectations may be due in part to the fact that the audience continually observes the enactment. In fact, a person desiring to change his role behavior drastically usually finds it difficult if not impossible without a geographic change. To change behavior he must escape the previous audience which has helped maintain and sustain role enactment.41

The audience is also an important variable in role enactment. Without audiences which simultaneously refuse and grant Parker the prophetic role, his enactment would have quickly faded instead of lasting fourteen years.

Other variables in role theory include "role demand" or "demands for a specific role enactment;"42 "role skill" or "those characteristics possessed by the individual which result in effective and convincing role enactment: aptitude appropriate experience, and specific training."43 Sarbin and Allen have developed, then, a comprehensive analysis of role theory where enactment is the dependent variable and role expectation, location, self-role congruence, and the audience

\[41\] Ibid., p. 534.

\[42\] Ibid., p. 510.

\[43\] Ibid., p. 514.
are the independent variables. While only a brief sketch of these concepts has appeared, further detail will be added in the immediate chapters. In sum, we have chosen to focus on the above mentioned concepts because they provide insight into Parker's rhetorical efforts and help us to understand the process of role enactment in the social world.

Research Issues

As will be demonstrated, Theodore Parker viewed himself as a prophet and lived his life acting what he believed was the prophetic role. The role of prophet and the symbolic reality which interacts with that role account for the rhetorical behavior of Parker. In the following pages, Parker as prophet will provide a perspective for understanding communicative behavior from role-theory assumptions. So, Parker's enactment of the prophetic role is the first major research issue in our study. What relation exists between the prophetic role and Parker's social interactions?

Preliminary research has revealed three additional questions for investigation. First, since the prophet believes he possesses the TRUTH or divine will of God, he is probably unwilling to compromise his ideas. So, we need to discern whether Parker's ideas and arguments were expressed as uncompromising "truth." Does the prophetic role require an
ego-involved individual?

Third, the role of prophet probably demands huge quantities of psychological energy. To maintain his unpopular stance, the prophet must expend effort. This suggests that the role of self-persuasion is important to the prophet, because the prophetic role requires a certain amount of risk. Thus, the prophet must continually convince himself of the validity of his assumed role: risk necessitates constant self-persuasion. And so, are the prophet's rhetorical efforts more successful with SELF than the public audience? Fotheringham discusses self-influence in persuasion, stating, "those who frequently function as message-sources in persuasion, more often than not influence themselves. . . . The preacher increasingly believes what he preaches."\(^4^4\)

By maintaining the role, Parker would become more committed to it and to the ideas associated with it.

Finally, I speculate that the prophet has no place within an organization unless he controls the power distribution and the decision-making processes. Since the role of prophet seems to threaten the institution because it attempts to introduce new values or policies, the prophet may be forced

to leave and perhaps initiate his own institution. Inasmuch as most organizations leave little room for the independent, dogmatic, forceful individual known as the prophet, he may have to create his own organization in order to disseminate his "truth." Parker is suitable to consider from this perspective. The organized church as audience and Parker's relation to that body through his role must be examined.

**Justification**

For several reason, a study which historically examines the dynamic process of prophetic discourse has potential value for our understanding and appreciation of the phenomenon of human communication. First, such an inquiry may yield insight into the process of persuasion in general by enabling one to identify variables and relationships in the process, thus revealing or refining strategies of social influence. Second, the genre of prophetic rhetoric has not been investigated in the communication discipline. Such a study will fulfill this need and may lend insight into human behavior and motivation. Third, a modification and application of role theory to the persuasive process may lead to a rhetorical model which can help one understand the importance of a rhetor's role in his own rhetorical efforts. Fourth, an innovative methodology for rhetorical-historical criticism
may be developed. Fifth, the role of the prophet within
the organization will be discussed. Finally, a contemporary
career interpretation of Theodore Parker will be completed.
Thus, several dimensions of the communication process
will unfold from the proposed study, as well as, a step
toward the uniting of the critic-historian with the behavioral
scientist as called for by Brockriede.\footnote{Wayne Brockriede, "Trends in the Study of Rhetoric: Toward
a Blending of Criticism and Science," in Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black,
eds., The Prospect of Rhetoric, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-
Hall, 1971), pp. 123-139.}

A note on source material is necessary. Since no
recording devices or reporters attempted to preserve Parker's
public discourse on the slavery issue, one must rely on
two major collections of Parker's rhetoric: \textit{Centenary Edition}
of the Works of Theodore Parker, 15 volumes, (Boston: American
Unitarian Association, 1907-1910), and \textit{The Collected Works of}
Theodore Parker, Frances P. Cobbe, ed., 14 volumes, (London:
Trubner and Co., 1863). The editors of these collections
claim to have worked from the original Parker manuscripts.
Comparisons of available manuscripts with these sermons and
lectures lead this author to suspect that their claims are
valid. A final major source utilized in the present inquiry
is a three volume collection edited by Parker: \textit{Speeches, Addresses,
and Occasional Sermons}, (Boston: Horace Fullen, 1867). It
should be noted that the above collections are now rare books. Since Parker's original manuscripts concerning slavery are scarce, we must rely on these works for our source material. In addition, we will rely on Ernest Bormann's text, *Forerunners of Black Power: the Rhetoric of Abolition*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971) for Parker's sermon titled "A Sermon on Slavery." Also, Grenville Kleiser, *The World's Great Sermons*, 10 volumes, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), provides a copy of Parker's "Transient and Permanent in Christianity" in volume five.

Our consideration of Parker the prophet begins with an examination of the prophetic role from a theological perspective and Parker's conception of that role. Next, a discussion of the historical influences which were determining factors in Parker's symbolic reality will ensue. Then, we will discuss the interaction of Parker the prophet with the "established" church for this is where the prophetic first begins to emerge. Finally, Parker's abolition stance provides a discussion of prophetic role enactment. Thus, our approach will be chronological so that the progression of role location and enactment will be apparent.
CHAPTER II

THE PROPHET

Theological Perspective

This chapter will explore the relationship between Theodore Parker and the prophetic role; a discussion which must commence with a consideration of the prophet from a Judeo-Christian orientation. Then, an examination of Parker's major theological translation where he discusses the "prophet" will follow. Finally, the relationship between Parker and the prophetic role will be considered.

Within the broad area of religious communication exists a unique genre of discourse which has not received serious attention from the communication student: prophetic rhetoric. Since this form of public address has generated little research, we must begin with a description or definition of the term.

Fundamentally, an orator engaging in "prophetic rhetoric" is an individual who publicly claims to be an associate of a divine will. In this regard, the rhetor advances arguments and ideas which he posits as being God's will for the contemporary situation. Through this act of pronouncement, the prophet becomes a partner in dialogue with his God. "The prophet is not a mouth-piece, but a person; not an instrument, but a partner, an associate..."
In the Judeo-Christian sense, the prophet is an earthly spokesman impelled to pronounce the will of God for a specific people, at a given stage in their history. So, on one level, the prophet is engaged in message behavior directed toward the modification of an exigence in a definite historical context and addressed to a rhetorical audience. He therefore expresses "the intuitive felt will of God for a specific situation in the life of an individual or nation." Fritsch considers the prophet in Israel.

The prophetic office was centered in charismatic individuals who were closely associated with the political life of Israel. Undeterred by political pressure and utterly fearless in the face of persecution, these messengers of God stood before kings to pronounce judgment on their personal lives, to give advice concerning national policies, and to predict the outcome of events.

Pronouncing the word of God and rendering a divine judgment required that the prophet challenge existing conditions and institutions. Heschel considers this characteristic as "iconoclastic." "The prophet is an iconoclast, challenging the apparently holy, revered, and awesome. Beliefs cherished as certainties, institutions endowed with supreme sanctity, he exposes as scandalous."  

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4 Heschel, op. cit., p. 10.
Fundamentally, the task of the prophet is to reveal the will of God to his chosen people.

The words the prophet utters are not offered as souvenirs. His speech to the people is not a reminiscence, a report, hearsay. The prophet not only conveys; he reveals. He almost does unto others what God does unto him. In speaking, the prophet reveals God. This is the marvel of a prophet’s work: in his words, the invisible God becomes audible. He does not prove or argue. The thought he has to convey is more than language can contain. Divine power bursts in the words. The authority of the prophet is in the Presence his words reveal.5

Thus, the prophet is an individual who believes himself engaging in a "divine rhetoric" with the goal of revelation. More often than not, the pronouncement of God's will agitates the "establishment." However, despite popular opinion, the true prophet will continue in his partnership with God.

A further characteristic of the prophetic rhetor is his uniqueness: prophets occupy novel places in history. Von Rad considers the sense of unique crisis inherent in the prophetic message.

Each of the prophets occupied a place of his own in the history of the relationship between God and Israel. This place was a determining factor in their message, and is the only standpoint from which to understand their whole discourse. They are conscious of being placed inside a historical continuum with wide perspectives over both past and future. Within it, however, each prophet stands as it were at the cross-roads where God's dealings with Israel, which have been almost stationary, suddenly and dramatically begin to move again. The place at which they raise their voices is a place of supreme crisis, indeed almost a place of death. . . . All the prophets shared a common conviction that they stood exactly at that turning point in history which

5Ibid., p. 22.
was crucial for the existence of God's people.\(^6\)

So, it is difficult to generalize about the prophets of ancient Israel because each occupied his own place in the history of the nation. "The message of each prophet was exactly directed to meet a specific time, and it contained an offer which was never repeated in precisely the same form as it had with the original speaker."\(^7\) However, it is still possible to describe generally the prophetic office in relation to "charisma," the "call," and the themes of the prophet's message.

Weber has extensively considered "charisma" in his writings. Accordingly, he defines the prophet as "a purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a religious doctrine of divine commandment."\(^8\) Furthermore, the individual endowed with charisma is an extraordinary person in several ways.

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader.'\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Ibid., p. 266.


\(^9\) Ibid., 1:241.
Weber considers the "divine mission" as a further aspect of charisma.

The bearer of charisma enjoys loyalty and authority by virtue of a mission believed to be embodied in him; this mission has not necessarily and not always been revolutionary, but in most charismatic forms it has inverted all value hierarchies and overthrown custom, law, and tradition.10

This divine mission, then, is usually iconoclastic in nature. Furthermore, the charismatic individual must continually "prove" himself and his mission to his audience.

He gains and retains it solely by proving his powers in practice. He must work miracles, if he wants to be a prophet. He must perform heroic deeds, if he wants to be a warlord. Most of all, his divine mission must prove itself by bringing well-being to his faithful followers; if they do not fare well, he obviously is not the god-sent master.11

Weber, then, defines the prophet as a charismatic individual who has a divine mission and who must continually prove himself and the validity of his office to his faithful disciples. Moreover, the attribute of charisma is related to the "call" of the prophet. "For our purposes here, the personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma."12 All true prophets must be called by their God. They must have had a confrontation with the divine in which God's

10 Ibid., 3:1117.
11 Ibid., 3:1114.
12 Ibid., 2:440.
will was revealed personally to them. The importance of the call can not be underestimated.

The call of the prophet was a basic and fundamental experience in his life, for it gave legitimacy to his office, authority to his message, and urgency to his preaching. . . .

That which distinguishes the true prophet from the false was the validity of his call. . . . The call for the prophet was the valid expression of God's will in his life, the certain assurance that God had reached down to take hold of him and make him aware of his mission.13

Furthermore, "This unique experience was an impelling force in the life of the prophet, giving urgency to his message and confident assurance in the face of hostile opposition."14 Thus, the call is an essential element of prophecy. Also, because each prophet in the history of Israel was a unique individual, each call must be considered on an individual basis: some prophets received their call through dreams, visions, and actual confrontations with God, while others simply "knew" in their heart they were chosen for a divine mission.

The prophet being a charismatic individual inspired by God through the call, launches into his divine polemics. "To the consciousness of the prophet, the prophetic act is an act of communication, in which a message is conveyed by words, thoughts, or signs."15 The characteristics of the prophetic message include an abrasive tone.

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13 Fritsch, op. cit., p. 1097.

14 Ibid., p. 1098.

15 Heschel, op. cit., p. 430.
The prophet seldom tells a story, but casts events. He rarely sings, but castigates. He does more than translate reality into a poetic key; he is a preacher whose purpose is not self-expression or the 'purification of emotions,' but communication. His images must not shine, they must burn.

The prophet is intent on intensifying responsibility, is impatient of excuse, contemptuous of pretense and self-pity. His tone, rarely sweet or caressing, is frequently consoling and disburdening; his words are often slashing, even horrid—designed to shock rather than to edify.16

Thus far we have mentioned the general characteristics of the prophet and the tone of his message. Now, a consideration of the major themes or subjects of prophetic discourse must follow.

The prophets of Israel discussed four major themes in their discourse: a dynamic, living God; the WORD; ethics; and a vision of the Kingdom. First, the prophets perceived God as being active in history.

The basic characteristic of OT prophecy was the centrality of God. For the prophet God was everywhere—in his life, in his message, and in history. God had personally called him and was with him at all times to strengthen him for his tasks and to protect him in time of trouble. With the eyes of faith, he saw the reality of God in all that happened.

... As the prophet views things, all history is under the direction of God. He initiated the historical process by a uniquely creative act... he supervises its unfolding throughout the ages; and he will bring it to a close by establishing a new age. The prophet saw unity and purpose in history because he saw God in it from beginning to end.17

So, the reality of God and his actions in history occupied a fundamental position in the theology of the prophets. To them, at least, God was alive and active in their lives and their call

16Ibid., p. 7.
17Fritsch, op. cit., p. 1098.
and mission were testimony to such.

The second theme of prophetic oratory is the prophet's claim to be speaking the WORD of God. "The message of the prophet is the living word of God. . . . This divine word which the prophet proclaimed was active and powerful, creating and destroying, comforting and disquieting."\(^\text{18}\) So, the prophet believes that he is endowed with the Word which is synonymous with the TRUTH. Confrontation with God leads the prophet to believe that he has been charged with the TRUTH. Such a realization creates certainty in the mind of the prophet. "In a variety of ways, in utterance and in action, the prophets stressed their staggering claim. It was such certainty of being inspired that enabled the prophet to proclaim again and again 'Thus says the Lord' . . . ."\(^\text{19}\)

The third topic of prophetic oratory is the emphasis on ethics.

According to prophetic teaching Yahweh who is holy, just, and righteous, demands that his people be holy, just, and righteous. Ethics for the prophet is rooted and grounded in God, whose holy will is expressed in justice and righteousness and who is the defender of all that is right and good. The prophets were the first to preach that morality is of prime importance. . . . The pleas of the 8th-century prophets for mercy and charity to the poor and oppressed, as well as their strong condemnation of

\(^{18}\text{Ibid., p. 1099.}\)

\(^{19}\text{Heschel, op. cit., p. 422.}\)
the greedy oppressor and religious hypocrite, are well known.20

The prophets were constantly pointing out the injustices in society.

Indeed, the sort of crimes and even the amount of delinquency that fill the prophets of Israel with dismay do not go beyond that which we regard as normal, as typical ingredients of social dynamics. To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence: to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world.21

Furthermore, the prophetic message was directed toward public more than private morality.

It is important to note, further, that the morality which the prophets had in mind in their strenuous insistence on righteousness was not merely the private morality of the home, but the public morality on which national life is founded. They said less about the pure heart for the individual than of just institutions for the nation.22

So, emphasis on justice and righteousness are important themes in prophetic discourse. The final general topic of prophetic rhetoric is the emphasis on victory or of a future time when God's will endlessly prevails.

Even though the prophets were mainly concerned with interpreting the divine will for their own day, they believed that the climax of history lay in the future, when God would destroy evil and bring in the age of

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20Fritsch, op. cit., p. 1099.

21Heschel, op. cit., p. 4.

bliss. This hope of a golden age was not the result of human speculation but was rooted and grounded in Israel's faith in a God who was guiding history to a divinely appointed goal. Belief in God's ultimate victory over evil and the establishment of his kingdom on earth is found throughout the prophetic literature.23

Even though the prophets were concerned with the present, such an interest was oriented toward the future when the Kingdom of God would be realized. They viewed the injustices of the present as impediments toward the building of the divine community. "They all had a radiant hope of a future when their social and religious ideals would be realized."24 The prophets, then, were individuals who possessed a vision of the future and coming reign of the Kingdom, a vision which became a motivating force in their lives.

In summary, a prophet is usually a charismatic person who knows the will of God and endeavors to proclaim that Word to his nation. He is a person called by God and endowed with a divine mission emphasizing the ethical imperatives of justice and righteousness. Since the prophet possesses the truth, he often appeals to the victory of the higher law over the law of man in his vision of the Kingdom. In so doing, the prophet does not distinguish between religion and politics; life is a unity which must be lived under the justice and righteousness

23 Fritsch, op. cit., p. 1099.

of the Kingdom. His emphasis on public morality usually prompts an unfavorable response from the established power structures which he often challenges.

Because the prophet is constantly discussing the injustice pervading society and therefore challenging the status quo, he is often called a "revolutionary." As a result, he "bears scorn and reproach... He is stigmatized as a madman by his contemporaries, and, by some modern scholars, as abnormal." 25

The prophets were extremely unpopular figures.

Amos could say: 'Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets' (3: 7), but Israel did not share his conviction wholly. It might be said the Hebrews as a people never accepted a single prophet. Kings sometimes consulted them, often to turn away and follow their own inclinations. Centuries later Jesus himself referred to this disbelief of the nation. As he approached Jerusalem for the last time he cried out, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophet and stoning those who sent you!... Regardless of their lack of acceptance, and it was tragic, the prophets through the centuries stand out as figures carved in rock. 26

Thus, the prophetic message was not always effective in gaining converts. In fact, the prophet was an outcast of society, for his message was far from comforting.

The prophet is a lonely man. He alienates the wicked as well as the pious, the cynics as well as the believers, the priests and the princes, the judges and the false prophets. But to be a prophet means to challenge and to defy and to cast out fear. 27


27 Heschel, op. cit., p. 18.
Parker As Prophet

In 1843, Theodore Parker completed his major theological work—a translation of the Old Testament theology of Wilhelm DeWitte. In Book II, DeWitte and Parker consider the prophetic books of the Bible. DeWitte certainly must have influenced Parker's image of the prophet, as he was thoroughly familiar with this German theologian and translated the work only because he thought favorably of DeWitte's ideas. In brief, besides his personal study, the DeWitte translation enabled Parker to construct his image of the prophetic role.

DeWitte as Parker translated him defined the prophet as "impelled by his active participation in the present and in the yet unformed future, living in the fire of inspiration and of holy zeal, expresses his own thoughts, demands, and wishes, cares and hopes rather than paints the history of his time." These men were also "interpreters of God," according to DeWitte.

They were also called men of God, and the angels, or messengers of God, because, by their inspired discourses, they carried out the divine idea of the theocracy, or the will of God, in the public life of the people. They were likewise seers, on account of the higher intuition they had of divine truth.

In a marginal note, Parker contrasts the office of the priest with that of the prophet. The priest, accordingly, is charged

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29 Ibid., p. 352.
with the "management" of the "forms" of worship. But, the
prophet has a quite different role.

The prophets broke through the symbolic forms, rose to a
spiritual view of them, and served the cause of truth by
proclaiming the word of God, while the priests remained
attached to the symbols, and preserved them in their
ancient restrictions and narrowness. Thus it was the
office of the prophets to purify and extend the influence
of religion and morality; they were politicians, naturalists,
and workers of wonders. Their action and influence on the
public were sustained and promoted by religion, poetry,
symbols, and music.  

This statement is insightful, for it is clearly Parker's image
of the prophetic role, at least in 1843.

DeWitte next considers the "Contents and Objectives of the
Prophetic Discourse."

They censured the false, untheocratical policy which was
pursued with respect to foreign nations, and disclosed the
abuses in the government and in the administration of justice.
. . . . They found fault with the corrupt morals, with the
degeneracy of the public worship of God, which was defiled
with idolatry, and reduced to a mere shadow. In respect to
all these subjects, they pointed out the True and the Right,
and admonished the public and individuals to reform and
amend their lives.

Finally, DeWitte discusses the "style" and mode of expression
characteristic of the the prophets in their public pronouncements.

The prophets expressed themselves spontaneously and
directly with the living voice. They sometimes appeared
and spoke in public places, and sometimes at home addressed
a circle of men that sought advice or edification. . . .
When they spoke in public, their speeches, probably, for
the most part, artless outbreaks of their zeal and inspiration,
short addresses and appeals, which, perhaps, were followed by

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30 Ibid., pp. 352-353.

31 Ibid., pp. 353-354.
replies, or a disputation. 32

The DeWitte text is helpful since it most likely was a significant contribution to the conceptual world of Theodore Parker. It, perhaps more than any of Parker's work, reveals the function and duty of the prophetic office. In sum, Parker's image of the prophet probably did not significantly differ from our previous analysis. Parker emphasized the importance of truth and justice and viewed the prophets as acting in a divine mission. Further, Parker's life testifies to the fact that he seriously incorporated the idea of the "prophetic" into his philosophy and style of living. Evidence for this assertion can be discerned in his reform interest and especially in his approach to the slavery issue.

His pulpit rang from Sunday to Sunday with the tones of a Hebrew prophet. He kept his eye on every public man, sounded his trumpet-call in the ears of the lagging, admonished the hesitating, warned the faltering, praised the valiant, instructed the ignorant, denounced the faithless, respecting no persons, but aiming his blows where his blows would fall heaviest. 33

Surely, here is an individual who possessed the truth and endeavored to actualize that truth in the world of man.

