MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
3 1293 01409 6600

THESIS
2

This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled

Just a Little Talk with Jesus:
An Analysis of Conversational
Narrative Strategies Used by
Evangelical College Students

presented by

Wallis C. Metts, Jr.

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Arts and Letters

W Fred Graham
Major professor

Date April 4, 1995

MSU is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution

O-12771

LIBRARY
Michigan State
University

PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.
TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE
JAN 2 9 2007 08 06 06		

MSU Is An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution
c:\circ\datedue.pm3-p.1

JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS: AN ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATIONAL NARRATIVE STRATEGIES USED BY EVANGELICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

Wallis C. Metts, Jr.

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Interdisciplinary Studies, Arts and Letters

1995

ABSTRACT

JUST A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS: AN ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATIONAL NARRATIVE STRATEGIES USED BY EVANGELICAL COLLEGE STUDENTS

By

Wallis C. Metts, Jr.

This ethnographic study examines the narratives of six students enrolled in an evangelical Christian college during January of 1994. Specifically, the tension between the rhetorical and relational character of these narratives was studied to explore the relationship between narrative strategy and worldview. Both oral and written samples were collected during an intensive four-week residential creative writing workshop. The narratives were subjected to a variety of analytical tools.

The study finds the students do not define their Christian experience in terms of being "born-again," nor do they make extensive use of direct biblical citation, either in their conversion narratives or in classroom discourse. Formal creative work does use biblical symbolism. The study supports James Hunter's observations about the erosion of symbolics boundaries among college-age members of the evangelical subculture, a subculture which constitutes as much as 30% of the U.S. population.

The researcher also develops a conversational paradigm and finds common assumptions about the monological character of evangelical discourse are not grounded in ethnographic observation of this interpretive community.

Copyright by
[illegible] Metts 1995

For my mom, who always
wanted me to be a doctor,
and for my dad, who always
treated my ideas as though I were.

Copyright by
WALLIS CONE METTS, JR.
1995

For my mom, who always
wanted me to be a doctor,
and for my dad, who always
treated my ideas as though I were.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project represents the last doctoral degree in general inter-disciplinary studies offered by the college of arts and letters at Michigan State University. As this program wound down, a number of people were patient and gracious in helping me achieve this degree, a dream delayed by both personal and professional complications.

These people include members of my committee, especially chair Fred Graham (religious studies) and David Ralph (communication department), both of whom stayed with this project in retirement. I took my first class at the university from Fred and he has respected my ideas and tolerated my shortcomings for eight years. Diane Brunner (English department) was enthusiastic about discouse analysis and its implications for my project. Her testimony sparked my conversion from linguistic positivist to realist. Patricia Stock, also of the English department, agreed to step in and fill a vacancy in my committee. Interdisciplinary studies are, in a university setting at least, "homeless." None of these faculty members was obligated to take me in, and their willingness to do so says a great deal good about the integrity and civility of university communities which are often and perhaps too quickly labeled as bureaucratic and cold.

Others in this particular university community have earned my respect and gratitude. One of these is Nancy Ainsworth-Vaughn, whose classes in discouse studies framed my understanding of the analytical tools I employ,

although any failures to employ them properly are my own. My several classes with her were the most helpful of any in my doctoral program in bringing this project into focus. Jackie Campbell, administrative assistant in the college of arts and letters, helped steer me through what few bureaucratic shoals I did encounter. She was understanding and supportive of my efforts to complete this progam while living and working in another city.

Members of my own community also supported me in this endeavor, not the least of which were the six students who gave their permission and support as I collected, recorded and analyzed their discourse. For research purposes they remain anonymous, but they were never merely research subjects, and I have taken pains not to think or write of them in those terms. They were and are my colleagues and my friends.

I appreciate also the encouragement and flexibility of three successive deans at Spring Arbor College. Tom Ball, chair of the communications faculty, helped keep this vision alive during its darker days, and many colleagues shouldered responsibilites of mine or waited patiently for me to find the time or energy to shoulder them myself. I was surrounded by encouragers and helpers, including my own students, secretary Elaine Courter, and faculty friends David Burns and Cathy Crater. I also worked as a freelance writer throughout this project, and editor Mary Lou Carney was gracious to a fault, giving me two things I needed often: laughter and time.

I was of course supported by my family. My parents and sisters gave me their praise and their prayers. My children—Margaret, Christian, Michael and Pilgrim—were proud of me, even when they didn't know or understand exactly what I was doing. I've promised not to make them call me "Dr. Dad." And my wife Katie gave me both stability and strength. She let me be alone

when I needed to be alone, and when I needed to not be alone, she was beside me, constant in faith and love.

Finally, I am thankful in this and every achievement to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, the Father of lights in Whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning (James 1:17).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

A colleague of mine, when she was about ten, went out into her front yard, hid behind a bush, and said, out loud, the three curse words she knew. She did this, she says, so she could repent and experience the joy of God's forgiveness.

I took care of all this when I was six. I dutifully and sincerely confessed that I was a sinner and threw myself on the mercies of God, depending solely on the death of Jesus Christ as the substitutionary payment for all my transgressions. Of course I didn't use those words. I was only six. And of course I didn't have a very long list of sins. Unlike my friend, I didn't even know three cuss words. But still, thirty-six years later, I define myself largely in terms of that experience. I am a born-again Christian. I know this because I "got saved" when I was six.

By the time I was ten, if I had met my colleague, I would have doubted if she were a Christian at all. I was a Baptist, but she was a Nazarene. She could get saved again if she had to, which in my mind meant she wasn't depending *solely* on the death of Jesus, so it didn't count.

Now scholars would have called us both Christians, and they would have called us both evangelicals, and they would have called us evangelicals of a particular sort, fundamentalists. They would have classified us in this way because we both made something of being "born again," even though we managed it in different ways. This just goes to show how little scholars know

about ten-year olds. We were just kids who heard and believed remarkable and wonderful stories.

The best stories, the most important stories, were from the Bible, stories about animals in large boats and fiery chariots and a king born in a stable. These were our master narratives. But the second best stories were stories by and about the adults in our homes and churches who had turned from drinking and gambling and fornication to lives of Christian devotion and service. People would tell these stories and everyone would shout and get excited. These are what Bormann calls fantasy themes.

It's hard to compete with stories like those by standing behind a bush and saying three bad words, but we tried. There were still sins to commit and repent of, but they seemed less glamorous. I finally played cards when I was in college, and in graduate school I went to a movie, both activities proscribed by my church.

Telling stories about these experiences wasn't very titillating for the next generation of evangelicals. Nobody shouts any more. They just yawn and turn on the TV. To sustain their faith young evangelicals today have had to find their own stories to tell and their own reasons for telling them. This project is about those stories.

In particular it is about the narratives of six Christian college students who retreated to the northern woods of Michigan to write poetry in January of 1994. It is a discourse study, part of a growing body of scholarly work which attends to actual language in use. I've used journal entries, creative work, and transcripts of taped conversations and discussions to piece together a snapshot of this small group of young evangelicals.

My purpose in doing so is to examine their world view, not by imposing a set of categories on their discourse but by discovering some of the trails in

their symbolic universe. By doing so I've found some trails are not as well-worn as one might expect. At this point I can tell you this much: they don't hide behind a tree to curse anymore and they don't talk much about being born-again. I make these discoveries by examining the tension—what I come to call a fault line—between their rhetorical and relational concerns.

Chapter one introduces the project—and the problem. Because evangelicals have strong rhetorical purposes, the complexity of their narrative discourse can be overlooked. They are, like everyone else, building and maintaining relationships, even in the more monological task of story telling.

Chapter two tells the story of how I came to be interested in this project and examines the biases I bring, as a teacher, a journalist, and as a Christian. This is an ethnographic study, and my role as a teacher-researcher-friend is both complicating and constructive.

In chapter three I introduce the students themselves, both as individuals and as members of a larger community of evangelicals. James Hunter has observed an erosion in the symbolic boundaries of this rhetorical community, particularly in terms of Christian college students, and his analysis is discussed here.

Chapter four introduces my own analytical tools, primarily Bormann's fantasy theme analysis and Livia Polanyi's observations about how the point of a narrative is negotiated. Throughout this study I examine the tension between the rhetorical and relational dimensions of discourse, a tension I believe reflects the *conversational* nature of discourse, including narrative. This conversational paradigm is also described and illustrated in chapter four and represents my efforts to theorize across the data. At times, however, I move beyond these theoretical constraints in an effort to interrogate the

symbols of this particular discourse community, bringing my personal experience with this tradition to bear on the analysis.

Chapter five examines the conversion narratives of the students, stories which reflect how they define their Christian experience. Peter Stromberg's recent analysis of Christian conversion narratives in *Language and Self-Transformation* (1993) is used to show how unacknowledged aims are accomplished through religious language.

Chapter six discusses a set of narrative poems. I show how these students use and understand Scripture to manage certain kinds of rhetorical and relational concerns. Chapter seven examines a skit about Christ's relationship with an individual. By analyzing the class's' reaction and comparing it to the author's conversion narrative, the way the students construct their own conception of Christ is explored.

In Chapter eight I return to my theoretical concerns and raise some methodological concerns as well. Finally I make a few observations about what this study suggests regarding the way evangelical Christian college students both construct and communicate their world view. A brief Postscript suggests a few of the implications of this project for teachers, researchers and others interested in the relationship between world view and language.

I am using world view here in the way it was used by the University of Chicago anthropologist Robert Redfield. He said a world view is "the way man, in a particular society, sees himself in relationship to all else." I've used the term in that general way throughout the study, but an examination of the concept as conceived by Christian (Sire) and Marxist (Kearney) scholars is included in Appendix A. My interest is in the "particular society" part of Redfield's conception, and the paths that society provides for its members to reach each other.

Appendix B gives the students the last word. I've included the reactions of three students to my analysis of their narratives. These "member checks" are one of several ways I've attempted to validate my findings. More than that, however, they represent my respect for these students as both co-researchers and as subjects whose candor and integrity have contributed to my understanding of their world view.

Several years ago I heard of an architect who built a campus without sidewalks. He wanted to see where people actually walked before he made the places where they should walk. It seems to me many approaches to world view analysis start with sidewalks poured at right angles. We assume people walk there because that's the place we've made for them to walk. I doubt if there is enough concrete in this study to pour any new sidewalks. But I have noticed some worn places in the grass.

And that is what this study is about.

CHAPTER 1

Just Jesus and Me: A story about stories

On January 2, 1994, five college students and I piled sleeping bags, luggage, and enough food for three weeks into a 16 passenger van and headed toward Cedar Bend Farm near Mancelona, Michigan. A sixth student would join us two days later.

There was no snow on the ground when we left the campus of Spring Arbor College near Jackson, Michigan. But there was plenty by the time we arrived at our destination, a large farm house where we would cook our food on a wood stove, read by the light of kerosene lanterns, and try to stay warm. We had sixteen inches of snow when we arrived and it snowed every day.

We were there to lose ourselves in a northern wilderness and write poetry. We were there to heighten our sensory awareness with new sensations: the rough feel of firewood, the smell of coffee and bacon, the smooth cool texture of wooden floors, the taste of smoke and fire and ash. We were also there to experience solitude, cabin fever, and cold. And it was cold. A planned winter canoe trip was canceled when it remained in the subteens for a week, and even our hearty northern guide refused to brave the chilly waters of the Jordan River.

No one complained—about canceling the canoe trip, that is. It was a sedentary group for the most part and the cross-country skis available to each of us remained largely unused. We brought in fire wood and sat around the fire, sipping hot chocolate. Days were long and slow, filled with lazy

afternoons and late nights playing cards, reading and writing poetry, and getting on each other's nerves. And telling stories.

It was only natural we would tell stories. As Walter Fisher suggests, we are narrative beings who "experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles and ends" (Sires,1976; Sires,1979). His narrative paradigm suggests, in fact, "all forms of human communication need to be seen fundamentally as stories." He says no communication is purely descriptive or didactic, a conclusion which perhaps defines narrative so broadly as to make it theoretically worthless. But while the value of his paradigm can be debated, his fundamental assumption that people are essentially storytellers is uncontested.

On a typical night after dinner, for example, Brad would be playing his guitar, composing lyrics to a song. Often these lyrics would be narratives. Norm would be in another room, sitting in a rocking chair, wrapped in a blanket, singing to himself: narrative songs. Angie would be upstairs, reading her Bible or writing a letter. More narratives. Lisa and Jerry and Ellen would be playing cards in the kitchen. Later most would be writing in a journal or struggling over the lines of a sonnet, preparing for class in the morning and for the daily conference to follow. The conversations around the card games and the journals and the poems all included narratives as well. So did class, which began each morning right after breakfast at 8:00 a.m. And so did the conferences throughout the day.

After lunch everyone helped bring in firewood and then napped or studied. Students took turns preparing dinner, and immediately after supper everyone would sit in large overstuffed chairs around the wood stove in the living room and read a poem to the group, either one of their own or one they had read that afternoon. Then the cycle would begin again.

Packed in around the edge of these days were the tools of ethnography: a computer, a tape recorder, a video recorder. Where there was electricity—in the dining room and kitchen—discussions, conferences and conversations were recorded and logged. Each of the students had signed a form consenting "to participate in a study of discourse strategies" involving "an analysis of transcripts of personal conversations with the instructor and classroom discussions as well as writing samples." Students were given the option of withdrawing from the study at any time or requesting that specific discussions or writing samples be exempted from the study. The writing samples included creative works generated for the class and a directed journal which included questions about linguistic values and influences.

What students knew about the study, according to the letter accompanying the consent form, was it involved looking at "the way students in the class used language, that is, more at how they say things than what they say." I could not have told them their narratives would become the focal point of the study because I wasn't sure myself which data I would use and how the project would become focused. I did know all of us were evangelical Christians, or at least we were all involved in an evangelical Christian college. Certainly, the relationship between world view and language would provide a starting point for any analysis to follow.

But the value of narrative began to emerge as early as the second day when, in conferences, I asked students to do two things: tell me about people who influenced their use of and/or love of language, and tell me about their Christian experience. The narratives I heard were intriguing, and will be treated at some length in Chapter 5.

Christianity, of course, is founded on the teachings of a storyteller and Scripture is seen by Christians as the story of God's dealings with man, told

largely in narrative fashion. For this reason, perhaps, Christians frequently cast their Christian experience in terms of stories, or of a particular story they call their "testimony." As we shall see, not all of the students responded with a narrative cast in this genre, which in itself bears on the analysis this project undertakes. But at this point, as a way to introduce the issues to follow, consider the beginning of Angie's story, the most conventional of all the testimonies I heard that day:

> From the time I was a little girl
> I was raised in a Christian family
> I went to church every Sunday
> and heard all the Sunday School stories about Jesus
> and I was just trained to know that
> that was the way things were.

Angie uses other stories— the stories of the patriarchs or the prophets or the apostles or Christ himself— to make sense of her own faith. One might expect a Christian's life to be informed by stories. Christianity has often been characterized as a storytelling community. Narrative theologians argue in fact that even its theological discourse has a narrative quality, since it is "faced with a more or less canonical body of texts, of which a large and important text is made up of stories" (Frawley,1987; Metz,1973; Metz and Jossua,1973). But do their own personal stories play a lesser role or a larger role in their faith? Do they trust their own stories more because they are used to trusting stories or do they trust their own stories less because the biblical stories seem larger than life? And how do they interpret all these stories?

Christians, of course, devote a lot of energy to a particular hermeneutical question: How can an ancient text be translated into contemporary experience? Widdershoven's analysis of the ideas of Collingwood, Gadamer and Derrida all have implications for this question, but his concern has more immediacy. He is concerned with stories like Angie's, stories of our own

experience. "In telling stories," Widdershoven says, "we try to make sense of life, like we try to make sense of a text when we interpret it" (1993).

Widdershoven suggests that "stories tell us who we are." This narrative identity comes about as we "become aware of the significance of our experiences by telling stories about them and fusing them with other stories"— including, in Angie's case, biblical stories. Personal identity is "the result of a hermeneutic relation between experience and story" (Widdershoven, 1993).

As Widdershoven shows, it is possible to apply different interpretive grids to this relationship. Of the three he describes, many Christians would be most comfortable with Collingwood's historical approach. They would try to rethink the thoughts of historical actors, allowing the distance in time to "serve as a prism that separates the important from the unimportant." This is a frequent technique in sermons. "Re-enactment" through liturgy and role-playing in children's Sunday school programs are literally, in Collingwood's terms, "a revival of the past in the context of the present" (Widdershoven,1993).

In a limited sense, this occurs in Angie's narrative. Later she says:

> But then, in fourth grade,
> I started reading Genesis and Exodus
> and going through and
> I committed myself to God personally
> during that time, I think,
> even though I was already a Christian,
> I was too young to understand what it meant.

Notice that she doesn't actually remember "committing herself to God" in that period— she assumes she did on the basis of her current understanding. Or rather, she tries to rethink the thoughts of the historical actor, in this case herself, through the "prism" of time.

Gadamer's fusion of horizons, as described by both Widdershoven and Thiselton, is also a comfortable approach for those whose narrative strategies have been framed by Christian experience. This view suggests the meaning we give any narrative is created in the history of its interpretations. Every biblical story, for example, carries the weight of two thousand years of interpretation(s). And that cumulative weight is felt as Christians interpret their personal stories in the context of their interpretive community.

After describing her own isolation as a "nerd geeko person at school," Angie applies this experience to her response to a missionary presentation calling for commitment to Christian service. Because of her own sense of alienation, she says:

> I have a real heart for kids and,
> just people, people that feel alone,
> I can understand how they feel.

This is not an adequate basis for her commitment, however. She sees a call to missionary service (which she later discards) as a larger plan of God's "calling." Her interest in missions is "because of my time when I felt like it was just me and God...alone in the world."

This is all part of her interpretive stance and is based on a history of interpretation. She is echoing the way Christians have sorted out the problem of pain since the time of the apostles when she says "God is going to do His will through me, even if it hurts me," and "God has really, really, really shown me His will through situations." Concerning his will she says:

> God's been talking to me about his will
> and how he works everything together
> for the good of those who love him
> and have been called according to his purpose.

This is almost a direct quote from the apostle Paul writing to the Romans. He writes: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

She may or may not have realized she was citing Scripture, but this does lead to considering Derrida's concept of interpretation as citation (Widdershoven,1993). At first glance, this may be the least comfortable of any of these three hermeneutical frames for evangelical Christians, fraught as it is with postmodern baggage. Derrida believes reading a text means taking it out of one context and placing it in a different one, one in which the original meaning is immaterial. This results, as Widdershoven explains, not in unity and continuity but in divergence and diffusion of meaning.

But intertextuality—citation—is undoubtedly a part of the Christian experience, particularly the evangelical experience, and in much the same way as Derrida suggests. Biblical texts are constantly being cited by older evangelicals in evaluating personal narratives, and often with little regard for the original context or meaning. Although I am not suggesting Angie's use of this citation in this case is not appropriate for the narrative she relates, Noll has noted "Americans have been perhaps more prone than people elsewhere to bend, twist, and abuse the Bible for their own sometimes very un-Christian purposes" (Noll,1992).

This use of Biblical authority might indicate narratives are intended to have a point, even if it is not the point the original text proposed. But more generally it can be said to indicate, as Polanyi has suggested, that narratives are related to "presuppositions jointly held [in this case by a Christian subculture] about what is right, wrong, normal, abnormal, etc." (Polanyi,1979). And, as vehicles for these presuppositions, the narratives—and the

citations—are appropriate to and perhaps even necessary for sustaining a Christian world view.

Following Bakhtin, Kristeva would call representative narratives like these—narratives with a point—"monological" discourse, in the same class with historical and scientific discourse. In her essay "Word, Dialogue, and the Novel," she distinguishes it from "dialogical" discourses, such as polyphonic novels (Kristeva,1986) According to Kristeva the monological form of narration, the epic, lacks ambivalence, "assumes a hierarchy," and is "theological"— that is, it is "a belief in the literal sense of the word."

"Dialogical" discourse, on the other hand, is "anti-theological" and "its history is the history of the struggle against Christianity and its representation." It is discourse which "transgresses" the "prohibition" inherent in monological discourse, a prohibition which refuses to let the text "turn back upon itself" or "to enter into dialogue with itself." Kristeva is talking about literary texts, of course, and she is using "dialogue" in a technical sense, the sense of non-exclusive opposition as opposed to causality and determination.

But this may be what Riessman means when she analyzes a spoken text she says "felt like" narration (Riessman,1993); it had a monological character, that is, the speaker was *telling* about her problems, not *talking* about them (dialogue). This corresponds with Kristeva's contention that narratives are primarily monological, hierarchical, even theological, reflecting "a belief in the literal sense."

But my experience at Cedar Bend Farm suggests this is an over-simplification. The narratives have some dialogical character as well, frequently occurring in the context of conversation and changing in the

process of negotiation, as Polanyi and others have shown (Bauman,1986; Labov,1972; Polanyi,1979; Tannen,1989).

The Christians whose stories are told and examined here are not just relating propositions, they are engaged in building and maintaining relationship, balancing rhetorical intent with relational need. I hope to show these narratives sometimes "turn back on" themselves and "invite dialogue."

This may suggests Fisher's narrative paradigm is too narrow.

Angie's narrative begins with stories she heard in Sunday school and read as a fourth grader, but concludes with "God has been talking to me." In her view, and in mine, all communication is not narrative—it is conversation, rooted in orality, uncertainty, and community. I will examine the narratives to follow in this light. But first, another story.

CHAPTER 2

Faith of our Fathers: Frames for analysis

This study is about stories, specifically about how a particular group of students at a particular point in time used stories in talking and writing. As a discourse study, it is about more than that, of course. It is also about world view and conversation and other aspects of discourse. That is to say, it is also about *why* those particular students may have used those particular stories and what it means that they did so.

It is a rather limited study. Its goal, as is the case with most discourse studies, is not to generalize but to particularize; that is, I am not concerned with drawing broad conclusions about language, but with making specific observations about the language of a particular, and to many, a peculiar subculture, in this case evangelical college students. More to the point I will examine how and why they used narratives and the contexts in which they used them.

The value of such observations should emerge throughout the study, and will be addressed at length at the end of the study. At the very least this study should contribute to an understanding of the relationship between world view and narrative strategies. But it should also provide some insight into these peculiar people— evangelicals, who comprise roughly 30% of the U.S. population by some estimates— and the way language frames their vision and their lives.

I use the term *peculiar* here not to indicate they are weird. I use it as an inside joke, a shibboleth of sorts. In fact, many evangelicals would not be offended by the term. The term, at least as translated by scholars working for King James almost 400 years ago, is one the Apostle Paul uses to describe the purpose of the Christian's calling: "to be a peculiar people zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14) The King James translation refers to God's people as peculiar four times, twice as his "peculiar treasure." (Exodus 19:5, Psalm 135:4) Although the meaning of the words so translated is "particular," I have come to accept the contemporary negative connotations of the translated term (i.e., peculiar = *really* strange). Some evangelicals, I suppose, even relish them.

This inside knowledge, this awareness of their language, makes me a suitable participant observer, once you get past any positivist notions requiring objective distance. Cameron and others have noted "we inevitably bring our biographies and our subjectivities to every stage of the research process, and this influences the questions we ask and the ways in which we try to find answers." (Cameron, et al.,1992) Others have suggested an intimate relationship between the researcher and the subject is not only inescapable but fruitful. Based on her experience with teacher/researchers, Patricia Stock says "The researcher must have access not just to the apparent forms of talk but to the forms imbedded in allusions and in other references that the community invests with meaning" (Robinson,1990).

I confess, however, that getting past positivist notions of objectivity has been a stumbling block[1] for me both personally and professionally. In doing

[1] Notice the biblical allusion: This term occurs 11 times in the New International Version, also as "stumbling stone" in the King James Version, translated from the Greek *skandalon*. Evangelicals, often growing up reading and memorizing large portions of Scripture, use such intertextual citations frequently if not consciously. The role of such citations will be addressed; I note it here to reiterate that, as an evangelical myself, I am equipped to notice them.

discourse analysis, I have come to appreciate a methodology that at first seemed alien and uncomfortable. My purpose then, in this chapter, is to tell how and why I came to be interested in this project and the methodology it requires. I will do this by telling my own story, reviewing the parts which seem relevant. This project is not, after all, simply about stories. It is a story. And it is my story as well as the story of the students I eventually came to know and to understand. If you will bear with me through this autobiographical digression, I will return to the topic at hand and use this autobiography to illustrate and articulate the assumptions which frame my analysis.

The author's biography

Preacher's kid

Like two of the students in the study, I am a preacher's kid. When I was five my dad sold a sign painting business in south Florida and we moved to Tennessee so he could study for the ministry. Even as a student in Bible college, he pastored a small Baptist chapel, and my life from then on centered around his ministries, including terms of service as pastor, evangelist, and church planter in Florida and Tennessee.

I taught my first Sunday school class at nine years of age, at about the same time I earned a week at a camp in New York by memorizing hundreds of scripture verses. At twelve I was playing the piano and organ in services. By the time I finished high school I had visited the mission field, attended numerous conferences and seminars, and "surrendered my life for full-time Christian service" as a medical missionary.

I did all this without any misgiving, mostly because of my dad's integrity. I respected him both then and now because he was what he said others should

be, a kind but principled individual who "walked the talk." I also respected and followed him because he was a careful and capable spokesperson for the faith. He majored in English in college and was multidimensional in his presentation of the gospel. He was a sign painter and an artist, a preacher and a poet. The author of twelve books, he was also a gifted speaker, practicing an oratory distinctive to Baptist preachers in the south. I enjoy listening to him even when I don't agree with what he is saying. I learned to respect the power of words in general and Scripture in particular.

Meanwhile my mother was buying me books and reading to me and telling me I was smart and could be anything I wanted to be, even a doctor. So I decided to be one. I eventually finished college with a degree in chemistry but then couldn't get into medical school; even though my degree was in science my only decent admission scores were in verbal skills. I went to seminary for a year while I decided what to do next, and then I went to the University of Tennessee for a master's degree in English education.

Teacher

In graduate school I started teaching upper elementary students in a private Christian school near Knoxville. The school, servicing mostly upper middle class evangelical families, emphasized the "integration of faith and learning" and most of my projects in graduate school at the time did too. My research focused on values education. My program did not require a thesis, but we had to formulate one in a research class: mine was an anthropological analysis of Christian schools (perhaps the first step down the slippery slope toward discourse analysis).

When I finished my master's program I moved to my first college assignment in the English department of an extremely conservative private

Baptist college in Chattanooga, the same school my father attended when I was a child. Here I taught fifteen hours of freshman composition each semester, riling the administration by critiquing chapel services in my 11:00 class and launching what some administrators considered a subversive literary magazine for students. I also chaired an interdisciplinary studies program and began to explore the possibility of future interdisciplinary work.

This brought me to Michigan State University and southern Michigan, where I joined the faculty of an evangelical college teaching journalism and communication theory and directing the student newspaper. I started work on the doctoral program in interdisciplinary studies for which this project is the culmination.

Journalist

While studying English education in my master's program at Knoxville, I took a course in teaching writing, the premise of which was if you want to teach writing you have to write yourself. The instructor required us to write for publication as part of the class. I wrote an article for the *English Journal* titled "Tips for Teaching English to Religious Fanatics." We did peer critiquing and the comments in the margin of my rough draft were honest and even angry. The article was subsequently published and I got another wave of reaction—about a dozen letters. People thanked me for saying things I didn't believe and others attacked me for believing things I didn't say.

