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# Framing Christianity: A frame analysis of Fundamentalist Christianity from 2000-2009

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Framing Christianity: A Frame Analysis of  
Fundamentalist Christianity from 2000-2009

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

This qualitative frame analysis examines how print media handles the concept of Fundamentalist Christianity. The researcher examined news reports in four prominent national newspapers over the ten-year period between 2000 and 2009 for references made to Fundamentalist Christianity. The sample is examined on the basis of Mark Silk's "topoi," a term taken from classical rhetoric meaning commonplaces or themes (1995). Silk outlines seven common topoi on which stories about religion are written, and these are utilized as a framework for this present study. While much has been written and researched on how religious groups, Fundamentalist Christians, and Evangelicals use mass media to promote their message to a secular audience, few studies have examined how the secular press frames Fundamentalist Christianity. This study, therefore, fills an existing literature gap by dissecting the portrayal of a demographic that has had a historical and cultural media presence for more than a century.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Fundamentalist and Evangelical Christians have used mass media to disseminate the Gospel to a world marked by secularism and humanism, two movements directly opposed to Christian teaching (Olasky, 1988). Much as the cultural identity of Christianity has been shaped by televangelism and broadcast ministry (Sculitze, 1996), the secular media has framed radical Christianity and, especially Fundamentalism, to be synonymous with bigotry, ignorant zealotry, and unapologetic extremism (Marsden, 1980).

The media play an important role, both in defining and representing dominant cultural ideology (Bolce & De Maio, 2008). Through journalists' interpretive frames, audiences make sense of stories that define their shared realities (Entman, 1993). In tumultuous times, journalists tend to resort to popular interpretive frames. This qualitative frame analysis asks two research questions:

*R1: How are stories involving Fundamentalist Christianity framed?*

*R2: Have these frames changed over time?*

This study is a vital contribution to a lacking literature stream. While abundant literature exists on how Fundamentalist Christians use media, fewer studies have researched the framing of Fundamentalism in secular media (Kerr & Moy, 2002, Kerr, 2003). Kerr and Moy (2002) conducted a quantitative frame analysis of Fundamentalist Christianity in print news from 1980-2000, citing September 11, 2001 as data contamination and terminating the data set pre-9/11. This present study will examine how media coverage handled Fundamentalism in the preceding months before and after 9/11,



to understand what contamination Kerr and Moy were alluding to. Consequently, this present study fills an existing gap in literature by undertaking a time period yet to be examined in media studies.

First, the study will be grounded on a foundation of how Fundamentalist Christians and other religious groups have been presented in the media in the past. Secondly, the literature review will focus on the dominance of cultural ideology, its shifting over time, and the framing of Fundamentalist Christianity. Thirdly, the theoretical framework for this study lies in Goffman's frame theory, which will be discussed thoroughly in that section. Lastly, the method section will outline how this study has been structured in order to answer the questions at hand.

### **Biases**

I became a "born-again Christian"<sup>1</sup> in October, 2007, during my sophomore year of college, although I always believed in God before that time. What I did in October, 2007, was decide to surrender my life to Jesus Christ. Doctrinally, on the basis of the definitions laid out below, I am an Evangelical Christian. I believe God gives salvation to those who believe in His son Jesus and repent (or turn away) from what the Bible calls sin. I believe sins can be forgiven by God's grace, which was poured out when Jesus died on the cross<sup>2</sup>. I also believe the Bible is the inerrant word of God. I am part of a non-denominational Christian church that meets on a college campus, the same church where I became a Christian almost four years ago. While this lifestyle of faith has changed my life and inspired me to write this thesis on this topic, I do not think it will negatively hinder the

---

<sup>1</sup> "Jesus answered him and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

<sup>2</sup> "But we believe we are saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are." Acts 15:11

results of my research. My worldview will, however, present inherent biases, an unavoidable issue that every researcher encounters.

### **Background**

This study delves into a religious movement that few truly understand. Although Fundamentalist Christianity is properly defined in the literature as an easily identifiable religious movement within early twentieth-century Protestantism, the media uses the term “Fundamentalism” as a synonym for a religious, ignorant zealot (Kerr & Moy, 2002). Nevertheless, many still adhere, doctrinally and culturally, to the branch of Protestantism that rejects modernity and secular humanism in every sect of American culture from education to the media (Marsden, 1980). In order to understand the basis for this research it is important to define Fundamentalist Christianity from both a historical and cultural perspective.

### **Defining Fundamentalist Christianity**

It is vital for the purpose of this study to specifically define what the author intends by the term Fundamentalist Christianity. “Fundamentalism” is a difficult word to define not because the definition or congregations of those who adhere to its definition are enigmatic, but rather because the word is often used “as a synonym for bigotry, fanaticism or anti-intellectualism” and, like the word “Puritan,” “has become a word of wide usage and immense symbolic power” (Carpenter, 1997, p. 4). In broad terms, Fundamentalism “may be described as a ‘religious way of being’ that manifests itself in a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group in the face of modernity and secularization” (Ruthven, 2004, p. 8).

Fundamentalism took root, surprisingly, not in the Southern U.S. 'Bible Belt,' but rather in California, a rapidly developing region at the time, in 1910 (Ruthven, 2004). Over the next five years, two devout Christian brothers, Milton and Lyman Stewart, sponsored the publication of Protestant tracts titled "The Fundamentals: A testimony of truth" (Ruthven, 2004, p. 10). These pamphlets,

"written by a number of leading conservative American and British theologians, were aimed at stopping the erosion of what the brothers and their editors considered to be the 'fundamental' beliefs of Protestantism: the inerrancy of the Bible; the direct creation of the world, and humanity, ex nihilo by God (in contrast to Darwinian evolution); the authenticity of miracles; the virgin birth of Jesus, his Crucifixion and bodily resurrection; the substitutionary atonement (the doctrine that Christ died to redeem the sins of humanity); and (for some but not all believers) his imminent return to judge and rule over the world" (Ruthven, 2004, p. 10-11).

The tracts were then distributed free of charge over a five-year period to pastors, missionaries, evangelists, religious lay workers, and others throughout the world.

Marsden wrote that Fundamentalists feel an obligation toward involvement in American politics. Fundamentalist Christians' attitudes toward politics, plus the political sphere's attitude toward Fundamentalist Christians makes for a rocky political climate in which journalists work. This is why a study in the framing of Fundamentalist Christianity in the media is so vital. When the media, in turn, influence attitudes toward both intersecting yet polarized sociopolitical worldviews, it is important to question how exactly they do this.

For the purposes of this study, Fundamentalist Christianity will be defined as any radical branch of Protestantism marred by a definite extremism not witnessed in mainstream Christianity.

### **The Fundamentalist Revival**

It is true that the type of Christianity marred by a rejection of modernism and stereotyped as bigoted and intolerant has no easily categorized genesis and no real history (Huff, 2008). The type of Fundamentalism this present study utilizes, however, is not old or latent. It is, instead, “a specific and culturally conditioned response to the intellectual and social challenges of modernity” (Huff, 2008, p. 18).

To understand the movement that emerged in the early twentieth century and forged a new faction of Christianity in America, it is necessary, however, to go back to the nineteenth century. Nineteenth century American Protestants saw their country as a Christian nation, and foresaw an imminent worldwide revival toward Jesus Christ (Marsden, 1980). Revivals, or “intense spiritual outpourings” first swept across the expanding frontier after the U.S. gained independence from Britain in 1776 and later swept through both Northern and Southern army camps during the Civil War (Marsden, 1980, p.11)(Maurer, 2009). As early as 1801, revivals could draw up to 20,000 attendees (Maurer, 2009). These meetings were marked by public confession, public repentance, emotional and, sometimes, “extreme physical reactions” to conversion to Christianity (Maurer, 2009, p. 60).

The terms “Evangelical” and “Fundamentalist” are often used interchangeably, but have different meanings. Fundamentalist Christians are a radical splinter group that broke away from Evangelicalism when humanism began to trickle into Protestantism in the early

twentieth century (Huff, 2009). Ever since the Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s, Evangelicalism “had already enjoyed phenomenal success in the country’s free market of religious ideas” (Huff, 2009, p. 19). This period of growth and success was followed, however, by a series of tests and trials of their faith: the issue of slavery, which divided Protestant churches, the Civil War, which both sides were convinced was a holy war, and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln (Maurer, 2009). Then, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, fault lines and doctrinal and ideological differences which sprouted from the seeds of the Enlightenment began to split evangelicals (Huff, 2009). The chasm that opened during this period “has remained a defining factor in American religious life ever since” (Huff, 2009, p. 21). The Enlightenment brought about such paradigm shifts as “scientific rationalism, philosophical naturalism, social-contract government, individual rights, laissez-faire economics, historical progress, and religious tolerance” (Huff, 2009, p. 22). These ideas and values have, since, become so ingrained in society that few would question their significance today, but at the time, “the secularizing trends of modernity had resulted in the marginalization of religion and had resulted in a world where the salvation of modern Christians was seriously threatened” (Maurer, 2009, p. 62). The struggle between the intellectualism and pragmatism of faith is what both defines and obscures the different sects of Evangelicalism (Marsden, 1980). The emergent themes of the newfound Fundamentalism were difficult to define, because “Fundamentalism was a mosaic of divergent and sometimes contradictory traditions and tendencies that could never be totally integrated,” but dispensationalism (a movement and tradition begun by John Nelson Darby in the mid nineteenth century) is a key quality (Marsden, 1980, p. 43). Dispensationalism is defined as “a refined system of biblical interpretation that divides

sacred history into several (usually seven) dispensations, eras during which God relates to his covenant people in distinct ways” (Baer, 2007, p. 248-249). This movement “became very popular among Christians who were feeling increasingly threatened by the idea of the primacy of human reason over the inerrancy of scripture and traditional Christian belief” and further solidified the anti-modernistic and anti-humanistic views of Fundamentalists (Maurer, 2009, p. 62). Fundamentalists were soon to face secular humanism head on, however, and the clash was to be highly publicized.

Journalism in the early twentieth century was characterized, like literature, by a turn against religion (Underwood, 2002). This movement, in Underwood’s opinion, was a “rebellion against orthodox Christianity,” which “took on a new force among a generation of American journalists-turned-fiction-writers who found a home for the nurturing of their talents, as well as fame, income, and adventure, as correspondents for the burgeoning mass-market publications of the era” (2002, p. 93). Literature deviated toward realism, naturalism, philosophy and morality apart from how it had been defined by Judeo-Christian values (Underwood, 2002).

As these new movements in “American intelligentsia” surfaced, and the chasm between secular press and Fundamentalist Christians grew, the battle came to a head in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925 (Underwood, 2002). John Scopes<sup>3</sup>, a high school biology teacher, had broken the law by teaching evolution. It was charged that Scopes “denied the story of the divine creation of man, as taught in the Bible, and did teach instead thereof that man had descended from a lower order of animals” (*Scopes v. The State*, 1926, p. 108). The press coverage of the trial was immense; Underwood calls it “one of the first true media

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<sup>3</sup> *John Thomas Scopes v. The State of Tennessee*, 154 Tenn. 105 (1926)

events of modern journalism” (2002, p. 94). H.L. Mencken was the press’ consultant and ringleader, “a caustic critic of traditional Christian theology,” and William Jennings Bryant was “the onetime populist Democratic presidential candidate and defender of the biblical account of creation” (Underwood, 2002, p. 93-94). Mencken, Scopes, and their supporters saw the trial as an opportunity to move away from the oppressive and rigid traditions of old church doctrine. Bryant, along with the Fundamentalists and Evangelicals of Tennessee, shared a fear that still exists among these groups today: “the secular media threaten the values and beliefs of evangelical faith” (Schultze, 1996, p. 65).

While, statistically, most journalists in 1925 sided with Scopes rather than Bryant, it must be noted that their attention was on the spectacle and controversy, not necessarily the deep-seeded moralistic and doctrinal debate at hand (Underwood, 2002). Over the twelve-day trial in July of 1925, reporters wired 165,000 words back to their newspapers daily (Olasky, 1988). Dayton residents, the Christians, were framed as ignorant, backwoods imbeciles, while Scopes and the pro-Darwinian side were seen as martyrs for science and progress. The underlying conflict was logic versus faith, what man could see versus a religious mold based on what he could not.

