Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion

"Head Knowledge Isn't Enough": Bible Visualization and Congregational Culture in an Evangelical Church

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Abstract

Ethnographers of American evangelicalism agree that "the Bible" functions within the subculture as a ritual totem, that Bible study cell groups are crucial social units, and that Bible reading is less about interpreting texts than appropriating their authority for personal applications. The present study, based on three years of fieldwork at a North American evangelical congregation, affirms this consensus while adding a new contribution. Missing from previous studies of "how the Bible works" is the role of Bible *visualization* in congregational life. This study demonstrates how visual persuasion builds on a penchant in American evangelical culture for visual communication. As this dynamic was observed *in situ*, congregational culture was subtly altered in ways that contravened the church's espoused values as connections to printed texts were attenuated, sermons increasingly featured eisegesis (projecting meaning into the biblical text) alongside exegesis (extracting meaning from the text), and congregational life was colonized by evangelical mass culture. Then, too, few studies explore how "mediatization" of religion extends into everyday congregational life. The present study elaborates this perspective and contributes to a growing ethnographic literature on American evangelicalism by describing Bible visualization practices crucial to a subculture with which one in four U.S. adults identifies. In so doing, field observations are analyzed through an extension of Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model that accounts for cognitive-cultural models as persuasive cues.

Since the rise of the New Christian Right, ethnographers have explored the "social life of scriptures" (Bielo 2009a) as a key to unlocking the American evangelical subculture. At the highest symbolic level, Ammerman (1987: 132) found the Bible acts as a ritual object that supplies the leader with the "essential trapping of his authority," while Ward (2009: 8) observed "the Bible" functions as a "dominant symbol" that condenses all actions into a single representation, unifies all other symbols into a common association, and draws all meaning "around the two poles of social obligation (defending and practicing the Bible) and personal desire (relating to God through the Bible)." Other ethnographers have limned the link between the Bible and evangelical identity. At an individual level, Harding (2000: 34) argued that conversion amounts to "a process of acquiring a specific religious language or dialect" derived from the Bible, and at the communal level, Frykholm (2004: 40) found that "reading is an important part of establishing oneself as part of a community." Others have plumbed evangelical epistemology and discovered, as did Ault (2004: 167), that Bible study focuses on "not just a passage's meaning in general but its specific meaning for us right now, in this context, given our particular dilemmas or needs." Luhrmann (2012: 59) similarly showed that evangelicals "read their Bibles in a conversation with God," listening for "the way the words intentionally lead them to respond." As such, Bielo (2009b: 49–50) observed, "literalism does not constitute a hermeneutic method" so much as imbuing scripture with an assumed authority that enables the "most widespread form of interpretive activity…an ongoing attempt to apply biblical texts to their everyday lives." Though evangelicals preach literalism in principle, Malley (2004) found, these declarations serve chiefly as markers for evangelical identity. In actual practice, "this avowal of literalism" is not allowed to "conflict with any actual restrictions to a text's historical meaning which would severely constrict the Bible's ongoing relevance" (p. 146).

Ethnographers who "write the culture" of American evangelicalism agree that "the Bible" functions as a ritual totem of deep symbolic significance, Bible reading cells function as crucial social units, and Bible interpretation is less about discriminating actual texts than appropriating taken-for-granted biblical authority for personal applications. The present study, based on three years of fieldwork at an evangelical congregation in the southwestern United States, affirms this consensus while adding a new contribution. Missing from previous studies is the impact of Bible *visualization* on congregational life. This study will demonstrate how visual persuasion builds on a penchant in American evangelical culture for visual communication, further attenuating connections to biblical texts and leaving congregational life less anchored in "the Word." This dynamic was observed over thirty-nine months as Riverside Bible Church installed a new pastor in September

2013 who then fundamentally shifted its rhetorical practices.[1] Sermons emphasized oral performance and word-pictures accompanied by PowerPoint slides of photos, images, and elaborate "technical" illustrations to condense teaching points, even as congregants were frequently warned about the dangers of "head knowledge." Video series from national parachurch organizations were shown during Sunday morning services, took the place of evening services, and replaced human teachers in Bible study groups for women, teens, and children. "Worship planner" software automatically generated song titles and lyrics for PowerPoint so that slides seen by congregants for Sunday worship no longer followed the hymn numbers and lyrics of the church's printed hymnal. Song selections increasingly—and intentionally—replicated what was popularly heard on Contemporary Christian radio. The annual Christmas Eve service was organized as a series of congregational responses to professionally produced video vignettes with paid actors portraying contemporary applications of Christmas religious themes. Over time, as representation became reality, congregational culture subtly altered in three ways: connections to printed texts were increasingly attenuated, sermons increasingly featured eisegesis (projecting meaning *into* the biblical text) alongside exegesis (extracting meaning *from* the text), and congregational life was increasingly colonized by evangelical mass culture. Yet these changes, though they seemingly contravened Riverside's espoused values, generated little resistance.

Further, a vast literature has developed on media and religion (e,g., De Vries and Weber 2001; Hoover 2006; Hoover and Clark 2002; Hoover and Lundby 1997; Meyer and Moors 2005; Stout 2013) and in particular on the American "electronic church" (e.g, Ward 2016) and its manifestations in televangelism (e.g., Alexander 1994; Hoover 1988; Postman 1985; Schultze 1990) and the cyber-church (e.g., Campell 2010, 2012; Cheong et al. 2012). Few studies on media and religion, however, explore how the "mediatization" of religion (Hjarvard 2008; Lövheim 2011) extends from the screen into the pew and everyday congregational life. Stout (2016) has called for a turn in media and religion studies from the technological school (i.e., technological values necessarily colonize religious media) and cultural school (i.e., religious media are epiphenomena of deeper cultural processes) to "a pragmatic perspective" for which the chief question is "how do audiences read [media representations] in a cogent way" (p. xi) and integrate them into lived experience at the local congregational level. The present study elaborates this perspective as well as contributes to the ethnography of American evangelicalism by describing visualization practices crucial to understanding "how the Bible works" (Malley 2004) in a subculture with which one in four American adults identifies (Pew Research Center 2015).

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[1] The name of the church and the names of all individuals have been changed.

This study will make its argument in three steps. First, the relevant literatures will be reviewed including those on the ethnography of American evangelicalism, on its intellectual history and resulting cultural predisposition for visual communication, and on visual rhetorics and persuasion theory. Prominent will be Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and an extension of the model to account for cognitive-cultural modeling (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Quinn 1987). ELM predicts that "peripheral cues" in persuasive messages such as speaker credibility can cause "peripheral processing" by the audience, while cognitive-cultural modeling defines culture as shared cognitive schemata that enable culture members to discern cultural meanings swiftly and accurately by mentally running messages through simplified prototypical scenarios. Second, the method of the study and the author's field observations will be set forth. Pike's (1971) method of "emic" observation, in which units of analysis are not predetermined but allowed to emerge naturally from the observed functional relations of a culture, will be explained as well as its application to the present study in which visualization was identified as a key analytical unit during, rather than before, fieldwork. Third, an ethnographic narrative of a typical Sunday at Riverside Bible Church will be presented and analyzed through the framework of ELM and cognitive-cultural modeling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The claims of Durkheim (1969), Mauss (1985 [1938]), and Weber (1992 [1930]) on the social impacts of Christianity "played a critical role in fashioning the broad comparative theories of society that founded sociology and anthropology" (Cannell, 2006a: 8). Yet as Cannell observes, within a "disciplinary nervousness about religious experience in general, the topic of Christianity has provoked more anxiety" (p. 3) and "was the last major area of religious activity to be explored in ethnographic writing" (p. 8). Since the late 1990s, however, "a comparative, self-conscious anthropology of Christianity has begun to come into its own," report Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins (2008: 1139), and is now "receiving a degree of anthropological attention that has previously escaped it." With "a concerted call…to consider seriously the possibility of routinely putting the religion of Christian populations at the center of ethnographic accounts," field researchers are "thinking comparatively and theoretically about similarities and differences in the shapes and histories of Christianity in various Christian populations." Further, such ethnographic research "is no longer the strict purview of anthropologists" and "is practiced…by those in sociology, communications, media studies, and a host of other disciplines" (Bielo, 2009b: 22). The present study is grounded in communication studies and, in particular, in the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1974), a research tradition with roots in sociolinguistics that studies how a

"speech community" (Hymes 1962) deploys language in social interaction to (re)produce a shared culture. Following previous ethnographic studies of evangelical speech (Ward 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2018a, forthcoming) and mediated communication (Ward, 2014, 2015c, 2016, 2017, 2018b), the present study explores the role of visual communication in (re)producing congregational culture.