This interactive exchange, combined with the thrill of seeing my byline, was enough to launch me as a writer. I began to write and publish in the popular press. Starting with religious periodicals, I diversified my interests and audiences, winning awards in news writing and science fiction. I have written for magazines, newspapers, trade journals, government publications

and children's magazines. This strengthened my credibility as a writing teacher, of course, but is also sensitized me to two issues: the difficulty—impossibility—of being a completely objective reporter (or, by extension, researcher), and the importance of listening and synthesizing carefully, especially in reporting interviews.

Scholar

Concurrent with these experiences I was developing my expertise as an interdisciplinary scholar, sorting out ideas around me and relating them to each other and to the projects I encountered. Robinson has suggested interdisciplinary thinkers are "perpetual neophytes, persistent amateurs" with "a readiness—perhaps an obligation—to get into the middle of as many conversations as possible." (Robinson,1990) I'd like to relate here, roughly in chronological order, the major conversations I encountered, noting briefly the implications of those encounters as they relate to the development of the current project.

The first of these was James Sire's book *The Universe Next Door*. I read it shortly after I began teaching at the college level. The book was recommended to me by a colleague, along with its companion volume *How to Read Slowly*. Sire introduced me to the concept of world view, cataloging, more or less in chronological fashion, the major world views which have shaped Western civilization. These included, in order, theism, deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern pantheism, and new consciousness. Sire defines world view as "a number of presuppositions, more or less self-consistent, generally unquestioned by each person, rarely, if ever, mentioned by his friends, and only brought to mind when challenged by a foreigner from another ideological universe" (Sire, 1979).

Sire differentiates these world views by examining the answers each provides to a series of basic questions about the nature of man, the meaning of history, the basis of morality, and the prime reality. He argues that each individual has a unique world view; our neighbor, then, represents the "universe next door" of the title. But he also asserts certain basic questions frame common, overlapping viewpoints, such as those he catalogs.

His second book, *How to Read Slowly*, influenced my interest in a project such as this even more. Picking up on the theme of world view, he argues one can learn to "read between the lines" and ascertain the world view of an author even if it is not explicitly stated. I had read some basic linguistics in graduate school—Edward Saphir and I.A. Richards, for example—and was intrigued by the idea.

I picked up on it when I started the interdisciplinary program at Michigan State, thinking, at the time, to do something with grammar. I wondered, for example, if someone with one world view might be more likely to use subordination than someone with a different world view. I had in mind a project that would involve counting prepositional phrases and noting tendencies toward abstract nouns and the like. The idea had some support in works like*Text and Epistemology* (Frawley,1987), which compares percentages of kinds of conjunctions and other grammatical constructions in journalism, theology, science and fiction.

But the idea led me ultimately to Richard Weaver and his book *Language is Sermonic.* Weaver, a rhetorician, believes rhetoric expresses the ultimate values of its users, which are reflected in sources of arguments, grammatical categories and ultimate term. Three of his ideas intrigued me. First, he says at the center of every culture there is a center of authority which he calls a "tyrannizing image." He writes: "There is a center which commands all

things, and this center is open to imaginative but not logical discovery. It is a focus of values, a law of relationships, an inspiriting vision" (Foss, Foss and Trapp,1991).

This "tyrannizing image" can be discerned through the "uncontested terms" of a culture, and it inserts itself between us and our experiences: "a developed culture is a way of looking at the world through an aggregate of symbols so that empirical facts take on significance" (Weaver,1970). This is what world view does, as I was coming to understand it, and thinking about "uncontested terms" and about the cultural context of discourse seemed more interesting than counting prepositions.

The second idea he raised was the notion of "rhetorical intention." Weaver believes "every use of speech, oral and written, exhibits an attitude" and "if one looks widely enough, one can discover its rhetorical dimension." As long as man is "a creature responding to purpose, his linguistic expression will be a carrier of tendency." Language is sermonic, he argues, and "we are all preachers in private and public capacities. We have no sooner uttered words than we have given impulse to other people to look at the world, or some small part of it, in our way" (Weaver,1970). This is what evangelicals do by definition: we try to get others to look at the world in our way. The rhetorical dimension of everyday language is certainly an aspect of the language evangelicals use, given as they are to proclaiming a message.

A third idea Weaver suggested is the idea of a linguistic "covenant." He rails against positivism and relativism, both positions with which thinking evangelicals are understandably uncomfortable. The first rules out the spiritual aspect of man and the second reduces language to a social construct devoid of any absolute meaning. Weaver circumvents this problem by asserting language is a covenant among those who use it. He writes:

> It is in the nature of a covenant to be more than a matter of transient causes. A covenant—and I like, in this connection, the religious overtones of the word—binds us at deeper levels and involves some kind of confrontation of reality. When we covenant with one another that a word shall stand for a certain thing, we signify that it is the best available word for that thing in the present state of general understanding. (Weaver,1970)

This is comfortable language for an evangelical, of course, since his or her "tyrannizing image" is the Word, the idea that God has revealed Himself in language. But the comfort I found was not limited to faith; I was reading Searle's speech act theory at the time (Searle,1969), an idea not too far removed from Weaver's "rhetorical intent," and soon after I read Grice's conversational maxims (Grice,1975). His cooperative principle sounded something like Weaver's linguistic covenant, without the religious overtones.

My reading and my course work were in communication up until this point. I was starting to warm up to conversational analysis as a methodology, except as a teacher of writing I was interested in doing more than examining adjacent pairs and other conversational phenomenon. Searching for a link between writing and speaking I came across Jay Robinson's *Conversations on the Written Word.* (Robinson,1990) This collection of essays about literacy claims language learning is a sociohistorical process, requiring both a glimpse of the future and a knowledge of the past. The metaphor which ties all this together is conversation. Robinson says the metaphor forces us to look at similarities between the two realizations of language: speaking and writing. He notes further that "the dominant metaphors for research in our time are metaphors of interaction."

At this point I started to understand what I had encountered frequently in other readings: texts exist in contexts; all discourse is situated action. Or, as Robinson quotes Mikhail Bakhtin: "Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of utterances." I had resisted this notion because many of its adherents used it to dilute the rhetorical notions with which I was more comfortable. But seeing a piece of writing as part of a larger conversation made perfect sense to me. I had seen the comments scrawled in the margin of my article on religious fanatics years before. I had read the mail. I had entered into conversations with unseen readers over and over again.

Following James Boyd White, Robinson sees language not as a code but as "a cultural resource that members of communities have available when they attempt to say something circumstantial and substantive to one another" (Robinson,1990). This resource, which includes a set of meanings and moves, is what White calls constitutive rhetoric: "the art of constituting character, community, and culture in language." This is what Stanley Fish calls an interpretive community, a community with "shared interpretive strategies" (Fish,1980), a concept which resonated easily with my experience and understanding of evangelical discourse.

But at the time I was most taken with Robinson's assertions about writing:

> All effective writing is centered in a writer's anticipation of the needs and interests and expectations of real or imagined individuals whose readings will count for something in the writer's system of values. Writing and reading are interactive processes, and as such are social activities, even when performed by individuals in lonely silence. (Robinson,1990)

I understood, finally, what many scholars I had read had been trying to say: discourse is situated action. I had been content to see this action merely

in terms of rhetorical intention, but was slowly coming to see its relational dimension: the action is rhetorical and probably intentional, but the situation is relational and perhaps even unconscious.

I then began a series of readings and classes in discourse analysis and sensed immediately a conflict between the sequential analysis of conversational analysis and the more contextual concerns of discourse analysis. This tension, which I eventually resolved for myself through a conversational paradigm, is the framework for the analysis which follows. I will take it up in Chapter 4. But I would like now to restate some of the biases I bring to this project, biases which have been alluded to throughout this chapter.

The author's biases

Researcher as evangelical

The first bias I bring to this project should be clear: I am an evangelical. This means, among other things, I have a high regard for Scripture, believing it was supernaturally supervised to provide a reliable record of God's dealings with and revelation to man. I am not naive about the endless complications such a position entails. I am sensitive to its hermeneutical problems, issues both of translation and interpretation. But, like the students this study examines, I believe God has somehow spoken to us and we have an obligation to try to understand what he is saying.

Let me state my own position on language briefly: Language, as a vehicle of truth, is limited and flawed, certainly. It has gaps and slippage and ambivalence. As a Christian, I would say it is *fallen*. But it reveals as well as it conceals, and it creates closeness as well as distance. Otherwise there is no

revelation and no way of knowing God through his Word, or even knowing each other. As Christ observed, our words reveal the thoughts and intents of our hearts—and ultimately of his. In language, meaning may always be obscured, but it is not invisible.

The implication of my evangelical bias for the study at hand is this: I not only respect the students whose narratives I examine, I often agree with the points they are trying to make by telling them. I understand these students in ways many scholars and journalists who have studied evangelicals do not.

In this connection I read with interest Cameron's definition of "empowering research" in *Researching Language: Issues of Power and Method*. (Cameron, et al., 1992). She says empowering research is research "on, for and with" using "interactive and dialogic research methods instead of the distancing and objectifying strategies positivists are constrained to use."

I have no secret agenda here. My goal in this study is to use the interactive and dialogic research methods of discourse analysis to reduce the distance not only between myself and my students (as researcher and researched), but between evangelicals and others. I treat the students as complex persons, hoping to help deobjectify them and their community to a community of scholars. In Cameron's terms, I want to empower evangelicals, but only in a limited sense, the Foucaultian sense Cameron describes. For Foucault, power is not monolithic, it is a force which circulates in a web of social interaction. (Foucault,1982) This study empowers evangelicals by making them—and others—more aware of the way narratives work to effect changes within their community. This is the "for" of Cameron's formulation.

The "with" is particularly accounted for by the world view I share with the students. I accept their vision of reality, and I will attempt to translate it for nonevangelicals. The case studies in Cameron's book are characterized as

"realism." (I expect we all want to be the realists in some sense.) In defining themselves in this way Cameron and her colleagues seek, as I do, to find some safe haven between the extremes of linguistic positivism and linguistic relativism, although they seem more afraid of the former and I am probably more afraid of the latter.

Realism, as Cameron defines it, "accepts the theory ladenness of observation, but not the theory-dependent nature of reality itself. Realism posits a reality existing outside and independent of the observer, but also stresses that this reality may be impossible to observe or to describe definitely" (Cameron, et al.,1992).

Evangelicals have named this reality, or rather they claim God has named it in Scripture, however difficult it may be to describe or observe. For them, as our discussion of their conversion narratives will show, this reality is not theory-dependent; it stands over and against their own understanding of things, framing a relationship with One who is totally other. By stating my own bias clearly I serve notice on the reader that I treat their relationship with God not only with respect but with reverence.

Before I state a second bias, I should note Cameron's "research with" formulation has procedural as well as relational implications, and throughout this project I have given the students opportunities to interact with the data and to comment freely on the influences which shape their use of language. Journal assignments and conferences were structured to provide this opportunity, providing important internal validation for many of the observations I make. I have asked the students themselves to comment on my analysis (see Appendix B). Cameron calls this interaction between the researcher and the researched "a necessary rather than a sufficient condition" for researching language. This chapter does not deal explicitly with

methodology, but I have methodological concerns and do address them, particularly in Chapter 8. But that methodology has undoubtedly been affected by another bias to which I now turn.

Researcher as journalist

The second bias is this: I am a journalist. I think like a journalist. I write like a journalist. I gather and synthesize information like a journalist. By stating this as a bias I do not mean simply that I write in the first person. Nor do I mean I will write shorter sentences than those generally used in academic discourse, although I hope to do that too.

I mean by this assertion to say my field notes look like those of a reporter, not an anthropologist. Transcripts of interviews are punctuated with the kinds of questions I ask as a reporter. My style tends to be tight, concise, unpretentious. I do this unconsciously.

This is not meant as an apology. I have been writing like this for twenty years, and I have been teaching people to write this way just as long. I will report what I thought and learned as clearly and simply as I can and give the reader information to draw his or her own conclusions as often as I can.

I am sensitive to the criticism this invokes, and my journalistic tendencies do not mean I will not write for the community of scholars for which a project such as this is intended. Silverman suggests the work of some interactionists "may fail to improve on good descriptive journalism" and says this may be overcome if "description serves only as a prelude to analytic work" (Silverman, 1993). I trust this will be the case here. This project is more than "descriptive journalism" because it relies on the purposeful application of analytic tools within the context of an articulated theoretical frame. But the project will be affected by my journalistic tendencies. This

leads to a third bias, a scholarly bias which also complicates this project and every other intellectual project in which I engage.

Researcher as interdisciplinarian

I am also an interdisciplinarian. Part of this, as my biography suggests, is due to a diverse academic background which includes study in chemistry, biology, psychology, English, education, theology, and communication. Prior to my doctoral work this orientation was not intentional, although it has served me well as a journalist.

However, as a generalist I lack the technical sophistication of many specialists who may read this. As indicated above, Robinson says interdisciplinarians are "perpetual neophytes, persistent amateurs" who "need all the help they can get if their constant questions are to result in useful answers." I have always been comfortable as a generalist, but this movement away from specialization has practical implications for this endeavor, the most prominent of which will be an intentional tendency to eschew jargon. I will define my basic terms—world view, narrative, conversation—in the context where they become central to my arguments or analysis, but they will be defined in general rather than technical terms, specific enough to use them more as a basis for asking questions than for suggesting answers.

My interdisciplinary bent has of course taken on philosophical —or theological—implications as well. As a Christian I find the fragmentation of discourse into what Foucault calls "regimens of truth" distressing. Since I presuppose the existence of a common creator, then all truths are God's truths and must somehow be related to each other.

For this reason, interdisciplinarity as I conceive it is not a mechanistic effort simply combining concepts and methods from different disciplines. Like Bauman, I resist this notion "because it concedes the legitimacy of the disciplinary differentiation to begin with." (Bauman,1986) And also like Bauman, whose work in the contextual studies of oral narrative are focused in the "integrative vision" of a performance-centered analysis, I have sought to find my own "integrative vision," attempting, not too presumptuously I hope, to address the tension between rhetoric and relationship. This is a tension I first felt as a student of conversational analysis in communication and discourse analysis in English language studies, both interpretive communities where I feel at home but remain, to some degree, a guest.

Before we examine that tension, however, I will introduce you to a community where I do feel at home, a community bounded by faith.

CHAPTER 3

All God's Children: Evangelicalism's changing face

The students I took to Cedar Bend Farm share an evangelical heritage, if not a commitment. Their conversation—both written and oral—reveals their world view. But it also reveals their insecurities and doubts.

They remind me, in fact, of two jokes about the definition of an evangelical:

> Question: What is an evangelical?
> Answer 1: The son of a fundamentalist
> Answer 2: A fundamentalist with a college education

Both answers are revealing. And both describe in some ways the small group of students who climbed into a van and rode off into the snow to write poetry and have their conversation analyzed. All six were from Christian homes, two in fact were preacher's kids. All of them were pursuing a liberal art degree—and confronting the questions such an education invariably raises.

The question here—no longer a joke—is what do you call the son or daughter of an evangelical when they get a college education? A new generation of evangelicals is confronting the postmodern world. Their discourse, as might be expected, shows something of the conflict.

These six students are not without their differences and their doubts. Their denominational affiliations were not uniform, for example: the three

non-seniors were Free Methodists, the supporting denomination of the college. The seniors were Nazarene, Baptist, and Lutheran. All would be classified as evangelicals, however, defined here as conservative Protestants.

American evangelicalism

The evangelical movement remains strong in the United States, where it emerged around the turn of the century from a split in Protestantism. The liberal wing opted for what Hunter calls aggressive accommodation—adjusting religious and theological truths to account for new and emerging ideals of twentieth century experience. Among other things, this resulted in a devaluation of spirituality, an emphasis on the social and ethical dimensions of life, and a universalization of salvation.

The conservative wing (fundamentalism, as it was then called) resisted cultural pressures by reasserting and defending key doctrines, most notably the authority and reliability of the Bible and the orthodox Christian view about salvation—that it occurs only through faith in Christ. Despite the intense pressure of a larger culture committed to tolerance and plurality, this movement has flourished. Hunter cites these evidences of its vitality (Hunter, 1987):

- Since 1965 membership in liberal denominations has declined at an average five-year rate of 4.6%, while evangelical denominations have increased at a five-year rate of 8%. Evangelicals give an average of 44% more to their church than do liberals—$535 vs. $301 in 1983, for example.
- From an essentially non-existent media presence in 1945, there are now over 350 Christian periodicals, 6,000 Christian book stores, and 1,200 Christian radio stations.

• In 1980, American evangelicals sent out 30,000 missionaries, 11 times the number of American liberal Protestant missionaries, twice as many as all the other countries of the world.

More recently, a 1990 Gallup poll indicates 47% of the U.S. population reads the Bible at least once a week, up from 41% in 1978, and 20% report reading it two or three times a week. The same poll reports 55% believe the Bible is the "actual" or "inspired" word of God which, whether taken literally or symbolically, is free from error (Noll).

Political analysts agree that the 1994 congressional elections, which returned the Republican party to control of Congress for the first time in four decades, were dominated by the "religious right." Exit polls showed 30% of voters identified themselves as evangelicals. "The religious right has built a momentum that's made them the largest political force in the country right now," says Arthor Kropp, president of People for the American Way, a liberal advocacy group (*Detroit News*, January 15, 1995, B1).

But Hunter claims second and third generation American evangelicals, those now in college, are in danger of losing their "binding address." By this he means an "inner imperative binding people to inherited rules and guiding them in virtually every detail of their day-to-day lives." This loss of binding address occurs "because the implicit meanings of culture succumb to the modern imperative of analysis, reflection, and introspection."

In a 1985 attitudinal study of students and faculty members at seven conservative seminaries and nine evangelical liberal art colleges similar to the one attended by students in this study, he found evidence of erosion in their commitment to key evangelical doctrinal positions, including the inerrancy of Scripture and the exclusivity associated with traditional Christian soteriology.

Half of the students believed the Bible was not mistaken in its teachings but "is not always to be taken literally in its statements concerning matters of science, historical reporting, etc." Two-thirds of the students believed "the only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus Christ," but a third of them indicated that was true "except for those who have not had the opportunity to hear of Jesus Christ," a real and understandable damper on the missionary zeal normally associated with the evangelical faith. These reservations would have been unacknowledged only twenty years ago.

Hunter associates this subtle but important shift to the movement's cultural and intellectual elite. Recall the fundamentalist with a college education become an evangelical. What does an evangelical with a college education become? Doubtful evangelicals, perhaps. While a survey of evangelical theologians, for example, shows 98% believe the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, 40% have abandoned their belief in inerrancy (Hunter,1987). This redefinition of the boundaries which encompass this particular world view is unsettling for those who hold it. For young evangelicals in Christian colleges, Hunter says, "Belief has not dissolved but the feeling of serene certainty has."

As you might expect, the uncertainties accompanying such a transition are reflected in the discourse of the students at Cedar Bend. Consider Brad, a Baptist preacher's kid, editor of the college newspaper, co-director of a student ministry drama team:

> WALLY: Um. How would you describe you Christian commitment slash experience?
>
> [Laugh]
>
> BRAD: Um, well, it was part of my dad's job. I had to be a Christian.

[both parties laugh]

WALLY: Yeah, well...

BRAD: We had to go to church.

WALLY: Given that dad got that started, um, what maintains it for you? Is it maintained?

BRAD: Oh, it's, it's real shaky. It's not, I wouldn't say, maintained, it's, any kind of functional, um, state, you know. It's very dysfunctional, I suppose. Right now... currently.

WALLY: Yeah.

BRAD: I've lost a lot of the ritual, I've lost a lot of the, the practices, and ah, just out of neglect, really.

WALLY: Well, for example, you do, you do, skits with "Final Cut." Are you doing those things because you care about it and believe it, or are you doing those things because you enjoy acting and being part of a group?

BRAD: Yeah, well, that's the only thing that really keeps me in the church, is that capability of being able to criticize it.

Brad, a member of evangelicalism's potential cultural elite, says his Christian experience is dysfunctional, and later, addresses his doctrinal uncertainties:

WALLY: Um, if somebody walked up to you in a coffee shop you were singing in, or something, and they didn't have any knowledge of you or didn't know where you went to school or anything, and they said to you, are you a Christian? Maybe something in meeting you made them wonder or something. What would you say to that question, and what would be the basis of the answer?

BRAD: That's not as easy as yes (laughs), I can say that right now, and it's not as easy as no.

WALLY: Okay. Well, why isn't it easy, I guess that's the question.

BRAD: Well, I guess it's really my heritage, that's really where my family stakes its identity, is in our Christian faith. And so to say no, is to deny, what I feel would be to deny a big part of myself. To say yes would carry along so much baggage, you know, but maybe it is baggage I have anyway. Ah, it would be hard for me to say either way. Um so, I might explain it like that.

In terms of fundamental Christian beliefs, those aren't anything, I'm really questioning. I mean, those are things you can go along and ask about, debate the virgin birth, you can debate, all those, kind of, you know, kind of, almost mythological things we've created. I mean, we didn't necessarily create them, maybe they've happened, but you know, I think those are areas where you can go back and forth, you can be a Christian either way, but, um, you know, what you were saying about the idea of what God has done for us, and dying, you know, those, those are questions I don't really question.

WALLY: Mmm.

BRAD: I mean, it isn't a question of whether God is trying to reach out to us in some way. You know, for me right now its a question of you know, it this a harmful thing? You know, is He out to get me? Because it seems like he is.

[Chuckles]

You know, is... is it necessarily good? Those are kind of the questions I'm dealing with right now. And, I mean, those are, that, that besides the whole culture that I don't like. You know, the whole thing was created around what originally happened. I, I don't, I don't have much of a desire to be a part of it anymore.

Brad here refers to the virgin birth as "an almost mythological thing" which may or may not have happened. And he doesn't think it is essential: "you can be a Christian either way." What remains essential is "what God

has done for us, and (Christ) dying"—and he's not even sure the relationship with God which results from this is a good thing.

He is the most articulate of all the students regarding these doubts, and we will return to discuss the rhetorical and relational implications of his and other Christian experience narratives. But clearly Hunter's conclusions about the "loss of binding address" is relevant to this discussion. The growth and vitality of American evangelicalism is founded in "the desire for a Christian community marked by authenticity and a faith unencumbered by ambiguity and self-doubt" but the intellectual elite of the movement are engaged in the "predilection for reflection" that results in a "subjective detachment" characteristic of the modern world. This results from, among other things, a "subjective hermeneutic" rooted in contemporary linguistic theory (Hunter, 1987). Brad addresses this tension when he writes in his journal about "an aspect of language that interests you." He writes:

> What interests me is its ability to shape our experiences. The idea that interests me more is that language may be our experience. Maybe that's too extreme, maybe language only allows us to experience things. That's a big "only."

In another place, discussing the movie *The Remains of the Day*, he writes, "If someone doesn't have words for something, it may not be experienced." Obviously, generalizations about what evangelicals believe should be made cautiously, and discourse studies such as this—studies which show what words and stories they have available to them—can only contribute to an understanding of the uncertainty young evangelicals are experiencing.

Generalizations about political attitudes marking this movement should also be made cautiously, a conclusion supported by a longitudinal study sponsored by fourteen Christian colleges (including Spring Arbor) involving the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) administered by the

American Council on Education. Seniors—including the three seniors at Cedar Bend—completed an extensive survey in the first and fourth year of college. This provided comparisons between the evangelical colleges involved and 1,300 other American colleges and universities.

The study found that 45% of the students in the evangelical colleges designated themselves "politically conservative" compared to 20% in the total sample. However, except with regard to approval of legalized abortion (16% vs. 46%), the students in Christian and non-Christian schools had essentially the same responses to a wide range of issues including support for government activities in the areas of gun control, reducing the deficit, environmental protection, consumer protection, capital punishment, military spending, school busing and the role of women in society (Baylis, 1994).

Wide differences did exist in areas of personal lifestyle: only 9% vs. 51% approved of premarital sex, for example. Motivation for attending college was also significantly different: Christians ranked influencing social values, making a contribution to society and participating in service higher than those in secular school. Questions unique to the Christian college sample indicate almost 90% engage in personal devotions, sharing their faith, and participating in small group prayer or Bible study.

Spring Arbor College

Results of the CIRP give some additional insight into Spring Arbor College, the college attended by the six students involved in this project. It is a small residential college: 80% of the students are more than 50 miles from home. 50% of the 1994 seniors plan to attend graduate school. 98% reported having a part-time job on campus.

The college stresses community: 95% had been a guest in a professor's home compared to 60% in all private four-year colleges. There are also community standards prohibiting alcohol, tobacco and even on-campus dancing. 56% of the seniors taking the survey had consumed some sort of alcoholic beverage in the year preceding the survey, compared with 85% in all four-year private colleges. Based on informal conversations, of the six students at Cedar Bend, three of them had used alcohol and three had not. 26% of the students at the college reported using alcoholic beverages in high school. 5% said they had spent six or more hours partying each week, compared with 25% in the larger universe. It's important to realize that 5% of such a small sample (41 respondents) is only 2 people. In these terms, one person reported smoking in the previous year.

The college has a strong values orientation as can be noted in the following chart comparing "items noted as essential or very important" by seniors against themselves as freshmen and against other private four-year college seniors:

TABLE 1: Important objectives for Spring Arbor College seniors (in percentages)

Objective	Senior year	Freshman year	Other colleges
be well off financially	14.6	30	47
have administrative responsibility	14.6	30	39
help others in difficulty	83	65	74
influence political structure	5	22	20
influence social values	73	58	53

(source: CIRP, 1994)

As freshmen they were already less likely than their secular counterparts to be primarily interested in material values, but the college experience strengthened this commitment. Perhaps most interesting, they had less

interest in influencing the political structure than other graduating seniors, a heartening statistic for political liberals who fear a tyranny of the religious right.

Ellen, a broadcast major who *is* interested in influencing the political structures, had this to say regarding the impact of the college on her life:

> WALLY: Well good, you um... how has being a college student at Spring Arbor influenced your Christian life?
>
> ELLEN: Um, probably it's made me question it more. Because I think before, I was just, I didn't question any of it. I thought it was all true and everything was right because I had learned it in church, or through my reading in the Bible, so I figure, but now, just meeting people and talking and getting different views, I found that, you know, there isn't always just one pat answer for everything. Whereas before, I wanted there, I wanted it to be like that. That would have made life easier, really. But I started to question a lot of things.
>
> WALLY: Like?
>
> ELLEN: Like issues, I mean, just, you know... I don't know, just issues about, you know. I guess, well, not necessarily issues that other people deal with, because like that whole thing about, like drinking and swearing in school and stuff, that wasn't really a big deal in my church, because I'm in the Lutheran church they don't condone, I mean, they don't say you can't drink. They don't say you can't. They don't want you to swear and stuff, but they don't care about the drinking thing. And so, a lot of things that, I think that, a lot of my friends at college try to, really deal with, I don't really have to, because I didn't think that it was an issue. The whole drinking thing, I never thought it was an issue. Whereas, I got here, and it's a major deal with everybody.
>
> WALLY: Yeah.
>
> ELLEN: But just these things that are like on a value level, you know. It's like some difficulties, I can't really think of something specific, it's just certain, certain issues like,

like abortion, capital punishment, things like that, of that nature.

WALLY: Uh-huh.

