

SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE AND TERRORISM: A

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF POST

9/11 SERMONS

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
CHAPTERS	
I.    A WOUNDED NATION	1
II.   RELIGION’S ROLE IN AMERICA	5
III.  SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY AND FANTASY THEME ANALYSIS	17
IV.   FINDINGS	47
V.    DISCUSSION	69
REFERENCES	75
APPENDICES	93
A.  WAKE UP CALL FANTASY THEME CONTENT MAP	93
B.  GOD IS SOVEREIGN FANTASY THEME CONTENT MAP	94
C.  LET’S ROLL FANTASY THEME CONTENT MAP	95

## CHAPTER I

### A WOUNDED NATION

“It was one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world as ‘before’ and ‘after,’” proclaimed one chilling editorial published in the *New York Times* on September 12, 2001 (New York Times, 2002, 17). Merely one day before, Tuesday September 11, 2001 at 8:46 in the morning, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center in Manhattan. Sixteen minutes later another plane, United Airlines Flight 175, struck the south tower. Due to the size of the hijacked Boeing 767s, and because of the massive amount of fuel they were carrying, the damage was impossible to control. America was horrified, but the attacks were not over. At 9:38 am American Airlines Flight 77 hit the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Twenty minutes after the Pentagon attack, the south tower collapsed and only a few minutes later, 80 miles outside of Pittsburgh, United Airlines Flight 93 plummeted to the ground, missing its intended target due to the heroic efforts of the passengers onboard, yet claiming 40 lives. Twenty heart-wrenching minutes later, as a stunned nation looked on, the north tower joined its fallen twin (New York Times, 2002).

For Americans everywhere the day the towers fell was a turning point in history, comparable only to what earlier generations had faced with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and with the attacks on Pearl Harbor (White, 2004). As one observer noted, “It was a harrowing moment, a moment of mourning, of terror and tears, of sorrow and anger and disbelief” (Winter, 2002, 111). The mixture of these emotions can only

begin to describe how the nation felt on 9/11. Not only did Americans feel the loss of the lives claimed by the atrocity, but they also discovered a loss of their innocence, which left a void in them as large as the gap in the NYC skyline (White, 2004). And who could blame them? The two enormous twin towers were literally “transformed from a bustling hubbub of financial enterprise into a morgue of forbidden silence” (White, 2004, 37) before their very eyes.

### America’s Response

The terrorists’ attacks screamed for attention, and America responded. In the hours and days following the attacks, the ashen smoke cleared to find a wounded nation desperately trying to make some sense of their loss, yet determined to rise above it. America rose “like a phoenix from the ashes, cohesive and compassionate and determined to begin again” (Winter, 2002, 111). In the aftermath of September 11, America went through several changes. The culture seemed to shift, in everything from the music that radio stations played to the television shows that drew in audiences (White, 2004). The CD that topped the charts after 9/11 was one featuring Celine Dion singing “God Bless America,” and Clear Channel Communications temporarily banned the playing of 150 songs that they believed to be unsuitable (White, 2004). Even MTV got into the swing of things by playing music videos they felt would be comforting, like U2’s “Walk On” (White, 2004). Old television shows, such as “I Love Lucy” began to draw in younger audiences (White, 2004) and for the film industry, shots of the twin towers were deleted from many movies that had been filmed prior to the attacks but were

not set to release until late 2001 or 2002 (Schneider, 2004). Advertisements afforded companies and the public a chance to grieve and in the heart of NYC such ads, offered at a discounted price by the *New York Times*, gave “the city a voice for collective pain and outrage” (Larson & Mullen, 2003, 7). Also in the world of print media, editorialist cartoons reflected the events of the massacre and offered Americans the chance to pass judgment and reflect on the haunting events (Edwards, 2003). However, the changes did not end there. America also welcomed with open arms a rebirth of patriotism. Many Americans proudly displayed the American Flag and the nation became obsessed with the 9/11 heroes, among them being the New York Firefighters, Police and EMS, and also the passengers of the fallen Flight 93 (White, 2004). Musicians began writing and performing patriotic songs, the members of Congress burst into “God Bless America” on the Capitol steps, and even the 2001 Miss America Pageant reflected the new patriotic mood (White, 2004).

From MTV to Miss America, it was a time to search for comfort and assurance and Americans were looking everywhere for it, even in churches, mosques, and synagogues (White, 2004). One research group reported that church attendance, that had held at a steady 43% since 1997 increased dramatically after 9/11, but within a few weeks had returned to the somewhat consistent level of 43% typical before the attacks (Barna, 2002). This decline in attendance was confirmed by a survey given in the middle of November (PEW, 2001). In another survey taken by the Zogby International tracking poll (as cited in White, 2004, 43) it was found that church attendance was up to 51% after the attacks. This attendance spike was a ten point increase from the numbers that had been

reported only a few months before. Beyond the attendance, people also reported they felt closer to God since the tragedy (as cited in White, 2004, 43). Yet according to the Democracy Corps poll (as cited in White, 2004, 43) in a survey administered in September 2002 the numbers had deflated to 39%. This survey confirmed the results found by other research groups. Apparently, in the days and weeks that followed September 11 the rush of Americans who sought out comfort in the church was short lived.

## CHAPTER II

### RELIGION'S ROLE IN AMERICA

The phrase “In God We Trust” is seen on every piece of American currency, the American Pledge of Allegiance states, “one nation, under God” and the final verse of the Star Spangled Banner is “Then conquer we must, for our cause it is just, And this be our motto: ‘In God is our trust’” (Libaw, 2002). But what role does religion, namely Christianity, play in America with regard to culture and politics? Is there really a separation of Church and State? Is religion influencing American’s culture the same way it did for the founding fathers or has it become simply nostalgia? This is an important issue to examine in order to also understand the role Christianity played in the aftermath of 9/11. In order to look at the role Christianity plays in America, it is important to contemplate what role the Christian preacher and his or her sermons play in American politics and culture. It is the interest of this analysis to specifically focus on how preachers and their sermons affect America’s attitude towards war and other major social movements. In order to do this, previous research of the role preachers and sermons played in wars like WWI and WWII, and in other major social events, like the Civil Rights Movement will be discussed in this chapter. The issue of war also brings up a very interesting concept, the idea of the just war. According to an article written by Keith Pavlischek, “Whether they realize it or not, Americans have been guided in forming their moral institutions by a long tradition of Christian reflection on the moral questions that surround the use of force—the just war tradition” (2001, 24). The literature review will

also look at this concept and the beliefs that surround it. However, before any of those issues are investigated the focus must first turn to look at the broader scope of things, being that of religion itself.

## Religion

The term religion can be used to describe a plethora of belief systems and it is well known that “there is much that distinguishes one religion from another in theology and in praxis” (Winter, 2002, 114). Therefore, it is important to specify which religion will be studied before the pursuit goes any further. For the purposes of this analysis, Christianity will be the religion analyzed. To further clarify the study, while there are several denominations that fall under the heading of Christianity, this study will include only those of the Catholic and Protestant religious traditions. When America’s population of adult church identifiers was examined in 1991, it was found that 25% of the church population belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church was the single largest denomination at that time. 33% of the church population was affiliated with mainline Protestant Churches, such as Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Unitarian, and some Lutheran and Baptist churches. Another 25% belonged to Evangelical Protestants, including most Lutherans, Baptists, branches of the Reformed Church and Pentecostal Churches, as well as smaller churches and those who split from established Churches. The remaining population was divided into various small religious groups. Those of the Jewish faith only made up 3% of the population, Mormonism accounted for 1%, other faiths tallied 6% of the population, and 7% denied affiliation

with any formal religious group (Wald, 1991, 248-249). These numbers show that the selection of churches for this analysis offers a fair representation of the major American religion, Christianity, and its major denominations. At this point it is important to note that while there are differing theological views between Protestants and Catholics, for the nature of this study the common ground they share is enough to unite them. Also, the aforementioned research that examined church attendance did not single out a certain type of Catholic or Protestant church. Obviously the problem of spiking attendance followed by a quick decline was a challenge that all denominations faced and therefore, all denominations are of equal importance in pursuing this matter.

### Preaching and Sermons

One of the traditions held by Christian churches is attending church or mass. It is at these regular services that church members listen to their pastor or priest teach them Biblical principals and instruct them in the way they should live their Christian lives. According to P.T. Forsyth, “Preaching is the most distinctive institution in Christianity” (1981, p. 3). Forsyth continues by saying that “with preaching Christianity stands or falls because it is the declaration of a Gospel. Nay more—far more it is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself” (Forsyth, 1981, 5). Preaching is one of the oldest and most continuing activities of the church, however the way people have preached has varied depending on the era and culture to which they belonged. Over the years, preachers have adjusted their sermons to address the needs and problems of their social context (Bosley, 1969). As it pertains to Christianity, the practice of preaching was one of the main

functions of all the New Testament churches (Bosley, 1969). Despite the persecution that the young church faced from the Roman government Christianity continued to spread. When the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the state religion and the persecution ceased, the Christians began to extend to other parts of the world (Bosley, 1969, 21). In the Medieval times, the church rose in power and began to lose its prophetic zeal (Bosley, 1969, 21). During this time the church became intent on gaining and keeping economic and political power, which continued until the time of the Reformation (Bosley, 1969). The Reformation movement was stirred by preachers and their sermons in France, Switzerland, Germany, and other European countries much to the dismay of the powerful Roman Catholic Church (Bosley, 1969, 22). It was in the midst of this religious upheaval that many religious groups fled Europe and its discriminatory laws, violence, and persecution to find relief in the newly colonized America (Bosley, 1969).

From the earliest settlements in America, “colonial communities had a vivid awareness of their dependence upon God and his word in holy Scriptures; they regarded the pastor as the man God appointed by divine decree to guide them in the way everlasting as that way is found in the Bible” (Bosley, 1969, 27). In the early settlements, the preacher would offer reassuring words for the settlers in his sermon in the midst of crisis and during elections. The Election Day sermon, second only to the Easter sermon, offered solemn warnings from the scriptures to aid the voters in what kind of man they needed to govern them. In these sermons, candidates were often compared to biblical characters (Bosley, 1969). Throughout the early years, the church had a major influence

on the young colonies' politics. Records from the colonies show that preaching was one of the most powerful aspects during the emigration to, and the settlement of, the New World (Bosley, 1969). It was in this tradition that young America won her independence and was founded. Therefore, at the very beginning of America's founding religion and politics were mutually influential.

It was believed that the noticeable significance of religion in American politics decreased dramatically after World War II. Yet Wald (1991) claims that even though the post-war period lacked the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth centuries' tone and temper of their religious controversies and wars, religion still has not given up political significance in America (Wald, 1991). The Modernization Theory (Wald, 1991) claims that as a society changes from traditionalism to modernity there is a decline in the strength of religious commitment, that religious morals and establishments begin to occupy a trivial role in social affairs, and that this decline in religious interest foreshadows a decay of religious presence in the society's politics (Wald, 1991, 242). Wald argues "if the condition of religion is assessed by the breadth of commitment to religious institutions and the persistence of ritualized behavior, then it appears that the US experience falsifies modernization theory" (1991, 243). He continues, "Religious enthusiasm in the US may ebb and flow but it has not followed the steady downward spiral predicted by the naïve version of the Modernization Theory" (Wald, 1991, 245). Wald references the example of pre-war, and post-war church attendance to make his claim. Church membership rose by 10% following WWII, as it was at 50% pre-war and at 60% post-war. These numbers differ slightly from the self-reports given by churches

at the time that stated the numbers were actually 70%. In 1939, weekly church attendance was at 41%, and in 1985 it was only down one point at 40%. In 1948, 90% of people polled said they believed in a Supreme Being, only slightly higher than the 87% who agreed in 1985. The belief in an after-life rose from the 68% reported in 1948 to 71% in 1981. However, from the 1950's through the 1980's, 75% of Americans reported a sense that religion was losing influence in society and only 56% in 1984 ranked religion as very important in their life as opposed to the 75% who claimed that in 1952 (as cited in Wald, 1991, 245). Wald concludes that it is difficult to determine if modernity has strengthened or weakened religious commitment in modern America. If Church affiliation is used as a determining factor, than it appears that religion retains a primary role. However, if the texture of American's faith is examined, then the modern religion appears to be less influential. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that modernity has affected the model of what religious commitment is by encouraging church members to affiliate themselves with a church of their choice instead of that of their birth, and also by encouraging smaller, competitive denominations and new religious traditions instead of the former, large, established sacred traditions (Wald, 1991).

From Wald's perspective, America is not exempt from religious influence upon its social agenda rather the role of religion has been influenced by and evolved because of modernity. This too seems to be the case for the role of religion in American politics. One major area concerning the role of religion in American politics is defining the "wall of separation" between Church and State. According to Wald (1991):

The language of the First Amendment to the constitution appears to confine religious and political forces to separate spheres, divided by an impregnable wall

of separation. The notion of a rigid wall of separation between religion and politics is tenable only within the confines of the most restricted definition of the two spheres. The concept of 'religion' must be broadened beyond the Church to take in the numerous voluntary associations and informal networks of social interaction that bind a congregation of believers. Because of the ambiguity inherent in the First Amendment, questions about the regulation of religion thus remain very much on the public agenda and are contested anew with each generation. (239-240)

However, Wald's interpretation of the First Amendment represents only one point of view. Political as well as religious groups have their own versions of what the First Amendment means, and the debates this engenders still continue today. Some believe that even if the government is not directly related to religion, as it appeared to be in the past, religion still ultimately affects political decisions because of the democratic nature the government operates under. According to Jess Yoder, "Democratic government in America places the responsibility for handling national affairs upon the citizens. Thus, responsible citizens must reconcile the acts of war in each new situation with their own consciences and their religious beliefs" (1969, 239). This brings to the forefront the topic of war and the role that religion plays in determining if war is morally correct or not. A question every generation has had to face in their time. Under the heading of this topic comes the terms *holy crusades* and *just war*. In order to examine how religion has influenced the nations' attitude towards war in the past, WWI and WWII will be examined.

