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Toward a narrative theory of moral discourse: The rhetoric of homiletics and faith development

Harsh, Steven A., Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1994

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TOWARD A NARRATIVE THEORY OF MORAL DISCOURSE:
THE RHETORIC OF HOMILETICS AND FAITH DEVELOPMENT

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
1994

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Adviser
Department of Communication
To My Family
and
In Memory of
Sarah Harsh
and
William and May Newman
Acknowledgments

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CHAPTER I
RESEARCH QUESTION AND RATIONALE

Introduction/Self-Reflection

My interest in narrative rhetoric and ethics began a long time ago when an honest pastor told a grieving friend of mine that he was not sure she would see her recently deceased husband again in heaven. She was upset because her pastor did not share her literal interpretation of heaven, and I, in my youthful naivete, was confused. Though I am still often confused, I have become increasingly interested over the ensuing years in the rhetorical and ethical implications of how we use and interpret myths and narratives, both secular and religious, to determine our values and to make sense of the ontological and existential questions of life.

Nikos Kazantzakis describes more poetically this ethical and rhetorical predicament of understanding myths in a literal, historical fashion, as opposed to a more symbolic and metaphorical interpretation:

Blessed be all those who hear and rush to free you, Lord, and who say: "Only you and I exist." Blessed be all those who free you and become one with you, Lord, and who say: "You and I
are one."
and thrice blessed be those who bear on their
shoulders and do not buckle under this great,
sublime, and terrifying secret: THAT EVEN THIS
ONE DOES NOT EXIST! (1960, 131)

The Research Question

The central focus of this dissertation is to
develop a revised theory of the epistemic role of
narrative rhetoric that will clarify the important
differences in the ways that religious and secular myths
are used in discovering, communicating, creating,
maintaining, and/or modifying human values and
communities. In short, I seek to formulate an epistemic
view of narrative that will explain how and why humans,
as rhetorical/spiritual animals, view certain types of
myths--religious vs. secular myths, in particular--in
significantly different ways. This question emerges
from the broader context of the debate in the last
twenty-five years over the epistemic role of rhetoric
(see Berger and Luckman, 1967; Bineham, 1989; Bitzer,

Included in this research question are the
following sub-issues, all related to rhetorical
epistemology as the key to understanding the
communication value of religious and secular myths:
(1) the implications of several different theories of rhetorical epistemology for assessing the truth claims of myths; (2) rhetorical insights into different theories of moral and faith development and their use of myth; and (3) the importance for rhetorical theory of the "spiritual" or imaginative dimension of human nature and values communicated via myth. In particular, I want to explore and make conspicuous the implications for homiletical theory and practice of the recent interest of rhetoricians in myth and narrative rhetoric (Bormann, 1985; Crable et al., 1990; Farrell, 1985; Fisher and Filloy, 1982; Fisher, 1987; Fowler, 1981; Hauerwas, 1977, 1981; Kirkwood, 1983; Kort, 1975; Lowry, 1980; MacIntyre, 1981, 1988; Osborn, 1990; Ricoeur, 1977; Rose, 1992; Rowland, 1989, 1990; Rushing, 1990; Smith, 1990; Solomon, 1990).

I intend to explore how narrative rhetoric generates and maintains values in our contemporary, pluralistic world where there is no apparent, ultimate, authoritative source of true values. Ethics, because of its contingent nature, has always been a concern of rhetoric, and certainly of homiletics. Yet in a world where ethical authority--like that provided by ideal

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1 Spiritual will be used in the Heideggerian sense to mean Being itself, the source of all life in which individual beings participate. See pp. 12-13 for a more detailed definition.
Forms for Plato or by Scripture for Augustine—no longer exists for many people, where preachers and prophets can no longer say with integrity and credibility, "Thus saith the Lord," the question naturally arises, What is or should be the role of rhetoric, and the related discipline of homiletics, in ethical and moral development?

As a concrete example of the significance of narrative ethical rhetoric, I will compare two different epistemic understandings and uses of narrative, namely how people use and interpret their religious myths or narratives, as opposed to other kinds of myths and stories that are labeled secular. My experience is that most adult American Christians are willing, and even expected as part of their secular education and maturation, to demythologize, that is, interpret symbolically and not literally, secular myths and stories. But these same people, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, often want to treat their religious myths as historical, as literally true events. For example, few adults profess a literal belief in Santa Claus as an actual jolly old elf who lives at the north pole and flies around the whole world in a sleigh in one night, or that the George Washington legends about chopping down the cherry tree or throwing the silver dollar across the Potomac River are historical
events.

But by contrast, a recent national poll found 47% of active American Protestants agreed with the statement that "everything in the Bible should be taken literally, word for word," and 48% disagreed with the statement that "the Bible may contain historical or scientific errors" (Wuthnow, 1992, 427). Those numbers were only slightly lower in a 1980 study of the general public by Gallup and Poling who found 42% of the American population affirming that "the Bible is the word of God and is not mistaken in its statements and teachings," 34% believed in a personal Devil, and 50% believe "the Genesis story of Adam and Eve as the start of human life on this planet" (1980, 136-137). An increasing tendency toward literalism is even indicated among clergy, where one would expect more education to promote higher levels of critical thinking. But Gallup and Poling report "some 78% of the younger clergy (ages 18-29) would approve a literalistic interpretation of the Bible compared to 70% of their elders (50 and older)" (139).

The purpose of analyzing this inconsistency in the important human epistemological and psychological phenomenon of how we treat secular and religious myths is: (1) to see what we can learn about narrative rhetoric and its relationship to ethical values implicit in the two approaches to myth; and (2) to propose a
consistent standard of judgment by which the truth claims of both secular and religious myths can be evaluated.

This analysis will include questions such as: What characterizes the narratives of secular vs. religious myths? By what criteria do humans differentiate between the two? How are these criteria applied in actual discourse? What are the implications of the distinction between secular and religious myths and the narratives in which they are ensconced for: (1) a rhetoric of social amelioration in general, and (2) for homiletics as a potentially vital part of that rhetoric in particular? Simply put, this study will examine questions that are of urgent importance to both rhetoric and homiletics.

Major Issues

Three important interrelated issues will be addressed in this study: (1) What is the proper epistemic role of rhetorical theory? (2) What is the relationship of rhetorical epistemology to issues of moral and faith development? and (3) What is the relationship of both of these questions to the spiritual/imaginative dimension of myth and narrative? Each of these questions requires elaboration.
Many contemporary rhetoricians argue that rhetoric, influenced by Postmodern phenomena such as process philosophy and pluralism, cannot be based on the certainty of knowledge or truth claims as in the Modern (eighteenth and nineteenth century) understanding of epistemology. Modern epistemology is characterized by Russman (1987) as "formal foundationalism" that is based on the Western "love affair" with the certainty of mathematics. Postmodernists, agreeing with Russman's claim that "mathematics tries to make knowledge neater and tighter than truth can bear" (Russman, 1987, 62), argue that rhetoric must have as its primary focus the existential and ontological anxiety of the times in which we live.

In this study I will explore the consequences of that claim, which is, of course, not a new issue, as illustrated by the perennial debates between theorists such as the Sophists and Plato and Aristotle, Carneades and the Stoics, and Descartes and Vico. I will examine and expand upon the current version of this debate between constructivists such as Scott, Brummett, Delia, and Kelly, and realists such as Russman, Cherwitz, and Hikins. This debate is over the extent to which reality is created through intersubjective consensus, as opposed
to existing independently of human perception. My intent is not to focus on the debate between the constructivist view and realism over physical reality, but on the issue of values where the point of contention comes over the perception and rhetorical interpretation of social reality. My claim is that all of reality is not socially constructed, but that our social reality is to a large extent rhetorically constructed. I will examine several theories of rhetorical epistemology to better understand how this is done, especially in terms of the ethical values that shape our communal and individual identities, as well as the spiritual and/or mythic sources of those values.

When dealing with abstract concepts like values, which are not empirically verifiable, scientific certainty is unattainable, and constructivists argue that one strength of their theory is its promotion of tolerance for a plurality of ethical perspectives. I will examine Russman's and other realist counter arguments to that claim later, but to their credit, the constructivists have been willing to face the difficult and often threatening issues of uncertainty and ambiguity in the human condition that others, especially the more fundamentalist religious views, try to deny. This controversial position gives constructivism its heuristic value and has generated a great deal of
valuable debate. Where it has taken an extreme skeptical position, however, and flaunted or even worshipped at the shrine of uncertainty, it has generated an unhealthy anxiety which causes a breakdown in meaningful debate.

I will extend the realist-constructivist debate by building on the arguments of Russman (1987), Arnett (1991), and Cherwitz and Hikins (1990). In various ways, they all argue that the opposing rhetorical theories in this debate, variously characterized by terms such as "objectivist-subjectivist," "public-private," "monologic-dialogic," "realist-constructivist," and "empiricist-humanist," are false dichotomies and/or extreme polarities on a theoretical continuum.

The extreme positions in this epistemological debate I am characterizing as dogmatism and relativism, and will argue that a version of philosophical and rhetorical realism, characterized by Russman (1987) as "informal foundationalism" and by Cherwitz and Hikins (1986) as "perspective realism," rather than being at one extreme of this continuum, is a useful middle ground between two extreme positions. This middle position will be developed into a theory of "relational rhetoric" by focusing on a key common element in such rhetorical theories as those labeled narrative, participatory,
ontological, feminist, and perspective realism, namely, that one's identity and ethical values originate within and are shaped by communal relationships.

Rhetoric and Theories of Moral Development

Another important related issue is the major difference in theories of moral development represented by the linear, hierarchical approach of Piaget and Kohlberg and the more contextual, participatory approach represented by Carol Gilligan. These two approaches have far-reaching implications for the role of rhetoric in moral development. The former, some argue, lends itself to a traditional prophetic, authoritative model of communication, while the latter results in a more dialogical, situational, and narrative approach to rhetoric.

While these two approaches to moral development theory have important rhetorical differences, I will argue that the two views, depending on the nature and quality of the transcendental ethical values the rhetoric promotes, often do share a common objective of moving persons toward equality and universal justice. This is especially clear, as I will show in Chapter Two, when one compares Kohlberg's highest or universal stage of moral development with Gilligan's concept of participation. The rhetorical strategies are quite
different, but the social reality being promoted is very similar. My claim is that contemporary rhetorical theory, with its emphasis on such concepts as relationality, consubstantiality, identification, and cooperative critical inquiry, can be a very effective vehicle for bringing the epistemological and ontological, persuasive and participatory dynamics together in a more productive middle position on the rhetoric of moral development.

I will also argue that the other necessary ingredient for synthesizing these two approaches to moral development is the broad understanding of the spiritual/imaginative dimension of human nature and rhetoric described below. One approach to this unifying process will be described by drawing on work like that of Tukey, who argues for an intrapersonal dialogue between Self and Ego that, when successful, transcends the dogmatic/relativistic dichotomy through personal identification or unity with what Tukey calls the "Divine" within each person, and which I will refer to as "Being." Tukey describes the situation as one in which "part of the [ethical] context is the state of the rhetor's being. . . . The associated ethic is not a moral code, but a way of being" (1990, 70), a function not just of rational and logical persuasion, but of identification with a community and with Being itself.
Rhetoric and the Human Spiritual/Imaginative Dimension

Whether through interpersonal communication of ethical codes or direct, intrapersonal experiences of divine revelation, religious and spiritual dynamics have been closely related to human values throughout the history of Western thought. I will therefore examine some issues related to the role of myth in religious rhetoric and how this role has changed in the postmodern era. Included in this area are concerns about: (1) the ethics and the rhetorical efficacy of dogmatism and reification of myths; (2) related arguments for narrative preaching; (3) the ethical questions raised by situations where a religious leader is operating from a different epistemological understanding of community myths than his/her audience; and (4) the crucial but perplexing issue of how mythic and spiritual/imaginative truth claims, including divine revelations— which are usually intrapersonal rhetorical events— can be consistently evaluated.

One of the claims I am making is that the exploration of the rhetorical aspects of the spiritual/imaginative dimension of human existence is an important, even essential, task for rhetorical theory. This is so because such an understanding will make clear that the taken-for-granted myths or grand narratives that shape our values, worldviews, and identity do not
operate at just the rational level. Many theologians and rhetoricians, such as Tillich, Campbell, Hauerwas, Ricoeur, Fowler, and Grassi, agree with Rowland that

the function of myth in providing "true" answers for crucial social and personal problems cannot be fulfilled by discursive forms. The problem is . . . that the discursive language of science or history works well for problems of fact, but fails utterly when problems of value are confronted. . . . There are no purely rational answers to such problems; therefore humans have no choice but to turn to narrative forms, the most powerful of which is myth. . . . The function of myth is to transcend ordinary life and provide meaningful grounding for that which cannot be supported rationally.

(Rowland, 1990, 103)

The realization of the limitations of reason and logic for dealing with the non-rational aspects of human existence is, of course, at least as old as Aristotle, who included both logos and pathos among his artistic proofs. But how to include the spiritual/imaginative dimension is admittedly a very difficult challenge for rhetorical theorists. I will argue, however, that this difficulty is not a sound reason to ignore the study of such crucially significant qualities as hope, love, and courage, which emanate primarily from the imaginative/spiritual part of human nature, and which may offer the most promise for solving many of our social and communication problems. If reason and logic are the only tools we have with which to critique any theory of human nature and communication, we rule out, by definition, any insights non-rational and imaginative
perspectives may have to offer. In this study, I will address how this important spiritual/imaginative dimension of human experience can be included in a relational theory of rhetoric and homiletics.

To do so, I will distinguish this use of spiritual from the anthropocentric, sexist image of "God" and/or of religion, which has characterized much of the Western, Judeo-Christian tradition, and that still is a communication barrier for many critically thinking people. I will argue for a definition of spiritual that avoids those problems because, rather than viewing God as a being with an extra-human existence, spiritual will be used in the Heideggerian sense to mean Being itself, the source of life of which all creation is a part and vice versa.

Skepticism and Spiritual Issues. Even scholars as diverse as Tukey and Bineham are in agreement on one thing, namely, that the spiritual dimension of human existence has "remained largely unexplored in the epistemic rhetoric literature" (Bineham, 1989, 141), and that is in large part due to the difficulty of

---

The necessity of including the spiritual/imaginative dimension in rhetorical theory was made very poignantly in a recent philosophical comic where the origins of the universe are being contemplated, and one of the characters says, "That's the whole problem with science. You've got a bunch of empiricists trying to describe things of unimaginable wonder" (Watterson, "Calvin and Hobbes," 6-21-92).
addressing spiritual matters of "unimaginable wonder."

Tukey points out that this was not always the case and urges an examination of the fact that

there is a neo-Platonic psychagogy (or spiritual direction) but to my knowledge not a neo-Aristotelian. Similarly, there may be little place for the spiritual in theory based on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, an interesting point for rhetoricians to consider especially when the field has been so dominated by his work. (1988, 6)

One of the obvious difficulties for rhetorical epistemology in dealing with spiritual matters is the age-old problem of skepticism. Overcoming or explaining dualisms is difficult for any epistemic theory, but it is far more complicated and problematic when addressing the spiritual dimension, which is by definition mysterious and beyond empirical measurement. Someone has compared attempting to talk about God with trying to "bite a wall," a task so difficult that "the modern situation, with its closely related aspects of pluralism and secularization [pressures] the religious thinker . . . to soft-pedal if not to abandon altogether the supernatural elements of his tradition" (Berger, 1980, 50). If such is the case for the theologian, surely it is even more so for the rhetorician as a social scientist. Given this reality, Bineham, not surprisingly, argues that

such skepticism is understandable, for certainly the physical is the most evident and comprehensive source of sensations. Few would say, however, that
it is the only source of sensation. Indeed many describe physical sensations as indistinct when compared to "spiritual" or "mystical" sensations. (1989, 145)

It is very important to note that Bineham, like most scholars who address the spiritual dimension, acknowledges the independent existence of the spiritual here and also when he cites William James, who states that "sensations or experiences of a mystical reality [emphasis added] 'are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experience can be'" (James, 1961, 73, cited in Bineham, 1989, 145).

The debate over a spiritual rhetorical theory, therefore, is not primarily over the existence of spiritual experiences, but over how those experiences are related to truth or human knowledge about the spiritual or divine itself, and if those experiences are direct or mediated through socially or rhetorically created symbol systems.

However, addressing the spiritual dynamic requires clarification of the distinction between epistemological and ontological issues, a distinction that frequently is blurred in the debate over rhetorical epistemology. The confusion is illustrated by Bineham:

Consensus theory seemingly creates a "theological" problem in that it reduces God to a verbal construct. To believe in God, or to make statements about God, presumes the existence of something or someone who operates at a level beyond that of human symbol systems. Even if we can know
about God only in terms of our symbol systems, most who choose to "believe" assume that God is more than that which we can or do know. A distinction is assumed between ontology and epistemology. But consensus theory explicitly denies such a distinction. (Bineham, 1989, 141-142, emphasis added)

An important part of the distinction between ontology and epistemology in a spiritual rhetoric has to do with clarifying the essential difference between "religion" as a socially constructed reality and the "spirit" as the impetus for religious organizations and symbol systems. Religious organizations and symbol systems are human attempts to know or interpret the spiritual experiences themselves and are undoubtedly social and intersubjective in nature. The spirit itself, however, while it is certainly shared through intersubjective communication, is also frequently a very personal and idiosyncratic experience (Tukey, 1988, 2). Part of the rhetorical epistemic argument, therefore, arises due to the mistaken identification of human, socially-constructed forms of religion, that are "more pointing [toward] than describing" the spiritual, with the spiritual itself (Tukey, 1988, 6).

Scott highlights this confusion when he argues that in consensus theory "becoming displaces being as the core of reality" (1989, 174, emphasis added). I heartily endorse a process-oriented theology because our understanding of the spiritual is continually in need of
revision and new insights, but my endorsement holds only if the distinction is made that what is in process or becoming is our understanding of Being, not the essence of Being itself. Berger supports that position when he describes the spiritual dimension as "a metahuman reality" that is injected into human life (1948, 48). We can go a long way toward clarifying the problem of religious skepticism if we are careful not to confuse the metahuman, spiritual reality with imperfect, human, rhetorical attempts to interpret it. Hikins makes that distinction very succinctly when he says:

In assessing Bineham's essay, we first must clarify an issue left opaque in his paper; namely, the nature of the object of religious belief. Once this tension is understood, we will be in a position to see that the really crucial issues in the epistemology of rhetoric are not really epistemological at all—they are ontological. (1989, 161)

I will examine these important arguments more carefully in the following chapters, but it is sufficient here to establish that attempting to apply the same theories of epistemology to spiritual matters that we use with empirical ones is fraught with obvious dangers. Aristotle's admonition to build arguments on the most pertinent facts available (see Cooper trans., 1932, 156-57) is admirable, but when dealing with spiritual matters, the number of "facts" at one's disposal and the methods for testing their reliability
are few and far between. That is why the language of myth and metaphor must play such a central role in building a theory of spiritual rhetoric.

The Hunger for Spiritual Certainty. Another very closely related issue must be introduced at this point, namely, the epistemological concern for truth or certainty. The ontological challenge for epistemology created by the infinite nature of Being makes certain spiritual knowledge impossible. Tukey and others have proposed an inclusive definition of the Divine that is both without and within human nature as an attempt to bridge the ontological and epistemological gap, and I will examine those arguments in depth later. The crucial issue for rhetoricians, however, is not that we untangle all of the Gordian knots of theology or philosophy, but that we avoid the temptation to elevate rhetoric to a higher position in spiritual matters than is justifiable.

While I agree with consensus theorists that there is a socio-rhetorical dimension to most if not all of our interpretations of spiritual matters, that is far different than Bineham's claims that "communication is at the center of theological study," that "a communication-based philosophy can also contain [emphasis added] a theology" (1989, 152), and that "God's nature is contingent upon those who interpret it"
I much prefer both Zarefsky's analysis that it is "not God's existence but human knowledge of God that is dependent on intersubjective agreement" (1989, 180), and Tukey's, that "the social, rhetorical realm has been transcended in the sense that this realm has been shown to exist within a larger, more encompassing reality" (1988, 6). The latter two statements are far more defensible both theologically and rhetorically because the "more encompassing reality" is Being, while rhetoric is a product of, by, and for beings.

Almost everyone agrees that, with regard to traditional Christian theological positions, a degree of uncertainty, or what Hikins calls "healthy skepticism" (1989, 168) is unavoidable. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," a position very similar to Bineham's translation of that concept into the language of rhetorical epistemology. Bineham says faith is "a willingness to act upon knowledge we have only in the broadest outline, or as a willingness to accept metaphor in place of literal knowledge" (1989, 152-53). That kind of uncertainty, however, especially in spiritual matters that affect our core beliefs, often creates an uncomfortable level of anxiety in response to what Berger calls a "deep religious hunger for certainty"
Hikins echoes that hunger when he complains that consensus theory leaves us with a "fragile and lingering faith" (1989, 169).

There are others, however, who argue that such uncertainty concerning human knowledge of the spiritual is an unavoidable, and even positive, aspect of the nature of faith and that the agnostic position is the only honest one finite humans can ultimately claim in spiritual matters. In his classic, *The Christian Agnostic*, Leslie Weatherhead cites thinkers from across the whole history of Christian theology, including: Blaise Pascal, "I am astonished at the boldness with which people undertake to speak of God," Harry Emerson Fosdick, "All intelligent faith in God has behind it a background of humble agnosticism," Gregory of Nazianaus, "it is difficult to conceive of God, but to define Him [sic] in words is an impossibility," and H.R. Mackintosh, who speaks of "the audacious and contemptible illusion that we have fathomed or surrounded God." Weatherhead's conclusion is that, "surely a reverent agnosticism is the only possible attitude" (1965, 36-43). This attitude is consistent with the ancient Hebrew practice of assigning the intentionally unpronounceable tetragramaton "YHWH" as God's name because any direct reference to the divine was considered too holy to even be uttered.
Developing a rhetorical theory of the spiritual that includes a healthy balance between dogmatic certainty and total relativism is, therefore, the challenge before us. The former intolerantly cuts off all theological debate and the latter makes all human knowledge of the spiritual so tenuous as to be worthless in providing direction to individual and social living.

**Spiritual Skepticism and Ethical Issues.** Pragmatically, of course, this debate is intimately related to matters of social amelioration because the values a society lives by, like spiritual matters, are not empirically verifiable. The above arguments about spiritual epistemology, therefore, can and must apply to moral values and ethical decision making as well. Tukey, in fact, indicates that one of the major reasons for rhetorical theorists to address this whole topic "is that a spiritual rhetoric makes ethics a primary if not central concern, in contrast to the numerous articles our field currently devotes to questions of epistemology" (1990, 72). Bineham illustrates the relationship between rhetorical epistemology and ethics in his discussion of Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel:

The world Rauschenbusch describes obviously requires ethical action based on something other than certainty. That action in this world stems from conviction, from belief in the probable. Rauschenbusch discourages dogmatic adherence to a
I agree fully with the wisdom of avoiding "dogmatic adherence" to any creed, but I certainly also believe there must be something more solid and dependable upon which to base ethical decisions than momentary persuasion. It is my objective, therefore, to explore arguments for a middle ground in epistemology, and therefore in ethical, rhetorical theory, that avoids the tyranny of reified, dogmatic values, but also just as emphatically avoids a tyranny of the majority that would create societal values based on consensus alone.

While most rhetorical scholars and ethicists agree that the values we act on are not known with certainty to be true and eternal, the arguments that follow will focus attention not only on our knowledge, but also on the ontological question of the existence of what Walter Fisher (1987) calls "transcendent values." Again, it is necessary to keep in mind the epistemological-ontological distinction. The propositions we hold are probable and therefore invite healthy skepticism, also known as tolerance. But the values that inspire and inform those propositions may be inherent in the fabric of Being itself, and therefore stable, even if they are epistemologically beyond the scope of the scientific and logical models for certain knowledge available to us as
finite beings. This tension between the epistemic and ontological frames much of the discussion in the chapters that follow.

The three major issues in this study (rhetorical theory, moral development, and spirituality) are all related by a common epistemological concern that has significant impact on the theory and practice of homiletic rhetorical forms. When dealing with contingent matters such as values and spiritual experiences, the criteria for making and verifying truth claims are more complex than with matters that are empirically measurable. As I will explain below, the consequences of the choices we make about how to promote ethical and moral development and how we make sense of spiritual phenomena are of crucial importance because of the tremendous psychological and social power and influence myths and spiritual experiences have on shaping our social reality. With regard to the religious discourse surrounding them, ethics and spiritual experiences ultimately involve questions of truth. Therefore they impinge on issues in rhetorical epistemology that, in turn, are of central importance for homiletics.
Importance, Relevance, and Justification of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on the social and ethical consequences of the dogmatic, relativistic, realist, and spiritual approaches to narrative rhetoric and values, specifically when those theories are examined for their relevance within the context of the anxiety and uncertainty of contemporary times.