ELLEN: Where as, before, I was just, it's this. You know? But then, gradually, I started... I think it's also when I get older, you know, things become more relative to me.

She begins by revisiting the issues of faith, reflecting the same tensions as her boyfriend Brad about "no pat answers." This reinforces Hunter's observations about the shifting doctrinal views of the coming generation of evangelicals. Her observation that "everything was right because I learned it in church, or through reading my Bible" seems a bit of an understatement however. Ellen had not just read the Bible, she had memorized entire books of it, placing second in the world finals of a Bible-quizzing competition sponsored by Youth for Christ. Interestingly enough, a review of the transcripts shows she was less likely to cite specific biblical allusions than any of the others. In fact, she never does so.[2]

Notice she expresses little concern about the lifestyle issues which concern many of her peers. Although Linda, for example, cites a conversation about whether Christians should drink or not as an important remembered conversation from her college experience, drinking wasn't an issue in the Lutheran church where Ellen was raised. (She uses the word "condone" rather than the word "condemn"; her church doesn't condone drinking, but

[2]This may be attributed to her family background. She states at one point: "My parents aren't very agressive when it comes to sharing their faith and things, and they never really, um, shared their, um, personal faith to me really, but it was just their example of, you know, going to church every Sunday, and, you know, of being a Christian, and the way you act toward people."

"they don't say you can't.") But the college experience has made Ellen question certain social issues like abortion and capital punishment.[3]

The college's value commitments are reflected in its CORE curriculum, which include a required cross-cultural experience (a minimum of four weeks), a course in Christian faith and cultures which includes an extended weekend in inner city Chicago, a freshman "bonding" experience (a camping expedition at Cedar Bend Farm—kill your own turkey , build your own shelter), and a philosophy of life paper as part of a required senior class. Through the CORE program, all students are familiar with the college mission statement, called "The Concept."

The Concept "calls for a community of learners who are distinguished by their serious involvement in the study of the liberal arts, their total commitment to Jesus Christ as a perspective for learning, and their critical participation in the affairs of the contemporary world." The central campus is dominated by a sculpture incorporating a lamp of learning (liberal arts) over a cross (Christian perspective) with a globe at its center (contemporary world). The college takes its mission statement seriously and curriculum decisions by the faculty address the implications of those decisions in terms of the Concept statement. In addition to the CORE curriculum, the college sponsors various lecture series, a "Spiritual Emphasis Week," and other events and programs related to its mission statement. On the CIRP survey, 100% of the students reported attending religious services each week. (There is mandatory chapel on Monday and Wednesdays.)

---

[3] CIRP data indicates Spring Arbor College seniors were less likely to support laws prohibiting homosexuality or to believe that racial discrimination was no longer a problem than they were as freshmen, but more likely to support capital punishment. Attitudes about abortion were essentially unchanged.

The Cedar Bend students

The students involved in this project are members of a small, committed evangelical college community. But the ties between them were more intimate than that.

It was a close group. Everyone knew someone else in the group, no great feat considering the on-campus enrollment of the mostly residential college is under 800. The three upperclassmen worked on the newspaper staff, for which I am the advisor. Of these three, the two males (Brad and Jerry) were roommates and co-directors of a drama team. The female (Ellen) was dating Brad. The three underclassmen (Angie, Linda and Norm) all went to the same high school and had the same English teacher. Angie and Norm had gone together for three years but had just broken up. They attended the same church, where Angie's dad is pastor. Three of the students had the same major: communication. Norm was a biology major; Jerry was a philosophy major; Linda was undecided.

The students kept a directed journal which required, among other things, some reflection on language. Although this journal provides a source of validation and data for this project, it also functioned to focus their attention on language as it related to the topic of the workshop: creative writing. However, some of the entries, such as "how were you careful about language in your home" seem pertinent to this chapter which establishes the context for the narrative samples to be analyzed. By way of introduction to the individual students, some discussion of their reflections on language will be included. Transcripts of conferences in which their journal entries were discussed will also be referred to.

It is time now to meet the students themselves.

Angie

Angie was a freshman, petite, bubbly, devout. A pastor's daughter, she was very intense about her faith, perhaps the most intense of any of the participants. She engaged in daily Bible reading and prayer, wrote frequent letters to friends and family, took her studies seriously, laboring for hours over various drafts of her poems. Her poems addressed family or Christian themes, except where themes were assigned. She participated in class, took criticism well both in private and in public.

The poem she chose for inclusion in a class anthology was a villanelle about herself and her mother and grandmother entitled "Three Generations of Lace." The poem most often critiqued in class was a sonnet comparing her loss of a boyfriend (not Norm, with whom she had broken up three months earlier) to the loss that Mary felt at the death of Christ: "As Mary, So I." She brought it to the table three times. She wrote a poem about abortion which was destroyed in a class critique, but she revised it and put it in her final portfolio anyway. Later it won a poetry contest in a Christian magazine. A representative haiku:

Gold, stained-glass window
In a shriveled maple frame
Glitters on the snow

The influences Angie lists on her language development are all authority figures, teachers or parents, with the exception of Linda, a member of the group who was a grade ahead of Angie in high school and whose writings were used as examples in class.

She says her family was always careful about "proper English" and her mother was quick to correct them "if something came out a little funny." Her mother didn't like "ugly" words like "crap, poop, suck, shut-up, and dang"

and "of course no swear words ever!" In a conference Angie indicated that she had no concept of the etymology of the word "suck" in its popular usage, although it was easily the most frequently used slang word by the Cedar Bend group. I heard her use it once, a kind of effort to be included near the end of the workshop. "We were taught to always talk respectfully and to say things as nicely as possible," says Angie, who did just that.

She listed twenty-six favorite words beginning with *tender, wistful, whisper* and *home* because "an image or an emotion comes to me." Angie was easily the most sentimental of the group, although she was not maudlin. She was somewhat gullible and accepted her role as the lone freshman with grace and good humor.

The last thing she reports reading she didn't have to read was the Bible, "because its words of truth give me peace and renew my perspective on life—it sets me straight with God."

Norman

Norman, a sophomore biology major, was the loner in the group. He seldom spoke unless specifically invited. He was the only student to do much cross-country skiing. At nights he often sat in a rocking chair, wrapped in a blanket, singing to himself or reading his Bible. He told me he was singing Christian choruses. Angie had broken up with him and he had not gotten over her, although contrary to group consensus he insisted to me that he had not signed up for the class because she had. There was no overt friction between the two for the entire three weeks, although we were living together in a closed environment.

Norm has a severe genetic disorder requiring him to take lots of medication. He was supposed to die before he was fourteen but

advancements in treatment have made the disease, which he never named, manageable. (Angie confirmed this assessment.) He wears a hearing aid.

Norm was extremely focused on his poetry, eager for criticism in conference but not in class, and talented. A frequent theme for his work was loss—his parents were divorced, they had sold a horse farm he loved, a best friend had gone to jail. Angie was the subtext of at least one poem. He looked at an orange one day and wrote an intense poem about the day an angel died. None of his poems were titled.

Norman was one of only two students to use profanity in their poetry. The only time he used it in conversation with me was talking about his parents' divorce. He was angry at his dad for "fucking another woman." He resisted working in set forms, although his required sonnet was as strong as any produced. In fact, his poetry was as strong as any produced, although he seldom brought it to class or read it willingly. The final couplet of his sonnet:

> Memories flap in the wind—filling silken sails
> Forcing small ships forward through hard, dark hail.

He included both teachers and authors in his list of people who had influenced his language including J.R.R.Tolkien, Mark Twain, and Patrick McManus, a humorist for outdoor magazines. His journal response to how language was used in his home included this response: "I didn't say fuck around my mom. When I was around my friends I didn't say fuck either. It's probably the only fucking word I don't ever say." He says he never takes the Lord's name in vain or uses racist words like "nigger." He says he also "never uses politically correct words."

His list of eleven favorite words include "emerald" and "sod." In his journal he says these words "make me feel strongly" and "definite memories

are triggered." In conference he said emerald reminded him of a family vacation at the coast, sod of the horse farm his parents sold after their divorce.

The last thing he read which he "didn't have to read for a class" was *Jurassic Park* because "I was bored" and "it fits pretty well into my reading habits" but he didn't like it because the dialogue was "dull and dimwitted."

Linda

Linda was a sophomore, undecided at the time between an English or a communication major. Like Angie, she was a peacemaker, sensitive to group squabbles and dynamics.

Her dad is an administrator at the college, one of the original forces behind the articulation of the college mission statement as the Concept. Her older siblings have distinguished themselves as scholars and Linda, although bright, struggles to find her place in relationship to them. She is insecure in this regard, although she has high regard for and expresses deep affection for her family. She has a good sense of humor, and in tapes her distinctive laugh is loudest and most frequent. Her favorite slang at Cedar Bend was "Butt-" as in butt-head, butt-cool, butt-good, a' la "Beavis and Butthead."

Linda is a committed Christian, and talks frequently in conference about her experiences in faith. She was deeply troubled by a recent experience on jury duty and, undecided about career aspirations, talked about becoming a lawyer to help the disadvantaged. She has since changed her major to education. She has personal devotions, although she is not as open or vocal about it as the other two non-seniors. She is strongly drawn to (and accepted by) the tighter circle of three seniors. She also wants to be accepted (and is accepted) by me. We scrape ourselves carrying in firewood one day and exchange blood, declaring ourselves "best friends."

Linda has a history of bulimia. She also has a crush at the time on a young pastor at her church, a church across the street from the college attended by about 30% of the student body. He drove her up to Cedar Bend a day after the workshop began (a four hour drive), and he led a mission trip to inner-city New York in which she participated and which had a profound impact on her spiritual life, as we shall see.

She writes poems about both her bulimia and her feelings toward this young pastor, but in class she never owns up to either, insisting that one must not confuse the author of a work with the narrator of the work.

Though often masked in public, in private she is candid and relatively transparent. She struggles with the issue of risk and art. When we return to campus she reads her poem on bulimia at a campus coffee house program. She includes it in a self-published collection of poetry by her family for a reunion.

Frequent themes in her work are food and love. Most have dark images, including death and suicide, although some are sentimental, almost clichés. When she works at it, she can be technically solid, with attention to subtle poetic devices including slant rhymes and alliteration. A haiku:

> Warm, yellow flames lick
> the cold ice cube in their midst,
> repelled yet refreshed.

Linda notes family and teachers as influences in language, particularly her family of "storytellers." "When our family gets together the tales get taller and the dung pile gets deeper," she writes in her journal. She says at home she was "careful to say what I meant, not using wrong definitions, not using superlatives." Cursing was proscribed, of course, but "at school I got enough use in." Honesty and openness were encouraged at home, but they were not allowed to attack each other— "we couldn't say 'you're an idiot,' but we could

say 'your idea is idiotic.'" Although openness was encouraged at home, "with other people we were not allowed to be rude."

She selected her favorite words on the basis of their sounds. The last unassigned book she read was *Prince Caspian*, a children's fantasy by C. S. Lewis. "It makes me feel closer to God when I read the *Narnia Chronicles*," she writes.

Ellen

Ellen, a senior communication major, was the complainer in the group, very negative about the farm's director who led the group on a strenuous cross-country ski trip. She had negative feelings about him based on her freshman experiences at the farm. She was the only one to complain much about the food (which students prepared themselves) or to openly resist any requirement, although only the experiential ones such as spending an afternoon alone in a cabin.

Slightly overweight and, by her own admission, slightly spoiled, she was the only member of the group from a large city, Detroit. The rustic experience did not agree with her, and she was not a motivated or disciplined creative writer. She was a serious news junkie, and being at Cedar Bend without radio or TV may have been the most difficult part of the experience for her. She was the only one that read the newspapers I occasionally picked up in town. She wants to be a broadcast journalist.

She came mostly to be with Brad, but she completed all the writing assignments and contributed freely in class with good insights and thoughtful questions. She was smart and quick-witted. She dubbed herself "highly intelligent" as a joke frequently, but she was extremely bright.

Her Christian experience has been addressed briefly above. She was the only student from a church (Lutheran) with a strong liturgy. Language influences include her parents, apparently somewhat proper and reserved, but focused mostly on mass media, including "every AP anchor," "Wayne's World," and *Beavis and Butthead.*

Her poems were all set in the context of the immediate experience at Cedar Bend with the exception of a few haiku and a villanelle about dinosaurs. She is the other student to use profanity in a poem: a reference to "damn snowmobilers." Her work always starts out abstract, but, after class critiques and conferences, she manages to infuse them with concrete images.

Ellen says she "never had to be careful about language in her home" although she got in trouble for saying "piss" when she was about ten. She says the entire family seemed to use swear words more often as she and her sister got older. Commonly used expressions in her home are "sphincter boy" from "Wayne's World" and "psycho." In response to a query, she says her family had no "proverbs" of its own and she "would be really scared if they did."

She likes particular words, and language in general, because "you can use language to make things sound important and powerful," also the reason for her fascination with news anchors. The last book she read on her own was *Jurassic Park* because "it was recommended to me by several people." She chooses books "that are popular."

Brad

Brad, also a senior, was the other preacher's kid. Somewhat melancholy, he is serious about creative work, especially songwriting in a sort of folk-jazz-

blues tradition. As mentioned above, he was the student newspaper editor, an exceptional but sometimes undisciplined student.

His favorite theme at Cedar Bend was angels. He wrote two songs about them. Although the lyrics have literary and biblical allusions, his angels swear and smoke cigarettes. One of them is a whore from Alaska. Women and cigarettes are others themes, not only in his poetry at Cedar Bend but in fiction he has shared with me on campus. Shock value is part of his creative tool kit, but it doesn't come across as being sophomoric.

Brad says he seldom swears much at home. "Bitch, dick, fuck and shit" are seldom used, he says, although he can get away with "damn, hell and crap." He says he can use these words even around his dad, a pastor. He says he "only swears around people I feel comfortable with." "If I swear around you, that usually means you're my friend," he says. ("Why don't you ever swear around me, damn it?" I joke. "Hell, Wally, I didn't know you cared," he responds.) He is reluctant to use slang around "grown ups" and has been trying to "irradicate the words 'like' and 'kind of'" from his vocabulary because both are an immature use of language — "as if swearing isn't," he adds. "Maybe people swear because they can't think of anything to say," he tells me later in conference.

Language influences (perhaps collaborating with Ellen) include "Wayne's World" and *Beavis and Butthead*. His list also includes Woody Allen and song writer Leonard Cohen, a virtual idol. His favorite words include *bosom* "because it sounds softer than breasts and more subtle than boobs"; *cigarette* "because of all the baggage that comes with it. It's such a full, satisfying, yet deviant word that I love it";[4] " and, *holy* "because it's a word I use a lot in my

---

[4] Although this word carries little baggage for most college students, it must be remembered that Brad is a Baptist preacher's kid whose mom teaches in a conservative Christian school. Although drinking was not a big deal in Ellen's church, both smoking and drinking would have

head...in the sense that maybe it's something we're all striving to be, but I can't exactly identify what it is."

The last unassigned book he read was a novel by Cohen because "whenever I get interested in an artist I tend to look up everything they do."

Jerry

Jerry, the most devout of the three seniors, is a cross between a computer "geek" and a philosophy major. He's a serious *Star Trek* fan, a self-confessed Trekkie. Brad's roommate, his commitment to the drama group they co-direct is firmly rooted in a concern for ministry. He plans to someday teach philosophy in eastern Europe, also as a ministry endeavor. He is knowledgeable and tells stories easily. His verbal skills are largely oral; his journal entries are cryptic, almost illegible.

Sometimes he gets on the group's nerves because he knows a little about practically everything and shares freely. A little overweight, he enjoys cooking. He is engaged and trying to unlearn habits of swearing he picked up in the dorm before he gets married to a devout girl (the yearbook editor) the following summer. He comes to Cedar Bend to be with Brad and Ellen and take a break from his senior project in philosophy, a comparison of contemporary and traditional hymns based on the linguistic theories of Wittgenstein. Like Norman, his parents are divorced. His dad, teacher of a college-age Sunday school class, had an affair with one of his students.

Jerry is at the workshop as part of an independent study in creative writing and is not required to write poetry. He works instead on drama—skits for his Christian drama group and a spoof based on a public access channel program

---

been taboo in his home. It can be assumed that his villanelle about smoking and waiting for a woman in a bar is not based on personal experience.

for Trekkies. One of the skits—and the class discussion regarding it— forms the basis of a later chapter. The skit is based on a conversation between Christ and a backslider.

Like the others, profanity was proscribed in his home, along with words like "stupid" or "dumb." Racial slurs and sexist statements were not allowed, nor were conversations about family problems when company was around.

Language influences he notes include Wittgenstein and Alfred Korzybski, but also Mark Twain's "Two Views of a River," science fiction, and TV. His favorite words are all "Anglo-Norman" in derivation, at least four syllables. Consistent with his philosophical interests, the aspect of language which most interests him is "how we decide that a specific word means something."

The last book he read was also *Jurassic Park* because "I love to read fiction and science fiction."

Observations about college-age evangelicals

The following chart summarizes responses to a directed journal entry about "remembered conversations." It serves to set up a few concluding remarks about the kind of evangelicals with which this study is concerned.

TABLE 2: Remembered conversations with college peers

Student's name	"Describe in detail one or more conversations you remember from college life."
Angie A freshman. The first conversation is with her roommate, the second with a male friend.	• differences between Christian and public schools • "The virtues and characteristics we (a male friend and she) admire in each other."
Norman Sophomore. Conversation with roommate.	• "About God's will for our lives...whether we should be doing something for God while we were in college." • "About lust...I said if your mind is set against something, hormones won't sway you."
Linda Sophomore. Conversation with male friend.	• "Drinking—if it's a right thing to do as Christians, different drinks, motives and reasons for drinking."
Ellen Senior. Generalized conversations with small mixed-gender groups.	• "Males explaining something about their anatomies we females don't know....quite technical and sometimes gross...the language is never hidden or sanitized."
Brad Senior. Late night discussion between several males on the same dorm floor.	•Did Jesus masturbate? "He was a man and therefore suffered the things men suffer with their genitalia...Led to a conversation about whether or not masturbating was wrong....I can't remember what we concluded—but I'm sure it didn't change our behavior at all."
Jerry Senior. Conversation with roommate (Brad).	• "Whether there is a difference between writing something on paper or typing it on a computer, aesthetically speaking."

Based on this chart and the discussion of individual students preceding it, the following observations seem pertinent to the analysis of narratives which follows:

- *Hunter's observations about the loss of binding address seem justified.* Particularly, the intellectually elite (in this case the seniors) have a "predilection to reflection." However, while outward evidences of devotion decline, their ethical sense remains intact. This observation will be documented further, but Brad's discussion about whether or not Christ masturbated reflects both sophistication and integrity.

- All of the students except one admitted to swearing. It is not clear what they mean by swearing, but all of them address the issue of taboo language in their homes, a topic not specifically solicited. *Swearing seems to be an important vehicle for establishing independence.* Both Ellen and Brad associate it with maturity, although Brad sees it as a possible violation of maturity.

- *Authority is an important aspect in their lives.* All of the students except Brad list their parents and/or teachers among the central influences of their language development, and Brad did discuss his father's role in a conference. In contrast, only two of them (Brad and Ellen) listed peers as a primary influence.

- *The media plays an important part in their language development, and, it can be assumed, in the development of their world view.* The students are not insulated from popular culture—three of the six had read the same current popular novel.

- *They are interested in themes common to their age group.* These themes include sex, relationship, self-discovery, and independence. These themes are frequently addressed in the context of faith, or at least morality.

- *They do not seem to be inhibited by the research process.* They are candid about issues one might expect them to be cautious about, given the Christian community they inhabit. Their experience with that community is

the focus of the first group of narratives we shall explore, although a brief examination of narrative theory comes first. In closing interviews they specifically deny being effected by the research process.[5]

Clearly, self-revelation dominates the discourse fragments reported here. The rhetorical tools are somewhat sophomoric; even formal structures such as sonnets are almost entirely self-focused. This is based on a need for acceptance, a strong relational need for students of this age. In and of themselves these fragments prove little about our thesis, other than that young adults like to talk about themselves. They do indicate, however, that young evangelicals are complex and earnest, defying stereotypes and engaging risk, however slight these risks might appear to others.

Emory University psychologist James Fowler has developed a cognitive-developmental theory regarding spiritual maturity outlined in his 1981 book *Stages of Faith.* As summarized by Malony, the stage of faith characteristic of adolescents is the synthetic-conventional faith phase "in which the need for meaning is fashioned by identification with others beyond the family and in which individuals begin to form a personal story of faith identity." An individuative-reflective faith phase, generally from ages twenty to thirty, follows "in which the need for meaning is fashioned by the assumption of responsibility for one's own commitments, life style, beliefs and attitudes." The emergent strength of this phase is "the critical capacity to reflect on identity (self) and on outlook (ideology)" (Malony, 1988).

---

[5] It is doubtful you can turn on a tape recorder and not affect subjects in some way. There is much discussion about whether or not it is possible to obtain "naturally occurring" data *and* informed consent.

The students at Cedar Bend show evidence of this emerging strength. How this capacity to reflect on identity and outlook is demonstrated by narratives is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

Tell me the Story of Jesus: Narrative as conversation

Describe in detail one or more conversations you remember from college life. Relate both the content and the context.

> "...I remember talking about lust with my roommate. I told him that if a beautiful babe slipped off a spaceship and threw herself atme and would then disappear (with no consequences) I still wouldn't have sex with her. He said that there's no way a gorgeous woman kissing all over me, naked, could be refused by me or any man. I disagreed. I said that if your mind frame is set against something, hormones won't sway you. Your mind determines the hormones that are released. As for context—I never remember exact words."
>
> Norman, Christian college sophomore

> "I remember years ago, my sophomore year, sitting in Chuck's room with at least myself, Jake and Chuck present, debating whether we thought Jesus masturbated. We all agreed that Jesus was a man and therefore suffered the things men suffer with their genitalia—itches, erections, and even general lust. Well, probably not lust, but we thought, if he's a man, he must have had some sexual impulses or feelings, he wouldn't have been human without them. Did he masturbate? It was a useless question. Chuck didn't think he did because it would have required some sexual images and basically lust. That led into a conversation about whether masturbating was wrong (and lustful) or not. I can't remember what we concluded—but I'm sure it didn't change our behavior at all."
>
> Brad, Christian college senior

> "I remember that many of my college conversations with friends have been about sex. Maybe it's the age we're at or the school but a lot of innocent conversations get turned in this direction. A lot of times the conversations can be males explaining something about their anatomies we females don't know. The topics usually get quite technical and sometimes gross. But the language has never been hidden or sanitized, except by a few bashful ones."
>
> Ellen, Christian college senior

These excerpts are from three of eight conversations remembered by six college students. When asked, without further direction, to recall one or more conversations from their college experience, half of the students recounted conversations about sex, perhaps, as Ellen suggests, because of their age and because of their environment. And perhaps, of course, because a conversation about having sex with aliens or Jesus masturbating is more memorable than discussing the need for national health coverage.

These excerpts also provide a starting place for our discussion about narratives. The first two are narratives, the third is not, the only one of all nine not reported as narrative. The other five involve drinking, dating, writing, schooling, and serving God. Perhaps more important than that three of the remembered conversations are about sex, all but one have references to faith and morality, and even that one involves value judgments (writing with a computer versus writing on paper).

I intend to use the first two—sex with aliens and the divine genitalia—to show how I define narratives and to illustrate how narratives reflect both rhetorical and relational intent. I want to make a few observations about these particular narratives before I begin. First, both narratives recall conversations which used hypothetical situations to deal with a current concern. The original conversation may or may not have included narratives

at all, although the sex with aliens discussion includes more concrete details which make it likely to have originally been focused on a short speculative narrative about an alien encounter. The use of hypothetical situations creates distance between the original conversants and the topic, a distance Ellen accomplishes by generalizing about the topic—that is by not telling a narrative at all. Brad also does this by claiming the conversation took place "years ago" when he was a sophomore; it was actually only two years.

Norm is a biology major and, whether his assessment about hormones is scientifically accurate or not, it is interesting that he did not draw on a rich store of biblical examples or scriptures to make his point. His faith is an important issue for him: he was one of two to report two conversations and the other conversation he recalled—also with his roommate—was about "God's will for our lives" and the fact that Norm was upset because "it didn't seem like I was doing anything for God during college." This was the most directly religious of all the remembered conversations, and given its place immediately preceding the narrative about the alien, it can be assumed that his protestations about moral purity are rooted in the same concerns as those of Joseph when Potiphar's wife threw herself on him: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Genesis 38:9) Neither Norm or Joseph are concerned with the physical woman (Norm calls the alien a "babe"), but with the spiritual implications of their own behavior. Norm thinks wrong behaviors can be avoided by force of will.

Brad obviously does not. He doesn't believe their conclusions about the morality of masturbation would have, or could have, changed their behavior. He claims not to remember the conclusions drawn about masturbation, but this is not the focal point of his remembered conversation anyway. This is a discussion about the relationship between Christ's humanity and his deity,

and countless priests, monks, preachers, theologians and Christian college students have had this conversation before (including the researcher).

Two particular aspects of this journal entry would seem to suggest Brad has negative feelings about sexuality. One is a note he wrote across the top of the page: "This was a somewhat risqué conversation—be warned." "Somewhat" was his second choice of a qualifier; it was written above another word he crossed out. This, however, is a warning to the reader and cannot be taken to reflect his own attitude about the subject, only his regard for the sensitivity of others.

A second cue might also reflect a negative attitude toward sexuality, but it would probably be mistaken. It is the use of the word "suffer," certainly a negative word. Brad writes: "We all agreed that Jesus was a man and therefore suffered the things men suffer with their genitalia." This may be, however, and probably is, a citation. Suffer is the word the Scripture uses to describe Christ's taking on the human condition. Hebrews 2: 18 says "he himself hath suffered being tempted." Several references to suffering occur in this chapter about how it "became him (God)....to make the captain of our salvation (Christ) perfect through suffering" (Hebrews 2:10).

These texts are not far from a frequently memorized text in Hebrews 4:15 which would have undoubtedly been referred to in Brad's late night discussion: "For we have not an high priest (Christ) which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Brad's choice of the word suffering cannot in and of itself be taken to indicate an attitude about masturbation, but rather an affirmation of the empathy evangelicals take to be characteristic of Christ's relationship with believers. This is also seen in a skit by Jerry called "Homecoming," where a believer named Michael accuses Christ:

Michael: "You don't even know what it's like out there."
Christ: "I know what it's like."

Underlying this late night debate about Christ's sexuality is a theological certainty: Christ knows what it's like.

I'm not suggesting young evangelicals have no sexual hang-ups. Ellen's observation that talks about sex start out as "innocent conversations" might be taken to indicate otherwise, and, of course, many experts would take even the question about the morality of masturbation to be unhealthy. But this is a study of discourse, and what I'm suggesting is the discourse may be more complex than it appears, at least in terms of word choice.

My primary purpose, however, is to use these brief narratives to illustrate what I mean by narrative and to explain the ways in which they have rhetorical and relational implications.

Definitions of narrative

Since Aristotle, most scholars have thought of narrative as having a beginning, a middle and an end. Sequence is considered to be a necessary and perhaps even sufficient aspect of narrative. Fisher, as noted in Chapter 1, makes it a paradigm, so broad as to be theoretically meaningless, but scholars in discourse studies have recently and most frequently taken Labov as a reference point (Labov, 1972).

