

2004

Performance as ministry: an ethnographic study of three Christian Repertory Theatre troupes

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PERFORMANCE AS MINISTRY: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
THREE CHRISTIAN REPERTORY THEATRE TROUPES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by
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August 2004

DEDICATION

For my family.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study could not have been completed without the cooperation and encouragement of an army of individuals: The hardy souls in *The Company*, *Gen X*, and *Acts 2* who shared and inspired; my directors and fellow performers through the years from whom I learned so much; Ron Howard and Jay Allison who taught me how to research; Ruth Laurion Bowman, Patricia Suchy, Andrew King, Renee Edwards, Gaines Foster, John Lowe, Anne Sullivan, and countless others who taught me everything else; the Communication Department at Mississippi College which encouraged without fail; Michael Bowman who cajoled, comforted, pushed, corrected, and challenged; my parents who modeled; my wife who tolerated; and my children who inspired.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| DEDICATION | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | iii |
| ABSTRACT | vi |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Purpose | 3 |
| Methodology | 16 |
| Significance | 23 |
| Conclusion | 26 |
| 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE | 28 |
| History | 29 |
| Theory | 37 |
| Practice | 48 |
| Conclusion | 56 |
| 3: ACTS 2 | 58 |
| Motivation | 61 |
| Leadership | 65 |
| Institutional Support | 71 |
| Practice | 75 |
| Theory | 88 |
| 4: THE COMPANY | 92 |
| Motivation | 97 |
| Leadership | 103 |
| Institutional Support | 111 |
| Practice | 116 |
| Theory | 129 |
| 5: GEN X | 134 |
| Motivation | 137 |
| Leadership | 141 |
| Institutional Support | 145 |
| Practice | 150 |
| Theory | 158 |

| | | |
|----|--------------------------|-----|
| 6: | CONCLUSION | 162 |
| | Definition | 162 |
| | Practice | 173 |
| | Religion and Drama | 185 |
| | The Future of CRT | 192 |
| | REFERENCES | 195 |
| | VITA | 202 |

ABSTRACT

This work seeks to define, explain, and place into historical and social context the phenomena of Christian Repertory Theater (CRT). It does so by examining three CRT troupes: Acts 2 from Nashville, TN, sponsored by Two Rivers Baptist Church; The Company from Fort Worth, TX, sponsored by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Gen X from Clinton, MS, which operated independent of external support. Ethnographic fieldwork was the primary vehicle of information-gathering in this case study analysis. The author experienced each group as either a participant-observer, observer, and/or interviewer. CRT was ultimately defined as an activity wherein a constituted group performs short, primarily dramatic and versatile performances within the context of larger worship services. The group also trains and ministers to its own members while maintaining an active performance schedule. CRT is classified as both a performance troupe and a ministry team. CRT is an active movement primarily within the Southern Baptist Convention where thirty-two states have annual drama festivals/workshops, there is an annual national meeting, and a decadal celebration. Churches and religious organizations are utilizing the dramatic arts in a variety of forms on a more frequent basis, and CRT is a part of that movement. CRT struggles with its dual functions of ministry and performance, walking the line between self-glorification and humble ministry. A third, less vital, function is the training of the group members. The survival of a troupe rests largely with a driving force internal or external to it which provides both vision and leadership. Performance styles for the groups vary, but the one consistency is the presence of “straight drama” in which the performers fully embody characters and the audience suspends their disbelief. Further,

CRT contends with the impression of frivolity as it does not contain the inherent gravity of more fully-developed and technical main-stage plays. CRT fills an important role both for its practitioners and the members of the churches and groups for whom they perform. The art form presents religious truth in a unique manner and provides an opportunity for growth and ministry to the members themselves.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The wind was blowing steadily, and, from my position pressing against the curtains leading into the sanctuary, it was difficult to hear my cue. I was also nervous because this was, after all, a large audience and I had a major role. The thought also crossed my mind of how silly it all was: me standing outside a large auditorium in a faux Biblical robe and headdress. The “preacher” droned on about the difficulty of translating Biblical theology and narrative into modern practice and understanding. Finally, the cue arrived: “For instance, what must it have been like to be walking down the road in old Israel and hear. . . .”

At that, I burst through the curtains. My entrance was half-way back in the sanctuary. Lots of exits. Lots of windows. Very open, contemporary sanctuary.

“UNCLEAN!” I screamed at the top of my lungs. The way the older lady with the blue-tinted hair startled on the row just in front of me struck me as funny. I kept going.

“Unclean! Stay away from me. Don’t come too close. You might catch it. Leprosy. Beware.” I went on to chronicle the experience of an outcast. I slowly made my way to the stage, going up the aisle as I talked. After describing the miraculous healing of the leper (me) recorded in the eighth chapter of the gospel of Matthew, I said, “I’m clean. I’M CLEAN!” And then, I froze in position.

And there I stood, looking directly into one of the slowly over-heating ellipsoidal lights, one leg up on the first level of a fake well. And I stayed frozen during the three monologues that followed--a beggar, a blind man, and a prostitute--relatively short, but when you are frozen and looking into a light, a minute can seem like an hour.

The preacher returned to the pulpit to continue his thoughts, to draw out the relevant explanations, to explain the deep spiritual implications of the performance. In reality, he was simply there to provide the bridge to act two of the vignette. He ended with, "But our call is not to Biblical characters."

With that, the first of my fellow monologists took off her Biblical wear and made her way across the stage. Hanging their clothes on a coat rack, my three fellow actors became a teen-age mother, a war refugee, and a homeless person. Once again, their monologues were short, but I was still frozen.

Finally, my turn came. I became an AIDS victim explaining to his stereotyped, conservative parents that he was both homosexual and afflicted with the disease. "Mom, Dad, I've got some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that I'm gay, but don't worry because the good news is that I have AIDS, and it's killing me." Another freeze.

The preacher stepped back up to the podium and issued the challenge to the audience. "Will you dare to care? Will you minister to the needy? Will you step out of your comfort zone?" The same basic challenges heard in churches, synagogues, and mosques around the world on any given holy day.

With that, the song "Be the One" by the contemporary Christian recording artist Al Denson began playing over the sound system. One by one, group by group, other members of our troupe strategically placed throughout the sanctuary began to make their way to the front. They hugged the teenage mother, walking away in an embrace. They embraced the beggar, offering her an apple and a coat. They offered a blanket to the refugee, taking him into their fold. Me, they left alone, very alone.

As the final poignant strains of the song echoed through the hall and faded into the night, I dramatically lifted my arms along with the lilt of the music to reach out to the audience, the nonverbal plea ever so carefully orchestrated.

The music faded, the lights went out, and the performance was over. I turned to make my way off-stage, already mentally arranging my night's agenda of minutia.

Suddenly, the lights in the other side of the audience flashed on. Well-trained in the physics of light spillover and the professionalism of theater, I froze again. The lights on the other side of the stage came on. Looking over my shoulder, I saw a diminutive white-haired lady in a blouse, skirt and tennis shoes running at me. Before I could move, she had me. With her arms enveloping me, we stood as one statue for what was surely less than a minute, but seemed an eternity. She was sobbing, and because no one cries in my presence without company, I began to join her. Looking into my face, Mrs. Vera Bluejacket, in between sniffles, managed to get out, "I know that you're just an actor, but I just couldn't leave you on stage by yourself."

Freeing my arms from her embrace, I willingly reciprocated the hug. The lights began to fade again. Whispering some nonsense about logistics or practicality, I managed to lead my rescuer off-stage where we were joined by the rest of the troupe blubbering and passing out Kleenex. The "show" had come to an end.

Purpose

This study seeks to define, explain, and place into historical and social context the growing phenomenon of Christian Repertory Theater (CRT). It does so by examining three CRT troupes: Acts 2 from Nashville, TN, sponsored by Two Rivers Baptist Church; The Company from Fort Worth, TX, sponsored by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS); and Gen X from Clinton, MS, which operated as an

independent group. Ethnographic fieldwork was the primary vehicle of information gathering in these case studies. The author experienced each group as a participant-observer, observer, and/or interviewer. The current study is purposefully and necessarily qualitative in nature. The study uses particular exemplars from each group as much for their theoretical import as for their importance to the group members. I attempted to use as much of the native language as possible during the descriptions of the groups and their activities and to use as much of the native viewpoint as I could in the analysis. At the same time, I attempted to maintain a researcher's necessarily distanced mind-set. The conclusions reached by this study arose from within the study itself. The practices, values, beliefs and norms of the participants guided the research to its theoretical conclusions and implications.

I have been actively engaged in Christian repertory performance for the past sixteen years. In that time, I have seen this unique art form portray its message in a pure and beautiful manner. I have also seen it done poorly, often at war with itself and its sponsoring agencies. The messages presented through this art form are consistently drawn from the Bible and Christian tradition. The manner in which it is presented is through simple dramatic sketches with straight-forward plot lines. The audience reaction to CRT presentations is generally positive. However, dramatic performance remains an afterthought or a once-a-year phenomenon in many modern churches. Research on it remains almost non-existent. Pastors remain hesitant to incorporate it. The current study is driven by the apparent contradiction between the effectiveness of the medium and its reputation among its primary audience.

The over-riding impulse for this study was simple: to define, describe, and classify CRT. That apparently simple directive led the study in several different

directions. The main thrust of the work remains definitional. A second area of focus involves the practices and norms of the groups. Third, the impact of CRT troupes on the discussion concerning and intercourse between drama and religion is explored. Finally, the study speculates about what lies in store for CRT.

Definitional issues are treated throughout this study, but it is a good idea at the outset to set up a general framework to guide the discussion. The field of Christian Repertory Theater faces many definitional challenges. First, the boundaries and overlap between the fields of performance, drama, and theater must be defined. Second, the concept of religion must be addressed. Finally, the other tasks which are specific to the art form must be considered.

This study defines CRT as an activity wherein a constituted group performs short, primarily dramatic and versatile performances of a religious nature, for various groups, in various settings, and for a variety of purposes. CRT is both a skilled performance troupe and a caring ministry team. A CRT troupe trains and ministers to its own members while maintaining an active performance schedule. This definition requires a bit of explaining. The following discussion elaborates on the areas of concern listed above. The first issue is the overlap between the fields of performance, drama, and theater.

For this study performance is stipulated as “an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience” (Bauman, 1992, p. 41). This definition is broad enough to allow for the discussion of all relevant issues regarding religion and performance without including subject areas that lie outside the purview of this study. CRT is a performance phenomenon. However, CRT performances are primarily dramatic in genre and

theatrical in practice. Thus, it is necessary to offer definitions for these terms as well. Drama is the genre of performance wherein the action is shown to the audience. It is contrasted with lyric in which the action is narrated and epic in which the action is both shown and narrated. Theatre is an institution, specifically the institution in which performance takes place. The distinctions between performance, drama, and theater are relatively benign, but it is helpful to fully understand how the terms are used in this study to avoid equivocation concerning the practice of CRT. To avoid any confusion in terms of genre or act, CRT is generally referred to as a performance activity throughout the remainder of this study.

The key to the above definition is the concept of framing. As Craig claims, “these things [performance activities] are not drama until they are cast into dramatic form” (1955, p. 20). CRT troupes do a lot of different types of performances. Their most common vehicle is the dramatic vignette in which the performers fully embody the characters they are portraying, and the audience willingly suspends its disbelief in order to accept the performance. The audience knows the performers are not the characters, but in order to enjoy/relate to/learn from the performance, the audience is complicit in the performers’ game of make-believe. For CRT troupes, these vignettes are generally short (5-10 minutes), versatile, easily staged, adaptable, and not reliant on technical elements, props or costumes. These performances are generally the first type of performances which come to mind when the concept of CRT is discussed among people who do it.

Other types of CRT performances include interpretive movement, narrative/poetry, tableaux, “invisible” theater, and improvisation. Interpretive movement is a combination of dance, sign language, and pantomime that visually tells the story of

a particular song. Although interpretive movement resembles dance, it is labeled as “interpretive movement” by Baptist ministers who cannot include “dance” in a worship service to the denomination’s historical stance on dancing. The styles of interpretive movement can range from classical ballet to sign language to a visual choir. The songs are either pre-recorded or sung by the church’s choir. Oftentimes, groups include minimal props or costuming, interaction with video, or opening sketches with this performance genre. Narrative and poetry are often used as transitions between longer pieces or as monologues by one performer. What I call “invisible” theater is generally used by groups performing for audiences not familiar with the group’s membership. This style usually involves a “plant”—i.e., someone who is acting like a member of the audience or as an uninvolved bystander—who is ultimately revealed and incorporated into the traditional performances. Finally, the groups often use improvisation in workshop settings in order to instruct or start dialogue or in rehearsal settings for the purposes of script-writing or training.

The two caveats in the definition regarding performance genre are “primarily dramatic” and “versatile.” According to Craig, drama only exists when “impersonation, action and dialogue” (Craig, 1955, p. 19) are all present in the dramatic form. Obviously, this is a simplistic view, but it does make a valid point in terms of CRT performance practice. This proscription adds specificity to the definition. The term eliminates practices that fall outside of the traditional view of CRT. Once again, the practice is largely determined by its framing, but there are certain practices that are generally not considered to ally with CRT. Based on the criteria of “primarily dramatic,” traditional homiletics and singing fall outside of CRT. This proscription would also seemingly eliminate many of the practices listed above as a part of the typical CRT

troupe's repertoire. However, these practices are generally used in conjunction with, and are framed as a part of, performances in the traditional dramatic form.

The concept of versatility is even more restrictive as it refers to ease of production in terms of travel, set, costumes, and props. Clowning and puppetry are thus eliminated. Passion Plays, Nativity Plays, and major productions are also cast aside due to their lack of versatility. CRT is a specific sub-genre of religious performance; this study does not seek to analyze all of the ways in which modern religion is dramatic or performative.

CRT is specifically religious in content, tone, and objective. Religion is stipulated for this study as the Christian religion, primarily the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The Christian faith and the theater have a long and precarious history. Limiting the discussion of religion to Christianity allows it to be more focused. Concentrating exclusively on one denomination allows for a discussion of many sociological and practical issues that a more diffuse focus would not. Plus, the case studies chosen for this study and the author's personal experience, both within and without the realm of CRT, fall within the SBC. While occasional mention is made of groups and practices outside of the SBC, most of the discussion in this study relates to the relationship between these two entities.

Finally, CRT has performance, ministerial and educational objectives. CRT troupes are constituted for the purpose of performance. This is their practice, the means through which they communicate. These performances have a variety of purposes: encouragement, teaching, evangelism, discipleship, and entertainment to name a few. However, the preference of the term "ministry group" on the part of many of the troupes is significant. The practice of the groups is subservient to the goal. The

stated objective of CRT is ministry. This is a case where the groups have come to be defined by their means (performance), but their ends (ministry) remain paramount to them. CRT walks the fine line between ministry and performance. As with ministers of all types, CRT performances must minister to both those in their audience who are already of like mind with the group and those who are not. They must use their means to delight their congregation and their message to instruct those from outside their church.

These groups must also minister to their own members. They do this explicitly through prayer times and devotions and implicitly through the act of performance. By providing the members the opportunity to immerse themselves in their characters, the actors may gain a deeper understanding of the truths taught by that particular performance. The groups go to great lengths to ensure that their members are not only given the opportunity to minister, but are ministered to as well. The final function of CRT is that of education. CRT troupes must train their members to be good performers. They often train other groups in performance, group dynamics, and other elements necessary to create and sustain a viable CRT troupe in environments such as workshops and conferences. CRT troupes also train their own congregations to be savvy audiences for their performances. The practice of CRT consists of act, content, and purpose. Each of the parts of the definition is vital to a thorough understanding of the practice.

Outside of the formal definition offered for CRT, but no less relevant to its discussion, is the practice's ongoing struggle with what constitutes "good" performance. This study uses the terms professionalism and amateurism to notate good and bad practice. One side of the argument claims that any performance in worship services is

good. They stage “bathrobe dramas” with little preparation, no expertise, and no real effort at professionalism. These performances are simply an outlet for the performers and are viewed more as curiosities than actual elements of the worship experience. The other side of the debate argues that CRT should be done well or not at all. For them, CRT is an act of worship and as such, demands the same attention, time, and expertise that are given to all of the other elements of a worship service. Professionalism is concerned almost as much with the audience’s reaction to the performance as with performance practice itself. Professional troupes’ performances are well incorporated into the larger worship service and are viewed as a part of the experience. In terms of practice, good CRT is essentially the same as good performance in any arena. Its characteristics are as much felt as known. The debate over professionalism and the value of unprofessional performance is a major area of analysis in this study.

The second area of emphasis within this study involves the practices and norms of CRT groups. The three groups in this study were chosen because they represent the entire gamut of CRT groups in terms of sponsorship: troupes sponsored by churches, troupes sponsored by academic institutions, and independent troupes. Sponsorship seemed the most logical way to categorize the groups because it is so fundamental to its practice, affecting every other facet of the group. The first group, Acts 2, represents the most common variety of CRT troupes, those associated with a religious body. Acts 2 is sponsored by Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. In existence for over thirty years, Acts 2 generally performs in its home church. They do small sketches in regular worship services and, in conjunction with the music ministry of the church, a major Easter production. Churches across the nation sponsor similar groups. A brief

sampling of other groups would include Innermission from Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX; Adventist Christian Theater from Carmichael Seventh Day Adventist Church in Sacramento, CA; and The Lighthouse Players in Clinton, MS. Acts 2 was one of the first groups of its kind. It hosts the decadal celebration of “Christianity and the Performing Arts” (a workshop, performance exhibition, and worship retreat held every ten years). It is sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention and enjoys strong institutional support from its home church. As such, they serve as an ideal exemplar of the practice.

The second group, The Company, represents groups associated with schools or universities. The Company has been in existence since the early 1980s. They are a troupe consisting entirely of seminary students who volunteer their time for the activity. Some of the students receive class credit from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) for their participation. Their sponsorship comes from SWBTS, even though they are incorporated as an independent organization. Their leadership is provided by a SWBTS faculty member. They travel primarily to churches and religious organizations within the state of Texas, but they also travel extensively across the nation in the summer. Furthermore, they attend and provide leadership for national conferences and workshops. Other examples of this type of group are Cross Section from Mississippi College in Clinton, MS; the Son Reflectors and Word Players from Samford University in Birmingham, AL; and the Baptist Campus Fellowship Drama Team from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, LA. The Company was selected because of their reputation and origination. They were one of the first groups to travel extensively performing this particular dramatic genre. Their director, Dennis Parrish, is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on the art form. The Company is

considered one of the very best at what they do, serving as an example for groups across the nation.

The third group, Gen X, represents private groups not associated with any other institution or organization. Gen X is no longer in existence. They were in existence for two years as a repertory company established by three college students for the purpose of bringing a Christian message to various audiences through the channels of theatrical performance, preaching and music. They consisted of five students who are all still pursuing career goals that relate to Christian ministry and who plan to use dramatic performance in their ministry. They performed several times, including a chapel service at a private school, at a summer camp for a church youth group, and at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting. Their selection for this project is based on several factors. First, their ministry can be looked at in its entirety. Second, their lack of “trained” personnel provides a counter-point to the performance professionals involved in the other two case studies. Finally, their ultimate demise is somewhat typical of groups trying to survive without institutional support. Other examples of this type of group are Face-to-Face in Birmingham, AL; the A.D. Players (originally associated with Second Baptist Church, Houston) in Houston, TX; and Johnson and Johnson in Murfreesboro, TN.

Taken as a whole Acts 2, The Company and Gen X serve as an appropriate sampling of CRT troupes. First, they are representative in terms of size. Acts 2 ranges from 12-25 members depending on interest and need. The Company has 8-20, and Gen X had five. Second, they vary in terms of longevity. Acts 2 has been around for over thirty years, The Company for twenty, and Gen X lasted less than three. Finally, they cover the span of professionalism. The Company is directed by a consummate

professional with years of theatrical training and experience, Acts 2 by someone with some experience and training, and although Gen X seemed to have had a very loose organizational structure, none of the players had any previous experience with CRT and little training in theater in general. As such, these groups seem to represent the entire population of CRT troupes. The study seeks to argue that the practices and norms of these groups can be generalized to the entire population of CRT troupes, offering a thorough understanding of the practice. The specific practices of the groups are discussed in chapters dedicated to each group individually, and the conclusions regarding the practice as a whole are presented in the final chapter.

The analytical foci of this study arose from my interactions with these particular groups, and groups like them, as well as my previous experience with CRT. The areas of analysis for the study are Motivation, Leadership, Institutional Support, and Practice. Motivation concerns both the reason for the group's existence and the individuals' personal motivation for being a part of it. One of the themes that the study keeps coming back to is the dual focus which CRT groups and the art in general seems to have in terms of performance and ministry. Motivation plays a key factor in that dichotomy. Leadership centers on selection and training. One of the key findings of this study is that CRT groups appear to rise and fall, succeed and fail, create and imitate based largely on the drive of one individual in a key position of authority or support. This person may be the director or it may be someone higher up in the organization who insists that CRT be a part of the over-arching institution's ministry.

Institutional support deals with how the group is maintained as an entity, considering both its task and maintenance functions. Financial backing, membership, social affiliation, and the opportunity to perform are all discussed. CRT, like all theater,

does not exist in a vacuum, and it must rely on the support of a parent or sponsoring organization, even though the troupes themselves may not be affiliated with an organization. The analysis of the practice of the groups looks at member selection, rehearsals, and performances. Examining how these groups actually work on a daily basis grounds all of the other theoretical areas of the study. These areas constitute the bulk of each group's inner workings and ministry. They provide a framework to address both the groups themselves and the larger questions surrounding the practice as a whole.

Third, the impact of CRT troupes on the discussion concerning and intercourse between drama and religion is explored. Religious organizations seem to be using all manner of performance on a more consistent and thorough basis than at any time in recent history. This use is driven by society and practice. Society as a whole has become inundated with the dramatic as the television and film industries have risen to prominence. Television has brought a whole new scale and intensity to the experience of drama that is without precedent in the history of human culture. As Raymond Williams (1974) has pointed out, there has never before been a time when a majority of any population had such regular and constant access to drama. Today more drama is watched in a week or weekend than would have been watched in a year or even in a lifetime in any previous historical period (p. 59). Church services have always been dramatic, but with the rise of secular drama to the level of cultural saturation, churches have had to use performance in order to communicate with their members. Churches are televised and aired on the radio. The services are carefully orchestrated in terms of music, technical elements such as video projection, and pageantry. Christian movies (*The Passion of the Christ, Left Behind*), video-Bible studies (the Fish-Tale group), and

multi-media presentations (Dave Ramsey) are being produced. The current social and cultural environment is necessitating that the tools of theater supplement the tools of the traditional religious orator. CRT is a part of this larger move toward the dramatic on the part of religion in general.

The practice of CRT and the official rhetoric of the SBC are in contradiction in one specific area, though. This contradiction is a result of female leadership within CRT troupes. There seems to be no distinction within the groups with regard to gender and leadership. At best the system is a meritocracy; at worst it is a system of favoritism. Either way, there is no indication that gender plays a significant role in the attainment of leadership positions. However, the SBC's stated position is that a female cannot be in a position of leadership over a male. The practices of CRT, then, appear to be in direct conflict with the doctrine of the SBC, the institution that sponsors it. It seems that CRT and the beliefs of most Southern Baptists are in alignment, despite the official texts, though. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most actual members of the SBC do not agree with its latest published statement of faith. As such, the practices of CRT do not seem as unpalatable to the SBC as its official rhetoric would seem to indicate. However, the institutions of the SBC control most CRT troupes practicing within its auspices. As such, the leadership of women within CRT, in the face of published SBC doctrine, is noteworthy.

Finally, the work speculates about what lies in store for CRT. Although this is not a major thrust of the study, and while qualitative studies do not generally aim at prediction and control in the way that quantitative studies do, I feel that it is appropriate in a study of this nature for a variety of reasons. First, all research should point the way to the future as well as illuminate the past. Second, this study is particularly interested

in the future of CRT, because it is currently experiencing such a blossoming within the SBC today. Finally, as performance and religion have historically been at such odds with each other, it is appropriate to suggest certain prescriptions or guidelines which could allow the two to co-exist, enable the one to improve within the context of the other, and give a reasoned defense for their co-existence. This predictive work will be rooted in the examination of the three current case studies, interviews with major players in the field, and my own observations after sixteen years in the field.

Methodology

This is an ethnography. It could be classified under several headings. It could fall under the area of the ethnography of communication as it concentrates on “the study of performance by anthropologically oriented folklorists” (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 1). However, this study is concerned with performance, not communication as a whole. Likewise, the study could be considered an ethnography of performance. However, “the description and understanding of communicative behavior in specific cultural settings” (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 2) is only of interest to this study where the specific cultural setting is that of dramatic performance. Besides, this study is interested in performance as a practice and not in specific instances. Nor could it be considered a study of “performing ethnography” as delineated by Denzin (1997, p. 91) where ethnographical texts are turned into performances. This study seeks to examine performers and the activities involved in the act of performance. In that, it may be as nearer to the sociology of art than any other field. Still, this study defies the labels of communication and performance scholars, and can only rightly be labeled an ethnography in the general sense of using participant-observation as its primary information-gathering tool.

The information-gathering process used the tools offered by Saville-Troike in her chapter on “The Analysis of Communicative Events” (1989, pp. 107-180). Information from Saville-Troike that was particularly relevant included her discussion on types of data and data collection procedures. This study leaned heavily on background information, material artifacts, social organization, artistic data, and common knowledge (p. 115-116) as the raw data to support its arguments. In terms of data collection, introspection, participant-observation, observation, interviewing, and ethnosemantics (categorizing the terms from the analyzed culture) (pp. 118-129) were all used. As such there are a lot of citations from “personal communication” in this work. These sources came either from direct communication in the form of a face-to-face interview or from electronic mail. Where appropriate, I have tried, in accordance with ethnographic methods, to retain the informant’s original language and grammar.

I also relied heavily on the work of Spradley (1980), particularly his discussion of inductive coding and interpretation of data. Spradley’s system of analysis was particularly useful while categorizing and classifying the different types of performances used by CRT troupes and the different types of CRT troupes themselves. Technical and procedural aspects of the study were also pulled from Van Maanen (1988) particularly as applied to the actual reporting of examples and writing of the study, Geertz (1973) in looking at the practices and norms of the groups which hold them together and represent them to the outside world, and Glaser and Strauss (1967) when it came to generalizing from the specific exemplars in the study to the larger context of CRT as a whole.

The sample groups chosen for this study serve as a quota sampling, one each from the three main types of CRT troupes. I observed the three groups in settings

ranging from rehearsals and performances to down time. My experience varies with each one. With Acts 2, my role was strictly that of observer, outsider. The group is sponsored by a church in Nashville, TN. My access was therefore limited by distance, and I had limited personal contact with the group. However, Cathy Bell, the staff member at Two Rivers Baptist Church, which sponsors the group, provided open access to cast members, church staff, and church members. I interviewed their director, several of the cast members, members at the church, and Bell herself. I was able to view several of their repertory performances via video-tape.

In terms of distance, the situation was similar with The Company, sponsored by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, TX. However, I have extensive experience with them. I was a member of the group for two years from 1992-1994. I have a relatively full understanding of their history, purpose, practices, norms, and genres. Since that time, I have maintained a working relationship with their director. I have extensive field-notes kept during that time in the form of journals. I also have video-tapes of performances. I conducted interviews with their director, current team members, past team members, and audience members. I took most of my exemplars from this group from the era in which I was a member; however, their director, Dennis Parrish, was extremely forthcoming in his support and assistance with my project. He gave me unfettered access to present members, chased down contact numbers of previous members with whom I had lost touch, put me in contact with churches and groups which had hosted the group, and unfailingly answered the myriad of questions I put to him in interviews.

Access to Gen X was much easier to come by, as it consisted of students at Mississippi College, the school at which I am an instructor. I have had all three of its

full-time performance team members in full-length plays which I have directed. I have also had them in classes. The difficulty with studying this group is that they no longer perform as a unit. I could not observe the group in action, but I had immediate access to all of the members. They also put me in touch with several audience members from their performances. I interviewed the members of the group, both the performance team members and the other members who preached and led music. I also studied three of their performance scripts. Taken as a whole, I was able to gain sufficient exemplars from the three groups concerning the major areas of analysis in this study to provide sufficient depth and validity for its conclusions.

As a corollary, I also viewed performances and interviewed members of several other groups. The Lighthouse Players are sponsored by Morrison Heights Baptist Church in Clinton, MS. Johnson and Johnson are a professional duo out of Nashville, TN. Cross Section is a student troupe from Mississippi College. Finally, the Son Reflectors are a group sponsored by the First Baptist Church of Gulfport, MS. These groups are not the focus of this study, and exemplars from their experiences were not used. However, I did find some of their input valuable in providing a fuller picture of the practice of CRT and in helping me triangulate my results.

Ethnography was chosen as the methodology for this study because it privileges lived experience and felt knowledge. Through thick description and contextualization, an ethnographer arrives at and is able to present his/her conclusions in ways unlike other researchers. According to Spradley, (1980)

A quiet revolution has spread through the social sciences and many applied disciplines. A new appreciation for qualitative research has emerged among educators, urban planners, sociologists, nurses, psychologists, public interest lawyers, political scientists, and many others. . . . Qualitative research – called ethnography by anthropologists – has come of age. (p. v)

“Cultural description” (Spradley, p. 13) is viewed as the primary task of ethnography, and as long as we operate from the assumption that learning about and from other cultures contains inherent value, ethnography and lived knowledge holds a place among theoretical, academic methodologies.

Ethnography can be extremely personal and real to the practitioner and should become so to the reader. This research was, in a very real way, the culmination of all of my experiences with the art form over the past sixteen years. No quantitative methodology could ever encapsulate the sum of lived knowledge gained during my time as a practitioner of CRT.

This time has given me extensive experience(s). I was a member of the group Cross Section from 1988-1992. The group was co-sponsored by the Mississippi College Communication Department and Baptist Student Union. It toured the state of Mississippi performing at churches and other religious-oriented meetings. We rehearsed weekly during the school year, taking the summers off. During my final year with the group, I served as student-director. I was the director of a group during two summers of staff work at the Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in Black Mountain, NC. That group rehearsed on an “as needed” basis and performed during the staff worship services. For two years, I was a member of The Company. That experience is covered below.

Finally, I have established a solo ministry in the time since my Company experience. I have performed for churches, schools, and private organizations in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. Although a solo ministry is distinct from group work, there are many similarities. My personal experience with CRT offers me a depth of understanding about the practice in general and the specific groups in

particular that an outsider could never achieve. I feel that my experience uniquely qualifies me to interpret the data from these groups as an insider and translate it for a larger audience. Ethnography (almost to the point of auto-ethnography in some cases) provided me the best way to translate my lived experience into a framework for academic, theoretical discourse.

No extrinsic system of analysis was used to interpret the data. To impose on the study an external framework would have been to impose the theoretical prejudices of the researcher onto the environment (personal prejudices are unavoidable and should be acknowledged). In his discussion of “conceptual reduction,” Lindlof (1995) claims that:

The qualitative analyst must devise a conceptual structure. This is never easy, because the analyst must be careful not to impose an external system on the data. Ideally, the concepts used in an analysis grow naturally out of an interaction between the kinds of action noted in the field and the theoretical ideas with which the analyst began the study. (pp. 216-217)

During the course of this study, I consciously strove to allow the structure of this study to evolve as it progressed. The “ethnographic research cycle” (Spradley 1980) began with my understanding of the major areas of theoretical and practical interest informed by my previous experience in the field. Other issues and ideas developed from interaction with and observation of the three exemplar groups. Using the processes of coding, organizing, and conceptual development outlined by Lindlof (1995), I ultimately arrived at a framework through which I could define and address the practice of CRT as well as its theoretical significance and future. However, some reduction was necessary due to the amount of qualitative data associated with ethnographical studies.

The explanation of the data should come from the researcher, called “second-order concepts” by Van Maanen (as cited in Lindlof, 1995). It is the task of the analyst

to make sense of the “actions, goals and motives of the social actors” (Lindlof, 1995, p. 217). The actors’ own interpretations of their actions are called first-order concepts. It is the task of the researcher to make sense out of the “confusion and contradiction” inherent in the interpretation of a situation by an actor in the midst of it (Taylor, 1977, as cited in Lindlof, 1995, p. 217). The second-order concepts used in this study are motivation, leadership, institutional support, and practice. Each case study is analyzed using these concepts as guidelines. I feel that these are the four areas which most help define what CRT is, analyze its various factors, and apply its theoretical implications to a larger context. Motivation is broken down into the reason for the group’s existence and the group members’ personal agendas. The discovery and analysis of motivation was one area in which my proximity to the art was somewhat of a hindrance to the study. Having been a member of a CRT troupe myself, I found it difficult to separate my motivation for participating in the activity from the motivation of the informants. Motivation was chosen as an area of analysis because the driving force behind CRT, religious conviction, is such an essential facet of the art itself. Leadership examines selection and training. This area of analysis is crucial to the study because a group’s director was found to be the primary cause for its success or failure. The sections on institutional support examine the factors necessary for the group to remain solvent and cohesive. These factors were found to be financing, membership and performance opportunities. Those three elements seem to be crucial to the survival of a CRT troupe. Finally, the actual practices of the troupes are examined. Typical practices were organized into subsets, including member selection, rehearsals, and performances. The discussion on practice assists in the definitional aim of the study. By utilizing those

four areas of analysis, I was able to arrive at a fairly in-depth understanding of the four groups examined for this study.

Although the general aim of this qualitative study was descriptive in nature, the discussion of theoretical implications was a major area of emphasis. As Prus (1987) claims, qualitative research is capable of theory-building in the “generic elements of group life: perspectival, reflective, negotiable, relational, and processual” (as cited in Lindlof, 1995, p. 219). This work does not claim to be primarily theoretical, claiming description as its primary function. However, by offering the three groups as exemplars I was able generalize certain types of behavior and practices from this sample to the general population of CRT troupes.