In 1914 the majority of American churches supported President Wilson's neutrality about US involvement from the pulpit (Yoder, 1969). However, when the Lusitania was attacked, their responses began to change. At first, the preaching was mixed with pro-war and anti-war messages, but as time passed support in favor of war

grew. Once America declared war, the churches stepped up to support it by turning the political issues surrounding the war into religious concerns (Yoder, 1969). This attitude was justified morally and theologically by preaching that the Germans were enemies of the Kingdom of God. The American soldiers became missionaries of the church and other preachers claimed that Jesus was not a pacifist. Some preachers went as far as to say that “pacifism was un-Christian, immoral, and un-American” (Yoder, 1969, 244). One popular preacher claimed, “If you turn Hell upside down you will find ‘made in Germany’ stamped on the bottom” (Yoder, 1969, 244). *The New York Times* picked up on the analogy and published headlines that read “German VS American=Hell VS Heaven” (Yoder, 1969, 245). Preachers not only supported the war from their pulpits, but they also became involved with the war efforts. However, even though so many ministers were caught up in the *holy war*, some preachers remained pacifists. John Hayne Holmes, a Unitarian Minister claimed, “War is never justifiable at any time or under any circumstance” (as cited in Yoder, 1969, 246). After WWI many preachers found they had been fooled by the ever-convincing propaganda that had accompanied the war frenzy. As a result, the 1920’s saw a call from the church for repentance and fifteen denominations made a declaration that they were opposed to war. The churches took on a new tone of pacifism in the 1920’s and 1930’s as the excitement surrounding the once “holy war” was squelched by the looming regret of having been deceived, and militarism began to be de-emphasized in America (Yoder, 1969). The aftermath of WWI also led some preachers to rethink what they thought justified the cause for a war. Reinhold Niebuhr claimed, “A war to defend the victims of wanton aggression, where the demands

of justice join the demands of order, is today the clearest cause of a just war” (as cited in Yoder, 1969, 249). Niebuhr insisted that the final decision about whether a war was justified or not needed to be made by the individual, however the church could aid in making that decision (Yoder, 1969). The idea of a *just war* was not a new concept introduced by Niebuhr, but it was important for his generation to rethink the classical Christian concept and weigh it carefully in the light of their current events. In actuality, the concept of *just war* has been around for many centuries, being first introduced by St. Augustine in the fourth century. It came from the Latin terms *jus ad bellum*, which actually meant “justice toward war” (Pavliscek, 2002, 25). Under this belief, before a war could be declared it had to meet three criteria. First it had to be of legitimate authority, next just cause, and finally it had to be fought with the right intention (Pavliscek, 2002). Typically a just war was fought in defense of a wrongful attack, to retake something that was unethically taken, and to punish evil (Pavliscek, 2002). The post-WWI ministers used these classical beliefs when trying to justify the war.

Preaching during WWII took on quite a different tone. For many congregations WWII was considered anything but a *holy war*, and many sermons given during WWII centered on what the church should have learned from WWI (Yoder, 1969). Unlike the preaching of WWI, the majority of WWII sermons declared that Jesus condemned war and the evils of war were often mentioned in the sermons of the time (Yoder, 1969). Another topic found in the WWII sermons was a fellowship theme (Yoder, 1969). According to Yoder, “The fellowship theme, commonly found in the preaching of World War II and later, was forcefully articulated in the words from a sermon of Winfield

Haycock: ‘When you think of the two pillars of religion, the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, you see that peace is the affirmation of God because it is the destruction of human brotherhood’” (Yoder, 1969, 250). In 1939, the Federal Council of Churches called on ministers to “resist propaganda and hatred and to maintain an unbroken worldwide Christian fellowship” (Yoder, 1969, 250). However, even though many preachers claimed the war was evil, they still asserted that Christians should fight in it to avoid greater evil (Yoder, 1969).

Yet, not all preachers took the pacifist side. Several sermons declared that the war was the judgment of God on both sides and it was not that Hitler had a wicked plan, or that America had decided to enter the war, but it was the will of God that was causing it. Billy Graham, and other preachers associated with the National Association of Evangelicals, preached the sovereignty of God (Yoder, 1969). They preached that the current rulers had a divine appointment, and that the war was in accord with the will of God. This approach took on the *holy war* theme that had been popular during WWI. Therefore, during WWII some ministers preached pacifism, some declared that the war was a *holy war*, and some labeled it as a *just war* (Yoder, 1969).

As WWII ended, the United States was thrust into an arms race against the Soviet Union. America had come out of the war on top, as the most powerful nation in the world, and its use of the Atomic bombs ushered in the nuclear age and the dawning of a new horror. Bigger and better bombs had to be made in order to keep up with the Soviet Union, and America was forced into the midst of a Cold War. For ministers, the new technology of mass destruction unleashed complex new issues. The preachers found it

challenging to apply the *just war* theory to the situation of nuclear warheads. Many became pacifists in the interest of purely surviving. However, others took a firm stand that communism should be destroyed at any cost and, in some circles, a Christian anti-communist crusade developed (Yoder, 1969).

Wars were not the only topic that the Church addressed from the pulpit. In regards to the Civil Rights Movement, sermons played a major role. By 1954, many preachers incorporated the topic of race and civil rights into their sermons. Prior to this year, there were only a handful of ministers, mainly those of the Unitarian denomination, who preached in favor of civil rights (Pinson, 1969). As the popularity of these topics rose in the pulpit, preachers typically took one of three very different stands. One group, making up the majority of preachers until their numbers began to reduce after 1954, decided to remain silent and refused to preach on the subjects of race or civil rights. The second group preached in favor of ending discrimination and called for an end to segregation. However, even though this group was interested in the same results, their levels of involvement differed, as some of them just asked for their congregations to practice more love in dealing with other humans, others from this group actually took part in sit-ins and civil rights demonstrations. However, preachers who preferred the milder approach often criticized the more radical level of involvement. Finally, the third group preached in favor of segregation claiming it was God's will. Preachers in this group believed that African Americans were inferior and needed to be separated out (Pinson, 1969). Although the beliefs of these three different categories were very different, the members of each group were not so easily divided. In any given group,

were preachers from all over the nation from all sorts of denominations and races. For example, both pro-civil right and anti-civil right preachers could be found within the Southern Baptist denomination. As for race, J.H. Jackson was an African American preacher who preached against the civil rights movement while Martin Luther King, Jr., another African American preacher, was at the forefront of the movement (Pinson, 1969, 377). By the middle of the 1960's civil rights preaching, though still pertinent, lost much of its urgency as other issues began to gain the attention of ministers (Pinson, 1969, 378).

During the conflict in Vietnam, ministers again had to decide what to preach to their congregations. The Vietnam conflict was a topic that was not given much attention by American Churches. Not many sermons for or against the conflict were published and ministers did not appear to respond with any passion to Vietnam. The strongest opposition against Vietnam was voiced outside of the churches by organizations that drew attention to the moral issues surrounding America's involvement (Yoder, 1969).

Although the lack of involvement by the churches for or against Vietnam appears to be a signifier that the role the Church played in American politics had changed, there are still those who currently believe that the church still has an influence on Americans' attitude towards war. One article discussing the issues of war published after September 11, 2001 declared, "Whether they realize it or not, Americans have been guided in forming their moral institutions by a long tradition of Christian reflection on the moral questions that surround the use of force—the just war tradition" (Pavlishek, 2002, 24).

CHAPTER III  
SYMBOLIC CONVERGENCE THEORY AND FANTASY  
THEME ANALYSIS

Symbolic Convergence Theory

The method of choice for this analysis is fantasy theme analysis (FTA), a rhetorical application of Bormann's symbolic convergence theory (SCT). This chapter will discuss a brief history of SCT and its rhetorical criticism method of fantasy theme analysis, the components of SCT, its theoretical roots, and its epistemological assumptions. The Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis section will end with a detailed account of how the theory and analysis pertain to this research and how the researcher will apply it to the selected texts.

*History of Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis*

Bormann and his associates introduced the symbolic convergence theory in the 1970's at the University of Minnesota. Although Bormann's name is the one that SCT is widely attributed to, Bormann co-created it with the help of his colleagues and students known as the Turtle Racers. This group met on a monthly basis for years in Bormann's home to lay the foundation for SCT, which represented a team approach to communication theory building (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). Though he is the known author of the symbolic convergence theory, the study of groups is not unique to Bormann. SCT was drawn from two different areas of research, rhetoric and social

science, and from the work of two different researchers, Bormann and R. F. Bales (Bormann, 1972; Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). Bales' study of small group dynamics inspired Bormann's theory after Bales discovered the communication process known as group fantasizing or dramatizing, (Bormann, 1972; Ball, 2001; Foss, 1989). Dramatizing was "defined by double entendre, stories, jokes, narratives, analogies, metaphors, and so on" (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). Bormann saw that Bales' work had practical, as well as theoretical implications (Ball, 2001) and declared in a meeting with his research team that Bales had discovered rhetorical criticism (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). According to Bormann, "Bales provides the critic with an account of how dramatizing communication creates social reality for groups of people and with a way to examine messages for insights into the group's culture, motivation, emotional style and cohesion" (Bormann, 1972, 396). After realizing the rhetorical benefits of Bales' discovery, Bormann and his team began to compose a communication theory that explained how a message "moves from a small group, to public speeches, to mass media, and, eventually to the larger public" (Ball, 2001, 217). The basic method of applying the theory of Symbolic Convergence was developed, and named Fantasy Theme Analysis. Fantasy theme analysis was created in the early stages of the SCT development, and was the only method used at first to apply SCT to research studies. As Bormann and his team began to view fantasy theme analysis as a key element in combining social science and humanism, they began to apply the concept in the area of rhetoric. The fantasy theme analysis method did four things. First, it highlighted the meaning of imaginative language in building group cohesion and collective

consciousness. Second, it put the audience back into the center of communication studies instead of all the emphasis being placed on the text. Next, it was a social approach that studied communication in the context of groups. And finally, it allowed for a more complex analysis of invented and non-invented imaginative language (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). Fantasy theme analysis was first used to apply SCT in studies on small group communication, but soon grew to include research in other traditional communication contexts by examining the process and how it works in the media, in different situations that featured an audience and a speaker, and even in examining historical documents (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001).

### *Components of Symbolic Convergence Theory*

According to its founders, symbolic convergence theory was given the name symbolic because it dealt with fantasy, language, and symbolic facts, and the name convergence because its basic theorem explained the process of communication in which groups share fantasies in order to develop their symbolic world (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). The main focus of SCT, “is upon the communicative processes by which human beings converge their individual fantasies, dreams, and meanings into shared symbol systems” (Bormann, 1980, 188-189.) According to Bormann, SCT is applicable because it is able “to account for the development, evolution, and decay of dramas that catch up groups of people and change their behavior” (Bormann, 1972, 399).

The basic unit of analysis or the basic concept for SCT is the fantasy theme. A fantasy theme is “a dramatizing message that depicts characters engaged in action in a

setting that accounts for and explains human experience” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 282). Fantasy themes are not fictitious in nature, rather they do contain verifiable facts and are created to provide a group of people with a reasonable, creative, and imaginative explanation of particular events that are confusing and disturbing (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 282, St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 213). Fantasy themes are created in order to fill rhetorical or psychological needs (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 282) and can be used to interpret an audiences past, present, or future (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 217). They can be a mere word, a phrase, a sentence, or even as long as a paragraph (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 282).

Along with basic concept of fantasy theme, there are also three associated basic concepts. They are symbolic cue, fantasy type, and saga (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 282). A symbolic cue is a shorthand indicant such as a symbol, sign, or inside joke that stands for a fantasy theme (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 283). Holding up the pointer and middle finger in order to make the peace sign is an example of a symbolic cue. A fantasy type is a standard scenario that uses a well-known, dramatic form to explain new events (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 284) and is an umbrella term for a cluster of recurring, related fantasy themes (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 215). For example, it has become a common practice to depict governmental corruption and cover-ups by placing the word *gate* at the end of them as in Watergate and Whitewatergate (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 284). A fantasy type is a standard situation repeated again and again by the same or similar characters and can include recognizable plot lines, scenes, situations, and representations of people (St. Antoine,

Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 215). According to Moya Ann Ball, “Fantasy themes and fantasy types are, ultimately, the building blocks of a group’s culture, propelling its members to some attitudes and actions and not to others” (Ball, 2001, 222). However, a saga is somewhat different from the other two associate basic concepts. A saga is “a detailed account of the achievements in the life of a person, group, community, organization, or nation” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 284). It is a concept that appears to be unique to rhetorical communities such as organizations that develop over time as a physical unit.

The next important technical term is rhetorical vision, which is SCT’s major message structure concept. A rhetorical vision is a composite drama composed of related fantasy themes that have been clustered into specific fantasy types (Bormann, 1972, St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 215). Because a rhetorical vision is composed of fantasy themes clustered into fantasy types, the fantasy type is the rhetorical visions’ workhorse (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000, 262). A rhetorical vision grasps large groups of people and puts them in the same symbolic reality (Bormann, 1972), thus it reveals a “coherent, unified, and holistic picture of a community’s shared beliefs” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 215). Participation in a rhetorical vision creates a symbolic consciousness for the group and prompts them into action (Bormann, 1972) and because they feature recognizable characters and plots, when they are alluded to despite the context or discussion, they can trigger “responses similar to those observed in the original interaction that spawned it” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 215). Rhetorical visions are usually indexed by a key word or slogan (St. Antoine, Althouse, &

Ball, 2005, 216), and these can be used to trigger responses in the group as well. Some researchers prefer to replace the word “vision”, with “myth” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, 252). However, the meanings are the same. Each rhetorical vision is comprised of four substructural elements. They are *dramatis personae*, plot lines, scene, and sanctioning agent. The *dramatis personae* is the character, the plot lines are the action that takes place, the scene is the same as the setting, and the sanctioning agent is the legitimizer for the rhetorical vision (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 285).

Prior fantasy theme analysis studies suggest that many rhetorical visions fit into one of three genres called master-analogues (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 218). They are pragmatic, social, and righteous. According to FTA’s creators, these genres are structure tensions that underlie the message’s mold. If a rhetorical vision has a righteous master-analogue it relies on fantasy themes that stress morality, correctness, and the right way (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 288). Righteous master-analogues are “shared by those who take part in a consciousness that is dedicated to some overarching cause or position” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 219). If a rhetorical vision has a social master-analogue it is concerned with humaneness, family, brother- or sisterhood, and social affairs (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 288). A social master-analogue “celebrates interpersonal relationships and the developments of good families at the concrete level as well as in the utopian envisioning of the future achievement of the family of humankind residing at peace on the spaceship of earth” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 219). Rhetorical visions that fit into the social genre category “feature idealistic notions of harmony and freedom, as relationships are paramount concerns” (St.

Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 219). Finally, if a rhetorical vision is immersed in a pragmatic master-analogue it values the bottom line, what is expedient, and what will work (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 288). Pragmatic rhetorical visions “extol the virtues of science, effectiveness, and common sense” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 218-219). They also value accomplishments and goals (Kuypers, 2005, 219).

