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**The Prayer Warriors:
Creating an US/THEM Division
Within the Fundamentalist Movement**

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Holly Ann Wiseman

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**THE PRAYER WARRIORS:
CREATING AN US / THEM DIVISION
WITHIN THE FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT**

By

Holly Ann Wiseman

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

THE PRAYER WARRIORS: CREATING AN US / THEM DIVISION WITHIN THE FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT

By

Holly Ann Wiseman

The recent growth of evangelical fundamentalism has become the focus of much study in the field of sociology. It is the purpose of this paper to explore that growth, concentrating on recruitment strategies within the movement. A field research study, primarily based on observation, was conducted at a large Assembly of God church in Mid Michigan. The findings of the study reveal a stark "us vs. them" dichotomy being created during the early stages of recruitment, and further nurtured through involvement in church events and activities. The bonding of members through use of this dichotomy is present at several social levels, and is constructed by means of at least three strategies utilized by the church: business images, theater / performance themes, and reality definition. Consequences of using an "us against them" dichotomy to gain commitment to fundamentalist organizations may be varied and far reaching. These findings suggest that further study of the "us vs. them" phenomenon within evangelical organizations must take place in order to understand the nature of recent growth in the movement.

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In September 1987, a brand new 3000 seat arena opened five miles outside Michigan's state capital. This magnificent building, with its beautifully landscaped grounds, wooden benches lining the walkways to its three large entrances, and its four enormous, lettered parking lots, which surround the structure itself, resembles a convention center from the outside. Inside the building, big, plushly carpeted hallways, twelve coat rooms, several rest rooms and entrances to the balcony seats, an information desk, and souvenir shop surround the fourteen entrances to the arena itself, giving one a feeling of attending an opera, or perhaps a stage play.

The arena itself is a spectacle. A large stage is set up with a small orchestra, a full choir, standing keyboards, a drum set, a grand piano, two or three standing microphones, a large American flag, potted flowers and small trees, and an area with seating for nearly thirty people. Behind the stage hangs a movie screen, and one can see several different colored lights on lighting boards above the stage. The seating is situated so that it surrounds the stage in a large half-circle, both on the main floor and on the balcony, which is flanked with national flags from all over the world. Some seats in the balcony are so far from the stage that six hanging television sets are provided, so that the people seated in these sections can see what is happening on stage. A large lighting booth is directly opposite the stage, and if viewed from the right angle, one can

vaguely make out several men with headphones and wraparound microphones scurrying around the booth, making certain that the show runs smoothly. Four television cameras are situated at various points and distances around the stage; each angle of the action is covered.

Had someone come to this arena with no previous knowledge of its existence, she would surely believe that she had stumbled across a new ballet or theater; maybe a concert hall. However, this magnificent structure is none of these things. It is, in fact, an Assembly of God church-- Faith Hill Church and International Outreach Ministries, to be exact-- a charismatic evangelical organization, and one of Michigan's largest and fastest growing churches.

In the early 1980's, Faith Hill Church was located in a small building on the south side of Lansing, Michigan. At that time, it had less than three hundred members in its congregation. Then, the parishioners say, a "miracle" happened. A member who had been away for several years serving in the U.S. Navy returned from his tour of duty. This young man's name was Bob Jacobson,¹ and during his absence from the church, he had been "saved," and what Faith Hillers refer to as "set on fire for God," which means that he "got serious."

Bob started his own Bible group, and began winning people over to Jesus and "saving" them. One day, Bob heard God calling him to preach, so he went and took the classes that he needed to become certified, and was soon a youth minister under another pastor. Bob was an excellent speaker and "soul winner."

¹ In the interest of confidentiality, names of all subjects and the church have been changed.

He continued to move up in the church, and quickly advanced to night minister, conducting the Sunday evening services each week on his own. More and more people started attending Faith Hill Church, to hear Pastor Bob preach. It wasn't long before Bob Jacobson became the senior pastor of the church. His energy and prayer are said to be unlike anything those who came in contact with the church had ever witnessed before. The congregation grew more rapidly than anyone could possibly have imagined.