As ethnographic accounts of Christian communities worldwide have multiplied, an astonishing range of outlooks and practices about the Bible have come to light (e.g. Bielo 2009a; Cannell 2006a; Engelke and Tomlinson 2006). These range from a Filipino community that regards excess reading of printed texts as hard work injurious to health and thus values plainsong chant as its preferred form of "reading" (Cannell 2006b), to an African denomination that rejects printed texts as tools of Western colonialism and believes "religious faith cannot be expressed through the written word…[since] the book is impersonal; it signifies distance…between its sender and receiver" (Engelke, 2006: 65). The lesson of these studies—which is good to recall in analyzing North American cases—is that "reading and writing, far from being neutral technologies with a self-evident and universal set of effects on the world, are ethnographically shifting categories" (Cannell, 2006b: 135).

The greatest number of field studies that explore Christian scripturalism at the congregational level, however, are ethnographies of American evangelicalism. While several field studies conducted prior to 2000 remain widely cited (Ammerman 1987; Balmer 1989; Brasher 1998; Griffith 1997; Miller 1997), macro-level studies by Crapanzo (2000) and Harding (2000) inspired a growing ethnographic literature on local practices (e.g., Ault 2004; Bartkowski 2001; Bielo 2009b; Frykholm 2004; Gallagher 2003; Ingersoll 2003; Luhrmann 2012; Malley 2004; Watt 2002). As described above, these studies broadly agree that American evangelicals read the scriptures less to *interpret* the Bible than to *appropriate* its authority for personal applications. In the most extended investigation of this dynamic, Malley (2004: 146) reported, "The maintenance of transitivity between the Bible and a set of beliefs is the core of interpretive tradition" such that "evangelicals' Bible reading is driven by a search for relevance." Transitivity is a concept in logic which holds that if one item is related to a second, and the second item is related to a third, then the first and third items are also related. Applied to evangelical Bible reading, this idea means that if authority rests in the Bible, then beliefs and practices appropriated from biblical texts are deemed authoritative. Evangelical doctrine that the scriptures are divinely inspired discourage completely arbitrary ascriptions to some degree. But because "the precise shape of the rationale [for inspiration] is not clear" (p. 146), readers have room to navigate a perennial tension between too much interpretive freedom (which would vitiate evangelicals'

self-identity as "Bible-believers") and too little (which would hinder appropriation and application of the Bible to personal needs of the moment).

Watt's (2002) description of an attempt to convert him during his fieldwork captures this dynamic. His inquisitor declaimed "that the Bible has to be read as a simple book, one that contains practical answers to our problems" and complained that, although Watt was a practicing Christian, the ethnographer's "readings of Scripture were 'too academic' and 'not practical enough'" (p. 103). This "theme came up perhaps a dozen times in our conversation" as "complications connected with understanding words or passages…were brushed aside or ignored" (p. 103). When Watt noted textual variants in the Gospel of Mark's resurrection account, his inquisitor "did not express any direct disagreement" but instead "began to ask a series of pointed questions to be sure I believed that the Bible was inspired" (p. 103). The man ultimately concluded about Watt that "I had been interpreting [the Scriptures]. He had not been doing that. He was just trying to teach me what the Scriptures said for themselves" (p. 104).

In the evangelical tradition, the necessary correlate of inspiration is *inerrancy,* a doctrine built on a transitive relationship: if God cannot err, and if the Bible is God's word, then the Bible is without error—with error understood through a "correspondence theory" of truth in which truth is that which corresponds to actual states of affairs. Thus, if God's Word cannot err, then the Genesis creation account of six literal days must therefore correspond to what actually happened. In recent years some evangelical scholars (e.g., Bovell 2012; Enns 2005; Sparks 2008) have questioned the doctrine of inerrancy, arguing that, as practiced, its assumptions precede the reading of the Bible rather than derive from such reading. Yet inerrancy remains a cornerstone of American evangelicalism—and a key to understanding the penchant in evangelical culture for "technical" illustration. As Marsden (1980), Noll (1994), and Smith (2012) have shown, 19th century American evangelicals drew on a particular strain of the Enlightenment known as Scottish Common Sense Realism. This philosophy held that all humans are endowed with sufficient reason to derive the plain meaning of an observation. As a Bible hermeneutic, this meant ordinary individuals could discern the plain truth of a scripture. In turn, this view of common sense realism fit a then-popular idea of science. The English natural philosopher Francis Bacon held that science is the observation and classification of phenomena; when enough observed phenomena are classified, underlying patterns become clear and laws may be derived. Just so, 19th century American evangelicals conceived of the Bible as a storehouse of observable "facts" whose classification would "scientifically" reveal divine laws. Thus, by the end of the century, popular American evangelical culture was awash with "technical" illustrations of divine laws.

An arch example of such technical illustration is "The Church versus The Kingdom" (Figure 1), published in 1918 and part of a series that diagrams the

"prophetic timeline" of apocalyptic events postulated by the evangelical doctrine of dispensational premillennialism (see Frykholm 2004; Marsden 1980; O'Leary 1994; Sandeen 1970). The timeline, in more stylized versions, remains a staple of evangelical literature. The appeal of technical illustrations for divine "laws" can be traced across the 20th century to the present. An *Ur*-text of American evangelicalism, *The Four Spiritual Laws*, is perhaps the most widely distributed religious tract in history since its release in the 1950s (Cru 2016). More than 2.5 billion printed copies declare, "Just as there are physical laws that govern the physical universe, so are there spiritual laws that govern your relationship with God" (Bright, 1967: 2). The laws are accompanied by diagrams illustrating "how to know God." The non-believer is illustrated with a throne occupied by the letter *S* (for "self") and placed inside a circle; the circle is filled with random dots of varying size (representing disordered thinking) while a cross (for Christ) is outside the circle. By contrast, the believer is illustrated with a throne occupied by a cross; the *S* is now placed at the foot of the throne and the dots within the circle are uniform and symmetrical. Next, "the Christian life" is symbolized by a railroad engine labeled FACT (representing "God and His Word") pulling a car named FAITH that is trailed by a caboose called FEELING.

Figure 1: The Church versus The Kingdom
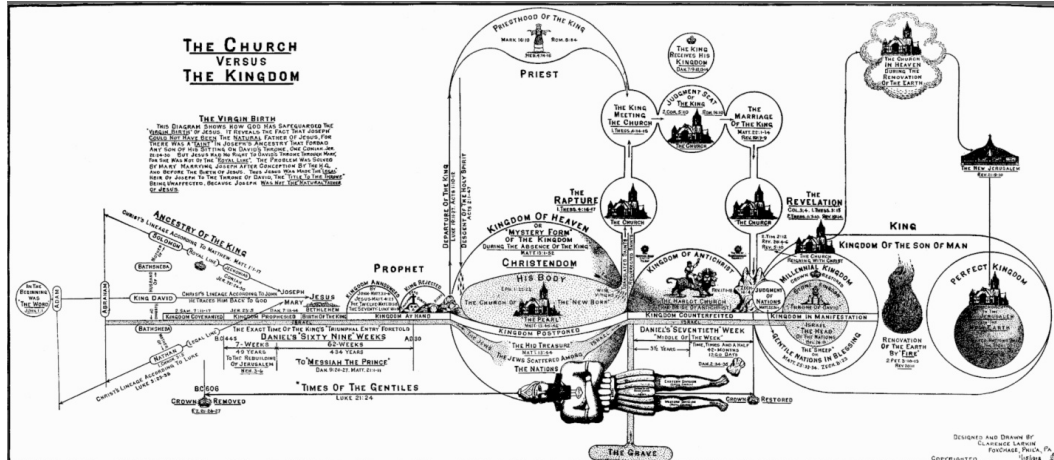
More recently, an evangelical bestseller (Blackaby, Blackaby, and King 2008) summarized "Seven Realities of Experiencing God" with a seven-step flow chart by which believers can "come to know God through experience." Another bestseller (Sande 2004) condensed human relationships into three broad categories illustrated by a speedometer. Yet another (Ingraham 2014) condensed human history into a culture war between absolutist and relativist views of truth; each is illustrated by a stickman within a circle (representing fields of experience) and by

arrows (representing "truth") that emanate either from inside the circle (i.e., relative truth) or outside (i.e., absolute truth). At this writing, the Amazon top bestseller in Christian systematic theology is *Visual Theology* (Challies and Byers 2016), released by a leading evangelical publisher and endorsed by a leading inerrantist theologian who explains that "students can more quickly grasp and retain theological concepts when they can see them in a single visual image" (Challies 2016). The book renders the process of eternal salvation, for example, as a flow chart. Examples of visual communication in evangelical mass culture could be cited *ad infinitum* and, as will be seen, became a major feature of discourse at Riverside Bible Church.

