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"Turn in your Bible to...": Examining Rhetorical Agency in Sermonic Discourse

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"TURN IN YOUR BIBLES TO…":
EXAMINING RHETORICAL AGENCY IN SERMONIC DISCOURSE

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All glory to Jesus, who was, and is, and is to come.

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Rhetorical agency is an ideologically contentious facet within communication and rhetorical research. While its importance in scholarship can be traced back to early works by Kenneth Burke and Pierre Bourdieu, debate continues regarding the source of agency, how it is enacted in rhetorical application and communication, and who/what can claim responsibility for the communication practices one may utilize in enacting their respective levels of agency. Thus, the ways in which the rhetoric of popular, influential individuals/antecedents affects the rhetorical agency and invention practices of those without significant levels of influence must be examined. American Christianity, in particular the culture created through heavy use of televised and web-media (televangelism), provides an excellent context to examine this subject. The present thesis discusses relevant literature to the topics of rhetorical agency, invention, and antecedents, as well as American Christianity, televangelism, and the changes that have occurred in religious rhetoric within the culture. Additionally, results indicate a high propensity towards rhetorical agency influenced through the themes of identity, adaptation, and audience sensitivity, and encourage pastors to focus on the identity and context through which their agency is manifested.

Chapter 1: A Visible Conformation and Transformation

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that

by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and

perfect." Romans 12:2 (ESV)

In his 2003 book, *Televangelism and American Culture: The Business of Popular*

Religion, author Quentin Shultze describes an astonishing, yet highly predictable global

phenomenon. Building upon the success of televangelism in the 1980s, increased

saturation in television and internet markets has changed the way that pastors engage in

ministry on a grand and national scale (Shultze, 2003). Ward (2015) expands further on

the global phenomenon in his book, *The Electronic Church in the Digital Age: Cultural*

Impacts of Evangelical Mass Media, noting that pastors have widely been demonstrating

an "intellectual and rhetorical turn: the move from proof texts to presuppositions, and the

decision to argue in terms of worldviews and human history rather than a string of Bible

verses" (p.195). With this turn, the contemporary American Christian church is showing

just how prevalent the influences of highly visible, popular, and media-savvy ministries

are on the religious rhetoric and sermonic discourse—communication delivered through

the channels of religious sermons—of Christian pastors. Ultimately, the rhetoric coming

from highly visible and popular pulpits is changing the culture of American Evangelical

Christianity at large, thereby challenging the rhetorical agency of individual pastors at the

local level and calling into question just who—or what—is the motivating source of the

rhetorical messages these local pastors are inventing are inventing.

While much research has examined how rhetoric is practiced by popular,

influential figures such as politicians, athletes, celebrities, and religious figures (Meister

& Japp, 2002; Rockler, 2003; Cesarotto, 2006; Parry-Giles, 2012; Brummett, 2015), there is scarce research on how the rhetoric of well-known, popular, visible, and influential agents affects the rhetorical agency and invention practices of similar agents without the same level of popularity and/or influence. In framing an examination and analysis of these influences, it is important to understand the origins of rhetorical agency as both an ideology and an exercised element of rhetorical research and practice.

Stretching back to the advent of post-modernism in rhetorical and communication research, rhetorical theorists have debated the ways in which rhetorical agency should be defined, classified, and examined. While Burke (1945), among the first discuss the concept of agency, defined it as the tools or instruments used by an agent to achieve a goal, he also noted that context can change an agent to an agency, and vice versa. For example, pastors can be both agents responsible for rhetorical expression, as well as the agency by which parishioners receive spiritual guidance. Due to a lack of contextual clarity, and with the rise of postmodern rhetorical scholarship, scholars have begun to conceptualize rhetorical agency as the instinctual human capacity and ability to act and be rhetorical within a given situation (Adrio & Mao, 2016). Along with a change in definition, scholars have examined how rhetorical agency becomes increasingly important within ever changing social and political environments; examining rhetorical agency raises questions regarding voice, power, and the rights of individuals (Hauser, 1999). Beyond intrinsic motivation for rhetoric, Hoff-Clausen, Isager, and Villadsen (2005) draw attention to the relationship between speaking agents and the specific situational conditions surrounding them, highlighting this dialectic as inherently relevant when examining the issue of agency. Further, Villadsen (2008) insists that research

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should focus on rhetorical agency as both allowing and constituting rhetorical invention, and must examine the conditions, motivations, and choices behind its delivery. Thus, research regarding rhetorical agency continues to build upon previously held conceptions and operationalizations.

While rhetorical agency is an ideologically important subject of rhetorical research, the source of rhetorical agency is a separate and uniquely contentious topic in and of itself. As noted by Geisler (2005), the topic of rhetorical agency becomes increasingly uncomfortable when the source of rhetoric and the autonomy of a rhetor are difficult to determine. Further, Lundberg and Gunn (2005) use the metaphor of the Ouija Board to highlight this discomfort, as well as the ontological nature of agency. They state that "while the exercise of agency takes place in the movement of the planchette, the status and possibly even the existence of the agent who originates the action is undecidable" (p. 84). In other words, whether by individual choice or external (in this case supernatural or otherworldly) possession, sometimes it is impossible to determine who is responsible for agency in a given situation. This contention over the source of a rhetorical message can further be examined through an understanding of Cicero's canon of invention.

Invention, as described by Cicero, is the first of five canons of rhetoric, describing the initial creation of a rhetorical message. Invention dictates the first thoughts regarding rhetoric, and how those thoughts influence the use of the remaining four canons (Cicero, trans. 1835). However, Cicero assures that invention is not reserved only for the uniquely original arguments that might arise, as in *de Inventione* where:

…our mind will approach invention with more ease, if it often and carefully goes over both its own relation and that of the opposite party, of what has been done; and if, eliciting what suspicions each part gives rise to, it considers why, and with what intention, and with what hopes and plans, each thing was done. (Cicero, Book II, trans. 1835, para. 15).

In other words, our ability to conceptualize and compose a rhetorical artifact is guided by what has happened before, what is happening now, what we agree with, what we disagree with, and what we ultimately hope to accomplish. As Bitzer (1967) and Miller (1972) outline in their respective research on the rhetorical situation, an exigence (a circumstance requiring a rhetorical response) that guides rhetoric must be examined in light of the historical context in which it occurs. Thus, how one responds to a rhetorical situation shows how they have been influenced by what has come before it and what might be occurring now. If, then, invention is not entirely grounded in original, creative thought or circumstance, to what extent are rhetors responsible for, and in control of, the creation and delivery of their persuasive messages? Further, to what extent does popular and/or influential rhetoric have an effect, positively or negatively, on our own rhetorical agency?

In answering these questions, and when examining the relationship between invention and rhetorical agency, the source of agency becomes both increasingly unclear and of great importance. Burke (1945), who contends for examining rhetorical instances through the lens of the pentad (agent, act, scene, agency, and purpose), argues that invention is always relative to the situation in which a rhetor finds themselves. The rhetorical subjects and positions invented in history, as Burke (1950) understood and

argued, "are not an afterthought, but forces that galvanize bodies for the roles they play in making history" (Wess, 1996, p. 27). Scholarship on the rhetorical situation sheds further light on the relationship between past and present circumstances. Bitzer (1967) describes both exigence and constraint as necessary in constructing rhetoric within a given circumstance. However, Bitzer is careful to note that rhetorical works "obtain their character from the circumstances of the historical context in which they occur" (p. 3). Essentially, Bitzer argues that rhetors should examine the history of similar situations and how rhetoric functioned within them. Further, as Enos (2013) contends, a rhetorician can enhance understandings of rhetorical agency by creating greater awareness and consciousness of historical contexts. In other words, greater attention paid to the historical and present contexts surrounding a rhetorical message could aid the understanding of a given person's rhetorical agency. One way that the connection between rhetorical agency and rhetorical invention can be simplified is through the term rhetorical antecedent.

Antecedents, which are classified as anything that has come before, inherently motivate the process of rhetorical invention (Jamieson, 1973). Thus, when conceptualizing *rhetorical* antecedents, Jamieson states that "perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows not merely from the situation but also from the antecedent rhetorical forms" (1973, p. 163). A such, any given rhetor is compelled to examine complexities of both the past and present circumstances surrounding a situation in the process of rhetorical invention. As rhetoric functions in a wide variety of contexts, such as interpersonal, family, political (Sheckels, 2002; Johnson, 2012), literary, and religious (Burke, 1950; Jamieson, 1975), numerous

antecedents exist that could potentially influence rhetorical invention, and thus the agency of a rhetor.

In sum, the vast number of possible antecedents to a rhetorical situation, along with the possible complexities of present circumstances, leads to contention regarding what possible source motivates an individual's rhetorical agency and invention. Thus, an appropriate understanding and application of antecedents in rhetorical agency is needed. From this, with both historical significance and increased social relevancy behind it, the context of American Evangelical Christianity more than meets any criteria for effective analysis. More specifically, I will examine how the rhetorical agency and invention practices of pastors without high levels of visibility or influence are influenced by televangelism and popular Christian ministries.

Since the days of radio broadcasting in the early 1920s, and its adoption to televised formats by Jack Wyrtzen, Percy Crawford, and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen in the early 1950s, Christian evangelicalism through mass-media formats (hereby referred to as "televangelism") has been a mainstay of American and world-wide popular culture (Kurian & Lamport, 2016). Evangelicalism, much like Christian movements that preceded it, came to be defined as a dual-natured ideology; it stems from both an impulse for increased dispensationalism and literalism when interpreting Christian scripture, as well as a desire for Christian revival in America on a massive scale (Carpenter, 1997). In achieving the latter of those two ideologies, while emphasizing the former, channels and networks of mass-communication (such as radio and television) became the tools necessary for success (Carpenter, 1997; Fore, 2007; Howley, 2001). Though mass-media and mass-communication channels can be, and are, used by religions other than

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Christianity, its popularity in American religious identity, along with its vast wealth of resources and social/political influence make the semantic use of the word "televangelism" a largely Christian, and primarily American, phenomenon (Howley, 2001).

Understanding the role that religion, primarily Christianity, plays in the United States is of paramount importance, especially as Christianity continues to change and adapt to the digital and mediated landscape. According to Pietkiewicz, Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, and Pietkiewicz (2016), "the belief systems of religiously involved people often shape practitioners' mental and emotional states, and inform and influence general values, social axioms, and practices" (p. 1573). Organizationally, religious mindsets guide workplace functions through controlling functions of work/life balance and stances regarding corporate responsibility. Examples of this organization/religion relationship range from organizations on the micro-level integrating religious tolerance and practice into organizational life (Kirby, 2006; Shenoy-Packer & Buzzanell, 2013), to the macro-level, with the very public statements of large corporations on issues guided by religious influence, such as Chick Fil-A's stance on gay marriage and Hobby Lobby's stance on abortion. Socially, religious influence can affect product marketing and acceptance (Abosag & Farah, 2014; Christy & Haley, 2008). At the more visible and influential level in America, religious rhetoric is and always has been heavily used in political and media contexts. Coe and Chenoweth (2013) note how "recent years have seen a rapid growth in studies that attempt to understand how, why, and with what effect politicians—especially presidents and presidential hopefuls—invoke religious themes" (p. 375). And, due to its

use of mass-media channels, televangelism is seen as a primary cause of this vast level of influence.

Televangelism, or any ministry employing heavy use of mass-media channels, is a particularly lucrative and influential enterprise. Schultze (1988) notes that massive pushes for televised broadcasts amongst a wide variety of religious groups came about in the late 1980s, primarily in response to the success of evangelical, televised preachers such as Billy Graham, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, and Oral Roberts. Graham, specifically, is highly regarded and respected as a pioneer of modern Christian evangelism through televised means (Shultze, 1988). Today, ministers of this caliber, such as Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Bill Johnson, Carl Lentz, Stephen Furtick, and Craig Groeschel, continue to remain a source of significant political and social influence, with many boasting physical congregations in the thousands (with televised/mediated congregations estimated to be numbering in the millions), and generating tens of millions of dollars in revenue each year (Dias, 2016). And, while media saliency and the accessibility of televangelism create cultural influence, they simultaneously open doors widely for mediated criticism by religious and non-religious individuals alike. Most notably, this has been addressed by comedian John Oliver in a now-viral bit on his HBO program *Last Week Tonight.* His commentary focuses on how influential and popular pastors, primarily those associated with televangelism, exploit their tax-exempt status as religious organizations through deceiving and openly exploiting parishioners for personal monetary gain (Oliver, 2015). Given its position and influence on religious and non-religious groups, televangelism is a strong source of

rhetorical motivation in regard to what pastors say and how their ministries are conducted.

As for pastors, the need to examine their agency is drawn from Burke's (1945) multifaceted understanding of the agent/agency dichotomy, as well as current understandings of the discomfort regarding rhetorical agency. Since pastors can be both individual agents and the agency by which individual parishioners receive spiritual guidance, and given the aforementioned research by Pietkiewicz et al. (2016) on the importance of religion in societal function, the motivations and influence behind the influences on rhetorical agency, invention, and use of rhetorical messages by pastors deserves further examination and analysis.

