

RUNNING HEAD: Methodist Media Campaign

Opening Doors--Where's the Doctrine?:

A Rhetorical Analysis of the United Methodist Media Campaign

Key Words: Methodist, church, doctrine, Pentad, Burke, believe, advertisements, bait and switch

Abstract

This paper seeks to define how the *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* media campaign reflects or contrasts the United Methodist doctrinal heritage using Burke's Pentad. From an analysis of the "I Believe" commercial, the largest implication found is a shift in philosophies between the United Methodist heritage and the advertisements, thus signaling a shift in the image of the Church from this campaign. Ramifications of the United Methodist Church's mediated image are discussed.

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### A Rhetorical Analysis of the United Methodist Media Campaign

Advertising floods Americans with offers to provide prescription drugs, food, leisure, credit, homes, and now they advertise people's need for God. Protestant churches are beginning to learn how to use the media to enliven the Gospel and intrigue the American public about church. The United Methodist Church began an advertising campaign to boost membership and denominational awareness in 2001. In a series of 30-second commercials, the Church presents itself in the most appealing way to non-members and members alike to let them know that openness will bring them to a community of acceptance and the open arms of God.

The increase in membership and retention would seem to be the defining goal of whether the advertising campaign was successful, but there are more crucial factors present in this marketing campaign for the denomination. The Church is entering into brand-imaging in hopes to impact the future of the United Methodist Church. Branding is explained as consistent identification tags that help illustrate the way an organization has shaped its identity and differentiated itself from other organizations in the market (Argenti, 2003). Image is defined as how the corporation is "seen through the eyes of its constituencies" (Argenti, 2003, p. 44). The symbolic messages that may be a person's first encounter with the beliefs and people of The United Methodist Church are also the same messages speaking to members within the organization about the direction the Church is heading.

With such a wide range of audiences, it is important to see whether this message can straddle the varying audiences while accurately representing the United Methodist's history, present, and future. This paper seeks to explore these issues by reviewing the history and purpose

of the United Methodist *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* campaign in order to see if the media campaign reflects or contrasts the United Methodist doctrinal heritage.

### Rationale

This campaign was created by Igniting Ministries, an internal communication organization of the United Methodist Church founded for this campaign in response to membership decline. American mainline denominations have lost 30 to 40 percent of their members since 1960 (Gorski, 2005). The United Methodist Church began this \$20 million dollar campaign to “increase awareness and recognition of The United Methodist Church’s basic beliefs, foster among non-members a positive feeling and willingness to visit a United Methodist church, and to renew a sense of commitment in United Methodist” (“About,” ¶1). Understanding the context of the communication of this media campaign plays a significant strategic role of increasing the importance of the portrayal of the United Methodist Church to the public.

The media campaign is meant to represent the people of the United Methodist Church. It is not unusual for churches to spend the time and money to research if their campaign has a positive effect on membership, but rarely do they take a deeper rhetorical look at the symbolism behind the messages. It is important to study symbolism in such overt media messages that are meant to represent a mainstream Christian church and a representation tied to the larger identity of the Westernized Church.

There is information available on the statistical increase in church attendance and that the United Methodist Church has gained name recognition in America from the *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* campaign, but little information exists analyzing the effectiveness of communicating such an image of the United Methodist’s dogma to the public and to the members of the United Methodist church. The literature review includes history of the United

Methodist Church, a review of UMC doctrine, the UMC Social Principles, a history of protestant-media relations, and the history of UMC communication in order to provide a background for the analysis and implications.

### Indoctrinated Hearts & Minds

#### *History of the Formation of the United Methodist Church*

The Wesleyan movement began the series of events that led to the forming of the United Methodist Church. After a transforming religious experience in May 1738, both John and Charles Wesley began leading a renewal movement in the Church of England. It wasn't until 1784 that the Wesleyan movement in America became an independent church, The Methodist Episcopal Church. During the Second Great Awakening a deep commitment of the general membership was expected of lay members and preachers. The Church adopted a set of General Rules by the Christmas Conference of 1784 that urged members to “avoid evil, to do good, and to use the means of graces supplied by God” (UMC, 2000, p. 12). This was meant to defend the seriousness of Methodism from what Wesley called the “almost Christians” (UMC, 2000, p. 12).

