

Religious Language

towards a framework for religious language theory

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Abstract

George Lindbeck (1984: 39) writes that from a cultural-linguistic point of view, religious change is not understood as emerging from new religious experiences. It is rather seen as coming out of changing situations within a cultural-linguistic system. When a certain way of ordering or explaining the religious character of a cultural group creates anomalies in its application to new contexts (eg. new media, new places and times of reception), new concepts, symbols and ideas are discovered that solve the anomalies.

I want to see how well this theory fits when we examine the differences in the language employed to communicate religious ideas in different contexts, and how this may impact on the way audiences receive and interpret the information to form a religious identity. The contexts I want to identify are:

1. Traditional mainstream Protestant communities
2. Evangelical Protestant communities (I know, I know: we could go to town trying to delineate between the two. I don't want to dwell on it, but will acknowledge that the definitions of such words, and the line drawn between them, are not clear, and both "mainstream" and "evangelical" streams exist in the same denomination)
3. Secular popular media (eg. film, TV shows - I'll just use a couple of examples)
4. Religious television, and
5. Religious web sites and accompanying discussion outlets

Basically, I want to know what the conditions are that create new ways of talking about, interpreting and experiencing religion in these media spheres.

Why This Paper?

The research I'm conducting for a masters degree is titled *Crossing Over or Crossing Out? The Media's Influence in Young People's Religious Language and Imaginings*. Part of this research involves adopting a framework for religious language theory, using this framework in human and media research to describe worldviews presented by both young people and certain media content, and a discussion on the evaluation of this framework as a tool for such descriptions.

Since I haven't yet found a published article that outlines a theory for religious language, I thought I might try to make one myself. I've since realised that I way too new at this whole thing to come even close to a religious language theory framework. In this paper I hope to scratch the surface about how religious language changes for religious groups and religious media spheres. The end, I hope, will be some points for considering a framework for religious language theory.

For each of the five sections outlined in the abstract, I will discuss a little about the world out of which the movements have grown, and attempt to draw connections between this

world, the movements themselves, and the language used therein. I will find examples for each of them to use as illustrations, that I'll leave uncommented and place in an appendix, given how long this paper is already. Bear in mind these descriptions will be quite superficial, and intended to start discussion or debate.

Mainline Protestantism and The Demystification of Religion

The Rational World

The Christian Church developed in part with the development of writing. The birth of Christianity in the cradle of Hellenist culture and philosophy was where the first Christians wrote on their faith. Indeed the Reformation drove, and was driven by the ascent of the printing press into European society. However those who lived in oral cultures communicated faith through the sharing of Gospel traditions, common prayers and proverbs. Christians were connected through a culture of orality that provided fable, myth and parable to faith, whilst being rooted in the narrative context of human living. Words were written in order to be recited and spoken, shared from mother to daughter, and recanted together to bring meaning to groups of people. Faith was communicated through immersion. The teaching of dogma and spiritual exercises such as prayers and proverbs enculturated people into a way of faith from the keepers of the story through verbal communication with each other.

The age of the printing brought change to this paradigm. The Reformation created a communication of faith through knowledge. The teaching of dogma gave way to theological exploration and discourse, and people were educated into faith from the educated elite through catechesis. Spiritual wisdom was less in the experience of the elder or priest, and more in the library and teaching institution.¹

The printing press brought subversive messages about Christian faith and church life to those who would receive it, encouraging a personal development of faith and claiming that lay people have a right to be involved in such matters. It released the need for personal communication and spread intellectual ideals en masse. It encouraged people to be involved in intellectual matters of faith. As access to information increased, so did the ability to specialise one's knowledge base and develop ideas.

Modern Protestantism

Philosophy asserted the supremacy of reason and empiricism, and the separation of facts from values. People held faith in the development of knowledge and technology that could overcome the world's problems. Both the belief in progress and the development of a scientific worldview created a modern world where:

1. mysticism, iconography and imagery are rejected in the way of knowledge through word and text. Theology asserts itself as another science. (Though in recent decades a renaissance of mysticism has been celebrated in many churches, and certain movements of the past have presented challenges to modernity, eg Romanticism in the wake of the Industrial Revolution).
2. denominationalism grows. While Christianity aligns itself to politics, individuals assert their own beliefs and break away from previous traditions.
3. rational humanity is seen as essentially moral. Evil is seen as a dysfunction or aberration. Rationality has saved the world.
4. religion separates itself from the secular world as cultural domain. Churches speak out to the public on issues of ethics, morality, politics, however have increasingly shied away from participating in government, affirm the line between Church and

¹ Pierre Babin, *The New Era of Religious Communication* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). Pp. 20-22.