In 1927, the Supreme Court of Tennessee reversed John Scopes’ conviction of breaking the anti-evolution law. Voskuil argues that, until the Scopes trial, it was questionable whether Fundamentalists were truly outsiders in American culture (1990). After their faith was showcased and subsequently ridiculed, however, it solidified Fundamentalists as “on the outside looking in” (Voskuil, 1990, p. 69). The radicals were even seen as deviants by other, less conservative, Protestants. This rift between denominations has continued until today. As will be examined, however, Christians have

frequently set aside their doctrinal differences and mobilized as like-minded activists when they started to gain a voice in the political sphere and as their media presence grew into an enormous evangelical industry.

For the purposes of this study, Fundamentalist Christianity will be defined as any radical branch of Protestantism marred by a definite extremism not witnessed in mainstream Christianity.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### How Fundamentalist Christians have used media

Since the very inception of Christian Fundamentalism, the movement has both depended upon and clashed harshly with mass media (Schultze, 1996). Christians, specifically Evangelicals, “founded most of the early book publishing organizations in the early years of the colonies, resulting eventually in an enormous publishing industry in the 1990s represented by nondenominational names such as Logos, Word, and Zondervan” (Schultze, 1996, p.64). In 1851, Henry Raymond, a Bible-believing Presbyterian, established the *New York Times* which was known for exposing both political corruption and secretive abortion clinics through the 1870s (Olasky, 1988). One of the most famous Evangelicals of history, Dwight L. Moody, first purchased newspaper space to advertise revival meetings in the 1880s (Maurer, 2009). Since early radio in the 1920s, broadcast ministry and eventually televangelism has given Evangelicals and Fundamentalists a permanent foothold in American mass media (Voskuil, 1990). The 1920s was a tumultuous and disastrous decade for Fundamentalists, however, with the rise of liberal Protestantism that seemed directly opposed to Fundamentalism’s ideals, and the Scopes trial of 1925 that forever scarred the public image of both Fundamentalists and Evangelicals (Voskuil, 1990).

The Pittsburg station KDKA, which went on air in November 1920, aired the first Christian broadcast just two months later, a church service from Calvary Episcopal Church (Voskuil, 1990). When this Sunday broadcast became a weekly occurrence, “it was the birth of broadcast ministry” (Voskuil, 1990, p. 71). Thus began Fundamentalist Christianity’s

love-hate relationship with mass media: the conflict between media as a vehicle to carry the Gospel to the unconverted and media as “tools of the devil” when used for worldly, humanistic means (Schultze, 1996, p. 61). The Radio Act of 1927, in an effort to end the broadcast disarray created by low-quality equipment, established standards for operating equipment and by 1933 there were far fewer religious stations operating (Voskuil, 1990). Still, televangelism and broadcast ministry have found a permanent place in media’s rich landscape, and continue that tradition many years later.

The internet, like early radio and early television, led to apprehension amongst Christian Fundamentalists because, while opportunities exist to share the Gospel over the World Wide Web, there are aspects of the internet that seem opposed to preserving a religious worldview. While the ultra-Orthodox are less likely than the secular to utilize email and e-commerce, “In most religions, technology itself is perceived as a potentially friendly tool, or at least as a must, in order to disseminate religious texts and religious studies internally and externally” (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005, p. 37).

### **Fundamentalist Christianity and Political Involvement**

While the present study handles the frames that the media use to speak in shorthand *about* Fundamentalist Christians, it is also important to examine the frames through which the political sphere speaks *to* Fundamentalist Christians. As previously mentioned, Fundamentalist Christians play a vital role in influencing and altering America’s political sphere. As with other like-minded social movement organizations, conservative Christians, regardless of denomination, find power in numbers. This group was first mobilized to action during the *Roe v. Wade*<sup>4</sup> Supreme Court decision, the first truly church-

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<sup>4</sup> *Roe et al v. Wade, District Attorney of Dallas County*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973)

endorsed case of political action (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009). *Roe v. Wade*, one of the most significant Supreme Court cases in U.S. history, granted women a fundamental right to choose to have an abortion (1973). Prior to *Roe v. Wade*, the Catholic Church and other denominations had endorsed social rather than political action (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009). In essence, “the ‘right to life’ frame bridged diverse religious traditions by focusing on Christian values generically and providing a rationale for coordinated involvement in American politics” (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009, p. 345). In spite of doctrinal differences, coalitions such as the National Right to Life Committee (NRTL) that emphasized the commonalities between denominations rather than their differences were formed (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009). Although this organization had a few small victories, *Roe v. Wade* has yet to be overturned, and Fundamentalists diverged from other Christians when it came to details of their pro-life stance. For instance, while the NRTL argued abortion should be illegal except in cases where the mother’s death, if she carried full-term, was imminent, Fundamentalists argued that “an exception allowed politics to trump morality” (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009, p. 346). In response, two members of the NRTL broke away and created the American Life League (ALL), aimed at achieving illegalization of abortion regardless of the life or death of the mother and despite the causes of pregnancy (rape or incest) (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009). Ever “since the formation of the Moral Majority in 1978, the ‘Religious Right’ has included a large number of fundamentalist Christians, making the terms inseparable in many minds” (Kerr and Moy, 2002, p. 65-66).

Although the right to life frame was the beginning of a mobilized Christian force in politics, the battle did not stop there. In the 1980s, the Republican Party began to ease tensions between doctrinally differentiated believers by creating new, generic frames that

all Christians could agree upon (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009). One of the frames that appeared in this era was the family values frame, one which, without the knowledge of the underlying issues, would be very difficult for Christians or non-Christians to oppose. The ambiguity of the phrase “was important because it provided shorthand for a bundle of issues, including abortion, school prayer, abstinence education, and opposition to homosexuality and pornography, which resonated with a broad range of religious groups” (Rohlinger & Quadagno, 2009, p. 348).

### **Fundamentalist Christianity and voting decisions**

Today, research shows that, aside from activists and politicians, “voters are turning to their religious affiliations more and more to help them form political opinions and make voting decisions” (McDermott, 2009, p. 340). Partly due to the increased cohesion among conservative Christians in America, political parties are becoming more polarized than ever before (Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006). This “contemporary divide pits religious ‘traditionalists’ (individuals with orthodox religious beliefs and high levels of religious commitment) against religious ‘modernists’ (individuals who are less committed to traditional religious beliefs and practices) and seculars, or nonreligious people” (Layman et al, 2006, p. 86). Fundamentalist Christians, by definition, would fit into the traditionalist category because of their rejection of socio-cultural modernity (Marsden, 1980). By title, however, Christians in each sector, whether modernists or traditionalists, have been mislabeled as Fundamentalists for decades (Marsden, 1980).

Research shows voters infer, stereotype, and make decisions on the basis of candidates’ religions (McDermott, 2009). Voters do not require detailed information about candidates’ religions, but have to receive the information from the media (McDermott,

2009). For instance, *the New York Times* mentioned John Kerry's Catholicism in 148 stories during the 2004 election cycle (McDermott, 2009). Audiences, in turn, call upon preconceived notions about different religions to better understand candidates. In sum, the media is both creating and perpetuating frames about religion, and audiences are using these frames to make vital decisions about politicians.

### **Growing Anti-fundamentalism as Predictor of Partisanship**

While it is clear that attitudes toward Fundamentalist Christians can define candidate support, antagonism toward Fundamentalist Christians in other areas than the political sphere has intensified over the past century. Scholars have differing views as to which historical events caused such antagonism, but most agree that there was a spike in anti-fundamentalism after the Scopes trial in the 1920s and another spike during the 1990s (Kerr and Moy, 2002). In this section, the literature about the mass public's view of Fundamentalist Christianity and its shift toward antagonism over time will be examined.

The media presents not just facts and stories but condensed, framed, and highly selective viewpoints for the sake of time, space or opinion (Bolce & De Maio, 2008). The audiences, in turn, use their own stereotypes, "Pictures in their heads," and heuristics, or mental shortcuts, to decode these messages. Oftentimes, both the media and the audience are drawing on previously composed shorthand. Loaded words like "Fundamentalist" instantly conjure either positive or negative images which have been constructed through personal experience or previous exposure to media information (Bolce & De Maio, 2008)(Pinsky, 2005). Now and then, however, cultural shifts and changing tides in dominant ideology bring about different shorthand. This can occur either on a nation-wide level or on a personal level. Bolce and De Maio said the following about opinion shifts:

“Such opinion shifts typically come about when elites repudiate previous elite-given stereotypes or when symbolic or face-to-face encounters with the group reveal its members ‘out of character,’ or as possessing more textured qualities than preconceived, but only if the individual is not emotionally committed to the pre-existing out-group schemata” (2008, p. 159).

Bolce and De Maio write that the media is more responsible than individual experience for developing audiences’ antagonism toward Fundamentalist Christians, and previous research affirms that face-to-face experiences with Fundamentalists have been either generally positive or not negative (Pinsky, 2005). By process of elimination, therefore, it is clear that public opinion regarding Fundamentalist Christianity is largely influenced by the often liberal, often secular media (Pinsky, 2005). There exists an increasing chasm between the media and the American people, in terms of religious affiliation, as shown in polls (Gallup, n.d.). While percentages have steadily declined over the past century, Gallup polls show most Americans (95% in 1952, 87% in 1992, and 80% in 2010) say religion is either fairly important or very important to their lives (Gallup, n.d.). Journalists, on the other hand, were found to have mostly secular mindsets in a 1981 study for which 240 of the media’s elite were interviewed (Lichter & Rothman). Eighty-six percent of the editors or reporters interviewed said they never or seldom ever attend any religious service (Lichter & Rothman, 1981). Therefore, despite the fact that religion intersects many other social issues on which journalists often write, “when journalists who cover these subjects encounter a religious angle, they and their editors are prone to run away from it, write around it or cover it as they would any scandal or political story” (Shepard, 1995, p. 20).

### **Fundamentalist Christians in print media**

As previously mentioned, little research has been conducted regarding the representation of Fundamentalist Christians in print news. A pivotal study, conducted by Kerr and Moy, analyzed 2,696 articles referencing Fundamentalism between 1980 and 2000 (2002). Coding the articles on the basis of stereotypes (“intolerance, intelligence, responsibility, sincerity, law abiding, patriotism, racism, forcing views on others, potential to be suicidal, political involvement, and violent nature”) and also on the basis of how trustworthy, untrustworthy, violent, or peaceful Fundamentalist Christians were framed as in the articles (Kerr and Moy, 2002, p. 58). The results showed that Fundamentalist Christians were portrayed as either “balanced” or “somewhat negative” (p. 59). Other results showed that the Fundamentalist Christians were, on average, portrayed as somewhat intolerant, somewhat criminal-minded, somewhat forceful in imposing their views on others, somewhat politically involved, and somewhat violent (Kerr and Moy, 2002).

Kerr and Moy also noted a steep rise in the number of articles that mentioned Fundamentalist Christianity in the 1990s, especially between 1993 and 1994. They refer to this particular inflation as the “Republicans’ ‘Contract with America’ which was labeled ‘pro-family’ and endorsed by the Christian Coalition” (2002, p. 65). The authors conclude that the growth of the number of articles about Fundamentalist Christians “may stem from the fact that as America continues to move toward a post-modern pluralistic society, more values of fundamentalist Christians are being challenged, and, as a result, this group is mentioned more often as it pleads its case for the more traditional value structure” (p. 66). Whatever the cause of the increase, there is a need for further research to determine

whether 9/11 and other post-Millennial factors have changed the framing of Fundamentalist Christianity in the media.

### **Portrayal of other religious groups in media**

As mentioned previously, news media have the enormous responsibility of making meaning and portraying an agreed upon truth for their audience. One of the ways this is performed is by identifying social deviance, whether it appears in the political sphere or as an aspect of religion. Marginalized groups may be labeled deviant because of “many reasons, sometimes for behavior, sometimes for appearance, and at other times for a wide variety of reasons” (Breen, 2001, p. 162).

Fundamentalist Christianity is not the only religious sect that has been labeled deviant and harshly stereotyped by the media in recent decades. Islam, Judaism, and Mormonism are examples of subjects that, when journalists do not fully comprehend the traditions of a religion, can be stereotyped and criticized. Below, the coverage of these three religions by the media is briefly examined.

#### **Islam**

While secular humanism is the force directly opposed to Christian values, Westernism is what drives the opposition against Islam in the media. Scholars have argued that, like Christianity, “secularism is a problematic concept in Islamic society” (Ayatollahy, 2008, p. 37). Like other religions, the Muslim religion sees mass media as an opportunity to distribute messages to mass audiences, but they also see the dangers of the dissemination of Westernized and Americanized ideas (Ayatollahy, 2008). Still, although Islam has been stereotyped in the media, “satellite television and the Internet have presented an opportunity for a more mutual understanding among different religions” (Ayatollahy,



2008). Any increase in dialogue about religions, in essence, can calm the fear of the unknown.