During this period of time, two different churches began to form: The Church of the United Brethren in Christ in 1800 and The Evangelical Association in 1803 (UMC, 2000). In 1946, the two churches had a total of just over 11 million members representing 6.5 percent of the population. In 1968 the two churches united creating The United Methodist Church, but the membership had dwindled to 10.8 million members, despite overall population growth in the U.S., thus representing only 4 percent of the population (Holsinger & Laycock, 1989). By 1988, UMC's membership still equated to only 4 percent of the United States population.

#### *Open Hearts Doctrine?*

The United Methodist Church came from a distinctively Wesleyan emphasis on the gospel in the formation of its doctrinal heritage. Wesley described that “the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason” (UMC, 2000, p. 77). Scripture is the “primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine” and the Wesleyan heritage used this along with tradition, reason, and experience to form a theological understanding. The UMC Book of Discipline (2000) explains that the use of Scripture is to be used “within the believing community informed by the tradition of that community” (p. 78). It should be “aided by scholarly inquiry and personal insight” (p. 78). Tradition, reason, experience, and Scripture work together to give us our understanding of the “truth of the biblical message in its bearing on our own lives” (p. 78).

The beginnings of the United Methodist Church created a Christian spirituality and doctrine, as stated by John Wesley, that was “the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion...of the whole church in the purest ages” (UMC, 2000, p. 50). While firmly believing the strengths of the Wesleyan movement, John Wesley also recognized the right of Christians to disagree on matters of “mode of worship,” “manner of administering [baptism],” or the administration of the “Lord’s supper” (Wesley, 1872, Section I ¶ 11). In Wesley’s Sermon 39, *Catholic Spirit*, he states, “keep you your opinion; I mine; and that as steadily ever” and that he does “not desire you to dispute those points, or to hear or speak one word concerning them” (Section II ¶ 1). Wesley has come to the conclusion that understanding the catholic spirit comes from knowing that “God’s eternal Word never has been, nor can be, exhaustively expressed in any single form of words” (UMC, 2000, p. 102). Therefore you cannot hold someone to your understanding of the truth, as you cannot be sure you are completely right in your understanding.

This conclusion from Wesley's Sermon has been used by various people, on both sides of disputes within The United Methodist Church, to prove their points and understandings.

*Social Principles of The United Methodist Church*

Throughout the formation of the United Methodist Church they have had guidelines and statements to guide their outreach and response. In 1972, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church formalized their guidelines and adopted a new statement titled *Social Principles*. These were revised in 1976 and have been revised at each successive General Conference (UMC, 2000).

The *Social Principles* are the ways in which the General Conference can speak to the human issues and essentially communicate the United Methodist's view on a given issue. The principles are to be a "call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice" (UMC, 2000, p. 95). The history of the *Social Principles* also describes that the United Methodist Church has a "long history of concern for social justice" (UMC, 2000, p. 95). It is important to note the history of interacting with diverse and marginalized populations due to the claims of diversity within the United Methodist Church.

United Methodists as a diverse people continue to strive for consensus in understanding the gospel. In our diversity, we are held together by a shared inheritance and a common desire to participate in the creative and redemptive activity of God. (UMC, 2000, p. 83)

Methodists seem to acknowledge within this quote that what holds a diverse group of people together are the commonalities in the traditions along with the common desire to reach God's children in need. Each member may have different ideas on how to share the gospel because of the difference in personal experience, tradition, understanding, or reason, but they are still

attempting to find consensus in understanding the gospel while continuing to serve God's children.

### *Past Experiences of Protestant-Media Relations*

Studying the past judgments, interactions, and immersion of the Church with media places the UMC media campaign in the correct context. The relationship between the Protestant church and media has progressively changed during the last century. Early in American history, Protestants used the written word in pamphlets and other educational material. In 1789 Methodists opened the first church-owned publishing house in America (UMC, 2000). This publishing house supplied members, preachers, and Sunday schools with Christian literature.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it became apparent to many concerned Protestants that movies would reach more Americans weekly than any commercial leisure had ever before reached (Moore, 1994). In 1937, the weekly attendance at movies was estimated to be three times that of the attendance at all places of worship by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. This dominant form of commercial entertainment was influencing and entertaining most of America and it was not under the control of a Christian group, but mass culture instead. This pushed the Protestants to respond to what they perceived as a media takeover of morals. However, most efforts met with less than success and by the 1980s, many churches, including UMC, were looking at their own uses for mass media.