State, and promote ecumenism, interfaith dialogue, and the freedom to the individual to follow their own spiritual path.²

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As the seminary and university claim authority over theology in the modern world, educated clergy, university and synod publications “suggest” the right way for local faith communities to worship, through the printing of prayers and service notes for public use. Clergy attempt to “educate” the laity with the goal of effecting perfect worship. Faith is embodied in text that seeks to name with theoretical prudence the divine and the place of the individual and community in relationship with God.

Local worship is bounded by a textual order that frames ritual practice. While churches have attempted to “modernise” worship with overheads and PowerPoint displays, more often than not these technologies just become another way of displaying text. Youth services involve drama, lights and music, yet they are met with reactions of older people that it is not worship without a sermon or prayer from the common book.

There is some scepticism of emotional or ecstatic expressions of religious experience, especially in regard to evangelical expressions of faith. Personal experiences of the divine are framed in terminologies that reflect a systematic theology. Theologians inquire into the nature of religious experience and discuss the psychology and sociology of religion. Thus there is what I have called the demystification of religion, and the taming of religious experience into cages of rationality and theoretical accuracy.

In the secular realm, however, churches refrain from religious language altogether. While conversion is not high on the priorities of these denominations, what is important is the promotion of ethics in public debate and the inclusion of marginalised people and groups in civic participation. Church institutions adopt the language of the medium in the content of their message.³

Evangelical Protestantism and The Remythologisation of Religion

The Revolutionary World

In this section I talk of Evangelicalism as if it's a completed distinct form of Protestantism or Christianity. I know in reality it is not true. Many members of established denominations, including Roman Catholics, would call themselves evangelical. And there are members who would not call themselves evangelical but would agree with the following descriptions of religion. Yet I believe that the current conversations on the divide between liberal and conservative/evangelical in contemporary Christianity (and wider society) is worth saying something about it, so for simplicity I have made the distinction between mainline and evangelical Protestants quite defined.

While these notions are not new in the twentieth century, World War II and the Nazi regime showed the world that rational humans are not essentially moral, and that progress does not always bring blessing. An while economic growth burgeoned in the 1950s and 1960s, the fall of the manufacturing industry in the develop world and the development of the global economy from the 1970s produced an increasing gap between rich and poor.

Fundamentalism found its place in an increasing secularised, ecumenical and plural religious marketplace, as regular church attendance fell from its peak in the early 1960s. At a time of civil rights movements, feminism, and anti-war protests, the polarisation

² Peter Horsfield, *The Mediated Spirit* [CD-ROM] (The Commission for Mission, Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria, 2002 [cited 2002]).

³ Taisto Lehtikoinen, *Religious Media Theory: Understanding Mediated Faith and Christian Applications to Modern Media*, ed. Raimo Salokangas, Pekka Olsbo, and Marja-Leena Tynkkynen, vol. 4, *Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Press, 2003). p.150.

between liberalism and conservatism clustered groups once divided by denomination or religion in society and politics.⁴

Growth of Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism made its place as a reaction to liberalism in the late twentieth century. Those not aligned to fundamentalist groups but dissenting from the liberal stance of mainline Protestantism found a home in new emerging communities. These communities saw in liberalism a decay of moral security, even a pervasion of evil, breaking down the fibre of society.

Evangelicals called for a conversion as a total surrendering to God, allowing oneself to become a tool for God's purposes in the world. It means taking up arms in battle against evil. This ideal made evangelical communities somewhat exclusive, defining who is in and who is not aligned to them.

The 1960s and 1970s saw evangelicals given social power as political groups approached both liberal and conservative Christians for support.⁵

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The evangelical focuses on expressing the emotive power of religious faith to bring about or enhance a transformative experience (not that this is untrue for all Christians – it just seems to be a primary goal). Religious language is expressed framed in notions of the price and prize of faith.

The evangelical worldview is dualistic and requires a convert to reject the world in favour of God. Themes and concepts relating to battles between good and evil are not uncommon, and link with notions of power, transformation, fulfilling purpose, etc.

For this reason I have used the term “the remythologisation” of religion (my spell checker says I have even invented it). For the evangelical, faith is framed in the language of a great story of battle between God and those who would thwart God's desires for the world.