Although, like other religions, Islam has historically been stereotyped and “othered” in the media, after September 11, 2001, the portrayal of Muslims became linked to terrorism and a sign of fear (Woods, 2007; Karim, 2003). One study showed that every fifth article that mentioned terrorism also mentioned religion and, although the media attempted to avoid “making specific negative statements about Muslim Americans and Islamic organizations in the United States, there was still a tendency to link Islam in general to some of the scariest accounts of the terrorist threat” (Woods, 2007, p. 16).

The occurrences of September 11, 2001 “shook the cognitive foundations of reality” and gave both the media and the government an opportunity to shift the collective American worldview, take a step back, and evaluate what would motivate someone to such an act of suicide and mass destruction (Karim, 2003, p. viii). Instead, “the opportunity was lost and integration propagandists shepherded people back to the set patterns of thinking about ‘us and them’” (Karim, 2003, p. viii). The discourse unraveled in a simplistic, nationalistic, and sometimes destructive manner during which the “self” was innocent and American and the “them” was evil and Islamic (Karim, 2003). The media was holding to a form rather than seeking out the truth.

The term “Islam” can be manipulated to evoke specific images, regardless of the fact that there are more than one billion Muslims in the world (“Islam,” n.d.). Ironically, the term “Fundamentalist” entered the media narrative regarding Islam despite the term’s Christian etymological foundation. The term is used, however, much the same way for both

religions -- to describe a radical or militant religious zealot willing to cause others harm on behalf of his or her atypical beliefs.

Ruthven believes the term Fundamentalist is inadequate in describing Muslim extremists, because technically, all Muslims are Fundamentalists. Ruthven argues that, “since all observant Muslims believe the Koran—the divine text of Islam—to be the unmediated Word of God, all are committed to a doctrine of scriptural inerrancy, whereas for Protestants biblical inerrancy is one of the hallmarks that distinguishes fundamentalists from liberals” (2004, p. 5). Thus, if scriptural inerrancy is the cornerstone belief of Fundamentalists, some Christians and all Muslims are Fundamentalists.

### **Mormonism**

Appallingly few studies have analyzed media representations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Without a doubt, however, the most pervasive representation of the Mormon population in the media is that of the polygamist. Since few sects of remaining Mormons practice this doctrine (polygamy in Mormon doctrine ended with the Manifesto of 1890), Martha Bradley wrote “the media’s obsessive focus on the unusual marital relations or family living situations of polygamist families obscures what is a highly effective and symbolic cultural system” (2004, p. 5). Once again, the marginal few who still adhere to the outdated doctrine are called “Fundamentalists” (Bradley, 2004).

Similar to Christianity, there are actual branches of Mormonism titled Fundamentalists, but these are splinter groups in comparison to the massive LDS church. Of the 13.8 million LDS members, approximately 50,000 practice polygamy (Bradley, 2004). It is not uncommon, however, for the media’s focus to fall on what differentiates

members of certain marginal religious sects from members of more mainstream denominations.

Through lack of understanding and the media's religious illiteracy, journalists seem often at a loss to explain why anyone would voluntarily enter into a sect that believes in and practices unusual doctrine (Wright, 1997). To fill this void, "news stories often parrot heresy/deception charges of religious elites or secular anticult themes accusing new religions of manipulating their members through psycho-physiological coercion ('brainwashing')" (Wright, 1997, p. 103).

### **Judaism**

Like Fundamentalist Christians, Muslims, and Mormons, Jews have been stereotyped, denigrated, and "othered" in the media (Yummel, 2004). The media plays a significant role in "defining groups perceived to be different, alien or threatening, by furnishing labeling terms which consolidate ideas of groups" and the Jewish subculture is in no way immune to this treatment (Yummel, 2004, p. 35). Yummel describes an advertisement which encompasses a universal Jewish stereotype, "the eternal stranger":

"Although in the advertisement one encounters no explicit reference to the identity of the merchant, his Jewishness is inscribed on his body. His body shape, size, facial structure, nose and so on, that is, his physicality, to use Eisenstein's terms, is reminiscent of figures used to depict Jews in caricatures" (2004, p. 42).

While Jews continue to be stereotyped in American media, Heilman claims that, as America became more of an ethnic melting-pot and a religiously pluralistic society, "some Jewish symbols became American symbols, too" (1995, p. 101). Unlike the aforementioned religions, Judaism is more widely understood; everyone in America seems to know what a

bar mitzvah is (Heilman, 1995). Birthed out of this understanding, however, are new ways in which the media finds juxtaposition between Christianity and Judaism, and focuses intently on such jokes as the “December dilemma” during which interfaith couples navigate the compromise of their holidays (Shandler, 2009, p. 185). Jews’ interaction with Christmas has long been an area of theological, social, cultural and political questioning “about the significance that Christianity has for them” and often brings up “family, assimilation, intermarriage, Hanukkah, anti-Semitism, Otherness, Americanness” (Shandler, 2009, p. 186).

Having examined the previous literature on Fundamentalist Christianity in the media and the representation of other “deviant” religions in American media, the next section defines framing as the theoretical framework for this study.

## Chapter 3: Theory

### Goffman's Framing

The first scholar to discuss framing was Erving Goffman, “a symbolic interactionist of the dramaturgical tradition,” in the 1970s (Littlejohn, 1977, p. 485). The audience and future scholars, however, would interpret Goffman’s framing as being focused on literal picture frames as references for how other “pictures” are framed (pictures, here, can mean either social or natural frameworks). Due to Goffman’s fourteen pages of seeming obscurity on picture framing, the concept has long since been considered a fractured paradigm, far from theory (Littlejohn, 1977).

Though Goffman’s later work *Frame Analysis: an Essay on the Organization of Experience* better focused and elaborated on the concept of framing, it wasn’t until Robert Entman picked up framing in the early 1990s that the fractured paradigm began to gain credibility in the study of mass communication. Still, Goffman’s concept has been utilized as a tool for visual sociology and dissecting visual rhetoric since its publication. And Goffman himself has consistently been cited as the father of framing.

Frames (also called frameworks or schemata), by definition, are elements or principles of organization, sets of rules or patterns, and heavily motive-laden social constructions through which participants interpret particular events (Littlejohn, 1977, p. 486). In other words, when a person steps into a room and asks “What is it that’s going on here?” they use interpretive frames to decode their surroundings and answer this question (Goffman, 1974, p. 8). Typically, social beings feel confident about their ability to dissect

social situations, but Goffman makes the point that we often misunderstand complex events. Regardless of our proficiency in understanding events and utilizing frames, complex events often require complex frameworks or several simultaneous frameworks to decode. While some argue that Goffman's original framing concept involved social interpretation, not communication, others state that the two are not mutually exclusive, and that communication (whether verbal or nonverbal) plays an irreplaceable role in social encounters.

### **Entman's framing**

When Robert Entman came upon this broken concept, seeking to make it a credible, pragmatic, and usable tool in the study of communication, what he wrote it lacked was an explanation of "exactly how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking" (1993, p. 51). In some ways, Entman made the definition of framing broader to encompass a wider range of applicability for frame analysis. In other ways, he gave frames a more detailed definition, adding terms like selection and salience and identifying key players: communicators, texts, and receivers (Entman, 1993).

To frame means "*to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and /or treatment recommendation for the item described*" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Frames have four functions, to: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Like Goffman, Entman (1993) stated that even miniscule amounts of communication or interaction can encompass all of these purposes and many different frames. Entman, citing the example of

frames used by journalists reporting on the cold war, wrote that even one sentence can be used for all purposes (1993).

An important element of framing added by Entman, especially as it relates to this present study, is that frames are drawn from four different areas. The first is the communicator, who makes either conscious or unconscious decisions about which frames to select. The second is the text, which contains frames due to “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (1993, p. 52).

The third frame location is within the message’s receiver, as people are often guided by frames which direct their thinking and conclusions. It is important to note that the intentional framing used by a communicator may be lost on the reader. The last location of frames is culture, which is “the stock of commonly invoked frames” (1993, p. 52).

Frames work by selecting and highlighting information that the communicator wants noticed by the receiver. Saliency is the factor that makes certain “information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (p. 53). The term “frame” has been utilized, for example, in the phrases *human interest frame* or *conflict frame* which refers to a “following of habitual information processing routines when confronted by certain types of information” rather than falling within the category of framing (Entman, 2004, p. 26). Entman calls these *conflict scripts* or *human interest scripts* instead, since labeling them as such would neither define a problem nor propose a remedy nor serve any of the other reasons that require scholars to identify frames (2004).

Edelman wrote that the prominence of certain issues is what makes frames powerful (1993), while Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock noted the importance of the presence or absence of certain key issues (1991).

A prominent example of highlighting key issues for framing lies in George W. Bush's impassioned rhetoric immediately following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Despite what was to follow, it can easily be said that Bush's speeches (commonly evoking the term "war" and "evil") were a fiery provocation of a feeling of unity and patriotism within the "receivers" of this frame (Entman, 2004). What Bush left out was the call for citizens to sacrifice resources and a proposal for taxes to increase, the negative aspects of a country at war (Entman, 2004). Unfortunately, the news media did not respond with its usual puzzled skepticism. Instead, it condemned dissent and, according to Entman (2004), became all but the White House agenda's megaphone.

Another example of the importance of framing is the "godless Communism" frame under which the media operated in the first half of the twentieth century. The backlash from this frame, according to Anthony Hatcher, was that the Eisenhower administration added several religious symbols to represent Americanism. A few examples are "In God We Trust" imprinted on all paper money beginning in 1955 and the addition of the phrase "Under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 (Hatcher, 2008). What was an injection of vaguely religious concepts into a pluralistic society looked, to the American people, to be an anti-Communist measure due to the many previous years of framing news stories in that manner (Hatcher, 2008).

The most powerful frames are those that become so habitual that they become paradigmatic or meta-schemas (Entman, 2004). The paradigms of *terrorism* or *communism*



in the examples mentioned previously, for which receivers draw on preconceived notions, are what make anti-terrorism and anti-communism frames so easily accepted and rarely refuted in public opinion. “For the most part,” Walter Lippmann wrote, “we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us” (1922, p. 81).

The following section will discuss the method used in this study to examine the framing of stories involving Fundamentalist Christianity.

### **Research Questions**

The bulk of the research on the framing of religious groups has been directed at sheer numbers – for instance, “how often are Christianity, Islam, or Judaism mentioned in mass media?” This study seeks to dig much deeper than these quantitative studies have, and is the first to employ qualitative research methods when studying the framing of Fundamentalist Christianity. Because of the dearth of research of this kind, it is vital to perform a qualitative frame analysis to understand the nature of the media’s portrayal of Fundamentalism and to lay a foundation for future studies. In other words, a qualitative frame analysis can uncover a variety of issues and themes that quantitative research questions may overlook. The first research question asks how Fundamentalist Christians are framed in news stories, and the second asks whether these frames changed between 2000 and 2009.

## Chapter 4:Method

### Search Terms

A thesaurus search of the term “fundamentalist” returns 24 alternate terms. Of these, this study will utilize six relevant words to optimize the search results on Lexis Nexis. The remainder of the 24 alternate terms will not be used, either because their definitions stretch too far away from the definition of Fundamentalism or they are not commonly used in conversation or news media today. The researcher will search for *Fundamentalist, fundamental, Fundamentalism, extremist, radical, diehard, zealot, fanatic, or ultraconservative* applied to the terms *Christian* or *Christianity* on Lexis Nexis’ online news database. *Extremist* will be used because extremism is defined as an “advocacy of extreme measures or views” which could be an alternate definition of Fundamentalism (“Extremism” Merriam-Webster, 2011). *Radical* is a synonym for extremist, but radicalism also refers to an adherence to roots or origins of a movement, as does the term “Fundamentalism” (“Radical” M-W, 2011). *Diehard* is often used in media and conversation to describe someone who ceaselessly defends what seems to be a lost cause, and therefore adheres to the definition of Fundamentalism used in this study (“Diehard” M-W, 2011). *Zealot* is most commonly used in conjunction with religious people, and is defined as a religiously fanatical person or even a bigot (“Zealot” M-W, 2011). *Fanatic*, which could be defined as someone who shows excessive enthusiasm for either religion or politics, will also be searched (“Fanatic” M-W, 2011). The last alternate term for Fundamentalist is *ultraconservative*. Ultraconservative is different from the others in that it defines a person’s

values rather than his or her adamant defense of these values (“Ultraconservative” M-W, 2011). Since traditionalist is a common synonym between Fundamentalist and ultraconservative, however, it is important to include ultraconservative as a search term. Lastly, and although it is technically different from Fundamentalism (historically, as mentioned in the Background section), *Evangelical(s)* will be included as a search term in this study. Evangelical is often used interchangeably with Fundamentalist in news, despite the fact that Fundamentalists are an extremist splinter group of Evangelicals.