Scholars have much debated what accounts for the persuasive power of visual argumentation because the rhetorical properties of visuality resist facile categorization. Visual images have "long been suspect as irrational, illogical, and somewhat slippery" to many scholars, so that a "traditional bias for modes of verbal expression and against visual images" is found in much of the literature (Hope, 2006: 31). Kostelnick and Roberts (1998), for example, proposed visual equivalents for the five classical canons of rhetoric. In contrast, countered DeLuca (2006: 86–87), attempts to "approach images with the mindset and methods of print ensures we will misread them; adopting an image orientation is a necessary first step." Or as Balter-Reitz and Stewart (2006: 116) averred, "The classical argumentation model of claim, evidence, and inference does not seem to provide much insight into the working of visual artifacts."

The needs of the present study, which aims to "write the culture" of an American evangelical congregation, require a theoretical framework that can connect persuasion and culture. Here a cue is taken from Barry's (1997) observation that the difference between verbal and visual communication is in the ways each is cognized. Physiologically, to "see" a thing is merely a question of how light falls on the eyes. But "visual intelligence" is a cognitive process by which "an interpretation of reality…is an image created in the brain, formed by an integration of immediate multisensory information, prior experience, and cultural learning" (p. 15). In turn, many ethnographers define culture as a cognitive structure (Faulkner et al. 2006) in which "culturally shared knowledge is organized into prototypical event sequences [mentally] enacted in simplified worlds" (Quinn & Holland, 1987: 24). These cognitive-cultural models, composed of communally validated propositions and images, invoke in the mind's eye "whole worlds in which things work, actors perform, and events unfold in a wholly expectable manner" (p. 20). Ward (2015a) recently demonstrated this phenomenon in describing how a cultural model of "giving" exerted directive force on fundamentalist Baptists who tithe their incomes. Propositions such as "sacrificial giving" and "faith promise giving" mentally invoked skeins of shared prototypical scenarios involving biblical stories, metaphors, and verses and social dramas about despised "health-and-wealth"

preachers. As will be seen, discourses of Bible visualization activated similarly shared cognitive-cultural structures among members of Riverside Bible Church.

What remains is to account for cognitive-cultural Bible visualization processes in a corporate setting where visual representations are made by the preacher to an audience. Ward's (2008) linkage of cognitive-cultural modeling to Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers an apt solution. Petty and Cacioppo theorized that a motivated audience, on hearing a strongly argued persuasive message, may expend the cognitive energy required to "centrally process" or elaborate the message, potentially resulting in strong attitude change. On the other hand, an audience may "peripherally process" a persuasive message once it perceives "peripheral cues" such as the speaker's credibility, crowd reaction, proffered rewards—or, as per Ward, cultural models—that allow the audience to save itself the cognitive energy and skip to a conclusion. Ward extended the ELM to argue that ordinary conscripts in a World War II German police battalion may have been persuaded by their commander's public plea for them to carry out mass shootings of Polish Jewish villagers because their cognitive-cultural models of "Jewish-Bolshevism," the German "racial community" (*Volksgemeinschaft*), and obedience to legitimated state authority shut down active cognition. Though no one at Riverside Bible Church would contemplate such evil, extensive use of visual persuasion in the pastor's Sunday preaching similarly invoked, as will be seen, cultural models that acted as peripheral cues that allowed the audience to bypass "central processing" of the persuasive messages. Thus, this dynamic of Bible visualization not only affirms that "the maintenance of transitivity between the Bible and a set of beliefs is the core of interpretive tradition" (Malley, 2004: 146) in evangelical Bible reading practice but also adds a visual dimension to that scholarly consensus.

METHODOLOGY

As the previous section affirms, ethnography has become a well-established method to limn the cultures of Christian communities in general and American evangelical congregations in particular. In conducting such a study, the ethnographer must answer a series of questions: What community will be observed? What is the ethnographer's standing in relation to that community? How will primary data be gathered? How will units of analysis be determined? What framework will be employed to analyze those units?

Since ethnographers, like other scholars, investigate subjects that hold abiding personal interest for them, many ethnographies of evangelical congregations were conducted by scholars with personal connections to the movement or to Protestant Christianity. Balmer (1989), Frykholm (2004), Malley (2004), and Watt (2002) grew up in evangelical churches, while Ault (2004) was raised a Methodist and

Luhrmann (2012) a Unitarian, and Bielo (2009b) and Griffith (1997) were active adult members of mainline Protestant churches. The choice of subject for the present study stems from a similar personal connection, as Riverside Bible Church is the church that I regularly attended (but never formally joined) for three years prior to commencing actual fieldwork. Some years earlier I conducted fieldwork that emphasized breadth, traveling weekends by motor coach with a gospel singing group and visiting some 200 conservative evangelical churches in seventeen states over a four-year period (Ward 2009, 2010, 2013, 2015a). As such, I had been searching for a new fieldwork project that emphasized depth through observing a single congregation over time. When Riverside's pastor of more than thirty years announced his retirement, and when the newly called pastor advocated changes in the congregational culture, I felt that formal fieldwork would afford opportunities to explore my interest in analyzing religious communication as organizational communication (Ward 2015b). Permission to proceed was secured both from my institution's review board and by the Riverside board of elders, and fieldwork commenced with Pastor Lonnie's installation on September 1, 2013. Fieldwork then continued for thirty-nine months through December 2016, and certain aspects of Riverside's culture have been elsewhere reported (Ward 2015c, 2018a).

My standing in relation to Riverside Bible Church is best understood through Gold's (1958) quadrilateral of fieldwork roles. The researcher may either take the standpoint of a *complete observer* who acts as a "fly on the wall" and observes without interaction; an *observer-as-participant* who interacts with culture members to gather predetermined types of data such as interviews; a *participant-as-observer* who has no agenda other than shadowing culture members in their activities to learn their ways; and a *complete participant* who is already a culture member or is sufficiently initiated in its ways to comprehend unarticulated cultural assumptions and meanings not accessible to the other three standpoints. Nevertheless, though my standing in relation to Riverside Bible Church was that of a complete participant, much of my fieldwork proceeded functionally from complete-observer methodology. Sunday morning and evening services were merely observed as I took field notes of the proceedings—singing, praying, preaching, various rituals—and gathered artifacts such as weekly bulletins, song sheets, prayer lists, activity calendars, Bible study lessons, and the like. Sunday afternoon choir rehearsals were also observed. Only in the weekly Sunday school class did I proactively participate as well as observe. Using "rhetorical field methods" (Middleton, Senda-Cook, and Endres 2011), I gently articulated marginalized "progressive" perspectives and elicited responses from the teacher and class members. Since I was accepted as a fellow believer and known to be a college professor, these "lofty questions" (as they came to be affectionately known among congregants) were perceived as stimulating diversions and even became a source of welcomed anticipation and, at times, playful teasing and humor. A final and fruitful source of primary data were

spontaneous conversations and semi-structured interviews before and after Sunday activities and at the numerous church social occasions in which I joined.

Deciding on units of analysis is a two-part process. On the one hand, as Pike's (1971) emic methodology advocates, the ethnographer should allow these units to emerge naturally from the functional relations of the culture being observed. Pike demonstrated this method by observing his own evangelical church and discovering that language use at its Sunday morning worship services naturally divided itself into a hierarchy of "slots," "classes," and "modes." Yet on the other hand, the complete-participant fieldworker can be handicapped because cultural practices can seem "normal" and thus escape notice. This difficulty is avoided in traditional fieldwork where a sense of "otherness," which is derived from observing cultures not one's own, generates units of analysis. But as Katriel (1991: 2) noted in her ethnographies of Israeli culture, ethnographers who plumb their own cultures must generate "the sense of discovery associated with the experience of delving deep into one's cultural 'self,' and experiencing oneself as an objectified 'other.'" In turn, this requires a "never-ending search for ways to identify, foreground, and estrange aspects of one's deeply felt cultural experience" in order to generate

> movements of de-familiarization…in which an ethnographic exploration begins to take shape as a mundane term, or a mundane social practice, or a mundane public practice inexplicably shed their accustomed air of "naturalness" and become interpretive sites for the exploration of cultural sense (p. 2).