Eventually, the congregation had to move to a larger building a few miles away from the original church. Although the new building was more roomy than the old one had been, membership continued to grow-- so much so that, at one point, Pastor Bob is said to have been conducting five services every Sunday, just to accommodate all the people who wanted to attend. When membership rose to two thousand, construction began on the new enormous building outside the city. Pastor Bob now performs three services every Sunday, bringing his charismatic message to over three thousand members in the main branch of the church, as well as countless nonmembers who attend each week, and those reached through Faith Hill's television ministry.

INTRODUCTION

The preceding resonates with other studies of fundamentalist religion today. Evangelical churches have been growing steadily throughout the 20th century, and have gained significantly during the past two decades (Poloma,

1982; Quebedeaux, 1978; Bedell, 1992). The Assemblies of God, in particular, has been described as the fast growing Christian denomination in America (Jacquet, 1991; Bedell, 1992; Poloma, 1989), and is the twelfth largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. (Poloma, 1988). During the ten-year period between 1971 and 1981, Assemblies of God membership rose by over one million, from 625,000 to 1,629,000 (Poloma, 1989). Today, the denomination claims well over two million members in this country alone (Bedell, 1992), and, largely due to its extensive overseas missions projects, Assemblies of God serve approximately fifteen million people world wide.

How do fundamentalist evangelical churches draw so many people today? What do the Assemblies of God and other organizations of this nature have to offer parishioners that they may not find in other denominations? The purpose of this paper is to examine these issues, focusing on one large Assembly of God church as an example. Data collected at Faith Hill Church in Lansing, Michigan, will be used to illustrate a deep "us vs. them" bond that is created in the church to facilitate recruitment of new members. This paper explores that bond, how it is developed within public services, and its consequences for churchgoers.

Historical Background of Movement

The Christian fundamentalist movement in the U.S. began as a reaction against modernism during the late 1800's and early part of this century (Evans,

1988). Fundamentalist beliefs generally include such tenets as the vicarious atonement, literal resurrection of Christ, the Triune God, pre-millennialism, and the reality of Satan (Ibid., p.2). Though not all fundamentalists adhere to the same combination of beliefs, there are two binding threads that link the movement together. These are the belief that the Bible is completely free from error, and that the sole authority on any question rests in the Bible (Boone, 1989; Evans, 1988).

From this movement arose the evangelicals -- a word that most all of today's Christian churches claim -- whose faith and beliefs rest in the Gospels of the New Testament (Blumhofer, 1993). Evangelicals elevate the importance of personal salvation, which is seen as only being possible through strict adherence to the doctrines of the New Testament. Since, according to fundamentalist evangelical beliefs, Heaven is only attainable by calling upon the saving power of Christ, "soul winning" is a major part of evangelical religious practice (Evans, 1988).

Charismatics sprang from the Biblical belief of Baptism of the Holy Spirit, which includes the idea that believers are endowed with supernatural gifts from God, such as glossolalia, being "slain in the spirit," divine inspiration, and prophetic knowledge (Poloma, 1989). The rise of the Charismatic following is closely related in time to the rise of fundamentalist Christianity. However, just as it is not true that all fundamentalists are Charismatics, neither are all Charismatics fundamentalist (Evans, 1988). Charismatics can therefore be

found in a variety of denominations, from Catholicism to Mormonism.

The Assemblies of God, which was created in 1914 by a group of Pentecostals from the Midwest who met in Hot Springs, Arkansas to discuss the Apostolic Faith Movement (Blumhofer, 1993), is always at once fundamentalist, evangelical, and charismatic (Evans, 1988). Since its establishment, the Assemblies of God, following the general trend of fundamentalist organizations in this country, has grown steadily each year, reached a plateau in the mid-1960's, but then gained rapidly over the past twenty years (Jacquet, 1991).