The Effects of Change and Uncertainty

Angst produced by change and uncertainty is, of course, not new. For at least 2500 years, since Heraclitus proposed that one could not step in the same river twice because all of existence is constantly in flux, people have been aware of the theory that the world changes around us. Such change is oftentimes wrenching because of conflicts it creates over the way we make sense of our existence. Even in Heraclitus' day, change was frequently associated with strife (Russell, 1945, 42-44).

Throughout the classical and medieval periods of Western history, the process of major change was quite gradual and existing paradigms continued to work adequately to explain existence, including a theistic foundation that served to account for any inexplicable anomalies. However, in the Modern era new discoveries
in the sciences challenged long-standing religious and mythological paradigms and in this century have promised humankind a central role in running the world in place of the "late God." These advances in science and technology have had a two-fold impact on our ability to maintain order in our lives. First, the amazing developments in technology made possible by science in this century have speeded up the process of change so much that it can no longer be ignored. We have moved from horse and buggies to moon landings, from primitive amputations to organ transplants, from colonial isolationism to an interdependent, post-cold war, post-communist, global-village economy, all in one lifetime. The changes are mind-boggling but have even more impact because the concomitant advances in communication technology mean everyone in technologically advanced countries like the United States is aware of the changes affecting our lives, as well as our very understanding of the world and our place in it.

In the twentieth century, the efficacy and ethics of the scientific paradigm have been challenged by and the human condition exacerbated by frightening new levels of irrational acts, including the Holocaust and the nuclear destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Through those tragedies we have become increasingly aware that there are ethical problems with how we have
used the scientific paradigm for making sense of existence. And when those flaws are emphasized by relativistic philosophies such as existentialism, radical constructivism, and deconstructionism, the result is the heightened ontological anxiety and skepticism that characterizes much of Postmodern thought.

The Quest for Fundamental Knowledge

One implication of all this is that the pluralism, ambiguity, and anxieties of Postmodern existence can increase the desire and/or need for epistemological and axiological certainty. One common response, therefore, to the threat of relativism and skepticism is to resort to the other extreme, namely reifying narratives and treating myth and metaphor as literal truth claims. This is especially true in the area of religious myths and ethics because of their importance to our identity and core values. Stanley Hauerwas describes this phenomenon when he says, "and the less sure we are of the reasons for our beliefs the more dogmatically we hold to them as our only still point in a morally chaotic world" (1983, 3). So, given the exigencies of postmodern existence, it is not surprising that Bruce Lawrence found that one of the distinguishing traits of fundamentalisms is "the contemporaneity of their
enterprise: fundamentalism is primarily a twentieth-century phenomenon, with historical antecedents, but no ideological precursors" (cited in Marty, 1991, 814).

Reification of myths, of course, changes the communication value of those myths in very significant ways. Joseph Campbell offers this insightful analysis:

Wherever the poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed. . . . When a civilization begins to reinterpret its mythology in this way, the life goes out of it . . . Such a blight has certainly descended on the Bible and on a part of the Christian cult. (1949, 249)

This assessment is especially relevant for contemporary rhetoric because it is a potential explanation for the phenomenon described by Postmodern philosophers like Bertens (1986) and Lyotard (1984) who claim that the "grand narratives" of history are no longer operative.

Another example of the problem with dogmatism and reification can be seen by looking at the Augustinian understanding of rhetoric reflected in Christian fundamentalism. Augustine saw rhetoric as that functional art which has as its objective, the dissemination of truth based on Biblical authority.3 This simplistic understanding of truth and authority has been undermined by modern scholarship in church history and Biblical criticism. For example, this scholarship

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3 On Christian Doctrine, Book IV.
reveals that the canon of the Christian scriptures was not established by divine revelation but by the consensus of delegates to the highly politicized Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. Such historical and biblical criticism contributes to the anxiety of those who seek security in authority and has been a major factor in Christian fundamentalism's emergence in this century as a reaction to the perceived skepticism of modernity.

The Consequences of Commitment

This study is significant because how we respond to challenges to the mythic structures of our lives has far-reaching social consequences. Reifying one myth or narrative as ultimate "truth" sets it in opposition to mythical interpretations of reality from other sources, and that conflict not only creates barriers to communication but can represent a serious threat to humanity in an ever-shrinking, increasingly interdependent, nuclear world. For example, Campbell says he "found in the literature of faith those principles common to the human spirit." But he believes "they had to be liberated from tribal lien, or the religions of the world would remain--as in the Middle East and Northern Ireland today--the source of disdain and aggression" (Campbell, 1988, xvii). Drawing on Richards' work on metaphor, Campbell contends:
Symbols are only the vehicles of communication; they must not be mistaken for the final term, the tenor, of their reference. ... Mistaking a vehicle for its tenor may lead to the spilling not only of valueless ink, but of valuable blood. (Campbell, 1949, 236)

Kenneth Burke describes the same kind of danger when he points out the alienation caused by humans as "symbol using and misusing animals" (1966, 16).

Narrative rhetorical interpretation is so important because one of the major functions of stories and myths is to make sense of the empirically unanswerable questions about the mysteries of life. Especially in our "master stories . . . we seek for the images and reality of powers that can be relied upon in life and death" (Fowler, 1981, 277). In other words, our myths provide a sense of order, a "sense that the world is understandable and explicable" (Leach, 1976, 51), or in Fowler's faith terms, a feeling of being "at home in the universe" (1981, 11). Religious myths in particular address the transcendent dimension, the ontological questions about death and suffering, being and nothingness, which is what makes them so vital but also so threatening when they are questioned.

Theologian Paul Tillich addresses human resistance to metamythic analysis when he describes myths which

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4 Quoting Wilfred Cantwell Smith.
have been revealed not to be literally true as "broken myths" or "myth recognized as myth" (1957, 50). He argues that there is such strong resistance when myths—religious myths in particular—are perceived to be threatened because we use our myths to avoid facing the lack of order and meaning in our lives, especially our own mortality. He says, "The pain of looking into one's own depth is too intense for most people" (Tillich, 1948, 59):

The primitive mythological consciousness resists the attempt to interpret the myth of myth. It is afraid of every act of demythologization. It believes that the broken myth is deprived of its truth and of its convincing power. Those who live in an unbroken mythological world feel safe and certain. They resist, often fanatically, any attempt to introduce an element of uncertainty by breaking the myth, namely, by making conscious its symbolic character. Such resistance is supported by authoritarian systems, religious or political, in order to give security to the people under their control and unchallenged power to those who exercise the control. The resistance against demythologization expresses itself in literalism. (Tillich, 1957, 51)

Rowland comes to the same conclusion:

One consequence [of demythologization] is that if the basic story in a myth loses its character as "objective truth" the power of the myth dissipates. The Greek myths no longer serve as a moral paradigm, precisely because we know they are "just stories." (1990, 103)

Tillich's and Rowland's analyses explain why taking shelter in literalism is so appealing, but the paradox and problem with literalism is that, in its resistance to myths and ideas other than its own, literalism
creates an even greater threat to the very order it seeks to maintain, in the form of religious, political, and ideological conflict. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle of anxiety and retrenchment further into literalism, where "dogmatism only masks our more profound doubt" (Hauerwas, 1983, 3), creating more rigid positions that in turn produce even more conflict and more barriers to communication. History is full of examples of the dangers of dogmatic, reified positions causing the failure of rhetorical, discursive means of dealing with conflict. Humans then too often resort to non-rhetorical, coercive, or destructive alternatives. The need, therefore, to achieve better means of social amelioration by improving rhetorical approaches to managing the conflicts between competing claims to truth of various ethical value systems and worldviews in a pluralistic, interdependent world is of crucial importance. This study is intended to contribute to this goal.

The Importance of Myth for Community Identity/Values

The fact that the spiritual dimension has not been thoroughly addressed by rhetorical epistemology is significant because of the important relationship between the spiritual/imaginative dynamic in human nature and ethical values. If authentic ethical
behavior, as Tukey and others argue, flows out of our identity—that is, our personal and community identity and ultimately our being's identity with Being itself (Tukey, 1990, 70)—and if Grassi, Rowland and others are correct that "the function of myth [is] providing 'true' answers for crucial social and personal problems" that reason and logic alone cannot provide, then it is essential that we have a better understanding of how myths function and how to evaluate their truth claims (Rowland, 1990, 103).

One crucial aspect of this process has to do with communal identification or participation, terms frequently used by rhetorical, ethical, and theological scholars alike (for example Tillich, Gilligan, Burke). This common terminology may therefore provide a bridge to connect these diverse fields and discover more holistic solutions to shared concerns for social amelioration. Hauerwas, for example, focuses on all of those connections when he says, "neither God, the world, nor the self are properly known as separate entities but are in relation requiring concrete display" (1983, 26).

Myth and narrative are effective ways we can display or envision the reality of our inter-connectedness (or what Cherwitz and Hikins call relationality) as human beings situated in the natural world. In other words, we cannot be ethical persons in
isolation but are by nature concerned about communication because we exist in community, and "every community involves and requires a narrative" (Hauerwas, 1981, 4). Rhetorical use of myth, therefore, has great ethical importance and promise because stories appeal holistically to human reason and emotion in ways that pure reason or authority cannot. This holistic quality gives narrative the potential for revealing and/or creating an identity or sense of being that promotes corresponding ethical behavior.

Narratives, of course, for the same reasons, have equal potential for promoting divisive and destructive values as well, making myth and narrative even more important to study for a rhetoric of social amelioration. For this and all of the above reasons, a study of the role of rhetorical epistemology in how we make responsible choices in, by, through, and with the myths we live by is both an appropriate and important undertaking that deserves exploration in this doctoral dissertation.

In Chapter Two I will review, therefore, a representative sample of the literature relevant to the questions raised above, namely the literature on myth, rhetorical epistemology, narrative theories of ethics and faith development, spiritual/imaginative rhetoric, and the homiletical use of myth and narrative. In
Chapter Three I will draw on the theories of Johnstone, Ehninger, and Kelly to analyze and critique the philosophical assumptions and arguments that support the various theories reviewed in Chapter Two. The conclusions drawn from that analysis will be presented in Chapter Four, and I will lay out my arguments for a relational, epistemic rhetorical theory of narrative. I will draw on the best insights of the existing literature, synthesizing them, where possible, to form a theory that will increase our ability to understand and consistently critique the ways that secular and religious myths are used rhetorically to generate and maintain individual and community identity and values. I will also describe the applications and implications of this relational theory for homiletics as a form of rhetorical praxis and as a potentially important vehicle for promoting moral development and social amelioration in a pluralistic/postmodern world.

In the concluding chapter I will identify some of the limitations and unresolved issues that are unavoidable in attempting to address philosophical and metaphysical issues. Implications of the study for rhetorical theory and criticism, as well as theology and homiletics will be explored, along with some questions for future investigation that I hope will promote further productive dialogue and argument on this
important topic.

With this overview of the central questions of this study and the projected destination of my inquiry, I turn now to what others from diverse perspectives have to say about a narrative theory of moral discourse.
CHAPTER II
THE CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE ON RHETORICAL EPISTEMOLOGY
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO MYTH, NARRATIVE, AND FAITH

In this chapter I will review representative literature on rhetorical epistemology as it applies to:
(1) truth claims of religious and secular myths and narratives; (2) competing approaches to rhetorical epistemology; (3) narrative theories of moral development and ethics; and (4) spiritual issues, faith development, and homiletical use of myth and narrative.

Truth Claims of Religious and Secular Myths
Research findings support the intuitive judgment that Americans put far more stock in the literal truth of their religious myths than they do in secular ones.¹ I am not aware of any studies dealing specifically with

¹ By secular myths I mean such things as fairy tales, mythic cultural characters, (like Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy), and legends about folk heroes and heroines, both fictional (like Paul Bunyon and Horatio Alger) and historical (like George Washington, Betsy Ross, Davey Crockett, and Annie Oakley), whose exploits have been embellished and perpetuated by narrative communication from generation to generation).
the question of how many adults believe secular myths to be literally true, and the reason for that seems obvious—no adult considered competent and sane in our society would hold such a position. Literal belief in such secular myths and mythic characters is acceptable only for young children, and adults who would hold such a position would not be considered to be in touch with reality.

However, the percentage of the American population holding religious, in this case specifically Christian, myths to be literally true is surprisingly high for a very rational, scientific, and empirically oriented culture. Gallup and Castelli (1989) found "31 percent of Americans believe the Bible is 'the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word,'" (60-61). That figure compares with 42 percent holding such a belief in the 1980 study cited in Chapter One, 34 percent in a 1985 Gallup survey, 39 percent in Nancy Ammerman's 1991 study, and 39 percent of teenagers and 49 percent of adults in a 1993 survey by Gallup and Bezilla.

Literal belief in specific biblical myths is even higher. Ammerman found that "almost two-thirds [of Americans] are certain Christ rose from the dead, three-fourths believe in life after death, and 44 percent are
creationists"² (1991, 2). The 1989 Gallup study also found only "ten percent of Americans believe that 'the Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts'" (61), a description that would certainly seem appropriate to most people for categorizing secular myths.

Gallup and Castelli also found that the number of Americans who believe that Jesus is God or the Son of God actually increased from 78 percent in 1978 to 84 percent in 1988 and a six-fold increase in enrollment in fundamentalist "Christian" schools from 1965-1983 (63). This data is consistent with the research on faith development by James Fowler. Fowler found that a majority of American church members are best described by the stage of faith development he calls "Synthetic-conventional,"³ and one of the key characteristics of that stage is that "demythologization feels like a fundamental threat to meaning because meaning and symbol are bound up together" (1981, 163). The literature on rhetorical theory and myth helps to explain this phenomenon of literalistic use of religious myths.

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² Defined as those who believe the biblical chronology that the universe actually began within the last 10,000 years.

³ Fowler's theory and stages of faith development will be described in detail later in this chapter, pp. 71-74.
Rhetorical Theory and Myth

Myth is very broadly defined in the literature of rhetorical theory to mean stories as well as models "people refer to when they try to understand their world and its behavior" (Robertson, 1980, xv). This means myth is used to describe the "taken-for-granted set of assumptions, conceptions and ideas . . . below the threshold of consciousness, that substantial realm of dramatic accounts whose accuracy and plausibility go largely unquestioned" (Nimmo and Combs, 1980, xii). Myth is a nonperjorative term that does not imply truth or falsity, but rather a significant aspect of a person or society's self-understanding and worldview.

Bormann and the "Fantasy Theme" Approach to Myth. Ernest Bormann offers one explanation of how mythic rhetoric can function to shape community identity and values in his theory of fantasy theme analysis. Building on the research of Robert Bales in Personality and Interpersonal Behavior, Bormann says,

Bales provides the critic with an account of how dramatizing communication creates social reality for groups of people and with a way to examine messages for insights into the group's culture, motivation, emotional style, and cohesion. (1972, 396)

Bormann describes how myths (in the broad sense of taken-for-granted assumptions) are promoted and accepted as responses to particular community concerns in this
A small group of people with similar individual psychodynamics meet to discuss a common preoccupation or problem. A member dramatizes a theme that catches the group and causes it to chain out because it hits a common psychodynamic chord or a hidden agenda item or their common difficulties vis-à-vis the natural environment, the socio-political systems, or the economic structures. The group grows excited, involved, more dramas chain out to create a common symbolic reality filled with heroes and villains. If the group's fantasy themes contain motives to "go public" and gain converts to their position they often begin artistically to create messages for the mass media for public speeches and so forth. (1972, 399)

The concept of "similar psychodynamics" as a cohesive force is critical to understanding the power of myth, especially religious myths, to create intense community identity, as I will demonstrate later.

Bormann's definition of "fantasy themes" is also important to keep in mind as I will examine later the characteristics of myth and in particular the commonalities and differences between religious and secular myths. Bormann describes fantasy themes as follows:

The content consists of characters, real or fictitious, playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the here-and-now transactions of the group. Thus a recollection of something that happened to the group in the past or a dream of what the group might do in the future could be considered a fantasy theme. (1972, 397)
**Fisher's Narrative Paradigm.** Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm (1987) is a seminal theoretical work because it takes very seriously the role of narrative rhetoric in shaping ethical values and behavior by the myths and stories we accept as true. Fisher recognizes the powerful rhetorical/persuasive values in myths and stories because they include the affective dynamics that are missing in a purely rational or logocentric model of rhetoric. Most relevant here is that narratives are "true" for Fisher depending on the perceived internal consistency of the story (narrative probability) and whether or not the stories "ring true" with other stories the hearers "know" from past experience to be "true" (narrative fidelity). Fisher develops this notion from MacIntyre's (1981) argument for the "implicit realism" at work when stories are accepted as true because they reflect real life experience.4

Such real life experience is, however, culturally determined to some extent, and Fisher's attempted solution to the problem of relativism is to argue that moral judgments are ultimately based on what he calls "transcendent values." This is a key concept because it

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4 This is especially important with regard to how stories reveal the basic communal nature of human existence, a concept I will explore later that is central to my understanding of the inter-relatedness of moral development theory, relationality, and spiritual rhetoric.
recognizes the need for an external source of values and a standard to truth. In the next chapter, I will extend the argument.

Another problem for Fisher and I will address later is the room for rhetoric to alter values. Rowland (1989) raises this concern in regard to myth: "If a narrative can only be a well-known societal mythology, 'creative mythologist' or 'view apply' (1990, 140).

Rowland (1989) argues that the epistemic value of stories depends on whether they are overextended to the point of becoming a broader definition of all discourse and characterizations. I find that distinct nature. I find that distinct because my primary interest is in the epistemic value of stories that Rowland raises several issues in regard, especially about applying it to myth: "Not all good stories and consistent characterizations of truth are difficult to apply. Fiction, myth, and allegory"
case because

[t]he details of the narrative may not reflect historical events, but the story is still accepted as "true" in a larger sense by the culture in which it is told. Thus, many accept the "truth" of the Bible, while doubting the details of the stories told in it. In sum, there is great agreement that myths are "not entertainment stories." They are crucial "framing stories" that are treated as "true" by the people who tell them. (1990, 103)

In this view of a socially constructed understanding of reality, the whole system of evaluating narratives is closed and not verifiable by external relationship or correspondence to the real world. As Rowland puts it, "The sense of whether the [story] "rings true" largely depends on pre-existing attitudes and values" (1989, 48), and, Rowland argues, Fisher's paradigm lacks generalizability and is therefore useful not so much for testing argument in the work as for testing its potential credibility for a particular audience. . . . It is hard to see how Fisher's view of narrative avoids this relativism. (1989, 52).

These epistemological issues certainly do not negate the value of Fisher's paradigm, but they do raise important questions about public and private, dogmatic and relativistic, theories of rhetoric and morality that will be addressed later.

Prophetic Rhetoric and Demythologization

Religious myths, in particular, are those myths that deal with questions of ultimate concern about our
existence. Tillich reminds us that the Greek word *mythos* means "stories of the gods" and then defines myth as "symbols of faith combined in stories about divine-human encounters" (1957, 48-49). Fowler describes how such myths function:

... we seek for the images and reality of powers that can be relied upon in life or death .... Our characters and faith orientations are shaped by the master stories that we tell ourselves and by which we interpret and respond to the events that impinge upon our lives. Our master stories are the characterizations of the patterns of power-in-action that disclose the ultimate meanings of our lives. (1981, 277)

Religious myths, in other words, point toward the transcendent dimension in life, that which is concerned with questions of meaning and purpose, suffering and death, being and nothingness—the empirically unanswerable "why" questions of existence that, because they deal with the essence of life, are so vital and so threatening when their truth claims are challenged.

In other words, myths provide some structure and order to an otherwise chaotic world. Peter Berger describes this chaos and the role of myth as follows:

I maintain that there is a dichotomy in the human situation between a middle ground, which is the realm of ordinary, everyday life in society, and various marginal realms in which taken-for-granted assumptions of the former realm are threatened or put in question .... the middle ground, which we take for granted as normality and sanity can be maintained (that is, inhabited) only if we suspend all doubt about its validity. Without this suspension of doubt, everyday life would be impossible, if only because it would be constantly
invaded by the "fundamental anxiety" caused by our knowledge and fear of death. This implies that all human societies and their institutions are, at their root, a barrier against naked terror. (1969, 92-93)

I will discuss later the ethical problem created by the desire to maintain order that Berger points to when he asks, Is it lying when a mother comforts her frightened child by telling him/her that "everything's O.K.,” knowing full well that it isn't? (1969, 67-68). This issue is similar, of course, to Socrates' notion of the "noble lie" (Republic, Book 3).^5

Since myths function in such powerful ways, they are very resistant to examination and change, but if a rhetor is convinced that a different myth offers more hope for social amelioration than an entrenched, taken-for-granted myth, he or she may feel obligated to present the new myth as an alternative description of reality. Only when presented with alternative myths or visions of reality are we able to reconsider our previous assumptions. Fowler describes this process as

^5 "Socrates suggested that people be taught a myth about their origins and thereby be made more willing to accept the rigors of pure meritocracy. The myth was a lie only in that the events it described did not literally take place. Socrates' problem was to find a device to help the unphilosophical accept a system he regarded as truly and objectively wise and good. The 'noble lie' was a mythical presentation of the truth Socrates was trying to inculcate, made understandable and, he hoped, palatable to the masses" (Russman, 1987, 113).
a "factor initiating transition to Stage 3 [that] is the implicit clash or contradictions in stories that leads to reflection on meanings" (1981, 150). These clashes that force us to reflect on our lives challenge our myths by breaking into a world of "shared reality . . . that has not been problematic and therefore not an object of examination and evaluation" (Fowler, 1981, 7).

The ethical dilemma of when taken-for-granted myths can or should be challenged will be explored in depth in later chapters, but Tillich's thoughts on literalism and the process of demythologization are worth noting here:

One should distinguish two stages of literalism, the natural and the reactive. The primitive period . . . consists in the inability to separate the creations of symbolic imagination from the facts which can be verified through observation and experiment. This stage has a full right of its own and should not be disturbed . . . up to the moment when man's [sic] questioning mind breaks the natural acceptance of the mythological visions as literal. If, however, this moment has come, two ways are possible. The one is to replace the unbroken by the broken myth. It is the objectively demanded way, although it is impossible for many people who prefer the repression of their questions to the uncertainty which appears with the breaking of the myth. They are forced into the second stage of literalism, the conscious one, which is aware of the questions but represses them, half consciously, half unconsciously . . . . This stage is still justifiable, if the questioning power is very weak and can easily be answered. It is unjustifiable if a mature mind is broken in its personal center by political or psychological methods, split in his [sic] unity, and hurt in his [sic] integrity. (Tillich, 1957, 52-53)

When taken-for-granted mythic views are in conflict, ethical constraints may oblige the prophetic
rhetor to take a stand, but the temptation is to take the path of least resistance and go along with the consensus or traditional view. Berger describes the prophetic experience as being part of a "cognitive minority":

The status of a cognitive minority is thus invariably an uncomfortable one—not necessarily because the majority is repressive or intolerant, but simply because it refuses to accept the minority's definitions of reality as "knowledge." At best, a minority viewpoint is forced to be defensive. At worst, it ceases to be plausible to anyone. (1969, 8)

Tillich takes a prophetic stance in the face of mythic conflict. He says that our desires for "traditional safety" are "neurotic defense mechanisms," and that "there should be no question of what Christian theology has to do in this situation. It should decide for truth against safety, even if the safety is consecrated and supported by the church" (1952, 141).

If truth were that easily determined or clear, we would not have so much difficulty identifying it. And how we evaluate the truth claims of different myths or narratives purporting to authentically portray reality is the task of rhetorical epistemology, to which I now turn.
Dogmatic, Realist, and Relativistic Rhetorical Theories

In this section I will review rhetorical responses to the epistemological questions raised by narrative rhetoric. To set the discussion in context, a brief historical overview of the dialogue between these points of view in the Classical and Modern eras may be helpful.