### *United Methodist Communication*

In 1980, the United Methodist Church created the General Commission on Communication to provide leadership in the Church for public relations, promotional needs, and to provide local churches and conferences with communication resources and services (UMC, 2000). The commission is charged with twenty-one specific responsibilities in promoting,

maintaining, and developing communication within The United Methodist Church. Its most recent charge was to create a “national, strategic media campaign can inform and excite members and non-members, enhance the church’s image, explain the purpose and mission of the church, stimulate church attendance, and, potentially, impact church membership beneficially” (UMC Communications, 1998, p. 11). Mass media was chosen to be the means of expressing this new campaign because it “is the farthest reaching communications tool available today, just as teaching from a boat, preaching on the plains, or recording messages on parchment were 2000 years ago” (UMC Communications, 1998, p. 1). UM Communications expressed that it was their Christian duty to use the best technology in order for the most people to be able to hear the message.

After test marketing pilot commercials and conducting research through the Barna Research Group (Barna, 2000), Igniting Ministries was formed on September 8, 2001, by the General Conference to help the local church in reaching the community and in advertising the *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* media campaign designed to reach unchurched and marginally unchurched people. Based upon Barna’s research, the least believable dimension for a church to hold would be open-mindedness and is also the focus of the UM slogan. Igniting Ministries is funded to target the 25-54 age range and to continue increasing the recognition of the United Methodist Church’s basic beliefs, to create a positive feeling towards the Church among non-members, and to renew United Methodists commitment (“About,” ¶ 4). Neither the pilot study nor the national audience research focused on the audience of members of the United Methodist Church though United Methodist Communications stated throughout their information that they wanted to have a positive result from this campaign upon members.

The initial campaign cost \$20 million and produced a variety of billboards, radio and television commercials, door hangers, direct mailers, web graphics, worship graphics, and printed advertisements to be used in newspapers (“Methodists,” 2005). The first television commercial aired was in response to the September 11 attacks on America. The first introduction to the *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* campaign was a message of hope rather than a group of advertisements (“Breaking,” ¶2). The advertising campaign has six different groupings of similarly themed advertisements that convey different aspects of The United Methodist Church: *Diversity, Good Works, Love Letters, Rain, Breaking News, and Classified* (“Advertising,” ¶ 5). Church officials say the campaign raised first time attendance by 19 percent between 2001 and 2004 and long-term attendance by 9 percent in 160 test markets (“Methodists,” 2005). The United Methodist Church is also the second most recognized American church after the media campaign, having risen from 3 to 19 percent among the 25-54 age bracket (“Methodists,” 2005). A 2003 report about the campaign claimed that it has begun to show a change in the “decline mentality” among church leaders who had shown cynicism about the United Methodist Church (UMC Communications, 2003, p. 2). The campaign also has received awards from both the American Advertising Federation and the Telly Awards (UMC Communications, 2003, p. 8).

In the 2005 report about the campaign’s efforts a few issues of differences and concerns are addressed. The report upholds that Wesley taught a commitment to openness and strongly preached against exclusivity, but this report then discusses the struggle about the place of homosexuals within the United Methodist Church (UMC Communications, 2005). The division in opinion is said to be an example of the efforts of the United Methodist Church to remain in dialogue about the disagreement, but that it does not mean the denomination is divided. The

word division is defined as being separated into factions or a difference of opinion which appears to be what is happening within the Church among the ordination of homosexuals (“Division,” 2001, p. 334). The relevance of this annual report is that it is the first message from UMC Communication that acknowledges that all United Methodist congregations will not equally be open-minded to every visitor that comes into the church (UMC Communications, 2005). This stream of communication highlights the differences and struggles to open-mindedness that exists in the church and addresses how the image portrayed in the campaign can still be valid.

It is important to begin a deeper study of the motivation and influences on this campaign because United Methodist Communication has begun to just scratch the surface of this discussion. Studies have been done to see the increase in name recognition and church attendance within the United Methodist Church, but there has been little research conducted to analyze the actual message communicated by the United Methodist Church upon the Church’s image. It is just as important to study the symbolism in the messages that are meant to represent the United Methodist Church to the public as it is to study the increase in membership from the campaigns. The following analysis will be used to address the research question of how the *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* media campaign reflects or contrasts the United Methodist doctrinal heritage.

#### Opening the Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors Campaign

After viewing the different television commercials and other types of advertisements that are a part of the *Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors* media campaign, the focus was placed on television advertisements because they have the highest visibility and offer a more extensive presentation in conveying the message of the campaign among the different types of advertisements. The specific television advertisement chosen is the “I Believe” commercial

which speaks to the diversity and acceptance within the Church. This advertisement is the rhetorical artifact since the message of the commercial aligns itself under the umbrella of the message of the entire media campaign.