Theories of Fundamentalist Growth

The religious right has recently become the topic of much discussion in the field of sociology. The movement's increasing size and political and social strength at a time when capitalism is experiencing a world wide crisis has produced several theories that bring the phenomenon into focus. Echo Fields (1991) uses Habermas' discussion of "legitimation crisis" in combination with his ideas of "colonization of the lifeworld" to explain the rise of activist fundamentalism during capitalist crisis. First, the impact of globalized capitalism on American workers has created a "bad fit" between the image of the ideal family and the reality of changing American families and our unpredictable working lives. Because of this contradiction, ideologies must be created that will explain and justify what is happening to our lives. Since fundamentalist Christianity holds the tenets of the capitalist system as part of God's holy

prescription (Ibid.), crises such as that described above are seen as natural and workable -- they are legitimized as part of the divine plan. Secondly, as consumerism, formal rationality, and other aspects of the capitalist economic sphere invade the private sphere, this "colonization of the lifeworld" produces families whose interactions revolve around income and consumption. Legal structures are currently "intruding into family life," as well as personal disputes between individuals. What comes out of this recent invasion of the private by the public may be reactionary countercultures, such as drug abuse, cult membership, or involvement in activist fundamentalism (Ibid.).

Margaret Poloma, whose work focuses on the Assemblies of God denomination, suggests that charismatic religious experience plays a crucial role in membership growth (1989). She contends that ecstatic experiences such as glossolalia and prophecies, which have been overlooked by researchers in the past, have significant institutional consequences in evangelistic outreach and the promotion of church growth. Although Poloma has shown that those who experience charismatic gifts are more likely to be devoted to the church and its evangelist efforts, the theory does not explain how these people were first drawn to the organization, or why the church's outreach measures have become increasingly successful during recent years.

Ammerman discusses the importance of fellowship (1987) to recruiting and retaining members into the movement. The mere fact that events take place so often at evangelical churches plays a large role in the commitment of

parishioners. For the members of the church studied by Ammerman, "the dizzying round of church activities can effectively shut out the influences of the world" (Ibid., p. 107). Others as well have found that a strong sense of community is a key factor in the rise of any religious movement (Poloma, 1982; Kanter, 1972; Marty, 1976; etc.). This was also found to be the case at Faith Hill Church. There is so much to do at the church that members need not spend any of their free time apart from the church or their fellow parishioners. However, the very fact that members feel such deep commitment, and choose to spend their time in this way, should be of critical importance. The creation of an "us vs. them" bond between parishioners of fundamentalist organizations is mentioned in several accounts (for example, Marty, Ammerman, Poloma, and Quebedeaux), but has not been explored as a major recruitment tool into these organizations.

Observations at Faith Hill Church and International Outreach Ministries reveal that a strong us / them dichotomy, built during the early stages of recruitment, is a central factor in obtaining new members and holding the congregation together. The dichotomy is constructed through several means at Faith Hill Church. A business theme helps to legitimate the church and its activities to possible recruits and to members themselves. This theme helps to develop a strong "us" identity through rational means, mirroring our capitalist society, but in such a way that does not create a loss of meaning for parishioners. A second theme, theater and performance, creates an "us" between congregation members by way of shared entertainment -- "inside jokes"

can be a powerful mechanism in making people feel that they belong. This theme is also used to model the proper behavior desired from members and possible recruits. Reality definition is a theme of utmost importance at Faith Hill. By constructing a separate reality for members and possible recruits, not only can the "us" be strengthened, but it is here that the "them" is created and the absolute separation occurs. Working together, these three themes found at the church help to create a very strong image of the "we" who are worshipping together at Faith Hill, and the "they," who reside in the world outside the church. It is the contention of this paper that examining the various ways that these "us" and "them" images are constructed is one key to understanding the rise of fundamentalist movements.

METHODS

The data used in this analysis were obtained through field research at church services and functions. During a twelve-week period in the spring of 1993, notes were gathered at weekly Sunday morning services, prayer group meetings, evening services, church television broadcasts, an abundance of literature published by the church and the Assemblies of God denomination, a Faith Hill passion play, and many conversations with members of the church.

Faith Hill holds services every day of the week, and most nights, as well, separate ministries within the church come together for their own events or services. In addition, Faith Hill has several prayer groups meeting every night,

television broadcasts several times per week, classes for members Monday through Friday,² and numerous activities, meetings, and events each week. Most of these are advertised to the public; however, some are either not open to the public, or simply not advertised.