The motive and rationale for this thesis is three-fold. First, I seek to fill a gap in existing research on invention and rhetorical agency, primarily to examine the invention practices and rhetorical agency of individuals as influenced by popular, highly-visible agents. Second, using a qualitative research design processed through a critical lens will allow agency to be examined in a more nuanced manner than allowed by the traditional perspective of rhetorical criticism. As argued by Reid (1944), "the critic should study not alone the result of invention, but the inventive process" (p. 417). The use of qualitative methodology, by analyzing the agency of individuals as they perceive themselves as motivated by well-known, popular rhetors, will allow a grounded discussion of how individual agency can be brought to the foreground of discussion of rhetorical agency. Further, successful application of qualitative research design will allow for future research and application of qualitative methodology to expand upon issues of invention, rhetorical agency, and popular influence beyond the currently examined context of

pastors and televangelism. Lastly, regarding the specific context of my study, I seek to provide explanation for the phenomenological shift in sermonic discourse observed through the advent of media-ministries, and provide both insight and recommendation to both pastors engaging in ministry as well as academics examining them.

In sum, rhetorical agency, rhetorical inventions, and how they are influenced by historical factors and antecedently influence are topics of repeated contention that require further examination. In doing so, the immense power of American Christianity as mediated through televised and digital formats provides a powerful context in which this topic can be examined. Thus, the following chapters will explore the literature surrounding rhetorical agency, rhetorical antecedents, invention, and issues surrounding televangelism. Then, I will discuss the methods of analysis, present interview responses from American Christian pastors, and offer discussions/directions for future research as well as recommendations for pastors in regard to understanding and exercising their own rhetorical agency.

Chapter 2: There's Nothing New Under the Sun…

"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there

is nothing new under the sun." – Ecclesiastes 1:9 (ESV)

History and Definitions of Rhetorical Agency

In remaining consistent with establishing the importance of both historical context

and present circumstances in a given rhetorical situation, it is more than appropriate to

begin any discussion on rhetorical agency with an examination of the history of the

subject itself and a closer look at what has led to the most current and useful definitions.

Rhetorical agency was first examined by literary critic and rhetorician Kenneth Burke in

his 1945 book *A Grammar of Motives*. Demonstrating a distinct shift away from

Aristotelian concepts of rhetoric and an ideal grounded in pragmatism, Burke reasoned

that within a dramatistic pentad, five rhetorical elements emerge: act, scene, agent,

agency, and purpose (1945).

Each point in the pentad represents a question in the topoi of rhetorical sense

making; act is the what, scene is the where, agent is the whom, agency is the how, and

purpose is the why. Regarding agency in more specific terms, Burke was concerned with

the *means* and the *instruments* which an actor uses to achieve his ultimate goal.

Additionally, ratios exist amongst dyads of each of the five points, which allow the

operationalizations and motivations of each point to be examined in increasingly

numerous contexts; the flexibility of the pentad is highlighted in the multitude of

attributions and motives for understanding any specific instance (Anderson, 2004).

However, within this understanding of the multifaceted nature of the pentad, the

classification of agency becomes less clear. For Burke, the context of a scene determines

what embodies agency within a given situation. While a painter might view the human body as merely a property of an agent, others might view it as the agency by which one absorbs, makes-sense of, and reports on the world as they experience it (Burke, 1945). Additionally, Burke highlights the multifaceted and interchangeable nature of elements in the pentad, stating:

> We may think of voting as an act, and of the voter as an agent; yet votes and voters both are hardly other than a politician's medium or agency; or from another point of view, they are a part of his scene (p. xx)

Take the example of pastors, as described in earlier chapters of this thesis, as additional conceptualizations of Burkean rhetorical agency. Pastors as individuals are agents, whose agency includes the pulpit, scripture, and granted-authority used to achieve their purpose. Yet, simultaneously, pastors are the agency by which individual parishioners (as agents) fulfill their purpose of spiritual enlightenment. As agency is described in terms of instrumentation or means by Burke in regard to dramatistic and philosophical texts, the presence of rhetoric changes the operationalization of agency when compounded with the agent-agency and agency-purpose ratios of the pentad. In other words, our ability to examine the nature of agency becomes dependent on the *context* in which the dramatic scene is taking place, who the actors are, and what purpose is ultimately being sought after. Anderson (2004) expands upon these connections by calling into question Burke's attention to action and motivation in regard to a given rhetorical situation and the praxis of rhetoric. She states that "while the activities of agents will tend to reify the dominant external conditions in which agents act, these external conditions are nonetheless open to change inasmuch as the evolving practices of

individuals might come to challenge them" (p. 256). The actions of agents perpetuate the

state of the external conditions in which they are acting, while those same conditions are

subject to change. Further, Bourdieu (1977) connects the relationship between the points

of agent and scene (more specifically classified as external social structures). He

contends that through practiced action within the social fields in which they inhabit,

agents are instilled with dispositions to act in accordance with the existing values and

practices of those social fields (Bourdieu, 1977). And so, arguably, Burke's definition of

agency can be redefined through the internal dispositions and subsequent practiced

actions of individual rhetors, primarily as they interact with external social, political, and

religious environments, placing action at the heart of this conceptualization.

Furthermore, Bourdieu sustains a distinct transition away from what Burke (1950)

called *old rhetoric*, and into what rhetorical studies began to dub *new rhetoric*, as first

outlined by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) in their book, *The New Rhetoric: A

Treatise on Argumentation*. Whereas old rhetoric was defined through the persuasive

power of agents in regard to artistic proofs used to achieve a purpose within a given

situation, new rhetoric drew influence from works such as Burke (1945; 1950) and Bitzer

(1967) to identify the epistemic nature of rhetoric. In doing so, the nature of rhetoric and

argumentation becomes not an ideologically universal concept that can be applied to any

situation, but one that changes in relation to the audience targeted for persuasion

(Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) While the epistemological nature of rhetoric and its

place within rhetorical scholarship has been debated (Scott, 1990), the intersubjectivity

(or agreement between two or more individuals on the basis of mutual understanding) of

new rhetoric gave way to the post-modernist perspective, which highlights the identities

of the speaker and audience as inherently important in a given rhetorical situation, and pays close attention to the messages passed between them (Aylesworth, 2008; Brummett, 1976). Meanwhile, Scott, in both criticism and extension of Brummett's (1976) claims, notes that identity and meaning is reified through the acts of communication and rhetorical criticism, especially through the values and motivations we discover through the process of rhetorical creation (1990). In summary, rhetorical practice and communication are compounded through the understanding that individual actions are based upon internal motivations and the relationship one has with the external social structure they inhabit, all while consistently evaluating both the state of said structures and the relationships forged with them. Thus, rhetorical agency can be defined as the "inherently human capacity to act, and is an intrinsically human ability to act upon evaluations and to question" (Adrio & Mao, 2017).

This definition of rhetorical agency allows for research of communication phenomena and rhetorical practice to be examined in a wide variety of contexts. Further, while Burke explicated agency through dramatic and literary criticism, his influence extended beyond the boundaries of literature and dramatism. Highlighted by the multidisciplinary nature of postmodern rhetoric, agency has been increasingly examined and debated amongst communication scholars. Gaonkar (1993) addresses the need for postmodern conceptions of agency in comparison to the old rhetoric, which typifies agency by viewing "the speaker as origin rather than articulation, strategy as intentional, discourse as constitutive of character and community, ends that bind in common purpose" (p. 263). In other words, the postmodern school of rhetoric critiques traditional concepts of agency, and presents new ideologies of rhetorical agency which places the burden on

the rhetorical act as habituated, intentional, and reinforced through social interactions. Bourdieu (1977) and Anderson (2004) expand the postmodern school by distinguishing rhetorical agency as innately born from practice within ever changing external social structures. Gaonkar (1993) elevates postmodernism further by placing the burden of rhetoric on individuals who enact rhetoric through interpretive practice, thereby manifesting and exercising their rhetorical agency.

Since agency is defined as the capacity to act upon evaluations, act in response to questions, and act to achieve a rhetorical purpose, the specific practices of rhetors within various social structures are of vital importance to understanding rhetorical agency. Brummett (1976) emphasizes the relationship of agency and context through discussion regarding the nature of an intersubjective reality. As a postmodern rhetorician fighting for a shift in research at a time when scholars were still largely clinging to the humanist perspective, Brummett argues that an objective reality is impossible to determine. Instead, he argues that reality—and an individual's agency within that reality—is entirely based on the way that an individual communicates meaning with the environments around them. By positing that it is important to observe the specific communicative actions of an individual in relation to the external environments in which they function, Brummett (1976) ultimately argues that communicative acts give someone rhetorical agency. Gilbert and Von Wallmenich (2014) address this by highlighting linguistic focus of communication acts. Using the example of narratives of mothers emphasizing focus and balance between professional and personal lives, agency became visible in communication through purposeful use of the self-identifying pronoun *I*, rather than the externally focused pronoun *it*. Here, the agency of an individual is still set within an

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external environment which is open to change, and is manifested through communicative and discursive practice of personal identification within the external environment (Gilbert & Von Wallmenich, 2014). As such, rhetorical agency moves beyond the philosophical level and into the physical as something that can be both examined and enacted in real-world situations.

At this juncture in the research, it becomes increasingly clear that communicative practice is vital in both manifesting and enacting individual rhetorical agency. Additionally, with more importance stressed on practice, a refined definition which pays attention to rhetorical agency as an *act* is ultimately appropriate (Adrio and Mao, 2017; Anderson, 2004; Bourdieu, 1977; Gilbert & Von Wallmenich, 2014). With an understanding of the history surrounding studies of rhetorical agency, its manifestation within communication studies can be examined for its complex nature. While a clear means of expressing rhetorical agency through the discursive use of *I* now exists, attention must be paid to the contentious nature of its motivations, practices, and rhetoric grounded in historical context.

Contentions of Rhetorical Agency

When agency is understood as the capacity to act, rather than the means by which an agent achieves a goal, external social structures and motivations that guide individual agents become increasingly important. Because of this, then, the nature of the source of rhetorical agency is a topic of repeated contention. Geisler (2004) generated debate over the ontological nature of rhetorical agency, highlighting vast discrepancies in how it is examined within rhetorical, philosophical, and communication studies. Her paper, written in response to debate surrounding rhetorical agency at the 2004 Association of Rhetorical

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Scholars (ARS) convention, brought attention to the issues regarding the description of rhetorical agency (using previous incarnations and definitions as fact in this matter), and what it should be (in regard to its value within rhetorical and communication studies, as well as how it changes within rhetorical perspective). Discussing new perspectives on the concept of rhetorical agency, Geisler would support increased attention to be paid to the importance of rhetorical agency as an element of rhetorical and communication research, describing the subject beyond simply merging the ontological and ethical natures of rhetorical agency (2004). She highlights the idea that while most arguments examine the *what* of rhetorical agency and how it merges with the *how*, in which the use of rhetorical agency in practice must be emphasized. Additionally, she notes how the increased use of media in communication might play a more significant role in addressing rhetorical agency than previously thought. Geisler (2004) describes an increased "interplay of audience and media in constructing and being constructed by [rhetorical messages]", stating that this "raises questions concerning who has agency—and therefore responsibility—for these repeatedly circulating cultural products." (p. 11). Here, Geisler brings attention to one possible significant influence on rhetorical agency as both an ideology and a practiced activity. Since media is both pervasive in mass message distribution and powerful in value-shaping communication, the types of messages seen through mass-media channels could have a highly significant impact on how individuals perceive their personal rhetorical agency as well as on the types of messages individuals craft.

However, failure to adequately determine the source of influence on an individual's rhetorical agency has led to increased debate and contention. This contention

is highlighted by Lundberg and Gunn (2005) who, in response to Geisler's report, use the metaphor of the Ouija board to describe the dissonance with which many individuals—including rhetorical scholars—tend to approach the concept of rhetorical agency. They note that the discomfort regarding rhetorical agency comes from an inability to determine the true source of a rhetorical message, stating that, much like the question regarding who is in control of the planchette of the Ouija board, "it nevertheless opens the question of an uncertain and unsettled subject position or disposition" (p. 85). Movement, or agency, could be entirely derived from creative and original thought of the individual involved in the rhetorical situation, or could have levels of control from sources beyond that of the rhetor. Using this metaphor, Lundberg and Gunn highlight the concept of ontotheology, or the theology of being in the presence of supernatural forces, noting that examination of source must be used to extend beyond Geisler's failure of simply acknowledging rhetorical agency as an existing element of rhetorical study (2005). Thus, regarding source and motivation, the role of historical and present contexts within rhetorical agency and the invention of rhetorical messages must be examined.