This work breaks down into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter two offers a review of pertinent literature. Chapters three, four, and five present my findings regarding the three case studies of CRT groups. Chapter six offers results and conclusions.

Significance

Christian Repertory Theater is a pervasive art form in American society. By themselves, the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination with over 15.8 million members and 40,000 churches, sponsors two yearly nation-wide conferences, yearly state conferences in thirty-two states, and a spotlight decanal conference on the performing arts (“SBC Faith and Facts”). Schools, universities, churches and private groups all sponsor troupes. Professional groups are even beginning to make their way onto the scene. The trend is also flourishing outside of SBC circles. Some form of the explicitly dramatic is taking root in Pentecostal, Methodist, and Episcopalian churches (just to name a few) across the country and the

world. These performances are readily identifiable in church services, fellowships, classes, and conventions. CRT is a phenomenon separate and distinct from church pageants, touring professional secular groups, solo artists, dramatic elements of the traditional worship service, and other uses of performance as they have been observed and analyzed in the past.

However, despite its ever-increasing popularity CRT has gone largely unnoticed by modern performance scholars. No theoretical, analytical, or critical work has been conducted concerning this pervasive art form. As such, it is ripe for investigation and analysis. As performance scholars broaden their theoretical scope and expand their areas of analysis, this religious genre merits inclusion in the discussion.

This study is an important undertaking, first of all, because of the pervasiveness of the phenomenon itself. As is noted above, churches and religious organizations around the world are turning to this type of medium to propagate their message. Religion is an abiding and important aspect of the human condition. CRT is altering the religious landscape. It is changing the look, sound, and feel of worship services, evangelistic crusades, and street ministry around the world. Books, web-sites, brochures, and conferences are all teaching the “how-to’s” of Christian Repertory Theater. It is time for the practice to receive critical, theoretical attention. The subject is weighty enough on its own to merit the attention.

Second, although Christian Repertory Theater is unique in its characteristics, having no true parallel outside of religious circles, its analysis promises significance for groups across the theatrical spectrum. The particular nature of this type of ethnographic study allowed for careful, specific analysis of many pervasive theatrical, small group, and religious practices. Many of the characteristics and features of CRT

apply across the entire spectrum of dramatic activity. All groups believe deeply in the importance of their activity. All troupes must deal with the practical elements of production and theater. All groups must devise rules and procedures allowing them to function as a unit and survive as individuals. All troupes must deal with the often explosive issues of leadership, casting, rehearsals, and creativity. These problems are compounded when the content of the performances concerns the religious beliefs of the cast, making the message of the performances all the more personal and significant. The ethnographic analysis of these three groups provided particular and practical exemplars of these very important functions of groups, both dramatic and otherwise.

CRT is ideal to serve as a trope for all dramatic groups. Religion claims to know Truth; drama claims to show truth. In that way, religious performance can be viewed as the very essence of performance. Frazer (1940), Hardison (1965), and Kirby (1975), among others have argued that religion lies at the origin of modern drama. They locate the roots of modern drama in pre-historical practices of shamanism, religious ritual, and sacred rite. Turner (1969, 1974, 1982), Hymes (1964), Foley (1995), and others have traced the performative nature of modern religious practices in pre- and semi-literate cultures. They use the terminology of dramatic theory to discuss and explain the rituals and rites of religious practice, even going so far as to re-stage many of these religious practices in a thoroughly theatrical context. The practices of religion and performance are symbiotic in nature and origins. This study looks at yet another instance where religion and performance are intertwined, both in style and substance. This work serves as a case study of a well-developed, though as-yet-unexamined art form.

Third, this study is significant because it touches on the current renaissance of praise and worship in protestant churches across the country. The SBC in particular is

experiencing tremendous growth in what would generally be referred to as non-traditional worship practices. Preachers are preaching without ties. Traditional choirs are being replaced with praise bands and ensembles. Hymnals are being replaced by screens on which the words of the choruses are projected using PowerPoint. Even traditional churches are offering alternative, contemporary services for those who desire such. CRT is a part of this movement. As such its analysis holds import for all of the other practices in this movement. The traditional choir is the institution that perhaps most closely resembles a CRT troupe in its make-up and motivation if not its history. Pastors, members, church planners, and religious scholars should all find this study a significant addition to the discussion of current worship practices in the SBC.

Finally, the objections to the dramatic raised by Plato in *The Republic* (see Barish, 1981) hold interest for this study. Essentially, Plato argued that the concept of theater corrupted society because theater, at its most simplistic, is lying. The current study claims that the basic premise of performance (misrepresenting oneself) is more readily understood as a specially-framed performance event and thus more acceptable in today's literate, modern society than it was 2500 years ago, 1000 years ago, or even 50 years ago. Christian actors dealing with the pervasive stereotypes concerning actors (liberal politically, promiscuous sexually, relativistic philosophically) in today's society is another area of interest for this study. These three case studies offer insight into a modern combination of two worlds that have historically been both friends and enemies.

Conclusion

This study is an ethnographic analysis which seeks to define and discuss the concept of Christian Repertory Theater. That discussion includes definitional issues, practice, theory, and implications. CRT is a pervasive, yet unexplored area of

performative practice. It is well-developed and responsive to its various exigencies modern. This study is a necessary first step in the exploration of an important style and type of performance.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The field of religious repertory theater has received virtually no critical attention. However, the literature involving religion and performance is both broad and deep. Starting with Plato and moving up to modern journals, this topic has drawn great interest and much discussion. A simple search in a dissertation database (www.firstsearch.org) drew 413 sites for “religion and drama” and 355 for “religion and theater.” The primary discussion seems to be divided into three areas: history, theory, and practice. Several works trace drama and religion back to common historical roots. This discussion covers the constant overlap of the fields and their sometimes cordial, often antagonistic relationship. The area omitted from this study is the history of worship, of which the use of performance is a sub-set. While performance is undoubtedly used as a type of worship, the current study is more concerned with definition and practice. The area of theory is divided between performance-oriented scholars and religious-drama apologists. Their divergent purposes color their findings, but their insight is illuminating. Finally, the works that concentrate on practice are somewhat elementary and often somewhat childish. The lack of depth in this area is consistent with the relative youth of the practice of religious repertory theater. It is also another facet signifying the importance of this study. Together these three areas thoroughly cover the overlap of the fields of religion and performance. While many of the sources that follow may not always seem to be relevant to the study at hand, they are provided to demonstrate the constant mixture of religion and performance throughout the ages and in various cultures. It is important to contextualize the present study in the continuum of

performance practices that relate to religion. Many works of historical and theoretical nature do have bearing on this study without directly contributing to it.

History

The writings concerning the history of religion and drama are profuse to the point of excessiveness. The following review attempts to choose those works which relate at least tangentially to the current study. The volume of writing in this area is so large that a complete review of all known literature would be counter-productive. Instead, only those works which seemed the most seminal in this area and contributed the most to the current study were reviewed. The writings in this area seem to fall into three categories: anthropological history, current/applied anthropology, and recent history. In the area of anthropological history, the two areas most analyzed are ancient (virtually pre-) history and the medieval period. Frazer (1940), Ridgeway (1915), Havemeyer (1966), and Kirby (1975) all argued that religion lies at the origin of modern drama. These authors locate the roots of modern drama in pre-historical practices of ritual patterns, worship of the dead, mimetic instinct, and shamanistic ritual. As such, they claim that the dramatic and the religious can never be completely separated, that any discussion of one inherently touches on the other. Chambers (1903), Hardison (1965), and Bates (1975) lead those concentrating on the medieval period, claiming that the church both founded and marginalized theater during that era.

Frazer's (1940) *The Golden Bough* offers the most comprehensive look at what may be called pre-drama. His original quest was to "explain the remarkable rule which regulated the succession to the priesthood of Diana at Aricia (1940, p. v). His quest led to the evaluation of primitive cultures throughout the world. Examining magic, superstition, epics, and tales, Frazer looks at how the primitive concepts of drama and

religion were overlapping to the point of one-ness. He compared cultures throughout the fertile crescent finding the common myths and superstitions within them all, primarily those having to do with seasonal changes. Drama was created as religious ritual; religion was enacted using dramatic conventions. He ultimately concludes that “the movement of the higher thought, so far as we can trace it, has on the whole been from magic through religion to science” (p. 824). Drama (performance) seems to be the vehicle through which this movement is made.

Ridgeway (1915) put more of an emphasis on locating particular performances within their cultural context (Kirby, 1975, p. xiii). He advocated the idea that theater began through ancestor veneration and worship. Taking examples from Greek hero cults and Islamic passion plays to trance performances from the Far East, he argued that theater began through worshiping the dead, even to the point of the actor serving as a medium for the dead ancestor, the theme upon which Kirby later elaborated.

Havemeyer’s (1966) *The Drama of Savage Peoples* claims that theater came about because “the desire to imitate is a universal human trait” (p. 241). Dismissed as overly simplistic by most anthropologists, Havemeyer’s claim is that theater is essentially instinctual. He cites examples from the animal kingdom to the game-playing among children. He goes on to claim that gesture preceded verbalization in human development for the same reason (Kirby, 1975, p. xiv). Havemeyer’s theory is of more use to this particular study than many of the others because of the nature of CRT troupes. One thesis that will be explored is that the natural impulse to imitate the culture around us is often cited by CRT apologists as a rationale for including performances in worship settings.

Kirby's (1975) *Ur-Drama: The Origins of Theatre* attempts to trace stories, myths or legends in disparate cultures back to their original story. Ultimately, he claims that shamanism lies at the root of all theater. He begins his discussion with an analysis of what shamanism is and how it developed. He then proceeds to demonstrate how the practice lies at the root of all of the major branches of theater: India, China, Japan, Greece, and even later post-dark ages Europe. He concludes: "Shamanism absorbed into folk culture lay at the origins of theater (1975, p. 153).

As for the English-Renaissance drama, Edmund K. Chambers' (1903) *The Mediaeval Stage* is widely regarded as the definitive work on the re-birth of drama during the late medieval period in England. His book covers minstrelsy, folk drama, religious drama, and what he refers to as "the interlude." The chapter that most concerns us here is his work on religious drama. He divides the genre along typical lines: mystery, miracle, and morality plays. Chambers claims that all of the types developed from the liturgy. He concentrates on specific examples of text, location, setting, performances. The works concerning this area of theater and religion are numerous, and most contain at least passing mention of Chambers' groundbreaking work.

Hardison (1965) also traces the re-birth of Christian performance during the medieval period. Through an exhaustive examination of the many places and dramatic presentations and scripts coming out of that era, he concludes that the church was both responsible for and antagonistic toward theater. From the liturgy of the Catholic Church to the more formal miracle and morality plays, the Church sponsored the dramatic rebirth that ultimately bloomed during the Renaissance. However, the theology of the age was decidedly conservative, and the Church quickly turned on its prodigy as the

subject matter of the performances moved away from religion as the clergy gave control over to the laity.

Craig (1955) concentrates on the miracle and morality plays of the late medieval/early-Renaissance periods. He locates the origin of medieval religious drama in “plays of the resurrection and the passion” (p. 19). He goes so far as to claim that drama was “again invented” (p. 19) during this period. He carefully chooses the word “invented” to convey the act of a creation of a new form. His thesis is that “monologues, masks, pantomimes, May games, quotes, debates and mere dialogues” are not drama, did not lead to the development of drama, and are misinterpreted by most scholars as dramatic (p. 19). He then proceeds to catalogue various types, locals, and settings for the drama of the age.

In the area of what I am referring to as applied/current anthropology, which deals with modern cultures but along the same line of thought as above, Victor Turner (1969, 1974, 1982), Dell Hymes (1964, 1969, 1974), and John Miles Foley (1995) have traced the performative nature of modern religious practices in pre- and semi-literate cultures. Anthropology is another area where ethnographers and anthropologists have written volumes that reach many of the same basic conclusions. Other scholars who have contributed significantly to this area are Elizabeth Fine (1977), Claude Levi-Strauss (1966), Walter Ong (1982), Alfred Lord 1936), Millman Parry (1971), Roger Abrahams (1968, 1972), Richard Bauman (1977), Dan Ben-Amos (1992), Ruth Finnegan (1992), Dennis Tedlock (1983) and others. This study chooses only three of the most-recognized authors to illustrate the point. The writers in this area often use the terminology of dramatic theory to discuss and explain the rituals and rites of religious practice, some even going so far as to stage many of these religious practices in a

thoroughly theatrical context. Their claim is that the practices of religion and performance are both symbiotic in nature and origins.

Turner (1982) spends a great deal of time categorizing cultures via the terminology of performance. His most significant contributions are his discussions of the social drama and the liminal/liminoid. He argues that social conflicts often play out in a conspicuously dramatic form, and that such social dramas pass through four predictable phases: breach, crisis, redress, and either reintegration or recognition of a schism. In regards to the present study, for instance, the argument could be made that the Southern Baptist Convention may undergo a social drama with regard to the use of theater in its worship settings insofar as the practice is still somewhat controversial to some its more conservative members. To such members, CRT represents a “breach” in worship practice, but whether it will develop into the “crisis” stage is as yet uncertain. The liminal/liminoid distinction contains much more import. Arnold van Gennep’s terminology of separation, transition and incorporation (Turner, 1982, p. 24) with respect to the purpose of performance within a cultural context can instigate an interesting discussion of the process undergone by/place occupied by CRT troupes within the spiritual community. The performers are allowed to behave in ways outside of the accepted cultural norm in service to the performance and then are allowed back into the society after their performance, often at a place of even higher esteem than before the liminoid period (performance). This process is all the more engaging when the members of the troupe are members of the same community of faith. These terms are used below in our discussion of Acts 2 and its membership drawn exclusively from the Two Rivers congregation.

Hymes (1964, 1965, 1969, 1974, 1975, 1977), both linguist and anthropologist, adds to the discussion with a plethora of selections both written and edited that both practice anthropology and critique it. His greatest contribution to the field of the intersection of religion and performance comes from his analysis of so many disparate societies. Through analysis of a variety of settings and cultures, he has argued that religion and drama are intimately connected. The over-arching motif of his writing seems to be that drama originated out of the need to symbolize and thereby exert control over nature, then god, then religion. The process is the same as what other writers posit for the original development of theater. In terms of this study, Hymes reminds us that CRT troupes are acting along a continuum of religious performance across the cultural landscape and not in isolation. Further, his concept of emic vocabulary, diction limited to a specific culture, holds value as the present study distinguishes between groups, isolating particular characteristics that make for the success or failure of the groups.

Foley's *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (1995) is admittedly an homage to Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (1936), but it serves our purposes here more than the original. Foley is much more concerned with the process of delivery in oral cultures than the inter-twining of theater and religion. One of his contributions is in his coalescence of others' ideas. He borrows and explains the "Oral-Formulaic Theory" (pp. 2-7) from Albert Lord and Milman Parry, and the "Ethnography of Speaking" (pp. 11-17) from Dell Hymes and Richard Bauman. His own theory includes the concept of "word power" which he coins to combine the two above approaches. Word power means "that particular mode of meaning possible only by virtue of the enabling event of performance and the enabling referent of tradition" (p. xiv). In other words, words have

special meaning when framed as performance and special meaning depending on the audience that hears them. Foley's fourth chapter, "Spellbound: The Serbian Tradition of Magical Charms," describe the performative practice he calls "bajanje, or magical charms" (p. 99-135). Foley acknowledges that the performative practice of word power is rooted in the religious beliefs of the community. Even while making a separate argument about how oral cultures create and maintain their narratives and their history, the religious beliefs of the group come into play. Once again, practices vary across the years and the cultures, but drama (performance) and religion are necessarily and constantly intertwined.

Moving into the area of recent history, Hiebert (2002, April 15) describes the modern history of major religious theatre productions by concentrating on three major long-running passion plays. Oberammergau, Germany, sponsors its play every ten years. The entire community becomes involved in this production. *Alive Again*, staged in Kaloops, British Columbia, is the largest indoor passion play in Canada. Finally, the *Canadian Badlands Passion Play* in Drumheller is the largest and most famous of the productions. Hiebert quotes Laverne Erickson, the general manager of Badlands, who notes that "There is a wave of Christians getting together for community-based theater" (Hiebert, 2002, p. 52). Dan Flukinger, the producer of *Alive Again*, described its impact with, "When you read the Bible you get the gist of what happened, but it's brought much closer by seeing it in front of your own eyes" (Hiebert, 2002, p. 52). This study speaks to the motivation of CRT troupes. The groups have deep beliefs in both their religion and the communicative efficacy of theater and seek to combine those values.

Childress gives an example of one production and its effect. A 1995 production at Calvary Temple in Modesto, CA, depicting the "reality of hell" was attributed with

more than 33,000 professions of faith in the Christian religion. More than 81,000 people saw the production with many more turned away due to logistical problems. However, the production was halted by the church's Senior Pastor Glen Berteau because of, not in spite of, the overwhelming numbers. "I was concerned we were not going to be able to follow up on that many people. I have a heart for evangelism, but also for discipleship" (Childress, 1995, p. 7). Childress brings to light the interesting dichotomy of the Christian call: to make disciples. The current study seeks to explore the dichotomy and the way in which CRT troupes seek to resolve it. The dual nature of the art is particularly relevant to this study as two of the troupes in the current study travel, eliminating almost any chance to follow up with those who may have made life-altering decisions based on their ministries.

Dissertational research in the areas of performance, literature, and religion also provides a lot of formulaic pieces that seek to explain the religious significance of a certain dramatic piece. Essentially, the formula is: describe all of the religious symbolism and references of a given piece of literature, discuss how this symbolism effects the worlds of literature, history, culture and/or religion. These works have little relevance to the current study, though, for the plays analyzed would not fall under any but the most liberal understanding of the concept of either religious drama or performance. A couple of examples should suffice. Eileen Krajewski's (2002) "Secular messianism and the nationalist idea in the plays of Adam Mickiewicz and William Butler Yeats" concerns how the two poets used messianic themes in order to promote a national identity in their respective countries, Poland and Ireland. Paul Patton's (2002) "The prophetic passion and imagination of David Mamet (Abraham Joshua Heschel, Walter Brueggemann)" ascribing the vision of Biblical prophecy to David Mamet follows

the “identify-and-interpret” formula, too. These works relate to the intersection of dramatic literature and religion, but they are not especially germane to the current study.

Theory

The theory on religion and performance is divided into three categories for the purpose of this study. The first issue is the definitions of both of the umbrella terms under which this study falls: religion and performance. The second area concerns the theoretical, anthropological nature of the discussion. The final subject deals with Christian/dramatic apologists leading an effort to reclaim performance for religious purposes.

Offering definitions for performance and religion is a tricky proposition. However, if both fields are defined, as they often are, as virtually all-inclusive, they cease to signify, have no meaning and ultimately hold no value whatsoever. In regards to the term “performance” Marvin Carlson’s (1996) excellent survey of the field is a good place to begin the discussion. He starts out with the admission that performance is “essentially a contested concept” (p. 1, from Strine, Long and Hopkins, p. 183). That initial definition sets the tone for the discussion that follows. He gives a definition of the “performing arts” as “the physical presence of trained or skilled human beings whose demonstration of their skills is the performance” (p. 3).

He then moves into more sociological definitions including Richard Schechner’s (1985) “restored behavior” (p. 4 from Schechner), behavior that has been previously witnessed by the performer and is now being reenacted. Carlson then offers the idea that all activity “carried out with a consciousness of itself” (p. 4) or, as Bauman puts it, “a consciousness of doubleness” (p. 5 from Bauman, 1989) could be considered performance. Restricting the definition somewhat, Carlson then quotes Bauman again

claiming that performance contains “the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential conduct” (p. 17 from Bauman, 1986, p. 3).

Borrowing from Goffman (1959), Carlson then offers the idea that performance is “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers (p. 37-38, from Goffman).

Carlson also discusses performance in terms of a framing: messages and signals set in a psychological frame so as to be recognized as, in a certain sense, not true (pp. 38-41). He borrows that definition from Bauman who claimed that “performance sets up, or represents, an interpretative frame within which the messages being communicated are to be understood, and that this frame contrasts with at least one other frame, the literal” (1977, p. 9). Along the way, he offers Roger Abrahams’ ends-focused definition, “a way of persuading through the production of pleasure” (p. 17, from Abrahams, p. 145). Two other definitions common to performance studies scholars that are helpful in contextualizing the field are: “A site of negotiation on the borders of society,” and “A method of inquiry favoring embodied practice and lived experience.” Through the years, and among the various disciplines, performance is clearly used in multiple ways and for multiple purposes.

The term “religion” is every bit as contested as that of performance. Though this study is directed solely at a specific type of Christian performance, an understanding of the over-arching concept of religion must inform the discussion. Patridge claimed that “Introduction to Religion” courses in college like to demonstrate the contested nature of the definition of religion by offering a long list of definitions, but all this does is create the

illusion that the term can be defined (2002, p. 59). Patridge does offer a helpful framework for viewing the term, however. He claims that most of the definitions come from one of three schools of thought: religious, naturalistic, or agnostic. The definition always serves the purpose of the definer (p. 60). Sharpe makes the classification even simpler: working and tactical. Working definitions are thorough, philosophical explanations of the term. Tactical definitions are propagandized. He cites Karl Marx's famous axiom "religion is the opiate of the people" as the ultimate tactical definition (Patridge, 2002, p. 59). Henson takes a fatalistic view of the task, claiming that "perhaps a satisfactory definition can be attained only by confining attention to one or a few of the 'higher' religions, the others being treated as defective or not normative" (1960, p. 442).

Several sources (Manser, McGrath, Packer, and Wiseman, 1999; Loetscher, 1955; Cross, 1997) trace the roots of the word back to Cicero who claimed its root as "relegere" meaning "re-read" and defining it as "tradition" or Lactantius who claimed its root as "religare" meaning "to bind fast" and defining it as "that which binds communities together." However, neither of the possible roots has much to do with the current use of the word. Smith offers "a system of beliefs and practices that are relative to superhuman beings" (1995, p. 893) which is solid if a bit exclusionary (Druids for example). Webster (Gove, 1961) gives the most thorough and complete definition:

The personal commitment to and serving of God or a god with worshipful devotion, conduct in accord with divine commands esp. as found in accepted sacred writings or declared by authoritative teachers, a way of life recognized as incumbent on true believers, and typically the relating of oneself to an organized body of believers; one of the systems of faith and worship. (p. 1918)

This, too, is overly exclusive of many groups that are traditionally thought of as religions. However, within the context of this study, it will suffice. In the terminology of Sharpe, it

was offered as a working definition, but it is used here as a tactical one. Much like the term performance, this definition applies to the larger discussion and not to the direct focus of this study.

The second area of concern is the anthropological aspect of the topic. Jonas Barish has most influenced this theoretical discussion. His groundbreaking work, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981), traces the title concept from Plato's *Republic* to modern performance practice. The two themes that re-appear throughout the work are Plato's original anti-mimetic bias and the type of lifestyle that seems to accompany theatre institutions. Rousseau's idea of the corruption of Man-God due to the arts (p. 256) and Nietzsche's tracing of the degeneration of man through the evolution of the stage (p. 402) are both variations on this theme. The original charges against the dramatist come from Socrates' charges to Ion (Plato). Socrates claims that the actor must have no specific knowledge, be good only at spectacle, and is an interpreter of an interpreter. Essentially, Socrates' claim is that an actor represents the opposite of the ideal citizen: all presentation with no substance. Plato's *Ion* makes three interrelated arguments against performance, claiming that it has no system, no substance, and no significance ((M. Bowman, personal communication, January 13, 1997). There is no craft to acting, no substantive knowledge to be gained from it, and thus no inherent value in it.

The corrupting influence of theatre and performance has been a theme of religious discourse since the early Church Fathers. As Barish (1981) notes, "Salvianus, a disciple of St. Augustine, points out that other sins defile only those who perpetrate them, but that the theater defiles those who merely see or hear it" (p. 80). This mind-set is traced through the early church (pp. 80-93) to Ben Jonson and the Puritans (pp. 132-154), up through Jeremy Collier's attacks in the early eighteenth century (pp. 221-

255) all the way to our own century (pp. 450-477). Barish offers both a historical account of the fact of antitheatrical prejudice and a valuable analysis of the stance.

Finally, a multitude of religious performance apologists have argued the merits of religious performance. This group, with roots as far back as Augustine, comes the closest to arriving at the aims of the current study. However, their work is different in both purpose and material. Their purpose was to advocate the use of performance in religious worship services. They are unapologetic and forthright about their goal. For the most part, this genre is dated, written primarily before the current boom in the popularity of theater performance within the church. They were writing for a church which was openly hostile to the concept of using performance within its walls. That situation has changed. The one recent author to take on the subject, Herbert Sennett (1995), offers a macro-view of performance in churches, concentrating on the big picture of what is taking place and why. Sennett's work is well constructed and well thought out, but it is too broad to cover any area in-depth. CRT is never even mentioned as a specific genre of religious theater. The aim of the current study is to update the work of previous theorists and offer the micro-view, looking at how CRT works in practice, in the trenches. The focus on one particular type of religious performance provides this study with a focus not found in comparable works.

In terms of the material performed in explicitly religious performances, previous scholars try to offer a survey of the field, even going as far as offering an overview of the entire landscape (Ehrensperger, 1962, pp. 171-187). In so doing, they fail to concentrate on the specifics, giving categories and genres but no specific examples of what is meant. Their material is presented as maxims, guides, even laws. The current study does not seek to lay down such heavy-handed proclamations. It simply seeks to

report on the process of CRT, how it is done, how it fits in with other religious practices, what makes it successful, why it is used, and (to an extent) how it is received.

Perhaps the most forthright in the admission of his purpose for writing is the editor of *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*. Drama (or performance) in worship can be “measured by the emotional and physical involvement of the congregation, the presence of crisis and conflict in drama, and the reenactment of an important spiritual experience or the rehearsal of that which is to be performed in the world” (Webber, 1994, p. 28). The goal of performance in worship is to minister to the congregation. Further goals are worship, education, entertainment, and evangelism. As people listen to theatrical performance, they are able to worship God through the message being portrayed. Congregants learn through identification with the characters. Their minds are engaged visually, and the message can then be communicated verbally. Each person’s experience will necessarily be subjective and personal, but the goal is spiritual growth and maturity (Webber, 1994).

Ramsden Balmforth (1926) seems to have been the first modern scholar to lead the charge in Christian Theater apology. He defined “religious drama” by surveying the religious plays from around the world. His work was primarily definitional in nature and adds little to the current study due to his focus on Christian drama as a genre and not as a performance practice. He spends his time attempting to delineate Christian drama from secular drama. He fails to discuss performance practice, one of the major emphases of the current study. Further, Balmforth was writing decades before the rise of modern CRT which began (arguably) with the advent of Jeannette Cliff George and the A.D. Players in Houston, TX, in the 1970s.

Parsons' (1947) *The Dramatic Expression of Religion* is a passionate plea for the churches to begin using performance more extensively. He used both history and theology in his persuasive appeal. In his final chapter, Parsons offers theoretical grounding for performance in the churches. He discusses six dynamics of theater and religion: historical animosity, churchgoers dissuading their children from careers in theater, church members attending secular theater, performance as outreach, performance as a moral ally of the church, and performance as cross-generational (Parson, 1947). Parsons, through these dynamics, is one of the first to offer sound theoretical footing for the burgeoning art form of religious performance.

Harold Ehrensperger (1947, 1962), writing at the same time as Parson, picked up where Balmforth left off with what essentially became a two-volume work separated by thirty years (*Conscious on Stage and Religious Drama: Ends and Means*). In this set, he offered definitions, values, and arguments in favor of using performance in religious settings. "Drama, both in and out of the theater, can lay its stern and uncompromising reality upon us, irritating and arousing us to the realization of the way we must go in doing our duty to fulfill our destinies. This is a religious experience" (1962, p. 21). In his first volume, he discussed the "dynamics" which govern theater and religion. First, drama is a natural impulse. Second, there is no separate religious drama. Third, life fully lived is naturally dramatic. Fourth, the church is the natural home of quality drama (that is, the church should have higher standards than the secular community). Fifth, drama is both "educational and priestly" (Ehrensperger, 1947). Further, he discusses each element of the dramatic, particularly as applied to the Christian performer.

Ehrensperger's final volume lays down three "laws" for religious drama: we control the means but never the ends (borrowed from Mahatma Gandhi), the means

should be our end (borrowed from John Dewey), and the only mean or end should be the genuine good (borrowed from Soren Kierkegaard) (1962, p. 14). The first law admits that a performer can only be held responsible for his/her own actions and words. The onus of interpretation lies with the audience. The second law claims that doing good performance should be the goal of the Christian performer. Having good performance as a goal enables the performer to ultimately achieve other goals such as ministry, evangelism, and education. The third and final law argues that Christian performance must be moral, upright and consistent in both message and means. If the performers lose their credibility with the group because of the performance content, the message will not be accepted no matter how well done the performance. Ehrensperger's work is more of a justification and apology for the art than a theoretical framework.

Herbert Sennett (1995) offers more of a framework for the practice of religious performance. In *Religion and Dramatics: The Relationship Between Christianity and the Theater Arts*, he offers a thorough analysis of the intersection between religion (particularly Christianity) and what he refers to as drama. He makes particularly pertinent points in his discussions of the definition and defense of religious drama. Sennett begins his quest for a working definition with two from other scholars. From Ehrensperger, he offers "Religious drama is not a kind of drama, it is a quality of drama. Religious drama presupposes a standard of work that is religiously oriented" (*Religious Drama*, p. 68). From Ev Robertson, he paraphrases "church drama can be defined as the enlightened portrayal of the basic human situations as interpreted through the Bible. It is also the expression of man's relationship to God as stated through the inspired writing of the Bible" (Robertson, 1976, p. 4). Although never offering his own definition, Sennett seems to conclude that the primary difference between secular and religious

performance is in its purpose. Church drama “attempts to touch the soul and spirit of a person so he will feel closer to God. Drama produced elsewhere will normally have a totally different purpose and content” (p. 3).

Sennett (1995) bases his defense of religious performance in three areas: philosophy, history, and theology. Philosophically, Sennett links theater and performance due to drama’s fundamental derivative from “man’s religious apprehension of life. . . . The theater enables people to see themselves in perspective, thus becoming a tool for self-discipline” (p. 6). The historical argument for the use of religious theater runs along traditional lines. Sennett traces theater through its pre-historical, primitive roots, down through the Hebrews and Egyptians, to the Greeks and Romans, through the medieval period, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the twentieth century. His thesis is simply that theater and religion have always been merged to some extent. Sometimes the union was official, sometimes it was in content, sometimes it was merely allusional, but the two have always been closely tied (pp. 17-28).

Theologically, Sennett defends the use of performance in Christian worship based on symbolism, ritual, drama in scripture, and performance as a form of communication (pp. 41-48). He then gives an overview of how performance is used in churches: in major productions, in worship settings, in sermons, and in church ministries. He concludes with a discussion of how churches and individual Christians have mixed with the world of secular theater and a theoretical discussion of the state of the relationship between the two entities as it now exists. His premises for this discussion are the “Hazard of History,” the “Hazard of Hysteria,” and the “Hazard of Honesty.” He claims the hazard of history is that we may fail to learn from it, once again tying theater to governmental controls. “Theater has always done well when forced to

make it on its own” (1995, p. 111). His “Hazard of Hysteria” would result from our failing to fund the arts in our educational institutions or church’s beginning to regulate and dictate theatrical productions within the entire community (1995, p. 113). This is an area that he fails to explain. It seems to contradict the hazard of history in that he here argues that the government should provide funds for the arts in educational settings but earlier claims that he does not want the arts tied to governmental controls. He does not resolve this apparent contradiction. Finally, the hazard of honesty involves the failure of playwrights to deal honestly with the life in which they are involved, writing instead to achieve popular success (1995, pp. 114-116). Sennett offers a sound historical overview of the relationship between theater and the church as well as some practical advice for its continuance and success.

Franklin Segler adds to the discussion with an analysis of the contemporary mind being trained to input information visually as well as verbally (1996, p. 195). He argues that religious performance need not emulate the secular but must make use of its tools. “Church drama should not intend to remake or redirect secular drama but should seek to gain its own identity by emulating the best artistic models within a philosophy that supports the ministry of Christ through the church” (p. 195). Segler supplements his discussion of the contemporary mind-set with an analysis of how performance utilizes and takes advantage of the modern ability to decode multiple streams of information from a variety of channels. He concludes with a more practical section, demonstrating how various dramatic elements can be incorporated in a worship setting (pp. 197ff).

Wren (2000) offers essentially an apology for Christian theater, citing its many uses and values. He quotes extensively from Steven Pederson, the director of the

drama ministry at Willow Creek Community Church. Pederson (Wren, 2000) claims that:

Stranded in the wilderness of a largely secular culture, many Christian thespians consider themselves guardians of a spiritual power source— potentially incendiary one. On the one hand devout or inspirational theatre seems to have the power to galvanize believers and witness to the skeptical. Through drama, we can tap into people’s pain and difficulty. (p. 9)

Wren goes on to argue that performance can be a power “catalyst” for faith. Essentially, Wren makes the argument that performance’s complexity of means is an effective communicator of a spiritual message.

Gwen Laurie Wright (1994) argues for the positive effects of improvisational theater in “Leisure, Drama and Christianity.” Wright’s emphasis is on the correlation between creativity and worship. “The whole concept of drama is integral to worship” (p. 249). According to Wright, dramatic performance is fit for worship on two counts. First, it is inherent in the human condition in that we were created in the image of a creative God. We are most like Him when we are being creative. Second, we are required to bring our best to His altar. If performance is the area in which we are talented, we are required by scripture to bring that gift to and use it for God.