Historical Roots of the Debate in Rhetorical Epistemology

The problem of skepticism in Western rhetoric dates back at least to Gorgias (fifth century B.C.E.) and his famous three-part argument "On Not Being" or "On Nature" and the mitigated skepticism of Carneades (c. 213-128 B.C.E.). Carneades recognized the existence of things in the world but focused on the difficulty in explaining how we can bridge the subject-object gap and how language is connected with objects in the world. Plato addressed this problem via the doctrine of ideal Forms. He held that things in the world exist and are knowable by virtue of their participation in a world of transcendental forms, and that the ideal speaker is a

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6 This argument, typical of the Sophistic school of rhetoric, says: 1) Nothing is, 2) If it is, it can't be comprehended, and 3) if it could be comprehended, it couldn't be communicated. (Summaries of this argument are in Sextus Empiricus (Adversus Mathematicos, VII, 65-87) and in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise, On Melissus, Xenophanes, Gorgias.
noble lover whose ultimate goal is to show people truth by comparing human action in this world to such Forms in the transcendental world as Beauty, Love, Justice, and Poetry.  

Aristotle defined humans as "the rational animal" to counter the sophistic overemphasis on pathos, but he also urged the use of all the available means of persuasion, including pathos and ethos among the artistic proofs of rhetoric. For Aristotle, rhetoric and dialectic are distinct from demonstration or formal logic. Dialectic differs from demonstration because it does not begin with true and primary premises, but with endoxa, that is, opinions that are accepted by "everyone or by the majority or by the philosophers—that is by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and illustrious of them" (Topics I, 100a-b). And rhetoric, the "counterpart of dialectic," is even more informal and uses "loose and imperfect forms applied to probable matters which could be otherwise" (Rhetoric, I, 2). So for Aristotle, demonstration deals with the certain, dialectic with generally held or taken-for-granted

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8 Rhetoric, I, 5.
9 Delia (1970) warns against the "logic fallacy," that is, the overemphasis on logos in Aristotle's thought, or equating rational thinking with formal logic.
opinions, and rhetoric with contingent matters that are not as generally accepted.\textsuperscript{10}

Carneades proposed a similar theory of probability in response to the other extreme position, the dogmatism of the Stoics. Carneades argued that the human mind is not a "tabula rasa," but that all perceptions are interpreted and given meaning by human agents; therefore, we must suspend judgment about the truth of them all. Carneades' doctrine of probability is significant because it exerted an important influence on Cicero and Roman rhetorical theory. If rhetoric cannot be based on certain truth, then the eloquence and oratorical skills of the rhetor assume an added importance. Cicero therefore defined rhetoric as the art of effective persuasion (\textit{De Oratore}, Book I), putting more emphasis on style and delivery and less on communicating truth or knowledge. Dale Sullivan points out how this classical debate is especially relevant to spiritual rhetoric. Sullivan contrasts non-rational and philosophical rhetorics and concludes that "primitive Christian rhetoric, especially proclamation, more closely follows Sophistic rhetoric than the

\textsuperscript{10} These distinctions of epistemic certainty and those of Carneades, as we will see below, are similar to those in the theory of Cherwitz and Hikins (1986), namely, justified true belief, justified belief, and belief.
philosophical rhetorics of Plato and Aristotle" (1992, 323).

The contemporary version of this debate between the consensus and realist schools of thought on rhetorical epistemology is a continuation of this historical dialogue. I will therefore review the contemporary debate with the intent of extending it and incorporating the best insights from each position into a more effective theory of narrative rhetorical ethics.

The Dogmatic Perspective

I am indebted to Arnett (1991) for his work in categorizing ethical approaches to communication. Both the universal/humanitarian and the codes, procedures and standards ethical categories in Arnett's scheme are included in my understanding of dogmatic rhetoric. Both are public (as opposed to private) categories. The universal/humanitarian classification is dogmatic because Arnett characterizes it as a position "that requires public proclamation of a priori higher principles that have permanence and universality."
Likewise, the codes, procedures and standards category is included in the dogmatic camp because it "relies on a select number of guardians of appropriate ethical conduct. Only in this case, the members create the codes and procedures; they are not discovered a priori
principles" (62-63).

Arnett identifies Richard Weaver as a twentieth century example of the dogmatic rhetorical perspective. Weaver is typical of the epistemological position that supports the dogmatic view in that he harkens back to the classical distinction between dialectic as epistemic and rhetoric as persuasive (1964, 64). The function of rhetoric in Weaver's theory is therefore limited to presenting essential truths (metaphysical dreams) or cultural values (tyrannizing images) in such a way that an audience will be persuaded to see the world as the rhetor desires. Weaver shares the dogmatic assumption that some people possess more truth than others and therefore have an obligation or right to persuade (1970, 194).

Dogmatic Rhetorical Praxis

While Weaver acknowledges the value-ladenness or sermonic nature of all language and that ultimate truth

11 That division, of course, has been called into question by the "rhetoric as epistemic" movement (see works by Berger and Luckman, Bineham, Bitzer, Brummett, Cherwitz, Hikins, and Scott), and while many theorists in that movement have shifted too far in the direction of relativism, the importance of rhetorical theory that includes both epistemology and persuasion is now well established.

12 See The Ethics of Rhetoric, 15, 25, 27-28, 115, 213; Ideas Have Consequences, 19-20; and Language is Sermonic, 140, 221-25.
is unknowable, he still argues for the authority of culturally constructed values or "tyrannizing images," which in Weaver's case are very ethnocentric, conservative, Christian values. Such religious rhetoric is an excellent example of dogmatic rhetoric at work, and of how religious myths are used literally to promote a particular value system and worldview.\(^{13}\) I will therefore use American Christian Fundamentalism as a case in point to illustrate how dogmatic mythic rhetoric functions.

The Manifest Destiny myth has been part of American history since before the colonization of the Western world. This myth is as old as Augustine and Dante's notion of God's elect doing battle with Satan's hordes, but those beliefs were baptized into American civil religion as early as John Winthrop's famous 1630 speech likening America to a "city on a hill" and to God's "chosen people" with a mission to evangelize the world and defeat the forces of evil.

New Testament scholar Robert Jewett illustrates the deep-seated, mythic nature of Christian dogmatism in his

\(^{13}\) An example of how this rhetorical approach influences homiletics is found in a recent homiletics text where the suggested questions a preacher should ask prior to writing a sermon are these: "What am I trying to do to these people? What do I wish them to see? What would I like to have happen in their minds as I preach?" (Killinger, 1985, 49).
book, *The Captain America Complex*, where he cites an 1860 sermon by Samuel F. Fisher before the American Board of Missions in 1860, entitled "God's Purpose in Planting the American Church":

> God's purpose was to spread the mission throughout the world: "to form men [sic], to give laws to nations, and to interpenetrate the souls of missions with the truth as it is in Jesus." . . . It would make possible the fulfillment of America's destiny to "lead the van of Immanuel's army for the conquest of the world." (1973, 184-85, emphasis added)

Mythic analysis is very relevant and important for contemporary social amelioration because the Christian dogmatic position is still advocated today by conservative Christians like Jerry Falwell, who says "we must extend our vision to evangelize the world in our lifetime" (Dobson, 1981, 221). Falwell's negative attitude toward genuine cooperative dialogue is summed up in this statement about the university he founded, Liberty Baptist: "Don't come here if you're a liberal," and "we do not care what liberals think about anything!" (Dobson, 220).

Alan Peshkin (1986) describes how the authoritarian structure of the Christian fundamentalist community is maintained by several interconnected dogmatic rhetorical strategies that include verbal, non-verbal, and administrative rhetoric, all grounded in biblical

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"truth." The submission of believers to authority figures is mandated by the Bible, and that authority structure is maintained through closed educational and social systems that function as "community maintenance structures." Teachers in Christian school must all be "born again," and books are carefully censored. Students and parents must sign loyalty pledges that promise obedience to the rules and authority of the school and to strict moral and dress codes. The purity of the community is also promoted by admonitions not to date, marry or even associate with non-believers, advice again based on selected biblical verses. Nimmo and Combs describe this phenomenon of selective reading of the Scriptures as a way to avoid contradictions and conflicting views, thus providing a comforting source of simplified truth and authority that helps people cope with the threatening chaos around us (1983, 211).

Jewett illustrates how one dominating myth can color an entire world view. He contrasts two myths, both biblical, and shows how the myth of zealous nationalism has influenced the American self-image, even though the more tolerant and inclusive myth of prophetic realism is advocated by far more biblical writers and

15 This is an example of a myth being used like a Burkean terministic screen (1966) or of William Brown's concepts of "attention switching" and "anomaly masking" (1982).
characters, including the major Old Testament prophets and Jesus himself:

Throughout much of the course of the American experience . . . it was the book of Revelation that placed its stamp upon the whole Bible. Revelation stands triumphantly at the end of the canon, submerging the strand of Prophetic Realism—including the message of Jesus—under a grandiose flood of zealous images and ideas. It pictures the plot of world history as a battle between God and his enemies. Over and over again it promises total victory to the saints. It urges them to keep themselves pure and undefiled while God annihilates their opponents, who are stereotyped as bestial and irredeemable. (1973, 24-25)

The closed dogmatic system perpetuates itself through the authority of the Bible itself, which is, of course, a closed canon. This means that the final word already has been spoken/written, and no other source can ever challenge that authority. Kathleen Boone points out that the canon is also closed in the sense that by interpreting the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, the traditional literary methods of establishing meaning in the intent of the author is put beyond human reach and critique (1989). Boone uses Foucault's theories to analyze how biblical inerrancy is maintained in spite of contradictions and obvious historical and scientific errors within the text.16 Boone applies this theory to the fundamentalist insistence that all interpreters of

16 Foucault argues that meaning is not in the text itself, but is "written" through the interpretive process, and that the role of the interpreter is hidden in that relationship (1984).
the Bible must be "sound," meaning that they must all agree with the basic assumption of the inerrancy of the Bible.

The dangers and limitations on meaningful communication created by dogmatic thinking are extensive and obvious, but dogmatism is still pervasive because the authoritarian approach purports to offer security. The positive value of a more dogmatic or public moral rhetoric is that it promises a sense of stability and identity in a moral community based on first principles that a private or relativistic morality cannot offer. The problem with the dogmatic position comes when it is based on revealed truth or transcendent values that are beyond rational debate and criticism.

Intersubjectivism, to which I now turn, is one attempt to respond to that concern.

The Relativistic Perspective

The extreme version of the relativistic theory is the intersubjectivist position (also referred to as constructivism, social constructivism, or consensus theory), which holds that there is only one mode of knowing, namely the social. This means that all human reality is linguistically created through discourse, argument, and eventual consensus.
Representative of the consensus view is the work of Barry Brummet:

To all experiences people give meaning, a process which is inherently and uniquely human. It is in this sense that people make their own reality, for we give to experience its absolutely necessary component of meaning. . . . people get meanings from other people through communication. . . . Meaning is the essential component of the reality of relatively simple aspects of experience like rocks and trees. How much more is meaning an important part of complex political and social situations. Here especially do people get meanings from communication. (1976, 29)

The importance for this study of the consensus view is the argument that meanings are contextual and ever-changing. Ethics are therefore situational and determined intersubjectively through cooperative critical inquiry because there is no prior truth (Scott, 1967).

The original source of constructivist theory is George Kelly's (1963) psychology of personal constructs. Kelly is concerned with individual cognitive constructs and how they influence our perceptions of reality and their effect on communication values and practice. Kelly specifically deals with the problem of reification of myths and values in his theory of using language in the invitational mood or the as if, which he adopts from Vaihinger's "philosophy of 'as if'." This imaginative mood allows persons to entertain new possibilities 'as if' they were true and thereby consider ideas and
concepts that might otherwise be too threatening.

Kelly begins with a fundamental postulate that says a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which they anticipate events. He develops that postulate with several corollaries, including: (1) the modulation corollary, which says that the variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of his/her constructs; and (2) the sociality corollary, which says, "To the extent that one person construes the construction process of another they may play a role in a social process involving the other person" (1963, 104).

Kelly classifies personal constructs in three categories:

(1) **Pre-emptive constructs**, which represent "a major source of communication destruction because they have the tendency to reduce another person or group or event or idea to a narrowly restricted category" (Monaghan, 1983, 437). These constructs are reductionistic and are typified by words like "nothing but," "only," "just." This kind of thinking operates from the assumption that if a person or object belongs to one category he/she/it cannot belong to another. For example, a globe could not also be a ball, a professor could not also be a mother or an athlete, and an enemy can be nothing but an enemy (Kelly, 1963, 154).
(2) **Constellatory constructs** that are stereotypical. These constructs fix other meanings that accompany them, for example, sex role or racial/ethnic stereotypes, assuming all Democrats are liberal, all homeless persons are lazy, and so forth. "Constellatory and pre-emptive ways of thinking in combination are the most devastating to communication, and represent the most dangerous form of prejudice" (Monaghan, 1983, 438).

(3) **Propositional constructs** that are uncontaminated with no restrictions of category membership. "This type of construct reflects the heart of Kelly's basic theory because it freely allows—or rather invites—alternative constructions of persons and events" (Monaghan, 1983, 439).

Kelly is in agreement with most rhetorical theorists that a common frame of reference is necessary for communication to occur and that stereotypes and prejudices are generally undesirable traits for promoting effective communication.17 Kelly's theory...

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17 For example, Burke's concept of "identification," Perelman/Olbrechts-Tyteca's concept that argument begins with "agreement," and Ehninger's egalitarian theory of argument. In a similar vein, Delia et al. (1976, 1977, 1979), in applying Kelly's constructs to interpersonal communication, have found that the more complex and permeable the constructs of a person are, the better he/she is able to communicate with another, because, as the sociality corollary states, he/she is better able to understand the way the other person(s) construe the situation.
provides an inventional method whereby we can critique values and assumptions by using imagination to envision a variety of different worlds. This process frequently involves the use of metaphorical communication to bring to conscious awareness our assumptions about the dualisms or binary oppositions in our understanding of the way the world is (Scholes, 1983, 3). Such taken-for-granted, dualistic constructs as male/female, conscious/unconscious, subject/object, human/animal, human/nature, and the more obviously constructed categories such as political, ideological, or religious stereotypes, can be suspended in the 'as if' mode of communication and new possibilities entertained that minimize these potential barriers to a free-flowing, creative communication process.

The relevance for this matter here is that consensus theorists are concerned with avoiding the dangers of reification and dogmatism that represent one pole of the perennial problem for philosophy of dualistic thinking. Richard J. Bernstein calls this phenomenon "Cartesian Anxiety," namely, the assumption that there are only two choices for epistemology, objectivism or relativistic skepticism (1985, 16-20). I have attempted to show that neither of these forced choices successfully addresses epistemological or ontological anxiety, and in the following section I will
examine how representatives of the realist school respond to this same concern.

**The Realist Perspective**

Thomas Russman understands the need to treat different aspects of language and reality differently. He says, "literal-mindedness applied to synecdoche or metaphor yields absurdity" (1987, 63), and addresses dualism in this way:

... why are we creating epistemological problems for ourselves ...? Physics tolerates a great deal of mathematical untidiness; why can't philosophy? Why do we rush to claim we have grasped definitive essences of matter and thought? ... All we need to do is recognize the incompleteness of our understanding of the material world. ... Perhaps we will never have tidy connections ... We should simply relax and be patient. Prematurely forcing the issue creates problems that push us to ever greater extremes. Our dualisms are of our own making, and grand idealisms, materialisms, and nihilisms are the extremes to which they have pushed us. (1987, 40-41)

"Perspective realism" is a similar theory of rhetorical epistemology advocated by Richard Cherwitz and James Hikins (1986), who address dualism by arguing in their "relational view" that there is no deep ontological distinction between the physical and mental realms. The differences in physical versus mental existents are "emergent" at points "above" the deep ontological level. Perspective realism claims that the explanation for inanimate phenomena like values is that there is a
relational logic to Being itself which accounts for the existence of values, regardless of whether a particular society or race is cognizant of those values.

The relevance for this study is that Hikins and Cherwitz admit that some entities, especially inanimate ones like ethical values, are more difficult to know with certainty, that is, as "justified true belief," because they are perceived from different perspectives by different people. The traditional explanations of Platonic Idealism or that they exist in the mind of God are rejected by realism in favor of relationality, which says that "everything is what it is in virtue of its relationship to all else" (1986, 143).

The practical strength of the perspectival approach is that, according to this theory, the lines of communication should always remain open because (1) everyone is related to everyone else according to the principle of relationality; and (2) because differences in knowledge occur not because one person is right and the other wrong, but because we each have unique perspectives from our particular position within our overall relationality. In other words:

Perspectivism based on a relational ontology offers opportunity and implies responsibility for continued efforts to solve differences by peaceful, discursive means. The theory asserts that, at least in principle, every person can realize the perspective of any other, and that once the relevant perspectives are understood, persons
engaged in controversy can engage constructively. (Cherwitz and Hikins, 1986, 154)

What distinguishes this theory of realism from relativism is that, while advocating a similar dialectical rhetorical theory, there is for realism a true ethic, and if all of the perspectives on a given situation were examined in a free and open exchange, that truth would likely be discovered. Realism, therefore, claiming that truth is not dependent on consensus, puts a stronger emphasis on dialectic as truth producing rather than consensus producing. Two serious problems with perspective realism remain, however, and will be addressed in Chapter Three: how ethical truths or relationality are created originally, and the fact that in many cases, for example with "bigots, racists, or xenophobes" (Cherwitz and Hikins, 1986, 108), that is, with extremely dogmatic persons, this dialogic process is unlikely to work.

Moral Development Theories

In this section I will review arguments for different theories of moral and faith development and the rhetorical implications of each.
The Hierarchical Model

The hierarchical theory of moral development is a linear, prophetic concept, represented most tolerantly and inclusively by scholars such as Lawrence Kohlberg and Joseph Campbell and most dogmatically by the fundamentalistic, authoritarian position cited earlier in the section on dogmatic rhetoric. Kohlberg and Campbell argue that individuals can gradually move from a legalistic, self-centered stage of morality to a more universal concept of unity and justice for all. This view shares a common assumption or narrative of the relatedness of all beings with the participatory theory (see below), but the hierarchical model emphasizes a more codified and certain epistemology and therefore a more persuasive view of rhetoric. For example, Campbell (1949) found a universal theme of cosmic unity in myths and religions from all over the world, but he also discovered that those myths have been changed over time to reflect sexist or parochial or other limiting biases. Like Marshall McLuhan, Campbell argues that "the community today is the planet" (1949, 388), and that "the great deed of the supreme hero is to come to the knowledge of this unity in multiplicity and then to make it known" (1949, 40).

Various rhetorical strategies are employed in this model to persuade one's audience to move to a higher
level on the moral hierarchy. These include: creating cognitive conflict by presenting "higher" values that challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, presenting new narratives of reality that can replace lesser or outmoded ones, and use of arguments that appeal to transcendent or objective values.\textsuperscript{18}

Kohlberg's model for moral development consists of three levels, each based on a different narrative focused in: (1) self, (2) others like self, or (3) a universal concern for everyone (1981, 409-412). Kohlberg found that change from one level of moral development to the next occurs because of cognitive conflict, and his important finding for rhetorical theory is that people prefer the highest stage of moral reasoning they comprehend but that they do not comprehend more than one stage above their own. As a result, assimilation of reasoning occurs primarily when it is the next stage up from the student's level. Developmental moral discussion thus arouses cognitive-moral conflict and exposes students to reasoning by other students at the next stage above their own. (1981, 47)

One implication of Kohlberg's findings for rhetoric is that communication is facilitated if a rhetor understands the assumptions behind the audience's

\textsuperscript{18} Specific examples of such rhetorical strategies include: "attack metaphors," "symbolic reversals," and "non-conscious ideologies" (K. Campbell, 1973), "invisible paradigms" (Spitzack and Carter, 1987), and Booth's "rhetorical stance" (1963).
narratives and values and looks for points of identification where perspectives differ. Kohlberg's studies lend empirical support to the work of Burke, Perelman/Olbrechts-Tyteca, Booth and other rhetoricians, namely, that if a rhetor's interpretation of life can be shown to be continuous with that of his/her audience, rather than radically different, it has a much better chance of being heard.

Several criticisms of Kohlberg's work will be considered in Chapter Three, not the least of which is that the sample for his research was entirely male. A potential elitism of the hierarchical theory is also reflected in Kohlberg's finding that only 5% of the population can be expected to achieve the highest level of moral development. An attempt to address these concerns has been offered by an alternative theory of moral development—the participatory model.

The Participatory Model

The participatory approach to moral development, represented by Carol Gilligan (1982), stresses dialogue and collaboration as preferred rhetorical styles, as opposed to her understanding of traditional persuasion as very hierarchical. Values in the participatory theory are not seen as universal codes or behaviors to be learned individually, but contextual and continually
in need of being developed and revised cooperatively by participants in a given situation. Relationships and participation in them are of utmost importance in this approach, not knowledge of universal truths or values.

Moral dilemmas in Gilligan's model are seen as conflicts in responsibilities toward people, including oneself, and not conflicts over abstract values that, according to Gilligan's critique of the hierarchical model, "sacrifice people to truth" (1982, 104).\textsuperscript{19} The metaphor used to describe this theory is that an ethical life is a web of interrelatedness with many possible paths to follow, not just one true path, as implied by the hierarchical model. Tolerance for pluralism and ambiguity is affirmed as a solution to a loss of connectedness and the ensuing aggression that, according to Gilligan, is encouraged by the competitive, either-or, reified perception of truth and values in the hierarchical model.

Philosophically, Gilligan calls for a paradigm shift from an emphasis on epistemology to ontology, namely from "the Greek ideal of knowledge as correspondence between mind and form to the Biblical

\textsuperscript{19} Gilligan uses two Biblical narratives to illustrate this point: Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in deference to a principle, obedience to God, and the woman who, when arguing her maternity suit before King Solomon, was willing to give up her claim to truth in order to save her child's life.
conception of knowing as a process of human relationship" (1982, 173). This perspective is comparable to that of Tillich, who interprets rhetoric, not as persuasion or adjustment of people to ideas, but as human adjustment to self, others, and the world. In oversimplified terms, the difference between the hierarchical and participatory theories is as basic as whether moral rhetoric is monologic or dialogic.

**A Middle Position.** There is agreement among a variety of scholars in philosophy, theology, homiletics, and rhetoric on the importance of participation in a rhetorical community for moral development to occur. This is in part because moral values or core beliefs do not change without struggle and that kind of growth is best done in community. MacIntyre (1981) and Hauerwas (1981) trace the problem of ethical confusion in contemporary Western society to a shift from the classical Greek and Judeo-Christian emphasis on morality as responsible citizenship in the *polis* to an overemphasis on individual freedom based on the philosophy of Locke and Mill. Indicting the "lazy indifferent ethic of tolerance," Hauerwas (1981, 174) argues that the problem with the contemporary pluralistic society is that we have no community or tradition to provide the teaching of identity or values. He insists, however, that this teaching of values is not
done by coercion, but by participation in the foundational narratives of one's community.

James Fowler has developed a very thorough model for how that participation occurs. In *Stages of Faith* (1981), Fowler identified the following stages in faith development that I will describe in some detail because they play an important role in the rhetorical model I will present in Chapters Four and Five:

Stage 1, Intuitive-Projective faith [is] the stage . . . marked by a relative fluidity of thought patterns, . . . the birth of imagination, the ability to unify and grasp the experience-world in powerful images and as presented in stories . . . . At the heart of the transition [to stage 2] is the child's growing concern to know how things are and to clarify for him- or herself the bases of distinctions between what is real and what only seems to be.

Stage 2, Mythic-Literal faith is the stage in which the person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community. Beliefs are appropriated with literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes. Symbols are taken as one-dimensional and literal in meaning.

In Stage 3, Synthetic-Conventional faith, a person's experience of the world now extends beyond the family . . . . At stage 3 a person has an "ideology," a more or less consistent clustering of values and beliefs, but he or she has not objectified it for examination and in a sense is unaware of having it . . . . [R]eadiness for transition may include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; . . . . the encounter with experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection.

Stage 4, Individuative-Reflective faith . . . . is a "de-mythologizing" stage . . . . [its] strength has to do with its capacity for critical reflection . . . . Stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes from
Stage 5, Conjunctive faith, involves a critical recognition of one's social unconscious—the myths, ideal images and prejudices built deeply into the self-system by virtue of one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like . . . . Alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions, this stage strives to unify opposites in mind and experience . . . . this stage's commitment to justice is freed from the confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation . . . . Stage 5 can appreciate symbols, myths and rituals (its own and others') because it has been grasped, in some measure, by the depth of reality to which they refer. It also sees the divisions of the human family vividly because it has been apprehended by the possibility (and imperative) of an inclusive community of being.