Invention and Antecedents

As previously argued, rhetorical agency is fixed upon the external and existing social structures that guide a person's beliefs, values, and motivations. While such claims are based in examining rhetorical agency in the present, rhetorical choices must be examined beyond in relation to the social and *historical* contexts that drive them (Gaonkar, 1993; Villadsen, 2008; Enos, 2014). Historical motivation can first be examined through examination and application of Bitzer's research on the rhetorical situation.

The rhetorical situation, which was presented by Lloyd Bitzer in 1967, outlines the conditions behind communicative situations that call for the strategic use of rhetoric to achieve a persuasive purpose. Essentially, Bitzer maintains rhetorical communication and discourse arise to serve as responses to particular situations, they must be appropriate and functional responses, preceded by attention paid to exigence ("an imperfection marked by urgency"), audience, and constraints (Bitzer, 1967, p. 6). Additionally, examining the historical context surrounding similar rhetorical responses suggests the need for rhetoric to not be solely driven by the current persuasive purpose trying to be achieved. On history and context, Bitzer (1967) highlights that, within each situation, rhetorical communication is "bound up with the context of situation and with the aim of the pursuit" (p. 4). In sum, the past and present contexts in which rhetoric is created ultimately guide the decisions of an individual rhetor.

Burke (1973) extends discussion of the rhetorical situation beyond Bitzer's original concept by prioritizing an individual's identification with historical commonalities over present circumstances and exigencies. In this way, Burke is grounding rhetorical choice in identifying with choices rhetors have made throughout history. Burke, therefore, extends the argument forwarded by Cicero in describing that rhetorical invention is not derived solely from the situation that calls for it, but rather that it will always draw upon what has been done before. However, while both Bitzer (1967) and Burke (1973) are able to touch on the importance of historical context in the creation of a rhetorical situation, there is a lack of terminology surrounding the guiding principles of history within invention practices. In examining this disconnect, the work of Jamieson

(1975) regarding rhetorical antecedents becomes an appropriate means of understanding how past rhetoric can motivate present invention.

Antecedents, by nature, are defined as anything that has preceded a current event or decision. As such, antecedents exist beyond rhetoric-based subjects (Jamieson, 1975; Marsh, 2003). Jamieson notes that rhetorical communication is grounded in past situations, stating that "the past may abide as a living presence" (p. 406). Both Jamieson (1975) and Marsh (2003) indicate that rather than simply looking at the given rhetorical situation as the driving force behind rhetorical choices, one should examine the whole of the rhetorical genre that precedes it. Johnson (2012), for example, notes the rhetorical use of Twitter by former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney in his unsuccessful presidential campaign in 2012. Romney, who had never had a Twitter account before his campaign, was driven by both antecedent and the exigence of the specific rhetorical situation he found himself in. In this campaign, President Barack Obama had long been a heavy user of Twitter, which served as the antecedent for Romney's use. The rhetorical situation was embodied in the exigence of growing needs for mass communication and the widespread use of Twitter as a tool for achieving this purpose (Johnson, 2012). Thus, rhetorical antecedents precede and work in tandem with rhetorical situations to guide rhetorical decisions.

Essentially, the purposeful nature of agency is undermined by the potential influences and motivations that come before it (Brummett, 1976). Additionally, historical contexts that guide rhetorical decisions are of paramount importance when discussing agency. First, Geisler (2004; 2005) highlights that rhetorical agency must be examined within for its cultural and historical context and significance, rather than simply the

results of specific actions. Additionally, Villadsen (2008) and Enos (2014) further this

claim, arguing that historical context and current rhetorical agency share an inseparable

bond that ultimately helps to determine the motivations of rhetorical decision and the

ability for an individual to exercise their rhetorical agency. As such, discussing rhetorical

agency in this way can expand upon existing research, which largely discusses rhetorical

agency at the ideological level, while simultaneously addressing and answering the post-

modern critique regarding traditional manifestations of rhetoric and agency through

practice.

In summary, historical and social context is ultimately inseparable from the

process of rhetorical invention and the practice of exercising rhetorical agency. However,

while many rhetorical scholars have been successful in their efforts to examine

historical/social dialectic at work in the rhetoric of highly influential individuals spread

out across pop-culture contexts (Brummett, 2015; Cesarotto, 2006; Meister & Japp, 2002;

Parry-Giles, 2012; Rockler, 2003), the direct influence of these highly influential rhetors

on the rhetorical agency of individual agents without this same level of influence is

limited in communication research. Thus, the first research question emerges:

RQ1: How is individual rhetorical agency affected by the rhetorical practices of

highly influential agents?

In addition to the need to examine the influences of highly influential rhetors on

the rhetorical agency and rhetorical practices of less-visible rhetors, these highly

influential individuals can be viewed as the same type of antecedents that precede

rhetorical decisions of the rhetors of this study. If they are the example from which

rhetors base their invention, then they in turn become antecedents themselves. Further,

while research regarding rhetorical antecedents shows evidence of both overt recognition of antecedent influence (Johnson, 2012) and subtle, incremental influence of rhetorical antecedents (Jamieson, 1975), there is little research regarding the extent of each type of influence, as well as the stated recognition of these influences on individuals. Thus, a second research question emerges:

RQ2: How are rhetorical antecedents either overtly or subtly factored in during the process of exercising individual rhetorical agency?

In summary, rhetorical agency is defined as an intrinsic human capacity to act rhetorically and to make evaluations of external factors, and comes to life through discursive practice which places the burden of communication on the relationship between the speaker and the social structures surrounding them. Additionally, while the source of rhetorical agency is a contentious factor in understanding it further, the examination of historical context through rhetorical antecedents could shed necessary light on motivations and development of individual rhetorical agency.

Regarding historical context and the personal development of active and practiced rhetorical agency, it is no surprise that religious contexts are repeatedly praised and denounced for their influence on the lives of individuals and groups alike (Pietkiewicz et al., 2016). In America, Christianity has long held a particularly strong hand over policy, law, and values held deeply by a large majority of persons, including myself. As such, with Christian influence still very much alive and active in the American conscious, it is important to understand how those responsible for delivering these messages influence us, and in turn, are themselves influenced.

Christianity and Religious Influence

I was raised in a household with strong and deeply-held Christian values. Even currently, I identify as a Christian and am active in my practice of Christian doctrines and belief in the Christian faith. However, just what that faith means has shifted throughout many years of research, practice, self-reflexivity, and prayer. I was raised in the Assemblies of God (AG) church, a charismatic and evangelical denomination, the largest and fastest growing Pentecostal denomination world-wide (Cross & Livingstone, 1974). Currently, I consider myself to be non-denominational, and various educational and living-based situations encouraged me to attend services of a variety of denominations. Still, much of my theological outlook comes from the charismatic, evangelical, and protestant/Pentecostal culture in which I was raised. Largely, these outlooks were influenced by my parents' position within the aforementioned AG culture. While my mother had served as a secretary for a number of prominent evangelicals in the AG while they were professors in residency at the local Christian college, the majority of this parental influence came from my father. My father regularly attended events and sermons from televangelist pastors such as Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Robert Tilton, Bruce Wilkinson, and John Hagee, to name a few. He was also a member of Promise Keepers, an evangelical organization for men that was founded by Wilkinson.

The reason for the influence on my family came as no surprise—while many of the aforementioned pastors operate non-denominational ministries, their base-theologies and social/organizational priorities closely align with that of the AG and similar Pentecostal movements (Jorstad, 1993). This influence on my upbringing was palpable and ever-present. I would routinely hear my father repeat and praise sermonic discourse

he had heard from these pastors. He would end his days of long-working hours by watching sermons and programs featuring these pastors, and would regularly send money to these ministries.

Perhaps most memorably, my siblings and I were routinely brought along to events in which these pastors would be present. In fact, I distinctly remember having Benny Hinn, an internationally known televangelist, place his hands on me and pray for healing for an issue I had with my teeth at the time. Over time, I noticed distinct shifts in my own church to rhetorical action and discourse that is remarkably similar to those pastors, which even further influenced my family. In turn, books and ministry tools from televangelist pastors became frequently used to guide sermon series; music and media used by these ministries became increasingly more common; and there was always encouragement to attend local events at which these pastors were present.

As for myself, while my Christian faith never significantly wavered, my desire for knowledge led me to question specific teachings and rhetorical messages from many of these pastors, a desire that has not been stifled. Further, my questioning still persists— with what authority do these pastors deem themselves credible to speak at this level? What appeal (or lack thereof) do they present to Christian ministries as a whole? And to what extent is the rhetorical agency of parish pastors influenced by these ministries? Taken together, critical examination of religious rhetoric, the industry of televangelism, and the influence on pastor's agency and motivation becomes appropriate for review and analysis.

In order to examine rhetorical agency through a specific context, I have chosen American Evangelical Christianity. Since Burke (1970) argues that religion is the starting

point by which all forms and functions of human motivation have emerged, it is appropriate to examine the religion that has held the most influence in American life: Christianity. Regarding evangelicalism, its rise in popularity and influence throughout the golden-age of televangelism has led to both sustained relevance and the need for healthy criticism of its functions and practices (Howley, 2001). Further, as previously described by Pietkiewicz et al. (2016), religious belief systems are vital in shaping the mental states, behaviors, and practices of individuals and societies alike. They argue that within societies and communities with religious beliefs deeply ingrained into societal law and function, it can be increasingly difficult to determine the source of a religious-based ideology. Essentially, an individual's capacity to understand the source of religious narrative and belief becomes perplexed between what the religious doctrine and texts dictate, and what beliefs commonly held and dictated by persons in the community or culture at large (Pietkiewicz et al., 2016). As Dewey (1934b) describes it, juxtaposing the source text with communal belief presents a distinction between religious rhetoric and the rhetoric of religion. Both are inherently guided by religious principles and communication about religion. However, the ways in which they differentiate in ideology, practice, and influence on rhetorical agency show just how powerful and pervasive the Christian religion remains in guiding American consciousness and argumentation.

Religious Rhetoric

Beyond any specific Christian application of rhetoric, sermonic rhetorical expression is dominant within many religious contexts. Religious rhetoric, according to Burke (1970), naturally stems from innate predispositions of persuasion, with religious

dogmas routinely understood to be amongst the most prevalent persuasive mediums. He

sates: "The subject of religion falls under the head of rhetoric in the sense that rhetoric is

the art of persuasion, and religious cosmogonies are designed… as exceptionally

thoroughgoing modes of persuasion" (p. xx). Religious rhetoric seeks to persuade

humans toward accepting and practicing various acts and attitudes deemed acceptable by

a specific religion. And, while rhetoric applied to religious contexts embodies and uses

the traditionally accepted rhetorical proofs, it shows significant deviations.

Crick (2012), for example, notes that religious rhetoric embodies a larger sense of

metaphysicality than traditional Aristotelian applications. Essentially, while pathos and

ethos both function in much the same manner as they would in other rhetorical messages

(Aristotle, trans. 2004), Crick argues that the dichotomy of faith and logic creates a

relationship of these two conflicting ideals (one metaphysical and the other grounded in

observable fact) that is unique to religious institutions, especially Christianity (2012).

Further, Crick suggests that this faith/logic relationship, characterized by phenomenon

related to specific revelatory signs, should be understood as "divine Logos, a set of other-

worldly guiding principles that stand above and apart from merely phenomenal

existence" which stems from interpretation of the divinely anointed Word (p. 37). Crick's

work extends previous focus on divine Logos from Burke (1970) who, by highlighting

the unique interplay between theology (words about God) and logology (words about

words), specifically focused around the Christian use of *The Word*. When presented in

lowercase form, *words* are simply symbols that correspond to physical items or traits that

can be observed naturally. Alternatively, *The Word,* presented in caps, has both empirical

reference while simultaneously becoming analogous for anything occurring in the supernatural realm (Burke, 1970):

> For whereas the words for the "supernatural" realm are necessarily borrowed from the realm of our everyday experiences, out of which our familiarity with language arises, once a terminology has been developed for special theological purposes the order can become reversed. We can borrow back the terms from the borrower, again secularizing to varying degrees the originally secular terms that had been given "supernatural conditions" (p. 7).

Essentially, what Burke is arguing is that words associated with supernatural forces can take on divine authority, and are therefore seen by the religious as infallible. In the case of *The Word*, Christian tradition does not see it as simply a collection of words— it is instead the inspired, infallible, and divinely appointed word of God himself. In the Bible, *The Word* is first used in the opening verses of the gospel of John, which state:

> (1)In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2)He was in the beginning with God. (3)All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:1-3, ESV).

Here, *The Word* is no longer a simple tool used in rhetorical discourse, and thus, the divine Logos can be understood as knowledge and wisdom from God as a direct and divine source. As such, religious rhetoric doesn't call for a designated need for logos in the traditional sense; *The Word* is the ultimate authority and logic required in a religious-based persuasive argument.