Religion in Popular Film – Symbolic Rebellion

A Symbolic World

The arrival of film brought two media disciplines together, theatre and photography. As the industry of popular film grew, cinematography rose as a new language construct – symbolic narrative.

In a film's construction of a world with symbols and associated meanings, a genre can construct the real world in particular meaning-ways, creating or reinforcing expectations of normality and abnormality. For instance, audiences of a romantic comedy compare their own romantic experiences with those of the characters in the film they are watching. In a real sense, audiences can see their own relationships being played out in the film world, and vice versa.

Horror is a popular genre that uses religious themes and language quite explicitly. Horror film offers us a picture of the marginal in our mythical make-up of the world. It asks us to consider that which we overlook. In doing so, it compels us to question our framing of the universe, our confidence in our understanding of the world order.

Where cautionary tales tell of the dangers if we stray from the moral code, horror can portray the cautionary tale regarding the moral code itself. Horror offers a glimpse of the

⁴ Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). Pp. 32-35.

⁵ See Lehtikoinen, *Religious Media Theory*. P. 165. Wuthnow, *America's Soul*. Pp. 32-35. Lynn Schofield Clark, *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Pp. 31-32.

extreme that is possible in the universe we have created for ourselves. Horror can be the antithesis to our myth-making.

In saying all this I do not intend to equate going to the movies with the practice of religion. Instead I contend that film, like other mass media, provide for the ritual communication of meaning, and like all commonly held stories have an impact on the values and beliefs on the communities in which they are shared. Horror films enter our culture through social gathering and become a commodity of the culture of the viewers. These commodities, like the stories, values and ideals carried in religious acts, impact on the cultural, and therefore religious identity of the culture's members. In this respect, film offers a symbolic rebellion.

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Visual symbols and imagery that are religious in these films are über traditional, often of Western Catholic origins. Religious characters (priests, nuns, ministers) are nearly always dressed in some uniform that would identify them and set them apart, despite what religious people would wear in real life.

A number of these movies explore the concept of an ancient truth, either ignored or replaced by modern rationalism, that forces its way into the lives of the films' protagonists. These characters struggle to accept this truth and the way it completely overturns their previous understanding of themselves and their world. For this purpose, religion is set as an anti-thesis to the modern world.

Religious Television – Creating A Virtual Kingdom

Failure of Mainline Protestantism to Enter TV and the Evangelicals' Success

Taisto Lehtikoinen⁶ identifies the following reasons for why established Protestant denominations to create successful religious television programming:

Lack of religious symbols – Protestants, after having rejected the imagery of Catholicism, need to create from scratch an audiovisual identity.

No “media person” – Whereas the Catholics have the Pope as key figure to draw media attention, Protestant leaders are not endowed with such attention or media savvy.

Suspicion of television – The Protestant position on television as a communicator of faith is oft times one of ambivalence, especially regarding social ethics.

Lack of clear goals – Mainline Protestants do not charge themselves with saving souls, and are not united in a common cause for religious television.

Evangelicals, on the other hand:

are not bound by large institutional structures, that limit individual entrepreneurship.

have a theology that fits the language of secular media.

have one clear goal – to convert the viewer. This forms the basis of religious television ethics. This goal fits the individualistic nature of television.

feel free to copy secular imagery and forms to insert religious content (eg. *A Thief in the Night* and *Left Behind: The Movie*⁷)

⁶ Lehtikoinen, *Religious Media Theory*. Pp. 155-156, 165-166.

⁷ See Clark, *From Angels*. Pp. 33-34.

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For these reasons religious television is predominantly evangelical, and follows the themes and language of evangelicalism. Religious television may best be described as the creation of a symbolic sanctuary. In its framing of visual stimuli, it endeavours to recreate a religious experience for the viewer. By filming a studio audience, not only does religious television mimic, but prescribes the response of the home viewer. The language of religious television is experiential and emotional, and endeavours to legitimate the religious identity of the viewer.⁸

Religious Web Sites and The Search for Intimacy

The Virtual World

The big transformation in the world of communications that cyberspace has brought is the one from “text” to “hypertext”. Hypertext enables the viewer of the web page to follow a series of information pathways, not limited by the text of the page the viewer is reading. This allows for more selectivity in exposure to information, and the individual’s power to create an information environment (a variety of windows on the desktop, in the bedroom with the television or stereo on). Peter Horsfield calls this “being in the flow” of information.⁹

Indeed, cyberspace communicates with not just text, but with sounds and symbols. The viewer does not just read, but is immersed with a variety of senses being used. The same would be said for television, were it not that in cyberspace, the viewer may contribute as much as be a passive audience.

