

FRAMING FAITH: RELIGION COVERAGE IN *TIME* AND *NEWSWEEK*, 2004-2008

by

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(Under the Direction of LEARA D. RHODES)

ABSTRACT

Open any newsmagazine and you're likely to see some type of religion or faith coverage. The role of the media, particularly magazines, in shaping how we view religion and faith issues has been somewhat understudied. This study used framing theory and textual analysis to examine faith and religion coverage in *Time* and *Newsweek* from 2004-2008, and how journalists make meaning of these issues for an audience, whether it is a part of a specific story about religion or faith, or a story that includes some aspect of religion or faith. The analysis yielded four major frames: culture, politics, religion vs. science and personality. This study adds to the already growing field of study in the framing of religion and mass media, and lays the groundwork for future analysis of the representation of faith or religion in mass media, particularly mass-circulating magazines.

INDEX WORDS: religion, media, magazines, culture, politics, mass communication, *Time*, *Newsweek*, textual analysis, framing theory

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Linda E. Davis, and all the women in my family, strong and intelligent women, who never had the opportunity to pursue higher education in this manner.

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PREFACE

The impetus for this study came in the spring of 2005, as I trolled a newsstand at a chain bookstore in Chicago. What I saw was something that puzzled me. There were at least three magazine cover stories that focused on issues or people of faith. One article was a profile of a popular TV preacher; another was about the Catholic Church; and a third was about the power of evangelicalism. As the months went by and I continued to make my regular pilgrimages to the bookstore, I saw more magazines—newsweeklies and monthly culture brokers—emphasize some aspect of faith, religion or spirituality in their coverage. As a magazine journalist and as a person of faith (in the Judeo-Christian tradition), I became interested in the impact of religion on culture and vice-versa. I wanted to find out what impact those in the profession were having on shaping discussion and debate around religion and culture issues.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It was the evening of April 13, 2008, and on the campus of Messiah College in Grantham, PA, CNN anchor Campbell Brown and *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham were moderating a series of questions for then-Democratic presidential rivals Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. Billed as a “Compassion Forum,” the two-hour event aired live on CNN and featured questions from the two journalists (Meacham is also a bestselling religion author), as well as religious leaders from across the country. While presumed Republican nominee John McCain did not participate in the forum, the two Democratic candidates talked openly and personally about their faith and the role of religion in public life. Obama spoke of coming to faith during his time as an organizer on the South Side of Chicago and how he tries to “be an instrument of [God’s] will” (2008). Clinton spoke of her upbringing in the Methodist Church and how she has “felt the presence of God in [her] life” since she was a little girl (2008).

It was the second such televised event for the Democratic candidates (former candidate John Edwards joined Clinton and Obama at a similar forum in June 2007), and the next day, on *The Situation Room*, Jeffrey Toobin, CNN’s senior legal analyst, reacted with a measure of astonishment. Toobin mentioned that he was reading a memoir by Ted Sorenson, a former close aide to John F. Kennedy and witness to the firestorm that erupted over Kennedy’s Catholicism during the 1960 presidential campaign. The candidate and his advisors were “paranoid” that Kennedy would be seen as religious at all, Toobin (2008) said, and “now we have Democratic candidates just embracing religion and talking about God. I think [they’re] right to do it politically. But I’m just shocked by how much the Democratic Party has changed.”

The re-entrance of Democrats into the public discussion of religion and faith is just one example of a phenomenon that has been growing in recent years. The intertwining of religion and media is such that Democrats, long synonymous with secularism, are engaging in discussion and debate at new levels. That Meacham, who has been editor of *Newsweek* since October 2006, was a key part and co-host of the televised forum could serve as further evidence that the combining of religion and media has and will continue to be evident in print media, as well. Whether it was a debate about intelligent design, the growth of Islam in the United States or a review of a book about atheism, newsmagazine journalists appear to be framing religion and faith in America. As such, the purpose of this thesis is to examine how *Time* and *Newsweek*, two mainstream, weekly newsmagazines, frame faith and religion.

The need for this research is rooted in struggle, as Kerr (2003) stated in his study of fundamentalist Christians and television news:

Indeed, this debate has often been couched in terms of conflict, as people refer to the American ‘culture wars’ between the more traditional conservatives who wish America to continue in the proven ways of the past and the progressive liberals who would cut loose older bonds and forge forward into a boundless future. The goal of this is not destruction but the dream of future prosperity, and the weapons are not explosives and bullets, but ideas and words, presumably those conveyed through the mass media. (p. 203)

Before there can be any discussion of religion and spirituality, the terms should be defined. In a study about how African-American women make meaning and use religiosity and spirituality as a coping mechanism, Mattis (2002) stated that “religiosity and spirituality are distinct but overlapping experiences” (p. 309); religiosity is the degree to which people adhere to

the prescribed practices and beliefs of a particular religion. Spirituality means a person's belief in life's transcendental and sacred nature and the demonstration of those beliefs in a quest for goodness and connection with others (Mattis, 2000, 2002; Zinnbauer, 1997). Put more simply, "Religion may be defined broadly as an organized way of knowing and orienting our lives to ultimate concerns" (Schaefer, 2005, p. 214).

Initially, this analysis was to begin with the September 11, 2001, attacks, but a larger question can be asked about the ideological-religious divide in the United States that became evident during the 2004 presidential and congressional elections. The 2004 election largely is considered the first election in which candidates openly discussed and were questioned about their religious beliefs (Pew, August 2006), and helped set off an increased intertwining of religion and politics. That intertwining seemed to become more apparent in the last presidential race, as self-identified evangelicals provided about 40 % of George W. Bush's total vote in 2004 (Mead, 2006). Although scholars now largely believe that the so-called "religion gap" based on exit polling may have been overstated in 2004, some research suggests that such a gap did exist.

Knuckey (2007) used a multivariate model to analyze the effect of moral values on vote choice relative to other issue preferences and variables in demography. Using data from the 2004 American National Election Study, he showed that while some of the effects of moral values indeed worked through party identification and ideology, moral values still exerted an independent effect on vote choice. Additionally, those values worked to the Republican campaign's advantage, as Knuckey also found that morally "'traditional' Democrats and Republicans were more likely to vote for George W. Bush than morally 'progressive' Republicans were likely to vote for John Kerry"(p. 237). Moreover, the Democrats and Republicans had different campaign strategies for courting the religious vote, with Bush's

strategy described as “well developed and consistent while Kerry’s was reactive and erratic” (Guth, Kellstedt, Smidt & Green, 2006, p. 226).

Additionally, in November of 2006, Michigan voters elected Keith Ellison the first Muslim to Congress in the history of the United States (MacFarquhar, 2006), and Mead (2006) noted that the number of self-reported evangelicals in the U.S. Congress increased. In 1970, roughly 10 % of the membership in both houses described themselves as evangelicals. In 2004, that number rose to more than 25 %. And in the ongoing courtship of the hearts and minds of “value voters” in the United States, religious leaders continue to influence or attempt to influence public policy, even after the November 2006 elections, when Democrats regained control of the Senate and House, and handed the Republicans (long synonymous with the “religious right”) a resounding defeat.

The intersection of religion and politics has also been in the forefront with the 2008 presidential election. Former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney’s Mormon faith came under intense scrutiny (Luo, 2007). On the Democrat side, the faith of the candidates has also been examined, culminating in the two faith forums that were televised on CNN (Healy & Luo, 2007; CNN, 2008). Although this mixing of religion and politics seems common and inevitable, a recent survey by the Pew Research Center found that Americans are becoming increasingly uncomfortable with the approaches offered by both liberals and conservatives when it comes to the role of religion in public life (August 2006). One way to examine these approaches is with an analysis of media, the socialization force that shapes our ideas and opinions. As Mead (2006) wrote:

Religion has always been a major force in U.S. politics, policy, identity, and culture.

Religion shapes the nation's character, helps form Americans’ ideas about the world, and

influences the ways Americans respond to events beyond their borders. Religion explains both Americans' sense of themselves as a chosen people and their belief that they have a duty to spread their values throughout the world. (para. 1)

The intersection of religion and media has emerged over the last few years as a field rife with rich possibility for study in the field of journalism and mass communication. From examinations of magazines to analyses of presidential rhetoric, the intertwining of religion and media in American culture and life has become an increasingly popular area of interest. Although this thesis would largely benefit journalists in terms of revealing to them their power in such matters, it also could benefit the larger public in showing them that their values and opinions are shaped by the media—particularly magazines—they consume. Moreover, for anyone—politician or pulpit-ician—who seeks to influence the public through media or culture, such research could be a valuable tool. The article could also be repurposed for magazine publication.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

American Politics

On September 12, 1960, as he was campaigning for the presidency of the United States, John F. Kennedy, then a U.S. senator from Massachusetts, made a speech that would become a watershed moment in American political and religious history. Before the Greater Houston Ministerial Association at the Rice Hotel in Houston, TX, the first and only Catholic ever to be elected president of the United States spoke about the role of religion in public office.

Dogged by questions on the campaign trail about whether he would be divided between loyalty to his Catholic faith and loyalty to the United States (1960), Kennedy spoke on a Monday to a group of dark-suited, Protestant ministers about the question of church and state and the “finger of suspicion” that had been pointed at a candidate of faith:

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute--where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote--where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference--and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him. (1960)

Kennedy's address and his views on his faith as private, some argued, set the tone for other Catholics who would enter American politics. But there would come a time in America's political history that the role of religion would change dramatically (again) and a candidate's faith and his expression of that faith would become an essential part of the push for the

presidency. There came a turning point in America's history during which presidential candidates began to talk openly about their faith as a public, positive piece of their lives. There came a time when presidential candidates communicated their ideas and formulated their public policies through a faith lens that would not be shattered by fears of divided loyalties. Indeed, there came a time when a politician's faith was seen by some as a politician's strength (Hoover, 1998).