The present author, as noted earlier, has followed this method to report on multiple evangelical social practices, from its speech codes to its rhetoric, whose importance to evangelical culture emerged only during field observation. In the same way, I may have begun observing processes of congregational culture change at Riverside Bible Church with some general expectations derived from my previous field project, but in no way did I anticipate that Bible visualization practices would emerge as a key.

Just as emic methodology calls on the ethnographer not to approach fieldwork with a prior commitment to the units that "should" be discovered, neither should analyses of the units ultimately discovered be guided by an *a priori* theoretical framework. Instead, that choice should be deferred. On reflection and for reasons described in the previous section, the framework of Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model—extended to account for cognitive-cultural modeling as a peripheral cue (Ward 2008)—commended itself to analyzing the power of visual persuasion in changing the culture of Riverside Bible Church.

FINDINGS

In its physical setting, Riverside Bible Church is tucked into an older suburban neighborhood and welcomes visitors with a street sign featuring a clip art logo. Warm earth-tone bricks face the low-rise building to create a pleasantly laid-back ambiance. In the 200-seat auditorium, moveable pews line up in rows facing a raised platform. At the center-front edge of the small stage is a modest wooden pulpit; above and behind the pulpit a standard-sized screen is lowered from the ceiling to show PowerPoint slides. Located in a medium-sized city of the southwestern United States, Riverside was founded in the mid-1960s when a group of dissidents left a local mainline Protestant church over its "liberal" drift. To write a doctrinal statement and constitution for a new church, they turned for help to the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS), long a major center of conservative evangelicalism and leading proponent of biblical inerrancy and premillennial dispensationalism (Hannah 2009). At the time, the "Bible Church" movement—a community of nondenominational congregations that loosely fellowshipped through the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (now IFCA International)—was growing, and the Riverside contingent chose this model for its polity.

For more than half a century, every pastor of Riverside Bible Church has been a DTS graduate. This group includes Pastor Tim, who retired in 2013 after more than thirty years of service to the church, and Pastor Lonnie who was called that same year (and began the Sunday immediately following his predecessor's departure). Weekly church attendance has never exceeded 135–145. Like most congregations of this size, the church is built around a core of families that have been part of Riverside for decades. Most "grew up" together with Pastor Tim as they all progressed from young parents to empty-nesters whose children often moved away to nearby major cities for college and employment. Though Pastor Lonnie is in his early fifties and his sons are teenaged, he presents a contrast to Pastor Tim. While the latter was a non-Hispanic white and professional engineer before entering vocational ministry, Lonnie is a bilingual Hispanic white whose parents were foreign missionaries and who himself went on to serve in the United States as a "worship pastor" or church music director.

Understanding the impacts of visual persuasion on the Riverside culture begins by describing Pastor Tim's practices before his retirement. He invariably wore a suit in the pulpit, spoke in a plain voice, exposited the Bible in a deliberate and unadorned manner, showed only verbatim Bible verses on the PowerPoint screen, provided sermon notes in the weekly church bulletin given to congregants, lamented the "dumbing down" of song lyrics in recent popular contemporary Christian music, often criticized the "Church Growth Movement" for relying on marketing techniques rather than scripture, personally taught the weekly women's

Bible study groups, and emphasized "The Word" as a motif for the church and its ministries. Pastor Lonnie, as will be elaborated below, is opposite in each respect. Unpredictable in his attire, performative in his oral delivery, delighting in word-pictures and intricately designed PowerPoint illustrations, he has taught the congregation new songs from the most popular contemporary Christian songwriters, is enthusiastic about multimedia presentations obtained from national evangelical "parachurch" organizations, and obtains small-group DVD curricula (often based on popular evangelical books and films or featuring popular evangelical personalities) for women's and youth weekly Bible studies. The contrast was perhaps most striking when Pastor Tim returned in 2015 for Riverside's fiftieth anniversary celebration to deliver a sermon on the "fundamental" mandate of faithfulness to "The Word" as the basis of the church, followed immediately by a message from Pastor Lonnie which did not mention "The Word" but instead proclaimed that being "followers of Christ" is Riverside's foundational mandate.

Field notes document that Pastor Lonnie's sermons (unlike his predecessor's) almost invariably conform to the classic model taught in public speaking courses: attention-getter (typically a story or factoid accompanied by a provocative or humorous image shown via PowerPoint), thesis statement, review of main points, elaboration of each main point, transitional statements between points to cue the audience, and a conclusion that reviews the main points, references the initial attention-getter, and provides closure through a memorable takeaway. The pattern is so pronounced and consistent that it may be presumed deliberate. Indeed, I seldom encountered such "advanced" technique in sermons heard at the 200 churches I visited in previous fieldwork. Further, Pastor Lonnie not only preached months-long series on various biblical books and topics but also chose these series with care to cultivate the congregation in line with his vision for the church. For the first six months of his tenure, he "preached through" the book of Joshua and each week likened the Israelites' conquest of the Promised Land to a period of great change and transition whose lessons applied to the changes and transitions at Riverside Bible Church. This series was followed by shorter topical series on "True Worship" (in which Pastor Lonnie urged congregants to set aside their music preferences in hopes of attracting young families to the church), "The Holy Spirit" (a subject which, in conservative evangelicalism, is a marker for being less doctrinaire), and "Making Disciples" (in which Pastor Lonnie set out his "philosophy of ministry" using the diagrams in Figures 2–5).
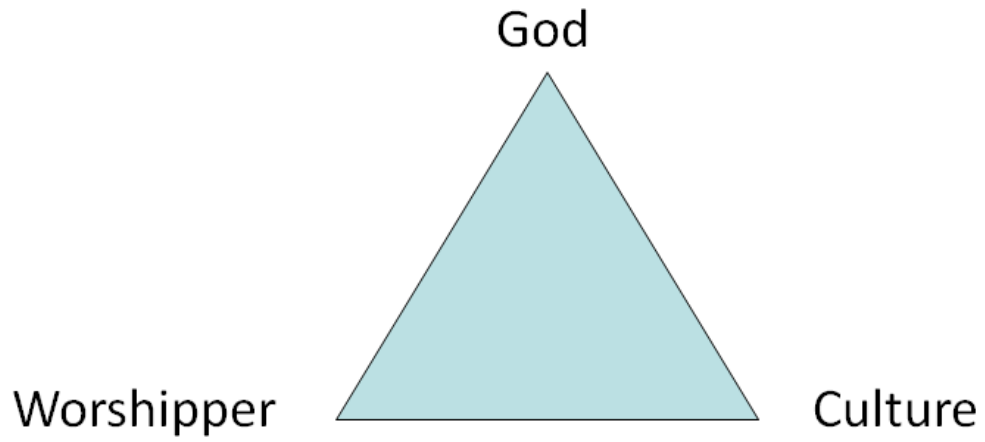
Figure 2: Worship Components