The use of divine Logos is especially prevalent, and arguably notorious, in Evangelical Christianity, with Brummett (1984) stating that "evangelical rhetoric seems

to predispose one to insistence upon an objectively obvious doctrine, a stand on a secure foundation that puts one at odds with a surrounding, hostile world" (p. 22). Here, the power of the divine Logos is not simply the ultimate authority; it is seen as obvious to both insiders and outsiders alike, with opposing arguments completely without possible footing. Additionally, the power and security of religiously driven rhetoric largely hinges on the principle of revelation, which Stob (2016) explains functions rhetorically as "the messages, appeals, and symbols that connect people to claims of a divine reality disclosed through spectacular means" (p. 47).

Historically, the revelation of God's message has dominated the narrative discourse of many religions (de Mesa, 2011; Fikri Nordin, 2011; Stob, 2016). Examples range from Abraham's promise of lineage and the disciple John's writing of the book of Revelation in the Christian Bible, to the Prophet Mohammad's appointment by Allah (and subsequent writing of the Quran), to the even more recent examples of Mary Baker Eddy's post-illness revelation of Christian Science, as well as Joseph Smith's Mormon theology which relies heavily upon the theme of revelation. Regarding the divine Logos, Burke furthers the relationship of symbol use in religious rhetoric, stating that "God, by definition, transcends all symbol systems" (1970, p. 15). Faith, therefore, replaces traditional logos in many respects, with God himself being the only proof an individual might need to substantiate a given claim. From this, a clearer application of Lundberg and Gunn's (2005) research can be understood through highlighting the relationship between religion and rhetorical agency.

As previously discussed, debate surrounding rhetorical agency often increases in contention when the source of an individual's agency is difficult to determine. In

addressing this contention, Lundberg and Gunn discuss Heidegger's (1969) philosophical stance regarding ontotheology, or the attention paid to the being and existence of God. Using ontotheology as the basis for their analysis of rhetorical agency, and the Ouija board as the metaphor that illustrates it, Lundberg and Gunn pose the question of who or what can claim responsibility in the process of exercising rhetorical agency (2005). In offering a route towards explanation, they argue that "separating the fact of agency from the value of responsibility and choice is fundamentally immoral." (p. 94). In essence, while a divine Logos may exist and benevolently guide beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, an individual's rhetorical agency must be understood as linked with personal choice. In the Christian context, the question as to the source of a religious rhetorical message remains incompletely answered. Can God and personal revelation from the divine Logos truly be the only sources of religious rhetorical agency? For many Christians, divine authority rests solely in God as the divine Logos, and thereby establishes the rhetoric that guides Christian discourse (Medhurst, 2004; Crick, 2012). However, while the divine Logos and the ontotheological nature of God as the source of rhetorical agency is established at the supernatural and metaphysical level, both Dewey (1934b) and Crick (2012) argue that this type of rhetorical agency in pragmatism and practice becomes less clear cut, and finds itself grounded in narrative experience.

In discussing the pragmatic nature of rhetorical agency stemming from divine Logos, Crick (2012) describes a shift away from religious rhetoric towards a rhetoric of religious experience. In essence, discourse regarding personal, educational, and lived experiences leading to an individual's acceptance of religious faith are not solely grounded in acknowledgement of the supernatural force at the heart of the faith. Instead,

an individual must assess the external and historical influences on their paradigm of faith, with the resulting discourse becoming both rooted in shared commonalities and manifested in personal and individual narrative (Crick, 2012). Thus, by shifting discourse towards personal narratives and statements, as influenced by religious texts and historical and external contexts, the rhetorical agency of those with religious affiliation can ultimately be understood as exercised in practice and discourse. At the head of modern American Christianity is this same shift towards a renewed and holistic mindset, based around personal experience, and the stressing of relevancy of those experiences to religious texts. But while specific experiences are personal to a specific speaker, it stands to question from where the interpretation of the meaning of an experience is motivated. And with the prevalence and salience of digital media as the life blood flowing throughout American Christianity, a closer attention paid to those motivations could offer some possible answers.

Televangelism

Use of media channels to distribute religious messages, such as televangelism, can play a vital role in exposing individuals to religious doctrines and shaping the mindsets and beliefs of audience members (Howley, 2001; Schultze, 2003; Ward, 2015). The strategic use of mass-media channels can play, and has played, a vital role establishing and maintaining religious and popular culture (Fore, 2007).

Televangelism as a distinct rhetorical context began in the 1950s, with increased attention to evangelical theology and preaching beginning in the 1960s, and a highpoint being reached in the mid 1980s (Howley, 2001; Fore, 2007). Derived from a political culture already heavily influenced by Christian values, Christian denominations,

particularly evangelical groups (due to both their increased political influence and their increased social relevance), recognized the important role televised media played in shaping American opinions. Thus, the 1960s became a period of both increased funding and attention to Christian televised broadcasts, as well as decreased regulation of television so that Christian messages could be shared freely and without political consequence (Fore, 2007). In the minds of many Christians utilizing these media channels, an entirely new movement was born. As stated by Jorstad (1993):

> it would absorb the centuries-old teachings in theology and ethics of its protestant heritage and blend them together through the power of the new mass media to create a movement of great energy and appeal (p. 22).

And while televised broadcasts of ministries still continue, the shifting landscape of popular mass-media has seen a shift in the use of various media channels by Christian churches. While the term 'televangelism' originated from the distinct use of television as the communication channel (Fore, 2007; Howley, 2001), I use the term as an umbrella term for pastors and ministries employing heavy use of mass-media channels.

In a distinct move beyond televised broadcasts, modern Christian churches have begun to adopt web-based ministry tools such as podcasts, YouTube-accessible sermons, and live-streaming from the sermon site to virtually anywhere with an internet connection (Ward, 2015). In fact, many nationally prominent churches have begun live-streaming sermons from one central campus to satellite campuses in order for each church in a given network to have the same sermonic experience as the next (Hutchings, 2017).

The increased use of mass-media has changed the nature of the Christian church experience. Schultze (2003) and Ward (2015) describe, due to the vast influence of a few

highly-visible and popular Christian ministries, a shift occurring in the use of contemporary music, video-based sermon illustrations, and engagement through social media platforms. Hutchings (2017) even notes that increased digital innovations with mobile technology, as well as the influence of the Oklahoma City-based LifeChurch.tv which created the most widely used Bible application internationally (YouVersion), have led to Christian resources largely moving away from the physical to the digital.

Beyond organizational operation, however, seismic shifts in theological approach and sermonic style have occurred as well. James (2010) notes a growing movement in sermonic discourse away from expository and liturgically styled sermons, and towards a more spirit-led, prophetic, charismatic style. Further, the emphasis of these sermons has shown increasing attention to world-view and social issues, as well as the relevancy and application of Christian doctrines in an increasingly post-Christian America, while taking on a more relaxed, informal tone and appearance as opposed to traditional liturgical expressions (James, 2010; Jorstad, 1993; Schultze, 2003; Ward, 2015). As such, both the style and the hermeneutic driving contemporary evangelical Christianity have evolved into a more socially conscious and relativity-seeking gospel. A shift in the business and organizational models of American Christian churches has established a new push for relevancy of Christianity in the digital age, a culture which Christian churches must adapt to in order to ensure their survival (Frankl, 1986; Schultze, 2003). An increased push for relevancy could prove to be especially influential for local pastors, especially with digital media so readily accessible.

Just as important and influential on local pastors is similar accessibility and salience of digitized theology for parishioners. Bitzer (1967) argues that among the many

constraints that could help or hinder the success of a rhetorical message, one's audience is among the perhaps the most influential. Here, pastors are put in an increasingly important rhetorical situation. While a particular pastor might not pay close attention to the messages being spread throughout the Christian digital landscape, easy access to Christian media could mean that his or her parishioners are influenced by messaged platforms. With the wealth of resources regarding Christian music, books, movies, talk shows, and both audio and visual recordings of sermons, the amount of Christian media one can become exposed to is staggering, to say the least (Hutchinson, 2017; Ward, 2015).

Herein lies a double-edged sword of a rhetorical situation. Hutchinson (2017) notes the increased access and transparency of digital media allows for mass influence of churches and pastors, both socially and theologically, to serve as a means to keep them accountable, relevant, and viable. On the reverse side, this transparency could ultimately hurt Christian ministries caught in scandal that would otherwise have been easily covered up, as with easy access comes the potential for more harsh criticism (clearly demonstrated by John Oliver's (2015) scathing criticism of televangelism). Given the possibility of functional and audience-related constraints, a third research question emerges:

RQ3: What are various constraints that effect the influence of popular/influential rhetoric on a pastor's rhetorical agency?

As a Christian man who was raised in this culture of American Evangelicalism, I feel a strong and dual natured desire for clarity and understanding of unanswered questions. And while the critical scholar within me certainly desires answers which will

hopefully advance existing literature regarding what influences on rhetorical agency and invention, the Christian at the core of me desires something more personal. I have seen both sides of the stage that has been set: I've seen both the earnest belief in *The Word* which leads to effective and zealous proselytization efforts grounded in the love of Christ, and I have seen the vile nature of greed and corporate interest that has alerted many to the inherent hypocrisy of persons operating under claims of supposed immunity because of a Christian affiliation.

In discussing the following chapters— which will outline the methods and procedures of analysis, the analysis of interview data, and discussions surrounding interpretations, limitations, and directions for future research regarding popular influence on rhetorical agency and religious rhetoric—perhaps I just might find my steps guided towards the light of deeper understanding, wisdom, and truth.

Chapter 3: Establishing Methods

"But he who is noble plans noble things, and on noble things he stands." Isaiah 32:8

(ESV)

In order to locate and discuss the influence of popular, influential religious rhetoric on the rhetorical agency of individual pastors, a qualitative research design wherein I interviewed individual pastors is the most effective and appropriate method of analysis. First, however, it is important to understand the nature of the subjects being examined.

Participants

I recruited 8 (n = 8) individuals to be interviewed for my thesis research. Frank is a senior pastor in his early thirties, and leads a non-denominational church plant from within a national network of churches, located in the southern United States. Mark is a long-standing senior pastor in his mid-sixties, and leads a charismatic Pentecostal church in the upper-Midwest. Mark has a terminal degree in theology and divinity. Aaron is a worship pastor in his early-twenties, and Trevor is a youth pastor who is also in his early-to-mid-twenties. Mark, Aaron, and Trevor all work within the same church. Greg is a long-standing pastor of a similar church in the upper-Midwest, yet he has only served in his role as a senior pastor for just over a year. He has experience as a worship and associate pastor and is in his mid-to-late-thirties. David is a senior pastor of a non-denominational church plant in the south-eastern United States. He also holds a master's degree in divinity and is in his early thirties. Robert is a senior pastor in his early forties and leads a Presbyterian congregation in the Southern United States. Finally, Spencer is an associate pastor of a non-denominational church plant in the Southern United States.

He has served in this position, officially, for just under a year. Each of my participants are of either Caucasian/White ethnicity or Mexican ethnicity, and they all operate within Protestant theological denominations of Christianity.

In order to be eligible for participation, three criteria needed to be met: individuals must be 18 years of age or older at the time of the interview (in compliance with IRB protocol), with the desired age being 23+; they must be an ordained and currently-working Christian pastor with up-to-date credentials; and they must be employed at a church with a distinctly local presence. Here, local presence refers to a church not having a significant impact on a national scale as judged by congregation size (500 or less), facilities (single campus), and a focus on serving the local community over individuals nation-wide.

These distinct elements of criteria were chosen for three primary reasons. First, regarding age, individuals who fell below the designated age threshold were unlikely to have finished their schooling and credentialing processes by the time of each interview. Secondly, regarding the credentialed status of pastors, having pastors who have obtained the proper credentials increases the credibility and ethos of each participant and is representative of a distinctly attuned understanding of homiletics and biblical text. Finally, as the nature of this study seeks to understand the rhetorical agency and invention practices of local pastors, the emphasis on a distinctly local church was highlighted. If a pastor of a church was deemed to have more significant impact on a national scale, their status was considered to be inappropriate for involvement in this study because of the extent of their influence on other pastors.

Within the confines of my region of study, finding individuals with a variety of denominational backgrounds was important to avoid the potential homogeneity of answers, yet allowing for enough similarity to examine common sources of national influence. In regard to homogeneity of belief, various regions of the United States were more preferable than a particular denomination (or group of denominations). Larger metropolitan areas, for example, are more likely to feature Assemblies of God, Lutheran, and non-denominational/evangelical-free churches, while the area colloquially termed as the "Bible belt" features Baptist, Southern Baptist, Presbyterian, and traditional Pentecostal denominations more heavily. As such, the regions of participant recruitment did encompass pastors and churches from both the northern and southern United States, as well as pastors operating both within and outside of the "Bible belt".