Stage 6, Universalizing faith, is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being . . . . Universalizers are often experienced as subversive of the structures (including religious structures) by which we sustain our individual and corporate survival, security and significance . . . . Such persons are ready for fellowship with persons at any of the other stages and from any other faith tradition. (1981, 133-201, emphasis added)

Fowler's developmental stages affirm the possibility and desirability of "reground[ing] the foundations of basic trust"20 (1981, 265) because "our images of the ultimate

20 Such change in traditional religious language would be called conversion.
environment change as we move through life. They expand and grow, and the plots get blown open or have to be linked in with other plots" (29). Fowler's theory is valuable also because it combines both the transcendent or universal dimension with the participatory rhetorical theory. Transcendent values are important in this theory because ideally people move toward

identification with a universal community . . . . This does not negate or require denial of our membership in more limited groups with their particular "stories" and centering values. But it does mean that our limited, parochial communities cannot be revered and served as though they have ultimate value. (Fowler, 1981, 23)

And the dialogical or participatory process is also central to Fowler's theory, as illustrated by this description of the essential role played by supportive communities of persons who are in transition from one stage of faith development to the next:

Communities that call persons to ongoing adult development in faith will not fear the intimacy of conflict nor the inevitable presence in growing faith of doubt and struggle . . . . Before prescriptions are offered, and without condemnation or accusation, they will be given the help of active listening in order to tell their present stories and visions of faith and to hear those of others. Such a community, by its regular celebrations and sharing of the master stories of its faith, will provide models by which adults can construct or reconstruct the faith-truth in their lives for this period . . . . A faith community that provides for the nurture of ongoing adult development in faith will create a climate of developmental expectation. (Fowler, 296)

The rhetorical theories of how values are discovered,
created, and communicated vary, but the recurrent theme of transcendent values invites and requires careful examination of the spiritual dimension in this process.

The Spiritual Dimension

A key to addressing the ethical and rhetorical epistemic issues raised above is the acknowledgment that human experiences go much deeper than reason, into the imagination. Imagination is what allows us to experience the common truths of other cultural, ethical, and religious perspectives. This is possible only if we can suspend the tendency to see our own myths as fact and others as fiction. The arguments of scholars such as Joseph Campbell, Ernesto Grassi, and David Tukey are representative of those who claim that the Western bias toward reason and logic has cut off Western rhetorical scholars from such powerful sources of truth and knowledge as dreams, myths, and rituals that flow out of the spiritual/imaginative level of our being.

Tukey offers an alternative to a totally rational concept of rhetoric, an alternative that is, he argues, more isomorphic with the complexity of human nature and therefore offers a way to move rhetoric beyond the theoretical debates between constructivists and realists to the more relevant common concern for how to make good, practical, ethical decisions. Tukey argues that
humans are more than social and rational animals and proposes that a third dimension or mode of knowing, that is, the spiritual, is necessary to fully understand human communication and epistemology. This view argues that humans are essentially spiritual animals and that traditional, rational/logical rhetoric, while adequate for dealing with social reality, is not equipped to explore the spiritual dimension. "To be alive and sensitive to reality," argues Tukey, "thought must be transcended" (1990, 67).

Sullivan addresses the same issue regarding New Testament rhetoric, which he describes as an epidictic rhetoric that "released the radiance of Being" (1992, 325). Sullivan says that "an orator cannot argue a person into acknowledging the presence of God . . . the speaker can simply awaken the audience to the presence of something far greater than themselves" (326). He argues that such rhetoric is not characterized by rational arguments, for its end is not judgment (krisis) but belief (pistis); it is aimed not at the mind but at the heart . . . . Imagination is the gift of poetic creation [and] makes possible the formation and transmission of vision. (327)

Grassi (1980, 1986) also argues that rational thinking is adequate only for demonstration, that is, where the premises can be known or proved, but is incapable of grasping the ambiguous nature of Being
itself. Grassi argues instead for a concept he calls *ingenium*, that is "a basic capacity to grasp what is common or similar in things—to see relationships or make connections" [emphasis added]. . . . It is a way of knowing that Grassi describes as a "grasping" or "letting appear" (1976). Grassi argues that imagination is a crucial quality which was represented by pathos in classical rhetoric but has been lost in favor of logos in the scientific paradigm. Grassi cites Plato, who argues that true rhetoric is not purely rational or purely pathetic, but that we need both (Grassi, 1976, 214), as well as Giambattista Vico, who learned from Cicero that rhetoric cannot motivate without the passions (Grassi, 1969, 41-42, Golden, 1983, 134).

Grassi echoes the more holistic view of humanity seen in the faculty psychological approach reflected in Bacon's definition of rhetoric as "reason applied to the imagination for the better moving of the will" (Dick, 1955, 309). Grassi argues that the holistic approach is crucial because reason alone is incapable of dealing with the ultimate, transcendental or cosmological matters of life. Grassi specifically addresses the distinction between Being and being, and says that while the senses and reason are adequate for comprehending being, we can only experience Being, which is always transcendental and ambiguous, through metaphor and
symbols. This requires "primal suspension" of our normal, rational, orderly approach to the world (1986, 113) because Being is paradoxical and ambiguous. Through our metaphors we can attempt to describe some aspects of the mysterious unknown nature of Being by imaginative comparison with what we know of being.

Another related and important aspect of the spiritual dimension of rhetoric is what could be described as intrapersonal rhetorical criticism. By this I mean the ability to evaluate imaginative/spiritual experiences and truth claims that are primarily intrapersonal experiences. Sullivan describes this in classical terms as the need to distinguish between apate (deception) and aletheia (truth), acknowledging the difficulty because this truth does not emerge through scientific analysis, empirical study, intersubjective agreement, or even dialectic; rather it emerges through revelation or unveilment. . . . Yet it produces a belief that seems stronger than the tentatively held opinions produced by doxastic or epistemic rhetorics, and it does not depend on consensus as a basis for truth. (1992, 328-29)

Both Hikins and Tukey also recognize the importance of intrapersonal rhetoric to moral issues and see it functioning both in similar yet very different ways. Hikins describes a dialogue within the duality of the mind that troubles one "to the point of serious reflection," and of being "shocked into openness
Tukey advocates "confusing the mind so that inquiry and insight can occur" because only when "the mind is faced with such a problem can one form a new, deeper, more profound way of looking at the world" (1990, 68). The important difference is that for Hikins the dialogue is controlled by "the voice of your own reason," and for Tukey it is best when the spirit "defeat[s] the ego at its own game." Berger (1969) describes this phenomenon as "ecstasy," that is, being open to the mystery of life by stepping outside of our taken-for-granted assumptions. Through this use of imagination Berger says our language can be not only metaphorical but also metamorphic. How these different theories can be synthesized will be addressed in Chapter Three.

Narrative Preaching. Homiletics is, of course, one method for putting spiritual/mythic rhetorical theories into practice, and the recent interest in the use of narrative in preaching is an attempt to do so. Don Wardlaw sums up the reason for this interest in a more holistic homiletical theory when he says

most preachers have been trained to force a straitjacket of deductive reason over metaphors, similes, parables, narratives, and myths which in effect restrains rather than releases the vitality of these forms. When preachers feel they have not preached a passage of Scripture unless they have dissected and rearranged that Word into a lawyer's
brief, they in reality make the Word of God subservient to one particular, technical kind of reason. (1983, 16)

Fred Craddock argues for the necessity of images and delineates the difference between traditional homiletical illustrations and narrative preaching:

Ideas and concepts are of little effect against images, and scolding does even less. Images must be replaced, and this comes only gradually, by other images. In the ministry of preaching, much of this burden falls on description. In other words, we are not discussing how to decorate a sermon, but how to preach. (1985, 201)

Christine Smith (1989) demonstrates the influence of participatory and imaginative rhetoric on homiletics when she argues that the goal of preaching is not persuasion but solidarity. Preaching in that context must still fulfill a prophetic/persuasive function, but prophetic is redefined:

I pose here an alternative definition for prophetic to the one commonly understood in homiletics literature and in Christian biblical theology in general. Often a prophet is seen as a lone individual bearing a difficult and confronting word of truth to a community. Even though the prophet stands within the community of faith, he or she is also "set apart." This model of prophet not only is inadequate but also is inconsistent with a feminist worldview. For those who preach from a feminist perspective, one views prophetic words and messages as they arise out of collective experience and wisdom. (1989, 64, emphasis added)

Lucy Rose reviews recent scholarship in addressing epistemology in narrative preaching and illustrates how the issues of mythic rhetorical epistemology impact contemporary homiletics, values, and social
Rose says:

I find comfort in the postmodern world, where nothing can be known absolutely. After all, God is ultimately beyond our knowing. And I find comfort in the postmodern Bible because Truth is always beyond our reach and no single interpretation exhausts a text's meaning. Truth, supported by "correct" biblical interpretation, kept women in a prescribed place and African Americans in slavery for far too long. For me, biblical interpretation and preaching are not about truth but about wagers (a word I borrow from Paul Ricoeur's Symbolism of Evil). That is, they are about faith commitments. . . . And we need to keep our wagers in conversation (Rorty, 1979, 373, 377, 389), precisely because they are not absolute truth . . . Preaching and biblical interpretation are both about wagers, wagers that can and must be subverted, replaced, and enlarged again and again by biblical texts. . . . If they [preachers] can let the text unsettle some familiar conviction by introducing ambiguity and tension, then the text may lead to "a more creative solution" (Lowry, 1985, 46), to an enlargement or replacement of a previous wager. Repeating this exegetical experience in the sermon, I believe, is at the heart of narrative preaching [emphasis added]. (Rose, 1992, 3-4)

Rose also describes a related homiletical form that reflects the issues at stake in the debate over rhetorical epistemology:

Another homiletical approach capable of replacing or enlarging wagers is indirect discourse (Craddock, 1981). Indirect discourse is kin, but not identical to narrative preaching. . . . This mode of preaching is eventful "dialectic," not closed rhetoric (Craddock, 1981, 129-32). The result is meaning in the hearer. A helpful vehicle is narrative structure. Like a novel, indirect discourse offers the hearers anonymity through distance and invites participation through identification. It aims to replace old image with new image, old symbol with new symbol, old myth with new myth, and I would add, old wager with new wager. (1992, 4)
While many of the theoretical differences reviewed in this chapter are incompatible, the dialogue among them is heuristic and full of potential for extending our understanding of how mythic rhetoric can contribute to moral and faith development and social amelioration. In Chapters Three and Four I will attempt to evaluate and integrate the relevant aspects of these theories into a more comprehensive and consistent model. I will explore the practical application of these principles to the practice and criticism of narrative rhetoric in general, and specifically to homiletics.
CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS

The construction and critique of rhetorical theory is a process of philosophical analysis and argument. Henry W. Johnstone, Jr. describes this theorizing as the "quest for the philosophical foundations of rhetoric" and warns against the easy approach that gives in to the "desire simply to be told which position is true and to settle for that. When we come to apply serious thought to philosophical matters," argues Johnstone, "one perceives that there is no single verity . . . [but] a variety of ways in which rhetoric could be undergirded" (Cherwitz, 1990, Foreword, xvii-xviii). This does not mean adoption of a totally relativistic approach that accepts all theories as being of equal value, but that through careful consideration and constructive argument, the merits of various rhetorical theories can be evaluated.

Operating from this philosophical assumption, in this chapter I will analyze and critique the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments for dogmatic, realist,
relativistic, and spiritual rhetorical theories, and specifically the implications of those arguments for the use of narrative rhetoric in homiletics and moral development. As a framework for this analysis, I will rely heavily on the models for argument and critical thinking provided by Douglas Ehninger's theory of argument and George Kelly's creativity cycle.

While Ehninger and Kelly do not address mythic or narrative rhetoric per se, I have chosen them because they provide a comprehensive structure and process for doing a meta-mythic analysis of the taken-for-granted assumptions that inform and undergird the various approaches to both mythic and non-mythic rhetorical theory. I will, therefore, utilize the methods of Ehninger and Kelly to critique and build upon the mythic and narrative theories of rhetoric described in Chapter Two. This process will include the spiritual and imaginative dimensions of rhetoric in an attempt to determine how this important non-rational dimension can be accounted for in a sound rhetorical theory.

**Ehninger's Theory of Correction**

Ehninger's (1970) theory of argument is based upon the concept of "correction" and has four characteristics: (1) the discourse must be bilateral, that is, a two-way process and not monologic; (2) it
must involve equal initiative and control by all parties involved; (3) it must involve correction, that is, a genuine openness to the other's point of view; and (4) it must include genuine self-risk on the part of all participants, meaning that all parties entering an argument know they could be mistaken in the views they are defending, as well as mistaken in the overall world view to which their beliefs contribute. Consequently, they must be willing to consider changing some significant aspects of their world view if convinced of the errancy of their present view by the argument of the other interlocutor(s). These four characteristics will be applied in this chapter to the various theories under consideration and the consequences will be carefully examined in light of their impact on moral development and social amelioration.

**Kelly's Creativity Cycle**

Kelly's invitational or "as if" mood compliments Ehninger's model of argument because it provides a systematic process for suspending judgments and assumptions about taken-for-granted beliefs. Kelly's (1963) model thereby makes possible a more detached consideration of each theory, as well as new constructs of identity and social reality that might be too threatening in the purely indicative mood. The "as if"
concept describes an imaginative mood that allows persons to entertain ideas "as if" they were true. Kelly argues for the value of the "as if" approach in psychology because it invites people in therapy to consider new ways of looking at themselves and their world in a hypothetical way that is less threatening than being directly confronted with a new concept. This is especially so when examining one's identity or core values (which are more crucial and therefore more difficult to change). This theory promotes playing with new ideas as a way of evaluating them for possible adoption as modifications of our personal constructs.

Another important contribution of Kelly's "as if" approach to communication is that it allows for broadening the scope of our work beyond the empirical, rational aspects of reality. The invitational mood lends itself to taking seriously the imaginative sources of rhetorical insight that have been largely ignored by traditional western thought since Descartes. This is a crucial element for developing a truly inclusive and universal rhetorical theory that can address the concern for social amelioration because so many barriers to communication with persons from different cultures and perspectives are lodged in the psychological constructs we use to interpret and give meaning to the world and other people in it.
One of the values of Kelly's construct theory is his typology of ways of thinking that serves as a test for literalism, namely constellatory and pre-emptive ways of thinking, which fix meanings stereotypically (see Chapter Two, pp. 59-61). These two kinds of thinking are contrasted to the third, propositional, which invites alternative constructions of persons and events in a psychological/rhetorical process that Kelly calls "the creativity cycle."

Kelly's emphasis on the value of propositional thinking and permeable constructs is important to rhetorical theory. Both are relevant to the role of imagination in rhetorical theory and practice. The creativity cycle in particular is a process whereby we can systematically recast constructs in hypothetical or "as if" language in order to consider creative ideas and metaphors that a more dogmatic approach would dismiss as preposterous. The creativity cycle provides a method for testing new constructs to see if they have any validity. The constructs are entertained in the invitational mood, allowing for many different possible explanations of reality, as opposed to the commonly used indicative mood of language that only allows for one. Truth for Kelly is, therefore, something to be tested, and he uses the scientific method as an example of the way we test our constructs, pointing out that many ideas
we now accept as common scientific truth, such as the earth being round, were ridiculed as absurd when they were first proposed.

Acknowledging the socially constructed nature of communities, Kelly argues that "one does not escape from his [sic] cultural controls (assuming there is ever any reason to escape) simply by ignoring them—he [sic] must construe his way out" (1963, 182). Kelly lists three conditions that are counterproductive to that construing—threat, preoccupation with old material, and the absence of a laboratory to try out new constructs (166-170).

The creativity cycle is a system of rhetorical invention designed to provide favorable conditions for productive construction and lends itself to rhetorical theory building and analysis because it is a process of loosening and examining taken-for-granted assumptions and constructs of reality and their supporting arguments. In that sense the creativity cycle is similar to a number of postmodern critical theories, but the major advantage of Kelly's creativity cycle is that it proposes a way to maintain the positive and necessary aspects of evaluating taken-for-granted assumptions—namely, to encourage creative, imaginative thinking that is unencumbered by reified ideas and values—while adding a reconstructive phase of retightening constructs.
that provides some closure and structure. This retightening can lessen the counterproductive anxiety of the more skeptical approaches and therefore makes a more orderly human existence possible. New constructs are, of course, subject to reconsideration in the next turn of the cycle, thus allowing the creative process to continue.

In short, the creativity cycle is an organized, inventional system for promoting the imaginative dimension in rhetoric. When applied to ethical issues, the creativity cycle provides a systematic way to reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions about values. The systematic nature of the creativity cycle is crucial to maintaining as much rational control as possible and is similar to Culler and Gouldner's definition of rationality as "the capacity to make problematic what had hitherto been treated as given; to bring to reflection what before had only been used . . . to examine critically the life we live . . . to think about our thinking" (Culler, 11).

Meta-theoretical Critique

This expanded understanding of reason is essential to rhetorical criticism in general, as well as to the meta-theoretical critique proposed by this dissertation. Edwin Black (1978) also makes this point in his critique
of the logical/rational assumption that traditional rhetorical critics make about the rhetorical audience. Black argues that Aristotle's concept of humans as rational animals was normative and not descriptive because we all know that people make many decisions for irrational reasons. Black argues for the importance of emotional appeals in rhetoric that precede conversion to the beliefs intended by the rhetor and uses cognitive dissonance theory to illustrate how we adapt our beliefs to coincide with our feelings in order to reduce dissonance. Beliefs and values are not created by traditional rational-logical argument alone, and emotions are not just a sub-form of proof, or just a part of the overall rational approach to rhetoric, but a legitimate rhetorical force in their own right.

Black's theory is important because it expands the scope of rhetorical criticism beyond an historical, academic exercise and makes it more relevant to contemporary social concerns. Black opened the way for other scholars (such as McGee, Campbell, Corcoran, Francesconi, Wander) to take seriously the role ideology plays in both the rhetorical audience and the rhetor, and especially the need for the critic to be self-reflexive about his/her own ideological biases.

Typical of this theory of criticism is Farrel Corcoran's statement that "the workings of ideology are
most powerful when they are least visible," and, quoting Althusser, he adds, "Ideology is indeed a system of representations but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness'" (1984, 56). They have become, instead, taken-for-granted assumptions (functioning as myths\(^1\)) that provide order and meaning for people's lives. The value of meta-mythic, ideological criticism is that it can help make us more aware of the religious and secular myths that exert great and often unconscious influence on how and why we live our lives the way we do. The process of demythologization can give people more control over their own lives. Robert Francesconi says, "it [demythologization] can open huge vistas of perspective on our social lives if it is taken as the reconstruction of our symbolic social being" (1984, 52-53, emphasis added). But what is the relationship between such a reconstruction and the actual state of affairs—social, political, intellectual, and spiritual—in which humans are involved? Raising this question of how the truth claims of myths are evaluated when they are brought from taken-for-granted status to conscious awareness brings us face-to-face with questions of epistemology.

\(^1\) See Chapter Two, p. 40 for a definition of myth.
The Epistemic Issue

The key epistemological questions for the creativity cycle have to do with how we can maintain the balance of keeping ambiguity at acceptable levels while not discouraging the creative invention and exploration of alternative realities. Retightening constructs and values we accept as true in the final stage of the creativity cycle offers a promising way to lessen the uncertainty of the extreme relativism of the contemporary trend in constructivist rhetorical epistemology. But if the creativity cycle is to successfully address that uncertainty, there remains a critical need to deal with the difficult epistemic issue of how and when decisions are made in the final stage of the cycle to tighten or adopt new constructs or retain old ones. This is an important concern not only for Kelly, but for all constructivist theories and for dialogic/participatory rhetoric in general.

Kelly's approach to that concern is to liken the process of developing constructs to the scientific experimental method. Although, at one point, he says that "how long one should hang on to assumptions in the face of mounting contrary evidence is pretty much a matter of taste" (1963, 31), his further development of the theory offers more specific recommendations. Kelly sees constructs as hypotheses that can never be
"substantiated with absolute finality" (32), and advocates accepting them as "tentative or ad interim statements of truth and then see what follows" (47). In "an atmosphere of experimentation," Kelly says, One does not "play for keeps." Constructs, in the true scientific tradition, are seen as "being tried on for size." They are seen propositionally. In fact, the seeing of constructs as proposed representations of reality rather than the reality itself is propaedeutic to experimentation. (163)

The epistemological solution for Kelly seems to be experimenting with constructs to see what "fits" or "works," and at first glance that seems to be a practical, empirical approach. But the unanswered question is, for whom does a particular construct or value fit or work? For example, to me, and those who agree with me, nationalism as a construct and militarism as the means for preserving it are no longer viable political constructs in an interdependent global community. Obvious also to me is that the capitalistic notion of private ownership as a definition of home is not working for growing numbers of homeless persons in our country and that reconstructing the meaning of that metaphor could create a more inclusive and secure community for everyone. But to those in political power--all of whom live in comfortable homes--the old constructs appear to be working just fine, and the disadvantages and/or the threat of considering
alternative constructions of reality are usually too
great for those in power to do so. Deciding the truth
claims of such political and economic myths has
tremendous implications for all citizens of the world,
and neither the alternative of perpetuating the tyranny
of the majority or the tyranny of an autocracy is a
satisfactory epistemological solution.

Fisher's Narrative Paradigm

The political and rhetorical dilemma raised above
illustrates one of the major problems with Fisher's
model of narrative rationality, pointed out in Chapter
Two.² The "truth" of narratives, according to Fisher,
is determined by a particular audience, based on that
audience's previous experiences of what is true and what
is not. As it stands, this is a theory hopelessly mired
in the status quo because the way Fisher defines
narrative fidelity rules out the possibility of
prophetic rhetoric persuading people to accept as true
any narratives that they have not already been taught or
experienced as such before. There is no bilateral or
equal openness to evaluate the narrative because of the
bias in favor of the established taken-for-granted
narrative. The construct is not loosened and is

² See discussion on pp. 42-45.
therefore not ever genuinely risked in an open dialogue.

Narrative fidelity also explains the approach many people take toward evaluating their religious myths. Those myths have not only the faith community's authority behind them, but a long tradition of unquestioned acceptance of their divine authority as well. Given those odds, challenging religious myths because of sexist or nationalistic or some other culturally or historically engendered bias is difficult at best, but especially so according to Fisher's theory because it so strongly privileges the existing culturally sanctioned version of reality.

One way to accommodate persuasive or prophetic rhetoric in Fisher's theory may be that the other criteria for judging truth claims, namely, narrative probability (the internal consistency of the narrative), could be so compelling as to counteract the tendency of narrative fidelity to reify the familiar and reject all new and alien concepts. This would require, however, a more sophisticated impartial critique of the narratives than Fisher has developed, and would also necessitate including a way to address the emotional investment people have in myths that provide order and security for their lives. As a solution, an intentional application of Ehninger's and Kelly's principles to mythic criticism would be an important step toward addressing the
concerns of the historical and social origins of myths and toward suspending the psychological factors that bias our judgment.

The other major problem with Fisher's theory is that, since it posits no external reality with which narratives can correspond, Fisher appeals in last-resort fashion to "Transcendent Values" as the final epistemic measure for truth claims of narratives. Transcendent values are a critical concept, but Fisher offers no satisfactory explanation for where these transcendent values come from or how we come to know them. Fisher (citing MacIntyre, 1981, 121) suggests that these transcendent values are a reflection of an "implicit realism" that comes from how the world is defined. But MacIntyre's point is that this "realism" is socially defined. He stresses that it is not defined individually, as in the modern emphasis on individualism, and while that may be an improvement, it hardly qualifies as a legitimate source of transcendent values.

A far more promising source of a correspondence check to validate myths and values is in the universal community described in such concepts as Being, participation, and relationality. These concepts truly do move beyond both individualism and particular communities and therefore can address more successfully
where transcendent values reside and how they come into existence. This is significant, not only because of its central epistemological importance, but also because introduction of a transcendent dimension has implications for a spiritual concept of human nature and rhetoric, and for the related concerns of intrapersonal experiences of revealed truth that I will address later.

A crucial epistemic insight for treating religious myths and secular myths in an equitable and consistent fashion is found when we apply Fisher's paradigm to the philosophical problem of subject-object dualism. Fisher appeals to the epistemic and rhetorical advantages of a concept of total ontological unity of all beings. He argues that such an approach overcomes human alienation and isolation and the ensuing skeptical problems of perception, knowledge and communication. But such an approach does not withstand Fisher's own test of narrative fidelity. Human experience is that we are, in at least some important respects, separate from other beings and objects in the world, and if rhetoric is to be used in the interest of truth, it needs to help persons deal with that reality rather than disguise it. On a broader scale this means acknowledging that there is a great deal of ambiguity, uncertainty, and probability in the world. Rhetoricians need to grapple with the ethical issues of when and how we deal with
that reality in all forms of knowledge, secular and religious, and not attempt to portray the world as a purely rational, logical place, as much of traditional Western philosophy and rhetoric has done.