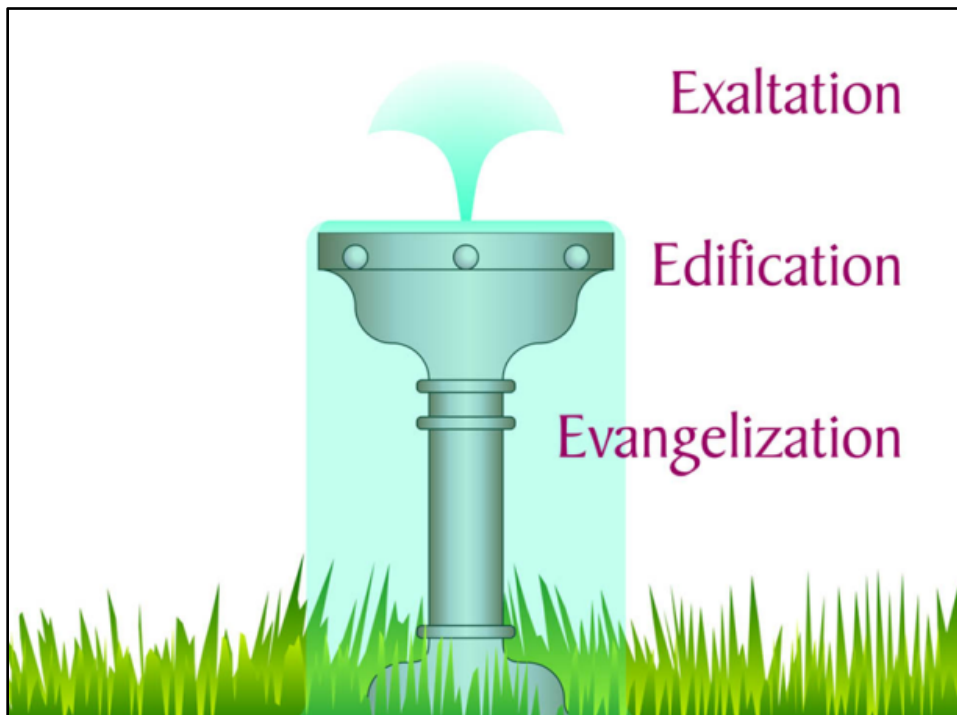**Figure 3: The Model Church**
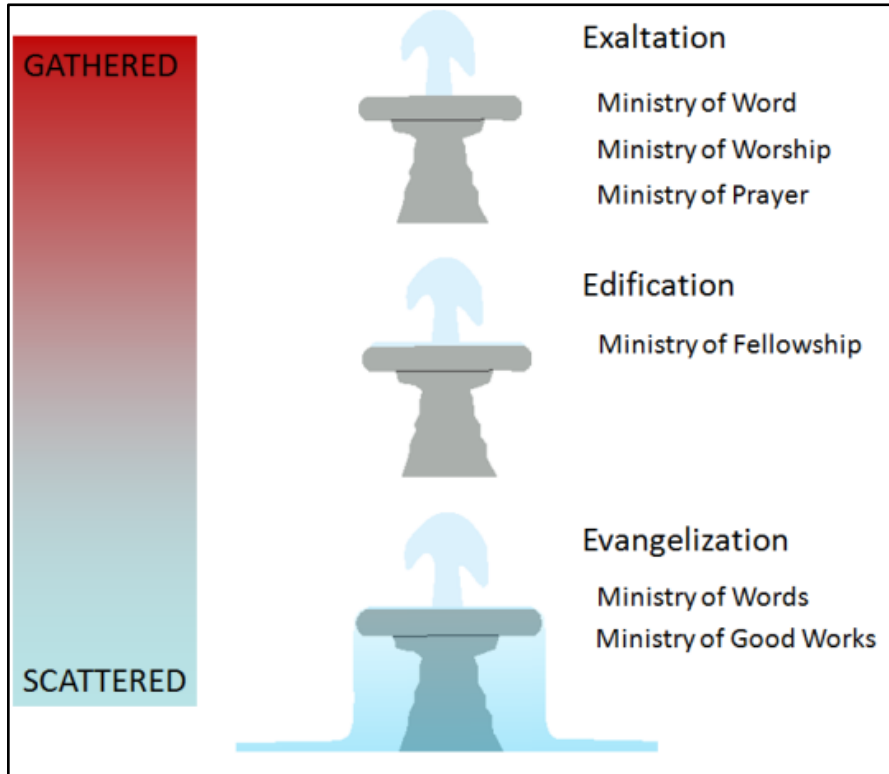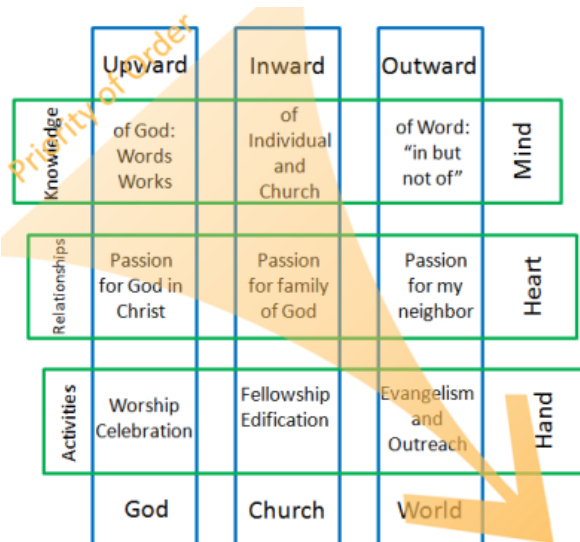
Figure 4: Ministries of the Model Church

Figure 5: The Church and the Believer

A year-long series on the book of Revelation (whereby Pastor Lonnie established his bona fides as a conservative evangelical by taking a strong premillennial and dispensational stand) followed these topical series. The Revelation series provided weekly opportunities for Lonnie to display via PowerPoint his own elaborate timeline charts (all self-designed) and present artists' conceptions of apocalyptic and millennial visions. Finally, in the fall of 2015 he launched into a year-long series on the Gospel of Mark. In an interview shortly before his third anniversary as Riverside's pastor, Lonnie explained to me his approach to pulpit communication:

> Under [Pastor] Tim, Riverside was "heady." He was propositional and logic-driven, while I like to anchor propositions in images. You can't overlook the emotional for the cerebral. So there's been a change in communication…. We [the church] lacked a "healthy" outlook. We were comfortable with a "formula" that worked in the past. So one area I've emphasized in my preaching is using tools like PowerPoint, stories, visuals, and images…. We have a lot of engineers [from the local plants] in our church, and their mentality is to "maintain" current systems. Many of them are left-brained, including Tim, who was an engineer before he went into the ministry, and so the creative right-brain can be fearful. The church had a stable "black-and-white" situation, which gave people clarity. But we didn't have much "color," which brings life…. So I had to go slow and first set up changes through my preaching…and create shared symbols to bridge the gap between "up here" and the people…. We live in an image-driven culture.

On average, one or two sermons each month provided occasions for Pastor Lonnie to remind the audience systematically that "Head knowledge isn't enough" and criticize, explicitly or by implication, scholarship for its own sake. Lonnie frequently cited the scholarly scribes and Pharisees, portrayed in the Gospel of Mark, as negative examples throughout his year-long preaching series on that evangelist's book. From Jesus's admonition in Mark 10:14, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God," he drew the analogy that emphasizing "Bible knowledge" denies "access" to people with lesser aptitude or interest for such knowledge. And he expanded Jesus's teaching in Mark 10:25, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," to argue that scholars and theologians are another example of a social elite that prizes "head knowledge" (human effort) over "heart knowledge" (faith).

The link between desired "heart knowledge" and visualization was made explicit, on a weekly basis for a year, during the Revelation series in which Pastor Lonnie repeatedly stressed that God, through his inspiration of the book's visions, "chose to use images because he wanted this message to engage our emotions." During the series, Lonnie acknowledged in a conversation with me that he enjoyed

