

LOSING FAITH IN THE SECULAR: THE POLITICS OF FAITH AND
KNOWLEDGE AT TWO AMERICAN PARACHURCHES

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ABSTRACT

LOSING FAITH IN THE SECULAR: The Politics of Faith and Knowledge at Two American Parachurches (Under the direction of Christopher T. Nelson)

How do religious organizations understand and experience the secular? This dissertation analyzes how secular institutions and philosophies are experienced by two seemingly opposite religious organizations, the conservative, evangelical Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and the liberal, new age Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE). Despite ideological differences, the organizations share a similar social positioning in that their core philosophies are religious or metaphysical in nature but their institutions are secular in design. As parachurches, these non-denominational religious organizations offer religious or spiritual guidance in combination with political discourse, academic knowledge, and public services in realms that for more than 140 years have been dominated by secularism: education and academia, media, law and government, science, and medicine. As a result, both CBN and ARE offer insightful critiques of the concept of “the secular”.

Data for this project were gathered primarily during a year’s participant-observation research in Virginia Beach in 2006, during which the author divided the year between ARE and CBN, working, leading tours, and attending graduate school courses, conferences, prayer meetings, yoga classes, and meditations. Speaking informally with hundreds of participants, the author gathered three dozen formal interviews from people at all levels, from volunteer to CEO, and in a variety of roles across both organizations. Adopting Holland and Lave’s stance that identities are crafted through collective

struggles through which positionings of self and other are made meaningful, this dissertation uses Bakhtin's sociolinguistic evaluations of dialogue combined with Christian Smith's and Talal Asad's critical assessments of institutions of power to analyze three core debates: (1) academic representations of Jesus and early Christian history, (2) scientific histories and predictions of earth changes, and (3) medical conceptions of healing and the body. It is through these struggles at the edge of the secular that its authority and power are most clearly experienced, as parachurch members who appeared vaguely confused at references to "the secular" became impassioned and articulate in their description of an oppressive and often invisible force in mainstream American culture that relegates the parachurches to a bounded and often denigrated position outside of mainstream authority and influence.

To Matt, who has been indispensable from the start, and
to Anya, who gave me a reason to finish.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLJ American Center for Law and Justice

ARE Association for Research and Enlightenment

AU Atlantic University

CBN Christian Broadcasting Network

OB Operation Blessing

P/c Pentecostal/charismatic

I INTRODUCTION

On one end of the city of Virginia Beach, the Christian Broadcasting Network wraps production of an episode of its long-running and innovative Christian Broadcasting show, *700 Club*. The studio audience, chatting among themselves about the show's



Figure 1: Free CBN bumper sticker in support of heterosexual-only marriage.

criticism of Democrats' blocking the appointment of a conservative judicial candidate and a segment on new archaeological evidence regarding Noah's Ark,

line up in the lobby of the CBN Broadcasting building for a guided tour. Next to free bumper stickers pictographically stating "Marriage = One man + One woman", flyers lay about advertising an upcoming public conference on the state of conservatism in the United States and what roles conservative Christians have in the political future of America. The tour guide, a white woman in her sixties, explains how televangelist Pat Robertson received a message from God to purchase a defunct UHF television station in 1960, and how, despite his having only eleven dollars in his pocket, he subsequently turned the station into a global phenomenon, bringing Christ to the far reaches of the world. She explains how Robertson, desperate for funding, made a plea to his audience for 700 people to stand together, pledging \$10 a month to cover the \$7000 monthly costs, and forming the 700 Club that inspired the show's title. She points to a map of the CBN campus, demonstrating how it has grown and diversified to include a university, think tank, and charity, among other organizations. The tour guide stops under a painting in the

hallway to recount the story of the artist. His brother, she relates, was a missionary to a remote region of Central America who, in the course of doing God's work, was murdered by the savages. But the story has a happy ending, she beams, as the artist of the painting years later returned to the same village where his brother was killed and converted his brother's murderer to Christianity. The tour concludes by the gift shop, where visitors can purchase postcards, clothing with the CBN logo, Bibles, Christian music, and books written by Robertson and other prominent conservative Christian authors.

Eighteen miles away, on the other end of the city, the Association for Research and Enlightenment concludes a half hour film about the late founder Edgar Cayce (pronounced "Casey") to a roomful of visitors who wait for a guided tour of the ARE

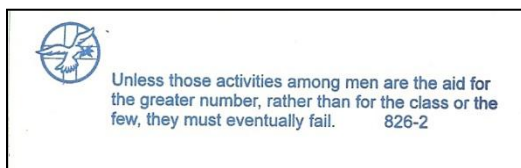


Figure 3: Sample scroll offered to guests at the ARE Visitor's Center and bearing a quote from an Edgar Cayce reading.

Visitor's Center. The tour guide, a white woman in her sixties, walks the group by a wall of flyers for ARE events, such as an upcoming conference on how Cayce's psychic readings dovetail with the Mayan calendar's end in 2012, and invites each visitor to select a little scroll containing a Cayce reading. She proclaims Cayce to be the Father of Holistic Medicine, recounting how, despite the financial failure of his hospital, Cayce's psychic readings provided herbal, massage, electric, psychological, or dietary treatments that continue to benefit people today. The ARE, she explains, began as a member organization of all interested parties and recipients of Cayce readings who wanted to track and scientifically study the readings and their outcomes. She points through a

Visitor's Center. The tour guide, a white woman in her sixties, walks the group by a wall of flyers for ARE events, such as an upcoming conference on how Cayce's psychic



Figure 2: An example of a religiously inclusive bumper sticker sold at the ARE gift store. (Copyright Northern Sun Merchandising)

window, past the meditation garden, to the old hospital, reclaimed for this purpose by the ARE and converted into offices shared by the Cayce-Reilly massage school and the graduate school Atlantic University. She ends the tour in the library, which she describes as second only to the Vatican in its repertoire of metaphysical texts, and directs the group downstairs to the free lecture, scheduled that day on the topic of the lost gospel of Mary Magdalene and its depiction of an egalitarian and socially progressive Jesus. At the conclusion of the lecture, the speaker hands coupons for the gift shop, where visitors can purchase bumper stickers proclaiming religious unity, tabletop pyramids and tea cups with the ARE logo, various religious texts, New Age music, and books ranging in topic from religious history to diet to ancient mysteries.

These two seemingly opposite religious organizations, the conservative, evangelical Christian Broadcasting Network and the liberal, new age Association for Research and Enlightenment, in fact share a similar social positioning in that their core philosophies are religious or metaphysical in nature but their institutions are secular in design; they are part business, part charity, and part educational facility. As parachurches, these non-denominational religious organizations offer religious or spiritual guidance in combination with political discourse, academic knowledge, and public services in realms that for more than 140 years have been dominated by secularism: education and academia, media, law and government, science, and medicine. As a result, both CBN and ARE offer insightful critiques of the concept of “the secular”.

These critiques became obvious to me only after years of study at both organizations. In addition to many visits before and after, I spent 2006 in Virginia Beach gathering field data through participant-observation and formal interviews. Intending at

first to adopt Bakhtin's sociolinguistic evaluation of dialogue to contrast and better understand how religious and political ideology became interwoven at each organization, my attention to dialogue soon directed me to something larger and less defined. Adopting Holland and Lave's stance that identities are crafted through collective struggles through which positionings of self and other are made meaningful, I fully expected to, and did, witness polarizing positionings of self and other as the two organizations squared off against each other. However, the contrasting gaze offered in the field began to unveil a vaguely-defined other that stood in contrast to the shared self of any person of faith, regardless of affiliation. At both CBN and ARE there lurked in conversational corners a shared perception of a powerful societal force that, for example, dismissed patients' belief in the healing power of prayer, became disgusted by public monuments to faith, or felt contaminated by professional contact with people who professed deep spiritual belief. This force was at times barely articulated but deeply felt, and came from so many corners of life that its import became clear only when viewed in light of Christian Smith's and Talal Asad's critical assessments of secularism as an historical social movement that so transformed Western institutions its own history has been forgotten; instead, secularization, in contrast to the overtly religious ideology it has replaced, has become synonymous with impartiality and religious neutrality, and is commonly held to be simply the natural course of civilization.

To understand how and why the secular was felt to operate according to CBN and ARE, I decided to analyze three conflicts during which the parachurches consistently addressed secular institutions, knowledge, and biases: (1) academic representations of Jesus and early Christian history, (2) scientific histories and predictions of earth changes,

and (3) medical conceptions of healing and the body. It is through these struggles at the edge of the secular that its authority and power are most clearly experienced, as parachurch members who appeared vaguely confused at references to “the secular” became impassioned and articulate in their description of an oppressive and often invisible force in mainstream American culture that relegates the parachurches to a bounded and often denigrated position outside of mainstream authority and influence.

Despite the protests made by these organizations, shared in part by this dissertation, that their claims to truth are made ineffective by secular institutions, there is no denying their own institutional nature. Indeed, this project began as a “study up” of CBN and ARE as significant, and powerful, cultural institutions. As Laura Nader pointed out in her famous critique of the ethics of anthropological study,

Anthropologists might indeed ask themselves whether the entirety of field work does not depend upon a certain power relationship in favor of the anthropologist, and whether indeed such dominant-subordinate relationships may not be affecting the kinds of theories we are weaving (1972:289).

With such power relations in mind, I chose to study organizations that led transnational movements of ideological weight, employing thousands, directing hundreds of thousands of volunteers and participants, and distributing literature and media that reached millions. Such a project proved strategically daunting, and so I began at the headquarters of communication and dissemination in Virginia Beach. During my fieldwork I divided my time between ARE and CBN, participating in every available avenue. I worked, led tours, enrolled in graduate school courses, and joined conferences, prayer meetings, yoga classes, and meditations. Speaking informally with hundreds of participants, I gathered three dozen formal interviews from people at all levels, from volunteer to CEO, and in a variety of roles across both organizations.

While engaged at the parachurches, I was witness to their own power in influencing participants' views of the world. In fact, I experienced this influence first-hand, and I mention an example of this in chapter 4 where I detail how my initial skepticism at the ARE gave way to an increasing openness to explanations of illness and healing outside the Western mind-body paradigm. Yet even while studying "up" to examine the power and influence held by these institutions, it was clear to me that an even broader dynamic existed, one in which I was an unwitting player. I began to question why I was so skeptical upon first entering the field, and how my years as a student in academia had influenced my own definitions and assumptions of religion, and my own blindness to the machinations of the secular. Hopefully without devolving into a postmodern paralysis, but rather by carefully examining the power relations existing behind the truths we proffer as academics, the "kinds of theories we are weaving" (Nader 1972:289), I seek in this project to better understand the parachurches' claims, not only to truth, but to the ways in which their truth becomes competitively, aggressively, and publicly devalued. As higher education is, at times explicitly, implicated in this process, I proceeded cautiously, attempting to remain conscious of my own assumptions about knowledge, authenticity, and secularism while simultaneously attempting to understand from the parachurches' perspectives how the secular is constructed.

The larger of these two religious organizations, the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) was in fact created out of concern over secularist influence in public culture. CBN's stated mission is explicitly evangelist and politically conservative, striving "to prepare the [world] for the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of God on earth" by engaging culture from pop culture to jurisprudence in the hopes of

countering the cultural influence of secularism, whose “cultish religion”, evolution (as Robertson argues), directs people away from religion and towards atheism. Founded in 1960 by televangelist Pat Robertson, CBN’s multiple components, including a major international religious broadcasting network, affiliated and sharing a campus with a university, charitable organization, Christian advocacy group, and public interest law firm each operate to influence public life in different ways. The organization as a whole functions in sympathy with the larger goal of the Religious Right to reinstate the mainstream Protestantism whose cultural dominance was effectively side-lined by secularists in the late 1800s.

Eighteen miles away, the smaller and much more ambiguously situated Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE) states as its only goal the “personal empowerment and healing at all levels—body, mind, and spirit” using the psychic readings of the late Edgar Cayce as resources. The organization and its members for the most part refuse to clearly define themselves as of a religious tradition, politic, goal, or even as religious at all, often preferring to characterize their work as “philosophical” or “educational”, despite the metaphysical origin of their research material. Organizationally, ARE remains in opposition to CBN in many ways, politically (members identify mostly as liberal and the organization is fiercely apolitical) and religiously (ARE is notably eclectic, with non-dogmatic, individual-led spiritualities and heavy influence in New Age practice), but is structurally similar in its multi-faceted campus and its public designation as spiritual, metaphysical, and therefore “non-secular”. As a result, both organizations’ very different critiques of secular institutions and alternative portrayals of global politics, history, the natural world, and the body are contested, dismissed, even ridiculed by

secular sources. This dissertation reveals how these two religious organizations struggle with issues of representation, authority, and power at the core of national debates over the proper role of religion in the public sphere.

What is Religion? What is Secular?

In multiple ways, these two religious organizations provide alternative practices, language, and perspectives to those present in mainstream American secular society. Yet these alternative points of authority often become points of conflict, as the organizations “overstep” their religious boundaries. Where CBN or its affiliated organizations become too politically involved, they draw fire not just from pundits but from the Internal Revenue Service, which ruled in 1999 that certain activities at Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition, such as producing “voter guides” for the public, were “too partisan for the group to enjoy tax-exempt status” (Anderson 1999). At the same time, where ARE or its employees become too assertive in their claims of medical relief from Edgar Cayce’s psychic readings, they risk censorship and legal action, as an ARE bookstore employee, amidst a discussion with a customer on the benefits of castor oil, was reprimanded by a worried supervisor for “practicing medicine without a license” (author’s notes, November 2006). Members at both organizations struggle to place themselves as meaningful social actors, connecting like-minded people not just to provide spiritual practice and dialogue but also to provide public education on social issues involving history, public policy, environmentalism, health, science, and politics, along with subsequent opportunities for social change. Yet their attempts at social activism are constantly challenged, almost always on the basis that their statuses as religious organizations limit their roles in the public sphere.

Religion is a core construct in American public life, one that is construed legally and politically as much as it is socially. The American public has wrestled with the role of religion since the birth of the nation. At the time of its ratification, the American Constitution was revolutionary in its division of religion from the functioning of government, essentially making religion a privately-directed rather than publicly-directed experience. The text of the First Amendment, which both prevents Congress from making any law “respecting the establishment of religion” and from “prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (U.S. Constitution, amend. 1) stood in stark contrast to other European governments of the day, all of which had a formal state religion and stood free to persecute citizens on the basis of belief and practice (Fowler et al. 2004:10). Despite the formal proclamation of separation, “mainstream Protestantism in fact functioned openly as the quasi-official religion centering the nation’s cultural and social life” (Smith 2003:26). However around 1870 this began to change, as “the following five decades saw the Protestant establishment routed from social power, its cultural authority greatly diminished, and its institutional influence significantly reduced” (ibid). In less than a century, the concept of the public realm as free from *religious persecution* evolved into a majority expectation that the public realm shall be free from *religion itself*, as an ARE member illustrated:

Author: What do you think [the definition of “the secular”] has become now?

Simmons: Void of religion.

Author: So not a safe space for religion, for all religions to interact?

Simmons: No... No... No. It’s funny, I hear from parents—for example in the far west side of the state of Virginia, my nephew lives in a small town and children are not allowed to wear—it’s quite a Bible Belt over there—because children are not allowed to wear Jesus on their shirt when they go to school. It caused quite a hoopla. The majority said, well I want my children to have Jesus on his shirt if he wants to or if she wants to

but public law said, no, the rule is you cannot wear a religious item to school (Phil Simmons, interview with author, September 21, 2006).

Christian Smith refers to the secularization of American public life as “the successful outcome of an intentional political struggle by secularizing activists to overthrow a religious establishment’s control over social legitimate knowledge” (2003:1). Using this definition, Smith makes a deliberate and well-argued break from theorists who would consider secularization as “the natural and inevitable by-product of ‘modernization’” (ibid). Instead, as Smith argues,

macrosocial secularization in America was revolutionary in that (1) it fundamentally concerned questions of power and authority; (2) an identifiable network of insurgents intentionally and successfully struggled to displace an established power, largely against its will; and (3) the triumphant regime fundamentally transformed in many areas the cultural and institutional structures that governed the public life of the nation (2003:2),

including those of science, higher education, public school education, public philosophy, the “judicial sphere,” media, and “the basic cultural understanding of the human self and its care” (ibid:2-3). The nature of this revolution, however, is insidious, as those people who “legitimately” and with authority document history and social change are indubitably situated within institutions, such as higher education and journalistic media, that identify as secular and benefit from the secular’s power and prestige. Thus the (publicly authoritative) study of religion and secularization is tainted by those who consider themselves distanced from the former and swept up in the power of modernization that proclaims the inevitability of the latter.

Talal Asad makes this point more directly with respect to anthropology of religion, and the question of who defines “religion” per se. His criticism of the definition of

religion, the story of secularization,¹ and the way the secular has been construed is part of his larger critique of Western knowledge production. He is credited by David Scott and Charles Hirschkind as cultivating an attitude of skepticism that “has been directed toward systematically throwing doubt on Enlightenment reason’s pretensions to the truth about the reasons of non-European traditions” (Scott & Hirschkind 2006:1). In particular, they claim, Asad draws attention to the way anthropology sets the terms of study without reflecting upon its own pseudo-religious assumptions: “the *ideological* conditions that give point and force to the *theoretical* apparatuses employed to describe and objectify [anthropologists’ native informants] and their worlds” (ibid:3, emphasis theirs).

¹ José Casanova, in *Public Relations in the Modern World* (and then again, defending his position in “Secularization Revisited: A Reply to Talal Asad”) reformulated the thesis of secularization to separate out what he felt were three discrete components: “1) secularization as a differentiation of the secular spheres from religious institutions and norms, 2) secularization as a decline of religious beliefs and practices, and 3) secularization as a marginalization of religion to a privatized sphere” (2006:12). Casanova discards the latter two,¹ focusing attention on the first point of differentiation. He argues a perspective similar to Asad’s, that

The very resurgence of reassertion of religious traditions may be viewed as a sign of the failure of the Enlightenment to redeem its own promises. Religious traditions are now confronting the differentiated secular spheres, challenging them to face their own obscurantist, ideological, and inauthentic claims. In many of these confrontations, it is religion which, as often as not, appears to be on the side of human enlightenment (Casanova 1994:233-34).

Casanova, Asad, and other commentators on the secular, like Christian Smith, present a heterogeneity of modern experiences of the religious and secular that contradicts the inevitable and progressivist theory of secularization.

Further, Casanova suggests that we take seriously the notion that secularization became a self-fulfilling prophecy once large portions of society accepted as true the basic premise that “secularization is a teleological process of modern social change” (2006:17). The idea that secularization is the marker of modernity necessarily requires any society desirous of the mantle of modernity to secularize. So, states Casanova, perhaps “the secularization of Western European societies can be explained better in terms of the triumph of the knowledge regime of secularism than in terms of structural processes of socio-economic development, such as urbanization, education, rationalization, and so on” (ibid).

The purpose of my study is not to comment on the process of secularization per se, although my research is informed both by Asad’s Foucauldian genealogical approach and Casanova’s (and Smith’s) comparative historical sociological analysis. Rather, I hope to shed light on the state of secularization in America today as it is experienced by those who position themselves as both benefiting from and suffering under it. This ethnography does, however, attempt to capture a particular moment in time when political and academic theorists in the US posit two contradictory claims: that secularization has triumphed (and the US is the leader triumphant), and that secularization has failed (and the US is the example triumphant). In fact, this study unintentionally answers the call made by Casanova for “the study of modern secularism, as an ideology, as a generalized worldview, and as a social movement, and of its role as a crucial carrier of processes of secularization and as a catalyst for counter-secularization responses” (2006:17).

What appears to anthropologists today to be self-evident, namely that religion today is essentially a matter of symbolic meanings linked to ideas of general order (expressed through either or both rite and doctrine), that it has generic functions/features, and that it must not be confused with any of its particular historical or cultural forms, is in fact a view that has a specific Christian history. From being a concrete set of practical rules attached to specific processes of power and knowledge, religion has come to be abstracted and universalized. In this movement we have not merely an increase in religious toleration, certainly not merely a new scientific discovery, but the mutation of a concept and a range of social practices which is itself part of a wider change in the modern landscape of power and knowledge (Asad 1993:42-43).

Asad demands that religion cannot be understood as a universal form of experience, but rather various traditions understood as religion “must be analyzed in their particularity, as the products of specific practices of discipline, authority, and power” (Scott & Hirschkind 2006:6-7). His search for how to define ‘what religion is’ led him naturally to ‘what religion is not’, hence the focus on the secular. While Asad’s focus was on the unequal relationship between the knowledge-producing West and their subjects of knowledge production, the Third World, his critique is similarly relevant to the unequal relationship between secular and religious/spiritual/non-secular systems of knowledge production.

Asad’s question of how and by whom religion is defined is particularly salient here, for two main reasons. First, because ARE and CBN are construed as “religious”, their systems of knowledge production are contested, dismissed, even ridiculed by secular sources. As discussed in chapters 3 and 4, the result of this degradation by secular systems of science, academia, medicine, and government is not only to reduce the efficacy and legitimacy of the organizations’ claims but to circuitously bolster the neutrality, authority, and legitimacy of secular claims by simultaneously making

ridiculous any criticisms the organizations have of the secular. Presumed neutrality and objectivity of the secular, presumed non-neutrality and therefore illegitimacy of religion.

Secondly, the fact that CBN and ARE operate as religious *organizations* emphasizes the ambiguity of their public roles as religious institutions. CBN and ARE are not churches but rather *parachurches*, non-denominational religious organizations that straddle the line between religion and the secular. The parachurches' identities are frequently in flux, both outside of and within the organizations, partly because they are each unified by belief, practice, and/or engagement with metaphysical material, which is largely what defines religion (popularly), but their multiple components borrow from and compete with nonreligious newsmedia, publications, health care, education, and legal aid. Thus, CBN and ARE emerge in many ways as *competitors* with secular institutions, using linguistic cues and genres taken from shared religious and cultural beliefs and merging them with common secular genres bearing authority and legitimacy, such as those taken from media, science, and law, to relate and contextualize religious, spiritual, political, and social information. In fact, despite the religious and spiritual discourses generated through CBN and ARE, structurally they look far more like secular aggregates than religious institutions, and their engagement with theology and metaphysics raises more questions than it answers about how they define "religion." I describe in the following sections, what binds together each organization is not a spatially cohesive community practice of religion, such as one might find in a local church, but rather a networked (and often virtual) community that is continually producing and re-producing a particular religious-social-political perspective on the world.

In understanding these perspectives, I pay particular attention to the practices and dialogues that mark the organizational self in tandem with the other. As will be much better articulated in future chapters this dissertation uses sociolinguistic evaluations of dialogue combined with critical assessment of institutions of power, both secular and religious to explore how the parachurches and the secular are produced discursively by and through the parachurches. Bakhtin's writings on dialogism, with his attention to the multiplicity in utterances' addressivity and intent, are central in assessing how these parachurches conceptualize themselves, others, true knowledge, and authority. Bakhtin reminds us that all utterances from the self have an intended audience in the other, and, relatedly, his approach integrates language with social context, as language is derived from and productive of the social. I also borrow Holland and Lave's concept of *History in Person*, by which they suggest that subjectivities/identities "are formed in practice through the often collective work of evoking, improvising, appropriating, and refusing participation in practices that position self and other" (2001:29). Identities, like the clearly constrained and politically imbued label *Christian* at CBN, "are durable...because the multiple contexts in which dialogical, intimate identities make sense and give meaning are re-created in contentious local practices (which is in part shaped and reshaped by enduring struggles)" (ibid:29-30). In this case, the struggles include not only the organizations' theological and political placement amidst long and contentious histories of each, but also the much broader cultural issue, central to the development of American nationhood and culture, of the role of religion in public life.

Engaging Culture in Christ's Name at CBN

We would like to see Christians go out and engage the culture and to have a voice in this culture war. You know our country is in a culture war. We are fastly

turning into two nations. We are having the traditionalists, who believe in limited government, honoring your parents, basic traditional moral values, and you have this new breed of folks who are the “everything’s relative, there’s no absolute truth, do whatever feels good, sexual morays”... I mean you have this gay marriage thing, you’ve got this show on HBO about polygamy – well that’s probably the next step in the degeneracy of culture. Traditional values that have been honored for centuries in civilized Western nations have just been all been thrown away to this moral relativism. Anything goes, whatever feels good. So we want to see our graduates engage the culture – not to beat up on people and say, “Oh we hate you, you guys are horrible” just to say “look, this is what the word of God says and we believe it’s valuable, we believe it’s worth fighting for”. And so we also want them to go out into their fields of service and just be good citizens. Be excellent teachers. Be moral, ethical lawyers. Be effective, powerful pastors who love your people. Not everything has to be ministry because we have a world out there that needs operating—we need lawyers, we need business people—but we just want people to be ethical and moral. Good citizens. We don’t want to live in a hole and let people do whatever they want. We want to engage culture and be an influence for culture, hopefully for the better (Ben Johnston, interview with author, March 30, 2006).

The desire to “engage culture and be an influence for culture” is the proclaimed *raison d’être* of the politically conservative Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), which was created by Pat Robertson “to prepare the United States of America, the nations of the Middle East, the Far East, South America, and other nations of the world for the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.” The direction of that cultural engagement was set initially by founder and leader Pat Robertson, a very public persona who continues to wield a great deal of influence over the direction of each of his creations.

Robertson founded the Christian Broadcasting Network as a small UHF station in Portsmouth, Virginia, broadcasting a recognizable televangelist program in the sixties featuring founder Robertson preaching gospel and conversion to Christianity. Since then, the show, which came to be named *700 Club*, has been transformed into unique

programming that is a hybrid of standard news, talk show, and televangelist programming.² With the success of *700 Club*, and under the leadership of controversial C.E.O. Robertson, CBN has diversified and expanded its broadcasting and webcasting around the globe while simultaneously branching into numerous institutions that are all interwoven on the same Virginia Beach campus. In addition to the media systems,³ Robertson founded Operation Blessing, a national and international missionary effort whose mission is “to demonstrate God’s love by alleviating human need and suffering in the United States and around the world” (Operation Blessing N.d.). Further, Robertson created and formerly led the Christian Coalition, a grassroots conservative social activist organization established in 1989 with the mailing lists acquired with his creative bid for presidency the previous year (Christian Coalition N.d.).

In addition to outright advocacy, televangelism, and humanitarian aid, another strong avenue Robertson established for social change, as Regent employee and student Ben Johnston points out in the above quote, is through CBN’s commitment to “Christian Leadership to Change the World” by training the next generation of Christians to lead in secular institutions like education and government. Robertson founded and remains “Chancellor-for-life” of an accredited private university, Regent University, which was originally begun as CBN University in 1977 to staff *700 Club* with interns who took class credit in lieu of payment (Foege 1996:15). Today the university provides some

² As I discuss in chapter 3, this format uses neutral broadcasting genres to reframe social issues in the context of CBN’s religious beliefs.

³ CBN itself is tax-exempt and nonprofit, hosting religious programming such as its cornerstone, but from CBN Robertson founded the for-profit International Family Entertainment, which sold its popular Family Channel to ABC Disney with the contractual stipulation that *700 Club* be shown on the now global channel in perpetuity (Quicke N.d.).

undergraduate instruction but focuses on graduate degrees, such as those in missionary education and media broadcasting/production.

Perhaps the most important departments on campus are those of government and law, which are designed, as one dean described, “to change the whole American culture and to create and fulfill a covenant with God” (author’s notes, March 2006). The education in government and law has a heavy emphasis on clinical experience and internships. The departments connect with a much smaller campus in Washington D.C., where former Regent graduates facilitate Regent student internships with sympathetic (primarily conservative Republican) politicians in national and state. Law students are also frequently invited to intern or work at the public interest law firm, the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), which shares space with Regent’s Washington, D.C. and Virginia Beach campuses. The ACLJ is another Robertson creation, a legal advocacy firm modeled after the ACLU but championing the rights of religious conservatives nationwide. The level of integration with CBN and Regent is evident as Regent’s website boasts:

Regent Law students participating in the ACLJ’s summer internship program played an integral role in the critical First Amendment case of *Pleasant Grove City v. Summum*, in which the ACLJ represented the Utah city in a challenge to a display of the Ten Commandments in a city park.

In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the ACLJ, clearing the way for governments to accept permanent monuments of their choosing in public parks (Regent University N.d.b., emphasis theirs).

The relationship between all of Robertson’s creations is complex and often contradictory. Although each of these organizations and institutions (CBN media, Regent, Operation Blessing, ACLJ, etc.) are technically separate entities, their operation and initial construction are so interrelated with each other as to appear as components of the

same institution. This is *not*, however, how they are experienced by most employees, students, and participants, many of whom share the sentiment expressed by a Regent employee, Madelyn Parris, who joked at the beginning of our interview, “I don’t see myself as being part of CBN. As long as that’s in bold, we’re good!” (interview with author, December 6, 2006). Yet, as institutions they share space, members, sometimes funding, and their statements of mission and belief are virtually identical. For this reason, although I will distinguish entities and affiliations when particularly relevant, hereinafter the name “Christian Broadcasting Network” and its acronym “CBN” will refer to these organizations as a collective.

Despite differences in institutional identity, every participant I spoke with at CBN identified as *religious* and as *Christian*. Beyond that, participants used a variety of labels (some interchangeably), including *evangelical*, *charismatic*, *fundamentalist*, *born-again*, and/or *saved*, which indicate a diverse, although related, set of Christian practices. Many at CBN are a part of what Joel Robbins identifies as “Pentecostal/charismatic” (P/c) Christianity, a varied set of practices that

grew out of the eighteenth-century, Anglo-American revival movement known as the Great Awakening. Evangelical Christianity, which includes such denominations as Methodists and Baptists, is marked by its emphasis on conversion. People are not born into the evangelical faith but must “voluntarily” choose it on the basis of powerful conversion experiences (often glossed as being “born again”). Because evangelicals believe this experience is available to everyone, they strongly emphasize the importance of evangelistic efforts to convert others. They also hold the Bible in high regard as a text possessed of the highest religious authority and often endeavor to read it in what they take to be literal terms (Noll 2001) (Robbins 2004:119-120).

While *fundamentalists* share its origins with Pentecostalism in the broader evangelical movement, both emerging in the early twentieth century and sharing conservative politics

(Robbins 2004:122), historically fundamentalists rejected Pentecostals on the basis of the doctrine “that the gifts of the Spirit ceased to be available to people after they were given to the Apostles during the original Pentecost” (ibid:122-123). Still, both P/c and fundamentalists share the evangelical focus on free will in choosing to be “born again into the Spirit”.

Nevertheless, CBN’s population includes members of these varying and historically contentious populations. Participants represent dozens of denominations of Christian practice, and are encouraged by CBN to maintain their practice in their particular church, a hallmark of the charismatic renewal movement with which CBN is affiliated (see Regent University N.d.a.).⁴ Robertson has imparted to all his organizations a strong ecumenical mission to unify all Christians, although this is persistently paired with reductionist messages about who “real” Christians are. This construction of *Christian* at CBN will be unpacked at length in chapter 3, but it is important to mention here that CBN, Regent University, and other related organizations all carry a “Statement of Faith” that employees, students, and volunteers are expected to adopt. While not mandatory, the establishment of 7 core tenets, or “articles of belief,” which “employees are expected to understand and adhere to” and which other participants are encouraged to share:

- A) That the Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and precept.

⁴ After 1960, Protestant churches became increasingly open to charismatic practice. Before then, members: who experienced Spirit baptism, spoke in tongues, or received other gifts of the Spirit were usually compelled to leave their churches and join Pentecostal ones. But once what became known as the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement began to spread, those who had received gifts of the Spirit retained membership in mainline churches and often formed charismatic subgroups within them (Robbins 2004:121).

- B) That there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- C) That man was created in the image of God but, as a result of sin, is lost and powerless to save himself.
- D) That the only hope for man is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the virgin-born Son of God, who died to take upon Himself the punishment for the sin of mankind, and who rose from the dead so that by receiving Him as Savior and Lord, man is redeemed by His blood.
- E) That Jesus Christ will personally return to earth in power and glory.
- F) That the Holy Spirit indwells those who receive Christ for the purpose of enabling them to live righteous and holy lives.
- G) That the Church is the Body of Christ and is composed of all those who through belief in Christ have been spiritually regenerated by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church is worldwide evangelism, and nurturing and discipling of Christians (Christian Broadcasting Network N.d.b.; see also Regent University N.d.).⁵

Not surprisingly, with a hundred years of doctrinal, cultural, and political division, unity, then re-division, CBN's efforts to unify its entire population under seven tenets is both successful, in CBN's continued power to grow and attract new participants, and fraught with conflict, as witnessed in everyday interactions on campus.

Further, Robertson's unique approach to combining his theological perspective with political action (endeavors which will be unpacked at great length throughout the dissertation) adds another dimension to negotiations of unity and conflict. In addition to the seven tenets, there is a commitment, expressed in everyday discourse, to a religiously-informed conservative political agenda that includes public practice of Christianity, capitalism and fiscal conservatism, and strong pro-life and "pro-family" activism that

⁵ Interestingly, there is no "Statement of Faith" for ACLJ, perhaps not surprisingly since "The ACLJ is specifically dedicated to the ideal that religious freedom and freedom of speech are inalienable, God-given rights" (N.d.). Operation Blessing has a link to "Statement of Faith" on one of their (obviously not updated) webpages (http://www.ob.org/obi_community/buttons_and_banners.asp) but the actual statement has been removed as of August 28, 2010.

condemns abortion, public obscenity and pornography and promotes heterosexual marriage, public funding of Christian education, and women's role as stay-at-home mothers. As Ben Johnston's above quote suggests, many at CBN and Regent see mainstream culture as unhealthy and full of temptation, and they share a commitment to change the culture "for the better". At the very least, members often express a desire to preserve their families' beliefs and ethics, to create a type of "safe space" within, but in spite of, mainstream popular culture.

However, while many churches and religious organizations weave together theology and politics, few are as proactive and proliferative as CBN's various organizations, which were constructed by Robertson to tackle different aspects of prophesy in Revelations, prophesies which he interprets as necessary to the second coming of Christ. As part of the preparation of society, which includes converting as many people to Christianity as possible and ensuring Israel is under Jewish control, Robertson has also expressed a belief that Christians need to be placed in positions of power to ease the transition to the End Times. The university and its related public advocacy, such as the School of Government's internship program that matches students with (almost exclusively Republican) politicians, are thus evidence of CBN's broader vision, set by Pat Robertson, of Christian *dominionism* - the idea that Christians have a right to rule (see Goldberg 2006). Dominionism is a fairly recent term, considered to be a more moderate form of reconstructionism but the term itself is problematic because it is rarely, if ever, used by those who promote its philosophy. More frequently it is used in popular leftist writings when describing the perceived "dangers" of the Religious Right.

Nevertheless, Robertson's social activism has been described as dominionistic not just by critics but by some CBN employees as well. A professor at Regent, Thomas Winston, contrasted Robertson's desire to "make the world Christian" with Winston's own, more fundamentalist, view of a biblical separation of the material and spiritual worlds, as informed by Jesus' statement that "you are in this world not of it" (informal interview with author, February 22, 2006). Winston felt that Regent balances an understanding of the latter doctrine with Robertson's reconstructionist, social activist approach, yet admitted that students tend toward the latter; they are less likely to be monastic and much more likely to approach "the other extreme where they throw out the separation and merge the two worlds" (ibid).

Even on campus, self-identified fundamentalists occasionally describe charismatics as immature and feckless, straying too far from biblical truth, and are described, in turn, by self-identified charismatics as old-fashioned and lacking in passion or the lived vibrancy of the Holy Spirit. Winston's earlier quoted caution against dominionism exemplifies this divide, but adds an overlapping influence in Calvinism, which provided the inspiration for the larger reconstructionism movement. The relationship between Calvinist, or *Reformed* traditions, and evangelicalism are complex, with groups proliferating that combine elements of both, such as "Charismatic Calvinists", but with others insisting on doctrinal separation (see Godfrey N.d.). As Winston reported, "Among Baptists, many are influenced by Calvinism, and Pentecostal and charismatic traditions latch onto the idea of Calvinist reconstructionism" (conversation with author, February 22, 2006). Winston attributed Robertson's relationship with Pentecostal and charismatic traditions that focus on free will rather than doctrine as fueling his efforts in

public and governmental reform. Even while he affectionately joked with his secretary, introducing her as “here’s one of them Calvinists,” Winston provided a warning in keeping with his identification as a fundamentalist against adopting the Calvinist perspective about public engagement. “You must exercise care about putting logical superstructure around scripture” (interview with author, February 22, 2006).