Procedure

Since the goal of this study is to understand how the influence of popular and highly-visible individuals on rhetorical agency, motivation, and invention practices, I approached my research using a qualitative design. Further, this study is inherently emic in its approach. Emic research, as described by Ferraro (2006), is research that examines the insider's view, examining the research topic from the perspectives and voices of the subjects being studied. By contrast, etic research examines the data from the outside, focusing primarily on the perspective and voice of the researcher (Ferraro, 2006). An emic approach is appropriate for my study, as I seek to understand the influences of highly-visible and popular rhetors on individual rhetorical agency and the motivations behind their sermonic discourse, respectively, by drawing conclusions from their voices and perspectives responses. This is enhanced by the use of qualitative methodology in the

data gathering and analysis processes. Additionally, as I am working from outside of existing theoretical framework to lay the base for future research, I am using grounded theory approach, and am employing the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method involves the dual-natured approach to analysis with which both current phenomenological structures are taken into account, as well as the historical contexts that precede them. As both present circumstances and historical context have both been established as key elements in understanding rhetorical agency, this analytical method is appropriate for my thesis.

Preliminary contact with individuals who met the criteria for this study in order to effectively obtain participants, with a number of individuals agreeing to serve as participants or recommending possible participants for consideration. Participants who were initially considered were found through convenience sampling, using my own personal and professional social networks (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, Creswell, 2007). Further, I used the snowball method of recruitment to gather further participants who fit my research criteria. Contact information for these participants was provided by my initial interviewees who emerged through convenience sampling. Additionally, I allowed for word-of-mouth recruitment, although this did not produce any willing participants.

Once initial contact was made with each respective participant, I conducted face-to-face, one-on-one, semistructured interviews with each participant. Questions posed to participants regarded the attention they pay to highly-influential ministries, their perception of the influence and control popular ministries have over their own, and the ways that audience expectations factor into the praxis of their rhetorical agency (see Appendix 1). Given that the questions were open-ended in nature, respondents

maintained the autonomy to provide as detailed and thick of description as they see fit (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I took on a personable and conversational tone with the interviewees, allowing their thoughts and responses to flow freely while allowing me to ask new questions as they related to both the study and the topics of discussion. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to one hour in length.

Following each interview, for sake of convenience and due to the number of interviews planned, transcription services were utilized. Additionally, I proof-read each transcription to ensure that the full scope of their responses was recorded accurately. In order to ensure confidentiality for my participants, no names were requested or voluntarily given during the interview process. If they, at any point, stated their name during their respective interviews, their names have been purposefully omitted from the transcriptions. Pseudonyms have been accordingly assigned to each participant.

Next, in order to more accurately determine and define themes and categories that emerged within the interview data, I used inductive reasoning in line with Smith's (1995) five-step qualitative analysis guideline. First, I read through each transcript twice, in order to become more familiar with the data. During my second reading, I engaged in first-level coding (open coding) by summarizing interview responses that related to the research questions of the study and writing these summaries (first-level codes) in the margins of the pages. Following this step, first-level codes of similar typology (based around interview exemplars) were grouped together to form relevant themes (second-level codes), again based on the research questions of the study. After referencing these themes against my own transcripts and earlier open-coding, I was able to determine that

my analysis adequately answered my research questions, based on the information provided through my interviews.

Throughout the processes of conducting interviews and analysis through coding, my personal biases were in need of constant consideration and maintenance. Due to my extensive experience with evangelical Christianity (positive and negative) and my identity as a man of Christian faith, the likelihood of positive bias towards local pastors with which I may identify was understood, even going as far back as the initial developmental stages of this study. Thus, for myself and the reader, it is important to accept that while it can be easy to uphold pastors to elevated status based entirely on positional labels, it is important to remember that they are individuals acting upon beliefs and values, operating within social hierarchies, and yearning to not repeat the mistakes made by those who preceded them. What follows will be both a deeper understanding as to what motivates and influences the sermonic discourse of pastors, as well as an introspective look into the lives, desires, and communication practices of honest and earnest individuals.

Chapter 4: Weighing What Remains

"Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophesies, but test everything;

hold fast what is good." 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 (ESV)

In addressing each participant, as the sole researcher, I took extra care as to not let my own biases affect the flow of conversation. As each participant is an expert in their own right within the Christian culture at large, my experience with this culture—no matter how extensive and ongoing—pales in comparison to the years of schooling, technical training, on-site experience, and countless hours of thought and preparation that make up several life times between all interviewees. Therefore, my own self-reflexivity manifested itself through a level of relinquished control over each interview. Essentially, I allowed the voices and responses of my participants to be dominant over my own, barring conversation moving into unrelated and unnecessary territory. Further, although specific questions were utilized to uncover more targeted answers, I allowed for casual conversation and rapport to build with the respective pastors that I interviewed. In this way, the influences on, and manifestations of, each pastor's rhetorical agency were uncovered through responses that were both expected and surprisingly refreshing.

Ultimately, an extensive process of analysis and coding of both interview audio-data, interview transcripts, and observational notes reveals three key themes corresponding to each research question: *identity*, *adaptation*, and *audience sensitivity*.

Identity

In approaching the influence on rhetorical agency and invention, the singular theme that emerged from each participant was that of identification. With a library of resources available to every local pastor, a focus on identity allowed pastors to speak on

who or what truly influences their lives as pastors. In this way, identity served as a filter through which resources, such as televangelism, can be analyzed and allowed to influence rhetorical agency. Through their responses, the theme of identity can be broken down into the following categories: *diverted attention*, *relationships*, *personal experience,* and *strategic need*.

Diverted attention.

First, the idea of a purposeful and intentional diversion of attention, both away from and to various ministries, emerged as a strong indicator of influence on rhetorical agency. Essentially, each pastor demonstrated a strategic rhetorical distancing from certain pastors/ministries, regardless of a presupposition of material success, prominence, or influence on a national scale. Here, the pragmatism acknowledged by successful churches—those churches who boast large numbers of congregants and vast financial/mediated resources—had a significantly lesser, almost adverse effect on the rhetorical agency of local pastors. In fact, while certain individuals of high prominence were mentioned, each was approached with careful discourse and a palpable sense of caution. When asked about the influence of certain prominent pastors, such as Joel Osteen or Kenneth Copeland, Greg was quick to note both the success and visibility of such pastors while simultaneously showing a lack of focus as to the conduct of their ministries. He stated: "there are some people that I won't listen to. Yeah, you brought up Osteen. I don't listen to him. That's not my thing. Yet, I don't tear him down."

A trend of diverted focus, mixed with an intentionally neutral stance when judging and criticizing came up many times in conversations with pastors, all of whom promoted the growth of the church as an international entity through neutral-positive

communication. In other words, while negative-criticism may not be present in conversations about various pastors with a large national focus, neither was outright praise. While I anticipated a sense of epideictic rhetoric geared towards televangelist pastors (either through praise or blame) to be either explicit or underlined in the conversations, at no point did any pastor demonstrate either. Trevor went so far as to state, unprompted, that he is careful not to drink the "haterade" – a colloquial term he used to describe a herd effect of shared focus on blame. As such, diverted attention away from such ministries shows intentional and rhetorical disidentification from the individuals at the head of such ministries.

This was far truer when concerning highly televised ministries, especially those associated in any way with the Prosperity Gospel. Greg, Mark, Frank, and Robert, all pastors above the age of thirty-five, explicitly stated that they avoid exposure and attention paid to televangelist-heavy ministries such as those of Osteen, Copeland, or Meyer, to name a few. For Frank and Robert, their diverted attention away from such ministries was influenced more by theological and denominational differences. Greg and Mark, however, focused on concern for their own church operation when deciding where attention and focus should be aimed. Regarding Osteen and Meyer, Mark stated that, "I'm not influenced by them because to me it's totally different… it's a totally different gig." Even David, who is in his early thirties, took care to distinguish perceived success of any ministry from individual pastoral and/or church goals. Regarding nationally influential ministries, he noted that:

> Regarding people like Joel Osteen, pragmatism rules the day. So, if it's
> successful, it's got to be right. But the moment that we as believers become

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pragmatic, where we say 'if it's successful, God must be blessing it"… When we equate those two… we become vacuums where truth is sucked out.

Interestingly, the aspects of conversations about national influence on one's rhetorical agency did not dwell heavily upon the mantle of televangelism. While, as previously discussed, the visible success of televangelist ministries was an elephant-in-the-room which could not be ignored for many pastors interviewed, the quick diversion away from such ministries showed a clear proclivity to identify elsewhere. Within each interview, I was careful to ask questions about such pastors, and was met with quick responses and even quicker diversion to different, yet related topics of conversation. As such, while specific responses did not present enough information to demonstrate a clear line of positive influence coming from televangelism, a strategic focus on other ministries clearly indicated how each pastor was careful in choosing their line of influence.

Here, both Trevor and Mark indicated a desire to move away from the controversy that has surrounded many televangelist pastors. Trevor specifically noted how the institution responsible for his pastoral training was an open supporter of Joel Osteen, and how he has since moved away from Osteen's influence, stating that "he was someone who was kind of supported by the Dream Center. And yet you know he was under fire a lot, cause he kind of watered down the gospel and preached prosperity gospel." Trevor acknowledges observable shortcomings and criticisms of Joel Osteen, who has been accused of presenting only the most comfortable and acceptable elements of Christian doctrine. Once this was stated, however, the diversion away from such ministries reared itself again, as it had in every interview that both preceded and followed Trevor's. Serving as a subtle and unique form of enthymeme, the strategic diversion

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evident within the discourse surrounding prominent televangelists serves to categorize televangelists as distinctly different identities from that of the local pastors. In essence, they are stating that since they do not identify with one pastor, since said pastor's ministry has a particular focus, we do not identify with any similar pastor with the same focus. Therefore, the focus shifts away from prominent televangelists as the source of positive identification and influence of local pastors, with the true source located elsewhere. In seeking an uncover this, additional categories within the theme of identification emerged.

Relationships.

With attention purposefully diverted away from televangelists, in particular those who are deemed controversial by the pastors interviewed, the relationships that each pastor had either personally forged or had perceived to be created with particular minsters showed the most visible form of identity formation and influence on rhetorical agency. Each and every pastor that I interviewed described a higher likelihood to be influenced by pastors with whom they identify on a deeper, more personal level. Frank began describing this influence on his pastoral identity by outlining the way that he approaches selective exposure of other ministers. He describes that:

> Even good, highly respected men who believe what I believe… I have to be very careful because what is being said is often being presented through just an audio clip or a video clip, instead of me being there and living it.

Much of this careful nature, for Frank, stemmed from a need to focus on the core-message rather than the person speaking on that topic. However, he continued his explanation by stating that:

When I say that I listen to more guys who are inside our network, it's not that I've

elevated them higher but most of them… I've met many of their leaders… I've

seen the effects of what they are doing and how they are doing it, and the

salvation of the people… I take the whole picture…

This concept of identification beyond surface level attributes of a nationally-

prominent pastor and/or their ministry was repeated throughout each subsequent

conversation.

For Mark, his direct line of influence comes from the scholars that he has worked

with, and with whom he has a deeper understanding of their lived-ministry. Mark even

went so far as to describe the scholars in his circle of influence as "real Christians" while

approaching televangelists with statements such as "first of all, I don't know if they're

even real Christians. Who are these televangelists? I don't know them from Adam." Here,

Mark understands the messages that televangelists are preaching as distinctly Christian in

presentation and image, while also explaining that he cannot vouch for the true fruit of

their efforts. Spencer also touched on this need to see how other pastor's ministries are

enacted in their lives beyond the pulpit, especially considering the fallibility of mortals.

Demonstrating a clear level of caution in his approach to letting his agency be influenced

externally, he states:

I would say that in the beginning when I first started, it grieves me a little bit at,

um, at the rates that some pastors either got burnt out or give into, you know, uh,

unhealthy relationships… Seeing those numbers was a little bit concerning

because I would've thought, like… what would happen to me?

Spencer, as a newer pastor at the associate level, shows both the need for identification based on lived ministry, while showing a level of healthy skepticism regarding who to be influenced by, and the amount of influence one should let have an effect on their agency.

For Aaron, Trevor, Greg, David, and Robert, the external influence comes from those whom they have met through their schooling, or through interactions and meetings at organizational gatherings and/or conferences. Each pastor gave specific and unique responses as to their individual influences, citing a closer relationship and deeper understanding as the primary reason for their identification. Ultimately, the most poignant response on the relationships forged with sources of influence came from Robert, who succinctly summarized this notion. Referencing pastors and authors of books lining his office shelves, he stated:

> One of the reasons that I like someone like Tim Keller, and many of the people
> that you see up here is that I've had opportunity to sit down with and have a
> relationship with most of them. It is incredible, and that changes things for me.

Thus, overwhelmingly, the sources of influence described in conversation by each pastor reflect individuals with whom participants have a closer relationship and deeper sense of identification.

Personal experience.