Falling somewhere between theory and practice is Kay Baxter’s *Contemporary Theatre and the Christian Faith* (1964). Baxter argues that the two worlds have much to offer each other. First, she provides a theological grounding for Christian theater practitioners. Acknowledging the current attitude of the church that actors and the traditional theater world are not in alignment with typical Christian morality, she argues that:

The main task of Christian students of drama is to build bridges, and if we are to be of any use in building a communications line between the artist and the church and in making the insights of the seers available to deepen our own

shallow thinking then we have to get in beside them and understand the nature of their trouble, being prepared to bar no questions. (p. 32)

Her line of reasoning seems to come from the type of theology practiced by Jesus: “in the world but not of it,” spending time among the “sinners and tax collectors” of his day rather than avoiding them. Baxter goes on to catalog the benefits that performance has for the church, primarily in enriching its doctrinal heritage (p. 33). Hers is a good argument for the Christian dramatist to continue to ply her trade and an excellent argument for drama in the church. At that point though, she varies from the current study in that she does indeed concentrate on Christian drama as a generic study, particularly concentrating on the major productions of the Passion and Nativity.

Practice

Books, articles, pamphlets, and web-sites abound offering the would-be dramatist practical advice on how to use performance in worship settings. From the plethora of workshops and conferences to the literature produced by particular religious organizations, the information is plentiful. This literature focuses on new groups’ concerns such as organization, rehearsal schedules, and recruiting members. Material for existing groups focuses on staging, equipment, finding material, characterization, and costume/make-up. Some material is even directed toward ministers in churches who may be considering using performance in their services. The practical advice offered to would-be practitioners covers a gamut of directing, performing and incorporating issues.

Much of the literature produced by Southern Baptists involves puppets and clowning. Three sources will suffice to demonstrate the general landscape of these works. Adair’s (1964) *Do-it-in-a-day puppets: For beginners* is just what its title advertises it to be. Adair argues that a church can set up an effective ministry using

puppets with very little work or fore-thought. Adair claims that churches need only to purchase the necessary equipment, hold a couple of practices, and find a performance venue. The fallacy of this “anyone can do it” approach is that no theatrical endeavor will be successful without effort, planning and expertise. Yet, this approach is common in the literature offering practical advice on utilizing performance in church settings.

Moak’s (1988) *Clowning in Youth Ministry* applies the field of clowning to a particular ministry area. There are similar works arguing for using puppets with every imaginable demographic. The advice does not differ much from one age group to another or from one type of performance to another. The formula is much the same. If you set it up and are excited about it, you can get people to become involved. It is part outreach, part in-reach, and part discipleship. Advice ranges from running rehearsals to offering spiritual guidance to the participants.

Ev Robertson’s (1983) *The Ministry of Clowning* is a good example of a holistic approach to the subject. He essentially covers the gamut of everything necessary for a successful clowning ministry. He falls into the same trap as many of the other writers, implying that this one book can turn a novice into a capable performer, but the tone of the book is more professional than most. *The Ministry of Clowning* is also a good exemplar for this type of advice literature because it does not attempt to do too much. The focus on clowning prevents him from trying to cover the entire spectrum of performance genres, as he does in another of his works (discussed below).

There are also some sources concerning interpretive movement, the pervasive form of performance in religious circles described in chapter one. At the 2003 Mississippi Christian Dramatic Festival, of the ten pieces brought by performance troupes for evaluation and adjudication, seven were of this nature. The scope of

sources here mirrors that of clowning and puppetry. Kelly and Hershberger's (1987) *Come Mime with Me* is of the "anybody can do it" genre. Essentially, they offer little more advice to the would-be performer than to jump in and try it. Admittedly, they do offer the caveat that some of the "performances," especially in the beginning, should be used more for rehearsal and practice than presented to the entire church. They seem to acknowledge that there is at least a modicum of talent and training necessary before one can assume a level of expertise in the field. But they do not provide much guidance in acquiring such expertise.

Joyce's (1980) *First Steps in Teaching Creative Dance to Children* fills the age-group specific type for this field. Like Kelly and Hershberger (1987), though, Joyce is more arguing for the use of movement and dance in a workshop or practice environment and not necessarily for public consumption. However, she does claim that the classes should ultimately perform if only for the parents. For her the performances are more motivational for the children than edifying for the audience. Her approach is decidedly secular and could have been written by any movement teacher at a local ballet school. Only the tone and content of the preferred music were particularly religious.

Finally, Fisk's (1955) *The Art of the Rhythmic Choir* assumes the burden of all-inclusive guidebook. The publication date notwithstanding, the book advocates for the practice in much the same form as its current manifestation. Sign language, gesture, and facial expression are all taught as vehicles through which to make visual the verbal message of the song. This book is more concerned with the art form, only mentioning the practicalities of running a group in a cursory way while addressing other issues. The book is admittedly a bit out of date, and many of its arguments advocating the art

form now seem unnecessary, but it still serves as a valid example of both advocating for and teaching how to do interpretive movement.

The most discussed and encouraged form of performance, however, seems to be the pageant. The nativity and the passion are the favorite subjects. However, most of this work is relatively simplistic. While many authors deplore what they refer to as “bathrobe dramas,” the advice that they proffer offers little hope of producing work much beyond that which they reportedly despise. It is the same paradox that we find with the other manifestations of Christian theatre. The writers on the subject want quality work, but they also want to encourage as many people as possible to participate. Their advice is given in the most simplistic terms, their message is watered down for public consumption, and their ultimate conclusion becomes more of a persuasive appeal to try the art form than an instructive lesson on how to do it well.

Staheli’s (1992) *Costuming the Christmas and Easter Play: With Ideas for Other Biblical Dramas* is an excellent example of the qualified versus the interested paradox. Staheli goes into great detail offering practical advice in the area of costuming, much of it professional and well written. It is the very antithesis of the “bathrobe drama.” However, she goes on to reverse her seeming position with the second section of her book. The “other ideas” which she offers fall much closer to the sketch side of the professionalism continuum than the vignette or full-production side. Admittedly, many of the other ideas are presented for children and youth, but there is still a decided change in tone after the discussion of Christmas and Easter plays. It is almost as if the author is acknowledging the acceptance of performance in the church during these two high, holy days, but has the attitude that “anything goes” during other times of the year.

Allensworth's (1984) *The Complete Play Production Handbook* is wholly professional in both tone and content. However, he runs into the same problem as Staeheli, and even compounds it, at least from the point of view of this study. It does not even address performance in the church outside of the two yearly pageants. These pageants are a mainstay on the church calendar in many denominations around the world. Allensworth offers a valuable service in presenting advice and instruction on making those productions better. However, he fails to address performance at any other time of the year. He also falls into the same trap of assuming that the uninitiated can produce or direct a show with minimal knowledge and effort. All told, he seems to discredit the complexity of the production and the issue of performance in a variety of religious settings.

Brandt's (1964) *Drama Handbook for Churches* attempts to correct the shortcomings of Staeheli and Allensworth. It addresses more than just costuming and more than simply the church pageant. The term "handbook" is apt: The book is an accessible and interpretable volume, but it lacks depth. Realizing that it was written as a practical guide and not a theoretical volume, it is still an over-simplification of the process. It seems to be a "Cliff's Notes" version of directing a church performance, either a pageant or a vignette for another worship occasion. The information is relevant and well-stated (if a bit out-dated especially in vocabulary and illustrations), but there is simply no way that a book, any book, could ever adequately prepare a complete novice to direct a professional performance for any purpose. The reach of the book seems to exceed its grasp.

The area that comes closest to the subject of this study is the practical advice given for starting and maintaining a troupe. Dunlop and Miller's (1984) *Create a Drama*

Ministry is an offering relatively typical of this genre. It attempts to teach the very basics of stage drama. From a dictionary of basic terms (for example: downstage, characterization, stage make-up) to basic set construction, the book is written for the novice. The bulk of the work presents and explains six presuppositions the authors use to justify their work: drama incorporates the same methodologies that Jesus used, drama has its origins in the church, drama has the capacity for immediacy, drama is non-threatening, drama creates discussion, and drama is an “overall” medium (1984). Dunlop and Miller remind us that the experts in this field are convinced that anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of terms and ideas can direct a troupe. The book is undoubtedly persuasive in nature, urging the reader to start a troupe, but it is also written for the novice. The content and purpose would be a paradox in any other field. It seems that the authors believe that the more performance in worship settings, the better, despite the lack of training or expertise on the part of those creating the performances.

Robertson’s (1978) *Introduction to Church Drama* is a somewhat more cerebral approach to the art form. However, he attempts to cover the entire scope of performance within the church, which diffuses his impact. He ranges from pageants to puppetry and interpretive movement to dramatic sketches. His tone is more professional (coming from the man who ran the “drama division” at the Southern Baptist Convention for years, this is not surprising), but the persuasive appeal along with the novice audience is still present. The paradox of the amateur presenting professional-quality performances seems inherent in works of this nature.

The online newsmagazine “Phillips Music and Drama” offers practical advice for the practitioner. Its mission statement claims its purpose as “the promotion of the use of

high quality Christian drama for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (*Phillips Music and Drama*). The site addresses issues ranging from starting a troupe to finding material. There is material for directors, writers, actors and technicians. As well, plays, workshops, and their own troupe itinerary are listed. The advice is rudimentary and written for novices. The writers also make an effort to make their advice applicable to a variety of situations and settings. Worship services, fellowships, age-groups specific gatherings, and evangelistic groups are all taken into account at some place within the site.

Another online site for the drama troupe is Mimestry with their stated purpose of “promoting the use and achievement of excellence in artistic ministry” (Mimestry). This site is sponsored by the Mimestry Company which is based out of California and England. They offer schools, programs, and performance examples to anyone interested in them. They also feature a store and library. Their site also has a feature that is relatively common to this type of site: a prayer ministry. This is an area of the site where people can write the group to request prayer for certain things. The group then posts the requests on the site and asks its supporters to pray for the request. Most of the requests revolve around the practice of CRT: groups getting started, groups gearing up for major performances, or groups making trips. This phenomenon seems to be another way in which troupes are striving to find community among themselves.

Another practical site is sponsored by the Young Ladies Christian Fellowship (YLCF). It gives advice on starting and maintaining a troupe. The information is similar in content and scope to the sites described above. The three main priorities for CRT troupes as seen by the YLCF are personality, type-casting, and organization (Brown,

2002). Brown's advice is particularly pertinent to this study when applied to Gen X because it did not manage to survive.

An excellent example of the type of source which assumes naiveté and even simplicity on the part of its audience is Anona Drama Team's site. The site informs its readers, for example, that the actor's responsibility is "to convince the audience that the performance they are watching is real" and that a key factor in doing this is "speaking the lines clearly" (2002). It adds that, "The actor should feel as though he is no longer himself; he is the character" (2002). Issues of schizophrenia aside, the elementary level instruction in this site is a representative example of the type of "advice" books, pamphlets, magazines, and web-sites available on the subject.

Finally, there are several sites that serve as clearinghouses for the groups. The biggest seems to be DramaShare (*DramaShare Christian Drama Resources*). This site contains scripts and ideas and seems to serve as somewhat of a shared community for CRT groups from around the world. Visitors can post their own scripts as well as articles, ideas, or advice. A smaller version of the same idea is Christian Drama Connection (*Christian Drama Connection*). Most of these sites have downloadable scripts, ones that can be purchased, and multiple links to other sites. The sense of cooperation and mutual benefit among these sites is evident from the absence of pop-up advertisements, the amount of free information, and the easy links to other sites that they provide.

Some work has been done specifically on the dramatic vignette, but far too little, not very recently, and none of it particularly outstanding. Barnard's (1950) *Drama in the Churches* is problematic. Discounting its datedness, it has other theoretical and practical limitations. First, it is not focused on one particular area, but rather is yet

another survey of current practices. Barnard discusses issues pertaining to both practice (how) and theory (why), but in doing so, never fully addresses either. Obviously, it was written in an era when little was being done in the churches in the way of performance outside of the Passion and Nativity. Barnard's thesis seems to be that any performance that can be incorporated into the churches' worship services would be a step in the right direction. He backs his argument up with examples of what is being done along with positive feedback reported from the congregations/audiences. Ultimately, he offers a valuable snapshot of where performance in the churches was in the 1950s but fails to offer the kind of practical advice that could be used to incorporate performance into worship services in today's environment.

Barrager's (1981) *Spiritual Growth Through Creative Dramatics* is a very good instructional work, but it does not advocate the use of performance in worship services. It is concerned, instead, with performance as a vehicle for education and discipleship. Barrager's argument is that performance is the quickest, most fully involving way of getting people (particularly youth) involved with, invested in, and focused on their spiritual life. Full embodiment engages the mind and body much more than mere intellectual study of scriptural lessons. He offers a complete program of games, activities and ideas for using performance in a Bible Study or workshop environment.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the literature covers the history of the intersections of religion and theater, offers sound theoretical analysis of the confluence, and provides adequate, if elementary, practical advice. The sources discussing the history are the most thorough. The subject is addressed by historical scholars of religion, theater, and culture. They cover pre-history up to modern performative practices. The omission is

Christian Repertory Theater, the newest performance practice to evolve. CRT is the subject which this study seeks to explore. The theoretical discussion concentrates on the rift within the church between the “anti-theatricals” and the performance apologists. The current study adds a new genre to the discussion, not a new philosophical standpoint. Finally, the material which offers practical advice is abundant, but ultimately lacking. It lacks both depth and breadth. It lacks depth because of the level at which most of it is written. Aimed at an audience of the naive and inexperienced, it does not achieve the level of expertise that secular texts offer. The lower level of the material in terms of performance expertise is due to its dual function of both education and persuasion. The authors in this area seem to be attempting to persuade people that “anybody can do it” while at the same time giving this large mass the tools necessary to do the job correctly. Ultimately, the task is too great. The discussion lacks breadth because it is overly focused on the pageant. The few texts that do address other subjects lack the depth and richness of their counterparts concerning the pageant. This lack is undoubtedly due to the relative youth of the movement. That is another lack which the current study seeks to satisfy.

CHAPTER 3: ACTS 2

The church is typical of a large, Protestant church in the United States. The audience sits in cushioned pews arranged facing the dais. The front of the church contains room for a choir, an orchestra, a large area for preaching/worship leading, and a pulpit. During this service, there is both a choir and orchestra. After a time of corporate music by the congregation, four chairs were quickly and efficiently placed in a row to the left (all directions are those of the audience) of the pulpit. After the chairs were arranged, the lights in the auditorium dimmed. Isolation lights during the performance rendered the orchestra and choir dark but not invisible.

The vignette used four players (three women and a man). All players were attired in traditional "Sunday Dress." There seemed to be nothing theatrical about the costumes. Seemingly, no effort was made to aid in characterization or visibility. The performers were dressed as the rest of the congregation and were not wearing "stage" make-up. The first player to speak was the man. He was in the chair on the far right, nearest to the pulpit. He held an offering plate in his hands and delivered his soliloquy to an unidentified "ideal" audience. His facial expressions and other nonverbal communication made it clear that he was not pleased to be holding the plate. He was justifying why he did not contribute financially to the church. He claimed that the church was already "nice enough." He then listed the reasons why he needed his money more than the church did. Included in his list were personal items as well as charitable deeds. The man then passed the plate to the woman next to him (audience left). She delivered her monologue while placing an envelope in the plate, turning it over several times while she spoke. Her monologue spoke of "inspiring others" by her willingness to

give. It was evident that her goal was to be seen by others as she gave. She fantasized about recognition from the church staff and her peers for her generosity, going so far as to dream of being called up on the stage and applauded for her contribution. She then passed the plate to the next woman.

The third woman was wracked with guilt over an occurrence when she was thirteen (she had lied to her mother). She then went on to list a litany of personal shortcomings. Every time she mentioned anything negative about herself, she placed another item into the plate. She gave everything that she had: money, credit cards, wallet, even her shoes. Her overly-penitent attitude made for a comic juxtaposition with the other more subtle players. After loading up the plate, she passed it to the lady on to next performer.

This lady was quite apparently and explicitly the solution to this morality play, the antidote, the resolution to the vignette. She expressed her gratitude for the things in her life: food, a bed, a warm shower, a good week and was glad to be able to tangibly express her gratitude. Her monologue was the only one delivered in the form of a prayer. As she finished, the lights faded, and the characters took their chairs and exited the stage. When the lights came back up, the preacher approached the pulpit and began his sermon on contributing financially to the church.

This was a performance of Acts 2, the Christian Repertory Theater troupe of Two Rivers Baptist Church in Nashville, TN. Acts 2 is the first group examined in this study. It represents the most common variety of CRT troupe, those associated with and sponsored by a larger religious body, most commonly a church. In existence for most of the last twenty years, Acts 2 generally performs in their own church. They do both small sketches in regular worship services and major productions in conjunction with the

music ministry of the church at Christmas and Easter. Similar groups across the country include Innermission from Travis Avenue Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX, Adventist Christian Theater from Carmichael Seventh Day Adventist Church in Sacramento, CA, and The Lighthouse Players in Clinton, MS. Acts 2 serves as the host for the decadal celebration of Christian drama sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention. As such, they serve as a good exemplar of the genre.

Acts 2 has a varied history. Its present incarnation is actually a re-start. History has several versions here, but one story has them as originally composed primarily of students (Amanda Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003), while another has them as a more eclectic band even in their original form (Cathy Bell, personal communication, January, 2004). Either way, it existed for several years in some form before fading out for a couple of years. This fade occurred because the church went through a change of personnel in the position of Minister of Music. Eight years ago Carey Dean came on staff at the church at that position. It was his idea to re-start a CRT troupe, and he appointed Cathy Bell, Worship and Event Coordinator, to oversee the group. "Out of a strong desire to reach out and help bring visual things to his [the Pastor's] message," Acts 2 was re-born in the fall of 1998 (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003).

This chapter attempts to demonstrate the nature of CRT as it functions within an SBC church. The vast majority of all CRT groups are of this variety. They vary in make-up, leadership, expertise, and performance style, but they are all sponsored by a church. This chapter concentrates specifically on the relationship between religion and performance as it is here that that relationship is most evident. The other two groups are still affected by the confluence, but their performances are not as directly controlled

by religious authority. Because of the group's primary motivation, this analysis also helps provide an understanding of the subtle nature of the relationship that exists between the dual functions of performance and ministry within CRT troupes. As argued in the introduction, that relationship is key to an understanding of CRT as a practice. As such, this chapter provides insight into the definition of CRT as well. As mentioned in the first chapter, the case study analyses contain sections on motivation, leadership, institutional support, and practice. I feel that these are the four areas which most help define what CRT is, analyze its various factors, and apply its theoretical implications to a larger context.

Motivation

As the vast majority of CRT troupes are voluntary, amateur groups, and those who are paid are done so only modestly, motivation is a key factor in the practice. Two facets of motivation are here discussed: group and personal. This section examines why groups are constituted, the dichotomy between performance and ministry, and group cohesion. On the personal level, attraction to performance in general, religious performance, and the specific group are discussed. These areas of analysis go a long way toward addressing the over-arching theoretical areas of both definition and practice.

Group

The mission statement for Acts 2 is literally the book of Acts, chapter 2. They cite the entire chapter as their inspiration and purpose. The chapter describes the descending of the Holy Spirit on the New Testament church during the Pentecost, Peter's subsequent sermon, and the resulting growth of the church. Verses 7b-11 of the text read:

(7b) Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? (8) And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? (9) Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, (10) Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, (11) both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God. (King James Version)

The group's goal is to make accessible the truths of their religion as they see them to an audience which may find them otherwise beyond their grasp. Acts 2 equates the congregants in their church with the people gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. They attempt to use as many "languages" as possible in order to reach them. Peter used words which the Holy Spirit translated for each individual into his or her native tongue. Acts 2 uses the languages of text, actions, characterizations, props, and costumes.

Further, it is the hope of Acts 2 that they would personify the kind of spiritual awakening, fervency, and true belief that is described throughout this chapter. Just as Peter introduced the message of Jesus Christ as a messianic figure to those assembled in Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Pentecost, Acts 2 attempts to proclaim that message to those in their church on a regular basis. Whereas it was the message of Peter that was new and unique, Acts 2 views their method of proclaiming that message to be new and unique. Even a casual conversation with members of the group provides a sense of this palpable excitement. Its members feel that oftentimes people cease to hear the message when it is presented in the same way for an extended period of time. CRT is a way for those already accustomed to the message to find newness and originality in their worship experience. They feel that drama is a new way of presenting an old Truth. The members are careful to note that their message is in no way new. They are ever mindful that their purpose is to reinforce the message of the pastor and worship leader, not teach a new doctrine.

As Bell reminds us, Acts 2 came about “out of a strong desire to reach out and help bring visual things to his [the Pastor’s] message” (personal communication, November, 2003). The group was officially constituted solely for the purpose of the supporting the pastor’s message. The ideas that the group would be a good way to get more people involved in the church’s ministries, that it would be a good ministry to its participants, and that it would allow for those gifted in theater to use their gifts were also raised by Dean and Bell in their original meeting, though (Bell, personal communication, November 2003). The point is that the motivation for the group’s formulation was ministry in terms of presenting the message, not performance practice.

Personal

Acts 2 does not call itself a theater group; it is a “drama ministry.” The use of the term “drama” aside, the label of “ministry” is significant. This label is explicit in the group’s name, implicit in their attitude concerning what they do, and carefully explained to anyone who asks. The individuals involved in the ministry draw their motivation from their spirituality, not from the desire to perform. Three areas of motivation seem to be foremost for the group. The first is that of expressing the Gospel message. This goal is a direct extension of every practicing Christian. Jesus’ last words to His followers were that they were to “go and make disciples.” Acts 2 attempts to open up various avenues to reach people rather than relying on the traditional protestant channels of homiletics and music (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). They attempt to dramatize the points that the pastor will make, is making, or has made (depending on the order of service) during his daily sermon so that an audience can have a clearer picture of the theology, lesson, or narrative. The group is also used to promote up-coming church events. The seemingly trite task of event-promotion is taken seriously by the group as

both a performance opportunity and the chance to encourage others to deepen their spiritual commitment by attending religious events.

The second area of motivation is the members' desire to use their talents. Although most of the members in the group have little theatrical training or experience, they all feel uniquely led to express their faith in this manner. A corollary to this calling is the sincere belief that they are gifted in it. Despite the presence of truly novice actors (and even occasionally directors), the group aims for a high level of professionalism and skill within their performances. The interview process described below is a rigorous test of an individual's desire to join the group. The coordinators of the group routinely turn down as many people as they let into the group (Terrell, personal communication, November 2003). They take their rehearsals and performances very seriously, considering themselves an integral part of the worship experience.

Finally, the group looks inward for motivation. The group serves a mentoring function for all of its members. Amanda Terrell and Sheri Simpson, the group's coordinators, seek to make the entire process, from auditions to rehearsals to performances, a part of the actors' spiritual journey. In this way, the two serve as de facto spiritual advisors for the members of the group. For many, Acts 2 becomes their primary area of interaction and spiritual support within the church (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003). The attitude expressed by the group is that group cohesion and unity are extremely important to them. In practice, though, the group does not have any specific time set aside during rehearsals or assignments given to do outside of rehearsals for this purpose. From their first interaction with the group, usually as a spectator, throughout their experience with auditions and interviews and ultimately as a member, the members seem to hold the group up as both a standard and a

cherished part of their own lives (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003). In turn, the group serves as a ministry to its members as well as the rest of the church.

The motivation that drives Acts 2, on both corporate and personal levels, is ministry and the sharing of the gospel message. I suspected that there simply must be some pride in performance, desire for the spotlight, and joy in applause that would motivate some members, but nowhere did I find these in my observations or interviews. Every member, from the top of the organization on down, explicitly toed the company line. With the motivation of Acts 2's members in mind, the primary function of CRT is less clear. They are a performance troupe because that is what they do. However, they see themselves as a ministry team. Hence, an accurate description must include both performance and ministry. Both must be included for a thorough understanding of their practice.

Leadership

Much of this study concentrates on the practice of CRT troupes. The working definition of CRT is composed almost entirely of what they do, very much an operational definition. The case studies led me to believe that much of that practice is motivated and directed by the groups' leaders. CRT seems to function best where there is strong leadership to guide it. There is nothing new in that; I would dare to say that such is the case for most performance endeavors. Where CRT begins to differentiate itself from traditional theater, though, is that this leadership, as we will see, is not necessarily comprised of the best performers in the group, the most knowledgeable individuals about theater, or the ones with the most experience. Still, CRT groups are so loosely constructed and often lowly prioritized in the lives of its memberships, that they must have strong leaders in order to sustain themselves. The current exemplar is an

example of two interesting phenomena. First, Acts 2's leadership is not based on performance skill. Second, its ultimate authority lies outside of the actual group. The two areas of leadership that are analyzed are its selection and its training.

Selection

Shortly after the group was initiated by Dean as the new Minister of Music at the church, Amanda Terrell and Sheri Simpson were chosen as “coordinators” for the group by Dean and Bell. “This decision was one that Carey Dean and I made together after much prayer and seeking the Lord's direction” (Bell, personal communication, January 2004). Dean and the Associate Music Director, Cathy Bell, chose the leadership together. “They were two members of the group who were put on our hearts” (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). No specific criteria were used in the selection process. Dean and Bell simply selected the people from the existing group whom they thought would and could best lead the group. Both were approached with the offer and eagerly accepted the positions. In their positions, they are in charge of recruiting, casting, setting schedules, and other administrative duties for the group. They are not, however, the ultimate voices of authority for the group (which remains with Dean) or even its primary artistic directors (which is shared by the group members).

Terrell has served on staff at a private, Christian elementary school and now works in the Dollar General corporate office. Before accepting the position with Acts 2, her primary theater experience was directing small-scale productions at the elementary school. Simpson had even less experience, dabbling with theater in high school and in her previous church. The decision for their promotion from members to leaders within the group can be attributed almost solely to the spiritual and leadership elements of their experience and training and not the theatrical. The promotion of Terrell and

Simpson is another example of the emphasis within the group on ministry even at the expense of performance excellence.

Both of Acts 2's coordinators are female. Nothing has been made by anyone in the group or the church about this fact. Bell claims that the coordinators' gender has "never been a problem . . . and it has never posed a problem scripturally" (personal communication, November, 2003). The practice of the group would seem to contradict the philosophy of the larger group of which they are a part. The Southern Baptist Convention has made it clear that women are not to hold positions of leadership over men, that they are to "graciously submit" to their husbands in all matters, and that they are not to serve in the position of "Minister" at the local church level. Bell is quick to point out that their title is that of "Coordinator," and not that of minister. The distinction brings to mind the word-game played in many SBC churches that have a Minister to Young Adults, a College Minister, a Youth Minister, even a Children's Minister, but insist on having a *Preschool Director*. The insistence is due to the fact that most of the people who feel called to *minister* to young children just happen to be female.

Nevertheless, this artful dodge seems to work for the group. In all reality, the two ladies do serve more as coordinators than directors, and they are certainly not ministers, a title which holds very specific connotations and requirements within the SBC. In fact, they often hand off directing duties to those members who are more trained than they. It is noteworthy that they avoid the word "director" so purposefully while "coordinating" a performance troupe. This situation is especially interesting in its practice at Two Rivers considering the positions of leadership within the SBC held by the church's Senior Pastor, Jerry Sutton. Most recently, Sutton chaired the prestigious and powerful Pastor's Conference of the SBC in 2000. In this light, the practice of

female leadership within CRT seems a bit more significant than were it practiced at a church less in line with the new fundamentalism of the SBC.

Furthermore, both coordinators are comparatively young (Terrell in her late 20s and Simpson in her mid 30s). With that, age is ruled out as a factor in rising to a position of leadership within the group. As a matter of fact, the group members seem to appreciate the idea that their leaders were not chosen based on theatrical expertise. They view them as equals and see the equality as a positive thing for the group. They are more able to relate to them on a personal level. Leadership within the group seems to have very little relationship to status. Simpson and Terrell's reputation within the group could also be attributed to the fact that they do very little actual directing, Simpson none at all. Their role is fundamental to the group, but they do not have to directly teach, direct, or correct the members. The dynamic of coordinating as opposed to actually directing allows them to maintain their positive relationship with the members more easily than would someone in a position of direct supervision.

One note of interest here is the structure of the group. The group arrives at its sense of identity not from within, but from its recognition by the church hierarchy. It is Sutton, Dean (who has recently left the church), and Bell who serve(d) major roles as sustainers and providers for the group despite their minimal role in the day-to-day operations of it. Simpson and Terrell serve as administrators and creative guides for the group, but their existence is not crucial for its survival. They are match-set pieces: remove them from the picture, and they could be replaced rather easily. However, remove Sutton's support from the group, and it would lose its purpose as he is the one who gives them access to their performance venue. Therefore, strong leadership is still a must for a CRT troupe, even when the structure of the leadership hierarchy lies

outside of the group's corpus. This distinction becomes even more relevant when looking at groups not sustained by a larger system of institutional support (as in Gen X). A group's leadership is a major factor in predicting its ultimate success or failure.

Training

As stated above, neither of the coordinators has an extensive background in the theater. Rather than attempt to rectify this situation, however, the group seems to revel in this fact. Viewing themselves as more of a "drama ministry" than a theater troupe, their coordinators were chosen as much for their ministerial abilities as their theater expertise. Terrell and Simpson are viewed as a part of the ministry no different from other members of the group. The group feels empowered to contribute to its own directing process. The coordinators, taking their cue from the Pastor, select the material, but after that, the group as a whole is involved in the direction process, with many of them taking their turn at direction.

Amanda Terrell is the primary artistic director for the group. In her late 20s and with little theater background or experience, Terrell is the coordinator for the actual performance tasks of the group. She selects most of the scripts, even writing some of them, and enlists group members for the performances. However, she generally stops short of actually directing the performances. The group has several directors, and they usually take over the process once the actual rehearsals for performance begin (Bell, personal communication, January, 2004). Terrell views herself as more of a facilitator than a director. She simply tries to get the right people in the right roles and let them do their jobs. Further, as she has little training herself, she tries not to be overly intrusive in actual performance direction or instruction (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003). When the group participates in the more complex production at Easter, the

Minister of Music fills the Producer role while one of the group members, Paul Klapper, takes over the direction of the group, including blocking, rehearsing, characterization, and the technical elements of the performance.

Sheri Simpson, in her mid 30s, deals with more of the administrative part of the group, such as setting schedules and planning rehearsals. Although she is an active member of the group as an actress, she views her role as a coordinator strictly in terms of administration. She does not view herself as a “director” in the theatrical sense of the word. She is, however, still an integral part of the leadership of the group. Once again, the group serves internal ministry functions as well as the more obvious external ones.

Another interesting “layer” in the leadership of the group comes in the person of Paul Klapper. He has professional experience as both an actor and director. He is one of the selection panel for new members, directs many of the CRT performances, and is the primary director for the church’s major pageants. He directed a community-wide children’s theater program in Nashville for some time (Bell, personal communication, January, 2004). Klapper lies outside the official leadership of the group, though.

In sum, Acts 2 has three tiers of leadership. The first level consists of two of the least experienced players in the troupe. The second tier consists of individuals not even members of the group itself. The final tier provides theatrical expertise but is not a part of the recognized group structure. Terrell and Simpson provide the group with internal nurture and organization, allowing the members themselves to lead much of the actual performance practice. Dean (before he left) and Bell provide the group with external motivation, opportunities to perform, and legitimacy within the larger culture of the church. Klapper, who is a member of the troupe, directs many of the performances.

CRT must have strong leadership, but here we see that leadership can take a variety of forms.

Institutional Support

Institutional support is the area of this case study which sets it apart from the others. Acts 2 is expressly and explicitly sponsored by and tied to an SBC church. It is a sub-set of the church in every way imaginable: membership, finances, location, even motivation. Acts 2 is an example of religion and performance being melded into one institutional practice. Adding to the mix is the fact that Two Rivers' Senior Pastor is a leader in the fundamentalist movement of the SBC which holds strong and vocal opinions regarding female leadership, worship style, and uniformity of doctrine. The functioning of these two seemingly disparate mind-sets under the same umbrella is intriguing and significant. Here, we look at the support received by the group in terms of financing, membership and performance opportunities. This section examines how the church helps the group with its internal functioning and affairs, and how it allows the group to achieve its external goals and ultimately fulfill its purpose.

Financial Backing

Financial backing refers to all of the monetary support offered by the host organization. CRT groups require funding for everything from travel to costumes to scripts. Two Rivers Baptist Church has included Acts 2 in its budget for its Music Ministry which, in turn, annually allots money for costumes, props, and other necessities. Acts 2 also has volunteers who make costumes, eliminating a great deal of those expenses. Further, the group solicits and accepts donations from church members and the community. The biggest community donation came three years ago

when the theme park Opryland donated a great many costumes to the church upon its closing (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003).

Acts 2 rarely travels outside of its own church, but when they do, a budget line from their own church allows them to do so at no expense to the host church or organization (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). This internal financing allows the group to be more open to external performance opportunities, regardless of whether or not a sponsoring group can afford the expenses that traditionally would be associated with hosting a CRT troupe.

Although their budget is not large, it is sufficient to meet all of the needs of the all-volunteer group. They make every attempt to do their vignettes with minimal costuming and props for practical reasons, but this also serves to keep the operating budget down. The only times of the year when the group does require a great deal of costuming and technical support are during the church's major pageant, and that event is sponsored explicitly by the music ministry, relieving the group of any financial responsibility where that event is concerned. Acts 2 is fortunate to be a member of an organization which supports them financially and relieves them of the burden of fiscal survival. The other groups in this study are not as well situated.

Membership

As a ministry of Two Rivers Baptist Church, Acts 2 draws its membership from the members of the church. A belief in the same religion is presupposed of all of the members, though the interview process does require a statement of faith. The group is held in high esteem by the members of the church, and membership is viewed as an honor (Simpson, personal communication, November 2003). Bell and Sutton both emphasize to the congregation the amount of time and dedication that membership

requires. They want to ensure that only those members who are serious about the ministry take the initial step of auditioning. As is always the case for performance, the members of the group are in front of an audience, so there is the eternal appeal of the spotlight to attract new members. The constant struggle for the group is to balance the call of the spotlight with the spiritual purpose of the group (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). As stated above, members of the group claim only ministry as their purpose.