In fact, in much more dramatic ways than this, the organization’s identity as “Christian” and “conservative” is produced as diversity is filtered, reframed, and explained into a cohesive narrative practice. While on one hand Robertson proudly proclaims CBN and Regent to be racially and ethnically “diverse”,⁶ it is clear first that members of the CBN community are expected to conform to particular ideals of Christian conservatism and second that the presence of a diverse population does not resolve racial struggles that have a long history in conservative Christianity (see, e.g., Gormly 2005). Melanie Ebert, a white student from New York, describes herself as born-again, very socially liberal, and particularly passionate about racial equality. Upon matriculation at Regent School of Government, she found the campus to be culturally very “Southern”, incredibly conservative, and unwilling to confront deeper issues of race on campus. Although she worked to encourage student dialogues on issues of race, she ultimately felt defeated and became anxious to leave campus. A former student, Christy Saunders, who came to Virginia from a very socially liberal, charismatic congregation in California, had similar interpretations of campus as Southern and incredibly conservative, as well as closed to other (social and political) ways of being Christian or understanding Christian politics. She found the restrictive social covenants placed on students to be counter to the

⁶ In an address to potential Regent students, Robertson referred to the student population as, “Very diverse and mature – 35 year old average, 22 % black, 8-10% Latino, 8-10% Asian and 35 countries represented” (author’s notes, March 16, 2006).

charismatic emphasis on free will, and described how, during her tenure as a law student, she would openly violate rules like the one prohibiting enrolled students from consuming alcohol by walking across campus while drinking beer, an open rebellion albeit one in which she was never caught (Saunders interview, June 28, 2004). Another student made national news when he was suspended for mocking Pat Robertson on a public webpage, a suspension over which he sued and lost because of Regent's standing as a private university (George 2008; O'Dell 2009).

I had a strange sympathy with these students as I became more familiar with campus life. My history with CBN was a long one: I finished high school in Virginia Beach a few miles down the street from CBN's campus. My family was a Navy family, bouncing from coast to coast every couple of years, passing through Virginia Beach at least three times. Our final move to Virginia Beach happened when I was a junior in high school, and my family became settled in the area until my father retired, a decade later. My memories of high school were replete with vibrant lunchtime conversations of sin and politics with friends who identified as conservative Christians and who later attended CBN's Regent University.

When I began dissertation fieldwork in 2006, felt the familiar discomfort of those high school conversations, where I felt the odd tension of enjoying friendships of people whose worldview I shared little agreement with, theologically or politically. Despite efforts in particular by the University to include students who identify as non-evangelical or, more shockingly, as non-conservative, there are myriad ways in which the campus identity as conservative evangelical is recreated to the exclusion of other possibilities. Before I could articulate these machinations I found myself reacting to them—driving

home from Government class at Regent while blasting the soundtracks to Extreme Liberal musical productions like *Hair* or *Rent* or wishing I had a beer to drink on campus in sympathetic protest with Christy. Partly I was reacting to the regulatory, punitive, and disciplinary practices on campus—the rules about student and employee conduct, the presence of security on campus (ostensibly to protect Robertson and his family), and the variety of comments, looks, gasps, and whispers that follow Untoward Behavior or Comments. Equally or more powerful were the discourses circulating through the CBN and Regent communities that were as regulatory, punitive, and disciplinary, although in far more subtle ways.

These practices and dialogues, as *History in Person* indicate, are precisely what constitute and reconstitute (in this case organizational) identity as they engage in struggles over terms like “diversity”, “Christian”, “religion”, and “politics” – terms that are simultaneously defined and shaped by outside forces and labels that are experienced differently depending on where one is positioned amidst these struggles. Indeed, my experience of “diversity” as contradictory was largely due to my position as other, a status that was reaffirmed with every new acquaintance, as inevitably one of the first questions I was asked was, “What church do you belong to?” My stock answer, that I was raised (non-evangelical) Catholic, was generally met with two responses, either a non-committal “Oh” or a further inquiry into whether I currently practiced (“No”). In either case, the conversation subsequently lagged, as I was marked as Not Saved. Similarly, my sympathetic awareness of the restrictive practices and discourses noted by the self-identified liberal students was also due to my position as Not Conservative. As I came to realize by the end of my time at Regent, the discourses and practices that weighed upon

me at were not simply *destructive* of the other, as I initially perceived, but *constructive* of both the self and the other, whether the latter were Non-Christians, Non-conservatives, their much-maligned ARE neighbors, or the ever-elusive and threatening Secular.⁷

Synthesizing Eclectic Vision at ARE

While CBN's constantly-produced organizational identity insists upon a solid sense of self alongside a solid understanding and practice of *religion*, ARE stands in stark contrast in its as a “religious” organization whose sense of self often includes an open refusal to define same.

I think the reason I've been here 34 years working is because there's such room for synthesizing eclectic vision – that you don't just swallow the Cayce readings...ARE's trying to be a spiritual resource center and it helps immeasurably to have some core material, sort of a starting point, but even though the place gets thought of as the Edgar Cayce center, everything about this place is way broader than just that. So that's really been enriching for me, that there's room to incorporate Jungian thought, Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, Kabbalah into forming one's own personal spirituality. And there's also plenty of room to maintain a traditional faith practice if you want to do that. So over the years I've kind of gone in and out of being in a church at the same time. Currently I'm not (Samuel Hanford, interview with author, December 7, 2006).

The proclaimed mission of the ARE reflects this individual flexibility in the statements somewhat vaguely-stated desire to “help people change their lives for the better through the ideas and information found in the Edgar Cayce readings” (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.a.). The focus is on “personal empowerment and healing at all levels—body, mind, and spirit” as the ARE strives “to be your personal resource for spiritual growth, holistic health, and mindful living” (ibid). Unlike CBN's mission statement, the ARE's is non-ideological. What ties the members together isn't a

⁷ This will be explored at length in chapter 3.

common set of beliefs or an identification as part of a religious tradition. As one employee remarked,

I think there is an image of ARE that it is either a religion of some kind or maybe even cultish in some way. Most people who think those things of the ARE have never been here. I used to jokingly say when someone would ask me if it was a cult, “you would be hard-pressed to find three people here to agree on anything, so we couldn’t be a cult”. Because we don’t agree on anything. So there is no dogma that anybody shoves down your throat (Lucas Contadino, interview with author, December 12, 2006).

Even the material upon which the ARE is based, the more than 14,000 psychic readings produced through Edgar Cayce’s trances in the first half of the twentieth century, is not doctrine. As ARE employee Simon Stonerock mentioned several times, the accuracy of Cayce’s predictions and diagnoses were related to his state of being; when he was ill, too full, or too tired the material that came through the trances was more suspect (conversations with author, 2006).⁸ In other words, the Cayce “Source”, although profound, is seen as fallible, just as he is seen so. Rather, the Cayce materials are used as a guide in the *seeking* of enlightenment.

Although he demonstrated remarkable psychic talent as a child in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, where he was born in 1877, Edgar Cayce’s fame came from his remarkable readings accomplished in trance. As the ARE website proclaims:

Later in life, Cayce would find that he had the ability to put himself into a sleep-like state by lying down on a couch, closing his eyes, and folding his hands over his stomach. In this state of relaxation and meditation, he was able to place his

⁸ Cayce found that “the best and most productive readings were given in a prayerful atmosphere” (Kirkpatrick 2000:167). Michael Mandville, an independent researcher, assessed the Cayce materials for accuracy in prediction and outcome, giving Cayce an overall confidence rating of 92% (<http://www.michaelmandeville.com/phoenix/trilogy/bookone/rp1chapter4.htm#Table100>, accessed August 27, 2010). Other sources that adopt a stringent scientific or even scientific worldview, such as <http://www.skeptdic.com/cayce.html>, claim Cayce’s accuracy cannot be verified because “the support for his accuracy consists of little more than anecdotes and testimonials. There is no way to demonstrate that Cayce relied on psychic powers, rather than the placebo effect, even on those cases where there is no dispute that he was instrumental in the cure” (accessed August 27, 2010).

mind in contact with all time and space — the universal consciousness, also known as the super-conscious mind. From there, he could respond to questions as broad as, "What are the secrets of the universe?" and "What is my purpose in life?" to as specific as, "What can I do to help my arthritis?" and "How were the pyramids of Egypt built? His responses to these questions came to be called "readings," and their insights offer practical help and advice to individuals even today (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.c.).

Although the material derived from the readings provided detailed medical diagnoses and cures, spiritual lessons on karma and reincarnation, and a rewriting of the accepted historical record, Cayce himself was slow to accept the material. A high-school dropout, devoted Christian churchgoer and reader of the Bible, it took years for Cayce to “trust” the content of the readings, which he often didn’t understand (particularly the medical information) and of which he had no memory during or after trance.⁹

Guided by the readings, Cayce opened a hospital in Virginia Beach in 1929, realizing his dream of providing full medical care for patients who had complicated and often untreatable (by medical knowledge of the day) diseases. However, the maintenance of the hospital became untenable as the Great Depression worsened, as some of Cayce’s most charitable donors became annoyed that his attention was being spent on patients rather than the donors’ personal readings, and as Cayce’s notoriously good heart and bad business sense led him to admit patient after patient who could not pay.

After the hospital failed, a depressed Edgar Cayce decided to write to everyone who had received one of his readings to ask their advice regarding what he should do next (Kirkpatrick 2000:436-437). The overwhelming response was for Cayce to begin a

⁹ Cayce’s lack of faith in the readings became clear to him when his second son, only a month old, became ill. It wasn’t until the doctors gave up hope that Cayce performed a reading, and by that point it was too late and the baby died shortly thereafter (Sugrue 1997[1943]:164). Despite his willingness to enter trances for other people, “he had not really answered the question...of whether he believed in the readings himself. He was a prophet without honor in his own heart” (ibid:165).

membership organization. His clients wanted to keep track of one another's treatment successes and failures, to hear new source information from future readings, and to learn the outcomes of scientific studies testing the readings health, paranormal, and historical material. Thus, the ARE, or "Association for Research and Enlightenment" was born, dedicated to these goals. Since Cayce's death, the organization has continued to research the Cayce materials and to bind together members with an interest in the topics Cayce covered in his readings. Although much of the material from the readings was specific to particular individuals, whether it was a health reading advising specific osteopathic manipulations or a life reading informing the client of his or her past lives, a great deal of information of general interest was woven in as well. As the ARE website states:

Although Edgar Cayce died more than 60 years ago, the information and concepts found in his psychic readings are timeless. With 14,306 readings recorded, documented, and categorized, we have available to us a wealth of information on holistic health, spiritual growth, meditation and prayer, philosophy and reincarnation, ESP and psychic development, ancient mysteries and civilizations, astrological influences, life after death, and the lost years of Jesus (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.d.).

Today the campus is strikingly similar to CBN's in the numerous independent but interrelated institutions sharing the same space. The original hospital stands next to the Visitor's Center and a handful of other buildings which jointly house the ARE member organization, the Cayce-Reilly School of Massage, the Health Spa, A.R.E. Press, A.R.E. Bookstore, the Edgar Cayce Foundation, A.R.E. Camp, and Atlantic University. The Visitor's Center also contains the library, which boasts one of the largest collections of religious and metaphysical material, second only to the Vatican, the conference center, and the mediation room overlooking the ocean. Again as with CBN, although I will distinguish entities and affiliations when particularly relevant, hereinafter the name

“Association of Research and Enlightenment” and its acronym “ARE” will refer to these organizations as a collective.

Through all these avenues for study and practice, the binding focus is the material from the Cayce readings and its collective study. Categorizing the practices or practitioners at ARE is notoriously tricky. Unlike at CBN, where individual and organizational identities are filtered through publicly recognizable (albeit contentiously defined) identifiers, seemingly appropriate labels (created by a visitor’s or ethnographer’s first impression of the organization) such as *religion*, *Christian*, *New Age*, and *liberal* are all circulated, tried on, amended, rejected. Exceptions and qualifiers arise for every term.

Is the ARE a *religion*? Participants seem uniformly convinced that the ARE is not a religion per se, but sometimes acts like one: “I don’t consider ARE my religion—it is not my religion. But it does help shape my philosophy. But there is a mystical aspect to it, it’s metaphysical” (Mary Connell, interview with author, October 24, 2006). Part of the problem, as Lucas Contadino points out, is there is no true institutional parallel to the ARE:

We need to make it really clear that we are not a religious movement. That we are a...it is really hard to find a counterpart to us – I think that is part of the problem. There are other organizations that do much of what we do but I can’t think of anybody that does everything that we do. We are so diverse. There are other organizations that do little pieces but we don’t have a counterpart (interview with author, December 21, 2006).

Despite some surface similarities to CBN in diversity of function, the ARE does not have the ease of claiming a publicly-recognizable social, religious, or political identification.

The disinclination to label the organization as religious is often paired with a reluctance to label one’s own faith as religious, or even to categorize one’s practice by any identifiable means. Many prefer to not use the word “religion” at all, seeing it as

politically charged. More than once I heard the disclaimer “I’m not religious, I’m spiritual” at the ARE, implying through further conversation that the term “religious” has popular connotations of zealotry, structure in lieu of practice, and submission to potentially corrupt authority. At one of the earliest conferences I attended, I met an ARE member who was attending divinity school in the Midwest. When I asked her what religious affiliation she held, she replied that she declined to select even a broad religious term, preferring to define herself only as a “person of faith” (author’s notes, March 12, 2006). Considering that this person was in training to become a leader in some aspect of divinity, I was startled by the possibility of being vague. It opened a host of questions for me – did she feel her spiritual identity and beliefs were too complex or different to match to a recognizable practice? Did labeling her position diminish it, perhaps making it too exclusive for her tastes? Or did she simply not trust that I would understand or be sympathetic to her beliefs? In any case, I saw her evasiveness reflected in numerous members who mostly, as I came to understand, were struggling to articulate their ever-shifting and expanding beliefs and practices.

Considering these struggles, it may seem odd to then ask: “is the organization *Christian*?”; however, this is a question of some debate, as Cayce was very devoted to a personal practice in Christianity, and Jesus and early Christianity were the focus of numerous readings. The answer according to some is not at all; according to others it is not enough. In my first month at the ARE I met people who self-identified as Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Catholic, and Christian, and a large number of people who (not surprisingly) refused to identify as any particular religion at all. Yet other members clearly saw the organization and its work as being firmly *Christian*. One visitor to the

ARE from North Carolina stopped by the front desk to renew his membership. He related that he had read the first (and authoritative) biography on Edgar Cayce, *There is a River*, three times in three days and found it to be the greatest book he'd ever read. However, he had complaints about the lack of Christ imagery at the Visitor's Center. "Jesus is the pattern, Christ is the way," he quoted. "The readings are all about Christianity and following Jesus Christ's path—so why is there no cross hanging at the ARE? It's too 'New Age' here," he sneered (author's notes, June 23, 2006).

"It's almost like our country has the Republican and Democratic divide and the ARE had people who want it to be the '*universal* Christ' versus people who want it to be '*Jesus the* Christ,' observed employee Gerald Hamlin (interview with author, April 3, 2006). The distinction, as many members explained to me, is that the latter focuses on the uniqueness of Jesus and his divine talents while the former offers a pattern that everyone is capable of following, one that leads to completeness with God. As one ARE speaker quoted Ram Dass, to the approval of many in the crowd, "I am God... but everyone else is, too" (author's notes, February 17, 2006).

Is the ARE *New Age*? According to some members, like volunteer Phil Simmons, the answer is a simple, "No" (interview with author, September 21, 2006). To others, like Mary Connell, the answer is a qualified "Because it does deal with metaphysical things, I guess..." although, she stipulated, "some of the conferences are a little bit too far towards esoteric types of things," straying too much from the Cayce material (interview with author, October 24, 2006). Despite some protests, it's hard not to become settled on *New Age* as a perfect identifier for the ARE as one walks through the Visitor Center and bookshop, surrounded by crystals, incense, tarot cards, meditation cushions and pendants,

soft music infused with the sounds of sitars and three point harmonies, and multi-faith iconography grouped together on walls and in paintings—one such painting depicting the seven chakras over a sitting Buddha surrounded by a rainbow, a menorah, and a cross.

Additionally, Cayce's influence on the development of the New Age movement of the 1960s and 1970s was significant, despite the fact that he passed away years earlier in 1945. As writer Mitch Horowitz describes, Cayce's readings "on topics ranging from reincarnation to astrology to earth-change prophecies... inspired a new generation of metaphysical writers and explorers" (2010:15). Horowitz gives Cayce credit for laying the foundations for the subsequent development of the popular New Age movement:

In this sense, Cayce is probably more responsible than any other single person for introducing esoteric ideas into mainstream American life. He was, for example, the first American to prescribe meditation for Westerners; his readings probing "past lives" inspired the 1956 mega bestseller *The Search for Bridey Murphy*, which ignited a craze over reincarnation; and Cayce introduced the now-ubiquitous term *channel* into the American vocabulary. But the psychic did more than set the template for New Age spirituality. The tone and ethics found in his trance readings suffused the burgeoning alternative religious culture with a sense of inclusiveness and religious universality. In his readings, Cayce made frequent reference to "the hopeful energies"—or, put another way, the force that calls us to love (or at least tolerate) our neighbors, eschew conflict, and help others (ibid:15-16).

Further, the ARE's own book catalog website refers to the ARE as a "nonprofit *new age organization*" and declared its purpose "as a *new age store* is to provide supportive *new age products* — books, CDs, DVDs, astrology charts and more — that assist people in their quest to discover their mission in life, explore their past, heal their present, and maintain a body-mind-spirit holistic health lifestyle" [emphasis mine] (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.b.). Case closed?

Despite this seemingly clear-cut identification, and despite the influence Cayce had on the development of the New Age, many at the ARE felt the New Age movement did not stick closely enough to the philosophical material in the Cayce readings. Whereas many New Age writings and fads offer “quick fixes”, the Cayce material offers simple guides to life that frequently prove difficult to implement.

The material that came through him to me is so empowering personally. It’s not New Agey in that, like some of the New Age stuff, it’s like anything goes. Whatever you feel like doing is fine and you ought to live your life, explore everything, there is no sin. That to me is kind of shallow. Whereas with Edgar Cayce it’s more complicated than that. It says you’re accountable for your actions and you reap what you sow... people struggle with that. They don’t even want to think that they’re responsible for their actions. It’s like if you eat junk food, don’t be surprised if you’re unhealthy (Simon Stonerock, interview with author, April 3, 2006).

The New Age quality of limitless freedom that Simon described is similar to what he later identified as “cafeteria spirituality,” a tendency to pick and choose elements from various religions without devoting yourself to any particular one. As Simon pointed out, the problem is that most people would pick the easy parts of the religions, not the challenging ones that encourage soul development (ibid). Clearly the ARE recognizes and plays a hand in the phenomenon of cafeteria spirituality as it offers texts, music, videos, classes, and conferences that bring together elements of numerous religious traditions. Yet, like Simon indicated, the Cayce readings did not promote an attitude of “anything goes”, which appears characteristic of many New Age practices. Rather, Cayce readings offered diversity in the much-quoted framework of “there are many paths to God.” The ARE functions, as one director, Samuel Hanford, indicated, as

the Good Housekeeping emblem of cafeteria spirituality. It’s like we live in such a cafeteria spirituality culture and I think that in many ways that’s very, very good, but it has its drawbacks, because you can sample too much and never make a

commitment to something. And it's very much something with very low reputability, and I think ARE's largely perceived as having an integrity and a history to it that people find reassuring. It's like you can look through the ARE press book catalog and maybe 10% of the books are going to be ARE Press books but you have a sense that there have been some set of ideals or some kind of criteria going into the selection of those. And there's so many different conferences and workshops and teachers out there you have a sense that you pick up the ARE conference catalog and the things that are going to be in there maybe 20% are about Edgar Cayce but the things that are going to be in there are going to have a certain level of integrity (interview with author, December 7, 2006).

Just as ARE members wrestle with individual and organization identities in the panoply of categories related to religion, they similarly wrestle with attitudes toward and identities of the political. In many ways, the ARE appears to share and support overtly liberal social and political positions, in stark contrast to CBN's proclaimed conservative platform, but the organization persists in representing itself formally as apolitical, and many members show as much ambivalence in political discourse as in religious discourse.

In terms of political engagement, the ARE stands in stark contrast to CBN: "it's interesting when I think of Pat Robertson's organization as so political so well-funded in that way, and there's been a real resistance, I think at the organizational level of the ARE to be any kind of political force" (Johanna Frawley, interview with author, February 4, 2007). From Cayce's death through today, the organization has maintained a staunchly apolitical stance. "The ARE leadership don't make political statements. They really dissuade political statements from being made in conferences" (Simon Stonerock, interview with author, April 3, 2006). As a result, individual members' politics are somewhat varied. *Liberal* as a political category frequently seems to go hand in hand with the religious category *New Age*, as both entail inclusivity, acceptability of diverse lifestyle, and focus on individual choice. Not surprisingly, then, many describe the

general tone of the ARE as “overall pretty liberal” (ibid), albeit with a very strong and vocal minority that see Cayce’s readings and spirituality as pertaining to *conservative* politics. As an example, Michael Smith, a self-identified *Republican* and *conservative*, expressed a feeling that liberal Democratic policies suppressed the creative expression and self-respect crucial to Cayce’s description of well-being:

Take welfare, take welfare. Ten years ago the rolls of welfare were outrageously high. Families were being destroyed because it incentivized women and minorities to have multiple children without a father and --because they gave increased welfare payments on that, and then [after welfare reform]... welfare rolls are like 40% of what they were five years ago. People are out working, they’re out building their lives, they’re out getting to be a part of the American process... [Creativity] immediately leaps forward... [People are] instantly better off because they get their self-respect back (interview with author, July 20, 2004).

Nevertheless, most people at the ARE headquarters, despite the organizational pressure to remain nonpartisan tend to identify as liberal.

Yet there is simultaneously a belief or expectation that individuals engaged through ARE spiritual practice typically tend to gravitate to liberal politics. As Mary stated, “we think alike about things and so we choose the same candidates” (Mary Connell, interview with author, October 24, 2006). As she described, “It is more liberal, it is more concerned with the welfare of people and the environment, and how we treat other countries in the world. You know, it is definitely, because of our mindset there we just all seem to choose the same candidates” (ibid). Any activism related to this liberal politic, however, is expected to manifest independently and apart from the formal organization, a situation which some, like minister Johanna Frawley, feels is a betrayal of Cayce’s original intentions through the readings:

...the social service and political aspect of Cayce’s work got dropped because it wasn’t “popular” or sellable, marketable... to the ARE itself. ...There was a real

split between those who think, “Oh, it’s other people’s karma, we shouldn’t deal with it” and then there were those like me who said, “Cayce quotes from the Bible in many readings, saying, ‘are you your brother’s keeper? Yes you are.’” So that goes against saying “just leave them alone to starve”, which is what some of my friends were telling me at the time when there was a big starvation over there [in Africa] (Johanna Frawley, interview with author, February 4, 2007).

For others at the ARE, however, the apolitical stance of the organization was precisely what distinguished the ARE as an appropriately hands-off spiritual organization in contrast to CBN. As Mary retorted when asked about ARE’s apolitical nature, “Well, we don’t have a television program where we tell people what to believe and how to vote” (Mary Connell, interview with author, October 24, 2006).

Throughout these negotiations, ARE members are building a communal sense of self with relation to the power politics that infuse identity land-mines like *religion* or *liberal*. ARE members often appear to avoid these loaded terms by choosing vague or broadly inclusive terms to refer to the organization: “philosophical,” “educational,” “spiritual”; or themselves: “fellow seekers,” “people of faith,” or “like-minded people.” When I questioned the use of the latter reference, one ARE employee explained it as:

People who are metaphysically oriented. It doesn’t mean necessarily politically. It means that people who think there is more to us than just the five senses, that are interested in meditation and spiritual development, that sort of thing. It doesn’t mean, though, how they choose to think of their spiritual development (Simon Stonerock, interview with author, April 3, 2006).

In many case, “opting out” of the terms allows for people to see themselves as unfettered, free from political dichotomies and spiritual dualisms. However, there is no escape from the “enduring struggle” (Holland and Lave 2001:30) of locating oneself or one’s organization among these terms. Even deciding not to choose becomes a political choice. An example is an employee’s refusal to take a political position on conflicts

raging in the Middle East, “I used to get so upset and wrapped up in the fighting between Jews and Palestinians, until I realized—it’s all karmic!” (Phoebe Jones, interview with author, July 19, 2006). Rather than working out which side had the superior claim, Phoebe came to understand the conflict as unresolvable until individuals involved took responsibility for overcoming their hostilities, a position certainly in line with Cayce’s concepts of karma and personal responsibility but reflective of Johanna’s comments on ARE’s avoidance of political activism.

Perhaps a more direct example is the way *sin* is characterized. At CBN, discussions of morality take for granted a strong, tangible dichotomy between “good” and “evil”, and in fact the truest evil is that which denies the dichotomy, as does, for example, moral relativism. It is partly for this reason that Ronald Reagan is so lauded: as the CBN Ministries Director says, “we must continually combat the same moral relativism that Reagan grappled with throughout his political career” in favor of taking a strong moral stance like Reagan’s “rightly call[ing] the Soviet Union the ‘evil empire’” (von Buseck N.d.d.). At ARE, however, the use of the word “sin” marks one as someone who doesn’t understand the true nature of spirit. Guest speaker Peter Russell echoed many ARE members in his remarks:

Take the word “sin.” It originally means “missed the bullseye”. The target is a better state of consciousness (ease). We don’t find inner peace because we’re aiming in the wrong direction. When we hear “sinners repent,” repenting means to rethink, to change our way of thinking (author’s notes, February 17, 2006).

Others at ARE tie this notion of sin to Cayce’s description of the karmic struggle and one’s failure to learn from one’s mistakes:

If you want to know what sin’s about, it’s about not being helpful to somebody else. It’s not like God punishes you, it’s just that you learn. If you put out love

that comes back, if you put out hate, you know your life is a product of your actions (Simon Stonerock, interview with author, April 3, 2006).

However either organization defines “sin”, its definition places into context the other’s definition and therefore the other itself. For CBN, the ARE’s refusal to adopt the binary of good and evil marks it as evil itself, whereas at ARE, CBN’s persistence in the binary is indicative of its lack of spiritual development.¹⁰

Religious Selves and Secular Others

Negotiations of identity terms are not done in a vacuum but rather in dialogue with other ways of being, other manifestations of identity struggle. As the terms are bandied about and given meaning, a crafting of the self with respect to the other sets up each organization in view of the other. Clearly CBN and ARE are engaged with a parallel process of development of self and other as they discursively produce themselves as religious/philosophical/political entities with respect to the other organization. However, these dialogues also reflect perhaps surprising similarities in their production of a shared other. Particularly evident in the parachurches’ struggles for authority and legitimacy in the public sphere, the organizations can be construed as constantly addressing a difficult-to-perceive, but eminently powerful *Secular Other*.

The vague outlines of this Secular Other can be seen frequently in the personal narratives of parachurch members. Often it is described as the alienating or meaning-suppressing culture that led members to seek the organizations in the first place. As Regent employee Madelyn Parris explained:

My whole mission as evangelical Christian is not to indoctrinate others... this [evangelical Christianity] has made me feel so much more complete and it’s made

¹⁰ Many members referred to CBN and its members as lower on the spiritual “ladder”, worshipping God out of fear rather than love, although they subsequently insisted that everyone is where they are for a reason.

such a difference in my life that I feel compelled—like a fire showed up in my bones—I can’t be so selfish and not share it (interview with author, December 6, 2006).

Later in the conversation, her eyes welled up talking about her experiences in a European country whose (as she described it) nihilistic culture and focus on philosophy rather than religion left its youth miserable and alienated, without life purpose. Her desire was eminently clear: to help them, to save them from themselves by the best method she knew, the means by which she herself was saved. This same sentiment was echoed by Shigeru Mitsuda in his talk at the ARE (2009) where he related his own experience as a disaffected youth in Japan. Mitsuda was so forlorn by what he describes as atheistic, academically-focused Japanese culture that he attempted suicide several times before finally finding inspiration in the ARE and the Cayce material. He is now the President of the Tokyo branch of the ARE and has since made it his mission to translate the material into popular press in Japan in his effort to reach out to and provide meaning for as many Japanese youth as possible.

The various discourses constructing this disaffected cultural space are also reflected in the parachurches’ engagements in the same public spaces outlined by Christian Smith as “fundamentally transformed” by secularization, including those aforementioned areas of science, higher education, public school education, public philosophy, the “judicial sphere,” media, and “the basic cultural understanding of the human self and its care” (2003:2-3), which began to be assessed in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 focuses on the element at the heart of higher education: knowledge production. Both organizations critique academic fields in of science, social science, and medicine among others for their monopoly on Truth and Knowledge. As CBN and ARE

encounter points of tension among their religious or spiritual perspectives and the stringently secular perspectives of academic departments and publications, the ensuing discourses struggle with underlying questions such as: What constitutes knowledge? What texts are seen as authoritative and bearing truthful information? Which are considered flawed, false, misleading, and why? How do these differences produce political constructions of the self and other? Shedding light on these questions is the way both organizations report on and align with differing factions in early Christianity. While the events of two thousand years ago do not have a direct lineage to the current incarnations of CBN and ARE,¹¹ both organizations reflect on the origins of the Christian church and its relationship with the Roman state, forming their own understandings, identities, and political alliances with different groups of that time. Further, their very understandings of history and how to best discern an accurate portrayal of the historical record, reveal the power, authority, and fallibility of the secular production of history and memory.

Chapters 3 and 4 emphasize how the parachurches' relationships to the Secular Other are multi-layered and often contradictory. Critiques of secular institutions are never uniform, nor even severe most of the time. While simultaneously producing knowledges that are fundamentally different, CBN and ARE frequently attempt to ally with the power of established secular knowledge producers such as credentialed academics, judges, and scientists by bringing them to speak for the organizations. Where that fails, either due to

¹¹ It should be noted that there are many at CBN and ARE who believe a direct lineage *does* exist, particularly between CBN and the early church and between ARE and alternative Christianities such as the Essenes or Gnostics. There are some at ARE postulate that similar conflicts exist now because the same groups people are reincarnating into today. This is based on Cayce's readings that suggested that conflicts at different points of time, including around the destruction of Atlantis are the result of two groups of leaders representing the Law of One (offering a spiritual path returning to God) and the Sons of Belial (focused on the material world and the accumulation of wealth and power).

the secular figure's unwillingness to be a spokesperson for the organization or an undeniable contrast between the secular and the parachurch position, the organizations may conflate scientific, judicial, or academic findings with the organizations' positions, they may mimic the credentials or speech genres of accepted secular sources, or they instead choose to portray the secular knowledge production system as corrupted and in contrast to their purer source.

In Chapter 3, participants at CBN demonstrate much ambivalence over how to incorporate science into everyday life and faith, largely influenced by three elements: historical mistrust and lack of familiarity with scientific theory, the undeniable social power and authority of science, and the process through which science and its components of "technology" versus "culture" are defined, segregated, and assessed. CBN's imagining of the "culture of science" is responsible for their depiction of science as a competing cultural institution with similar motivations. Just as CBN seeks to convert the public to its worldview by wielding the authority of the Bible, science is understood as seeking to convert the public to its worldview (inevitably reductionist and atheistic) by wielding the authority of scientific method and fact.

Chapter 4 focuses on ARE's engagement with science and medicine, looking particularly at frictions around health and healing that arise from tensions between medicine as dominated by the Western, occidental scientific paradigm and alternative medicine as remaining alternative largely fringe because it encompasses eclectic practices that do not fit into (or that blatantly contradict) the scientific paradigm. Similar to CBN in its contradictory relationship to science, ARE members critique science and medicine as willfully blind and slow to catch up with the truth yet maintain a scientific knowledge

paradigm, engaging in research and appropriating scientific studies that lend credibility to Cayce's alternative health practices. In addition, however, the ARE's struggle also demonstrates potentially irreconcilable differences in how illness, health, and the body are perceived. Dovetailing with CBN's critiques, the ARE sheds light on the cultural underpinnings of a Western practice of medicine so cloaked in the rhetoric of "science" that it fails to address its own cultural suppositions.

Finally, this dissertation concludes with a brief discussion of the hegemony of the secular and a look forward to future discussions of the parachurches' discourses on media, public education, and government.

I must note here that the use of the term *the secular* is almost entirely my own, as this is not a term that circulates among either organization. The absence of the term itself is significant, as it indicates, perhaps, a philosophy that is so integrated into institutions of power as to be taken for granted. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define *the secular* as the socially- and governmentally-supported space in American culture wherein institutional decisions are expected to be based on rationality, ethics, and political consensus rather than religious belief and morality. *Secularism*, on the other hand, refers to the social movement that successfully worked to establish the secular space and which continues to police it. Finally, I want to address my use of the term *public sphere*. This term is used here in the style of Melani McAlister, who once stated that she borrowed the concept from Habermas then threw out everything but the name. As Christian Smith articulates in his similar use of *public life*, "I follow Habermas broadly in meaning those fields of social life in which culturally different groups of people must live together with

common normative and institutional arrangements that govern or influence important dimensions of their lives” (2003:vii).

The parachurches are uniquely positioned to critique the secular, being hybrid organizations that operate often indistinguishably from private business, education, health care, media, and political action committees. They engage the public on multiple levels, providing messages about spirituality and religion but also about law and politics, health and science, childhood education, and news broadcasting. Whether specifically organizing or facilitating organizers, they provide inspiration for social movements and as producers and objects of media, they insert new terms into dialogues of public discourses.

Whenever religion and politics collide public scrutiny of religion intensifies—it was in fact this combination that led me to construct this project, a comparative assessment of the relationship between religious belief and political activism at CBN and ARE. However, as my project unfolded I found the parachurches to be foils for the secular; by scrutinizing engagements between parachurches and secular institutions for the processes by which parachurches constructed religious knowledge and identity, I found similar processes in the construction of secular knowledge and identity.

Yet throughout my own discussion and construction of these dichotomies, I hope to keep in mind Terry Evens’ point that because postmodernism embraces reality

as basically ambiguous, the antinomies implicated by these dire social problems get redefined as nondualisms, such that their principles are both opposed to and continuous with each other. As a result, the principles are neutralized neither by an idealist nor a materialist reconciliation. Instead of abstract logical oppositions, they reappear as profound tensions or vital dynamics (2008:xi).

Although Evens is referring to serious social events including genocide and “massively destructive military conflagrations” (ibid:x), his larger point is directly relevant to the continual polarization of the categories “Religion” and “Secular” in American society.

The tensions between “religion and politics” or “religion and science” as are popularly construed, can thus be seen not as irreconcilable dualisms but rather as mutually-produced, and continuous categories. Perhaps it is true, as Evens suggests, that

the common ground does not exactly pre-exist: it obtains as a moving dynamic, something ever in the making. In which case, of course, it can never be fixed beforehand, and, for this reason, always goes to affirm abiding otherness. A firm and immovable common ground bespeaks only the selfsame or identity and renders otherness impossible. But otherness abides, and because it does, we never do arrive at the common ground—we only travel in its direction (2008:xiii).

However this dissertation project hopefully offers some insight into how the otherness (of both “religion” and “secular”) is produced, perhaps most importantly revealing the underlying power politics that blind us as academics to our roles in their construction.

II TRUE TEXTS: HISTORICAL IDENTITY, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION, AND THE SELF

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16; New International Version).

Jesus said, "If your leaders say to you: 'Look, the (Father's) imperial rule is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the (Father's) imperial rule is within you and it is outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty" (Jesus of Nazareth from the Gospel of Thomas verse 3).

Bethany: You're saying having beliefs is a bad thing?

Rufus: I just think it's better to have ideas. You can change an idea. Changing a belief is trickier (*Dogma*, dir. Kevin Smith).

In 2006, when I was in the field spending my time in Virginia Beach traveling between Christian Broadcasting Network and the Association for Research and Enlightenment, two events, one entertainment and one academic, made huge waves at both parachurches. The first was the release of the film *The Da Vinci Code*, based on the hugely bestselling book written by Dan Brown three years earlier. The second was the public release of an ancient text that for 1700 years had only been rumored to exist, the lost Gospel of Judas. Both texts contradict established Christian doctrine, challenging some of the most passionately held beliefs. *The Da Vinci Code* blends historical accounts with fictional imaginings to suggest that Jesus was not only married to Mary Magdalene but fathered a child by her. The Gospel of Judas recounts Jesus' life and death from Judas' perspective, suggesting that Judas was Jesus' favorite disciple, the one who understood Jesus' grand plan of self-sacrifice and who only revealed Jesus' location to the Romans

by his request. The interest over these two releases sparked public discussion of Biblical veracity and renewed interest in alternative religious and historical texts.

Authors and leaders at both CBN and ARE jumped to alternately discuss, correct, verify, and condemn the religious historical material in both the novel and the lost gospel, filtering it for members and adding their opinions to conversations in the public sphere. The ARE has long supported reading and discussion of Biblical history alongside other Christian texts excluded from the Bible, such as the gospel of Mary Magdalene, as Cayce's readings depicted a radical and controversial version of Christian history that was later largely confirmed by the discovery of Gnostic gospels and Dead Sea Scrolls. However, authors at the ARE still felt the need to address Brown's supposition that Jesus and Mary were lovers and had a child together as historically false and contradicting Jesus' transcendence of material pleasures:

The idea that the progeny of Mary Magdalene and Jesus are living today fits nicely within our growing interest in the genetic code and its impact on future generations. Blood lines have always been a fascination for humans. But, as exciting as it may be to think that Jesus' heirs may be living quietly in Europe, it is not true according to Cayce's reading of the Akashic records (Van Auken N.d.a.).¹²

The release of the Gospel of Judas, however, with its heroic presentation of arguably the most reviled figures of the last two thousand years, raised few eyebrows at the ARE, largely because the text confirmed Cayce's already controversial description of Judas as well-intentioned but misguided.

Wouldn't the more loving choice have been to follow Judas' way, to overthrow Rome, liberate Jerusalem, and raise all of us into paradise? From outward appearances it seemed so, but from inner truth it was not.... Jesus left because that was best for all of us. As he said, "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there you may be also (Van Auken N.d.b.).