In SCT the technical term for communicators is fantasizers and rhetorical community (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 291) and the elaboration, sharing or “catching on” of a fantasy theme is known as chaining (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 214). The medium that is the best for fantasies is one that promotes group or public sharing, instead of only personal fantasizing (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 291), thus creating a perfect environment for chaining. Fantasy themes occur in and chain out from all discourse and, as is evident in group and public fantasizing, can occur in the communication of people in small or large groups, as well as oral, mediated, and printed forms of communication (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 33). For group communication, this chaining process is called group chaining, likewise in the media of public communication the process is known as public chaining (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 291). Fantasies that begin in small groups are often adopted into public speeches, then embraced by the mass media, and eventually are spread out to larger publics (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 291). Thus “the phenomenon of group fantasizing affects and is applicable to persuasive events on a public scale” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 222). Evidence of public, or mediated chaining may manifest when creators of texts borrow, adapt, or disseminate frequently used dramatized images

or ideas (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 214). Fantasies that chain out publicly among significant sized groups of people often reappear as slogans and symbols on bumper stickers and t-shirts (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 33). In both instances, the symbolic structures conveyed in the group or public fantasizing becomes part of the symbolic consciousness of the member within different rhetorical communities (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 291). Symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis assume that chaining is a multi-step flow rather than a two-step flow, meaning that instead of simply transferring “from the media, to opinion leaders and to the public, information flows in all directions between all agents creating a web of interaction and making possible a unified rhetorical vision” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 236). This concept is especially important to the research at hand. It is important to note that the act of fantasy chaining does not take place only in small group communication nor does it flow in a certain direction. Bormann (1972) argued in his first journal article introducing SCT that fantasy chaining can take place in a group listening to a public speech (398).

Bormann (1972) said:

My argument is that these moments happen not only in individual reactions to works of art, or in small group’s chaining out a fantasy theme, but also in larger groups hearing a public speech. The dramatizations which catch on and chain out in small groups are worked into public speeches and into the mass media and, in turn, spread out across larger publics, serve to sustain the members’ sense of community, to impel them strongly to action (which raises the question of motivation), and to provide them with a social reality filled with heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes. (398)

Therefore, a sermon can be an acceptable way to study SCT. According to

Bormann, this research “is one that is ideally suited for Fantasy Theme Analysis”

(personal communication, February 20, 2005). Bormann also said, “concerning sermons, I and other students of mine have applied Symbolic Convergence Theory to the study of religious speakers” (personal communication, February 20, 2005). In his 1972 capstone article, Bormann used as an example a fantasy theme analysis he had done using the sermons of Puritan preachers (Bormann, 1972). Bormann found through examining the text of the sermons that the Puritan rhetorical vision was comprised of two common fantasy themes (Bormann, 1972). The first fantasy theme was “the pilgrim making his slow, painful, and holy way, beset by many troubles and temptation” (Bormann, 1972, 404). The second fantasy theme was “the Christian soldier fighting God’s battles and overcoming all adversaries in order to establish the true church” (Bormann, 1972, 404).

To conclude the technical terms, there are three concepts that enable the evaluation of the quality and effects of fantasy sharing among the affiliates of rhetorical visions. The terms include fantasy theme artistry, shared group consciousness, and rhetorical vision reality-links. The term fantasy theme artistry is an evaluative concept that examines fantasy themes, symbolic cues, fantasy types, rhetorical visions, and sagas for rhetorical creativity, novelty, and competitive advantages. This concept allows researchers to understand why some renditions of a rhetorical vision are more successful than other versions of the same idea. For example, the idea behind the term “manifest destiny” was depicted in various statements after Horace Greeley used it in 1845, but some versions of the phrase were more successful than others. Fantasy theme analysis researchers claim this is because, based on the idea of fantasy theme artistry, some of those expressions were more rhetorically artistic than the others (Bormann, Cragan, &

Shields, 2001). When dealing with fantasy theme artistry, there is a closeness of fit standard. The closeness of fit standard claims that a fantasy theme should fit its rhetorical community, as well as be coherent with other fantasy themes within the rhetorical vision (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). Closeness of fit is determined by examining the community creating the symbolic reality, and also the rhetorical vision it is a part of. For example, when President Clinton's Whitewater investments were referred to by adding "gate" on the end, in order to compare it to Watergate, the analogy failed because there was no cover-up and the situation was not scandalous like Watergate. Therefore the closeness of fit standard was not met and the analogy failed (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 292). The next evaluative concept, shared group consciousness reminds researchers to check for the occurrence of symbolic convergence by identifying the principles of novelty, critical mass, and channel access. These three principles "help symbolic convergence to catch-up larger numbers of people and build a collection of fantasy themes, fantasy types, and symbolic cues into a widely accepted rhetorical vision" (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 293). A lack of novelty, critical mass, and channel access lead to a failure to achieve a common consciousness (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 293). Finally, the evaluative concept rhetorical vision reality-links are important in sustaining visions and themes because they anchor the rhetorical visions and fantasy themes to objective reality (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001).

### *Epistemological Assumptions of Symbolic Convergence Theory*

Now that the technical terms of SCT's components have been discussed, it is time to examine SCT in a different light. In order to truly understand symbolic convergence theory the epistemological assumptions that make up the foundation of the theory must be explored. It is in this direction that this chapter now turns.

The symbolic convergence theory is classified as a general theory, being both transcultural and transhistorical, (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001; Ball, 2001) and it also can be applied to any of the traditional communication contexts (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). This is very important to highlight in regard to this analysis, because Symbolic Convergence Theory is not a theory that is restricted to the study of small groups. According to Bormann:

It is true that the development of Symbolic Convergence Theory much of the experimental work itself was done on small groups, by Bales and by our group in Minneapolis. However, the full development of it spread out far beyond that material. Small group communication is an integral part of Fantasy Theme Analysis, but the analysis once it became a theory moved beyond the small group arena, and certainly the study of sermons was one of the important areas of study (personal communication, February 20, 2002).

Over the years, SCT has been used to study and solve actual problems faced in the real world in all aspects of communication including, interpersonal communication, public communication, organizational communication, mass communication, and intercultural communication (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001) as well as in the sociopolitical and political arena.

Symbolic Convergence Theory grew out of the ontological assumption that humans are dramatizers by nature and was built on the model of the natural sciences.

Symbolic Convergence Theory is based on six epistemological assumptions (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 31) which will be discussed further later in this essay. First, the direct content of the message conveys meaning, emotion, and motive for action (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 31-32). From this assumption SCT maintains that meaning exists in the message (Bormann, 1972, 406; Cragan & Shields, 1995, 31-32). The second epistemological assumption that SCT is based on is that our view of reality is created symbolically. This means that people build a collective view of reality through engaging in conversations, listening to speeches, having small group discussions, and through mediated messages (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 32). The Symbolic Convergence Theory's third assumption is that fantasy sharing creates symbolic convergence that is dramatic in form (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 32-33). This is because humans tend to instigate, construct, exaggerate, reconfigure, and thus evolve an explanation of events that has the potential to catch on and spread through a group of people (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 32-33). Next, the method of fantasy theme analysis is the basic method to use in order to discover, capture, and analyze symbolic reality (Cragan & Shields, 199, 33). The fifth assumption holds that fantasy themes occur in and chain out from all forms of discourse including oral, mediated, and text, as well as in large and small group communication (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 33-34). And finally, SCT claims that participants in different and competing rhetorical visions interpret the same phenomena in various ways (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 34). This reflects that there are always three alternative archetypal deep structures that compete against one another as different explanations of symbolic reality, regardless of the content of the competing visions (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 34). The

three archetypal deep structures are the righteous, social, and pragmatic master analogues (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 34) that were discussed earlier in this chapter.

Symbolic Convergence Theory gives an account for the use of imaginative language, the development of shared fantasies, and for the creation, rise, and fall of a community's consciousness (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). Symbolic Convergence Theory places the audience in the middle of its communication model. According to Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, "Although SCT posits that the loci of meaning, emotion, value, and motive for action are in the message, it also posits that the message is co-created with the audience" (2001, 273).

Another characteristic of SCT is that it explains "seemingly divergent phenomena with the same principle" (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 274). Symbolic Convergence Theory does this by explaining both discursive language and imaginative language. This is possible because SCT assumes that fantasy is the communicative force that explains both "the constitutive consciousness of collectives" and also the historical phenomena known as special theories, that "provide the knowledge necessary the participation in and the critique of communication styles and episodes" (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 274).

### *Criticism of Symbolic Convergence Theory*

As with any theory, SCT has had its fair share of critics. One of the most recent criticisms came from a scholar named Joshua Gunn in 2003. Gunn claimed that the key limitation to SCT was that it "was defended as an entirely conscious endeavor, although

Bormann described a process that invited people to ‘grow excited, interrupt one another, blush, laugh, [and] *forget their self-consciousness*’ (emphasis added)” (Gunn, 2003a, 52). Gunn also claimed that SCT was inconsistent, that its Freudian fantasies were deceptive, and that it was an incomplete theory of invention (Gunn, 2003a). To these criticisms, Bormann, Cragan, & Shields were quick to respond, defending SCT by claiming that Gunn’s arguments did not come from any research he himself had done and that they were based on a critical theory developed by other post-modernists. In their responsive article, Bormann, Cragan and Shields went through each of Gunn’s accusations and offered a rebuttal to each and every one (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2003). The end result is obvious differences in interpretation of terms and theoretical foundations, as well as differing preferences in selection translations. Although Gunn offered a one paragraph response to Bormann, Cragan, & Shields rebuttal (Gunn, 2003b), it lacked any real critically sound assertions.

### *Applications of Symbolic Convergence Theory*

As for application, SCT can be applied using a qualitative or rhetorical, as well as a quantitative method. Researchers can use the method of content analysis to apply SCT qualitatively, and quantitatively SCT is studied using Q-types, multivariates, and factor analysis using the QUANAL computer program (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001). The pioneers of SCT research began combining the qualitative and quantitative methods in their studies by using fantasy theme analysis to analyze the consciousness of an

audience from a rhetorical standpoint, and then would use the QUANAL analysis to provide validity for their findings (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001).

### Fantasy Theme Analysis

Yet even though there are several ways to apply the symbolic convergence theory to research, the one of interest to this study is the method of fantasy theme analysis or criticism. Although there are two names used for the same principle, this study will refer to the method as fantasy theme analysis in order to eliminate confusion and because this is the term often used by Bormann. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, SCT's fourth epistemological assumption places fantasy theme analysis as the basic method of analysis (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 33). Fantasy theme analysis "helps us see how stories shape reality and therefore how people may act in relation to that socially constructed reality" (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 219). Fantasy theme analysis is a method, qualitative in nature, unique to the theory of symbolic convergence (Ball, 2001) and "is a method used to look at how a group dramatizes an event and at how that dramatization creates a special kind of myth that influences a group's thinking and behaviors" (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 212-213). Fantasy theme analysis is a metacriticism, also transcending time, history, and culture (Ball, 2001). Because of this, it can be applied to texts regardless of their date, the culture they came from, and it will still be relevant to use on texts in the future. Fantasy theme analysis is what Bormann considers the basic method to capture symbolic reality (Bormann, 1972) and it "allows a researcher to discover, capture, and analyze a chaining fantasy and the fantasy theme representations

that make up a given symbolic reality” (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 33). Fantasy theme analysis is used to “flesh-out the symbolic reality and consciousness of a particular rhetorical community” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001, 283). By using this method, researchers are able to observe the chaining of fantasy themes by examining texts for the use of reiteration, reconfiguration, embellishment, fantasy types, and inside cues, along with laughter and excitement in live conversations (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001).

### *Conducting a Fantasy Theme Analysis*

Once a researcher has decided to view a text under the microscope of the fantasy theme analysis, there are several different ways that the analysis can be conducted. Several different experts, including Bormann, have created their own step by step process to complete a successful fantasy theme analysis. In the next section each of those methods will be discussed, beginning with Bormann. According to her 2001 article Moya Ann Ball, a former student of Bormann’s, believed that the process that Bormann himself suggested for conducting a fantasy theme analysis in his 1972 capstone article was still the best procedure to follow. Bormann’s steps for a fantasy theme analysis begin with the critic collecting the appropriate evidence, which can include anything from audio or videotapes of group meetings, to letters, to even the memoirs of participants (Bormann, 1972; Ball, 2001). As in the case of this particular study the appropriate evidence would be the sermons that were selected. Yet, whatever the proof of choice may be, the researcher will need to examine it for “shared narratives, dramatic communication, imagery, figure of speech, and the like that are clues to periods of

fantasy sharing” (Ball, 2001, 222). It is in this stage that Bormann recommends looking for patterns of characterizations, setting, actions, and dramatic situations (Bormann, 1972, 401). The critic then takes the recurring themes and begins to cluster them into fantasy type groups. After these different fantasy themes and types are identified, the researcher then moves to forming the rhetorical vision (Bormann, 1972; Ball, 2001). The rhetorical vision has many characteristics, as described in the following statement by Ball (2001):

In that vision there will be heroes and villains, key personae, characterizations, attitudes about work, praising and blaming, valorization of some emotions and not others, scenic backdrops or settings that are privileged over others, behavior that is praised and behavior that is censored, insiders and outsiders, and a multitude of beliefs and values that, ultimately, become warrants for argument and action. (222)

Finally, once the critic has constructed the rhetorical vision, Bormann recommends asking questions that relate to the elements of the drama (Bormann, 1972.). In his 1972 capstone article Bormann raised a list of forty-four questions to serve as examples of the types of questions a critic might ask, rather than presenting a model for FTA (Bormann, 1972, 401-402). According to Bormann, there is not a set of specific questions that has to be asked at this stage; instead the critic must decide what questions are of importance. However, Hart and Daughton (2005) offered eight questions in their *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* text in order to aid the “beginning critic” (Hart & Daughton, 2005, 253). The probes they presented are designed to assist the critic in isolating the stories that are repeated throughout a text and to follow up by asking what lessons these certain stories seem to be teaching (Hart & Daughton, 2005). The eight probes recommended by Hart and Daughton (2005) are: Given the rhetor’s story lines: 1) What

are people like? 2) What are the possibilities of group action? 3) On what can people most depend? 4) What is humankind's fundamental purpose on earth? 5) What are the fundamental measures of right and wrong? 6) How can success best be measured? 7) What sort of information is most dependable? 8) Why do things happen as they do? (254). After asking these questions, Hart and Daughton (2005) recommend asking, "What responses do these story lines invite from the audience?" (254). Bormann (1972) recommends, and Hart and Daughton (2005) echo, that it is not necessary for a critic to ask all of the questions for a single text, but rather in a thorough critique of a single message it would be better for the critic to ask more questions and seek out more details than for a study done on several messages (Bormann, 1972, 402; Hart & Daughton, 2005, 253-254).