### **Publications**

The researcher examined the top four highest circulating U.S. newspapers – *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times*. These four publications have the highest daily paid circulation as compiled by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC). The Audit Bureau of Circulations, created in 1914 to end deceptive advertising practices that lied about circulation statistics, is an independent, third-party data collection agency that compiles in-depth data reports and circulation statistics (“About ABC,” 2010). *The Wall Street Journal*, owned by News Corporation and published in New York, had a daily circulation of 2,061,142 as of the six month period ending September 30, 2010 (Audit Bureau of Circulations [ABC], 2010). *USA Today*, owned by Gannett and published in McLean, Virginia, had a daily circulation of 1,830,594 as of this same six month period (ABC, 2010). *The New York Times*, owned by The New York Times Company and published in New York, had a daily circulation of 876,638 as of this same six month period (ABC, 2010). Lastly, *Los Angeles Times*, owned by Tribune, had a daily circulation of 600,449 as of this same six month period (ABC, 2010).

Because online circulation is more difficult to measure (for these newspapers, with the exclusion of *The Wall Street Journal* which has implemented an online pay wall), only print circulation statistics were used to determine the widest circulating national newspapers as used in this present study.

To search these publications individually, after each search term was entered into Lexis Nexis, the researcher entered the publication name under “Search the News by Source Title.”

Lexis Nexis’ newspaper search results are not aggregated chronologically unless that is specifically selected. The researcher selected “Sort oldest to newest” in the drop-down menu that appears above the search results. The oldest possible search results are from 1980 (Lexis Nexis does not collect sources older than 1980). For the purpose of this study, the researcher only analyzed articles published between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2009. For each publication, the researcher selected only the search results that fell within these dates. The *Los Angeles Times* did not return any relevant results and was therefore not used for this study.

### **Frame Analysis**

Once every article available within the specifications mentioned above was collected, a qualitative frame analysis was conducted to examine how Fundamentalist Christians were framed in each article. The researcher used a combination of Silk’s topoi (1995) and Entman’s frame analysis (see Figure 1). For an individual article, it is possible that all twelve cells of Entman’s frame analysis chart will be filled and several of Silk’s topoi will be utilized simultaneously. Different frames are in no way mutually exclusive (Entman, 2004).

## **Identifying Silk's Topoi**

Mark Silk identified seven topoi (the plural of the Greek word topos) through which the media present religious coverage (1995) (Moore, 2003). Silk's theory, as previously mentioned, opposed previous ideas about media and religion because it stated that the media honor religion by adhering to these seven topoi (which Silk stated are not exhaustive) (Silk, 1995). For this present study, the researcher will identify which topoi are being used. Below each topos is defined.

### **Good works**

Since the early 1990s when Jimmy Carter publicly challenged Atlanta's religious community and claimed more needed to be done to help the poor, "the topos 'religion ought to devote itself to helping the poor' took on the aspect of a universal truth" (Silk, 1995, p. 58). It is Silk's opinion that the stance of the Christian church decreasing social ills through charity work is a derivative of Western religious tradition, not secularization of the media. He argues that a secularized media would challenge other institutions and the state to concern itself with social welfare and leave the church to "concern itself with belief and devotion" (Silk, 1995, p. 59). To identify the good works topos in news articles, the researcher will look for congregations, churches, or religious people framed as "institutions that are benefiting their members and the community at large" (Silk, 1995, p. 57).

### **Tolerance**

The tolerance topos can take on different forms in news stories. It can involve the "salient church-state topos" which is a complicated separation to say the least (Silk, 1995, p. 66), especially considering how affected partisanship can be by party members' religious affiliations. The tolerance topos can be the mere "expression of secularist indifference or

the desire not to offend” (Silk, 1995, p. 66). Religious tolerance may stem from the founding fathers and their opinions about the freedom of worship, or, Silk argues, it may go back to the Sermon on the Mount (1995). If religious tolerance is, in fact, Jesus’ teaching that still permeates journalistic praxis, Silk’s hypothesis that journalistic morals stem from Westernized religious tradition would become true for the tolerance topos. This present study, however, doesn’t seek to affirm or disclaim Silk’s opinion, but merely use his topos as an outline for decoding frames about Fundamentalist Christianity. This research will define the tolerance topos, therefore, by looking for language that seeks to understand religion rather than approach it with hostility or exploit it as controversy.

### **Hypocrisy**

When looking back on newsworthy Christians in the past century, it is impossible not to see wild tales of adultery, illegitimate children, and countless moral lapses committed by church leaders (Silk, 1995). The media blitz surrounding Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart epitomized the topos of hypocrisy -- two Christian television ministries that became “entrepreneurial shepherds of far-flung flocks” before crashing into sex scandals and widely publicized falls from grace (Silk, 1995, p. 83). In this case, “the news media actually played a crucial investigative role in exposing the financial shenanigans at PTL (the Bakker’s Praise the Lord/People that Love ministry) as well as the various sexual misdeeds” (Silk, 1995, p. 85). Media and audiences both seek out stories exposing hypocrisy, “particularly when the hypocrites are as weepy and sanctimonious as Swaggart and the Bakkers” (Silk, 1995, p. 87). For this present study, the researcher will look for the hypocrisy topos by identifying frames that charge “religious leaders with

violating norms that they (are presumed to) profess” (Silk, 1995, p. 92).

### **False Prophecy**

The hypocrisy topos frames religious people as insincere (Silk, 1995). The false prophet, on the other hand, is not bound by sincerity or insincerity, “but either way, he (or she) is an affront to the social order” (Silk, 1995, p. 91). One element of the false-prophecy topos that has been longstanding is “an aversion to the exploitation of women” portrayed in the media, especially since the media has a preoccupation with plural marriage in Mormonism (Silk, 1995, p. 93). Doctrine considered to contain false prophecy in the media is any which tends to prey on the gullible or brainwash its adherents (Silk, 1995). The word “cult” is predisposed to interpretation as false prophecy (Silk, 1995). As mentioned in the literature review, any religion labeled as deviant from mainstream Christianity is subject to anti-cult media representation, and any article that treats Fundamentalist Christianity in this way adheres to a topos of false prophecy.

### **Inclusion**

The inclusion topos is the backhanded compliment of a news story about a minority faith. Media, in an effort to explain a religion in bite-sized comprehensible way rather than marginalize it, will often focus on “alien faiths” (Silk, 1995, p. 108). Having to explain minority religions’ beliefs and doctrine, although combating ignorance, is also indirectly acknowledging how this religion differs from mainstream Christianity, and thus indirectly labeling the religion as deviant (1995). Inclusion also involves the American identity, in-groups, and out-groups. While groups can shift from out-group to in-group, oftentimes stereotypes and labels can remain for years (Silk, 1995). Silk states, “The story about Muslims in the United States, ‘Muslims enter American mainstream,’ was a parable of

ethnic assimilation” (1995, p. 115). If a news organization takes great pains to tell the audience about how included a religious people are, the truth may be just the opposite (Silk, 1995).

### **Supernatural Belief**

According to Silk, news media and religion are in constant opposition, especially since the majority of religious belief relies upon matters that cannot be expressed empirically (1995). So how should reporters approach coverage of signs and wonders, “a miraculous healing, an apparition of the Virgin Mary, a poltergeist”? (Silk, 1995, p. 119). Silk’s opinion is that journalists should “let the word go forth,” reporting the facts as they are, without judgment. The problem is: that reporting style is the essence of tabloid fare (Silk, 1995). And recently, in Silk’s opinion, “whatever journalists’ personal beliefs, the mainstream news media’s approach to the supernatural has become more tabloid than skeptical -- often less skeptical than that of church authorities” (1995, p. 122). Some claim that regardless of whether journalists are looking for miraculous occurrences or skeptical of them, they should report exactly what they see (Silk, 1995). When “the supernatural is ensconced as a regular item on the bill of bizarre and amazing fare,” journalists are adhering to the supernatural belief topos (Silk, 1995, p. 120).

### **Declension**

Mainstream Protestantism, in many church leaders’, political leaders’, and church members’ opinions, has become a lukewarm, wishy-washy industry clung to by congregations that rarely see the power of the Holy Spirit in their personal lives (Silk, 1995). “Since the days of the Puritans, American religious leaders have rarely let slip the opportunity to lament the decline of religious devotion,” Silk says, but neither he nor this



present research intends to judge the validity of declension arguments (1995, p. 135). Instead, the researcher will examine articles for topoi that show faith is a declining American tradition, a worshipful act of generations gone by, now replaced by either godlessness or apathy.

See Figure 2 for the spreadsheet used to identify and examine the topoi within news stories involving Fundamentalist Christianity.

**Table 4.1: Topoi Keywords (Silk, 1995)**

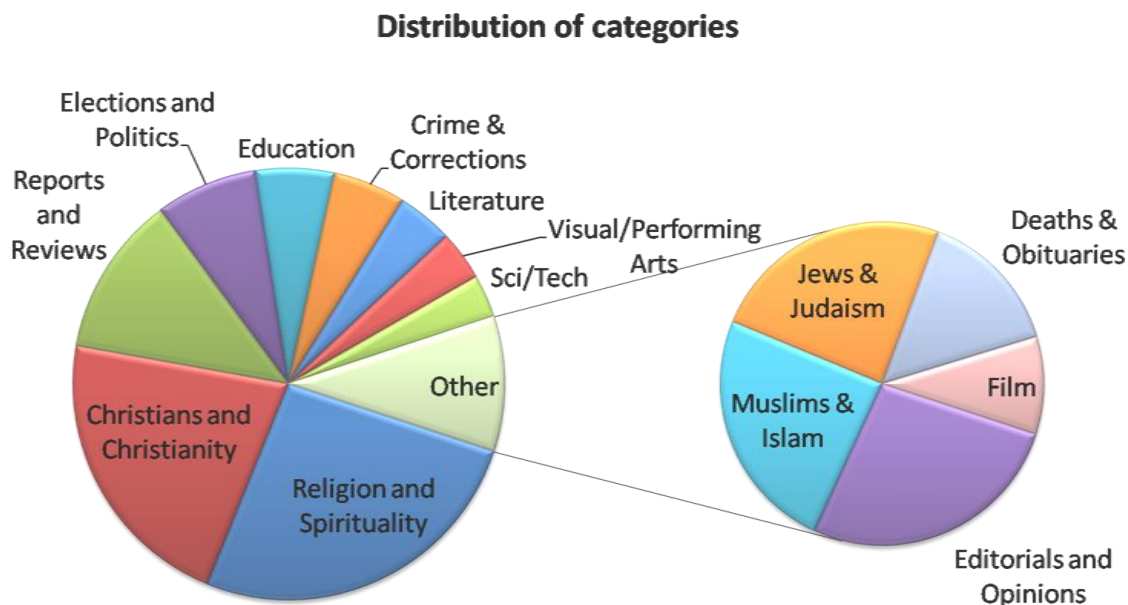
<b>Topoi</b>	<b>Keywords</b>
Good Works	Good Samaritan, charitable, giving, philanthropic, humanitarian, altruistic, generous
Tolerance	Open-minded, benevolent, understanding, closed-minded, biased, intolerant, bigoted, prejudiced
Hypocrisy	Dishonest, bigoted, deceptive, sincerity, fraudulent
False Prophecy	Apocalypse, foreseeing, vision, revelation, fervor, extremism, deception
Inclusion	Inclusive, open, accepting, narrow, ignorant, uninviting, staunch, stringent, conservative, judgmental
Supernatural Belief	Charismatic, prophecy, tongues, healing, irrational, demented, illogical
Declension	Deterioration, secularization, humanism, decay, decline, degenerate, corruption, worldly, regression

## Chapter 5: Results

The search terms discussed previously (Fundamentalist, fundamental, Fundamentalism, extremist, radical, diehard, zealot, fanatic, or ultraconservative applied to the terms Christian or Christianity) returned 286 articles from three different publications. From these articles, the researcher analyzed 36 articles or about 12.6 percent. The articles were narrowed down to locate the most relevant to this study. If an article only briefly mentioned Fundamentalist Christians within the context of another topic, that article was not utilized. Of the returned search results, many were film reviews, book reviews, theater reviews, "letters to the editor," and obituaries. While future research should delve into how these types of articles framed Fundamentalist Christianity, this study did not. While this study did examine a few obituaries, one of them being Jerry Falwell's obituary in the *New York Times*, most were not pertinent to this present research, and were therefore not utilized.