¹² This article is no longer posted as author tried to view on August 13, 2010.

The author is referring here to a frequently cited Edgar Cayce's reading regarding Judas in which he was asked, "Was Judas Iscariot's idea in betraying Jesus to force Him to assert Himself as a King and bring in His kingdom then?" Cayce replied in trance, "Rather the desire of the man to force same, and the fulfilling of that as Jesus spoke of same at the supper" (2067-7).

In contrast, authors and leaders at CBN developed a broad campaign to correct what one author, featured on CBN's webpage, referred to as the "*Browning* of Christian History" (Witherington N.d.).¹³ *700 Club* featured numerous segments and CBN.com set up webpages outlining how Biblical and historical sources contradict Dan Brown's romanticized and arguably factually and theologically incorrect reporting of alternative Christianities. For example:

Da Vinci Code says...

The Dead Sea Scrolls along with the Nag Hammadi documents are the earliest Christian records.

History Says...

The Dead Sea Scrolls are purely Jewish documents; there is nothing Christian about them. There is also no evidence any of the Nag Hammadi documents existed before the late second century A.D., with the possible exception of the Gospel of Thomas.

Da Vinci Code says...

"One particularly troubling theme kept recurring in the [Gnostic] gospels. Mary Magdalene. . . More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ" (p. 244).

History Says...

The Gnostic Gospels, a collection of anonymous writings that blended pseudo-Christian ideas with esoteric spirituality, say nothing about Mary and Jesus being married. *(Excerpt from *The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code* by Richard Abanes)

(Christian Broadcasting Network N.d.a.).

¹³ This term is taken from a segment of *The Gospel Code* by Ben Witherington, a book written as a Christian response to Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*.

CBN's condemnation of Brown's creative rewriting of Christian history was tied together with a condemnation of historical and religious sources of information, such as the Gospel of Judas, that contradict their interpretation of Biblical knowledge:¹⁴

We need to realize there are reasons why these texts didn't last, because they were fictions. They were written two centuries after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and we need to call it for what it is, these are heretical texts and they should have no influence on our faith today (Gordon Robertson 2006).

The power of the commentary on these historical events lay in the parachurches' ability to succinctly frame concerns over the theological implications of the text and to refute them with authority and finality. As will be discussed more in chapter 5, both CBN and ARE work to persuade diverse audiences that their particular philosophy or understanding of life and divinity is correct. Although the approaches, messages, and personalities at either organization are very different, both use language and discursive styles to create layered meanings, to downplay messages to some groups while clearly transmitting them to others, and to present issues as poignant and reasonable to many different populations.

While clearly it is impossible to know from speech how it is received by its audience, a great deal can be learned by exploring the "dialogical nature" of the text – that is, the idea that "our discourse occurs in the context of previous (or alternative) utterances or texts and is in dialogue with them, whether explicitly or implicitly" (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995:15). Dialogism focuses attention on the intent and position of the speakers as well as on their reception. Taking up the roles of speaker or addressee is a social process, so it is important to "be on the lookout for indicators of how actors

¹⁴ I say "their" interpretation because CBN's stand on biblical and political issues offers differ from established church interpretations, whether Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, etc. There is room for discussion but much of CBN's core theology is/was developed by Pat Robertson and his family and has evolved over time even within the organization.

take up the roles, discharge and vacate them, and provide openings for others to assume them or closures to prevent them from doing so” (Hanks 1996:208). An utterance has both an author and an addressee, and the author’s/speaker’s intended audience can be seen in the utterance’s addressivity – an essential component which controls both its composition and style (Bakhtin 1999[1986]:132). Addressivity presumes that, as Bakhtin says, once a listener understands the meaning of an utterance, “he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it” (1999[1986]:124).

At the same time the speaker is anticipating the addressee’s response to her/his utterance, s/he cannot control (or often even anticipate) the actual response. Dialogic and multiparty interaction both produce and are produced in context – as Hanks says, “whatever the trajectory of a discourse in society, it never emerges in a vacuum” (1996:218). Instead, it “bumps into and channels through social pathways that preexist it and persist after it has run its course” (Ibid). In other words, once an utterance is produced, it may carry a certain original intent, or follow prefigured paths of reception, like media formations, but eventually they “circulate as objects whose meaning and range of reception is beyond the control of the proximate participants” (Ibid).¹⁵ In this sense, a speaker’s intent can be lost, amplified, or perverted—the utterance can be dismissed, lacking impact, or can take on exceptional meaning for people outside the anticipated trajectory. This conception of social pathways preexisting and persisting is powerful but not entirely complete. The utterance itself may create pathways, connect or destroy them.

¹⁵ Perhaps this project is a good illustration of this phenomenon – my examination of (for example) CBN’s utterances with a particular, critical gaze is most certainly outside the intent or desire of the original speaker (and intended sympathetic listener), and the fact that certain media is desired by CBN to “get their message out” in turn enables me to receive the message as well.

This points to the crux of sociolinguistic study: the dialectical relationship between an utterance and its social context. Mannheim and Tedlock's discussion of dialogism emphasize both the heterogeneity of culture that arises from this continual dialogue as well as the social and institutional embeddedness of dialogic action (1995:3-4). Culture is seen both as inventive/spontaneous and as exercises in/contestations of power, which is located "within a social ontology in which neither individuals nor collectivities are basic units" (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995:3-4, 8). By rethinking the location of culture, their project becomes "one of identifying the social conditions of the emergence of linguistic and cultural forms, of their distribution among speakers, and of subjectivity itself as an embodied constellation of voices" (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995:8). As Gumperz explains:

The verbal system can...be made to refer to a wide variety of objects and concepts. At the same time, verbal interaction is a social process in which utterances are selected in accordance with socially recognized norms and expectations. It follows that linguistic phenomena are analyzable both within the contexts of language itself and within the broader context of social behavior (1972:219).

Gumperz's insight that speaking involves social "contextualization cues" that instruct the receiver how to interpret "what is going on here" implies that there are linguistic codes that are shared among a group of people (Hanks 1996:220-21). Rather than delve into the sticky realm of defining specific "groups", however, many sociolinguists turn to practice theory to help explain how utterances are understood.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus provides the "potential to generate homologous formations across different cultural fields" (Hanks 1987:677; Bourdieu 2003[1977]). Linguistic habitus creates a recurrent grouping of stylistic, thematic, and constructive features, which are understood as genres. The term "speech genre" or "discourse genre"

is a descriptive term that is “greater than the single utterance but less than a language” (Hanks 1996:242). Genres, through their particular construction, impart certain expectations of the speaker and hearer. Regardless of the content of the material, the mere fact that it is transmitted in the style of a particular genre provides information to the listener, often signalling a political or social position which may lend to or detract from the speaker’s authority. Guha gives us an example of this in historical text, an official British document reporting on India. Although, from its form the document appears to be a neutral recording of a political situation, Guha argues that “the indices in this discourse...introduce us to a particular code” which speaks with “the voice of committed colonialism” (1994, p. 346).

Bakhtin distinguishes primary genres, consisting of just one kind of practice, from secondary genres, which combine two or more primary ones. (Hanks 1996, p. 242-43) Primary genres include greetings, jokes, assertions, questions, giving directions, taking oaths, and ordering food, whereas secondary genres typically blend these simpler genres into practices like novels, sermons, closing arguments, public lectures, and debates. Persuasive discussion at CBN and ARE borrows authority from different sources by utilizing discursive genres such as public lecture, debate, sermon, or news broadcast.

Further, the organizations create “short-cuts” in conveying authority and content by utilizing distinct discursive styles. On a smaller scale than genre, yet similarly placed between single utterance and language, these discursive styles provide recognizable cues to their recipients as to the broader authority of the speaker’s references, to elements of subtext in the speaker’s discourse, and to the speaker’s expectations of the community of listeners. Such styles in common use at CBN and ARE include, for example, “common

sense speak”, divine authority received through individual’s “Word of God” (CBN) or “intuition” (ARE), and pseudo-academic styles that borrow from the language and presentational style of scholarly work from fields such as history and archaeology. The conceptualization of shared styles in dialogue presupposes a different construction of “group” – in both parachurches’ cases it is a cyber-construction, since so much of their audiences are connected via Internet, telephone, or television. The conception invokes the image of a constellation of people sharing a particular habitus; at least enough of one to share in understanding particular discursive styles and genres. By combining analysis of language and linguistic cues with social context, CBN and ARE can be read each as “an embodied constellation of voices.” Further, by examining the choice and combination of these styles in use, whether by leaders or members, one can see the myriad ways that cohesion of understanding, mission, and/or value is actively produced.

In the above example of the *700 Club* commentary on the Gospel of Judas, the longer speech (presented and analyzed below) juxtaposes various styles, intelligible to the audience, that provide clear and authoritative messages regarding understandings of true (sources of) knowledge, identification with contemporary and historical figures (suggesting particular configurations of social power), and characterizations of and approaches to Others. These understandings are reinforced from the top of the CBN hierarchy through other speech events directed by CBN leaders (website articles, news reporting, commentaries, etc.) but the messages are echoed in numerous other speech events through and around CBN.

While the parachurches are constructing the Other, they simultaneously produce the Self. Through the dialogues around the *Da Vinci Code* and the Gospel of Judas, both

CBN and ARE operationalize styles and other linguistic cues to produce messages about three specific questions:

1. What is knowledge?
2. How is it made and by whom?
3. What are the implications of and mandated responses to false knowledge?

At the heart of the differences among the parachurches and the secular is not simply what each organization believes but rather what each organization constitutes as legitimate knowledge. At CBN, it is very limited – other historical texts may be of interest, but the only texts directed by God have been assembled into the Old and New Testaments, through a process also directed by God (although it is true that other protestant sects like Mormons have other holy texts, such denominations tend to be looked down upon at CBN.¹⁶ Nevertheless, most at CBN welcome other avenues of knowledge production, such as science-based medicine and technologies, provided they do not conflict with Biblical text and interpretation.¹⁷

At the ARE, however, the array of holy texts is almost unlimited (although all texts are paired/compared with the Cayce Readings).¹⁸ Because the truest guide is internal, the texts that most help the individual in his/her search for God are considered valid, no matter what they are. However, there is a strong sense, inspired by the Readings,

¹⁶ See example later in this chapter.

¹⁷ Chapter 3 explores more in depth what happens at CBN when these conflicts arise.

¹⁸ Today, fewer and fewer people remain who knew Cayce personally, but the organization continues to expand, fostering ties with New Age gurus like Deepak Chopra and holistic health activists like James Gordon, both of whom are regular speakers at ARE conferences. Indeed, the topics focused upon at the ARE often read like a guide to New Age interests: “transpersonal subjects such as holistic health, ancient mysteries, personal spirituality, dreams and dream interpretation, intuition, and philosophy and reincarnation” (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.a.).

that God or a type of ultimate truth and purpose exist objectively, although there are many paths to it. As Cayce illustrated in reading 3004-1:

(Q) Will my studies in AMORC¹⁹ bring me the most in the highly spiritual, or the TAROT - particularly the course on the magical language?

(A) Either of these may bring material help or gain. The SPIRITUAL gain is in the TRUTH that is found in Him, who is the Way, the Truth, the Light. These others are only as light along the way. The truth is ONLY in Him, Jesus the Christ!

As will be explored more later in the paper, Jesus is most often discussed at the ARE as embodying the ultimate truth, the manifestation of God that each person is capable of and so he is the best example of a clear “return to God”, even though, as Cayce’s reading suggested, “there never was a time when there was not a Christ (262-103)” (Van Auken 2007a:4).²⁰

Although Cayce was personally very devoted to Biblical Christianity, and even in his trances he did disparage some pop cultural New Age material,²¹ for the most part the readings and broader organizations support the philosophy that where a source or experience provides insight for the individual, it is considered valid. A classic example from the Readings, recounted by ARE employee Gerald Hamlin, was when someone asked Cayce about the truth of material contained in the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ (Dowling 1997), a book channeled by a nineteenth century American pastor

¹⁹ The Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, more commonly known as the Rosicrucian Order. For more information, see their website: <http://www.amorc.org>.

²⁰ The readings stated that the presence of a Christ during every time meant that “the Holy Spirit was always accessible, but most had lost awareness of this. Jesus’ leaving (death as a human), fulfilled the ‘blood sacrifice,’ bringing the Spirit down upon everyone who made the slightest effort, even Gentiles (to the disciples’ dismay)” (Van Auken 2007: 4).

²¹ Reading 262-2 states:

Question 15 asked by client [341]: To what advantage may we use the ideas presented in the “Song of Sano Tarot” [by Nancy Fullwood] for the benefit of this group?

Answer from Cayce’s Source: It is to be hoped that the sources would be much higher than these, and that they would seek higher! [See 262-2, Par. R1.]

named Levi Dowling, Cayce's response was "it was true for Levi" (interview with author, April 3, 2006).²² Nevertheless, there is an understanding that this variety of subjective paths does ultimately lead to one truth, a truth that is recorded in the ether of the Akashic Records and which was accessed by Edgar Cayce. Although even Cayce was fallible, an "imperfect instrument", he is generally considered by ARE members to be one of the most reliable sources of truth, and his renderings of history, theology, and prophesy are the yardstick by which other sources are measured (ibid). Still, even Cayce encouraged individuals to "be their own psychic", insisting that everyone can access the truth of the divine (including the Akashic Records) on their own, and to rely on anyone else for information, even Cayce himself, is to channel one's messages through someone else's karma and cultural limitations.²³ Through dialogues and study of health, spirituality, and ancient mysteries (including early Christianity), ARE members work through and reconcile the tensions between objective and subjective truths, with discourses borrowed less frequently from religious and political sources and more frequently from academic ones.

The question of what constitutes knowledge for each organization is intimately tied to two larger themes in this dissertation. First, these opposing reactions are very suggestive of underlying differences, not just in each parachurch's approach to holy writ, but also in the broader philosophies that tie together the role of the parachurch; the

²² The verbatim Cayce text is as follows:

(Q) We are told that the Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ is taken directly from the akashic records. Is it historically true, and should I use the facts in my book?

(A) It is the experience of an individual, or of Levi, who was in that experience and wrote from his own experience. To him it was an actual fact (2067-2).

²³ This common expression, "Be your own psychic" is the title of a successful and long-running psychic-training conference. It is loosely attributed to Cayce, although he never used this exact phrase. The concept is attributed to several readings, including 256-2: "These psychic abilities are latent in each and every individual...It may be developed by application, not just thinking - but by applying."

political relationship of institution to religious ideology; and the way knowledge is received, organized, produced. The parachurches' valuation and construction of knowledge establishes a spiritual perspective that is simultaneously deeply political. ARE and CBN, like other academic sources, construct historical figures as interconnected figures with spiritual purposes and particular relations to "Others" but particularly to institutions of power. How the parachurches' understand and align with these figures reveal patterns in how they understand their contemporary missions and relations to social and state institutions of power. As I will discuss in the following section, various constructions of the origins of Christianity depict the Roman state as supportive ally or persecutory threat and depict underground Gnostic Christian groups as dangerous guerillas or heroic grassroots movements, analogous to contemporary struggles with parachurch identity, regulation by the state, and efforts to practice and grow in American society.

Second, although the above examples relate specifically to Christian history, the CBN and ARE, both religious organizations, speak authoritatively on far more than just abstract spiritual matters. Their discussions and practices of religion extend inward, to conceptions of the body and mind, outward, to macrosocial institutions, and sideways, to the relationship between the metaphysical and natural worlds. As a result, the parachurches are constantly abutting, conflicting with, or enlisting secular institutions, simultaneously providing foils for parallel secular organizations and processes. While leaders at ARE and CBN were interpreting and reframing information in *The Da Vinci Code* and lost gospels, at the same time, historians, religious studies experts, and

archaeologists were jumping to do the same thing, and coming to a variety of often contradicting conclusions.

STS and critical theory have for years pointed to the political and humanistic nature of knowledge production, particularly in academic disciplinary arenas like science, where the “supposed neutrality and transparency of objective scientific inquiry” is expected to stand on its own (Franklin 1995:164). The academic field of history, far more self-reflexive, has suffered through decades of critique and defense of its own systems of knowledge production. Although, as David Christian points out, “Historians haven't always been so good at putting their own discipline in context” (2003:437), discussions abound regarding the very possibility of an historical fact and (presuming its possibility) how it can be properly designated. As Richard King points out, “one of the central trends in contemporary thought has been an attack on the distinction between fact and fiction, between the search for truth and the discovery (or deconstruction) of meaning” (1991:171). Whether historians emphasize the fictional nature of history as a cultural construct (see White 1987, Doctorow 1977) or attempt to preserve a distinction between the two constructs and their function in society (see King 1991),²⁴ the construction of historical knowledge is a political endeavor, one that can have powerful consequences.²⁵

²⁴ As King writes:

Fiction no less than history is caught in the nexus of power; put another way, to be concerned with facts and events is not automatically to be complicit in power. Or no more so than is the case with fiction. Secondly, though the distinction between history and fiction is a conventional one, it is a useful, even fruitful distinction and one that is hard to imagine doing without. The ambiguous upshot is that fiction can enrich our understanding of memory; history can restrain the wilder probes and speculations of fiction. We need them both; but we also need to maintain their separate identities, even as we emphasize their conceptual interdependence (1991: 173).

²⁵ As Wagoner says, to theorists such as Edward Said (1978) “we owe the rich development of the insight, ultimately deriving from Gramsci and Foucault, that European colonial conquest was dependent not just upon superior military, political, and economic power, but also upon the power of knowledge” (2003:783).

Knowledge production at ARE and CBN is as political and even more complicated, as their sources of history are mixed with metaphysical sources that are difficult or impossible to confirm. Debates at the parachurches add an element of “belief” to the struggle to distinguish between fact and fiction. Sometimes self-consciously postmodern, other times insistently opposite, members at both organizations struggle simultaneously to privately establish their subjective understandings of factual truth while also struggling to maintain this grounding in the panoply of differing knowledges in secular life.

Beyond simply casting light upon the suppositions and assumptions hidden in the more respected and supposedly neutral authority of secular systems of knowledge production, these very different parachurches similarly reflect secular hegemony. CBN and ARE knowledge production constantly speaks with and against secular forms of knowledge production, in many ways supporting the power and prestige of the secular realm. Despite the literal contestation of secular sources of information, for example the challenges to science best seen in chapters 3 and 4 with CBN’s support of theories of Creationism over evolution and ARE’s support of alternative medicine over occidental, Western practice, the parachurches demonstrate the authority and legitimacy of those same secular sources by mimicking and borrowing academic titles, sources, data, and general appearances in an effort to strengthen their own arguments. Although the parachurches’ exclusion from secular institutions is apparent in multiple ways, such as the restrictions on their engagement with politics due to their status as religious non-profit organizations, this exclusion can be insidiously subtle in other realms, such as academic science and history. An example that will be discussed later in chapter 4 is that

of the contradictory relationship ARE has with well-respected Egyptian archaeologists. As an ARE author writes, despite personal interest in the Cayce material and differing historical record, the archaeologists deliberately refuted information that would have supported Cayce's history, "holding to the accepted line—at least in public. In private, both retained open minds and continued to keep their eyes alert for any evidence that Cayce was right" (Van Auken 2010:28). ARE members watch with frustration at the lack of public support for exploration of Cayce's ideas about ancient Egypt, despite what they believe to be increasing evidence in the secular academic archaeological record.

In addition to reflecting on the organizations' relationship with the secular, this chapter also examines their own self-construction. Focusing on discussions of early Christian history, this chapter explores how either parachurch characterizes and relates to the early Christian church and competing heretical sects such as the Gnostics. The process of narrating and sourcing history by various members of each organization actively produces a coherent portrait of two groups' identities and their political relationships to each other, mainstream culture, and secular state power.

Resurrecting Christian origins – Orthodoxy and Heresy

One of the primary sources of the parachurches' identities, perhaps not surprisingly, is the history of Jesus Christ and his followers. In secular academia, every new discovery of ancient text brings new debates and theories about early Christianity. ARE/CBN both participate in and sidestep these debates with their own interpretations of texts and events from that time. Ancient religious texts, current spiritual manifestations, archaeological findings and historical documents are mined, interpreted, assembled and reconstructed through the parachurches, all in an effort to build a logically cohesive

narrative answering questions of what happened, why, and how it is relevant to today's life purpose.

The Christian traditions, as Religious Studies scholar Bart Ehrman points out, inherited from Judaism a focus on holy writ (2005:19-20). Thus it is not surprising that various denominations and sects have developed primarily from disagreements over which texts are holy and which are heretical, or over which interpretation is closest to God's word, or over how to reconcile the numerous contradictions that, also not surprisingly, have developed in the texts over 2000 years of differing religious perspectives, transcription mistakes, and political manipulation of the text. Because both ARE and CBN were Christian in origin (although, as described above, non-Christians still play an active role, particularly in the ARE), both share an organizational focus on the New Testament, and in particular the four Gospel depictions of Christ, especially the four accounts of the life and death of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.²⁶ Nevertheless, their perspectives on the meanings and histories of those texts are radically different.

In addition, within the last 100 years or so, new discoveries of previously unknown ancient texts have stirred great popular interest and have elicited very different reactions from the two parachurches. These texts, which include the texts at Nag Hammadi and the Dead Sea Scrolls, among others, often speak to events and people not mentioned in the orthodox Bible, and frequently provide perspectives contradictory to the Bible and to accepted Christian doctrines.

²⁶ Of course the ARE's main purpose is to study the text of Cayce's 14,000 psychic readings; however, while in trance, Edgar Cayce frequently referred to the gospels of the New Testament, and they are still considered a primary source of spiritual information. Both organizations also have a shared non-textual, "experiential" component to their faiths, whether it is "speaking in tongues" and channeling the Holy Spirit at CBN, or practicing transcendental meditation at ARE.

Despite the incredible diversity reflected in the various Jesus-inspired texts, in many ways there is a simple functional dichotomy between those declared holy by the early Christian church and those that were excluded as heretical. Those included as orthodox, the four main gospels plus other writings, including those by the Roman disciple Paul, were interpreted as touting 1) worship of Jesus as God not man; 3) salvation as exclusively through belief in Jesus' divinity, and often 3) stratified culture with hierarchies within the home and state.²⁷

In contrast, other texts discovered at Nag Hammadi and elsewhere in Egypt pointed to a very different Christian history and theology that had largely been suppressed or forgotten since the first few centuries after Jesus' death. These texts were grouped together by early Church founders as heretical, but, as Elaine Pagels points out, the texts were written by groups who shared a Jewish heritage and who "claim to offer traditions about Jesus that are secret, hidden from 'the many' who constitute what, in the second century, came to be called the 'catholic church'" (1979:xix). Today these Christians are referred to as "Gnostics", a name derived from the Greek *gnosis* which is generally translated as "knowledge" but which refers not to rational knowledge but rather to "insight," the "intuitive process of knowing oneself" (1979:ibid).²⁸

²⁷ Even where the gospels did not explicitly support these interpretations, they at least did not refute them or directly contradict them.

²⁸ Pagels writes:

The Greek language distinguishes between scientific or reflective knowledge ("He knows mathematics") and knowing through observation or experience ("He knows me"), which is *gnosis*. As the gnostics use the term, we could translate it as "insight," for *gnosis* involves an intuitive process of knowing oneself. And to know oneself, they claimed, is to know human nature and human destiny. According to the gnostic teacher Theodotus, writing in Asia Minor (c. 140-160), the gnostic is one has come to understand "who we were, and what we have become; where we were... whither we are hastening; from what we are being released; what birth is, and what is rebirth" (1979:xix).

The process of coming to know oneself is at the core of Gnostic texts because of the conviction that all people have the potential to access the divine through themselves, as the gnostic teacher Monoimus recounts:

Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, "My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body." Learn the sources of sorrow: joy, love, hate . . . If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself (Pagels 1979:xvii).

As Stephan Hoeller suggests, Gnostic Christians held a “conviction that direct, personal and absolute knowledge of the authentic truths of existence is accessible to human beings, and, moreover, that the attainment of such knowledge must always constitute the supreme achievement of human life” (N.d.[1982]:11).

It is this location of divinity as accessible from within the individual that most directly contradicts the early church’s orthodoxy as determined by the Gospel of John. In *Beyond Belief*, Pagels argues that, through comparison of the Gospel of John and the gnostic Gospel of Thomas, found at Nag Hammadi, the two were written in dialogue with each other, to defend their positions and argue against the other’s:

John says explicitly that he writes “so that you may *believe, and believing, may have life* in [Jesus’] name.” What John opposed, as we shall see, includes what the Gospel of Thomas teaches—that God’s light shines not only in Jesus but, potentially at least, in everyone. Thomas’s gospel encourages the hearer not so much to *believe in Jesus*, as John requires, as to *seek to know God* through one’s own, divinely given capacity, since all are created in the image in God (2003:34).

Additionally, the gnostic gospels, such as those of Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene, also reflected more complicated theologies and politics that contradicted Hebrew and Roman social norms. For example, the Pistis Sophia recounted an interaction between Jesus and Mary Magdalene during which Jesus states “that whoever the Spirit inspires in divinely ordained to speak, whether man or woman” (Pagels 1979:65). As Pagels points

out, this would have been incredibly controversial to both Jews and Romans of the time, and in fact “Orthodox Christians retaliated with alleged ‘apostolic’ letters and dialogues that make the opposite point” (ibid).

The term “gnostic” is itself a point of contention among academics. The label has been applied to a variety of religious groups existing around the time of Christ, some of whom were followers of Jesus and some of whom weren’t. Yet while academic scholars are currently debating how best to define the term “gnostic” and if and where it applies to the texts at Nag Hammadi,²⁹ the term has recently taken on a life of its own in American public spheres, largely due to the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code*.³⁰ It is this public fascination with alternative Christian histories that has sparked response and controversy from both CBN and ARE. In the following sections, each organization’s understandings of Gnosticism and its relationship to early Christianity will be given, along with the organizations’ explanations of the relevance of those histories to members’ spiritual practices today. By paying particular attention to the language with which each organization addresses Christian and gnostic history, the next sections explore how messages and valuations are implicit in the organizations’ histories and commentaries.

²⁹ Elaine Pagels describes the struggle contemporary scholars are engaged with to define how and whether the term “gnostic” applies to the ancient documents found at Nag Hammadi, “Insofar as *gnostic* refers to one who ‘knows,’ that is, who seeks experiential insight, it may characterized many of these sources accurately enough; but more often the ‘church fathers’ used the term derisively to refer to those they dismissed as people claiming to ‘know it all’” (2003:33; see also Williams 1996 and King 2003).

³⁰ As examples, see the article “The Da Vinci Code’s Shaky Foundation: Gnostic Texts” which argues, “Gnosticism is now in vogue. But people who treat the Gnostic gospels as history are buying into liberal revisionism” (Hitchcock 2003). The less polemical article “Why is Gnosticism Important Today?” also sources Brown’s novel as the reason for current interest in Gnosticism, “It appears that Gnosticism became popular with the interest in *The Da Vinci Code*, but perhaps because its teachings are striking a responsive chord with us today, it continues to grow in interest. For example, since January, 2005, there have been over one million visitors to the Gnostic website Gnostic teachings.org” (McLaughlin 2007).

Talking Back to Judas at CBN

A month before the release of the feature film version of the bestselling *Da Vinci Code*, an historical document was unearthed that further romanticized Biblical conspiracy. In April 2006, information contained on a 1700-year-old parchment was released to the public, after being in private hands for more than 30 years (Wilford and Goodstein 2006). The document purported to be the Gospel of Judas Iscariot, the story of the disciple who betrayed Jesus to the Romans. The newly recovered gospel conveys the doctrine that Judas, far from being a loathed traitor, was Jesus' favorite, and the only disciple who understood that Jesus' power was in his destiny to shed his material form. The gospel hints that Judas acted at Jesus' request, or at least with his approval, in triggering the events that led to the crucifixion and resurrection. This new portrayal of Judas, which contradicts 2000 years of Christian doctrine, sparked a media sensation and created instant controversy among religious leaders and scholars. In Virginia Beach, CBN and ARE both moved quickly to interpret the new religious text for their respective audiences.

At CBN, leaders leapt to debunk the new gospel as misleading and heretical. On *The 700 Club*, a brief news story about the gospel was followed by commentary by the host, Pat Robertson's son, CBN C.E.O. Gordon Robertson.³¹

1. This was labeled heretical in 180 AD by Irenaeus, a bishop who wrote
2. against heresies and this is one book that he listed and scholars have long
3. wondered where it was, because copies didn't exist. And now we've found
4. a copy and somehow or other in the hysteria going on today with DaVinci
5. Code, it's suddenly somehow popular to take heretical documents, written
6. by a sect, who located themselves in the desert outside of Egypt in the
7. second century. And they seemed to love to take these names. They took
8. pseudonyms in order to enhance the veracity of what they were trying to
9. write.

³¹ Gordon Robertson succeeded his father (who remains chairman) as C.E.O. of CBN in 2007. To avoid confusion, I will refer to him as "Gordon" to distinguish references to Pat "Robertson".

10. The basic heresy is simple: It's not "by faith through grace that we are
11. saved" is what they're saying. It's what Jesus did plus this special secret
12. knowledge that he would only reveal to the select few. And that's the
13. basic Gnostic heresy: gnosticism, gnosis, knowledge, there's some secret
14. knowledge that needs to be imparted. It's more than just the death and
15. resurrection of Jesus Christ and our belief in that; you've got to have
16. something else. And, rightly so, the early Church condemned it.
17. But what is amazing to me is the number of these heretics and these
18. heretical texts that seem to be coming out in the popular press today and
19. how it seems to be leading people astray. And there were so many of
20. them in the second and third centuries because of the severe persecution of
21. the Roman Empire against the Christian Church that they were sort of
22. allowed to flourish in light of the persecution. But you don't hear about
23. some of the really wackier ones. There was one in Rome that believed that
24. if they were martyred they would go instantly to heaven. It wasn't just by
25. grace or through faith but you also had to add martyrdom. So they would
26. intentionally try to get themselves martyred. And they would waylay
27. travelers on the road and they had a club in their hands and they called the
28. club the sword of David, and they would go and beat the travelers saying,
29. "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord" as they beat them. And what they
30. intended was for the travelers to then turn on them and kill them and then
31. they would go straight to heaven. Well, that sect didn't last too long.
32. We need to realize there are reasons why these texts didn't last, because
33. they were fictions. They were written two centuries after the death and
34. resurrection of Jesus, and we need to call it for what it is, these are
35. heretical texts and they should have no influence on our faith today
(Robertson, Gordon 2006).

Although it appears to be a simple dismissal of the new text as contradicting CBN's core beliefs, Gordon uses a verbal talent comparable to his father's in wrapping several additional messages into his public address.³² To start, Gordon denounces the Gospel of Judas as "basic heresy" (line 10) in its contradiction of Biblical text that provides the core of Christian theology:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not as result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His

³² Alec Foege calls Pat Robertson's talent for seemingly neutral utterances "backward verbal arabesque": creating utterances that are packed with hidden significance but which overall sound "so damned *sensible*" (1996:111).

workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Anything other than belief in “the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” (lines 14-15) violates Christian doctrine. Considering the simplicity of this fact, it’s curious why Gordon did not stop there. Instead, he used persuasive tactics common to the CBN community that blended speech styles and non-doctrinal sources to both bolster his argument and dismantle his opponents’ positions.

Reverence

First, Gordon, along with Robertson and many others at CBN, frequently strengthen their positions by referring to both Christian and non-Christian sources of information using *Reverent Speech*.³³ Reverent Speech combines two elements. One element is that the truthfulness of a source is presented as obvious (even though the same source might later be dismantled as incorrect or illegitimate). The other element is that there is an implicit reprimand against questioning this particular source.

In the above quote, Gordon draws on precedence set by the authority of the early church to affirm his reading of the Gospel as heresy. His reference to Irenaeus, the bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul, as an authority on heretical texts is an obscure choice but an appropriate one according to religious historians. In fact, the first hint of the existence of a gospel according to Judas came from Irenaeus’ firm condemnation of it in his five-volume diatribe against followers of false doctrines (Ehrman 2006). Although the four New Testament gospels are the oldest to survive, it is unclear how many accounts were written about Jesus because many “were eventually destroyed as heretical – that is, for teaching the ‘wrong ideas’ – or were lost in antiquity out of general lack of interest”

³³ This is a discursive style that I am designating here.

(Ehrman 2006:80-81). Many accounts were written soon after the four accepted gospels, including the gospels of Thomas, Philip, Mary Magdalene, and, of course, Judas (ibid). One of the greatest influences on the establishment of sacred versus heretical Christian texts was Irenaeus, a bishop in what is now considered to be France. At a time when followers of Jesus splintered into numerous sects, persecuted by Romans and other religious groups and often divisive among themselves, Irenaeus sought to unify Christian groups. He worked both to institutionalize an orthodox “four formed gospel” of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John while campaigning against the “heretics” who did not adopt it (Pagels 2003:81). To protect his message, he declared the four gospels the only genuine Christian texts, and demanded that “believers destroy all those ‘innumerable secret and illegitimate writings’ that his opponents were always invoking” (Ibid:147).

Irenaeus’ attempts to create a “catholic church”³⁴ united by a canon was substantially furthered more than 130 years after his writings, when Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, declaring amnesty for Christians through his edict of toleration in 313 (Pagels 2003:168). This amnesty only extended, however, “to those who belonged to what may have become, by his time, the best-organized and largest group, which he called the ‘lawful and most holy catholic church,’” or those who followed Irenaeus’ four-gospel legacy (Ibid:168). Constantine, in his attempt to consolidate state and church power, funded the creation of the Nicene Creed that assembled twenty-seven writings into what is now considered the New Testament (Ibid:170). The support of the Roman state effectively authenticated a Christian church under a uniform doctrine of faith and practice.

³⁴ Polycarp and Irenaeus both used the term “catholic,” meaning “universal” to describe their vision of a united and uniform church. See Pagels 2003:80.

Gordon's reference to Irenaeus was an alignment with the early church against Gnosticism as heretical in its understanding of salvation as requiring more than belief: "there's some secret knowledge that needs to be imparted" (lines 13-14). As Gordon affirms, "rightly so, the early Church condemned it" (line 16). In numerous speeches and writings by other members of the CBN community also look to "early church Fathers" to support the infallibility and exclusivity of the New Testament texts, for example:

...it is significant to observe that the historic church tradition through the centuries has held the Scriptures to be God's infallible word. The early church Fathers affirmed such; for example, Irenaeus claimed that "the Scriptures are perfect, seeing that they are spoken by God's Word and his Spirit," and Augustine wrote concerning the Scriptures of his conviction that "no one of the authors has erred in anything, in writing." Such total acceptance of Scripture implicitly undergirds all the great creeds and confessions, and becomes explicit in later Protestant and Roman Catholic formularies... The infallibility of God's written word has been generally affirmed through the centuries by the great church traditions (Williams N.d.).

The reverence with which "the early church Fathers" is spoken is echoed in discussions of the "Christian Faith, of the "Founding Fathers" of America, of politician Ronald Regan, the "Great Communicator" after whom a conference is named at Regent University, of Pat Robertson, referred to on CBN's campus as "Mr. Robertson", and other CBN leaders, and (of course) of the Bible. The latter is so profound that even a discussion of its writing bears certain rules respecting its presumed infallibility. A seven-chapter document regarding the Scriptures, written by a Regent University theologian and posted on CBN's Spiritual Life webpage, presented an argument at length that "the Scriptures are unalterable, infallible, and completely trustworthy" (Williams N.d.). This perspective was clearly shared by the bulk of the CBN community. The infallibility of the New Testament is in fact one of the core tenets expected to be accepted by employees, students, and volunteers at CBN and Regent (see chapter 1), and the culture on campus

certainly reflects this belief. When sitting in a class at Regent I made what I felt at the time was an historically correct observation reflecting scholar Bart Ehrman's explanation of how human error and politics contributed to numerous Biblical contradictions, that the Bible may have been inspired by God but was still written by humans. An audible gasp, followed by uncomfortable silence, followed my remark (author's notes, October 2006).

However, it is not only Biblical and Christian sources that are met with reverence in persuasive argument. Very frequently secular wells of information, such as academic history and science, are also spoken of as self-evident sources supporting one's argument. As discussed at length in chapter 3, this reverence of secular knowledge often presents as a *pseudoacademic-speak* or *pseudoscience-speak* because the discourse takes a similar form and uses similar language as academic or scientific discourse but does not follow the same logical or methodological systems of interrogating hypotheses and carefully cited sources.³⁵

In a neutral manner suggestive of a history textbook, Gordon provides details (albeit with no references or sources) on the existence of Gnostics, "there were so many of them in the second and third centuries because of the severe persecution of the Roman Empire against the Christian Church that they were sort of allowed to flourish in light of the persecution" (lines 19-22). To illustrate the illegitimacy of this multitude of "sects",

³⁵ These systems and practices are of course in the most idealized forms of academic and scientific discourses and are considered to be most clearly seen when peer arguments or data are challenged. For example, in *The Panda's Thumb*, Steven Jay Gould revisits craniometry as a "scientific" field of inquiry and he systematically challenges the integrity of the hypothesis, the preexisting biases of the scientists, the reproducibility of the findings, and the validity of conclusions based on the findings (1992). Throughout this process is an intense examination of a cohesive logical system that makes no/few assumptions or leaps of faith without clearly documenting them as separate interpretive practices. As will be discussed in chapter 3, pseudoscience-speak uses similar interrogatory practice but masks interpretive practices with predetermined conclusions based on unquestioned truth, for example, the veracity of Biblical knowledge. As a result, scientific investigation is bent toward proving an article of faith rather than discovering unknown and possibly revolutionary conclusions.

he documents the theology and behavior of a particular group of Gnostics (again with no references or sources):

22. But you don't hear about
23. some of the really wackier ones. There was one in Rome that believed that
24. if they were martyred they would go instantly to heaven. It wasn't just by
25. grace or through faith but you also had to add martyrdom. So they would
26. intentionally try to get themselves martyred. And they would waylay
27. travelers on the road and they had a club in their hands and they called the
28. club the sword of David, and they would go and beat the travelers saying,
29. "Praise the Lord, praise the Lord" as they beat them. And what they
30. intended was for the travelers to then turn on them and kill them and then
31. they would go straight to heaven. Well, that sect didn't last too long.