In order to examine this advertisement, Kenneth Burke's Pentadic Criticism will be used. Burke studied human motivation in terms found through the study of drama and labeled this *dramatism*. Burke assumes through dramatism that humans "develop and present messages in much the same way that a play is developed" (Foss, 1989, p. 336). The five basic elements of a drama - act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose - are used to discover the motives since they "describe any symbolic act fully" (Foss, 1989, p. 337). Act describes what took place, scene describes the background and situation in which the act occurred, the agent is the person who performed the act, the agency is the means or instruments used to perform the act, and the purpose is why the act was done (Foss, 1989).

The Pentad is used to first identify the five elements in the rhetorical artifact. Then the relationships among the five terms are discovered through ratios which determine the relationship between them and the effect each has on the other. One element of dramatism will emerge as having the most impact on the other terms and this will be the element studied to determine the motive of the advertisements. Persuasion is the attempt to have the audience accept the reality of the speaker, thus the Pentad is used as a means of examining how the persuader tries to restructure the audience's view of reality (Ling, 1970). Different philosophies are portrayed through the focus on specific elements by the speaker in the artifact, such as: act featured signifies realism, scene being featured shows materialism, agent being featured shows idealism, agency being featured signifies pragmatism, and the purpose being featured indicates mysticism (Ling, 1970).

By analyzing these ratios and determining the motivation utilized in the advertisement, the Pentad identifies which elements of the advertisement the United Methodist Church stresses and therefore clarifies which elements are really driving the message of the advertisement. Comparing the philosophy of the Wesleyan tradition to the philosophy revealed by a Pentadic analysis of the “I Believe” commercial helps illustrate whether the advertising campaign is reflecting or contrasting the doctrine. This may lead to understanding if the identity of the Church being portrayed already existed from its doctrinal history or if the advertisement is creating a new image, identity, and understanding of the Church.

#### I Believe – But In What?

The “I Believe” commercial has three dominant individuals speaking in outside locations and is wrapped up by a male voice-over at the end of the commercial. The dominant speaking individuals are: a black middle-aged female who appears of lower socio-economic status, a white older male who has a bushy white beard of lower socio-economic status, and a white older female of middle to upper class. The different individuals make the following statements: “I believe that no one who asks for help should be turned away,” “None of us are qualified to judge the lives of others,” “I believe that the church isn’t a building,” “When you truly embrace diversity, you embrace God,” and “I can’t believe there’s a church that believes all these things.” All of the individuals speak outside of church buildings. A male voice wraps up the testimonies with a statement “We may not all believe exactly the same thing but the people of the United Methodist Church believe in God and in each other. If you’re searching for something to believe in, our hearts, our minds, and our doors are always open.” While this voice-over is heard, images flash back to all the individuals in the commercial.

In the “I Believe” commercial the following elements can be identified: The act is advocating complete openness through policy statements about what a church could be. The scene is outside of buildings depicting a sense of nature as a means of connection to God. The agent is the United Methodist Church personified through multiple voices. The agency can be defined as the monologues from a myriad of individuals and a man’s voice personifying the church. The purpose is in bringing together the marginalized. Other elements had potential relationships, but the dominant element that stands out is the act. This is evident in that the choices of who would be in the commercial (agent), what background they would be in (scene), and the means used to perform the act (agency) all drive the message. The commercial places importance on what is being said: that you don’t have to believe the same thing, but that in the United Methodist Church someone will believe in you and in God.

For example, the scene reinforced the belief that the church is more than a building, but is made from relationships with people who believe in diverse constructs of church. The myriad of people who gave testimonies never appeared within a traditional church or within a building. Instead they appeared in the following locations: in a garden, in the forefront of the frame with a church in the background, in the midst of nature, or in the middle of the inner-city. Scenes also appear in everyday, common locations: gardens, a freeway during rush hour, a city block, and a neighborhood park. The scene suggests that the United Methodist Church did not want its message to have an association with a church building with its closed in walls, but rather, they preferred open-air locations that would be common to everyday life. Instead of associating this message with the inside of a church building, the message is associated with the different individuals that advocate openness and a natural relationship with God.

The agent of the commercial is influenced by the act in the way the United Methodist Church chose to use a myriad of different races, classes, and age groups along with a male voice-over to personify the United Methodist Church. Instead of assigning the individuals and the male voice as the agent, actual personification of the church is identified as this because the combination of the testimonies and the male voice embody the United Methodist Church. The choice of individuals is less significant than what they are doing which is advocating complete openness. The variety of individuals reinforces a visual representation of the message of diversity for the church. It appears they were chosen as a diverse group in order to not contradict the theme of openness.