Below is a chart which shows the distributions of a portion of the subjects under which the articles fell. From these categories, the researcher's focus was on any article that directly involved Fundamentalist Christianity. Most of the relevant articles came from the categories of politics, religion and spirituality, or Christianity.

**Figure 5.1: Distribution of categories within search results**



There could be several reasons why so few articles were relevant to the topic of Fundamentalist Christianity as compared to Kerr and Moy's 2002 study which analyzed 2,696 articles from 1980-2000. First, Kerr and Moy's study covered twice the time period this present study covered. Second, their study searched the Lexis Nexis database for all relevant articles across all the newspapers available in Lexis Nexis, while this present study only searched the top three national newspapers (*New York Times*, *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*). The *Los Angeles Times*, though one of the top four national publications by readership, did not return any relevant search results and was therefore not utilized. It is possible that in the years following 9/11, the media's agenda was more focused on Islamic fundamentalism than radical Christianity, as many articles found in the search were deemed irrelevant because, while they framed Islam a certain way, there was not enough

available data to determine how they framed Christian Fundamentalism. It is also possible that, as Islamic fundamentalism has been portrayed so negatively in response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11, reporters are cautious about using the term “fundamentalist,” to describe Christians.

### **Emergent Frames**

The framing of Fundamentalist Christianity in the print articles examined was generally negative, although print reporters often covered Fundamentalism through a veil of open-mindedness (this will be discussed in depth below). Several different negative frames were used to discuss radical believers. Below, these emergent frames will be explained.

### **Polarization and divisiveness**

This study found that there is fear and speculation among journalists in this study that being a Christian (let alone a Fundamentalist Christian) and trying to advance in the public sphere are mutually exclusive tasks. Perhaps the pull between church and state, or faith and reason, seems to polarize political parties, the media seems to fear the dichotomy will destroy constituencies and utterly abolish prospective votes. During the period studied, 2000 to 2009, the most evident example of this polarization was the issue of former President George W. Bush’s relationship with Christianity. Bush’s religion was both an ambiguous “is he or isn’t he?” and a perceived source of conflict to the media (see Keller). One reporter wrote, “Is President Bush a religious zealot, or does he just pander to that crowd?”<sup>5</sup>The media either saw Bush’s belief system as offensive, divisive and

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<sup>5</sup> Keller, B. (2003, May 17). God and George W. Bush. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/17/opinion/god-and-george-w-bush.html>.

discordant or as a powerful contrivance he used to assert his agenda.<sup>6</sup> Either frame is negative; when Bush wasn't framed as a born-again Evangelical, he was framed as manipulative in the way he catered to Evangelicals.

A media backlash was evident in articles published in early 2001 after John Ashcroft, former governor of Missouri and former U.S. Senator, was chosen as the U.S. Attorney General under the Bush administration.<sup>7</sup> The choice was framed by the media as having purely religious roots, possibly because Ashcroft had stringent, conservative values that catered to the radical right-wing constituency. Also, the media framed Ashcroft as incompetent because, prior to his election as Attorney General, he had been narrowly defeated by a candidate running for Senate.<sup>8</sup> The problem was his opponent had died three weeks before the election in a plane crash, and had been elected posthumously (his widow took the Senate seat). The media often mentioned Ashcroft's defeat by the deceased Mel Carnahan. When the *New York Times* announced Ashcroft's election, reporters Neil Lewis and David Johnston even opened with "Within days of Senator John Ashcroft of Missouri's narrow re-election defeat by a candidate who died three weeks before Election Day, religious and conservative leaders began promoting him for a major position in a Bush administration" (para. 1).

Like Bush's religion, Ashcroft's values seemed to spark a fear of polarization within the GOP, especially regarding "emotion-laden social issues like abortion, the death penalty,

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<sup>6</sup> Suskind, R. (2004, October 17). Faith, certainty and the presidency of George W Bush. *New York Times Magazine*. Retrieved June 22, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html>

<sup>7</sup> Johnston, D. & Lewis, N. (2001, January 7). Religious right made big push to put Ashcroft in Justice Department. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/07/us/religious-right-made-big-push-to-put-ashcroft-in-justice-dept.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Governor's widow goes to senate. (2000, December 6). *New York Times*. Retrieved June 22, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/06/us/governor-s-widow-goes-to-senate.html?src=pm>

crime, civil rights and the selection of federal judges” (Lewis & Johnson, 2001). While the issue of whether or not John Ashcroft is technically a Fundamentalist Christian is outside of this study, this was the label that was given to him by the media as soon as his views, and backing by conservative leaders, became evident. To Ashcroft’s opponents, Lewis and Johnston wrote, “He represents a troubling, even dangerous mixing of public policy and religious fundamentalism” (para. 13). The troublesome mix of religious values and politics is not an uncommon frame, and will be discussed below in the “Church and State” section.

### **In Jesus’ name**

Evoking a generalized supreme being, even using words like “God,” “pray,” and “blessed,” is not typically offensive. When the terms are not used in an extreme or inflammatory way, politicians, CEOs, and Hollywood stars can generally discuss vaguely religious topics with little or no critical backlash from the press. The U.S. Congress prays before legislative sessions, and the Supreme Court begins with the declaration “God save this honorable court.”<sup>9</sup> Even U.S. currency declares “In God we trust.” It is not, therefore, offensive or socially unacceptable to discuss an enigmatic supreme being.

This study found, however, that this is not the case when it comes to the use of the name “Jesus Christ.” The specificity is divisive and politically incorrect. How much differently, then, is a Christian framed in the news when he or she is labeled “pious” or “devout” rather than a “Jesus freak”?<sup>10</sup>

An article from *USA Today* that condemns Christians for being judgmental of Muslims discusses Reverend Billy Graham’s invocation “in Jesus’ name” at President

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<sup>9</sup>Lewis, N. (2001, January 13). Critics See Little in Ashcroft Speech to Derail Nomination. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/13/politics/13ASHC.html>

<sup>10</sup>Kristof, N. (2004, April 24). Hug an Evangelical. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/24/opinion/hug-an-evangelical.html>

George W. Bush's inauguration. The author accuses Graham of two offenses --praying "in Jesus' name" and equating all Muslims with terrorists.<sup>11</sup> It appears that, as framed in *USA Today*, the name Jesus is as offensive as a Fundamentalist Christian judging someone for having a different belief system, and as offensive as saying another religion is based in evil and violence.

The last example of the perceived offensiveness of Jesus Christ appears in an article in the *New York Times* about the "dipping" of the American flag at the Naval Academy Chapel in Annapolis, Maryland. At the Sunday service, a midshipman dips the American flag, as a sign of respect, before the altar's cross.<sup>12</sup> Though, according to the Navy, the American flag is not dipped at any other service, this ritual has taken place at this particular service for 40 years. After a higher-up called attention to the unusual tradition, the dipping was suspended for a few months, but then resumed. Although the article suggests it is the abnormality of the ritual that has caused the stir, and not the fact that the flag is being dipped before the cross, at another point in the article, the redundant frame is used: "Conservative Christian chaplains have battled the military to break with tradition and pray in Jesus' name at military functions."<sup>13</sup> The author shows, here, that it is not only the oddity of dipping the flag that has called the ritual into question, but it is the specificity of kneeling or praying to Jesus that is offensive. Even at a nondenominational Protestant Christian service, showing specific reverence toward Christ is avoided (Banerjee, 2008).

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<sup>11</sup> Grossman, C. L. (2001, November 21). Not all Christians reach out to Islam. *USA Today*. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/hottopics/lnacademic/>

<sup>12</sup> Banerjee, N. (2008, March 8). Clashing Over Church Ritual and Flag Protocol at the Naval Academy Chapel. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 12, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/08/us/08chapel.html>

<sup>13</sup> Banerjee, N. (2008, March 8). Clashing Over Church Ritual and Flag Protocol at the Naval Academy Chapel. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/08/us/08chapel.html>

## **Church and state**

As mentioned previously, a common frame utilized in political commentary is the church and state frame, which focuses on the seemingly dangerous mix of the right-wing conservatives' religious values and their power in office. This is most often evoked in discussions on prayer in schools, but when politicians seem to compromise their public stance by integrating God or Jesus, media also tend to oppose, citing the church and state conflict.

In early 2000, George W. Bush spoke at Bob Jones University, a Fundamentalist Christian university with notoriously strict standards for students (including, until 2000, a campus-wide ban on interracial dating). Though the most conservative members of the Republican Party said that Bush was attending only in an attempt to appeal to a splinter group of voters, the media attacked the visit as a disconcerting indication that, if elected, the Bush administration would be incapable of removing religion from political decision-making.

In addition to the frame of religion bleeding into politics, the media was concerned about religion bleeding into schools. Almost a century after the Scopes trial, the teaching of evolution in schools is still a controversial topic (although not quite as controversial as the teaching of intelligent design). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, proponents of creationism are framed in the same way they were framed in the 1920s, as ignorant bigots. In fact, "bigot" was one of the most commonly used terms this study found describing Fundamentalist Christians, outnumbered only by the term "intolerant." Nicholas Kristoff wrote, "But if I praise the



good work of evangelicals -- like their superb relief efforts in Darfur -- I'll also condemn what I perceive as bigotry" (evoking both the tolerance and good works topoi).<sup>14</sup>

Aside from bigotry, the topic of religion in the classroom was also framed as proselytizing and manipulating. In 2001 a lawsuit was settled between the Good News Club, a Bible-study group, and a small school district west of Albany, New York, five years after the school district forbade the Bible-study group to meet on the campus of an elementary, middle and high school. Although the Good News Club was victorious at the Supreme Court level, the media still attacked the proselytizing of students (who, in turn, were depicted as incapable of making their own decisions). *New York Times* reporter Kate Zernicke wrote that the Good News Bible study was "run by Child Evangelism Fellowship Inc., which encourages the proselytizing of young children." These clubs, "for children from kindergarten through sixth grade, teach Bible lessons, reward children with candy for recalling bits of scripture and allow them to make professions of faith to become members of the church."<sup>15</sup> This frame of Fundamentalist Christians and Fundamentalist Christian organizations preying on the young and impressionable is not uncommon. This manipulation will be discussed further below under the emergent topos "deception."

If nothing else, the clash of evolution and intelligent design is framed as disruptive white noise that interferes with a solid educational environment. One reporter simply wrote, "Let the teachers teach. Let the students learn...Let's move on."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Kristof, N. (2004, November 24). Apocalypse (Almost) Now. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/24/opinion/24kristof.html>

<sup>15</sup> Zernicke, K. (2001, June 12). The Supreme Court: The Hometown; Justices; ruling is good news to small town pastor. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/06/12/us/supreme-court-hometown-justices-ruling-good-small-town-s-pastor.html?src=pm>.

<sup>16</sup> Vinciguerra, T. (2000, June 25). Word for word/Religion in the classroom: In Louisiana parish, dim echoes of the "Monkey Trial." *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from

## Faith and Reason

With the evolution in schools argument, the church and state argument, and other controversial religious topics in the media, there is often an underlying frame that is not discussed as blatantly as others. Anthony Lewis, *New York Times* reporter, provided the best example of this seeming dichotomy in the statement “Religion and extreme nationalism have formed deadly combinations in these decades, impervious to reason.”<sup>17</sup> Lewis, in his last op-ed column after 32 years at the *New York Times*, attacks all types of Fundamentalism, stating that Christian Fundamentalism is just as extreme and unreasonable in its actions as the tenets of Islamic Fundamentalism that brought about the terrorist attacks of September 11. The foundation of Lewis’ argument is that the United States is built on faith in reason, not in man or religion, and that often in turbulent times, people resort to fear (he cites the “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia, the September 11 attacks, McCarthyism and Christians who refuse to believe in Darwinism as a few examples of knee-jerk fear reactions). In essence, Lewis is equating religion, whether it is Islam, Judaism or Christianity, with fear. Lewis seems to suggest *fear threatens reason*. Though he doesn’t blatantly write it, Lewis implies that religion breeds fear, and fear threatens the foundation of the United States.