Performance Opportunities

For a group to be successful, it must have the opportunity to perform. Acts 2 receives this opportunity from the same source as its membership and funding. It is in the worship services of Two Rivers Baptist Church where Acts 2 finds its primary outlet for performance. The request for their services generally comes from the Pastor, Jerry Sutton. When he feels that a dramatization of his message is appropriate, he makes the request to Bell who passes it on to the group's coordinators. He tries to make the request at least a month in advance to allow the group time to prepare. The coordinators then search for material that would be appropriate for that message. They either find the material in a printed source or write their own. The sketches are generally between five and seven minutes long. The group usually performs immediately before the pastor delivers his sermon (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003).

Skits are also used to promote special events. Church promotions, concerts, fund drives, and even community and inter-denominational events have been advertised during the worship services by the group. These performances are much less formal than worship-oriented sketches. They are always written by the group

members and have a more laid-back, impromptu feel to them (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003).

The group has also found other outlets for performance within the church. They have, on occasion, performed for Sunday School classes of various ages, particularly youth and senior adults. They have also performed at rallies and other special events for these age groups. It is on occasions such as these that the group gets to use their entire repertoire, ranging from entertainment to education to worship. These are the performances where the group is allowed the chance to combine multiple sketches into a longer, unified performance (Simpson, personal communication, November, 2003). It is during these opportunities that the group most resembles a traditional performance troupe.

Acts 2 has performed in other churches as well. The latest example has been the Word of Life Church, in Smyrna, Tennessee. At Word of Life, the group participated in a workshop and drama conference. This collaboration has led to the consideration by both groups of partnering to deliver their message to the large community of which they are a part. One possible implication for this partnership may include performances in local schools, primarily private academies (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003).

What we find in the case of Acts 2's blend of religion and performance is a surprising lack of conflict. The historical conflict between the two worlds has simply not surfaced in any tangible way at their church. The church willingly meets the group's minimal budgetary requirements. The church members regularly audition for the group to the point where only approximately one-half of those auditioning make the group. The group has plenty of performance opportunities, both in the regular worship services

of the church and in other venues. Every age within the church seems to have accepted them. They have performed for both youth rallies and senior adult banquets. The church has even underwritten their burgeoning efforts to take their act on the road. This cooperation may not make for great theatre, but it does create an excellent environment for a CRT group to grow, learn their craft, and flourish.

Practice

In large part, this study seeks to define CRT. The practice of the group is the largest element of that definition. Acts 2 provides a glimpse of a group for whose membership CRT is an extra-curricular activity, for many of whom this is one of the lower items on their priority list. The group is forced to function without being its members' top priority to coordinate rehearsals, schedules, and performance opportunities. The three areas that are covered are member selection, rehearsals, and performances.

Member Selection

Coordinators Terrell and Simpson, Bell, and member Paul Klapper, who directs many of the group's performances, are in charge of casting the group for the year. Returning members do not re-audition, although, "our existing members do come through an 'interview' time where they have opportunities to re-commit to the schedule and purpose of the drama ministry" (Bell, personal communication, January 2004). The group maintains about twenty members. According to Bell, most of the members are female, and they are always looking for more males. "It's kind of a joke. We always say, 'If a man walks through the door who can read a script, he's automatically in the group'" (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003).

Auditions are held each August. The casting call is made in church worship services both orally and through video announcements, in the printed weekly bulletins handed out at the services, and in the monthly newsletters mailed to the church membership. Those interested in auditioning must sign up and obtain an audition packet, which includes a monologue. The auditions are held over three evenings, and the group usually has about ten to fifteen individuals audition for between three and ten slots, depending on group turnover that year. Each person must deliver the one-minute monologue included in the audition packet and give a personal testimony. Letters are sent out informing the participants of the results of the auditions. (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003)

Members are cast according to their theatrical ability, but the coordinators also weigh their personal testimonies. It is a delicate balance between talent and calling. The selection committee has two goals: to select a talented cast of performers and to select a group of people dedicated the purpose of the group (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). The talent side of the equation is the easiest to judge and is in line with other repertory theater companies. Matters of training, experience, flexibility, availability, and personality are all significant factors in determining a person's value as a performer to the group. These factors are determined at the audition, through the interview, and from the application. This part of the process is much like the casting of any other theatrical company, play or performance endeavor. The selection committee examines the applications, watches the monologues, and conducts the interviews before arriving at a consensus on the players with the most performance value.

The other side of the equation is more difficult to judge. The committee wants to ensure that potential members desire to join the group for reasons in line with its purpose. As such, the members' personal lives should reflect the Christian way of life (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). Obviously, this varies a great deal from other groups where such questions or requirements would not only be out of place but, in most cases, illegal. However, since the group views itself as a ministry team and not primarily a performance troupe, the requirement does make sense. It is the same requirement placed on all of the members of the church's staff (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). No personal creed or declaration of faith is required of the members of the group. They only have to proclaim faith in Jesus Christ, be baptized into the Baptist faith, and have joined Two Rivers Baptist Church. All other matters of doctrinal purity or personal integrity are handled within the group and are not considered justification for asking anyone to leave the group (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003).

To me, this tightrope act is the most theoretically significant factor of this group. This church denies less talented members the right/opportunity to exercise their talents in the way in which they feel called. They call themselves a ministry group; yet, they admittedly choose people based "primarily" on talent. They call themselves a performance group; yet, they eliminate potential cast members for their beliefs and values (less of a theoretical quandary as this is done in various secular groups as well). The requirement of faith for its cast members is one reason why I feel that CRT is a distinct style of performance troupe. No other group has this fine line to negotiate in such an explicit, extant fashion. Both functions, faith and performance, must be a part of any workable definition for CRT. Take away either function, either priority, either

characteristic, and the entire art is altered to the point of becoming something different entirely.

Requirements for membership in the group are that individuals be members of Two Rivers and at least 18 years old. The group is viewed as a ministry of the church which explains the requirement for membership in the church. One interesting theological aside here is the calling of the New Testament church to reach out to its community. The group feels that “ministers must reach a level of maturity before being allowed to minister” to the church, though (Simpson, personal communication, November, 2003). Since Acts 2 is viewed more as a ministry than as a showcase for talented actors, they feel that the requirement for membership in the church is appropriate. In this instance, Acts 2 chooses to emphasize the maturity of its ministry team over its desire to reach out to people outside of their church’s membership. That is also why the personal account of a potential group member’s relationship with God and his/her spiritual life is a significant portion of the audition. I do find it interesting that when it suits their needs, they use the word “minister” much more indiscriminately than when they are trying to explain how a woman can be in charge of a man.

The age requirement is more of a practical step. In times past, the group consisted of a great many junior high and high school students and a few college students. Having the group so constituted proved difficult practically because of the conflicting and crowded schedules of this age group. It was simply difficult to find a time when all of the members could meet to rehearse. Therefore, the group instituted the age limit (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003). Dealing with schedule conflicts is still a sometimes-difficult matter, but most of the members are now in the same stage of life.

Rehearsals

Acts 2 typically meets every other week, or two times a month. Regularly scheduled meetings are held on Sunday afternoons whether the group has a scheduled performance or not. When a performance is coming up, the group generally practices on Tuesday and/or Thursday nights. Saturday rehearsals are also common (Bell, personal communication, January, 2004). Most of the rehearsals are on the basis of need. Most of the group does not have to attend all the rehearsals because the cast is announced in the meetings. As such, the group operates more on a script-to-script basis rather than as a creative, idea-generating company. By the time they meet, the script, the casting, and the performance date are already in place. Very little time is given over to the specific tasks of actor-training, improvisation, or exercises. The group exists for the purpose of staging presentations for worship services, and their time management demonstrates this priority.

Meetings begin with a short devotion given by one of the group members. Topics vary and are not necessarily geared toward either performance practice or the sketch being rehearsed at that time. The business of the group is usually discussed next. Scripts are passed out, and schedules are discussed. Members who are not in the sketch or sketches being practiced at that rehearsal are free to go, even though many choose to remain for a variety of reasons such as performance education, group support or simple curiosity. The rest of the time is given over to rehearsal of a specific piece, or the group is simply dismissed if no performance is looming (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003).

Rehearsals take place in both in a classroom environment and in the church's worship center. The group's primary home is a classroom space, but final blocking and

polishing rehearsals for all of the sketches take place in the worship center. Terrell generally runs the group's rehearsal time either by explicit direction or appointing the person who will be directing the piece. Usually, a piece will be rehearsed for two to three weeks before it is ready for performance. The process of rehearsal runs parallel to any other dramatic endeavor. The piece is cast by the director, and the cast has an initial read-through (usually in the classroom). Next, they get the piece "on its feet" by staging the blocking. By now, most of the directors in the group have a pretty good understanding of their performance area, so they can usually stay in the classroom for the initial blocking. After the piece is blocked and in a somewhat finalized form, they move into the worship center for final polishing and the addition of any technical elements. Each rehearsal session runs between one to two hours (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003).

Performances

The group primarily performs in their church, which is described in this chapter's introduction. Generally, the group uses minimal set pieces. As a small part of the larger worship service, the group has to be able to set up for their scene, perform it, and disassemble it in a matter of just a few moments. Most pieces last no more than seven minutes, and that amount of time does not justify (in the minds of the worship leaders) the setting up of large set-pieces (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). The group uses a great deal of abstract staging, using chairs for a variety of purposes. They also have to deal with the presence of the podium on stage, but it is clear, light-weight acrylic that can be, and generally is, moved out of the way for the performances. Sometimes, they perform to one side of it or on the steps in front of it. Other impediments to blocking are the grand piano, decorative columns framing the stage,

and a dividing wall that separates the orchestra from the platform. Another issue with which they deal is the fact that the church's worship services are televised. Therefore, their staging must be amenable to the cameras as well as the live audience. Obviously, these requirements change dramatically when the group is staging their annual Easter Passion Play, but that performance is quantitatively different from the regular performances of the group as it incorporates the entire choir, massive sets, extensive costuming, a much longer script, extensive technical elements, and church and community advertising.

During its repertory performance opportunities, Acts 2 concentrates on what could be called "traditional drama." They avoid pantomime, claiming that "unless it is done almost perfect, it really does not work too well" (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). They like to be very active and vocal. They prefer "traditional acting" (performers fully embodying characters on stage). They are not a highly experimental group. Most of their performances are straight-forward narratives with simple plot-lines, clear antagonists and protagonists, one clearly defined message, and little narration (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). A couple of examples may help provide a clearer understanding of their practice.

At the decanal celebration of the arts hosted by their church, the group presented a dramatized version of the "David and Goliath" story from the book of First Samuel. The piece had four main characters: David, Goliath, King Saul, and Goliath's sword bearer. Two other performers narrated the action and had a few audience asides. The only prop used was the chair Goliath stood on to make himself tall. (In actuality, the performer playing Goliath was rather short, and they played to that in the description of the character.) The actors essentially portrayed the time-worn storyline from David's

arrival at the camp of the Israelites to his ultimate defeat of Saul. The piece was highly entertaining, extremely professional, direct in its message, and also very funny.

Another example comes from a performance entitled “Meet Joe: The Compassion of Jesus.” It was a part of a six week series the group did that ran during the Two Rivers’ Sunday morning services. I am including the script as it was written:

(Standing with tire that has just been changed. Sandy is attempting to pay him for helping her.)

Sandy: I really do want to pay you for your effort here...

Joe: Oh... never you mind! I won't accept any payment. I'm just glad to be of help.

Joey: *(running in from SR with toy)* Mom!

Sandy: Joey... you sit right over there and play for a few minutes, okay?
(Joey sits down with toy and plays quietly)

Joe: Your son's name is Joey? What a coincidence...

Sandy: Excuse me?

Joe: Oh sorry... my name is Joe. Funny, huh?

Sandy: That is odd.

Joe: Well... I figure if I'm gonna change your flat tire... you should at least know my name. Joe McCormick *(reaches out to shake her hand)*

Sandy: Hi Joe. I'm Sandy... that's my son Joey

Joe: He's a fine-looking young man

Sandy: Thanks. He's the spittin' image of his father. Listen... I really do want to thank you for helping me. If you won't take my money, could I at least give you something to eat for lunch? Or something to drink? We have an ice chest in the car.

Joe: Well... I wouldn't say no to a cold drink

Sandy: *(to Joey)* Joey... honey go grab a couple of cokes from the car... you can have one too. *(Joey runs and brings drinks back. Hands them off and continues to play)*

Joe: Looks like ya'll are on a big adventure! Got your car loaded down. Are you going home for the holidays?

Sandy: Sort of. We're in the process of moving back in with my family. My husband and I had a small business down in Florida. I just sold it on Thursday to a family friend.

Joe: I see. Your husband... did he head up this way before you?

Sandy: No...

Joe: Oh... he's finishing up the loose ends...

Sandy: Not exactly. He was killed in a car accident a few months ago.

Joe: I'm so sorry...

Sandy: Thanks... *(begins to cry)* It was just so unexpected, you know? You never plan for something like this to happen. I never expected to be a widow at 36... or a single mother! Simon and I were

partners... in everything! (*apologizing*) I'm sorry... I just cry at the drop of a hat nowadays. I'm so tired of crying?

Joe: I know a little of how you feel...

Sandy: (*not hearing, but continuing on*) I sold the business... Simon was the brains behind it, and I didn't want it to fail. I sold the house... the house WE built together! I remember picking out all the colors... and doing Joey's room together before he was born. It was just going to be too much for me to try and keep up by myself... and all those memories... I couldn't hardly stand to walk in the door anymore. I just kept waiting for Simon to come home...

Joe: (*comforting*) There... there... (*hands her a handkerchief*) I know it's hard. You may not believe me right now, but you will heal... with time. I lost my wife two years ago to cancer. It was a long struggle. Part of me wanted her not to suffer... and part of me wanted to hold on to her. You know... people think that if you're older, it's easier. It makes more sense for people to die when they have reached a certain age. But it's never easy to say goodbye to someone you love. As a matter of fact... I never said goodbye to [NAME OF JOE'S WIFE—DETERMINED BY JOE] ... I just told her I'd see her later... because I know that one day, I will. Do you know what I mean?

Sandy: Yes... my husband was a Christian. I am too. I just don't know why God would let this happen, you know? I'm trying not to be hurt or angry... but it doesn't always work.

Joe: That's when you have to remember all the things He has blessed you with. That's not always easy either. Sometimes we only see how bad it is... our circumstances... when really, the Lord wants us to see Him. To keep ourselves focused on Him. He's certainly blessed you... your son is a wonderful gift from God.

Sandy: He has brightened up many lonely nights here lately. His bedtime prayers are just precious. He's begun to really look out for me... Simon would be proud. Joey's become quite the little man of the house.

Joe: Let me give you just a small piece of advice from an old man... when you have those really bad days... cling to the Word of God. Let me tell you what has really helped me in the past two years... a verse in Psalms that says "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." That verse has meant the world to me. Not only did my wife's life matter to God... but her death did too. He *never* leaves us... death is just a door to our new life.

Sandy: I never thought about it that way. Thank you Joe. Thank you for listening to me... and for changing my tire! I just don't know what we would have done if you had not come along.

Joe: I was glad to do it.

Sandy: (*to Joey*) Joey... come on. We need to pack back up and hit the road again.

Joey: Mom... have you been crying again? Please don't cry anymore.

Sandy: Oh, I'll be all right. I just need a hug. *(Sandy and Joey embrace)*
 Do you want to thank Mr. Joe here?

Joey: Wow... you've got my name! Well, thanks Mr. Joe.

Joe: Joey... you be sure and take good care of your mother now, okay?

Joey: Yes sir... I will. *(Sandy and Joey start to walk away)*

Joe: *(takes red ball cap off... calling after them)* Joey! *(Joey runs back)*
 Here... You're the man in your house now... why don't you take
 this? *(Places cap on Joey's head)*

Joey: Thanks Mr. Joe *(exits with Sandy SR... Joe exits with tire at SL)*
 (Acts 2)

Such scripts are easily staged, not reliant on technology, and generally fall under the classification of the vignette.

Acts 2 has the specific concentration on drama as a genre because it is only one of the ministry teams at Two Rivers. With dance, music, and preaching all involved in the various ministries of the church, the congregation is provided with many different types of performance and audiovisual stimulation. Acts 2 feels that its responsibility is geared toward strictly dramatic representation.

This re-surfaces the definitional purpose of the study. CRT must be categorized as either a genre, a performance style, or a theatrical movement. Or perhaps it is some combination of the three. The typical performances of Acts 2 would seem to reinforce the definition offered at the outset of the study. They focus on short sketches that require virtually no technical elements or special props. Their actors usually fully embody characters, and the pieces call for a suspension of disbelief on the part of their audience.

The closest the group has come to a form of non-traditional theater was during a performance when the performers were planted out in the audience. The group performed a sketch entitled "Heart of Worship" during a Sunday evening worship service. The piece, written and directed by group member Kathy Biggers, was intended to "make people aware of the spiritual warfare that goes on even in church and the

things the devil uses to distract from worship” (Simpson, personal communication, November 2003). The cast members began the sketch seated among the audience. To begin the piece, other cast members entered the auditorium from various directions dressed as demons. Each demon “attacked” a target (one of the group members in the audience). The conversations between the demons and the congregants dealt with pride, self-consciousness and criticism. Essentially, the demons were encouraging their targets to sin. For example, one of the interactions concerned self-consciousness:

Self Conscious: *(Folds arms together and overdramatizes shrinking into self. Uncertain assumes same posture, but less dramatic)* Well, we're here. But does anybody care? I don't think so. Has anybody noticed. Not a chance.

Uncertain: *(to self)* Nobody has said hello to me even once. Not once. Not even SMILED at me. What am I doing wrong?

Self Conscious: Give me a break. *(mocking)* What am I doing wrong? This is CHURCH!. These people are supposed to be *(sneering)* loving! You aren't supposed to have to do anything. *(Uncertain begins to look hurt/angry)* They're just supposed to LOVE you! What about these folks in these pews? How often, in the three weeks you've been coming, have they even looked at you?

Uncertain: Well, I never sit in the same place twice.

Self Conscious: WHO CARES!!!! IT'S THEIR JOB TO FIND YOU!! THAT'S WHY YOU'RE HERE, RIGHT?!

Uncertain: *(confused and beginning to be a little frantic)* I don't know. I need to think. I ... I ... I don't know.

Self Conscious: *(drapes solicitous arm over Uncertain)* Well, c'mon, Sweetie. We'll think together, okay? *(Acts 2, The Altar)*

As the targets began to indulge in their “sin,” other group members began to sing the contemporary Christian song, “The Heart of Worship.” With this, angels appeared and the demons fled. The targets left the audience and came down to the altar to repent (Terrell, personal communication, November, 2003). According to Bell, “it was a very powerful skit. We got a very strong response” (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003).

As far as actually using audience members in their performances, Bell observed that this practice sometimes causes the audience members to feel uneasy (personal communication, November, 2003). This relatively common practice in experimental theater has yet to be utilized by Acts 2. They know that the audience will be involved in singing during the course of the service, will hear a sermon right after their performance, and will have a chance to respond to the message after the sermon is over. Therefore, they do not feel compelled to draw the audience into their performances at the level of actual physical involvement.

Surprisingly, the group uses costumes and props during a majority of their performances during the church's worship services. Most of the time, the costumes are few in number simply because of the small number of characters and can be handled rather easily. The one exception during the calendar year is the Easter performance when the group is joined by the choir and others and therefore uses a great deal of both costumes and props. This production is seen as a part of the entire Music Ministry, however, and the group is simply the core of the larger effort.

For their weekly performances, costumes range from Biblical attire to "regular street clothes." As noted above, the group received a large donation of costumes from Opryland when the theme park itself ceased operation. From that gift, the group has a large store of costumes and props from which to choose. If they cannot find what they are looking for in that collection, however, the hotel is their next option. The Opryland Hotel is still thriving and uses costumed workers for many of its special celebrations and events. The church has a working relationship with the hotel and can borrow costumes that are not currently in use. Exhausting these possibilities, the group has several volunteers in the church who make costumes for them. If the sketch is planned far

enough ahead, making costumes is a viable option. Renting or buying costumes is viewed as the last resort, but they have done so in the past for elaborate or complicated necessities (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003).

The group feels that appropriate costuming adds to their performances, allowing the audience to be more caught up in the performance. Costuming is another way in which the group distinguishes itself from the homiletic ministry of the church. Costuming allows the audience to suspend its disbelief and view the actors more in character than they would while listening to the same message in the form of a sermon (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). Costuming is one area in which the group varies significantly from the other groups in this study. As will be noted later, when a group is performing several sketches in succession, costuming is not a viable option due to practical concerns. However, Acts 2 still falls easily within the spectrum of what a CRT troupe can be. The “few technical elements” within the working definition can certainly allow for the costuming of pieces done independently and at the host institution.

The way that Acts 2 goes about the business of performance offers a blueprint for conducting a similar troupe. The first and foremost observation concerning their practice is that they aim for an extremely high level of professionalism. The actual performances are of an extremely high quality, demonstrating professionalism on the part of the actors and creativity on the part of the entire cast. Rehearsals and meetings are also geared toward performance excellence. Some time is taken at the beginning of the meetings for a devotion, and the group begins and ends each rehearsal with prayer, but other than that, this group could easily be mistaken for any performance troupe of any purpose or type. As discussed in the introduction, the concept of good versus bad

performance is nebulous at best. However, Acts 2 clearly aims for and has the ability to achieve “good” performance. The second issue is its purpose. Practice is where the rubber truly meets the road, so to speak. Two things most clearly demonstrate our priorities: our checkbooks and our calendars. We spend money and time on the things that we most treasure. Setting aside money, it is clear that this group spends the majority of its time on performance. Does this contradict their stated goal to be a “ministry” group? I do not think so, because for them, performance is ministry, ministry is performance. What it does say is that this group feels more called to the public ministry of performance than to the more private ministry of, to and for each other. Once again, CRT is about performance, even if that performance comes from a religious motivation. The final lesson here is that CRT groups are created to perform and need to perform in order to survive. Without those opportunities, the group withers and dies. Acts 2 faded away without opportunities, but as soon as it was given a venue for performance it regained its status within the corpus. Acts 2 teaches us that CRT groups can be professional, performance-centered, active troupes.

Theory

It is significant to note that none of the people involved in the Acts 2 ministry had given much thought to the philosophical, historical, or even theological implications of their ministry. The thoughts and feelings here expressed are those of the group, but they were all implicit, expressed in their actions and policies, until this researcher began to bring some of their underlying theology and beliefs to the forefront of discussion.

In regard to the relationship of drama and religion, the group is aware of their varied past interactions. According to group member Nancy Klapper, “Drama started in the church long ago with the Catholics. Drama is a very good tool for reaching people

who may not have a background in the church.” She also added, “Jesus told stories; that’s the way He illustrated a lot of His messages.” As for Acts 2, she noted that she has not faced any opposition to their performing in church. (personal communication, November, 2003)

Bell, however, had a different story to tell. When asked if she ever experienced any resistance to the group performing in church, her reply was an emphatic “Yes.” “Everyone has an opinion in church,” she stated. When asked how she deals with this resistance, she said, “If we feel that we are going in the direction of God, we can overcome it” (Bell, personal communication, January, 2004). The coordinators and members of Acts 2 all feel called of God as members of the ministry. They view God as their ultimate leader. This mindset allows them to continue in the ministry with little concern for the complaints of others. However, as the members of the church directly support the group’s ministry through their financial contributions to the church, Bell feels an obligation to listen to each complaint and treat the complainant equally and fairly. However, the ultimate decision as to material, performance style, performance opportunities, and the like falls to the senior leadership of the church and the members of the group. Bell knows of no one who has actually gone as far as leaving the church due to the use of performance during the worship services, though “style of worship is, I’m sure, a factor when people decide which church to attend” (personal communication, November, 2003).

As for the more practical concern of the theological underpinnings of the sketches used by the group, no one can remember a time when they struggled over the theological/philosophical content of a particular sketch. The lack of theological bickering could be because the members of the group have no real say in the group’s sketch

selection to begin with. Sutton gives the group the topics about which he will preach and tells them which sermons he would like sketches to coincide with. As noted above, the true positions of leadership for the group actually lie outside of it. As such, the possibility for conflict within the body of the group exists more in how the message is delivered and in the line-by-line interpretation of the sketches than in the over-all message. With such small space for theological conflict, there has yet to be an instance of a conflict of this type within the group.

Definite contrasts in style and preferences have been noted, though. The younger members of the group and congregation seem to like more humorous content, while the older generation want the sketches to be more “traditional” (Bell, personal communication, January, 2004) “Traditional” here seems to imply a certain depth, gravity and seriousness regarding their performances. The coordinators attempt to balance these disparate preferences by varying the tones and styles of scripts for the group throughout the course of the year.

Like every group in their situation, Acts 2 is struggling to please the majority of their cast and congregation. They endeavor to meet the needs and tastes of everyone involved, but with so many people involved, it is often a losing battle. The group leaders claim prayer and spiritual guidance as their primary weapons in this on-going battle.

As for introducing the basic concept of performance to the congregation as a whole, when the group first began performing in church services, they had to start small and gradually build to their present level of involvement and complexity. They began with very short, very traditional pieces that were largely based on stories directly from the Bible, primarily the parables of Jesus. Now their congregation is aware of the possibilities of their method of communication. They are now able to branch out into

modern parables, complex story-lines, make more use of humor, and even use song and interpretive movement as a part of their performances. The recent addition of a dance ministry to the worship services has further pushed these boundaries. The group attempts to be conscientious of all of the different opinions and prejudices within the congregation as it chooses scripts and performance styles (Bell, personal communication, November, 2003). However, the adage, "You can't please everyone" could have well been written for this very situation.

Acts 2 is an excellent exemplar for groups of its kind. It fights an on-going battle to continue its ministry in the face of constant challenges. It is faced with various opinions on the legitimacy of performance in the church from both congregation and staff; it must find time to rehearse and material to perform; it depends on the labor of volunteers and the expertise of the inexperienced and untrained. However, it also has the support of the church staff, the passion of its members, and the creative abilities of an entire church from which to draw. It thrives because it views itself as a ministry of the church and a calling from God. As such, Acts 2 is the same as and different from church-sponsored CRT groups across the nation.

CHAPTER 4: THE COMPANY

The scene could be any small-town church in the southern part of the United States; this one happens to be Calvary Baptist Church in Paris, TX. The stage is relatively small with steps leading up to it all the way across the front. There is a piano on the stage right side and an organ stage left. A small wooden fence separates the stage from the risers where the choir generally sits. The chairs in the choir loft are padded with the same color as the carpet: blood red. Above the loft is a baptismal with a stained glass picture of Jesus arising out of the water with a dove above His head. The stage is bare; the chairs, pulpit, flowers and communion table all having been removed.

The pastor stands before his congregation in khaki pants and a “golf” shirt. He is introducing tonight’s “special guests.” He is speaking without amplification. He tells the Sunday night crowd that their performers for the evening are “The Company out of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth.” He mentions that they have traveled to Africa, Asia, and “all over this country.” He concludes with, “So, here they are!”

With that, recorded music begins to play. Company cast members enter the auditorium from every possible entrance. They are wearing a variety of brightly-colored t-shirts with their group logo on the front, blue jeans, white tennis shoes, and white gloves. They are clean cut (except for two of the men who have hair beyond their shoulders). They are all Caucasian and between 22 and 32 years of age. They assemble on stage by the time the lyrics of the song begin. The song is the up-beat “Awesome God” by Rich Mullins (1988). As the words to the song start, so does the

group's choreographed interpretation. The lyrics begin with, "When He rolls up His sleeves, He ain't just puttin' on the ritz." A male performer steps upstage-center (UC) and mimes rolling up his sleeves while the others form a "V" coming downstage away from him. "There is thunder in his footsteps and lightning in his fists," the song continues. The female performer to the right of the UC performer steps into the "V," extends her arms, and pounds her fists on an imaginary table. Then, the UC performer reaches into the sky with both hands and comes down in the manner of the baseball "safe" call. The other performers "catch" the momentum from the UC performer and fan their hands out away from him. The verse finishes as the actors act out the various phrases and ideas. As the chorus starts, the actors use sign language to translate the music into a visual form. Thus begins another performance of The Company.

The second group of this study, The Company, represents groups associated with schools or universities. Other examples of this type are Cross Section from Mississippi College in Clinton, MS, the Son Reflectors and Word Players from Samford University in Birmingham, AL, the King's Troupe from Blue Mountain College in Blue Mountain, MS, and the Baptist Campus Fellowship Drama Team from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, LA. The Company was selected because of their reputation and origination. They were one of the first groups to travel extensively performing this particular dramatic genre. They are widely viewed as one of the very best at what they do. Further, their founder and Artistic Director is regarded as a leader in the field of Christian Repertory Theater, having taught conferences, led seminars and workshops, and authored articles on the subject for almost 20 years now.

The Company's web-site (n.d.) describes their ministry in this way:

From youth rallies, retreats, and conferences to worship services and workshops, The Company has built a far-reaching ministry which has touched audiences across the world!

The Company has been featured at various state conferences and drama festivals, state Baptist youth evangelism conferences, various state BSU Conventions, annual meetings of the BGCT, The Southwest Theatre Conference, and state Super Summer School weeks for youth.

The Company has also performed during Jericho weeks at Ridgecrest and Glorieta as well as the 1998 Baptist World Alliance Conference on Worship in Berlin, Germany.

For almost twenty years The Company has been proclaiming God's Word through the performing arts. (*Company*)

They are a troupe consisting entirely of seminary students who volunteer their time for the activity, some receiving credit for a class. Their sponsorship comes from SWBTS, even though they are incorporated as an independent organization. Their leadership is provided by a SWBTS faculty member. They travel primarily to churches and religious organizations within the state of Texas, but they also travel extensively across the nation in the summer. Further, they attend and provide leadership for national conferences and workshops.

The Company has been in existence since August 22, 1984, when Dennis Parrish began his career at Southwestern. The year before the group began, Parrish experimented with repertory theater.

I did it [the original trial run] as a part of my thesis project. I graduated with a Masters of Arts in Christian Communication. The title of my thesis was "The Creative Process of a Traveling Repertory Ensemble." My thesis was that there is a creative process that is involved in making necessary decisions that are going to impact where you travel because you are not always in the same stage environment as a proscenium theatre. (personal communication, October, 2003)

After a six-month run with that show and graduating, Parrish was hired as an adjunct instructor at SWBTS to teach the class "Repertory Performance in Touring." Using the members of that class, Parrish directed a repertory performance. Their first

performance was on October 5, 1984, at a singles' rally at First Baptist Church, Euless, TX. From there, Parrish recalls,

I had already planned a second performance so that the high would not be too long-lived before we had to realize that we had to keep rehearsing new material in order to keep going. That was 19 years ago. (personal communication, October, 2003)

However, Parrish still had to convince the department chair of the efficacy of the group.

The cast of eight members came up with a logo which Parrish had formalized and put onto a t-shirt. He also selected a scripture verse to support the ministry of the group: "The Lord announced the word and great was the company of those who proclaimed it" (Psalms 68:11, New International Version). That Christmas, surrounded by the members of the group, Parrish presented Darryl Baergon, the department chair, with the first Company t-shirt. "I kind of schmoozed him, I guess. I was hoping he would buy into it. He did by cheerfully accepting it" (personal communication, October, 2003). With that, the group became an official ministry of the Department of Communication Studies of SWBTS.

Despite every effort to balance the case studies presented in this dissertation, I have more information about The Company than either Acts 2 or Gen X. There are several reasons for this. First and most significantly, the Company director is a thoughtful and careful individual who has given much time over the years to the theoretical implications and practices of his group. This project seemed almost therapeutic for him. His insights were extremely helpful to me, and this study attempts to include as many of them as possible. Highlighting Parrish's insight should not be taken to mean that the other groups were less cooperative, only that Parrish has more experience and insight into the field. Second, the group has been in continuous existence longer than the other groups with the highest level of leadership intact. This

continuity has allowed it to mature and learn from its mistakes in a way that the others did not and have not. Third, The Company is a for-credit course at SWBTS. As such, there is a great deal of published material concerning it. Many of the policies and procedures of the other groups are informal and unwritten; not so with The Company. Finally, I was a member of The Company for two years. My participant-observation experience with the group is much more extensive than with the other groups. As stated above, every effort was made to balance the case studies, but being an active member of the group simply provided more exemplars than the roles of outside observer and interviewer ever could. There was, quite simply, more qualitative material from which to draw.

This chapter describes and analyzes a CRT under the auspices of an organization or institution other than a church. In this case, the institution is a Southern Baptist seminary. This focus is distinctive because it is in these types of groups where we find the most capable, inspired leadership for CRT troupes. Like Parrish, the leaders of these troupes are often professors at the sponsoring institutions. It is through these institutions that we glimpse the performance expertise that is possible for CRT troupes. The difference between a troupe sponsored by a church and one sponsored by a school is analogous to the difference between college theater and community theater. School-sponsored troupes are usually led by a professor from the school, typically from the theater department. Church-sponsored groups must rely on their membership for leadership which usually means that they do not have a trained professional in charge. Since this analogy fails to hold for independent groups which are often a step backward, CRT troupes sponsored by schools are often the acme of the art in terms of innovation, technique, creativity, professionalism, and daring. This

section offers a snapshot of what does that type of troupe looks like. It also discusses what happens when a troupe of that nature shows up at a small town church for a Sunday evening worship service. The analysis of The Company adds to the significance of this study by demonstrating how well the art can be done, how the group can successfully minister both internally and externally without compromising performance excellence, and by further refining the definition of the art.