A major characteristic of the prophet mentioned previously is that he is an iconoclast. Parker was aware of his "minority" position and unpopularity as a result of his challenging discourse.

32 Ibid., p. 357.

But I knew that I had thoroughly broken with the ecclesiastical authority of Christendom; its God was not my God, not its Scriptures my Word of God, not its Christ my Savior; for I preferred the Jesus of historical fact to the Christ of theological fancy. . . . I came to preach 'another Gospel,' sentiments, ideas, actions, quite unlike what belonged to the theology of the Christian Church. Though severely in earnest, I came to educate men into true religion as well as I could; I knew I should be accounted the worst of men, ranked among triflers, mockers, infidels, and atheists. But I did not know all the public had to offer me of good or ill.34

Even though Parker was aware of his unpopularity and the great turmoil he often created, he nevertheless continued to speak out. Like the ancient prophets, Parker found himself in a unique historical situation which impelled him to engage in reform.

But I saw the nation had reached an important crisis in its destination, and, though ignorant of the fact, yet stood hesitating between two principles. The one was slavery, which I knew leads at once to military despotism—political, ecclesiastical, social and, ends at last in utter and hopeless ruin; for no people fallen on that road has ever risen again; it is the path so many other republics have taken and finished their course . . . . The other was freedom, which leads at once to industrial democracy—respect for labour, government over all, by all, for the sake of all, rule after the eternal right as it is writ in the constitution of the universe—securing welfare and progress.35

So, viewing the nation at a crisis point, Parker began to proclaim the will of God which included but went beyond rational discourse. Thus, for example, he became the chariman of the Executive Committee of the Boston Vigilance Committee.36


36Supra., p. 5.
such, he was once arrested for obstructing justice in a fugitive slave case.

Like the prophets of history, Parker courageously acted out his divine mission. Similar to our previous discussion of the ancient prophets, Parker believed that he was "called" by God.

In my early boyhood I felt I was to be a minister, and looked forward with eager longings for the work to which I still think my nature itself an 'effectual call,' certainly a deep one, and a continuous. Few men have ever been more fortunate than I in having pains judiciously taken with their intellectual culture.\(^{37}\)

Parker's call provided him with direction. "So I determined to become a minister, hoping to help mankind in the most important of all human concerns, the development of man's highest powers."\(^{38}\) Therefore, at an early age Parker intuitively felt that he had a duty and mission to perform.

As mentioned, Parker's call led him into an unpopular battle. Nevertheless, even though he often suffered for his actions, he was driven forward knowing that he was speaking the TRUTH, as revealed in a letter.

I have often cautioned my friends against defending me. The bitterness of my own sufferings has been to see others suffer for me. I am strong and old—older than ever before, at least; I am broad-shouldered for suffering, and have borne that all my life; not to suffer would be a new thing. . . . If it gave me pleasure to say hard things, I would

\(^{37}\)"Experience as a Minister," p. 264.

\(^{38}\)Ibid., p. 264.
shut up for ever. But the TRUTH, which costs me bitter tears to say, I must speak, though it cost others tears hotter than fire.39

So, Parker believed that he possessed the TRUTH, a major prophetic trait. He arrived at the truth, however, not by divine intervention or revelation, but through his intuition and conscience.

There is a moral faculty called the conscience. Its function is to inform us of the moral ideal; to transfer it from God's mind to our mind; to inform us what are the natural modes of operation, the rules of conduct in our relation with other men.40

Thus, the conscience of man plays a major role in the thinking of Parker because it links man with divine knowledge or God's will for the contemporary situation. Having discerned that will, Parker set about the dissemination of the Word.

A further theme in Parker's discourse was his keen awareness of a dynamic, living God. Although his ideas concerning God will be discussed in the next chapter, it may be emphasized here that Parker believed in the infinite perfection of God. "This doctrine is the corner-stone of all my theological and religious teachings—the foundation, perhaps, of all that is peculiar in my system."41 Parker's theological position could be described as "evolutionary theism." That is, he viewed God as acting in the history of man, attempting to make real His moral perfection.


41 "Experience as a Minister," p. 294.
He is a perfect Creator, making all from a perfect motive, for a perfect purpose, of perfect substance, and as a perfect means; none other are conceivable with a perfect God. The motive must be love, the purpose welfare, the means the constitution of the universe itself, as a whole and in parts—for each great or little thing coming from Him must be perfectly adapted to secure the purpose it was intended for, and achieve the end it was meant to serve, and represent the causal motive which brought it forth.\textsuperscript{42}

Thus, Parker saw God and man working together building the Kingdom on earth. Consequently, Parker was especially concerned with justice and righteousness.

Partly for your education in true religion, and partly to promote the welfare of your brothers, I have preached much on the great social duties of your times and place, recommending not only 'palliative charity,' but still more 'remedial justice.' So I have not only preached on the private individual virtues, which are, and ought to be the most constant theme of all pulpits, but likewise on the public social virtues, that are also indispensable to the general welfare. This work brought me into direct relation with the chief social evils of our day.\textsuperscript{43}

Parker, then, was interested in justice and morality, thus, sharing a concern with his ancient predecessors. This theme will be discussed in great detail in the forthcoming chapter on slavery and abolition.

The final theme of prophetic discourse is the emphasis on the Kingdom of God. Again, we will discuss Parker's vision of the Kingdom in a later chapter, but it should be noted that his life was directed toward the establishment of a democracy where God's will prevails.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., p. 295.

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p. 317.
Writing of future Christs and of the industrial democracy to come, working for a nation without slavery, preaching a religion not widely accepted, promulgating a method of theological scholarship not welcomed by American theologians, Theodore Parker revealed his utopian vision. But the utopia was not in the life hereafter or in the millennium which would finally come on earth; it was in the foreseeable future that he himself might live to see. Believing in the perfectibility of man and community, Parker devoted his life to bringing about that perfection.\textsuperscript{44}

Approaching death, Parker wrote the following to his congregation--a statement summing up this chapter and revealing Parker the prophet.

For to the success of the great truths I have taught, it is now of the smallest consequence whether I preach in Boston and all the Lyceums of the North, or my body crumbles in some quiet, nameless grave. They are not MY truths! I am no great man whom the world hinges on; nor can I settle the fate of a single doctrine by my authority. Humanity is rich in personalities, and a man no larger than I will not long be missed in the wide field of theology and religion. For immediately carrying a special measure and for helping this or that, a single man is sometimes of great value; the death of the general is the loss of the battle, perhaps the undoing of a state; but after a great truth of humanity is once set a-going, it is in the charge of mankind, through whom it first came from God; it cannot perish by any man's death. Neither State, nor press, nor market, nor Church, can ever put it down; it will drown the water men pour on it; and quench their hostile fire. Cannot the Bible teach its worshippers that a grave is no dungeon to shut up truth in; and that death, who slays alike the priest and the prophet, bows his head before her, and passes harmless by? To stone Stephen did not save the Church of the Pharisees.\textsuperscript{45}

Parker perceived his efforts on a cosmic level. He was a messenger of TRUTH who believed had initiated a revolution of justice and hope. Obviously, one can argue whether Parker consciously viewed

\textsuperscript{44}Albrecht, op. cit., p. 9.

\textsuperscript{45}"Experience as a Minister," p. 341.
himself as a prophet. But, such issues are theological rather than rhetorical and although interesting questions, they are not in the bounds of the present study. What is essential, however, is that Parker acted as if he were a prophet. Thus, he was driven by an urgent sense of duty to his conscience, his people, and his God. He possessed the TRUTH and fervently attempted to actualize this truth in American society. In brief, Parker felt he had a divine mission and that his life, both in action and word, was directed toward its fulfillment. This, then, is the symbolic reality from which Theodore Parker interpreted contemporary events. The task he was to perform together with his God dominated Parker's view of the world. From this perspective, we can begin to understand the life of Theodore Parker.

The remainder of this study will explore the implications of the prophetic role for communication. The next chapter provides a brief introduction into the major historical movements which somehow influenced the thinking of Parker. After this overview, we will consider the parameters of Parker's rhetorical vision in relation to the established church and the slavery issue of the nineteenth-century.
CHAPTER III

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PARKER'S VISION

Thus far we have considered Parker as prophet; however, to appreciate the rhetorical vision of Parker, we must now describe the intellectual climate which fostered his role. Briefly, three major intellectual thrusts affected the thinking of the prophet: the Unitarian movement, the transcendentalists, and the abolitionists. Each of these espoused a certain world view or interpretation of reality which was incorporated into Parker's prophetic vision.

The Unitarian Movement

New England had long been the domain of the Puritans. However, in time, the traditional doctrines were challenged on several fronts. But perhaps the most formidable opponent became the "new" philosophy introduced by the Enlightenment era. Soon a dissenting group broke with the Calvinistic Congregational establishment, claiming that the strict God of John Calvin was no longer meaningful for the nineteenth-century.
Congregationalism . . . was plagued by internal difficulties on a doctrinal basis, as the urban New England divines in the Enlightenment era radically reworked the old Calvinism. They spoke of reasonable Christianity, a benevolent deity, natural as opposed to revealed religion, and eventually of Unitarian ideas of God. By 1825 a split had come. What had once been the established church in New England was now part of a complex of two smaller denominations, Congregationalism and Unitarianism.¹

Theologically, the new thinkers of the Congregationalist church espoused ideas advanced by William Channing in his famous sermon of May 5, 1819, "Unitarian Christianity." In this exposition, Channing claimed that the Bible must be studied by the application of reason and common sense. Accordingly, such a method of inquiry revealed that God is not a trinity of beings, but a unity. Furthermore, the doctrines of predestination, infant damnation, and original sin were "deplorable" ideas and allegiances to them must be thwarted. Underlying these ideas was the assumption that man is capable of growing toward moral perfection and therefore can change society.

The second part of Channing's sermon . . . is devoted to an exposition of some of the doctrines to be derived from the Bible, 'particularly those which distinguish us from other Christians.' The first of these is the Unity of God, as contrasted with the doctrine of the Trinity. Next is the Unity of Christ, in place of the doctrine of two natures in one person. The third point is the moral perfection of God, whose infinite goodness, justice, and mercy manifest his concern for the virtue and happiness of human beings.

The Calvinistic doctrines of depravity, election, and eternal damnation are rejected as offering a false and dishonorable view of God. The fourth doctrine is the mediation of Christ: Channing acknowledges the existence of some difference of opinion among Unitarians on this score, but he insists that any doctrine of the atonement that implies that the death of Jesus was necessary to placate an angry God is absurd, unscriptural, and immoral. Finally, Channing explores the nature of true holiness, which he defines as love to God, love to Christ, and benevolence toward one's fellow men.2

Channing's sermon revealed an innovative method or approach to Christianity based on rationality and reasoning. In short, "Unitarians, influenced by the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, had come to teach the strict and simple unity of God, the essential humanity of Jesus (though most of them believed that he was more than a man and truly a Saviour), the native dignity of man, and God's aid to man's every effort toward salvation."3

Channing's theological vision certainly did not concur with the "acceptable" Calvinistic assumptions of his day. However, Channing did provide the necessary leadership for the liberal adherents.

Channing's sermon of 1819 provided the liberal Christians of his day with a party platform, thereby sharpening the cleavage between them and their orthodox neighbors both

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theologically and ecclesiastically. The pamphlet warfare he initiated continued for half a decade, and the effects were lasting on Unitarians and Trinitarians alike.\textsuperscript{4}

With such an emphasis, the liberals organized the Berry Street Ministerial Conference in 1821, an informal group meeting periodically throughout the year. Still, however, the conference remained a part of the formal Congregational Church until three years later when more concrete action was taken by the liberals. "The first step was taken in 1824 at a meeting of a club of thirty or forty leading Boston Unitarians called the Anonymous Association, who were interested in promoting the progress of liberal Christianity."\textsuperscript{5}

In May of 1825 the Berry Street Conference met and adopted a constitution for an association "to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of Christianity."\textsuperscript{6} Thus, the American Unitarian Association was founded. In 1837 the first permanent secretary was hired, Rev. Charles Briggs, and in 1847 the association was incorporated.

In summary, the rhetorical vision of most Unitarians contained several major themes. First, these individuals believed that "truth" was revealed when reason was applied to the Scriptures.

\textsuperscript{4} Wright, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{6} \textit{Ibid.}, 2:44.
Orthodoxy was to be rejected primarily because it seemed incompatible with the dictates of reason and rational morality—this had been the theme of seventeenth and eighteenth-century rationalism, and Unitarianism typified the continuation of this view in the nineteenth century.7

Such an approach led to several conclusions. Most important were the unity of God and Jesus and the brotherhood-of-man concepts. Because Jesus was sent by God to show man how to live ethically, social concern for all men became important in Unitarian thought. In effect, the emphasis on applied reason was an attempt to make religion compatible with scientific advances. In so doing, the Bible was demythologized and the strong ethical demands of the New Testament made apparent.

"Thus, later Unitarianism came to be less and less concerned with the distinctively Christian witness and increasingly interested in general religious affirmations which were wholly consistent with a 'scientific world-view' and with a profound ethical concern."8

Underlying these radical ideas was a profoundly optimistic view of human nature; man can indeed improve and grow into a morally perfect being. Obviously, this assumption is distant from the God of predestination posited earlier by John Calvin.

There is an 'essential sameness' between God and man, declared Channing, and 'all virtue has its foundation in the moral nature of man.' The great significance of Jesus is that he leads and entices men to divine perfection.


8 Ibid., p. 225.
Having been made for 'union' with the Creator, the 'infinite perfection' of the Creator is the 'only sufficient object and true resting place for the insatiable desires and unlimited capacities of the human mind.'

If we cast the Unitarian symbolic reality in a theatrical paradigm, several observations can be made. For example, the stage of the drama is a world founded on rationality and discernible through logic and reason. Religion approached rationally is compatible with this system, for the Bible reveals a benevolent deity, striving together with man to improve the moral condition of society. Contrasting this scene with that of the Calvinistic drama, a tension is apparent as the two struggle in front of the audience of nineteenth-century America. The major hero in the Unitarian drama is William Channing—the intellectual leader of this novel world view. Audience members favorably disposed to this hero and his theology discover that they suddenly have a moral and ethical obligation to society. So, the entire thrust of religion is outward directed. The inward personal salvation of the individual soul is no longer the central issue.

Thus, the Unitarian emphasis on reason—propelled to America by the philosophers of the Enlightenment—had important ramifications for the theological and social scene. Theodore Parker was introduced to Unitarian thought at an early age and further refined and molded these themes.

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Transcendentalism

In turn, the rational Unitarian approach to theology was challenged by the transcendentalist philosophy or world view. Partly out of a dissatisfaction with the rational forms of religion and also of being introduced to several German philosophers, some Unitarian leaders became disciples of the transcendentalist movement.

Even before the end of the eighteenth century American clergymen had been influenced by German Biblical scholarship and the teachings of Immanuel Kant. . . . Coleridge and Carlyle were apparently important transmitters of German thought (especially Kant) to Americans through their writings. At any rate, there emerged a philosophical movement known as Transcendentalism, which had many roots,—Platonic and pre-Socratic philosophy, European Mysticism, New England theological trends, various English and French philosophers and German poets and philosophers. . . . Unitarianism had been in part a rational protest against Calvinist dogmatism, but by 1835 it had become almost a cult of 'sobriety and decorum,' . . . Thus, New England youth revolted against stereotyped liberalism and Transcendentalism, not 'primarily a philosophy or a reform movement' but essentially 'a mental and spiritual attitude' emerged. It sought to find the source of all truth within the nature of man.10

The transcendentalists were similar to the Unitarians in several respects: they posited a benevolent God, criticized the concept of the Trinity, emphasized the moral potential in men, and refused to accept the Calvin interpretation of the atonement.11

10 Weisenburger, op. cit., pp. 142-143.

11 Ibid., pp. 142-145.
But the transcendentalists also advanced beyond the Unitarian liberalism, most importantly in (1) a doctrine of divine immanence, (2) a reliance upon the intuition, (3) a rejection of all external authority, and (4) a radical social ethic.  

Several New England leaders were avowed transcendentalists: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Orestes Bronson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, James Freeman Clarke, and Elizabeth Peabody. Of these, Emerson was perhaps the best known. His "Harvard Divinity School Address," preached in the Spring of 1838, gained immediate attention and propelled the transcendentalists to national recognition.  

In the spring of that year the senior students of the Harvard Divinity School invited Ralph Waldo Emerson to address them on the occasion of their graduation. He had served as minister of the Second Church in Boston for three years, and had then withdrawn from the active ministry to devote himself to literature. He had for several years found the religion of Unitarians cold and formal, and had tried to rouse them to make it a vital personal experience. But he had at length become persuaded that the ministry of the day, looking to persons and events in the past for inspiration instead of listening for the voice of God in their own souls, had lost any real power, and in his address he urged the young preachers to search for God within and today rather than in persons of by-gone ages.  

Emerson began his address discussing the moral sentiments which can be cultivated by all men—sentiments which are the "essence of all religion." Implied in his ideas is the assumption that man can grow and seek moral perfection. Emerson continued,


13 Wilbur, op. cit., 2:457.
stating that the moral sentiment is revealed to each man through his intuition.

Meantime, whilst the doors of the temple stand open, night and day, before every man, and the oracles of this truth cease never, it is guarded by one stern condition; this namely; it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul.\[^{14}\]

With this background, Emerson considers the two "defects" of historical Christianity: the preoccupation with the person of Jesus and the failure to emphasize the Moral Law or sentiment "whose revelations introduce greatness—yea, God himself—into the open soul."\[^{15}\] Accordingly, these criticisms can be answered by "true teachers."

The stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed; the fear of degrading the character of Jesus by representing him as a man;—indicate with sufficient clearness the falsehood of our theology. It is the office of a true teacher to show us that God is, not was; that He speaketh, not spake.\[^{16}\]

And so, God lives and can be revealed to every searching soul. It is the function of the teacher to emphasize this revelation.

I look for the hour when the supreme Beauty which ravished the souls of those Eastern men, and chiefly of those Hebrews, and through their lips spoke oracles to all time, shall speak in the West also. The Hebrew and Greek Scriptures contain immortal sentences, that have been bread of life to millions. But they have no


\[^{15}\]Ibid., p. 112.

\[^{16}\]Ibid., p. 112.
epical integrity; are fragmentary; are not shown in their order to the intellect. I look for the new Teacher that shall follow so far those shining laws that he shall see them come full circle; shall see their rounding complete grace; shall see the world to be the mirror of the soul; shall see the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart; and shall show that the Ought, that Duty, is one with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy.  

The "Divinity School Address" evoked condemnation from most Unitarians, who held that the Scriptures examined rationally, not man's intuition, was the basis of Christianity. However, a few members of the audience were impressed with Emerson's ideas. "Some of the little company heard the address with unfeigned delight. One of these was the Rev. Theodore Parker, young minister of a little church at West Roxbury, who wrote of it, 'It was the noblest, most inspiring strain I ever listened to.'"  

The rhetorical vision propagated by the transcendentalists was founded on several core ideas. First, the transcendentalists believed that God could be revealed to every man through the intuition—that all individuals must listen for God in their own souls. The intuition, therefore, revealed the moral sentiment which posited the divinity of man and his capacity to live according to the Moral Law. Emphasis on the Moral Law led to

17 Ibid., pp. 115-116.

18 Wilbur, op. cit., 2:457.
a rejection of external authority or the constraints of any organization or institution. The only valid authority on which to base one's life is that derived from the intuition. Finally, such a philosophy fostered a concern for the social welfare of all men. A consequent "radical ethic" evolved, with Parker perhaps representing the culmination of such thought.

Parker's Theological Vision

Having discussed the symbolic realities abounding in Parker's world, we must consider the theological vision of the prophet: how he interpreted reality. Parker's theological assumptions can hardly be divorced from his allegiance to the transcendentalist and Unitarian philosophies which pervaded all his writings. We begin our investigation by relating a story found in Parker's journal which illustrates his early transcendentalist "leanings." One day when Parker was four years old, while walking home he discovered a small pond with a tortoise sunning itself in the shallow waters. The young man picked up a nearby stick and raised it in order to strike the small animal.

But all at once something checked my little arm, and a voice within me said, clear and loud, 'It is wrong!' I held my uplifted stick in wonder at the new emotion—the consciousness of an involuntary but inward check on my actions... I hastened home and told the tale to my mother, and asked what it was that told me it was wrong? She wiped a tear from her eye with her apron, and taking me in her arms, said, 'Some men call it conscience, but I prefer to call it the voice of God in the soul of man.
If you listen and obey it, then it will speak clearer and clearer, and always guide you right; but if you turn an ear or disobey, then it will fade out little by little, and leave you all in the dark and without a guide. Your life depends on heeding this little voice." . . . I am sure no event in my life has made so deep and lasting impression on me.

It seems that Parker at an early age was introduced to the mystery and significance of the conscience.

Parker's mature statement on the conscience and intuition was made several years later in a lecture titled "Transcendentalism."

He began by considering the transcendentalists as those who rely on the faculty of the intuition, which transcends the senses and originates ideas.

They maintain that the mind is not a smooth tablet on which sensation writes its experience, but is a living principle which of itself originates ideas when the senses present the occasion; that, as there is a body with certain senses, so there is a soul or mind with certain powers which give the man sentiments and ideas. This school maintains that there is a consciousness that never was sensation, never could be; that our knowledge is in part a priori; that we know, 1, certain truths of necessity; 2, certain truths of intuition, or spontaneous consciousness; 3, certain truths of demonstration, a voluntary consciousness; all of these truths not dependent on sensation for cause, origin, or proof.

