

RESHAPING THE “GOD BEAT”:
HOW THREE COMMUNITY NEWS WEBSITES FRAME RELIGION

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DEDICATION

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ABSTRACT

With a downsizing of newspaper staff and an upswing in Internet use, the religion beat has had to adapt, much like the rest of journalism. In some cases, the religion beat has been cut. But some publications maintain the beat in new ways. This qualitative study explores how three community news websites — the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Faith in Memphis* from the *Commercial Appeal* — frame religion.

Using textual analysis and interviews, the researcher sought to determine the relevance of previous frames, identify new frames and describe models for religion coverage. Mark Silk’s 1995 *Unsecular Media* acted as a guide; Silk identified seven frames for journalism stories, each one informed by values that underlie American life. This study found that though some of Silk’s frames are still present, new frames have, indeed, emerged. This study found a large dependence on community content — a community-driven reporting model within the religion beat.

Ultimately, this study fills a gap in research by documenting the way religion is framed online at the community level. It also expands knowledge of the way religion news is framed in the community context. Prior to this, no study has been conducted of online religion coverage at the community level.

“You have noticed that the human being is a curiosity. In times past he has had (and worn out and flung away) hundreds and hundreds of religions; today he has hundreds and hundreds of religions, and launches not fewer than three new ones every year.

I could enlarge that number and still be within the facts.”

— from Mark Twain’s *Letters from the Earth*

“You’re not a believer, are you?” Haines asked. “I mean, a believer in the narrow sense of the word. Creation from nothing and miracles and a personal God.”

“There’s only one sense of the word, it seems to me,” Stephen said.

— from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*

INTRODUCTION

In an August 2008 column in *The (Lakeland, FL) Ledger*, Cary McCullen, the paper's religion editor at the time, writes about the shifting of what some have come to call the "God Beat" — in other words, the religion section (McCullen 2008). In the column, McCullen (2008) discusses the elimination first of religion sections in papers such as the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and the *Dallas Morning News*, and then the cuts of reporters. He makes this comparison: "I often tell people that being a religion reporter is a little like being a sports reporter who has to know the rules and the key players of sports as different as soccer, polo, baseball and fencing" (McCullen 2008). Yet despite their expertise, he writes, these sections — and people — have been cut. Although national media outlets such as the *Washington Post* and the *Huffington Post* cover religion, at some local papers, religion coverage is nearly gone (Waldman 2011).

Of course, the religion section is not isolated — since 2006, staff at daily newspapers has been decreased by more than 25 percent (Waldman 2011, 10). And according to Waldman (2011), though hyperlocal news and citizen journalism are thriving, local news coverage by traditional news outlets, such as newspapers, is suffering across beats — religion, health, environment and business, to name a few. Yet in the midst of these cutbacks, some local beat reporters have been considered more essential: those who cover education, city council and police, for example (Waldman 2011).

These changes have come with an upswing in Internet use. According to a January 2011 report from The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "The

Internet is slowly closing in on television as America’s main source of national and international news”; though the number of people citing television, radio and newspapers as their primary source of news was lower in 2010 than in past years, the number of people reporting the Internet as their top choice was up (Pew 2011, 2). With the staff cuts and the Internet growth, the religion section has had to adapt.

But even with changes, the press still has a duty to talk about religion — at least, that is how Hoover (1998) sees it. Although most of his work was done during the height of religion coverage, before the changes and before staff cuts, his view is still relevant. According to Hoover (1998), the media is partially responsible for creating community discourse about religion. That discourse comes through the stories that are told via news outlets, and each of those stories is told through a certain frame. To put it simply, a frame is the lens through which a story is told; framing involves choosing which aspects of reality to highlight in the text (Entman 1993, 52). Through exploring those frames — both those that are well established and those that have emerged recently — a better understanding can be reached about the ways religion is covered in a community.

This study explores how three different community news websites that still have robust religion coverage — the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Faith in Memphis* from *Commercial Appeal* — frame religion textually. In so doing, this study will help provide a better understanding of the type of religious discourse that is being presented and facilitated on a community level, as well as what is lacking. It will also explore what it is that shapes religion coverage in the United States today and how the “God beat” works at each of these publications in relation to the frames.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As will be discussed later, the primary research method for this study is textual analysis. As McKee (2003) explains, such analysis relies on a sense of cultural relativism: “We make sense of the reality that we live in through our cultures” (10). Thus, it is important to understand not just the texts — in this case, religion news articles — but the culture surrounding the texts. As self-contained as a news text may seem, each text has strong ties with “cognitive, social, cultural, or historical ‘contexts’” (van Dijk 1991).