Motivation

People come to SWBTS for the express purpose of joining The Company. I did, as did four other members of the group during my service. It has the reputation and ethos to draw people from across the SBC to Fort Worth to participate in its ministry. People come for a variety of reasons. Others join the group after beginning their seminary study. They arrive to study ministry and find that they are able to actually practice it while still in school through a way they never could have conceived. This section of the study looks at the myriad of reasons why individuals choose to associate themselves with The Company. Before personal motivation, though, the chapter analyzes why the group exists in the first place. The history of the group is documented above, but the reasons for its formation are still left to be addressed. The discussion of what motivates the group as a whole involves group dynamics and loyalty but is more geared toward the motivation of its founder.

Group

The course syllabus (n.d.) describes the Company like this:

The Company is both an ongoing ministry and a Communication Arts Class under the School of Educational Ministries at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. As such it is an educational opportunity, as well an opportunity for practical involvement in ministry. The following topics, and more, may be explored by active participation in the ministry: Acting techniques, Vocal techniques, Dance, Sign Language, Pantomime, Script writing, Choreography,

Storytelling, Directing, Group Dynamics, Leadership, Teaching, Traveling with props & costumes, Make-up, Working on the stage, Rehearsals and Technicals, Auditions. (Parrish)

The official reason for the existence of the group is two-fold: educational and ministerial.

The stated conflict with this group is not the struggle to balance performance and ministry so apparent in other groups but rather performance and ministry versus education. Performance and ministry are considered linked intrinsically. Performance is simply the primary way in which this particular group ministers. With that, a new dichotomy is brought to light in CRT. On the one hand, the group exists as a class requirement for students who elect it at SWBTS. Its purpose is to teach the things involved with Christian Repertory Theater. On the other hand, the group exists as a ministry/performance team. As stated above, the motto/scriptural underpinning for the group is, "The Lord announced the word and great was the company of those who proclaimed it" (Psalms 68:11, New International Version). The slogan sums up the existence and purpose of the group.

The Company's motivation, though, cannot be separated from its founder. As his motivation goes, so goes the motivation for the group as a whole, and examining Parrish's individual motivation is relevant here. Parrish was raised in a devout, Christian, Baptist home. He "accepted a full-time call [to serve as a minister] when [he] was a fifteen-year-old, teenage boy" (Parrish, personal communication, October, 2003). He grew up as an athlete, but during his junior year in high school, he had both of his legs broken while playing quarterback for his football team. During that healing process, the doctors discovered a bone disease in his kneecaps. The original diagnosis prescribed a series of arduous and complex surgeries, but one doctor suggested

therapy instead. That is how Parrish, the typical high school jock, found himself taking ballet lessons. Parrish (October, 2003) describes his “lightning bolt moment” like this:

Inside my soul and inside my spirit I knew right then and there that I never wanted to go back to competitive sports. . . . I really kind of liked artsy things, I heard music all along, but I never put it to movement. I had emotions, but I never knew quite how to express them. All of the sudden, I started being introduced to the world of theatre. (personal communication)

Parrish had now been introduced to religion and theater. The elements that were to lead him to develop The Company were in place.

Parrish went to Virginia Commonwealth University where he earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in theater. During his junior and senior years, he was part of a group called Company. The purpose of the group was to develop, write, and rehearse “repertory material.” The group work was intensive, rehearsing 22 hours a week while maintaining all of the other requirements of college students. His work with Company is where Parrish developed “the whole philosophy and concepts of what became later on as known as The Company” (Parrish, personal communication, October, 2003). Upon graduation, he chose to attend SWBTS where there was no theater presence. The story there picks up with the history of The Company as described above.

Parrish’s motivation was to combine his calling as a Baptist minister with his love for theater. However, he quickly realized that he could minister to more people by being flexible enough to perform in settings not used for traditional theater, namely churches, than he could by establishing a traditional theater and performing Christian material. However, in order to do this, his material had to be explicitly religious, suitable for various rhetorical exigencies, and adaptable to a variety situational demands. Further, he had to develop a troupe. With that, The Company was born.

The truly intriguing thing about the listed motivating factors is not what is here, but what is missing. The Company goes to great lengths to minister to its own members (as described below). Yet, nothing is mentioned about the desire to minister to the group members in terms of the founding or running of the group. Ministry to its group members is an integral part of the group's functioning, but it was not a part of the initial motivational thrust. The factors that were present were the motivation to minister through drama to a larger audience and to educate both the players and the audience. Much like the discussion in the previous chapter concerning the dual focus of ministry and performance, this group seeks to achieve both of those goals simultaneously. They educate their members primarily through performances, not explicit lessons on performance. The Company does very little explicit theatrical instruction (more on that under Practice below). Instead, they combine the foci of their ministry. What motivates the group is CRT. Parrish desires to both practice it and teach it.

Personal

Each person brings in a unique background and history to the group, but some general observations about personal motives can be made. The group's website (n.d.) has this to say about a member's motivation:

Being a member involves a commitment of time, energy, love, spiritual diligence, and excellence in preparation as well as performance. The challenges are great. The hours are long. The work is real and often difficult. The rewards are often not on this earth. (*Company*)

Perhaps the most telling thing concerning the message given to prospective members of the group is that the rewards are "often not on this earth." While most scriptural scholars phrase the saying as "not of this earth," the sentiment remains the same. Individuals do not join the Company for worldly gain, either in terms of money or fame.

Parrish (October, 2003) discusses motivation in this way:

I know that a lot of them are looking at this as a fulfilling of their call. Many of them just want to be effective and innovative in spreading the gospel. I think overarching elements are for evangelistic and mission-driven purposes. I did a count of the past Company members, and I think that 85% are in ministry related endeavors now that they have graduated. Out of the 85% that are in the ministry, I believe 40% are in a mission field. I believe that for the members it was just how God has moved them. (personal communication)

This motivation is borne out in several ways. First, The Company is a true troupe, in both ideal and practice. Performances are specifically designed so that each player is afforded an opportunity to shine without featuring one player. The exception that proves the rule is when the group performs at the home church of one of its members. Every attempt is made by the administrative staff, particularly Parrish and his wife and office manager, LeighAnne, to make it to each member's home church during their time in the group. On that trip, that group member is featured in as many pieces as possible. In addition, the featured member is given the privilege of introducing the group and doing as many transitions as possible. It is the very rarity of this that highlights the normal troupe mentality. The members of the group are there as ministers, not fame-seekers.

Second, The Company pays only a minimum amount to its members. During the school year, when the troupe is traveling to "six to seven local trips and four to five out of town trips per semester" (Parrish, Syllabus), no compensation is paid. All of the funds paid to the group by the churches go to the administrative, clerical, and practical costs of running the troupe. Most of the members hold jobs as well as performing in the group, this despite weekly four-hour rehearsals and performances "between 2-6 hours one way" away from their base (Parrish, Syllabus). During the summer months when the group travels full-time, returning home only to prepare for the next trip, the members

are paid only enough to cover the barest of necessities. Obviously, Company members are not in it for the money.

Finally, the troupe members view themselves more as ministers and teachers than as performers. The group, for all of its performances, relishes ministry opportunities. Week-long camps, week-end conferences, drama workshops, and subject-specific seminars are only a few of the settings in which group members are allowed to minister to their audience in off-stage settings. Being a part of the group endows each member with enough ethos, personal credibility, to minister with the people who have been in their audience. Much like “stars” in all of the performing arts, audience members feel a certain kinship with the group members and readily open up to them concerning a variety of personal issues and concerns. Mark James had a girl at a camp in Miami, OK, open up to him about an attempted suicide (personal communication, June, 1993). Mike Cline dealt with a child involved in drugs during a Super Summer in Belton, TX (personal communication, July 1994). The personal ministry opportunities afforded the membership of the group simply by their place up front are many. Too, the individuals of the group see themselves as teachers. This viewpoint is borne out in the number of members who have gone on to teaching positions, but it is also evidenced by the group’s enthusiasm for workshops. The group is a frequent participant in state and national workshops as well as often conducting classes for individual churches during week-end revivals and performance series. The motivation for each member of the group varies, and certainly there is a bit of vainglory and pride in the mix, but overwhelmingly, the group members join The Company out of a desire to minister.

The motivation for both The Company as a whole and its members adds to the overall examination of CRT as a performance practice. Both of the case studies thus far have emphasized ministry as their motivation at both the group and individual levels. Both have used performance as the vehicle for that ministry, linking them intrinsically. However, the Company introduces education into the equation. I feel that this is not a mission of the art as much as a by-product of it. Although this group is clearly in the business of performance training, it is an exception to the norm. Because The Company exists at a school which is in the explicit business of producing Baptist ministers, their goals must contain education. Other schools (Samford, Carson Newman, LSU) do not have this specific charge. They are liberal arts institutions, and CRT is simply another avenue for ministry. Groups sponsored by these schools can and do concentrate on the doing of the art and not the teaching of it. CRT has as its purposes ministry and performance. Although there are instances where groups teach performance both to its membership (retreats, rehearsals) and to others (workshops, conferences), I feel justified in leaving this function out of the formal definition of the art.

Leadership

The Company is different from other troupes in its leadership. Parrish holds the title of “Artistic Director” for the group. Make no mistake, though, it is his group. He was its founder and remains its creative guide, chief administrator, encourager, confidant, and final authority. He runs the rehearsals, he controls the purse strings, he chooses the scripts, and he makes all the important decisions. Parrish was not selected to be the leader of the group; he leads because of his inherent position as founder and teacher. The group is as much identified with Parrish as it is with the group

membership. This type of identification is a unique occurrence in the world of CRT where the leadership of groups change as professors change positions, move, or retire.

However, Parrish is also a full-time professor, husband and father of two. For these reasons, as well as for the purposes of education, he has found it necessary to create a system whereby members of the group rise into positions of leadership within it. In Parrish's (October, 2003) own words:

As the ministry of The Company increased, so did the request for performances all across the country and even around the world. I became a father that year, and I began to wonder how I would watch my son grow up if I had to be gone for weekends at a time. The more I thought about it, the more I actually needed to empower the students to go out and [perform as a] Company. That was my goal to enable and empower students. Once you give that to them and they buy into it, you kind of step out of the way and give guidance and direction and you watch them grow. (personal communication)

As such, the position of "Road Director" was developed. These individuals lead the group during their frequent trips, as Parrish no longer travels on trips of less than a week except in special circumstances. The position of Road Director holds a lot of commonalities with leaders of other groups and is valuable for analysis and extrapolation. This section discusses both the selection and training of the leadership for CRT. However, since Parrish was not selected, the first section has only Road Directors as its focus.

Selection

The group's guidelines (n.d.), which are passed out to all group members when they join the troupe, describe the position of Road Director thus:

The position of Road Director in The Company is one that requires leadership, preparation, and adaptation. The Road Director is not only a spiritual leader and minister. They must also pursue professional excellence in theatre arts. A Road Director in The Company is similar to a Stage Manager and/or an Assistant Director in a theatrical company. They are in charge of the "show" when it is on the road. They look out for the interest and benefit of both the acting company

and the venue, and they ensure that the “show” is presented with excellence according to the vision of the Director. (Parrish, Guidelines)

The Road Director in The Company is essentially an extension of the group’s Artistic Director, complete with creative input. The Road Director of a performance has input into what will be performed and who will perform it. He or she also has some creative freedom to adapt pieces for specific audiences under the supervision of the Artistic Director. The basic job description for Road Directors is: To fit the Vision of The Company to the needs of the Contact and Ensure the Excellence of each Performance. (Parrish, Guidelines)

The Company syllabus (n.d.) lists the duties of the Road Director as

Reading Assignments: Read one applicable book or research one applicable topic each semester. Write and turn in a brief summary.

Directors' Meeting: Must attend additional meeting every week before Tuesday rehearsal.

Directing/Administration: The Road Director's primary responsibilities are to facilitate business meetings, direct rehearsals, plan performances and trips, and supervise Team responsibilities. The Road Director will be supervised and evaluated by the Artistic Director.

Evaluation: The Road Director, as well as the Artistic Director, will evaluate Members. The Road Director's leadership will also be evaluated by the Members. (Parrish)

Road Directors have specifically delineated criteria and duties, many of which involve self-education as well as helping to train the membership.

However, nowhere is there a list of either the requisites for being selected as a Road Director or the method by which the selection is made. Parrish simply makes these decisions unilaterally. As he is the creator and artistic director for the group, that is his prerogative; however, it does lead to speculation regarding the process.

One factor is interesting: the majority of road directors have been female. Four males have been Road Directors as opposed to eight females. Paul Phillips, David Price, Robert Devargas, and Jon Tillman stand in contrast to DeEtte Rabb, Judi Bishop,

Karen Anderson, Charlotte Sullivan, Ashley White, Margie Drane, and Chris Williamson. Obviously, this gender discrepancy is interesting theoretically. Southwestern Seminary is a Baptist institution, supported by gifts from local churches and in existence to train Baptist ministers. The most recent edition of the Baptist Faith and Message, which purports to explain the faith shared by all Baptists and is used as a creed by the seminaries requiring its signing by professors, explicitly states that women are not to serve in position of power over men. Additionally, SWBTS has just announced that it will no longer be having female professors teaching classes taken by men. Females will only be allowed to teach in the school's new "Women's Studies" department.

This contradiction is a case of what Ulmer (Scholes, Comley, and Ulmer, 1995) would claim as a discrepancy between the official and personal texts of an organization. The official texts explain how an organization claims to function, its ideal. Personal texts are examples of the organization in practice, the reality. In this case, the explicit text of the organization clearly states that women are not to be in positions of power over men. The Company's own literature (n.d.) bears this out in the scripture pulled out to support the position of Road Director:

He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens," (Exodus 18:25) and "If it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Romans 12:8). (Parrish, Guidelines)

The gender in Exodus and the pronouns in Romans are no accident. However, the personal and practical texts of the group tell a different story.

Parrish's (November, 2003) insight into the role of director may help to reconcile the problem between texts:

I have a philosophy, or actually it is a theory that has been used in modern theatre history. It is known as the feminization of theatre. The principles of it are,

in a nut shell, it is basically the motherhood of theatre. You take any mother, and you can assign to that woman the elements of nurturing and developing . A mother has a nature about her that is somewhat different than the male father or gender. Theatre people took onto that back in the mid-forties. Prior to that, theatre had been dominated by a male presence. It was basically the male director who said “Here’s what I’m going to do” and “Here’s how you are going to do it for me.” The director would say “I’ll make you a star because you are going to do it my way.” In the mid-forties, according to American theatre history, the feminization of theatre started occurring. That was where there was the depletion of the male dominant authoritative figure, and it was not the only way of going about doing theatre.

In the presence of my mother there is a protective, nurturing sense, that I didn’t quite feel that my father had. My father had a security sense in my life because he was the breadwinner and supporter. Emotionally, he wasn’t as attached to me as most men of that time weren’t to their children. My mother had that more natural tendency to be expressive in that emotional side; and that is true of the feminization of theatre directors. (personal communication)

Despite the official texts of SWBTS and the SBC, of which The Company is a subordinate member, Parrish has explicitly chosen to promote and encourage female leadership within his group. He does this in his own directing style and with the selection of Road Directors. Admittedly, he seems to visualize the female directors (and even his own role) as almost motherly, which could be interpreted as diminutive, as less-than. In this case, though, I do not feel that Parrish views the feminization of the directorial position as a negative. Rather, his philosophy of ministry to his membership (“If you have the heart, I’ll teach you the art”) virtually requires a certain amount of caring, relationship building and maintenance, even compassion on the part of his directors. These are all viewed as female gender traits. This gender-trait identification and the subsequent use of it by Parrish is not new to theater (i.e. feminist theater), but it is new to the world of religion in that in The Company women are viewed as leaders because of their gender, not in spite of it. Performance serves as a leveling instrument for females within the group’s parent organization(s), providing an outlet for leadership to a portion of the population otherwise denied it.

Leaders are selected by Parrish without any published criteria for their selection. The only criterion seems to be Parrish's stamp of approval. This apparent subjectivity is only significant when we realize the lengths to which he has gone to document and formalize all of the policies of the group. This is the notable exception. As Bell reminded us earlier, many of the decisions regarding personnel in a CRT group are spiritual and emotional as well as merit-based. Those are decisions that simply cannot be quantified. This varies little from any other troupe or organization in general, though. Many of the characteristics of great leaders cannot be counted, listed, or put on a spreadsheet. CRT is no different. The only added element in the discussion is spirituality, and that should be nothing remarkable for a CRT troupe.

Training

Parrish has extensive training and experience in theater. He also has training in dance and voice. He received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from Virginia Commonwealth University where he was active in their theater program. He went on to achieve Master of Arts degrees in both Religious Education and Communication from Southwestern. At the time of his degree, Southwestern offered no classes in drama or performance. Parrish decided to stay at the school in order to change that (Parrish, personal communication, October, 2003).

During his tenure at Southwestern, Parrish has served as a television producer, free-lance writer, co-owner of a production company (Advent Productions), and frequent director for various productions, meetings, and conferences. Notably, he has worked for the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, the ACTS Network, the Future Homemakers of America, and the Greater Fort Worth Christmas Pageant (*Company*, n.d.).

Parrish's background points up the concept that experience is as valuable as education in the world of CRT. By establishing one of the first successful CRT troupes Parrish managed to successfully cast himself as an expert in the field: teaching workshops, hosting conferences, and writing articles on the subject. He has managed all of this despite the fact that he holds only a Bachelor's degree in the Fine Arts. Secular theater programs and troupes, on the other hand, tend to be led by Master of Fine Arts graduates in Theater. Obviously, this is a generalization, and though the scope of the groups and programs in existence precludes its confirmation, the qualitative, anecdotal evidence is overwhelmingly in its favor.

The rationale for this seems to be two-fold. First, CRT is not as artistically challenging or "cutting edge" as a secular theater program. CRT is designed to reach the average person, not the more sophisticated, theatrically savvy audience. This lower culture aim is even more relevant in the SBC where most of the churches are in the South. CRT does not exist to create new and creative forms of religious, theatrical expression. It exists in order to convey a message to an audience in the most direct, visually-compelling manner possible. As is the case with Parrish, the leader's education and experience with their faith and its literature are as important as their education and experience with theater. "Success" to these groups relates more to their ability to convey their message in a way that is decodable by their audience than to create a significant, creative new art form.

Second, a director of a CRT is as much a spiritual mentor as a theatrical director. While all directors play the role of advisor for their casts, this role is magnified in the case of CRT. CRT is spiritual by its very nature. The director has to be a homeletician, explaining how the group's pieces are consistent with scripture. The director also has to

fill the role of pastor to many members of the group as they travel on the weekends and miss their own church services. Add to these the role of confidant, mentor, teacher, policeman, and playmate, and the picture of the modern CRT director begins to come into focus. The training of a CRT director is necessarily diverse. The demands of the art form are unique, and the training and experience of the directors must be so as well.

However, Road Directors for this group are often completely untrained.

Discussing the subject of whether or not they are trained, Parrish (November, 2003) claims:

Only in the sense that they are current Company members. The training is basically on-the-job. The directors meet with me every Tuesday night before rehearsal starts for an hour. We basically work out our agenda of what will happen this particular rehearsal night. There we will take about what our night going to entail. We can be honoring the students that are in The Company as far as dismissing them when their part is done. (personal communication)

When discussing one particular director (Charlotte Sullivan), Parrish noted that she came from a background dissimilar to theater or communication. As she was progressing and maturing within the group, he coined the phrase, "If you have the heart, I'll teach you the art." In fact, the training for Road Directors often consists entirely of their experience within the group.

However, due to Parrish's abiding presence, the lack of formal training for Road Directors does not necessarily negate the importance of trained leadership for successful CRT troupes. True, the Road Directors are trusted with many of the smaller decisions during the course of a trip, but Parrish maintains ultimate control of the group. It is his ethos and gravitas that draw people to the group, sustain cohesion, and establish group unity of purpose and message.

The Company re-affirms the position that the long-term success of a CRT troupe depends on support from a central figure. In Acts 2, that figure was external, the

Minister of Music, without whose support, the group withered. In this case, that figure is Parrish. CRT may be as much about the cult of personality or charisma as it is the desire to minister or perform. One of the members of The Company, Chris Pollard (May, 1994) put it this way:

There are some who could tell you, "I've got an extra ticket to Disney World, come with me." They could offer to pay everything, but you still wouldn't go. Then, there are others who could ask you to come shovel manure with them and your only question would be, "Where's the shovel?" (personal communication)

Parrish falls into the latter category, as do most of the people who lie at the heart of successful CRT troupes. He has done an adequate job of sharing the leadership responsibilities of the group for a variety of purposes, but in the end, he is the group's leader.

Institutional Support

Just like the rest of the world, The Company has to face financial reality. The following analysis is valuable because, other than the salary of its director, this troupe does not receive financial support from its parent institution. Furthermore, the ambivalence of SWBTS towards the group (explained below) and a desire for a much more ambitious schedule forces the group to rely almost exclusively on performance venues away from its host. Once again, finances, personnel, and performance opportunities are examined.

Financial Backing

In the case of The Company, finances and performance opportunities are provided by sources external to its host organization. Money for a group such as The Company is always a touchy issue. In this area they essentially operate as a professional troupe would. As stated above, SWBTS' only contribution to the group is the director's salary. On the one hand, the group needs enough funding to operate.

Costumes, props, and set-pieces must be purchased or built. Members (during the summer) and clerical staff must be paid. Travel expenses have to be met. On the other hand, though, the group does not want to turn down any church or organization that wishes to host them. Therefore, the group has a set performance fee but is extremely flexible in adapting that to meet the limitations of a particular host (Parrish, personal communication, October, 2003).

The group also takes donations from parties interested in supporting their ministry. According to the group's (n.d.) web-site,

The Company is endorsed, but not financially supported, by Southwestern Seminary. If you are interested in finding out how you may undergird our ministry through financial support, please contact us at our address or call or email our office. (*Company*)

This appeal brings in little steady income though, leaving the group to support itself through its performances.

Parrish has taken the added step of incorporating the group as a private corporation with no legal or binding ties to Southwestern Seminary (Parrish, personal communication, October, 2003). That gives him more flexibility in terms of the group's future. If Parrish were to one day leave the seminary, he could take the corporate name and logo of the group with him. Obviously, he would have to find a new source of institutional support for his group, but as he is the unquestioned heart and soul of The Company, re-locating the group to another college or institution where students who share Parrish's religious and theatrical interests would probably not significantly hamper the group's success.

Membership

The Company draws its members from the students at SWBTS. According to their web-site (n.d.), there are six criteria for potential members of the group:

1. You must be a student at SWBTS.
2. You must schedule a personal interview/audition with the director, Dennis Parrish.
3. You must take at least one Theatre Arts or other communication class with Dennis Parrish. At his discretion this class may be prior to or concurrent with your entrance into The Company.
4. You must take The Company as a class for at least two semesters.
5. You must be willing to sign a commitment to The Company.
6. After your apprentice semester you must commit to one year in the group. (*Company*)

The site (n.d.) goes on to add:

The Company has a great heritage of training men and women in the ministry. Out of 114 former members, 73 of these are currently engaged in Full-time Ministry, and many are designing their own ministries to creatively reach their parts of the world for Christ. Many others are actively being “roaring lambs” in the secular world as Teachers, Actors, Writers, and in many other ways. The Company also has a great heart and focus on missions and we are immensely proud of our 20 members serving with the IMB or NAMB today. (*Company*)

The site serves to give criteria for membership as well as advertise to potential members.

The people who come to the group arrive for a variety of reasons, many of which I was fortunate enough to learn during my time with the group. The aforementioned Karen Anderson, Robert Devargas, Mark James, and I all chose SWBTS at least in part because of the ministry of the group. Others came to the group with extensive experience in theater but without choosing their seminary because of it. David Price, Charles Chamblee, and DeEtte Rabb are examples of this. Still others joined the group with little theatrical experience and were simply led to serve: Chris Williamson, Chris Pollard, and Mike Cline.

Whatever the initial motivation of group members, the seminary serves as the perfect vehicle for introduction into the group. The school is designed to prepare individuals for careers within the Baptist religion. However, relatively few positions of service and ministry are actually available to students while attending the school. The

greater Fort Worth area has a finite number of churches offering positions of ministry; yet, everyone at SWBTS feels called to the professional ministry. The Company provides an outlet for the students' desire to minister while in school. For many, this outlet is new and exciting, for others it is a continuation of talents developed previously. Either way, the group gives the students the chance to both serve and prepare to serve at the same time.

The institutional support on which The Company relies sheds some light on the broader picture of CRT. The primary thing that stands out about the pool from which The Company draws its membership is that they are all training for full-time employment in the ministry. That is the stated purpose of the host institution. The group, then, serves as a breeding ground for future CRT troupes connected with churches. Although this point may speak as much to motivation as it does to internal support, it is an important one to make. One of the best ways to create quality performances is to provide for the training of its directors. As one of the stated objectives of The Company is education and as it is drawing its memberships from a group of people who will soon be in an ideal situation to lead a troupe of their own, The Company is achieving just that.

Performance Opportunities

The Company has one performance opportunity a year at their host institution. They perform at SWBTS in a chapel service once a year. Other than that, they rely completely on invitations from churches and organizations. Initially, Parrish relied on his personal contacts to secure performance opportunities. However, as the group grew in experience and prestige, word-of-mouth among SBC pastors began to work in favor of the group. Twenty years later, the group is rarely without performance opportunities.

Factors external to the group or art form do occasionally play a role in the group's performance chances, though. Parrish (November, 2003) notes,

I have never had a cast bigger than twenty-four cast members. That was back in the day when the economy could afford it. That was when twelve people could go on one trip and the other twelve could go on the same weekend to another place. Now, really after 9/11 the two through six member team, those are the ones people can afford. They only have to put us up into two hotel rooms; or they only have to feed six hungry bodies as opposed to twenty-four that I might bring. (personal communication)

In that way, The Company is like any other group contracted by an organization to do a task. They must be as economical and fiscally responsible as possible in order to compete in the marketplace.

The Company is in a unique position. Their host organization does very little to provide them with institutional support other than a pool of talent from which to draw. Yet because of their reputation, they are able to function as a group relying on sources outside of the school. In this manner, they operate very much like a professional troupe would. Their professionalism is a fortunate happenstance for the current study in that the professional troupe cased in the next chapter was ultimately unsuccessful in remaining together.

Solvency and functionality, then, require some definite components. First, the membership must realize that CRT is no way to get rich. The Company pays its membership a mere pittance during the summer months and nothing at all during the regular year. If The Company, which has as many performance opportunities as it wants, is not able to support a full troupe financially, then there is little hope for lesser known groups. Second, reputation is everything. The performance opportunities for The Company did not happen accidentally or overnight. Parrish started slowly and built the team's schedule to where it is today. Finally, CRT troupes that must support

themselves financially must be aware of the business aspects of their endeavor.

Parrish has had to cut down on the number of people that he sends to a show, and all troupes have to respond to the economics of the time. Businesses must adapt or perish; CRT can be no different. The Company is an excellent example of what must be done when a troupe receives very little support from its host institution.

Practice

The Company continues to produce quality performances year after year. They transition smoothly from one cast to the next, adding new blood while saying goodbye to old friends. They balance their desires to minister, perform, and educate. This section examines this remarkable achievement. Parrish has been in this business for a long time, and the way he runs his troupe could serve as a model for any group of any of the types described in this study. Some of the practices are specific to their unique situation, but many are highly portable to a variety of exigencies and situations.

Member Selection

The Company is both a CRT ministry and a class at SWBTS. As such, the group has a course syllabus. The syllabus (n.d.) has this to say about becoming a member of the group:

Because The Company is a performing group as well as a class and a ministry, those who wish to join must audition. However, The Company is built on a determination that if a student has "the heart," they can be taught "the art". *All skill and experience levels are welcomed! It doesn't matter if you have ten years experience in the theatre, or if you don't know the difference between the stage and the audience.*

1. Application: The application/audition form may be picked up, filled out, and turned in at the Communications Office in Price Hall 101 or The Company Office, Price Hall 123.
2. Audition: Students will do cold readings of monologues and scenes.
3. Callback: Callbacks are a personal interview with Artistic Director and Professor, Dennis Parrish.
4. Invitation: Qualified students will be invited to join The Company as apprentice members. Attendance at a training retreat is required as well

as agreement with the published policies and procedures, and the requirements of this syllabus. (Parrish)

Parrish (November, 2003) describes the process of auditioning:

What we typically do is we have an audition in front of current Company members. They actually see a piece performed by current Company members. Then, we give out the script to them and watch it one more time, and as we are performing it they are reading along. We then say, "We want you to do the medical student, or we want you to be the professor." We then put some Company members in the same role, and then we put a couple of people who are auditioning into that line-up as well. They just do a reading of it; they don't act it out. The reading gives us a chance to hear their voice and see their posture, what the physical elements they are bringing to the table are all about. Next, there is a prepared monologue that they must do for me. I usually bring in outsiders, at least a former Company member that is in the area, to serve as adjudicator or judge or second pair of eyes. The Company members who are currently in the group befriend them and try to make them feel comfortable by doing the reading along with them. Then, each person goes through an interview process with me. It is there where I kind of spell out the good, the bad, and the ugly, and what I require. If they still want to be a part of The Company, I extend an invitation to them to be an apprentice for the first semester. At the end of that semester each person can choose to go their separate ways, or we can choose to ask an individual person to go their separate way. I've only had to do that twice in nineteen years, to turn somebody away. Then, it goes back to my philosophy, "If you have the heart, I'll teach you the art." (personal communication)

In this way, new members are brought in and assimilated into the already-existing group. The audition process contains elements focused on both an individual's talent (cold readings, prepared monologues) and motivation/personality (interview, apprenticeship). In this, the way in which members join the group mirrors the reality of life once they are in it. The group members must have the talent to be viable performers for the group, but motivations other than ministry hinder the over-all mission of the group.

Of course, exceptions are made to this method. I was one such exception, as was another member joining at the same time, Robert DeVargas. DeVargas began attending the seminary in the summer of 1992, during which he performed with the

group several times. They needed an extra performer to be able to fill two teams, and he was available, and he performed. Then in the fall he took the class and served his apprenticeship semester at the same time. Ordinarily, apprentices perform very little, mainly serving as extras while the full-time members of the group play the more meaningful roles. DeVargas' experience was a bit different. He entered the group as a veteran of the stage. He had been a professional magician for several years before deciding to enter the seminary and join The Company. He was utilized almost immediately as a speaker for the group as well as playing many of the "lead" roles. DeVargas is now the Chair of the Communication Department at SWBTS.

At the same time, I was also entering the group. I began seminary in the fall of 1992. I had previously been a member of a college repertory group called Cross Section. Cross Section performed many of the same sketches as the Company. Our director had purchased a script book written by a former Company member and containing many of the scripts still in use by the group. As the student director, I had played a majority of the more meaningful roles. Because of my experience, I was allowed to take the class and apprentice at the same time. However, I was coming into the group directly from college and lacked the professional experience of DeVargas. Because of that, my apprenticeship was more traditional, despite my entering the group without the audition process. As is evidenced, despite a formalized process for induction into the group Parrish retains enough flexibility to adjust the policies as he sees appropriate and necessary.

The one omission in the literature is any true criteria for group selection. All students at SWBTS must submit statements of faith and recommendations from pastors, so the spiritual element of a potential member is pre-screened for the group.

The talent area is covered in auditions. There seem to be no further criteria for membership. The group has historically consisted of slightly more females than males and almost all Caucasians. Ages of members generally run from 22 through early 30s, a relatively accurate reflection of the seminary's student body. Parrish (November 2003) looks at it this way,

There really isn't a male to female ratio. Right now, I've got four males and four females, actually a total of ten, because I have one male and one female on what I call reserve. They are finishing up their thesis so they can't really travel as much as they would like to; but if I need them in a pinch they come in and perform. Right now we have two African Americans, a Korean. We most definitely use the Caucasian person more; that is a representation of what Southern Baptist are, anyway. (personal communication)

This type of inclusion is consistent with the above discussion regarding leadership within the group. Drama and performance seem to be a unifying force within the SBC, a place where people of all types can come together in a common purpose and with common opportunity. The Company is no exception.

The Company fits nicely within the two poles of ministry and performance that is CRT. Surprisingly, this group, known for its quality in terms of performance, seems to lean more toward the ministry aspect, as opposed to performance, when selecting its membership than does Acts 2. Parrish's motto, "If you have the heart, I'll teach you the art," is the clearest indication of that leaning. Parrish's training and ability as an educator are able to bridge that gap. Viewed from that angle, the motto becomes almost a statement of braggadocio. Still, the significance here is that even a group renowned for its performances looks to the ministry aspect of a person's motivation and ability when adding new members. CRT is truly a combination of the two purposes.

Rehearsals

The Company has well-organized, disciplined, purposeful rehearsals. Parrish is every bit the perfectionist, and this character trait is evident in his rehearsals. He (November, 2003) describes them in detail:

We have a Tuesday rehearsal. It starts at 7:15 with fifteen minutes of devotion, fifteen minutes of what we call 3-2-1 (where three members get together twice a week . . . and talk to each other for fifteen minutes and five minutes or so they pray). Then, about ten till eight, we go over what I call housekeeping. Housekeeping is where we determine if anybody's schedule changed that they now cannot go on something that they committed to doing in the near future, or if there any reports from any of these teams that we have. Every first Tuesday of the month, the social club gets up and says "Yes, we have a birthday and we need to honor those who have birthdays." We have cake and drinks. We have a little of bit of socialization going on. By about 8:30, we are an hour into our meeting, and it usually is over by then; so we go into rehearsal. We have an agenda of what the rehearsal is going to contain throughout the night, so if you are a student studying Greek and you have a big test Wednesday, you can kind of at least gauge your night. You can see when you will be dismissed if you are not going on this weekend's performance. As we get rid of the people who are not going on the weekend performance that are coming right up, then we work on the particular run-down and the casting of the people who are in this up and coming show. This is how we prepare for performances. (personal communication)

The group first attends to the ministry needs of its members. The Company was the only group examined which did this in such an explicit manner. Next, they take care of the maintenance functions of the group in their business (housekeeping) meeting. The group provides time for social/group-building activities as well. Finally, they get down to the business of their task function: rehearsing for performance. The group also has other times set aside for both training/instruction and group-building. Parrish

(November, 2003) notes:

We train the performers in mini retreats. They are scheduled battery rehearsals. I try to make a little fun out of it. We start at 9:00. I feed them lunch with Company funds; we break at 5:00; and everybody goes home and showers and relaxes and returns about 6:30. I give them what I call artistic nights out. . . . I'll take them to a play, or I'll take them to an appropriate movie. We might go to a museum or pageant; we'll do something at the conclusion of the Saturday mini-

retreat. We will usually go out for dessert afterwards, and we critique the event or performance that we saw. That is how they get trained. (personal communication)

The Company has by far the most extensive training program of any of the groups contacted by this author. Weekly rehearsals with one mini-retreat per year were the norm for most of the groups (Cross Section, Word Players, Son Reflectors).