Heidi Campbell¹⁰ describes cyberspace as “a reality laboratory”, a place where new meanings and ways of being can be explored. In cyberspace, the surfer would not just read a page and move on to the next, but is often given the opportunity to reflect on the information in an email group, a news group, a guest book, or a chat room. In cyberspace, the “viewer” becomes the “user”.

In these spaces, real distance (from one person to another) is polarised with virtual closeness. A new social more is developed, where intimacy and honesty is created among participants without fear of losing control of personal exposure.

Religion in Cyberspace

It has been noted that surfers of religious web sites visit more for the purpose of creating relationships than just acquiring information. And these surfers tend to be Church-goers in the real world, who use the sites to inform their own religious participation.¹¹ These religious sites become opportunities for users to critique real-world values and symbols and explore new ones.¹² These sites may be created by church or para-church organisations for precisely that purpose, if not for dissemination of information about what’s happening around their diocese.

There are also sites whose purpose is merely devotional. They may be pages that have a thought or prayer for the day, or sites that endeavour to create a virtual altar, or cyber-sanctuary.

⁸ See Wuthnow, *America's Soul*. Pp. 127-128 and Bobby C Alexander, *Televangelism Reconsidered: Ritual in the Search for Human Community*, ed. David E Klemm, vol. 68, *AAR Studies in Religion* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994). Pp. 4-10.

⁹ Horsfield, *Mediated Spirit*.

¹⁰ Heidi Campbell, "Approaches to Religious Research in Computer-Mediated Communication," in *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T&T Clark, 2003). P. 221.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 223.

¹² Alf Linderman and Mia Lövheim, "Internet, Religion and the Attribution of Social Trust," in *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T&T Clark, 2003). Pp. 235-236.

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My limited research into religious CMC came up with the following points for consideration:

1. Visual and textual language used are derivative of the site's origins – i.e. sites created by a particular denomination or organisation would adopt images and icons present in their own churches.
2. Sites not connected to such communities would invent their own, and some would shy away from using any imagery that would be seen as traditional. The same goes for text.
3. Sites that were particularly devotional, however, would be quite the opposite: imagery that was particularly traditional. I suggest that the more traditional the imagery, the more likely that the illusion of virtual sanctuary could be created and suspended.
4. Document topics are often issue specific, which suggests the audience catered for are already “churched” in some way.

Toward a Framework for Religious Language Theory

Enough of this waffle, now on to the good stuff (for me anyway).

From a history of religious language theory where attention was given to the relationship between word and object (eg. What's the difference between talk of trees and talk of God when we know one exists have no proof of the other?), Ludwig Wittgenstein made a substantial break. He developed the notion of “language games”. Language is socially constructed in that the meaning of (or in) words do not relate to anything external but to their use. “Tree”, for example, does not have any meaning apart from that which people who say, read, hear or write the word ascribe to it.¹³ Religious language theory should not be concerned with the objects to which language refer, but to the meanings that a community would attribute to it.

Linderman and Lövheim move a step ahead when they talk of social semiology.¹⁴ Language develops through the interplay of two key notions. The first key notion is the act of communication: text will signal its belonging to a meaning system in that its elements are organised according to that system's rules and conventions, so there are constraints on an individual construction of meaning. The second key notion is the individual: each reader has a variety of ways to relate text to different meaning systems, and to combine elements from different meaning systems. Language evolves through the cycle of reception and reproduction of meaning systems through which text is given and taken.

A religious language theory that would interest me, then, would seek the answers to:

How does the interplay between media, culture and history set the “rules of play” for religious language to form and enable a religious identity?

How are individuals freed by, and constrained by, media, culture and history to seek a religious identity?

A religious language theory would also:

provide a framework for discerning what is religious and what is not, and where the line between sacred and secular shifts and blurs,

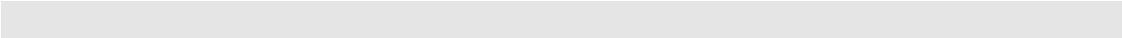
¹³ See Stephen Richards, *Religious Language* (2004 [cited 30 January 2005]); available from <http://www.faithnet.org.uk/A2%20Subjects/Philosophyofreligion/language.htm>.

