

Naming the Church: The Representation of Two Congregations in the Media

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of religious and ethnic group conflicts in the media using a case study in Oregon. Local newspaper reports about a struggle between the St. James Catholic Church and the San Martín Catholic Mission were analyzed using cluster criticism to identify the key terms used to communicate ideas about the two congregations to the local public. Various patterns and themes emerged, which indicate that the institutions and leaders on each side of the conflict were presented as opposing forces of hierarchy/community and logic/emotion. From this analysis it can be seen that the newspapers reporting on this conflict portrayed St. James as a hierarchical, business-like structure, while San Martín was represented as a vulnerable, benevolent community. The newspaper's rhetorical strategy of associating the names of the churches with certain ideological features may have influenced local perceptions of the conflict, leading to a favorable outcome for the San Martín community.

The Churches



St. James Church,
McMinnville

San Martín de Porres,
Dayton



Background and Context

- 1974: Iglesia Católica de San Martín is built by Latino farmworkers in a converted theatre in Dayton, Oregon
- March, 2010: Rev. Terry O'Connell of St. James Catholic Church in McMinnville announces San Martín will be sold and the two congregations merged
- April, 2010: Trini Marquez and Maria Sandoval appeal case to the Vatican's Congregation of the Clergy, Rome
- December, 2010: San Martín receives permission to keep church under authority of St. John in Newberg

Research Questions

1. How are the St. James and San Martín congregations and leaders portrayed by the media?
2. How does the media portray religious and ethnic group conflict?

Method

Cluster Criticism (Kenneth Burke)

1. Identify key terms in an artifact based on frequency (how often they occur) and intensity (how important they are)
2. Map terms and descriptions that are clustered around key terms
3. Identify patterns that emerge from key terms and associations
4. Interpret the ideas and images that the key terms evoke

Theoretical Perspectives

“Terministic Screens” (Kenneth Burke)

- Terms and names highlight or de-emphasize certain aspects of a text and reveal a rhetor's worldview.
- We are able to understand a rhetor's perspective through their words because “our particular vocabularies constitute a reflection, selection, and deflection of reality” (Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* 45)

“Ultimate Terms” (Richard Weaver)

- God/Devil Terms: god terms represent ideals of goodness, while devil terms and their associations represent ideals of evil and have negative connotations
- Reveal ideological and cultural perspective of the rhetor by highlighting the concepts that are important about a particular idea and demonstrate the moral oppositions the rhetor sees

Data Analysis

Artifacts and Key Terms

- Six newspaper articles from *The News Register*, *The Oregonian*, and *El Hispanic News*
- Key Terms: *St. James*, *San Martín*, *O'Connell*, *Sandoval*, *Marquez*

Analysis process

"We can't support **San Martin**," he said. \$

But longtime members of the **San Martin** community say they had no warning the mission was falling behind financially. **Sandoval** said that for the past eight years, a second collection had been earmarked for **San Martin's** expansion, but she said **O'Connell** has refused to answer questions about that fund.

Trini Marquez, who has attended **San Martin** for 35 years, says she can't imagine worshipping anywhere else. She's visited **St. James** in McMinnville and St. Joseph's in Salem, but both are missing "the struggles" that have been part of the mission from its beginning. "I don't feel the same faith anywhere else," she said.

Results – Emerging Themes

Institutions		St. James	San Martín
	Hierarchy v. Community	<i>Fiscal committees, officials</i>	<i>Members, the people</i>
	Logic v. Emotion	<i>Finances, costs, matters of efficiency</i>	Used personal stories

People/Leaders		Father O'Connell	Sandoval, Marquez
	Roles Hierarchy v. Community	<i>Priest, presider</i>	<i>Representative, long-time member</i>
	Actions Logic v. Emotion	<i>Decision maker, having the responsibility to close the church</i>	Used a narrative of belonging, fought for their church, devoted to the community

Conclusions

1. The media was biased when reporting about the conflict between St. James and San Martín.
 - The newspapers used a more persuasive rhetorical strategy for this context when talking about San Martín (pathos) than when talking about St. James (logos).
2. The names of each congregation and its leaders were presented and used as symbols of greater characteristics or Ultimate Terms.
 - “San Martín” as god term; “St. James” as devil term
 - These strong associations reinforced how the public viewed each group, its leaders, and the conflict overall.
3. Race and ethnicity were not prominent features of the news reports, although they may have been influential factors in the actual conflict.

Implications

This conflict represents trends regarding ethnicity and religious institutions in the United States today.

- Latino populations increasing
- Religious institutions are decreasing

This situation shows what happens when these trends meet and how those conflicts are represented in the media.

The media is a significant and influential source of information, so reporters should be conscious of the ways they present information about emotionally charged issues like the closing of a community church.

If the goal of a newspaper is to report facts and influence readers' opinions, reporters should pay special attention to how they describe groups and how they use names to discuss and represent institutions, people, and ideas.

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