

ABSTRACT

JULIE ANN SCHURR. "Welcome to the Distributorship!": The Construction of Discursive Power and Manipulation in the Evangelical "Prosperity Gospel" Movement (Under the direction of Professor Agnes Bolonyai and Professor Susan Miller-Cochran)

The rhetoric of religion is largely underrepresented in the corpus of discursive studies; within the fields of discourse analysis and rhetoric, only a handful of studies deviate from the examination of political and interpersonal speech to approach the construction of a discourse that influences a significant portion of the world's population on a daily basis. Over the last fifty years, modern media broadcasts and dedicated internet streaming channels have transformed the world of religious speech: pastors once confined to a pulpit now speak as televangelists on a global stage.

This analysis of religious rhetoric will attempt to serve a dual purpose: the primary aim will seek to fill a gap in the literature through examining the construction of discursive power and manipulation (Van Dijk, 2006) in this new global religious rhetoric through applying an overarching framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the rhetoric of Kenneth Copeland, a prominent televangelist and co-founder of the "prosperity gospel" movement. Through using a mixed-methods approach, the following study will use both quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine the methods Copeland employs in the construction and maintenance of a discourse of power.

The second goal of this study is to test the hypothesis that Kenneth Copeland's discursive construction is the primary force behind his longevity and seemingly unassailable position within the ranks of the televangelist elite. While many of Copeland's contemporaries have fallen out of favor due to questionable moral and ethical practices, Copeland has remained largely untouched. Through employing the larger frameworks of Van Dijk, Bourdieu, and Fairclough, I will attempt to demonstrate the way Copeland is able to exploit the covert nature of discursive mechanisms in his creation and use of discursive power and manipulation in his prosperity gospel.

Keywords: Discourse, Power, Manipulation, Religion, Televangelism