However, The Company can require a great deal more of its members because of its dual role as a class as well as a troupe. For instance, according to the Company syllabus (n.d.), continuing members are required to:

Read one applicable book or research one applicable topic each semester. Write and turn in a brief summary; Write and turn in analyses of two characters from regular performance material, and two scenes from regular performance material (Format for these assignments is in *A Practical Handbook for the Actor.*); Depending on evaluations from past semesters Member may request a specific team assignment. Performance of Team responsibility will be evaluated by Road Directors and the Artistic Director; and Performing Members may be assigned an Apprentice Member as their "Buddy". (This is dependant on the number of Apprentice Members and the number of Performing Members) All Members are encouraged to develop these relationships for spiritual, emotional, and educational benefit. Additional responsibilities fall to Apprentice and Beginning members as well as Road Directors. (Parrish)

The quality and style of its rehearsals are undoubtedly why the group has been able to sustain itself over the years. Because of its required training (and the presence of a theater professional), the group achieves a level of theatrical professionalism that the average troupe could not. The professionalism of The Company argues for training and experience in the field of theater as prerequisites for directing a CRT troupe.

Preachers and Music Ministers in churches receive advanced degrees in their fields, and yet the directors of CRT troupes receive nothing comparable. The relative reputations of/opinions among the membership concerning the preaching and music ministries of most churches via their drama ministry should then be of no great surprise.

Further, the explicit times built into rehearsals as well as extra required time during the week where the members must minister to each other is a model of ministry for other groups. If CRT is to fulfill both roles, performance and ministry, then they cannot simply settle for ministering through performance. If they are going to call themselves a “ministry team,” they should minister to each other before facing an audience. The Company is the one troupe in this study which actively pursues this goal.

Performances

As stated above, the Company was created to perform in ambiguous situations and settings. In fact, one of the working mottoes of the group is to be “flexible and adaptable in ambiguous situations.” Parrish (October, 2003) states:

My thesis was that there is a creative process that is involved in making necessary decisions that are going to impact where you travel because you are not always in the same stage environment as a proscenium theatre. You are in churches; you are in places where people won't let you, or you can't, remove the Do This In Remembrance of Me table, or you can't remove flowers. (personal communication).

The performance record of the Company bears out this original purpose. The group has performed in churches of every shape and size, in classrooms, auditoriums, gymnasiums, amphitheaters, pavilions, and even fast-food restaurants.

The group's repertoire is one area which requires some discussion. First, it is well-fitted to the tasks of flexibility and adaptability. It consists of approximately equal numbers of dramatic sketches which rely on very few set pieces or props and musical interpretations. The group also does a couple of more formal pieces which require greater set-up. With this variety of performance pieces at the ready, the group is able to rise to the exigency of various performance opportunities despite their often great disparity of tone, content, purpose, and audience. Drawing on Parrish's extensive

background in dance as well as main-stage theater, the group never fails to create visually compelling stage art no matter the setting or environment.

Describing the process of creating a run-down for a performance, Parrish says, “I typically . . . involve music, creative movement, scripture, humor, and some kind of tough hitting poignant pieces that really carry the gospel message” (Parrish, personal communication, October, 2003).

At this point a few descriptions of performance pieces are in order. These descriptions will be called on later in the service of defining a CRT troupe. First comes the style of performance which is most readily identifiable as CRT: the short, dramatic vignette. The Company has an extensive repertoire, but a few examples should suffice. “Good Sam” is a modern day re-telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan with each passer-by trying to out-do the others in fallacious reasoning as to why they should not help the poor Slobovian who has been robbed and beaten. “Train Up a Child” follows a family on their journey from the alarm clock to the beginning of a Sunday morning service. “The Road to Bandania” has two characters encountering various people wearing blindfolds who refuse to take them off for a variety of reasons. “The Park Bench” has two friends sitting on a bench discussing religion and ethics. All of these pieces are less than ten minutes in length, require virtually no props, and can be performed in almost any setting.

As described in the introductory chapter of this study as well as the introduction to this chapter, the group’s interpretive movements are a combination of dance, sign language, and acting that visually tells the story of a particular song. The group’s traditional repertoire contains movements to the songs “Awesome God,” “People Need the Lord,” “Show Me the Way,” “Jesus Saves,” “Thy Word,” and “Thank You.” Several

songs use props such as bandanas and white gloves, while another uses white robes as costumes. Often, the group uses one of the interpretive pieces as the culmination of a dramatic piece.

At a performance at First Baptist Church, North Richardson, TX, a deaf lady remarked that the performance was “as close to hearing music” as she would ever come. The interpretation was to the song “Behold the Lamb” as performed on tape by the FBC North Richardson choir. The performance utilized a projection screen upstage center with which the performers interacted during several points in the performance. The screen showed portions of Franco Zeffereilli’s *Jesus of Nazareth*. The performers were each given different choreography based on the verses, choruses, echoes, and repeats of the song. The combination of the elements was visually, as well as aurally, stimulating.

The larger, more complex pieces are reserved for special occasions. For a chapel service at Houston Baptist University, the group performed a piece entitled “Tuesday’s Cookies.” The piece was acted out by four of the members while it was narrated by a fifth. A pre-recorded musical composition played in the background. This piece was much heavier than most of the pieces done by the group as it concerned child molestation. For a week focusing on foreign missions at both the Ridgecrest Conference Center just outside of Asheville, NC, and the Glorieta Conference Center just outside of Santa Fe, NM, the group staged the battle of Jericho from the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. This production, along with full Biblical garb, had a fifteen foot wall running the breadth of the stage which collapsed on cue. For several occasions, the group performed a piece called “People in the Trash” where they literally trashed a stage. They scoured local neighborhoods and dumps for thrown away items

and then piled them onto the church or auditorium's stage to the point where the apron was the only usable performance space. Company members were required to hide themselves in the trash and then lie motionless while the audience arrived, during the opening part of the service, and until their cues arrived in the performance. These pieces are not a part of the group's typical run-down, but they are a part of its complete repertoire.

Even in its "regular" performances, the group uses wardrobe to enhance visual stimulation. For their "formal" presentations, primarily in Sunday morning worship services, the group uses a combination of long sleeve dress shirts and identical ties for the gentlemen and like-colored dresses with similar scarves for the ladies. During their more casual performances (everywhere else), the group uses brightly colored t-shirts with the group's logo on the front. In both cases, the group members play a variety of roles without costuming to fit a particular role or changing costume. The cumulative effect of the group in similar outfits both distinguishes between characters and gives the group a cohesive feel.

As far as casting for an individual show, Parrish claims, "It is really whoever shows up. . . . We just kind of send our people on performances that they can commit to" (Parrish, personal communication, November, 2003). The primary concern for Parrish is availability. Gender and race play the same role for him that they do in any performance endeavor which is to limit performers in the roles they can play credibly, but talent is relegated to a secondary concern. Parrish's concern is more to nurture the cast members than to always put the best, most-talented cast before any one audience. The desire to train his cast and give them experience in no way implies that he desires sub-par performances. He goes on to say, "For the most part everybody realizes that,

given the opportunity, they will rise to the challenge and not lower the bar that we strive for” (Parrish, personal communication, November, 2003). Still, he keeps the dual focus of training as well as performing. This duality is one of the reasons that the group has stood the test of time. As older, better-trained members rotate out of the group, Parrish always has new members ready to fill their shoes because he has given them performance opportunities all along.

The Company has limited experience with audience involvement and non-traditional theater. The introduction of this study described the story of Vera Bluejacket. After coming onstage, she explained that she simply could not remain seated any longer. The previous year, she had witnessed another Christian performing artist, Jeannette Cliff George (who was one of Parrish’s inspirations, incidentally), perform a piece in which she was attempting to carry a large number of black flags onto the stage. Each flag represented a country in which there are no Southern Baptist missionaries. Although she felt compelled to join George, she did not. The performance of the AIDS victim reminded Bluejacket of her previous reticence, and she did not want to repeat her apathy. Therefore, she thrust herself upon the performance in the role of the final caregiver. Parrish described the moment: “It still speaks to me, because it was the power of the visual and spoken word combined. We used technology, the light that went a lot slower than it normally did, an actor, the written word, and the performed word. It just compelled this lady” (Parrish, personal communication, November, 2003).

Bluejacket’s performance speaks volumes about the power of performance to encourage, engage, and move an audience when combined with religious fervor and emotional appeal. However, Brecht (1964) would argue that Bluejacket’s actions were misplaced and mistimed. The Company, in making the emotional appeal, provided her

with an outlet for her emotional need to support the needy. Her need was satisfied in a manner (time and place) in which no real need was met. After all, the actor was not truly suffering from the disease nor at odds with his parents. Bluejacket, therefore, got all of the emotional benefits of charitable goodwill without actually making a difference in the real (non-presentational) world.

The Company allowed Bluejacket to suspend her disbelief. Brecht's alienation effect techniques and theory, inspiring the audience to action in the non-theatrical world instead of prompting them into action within the relatively safe world of the make-believe (not his work on alienating the audience from the conventions of society; that would run counter to the purposes of CRT), are an interesting lens through which to view this performance and indeed the practice as a whole. The presence of the narrator/joker figure, the characters assuming different roles on-stage, and use of music, all elements recommended by Brecht as ways of making the performative elements more visible throughout the performance and thus not allowing for the suspension of disbelief, were already used. The issue with which practitioners must deal becomes the possibility of achieving the aesthetic distance encouraged by Brecht when dealing with a subject so close to a person's psyche, particularly when in an environment as emotionally charged as that of a week set aside to concentrate on the very subject of the performance.

The group has also experimented with nontraditional theater, specifically Boal's (1992) concept of Invisible Theatre. During the first week of July, 1993, The Company was invited to be the featured performers at the Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission's Week ("Jericho") at Ridgecrest Baptist Conference Center in Black Mountain, NC. During that performance run, two of its members posed as hikers who simply happened upon the center. They had devised back-stories and world-views

purposefully at odds with those of the conference attendees. During the three-day continuous performance, the cast members were “witnessed to,” fed numerous times, and one was given shelter by the “audience.” The group was effective in presenting its message concerning the need for personal evangelism through the use of a type of theater (most likely) previously unknown to most of its audience.

The Company can teach the rest of the CRT universe a great deal in regards to performance. The Company continually pushes the envelope in its performance style (“People in the Trash”) and content (“Tuesday’s Cookies”). This case study seems to indicate that Baptist churches are willing to accept alternative performances. The responses from audiences worldwide have been overwhelmingly positive to the group’s creativity and boldness. The one x-factor in the equation is the distance factor. The Company comes into a church as an unknown, with almost celebrity status. The audience is removed from them because they are unknown, from another town, and not associated with their local church. Their audiences are liable to give their performances more credence than they might those of their fellow church members. Also, audiences would be more likely to allow more from this group because they know it is a rare occasion, that the group will be gone by the next day. However, this x-factor does not totally nullify the lessons gained from The Company’s daring. I would argue that the lesson is still valid, that audiences are willing to accept daring and innovation as long as it is done well and as long as the values taught are still in line with those of the group. Baptist churches may be ready for new performance styles, but they want the same message as always.

The other area of interest in terms of the performance practices of The Company concerns the definition of CRT. In a sense, the clause “primarily dramatic and versatile

performances” in the definition of CRT seems to disqualify The Company, one of the premier CRT groups in the world, from inclusion in the practice. After all, they do a great many types of performances other than strictly dramatic and many of their performances have major technical, prop and costume requirements. I argue that the group still qualifies for inclusion based on their primary repertoire. Groups associated with churches sometimes serve as the main players for Christmas pageants, and independent groups occasionally stage main-stage plays. Yet, neither of these groups are traditional theater troupes. The issue of style of performance is more problematic. The interpretive movements by The Company (or any group for that matter) are dramatic, but are not exclusively drama; some require the audience to suspend their disbelief, but most do not. They are short and flexible but are not drama in a traditional sense. In terms of genre, most would qualify as narrative. Since most groups do some form of this type of performance, it is necessary to include them in the definition. However, since dance troupes lie outside of what is thought of as CRT, the requirement of some “straight drama” should remain in the definition.

Theory

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, Parrish has spent a great deal of time in reflection concerning the art to which he has dedicated his life. The current analysis comes out of his considered responses to questions regarding the underlying assumptions concerning CRT. For instance, when asked to compare theater to preaching, he (November, 2003) claims,

It awakens many more senses. It allows a person, congregation, or audience member to have a chance to experience things beyond just the spoken word, which is what the preached word is. I'm not taking away from the moving of the Holy Spirit to do its work as it can in any circumstance. I think as long as we are truthful with the gospel in our interpretations as we understand them scripturally, dramatic elements just have more of a memorable impact as opposed to just the

preached word. A dear friend of mine by the name of Dr. Calvin Miller, who actually was on the preaching faculty at Southwestern Seminary but has gone to divinity school in Alabama (Beeson Theological Seminary), he has a pastor's heart. He is a very creative man; he has written several scripts that I have even performed. I've asked him if he thought that at any point The Company or any drama team could actually take over an entire sermon and it stand on its own. He said it could and it does happen, and he has seen The Company do that. He said that speaking from a pastor's perspective, he would still want the pastor's touch to bring closure to it on a particular Sunday service to bring the performance back into perspective instead of maybe just drawing the invitation out. I respect that; I think I never want to go into a church and I never want to have an attitude of theatre can replace the preached word. That is not at all what I believe, I think drama is the complement to the preached word. (personal communication)

Parrish here identifies the fundamental advantage that performance has over the spoken word alone: multiplicity of means. Performance activates more senses, engaging the viewer in a way that oral communication by itself cannot. The other item of note is his analysis is the combination of the two methods. According to Parrish's line of reasoning, a preacher is still required to bring closure to the drama. Although it comes from Miller, it is interesting to see that even Parrish, the paragon of CRT, never challenges it. Implicitly, he seems to be saying that churches are still not ready to move to worship services where performance is the only mode of communication offered.

The Company breaks barriers. There is little doubt that the group often performs for individuals who have never even conceived of Christian performance, some of whom are offended by the concept. Finding audiences new to the art form is inevitable with the all of the performance opportunities that the Company accepts. However, Parrish can remember only a few isolated incidents where a protest was actually lodged. Perhaps one of the harshest critics of the group was the author's own grandmother who, according to the author's mother, "would have gotten up and left" had the author not been a part of the ensemble. However, this kind of reaction is rare. Mostly, the group is accepted whole-heartedly. Praise (n.d.) is frequent and unqualified:

Thank you for giving of your precious time and talents to make Touch A Life a blessing to those who attended. There is no way we could pay you for what you are worth. We appreciate you giving to help our churches in this way.

Diana Lewis, Arkansas Baptist State Convention

The impact on our entire church was one of blessing and an openness to allow God to use creative methods to communicate the gospel. The kids are still talking about the workshop. Some are looking for scripts while others are beginning to write their own. I can't wait to see how God uses the seed you planted to grow it into an effective tool for the Kingdom.

Thumper Miller, Willow Point Baptist Church, Shreveport, LA

I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed your performances at Geyer Springs Baptist Church in Little Rock. I'm a 59 year old grandmother of seven grandchildren and I was delighted, awed, inspired and entertained by your work.

Sue Wynkoop, Conway, AR

The team members were good examples to our youth. They love Christ! You can see it!

Gary Bowman, FBC Lancaster, TX

May God bless you all in your efforts! The Company was great. I personally loved every minute. Our SBC churches, especially old/established ones, can be very rigid and closed-minded. I pray God used The Company to focus our congregation on Him instead of self!

Bobby Kacal, FBC Sherman, TX

The Company did a super job. God spoke through you to communicate the gospel and the teachings of His word. Thanks for submitting yourself to the Lord.

Dan Wynn, FBC Natchez, MS

The audience was connected to the presentations... They had made friends and established relationships with people here during the short time they were in Fordyce... They interact well with our people. They even took part in an opening assembly in Sunday School... Way to go!

Ken Shaddox, Pastor, FBC Fordyce, TX (*Company*)

Admittedly these are biased quotes taken directly from a source attempting to promote the group. Still, they do have currency. Although I was in the group and not in the best position to hear the negative thoughts of people regarding the group, I did hear some negative things regarding the group. Still, I never heard anyone saying anything negative about the use of performance itself. It seems that The Company has been extremely successful at breaking down established barriers between the worlds of performance and religion.

The lack of criticism of the group is probably due to two main reasons. As outsiders to the churches where they are performing, they bring a certain level of credibility with them. The effect of coming in from the outside is doubly true when considering that they represent one of the SBC's six seminaries, schools which are looked to as the experts when it comes to theology, worship, and practice. Second, they are advertised well in advance as being a CRT troupe. Everyone in the audience knows, at least to some extent, what to expect. People who are vehemently opposed to the concept of combining theater and religion simply stay home, and the group is able to avoid negative experiences in that particular area.

One other area of emphasis here is the locus of power. The Company is in the unique position of being tied intrinsically with an institution that, in reality, offers it very little support. As mentioned above, the group is actually incorporated as an independent entity, performs only rarely at SWBTS, and draws no financial support from them save that of the director's salary. The group, in many ways, stands alone. Parrish has been able to sustain the group based on his reputation and on the performance competence of the group. Many of those in the group choose the school (the alleged parent organization) based on The Company (the alleged dependent group). The switch of reasons to come to SWBTS is an interesting case of role-reversal for CRT and reminds us that performance does have the power to draw people to it. In such cases, the dependent organization, or its representative, can feel somewhat less reliant on the over-arching organization for survival. In this case though, the one thing that SWBTS controls is Parrish's employment, which seems to be the key factor in terms of institutional control. As long as he remains an employee, SWBTS will continue to reap the benefits of having The Company associated with it (name recognition, recruitment,

ministry) without having to support the group in any measurable way (finances, performance opportunities). The question of switching priorities in terms of SWBTS and The Company as motivating factors for being a member of both is still valid though. As the current move toward more emotionally-charged worship practices in many SBC churches and the number of people that this move is attracting is demonstrating, people do choose churches based on worship style. CRT is an element of a church's worship style. As the practice becomes more pervasive, church-goers will undoubtedly begin to seek out churches where they can either see or participate in CRT.

The Company has remained at the forefront of the CRT movement for the last twenty years. The elements of their success seem to be a trained and dedicated director, a constant influx of new and talented performers, a clear and shared vision, a systematic method for training and assimilating new members, and a reputation which enables them to perform enough to maintain momentum. If every group could emulate this formula, CRT troupes would flourish. However, these ingredients have coalesced in this group in a unique fashion, virtually unrepeatable in other situations. The purpose of this study is to discern how these elements can be universalized to fit the needs and exigencies of other troupes. The Company serves as something of an ideal; its lessons must be practical. The political adage says, "We campaign in poetry and govern in prose." Much the same could be said for seeking to emulate The Company. It is an ideal to which other groups can aspire.

CHAPTER 5: GEN X

The site is a large gameroom. On one side of it is a make-shift stage consisting of four, 4' x 8' x 2' risers pushed together. It has been cleared and equipped with a podium and several microphones. The rest of the room is filled with folding chairs in which approximately 100 teens are sitting. Various recreational and entertainment pieces have been pushed to the sides of the room: a television set, a pool table, and a couple of ping pong tables. The lights in the room are fluorescent, with no special lighting for the stage area. The audience is sitting in folding chairs in the shape of a fan around the stage. The vast majority of them are in their teens. All are Caucasian, and they are split relatively equally in terms of gender. A few adults are mixed in with the group and others are standing in the back of the room. On the stage, two actors are performing a sketch about a carpenter and an apprentice. The two are dressed in jeans and t-shirts, nothing that would signify a dramatic presentation. They are not using any mechanical amplification, either.

The script involves the carpenter mentoring his young apprentice and advising her to use her new-found skills to the betterment of mankind: several puns on the words sole/soul, the challenge to leave the safety of the workshop, and other take-offs on the motif. The teens in the audience seem genuinely attentive to the scene being played out before them. The adults in the room seem to have the dual focus of watching the performance and watching the teens watch the performance (M. Quarterman, personal communication, December, 2003).

The sketch is being performed by the third group in this study, Gen X. Gen X represents private groups not associated with any other institution or organization. Gen

X was a ministry team established by two college students for the purpose of bringing a Christian message to various audiences through the channels of dramatic performance, preaching, and music. Ultimately, the group consisted of nine students who were all interested in pursuing goals in some way related to the Christian ministry. The group contained members who specialized in preaching, in music, and in dramatic performance. The dramatic performance portion of the ministry included five members, all of whom were planning on pursuing career goals that related to the Christian ministry and who planned to use dramatic performance in their ministry. Gen X was in existence as a corporate entity for two years. Their ministry provides insight into the business and personal side of repertory theater in terms of what is necessary for a group to be successful. Other examples of this type of group are Face-to-Face in Birmingham, AL, the A.D. Players (originally associated with Second Baptist Church, Houston) in Houston, TX, and Johnson and Johnson in Murfreesboro, TN.

Gen X was formed in spring, 2001, by Matt Weston and Wes Sullivan. The two men envisioned a group modeled after the Campus Crusade ministerial team, All Things to All People. They enlisted Thad Burkhalter to lead music and Emory Colvin, Sarah Braddock, G. T. Moore, and Chase Quarterman to do theatrical performances. The group later added Jacob Lipking and Mitzi Quarterman to the dramatic arts team. They performed at two summer camps, a school chapel service, several DiscipleNows, a church worship service, and a couple of other miscellaneous performances. They disbanded in fall, 2002, for a variety of reasons, the most significant being the crowded calendars of the team members.

Gen X serves as an important counterpoint to Acts 2 and The Company because of, not in spite of, its failure to succeed as an organization. It did fail, by any quantitative

or qualitative method of analysis. It lasted just over a year and a half as a viable organization, only performing for about half that time. It quickly lost half of its original cast. It performed at only five venues. However, its failure is an invaluable addition to this study because it offers a contrast with the success stories of Acts 2 and The Company. If those two groups are exemplars for what works, Gen X serves as a cautionary tale of what does not. Other groups that have tried and failed in their quest to form a viable group are Face-to-Face in Birmingham, AL, which failed for many of the same reasons as Gen X, and Johnson and Johnson, from Nashville, TN, whose ending was more of a personal choice concerning their family than failure as a troupe. As such, Gen X's inclusion in this study was paramount.

There are other groups of the type which Gen X represents for this study (a professional, unattached group) that have been successful. The best example is Johnson and Johnson from Nashville, TN. Paul and Nicole Johnson performed as a viable act for seven years before ending their run as a traveling group. Their run was funded through performance fees, to be certain, but their primary source of income was from the sales of books, cassettes, and video tapes. However, their success confirms many of the same principles that this study has already demonstrated through the analysis of Acts 2 and The Company. Gen X provides a better exemplar by demonstrating the characteristics of an unsuccessful run.

This chapter discusses a CRT troupe which operates without the support or restraints of a sponsoring or encompassing organization. It concentrates primarily on leadership and institutional support as those seem to be the elements which most contributed to the downfall of the group. Motives and practices of this group were similar to those discussed in previous chapters. This study contributes to the theoretical

value of the overall work primarily in terms of the issues of viability and longevity. The most long-standing, active, and viable troupes are those connected with a parent institution. Successful CRT groups seem to survive only within the context of larger, mission-oriented groups. The case study of Gen X provides us with additional reasons why that seems to be the case. This chapter contributes to our understanding of CRT because it serves as a cautionary tale and perhaps even a restrictive one.

Motivation

This group, like the others analyzed, claimed ministry as its primary motivation. In this case, that claim is interesting because several of the members of the group were making career decisions at the time of their participation in the group. Livelihood, income, and status factors should have been factors in those types of decisions. Yet, motivation is the driving force both in the purpose of the group and in the stated purposes of the individuals.

Group

The message that Gen X intended to convey was the traditional message of the Christian church. The mission statement of the group summarized the group's purpose. It stated, "Seeking to see ourselves and others encounter God in fresh ways, acknowledging our differences in learning, and making available a way for every person to encounter God in the way that they learn best" (Weston, personal communication, October, 2003). The statement, written by Weston and Sullivan, served as a guide for the group. Weston chose a verse from the Bible as a motto. The verse, Philippians 2:15, reads, "So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe"

(New International Version). The group's main purpose was spreading the message of Jesus Christ to youth in hopes of leading them to Christianity.

As Colvin (personal communication) put it, the group's stated message was:

The Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God. God is the Father and Creator of the universe, Jesus Christ was sent to earth as God's only Son. He lived a perfect, sinless life and was crucified, died, and was buried. He rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into Heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father and will come again to judge the living and the dead" (September, 2003).

Gen X shared the message that through faith in Jesus Christ, the students could receive salvation for eternity and the forgiveness of all their sins.

Furthermore, the group wanted to establish an environment where kids could seek God; feeling that through performance, younger generations would learn better than simply through traditional channels. Performance was their chosen method because it is an "emotional art" (Colvin, personal communication, September, 2003). The belief of the group was that students would better be able to relate to the characters in the performances than the pastor of a church. Colvin claimed that religious performance is "an open-ended opportunity to share your faith" (personal communication, September, 2003). In other words, performance opens doors of communication with students in a way that homiletics does not. The group attempted to open channels through which they could then connect with the students in private conversations away from the performance environment. The performances also provided a context for speakers, teachers, and others to discuss religious topics with the groups for which Gen X performed. Ministry served as both a motivation and a stated task function.

Though Gen X was a short-lived ministerial team, the group made a definite impact on both the youth for whom they performed and the members themselves. "It

was one of those things in my life that I will never regret. We grew from it all” (Weston, personal communication, October, 2003).

In essence this group seemed created for the short term. The group was founded by and consisted solely of college students. The group all had ministerial career goals, but none of them were intrinsically or extrinsically linked in any way. It was as if they knew that they would only be together for a short while. Money was never mentioned as a driving force. The group members invested the time, energy and emotional capital in an organization that was destined to dissolve within a couple of years. Their main reason offered for doing so was, once again, the religious concept of a calling or obligation. Weston and Sullivan were talking about “new ways to reach kids.” Drama was simply a channel for them. Gen X served as a laboratory for these young ministers, a way of testing methods for reaching an audience. Performance was only one of the methods with which they experimented.

Personal

As noted elsewhere, CRT walks the line between performance and service. Gen X members drew their motivation from the latter. As Weston put it, “One day, Wes and I were driving around in my truck talking about what we could do for God’s kingdom. Then, we started thinking about how we could minister to the youth, and the group just evolved from there” (personal communication, September, 2003). The other members relate similar motivation. Mitzi Quarterman is a case in point: “Personally I think it [acting] was a great opportunity to witness. I am better at showing my thoughts and feeling through acting than I am at public speaking, so I was able to spread God’s word through drama” (personal communication, December, 2003).

Unstated in all of their interviews is the desire to be in front, to lead, to be admired, to be respected, and to receive affection from the audience. As college students, these performers would have naturally been looking for belonging and acceptance. Yet, these needs never surface in their discussion of motivation. One reason for this omission may be the method of information-gathering. Interviews are, by their very nature, subjective. Respondents often say what they feel the interviewer wants to hear and what casts them in the best possible light. Surveys would be no better because they measure only reported behavior and motivation. Even ethnographical observation deals more with behavior than motivation. In this case, however, there is no reason to suspect that the respondents were dissimulating, and the unanimity of their responses is an indication that, in their minds at least, self-aggrandizement was not a primary motive.

CRT is simply different from main-stage performances, both secular and religious. CRT troupes actively engage their audiences in ways that main-stage performances cannot. CRT performances take place in environs that the audiences are more accustomed to than the performers, provide interaction time as a matter of course, and are couched in the context, both physical and temporal, of religious communication. While popular mythology may lead us to believe that performers are always mere attention-seekers, this study suggests that, in the case of those who do CRT performance, such motives are largely absent.

Another interesting area of analysis here is the reason for the group's demise. As explained above in the short narrative of the group's history, the group fell apart after less than two years primarily because of the crowded calendars of its members. To some extent, CRT must be a priority for its members if the group is to thrive. Since CRT

is not yet a feasible option for someone seeking full-time employment (more on that below), CRT practitioners are required to have other jobs or responsibilities. However, the kind of commitment required of the group members is more in line with what Parrish expects of The Company members than what was asked of the Gen X performers. Practice is discussed below, but it is important to note here that, no matter the motives of those who do CRT, without dedication and commitment, that impulse is wasted. Of course, this study in no way wishes to condemn Gen X or its membership. For two years, they provided a valuable service to the groups which saw them perform. Their motivation was not to create a lasting group, only a viable one for a short term. In that, they succeeded.

Leadership

Leadership is where we see the true failings of Gen X. While this study is not meant to be an indictment against the group's leaders, even its leaders saw many areas in which the group was not as they originally envisioned it and fell short of expectations. This section looks at the leadership of the group and explains its short-comings. The explicit failures and successes themselves are catalogued in the discussion of the group's practice.

Selection

The originators of the group, Weston and Sullivan, were the leaders of the group as a whole. They took command of the initial coordinating, organizing, and scheduling of the team in its earliest stages of existence. However, it was a challenge for the team to have two leaders with equal authority and decision-making powers. Weston eventually emerged as the sole leader of Gen X. As Weston (September, 2003) noted,

In the beginning, both Wes and I shared a great deal of leadership. Eventually, because I have a stronger personality than he, I moved into the foreground, while

Weston stepped behind the scenes and became an encourager. If he had not done that, I believe there could have been a great potential for conflict, but God works his plan out according to his will, and everything was fine. (personal communication)

With Sullivan backing down, Weston became viewed as the unquestioned leader of Gen X. Weston has significant experience, if little training, in the area of youth ministry. He has no experience in leading a ministerial team, however, which is significant to this study.

Though Weston assumed primary leadership roles, the decisions and planning processes relied heavily on all members of the group. There were no particular ranks or levels of authority within the ministerial team. In theory, each member assumed equal responsibility in decision making. One of the stated objectives for the group was to “keep God in control, and rely on His authority rather than our own” (Weston, personal communication, September, 2003).

In terms of the group’s dramatic arts ministry, Colvin emerged as the initial coordinator and organizer. She was the one originally approached by Weston to head the performance part of the group. No criteria were mentioned concerning that decision by Weston and Sullivan. Colvin was simply a friend of the two originators, was known by them to have theatrical experience, and was training for a career in the Christian ministry. Colvin had an active role in selecting the members she knew to be qualified for the team. Once the members were selected, she distributed much of the organizational burdens to the new team members, all of whom had some background in theatre. Eventually, the Gen X members alternated writing, directing, and administrative responsibilities. This distribution of leadership and authority gave each team member a sense of purpose, while never over-burdening any one person. (Colvin, personal communication, September, 2003)

It is interesting to note that both Colvin and Sarah Braddock, Colvin's eventual replacement as primary director of the group's performance efforts, are female. No one in the group had any reservations or qualms about gender as an issue in leadership positions. For the purposes of this study, gender is only relevant here reasons discussed in the previous chapters: female leadership runs contrary to the official documents of the Convention of which the group claims to be a part. In terms of the internal relevance to the group itself, gender was not an issue.

Hence, none of the leaders in the group was selected on a merit system. Weston and Sullivan arrived at their positions because they founded the group. Colvin and eventually Braddock became the directors of the performance group because of their personal relationships with the group's founders. At first glance, Gen X seemed to use the same method to select its leaders as Parrish and even Bell to a lesser extent, but the groups are qualitatively different. Both of those decision-makers observe their members in action, in interaction, and in a variety of situations before promoting them to leadership positions. Gen X operated more like a social club in this instance. Groups need competent leadership based on factors other than personal relationships and preferences. To produce quality performance, quality leadership is a must.

Training

Because the group originated from college students and leadership was theoretically equally distributed among the members of Gen X, the team had no specific established director who took charge of the performances. However, Colvin initially emerged as the leader and director of the performance team, being that she was the first member asked to join by Weston and Sullivan.

Colvin, at the time of the group's creation, was a sophomore majoring in both Christian Studies and Communication with a Theater emphasis. She had a great deal of theater experience at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette while still in high school but had no formal training in either theatrical direction or group leadership. She had appeared in a number of main-stage productions (*The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Guernica*, *Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Madwoman of Chailot*, and *The Sound of Music*) both at Westminster Christian Academy in Opelousas, LA, and at UL-L. In terms of Christian Repertory Theater, she had no experience whatsoever (Colvin, personal communication, September, 2003). Braddock, who took the helm from Colvin, had even less main-stage experience and had no repertory experience, either (Braddock, personal communication, November, 2003).

Though the entire performance team was under the age of twenty, each member who joined Gen X had some training and experience in theatre. The fact that everyone had a small amount of experience actually led to some conflict within the group. Colvin viewed herself as the group's performance director. However, because the team members had some knowledge in performance, they viewed a director as unnecessary or undesired. For this reason, personality conflicts between the group and Colvin ultimately led her to leave the group (G.T. Moore, personal communication, December 2003). When Braddock assumed the mantle of primary director, she took a more democratic approach, allowing the members to share the directing responsibilities.