Though the individuals are all dressed in black clothing, the characteristics and accessories are different for each individual. The differences in individual features and differences stand out in contrast to the black clothing. One black woman for instance has her hair wrapped up ethnically and has a gap in her front teeth, another man has an un-kept beard, a younger man has punk glasses with a scarf, another man has a trench coat over his clothes, and another man is in a black dress shirt and slacks. Difference is evident in the appearance of each individual.

The agency is the verbalization of the advocacy of complete openness (act) through monologue. Monologues provide a voice to each person's beliefs which places importance on allowing individuals to have their voice heard. Each individual uses his or her voice to paint a picture of what the United Methodist Church should be as they advocate for openness in the Church.

The analysis stresses that the act is the dominant feature of the commercial which according to Burke's Pentad names the corresponding philosophy as realism. Realism is a

philosophy that gathers understanding from believing that “universal principles are more real than objects as sensed” (Foss, 1989, p. 339). Embracing the universal principle of diversity is seen as the means to bring you to know God. This philosophy leads to believing that being open-minded to differences is what helps you understand more of God’s nature. Not only does an open-minded attitude lead to greater understanding, but the process of considering a variety of views leads to the creation of something that is more real than anything that can be experienced individually. That is, discovering God through diverse views is more real, and is more likely to yield better understanding, than say, dogma or Methodism. Hence, it is the relationships with diverse “others” that matter on our journey to discover God, not the process.

#### Opening Doors, Closing Doctrine?

Before using the Pentadic analysis, it was difficult to assess if the Church was communicating its existing identity or if it was taking a different direction with the media campaign since the UMC had little or no communication with the larger public or its own congregants before this media campaign. This also means that the implications of this media campaign hold more weight. This advertising campaign served to present a united image of the UMC that had not been communicated within the Church before the launch of the national media campaign. This was the first media campaign to communicate the identity of the UMC to the public and to the congregants and, therefore, the choices behind this media campaign are colossal in determining the present identity and future direction of the UMC. Previous ambiguity would have to be defined as they chose how to communicate over 250 years of the Methodist movement to the public.

There is a constant redefining of the United Methodist Church in its Book of Discipline through minor but significant changes in wording as they continually “reclaim and renew the

distinctive United Methodist doctrinal heritage” in context of “the contemporary world” (UMC, 2000, p. 55). The media campaign is the first public communication of the shift in identity as the other slight redirections through editing the Book of Discipline every four years had been only contained to the new printing of the Book of Discipline which most congregants do not obtain.

This analysis offers implications of the effects of this rhetorical choice of the commercial for the United Methodist Church. First, The United Methodist Church in their media campaign may be willing to compromise their message in order to present the desired image of the United Methodist Church. This implication comes from the driving force of advocating open hearts, minds, and doors in the commercial.

In the 2005 Living the Promise document the Church recognizes that “not all United Methodist congregations equally open their hearts, minds and doors to welcome people” (p. 5). They continue on that this promise of having open hearts, open minds, and open doors is a “worthy goal” that is “subjectively measured” (p. 5). This is the first acknowledgement of a tension between proclaiming the new ideal policy of how they desire the Church to interact with the seekers and how the seekers may actually be received.

It is a fair statement that all congregants may not be open-minded to someone who, for instance, has beliefs that may not even be compatible with Christianity. It seems wise not to completely allow someone with incompatible beliefs to have free reign within an organization that is formed to nurture the faith journey of Christians. Still from the seekers point of view, their experience is very different from the advertised image set forth of the United Methodist Church. They may not find that the Church’s hearts, minds, and doors are always open. This is not what the commercial has advocated though. The commercial advocates a new policy in which the

ideals of who the Church should be are associated with the brand-imaging campaign of the UMC.

Understanding that the Church is advocating for a policy based on the ideal of embracing diversity is a worthy goal based on openness that the Church had not previously appreciated. Looking at Wesley's heritage and the Book of Discipline, we see evidence that frequently suggests the philosophy of mysticism for the Wesleyan heritage. If a Pentadic criticism was carried out on much of Wesley's work, we feel the dominant element would be purpose due to the theme of method and pattern (dogma) affirming unity as a means to understanding God's nature reoccurring in many different areas and works of Wesley.