That time was 1976, and the candidate was Jimmy Carter. An evangelical Christian and member of the Southern Baptist Convention, Carter was a Sunday School teacher who wore his faith on his sleeve, becoming the first presidential candidate to declare that he had been "born again" and had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ (Miller, 2006, p. 36). Although then-president Gerald Ford also considered himself a Christian, it was Carter who captured the American public's imagination and attention when it came to matters of faith. As Johnstone argued, "Faith was the theme of the 1976 election, and it was upon the public's need for faith that both presidential candidates built their campaigns" (1978, p. 248). And when Carter ran for president, Johnstone (1978) wrote, it was that faith that helped define him, as a humble peanut farmer who could help heal America's wounds (p. 243). Carter's open declaration of his Protestant, evangelical faith had a profound impact on the presidential election process:

The 1976 presidential campaign of Jimmy Carter stood in sharp contrast to precedent. Unlike in the election of 1960, where (for vastly different reasons) the winning candidate had to distance himself from his religion, Carter was quite open about his. By 1980, both major candidates would need to declare themselves "born-again Christians." (Hoover, 1998, p. 5)

In the run up to the 1980 election, Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority launched a

“political action committee, an alliance of Christian conservatives—evangelicals and Catholics, Washington types and of course, Falwell—who wanted to crush Carter and all he stood for” (Miller, 2006, p. 36). Although Carter was seen as a Christian candidate, Falwell and others in the Moral Majority believed that the nation under Carter’s leadership was facing a “moral and spiritual decline” and that change was in order (Johnson & Tamney, 1982, p. 123). According to their own estimates, the now-defunct Moral Majority flexed their political muscle, registering between 4 million and 5 million new voters in 1981, and played a significant role in Ronald Reagan’s defeat of the incumbent Carter (Miller, 2006). Although Johnson and Tamney’s analysis (1982) of likely voters in 1980 in Muncie, IN, disputed this claim (the researchers found that the more significant variables among religious voters was party affiliation and education), the media and public perception has tended to emphasize the Moral Majority’s supposed role in Ronald Reagan’s election. That Reagan was a divorced former Hollywood star and still garnered the support of Falwell and other religious conservatives could further point to their dissatisfaction with Carter: “Reagan alone embraces the political efforts of the conservative evangelical leaders and pledged to work for enactment of their agenda, he increasingly drew the New Christian Right into his camp” (Wald & Calhoun-Brown, 2007, p. 216).

The election of Reagan may be further evidence of the idea that religion and politics in the United States have always made strange bedfellows. Despite the “wall of separation” between church and state that Thomas Jefferson wrote about (1802), religion and politics come together again and again. From the earliest days of the democracy when the forefathers spoke of religious freedom in the formation of this new world, to the present, when the two candidates vying for the presidential office, John McCain and Barack Obama, openly court so-called values voters (Broder, 2008), America’s fascination with religion and the intermingling of religion with

politics has been ever present.

The Role of the Media

The media has also been present, a key player in the realms of both politics and religion. The United States has a long history of religion and media that contributes to the broader idea of public communication. In America's early years, local pastors served as the primary sources of news and the most important public voices on matters of society and politics, according to Schultze (2003), who wrote, "The clergy were the unrivaled, authoritative sources of information and interpretation for most people, the most believable and trustworthy sources that individuals in communities used to orient their lives, epistemologically and morally, in the emerging nation" (p. 268). As colonial newspapers in the eighteenth century began to gain their voice, the editors and writers saw religion, specifically Christianity, as vital to everyday life, and "framed public life in the most commonly shared language of the time—the language of the Protestant faith" (Schultze, 2003, p. 269). In the nineteenth century, editors defined news as a political instrument intended to promote party interests (Schultz, 2003, p. 269). The partisan press was pervasive during this era, with editors and their newspapers acting purposefully as the central link among political parties, voters and the government. These political actors, argued Pasley (2001), traced their power to the ownership and control of the print media, the only means of mass communication available at that time. That ownership of the means of shaping and disseminating the news or political messages on a large scale equaled power in early American politics.

Indeed, journalists were once politicians, often the most well known and most powerful candidates running for political office (Pasley, 2001). Just as politicians needed to control messages to the electorate, newspeople had the means and the opportunity to control how those messages were communicated. With the rise of the penny press, as journalism began to become

more professionalized (Pasley, 2001) and more commercialized (Baldasty, 1992), that communication changed; the partisan press began to recede and editors turned their attention to more sensationalistic and general topics (Mindich, 1998).

The presidential election of 1920 between two prominent newspapermen, Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox, was the “last hurrah for the old political press” (Pasley, 2001, p. 1). When that relationship was over, the media had, at the very least, become and still remain a key force in the political process: “The news media and the parties parted ways permanently after the 1920s, ending a partnership, perhaps even a merger, that had profoundly shaped American political development” (Pasley, 2001, p. 1).

In the same way that early print media served as a link between the public and politicians, the media have been the go-between on matters of religion. The marriage between religion and media has arguably been a rocky one. Religion has secrets and idiosyncrasies that the media has exposed to public light. The media has had an ongoing flirtation with reason and science. Nord (2001) argued that the characteristics of American news are rooted firmly in the early religious culture of New England (2001), specifically as it related to the subject matter and reporting methods. News was religious and public, Nord (2001) wrote, and accessible to individual people. It meant something beyond the printed words on the page:

In seventeenth-century New England all four of these defining elements of news—occurrence, current, public and reporting—were shaped by the belief that everything happened according to God’s perfect plan. News was, in a word, teleological. The teleological order was not only divine; it was patterned, recurrent, meaningful; the meaning was social and public. (p. 32)

That meaning became even more social and public in the eighteenth century, with the Age of Reason, a time in which there was an upsurge in personal religion that revitalized traditional Christianity (Barbour, 1997). It was that new “evangelical fervor and recovery of experiential religion” (p. 41), which occurred across nations and denominations that helped to further cement religion’s place and matters of faith as a foundation of American life.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion and Media

While there has been some study of how television and newspapers frame religion, there appears to be little recent research or study about magazines in this area, except from journalism trade publications. As a billion-dollar industry and the more colorful cousin to newspapers, this medium lends itself to further study. Additionally, mass communications researchers have recently begun to study religion and media more thoroughly, as an emerging field. In the editor's introduction to the first issue of the *Journal of Media and Religion*, Stout and Buddenbaum (2002) noted that work in media and religion has been "conspicuously missing from basic textbooks on mass communications" (p. 5). They also wrote that the understudy of the interface between media and religion continues despite the fact that religion is fundamental to all communities: "Religious leaders are instructing their flocks about media use and lobbying for particular laws and policies. Religious groups are depicted daily in the news or emerge in some other medium of popular culture (eg. Television, movies, the Internet, etc.)" (2002, p. 5).

The nature of the link between religion and media reaches into the past, as well. In a far-reaching essay, Winston used historical analysis to argue that the mainstream media missed the takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention (which shifted control from mainline Baptists to more conservative evangelicals) and only covered the rise of the Religious Right from time to time during the 1980s and 1990s because journalists did not understand the power shift or its impact (2007). Winston also wrote about a change in coverage that began with the 1925 Scopes trial, which focused on the teaching of evolution in public schools. She argued that it was the

outcome of that trial that resulted in the diminishing of the role of religion in culture and society from mainstream news (2007). The model of “true believers as fools, men of science as heroes--defined mainstream coverage for the next fifty-plus years” (Winston, 2007, p. 974). Winston also offered a timetable for the return of religion to American culture and society. She stated that it was during the Civil Rights Movement that Martin Luther King, Jr., brought such moral discourse back to the mainstream (Winston, 2007). The activism that continued to flourish in the United States following King’s assassination inspired the founding of the Moral Majority, an interdenominational mass religious movement that rose to prominence in the 1980s. The founder, Rev. Jerry Falwell, sought a “cultural transformation”(Winston, 2007, p. 975).

In terms of religion and the media’s perception and reporting of religious issues, several examples stand out. In 1980, researchers conducted a large-scale study of rhetoric in *Time* magazine, which this thesis will build upon. Hart, Turner and Knupp (1980) set out to examine how the magazine attempted to “construct” American religion over time. They argued that “media-based, rhetorical protocols—not empirical facts or even popular perceptions—have guided *Time*’s treatment of religion” (p. 257). The scholars used content analysis to examine 648 religion sections that appeared in *Time* magazine between 1947 and 1976. The researchers investigated how American religion has been defined, described and given ‘social reality’ via mass communication (Hart, Turner & Knupp, 1980). In their rhetorical analysis, the investigators concluded “religion in America is an overwhelmingly institutional affair, more concerned with matters of bureaucracy than with pastoral matters” (p. 261). They also found that religion, no matter the denomination, is permeated with conflict, with four out of every five articles on religion in the past 30 years of the study containing a primary conflict element (Hart, Turner & Knupp, 1980).

Hart, Turner and Knupp put forth “five rival hypotheses” to explain *Time*’s religious coverage, before settling on a sixth. The researchers found evidence for gatekeeping, straight news, political, institutional, and sociological hypotheses, but they opted for rhetorical analysis to explain the coverage, in which “any communicative transaction—including the reporting in popular newsmagazines—involves selecting and shaping of messages for particular Others” (p. 273). The researchers concluded that *Time* depicted religion as a “conflict-ridden, human enterprise”; that stereotypes based on denomination and geography affect media coverage of religion; and that the way media portrays religion differs sharply from “demographic and sociological facts” (p. 257).