Presenting Gnostics in this manner allows Gordon to offer a set of facts that supposedly stand on their own. In fact he is conflating all Gnostics as opportunistic groups that are all conflated with one radical (and impliedly ridiculous) sect. There is no mention of the source of his details so there is no way to critique them.

Gordon's reference to the historical record as undisputed fact is something that is repeated in numerous other utterances to support broader argument. However, many of these other utterances strengthen their position further with specific references to "scholars", "historians", or specific authors (frequently alongside mention of their credentials). This discourse strategy is extremely prevalent through conversations and writings refuting the historical suppositions of *The Da Vinci Code*. The example given at the beginning of this chapter is taken from an elaborate refutation of the historical material presented in the novel. As listed above:

Da Vinci Code says...

The Dead Sea Scrolls along with the Nag Hammadi documents are the earliest Christian records.

History Says...

The Dead Sea Scrolls are purely Jewish documents; there is nothing Christian about them. There is also no evidence any of the Nag Hammadi documents existed before the late second century A.D., with the possible exception of the Gospel of

Thomas.

Da Vinci Code says...

"One particularly troubling theme kept recurring in the [Gnostic] gospels. Mary Magdalene. . . More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ" (p. 244).

History Says...

The Gnostic Gospels, a collection of anonymous writings that blended pseudo-Christian ideas with esoteric spirituality, say nothing about Mary and Jesus being married.* (Excerpt from *The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code* by Richard Abanes)

(Christian Broadcasting Network N.d.a.). In this discussion, "History" takes on a life of its own, speaking for itself in contrast to the fictions presented by Dan Brown. History says that Browns' data about Jewish and Christian texts is incorrect. History is further supported by a specific cite from an author (who is presumed to be an authority but is not a scholar).

In another example, a text supporting CBN's position against the heretical material in *The Da Vinci Code* was excerpted and placed on CBN.com:

No scholars that I know, whatever their theological persuasion, think that the canonical Gospels are from any later than the last half of the first century A.D. (or possibly in the case of John's Gospel, the first few years of the second century). Since Gnostic thought only came to the fore in the middle and later parts of the second century A.D., it's not surprising that the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary did not arise earlier (Witherington N.d.).

Borrowing the weight of "scholars", Witherington emphasizes the historical primacy of the "canonical Gospels" and the secondary development of Gnostic Gospels. The implication is that written material developed simultaneously with its particular theology and the earlier material (reflective of CBN's orthodox Christianity) was therefore the more historically and theologically accurate. In all of these examples of persuasion, whether referring to *fact*, *scholars*, or *history*, secular knowledge is presented in a manner of similar reverence and infallibility, with unquestioned authority and support for CBN's shared theological and political position.

Ridicule

The partner to *reverence* discourse is its opposite, *ridicule*. In a manner similarly devoid of academic or scientific sourcing, opposition is frequently dismissed using ridicule and fear. The ridicule discourse helps to build an argument by playing down the authority, legitimacy, factuality, and relevance of a text and by maligning and ridiculing its followers. In the first paragraph of Gordon's commentary on the Gospel of Judas he denounced the gospel as heretical and therefore unworthy of study or discussion (line 2), he fictionalized the Gospel by conflating intrigue in the Gospel with public "hysteria" over the previously debunked DaVinci Code (line 4), and he described the gospel as one written by a "sect" (which evokes images of cults and Branch Davidians) who falsely claimed the name of a disciple in order to deceive readers as to the truth of their message (line 6). Gordon's later reference to a "wackier" (line 23) Gnostic group clearly sets it up as idiotic, and the fact that Gordon locates this Judas "sect" "in the desert outside of Egypt in the second century" further diminishes their credibility, as he implies that they weren't simply outside the holy land of what is now Israel, they were a fringe group living in unsuitable terrain outside of civilized (albeit non-Christian) land.³⁶

Ridicule assists with labeling, adding weight to the "otherness" of people, ideas, religions, etc.; frequently paired with "exposure" of non-Christian origins to deflate value. In other situations, ridicule can be dropped and simply the non-Christian nature can be exposed to stand for itself. In one lecture I attended on Regent University's campus, the professor repeatedly drew laughs by making snide and derogatory comments about political theorists who were atheist, liberal, or French (a nationality especially reviled on

³⁶ It is a bit unclear why Gordon makes this supposition – he appears to conflate the location of the sect with the location where the document was found.

campus for its lack of support in Bush's "War on Terror" in Iraq). The barrage of ridicule against the individual theorists lent weight to the professor's (and students') dismissal of the theories themselves. A common theme throughout the Law School and School of Government was a shared concern over and disrespect for social theories and decisions that were not based on Christian worldview. Ridicule of non-Christians lent support to these concerns.

The clear message from is that which does not have origins in the authentic and true gospels has no worth. This is both affirmed and produced through the various ways Gnosticism is defined at CBN. In addition to descriptions of Gnostics such as that given by Gordon which focuses on their absurd behavior, other descriptions emphasize the foreign origins, non-Christian, and even the non-*religious* nature of Gnosticism:

Gnosticism was an attempt to add to Christianity an essentially Eastern worldview dressed up with Christian language. It was presented to the Roman world as the true Gospel—complete with endless mysteries that only those with secret knowledge could unravel. Many unsuspecting people were enthralled with Gnostic writings, particularly their sometimes gory and salacious initiation ceremonies. Christian pastors and theologians repeatedly rejected all forms of Gnosticism, until, by the middle of the third century, it had all but disappeared (Colson 2006).³⁷

This statement accomplishes, in the first two sentences, to highlight that Gnosticism is actually "Eastern" (read: unfamiliar to "Western" civilization), "dressed up with Christian language" (read: a wolf in sheep's clothing, with no real ties to the Christian religion), "presented...as the true Gospel" (read: false doctrine deliberately attempting to deceive), "complete with endless mysteries that only those with secret knowledge could

³⁷ Colson is unaffiliated with CBN but his commentary on Gnosticism and the Da Vinci Code is still posted on CBN. Further, Colson is a very popular Christian author whose views are shared by many at CBN. In at least one classroom his writings (intended for the general public) are used as graduate-level textbooks.

unravel” (read: fictional and inaccessible as a mystery novel or, perhaps, Scientology?)³⁸.

In at least four ways, the otherness and foreignness of gnosticism is emphasized until its danger is revealed (its enthrallment of “unsuspecting people”) and its short-lived fate is approved, “Christian pastors and theologians repeatedly rejected all forms of Gnosticism, until, by the middle of the third century, it had all but disappeared” (Colson 2006). In fact, the resuscitation of Gnosticism in public interest is attributed again and again to the fictional, and historically inaccurate, *Da Vinci Code*, highlighting again the ridiculous, salacious, and false nature of Gnosticism itself.

Common Sense

Another persuasive style, implicit in Gordon’s speech but explicit in many others’, is that of *common sense*. This style allows the author to present information as self-evident in its truth and logic, making the argument again less available for questioning and attack, as the opposing position must be, by definition, insensible. The common sense approach is frequently used to undermine questions that appear sensible by countering them with straw man arguments that demand agreement. In many cases, advice is offered as to how to use common sense to respond to and make nonsensical opposing questions. In the following dialogue, the CBN.com Program Director is interviewing the author of *The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities*:

For the average Christian, what is their best argument to defend the accuracy of the New Testament?

I actually think the best argument is to look at the behaviors of those who were closest to Jesus that we know about. ...The New Testament texts

³⁸ The non-religious nature of Gnosticism is also emphasized in an interview posted on CBN.com: “Gnosticism comes from the Greek word for gnosis which means knowledge. It is a religion that claims to have secret knowledge above and beyond what most people have associated with religion” (Carpenter N.d.).

make it clear that something changed them. ... The very Paul who persecuted the Church and tried to remove Christians, put his life on the line and according to tradition he was also crucified as a result of defending his faith. If you knew you made it up ... why would you die for it? That puts us into a plausibility position. What is more plausible to believe ... that the early Church made this up and then died for it, or, this really happened and that explains the transformation (Carpenter N.d.)?

Because presumably no person with common sense would be so committed to a made up story as to die for it, the logical response to this two-option question is that the events of the New Testament must be literally true. There is no room here for other possibilities, like perhaps the authors of the New Testament were politically motivated in their writings, or perhaps they were representing what they believed to be true but which differed from the experienced truth of other people involved in these events. The dichotomy has been established and common sense dictates that one answer bears much more weight than the other. Examples of this style are exceedingly prevalent and will be discussed more at length in chapter 3.³⁹

Belief

Of course the last refuge of argument at CBN is the core of Christian faith: faith or *belief*, whether intellectually plausible or not. Belief by its very definition is not expected to be plausible – it is frequently seen as a test of faith against ridicule, irrationality, even contradiction. Since the accepted premise of belief at CBN is “that the Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and precept” (Christian Broadcasting Network N.d.b.), scholarly questions over the accuracy of the Bible become a test of faith.

...How do we know whether the New Testament as Christians know it is completely accurate [sic]? Man is frail and is prone to mistakes. Isn't it possible that some of these early church fathers could have made errors?

³⁹ Examples from chapter 3 pertain specifically to discussions of evolution and creation science.

...How do you prove truth? In some ways, when you are not dealing with science it is a very hard thing to do. So, what you are dealing with is that you want your hands on the best sources. You want your hands on those sources that the closest to what takes place. That is why the apostolic roots are so important... Then, the next thing is to ask yourself whether there is a coherence in what is going on in these texts. Do they make sense alongside one another? The answer to that question is yes. And the last thing is, does this explanation have more plausibility than other explanations for putting this together. Because you are dealing with the humanities and not the sciences you cannot come up with 100 percent proof. There is no experiment you can run that can replay the First Century. So, you are left in a situation where you are dealing with the plausibility of what is going on. The last factor, which is important theologically, but which most people don't even think about is the role of spirit in opening up a person's heart to what is going on in these texts. This is because of the claims that God is active in certain ways, even unusual ways. For some people this is a hurdle that they cannot get past (Carpenter N.d.).

The Politics of True Knowledge

The various discourses around the topic of early Christianity do not simply present the understanding of history shared at CBN, they actively create a shared CBN identity, establishing and reinforcing systems of belief, culture, and politics. Although many of these discussions are issued “top-down” through media that does not foster discussion or response, themes connect to conversations held throughout the CBN community.

The Christian Compass and Fear of Secular Knowledge

At the core (and as established above), there is a uniformity of belief in biblical text as the sole source of divine information and history. As one Regent professor, Dr. Milton, affirmed, despite a proliferation of other early texts, only those accepted into the Bible were deemed on good authority to be legitimate. Milton, like most at CBN who commented on early Christianity, unquestioningly accept that early Christian authority as

valid and accept the Bible as an infallible sources of truth. There is no postmodern question of subjectivity here. In a government class I attended at Regent, we discussed notions of cultural relativism implied through the term “Christian worldview.” “I don’t like that term, ‘Christian worldview,’” commented the professor, “it implies that I have one worldview in equal standing among many. I don’t have a ‘worldview’, I have the Truth” (author’s notes, August 2006). For the Robertson, and for most of those who flock to CBN’s various entities, “Truth” (i.e. true knowledge) is an objective reality.⁴⁰

The problem with “belief” (as writer Kevin Smith remarked through his film “dogma” in the chapter’s introductory quote) is that one cannot argue with it; it is self-justifying. There is a type of reverence of reverence because the belief marked by reverent speech becomes untouchable by debate or one becomes, by definition, a non-believer. This is why it is so tricky to argue with the Gospel of John, why it is so difficult to dismantle arguments supportive of belief – any commonsense or secular information can be interpreted as tests of faith.⁴¹

In fact, the bolstering of belief’s legitimacy using reverent speech when referring to sources and ideas that support Christian doctrine dovetails with a broader fundamentalist Christian culture of non-questioning. In February 2007, I was speaking to a friend who was raised in a fundamentalist Christian church, and I was complaining about how, in a class at Regent University the previous semester, I felt I was one of the only people in the class who pushed the professor on his statements and asked questions

⁴⁰ It may be interesting to note here that, despite the objective truth of the word of God, there is a lot of contention over who can perceive the word of God today and how it is received. Pat Robertson has made some very inflammatory predictions based on the word of God that he received through individual prayer.

⁴¹ As an example of this, see chapter 3 for a discussion of Creation Science and a commonly-made supposition that dinosaur fossils are a test of faith in Biblical literalness.

where I felt they were obvious. Susan's response was very insightful, pertaining to conservative Christianity in general but to her upbringing in southeastern Virginia in particular, "the whole culture, growing up, was about *not* asking, so it's no wonder it's hard to get Regent students to think critically" (author's notes, February 2007). Susan reflected on how the authority of parents, her pastor, her former husband, and her teachers was all reinforced through various Christian teachings but was part of a broader hierarchy that discouraged interrogation and questioning in lieu of devotion and belief.

Nevertheless, questions arise, such as those inspired by the Gospel of Judas on the fallibility of early Christian founders. How these questions are resolved is productive -- of history, of knowledge, of misled or evil non-believing "Others", and, most importantly, of the CBN "Self". These processes operate in tandem -- binaries of true versus false history or self versus other. A primary example is through Gordon's addressing of the Gospel of Judas. On one hand, he debunks it on theological grounds, suggesting that the gospel is false because it claims that it is not "by faith through grace that we are saved" (line 10) but rather it is part of Gnosticism, whose followers believed that salvation came through secret or inner knowledge. However, Gordon Robertson takes the extra step of painting the Gospel as not just heretical but fictional, akin to Dan Brown's novel *The DaVinci Code*, and as ridiculous, akin to misguided suicide cults. This step is deliberately divisive, to reify who is correct and who is not. This positioning, the need to take a stance, is reflected on campus in conversations, particularly around one's commitment to Christianity. "Why were we given free will?" posed one professor, answering, "so that we would make the right choice" (author's notes, September 2006). As one Dean at Regent said, when asking an ambivalent student to take a stand on a political issue, "The

most dangerous place to be is the middle of the road” (author’s notes, March 2006). Making the right choice, however, means traversing through competing systems of knowledge production in the secular world.

Secular academics, scientists, and politicians pose a threat simply because they do not share the Christian belief system that forms the basic guide to navigating the world. The necessary engagement with secular society means dabbling in secular sources but this gets tricky. As one government professor at Regent indicated, how can you trust theories from political theorists who do not share your Christian understandings of humanity, life’s purpose, and global prophecies (author’s notes, November 2006)? Secular sources are frequently drawn upon at CBN to support the authority of their statements or legitimacy of their positions, but the sources themselves are ultimately untrustworthy in contrast to Bible.

As Regent Professor Thomas Winston pointed out in a Government class, “There are a lot of false doctrines out there today—a lot of ‘loosey-goosey’ stuff...so, how can you know the will of God?” (author’s notes, March 18, 2006). Winston’s solution was a guide that he called “the Christian Compass” (ibid, see inset diagram). “We both should and shouldn’t make a big thing about it,” explained Winston, “I never wrestled with the will of God but it is very important to me. I had the opportunity to run for office but knew it wasn’t God’s will” (ibid). He explained, “life is like a wheel with four spokes. God must be at the center” (ibid). The four spokes are Prayer (turning to God for help), Fellowship (“Do you have the right relationship with the local church; do you submit to the authority of a preacher?”), the Bible (as the primary, literal, and infallible source of doctrine), and Witnessing (“You must give out—don’t be like a sponge, be like a

fountain”) (ibid). “God’s will is not a mystery,” Winston concluded, “If we do these four things, God’s Will will be self-evident” (ibid).

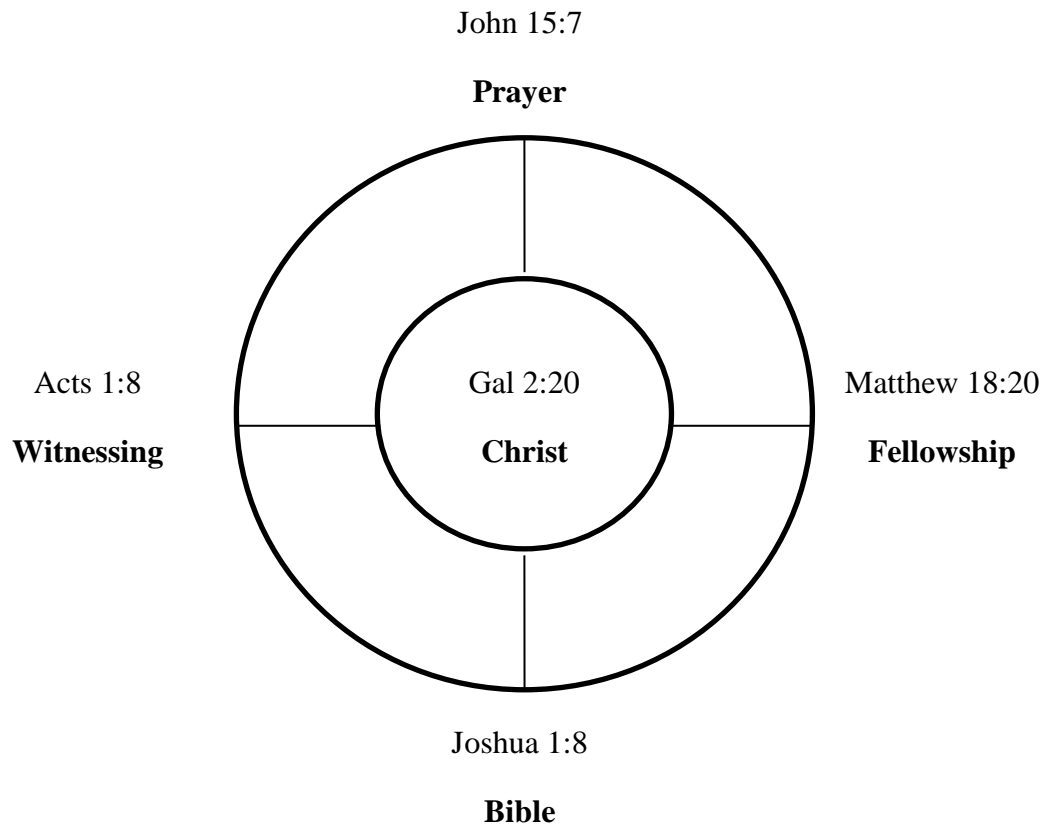


Figure 4: The Christian Compass, as perceived by a professor at Regent University.

As the class mulled over this internal process, the professor transitioned from discussing the unreliable bases of secular sources of information to discussing the unreliable decision-making of secular politicians. After taking a vote as to how students would characterize Congress (the majority agreed with General Schwarzkopf’s description of Congress as “the largest adult daycare” he’d seen), Professor Winston asked “how do you want decisions made?” (author’s notes, March 18, 2006). The class agreed that they ideally wanted politicians both to use a Bible-based decision-making

process such as the Christian Compass⁴² and to follow the will of the people. The frequently expressed presumption that the “will of the people” would reflect CBN’s belief system is a common one. Pat Robertson and others often present fundamentalist/charismatic Christians as the “true majority” in America, albeit one that is suppressed and threatened by a liberal minority in media and government. This position is similar to what drove fundamentalists back into confrontation with modernity in the 80s, according to Harding (1994:539; see also chapter 3).

In the classroom, the academic and thoughtful approach to understanding leadership illuminates both the classes’ fear in placing trust in secular leaders and their desire to make the process easier. Since “real” Christians should already have internalized this moral compass, voting for Christians should ensure that moral public decisions are made; no further questioning in contrast to the interrogation that must occur with candidates or leaders who do not share CBN’s belief system. It is this contrast that makes drawing upon non-Christian sources so high-stakes and what makes the creation of an insular Christian community so tempting. Perhaps this is partly the inspiration for CBN’s work to provide information on all elements of life from diet to finances to dating.

However, trusting leaders is twofold: one must trust the process by which they make decisions and the sources of knowledge which inform the decisions. Whether the information is scientific, relating to evolution or global warming, or social scientific, relating to civil rights or childrearing, the cultural/moral/religious implications can be far-reaching. It thus seems to be CBN’s task to reframe secular knowledge, whether accepting, rejecting, or amending it. False knowledge is exceedingly dangerous because

⁴² The use of Winston’s “Christian Compass” as a guide for political decision-making reflects strong concerns over the lack of control constituents have over politicians once they’ve been elected to office. The “Compass” brings to mind political discussions of transparency in Latin America.

of its potential to entice people away from the Truth. Considering Susan's earlier comment about conservative Christian culture as "about *not* asking (author's notes, February 2007), leaves CBN's own population vulnerable to outside misdirection.

CBN members adopt various approaches in order to protect themselves and their families from these corrupting influences, whether "opting out" of secular culture entirely by homeschooling children or creating conservative Christian counter-cultures by promoting Biblical fiction like the *Left Behind* series, by expanding alternative news programs like *700 Club*, or by aggregating a bevy of professionals from psychologists to plumbers into a "Christian Yellow Pages". Yet for many, their motivation, at least in part, is not just a distaste of secular temptations but an active *fear* of them. The use of ridicule marks and dehumanizes people and ideas that are inauthentic to CBN's culture, making them objects of derision and fear, whether they are "Gnostics", "liberals", "Congress", "Muslims", or just "non-Christians". The fears over the tempting and polluting effects of secular culture/knowledge/government on the CBN "Self" reinforce and justify the need to clearly identify the "Other."

Marking the non-Christian "Other", Producing the CBN "Self"

The reframing of discussions of early Christianity, authors, newscasters, professors, and CBN participants repeatedly situate historical characters and information with respect to CBN's Christianity, all contributing to the process of "Self" construction. As an example, one CBN reporter, spotlighting the find of the Gospel of Judas in a special segment just prior to Gordon's commentary, states:

While it is being called a major archaeological find, early Christian leaders discounted the text centuries ago, and it is not likely to change Christian belief today, either.

One scholar from Asbury Theological Seminary tells The New York Times that the documents tell us nothing about the historical Jesus or the historical Judas. But they do tell us a lot about people who were labeled heretics, even in their own day (Jessup N.d.).

This unnamed (divinity school/believer) academic reassures the CBN viewership that the Gospel of Judas has no useful information for (true) Christians, then reframes the Gospel as instructional on heretics. More directly, during an interview with theological professor Darrell Bock who authored a book debunking *The Da Vinci Code*, CBN program director Chris Carpenter asked,

Point blank, can these missing gospels do anything for us?

to which Bock replied:

Historically, this stuff benefits us in understanding the debate that is going on between Christianity and these fringe groups. You get to hear from them directly. It is always helpful as a matter of history. But the bottom line question for most people is ‘does this stuff help us understand orthodox, real, authentic Christianity any better?’ The answer to that question is no. It doesn’t other than to provide a mirror against which we can see Christianity interacting with that which it views is not what Christianity is. To that extent it can be helpful (Carpenter N.d.).

Clearly this is not the stance taken in secular academia, where excluded gospels are mined for their historical information, their political positions, and as reflectors of the human-constructed development of orthodox Christian tradition. In fact, Elaine Pagels’ reading of the Gospel of Thomas contrasts it against the Gospel of John, coming to the conclusion that John had “written his gospel to refute what Thomas teaches” (2003:58). Similarly, Pagels and King point out that certain language in the Gospel of Judas, accusing enemies and nonbelievers of various atrocities like incest and infanticide, was a trope seen throughout Biblical writings. The accusations were not meant to correctly portray the practices of opposition but to discredit them in the eyes of the public by

associating them with the most abhorrent social practices of the day (see, e.g., Pagels and King 2007:71).

Demonizing opponents may be common to the human condition, especially in political smear campaigns, but I found it particularly relevant at CBN that “Others” were often depicted with fear and sometimes exaggeration derived from ignorance (see chapter 3). Pat and Gordon Robertson regularly participate in this during their commentaries on *700 Club*. Pat Robertson commented on a 2003 Democratic filibuster against conservative judicial appointees by describing a Wall Street Journal editorial cartoon depicting Senator Schumer “as a vampire with long teeth holding Justice hostage in his hand while he’s ready to suck blood out of her throat” (Robertson 2003). Robertson called for “American people to stand up and fight” the Democratic senator whom he effectively portrayed as a violent and dehumanized predator (ibid).

However, dehumanization is not just a political tactic; it is commonly used not just to inspire fear but to suggest that fear is appropriate in keeping to the Christian path. The Biblical theme of Satan as often appearing pleasant, benign, and/or charming (“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” 2 Corinthians 11:14, New International Version) is a warning to always be aware of what/who is good and true and what/who is evil in disguise. One teacher at Regent recounted a story about speaking at a prison and was told later that Susan Smith, the convicted mother of two who suffered from mental illness and who, after drowning her children, falsely claimed that a black man kidnapped them, was in the audience. When the teacher discovered Smith had been in the front row, he was horrified, at how unnoticed and indistinct the “face of evil” was (author’s notes, March 2006).

Dehumanization is also a defensive maneuver in response to being dehumanized. A very strong concern among many at CBN was how they were perceived and reviled by non-believers. One student asked me to pass along the message in my academic writings “that we’re not freaks” (author’s notes, March 30, 2006). “We kind of feel like we are the beat up class,” complained student Ben Johnston, “If you are a Christian today and are just somewhat vocal about your faith – if you dare pray over your lunch in front of your colleagues at a secular establishment or you dare have an opinion about gay marriage, you will get labeled a Right-Wing Fanatic Kook by some people” (interview with author, March 30, 2006). In another case, a student described how the “Other” dehumanized the “Self”, observing how the faces of pro-choice protesters were disfigured with hate at the pro-life protesters, whom she described as calm, love-filled, and innocently amazed that their Spirit-directed task could inspire such rage (author’s notes, September 2006). CBN WorldNews stories frequently heighten this fear of attack by highlighting Christian victims of physical violence.

It becomes critical, then, to understand who and what is legitimately Christian. Non-Christians may be potential converts or simply misguided, but they could also be actively hostile or agents of evil against which Christians must defend themselves. True Christianity, as understood at CBN seems straight-forward, boiled down to the seven tenets at the core of CBN’s faith; however, there are specific and non-self-evident political affiliations woven in. In fact, in a separate public address, Pat Robertson appeared to channel Irenaeus in his concern over “What is the Greatest Problem Facing the Church Today?”⁴³

1. From my point of view, the greatest problem facing the church is lack of

⁴³ This is a theme that Robertson repeatedly addresses in public and on *700 Club*.

2. unity...I am not advocating unity at the expense of purity or at the expense
 3. of doctrinal truth. We cannot throw out the Bible in order to have unity.
 4. We cannot embrace any strange doctrine just to have superficial unity. But
 5. we must have unity where those who truly love Jesus Christ will love each
 6. other and try to work together. Even though they may differ over
 7. techniques and other superficial things, Christians must work together and
 8. emphasize areas of agreement. When this happens, the church will become
 9. a supernaturally powerful force. According to the book of Genesis, upon
 10. the occasion of the building of the tower of Babel, God saw that the
 11. people had one language and were of one accord. Because of this, He said
 12. that nothing they wanted to do would have been impossible for them (see
 13. Genesis 11:6). If the church could achieve unity, it could change the
 14. political and social structure of society with no trouble at all. The world
 15. would be a beautiful place to live in if the church would get together.
 16. Regrettably, we do not. We have a divisive party spirit...we have
 17. jealousy...we fight...we are suspicious of one another. I am not talking
 18. about those who do not really believe in God. I am talking about the ones
 19. who are believers, who have been born again. If people will truly follow
 20. after the Spirit of God, they can operate in unity, because the Spirit of God
 21. will give them unity (Pat Robertson N.d.).

Robertson's call for unity is poetic in its subtext. He works to reconcile contradictions across multiple Christian theologies and practices (even within his own organizations, as described earlier) by clarifying who "true" Christians are, what their goals are, and what the rewards will be for uniting. First, Robertson identifies "Christians", or "the church" (line 1), as those who "truly love Jesus Christ" (line 5) a label that is later paired with Christians as "believers, who have been born again" (line 19). Here his definition narrows substantially, as those who have not been "born again" are considered "those who do not really believe in God" (line 18).

Anthropologist Susan Harding describes the often amorphously vague term "born again" as

a kind of inner rite of passage that is completed when sinners are "saved," or "born again," "regenerated," "washed in the blood of Christ." Salvation is experienced as a release from the bondage of sin and a personal reconciliation with God. "A new self, "spiritual man," emerges and the supernatural imagination is cut loose as the newborn Christian "accepts

the meaning of the gospel" and begins to speak the language of Christ (1987:170).

The importance at CBN of becoming born again or "saved" cannot be overstated. It is commonly expressed that all Christians share common purpose and come together through CBN's various institutions to work together. However, there is an implication that one has the option of becoming "saved" regardless of denomination. It was pointed out to me by several CBN members that Pat Robertson's wife, Dede, was raised Catholic, a point that stands as evidence of denominational diversity. However, Dede is not a practicing Catholic, having become born again along with her husband (Marley 2007:10-11, 17). Sara Peroni, a student at Regent, talked about her family's similar experience with religion. She was raised Catholic but after her mother was saved when Sara was young they began attending a nondenominational charismatic church. This caused "big fights" with her father, who insisted on continuing his Catholic practice, so the family attended Catholic and charismatic services three times a week. Her mother's conversion saved her parents' relationship, Sara said, and the religious comparison helped her "see the difference between a 'dead' religion [Catholicism] and a live one where there was no intermediary like a priest in the relationship with God" (conversation with author, September 27, 2006). I pointed out that Sara's language of her mother as "saved" contrasted with her father's state. "Does that mean your dad is 'lost'?" I asked. After a pause, Sara responded, "Yes, he is" (ibid).

Despite the proclamation of religious diversity, a bias toward charismatic practice is clearly evident (although not universal).⁴⁴ Naturally there are tensions and contestations, along with an often vaguely defined sense, set by Robertson, that some

⁴⁴ The persistently contradictory presentation of a clearly bounded charismatic practice as nondenominational is something I look forward to exploring more in depth in the future.

Christian practices are superior to others – a sense that some employees and students did not perceive until they were immersed in the culture of the local campus. Many members of CBN agree with Robertson’s opinion that Mormons, along with Unitarians, Hindus, and New Agers (including followers of Edgar Cayce), among others, are non-Christian cults that threaten the unity of the true Christian following (Pat Robertson N.d.).⁴⁵ At the height of presidential campaign season in 2007, several of the Republican candidates visited CBN’s campus. When presidential candidate Mitt Romney was invited to give the Commencement address at Regent University, outrage broke out among many students presumably over whether Regent’s invitation acted as a political endorsement. The issue was not Romney’s politics, however, but his religion: he is a practicing member of the Mormon Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Brody 2008). After a university-wide email was set out by the administration to calm the protests and justify the administrators’ choice of Mitt Romney as speaker, one shocked student replied:

I cannot believe this is an issue! We are going to be working side by side with people and leaders who come from a variety of faiths and religions. Are we not confident of our faith!! We would be a poor witness to our Lord if we denied someone to speak to us based on religion. Jesus would listen to him. Listening to a leader is not an endorsement!! If someone would've treated me that way I would not have been a born again Christian. I would still be an atheist. We should be open to all, while proclaiming our faith to all (listserv email to author, April 13, 2007)!!

In Robertson’s description of Christians, some diversity is acceptable, “they may differ over techniques and other superficial things” (lines 6-7, he is firm that they only include those who adopt the Holy Bible exclusively as their theological guide: “I am not advocating unity at the expense of purity or at the expense of doctrinal truth. We cannot

⁴⁵ It is perhaps surprising then that Robertson was part of the selection committee that chose Romney as a speaker; however, Robertson is known (at least locally) for publicly condemning or criticizing religions like Unitarianism while simultaneously soliciting their partnership.

throw out the Bible in order to have unity” (lines 3-4). This raises the question of whether, for example, Mormons, who accept as holy text the Book of Mormon, or Catholics, who accept interpretive texts like Catechism, would meet Robertson’s stringent requirements.⁴⁶ Clearly this is a conflict across campus, again reference issue with Mitt Romney? Discuss how who constitutes a “real Christian” becomes a disciplinary question – “You’re not a real Christian anyway” is a joke/insult on campus when you violate certain social/political rules.

Institutionally, the Christian Broadcasting Network and affiliates take pride in their increasing, and increasingly diverse, population of Christians who are unified in precisely the way Robertson outlines above, but the parachurch is engaged in tricky work – unifying people under a single religious banner while applauding their denominational diversity. CBN leaders identify CBN as orthodox in religion and mission, creating a distilled doctrine, the seven tenets, upon which all Christians can theoretically agree. Even politically, CBN, Regent University, et al present a conservative political platform as uniform and self-evidently derived from Christian values.

However, CBN’s institutional nature as a semi-secular organization, combined with Robertson’s desire to unite all Christians, results in the organizational heterodoxy that is constantly in flux.⁴⁷ The university matriculates a new body of students each year, many of whom do not even realize Regent’s relationship to the Robertson family. As administrator Madelyn Parris laments, every year Robertson makes an unfortunately-timed inflammatory public statement just before a semester starts. And every year

⁴⁶ It should be noted, however, that in 1994 Robertson did sign the document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” which was developed to strengthen the relationship between the two communities (Leadership U N.d.).

⁴⁷ Thanks to Chris Nelson for making this point!

somebody drops out as a result. “Don’t they know before they apply here that Regent was started by Mr. Robertson?” (Madelyn Parris, interview with author, December 6, 2006). Further, despite Robertson’s clear intentions to create various institutions to tackle different elements of his larger mission, even people in the institutions themselves do not generally feel connected. “A lot goes on there that I don’t agree with,” stated Parris, “I don’t see myself as being part of CBN [and] people at CBN don’t see themselves as being part of Regent... We’re sister organizations but operating very differently” (interview with author, December 6, 2006). Similarly, Jenny Shepard, described her employer, Operation Blessing as purely humanitarian and apolitical, stating, “we stay away from the CBN connection [because their evangelism] can be detrimental to our mission” (interview with author, September 20, 2006).

The need to define Christians thus is not simply about identifying the Other for whatever reason—it is also about *producing* the Self, a CBN/Christian self that “of one accord” (line 11). The stakes are high: “the world would be a beautiful place to live in if the church would get together” (lines 14-15). Success is both a sign of God’s favor and that which incurs it.

“Sometimes the Winners Deserve to Win”

The idea of success as evidence of God’s blessing is reflected in and extended to all elements of Christianity at CBN, from doctrinal veracity to political mission. In Robertson’s estimation, unity would result in God’s divine favor: “the church will become a supernaturally powerful force” (lines 8-9). In fact, “the church” that Robertson so broadly constructs begins to look like “the church” that Irenaeus described in the second century. Irenaeus, writes Pagels encountered in Lyons “an overwhelming surplus”

of Christian practices that demonstrated huge diversity in theological understanding and practice (2003:92). For Irenaeus, like Robertson, “the problem was how to discriminate: ‘How, he asked, ‘can we tell the difference between the word of God and mere human words?’” (ibid). His solution was to construct a four-gospel canon and to denounce all other teachings as heretical. The canon became accepted doctrine of the first catholic (universal) Christian church, the same one Robertson declares we “cannot throw out...in order to have unity. We cannot embrace any strange doctrine just to have superficial unity” (lines 22-23).

Further, the potential political benefits latent in Robertson’s call for unity seem to parallel those that actually followed the consolidation of an orthodox church in the first centuries of Christianity. After the Roman Emperor Augustine’s spiritual transformation into Constantine in 312, Constantine “declared amnesty for Christians and became their patron. But this practical military leader chose to recognize only those who belonged to what may have become, by his time, the best-organized and largest group, which he called the ‘lawful and most holy catholic church’” (Pagels 2003:168). Robertson seems determined to forge a similar consolidation of the fractured Christianities that have arisen (or still exist?) since then: “If the church could achieve unity, it could change the political and social structure of society with no trouble at all” (lines 13-14), seemingly expressing hope that the CBN’s efforts to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ would be expedited through the consolidation of Christian identity and power.

The belief “that the material signs of their success also were signs of God’s favor” was initially derived from a Calvinist doctrine of preordination but is more broadly present in the theologies of many Protestant groups (Bowen 2007:21). Pat Robertson

personally has repeatedly illustrated how this belief influences his perceptions of and decision-making about CBN. In a 2006 address to prospective students at Regent University, Robertson described how, in 1975, he was trying to buy six acres of land to expand CBN. Amidst this process he received a Word of God (communication by the Holy Spirit) to build a school “for My glory” (author’s notes, March 16, 2006). Somehow, presumably with God’s help, he managed to raise enough funding and was guided to the perfect purchase of 140 acres. “Now,” Robertson affirmed meaningfully, “we have two miles” (ibid). The clear message, reinforced throughout the speech with references to how the university continues to expand and excel exponentially, was that the purity of Regent’s mission in God’s service has directly lead to its financial, academic, and political success.