Anthony Lewis isn’t the only reporter to frame faith and reason as if the two can never coexist. Karl Giberson and Darrel Falk wrote a piece for *USA Today* called “We believe in evolution – and God,” which is a summons to bridge the chasm of faith and reason by

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/25/weekinreview/word-for-word-religion-classroom-louisiana-parish-dim-echoes-monkey-trial.html?src=pm>.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis, A. (2001, December 15). *Abroad and at home: Hail and farewell*. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/15/opinion/abroad-at-home-hail-and-farewell.html>.

marrying the theory of evolution with the Biblical account of creationism.<sup>18</sup> Giberson and Falk repeatedly suggest that evolution is God's way of creating, and that Christians should not shrink from the theory of evolution in fear, but have a little faith in it, instead. Giberson and Falk manage to demean both the scientist and the religious through their argument, the scientist for being faithless and the religious for being unreasonable. The authors simplify a concept that is in no way simple. Throughout their argument, Giberson (though a Christian himself) and Falk frame Fundamentalists as intolerant, quick to judge, and narrow-minded.

### **Narrow-mindedness**

Of all seven of Mark Silk's topoi, the most frequently evoked was the tolerance topos. While reporters tended to frame Fundamentalist Christians as intolerant and narrow-minded toward people with other belief systems, the media also tended to frame themselves (or the other media elite) as quite tolerant and open-minded. Media frames suggest Christianity would be far less repugnant if Christians would keep to themselves and stop proselytizing and evangelizing, live and let live. Nicholas Kristof, one of the *New York Times'* most abrasive and hard-hitting reporters, laid down his weapons in one column and called for a more tolerant media. "It's always easy to point out the intolerance of others," he wrote. "What's harder is to practice inclusiveness oneself" ("Hug an Evangelical," 2004).

Again, "intolerant" was the most recurrent term used to describe Fundamentalist Christians. Fundamentalists were often framed as dangerously ruthless in their attempts to convert others. When Bonnie Penner Witherall, a Christian missionary in Lebanon, was

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<sup>18</sup> Giberson, K. & Falk, D. (2009, August 10). We believe in evolution – and God. *USA Today*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.lib.usf.edu/hottopics/Inacademic/>?

murdered in 2002,<sup>19</sup> the media assumed she had been trying to convert Muslims to Christianity. The articles never mention the intolerance of her murderer, only her own. Intolerance is a characteristic that manifests itself in many different ways. For Witherall, according to reporter Neil MacFarquhar, her intolerance caused her to proselytize Muslims (which resulted in her death).

### **Fundamentalists and Pentecostals**

The literature review defines Christian Fundamentalism as a movement in history that splintered from mainstream Christianity in defense of the “fundamentals” of doctrine. This movement developed in response to a perceived wave of secular humanism that both the U.S. and the church were subjected to, caused by scientific enlightenment and other breakthroughs in knowledge. It was mentioned previously that, often when the media use the term Fundamentalist, it is used incorrectly, to describe anyone who holds extreme views not typical of mainstream Christianity. The research conducted only affirms the literature – more often than not, the Christians about whom reporters were writing were not actually Fundamentalists but conservative Evangelicals.

Another finding is that often reporters mislabeled Pentecostals as “Fundamentalists.” While it is beyond the scope of this research to link any causation to this, it is possible that the unusual practices of Pentecostals (praying in tongues, prophesying, etc.) cause them to be mistaken for extremists or Fundamentalists. In Laurie Nadel’s account of increasing Pentecostalism on Long Island, she lumps Fundamentalists with Pentecostals, as if the two are indistinguishable. Nadel writes, “But dozens of

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<sup>19</sup> MacFarquhar, N. (2002, November 25). Killing underscores enmity of evangelists and Muslims. *New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/11/25/world/killing-undercores-enmity-of-evangelists-and-muslims.html>.

Pentecostal and fundamentalist Christian churches, with their charismatic practices like speaking in tongues, dot Long Island's religious landscape, and some, like the Upper Room in Dix Hills, which can seat 3,500, are among the largest churches on the Island."<sup>20</sup> Nowhere in the literature are Fundamentalist Christians attributed with charismatic practices. While there certainly may be Fundamentalists who pray in tongues and Pentecostals who reject modernism, Nadel's misuse of the term affirms literature that suggests the media's meaning-making task is often fulfilled by identifying deviance. In the case of expanding Pentecostal churches on Long Island, those who pray in tongues are considered deviant. Fundamentalists, because of the sternness of their beliefs, are also considered deviant. It is not the commonalities of Pentecostalism and Fundamentalism that cause them to be amalgamated into one religion, but rather the mutuality of their social deviance.

In Nicholas Kristof's column, "God, Satan and the Media," he calls for more tolerance and inclusiveness between Fundamentalist Christians and the media elite who tend to respond to ignorance with more ignorance. He goes on, however, to claim "Fundamentalist Christianity" is growing across not just the U.S. but the world. "The number of African Christians has soared over the last century," he writes, "to 360 million from 10 million, and the boom is not among tweedy Presbyterians but among charismatic Pentecostals." Neither of these denominations are necessarily Fundamentalists, but Kristof is lumping Pentecostals in with Fundamentalists, the way Nadel did.

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<sup>20</sup> Nadel, L. (2006, March 26). L.I. at worship – It's not if, it's when: Waiting for the end, with trepidation and joy. *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9905E4DA1630F935A15750C0A9609C8B63>.

## Emergent Topoi

Mark Silk's seven topoi (good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, false prophecy, inclusion, supernatural belief, and declension) were commonly utilized as themes throughout the articles examined. In fact, all but two of the analyzed articles evoked at least one of Silk's topoi. As previously mentioned, tolerance was the most commonly evoked topos (appearing in 61 percent or 22 of the articles ), as Fundamentalist Christians were most often framed as intolerant and either secular persons or persons of other religions were often framed as tolerant when juxtaposed with Fundamentalist Christians. The second most commonly used topos, inclusion, (appearing in 39 percent or 14 of the articles) often appeared concurrently with tolerance. For example, in an article titled "Catholics minimize impact of Bush visit to Bob Jones,"<sup>21</sup> Fundamentalist Christians were juxtaposed with Catholics; Catholics were framed as accepting of Fundamentalists (inclusive) while Fundamentalists were framed as anti-Catholic (exclusive). The quotations used and aspects of the situation highlighted showed that the Fundamentalists were being harshly intolerant in their exclusivity by judging Catholics for their adherence to certain beliefs (Schemo, 2000). The topoi used, therefore, are both tolerance and inclusion.

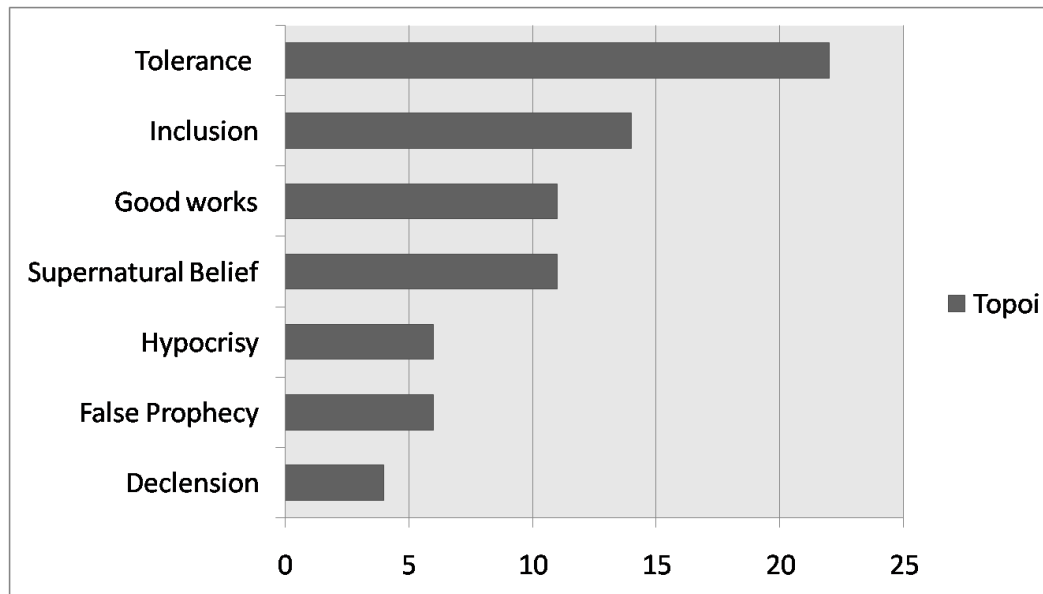
The least frequently used topos was declension, or the deterioration and secularization of society (moving away from the church as the prominent institution). Declension was mentioned in only 11 percent (or 4) of the articles examined. This could be because, in the context of a plural society, journalists are less preoccupied with the secularization of the U.S.

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<sup>21</sup> Schemo, D. J. (2000, March 2). *The New York Times*. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/02/nyregion/catholics-minimize-impact-of-bush-visit-to-bob-jones.html>.

The good works and supernatural belief topoi were both used about 30 percent of the time, and the hypocrisy and false prophecy topoi were both used about 17 percent of the time. The graph below shows the distribution of Silk's topoi in the articles examined for this study.

**Figure 5.2 Topoi by frequency**



In addition to Silk's seven topoi, two emergent topoi were identified through this research, deception and ignorance, that were often utilized in the articles examined. Deception and ignorance will be examined in depth below.

### **Deception**

Fundamentalist Christians and Fundamentalist Christian churches were often framed as being deceptive in the articles examined, meaning they were misleading or manipulative. There were a few striking examples of this topos. The first was in an article called "Killing underscores enmity of evangelists and Muslims" which discussed anti-Americanism in Lebanon that may have led to the death of a missionary named Bonnie Penner Witherall in 2002. *New York Times* reporter Neil MacFarquhar suggests a few

possibilities as to why a gunman would kill the 31-year-old while she was working in a prenatal clinic in the Middle East. One of the main reasons cited was Witherall's attempts at converting Muslim children to Christianity (a claim that was disputed by Witherall's organization throughout the article). The reporter wrote that, in response to the allegations, the missionary organization (for which Witherall worked) "sidestepped" the proselytizing issue (MacFarquhar, 2002, para. 8). This depicted both the deceased missionary and the organization for which she worked as deceptive, on the basis of mere allegations.

Another article focused on Timothy LaHaye, successful Christian author who co-wrote the *Left Behind* series, a series of 16 novels published between 1995 and 2007 that depict a fictionalized version of biblical end times prophecy. These books are offensive, columnist Nicholas Kristof wrote, because they depict good people being thrown into the lake of fire because, despite their good works, they did not accept Jesus Christ as their savior. Apparently, LaHaye and the other author, Jerry Jenkins, had emailed Kristof to defend themselves in a response to an earlier column. Basically, the authors told Kristof that, despite the offensiveness and exclusivity of their message, they believed not backing down or denying their beliefs was their cross to bear. . Kristof, in turn, highlights their lucrative marketing empire, listing available *Left Behind*-brand items like screen savers and calendars. "This isn't religion," Kristof writes, "this is brand management."<sup>22</sup>

Kristof portrayed the business of *Left Behind* as a deceptive money-making scheme run by two men who know more about marketing than they do about compassion. Kristof ends the article with this satirical ultimatum: "So I challenge the authors to a bet: if the

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<sup>22</sup> Kristof, N. (November 24, 2004). Apocalypse (Almost) Now. New York Times. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/24/opinion/24kristof.html>.



events of the Apocalypse arrive in the next 10 years, then I'll donate \$500 to the battle against the Antichrist; if it doesn't, you donate \$500 to a charity of my choosing that fights poverty -- and bigotry.”

Kristof's depiction of LaHaye could also fall under the hypocrisy topos. A distinction must be made, therefore, between the deception and hypocrisy topoi. Deception is rooted in manipulation or conniving, often in conversion attempts. Hypocrisy, on the other hand, is when a person says he or she is a Christian, but his or her life doesn't display the manifestation of an internal conviction. This topos is often seen in cases of scandals in churches.