The main focus of this research centers on the 10:30 a.m. Sunday services. Through this huge all-congregational meeting time, it was possible to gain a good overview of the church as a whole; who was attending, and what was happening within the church. The service chosen has the highest attendance of any event at Faith Hill. Most importantly for this study, the 10:30 a.m. Sunday service has the largest number of visitors to the church. Because of this, much data were recorded concerning Faith Hill's strategies for pulling members in, and creating a bond between them and their church. Church beliefs and teachings, as presented to visitors, as well as the general characteristics and attitudes of those attending, were recorded.

Data collected during this study were analyzed using a combination of two qualitative methods. The extended case method, as described by Michael Burawoy (Burawoy, 1991, pp. 8 - 27 and 271 - 287), involves going into the field equipped with preexisting theories, then reconstructing these theories as anomalies occur. We "lay out as coherently as possible what we expect to find in our site before entry." When a violation of the theory is discovered, the theory is rebuilt, using existing literature and the anomaly itself to help us understand

² Toward the end of this study, the church opened up its own Bible college, as well.

the problem. In other words, "rather than theory emerging from the field, what is interesting in the field emerges from our theory." I entered this study with several preexisting theories and ideas of what was likely to be found. These ideas were gradually rebuilt throughout the time in the field, as contradictory evidence appeared.

The major method of analysis used in this study is the grounded theory method, which is defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Here, the researcher discovers a "new" theory from the data she has collected in the field, rather than attempt to verify or restructure an already existing theory. The development of a grounded theory therefore begins with no particular commitment to ideas or expectations of what the data will produce. Data is first gathered, then it is coded and diagramed in a way that facilitates the surfacing of important findings that may have otherwise been overlooked. Strauss argues that a good theory "ought to be developed in intimate relationship with data, with researchers fully aware of themselves as instruments for developing that grounded theory" (Strauss, 1987, p.6). While several theories were brought into this study, most of the findings presented here arose from the data, through coding and diagraming of research notes. Unanticipated information began to form and eventually solidify into theories of their own.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

As a large Assembly of God church, Faith Hill embraces the overall

theology of its denomination. Because of this, it strives to help meet the goals of the collective Assemblies of God, which are posted on a large sign hung on the wall of the church's entrance hallway:

The Decade of Harvest . . . Our Goals for the year 2000: to establish 5000 new churches; to enlist one million prayer partners; to reach and win five million people to Christ; to train and disciple 20,000 ministers.

While staying connected to the denomination and its goals, Faith Hill does not lose sight of its own existence as a unique organization. The specific needs of the Faith Hill congregation are important, and through the attempt to meet these needs, the church hopes to be able to form an alliance between churchgoers within its own setting. If achieved, this alliance may in turn help the church move toward the more general aims of its denomination. The ability to gain and retain members on a church level is the key element to accomplishing the goals stated above.

Faith Hill Church claims three thousand members in its main branch alone, and continues to grow. How is this church able to bring together such a sizeable congregation successfully, keep them motivated and focused on the goals of the church, and form a strong bond among them as a unit?

From the data collected during this study, one overriding theme emerged to be present at all levels of church activity. A powerful separation between those who worship together at the church -- "us" -- and those outside the Faith Hill setting -- "them" -- is created during the earliest stages of recruitment, and

then nurtured consistently at each meeting, on every television broadcast, in all publications dispersed by the church, and symbolically through song lyrics, decorations, slogans -- even messages on T-shirts.

This "us vs. them" dichotomy works to benefit the church in several ways. By creating the world outside the church as full of danger, ignorance, and evil, the dichotomy seeks to produce members who are loyal and devoted to the church, while insuring that parishioners' time and money will not be split among several activities or causes. While not a closed cult community nor a live-in commune, as those described by Kanter in her work, Commitment and Community (1972), members are nonetheless willingly separated, physically and psychologically, from the world beyond the church. Creating and maintaining this separation is an enormous task, especially given the size of the church and the diversity of its parishioners. The idea of constructing a strong "us vs. them" bond between three thousand individuals may seem incomprehensible to many, but Faith Hill seems to accomplish just that.

Efforts to create and sustain membership commitment were discovered in three major underlying themes of church activity: a business theme, a theater and performance theme, and reality definition. Together, these areas work to help construct the us / them dichotomy at the church, which is used as the basis for recruitment and maintenance of members.