The interpretation of material success to God’s favor, well described in Weber’s *Capitalism and the Protestant Ethic*, is not necessary to the doctrine of predestination, where people read success as giving some insight into whether they might be among the saved (Bowen 2007). Rather, this type of interpretation is also loosely related to the unknowability of God’s doctrines; while Catholic response is to have catechism interpreting bible, many Protestants are left wrestling directly with the text, which, as Ehrman has pointed out, is full of holes, contradictions, and obscure prophecies and laws (2005). When seeking answers as to whether one has the correct interpretation, it seems natural to look for positive consequences as signs that one is moving in the right direction.

Clearly there has been a long and evolving development of Christianity that has included the breaking away of Protestants from the early Church, then the fracturing of Protestants into multiple denominations. Contemporary differences among Christian

groups (even those currently participating through various CBN organizations) are understood to exist and continue to produce complicated interactions at CBN. Further, two thousand years of changes in language and culture stand between CBN and the early Christian church. Nevertheless, participants at CBN regularly depict their theology and morality as having a direct lineage from the divinely inspired decisions of the early Church. At CBN, most (including Robertson) depict Christianity as evolving in a linear progression from Jesus to his disciples' teachings to their texts, which documented Jesus' life, words, and meanings exactly, to the consolidation of legitimate religious practice as the first Christian church to its endorsement by the Roman state. CBN relates Christian history as it is most commonly retold by Christian churches – a neat series of events that demonstrate God's favor in their fluidity, power, and good fortune. The Gnostic gospels, along with other non-Christian doctrines subdued by the Christian church, become obviously flawed simply because of the fact of their destruction. As one author said in interview at CBN:

The attention [the Gnostic gospels] have gotten is coupled with the cultural factor – that is that history is supposedly written by the winners and now we are hearing the voice of the losers. So, the thought is that we need to re-address the imbalance. Of course, the other half of the story is that sometimes the winners deserve to win. And that is part of the story I am trying to tell. I'm trying to explain why it is that this extra biblical material ended up not having an impact (Carpenter N.d.).

How CBN as an organization re/imagines and allies with historical factions in early Christianity reveals a lot about its construction of its own identity among contemporary political and religious struggles.

The obvious benefit to CBN in its alignment with the early Church is a sense of truth in continuity of interpretation, practice, and purpose that authorizes CBN's contemporary practices today. Despite the scholars' understandings of Christian practice

as eclectic, frequently irreconcilable, and differing throughout time, at CBN there is a popular persistence in the notion of “Truth” as being sameness in form and uniformity of content CBN’s discourses around connecting to the early church express two main beliefs. First, that the early church weeded out the truest, earliest gospels from copies and false doctrines, therefore founding a spiritual practice following Christ based on His true teachings. Second, whatever the historical legacy is that resulted in contemporary American fundamentalist and Pentecostal/charismatic practice, it is believed that today’s practices conform to the original teachings of the gospels by the early Church.

The repeated retelling of the story of Christianity, culminating with references to CBN’s successes and prophesying even greater success contingent on future unity, is productive of both a type of organizational unity and a sense of divinely-inspired purpose centered around a united reading of doctrine. This purpose-directed unity is further fueled by discourses of the self that are reverential and common sense-oriented, discourses that build into Self personas that are solid in their defense against Others who would throw the Self off the path. These personas may be soldiers, martyrs, or both, but they are definitely “winners [who] deserve to win” (Carpenter N.d.). These personas are reflected and fueled by unambiguous political statements of faith, such as the professor’s comment “I don’t have a ‘worldview’, I have the Truth” (author’s notes, August 2006). They are similarly reinforced through Robertson’s repeated self-presentation as subaltern to an oppressive liberal imperial regime. After his speech to prospective students at Regent, a man in the audience thanked him on behalf of conservatives “for speaking your mind” (author’s notes, March 16, 2006). Robertson replied, “I drive PCers crazy. We don’t

believe in PC, we speak truth. There is no freedom out there any more. This PC thing has run amok” (ibid).

The persistent reframing of historical and doctrinal material as unified glosses over and diminishes the visibility of controversies and multiple perceptions on CBN’s own campus. The rebellious insistence on speaking Truth in contrast to the “PCers”’ misguided inclusivity and the persistent statements as to the meaninglessness of non-doctrinal sources contributes to the actual lack of impact these sources have on CBN’s community. How CBN as an organization explains the relevance and meaning of newly recovered Gospel of Judas positions CBN, the document, the audience, other interpretations, other groups, and eventually the state. Before the latter connection is explored, however, it is necessary to turn to the ARE, which offers a parallel, if contrasting, production of knowledge, Self, and Other.

Understanding Judas (ARE)

The early Christian histories presented through the *Da Vinci Code* and the Gospel of Judas inspired responses not just from CBN but from the Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE) as well. One ARE newsletter article, concerned with the way various sources “have been purporting that Jesus was little more than a typical man, human in every sense of the word: man, husband, father, and dead bones buried”, uses quotes from the Bible alongside quotes from Cayce’s readings to counter society’s “Humanizing [of] Jesus” (Van Auken 2007a:1). However, the ARE responses to this popular demystification of Christianity differ substantially from those at CBN. At CBN, the consequences of humanizing Jesus in a “biblically illiterate population” means that “millions can be suckered” away from true salvation and into eternal hellfire (Colson

N.d.). At the ARE, the effect of the “growing assaults on Jesus’ divinity and supernatural experiences” are revealed to be broader spiritual crisis,

causing many to concede the absolute reality of matter and earthliness, taking away the uplifting sense of a nonphysical life, a nonphysical nature within us all. If Jesus was simply a typical man – born, married, became a father, and was buried – then we have little to lift our hearts and minds above the realities of physicality. Spirit, mind, and heavenly dimensions become pipe dreams (Van Auken 2007a:2).

The author, Van Auken, goes on to describe the “assaults” on Jesus’ divinity as coming not just from pop culture but from “serious scholars” who “are beginning to find what they believe to be evidence against Jesus’ experiences” (ibid).

The author’s response to this questioning of faith is to assess and integrate Biblical text and material from the Cayce materials to compose a thesis that brings the readers, presumably sympathetic since the article was written in a member newsletter, to a clear assurance of spirituality, Jesus’ divinity, and the spiritual path shared by Jesus, Cayce, and ARE members. In presenting his arguments, the author used discursive styles to reason with and persuade his audience in a manner similar to Gordon Robertson and other members of CBN. However, rather than using the styles of reverence, ridicule, common sense, and belief that are frequently used at CBN, Van Auken uses styles that reflect the differences in population, purpose, and values between the two organization.

Respect

Whether speaking about science or religion, politics or music, a common discursive style at ARE is *respect*. Rather than the unquestioned adoration of reverent speech, *respect* imparts a “politeness” to the dialogue, carefully avoiding condemnation and disparagement while reserving the right to present an opposing view. In “Humanizing Jesus”, despite the fact that the entirety of the article argues against their

suppositions, the author preserves the dignity of the “serious scholars” by suggesting that 1 Corinthians 15 “is certainly confusing enough to see how one could conclude that Paul really does not believe in the resurrection of the physical body” (Van Auken 2007a:2). The language allows that it is reasonable to mistake Biblical meaning then continues in a way that clearly sets up an opposing scholarly argument.

The presence of this style should not be conflated with a respect for all people and things. However, respect for others is a core lesson for ARE members who seek to apply principles from the Cayce Readings into their everyday lives. Virtually everyone I met at the ARE headquarters had at one time been a participant in a “Search for God” study groups based on instructional Readings Cayce did for a group of people interested in spiritual practice and “soul development”. Group members are expected to discuss, reflect upon, and find methods of practicing spiritual lessons that include “Cooperation” and “Virtue and Understanding”. “Don’t judge your siblings,” one ARE lifetime member used to tell her children, “you don’t know where they’re coming from or what their karmic lessons are” (Lily Bedford, interview with author, June 28, 2010).

Similarly, when contemplating the “newly discovered Judas Gospel and its softer opinion of Judas’ betrayal”, one ARE columnist analyzed Judas’ life and intentions in light of Cayce’s insights and historical knowledge by contextualizing and understanding Judas and his role in Jesus’ life purpose:

Cayce’s readings say that Judas Iscariot was engaged in political activity to proclaim Jesus as the messiah-king the Jews were waiting for: “Those groups about Judas sought to proclaim Jesus as the deliverer of the peoples from that bondage, that taxation” (1179-8).

From this point of view, we might conclude that Judas was hoping to force the kingship issue with Jesus, as the readings suggest in 2067-7, in which case Jesus might have simply been allowing, perhaps even encouraging, Judas to follow the course he was already motivated to pursue. The thing that is

inconceivable is that Jesus did not know what was going on or that he could not have stopped it.

On another level, Judas stood for political and financial structure, while Jesus was teaching the world the primacy of the heart. Jesus' teaching was that we can have both but need to choose which of them is to be in charge. We cannot serve two masters (Dean 2006:4).

The author reflects the opinion of many at the ARE that Judas honestly believed Jesus' worth to be as a powerful political ruler and hoped to prompt Jesus into forcing him to overthrow his captors and revealing himself as king.⁴⁸ Judas' mistake was in not recognizing that Jesus was teaching a spiritual, communal way of being, the value of which would have been greatly lessened had he succumbed to material and political power and ruled as an earthly king.

By this retelling of the story, Judas becomes a sympathetic character who acted with the full knowledge and consent of Jesus, allowing Jesus to fulfill his purpose, albeit not as Judas expected. Judas' life is one of lessons for all mankind:

What we know about Jesus is that he was a man who lived a life of perfect congruence with Spirit, with the Will of God. And what is that Will, that Spirit? What distinguishes Spirit's purpose from the purposes of humankind? Is it not that Spirit, the Father, is concerned with the whole? In this case, the whole of humanity? That no soul be left behind? This was the fire that burned in Jesus' heart, to save the whole, which was and is our Father's Will for us all.

Judas contributed to the Spirit's perfect plan to redeem all of humanity. Shouldn't we stop judging him? We can be sure that Jesus never judged him. And perhaps that is the main value of the gospel of Judas at this time: as we have learned from her own gospel that Mary Magdalene was not who we thought she was, we can at least consider the possibility that Judas Iscariot was other than a simple traitor. In any case, praying for his soul would be more Christlike. Perhaps it is time we stop excluding him from the one spirit. Can we be whole without him (Dean 2006:4)?

The distinction between *respect* and *reverence/ridicule* is clear. Rather than holding Judas as either unflawed or, oppositely, as flawed beyond the saving, the ARE authors

⁴⁸ The Gospel of Judas tells a slightly different but no less heroic story of Judas as helping Jesus to fulfill his destiny of overcoming mortality by prompting the crucifixion and resurrection.

hold Judas to be flawed in character and mistaken in his actions yet still a human being worthy of compassion, understanding, and forgiveness.

While respectful and peaceful dialogue is generally a socially popular and frequently idealized state of being, it should be pointed out that *respect* as a discursive style has the tactical effect both of giving the speaker the moral high ground and of disarming opposing parties' defensiveness. This is particularly relevant in chapter 4 as ARE continually attempts to partner with scientists and scientific institutions. When countering popular and academic theories about the origins of Christianity, speaking with *respect* has the effect of joining the debate as equals.

Scholarly Thesis

Continuing the Self-positioning as scholarly equals, speakers and writers often (but not always) reflect an intellectualism or a positive valuation for scholarly work, often modeling their arguments and discussions after scholarly ones.⁴⁹ In her article "Reconsidering Judas Iscariot", ARE member Barbara Robinson compares Judas as depicted in the public imaginary versus Judas as an historical figure, asking the question "what can we learn from the *Gospel of Judas*?" (2006:28). Throughout the article, Robinson shuffles together scientific and academic sources (such as those written by Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels) with Biblical text and Cayce Readings, even weighing historical fiction and contemporary reactions from religious leaders, in her attempt to answer the question, "If we accept the *Gospel of Judas* as authentic, are we rewriting history or viewing earlier occurrences in a truer light?" (ibid). The ultimate lesson of Judas' life and Gospel, Robinson relates, is "the teaching of Jesus that rings out as distinctly now as it has through the ages: 'Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven'", but her

⁴⁹ Most frequently these are the leaders at ARE who are also prolific writers.

questioning of the historical accuracy of the Gospel remains unresolved, and her discussion ends with the observation that “through the ages various individuals have recognized that ‘there might be another side to the story’” (ibid:31). Both CBN and ARE draw in outside sources, including scholarly work, but while discussions at CBN often oscillate between reverence for those works that support their beliefs and ridicule of those works that contradict them, discussions at ARE, like Robinson’s, more generally tend to be more non-committal, adding academic sources, for better or worse, to the broader search for truth.

John Van Auken’s article on “Humanizing Jesus” is more demonstrative of scholarly form. Van Auken directly addresses scholars’ interpretation of Corinthians as revealing that Paul did not believe in the resurrection, offering competing Biblical passages that place Paul’s experience in context. Van Auken proceeds through a scholarly theological discussion, asking readers to “think about” literal text in broader historical context, suggesting that a particular event “is surely one of the best pieces of evidence that Jesus was indeed divine and superhuman” (Van Auken 2007a:2). With its explicit transitions switching between sources, “Let’s look now at the perspective from Cayce’s psychic readings” (ibid), logical analysis of Biblical text, and frequent references to “our study” (ibid:4) of spirituality, Van Auken adopts a tone that is impartial yet invested in providing evidence for a particular argument.

The scholarly nature of some discussion at ARE is revealed in part by the structure of the institution and the tone set by recent leadership. Cayce’s grandson and former ARE President, Charles Thomas Cayce, has a doctorate in child psychology and certainly has a very intellectual influence on the organization. Revealingly, he has said on

more than one occasion that he wished the “E” in ARE stood for “Education” instead of “Enlightenment” (author’s notes, June 2006). Whereas at CBN there is tension between media-producing CBN and academic Regent University—a tension Regent employee Madelyn Parris described as derived from the contrast of emotional, female CBN and intellectual, male Regent University (interview with author, December 6, 2006), the ARE’s Atlantic University is more seamlessly integrated into the whole, with AU teachers doubling as ARE directors, shared conferences, and AU texts written by volunteers and staff at ARE. A former politician who became fascinated with the ARE, Arturo Perez decided to come to AU to study theory with the ARE scholars, then stayed to attend the Cayce-Reilly massage school to learn the bodily knowledge and practice, which he considered the more physical, “other side” of the scholarly theoretical work that pervades most of the rest of the ARE. Also, there is a great deal of pride about the ARE library, which tour guides reveal is the “world’s second-largest library of writings on metaphysics and spirituality next to the Vatican” (author’s notes, June 2006).

Edgar Cayce himself several times referenced a “higher mind” that is required to comprehend the universe’s mysteries, a “fourth dimension logic” that is required to reconcile contradiction and understand abstract thought. One ARE employee, Simon, paraphrased Cayce as saying several times, “What a pleasure to find a ‘fourth-dimension’ mind – someone who can think about ideas and concepts” (author’s notes, June 28, 2010). Cayce referenced the term several times in readings, understanding metaphysics requires abstract thinking.⁵⁰ In one example, he stated,

⁵⁰ One Cayce Reading stated: “Best definition that ever may be given of fourth-dimension is an idea! Where will it project? Anywhere! Where does it arise from? Who knows! Where will it end? Who can tell! It is all inclusive! It has both length, breadth, height and depth - is without beginning and is without ending!

...death is as but the beginning of another form of phenomenized force in the earth's plane, and may not be understood by the third dimension mind from third dimension analysis, but must be seen from that fourth-dimension force as may be experienced by an entity gaining the access to same, by development in the physical plane through the mental processes of an entity (136-18).

To break free from the material plane and its limitations, Cayce encouraged people to mentally wrestle with complex concepts and to develop their imaginations. Atlantic University, in its various incarnations, has always been intellectually inspired by the material from the Cayce readings and took as its original purpose “to establish here a center of learning, culture, and research at which every department of human knowledge and scientific endeavor will be represented which has anything to offer, looking toward increasing the worthwhileness of human life and experience...” (Todeschi 2010:4) The university’s engagement with the metaphysical (“We shall [also] try to discover the real facts about psychic phenomena...” was to be approached from a scientific and scholarly perspective: “The approach will be entirely scientific and the same general methods will be used as are utilized in all the other sciences” (ibid).⁵¹

This valuation of knowledge and thought process is reflected in the frequently adopted *scholarly* style, and further reflected in members’ frequent reference to the ARE as a “philosophical” organization. Because ARE is separate, perhaps even alienated, from traditional academic institutions (this will be discussed at greater length in chapter 4) the use of a *scholarly* style which utilizes various academic tropes in the construction of argument by drawing on logic and supportive evidence, testing theses, etc, could be seen

Dependent upon that which it may feed for its sustenance, or it may pass into that much as a thought or an idea” (364-10).

⁵¹ Atlantic University was originally established the year *before* the ARE and went through many openings and closings until its present status as a mostly distance-education graduate school. Interestingly, the official seal contains the Cayce-inspired motto, “Those Who Have the Light Should Declare It unto Others” (Todeschi 2007:4).

by secular scholars as “pseudo-scholarly”. At times the use of *scholarly* language and style seems to carry with it a desire to integrate into secular academia or perhaps a desire to impart a “borrowed authenticity” to strengthen an argument by throwing the reputation of secular academic study behind the argument. However, as discussed in chapter 4, the ARE’s use of a *scholarly* style seems primarily out of place because of their focus on metaphysical material that often is quickly labeled as “fringe” and pushed out of mainstream academic study, a phenomenon that suggests the limits and biases of secular scholarly inquiry.⁵²

Nevertheless, the prevalence of a scholarly style of discussion reflects the ARE’s valuation of knowledge and thought process. Information may be valued in itself, and is inevitably compared to Cayce Readings which provide a baseline truth, but members are encouraged to work out their own logic. The Readings, like Biblical text, are not self-evident, and so opportunities exist, whether through workshops designed for people to uncover their “highest ideals” or through Search for God study groups, to make their own conclusions. One ARE member, employed at the Virginia Beach headquarters, related how much he appreciated the transformative effect of his ten years in a Search for God group, particularly the way he was encouraged to seek “a greater truth that encompasses [divergent] points of view” (Simon Davis, interview, with author April 3, 2006).

Complaint and critique of the study of the Cayce material often also resembles scholarly argument and politics. A member in Arizona wrote to the Personal Spirituality newsletter to complain about articles that include edits to Cayce quotes, complaining that

⁵² Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be noted that there is a large body of literature that suggests that the traditional areas in secular universities, such as Religious Studies and Divinity, responsible for studying the metaphysical, are becoming increasingly intolerant to religious beliefs among religiously practicing faculty members, preferring more “objective” (nonreligious) researchers (See, e.g. Wiebe 1999).

editing prevented accurate study of source material, “Understandably, the concepts Mr. Cayce was giving from the Akashic records are often wordy and difficult, but if you folks at the A.R.E. are going to interpret them from your own particular understanding, then the true message will become watered down” (Van Auken 2007c:4). The editor of the newsletter responded:

“You folks”? You write as if we are different than you. We are just like your study group. Some like the original; some prefer a modernized, cleaned version; and some simply want to be told what the readings mean because they can’t understand them. We are *not* unconscious of what we’re doing. We realize how controversial this is. It is a controversy among *us*. We struggle in our hearts and minds with this. There’s no “you folks” here. We are one folk with the same ideal. But we have a complicated task before us.

...In the spirit of the readings, I attempt to do the best I can to bring the Cayce readings to today’s seekers. Often, after they have been a member for a while, reading interpretations of the readings, they begin to read the readings in their original condition. By this time, some are ready to deal with the complex syntax, dense paragraphs of multi-level concepts, excessive use of the word “that,” and the biblical King James English (Van Auken 2007c:4).

The imagining of the ARE community as jointly engaged in “study”, the debate over whether original or clarified text offers truer meaning, and the idea that learning occurs in stages all resemble academic communities and identities. Similar to academic politics, there is generally an established orthodoxy, but always there is encouragement to incorporate new materials, to learn from them, albeit in a directed way.⁵³

⁵³ It is important to note, however, that there is no uniform approval among ARE participants of scholars or secular education. One administrative employee, Daisy, related her perception that scholars believe that they “are ‘up there’ and we’re peons” even within the ARE (author’s notes, December 19, 2006). And there is enormous criticism of education, particularly higher education. As one Masters-educated ARE employee, Gerald, reflected, “education really ‘de-spiritualized’ me...there is a rational emptiness that goes on with educated people” (Gerald Hamlin, interview with author, April 3, 2006).

Seeking

When I first began my fieldwork at CBN and ARE, someone asked how I was finding the difference between the two. I flippantly responded, “ARE has all the questions and CBN has all the answers.” Despite the vastly over-simplified nature of this response, there is an element of truth in the characterization of the parachurches’ belief systems as open or closed. In the above quote, the editor highlighted a theme often used to characterize the ARE: “In the spirit of the readings, I attempt to do the best I can to bring the Cayce readings to today’s seekers” (Van Auken 2007c:4). The notion of *seeking* as the primary engagement of ARE members is repeated in every form possible, even down to the ARE catalog, where the editor addresses readers as “Fellow seekers”.

While CBN holds to its 7 tenets, ARE focuses less on “belief” than on the “search”. When the author holds that, “Here’s another interesting reading pertinent to our study” (Van Auken 2007c:4), the emphasis is on a collective search for knowledge or enlightenment pertaining to possibly unanswerable esoteric questions. The style of *seeking* implies an inclusive journey with individual meaning, very fitting with the Gnostic Gospel’s frequent directive to “seek inward” as in the Gospel of Thomas quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Locating True Knowledge Within

The various discourses around the topic of early Christianity offer insight into the identity crisis faced by the ARE community. This crisis is organizational, not necessarily individual, although individual members clearly have a hard time explaining themselves succinctly or even at times presenting themselves in what they believe to be a socially acceptable way to non-members. On the surface, what ties together the ARE members is

textual, just as the CBN members focus on Biblical text, the ARE members focus on the Cayce Readings, leaving it to individual members to integrate the readings into the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas, the Gnostic Gospels, etc. However, as with CBN, discussions of texts and historical events (such as those of early Christianity) are productive of a Self whose parameters are guided by the “top-down” media, lectures, and writings constructed through the ARE headquarters.

Heretical Truth, Paulitans, and the Venture Inward

Understandings of Jesus’ birth, death, and teachings that are represented in ARE discourses and the Cayce readings are profoundly different from orthodox Christianity in several ways. One primary difference is members’ willingness to accept other texts as historically accurate and/or divinely inspired alongside the Bible. To devout Christians, this is doubly blasphemous where the non-Biblical texts have been labeled as heretical by the church. That members at the ARE find historical and religious value in, for example, the Gnostic Gospels, can be seen first in their constant presence in ARE library, bookstore, and catalog and in discussions like SHD’s response to another member’s question regarding the Gospel of Judas, “as we have learned from her own gospel that Mary Magdalene was not who we thought she was, we can at least consider the possibility that Judas Iscariot was other than a simple traitor” (Dean 2006:4).

The most profound difference with orthodox Christianity, however, is Cayce’s conception of Jesus as exceptional, but not singular, in his divinity. As Van Auken repeats from reading 900-100:

(Question asked by Morton Blumenthal): As given, ‘We are God, that Spirit Father, performing our functions as portions, yet capable of becoming perfect like that whole spirit and absorbing the power of the Whole.’ Then Jesus Christ like us

was man, but made perfect as the Whole spirit and so became equal to or One with the Whole Spirit Father.

(Answer from Cayce in trance): Correct (Van Auken 2007a:2).

The conceptualization of Jesus as both man and God, as an avatar who came not to inspire worship but to present a pattern for all mankind to live, inspires not just a different reading of Christ's teachings but a different telling of the history of the Christian church.

The notion that "history is written by the winners," not the righteous (or correct), permeates the ARE, where mysteries and alternative histories are retrieved/recreated/re-membered, producing completely different worldviews. I was encouraged by numerous people at the ARE to read an ARE member's historical account of Jesus entitled *Lives of the Master*. The author, Sanderfur, a friend and speaker at the ARE spliced the Cayce readings on the reincarnations of Jesus alongside Biblical history, Gnostic gospels, Dead Sea Scrolls, and a variety of other historical and religious texts to provide an alternative Christian history that contests contemporary declarations of *orthodoxy* and *heresy*.

As the Roman and Eastern Churches became more organized, they began to simplify their theology so as to broaden its appeal and to accommodate the religious rites and beliefs of the Greek and Roman populations which they served. Numerous Councils were convened during the fourth and fifth centuries, and certain beliefs of the original Mother Church, those of the Judeo-Christians, were declared heretical. As we have seen earlier, the belief in the multiple lives of the Master was one such casualty. These Judeo-Christian churches declined and were virtually wiped out in the Muslim tide which subsequently swept the Middle East.

In looking at the writings of the early orthodox Church, we witness a new religion obsessed with renunciation of 'heresy'. Archaeological finds in this century permit us to examine objectively some of these heretical beliefs and to compare them with the well-known, standardized, clerical doctrines. When we discern the sources of the so-called "heresies," we find that many of them may be traceable to the apostles and followers who knew Jesus and probably to the Master himself. In its place was imposed a simple, mandatory, credal [*sic*], hierarchical theology which was promulgated some two hundred or more years after the death of Jesus. It was an orthodoxy stressing ritual baptism, confession

of the Church creed, participation in worship, and obedience to the clergy. It reflected a fear, not only of certain Christian factions but also of individual insight from God and of the inner guidance of the soul.

Thus, the Roman and Eastern Orthodox Churches, in haste to standardize Christian theology, lost some of the original teachings of Jesus. These teachings were maintained by the Nazarenes, Ebionites, Elkasites, and others until these groups passed into oblivion a few centuries later. They were not extreme, fanatical factions but remnants of the inner core of Jesus' faithful followers. They are the ones who should have had the teachings of Jesus—even the hidden mysteries—in their purest and most unadulterated form (Sanderfur 2002:200-201).

Sanderfur's history portrays the orthodox church as focused on broadening their appeal, "obsessed" with identifying and persecuting nonbelievers, simplifying and solidifying theology into a creed, imposing hierarchy, and externalizing spiritual practice.

This latter point is a third major deviation from orthodox belief and practice, and perhaps the one that most defines spiritual practice as it is described through ARE: salvation is achieved not by believing in the sacrifice of a God wholly distinguished from yourself, as described in John 3:16, but rather by looking inward to connect with the internal divinity. As described in the Gospel of Thomas as quoted at the beginning of this chapter, "When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father" (verse 3).

In this way especially, the parachurches' disparate understandings of early Christianity is stunningly reflective, in both fundamental theology and in social and political orientation, of the differences between the two parachurches. CBN identifies a strong connection to the early church that is unbreakably tied to its loyalty to the Old and New Testaments as the only true word of God, and presents as a core element of Christianity the external nature of Jesus-as-God:

As an evangelical Christian, if I could summarize what it's all about it would be Romans, which was written by Paul...Romans 9, "If you confess with your mouth

‘Jesus is lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Madelyn Parris, interview with author, December 6, 2006).

At the ARE, on the other hand, members are far more likely to connect explicitly and implicitly with Gnostics through New Age practices that “focus on the powers available to the self through proper training, meditation, and access to knowledge” (Bowen 2007:84).⁵⁴

I don’t see Jesus as really establishing a religion. I think what he foresaw sometimes in the future... was a universal church based on loving god and loving your neighbor. Very simple. Very simple message. And yet churches over the years have added so many rules and things you have to believe in that they’re restricting (Mary Connell, interview with author, October 24, 2006).

When I’ve brought up this theological contrast in conversation with ARE members, frequently people have responded similarly to Lily Bedford’s comment that, “that’s just where they are in their karma” (interview with author, July 10, 2006). One member explained to me that there is a spiritual “ladder” of sorts, that becomes more open and inclusive the higher you get. People who are focused on dogma and rigid, exclusionary belief systems are simply lower on the ladder, he said, but they’ll work their way up eventually, even if it takes several lifetimes (Michael Smith, interview with author, July 9, 2006). As Mary recounted:

My husband plays golf with some Southern Baptists. And they just absolutely will not – and I think this is where they are in their stage of [spiritual] development – absolutely will not even think about the possibility of something existing beyond this area because this is what they say in their church. They won’t even open up their minds to listening to anything... I just wish they would just let the rest of us be and not criticize other people and not tell them members to vote for certain people. Put out what they believe in and let their members make their own choices. I really resent information being distributed to churches before election time. I just think it is very improper. We wouldn’t... the ARE wouldn’t think of doing that. But CBN does that (Mary Connell, interview with author, October 24, 2006).

⁵⁴ This definitely pertains to New Ageism broadly but is appropriate here.

One ARE employee, Deirdre Crichton, discussed how she was formerly very similar to folks at CBN, “I was very devout evangelical Christian,” she said, but had an awakening that God was bigger than the conservative view. She found a new home at the ARE and related that she was once told by a member that it was fairly remarkable that she transitioned “from a religion of fear to a religion of love in one lifetime” (interview with author, December 4, 2006).

Ian Hennessey had a more theological perspective. “The reason people at CBN don’t sound like Christians is because they’re not. They’re Paulitans” (interview with author, September 11, 2006). When I asked him to explain further, he replied,

Paul’s religion is not Christianity at all so most people who think they’re Christians are not Christians, they’re Paulitans. They follow Paul’s teachings (44:59). I know all this stuff about him being blinded by a glorious light on the road to Damascus and God coming down and telling him, “Paul, Paul, why persecuteth thou me?”...the fate of Paul’s teachings on the planet has not been pristine, and I’m not an advocate of Paul at all. I’m an advocate of Jesus. Jesus’ teachings were very simple. He said “heal the sick, feed the poor, if you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn’t have any”. He didn’t say, “accumulate a big bank account and dominate as many as you can”. That wasn’t his teachings. It was very simple...it’s great you can get all these doctorates and divinities and be called “Doctor this” or “Reverend this”. That’s great, but it’s all in your head. That’s not where the compassion comes from (ibid).

Dr. Robertson’s philosophy, Ian continued, “is not the philosophy of Jesus” (ibid).

Similarly, Sanderfur presents a history of the Christian church as constructed “primarily out of the teachings of Paul” that focused on “Jesus’ crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension [and not] in the details of Jesus’ life or what he had said or taught” (Sanderfur 2002:200).⁵⁵

Clearly, those at CBN would disagree with this formulation, but it was fascinating to reflect on how frequently Paul was called upon in conversations and writings by CBN

⁵⁵ There is an extensive body of literature in theological and religious studies writings; however, the influence of Paul over the teachings of Jesus is more generally referred to as “Pauline Christianity”.

members to represent Christian belief, identity, and exclusivity. Regent employee Madelyn Parris quoted Paul in Romans (above), citing his words as central to her identity as an evangelical (Madelyn Parris, interview with author, December 6, 2006). Robertson cited Paul in Corinthians in describing the difference between true Christian practice and Gnostic-like cultism such as that taught by Edgar Cayce (Robertson N.d.).⁵⁶ Regent student Ben Johnston told me at length about his plan to one day draft a play about the life of Paul, the apostle he found most fascinating because of his superior social status as a Roman (author's notes, October 2006).

Fear, Pity, and the Dogmatic “Other”

ARE members' labeling “Christians”, or at least Christians at CBN, as Paulitans in one way reclaims Jesus and his teachings, putting value and attention on the “lost histories” and alternative Christianities as bearing more truth than the orthodox teachings. The True Knowledge becomes wrapped in a history of intrigue, conspiracy, and persecution by the Winners – the orthodox Christians. As a result, (and despite its “apolitical” nature), the ARE Self becomes politically positioned, historically and contemporarily, against the CBN or Christian Other.

This positioning manifests in primarily one of two ways. First, many members carry a contempt for unquestioned religious dogma, sometimes openly criticizing CBN as an example, as with Mary Connell's comment that, “Well, we don't have a television

⁵⁶ As Robertson teaches:

The apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said the psuchikos man, the soulish man, will not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him (see I Corinthians 2:14). Mind control, the Edgar Cayce teachings, and the new age movement all appeal to the soulish man, because they do not require repentance. They do not require being born again. A concept in most of these cults is that if a person gains sufficient knowledge, he can dominate and control the events of the world because he is part of god. He can manipulate god, because he is god. He is part of the universal consciousness, and as he opens himself up to progressive revelations, he in turn is lifted to higher and higher levels of understanding. As he advances, they teach, he gains authority over himself, his body, and those around him (Robertson N.d.).

program where we tell people what to believe and how to vote” (interview with author, October 24, 2006). One ARE employee, Gerald Hamlin, related a conversation he had with a woman regarding the Nicene Creed. Gerald, who had been raised Catholic, had mentioned that when he recited the Creed, he simply left out the things he disagreed with. The woman said that she had asked her priest how to handle that same issue and he had told her to simply repeat the entire Creed over and over again until she believed it. “Oh,” Gerald had replied with astonishment, “like in a cult?” (author’s notes, June 28, 2010).

The second way that members position themselves via orthodoxy is through a sympathetic relationship with other groups (historical or contemporary) opposed to orthodoxy. The conversations and writings of ARE members suggest a sensitivity to persecuted groups like the Gnostics, in which the orthodox church is portrayed as not understanding or deliberately closing its eyes to the profundity of the material it labels as heretical. It’s no wonder, then, that ARE employee Simon Stonerock observed, “I think the ARE is kind of like a mystery school, and really to get in you really have to get past all this junk, all these gatekeepers that hide the place, kind of test you” (interview with author, April 3, 2006). The parallels to mystery religions have been around since Cayce himself. As his biographer describes, “The system of metaphysical thought which emerges from the readings of Edgar Cayce is a Christianized version of the mystery religions of ancient Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, India, and Greece” (Sugrue 1997[1942]:305). The ARE’s lack of an “evangelical” public presence (eschewing conversion and expecting potential members to be guided to them) and its reticence as an organization to make any political overtures (as described in chapter 1 by Johanna Frawley) connects with members’ descriptions of Truth as lying inward, accessible through practices like

prayer and meditation. Further, this focus on a subjective experience of divinity through individual practice becomes strengthened through members' descriptions of and identification with ancient writings like the Gnostic Gospels and Dead Sea Scrolls. In any case, the orthodox Other, whether the church or CBN, can be seen as both pitiable and frightening.

As part of my work at the ARE front desk, I was assigned the task of giving the daily tour. Every afternoon the ARE offered a 30 minute film about the life and work of Edgar Cayce, which was followed by an hour-long tour of the ARE. As I recited facts about Cayce's awakening to his abilities, audience members had a variety of reactions. Many nodded, clearly familiar with Cayce's abilities and philosophies in trance. Some looked relieved, often coming up to me after the tour to tell me their personal experiences with psychic phenomena or past life memories. Others looked uncomfortable, amused, or outraged. One day I mentioned to a front desk volunteer, Wanda, that a few teenaged boys had spent the first ten minutes of the tour giggling then left. Wanda said that people come in all the time because they're curious. "You just have to let them flow in and out" (author's notes, August 14, 2006).

Another day I spoke with a front desk employee, George, complaining about how uncomfortable I felt when a woman (who appeared to be Christian) folded her arms and snorted contemptuously upon hearing that Cayce surprised himself by referring to a client's illness as "karmic". As I explained that Cayce was a devout Christian and slowly came to believe that reincarnation was not incompatible with the Bible, the woman shook her head and for the rest of the tour stayed at the back of the group, shooting me hostile looks. Fully expecting George to echo Wanda's sentiments that these events were

opportunities for spiritual practice, I was floored when he asked “why did you talk about reincarnation?” I confusedly responded that it seemed pretty core to Cayce’s life and work, and George commented that most people came to the ARE because of interest in the health readings, so there was no reason to bring up controversial subjects unnecessarily.

Although the overwhelming majority of people I spoke to at the ARE described a feeling of relief and homecoming upon finding the ARE, they frequently shared a reluctance, fear, or inability to explain the ARE to outsiders. Part of this may have been due to the fact that many ARE participants sought refuge in the ARE—members spoke to me of feeling alienated from their families and peers because of unwanted psychic experiences, unexplained memories of traumas or events occurring before their birth, near-death experiences, or chronic health concerns that seemed unmanageable until they found relief through Cayce treatments. The ARE networks people with these similar experiences and struggles, takes their experiences seriously, offers spiritual context and guidance, and, for many, becomes their “island in the sea of life” (Lucas Contadino, interview with author, December 21, 2006).

Nevertheless, members often suggest that engagement with the Other is mandatory spiritual practice, no matter what the risks. As John suggests, it may even be a test:

I have travelled all over the world and I have been on lots of planes and in lots of lines, and over and over and over again people have said to me “what do you do?” or “where do you work?” There have been times when I have just been exhausted. And the easy answer is “I work for a research organization” or “I work for a non-profit”. And nobody asks another question. But I have forced myself to say something like “Have you ever heard of Edgar Cayce?” and I give this big spiel. I have told the universe I will do it. And... I was at Norfolk Airport once and this heavy-set couple sat across from me waiting to go on and they both have carry-on

luggage with homemade big yellow bumper stickers on them that say “Be Saved or Be in Hell”. I saw that and thought the universe is going to sit me next to those people, I know I am going to be sitting next to those people, I just know it. And sure enough when we got on the plane I was on the aisle, the husband was here and the woman was there. When we took off the husband says “so what do you do?” And I thought I have a promise. It’s a promise. So I did my spiel and I didn’t go in to detail but at the end of the ride I can tell you that his feeling was that it was a damn shame that someone as nice as me was going to hell. There had been some level of interaction but he thought I was crazy (John Winehouse, interview with author, December 21, 2006).