For religions that are considered out of the mainstream, Chen (2003) wrote about the complex framing of Mormons as a “model minority” religion during the news coverage of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, Utah. Newspaper and magazine journalists used the spotlight on the city to examine some of its most famous (or infamous, depending on the news item) residents. Some journalists viewed it as a coming out party for Mormonism, a chance to convey or negate the stereotypical images that many have about Mormons. One result from these articles was to continue to frame Mormons as outside of mainstream American culture (Chen, 2003). In using content analysis and a historical comparison for his study, Chen wrote, “Over the past six decades, journalists’ accounts have signaled, in a multitude of ways and through discussion of a variety of events, continuing Mormon ‘Otherness’” (p. 37).

In that vein, Hill, Hickman and McLendon (2001) used a content analysis of two newspapers and three wire services to determine whether news coverage of religion or religious groups at the turn of the millennium met the criterion for neutral and unbiased coverage. Researchers analyzed *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, Associated Press, Reuters and

State News Service and found that the terms used to describe these groups and their members did not support the criticism from “religious elites” that coverage was biased (p. 31). Scholars found, however, that the news organizations were prone to “characterize Heaven’s Gate, Aum Shinri Kyo, the Solar Temple, the Concerned Christians and Falun Gong as cults” (p. 34). The researchers also concluded that the wire services were found to be the most negative in their coverage (p. 33).

Additionally, Moore (2003) used Silk’s (1995) “unsecular media hypothesis” to examine 2001 national newspaper coverage of Rev. Jesse Jackson’s adultery scandal. Moore researched whether journalists framed their stories about Jackson in ways that promoted a particular religious worldview. He argued that media could use traditional themes or motives that could be perceived as religious in nature, but use those themes and motives in such a way that vacated the religious dimension (Moore, 2003). In other words, journalists can secularize what are commonly thought to be religious themes. Moore concluded that the brief criticism of Jackson in the national news media following the disclosure of a long extramarital affair and an out-of-wedlock child raised real questions about the secular or unsecular nature of the news media. In comparing Jackson’s scandal to those of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker (in which both men publicly admitted to extramarital affairs), Moore (2003) found that the framing of Jackson’s affair as “hypocrisy” did not go as deep as it did for Swaggart and Bakker because Jackson, a former Democratic presidential candidate, was seen more as a political figure as opposed to a religious figure.

In terms of framing news stories, McCune (2003) found that journalists largely are influenced by the people they cover and often allow story frames to be set for them. McCune examined the coverage surrounding a 1996 Tennessee bill that would have prevented evolution

from being taught in school as fact, igniting controversy reminiscent of the 1925 Scopes trial. In that case, Tennessee teacher John Scopes was found guilty of teaching evolution to high school students. The 1996 bill was defeated, and in her analysis McCune showed that the bill's opponents were largely able to "[frame] the debate in terms of their own worldviews" (p. 12), and therefore dominated the public sphere. The analysis of newspaper articles found that many stories skewed largely against the bill.

In an earlier study, Buddenbaum analyzed the religion coverage of *The New York Times*, *Minneapolis Star* and *Richmond Times-Dispatch* during the summer of 1981 (Buddenbaum, 1984). During the time of the study, the *Times* did not have a religion page, but two reporters assigned to the beat. The *Star* and *Times-Dispatch* had one religion writer each, as well as a religion page. Buddenbaum found that the *Times* carried fewer religion stories than either the *Star* or the *Times-Dispatch*, and that the focus was generally on Christians and Christian organizations, particularly from Protestant churches. In terms of religion coverage, denominations with the largest populations received the most attention at all three newspapers, save for this exception: "Although Judaism was covered less frequently than this explanation suggests it should have been, this may be due to the way news is covered at the *Times*. Other writers, covering their own beats, produced numerous 'Jewish stories' that were not included in this analysis" (p. 603).

Using a cross-national study, Perkins (1984) looked at the content of mass-circulated magazines in the United States, England and Canada over five decades. Perkins used magazines (*Reader's Digest*, *Saturday Review* and *National Enquirer* in the United States; *Reader's Digest: British Edition*, *Illustrated London News* and *Weekend* in Great Britain; and *MacLeans's* and *Saturday Night* in Canada) as "cultural products" in asking how prominent overt religious

content appeared in the popular press (Perkins, 1984, p. 162). Perkins's content analysis found that there was very little material devoted to religious themes in the pages of the magazines, but could not account for or predict a decline or increase in religious content over time. Perkins wrote that the limited supply of such religious content appeared to be persistent: "In short, a small but continuing stream of religious material seems to reach public attention through this form of mass media" (p. 164).

Another element of scholarship in religion and media centers on rhetoric and speech communication, particularly when it comes to politicians. As a candidate, former President Jimmy Carter became one of the first aspiring presidents to express religion publicly and use it to set himself apart from other candidates (Erickson, 1980). Erickson argued that Carter's religious-political discourse reaffirmed the United States' civic piety and faith in America, and that his discourses around religion communicated elements of trustworthiness, served as an identification source with evangelicals and generated attention from mass media (p. 222). Erickson wrote that Carter's rhetorical strategies and the image that he projected of himself and his allusions to his spirituality "struck a responsive chord with the electorate" and served to reduce complex issues, such as inflation, unemployment, hunger and inferior housing to their "religious underpinnings" (p. 225).

An additional element of religion and media scholarship involves the study of religious publications. Newman and Smith used survey research to analyze the political role of religious media. The researchers found that nearly a quarter of the public claims to have used religious media when making voting decisions in the 2000 presidential election (Newman & Smith, 2007). Newman and Smith found that religious media users felt closer to George W. Bush and Pat Buchanan than they did to Al Gore and were more likely to vote for Bush and Republican House

candidates than those who did not use religious media (p. 846).

The intersection of religion and media is increasingly relevant in the context of American culture and society. Across many different fields, including journalism and mass communication, and rhetoric and politics, scholarship around this intersection is evidence of the permeation of this topic in today's culture. That the media often interpret those faith matters gets to the purpose of this study, which is to examine how the media, specifically mass-circulating newsmagazines framed "faith" and "religion."

Journalists and Religion

In the study of religion and media, particularly news, the role of the journalist must also be examined. Because religion makes an impact and makes a difference in national culture, Gormly (1999) wrote, the journalist is obligated to report on faith and religion and the role these issues occupy in society. Often, Gormly argued, the lack of knowledge about religions and religious issues makes this a difficult task. He used a mail survey to examine how the country's accredited journalism schools were responding to the problems of editors and reporters and their education about religion. Gormly(1999) found that those administrators who answered the survey believed that journalism school graduates were leaving school without basic knowledge in religion and that, overall, graduates were not informed enough about religion to do their jobs (p. 35). He concluded that the administrators believed that religion is an involved, difficult topic and one that is important to cover. Respondents reported that there is not enough religion coverage and that "all reporters need a basic understanding of [religion]" (p. 37), but only a third of the administrators responded yes when asked in the survey if students should take a religion course; one-third responded no.

Further evidence of the link could include Underwood's article (2001) on journalists' ethics and the Judeo-Christian tradition, which not only gets to the heart of the question about media coverage of religion and faith, but also shows that there could be room for improvement. Underwood's theory that journalists' ethics are more in line with Judeo-Christian values than many conservative critics believe (2001) appear to be very relevant in today's society, where editors, writers and reporters often come under fire for being "too liberal" or "too secular" in their work. The implication here is that journalists somehow are disconnected from their audiences because of their supposed irreligiosity, but Underwood (2001) found that the supposed separation was not necessarily true. Underwood also hypothesized that journalists would not always recognize their values as being founded in Judeo-Christian belief systems, which his study also showed. For example, journalists may attribute their values to the "Golden Rule," but are not consciously aware that the "Golden Rule" is rooted in Judeo-Christian scripture (as well as in the texts of other religions). According to Underwood, "journalists, regardless of religious viewpoint, tended to endorse a core group of moral and ethical principles that are also at the heart of the religious tradition in America" (2001, p. 39).

In looking at newspaper coverage of intelligent design, Martin, Trammell, Landers, Valois and Bailey (2006) found that intelligent design was framed as a religious as opposed to a scientific movement. In their content analysis of nearly 600 articles from major newspapers, researchers coded for the presence of three portrayal--certain, scientifically certain and uncertain--and analyzed those variables across newstype (2006). These scholars also measured the presence of several frames and the dominant frame within each article. Their findings suggested that mass media "experience difficulty covering religious issues" (p. 59), because the dominant frames that organized intelligent design articles focused on science and education, not religion.

Despite that seeming difficulty, another study found that journalists are not as irreligious as some critics have contended (Underwood & Stamm, 2001), because the religious values of journalists have a great deal of impact in determining why certain stories are reported and handled the way they are. A more in-depth study of journalists' beliefs and attitudes would go a long way toward closing the knowledge gap in this area.

Additionally, although this study will focus on mainstream, mass-circulating newsmagazines, scholars have also used framing to analyze broadcasting. Haskell (2007) used positive, negative and neutral frames to determine if there was bias by Canadian news media toward evangelicals. The study concluded that evangelicals were portrayed in a neutral fashion in nightly national television news reports (1994-2004), which suggests that Canada's national TV journalists tried to provide balanced coverage. But the "concentrated framing of evangelicals as intolerant, criminally-minded and un-Canadian may stem from specific differences in the value systems" of the journalists and the evangelicals (p. 140). Another article about the framing of fundamentalists in broadcast news from 1980-2000 found that fundamentalist Christians were reported in a "consistent, mildly negative manner" (Kerr, 2003, p. 203). Researchers also found that the television journalists are attempting to provide an "accurate and objective picture" (p. 228) of fundamentalist Christians.

CHAPTER 4

THEORY

Framing Theory

When researching faith and religion issues in the news media, the frame or lens that the media use to cover, report, describe and convey these issues can be essential. In conducting initial research on the coverage of faith and religion in mainstream publications, framing theory emerged quickly as a complete and thoughtful approach. The power of the media to shape dialogue and discourse, the power to ignite debate and spur debacle is one that should be examined more thoroughly.