Images of Business at Faith Hill Church

One very dominant theme that functions to create a strong "us" at Faith Hill is the presence of bureaucratic business characteristics. Positions of church staff and workers are meted out in a clearly defined, hierarchical fashion. The senior pastor is decidedly the Chief Executive Officer of the organization, followed by a descending pyramid of pastors, district ministers, elders, and so on, right down to ushers, greeters, and parking lot safety patrols. This established hierarchy -- which differs considerably from many other Pentecostal churches of the past and present -- brings the security of knowing that "someone is in charge here." It provides structure to the entire church -- everything is always in its place; there is no chaotic element to Faith Hill. The hierarchy also works to get members involved in their church. Everyone who wants a place in the business of the church is afforded one, and opportunities for moving up are abundant.

Another aspect of the business theme at Faith Hill pertains to its general look and feel. As stated earlier, the building itself resembles a convention center. It is huge, new, and clean, with beautifully landscaped grounds. When one pulls into the Faith Hill parking lot, she is directed to an appropriate space by safety patrol men wearing bright orange vests over dark suits. There are always one or two police cars patrolling the lot Sunday mornings, and on occasion, the policemen will park their cars outside while going inside the building to drink coffee and talk to Pastor Bob. These things all lend a sense of

authority to Faith Hill. The church and its senior pastor are legitimated not only in the eyes of the parishioners, but -- by extension of the secular patrolmens' presence -- it is legitimated to the entire community.

Images of authority and legitimation can also be found in many of the church's song lyrics as well:

. . . Commander in Chief, bring us to attention, lead us into battle to crush the enemy . . . Jesus has all authority here in this place, He has all authority here . . . ("Mighty Warrior" song lyrics)

The services and church literature are also saturated with business images. Words such as "corporation," "hostile takeover," "compensation," and many others appear throughout pamphlets printed by the church. When speaking, Pastor Bob incorporates images of business, as well. Consider this excerpt from one service during Faith Hill's two week "Missions Conference":

After the prayer for money, Pastor Bob tells the congregation that if anyone is interested in money or money management, "whatever you do, don't miss tonight's service" . . . He is talking about the guest speaker tonight, whose topic is "Fresh Financial Anointing." Pastor Bob says this guy "will share with you the secret of 'God's Multiplication Factor' and pray for each attendant to receive an anointing for financial miracles!" (FN #8, 3/15/93, p. 5)

Pastor Bob's sermons and literature are all formed in organized topics which fit under one larger subject heading. Each week, he will introduce the major theme for the day, and then present seven or eight points that illustrate the theme. These points are then discussed in a very neatly organized fashion. This memo-like point by point analysis of each topic is never deviated from, it is the set style of getting down to each week's business.

Finally, advertising is one of the church's main tasks each week. This is not the usual "church announcements" part of the service, which is generally set off into one five-minute block, but it is full-blown advertising. Besides imploring the congregation, many of whom are visitors, to attend various activities during the week -- which amounts to a very large portion of the verbal communication at the Sunday morning service -- posters, signs, pamphlets, and newsletters containing information on these activities can be found at every turn in the building. The fact that there is always something to do at Faith Hill, and that the advertisements make every event sound very exciting, helps a great deal in keeping up the dominant time commitment needed for the creation -- and separation -- of the church's "us."

Theater / Performance Characteristics

A second factor that aids in the formation of Faith Hill's "us" is the presence of a theater / performance theme at the church. The inside of the chapel itself looks like a theater, with its huge stage, two-tiered audience seating, orchestra, TV cameras, and lighting booth. Like a stage play, each actor involved in the service / show wear costumes fitting to their characters, and both the actors and their costumes, as well as the stage decorations, vary according to the content of different performances and make up of the audience. For example, during the missions conference mentioned earlier, in which the title of the service was "Air Hope Flight 202," I recorded these observations:

. . . On the wall in the back of the stage is this big plane thing sticking out. It is like half a plane, flying into Faith Hill chapel, and it has flags draped over it. The ushers are dressed in these short sleeve button up shirts with blue pants, instead of their usual red blazers, and are wearing little plastic name tags. They are, apparently, our flight attendants today. The ushers hand everyone an "Air Hope Flight 202" boarding pass as we enter . . . (FN #7, 3/8/93, p. 2 - 3)

The same type of costume and performance change was noted at every service, as color coordination and theme of the service were altered not only each week, but also at each different service, according to the topic of discussion and/or the make up of the audience. The theater / performance theme creates a fun atmosphere at the church, in which those attending -- whoever they may be -- can feel at ease during fellowship.