Labov assumes narratives are stories about past events and that they have common properties. A "fully formed" narrative has the following six elements (note their occurrence in Norm's account of the conversation about sex with an alien):

TABLE 3: Labov's elements of narrative

ELEMENT	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
ABSTRACT	SUMMARY	talking about lust
ORIENTATION	SITUATION	with my roommate
COMPLICATION	SEQUENCE	I told...He said...I said
EVALUATION	SIGNIFICANCE	Your mind determines the hormones that are released
RESOLUTION	WHAT HAPPENED	I disagreed
CODA	PERSPECTIVE	I never remember exact words

Burke's approach to analyzing language offers a different structural approach. Narrative analysts have also used his dramatic pentad—act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose as a basis for exploring stories. "Any complete statement about motive will offer some kind of answer to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he or she did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (Burke, 1945).

Structural approaches such as these have been criticized for not accounting for cultural diversity: Labov, most notably, for his reliance on western modes of thinking regarding time. Other narrative sequences proposed include consequential sequencing (Young, 1987) and episodic (thematic) narrative (Michaels, 1981). Riessman also suggests habitual narratives, hypothetical narratives, and topic-centered narratives as narrative forms in which our expectations about character and plot may not be met (Riessman, 1993).

Since the students are all white westerners, and since my purpose is simply to show how rhetorical and relational concerns are handled in a given form (I could have used questions or commands for example), I am content to accept Polanyi's definition, which follows Labov. She sees narrative as a

structure "in which the order of the recital of the events recapitulates the order in which the events are supposed to have taken place" (Polanyi, 1979).

There is some important language here: the order in which events are *supposed* to have taken place. Brad and Norm have both selected details from the event they describe and have undoubtedly forgotten or ignored others. Brad tells us what Chuck thought about Christ's sexual behaviors, but not what Jake thought or even what Brad himself thought. Norm recounts only four conversational exchanges in an entire conversation.

Polanyi also shares Labov's concern for what he calls "reportability," the ways in which storytellers forestall the question "so what?" This is, in fact, Polanyi's central concern. She sees a story as "the linguistic encoding of past experiences in order to explain something about, or by means of, the events or states described. A story is thus an illustration" (Polanyi, 1979). Although she sees an event structure as essential to her definition, "the event structure may be quite unimportant, and the story may well be an illustration of some important aspect of character or situation." This point, she believes, is negotiated, a concern to which we will return later in this chapter. Her understanding of narrative, however, addresses both my concerns, the rhetorical as well as the relational dimension of narrative and, by extension, conversation.

Rhetorical dimensions of narrative

Both Brad and Norm have related an event structure, a narrative. But their rhetorical intentions seem rather obscure. The narratives are invited narratives, responses to a question over which they had little control—a teacher asked them, actually required them, to keep a journal which presented a series of questions about language. This particular question was

posed on day fifteen, two-thirds of the way through an intensive workshop requiring constant reflection on and exercise of language. What rhetorical intention might be at work here?

To start with, both have a point to make. Norm's point is rather simple to ascertain: "Your mind determines the hormones that are released." Brad's point is a little more complex. Is it the inability to change ones sexual behavior, or habits? This is his last statement: "I'm sure it didn't change our behavior at all." From Labov's taxonomy, the location of this statement at the end raises the possibility that it is a coda, a statement which returns the perspective to the present. The key to understanding his point is the pronoun "it," which refers to the discussion, or perhaps to the supposedly unremembered conclusion. That being the case, his point is likely stated most clearly when he says "Did he (Christ) masturbate? It was a useless question." But if this was a useless discussion, why did he tell us about it?

Some insight into this question comes from understanding why, from a rhetorical perspective, people use stories. In *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* (1990), Hart suggests three critical probes:

- *Does the narrative spring from a master narrative?* From Brad's perspective, the story is rooted in *the* master narrative, the incarnation. When asked to recall a conversation, he would attach special importance to a conversation about the relationship of God to males like himself through Christ.

- *What propositional content is the narrative designed to reveal?* The proposition most clearly stated is "he must have had some sexual impulses or feelings." The group agrees on the essential humanity of Christ.

- *What propositional content is the narrative designed to mask?* The use of the narrative allows Brad to recount a conversation without reporting

his own conclusions. (Compare this with Ellen's response, which is much more judgment driven.) The request was to describe one or more conversations; he is not obligated to make judgments.[6] He could have said "One night some friends and I decided Jesus probably masturbated" and detailed the theological grounds for such a conclusion. Brad is extremely reluctant to offend people, not just me as a teacher, but mere acquaintances. He told me in one conference he doesn't like to tell people he is doing "great" because if they are having a bad day it will just make them feel worse. He chooses a narrative not only because it is a primary vehicle of human interaction, but, from a rhetorical standpoint, because it allows him to make a point—that many college bull sessions are "useless"—less obviously. Hart says "Narrative is depropositionalized argument. It holds open the illusion that we—as listeners and readers—help to determine its meaning" (Hart, 1990).

Not all of the five students who chose a narrative response did so for the same rhetorical reason as Brad. Norm's response, for example, has a different motivation. Although his narrative may also be "depropositionalized argument," his use of narrative is not intended to mask anything. His rhetorical motivation appears to be to enter into what Bormann calls the "rhetorical vision" of his community.

The idea of rhetorical vision grew out of fantasy theme analysis and its corresponding theory in communication called symbolic convergence theory. Bormann and his associates at the University of Minnesota were studying small group interaction and noticed when certain themes were introduced in a group they were "dramatized." Certain idealized narratives would cause a

---

[6]You recall, he is not comfortable drawing conclusions. In his discussion of his Christian experience, he says even the question about whether or not he is a Christian at all "is not as easy as yes or no," this in spite of the tremendous "baggage" his Christian heritage represents.

symbolic explosion in the form of a chain reaction. "As members of the group entered into the fantasy, the tempo of the conversation increased. People grew excited, interrupted one another, laughed, showed emotion, and forgot their self-consciousness" (Bormann,1972), a manifestation we shall see in later chapters. Similar types of stories can be grouped as fantasy types and, as these stories become dominant in various communities, they constitute that community's rhetorical vision. He defines fantasy as "the creative and imaginative interpretation of events that fulfills a psychological or interpretive need." A rhetorical vision is "a unified putting together of the various scripts which gives the participants a broader view of things" (Bormann,1985).

Bormann himself has used this analysis to analyze revivalism before the Civil War (Bormann, 1985). Others have used it to look at religious and political movements including Christian Science (McDonald, 1978) and McGovern's presidential campaign (Semlak, 1973). In a ten-year review of fantasy theme analysis published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech,* Bormann cites over 30 studies based on this approach (Bormann,1982).

From this perspective, Norm's encounter with the sexy alien can be seen as part of an overcoming-temptation-by-strength-of-character fantasy type, a narrative in which the hero (Norm) overcomes the weaknesses of the flesh and joins Joseph and other heroes of the faith—including Jesus in the triumph of moral purity.

Bormann says fantasy theme analysis "forces scholars to search for the boundaries of rhetorical communities and reveals the complex and complicated terrain" of those communities. Those boundaries constitute the horizon of that community's world view. These fantasy themes become more prevalent, he notes, when members of that community feel uncertain

and insecure, a condition we have pointed out is characteristic of young evangelicals today.

These then are two of the rhetorical dimensions of narrative, choosing a narrative to reveal or conceal propositional content and choosing a narrative to identify with the rhetorical vision of one's community. The concept of community brings us now to examine the relational aspect of narrative.

Relational dimensions of narrative

As Brad and Norm are making rhetorical decisions about their remembered conversations, they are also constituting relationships, in this case with me. The two discourse fragments with which this chapter has concerned itself seem at first glance to be ill-suited to a demonstration of relational need since they are written, not spoken. But this challenge can result in their becoming even more convincing examples, not less.

Polanyi, as we have already said, believes the point of a narrative is negotiated between the speaker and the listener(s). To illustrate her ideas we will revisit Brad's narrative, lines cast in terms of how they might be spoken (I'm relying mainly on intuition).

> I remember years ago,
> my sophomore year,
> sitting in Chuck's room
> with at least myself, Jake and Chuck present,
> debating whether we thought Jesus masturbated.
> We all agreed that Jesus was a man
> and therefore suffered the things men suffer with their genitalia—
> itches, erections, and even general lust.
> Well, probably not lust,
> but we thought,
> if he's a man,
> he must have had some sexual impulses or feelings,
> he wouldn't have been human without them.
> Did he masturbate?

It was a useless question.
Chuck didn't think he did
because it would have required some sexual images and
basically lust.
That led into a conversation about
whether masturbating was wrong (and lustful) or not.
I can't remember what we concluded—
but I'm sure it didn't change our behavior at all.

Polanyi says stories carry three kinds of information. These are characterized by an event structure, a descriptive structure, and an evaluative structure. Despite western conceptions of time, the event structure may be insignificant: narrators may use the story to illustrate character or situation. As we have seen, Brad uses this narrative to make a point about the value of late night bull sessions. The event structure itself is not essential to this task and his narrative, unlike Norm's, lacks temporal connectives like "and then."

The second structure, the descriptive structure, provides "all of the environmental and character-centered information" (Polanyi, 1979). In this case it is seen in the first four lines:

I remember years ago,
my sophomore year,
sitting in Chuck's room
with at least myself, Jake and Chuck present

He establishes time and place and characters, what Labov calls orientation. Actually, it is my own projection which puts this late at night, a projection based on my own experience and the sensitive nature of the topic. Brad's own roommate, Jerry, is not present. The "years ago" may serve to set up his claim not to remember specific conclusions, and may also then be an indication of the point to be made: not a point about masturbation but about conversation.

This is seen in Brad's extensive use of the third structure Polanyi addresses: evaluative structure. She says, "As a general principle it can be stated that anything which departs from the norm of the text can act evaluatively by drawing attention to itself" (Polanyi, 1979). These devices can include repetition of key words, reported speech, increased use of modifiers and suspension of action. Brad uses all of these. Christ (as "Jesus" or as "he") is referred to seven times, masturbation only three times, the same number of times as "lust" or "lustful" and "we thought" or "concluded."

The only reported speech is very indirect: "Chuck didn't think he did because...." Compare this with Norm's "He said there was no way a gorgeous woman kissing all over me, naked, could be refused...." We can assume words like gorgeous, naked and kissing were part of the original speech event. Brad's more indirect use of reported speech creates some distance and helps hedge against offending the reader. He isn't shy about evaluating the point of his narrative directly however: the conversation was "useless" and "didn't change our behavior at all."

How does this all relate to negotiating the point of the narrative, especially a written one like this? Polanyi says speakers, especially American ones, decide if a story is "storyworthy" by basing it on culturally, socially or personally interesting material. Culturally interesting material is the broadest category, referring to the values, beliefs and world view of a given culture, in this case evangelicalism. Brad senses that any discussion of Christ is culturally interesting. Socially interesting material is more limited—in this case Brad knows I'm interested in studying conversations by college students and he holds this one out as typical. He is gambling somewhat on the personally interesting aspect. He doesn't know if I will find the topic of

masturbating interesting, I am, after all, a forty-year old married man. But he hedges his bet with the caution he scribbles across the top of the page.

Twice he seems to address me directly. The first time he says the group concluded Christ probably had itches, erections and "general lust." He is not sure I can accept attributing lust, understood as sin, to the person of Christ so he withdraws the conclusion and then recasts it as "sexual impulses":

> Well, probably not lust,
> but we thought,
> if he's a man,
> he must have had some sexual impulses or feelings,
> he wouldn't have been human without them.

Later he uses a question, an involvement strategy which allows the reader/listener to enter into the narrative, even though it is written. We are, in some sense, involved in conversation.

Toward a conversational paradigm

I take this position—that we enter into conversation with readers and listeners through either speaking or writing—seriously. Martin Nystrand says, given that writing also occurs in a social context "every written text is not wholly idiosyncratic" (Nystrand,1986). In his "Notes Towards a Reciprocity-based Text Grammar" Nystrand says "what counts is not simply what the text says but how what is said relates to what is already shared by writer and reader." This results in what he calls "choice points," places where the writer must decide whether or not elaboration is necessary. In Brad's narrative one of the choice points occurs when he pulls back and elaborates on "general lust."

Nystrand starts with references to reading and compares the two processes, noting, for example, how readers use cues to reduce the possible meanings of

a text and how writers supply those cues. They lead, in his work, to an understanding of topic and to comment on the topic. Studying writing in this way would be profitable if all it did was provide some insight into topic management, a particularly difficult concept in conversation (West and Garcia,1988) since it is difficult to know, from a transcript or tape at least, if something in the environment prompted the new topic, or if there are connections in the conversation known to the participants but not the researcher, connections to shared experiences previous to the conversation.

In writing, however, at least in the case of experienced writers, the author is more likely to elaborate on these things simply because he or she is less likely to take them for granted. So coherence and topic management could be examined in written discourse and the understandings gathered applied to our understanding of conversation. For example, the question from Nystrand's analysis can be raised: is there something analogous to a choice point in spoken conversation? Findings could be applied to our understanding of spoken discourse, provided one is willing to consider writing as conversation.

Some people obviously are not. For example, Wilson's Speaker's Rights Theory (SRT) attempts to delimit conversation so narrowly as to even exclude jokes and banter. He says, "Conversation is being defined as that speech event where an effort is made to maintain a relative equality in the distribution of speaking rights" (Wilson,1989). This is typical of the focus on power which characterizes the work of some discourse analysts. But I find Wilson's quest for a limited definition of conversation completely unnecessary. I'm perfectly willing to see all discourse as conversation, situated somehow along relational and contextual continuums, an idea hinted at by Goffman in his discussion of participation framework (a

discourse analysis concern) and production format (a conversational analysis concern) when he allows for platform monologue (Goffman,1981). In extending talk to include writing I am extending this idea even further.

In this view, not only can our understanding of conversation be enhanced by an analysis of writing as suggested above, but our understanding of writing can also be informed by our understanding of conversation, the most basic of human communication events. An essay, for example, can be construed as a turn at talk. From this perspective, any piece of discourse (even the most formal) is interactional—prompted by some other piece of discourse, inviting some response and also located in some rhetorical context.

SRT seems to fail primarily because speaker's rights (as compared to speaker's turns) are difficult to ascertain from the data. He describes the difference in terms of silences: in conversation silence is to be avoided. This creates, according to SRT, the need to maintain talk without any individual being overtly in control. He says: "Conversation is being defined as that speech event where an effort is made to maintain a relative equality in the distribution of speaking rights."

But the problem, of course, is that people can have the right to speak and choose not to speak; there is no way to tell if they felt they had the right to talk unless you ask them. This is not a bad idea. But why not just depend on the participants' or researchers' intuition about whether or not they felt like it was a conversation in the first place?

Despite Wilson's protestations to the contrary, he is defining conversation by negation: it doesn't have explicit topic initiation. Commands have to be of a certain sort (commands to speak), not other sorts. Topics cannot be initiated or maintained overtly. If they are, it's not conversation because participants will censure the offending party.

This is an interesting and important insight. But it doesn't always apply if the conversation is between two people and one of them is shy. Or introspective. Or non-confrontive. Or younger. Or female. Or from Saudi Arabia. SRT takes no account of personality or conversational style and essentially defines any asymmetrical exchange as non-conversational. All sorts of everyday, ordinary talk is excluded by definition. People often joke about whether or not men and women can carry on a conversation. According to SRT, probably not. Women's speech is often characterized by the forms of indirectness Wilson equates with conversation; men's speech isn't. Except Brad's narratives are, which suggest such generalizations are unwise.

To take a stretch of everyday talk and then exclude (outmode is his term) jokes, banter, various imperatives, narratives, etc. from analysis seems unnecessary. These elements are part of what we mean by conversation—speech events which give conversation its texture and define its relational aspects. Conversation is not a speech event; it is *composed* of speech events.

But if conversation can be defined too narrowly, can it also be defined too broadly? I think not. Conversation is always situated interaction. But in some sense all situated interaction is conversation. To study it we have to examine the situation and the relationships, as discourse analysts have rightly insisted. As such, conversation is an extended metaphor for all discourse, written or oral. One may try to limit it to a spoken exchange between two persons, but there is no reason not to include three persons, or four persons. Furthermore, if one is willing to consider the possibility of written exchanges, a writer can have a conversation with thousands of people.

In *Conversations on the Written Word* (1990), Robinson says:

> Most kinds of writing, reflective readers know, and most kinds of reading—perhaps all kinds— are essentially conversational. Writing and reading are nothing more and nothing less than attempts by human beings to form community with other human beings whose real needs and expectations and understandings are imagined when not known.

Robinson also suggests that when we see writing as conversation we are speaking metaphorically. "But to use the metaphor and mean it," he says, "is to force oneself to look for deep similarities between the two realizations of language that may be masked by differences in the mediums."

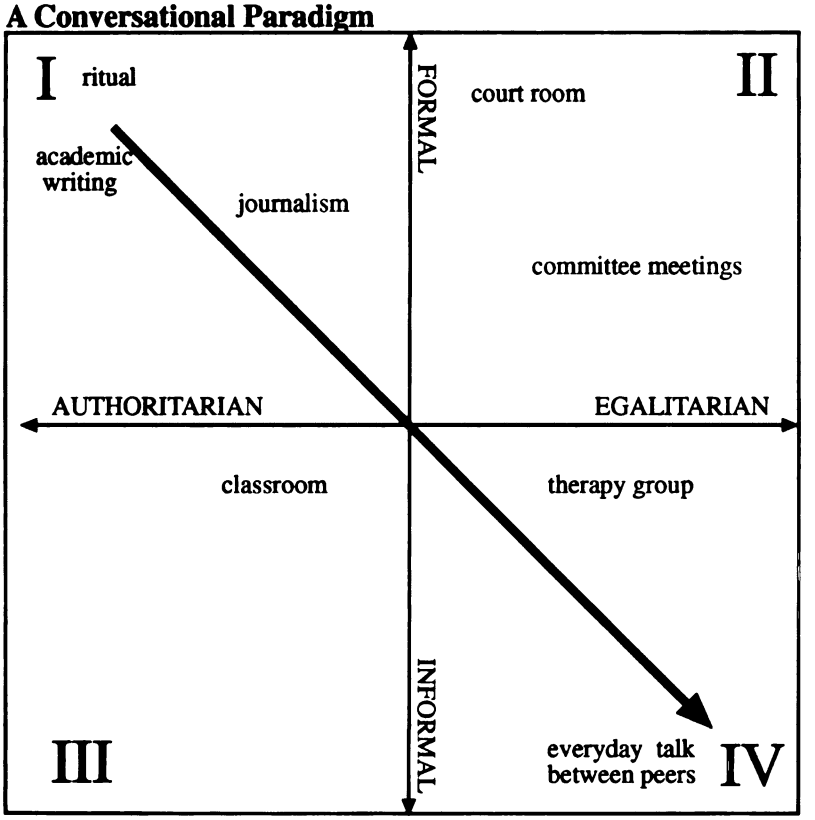
Metaphors are instructive, of course. But when we say some writing is conversational and some is not, do we mean conversation has characteristics some writing shares and some doesn't? Do we mean, perhaps in a Bakhtinian sense, some writing is dialogic and other writing is monologic? Or perhaps we mean it is personal and reflective. A love letter or a note of condolence may in fact be more personal than an oral conversation. Perhaps and most probably we mean some writing "follows the rules" and some doesn't.

If, as Silverman has suggested, conversation is not only the baseline for other forms of talk, but also for all discourse, written and spoken, formal and informal, then conversation becomes more than a metaphor. It becomes in fact the paradigm through which all human communication can be understood.

The usefulness of such a paradigm emerges from the tension between two dimensions— a relational dimension and a rhetorical dimension.

Consider the diagram below:[7]

A Conversational Paradigm



The vertical axis reflects *rhetorical intent.* Consciously or unconsciously we manage meaning through strategies appropriate to particular contexts. Along the vertical axis we apply rules consistent with the machinery of conversation to make and respond to various rhetorical goals. As represented in this conversational paradigm, the more formal the situation,

---

[7] I've plotted different forms of discourse along the x and y axis, but these are merely illustrative at this point. They would vary from discourse sample to discourse sample. A particular classroom may be more or less authoritarian, for example, and, accordingly, its discourse might be situated differently along either dimension.

the more rules we manage, although in terms of a conversational paradigm the rules are extensions of what works in the conversation underway, that is to say they have descriptive as opposed to prescriptive power.

The horizontal axis reflects *relational concerns*. These include issues of solidarity such as cohesion and coherence as well as issues of power such as interruptions, topic management (and control), questions and other concerns normally associated with discourse studies. The arrow suggests we have a tendency to move discourse down and to the right, balancing relational and rhetorical intentions. As we do, we engage in what people generally recognize as conversation. This tendency is the focus of this project and we will return to it again.

There is no quantification proposed with this model, and for my purposes none is needed. But suppose, for the sake of clarification, you could plot discourse along these axes in some consistent and reproducible fashion. Forms of discourse could be plotted as clouds or fields; perhaps you could say, for example, that first person student essays tend to fall in a certain area. Or you could say that each quadrant represents certain kinds of interactions: mediated (I), small group (II), large group (III), or interpersonal (IV) communication.

Most writing, in any event, falls in quadrant I; it has lots of rules and it is usually *author*-itarian. And, to the degree it moves toward egalitarian and informal discourse, it becomes—and is—conversational. To view writing in this way may mean to examine the way a writer constructs his turn at talk, the way he invites back-channeling, or the way he handles footing. It may mean to think about how long a turn is constructed by the writer and for what reason, or how various speech acts—promises, questions, commands—

are set up and used. It may mean to choose narration over description for rhetorical purposes, as I have tried to illustrate through Brad's narrative.

On the other hand, this approach also means we constantly examine the tension these rhetorical behaviors create over against the relational needs of the writer or speaker, their sense of authority, alienation, or community, their sociocultural identity.

Writers or speakers sensitive to the implications of this tension may try to move their conversation—in whatever discourse form it takes—up and down or over along these lines, depending on their purposes. A feminist may want to move her academic writing to the right, keeping the respect of her colleagues but being more inclusive in both language and perspectives; an evangelical, on the other hand, may want to move hers down and to the left, making her message less formal but more authoritative. Then again, she may not. But according to this paradigm, this movement is in every sense a conversational move.

I close this chapter by illustrating if not illuminating this conversational paradigm with a brief narrative from Angie, whose conversion narrative we touched on briefly in the first chapter. This is one of two short narratives she includes as a response to the same journal assignment which elicited Brad and Norman's narratives above.

She writes:

> In mid-November my friend Bill came to my room to study for a Spanish test we were going to have the next day. But we didn't study! The small talk we began with turned into an important conversation about personal things. He told me that he'd noticed me last year when I'd visited the campus and he'd been observing me during our friendship and the thoughts I'd brought to his mind were, "She's the kind of girl I could marry." He talked about his call to ministry and how he would never date anyone who wouldn't make a good pastor's wife. We had a generally

very encouraging time, talking about the virtues and characteristics we admire in each other.

Along the rhetorical dimension of the conversational paradigm, Angie has suspended some of the rules. Her other writing shows she is quite sophisticated in writing essays for school. A summary assignment on "Why is risk an element of art" is a model five-point essay. Here, however, she suspends the organizational aspects of such writing (introductions and conclusions) and uses oral rather than written forms (three independent clauses in one sentence). She has moved her discourse down along the rhetorical axis.

Her choice of narrative is also a rhetorical move, a depropositionalized argument in Hart's terms, which makes the discourse less formal. The propositional content is that the choice of a mate is "important," as opposed to studying for a Spanish test. No master narrative is at work, but boy-and-girl-find-God's-choice-for-a-mate is a fantasy, perhaps in both the everyday sense as well as the technical sense used by Bormann.

She has also moved her discourse to the right along the relational axis. She does this by trying to indicate emotional quality (exclamation points and underlining) and by the use of involvement strategies[8] including constructed dialogue and specific detail (a Spanish test).

She is having a conversation with a particular reader, in this case, me. At this point Angie had spent fifteen days at Cedar Bend, and during almost this entire time she had been working on a sonnet about why God was keeping someone (Bill) from her. We have had several conferences about this sonnet, and, although she has never named him to her peers, [9] she has told me in

---

[8] See Tannen (1989) for a discussion of involvement strategies.

[9] Angie and Bill are both fictitious names. None of the names appearing in this study are the actual names of the students or their peers.

conference the relationship never achieved the potential suggested here. The narrative is storyworthy because she believes it is, in Polanyi's terms, personally interesting—that is, interesting to me because we have a shared history with the topic.

Because this is part of a conversation with me, she also fails to elaborate on issues she might have expanded in writing or speaking to someone else. These include defining or explaining a "call to ministry" or "a good pastor's wife." She does this because we have a shared experience: we're both preacher's kids. She also assumes I know the kind of virtues and characteristics she and Bill might admire in each other. Such assumptions are characteristic of the conversion narratives I solicited on the second day of the workshop, a collection of material to which I now turn.

CHAPTER 5

All to Jesus, I Surrender: Oral conversion narratives

Where are you in your Christian experience and who are some of the people who helped you get there?
1]
Um, really,
Spring Arbor College,
just people associated with the college,
with the church,
have, um, helped me a lot in my spiritual walk.
[2]
My CORE instructor,
my CORE instructor was Steve Whelton,
and I attend a weekly Bible study with him,
and he really just has been a good example for me.
[3]
Last August, or this past August,
we, um, took a trip to New York City
on a ministry, er, missions trip there
to the New York, um, New York School of Urban Ministry.
And, um that was the first time
I've every had to share my faith with other people that I've never, you know, that were strangers.
[4]
And it was really risk-taking, you know,
going to, just living in the city, you know, the subway...

You were there how long?

For nine days.
Um, we were there on the subway after we saw *Les Miserables,*
and there was a drug bust right next to us,
I mean, really, just urban experiences.
[5]
It really helped me grow—
learned to have to trust God.
Um, simple act of giving, um, everything to Him—
how hard it is for me to give God a situation,

because I'm the kind of person who wants to straighten everything out.
I want to work out everything for everybody,
and just, you know, in having to just sit back
and give something to God is really a struggle,
and so, that trip especially,
showed me how much I just can't do it all.
[6]
You know, just, um, that was the first time
that I felt God, um, really came and was right next to me.
Um, before I always felt like,
well people have well, experiences with God,
where they feel really close to Him,
but I just, you know, haven't had that kind of experience.
And I'll just be like that, you know, is fine,
but um, [laugh]
I always felt kind of bad.
I always thought that there was something wrong with my Christian walk,
because I hadn't.
[7]
And um, we went to the Times Square Church,
and I just really felt like I had to go through a spiritual battle.
I felt like like, God was really,
I felt like God and Satan were on one side,
each of them on one side of me,
and I was just going through all of these different events,
um, in my life, different attitudes in my life
that I need to change.
I was just, like, I was fighting it right there,
and really fighting the decision to give my life to God to do,
to give it to Him.

Linda, sophomore

Linda's narrative is one of the responses from each of the six students in private conferences when asked to tell me about their "Christian experience." Stromberg calls stories like these "conversion narratives," even though they are not about the conversion experience itself. He uses the terms to signify stories "based in part around the claim that their conversion experiences have changed them in a fundamental way and that these experiences have led them to a deepened commitment to their faith" (Stromberg, 1993).