The media brings attention to certain events, topics or ideas and then assists the audience or reader in prescribing meaning to those events, topics or ideas. This framing gets to the very nature and essence of what issues society deems worthy. From media and religion to political and social movements, framing is validated repeatedly as a relevant theory for research.

Examining how magazines frame faith and religion through the media lens and analyzing this cultural phenomenon makes sense: “In the study of religion and media, framing has a value far beyond knowing what is in the news; it also determines the types of information that ultimately contribute to public opinion about particular religions” (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003, p. 1).

From a communications theory perspective, framing emerged to replace ideas such as the magic bullet theory. Frames capture the way journalists can embed meaning across time, stories, and media; frames are “structures that draw boundaries, set up categories, define some ideas as out and others in, generally operate to snag related ideas in their net in an active process” (Reese, 2007, p. 150). Additionally, and importantly, according to Van Gorp, “the text and the frame

must be seen as independent from one another. Both the attribution of meaning to media content and the connection with certain frames are part of the reading process” (2007, p. 63). Framing is “based on the assumption that how an issue is characterized in news reports can have an influence on how it is understood by audiences” (Scheufele, D.A. & Tewksbury, D., 2007, p. 11). Chong and Druckman (2007) wrote that the major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be looked at from a number of viewpoints and can be construed as having implications for many values or considerations. “Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104).

de Vreese, Peter and Semetko (2001) wrote that researchers can draw a distinction between issue-specific news frames and generic news frames. An issue-specific news frame focuses on specific topics or ideas, while generic news frames are more broadly applicable to a “range of different news topics, some even over time and, potentially, in different cultural contexts” (p. 108). A generic frame may be more useful for generalization, comparison and theory building, particularly in political and economic news (de Vreese, Peter & Semetko, 2001). A generic frame may also guard against locking these frames in place, “as though they are not part of a larger conversation, serving particular interests and undergoing changes over time” (Reese, 2007, p. 149).

Framing occurs in four stages, as defined by D. Scheufele(1999): frame building, frame setting, individual-level effects framing processes and society’s response or feedback to media frames. B. Scheufele (2006) wrote that “frames can be identified in at least three areas: (1) among journalists, newsrooms or media systems, (2) of media messages or society, and (3) among political, economical, cultural etc. actors, groups, or organizations” (p. 66). The frame,

therefore, is an interpretation: “Straightforward guidelines of how to identify (or even define more precisely) a frame in communication do not exist (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 106). Although Chong and Druckman specifically wrote about a speech act, the idea of frames as subjective interpretations can extend to the printed word, as well. Kerr (2003) argued that technological differences driving news production might threaten solid, informative, accurate, factual and neutral reporting, which may make “television news not only more prone to framing, but also more prone to intentional frames” that are devised so that broadcasters can express their own viewpoints (p. 212). Kerr concluded that frames are essential to the audience’s understanding of news stories because they have the power to influence society: “Frames are thus the context that is communicated with the text, which can shape the way text is received” (2003, p. 212).

In the context of political and social movements (as in the politicizing of faith), frames are also critical in understanding how movement organizers and members shape and define news events, and the degree to which media approve or deviate from those definitions. In this way, language and rhetoric play key roles in shaping the message, even in the very words that are used to shape the message. Frames are related to politics, as part of political arguments and social movements’ discourse. They are alternative ways of defining issues, essential to the political and social world (d. Vreese, 2005). Spielvogel (2005) found that conservatives framed the Iraq War and the so-called “War on Terrorism” in terms of moral values, rather than allowing these major events to be addressed in terms of an argument about public morality. Spielvogel (2005) wrote that Bush relied upon a framing of the war as part of an ongoing struggle between “good and evil.” It was this frame that became a part of the American language in the months following September 11, 2001: “When used in political discourse, frames rooted in moral values invite

audiences to interpret political issues and programs based on their own deeply rooted cultural standards of what is considered right or wrong in human conduct, action, and character” (Spielvogel, 2005, p. 551).

In her study of media representation of “third wave” feminism, Bronstein (2005) wrote that selected frames informed the favorability or unfavorability of the article’s view of third wave feminism. Bronstein (2005) wrote that framing’s central logic is that journalists make up the symbolic representations of society that readers or audiences use to make sense of issues and events. Further, journalists provide story patterns that are familiar and subtly or even subconsciously tell members of society how to interpret information--thus giving order and meaning to facts that would be otherwise difficult to comprehend (Bronstein, 2005). Media framing is critical then, Bronstein (2005) argued, to the study of news and social movements because the ways journalists present a movement cannot only influence public opinion, but also influence public support and action.

Framing also has further value beyond helping to define news; it helps determine what kind of information contributes to public perception of particular religions or faiths, and it is a necessary tool for producing and consuming news (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003). Moreover, information selection is part of the framing process, Haskell (2007) argued, whereby journalists must use “interpretive judgment, that is, they must select and emphasize some facts and leave others out” (p. 123).

Research Questions

Hoover (2006) wrote that the relationship between religion and media is “defined by the fact that the media are now the context through which social and cultural relations occur and representations are made” (p. 289). He further asserted, “It is through the media that much of

contemporary religion and spirituality is known” (p. 1). It is important, then, that the examination of *Time* and *Newsweek* place religion and faith in a cultural context. According to Grossberg, culture is the “whole way of life of a society or people” (2006, p. 20). As such, religion and media become a part of culture and create culture: “The media have come to play an ever greater role in our religious and cultural understanding” (Mitchell & Marriage, 2003, p. 1).

Soukup (2002) argued that religious studies and communication scholars should not look at religion and media separately, but rather look at both as they relate to culture and the making of meaning. Gormly (1999) wrote that scholars who study culture see religion and culture as “inextricably interwoven” and that religion is a potent culture force that affects behavior and imparts moral views and values into the public realm” (p. 24). This gets to the heart of this thesis, which is how did journalists make meaning of religion and faith in the pages of *Time* and *Newsweek*? Although meaning-making is a subjective process, social scientists agree that it is “shaped moment-to-moment” by culture and context (Agar, 1996; Merrick, 1999; and Rennie, 1999; as cited in Mattis, 2002, p. 318). To that end, this thesis will address the following questions:

RQ1: How have mainstream news magazines framed faith and religion?

RQ2: To what extent have these frames centered on American politics?

RQ3: To what extent have these frames centered on American culture?

In looking at these questions, this thesis hopes to discover how these two magazines frame religion and faith.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research looks to analyze and preserve the “situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 18). Qualitative analysis does not seek to construct something larger. Rather, it seeks to set up a “poetic resonance” with the native interpretation through naturalistic observation (Christians & Carey, 1989). This type of analysis can aid in the examination of meaning-making, as the study of media moves from a medium-oriented approach to a meaning-oriented approach (Hoover, 1998).

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis as a method of inquiry has long been used in framing theory. Although either qualitative or quantitative analyses would be sufficient when analyzing frames, using this qualitative method would help to recognize that “meaning is a social production, and as such is embedded in issues of power. Unlike content analysis, the text is not the end in textual analysis; it is the means by which we study the signification process, a representation of reality” (Acosta-Alzuru, 2003, p. 198). Additionally, qualitative methodology has emerged recently in the examination of religion and media, as these methods allow for the investigation of outcomes such as meaning and identity (Hoover, 2006).

As a method of qualitative research, textual analysis is a way for researchers to gather information about how other people make sense of the world around them, “an educated guess” about the most likely interpretations that might be made of a text (McKee, 2003, p. 1). With

roots in literary criticism and structuralist linguistics, textual analysis focuses on texts as cultural influencers (Potter, 1996, p. 63). In analyzing texts, scholars attribute meaning to large-scale units by interpreting the meaning of units on a smaller scale. However, in interpreting the smaller scale units, Potter (1996) wrote that the scholar must assess how these units fit as examples of the broader scale units (p. 63). Potter called the interpretive perspective the most popular one in text-focused research (p. 163).

Scholars have recognized that the study of magazines has been somewhat neglected—not from an advertising perspective, but from an editorial perspective. Webb (2006) wrote, “as a cultural form, magazines have not received the attention they deserve,” and that many studies fail to address the role of magazines as “reflectors or shapers of culture” (p. 866). But the prominence, national reach and permanence of magazines, as well as the narrative style, diversity and complexity within mainstream magazines make them important locations of culture.

Researchers have also used textual analysis to compare magazines. Rowley and Kurpius (2003) conducted a comparative study of Blacks in business magazines (*Forbes*, *Fortune* and *Black Enterprise*) and found that evidence of racism exists in the way both *Forbes* and *Fortune* cover minority business communities (p. 253). Gadsden (2000) conducted a 10-year textual analysis of *New Woman* and *Essence* magazines and found the male voice present in both texts. In both cases, that male voice runs counter to the stated missions of the magazines themselves. Gadsden (2000) concluded: “If men can define women’s gender roles and sexuality in a woman’s magazine, women have not been successful in claiming a social space free from male dominance” (p. 56).

Bronstein used textual analysis in her study of the framing of “third wave” feminism in newspaper articles. She concluded that while print journalists abandoned some of the more

negative frames that defined their coverage of the feminist movement that emerged during the 1960s, journalists still tended to depict third wave feminism in ways that “distort its identity and purpose” (2005, p. 783).

Textual Analysis Applied

This study is an analysis of faith and religion frames in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines from 2004-2008. A comparative analysis brings clarity and makes conceptual categories more precise (Christians & Carey, 1989). Founded in 1923 by Henry Luce, the son of missionary parents (McCloud, 2004, p. 8), and Briton Haddon, the first issue of *Time* appeared on March 3, 1923, with religion as an early department. (Tucker & Zuckerman, 1991, p. 163). *Newsweek* launched 10 years later, on February 17, 1933. That the magazine was founded by Thomas S. Martyn, who was the first foreign news editor for *Time* (Tucker & Zuckerman, 1991, p. 172), shows that the link between the two highest-circulating newsmagazines goes back nearly to the beginning. As far as the reach of both magazines, *Time* reported a rate base of 3.25 million, while *Newsweek* reported a rate base of 3.1 million in December 2007 (Newsweek, 2008).