Sonja Foss (1989) also has offered a detailed five-step plan on how to conduct a fantasy theme analysis. According to Foss, a critic first must find evidence that symbolic convergence has taken place by identifying the sharing of fantasy themes or a rhetorical vision. If this is done in a text, the critic will look for frequent mention of a theme, a narrative, or an analogy in a variety of messages across different contexts. Second, the critic will code the rhetorical artifacts for fantasy themes by looking for setting, character, and action themes. When using a text, this is done by carefully reading it one sentence at a time in order to pick out any reference to setting, characters, and actions. When each reference is found, the critic marks it as a possible fantasy theme. Next the critic looks for patterns in the fantasy themes in order to assemble the rhetorical vision. To do this, the critic must first separate the major fantasy themes from the minor ones according to

how often they appear. The major fantasy themes appear more frequently than the minor ones. After the major fantasy themes have been identified, the critic constructs the rhetorical vision by linking the setting to the characters and then the same to the actions the characters performed. As more than one rhetorical vision may exist, this method allows the critic to identify them all. The fourth step is to name the motive for the visions identified by deciding which rhetorical vision is the most discussed, has the most emphasis placed upon it, and has a greater impact on the other themes in the vision. Then the critic considers what could be motivating the participants in the rhetorical vision. Finally, the critic assesses the group's rhetorical vision. This assessment can be done in one of several ways, but no one way is way is the best. According to Foss the critic is free to select an evaluative method that fits their own social and theoretical goals, as well as the ones mandated by the artifacts (Foss, 1989, 293-297).

More recently, Thomas St. Antoine, Matthew Althouse, & Moya A. Ball, (2005) suggested a three-step process to use in order to conduct a fantasy theme analysis. To begin the analysis, he recommended that the critic first find evidence. This step includes three sub-steps, starting with the critic choosing an appropriate topic. In making such a choice, the critic needs to be ready to argue why the topic has social significance and why it played a role in some kind of persuasive process. After the topic has been selected, the critic then gathers the applicable rhetorical texts. Next the critic searches the artifacts for "evidence of shared narratives, dramatic communication, imagery, figures of speech, and the like" (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 217) while keeping in mind the definition of a fantasy theme (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 217). The next step in St.

Antoine, Althouse, & Ball's, process is for the critic to categorize the messages. Once the critic has found evidence of dramatization they categorize and count the themes found within the texts in order to make determinations about the attitudes and values of the group. These categories include setting, character, and actions and are found by the critic carefully examining the text's characteristics and scrutinizing each sentence of a speech (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 217). At this point, the critic may also search for and categorize the fantasy types by looking for the fantasies that have similar plot lines, scenes, characters, or situations (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 218). For the final step, the critic begins to construct rhetorical visions. According to St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, there is no easy formula to use in order to do this because of the many complexities of a rhetorical vision and because more than one rhetorical vision may be functioning within a community at any given time (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 218).

After looking at each of the suggested ways to conduct a fantasy theme analysis, it is easy to see that although they differ in the exact steps they use, each process is very similar. While a beginning critic may benefit from having exact questions outlined for them as in Hart and Daughtons' process, a more experienced critic can take advantage of the freedom the fantasy theme analysis allows. Obviously there is no exact way of doing a fantasy theme analysis because the questions asked can be prompted by the findings in the artifacts. However, the foundation of the analysis is the same, and there are certain aspects of the analysis that are consistent enough to allow numerous researchers to apply

it to scores of assorted texts and artifacts. It is this freedom that makes fantasy theme analysis an appealing and invigorating form of rhetorical criticism.

### *Applications of Fantasy Theme Analysis and Politics*

After understanding the freedom that is allowed in a fantasy theme analysis, it is no wonder that researchers have utilized it to produce an array of studies throughout the years. Between 1972 and 1992, there were more than fifty SCT studies published from six different contexts: political, social movements, organizational, mass communication, interpersonal and small group, and public relations (Cragan & Shields, 1995, 182). Of those many fantasy theme analysis studies, there are several that have dealt with the rhetorical vision and fantasy themes of presidential campaigns and other political issues. It is these studies, more so than the others, of immediate interest to this analysis and therefore they will be explored in this section.

In 1973, Bormann conducted a fantasy theme analysis of the Eagleton Affair, one of four major news events from that year. The affair involved Senator McGovern, Senator Eagleton and the leak of Eagleton's mental health problems during the 1972 election. McGovern, unaware of Eagleton's condition, was faced with the decision of whether or not he should drop Eagleton as his running partner. Bormann's analysis followed the eight day long drama that resulted in Eagleton stepping down as a vice-president candidate, yet still managing to win the sympathy of the American people. As for his running mate McGovern, Bormann's study found that the fantasy theme the

American public created of McGovern was that of an “inconsistent, inept, untrustworthy and politically expedient politician” (Bormann, 1973).

In 1977 and 1978, three different studies were conducted as part of a synchronized research project interested in “the relationship between the fantasies dramatized by various groups during the course of a political campaign and the rhetorical visions which voters come to share and which serve to form their political social reality” (Bormann, Koester, & Bennett, 1978, 328). In one of the three studies, Cragan and Shields examined American foreign policy mediated messages played in Peoria in 1976. From their analysis, Cragan and Shields were able to identify the hero, Henry Kissinger and the villain, “the uninformed emotional citizenry that either crusades to make the world safe for democracy or retreats into isolation” (Cragan & Shields, 1977, 278). The findings also discovered that the Power Politics rhetorical vision was the most accepted in Peoria. Based on their findings, Cragan and Shields built a speech addressing foreign policy that according to the data would “please the most and offend the least” (Cragan & Shields, 1977, 287) in order to show a real world application for their study. The second study was conducted by Rarick, Duncan, Lee, & Porter and looked at the Carter persona in order to see if the dramatic themes of Carter and Ford’s campaign messages lined up with the audience perceptions of what those major themes were and if that played a role in their voting. The results found that the dramatic themes and the audiences’ perceptions and responses were linked. These results provided a foundation for the hypothesis that “mass media campaign events influence voters because listeners come to share the fantasies in media dramas” (Rarick, Duncan, Lee, & Porter, 1977, 272) as is

similar to the way small groups share fantasies (Rarick, Duncan, Lee, & Porter, 1977). The third study was fashioned by Bormann, Koester, and Bennett and studied the presidential campaign of 1976 by first looking at the shared fantasies portrayed by political cartoons of the time and secondly by examining the voters' perception of those shared fantasies. The study had three major findings. First, it was found that the political cartoon was the mass media's version of an inside joke. Secondly, the participants in the study separated into one of three major categories depending on their shared fantasies and those fantasies created a vision of the campaign unique to each group. Finally, the majority of each of the three groups voted as anticipated depending on the vision collectively held by their group (Bormann, Koester, and Bennett, 1978).

Several years later Bormann conducted another fantasy theme analysis with a political agenda. Bormann examined the simultaneous hostages' release from Iran and Reagan's Inaugural Address in 1981. After his examination of the events, Bormann claimed that while Reagan was addressing the nation with a theme of restoration and renewal, the media subliminally supported his theme by cutting to footage of the hostage's release. In doing this, Bormann maintained that the media is able to influence their audience even when they are presenting "breaking" news (Bormann, 1982).

In 1996, Bromann, Cragan and Shields looked at the rhetorical vision of the Cold War. This particular study afforded a unique chance to look at the life cycle of a rhetorical vision, as 1990 witnessed the end of the Cold War with the fall of the Berlin Wall. As the article states, "the rhetorical end of the Cold War provided an unprecedented opportunity to examine the creation, rise, maturation, decline and end of a

major rhetorical vision” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000, 260). The Cold War study served as a paradigm case to explain the term rhetorical vision, and still serves as an extended example of the three streams of rhetorical consciousness that characterize the life cycle of a rhetorical vision. These three rhetorical consciousnesses, referred to in the article as phases, are consciousness creating, raising, and sustaining (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000, 260). Phase one, consciousness creating is “the sharing of fantasies to generate new symbolic ground for a community of people” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000, 261). Phase two, consciousness raising is “the proselytizing that leads inquirers and newcomers to share the fantasies of a rhetorical vision in such a way that they become converts and members of the rhetorical community” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000, 269). Finally, phase three, consciousness sustaining is “aimed at keeping those who have shared the rhetorical vision committed” (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000, 271) by adding new life into the rhetorical vision in order to keep those who had previously shared the vision from losing faith in it (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000, 272). The article goes on to explain, by using the Cold War rhetorical vision as an example, the decline and termination of a rhetorical vision, thus allowing the reader to fully understand the entire life cycle of a rhetorical vision (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2000).

These political fantasy theme analyses are important to this analysis for two reasons. First, they are examples of how versatile the method of fantasy theme analysis is. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, fantasy theme analysis began exclusively in small group studies. However, as the theory grew it became applicable to various other

genres and these political fantasy theme analyses are another great example of fantasy theme analysis in action. Secondly, the political fantasy theme analyses are of interest to this study because the attacks of September 11, 2001 were not only a social problem, but a political one as well. Therefore, in this analysis, those political questions and answers might surface as fantasy themes in the sermons examined.

### September 11, 2001 and Fantasy Theme Analysis

How did American churches deal with the tragic events of September 11, 2001?

There is not a way to answer this question completely, but one step that can be taken is to perform a fantasy theme analysis on the sermons given in the immediate weeks following the attacks. According to Bormann (1972):

Against the panorama of large events and seemingly unchangeable forces of society at large or of nature the individual often feels lost and hopeless. One coping mechanism is to dream an individual fantasy which provides a sense of meaning and significance for the individual and helps protect him from the pressures of natural calamity and social disaster. The rhetorical vision serves much the same coping function for those who participate in the drama and often with much more force because of the supportive warmth of like-minded companions. (400).

In doing so, the researcher can examine what rhetorical visions began to form, giving them a glimpse into how a portion of America tried to cope with the tragedy of the fallen towers. An efficient way to conduct such an analysis would be to simply examine the sermons the preachers gave, in order to see exactly what the churches were being told.

In order to examine the messages the congregations heard in the immediate weeks following the attacks a fantasy theme analysis will be applied to the sermons from the

eight-week period of the attendance spike. Although there are several ways to conduct a fantasy theme analysis, for the purpose of this essay the researcher will first read each sermon in order to code for fantasy themes, including symbolic cues and fantasy types. The critic will then identify the fantasy themes by looking for references to the scene, dramatis personae and plot lines within the sermons. Next the critic will determine which fantasy themes are major and which are minor, and will then examine the pattern of the major themes in order to construct the rhetorical vision or visions, if any have developed.

This analysis will examine 168 sermons in order to answer the questions: What fantasy themes emerge from the contents of these sermons? Next, into what fantasy types can the identified fantasy themes be clustered? And, finally, what rhetorical vision, if any, is displayed by these sermons?

To answer these questions, two different fantasy theme analysis critiques will be conducted using the same 168. First the sermons will be organized chronologically, and the sermons given on the same days will be grouped together. By being placed in these groups, the sermons can be examined week by week for similar fantasy themes that appear to develop at the same rate over the eight-week period. In the same manner the grouped sermons can be studied for the emergence of fantasy types and finally for the overall rhetorical vision.

After the chronological analysis has been performed, the sermons will then be arranged by denomination and a new fantasy theme analysis will be performed on the denominations that have at least ten sermons represented. If a denomination does not have at least ten sermons represented in the collected artifacts, it will not be included in

this second fantasy theme analysis because fewer than ten are not enough to glimpse a fantasy theme for a denomination. Again, the sermons will be coded, but this time the focus will be on how, if at all, fantasy themes develop within each denomination. By examining the sermons of each represented denomination together, the critic will be able to code for the chaining out of fantasy themes and a possible rhetorical vision that is unique only to a certain denomination that might have otherwise been overlooked.

After the rhetorical vision is constructed, if one exists, the critic will suggest the motive for the preacher and congregations of the shared rhetorical vision. Finally, the critic will assess the rhetorical vision and the critic will evaluate the rhetorical vision in light of the attendance spike and decrease, and make assertions as to what role they may have played in the rise and fall of attendance. If there is not a rhetorical vision that developed in the short eight-week period, the fantasy themes will be examined in this light.

The chronological fantasy theme analysis and the denominational fantasy theme analysis will both consider the possibility for the potential of outside influences causing distinguishable trends within the development of fantasy themes and the rhetorical vision during the evaluative stage. If there are certain fantasy types that seemed to develop across all denominations at the same time or in one denomination over a period of time then the current events happening at the same time could be examined in another study. In this manner, it would be possible to begin to look into the influence that the media may be having on the sermons. It also would be a starting point to examine how actual events, as they unfold, affect the sermons given soon there after.

## Artifacts

The sermons examined for this analysis vary in length. There are 168 sermons, from different Christian denominations and presented between September 12 to November 12; an eight-week period following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. There was no significant reason to collect one hundred and sixty-eight sermons, rather that was the number of sermons available to the researcher as many of them were posted on various sermon websites. The collection of preachers who performed the sermons are male and female, however the majority were males. There were only 15 sermons from females out of the 168 sermons collected. However there is one denomination, Unitarian Universalist, that appears to either be impartial to or prefer the opposite view as out of the fourteen Unitarian sermons gathered for this study nine of them were authored and given by female pastors. The denominations included in the body of texts were Anglican, Assembly of God, Independent or American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Bible or Community Church, Christian, Church of Christ, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Unitarian/Universalist, and Non-denominational. A category of “others” was developed for those that did not directly fit into those previously listed.

The sermons were collected from churches located in thirty-nine states from all over the United States of America. Texas, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Florida, and California all had ten or more sermons from their state. The other thirty-four states had fewer than ten sermons represented, with Arizona, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, New Hampshire, and Utah each only having one sermon. Of the one hundred and sixty-

eight sermons collected, only three did not have a location. It is important to consider sermons from any of the fifty states because when the tragedy struck in New York City, Washington DC, and near Pittsburgh it affected Americans everywhere. Due to the modern advances in technology, viewers worldwide were able to watch via satellite only moments after the first plane hit the north tower. With the exception of the horrific beginning and the crash of Flight 92, the viewers were able to watch the entire drama unfold live, intermittent with flashes to the other attacks. They were able to hear the shock and disbelief in the reporters' voices as they cracked when their professional manner collapsed for a seconds under the weight of their own humanity. Due to the live feed and the reflected horror in the eyes and voices of the reporters, every viewer felt as though they were experiencing the tragedy firsthand through the television in their home, office, or classroom. For this reason all sermons, regardless of geographical location, can be equally weighted in this study examining the reaction to the attacks. Whether the sermon was given fifty miles outside of New York City, or across the nation on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, the listeners in both areas were exposed to just as much coverage of the tragedy, and were therefore equally affected.