¹⁴ Linderman and Lövheim, "Attribution of Social Trust." P. 233.

recognise that religious language does not just reflect a system of belief but sets the bounds of religious experience (If we consider faith as a communicative process, then we consider that experience is given meaning when mediated through language, and in this sense language would set the rules for experience to have religious meaning.),

recognise that in a new media context, text is not just words, but an entire environment of information mediated through pictures, sounds, and words in which a viewer/reader/user is present.

The young people who are the subject of my research come from a variety of backgrounds where religion has had differing impacts. My goal is not just to decipher their religious language and determine where they got it from, but try to get an understanding of how the sources (experiences of inclusion or exclusion from religious participation, popular media, experiences of divine encounter) frame the way they use the sources to construct a language system to talk about religion in general. I feel at this stage that religious language theory cannot be a secure point of departure, but that the discoveries in the research will challenge any theory professed.



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Appendix

Example of Mainline Protestantism – The Basis of Union

The foundation document of The Uniting Church in Australia was adopted in 1977 (and revised in 1992 for inclusive language). Here is an excerpt.

The Congregational Union of Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, in fellowship with the whole Church Catholic, and seeking to bear witness to that unity which is both Christ's gift and will for the Church, hereby enter into union under the name of the Uniting Church in Australia. They pray that this act may be to the glory of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They give praise for God's gifts of grace to each of them in years past; they acknowledge that none of them has responded to God's love with a full obedience; they look for a continuing renewal in which God will use their common worship, witness and service to set forth the word of salvation for all people. To this end they declare their readiness to go forward together in sole loyalty to Christ the living Head of the Church; they remain open to constant reform under his Word; and they seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this union these Churches commit their members to acknowledge one another in love and joy as believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, to hear anew the commission of the Risen Lord to make disciples of all nations, and daily to seek to obey his will. In entering into this union the Churches concerned are mindful that the Church of God is committed to serve the world for which Christ died, and that it awaits with hope the day of the Lord Jesus Christ on which it will be clear that the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of the Christ, who shall reign for ever and ever.

The Uniting Church in Australia lives and works within the faith and unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Uniting Church recognises that it is related to other Churches in ways which give expression, however partially, to that unity in faith and mission. Recalling the Ecumenical Councils of the early centuries, the Uniting Church looks forward to a time when the faith will be further elucidated, and the Church's unity expressed, in similar Councils. It thankfully acknowledges that the uniting Churches were members of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies, and will seek to maintain such membership. It remembers the special relationship which obtained between the several uniting Churches and other Churches of similar traditions, and will continue to learn from their witness and be strengthened by their fellowship. It is encouraged by the existence of United Churches in which these and other traditions have been incorporated, and wishes to learn from their experience. It believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific. The Uniting Church declares its desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches.

(...)

The Uniting Church acknowledges that God has never left the Church without faithful and scholarly interpreters of Scripture, or without those who have reflected deeply upon, and acted trustingly in obedience to, God's living Word. In particular the Uniting Church enters into the inheritance of literary, historical and scientific enquiry which has characterised recent centuries, and gives thanks for the knowledge of God's ways with humanity which are open to an informed faith. The Uniting Church lives within a world-wide fellowship of Churches in which it will learn to sharpen its understanding of the will and purpose of God by contact with contemporary thought. Within that fellowship the Uniting Church also stands in relation to contemporary societies in ways which will help it to understand its own nature and mission. The Uniting Church thanks God for the continuing witness and service of evangelist, of scholar, of prophet and of martyr. It prays that it may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds.

(...)

Example of Evangelicalism – Hillsong Church

Hillsong is one of the fastest growing evangelical movements in Australia. It released a CD of its own religious music which was the highest selling CD in Australia for over four weeks. Despite its rapid growth and media attention, it is widely criticised for its emphasis on the creation of personal wealth as part of faithful living. This statement was lifted from its web site, titled “What We Believe”.

We believe that the Bible is God's Word. It is accurate, authoritative and applicable to our every day lives.

We believe in one eternal God who is the Creator of all things. He exists in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He is totally loving and completely holy.

We believe that sin has separated each of us from God and His purpose for our lives.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ as both God and man is the only One who can reconcile us to God. He lived a sinless and exemplary life, died on the cross in our place, and rose again to prove His victory and empower us for life.

We believe that in order to receive forgiveness and the 'new birth' we must repent of our sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and submit to His will for our lives.

We believe that in order to live the holy and fruitful lives that God intends for us, we need to be baptised in water and be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to use spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues.

We believe that God has individually equipped us so that we can successfully achieve His purpose for our lives which is to worship God, fulfil our role in the Church and serve the community in which we live.