Each service at Faith Hill is broken down into small segments, with "commercial breaks"³ of jokes or announcements scattered throughout, to keep the audience's attention. Everything is very well rehearsed and tightly scheduled, right down to knowing when to pause for audience laughter. The best examples of this phenomenon are illustrated by the staged interactions between Pastor Bob and his wife Betsy:

Pastor Bob continues, "As scary as commitment can be, I don't think that we can grow without it." Betsy smiles and nods at this. Pastor Bob says to Betsy, "Do you remember that night?" [Referring to a story told earlier] Betsy replies, "Not really, since you're making the story up!" Now there is uproarious laughter. Pastor Bob looks "fake embarrassed," and slaps Betsy lightly on the shoulder. She starts laughing, too. (FN #9, 3/22/93, p. 8)

³ FN #11, 4/5/93, p. 8 -- Guest pastor Gil Underwood uses the words "let's pause for a commercial break" during his sermon.

The precise staging, well-rehearsed dialogue, and spectacular lighting of the whole Sunday morning event adds to the sense of attending a theatrical performance. The experience of shared entertainment, like friends sharing in a joke, may allow visitors to feel that they belong at Faith Hill -- they are part of the "us" at the church.

A final function of Faith Hill's theater / performance theme is to allow those on stage to "act out" behavior that is desired from the audience itself. Rehearsed discussions concerning the tithe, joking about those attending other churches, and modeling proper husband - wife interaction is only part of what is involved in this. The actors often conduct the congregation's in church behavior as well:

. . . The entire choir, as well as some of the pastors in the pastor's section, raise their arms during an emotional song. Many people in the audience begin to raise their arms, too . . . (FN #5, 2/1/93, p.5)

The Construction of a Shared Congregational Reality

Perhaps the most important of the factors that work to create Faith Hill's "us vs. them" bond is reality construction within the church. Not only does the definition of reality help to build and emotionally bond the "us" at the church, but within this creation lies the basis for the "them." This theme is woven into everything that goes on at Faith Hill -- it is not a subtle or subconscious phenomenon, but is right there, out in the open, at all times.

Church literature is saturated with constructions of the us / them

dichotomy. Both the "us" and the "them" are clearly defined, often going so far as simply listing who "we" are and who "they" are, and characteristics of each. During my short period of observation at Faith Hill, I was able to discover and record at least five different levels of "us" vs. "them" at play in the church: Nationalistic, Cultural, Religious, Inter-religious, and between the ministries within the church itself.

The most prevalent of all distinctions made in the church are those made at the religious level. In Bob Jacobson's The New Life: The Start of Something Wonderful!, which is given to all newcomers to the church on their first visit, there are specified 26 things that "you will want to do" when you become a Christian. It also includes lists titled "Beware of So-Called Ministers Who Deny . . ." and "Beware of False Prophets and False Teachers . . ." The latter enumerates 31 religions that Pastor Bob calls "cults," among which are such established faiths as Buddhism, Mormonism, Unitarian Universalist, and the Metropolitan Community Church. (Surprisingly, the list does not include the Hare Krishnas, a religion that is an old standby on everyone else's black list.)

The services at Faith Hill are also filled with material meant to create an "us" and "them" in the minds of the congregation. Song lyrics are thick with images that, both explicitly and implicitly, help construct this dichotomy:

"All Hail the power of Jesus' Name!"

"We are the Chosen Seed of Israel's Race!"

"Our God Reigns!"

"Our God is Awesome!"

"We are His Obedient Servants . . . "

And the weekly hymn:

**"Jesus, Your Name is Power; Jesus, Your Name is Might;
Jesus, Your Name Above Any Other; Jesus, Your Name is Life."**

Jokes are another important element in defining reality at Faith Hill Church. During an average 90 minute service, 17 jokes were recorded in observation. After subtracting the thirty minutes spent on congregational singing, this means one joke was told about every 3 1/2 minutes. The numerous jokes told during the services are always geared at making an us / them distinction. Most poke fun at other cultures or religions, and some are interreligious, or even interchurch.