Thus, there are important pieces of context to explore before delving into textual analysis. First, it is important to understand what religion means and how it plays out in American culture. It is also important, before exploring religion news today, to understand the history of religion news and how it has shifted through time. Framing theory will also be explained, as it is the theoretical foundation for this study.

Defining religion

Before talking about religion coverage, it is important to understand what religion is and how it plays out in American culture. According to the 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey study, about 78 percent of adults surveyed reported belonging to some form of Christianity; about 5 percent reported belonging to other faiths, and about 16 percent reported not being affiliated with any religion (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008).

Froese and Bader (2010) highlight the fact that though American life is full of references to God — “God bless you,” “God bless America,” “In God we trust” —

there's not a unified idea of what "God" actually means (1). At issue is not so much the question of whether God exists: "We might, however, be in a war over who God is." (Froese and Bader 2010, 4). They note two of the biggest theological disagreements: to what extent God interacts with and judges the world (Froese and Bader 2010, 10). "God is not dead," they write, "because God continues to be the clearest and most concise reflection of how the average American perceives his world" (Froese and Bader 2010, 10). Just what "God" means, however, is up for debate; Froese and Bader (2010) claim that as many kinds of God exist as there are people — perhaps even more.

But as much as some kind of "God" is important, there is no a solid set of information about how God-following the U.S. is. Kosman and Keysar (2006) point out the difficulty in pinpointing religion empirically — because of the separation of church and state, the U.S. Bureau of the Census does not gather religious statistics, so religious information is often self-reported.

It is important to note that "religious" is not an interchangeable term with "church-goer." Not everyone who is religious goes to church. Chaves (2011) describes one category of people as religious "nones" — the unaffiliated (20). He notes that just because people are unaffiliated, that doesn't mean they have no religious practices. It just means they do not connect themselves with a particular school of religious thought, and even if they do, they might not voice it (Chaves 2011, 19). Although about 80 percent of people consider themselves both spiritual and religious (39), Chaves (2011) notes that many people are part of the "spiritual but not religious" phenomena (19) and that neither spirituality nor religion necessarily equate to participation in organized religion.

Though the U.S. remains highly religious in world standards, there has been a “softening” of religious involvement (Chaves 2011, 54). According to the most recent U.S. Religious Landscape Survey from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, about 16 percent of people say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith — that’s more than double the number who say they were unaffiliated as children (5). This unaffiliated group has seen growth in recent years and is the “biggest gainer” among religious groups: “People moving into the unaffiliated category outnumber those moving out of the unaffiliated group by more than a three-to-one margin” (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008, 7). That being said, “More than 60 percent of American adults have attended a church service at a religious congregation within the past year” (Chaves 2011, 55).

Alongside the God question, the “nones” and the “spiritual but not religious” phenomena, there is a sense of growth in religious plurality and diversity. Chaves (2011) writes about religious diversity in interpersonal relationships. More marriages between people of different religions are occurring than in previous generations, which means more people have relatives with different religious beliefs than their own (Chaves 2011, 25). Along with this, there has been a decline in the number of people saying their close friends share the same religious beliefs as they do (26). Overall, “Americans have become more accepting of religions other than their own,” Chaves (2011) writes (26). This is not to say that all religions are equally tolerated, nor that they are equally respected, but simply that there is more acceptance of increasing diversity. There is a sense of post-structuralism, of the idea that “no single representation of reality can be the

only true one, or the *only* accurate one, or the *only* one that reflects reality because other cultures will always have alternative, and equally valid, ways of representing and making sense of that part of reality” (Reese et al. 2001, 10-11).

The Internet testifies to this ongoing discussion with websites and forums for conversation, as the following examples demonstrate. It is important to acknowledge that each of these sites is done from a certain perspective — they are not straight news sites, but sites for religious discussion.

Killing the Buddha, an online magazine, acts as a forum for “readers who are both hostile and drawn to talk of God,” generating discussion about religion and social issues as “an electronic Tower of Babel, a Talmudic cathedral of stories about faith lost and found.” At first glance, postings seem to be about faith lost or skepticism, but the site demonstrates the diversity and plurality of what religion means. It was founded in 2000 by authors Peter Manseau and Jeff Sharlet. Most of its editors are published writers — some of books, some of essays and articles. The rest of the group is comprised of professors and students pursuing advanced degrees related to religion.

Religion Dispatches, a progressive site, states, “Although religion is one of the most powerful forces shaping domestic and global politics today, it remains among the least understood and under-analyzed dimensions of our world.” The site focuses on the intersection of religion and values, and on the religious layers of social issues and news. Its director, Gary Laderman, is the chair of the religion department at Emory University.