For example, Wesley published his *Sermons on Several Occasions* in order to set forth doctrines that teach "the essentials of true religion" as the movement grew larger than those that Wesley had personal contact with in Britain (UMC, 2000, p. 51). In 1755, he also provided *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* in order to be a doctrinal guide for Methodists. Wesley also ensured that pastors in Methodist pulpits preached no other doctrine "than is contained in Wesley's *Notes Upon the New Testament* and four volumes of *Sermons*" in 1763 when controversies arose (UMC, 2000, p. 51). The dominant force in Wesley's policy was in providing a standard measure that would affirm the unity during the controversy. Once the Methodist movement became a Church, Wesley still provided Articles to outline "basic norms for Christian belief within a church" and the Methodists used these Articles to test correct doctrine (UMC, 2000, p. 51).

Though Wesley promoted the "catholic spirit," he never promoted open-mindedness as indifference (Wesley, 1872, Section 2 ¶2). Instead Wesley stated that a Methodist should be firmly rooted in their beliefs but not try to sway another to their point of view (Wesley, 1872,

Section 2 ¶3). The point must be made that at the time of Wesley's sermon, controversies with the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Episcopalians were prevalent concerning informal worship, infant baptisms, and emphasis on free will (UMC, 2000, p. 54). This leads me to believe this was his guideline for interacting with other denominations in the midst of conflict. If the open minded nature is to be applied within the Methodist Church, then why did Wesley protect doctrinal integrity against the heresies of the time - Socinianism, Arianism, and Pelagianism by charging preachers or members with doctrinal irregularity (UMC, 2000, p. 53)? This construction of using Wesley's understanding of the catholic spirit as a justification for allowing complete openness at the expense of disagreeing with the doctrine seems inconsistent with the actions and weight that Wesley took in protecting and upholding the doctrine as a means of unity in order to pursue God. This is consistent with the philosophy of mysticism where unity is "emphasized to the point that individuality disappears" (Foss, 1989, p. 342).

Time and time again through Wesley's actions of supplying doctrinal standards and Articles in the midst of change, he anchored the Church's approach to God to maintaining unity through methods and patterns. These methods and patterns serve as a cornerstone for doctrine in that Methodists adhere to a guide for their faith. The culmination of these methods and patterns that are embraced among Methodists becomes the doctrine. This continual striving for unity through the doctrine exemplifies that the purpose of unity was the driving force in Wesley's work and therefore displayed mysticism.

Realism on the other hand stresses that both things and concepts have a universal existence and that concepts "are understood to imply the objectivity of universals" (Reese, 1999, p. 637). Coming to understand God through the diverse views constructs a more real view of God than one unified view could bring. Therefore the realist response to the differing opinions

and doctrines in Wesley's time would be in discussing the differences in order to be exposed to a view of God that one person may not be able to come to. Exploring a variety of other people's experiences and understandings would bring a better perspective of who God is than strictly guarding a doctrine that expresses the discovered methods to knowing God. Realism does not seek to guard doctrinal integrity because that doctrine may not provide the most real view of the universal God. This philosophy takes the United Methodist Church on a different path than it has taken before in dealing with views that arise which may be contradictory to the doctrine. The doctrine isn't given as much weight as say complete openness to spiritual seekers and their differing beliefs.

The shift in philosophies and the new policy of the United Methodist Church always having open hearts, minds, and doors comes from the omission of the aspect of accountability from the Wesleyan heritage. The Book of Discipline declares that the UMC does not proclaim a social gospel "that does not include the personal transformation of sinners" (2000, p. 49). In order to transform a sinner, a person's actions or beliefs must be judged as needing transformation and redemption. How does this not include accountability and a recognition that the sins of a person or social structure cannot be tolerated? The Book of Discipline sets forth that "support without accountability promotes moral weakness" and that a church "lacking the courage to act decisively on personal and social issues loses its claim to moral authority" (2000, p. 49). These statements in the 2000 Book of Discipline, the edition of the Discipline available during the development of this media campaign, still upholds the philosophy of mysticism.

Yet the United Methodist Church did not choose to present an image of a body of believers holding society and individuals accountable in their pursuit of God, but rather chose only to present the other half of those statements that "a church that rushes to punishment is not

open to God's mercy" (UMC, 2000, p. 49). This analysis and the previous implications show this campaign exemplified a shift in focus of the United Methodist Church from realism to mysticism. This shows also the shift to allow the desire to appeal to seekers to become a driving force in the direction of the Church instead of this message serving as the first public wide-scale communication of what the United Methodist Church has already become.