In the political arena, the intuition reveals "proper" conduct.

It appeals to a natural right; absolute justice,

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absolute right. Now the source and origin of this justice and right it finds in God—the conscience of God; the channel through which we receive this justice and right is our consciousness of the conscience of God. This conscience in politics and in ethics transcends experience, and a priori tells us of the just, the right, the good, the fair; not the relatively right alone, but absolute right also. 21

Thus, the individual is capable of arriving at the just and right mode of conduct. Parker next relates his transcendentalist philosophy to government and the "great political idea of America."

The idea of the Declaration of Independence, is a composite idea made up of three simple ones: 1, Each man is endowed with certain unalienable rights. 2, In respect of these rights all men are equal. 3, A government is to protect each man in the entire and actual enjoyment of all the unalienable rights. Now the first two ideas represent ontological facts, facts of human consciousness; they are facts of necessity. The third is an idea derived from the others, is a synthetic judgment a priori; it was not learned from sensational experience; there never was a government which did this, nor is there now. 22

The transcendentalist's goal, then, was to actualize the political ideal of democracy.

Transcendentalism has a work to do, to show that physics, politics, ethics, religion rest on facts of necessity, facts of intuition, facts of demonstration, and have their witness and confirmation in facts of observation. It is the work of transcendentalism to give us politics which represent God's thought of a state—the whole world, each man free;

21Ibid., pp. 25-26.

22Ibid., pp. 26-27.
to give us morals which leave the man a complete individual, no chord rent from the human harp,—yet complete in his social character, no string discordant in the social choir; to give us religion worthy of God and man,—free goodness, free piety, free thought.23

Operating from such assumptions, Parker was destined to create a stir in both the political and religious realms. As mentioned in Chapter I, the first consequence of his transcendentalist approach came with the preaching of "A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity"—in 1841.

But the excitement over Emerson's address had barely died down when a new occasion unexpectedly rose. Mr. Charles C. Shackford was to be ordained as minister of the Hawes Place church in South Boston, and Theodore Parker was invited to preach the sermon. . . . When he was invited to assist at the ordination, he had been preaching but four years, but he was already known as one of the Transcendentalists, and hence was under some suspicion. He chose as his subject 'The Transient and Permanent in Christianity.' Although he believed in the miracles, he insisted that Christianity does not need them to prove it true, but stands on its own merits, and its permanent element is the teaching of Jesus, which is self-evidently true, does not depend on the authority of Jesus, and would still be true even though it were proved that he had never lived at all. It is the forms and doctrines that are transient in Christianity. All this, putting concretely what Emerson had said abstractly, was in itself far enough from the views then held by most Unitarians, but it sounded still worse because he said it in language that seemed sarcastic and even irreverent; so that many of the Unitarians present were deeply shocked and grieved.24

Parker began his sermon by discussing that which is permanent and transient in the Christian faith.

23Ibid., p. 37.

In actual Christianity,—that is, in that portion of Christianity which is preached and believed,—there seems to have been, ever since the time of its earthly Founder, two elements, the one transient, the other permanent. The one is the thought, the folly, the uncertain wisdom, the theological notions, the impiety of man; the other, the eternal truth of God.25

Parker considers the transient in Christianity as the doctrines and "forms" abounding in the faith. Discussing the permanence or truth of Christianity, he states that the faith is valid because it rests on truth, not the authority of Jesus.

I can not see that it depends on the personal authority of Jesus. He was the organ through which the Infinite spoke. It is God that was manifested in the flesh by Him, on whom rests the truth which Jesus brought to light, and made clear and beautiful in His life; and if Christianity be true, it seems useless to look for any other authority to uphold it, as for some one to support Almighty God. So if it could be proved . . . that the Gospels were the fabrication of designing and artful men, that Jesus of Nazareth had never lived, still Christianity would stand firm, and fear no evil. None of the doctrines of that religion would fall to the ground; for, if true they stand by themselves.26

Parker concludes, stating that "Christianity is not a system of doctrines, but rather a method of attaining oneness with God. It demands, therefore, a good life of piety within, or purity without, and gives the promise that whoso does God's will shall know of God's doctrine."27 This is absolute religion.

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26Ibid., p. 165.

27Ibid., p. 176.
It is absolute, pure morality; absolute pure religion,—the love of man; the love of God acting without let or hindrance. The only creed it lays down is the great truth which springs up spontaneous in the holy heart,—there is a God. Its watchword is, Be perfect as your Father in heaven. The only form it demands is a divine life,—doing the best thing in the best way, from the highest motives; perfect obedience to the great law of God. Its sanction is the voice of God in your heart; the perpetual presence of Him who made us and the stars over our head; Christ and the Father abiding within us.28

The ideas of this sermon were certainly not congruent with the assumptions of most New England Unitarians. Parker's emphasis on conscience and intuition threatened a Unitarian theology grounded in reason. As expected, Parker was severely criticized for this sermon, which clearly stated that true Christianity did not require the Bible, the testimony of the apostles, or the person of Christ to establish its validity. Rather, true religion could be revealed to all men through the conscience. Such opinions were not readily accepted. The immediate impact of the sermon was that most of his fellow clergymen refused to exchange pulpits with him.

By July . . . he could count on at most twelve of his brethren to exchange pulpits with him. Congregationalists were asking their ministers and prospective ministers if they would exchange with Parker; ministers, to test their own positions, asked themselves if they would exchange with him. Parker had achieved a notoriety he would never escape.29

28Ibid., p. 174.

29Albrecht, op. cit., p. 44.
Most Unitarians began to treat Parker as a "heathen and publican."

Some of his brother ministers refused to speak to him in the street, to shake hands with him or sit beside him at meetings. They called him unbeliever, infidel, deist, atheist, and tried to get him turned out of the pulpit.

.......

Hence most of the ministers simply gave him the cold shoulder, and made him feel unwelcome at their meetings, so that he seldom attended the Association, and had little to do with most of its members. He was never expelled from the ministry, but in the Unitarian Yearbook his name was never included in the list of ministers and churches except in the first one in 1846; and in the printed list of members of the Boston Association it never appeared at all.\textsuperscript{30}

Parker's reputation was established by 1841. His ministry during the next few years was difficult and un.rewarding. However, he continued to refine his theology and further developed a deep social concern—speaking out freely on the injustices of his day. In time, a group of laymen recognized Parker and accepted his world view. These concerned individuals eventually founded the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society and installed Parker as their first minister.

\textsuperscript{30} Wilbur, op. cit., 2:459-460.
crowding Music Hall with its thousands, who had come not
to listen to sensations, nor to popular oratory, but to
plain fearless discussion of serious themes. Parker
was henceforth a man despised and rejected by his own
denomination. His thought as it cleared grew more and
more radical but never less religious; but as time
went on, beside his Sunday preaching he threw himself more
and more into great social reforms of the day, temperance,
prison reform, the elevation of women, and against capital
punishment, war, and slavery.31

Theodore Parker remained minister of the Society until his death
in 1860.

As Parker continued to read and study, he formulated concrete
theological positions. For instance, his notion of God was
predicated on a firm belief in the "religious sentiment" in
man. According to Parker, all men are born with a feeling
of dependence on something greater than man himself. "Now the
existence of this religious element—of this sense of dependence,
this sentiment of something without bounds, is itself a proof
by implication of the existence of its object,—something on
which dependence rests."32 This dependence was known intuitively
and its object is God who is the soul of man. "The life of God
is my soul; it is vain that you tell me of God out of me."33
So, Parker believed in a dynamic, living God who is Perfection.

I have taught that God contains all possible and
conceivable perfection:—the perfection of being, self-
subsistence, conditioned only by itself; the perfection

31 Ibid., p. 461.

32 Parker, A Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion,

33 Weiss, op. cit., 1:167.
of power, all-mightiness; of mind, all-knowingness; of conscience, all-righteousness; of affection, all-lovingness; and the perfection of that innermost element, which in finite man is personality, all-holiness, faithfulness to Himself.  

If such is the nature of God, how did Parker perceive Jesus? Jesus became the "ideal" man who provided an ethical model for human conduct.

Jesus is a model man in this respect: that he stands in a true relation to men, that of forgiveness for their ill-treatment, service for their needs, trust in their nature, and constant love towards them, --towards even the wicked and hypocritical; in a true relation to God, that of entire obedience to Him, of perfect trust in Him, of love towards Him with the whole mind, heart, and soul; and love of God is also love of truth, goodness, usefulness, love of love itself.

A further component of Parker's theology was the assumption of an evolutionary philosophical base. As Parker posited the infinite perfection of God as the cornerstone of his theology, it followed that man is also striving for perfection.

We all see the unity of life in the individual; his gradual growth from merely sentient and passive babyhood, up to thoughtful, self-directing manhood. I have tried to show there was a similar unity in life in the human race, pointing out the analogous progressive development of mankind, from the state of ignorance, poverty, and utter nakedness of soul and sense, the necessary primitive conditions of the race, up to the present civilization of the leading nations.

34 "Experience as a Minister," p. 295.
36 "Experience as a Minister," pp. 296-297.
Here, then, was the theological bridge Parker employed as the rationale for his reform activity. If man is evolving toward perfection, he is capable of improving his earthly "condition." Man's potential for progress in unlimited. All that was needed was someone to teach men to live according to Jesus and the "higher law" of God. Parker, as prophet, believed he was that teacher. Parker's involvement in the social issues of his day was founded not merely on humanitarian ideals, but rather on a complex theological understanding of the nature and purpose of the cosmos.

Look at the facts of the world. You see a continual and progressive triumph of the right. I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.37

If man was evolving and improving his moral condition, then no obstacle could long delay God's progress. Thus, in his effort to enhance God's moral activity in the world of man, Parker would become involved in civil disobedience.

A commitment to civil disobedience follows directly from the transcendental notion of the Higher Law. God's laws are known intuitively, and when civil law conflicts with this higher law it becomes man's duty, regretfully and with a realistic view of the consequences involved, to disobey the law of the land. . . . Parker, without

doubt, was the strongest formulator and follower of the Higher Law doctrine.38

Parker's concern with the Higher Law eventually led to discussions on civil-disobedience.

Now then, as it is a moral duty to obey a just statute because it is just, so it is a moral duty to disobey any statute which is unjust. . . .

Here, in disobedience, there are two degrees. First, there is passive disobedience, non-obedience, the doing nothing for the statute, and second, there is active disobedience, which is resistance, the doing something, not for the statute, but something against it. Sometimes the moral duty is accomplished by the passive disobedience, doing nothing; sometimes, to accomplish the moral duty, it is requisite to resist, to do something against the statute. However, we are to resist wrong by right, not wrong by wrong.39

Parker often envisioned situations when violence was justified for obedience to the law of God.

When the nation will accept every creed which the priest makes, because it is made for them, then they are tools for the priest, intellectually dead; and they are fit to have Catholic tyrants rule over them in the church. When the nation is willing to accept a statute which violates the nation's conscience, the nation is rotten. If a statute is right, I will ask how I can best obey it. When it is wrong, I will ask how I can best disobey it,—most safely, most effectually, with the least violence. When we make the priest the keeper of our creed, the State the master of our conscience, then it is all over with us.40


40Ibid., pp. 159-160.
Parker's efforts at reform, then, were guided by the Higher Law doctrine. Throughout his life, he was motivated by an idealistic democratic vision. Believing that America is God's chosen country for the enactment of moral perfection, Parker's democratic ideal enforced his conception of reality.

This democratic idea is founded in human nature, and comes from the nature of God who made human existence. To carry it out politically is to execute justice, which is the will of God. This idea, in its realization, leads to a democracy, a government of all, for all, by all. Such a government aims to give every man all his natural rights; it desires to have political power in all hands, property in all hands, wisdom in all hands, goodness in all hearts, religion in all souls. . . . Such a government has laws, and the aim thereof is to give justice to all men; it has officers to execute these laws, for the sake of justice. Such a government founds schools for all; looks after those most who are most in need; defends and protects the feeblest as well as the richest and most powerful. The State is for the individual, and for all the individuals, and so it reverences justice where the rights of all, and the interest of all exactly balanced. It demands free speech, every thing is open to examination, discussion, 'agitation,' if you will. Thought is to be free, speech to be free, work to be free, and worship to be free. Such is the democratic idea, and such the State which it attempts to found.41

This, then, was the utopian vision guiding Parker's life and actions. Here is a Kingdom dominated by Parker's theory of absolute religion or "perfect obedience to the Law of God; perfect Love towards God and man, exhibited in a life allowing and demanding a harmonious action of all man's faculties, so far as they act at all."42


42Parker, Discourse on Religion, p. 241.
In sum, this is the rhetorical vision espoused by Theodore Parker, a unique symbolic reality greatly influenced by transcendentalism and Unitarian thought. Man is by nature a religious being owing perfect obedience to his creator. The conscience reveals, to Parker, a God striving to act out his divine will through human agents. Accordingly, civilization was continually progressing toward moral perfection which will culminate in justice, love, and equality for all men. Jesus is the model of perfect obedience to the divine will and all men must attempt to imitate the ethical imperatives which he taught.

Parker's view of history was thus "colored" by his symbolic reality. He interpreted life and contemporary events within a larger theological sphere. Given the nature of his assumptions, Parker had to become involved in the social issues of his day. He could not escape the burden of dealing with the injustices of society. He could not fail his God. Parker, then, had to lead the "fight." He had to be a prophet participating in a divine cosmic drama.

Parker as rhetor employed discourse in an effort to alter the perceptions of his audiences. "In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which
changes reality through the mediation of thought and action." In this regard, Parker constructed a drama set on a cosmic stage. Although the dramatic action took place in the here and now, the drama had more urgent ramifications on a higher, transcendental stage. Men living in accord with their consciences were suddenly thrust into a partnership with God. Parker, then, attempted to instill a divine sense of duty where every earthly here-and-now act simultaneously affected one's relationship with God.

The heroes in the drama were all those living according to the law—as defined by Parker, the major protagonist in the drama. In this sense, Parker functioned also as a playwright in defining man's responsibility and actions. Parker's emphasis on Absolute Religion, social ethics, and evolutionary theism reveal that he was not simply another reformer. Rather, he was defining himself as a significant actor in an ultimate drama. Here, then, was the prophet preparing for a relentless battle with the villains who attempted to hinder the divine process of evolution to the great democratic vision.

Naturally, Parker's prophetic role slowly emerged. The process of role enactment began, however, when he confronted the "established" Unitarian Association in the early 1840's.

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CHAPTER IV

THE PROPHET CONFRONTS THE ORGANIZATION

This chapter begins a rhetorical exploration of Parker the prophet by focusing on the early development of the emerging prophetic role. In the unfolding of that role, Parker's relationship with the established church structure represents the first stage of role enactment. Here, he begins to locate, define, and enact the chosen role. As previously mentioned, a prophetic communicator is the individual who claims to be speaking the TRUTH or word of God for the contemporary experience. Historically, the religious prophet has not remained in the established ecclesiastical institution. The ancient prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as, the contemporary "prophets" Daniel and Philip Berrigan confirm this observation. Traditionally, then, the message of the prophet has not been readily received by the church. This is true also of Theodore Parker.

What is there about the nature of prophetic discourse
which makes it unacceptable to the organization? The first section of this chapter considers further historical background of the American Unitarian Association. Next, a theoretical foundation for the understanding of behavior within the organization is established. Theodore Parker's relationship to the Unitarian Association and the implications of communication theory for considering this relationship conclude our discussion.

**Roots of Organizing**

For a fuller sense of the rhetorical vision of the organization in which Theodore Parker functioned in his early years, it is necessary to supplement our previous discussion of the Unitarian Association with a brief consideration of Congregationalism.

As noted, American Unitarian thought was initially fostered in the ranks of the Congregational Churches in New England. The Congregationalists, in turn, were strongly influenced by the theology of the Puritans. Furthermore, the Congregationalists also held definite views on church organization. Reacting to the strict control and authority exerted by the Church of England, the Congregationalists placed power in the hands of the local parish church when they came to America.

Since they had had unworthy and unwanted ministers thrust upon them in their parish churches, they were unwilling to concede the power of ordination even to a presbytery, reserving it to the local congregation alone. Furthermore,
since they had been pressured on occasion by the threat of excommunication wielded by a bishop, they were insistent that this power also must be reserved to the local congregation so that an individual might be tried by those who knew him best and by any higher authority.¹

The Congregationalists came to America, then, in an attempt to purify the Church of England on two major fronts: theological and ecclesiastical. In sum, the Congregationalists attempted to establish "in America a biblical church order, free of the gathered corruptions of Stuart Anglicanism, and together with it, a community regulated throughout by divine and natural law, the Canaan of the new covenant."²

In their search for religious freedom, each Congregationalist parish remained a separate entity and formed its own approach to life, given the fundamental theological assumptions of the Puritan heritage. The local parish, then, became the instrument for acting out God's will in the new world.

Hence the term 'congregationalists'—those who believed that the church is the local, functioning body. There is no church in the abstract, no such thing as a combination of churches forming the church. The church is always a concrete community and in the aggregate one can only speak of churches. This does not prevent a number of communities from undertaking joint projects; but in theory that would only be the concurrent action of individual churches.³

¹Hudson, op. cit., p. 37.
³Dillenberger, op. cit., p. 104.
Such an attitude fostered a marked degree of independence, which becomes the key to comprehending Congregational organization. Each was not part of a hierarchy, nor a branch of a perfected institution, but a kind of club composed of individual Christians searching for a godly way of life. The congregational church was a group of going concerns, not a monolithic establishment. When they used the word at all, Puritans usually spoke of the 'churches' rather than the 'church' of New England. What held them together was no unified administrative structure, but a common quest, a common way of living.\(^4\)

With such an emphasis on the power of the local parish, the office of the well-prepared minister understandably became a vital role in the life of the church. Since the church was the local church and it was the believers who made the decisions, there was a tendency toward democracy in the congregation. But responsibility was still heavily focused on an educated clergy. Congregationalists were wary of untutored and untrained clergy. They distrusted emotion, though not vitality, and placed a premium upon learning.\(^5\)

Thus, Congregationalism posited a Calvinistic theology, stressed the independence of the local parish, and made the minister the guiding and powerful force within the church. In other words, the rhetorical vision adopted by the Congregationalists shaped organizational relationships. Each member of the local parish kept a compact with God;


\(^5\)Dillenberger, op. cit., p. 109.
he was therefore responsible for acting out God's will. Furthermore, breaking such a holy covenant surely implied eternal punishment. So, each confessing member had an obligation and duty to live according to the will of his divine master. In turn, the loyal disciple was properly "rewarded" with eternal bliss. Everyone had a role which was determined and constrained by the divine vision.

But the struggling confessor did not face the world alone. Indeed, he was supported by a local community of believers which was guided by a minister ordained to lead the "flock" in its mission. Furthermore, the local clergyman's duty was to interpret the will of God--to construct a meaningful vision which provided the congregation with a focus and believable interpretation of existence. Therefore, the local minister functioned as a tutor--providing the inhabitants of the new world with a symbolic reality and a vision of a divine work. The rhetorical vision fostered by the clergy served to "sustain the member's sense of community, to impel them strongly to action . . . and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes."  

As noted in a previous chapter, American Unitarians broke from the Congregational tradition on several doctrinal issues.

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Reviewing, the Unitarians were influenced by the philosophers of the Enlightenment who stressed a rational, intellectual approach to religion. Accordingly, God became a unity rather than a trinity of beings. The doctrines of predestination, infant damnation, and original sin were discarded. Further, a radical social ethic developed.

The rhetorical vision of the early Unitarians was different from that of the Congregationalists and established unique relationships and prescribed ways of acting. For example, the application of reason to Scripture revealed a social dimension not explored by the Congregationalists. Jesus became the ethical model demanding the faithful follow his example. So, a concern with the brotherhood of man—reaching beyond the immediate local community instilled a new divine mission. Duty to the social betterment of the world of man became an impelling "rule of conduct" with the new liberals. Their role was thus influenced by an allegiance to an innovative vision.

By demythologizing the Scriptures—disregarding the doctrines of predestination, original sin, and infant damnation—the Unitarians were released from the psychological burden of ever present supernatural punishment. Instead, a more optimistic attitude prevailed with the focus of attention shifting from the
individual to the larger society.

Clergy also played a significant role in the Unitarian drama. They provided the community with the "proper" intellectual interpretation of the Scriptures and human existence. Again, the ministers as tutors constructed a meaningful vision ordering the focus of life within an attitude of rationality and social concern.

In 1821 the intellectual followers of the liberal movement made their first efforts at organizing when a few clergy formed the Ministerial Conference in Berry Street, which finally split from the Congregationalist Church in 1824. Thus, the American Unitarian Association was born and Theodore Parker's prophetic message soon challenged the newly organized society.

**Organizing**

To assess the impact which the prophetic message had on the American Unitarian Association, it is necessary to briefly consider the concept of "organization."

Chris Argyris states the essential "properties" of any organization are "(1) a plurality of parts, (2) maintaining themselves through their interrelatedness and (3) achieving specific objective(s), (4) while accomplishing 2 and 3 adapt to the external environment, thereby (5) maintaining their
interrelated state of parts."  

More recently, Hicks has offered a conception of the organization emphasizing the individual and interaction. "An organization is a structured process in which persons interact for objectives." 8 Implied in Hicks' definition are the following ideas.