The Immanent Frame, connected with the Social Science Research Council, has “interdisciplinary perspectives on secularism, religion, and the public sphere.” It has an

academic, scholarly focus — a Q-and-A with literary critic Terry Eagleton about his new book on religion and an interview with Sean Dorrance Kelly, the chair of Harvard's philosophy department, are a few examples of the site's content offerings. Its contributors are scholars and writers— professors at universities such as Yale, the University of Southern California and Columbia University.

Trans/Missions, the website for the Knight Chair in Media and Religion at University of Southern California, was designed to help increase knowledge, particularly among journalists, about religion, spirituality and their intersections with sex, science, politics and other issues. It is overseen by Diane Winston, who has religious expertise both as a journalism and a scholar.

GetReligion takes a media critic approach, highlighting the underlying religious nuances of big news stories — more of a between-the-lines approach. Its staff consists of a crowd of practicing journalists and traditional church-goers — a contrast with the less traditional *Killing the Buddha*. The editor, Terry Mattingly, writes the syndicated “On Religion” column for the Scripps Howard News Service and directs the Washington Journalism Center at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities.

Beliefnet aims to serve people spiritually. It is not affiliated with any one spiritual or religious group but designed to help people's spiritual lives. It was founded in 1999 by Steve Waldman, a former editor of *US News and World Report*, and Robert Nylen, a magazine publisher and contributing writer to several newspapers and magazines. Nylen died in 2008, and Waldman retired in 2009. Its current president and CEO is Steve Halliday, an attorney with specializations in broadcast and telecommunications.

Patheos, founded in 2008, acts as a resource for people of a variety of belief systems. It includes factual information, history, commentary and dialogue. It organizes information into faith “channels” by religious group, and it features blogs and columns, along with an online library. Channel advisors and editors are active — or at the very least, well versed through scholarship — in the faith of the channels they oversee.

These are just a few examples. Although they are not objective, they demonstrate the types of conversation and questions present about religion and how it plays out.

Another site that reviews religion news, *The Revealer*, created through New York University’s Center for Religion and the Media, points out the connection between religion and, well, everything else: “Politics, pop culture, high art, NASCAR — everything in this world is infused with concerns about the next.” As Kosman and Keysar (2006) note, religion even has a place in the market mentality. Organizational religions and church bodies often have products such as books, jewelry, décor, etc. available for purchase; urban planners consider the places of worship that dot the street corners and send their spires into the skylines. Beyond that, the food industry caters to the needs of certain religious groups, the health industry must understand patient preferences when it comes to ethically challenging practices such as contraception and abortion, and the greeting card industry attends to the holiday needs of a diversity of religions (Kosman and Keysar 2006).

People also give philanthropically to religious organizations (Kosman and Keysar 2006). According to the most annual philanthropy recent report from the Giving USA Foundation, religious organizations received about \$100 billion in charitable donations,

which is 35 percent of the total charitable donations received by all organizations combined (2011, 6). The second-highest receiving sector, education, had only about \$42 billion in donations in 2010 with 14 percent of the total; the third largest recipient, foundations, had 11 percent of the total with \$33 billion (Giving USA Foundation 2011, 6). The fact that religion is the leading sector to give to is nothing new — religion has received the largest share of contributions for 56 years, which is as long as the report has been around (Giving USA Foundation 2011, 7).

All of this shows that religion is not just relegated to the church or to the individual, or even a group of individuals, but has a role in industries and organizations prevalent in American life — it is even important enough to consistently receive the largest share of charitable donations. Some news organizations have taken note of this overlap, “the intersection of faith with other facets of life and moral choices in the secular world” (Luecke 1999, 134). Religion is not just performed within a church, but acted on in everyday life.

Religion in the news and American life

According to Diane Winston (2007), historically, religion has always had a significant role in U.S. media and history. Despite the shift from a lens of spirituality to one of conflict, then to what she sees as a divide between sacred and secular, religion still underpins American life and the media, and “the fundamental dynamic: the entwining intimacy of God, man, and a damned good story will remain fundamental to the American destiny — and it’s chroniclers” (Winston 2007, 986). In the nation’s early years, religion had a determining role in everyday life, and thus, in the media: “Divine

providence played a decisive role in covering and interpreting everyday occurrences” (Winston 2007, 969). The changes that have occurred in the way newspapers cover religion follow the nation’s history. In the post-Civil War to pre-civil rights era, the media focused less on movements as a whole and more on big-name leaders (Winston 2007). Still, in the nineteenth century, “even though religious swindles, scandals, and scalawags were fair game for the penny press, respect and reverence for traditional religion was widely represented in news columns and opinion pages” (Winston 2007, 972-973).