In addition to deeper, individual relationships with external sources of influence, the respective experience levels of each pastor interviewed indicated either higher or lesser proclivities to allow for effect on their own rhetorical agencies. David, Greg, Frank, Robert, and Mark represented the higher end of the spectrum in terms of age, with

Mark—in his sixties—being the oldest pastor interviewed. Additionally, David, Greg, Robert, and Mark also represented pastors with individual careers spanning a decade or longer—again with Mark at the highest end of the spectrum at nearly thirty-five years as a pastor. Greg was more unique, having served as an associate pastor and a worship pastor simultaneously for a number of years before stepping into a senior pastor position barely a year before the time of his interview. David, Robert, and Mark also achieved terminal degrees in theology or divinity-related studies. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Aaron, Trevor, Spencer, and Frank had each only been an on-staff pastor for five years or less at the time of being interviewed, with Trevor and Spencer serving as on-staff pastors for less than a year each. Interestingly, the responses from each pastor seemed to show a relationship between personal experience and security of identity. Mark and Robert, who were the most experienced pastors interviewed, showed a lower inclination towards intentionally seeking out external influence from other pastors.

In each case, their personal experiences seem to have given them security to function in accordance with their own abilities, understandings, and goals. David's responses followed closely in suit with Mark and Robert's, and he spent a significant portion of conversation describing aspects and outcomes of his formal schooling in homiletics, which is the study of preaching and sermon writing. He highlighted:

> There's really two main avenues of thought, which are deductive preaching and inductive preaching. So, if you would take a sermon course or you take a homiletics course, which is the study of preaching… at a local university or Bible college, they're going to give you deductive and inductive. And historically, most churches and pastors have preached deductive preaching…

As David continued to elaborate on the more scholarly and practical approaches to sermonic discourse, he demonstrated a clear security in his own understanding and approach to the theology he presents on a weekly basis. As such, his security in his own identity as a pastor and homiletic individual was more dominant in conversation than any need for seeking external influence to aid in achieving his own preaching goals.

Frank represented the opposite end of the spectrum, describing the model of his network as one that any newly appointed pastor can utilize within their church. He outlines that pastors are allowed to work within the confines of the model as they personally are able to do so, stating:

> Obviously, we want to be replicating internally, so… there are numbers of times that I don't follow the specific model, but it's always within the bounds of 'is what I'm saying biblically based?' and 'is there scripture to back me up?'

In this way, Frank demonstrates how the security of one's identity allows them to innovate with the confines of both what is expected of them and what has been done before. If one pastor has both the freedom to innovate and the ability to do so, then they are more likely to be secure in their identity as a pastor and not rely on significant amounts of external influence.

Aaron, Spencer, and Trevor, however, showed an interesting dichotomy in their high levels of freedom and their low levels of experience as an on-staff pastor. For these three pastors in particular, a degree of freedom has been afforded to each that must be reconciled with a lesser understanding of how to manifest their agency as pastors. This was especially true when compared to their more experienced counterparts. As such, they demonstrated less security and more openness to identify with, and be influenced by,

more nationally successful pastors. Aaron outlined how he and two of his other co-pastors with similar levels of experience to his, including Trevor, have talked about "where we want to be in the future and how we'd like to see the church grow and everything. And we talk about other people's positions in other churches…" Trevor extended this same notion, and when talking about Pastor Mark, who is the senior pastor of their church, stated "he will pour into us… he will, you know, teach us. But you know I feel like on any given Wednesday night I can prepare a message in the way that I feel God is speaking it." While both Trevor and Aaron gave similar responses, they were also the two pastors who brought more nationally prominent ministries into the conversation. Here, the dichotomy manifests itself in both how they describe the control they have been given over their ministry roles, as well as a need to seek external influence for purposes of rhetorical effectiveness.

Strategic need.

Finally, for a number of pastors interviewed, the vulnerability and openness of the need for external influence demonstrated a clear effect of the rhetorical agency of local pastors. From both the personal and the organizational aspects of a pastoral position, the openness to influence was largely based around the individual and strategic needs of each pastor. Pastorally, the idea of theological cohesiveness was present. Mark showed a higher proclivity for seeking the influence and insight of biblical scholars, rather than specific pastors. As an academic himself, who holds a terminal degree in Christian apologetics and Greek, his tight circle of influence is comprised of individuals who will help him better understand the deeper, more theologically challenging aspects of pastoral leadership and biblical application. For Trevor, Aaron, David, and Greg, strategic

openness of influence came from a need to create a cohesiveness and relevancy within their messages. Trevor talked openly about his position as a youth pastor, and his need to remain topical, relevant, engaging, and coherent for his students. He explained:

> I think a lot of that sometimes you hear a pastor or someone else read a certain message and think, like, 'well that's really good.' And I'll almost just try to teach that same thing to students. So yeah, I think not only how they do it, what they're teaching… I think, you know, you can find yourself really just trying to use and teach. And I think that can be good. I don't think it's always unhealthy. I think you just got to be careful and really you can't be unhealthy.

Here, Trevor was allowing another pastor's take on the core-message to influence his interpretation and delivery of various biblical teachings. Shifting from the existence of external rhetoric to the individual manifestations of rhetorical agency, Trevor acknowledges the inherent positives in allowing nationally prominent pastors and ministries to have a degree of influence. He then demonstrates this effect on his rhetorical agency by describing his subsequent evaluations and actions.

David was another pastor that spoke highly of his allowance for theological influence from other pastors, although more so in hindsight. As the pastor of a recent church-plant—a new and independently functioning church which has been recently established—his vulnerability to be influenced on a personal, theological level was evident through our conversation (Ruhl, 2006). Early on in his interview, David stated that:

> The moment that we become myopic in vision, and the moment that we become silos of ministry, then always disaster takes place. Really, because the lack of

exposure to what God is doing on both the local and the national levels forces us by nature to move towards extremes.

Following this statement, David continued describing the need for pastors to be well-rounded in how they approach ministry, or risk alienating current and future members of their congregations. Regardless of David's previous experience within two separate and well-established churches, a circle of influence allows him to gain insight into various theological approaches to biblical scripture, even when the biblical text does not change in any way. This sentiment was echoed by a number of pastors for the purposes of increasing their own personal growth as ministers.

Aaron, who provided insight into the strategic need for influence from the perspective of a worship pastor, talked openly about his need to be sensitive to what is happening in the Christian culture from a national level. Using the phrase "finger on the pulse" multiple times during our conversation, he described his role as that of a liaison for congregants as to what is going on in the Christian culture at-large. As such, his external influences must be strategically chosen to provide the most beneficial outcome for him as a pastor, and his church as a whole. He stated:

In terms of worship, my wife and I are the only ones who have a finger on the pulse as to what's happening outside of this church. So, I feel as though my position is 'you pay attention to what the culture is doing, and you bring it to us in a palpable sort of way.' And so, I really feel like I'm, like, the leader of that camp.

Because of the degree of freedom and creative control afforded to Aaron, his strategic need and openness for influence demonstrates a willingness to be both selective

to external influence while open to his identity being formed by those sources of influence he does choose.

This same notion of freedom and control leading to carefully selected influence was evident in nearly all participants' responses. Frank, who is a pastor of a non-denominational church-plant within a larger network of churches, described how his position and degree of freedom as a lead pastor increases his need to seek influence and create cohesive structures for his church. He demonstrated a clear understanding that the pastors within his network who have experienced the same challenges that he currently faces can provide insight and healthy influence in order for his ministry to prove fruitful. Beyond theology and approach to scripture, each pastor discussed allowing for influence to affect the overall function of the church or the department that they oversee. Aaron discussed paying close attention to the more finite details of nationally successful church's worship ministries; anything from the font used in the song-lyric slides, the instrumental effects used by the musicians, the format of the worship set, and the various services used by worship musicians all can be examined for their effectiveness and can demonstrate the potential success of pastors around the country.

Greg described utilizing leadership models from nationally successful pastors such as Craig Groeschel, Chris Hodges, and Bill Hybels to influence the more business-related aspects of his church. He described that he makes strategic attempts to be influenced at both the pastoral and leadership levels, stating:

I try to find people that, I guess… I would say the guys who, I believe, who I really focus in on right now tend to be church leaders. Especially in my role now

as a pastor of a church. So, allowing them to speak to me both in leadership and in

kind of a personal discipleship level.

In addition to Greg's sentiments, Spencer also described the need for influence to

shape his pastoral identity and agency as determined by his specific needs at a given time.

In particular, he discussed the need for sound theological understanding through mutual

agreement from other pastors. As a newer pastor in the associate position, he described

that "our lead pastor here does encourage, like 'hey, listen to the teachings of others, and

be attentive… be assured that, when I'm not teaching, I'm asking questions later or

unpacking it.'"

Overwhelmingly, each pastor described at least some degree of openness in

allowing for external influence, citing multiple reasons based around each individual

pastor and their respective churches. This, however, is rhetorically juxtaposed with

purposeful self-reflexivity in their own manifested agency. In other words, the openness

with which each pastor described their needs of influence was always accompanied by an

honest reflection of their own abilities, circumstances, congregants, and their connection

to the biblical source material. Rhetorical agency, therefore, found both external

influence from the nationally prominent level yet focused itself within the intrapersonal,

interpersonal, and local circles of manifested and targeted communication. This grain-of-

salt restraint on external influence, especially from nationally prominent sources, can be

explored further.

Adaptation

In manifesting rhetorical agency in practical application through pastoral ministry,

each participant discussed the process by which they form and create sermons within the

Christian culture at large. While acknowledging those individual sources of national level influence which they more highly identify with, the unmistakable successes of televangelists (and pastors with similar influence not under the umbrella of televangelism), as well as the ease to which these resources can be accessed were both quite present in each conversation. Additionally, the long-standing history of Christian ministry and apologetics was also understood to be an influence on how sermons are created, delivered, and evaluated. David summed this up succinctly, stating that "communication is communication. There is nothing new under the sun, Ecclesiastes tells us." Through this understanding, a great sense of care was revealed by each pastor when deciding when and how to allow permeability in regard to external influence. In a broad sense, the most discussed response to questions that sought to understand the influence of nationally successful ministries on the rhetorical agency and sermonic discourse of local pastors was that of *adaptation*.

One after another, the pastors which I interviewed emphasized the need for adaptation over adoption as the primary manifestation of external influence on rhetorical agency. As such, the mediated resources which exist outside of a church were carefully evaluated by each pastor. Following this evaluation, the potential for adaptation within specific rhetorical situations showed a distinct influence on rhetorical agency and the process by which it manifested itself in sermonic discourse. The theme of adaptation can therefore be broken down into the following categories: *core confines*, *available resources*, and *desired goals*.

Core confines.

First, the religious aspect of this approach to rhetorical agency yields a sharp contrast to more open-systems that can be rhetorically influenced by society and culture. In other words, because the participants are pastors of Christian churches, their rhetoric must always be tethered to biblical texts. Unpacking the rhetorical juxtaposition of antecedental influence from nationally prominent pastors with an honest reflection of one's own agency and ability revealed a caution to be influenced—not just because of who the influencer is, but because their words must be weighed against the source text.

Frank discussed the process by which he creates sermons, taking an expository approach to unpacking and teaching scripture that is careful to not let potentially hazardous interpretation into his discourse. He outlined his approach to teaching and agency by showing more attention to structural influences that can be applied to the Bible. In describing his ministerial approach, he stated that "we make sure we stay inside the boundaries of the text and not stretch things or say things that aren't there. So, I guess it's not imitating delivery styles, more imitating a structure of an outline."

Robert exercised similar care to operate within the boundaries of biblical structure above all other rhetorical approaches and strategies yet taking a distinctly larger-picture viewpoint. For Robert, it wasn't simply being tethered to the specific texts and passages, but to the larger themes and beliefs of the church as a corporate body. When describing this focus, he took a more philosophical approach, noting that "God's love doesn't ebb and flow with my faithfulness. God's love is his faithfulness."

Trevor revealed this same notion in a similar manner, reflecting on lessons which had been instilled in him during his years of schooling. He stated that "the method isn't

sacred, but the message is sacred. So, you can change your method; your method can be whatever. But, you know, the way you do church isn't sacred, but the message is sacred." Specific attention to the sacred nature of the source text directly extends the identification with other pastors and/or their ministries by accepting the dichotomy between the enacted ministry and the text—the Bible—from which it is sourced. Rhetorical choices to accept and adapt to what is being done by nationally-influential and prominent ministries, therefore, must be conducted through self-reflexivity, skeptical evaluation, and a fervent understanding of the tenets of the source material.

Similarly, a deep sense of divine revelation and guidance was revealed through each participants description of their sermonic processes. Unanimously, the process of sermon creation and the reflection on rhetorical choices started with prayer, with participants describing their following actions as having agency only when and if they felt that God was leading them in that direction. As stated by Trevor, "I mean, I really try to always just start with prayer and say 'God, what are you trying to speak to these students?' And I start with the Word." Similar phrases were used intermittently by other pastors as well through the posing of rhetorical questions to one's self, with Greg asking "how does God want me to deliver this message?" and Frank asking "what is God trying to show me in these passages?" Essentially, for these pastors, the Word is not simply the biblical texts as they are written, but also the divine Logos and truth that comes from God's guidance. By extension, this includes the Bible, which was also unanimously agreed on by all interviewees to be God-breathed and a source of divine truth. Thus, a sense of personal responsibility and God-given control certainly manifests itself as an influence on each pastor's rhetorical agency.