The 2005 Living Our Promise report recognizes that "what we say influences who we are and what we will become" (UMC Communications, 2005, p. 5). In other words, the identities, messages, and goals communicated affect "who we are and what we will become" (p. 5). The words the UMC chose directed the congregations to be led towards open-mindedness and away from accountability, towards realism and away from mysticism. The media campaign acknowledges that they are using words like "the rudder of a ship" to "control" the definition of the UMC (p. 5). This illustrates the metaphor in the Book of James of controlling a ship by controlling the rudder to a tongue defining the way in which a whole body will act. The words and philosophy of the media campaign are acknowledged as intentionally being used as the rudder to steer the ship, the UMC, instead of the rudder being the Discipline or even more puzzling...God. Did anyone realize they were being steered in a different direction because the media campaign did not embrace the balancing factor of accountability and the Wesleyan history of never promoting indifference or tolerance of sin?

The risk that United Methodist Communications acknowledged was framed in light of the philosophy of realism in that their campaign is "courageous" in taking the risk that either they "will not communicate effectively enough" or that they "will not embody community in a way that incorporates seekers into our midst" (p. 6). The Church may not embrace the seeker as the campaign developers hoped, but they do not draw the conclusion that advertising an ideal that is

only subjectively measured may be compromising the message or truth of what the United Methodist Church has been and will be in the future. They also focus on the fact that a risk is failing to allure the seekers, not on the fact that they may be compromising the identity of the United Methodist Church in their communication of an ideal that the United Methodist Church does not actually yet embody.

In gauging the audience response to this rhetorical choice, it is difficult since most of the statistics are reported by the UMC and focus on their measure of success. The United Methodist Church is focusing favorably on the audience response to the media campaign by looking at attendance increases. There was a 19 percent increase in first-time attendance and an overall 9 percent increase in total attendance in 2004 (Barna, 2004, p. 22-23). The media campaign cannot be concretely connected as a cause of the increase in attendance, but the UMC believes the campaign to be the cause because they claim no other factors changed. It is problematic to say that no other factors changed in the four years studied compared to attendance in the year 2000. Societal attitudes in America shifted after 9/11 and though the Barna Research group excluded the 108% increase in attendance in 2001, they did not explore the idea that the increase in attendance could still be from a societal attitude shift from this tragedy. They also did not take into account the shifting positive attitudes of the Millennial Generation toward organized religion. Though we are not claiming that these two factors must account for the increase in attendance, we are suggesting that there are clearly other likely factors contributing to an increase in attendance than simply the media campaign.

Though seekers had more favorable impressions for nine specific areas that were the agenda for the media campaign, these same seekers' overall impression of the United Methodist Church was unchanged after the campaign. The same percentage of people had indifferent

impressions of the Church as favorable impressions (Barna, 2004, p. 18). Overall the media campaign did not raise or affect the favorability of the United Methodist Church among seekers according to the percentages from the research. This signals that though the Church raised attendance and seekers believed the specific agenda of the campaign, the UMC did not significantly change the seekers' impression of the United Methodist Church. This is an important response that may allude to the fact that seekers don't necessarily feel that the specific messages the campaign championed play a role in their overall opinion of the United Methodist Church. This is a great disappointment that is never really dwelled upon in the United Methodist Communications reports since the media campaign seems to be driven by the agenda to present an image of the UMC that appealed favorably to spiritual seekers.

#### Where's the Doctrine?

This analysis using Burke's Pentad gave means to finding the most dominant feature of the commercial which reflects the advertising campaign. This is important to do because the prioritizing of the elements in the commercial also revealed the prioritizing of the United Methodist Church in making this commercial. With the act being the most dominant element, it communicates that advocating complete openness is important enough to the UMC to influence what is in the background of the commercial, how the message is presented, and even who is going to be visually and audibly represented. This analysis is relevant because knowing the motive and attitude of the United Methodist Church towards prioritizing the commercial's elements helps reveal the means in which they are trying to accomplish their mission of the campaign in increasing the recognition of the Church's basic beliefs, create a positive feeling towards the Church from seekers, and renew a sense of commitment among United Methodists.

This analysis of the “I Believe” commercial found the act to be the dominant element which brought forth the following implications: that the act was focused on creating a new policy and that this media campaign signaled a shift in identity for the UMC. These implications when compared to the philosophy of the doctrinal statements from the 2000 Book of Discipline and from the Wesleyan heritage led to the conclusion that though it is true that the United Methodist Church portrayed the open-minded traits of the Wesleyan heritage, the willingness to compromise the message of the United Methodist Church to present the desired image that would be most favorable to seekers, through realism, implies that this media campaign represents a shift in the identity of the United Methodist Church.