Humiliating the "them" is not the only method available for the separation of members from nonmembers, however. Often, "they" are presented to the congregation as frightening, dangerous people whose violence can only be escaped through the safety of Faith Hill Church. Consider the following example of "them" creation during one of Pastor Bob's sermon's:

. . . Pastor Bob goes on, trying to scare parishioners. He says that he was two miles from the towers when the explosion occurred. [Referring to the 1993 bombing in New York City] He says that you never know what will happen to you. He tells about an NAACP leader who just opened his mail one day, and there was a letter bomb, and it killed him right there . . . Pastor Bob tells another story about a pastor who opened his mail to find a bomb, but he was not even injured, because of his faith in the lord . . . Pastor Bob tells the congregation that on the same day the bomb exploded in the tower in New York, he was at the Newark airport to

catch his plane home, and there was a bomb scare at the airport. "Experts say that the terrorists have made it to America . . . We are living in a different world today, and I will tell you who is going to make it -- High Performance Believers who have Faith in Jesus Christ!" (FN # 9, 3/22/93, p. 12)

Not only is Pastor Bob creating a nationalistic and religious separation by making these statements, but there is an implicit racial division as well. Note that the NAACP leader in the story died under the same circumstances that the faithful Christian pastor came out of unscathed.

Recruits from the public service who choose to become members of Faith Hill are further exposed to this kind of strong programming against "them." Although the church's required membership classes and "Believer's Services" were not attended as part of the observations for this study, talking with people who have been involved in these events reveals that "us vs. them" is largely created by misinforming and/or providing potential members with selected and incomplete information regarding other cultures and religions. When I asked one female member at the Faith Hill visitor's center why the church felt that Africans need to be missioned to, given that they already have many religions of their own, I was told that "Everybody in Africa is starving to death, because they worship cows and refuse to eat them." While it is probable that this is simply one woman's misunderstanding, rather than information given to her during a class, the woman was clearly in a position of educating newcomers about the church's beliefs.

In fact, all of the full members that I spoke with during this study believed

the same sort of false information about peoples different from themselves. On

Buddhists:

"There is a right, and there is a wrong. Worshiping Jesus Christ is right, worshiping Buddha is wrong . . . " (FN #12, 4/12/93, p.15)

"Asians need to be missioned to because they worship a Buddha God . . . " (FN #5, 2/15/93, p. 16)

When asked about Moslems:

"It's not that they're bad people, it's just that Moslems are very devout in their religion. And they're, they are -- they're violent! They're violent people. A lot of the bombings and stuff, it's done by Moslems. A lot of the world unrest is caused by Moslems. It's part of their religion! And for a Moslem, if you became a Christian, and gave your life to Jesus Christ -- it would be good for them to kill you . . . your brothers and sisters, your father or mother -- they might kill you!" (FN #12, 4/12/93, p. 16)

On Catholics:

"The only way you're going to get to heaven is if you accept Jesus Christ as your savior . . . not if you pray to a -- all the prayers to the Virgin Mary, all the prayers to a statue -- that's not going to get you there." (FN #12, 4/12/93, p. 11)

A question about Russian Jews was answered:

"They're Russian Jews, they're Jewish. But being a Russian Jew is not a religion, that's a race. If you're a Russian Jew, they can be a Catholic Russian Jew, a Protestant Russian Jew, they can be a, uh, Judaic Russian Jew . . . " (FN #12, 4/12/93, p. 15)

And on Homosexuality:

". . . They choose it! . . . I'm not saying that the Homosexual is bad. I love him. But what he is doing is wrong . . . " (FN # 12, 4/12/93, p. 9)

"My feeling is that homosexuality itself is wrong, according to God's word, but I don't hate them -- the Bible says we're supposed to hate

the sin, but love the sinner . . . I believe it's a choice, on their part . . ." (FN #12, 4/12/93, p. 8)

One member, a young man in his early thirties who is currently working his way up the church hierarchy, made a good summation of Faith Hill's reality definition theme differentiating between "us" and "them" in this one brief statement:

"Homosexuals, Lesbians, Blacks, Jewish, Moslems, everything -- they're all people! We love them all. But! The Bible is very specific. Unless you call upon the name of Jesus Christ, you will not be saved. So, we want to help, we don't hate these people -- but the fact is that only through the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ is someone saved." (FN #12, 4/12/93, p. 17)

CONSEQUENCES AND CONCLUSIONS

As a result of this creation of an us / them dichotomy at the church, the commitment between members noted in so many organizations like Faith Hill is formed and nurtured. Members feel empowered in a world where power is set aside for only a few. The knowledge of being part of "God's Victorious Army" can be very comforting during times of great uncertainty such as this. As Ammerman notes, "One of the keys to this power is the knowledge that believers have that, as one of the saved, they automatically outrank anyone who is unsaved. No matter what outsider they are with, believers have the higher status." (Ammerman, 1987, p. 107).

This sense of spiritual superiority works to outweigh the alienation that people often feel in the world outside the church. To members, there is no differentiation between life inside and outside the church. Within the church,

they may have important tasks to which they are assigned to help keep the organization running. Outside the church is where their most crucial role is found, as members attempt to win as many souls as possible to their savior. Missioning to "them" is one of the largest responsibilities a member has, and this helps to further delineate between churchgoers and everyone else.

A strong "us" creates a strong sense of community among the congregation, and this also can work to fill the void of a loss in peoples' lives. New recruits to the fundamentalist movement usually describe their former lives as "miserable" -- they may have been taking drugs, fighting with their spouses, or drinking a lot before they found the church (*Ibid.*, p. 155). Another pattern of convert are persons whose lives were undergoing a change at the time of conversion (*Ibid.*, p. 156). The same types of accounts were found among members of Faith Hill. Both of the members with whom I spoke formally related that they had been using drugs before coming to the church, and both had recently experienced the death of a loved one shortly before conversion.

On a larger level, the effects of this powerful bond between members of the movement are realized in several ways. Fundamentalist views have become mainstream in today's world, and the movement is now, more than ever, able to influence national policies, both domestic and foreign. While church TV programs were once seen Sunday mornings or late nights on obscure local cable stations, today's fundamentalists own and operate their own 24-hour national television network. There are national news programs run by

fundamentalist groups, and several secular television programs advocate fundamentalist views, as well. Fundamentalists have invaded the political sphere also -- not only running for office, but often running successfully.

The movement's new found power and influence are not only due, in part, to the successful creation of an us / them dichotomy within the individual churches, but this power in turn acts to bring more potential recruits to the public services themselves. From here the cycle begins again, with the individual church creating an "us vs. them" bond, gaining new members and more power and influence to the movement in the process.

This paper has focussed on the construction of an us / them bond between members of a church congregation as a major factor in the growth of the fundamentalist movement. Field observation performed at one Assembly of God church over a twelve-week period in 1993 revealed that the creation of this dichotomy is at the center of all church activities, from recruitment at public services to membership classes and "Believer's Services." Although the us / them phenomenon has been noted by several researchers of the fundamentalist movement, the findings discussed in this paper suggest that this dichotomy is critical to fundamentalist organizations gaining and retaining members in today's world. The "us vs. them" ties present in the movement need to be explored more fully to gain a complete understanding of fundamentalist growth.

It is also important to note that not all visitors to Faith Hill Church stay and become devoted members, despite the efforts discussed in this paper to draw

people in. Some may be turned off to the idea of a commitment based on "us against them." For others, the pull is simply not strong enough to create an allegiance between themselves and the church, or they may feel overwhelmed by the apparent time and financial commitment needed to become a member. Further study on the growth of evangelical fundamentalist organizations such as Faith Hill may focus on those visitors who are not enticed by the congregational us / them bond to join the church.

As peoples' sense of identity and meaning continues to get lost in the increasing crises of our world capitalist system, so does evangelical fundamentalism continue to grow and expand into every realm of society. While many feel that this growth is good for both individual members of the movement and society itself, as Ammerman notes, "The answer depends on one's definition of *good*" (*Ibid.*, p. 191). Creating identity and a sense of belonging to otherwise alienated masses seems noble, but achieving this through the stark separation of "us" and "them," "good" and "evil," merits close attention in a world that is getting smaller every day.

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