(1) An organization always includes persons. (2) These persons are involved with one another in some way—that is, they are interacting. (3) These interactions can always be ordered or described by some sort of structure. (4) Each person in the organization has personal objectives, some of which are the reasons for his actions. He expects that participation in the organization will help to achieve his objectives. (5) These interactions can also help to achieve compatible joint objectives, perhaps different from, but related to, their personal objectives. 9

Hicks, then, offers an interaction orientation where the organization is "designed to achieve the personal objectives of the people interacting." 10 Thus, the foundation of any organization is the interdependent individual. Only through an exploration of the dynamics of individuals interacting with

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9 Ibid., p. 16.

10 Ibid., p. 16.
one another can one begin to comprehend the mechanics operative in organizing.

The core element of an organization is persons interacting, and such interaction is the necessary and sufficient condition to establish the existence of an organization. However, an organization also can have working elements, the resources that determine effectiveness. Working elements consist of non-human resources and the abilities of humans. Human abilities include the ability to do, the ability to influence others, and the ability to use concepts of creating, planning, organizing, motivating, communicating, and controlling.  

Interaction is the major component of any organization. "An organization comes into being because of personal objectives; it functions through interaction among persons. These interactions are, in fact, the only processes by which organizations can function."  

Weick also underscores the importance of interaction. Organizing is accomplished by several recurrent processes. Processes consist of individual behaviors that are interlocked among two or more people. The behaviors of one person are contingent on the behaviors of another person(s), and it is this contingency which is the main property that separates collective from singular action.

Weick further defines the organization as a set of ongoing processes that "create, maintain, and dissolve social collectivities,

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11 Ibid., p. 29.

12 Ibid., p. 20.

that these processes constitute the work of organizing, and
that the ways in which these processes are continuously executed
are the organization."\textsuperscript{14} Weick, therefore, offers a "process"
view of the organization. At its simplest, an organization
consists of people interacting with each other; among people
the goal-achieving interaction is communication.

The effectiveness of communication in organizing is
dependent on the nature of interaction among various individuals.

A given system of behavior may be regarded as 'communicative
behavior' whenever the event in question exhibits some form
of interaction between messages and individuals. The notion
of interaction entails the idea of interdependence, a
process having mutuality, shared activity, some form of
linkage or connection with a message.\textsuperscript{15}

When individuals interact they are engaged in interdependent
behavior. "The notion of interaction entails the . . . idea
of interdependence--a mutual influencing process among countless
factors, each functioning conjointly so that changes in any one
set of forces affect the operations of all other constituent
activity in a total field of experience."\textsuperscript{16}

Communication involves individuals linked together in
interdependent, mutually shared behaviors. From the role theory

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 1.

\textsuperscript{15}Kenneth Sereno and C. D. Mortensen, eds., \textit{Foundations of

\textsuperscript{16}C.D. Mortensen, \textit{Communication: The Study of Human Interaction},
perspective, communication may occur when roles are enacted and linked by verbal and nonverbal messages. Thus our precise research interest focuses on roles interacting in a formal organizing process. Specifically, how does the role of prophet interact with the "established" role in the ongoing Unitarian Association?

The Religious Prophet

Parker's prophetic role began to emerge publicly with the preaching of the "Transient and Permanent in Christianity" in 1841. As mentioned in the last chapter, Parker was severely criticized for this sermon. A writer in the Christian Examiner, a Unitarian publication, responded to Parker's ideas.

This sermon has been the subject of so much newspaper discussion, and has so largely occupied the attention of the religious public, that we should hardly be excusable were we to pass it by in silence. . . . Unfortunately for the reviewer, the author of this discourse has taken the liberty usually, though wrongfully conceded to him who writes a sermon, of writing illogically. It is therefore often difficult to determine what sentiments he means to convey. His propositions cover more ground than his proofs. His premises fall very far within his conclusions. Sweeping general statements, which seem altogether to set aside the historical and authoritative element in Christianity, he sustains and illustrates by specifications, which need not alarm the most bigoted conservative.17

Such was the opinion of the "established" organization.

A contemporary of Parker offered further insight. Allen

first summarized the major issue in the sermon and then commented on the Association's reaction.

Hitherto, miracles would seem to have been tacitly assented to on both sides, as marking the line of division between Christian belief and whatever lay outside. Now, the wonderful works ascribed to Jesus were suddenly, nay, offensively, brought to the level of those performed by such errant theosophists as Apollonius of Tyana. . . .

These things it is necessary to mention, because they counted far more than argument in the angry reaction that followed. That sharply reactionary temper prevailed, in a large majority of the Unitarian body, almost to the time of Theodore Parker's death.18

Within a year after Parker had preached this volatile sermon, he published a more detailed account of his theological views titled "Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion."

Once again, Parker reinforced his "radical ideas on absolute religion." The Examiner responded.

We have been sadly disappointed in the work. We look upon it as wholly unworthy of its author's character and mind, and believe that he too, when the heat of the battle is over, will look upon it as a strange blending of youthful aspiration and youthful folly. We deeply regret that one possessing a mind capable of what is so high should descend so low . . . .19

Allen reported an ensuing debate in the Unitarian Association concerning the status of Mr. Parker.

Another step of separation was suggested, but was never carried out. It was, that Mr. Parker should be compelled, either by direct exclusion or by moral pressure

to retire from membership in the Boston Association. The subject was formally debated in his presence at a meeting held in January, 1843. When he was charged with holding a position outside of Christianity, he replied that he, on the contrary, accepted Christianity as 'absolute religion'. . . . Should the Association exercise its clear right of dismissal, wrote Mr. Parker afterwards, 'I will never complain; but, so long as the world standeth, I will not withdraw voluntarily while I consider rights of conscience at issue. To withdraw voluntarily would be to abandon what I think a post of duty.'

Parker soon left for a year of travel in Europe; when he returned to Boston, he expounded his radical theology once again, but with renewed vigor. The Examiner responded on behalf of Unitarian orthodoxy.

Within such limits as were at our disposal we have endeavored to show that the views which . . . are connected with Mr. Parker's name are unscriptural, unsound, and mischievous. . . . We do solemnly pronounce our conviction that the exposition which Mr. Parker gives of the grounds of faith is opposed to the New Testament, and destroys its value, is at war with reason, and is of dangerous tendency. And we are glad to record our belief, that he stands alone, among those who occupy Unitarian pulpits, in entertaining such views.

Thus Parker became a well known, even notorious, clergyman. However, he soon left the Unitarian Association to become minister of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society. Our immediate concern, though, is with Parker's relationship to the Unitarian Association prior to his departure. Hence, we

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shall focus on the interaction of the prophet and the establishment. In conclusion, the Examiner offers a final insight into how the Association perceived Parker in these early years of role enactment.

He denies the miraculous character of Christianity. He denies that Jesus was sent upon a special mission, in any other sense than that in which any other great or good man has a mission to perform, growing out of the exigences of the time in which he lives, and the capacities with which he is endowed. He denies the inspiration of Jesus, in any other sense than that in which it may be shared by any of our race,—the same in kind with what we all have, and differing in degree only according to the larger natural endowment and moral or spiritual development of the individual. He denies the miraculous narratives of the New Testament, and holds them to be exaggerations of an admiring but poorly enlightened faith. The resurrection even of our Lord he rejects from among the facts which he can believe, and represents the Gospels as the most singular compound of the true and the false, that the literature or the religion of any period of the world has ever known. It is plain, then, that so far as faith in the supernatural mission of Christ, or in the historical record of his life, is concerned, Mr. Parker is not a Christian believer.21

This statement reveals that the perceived image of the prophet was for the most part incompatible with the symbolic reality of the organized Association. Briefly, the Association's symbolic reality posited Christ as the

founder of Christianity and God as a unity. Religious truth was revealed when reason was applied to the Scriptures. The symbolic world of Parker, however, depicted individual intuition as the authority in religious matters. Thus, the assumptions and starting points for Parker and the Association were not congruent.

Furthermore, the "boundary" of the Unitarian world was flexible and open to change as the attempt was made to reconcile scientific advances with theological understanding. On the other hand, the prophet was rigid because he knew the TRUTH and was willing to compromise this truth with no one. Parker was not open to change. In turn, he attempted to force his "truth" on the organization, an endeavor which was not persuasively successful. In brief, the prophetic message attempted to change the assumptions of the Association. Because Parker's message was incongruent with the accepted norms of the established organization, it was rejected on a content level.

However, the prophetic attempt to reorientate the content of the Association's symbolic world, simultaneously imposed a relationship reorientation. Being a highly ego-involved individual, the prophet perceived himself as possessing the TRUTH. Whereas the Association was intellectually content to perpetuate
its ideology, Parker was bent on living out the consequences of his philosophy while demanding that others do the same. Since he knew the TRUTH, he was willing to take risks and live a rather "unpopular" existence. Such action, however, was not acceptable institutional behavior because it violated the rules of conduct or just guides for action governing the organizing process of the Association. In being rejected, Parker as prophet was advocating his own set of rules as revealed in his prophetic vision.

When an individual becomes involved in the maintenance of a rule, he tends also to become committed to a particular image of self. In the case of his obligations, he becomes to himself and others the sort of person who follows this particular rule, the sort of person who would naturally be expected to do so. In the case of his expectations, he becomes dependent upon the assumption that others will properly perform such of their obligations as affect him, for their treatment of him will express a conception of him.

As Unitarian minister, Parker was obliged to act according to certain expectations espoused by the Association and the larger New England society. However, as prophet, Parker was obliged to act according to a unique set of rules embedded in his chosen role. His faithfulness to these rules was unwavering as revealed in a letter written in June of 1842.

I have no fellowship with the other clergy; no one that helped in my ordination will now exchange ministerial courtesies with me. . . . If I stay at Spring Street, I

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23Ibid., pp. 50-51.
must write a hundred and four sermons a year for about a hundred and four people. This will consume most of my energies, and I shall be in substance put down,—a bull whose roarings can't be stopped, but who is tied up in the corner of the barn-celler, so that nobody hears him; and it is the same as if he did not roar, or as if he were muzzled. Now, this I will not do. I should not answer the purposes of life, but only execute the plans of my enemies,—of the enemies of freedom of mankind. I must confess that I am disappointed in the ministers,—the Unitarian ministers; I once thought them noble; that they should be true to an ideal principle of right. I find that no body of men was ever more completely sold to the sense of expediency. Stuff them with good dinners, and freedom, theology, religion, may go to the Devil for all them. I believe the abolitionists and temperance-men are half right when they say, 'The church is humbug;' and the other half of the right is, 'the ministers are ditto.'... Now, I am not going to sit down tamely, and be driven out of my position by the opposition of some, and neglect of others, whose conduct shows that they have no love of freedom except for themselves,—to sail with the popular wind and tide. ... I will study seven or eight months of the year; and four or five months, I will go about and preach and lecture in the city and glen, by the road-side and field-side, and wherever men and women may be found. I will go eastward and westward, and northward and southward, and make the land ring; and if this New England theology that cramps the intellect and palsied the soul of us, does not come to the ground, then it shall be because it has more truth in it than I have ever found.... What I have seen to be false I will proclaim a lie on the housetop; and, fast as God reveals truth, I will declare his word, come what may.24

As early as 1842, Parker reveals that he was committed to a unique set of rules fostered by his interpretation of human

24 Frothingham, op. cit., Letter to Dr. Francis, June 24, 1842, pp. 173-175.
existence. Clearly, he was a dogmatic individual sure of himself and his mission.

The prophet, therefore, acts as if he knows where he is going. The Association tended to restrain Parker by obliging him to conform to the established rule system. Parker's failure to do so forced many of the Association members to reduce him to a "nonperson" by refusing to recognize him on the streets. So, Parker was forced out of the organization because he would not conform—insisting to live according to his prophetic rules.

It must be noted that individuals assuming the prophetic role require at least two major audiences which interact with the performer. First, the prophet needs a faithful following of disciples favorably disposed to his world view and who help perpetuate that view in their lives. Second, the prophet must have an audience which rejects his message and publicly condemns his actions. In this respect, a creative tension arises, allowing for a proper role enactment. The prophet must attract both disciples working as change-agents and critics to validate his role. If he has no small band of faithful followers granting him authority, the prophet can not be legitimate; he would only be a lone, social outcast. Furthermore, if the prophet has no vocal critics which impede his quest, then
he can not be a prophet--for the true prophetic message needs an active opposition which denies him and thus establishes the tension necessary for the legitimate role. In this perspective, the Association is the audience providing the essential "negative" feedback for the prophetic performance.

Fundamentally, the prophet demanded new patterns of interaction within the organization by calling for a new allegiance to conscience and stressing an individualistic, personal theology directed toward the betterment of the human condition. Thus, loyalty to intuition and not an association of clergy was essential. Also, because the conscience revealed the TRUTH, the prophetic minister was obliged to impose this truth on society at all costs. Therefore, the minister as intellectually passive teacher was relegated to minister as emotionally active "doer of great deeds" in the prophet's thinking. That is, Parker attempted to change the role expectations of the 1840 Unitarian minister.

The prophetic message, then, threatens the organizing process because, according to Weick, an institution survives only to the degree it maintains a balance between flexibility and stability.\textsuperscript{25} When confronted with the prophetic message demanding a reorientation of interactional patterns, new

\textsuperscript{25}Weick, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 33.
allegiances and power alignments, the organization must necessarily reject this input or else face the possibility of losing this "balance," if indeed it ever existed in the Association.

A further perspective for realizing the impact of the prophetic message on a relationship dimension is Berne's.

There are two sets of influences which can threaten the existence of a group: disruptive forces from without and disorganizing forces from within. Dealing with such matters must take precedence over everything else to ensure survival. In time of external or internal danger, other work has to be given up in order to deal with the emergency. The vigor with which these threats are met depends on how strongly the members wish to maintain the existence of the group. . . . Thus, there are three forces that must be taken into account in a group's struggle for survival: external assaults, internal agitation and the opposing strength of the group.26

In this regard, the prophetic message represents an internal agitational threat. "Internal agitation arises from the actions of members who tend to disorganize the group according to their individual proclivities. The success of internal agitation brings about a change in the group structure, and the concerted efforts of many individual proclivities may result in a complete revolution."27 There is no doubt that Parker as prophet was attempting to revolutionize popular religious thinking. In the process, the relationship

27 Ibid., p. 72.
reorientations demanded were experienced as a threat for the survival of the Association. Thus, the prophet was rejected.

As mentioned, the prophetic act is fundamentally one of communication; through discourse the prophet enacts his role in society. But when denied access to the public channels of communication, Parker could not define himself or the situation. The Association attempted to deny Parker this vital necessity when its members refused to exchange pulpits. However, only free access to unconstrained communication channels allows the prophet to elicit the antagonistic and complementary roles of the two major audiences.

In conclusion, we have seen that the established organization did not grant the prophet meaningful interpersonal communication. As stated, individuals must interact within an organization; an interdependence with others that enables one to function.

Given that interdependence is the crucial element from which a theory of organization is built, interacts rather than acts are the crucial observables that must be specified. The unit of analysis is contingent response patterns, patterns in which an action of actor A evokes a specific response from actor B which is then responded to by actor A. [28]

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The two major audiences responding to the prophetic role enactment were linked by unique interacts. First, the Association responded to Parker by censuring him and denying him access to other pulpits. Eventually, members of the organization began to criticize and condemn Parker's actions. On the other hand, the small group of faithful supporters who established the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society in 1846 were linked to the prophet in a different fashion. Here were the disciples, granting their leader all power and authority and looking toward him for the WORD.

Parker's relationship with the American Unitarian Association represented only the initial stage in the role location and enactment process. These early years were a time, then, when the emerging prophet first became public. Parker's radical, uncompromising attitude toward theology grew over the months and years and culminated in a militant abolitionist position. Thus, the slavery issue provided Parker with a "crisis" demanding a prophetic response. Unhesitatingly, the prophet pronounced the divine judgment in a "skillful" performance.
CHAPTER V

ABOLITION

Theodore Parker as prophet participated in a unique rhetorical vision which demanded emancipation of the slave.

The abolitionists were agitators who hoped to convince their fellow Americans that slavery was morally wrong. They often disagreed among themselves, over both means and ends, but they were all dedicated to emancipation and concerned about the tragic consequences of slavery, especially the victimization of blacks. Many abolitionists were equally committed to the goal of changing white America's negative consciousness about blacks in the hope of ending racial discrimination.¹

Most abolitionists demanded immediate emancipation.

A number of tendencies long resident in the American experience, as well as the intellectual and moral climate in Great Britain during the first third of the nineteenth century, served to stimulate the emergence of the historical movement aimed at the immediate emancipation of the slaves which is usually called abolitionism.²


²Ernest Bormann, Forerunners of Black Power, p. 1.
The abolitionists, then, were the radical elements of the anti-slavery movement in America who lived with a sense of urgency—demanding total emancipation.

Although the slavery issue emerged in American history as early as the Second Continental Congress, abolition efforts were not substantially organized until 1817 with the founding of the American Colonization Society. In 1831 William Lloyd Garrison began perhaps the most noted abolition paper, the *Liberator*. The following year marked the establishment of the New England Anti-Slavery Society and in 1833 the American Anti-Slavery Society was formed, with Arthur Tappen as president. Each of these organizations had a unique set of goals and means for reaching them. However, in general, the rhetorical vision of the abolitionists was of a future America void of racial discrimination where all men could fulfill their human potential. To achieve this future state, the abolitionists cast slavery as a moral wrong—a sin against both mankind and God. Being concerned with the social and ethical consequences of slavery, the abolitionists refused to compromise their vision and although differing on strategies and tactics, they remained faithful to their espoused goal: emancipation.

Bormann groups the abolitionists into two major rhetorical
"camps"--the agitators and evangelicals.

The agitator and the evangelist . . . both participated in the same rhetorical tradition. The essential difference was that the strategy of the agitator was to sting, goad, and disturb the audience, while the aim of the antislavery evangelist was to convert the listener to the gospel of immediate abolition and to recruit people for active work in the antislavery cause.3

The agitators were the representative radicals in the movement.

The agitators took the position that their movement was a revolutionary effort standing against and outside the cultural stream of the American experience. They saw themselves as pure and uncorrupted, as standing outside the essentially polluted culture. The agitators became no-government men and argued against ecclesiastical and civil institutions as being beyond reform. Their answer to the problem of union with the slaveholders was disunion. Garrison and Phillips burned and cursed the Constitution and denied that the tradition of the founders was a worthy one.4

In contrast, Bormann considers the evangelicals as moderates more concerned with working inside the "system."

The rhetoric of conversion, by placing the movement into the general cultural context, accepting the main positive myths of American self-identity, using the frame of America's values as the basis for ruthless and critical self-examination of the corruption of the sin of slavery, and then urging the need to cut out the corruption and propitiate the sin, thereby saving the noble American experiment, proved to have a powerful, persuasive appeal to the uncommitted.5

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3Ibid., p. 6.


5Ibid., p. 29.
Bormann considers Theodore Dwight Weld and William Lloyd Garrison as representatives of the evangelical and agitator schools respectively. Theodore Weld was certainly not a radical or agitator within the abolitionist movement. Rather, he is considered a moderate who emphasized the religious approach to conversion as his strategy for emancipation. He also differed from the agitators in his thoughts about immediatism and the inferiority of the slave.

Unlike Garrison and Phillips, Weld did not demand immediate abolition; nor did he regard gradualism as a sin. On the contrary, he confessed freely that he regarded the Negro as inferior; and he did not believe the colored people should suddenly be allowed to vote and to assume the full responsibilities of citizenship. Instead Weld advocated a national agreement on a plan for gradual emancipation, to be enacted into national laws, and to be accomplished by systematic education for Negroes during a transition period of white stewardship.6

Weld (1803-1895) entered Lane Seminary in 1833 and gradually began to adopt an abolitionist position on slavery. In 1835 he organized the Ohio State Society and commenced several lecture tours throughout the country. When his voice failed, Weld resorted to writing and began publishing for the American Abolition Society.

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Bormann classifies William Lloyd Garrison in the agitator camp, because he openly criticized and rebuked individuals and institutions that were not favorable to his cause.

His themes were that slavery is evil; that those who were not against it were for it; that it must be fought to the death by any and every means available, here and now; that the churches were anti-religious because they sanctioned slavery; that the Constitution was a 'covenant with death and a compact with hell' because it sanctioned slavery; and that the best solution short of war (which, as a pacifist, he opposed) was to break up the Union, form a free Northern nation, and from it as a base to do everything possible to assist as many slaves as possible in escaping from their Southern masters.7

In an effort to modify the exigence of slavery, the agitators and evangelicals chose to engage in various persuasive campaigns aimed at freeing the slave. While noticeably disagreeing as to the proper strategy to employ, most abolitionists did concur that the Southern slaveholder and his institution of slavery were the "enemies." Hence, the abolitionists directed their persuasive attempts accordingly, attempting to convince the remainder of society of the validity of their rhetorical vision.

It was the abolitionists who, by attacking slavery, made it the symbol of the South. Instead of being but one feature of Southern life it was made the explanation for all parts of it. By 1860 the abolitionists had succeeded in painting a picture of Southern slavery which Northerners did not question. "The thieves, the man stealers, the whoremongers must be thrust out with

7Ibid., p. 231.
headlong haste and in holy terror that God may come in.⁸

The rhetorical visions of the abolitionists soon collided with the visions or symbolic realities of the Southern defenders of slavery.