Because, as Tebbel and Zuckerman argued, “All magazines reflect some aspect of American life, and have from the beginning” (p. 294), and because, as Kitch wrote, “Magazines were the first truly mass medium in the United States” (2001, p. 4), this study seeks to examine a print medium that has been somewhat understudied. Additionally, magazines, in particular, can have a large impact in terms of symbolism and meaning: “The national print media is best viewed as an arena of symbolic production where magazines characterize groups as mainstream or marginal, orthodox or heterodox, religious or nonreligious in ways that accord with the social locations of their producers” (McCloud, 2004, p. 5).

This thesis sought to locate and analyze the framing of religion and faith across nearly four years of coverage bookended by the 2004 and 2008 U.S. elections. Using text gathered from articles published between September 1, 2004, and April 1, 2008, the study looked at how mainstream media, particularly weekly newsmagazines, framed religion and faith. An EBSCOhost database search of the keywords “faith” and “religion” in *Time* and *Newsweek* during this time period yielded a total of 329 articles. By focusing solely on these two key words, whose meaning is similar across cultures, the researcher hoped to both narrow the study to make it more generalizable and to ensure that the sample excluded articles that were tangential to the research questions. Drawing on the work of Hart, Turner and Knupp (1980), this study included feature and non-feature articles to guard against “systemic bias.”

To aid external validity, the researcher narrowed the sample to 246 articles by discarding stories that made reference to faith and religion outside of a traditionally religious or faith-based context, as well as those articles that included lists, surveys, editor’s letters, and shared content (*Newsweek*’s “God-O-Meter,” which is a pithy measure of religiosity, comes from Beliefnet.com). This stratified sample yielded 138 articles from *Newsweek* and 108 articles from *Time* (It should be noted again that *Newsweek* editor Jon Meacham is a religion writer, and may, therefore, push for more religion coverage). After a “long, preliminary soak” (Hall, 1975, p. 15) with the text, each article was read for categorization and organization and, upon close reading, assigned a generic frame. The assignment of this frame was based not only on the text of the article itself, but also on headline and sub-head cues. The initial frame assignment also was an attempt by the researcher to ascertain the extent to which the religion and faith thread appeared throughout the text sample, which in and of itself points to the meaning and impact of religion and faith in these two publications. The researcher decided on four major frames: culture,

politics, religion vs. science and personality. Within these frames, the researcher assigned rich frames based on the organization of the news article.

The researcher analyzed not only the articles that included some aspect or thread of religion or faith, but also the magazine articles that dealt more directly with aspects of religion and faith, as Scott (2005) did in his research on re-presenting Mormon history. Scott effectively used the British Cultural Studies tradition in his search for the structuralist notion of making meaning, through representation and rhetoric. He used Hall's introduction to *Paper Voices* (1975) as his guide. The researcher, too, found guidance in Hall's seminal work: "Our purpose was, where possible, to uncover the unnoticed, perhaps unconscious, social framework of reference which *shaped* the manifest content of a newspaper over relatively long periods of time" (p. 16).

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS

Introduction

This analysis of religion and faith frames in *Time* and *Newsweek* yielded four dominant frames: culture, politics, religion vs. science, and personality. In the broadest sense, the most prevalent frame was culture (103 articles), followed by politics (50 articles), personality (38 articles) and religion vs. science (18 articles), which includes stories dealing with atheism or secularism. That the religion and faith thread was found to such a degree in these pages points to the salience of those topics in everyday life. The remaining frames were found to a somewhat lesser degree, but remain evident in this analysis. In addition to the thematic and generic frames, the researcher concluded that the organization of the articles often pointed to a rich frame. In these instances, the way the writer structured his or her stories often competed with the thematic representation of the article in terms of yielding a frame. These rich frames generally proved a useful tool in the examination of these magazine articles. Additionally, there were differences among news briefs, essays and cover stories, in terms of how the frames developed and based on story structure.

Culture

Religious Experience

The culture frame included articles that focused on how people live, work, love and make sense of their lives. Also present within the culture frame were rich frames, such as military, that further aided in the deconstruction of these magazine articles. The dominant culture frames in terms of religion and faith were concerned primarily with how people lived out their faith every

day. These slice-of-life articles not only served to provide a window to a place in time for those interviewed for the story, but also aided in the assessment of the larger meaning behind these lived experiences.

Chu (2005) wrote an article for *Time* that looked at Muslim Boy Scouts. Intended for a general audience, the story pointed out that there have been all-Muslim Scout troops for 20 years. Only now, in the wake of the September 11 attacks and the growth of Islam in the United States, the Scouts have become ambassadors for their faith. The story seems to be about finding common ground, and “normalizing” Islam. But Muslim boys in troops are still considered “other” because of food they can’t eat and special merit badges that they can pursue. Chu wrote about a Boy Scout jamboree where leaders handed out Bibles, and how one Scout ended up “eating meal after meal” of peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches because he wasn’t certain if the meal that was provided contained pork. He also wrote of these Muslim Boy Scouts as having to grow up fast and represent their faith: “And no Muslim chaplain was on site to lead Friday services, so Asad Shahid, 15, of Naugatuck, Conn., nervously guided his fellow scouts to a spot in the shade of a big oak tree, turned to face Mecca and led the prayers for the first time in his life” (Chu, 2005, para. 7). For the reader, Chu provided strong background information about the Boy Scouts and the context for writing this story. He also was able to portray the boys as the “same,” at their insistence:

Still, the more the Muslim boys are set apart, the more they want to be thought of-- and treated--the same as other scouts. “We’re the same. We’re the same,” insists Ali Raza Jiwani, 14. “We’re the same as everyone else: humans made by God.” Ali Raza and his buddies talk basketball. They tease one another about girls. They swear. And they are fervently patriotic. “We’re proud to be Asian American,” says Amin Ali, 15, who has

thought about becoming a military pilot. “I love my country,” says Salman. “My religion doesn't interfere with that.” (Chu, 2005, para. 8)

As the story developed, Chu portrayed these boys as living out their faith and struggling for a more positive recognition of their identity as Muslims and Americans. Their status as Boy Scouts appears to be a stand-in for patriotism.

Newsweek published a story about how young people are embracing fellow Muslims of different backgrounds, particularly at one mosque in California. This new generation of Muslims is shaping the mosques into a more inclusive space. The focus of the cover story was generational, with Ali (2005) writing about how a shared faith is bringing Muslims together. The lead was particularly effective in setting up the notion of changed times and the context of those times:

When the youth group at southern California's Mission Viejo Masjid met recently, the scene looked like a public-service announcement for racial tolerance. The Sudanese imam sat next to a Palestinian-American student, who sat next to a female Anglo convert, who sat next to a son of Pakistani immigrants, who... well, you get the idea. But this isn't a clever ad; it's mosque life on any given weekend in Orange County and cities across America. (Ali, 2005, para. 1)

The writer provided the supporting context and supposition for this trend, as well. Ali (2005) wrote that the people driving this trend, the children of immigrants, are the fastest-growing group among the nation's estimated 7 million Muslims. Combine their faith with the “American tradition” of diversity, and the mosque in Orange County is the welcome result. As written, the story does little to provide contrast of a time when Muslims did not worship together, and the modernism and symbolism of worshipping together can be seen as the perfect

representation of peace. Both of these articles provided more of a real-life look at what it means to be young and Muslim in the United States, which appears to be the motive of both writers. The idea that these pious and dedicated young people are just like everyone else is a prevailing theme in these stories that focus on the lived Muslim faith.

Standing in sharp contrast to that claim is another *Time* article, which focused on how the Christian faith is lived on college campuses. In “Faith and Frat Boys,” Chu (2005) attempted to answer the question as to how young American Christians are reconciling their faith and the call to evangelize in what can be an increasingly decadent college culture. The difference is, well, difference. Instead of simply emphasizing the similarities of the experience of Christians on campus (which he did to a lesser degree by writing about a former frat house that is now home to campus Christians), Chu set these student believers apart. In the story’s lead, Chu uses what could be a scene from *Animal House*, with women passed out on one fraternity’s couch and a fraternity brother extolling the “awesomeness” of an exposed breast:

By the time the revelers rose, after noon, Straub, 21, who is not only a loyal fraternity member but also a leader in the Greek InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, had already gone to church and come back. As some of his frat brothers nursed hangovers and others cleaned up from the night before, Straub pondered his situation. He walks a fine line of faith at Indiana, which is currently ranked by the Princeton Review as America's No. 15 party school (and No. 5 in the category “lots of beer”). The challenge, Straub says, is “How can I serve God and love the guys here?” (Chu, 2005, para. 2)

Chu used a recent national study about religious fellowship on campus to provide key context for the story, the organization of which makes Straub’s (and others who do the same ministry work) task seem like an uphill battle (At one point, Straub talks about being a “warrior”

for Christ). Chu leaves the reader with what appears to be some semblance of hope for the effort. Every week, Chu wrote, the president of Greek InterVarsity, Peter Howell, knocks on doors and invites his fellow fraternity brothers to a Bible Study. While few seem to take him up on that offer, Chu ended the story on note that seems upbeat: “In the biggest meathead frat, he's himself. He's 100%. And no matter what day I say no, he'll always come back,” says junior Trevor Loe, who declined to attend that week's session. “One day, when I'm ready, I'll remember Peter” (Chu, 2005, para. 14). By setting apart the Christians on campus, even though that religion is considered mainstream and dominant in America, Chu appears to leave the reader with the impression that Christians will be considered “other.” In all three of these stories, the institutions, Boy Scouts, the mosque and the university, appear to represent what is traditional. In focusing on people living beyond that tradition, the writers seem to be focusing on change, difference or the need for both.