Another interesting characteristic of the sermons gathered for this analysis is that they are all by ordinary ministers. Although many well-known pastors and evangelists gave sermons about the terrorist attacks, and many of those same preachers were even present and delivered sermons at a service in the National Cathedral for a National Day of Prayer and remembrance held on September 14, 2001 (ABC News, 2001), these famous ministers are not the focus of this analysis. The purpose of this research is to

examine sermons in order to find out what was told to those who attended church during the attendance spike. Many of the “famous preachers” delivered their sermons on television, to a general audience instead of a particular congregation. Therefore, in order to study what the “average church attendee” heard during the eight weeks that followed the attacks, the analysis must be over the sermons that these “average attendees” heard. Thus, the sermons to be examined are from average ministers, although some of them are well known within their denomination, they are not as infamous as televangelists.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This chapter examines the general themes found when the sermons were read and coded line by line. It is important to note that the term theme is used in this situation to mean that it was a common idea expressed within the texts. In this section, the term theme is not referring to a fantasy theme. From the data, three fantasy themes were discovered, and the next chapter will discuss these specific fantasy themes in detail. The findings are reported, first by chronological order and then by denomination. The chronological and denominational division of the texts aided in finding the themes that only appeared for short terms, as well as the ones that began to emerge at a later date, and also deciphering which themes were common to which denominations.

#### Sermons by Date

##### *September 11- 15, 2001*

A few of the sermons collected for the study were given in the same week of the attacks. There was one sermon that was actually given on September 11, 2001. Although the sermon was given on the same day as the attacks, the Church of Christ preacher did not mention the attacks at all. Instead he urged his congregation not to desert their “witness” and to stay strong even if they are threatened with death (Stillwell, 2001). Some of the themes from that sermon were to “turn from evil”, “not to repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing”, and to “seek peace and pursue it” (Stillwell,

2001, ¶ 1). Stillwell told his congregation that “the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (2001, ¶ 1) and that “it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (Stillwell, 2001, ¶ 1). Stillwell also told the story of Christians who were martyred for their faith (Stillwell, 2001, ¶ 6-7). The word “strength” was also used several times throughout Stillwell’s sermon (2001) and many times it was in reference to God’s strength or the strength given to believers through Christ (Stillwell, 2001).

The sermons given on September 12, 2001 all had the common theme of prayer and all mentioned the attacks from the previous day (Baker, 2001a, Bryant, 2001, Dixon, 2001, May, 2001). Two of the sermons shared the common theme of God turning bad into good (Baker, 2001a, ¶ 17), and that God intends for good what Satan intends for evil (Dixon, 2001, ¶ 26). Only one sermon was pro-war stating, “Yes, we do want justice to come to those who are responsible for the loss of so many American lives. I believe we should seek justice as a country” (Bryant, 2001, ¶ 28). In the same sermon the preacher also questioned if God could be punishing America in order to steer Americans back to him (Bryant, 2001, ¶ 25). Bryant also told his congregation several times that God was in control (2001, 26-27). One phrase Bryant used repeatedly was “victory will come in the morning” (2001, ¶ 12-13) and sometime shortened it by just saying the phrase, “in the morning” (Bryant, 2001, ¶ 17, 19, 29). Occasionally this phrase was altered to “judgment will come” or “justice will come” in the morning (Bryant, 2001, ¶ 17, 19, 29, 31). In another sermon, the pro-war message was not preached as strongly, but the congregation was told to support the government and its attempts to keep another attack from happening (Dixon, 2001, ¶ 20) and that corporal punishment was a tool of God used to

discourage evil (Dixon, 2001, ¶ 21). Dixon also told his congregation to “resist the temptation to become consumed with anger, hostility, and bitterness” (2001, ¶ 18). In May’s sermon, he mentioned government action and told his congregation to pray for the military, but did not directly make a pro-war statement (May, 2001). May called the attacks a “wake up call to those who defy God” (2001, ¶ 1) and referred to that theme throughout his sermon. May also mentioned other preachers who were calling the attacks a “judgment upon America” but he stated that he believed God’s judgment on America had started long before the attacks (May, 2001, ¶ 2-5). May, like Bryant, used the theme that God is in control and also had a theme of repentance throughout his sermon (May, 2001). Baker used the Bible character Job as an example in order to instruct his congregation on how to deal with tragedy (Baker, 2001a).

There was one sermon given on September 15, 2001 among the artifacts. That sermon also had the theme that God turns evil into good (Hartson, 2001, ¶ 11) found in some of the sermons from September 12, 2001. It also mentioned the attacks directly (Hartson, 2001). Hartson told his congregation that they were not immune from tragedy and that “God brings hope to a tragedy” (2001, ¶ 6).

#### *September 16, 2001*

The first Sunday after the attacks provided the most artifacts for this analysis. There were one hundred and nineteen sermons used for this study that were delivered on this date. From those sermons, many interesting themes were discovered. They are: wake-up call; God’s judgment; repentance; revival; salvation; evil into good; God is in

control; heroes; Pearl Harbor; objects of the attacks; towers; actions to take; Phoenix; promises offered to Christians; war; God's vengeance; and terrorists. One of the most common themes found was, the "wake up call" theme (Abrams, 2001, Arch, 2001, Atwood, 2001, Ball, L., 2001, Briggs, 2001, Coget, 2001, Cooper, 2001, Drake, 2001, Finitzer, 2001, Gilstrap, 2001, Linkous, 2001, Mason, 2001, Miller, 2001, Neethling, 2001, Sauer, 2001, Shepherd, 2001a, Swensen, 2001, Whitchurch, 2001, Yarbrough, 2001b). At times this wake up call was to America to turn from its sins, and other times it was to Christians and the Church to examine their relationship with God. Occasionally, the wake up call was addressed to both groups. An interesting spin on the idea of the wake up call was formed from the date of the tragedy when written out in numbers 9-11. This is incredibly similar to the national emergency number 9-1-1. The resemblance of 9-11 and 9-1-1 did manifest as a theme in the sermons (Warford, 2001, Ball, L., 2001, Briggs, 2001). Warford said the attacks were an "emergency call (911) from God" (Warford, 2001, ¶ 1) and later told his congregation, "I say to you and all that will listen to the 911 calls read and heed the Word and anger of God today and forever, AMEN" (Warford, 2001, ¶ 5). Other forms of the emergency theme were that the Church should make a 9-1-1 call to God in its emergency (Swindall, 2001). It was even said that the date 9-11 was an emergency number (Trombly, 2001).

Another major theme referred to was the attacks and if it was or was not God's judgment on America (Arch, 2001, Black, 2001, Burnett, 2001, Coget, 2001, Friedman, 2001, Hamby, 2001, Huston, 2001, Keller, T., 2001, Shepherd, 2001a) or God punishing or not punishing America for her sins (Becker, 2001). Several preachers felt the attacks

were directly caused by God judging America (Arch, 2001, Black, 2001, Hamby, 2001, Coget, 2001). Along the same lines, references were made to the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah (Black, 2001). A quote used several times was, “Billy Graham once said, ‘If God does not punish America for all its sins- He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology’” (Baumgartle, 2001, ¶ 19, Sproul, 2001, ¶3, Shepherd, 2001a). However, other preachers took an opposing stance. Another common theme was that God was not judging America (Huston, 2001, Burnett, 2001, Friedman, 2001, Keller, T., 2001, Shepherd, 2001). In regards to this theme, one preacher said, “Shallow thoughts explain Tuesday’s tragedy as God’s judgment on America’s collective sin, which ironically mirrors the shallow ideology of the militant wing of Islam” (Allen, 2001, ¶ 3). A third opinion held was that God was not judging America, yet He allowed evil men to attack America (Lancaster, 2001, Keller, R., 2001a, Piper, 2001a, Wallace, 2001). Along the same lines, many preachers mentioned “free will” (Fintzer, 2001, Gilstrap, 2001, Keller, R., 2001a, Leroe, 2001, Lewis, 2001, ¶ 18, McMahon, 2001, Piszczor, 2001, Stanley, 2001a, Shockley, 2001b, Swensen, 2001, Wrather, 2001). They told their congregations that man has a free will to choose between evil and good, and because sometimes man chooses evil, he does terrible things. Therefore, the attacks were just the result of men choosing to sin. Still others declared that God did not cause the attacks. In order to support their stance, they told their congregations, “God is not the author of evil” (Burnett, 2001, Coget, 2001, Keller, R., 2001a, Shockley, 2001b, ¶ 3).

As previously mentioned, Billy Graham’s Sodom and Gomorrah quote was cited often. But other preachers referenced Billy Graham to make other points (Black, 2001,

Burnett, 2001, Cavanaugh, 2001, Cooper, 2001, Davis, 2001, Miller, 2001, Perchlik, 2001, Washburn, 2001). Paul Black quoted Billy Graham in saying, ‘We’ve lost sight of the fact that some things are always right and some things are always wrong. We’ve lost our reference point’ (2001, ¶ 95). The quote of Graham’s that Black used called for a revival at the end of the quote (Black, 2001, ¶ 95).

Black’s call for revival was not alone. The themes of repentance, revival, and salvation were often used. The theme of repentance was used by an overwhelming number of preachers (Arch, 2001, Ball, 2001, Becker, 2001, Burnett, 2001, Cavanaugh, 2001, Coget, 2001, Fowler, 2001, Girkin, 2001b, Gilstrap, 2001, Gillespie-Mobley, 2001, Groover, 2001, Hays, 2001b, Keller, R., 2001a, Lancaster, 2001, Maggard, 2001, Mallory, 2001, Malone, 2001, Mason, 2001, Miller, S., 2001, Milton, 2001, Neethling, 2001, Newell, 2001, Norman, 2001, Pitts, 2001, Piszczor, 2001, Runyan, 2001, Shultz, 2001, Wallace, 2001, Wilkins, 2001b, Wilson, 2001, Whitchurch, 2001, Wrather, 2001, Yarbrough, 2001b). There were actually several different versions of the repentance message. Many pastors heeded their congregations to repent and turn back to God. However, some preachers said that Americans needed to repent as well (Cooper, 2001). Salvation was also common (Cavanaugh, 2001, Curry, 2001, Perkins, 2001b, Pizczor, 2001, Trombly, 2001, Warren, 2001). After mentioning the loss of lives, Baskin asked his congregation, “Are you saved?” and, “are you prepared to die?” in order to preach salvation (2001, ¶ 5). Then there were two ministers who called for a revival (Black, 2001, Miller, 2001). And two more who believed the revival had already begun. DeWitt (2001c) said, “We are seeing people go to God like never before” (¶ 6). Another

preacher said, “Many prodigal sons and daughters have turned to God during this time” (Cavanaugh, 2001, ¶ 12).

Another popular theme was that God could take evil and transform it into something good (Cooper, 2001, Davis, 2001, Dawson, 2001, Durham, 2001a, Finitzer, 2001, Gillespie-Mobley, 2001, Groover, 2001, Hensley, 2001a, Keller, R., 2001a, Keller, T., 2001, Lancaster, 2001, Meador, 2001, Perkins, 2001b, Pizczoe, 2001, Stanley, 2001, Swensen, 2001, Washburn, 2001, Williams, J., 2001a, Wrather, 2001). A phrase used to capture this theme is, “God brings beauty from ashes and life from death” (Smith, J., 2001c, ¶ 7). Two preachers referred to the Biblical story of Joseph, quoting Genesis 50:20, “‘As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good’. And so, these terrorists meant it for evil, but God is going to use it for good” (Arch, 2001, ¶ 43, Neethling, 2001, ¶8). Also quoted was Romans 8:27-29, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Briggs, 2001, ¶ 10, Mason, 2001, Smith, 2001c, Swindall, 2001). Yet another version of this theme used was God will triumph over evil (Broyles, 2001). A story told to illustrate this point was about a fisherman whose house burned (Wilson, 2001). The story as told by J. Williams (2001a):

There is an old Norwegian tale about a fisherman who, with his two sons, went out on a daily fishing run. The catch was good; but by mid-afternoon a sudden storm blotted out the shoreline, leaving the men groping for the direction home. Meanwhile, a fire broke out in the kitchen of their rustic cottage. Before it could be extinguished, the fire had destroyed the family’s earthly possessions. Finally, the father and sons were able to row their boat ashore. The man’s wife was waiting to tell him the tragic news of the fire. ‘Karl, fire has destroyed everything,’ she said tearfully. ‘We have nothing left.’ But Karl was unmoved by the news. ‘Didn’t you hear me?’ she asked. ‘The house is gone!’ ‘Yes I hear you,’ replied Karl. ‘But a few hours ago [we] were lost at sea. For hours I thought we

would perish. Then something happened: I saw a yellow dim glow in the distance. It grew larger and larger. We turned our boat toward the light. The same blaze which destroyed our home was the light that saved our lives' (¶ 20).

Another common theme used by many preachers was the phrase: God is in control (Ball, 2001, Coget, 2001, Cooper, 2001, Davis, 2001, DeWitt, 2001, Finitzer, 2001, George, 2001, Lawrence, 2001, Lewis, 2001, Lord, 2001, McCartney, 2001, Norman, 2001, Perkins A., 2001b, Perkins R., 2001, Runyan, 2001, Wright, 2001). Sometimes a similar theme, God is still on the throne (Thomas, 2001, ¶ 7, Ball, 2001, Davoll, 2001, Perkins A., 2001b) was used. Other related themes used were, God is still standing (Ryken, 2001, ¶ 3), and God is still in charge (Perkins, R., 2001, ¶ 6). All of these themes were used to remind the congregations that God was still God, even though America had been attacked. God is good (Fowler, 2001, ¶ 14, Broyles, 2001, ¶ 16, Sproul, 2001, McCartney, 2001, Davis, 2001, Lewis, 2001) was used by several ministers. Hays (2001b) used a similar version by saying, "God is faithful" (¶ 25).