What is interesting about Linda's narrative—and about all but one of the narratives solicited by this request—is that there is no mention of a conversion experience. In a subculture supposedly rooted in the experience of being "born-again," only one person even mentioned it. Angie, whose narrative was referenced in chapter one, says

> But then, in fourth grade,
> I started reading Genesis and Exodus
> and going through and
> I committed myself to God personally
> during that time, I think,
> even though I was officially already a Christian,
> I was too young to understand what it meant.
>
> I gave myself to God when I was just really little
> but I really committed myself later.

Angie makes a distinction between "officially" being a Christian and being a committed one, one who understands what it means. What it means rather than how it is defined is the focus of all these conversion narratives which, with the exception of Angie's, begin in the middle of things. Linda starts three months earlier. Norm, Ellen, Angie and Brad make references to a childhood surrounded by Christian family as part of the orientation to the narrative, but begin to describe their Christian experience (the event structure of their narrative) in high school or college. Jerry and Norm begin with the impact of their parents' divorces, even though both sets of parents were Christians. (Norm is emphatic about the fact that his dad *used to be* a Christian.)

Another similarity is Linda's reference to a Christian mentor, an instructor and Bible study leader who "has been a good example to me." For Ellen this mentor was a youth director who prompted a period of growth and excitement in her church and got her involved in quizzing. Jerry responded

to a new youth director who "showed me that it's possible to be a Christian and to do what you do well." Norm mentions an older brother with a serious genetic kidney disorder who was not a mentor as much as an example of courage and "putting his trust in God." Only Angie and Brad—the two preacher's kids—do not mention a specific individual in this regard, although their father's role can be safely assumed. They both report positive relationships with their fathers. The reference to these role models recalls Fowler's synthetic-conventional faith phase "in which the need for meaning is fashioned by identification with others beyond the family and in which individuals begin to form a personal story of faith identity" (Maloney, 1988). This phase—typical of adolescence—is evidenced by "identification with others" such as youth directors and missionaries and occurs, in these narratives, as part of the high school experience.

The reference to these individuals is not entirely spontaneous, however, and so may not reflect an overriding concern of their own narrative identity in terms of Christian experience. These narratives occurred immediately after a question about individuals who had some impact on their language development and in some cases a discussion of the role of others in their Christian experience was specifically called for.

What was not called for, and yet appeared in every one of these narratives, is some reference to struggle. These students, as second or third generation evangelicals, probably made some "profession of faith" or "accepted Jesus into their heart" at an early age. But, with the exception of Angie, they do not see this experience of being "born-again" as fundamental to their Christian experience. Linda's narrative involves her sense of a struggle between God and Satan and, more to the point, "fighting the decision to give my life to God." This is what Angie referred to as commitment, and for these students

committing one's self to God is difficult to do and to maintain. For each of the students, the conflict is different. Jerry's concern is aesthetic. He had to overcome his perception that being a Christian involved "mediocrity." Norm struggled with the discipline of maintaining a habit of prayer. Angie struggled with the loneliness—being a Christian among non-Christian peers, a struggle hinted at by Ellen who also had to overcome a tendency to be satisfied with "pat answers." "I wanted it to be like that. That would have made life easier, really," she says. Brad, as we saw in chapter two, felt like God "was out to get" him, and struggled with doctrinal certainties.

How or why is this commitment maintained, given that four of them describe it as difficult or hard and all of them see it as a struggle? Brad, you recall, saw it as "where my family stakes its identity," a bond not to be underestimated. But those with a more devotional bent see it differently. Linda wants "to feel close to" God. She says

> I always felt like,
> well people have well, experiences with God,
> where they feel really close to Him,
> but I just, you know, haven't had that kind of experience.
> And I'll just be like that, you know, is fine,
> but um, [laugh]
> I always felt kind of bad.

If the opposite of feeling bad is feeling good—that is, feeling close to God—she is willing to engage the struggle she describes to experience this closeness. Norm had begun to read his Bible and pray again after he "rebelled for a few years" because he realized

> ...there's nothing in this world
> that you can count on forever.
> People are always going to fail.
> I'm not going, going around,
> 'people are always gonna fail you,'
> but.. they do,

and they will.
And um, I just realized
that I had to have my life based on the right thing.

For Norm commitment is just the "right thing." In conference he denies that any specific event was a catalyst for his return to faith, although Angie had broken up with him after several years of going together within the time frame to which he alludes, adding to the list of people in his poems—a best friend, and parents—who had somehow "failed" him.

Angie and Jerry ultimately justify their struggle on the basis of being able to know God's will, a realization for both of them which was discovered accidentally through the work of providence. For Jerry, a senior, and Angie, a first year student, their choice of a college has turned out to be the right choice for them personally (although they were uncertain about it), and they attribute this to God's wisdom revealed after the fact.

Jerry, for example, had planned to go to the University of Michigan and study computing, but he ended up at Spring Arbor studying philosophy because he thought he should go to the mission field, a "call" about which he is now ambivalent. At Spring Arbor he has made important friends—especially his fiancee— and he concludes "what has happened to me here has been God's will. And my relationship with my fiancee, and my friendships so that, maybe, perhaps God made me feel a call to the mission field to get me to go to Spring Arbor. Because if he had just said go to Spring Arbor, I probably would have said why, and not done it."

Notice the timidity of his assertion: "so that, maybe, perhaps." Notice also that he offers no account of how God speaks to him, a notion we will address in chapter six and seven. And notice finally how even the call of God can be adapted to fit existing relational realities.

But we now turn to a closer examination of Linda's conversion narrative, beginning with the relational aspects and turning then to its rhetorical design.

Relational aspects of conversion narratives

The relational aspects of Linda's narrative are framed by the student-teacher context. Although Linda and I were to become "best friends" and although she would eventually confide in me about the nature of her relationship to Steve Whelton and, several weeks after our return from Cedar Bend, her own history of bulimia, this was the first time she had ever talked with me individually, the first conference of the workshop. In fact, she might have been even a little more intimidated than one might normally be with a new professor—she had arrived only the night before, coming up two days after the rest of the group because she was finishing a term of jury duty.

Her effort to make a narrative that is storyworthy begins with a reference to the college and to people I know at the college. This is a means of establishing the narrative as being socially interesting. The reference to "risk taking" in stanza two is an effort to make it personally interesting; she is picking up on one of the themes of the workshop, a theme I discussed at length in class that morning, her first experience with me as an instructor.

If she has doubts about her Christian experience, she is not going to discuss them until she has some relational background to convince her that I have my own doubts or can accept hers. But, given the exploratory character of this exchange, she has some confidence in her abilities as a storyteller (from a family of storytellers, she writes in her journal later) and proceeds without prompting and only one interruption on my part. She is also somewhat candid about her feelings—she felt bad that she had not felt close to God

(stanza six). In this context, of course, talking to a Christian professor at a Christian college, it would be okay to feel bad about that; no real risk is involved.

Five times she seems to invite some back channeling through the use of "you know," and the things taken to be experiences I might reasonably be taken to understand are the fear of sharing one's faith with others (stanza three), the fear of a large city (stanza four), the difficulty of giving up control (stanza five) and the feeling—perhaps also a fear—that others have something we don't, in this case a closer feeling of God's presence (stanza six). What she does not assume I can relate to is her more personal and less universal spiritual experience where she felt God and Satan pulling at her (stanza seven). All of the fears and feelings she assumes I can relate to are common to the evangelical experience except one—the fear of a city, or a new place. Her efforts to involve me in this experience include specific details: *Les Miserables*, New York School of Urban Ministry, Times Square Church.

Rhetorical aspects of conversion narratives

Linda also waits until she has established relationship before introducing the point of the story and its personal nature—she uses the word "felt" six times, all in the last two stanzas. The point is reflected in the word "give" which occurs four times, twice in stanza five and twice in stanza seven, bracketing the conflict and climax of the story, the desire to experience the presence of God and its eventual realization.

The way this point is handled is part of the rhetorical aspect of this narrative. Her choice of a narrative in this case is almost prescribed by the invitation to "tell me about..." But why would she chose this narrative and

not another narrative? And why would she choose this kind of narrative, rhetorically speaking?

One reason for this narrative may easily have been her relationship with Steve Whelton, who, in addition to taking her to New York City and teaching her first-year college orientation program (stanza two), spent four hours driving her up to Cedar Bend the previous afternoon. Possibly they talked about the trip to New York City on the way up. We've mentioned that she was infatuated with him and we will look below at a narrative she wrote about her love.

But Steve on the surface appears to be only a bridge to a story she sees as being crucial to her Christian experience, a story about how she came to finally experience a closeness to God she had seen in other by giving herself to God. She does this by giving up control. A lengthy evaluation of the story occurs in stanza five:

> It really helped me grow—
> learned to have to trust God.
> Um, simple act of giving, um, everything to Him—
> how hard it is for me to give God a situation,
> because I'm the kind of person
> who wants to straighten everything out.
> I want to work out everything for everybody,
> and just, you know, in having to just sit back
> and give something to God is really a struggle,
> and so, that trip especially,
> showed me how much I just can't do it all.

But one of the things she can't "work out," one of the things she has to "sit back" and "give to God" is her relationship with Steve, although she doesn't say so here. This may be a case of telling one narrative to keep from telling a different one, a narrative about how "hard" it is to do a "simple" thing, to not

declare or demonstrate one's feelings about someone she cares about. Notice these lines from her (required) sonnet:

> I've known a longing for your love before,
> A languish felt as friendship shared was kind.
> I labor so to lose this unfamiliar roar,
> To banish thoughts of you that rule my mind.
> I dream of bricks and ghosts, of fire and wine,
> Of dreams and books, of things that can't stand still;
> I drown my time with memories not mine,
> The image of your face these things can't kill.
> Has my epic dream of life denied God's will?
> Do I sin each breath I breathe your favored name?
> I fight to feel alone, separate, but still
> Your touch, your gaze appear to fuel my shame.
> I die each day my love for you is hid,
> I live each night with you beneath closed lids.

Her love for him has taken on epic proportions. She is, in fact, consumed with thoughts about him, but she has no assurance this love is "God's will," and, since it may not be, it could even be a sin to breathe his name. In class she specifically denies that this is anyone in particular—"It's just imaginary," she says. In conference, however, she tells me it is Steve, but liking him is "such a cliché" and "everybody has a crush on him" so she says she hasn't told anyone about it. While not addressing it directly in the poem, she has chosen to "give" this to God and "wait and see." This is the theme of her conversion narrative: "to sit back and just give something to God is really a struggle" (stanza four).

On that first day Linda does not choose a master narrative to do this—as Angie does when she compares her loss of a boy friend (not Norm, but Bill) to Mary's willingness to give up her son Jesus for the will and work of God. Instead, Linda chooses a fantasy theme common to her rhetorical

community—how we learn to surrender to God's will. (This is one of the poems about which the group became animated and excited.)

She chooses a fantasy theme for relational reasons; she doesn't know me yet and can't tell me about the specific struggle in which she is currently engaged. But the important struggle for this young woman at this point in her life is this: she just spent four hours in a car with a guy she likes, but for some reason she doesn't believe God has given her permission to do so or to say so.

In *Language and Self-transformation: A study of the Christian conversion narrative,* Stromberg describes conversion narratives as rituals in which believers invoke certain emotional conflicts and attempt to resolve these conflicts by reframing them in the language of evangelical Christianity (Stromberg,1993). He argues that self-transformation occurs "as a result of changing embodied aims into articulable intentions." These embodied aims are unacknowledged purposes—such as Linda's desire for Bob. "Such a feat is possible because of shifts between constitutive and referential realms," he notes. The referential realm is expressed in what he calls canonical language, "a set of symbols concerned with something enduring and beyond everyday reality." The constitutive realm is the metaphorical, meanings generated in and by the situations one finds oneself in, which Stromberg characterizes as "initially opaque to interpretive effort." He suggests "subjects be conceptualized as having multiple and sometimes even contradictory aims, and that utterances be assumed to reflect this somewhat messy subjectivity."

My reading of Linda's narrative assumes this to be true. As Stromberg asserts, "A conversion narrative is a ritual that integrates unacknowledged purposes into a socially construable project." And I agree further with him that such narratives are performances, performances which constitute the

world in which the narrators live. He says "the point is not that the efficacy of the canonical language is recalled in the conversion narrative, rather that efficacy is experienced in the narrative." In telling about her trip to New York Linda is working out the complications of her love life, and she may be doing so unintentionally.

In fact, the tension between the rhetorical and relational aspects of her narrative are not unlike the shifts between the referential and constitutive realms with which Stromberg is concerned. But my focus is different: I am not concerned as he is with the construction of one's identity, but with the ways in which that identity is communicated to others and what that says about this particular rhetorical community.

Observations about conversion narratives

Here are a few observations about what the rhetorical and relational tensions in these conversion narratives say about the college-age evangelical who told them:

- *These students define their Christian experience in terms of the present.* This may reflect a shift in binding address, as Hunter has noted. More likely, it suggests that for second and third generation evangelicals the central story of Christian experience has shifted from a fantasy type based on being "born again" to a type based on struggle and commitment. The reasons for this are unclear based on the narratives I examined.

I do know that twenty years ago, when I was a college student, I would not have conceived of beginning any narrative about my Christian experience without saying "I was saved when I was six" or something along those lines, especially when talking to another believer. I would have done so to identify myself as a legitimate member of the community. For Linda that

identification occurs through an expression of shared present fears and feelings— "you know."

- *The rhetorical content (of the conversion narratives at least) is framed largely in canonical language.* In almost every case, the point of the story, the ways in which it is evaluated internally, resort to religious images and language. For Linda there were references to giving God control and trusting Him. Jerry and Angie evaluate their narratives in terms of "God's will." These may in fact mask "unacknowledged purposes," but they unmask that which is for them "enduring and beyond everyday reality." These presuppositions include a confidence in God's wisdom and control. For Brad only are these issues challenged, and not without considerable and articulated tension.

- *These narratives invite multiple readings and cannot be taken to be exclusively monological in character.* One does not have to have access to her journals and poetry to sense from Linda's narrative that she is talking about something that she's really not talking about: Consider her last two lines:

> I was just, like, I was fighting it right there,
> and really fighting the decision to give my life to God to do,
> to give it to Him.

What might she mean by not finishing her thought about what God might want to do with her life? She is "fighting the decision to give my life to God to do..." To do something. To give up on Steve? And consider these lines:

> It really helped me grow—
> learned to have to trust God.
> Um, simple act of giving, um, everything to Him—
> how hard it is for me to give God a situation.

Why the two um's? Giving everything to him is the point of her narrative. Why the hesitancy in expressing it? What "situation" is hard for her to give up?

These cues suggest there is more here than meets the eye. Her narrative is sermonic, as Weaver suggests all language may be. She draws conclusions about her Christian walk. But she hedges too. She communicates, both intentionally and unintentionally, the paradox of a life which is at once both "simple" and "hard."

- Finally, there is something missing from these conversion narratives. *Although they use religious language, these conversion narratives are essentially void of any meaningful citation from or even reference to Scripture,* with the exception of Angie's citation of Romans (discussed in chapter one) and her reference to Bible reading as a child noted above, and a brief comment by Ellen about the effect of memorizing Scripture. We will take up these two examples in the next chapter, where we will also examine the ways in which the students do use Scripture, particularly in their narrative poetry.

CHAPTER 6

Angels Watching Over Me: Formal written narrative

But when I ,
finally about fourth grade,
I began,
actually in second grade,
began reading the Bible,
like in the Gospels,
for myself,
and that,
gave me an element,
of just like,
being positive that it was really true.

Angie, college freshman

What is remarkable about this narrative fragment is not that a second grader was reading the gospels—"finally," as though she couldn't wait to begin. What is remarkable is that of six evangelical college students she is the only one to report doing so, or to in any consistent fashion reference Scripture as a way of discerning whether or not a thing "was really true."

Her conversion narrative is the only one framed by references to Scripture and includes references in other places to "stories about Jesus" and reading Genesis and Exodus in fourth grade. "Going through" Scripture in this way she "committed" herself to God "personally."

Like others whose conversion narratives we have examined, Angie characterizes her Christian experience as a struggle—a struggle with loneliness. She tells me:

During junior high I was
kind of a loner,
kind of a nerd geeko person at school,
because I kind of,
I didn't want to be like everybody else,
like, I had these ideas that
like Christians shouldn't do all these things,
like things even my parents didn't believe, but
like I thought Christians shouldn't wear panty hose
because they were pretending that their legs were tan.
You know what I mean?
I had all these little ideas, and,
so I was kind of a weirdo,
and then, I decided,
I felt *really* lonely
like it was just me and God in the world.

As a "nerd geeko person" she had gone beyond even her parents own standards and felt "really lonely." In high school, however, she had become more tolerant, partially through her relationship with her best friend, also a preacher's daughter, who had non-Christian friends. "At that time, I just didn't understand how she could do that," Angie reports.

Later, still in high school, she feels a call to minister to "people that feel alone." She says:

I can understand how they feel
because of my time when I felt like
it was just me and God, you know,
alone in the world.

In the past few years
I've lost that closeness to God,
I've been, like its me alone in the world,
and just in the last two months
God's been talking to me about his will
and how he works everything together
for the good of those who love him
and have been called according to his purpose.

When she goes from "me and God alone in the world" to "me alone in the world," God begins to talk to her and he does so through Scripture. As we observed in chapter one, this is practically a direct quote from Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

For Angie, the confidence in providence alluded to in the preceding chapter is validated by Scripture, but it would be hard to say Scripture is for her the sole reliable means of knowing truth, a position taken by orthodox Christians in the past. The Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* was, in fact, the unifying principle behind American Protestantism before the turn of the century and remained the focal point of the emerging evangelical movement. "Scripture, as illumined by the Holy Spirit, is the only trustworthy guide in moral and spiritual matters," says Kenneth Kantzer, a contemporary evangelical theologian.

But Angie is also depending on another way of discerning God's will. Consider this excerpt:

> I didn't even know
> where he wanted me to go to school,
> I hadn't prayed about it,
> I just went to Spring Arbor because,
> actually because Norm wanted me to,
> and he would have been really mad if I hadn't,
> and God has
> *really, really, **really***
> shown me his will through situations now.
>
> I feel like I'm on track again and
> I feel like I'm closer than ever before
> just because now I realize I'm weak
> and I have to trust in God.

She chooses a college so her ex-boyfriend won't be mad, but God uses this mistake anyway and "really, really, really" shows her his will through

circumstances. The "really," emphasized by repetition, pitch and volume, denotes the importance of this additional means of revelation. Her understanding of it is not at odds with the Scripture she cites earlier; it may in fact be an extension of its claim that God is working everything out. But it assumes some independent agency here. God is using situations to show her his will; the result is she is "closer than ever before."

Overall, however, Angie fits a profile commonly ascribed to evangelicals. Stromberg says "The central task of the believer in evangelical Christianity is, through his or her interpretation of the Scripture, to find a meaningful link between the symbol system (the Bible) and his or her experience" (Stromberg, 1993). She is also from a specific tradition within evangelicalism called Pietism which stresses the need for an experiential faith as opposed to one based in tradition or doctrine. Four of the students—Angie, Linda, Norm, and Jerry—are from churches in this tradition. This may account for their reliance on personal experiences as a way of discerning God's will.

But Angie's use of Scripture, her linking of that particular symbol system with her experience, is pervasive. Consider this sonnet, like Linda's about an unreturned love interest. The title is "As Mary, So I."

> I wonder at the one You brought for me to love—
> A rebel wisp in his eyes can't hide the intensity
> Of a wise child—in laughter, faith, and love.
> Guitar's song echoes passion's immensity.
> As Mary watched You take her gift away—
> Watched him beaten, stripped, punished as a thief;
> Her grown-up son she watched as soldiers slay,
> And wept for joy beneath heartsick grief.
> So I know a deep and joyful anguish...
> My arms are empty now except for You.
> You called him back, and even though I languish,
> You've shown me it's your will, I trust it's true.
> As Mary treasured up these things in her heart,
> So I treasure his memory and won't let it part.

In a class critique she says she read a book about Mary the previous summer and Mary is her "new hero." The poem itself is rich with citations, especially Mary treasuring these things in her heart, a paraphrase from Luke 2, a chapter I memorized for a Christmas program in first grade and which Angie had undoubtedly memorized too. For some reason God has taken this relationship out of her life; she must accept this as it is his will. She is not entirely confident of her ability to discern this. "I trust it's true," she says. It's okay though. Somehow God himself has become her lover: "My arms are empty now except for You." Stromberg argues that "believers often attempt to realize in their relationships to God aims that are forbidden in mundane society." He notes "sexually tinged relationships with the divinity are anything but rare, compromising a stock piece in the repertoire of asceticism."

Angie, however, is the exception rather than the rule. Ellen's use of Scripture in her conversion narrative is more characteristic of the group. She says

> And then, also,
> in high school,
> I started Bible quizzing,
> and that consumed my life pretty much
> for four years.
> And so, I was around people,
> I was around peers,
> who had the same Christian values as I did,
> and so that really influenced me a lot,
> as well as, you know,
> memorizing Scripture,
> and um, I think that's really
> where I started to take it in personally
> when I was about in tenth,
> in like, ninth or tenth grade.

Bible quizzing requires memorizing entire blocks of Scripture, in fact entire books of Scripture. Contestants "jump" off a chair rigged to indicate

who jumps first and then complete Scripture verses, often after hearing only one or two words. Ellen placed second in world competition—but she later writes in her journal that she would be "scared" if her parents had used proverbs around the house. Quizzing seems to be important to her for social reasons, allowing her to be around peers who "had the same Christian values as I did."

Although all of these students probably memorized a great deal of Scripture in Sunday school and church youth programs, Ellen, who probably memorized the most appears to use it the least. Her discourse available to me for analysis reflects no intertextual citations such as Angie's use of Romans 8:28. In fact, the recorded discourse of the group in classroom discussions and conferences was much more likely to be laced with citations from the popular media than with any reference to Scripture.

The exception is in the formal creative works themselves, and the references here are often indirect. The rest of this chapter involves an analysis of these works, particularly a series of works about angels which I take to be characteristic of the ways Scripture is handled by this group.

Angel narratives: a rhetorical analysis

One of the most popular themes at Cedar Bend, for two students especially, was angels, a theme which may reflect the culture at large. Angels were big in popular culture at the time. A book about angels was on the best seller list. Angel specialty shops were springing up around the country. A couple of new shows about angels were being tested by the networks. The angels in popular culture were not always consistent with biblical notions, however. Many shared characteristics of New Age "spirit guides," shadowy

figures leading people around in altered states of consciousness. Others appeared as soft and sentimental creatures, warm and fuzzy.

Wood observes cherubs in popular culture are naked babies with dimpled cheeks, but cherubim, a special class of angelic creature mentioned ninety times in the Old Testament, "never sound chubby or cute." Associated with guarding God's holiness, they are described by Ezekiel as fearsome creatures with whirling rings of eyes, four faces, thundering wings that conceal human-like hands, surrounded by flashing fire (Wood,1994).

Angels as depicted in the Bible, however, are more like rank-and-file soldiers, mentioned over three hundred times in Scripture. The Old Testament word *malak* and the New Testament word *aggelos* both mean "messenger." *Aggelos* is one of the root words of ev*angel*ical. The biblical angels deliever messages from God, dole out judgments, make announcements, and defend and aid God's people. Always referred to as male, they are spirit beings which sometimes appear in human form.

The Cedar Bend angels are for the most part biblical angels, given a few artistic liberties. They appear as messengers, in the biblical sense, or as witnesses to the lives of the characters in the narratives, also a biblical function of angels. The two students who wrote about them are Brad and Norm, whose remembered conversations involved not having sex with aliens (Norm) and whether or not Jesus masturbated (Brad).

Norm's angels are heavenly witnesses to human events, and they don't like what they see. Tucked in his final six haiku, five of which follow conventional themes of nature, is this piece:

> What do angels feel
> watching willful destruction:
> are they disgusted?

This is a theme he returns to later in the workshop:

The oranges sweat in the sun
people walk slowly, strenuously.
Dogs pant in the shade.
Young women sprawl out on towels—
legs spread, arms away from their body,
absorbing every ray.
Windless calm, nothing stirring
salty air.
Teenagers hold cold cans of Coke
against baking brows
doing anything to escape
from reality.
The day the angel died.

Young couples make love,
all the fans whirring.
Old man sits in rocking chair
telling anyone who will listen,
"This is nothing compared to '64."
Police knock down door
of crack house—thug is shot.
Woman slowly turns pages
Danielle Steele novel—
tips of pages bent back marking
juiciest scenes.
Frumpish middle-age husband
doesn't excite her anymore.
The day the angel died.

Construction workers shed sweat freely
whistling as girls in bikinis sway by.
The old men lift rheumy eyes,
savoring the shape that still
grips their attention.
Boy robs "Jerry's Party Store,"
police catch him a block away—
initiation into the gang.
Young men swing in hammocks,
or watch the beach, looking, lusting,
wishing.
Sunday in Miami
Church melts in the sun.
The day the angel died.

I did not see this poem in conference before Norm read it in class. He introducd the poem on the last day of class, apparently emerging fully blown in some last creative flurry. He had told me he had written a poem about an orange, and he reads it at my invitation after declining an invitation to read a more personal work about the death of a horse which works as a metaphor for his parents' divorce. He reads the poem reluctantly, telling the group "it's not any good right now." This was the class' reaction, and my own:

Wally: You got that out of looking at an orange?
(several people laugh)
Norm: I got the first sentence looking at an orange.
(more laughter)
Wally: Pretty cool. The history of an orange. Okay. Comments?
(pause)
Linda: Good.
Jerry: You always say that.
Linda: No I don't always. It was good. What can I say?
Angie: Question. Did you write this after we had our conversation yesterday? Our class talk?
Norm: About what?
Angie: About sex? (slight laugh)
Norm: No
Angie: It just seems that...(most of class is laughing loudly)
Norm: No, that didn't influence it. I was looking at an orange.
Linda: Wow.
(extended laughter)
Wally: Any other questions? Did you write that yesterday?
Norm: Yeah.
Angie: I think it was subliminal. You didn't even know that that was it.
Linda: Have you been in Florida much?
Norm: Yeah. I went there on my first Christmas break.
???: I just thought all this snow finally got to you.
(Much more laughter)
Wally: "I was just looking for the hottest images I can find." (More laughter) This is your temperature poem, right? All right, any other comments on that?

So what is Norm doing with his angel poem, from a rhetorical perspective? First he is completing a requirement for a poem about hot and cold—hot in this case. And, despite his protestations to the contrary, he may be influenced here by the conversation to which Angie alludes, a spontaneous conversation at the end of the previous day's class about friends who got married and found that "sex isn't all it's cracked up to be."

But he claims to have looked at an orange which apparently reminded him of a trip to Florida. Either as an actual event or a poetic device, he recalls a Sunday on which people indulged in sensual rather than spiritual concerns:

> Sunday in Miami
> Church melts in the sun.
> The day the angel died.

The angel here is grieved—"disgusted" is the word Norm uses earlier—and "dies," not something biblical angels do literally. This angel is engaged in a biblical enterprise, however. The Christian's life is "a spectacle to the world, and to angels" the Apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 4:9. As men engage in spiritual struggles such as those Norm and his peers report in their conversion narratives, angels rejoice when men turn from sin (Luke 15:10) and, Norm assumes, grieve when they don't.

Biblical angels are curious, especially about how God could provide salvation through the sufferings of Christ. I Peter 1:12 says this is something "the angels desire to look into." In Norm's view, the death of an angel serves as a rhetorical device to indicate how disappointed angels must be by the way people in Miami on a Sunday are indifferent to this same gospel message.