It must be acknowledged that the United Methodist Church selectively chose the most appealing attributes of their identity that only presented half of the image of the United Methodist doctrinal heritage. This could be explained in saying that the United Methodist Church only has 30 second commercials to increase the interest and favorability of the Church and therefore the most appealing attributes must be communicated to achieve the desired outcome. This campaign may also be viewed as an apologetic engagement of culture to be more effective. Both of these scenarios imply that the desire of increasing favorability of the UMC drove the choices of the United Methodist media campaign instead of communicating the entire spiritual and doctrinal identity of the Church. The desired outcome was more important than ensuring an accurate representation of the United Methodist history and doctrine. It could be viewed as a bait and switch approach if the seekers are lured to the UMC based on a goal of being open-minded, but do not find the Church that matches the image presented.

The omission of half of the doctrinal history of accountability in turn creates a new image and identity of the United Methodist Church since this media campaign was the first wide-scale

communication of their identity and it chose to communicate only open-mindedness instead of also promoting spiritual accountability. This may be the desired outcome in the way that the United Methodist Church developed the commercials and focus of the media campaign or this may be an indirect effect of choosing the most appealing attributes of the UMC to entice seekers to visit our congregations. In either scenario, or a combination of the two, the media campaign shifts the philosophy and approach from knowing God through mysticism, unity in doctrine, to realism with complete openness to diversity. This philosophy shift was not only communicated to those outside the UMC declaring what they would find in the Church, but the UMC also communicated to the clergy and congregants of the UMC their identity.

If the Church continues to advertise itself as a completely open-minded organization then it forfeits its moral authority to speak into seekers and congregants lives. If the ultimate goal of Christianity and the Church is in being open-minded and embracing diversity, then what grounds does the Church have to apply Scripture to daily life or provide intervention and counseling to someone in say, an addictive lifestyle? By only representing the favorable half of the image, the UMC has inadvertently forfeited the right to encourage others towards righteousness because that means judging that a person needs change in their life which would contradict the realist view that the individual's differences brings a more real view of God.

If the Church inadvertently began changing the identity of the UMC by only communicating the favorable attributes to seekers, a remedy could be in expanding the scope of the media campaign. Now that the initial invitation to be welcomed into the United Methodist Church has been issued, the Church could communicate the opportunity of finding a community for spiritual accountability and development not simply to find people to share the journey of

questioning. Organized religion can serve as a place where people search for answers and a framework for their faith, not simply a forum to question and search as the UMC has advertised.

A larger implication from this study is that using the approaches of marketing compromises the message of the Church. When professionals try to sell the Church it seems nearly impossible to represent the experience within the Church completely to the public in a short advertisement. The danger of bait and switch seems high in trying to sell a spiritual encounter with God or community of faith.

Future research might include other means of analysis which would reveal more findings about the media campaign and its effects. This research served as a starting point in studying the seeming shift in the portrayed identity of the United Methodist Church. If the shift is incidental, this would tend to suggest that the creators of the media campaign did not understand that by omitting part of the Wesleyan tradition from the commercials and only focusing on part of the heritage that they were recreating the identity of the UMC. If the identity shift was intentional, it raises the question if UMC Communications was instructed to make this change by the UMC.

Another angle for looking at the shift in identity would be to see if the UMC media campaign was an apologetic appeal of the Church to mass culture. From this approach it would be that culture has certain ideas of the Church and the UMC responded through these commercials to defend their identity to mass culture. This still indicates a shift, but it would be interesting to see if this campaign was an attempt at apologetics.

As this campaign continues to be developed, what types of advertisements are continued to be developed would determine if the UMC is refining the first image presented or if they are continuing to uphold the shift. Another area of study concerning the effects of this campaign would be in studying the effects of this media campaign on congregants of the UMC independent

from the research reported by UMCCom. How would the members describe themselves and the UMC and does this match the attributes communicated by the media campaign? This would help reveal if there is a disconnect in congregants about the image portrayed and their Wesleyan and doctrinal heritage.

Finally, throughout the doctrine and Wesleyan heritage, the UMC claims that they advocate for marginalized populations (women, blacks, poor, etc.). In light of a campaign embracing diversity, it could serve as a guide to see how these populations incorporated into the Church. This may provide guidance for the current approach of including diverse people within the denomination.

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