Yet many members also reported that such engagements often turn out better than expected. Joe, a massage therapist at the Cayce Health Spa told me that he had a client one time who looked like a member of Hell’s Angel—huge, muscular, and covered in tattoos. The therapist hesitantly asked if he had ever had a massage before, and to his surprise the man not only had frequent health massages but was quite familiar with Cayce’s theories and school of massage. “Let that be a lesson to me!” Joe laughed (author’s notes, September 2006).

In a way, regardless of outcome, though, the Other and how it will respond is both unknown and known, as its production is tied to a much longer alternative history told through the ARE. This common organizational understanding of Christian and pre-Christian history is originally related through the Cayce readings, but has been much researched and expounded upon since then. Cayce’s description of Jesus was as one of many Christs or “anointed ones” who volunteered to incarnate in order to show spirits trapped in the earthbound karmic cycle the way back to God. This effort was part of a larger struggle that began at the dawn of time, when souls that were initially attracted to the life on this material plane became trapped in material form and forgot their true selves. Adam and Eve (referred to by Cayce as Amilius and Lillith), as well as Jesus and many others, were part of a group of souls Cayce calls the “Children of the Law of One”, who

understand the unity of all life with God and who disparage the fleeting nature of the material world (Sanderfur 2002:42). It is their sworn task to bring souls back to peace and unity with God, and their greatest challengers are those whom Cayce referred to as “the Sons of Belial”, souls who have become invested in the material world and who seek to accrue and wield power (ibid:43; Little et al. 2006:44-45). This conflict, which has arisen in intensity during various periods of time, including the peak of the Egyptian empire and the birth of Jesus, is also the hallmark of our current political quagmires. More than once I heard the Religious Right, and Robertson specifically, referred to as Sons of Belial for their focus on material gain, their desire for political power, and their religious teachings that we are separate from and inferior to God. It is not surprising, then, that the ARE agrees with CBN’s self-portrayal as descended from the early Christian church, with the main difference being that the portrayal at ARE does not reflect well on either CBN or the church. Jesus’ life and legacy becomes retold at the ARE as split, with the Law of One best exemplified by Christian Gnostics and with Sons of Belial driving the consolidation of Jesus’ teachings into an exclusive church that shortly merged with state power, allowing it to effectively shut down Gnostic dissenters and to expand its wealth and reach.

Conclusion

The production of knowledge through ARE and CBN is equally the production of Self, and therefore of Other. As with secular sources of knowledge production, the veracity and legitimacy of knowledge production at ARE and CBN depends less on the knowledge produced and more on the process of production, including the language with which truth is spoken and the presentational style with which evidence supporting truth is

given (see, e.g., Latour and Woolgar 1979). Central as well is the way that truth is politicized, with the Self in agreement with the knowledge and its method of production and the disagreeing Other clearly misled.

The construction of the orthodox Other through the ARE is not necessarily religious. Although CBN and the early church provide good foils for dogmatic institutions that ridicule and protest the existence of the ARE, they are not the only Other encountered there. “Pop culture” and “serious scholars” challenge divinity and mysticism (Van Auken 2007a:2). Scientists and physicians challenge Cayce’s notion of the body and the ARE understanding of the way the body is connected to the mind and spirit.⁵⁷ Similarly, the Self constructed at CBN is not produced simply with respect to other contrasting religious groups. Liberal politicians and scientists are frequently construed as oppositional Others, particularly dangerous because of the cultural weight that is given to their contrasting knowledges. Thus, in each depiction of Christian origins, the organization structures their communal identity with relation not only to other systems of belief but to the systems of belief, fact, and knowledge of secular institutions.

Further, the production of Christian origins is also a political positioning with relation to these secular institutions. CBN’s alignment with the church as clear “winners” and divinely ordained suggests that the church’s subsequent merging with and protection by the Roman state was similarly appropriate. In fact, Robertson has argued more than once that the wave of secularism in the last century inappropriately squelched Christianity as it should properly function with relation to the State. Robertson and many at CBN protest the ending of what Christian Smith describes as the former relationship between religion and politics, where “mainstream Protestantism in fact functioned openly

⁵⁷ This will be much elaborated upon in chapter 4.

as the quasi-official religion centering the nation's cultural and social life" (Smith 2003:26). The dominionism reflected through CBN (as mentioned in chapter 1) relates a vision of Christianity as partnered with but ultimately superior in its guiding of state power. As will be seen in the next chapter, a major stumbling block to the execution of this vision is the cultural hold that secularism has, particularly over such a powerful system of knowledge production as science.

In contrast, the ARE's reading of early Christianity reflects a valuation of and political alignment with the rebels, the Gnostics early Judeo-Christian (as opposed to the Roman catholic) church that held the "true" Christian teachings. It's no wonder, considering how harassed and shunned Cayce was throughout his life, and how the legacy of persecution continues today through Robertson's occasional attacks on ARE, calling them a cult (Robertson N.d.) and saying he knew "the devil was dwelling there" (Simon Stonerock, interview with author, April 3, 2006). The lack of political activism on the part of ARE members may be motivated largely from a desire for peace and avoidance of ridicule or contempt. However, it may also be motivated by a desire to not make the same mistake Judas made in standing for "political and financial structure, while Jesus was teaching the world the primacy of the heart" (Dean 2006:4).

III FIGHTING SCIENCE WITH SCIENCE AT PAT ROBERTSON'S CHRISTIAN BROADCASTING NETWORK

Despite earlier disbelief in global warming, conservative Christian televangelist Pat Robertson shocked many of his supporters in 2006 when, a year after expressing concerns about “far-Left environmentalist groups and their growing push to enlist conservative evangelicals in their cause” (Inhofe 2005), he reversed his position, announcing that he believed that the phenomenon of global warming was valid. Although he credited not science but rather the “summer’s record-breaking heat” for making him “a convert,” he did address the broader ecological context in a broadcast of his Christian news talk-show, *700 Club*: “It is getting hotter, and the icecaps are melting and there is a buildup [sic] of carbon dioxide in the air...We really need to address the burning of fossil fuels” (Roberts 2006).

Robertson’s change of heart on global warming, while seemingly revolutionary, is instead reflective of the complex and contradictory relationship that many American conservative Christians have with science and the scientific community. This paper examines how Robertson’s extensive and vocal conservative Christian organization defines and constructs its relationship with “science”. Through dialogue over issues of global warming, evolution, and biblical archaeology, members of Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) and related organizations construct the scientific “Other” as at once having familiar authority and legitimacy and yet also usurping its boundaries,

proffering answers to questions it is not equipped to address and leading people towards atheism and away from Christianity.

This struggle to preserve the proper roles of religion and science is evident as the seemingly haphazard adoption or rejection of scientific findings reveals patterns in which elements of science are benignly useful, such as health care or digital technologies, versus which threaten to influence Christian's interpretations of biblical truth. An example is in Robertson's own ambivalence about theories of natural science: although he appears "converted" to scientific concerns about global warming, he has not experienced similar conversions regarding evolution. Famous in 2005 for referring to evolution as "a cultish religion" in which "the evolutionists worship atheism" (Robertson 2005), Robertson continued to argue against it in 2009, providing CBN viewers with tangible pointers on how to "us[e] common sense to debunk evolution" (Comfort 2009a).⁵⁸ Further, controversy and disagreement abounds among Robertson's followers and employees over the accuracy of scientific knowledge, its moral repercussions, and its applicability to their lives. Throughout CBN's organizations, whether on campus or on their interactive websites, the employees, students, volunteers, and other participants present diverse and sometimes conflicting messages about global warming, evolution, the archaeological record, medical research, and the political agenda of the scientific community.

As one might expect at a conservative religious institution, there are very vocal critiques of science present at CBN. From stories on CBN's cornerstone Christian news talk show, *700 Club*, to classes at Regent University, the proper role of science is debated

⁵⁸ In Robertson's interview with Ray Comfort, which is discussed at length later in this paper, Comfort provides concrete strategies and examples for how Creationists can argue effectively with Evolutionists.

and refined (see, e.g., Colson N.d.). Yet CBN stands apart from other, more extremist groups in the Religious Right movement in its increasing valuing of science as a source of knowledge and legitimacy in some instances. *700 Club* broadcasts and CBN.com news articles frequently reflect a broader social change among the Religious Right that suggests some space is opening up for vocal supporters of environmentalism, health, and some scientific historical findings. CBN.com even features a “Health & Science” section, where readers can find out about scientifically-supported diet plans, archaeological discoveries about biblical events, information about flu vaccines, the latest NASA shuttle take-off, or, perhaps surprisingly, information about “going green”.⁵⁹

When viewed closely, however, CBN’s and Robertson’s openness to science seems less about a conservative Christian paradigmatic shift and more about CBN’s relationship with the public. CBN’s devotion to engagement with mainstream culture inevitably requires engagement with science because science is inextricably interwoven into the secular realm, which Robertson hopes to influence. CBN is a mix of fundamentalist, evangelical, charismatic, Catholic, and Protestant Christians brought together by common politics fed by a shared theological vision: to integrate into and change society for the better. As part of its mission statement, CBN is committed to preparing the world “for the coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth” (Christian Broadcasting Network N.d.c.), and their methods for accomplishing these include converting as many people to Christianity as possible, keeping the holy land of Israel in the hands of Jewish leaders (per Revelations), and assisting Christians into positions of power. Robertson changed his university’s name from CBN University to Regent University to reflect this missionary desire to foster

⁵⁹ See, e.g., Strand 2009.

Christian leaders who would direct the world's organizations as "one who governs a kingdom in the absence of a sovereign" (Foege 1996:176).

Robertson's integration into mainstream public life is also reflected in his own conversion story which hinged upon his realization that he could be both religious and a successful public member of society. As he recounted, his mother arranged a meeting with a fundamentalist evangelist from The Netherlands, Cornelius Vanderbreggen, who took Robertson to an expensive restaurant and told him that "You are the Lord's guest. God is generous, not stingy. He wants you to have the best. Order anything you want" (Foege 1996:86; cf. Robertson 1972). This brought new awareness to Robertson, who later wrote, "I thought God's people wore shabby clothes, baggy trousers, and suit coats that didn't match... I thought they ate hamburger and boiled turnips" (Foege 1996:86). The realization that material wealth and religion were not mutually exclusive so profoundly affected Robertson that he immediately enrolled in New York Theological Seminary.

Although very diverse, CBN broadly reflects Robertson's openness to material



Figure 5: CBN Studio Building, in the heart of the CBN campus.

society. Unlike some fundamentalist Christian groups that express a Luddite-like resistance to technology and its social-spiritual consequences, CBN applauds the benefits of scientific knowledge and technology, such as CBN's groundbreaking use of satellite and interactive website technologies or its

aforementioned articles about health and environmentalism. Nevertheless, these

concessions are not unproblematic. Rather than revealing a transformative adoption of scientific fact, writers, academics, and participants at CBN demonstrate much ambivalence over how to incorporate science into everyday life and faith.

This necessarily begs the question: what is “science”? Science is a term that in public discourses is used alternately to represent a methodological approach to the natural world, an academic discipline (subdivided into various hard and soft sciences) and the community of people who adopt the methodologies, training, or practices of these disciplines. While this paper incorporates some of these elements in discussion, the primary goal is to define the category of “science” as it is understood through dialogic practice at CBN. As Bakhtin points out, “[t]here can be no such thing as an absolutely neutral utterance” (1999[1986]:128). Speakers bear a plan of where the utterance fits into the chain of speech communion between the speaker and the addressee, and this plan influences the speaker’s lexical, grammatical, and compositional choices. By exploring the ways CBN members speak about and to science, the construct of an imagined “Scientific Other” becomes clear.⁶⁰

Several factors influence CBN’s construction of and engagement with this Scientific Other. First is the historical mistrust and lack of understanding conservative Christians have of science and scientific theory. “Science” has become a highly politicized category over more than a century of discord between biblical literalists and non-literalist secularists who sought to wrest political power away from Protestants by

⁶⁰ Of course as CBN produces the imagined Scientific Other it is subsequently producing the imagined Christian Self, one which self-identified Christians unaffiliated with CBN frequently contest. As one such woman stated to the author in casual conversation about CBN, “I’m Christian and I’m conservative, but I think those people are crazy.” Nevertheless, the construction of the imagined Christian Self at CBN works to call together people for social change, much like Benedict Anderson’s description of the nation-state inspired people to live and die for what was essentially an imagined construct (2003[1983]).

promoting scientific fact over biblical morality and belief in law, education, medicine, and other public realms. Through the twentieth century, fundamentalist and evangelical Christians have first “opted out” of then “re-entered” mainstream society, largely in an effort to avoid or combat scientific knowledge and the power it wields in society.

A second factor influencing CBN’s engagement with science is the latter’s undeniable social power and authority. In many ways science and its cultural trappings become recruited, whether for content or simply for legitimacy of form. Participants at CBN, just as at other religious institutions, frequently borrow scientific data to support their religious beliefs. While the archaeological record may be contested with regard to accepted biblical history, CBN media writers often report upon archaeological discoveries such as an ancient ship that appears to fit the description of Noah’s ark. Yet, because of the hostility with which fundamentalist and evangelical Christians viewed science over the last century, a prevailing ignorance remains as to the actual methods and tenets of disciplinary science, even among “mainstream” evangelical Christians⁶¹ like those at CBN or Regent University who comment extensively on science’s flaws. As I will discuss, this is particularly evident in contestations of evolution and global warming, during which popular understandings of the phenomena, rather than scientific theories, are debated at length. Scientific data aside, the structure of scientific method, fact, and writing itself carries great authority, which is also borrowed. Whether in *700 Club*

⁶¹ As explained in Chapter 1, traditionally there has been a divide in the U.S. between fundamentalist Christians and those whom Joel Robbins characterizes as “Pentecostal/charismatic”; the former tend to focus on “doctrinal purity” while the latter has typically been defined as “experientialist” (2004:123). Robertson has worked to bridge Christians of varying traditions, preferring to focus on political rather than theological solidarity by taking strong conservative stances on political issues. Although “evangelical” traditions are similarly distinct from categories of fundamentalist and charismatic, being “marked by its emphasis on conversion” (Robbins 2004:119), for simplicity’s sake in this paper members of CBN may be referred to generally as “evangelists”.

broadcasts or Regent classrooms or blogs on CBN.com, participants adopt the apparently neutral form of “science-speak” to lend weight to their assertions.

Perhaps the most important factor explaining the contradiction and complexity of science and religion at CBN is the process through which science and its components of “technology” versus “culture” are defined, segregated, and assessed. Science as a discipline or philosophical approach clearly has its own history during which its technologies of language, knowledge production, and engagement with the natural world were developed. However, the focus of this paper is less on the particulars of “science” per se and instead is on the authority and influence of science as understood by CBN. Naturally, the organization’s definitions of science are crafted with respect to themselves, and, through their own valuations of science and its social role, they simultaneously reveal their own insecurities, values, and goals within the public sphere. According to depictions by CBN media, professors, public commentators, and individual members, science is much more than a philosophy or system of technologies, it is a competing culture and social movement unto itself. “Science” and “scientific community” are repeatedly invoked by participants at CBN as representing a coherent, identifiable group with particular values and goals.

An example of this occurred during the 2006 Symposium in Honor of Ronald Reagan, hosted by Regent University (and later aired on CSPAN). The Symposium, entitled “The Future of American Conservatism” drew a large regional crowd of academics and interested members of the general public. One local audience member who identified herself as a “politically incorrect” housewife and mother of four brought up the issue of stem cell research, saying she donated the umbilical cord blood saved

from her daughter Reagan (named after President Ronald Reagan). The mother asked, “Why don’t conservatives push for umbilical cord research without using the embryo?” The conference speakers, who were all pundits, journalists, and academics from around the country,⁶² replied that there is a pressure on politicians to remain neutral. One remarked that he was hopeful that the next generation will be more anti-abortion, remarking, “It’s hard to take on the entire scientific medical community.” The clear implication was that the scientific community is at best indifferent to abortion, appearing rather criminally so in “their” desire for knowledge above the sanctity of what one speaker described as “preborn infant life”.

In numerous ways, CBN participants subtly separate out the data and technological products distilled through scientific process from their uses and interpretations, which are driven by the cultural framework of scientific practitioners. The latter is thus depicted as a competing cultural institution with similar motivations. Just as CBN seeks to convert the public to its worldview by wielding the authority of the Bible, science is understood as seeking to convert the public to its worldview (inevitably reductionist and atheistic) by wielding the authority of scientific method and fact. As will be explored in this paper, it is this multi-faceted nature of science as both product and culture that defines the contradictory, love-hate fascination CBN members have with scientists and scientific process.

⁶² Despite the apparent non-affiliation these pundits had with CBN, several were close friends of Robertson and other leaders at Regent University, and were brought in to the conference to comment on/speak for conservatism in a way that reflected everyday language and politics at Regent. Of note, all eight speakers were white men.

Science versus Religion?

Dr. Jonathan Jacobs, a professor of law and politics at Regent University describes conservative Christianity's engagement with science as a recent phenomenon and a reluctant one, driven by the prevalence of science in the public sphere. When I met with Dr. Jacobs several times on campus, he related his studying and teaching in both secular and conservative Christian higher education. A self-identified unapologetic, conservative, fundamentalist Christian, his personal experience in both "leftist secular" and "extremely conservative Christian" educational settings gave him a broader perspective on the Religious Right and led him to perceive Regent University as somewhere in the middle – a fairly moderately conservative Christian university that had room for liberals and more extreme conservatives.⁶³

Puzzled by what I saw as open contradictions in the depiction of science as foe and friend, I mentioned to Dr. Jacobs that I was trying to think through the relationship between CBN and the scientific community, to which he replied "There's a relationship there?" I laughed, again stating my surprise at Robertson's recent confirmation of global warming.

"You touch on something very important there," Jacobs replied, "there is a phenomenon taking place" (interview with author, December 14, 2006). Reflecting on his experiences in academia, Jacobs remarked on conservative Christianity's general distance from science:

Clearly what you would call the hard sciences are underrepresented in what you might call conservative Christian colleges and universities, and there aren't many

⁶³ Jacobs defined "conservative" consistent with other definitions circulating at CBN. As part of his identification as a conservative Christian, Jacobs expressed a belief in the literal and exclusive nature of the Bible, the primacy of family and open worship of Christ as God, and the reprehensibility of abortion and homosexuality and postmodern relativism.

of those, but there's not much science taught there, period. And it is a curious thing because... [it is] ubiquitous in secular academia.

If you look carefully at [conservative Christian universities], they don't really teach science. It's actually fairly unusual to have a [secular] school that doesn't have a science component. You can't major in science there as if somehow this isn't important. Regent is no exception (interview with author, December 14, 2006).

Considering how ubiquitous science is in secular academia, I replied, why would

Christian schools ignore science?

Arguments I've heard at Regent [and other conservative Christian universities] are mission-oriented: "it's not our mission". And I guess that's true, but on the other hand, how do you completely yield that field to the adversary? And [how can you] think that, particularly in a modern culture, that you can be ultimately successfully in fundamentally changing it by yielding all of that all at once. That's a big thing. Part of the problem I'm sure is that as the church we're uncomfortable with science (interview with author, December 14, 2006).

This discomfort between (certain) religion and (some) science is longstanding in the United States. These struggles have fuelled conversation in popular press and media and have, to some extent, furthered public perception of science and religion as acrimonious and irreconcilable. Mainstream depictions of science increasingly conflate the field with atheism or agnosticism, but rarely with belief. Lately popular media seem to be flooded with debates structured by the media outlets that present them, where anti-science people of faith square off against atheistic scientists over global warming, stem cell research, or evolution.

This popular view of science and religion in the U.S., as sociologist Christian Smith points out in *The Secular Revolution*, represents them as factions in "an enduring 'warfare' of fact against faith" (2003:9). The two sides "are thought of as two antithetical means to knowledge, inherently incompatible kinds of claims to truth that have been ever battling each other for human allegiance" (ibid). This becomes reiterated and therefore

concretized through pop culture depictions, albeit sometimes humorously. In Season 9 of *The Simpsons*, a disbelieving Lisa finds what looks like a fossilized angel. After much debate over its scientific validity, the angel disappears and the town suspects its chief critic, Lisa. Lisa is chased through the streets by a religious mob, which proceeds to destroy institutions of science throughout the town.

Despite continued “Crossfire”-like⁶⁴ positioning of science and religion in the media, most people exist in both worlds simultaneously, as the same Simpsons episode points out when bartender Moe, in helping destroy the Museum of Natural History, is crushed by a mammoth tusk and exclaims, “Oh, I’m paralyzed! I only hope medical science can cure me!” (Lisa the Skeptic 1997). As Moe points out through obvious irony, however, the authority of secular institutions, particularly science, is undeniably powerful.



Figure 6: The "angel" from The Simpsons episode "Lisa the Skeptic." (Copyright Fox Broadcasting Network)

The view of religion and science as warring opposites, however, is not the inevitable facing off of natural enemies. Rather, as Smith points out, it is “less a reflection of historical reality, and more an interest-driven ideological frame first promoted by certain late-Victorian academics” (2003:9). This political rebellion was heavily influenced by the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment project, during which “scrutiny and criticism were the order of the day. Established religion, at once a dominant ideology and an instrument of political power, was a primary target of the scorn,

⁶⁴ Crossfire was a CNN news talk show pitting liberal against conservative over various topical issues.

wit and critical acumen of the Enlightenment philosophers” (Hammer 2001:2-3). As the social movement developed into the twentieth century, scientific knowledge production became synonymous with secularism.

It can be seen through the regular adoption of social scientific evidence as a determining factor in legal decisions since the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* and through the increasing reliance upon quantitative data and “evidence-based practice” in the social sciences. Most significantly, perhaps, the scientific worldview has had a major effect on contemporary religion, which must work to find a meaningful role alongside, against, or in place of science (Hammer 2001).

Science, with its naturalistic approach to understanding the empirical world, has become the dominant standard against which alternative systems of knowledge production must argue. Over the course of the twentieth century, some denominations have reconciled particular truths of Christianity and science. However, fundamentalist Protestant Christians in the U.S. continue to wrestle with contradictions between their literal interpretations of the Bible and alternative cosmologies produced through scientific research.

According to Susan Harding, “after the Scopes trial in 1925, fundamentalists ‘separated out’. That is, they accepted their designation as unfit for ‘modernity’ and for ‘modern’ political discourse, which henceforth were understood to be intrinsically secular and off-limits to Biblical literalists” (1994:539). Fundamentalists, or as Dr. Jacobs referred to them, “those Christians who took the Bible seriously,” began “to withdraw from public life of all sorts and also academic life at the same time” (interview with author, December 14, 2006).

Since the Scopes trial, conservative Christianity has frequently presented itself as antagonistic to science. As the secular movement grew, the authority of science to establish the historical record through the theory of evolution became one of the key issues in classrooms and courts. As Christian Smith points out, rather than being a triumph of reason over religion, the outcome of the Scopes trial was symbolic of a political transition of power in the public sphere (2003). It was not until 1979 when fundamentalists “broke the ultimate barrier and plunged en masse into the national political arena, most strikingly through the organization of the Moral Majority under the Reverend Jerry Falwell” (Harding 1994:539). This decision was influenced in great part by the theology adopted by Moral Majority leaders, like Falwell and Robertson, who adopted as their mission the preparation of the world for the second coming of Christ. Re-entering secular institutions and media became imperative.

There’s a long period of time there, literally, when conservative Christians just didn’t get involved, period, with anything “public”. They existed, they had jobs, so they obviously did something, they put food on the table and so forth, but their influence in the public square was minimized. And that included academia, just a general withdrawal. And it’s only fairly recently that that has changed. In political terms it only changed twenty, twenty-five years ago. It started to change twenty-five years ago⁶⁵ (interview with author, December 14, 2006).

The impetus for re-entering the mainstream was the realization that institutions still have to exist in the secular realm in order to be effective in changing it. Fundamentalist Christians at CBN and elsewhere have struggled with engaging secular standards of academia, medicine, law, etc, all of which incorporate scientific methods, data, and valuations. An example of this is in education, where secular politics prevail

⁶⁵ Interestingly, Jacobs noted that in his opinion, “it may have, by the way, reached its peak already, it may be subsiding again” (interview with author, December 14, 2006).

over academic institutions, requiring science disciplines in any school which desires degree accreditation from national professional organizations.

In some fields of endeavour, you might say, the reintroduction [of Christians] hasn't even taken place yet. And I wonder if maybe science itself is one of those where, clearly again there was a time when almost everybody engaged in this discipline came at it from some kind of Christian or at least pseudo-Christian perspective. At the very least they paid lip service to it – they had to because that was the price of admission. Obviously that has changed radically and for whatever reason, science in particular seems to be very inoculated against the re-entry of Christians into that field, unlike other fields, where, Christians maybe didn't yield but have assertively re-entered. More successfully in politics. In other areas endeavored...for example take the arts, not as successfully as politics but still some infiltration, but the sciences, almost nothing. As though we haven't done much, haven't tried (interview with author, December 14, 2006).

As Dr. Jacobs said earlier, “Regent is no exception” (Interview with author, December 14, 2006). Regent University began as a graduate school, which allowed administrators to circumvent many of these issues. No science classes are needed, for example, for a law school to become ABA-accredited. However, as Regent expands into undergraduate education, they face broader cultural requirements.

Robertson, as Chancellor-for-Life at Regent University, has expressed ambivalence about some of the solutions the university has enacted. Rather than incorporating a biology or physics department, Regent boasts an extensive Psychology department, in spite of Robertson's admonition that, “true Christians don't need psychology”.⁶⁶ The department provides graduate degrees and a much-needed undergraduate “science” component. Within the field of psychology, however, there are broad disagreements dividing more “scientific” evidence-based practices such as cognitive-behavioral therapies from more intuitive and subjective practices such as Gestalt Therapy. Therapies rooted in Christian ideology are taught and practiced as

⁶⁶ Author's notes from speech given by Robertson, Orientation Weekend March 2006 at Regent University

effective treatments for their relevant subculture. Thus, Regent University's accommodation of academic science is to provide instruction in the "softer" side of a soft science.

The issues with incorporating science into undergraduate Christian education are somewhat widespread. As Regent Professor Jonathan Jacobs commented, recounting his experience at another fundamentalist university,

I have known some outstanding scientific scholars who were also Christians and very, very good at what they do. And even consistently applying biblical principles to their own field. But they're awfully rare, and you'd be hard pressed to build a whole university with a whole scientific component to it. You'd have to pull them from all corners. You could leave no stone unturned if you just wanted them. Period. Because as Christians we don't even pursue these fields. If you don't go to graduate school you're not going to get a Ph.D. If you don't have a Ph.D. you're not going to have professors in these fields. And that's largely what happens. I can remember [another fundamentalist Christian university] trying to find – we were under certain obligation for accreditation reasons, we had to teach science. And for a couple of years we'd have this search going on: Any science. We don't care whether you teach geology, we just need somebody. A gigantic ad: "You can teach any of the following fields" and there was a long list. Please teach some science, we don't care what it is. Could you make up a science? That's fine. Paranormal Psychology, we'll try that. Eventually found – I know her very well, we went to graduate school together – she was a very talented biologist, but [her graduate school] had a gigantic biology department. She was literally the only Christian in that whole department. And that's a pretty substantial school. All over the country the same thing is happening (interview with author, December 14, 2006).

Clearly, as Dr. Jacobs identified, science is considered an integral part of mainstream/secular/non-Christian society, and CBN echoes the broader struggles fundamentalist Christians have undergone throughout the twentieth century in sorting out their actual and desired roles in the public sphere. Robertson was active in the Moral Majority before striking off on his own to develop his Christian talk show, *700 Club*, to spearhead a famous Presidential campaign, and to expand CBN media into multiple institutions, all designed specifically for broad public influence. Throughout most of this

time, CBN was best known for their support for their criticism of science over issues such as evolution. However, CBN's engagement with science has become much more contradictory as participants recruit scientific technologies and mechanisms, as though they stood for science proper, to promote political and theological positions. This becomes particularly complex when scientific reasoning and data is used seemingly to contest science itself.

“Fighting Science with Science”

Whether arguing for evidence of Noah's ark and confirmation of Jesus' miracles, or arguing against the practice of abortion and the theory of evolution, participants at CBN draw on an unlikely source to strengthen their claims: science. On occasion, participants enlist scientific data to support religious suppositions (as will be discussed later in this chapter). More frequently, particularly in media and education, CBN participants present information in a way that resembles scientific deduction and dissemination.

When the feature film *Evan Almighty* was released, starring Steve Carell as a modern-day Noah, *700 Club* and CBN.com featured a series of informative news articles on Noah's ark. The articles became arranged into three categories: “The Facts”, “The Faith”, and “The Film”. While “The Faith” focused on Noah's faith and spiritual task and how they apply to contemporary everyday life and “The Film” included reviews and commentaries of the movie's depictions of biblical events, “The Facts” included not just biblical data about the events of the flood but also scientific data. Articles such as “The Archaeological Search for Noah's Ark” and “Where is Noah's Ark Today?” discuss NASA satellite photography and C-14 readings of soil on Mt. Ararat along with

conditions under which wood petrifies and a naval architecture team's calculations of whether an ancient, boat-like structure seen atop Mt. Ararat in satellite photos could float.

The material in the articles can be very convincing, laying biblical text next to scientific technical explanation. In "Where Did All That Water Come From?" the author, investigating the origin of the floodwaters, first presents the biblical description from chapter 7 of the Book of Genesis:

10 After seven days, the waters of the flood came and covered the earth.

11 When Noah was 600 years old, on the seventeenth day of the second month, all the underground waters erupted from the earth, and the rain fell in mighty torrents from the sky. 12 The rain continued to fall for forty days and forty nights.

17 For forty days the floodwaters grew deeper, covering the ground and lifting the boat high above the earth. 18 As the waters rose higher and higher above the ground, the boat floated safely on the surface. 19 Finally, the water covered even the highest mountains on the earth, 20 rising more than twenty-two feet above the highest peaks.

24 And the floodwaters covered the earth for 150 days.

The religious record is then followed by description lifted from www.ChristianAnswers.net⁶⁷ that appears drawn from scientific material:

According to www.ChristianAnswers.net, "There are many volcanic rocks interspersed between the fossil layers in the rock record -- layers that were obviously deposited during Noah's flood. So it is quite plausible that these fountains of the great deep involved a series of volcanic eruptions with prodigious amounts of water bursting up through the ground. It is interesting that up to 70 percent or more of what comes out of volcanoes today is water, often in the form of steam."

"In their catastrophic plate tectonics model for the flood, Austin et al. have proposed that at the onset of the flood, the ocean floor rapidly lifted up to 6,500 feet (2,000 meters) due to an increase in temperature as horizontal movement of the tectonic plates accelerated. This would spill the seawater onto the land and cause massive flooding -- perhaps what is aptly described as the breaking up of the 'fountains of the great deep'" (von Buseck N.d.b.).

⁶⁷ ChristianAnswers.net describes itself as "a mega-site providing biblical answers to contemporary questions for all ages and nationalities with over 45-thousand files" (Cf. ChristianAnswers.net N.d.).

When the “scientific” references for these articles are investigated, however, very little of the supportive material is from scientists within academic disciplines or from sources that have been peer-reviewed in these fields. In the previous example, the article cited as “Austin et al.”, entitled “Catastrophic Plate Tectonics: A Global Flood Model of Earth History,” is published in Proc. Third ICC (1994:609-621), an abbreviation for the Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Creationism.

Another example is from the article “What did Noah's Ark Look Like?” wherein the question of “how could they fit all those animals on the Ark?” is answered by material from two books and a website all written or sponsored by Creationist organizations (von Buseck N.d.a.). Encyclopedic material like “scientists have named and classified more than 1 1/2 million animals” (von Buseck N.d.a.), is brought in as a launching point for the discussion, but the reasoning for how and which of those animals were fit on the Ark is provided by books such as *Noah's Ark, A Feasibility Study* (1996) which was published by the Institute for Creation Research. Another source, *The Genesis Flood* (1961), was noted as being written by “Doctors” John C. Whitcomb and Henry Madison Morris. The authors’ titles lend credibility to their assertions, but it is never made clear that Whitcomb’s doctorate is in theology (Answers in Genesis) and Morris’ doctorate is in hydraulic engineering (Dao), items of interest that would surely diminish readers’ perceptions of their authority to speak on geology and natural history.

Indeed, there is material in these articles that genuinely comes from peer-reviewed scientific disciplinary sources, but it is generally in the form of succinct facts that are then placed into context by pseudo-scientific sources. It is a tactic described by Olav Hammer as the “Rhetoric of Rationality”, whereby one’s claims of logic are shored

up by the simple insertion of mathematical calculations, which offer the illusion of scientific fact and authority (Hammer 2001:243-44).

The insubstantiality of this rhetoric may be partly explained by the previously mentioned history of divisiveness between evangelical Christians and the scientific community. This antagonism against disciplinary science, frequently felt on CBN's campus, both explains and is compounded by a continued, pervasive ignorance about actual scientific theory and approach. This is not surprising, given the lack of comprehensive education in or exposure to science per se. Yet it does not stop the development of pseudo-scientific arguments for religious belief or against scientific theories.

The result of this estrangement is a type of "imagined" dialogue, wherein CBN participants actively recruit material from or construct arguments against imagined, and therefore non-responding, scientists over various issues of public debate. The lack of representative scientists is not entirely the responsibility of CBN; hostility among academia and science member groups often discourages scientists from even visiting religious campuses. An example is at another Virginia Beach religious organization, the New Age organization, Association for Research and Enlightenment, an astronomy professor speaking at a conference about astronomy and astrology recounted how his colleagues warned him not to attend because he would "get a reputation" as a fringe scientist. He reportedly decided to risk being so labeled, responding that "someone had to go and give them the correct information" (May Chandre, interview with author, November, 29, 2009).

Nevertheless, the lack of interaction on campus with scientists produces two main effects. First, there is no rebuttal by scientists to the depictions of scientific process or knowledge, so CBN participants often build “straw man” arguments based on misinformation. A common example of this is in conversation regarding evolution. Literal biblical interpretation is shared by many members of the CBN community, and the theory of evolution with its extended historical timeline is considered one of the greatest slights to biblical history. Whether in commentary on the *700 Club*, in writings at CBN.com, in classrooms at Regent, or in everyday conversation on campus, evolution is constructed and deconstructed.

In a Government class at Regent University, the professor, Wayne Milton, was articulating “Christian” (defined according to Regent’s core tenets) influences on American law and politics and was contrasting them with the atheistic or naturalistic philosophies of famous political theorists such as Hobbes and Rousseau. As frequently happened, the lecture turned to commentary on contemporary politics as Professor Milton argued that Darwinism was dangerous.

With no God, the foundations for ethics goes away... God could design the universe or you could find “chance” causing the universe, but “chance” is no answer – it’s what we say when we don’t know. It’s an acknowledgement of ignorance...Look at the terms [of evolution]: “Random Mutation” – A fish develops lungs—and drowns. ...Random mutation is typically lethal; if you do have non-lethal ones, the problem is it doesn’t result in useful mutation. As Christians, we know this is a flawed worldview. The components have the ring of truth but taken together it’s implausible.⁶⁸

Professor Milton’s understanding of evolution was deeply flawed, conflating the process solely with mutation rather than characterizing mutation as one of several effects on species reproduction, including gene flow, genetic drift, biased variation, transposable

⁶⁸ Author’s notes from class at Regent University, September 13, 2006. See also Colson 1999.

elements, or nonrandom mating, which produce variations that undergo natural selection in a constantly shifting environment (Mayr 2001). Yet this misunderstanding was pervasive on campus, and in class students exchanged knowing nods during the discussion.⁶⁹ As with this example, these arguments often become detailed enough to give an impression of a technical understanding of the material when in fact the arguments are simply reproducing jargon without proper definition.

The misrepresentation of evolution is frequently paired with rational arguments against it and, as was presented on one episode of *700 Club*, instructional information on “how Christians can use logic to point Darwin followers to God” (Comfort 2009a). During this segment, Pat Robertson interviewed fellow evangelist and author Ray Comfort, who used examples such as the following to point out what he believed to be the ridiculous nature of evolution:

Robertson: What are some of the significant flaws in the theories of evolution that he is advocating?

Comfort: Let’s pretend I’m a believer in evolution. There’s a big bang, life form begins, and over millions of years a dog evolves. It’s the first dog. It’s got a tail, teeth, legs, eyes, and it’s good that he has eyes because he needs to look for a female. He’s been blind for millions and millions of years but now he can see and he’s got to find a female. She’s got to be evolved in the right place at the right time with the right reproductive organs and she’s got to have the desire to mate. Because without the female, he’s a dead dog.

Robertson: [Laughs] ...the whole idea is “You Can’t Make Them Think” [sic, quoting Comfort’s book title *You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence but you Can’t Make Them Think*]. What else do they have to think about besides the missing female (Comfort 2009a)?

⁶⁹ This conflation of evolution with mutation is also common in other popular and religious (mis)understandings. For example, in a film that was popular among New Age groups in 2006, *The Indigo Evolution*, had at least one reference to future human evolution as progressive mutation towards improved ability.