Brad's angels, on the other hand, are not so somber. He has four different works dealing with angels, including, like Norm, a haiku:

A branches blanket
like an angel's frosted wings,
needles pointing upward.

His angel image is less melancholy, but also, like Norm's, prefigures a later work, lyrics for a song called "Ice Angel":

No one lives in the house of virtue,
and no one dines at the table of righteousness,
not even angels with the holiest of foreheads,
not even angels from the heaven above.

My guardian angel is a whore of Alaska,
last time I saw her I meant to ask her,
if the snow that drips from her wings and her past
is a part of the glorious heavenly cast.

My angel comes in a gown of icicles,
anoints my head with oils from Antarctica,
she covers me in a blanket of frozen tears,
then she sits and crosses her bare blue legs.

Then she says, "I ain't trashing no city."
and she says, "I ain't talking through no donkey,"
and she says, "I ain't visiting a virgin,
but I'll be, yeah, I'll be, honey, your angel of ice."

And no one lives in the house of chastity,
and no one dines at the table of faithfulness,
not even angels with the holiest of foreheads,
not even angels from the heaven above.

This is Brad's temperature poem, in which the snow-covered tree in his haiku begins to talk to him. He wrote another song about angels too, "The Angel Song":

I met an angel on my way,
and he asked me about my day.
I said, "Buddy,
You don't know what it's like to be
a million dollars short of rich, a million bucks
from rich."

He said, "You've got no place to complain.
Think you're the only one with pain?"
And with that he
lit a cigarette. He said, "A
cigarette a day keeps the holy man away,
away."

"You're a woman short of love,
but that's never stopped you before,"
he said between cracks in his teeth.
"You've never stopped there before,"
he said between cracks in his teeth,
Unfolding crumpled wings and strife
he moved his halo to the side,
and let out a heavenly sigh.

Brad's fourth and final angel reference is the first two lines of his sonnet, a poem called "Mortal Misery":

Have you felt the tiny brush of angel's wings
across the sweating nose of things undone?

Unlike biblical angels, Brad's angels have wings. And at least one of them is female. They have human qualities, and eschew divine perfection with crumpled wings and slanted halos. In fact, like biblical angels, they appear as humans, smoking cigarettes, sighing, and dispensing advice. But his "Ice Angel" was one of the most popular of all the creative works, producing in the group a flush of acclaim. It seems, on the face, an unlikely fantasy theme, but guardian angels apparently elicit strong emotions among these young evangelicals, however irreverent those angels might be. The rhetorical implications of these narratives seem obvious. In his songs he develops a fantasy theme using narratives (depropositionalized arguments) to comment on his own crisis of faith.

From Stromberg's perspective, the poem may be acting as a vehicle for "embodied aims," providing through the use of subversive canonical language about angels a means of expressing concerns unaccepted in this rhetorical community. There are creative risks involved, and Brad is not unaware of the implications. Artists, he writes in an essay at the end of the course, are risk-takers who face "rejection, criticism, hate-mail, embarrassing exposure and great number of other very painful possibilities." On the other hand, these risks could result in "praise, satisfying self-expression, success, technical mastery, and a number of other positive results."

Brad seemed surprised his angel poems met with almost universal acclaim. In a sense he has negotiated a balance between exposing himself in ways that might prove embarrassing in this group and achieving satisfying self-expression through technical mastery, including a challenging and successful musical setting for the lyrics to "Ice Angel." In the end his most negative treatment of an angel receives the highest marks from his peers.

Part of this is achieved by giving his angel a biblical context. Consider these lines:

> Then she says, "I ain't trashing no city."
> and she says, "I ain't talking through no donkey,"
> and she says, "I ain't visiting a virgin,
> but I'll be your angel, honey, your angel of ice."

His guardian angel does not seem to be doing what angels are supposed to do. These three references are specifically biblical—the angel who destroys Sodom, the angel who confronts Baalam, and the angel who announces the birth of Christ to Mary. In conference Brad tells me he spent a couple of hours looking in a Bible for more obscure references, and was frustrated by

the limitations of the Bible concordance (index of quotations) available to him at the Farm.

His use of angels provides a way for him to comment on the difficulty, the struggle, of his and his peers' Christian experience. According to his poem, no one, not even an angel, can achieve the righteousness, virtue, faithfulness, and chastity required. You recall "holy" is one of his favorite words: "It's something we're all striving for."

The angel narratives: a relational analysis

These biblical citations are one way Brad involves his audience in his narrative. And the struggle he alludes to make his song both socially and personally interesting (Polanyi, 1979). These are techniques used by Norm as well. His use of concrete detail involves his audience with the specific sensory image of a hot day in south Florida, cold Cokes pressed against baking brows, whirring ceiling fans and Danielle Steele novels. Sex is always personally interesting to college readers and spiritual dryness is interesting to this particular groups of believers, several of whose conversion narratives focus on not feeling close to God.

But the most interesting relational interplay may be occurring not between these two writers and their small audience of snow-bound evangelicals. The most interesting relational concern may be competing moral visions. In the front of the journals provided for the class was an optional entry across from Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice," which begins with the lines "Some say the world will end with fire,/some say with ice." Only two students completed this entry: Brad and Norm.

Brad, in characteristic artistic fashion, drew a picture of Beavis and wrote under it: "The world will end when people who look like this take control." Norm uses the page to recount a more prophetic vision. He writes:

> The world will end exactly as God plans it to end. Christ will come and reign for a thousand years, and after that it will be destroyed. Probably by fire—internal heat triggered by the explosion of a meteorite. But that's just speculation. I really have no idea. One thing I'm sure about—there aren't going to be any interplanetary civilizations before Christ comes. Science's progress is limited to uncertainty. We might find a way to extend human life a couple of more years, and maybe find a few cures, but the dream of science fiction writers will never be seen as reality.

All of the students would accept or at least respect Norm's first two sentences. They have a shared eschatology for the most part. And the second coming of Christ is a rich and fertile fantasy theme for any evangelical narrator. But Norm is engaged in a dialogue with a number of different parties. He responds to Frost, first, who says in his poem "he holds with those who favor fire." But Norm may also be reacting to both Brad and Jerry, Trekkies who during the time this journal entry appears are working on a skit about Star Trek. I have few ideas about what topics these students discussed late at night, after the tape recorder was turned off. But Norm is sensitive here to his social context.

Norm is the only student not to comment on Brad's angel works in class. But his angel poem is a reaction to Brad's, coming as it does following successful public performance and peer acceptance of what in Norm's view would be Brad's more jaded angelic vision. Such a reading seems consistent with Norm's prophetic temperament.

Both Brad and Norm have used Biblical frames to articulate narratives about the influence of the supernatural in their lives, and although they have

done it with less directness than Angie, they have used the symbol system to manage both rhetorical and relational concerns. I offer the following observations about how this is done and what it may or may not mean:

Observations about intertextual citation

- *Intertextual citation as evidenced by the use of direct quotations from Scripture is not as characteristic of young evangelicals as might be expected,* although Biblical literacy is strong as seen in the sophisticated use of angels in the narratives examined. These students treat Scripture with respect, but recourse to experience as a way of discerning God's will is growing in importance.

- *The use of Biblical imagery seems to increase in structured formal discourse.* Students who did not use citations in their oral conversion narratives or classroom discourse did so in their poetry. This would indicate they see it as a legitimate source of authority and validation as well as a source of powerful metaphors and fantasy themes to which an audience can relate.

- *No observations about the use of Scripture in informal discourse can be drawn from this study.* Physical limitations of this study prevent informed observations about the use of intertextuality in more informal conversations, sitting around the wood stove in the living room or playing cards late at night around the kitchen table. Because the farm house where data was collected only had electricity in the dining room (which functioned as a classroom), the observations based on this data can only be taken to describe classroom discourse.

Some evidence exists to indicate use of biblical frames of reference may increase as discourse becomes less formal in the same way it increases as it

becomes more formal. Consider this poem by Ellen, her only recorded reference to Scripture outside of her conversion narrative.

> Stoke the fire
> Join the fun
> We sit up late
> playing cards
> solving problems
> telling futures
> writing poetry
> getting angry
> "What does the
> Bible have to say?"
> I'm right
> you're wrong
> hear them sing
> what's going on
> Stoke the fire
> join the fun.

This poem shows up undated and undiscussed in her final portfolio, so it is difficult to place it in a context. But it is quite likely several discussions occurred over the issue of drinking. Linda seemed particularly concerned about this issue, mentioning it in both her conversion narrative and as the topic of her remembered conversation. After she discussed her trip to New York (chapter four), I asked her to discuss her earlier Christian experience. Here is that exchange:

> WALLY: Let's go back to earlier. When in your life did you start to say this Christian thing is me, I care about this, this is who I am. When was this starting to kick in for you?
>
> LINDA: Yeah, um, probably high school. Um, until then, um, you know, um the peer group. You just concentrate so hard on just trying to, on being like everyone else, and trying just kind of to lose myself in the shadow. I didn't want to make a stand, I didn't want to be someone who was different at all, who was noticed. Um, and then in high school I really had to make the difficult choices. Um, my friends started making choices that I didn't agree with,

> and I had to really search why I didn't agree with them. Um, I'm still doing that. I was starting a conversation out there, trying to get different people's views on drinking. Not because, not that I shouldn't drink because I'm under 21, but, biblical standpoint, why shouldn't I be drinking, you know?

As early as the first day there is a discussion about drinking from a "biblical standpoint" outside the range of the audio and visual recording equipment. Dicussions about drinking and other topics may have been the source of Ellen's reported speech in her poem: "What does the Bible have to say?"

I will discuss the research limitations involved in not having access to these conversations in my concluding chapter. But the possibility that Scripture is more likely to frame discourse in formal written discourse and informal conversational discourse, but less likely to do so in institutional discourse, again raises the issue of how education affects faith. Hunter says "contemporary Christian higher education produces the unintended consequence of being counterproductive to its own objectives" because it "contributes to the erosion of its symbolic boundaries" (Hunter, 1987). The analysis presented here may indicate these students do not feel comfortable grounding classroom talk in Scripture and their college experience in fact undermines their commitment to positions traditionally associated with the evangelical tradition.

One of those positions regards the person and work of Christ, a "symbolic boundary" to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 7

Jesus Lover of My Soul: Dramatic discourse

Hunter's suggestion that Christian colleges may be counterproductive to their own objectives by eroding symbolic boundaries is one Jerry, a senior, specifically denies, at least in terms of his understanding of Scripture and salvation. He claims, as we shall see, to have arrived at his views independently before college.

In an exchange of E-mail a year after the workshop I asked him to send me a copy of the skit analyzed below. I also asked him to describe his views on inerrancy and soteriology and to comment on the way those views had been affected by his experience at Spring Arbor College. Here is his reply (without corrections of spelling and punctuation):

> Date: Thu, Jan 19, 1995 2:19 PM EDT
> From: [Jerry]
> Subj: Inerrancy (sp.?)
> To: METTSWAL
>
> File: homecoming.sit (6336 bytes)
>
> Wally,
>
> I'm sending you Homecoming and my views on Inerrancy. Your mail message also mentioned Christ as the ONLY means of salvation, so I'll throw that in too.

INERRANCY:
I believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God.
(Plenary Inspired that is.)
I believe that everything in the Bible is their because of the DIRECT will of God.
HOWEVER: I believe that when reading the Bible, one must keep in consideration the cultural, social, and historical point of vie of both the author and the intended audience, as well as the literary mechanincs involved.
For Example: Gen. Ch 1 is written in a poetic format. Therefore, the author (whether it was Mosses, or a group of scholars spread out over a thousand years) may have taken some artistic licence in writting.
Another Example: In Rev. when John talks about giant locusts, he could have actually seen helicopters. To a 100 A.D. person, a group of helicopters, could very well look like locusts from a distance.
Yet Another Example: When Paul talks about marriage in Corinthians, he was addressing the trend for Christians to sell everything, and go wait in a field for Christ to return (which they believed was immenent). That is why he talks about marriage so non-chalantly: he is trying to convience the Corinthians that they can go ahead and marry, it won't intterupt their vigil for the second advent.
My view of God as author of the Bible, is one of God giving his human instruments visions, feelings, and insights, thereflre allowing them to write. It is NOT of God dictating to some schmuck who writes down everthing God says. (With the exception of direct quotes from God)

Christ as the ONLY means of salvation:
Jesus said "No man comes to the Father but by me."
Yes.
But what does it mean to come to Christ? I guess I lean toward the Catholic doctrine that all men (and women) have the ability to discover God by the light of their own reason.
A bushman who has never heard the word of God, may still feel a spiritual presence by from the creator of the universe.
After all, the Bible make numerous references to us being JUDGED in the end. If salvation were as cut and dry as "I got saved" or " I didn't get saved" there wouldn't be much to judge.

> AND: I held these views LONG before I even HEARD of SAC, so THEY did not corrupt me.
>
> P.S. What version of AOL are you using? The new version (2.5.1) is great!

This E-mail message, with its misspellings and false starts, is characteristic of on-line discourse, often hurried and more "conversational" than writing in academic contexts. Here Jerry says the college did not corrupt him, and that may be so. His view of a last judgment is a specific doctrinal position of many in the Wesleyan movement to which his own church (Nazarene) subscribes. However, it is *not* typical of that tradition in particular or evangelical churches in general to discount the necessity of being "saved."

The poor bushman is problematic, of course, but my concern here is not with Jerry's doctrine but with his discourse. Consider this fragment:

> Jesus said "No man comes to the Father but by me." Yes. But what does it mean to come to Christ? I guess I lean toward the Catholic doctrine that all men (and women) have the ability to discover God by the light of their own reason.

Christ, who described himself as the "light of the world," says he is the only way, but Jerry says we don't know what that means. He thinks people can come to God through the "light of their own reason." The shift is managed by interchanging "Christ" and "God," a semantic solution allowed by the Christian conception of the Trinity perhaps, but not, historically at least, in the way Jerry manages it here. Christian orthodoxy is careful to distinguish between the roles of God as Father and as Son, and the Son alone provides an avenue for coming to God in any sense.

However Jerry allows the bushman to come to the Father *without* coming through the Son, a requirement evangelicals generally maintain on the basis

of the verse Jerry himself quotes but then discounts. By not distinguishing between Christ and God in terms of how salvation is acquired, he is failing to make a distinction critical to the Christian faith since the first century.

This blurring of the first two persons of the Godhead is seen in his E-mail as he discusses Scripture too. In general, his hermeneutics are consistent with current evangelical scholarship in its concern about the "cultural, social, and historical point of view of both the author and the intended audience." As he observes, this allows some latitude in interpreting the creation story from Genesis 1. A "dictation" view of revelation is also widely discounted, even among fundamentalists. There is no "schmuck who writes down everything God says." But notice the exception Jerry makes: "With the exception of direct quotes from God."

In the very next paragraph he begins to discount a "direct quote" from Christ. How does Jerry view Christ? What is his role in the Christian experience? How do believers relate to Christ? To explore this we will look at Jerry's narrative account of this relationship, a skit called "Homecoming."[10]

Homecoming

Christ is on stage, sitting. After a few moments, Michael enters.

Christ: (Happy, glad to see him) Michael! You're back!

Michael: (A little uncertain, or maybe apprehensive) Yeah.

Christ: I missed you. I always miss you when you're away.

---

[10] If this were a CR-ROM, which is how discourse studies will be reported in the next few years, you could now push a button and watch Brad and Jerry perform this skit. But lacking the technical expertise to provide such documentary, I offer you the skit in its entirety, lacking the dramatic and verbal complexity of its performance.

Michael: Great.

Christ: I'm glad you're back, there's so much I want to talk with you about! (Notices that Michael is holding his hand as though it is injured) Are you O.K.?

Michael: It's not that bad.

Christ: Let me see it. (Michael holds out his hand. Christ takes it and examines it.) Doesn't this hurt?

Michael: Not that much.

Christ: You should have come to me sooner, let me help you.

Michael: (Takes his hand back) No, that's O.K. It barely even hurts.

Christ: Michael, please, let me help you. (Michael gives him his hand) There, isn't that better?

Michael: Yeah, thanks.

Christ: Michael, it's so good to have you back. You can't believe how much I missed you.

Michael: Yeah, well, I'm back.

Christ: Now, we can continue where we left off. You never have to leave again. (Hold out arms as if to give Michael a hug, but Michael pauses, then walks away)

Michael: Look, I'm not ready for that.

Christ: What do you mean?

Michael: I'm not here to "build our relationship." I just came to get something. (Starts to rummage through a drawer)

Christ: What is it? What do you want?

Michael: (To himself) Where did I leave that thing? (To Christ) Don't worry about it, it's just something of mine

I've been meaning to get rid of. Ahh, there it is. (Finds what he's looking for)

Christ: Michael?!?

Michael: What?

Christ: What are you going to do with that?

Michael: I'm going to sell it.

Christ: Sell it? You can't sell that!

Michael: Sure I can, why shouldn't I?

Christ: Because I didn't give that to you just so you could sell it. It's a gift with a special purpose. And selling it out there is not what it is intended for.

Michael: Well, it's not getting a lot of use around here. Besides, you have no idea what I can get for this. (Starts to leave)

Christ: Michael, please don't go.

Michael: Why not?

Christ: Because I might not be able to help you next time you get into trouble.

Michael: Right. (Starts to leave again)

Christ: Michael, please.

Michael: Oh, come off it! You know that every time I come back you'll help me!

Christ: I won't always be able to.

Michael: Yeah, right. You've said the same thing for the last I don't know how many times. But you still take me back. (Starts to leave, stops, walks near Christ in frustration) You know, you're really pathetic! All you do is sit here and wait for me, and then when I come back all I do is ask for help, and then leave again! And this time I'm

even taking one of your gifts to sell out there! And yet still you sit! (Starts to leave)

Christ: Michael, please don't leave.

Michael: (Stops) Give me one good reason not to.

Christ: Because you'll just get hurt again. Like the problems with Sue when your marriage was on the rocks, and when your children, Jeff and Sara started getting into trouble, and when you lost your job. In one way or another, those all started happening because you left me. (Pause) Michael, someday the trouble you get into may be more than I will help you out of.

Michael: Yeah, right. You helped me with all of those other problems, and you even FIXED my problem this time. Face it, no matter what I do, you're always going to take me back.

Christ: I won't always be able to Michael, please don't go out there again.

Michael: Please, you spend all of your time sitting here waiting for me, you don't even know what it's like out there.

Christ: I know what it's like.

Michael: Oh yeah, I forgot you know everything. Well then, you must know this: I'm leaving, and I'm NOT coming back! Good Bye! (Exits)

Christ gets up as if to follow after Michael, but stops before leaving center stage. Christ stands there for a moment, as if agonizing over a decision, then looks upward in silent pleading prayer, then sadly returns to his seat. Long pause, then...

Michael: (Enters, pauses at the entrance and looks at Christ, expecting to be greeted. Michael is panicked and worried) Uh, hi! I'm back!

Christ: I know, Michael.

Michael: Oh, yeah, right. Well, um, I need some help.

Christ: I know.

Michael: Yeah, you know that too. Look could you give me a hand here?

Christ: (Pause, painfully) No.

Michael: What?!?

Christ: I'm sorry Michael. I can't; it's too late.

Michael: What?!? C'mon, sure you can. O.K., look, I PROMISE I won't leave again! Hey, remember what it used to be like, how we would just sit and talk and just be with each other all the time?!? I PROMISE it will be just like that again, 'cause I'm never gonna leave again.

Christ: Michael, it's too late.

Michael: How can you say that? Remember all the stuff we did together? Remember all the things I did for you?

Christ: I remember. I remember all the things you did. And I remember why you did them.

Michael: Well, this is real serious, if you don't help me I could be in REAL trouble! I mean, this is more that the other stuff you've helped me with, if you don't help me...I...could...die.

Christ: (Stands) It's too late.

Michael: What do you mean?

Christ: You're already dead.

Michael: No, I can't be!

Christ: You have to leave now.

Michael: No! I won't go!

Christ: You have to Michael. You've made your choice.

Michael: You won't make me go! I thought you loved me!

> Christ: I do love you Michael, I wish I could let you stay. But, the choice was yours, and you have made it. Now you must go.
>
> Michael: But Lord!
>
> Christ: Michael! (Pause) Depart from me, I knew you not.

I want to comment briefly on the group's reaction before examining Jerry's rhetorical and relational concerns. Norm says "it gets a little bit repetitive." Ellen wants more character development and more discussion of the gift Michael intends to sell. For her it seems both too "vague" (not enough detail about the gift) and too "blunt" (when Michael tells Christ "you're so pathetic" it "almost scared me," she says). Brad feels Christ should be a little more abrupt, perhaps angry, when Michael appears the second time. Angie, on the other hand, wants Jesus to "be a little more heartbroken." Brad, as the discussion progresses, changes his position and wants the last line to be angry, but the second scene to "build up to that." Linda wants to know about the gift too.

Four members of the group praise it for the same reason: it gives Christ a conversational presence. Linda says "I like the idea of the conversation and I also like the point he was driving across about how we leave the relationship always knowing, expecting Christ to be right there."

Angie is most insistent on this point. She says:

> I like it because it is very conversational, very real in the way people talk. It brings a Christ relationship to the level of, like, just a personal relationship and that's what it is. It shows people that aspect. And it's kind of neat because it shows a friendship. At first you don't know that it's God he's friends with, but it makes you see, if you had a regular friend who came and used you and they had a problem. And like you were calling God pathetic because he just sits

there and waits for you and every time you have a problem helps you and wants you to hang around, but he has no life. I like that. It shows his constancy through, I mean, good slant, good angle, I like it.

What Angie and her peers are doing throughout this critique is projecting. There is no reference to Scripture as a standard or measure of what Christ may actually be like. He is a conversational partner: somewhat angry in Brad's view, constant and caring in Angie's view. For Ellen, he is unapproachable; you wouldn't go up to him and tell him he is pathetic. The students see him the way they want him to be. It is written around a specific biblical citation, however, and we now consider Jerry's rhetorical and relational concerns.

Rhetorical aspects of "Homecoming"

The skit was being prepared for performance in churches by a drama group directed by Brad and Jerry. It concludes with the line: "Depart from me, I knew you not," a reference from Matthew 7:23.

In the second class reading Brad reads the line as "I never knew you." Jerry jumps him over the misreading immediately, with an extended and loud AACHH! "You messed up," he says, as Brad immediately repairs and says the line as written not once but twice: "I knew you not." There is a brief pause after which Ellen says emphatically "It's OKAY" and laughs, apparently trying to defuse the tension. The transcript shows little of the emotion involved in this exchange. It continues as below:

BRAD: Uh, it's a Scriptural quote...
JERRY: yeah
BRAD: ...although, if you looked it up in another version, maybe it would be "I never knew you."

> JERRY: That's true. I think maybe the Jehovah Witness version says that. (laughs)
> ANGIE (very softly): I think the New International Version might say that.
> JERRY: I beg your pardon?
> ANGIE: I think the New International Version might say that.

There is a real concern here about using the exact words of Scripture, although as it turns out Jerry is mistaken. Brad has cited the verse as it appears in both the New International version and the King James version, the versions both he and Jerry would be most likely to have memorized as children. Matthew reports Christ saying this in an order reversed from how Jerry quotes it: "I never knew you, depart from me, ye that work inequity." Christ, in turn, is quoting Psalms 6:8: "Depart from me, all ye workers of inequity."

Jerry's hermeneutical sophistication indicates he knows Jesus was quoting from the Hebrew into Aramaic while Matthew is quoting him in Greek and all of this is being translated into English, but he appears to be concerned about getting the words exactly right. He tells me later he wants to use the verse exactly as it appears to "spark people's memory" of the original text so "when they go home they will think about it."

Get-ready-because-you-have-to-stand-before-Christ-and be-judged is one of the ultimate fantasy themes in his rhetorical community, and, interestingly, one which conflicts with his view of the reasoning and seeking bushman. He reinforces his narrative by invoking the power of a remembered script. Here is the text as it appears in its biblical context (Matthew 7:21-23):

> Not everyone who says to me, `Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

> Many will say to me on that day, `Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'
>
> Then I will tell them plainly, `I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

According to this text, it may not even be enough to profess Christ and do good works. One must also *know* Christ. Where does this leave Michael, Christ's conversational partner in the skit? Notice his appeal, after he has died. Christ tells him it is "too late:"

> Michael: How can you say that? Remember all the stuff we did together? Remember all the things I did for you?
>
> Christ: I remember. I remember all the things you did. And I remember why you did them.

Christ knows what one does and *why* one does it, an ability Michael characterizes as giving him an unfair advantage. When he returns the first time, Michael is not interested in "building a relationship." When he leaves Christ warns him not to:

> Christ: Because you'll just get hurt again. Like the problems with Sue when your marriage was on the rocks, and when your children, Jeff and Sara started getting into trouble, and when you lost your job. In one way or another, those all started happening because you left me. (Pause) Michael, someday the trouble you get into may be more than I will help you out of.

Jerry is being careful with his words here. Michael can get into more trouble than Christ *will* help him out of, not *can* get him out of. But this fragment, indeed this entire skit, has personal connections for Jerry. This is how his conversion narrative begins:

When I was a really little kid,
before I was 12,
my family, I mean, we attended church,
my mom was the church secretary,
my dad was on the board of trustees
it was I guess in a way it was real to me
but I, it was all very legalistic.
Being a Christian and loving God and serving him,
meant that we didn't go to movies,
we did go to church every week,
we did this, we did...
it was all what we did,
not necessarily what we were
or how we thought or anything?
And then my dad was the head of a discipling group
for the college and career age group,
and he slept with one of the students, a girl,
And that was just kind of the climax.
They'd had a couple of problems for a couple of years.
So, anyway, my parents got a divorce.

From there it was kind of a question,
especially for my mom and for us,
you know if we did all the right things
then how come this happened and stuff like that.
I think, because of that, it had to be more real.
I couldn't just say, well, if I do this, if I don't do this...
I came to realize that faith in God
required more than actions.
You couldn't find God in what you did,
it was an attitude of faith,
an attitude of love,
and, you know,
faith in Him?
So it became a lot more real,
then.

An important question for Jerry is "if we did all the right things then how come this (the divorce) happened?" He realizes finally that he couldn't find God in "what you did," it was "an attitude of love" and, ultimately, as reflected in his skit, a relationship. As Matthew 7 puts it, you have to *know* Christ.

Jerry doesn't believe bad things happen to you because of what you do. Christ warns Michael that he will run into trouble "because you left me," a relational concern. And his understanding of this is not rooted in his ongoing personal Bible study; in fact, he tells me the reason he got the biblical reference wrong at Cedar Bend is because he didn't have a Bible with him to check it.[11] His understanding of this issue is more likely based on conversation, the same vehicle he uses to communicate it with. He continues his narrative:

> My mom was working through a lot of the stuff
> with some friends of hers in the church.
> My dad kind of broke all ties with the church
> and with any of the people that my parents had known,
> so my mom was still friends with most of them.
>
> Some people didn't want to
> have anything much to do with my family anymore,
> because I think they were afraid it
> would happen to them or something.
> I don't know.
> But mom would talk to her friends,
> and they would try to work through
> and try to figure out, you know,
> what's going on, and,
> I've always slept with my door open.
> And the kitchen where she always sat and talked to people
> was right beneath my door,
> underneath the staircase,
> so I always heard everything that was going on,
> and I would lie there and think about it,
> and go, yeah,
> what about that?