A related issue is Fisher's agreement with those who claim that rhetoric is ontologically based rather than epistemological. Fisher says,

I join Karlyn Campbell in believing that rhetorical experience is more usefully viewed ontologically than epistemologically. Put another way: rhetorical experience is most fundamentally a symbolic transaction in and about social reality. (1987, 17)

While the question of epistemology versus ontology is certainly a both/and issue (rather than either/or question) there is some value to emphasizing the ontological position when it is understood to mean, as I believe Fisher intends here, that dialogic-participatory, relational rhetoric is preferable to monologic-dogmatic rhetoric.

On the negative side, however, this ontological emphasis of Fisher's theory, because of the importance it places on consensus production rather than truth production, is also susceptible to use or even misuse by the more extreme forms of constructivist theory. This occurs when ontology is construed narrowly as merely focusing on the social nature of human existence and ignores the broader context of being, namely the
transcendent and spiritual dimension of Being.\(^3\) That narrow understanding of human being increases ontological anxiety by calling attention to the difficulty or impossibility of "knowing" which of our myths and narratives are true. When carried to its logical conclusion, this overemphasis on a socially constructed reality (as opposed to a rhetorically constructed social reality) leads to the kind of radical skepticism characteristic of Deconstructionism that questions our ability to use language at all because of the uncertainty of the meaning of words, even when used in context.

**Dogmatism**

The desire for as much certainty as possible in our knowledge and truth claims, especially those about our core beliefs and values, is understandable for both philosophical and psychological reasons. As described in Chapters One and Two,\(^4\) uncertainty in spiritual matters often creates an uncomfortable level of anxiety.

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\(^3\) The distinction between being and Being is the differentiation made by Grassi and Heidegger described in Chapters One and Two—"being" (lower case "b") refers to existence as we know and participate in it at the finite, human level, and "Being" (upper case "B") refers to the spiritual dimension or Being itself, the source of life of which all creation is a part and vice versa.

\(^4\) See Chapter One, pp. 19, 25-27, and Chapter Two, pp. 45 and 56.
in response to what Berger calls a "deep religious hunger for certainty" (1980, 58).

Questioning religious myths that help people deal with their own mortality threatens what for some is "a barrier against naked terror" (Berger, 1969, 93), and the reaction to this threat is often a retreat into dogmatic reification of our religious myths. Hauerwas describes this phenomenon when he says, "and the less sure we are of the reasons for our beliefs the more dogmatically we hold to them as our only still point in a morally chaotic world" (1983, 3). Nimmo and Combs specifically describe one strategy for achieving this certainty, namely selective and literal reading of the Scriptures as a way to avoid contradictions and conflicting views, thus providing a comforting source of simplified truth and authority that helps people cope with the threatening chaos around us (1983, 211).

Given the exigence of postmodern angst created by the rapid pace of change in this century, an increased awareness of human mortality and irrationality in the nuclear age, and the challenge of new paradigms for making sense of life in a pluralistic culture and world, I am surprised that advocates of the dogmatic

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5 See Chapters One and Two for detailed descriptions of each of these contributing factors to contemporary anxiety and the resulting desire for certainty.
position are so rare in current rhetorical theory. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the theoretical pendulum has swung so far away from the empiricism and positivism of the Modern era to the other extreme—a position that might be characterized as "the third sophistic" of Postmodernism and relativism.

Nevertheless, there are those, especially in the religious right, who favor dogmatism. In fairness to them, the advantage of the dogmatic approach to values is that a public ethical position appears to offer more stability and communal identity than a private one. The price for that stability, however, is that whether those values are revealed or discovered (what Arnett describes as \textit{a priori} values that are permanent and universal) the openness to correction or entertaining other values is often ruled out by definition. Not so obvious, however, is that the same is also true in a more dialectical approach where values are intersubjectively created and maintained by "guardians of proper ethical conduct" (Arnett, 1991, 63).

The negative side of this \textit{intersubjective dogmatism} is illustrated by the inflexibility of Weaver's position and its susceptibility to the weaknesses of both the dogmatic and the relativistic positions, namely, both the tyranny of the majority and of the authoritarian rhetor. This double jeopardy occurs because admittedly
social constructs (tyrannizing images) become reified and generalized beyond the community of origin. This is a prime example of how reification is characterized by "amnesia about who created social products" (Sternberg 1981, 169). Weaver acknowledges the social constructive influence on the formation of values but draws an arbitrary line between rhetoric and dialectic that assigns rhetoric a role only in the promotion of those values, and none in their invention, that is, in their creation and/or their correction.

William Brown's (1982) concepts of attention switching and anomaly masking are commonly used rhetorical strategies for maintaining this amnesia, namely, rhetorically focusing attention away from factors in an ethical system that would encourage critical examination and possible corrective measures in a creative rhetorical process. Selective reading of scripture and avoidance of all contradictory ideas are specific strategies for doing this that are employed by fundamentalist Christians, as indicated in Chapter Two. An excellent example of such selective reading or "proof texting" is the use by militaristic Christians and Jews of Joel 3:10, which directly contradicts the more famous pacifism of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 by calling God's people to "beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears" in order to "restore the
fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem." This position is, of course, easily translated into the civil religion myth of America as the "New Jerusalem."

Christian dogmatism is grounded in the authority of the Bible as the inerrant word of God, and is an example of how a belief is adopted by those with a common psychodynamic described in Bormann's fantasy theme theory:

A small group of people with similar individual psychodynamics meet to discuss a common preoccupation or problem. A member dramatizes a theme that catches the group and causes it to chain out because it hits a common psychodynamic chord or a hidden agenda item or their common difficulties vis-a-vis the natural environment, the socio-political systems, or the economic structures. (Bormann, 1972, 399)

The common psychodynamic in this case is a need and/or desire for an authoritarian sense of certain truth and knowledge. An example of this phenomenon is when Robert Billings, a leader of the Moral Majority and first director of the national Christian Action Coalition, said that "people want leadership--they don't want to think for themselves. They want to be told what to think by some of us close to the front" (Liebman, 1983, 37). A factor in this willingness to be influenced or controlled by charismatic, authoritarian leaders may also be found in Peshkin's (1986) discovery that

6 See Chapter Two, pp. 40-41 for a more detailed discussion of Bormann's theory.
Christian school students had lower IQ's than public school students, and in other studies (Monaghan, 1967; Liebman and Wuthnow, 1983) that fundamentalist churches tend to attract members with a high school education or less. This suggests that these churches constitute rhetorical audiences less likely to be made up of critical thinkers than those with more formal education.

Boone (1989) describes some of the non-verbal rhetorical strategies used to maintain the authority and centrality of the Word in fundamental churches. She points out the tendency of the ministers of those churches to carry and use the Bible as a sign of authority while preaching and visiting parishioners. Furthermore the pulpit and the open Bible are featured symbolically and architecturally by placing them in the center of the sanctuary, as opposed to more eucharistic churches where the altar is the focal point of the worship setting.

All of these rhetorical strategies reinforce the closed attitude described in Chapter Two, an attitude Rodney Kennedy labels "revealed positivism" (1990, 205), where all contact with different myths and all questioning of the party line is discouraged. Suffice it to say that this approach is the direct antithesis of correction and the creativity cycle. Such a position might be theoretically defensible if it were uniformly
applied to secular and scientific myths as well, though that would eliminate all social and scientific progress. But if supporters of dogmatism are willing to reevaluate and symbolically interpret secular myths while insisting on a different standard and method of evaluation for religious myths and beliefs, surely that inconsistency alone invalidates the dogmatic approach.

Relativism

By taking a relativistic approach to truth and knowledge, the rhetorical theory known as constructivism or consensus theory strives to avoid the vexing problems of dogmatism, what they label the "dangers of certainty" and the "hegemony of belief" (Bineham, 1989, 153). This is done by promoting the free exchange of ideas where "people get meanings from other people through communication" (Brummett, 1976). To that point, this view is certainly in agreement with Ehninger and with the invitational first part of Kelly's creativity cycle. A major problem for relativism, however, is that it fails to guard against and even exacerbates the anxiety of skepticism, as described above, because there is no phase in this rhetorical process for retightening

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7 See Chapter Two, pp. 58-62 for a more detailed description of the relativistic view of rhetorical epistemology.
constructs and providing any stability or certainty.

Furthermore, the relativistic position, while it may avoid the problems of authoritarianism, is susceptible to falling into the equally problematic trap of the tyranny of the majority. If truth is ultimately unknowable and ethical values are created by the meanings of the majority of people interpreting a given situation, then the democratic ideal, which Scott (1967, 10) insists is necessary for rhetoric to be potent, is preserved, but at the cost of silencing any dissenting, prophetic voices that dare to challenge the consensus view. How can a rhetoric of social amelioration ever be possible if the viability of a visionary stance that differs from the majority view is declared automatically unacceptable? Such a position clearly violates the principals of correction and the creativity cycle.

The most telling evidence against the constructivist theory is found, ironically, in the very effectiveness of the persuasive rhetoric that consensus theorists reject. History provides ample evidence of visionary, prophetic spokespersons who have changed the course of human history by espousing unpopular stands for their beliefs against overwhelming odds, often paying with their lives. How can consensus theory explain the rhetorical success of such a progressive and courageous minority position?
Prophets by definition must rely on a claim to truth or wisdom that has not yet been granted consensus status by the majority of their audience. This illustrates the major problem for consensus theory, namely, the lack of any final arbiter of truth. Scott says that what "cannot be done away within a community is commitment to the norms of that community" (1977, 263). He then attempts to address the cognitive minority issue, and seemingly contradicts himself by quoting Popper's claim that tolerance is "one of the most important principles of humanitarian and egalitarian ethics." This is contradictory because constructivism rejects any claim for such an unchanging value in its repudiation of the traditional rhetorical notion of prior truth being made effective through persuasion (Scott, 1967, 10).

This is not to say that tolerance is not a worthy and important value. A major premise of this analysis based on Ehninger and Kelly is obviously founded on tolerance. The point is that a major argument for consensus theory is based on the assumption that tolerance is guaranteed only by the consensus view, and this is an assumption that needs to be examined.

Thomas Russman (1987) presents a very thorough and convincing argument that skepticism should not be equated with tolerance. The essence of Russman's
analysis is that skepticism happened to be the philosophical position used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to combat the intolerance of religious persecution, and this "helped give skepticism a high moral sheen it would otherwise have lacked" (1987, 98). Russman argues for a more positive approach to tolerance as a value based on conviction rather than skepticism because such a position can be used to defend against both dogmatic and skeptical arguments for intolerant positions.

Russman argues that pure relativism falls prey to the dilemma of Cartesian anxiety, namely, believing that objectivism and subjectivism are the only two alternatives upon which rhetorical theory and epistemology can be based. He proposes a third alternative that can draw on the most creative features of both,

... another form of foundationalism that does not suffer from the intolerance of formal foundationalism. This informal foundationalism makes possible the grounding of our convictions in favor of toleration and individual liberties in sources beyond conventions. (1987, 107, emphasis added)

When applied to rhetorical epistemology, Russman's argument supports the position that perspective realism offers a middle position between dogmatism and relativism. Rom Harre says:

Russman's 'third way' leads between the sterile
formalist foundationalism of the empiricist tradition and the excessive relativism of those who think that all knowledge is framework bound. While conceding the necessary role of concept in perception he shows how the growing sense that there is an objectivity to our experience of the world can be supported.\(^8\)

I will explore below what the other sources "beyond convention" could be upon which a tolerant public ethic can be based.

Realism

Two issues need to be addressed with regard to the realist position on rhetorical epistemology and narrative. First, while perspective realism's insistence that physical reality exists independently of human perception makes intuitive sense and relieves much of the anxiety created by radical skepticism, the claim that values also exist independently of human beliefs and perceptions of them is more problematic. For example, it is not hard to conceive of a tree or another person continuing to exist when I have no physical sensations of them, but it is much more difficult to understand where or how tolerance could exist if no human being were thinking about it, talking about it, or practicing it at a given point in time. The persistent ontological question is that if ethical values exist

\(^8\) On the dust cover to Russman's *Prospectus for the Triumph of Realism*. 

independent of human consciousness, where or how do they exist?

Perspective realism's response to that question is to argue for a doctrine of relationality that posits universal values in a "deep ontological level," that is, in the essential fabric of human existence as communal beings. Remember that Cherwitz and Hikins argue that everything is what it is by virtue of its relationship to the rest of the universe (see Chapter Two, p. 64). The universalism and holism of this theory is very appealing, but the unanswered question, because realism strongly privileges rhetorical description of reality over social construction, is how those relationships are created.

The theoretical issues raised by such questions are of great importance, especially the interrelated notions of rhetoric and spirituality that they imply or at least allow, an issue I will explore in depth below. For now, I simply argue that Cherwitz and Hikins' claim that the "definition of relation as the progenitors of universals is to have uncovered the last major component of that discussion" (1986, 146) is premature and unsatisfactory, and especially that it is more evidence of the need for a spiritual/imaginative dimension of rhetorical theory. I will develop this argument in Chapter Four, but my concern is that, as it now stands, relationality stops
short of solving the epistemic problem because (1) it
does not explain the origins of relationships and
values; and (2) is not an holistic rhetorical theory
(that is, one that includes pathos and logos) that can
address the resistance to demythologization.

The second issue has to do with the role of emotion
in the rhetorical process. One of the dynamics that
makes discussion of ethical situations so difficult is
the emotional investment persons have in their own
taken-for-granted perspective on a given issue. The
strength of perspective realism is that by allowing for
differences in perspective to account for both pluralism
and various levels of truth claims, perspective realism
is compatible with the dialogic spirit of correction and
the creativity cycle.

The problem, raised by Cherwitz and Hikins
themselves, is that the dialogic process is not very
amenable to use with extremely dogmatic or prejudiced
people (1986, 108). My claim is that this is the case
because, at least in part, realism is grounded in a
totally rational philosophy and has not adequately
addressed the emotional or non-rational dynamic in human
nature and rhetoric. This is an issue I will address in
Chapter Four, developing a relational theory of mythic

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9 That is, belief, true belief, and justified true belief.
rhetoric that includes a sound spiritual/imaginative component.

**Moral Development**

In this section I turn to a critique of the theories of moral development described in Chapter Two (pp. 65-74), namely the hierarchical, participatory, and a middle position between the two. The most obvious criticism of the hierarchical approach to moral development is that by definition it rejects the bilateral, dialogical premise of correction. Like Weaver, Kohlberg assumes that those who have achieved a "higher" level of moral development have a right and a duty to influence the morality of others. That same attitude may also explain the exclusion of women from Kohlberg's study and the small percentage (5%) of the population (one would have to presume all men) who are expected in Kohlberg's model to achieve the highest level of moral development.

Neither Campbell nor Kohlberg address the epistemological question directly but seem to assume that the universal nature of their highest moral constructs are intuitively true. In Chapter Four I will advance some arguments for why I believe they are right about that, but the failure or unwillingness to support that assumption or to expose it to critical examination
is another example of the dogmatic elitism that is unacceptable in this approach.

While Gilligan's call for total collaboration is an understandable reaction to dogmatic and patriarchal systems of ethics that have far too long been in power, her participatory approach is also in many ways another version of constructivism that swings the pendulum back too far in the direction of relativism and skepticism. This is the case because in this view there are no a priori universal codes or values. Values are in a constant state of flux because they are socially constructed, situational, and continually revised and developed within each new context by the participants.

Another indication of the over-reaction to hierarchical concepts is the tendency of Gilligan and many feminists to mischaracterize persuasion as only hierarchical when, in fact, most contemporary theories of argument (for example, Ehninger, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca) affirm the need for tolerance, agreement, and collaboration. This basic point of agreement between these two rhetorical theories is an indication of the possibility of a middle position between the hierarchical and participatory models of moral development that I will develop further in the next chapter.
Hauerwas' argument for a public morality appears to offer more balance between epistemological certainty and participation in the production and transmission of the community's narrative because it has the ring of authority we confer on religious myths and value systems. However, upon closer examination, this view is lacking for the same reason social constructivism or consensus theory is lacking. Even though it is based on the authority of a religious community, Hauerwas' value system is still subject to the limitations of any system codified and transmitted by a fallible human community.

When the final source of values is the social community, there is no ultimate arbiter of truth between differently constructed social realities, be they secular or religious realities. My proposed solution to this dilemma is to broaden the concept of religious authority, much as Fowler does, to incorporate the notion of a transcendent, universal community to which all individuals and societies, including different religious communities, belong. Fowler argues that

identification with a universal community ... does not negate or require denial of our membership in more limited groups with their particular "stories" and centering values. But it does mean that our limited, parochial communities cannot be revered and served as though they have ultimate value. (1981, 23)10

10 See Chapter Two, pp. 71-74 for a detailed description of Fowler's theory.
This approach offers freedom from the limitations of reified myths that promise security in certainty that they cannot deliver. This middle, relational position also offers a standard by which we can judge the truth of moral values based on the inherent communal nature of being human, thus superceding the irreconcilable differences and shortcomings of all culturally biased value systems, be they secular or religious.

My contention is that this universal community is very similar to the concept of relationality. With the addition of the spiritual/imaginative dimension, perspective realism and the values that emerge from its relational logic offer both a source of ethical knowledge and a rhetorical/communal model for discovering it. Consequently, a critical element of the development in the next chapter of the synthesis of the hierarchical and participatory models will be the inclusion of the important role of the spiritual and imaginative dimensions.

**Spiritual/Imaginative Dimension**

Tukey's theory of the spiritual, described in Chapter Two, addresses several of the concerns raised by

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11 See Chapter Four, p. 130 for clarification of the distinction between "universal community" and "universal audience."
the relativistic and dogmatic positions because Tukey
presumes an understanding of human nature that is
holistic and allows for extra-rational influences on
human values and behavior. Rather than elevating the
importance of reason and rhetoric by defining humans as
"rhetorical animals," as the constructivists do, Tukey
goes to the other extreme and emphasizes, perhaps
overemphasizes, the mystical, spiritual aspect of human
nature.

I say overemphasizes because one problem with the
spiritual/imaginative approach is that it seems to
require a willingness to surrender rational control of
our ethical behavior.12 This would be fine if we had a
guarantee that to do so would always result in an
orderly transfer of power to an ethical, just, source of
being. Such optimism is, of course, unrealistic because
history, as Hikins (1989) points out, is full of
irrational atrocities done in the name of various gods,
and the failure to address this concern is a serious
flaw in Tukey's theory. My proposed solution to this
problem is a theory of relationality based on a
creative, bilateral dialogue between spirit and reason
in which neither lays claim to ultimate or exclusive

12 Tukey, remember, argues that "thought must be
transcended" and the spirit "defeat the ego at its own
game" (see Chapter Two, pp. 75 & 78).
superiority.

The challenge to balance these two emphases and to benefit from the insights of both is illustrated by the divergent inventional approaches of Hikins and Tukey, one stressing reason and the other spirit as instrumental in loosening constructs and entertaining new visions of a better social reality. Both of these views point toward an important rhetorical dimension in how our values and beliefs are shaped. The truth as to the impact of reason and spirit on the process lies somewhere between these two extremes, that is, that humans are neither exclusively rational-rhetorical animals nor purely spiritual animals, but some combination of the two.

An important concern in developing the relational theory in the next chapter will be to strive for a genuine balance between spirit and reason. One indication of the common ground between the two is suggested by Grassi's inclusion of intuitively grasping relationships as a form of knowing, an approach that lends itself to applying imaginative processes to relationality as a balance to its predominantly rational approach.

Encouraging a productive dialogue between spirit and reason raises again the issue of intrapersonal rhetoric because imaginative/spiritual experiences are
primarily intrapersonal experiences. An adequate procedure for doing intrapersonal rhetorical criticism, that is, a methodology for evaluating spiritual and imaginative experiences and truth claims, is an important dimension of a spiritual/ethical rhetorical theory. Without such a method there are no standards by which to evaluate truths "revealed" through intrapersonal religious experiences. The concept of relationality provides such a standard and will be instrumental in addressing this issue in the next chapter.

In dealing with the importance of the spiritual dimension on the rhetorical/epistemological process, every theory has some weaknesses. The task of describing accurately a mysterious, spiritual, extra-rational influence through the limited, finite, rational language structure we have at our disposal is, by definition, impossible. The importance of a spiritual/imaginative rhetoric, however, is that it reminds us of the powerful influence of the imaginative/extra-rational within human nature. We are intuitively aware that our emotions are powerfully persuasive and that there is a mysterious quality to life that cannot be explained rationally, whether we

13 See Chapter Two, pp. 77-78 for the earlier discussion of this issue.
call it spirit, God, Being, relationality, intuition, imagination, myth, or by some other name.

In order to address such ambiguous dynamics that defy empirical methods of verification, a holistic rhetorical theory must incorporate the principles of openness that are contained in Ehninger and Kelly's theories of rhetorical epistemology. We dare not let our desire for certitude blind us to the mysterious qualities of Being when dealing with religious myths. Russman argues for tolerance toward ambiguity in dealing with material reality, but surely what he says is even more true with regard to how we treat our secular and especially religious myths, and worth repeating here:

The mysteries remain great, and we should not assume that they will be readily solved by pursuing normal research as defined by current theory. From the beginning, great problems have stalked our efforts to force the universe into the shape of available mathematics. . . . Physics tolerates a great deal of mathematical untidiness; why can't philosophy? . . . Perhaps we will never have tidy connections. . . . We should simply relax and be patient. Prematurely forcing the issue creates problems that push us to ever greater extremes. (1987, 39-40)

Including the concept of Being in rhetorical theory has serious implications for ethics and for rhetorical theory and criticism, and there is a need to integrate the common concerns which acknowledge that importance. This common epistemological thread is what unites all of the diverse theories I have been discussing. I will
argue, therefore, in the following chapter that
Campbell's notion of the "metaphor of the planet,"
Kohlberg's universal stage of moral development,
Gilligan's notion of participation, Tukey's concept of
acting from the "perspective of the universe," and the
concept of relationality and perspective realism share a
common spiritual foundation, that is, they are grounded
in the reality of deep ontological relationships that
transcend socially constructed values and barriers to
communication and unity.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS: RELATIONAL RHETORIC AND HOMILETICAL THEORY

In this chapter I will summarize the conclusions drawn from the material analyzed in the preceding chapters and use those conclusions to develop a relational epistemic rhetorical theory of narrative that explains: (1) how and why religious and secular myths are defined and used in significantly different ways; (2) why the same consistent criteria should be used to judge both secular and religious myths epistemically; (3) how the theory of relationality, when expanded to include the spiritual/imaginative dimension, can provide this epistemic and ethical criteria; and (4) the role of myth in shaping values and identity. In the second part of the chapter, I will apply this relational theory specifically to homiletics as a form of rhetorical praxis for promoting moral and faith development and social amelioration. This section will not focus on theological criteria, but on philosophical and rhetorical criteria for a holistic understanding of human nature and narrative rhetoric that can address the
Characteristics of Secular and Religious Myths

Both secular and religious myths share many characteristics because of their common mythic nature. Where differences emerge in how the two kinds of myths are identified and used, the dissimilarities are largely due to the variations in psychological, moral, and faith development of those individuals and communities who use them. I will explore those differences below, but first want to discuss the common characteristics.

As myths, both those of the secular and religious variety are by definition symbolic or metaphorical in nature and therefore not intended to be interpreted literally. Because of the inherent quality of pointing-toward, as opposed to definitively describing, reality, both types of myths are social creations of either secular or religious communities and are used, among other things, to establish identity and values. As a result of these features, both kinds of myths are inherently subject to demythologization, which means that learning to interpret them symbolically, rather than literally, is an expected stage in the developmental process. Perelman's definition of "formal justice" is supportive of this argument for treating
religious and secular myths in a consistent fashion. Perelman defines formal justice as "a principle of action in accordance with which beings of one and the same essential category must be treated in the same way" (1963, 16). A consistent standard of evaluation, which I will describe below, is required for both secular and religious myths because both are essentially metaphorical, symbolic, social creations that define values and identity.

As Hauerwas reminds us, every community has a narrative, and the myths included in these narratives tell us who the community is and what its values are. These communal myths, both secular and religious, are a concrete display of our connectedness (1981, 4). MacIntyre describes how stories show our connectedness when he says, "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'" (1981, 216).  