Sharing the director role seemed beneficial for the cohesion of the team. With each member equally participating in the writing, directing, and coordinating duties of

the group, the group was better able to relate to each other and bring about viable performances (Braddock, personal communication, November, 2003).

The ultimate demise of the group could be attributed to the lack of a strong director for the group. Weston concluded that the disbandment resulted largely from lack of commitment and poor planning by the group's leadership. He admitted that although the idea was exciting, the group probably jumped into action too quickly and should have taken more time for prayer and careful preparation (personal communication, September, 2003). This lack of foresight perhaps could have been remedied by the presence of an experienced director. CRT has ministerial functions, but it remains, at its heart, a performance endeavor. As such, it is imperative that the group have someone within or without the group who can direct the group in performance as well as in group cohesion and team-building.

Institutional Support

This section highlights another major area of struggle for Gen X. They had no parent organization to fall back on for guidance, members, financial support, publicity, performance opportunities, or anything else. The following discussion is crucial for the over-all study because it cuts to the very core of what a CRT troupe is. CRT troupes often fail without the support of a larger group. Professional CRT groups must balance their stated functions of performance and ministry even though the unspoken function of group survival must be satisfied as well.

Financial Backing

Gen X considered themselves a professional troupe, but they never achieved self-sufficiency. As such, most of their meager expenses were met by the members of the group. As Chase Quarterman (December, 2003) mentions, the group members

considered the money that they spent on the group as a part of their tithe (money set aside for the support of the church):

Going and performing in these places is like tithing: even though it's fun, it's hard work. I know that God has given me a talent, and I felt like I needed to give back what I had been given. Tithing isn't limited to just giving money to the church, it's giving back anything God has given you. (personal communication)

The members of the group absorbed the modest costs of putting their performances together. While the group used very few props and costumes, what they did use they were able to find at their homes, borrow from the Mississippi College theatre department or purchase from local thrift stores.

The group's larger expenses, travel and lodging, were paid by the groups extending the invitation to perform. The Gen X members were paid a minimal salary for their week-long camp performances, each receiving \$150.00 per week (M. Quarterman, personal communication, October, 2003). Obviously, this figure eliminates greed as a motivating factor for performance, but for college students struggling financially to meet expenses, the money did come in handy.

The financial record of Gen X demonstrates the difficulty in running, or at least beginning, a fully self-sufficient CRT troupe. No organization, religious or otherwise, is willing to pay top dollar for a group with no reputation and little training or experience. Of course, the only way to gain a reputation and experience is to perform. For the initial stages of any group's run, they almost perforce must rely on outside sources of income. This problem does not exist for groups (such as The Company and Acts 2) with sponsoring organizations that can absorb any initial costs.

This problem is seen repeatedly in the struggles of similar groups. The members of Face-to-Face from Birmingham, AL, held full-time jobs and traveled exclusively on the weekends. I maintain my own CRT ministry, yet I must work full-time to support

myself because performance does not offer steady or sufficient funds. For more well-known, prestigious groups, the problem is no less significant. Groups such as Johnson and Johnson and Custer and Hoose have had to rely on script and video sales to supplement their performance income. Performance alone simply did not provide enough financial remuneration.

Membership

Gen X did plug into an organization in order to find its membership. Although it in no way sponsored the group, Mississippi College provided the pool of students from which Gen X was formed. Mississippi College is a small, Southern Baptist-affiliated school in Clinton, MS. The school has both a thriving Christian Studies department and an active theater program. The school sends many of its students off to Southern Baptist seminaries each year. The school also has an active Baptist Student Union, Reformed United Fellowship, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and other religious-affiliated and dedicated groups. MC has no theater major but does offer a communication major with a theater emphasis. Students can also gain experience through the school-sponsored plays, various one-act play opportunities, the opera workshop, and other miscellaneous performance chances. The members of Gen X were hand-picked from the MC student body by Weston, Sullivan, and Colvin for inclusion within the group. Having an entire campus of potential members was a decided advantage for the group as it sought members willing to make the sacrifices necessary to join a group of this nature.

The two originators of the group also drew from sources outside of the school, particularly in seeking advice and direction. Primarily, Weston and Sullivan depended on two people for guidance. Weston contacted Harvey Ellis, a board member of the

Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) for help (Weston, personal communication, September, 2003). Ellis is in charge of the Discipleship Ministries program of the MBCB. Each year, he sponsors the state's Creative Arts Conference. Although Ellis has no background in theater, he does have experience with ministry teams and contacts in the areas which would have aided a burgeoning CRT group. Also, Weston spoke with the director of the Student Life Convention, Randy Hall, who provided some insight into his ministerial organization. Having spoken at churches throughout Mississippi, Weston and Sullivan had a network of contacts upon which to draw to seek performance opportunities for their group (Weston, personal communication, September, 2003).

A lack of internal support did not seem to affect Gen X. Because the group did not rely on CRT for its income and because it had a pool from which to draw its membership, they were able to function without help from an outside source. However, the intangibles that a parent organization can offer were missed. Particularly since the members/leaders were so young and relatively inexperienced, having a source of outside guidance could have greatly benefitted them. Weston did seek to fill this role with advisors, but the lack of organizational ties, credibility and contact definitely seemed to hinder the group.

Performance Opportunities

CRT troupes seem to gain popularity on a word-of-mouth basis, via an informal grapevine of ministers throughout the area in which the group performs. Gen X was no exception. Weston did create an advertising brochure for the group, but most of their contacts and opportunities came through groups which had personal contact with members of the group in the past. The group got one of their performance opportunities

in Lafayette, LA, because the Minister to Students, Mickey Bailey, knew Colvin. Colvin had been a student at the church until she left for college. They were also invited to several DiscipleNows (weekend retreats for high school students) based on Weston and Sullivan's speaking experience with the churches in the past. (Colvin, personal communication, September, 2003)

The one exception to this pattern was the group's invitation to perform for the Big Creek Baptist Association in Arkansas. The leaders of the retreat heard about the group second-hand through another church which had used the group for a DiscipleNow (Weston, personal communication, September, 2003). Gen X had no first-hand knowledge of the church which had invited them to perform. Such invitations are rare for new and relatively inexperienced troupes. That Gen X received such a "gig" so early in its existence was an encouraging sign for the group had they been able to sustain their ministry.

Gen X and The Company teach the same lesson--Gen X as the negative example, The Company as the positive one. When Parrish started his group, he made sure to schedule several performances right at the outset to get the momentum of the group moving. Gen X failed to do this. Their performances were either a couple of months apart or came in bunches with even more months between them. This type of scheduling is a short-coming of the group due to its lack of support from the church community which it desired to serve, but more significantly, it is a mark of short-sightedness on the part of the leadership of the group. As Weston said, "If we had it to do over again, there are some things we would do differently" (personal communication, September, 2003). Ultimately, the group faded because the membership had other

priorities, but one is left to wonder if those priorities would have been altered had the group been more active in performance.

Gen X's experience as an independent CRT troupe was short-lived. However, that seemed to have been a function of leadership and practice rather than that of institutional support. The lesson that they teach us is that religious organizations cannot underwrite an independent troupe's entire finances simply through payment for performance. The inevitability of financial stress and the constant fight for economic survival was a lesson alluded to in the discussion of The Company and is here demonstrated plainly. The opportunities for groups to perform come too few and far between and the payment for an entire troupe is simply not enough to support them all. Groups must be bi-vocational if they are to survive. The challenge for members becomes the balance of both jobs. That challenge puts independent troupes in the same situation as church and school-sponsored troupes, and that balance has already been discussed.

Practice

Even though Gen X lasted only just over eighteen months, it does offer some lessons for those who wish to do CRT well and do it for an extended period of time. The performance practices of Gen X discussed below serve as an example in the negative surely, but there are also some gems of knowledge to be gleaned from the things that they did well. After all, they lasted as long as they chose to and broke up on their own terms. Their primary failure seems to be that of a lack of activity while they were together; they simply did not perform often. The following section is an important addition to the "big picture" because it demonstrates how groups without a parent organization can accomplish all of the things that must be done in order for

performances to take place. These groups are forced to advertise, cast, rehearse, perform, minister, communicate, and survive all without the internal lines of communication already provided for groups supported by a larger network.

Member Selection

Because of the way in which Gen X began, there was no need for formal auditions to select members. Weston and Colvin simply hand-picked the members they knew would have an interest in the group. Commonalities among the group included a devotion to the Christian life and the desire to spread the gospel through innovative and interesting ways. The group members point to prayer as a major factor in the ultimate membership of the group. According to Weston, "God selected the right people to be a part of Gen X" (personal communication, September, 2003). There were no second choices, no alternates, and no rejections in the selection of the membership of the group; the only members who were considered became a part of Gen X.

There were no explicit, definitive criteria for participation in the group. The leaders tried to construct a group which could perform a variety of pieces. They attempted to balance males and females, and younger and older looking individuals. However, these were secondary concerns. Of primary concern were members who could be committed to the mission statement of the group (Colvin, personal communication, September, 2003). Still, no formal membership criteria were established or followed. Even age was not a conscious factor, although the pool from which they drew was of their friends and college classmates.

In many ways, for CRT to be successful, it has to be treated as a business. Money changes hands. Details and organization are required. Obligations and responsibilities cannot be shirked. In this case, certain members' feelings got hurt and

others left the group because of interpersonal difficulties. Part of that problem was that the membership of the group and the leadership of the group were so closely intertwined. There was no sense of respect for the capabilities and final authority of the director. The members viewed the leaders as friends. When the directorial decisions had to be made, the director came off looking like she was “playing the heavy.” The lesson here is more one of organizational communication than of performance theory, but nevertheless, it is there. A laissez-faire approach to leadership or directing reduces some of the stress of group maintenance, but it is not so effective when certain task functions need to be performed. Leaders/directors must be respected and followed if any theatrical endeavor is to be a success. The membership must trust the leader’s vision and be willing to follow it. This trust and obedience do not require dictatorial authority on the part of the director or blind allegiance on the part of the membership. It does acknowledge the fact that someone has to call the shots, though.

Rehearsals

Gen X held extremely casual rehearsals. In fact, the group never had a consistent rehearsal schedule. The group relied on a few meetings before a given event to prepare. The group members felt equipped to handle the types of performances done by the group with little to no preparation. Members describe the rehearsals that did take place as fun and efficient.

We would get a script, have time so we could memorize it, and then come the weekend of the performance, we would finally practice together. We wouldn’t block it until shortly before the performance, because we were all experienced, and could adlib and work well together. Even though we didn’t rehearse much, it worked because we practiced enough for *us*, and we didn’t have to have a set schedule. (C. Quarterman, personal communication, September, 2003)

Class, work, and extra-curricular schedules also created time conflicts for the group.

Fortunately, the group was able to carry off their performances without a great amount

of rehearsal. Mitzi Quarterman (December, 2003) remembers that although the performances were “thrown together, they were always successful and well received.”

When they did rehearse, they primarily met at Aven Little Theater on the campus of Mississippi College. Aven is a small, black-box style theater. There is a proscenium stage, but it is not pronounced, and the environment can be altered for any style of performance. The group rehearsed at times when there was no production running in the theater, so there was no set with which the group had to deal. The group used the house lights for the most part and rehearsed in the audience section of the theater as much as on the stage. The performance scripts did not use a specific set, so the rehearsal space could have been anywhere. As a matter of fact, several members of the group claimed the read-through rehearsals in the car on the way to the performances as extremely important to their preparation (M. Quarterman, personal communication, December, 2003).

The group seemed to rely on prayer as much as rehearsal. Weston says, “We prayed a lot—prayer was a huge value to us, it was our center focus” (personal communication, September, 2003) The reliance on, even the practice of, prayer is a major distinction between religious and secular performance troupes. The perception of the “outside” world is that today’s religious drama (and art and music) is inferior to secular. Perhaps the lax attitude of Gen X in regard to rehearsals is an example of what leads to the perception. One wonders what would happen if the students put the same kind of preparation and effort into their class assignments, let alone their later careers, that they claim to have put into this group. Without attempting to disparage either their work ethic or their commitment, simply praying that their performance would be acceptable seems counter-intuitive. Success in any endeavor is generally achieved

at the same level as effort put forth. This lack of effort on a continuous basis may well be one of the primary factors which led to the ultimate downfall of the group. Sanford Meisner (1987) claims that drama is the easiest thing in the world to learn, it only requires thirty years to master. The members of Gen X seemed unwilling to make that type of investment of time, energy, dedication, expertise, and patience into their ministry.

Performances

The group's performances took place in a variety of settings and atmospheres. Their weekend performances took place in the chapel of a private school and various worship centers of Baptist churches. The chapel was in a gymnasium where the students were seated on the bleachers and the performance took place on the floor. Acoustics were the primary problem for the group as not enough microphones were available for all of the members of the group. The worship settings were much more conducive to the dramatic event. The stage environment was always elevated with the audience seated in pews. Both environments contained the traditional separation of audience and performers (Colvin, personal communication, September, 2003).

They also had one performance at MC for the school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes organization. That performance took place in a large classroom in the field-house on campus. The classroom is relatively "standard issue" with student desks, fluorescent lighting, and a chalk board in front. The room is not large enough to require amplification. It seats approximately fifty.

At their week-long camps, the performances occurred in a much less formal environment. At the first camp, Spirit University, the group performed in a game room. Performing on an elevated, temporary stage set up against one wall of the room, the

group was limited in both space and technical performance aspects. The second week-long camp took place in a pavilion area with limited lighting and sound capabilities. This area was more rustic than the first but had the same limitations in regards to technical capabilities (M. Quarterman, December, 2003).

Gen X's actual performances were a bit different in structure than the other groups discussed because they were an entire ministry team instead of solely a performance troupe. As such, they could coordinate all of the elements of a worship service together: music, homiletics, and dramatic performance. However, they approached their use of the dramatic presentations in a slightly different fashion than the other groups as well, particularly during their week-long camps.

The group put together sketches which were inter-related and built on each other. According to Colvin (September, 2003),

We had a week-long story that unfolded day by day and the Bible Studies would draw from that. The drama was based on a carpenter who represented God, and we played out different characters in different situations e.g. the apprentice who was afraid to leave his master (emphasis on ministry and mission--go where the Lord calls), the unwanted child who needed a pair of shoes (the shoes were a representation of Jesus and how he came for the wounded and the unloveable [sic], etc.), and there was also one about how to treat those in the body of Christ told by arguing customers in the shoe shop. (personal communication)

These presentations led up to the presentation of the gospel message (Jesus as Christ and Messiah) on the final day of the performance run. The group tied the entire week together thematically through the use of a continuing motif within their performances.

The group also used various sketches during the morning meetings to prepare the students for their small-group times. These sketches were much less formal in tone and content than the evening performances. This switch in tone highlights the flexibility of the group in meeting the various demands placed on a repertory troupe. Not only must a troupe be equipped to handle various staging and technical issues; they must

also have a variety of scripts with a variety of tones, messages, and purposes available for use.

Gen X is the only group in this study to actively use audience involvement in a performance venue outside of workshops. During the group's performances for the week-long camps, the group started Bible studies in their morning performances with the team doing improvisational games (freeze frame, scene tag, and others) in order to get the students emotionally involved and engaged. According to Colvin (September, 2003):

Oftentimes in BS's (Bible Studies) they come in tired or not wanting to be there, so we started with something fun that got them awake, alert and interested. Each one of the drama team members would give a short testimony, then Matt would start the study. Most references in the study to our drama came from the "worship time" drama we presented. (personal communication)

The inclusion of the group members' personal narratives allowed the students to get to know them better, further engage the members of the audience, and lighten the tone of the performances.

Further, the group considered what happened after the performances as a vital portion of the group's ministry. In all dramatic performances, the audience responds in some way. Gen X was no exception. "Sometimes, after the performances, there were no laughs, no tears, no applause, only awe-struck faces from the audience that had been touched by the messages" (M. Quarterman, personal communication). In religious performance the response of the audience is the actual goal of the performance: audience members choosing to follow Christ in a religious lifestyle. Mitzi Quarterman serves as a good example for Gen X in that she was able to lead several girls to Christ after one of the group's performances. In this way, the group fulfilled its stated mission through audience involvement with the group members. The personal relationships of

the group members with those to whom they were ministering serve as further evidence, in addition to the personal testimony discussed earlier, that ministry, rather than the performances themselves, was the goal of the group.

Gen X consciously focused itself on the traditional concept of drama. They consciously avoided other genres frequently used by CRT troupes, such as interpretive movements, narration and tableaux. They used music at the end of a couple of their pieces but did not actively “interpret” the songs in a symbolic fashion. Instead, they concentrated on character and plot development and allowed the story-lines to create drama instead of relying on technical elements (Colvin, personal communication, September, 2003).

The group did not use specialized lighting techniques, for example. The venues where they performed were not equipped with theatrical lighting, but the group claims that it did not need them anyway. The dramatic performances were simple enough in structure and content to be performed in a variety of places and contexts. As such, they were not reliant on highly technical elements (M. Quarterman, personal communication, December, 2003).

Gen X purposefully kept its needs for props and costumes at a bare minimum. As is the case for all repertory groups, this is necessary because they need to be flexible and adaptable in a variety of situations. Further, the group had the issues of travel and budget to consider. As the group performed most of their few significant runs in Texas and Arkansas, they had to be able to carry everything that they would need in only a few small vehicles. Limited space is one reason the group used primarily modern, casual dress in their performances. They also used virtually no set pieces that could not be found on-site (M. Quarterman, personal communication, December, 2003).

The only element of performance that could be considered “nontraditional” was the one interpretive movement that the group used during their camp experiences. Interpretation is a relatively common element of CRT groups and a staple of The Company’s repertoire. In that sense, interpretive movements are nontraditional to the theatrical world as a whole, but in the world of Christian performance, they are commonly performed and easily recognized.

In many ways, Gen X serves as this study’s best exemplar for its actual performance style. CRT as a genre is intrinsically tied to the suspension of disbelief as one of its defining characteristics, and “straight drama” is what Gen X focused on. Further, its style is simplistic and not reliant on costumes or special effects. The Company is almost a performance art group at times, utilizing interpretive movement, tableaux and non-traditional performance styles. These are not bad performance practices, of course. They simply fall outside of the working definition proffered by this study for CRT. Acts 2, on the other hand, often relies heavily on costumes and virtually always uses specialized lighting if only for visual accentuation. Once again, CRT is built for versatility and eschews such practices as technically reliant pieces and the use of multiple costumes and props. Gen X provides an example of a group that performed pieces in character, relying on the suspension of disbelief almost to the exclusion of all other types of performance. Further, they performed without costumes, props, or technical elements. Hence, they serve as a prototypical CRT troupe.

Theory

Gen X was created to present the message of the Christian religion in new and easily interpretable ways. Weston and Sullivan set out to create a group which would entertain and energize as well as educate and proselytize. As such, they realized that

they would, by their very nature, run counter to many of the traditions and practices of the established order. The group did not set out to upset or instigate, but certainly they entered the arena with a full knowledge of the challenges ahead.

Many churches do still reject most forms of art, including performance, as legitimate worship practice. However, the extremely short life of Gen X, as well as the hand-picked nature of their performances, shielded them from these churches. Gen X's target group was youth, and youth are among the generation which agrees with Gen X members' views of religion and performance. In fact, this age group seems to relate much more to performance than to a sermon. Chase Quarterman noted, "Just like there is music and art in churches, like stained glass windows, drama is just another art form. So, we never saw a problem with it" (personal communication, September, 2003). The group drew inspiration from the Campus Life CRT, All Things to All People, which has used performance to reach youth for over a decade. In their short run, Gen X received only praise, regard, and appreciation for their use of performance in sharing the Gospel message.

As this group aimed its ministry specifically at youth, one is left to wonder at the generational issues that were at play in this particular area of concern. Only once in their existence (FBC, Lafayette) did they perform in any setting in which adults were a part of the primary audience. In all their other performances, adults were present only in the role of teachers and supervisors for the youth. This focus and selected audience prevented any conflict between the worlds of performance and religion. Youth are largely unaware of the historical animosity between the two fields. Plus, this particular generation has been weaned on performance from an early age. Information and persuasion in dramatic form is nothing new to them. From the blatant messages of

commercials to the more subtle value claims made in television and cinema, this generation has faced narrative persuasion and been faced with the task of determining fidelity and probability (Fisher, 1978) from the earliest ages of mental and emotional development. One would wonder if they had failed to accept it, not that they did so readily. The only real question is how they were able to shift their thinking regarding performance between the normal secular values of most of the performances in today's culture and those of Gen X. Apparently, according to the response that the group received, even this was no obstacle for the youths in the audience. Their message was received well, and religious decisions were common in all of their performance venues: people decided to accept the tenets of the religion or re-dedicate their lives to those tenets (M. Quarterman, personal communication, December, 2003).

In terms of internal issues, Gen X drew its membership from people with similar backgrounds and experiences. These similarities led to a general consensus about doctrinal issues argued by the scripts performed by the group. However, even with this general consensus, one conflict did arise.

We never really had a conflict except once with GT. GT has a Presbyterian background, and there was a drama that brought up the predestination debate. He had a little bit of an issue with it, so we slightly changed the script, not in its message, but just the wording so it was less controversial for GT. (Weston, personal communication, September, 2003)

The group was able to maintain cohesion, mollify a dissident member, and still proclaim the message as shaped by the majority of the membership. No one left the group over doctrinal issues, and the group was able to put forth the message agreed to by the majority of its membership.

It is telling that even in a hand-picked group, even in a group that lasted such a relatively short time, a doctrinal issue arose, though. In an environment of equals,

where no one has the ultimate authority, these types of disagreements are eventualities. Drama/theater is a collaborative art form, and each member of the team has the right and obligation to contribute to the message. However, the lack of a clear voice controlling the message often leads to a muddled and confused text. Gen X suffered from this confusion by trying to emulate the postmodern, shared leadership model of directing, despite the thoroughly modern aim of its performances.

Gen X can be viewed as an experiment in Christian Repertory Theater. They did not last as a traveling troupe, but in hindsight, no real thought went into their longevity at the outset. They were established, coalesced, performed, and went their separate ways. In the end, though, they provide us with some interesting insights into the theory and practice of CRT. Theoretically, their lack of a unifying voice demonstrates the necessity of such when multiple personalities are shaping the message. Their focus on a specific audience shows that directed aim can be positive and accomplished. Finally, they showed that churches are open to performance, even when the group is new and without institutional alliances or sponsorships. Practically, their main contribution was a reminder that this type of ministry can be achieved. Talent, training, and experience are helpful—even necessary for “good” performance—but Gen X demonstrated that college students with desire and energy can do this type of ministry. They also serve as a reminder that strong, established, committed leadership is important in any endeavor, CRT included. The group may not have survived as a permanent entity, but their run was valuable to those who saw them, to the members who participated, and to those who can learn from them. As Weston commented, “It was one of those things in my life that I will never regret. We grew from it all” (personal communication, September, 2003).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The three case studies in this work lead to many areas of discussion and analysis. First, it is necessary to revisit several definitional concerns within the realm of CRT. Second, the actual practices of the group require analysis. Third, the confluence of religion and performance should be re-visited in light of the newly emerging genre of CRT. Fourth, all research should point to the future, and this is no exception in terms of both CRT itself and further research concerning it.

Definition

Burke (1969) reminds us that labeling and naming have power. The name and definition of CRT is significant. This section re-examines what Christian Repertory Theater, and more practically what a CRT troupe, is. This discussion is perhaps best begun by looking at all of the things that it is not, defining through negation. First, it is not merely “religious theater.” The primary theoretical concern with using that phrase is that it has been so variously defined that it virtually ceased to signify. Some definitions have it meaning “any theater which magnifies the human condition and helps to express the innermost being,” in other words, virtually all performances of any type. CRT is much more specific than that definition insinuates. The other end of the definitional spectrum has it meaning “only enacted theater which adheres strictly to religious texts.” CRT is broader than that. CRT falls in the middle of the definitional spectrum, specifically addressing religious themes and issues but more often than not in modern contexts and arenas. CRT implicitly and explicitly operates with the proscription that its material be specifically Christian in nature. The pieces range from modern interpretations of stories from the Bible similar to the Miracle and Mystery plays to

stories which seek to illustrate truths from the religion as a whole similar to the Morality plays. CRT is a performance movement which seeks to put forth the Christian message.

CRT troupes perform under the same restrictions and requirements as a pastor of a church. Because of the nature of their performances, their audiences are expecting the Christian message in a relatively explicit manner. Their values cannot be too thinly veiled or too ambiguously coded. The second of Fisher's questions concerning the Logic of Good Reasons (1978) is whether or not the values espoused are appropriate to the setting in which they are being presented. The setting in which these groups perform, due to the nature of their funding and existence, is almost always explicitly religious. Hence, the values presented by these groups must be also.

Performances have historically been used as a vehicle to make political (*Angels in America, Trojan Women*), social (*Hair, Henry V*), and cultural (*Rent, Fires in the Mirror*) statements, though. The motivation behind major theatrical works has made them no less theatrical, has made their texts no less dramatic. In the evaluation of its worth, CRT should be held to the same standard, not a higher one. Indeed, CRT can still be a performance troupe, even a theatrical troupe, even with religion as the motivation behind its performances. Clearly they use performance as their vehicle, and at that point, they are a performance group. Yet, CRT is not merely a pared down version of "religious theater."

Second, CRT is not a main-stage production. The distinction may be a primarily generic one but, once again, there is power in naming. True, CRT troupes are often used by their churches (when sponsored by churches) for the purpose of their major shows (usually Passion and Nativity), but the troupes themselves do not exist for that

purpose. They exist to perform short pieces primarily in worship services and sets of pieces that can be combined into more complete, independent shows. Their performances are always couched within a greater agenda, being used as a part of a larger program. This proscription does not exclude CRT troupes from staging main-stage performances. Indeed, the AD Players from Houston, TX, have established their own theatrical company. Once again, though, the name change is relevant. When they shifted their focus from performing in worship services to staging full-scale performances, they also changed their title to “theatrical company” instead of “repertory troupe.” All Things to All People, sponsored by Campus Crusade, presents one production, *Stephen*, during all of its rallies and conferences. Still, that performance is couched within the context of a greater service, sharing the stage with both music and public address. CRT troupes, by definition, concentrate on vignettes and performances which are couched within a greater context, the worship service of which their performance is a portion.

Further, because of the nature of their performance style, they must also be in a state of constant performance in order to establish momentum, keep their members and audiences interested, and continue to exercise their craft. As Parrish noted when discussing the process of forming his group, he did not want to let the “high wear off” before taking to the stage again. As CRT troupes are not main-stage groups and exist in service to the act of worship by a corporate body, they need a variety of pieces that they can call upon and need to be performing them often. Stagnation breeds apathy, apathy breeds a lack of concern, and a lack of concern leads to an end for the group. Each of the groups in this study teach us this lesson: The Company by their success, Acts 2 by their re-birth, and Gen X by their termination.

Third, CRT is not the repetitive performance of one set show. Put another way, CRT requires flexibility on the part of the group and its members. The term “repertory” in the title CRT implies a certain mobility and adaptability, having a stock of performances for a variety of exigencies at the ready. Flexibility for CRT troupes falls into three categories. The first is repertoire. CRT troupes must have pieces that can be easily adapted to a variety of situations and circumstances: content, setting, time requirements, technical availability, and cast requirements. Groups receive invitations to perform in a great variety of places and for a great variety of audiences; they must have material ready to meet these challenges. The necessity for flexibility is yet another reason why finding material for this practice is such a difficult endeavor. This hardship is discussed in detail below.

Second, they must be ready to adjust to challenging performance settings. From huge auditoriums with all the latest technical advancements to tents in the middle of a pasture, a CRT troupe has to be equipped to deal with a gamut of performance opportunities and challenges. The Company once performed for a week-long camp in central Texas in the middle of the summer under an outdoor, lighted pavilion at night where the cast had to do all of their freezes with their eyes and mouths closed because of the swarms of insects that were attracted to the lights. The various performance exigencies faced by CRT troupes require great flexibility in technical demands, set pieces, costuming, and props. The fewer requirements a group has, the more it will be able to meet the various demands placed upon it. Gen X developed pieces that required only hand-held props and no more than three cast members. That practice worked to their advantage and allowed their pieces to be easily adaptable to virtually any performance setting. Acts 2 must set up and take down their “set,” such as it may

be, immediately before and after their performances when performing in the worship services of their church.

Finally, a group must be flexible in its demands for compensation. The reality of today's economy makes professional CRT troupes extremely difficult to maintain. Most successful groups of this nature are voluntary groups. Churches in today's environment are having a hard enough time supporting their own staff, plant, and ministries without paying for professional dramatists, either internally or externally. For a group to take advantage of every opportunity to perform, they must be extremely flexible in their demands for compensation. Simply put, bringing in one person to speak or sing is less expensive than bringing in six to do performance. The Company has faced this situation over the last several years, cutting their group in half and often cutting back even further and traveling with a skeletal group from what is left. If the group is to have opportunities, they must realize this fiscal reality and adjust accordingly. CRT troupes, like any other entertainers, are paid for their services based as much on reputation as on skill. To date, precious few groups have solidified reputations strong enough to demand enough compensation to support the group members in a full-time capacity. Acts 2 is strictly voluntary and only travels within its immediate region. The Company pays its summer members a minimal salary. Gen X members were paid "small fees" for their week-long services. The simple truth is that CRT as an art form is not yet to the place where predominantly unknown groups can demand top dollar. Even well-known, professional troupes such as Johnson and Johnson and Custer and Hoose rely more on tape, video, and book sales than on appearance fees for their financial survival.

An example of the financial difficulties that sometimes occur with these troupes comes from a troupe whose name the author was asked not to use. They performed at

a small church for a contracted monetary sum plus a “love offering gift” (money collected at the service from the audience for the group). After some time had passed following the performance, the church was contacted about the payment. The pastor admitted that a large sum of money had been collected that evening in the form of a love offering for the group. However, the church had several outstanding financial needs, and the pastor had simply decided to use the money for those purposes. He sent the contracted sum but never sent the love offering gift.

Ethical issues aside, the story illustrates the precarious position of CRT troupes. They are seen as performers, workmen worthy of their hire, and their ministry is so visible, so new and so well-liked that people in local churches are often inspired to contribute. However, the church is doing well to keep all its own bills paid. The economics of the situation do not support paying a large amount to the group. CRT troupes must balance their own needs for financial solvency with the capabilities of those audiences whom they are trying to reach. The precarious line between professional acting troupe and compassionate ministry team (discussed below) surfaces once again. In repertoire, staging, and compensation, a troupe must be flexible. As The Company motto makes explicit, CRT troupes must be “flexible and adaptable in ambiguous situations.”

Finally, CRT does not consist of one genre of performance. Sketches and vignettes are the traditional form of presentation for CRT troupes, but all of the groups studied did more than “characterized drama, actors participating in imaginary circumstances” at least on occasion. Acts 2 was the closest to maintaining a strictly dramatic repertoire, but they have other groups within their church which specialize in the other genres, specifically a dance troupe which concentrates on interpretive

movement. Both The Company and Gen X used interpretive movements to music as a part of their own performances. In fact, interpretive movements are becoming more and more common. In adjudicated CRT panels at state and national conferences interpretive movements are outnumbering straight dramatic performances by as many as two to one (Ev Robertson, personal communication, April 5, 2004). Groups are taking advantage of even more genres, too. The Company also uses narration, poetry, even tableaux. Gen X used improvisation as a major part of their interaction with the audience. All of these forms of expression are examples of dramatic genres used by CRT troupes to successfully communicate their message and propagate their value system. CRT troupes are not tying themselves to the front of the performance space in the vain attempt to recreate the environment of a proscenium stage. They are actively and interactively utilizing all of the performance elements at their disposal in order to engage the audience, utilizing as many of their senses in as many ways as possible. CRT is actually a combination of dramatic genres held together by a commonality of purpose and nature. However, pieces which do fall within the traditional genre of drama are a hallmark of the art form and should be present for a group to call itself a CRT troupe. Otherwise, groups who do no drama at all would fall under an umbrella opened too wide.

With the knowledge of what CRT is *not* firmly in hand, the question of what they are still looms. The working definition, "presentations of spiritual truth, primarily in the SBC, requiring the suspension of disbelief, for use in worship settings, that feature performances that require few technical elements and performed by groups seeking to minister through their art," still seems to work. However, two juxtapositions within the modern CRT movement must be resolved before it can be properly labeled: nature

versus purpose and performance versus ministry. The first contradiction lies in CRT's dual internal/external functions. A group should either be constituted to teach and minister to its membership or to put on performances. The second juxtaposition is similar, yet focused on the group's external task function: CRT as a performance movement versus CRT as a ministerial avenue. CRT as performance, religious conviction, and/or both is discussed

The contrast between nature and purpose is between being and doing. On the one hand, a group is. It exists. The members are joined together as a solitary body. They train, they learn, they minister within the group, and they coalesce. They have maintenance functions to perform. On the other hand, they "be" in order to "do". The reason for their nature is their purpose. They train and learn in order to demonstrate those things for which they have trained and which they have learned to their audiences. They have task functions to perform. Most groups which are constituted for performance are solely constituted for either the purpose of nurture or the purpose of task. They are together in order to grow and learn (as in schools or workshops) or they are together to perform (as in virtually every traditional theatrical experience). CRT troupes are acting companies which exist in order to both train and perform. They must struggle to balance the dual demands between learning (refining their craft, growing and coalescing as a group, ministering and caring for each other) with the necessity of doing the very thing which they are constituted to do: perform.

The three groups in the study all struggled mightily and (sometimes) effectively with these issues. The Company was the most explicit with these dual demands. They have in place such practices as training weekends, nights out as a group, prayer sessions, journal assignments, reading assignments, a buddy system, and exercise

requirements to nurture, train, and revitalize the group as an entity. Acts 2 probably does the least in this area, simply praying before each rehearsal after a brief time of sharing any special requests. Gen X considered their driving time to be their time for internal ministry and group-building. They did virtually no explicit internal group-building, either. For a group to be successful, it must take care of its people. The contradiction of nature versus purpose must be met for the group to thrive. However, this contradiction is not one that is mutually exclusive. Both of the purposes of the group can be considered in its definition. CRT is a case where most troupes, by definition, need to fill both roles.