Both *Time* and *Newsweek* published stories on the same news item. When Muslim taxi drivers in Minnesota refused to pick up people carrying alcohol from the airport, passengers complained to the airport commission. Each story took a different approach, possibly because the stories were written several weeks apart. The shorter story by Miller and Brinkhaus for *Time* was published in the May 14, 2007, issue and was set up as a conflict between the taxi drivers and the airport commission. The writers supplied the context and scope for the issue. They wrote that roughly 75 % of the 900 drivers who service the airport at Minneapolis-St. Paul are Somali immigrants, most of whom are observant Muslims who believe that it is a sin to carry, sell or drink alcohol. The impact? “According to the airport authority, passengers were refused nearly 5,000 times over the past four years” (Miller & Brinkhaus, 2007, para. 2). The writers further set up the conflict by writing about the public outrage that greeted the airport commission's

compromise, which was an agreement to designate some cabs as alcohol free. Two weeks later, the commission reversed itself (Miller & Brinkhaus, 2007).

The writers appear to characterize this as a quality of life issue for the cab drivers: “We are just regular people trying to live by our faith and do our jobs,” says Abdinoor Dolal, who is the cabbies' unofficial spokesman. “Something so small as this, why can't it be resolved? We don't understand” (Miller & Brinkhaus, 2007, para. 4). In the next sentence, however, the writers seem to hedge by including a statement from an Emory University professor and attorney stating that the cabbies would lose should they take their case to court.

Time handled the story differently. Published on January 29, 2007, Van Biema and Pickett's story focused on the claim that the conflict was not a “clash of civilizations.” (2007). Instead of writing solely about the conflict between the cab drivers and the airport commission, the writers provided the religious context that was missing from the *Newsweek* story: “Their Islamic jurisprudence might actually have been a little shaky: most varieties of Islam hold that while Muslims in a non-Muslim country may not drink alcohol, they may carry it, something cabbies in most American cities do without a qualm” (Van Biema & Pickett, 2007, para. 2). The writers interviewed one cabdriver who stated that he didn't practice Islam as much as he did in his home country, but still did not want anything to do with alcohol. But if a judge ruled that he had to drive customers with alcohol or risk losing his job, he said he would deal with it:

“It would hurt my beliefs,” he says. “But there are rules in this country. If we want to impose our rules and our beliefs, we should stay where we came from. If the court finds that what we are doing is wrong, then it's wrong. I could get another job.” That sounds both Islamic and realistic. (Van Biema & Pickett, 2007, para. 9)

By including this quote later in the story, the writers seem to be appealing to “reason,” with this cab driver as a voice of reason. The journalists also termed his comments “realistic,” implying that any other stance is unrealistic. The *Newsweek* article, by leaving out much of the religious context, appears to skirt favoring one side over the other.

Within the dominant culture frame, there was also a subordinate military frame. Although this rich frame represents six articles (five of them in *Newsweek*), one cover story contained universal themes. The May 7, 2007, cover story, “Faith Under Fire,” examined how war can test the faith of those entrusted with building the faith of others. Using the journal from one Army chaplain to help tell the larger story of a war where soldiers are facing difficult, life-threatening situations and injuries every day, the writers use this journal as a microcosm for the larger military experience. One passage succinctly explained what the chaplain has experienced, from being “on fire for God” to enduring a crisis of faith:

Yet at times in the Iraq War zone--and after coming home--Benimoff began to question that love. His experience, detailed in a daily journal and voluminous e-mails from Iraq shared with *Newsweek*, is a tale of a devout young man who begins his time in Iraq brimming with faith and a sense of devotion that carries him into a second tour. (Conant, Ephron, Dehghanpisheh & Nordland, 2007, para. 2)

The writers of this article appear to try to normalize the soldier’s crisis of faith by revealing his entire journey—what got him to those moments of seeming despair to what has led him back. In doing so, in attempting to create a sense of normalcy, the writers appear to stake claim to the idea that crises of faith come with belief and are to be expected:

In some ways, Benimoff’s story is common to people of all walks of life and all beliefs. It is the story of spiritual struggle--and of trying to accept a world of both good and evil,

where pain and loss seem unconnected to faith and justice. Such tensions are magnified on the battlefield. Countless soldiers--not just chaplains--have struggled with how to reconcile a God of love with a God who allows the terror of conflict. (Conant, Ephron, Dehghanpisheh & Nordland, 2007, para. 4)

This story also provided relevant statistics to back up the claim of normalcy: “According to a 2006 military study, 27 % of chaplains and their assistants in the field reported burnout levels that were ‘high’ or ‘very high.’ Some of the potential effects of what the Army calls ‘provider fatigue’ are acutely troubling for chaplains: hopelessness and doubts about spirituality” (Conant, Ephron, Dehghanpisheh & Nordland, 2007, para. 7). The writers of this story are attempting to provide a real look into the life, times and struggles of soldiers battling the war in Iraq and what happens when they return home. Just because much of the physical battle takes place thousands of miles away, this story seems to say, doesn’t mean that the impact won’t be felt when they return to America.

Politics

Religious Democrats

The second most prevalent frame in this analysis is politics, which also overlapped with the personality frame, as a major device of these newsmagazines is the political profile. For the purposes of locating a larger meaning, the researcher focused on articles that seemed to set an agenda in how the writers organized their work. Within this categorization, over time and in both publications, emerged the idea that Democrats are becoming more religious and reaching out to religious voters. A November 21, 2005, *Newsweek* story put forth the early hypothesis that the Democrats would have to make a change. Fineman’s (2005) story about Democrat Tom Kaine’s

successful gubernatorial campaign focused on the idea that Kaine was the first Catholic to win that office, and that he did so in a predominantly Protestant state:

He provided a road map into the cultural mainstream for national Democrats. And he highlighted the ever more pivotal role of Catholic politicians, jurists and voters at a time when “values” debates are front and center. “We can't completely separate politics and faith,” Kaine told *Newsweek*. “They rise from the same wellspring: the concern about the distance between what is and what ought to be.” (2007, para. 1)

The plan for the Democrats moving forward, according to Fineman, was to discuss their faith in public in a genuine way that would appeal to voters.

A *Time* cover story from July 23, 2007, “Leveling the Praying Field” (Gibbs & Duffy), seems to provide thorough evidence for this claim. Following Sen. John Kerry’s loss to President George W. Bush in 2004, these articles seem to claim that the Democratic Party went back to church and began working to improve its personal relationships with people of faith.

The Democrats are so fired up, you could call them the new Moral Majority. This time, however, the emphasis is as much on the majority as on the morality as they try to frame a message in terms of broadly shared values that don't alarm members of minority religions or secular voters. It has become an article of faith among party leaders that it was sheer strategic stupidity to cede the values debate to Republicans for so long.... (Gibbs & Duffy, 2007, para. 4)

Both of these stories, appearing years apart, provide key context and support for the claims of Democrats “getting” religion. In doing so, the writers appear to take on the frame set forth by the Democrats, that the party has changed and will no longer leave religion to the Republicans. Through the use of quotes and statistics, as well as historical analysis, both stories

point to religion and faith as key strategies for Democrats. Another part of that strategy and another element of this rich frame involves America's burgeoning Hispanic and Latino population. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* published articles relating to how to tap into and harness that community's political power, although the articles appeared a few months apart. In Novak's "Translating Faith Into Spanish," which was published October 25, 2004, in *Time*, the religion and faith link is explicit, as the writer includes a religious organization's appeal to Hispanic or Latino voters:

It makes all the political sense in the world: take your wedge issues--abortion, same-sex marriage and stem-cell research--and aim them at a population whose membership in the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian churches exceeds 90%. That's the strategy deployed this season by Focus on the Family, the conservative group run by James Dobson, to try to sway the Hispanic vote for George Bush. (Novak, 2005, para.1)

The article also briefly mentions Sen. John Kerry's response, that some of his ads have a "drive-by reference to religion" (Novak, 2005, para. 5).

The *Newsweek* article, published May 30, 2005, focuses on Antonio Villaraigosa's successful Los Angeles mayoral campaign and the spark that his victory gave the Democratic Party. After losing ground with the Hispanic or Latino vote in 2004, Campos-Flores and Fineman write, the Democrats must regroup for 2006 and beyond. The writers assert, by using quotes and statistics from the Pew Center on Religion, that because many of the Hispanics and Latinos registered to vote in the United States are devout Catholics, the Republicans were able to tap into what was once considered to be a Democratic base and turned that population into swing voters: "By reaching out to such churches, the campaign tapped into large concentrations of potentially sympathetic souls. 'Many evangelical communities are greatly identified with the

Hispanic community,’ says Roberto Suro, director of the Pew Hispanic Center” (para. 6).

Although this story was focused more on how Democrats plan to energize and fight for the Hispanic or Latino vote, the story does use religion as part of that strategy.

Mormonism

Another key, rich frame within politics involved Mormonism, particularly as it related to former Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney. In this rich frame, both *Time* and *Newsweek* appeared to frame Mormonism as “other.” In Meacham and Kliff’s story, “A New American Holy War,” which was published December 17, 2007, the writers seem to characterize Romney as somewhat vague on the particulars of his Mormon faith. The story outlined the differences between evangelicals and Mormons, using Republican candidates Mike Huckabee, a former Christian preacher, and Romney, a high-ranking member of the Mormon church, as foils. In offering further evidence of this “holy war,” the writers lead the story with this striking context: Romney’s December 6, 2007, religion speech, in which he extolled generally the virtues of faith and the founding fathers. All the while, though, he had been battling anti-Mormon bias, which, some have said, ultimately played a part in sinking his campaign:

In November, voters in Iowa and in New Hampshire received mysterious calls known as push polls, in which the questioner “pushes” an often hostile point about a candidate in the guise of asking a polling question. According to *The Boston Globe*, Ralph Watts, a state representative in Iowa who backs Romney, got just such a call. The voice on the other end of the line said: “Some people say the Mormon Church is a cult; would that make you more or less likely to vote for Mitt Romney?” Then came favorable questions about John McCain....(Meacham & Kliff, 2007, para. 7)

The push poll was one example of negative campaigning around the Mormon faith that the writer included in this story.