Some of the themes illustrated the very best of human nature. The attacks made ordinary people into heroes (Friedman, 2001), and several preachers mentioned them in their sermons. Among these heroes were the rescue workers (Briggs, 2001, Curry, 2001, DeWitt, 2001c, Hays, 2001), specifically the firefighters and police (Broyles, 2001, Cavanaugh, 2001, Lewis, 2001, Yates, 2001). Amundson told the story of a woman who had been escaping one of the towers, and as she was rushing down the stairs, firemen passed her on their way up (2001, ¶ 4). He said, "When buildings are on fire, most people run out of them. Firefighters run into them" (Amundson, 2001, ¶ 4). Another preacher sang the praises of heroic workers, "battling danger and fatigue, in the hopes of

finding one or two people alive under the debris” (Bankson, 2001, ¶ 10). As well as the rescue worker, the passengers on the fallen flight that had attacked their hijackers were called heroes (Grover, 2001). One preacher said of the passengers’ actions, “It is an amazing picture of courage” (Amundson, 2001, ¶ 5). Another positive theme used was that America had drawn closer since the tragedy (Briggs, 2001), and that people were uniting (Linkous, 2001, Hensley, 2001, Keller, R., 2001a, McMahon, 2001, Meador, 2001, Stanley, 2001).

Some preachers blamed the attacks on America’s relationship and support for Israel (Burnett, 2001, Curry, 2001, Edwards, 2001, Coget, 2001). One preacher explained, “America supports Israel and America is basically a Christian nation. Muslims hate both Jews and Christians” (Abrams, 2001, ¶ 16). Yet others were not so quick to blame, and offered as an explanation for the attacks, “bad things DO happen to good people” (Stover, 2001b, ¶ 3, Malone, 2001, Mallory, 2001b, George, 2001, Shepherd, 2001a).

Echoing the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s address to Congress after the attacks on Pearl Harbor (Zezima, 2004), some preachers used the phrase “A day that will live in infamy” (Anselmi, 2001, ¶ 16, Newell, 2001b, Warford, 2001, Finitzer, 2001, Sproul, 2001, McCartney, 2001, Trombly, 2001) in regards to September 11<sup>th</sup>. One preacher rephrased the famous saying by announcing “September 11, 2001—a day that will be remembered always” (Cavanaugh, 2001, ¶ 13, McMahon, 2001). Aside from the quote, other references to Pearl Harbor were made (Black, 2001, Sproul, 2001, Stanley, 2001, Ford, 2001, George, 2001, Leroe, 2001, Milton, 2001). Sproul (2001) said, “I am

sure that in the future history of United States, September 11, 2001 will rank right along side December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941” (§ 2). Another preacher said that people were comparing September 11, 2001 to Pearl Harbor (Leroe, 2001, § 6). Along the same lines, two preachers said that America’s response to the attack was like awakening a sleeping giant (Meador, 2001, Stanley, 2001), a phrase contributed to Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the Japanese fleet after they attacked Pearl Harbor (Zezima, 2004). The Holocaust from WWII was also mentioned. References were made to the Holocaust, Nazi’s, and Anne Frank (Presley, 2001, Crawford Harvie, 2001, Stanley, 2001). One preacher even referred to September 11, 2001 as, “Tuesday’s Holocaust” (Sproul, 2001, § 2).

The objects of the attacks offered an interesting theme. The attacks were on “obvious symbols of power in America” (Wright, 2001, § 5, Black, 2001, Buice, 2001, Wilkins, 2001b), the towers representing economic power and the Pentagon representing military power (Wright, 2001, § 5-6, Loehr, 2001). Several ministers reminded their congregations that their hope and strength is not in their military or economic power (Edwards, 2001, Hays, 2001b, Piszczor, 2001), but for Christians the symbol of hope is the cross of Christ (Wright, 2001, § 8, Perkins, 2001b). This theme relates to two other themes that appear in the sermons. One is the loss of safety and security, and the other is the theme of the cross. America’s loss of safety and security was mentioned several times (Wright, 2001, § 4, Linkous, 2001, Peck, 2001b, Black, 2001, Curry, 2001, DeWitt, 2001c, Durham, 2001a, Lewis, 2001). One minister said, “we have had a loss of our sense of well-being, our sense of protection” (Lord, 2001, § 3). A very popular scripture

reference was to the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm, as many preachers told their congregations that, “God is our refuge and strength” (Wright, 2001, ¶ 1,13, Cooper, 2001, Davis, 2001, Dawson, 2001, DeVine, 2001, Durham, 2001, Edwards, 2001, George, 2001, Haselhahn, 2001, Hensley, 2001a, Lancaster, 2001, Perkins, 2001b, Ryken, 2001a, Shepherd, 2001a, Swensen, 2001, Trombly, 2001, Washburn, 2001, Williams, 2001a, Wright, 2001). The cross was another symbol used (Wright, 2001). One preacher told their congregation to rally around the cross (Whitchurch, 2001). Another preacher said, “rally around the cross, not the flag” (Runyan, 2001, ¶ 1).

An extremely interesting theme used was the tower theme. A Bible story of a tower, the tower of Siloam, which fell and killed a lot of Galileans, was mentioned several different times (Lancaster, 2001, Newell, 2001b, Perkins, 2001b, Sproul, 2001, Wallace, 2001, Wilkins, 2001b, Wilson, 2001, Yarbrough, 2001b). Also, congregations were reminded of the, “Strong tower of the Lord” (Stover, 2001b, Wrather, 2001). Two others said, “David calls God, ‘his fortress’ (Norman, 2001, ¶ 5, Fowler, 2001). One preacher quoted the scripture Isaiah 20:25, “In the day of great slaughter, when the towers fall, streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill” (Hensley, 2001a, ¶ 7).

Congregations were instructed to take action in different ways by their preachers. Some were told to focus on God (Borst, 2001), and others to put their faith in God (Burnett, 2001, ¶ 15). Still others were encouraged to forgive (Buice, 2001, Piszczor, 2001, Stanley, 2001, Allen, 2001). Prayer was another common theme that involved action on the part of the congregation. Many preachers urged their congregations to pray

(Field, 2001, Linkous, 2001, Loe, 2001, Maggard, 2001, Mallory, 2001b, Malone, 2001, Martem, 2001, Miller, 2001, Neethling, 2001, Newland, 2001, Peck, 2001b, Pizczor, 2001, Warford, 2001). Congregations were also asked to offer special prayers for the family and friends of those who lost loved ones, and the rescue workers (Abrams, 2001, ¶ 1, Cavanaugh, 2001).

Two different preachers used a Phoenix to make their points. One said, “love and hope is rising Phoenix-like from the ashes” (Presley, 2001, ¶ 12). Wright also used the phoenix analogy. Wright told his congregation that “every symbol man makes crumbles to the dust” (2001, ¶ 14) but the cross rises from the rubble like a phoenix (Wright, 2001, ¶ 14).

There were several promises offered to Christians, throughout the sermons. Congregations were told if they would humble themselves, God would heal their land (Drake, 2001, ¶ 21, Sylvester, 2001, Yarbrough, 2001b, Norman, 2001). The scripture used for this theme said, “God says if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wickedness, then I will hear from heaven and heal their land” (Wilkins, 2001, ¶ 5, Miller, 2001, Miller, 2001).

Several different ministers also promised God’s comfort (DeWitt, 2001c, Durham, 2001a, Haselhuhn, 2001, Lancaster, 2001, Mason, 2001, Peck, 2001b, Pittendreigh, 2001b, Sproul, 2001, Smith, S., 2001d, Stanley, 2001, Vaughan, 2001, Washburn, 2001).

Another promise was that death had no power. Abrams quoted Corinthians 15:55 to his congregation, “O death, where is they sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (2001, ¶ 35).

The theme of war and other related themes were very popular. In some sermons war was openly discussed (Dever, 2001, Buice, 2001, Abrams, 2001, Groover, 2001). Buice told his congregation that forgiveness was not a substitute for justice (2001, ¶ 11). Abrams mentions that some believe America should declare war on bin Laden, but cautions that war may not achieve the goal of eliminating the terrorist threat (2001, ¶ 6). Several sermons were pro-war meaning they were for America going to war to avenge the attacks (Huston, 2001, Keller, R., 2001a, McMahon, 2001, Shepherd, 2001a). One preacher said, “we must forgive our enemies, we also must stand against evil” (Allen, 2001, ¶ 21). Others, however, mentioned the need to support the military, but were not blatantly for or against war (Amundson, 2001, Ball, 2001, Cavanaugh, 2001, Coget, 2001, Fowler, 2001, Hays, 2001b, Mallory, 2001, Malone, 2001, Maggard, 2001, Martem, 2001,). Timothy Peck (2001b) told his congregation:

Now according to the Bible, God’s wrath against evil is sometimes executed by the government. The Bible calls government officials ‘God’s servant’ who exist as ‘agents of God’s wrath’ in Romans 13:4. So as our government investigates what’s happened and takes appropriate action based on their intelligence information, we need to support our government in those actions (¶ 6).

Also part of the war theme, was the idea of a just war. Several sermons used the phrase just war (Ball, 2001, Baumgartle, 2001, Buice, 2001, Field, 2001, Sylvester, 2001). Buice reminded his congregation, “Even in the most just war ‘victory must be observed like a funeral’” (2001, ¶ 16). A similar theme was the idea of the Holy war (Briggs, 2001, Curry, 2001). Some preachers felt the attacks were good verses evil, and a conflict between God and Satan (Abrams, 2001). However, others disagreed.

One sermon read, “The president called this a conflict between good and evil, and this may be true but only if we remember the words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, ‘The dividing line between good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being’” (Buice, 2001, ¶ 17). Another preacher claimed, “this is not a war of good vs. evil” (Hansen, 2001, ¶ 21), and still others, believed that this war not a religious war (Perchlik, 2001, Field, 2001).

Along the same lines as war, some ministers preached about God’s vengeance. A common theme was vengeance belongs to the Lord (Stover, 2001, Shockley, 2001b). Two preachers quoted, “Hebrews 10:30, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Stover, 2001b, ¶ 4, Baumgartle, 2001, ¶ 10). Others announced that God would punish the guilty (Perkins, 2001, Dever, 2001, Keller, R., 2001a, Lancaster, 2001, Shepherd, 2001a, Washburn, 2001). “There will ultimately be justice—if not in this life, in the life to come” (Leroe, 2001, ¶ 13).

The term terrorist was used in several sermons (Abrams, 2001, Allen, 2001, Perkins, R., 2001, Crawford Harvie, 2001c, Davoll, 2001, Dawson, 2001, Durham, 2001a). Also used were the terms “coward, (Ball, 2001)” “killer,” “godless enemy,” (Abrams, 2001, ¶ 4, 17, 20) “faceless coward,” (Miller, 2001, ¶ 2) and “Muslim extremist” (Peck, 2001b, ¶ 6, Buice, 2001). Osama bin Laden was directly named in some sermons (Briggs, 2001, Broyles, 2001, Coget, 2001, Huston, 2001, Piszczor, 2001). Yet, to make the Muslim/terrorist separation, a few preachers reminded their congregations that not all Muslims were terrorists (Buice, 2001, Peck, 2001b). Some preachers warned that the attacks would continue (Borst, 2001, ¶ 6, Black, 2001), and that the terrorists won’t go away (Broyles, 2001). One preacher said the attacks would

continue unless there were enough righteous men to keep judgment from America (Black, 2001).

*September 17-20, 2001*

There was one sermon collected for September 17, 2001. It used a lot of the same themes as the sermons given on September 16, 2001. Crow (2001) used the phrase, “all things work together for good” (¶ 16). He also reminded his congregation that God was in control (Crow, 2001, ¶ 27), and also referred to the story of Joseph in Genesis (Crow, 2001, ¶ 9). Love was another theme Crow used (2001) and he told his congregation, “We can’t blame God for something He didn’t do. But we can depend on God to clean up the messes after we cause them” (2001, ¶ 18).

There was also only one sermon collected from September 19, 2001. Interestingly, this sermon does not mention September 11, 2001. This sermon had two main themes. First, that if Christians have faith, they will take risks even in the face of fear (Smith, J., 2001b). Secondly, that fear does not rule out tough faith (Smith, J., 2001b). Smith continues this theme, shortens it to “risky faith” (2001b, ¶ 5, 7, 9, 12, 13), and uses it repeated as the sermon continues.

September 20, 2001 is represented by only one sermon as well. The main theme found in it was prayer (Girkin, 2001a), a theme common on September 16, 2001. Girkin (2001a) also commented on the services the Church had the Sunday before (September 16, 2001). He said that in those services, many people repented and came back to God. Girkin expressed that he hoped the repentance would continue (2001a).

*September 23, 2001*

The sermons given on Sunday, September 23, 2001 were the second largest group. This was the second Sunday after the attacks, and many of the same themes emerged, as well as some new ones. Some of the same themes were: the story of Joseph (Keller, R., 2001b, Smith, S., 2001b, Baker, 2001b); God is good (Buchanan, 2001, Smith, S., 2001b); Sodom and Gomorraah (Duncan, 2001); and references to Billy Graham at the National Day of Prayer (Brownsworth, 2001, Buchanan, 2001). Other themes found that were also used in the September 16, 2001 sermons were: references to the Tower of Siloam (Buchanan, 2001, Rodney, 2001, Ryken, 2001b, Philip, 2001); just war (Brownsworth, 2001, Zaspel, 2001); free will (Buchanan, 2001, Shockley, 2001a, Williams, 2001b); forgiveness (Peck, 2001a, Ryken, 2001b); prayer (Morrissey, 2001); and beauty from ashes (Buchanan, 2001).

There were also two new themes. First of all, several preachers borrowed President Bush's theme of America not being defeated or shaken by terrorism (Shepherd, S. 2001b, Brownworth, 2001, Mott, 2001, Perkins, A., 2001a). One preacher said, "Our President George W. Bush made this statement, 'Terrorists attacks can shake the foundations of America's tallest buildings, but it cannot shake the foundations of America'. I would add to this, 'and it will not shake the foundation of the church of the Living God'" (Mott, 2001, ¶ 2). Another preacher said, "When President Bush addressed the nation on Thursday night he ended with these words: Freedom and fear, ...justice and cruelty, ...have always been at war, ...and we know that God is not neutral between them" (Brownworth, 2001).

The other theme was a very interesting one. It was “Let’s roll” (Buchanan, 2001, ¶ 18, Shepherd, S., 2001b, Warford, 2001, ¶ 2-7). This was a phrase used by one of the passengers on the fallen flight that crashed outside of Pittsburgh. According to Warford (2001) “‘Let’s Roll!’ is an expression Todd Beamer used whenever his wife and two young sons were leaving the house for a family outing” (¶ 2). The passengers, realizing it was too late to save themselves, attacked the hijackers and ultimately crashed the plane. Yet, their heroic effort saved the lives of the people targeted for the pending assault. The martyrs were led into battle by Beamer’s cry, “Let’s Roll”, which echoed through the phone before the connection was lost, and the forty-four passengers of United Airlines Flight 92, were silenced forever (Warford, 2001, ¶ 2-4). Warford told the story of Todd Beamer, and then turned the phrase “Let’s Roll” into the battle cry of his church. He explained to them how he planned for them to actively practice their Christianity from daily prayer at the Church, to devoting everyday to sharing Jesus with others. Warford used “Let’s Roll” seven times in regards to his congregation. He closed his sermon with the phrase, “This is our mission from Jesus, so “Let’s roll!” (Warford, 2001, ¶ 9).