### **Ignorance**

The second emergent topos uncovered by this research is ignorance, which though related to deception, is distinguishable from it. As mentioned previously, “bigot” was one of the most commonly used terms to describe Fundamentalist Christians. Bigotry goes hand in hand with this emergent topos. Describing Fundamentalists as ignorant can either signify they are altogether uneducated or that they are insensitive to others' beliefs. Another term for this ignorance could be naiveté. The difference between intolerance and ignorance is that intolerance is a choice, while the ignorant are often framed as victims. The opposite of intolerance is acceptance; the opposite of ignorance is knowledge. Children born into Fundamentalist Christian homes are framed as ignorant, because this lifestyle is the only one they have ever known. When an ignorant person meets a deceptive religion, the media often frames the ignorant person as a victim (thus, framing the religion as a cult). Kristof describes the ignorance of religious people by portraying their antitheses – the media elite:

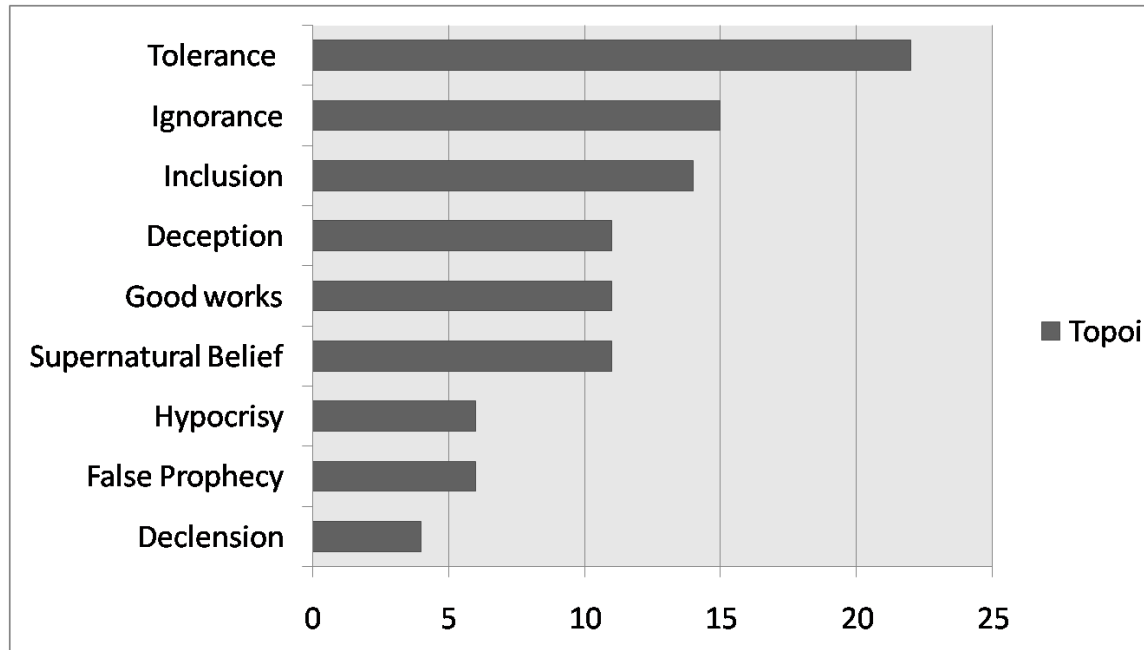
“In its approach to evangelicals, the national news media are generally reflective of the educated elite, particularly in the Northeast. It's expected at New York dinner parties to link crime to deprived childhoods -- conversation would stop abruptly if someone mentioned Satan.”<sup>23</sup>

Kristof's statement also reflects the faith and reason frame, showing that these Northeastern “educated elite” are intellectual enough to reason beyond supernatural causes of contemporary social problems. Moreover, Kristof's contrast of elite and evangelical frames Fundamentalist Christians as ignorant and uneducated. It is a backhanded compliment, since the entirety of his column calls for more tolerance in the media toward Fundamentalism. Kristof, who is cited more in this study than any other reporter for the negative way he frames Fundamentalism, wrote in this column, “Such mockery of religious faith is inexcusable” (Kristof, “God, Satan, and the media,” 2003). The columnist goes on to write about his high school girlfriend who prayed in tongues, feeling the need to defend her intelligence by stating, “contrary to stereotypes, she was an ace student, smarter than many people fluent in more conventional tongues, like French and Spanish” (Kristof, 2003, para. 9). The fact that he feels the need to defend her, speaks to his own view of Fundamentalist Christians as being less than intelligent.

The bar graph below shows the frequency of the topoi evoked in the articles examined for this study, including the two emergent topoi (deception and ignorance).

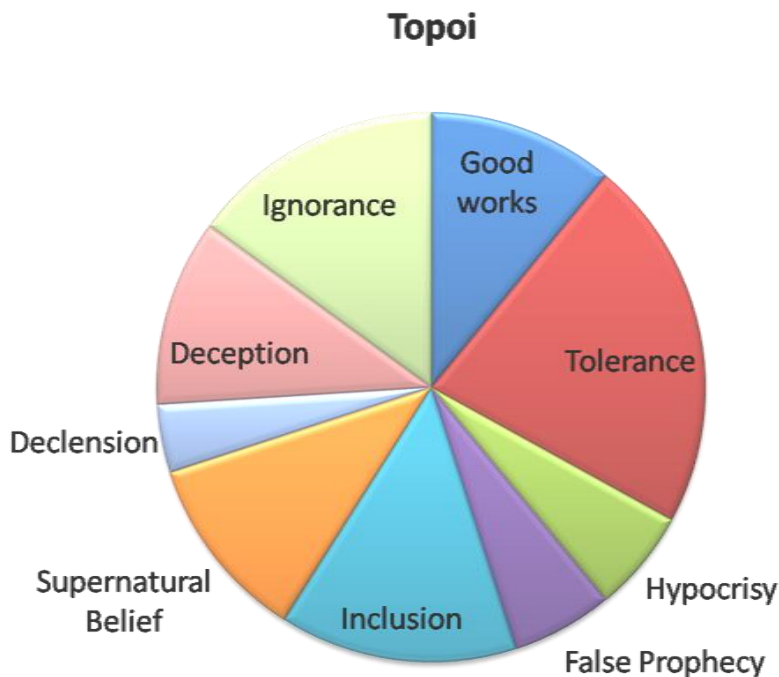
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<sup>23</sup> Kristof, N. (2003, March 4). God, Satan, and the Media. The New York Times. Retrieved May 9, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/04/opinion/god-satan-and-the-media.html>.

**Figure 5.3 Frames by frequency**

The chart below shows the distribution of topoi across articles examined for this study. It should be noted that many articles contained more than one topoi and two of the articles contained no topoi.

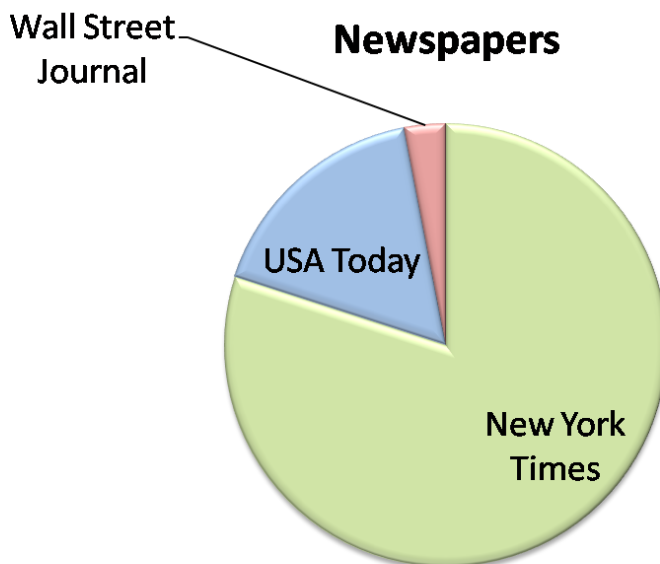
**Figure 5.4 Topoi by distribution percentage**



### **The Media**

Of the journalists whose work was examined for this research, approximately 80 percent worked for the *New York Times* (29 of the articles), approximately 17 percent worked for *USA Today* (6 of the articles), and approximately 3 percent worked for the *Wall Street Journal* (1 of the articles). About 61 percent of the articles examined were written by men (22 of the articles); about 39 were written by women (14 of the articles). Some of the most notable articles examined for this study are op-ed columns.

**Figure 5.5 Distribution of search results by newspaper**



### **September 11, 2001**

One major motivation to perform this study was to understand what Kerr and Moy (2002) meant when they wrote that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 contaminated their research set. To this, there is no direct answer. This research found a lull in articles about Fundamentalist Christianity that lasted about eight weeks after 9/11. When coverage returned, it was gentler. The first relevant article that appeared was about a Christian who escaped the twin towers. The words used to describe the man were “fervent” and “dedicated” rather than the more negative words that had been used before 9/11 (“intolerant,” “extremists,” “egomaniacs”).<sup>24</sup> There are possible reasons why the negativity

<sup>24</sup> “Fervent” and “dedicated” – see Barry, D. (2001, November 6). In pulpits, a grateful Christian testifies to deliverance. New York Times. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/11/06/nyregion/nation-challenged-survivor-pulpits-grateful-christian-testifies-deliverance.html>; “Intolerant,” “extremists,” and

softened after 9/11, but it seems, that as the U.S. retreated into a sense of unity and anti-terrorism, the country seemed to return to an old belief system or moral code. It's possible, in the media's attempt to not blame all Islamic Fundamentalists for 9/11, political correctness was highly valued and Fundamentalist-bashing was diluted for a few months. Shortly thereafter, by early 2002, the negative frames had returned, and the media seemed to be settling back into their pre-9/11 ways.

### **Differences between newspapers**

While this study's results are not meant to be comparative, there were a few noticeable trends in how the different sources framed Fundamentalist Christianity. First of all, while the *New York Times* often used the narrow-minded (or intolerant) frame, *USA Today* did not use this frame in any of the articles analyzed for this study.

### **Limitations**

While this qualitative frame analysis was effective in uncovering how Fundamentalist Christians were framed in three national publications over a ten-year span, the results cannot be generalized beyond these publications and it cannot be assumed that the framing of Fundamentalist Christianity would be the same before and after the data set. Also, the words the journalists wrote must be taken at face value. One vital key of qualitative frame analysis is to not "read between the lines" or assume the reporter had any motive for writing what he or she wrote. The biggest limitation of this research was the dearth of relevant articles to analyze. So, while the results show how 32 reporters who wrote 36 articles framed Fundamentalist Christianity, these results cannot be generalized

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"egomaniacs" – see Halbfinger, D. (2001, July 7). Schundler seeks to shift debate on abortion. *New York Times*. Retrieved May 2, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/07/nyregion/schundler-seeks-to-shift-debate-on-abortion.html>

beyond the scope of these articles. This study is certainly a greater representation of specific reporters' perspectives on Fundamentalist Christianity than it is on specific news organizations' stances on the subject.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This qualitative frame analysis examined Fundamentalist Christianity in three print news publications from 2000 to 2009. The research was successful in uncovering several emergent frames and two emergent topoi. Using Entman's frame analysis method and Silk's topoi, the researcher analyzed, in depth, 36 total articles that were directly relevant to the topic of Fundamentalist Christianity and effectively portrayed the media's perspective on this radical subculture of Christians. Despite the events of the past few decades, the findings of this study show that in the years since Kerr and Moy performed a similar quantitative study, the framing of Fundamentalist Christianity, at least by these two most prominent newspapers in the U.S., is still generally negative. Comparing this present study's results with Kerr and Moy's study is complicated, however, because the nature of each study is vastly different and the researcher sought to perform a nuanced reading of the framing of Fundamentalist Christianity in a deeper, qualitative way.

This present study uncovered frames and topoi to show the profundity of perpetually negative framing of a subculture, not necessarily the frequency of the framing. Fundamentalism's portrayal is still consistently negative, highlighting the intolerance, bigotry and zealotry of a distinct social enclave that worships the same God as almost half of the U.S., but is committed to Him too radically.

Since 1925, the way the media speak about and write about many subcultures and minorities has changed drastically. Nineteen twenty-five was three decades before the women's liberation movement and two decades before the civil rights movement began.