Comfort's analysis indeed makes evolution appear ludicrous and immature. However, his argument shows a profound lack of understanding of the tandem evolutionary development of males and females, ignores the fossil record that shows interim species progression between single-celled organisms and modern-day dogs, and fails to consider the billions of extinct species (dead dogs?) that illustrate how evolutionary theory accounts for how challenging survival is. Comfort's argument, which he takes from his book, sardonically entitled *You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence but You Can't Make Him Think* (Comfort 2009b) creates a straw man argument that sets up a distorted and inaccurate depiction of the theory of evolution, then attacks the depiction in the absence of any scientific authorities knowledgeable enough to speak on the subject.⁷⁰ Straw man arguments against science permit speakers a particular authority, having "out-logic'd" the field of logic, and contributes to the second effect of imagined dialogue: the construction of the "Other."

The imagined "Other" of science, reflected in numerous references I collected in interviews, classrooms, media, and casual interactions on CBN's campus, is a construct of a powerful force in secular society, a partially obscured community with a political agenda that is at best dismissive to Christians and at worst openly hostile to them. Scientists, evolutionists, and atheists are frequently grouped together in this category, as when Ray Comfort referred to "bad atheists" as evolutionists devoted to ridding the public sphere of Christianity (Comfort 2009a), or, as earlier mentioned, when Robertson accused evolutionists of worshipping atheism (Robertson 2005). These depictions operate to simultaneously put a face to and depersonalize "the enemy." On one hand this process

⁷⁰ Preceding the interview with Robertson, *700 Club* viewed clips of Comfort interrogating "average Americans" on the street about their belief in evolution, pushing them to defend the mechanics of evolution, in which they clearly not grounded.

makes it easier to disparage the scientific Other, such as when a senior *700 Club* reporter blogs that the unseasonably cold winter of 2008 “could use more global warming”:

Seriously, you gotta admire, or feel sorry for, the dedication of the climate change crowd. They’ve been braving all kinds of cold, nasty weather this winter to get out the message that it’s actually *warming*. It’s a remarkable ability to persevere in spite of the obvious (Hurd 2008).

The author continued, remarking cuttingly that, “I guess it must take at least a PhD to understand how dangerous all this global warming stuff is” (Hurd 2008).⁷¹ More directly, Robertson invoked the danger and stupidity of the scientific Other when problem-solving with Ray Comfort over how to counter the “bad atheists” (Comfort 2009). Comfort stated, to Robertson’s amused agreement, that “God gave us six senses. The sixth sense is common sense and that’s what the atheists and the evolutionists lack” (Comfort 2009). As Robertson signed off the interview, he ended with the supportive admonition to Comfort: “Don’t let the bad guys overwhelm you” (Comfort 2009).

These types of remarks dehumanize a vaguely structured community of atheistic scientists, stirring fear and consolidating a powerful social threat against which the social movement can rally. Yet at the same time the Other is drafted as hopelessly flawed, lacking in logic and common sense. As a result, science is approached frequently as a philosophical adversary that can be defeated through rational argument. The notable exception is, as stated earlier, the evidence produced through scientific means is in accordance with a core tenet at CBN, in which case it is enlisted to support said tenet.

The seemingly contradictory engagement with science is due largely to the fact that, as Olav Hammer points out, even the most fundamentalists Christians have been “modernized” by the Enlightenment project and will, when necessary, “attempt to

⁷¹ Much confusion about global warming is shared by the general public, leading environmentalists to produce articles such as, “If Global Warming Is Real, Why Is It So Cold?” (Shapley 2010).

support their positions by arguing from the same basis of historical scholarship and rational debate as their liberal critics” (Hammer 2001:4). The mark of modernism can be seen in CBN’s use of scientific data on health, history, and nature to support their core theology, such as with archaeological evidence supportive of biblical description of Noah’s Ark. However, modern thought can also be seen in CBN’s frequent forays into Creation Science, during which they borrow the language and methodological (or pseudo-methodological) approach of science to, ironically, gain power as an alternative to occidental “mainstream” science.⁷²

The resulting blend of half-rational, half-faith argument, just as in the *700 Club* interview with Ray Comfort, works largely to position science in relation to the core religious faith shared at CBN. In the following CBN interview of a Creation Scientist, science is characterized, according to its own logic, as subservient to Christian belief:

Science requires that there's a logical, orderly universe. And that only makes sense if there's a logical, orderly God who created that universe and maintains it in a logical, orderly fashion. You see, if the universe were just an accident, a by-product of a Big Bang, then why would it have any order at all? Why would it obey laws like the laws of physics that you've heard of? Well, you see, that makes sense if God made the universe, if there's a mind behind it. And that's what the Bible teaches. So science actually requires the Bible to be true in order to work (Lisle 2007).

Arguments like this one contain all the trappings of scientific thought and rationality but inevitably contain leaps of faith and gaps in reasoning because they are goal-motivated:

⁷² According to Hammer’s four avenues of religions’ modern engagement with science, CBN seems to alternate between conflict (positioning themselves against science) and scientistic, which is defined in this context as

the active positioning of one’s own claims in relation to the manifestations of any academic scientific discipline, including, but not limited to, the use of technical devices, scientific terminology, mathematical calculations, theories, references and stylistic features – without, however, the use of methods generally approved within the scientific community and without subsequent social acceptance of these manifestations by the mainstream of the scientific community through e.g. peer reviewed publication in academic journals (Hammer 2001:202-03).

This is a different use of the word “scientism” from that used by participants at CBN. The latter’s definition, adopted by this paper, will be explored shortly.

rationales are designed pursuant to an evangelical Christian belief in the literal truth of biblical record.

What is most important is not the rationality of the argument but its form. CBN media and the *700 Club* does not look like other televangelist media. Like the Moral Majority, CBN was designed to merge political and religious discourses. However, Robertson's innovation was to transform CBN from a clearly designated religious institution to one that matched secular institutions in broad appeal, style, and authority. When I was a Navy brat in high school in 1990s Virginia Beach, relatively unaware of CBN's existence, never mind close proximity, my friend Scott drew my attention to broadcasts of *700 Club*. "I forgot it wasn't the 'real' news," he commented sardonically, "until Pat Robertson mentioned that Bill Clinton was Satan." Politics aside, Scott's comment pointed out how well CBN's media cornerstone, despite its religious and political mission, had adopted the look and expression of mainstream media.

What does this accomplish? Wouldn't Robertson and others at CBN want to mark themselves as Christian in order to better serve their members? The problem with marking oneself as Christian is that it limits one's reception, and therefore one's impact, in the public sphere. Impacting the public sphere is precisely what CBN visionaries hope to accomplish.

Understanding how and why CBN discourse strives for neutrality and authority may be illuminated through a brief foray into sociolinguistics. Borrowing from Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which provides the "potential to generate homologous formations across different cultural fields," linguistic habitus creates a recurrent grouping of stylistic, thematic, and constructive features, which are understood as *genres* (Hanks

1987:677; Bourdieu 2003[1977]). The term “speech genre” or “discourse genre” is a descriptive term that is “greater than the single utterance but less than a language” (Hanks 1996:242).

Genres, through their particular construction, impart certain expectations of the speaker and hearer. Regardless of the content of the material, the mere fact that it is transmitted in the style of a particular genre provides information to the listener, often signaling a political or social position which may lend to or detract from the speaker’s authority. Guha gives us an example of this in historical text, an official British document reporting on India. Although, from its form the document appears to be a neutral recording of a political situation, Guha argues that “the indices in this discourse...introduce us to a particular code” which speaks with “the voice of committed colonialism” (1994:346).

Bakhtin distinguishes primary genres, consisting of just one kind of practice, from secondary genres, which combine two or more primary ones. (Hanks 1996:242-43)

Primary genres include greetings, jokes, assertions, questions, giving directions, taking oaths, and ordering food, whereas secondary genres typically blend these simpler genres into practices like novels, sermons, closing arguments, public lectures, and debates. CBN, with its blending of various institutions from educational to charitable to media to legal activist, is a wealth of secondary genres. In just one episode of *700 Club*, for example, the show offers information presented in formats that the American public would recognize as News, Entertainment reporting, Commercials, Sermon, Telethon, Talk show, Advice-columnist/guru, Political commentary/lobbying, and Missionary/charity work.

The use of the “News” genre is particularly significant. As with the Rhetoric of Rationality, the “Rhetoric of News Media”, as one might call it, is also used to import



Figure 7: CBN Corporate Building and global satellite system.

ideological neutrality. As one author who reported on CBN said, “The collage techniques by which today’s television news programs tell the stories of the day were long ago perfected. Truth is too subjective a term; credibility *is* the truth. And CBN News’s [segment] so far seems – if not particularly detailed...perfectly credible, perfectly *reasonable*...” (Foege 1996:25). The news desk, complete with generic anchor, accompanying graphics, and Standard English, news-pattern voice-overs, brings the “opinion” out of the news by presenting it in a “fair and balanced” way.

This supposed neutrality allows for easier imparting of judgment because it is unseen. The fact that “the news might not tell us what to think, but it does help determine what we think about” allows for a certain degree of influence over the audience’s thinking (Beale 1997). As an example, many authors have pointed to the news media’s ability to “prime” or “activate” audience attitudes during news programs, such as race attitudes in crime reporting (Valentino 1999). The direction of persuasion aside, the effectiveness of this invisible persuasiveness is a result of the way that the genre of mainstream news reporting in general has cultivated an appearance of impartiality, using “neutral” language that actually brings in hidden meanings. As Guha points out, even texts produced in supposedly neutral genres “are not the record of observations

uncontaminated by bias, judgment and opinion. On the contrary, they speak of a total complicity” (1996:346).

The characteristics of the “news” genre, just as with any other secondary genre, are defined in a particular way and cannot be confused with the other; however, secondary genres themselves may be blended. The “news” genre in American mainstream news programs, for example, can be blended with another identifiable secondary genre to become what critics call “infotainment” – a blend of traditional news reporting and gossip-driven entertainment reporting. As one author notes, “[t]he lines separating actual tragedy, important public events, and dramatic entertainment have become blurred, as have the difference between personalized tabloid titillation and substantive legal or political information” (Fox and van Sickel 2001:55). A format intended originally for “straight news or in-depth analysis” has been transformed through the presentation of more tabloid and sensationalized content. The mainstream media “have abandoned many of their self-imposed standards for avoiding tawdry and sensational topics”, although the news format has remained fairly unchanged (ibid). An example is the finding that news programs now present true crime stories as dramatic entertainment; “[r]arely is there an attempt to place them into the context of the real workings of the legal system the findings of scholars, or general trends in U.S. society” (ibid:78). Thus there is both an expectation for entertainment and a lack of expectation for context by the audience, both of which work well for producers who have an agenda to convey.

In similar fashion, whether in classrooms, through blogs, or on television, participants at CBN frequently employ what Hammer observed as the “Rhetoric of

Rationality,” blending religious belief with the neutrality and authority of scientific data. Without losing the signals representing the truth of Christian belief, speakers strengthen their statements by imparting this scientific authority, as though it were a testimonial. Further, the supposed neutrality of science, just like that of news broadcasting, is brought to bear as well, making an overt religious statement appear more benign and nonpartisan.

However, because CBN’s broader statement of faith is so rooted in belief derived from a solitary source (the Bible), science may serve to legitimize the truth of the Bible but ultimately is not necessary to many believers, as any contradiction of fact may be interpreted as a test of faith, and it is science that is presumed to be faulty for not matching up to the biblical record. So why would CBN participants so frequently turn to scientific and pseudo-scientific sources to justify their belief in the Bible?

This answer may lie, at least in part, in Bakhtin’s statement that every utterance contains an idea of the audience to whom it is addressed (Bakhtin 1999[1986]:132). Focusing on this aspect allows for interpretation of utterances both to understand who a speaker’s imagined audience is and to interpret change in production as a response to audience reaction. Using this observation to read these examples of science-speak at CBN, there are strong indications of their intended, if imagined, audience(s).⁷³ CBN as a whole speaks not only to the converted Christian but to potential religious converts; not only to devout political conservatives but to potential political converts. They succeed

⁷³ Because people are involved in multiple endeavors/practices at any given time, they participate in, or at least understand, multiple genres that connect them to other people. Bakhtin describes more specific forms of intertextuality, including “heteroglossia”, where discourses are borrowed from other languages or linguistic registers, and “heterology”, where discourse genres are juxtaposed (Mannheim & Tedlock 1995:16). As Bakhtin states, genres organize our communicative expression unconsciously, but different genres may also be mixed deliberately (Bakhtin 1999[1986]:124). In this case, CBN media may benefit by mixing traditional fundamentalist Christian genres, such as gospel televangelism, with identifiable secular genres such as mainstream journalism, scientific reporting, etc.

through many avenues, one of which is by putting argumentative weight behind their posited truth.⁷⁴ Rather than falling into genres that immediately marked them as members of an exclusive club, CBN media chose instead to speak to a broader audience by adopting a tone of neutrality and expertise.⁷⁵ By doing so, they can effectively reach doubting believers who are influenced by the overwhelming pressures of secular society (e.g. how to teach your kids about Creationism when they are in public school), believers engaged in missionary work (e.g. how to argue with an evolutionist), and nonbelievers who are potential converts (e.g. science proves we're right).

To this end, there are benefits to neutrality; a wider audience listens without defensiveness and without the discrediting of their perceptions of the world being relegated to the back room of "religion". CBN works to remain relevant to today's lives. Its cornerstone program, *700 Club*, is broadcast across the United States on publicly accessible network channels like FOX and NBC, and on cable network channels like ABC Family Channel. It is even transformed into different regional broadcasts around the globe, with local hosts who translate the issues into accessible form in numerous languages. It has adopted a mixed format of mainstream news broadcast and talk show, presenting information factually (as in the examples above), then frequently commenting on how viewers should understand the material and its social and religious relevance. The neutrality of the format is so convincing, to its target population anyway, that Glenda, an older viewer of and donor to *700 Club*, described the program to me as the *only* unbiased

⁷⁴ Other avenues include various emotional and spiritual connections.

⁷⁵ An important side benefit to this public neutrality is perhaps an avoidance of public condemnation. As one CBN employee and Regent student said, when asked by the author what message he would want the greater public to receive about CBN, "Tell them we're not freaks" (Ben Johnston, interview with author, March 30, 2006).

news program. Unlike CNN or MSNBC, she posited, the *700 Club* did not skew their reports, speaking honestly and clearly to viewers on issues of international politics, the latest scientific advances, and domestic legal battles.

A huge part of this depiction of neutrality is the use of scientific language and material to support statements. CBN can't ignore science yet engage public audiences—media, university, and other participants have to acknowledge some of the contradictions that drive people towards science and away from faith, as when scientific theories provide compelling alternative explanations to biblical material, i.e. evolution versus creationism. Appearing neutrally persuasive, rather than persisting in statements of faith, helps one strengthen faith by incorporating voices from “outside” the faith. Because of the presence and authority of science and regardless of whether individuals actually understand scientific theory and fact, such as those individuals targeted by Comfort in his attempts to make evolutionists look foolish (Comfort 2009), CBN participants appear compelled to address the competing scientific worldview.

Many at Regent and CBN characterized the scientific worldview as dangerously misleading. In addressing naturalism (which is frequently conflated with science and scientific worldview), Professor Milton commented “We are constantly making gods; we are god factories. Hence the First Commandment.⁷⁶ Satan loves himself most of all, and loves to make himself into a false god” (author's notes, September 13, 2006). Since science is regarded, as one student stated, “as authoritative fact”, other worldviews and forms of knowledge are made to appear biased next to it. Therefore, to effectively present what those at CBN might describe as Fundamental Truth and what outsiders might describe as a competing Christian Worldview, they must use the language of the

⁷⁶ You shall have no gods before me (Deuteronomy 5:7, New Revised Standard Version).

dominant paradigm to, as one CBN news articles reports, “fight science with science” (Lisle 2007).

Taking the Scientism out of Science

This “fight” against science becomes much more complex as the definition of science is further articulated. Many CBN participants lump everything scientific into one category, where the difference between good and bad science is deemed self-evident: the authority and benefits of science are pervasive even as the institution is demonized. But at least some of the members of CBN tease apart these differences.

In theory, science as a methodological approach to natural phenomena is fundamentally different from the evangelical Christian approach prevalent at CBN: the former addresses “how” the mechanics of the natural world operate while the latter postulates on “why” they operate in that particular fashion. This difference is reflected in British anthropologist Evans-Pritchard’s famous description of witchcraft among the Azande: “The Zande mind is logical and inquiring within the framework of its culture and insists on the coherence of its own idiom... (1976:16). Witchcraft provides them with a natural philosophy by which the relations between men and unfortunate events are explained” (ibid:18). Evans-Pritchard was speaking to an audience who dismissed witchcraft as irrational, something he argued was clearly untrue. Instead, his insight was as to how a belief in the supernatural filled the gaps left by science. In his famous example, Evans-Pritchard described how when a granary collapsed, causing injury or death,

Every Zande knows that termites eat the supports in course of time and that even the hardest woods decay after years of service... [However,] why should these particular people have been sitting under this particular granary at the particular moment when it collapsed? ... We say that the granary collapsed because its

supports were eaten away by termites... We also say that people were sitting under it at the time because it was in the heat of the day and they thought that it would be a comfortable place to talk and work... [But] we have no explanation of why the two chains of causation intersected at a certain time and in a certain place (ibid:22-23).

Witchcraft, like religion, “can supply the missing link” (Evans-Pritchard 1976:23) by explaining the metaphysical meaning for happenings that would otherwise default into the categories of chance or coincidence.

Reflecting this idea of segregated domains, Stephen Jay Gould, the spokesman for science both in *The Simpsons* and in college classrooms everywhere, offered his solution to the issue of conflict between science and religion, an issue “so laden with emotion and the burden of history that a clear path usually becomes overgrown by a tangle of contention and confusion” (1999:3). His suggestion, which he presents as “nothing original” (Gould 1999:3), proposes a reinforced segregation of the domains of science and religion, marked by respectful non-interference and intense dialogue, through the “Principle of NOMA, or Non-Overlapping Magisteria” (ibid:5). This is, he suggests, a resolution to a conflict that never should have existed by properly dividing the domains of authority, with religion responsible for “questions of ultimate meaning and moral value” and science responsible for the empirical realm (Gould 1999:6).

Although Gould, along with many other commentators, persist in arguing that science and religion are compatible because they address different realms (e.g. physical versus metaphysical or logical versus ethical), the influence that scientific thought has over secular society sets up a privileging of certain questions, foci, and processes of knowledge production. The scientific method focuses attention on questions that can be asked and answered in particular, physical, quantitative ways, thereby disregarding

questions and entities that cannot be assessed in this manner. It is an easy step for many to conclude that questions that cannot be addressed by science are irrelevant and/or involve imaginary constructs whose existence can never be proven and which therefore should be dismissed.

As a result of this devolution from testable questions into moral judgments on that which cannot be tested (like the supernatural), science has provided the basis for an extreme form of secularism wherein any belief system that includes an understanding of metaphysics is false and must be excluded from secular institutions such as government, law, and education. Defending their right to be in the public sphere, conservative Christian universities and political organizations, including CBN, charge the opposite: that scientific thinking has encroached upon private and religious domains to the point that the supposed “secular” scientific perspective has become a religion itself. Professor Stowe, a faculty member in the department of Government at Regent University, put it most succinctly when he distinguished, “I don’t have a problem with *science*. I have a problem with *scientism*.”

Scientism posits that the “formal and natural sciences are the only or most important measure of what counts as knowledge” (Savage 1988:6; cf. Bernstein 1983).⁷⁷ It is “a scientific worldview that encompasses natural explanations for all phenomena, eschews supernatural and paranormal speculations, and embraces empiricism and reason as the twin pillars of a philosophy of life appropriate for an Age of Science” (Shermer 2002). Because it expands beyond scientific method or gaze into a philosophy predicated on the basic scientific approach, scientism has less to do with the practices of disciplinary

⁷⁷ As mentioned earlier, this is a different usage of the word “scientism” from when it refers to the Esoteric use of science to “prove the validity of the religious point of view” (Hammer 2001:203).

science and more to do with the culture of science that is the target of so many of CBN's critiques.

Charles Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries, has written extensively about scientism as a culture and competing religion. Colson, a former aide to President Richard Nixon who spent time in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal (The Chuck Colson Center), penned a dramatized tome on the conservative Christian worldview entitled *How Now Shall We Then Live* (1999), which is used as a textbook in some Regent graduate-level classes. Both in the book and in subsequent writings which have been republished by CBN, Colson argues that scientism is rooted in Darwinism, reporting that:

Tufts University professor Daniel Dennett writes that Darwinism, rightly understood, is a “universal acid” that dissolves away all traditional moral, metaphysical, and religious beliefs. For if humans have evolved by a material, purposeless process, then there is no basis for believing in a God who created us and revealed moral truths, or imposing those moral views in any area of life (Colson N.d.).

Evolution and Darwinism are thus reviled because they are thought to promote an alternative philosophy for understanding life's meaning. As one CBN reporter remarked, “Many leading evolutionists claim there is no purpose and no intelligence behind biology – which are actually religious statements about the nature of reality” (Sitton 2006). It is for this reason that Robertson, speaking on the *700 Club* in 2005, accused evolutionists of worshipping atheism, proclaiming, “I mean, it is a religion, it is a cult. It is cultish religion, and whenever you start talking about the origins of life, you now get into religious matter, and theirs is just as much religion” (Robertson 2005).

It is hard to disagree with Robertson, despite the incendiary nature of his accusations, when defenders of scientism make statements like the following in

mainstream science journals: “*Scientism* is courageously proffering naturalistic answers that supplant supernaturalistic ones and in the process is providing spiritual sustenance for those whose needs are not being met by these ancient cultural traditions” (Shermer 2002).

Unlike the use of the scientific method as only one mode of reaching knowledge, scientism claims that science alone can render truth about the world and reality. Scientism's single-minded adherence to only the empirical, or testable, makes it a strictly scientific worldview, in much the same way that a Protestant fundamentalism that rejects science can be seen as a strictly religious worldview. Scientism sees it necessary to do away with most, if not all, metaphysical, philosophical, and religious claims, as the truths they proclaim cannot be apprehended by the scientific method. In essence, scientism sees science as the absolute and only justifiable access to the truth (Public Broadcasting System).

Atheist/agnostic organizations such as *Freedom from Religion Foundation*, in their attempts to parody religion, draw attention to how their scientistic worldview supplants religion rather than, as Gould so hopefully insisted, “dividing the domains of authority” (1999:3). Their advertisements, seen on billboards and buses, call for exactly what Robertson accuses them of, the worship of Charles Darwin. Even accounting for creative irony, the organization’s materials are undeniably



Figure 8: Billboard sponsored by Freedom from Religion (Copyright www.ffrf.org).

patronizing about the primitive nature of religious belief. One advertisement calls for people to “Praise Darwin: Evolve Beyond Belief (Freedom From Religion),” a derisive pun intended to suggest that “believers” are less evolved than atheists. The Freedom from Religion co-president Anne Laurie Gaylor remarked about the Foundation’s mission:

We think it's a scandal in this country that so many people are illiterate when it comes to science and that they reject... the information that's right in front of them about evolution and instead think that... they should

swallow the Genesis story that we were created in six days (Christian Broadcasting Network 2009).

There is no overlapping magisteria here; clearly the group believes that literal interpretation of the Bible is false and should be supplanted by a cosmology rooted in scientific research.

The primary concern expressed by members of CBN is that scientism hides behind the politically neutral label of “science.” Ironically, the neutrality of the scientific genre that Robertson and others at CBN borrow to convey their truth is precisely what they contest in their complaints against scientism. Just as pseudo-science often relies on the Rhetoric of Rationality to present belief as having a basis in scientific knowledge production, scientism “is supported by discourse conventions giving the impression that method yields truth or verifiable fact, that reality may be described objectively, that the most important audience for research is the disciplinary community” (Savage 1988:6).

Although many CBN members draw this distinction between science and scientism, scientism draws its authority and attraction from the way it is interwoven with scientific methods, facts, language, and discipline practices. The seeming contradiction of CBN members wanting to “fight science” while simultaneously relying on its technologies and authority in other situations actually speaks to the difficulty of segregating the philosophy of scientism from the study of science.

As a result, the scientific worldview is one that many at CBN believe is a wolf in sheep’s clothing: rather than just a methodology it is a culture, a religion without the trappings. Robertson appears in mainstream media to be foolish and fanatical when arguing that:

[E]volutionists worship atheism. I mean, that's their religion. And evolution becomes their religion.... So this is an establishment of religion contrary to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution... It is cultish religion, and whenever you start talking about the origins of life, you now get into religious matter, and theirs is just as much religion. The only difference is that even questioning, questioning that -- the ACLU says even if you question our religion, you are guilty of violating the First Amendment.⁷⁸ I mean, give me a break (Media Matters 2005).

However, this does raise important questions about the secular and how it operates for all religions and religious-like philosophies. Is it an umbrella for the protection *of* all religions or a domain protected *from* them? Either way, the secular movement theoretically posited equal treatment of all religions, without the privileging of one over the other. If the secular has become infused with the religious-like cosmology of scientism, how then should religion be addressed in the public sphere?

In the end, the task CBN institutions appear to take is to reframe the public role of science. CBN reporters and Regent professors alike comment on the way that science's presumed neutrality masks hidden agendas, philosophies, and biases, which they feel are necessary to unveil. Pundits and academics at CBN frequently discuss the "boundaries" of science, particularly as they relate to the "evils of scientism". Yet despite the criticism and policing of science, CBN also demonstrates a desire to become relevant alongside the authority of scientific knowledge production by changing the social and historical context by which "science" is understood as a category. As one article lauded, "Christianity's role in promoting scholarship and science has a long history - an amazing history of

⁷⁸ The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution offers both a protection of religious freedom and a separation of religion from the State. Since the adoption of the Constitution, federal courts have struggled to define the boundaries and contexts of these edicts. The formal text is as follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances (U.S. Constitution, amend. 1).

significant influence on the foundations of intellectual endeavor,” praising “Science, a Creation of God” (Totheroh N.d.).

IV FLEXIBLE KNOWING: HEALING AND THE BODY AT THE ARE

In between speakers at a conference at the ARE, I overheard a man describing to a friend of his how he had an emotionally disruptive experience that had invited in strep throat. At the time I chuckled to myself, shaking my head affectionately (patronizingly?) at the common New Age belief that the mind-body connection was so strong that one could correlate disease directly to mental state and subsequently control both. Evidence of this belief is everywhere at the ARE, as Edgar Cayce's primary interest was in helping people through health readings, which unveiled the primacy of emotion and attitude in health.

It was, then, a fairly strong marker of how transformative my research and experiences in the field were when, a year later, after my husband was diagnosed with a serious illness, I spent hours looking through Cayce readings and Louisa Hay's Cayce-like New Age diagnostic bible "Heal Yourself" to try and understand how my husband's emotional patterns could have manifested in such a physically destructive way. Although my husband ultimately received the majority of his treatment through occidental biomedical means, my observation in the field of the successes of Cayce treatments at treating everything from rheumatoid arthritis to cancer led my husband and me to seek a variety of alternative health treatments to complement the biomedical ones. Using castor-oil packs, herbal teas, nutritional changes, meditation, acupuncture, and hypnosis, my husband shocked his Western physicians (but not us) by mitigating or completely eliminating treatment side effects and by improving at a much more rapid pace than

expected.⁷⁹ What was shocking to us was the way that the physicians almost universally disregarded these alternative treatments, even in cases such as when a physician insisted that a side effect would continue to worsen, although acupuncture treatments for the side effect removed it completely. Treatments geared toward enlisting or improving the mental state of the patient in healing, such as hypnotic suggestions during surgery, were barely tolerated by physicians, in the best cases inspiring mild curiosity.

Although Western medicine gives lip service to the importance of managing stress and the influence a patient's state of mind has on the success of her treatment, in operation it largely ignores the state of the mind of the patient or patient's family. Further, my experience with my husband's illness and recovery led me to believe that the patient was in fact the least important person in the room. Doctors came into the patient's room with tests already performed and analyzed, with diagnosis, treatment plan, and prognosis already planned. Informing the patient of what would happen to him was the penultimate step to actually performing the treatment on him. The patient's role was to sit quietly in waiting rooms, sometimes for hours at the mercy of the doctor's changing schedule, then to listen quietly as the doctor recited the treatment plan and the innumerable risks (a process made terrifying and necessary by the lawsuit culture of the medical community), then finally to quietly receive whatever treatment was prescribed.

The alternatives offered by holistic medicine at the ARE don't just address state of mind, they place it at the center of healing, therefore placing the patient him or herself at the center of the healing process. One of Cayce's most famous quotes from the readings, painted on a wall in the ARE Visitor Center entryway, states "Spirit is the Life,

⁷⁹ To be fair to the physicians, at my husband's 6 month post-operative check-up, we learned that one skeptical physician had been floored by my husband's avoidance of treatment side effects using acupuncture and had even gone so far as to recommend it to another patient.

Mind is the Builder, Physical is the Result.” This statement is testament to the connections among all forms of life, but also to the power of the mind not to perceive reality but to create it for the individual. Individuals’ states of mind mattered not just for health or for material gain (as is suggested by the bestseller *The Secret* (2006)), but more importantly for overcoming the cycle of karma.

***Edgar Cayce and Holistic Medicine: Karma as a healing paradigm?*⁸⁰**

Even Cayce, however, did not draw a perfectly straight line between disease and individual mental state. He admitted to a few “accidents” that contradicted the meanings of God’s larger plan. Further, his descriptions of the workings of karma were complex. Disease could be manifestations of unresolved issues from past lives, just as one client’s stomach disorder was the result of two past lifetimes of overeating, during which he proved an inability to control his food behavior without sub-(or super-)conscious intervention in the form of a stomach disorder that required a great deal of attention to and restriction of food. Disease or hardship might also be something that one needed to experience in order to understand, a concept often related to bad behavior in a past life that indicated the same lack of understanding. One such example, which was mentioned several times at conferences and in general conversation, was the story of a man who came to Cayce in hopes of a reading that would cure the man’s blindness (1861). Cayce’s subsequent readings revealed that the man had, in a past life, been responsible for blinding his enemies. However, unlike his brother, who did the same but felt it was a

⁸⁰ As mentioned in chapter 1, not all members of the ARE are educated about or interested in Cayce’s philosophy of health, but it continues to be one of the primary foci of the organization itself, along with spirituality and ancient mysteries. People share different levels of knowledge about Cayce’s health recommendations and about mind-body medicine in general, but the conference center, massage school, bookstore, and library support a range of ideas and practices related to, but not necessarily derived from, the Cayce perspective.

culturally-binding duty, he enjoyed it. Cayce indicated that even with this karmic history, the man was *only* born blind, observing, “Isn’t God merciful?” (author’s notes, March 2011).

Yet another way in which the operation of karma might cloud one’s healing is when the disease or death is meant to help others work through their karma. As I worked at the front desk of the ARE one morning, a woman came in and began telling me of her late daughter who had died at the age of 9 or 10 after a long battle with cancer. Her daughter, she informed me, had very clear memories of past lives, including one in which mother and daughter had been on the Titanic when the mother had lost her husband, along with most of the family’s money. The daughter had described how in that life the mother had given up, caught cold, and died, leaving the daughter at the mercy of unscrupulous relatives and an unsure fate as a young female orphan in the early 20th century. The daughter explained to her mother that this was why she, the daughter, had to die in this lifetime, so the mother, in this life divorced, could know what it was like to be left alone. The woman found her way to the ARE largely because her story echoed others in the Cayce readings...sometimes disease is suffered not solely to provide a lesson to the sufferer but to provide opportunities for growth for those around the patient.

Indeed Cayce’s coming to terms with reincarnation in his waking life led to a plethora of “life readings” in his trance state that changed the way his followers thought about not just disease but death. One friend of mine from the ARE, Lily, when facing a long course of treatment for cancer, struggled with whether it was easier to just “start over.” Although she is a biomedical health care practitioner, she strongly believed that her diagnosis was directly related to interpersonal conflict that she had been fostering for

some time. The thought of putting her body through harsh biomedical treatment seemed overwhelming when paired with the necessary internal and interpersonal changes she would have to make. As she talked through her concerns with her therapist, also an ARE member, they together concluded that the choice was hers to resolve her issues incarnate or disincarnate. Lily's chosen medical path was to pursue some (but perhaps not all) of the treatments recommended by her physicians while using meditation and spiritual self-care to hopefully resolve the underlying issues. She decided, at least for now, to try and wipe her karmic slate as clean as possible. This debate seems ludicrous within the ethics of the biomedical and American legal systems. Death is perceived of as the enemy, to be avoided at all costs. In Lily's case, the main influence on her choice to survive was not a fear of death but rather the expected tedium of dealing with the same issues in another life. The soul's development (through shedding bad karma and acquiring good karma) was thus central to Cayce's portrayal of the body-mind-soul connection, and therefore central to issues of healing.

Patient, heal thyself

Our bodies are atomic structures, hard wired for spirit. Our bodies are antennae for the divine – Every atom has an impression of divine in it. We're the RNA of God's spirit. We must do everything we can to keep body clear (Jane Redburn, author's notes, March 11, 2006).⁸¹

As Cayce said, healing requires a balance between two principles: physical attunement with our spiritual source and personal responsibility for the healing process (Thurston N.d.). Issues stemming from this life or past lives may push us out of physical attunement, and taking responsibility for health means taking a close examination at all parts of our lives and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors. In the 1940s, a

⁸¹ All of the quotes from Jane Redburn are taken from her talk "Awakening Your Spiritual Self: Cayce on Healing Prayer" which was part of an ARE conference on *21st Century Prayer* in March 2006.

woman approached Cayce for a reading. She was very distraught because her son, despite numerous interventions, continued to wet the bed every night through the age of eleven. Cayce performed a reading for the family, suggesting that the son had performed violent acts against others in his former life and the bedwetting was a subconscious avenue of self-punishment. Cayce recommended that the mother sit with the son while he was falling asleep and repeat statements to him as he entered REM sleep to the effect that he was a good person and that he would use this life to help others. In a matter of days the problem was largely reconciled and after a few months was completely eradicated (2779-1).

The predominant philosophy from the Cayce source was a sense that the self-other dichotomy is a false one. Whether condemning others or condemning self, the action is a barrier to healing and peace. As one ARE energy worker, Jane Redburn, commented at a conference on Healing Prayer, “All self condemnation is to be laid aside. Set aside things that cause doubts. We are each called to be the Christ in another’s life”⁸² (author’s notes, March 11, 2006). Additionally, there is a connection between helping the self (by vibrational attunement through diet, exercise, prayer, and meditation) and helping others, “Those forces that are destructive in the Self are broken down by the raising of vibrations...When people have attuned themselves, they can bring that forces to others. The paradox is that one must be attuned oneself to help the most” (author’s notes, March

⁸² Recall from Chapter 1 that “Christ” at the ARE refers not to the person Jesus but rather to the title (from the Greek “*khristos*” meaning “The anointed”) indicating a human who has achieved enlightenment.

11, 2006). So one both has to take care of one's own needs and simultaneously help others.⁸³ "When we are helping others we are being helped."

This philosophy is at the core of the Christ consciousness, the pattern Jesus provided for humanity to use in their reunification with God. By moving further down the path of Christ consciousness, we become our own best physicians, whether diagnosing or prescribing. Cayce argued that each person could, as Louisa Hay's book title *Heal Your Body A-Z* (1998) suggests, heal themselves; when he performed a health reading, he "read" the subject's subconscious, deriving the cure from the subject him- or herself. One friend of mine and member of the ARE, Michael, uses a pendulum in meditation. He has designed an elaborate map of letters, numbers, dates, body parts, etc over which he swings the pendulum to answer questions about his life and health. The answers, he says, come from within; the pendulum is only "test equipment" to access the clarity of his subconscious without fighting with the much louder and blinder conscious. When my husband fell ill, Michael, along with other friends from the ARE, were quick to remind us both of the Cayce protocols for treating my husband's illness and of my husband's own ability to judge which treatments, Cayce or occidental, would help him the best. Healing is thus multi-faceted and very active on the part of the patient.

The idea that one cannot simply passively receive healing is another contradiction of Western medicine, where pills are touted as able to cure anything from depression to digestive tract disorders, without so much as the conscious participation of the patient. Cayce definitely saw a role for drugs and surgery but he warned patients "of misunderstanding how they work and of expecting more of them than is possible."

⁸³ The latter is a Cayce recommended treatment for depression: "Altruistic service provides a sense of interpersonal connectedness which can be extremely therapeutic in the treatment of depression" (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.a.).

Medication can provide a false sense of “oneness” through temporary relief of physical or mental problems. They can be stepping stones or aids in a process of true healing but:

Healing that really takes hold and lasts must come from changing one’s inner consciousness and vibration. That happens most effectively from consistent and persistent human effort (i.e., engaging one’s desires, purposes, and will) – a step that pills all too easily allow us to skip (Thurston N.d.).

This idea has been reinforced by a variety of Holistic Health practitioners; James Gordon, Director of the Mind-Body Institute in Washington DC and the author of *Manifesto for a New Medicine* (1996) documents similar concepts in his own medical practice. Gordon, an occasional speaker at the ARE, has written about a patient of his suffering from metastasized cancer who defied her oncologists’ predictions by appearing to rapidly heal holes that had begun to form in her pelvis bone. However, when the oncologists dismissed the mind-body work she was doing with Gordon as nonsense and reiterated predictions of her decline in health, the holes reappeared immediately (1996).