Although slavery had existed for centuries without creating overwhelming moral problems for Western man, the institution always seemed inconsistent with his ideals. Thus, wherever slavery existed in Western society, elaborate social and philosophical rationalizations developed. And when the institution, in one of its most oppressive forms, was becoming firmly established in eighteenth-century British America—a place some men had seen as a crucible for human perfection—new tensions were created which further required restatement and the extension of older Western justifications of slavery. The proslavery defense was not so coherent or unified a body of thought as it was to become in the 1830's when slavery came under increasing attack. Yet the institution created enough uneasiness to elicit at least erratic, random defenses.⁹

The American Civil War may be viewed as a clash between two contrary symbolic realities. Within the tension, the abolitionists were somewhat successful in bringing the slavery issue to a national focus.

The abolitionists did not succeed in implementing their revolutionary vision of a society based on brotherly love and racial equality. This may, after all, have been an impossible goal, but it probably required at least that the abolitionists maintain their role as agitators, continually propelling their fellow Americans toward higher

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⁹ Sorin, op. cit., pp. 21-22.
levels of consciousness. . . .

The abolitionists' agitation over slavery, however, did initiate a cycle of events that led to the destruction of the 'peculiar institution,' if not of all its ramifications. Moreover, their work during and after the Civil War helped to enshrine in the Constitution the ideas of radical justice toward which this country gropes its way. They were often short-sighted and sometimes insensitive, but they provided us with an example of men and women with the courage to risk painful self-examination, to measure the gap between reality and their aspirations for themselves and their society.10

In the foregoing, a few of the abolitionists' major themes have been isolated and their relation to the ongoing symbolic reality has been mentioned. Several of these themes will appear again in the rhetoric of Theodore Parker. In summary, the symbolic realities of the abolitionists were unified by a utopian vision of a future America free from the evils of slavery. Indeed, the America of the future would be a land where freedom abounds for all people. This unifying theme can probably be attributed to the Puritan view of America as the land of God's chosen and the later manifest destiny concept. At any rate, the vision of a free people was an important unifying theme in the rhetorical vision of the abolitionists.

10 Ibid., pp. 167-168.
Slavery, then, was viewed as that institution which prohibited the realization of the emancipated America. Many abolitionists, especially those of the evangelical camp, labeled slavery a "sin."

Since slavery was a sin and the abolitionists were battling on the side of God, they had more than merely human reasons for committing themselves to the movement. They were God's chosen people and his instrumentality, which meant that they were inevitable and must win.11

The sin was slavery and the "enemy" became the slaveholder and those in sympathy with the Southern cause. The institution of slavery must be removed from God's society. Here the abolitionists often disagreed--the means to the goal of freedom were often different. Thus, several rhetorical visions began to interact with society, each advocating a peculiar "reality." But even though these visions were not congruent, each was opposed to racial discrimination and the exploitation of the slave.

Parker's Abolition Vision

Parker, as prophet, employed discourse to enact his role, define reality, and alter behaviors. "The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is

11Bormann, Forerunners of Black Power, p. 32.
always persuasive."\textsuperscript{12} From a dramatistic perspective, Parker attempted to construct a drama; his discourse and his actions aided his efforts. The rhetorical task facing the prophet was to impose and legitimatize attitudes and values by creating a cosmic/transcendent drama in which all the players (rhetorical audience) were instilled with a divine mission. If, then, Parker could define the situation by constructing a social reality where men believe they are doing God's work, he would be successful.

Within the larger social drama and rhetorical vision, Parker had to enact his own prophetic role. As God's agent on earth, Parker became the protagonist in his drama.

The protagonist of a play is usually the leading character . . . . The chief characteristic of the protagonist is a desire, usually intense, to achieve a certain goal, and it is in the interest of the audience in watching him move toward that objective that constitutes its absorption in the play . . . .

Near the beginning of every well-constructed play the author directs our attention strongly toward one of his characters. He does this principally by showing this person, the protagonist, in the grip of some strong desire, some intense need, bent on a course of action from which he is not to be deflected. He wants something—power, revenge, a lady's hand, bread, peace of mind, glory, escape from a pursuer. Whatever it may be, some kind of intense desire is always present.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12}Bitzer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 41.

As prophet, Parker attempted to enact the Kingdom of God in his lifetime. The Kingdom, therefore, became the goal toward which the protagonist progressed.

Parker's evolution as an antislavery protagonist incensed with a divine mission encompassed four time periods. First, the years from 1838-1844 represent a phase of "general disgust" in Parker's attitude about slavery. In these early years, although Parker was not actively engaged in abolition activity, intellectually he condemned slavery in public and private conversation. Intensely disliking any form of slavery, Parker was simply not familiar enough with the problem to become emotionally involved. Rather, these early days were spent on theological issues, a time when Parker was carefully constructing a philosophical foundation to guide his future reform activities.

The second antislavery phase of Parker's life was 1844-1850. During these years, Parker became minister of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society and was granted freedom to develop and mold the organization in a "religious" way. Furthermore, these were the years when he realized the injustice inherent in the Mexican War. Opposing the annexation of Texas, Parker began to become more involved in slavery and related issues. During the third period (1850-1855), Parker

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labored endlessly against the enactment and enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law. This became an extremely active period for the prophet when the majority of his public discourse against slavery was issued. The final phase of Parker's antislavery activity was 1855-1860. In these latter years, though often in poor health, he continued his radical endeavors. He became involved especially in the Kansas-Nebraska issue and with John Brown. In short, Parker never relinquished his intense drive to eliminate slavery until his death in 1860. With this overview, a more detailed discussion follows during which we will begin to construct Parker's rhetorical vision and his role in relation to the slavery issue.

1838-1844

As noted earlier, Parker was establishing a broad rationale during these years, which was to guide his efforts in various reform tasks. His first major public pronouncement was a sermon delivered in January, 1841--"A Sermon of Slavery."

As revealed in this sermon, Parker's major assumption and fundamental component of his rhetorical vision is that all men are created free and equal before God.

Now man was made to be free, to govern himself, to be his own master, to have no cause stand between him and God, which shall curtail his birthright of freedom. He is never in his proper element until he attains this condition of freedom; of self-government.  

The Christian idea of the equality and brotherhood of man was then associated with the democratic ideal established by the founding fathers.

Behind all of Parker's actions to eliminate slavery was his belief in Christianity. His absolute religion dictated not only that all men were created equal and that all men were brothers, but also that this nation was destined by God to become a utopian democracy. With slavery, this achievement was impossible.¹⁶

Thus, freedom and equality for Parker were essential elements of his vision. He was certain that "all men are born free and equal, and that the God of eternal justice will at last avenge the cause of the oppressed."¹⁷ Slavery was the major obstacle keeping God's chosen country from becoming the Kingdom and the protagonist's task was to proclaim this fact.

It is known to you all, that there are some millions of these forlorn children of Adam, men whom the Declaration of Independence declares 'born free and equal' with their master before God and the Law; men whom the Bible names 'of the same blood' with the prophets and apostles; men 'for whom Christ died,' and who are 'statues of God in ebony'--that they are held in this condition and made to feel the full burden of a corrupt society, and doomed from their birth to degradation and infamy, their very name a mock-word; their life a retreat not a progress. . . .¹⁸

¹⁶Albrecht, op. cit., p. 91.


¹⁸Ibid., p. 203.
Parker then depicted the slaveholder as the enemy of freedom and the personification of evil.

The plain truth of the matter is this:—Men who wish for wealth and luxury, but hate the toil and sweat, which are their natural price, brought the African to America; they make his chains; they live by his tears; they dance to the piping of his groans; they fatten on his sweat and are pampered by his blood.19

Furthermore, these "masters" are the individuals infested with the "slave-spirit."

The man who would use his fellow man as a tool merely, and injure him by that use; who would force another in any way to bend to his caprice; who would take advantage of his ignorance, his credulity, his superstition, or his poverty, to enrich and comfort himself; in a word, who would use his neighbor to his neighbor's hurt,--that man has the spirit of slave-holding, and were circumstances but different, he would chain his brethren with iron bonds. If you for your own sake, would unjustly put any man in a position which degrades him in your eyes, in the eyes of his fellow-men, you have the spirit of the slave-holder.20

Parker next discussed those individuals opposed to the slave-spirit or the abolitionists.

We all know there is at the North a small body of men, called by various names, and treated with various marks of disrespect, who are zealously striving to procure the liberation of slaves, in a peaceable and quiet way. They are willing to make any sacrifice for this end. They start from the maxim, that slavery is sin, and that sin is to be abandoned at once, and for ever, come what will come of it. These men, it is said, are sometimes extravagant in their speech

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19 Ibid., p. 204.
20 Ibid., p. 209.
they do not treat the 'patriarchal institution' with becoming reverence; they call slave-holders hard names.

... Honest souls engaged in a good work, fired with a great idea, sometimes forget the settled decorum of speech, commonly observed in forum and pulpit, and call sin SIN. If the New Testament tell truth, Paul did so, and it was thought he would 'turn the world upside down' while he was only striving to set it right.21

In this first address, Parker begins to structure his drama. The villains clearly become the slave-holders and those in their sympathy exhibiting the "slave-spirit."

These base men are motivated by greed and selfish desires to attain wealth at the expense of others. As such, their attitudes and actions are sinful from both a democratic and Christian perspective.

This vast majority of pro-slavery support is countered by a small handful of heroes--those who are not afraid to speak out. These men of great courage and conviction are motivated toward creating a society based on the democratic ideals vocalized by the founding fathers.

The tension between these two attitudes provides a sense of dramatic action. The stage is set. The actors prepared. The curtain rises and the wicked, sinful enemy is challenged by the much power-inferior protagonist endowed with a passionate zeal characterized by a spirit of truth and sense of justice.

21 Ibid., pp. 207-208.
The prophet's strategy was simple. The slavery issue first had to be made "present." Though slavery was a here-and-now issue, Parker attempted to instill cosmic proportions when he labeled it a moral SIN—standing against our democratic and Christian spirit. Thus, slavery is more than a social problem; it now became a matter of national survival. At this juncture, the prophetic role is beginning to emerge. Parker was employing discourse to create a divine drama of extreme significance for every American. In essence, Parker was locating his role. "In order to survive as a member of a society, the individual must be able to locate himself in the social structure. From his repertory of roles, he must select one that is appropriate to the situation."

To locate and enact his prophetic role, Parker had to be recognized as a "holy man." That is, a major supportive audience must grant the prophet religious status—a man of divine insight. Parker's attack on slavery from religious rather than social assumptions can be viewed as a significant effort to create the religious aura. Thus, the religious prophet could label slavery "sin." The rhetorical importance of this name is the behavior it can elicit. In the Biblical sense of the term, "sin" suggests any attitude opposing human fulfillment or that which hinders man from developing his

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22 Sarbin and Allen, op. cit., p. 506.
human potentials. Consequently, the admission of the act of "sinning" or repentance implies a further action on the part of the confessor: individual or social change to eliminate the sin and its consequent guilt feelings. So, when Parker attached the label "sin" to slavery, he hoped to convince believing Christians to repent and more importantly to move beyond confession into the arena of social action: emancipation.

However, by utilizing the label "sin" Parker was simultaneously attempting to gain social support of his role. Surely a true prophet has the authority to point out the sins of society! "Obviously, the work of a rhetor is in large part the promotion of names favorable to his own cause." Therefore, the linkage between "sin" and the prophetic role is an essential interaction necessary for authentic role performance. Only the legitimate prophet has the authority to call sin SIN.

Language as strategy involves applying names with the intent that avoidance or approach . . . associated with the linguistic category will be carried out in relation the nonlinguistic category. Frequently the mere assertion of a name is not enough; the rhetor must also offer explanation or proof of the appropriateness of the name being assigned.

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25 Ibid., p. 387.
Parker's supportive evidence of the appropriateness of the label "sin" was his prophetic role. Thus, a determining factor in Parker's rhetorical efforts was his success at rhetorically linking the role of prophet with the "sin" of slavery.

Furthermore, as discussed in the last chapter, Parker had to be recognized by two major audiences. First, he must attract and hold a group of loyal, faithful disciples who grant him power and authority. Also, because the prophet is an iconoclast advocating a revolution in social values, he must alienate, disturb, and threaten those in the established power centers. Only when the prophet is recognized by these major audiences can the prophetic role be legitimatized. The true prophetic mission will elicit both love and hatred from society; few feel neutral toward the genuine prophet.

A good protagonist is one that arouses some kind of emotional response from the audience. . . . The important thing is that the audience must not be indifferent to him. We must care, one way or another, whether he achieves his goal. A protagonist incapable of arousing some kind of emotional response is almost certain to bore the audience and sink the play.26

The interaction of the two major audiences provided consensual reality, social reinforcement, and role maintenance

26Mabley, op. cit., p. 9.
for Parker the prophet. The Twenty-eighth Congregational
Society founded in 1846 became the supportive community of
believers—a fellowship composed of humble, sensitive
people.

The hall was filled every Sunday morning with earnest
listeners, humble people in the main, but intelligent,
eager, determined; who came for spiritual food, and
were sure to get it. They flocked together, individual
men and women, from the four corners of the ecclesiastical
world; some from the 'outer darkness' of the world non-
ecclesiastical. The circles of fashion were not largely
represented; but the thoughtful, sensitive, and humane
were there in numbers. The seekers, doubters, reformers,
were conspicuously present.27

Until his death, Parker was minister of the society. Thus,
for fourteen years this group of faithful disciples supported
the prophet throughout his reform activities. The society
grew in numbers and the preacher attracted an audience of two
to three thousand every Sunday morning in his later years.

His congregation, with as many as 7000 on the register
(and a solid core of 500), included individuals from the
most diverse groups. Many flaunted Boston society in order
to attend the church, and a few habitually came after the
service began and left before its close to avoid observation.
. . . among those who attended his services, were reformers
such as William L. Garrison; Samuel G. Howe and his wife
Julia Ward Howe; and politicians such as Salmon P. Chase,
John P. Hale, and Charles Sumner.28

The Twenty-eighth Congregational Society continued to support
Parker throughout his reform ministry. Financially and
psychologically, the community granted him the right of "divine"

27 Frothingham, op. cit., p. 231.

28 Albrecht, op. cit., p. 70.
leadership concluding that his conduct was appropriate, proper, and convincing. In an 1849 letter to Joseph Allen, Parker described his support community.

Our church in Boston attends a little to the humanities in an ecclesiastical sense; not much, for we are poor. We have a Committee of Benevolent Action, who are the almoners of the society. Twice a year we take up a collection for the poor. Once a fortnight the committee meets in the season from October to May, and consults about cases, &c. They keep a record of their doings, and are eminently useful. They find places for men, women, and children; and the blessing of such as are ready to perish falls upon them. Besides that, the members of the society are almost all engaged in some of the great reforms; e.g., antislavery, temperance, prisons, &c. But we have no organized ecclesiastical action in these matters; I wish we had; but I have not time for all things of that sort. I once hoped to have a committee on each of these topics, to report annually to the society the conditions of each of these reforms. Then such as liked one, and not another, could work in their own way. But perhaps this is better done as it is; each man connecting himself as he sees fit, without any ecclesiastical organization about it.29

As will be demonstrated, the larger Boston public reacted less favorably to the behavior of Mr. Parker believing that his activities were inappropriate, improper, and unconvincing. The collective feedback from these two polarities served to legitimatize the prophetic role. These early years, therefore, were times of role location and enactment probings.

Aside from the 1841 sermon, Parker had been silent on the slavery issue, being preoccupied with theological rather than social concerns. In essence, the prophet was formulating a conception of the WORD which must be actualized in society. However, the pressure of waging a fierce battle in the theological arena forced Parker to take a leave of absence from his parish in West Roxbury and travel to Europe; on his return, he was ready to act. His philosophy has been established; now he prepared to live out the consequences of his intellectual positions. The prophet was about to be heard in New England.

As stated earlier, Parker became minister of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society in 1846. Here he began his reform efforts with half of his sermons directed toward the improvement of social conditions. On January 4, 1846, Parker was installed in his new church. A major newspaper reported this event as follows.31

On Sunday morning last the installation of the Rev. Theodore Parker over the assembly of persons who met together on the first day of the week at the Melodeon took place. The transaction seemed very much like that of voting in a public officer of the city.

There was no charge, no right-hand of fellowship, connected with the installation—but the question of ratifying the selection of the committee in inviting

30Albrecht, op. cit., p. 72.

31Note, however, that Parker's reputation had previously been established in the theological realm; he was no stranger to the Boston press.
Mr. Parker to be their minister was put to the society, and they signified their assent by rising in their seats. A person who was present on the occasion from curiosity, pronounced it to be the 'most ultra piece of nothingarian simplicity' that he ever witnessed; and certainly it seemed to be a 'way of doing things' calculated to give the world a strange idea of the irresponsible character of this novel self-constituted order of ministers.32

Thus, before Parker even began his reform work in slavery, his reputation had been noticed and his character questioned by at least the audience of this Boston newspaper and the Unitarian Association as seen in the last chapter. He had begun to isolate and alienate a portion of New England society.

The sermon Parker delivered this day is a pivotal one because it establishes his attitude toward the work of the church as an instrument of reform, which became a prophetic description of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society.

Parker began by defining the church.

We are here to establish a Christian church; and a Christian church, as I understand it, is a body of men and women united in a common desire of religious excellence and with a common regard for Jesus of Nazareth, regarding him as the noblest example of morality and religion— as the model, therefore, in this respect for us. . . . the essential of substance, which makes it a religious body is the union for the purpose of cultivating love to God and man; and the essential form, which makes it a Christian body, is the common regard for Jesus, considered as the highest representative of God that we know.33

32Boston Evening Transcript, 6 January 1846, p. 2.

Jesus, then, was the ethical model to be followed by the Christian in reforming society. Again, this is a somewhat radical idea since New England was dominated by the Congregational Church. While isolating the established church bodies which were concerned more with individual salvation, Parker was appealing favorably to the members of his faithful following. The change in emphasis from the soul of man to the salvation of society was a radical idea in 1846. Further, Parker was uncompromisingly clear in his stated duty of the church.

A Christian church should be a means of reforming the world, of forming it after the pattern of Christian ideas. It should therefore bring up the sentiments of the times, to judge them by the universal standard.\(^3\)

Accordingly, in its reform work, the divine role of the church approaches the prophetic.

If there be a public sin in the land, if a lie invade the State, it is for the Church to give the alarm; it is here that it may war on lies and sins; the more widely they are believed in and practiced, the more are they deadly, the more to be opposed. Here let no false idea or false action of the public go without exposure and rebuke. But let no noble heroism of the times, no noble man pass by without due honor.\(^3\)

Obviously, the prophet is concerned with public morality in his philosophy of the church. Applying these ideas to the slavery issue in particular, Parker was appalled at the silence characteristic of the church in relation to this

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 27.

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 27-28.
dreadful sin.

The few that speak a manly word for truth and everlasting right, are called fanatics; bid be still, lest they spoil the market. Great God! and has it come to this, that men are silent over such a sin? Tis even so. Then it must be that every church which dares assume the name of Christ, that dearest name to men, thunders and lightens on this hideous wrong! That is not so. The Church is dumb, while the State is only silent; while the servants of the people are only asleep, 'God's ministers' are dead!36

According to Parker, "Christ is the liberator; he came not to drive slaves, but to set men free."37 The Christian church must follow this ethical example.

Throughout this sermon, Parker discussed martyrs and prophets; he was defining his role.

I love and venerate the saints of old; men who dared step in front of their age; accepted Christianity when it cost something to be a Christian, because it meant something; they applied Christianity, so far as they knew it, to the lies and sins of their times, and won a sudden and fiery death. . . . I shout when I see one; I take courage and thank God for the real saints, prophets, and heroes of to-day. In another age, men shall be proud of these puritans and pilgrims of this day. Churches shall glory in their names and celebrate their praise in sermon and in song. Yea, though now men would steal the rusty sword from underneath the bones of a saint or hero long deceased, to smite therewith the head of a new prophet, that ancient hero's son. . . .38

In sum, Parker's installation sermon provided him with a

36Ibid., p. 32.

37Ibid., p. 23.

38Ibid., pp. 34-36.
public forum where he could freely pronounce his prophetic vision of the church.

The scene was now established. Since the American pulpit for the most part was silent, the church needed a new leader to instill ethical vitality and courage. Once the audiences realized and accepted this interpretation of reality, a dramatic expectancy began to build: Who would lead them? A saint? Martyr? Prophet?

The drama and rhetorical vision are now expanded. The heroes in Parker's symbolic reality were not only the abolitionists, but also those leaders in the church battling for freedom and brotherhood. If the church was led by courageous men who followed the prophetic model of Jesus, the Kingdom of God might become a reality. So, the church and its leadership entered the drama in a major role. The evil slave-holder is opposed by yet another adversary.

Six months after Parker was installed in the Society, he began preaching on the Mexican War. In the 1820's Americans began migrating to Mexico at the request of the Mexican government, who desired ambitious settlers to populate the territory and work the soil. In 1835 these Americans began open warfare with the Mexicans for the purpose of becoming independent.

Within a decade more than twenty thousand settlers and a thousand slaves had entered the area, broken the land, and planted cotton. These energetic, restless people frightened the Mexican authorities by demanding local
government and relief from cultural and political controls. . . . When Mexican rule was not materially liberalized, the settlers declared their independence and expelled the Mexican authorities.39

Finally, in 1836, Sam Houston forced the Mexicans to grant independence to Texas, the Lone Star Republic. Texas immediately asked Congress for annexation, which was not granted until 1845. However, once again war broke out with Mexico over a boundary dispute. United States forces marched to Mexico City by 1847; in a year the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, thereby ceding to the United States land now occupied by Texas, New Mexico, and California.