*September 26, 2001-October 7, 2001*

There was only one sermon given on September 26, 2001. It referred to God as a strong tower of refuge, which was a popular theme amongst the sermons given on September 16, 2001. There was also only a handful of sermons given on September 30, 2001. Most of the themes found in them were previously mentioned. They were: sleeping giant (Luthy, 2001b); war between good and evil (Durham, 2001b); and to

return to God (DeWitt, 2001b, Durham, 2001b). There was also one new theme. DeWitt gave a sermon about normalcy (DeWitt, 2001b). DeWitt (2001b) said:

The stores are gearing up for Christmas. The airports are back open and planes fill the skies. Life seems to be getting back to 'normal.' The question on everyone's mind seems to be 'will we ever be the same again?' I believe the more appropriate question should be, 'should we ever be the same as we once were?' (§ 6).

October 7, 2001 the Sunday approximately four weeks after the attacks was moderately represented in the artifacts. Perhaps this was because there were less sermons given about September 11, 2001 as preachers moved on to other topics. There were several themes that continued from the earlier sermons. They were: anti-war (Grant, 2001); salvation (Grant, 2001); just war (Mallory, 2001c, Nelson, 2001); prayer (Mallory, 2001c, Smith, S., 2001c); and return to God (Nelson, 2001). There were also two new themes. One of them was anxiety (DeWitt, 2001a) and anger (Crawford Harvie, 2001a). These themes were both emotions many Americans were struggling with by the fourth week after the attack. DeWitt (2001a) said, "After the events of September 11, 2001, it is safe to say that we are a nation with a great deal of anxiety" (§ 4). He reminded his congregation, "Cast all your anxiety on him because He cares for you" (DeWitt, 2001a, § 7) from 1 Peter 5:7. On a similar note Kim Crawford Harvie (2001a) gave a sermon over anger. She told the story of a woman whose son was murdered by a gang member. The woman began visiting the killer in prison and eventually legally adopted him to be her own son. She said, "these are angry times. But if a mother can make her son's murder into her own son, anything is possible... And the choice is ours: Will we chase the arsonist while everything goes up in flames? Or will we create?" (§ 35).

### *Other Themes*

Out of the one hundred and sixty eight sermons, only three made negative comments about the service in the National Cathedral (Ball, 2001, Wilson, 2001, Wilkins, 2001a). Ball and Wilson gave their sermons on September 16, 2001, and Wilkin's sermon was given on September 23, 2001. Ball and Wilkin's denomination was Presbyterian, and Wilson's was classified in the other category. Wilkin's said, "I tell you the worse thing that has happened over the last two weeks was not the collapse of the World Trade Center or the destruction of the Pentagon, as bad as those are, but the worse thing was the pantheistic polytheistic worship services that have been held around this country" (2001a, ¶ 5).

### Sermons By Denomination

Out of nineteen different denominations, there were four denominations that had ten or more sermons represented. They were Methodist, Non-denominational, Baptist, and Unitarian Universalist. The Methodist had four themes that appeared to be common to their denomination. They were: wake up call (Neethling, 2001, Mallory, 2001a, Sauer, 2001); repent (Neethling, 2001, Pitts, 2001, Shockly, 2001a, Fowler, 2001, Mallory, 2001b); Let's Roll (Buchanan, 2001); and evil to good (Neethling, 2001, Williams, 2001a, Sauer, 2001, Buchanan, 2001).

The Non-denominational sermons had eight themes. They were: the date that will live in infamy (McCartney, 2001, Finitzer, 2001, Wallace, 2001, Anselmi, 2001); God is in control or God is still on the throne (McCartney, 2001, Finitzer, 2001, Perkins, A.,

2001b, Lawrence, 2001); refuge, strength, or comfort (Perkins, 2001a, DeVine, 2001, Peck, 2001b); and repent (Maggard, 2001, Finitzer, 2001, Wallace, 2001, Perkins, A., 2001b, Becker, 2001, Arch, 2001). Also: prayer (Maggard, 2001, Curry, 2001, Peck, 2001a, 2001b, Arch, 2001); forgiveness (Curry, 2001, Peck, 2001a, Allen, 2001); Galileans and the fallen tower (Wallace, 2001, Perkins, A., 2001b); and finally, God's judgment (Wallace, 2001, Curry, 2001, Becker, 2001).

The Baptist had three common themes. First, there was the theme of repentance (Gilstrap, 2001, Norman, 2001, Groover, 2001, Dever, 2001, Whitchurch, 2001, Durham, 2001b, Wrather, 2001). The second theme was the wake up call theme (Gilstrap, 2001, Drake, 2001, Swensen, 2001, Yarbrough, 2001b, Miller, 2001, Atwood, 2001, Abrams, 2001, Warford, 2001). The final theme was the story or references to the Tower of Siloam (Newell, 2001, Yarbrough, 2001b) and the tower of the Lord (Wrather, 2001).

Finally, the Unitarian Universalist denomination had a different aspect completely. Many of their themes dealt with emotions. There were multiple emotions discussed (Rak, 2001, Huston, 2001, McMahon, 2001, Buice, 2001). Also, the specific emotions of anger (Crawford Harvie, 2001a), grief (Crawford Harvie, 2001b, Teichert, 2001, Buice, 2001), were considered alone, and hope was encouraged (Hansen, 2001, Presley, 2001, Rak, 2001). Healing wounds was another theme (Ford, 2001). Ford (2001) said:

[Stuart Meltzer] Calling his wife from the 105<sup>th</sup> floor of the first building hit that morning. 'Honey, something terrible is happening I don't think I am going to make it. I love you. Take care of the children'... if we really hope for something out of this...it will come from those last words on the 105<sup>th</sup> floor... the only lesson we can pull out of this horror that will ease hurt and heal wounds (§ 8, 9, 11).

Although war was also another common theme (Hansen, 2001, Perchlik, 2001, Huston, 2001, Crawford Harvie, 2001c, McMahon, 2001, Buice, 2001), an established view did not occur. There were both pro-war (Hansen, 2001, Huston, 2001, McMahon, 2001, Buice, 2001) and anti-war (Perchlik, 2001, Crawford Harvie, 2001c) beliefs present.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Now that the individual themes found have been listed in the previous chapter, this chapter will first discuss the basic themes found, and then discuss the three fantasy themes found. As each fantasy theme is discussed, the sub-themes that can be categorized under each of them will also be examined. This chapter will then discuss the fantasy themes that had begun to emerge, but were not complete, and what they were lacking. It will also discuss the one fantasy type found within the text. Finally, this chapter will discuss the limitations of this study and why there was an absence of a rhetorical vision.

#### Themes

Some of the themes found were only used a handful of times, while others, like the theme of repentance, war, God turning evil into good, the tower of Siloam, and prayer were used throughout the cannon of sermons used for this study. The themes of God's judgment, regardless of whether they thought September 11, 2001 happened because God was judging America for her sins, or not, were very short-lived. They made an appearance at the beginning of the sermons, but after September 23, 2001 this theme, and its sub-themes were no longer used. The need for justice was another dominant theme that seemed to grow less important as time went on. Even though justice was the center of the themes, there were several different approaches to obtain justice present. Some

preachers said that America should seek justice by going to war. Others were not openly in support of war, but asked their congregations to support the military. Often times these requests were backed up by Biblical scripture that stated God gives the military the right to seek out justice. And then there were preachers who were against war. These preachers said God would see to it that justice was served, and that America or the individual church members need not take it upon themselves to bring that justice to their fellow man. They were told that God would punish the wrongdoers either in this life or in the next. At first the themes supporting war and the military were popular, but as weeks passed the themes of allowing God to serve justice became more prevalent. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the first feelings of shock and the need for revenge were starting to wear off and America, as well as the churches, began to worry about acting too hastily.

On the other hand, some of the themes arose in the later dates. One of those themes was the “Let’s Roll” theme, which is one of the three fantasy themes. The story of the passengers of Flight 92 were mentioned earlier on in the sermons, however the phrase “let’s roll” did not appear until the sermons given on September 23, 2001. Perhaps, the popularity of this theme could be attributed to the rise in media attention it received during the weeks after the attacks. Another theme was the anger theme found in a Unitarian Universalist sermon. The story of the mother who adopted the boy who had murdered her own son was an example used in this sermon and the anger theme was not used before this October 7, 2001 sermon. Also on October 7, 2001 was a sermon given about anxiety. Both anger and anxiety were both emotions that probably began to

emerge after the initial shock of the attacks wore off. As well as the aforementioned themes, the theme of normalcy began to emerge later in the texts. The normalcy theme made its debut on September 26, 2001. This is a fascinating theme because it discusses an issue that would only be appropriate after an adequate grieving period. The attacks were still fresh on everyone's minds, yet enough time had passed for people to start feeling like they were getting a portion of their pre-911 lives back.

### Fantasy Themes

As was earlier mentioned, a fantasy theme is “a dramatizing message that depicts characters engaged in action in a setting that accounts for and explains human experience” (Bormann, Cragan, Shields, 2001, 282). There were three main fantasy themes found in this study. They were, the wake-up call fantasy theme, the God is sovereign fantasy theme, and the “let's roll” fantasy theme. Each of these themes, wake-up call, God is sovereign, and “let's roll”, respectively, have been mapped in content maps to clarify the relationships within them. They can be found in the appendixes at the end of this study. Of these fantasy themes, the wake-up call and God is sovereign are sacred fantasy themes because they share the same rhetorical community, the churches, and are less applicable outside of this common rhetorical community. The last fantasy theme, “let's roll” is a secular fantasy theme. It is shared by a rhetorical community that stretches beyond that of the church.

First, the wake-up call theme, including the 9-1-1 call and emergency call themes, created a common fantasy theme—“the wake-up call”. This fantasy theme developed as

a short term theme, because it was only present in the first few sermons. However, even though its life span was not very long, it was still a shared fantasy theme. The main characters were God and America and the church. The action was that God was waking America and/or the church by allowing the attacks. The implied reaction is that America needs to turn back to God, because in the recent years she has strayed away from Him. The settings begin with the scenes of the attacks and continue on to the date of the sermon. This fantasy theme was common among the Methodist and Baptist churches, significantly, but not common among the others.

Another dominant fantasy theme was the God is sovereign fantasy theme. This fantasy theme was common to the Baptist, Methodist, and Non-denominational churches. This is a very interesting fantasy theme because of its sacred tradition. This theme existed before the attacks of September 11, 2001 with the story of Joseph from Genesis, and was just as applicable after the attacks. This is represented in the content map of Appendix B. The God is sovereign fantasy theme is strong within the Christian community because of the shared rhetorical community, stemming from having a common text, the Bible. However, this fantasy theme would probably be limited outside of the Christian community because it would be lacking that shared rhetorical community. Several different themes could be lumped together under this broader theme, such as God is still on his throne, trust in God's comfort, God is our strength and our refuge, and God will turn this evil into something good. Each of these particular themes offered reassurance and comfort. They were meant to build up faith and quiet fears, and even though they each took different angles and focused on different aspects of life, they

all had the same basic message—God is in charge and even though the attacks were horrific, God still has a plan and a purpose. The main characters were, God, Joseph from the Biblical story in Genesis, and the Church. The scene was Egypt, for the story of Joseph, and the attacks of September 11, 2001 continuing on to the dates the sermons were given. The main action of this fantasy theme was that God was and is sovereign, but also that it is okay to return to a normal life, and that God will turn evil into good.

The final fantasy theme was the story of Todd Beamer and the passengers of flight 92. This story was a story of ordinary men and women doing something extraordinary, as well as, people sacrificing their lives, and in a sense making the ultimate sacrifice, to save others. Although the story of Todd Beamer and the other passengers was unique to that certain situation, the basis for their story was not. This is a story that is common with war and is a touching and courageous tale. It exemplifies the very best of human nature, and creates instant heroes. Because of its role in the story, the phrase “Let’s Roll” was used as a symbolic cue. Just by the mere mention of it, the story of the flight 92 heroes was instantly thought of. As was the case of one of the sermons, the phrase could also be applied to other situations, and used to set an example of the type of attitude one needed to approach a certain task. Using the phrase meant, let’s take action and let’s do whatever it takes to see it through. At the time of the sermons, Let’s Roll was just beginning to catch on, but in the months following September 11, 2001, it became a saying well known within the United States. The characters in this fantasy theme are Todd Beamer and the passengers of Flight 92, as well as the hijackers. Todd Beamer and the passengers are the heroes of the story, and the hijackers are the villains.

The scene is onboard of Flight 92 in its final moments. The action is that the passengers, led by Todd Beamer, heroically take over Flight 92 from the hijackers and save the lives of the people located at the intended target, even as it cost them their own lives.

### Emerging Fantasy Themes

Throughout the sermons were fantasy themes that were beginning to emerge, but were not yet complete. In order to be a complete fantasy theme, there needs to be characters, a scene, and an action. Occasionally there would be one or two of these factors present, but not all of them. For example, there were the characters of the heroes, but there was not a common action and a common setting always associated with them. Instead, the theme of heroes, often fit into an overarching fantasy theme, such as the wake-up call fantasy theme or the let's roll fantasy theme. Other times there was a character and an action, but no specific setting. For instance, God was a main character that had many different actions, but the setting was not clarified. Occasionally it was implied that God was acting from Heaven, or the cosmos or throughout the world, but there was never a definite setting. For instance, when preachers used the phrase God will avenge those who have done wrong, there is an obvious character, and also an action, but other than that it is very vague. In this instance, the setting is either implied or it is left up to the audience to place God in a certain setting. The lack of setting could make this action more difficult for the audience to grasp as a complete fantasy theme. It is an implied fantasy theme, but not a complete one. Therefore, God will avenge those who have done wrong can be classified as an emerging fantasy theme.

## Fantasy Types

Occasionally, some of the fantasy themes began to chain out. This chaining process leads to the development of fantasy types. According to Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, a fantasy type is a standard scenario that uses a well-known, dramatic form to explain new events (2001, 284). There was one fantasy type found: the “day that would live in infamy” reference. Because this phrase was already established during WWII, by using it in reference to September 11, 2001, the users are claiming that the attacks are just as horrific as those of Pearl Harbor. This particular phrase reminds the listeners of another time America was wrongfully attacked. As they well know from history, America rose to the challenge and avenged the soldiers killed in Pearl Harbor by entering WWII and ultimately winning. Therefore, America will once again rise to the occasion and avenge the victims of 9-11. It is a classic tale of good versus evil, and by using the same phrase as President Roosevelt, the ministers claim that the attacks on September 11, 2001 were just as horrific and uncalled for as Pearl Harbor. Also, using that same phrase makes the statement that the victims will never be forgotten.