Available resources.

Next, the availability of resources is a significant factor in the influence on rhetorical agency. Rather than sermonic discourse as it relates to preaching, this pattern of responses links more to the overall conduct of church ministry. Here, the focus on the local nature of these churches revealed, unsurprisingly, diminished resources (people, facilities, and financial resources) when compared to the churches with national prominence and influence. Therefore, the manifestation of individual rhetorical agency finds itself at a crossroads between what has been seen to be pragmatically successful and what is possible to be accomplished given the resources available.

This dichotomy dominated a large portion of discourse. David, in particular, described the proclivity towards resource-focus to be an often unhealthy and unbiblical use of a church's and pastor's time. He stated, "when I ask people how their church is doing, the top three answers I normally get every time are building, so it's a facilities issue, it's a finance issue, or it's an attendance issue." He contended that because of antecedent ministries that focused heavily on those characteristics, such as the televangelist ministries of the '60s' through the '80s', modern church leaders are expected to concern themselves with these same characteristics. Ultimately, the antecedents of televangelist ministries (and the resources they demonstrate possession of) certainly showed itself to be an unavoidable factor when exercising self-reflexivity regarding each pastor's congregation, resources, and surrounding communities.

Greg openly described the cautious approach to viewing antecedent televangelist ministries and the resources they possess. More specifically, he addressed their effect on

the mindsets of church leaders when addressing potential resources or behaviors to implement in a local church. He stated:

> I think there's two major temptations. One is 'well that's working for them, I need to do that somehow.' The second temptation is 'we're terrible. We can never do that. You know we can't measure up. We don't have the facilities, we don't have the budget, we don't have… insert blank.' The context I think plays a huge part in that.

The end of this statement reflects the thought which is the cornerstone of adaptation of external influence—context is key when seeking to implement possible actions or resources, especially when they are emphasized at the national level. Specifically, these pastors recognize that the successful actions of highly influential church ministries do not translate universally to churches whose presence and influence are distinctly local.

Aaron spoke on this from the perspective of a worship pastor, noting the permeability and wide-spread influence of nationally prominent worship pastors and musicians. When comparing his local church of about 500 congregants to churches such as Bethel Church, Hillsong Church, and Elevation Church (which all boast congregations of at least 4000-plus individuals through multiple physical and online campuses), he stated that "there are a lot of things with music that I'd really like to do, but I'm working with volunteers versus a bunch of professional musicians."

Here, Aaron recognizes that his distinctly local church is unlikely to have access to the same resources of a nationally prominent church, and therefore has to exercise caution when taking risks with the resources available. Responses such as this, while

acknowledged by nearly each pastor, were not communicated with disdain or self-deprecation. Rather, each was an honest reflection of one's own strengths and weaknesses in their own ministry. A palpable tone of self-reflexivity and openness regarding the resources available to each pastor gave way to a deeper understanding of the need for *adaptation* rather than blatant *adoption*.

Focusing on adaptation, Robert, Greg, David, Spencer, and Aaron were careful to demonstrate their own self-reflexivity through continuous examination of context. Instead of adapting what seemingly was successful, the need to understand the conditions for success was reflected in our conversations. Spencer, who comes from a church plant that stems from a network of churches, reflected on the geographical differences that contribute to successful strategy implementation. "Every part of the country, almost what it feels like, is different. Everybody has their trends," he stated, describing churches within the network in California, Pennsylvania, and states in the Pacific Northwest. He continued, stating "different areas have different things. And so, I've seen people who've actively been seeking, but also not afraid to take risks of 'hey, this may work, this may not.'" By consciously acknowledging the disconnect between the concepts of pragmatism, success, and context, each pastor demonstrates a significant impact on their rhetorical agency. In this way, the manifested agency of local pastors in locked in conflict of what *should* be done and what feasibly *can* be done.

Desired goals.

Finally, the desired goals of each pastor and their respective ministries was shown to be a significant factor in determining what sources and manifestations of influence should be accounted for. Regardless of the national success and prominence of any single

Christian church and/or its pastor, local church pastors are bound to act within the confines of their own individual goals. This, by default, extends to the overall organization and conduct of their church ministries as well. Each pastor was careful to reflect upon where they felt God was leading their churches. Additionally, a clearer understanding of those goals demonstrated a more purposeful allowance for external influence on rhetorical agency. Greg described how creating a clearer sense of the direction of his church was vital in understanding what to adapt to, when to adapt to it, and how the adaptation should look. He stated:

> We're aspiring to be this, and then the next layer underneath that is your goals and your core values. Here's where we're trying to be, and here's how we're going to get there. And again, in the same conversation is if you don't have these goals written down, you just may not know what your values are.

What Greg describes here indicates that a church which lacks clarity of goals and desires will be less successful in adapting to external influences within the larger Christian culture. His discussion stemmed from an earlier point in the conversation wherein the balance of pragmatism and context were discussed in more detail. For Trevor and Aaron, both of whom are younger pastors working at the same church, that sense of goal-oriented action was very important when reflecting upon what affects their respective rhetorical agencies. As the head of worship ministries, Aaron demonstrated a particularly deep understanding of how his role impacts the tone and culture of his church. He said:

> There are things where it's like 'that is what worship can be. We need to be moving in that direction.' But I'm not just going to take the risk and all of a

sudden go from one Sunday to the other just like boom—now it's all going to look like this. It's like I'm kind of pointing our toes in that direction, and just, like, taking one step at a time.

Here, Aaron pays special attention to the balance of desired goals and available resources, once again demonstrating the need for context in the adaptation of external influences. By better understanding the direction that he desires his ministry to move in, strategic actions can be implemented on a case-by-case basis.

Frank addressed this attention to desired goals yet focused heavily on the more negative aspects of influence, stating:

I always think of what our primary goals as a church are… Instead of doing an event where it feels like… it's a fun event, it's a nice event, but it has very little impact in seeing some believers in Jesus become more mature in their faith. It's just… it was fun, and I want to say that those are the things I want to cut out now. People want to do those things, and I'm not saying they can't. But the focus of our church will not be on those things.

For Frank, the impact of the Bible on the lives of his church members is far more important than creating events which, while enjoyable and beneficial in many ways, may distract individuals from biblical truths. In doing so, he highlights the dual natured aspect of goal-centered influence and action. For his church, he is more focused on what not to implement in the face of his desired goals rather than what influences should be implemented.

Mark described a similar focus, noting how he chose not to spend a significant amount of money on marketing. In describing how this action juxtaposes that of other

churches in his city, he noted that "that's exactly the opposite of what the other group does. They use marketing. They use it. I don't think they are all of that. I think that's what they're supposed to do." In this way, he follows the aforementioned trend away from rhetoric that is explicitly epideictic, choosing instead to focus on the goals of his church over an attention to other churches. In this sense, *epideictic* refers not to strictly public speech, but to any rhetorical manifestation of overt praise or blame. Here, identity returns as an important factor in addressing the desired goals of a ministry, revealing tension between that of current identity and both desired identity and desired goals.

Trevor and Aaron felt tension of identity and resources in viewing the current congregants when juxtaposed with their desired church identity and goals. Being employed in the same church, and both representing the younger individuals in positions of leadership, they shared their struggle openly. Trevor remarked:

We're just kinda comfortable with the small church we have. Even the congregation members, you know, are like 'we know what we want, and if we grew that way we wouldn't know what we want.' I feel like, you know, there can kind of be just a fear of that. I don't know. I really like… I think we should all be hungry for disciples.

Showing a clear attentiveness and sensitivity to the specific contexts which rhetoric manifests, as well as a pastors desired goals for the ministry, he experiences tension in which the current identity of the church clashes with the direction toward which he would like the church to move. While not as explicit, similar responses indicated that pastors cannot address sermonic discourse within a vacuum, revealing the factors influencing

rhetorical agency would still need to be, in part, contingent on context. Therefore, a final theme of analysis emerges.

Audience Sensitivity

The invention of rhetoric of any kind, especially oratory, must be directed at an audience while also remaining open to influence through audience feedback. Each pastor revealed their respective audiences—both internally and in the local communities—to be the primary driving forces behind how their messages are created and delivered, and what actions of the church organization should be implemented.

Throughout every conversation, each pastor displayed a keen understanding of the makeup of their respective members and attendees of their church—those individuals comprising a church's congregation. A myriad of factors including gender/sex, race, socioeconomic status, age, and socio-political leanings were all discussed by each pastor when they described their congregations. The needs of these congregations were largely the first consideration when approaching both sermon creation and the adaptation to trends dictated at the national level. Greg and David outlined how a deeper understanding of their churches congregations led to more effective and poignant preaching. David stated:

> Being a pastor… I think go back to being a pastor of those specific people. As a shepherd, I know what's going on in their lives… So, in terms of preparing, when God is speaking to me and stirring my heart for a passage, the audience plays a monster part in actually what I'm going to spend time elaborating on or communicating.

This portion of conversation led to David expressing caution regarding pastors who rely on "silver bullet" sermons, or sermons that a pastor can deliver with seeming effect, regardless of the audience. "It just doesn't connect with the audience," David bluntly stated.

Frank, Mark, Trevor, Aaron, Robert, and Spencer echoed this same sentiment, explaining that they do not consider any message or possible sermon topic to be more effective than another. Instead, each described the choice to base sermon topics and content on what sins or issues the congregation may be struggling with, as well as what social issues may be particularly pressing at a given point in time. Frank described the process of "just looking at the people that I know and trying to see why I've focused on this a lot, knowing that I only can focus on one thing at one time," which is then followed by an acknowledgement of what focus shifts must be made, continuing "as I'm focusing on that, I may notice that something else is being neglected with inside the church." Here, the sensitivity of a pastor to his parishioners allows for the sermonic discourse to be directed at those within the church, rather than what subjectively feels right or pragmatic from the point of view of the pastor delivering the message.

While the focus of sermonic discourse should be primarily directed at parishioners of a church, long-standing and recent antecedents alike cannot be disregarded. Put differently, the external influence of nationally prominent ministries prevents sermonic discourse from existing in a vacuum. Greg expanded upon this notion to address overall church conduct. One instance discussed in our conversation regarded the topic of fasting. He outlined the need for his church to understand fasting more clearly, and to act on fasting in an appropriate manner. He said:

I'm seeing from so many of these churches, they start the year off doing a 21 day

fast. Like okay, so, I'm going to scratch at that and start to dig at that and I

thought you know I don't think we've done one since we did the building project.

So, we haven't taught people. I think an important part of the rhythm of Christian

life. So, we're going to do the same thing. We're going to do a 21 day fast to start

the year.

Here, Greg again balances the external influence with the internal needs of the church

and its members. While recognizing the actions that other churches are doing, he also

weighs them against the needs of his audience. In this instance, he recognizes that the

audience has a need for similar instruction and action, and thus the context lends itself for

the adaption of external influence based on audience need.

Mark demonstrated this from a different viewpoint, noting the ways that many

churches do not address the more unusual areas of biblical text. Stating that "I've got a

series that I do called 'weird Bible stories', and it is about 10 stories", he makes careful

note of his audience's need to understand the more unusual aspects of the source text.

Mark does this knowing full well that they are unlikely to receive teaching on these

passages from the more nationally prominent churches. This shows a clear demonstration

of the interdependence between both local and national churches, revealing a clear

indication of influence on pastor's rhetorical agency.

Additionally, the surrounding local communities of each church were revealed to

play a significant role in how pastors exercise rhetorical agency through audience

sensitivity. Much of this stems from an understanding of the mission of the Christian

church as a corporate body. The church does not merely exist within the confines of a

building, and therefore extends out to all community members that need to hear the word of God. As such, much in the same manner that pastors reflected upon the specific identities and needs of their congregations, the identities and needs of those in the neighboring cities and towns revealed themselves to be prominent areas of focus.

Mark discussed that a primary focus of his ministry is to represent Jesus within the suburban, middle-class nature of the city in which his church is placed. He stated:

> We influence the community in a lot of ways primarily with the chaplaincy. I'm a police chaplain, I've also certified us with FEMA… So, we do have a reputation in this community… we are known as a church, really, it's the 'go-to' church.

By understanding the needs of the community, Mark directs his ministry to maintain a good-standing reputation within the surrounding areas, thereby increasing the potential to bring new individuals into the congregation. Robert, Spencer, and Frank addressed this same notion when describing their communities, noting that their churches are positioned in cities with high levels of ethnic diversity.

Finally, while not explicitly discussed as being expressed by individual church members, the expectations of the church congregants revealed themselves to be an underlying factor of influence when manifesting rhetorical agency. Each pastor described the impact of the accessibility of media-heavy church ministries and how it has changed the expectations of church parishioners. Comments such as "people don't plant in churches anymore" from Trevor, "there's so much that's out there for public consumption" from Robert, and "we're in a 'megachurch ghetto'" from Mark, all reflected the importance to remain relevant and effective in order to maintain current members of their churches and gain prospective members.