doing his own graphic designs and creating visuals for his sermons. The "philosophy of ministry" PowerPoint, which he furnished to me and Figures 2–5 show, illustrates his style. A triangle (Figure 2) visually represents "authentic" worship by symbolizing how individual believers employ their own cultural forms as they reach up toward God. The visual metaphor of a fountain (Figures 3 and 4) whose spray goes up and fills the bowl to overflowing depicts the model church; in the same way, exaltation of God ultimately fills the congregation with mutual edification that spills into the surrounding community through evangelism. The overall dynamic between the church and the believer is then synthesized as a matrix (Figure 5). Later, the lengths of technical execution to which Lonnie would go to make a visual point were evident in a humorous decision tree diagram, "Should I Go to Church Today?" (Figure 6), used in 2016 to introduce a sermon on Mark 8:34, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Figure 6: "Should I Go to Church Today?"
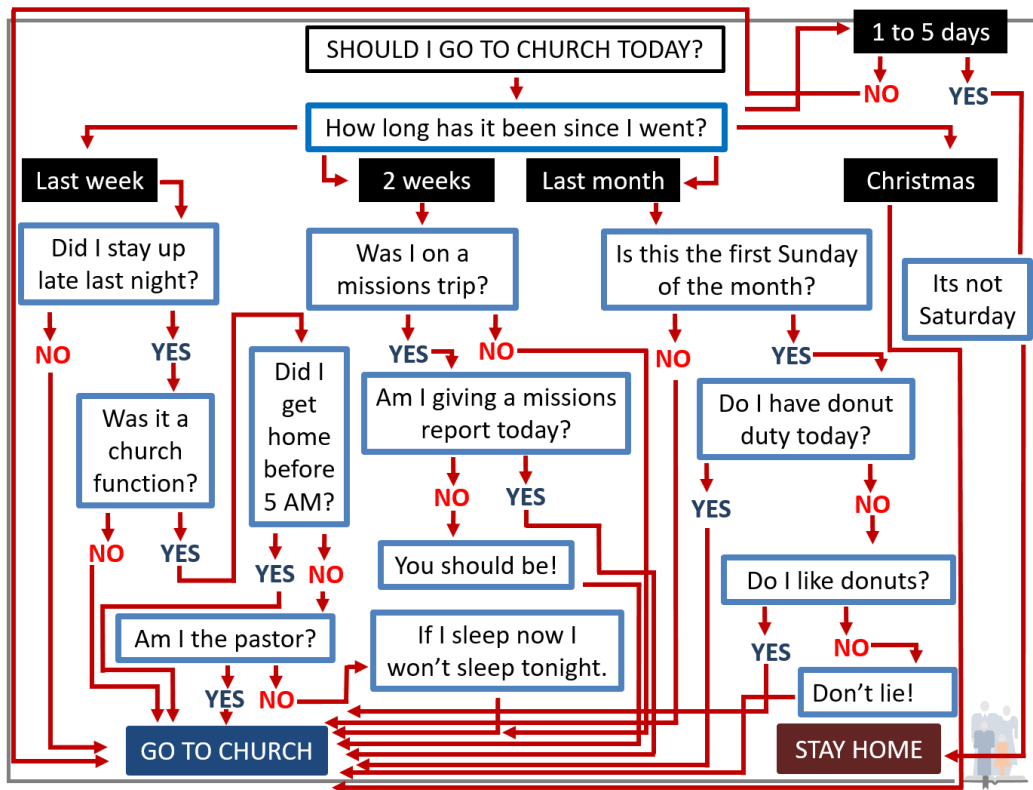
Increasing use of visual resources, however, was not confined to Sunday morning sermons. The twelve-week "Truth Project" DVD series from Focus on the Family (2008) was shown in its entirety during Sunday evening services during the spring and summer of 2015. The high school youth group, led by Pastor Lonnie, viewed the Truth Project DVD series "Does God Exist?" and "Who is Jesus?" Meanwhile, the weekly "ladies'" Bible study (taught personally for many years by Pastor Tim) used small-group DVD curricula based on the popular evangelical books *Jonah: Navigating a Life Interrupted* (Shirer 2010) and *Culture Shock: A Biblical Response to Today's Most Divisive Issue* (Ingraham 2014)—both authored by evangelical media personalities—and the popular evangelical film *War Room* (Kendrick & Kendrick 2015).

While Pastor Lonnie always reveled in word-pictures for his sermons, during his initial months in the pulpit he also delighted in comparing the same Bible verse or phrase in multiple English translations—sometimes as many as half a dozen. Near the end of his first year, though, we had a conversation, and he related how the church elders resisted this hermeneutical device and preferred the New American Standard translation (long favored among Bible Churches) of Riverside's pew Bibles. Thus, compared to Lonnie's initial series on the book of Joshua, which proceeded "by the book" and featured extensive wordplay among different printed translations, his increasing reliance on visual aids and eisegesis in subsequent series was instructive. With that mind, below is a narrative description of a Sunday morning at Riverside Bible Church during Lonnie's 2015–2016 sermon series on the Gospel of Mark.

ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE

It's just before nine thirty, and as I rush in and grab a cup of coffee in the fellowship hall before Sunday school begins, a retiree from one of the local plants approaches me with a big grin. "Hey, Brother Mark, you're on time today," Ross chuckles. "What happened to you?" We laugh and part company just as Pete, a retiree from the local bank, shakes my hand and gives me a sly wink. "Hey, Professor! Have you thought up some 'lofty questions' for today?" he asks, smiling. Tables have been set up in the hall and everyone, about thirty mostly middle-aged and elderly adults, take their seats. The teacher, a retiree and church elder named Andrew, solicits "prayer requests," and in response, various class members ask prayer for sick relatives and friends. All then bow their heads as Andrew prays for each request. Then we plunge into our current study on the Gospel of John; this Sunday's lesson covers chapters 11 and 12, in which Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead and is anointed at Bethany. These two chapters are favorites with the women in the class because, together with a parallel passage in Luke 10, they describe the household occupations of sisters Martha and Mary. Martha is preoccupied with

cooking and serving when Jesus and his disciples arrive, while Mary drops everything to sit at Jesus's feet. The story prompts a discussion, typical of Riverside's Sunday schools, as class members ask no true questions but offer up comments that describe their own personal applications using evangelical speech codes that affirm conventional evangelical wisdoms—in this case, about essentialist gender roles (Bartkowski 2001; Brasher 1998). For myself, I came to class prepared gently to ask some questions: Why do the chief priests plot to kill Jesus after he raises Lazarus in John's gospel but after he casts the money changers from the temple in the other three gospels? ("No reason it couldn't have been both," Andrew breezily assures me.) Is the story in John 12 of Mary anointing Jesus's feet with oil a variant of the story in Luke 7, where the details are the same except that the unnamed woman is a prostitute? ("No, it must have been a different woman," replies one man, as Andrew and the rest of the class nod agreement.) Why does the anointing occur near the beginning of Jesus's public ministry in Luke but near the end of his life in the other three gospels? ("It's easiest to simply believe the Bible," declaims Andrew, "and believe that Jesus was anointed twice.")

During the break time between Sunday school and the morning service, I decide to check out the church library. It's the end of the month, and perhaps some new magazines have arrived. Indeed, the latest issues of *Acts & Facts* and *Answers,* two glossy creationist monthlies, are on display. Also, the cover story of *Grace in Focus* catches my eye with its excoriation of the current Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) faculty and "the vast majority of [seminary-based] evangelicals and inerrantists around the globe," who are attempting to engage modern critical scholarship (Wilkin, 2015: 8). Finding such an article in the Riverside library's magazine rack, however, is not surprising. The overwhelming majority of books date from the 1970s to the early 1990s and reflect a "Battle for the Bible" (Lindsell 1976) mentality which prevailed among the DTS faculty of that generation and in evangelicalism generally. For their lesson preparation, Andrew and Riverside's other Sunday school teachers rely heavily on these resources that were published thirty to forty years ago.

The clock on the wall shows that the morning service is about to begin, and I slip into my accustomed pew in the center right side of the sanctuary. The PowerPoint screen has been lowered, and slides of church announcements are playing in a constant loop. The Riverside logo is featured on each slide—and has an interesting story whose evolution is shown in Figure 7. Pastor Tim adapted the logo from a 1980s monochrome clip art of a nuclear family grouping as stick figures. Pastor Lonnie tried to replace the logo with a contemporary, stylized flaming Bible in full color but, as he later told me, encountered resistance because flames are associated with Pentecostal and charismatic churches that practice tongues-speaking. So he touched up the old logo to render the clothing of each stick figure in a different color. Yet the family remains nuclear and middle class (the

father wears a suit and tie, the mother a dress with a 1980s "pilgrim" collar, the older son a sweater vest, and the younger daughter a knee-length party dress), and all four faces are white—though Lonnie later adopted a multiracial grouping as his personal logo. In a personal communication (May 10, 2016), he acknowledged that the present nuclear-family Riverside logo "means to our culture and community something very different than it does to us" and creates "a gap that I believe we are responsible before God to bridge." Structural (rather than overt) racism is also suggested by remnants of hallway décor from Riverside's 2014 summer Vacation Bible School (VBS), when the church made itself over as a "Wild Animals" jungle replete with posters depicting international people of color in "primitive" settings thanking missionaries for bringing them the gospel and such blessings as clean water.

Figure 7: Evolution of the Church Logo

Pre-2014   2014   2015   2016
B&W Clip Art   'Flaming Bible'   Caucasian   Multiracial

The morning service begins as Andrew, in his role as an elder, delivers announcements. Among these notices, he plugs the weekly "ladies'" Bible study that is currently using a DVD curriculum based on a book by a nationally syndicated radio and television personality and then reminds the "ladies" (not the men) that volunteers are needed to cook turkeys and hams for the upcoming Riverside Thanksgiving Dinner. In fact, as Ault (2004) and Brasher (1998) discovered at the churches they observed, the women at Riverside exercise considerable power by operating—largely without male supervision—their own "shadow church" of women's programs and by planning and executing nearly all of Riverside's church-wide social activities. Once Andrew is done with announcements, Stanley, a vibrant and folksy retiree who is also an elder, steps forward to lead congregational singing. Along with piano accompaniment, this fall Pastor Lonnie added a drum set played by a college-aged volunteer. PowerPoint slides display lyrics generated by "worship planner" software from an electronic

database, so that hymnal numbers are omitted and lyrics often diverge from those in the pew hymnals (which no one uses). Today, the song service begins with a traditional hymn, sung up-tempo with an insistent drum beat, followed next by an older praise-and-worship chorus that has been a Riverside favorite since Pastor Tim's days, and then two newer choruses (taught last year by Pastor Lonnie to the congregation) from contemporary Christian songwriting duo (and Christian radio playlist staples) Matt Redman and Chris Tomlin. (Though the adult choir is not singing this morning, on the occasions when they do perform, its members still struggle with conveying emotion through their facial expressions as Pastor Lonnie encourages them to do.) The announcement, "Will the men come forward to take the offering?" follows the song service. Ushering at Riverside is an exclusively male office.