\footnote{During the time I was writing this chapter, I experienced this connectedness in a concrete way. While driving one morning to an appointment for which I was very late, I drove by a little girl carrying a school book bag, walking along the side of a busy state highway. I was curious because she seemed to be walking away from the nearest school. I drove by her because I was in a hurry, but before I had gone a quarter of a mile, my concern for her became stronger than my need to be on time; and I turned around and went back to check on her. She told me that she was in kindergarten and had missed her school bus, and she was walking to her}
The differences between secular and religious myths are in how they are used. Those differences begin to emerge when the identity and values of local, limited communities are universalized and imposed on others beyond the community of origin. Depending on their use by persons in different stages of moral and faith development, the most significant distinctions between secular and religious myths can be characterized as follows:

**Secular Myths:** (1) are creations of interpersonal communication; (2) address matters of being; (3) are not essential to the security of identity vested in core values; (4) remain symbolic and are easily demythologized; (5) are subject to empirical critique; and (6) lose moral authority when seen as "just stories" (Rowland, 1990, 103 and Tillich, 1957, 50).

**Religious Myths,** by comparison, (1) are interpersonal creations of religious communities but often involve *intrapersonal* revelation as well; (2)
address matters of being and Being; (3) are essential to the security/certainty of core values; (4) often become reified and resistant to demythologization; (5) are difficult to critique empirically; and (6) have the moral authority of the community plus divine authority.

The differences in these characteristics are attributable to two factors—the quality of the moral and faith development of those using the myths, which is, in turn, closely related to the psychological need for certainty fulfilled by believing the myths to be literally/historically true. The deeper this psychological need for certainty, the greater the differences we find in the characteristics attributed to the two kinds of myths. Consequently, the more need there is for rhetors using these myths to be sensitive to how these distinctions affect discourse and to issues of identification with their audiences.

How Criteria are Applied in Discourse

As the research data in Chapters One and Two shows, the majority of Americans tend to apply epistemic

2 The distinction between being and Being used in this comparison is the differentiation made by Grassi and Heidegger described in Chapters One and Two--"being" (lower case "b") refers to existence as we know and participate in it at the finite, human level, and "Being" (upper case "B") refers to the spiritual dimension or Being itself, the source of life of which all creation is a part and vice versa.
criteria to secular and religious myths in consistent and similar ways. By that I mean that for most Americans the decision to accept a myth as true or untrue is made in the same way for both types of myths. This also means that both types of myths are passed on from one generation to the next, along with the increasing ability and maturity to use the principles of correction and creativity to interpret and understand the symbolic truths contained in the myths. Empirical and historical criteria are applied to both kinds of myth, promoting intellectual growth and open rhetorical argument. However, for some people, this critical process can also lead to the anxiety caused by "broken myths," to use Tillich's term (1957,50), which lose their authority to shape values and identity in an unambiguous way.

Differences in how mythic truth claims are evaluated emerge because religious myths function for many people to provide a sense of security and certainty in an ever-changing, unstable world and function as "barrier[s] against [the] naked terror [and] 'fundamental anxiety' caused by our knowledge and fear of death."3 For that reason, religious myths are often reified and closed to any and all critical inquiry by

3 See Chapter Two, pp. 45-46.
the various dogmatic rhetorical strategies discussed in Chapter Two. In essence, the very questions and observations essential to correction and creative thought that we apply and encourage with regard to secular myths are often discouraged or even forbidden when it comes to religious myths.

For example, almost all of us eventually apply the laws of physics to the Santa Claus myth and deduce the impossibility of flying supersonic reindeer visiting every house in the world in one night, and/or the incompatibility of a fat man and skinny chimneys. But according to Gallup et al. for 30-49% of Americans, those same laws of physics are suspended when it comes to Moses parting the Red Sea or Jesus walking on water.4 Campbell illustrates this phenomenon in his discussion of the story of the ascension of Jesus:

We know that Jesus could not have ascended to heaven because there is no physical heaven anywhere in the universe. Even ascending at the speed of light, Jesus would still be in the galaxy. Astronomy and physics have simply eliminated that as a literal, physical possibility (1988, 56).

This is a case where the problem with Fisher's concept of narrative fidelity and probability becomes apparent. Where well-established secular or religious myths can pass the tests of narrative fidelity and probability

4 See Chapter Two, pp. 37-40 for a summary of these findings.
with ease due to their taken-for-granted status in a particular community, Fisher cannot account for the unbiased critique of outside observers because he acknowledges no external reality as a criterion of mythic veracity.

To stay with the two examples above, narrative fidelity affirms the Santa Claus myth in a group of believing pre-schoolers because their previous experience of it is that it is true, and within the closed system of a pre-school worldview, it is also internally consistent. But an older and wiser seven-year-old can raise questions about this myth based on his/her broader experience and perception of inconsistencies with external reality. Likewise, the miracles of Jesus are accepted as true by a closed community of Christian believers, but can be viewed differently by someone outside that community who can see the failure of a literal interpretation to correspond with his/her experience of reality. These differences in how criteria are applied to religious and secular myths have significant implications for rhetorical theory and practice.

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5 See pp. 93-98 for a more detailed discussion of Fisher's criteria for evaluating narratives.
Implications of Different Criteria

When different characteristics and levels of authority are attributed to religious and secular myths, these inconsistencies can create important communication problems. For example, when a rhetor is using a myth symbolically and significant numbers of people in his/her audience are interpreting it literally, major communication and ethical problems can arise. Berger, for instance, raises the question of how honest it is to tell a frightened child that everything all right when the parent knows full well that it is not (1969, 67-68). Most of us would agree that such a "lie" is appropriate at times, but that ultimately, in order to become a responsible adults, one must face squarely the existential truths and threats of life.

Likewise, a preacher who allows his/her congregation to think that he/she is using the myth of the fall of Adam and Eve literally may be communicating an unintended sexist message, or at best a mixed message about female-male relationships. Or, if the preacher does the same with the second coming of Christ, she/he may be promoting a lack of human responsibility for social amelioration, namely that God will soon/eventually intervene and right all injustices—therefore humans need only be concerned about their own personal salvation and not issues of social justice.
The discrepancy in how myths are intended and interpreted is more relevant to the use of religious myths, of course, because of the much wider range of beliefs and interpretations of them. While one can safely assume that most Americans treat their secular myths epistemically at the level of "belief," the research data shows that a significant portion of that population hold their religious myths unquestioningly at the level of "true belief." This is understandably more prevalent among religious communities, and therefore a very significant issue for homiletical theory and praxis, a point I will return to below.

We must remember that religious myths, like secular ones, are products of social communities, even if they are religious communities, and that all human communities are fallible. Failure to apply the same consistent criteria to religious myths often makes them irrelevant victims of skepticism and/or dangerous divisive elements in the human community. The major loss in this process is that religious myths lose the potential of communicating the mystery and unity of the Universal community or of participation in Being itself. Instead (as described in Chapters One and Two), the holistic communicative power can be turned into an equally powerful negative force of dualism that destroys community instead of building it. If the truth claims
of a particular community are set over against those of another community in the absence of a consistent rhetorical standard for evaluating those claims, the conflicting world views can result in the kind of ideologically and religiously inspired violence we have witnessed in such places as Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, and the Middle East.

A Consistent Standard of Judgment

Having established that all myths are products of communities, that myths can only be challenged and replaced by considering alternative myths, and that the principles of correction and creativity are therefore the most appropriate way to approach mythic rhetoric, a key remaining question has to do with establishing a consistent standard by which the truth claims of both secular and religious myths can be evaluated. Given the inherent commonalities of secular and religious myths, it is only reasonable to expect that communication would be facilitated if the same standards of epistemic judgement were consistently applied to both types of myths. In other words, if most Americans are willing to apply the process of critical inquiry to the interpretation of secular myths, should we not also treat religious myths in a similar fashion?
Because the most significant function of myths is to generate and maintain community identity and values, things that cannot be measured empirically, the standard of evaluation must be appropriate to the content of myths, namely philosophical in nature and focused on relationships. The philosophical concept of relationality meets those criteria and can be applied to both the content and the rhetorical style of myths. Simply put, my claim is that if we understand relationality to include the deep ontological connections implied in such spiritual/imaginative terms as Being and Universal Community, we can use it as a standard to evaluate the truth claims of values communicated in all kinds of myths and also the validity of the rhetorical style in which those myths are used.

The relational standard is this: if a myth, by its content and style, promotes unity and open communication among individuals and diverse communities, based on principles like Ehninger's correction and Kelly's creative invention, it is true. Truth here is defined as correspondence to the pluralistic, interconnected, communal nature of existence. By the same token, if a myth promotes division and dualism and individualism, it does not correspond to the reality of existence and is therefore untrue.
A brief clarification is necessary here to distinguish the way I am using the term "universal community" from Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's similar-sounding but very different notion of "universal audience." While both concepts function to help make choices about the relative merits of values and arguments, the basis for those decisions is quite different. The universal audience is a mental construct created by a rhetor, a "metaphor which functions as an invention tool" (1969, 285) to choose arguments that will appeal to "reasonable and competent persons." The universal audience can range from one person or oneself, to larger groups, and is subject to biased views of what is reasonable and competent. As one critic points out, "every culture and perhaps every speaker has a different universal audience" (Foss, 1985, 108).

The universal community of Being, by contrast, is intended to describe the relational quality of the ontological bonds that exist as a reality between all humans, and indeed all of creation. While of necessity still metaphorical in nature, because we cannot fully describe metaphysical reality in a logical/rational symbol system, universal community points us toward a rhetorical and ethical standard based on fully democratic and egalitarian participation. Unlike the universal audience, which is not universal at all but by
definition privileges an elitist community of the philosophically inclined, the notion of a truly universal community promotes a totally inclusive rhetoric emphasizing the relationality that defines individuals and particular communities in the broadest possible sense.

Philosophically, the logic behind this approach is that criteria for judging the truth claims of communication are based on the essence of community itself—meaning community understood in its broadest and most egalitarian sense. While dogmatic, authoritarian, closed societies, like the fundamentalist groups described in Chapters Two and Three, are indeed a type of community, they are the very antithesis of the essence of community as defined by the doctrine of relationality.

We are all, at least potentially, rhetorical animals, that is, those who communicate, because we are social beings who live in community. The nature of the word "community" itself reveals the essential relationship of communication to community. But, as I have shown above (pp. 74-81, 114-19), we are more than rhetorical animals. Humans have a more universal connection to other people beyond their own social communities and to the other parts of creation itself, through the participation of our being in the essence of
life, or Being itself. And it is this spiritual/imaginative aspect of human nature that transcends the narrow boundaries of individualism and culturalism, which are the primary sources of reification and the destructive qualities of mythic rhetoric. Relationality in its broadest sense, including the spiritual/imaginative, transcendent, dimension, is the key to overcoming the communication barriers created and/or perpetuated by inconsistent theories of rhetorical/mythic epistemology.

Relationality, then, provides the basis for a public ethic grounded in a principle that transcends any particular community and is therefore beyond the conventions of consensus as the arbiter of truth. Relationality as the standard of truth for both religious and secular myths promotes the kind of mutual respect necessary for the process of correction to function openly and thoroughly, and provides also a standard for making critical decisions in the final stage of the creativity cycle about how and when to adopt or tighten constructs. In other words, spiritual/imaginative relationality is a key concept for making decisions about questions of epistemology related to myths.
Relationality is also useful in clarifying the philosophical reasons that show why Campbell and Kohlberg are correct in their understanding the necessity of a universal community as the highest moral good, and why the hierarchical rhetorical theory, especially in Kohlberg's case, works at cross purposes to this goal.

Campbell and Kohlberg, as I pointed out in Chapter Two (pp. 66-68), share a belief in the kind of unity represented by relationality. Campbell describes this concept when he argues that "the community today is the planet" (1949, 388), a unity that, as in relationality, is inherent in creation (whether one adopts a theistic or contemporary astronomical account of creation) and reflected in the common themes of cosmic unity in myths from diverse cultures all over the world. But this unity has been fractured by human misuse of symbols and myths to promote competition and division between individuals and communities.

In this regard, Campbell's findings support the theories of human nature of such diverse scholars as Burke, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Gilligan, and Foss and Griffin. In all of these works, the unity of the universal community is the natural state of Being from which, to use the Judeo-Christian Edenic metaphor,
humankind has fallen. Campbell, therefore, describes the rhetorical goal of recapturing this natural state of relationality when he says, "the great deed of the supreme hero is to come to the knowledge of this unity in multiplicity and then to make it known" (1949, 40, emphasis added). Compare that view with Foss's and Griffin's description of Starhawk's similar rhetorical theory or responsibility:

Once individuals are aware of their power, available through their connection to the ultimate life force, they are held responsible for using it for transformation of a rhetoric of domination. (1992, 339, emphasis added)

The differences between the participatory rhetorical theories and the hierarchical approach of Kohlberg now begin to emerge more clearly. Even though the goal of unity in a universal community is very similar, the vehicle for achieving the goal is so different that for Kohlberg it becomes circular and self-defeating. Where Campbell et al. posit rhetoric as a holistic, participatory vehicle for "coming to knowledge" of the inherent unity or relationality of Being, Kohlberg's epistemology is of a sterile, abstract unity imposed by human invention and argument.

Kohlberg's goal, therefore, is compatible with the participatory approach, but rhetorically ineffective because it fails to utilize all available means of persuasion. By that I mean that Kohlberg and other
hierarchical theories rely almost exclusively on rational, logical arguments and ignore the powerful appeals to pathos and ethos that the more holistic theories of participatory and narrative rhetoric afford. I would argue that one of the major reasons for Kohlberg's finding that only 5% of the population achieve the highest stage of moral development is his narrow understanding of epistemology that ignores two-thirds of the rhetorical tools at its disposal. Where Kohlberg advocates an epistemology of intellectual assent to the concept of relationality, relational rhetoric is based on knowledge as an experience of relationality through participation in egalitarian, dialogic, creative communities.

These kinds of communities are described by Gilligan and Fowler (see pp. 68-73). In authentic communities, relationality is experienced because tolerance, correction, and creativity are encouraged as the guiding ethical and rhetorical principles of both the universal and particular community. Fowler specifically emphasizes that identification with a universal community does not negate the value of belonging to more limited cultural or religious communities, as long as the two are kept in their proper

6 See Kohlberg's notion of cognitive conflict described in Chapter Two, p. 67.
perspective of creative tension and growth, meaning that the universal community of Being always has priority over particular communities of being (Fowler, 1981, 23.) Fowler is very clear that the epistemological process of coming to know oneself as a part of the universal community takes place in particular, supportive communities that are based on active listening to each person's "stories and visions of faith" (1981, 296), a thoroughly democratic approach that does not privilege intellectual superiority but encourages and allows everyone to tell her/his own story.

The following section of this chapter demonstrates how a theory of spiritual/imaginative relationality can inform and improve how particular community values and identity are generated and maintained by myths. This is done by providing a consistent moral and epistemic standard whereby those myths can be evaluated. In the concluding section, I will apply this relational theory to narrative preaching as a model for rhetorical praxis that promotes moral development and social amelioration.

**Myths, Values, and Identity**

I have demonstrated above how the types of myths a community lives by and how those myths are treated are major factors in determining the community's identity and values. If, for example, a particular Christian
community chooses to identify itself by dogmatically clinging to a literal, closed interpretation of what Jewett (1973) calls the myth of Zealous Nationalism, the values of that community will be self-righteous, militaristic, and imperialistic. Jewett points out that such a community may also be apathetic toward its responsibility for justice issues. This comes, as indicated above, from assuming that the outcome of the inevitable cosmic confrontation between good and evil at Armageddon, as portrayed by the book of "Revelation," is assured, and therefore human efforts at social amelioration are superfluous. Neither alternative—aggression or apathy—has desirable consequences for the interdependent global community of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and neither is compatible with the tenets of correction, creativity, and relationality.

By contrast, adoption of Prophetic Realism, Jewett's label for the alternative interpretation of the Judeo-Christian myth, focuses attention on the fallible nature of all people and all particular, social communities. Prophetic Realism emphasizes the essential need for cooperation, mutual respect and concern for all parts of creation, especially other people, and defines the role of humans as recipients of the knowledge of the universal community. We are, by this interpretation of reality, potential participants in this universal
community by nature of our interconnectedness (relationality) and therefore agents (prophets) of the social amelioration that will/can transform potential relationality into instantiated relationality.

The conflict between the antithetical truth claims of Zealous Nationalism and Prophetic Realism, two well-established Judeo-Christian myths, both grounded in biblical/divine authority, illustrates one of the most important epistemic challenges of mythic rhetoric. This kind of ideological/theological dilemma also illustrates, as I will discuss below, the necessity for a theory such as the doctrine of relationality that provides an impartial standard for choosing between two contradictory myths that both claim the same religious authority.

Intrapersonal Rhetorical Issues of Epistemology

When two diametrically opposed versions of reality both claim divine authority (an all-too-common reason for the kinds of religious conflicts and wars typified by the on-going hostilities in places like Northern Ireland, the Middle East, and the former Yugoslavia) the need for a standard by which to evaluate intrapersonal rhetorical claims is clear. This is the case because

7 This community is called the Kingdom of God in the Biblical narrative.
many religious myths lay claim to truth based on divine revelation, an intrapersonal communication event confined within the recipient that transpires between Being\(^8\) and the individual being. While listening in on this internal dialogue to evaluate its claim to knowledge is impossible, an unbiased standard like relationality provides an external criteria for making such a judgment. Such a standard of judgment avoids the impossible, endless ad hominem arguments over the favored status of the prophet and instead puts the focus of the inquiry where it belongs, on the values and consequences inherent in the myth or revelation itself.

**Implications of Potential and Realized Relationality**

The above discussion is, of course, an oversimplification of the process. If the ultimate truth of cosmic relationality were as readily apparent as the above indicates, why would anyone resist it? The reality of the human condition is that we live in the creative (or destructive) tension between the vision of our essential relationality and the fragmented nature of our actual existence. This has two important implications for mythical rhetorical theory and epistemology.

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\(^8\) Other terminology used for Being, for example, include Tukey's use of "Spirit" and Starhawk's "Goddess."
First, the two extreme rhetorical theories I have been comparing—dogmatic/hierarchical and relativistic/participatory—reflect this tension between potential and realized relationality. The participatory approach, on one hand, focuses attention on the potential or essential quality of cosmic unity, while the hierarchical approach puts more emphasis on the "fallen" or fragmented state of human existence. This difference is highlighted in Foss's and Griffin's (1992) comparison of feminist and patriarchal rhetorical theories. The former, represented by Starhawk, stress experiencing unity as ultimate reality through mystical and emotional rituals, and the latter, represented by Burke, focuses on restoring a divided, imperfect human existence to wholeness through an intellectual, rhetorical process of recognizing and establishing identification or consubstantiality.

Both the difference and commonality in these two approaches are reflected in Foss's and Griffin's summary of Burke's and Starhawk's definitions of rhetoric. Burke's view of human nature is characterized as "separated from our natural condition by instruments of our own making," while Starhawk's is that "humans are co-essential with their natural condition of immanent value and interconnection, users of mystery, ritual, and power—with to maintain a rhetoric of inherent value"
(Foss and Griffin, 1992, 342, emphasis added). Foss and Griffin add that "perceived separateness from others and from the Goddess, then, is not real . . . " (1992, 333). These two rhetorical approaches differ in method because their starting points and goals differ—one to maintain an ideal state, the other to restore or at least move us closer to our natural, essential condition.

Rather than being an either/or, both approaches are compatible and necessary because, as Foss and Griffin conclude,

> [t]he rhetoric Starhawk describes best is a rhetoric that characterizes the communication that takes place in an atmosphere of equality, support, and affirmation. Burke's theory, on the other hand, is more useful than Starhawk's in describing inter-system rhetoric, the rhetoric that seeks to cross boundaries in order to generate identification when none appears to exist. (1992, 345)

Secondly, the distinction between potential and realized relationality is important because it further illuminates the need for the spiritual/imaginative component in the concept of relationality. As I stated in Chapter Three (p. 109), the claim by Cherwitz and Hikins that relationality is the "last major component" in the search for universals is premature for at least two reasons. Without the spiritual/imaginative dimension, relationality cannot fully address the epistemic issue because (1) it does not explain the origins of the interconnectedness of Being; and (2) it
does not account for a holistic rhetorical theory that can address the powerful attraction of reified communal myths and the persistent strength of human resistance to cosmic unity. The first issue is theological and beyond the scope of this dissertation, but the second is undeniably rhetorical.

The doctrine of relationality as described by Cherwitz and Hikins, because of its primary reliance on logic and reason to motivate acceptance, is rhetorically incomplete for the same basic reasons I discussed above with regard to Kohlberg's theory. Without the spiritual/imaginative dimension to appeal to emotional and ethical factors, relationality cannot effectively address the strong emotional reasons people have for reifying their myths and values. The anxieties of the human condition discussed in Chapters One and Two motivate us to settle for the quasi or even false security of limited communal and religious myths, rather than risking a leap of faith on the potential cosmic unity of a radical spiritual/imaginative relationality.

The rudimentary rhetorical maxim of identification with the audience tells us that because the resistance to changing one's interpretation of religious myths is, at least in part, an emotional issue, the rhetorical response must also include an appeal to pathos and ethos, in addition to reason. The reification of myths
functions intellectually and emotionally to protect core beliefs and values from challenges of alternative myths and values. So presentation of prophetic, new, universal myths of reality requires a holistic rhetorical approach, and the spiritual/imaginative dimension is necessary to provide an effective appeal.

To return to the earlier example, the myth of Zealous Nationalism is very strong because of a conditioned fear of unknown enemies with unfamiliar mythic formulations of reality and of an inherent anxiety about mortality and how to justify our finite existence. To overcome these powerful fears, an alternative myth must utilize a rhetorical approach that involves as much of our being as possible—our imagination and emotions, as well as our minds. This is why I argued earlier (pp. 115-16) for a synthesis between Hikins' and Tukey's notions of intrapersonal rhetoric—namely that an egalitarian dialogue between both spirit and reason is more insightful than either can hope to be alone. Naturally, the more aspects of our being that are used, the more the imaginative powers of the human spirit are fully actualized. This is the rationale behind Grassi's argument for ingenium, Starhawk's use of ritual and altered states of awareness, and other forms of mystical experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. Western preoccupation
with reason and logic has relegated such potential avenues of inquiry to the fringes of rhetorical epistemology—or beyond. But, as I have shown above, since relationality can provide a method for evaluating the insights of both inter- and intra-personal rhetorical events, the scope of our rhetorical inquiry can now be vastly expanded to include spiritual and imaginative discourse.

To explore the realm of mystical experience in general is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but narrative rhetoric is one related and effective vehicle for engaging more of our human potential in the search for knowledge about the meaning of life. Narrative rhetoric invites the listener to come to know the truth of relationality by participating in stories where that potential reality is shared. To illustrate the strengths of such a rhetoric, I now turn to an exploration of how a relational theory of narrative rhetoric can make the practice of homiletics more relevant and responsive to the exigencies of the contemporary pluralistic rhetorical situation.

Homiletical Praxis and Narrative

Richard Jensen (1993) argues convincingly for narrative preaching as a new paradigm for contemporary homiletics. While many homiletics scholars have
advocated for narrative preaching and practitioners have adopted it almost as a popular "fad," Jensen offers a sound theoretical and philosophical analysis explaining why narrative preaching is effective and why it is, therefore, more than just a passing fancy. Jensen describes narrative preaching as a necessary rhetorical response to the twentieth century shift from one communication era to another--namely from the literate (written/print) medium to the post-literate (electronic) communication era.

Communication experts are generally in agreement that there is much about our post-literate culture which is like early oral culture. . . . therefore we can learn much about preaching in our time from the earliest oral era of human communication. People in those cultures thought in stories. Thinking in stories is one way that we can structure sermons for people in a post-literate world. (Jensen, 1993, 9)

Based on this communication paradigm shift, Jensen builds a case for homiletic theory and practice to take seriously the communal and holistic approach that narrative brings to rhetoric.

In this section, I will summarize the rhetorical case for narrative as it applies to contemporary homiletical theory and practice, especially to the need to address the issue of prophetic preaching, reified religious myths, and dogmatic rhetorical style. This discussion will be organized around three rhetorical principles that emerge from this study: (1) the
inherently ambiguous nature of spiritual rhetoric; (2) the embodiment of relationality through solidarity as the goal of preaching; and (3) the holistic appeal of narrative rhetoric as a vehicle for prophetic preaching that promotes moral and faith development and social amelioration.