Theodore Parker interpreted American involvement with Mexico as primarily a war concerning the extension of slavery. "If I understand the matter, the whole movement, the settlement of Texas, the Texan revolution, the annexation of Texas, the invasion of Mexico has been a movement hostile to the American idea, a movement to extend slavery."40

Parker firmly believed that America should not take part in such a military endeavor to extend slavery. "The progress of the Nation toward an industrial democracy and a utopian state were dreams he shared with many of his countrymen, and slavery represented an obstacle to each."41 Thus, the prophet


41 Albrecht, op. cit., pp. 72-73.
condemned this Mexican War of aggression.

War is in utter violation of Christianity. If war be right, then Christianity is wrong, false, a lie. But if Christianity be true, if reason, conscience, the religious sense, the highest faculties of man, are to be trusted, then war is wrong, the falsehood, the lie. I maintain that aggressive war is a sin; that it is national infidelity, a denial of Christianity and of God. Every man who understands Christianity by heart, in its relation to man, to society, the nation, the world, knows that war is wrong.42

Interestingly, Parker continued and discussed those circumstances when war was acceptable, thereby providing a rationale for his forthcoming "holy war" on slavery.

There are times when the soberest men and the best men have welcomed war, coolly and in their better moments. Sometimes a people, long oppressed, has 'petitioned, remonstrated, cast itself at the feet of the throne,' with only insult for answer to its prayer. Sometimes there is a contest between a falsehood and a great truth; a self-protecting war for freedom of mind, heart, and soul; yes, a war for man's body, his wife's and children's body, for what is dearer to men than life itself, for the unalienable rights of man, for the idea that all men are born free and equal. It was so in the American Revolution; in the English, in the French Revolution.43

However, the war with Mexico was not such a war of liberation, but rather one of aggression for the benefit of the slave-holders. This war, therefore, must be actively resisted by Christians everywhere.

But why talk for ever? What shall we do? In regard to this present war, we can refuse to take any part in it; we can encourage others to do the same; we can aid men, if

42 "Sermon on War," p. 50.

43 Ibid., p. 66.
need be, who suffer because they refuse. Men will call us traitors: what then? That hurt nobody in '76! We are a rebellious nation; our whole history is treason; our blood was attained before we were born; our creeds are infidelity to the mother-church; our Constitution treason to our fatherland. What of that? Though all the governors in the world bid us commit treason against man, and set the example, let us never submit. Let God only be a master to control our conscience. . . .

Now is the time to push and be active. . . . Let us bear our testimony like men, not fearing to be called traitors, infidels; fearing only to be such. 44

According to Parker, the church had to take an active role in attempting to halt the Mexican conflict. Speaking out several times on this issue, Parker stated in 1847 that, "This war is waged for a mean and infamous purpose, for the extension of slavery. . . . The war had a mean and infamous beginning. It began illegally, unconstitutionally." 45

Justifying his involvement in the Mexican issue, Parker revealed his prophetic attitude.

I know my voice is a feeble one in Massachusetts. I have no mountainous position from whence to look down and overawe the multitude; I have no background of political reputation to echo my words; I am but a plain humble man; but I have a background of Truth to sustain me and the justice of Heaven arches over my head. 46

When the peace treaty was finally signed in 1848, Parker discussed the lessons it had taught Americans.

Let it teach us two things: Everlasting hostility to slavery; everlasting love of Justice and of its Eternal Right. . . . I call on you to teach this lesson to your children, and let them know that such a war is sin, and

44 Ibid., pp. 76-77.

45 "Mexican War," Parker, ed., 1:82.

46 Ibid., p. 89.
slavery sin, and while you teach them to hate both, teach
them to be men, and do the duties of noble, Christian,
and manly men. Behind injustice there is ruin, and above
man there is the everlasting God.\textsuperscript{47}

Parker interpreted the aggressive war with Mexico, then,
as a further obstacle to the establishment of the Kingdom.
In time, he became more aware of the political realities
surrounding the complex slavery issue and consequently became
more involved in confronting this evil.

Slavery, which slowly became the central problem for
Parker, by 1850 finally absorbed most of his time and
interest. In the early 1840's his ostensible concern
was slavery in general and in the abstract, but soon
his attention was directed wholly to Negro slavery in the
Souther states. As he turned to the problems of stopping
the expansion of slavery and of destroying the institution,
he became more involved with political issues; for he
realized that politics was the instrument through which
righteousness would have to act. At the same time, he
realized that people would have to be convinced of the
wrong of slavery and of the justice of abolishing it.
Parker therefore assumed two primary tasks: to convince
his audiences of the evil of slavery through
statistics, exhortation, and pleas for justice;
and to persuade politicians to act on the basis of
right.\textsuperscript{48}

Parker composed his first extended discourse on slavery
in December 1848, "A Letter to the People of the United States
Touching the Matter of Slavery," issued in a one-hundred-page
pamphlet. He began by assuming that only information was necessary

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 131-132.

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Albrecht, op. cit.}, p. 91.
to arouse the country in a "holy war" against slavery.

I speak to the people, not as sectarians, Protestant or Catholic—not as Democrats or Whigs, but as Americans and as men. I solemnly believe if you all knew the facts of American slavery and its effects, as I know them, that you would end the evil before a twelvemonth had passed by. I take it for granted that you love justice and truth. I write to you, having confidence in your integrity and love of man, having confidence also in the democratic ideas on which a government should rest.49

Parker then informed his audience of the facts of slavery. To this end, he discussed statistics and the history of slavery; the condition and treatment of the slaves; the effects of slavery on industry, population, education, law, and politics. In brief, Parker amassed considerable evidence to develop several major arguments denouncing slavery. Throughout this letter, Parker acted as a "Man of Words," who "by persistent ridicule and denunciation, shakes prevailing beliefs and loyalties, and familiarizes the masses with the idea of change."50

Parker the prophet as man of words, pronounced judgment on the prevailing attitude that slaves were property.

The slave is not theoretically considered as a person; he is only a thing, as much as an ax or a spade; accordingly he is wholly subject to his master, and has no rights—which are an attribute of persons only, not of things. All that he enjoys therefore is but a


privilege. He may be damaged but not wronged. 51

Clearly, the slave as "thing" subjected to the violent slave master was a terrible reality in the thinking of the prophet. By denying human rights to the slave, the South was committing a moral SIN; the slave was by nature a free man.

Is any man born a slave? The Declaration of Independence says, all men are born 'equal;' their natural rights 'unalienable.' It is absurd to say a man was born free in Africa, and his son born a slave in Virginia. The child born in Africa is made a slave by actual theft and personal violence; by what other process can he be made a slave in America? The fact that his father was stolen before him makes no difference. By the law of the United States it is piracy to enslave a man born in Africa; by the law of justice is it less piracy to enslave him when born in Baltimore? 52

Parker continued and discussed the effects of slavery on education.

The effect on the intellectual, moral, and religious condition of the slave is easily understood. He is only continued in slavery by restraining him from the civilization of mankind in this age. His mind, conscience, soul—all his nobler powers—must be kept in a state of inferior development, otherwise he will not be a slave in the nineteenth century, and in the United States. In comparison with the intellectual culture of their masters the slaves are a mass of barbarians; still more emphatically, when compared with the free institutions of the North, they are savages. 53


52 Ibid., p. 36.

53 Ibid., p. 50.
Parker implies here that the slave masters are intentionally keeping the slaves in a state of ignorance. If the slaves "tasted" freedom, they would no longer be content.

When discussing the effect of slavery in law and politics, Parker stated that slavery is incompatible with the major political ideas underlying our national heritage. Again, the prophet returned to his earlier argument from definition.

These are, first, the idea, that in virtue of his manhood, EACH MAN HAS UNALIENABLE RIGHTS, not derived from men or revocable thereby, but derived only from God; second, that in respect to these rights ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL; third that THE SOLE DESIGN OF POLITICAL GOVERNMENT IS TO PLACE EVERY MAN IN THE ENTIRE POSSESSION OF ALL HIS UNALIENABLE RIGHTS. 54

Parker's first major discourse attacking the institution of slavery is a forceful elaboration of earlier ideas. Acting as a prophetic man of words, Parker argued that all men are created equal and endowed with natural, unalienable rights. Second, America is destined to create a religious utopia by acting out God's will. Southern slavery degraded men and sustained by violence represented the major barrier to the attainment of this utopia. Demonstrating that slavery was economically, educationally, and morally harmful, Parker attempted to stimulate his audiences to action. Yet, Parker was not only cognizant of the "facts" and "reality" of slavery, he was also aware of the TRUTH, that slavery was a sin and was to be

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54 Ibid., p. 61.
abolished. Thus, the prophet proclaimed the WORD. "I am not to speak of slavery considered as a wrong, an offence against the natural and eternal laws of God. You all know it is wrong—a crime against humanity, a sin before Almighty God." 55

Armed with a storehouse of data and "truth," Parker would now attempt to lead his beloved country in a "religious" war destined to make America the Kingdom. Thus, Parker "raised" the level of dialogue above the social-political realm to the cosmic drama of truth and righteousness, adumbrating the prophetic role.

Parker's Letter, like much of his other work on slavery, reveals what he valued. Civilization, humanity, mankind—these abstractions he often placed on a level with Christianity; for the Christianity he preached as absolute religion includes them as virtues. The nation as the potential fulfillment of the promise of these abstractions has a sacred trust to be true to them. Progress was only a general label for the course of the nation which he conceived in terms of growth—population, wealth, industrialization. Since slavery impeded such growth, Parker considered it a sin against Christian morality and against the nation entrusted with the divine mission. 56

At this juncture in the drama, Parker firmly believed that antislavery work could be accomplished primarily through discourse: the pulpit, lecture, press.

Call slaveholding, slaveholding; let us tell the evils which arise from it, if we can find language terrible enough; let us show up the duplicity of the nation, the folly of our wise men, the littleness of our great men,

55 Ibid., p. 75.

56 Albrecht, op. cit., p. 97.
the baseness of our honorable men, if need be; but all that with no unkind feelings toward any one.57

Parker advocated a prophetic rhetoric of protest as a major tactic for confronting slavery. He was certain that such a verbal offense would be effective.

We are certain of success; the spirit of the age is on our side. See how the old nations shake their tyrants out of the land. See how every steamer brings us good tidings of good things; and do you believe America can keep her slaves? It is idle to think so. So, all we want is time. On our side are Truth, Justice, and the Eternal Right. Yes, on our side is religion, the religion of Christ; on our side are the hopes of mankind, and the great power of God.58

A major audience, as reflected in the Boston press, now began to associate Parker with radical abolitionists. For example, during 1848 several meetings were held which the press immediately labeled as "anti-Sabbath Conventions." In reality, these gatherings were of prominent reformers aimed at discussing the expansion of their efforts on the slavery front. One of the group's beliefs was that Sundays were no "holier" than any other day of the week and therefore reform work must proceed as normal. Even though this was a minor issue, the press attached a negative significance to the event.


58 Ibid., pp. 117-118.
It is opposition to a 'ceremonial religion' which is at the bottom of their motives! It is religious change that they would bring about! It is to establish what they call Christianity that they would dethrone Moses and the prophets! Or rather it is to put up PARKERISM or some other ism, that they would put down orthodoxy and abolish the Sabbath! . . . . Their disinterested morality, traced to its last analysis, is that of the fox, who called a Convention for the abolition of a certain fashion; not that he would be benefited thereby, or that he suffered any grievance therefrom, but that others might be reduced to a conformity with his own standard of beauty.59

In an article titled "Blasphemy," another account of an Anti-Sabbath meeting appears. Of course, abolitionism was a major topic of discussion. William Lloyd Garrison began the meeting.

Next came the reverend Theodore Parker. He commenced by saying--'I did not rise sir, for the purpose of making a speech'--and then he made one, occupying ten closely printed pages. . . . I charitably hope, that Mr. Parker is apt to do the very thing 'he did not intend' to do--for this is the only ground, upon which he can obtain absolution, for the great mass of heresy and folly, which he has poured upon the community at sundry times, and in diverse manners.

His conduct, in the Anti-Sabbath Convention, gave satisfaction to nobody. He said enough, to excite the entire disapprobation of friends of religion, and of the law and order; and by no means enough to meet the wishes of the assembled maniacs, into whose close communion he had thrown himself. The clergy looked upon him as an apostate--the Anti-Sabbatarians as an imbecile. . . .

I am disposed to ask of the community as much indulgence for Mr. Parker as they can possible spare. But it does not appear, that he, in any way, opposed the publication of the proceedings of this . . . wicked and silly convention.60

Thus, it is apparent that a major contemporary newspaper and

59 Transcript, 28 January 1848, p. 2.

60 Transcript, 31 July 1850, p. 2.
probably a significant portion of Boston society viewed Parker and the abolitionists in a negative perspective by 1848. So, the audience provide consensual reality for the prophet. Realizing that he was unpopular, the prophet was inspired to continue his proclamations and alienation tactics: the "right" people rejected him.

In the presidential election of 1848, the Free Soil candidate, Martin Van Buren, lost to the Whigs' General Taylor. In a speech assessing this election, Parker discussed the "ideal" American in such times or moral confusion, possibly disclosing his own search for rhetorical identity.

But when a man, for conscience' sake, leaves a calling that would insure him bread and respectability; when he abjures the opinions which gave him the esteem of honorable men; when, for the sake of truth and justice, he devotes himself to liberating the most abused and despised class of men, solely because they are men and brothers; when he thus steps forth in front of the world, and encounters poverty and neglect, the scorn, the loathing, and the contempt of mankind--why, there is something not very common in that. . . .

When intelligent men mock at small beginnings, it is surprising they cannot remember that the greatest institutions have had their times which tried men's souls, and that they who have done all the noblest and best work of mankind sometimes forgot self-interest in looking at a great truth; and though they had not always even a negro boy to help them, or an obscure hole to lay their heads in, yet found the might of the universe was on the side of right, and themselves workers with God! 62

61 The major source for audience reaction is the Transcript which had a circulation of about 40,000 in 1850 and was a "status quo" or Whig publication. The Transcript probably differs only in degree of criticism directed toward Mr. Parker.

Parker’s description of the "ideal" American is also an accurate depiction or interpretation of his own life. Surely, the prophet is a noble lover concerned with the welfare of his audience. Thus, the prophet had located his role in society and begun to alienate as well as attract certain members of society in his enactment. In short, the prophet's task was to "organize the rights of man in America." "We have a genius for liberty; the American idea is freedom, natural rights. Accordingly, the work providentially laid out for us to do seems this, -- to organize the rights of man."  

In summary, Parker as prophet provided a supernatural interpretation of the social scene which in turn imposed certain prescribed behaviors on the listener.

Every major religion stands in intimate relation to the morality of the people who profess the religion. Certain of the moral tenets are explained as having a supernatural origin; the powers of the other world are conceived as supporting and cherishing these principles, being ready to punish their violation and to reward their observance; and salvation and blessedness are interpreted in terms of the individual’s relation to the moral ideals. Religion therefore adds something to morality and strengthens it by connecting it with the world lying beyond the senses. It often happens that not all the moral rules are embodied in religion. . . . Nevertheless, there is usually a feeling that the supernatural world somehow is connected with the whole of group morality as a system.

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During this period of his life, Parker had evolved from a clergyman with an intellectual interest in slavery to a prophet emotionally involved in a divine mission. Thus, Parker possessed the TRUTH, was aware of the public sin, and proceeded courageously to defeat the enemy. Rev. Parker had now located himself and role in society. He was both loved and hated.

Between 1850-1855 the prophet waged a relentless rhetorical battle to enact his role and raise the slavery issue to a cosmic drama where the will of God was being denied.

1850-1855

During the early 1850's the nation became increasingly preoccupied with the slavery issue. Much attention fell upon Washington and the national political climate. This was the era of the 1850 Compromise and the Fugitive Slave Law. A major issue of the 1848 elections had been the status of the California and Mexican territories: should these states be admitted to the Union as free or slave? After General Taylor was elected President, he offered his plan. "He proposed to let events determine policy; California was to be admitted immediately as a free state, while Utah and New Mexico were to make the judgment when they were organized as states."^65

^65 Schutz, op. cit., p. 168.
Taylor's critics called this a "no-action" plan which avoided the real issue. Throughout Taylor's occupancy of the White House, Parker criticized his political solutions to the slavery issue. When Taylor died in 1850, Parker preached a critical sermon. Audience reaction was appropriate to confirm the prophet's role and identity.

The Reverend Theodore Parker gave so much offence to some of his congregation by his sermon against the late President Taylor on Sunday last, that they rose and quitted the church. Like Iago, Mr. Parker can say, 'For I am nothing, if not critical.'

With him, originality consists in dissent. He reminds us of the critic in Voltaire's Candide, who has a perfect contempt for Milton. 'What a very great man this must be,' says Candide, 'to despise one, whom all the world thinks so much of.'

To solve the question of balance between slave and free states, Daniel Webster and Henry Clay offered an alternative to the Taylor plan. In short, the bill soon to be called the Compromise of 1850, included the following.

(1) the admission of California as a free state, (2) the territorial government of New Mexico without a provision for slavery, (3) the redrawing of Texan boundaries in exchange for a national assumption of her debts, (4) the prohibition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia, and (5) a strong fugitive slave law.

Daniel Webster's support of this compromise bill brought forth a hitherto-unheard flurry from Theodore Parker. Hurt and

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66 Transcript, 16 July 1850, p. 2.

67 Schutz, op. cit., p. 168.
deeply shocked over Webster's actions, Parker perhaps disenchanted with the entire political process, began to move to an even more radical position. Because Parker believed that Webster had "sold out," he quickly made the Massachusetts senator into the personification of the evil politician concerned more with his own future than the well-being of the nation.

In his formal reply to Webster's "Seventh of March" speech, Parker began, "A great crisis has occurred in the affairs of the United States." Parker's attitude toward Webster was one of mourning.

Last of all . . . a son of New England, long known and often deservedly honored, has given his decision. We waited long for his words; we held out peace in his silence; we listened for his counsel. Here it is; adverse to freedom beyond the fears of his friends, and the hopes of his foes. He has done wrong things before, cowardly things more than once; but this, the wrongest and most cowardly of them all: we did not look for it. No great man in America has had his faults or his failings so leniently dealt with; private scandal we will not credit, public shame we have tried to excuse, or, if inexcusable, to forget. We have all of us been proud to go forward and honor his noble deeds, his noble efforts, even his noble words. I wish we could take a mantle big and black enough, and go backward and cover up the shame of the great man who has fallen in the midst of us, and hide him till his honor and his conscience shall return. But no, it cannot be; his deed is done in the face of the world, and nothing can hide it.

Parker believed that Webster had betrayed his sacred trust. From the perspective of the prophet, there can be no

68 "Answer to Webster's Seventh of March Speech," Parker, ed., 2:147.

69 Ibid., pp. 148-149.
compromise of human rights. The only solution is complete abolition; any political tactic short of total freedom is not acceptable. In brief, Webster had compromised with sin.

I honor the majestic talents of this great man. I hate to couple his name with that other, which few Americans care to pronounce. But I know no deed in American history done by a son of New England, to which I can compare this, but the act of Benedict Arnold!70

Webster had forsaken the spirit of New England. Parker was convinced that Webster was concerned only with his own political future. So, Webster became the evil politician—not to be trusted and forever to be condemned. "Try it morally, try it intellectually, try it by the statesman's test, the personal expediency of to-day—it is a speech 'not fit to be made,' and when made, not fit to be confirmed."71

Parker concluded his discussion and assessment of Webster with these words of vision.

We see dimly in the distance what is small and what is great, Slow of faith how weak an arm may turn the iron helm of fate; But the soul is still oracular; amid the market's din, List the ominous stern whisper from the Delphic cave within—"They enslave their children's children, who make a compromise with sin."72

Throughout the years, even after Webster's death, Parker continued to condemn him. In brief, Webster became a major villain.

70Ibid., p. 170.
71Ibid., p. 173.
72Ibid., p. 173.
in the drama—a politician unconcerned with the higher law of God. "I believe no one political act in America, since the treachery of Benedict Arnold, has excited so much moral indignation, as the conduct of Daniel Webster." Even in 1852 Parker said, "Let us pity the lion now that his mane is draggled in the dust and his mouth filled with Southern dirt." Of course, his assessment of Webster was never popular in Boston. The Transcript of November 11, 1852 has this insert: "The Home Journal has this item—Theodore Parker and Daniel Webster—the living ass and the dead lion." Such a response was also prompted by Parker's sermon preached on the death of Webster in October of 1852 and commented on in a paper of the times.

Theodore Parker delivered a sermon upon Daniel Webster on the 31st of October published . . . as soon as the breath had left the body of the dead. . . . The sermon performs the office of the Lion's Mouth at Venice, in which were formerly deposited, among some truthful charges, all the libels and lying malice which festered in the secret breasts of rivals and enemies . . . . The obvious difference between the two cases is, the Italians made their assault upon the living; Parker, like a foul bird, preys upon a corpse.

The first thing, which strikes the reader, is the ridiculous assurance of the preacher. He is of course one of the self-styled redeemers of the black race. That

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75 Transcript., p. 1.
is not so remarkable, because there are a number of them; but what is singular, in persons of such sensibility to the black man, they are mostly notorious for the coarseness of their nature, and the hardness of their hearts. There are few men of sufficient impudence and assumption to place themselves so coolly in the office of final judge of a fellow creature, and that one, Daniel Webster....