We believe that God wants to heal and transform us so that we can live healthy and prosperous lives in order to help others more effectively.

We believe that our eternal destination of either Heaven or hell is determined by our response to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back again as He promised.

Example of popular film – *Stigmata*

The opening credits of *Stigmata* opens this theme vividly. A rapid stream of images alternating between religious artwork – a crucified Jesus, crosses, spilled wine and blood – and youthful living – Frankie working at the beauty salon, clothes shopping, drinking in a night club, taking her boyfriend home – sets an opposition which will undoubtedly clash through the movie.

The director then uses popular traditional Christian imagery to evoke anticipation and release of high impact events, such as an attack of stigmata or a possession on the main character. These images include doves, candles and water.

The dichotomy between ancient knowledge and contemporary life is shown in the film, between religious asceticism and youthful cornucopia.



Example of religious television – *Believer's Voice of Victory*

The episode treated here was produced in 2004 by Kenneth Copeland Ministries Inc., was hosted by Gloria Copeland who presented Billye Brim. Brim offers viewers insight into the fast-approaching end times, as discovered by studying Leviticus and the Hebrew tradition of Rosh Hashanah. She predicts the end times, which started on 29 September 2000 (with the declaration of war by the PLO on Israel) will conclude in 49 years with the arrival of the King Messiah.

Brim's speech was both introduced and concluded by Gloria's explanation of the series of episodes to be presented over four weeks – "Understanding the signs of the times, so you can be in the right place at the right time, and not in the wrong place or the wrong time".

As Brim reads from the Bible, references are posted on subtitles for the audience to look up for themselves. In between Bible references, there appears information about Billye Brim's products and web site address.

Brim and Copeland are seated across a small table with coffee mugs in a lounge room setting. A large window at the back of the stage gives view to a green pasture with a small white church on the horizon. There is no studio audience filmed.

The episode almost ends with an advertisement for Brim's CD and book collection titled "The End Times Package" with the tag line spoken: "Discover God's timetable so you can understand God's future for you".

Copeland concludes with a prayer asking God to quickly convert those who have not heard the Word, so they can get things straight. Then there is an advertisement offering a free "Salvation Package" for those who have been watching and have been converted during that time.

Example of religious web sites – www.ginkworld.net

This site endeavours to be "a site dedicated to the advancement of the Christian Gospel in a postmodern age." Its language, therefore, strives to be "postmodern", or to follow the language of the internet. For example: the title "dna" is used for the page listing their history and mission statement. "dna – what makes us "us"". There is a reluctance to use capital letters – a "pomo" fashion.

John O'Keefe, the site's original producer, offers an article, in a section titled "straight talk – straight-up and straight out – no holds barred theology". The article is titled "Quantum Servanthood: knowing how to lead in chaos". It opens with a line from an REM song, and throughout the article, but especially in the opening paragraph, references to television and other popular media are rife. In the article he appears to define the boundary between modern and postmodern, and affirm the latter. Then he goes on to expound ideals of leadership in "an emerging" context.

His assertions lie in his notion of the term "quantum" in whose definition he sees a paradox between "smallest" and "largest" portion. He uses it to define a model of servant leadership, where being lowest makes you the highest.

Another article presented under the same section heading was by Mark Priddy and titled "It's not business... It's the Gospel". It used text colour to present two points of view on the notion of marketing the Gospel, and purported a negative view of campaigning for church membership by appealing to consumer needs.

It appears that these articles are for an already believing audience, however there is an article written by John O'Keefe in one of the menus on the person and personality of Jesus. While the first half endeavours to provide a historical background of the person of Jesus, there is a quick shift in focus to beliefs about Christ. Each statement about him ends in questions beginning with: sounds like? Examples: sound like someone you know?, sound like something you need? This strikes me as a clear call to conversion.

Other articles included a conversation with Eugene Cho, a pastor and worker for Quest, another online religious site, and a description of the turn to faith by Alice Cooper.

The site seemed to shy away from traditional Christian imagery – crucifixes, altars, candles, faces of Jesus, and used instead pictures of human faces, and circles and triangles which I assume are references to the Trinity. A particular example was of a triangle tongue piercing. Other images included pictures from movies, such as Silence of the Lambs.

This site encourages participation through emails to message boards, and offers links to e-groups. The message board and discussion group is quite extensive. It asks for donations to keep the site running. It also offers resources for devotions, parenting, dating, and tattoo art. Nearly all are links to other sites.