Ambiguity and Spiritual Issues

However one feels about the ambiguity of postmodern existence, uncertainty is a constant reality when dealing with questions of Being. Because, as Weatherhead (1965, 36-43), Rose (1992, 3-4) and others remind us, "God is ultimately beyond our knowing," in dealing with theological matters the principles of correction and creativity must be applied. When finite beings engage in discourse about Being itself there is no absolute certainty, no "justified true belief" to use the terminology of traditional philosophical epistemology. For rhetoric and homiletics, this means that Craddock's call for preaching to be "eventful dialectic, not closed rhetoric" (1981, 129-32) is both theologically and rhetorically sound.

Rodney Kennedy reinforces the need for rhetoric and especially sermons to correspond to reality when he critiques the traditional rational-logical homiletical model for creating an "aura of unreality [because] life
lacks the very things [traditional] sermon method includes: order, coherence, clarity" (1990, 78).
Kennedy cites the following from Leander Keck in support of this position: "The clearly wrought sermon seems to imply that truth is rational, consistent, and reducible to a limited number of points" (1978, 42). This position is more eloquently developed by Frederick Beuchner in the following description of the preacher's task:

If he [sic] does not make real to them [the congregation] the human experience of what it is to cry into the storm and receive no answer, to be sick at heart and find no healing, then he becomes the only one there who seems not to have had that experience . . . . As much as anything else, it is their experience of the absence of God that has brought them there in search of his [sic] presence, and if the preacher does not speak of that and to that, then he becomes like the captain of a ship who is the only one aboard who either does not know that the waves are twenty feet high and the decks awash or will not face up to it so that anything else he tries to say by way of hope and comfort and empowering becomes suspect on the basis of that one crucial ignorance or disingenuousness or cowardice or reluctance to speak in love any truths but the ones that people love to hear. (1977, 40-41)

In response to this exigence of ambiguity, Kelly's conditions for promoting creative or inventional new constructs for making sense of life are very instructive for understanding the temptation for preachers to speak only what people love to hear. Remember that Kelly lists three negative conditions--threat, preoccupation with old material, and the absence of a safe environment
or laboratory for experimentation—as those that inhibit the creative process (1963, 166-70). By inference, the positive corollaries of those attitudes—tolerance, imagination, and a community that is supportive of cooperative, critical inquiry—are the guiding principles for the atmosphere that creative preachers want to engender both by the style and content of their preaching.

The ambiguous nature of spiritual/imaginative issues also means that metaphor and narrative are the most appropriate vehicles for indirect discourse about Being, as Grassi (1980, 1986) so thoroughly and eloquently argues. Grassi, as I indicated in Chapter Two, contends that rational thinking is incapable of comprehending the ambiguous nature of Being itself and argues instead for ingenium as "a basic capacity to grasp what is common or similar in things—to see relationships or make connections," a way of knowing that Grassi describes as a "grasping" or "letting appear" (1976). Grassi argues that the holistic approach is crucial because reason alone is incapable of dealing with the ultimate, transcendental or cosmological matters of life.

Grassi specifically addresses the distinction between Being and being, and says that while the senses and reason are adequate for comprehending being, we can
only experience Being, which is always transcendental and ambiguous, through metaphor and symbols. This requires "primal suspension" of our normal, rational, orderly approach to the world because Being is paradoxical and ambiguous. Through our metaphors we can attempt to describe some aspects of the mysterious unknown nature of Being by imaginative comparison with what we know of being. The metaphorical nature of religious discourse is also the reason behind Craddock's claim cited earlier that "ideas and concepts are of little effect against images, and scolding does even less. Images must be replaced, and this comes only gradually, by other images" (1985, 201). In short, the ambiguous nature of religious discourse necessitates a focus on experiencing Being, not knowing it in the traditional, intellectual epistemic sense. This brings us to a discussion of narrative preaching and solidarity.

**Relationality and Solidarity**

Narrative preaching enhances the participatory nature of the communication process. Because of its bilateral and ambiguous style, narrative preaching can address the difficult issue of how to promote

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9 For a more complete discussion of Grassi, see Chapter Two, pp. 75-77.
identification and dialogue in what is still a very monologic style of communication. By sharing in a genuine spirit of inquiry and affirming the positive qualities of theological ambiguity, the preacher can be seen as an authentic fellow pilgrim in the theological adventure. This promotes solidarity, identification, and trust, all qualities that will enhance the effectiveness of the discourse.

Solidarity is, however, a more significant issue than a mere rhetorical strategy. As noted in Chapter Two, Smith argues that solidarity, and not persuasion, is the goal of preaching, and cites Beverly Wildung Harrison in describing "relational connectedness as her [Harrison's] moral and ethical imperative" (1989, 117). Harrison has this to say about solidarity and it's ethical ramifications for social amelioration:

Genuine solidarity involves not mere subjective identification with oppressed people but concrete answerability to them. Solidarity is accountability, and accountability means being vulnerable, capable of being changed by the oppressed, welcoming their capacity to critique and alter our reality . . . . (1985, 244)

The similarities between this argument for vulnerability and openness to change, and Ehninger's theory of self-risk and correction are striking. Recall, according to Ehninger the concept of self-risk and correction has four characteristics: (1) the discourse must be bilateral, that is, a two-way process and not monologic;
(2) it must involve equal initiative and control by all parties involved; (3) it must involve correction, that is, a genuine openness to the other's point of view; and (4) it must include genuine self-risk on the part of all participants, meaning that all parties entering an argument know they could be mistaken in the views they are defending, as well as mistaken in the overall world view to which their beliefs contribute (1970). The ethical dimension only serves to underscore the significance of the practical consequences of adopting such sound rhetorical insights for homiletics.

A key to this process is summed up in Rose's (1992, 3-4) insight that sharing the exegetical experience with the community is at the heart of narrative preaching. Unlike traditional logo-centric preaching, based on a one-way hierarchical model of persuasion illustrated by Killinger's (1985, 49) and Billings' (see Liebman, 1983, 37) dogmatic descriptions of the preaching process referred to earlier (see pp. 54 and 103), narrative preaching is metaphorical and open ended.

Narrative preaching allows and invites participation in stories at a variety of emotional and intellectual levels, affording individuals opportunities to engage the story at different places while sharing a common experience. The same story can also speak to the
same person in different ways at different points in time, depending on the particular needs and level of faith development he/she brings to the story at any given moment. Narrative preaching meets the criteria for creative constructing when the preacher trusts the story and the listener to engage in free dialogue and resists the strong temptation to offer predetermined explanations of what the story "means."

Kennedy describes how the ethos created by a narrative preaching style can build community in this way:

... character and culture are both products of metaphor. The preacher is granted authority by virtue of tradition, position, and charisma. Derived credibility, however, is at least partially determined by the metaphors the preacher employs. The metaphors are context-dependent and the audience must decide whether or not to grant legitimacy and authority to the reality offered by the metaphor. The preacher may choose, like other rhetors, to rely upon traditional and positional authority. She may, on the other hand, risk offering new ways of viewing the world. ... The shared risk in offering the metaphor for the audience's unpacking, creates the potential of intimacy and community. (1990, 247)

Rose describes this process as one that "invites participation through identification [that] aims to replace old image with new image, old symbol with new symbol, old myth with new myth . . ." (1992, 4). This model is in keeping with Hauerwas' and Fowler's arguments described in Chapter Two, namely that values are not learned by coercion, but by participation in the
foundational narratives of one's community in a supportive "climate of developmental expectation (Fowler, 1981, 296)."

Narrative-Prophetic Preaching

As I have argued above, narrative preaching provides a form of holistic, relational rhetoric that appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos. Narrative employs the playful, imaginative dynamic of propositional thinking that Kelly espouses and can therefore be offered in the bilateral spirit of genuine risk without the dogmatic and authoritarian overtones of religiosity or the narrow rational-logical limits of a more traditional homiletical theory. As Craddock points out, myths and images are lodged deeper in our self-understanding than reason and therefore are necessary ingredients in order to challenge and/or replace taken-for-granted myths and images that neither authority nor reason alone can effectively address (1985, 201). This understanding of the function and nature of myth also explains why Ricoeur argues that "metaphor does not produce a new order except by creating rifts in an old order" (1977, 22) and why Lowry maintains that "if they [preachers] can let the text unsettle some familiar

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10 See Chapter Two, pp. 70-74 for a detailed discussion of Fowler's and Hauerwas' work.
conviction by introducing ambiguity and tension, then the text may lead to a more creative solution" (1985, 46).

This creative, inventional use of demythologization means that one of the important skills for preachers, especially in the uncertainty of contemporary times, is to know how to sensitively and accurately assess the level of literalism and security of their hearers. This means being able to distinguish between what Tillich calls the "natural" and "reactive" forms of literalism (1957, 52-53) and to make judgments about the relative strength of the hearer to cope with ambiguity and challenge. This critical discernment is necessary in order to make difficult ethical and rhetorical decisions about when and how much to challenge taken-for-granted myths and beliefs, or in Kelly's terms, when to loosen critical cosmological or theological constructs and when to retighten and/or reaffirm them.

The difficult prophetic process of critical inquiry is made easier through the use of narrative because it promotes identification and solidarity of the rhetor with the audience, as noted above, unlike the traditional confrontive, win/lose approach of the hierarchical model. Participation in narrative promotes

11 See Tillich discussion, Chapter Two, pp. 47-48.
the kind of cooperative prophetic effort Smith describes when she says, "For those who preach from a feminist perspective, one views prophetic words and messages as they arise out of collective experience and wisdom" (1989, 64). This kind of communal invention and therefore ownership of prophetic messages obviously functions to lessen potential threat and resistance to consideration of new constructs and values because it enables a group of equals to examine myths collectively in a creative fashion, thus embodying the essential principles of both Ehninger and Kelly.

A reminder is needed here about resistance to the prophetic process. In any discussion of reconstructing master stories and values the problems associated with relativism and ambiguity discussed earlier must be kept in mind. Many Christians, as demonstrated in the arguments for reification and the research data examined in Chapters One and Two, are not ready to celebrate the ambiguity of a "Postmodern Bible" (Rose, 1992, 3-4) but are indeed quite threatened by such a notion. Threat is, of course, counterproductive to creative communication, and Craddock applies this practical insight to homiletics very well when he reminds us that the goal of preaching is not just "to get something said, but to get something heard" (1985, 167, emphasis added). Sensitivity on the part of the rhetor/preacher
to the level of faith development of the audience and an understanding of the strength of their need for certainty are therefore essential characteristics of effective communication.

Expediting the completion of the communication loop by removing as many barriers as possible to having one's message received is a critical homiletical and rhetorical insight for prophetic preaching. Keeping this basic notion in view serves as a reminder of the dangers of two extremes for the prophetic preacher: (1) that erring on the side of too much caution and failing to challenge taken-for-granted myths that mitigate against relationality is one avenue to failure as an agent for social amelioration; and (2) that the other extreme (promoting too radical a change and dealing insensitively with taken-for-granted myths) also leads to unnecessary resistance and the similar result of failure to accomplish the goals of personal growth in moral and faith development, and therefore in social amelioration as well. The evidence in rhetorical, ethical, and homiletical scholarship is in agreement that while an extensive degree of openness and ambiguity is necessary and desirable in our epistemological treatment of both secular and religious myths, the more extreme forms of both reification and relativism are counterproductive.
In a related vein, the findings of Kohlberg (1981) with regard to resistance to cognitive conflict is instructive at this point. Recall Kohlberg found that most persons were receptive to new values and constructs if they were not too radically different from the taken-for-granted beliefs of the hearers. As the differences between the old and new myths widen, however, the resistance to hearing them also increases (see pp. 65f.). These findings reinforce the importance of understanding and assessing an audience's level of faith development, including their propensity for literalistic interpretation of myth.

Furthermore, solidarity and identification are enhanced, and therefore the likelihood of new constructs being entertained increased, when new myths are shown to be continuous with, and not radically different, from currently held beliefs. Through judicious use of rhetorical strategies like anomaly masking and featuring (see p. 101), the commonalities between different myths can be emphasized more than their differences, thereby encouraging participation in the creative process. For example, the basic concept of relationality as it exists at whatever level of moral and faith development in a given audience can be used as a common ground upon which to build a broader understanding of solidarity. A likely and acceptable progression for moral and faith
development is to begin by focusing on values of love and justice for family members or other particular communities that already exist in an audience, and then, at an acceptable pace, to show how those same values can and should be extended to include other persons beyond those limited communities. This progression flows especially well when it is grounded in a spiritual mythic framework that can utilize the intuitive awareness of our universal relationality through our participation in Being itself. Furthermore, myths and stories, because of their fictional, as-if quality, are less threatening than reified, "factual" claims about truth and reality, and therefore better suited to enabling and encouraging moral and faith development.

A word needs to be added here about rhetorical awareness of the context in which preaching is being done. The model described above needs to be adapted to fit the situation and context of the congregation being addressed. For example, prophetic preaching to a congregation of oppressed people is a very different rhetorical situation than preaching to a congregation of oppressors. The exigencies may be the same, but the

12 This is an application of Aristotle's theory of the enthymeme and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) concept of argument beginning with agreement. In both cases, identifying pre-existing areas of agreement between rhetor and audience is an important starting point for productive communication.
constraints and the ability of the audience to affect change in the situation are very different. In particular, the oppressed congregation may be very receptive to a new, explicit, reconstruction of their reality since they have little to lose by changing their situation. On the other hand, a congregation made up of oppressors who are in control of and benefiting from the political and economic status quo will be much less willing to consider having their taken-for-granted assumptions challenged. This latter rhetorical situation requires a much more indirect, gradual, and less threatening rhetorical/homiletical approach like the narrative-prophetic model described above.

Finally, let me make explicit what I hope is obvious, namely the practical value of this homiletical/rhetorical use of narrative to promote social amelioration. This relational approach to rhetoric in general and preaching in particular is designed to enable and encourage participants in the process to collectively examine and reevaluate the taken-for-granted stories and myths that shape their values and identities. This is done by utilizing the principles of relationality in a non-threatening way

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13 See Bitzer (1968) for a complete discussion of these constituents of what he calls "the rhetorical situation."
that lessens the likelihood of retreat into dogmatic positions that disrupt the communication process and can lead to destructive forms of conflict.

The relational narrative process is designed to promote moral and faith development for individuals and communities that progresses toward more and more inclusive concepts of relationality. Claiming stories and myths as ours that move away from grounding identity in particular communities and toward identification with the Universal Community of Being Itself is the principal way inclusion is achieved. As increasing numbers of people are able to grow into these more inclusive stages of moral and faith development, thus developing more tolerant attitudes toward the myths and values of other communities, the potential for creative, egalitarian communication increases, along with the concomitant benefits for society. In short, potential relationality becomes more realized.

This is not to say that relational rhetoric is the only valid approach to social amelioration. Direct political and social action to bring about systemic change that recognizes relationality and fosters justice in social structures is an ally of the prophetic preacher and to be encouraged. For the preacher in a local congregation, however, the most productive and long-lasting contribution to social amelioration is to
begin by accepting his/her congregation where they are in their faith journey and through open, participatory, mutual sharing of myths and stories, to grow together toward recognizing (that is, coming to know) and experiencing the relationality that defines our very being individually and collectively as a society.

With those lofty goals firmly in place, I turn to an examination of the limitations and implications of the relational theory developed in this dissertation for rhetorical theory and criticism, as well as for theology and homiletics.
CHAPTER V

IMPLIEDIONS FOR RHETORIC, THEOLOGY, AND HOMILETICS

AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations of the Study

There are two limitations of this study that merit discussion, specifically the rapid pace of change in contemporary life and the ambiguous nature of spiritual/imaginative and metaphysical concerns. With regard to the former, the increasing rate of change contributing to postmodern anxiety is illustrated in the kinds of societal and world changes that have transpired during the writing of this dissertation—very important events that have happened so rapidly in recent months that they are difficult to keep up with.

For instance, the shift to a more liberal political power in the office of the President of the United States and the scandals involving several prominent televangelists are both indications of a decline in the political influence of the religious right from its peak in the Reagan/Bush administrations of the 1980's. How significant or long lasting this decline will be remains
to be seen, but it may be reflected in a recent study (Gallup, 1993) that found a decreasing trend in the percentage of younger persons holding a literalistic position on religious myths. While the overall percentage of the population (30-50%) claiming the literalistic view is still very significant, the potential trend toward a more symbolic interpretation is certainly an issue for further study.

Likewise, the unexpected and dramatic breakup of the Soviet Union has had far-reaching effects on many aspects of life all over the world. Among those effects is a perception—justified or not—that the nuclear threat has been lessened by the fall of Communism. Since a part of my argument has been that the dread of nuclear annihilation is an important factor in creating postmodern anxiety, further study on how the perception of a decrease in this danger is affecting postmodern anxiety and the desire for mythic certainty is needed.

Other unavoidable limitations are common to any study attempting to deal with a subject as broad and ambiguous as the epistemology of the spiritual and imaginative dynamics of rhetoric and human nature. Philosophical, and especially metaphysical matters, defy empirical study and offer little hard data for examination by traditional methods of analysis. Because of these complications, there are always those who argue
that communication scholars should limit their studies to communication events and leave philosophical questions to the philosophers.\(^1\) To do so, however, is to deny the historical roots of rhetoric in the academic discipline of philosophy, as well as to ignore the necessity of doing the hard work of critically examining the theoretical foundations of why and how we create and critique specific rhetorical products.\(^2\)

More significantly for this study, a similar case could be made to declare spiritual matters out of bounds for rhetorical study and defer those issues to the theologians and questions of values to the ethicists. I have attempted to show, however, that if rhetoric is to make any significant contributions in the contemporary era, especially in the important areas of ethics and social amelioration, rhetoricians must recover a broad, holistic understanding of human nature and rhetoric. This means, among other things, finding a way to include the non-rational, spiritual/imaginative dimensions of human nature and communication within the scope of rhetorical criticism.

\(^1\) For instance, see Brummett's 1990 "Eulogy for Epistemic Rhetoric."

\(^2\) See Cherwitz, 1990, Chapter 1, for a thorough elaboration of this argument.
As I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the spiritual/imaginative dimension is an essential aspect of rhetoric because it is a powerful force in developing and influencing ethical values and behavior. This is the case because the taken-for-granted myths that shape our values, world views, and identity do not operate at just the rational level. Therefore, in spite of the inherent problems and limitations in dealing with such complex and ambiguous issues, I hope this study has clarified both the necessity of and some practical applications for addressing them. In the following sections, I will summarize the major implications of the study for rhetorical theory, criticism, theology, and homiletics.

Implications for Rhetorical Theory

The most significant implications of this study for rhetorical theory are: (1) relational rhetoric's ability to offer a balanced, and holistic response to the exigencies of life in the postmodern era, namely, an epistemological position between the counterproductive extremes of dogmatism and relativism; and (2) an intentional focus on social amelioration through a realistic approach to invention and creative ideological change. This approach, I contend, is necessarily sensitive to the natural human resistance to significant
changes in core values taken-for-granted assumptions about reality.

A Balanced and Holistic Rhetorical Theory

Inclusion of the spiritual/imaginative dimension in rhetorical theory is an attempt to address the bifurcated nature of the rhetorical animal created by the advocacy of the extreme positions of dogmatism and relativism. The relational theory developed in the preceding chapters calls for a restoration of rhetoric to the complete understanding of human nature embraced by Aristotle's use of all three artistic proofs—logos, pathos, and ethos—because overemphasizing any one aspect of human or rhetorical nature results in an incomplete theory, one that flies as well as a bird with one wing.

For centuries the rhetorical bird has limped along on the wing of reason and logic, to the neglect of spirit, imagination, and emotion as legitimate concerns to be addressed by rhetorical theory. The Cartesian bias toward reason and logic has cut Western rhetoric off from powerful, non-rational sources of knowledge, such as dreams, myths, and rituals, flowing out of the spiritual/imaginative aspect of our being.

The problems with the logocentric approach have been described in detail (pp. 12-14, 74-77). If reason
and formal logic are the only tools we have to critique any theory of human nature and communication, we rule out, by definition, any insights non-rational perspectives may have to offer. I have argued that humans are in part spiritual/imaginative animals and that traditional, rational/logical rhetoric is not adequate to address this dimension of human experience and reality. A holistic rhetorical theory is therefore a necessary alternative to a totally rational concept of rhetoric because it is more isomorphic with the complexity of human nature.

In the postmodern era we are witnessing another extreme pendulum swing to the other wing of rhetorical epistemology, to mix a metaphor, namely to the extreme relativism of what I have characterized as the Third Sophistic (p. 100). Postmodern rhetoric, an excellent example of the influence of Cartesian Anxiety on our thinking, exemplifies dualistic, either/or thinking when a pluralistic, both/and approach would be vastly more productive.

Steve Whitson and John Poulakos (1993) illustrate this phenomenon quite well in a very recent essay in which they argue for the nihilism of Nietzsche as the

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3 See Chapter Two, p. 62 for Bernstein's description of "Cartesian Anxiety" as the assumption that there are only two choices for epistemology, objectivism or relativistic skepticism.
savior of rhetoric from the "detour of epistemology."

They argue that

the epistemic endeavor is derivative of something greater: primordial desires, irrepressible passions, and blind drives, all of which characterize, more than anything else, the make-up and the life of human beings. (132, emphasis added)

Whitson and Poulakos go on to describe a typical postmodern view of rhetoric, namely the use of artistic, seductive, appeals to the senses for the purpose of masking the chaos of existence (1993, 136-142). This rhetorical theory is philosophically consistent if one accepts postmodernism's depressing description of the human condition. But fortunately that definition is not generally recognized as complete. While I have been arguing throughout this study for more serious attention to be paid to the non-rational aspects of human nature, we cannot afford to allow the shortcomings of rationality to push us into the abyss of pure aestheticism. Desires, passions, and doubts are all legitimate and important aspects of the human condition, and therefore need to be addressed by rhetoric. But there is also stability and order in human existence and therefore a need to maintain a balanced and appropriate role for reason, logic, and epistemology in rhetorical theory.

To affirm a role for reason and logic in human nature is not to deny the very real concerns of anxiety
and alienation in contemporary society. By addressing the legitimate concerns of skepticism and agnosticism in matters of knowing and experiencing Being, I have tried to acknowledge the importance of these concerns while keeping a balanced perspective via the refutation of the erroneous and dangerous postmodern claim that because there is no absolute knowledge in some areas of inquiry, there is therefore no knowledge at all. Rhetoricians from Carneades to Cherwitz and Hikins have recognized the existence of different levels of confidence that may legitimately accompany our beliefs, and postmodern challenges to human existence, while severe, have not succeeded in proving the case against reason.

Rhetorical theory based on a spiritual/imaginative understanding of relationality offers a way to address the important exigencies of alienation and anxiety in the postmodern rhetorical situation. To pretend one can overcome the inherent alienation of human individualism would be a denial of reality, but what relational theory offers is a participatory, dialogical approach to rhetoric that acknowledges and addresses the inherent exigence of anxiety and separation. This approach argues that we can ameliorate the exigence of alienation, not by trying to deny the subject/object dichotomy and our individuality through relativistic slight of hand, but by building bridges of communication
between separate, distinct—but related—individuals. One important way this is done is through communal identification via participation in myths and narratives that help humans know who we are and what our values are.

The theory of spiritual/imaginative relationality offers an effective rhetorical response to some of the major exigencies of postmodernism. The response to both the epistemological and ontological questions of postmodernism is that human beings are known and also come to know the world by listening to each others' perspectives and narratives about life. Rhetoric for the pluralistic postmodern world must be an open process because, as Karlyn Campbell says:

The only effective response to the sensation of being threatened existentially is a rhetorical act that treats the personal, emotional, and concrete directly and explicitly, that is dialogic and participatory, that speaks from personal experience to personal experience (Campbell 1972, 83).

In other words, the pluralism and skepticism of our time actually do a valuable service for rhetorical theory by emphasizing the need for facing the reality of the ambiguous nature of human existence and not attempting to cover it up with rationalistic or scientific or theological paradigms.
Both pluralism and skepticism call for open, honest dialogue about the contingent realm of existence. The contingent, of course, has traditionally been rhetoric's arena, and one of the advantages of a holistic, narrative rhetoric is a rediscovery of that focus. Whereas traditional logocentric rhetoric was characterized by a monologic speaker-audience model based on the assumption that "I know and I will tell you," relational rhetoric's model is that everyone experiences life and we are known by others when our perspectives and stories are shared. In turn, we come to know others and to know more of the larger order of existence by listening to other perspectives.