For shame man! Similar abuse the public's ear has been accustomed to for the last two years; but not from the pulpit—not upon the recent dead.

The infidel preacher's modesty is equal to his malice. In his discourse, he does little else than measure the dimensions of Webster's brains, compute the power of its faculties, and weigh his heart, and even conscience in his Abolition scale.

Mr. Parker sees very little to approve in anybody not belonging to his abolition clique, except perhaps in its very opposite extreme...

But we have not room for any further examination of this scandalous production. All that can be justly said in its favor is, that under the guise of tenderness for the departed, it deals abner thrusts throughout; that it vibrates venom all along its tedious length, and like a viper, quivers with malicious vigor at its very end.

The above assessment of Parker's rhetorical behavior may be understood in terms of our model. Unitarian clergy were not expected to pronounce judgment on the popular senator; in terms of role analysis, Parker violated the role expectations accorded the 1852 Unitarian minister. "Role expectations, then, are collections of cognitions—beliefs, subjective probabilities, and elements of knowledge—which specify in relation to complementary

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Transcript, 15 November 1852, p. 1.
roles the rights and duties, the appropriate conduct, for persons occupying a particular position." Because Parker violated prescribed behavior, he was certainly unpopular during these months; who but the prophet would dare criticize a "patriotic" son of New England?

With the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law Parker reassessed his duty in relation to obeying it. He now began to consider seriously the implications of the law-of-God concept and the law-of-man. By November of 1850 he stated the higher law principle.

It is not for man long to hinder the march of human freedom. I have no fear for that, ultimately,—none at all, simply for this reason, that I believe in the Infinite God. You may make your statutes; an appeal always lies to the higher law, and decisions adverse to that get set aside in the ages. Your statutes cannot hold Him. 78

In April 1851, Parker again considered the question of obedience and the laws of men.

What shall we do? . . . Never obey the law. Keep the law of God. Next, I say, resist not evil with evil; resist not now with violence. Why do I say this? Will you tell me that I am a coward? Perhaps I am; at least I am not afraid to be called one. Why do I say, then, do not now resist with violence? Because it is not time yet; it would not succeed. . . .

Resist, then, by peaceful means; not with evil, but with good. Hold the men infamous that execute this law; give them your pity, but never give them your trust, not till they repent. Then swiftly forgive. Agitate, discuss, petition, and elect to office men whom you can trust; not

77 Sarbin and Allen, op. cit., p. 498.

men who never show their face in the day of darkness and of peril. Choose men that are men.79

The prophet was instructing his people to obey their conscience and the just law of God. The laws of men should be obeyed only when "the laws actually represent the conscience of the people, and help them keep the law of God. The value of human law is only this—to conserve the great eternal law of God. . . ."80 After providing a general overview of obedience and the law, Parker directly considered the Fugitive Slave Law.

But the Fugitive Slave Law is one which contradicts the acknowledged precepts of the Christian religion, universally acknowledged. It violates the noblest instincts of humanity; it asks us to trample on the law of God. It commands what nature, religion, and God alike forbid; it forbids what nature, religion, and God alike command. It tends to defeat the object of all just human law; it tends to annihilate the observance of the law of God. So faithful to God, to religion, to human nature, and in the name of law itself, we protest against this particular statute, and trample it under our feet.81

The prophet next stated that men have a moral obligation to disobey the Fugitive Slave Law.

This disobedience to the Fugitive Slave Law is one of the strongest guarantees for the observance of any just law. You cannot trust a people who will keep law, because it is law; nor need we distrust a people that will only keep a law when it is just. The Fugitive


81 Ibid., p. 148.
Slave Law, if obeyed, will do more to overturn the power of human law, than all disobedience to it— the most complete. 82

Parker continued, proudly relating his own actions and preparations in relation to this evil law; he would not hesitate to employ force is necessary.

I have been obliged to take my own parishioners into my house to keep them out of the clutches of the kidnapper. Yes, gentlemen, I have been obliged to do that; and then to keep my doors guarded by day as well as by night. Yes, I have had to arm myself. I have written my sermons with a pistol in my desk,—loaded, a cap on the nipple, and ready for action. Yea, with a drawn sword within reach of my right hand. 83

As expected, Parker and other advocates of the higher law doctrine did not go unnoticed in the public press. The press immediately assumed its antagonistic role.

With the firearms of his grandfather, and the jacket of Thomas Sims, Mr. Parker would make a very respectable modern Crusoe, in the island of Juan Fernandez. But it would never answer to put them (Garrison, Parker, et al.) together for in the absence of other objects of antagonism, they would infallibly wrangle, among themselves; and the experiment might resemble, in its results, that related by Goldsmith, of the philosopher who shut up a large number of spiders, in a box, with the view of getting them into the way of making silk overnight— and found them all dead, save one, in the morning— the sole survivor of the general fight, an advocate, doubtless of the higher law. 84

82 Ibid., pp. 148-149.

83 Ibid., pp. 150-151.

84 Transcript, 12 July 1851, p. 2.
Parker's militant attitude toward total obedience to the higher law motivated his involvement in several fugitive slave incidents. Here, the prophet often moved beyond discourse. For example, he was proud and often boasted that he had harbored and protected two runaway slaves, William and Ellen Craft. One month after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill, Southern slave hunters were in Boston searching for the Crafts. However, partly through Parker's efforts, the Crafts were never found. His attitude was aptly summarized on November 7, 1850, when after remarrying the Crafts he wrote in his journal, "After the marriage I put a short dagger in his hands [William], as a symbol of one kind of work, and a Bible as a symbol of another sort of work."\(^{85}\)

On April 19, 1851, Thomas Sims—a fugitive slave—was carried away from Boston and returned to his Southern master. "Parker was among the first to try to delay Sims' return, though he was able to accomplish little."\(^{86}\) By now Parker was an active member of the local Vigilance Committee, but even the efforts of this unique group failed

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\(^{85}\)Sanborn, op. cit., p. xx1.

\(^{86}\)Albrecht, op. cit., p. 103.
to free Mr. Sims. Legal and peaceful negotiations were attempted, but all in vain. Parker had witnessed a major moral defeat.

In May of 1854, the fugitive Anthony Burns was arrested in Boston, the first since Thomas Sims. Once again the Vigilance Committee sprang into action. Again, Parker played a leading role. His rhetoric became emotional.

It is not speeches that we want— but action; not rash, crazy action, but calm, deliberate, systematic action— organization for the defense of personal liberty and the State rights of the North. Now is a good time; let us act with cool energy. By all means let us do something, else the liberties of America go in ruin— then what curses shall mankind heap upon us! 87

Obviously, Parker felt the urgency of the moment. Here was yet another "crisis" point. Clearly he was prepared to move beyond agitation rhetoric in the realm of physical action. The "law" appropriately responded.

Because of his inflammatory discourse and consequent public behavior, Parker was arrested and indicted for obstructing justice. In a public meeting designed to discuss the case of Burns, Parker spoke after Wendell Phillips and it was such inflammatory remarks which led to his arrest.

Gentlemen, there is no Boston to-day. There was a Boston once: now there is a North suburb to the city of Alexandria. Gentlemen, there is one law,—

slave law; it is everywhere. There is another law which is also a finality; and that law—it is in your hands and arms, and you can put it in execution just when you see fit. I am a clergyman and a man of peace. I love peace. But there is a means, and there is an end. Liberty is the end; and sometimes peace is not the means toward it.88

After the meeting, several men were arrested for attempting to storm the jail where Burns was being held captive. Eventually, Parker was also arrested for his part in arousing the emotions of the Boston public. For the most part, he welcomed his arrest, planning to defend himself and thereby use the court room as a public forum to discuss the entire slavery issue. However, the judge denied Parker the opportunity to speak. Still, he published his defense in a 221-page pamphlet which was circulated to the public.

Another issue which provoked Parker during these years was the Kansas-Nebraska question. In 1854 Congress was deciding on the status of these two new territories: should they be admitted to the Union as free or slave states? Stephen A. Douglas prepared a bill which allowed the population of these states to decide the issue for themselves.

The territory was to be organized and the people were eventually themselves to decide on the institution of slavery. Unfortunately, his opponents amended the bill, providing for outright repeal of the Missouri Compromise and the division of that area into two territories. In

88Frothingham, op. cit., p. 423.
short, the amended bill would let Kansas and Nebraska, the two territories, decide the issue of slavery or freedom for themselves—and Kansas was expected to follow Missouri, becoming a slave state.89

Douglas' bill eventually became law. In February, 1854, Parker declared that the Nebraska issue signaled a "new Southern assault on freedom in America." Parker interpreted the new legislation as another attempt to establish and extend the slave power in a new territory.

It is an attempt by the Federal government to establish it in a territory where it has been prohibited by the Federal government itself, by the solemn enactment of Congress, made thirty-three years ago, at a time when all the North swore solemnly that it would not suffer slavery to come north another inch.90

Here, Parker was referring to the Missouri Compromise, which he interpreted as being violated by the new Kansas-Nebraska Bill.

Parker believed the Kansas-Nebraska act was the tenth step in the progress of the slave power. The first step he claimed came in 1787 when "America inaugurated slavery into the Constitution," by allowing slave states to enter the Republic. The remaining steps in the slave progress included: 1792, Kentucky admitted as a slave state; 1793, the Federal government took charge of "delivering up" fugitive slaves; 1821, Missouri entered as a slave state; 1845, Florida

89Schutz, op. cit., p. 173.

and Texas entered the Union as slave; 1848, the Mexican War; and 1850, the Fugitive Slave Law. Parker continued, "The slave power is now ready to take a tenth step. It wants these things: the acquisition of Cuba, the Mesilla Valley, the enslavement of Nebraska." Parker then discussed the five remaining steps in the slave program.

I. The acquisition of Dominica—and then all Hayti—as new slave territory.
II. The acquisition of Cuba, by purchase, or else by private filibustering and public war,--as new slave territory.
III. The re-establishment of slavery in all the free States, by judicial 'decision' or legislative enactment. Then the master of the North may 'sit down with his slaves at the foot of Bunker Hill monument.'
IV. The restoration of the African slave-trade, which is already seriously proposed and defended in the Southern journals.
V. A yet further quarrel must be sought with Mexico, and more slave territory be stolen from her.

Parker believed, then, that the South was pressing for a slave Nebraska so that it could gain direct control over Congress and "conquer new territories" for slavery. In this regard, the South, rather than the slave-holders, had now become the ENEMY.

I say the South is the enemy of the North. England is the rival of the North, a powerful rival, often dangerous; sometimes a mean and dishonorable rival. But the South is our foe,—far more dangerous, meaner,

92 Ibid., p. 279.
and more dishonorable. England keeps treaties; the South breaks faith. She broke faith individually, and Webster lies there a wreck on the shore of his own estate; breaks it nationally, 'and renews the agitation!' I always knew she would; I never trusted her lying breath; I warned my brothers and sisters against it; now she fulfills the expectation. She is the enemy of our material welfare and our spiritual development. Her success is our ruin.  

Briefly, Parker revealed here that he knew the course that history would take; he warned the people; he possessed the TRUTH. Thus, in terms of "role expectations," Parker demonstrated that he was the person he claimed to be: a prophet.

Sensing the urgency of the times, Parker called for ACTION.

Now is the time to push and be active, call meetings, bring out men of all parties, all forms of religion; agitate, agitate, agitate. Make a fire in the rear of the Government and the Representatives. The South is weak--only united. The North is strong in money, in men, in education, in the justice of our great cause--only not united for freedom. Be Faithful to ourselves and slavery will come down, not slowly, as I thought once, but with a great crash!  

Furthermore, Parker began to attack verbally the Roman Catholic Church.

The Catholic clergy are on the side of slavery. They find it is the dominant power, and pay court thereto

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93 "Nebraska Question," p. 281.

that they may rise by its help. They love slavery itself; it is an institution thoroughly congenial to them, consistent with the first principles of their Church. 95

And so, the Catholic Church became identified with the "enemy" in Parker's drama.

The Roman Catholic Church claims infallibility for itself, and denies spiritual freedom, liberty of mind or conscience, to its members. It is therefore the foe of all progress; it is deadly hostile to democracy. To mankind this is its first command--Submit to an external authority; subordinate your human nature to an element foreign and abhorrent thereto! It aims at absolute domination over body and the spirit of man. 96

To Parker, the Roman Church was a slave-master because it took away the freedom to think and act that every individual was entitled to possess.

During this phase of antislavery activity, Parker continued to act as a prophetic individual. Both his discourse and subsequent involvement in several fugitive slave incidents confirm this observation. In short, Parker's rhetoric became more radical. He had become disillusioned with THE New England politician and used every opportunity to criticize Webster by personifying him as evil incarnate. The South was further portrayed as the enemy with Parker listing the phases of the Southern master plan for the domination of


96Ibid., p. 354.
America. Besides the South, the Roman Catholic Church emerged as an enemy. Parker also refined the higher law doctrine during these years, advocating disobedience to all laws which did not coincide with God's.

Furthermore, the prophet became committed to a program of action. Although discourse played an essential role, the prophet had to act. So, Parker hid and cared for fugitive slaves. He became chairman of the Executive Committee of the Boston Vigilance Committee. His actions surrounding the Burns affair caused authorities to arrest and indict him as a "dangerous" person. Thus, Parker demonstrated courage and a commitment to his prophetic vision.

The remedy is in our hearts and hands. God works no miracles. There is power in human nature to end this wickedness. God appointed the purpose, provided the means—a divine purpose, human means. Only be faithful, and in due time we shall triumph over the destroyer. Every noble quality of man works with us; each attribute of God. We are his instruments. Let us faithfully do the appointed work! Darkness is about us! Journey forward; light is before us!97

Clearly, Parker's vision was continually changing and growing. His radical conclusions of this period are quite different from his ideas ten years previously. Reports from the Boston press confirm that Parker was creating more

and more tension in society—a necessary reaction for the prophet.

Role enactment that is observable by a variety of other persons makes the role more vulnerable to positive and negative sanctions from audiences than does role enactment that is restricted from observation. Especially when a performer deviates from role expectations, observability can lead to immediate feedback and possibly to negative sanctions by the audience.98

As will be demonstrated, the concluding years of Parker's life do not deviate from the prophetic pattern which he had established.

1855-1860

The final period of Parker's life exhibits a remarkable decline in his rhetorical efforts. We can attribute this to his increasingly poor health. Finally forced to seek warmer climates, in 1859 Parker departed from America and died in Florence, Italy in 1860. However, during these years of extreme illness, Parker never lost his enthusiasm and hatred of the demonic forces abounding in his world, as indicated in an 1856 sermon.

When an important event occurs, I have felt it my duty, as a minister and public speaker, to look for its causes,--which often lie far behind us, wholly out of sight,--and also for its consequences, that are equally hidden in the distance before us.99

98 Sarbin and Allen, op.cit., p. 533.

And so, the prophet continued his divine mission.

Kansas again became a major issue. In 1855, an election took place to decide the status of the state. The vote was in favor of slavery, but the antislave forces claimed the elections were unfair and so established their own government in protest. Eventually the two sides clashed in a series of battles with the proslave people burning Lawrence and imprisoning the governor. Parker interpreted these events as a "civil war."

America is now in a state of incipient civil war; in Kansas houses are burned, others are plundered, blood is shed... Lawrence has been sacked; property destroyed, one states to the amount of a hundred and thirty thousand dollars; and I know not how many men have been murdered. I shall not speak of the violence to women. These are acts for which the general government is responsible, committed by its creatures, who have been set upon the honest inhabitants of Kansas.100

Again, Parker views the events in Kansas as caused by the slave-holders who are "despots." "In Kansas, on a large scale, this Russia in America, this privileged class of despots in a democracy, wages war against freedom. It burns houses, destroys printing-presses, shoots men."101 Discouraged by these recent events, the prophet stated that he was willing

100 Ibid., pp. 241-242.

101 Ibid., pp. 242-243.
to fight if necessary.

I have no fondness for fighting; not the average 'instinct of destruction,' I should suffer a great while before I struck a blow. But there are times when I would take down the dreadful weapon of war: this is one of them for the men in Kansas.102

A second issue confronted by Parker during these years was the idea of racial supremacy. Thus, at a time when the Boston public was generally in sympathy with his position on Kansas,103 Parker began to move toward an even more radical position.

Of all races, the Caucasian has hitherto shown the most of this instinct of progress, and though perhaps the youngest of all, has advanced furthest in the development of the human faculties, and in the acquisition of power over the material world; it has already won the most welfare, and now makes the swiftest progress.104

However, not only is the Anglo-Saxon race supreme in Parker's new drama, but now the African is portrayed as inferior.

The regressive force may consist in the general sluggishness of the whole mass of the people; then it will be either an ethnological misfortune, which belongs to the constitution of the race--and I am sorry to say that the Africans share that in the largest degree, and accordingly, have advanced the least of any of the races--or else an historic accident entailed on them by oppression; and that is the case also with a large portion of the

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103 cf, Transcript, 29 September 1856, p. 2.

Africans in America, who have a double misfortune—that of ethnologic nature and historic position. 105

As Parker viewed world history, he emphasized the cultural development of the Anglo-Saxons. At the same time, he began to formulate a low image of the slaves mainly because they seemed to Parker not willing to fight for their freedom.

During this final period, Parker offered a last view of his conception of the Kingdom, a future land mighty in righteousness, brotherhood, and free of slavery.

If we are faithful to our duty, one day, America, youngest of nations, shall sit on the Cordilleras, the youthful mother of the continent of States. Behind her are the Northern lakes, the Northern forest bounded by Artic ice and snow; on her left hand swells the Atlantic, the Pacific on her right—both beautiful with the white lilies of commerce, giving fragrance all round the world; while before her spreads out the Southern land, from terra firma to the isles of fires, blessed with the Saxon mind and conscience, heart and soul; and underneath her eye, into the lap of the hemisphere, the Amazon and the Mississippi—classic rivers of freedom—pour the riches of either continent; and behind her, before her, on either hand, all round, and underneath her eye, extends the new world of humanity, the commonwealth of the people, justice, the law thereof, and infinite perfection. God; a Church without a bishop, a State without a King, a community without a lord, a family with no holder of slaves; with welfare for the present, and progress for the future, she will show the nations how divine a thing a people can be made. 106

105 Ibid., p. 441.

106 Ibid., pp. 488-489.
Here, then, was Parker's utopia or ideal society, one in which the prophet's philosophy is enacted. Obviously, the prophet has greatly expanded his conception of the Kingdom from the simple democratic state he advocated a decade earlier.

During these years of political tension when the nation was divided over the issue of slavery and on the brink of war, the Supreme Court became a focus of attention. Two days after the inauguration of President Buchanan, the Court handed down the famous Dred Scott decision which, according to Parker, "denied that Congress had power to limit slavery in the territories and asserted that the states had no authority to make Negroes American citizens." Naturally, Parker did not react favorably to this decision.

The Supreme Court is only the dirty mouth of the slave power, its chief function to belch forth iniquity, and name it law. Of the decision itself, I need not speak. It is the political opinion of seven partisans appointed to do officially that wickedness which their personal nature also no doubt inclined them to. That court went a little beyond itself,—out-Heroding Herod. Now, the Supreme Court was considered part of the enemy camp and, like the politicians, must be condemned.

In 1858 New England was in the midst of a religious revival. Several preachers reacting to Parker's political and

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108 Ibid., p. 284.
social involvement used this opportunity to condemn the prophet. Frothingham reports several prayers that were issued from various pulpits ans directed toward Parker.

In this regard, they provide insight into Parker's audiences.

O lord! Send confusion and distraction into his study this afternoon, and prevent his finishing his labors for to-morrow; or, if he shall attempt to desecrate the holy day by attempting to speak to the people, meet him there Lord, and confound him, so that he shall not be able to speak.

O Lord! Put a hook in this man's jaws, so that he may not be able to speak.

Hell never vomited forth a more wicked and blasphemous monster than Theodore Parker; and it is only the mercies of Jesus Christ which have kept him from eternal damnation already.\textsuperscript{109}

And so, Parker continued to evoke a strong emotional reaction from various New England audiences. His role was thus confirmed.

Until his death Parker did not cease to criticize and condemn the American political system, which he viewed as being controlled and manipulated by the "slave power." His commentary on the Kansas issue and the Dred Scott decision attest to his relentless struggle.

In conclusion, Parker's rhetorical vision changed considerably over the years. His vision began in 1840 with a simple view of the Kingdom as a democratic state and

\textsuperscript{109}Frothingham, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 495.
concluded with the complex notion of the Anglo-Saxon domination of the entire American continent. In his earlier years the villains in the drama were only the Southern slave holders. Soon, however, this category was expanded to include Daniel Webster, politicians in general, the entire South, the Supreme Court, and the Roman Catholic Church. Parker's heroes began with the abolitionists and concluded with the abolitionist prophet willing to fight for his God in a holy war. Also, Parker moved from his original protest-agitation position to advocating physical action to remove the national sin from the "chosen" country. So, as time progressed, Parker moved to a more radical position--seemingly more removed from "reality." The Boston press interpreted his life thusly.

The friends of this eminent man will not be surprised at the intelligence of his death, as that event has been expected by them for more than a month. Rev. Parker for the last twenty years was in such constant antagonism with the majority of his countrymen on almost all questions of politics, theology, and morals, and created so many bitter enemies during his career, that some time will pass before any fair estimate of his powers, his conduct and his influence can be made.