---

[11] Jerry relies on his memory of Scripture in constructing this skit. In conferences before and after its presentation in class he says it is based on Matthew 25, a text about the judgement which includes no version of the disputed line: "I never knew you." Verse 12 in that chapter does use "I know you not" in a parable about ten virgins.

Relational dimensions of Homecoming

His rhetorical concern, then, is to communicate his insight about God through both a narrative and a conversation, powerful rhetorical tools drawn from his own experience. His relational needs in this case seem insignificant, compared with these rhetorical concerns. Insignificant, perhaps, but not nonexistent.

His primary relational concern appears to be with the audience. He wants them to go home and think about the message. He uses all sorts of involvement strategies: reported speech, specific detail, repetition. The skit is both socially and personally interesting, as evidenced by the class response. It produces the excitement of a genuine fantasy theme as his peers rush to co-construct it.

But in the *academic* discourse community of Cedar Bend, where angels wear crumpled wings and slanted halos, a discourse community where Angie's abortion poem is trashed by the class as too polemical, Jerry is uncharacteristically modest when the work is introduced. He offers to read it rather than act it out. He suggests he is too tired to do it justice. He judges it severely before he even begins: "It sucks!" he says. He senses it is the wrong audience, the wrong time and place. It is intended for a church, not a classroom.

But in this case he is wrong. He strikes a responsive chord. For the most part, these students are engaged in a struggle to create and maintain a personal, conversational relationship with Christ. Jerry's skit suggests it can be done. After all, the students have not rejected him as Michael has. Here is a Christ who heals and hugs and helps. He seems to be exactly the kind of

Christ they want, even if he is not exactly the kind of Christ the creeds proclaim him to be. [12]

The analysis of this chapter continues to support Hunter's observations concerning the loss of binding address. I will return to this in my concluding chapter, but a few additional observations seem justified here.

More Observations

- *Young evangelicals may be relying on a rich background of biblical teaching rather than personal study for their understanding of Scripture.* Jerry never checks the text on which his skit is based. Brad is frustrated because the concordance he has access to doesn't contain some of the more obscure angel references he has *heard* about. Three months after Cedar Bend, Brad goes on the mission trip to New York City to which Linda refers. He has to prepare and present a devotion on a Bible character and chooses, appropriately enough, doubting Thomas, the disciple who refused to believe in the resurrection until he touched Christ himself. When he returns from New York, Brad tells me it was exciting to make a point about the story he had "figured out" himself. He treats this as an *unusual* event, not just in his current state of skepticism but for him generally.

- *The image of Christ presented here may owe as much to psychology as to theology.* This is a Jesus who helps and heals and hugs. The students have not defined their Christian experience in terms of regeneration, but in terms of a struggle: they are "working through" their problems. In an analysis of popular literature produced by evangelicals since 1925, Watt, a historian,

---

[12]Jerry and the others could and probably would in church or while talking to a pastor define Christ in terms of traditional theological constructs. And the Christ presented here is not merely human: he has omniscence, for one thing. But the Christ co-constructed by this writer and this audience is primarily concerned with Christ as human, a concern seen earlier in Brad's discussion of whether or not Christ masturbated.

concludes popular evangelicalism has been profoundly influenced by its encounter with modern psychology. He writes:

> A subculture shot through with therapeutic ideas and practices is one in which traditional religion is declining....If therapeutic world views are symptomatic of the declining power of traditional religion and if evangelicalism is at base a therapeutic subculture, then the vitality of evangelicalism is not a sign that traditional religion is flourishing in America. It is rather a sign that a new sort of faith, one that owes at least as much to modern psychology as to Paul, is being born (Watt,1991).

What other signs are there that a new sort of faith is being born? More specifically, how have these signs been reflected in this project? These are questions I now consider.

CHAPTER 8

Just As I Am: Conclusions and questions

I have used the titles of hymns as chapter titles throughout this project, mostly because the titles reminded me of some theme discussed in the chapter. I have done so without comment, but this title, at least, should be explained.

"Just as I Am" is the hymn I sang more than any other hymn in my entire childhood. The first verse goes like this:

> Just as I am without one plea
> But that thy blood was shed for me,
> and that thou bidst me come to thee:
> Oh Lamb of God, I come.

I include it here for two reasons. First, it is an invitation hymn. We sang the same song week after week. The rhetorical intentions of the service had been dealt with. The sermon had proclaimed the truths. But underlying even that seemingly monological discourse was a relational concern. You needed to come to God, and this song was the signal that you could do so, not just in your heart, although that was okay too, but before assembled witnesses. You were invited by this song to establish (get saved) or reestablish (rededicate your life) that relationship in a social context, before friends and family members who would help you and pray for you and remind you without ever saying a word that you were part of the family of God.

The song also meant the service was about over. All I had to do was decide if I needed to go forward and confess any sins, and, if I didn't, I would

The song also meant the service was about over. All I had to do was decide if I needed to go forward and confess any sins, and, if I didn't, I would soon be out the door, laughing with my friends, running across the parking lot toward open fields and sunshine. That's one of the reason I've included it here. All I have to do is examine my heart, or at least my methodology, confess a few shortcomings perhaps, and we're all out the door.

There is a second reason for including this song as well. Faith seemed simpler then, although I doubt if it really was. But such a song—and such a faith—is more complicated for the students who went with me to Cedar Bend. Is there just one plea? How about the bushman and his light of reason? The students want to be close to God. But it isn't as easy as going forward in church—it is, in fact, a "struggle." And what about the blood and the cross? Only two students mentioned it at all, the student with the most doubt and the student who was most devout. Angie mentioned it in her poem about Bill, an almost trivial use of her community's most compelling master narrative to articulate what Stromberg calls an embodied aim. Brad uses it too. He says in his conversion narrative that "what God has done for us, and (Christ) dying, you know, those, those are questions I don't really question." The only thing he doesn't question is Christ dying—and he calls *that* a question.

What this discourse study has uncovered—to use Foucault's analogy of archaeology—is a faith in confusion. In his analysis of published Christian literature, Watt says "the portrait of the evangelical mainstream which emerges from this book makes it look less and less like a disciplined and charging army and more and more like a group of Americans that are trying—quite successfully—to fit in" (Watt, 1991). My concern here is not with how these students are trying to fit into American society, although that

is undoubtedly part of what is going on in their lives. I have been more concerned with how they are trying to fit into their own faith.

What is an evangelical?

Quite frankly, and here is my first confession during this invitation hymn, I sallied forth to defend their faith and now find myself quite unable to define it. I am not alone in this quandary. In *The Varieties of American Evangelicalism* (1991), a collection of essays by thinkers in a dozen different evangelical traditions, editors Johnston and Dayton struggle with defining evangelicalism and find no satisfying solution.

I have defined it as conservative Protestantism, rooted in a split dating from early in this century. Dayton says this conservative/liberal dichotomy is problematic. Churches in the holiness tradition pioneered the ordination of women hundreds of years before mainline (liberal) Protestant churches, for example. He says evangelical churches are actually on "the newer and innovative edges of Christianity" and the movement includes young movements such as Pentecostalism which are still in the process of developing a critical and historical consciousness. He suggests we dispense with the term altogether and focus on "more useful and appropriate categories of analysis" (Dayton,1991).

This leads to my second sin, perhaps. In drawing conclusions about the role of experience or Scripture in defining the Christian experience of these students, I may have in some ways overlooked their own unique tradition within the borders of the evangelical community. Angie, Norm, Linda and Jerry are all from churches which are not only Pietistic, a distinction dating from soon after the reformation, but, more recently, from the North American holiness movement founded largely on the teachings of John

Wesley. Wesley was concerned with the Scripture primarily in terms of its "sufficiency for salvation," and believed it had authority as a vehicle for the Spirit of God to witness of the love of God (Bassett,1991). He believed, as our analysis of Angie's conversion narrative shows, the Scripture must be confirmed in *experience*.

This holiness tradition also maintains a doctrine of *entire sanctification*. At the risk of oversimplification, this doctrine holds one can achieve a divine cleansing from the tendency to sin along with a gifting of unconditional love for God and neighbor (Bassett,1991). This comes to people who have already been justified by grace, that is, who have accepted the atoning work of Christ. To outsiders this sometimes appears as getting saved over and over again.

Brad brought this to my attention when I asked him why he thought little was made of the conversion experience itself in the Cedar Bend narratives. Brad, a Baptist who only gets to do it once, said "these people have to do it over and over again, so maybe it doesn't mean as much." In fact, he said, "I always talked about being born-again when I was growing up" but he suggests he may not have brought it up in his conversion narrative "because I've been hanging out around Wesleyans too long."

Of course Angie specifically accounts for "giving her life to God," and the holiness movement is deeply rooted in nineteenth century American revivalism where such conscious acts of accepting Christ were specifically called for. Even if I have misread the holiness vision of Scripture and salvation from my own more Calvinistic viewpoint, it remains clear that the students' views of these matters are extending the symbolic boundaries of their faith, not only in a larger evangelical context but in their own holiness tradition as well.

According to Bassett, Phoebe Palmer, an important early leader of the movement, certainly believed that to be a believer was to know and believe the Scripture; and H. Orton Wiley, whose *Christian Theology* (1940) is a widely used text in the movement, specifically chastised fundamentalism for a hermeneutic that, by separating the spirit of God from the Word of God, "came to mean nothing more than human reason" (Bassett,1991).

This theological perspective views the Scripture as primarily a vehicle, or to use a Wesleyan term, a medium, for salvation. It leads ultimately to a love of God, a relationship to which Jerry easily attests. But it makes no room for his curious and reasoning bushman. And Jerry and his peers remain nevertheless clearly identified with evangelicalism, whatever it may be.

Johnston suggests evangelicalism is characterized by a "family" resemblance, more useful as a description than a definition. Citing Cullen Mullen, who calls it "a twelve-ring circus," and Roman Catholic missiologist Thomas Stransky, who calls it "a confusing conglomeration," Johnston follows Timothy Weber and others in seeing it as a collection of church traditions with a common theology and a basic ethos. He says it is composed of "those churches that have wanted effective, biblically-based evangelistic and social outreach" as a means "both of expressing and of extending the *evangelion*, the gospel—the good news of Jesus Christ" (Johnston,1991).

This may be as close as it gets. But our concern here is not primarily with how evangelicals are defined, but with how they view the world, and more specifically with how that is reflected in their conversation, both spoken and written. Our concern has not been so much to define them as to describe them. This brings us to the second verse of our invitation song.

Does discourse analysis help us understand who evangelicals are?

I've argued that discourse is essentially conversation, and I've suggested viewing narrative in this way forces us to look at both the rhetorical intent and relational concerns of speakers and writers. I've not claimed that such an analysis is particularly new or original.

For me it came from an effort to balance the social science concerns of conversational analysts with the more humanistic concerns of discourse analysts. The conversational analysts have tended to study sequential features of language (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson,1974; Schegloff,1968), and I take the rhetorical choices speakers and writers make to be choices about what comes next. That is I take them to be sequentially organized, although, and this is confession number three, I have not addressed this in my analysis or documented it here. To do so would have required more extended stretches of informal talk than I was able to obtain given the physical limitations of my data collection. There is only so much you can record in a six room house with two electrical outlets. I also found myself wanting to give the students a break from the intensive focus on language which both the research project and the workshop itself involved. Narratives have been examined in such contexts, of course, by discourse analysts such as Goodwin who makes much of stories as participation structures (Goodwin,1990).

Like conversational analysts, discourse analysts have studied the sequential features of talk (Ainsworth-Vaughn,1992; Murray,1985), but they have concerned themselves more with the context, using it as a vehicle for examining issues of power, gender and culture (Ainsworth-Vaughn,1992; Fisher,1983; Johnstone,1993; Tannen,1980; Thorne,1993; West and Garcia,1988). They have been more focused on

the relational aspects of discourse. This is a discourse study, and I have data available which might reflect on some of the concerns with which discourse studies are normally concerned. A class discussion about the movie *The Remains of the Day*, for example, might show something about how this group of young evangelicals negotiates issues of gender. More specifically, it was a discussion about why the females in the group spent twenty minutes talking about the movie and the males never said a word. (When I brought this up, Ellen threatened my life if I was going to call it a "chick flick," a designation Jerry gave it the night before.)

Discourse studies about such discussions—who speaks, who controls topic, etc.—would be useful, but they are outside my work here, which examines the role of narrative. I chose narratives for several reasons. One is because Christianity is seen as a storytelling community. Although this data is largely classroom discourse, a limitation I've acknowledged above, this is primarily a study of religious discourse and narratives seem appropriate to this task. I also chose narratives because narratives are generally seen as a speech event which interrupts conversation, and I see it as a part of conversation. Confession four: I chose narratives because they gave me a chance to demonstrate my conversational paradigm. I'll tackle this again below. First, however, I want to offer a brief defense of the validity of what I have attempted here.

This defense is not intended to defend discourse studies from its more scientifically minded (positivist) critics. This is a qualitative study and makes no claims to be otherwise. My intention at this point is to assure scholars who conduct and value qualitative research that I have been sensitive to the demands of such research.

Reissman, speaking of narrative studies specifically, says their validity is based on persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic use. By persuasiveness she means "Is the analysis reasonable and convincing?" She says this occurs "when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from informants' accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered"(Riessman,1993). I've tried to account for the observations I made at the end of each chapter. I used Stromberg's analysis of self-transformation through conversion narratives to extend my own understanding beyond that which my own use of Bormann and Polanyi allowed. But ultimately, as Reissman notes, the persuasiveness of the analysis rests on the rhetoric of writing and the reader's response.

The second criteria she notes is correspondence. "An investigator can take results back to those studied," she says. Reissman says "member checks, " as Lincoln and Guba call them, increase credibility, although the validity of an investigator's interpretations cannot be completely validated in this way (Riessman,1993). The stories themselves are not static and meanings shift as consciousness changes. Nor can our theorizing across a number of narratives be evaluated by individual narrators. Throughout this study I have referenced the continued and continuing commentary on these narratives by their narrators. In addition, I asked the three students (Linda, Brad, and Jerry) whose narratives were the focus of major chapters to provide a brief response to my analysis of their own work. These reactions are included in Appendix B.[13]

Coherence is another aspect of validity which, in Reissman's view, consists of modifying understandings of speakers' and writers' beliefs and

---

[13] I have intentionally not responed to their comments. As teacher/researcher/writer I already have disproportionate power in this project. This appendix is intended to give them the last word. I am, of course, thankful that they found the analysis accurate..

goals (global coherence) in light of particular narratives (local coherence). For example, I expected the first conversion narrative I encountered (Angie's how-I-gave-my-life-to God story) to be the prototype, but it turned out to be the exception. Themal coherence is also important—the clustering of stories about angels, for example—for avoiding ad hoc theorizing (Riessman,1993).

Finally there is the pragmatic use, "the extent to which a particular study becomes the basis for others' work" (Riessman,1993). She says we do this by describing how the interpretations were produced, "making visible what we did," and making primary data available. I have offered data in large chunks, hoping to provide others the opportunity to make observations independent of my own analysis. And finally, quoting Agger, Reissman says we further the understanding of narrative analysis by bringing our "foundational assumptions [and values] to the surface." I've made no secret of these.

Silverman discusses the validity of qualitative research more generally, suggesting one way it occurs is through "triangularization," a term coined from navigation. He defines this as "comparing different kinds of data (e.g. quantitative and qualitative) and different methods (e.g. observation and interviews) to see if they corroborate one another" (Silverman,1993). I've attempted this using data from quantitative surveys, student journals, interviews, classroom discussions, creative works, and even E-mail, and trust the analysis is richer for the diversity of narratives and discussions of narratives considered. Silverman cautions, however, that triangularization of data can not in and of itself arrive at an "overall truth." Nor do I wish to suggest that it does. I've been careful to offer observations, not conclusions, not out of regard for the postmodern temper as much as for the clear limitations of this work. As Reissman observes, narrative analysis is only "a

useful addition to the stock pot of social science methods, bringing critical flavors to the fore that otherwise get lost" (Riessman,1993). This study says something about six evangelical college students, flavoring the findings of Hunter and others who have noticed subtle changes in the values of young evangelicals generally.

I have attempted to do so through the use of a particular paradigm. It is time for the third verse of the invitation hymn, a discussion of how that paradigm contributes to an understanding of discourse in general and world view in particular.

What are the implications of a conversational paradigm?

Silverman, a conversational analyst, sees conversation as the baseline for understanding other forms of talk, a distinction he sees as being critical in distinguishing conversational analysis from discourse analysis (Silverman,1993). The tension between these two approaches contributed to my development of the paradigm set forth in chapter four. To review, I see all discourse as conversation, and I see conversation as emerging from the tension between rhetorical intent and relational concern.

Others have noticed this tension as well. In *Conversational Realities* (1993), Shotter argues for a "rhetorical-responsive version of social constructionism." He says:

> I want to claim that our ability as individuals to speak representationally—that is, to depict or describe a unique state of affairs (whether real or not), as we please, independently of the influences of our surroundings—arises out of us first and primarily speaking in a way that is responsive to the others around us.

He uses the term rhetorical rather than referential because "our ways of talking can 'move' people to action, or change their perceptions." He believes

most of the time we fail to fully understand each other, and if we do, it is by testing each other's talk, questioning and challenging it, reformulating it, and so on. The rhetorical aspect of language, however, allows us to use metaphors (or stories) to "make connections" between disconnected utterances and give form to "merely sensed feelings and tendencies shared by speakers and listeners."

This has been my concern. By examining a fault line between rhetoric and relationship I've hoped to see how the students "make connections" and so, in Shotter's terms, "depict or describe a unique state of affairs (whether real or not)." Some of what the students believe is real and some is not. I say that because I am not a social constructionist, strictly speaking. I do believe we construct our understanding of the world through words. But as a Christian I believe the world and God exist outside and independent of my understanding.

More to the point of Shotter's argument and aside from my theological perspectives, however, this tension between the rhetorical and the relational reveals the way connections are made, and this is at the center of any world view analysis. Redfield, as noted in the preface, says a world view is "the way man, in a particular society, sees himself in relationship to all else." Essentially, it is the construction of a universe along an axis from self to not-self, including nature, others and God. The rhetorical and relational aspects of a conversational paradigm such as I'm suggesting allows us to explore both ends of this axis: the self is seen in the rhetorical aspect of this tension and the not-self is seen in the relational aspect. My analysis has focused on the social and spiritual relational concerns, but an analysis could be undertaken which examined discourse in terms of the relationship of speakers and writers to the physical environment as well.

What has been discovered then about the world view(s) of these six young evangelicals? I offer these condensations of the observations at the end of previous chapters as representative and not comprehensive. We have, after all, only carefully considered the way they see themselves in relationship to three not-selves: conversion, Scripture, and Christ.

- Conversion is an unrecapturable event in the past. Generally, these students see it as the beginning of a process, what they call over and over again a struggle. It is not hopeless however. This struggle is characterized by what I have called "confidence in providence."
- Scripture represents an important symbol system in the background rather than the foreground of their consciousness. Their language is not characterized by extensive citations, but in intentional creative work it offers a rich resource of allegory and allusion.
- Christ is to some degree a projection of self, easily conceptualized as conversational partner. He is seen primarily in terms of his humanity rather than his divinity.

Are these findings generalizable? No. As I have said, the goal of discourse studies is not to generalize but to particularize. But these particular students have constructed these particular aspects of their worldview in community, which may suggest that the rhetoric of evangelical pulpits is not always maintained in the relational concerns of those who sit in evangelical pews, or by those who attend evangelical colleges.

And now it is time for the last verse. Just like when I was a kid, we've sung the song through several times. We sometimes ended on a different verse than the last one. Today it is verse two:

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without,
Oh Lamb of God, I come.

The preacher is putting the pressure on now. "The symbolic boundaries of Protestant orthodoxy are not being maintained," says Hunter. "An increasing number of evangelicals no longer really believe in the sanctity of these symbolic boundaries....It is not as though these evangelicals no longer believe in God, his authority, or the authority of scriptures, or the divine sanction of the traditions.... It is that they have trouble believing them simply and literally."

Wait, another sinner has come forward to repent. Maybe it's Brad. There is time for one more verse.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thou promise, I believe—
Oh Lamb of God, I come.

A promise from God? I expect that too has rhetorical and relational dimensions, part of a conversation in every sense.

POSTSCRIPT

I offer here a few suggestions about what this project might mean to teachers, researchers, and others interested in the relationship between world view and language.

The conversational paradigm has implications for teachers of writing. If they can get students to think self-consciously about the conversational aspects of their work, that is about both their rhetorical and relational concerns, the students may be able to make better choices during the composing process. This could be accomplished in classes and workshops by examining ordinary conversation and how it works, drawing on the work of conversational analysis. This would be useful work since it provides a vehicle for some students to move from the known (conversation) to the unknown (composition).

Scholars interested in hermeneutics generally can also make use of this paradigm. There are many different analytical tools available to examine the rhetorical or relational aspects of various texts. But by doing both (examining the fault line as I have called it), insights can be gleaned which may be helpful in understanding how relationships are constructed and examining how world views are maintained or changed. Religious scholars, for example, might examine biblical texts and both public and private prayer from this standpoint.

As I suggested in chapter eight, further insights into the evangelical subculture could be gained by doing discourse study in other conversational forms as they relate to other symbolic boundaries. For example, I can use the data I've collected to examine other questions. How do evangelicals handle

data I've collected to examine other questions. How do evangelicals handle issues of gender and authority? What is the role of media in the language of evangelicals? Studies of this type would contribute to further understanding of the evangelical world view.

I have not examined it here, but the oral character of this subculture would be an interesting study. Because these students see Christ as a conversational partner, they think (as most evangelicals do) of God "speaking" to them. Chidester observes: "Protestant religion is characterized by an almost exclusive dominance of the auditory mode, in the centrality of the Word, the sermon and *fides ex auditu*" (Chidester, 1982). Is evangelicalism in some sense a preliterate culture, since its biblical text continues to be perceived as spoken, as alive?

Finally, I believe this project contributes to discussions about ethnography. How effective can one be as both member and observer of a community? What is the role of the subject in the research process? I hope I've been transparent enough and thorough enough to help answer these questions. And I hope I've raised some more.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

World View: Definitions and metaphors

Angie and the other students at Cedar Bend share what anthropologist Marguerite Kraft calls an "integrating core." In the case of these young evangelicals, that core is held together by, in Weaver's term, the "tyrannizing image" of their subculture— the incarnation of God as man. This core is their world view and is reflected in their conversations in general and their narratives in particular. Conversation involves communicating this world view to others, a rhetorical dimension, and creating this world view in conjunction with others, a relational dimension.

This appendix explores in a general way what the term means and various metaphors which have been or could be applied to it. It does so without reference to the data collected at Cedar Bend Farm, but the analysis of that data in this project serves, among other things, to suggest ways in which world view can be examined through the use of the conversational paradigm suggested in chapter three. New ways to think about world view are needed because the term itself, despite common usage in intellectual circles, lacks clear definition.

The problems in defining the term can be illustrated with two examples. Consider Richard Tarnas' book, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view.* This book is an

historical look at the issue of world view which "explores the evolution of the Western mind" (Tarnas,1991). The first chapter is "The Greek world view." Throughout the book he then traces the impact of Greek thinking—and concepts such as archetypal forms—on the classical, medieval and modern periods, coming finally to bear on the "postmodern mind." He concludes that contemporary intellectual ambivalence is due to a joining of "masculine" and "feminine" perspectives, a marriage toward which he says "masculine" Western intellectual traditions have always been inclined.

However, in a five hundred page book subtitled "Understanding the Ideas That Shaped Our World View," he never once defines the term. This is true of other works which include the term in their titles: "Do Men's and Women's World Views Differ?"(Jensen, McGhee and Jensen,1991) and "Effects of World View on Purpose in Life" (Molcar and Stuempfig,1988).

A second example of the confusion surrounding this topic is the way it is often defined so broadly as to be analytically useless. Consider Hoffecker's *Building a Christian World View*. He says a person's world view is "the collection of his presuppositions or convictions about reality, which represents his total outlook on life." These presuppositions, he says, remain "unidentified and unexamined." He does not say so, but apparently when the presuppositions are identified and examined they become convictions. At any rate, taken together, they "govern every dimensions of life" (Hoffecker,1986).

This is an important task, this governing of every dimension of life. Why then is the term undefined or broadly defined or poorly defined? Is the term manageable at all, given its invisible and pervasive character? Part of the problem with defining the term is its interdisciplinary usage. Take the two examples already cited. Tarnas uses it as a rough equivalent of an historical

intellectual era while Hoffecker, although approaching it from a historical perspective, gives it philosophic and religious significance.

Confusion abounds. The term appear as one word (Noebel,1991), as two words (Kearney,1984; Sires,1976) and as a hyphenated word (Jensen, McGhee and Jensen,1991). It can mean a way of looking at things, as in "an existential world view," as well as a comprehensive look at things, as in "developing economies: a world view." Originally associated with anthropology, at least in American intellectual circles, the term has been adapted and applied to discussions of theology, hermeneutics, philosophy, psychology, history, literature, business and any number of other disciplines and interdisciplines (Rosenau,1992). Synonyms and near synonyms are common, including German philosopher Habermas' "life world" and missionary anthropologist Fision's "mind world."

At a deeper level, the problem of definition is also rooted in the conflicting world views of those who use and define the term. Idealists and pragmatists, modernists and post-modernists each camp has a different set of presuppositions about where these different presuppositions come from and how we use them.

World view—an historical perspective

According to Kearney there are two world view schools, both of them rooted in idealism in general and in modern American anthropology in particular (Kearney,1984). The first of these is identified with Boas and his concept of culture. Boasians work by constructing a cultural history of a local culture by compiling an exhaustive list of its cultural elements.

One of Boas' students was Edward Sapir who defines culture as a *world outlook* and says in doing so he wishes

> to embrace in a single term those general attitudes, views of life and specific manifestations of civilization that give a particular people its distinctive place in the world. Emphasis is put on how what is done and believed functions in the whole life of that people (Sapir,1949).

Ruth Benedict was another student of Boas, best known for her *Patterns of Culture* (1934). This study of Dobuan, Pueblo and Kwakiutl cultures was also influenced by Spengler and his *leitmotifs*, Dilthey and his *weltanschauung*, and Gestalt psychology, which developed out of experiments with perception.

Benedict believed each of the three cultures could be reduced to a single psychological rubric and this conclusion has been often and justly criticized. One criticism involves the absence of any explanation of personality acquisition, a criticism addressed by Benedict's most famous student, Margaret Mead. Mead's culture and personality theory is different from world view, however, since personality theory is interested primarily in the affective dimensions of life (emotions, needs) and world view is more often concerned with the rational dimension (logic, systems of thought). The two cannot be entirely separate, of course.

Largely independent of and concurrent with the work of Boas and his students at Columbia University, Robert Redfield, a sociologist and social anthropologist at the University of Chicago, began to study world view looking for universals rather than patterns. He defines world view as "the way a people characteristically look outward on the universe" (Redfield,1953). His concept is mainly descriptive and his universals include a sense of self, distinctions between humans (gender, age, race, tribe), relationship to the non-human (nature, God), and attitudes toward time and space.