ARE and the Holistic Health Movements

Although some critics of New Age medicine have suggested that they are no more holistic than Western medicine because, for example, reflexology focuses entirely on the feet, this seems to miss the point entirely.⁸⁴ Regardless of the specific focus of the

⁸⁴ As Levin & Coreil argue:

Velimorovic [48.19] and Vanderpool [50] have noted, ‘holistic medicine’ - with its frequent emphasis upon discrete behaviors and upon particular foci of intervention (e.g., the foot, the iris, the spine, the chakras, the soul)—is in fact, extremely reductionistic and often no more ‘whole-person-oriented’ than allopathy. In essence, the new age patient may be as fragmented a collection of parts as his or her ‘old age’ counterpart. Where the allopath may see the patient as an amalgam of lungs, kidneys, extremities. etc., the new age practitioner may see the patient similarly, although the ‘parts’ are different (meridians, chakras, prana, etc.). In fact, in cases where the new age practitioner is an especially dedicated ideologue, it may be the allopath who seems ‘holistic’ by comparison. Cardiologists, for example, are a subspecies of internist; an iridologist, though, may be credentialed only in iridology, if even that. The former may be criticized for placing an inordinate emphasis on the heart, but, to the latter, therapy may well be completely reducible to ministrations of the eye. And where the allopathic specialist will refer a patient to another specialist, it is unlikely that a Rolfer will refer a patient to, say, a Reiki master, at least on a

treatment, holism means thinking of the person as a whole, not as a sequence of parts that have no relation to one another. The ARE overview of Cayce's treatment of depression explains it in this way:

While Edgar Cayce's perspective has many similarities to the modern medical (biochemical) model of depression, there are important differences. Instead of relying heavily on medication to alter the chemical balance in the nervous system, he would usually recommend more natural methods. These "holistic" therapies would help the body to be its own "medicine chest" and thus bring its faulty biochemistry back into a healthy state. "Holistic" refers to Cayce's tendency to consider the whole person (body, mind and spirit) when diagnosing illness and making treatment recommendations. Hence, Edgar Cayce is widely regarded as the "father of modern holistic medicine" (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.e.).

Cayce's early emphasis on "maintaining a well-balanced diet, regular exercise, the role of attitudes and emotions" and "the importance of relaxation and recreation, and keeping our physical bodies cleansed-both on the outside and the inside" as part of the prevention of illness (N.d.f.) predicted (and some argued inspired) the rise of holistic health movements later in the twentieth century.

Truth in Healing

The differences between the ARE's approach to healing and the biomedical/Western approach to healing are profound and locate the sources of healing, and of knowledge about the body, in entirely different places. The ARE's holistic approach, begun by Cayce and continued through treatments and research, holds (at least) four principles of healing that differ from occidental Western medicine. First, regardless of outside influences, the patient is ultimately the source of his own health problem, diagnosis, and cure. Whether through direct meditation, as with Lily and Michael, or with the assistance of talented telepaths like Edgar Cayce, the higher self, accessed through the

systematic basis. In any event, there are certainly no relevant data addressing such referral patterns (1986: 891).

subconscious (as opposed to the lower, animalistic self governed by the conscious mind) holds the keys to health problems and solutions. Second, the mental and emotional state of the patient is vital to the cure. Whether through hypnotic sleep suggestions, as in the case of the bedwetting boy, through disciplined self-change, or through maintenance of a faith in one's own choices in healing as in the case of James Gordon's patient, the mental or emotional state of the patient determines healing. Third, holistic approaches like Cayce's, along with most other non-Western traditions, are founded on the principle that the body, mind, and spirit are connected, so that a problem on any level can manifest in a variety of forms. This is why, fourthly, Cayce's approach to health ties together diet, exercise, meditation, and prayer.

In contrast, Western medicine is heavily influenced by the field of science. As discussed above, the patient is definitely not the most important person in the doctor-patient relationship. Medical paradigms tend to externalize health problems, the processes of diagnosis, and treatments. Further, Western medicine does not recognize a spiritual component. Practitioners and writers do recognize a connection between mental/emotional and physical, but generally in the sense that physical/chemical intervention can affect any type of mental/emotional/physical healing. As a result, treatments like prayer, etc are dismissed, considered absurd to include as standardized health treatment. (This of course is also related to the privatization of religion politically in the US).

In fact, the segregation of healing from religion is uniquely Western and recent, yet it is integral to the primary and fastest-spreading health paradigm around the globe. Within the United States, the rise to power of the AMA is a story of persistent political

lobbying against all other forms of medicine, removing the ability of midwives, etc... to legally practice, thereby denigrating them to “alternative” status. This power dynamic continues today through the continued regulation of any health practice and more importantly through the politics of insurance coverage. In spite of studies demonstrating the effectiveness of, for example, homeopathy’s treatment of dysentery or acupuncture’s treatment of joint disease, the vast majority of health insurance policies will not cover these types of treatments. The justification of this exclusion is based in a lack of “evidence” of effectiveness, the funding for which research inevitably comes from the pharmaceutical companies that provide the newly branded “effective cure”. Because of the focus on human practice over pharmaceutical companies, scientific studies of alternative health techniques become reliant on non-corporate sources of funding, which are tenuous and few.

Yet it is the approval of science, through scientifically rigorous and repeatable studies showing statistically valid effects, that provides validity for any health practice. For the most part, the ARE’s members, directors, and founders are perfectly amenable to this process. Largely this is because, although the initial health information upon which the member-based ARE was founded came from metaphysical sources (the Akashic Records or individuals’ subconscious via Edgar Cayce’s psychic trances), the founders and members of the ARE originally understood Cayce’s material to have a great deal of natural truth in it. That is, despite the individualistic nature of Cayce’s readings, he often spoke of laws of healing or preventative health practices that were universal and could be studied.

In fact, Cayce himself was originally suspect of his own trances and the information derived from them, particularly because he did not remember any of what he spoke during the trance and had to rely on others' transcriptions. As a result, he allowed for scientific testing of his physiology during trances, until the testing violated his consent, becoming painful when scientists jabbed a hatpin through his cheek and a knife under his fingernail (Kirkpatrick 2000:130). Even in spite of this, Cayce frequently allowed scientists and skeptics to spend time with him, during trances and otherwise. An example of this was when Harry Houdini, dedicated to exposing con artists and fraudulent psychics, visited Cayce numerous times, ultimately failing to debunk or explain the phenomena and actually receiving psychic readings from Cayce on his behalf (ibid:10). Police and FBI agents were equally perplexed and unable to explain away the knowledge Cayce produced. As a recent biography of Cayce's states:

That Cayce didn't charge admission to witness his trance sessions, that he didn't conjure ectoplasm or summon phantom spirits in a darkened room, presented unique and entirely unfamiliar challenges [to FBI and police investigations]. That he built no church, had no disciples, and avoided the lime-light, confounded and confused them. As novelist and psychic researcher Arthur Conan Doyle described Cayce: "He was in a class all his own" (Kirkpatrick 2000:10).

Partly because of the strong convictions that the material from the trances proved accurate, combined with continued attacks by both religious groups, who felt Cayce's practices constitute occultism, and by skeptical scientific groups, who felt that Cayce's methods were so incongruous with science that they must be fraudulent, the ARE sought to use scientific methods to prove the validity of the readings. The very founding of the ARE was intended "to help people transform their lives for the better, through research, education, and application of core concepts found in the Edgar Cayce readings" (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.a.).

Thus, the information Cayce provided about health (and later about ancient mysteries, artifacts, and religions) provided ARE members with truth that was not incompatible with scientific ways of understanding the natural world. The ARE was founded in 1931 to “research and explore transpersonal subjects such as holistic health, ancient mysteries, personal spirituality, dreams and dream interpretation, intuition, and philosophy and reincarnation” (Association for Research and Enlightenment N.d.c). However, the direction of the ARE has varied with time, and although the 1960s brought a focus on proving the scientific validity of the Cayce readings, that passion has waned in recent years.

Science and Faith at the ARE

For a “religious organization,” the ARE continues to be very scientific in that it supports research and it attempts to follow particular scientific protocols to interrogate the readings in a certain way but also in its relationship to the scientific community. Roughly half of the conferences I attended brought in researchers from universities or health centers, including Duke University’s Medical School. But the ARE seems less like a research organization (which it may have been at one point in time) and more like a spiritual center with a passing interest in science, with a few exceptions.

Perhaps one aspect of this transformation is due to the lack of interest in or respect for ARE by scientists. As one director of the ARE, Samuel Hanford, observed:

I think in general what’s going on here is not given much currency by most scientists. Now we’ll have people come in to speak here who are one tenth of one percent scientific community who are thrilled that there’s a place like this (interview with author, December 7, 2006).

Hanford believed what is off-putting to scientists is their perception of the ARE as religious or philosophical, in contrast to scientific. He suggested that was a factor in

ARE's help in funding the development of a separate nonprofit research organization, the Meridian Institute, which is staffed by ARE members who are health professionals.⁸⁵ As Hanford describes, "they tried to do some pretty solid protocol medical research on some of the hypotheses that would come out of the Cayce health readings. And they've gotten some peer-reviewed journal publications out of that." In contrast, peer-review articles from the ARE itself are rare. Most research remains in house or is published through the on-site publishing house, missing a crucial step in achieving academic and scientific validity: the peer-review process.

So why is the ARE reluctant to engage the Western medical community through research and articles, preferring instead to outsource it to the Meridian Institute? Isn't the "R" in ARE for "Research"? Hanford suggests that partly due to the fact that "most of the board and most of the membership don't feel like that's the best use of money." The reason for this is twofold. First, it's partly because the ARE population itself doesn't really care about whether, for example, a Cayce-recommended health treatment or the existence of the lost continent of Atlantis, is scientifically researched and justified. This did not signify a dismissal of scientific knowledge or processes, but rather a sense of frustration at their limitations. Science was perceived of as oppositional to religion, and many who came to the ARE were attracted by its "middle ground," including Samuel Hanford.

Hanford stated that his personal interest in merging science and faith has changed over time. It was, in fact, the reason that he and other ARE employees chose psychology as a field of study – because of its potential to stand in between the two. (Although Hanford now does not believe psychology to be the middle ground between science and

⁸⁵ Meridianinstitute.com

faith, an opinion that seems affirmed by the increasing “scientification” of psychology as a discipline). Hanford does admit to

...times where I have been real intent on can we get peer-reviewed journal articles on testing hypotheses out of the readings. I love it when there are people who are into that, it's just not where my passions are right now, myself. But you know if we were to pick up the phone right now and call a typical ARE member...my guess is that she wouldn't have that much interest in cardiologists from Duke. She's sort of glad that's going on and if it's in Venture Inward she'd say “oh, that's nice”, but she's more interested in where the Hall of Records are and how to do a such-and-such poultice if you're having chronic headaches, and something about astrology maybe that has to do with her grandkids. So it has a little flavor of application to it but the notion of doing any kind of systemized, systematic research is probably more of the kind of thing of, “well, I'm glad they're doing this” (interview with author, December 7, 2006).

An indifference to scientific research is one side effect to the larger critique of science apparent in many instances...leads to the second reason for why the ARE board is reluctant to fund research is because no matter what evidence they provide, skeptics are not going to be convinced about phenomena that they don't already believe in:

How many times do we have to prove in a laboratory that there is something to ESP before we say, “Okay, what's next?”

Yeah, so if you've got \$50,000 in disposable income, do you spend it trying to convince people who are probably going to be skeptical anyway to believe something they don't want to believe, or do you underwrite scholarships for ARE Camp for some 11-year-olds who are not going to be able to go otherwise? And it's going to have a life-altering experience for them. And our tendency has been to run a deficit budget for something like the Camp than it has been to fund another parapsychology experiment (interview with author, December 7, 2006).

Why spend precious resources on a scientific form of knowledge that is doomed to fail to convince scientists? It ends up doing a disservice to the people who are already involved in the organization who are there because they either took a leap of faith or because they already question the forms of knowledge science provides.

A Double-Blind Placebo Study of Faith

Further, often stated by ARE members or implied through discussions of holistic health is belief that the scientific paradigm was not just limited but methodologically crippled by its limitations. For one thing, the method requirements makes scientific, particularly medical, research prohibitively expensive for those outside of the accepted paradigm, and other forms of research are looked down upon as less valuable. Hanford argues that the ARE preferred method is anecdotal:

that kind of research effort has been more meaningful. It's where an ARE member who is professionally situated in a way where they can either surreptitiously or overtly take some ideas from the readings and put them into practical application and some way of collecting data, even if it's not double-blind. And then you've got a kind of anecdotal report that, who knows, maybe somebody else working at a bigger facility reads that and they get inspired to incorporate some of those features into a well-funded study that then got... there's not a centrally planned program, but a member who has the professional credentials and the research opportunity sort of on their initiative take something up. There have been physicians over the years that have done that in a kind of informal way (interview with author, December 7, 2006).

The lack of faith in the form and authenticity of the scientific study of medicine is perhaps tied to the fact that Cayce's "holistic health" is contrary in form to occidental medicine. While it is increasingly popular in American health systems to speak of "holistic health", "integrated medicine", or "alternative and complementary treatments", there are fundamental differences in the ways that various medical practices view the body, and, in particular, the mind/soul connections to the body. Holistic medicine at the ARE doesn't just offer an alternative medical system, it suggests that the one we have is fundamentally flawed. If, as described above, illness is very specifically tied to one's karmic issues, attitudes, or mental state to such an extent that these qualities determine

the success of even the most “proven” treatments, how can one scientifically test treatments without accounting for individuals’ anecdotal mind-body issues?

This perspective is perhaps best illustrated through the writings of Edgar Cayce’s eldest son, the late Hugh Lynn Cayce, who was the person primarily responsible for the development of the ARE and for making his father’s work accessible to the general public. He was a devout Christian and spoke extensively about Jesus. In one of these commonly-given talks, he referenced Matthew 8:2-3, where a leper approached Jesus, saying “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” The passage continues, “And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.” Hugh Lynn pointed out that here, as in other passages, the leper had faith in the cure before Jesus laid hands on him (Cayce 1984). In similar fashion, Pat Robertson and other hosts of *The 700 Club*, including Robertson’s son Gordon, always include a segment of the show in which the hosts pray and open themselves to receive “words of knowledge.” The hosts channel divine information about television audience members who have various afflictions. By praying along with the afflicted viewers, and by calling on God’s healing power, the hosts report on healings they sense are happening among the viewing audience. The only requirement for the viewers is that they open themselves to healing through faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Successful cases are often featured on the show. This phenomena is the opposite of double-blind placebo concept where healing operates independent of faith or even knowledge.

This also points to problems with the way medical research is performed when investigating “alternative therapies.” I once had a conversation with my father-in-law, a physician, over whether alternative therapies were legitimate or not. His argument,

because they have not been rigorously tested but rather rely on anecdotal evidence, was that they were not yet legitimate. But why would physicians be so dismissive of anecdotal evidence? I asked. His response was twofold: first, if a treatment is said to “work,” it means the treatment works for a large portion of the population; second, it is very hard to distinguish supposed “anecdotal success” from the effects of placebo. What then, I countered, is the problem with placebo if it brings about success for the patient? But it doesn’t, he stated, it generally creates a false read that does not last. This stumped me until the implication sunk in that his argument relied on conflating anecdotal evidence of success with short-lasting placebo, something I find very hard to swallow, particularly after having spoken with so many people at the ARE who reported long-lasting success with the Cayce remedies, whether for psoriasis or for cancer.

In fact, whether alternative therapies (at least those at the ARE) become legitimate in the eyes of biomedical practitioners and devotees of science is often reliant upon their surviving a rigorous testing using a methodology that is blatantly contradicted by the alternative therapies’ mechanism of success. Cayce talked primarily and extensively about attitudes and emotions as the cornerstone of healing... this means that scientific studies that rely upon a notion of medicine as working successfully on the body regardless of the knowledge or state of mind of the person attached to the body (1) cannot speak authoritatively about therapies that do rely on the state of mind of the person, and (2) can always be excused by alternative health practitioners on those grounds. In other words, scientific study ends up proving itself only to scientists, since any disproving of alternative means can be explained away by alternative practitioners through the study’s likely methodological faults.

An example of this conflict is explained by Erika Bourguignon, who cites a popularly-discussed study on the healing effects of intercessory prayer by cardiologist Randolph Byrd (2003). Byrd's study, which is published in the *Southern Medical Journal* (1988:15), used a randomized double blind controlled study of patients in a cardiac care unit. The carefully selected patients in the experimental group were, without their knowledge, prayed for by born-again Christians, while the control group members were not. The study suggested significant differences in outcomes, but because of its design, Byrd argued, it was not a "pure" study as it did not take into account whether participants prayed for themselves or were prayed for by others. Bourguignon's critique of the study focuses on its implicit theology – how was God understood to act in this study? How did the patients' faith affect the outcome? As she argues, "In any case, this study doesn't tell us anything about faith healing, and doesn't attempt to. The faith of the patients is not an issue. It is the faith of the study's author and of those who prayed that is tested" (Bourguignon 2003:16).

The Laws of Healing Prayer and the Study of Free Will

Byrd's study is the biomedical opposite to Hugh Lynn Cayce's story of Jesus and the leper – the leper's faith preceded the healing by Jesus, while Byrd's study wouldn't even have informed the leper of Jesus' existence. This is also in opposition to the way prayer was described by Cayce and continues to be practiced at the ARE today. Almost at the same time the ARE was founded, a group of Cayce followers organized a prayer group to meet once a week, during which volunteers would pray for others. This group, the "Healing Hands," continues to meet weekly at the ARE, welcoming anyone interested to attend and/or pray with them. In addition to praying for peace and divine blessings in

general, Healing Hands accepts requests from individuals in need of prayer, or on behalf of others who have passed on or who are otherwise unable to request prayer for themselves. Participants will also perform hands-on healing at prayer meetings for any who need it. There is a discrete methodology and theory to their prayer, however, that was informed by Cayce's readings that were directed to this purpose. At a 2006 conference on healing prayer, Cayce's divine laws were described by Jane Redburn, an ARE energy practitioner and member of the Healing Hands prayer group.

First is the belief that human bodies "are atomic structures that are hard wired for spirit" (author's notes, March 11, 2006). By attuning ourselves through proper diet and exercise, we make ourselves receptive for divine information (psychic or collective experiences) and purpose (service to others according to our skills). This is very important on both sides: whether one is praying for another or receiving prayer.

Second, there must be a sincere and conscious desire for healing by all parties. As Jane Redburn stated at the Prayer conference, "God cannot save a man that would not be saved" (author's notes, March 11, 2006). Cayce repeated quite frequently that someone requesting prayer must cultivate and express a sincere desire to be healed. As a result, the Healing Hands prayer group will only offer direct prayer to those who specifically request it for themselves, as Redburn says, "because we ask people to do their own work in preparing to receive the change, the energy toward healing" (author's notes, March 11, 2006). Otherwise, they will pray that the individual or group be surrounded by white light so they will have the necessary resources available to them when they desire help and healing.⁸⁶ In addition, the person praying must be "attuned", as mentioned above, which

⁸⁶ Healing Hands will also offer prayers to those who have died to ensure they "cross over" safely and quickly. Cayce spoke often (outside of the trances) of spirits whom he saw trapped on the earthly plane

is marked by “ability to feel that consciousness of the sincere desire WITHIN to BE a blessing, A channel, to someone” (281-3:3 [emphasis sic]).

Third, all self-condemnation must be laid aside (author’s notes, March 11, 2006, see also 281-3:2). Destructive and judgmental forces interfere with the Christ consciousness, which (as stated earlier) is predicated on the unity of self-other-God. Criticism of or attack on self is just as destructive as criticism of or attack on others.

Finally, Redburn described Cayce’s fourth rule of prayer as “knowing the purpose of the prayer.” It is very important that those praying have a clear conception of the ends for which they are assisting. If someone is ill, are they asking for a quick recovery? For freedom from pain? Or for a peaceful death? When the sincere intention of the prayer matches the sincere intention of the person receiving prayer, the greatest amount of good can be accomplished.⁸⁷

It’s clear from these rules that Byrd’s study of prayer was doomed to failure. Participants in the study provided prayer with disregard to the spiritual attunement of the person praying, violating Cayce’s first rule for success in effective prayer. The study also disregarded the individual needs of the patients themselves. People praying knew nothing of the specific purposes for the prayers they made on others’ behalf. Further, according to these rules, the study seemed ethically suspect and ineffective by not taking measure of the intentions of the patients for whom prayer was made. Concentrated prayer effects,

because they did not realize they had died, or because they had unfinished business that did not allow them to move into the next stage of the cycle of incarnation. Cayce (much like the protagonist of the film *The Sixth Sense*!) would counsel spirits to help them move on.

⁸⁷ As an alternative, and because, as a guest speaker at the ARE pointed out, we cannot see all ends, so often Cayce recommended the prayer “thy will be done.” This can be confusing when we are trying to discern when it is important to exercise our free will and when we assume too much God-like authority when trying to control part of the larger plan. The best use of free will, the ARE speaker and Cayce both argued, is to willingly become a conduit for God, who sees infinitely farther than we do (author’s notes, March 11, 2006).

states Redburn, can be tremendous, so one praying must be careful that subject is ready and attuned (author's notes, March 11, 2006). This is believed so strongly at the ARE that the Healing Hands prayer group will not pray directly for anyone who is not aware of and receptive to the prayers.

Scientific studies of prayer, or at least those that would pass muster according to Cayce's rules and ethics, must therefore take into account the larger supposition that the patient's will and attitude are the most important aspects of health care. This, of course, leaves a huge gap for error that can explain away poor outcomes. If prayer fails to be effective, either the patient or the person praying must not have focused their will or attitude carefully enough. Or there are karmic lessons yet unlearned. Or there is a larger divine plan that is unknowable to us rats in a maze.

It is not at all my intent to mock the beliefs behind Cayce's understanding of prayer. Rather I just wish to point out, as others have, how exceedingly difficult it can be to combine the assumptions of science-based medicine with the assumptions of healing at the ARE. Nevertheless, Cayce did state that some elements of health were possible to test, and suggested they would eventually be proven true through scientific study. Throughout the ARE website and massage school literature are numerous examples of scientific findings that correspond to Cayce readings. An example of this is Cayce's reading 1158-31 in which he stated "Those who would eat two to three almonds each day need never fear cancer." He referenced almonds several times as an aid for preventing a tendency toward cancer or toward the recurrence of cancerous tumors.⁸⁸ Since his death (in 1945),

⁸⁸ "If an almond is taken each day, and kept up, you'll never have accumulations of tumors or such conditions through the body." (3180-3)

several studies have suggested the effectiveness of almonds as part of an anti-cancerous diet.

The Cayce laws of healing prayer do include a universality that potentially could be captured by medical studies. In one sense, as Jane Redburn points out, “It doesn’t matter how healing comes, the attunement of the body to the Christ forces is the same” (author’s notes, March 11, 2006). However, she explains, each person’s particular stumbling blocks are different. “Jesus treated patients differently according to their needs,” Redburn affirmed (ibid). Medical studies which have more recently been focused on determining (or scientifically explaining) the effectiveness of alternative therapies often try to balance the universal versus individuality aspects of healing.

The ARE has invited numerous scientists and non-member health practitioners to speak about their research at ARE conferences, including cardiologists at Duke who are researching the effects of therapeutic touch and intercessory prayer on patients undergoing cardiovascular surgery. Yet the primary focus of biomedical healing on external intervention through medicine and surgery contradicts the core of the Cayce philosophy of healing, summed up here by Jane Redburn: “Would that all men would know...as we try to emulate the Christ consciousness, more is accomplished than through all the power of man” (author’s notes, March 11, 2006).

Knowledge Production in Health

According to the cosmologies of ARE and CBN (although the latter has not been as thoroughly described here), many scientific studies of health and the body are patently flawed. However, irrespective of how cleverly scientific studies are designed, the

principles of the ARE suggest a fundamental flaw in the scientific perspective as a whole, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Yet this critique does not manifest at the ARE as an opposition to science. On the contrary, there is an engaged respect apparent in the various collaborations with researchers and open conversations with the scientific community, even when those collaborations/conversations are repeatedly rebuffed.⁸⁹ The larger problem here is one of assimilating different approaches to medicine. If not “scientifically valid”, then the approaches are discounted without further study, or fair study is not possible because the alternative perspectives are not compatible with the scientific methodology, or alternative philosophies are not intelligible to biomedical theories so they are recategorized as “religious practices” and not “medicine”. There is a catch-22 because religious treatments may be effective or more effective than medical treatments but how would its legitimacy be established? Would that validation come from medicine? Using medical methodologies?

Other medical cosmologies (Ayurvedic, traditional Chinese, various shamanistic practices) and other Western “religiously-based” medical/health issues: Genesis diet, PR’s soyshakes (along with funny story), Christian Science, words of knowledge – all are very disparate, but what ties them together is their engagement with biomedical science from a less powerful position (the legacy of colonialism/globalization?). They become grouped together and relegated to “alternative” or “complementary” status in the U.S., despite their mutual unintelligibility, their effectiveness, or the primacy of their cultural relevance. Although there is much talk now in American medicine about integrating these different medical practices and knowledges, in actuality most “alternative” practices form

⁸⁹ Examples include scholars in astronomy, Egyptology, and geology.

niches or are sidelined (sometimes out of the country, as with the Cayce cancer treatment center that was forced to relocate to Mexico) while the AMA dominance upholds one version of the biomedical form of knowledge production.

The ARE, inspired by Cayce's holistic health readings, manages to draw from both science and faith, but is repeatedly excluded from mainstream biomedical journals, conferences, and general acceptance. At its core, the ARE derives its information from metaphysical sources (the Cayce psychic readings, energy assessments, etc). As a result, no matter what the topic, medical scientists appear reluctant to engage the material. Nevertheless, the authority of the scientific medical paradigm is so pervasive that ARE members/employees continue to seek out scientific studies (reporting on the studies to members on the website and in the members magazine), invite secular (religiously unaffiliated) health care practitioners to speak at conferences, and even fund scientific health research.

V A BRIEF INTERMISSION

As we see it, at the end of this life, because we do believe that there's only one shot at it, we will be judged by God for what we have accomplished on earth (Regent University employee Madelyn Parris, interview with author, December 6, 2006).

Just tell me what I have to do to not come back (attendee at an ARE conference on breaking the karmic cycle of reincarnation, author's notes, July 22, 2006).

Looking Towards the Political Future

This conclusion, as the title implies, is more of an intermission, as I come to the end of the dissertation but feel there is so much more to say. Perhaps it is Christian Smith's description of the secular as comprising cultural and institutional structures of science, higher education, public school education, public philosophy, the "judicial sphere," media, and "the basic cultural understanding of the human self and its care" (2003:2-3) that inspires me to continue looking at the ways parachurches respond to the incredibly broad authority of the secular beyond the three institutions I have addressed with specificity. This is why I hope to pause here, to return to the field with more specific and targeted questions, my eyes open to issues that did not crystallize for me until the end of my time in the field.

In fact, I have left the most interesting element of the parachurches' relationship with the secular, their engagement with governmental law and politics, until the last, where I will end with a few comments suggesting the course this discussion will take in the future. Although everything addressed in this dissertation reflects deep political voice and positioning, the parachurches encouraged vastly different attitudes toward explicit

political activism. The more time I spent in the field with CBN and ARE, the more curious I became about how CBN seemed to inspire members' political engagement and ARE seemed to dissuade it. This was, in fact, a question I put to a director at the ARE, Lucas Contadino, who responded:

Let me answer this briefly three ways. Part of the inaction comes out of the readings themselves in that the readings make it very clear that we are not a dogma, that we do not have a set of belief systems, that we do not have "this is what you have to do" or "this is what you have to believe." So the next step in that is that it would be completely contrary to the readings to say "you need to vote democratic" or you need to do whatever, because each soul has to find his own way. ...[W]e do not have the same makeup as Pat Robertson with all our membership as the same kind of person – it's not. They are all working on individual stuff and they don't want to hear about your belief system necessarily. The third answer is going to be that there are definitely things that we could do better – taking a stand and presenting a perspective or presenting a "what about"... (December 21, 2006).

As Lucas describes, there may be ways the ARE could be more proactive, but its lack of dogma is intimately connected to its lack of political positioning, just as the opposite is true at CBN.

However, it is not simply about a lack of dogma but also about a vision of the future and the role that members can expect to take. "Edgar Cayce talked about a thousand years of peace [arriving soon], and it's almost like the ARE thinks that *that* will be its time" (ARE employee Simon Stonerock, interview with author, April 3, 2006). In contrast, Simon said, "I am interested in the politics of urgency. CBN has a sense of urgency about current political situation so it acts but ARE has belief in the divine order, and it's like they're just waiting for it to unfold" (ibid).

In both cases, the parachurches are witnesses to the unfortunate goings-on of the outside world, a world that has promise but persists in misunderstanding the true nature of God and humanity. More specifically, there is a cultural-political Other, the

construction of which both CBN and ARE share. This is the aspiritual Other, the materially-obsessed Sons of Belial or the agents of Satan that lead the flock away from God. It is a force described as cultural and social, demonstratively powerful in law and policy and subtly powerful in its persuasion and logic.

More specifically, it is what I have identified, with the help of theorists like Talal Asad and Christian Smith, as the *secular*. It is the Academic Other in chapter 2 against which the parachurches' histories and truths are constructed. It is the Scientific Other in chapter 3 which is borrowed, applauded, maligned, and contested as CBN produces their image of the world and how it functions. Is it the Medical Other in chapter 4 which is illuminated in stark contrast to the ARE's construction of the interconnected body-mind-soul and how it heals.

Hegemony of the secular

What is common to these portrayals of the *Secular Other* is its combination of social power and ill-definition. At both parachurches, it is vaguely defined as a social movement⁹⁰ but one whose power lies in blinding others to the truth, often by making the truth ridiculous.

One crucial question when understanding these discourses on the secular (whether academic or popular) is: where is the secular located? In fact, the very definition of the secular is bound up in this question. For most anthropologists writing about the secular, it is described as being unequivocally tied to the state, which attempts to divide religious dogmatic influence from the rationalist workings of a democratic (or communist) government. Yet the primary discussions I had about the secular at CBN and ARE were

⁹⁰ Showing, perhaps, an agreement with Christian Smith's historical re-thinking of secularism as a deliberate social movement rather than the expected outcome of modernization.

not about the secular nature of government, but about social spheres of influence in which the secular policies of the government had been adopted. The parachurches are clearly trying to make a voice for themselves and an impact on secular organizations, seeking power in their own ways. Members of both parachurches discussed institutions of science, academia, and media as being infused with a hegemonic secularist culture far more insidious and persuasive than overt government action.

In this question it is very useful to reexamine Antonin Gramsci's struggles to understand hegemony and the relationship between civil society and the state. Gramsci speaks of hegemony both as an effort on the part of the proletariat and as the tool of domination by the bourgeois ruling class, but on a broad level, hegemony can be understood as an alliance among groups that achieves ideological integration in society. This alliance presumes a match of interest and tendency among the groups, but also entails a balance of compromise that is both economic and corporate (Gramsci 2003[1971]:161). The rise to power, and the maintenance of power once achieved, relies on a cultural integration of a particular ideology; the creation in society of a unison of economic and political aims as well as intellectual and moral unity (Gramsci 2003[1971]:181-82; Anderson 1977:19). The importance of compromise over violence is strongly emphasized here: "If the union of two forces is necessary in order to defeat a third...[t]he only concrete possibility is compromise. Force can be employed against enemies, but not against a part of one's own side which one wants to assimilate rapidly, and whose 'goodwill' and enthusiasm one needs" (Gramsci 2003[1971]:168). In opposition to domination, absorption or direction of allied social forces in this way

allowed for the creation of “a new, homogeneous, politico-economic historical bloc, without internal contradictions” (Gramsci 2003[1971]:168; Anderson 1977:19).

However, while the concept of hegemony offers a contrast to the power of domination, they are both exercised in society to differing extents. Through his Prison Notebooks, Gramsci questions where hegemony and domination were located and how they were exercised (Anderson 1977:21). His resulting search for answers creates what Perry Anderson refers to as “a persistent slippage” in his understandings of hegemony and domination and how they relate to the “State”, “civil society”, and “political society” (Anderson 1977:1). In trying to locate where cultural hegemony drew its strength and guidance, Gramsci postulates first the dominance of the state, then of civil society, before theorizing that power is located in between the two, with institutions of civil society (media, advertising, popular culture) guiding possible public understanding (or creating authorizing discourses?) while relying on the institutions of the state (military, tax revenue system, law) to support the interests of civil society.

As Anderson points out, however, the ideological power of the bourgeoisie is located not just in civil society but in the capitalist State itself. While means of communication are important in maintaining the stability of the class order of capital, the power of the consent to bourgeois ideology is “that it takes the fundamental form of a belief by the masses that *they exercise an ultimate self-determination* within the existing social order” (Anderson 1977:30). In other words, “It is thus not acceptance of the superiority of an acknowledged ruling class (feudal ideology), but credence in the democratic equality of all citizens in the government of the nation – in other words, disbelief in the existence of any ruling class” (Anderson 1977:30). The State is thus a

crucial part of the making of “consent” because the belief of self-determination hinges on the myth of democracy inherent in a parliamentary representative State (Anderson 1977:31).

Similarly, the power of the secular is in the “myth of the secular,” the belief of its political and religious neutrality. Clearly, the history of the idea of secularity was a partisan one, arguing against mainstream Protestant politics and moralities (Smith 2003). Behind the idealism of equal and fair treatment of all religions was a hostility toward the dominant expressions of Protestant faith, a hostility that some (including those at CBN and ARE) argue has spread to include all expressions of faith today.

At the same time, the idea of the secular in American culture and government has become so revered and protected that its logic appears self-evident. Whether fictional portents of doom like *The Handmaid’s Tale* or real-life examples like the Taliban in Afghanistan, horrifying examples of the collapse of the secular abound. The terms of the secular may be perpetually in contest (e.g., where is the line between free practice of religion and the separation of church and state?) but the need for the secular realm is considered irrefutable, even (especially?) among institutions of faith, as evidenced by Regent professor Thomas Winston’s admonition, “Jesus said ‘you are in this world not of it’” (informal interview with author, February 22, 2006)., “People say ‘[CBN] want[s] to turn America into a church,’” Regent employee Ben Johnston protested. “We don’t. My God, we want separation of church and state” (Johnston interview, March 30, 2006).

Woven into Johnston’s protest, however, is a defensiveness based on public perception of CBN as threatening the neutrality of the secular. Far more than ARE, CBN relates to what Smith describes as the “Protestant establishment” that was “routed from

social power” (2003:26). Robertson’s visions of challenging the government and reinterpreting the Constitution’s stance on religion do resemble a throwback to the nineteenth century when there was separation of *church* and state, not separation of religion and state. As one CBN interviewee protested, “It’s absolutely clear our founders did not want to separate God and government...The Declaration of Independence on four occasions refers to God and that created our government” (Strand 2010). Some of what Robertson and others at CBN protest about the secular could possibly be understood as frustration over losing political control in government and the public sphere. In contrast, most people I spoke with at the ARE were strong secularists in that they wanted to preserve a distance between public forms of government, science, and education and private forms of religion, some even holding up CBN as a model of how *not* to be. However, both CBN and ARE perceive in the secular a veiled hostility against and sometimes heavy-handed control over expressions of faith—a hostility that CBN and ARE perceive underlies most of their critiques against secular institutions of government, law, science, medicine, academia and education, and media.

CBN and ARE draw attention to the lack of neutrality by (1) inserting revealing terms into public dialogues that parody or critique secular terms (Activist Judges, Creation “Science”), by (2) adopting secular forms of information distribution in media, internet, education, by (3) adopting/borrowing secular knowledge, systems of knowledge production, and forums for political power (scientific data and modalities, voting & public referenda).

This is not to argue that CBN and ARE are in any way “neutral” in opposition to the secular. Both groups engage in persuasion, like any other organization that has a hold

on the truth, whether it's the CDC trying to persuade people to wash their hands to prevent the transfer of disease or the Holocaust Museum trying to persuade people of the accuracy of their historical record regarding WWII and the Holocaust. There is nothing inherently bad in persuasion, it can be used in earnest or to manipulate. However, CBN and ARE are frequently called to task on their persuasion because of their statuses as religious or spiritual organizations, even (especially?) from within their organizations. Regent student Sara Peroni, for example, expressed a wish that "Christians would stop acting like a special interest group" in their self-promotion, particularly in partisan governmental politics, as, Sara believed, people who truly have God in their heart should be in all levels of government regardless of political affiliation (author's notes, September 2006). The CDC and Holocaust Museum, on the other hand, as *secular* institutions, are expected to promote a neutral, objective, and universal truth, a promotion that typically isn't even thought of as persuasive.

The parachurches are just as contradictory as the secular, acting as neutral and not-neutral producers of knowledge, but the points of friction between the parachurches and the secular are very revealing of hidden meanings and power in the public sphere. The unexamined nature of the secular and its production of "knowledge" (explored in the next chapter), in combination with its cultural authority and power, forms the basis of the deeply political relationship between institutions marked as "faith" versus those marked "secular". Despite its promise for neutrality and fair treatment of religion in America, the secular has, for many, failed to live up to its promises, sparking a loss of faith in the very possibility of the secular.

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