Second, groups must deal with the even stickier contradiction between performance versus ministry in its external relationships. Acts 2 does not even have the terms “drama,” “theater,” or “performance” in their official title, so much is their desire to be viewed as a ministry team. Parrish of The Company puts his priorities front and center with the oft-repeated motto, “If you have the heart, I’ll teach you the art.” Weston and Sullivan formed Gen X, not as an effort to do good drama, but as a way to minister to young people. Still, the groups, by definition, minister through performance. Theater is a difficult, time-consuming, talent-requiring art form. Groups which desire to be ministers of the gospel message through theater must also be good dramatists. This contradiction must be resolved for the group to accomplish its mission.

The data in these case studies seem to indicate that CRT troupes are primarily ministerial in nature. The Company insists on it, Acts 2 labels it, and Gen X was formed because of it. Parrish accepts everyone who “has the heart.” Acts 2 holds auditions but readily admits to favoring those with the “proper” motivation over those with more talent. Gen X hand-picked its performance team members based almost solely on their desire

to minister. The evidence seems to indicate that CRT performance practice is less important or less worthy of our attention because of its subservience to the group's primary mission. However, I would argue that this very focus, this downplaying of the groups' theatricality, of their very reason for existence, makes them more significant, more theoretically intriguing, not less.

CRT is, in many ways, an art form at war with itself. In the secular realm, theater is, by and large, done for the sake of doing theater. The distinction made in the first chapter becomes vital here. CRT is a performance movement, not a theatrical one. They use theater; they do not do it. They use it as an evangelical tool, as a ministerial (both internal and external) tool, as a therapeutic tool. They do not do theater for the sake of creating lasting and memorable art. They perform as an act of worship, as a way of utilizing their natural talents and proclivities in a way that they feel will honor the God that they serve. That aim in many ways becomes their downfall in terms of what we would call "important" theater.

Theater, performance in general even, is about the search for truth, particularly the uncovering of the human condition, of what it means to be human in extreme and conflicted situations. However, the fact that CRT does theater for the purpose of worship (and in particular in worship settings) means that certain subject areas, certain ways of expressing truth, are taboo. These artists are limited in what they can and cannot explore about the human condition. They are also limited as to the ways in which they can explore it. The easiest example here is in the language available to them. No one could deny that vulgarity is a part of today's reality. Any actor hoping to portray a homeless, uneducated vagabond would probably use vulgar and profane language in order to accurately portray this person's existence. A CRT troupe member,

though, would never, could never, use that sort of language. It would be against their nature, their purpose, and would violate the unwritten contract with their implied audience. In many cases, CRT must portray a watered-down, less-than-realistic version of certain truths to its audience. To put it another way, CRT desires to portray “Truth,” but the exigencies of its situation keep it from portraying “truth”.

CRT’s art form could easily be seen as less valid than that of secular theatrical troupes because certain subjects and means are off-limits to it. In like fashion, CRT’s message could be viewed as less valid than a preacher’s or a musician’s because CRT’s portrayals are compromised by their means. In other words, CRT may be coming up short in both worlds by attempting to keep one foot in each. As for the religious realm, the growth and popularity of CRT would seem to indicate otherwise. The numbers have already been given. Apparently the art form is appealing to an ever-increasing number of church-goers. It would appear that the reality in which the church-goers live is akin to the reality which CRT is allowed to present through performance. Fisher’s (1978) third principle in regard to the “Logic of Good Reasons” holds that, for the advice of a message to be accepted, it must be in line with the values already held by the audience. In a majority of cases, the values presented by CRT are in line with the values already experienced by its audiences. Further, audiences are apparently accepting the messages as both fidelitous and probable.

The fact that CRT is both a performance practice and a religious calling does not cheapen what the theatrical/performance world can learn from the art form, either. I see two areas where the theatrical world can learn from CRT. The first is in the realm of audience analysis. Acts 2 in particular is often led by a man, Paul Klapper, who comes from a secular theater background. Yet, he understands that the audience he is dealing

with expects a certain moral content and expects “traditional” theater. He has been able to adapt his own direction to stay within those confines. Certain performance troupes could learn from this tact. All performance must be translatable by their audience in order to be of value. Second, CRT has been forced to be creative to communicate their message and yet remain within the confines of its situation. Unique art forms such as the interpretive movement have sprung forth. In this sense, CRT is every bit the performative innovator that Schechner and Cage are.

Hence, CRT is defined as such: “CRT is an activity wherein a constituted group performs short, primarily dramatic and versatile performances, within the context of larger worship services. CRT is both a skilled performance troupe and a caring ministry team. CRT trains and ministers to its own members while maintaining an active performance schedule.” For a group to be successful, they must be all of those things.

Practice

Now that we have a clearer understanding of what CRT is, it is important to revisit how it works. As a practice, CRT is slowly and steadily growing and improving. Luminaries in the art such as Ev Robertson, Jeanette Cliff George, Ragan Courtney, and Dennis Parrish all indicate that the art form is more widely accepted and practiced than ever before. All of these practitioners have their own ideas concerning the health, the future, and the significant problems with CRT. Two schools of thought exist. The first is that CRT is excellent as it stands today and should be left grow on its own device. The second claims that there are major theoretical issues inherent with the practice of CRT that need to be addressed and major problems with the art that need to be solved.

The first school claims that nothing at all should be done. This option assumes that CRT is fulfilling its purpose within the SBC and there is no need for it to get bigger or better. The position that the art form should remain the same assumes that the church is not the place for experimental theater, that amateurs are capable enough to present simple vignettes that clearly present a moral or theme without requiring serious character development or plot complications. This option claims that many SBC churches are perfectly content with rhetoric as their primary vehicle for communication and are not yet ready to come to church every Sunday to see a performance. The “status quo is okay” argument highlights the fact that performance is a healthy hobby for many in the laity and the occasional performance allows them to do that hobby and exercise any gifts that they feel they need to exercise without turning the group into a professional troupe requiring serious time commitments. This position also points to the thirty-two state workshops/conventions, the annual national drama festival and the decadal celebration of the arts as opportunities for anyone who is interested to both participate in and learn about CRT. It supports its claim by pointing to the groups that do exist and flourish, to the individuals who are making their living doing CRT, and to those volunteers who teach at all of those conferences and workshops as evidence that interested parties can and do good performances within the confines of the SBC.

This is a valid stance. Clearly CRT has survived without major renovations to its practice and theory to this point. Almost as clearly, it should continue to do so. All of the above presuppositions are accurate to a degree. Although the quality of CRT does suffer from inexperience and lack of training, it is growing and thriving in its current form. And though it could be much more than it is, what it is serves a useful purpose in today’s church.

The second school of thought would beg to differ. This position claims that CRT needs to be other than it is. One caveat before the explanation: I am not sure that it does. Many of the practitioners observed and interviewed in this study and others with whom I have talked throughout my years in this practice are convinced that CRT does need to reinvent itself. Others cite the above arguments and feel that CRT is in a good place. I feel that this is one instance where I can “have my cake and eat it, too.” I am in a position to present the arguments for both sides and allow the reader to decide for her/himself.

Advocates for change most often point to two reasons. The first is argued in several parts of this study. We live in a society saturated by performance, mediated and otherwise. For churches to reach this modern audience, it must frame its arguments, its message, in a medium that is familiar to its audience. Our attention spans and receptive faculties have been trained by this performance saturation. CRT should be used much more by modern churches to reach this performance-savvy audience.

The second reason that CRT should be expanded and improved is the simple fact of its existence. The proponents of this idea point to our responsibility to do whatever we do “as unto the Lord.” Because the art form exists, because people are doing it, because churches are dedicating resources to it, then it should not be done half-heartedly or haphazardly. Any endeavor undertaken by the church should be done expertly and at as high a level as possible. For some, an interaction with a CRT troupe may be the only exposure to the gospel message that they have for their entire lives. This interaction should be as polished and professional as possible. The Company traveled to Africa in the summer of 1993 and performed in many villages without

electricity or running water. For many of these villagers, those performances and their reaction to them could well mean the difference between the adherence to or rejection of the gospel message. The old adage holds true in this situation: “Anything worth doing is worth doing well.”

Operating from assumption that CRT does need to improve then, there are several things that the art form could do to become “better” in its performance practice. Three major areas of concern exist for CRT troupes in the practice of their art form: material, personnel and competence. The difficulty with material is, simply put, finding it. The groups highlighted in this study demonstrate, to some degree, the negative spiral that affects CRT groups with regard to material. This conclusion is also based on the author’s experience with other groups and interviews with professionals in the field. The group starts off full of purpose and energy. They find a few pieces which fit their group members well and contain an appropriate message. They perform these pieces at their home church and perhaps take them on the road a couple of times. However, they soon begin to need new material. They begin to look for more quality pieces. This task is exhaustive and invariably unsatisfactory. It is virtually bound to be. Material in this field is too broadly scattered to be easily located. The CRT group has needs unlike a traditional repertory theatrical troupe. Not only do they need material containing a certain message, it must also fit the cast of the group, the time limit they have been given, the genre desired, the level of training necessary, the amount of rehearsal required, and a hundred other variables. There is, therefore, no cataloguing system or even a definitive publishing company. Several web-sites and published works have made the effort, but there simply can be no complete cataloguing system for no system would fit all of the disparate needs of a CRT group.

Many of the leading practitioners in the field agree. Most write their own material; others adapt material from other sources. In this manner, CRT more closely resembles the field of performance studies than traditional theater. Anne Sullivan, who has been directing CRT in some form for almost 20 years says that she gets her material “anywhere . . . everywhere . . . I never go into a book store without looking for poems, plays, short stories, bible commentaries, et cetera that might offer some ideas/material for dramatic worship presentations” (personal communication, February, 2004). John Maxwell, the founder of the Fish Tale Group and performer of the one-person shows “Flower Child” on the life of John the Baptist and “Fish Tales” on the life of the Apostle Peter, claims the Bible as his greatest inspiration but ends up doing the writing himself (personal communication, February, 2004). Solid material that matches the needs of a particular group is difficult to locate in a timely manner.

In many cases, the groups feel compelled to write their own material. However, as any trained dramatist can readily attest, writing quality drama is not a task for the novice. The group is faced with producing less than quality material (also covered below in the discussion of competence), and they soon lose faith in their directors and credibility within their target audience. They begin their inevitable decline. The rare exceptions are those groups which have the kind of talented writers in their midst who can continue supplying fresh material for the group. The Company serves as an excellent example here as it continues to bring in a steady supply of artists talented in this area. Parrish gives them the freedom and the forum to create, and the group continues to prosper. Many factors lead to groups succeeding or not succeeding. Yet, poor material (which is both the product of and cause for more bad writing) is definitely one of them.

Second, CRT troupes must find a way to adequately deal with the problem of personnel. The horns of the dilemma upon which CRT finds itself in relation to this concern are sufficient numbers and sufficient talent. Simply put, church pews are not packed with well-trained, experienced actors; neither are seminary and other religious oriented organizational rosters. At the risk of reinforcing cultural stereotypes, the fact of the matter is that most of the highly trained, professional theater artists in this country are not participating in religious performance of any sort and certainly not in the Protestant faith. CRT troupes must rely on the population pools in their local churches, Christian colleges, and seminaries as institutional support in order to recruit new members, though. In order to get enough participants to make the ministry work, the troupes end up taking members who are neither trained nor experienced. The presence of untrained personnel leads directly back to the quandary described above in the discussion of material: poor performances and poor responses. In order to insure the long-term success of the group, the directors must train the members. It goes back to Parrish's statement, "If you have the heart, I'll teach you the art." It falls to the groups themselves to train their members to worship, teach, and edify in this manner if the art form is to survive and thrive. In order to achieve this, troupes must be led by well-trained, dedicated theater artists who have a gift for both teaching and direction.

The problem with personnel extends to the selection and training of leaders. In this area, the demise of Gen X demonstrates the importance of trained, experienced directors. The original director of the group, Emory Colvin, had both training and experience to a degree. However, her relative youth was a factor. She had been involved in theater for six years and had minimal directing experience within that time. That was more than anyone else in the group, but it appears that it was not enough to

justify her position as leader. Personality rifts developed within the group based on her leadership style. She lacked the ethos to command the respect of all of the troupe members. Leading a group of people with strong personalities, various opinions, and disparate talent levels is a challenge. Add to that mix the attitudes inherent in any teenage group. Putting a peer-member in charge of that eclectic mix simply did not work in this context.

Matt Weston, the leader of the over-all group, was the one who shouldered the blame for the ultimate failure of the group. He accepted it as such by acknowledging his shift in priorities as he progressed through his college years (personal communication, September, 2003). By that time, Colvin was no longer a member of the group. Sarah Braddock had taken over as the primary leader of the drama group. However, Braddock did not view herself as a director but as simply another member of the group. This structure worked for the brief time that the group was in existence after the departure of Colvin. However, as no group can survive on a long-term basis without adequate leadership, it is safe to assume that the deterioration of the drama group was inevitable even without Weston's shift in priorities and the group's failure to continue.

The example of The Company would tend to further indicate that the presence of a leader who is somewhat older, with more experience, and/or advanced training is necessary to ensure the long-term success of the group. Parrish is far and away the oldest, best-trained, and most experienced participant in the ministry of The Company. The members view him as both teacher and role model. Many of them choose SWBTS for the sole purpose of being in *his* ministry. He has the experience, training and personal ethos to command the respect of the troupe. As such, he is able to be the commanding voice and presence that a troupe needs to combine the various opinions

into one unified message. He can also handle the different personalities in conflict situations and has the ethos necessary to make those types of decisions last. He is an example of the type of leadership necessary for CRT troupes.

At first glance, Acts 2 seems to contradict that finding. Both directors are of generally the same status as the rest of the group. They are younger than many of the group, less experienced and formally trained than some, and neither are viewed as the best actors in the troupe. However, it is interesting to note that Acts 2 exists within the structure of another larger, more well-established group, the church itself. Since the church's administration played a major role in choosing the leadership for the group, it is fair to assume that they lend their significant ethos to their chosen leaders. Therefore, the same conclusions can be drawn from the success of Acts 2 as from the success of The Company and the failure of Gen X. A group needs an established director in order to be successful. That director must have the experience and the training to command the respect of the group. Whereas Simpson and Terrell may lack the ethos to command the respect and attention of their group, Sutton and Bell do not. The conclusion that a strong, experienced, trained leader of a CRT troupe is therefore validated by Acts 2 as well as the other two groups. Obviously, the amount of training and experience necessary changes from group to group. However, that necessity is ever-present and paramount.

The final major area of concern in CRT practice is performance competence or excellence. Pastors are sent to school for between three and six years before they are allowed to practice their craft on a full-time basis. Music ministers face a similar education process. Yet, untrained, inexperienced dramatists are allowed to practice their craft in even the largest of churches with the richest and longest histories in CRT.

Furthermore, they feel completely justified and capable of doing so, both in performing and writing. These same individuals would never attempt to audition for a main-stage play at even the community theater level, though. They would feel inferior to the task, whereas a pastor or music minister could readily display their talents in a secular venue. This discrepancy is alarming. It seems to exist because CRT is viewed as an inferior art form. In the minds of even those who perform CRT, it is inferior to other forms of religious communication and to secular theater. This viewpoint, along with so many other areas of concern for CRT, is partially a product of its having a foot in both the world of religion and the world of performance.

Several reasons for this persistent attitude exist. First, CRT is relatively easy to do, if quality is not considered a factor. As defined above, CRT is not a main-stage, “major” performance. It consists of sketches and interpretive movements. They are short temporally and do not carry the gravitas of a thirty-minute sermon. They are usually not fully costumed, staged or propertied. In many ways they are viewed as a novelty act to break up the sameness of the “real” forms of worship and religious expression. As such, people with little or no theater experience are encouraged to become involved. The participation of untrained actors, writers and directors leads to inferior pieces thereby reinforcing the audience pre-disposition that performance has no place in worship. The cycle continues and the whole situation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Parrish’s motto, “If you have the heart, I’ll teach you the art,” is great as the slogan for a mission group, but it does not work for a professional performance troupe.

Also, pastors often put together impromptu groups consisting of hand-picked people that the church already knows as gregarious and out-spoken. These sketches are often slap-stick and lack any depth or gravity. The impression that CRT is not a

serious art form is deepened. Well-established, professional troupes are asked by their ministers to perform menial and demeaning tasks such as announcing an upcoming carnival by staging a pie-in-the-face, banana-peel routine which further undermines the credibility of the art. CRT is also viewed as a steppingstone to more meaningful forms of drama instead of as an end unto itself. The Mississippi College troupe Cross Section is advertised in part as a great way to get experience before auditioning for the main stage plays at the school. The end result is that CRT is regarded as a second-class citizen in the worlds of both drama and religion by both its participants and its audiences.

Second, CRT, like all performance, feeds on the natural inclination towards make-believe. Theater requires no skills that are not on display in our everyday lives save the invisible art of memorization. Because of this perceived lack of exceptional requirements, a great many people feel that they can do it who actually have no theatrical ability. Those who are best at performance make it seem incredibly easy. Others buy into that perception. As such, the mindset develops that performance is something that can be “winged.” This mindset is especially true in an environment without a trained professional to truly teach the art and craft. This perception is true of theater in every format, but CRT is especially susceptible to it as the performances are short and seemingly easy.

Finally, and as a corollary of the first two points, CRT suffers from a lack of official recognition from its sponsoring agencies. This recognition comes in two forms. The first and most significant is a lack of funding. The second is the standing of performance artists within the Christian community. This study shows how groups are supported by parent organizations. It also discusses how a few groups have been able

to remain solvent. However, as a whole, CRT has not become a viable career choice for the Christian actor/actress, director, or writer. Positions which pay enough to sustain an individual or family are virtually non-existent.

Churches are not seriously committed to CRT (and art in general) as a viable form of worship, education, and edification. The greatest funding for the arts, particularly theater, in today's society comes from secular sources looking for a return on their investment. In like fashion, the great playwrights and artists flock not to the banner of religion but to the cash-cows of Broadway and cinema. Just as in Rome and England before us, drama has been taken out of and away from the churches. Individuals who are gifted in theater find like minds and souls in the secular theater, not in the modern church. CRT, pageants, and "religious cinema" are viewed as inferior products by the industry. The people who remain as the keepers of the flame of religious theater are more often than not those who lacked the talent to "make it" in the secular world. They are out-manned, under-funded, unsupported, and unappreciated. Religious art, with religious theater and CRT as sub-sets, plays ugly step-sister to secular artists' Cinderella.

For the modern church to reverse this trend, it will have to make a financial commitment to the performing arts as a means of communicating its message, entertaining its congregants, ministering to its practitioners, and attracting new believers. This commitment by churches speaks to training, hiring practices, and budgetary concerns. Until churches, and the term here applies on an institutional level, get serious about paying professionals and training its own members to become proficient in CRT, performance will always remain a secondary factor in church worship services. For CRT to truly flourish, seminaries should have entire programs dedicated

to the use of dramatic performance in worship services. Churches must be willing to pay for great artists to practice and perfect their craft within the Christian culture instead of being forced to seek out secular teachers and performance opportunities because they are the better training and experience. Christian academies, universities, and seminaries should trumpet the arts and teach them to all prospective ministers of every ilk and kind. CRT must take a path similar to that of the choir. Churches do not have paid choirs, but they do have paid Ministers of Music who have seminary degrees that combine both theology and the practice of their craft. Lukewarm efforts at “throwing something together” in the field of dramatic performance should no longer be acceptable or accepted by church congregations.

The second form of recognition needed by CRT is a position of standing within the Christian community for its performance artists. This position is partially a by-product of its lack of professionalism to be sure, but something else is at play here, also. The Christian church and performance artists have virtually always had a troubled relationship. Today is no different. The average performance artist of today is far removed from the Christian church. Many artists may view themselves as religious, but most do not call themselves “Christian.” They are, therefore, not practicing their craft in the church. The church is left with artists who seriously desire to minister, who have a sincere compassion for their audiences, but who lack the artist’s call and vision of their brethren practicing their art in the “real world.” At the point where the luminaries, visionaries and enlightened in the performance community are plying their trade in secular society, CRT suffers from the loss.

For the Christian performing arts to flourish, the modern church must reach out to secular performing artists on a personal, as well as financial, level. The church will

never be able to compete with the financial remuneration of the secular theater. It must then offer to the artists the same benefits of church membership open to all people. Artists must find in the church a safe haven for their ideas, personalities, eccentricities, and beliefs. For artists to come back to the church, they must first have the sense that the church genuinely cares about them and not simply their talents. The church has, in many cases, become a place of exclusion, and this mind-set must change if secular artists are to be lured back into the fold.

The state of the practice of CRT in today's church is healthy and active. Some would argue that it is right where it needs to be in service to the church. Others would claim that by improving its material, personnel and competence, CRT could achieve a much more significant role in the day-to-day functions of the Baptist church. Whichever the stance, CRT remains a significant, important art form on the cultural landscape.

Religion and Drama

Having discussed both what it is and how it works, let us now turn our attention to placing CRT into a larger context. For CRT, this requires a discussion of both religion and performance for it has one foot firmly planted in each field. Performance and religion have long been locked in a mutual love/hate relationship. Historically, the major areas of contention have been content and lifestyle. However, the major theoretical significance of CRT appears methodological in nature. CRT holds value for religion in the areas of multiplicity of interpretation, locus of power, and "full embodiment" and for performance, like religion, in the area of locus of power. One other issue that is treated separately is the idea of female leadership within CRT troupes. Female leadership is viewed as a separate issue because it is so symptomatic of the current struggle taking place solely within the confines of the SBC.

First, CRT affects religion about religion by offering a variety of possible interpretations. The last twenty years has seen a consolidation of power within the SBC. Particularly among the people in the best positions to most advance CRT, allowing for the possibility of alternate interpretations is not viewed as a positive. The traditional Baptist viewpoints on such theological doctrines as soul competency and the priesthood of the believer are being forsaken in name of doctrinal purity and denominational solidarity. In SBC colleges and seminaries, professors are being asked to sign either the *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) itself or a form saying that they believe in its tenets. SBC missionaries are being asked to sign the BFM as well, insuring one interpretation of Baptist theology. Board appointments and leadership positions within the Convention are going only to those who believe explicitly as those offering the appointments. Uniformity of theology and thought are highly prized. As the SBC struggles with the dueling concepts of soul competency and doctrinal purity, the allowance or promotion of a form of expression that allows for the possibility a multitude of interpretations does not seem likely.

In this solidarity of interpretation, CRT does differ from the traditional religious rhetor in two fundamental ways: interpretation and formulation. The primary task of a preacher is to make his/her “side” well known from the outset of his/her message. The more the speaker can speak in plain English, the more clearly they can express their theology, the more direct they can make their message, the more they consider their message a success. Drama stands diametrically opposed to this uniformity of purpose. Conflict is the one essential element of drama. For drama to exist, a character has to be attempting to overcome a challenge, achieve a goal, or simply complete a task. All of those descriptions require two sides to the picture. In CRT, these sides are generally

painted relatively clearly as good and evil. In the “Heart of the Matter” sketch by Acts 2 for instance, it would be difficult to imagine an audience member siding with the demons. Two things are relevant here. First, there is the theoretical possibility of someone agreeing that SBC church members *should* be nicer and more friendly to strangers and thereby failing to accept the message of the sketch. Second, and this is more to the point, the sketch offers varying degrees of acceptance. Whereas a rhetor has only one position, the sketch has several viewpoints which could be deemed acceptable. The angels are purely and completely obedient; the singers are above the fray, simply issuing the call to obedience; and those struggling with the sins and demons begin by agreeing with the demons and end by accepting the call of the singers. As Maxwell noted when discussing his latest sketch, “The Prodigal,” “My problem with this piece is that I identify with her (the antagonist older sibling who is attempting to earn grace), not him (the protagonist younger sibling who is accepting of grace)” (personal communication, February, 2004). The point is that drama always posits multiple viewpoints, whether they be acceptable or not, and the current SBC could/should learn from this performance characteristic.

The second area where the SBC could learn from CRT is in the process of message formulation. As argued above, the SBC is currently seeing a consolidation of power that starts at the level of the local church pulpit. CRT, on the other hand, is a communal act. Several minds and talents help shape the message. Writers, ministers, directors, and actors all shape the message, from its explicit theme and content to its nuances and emphases. True, ministers have the final say on when a group is allowed to perform and usually even what they perform, but once the performance starts, all those voices are expressed. That replacement of the master narrator with a multitude

of voices is not attractive in the current atmosphere of the SBC. Indeed, from conception through interpretation, CRT allows for a variety of interpretations along every step of the communicative process. With performance's inherent offering of multiple views of reality and expression of multiple voices, it is little wonder that more churches do not embrace the use of CRT.

However, this seems like a contradiction within the church. Jesus Himself taught primarily through the use of parables, narratives with multiple characters in conflict with each other. The scripture is replete with "evil" characters as well as good. Jesus even went so far as to tell His followers that they should simply tell the story and allow the Holy Spirit to convict the listeners. CRT takes the Christian religion back to its roots. If Christians believe, as they claim, in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the fact that performance texts are ambiguous and require choice would seem to be a good thing. This very vagueness would give the Spirit the opportunity to affect the minds of the audience.

The second area where CRT affects religion is the locus of power. Much like CRT allows for the dissemination of message formulation, it also allows for a dispersion of power. Writers, directors, and actors all help frame the message and therefore share in the power. Shared power is a characteristic admired and promoted in postmodern performance theory. Whitmore (1994), Schechner (1973), Donkin and Clement (1993) and others advocate the dissemination of power throughout the group as well as the promotion of multiple truths and realities through performance. Gen X serves as the best example here. Particularly after Colvin left the group, they existed without a true director figure. They worked together to frame their message and rehearse their sketches. They were the very model of a postmodern troupe. No one voice controlled

the message. The same can be said of The Company at the point where Parrish allows his road directors to arrange the performances, script or improvise the segues, and cast the shows. Acts 2 has as many as five people who could rightly be called “in charge” of the group.

In the organizational structure of every other organization within the SBC, however, there is a strong leader serving as the unifying voice for the congregation or group. Pastors are seen as the “Shepherd” presiding over a congregation referred to as “sheep.” Even the architecture of SBC churches is designed exclusively for one-way communication. The Baptist faith prizes strong leaders who control the message and the means. CRT places an emphasis on group contribution and egalitarianism. Little wonder the two sometimes have a hard time co-existing.

The final area where religion can benefit from the practice of CRT is in what Barrager (1981) calls “full embodiment.” Barrager’s argument is that performance is the quickest, most fully involving way of getting people (particularly youth) involved with, invested in, and focused on their spiritual life. Full embodiment engages the mind and body much more than mere intellectual study of scriptural lessons. Thus, to Barrager, CRT is more of a ministry to those who are active in it than those who are merely serving as its audience. CRT allows its actors to embody the lessons of scripture and learn them in a way that is unavailable to other methods of instruction. CRT affects the field of religion through its difference stance on the multiplicity of interpretation and locus of power, and the opportunity for “full embodiment” on the part of its participants.

CRT has as much to say to theater about locus of power as it does to religion. Whereas it reminds religion that the power need not be centralized, it reminds performance scholars of just the opposite. Even though performance is democratic in

its very nature, behind every instance of a long-standing group is a driving force in the presence of one person. While this is equally true (in my experience) in all performance groups, many feminist theories still cling to the idea that a group and/or performance can operate as a complete democracy (see Whitmore, 1994; Donkin & Clement, 1993). CRT would seem to indicate that major practical concerns exist with this theoretical concept. In every case where no individual has been a driving force within or without a group, the group has failed. The temporary death of Acts 2 is the best example here. When their Minister of Music left, the group died. They were not able to sustain themselves without a strong personality leading the way. The ironic thing concerning this discussion is that many of the feminist scholars who insist that groups can be completely democratic are in fact strong personalities who control groups of their own!

Female Leadership

Ironically, the area and concept of female leadership is one which CRT groups have not given a second thought. In an ideal world, this would not be ironic; it would simply be. However, the world of the twenty-first century SBC is not an ideal world. The latest version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (Hobbs, 2000), which purports to summarize the beliefs of those who belong to the Convention, contains two areas very negative in regards to women in leadership positions. The first claims that women should not hold positions in the church where they serve over men. The second claims that a wife is to “submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband” (Hobbs, 2000). Leaving aside the second reference as irrelevant to the discussion at hand, the first seems to preclude women directors of men in a CRT. However, this exclusion has not been effected practically. The Company has female Road Directors; Acts 2 has female coordinators. One of the founders and guiding forces of the art form

is Jeannette Cliff George of the A. D. Players in Houston. This practical and theoretical contradiction is even more shocking when realizing that the nature of two of the case studies in this work. The Company performs under the auspices of SWBTS which recently announced that it would no longer have female professors teaching males in a classroom environment. That is how seriously they take the proscription of having males under the leadership of females. Acts 2 is a ministry of Two Rivers Baptist Church, pastored by Jerry Sutton, who is well known for his stance on Biblical inerrancy and religious fundamentalism, including the proscription against women leading men.

Two theories as to why CRT seems to contradict the published and practiced positions of other areas of the Baptist religion in regard to women in leadership positions are posited. The first lies in the nature of theater itself. Theater is more egalitarian than the other areas of leadership within a typical church. When a pastor is speaking, it is he (masculine pronoun appropriate) who takes the stage. However, when a drama troupe takes the stage, no audience could ever discern who was the leader of the troupe. The voice seems to be corporate in nature, not singularly that of a director or writer. The corporate voice holds true even when there is narration between pieces as that is as much a “role” as character acting. CRT troupes tend to survive more easy with women in leadership positions because they are somewhat “out of sight” in terms of being visible before the larger corpus. The very element that hurts their growth and development in the above discussion regarding unity of message helps their survival chances in this practical concern.

The second theory continues along the “out of sight” line of thinking. Despite its almost ubiquitous presence in churches throughout the SBC, drama troupes have still not caught on as mainstream participants in the corporate act of worship in these

churches, particularly the ones with a more conservative bent. CRT performances are seen as diversions during the course of the year and called upon for their talents during the special seasons of the year, but they are not used fully during regular worship services. The groups are able to somewhat “fly under the radar” in terms of who their leadership is. The same logic which leads to unprofessional performances of ill-written material by untrained actors works in favor of the CRT troupe in this situation. Churches are simply not supportive enough of the troupes to get involved and interested in who their leadership is. As CRT grows and the SBC becomes even more conservative, both of which this author believes will happen, the area of females in leadership positions will one day become a problem for all three types of CRT troupes.

CRT has much to learn from and to teach both of the worlds in which it is a part. The challenge is to continue to exist in each of them while learning from the other. Performance and religion are so very similar in their quest for truth and even, in many ways, their expression of it. CRT has the ability to serve as a bridge between these two cultural heavy-weights.

The Future of CRT

No one can foresee the future. CRT is no different. However, it is conventional at the end of a work of this nature to offer some nod toward the future of the subject at hand, both in terms of the artifact itself and research concerning it. Personally, I see very little change in the foreseeable future for CRT. CRT will continue to struggle to find support and opportunity in protestant churches. The social and even economic circumstances in the SBC and the country are simply not right for an explosion of the art form at the current time. Professional CRT troupes will not be able to survive entirely via performances for the foreseeable future. Once again, economics plays a role here.

Also at play, though, is the fact that religious organizations are extremely wary of “outsiders,” and CRT groups must take the requisite time to build up their reputation in order to establish the trust necessary to be given the opportunity to perform before numbers significant enough to supply the requisite remuneration. CRT material, training, and leadership will improve steadily but not dramatically. All of the state and national festivals will continue to affect the over-all quality of the art. However, the encumbrances to “good theater” within the church are not going away anytime soon. Headway will be made, but only slowly. Finally, CRT will be forced into experimentation. One of The Company’s mottoes is, “You’re never truly creative until you run out of options.” CRT will have to continue to search for unique performance opportunities, ways of growing into new churches and out into its communities, ways of improving its art, and styles of performances. One of the highlights of CRT is its versatility, and that component will have to be paramount in order for it to thrive in the future.

This work has laid a foundation for further research. Now, we know what CRT is, what its major areas of conflict and interest are, and how it affects the larger picture of which it is a part. The academic discourse surrounding this sub-genre of both performance and religious rhetoric begins here. The future of research involving it must by necessity involve the voices of its practitioners as well as theorists from both religion and performance. Conclusions reached in this study (including the definition of CRT, its place within the SBC, the requirements to make it a success, even what the term “success” means in this field) should be checked and counter-checked by those who do it, those who see it, those whose business is the production of performance theory, those whose business is the proclamation of the Christian message, and a myriad of

other voices. CRT has been a part of SBC churches for over 30 years; now, it is time that it become a part of performance theory, its practices refined in the cauldron of academic discourse and debate.

This is a field of academic study and inquiry in its infancy. As such, it has the potential to progress in several different directions. The first area of interest is in combination with the history and practices of worship. CRT here was conceived as a performance practice, but it is also a form of worship. The implications of that shift in focus need to be explored. Second, CRT will ultimately take on the form of video productions. This shift in means will create an entirely new set of theoretical and practical concerns. Finally, it will be interesting to note the progression of the art itself in the future. As more and more people are drawn to it and it gains recognition as a legitimate performance endeavor, discussions concerning its practices, participants, and audience reaction will all be valid.

CRT is a flourishing, yet still promising, art form. Its possibilities are endless, its potential boundless. Its implications are just beginning to be recognized. Despite the challenges it will face and the changes it will undoubtedly undergo in the coming years, I feel that CRT will flourish as it matures into a distinct, respectable and respected art form. It is a new genre just beginning to spread its wings. Its life should be long and prosperous.

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VITA

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