In a May 21, 2007, cover story for *Time*, “The Religion Test,” Gibbs set up the question of Romney's candidacy raising a larger issue. It may be OK to ask a candidate about school vouchers, “But can you ask if he believes that the Garden of Eden was located in Jackson County, Mo., as the Mormon founder taught, and vote against him on the grounds of that answer? Or, for that matter, because of the kind of underwear he wears?” (para. 1). By describing Romney’s Mormon faith in this matter (mentioning the underwear and the idea about Jackson County, Mo.), Gibbs (2007) leaves readers with the impression that Mormonism is outside the norm and perhaps even somewhat kooky. She further extends that “other-ness” by including what could be deemed unfavorable assertions about Mormon founder Joseph Smith:

Slate editor Jacob Weisberg threw down the challenge after reviewing some of Joseph Smith's more extravagant assertions. “He was an obvious con man,” Weisberg wrote.

“Romney has every right to believe in con men, but I want to know if he does, and if so, I don't want him running the country.” That argument, counters author and radio host Hugh Hewitt, amounts to unashamed bigotry....(Gibbs, 2007, para. 2)

Gibbs included Weisberg’s more inflammatory remarks to raise the question of legitimacy, without overtly raising the question, herself. She did, however, include denouncements of such statements about Mormonism. Despite this “hedge,” the inclusion of such inflammatory remarks seems to serve the interest of making Mormonism seem abnormal. Both of these stories appear to label Mormonism (and by extension, Romney) as “other.” Even though there should be no “religion test” for public office, the writers seem to say, Mormonism and Romney fail that test.

Religion vs. Science

Religion vs. science is a third frame that emerged during the analysis of the sample. A key part of this frame was the rich frame of atheism or secularism. Van Biema, Cray, Israely and Bierklie wrote a November 13, 2006, cover story for *Time* that puts it succinctly: “God vs. Science.” The thesis for this story, which is set up as a debate, is the question of religion standing up to the advances of science. The magazine enlisted the services of renowned atheist and scientist Richard Dawkins and scientist Francis Collins, a professed Christian and director of the National Human Genome Project. The debate format not only lets the participants speak for themselves, but also allows the journalist and the newsmagazine to dodge writing more definitively about the tricky subject of religion, one that could lead to charges of bias. The discussion is between two scientists with binary belief systems, one who believes in God and science (Collins) and the other who wrote a book called *The God Delusion* (Dawkins). *Time* does not include a trained theologian in this debate, so Dawkins and Collins are seemingly approaching the topic from a scientific perspective. The tone of the debate is, at times, civil and somewhat illuminating, as in this exchange:

COLLINS: By being outside of nature, God is also outside of space and time. ... The idea that he could both foresee the future and also give us spirit and free will to carry out our own desires becomes entirely acceptable.

DAWKINS: I think that's a tremendous cop-out. If God wanted to create life and create humans, it would be slightly odd that he should choose the extraordinarily roundabout way of waiting for 10 billion years before life got started and then waiting for another 4

billion years until you got human beings capable of worshipping and sinning and all the other things religious people are interested in. (para. 21).

But the debate then devolves a bit, and ends up moving to an area that leads Collins to characterize atheists as “arrogant:”

DAWKINS: ... It would be unseemly for me to enter in except to suggest that he'd save himself an awful lot of trouble if he just simply ceased to give them the time of day. Why bother with these clowns?

COLLINS: Richard, I think we don't do a service to dialogue between science and faith to characterize sincere people by calling them names. That inspires an even more dug-in position. Atheists sometimes come across as a bit arrogant in this regard, and characterizing faith as something only an idiot would attach themselves to is not likely to help your case. (2007, para. 43)

This “God vs. Science” story does not appear to have a definitive winner, as neither Dawkins nor Collins seemed to want to concede any ground. The writers seem to purposely leave the discussion open-ended.

A similar *Newsweek* story, “The God Debate” featured different people on the opposing sides and led to a discussion with a more theological tenor. With editor Jon Meacham as the moderator, the April 9, 2007, article took on a more irreverent tone, at least in the introduction. Although the question posed to the debaters, “Is God real?” is slightly different than the God vs. Science characterization, the discussion touched on the historical and contemporary relationship between science and religion. In describing the two discussants, Meacham sets up the tone as somewhat more jovial or even celebratory:

Rick Warren is as big as a bear, with a booming voice and easygoing charm. Sam Harris is compact, reserved and, despite the polemical tone of his books, friendly and mild. Warren, one of the best-known pastors in the world, started Saddleback in 1980; now 25,000 people attend the church each Sunday. Harris is softer-spoken; paragraphs pour out of him, complex and fact-filled-- as befits a Ph.D. student in neuroscience. At *Newsweek*'s invitation, they met in Warren's office recently and chatted, mostly amiably, for four hours. (2007, para. 1)

Just as in the *Time* story, however, the person representing the atheist point of view, appears to get a bit defensive. Harris interrupts as Warren makes a generalized statement about atheists being intolerant:

HARRIS: How am I being intolerant? I'm not advocating that we lock people up for their religious beliefs. You can get locked up in Western Europe for denying the Holocaust. I think that's a terrible way of addressing the problem. This really is one of the great canards of religious discourse, the idea that the greatest crimes of the 20th century were perpetrated because of atheism. (Meacham, 2007)

In these two characterizations, one as "arrogant" and the other as "intolerant" the story appears to shift the power to those arguing on behalf of a higher power. The inclusion of those specific comments seems to be more supportive and favorable toward the two people—Collins and Warren—who believe in God. Meacham also lets Warren have the last word (he let Harris go first because the debate was taking place in Warren's church office). Allowing Warren to have the last word in these excerpts seems to serve the purpose of making Christianity or belief seem normal and in the main, rather than atheism:

WARREN: I believe in both faith and reason. The more we learn about God, the more we understand how magnificent this universe is.... We're both betting. He's betting his life that he's right. I'm betting my life that Jesus was not a liar. When we die, if he's right, I've lost nothing. If I'm right, he's lost everything. I'm not willing to make that gamble.

(Meacham, 2007)

In both of these stories, the two atheists seem almost to be fighting to have their voices heard, even in a setting that is supposed to do just that. By taking on the arrogant and intolerant labels, both Dawkins and Harris appear to stand up for those who share their beliefs, but seem to come off as somewhat unforgiving in their beliefs. The meaning here seems to be that once alternative views are set, the battle begins.

Other stories in both magazines seem to lend more value to the atheist view. “The New Naysayers” and “Sunday School for Atheists” are just two examples of an atheist/secularist view making its way further into the mainstream. Adler’s September 11, 2006, story for *Newsweek*, “The New Naysayers,” profiled atheists such as Dawkins and Harris and the impact and success they have had with books denying the existence of God. Adler also writes that both would call themselves agnostic: “Dawkins and Harris are not writing polite demurrals to the time-honored beliefs of billions; they are not issuing pleas for tolerance or moderation, but bone-rattling attacks on what they regard as a pernicious and outdated superstition” (Adler, 2006, para. 4).

Lee-St. John’s December 3, 2007, story for *Time* about non-believers looking for places to teach their children values represented a different approach to the rise in visibility in America of those who don’t believe in a higher power. Lee-St. John used statistics to set up context for this story. He wrote that about 14 % of Americans say they have no religion; among 18-to-25-year-olds, the proportion jumps to 20%, according to the Institute for Humanist Studies:

The lives of these young people would be much easier, adult nonbelievers say, if they learned at an early age how to respond to the God-fearing majority in the U.S. “It's important for kids not to look weird,” says Peter Bishop, who leads the preteen class at the Humanist center in Palo Alto. (Lee-St. John, 2007, para. 3)

Not only is it important for kids to feel normal, the article seems to state, it also supported the parents' position that not believing in God is OK, and that there is a place and a way for them to reinforce important morals and values in their children. In setting up the children's non-believer ideas as weird, the article sets up the rich frame of atheism as strange. But there appears to be space for these alternative views in these two articles.

Personality

One frame that was found across several types of stories was the personality frame. These were stories that focused on an individual, be it a politician, entertainer, a sports figure or a church leader. *Jeopardy* champ Ken Jennings decried Alex Trebek's polygamy jokes in one article (Soukup, 2004); Actor Rainn Wilson's Q and A in *Time* referenced his Ba'hai faith (2007). The key element in this frame was either a personal interview or some other vocalization of the subject, as well as headline cues that focused on the subject.