When translated into rhetorical practice, relational rhetoric employs the theories of Fowler, Ehninger, and Kelly to promote an egalitarian, creative, bilateral communication event. Equal initiative and control of the process and a mutual openness to correction of one's worldview, as described in earlier chapters, are carefully observed. Narrative rhetoric is especially amenable to this approach because of its ability to use vivid images, dramatic movement, and imagination to create an open-ended, participatory experience for exploring alternative approaches to moral and faith questions.
A Rhetoric of Social Amelioration

A very important implication of the balanced and holistic approach to rhetoric developed in this study is that relational rhetoric intentionally promotes social amelioration by affirming the reality of the diversity and pluralism of humankind and the various paradigms people use to construct their social reality. Relational rhetoric promotes an openness and tolerance for a variety of points of view and "advocates finding out what members, acting in their everyday capacities, do to constitute their social worlds and how they do this communicatively" (Hawes, 1977, 36). In a pluralistic world, participatory rhetoric allows and encourages everyone to benefit from the perspectives of a variety of different peoples and cultures.

Furthermore, relational rhetorical theory promotes social amelioration because it broadens the scope of epistemology and rhetoric to include mythic and spiritual/imaginative knowledge. Relational rhetoric argues that persons come to know others, self, and the world, by an egalitarian sharing of individual perspectives and experiences of life, especially their master narratives and myths. This theory includes the important ability to engage in discourse about our uncertainties and anxieties, not in ways that exaggerate them into counterproductive, radical skepticism, but in
ways that allow those very natural uncertainties to serve as a common bond of the universal community of Being to which we all ultimately belong.

Accepting this common human condition of uncertainty is a key to participating in and understanding community myths and narratives different from our own. Myths and narratives, in other words, are vehicles for exploring—through invitational, non-threatening modes of language and communication—the common symbolic truths that lie deeper than a literalistic, reified hearing of the myths will allow. This creative, mutual exploration of perspectives is achieved by switching attention to common, universal truths instead of focusing on literalistic differences that divide and promote parochialism and conflict. Such an approach allows myths the creative capability of making the concept of relationality more concrete for hearers and inviting greater participation in the universal community of Being.

Participation in the universal community is done, significantly, not at the expense of particular communities and narratives, which would increase resistance to hearing other perspectives. Dual membership affirms both participation in particular communities and finding deeper meaning in also
identifying with the universal community.\(^4\) This tolerant attitude is further employed to encourage a sensitivity to the resistance to change and the emotional factors involved in reconsidering the truth value of long-held, taken-for-granted beliefs and attitudes. Acknowledging that change is gradual and often painful, relational rhetoric provides for supportive contexts and communities in which the creative process can occur in ways that are as non-threatening as possible.\(^5\)

Relational rhetoric's emphasis on identification or solidarity with one's audience includes an important redefinition of prophetic that I will address in more detail below in the section on homiletics, but is significant here as well because of the concern it shows for the impact of mythic change on all parties in the communication process. This redefinition of prophetic also calls attention to the impact that relational rhetoric has on the effectiveness of prophetic rhetoric as well as a radical change in its goals.

Because of its sensitivity to how difficult the process of change is, Kelly's creativity cycle is an excellent model for invention balancing the need for

\(^4\) See p. 73 for Fowler's discussion of this process.

\(^5\) See earlier discussions of Fowler, Kelly, and the sections on narrative rhetoric in Chapters Two and Three.
both change and stability. Kelly affirms the important role of myth and narrative to shape community relationships and that only myth can replace another myth. Kelly promotes the positive human potential for creative change and growth through new constructs of our social reality, and, at the same time, provides for a critical reconstructive phase of retightening examined constructs (see pp. 86-88) to deal with the anxiety resulting from too much change and uncertainty. All of these characteristics are crucial because they respond to specific exigencies of contemporary postmodern life.

The final, and perhaps most significant, implication of the relational theory is that it provides a consistent epistemic standard for evaluating both religious and secular myths and narratives. I have described in detail the significant similarities and differences in how religious and secular myths are defined and used by the American populace (see Chapters One, Two, and especially Four, pages 107-119, for this discussion). And I have explored a spiritual and imaginative doctrine of relationality as a way to resolve the inconsistencies in how secular and religious myths are used. My analysis suggests that an

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6 See Chapters One and Two for detailed discussions of the need for and lack of certainty in our lives, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the various rhetorical strategies for responding to those exigencies.
epistemological standard of evaluation can be based on whether a myth does or does not promote participation in the universal community of Being (see pages 116-17 for a detailed development of this concept). This points to implications for rhetorical criticism that deserve separate treatment.

**Implications for Rhetorical Criticism**

If my attempts to establish the importance and power of myth for shaping values and community identity, for creating and/or resolving ideological conflict, and therefore as a potential ally or foe of social amelioration have been successful, the need for a sound, consistent method of critiquing mythic rhetoric should be obvious. This need is both more urgent and the questions involved more complex because of the ambiguous and emotionally charged nature of myth and narrative described throughout this study. The major implications for criticism, therefore, are methodological. They reveal a need to develop a method of mythic criticism that: (1) expands the purview of traditional criticism to include emotionally charged taken-for-granted assumptions; (2) improves on existing criteria for evaluating myths; and (3) is applicable to both inter- and intra-personal rhetoric.
Criticism of Taken-for-Granted Assumptions

Relational theory makes possible the expansion of the scope of rhetoric to include such non-rational artifacts as narrative, religious rhetoric, and myth—defined broadly to include taken-for-granted models and assumptions about reality described earlier (p. 40). These kinds of rhetoric defy "empirical" or "logical" analysis and are admittedly difficult to critique, but because they exert such a powerful influence on the perceptions persons have of each other and their world, and therefore on corresponding ethical (or unethical) behavior toward one another, development of a sound, consistent method to evaluate them is imperative.

Fisher's narrative paradigm, as I have acknowledged, has made significant contributions to this area of study because of its early recognition of the importance of narrative for moral discourse. I have attempted to build on Fisher's work and rectify some of its weaknesses, namely the common fallacy of overstating a theory's applicability, and the lack of sound criteria for evaluating narratives beyond a relativistic perspective.

The former concern has to do with whether or not Fisher's theory is a new paradigm for communication in general, as he claims, or merely a theory for narrative criticism. I am in agreement with Rowland and Danielson
(see pp. 43-44) that Fisher's work is useful when applied as a form of genre criticism to myth and narratives per se, addressed to specific audiences. But, as Rowland notes, the narrative paradigm looses much of its effectiveness when applied across the broad spectrum of communication.

The second concern is of primary interest here, however, namely that Fisher's criteria of narrative fidelity and narrative probability are inadequate for an epistemological critique of narratives and myths. I will highlight the arguments offered earlier (see pp. 93-98) to support this claim.

The truth of narratives, according to Fisher, is determined by a given audience's previous experiences, which result in what the audience believes is true and what is not. The way Fisher defines narrative fidelity (as correspondence to what an audience already "knows" to be true) rules out the possibility of changing its epistemological status. Fisher claims to favor the intersubjective theory of rhetorical epistemology, but there is no provision in his model for genuinely bilateral dialogue to "search" for or "develop" new or different beliefs. Nor is there suggested any openness to critically evaluate particular narratives because of this inherent bias in favor of the established taken-for-granted narrative. In Fisher's model there is also
no acknowledgment of the strength of the emotional investment persons have in their myths, and therefore no method for addressing this important dynamic vis a vis competing narratives or calls for reassessment or change in extant "truths."

More importantly, given Fisher's orientation in the consensus school of rhetorical theory, there is no external reality posited to provide any correspondence "check" to determine the veracity of myths and narratives. Fisher's attempt to provide external validation in the form of "transcendent values" fails to even transcend the particular community that produces those values.

In short, Fisher is concerned exclusively with consensus, not truth. He therefore can provide only relativistic standards of evaluation that are of little use when applied to myths and narratives from divergent communities in need of ideological or religious conflict resolution.

A Consistent Standard for Mythic Criticism

Relational theory makes possible the development of a consistent standard for mythic criticism. This crucial implication of approaching mythic criticism from an epistemological perspective means that relational rhetoric is not concerned about evaluating persuasive
effectiveness. In matters of such importance as identity and ethical standards, the stakes are too high to lose sight of the fact that rhetoric's highest calling is to improve the quality of life and not merely to win arguments. Mythic criticism, in this view, is concerned with the relative merits of the claim by any given myth to being a true description of reality. To address this concern I have proposed the following relational standard of evaluation:

If a myth, by its content and style, promotes unity and open communication among individuals and diverse communities, . . . it is true. Truth here is defined as correspondence to the interconnected, communal nature of existence. By the same token, if a myth promotes division and dualism and individualism, it does not correspond to the reality of existence and is therefore untrue. (116-117)

There are several advantages to this standard. First of all it is applicable to myths in general, meaning that it provides a consistent criterion that is appropriate for both secular and religious myths, thereby avoiding the difficulties described earlier that are created when these myths are treated differently. Given the symbolic and metaphorical nature of all myths, it is imperative to develop criteria focusing on the symbolic truth, and not the literal meaning, of both secular and religious myths.

Secondly, this definition of mythic truth addresses both the content and style of the myth being evaluated.
This is important because both are equally critical to the message sent and received. Incongruity between these two dimensions of communication sends a confusing message. For instance, a myth whose content appears to promote unity but that is presented in an exclusive, judgmental, or authoritarian style is not effective because audiences do not know which message to attend to. The same is true for narratives, or even rhetorical theories, that purport to advocate participation, dialogue, and equality, but do so in sterile, abstract, hierarchical, and/or dogmatic fashion.

Finally, this definition of mythic truth is significant because of its universal nature, both historically and ideologically. Because the standard of evaluation transcends temporal concerns, it avoids the impossible task of trying to reconstruct an irretrievable historical context. This means that myths are evaluated for their consequences and relevance in the present, and not for what they might have meant in the time or context in which they were created.

In this era of the pluralistic, interconnected, global community in which we live, a standard of evaluation transcending the conventions of consensus of particular communities is an absolute necessity. Relational rhetoric provides such a standard,
emphasizing the elements of common human experience revealed in different myths and metaphors, rather than focusing on often insignificant differences in particular, literal vehicles. Such an emphasis or attention switch, to use Brown's terminology, is a way to view life from another's perspective and thereby increase understanding and community in the broader sense.

A Standard and Method for Intrapersonal Rhetorical Criticism

One of the most important implications of this definition of mythic truth for religious rhetoric is the contribution it makes in evaluating the kind of divine revelations that are so powerful and problematic for traditional rhetoric. Because of the highly subjective nature of experiencing Being, this matter calls for a method of intrapersonal criticism so that ethical truth claims based on spiritual experiences can be responsibly evaluated. To do so requires a balanced dialogue between spirit and reason in which neither lays claim to ultimate superiority, but acknowledges that humans are neither exclusively rational-rhetorical animals nor spiritual animals, but some combination of the two.

The holistic nature of the relational rhetorical theory emphasizing logos, pathos, and ethos, provides
for this kind of balanced approach, and the definition of mythic truth offered above is at least a beginning in developing a standard whereby myths can be judged somewhat impartially. Applying the standard of relationality to myths is a consistent approach that encourages the suspension of emotional, religious, and ideological biases that come from particular communal perspectives, thus removing some of the barriers that interfere with communication processes and the discovery of more universal truths.

For example, if the concept of relationality is applied to the "revelations" claimed by people who promote racism or sexism, or to those of self-appointed prophets like Jim Jones or David Koresh that promote violence and death, their incongruence with the tenets of relationality is quickly exposed. On the other hand, the validity of myths or revelations espoused by prophets like Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Chief Seattle, and Martin Luther King, Jr., that celebrate and promote unity with other peoples and the cosmos is just as readily obvious.

Having examined the implications of the relational theory for rhetoric and rhetorical criticism in general, I will now examine specific, related implications for theology and homiletics.
Implications for Theology

Insights for theology from relational rhetoric include: (1) a better understanding of how and why religious fundamentalism functions rhetorically in the postmodern era; (2) a reaffirmation of the positive and necessary qualities of ambiguity and healthy skepticism in theological discourse that make rhetorical analysis of spiritual rhetoric possible; and (3) most importantly, a way to promote greater tolerance and understanding of different religious perspectives.

The Rhetorical Function of Fundamentalism

While there is much contemporary criticism of religious fundamentalism, this criticism may be the result, at least in part, of the failure to understand what the phenomenon is. More sensitivity and tolerance for the literalistic position is made possible by understanding that the "deep religious hunger for certainty" is, as I argued in Chapter One, a major motivation for literalism and reification of myths, and that fundamentalism is primarily a response to the intensified uncertainty and anxiety of the postmodern era, as I argued in Chapter Two. Increased understanding of the fundamentalist audience and its motivation produces potentially more effective rhetorical strategies for constructive dialogue. In
this way, persons of different mythic perspectives on reality can hear each other more clearly, and those who choose to can expand their vision of a more universal reality.

I have emphasized Fowler's work on faith development (pp. 71-74) because it provides a very helpful model for both analyzing the degree of literalism in a person's faith position, and a rhetorical/theological theory for enabling people who choose a more universalizing faith to move toward it. Fowler recognizes faith as a holistic way of being in the world—a position characterized by Smith's poignant description of faith as "feeling at home in the universe" (see p. 30). This approach to faith is amenable to an open, participatory, permeable construct of the faith community while a more traditional definition of faith as intellectual assent to correct beliefs, by contrast, lends itself much more readily to dogmatism and elitism.

Ambiguity and Spiritual Rhetoric

At this point the theological and rhetorical implications converge and compliment each other, that is, the necessity of affirming ambiguity when discussing theological matters and the rhetorical approach to experiencing or grasping connections to Being. Kelly's
notions of propositional thinking and invitational language coincide especially well with Fowler's pivotal concept of dual membership in both one's particular community and the universal community of Being. Propositional thinking, remember, means that constructs are "uncontaminated with no restrictions of category membership" (p. 61). In other words, claiming membership in a Buddhist or Christian or Moslem or Atheist community while simultaneously identifying oneself as a member of the more inclusive universal community of Being is possible and even encouraged.

Remembering the important distinction and frequent confusion between epistemological and ontological issues is essential for maintaining a positive attitude toward ambiguity. While an honest acknowledgment of the limits of epistemic certainty in theological matters avoids the dangers of dogmatic hegemony, equally important is the avoidance of radical skepticism on the ontological level that just as quickly reduces religious rhetoric to wishful but irrelevant thinking. Two key tenets of relational theory for theology and ethics, therefore, are: (1) propositions about Being and ethical behavior are constantly in the process of being redefined; but (2) the interconnectedness of all beings and the values that inspire our philosophical, theological, and ethical propositions are constant because they are inherent in
the relational fabric of Being itself.

Russman's statements about ambiguity are so important that they merit repeating here. Russman says, "literal-mindedness applied to synecdoche or metaphor yields absurdity" (1987, 63), and he addresses dualism in this way:

... why are we creating epistemological problems for ourselves ...? Physics tolerates a great deal of mathematical untidiness; why can't philosophy? Why do we rush to claim we have grasped definitive essences of matter and thought? ... All we need to do is recognize the incompleteness of our understanding of the material world. ... Perhaps we will never have tidy connections ... We should simply relax and be patient. Prematurely forcing the issue creates problems that push us to ever greater extremes. Our dualisms are of our own making, and grand idealisms, materialisms, and nihilisms are the extremes to which they have pushed us. (1987, 40-41)

In addition to the dangers of the extremes Russman cites and the ideological confrontations inherent in dogmatic positions, another implication of this study stems from the fact that over 50 percent of Americans, according to Gallup et al. (1980, 1989, 1993) do not accept a literalistic interpretation of religious myths. These persons are the ones who have difficulty relating to a dogmatic theological perspective and will very likely develop an unhealthy skeptical attitude toward religion in general. For them, instinctively applying

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7 This was quoted earlier in Chapter Two, p. 63.
the principle of narrative fidelity means that such Christian myths as the virgin birth or Jesus walking on water or bodily ascending into heaven do not correspond with their previous experience of the world. Literalism, therefore, for over one-half of the population, becomes a barrier to focusing attention on the deeper, more significant symbolic truths contained in religious myths. This is an unnecessary obstruction to communication that honestly affirming the ambiguous nature of theological beliefs can avoid.

We can eliminate this impediment, in part, by reformulating our theological beliefs about human nature in a balanced, holistic way. This means insisting, as I have been arguing throughout, on a bilateral dialogue between the spiritual and rational dimensions of human nature where both are treated as important and neither facet of human nature dominates or claims superiority over the other.

Tolerance and Perspectivism

Finally, this study has implications for a rhetoric of social amelioration. Theological concerns are so important to this issue, however, that I also want to reiterate their connection here. The hunger for certainty that motivates the divisiveness of dogmatism is at its core a religious hunger—perhaps not religious
in the institutional sense of that word, but religious in the sense that its central concerns are the ultimate metaphysical issues of the meaning of life and death. One of the great tragedies of reification of religious myths is that the positive message of these myths, namely an invitation to share the common hopes and fears that can potentially unify humankind, are transformed instead into rigid, impermeable barriers that divide one community from another.

The single most important implication of this study is summed up in Campbell's assessment that our epistemological task as religious rhetoricians in today's global community is to come to know the basic truth of the unity of the universal community of Being, and by focusing attention on that unity instead of on our differences, to make this solidarity known to others. Understanding the hunger for certainty is a small first step. A giant leap for humankind, however, is the realization that genuine security comes not from reifying our myths as true and dismissing all others as fictional, but only from embracing the ambiguous nature of existence, as well as others who share this uncertain existence. In short, theological myths and symbols have great power that can be used to create or destroy communication and unity, and therefore those who use them must accept great responsibility for the
consequences of their rhetorical endeavors. I turn, now, to a summary of the implications of this study for homiletics.

**Implications for Homiletics**

Most of the implications for rhetoric discussed in this chapter apply as well for homiletics as a subspecies of rhetoric. Therefore I will address the relationship of rhetoric and homiletics briefly and focus most of this section on two specific ramifications of this study for preaching, namely, the provision of a stronger theoretical foundation for narrative preaching, and secondly, some principles and strategies for the practical application of relational rhetoric to homiletics. This latter category includes a redefinition of the traditional goals of preaching and of prophetic preaching in particular, as well as specific strategies for making the sermonic experience more participatory and creative.

**Rhetoric and Homiletics**

By reaffirming the historical ties between rhetoric and homiletics, this study applies the relevant traditions and theoretical insights of both classical and contemporary rhetoric to the art of preaching. Situating homiletics in this broad theoretical context
allows it to benefit from a much deeper pool of scholarship. Therefore the discussion above of such general rhetorical topics as epistemology and ontology, dogmatism, realism, and relativism, rhetorical criticism, and moral development can be utilized for improving homiletical theory as well.

Specific rhetorical strategies for praxis can also be translated into the preaching context, including previously discussed tactics such as recognition of literalism and resistance to altering or even abandoning particular taken-for-granted assumptions, understanding the context of a specific rhetorical situation, establishing identification with one's audience, and holistically employing all the available means of persuasion. Most of those elements are, of course, long-standing components of traditional rhetorical theory that homiletics has always drawn upon. The emphasis on the implications of mythic and narrative rhetoric for homiletics, however, is what makes relational rhetoric most significant for homiletics.

Theoretical Support for Narrative Preaching

From a theoretical perspective, I have endeavored in this study to establish a stronger theoretical foundation for narrative preaching. Rather than relying on narrative preaching's popularity or anecdotal
evidence of its effectiveness, I have attempted to support the use of myth and narrative in homiletics with the principles of communication theory. Without going into great detail again, I will summarize the most relevant points.

Narrative preaching is both effective and popular, in part, because of its appropriateness for the contemporary communication era. This is due, in large measure, to the paradigm shift communication theory is currently experiencing from print to electronic media. Contemporary audiences are more receptive to narrative because the electronic era is more similar to the oral communication paradigm that preceded the written/literate era, and which, of course, relied heavily on narrative (Jensen, 1993).

Narrative is sound homiletical theory, furthermore, because it is isomorphic with the holistic, ambiguous nature of human existence in postmodern times. Narratives are open ended and metaphorical, enabling them to speak to various people in different ways, which is crucial in our pluralistic world. Additionally, narrative and myth are especially appropriate for religious communication because of the ambiguous nature of spiritual matters. Being cannot be known in traditional, epistemological ways, but can be experienced through narratives and myths that invite
hearers to participate in them. This same openness allows the preacher to be a fellow participant in the story, rather than an expert dispensing authoritative, final truths. Additionally, as I will discuss in more detail below, narrative is appropriate for one of the principal purposes of homiletics, namely, addressing ethical issues, because values and identity are engendered primarily through participation in the master stories of the communities to which one belongs.®

The Rhetorical Praxis of Narrative Preaching

This section focuses on particular strategies for addressing the important issue of how relational rhetoric can be applied to preaching, which is still largely a tradition-bound, monologic, authoritative model of rhetorical praxis.

One of the major principles of mythic criticism, namely, challenging taken-for-granted assumptions by proposing new ways of envisioning reality, needs to be applied to homiletical theory itself. The narrative paradigm for preaching can replace the logocentric, rational model only if the established assumptions supporting the latter are brought to conscious awareness.

® All of these arguments and the sources for them are described in much more detail in Chapter Four, pp. 146-62.
so they can be evaluated. Then the kinds of arguments for narrative that I have enumerated above and in the previous chapters can be presented so an informed choice can be made.\(^9\)

This process of revising homiletical theory involves recasting some crucial terms in a new light, for example, redefining the goal of preaching to include establishing the solidarity of the community, rather than simply focusing on the preacher's success or failure at persuading the congregation to accept her/his perspective on the truth. This change includes an epistemic switch from reliance on the preacher as the lone source of wisdom to a collective experience of the knowledge of relationality that is accomplished through the sharing of different perspectives and life experiences.\(^10\)

This collective approach is not intended in any way to exempt the preacher from the rigors of responsible scholarship and using his/her expertise and training in

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\(^9\) At the risk of stating the obvious, I want to insert a disclaimer here, namely that I am not arguing for narrative preaching as the most appropriate style for every situation. The context for preaching, the character of the audience, and the nature of the subject matter can at times certainly make a rational/logical approach the most suitable for a particular sermon.

\(^10\) This concept and those to follow have been developed in depth in Chapter Four. I will summarize them here and refer the reader to pp. 146-62 for expansion of these ideas.
a responsible and honest manner. Like everyone in the community, the preacher is expected to share as much of her/his unique story and perspective on the truth as possible. But because of the ambiguous nature of religious discourse, regardless of how much experience and truth the preacher has to share, the tone and style of preaching need to be conversational, what has been described earlier as "eventful dialectic" or sharing our "wagers" about the ultimate questions of life, and not "closed rhetoric."

A word about specific homiletical strategies is also important because such techniques have the potential to operationalize the concepts of cooperative critical inquiry and assist in creating a dialogical, supportive community. For example, such strategies might include holding weekly sermon study groups enabling members of the congregation to participate in the production of the sermon, and/or discussion/feedback groups that respond to the sermon. Indirectly, dialogue with the congregation can also take place through sensitivity and listening to concerns that are revealed as the preacher as pastor or counselor or administrator shares the faith journey with the congregation on a daily basis and lets that experience inform his/her preaching. This is not intended in any way to suggest a breach of confidentiality by using
material about parishioners in sermons, but simply to point out an important opportunity to listen to the stories of the congregation and to address their concerns and employ their insights in sermons.

These and other creative strategies can generate dialogue within the congregational community. But even when the format of the preaching event itself remains monologic, as is usually the case, a creative, conversational atmosphere can still be produced if the preacher sets the example and maintains an open, collegial attitude toward the preaching task and the community. This attitude is summarized succinctly in two of the key concepts from Kelly and Fowler described in earlier chapters. The creative faith community is characterized by them as tolerant, imaginative, and one without fear of intimacy, conflict, doubt, or growth; where non-judgmental, active listening occurs, along with regular celebrations of master stories in an atmosphere of nurture and developmental expectation.¹¹

Conclusion

All of the theories and strategies I have discussed above are important for relational rhetoric and

¹¹ Fowler's description of the community is cited in full on pp. 72-73 and Kelly's conditions for creativity on 87 and 149.
homiletics. But the critical element at the core of the dialogical process is the attitude of openness, sensitivity, and collegiality on the part of all members of the community, and especially of the preacher or rhetor. This attitude is what unifies the theory and practice I have been advocating throughout this study.

The relational perspective on reality informs values, identity, and behavior, and this perspective is created and maintained by participation in the myth of spiritual/imaginative relationality—the myth that promotes the knowledge and valuing of our interconnectedness with members of our particular communities and, more importantly, with the universal community of Being itself. Enabling and promoting participation in this myth is a rhetorical enterprise and is at the heart of the rhetoric of homiletics and faith development.
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