Even Mark and Frank, who largely remained less influenced by what is being done by nationally prominent ministries, conceded that effectiveness cannot be ignored when addressing a congregation. Ultimately, Frank disclosed that he often reflects upon and questions his own effectiveness as a pastor to the congregants and the community at large. Robert described:

> When we moved here we said 'we're not in Nashville but we're an hour away from Nashville…' What would you think would be really important if you had a church in downtown Nashville and you were there? What would be an aspect that people would be maybe more attuned to in Nashville than say they would and Munfordville? Music. So, the quality and the ability of what you do that's going to matter.

In this situation, Robert sums up the inescapable need for churches and their pastors to remain relevant and effective. With the vast amount of external resources and influences available for public consumption, the rhetorical agencies of these pastors are at least somewhat affected by the need to keep individuals in attendance at their own churches.

Chapter 5: Revelations and Reflections

"For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens."

Job 28:24 ESV

Discussion and Implications

The present study sought to understand the influence of highly influential pastors and their ministries on the rhetorical agency and sermonic discourse of local pastors. Surprisingly, there were few mentions of pastors and ministries associated with more overt televangelism were raised by the pastors interviewed. Further, mention of those nationally prominent pastors indicated little to no direct positive influence on the ways in which these local-parish pastors conducted their ministries. This emerged from both preaching and an organizational standpoint's. Instead, while some participants indicated an overlap in various influential pastors and ministries, those deemed to be influential to the individual pastors interviewed for this study were unique and highly personal. When this surprising revelation revealed itself early on in the process of obtaining interview data, it came as a significant personal shock, as I expected more overt evidence of conscious choices which were influenced by national rhetoric and trends. To understand this deeper, the focus of the interview questions gradually shifted towards the revealed themes of identity, adaptation, and audience sensitivity. Additionally, these themes emerged within each interview both in the order that corresponds to their discussion in the previous chapter, as well as in direct response to the guiding research questions. Therefore, discussion and analysis of results can further explain the unique way in which influential individuals influence the rhetorical agency and manifested discourse of less-prominent individuals.

The first theme—identity—emerged in relation to Research Question 1, which sought to discover how the rhetorical agency of individual pastors was affected by pastors at the highly influential level. While the success of nationally prominent and influential pastors was acknowledged by each individual, the true measure of influence came from a stronger degree of internal and external identification. This revealed two key findings: first, direct and observable influence on, and manifestation of rhetorical agency may be determined by the security of one's own identity, and two, that external influences may only see direct application if the individual in question highly identifies with the source of the influence. For the internal identification of pastors, experience is an important factor here. Nearly every pastor who had been involved in their ministry positions for a significant amount of time reflected far more security in their identities, communication styles, and goals of discourse than their less-experienced (and often younger) counterparts.

In regard to this study, more external sources of influence at the national level were described to be intentionally sought after by the less-experienced pastors, in order to create a more effective manifestation and delivery of religious rhetoric and sermonic discourse. When applying and evaluating the operational definition of rhetorical agency used in this study, less experience as a pastor indicates a diminished capacity to evaluate what is needed in their church, their community, and the Christian culture at large. As such, in order to aid in shaping their identities, these individuals seem to have higher levels of openness to external influences on their rhetorical agency than more experienced, secure pastors. For external identification, surface-level and observable rhetoric is largely overlooked in favor of individual discipleship. In other words, an

individual is more likely to be influenced by someone that can facilitate growth in their position or field, regardless of how successful a rhetorical practice may superficially appear to be.

For the pastors involved in this study, the individuals who were seen as more influential in their respective lives and ministries were those with whom each pastor had a more comprehensive knowledge of, and who they identified with on a deeper level. This focus relationship implies that, on a more individualistic level of identification, pragmatism and success on a grand scale is not a significant influence on rhetorical agency, as its success does not universally align with pastor's identity and individual needs/goals. In regard to previous research on rhetorical agency, the identity of the agent reemerges as a prominent element of Burke's (1945) pentad, while calling into question how other agent's influence the formation of another agents' identity.

Next, the theme of adaptation emerged in response to the second research question, which sought to understand how rhetorical antecedents influence the manifestation of rhetorical agency. Here, external influences and rhetorical antecedents always were accepted to be a present factor, while at the same time were always approached with a level of self-reflexivity and care. In this way, each pastor revealed an antecedent to almost never be accepted at face value. Instead, for those that had a clearer understanding of their available resources and desired goals, antecedents were adapted in parts, rather than adopted as a whole. Still, rhetorical antecedents were never ignored, just not always used based on context. This implies that rhetorical antecedents likely have their greatest influence in the formation of goals and desired outcomes, especially where churches are considered.

For the pastors interviewed in the present study, the end result of the actions of a highly influential pastor and/or their ministry, and the possible reiteration and use of this antecedent, is always weighed against what can feasibly be done by the pastor based on the available resources and context. In turn, if this antecedent continues to have a significant effect, then the pastor's rhetorical agency will likely begin to turn in such a way as to seek that desired outcome and move towards it incrementally. Thus, antecedents likely have a larger impact on the initial evaluations of a rhetorical situation than the ability to challenge its feasibility.

Lastly, the theme of audience sensitivity, as well as aspects of adaptation, emerged in response to the third research question which sought to uncover the constraints which affect the influence of highly influential rhetoric on the rhetorical agency of local pastors. Of note, the most significant restraint was that of the audience, which is comprised of a church's parishioners and members of the local community. A degree of sensitivity towards the target audience of an individual pastor's sermonic discourse was a repeated aspect of conversation, with pastors describing their rhetorical invention processes specifically geared towards their congregations. As such, each pastor described careful attention to the specific needs of their church members. This extended to the local communities as well, with the needs of the specific community revealing themselves to be a constraint on what national-level influences are to be adapted, albeit to a lesser degree.

Ultimately, the impact of televangelism and modern evangelical culture on the average church congregation emerged as the largest constraint in the influence of local pastors. Here, the present results show their highest levels of consistency with previous

research on the impact of televangelism on modern Christian culture (Hutchinson, 2017; James, 2010; Schultze, 2003; Ward, 2015). Analysis indicates that the accessibility of mediated ministry resources leads pastors to focus increasingly more on their own effectiveness, demonstrating a need to maintain audience engagement and focus. Because parishioners have an arsenal of physical and digital church resources to choose from, careful and strategic attention to the needs of a church congregation and its surrounding community are the most impactful constraint, thereby revealing a clear influence on pastor's rhetorical agency. Additionally, this reveals tension between the desired goals and identity of a pastor and their ministry, and the expectations and needs of its congregants.

Of important note here is the lack of explicitly epideictic rhetoric regarding nationally successful ministries, and the rhetorical self-reflexivity demonstrated by each pastor. Again, epideictic here refers to discourse that is entirely praise or blame-oriented in nature. These two emergent factors both seen as constraints on the development and manifestation of rhetorical agency (especially for pastors) and provide new insight into previous research on rhetorical agency.

First, each pastor remained largely neutral in rhetorically evaluating those with high levels of influence. Neither overt praise nor overt blame was demonstrated, with any instance of this possibly occurring almost immediately undercut by a recognition of their individuality. Examining these responses further revealed that whenever a highly individual and their ministry was seen as either positive or negative, pastors were careful to keep a degree of distance from them. Instead, the focus almost always reverted to an individualistic level, thereby never letting either the pastor being interviewed, or the

nationally influential pastor being discussed, become a sole paragon of success or failure. While each pastor made a conscious effort to conduct their ministries in ways that clearly showed a negative correlation with the actions and influences of televangelism, rhetorical discourse that included hate or blame was never once used in any capacity.

Rhetorical agency, therefore, may just as well be manifested through a consciously communicated choice not to be externally influenced as much as can be influenced by rhetorical antecedents, regardless of how prominent they may be. Next, by tethering themselves to the source material (the Bible), these pastors highlight a commonly-shared influence on their rhetorical agencies. As the results argue, all manifestations of rhetoric in sermonic discourse and ministry conduct must be weighed against the Bible, and ultimately cannot move beyond its boundaries.

This source-tether potentially indicates a significant difference in the manifested rhetoric of religiously-affiliated individuals versus non-religiously affiliated individuals. Especially for pastors, who are tasked with teaching what the Bible says and how it applies in daily life, this confinement is especially constraining on the situation. Further, each pastor demonstrated a hesitancy to act rhetorically in sermonic discourse and church action unless they felt that their decisions were led by God. Every pastor described that at the outset of sermon writing and delivery practice was a time of prayer, asking God to lead and guide them. When returning to Lundberg and Gunn's (2005) Ouja board, a new perspective on rhetorical agency as it relates to ontotheology emerges: individuals may have a degree of control and freedom to act of their own volition, yet must recognize the presence, guidance, and possible interference of supernatural forces. Therefore, the

answer as to who moves the planchette is left entirely to the interpretation of the individual whose hands are touching it.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

In spite of the broad nature of this research study, as well as the deeply rich data field collected through the research, limitations exist which reposition directions for future research. First, while this study sought to uncover how the rhetoric of individuals at the highly influential level affects the rhetorical agency and manifested discourse of those at the less-influential level, the results may be unique only to the nature of the individuals used in this study. The nature of Christianity and its culture, as well as the moral standard pastors feel called to uphold, may have a significant impact on the results of this study that may not reveal themselves with participants of differing cultures, organizations, or identities. This may prove to be especially true in regard to the odd, bifurcated praise-blame rhetoric as a constraint on development and manifestation of rhetorical agency. As the larger scope of this study set out to uncover how the rhetoric of highly influential individuals affects the rhetorical agency of individuals at lower levels, future research will examine contexts and cultures beyond Christianity.

Second, while the research design was able to use qualitative methods to uncover how rhetorical agency manifests itself in the responses of each participant, it does not allow for the inclusion of rhetorical points of reference. That is, without examining and analyzing the rhetoric of the nationally influential individuals which may influence the participants of this study, it can be difficult to understand what rhetorical manifestations are identified with, adapted into, or ignored by less-prominent individual. Future research could use more traditional methods of rhetorical analysis to create a more comprehensive

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picture of what influences rhetorical agency or employ a mixed-methods research design which also utilizes the qualitative design of the present study.

Finally, the demographic nature of my participants was ultimately far more homogeneous than initially expected. While the expectation to find a majority of male participants was understood, given that the majority of Christian pastors in the United States are male (Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2010), the lack of gender diversity prompts future research to seek a more diverse pool of participants. Further, because only one of my participants was not of either Caucasian racial background or American cultural heritage, responses which indicated the impact of his cultural background on his approach to letting influential rhetoric affect his rhetorical agency could not be coded into analysis for this study. Therefore, future research will seek to include participants which comprise a more diverse group based on gender, race, ethnicity, and various other pertinent factors.

Conclusion

The present thesis sought to examine the effect to which the rhetorical practices of pastors from highly influential and prominent ministries affect the rhetorical agency and sermonic discourse of local pastors. Ultimately, the influence of highly prominent ministries on the local church and Christian culture as a whole cannot be ignored or undersold. Still, my own expectations that were shaped by my previous experience with this subject saw a significant shift away from pragmatism and overt influence and towards one which places a higher emphasis on context. In fact, as I conclude this thesis, I am made aware of the death of Billy Graham, who is widely considered to be the most influential American Christian evangelist of all time. Though his highly influential status

has spanned decades and will likely continue following his death, the present research interjects and challenges the notion that his and/or other's statuses as prominent evangelists will always be overt factors which shape the manifestation of rhetorical agency.

The findings in this research acknowledge the interdependence of national and local churches, primarily in an increasingly consumeristic and technologically connected culture. However, it more highly emphasizes the importance of identity and context when allowing antecedents to influence rhetorical agency and sermonic discourse. Each pastor interviewed demonstrated a caution to preach or to conduct their churches in various ways that have been seen by nationally prominent pastors or ministries, regardless of how pragmatically successful that pastor or ministry is/was. Thus, because past and present antecedents cannot be adopted wholesale, pastors must highlight their own perceived markers of success and effectiveness, remain tethered to biblical text, and have a clear understanding of the identity and desired goals of their ministries. Further, while influential ministries and rhetorical agents certainly demonstrate an effect on internalized and manifested rhetorical agency, the differences inherent in specific contexts open doors to a vast array of possible research foci. As for the local church, it will continue to serve its purpose as dually positioned within both local communities and the Christian culture at large. It is my hope that the present discoveries and implications generate a fresh conversation for pastors to recognize their antecedental influences and come to a clearer understanding of the important role they play in the formation and understanding of Christian identity.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions:

1. How much attention do you give to what largely influential pastors, past and/or present, are saying and/or doing?

2. How much control do you perceive you have over the messages you deliver, or the way you conduct your ministry?

3. How do audience/parishioner expectations factor in to the way you create your messages?