One subject was Mother Theresa, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who died in 1997. The disparate treatment of Mother Teresa by *Time* and *Newsweek* at the release of her letters in book form, serve as evidence of how these two magazines attempt to create meaning. Ten years after Mother Teresa's death, her secret letters reveal that she spent almost 50 years without sensing God's presence in her life. The publication of a book containing those letters led *Time* to put the nun's “agony” on the front page (Van Biema, 2007). The article was written in terms of what it could teach the reader about the value of doubt:

Although perpetually cheery in public, the Teresa of the letters lived in a state of deep and abiding spiritual pain. In more than 40 communications, many of which have never before been published, she bemoans the “dryness,” “darkness,” “loneliness” and “torture” she is undergoing. She compares the experience to hell and at one point says it has driven her to doubt the existence of heaven and even of God. ... “The smile,” she writes, is “a mask” or “a cloak that covers everything.” (Van Biema, 2007, para. 5)

While *Time* used one of its well-known religion writers to cover this story (perhaps because they may have secured the rights to reprint excerpts), *Newsweek* enlisted atheist Christopher Hitchens, a *Vanity Fair* columnist and known critic of Mother Teresa, for its critique. Hitchens’ take, in “The Dogmatic Doubter” (2007) seems to be that Mother Teresa rebuked and abandoned her faith, that these “scrawled, desperate documents” (para. 2) of doubt could be seen as a natural byproduct of an unseen faith. Hitchens divulged that his interest in this subject is that at the invitation of the Vatican, he testified against the beatification and canonization of Mother Teresa, and ‘confessed’ that in terms of faith, he believed that “the absence of evidence is the evidence of absence” (para. 3). In his analysis of Mother Theresa’s letters, he viewed her doubt as unbelief, and concluded that because in her writings she stated that she did not feel the presence of God, she was rejecting the faith. His evidence of such could appear biased, as he is known for being critical of Mother Teresa. As one who claims no belief in God, his analysis may be skewed. It is important to note, also, that the choice of Hitchens to analyze this book, could either be seen as inspired or piling on. That an atheist would be sent to assess the faith or doubt of one of Catholicism’s most revered figures could lead to more open and honest debate. Or, it could lead to less engagement in the discussion because it may have been seen as unfair.

Politics

A major rich frame or dueling frame of the personality frame is politics. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* feature political profiles, often prominently. Of course, these types of stories tend to run in election cycles, and ebb and flow with the he's in, she's out aspects of campaigning. One major political rich frame that was present in both magazines was that of former Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee as religious. In "A Pastor's True Calling," the writers focused on Huckabee, a former pastor and former assistant to a televangelist. This was a different characterization of faith, patently unlike that of other presidential candidates. Huckabee actually had been the pastor of a church for several years and comes by faith declarations pretty naturally, according to the December 17, 2007, *Newsweek* cover story.

Despite attempts to paint Huckabee as a down-to-earth Christian leader, the article mentioned Huckabee's time as governor of Arkansas and the friends and enemies he made while in office. The story also characterized Huckabee as someone with questionable ethics practices. Though he fancies himself a "folksy country preacher, he spent a decade as the Republican governor in overwhelmingly Democratic Arkansas, a state where politics is rough and memories are long. Over the years, Huckabee made plenty of enemies, not all of them Democrats" (para. 9). For would-be voters, this information, relatively high up in a long cover story, serves as a signal that all was not what it appeared to be. Because while Huckabee does have a strong faith and background, this story seems to put forth the hypothesis that it doesn't mean that he wouldn't have problems if elected president.

Time took a seemingly more irreverent approach to Huckabee's candidacy. In "Jesus Christ's Superstar" (Poniewozik, 2008), the writer characterized Huckabee's now-defunct campaign as a "Christian crossover product" that appealed largely to a young, Evangelical base.

At the same time, Huckabee was becoming somewhat of a media magnate, with appearances on top late night shows and humorous campaign commercials. Having a foot in both of those worlds didn't seem to bother the younger generation, which has a tendency to see religion in mainstream culture: "Adam Smith, editorial director of *Relevant*, a magazine for young Christians, says Huckabee's engagement with the pop world speaks to younger Evangelicals. "Most of our readers don't really see a demarcation between mainstream culture and "church culture," he says" (para. 6).

Using an interview with the editorial director of a magazine that speaks to young people seemed to be a sound way to build evidence for the writer's claim that Huckabee has a broad-based appeal. The end of the article also seems to boil down what the candidate's true prospects were: "Any crossover effort can have limits. Entertainer-preacher Huckabee could simply end up being the best-liked candidate among people who will never vote for him" (Poniewozik, 2008, para.10).

Entertainment

Another aspect or rich frame of the personality frames involved entertainers. A September 5, 2005, feature story on Kanye West revealed the contradictions within West about living a hip-hop lifestyle and being a professed Christian:

"I definitely have conflicts," he says. "Am I able to walk like I'm Jesus Christ? No, but I do a lot more right than wrong. From what I hear, all sins are equal in God's eye. But I believe some sins are worse than others." He smiles at the girl from the video. She smiles back. "That's where the concepts that I touch on all the time come from--that fight between good and evil within yourself." (Ali, 2005, para. 6)

In this article, West's faith became secondary to the story, where the news was the release of West's CD, *Late Registration*. By including this passage in the *Newsweek* story, the writer portrays West as a man who struggles with conflicts and contradictions just like anyone.

A *Time* story was similar in its treatment of Tyler Perry, a once-homeless man now reaping the rewards of his theater, film and television success. "The Modest Mogul," published March 31, 2008, begins by Corliss giving the reader the impression that it is Perry against Hollywood. Although the story is more about Perry's rise to fame despite Hollywood's disinterest, Perry's faith and the portrayal of the Black church experience plays a large part of setting the stage for the story. Corliss begins with an anecdote about Perry's post-play talk with audience members at one performance. Corliss wrote that Perry confided to the audience that he turned down a comedy serious because it couldn't be religious:

"If you don't want my God here, you don't want me here either. God has been too good to me to go and try to sell out to get some money. That's O.K. I will sit in a corner and be broke with the Lord before I will sit there and have them give me millions and sell my soul. It ain't gonna happen." (Corliss, 2008, para. 1)

The larger issue for Perry seems to be standing up for what you believe in and not compromising your beliefs for a quick buck. That he was patient and owes his success largely to himself may be testament to the reward you can receive by standing fast in the faith. The way Corliss organized the story, it appears as if he is putting forth the idea that maintaining belief in God and holding fast to your beliefs will be rewarded in the end. That the stories about Kanye West and Tyler Perry use religion as an aspect of the subject's personality further categorizes these stories in the personality frame.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Framing Religion and Faith

Newsmagazines' framing of religion and faith and the influence of those frames in the United States is something that may have gone largely unexplored. Religion is at times explicit, as with faith-based publications such as *Christianity Today* or *Relevant* magazine, or even in newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor*. But it is those publications--these magazines that purport to cover everyday life with fairness and accuracy that must be examined. What types of frames regarding religion, faith and culture emerged in *Time* and *Newsweek* and how are those frames shaping the minds, and values of the reading audience? These are all questions that the researcher sought to answer with this thesis.

Although some may view these generic frames as categories, it is the rich frames that emerged within these generic frames that point to the valid construction of the frame. While the majority of the articles took on a culture frame, focusing on the lived experience of individuals and groups, journalists from both magazines placed emphasis on similarities and differences within these lived experiences, particularly among young people. In the larger cultural context, these articles served, in a way, to demystify the faith process for some people, and heightened it for others. By focusing on the pious nature or aspects of Islam, the writers seem to be depicting that faith as one striving to make peace with American culture. Within the frame of culture was a rich frame of military, focusing on the lives of American soldiers and their journey through a faith lens. For readers who might be struggling to make sense of the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan, the Army chaplain's passage from and back to faith may serve as a reminder that faith can be a difficult and crisis-filled journey.

The magazines' framing of faith and religion also centered on politics. In this frame, the articles focused on the major issues facing the American democracy, and the ways that politicians were seeking to engage voters represented by the reading audience. The Democrats emerging as religious was a rich frame across both magazines, and signaled what the Democrats put forth as a new era in U.S. politics. The sub-framing of Mormonism as "other" served to make meaning for those readers who hold beliefs that are more mainstream. That Romney failed to clearly articulate his faith, according to journalists who wrote about him, seemed to signal an end to personal faith in the realm of politics. In not revealing enough about his faith, Romney seemed to fail to gain the trust of the American voters. By including certain voices (particularly hostile ones) and excluding others, the characterization of Mormonism as "other" appeared in several articles.

The religion vs. science frame was often present through stories debating the merits and detriments of both. Within this frame, too, there existed atheism as a rich frame. As nonbelievers enter the marketplace and exchange ideas, it is important to remind readers, these journalists seem to say, that there are different points of view. The debates between believing and non-believing scientists and an agnostic and a megachurch pastor serve to offer the reader increased access to those varied points of view. And as nonbelievers tried to find ways to live out morality and values in different ways, it is important to note that American culture may be rising to meet that need.

The personality frame is most dominant when the article conveys information about one person, either in a feature story or a Q and A. That *Time* and *Newsweek* chose to tell Mother

Teresa's story in entirely different ways only lends more credence to this comparison analysis. It also points to the idea that these publications are shifting roles, allowing more people to evaluate one another and allowing them to speak more often for themselves or through others. The voice of the "journalist" appears to be changing, which was particularly evident in Hitchens' article. As for politicians, particularly those claiming religious faith, the framing of the stories involving Mike Huckabee also proved revealing. A perfect storm of a pastor-turned-governor who runs for president provided an interesting study for how mass media cover faith and politics. These generic frames have meaning not just within the articles themselves, but also as evidence of the weight of the thread of religion and faith that is woven through these texts.

Implications for Further Study

Through this research and analysis, the researcher hopes to contribute new knowledge about the role of magazines in the interface between mass media and religion. Although this study is limited by time and scope, (and by the content of the magazines' themselves), its results could point to larger cultural meaning surrounding magazines and religion framing. Through each of these frames, the writers attempt to convey some type of meaning. To a great extent, the articles created meaning for certain aspects of American culture. From how people live to how people find and lose faith, these journalists create a space where religion and faith intermingle with news of everyday life. This study could be extended to encompass the next presidential era, or an historical analysis could be done to look at how these same magazines frame religion and faith in the past. Future research could examine the framing of faith and culture in faith-based magazines and/or primetime television shows. And because mainstream newsmagazines are publishing much of their content online, it could be possible to conduct an Internet study of these same issues.

Another aspect of this type of analysis is the role of the journalist. In framing articles a certain way, journalists create meaning for readers, intentionally or unintentionally. The role of the journalist in the process of framing is key to how readers consume and understand articles. An interview or survey of magazine writers who cover religion and faith or include those aspects in their stories could also be undertaken.

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