The character of Mr. Parker's preaching is too well known to need any comment.

This is not the place or time to attempt an analysis of Mr. Parker's mind and character. Some of his qualities, however, stand so plainly out to the eye, that none but
the prejudiced can avoid seeing them. He had the character of a Puritan with the mind of a Rationalist; and he carried into his 'liberal' theology all the resolution and relentlessness which characterized the thinking of the old Puritan divines. It was this sturdiness, tenacity, and pugnacity of disposition which separated him from most of the men of his intellectual class. Connected with this earnestness of character, was his unwearied industry and insatiable activity, and connected with it also was his incapacity to do justice to other and opposite minds.

His opinions had so grown into his nature, seemed to him so unquestionably true, that he did not appreciate the sentiments, the perceptions and the arguments of differently constituted and differently cultured intelligences, and was too apt to call that cowardice or hypocrisy which was only difference of thinking. 110

Even though the Transcript's account of Parker's life is somewhat subdued, others assessed his work differently.

The "Advertiser" said, 'From whom has his surgery not cut away some old prejudices, to whom has his treatment not brought some cure' . . . . The pro-slavery 'Courier' said, 'He is gone, and let no one imitate his bad qualities.' The Republican 'Atlas' noted that 'the trio of leading ultra abolitionists was broken' by his death, but conceded to him 'the character of a Puritan with the mind of a rationalist.' . . . . The 'Observer' thought he could scarcely have been ranked as a religious man.' The 'Christian Register' marked his 'unforgiving bitterness to opponents' as 'almost the sole defect of his character.' The 'Liberator' had only praise for him . . . and it was inevitable that the session of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, May 31st, should be mainly devoted to a

110 Transcript, 29 May 1860, p. 2.
series of generous appreciations of his character and his practical efficiency. The speakers were Samuel J. May, John T. Sargent, Wendell Phillips, Garrison, James Freeman Clarke.111

Parker succeeded in arousing a variety of responses from society. In so doing, his prophetic role was legitimatized, for his act proved to him, at least, to be proper, convincing, and appropriate. And so, he courageously acted out his one major role because his audiences in turn accepted their ascribed roles.

Throughout our discussion, we have considered the reaction of several Boston publics to Parker. However, data concerning the specific reactions of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society is, to my knowledge, non-existent. Under the circumstances, we can only assume that the fact the Society sustained him for fourteen years and encouraged his development is proof that the Twenty-eighth reacted favorably toward him granting him prophetic leadership. Insight is provided, however, in a speech delivered after Parker's death by a Mr. Ellis, who was spokesman for the Twenty-eighth.

The resolve that 'Theodore Parker should have a chance to be heard' was more than the word of a friend, or a protest for religious freedom, or a plan for a free church. Before the South-Boston sermon, it was

known who and what was coming in this young preacher.

... But that simple resolve, the seed of this society, was dropped in faith that that truth would prevail; the mover of it having a year or two before, in a little book now forgotten, shown how it was the 'basis of all true art, criticism, society, morals, laws, and religion.

Success! For fifteen years a free church; this truth embodied in labors for the dangerous, perishing, criminal classes, for education, woman, temperance, freedom, peace; its light thrown on the lives of our great men and heroes; put in volumes that will live with the English tongue; put into labors that now move and will move the American Church and State whilst they endure; set forth in a system of religion, a positive spiritual theology, a method of spiritual culture; shadowing a scheme of ethics; containing almost the only fit attempt to state the law of nature, the law of laws, in the language; his thought, his life,—these are success and triumph enough.

On January 11, 1859, the members of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society sent Parker their last formal letter. Again, it reveals a supportive attitude and favorable opinion of their minister.

On the formal organization of the Society, when you were installed as its minister on the 4th of January, 1846, you preached a sermon of 'The True Idea of a Christian Church.' How well and faithfully you have labored from that time till now to make that idea a fact, and to build up such a church, we all know.

The world has called us hard names, but it is on you that have fallen the hatred, the intolerance, the insults, and the calumnies of men calling themselves Christian. Alas! that they should be so wanting in the first principles

112 Frothingham, op. cit., pp. 547-548.
of that religion which Christ taught and lived. ... While the little we may have sacrificed on our part has been as nothing in comparison with all we have gained from our connection with you, as members of this Society, on yours the sacrifice has been great. ... For all that you have been to us, for all that you have done, and borne, and forborne, in our behalf, we thank you kindly, cordially, and affectionately. We feel that we owe you such gratitude as no words or ours can express. If we have not shown it in the past by conforming our lives to that high standard of morality and piety, which you have exemplified in your own, let us, at least, try to do so in the future.¹¹³

Thus, it seems that the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society provided Parker with a necessary support community of disciples. This general audience coupled with the critics abounding in the larger New England public enabled the prophet to enact and maintain his role.

Parker's adoption of prophetic discourse can be attributed also to a further aspect of role theory: self-role congruence.

We assert that other things being equal, when self-characteristics are congruent with role requirements, role enactment is more effective, proper, and appropriate than when role and self are incongruent. By self-role congruence we mean the degree of overlap or fittingness that exists between requirements of the role and qualities of the self. ... Self-role congruence is reflected in observations that the person seems to like the role, is involved in it, and is committed to it.¹¹⁴

Did Parker view himself as a prophet? A few days before his death, the Transcript reported these words of a dying man,

¹¹³ Weiss, op. cit., 2:259-262.

¹¹⁴ Sarbin and Allen, op. cit., p. 524.
"Of course you know I am not afraid to die, though I wished to live and finish much work which I longed to do. I had great powers committed to me, and have but half used them."115

A debate on the above question could ensue. However, such is not the issue of this present inquiry. Rather, we have attempted to describe how Parker used public discourse to define his position in society and enact his chosen role. In this regard, Parker was successful.

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115Transcript, 30 May 1860, p. 2.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

In this study we have detailed the prophet's rhetorical vision and followed its evolution. We have also commented on the impact of the prophetic message and world view on an "established" organization. In so doing, we have emphasized that Parker's role enactment was effective in that he succeeded in maintaining a tension in society, thereby arousing a variety of emotional responses from various audiences. Likewise, Parker's enactment was successful because one audience, at least, granted him his divine status and reciprocated by accepting the relationship and roles imposed by the prophet.

In brief, through discourse and subsequent behavior, the prophet enacted his role as an earthly spokesman of a divine will. The prophetic office enabled Parker to define "self." So, he constructed a cosmic, transcendent, drama and placed himself in a significant role as the "star"
performer. In so doing, the drama served several psychological functions. For example, on a basic level, the prophet's message permitted "expression:" thus, Parker could tell the world "who" he was. As such, the prophet believed himself endowed with supernatural directives; it became his duty to perform the divine will. Thus, Parker set himself apart and above his contemporaries; he was someone special.

Further, defining himself, Parker's discourse enabled him to define the situation and ensuing social relationships. In brief, his rhetoric placed him apart from society; a necessary social distance was created. If Parker was a legitimate prophet, he had to maintain this distance or tension, for surely he was not an "ordinary" person. The only viable relationship Parker could have was that with his God. In short, definition of self and others allowed Parker to define the situation. In this regard, Parker defined the contemporary situation as a time of moral and spiritual decay. Slavery was a sin hindering the enactment of the Kingdom.

Parker's rhetorical task was to enact his chosen role while imposing a unique interpretation of reality on his audience. As we have seen, he created a drama of divine proportions. Parker's efforts at sustaining this drama created
a "group culture" for those accepting his definition of situation.

The culture of the interacting group stimulates in each of its members a feeling that he has entered a new realm of reality—a world of heroes, villains, saints, and enemies—a drama, a work of art. The culture of a group is a fantasy established from the past, which is acted upon in the present. In such moments, which occur not only in groups, but also in individual responses to works of art, one is 'transported' to a world which seems somehow even more real than the everyday world. One may feel exalted, fascinated, perhaps horrified or threatened, or powerfully impelled to action, but in any case involved.¹

So, acceptance of the dramatic, divine rhetorical vision of the prophet created a group culture in which the participants felt involved and impelled to act in a "holy" was against the sin of slavery. This, then, was Parker's persuasive strategy from a dramatistic perspective. By defining himself as a prophet, he correspondingly defined the situation and the audience roles.

Four major research questions were posed in the introductory chapter which now merit consideration. First, we asked: What relation exists between the prophetic role and Parker's social interaction? The evidence, as discussed in the previous chapters, suggests that there is a direct correlation between the prophetic role and Parker's behavior. In sum, Parker's serious commitment to the role is the major determinant of this rhetorical behavior—

verbal and nonverbal. Furthermore, the prophetic model enables us to understand, at least, Parker's social action.

Second, does the prophetic role require an ego-involved actor who possesses the TRUTH and is unwilling to compromise? We can now state that the prophetic role as enacted by Parker demanded such an individual. Indeed, Parker became the "true believer" who knew the TRUTH and was certainly unwilling to compromise. In fact, those who did compromise the TRUTH often became enemies or scapegoats in the prophet's ongoing drama as evidenced by Parker's treatment of Daniel Webster.

Third, are the prophet's rhetorical efforts more successful with SELF than the public audiences? We can approach this question by stating that Parker's communicative endeavors were at least as effective with self as well as the two major audiences which reacted with antagonistic and complementary role behavior. We can surmise that the constant public criticisms fired on him caused doubts in his divine mission. Thus, when Parker addressed the faithful disciples of the Twenty-eighth Congregational Society, he was simultaneously addressing himself and convincing himself of the legitimacy of his chosen role.

Finally, can the prophetic role be institutionalized? Obviously, Parker was successful at institutionalizing his role.
However, this was possible only because he was able to convince a handful of disciples that he was legitimate. Furthermore, he sustained their support over a fourteen-year period while engaging in increasingly radical behavior. Parker's success at this is the key to his rhetorical effectiveness. Perhaps it was his charisma, his interpretation of reality, his sensitivity to the urgency of the times, or his comprehensive intellectual analyses of social issues which enabled such a successful role enactment. However, it was probably a combination of these factors as well as countless unaccountable forces which enabled Parker to accomplish this rare and unique goal.

Thus, Parker as prophet provides the communication student with new understanding of an historical figure. In conclusion, we hypothesize that Parker was more concerned with maintaining his prophetic role than with changing society or exigence modification. This is evident in his abolition behavior--as society began to move closer to his own rhetorical stance in the late 1850's, Parker as prophet in turn became more radical when he began advocating Anglo-Saxon supremacy and the domination of the entire American continent. Therefore, we are inclined to argue that Parker was simultaneously concerned with SELF and role maintenance as well as with eliminating social evils.
Granted, the assumptions of role theory might prompt such a conclusion; however, role theorists do not differentiate between the self-centered and altruistic SELF. As such, we are justified in making this distinction on the basis of available evidence.

Throughout our inquiry into the rhetorical behavior of Theodore Parker some modifications to role theory have been indirectly considered. First, by focusing on rhetorical visions and manifest roles evolving through time, we are able to consider HOW roles are located and enacted. So, we move beyond the WHAT or content of a given role and begin to discern exactly how that role is enacted in society over time. So, we can discover how Parker acted rhetorically to sustain his role in a constantly changing social milieu. Second, relevant audience feedback may exist which is not approbation. That is, role theorists primarily consider that type of feedback which is positive and complementary to a given role performance. However, the prophet requires also a significant negative feedback. Social criticism is a necessary component of the prophetic enactment. Finally, Sarbin and Allen do not seriously consider the issue of "meaning." On the contrary, we have posited that the "meaning" the prophet gave to reality and his role was a primary determinant of role enactment. Acting as
a tutor defining the social world, Parker was able to convince his faithful community of his divine "wisdom."

Although history has not counted Parker among the "great" abolitionists, the prophet's rhetoric was effective; it enabled him to play the role for about fourteen years. McCall's investigation of Parker\textsuperscript{2} considered his rhetorical behavior from a neo-Aristotelian perspective. Our immediate work has departed from McCall's research by exploring Parker's use of discourse. Language may be used for purposes other than, but including, exigence modification. In brief, the critic must begin to consider these other potential uses—this study has made this case. My investigation, then, concludes that a major variable in Parker's rhetorical activity was the role of prophet—a role which pervaded his thinking and behavior. This is a modification and addition to interpretations of Theodore Parker. Now, we need to place the "method" of this study in perspective.

\textit{Toward An Image Centered Rhetorical Criticism}

This study of the rhetorical use of discourse to create and maintain a prophetic role has focused on language behaviors as primary data. Such an emphasis has important ramifications for

\textsuperscript{2}supra., p. 6.
an appreciation of the critical act. The following pages present a critical framework consistent with the assumptions and findings of this study. Thus, we will examine the prophetic model and role analysis, attempting to move beyond the present concern with Theodore Parker to the broader field of criticism.

In the introduction, we established that man is fundamentally a symbol-creating and symbol-manipulating being. If this assumption is granted, then it is evident that man also creates symbolic worlds, living accordingly. Man, then, creates a subjective image of reality and correspondingly lives according to these perceptions.

Rhetorical criticism consistent with this perspective must be phenomenologically oriented. Richard Gregg has considered this approach which presumes that, "all behavior is determined by and pertinent to the perceptual field of the behaving organism." Behavior, then, including communication patterns, is a function of the symbolic reality constructed by the individual or the group with which he identifies. Granted this assumption, Gregg considers the task of rhetorical criticism.

The critic focuses his energy upon discovering, defining, and describing those images which are active within the confines of the rhetorical act. He understands that

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recipients of any rhetorical effort bring to the situation individual images of themselves and their reality which may in some form coalesce into shared group or public images. Such images will not be passive but will form a screen, actively sifting and sorting, interpreting and coloring, evaluating and judging, and finally accepting or rejecting all messages which pass through it. The rhetor in turn is one who attempts to manipulate images by the use of language. His choice of words and his manner of linguistic expression may reveal to some extent his perception of himself and his reality.4

The critic with symbolic-processing as the "new key," must be message centered; verbal and non-verbal messages provide the critic access into the rhetor's symbolic world. Certainly, then, a phenomenological orientation requires that the critic concentrate his efforts on the message-related behavior exhibited or displayed by a source "acting" according to him image of reality.

Gregg's study of the 1966 Fulbright Hearings utilizes the phenomenological approach.5 Bennis and Phillips consider the phenomenological perspective as it relates to the study of communication theory in general.6 Lanigan also attempts

4Ibid., p. 85.


to establish a similar framework, when he discusses the
"structuring of situation."

The existential phenomenologist asserts that criticism
must proceed by examining the individual man speaking
in a situation. By 'speaking' is meant the intentional
psychological and physical structuring of a unique,
meaningful situation by the rhetor's act of communication
with his auditors. The speaker creates the rhetorical
act and thus calls the situation into being.7

Bormann's discussion of rhetorical visions treated in
the first chapter is consistent with the above authors. His
thinking, in turn, is based on the research conducted by
Bales and his concept of "subjective worlds."

Individuals in interaction create subjective worlds
of culture. . . . Human beings prefer a world they make
themselves because it is filled with elements from
their own minds and emotions. Their feelings adhere
to every mental object in their subjective world.
Feelings make the objects emotionally real, though
some are hated, some are loved.8

If one follows the implications of the above scholars, a
paradigm which focuses on the interaction of actors within
a larger social drama could be established. Such an
orientation emphasizing the reciprocal action of convergent
symbolic realities underscores the basic attribute of human
behavior: man's preoccupation with the symbolic.

7Richard Lanigan, "Rhetorical Criticism: An Interpretation
8Bales, op. cit., pp. 152-153.
What are the implications of such an orientation? First, the critic must perceive a given message or series of messages issued by a source as being a subset of a larger symbolic reality. Thus, the message becomes central not only for its impact on a given rhetorical audience, but also on its interactional effect on the ideational structure responsible for its construction. So, the critic should not concentrate solely on immediate persuasive effects attributed to the message. Indeed, he must also view the message as the link between the rhetor's and audience's symbolic realities. The message then becomes the focus, the primary data, of any rhetorical study.

To understand fully the dynamic potential of messages within an image-centered perspective, the critic must begin with the source-message link before considering the effects a message may have on the images of the receivers. Classification of message "types" can then be related to the particular rhetorical vision or image of reality as revealed in a given message event.

So, a concern with messages as indicators of source perceptions and meaning results in classification according to what the messages indicate of the source's symbolic reality. Since the message is the communicator's link between his inner, subjective world and "reality," the critic needs to explore this relationship in order to understand behavior. The scholar
who reconstructs the source's image of reality and then follows this world as it evolves through time and space can enrich our understanding of human conduct in communication. This has been the perspective of the present study. From the above assumptions, we have followed the rhetorical vision of Theodore Parker as prophet over time and focused on the use of discourse in role enactment.

The phenomenological approach has advantages. First, it allows a more realistic view of the communicative process by exposing the "clash" of receiver-source perceptions. Thus, a message or series of messages operates in the larger perspective of the image realm. As Gregg states, "To evaluate a discourse on its own singular merits in terms of its immediate effect may be to overlook its more important long-range function of acting in conjunction with other discourses and events to solidify, alter, or break down the climate of opinion influencing policy and behavior."^9 Messages, then, are viewed as being only a single input into the larger social context. As part of a larger system, messages interact with other messages, persons, events, and objects.

Specifically, a sender is motivated by his perception of the world to engage in communication. Thus, he formulates and emits a message which contains elements of a rhetorical vision, in a particular channel, directed toward a chosen receiver. At this point, the message is only one of several inputs operating in the larger social system. As such, the
message may: (A) "miss" the receiver's symbolic reality, thus causing, perhaps, the rhetor to "try again;" (B) penetrate the receiver's symbolic world and force an "adjustment" of sorts—in relation to attitude and/or behavioral modification; (C) be actively resisted by the receiver; or (D) the message may be processed according to a combination of the above. In any event, feedback from the sender's rhetorical efforts enables him to adjust or reformulate his message—if he so desires.

Traditional criticism has focused on level (B) or the immediate effects a given message has on a particular audience relative to attitude/behavior modification. But, preoccupation with immediate attitude change ignores an important fact: certainly messages that "miss" their mark or are rejected can be effective. However, effectiveness is not defined from a receiver-change perspective; rather, effectiveness is interpreted from the source's viewpoint. That is, a rhetorical "miss" or rejection may be exactly the results the source intended. Perhaps, then, the message serves a different purpose for the sender than attitude change in the auditor.

This observation leads to a second implication of the phenomenological orientation: a concern with the potential functions discourse can perform other than exigence modification. Although it is not our purpose to consider all the possible uses of discourse, a brief survey is helpful. When considering the nature of language, Robinson states that the primary purpose of speaking may include: the avoidance of worse activity ("distract attention from other thoughts"), conformity to norms, aesthetics ("express oneself beautifully"), encounter regulation, regulation of self, expression of affect, establishment of role relationships, communication of knowledge, and inquiry. From a psychiatric perspective, Meerloo considers the uses of verbal communication as including: the need to express, the need to make sounds, the need for contact, the need to communicate, the need to create, the need to confront the world, the need for individuation, the need for magic control, the need to be controlled, the conscious need to control others, the need to confess, and the refusal of contact. Morris considers signs as serving informative,


valuative, incitive, and systemic uses. "Signs may be used to inform someone of the properties of objects or situations, or to induce in someone preferential behavior toward some object or situation, or to incite a specific course of action, or to organize the disposition to behavior produced by other signs." Also, Thayer lists the possible uses of communication as those of adapting oneself to the environment, adapting the environment to oneself, the getting or giving of information, directing and commanding of subordinates, and the influence and persuasion of others.  

Although this list is not exhaustive, it begins to move the critic away from a preoccupation with persuasive effect relative to audience behavior or attitude change. So, when a given message is rejected or "misses" the mark and is judged ineffective by the critic, it may be that the rhetorical effort is effective in role enactment, need fulfillment, regulation of social relationships, or reality testing.

In summary, a phenomenological framework concentrating on the message will view rhetorical discourse as (a) being

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only one input into a larger social system and (b) performing potential functions beyond exigence modification. Such a perspective, then, leads to an understanding of source motivation because rhetorical visions begin to provide the critic access into the symbolic realities underlying source behavior. This insight, coupled with a consideration of the sender's behavior and the social/historical context, provides a basic motivational perspective.

The present study has focused on the prophet's use of discourse for role enactment. Thus, we have viewed Parker's rhetoric as enabling him to portray himself as a special person, endowed with the WORD. Granted this role, Parker's interaction with the complementary and antagonistic roles of society reinforced both his role and "definition of situation." The phenomenological approach investigates this inner subjective world of the actor which fosters the role enactment. "Effective" role enactment, in turn, reinforces the actor's symbolic reality. Therefore, the role-symbolic reality interaction is a meaningful issue for the communication student. A combination of phenomenological and role theory assumptions is one method of investigating this interaction.

In addressing the research issues discussed in Chapter I, it is evident that the rhetorical critic examining discourse
as primary data may find fruitful insights in historical research. Of the scholars studying Parker in the communication field, none have described or considered the role of prophet and its influence in his life. However, it seems that it was this chosen role of a divine spokesman for God which integrates our interpretation of Parker and organizes our approach to his rhetorical behavior.

In sum, Rev. Theodore Parker acted as if he were a prophet: only the prophet can lament, "The American pulpit is the sworn ally of slavery . . . . I know there are exceptional pulpits . . . but how few they are! --little lamps hung out from windows, here and there on a country road at night, they only show how deep the darkness is. . . . "

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Parker, Letter to Samuel May, May 1833, in Weiss, op. cit., 2:118.
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