Certainly the way reporters speak about women, racial minorities and even some religious minorities has changed since the Scopes trial. It behooves and burdens this researcher to report that the way the media frames Fundamentalist Christians seems to have changed little if at all since the first big media event in Dayton, Tennessee, that year, almost a century ago. The secular humanism that was trickling into formerly Christian institutions in 1925 has become a dominant cultural ideology in 2011. The manifestation of this cultural ideology is political correctness, compromise, and understanding. When juxtaposed against Fundamentalist Christianity, secular humanism is a crowd-pleaser.

In 2011, after the downturn of the newspaper industry, media organizations are making the difficult choice to cut departments, jobs, and print space. The industry, invaded by new web standards, shorter attention spans of readers, and several years of declining readership, has experienced a complete overhaul. A media oft accused of liberalism is running on fumes in these turbulent times, covering several wars thousands of miles away and experiencing the struggles of an economic recession that hits close to home. Now more than ever, it is not seen as a necessity to have a religion reporter on staff. That type of specialization, in fact, is not often sought in new hires at media organizations. Rather, well-rounded qualifications, with experience in videography, photography, and web design, stand out on a resumé beyond specifications.

Although staffing religion reporters is no longer a priority for media organizations, religious fundamentalism is one of the most controversial topics appearing in print news, especially since the terrorist attacks on 9/11 and ensuing wars in the Middle East. And the American people continue to adhere to religious beliefs, despite the secularization of major U.S. institutions like education and the media. Polls show an average of 49.5% of Americans

stated they were Protestant in the ten years examined for this study (2000 to 2009)(Gallup). Yet, in the American media, the name Jesus, the God these people worship, is considered offensive. There exists, therefore, a chasm separating the media from almost half of its audience.

The findings of this limited study call for a more relatable national media, one that, rather than facing intolerance with intolerance, seeks to not only understand their readership's beliefs but speak to these beliefs in a way that doesn't alienate and offend readers. Empathy requires knowledge. The truth doesn't change because it is framed differently. Stereotypes are easy for space and time, and reporters are working in the age of Google research and email interviews. Still, journalists should fight the urge to respond with judgment to judgment or respond with ignorance to ignorance.

Future research should extend this study's data set beyond December 2009 and beyond Christian Fundamentalism to different sects of Christianity such as Evangelicalism, Protestantism, or Catholicism. A few newsworthy events that took place during the execution of the study could have changed the way the media framed Fundamentalist Christianity.

In August, 2010, a pastor in Gainesville, Florida named Terry Jones began to draw media attention when he announced that his church would memorialize 9/11 by burning the Koran, Islam's sacred text.<sup>25</sup> His announcement initially came as a threat in response to the news that an Islamic center would be built near Ground Zero in Manhattan. Tension escalated in the days leading to September 11, but Jones backed down and did not burn a Koran that day. He did burn a Koran, however, in the following April. In response, a violent

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<sup>25</sup> Cave, D. (2010, August 25). Far from ground zero, obscure pastor is ignored no longer. *New York Times*. Retrieved June 22, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/26/us/26gainesville.html>

rally broke out in the streets of Afghanistan and seven people were murdered, some beheaded. The media framed the antagonistic firestorm as originating with the man who lit the match – Terry Jones. The Terry Jones incident displays the potential brutality and incitement to violence that can happen when contentious religious extremists, amplified by media attention, come head to head.

The next month, on May 2, 2011, almost ten years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden was shot and killed in Pakistan at the hands of U.S. Navy SEALs.<sup>26</sup> A major U.S. victory against jihadist, religious Fundamentalism is suspected to alter the way the media frames even Christian Fundamentalism.

Shortly following Bin Laden's death, Harold Camping, a radio evangelist, predicted that the world would end on May 21, 2011 at 6p.m.<sup>27</sup> Social networks and news organizations were abuzz with satirical (and some genuine) expectation of the apocalypse. As the day came and went, it seemed even the radical Christians had turned on the "false prophet," citing "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven or the son himself. Only the father knows," (Matthew 24:36).<sup>28</sup>

These three major media events have given an international voice to many radical believers, whether they are Christian or Muslim. Future research on Fundamentalist Christianity will likely have a stockpile of news articles to examine from 2011 alone, and should delve more deeply into the juxtaposition of Islamic fundamentalism with Christian Fundamentalism.

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<sup>26</sup> Baker, P., Cooper, H., Mazzetti, M. (2011, May 1). Bin Laden is dead, Obama says. *New York Times*. Retrieved June 22, 2011 from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/02/world/asia/osama-bin-laden-is-killed.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/02/world/asia/osama-bin-laden-is-killed.html?_r=1)

<sup>27</sup> James, S. (2011, May 19). From Oakland to the world, words of warning: Time's up. *New York Times*. Retrieved June 22, 2011 from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/us/20bcjames.html>

<sup>28</sup> Kimsey-Trotter, S. (2011, June 13). Letter: How could people buy Rapture scam? *Knoxville News Sentinel*. Retrieved June 22, 2011 from <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/jun/13/letter-how-could-people-buy-rapture-scam/>

Though this study merely scratched the surface of the issue at hand, it adds to the foundation of insider-outsider societal norms and the media's dissentient stance on any type of social deviance. This researcher wonders, in another century, whether the mainstream Protestant or Catholic will become too abrasive and offensive, and will begin to be framed as extremists or zealots. Will there come a day when any adherence to any outdated doctrine make someone an outsider?

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## Appendix 1: Articles by topos

Article	Byline	Source	Topoi								
			Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False Prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural Belief	Declension	Deception	Ignorance
Thais say they rescued hostages after standoff	Seth Mydans	NYT				X		X		X	
Catholics minimize impact of Bush visit to Bob Jones	Diana Jean Schemo	NYT		X			X			X	
On the campus in the center of the storm, life goes on	Gustav Niebuhr	NYT	X	X				X			
In a Louisiana parish, dim echoes of the "Monkey Trial"	Thomas Vinciguerra	NYT		X				X		X	
Religious right made big push to put Ashcroft in Justice Dept	David Johnston and Neil Lewis	NYT	X					X		X	
Critics see little in Ashcroft speech to derail nomination	Neil Lewis	NYT					X				
Justice's ruling is good news to small town's pastor	Kate Zernicke	NYT		X			X		X	X	
Schundler seeks to shift debate on abortion	David Halffinger	NYT		X	X						
In pulpits, a grateful Christian testifies to deliverance	Dan Barry	NYT	X		X		X			X	
Abroad and at home: Hail and farewell	Anthony Lewis	NYT		X				X			
State seeks child parents don't acknowledge	Pam Belluck	NYT				X		X		X X	
The his-and-hers Bible	Emily Nussbaum	NYT		X			X		X	X	
A best-selling formula in religious thrillers	David Kirkpatrick	NYT		X		X	X	X		X	
Judge's biblical monument is ruled unconstitutional	Jeffrey Gettleman	NYT		X						X X	
Killing underscores enmity of evangelists and Muslims	Neil Macfarquhar	NYT	X							X	
Hug an evangelical	Nicholas Kristof	NYT	X	X			X			X	

Article	Byline	Source	Topoi								
			Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False Prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural Belief	Declension	Deception	Ignorance
In Ohio town, same-sex marriage ban brings tensions to surface	Ginia Bellafante	NYT		X				X			X
Apocalypse (almost) now	Nicholas Kristof	NYT	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Gay teenager stirs a storm	Alex Williams	NYT		X				X			X
Evangelical filmmaker criticized for hiring gay actor	Neela Banerjee	NYT		X				X			X
It's not if, it's when: Waiting for the end, with trepidation and joy	Laurie Nadel	NYT	X			X		X			X
Falwell's conservative legacy lives on in the pulpit and in public life	Laurie Goodstein	NYT						X			
Cell biologists traded religious fervor for scientific zeal	Sheryl G. Stolberg	NYT	X								X
God, Satan and the media	Nicholas Kristof	NYT		X					X		X
God and George W Bush	Bill Keller	NYT	X		X			X		X	X
Clashing over church ritual and flag protocol at the Naval Academy Chapel	Neela Banerjee	NYT		X							X
More religion, but not the old-time kind	Laurie Goodstein	NYT		X					X		X
Anti-Bush criticism and the fixation on 'delusional' Christian fundamentalism	Peter Steinfels	NYT		X	X	X					X
Rebels with a cross	JohnLeland	NYT									
College ascribes its ways to Christian beliefs	Dennis Cauchon	USA		X	X						X
Critics confront Ashcroft today AG nominees faces biggest fight since Bork, Thomas	Toni Locy, Kevin Johnson	USA		X							

Article	Byline	Source	Topoi							
			Good works	Tolerance	Hypocrisy	False Prophecy	Inclusion	Supernatural Belief	Declension	Deception
In God we trust' pressed for schools	Debbie Howlett	USA					X		X	X
Religious teaching straight to your iPod	Ron Barnett	USA	X							
We believe in evolution -- and God	Karl Giberson, Darrel Falk	USA								X
Not all Christians reach out to Islam	Cathy Lynn Grossman	USA	X	X						
Tastes -- houses of worship: the iconoclast's icon	David Shiflett	WSJ		X	X					

## Appendix 2: Articles by frame

Article	Byline	Source	Frames					Faith and Reason
			Fundamentalists and Pentecostals	Church and State	Polarization	Narrow-minded	Jesus' Name	
Thais say they rescued hostages after standoff	Seth Mydans	NYT						X
Catholics minimize impact of Bush visit to Bob Jones	Diana Jean Schemo	NYT		X	X			
On the campus in the center of the storm, life goes on	Gustav Niebuhr	NYT			X	X		
In a Louisiana parish, dim echoes of the "Monkey Trial"	Thomas Vinciguerra	NYT		X		X		
Religious right made big push to put Ashcroft in Justice Dept	David Johnston and Neil Lewis	NYT		X	X			
Critics see little in Ashcroft speech to derail nomination	Neil Lewis	NYT	X	X			X	
Justice's ruling is good news to small town's pastor	Kate Zernicke	NYT		X				
Schundler seeks to shift debate on abortion	David Halbfinger	NYT		X	X	X	X	
In pulpits, a grateful Christian testifies to deliverance	Dan Barry	NYT						
Abroad and at home: Hail and farewell	Anthony Lewis	NYT		X		X		X
State seeks child parents don't acknowledge	Pam Belluck	NYT						
The his-and-hers Bible	Emily Nussbaum	NYT						X
A best-selling formula in religious thrillers	David Kirkpatrick	NYT			X		X	
Judge's biblical monument is rules unconstitutional	Jeffrey Gettleman	NYT		X				
Killing underscores enmity of evangelists and Muslims	Neil Macfarquhar	NYT				X		X

Article	Byline	Source	Frames					
			Fundamentalists and Pentecostals	Church and State	Polarization	Narrow-minded	Jesus' Name	Faith and Reason
Hug an evangelical	Nicholas Kristof	NYT		X		X		
In Ohio town, same-sex marriage ban brings tensions to surface	Ginia Bellafante	NYT				X		
Apocalypse (almost) now	Nicholas Kristof	NYT			X			
Gay teenager stirs a storm	Alex Williams	NYT				X	X	
Evangelical filmmaker criticized for hiring gay actor	Neela Banerjee	NYT				X		
It's not if, it's when: Waiting for the end, with trepidation and joy	Laurie Nadel	NYT	X					
Falwell's conservative legacy lives on in the pulpit and in public life	Laurie Goodstein	NYT		X				
Cell biologists traded religious fervor for scientific zeal	Sheryl G. Stolberg	NYT						X
God, Satan and the media	Nicholas Kristof	NYT		X				X
God and George W Bush	Bill Keller	NYT		X				
Clashing over church ritual and flag protocol at the Naval Academy Chapel	Neela Banerjee	NYT		X		X	X	
More religion, but not the old-time kind	Laurie Goodstein	NYT						X
Anti-Bush criticism and the fixation on 'delusional' Christian fundamentalism	Peter Steinfels	NYT		X		X		
Rebels with a cross	JohnLeland	NYT						
College ascribes its ways to Christian beliefs	Dennis Cauchon	USA						
Critics confront Ashcroft today AG nominees faces biggest fight since Bork, Thomas	Toni Locy, Kevin Johnson	USA	X	X	X			
In God we trust' pressed for schools	Debbie Howlett	USA		X				
Religious teaching straight to your iPod	Ron Barnett	USA						
We believe in evolution -- and God	Karl Giberson, Darrel Falk	USA						X
Not all Christians reach out to Islam	Cathy Lynn Grossman	USA		X	X		X	
Tastes -- houses of worship: the iconoclast's icon	David Shiflett	WSJ		X	X	X		