Following a corporate prayer led by Andrew, a visiting missionary from a national parachurch organization takes five minutes to show a professionally produced video that promotes Bible distribution outside public schools and at other local venues. Pastor Lonnie then steps to the pulpit for his morning "message." An unpredictable dresser, today he sports a dark blazer and purple open-collared shirt. He immediately gains the congregation's attention by putting up a striking image on PowerPoint and asking the question, "Does might make right?" Continuing his Sunday morning series on the Gospel of Mark, he comes to chapter 2 and the story of a paralytic who is healed after being lowered by four friends from the roof of a Galilean house into the midst of a crowded room where Jesus is speaking. Lonnie sets the scene by spending a minute and a half describing a series of PowerPoint slides that show artist renderings of a first-century village dwelling and then his own original floorplan diagram that locates the various characters in the story. Then, once the scene is set, he launches into a series of vignettes accompanied by his dramatic oral interpretation and even skit-like performances. Lonnie begins by imagining the mindset of the crowd that is thronging the house to hear Jesus:

> These four men and the paralyzed man must have gotten to that [house] door and said, "Uh, man! Our friend here is sick and we'd like to see Jesus. Would you let us through?" [But others replied,] "I've been here since 7 a.m. this morning." "Uh, we've got a sick person, too, you know, and so you just have to wait your turn." And they [the four men] could've heard things like that. It makes me ask this question: Why didn't the people let them through? It makes me think that the people there did not really have a spirit of kindness about them. They were not willing to let a sick man through?

Next, Lonnie speculates about the shared mindset of the four men who were carrying their paralyzed friend:

So they got creative. And since we know from our [PowerPoint] picture here that houses had stairs on the outside, [it] very well could be that these men climbed up to the roof of the house and said, "We're not going to let this stop us." And so they say, "Where was he [Jesus]? Well, he was kind of in the front room, probably right about there." They're walking on the roof. And what did they do? It says there they started to remove the roof, they took it apart. The NASB [New American Standard Bible] here says that they "dug" down into it, which means it must have been some kind of dirt. They got down to it, got down to the slats, [and] removed the slats. They're getting very creative here.

Now Lonnie returns to the crowd and visualizes their reaction:

And so, from that spot, imagine what the people inside started to experience. Jesus is preaching, he's telling THE WORD and the people hear a [Pastor Lonnie makes a scratching sound into the microphone]…. They start to hear that, scratching sounds from above. It starts to get louder. And then all of sudden dust starts to come down and bits of dried mud and finally a rock falls on someone's head. All eyes are now up there, right? They're no longer on Jesus. "What's going on?" Everyone is fixated on the roof. And the hole appears and then light shines through. And then you see some hands working and then finally a face, two, three faces, and the hole gets bigger. And one of them says, "Well, hello down there!" Someone responds, "Hello, up there."

That the same pericope in Luke describes the four men removing roof tiles is brushed aside and not mentioned. Thus, Lonnie comes finally to Jesus and imagines what he might have thought:

Jesus [was] whisked into another room, and he's waiting there until the danger passes, right? It could've been, but no. We don't read that Jesus showed any kind of frustration at the destruction of the house or, more importantly, at this interruption. In fact, we read the very opposite. What does verse 5 say? "And Jesus, seeing their faith…." Oh, the Lord has eyes to see things that escape most human beings, doesn't he? Mark tells us quite clearly that Jesus saw the work of these men as evidence of faith. He saw in them a deep concern for their friend. They did something about it…. He saw they were willing to work together to get it down. And he saw that they didn't give up, even when it seemed impossible to get the job done.

Lonnie then starts to make an "application" built on his conjecture about the presumed mindset of the four friends and turns it into a mandate for evangelization:

"Aw, I'm giving up. I'm outta here." They could've said, you know, "Maybe we better find a better time to get to Jesus. It's just not working out." They didn't give up. They said, "No, I love my friend and I know Jesus can do it." How easy it is

for us to miss the point. How many times have you and I…seen someone irritated with a cranky attitude and we take it personally, only to find out later that it's not about you, it's not about me. That person that we thought was just grumpy has troubles that we were never aware of…. In many ways, these four men were doing what Jesus had called them to do. They were fishers of men. It's what we should do, to bring others to Jesus, even if it means an epic effort, and not give up.

The application continues with Lonnie's observation that Jesus first forgave the paralytic his sins and only then healed his body. Later in the sermon, Lonnie expounds the point that Jesus's action showed both his divinity and his priorities. But for now, he asks congregants to put themselves in the shoes of the crowd:

So say you were watching this take place and had a piece of roof fall on your head and it left a little lump, you know. And you saw the sick man lowered down and saw Jesus' eyes as he looked at the man, then he looked at the four. Remember, the four weren't able to come down. They were still on the roof. And then you heard Jesus' words and saw the expression on his face. I can't imagine that it was anything but a smile. Would you have been blown away with amazement? Would you have been transfixed by Jesus' awesome show of compassion? Would you have looked up and seen the sense of relief on the faces of this man's friends? [Or] would you have said, "I wish he'd just heal the guy"? I wonder how the people responded.

At last, Lonnie comes to a favorite target—the scribes who were present at the scene. Using the occasion to press a consistent theme in his preaching, he speculates:

We know for sure that these guys [the scribes] weren't blown away with amazement. Their thoughts were not on the compassion of Jesus or the love that the men had shown to their friend. Naw, they had seen this event and waited through what was for them just the mushy stuff and got to the OBJECTIVE truth: "This guy is claiming to be God." …But in the exercise of their intellect, they had overlooked the heart of the matter. God was HERE, there with them—and what was he doing? Forgiving sins! That's the heart of the matter, man! But for them: "IRRELEVANT!"

After expounding on the divinity of Christ, Lonnie cannot resist a veiled dig, delivered in a sarcastic tone, at modern critical scholarship about the historical Jesus:

Some have said Jesus was not sure of his identity, that he was conflicted and at times doubtful of his call as the Messiah…. In the sight of all the people there, Jesus makes a statement, the statement that he is God, and then backs it up with a miracle. Awesome! What was the accusation of the scribes? That Jesus claimed to

be God. Did Jesus qualify his response to them? Did he say, like, "Uh, I know you think I'm God and I want you to know that I'm really not God but only a prophet—the greatest prophet ever, I might say, and that I have the 'Christ spirit' in me, and that I'm going to die for people to make a way for them to follow my example. In fact, you could call me a god, you know, with a little 'g,' you know, or maybe a semi-capital 'g.' But I'm really not God, you know, I'm not the great I AM. No." Does he say that? No. He knows exactly what they [the scribes] are thinking and he tells them that he has the authority to forgive sins.