## Rhetorical Visions

There were not any particular rhetorical visions that seemed to chain out during the eight-week period under examination in this analysis. As was earlier discussed in this essay, a rhetorical vision grasps large groups of people and puts them into the same symbolic reality (Bormann, 1972) and it reveals the community’s beliefs as “coherent, unified, and holistic” (St. Antoine, Althouse, & Ball, 2005, 215). Based on these

explanations of what a rhetorical vision does, there were no findings to support that this level of sharing took place within the larger Christian community. There were three strong overarching fantasy themes found among different denominations and churches, but for the Christian community as a whole, there was not a unified belief found.

### Limitations

One limitation to this study is that the vast technical terms of symbolic convergence theory and fantasy theme analysis. Because there are so many different terms, it is easy to grow confused because not all SCT and FTA literature uses the same terms exactly. Even the differences between a fantasy theme, fantasy type, and a rhetorical vision can begin to blur. Occasionally in past research, the terms fantasy theme and rhetorical vision were used interchangeably, making it hard to decipher between the two. Also, as was the case with this study, one does not always apply all of the terms to their individual study. The terms used depends largely on the way the study is conducted, whether it is conducted quantitatively or qualitatively/rhetorically. For instance, in this study fantasy theme, rhetorical vision, public chaining, fantasy type and symbolic cue were used. However, terms like saga, fantasizers, fantasy theme artistry, shared group consciousness, and rhetorical vision reality-links were not.

Another limitation with the theory of symbolic convergence is that it does not explain why at times themes do not develop into fantasy themes. It focuses primarily on the fantasy themes that chain out, and eventually chain into rhetorical visions. However, aside from the closeness of fit standard that claims a fantasy theme should fit its

rhetorical community and be coherent with other fantasy themes within the rhetorical vision (Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 2001), there is no other explanation as to why fantasy themes do not develop.

Another limitations to this study was the lack of sermons for certain dates. Aside from September 16, 2001 and September 23, 2001 there were not a large amount of sermons collected for this study. After several weeks, there were no sermons represented at all. This could be that closer to the end of the eight-week period under examination the topic of September 11, 2001 faded out as other topics were given more attention. If this is so, perhaps the decline in church attendance was because America was starting to feel more “normal.” Perhaps the loss of safety and security that many ministers mentioned in their sermons was being regained and along with that the numbers of people who flocked to the churches after the attacks declined because they felt safe enough to go back to their usual routines, even as it included not attending church. However, this is just one possible explanation.

Another limitation to this study is the vast number of sermons examined. Due to the large group, it was hard to zero in on certain themes and all of the findings were discussed on a very broad scope, instead of by particulars. However, it is also true that the large number of sermons examined made an excellent starting point. It was easier to identify common themes because of the vast numbers, and this is an interesting angle to take. Further research might include narrowing the texts to one or two sermons so that particular fantasy themes could be focused on more closely.

Overall this analysis was a successful fantasy theme analysis. Not only do the sermons examined show and confirm the theory that man uses fantasy to explain disasters and other difficult events, the sermons examined can also help to defend the belief that the act of symbolic convergence is not merely an act of small groups. On a more applicable level, this research could be of interest and useful to ministers who are constantly writing and giving sermons of their own. If those ministers have been preaching for several years, perhaps they too gave their very own September 11, 2001 sermons and can see from this analysis how common or uncommon the ideas expressed in their sermons were. The data could also be examined in contrast to sermons given since September 11, 2001 over large tragedies, such as the Tsunami that struck on Christmas of 2004, and even those that are yet to be given.

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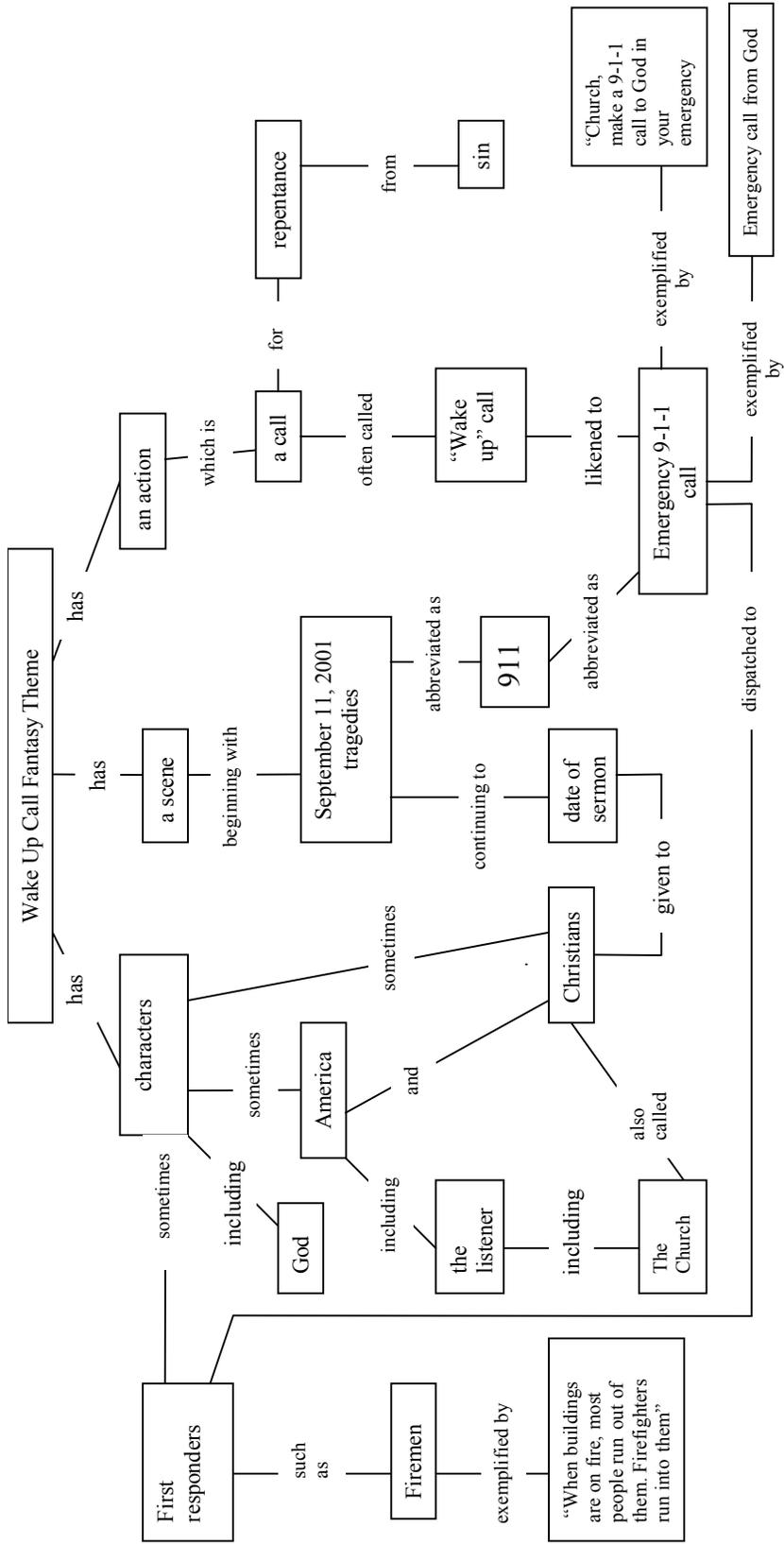
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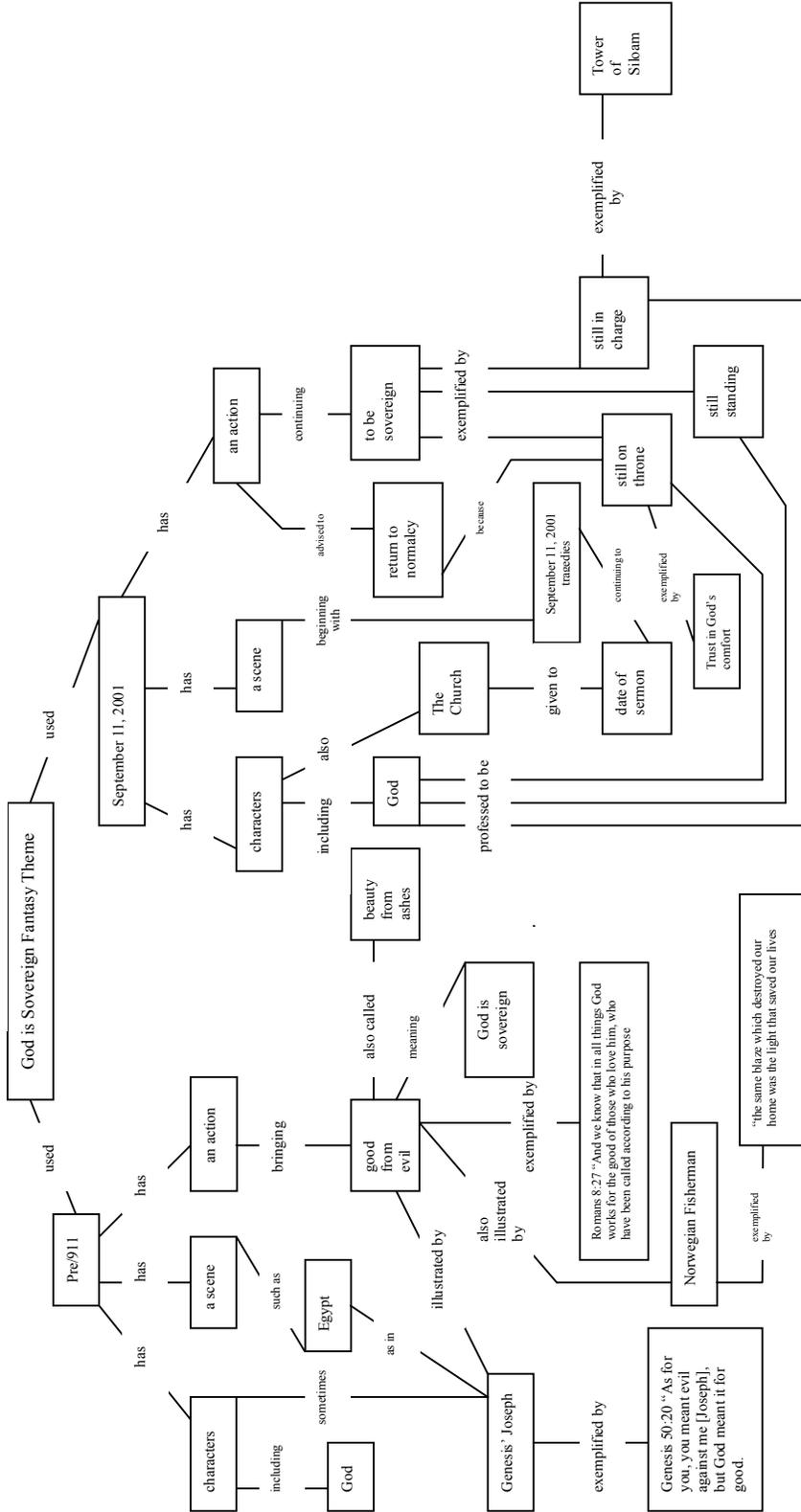
APPENDIX A

Wake Up Call Fantasy Theme Content Map

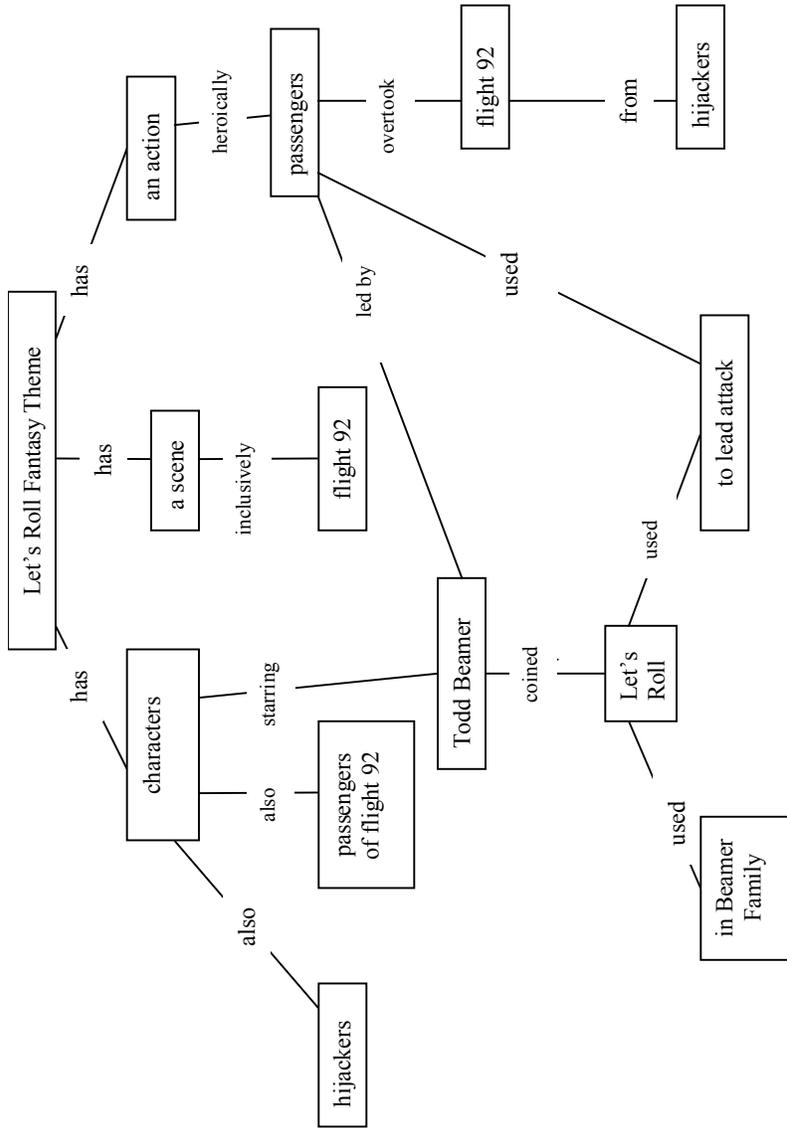


## APPENDIX B

### God is Sovereign Fantasy Theme Content Map



APPENDIX C  
Let's Roll Fantasy Theme Content Map



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