World view— a Christian perspective

Both traditions of world view study have influenced the work of evangelical scholars, although Redfield's approach is dominant. Sire, who studied at the University of Chicago, follows the Redfield school in *The Universe Next Door.* Sire says a world view is "a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world" (Sires,1976). He develops a set of questions each world view attempts to answer and then compares the answers of theism, deism, naturalism, existentialism, pantheism, and new consciousness. The questions are:

1) What is the prime reality, the really real?
2) Who is man?
3) What happens to man at death?
4) What is the basis of morality?
5) What is the meaning of human history?

His answers have since become the criteria for defining world view in studies by some evangelicals. Molcar, for example, studies the effect of world view on purpose in life, identifying the world view of students at California State University by asking them to select one of a set of five statements characterizing perspectives on God, humans, death, morality and history as developed by Sire (Molcar and Stuempfig,1988).

Both Hoffecker and Noebel take an approach similar to Sire, using categories rather than questions. Hoffecker compares world views on the basis of their perspectives on God, anthropology and epistemology (Hoffecker,1986). Noebel discusses three world views (Christianity, Marxism, secular humanism) in terms of ten categories derived from a series of lectures by James Orr in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1891. In the lectures, "The Christian View of God and the World," Orr says a Christian is committed "to a view of

man, to a view of sin, to a view of redemption, to a view of God in creation and history, to a view of human history found only in Christianity" (Noebel,1991).

Such an approach is similar to that of Blamires, who describes the "marks of a Christian mind" as a supernatural orientation, an awareness of evil, an acceptance of authority, a concern for persons, and a sacramental cast. He calls these "a few of the presuppositions which constitute its (the Christian mind's) frame of reference (Blamires,1963).

But all of these approaches have a weakness: the categories derive from the world view of the cataloger. World views are compared from the perspective of the analyst, but an analyst with a different world view might not accept the categories as valid or even important. For example, Kearney, whose model we examine shortly, maintains "The concept of world view, as a variant of American anthropology, is best regarded as embedded within American liberal bourgeois culture" (Kearney,1984).

Charles and Marguerite Kraft, on the other hand, have followed Boas rather than Redfield and Sire in their anthropological approach to missions. In her dissertation at Fuller Theological Seminary, Marguerite Kraft uses ethnosemantics to study the world view of Nigerian tribes. By analyzing lexical terms she discovers dominant categories in the thinking of a particular tribe and then describes how those concepts can be used to communicate the Gospel message.

Her definition of world view is not unlike that of Sire and others following the Redfield school. She sees it as "the central set of concepts and presuppositions that a society lives by" (Kraft,1978). She says:

> Worldview is learned unconsciously early in life and is not readily changed. As a child learns how to interact with his surroundings in a socially acceptable way, he is

> developing a worldview which will influence his actions the rest of his life. This will be the integrating core at the center of his perspective on reality. Worldview bridges the gap between the objective reality around him and the culturally agreed on perception of that reality within him. This integrated core provides the framework for accepting or rejecting new elements in life. As he comes into contact with new ideas and elements, they are borrowed only if they fit into his worldview or if they can be recut or recolored to fit (Kraft,1978).

Her husband Charles, following the same line, says world view has five functions: explaining, validating, reinforcing, integrating and adapting (Kraft,1974). These last two functions are particularly interesting. According to Kraft a world view has an integrating function because it orders perceptions or reality into an overall design and has an adapting function because it is resilient, reconstructing old and new understandings to maintain equilibrium. As Kraft notes, religion has similar functions.

But the approach the Krafts use is not without its problems. Kearney observes that enthnosemantic approaches to world view are limited to semantic domains for which speakers have names. World view study, however, deals with larger domains with deeper structures. Enthnoscience is also labor intensive and is thus limited to finite domains, unable, for the most part, to "investigate how the idea systems relate to behavior, nor how they change through time" (Kearney,1984).

In fact, Kraft tried to do both. She attempted to use world view to account for specific behaviors in the culture and collected data over three ten-year intervals. But Kearney's concerns do seem to justify making ethnoscience a tool within the larger framework of world view theory, a field for which discourse studies may be more heuristic. Kearney, a Marxist, seems especially concerned about the tendency of ethnosemantics to focus on nouns rather

than verbs, concerned, as he is, with action, or praxis as Marxists prefer to say. It is a concern Christian scholars should share. Faith without works is dead.

World view— a Marxist perspective

Kearney's own model, described in his book *World View*, defines world view as "a set of basic assumptions and images that provide a more or less coherent, though not necessarily accurate, way of thinking about the world" (Kearney,1984). He has studied Redfield's model and extended its application to world view studies by subjecting Redfield's categories to a Marxist critique, focusing his understanding of world view on what he calls *logico-structural integration.*

By this he means "some assumptions and the resultant ideas, beliefs, and actions predicated on them are logically and structurally more compatible than others, and the entire world view will strive toward maximum logical and structural consistency" (Kearney,1984). The "logical" aspect of this paradigm is roughly analogous to the assumptions of a world view while the "structural" aspect deals more with its controlling images, or "templates." These interact so "that a world view as a system has some independence of material and social influences because of its own internal dynamics."

These dynamics are of course what a conversational model of discourse reflects, the ways in which speakers or writers negotiate the tension between their rhetorical intentions—the logical aspect of Kearney's model—and their relational needs—the structural aspect. These relational needs reflect their need to fit into the social structures around them, to find and share controlling images.

Kearney has in fact modified Redfield's categories. He does not include God, as Redfield did, but explains God in terms of "projection" and "reification." He writes:

> Humans seem to be uncomfortable not having answers to basic concerns such as life, death, illness, cosmology and their own destinies in general. Consequently humans tend unconsciously to supply satisfying answers that often have little bearing on the things they purport to explain. In supplying these answers, people draw on their experiences and understanding in other areas of life and fashion answers out of this material. This process is referred to as projection and the ideas, the symbols, the false knowledge so created are uncritically assumed to be "out there" in the real world. These images are thus reified, made things, assumed to be aspects of the environment, when in fact they are reflections of the environment (Kearney,1984).

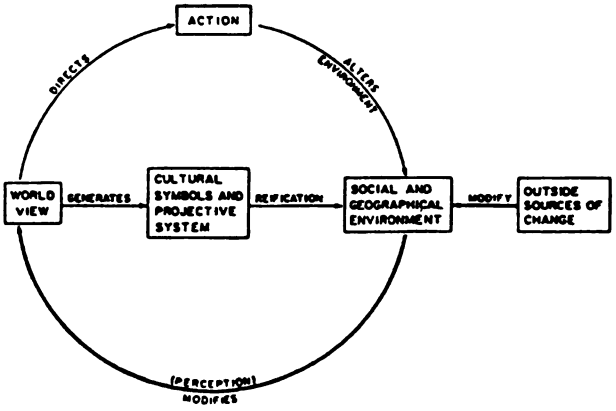
This, in Kearney's view, explains ghosts, spirits and gods. He quotes Marx: "The productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life."

This is not radically different from sociologist Peter Berger's discussion of religion in the context of "world building." In *The Sacred Canopy* he sees world building as an ordering, or nomizing (naming) activity. This nemos acts as a "shield against terror." The tendency, says Berger, is "for meanings of the humanly constructed order to be projected into the universe" (Berger,1967). This, he maintains, is the basis of religion.

Projection and reification do occur, of course. We create social, political and religious images which take on "real" character in our thinking and are in fact different from the persons themselves or from God Himself. But Christians locate God on Kearney's model (see Figure 3) differently than Kearney does.

Kearney locates God inside the circle, as a construct of a projective system. Christians can concede that their understanding of Him is partially generated in such a fashion, but He is also outside the circle, modifying the environment. By "outside sources of change" Kearney means "any influence from outside the environment that intrudes into it and alters it to the point that it results in inhabitants perceiving it in a new way" (Kearney,1984). The Christian sees the supernatural as one of those influences which intrudes into and alters the world and our perception of it.

Figure 3: Kearney's cross-cultural model of world view



World view—a metaphorical perspective

Before drawing any conclusion about any of these definitions or models, a number of metaphors can be examined which also help clarify the issue of world view. Some of these can be classified as mechanical metaphors. Sire adapts Alvin Toffler's filing cabinet metaphor from *Future Shock* (Sire, 1979). This metaphor suggests our basic presuppositions are the files we use to sort new information, and thus are ultimately the basis of our perception. When we encounter a new idea we either file it if it is an idea consistent with our view of reality or discard it if it is not. If the new idea is compelling enough or if the social pressure to accept it is strong enough, that is, if it suits our

rhetorical and relational needs, we may create a new folder altogether. That is one reason why a study of college students seems fertile regarding this issue: they are engaged in the process of creating and sorting files.

Kearney also uses a mechanical metaphor. He suggests that world view is like computer software. This is not unlike a filing cabinet, but faster and more sophisticated. It also provides for linking files. Aside from the physical abilities and limitations of the nervous system, he says world views "determine perceptual selectivity and serve to organize received information and recombine it in new patterns" through principles of logic, world-view universals and "other innate or acquired structures."

Another metaphor is a skeleton. Anthony Wallace says the human brain contains "a unique mental image of a complex system of dynamically interrelated objects" called a "mazeway." But he believes many different kinds of behavior are based on relatively few assumptions:

> A world view is not merely a philosophical by-product of each culture, like a shadow, but the very skeleton of concrete assumptions on which the flesh of customary behavior is hung. World view, accordingly, may be expressed, more or less systematically, in cosmology, philosophy, ethics, religious ritual, scientific belief, and so on, but it is explicit in almost every human act (Wallace,1970).

Vision itself is another biological metaphor, the one on which the term world view is based. Sire compares world view to tinted glasses, coloring our perception of things. Wallace, as just noted, says a mazeway is a "unique mental image." This leads to another class of metaphors, metaphors of space. These suggest world view affects what we see and how we see it.

Sire, for instance, uses the notion of a universe, arguing that while world views have a larger collective sense, such as a Christian world view, they are

idiomatic: hence the title of his book *The Universe Next Door* in which he argues that each individual has a unique vision (Sire, 1979). In *How to Read sSowly* he uses a more manageable metaphor, that of a map, a "map of reality." He says:

> Like any map it may fit what is really there or it may be grossly misleading. The map is not the world itself, only an image of it, more or less accurate in some places, distorted in others. Still, all of us carry around such a map in our mental makeup, and we act on it (Sire, 1979).

This spatial image has been explored indirectly in hermeneutics with the concept of horizon, a central notion of Thiselton's *The two horizons*. His book on philosophical hermeneutics explores and relates the work of Heidigger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein. The underlying problem of hermeneutics, according to Thiselton, is two-sided: "the modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition" (Thiselton,1989). He borrows the term horizon from Gadamer who uses the analogy of conversation. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer writes, "In a conversation, when we have discovered the standpoint and horizon of the other person, his ideas become intelligible, without our necessarily having to agree with him" (Thiselton,1989).

Thiselton says Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung*, or "fusion of horizons," describes the problem and the task of hermeneutics, a problem otherwise known as the hermenutical circle. Briefly, questions put to the text are reshaped by the text itself. This cyclic process (Thiselton prefers spiral process) continues as we come to understand a text. To get into a text at all, however, requires *pre-understandings* (Thiselton,1989). In hermenutical terms some pre-understanding is necessary to interpret a text.

World view extends that idea to the world itself. A world view is a set of fundamental pre-understandings which constitute a standpoint from which we see things. In biblical hermeneutics understanding occurs as our horizons overlap with that of the writer. In conversation the same thing happens as a speaker or writer shares or comprehends the world view of the listener or reader. But a world view is not just a way of making sense out of what we see or hear; it is a way of making sense out of everything we touch or taste or smell or see. And, to extend the metaphor, it defines the limits, or the horizon, of that of which we can make sense.

Horizon, in this hermenutical sense, raises a different set of metaphors, metaphors rooted in social interaction. Wittgenstein's concept of a cage may be a negative image of horizon as discussed above. But his concept of language-game has been quite influential in philosophy, in hermeneutics, and in the social sciences, and Thiselton discusses his view at length (Thiselton,1989). In Wittgenstein's thinking all language is part of a given language-game. Meaning depends on use, which depends on training. The language-game is not law-governed, but regulated by custom or convention. Consequently, language is always context dependent, and there are different contexts. Language is rooted in "forms of life" which are ultimately the "scaffolding of our thoughts."

Wittgenstein doesn't use the term world view, but the "scaffolding of our thoughts" sounds like the set of assumption about reality we call a world view. But can a world view be seen as a "form of life" with a particular "language game"? Wittgenstein sees religion as a language-game, but he says we have different language-games at different times and for different reasons.

Stanley Fish, a literary critic, argues that we can have different strategies for making sense of language. His notion of interpretive communities is

based on "shared interpretive strategies," a set of assumptions about what counts. He claims a person can belong to more than one interpretive community. That's why the same reader may get different meanings from the same text. A lot of people can also belong to the same community. That's why different readers can get the same meaning (Fish, 1980).

Gill describes interpretive communities in a way which reflects the notion of world view. He writes:

> An interpretive community, be it ancient Israelites or present-day speech-act theorists, is basically teleological because it imposes on the experiences of its members a sense of that for which an event occurs, a direction or goal which gives meaningfulness and value to their lives (Gill, 1983).

But while an interpretive community can and probably does share major presuppositions of a common world view, they are not the same thing . A community nurtures a world view, as Kraft observed. The world view also nurtures the community, giving rise to the interpretive strategies it shares. Our purpose in this study is to examine that which gives meaningfulness and value to the lives of the students who participated in the project, and, in doing so to increase our understanding of how their world view informs their conversation. World view, as used here, is not a language-game or an interpretive community, although both metaphors can contribute to our understanding of how it works and what it is. World view is used here in the sense of Kraft's "integrated core," what the ancient Israelites called the heart.

Metaphors such as these help clarify the notion of world view, but the search for the perfect metaphor is probably unnecessary and unwise. Thiselton, following Wittgenstein, cautions against the power a picture has to seduce us. "What misleads us," he says, "is not simply the power a of a model or metaphor as such, but the fact that all too often our way of seeing a

particular problem is wholly dictated by a single controlling picture. In these circumstances it exercises a spell over us, which bewitches our intelligence and blinds us to other ways of seeing the problem" (Thiselton, 1980).

Perhaps then there is wisdom in the multitude of models, definitions and metaphors which have been described here. But at least a few observations seem to be in order.

Observations

1) *World view can be seen as a religious concept.*

Such a conclusion has been hinted at above. Kraft, for example, gives world view an adaptive and integrative function which Malinowski has assigned to religion (Kraft, 1978). Redfield included God as one of the universals with which world view deals (Redfield, 1953). And even atheistic conceptions of reality such as Marxism are predicated on articles of faith. Hoffecker says: "We must not draw back from the conclusion that all of life is religion...and all world views are religious, not just those expressed by theologians....Every philosopher we studied intended, either consciously or unconsciously, that his ideas be foundations for life" (Hoffecker, 1986). The students we met in this study are not equally devout, but, in world view terms, they are equally religious.

2) *World view has its own "hermeneutical circle."*

You cannot not have a world view, nor can you not have pre-understandings which influence how you view the concept of world view or the world view of others with a different world view. That is not to say that a catalog approach to world view such as Sire's is without merit. It has its place in an interpretive community, and scholars outside that community

can still use it to make progress toward a fusion of horizons. But the catalog approach is limited and should be supplemented by other approaches and tools.

3) *Discourse studies, although generally ignored by Christian scholars, have much to add to the discussion about the meaning and significance of world view.*

In some sense this is a difference between inductive and deductive approaches. Do you start with generalizations or particulars? Both ways of looking at world view may help, but starting with particulars allows scholars to go beyond discussions of what world view is to discussions of what it does and how it does it. In religious studies there has been little attention given to how world view affects our language or behavior. Discourse analysis may help reveal what the presuppositions of a world view are instead of what they are supposed to be.

4) *World view studies are problems in cross-cultural communication.*

The work of world view studies has often been to compare one world view with another. But motives vary according to the world view of the researcher. Marxists such as Kearney call for more work on classes and societies to aid oppressed peoples by helping them understand the mentality of oppression (Kearney, 1984). Theists such as Noebel call for more work on ideologies in order to aid non-theists in seeing the advantages of the truths which theists maintain (Noebel, 1991).

Fish's notion of interpretive communities is helpful here. As Gill notes:

> Many interpretive communities believe that their strategies produce truth, but the outside observer is more likely to find that those strategies, knowingly or not, serve

> the purpose of interpreting reality in ways that communities believe are meaningful....Only when a community understands the sources of its beliefs can it examine them in light of other values. Then it can begin to avoid the limitations of an entirely self-regulating system, which must accept its priorities unexamined and fail to persuade people of different values. Only when a system has goals beyond itself can it find priorities for its internal values that will be persuasive to people outside its community (Gill, 1983).

Kearney's model, which is essentially a cross-cultural one, is useful to any interpretive community interested in examining the how and why of world view rather than merely the what. Looking at how a basic set of assumptions is articulated in discourse is fertile territory for researchers interested in world view.

5) *World view is both rooted in and reflected in language.*

Zhiming says "language is able to describe the world by virtue of an isomorphic fit between them" (Zhiming, 1990). In his analysis of language and world view in ancient China he finds that Confucius and others did not see language as a descriptive tool independent of the world it describes. Thiselton shows the same to be true of Heidegger and Wittgenstein (Thiselton, 1989). Wittgenstein said, for example, that "only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning." He sees language as a "form of life," its uses (language-games) grounded in particular surroundings. Discourse analysis, reader-response criticisms and other contemporary approaches to language converge at this point (Marshall, 1983).

Feminist critics, for example, "look at how literature comprehends, transmits, and shapes female experience and is, in turn, shaped by it" (Erickson, 1983). This concern has led to studies on women as both readers and writers—in other words, on how language reflects and shapes a woman's

world view. Feminist psychologists also use language as a basis for examining world view. Jensen concludes that "men and women have differing world views which lead them to place greater importance on the different adjectives associated with what might be called a masculine or feminine perspective, as described by recent feminist writers" (Jensen et al., 1991).

It is important then that any world view analysis concern itself with an analysis of the language of its adherents, not merely the philosophical formulations of the analyst. This is a focus consistent with Christ's observation that our words reflect the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

APPENDIX B

Student Responses to the Analysis

Linda, whose conversion narrative is discussed in chapter five

Relating with words someone else has written has always been a very profound experience for me. It has been doubly so in reading someone else's words about me that seem to speak from my very core and bring back feelings and emotions I experienced at a time in my life I haven't thought about for a while. Since Cedar Bend I have resolved my feelings for Steve and have come to have a stable, fulfilling friendship with him. He lives in another state now and we periodically keep in touch.

It was a scary experience to read what Wally wrote about me in this paper because I am one who has prided myself in being able to keep a part of myself hidden. I frequently have found myself talking to someone about a subject while secretly in my mind I am talking about something else. Wally is the first person I have known who has seen through this rouse by simply examining my words. He didn't prod me with questions until I came out with what I was feeling, but by examining my words the curtain was lifted.

Brad, whose angel poems are examined in chapter six

It was popular culture's immense fascination with angels that attracted me to write about the subject. I looked at how "pop" Christians had so recently come to view angels, through the god-awful pulp fiction of Frank Peretti, and how "new-agers" had adopted for their angel imagery cute, well-meaning creatures, and found both utterly unsatisfying and boring.

I thought it would be interesting to portray angels in their socially acceptable role as guardians, but at a dimension of morality to their being, a missing attribute of biblical angels. They were just as confused and morally impaled as the rest of us. In fact, even they couldn't live up to the expectations we are given as Christians. This was divinity I could relate to, faltering and beautiful all at once.

It's interesting that Norm's angels are in contrast with mine. They seem angry and bitter, sad at the world's state. He seems more comfortable with Peretti's angels. After being reminded, I did notice that Norm never commented on my angel poems. What is interesting is that I don't seem to be involved in the conversation about his poem. In all honesty, I don't remember him reading that poem or discussing it afterward.

Jerry, whose homecoming skit is discussed in chapter seven

I agree with most of Wally's analysis as laid out in chapter seven. The rhetorical and relational aspects are very well laid out, and seem quite plausible to me. There is one point with which I have a problem: the E-mail message at the beginning of the chapter. I did not know how the message would be used, and hence did not take the time with my discourse that I would have had I know it would be used verbatim. [Jerry did give permission for the E-mail to be used as data.] I believe that the analysis, when using only the E-mail message as a point of reference, is correct. But had I known it would have been used in this matter, I would have laid out my beliefs in a much more coherent manner. In that case there would be, I believe, no inconsistency in my views.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ainsworth-Vaughn, Nancy. "Questions with dual functions: The 'treatment' question in medical encounters." *Medical Encounter* 9.1 (1992).

Ainsworth-Vaughn, Nancy. "Topic transitions in physician-patient interviews: Power, gender, and discourse change." *Language in Society* 21 (1992): 409-426.

Bassett, Paul. "The Theological identity of the North American Holiness Movement: Its understanding of the nature and role of the Bible." *The Variety of American evangelicalism.* Eds. Donald Dayton and Robert Johnston. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991. 72-108.

Bauman, Richard. *Story, performance, and event: Contextual studies in oral narrative.* Vol. 10 of *Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986. 115.

Baylis, Bayard, et al. *The Christian college freshman and the national college student population: Comparisons and analysis.* Unpublished manuscript. Department of Behavioral Science, Messiah College, Grantham, PA.

Berger, Peter. *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion.* New York: Doubleday, 1967.

Blamires, Harry. *The Christian mind.* Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1963.

Bormann, Ernest. "Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58.1972 (1972): 396-407.

Bormann, Ernest. "Fantasy and rhetorical vision: Ten years later." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68.1982 (1982): 288-305.

Bormann, Ernest. *The force of fantasy.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985.

Cameron, Deborah, et al. *Researching language: Issues of power and method. The Politics of Language.* London: Routledge, 1992.

Dayton, Donald. "Some doubts about the usefulness of the category "evangelical"." *The Variety of American evangelicalism.* Eds. Donald Dayton and Robert Johnston. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991. 245-251.

Fish, S. *Is there a text in this class: The authority of interpretive communities.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Fisher, Sue. "Doctor talk/patient talk: How treatment decisions are negotiated in doctor-patient communication." *The Social Organization of Doctor-Patient Communication.* Eds. Sue Fisher and Alexandra Dundas Todd. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1983.

Foss, Sonja, Karen Foss, and Robert Trapp. *Contemporary perspectives on rhetoric.* Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1991. 55-85.

Foucault, Michel. *Power and knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings.* New York: Pantheon, 1982.

Frawley, William. *Text and epistemology.* Vol. 24 of *Advances in discourse processes.* Norwood, NJ: ABLEX Publishing, 1987.

Goffman, Erving. "Footing." *Forms of Talk.* Ed. Erving Goffman. Philadephia: University of Pennsylvania, 1981. 124-157.

Goodwin, Marjorie Harness. *He-said-she-said: Talk as social organization among black children.* Bloomington,IN: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Grice, H. P. "Logic and Conversation." *Syntax and semantics.* Eds. P. Cole and J. L. Morgan. Speech Acts. New York: Academic Press, 1975. 3: 41-58.

Hoffecker, W. A., ed. *Building a Christian world view.* Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986.

Hunter, James. *Evangelicalism.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Jensen, L., A. McGhee, and J. Jensen. "Do women's and men's world-view differ?" *Psychological Reports* 68 (1991): 312-314.

Johnston, Robert. "American evangelicalism: An extended family." *The Variety of American evangelicalism.* Eds. Donald Dayton and Robert Johnston. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991. 252-269.

Johnstone, Barbara. "Community and contest: Midwestern men and women creating their world in conversational storytelling." *Gender and conversational interaction.* Ed. Deborah Tannen. 4 vols. Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. 62-82.

Kearney, M. *World view.* Novato, California: Chandler & Sharp, 1984.

Kraft, C. "Ideological factors in intercultural communication." *Missiology* 2 (1974): 295-312.

Kraft, M. *Worldview and the communication of the gospel: A Nigerian case study.* Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1978.

Kristeva, Julia. *The Kristeva reader.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Labov, William. "The transformation of experience in narrative syntax." *Language in the inner city.* Communication and conduct. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvannia Press, 1972. 354-396.

Metz, Johann Baptist. "A short appology of narrative." Trans. David Smith. *The crisis of religious language.* Eds. Johann Baptist Metz and Jean-Pierre Jossu. New York: Herder and Herder, 1973. 84-96.

Metz, Johann Baptist, and Jean-Pierre Jossua, eds. *The crisis of religious language.* New York: Herder and Herder, 1973.

Molcar, C., and D. Stuempfig. "Effects of world view on purpose in life." *The Journal of Psychology* 122.4 (1988): 365-371.

Murray, Stephen. "Toward a model of members' methods for recognizing interruptions." *Language in Society* 14 (1985): 31-40.

Noebel, D. *Understanding the times.* Manitou Springs, Colorado: Summit Press, 1991.

Noll, Mark. *A history of Christianity in the United States and Canada.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.

Nystrand, Martin. *The structure of written communication.* Academic Press, 1986.

Polanyi, Livia. "So what's the point?" *Semiotica* 23.3/4 (1979): 207-241.

Redfield, R. *The primitive world and its transformations.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. *Narrative analysis.* Vol. 30 of *Qualitative Research Methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993.

Robinson, Jay. *Conversations on the written word: Essays on language and literacy.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1990.

Rosenau, Pauline Marie. *Post-modernism and the social sciences.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992. 184.

Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson. "A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation." *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction.* Ed. J. Schenkein. New York: Academic Press, 1974. 79-96.

Sapir, Edward. *Culture, genuine and spurious.* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949.

Schegloff, Emanuel. "Sequencing in conversational openings." *American Anthropologist* 70.6 (1968)

Searle, J. *Speech acts.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1969. 3-71.

Silverman, David. *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analysing talk, text and interaction.* London: Sage, 1993.

Sire, James. *The universe next door: A catalog of world views.* Downers Grove, Illinos: Intervarsity Press, 1976.

Sire, James. *How to read slowly: A Christian guide to reading with the mind.* Downers Grove, Illinos: Intervarsity Press, 1979.

Stromberg, Peter. *Language and self-transformation: A study of the Christian conversion narrative. Publications for the Society of Psychological Anthropology.* London: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Tannen, Deborah. *Toward a theory of conversational style.* Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1980.

Tannen, Deborah. *Talking voices: Repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse.* 1989.

Tarnas, R. *The passion of the Western mind.* New York: Harmony Books, 1991.

Thiselton, A. *The two horizons: New Testament hermenuutics and philosophical description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadmer, and Wittgenstein.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989.

Thorne, Barrie. *Gender play: Girls and boys in school.* New Brunswick,NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993.

Wallace, Anthony. *Culture and personality.* New York: Random House, 1970.

Watt, David. *A Transforming faith: Explorations of twentieth-century American Evangelicalism.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutger's University Press, 1991.

Weaver, Richard. *Language is sermonic.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970.

West, Candace, and Angela Garcia. "Conversational shift work: A study of topical transitions between women and men." *Social Problems* 35.5 (1988): 551-573.

Widdershoven, Guy. "The story of life: Hermenutic perspectives on the relationship between narrative and life history." *The narrative study of lives.* Eds. Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1993. 1: 1-19.

Wilson, John. *On the boundaries of conversation.* Vol. 10 of *Language and Communication Library.* 1st ed. 10 vols. London: Pergamon Press, 1989.

Wood, Debra. "Angels have no wings." *Discipleship Journal* 1994: 57-59.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIV. LIBRARIES
31293014096600