In his conclusion, Lonnie refers back to his opening attention-getter and the question of whether might makes right. The surprising answer is yes, since only Jesus has the divine might to make spirit and body right—and redeemed. Then, as a memorable takeaway, he closes by building a final application on the presumed unkind spirit of the crowd:

> And so what [had] they witnessed? Just the healing of the body or have they seen more? Jesus gave evidence of his ability to forgive sins. So did they flock to him to be forgiven of their sins? "Oh, he forgives sin! Everybody, c'mon! He can forgive sins! C'mon, everybody! Please forgive my sins!" Did they do that? Did they fall down and worship before him and say, "He's the sin forgiver. He's got to be God." Did they? No. So I believe much was missed. This event here, Jesus gave irrefutable evidence that he is divine. But the response [of the people] was one that might have been, let's say, after a really moving movie. Or after going to Disneyworld. Or having witnessed a great show. They were amazed. Were they transformed? Were they changed? Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

With that, Lonnie reviews the main points of his message. Then he bows his head and closes his eyes—thereby signaling the congregation to do the same—and launches into (what I termed) a ritual "recap prayer" or sermonette recapping his message and delivered as an extemporaneous prayer. The pianist comes in softly behind the prayer with a musical bridge to a closing congregational chorus, followed by dismissal.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

While eisegesis is not uncommon in evangelical preaching (many sermons expand at length on stories told in biblical texts; see Ward 2009), less common among conservative evangelicals (who esteem exegetical sermons) is building the application on the inference rather than the text. Thus, using the story of the paralytic to preach that Jesus is divine by dint of his claimed ability to forgive sins and perform miracles is an application built directly on the Markan text. But to preach that the presumed mindset of the paralytic's four companions affirms a call to evangelize, or that the crowd's presumed unkindness toward the paralytic

demonstrates misplaced priorities, or that the scribes' rejection of Jesus stemmed from intellectualism—these applications are built on inferences read into the text. Thus, the question becomes, Why was the Riverside congregation, after three decades of plainspoken exegetical preaching from Pastor Tim, persuaded by Pastor Lonnie's increasingly eisegetical argumentation? Corollary to this question are two more questions: What changes in congregational culture were necessary conditions for eisegetical preaching to become persuasive? And how did eisegesis itself contribute to these cultural changes?

To these questions, Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) Elaboration Likelihood Model, and its extension to include cognitive-cultural modeling (Ward 2008), suggest some answers. The question is what "peripheral cues" were present so that Riverside congregants were persuaded by eisegetical preaching? Since Petty and Wegener (1999) demonstrated that peripheral cues depend on context and a universal list is impossible, researchers must plumb the dynamics of each speaking situation. In the case of Pastor Lonnie and Riverside Bible Church in particular— and evangelical preaching in general, as suggested by the present author's earlier fieldwork across some 200 churches—five peripheral cues emerge as keys.

First, speaker credibility is a powerful cue. Ward (2015b) observed that conservative churches regard their pastors as "God's man," who is divinely appointed and specially gifted to lead as Christ's "undershepherd." As "head" of the local body, the pastor is owed obedience by virtue of both scriptural decree and the biblical "household code" that (as also in the case of essentialist gender roles) prescribes human interactions as a set of ordered relationships. Then, too, Pastor Lonnie is a graduate of the seminary that helped birth Riverside and from which all its pastors have come for more than half a century.

Second, an affinity for visual persuasion is rooted deep in the American evangelical "DNA" and creates receptivity to the visualization practices at which Pastor Lonnie was so adept: word-pictures, dramatic oral interpretations, PowerPoint images, "technical" illustrations, and selected professional videos. If a concept can be visualized, whether in images or the mind's eye, Riverside congregants are cued to process the message peripherally.

Third, increasing introduction of products from evangelical mass culture—from contemporary Christian radio hits to small-group DVD curricula based on popular books and films—enjoys immediate communal validity because they tap deeply into the subculture that Riverside congregants share with evangelicals nationwide. Plumbing that connection is beyond the scope of this study, and, as noted earlier, research into media and religion is only now taking what Stout (2016) called a "pragmatic" turn that investigates how audiences "read" religious media texts and act on them in everyday non-mediated religious life.

Fourth, the transitivity that governs evangelical biblicism is remarkably flexible: if the pastor's arguments make reference to the inspired Word of God, then his applications must be authoritative.

Finally, the four cues just set forth are reinforced via cognitive-cultural modeling by which, as described earlier, "culturally shared knowledge is organized into prototypical event sequences [mentally] enacted in simplified worlds" (Quinn and Holland, 1987: 24). Thus the pastor's Sunday sermon, the use of visuals and visualizations, the credibility of evangelical cultural products, and the transitivity of an "inspired" Bible are all reenacted—peripherally—in the minds of congregants as simplified, prototypical scenarios. The Sunday sermon, the visuals, the cultural products, and the "inspired" Bible all fit into mental schema that enjoy longtime communal validation. Interestingly, the only visualization Riverside members resisted was Pastor Lonnie's "flaming Bible" church logo since the image activated a schema that associated flames with Pentecostal and charismatic Christians who are "other" to Riverside's identity. Though Petty and Cacioppo's ELM holds that peripherally processed persuasive messages can produce only weak attitude change, the present study suggests such attitude changes are reified and gain directive force as cognitive models activated by preaching are constantly reinvoked Sunday mornings and evenings year-round. Thus, an evangelical subculture that prides itself on being "People of the Book" can, over time, gradually attenuate its connections to its own sacred texts.

In the end, Pastor Lonnie's accomplishment may be fruitfully seen as creating what Becker (1982) called an "art world." The elements of this world began with his own activities: setting aside time each week for conceiving and executing multiple visuals from available materials and displaying this work via PowerPoint at weekly worship gatherings of the Riverside congregation. Yet sociological interest in Lonnie's visual presentations also "consists of a work being made *and* appreciated; for that to happen, the activity of response and appreciation must occur" as audience members "have an emotional or intellectual reaction to it, 'see something in it,' appreciate it" (Becker, 1982: 4). Riverside members were quickly drawn into Lonnie's art world as they soon felt at ease to giggle or say "Amen" in the "right" places during his illustrated sermons. More broadly, worshipers extended peripheral cues common in their evangelical subculture to accept, without central cognitive processing, their pastor's visual innovations as persuasive and authoritative. In so doing, congregants accepted a level of biblical eisegesis and communal participation in evangelical mass culture that were discouraged, often actively and consciously, by their former pastor and by Riverside's historic organizational identity as a "Bible church" focused (textually) on "the Word."

Sustaining this art world required "creating and maintaining the rationale according to which all these [above] activities make sense and are worth doing" (Becker, 1982: 4). In turn, such "[r]ationales typically take a form, however naïve,

of a kind of aesthetic argument, a philosophical justification which identifies what is being made as art, as good art, and explains how art does something that needs to be done for people and society" (p. 4). As he stated in his interview cited earlier, Pastor Lonnie gave great thought and devoted much purposeful activity to his image-making so that he might "bring life" and a "healthy outlook" to the church by "creat[ing] symbols to bridge the gap between 'up here' and the people." His philosophic rationale spanned individual cognition ("You can't overlook the emotional for the cerebral"; "Many [members] are left-brained…so the creative right-brain can be fearful") and communal culture ("So there's been a change in communication"; "We live in an image-driven culture").

A necessary element "to do all this supposes conditions of civic order such that people engaged in making art can count on a certain stability, can feel that there are some rules to the game they are playing" (Becker, 1982: 5). Pastor Lonnie could, in fact, count on a stable set of rules for "doing church" in the evangelical subculture: the instant credibility afforded a pastor or preacher as "God's man," especially if credentialed by a trusted seminary; the latent affinities for visuality in contemporary evangelical mass culture; and, most of all, a universal recognition in evangelical culture of the Bible as the one dominant symbol whose invocation authorizes all else. Both intuitively and consciously, Lonnie skillfully played by these rules to, as he stated in his interview, "go slow and first set up changes through my preaching" and then over time wean Riverside's culture away from the "black-and-white situation" of its former "propositional and logic-driven" ethos and "comfortable…'formula' that worked in the past." Instead, by "anchor[ing] propositions in images" and "creat[ing] shared symbols," Lonnie strove to construct at Riverside Bible Church a "healthy" world of "color" and of "PowerPoint, stories, visuals, and images" where "right-brain" emotion and creativity would be unleashed.

This world suggests, as well, the importance of case studies in ethnographic research (Becker 2014). To demonstrate the inputs and outputs of a social structure is insufficient; only by observing the "black box" where members complexly interact and thereby construct shared values can their social life be understood. Such an approach is no less vital to the ethnography and sociology of religion. For the analyst, then, "the real action is close to the earth, down here where people are doing things with each other, creating what we like to call, not realizing we're speaking metaphorically, 'social structure' and 'organization,' though what they are really doing is finding ways to collaborate in the day-to-day here-and-now, getting life done" (Becker, 2014: 187). In the present case, visual communication and persuasion were primary factors in "everything that observably contribute[d] to the results" (p. 4) of members' congregational life, factors without which an analysis of that life would be incomplete. Of course, given the position of the sermon in (at least) the Christian tradition, rhetorical analysis of sermon texts

remains a venerable approach to parsing the discourses of faith communities. Yet the present research, by compelling attention to visualization practices and their attendant social effects, demonstrates the imperative for any "analysis, [any] theory, to contain everything…need[ed] to describe and account for what [a] case study has forced [us] to see" (p. 4).

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