According to Judith Buddenbaum (1986) reporters in the 1950s and 1960s covered local religions stories with an events-based focus, but in the 1970s, reporters began writing more in-depth stories about issues. Throughout the 1970s, there had been a growing concern about “poor religion coverage” (Willey 2008, 195). In 1981, the Rockefeller Foundation held a conference in New York with 25 media professionals and scholars to discuss problems with religion reporting and ideas for improvement, and the first in-depth report on religion and journalism was produced (Willey 2008).

Some hold that contemporary coverage of religion is far from adequate: “The diverse ways in which faith is experienced are often ignored by news media, relegated to a buried weekend news story or taken up only when something controversial is in the offing” (Domke and Hindman, 2007). But Bradley (2009), like Winston (2007), points to the way religion has shaped the nation “since the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock,” particularly in rhetoric: “Even now, arguments about abortion, environmentalism, foreign policy, immigration reform, and welfare politics are all honeycombed with religious, and

often strictly biblical, references, norms and themes” (2). In other words, though Chaves (2011) notes that religiosity is on the decline, religion is still a foundation for nearly every aspect of American life (Bradley 2009).

In covering religion, the press sometimes tends to look to certain religious “experts” for information. Rosenholtz (2011) looked at the use of religious experts on the evening news. Particularly, she explored who the media turn to for religion insight in an election year — in her case, 2008. She writes, “Despite our country’s well-published religiosity, Americans are quite uninformed about religion, even the religions we individually profess” (6). She found that evangelical megachurch pastor Rick Warren was cited most often, with Rev. Jeremiah Wright, the pastor of the church President Barack Obama used to attend in Chicago, at a close second. Rosenholtz (2011) also found that one of the largest religious groups, mainline Protestants, have little public voice, as far as media use of Protestant experts is concerned. This is odd, as there are so many groups to tap into within Protestantism.

As stated in the introduction, Hoover (1998) discusses the importance of religion news coverage in the discourse of the American public. He writes:

The success of the American experiment depends in part on our ability to engage in a kind of public discourse that successfully takes account of the diversity of religious values and sentiments present in it. Because of their prominence in that discourse, the media — and particularly journalism, — are implicated in this task to a greater degree than they might realize. (12)

This idea of public discourse aligns with the normative theory of the media as a facilitator of conversation.

Conversation on culture

According to one normative theory, the media has a facilitative role in stirring public discourse, thereby helping shape public opinion (Christians et. al 2009). In a democracy, a key part of being a facilitative press is weaving in elements of culture — and not just high art kinds of culture, but the nuances of day-to-day life: “Culture is also a crucial dimension of our citizenship that requires nurturing and reflection. As cultural beings, the verbal and visual symbols of everyday life, images, representations, and myths make social relations meaningful for us and locate us in time and space” (Christians et. al 2009, 167). With that in mind, religion would fit into that model as a part of everyday life and everyday social interactions, but also as something highly symbolic in its nature.

Some of this symbolism comes in the form of rhetoric that finds its way into reports from beats outside religion. To cite one example, Campbell (2010) notes this prevailing religious rhetoric in the early days of the iPhone, highlighting its characterization as the “Jesus phone” in blog reports and later, some media reports. This was also true in the early sports media coverage of Tim Tebow, the openly Christian quarterback who was recently traded from the Denver Broncos to the New York Jets. His faith was apparent in early coverage of him, and reports are filled with religious references. In an October 2011 article, ESPN’s Tim Keown, for example, calls him “the

quintessential sports messiah.” In the same article, Keown weaves in other religious-sounding language: “seekers,” “it came to pass,” “the book of Tebow.”

Since then, demonstrating how religion coverage across beats can be more than just references and rhetoric, even exploration and discussion, coverage of Tebow’s faith has been more blatant. A March 24 *New York Times* piece, “Tebow in Babylon” by Ross Douthat, illustrates this point. It still has religious language: “O ye of little faith. Did you think that the Lord God of Hosts, having raised Tebow up as a Gideon of the gridiron, would pass up the opportunity to put his faithful servant to the test?” Beyond mere language use, the article is direct with its examination of Tebow’s faith and how it plays out in his life, stating that “the link between faith and football can’t be broken.” Instead of just referencing Tebow’s religion, Douthat takes a good hard look at it — and it is not even in the religion section.

This open discussion and acknowledgement, even fascination, with Tebow’s faith is just one example of religion’s appearance in a range of celebrity coverage. When teenage music star Justin Bieber got a Jesus tattoo, for example, the names made headlines together: FOX News reported, “Justin Bieber Gets Big Jesus Christ Tattoo on His Leg,” a *Huffington Post* photo was displayed as “Justin Bieber Jesus Tattoo Photo: Singer Shows Off New Ink,” and *The Guardian’s* Lost in Showbiz blog ran a story called “Justin Bieber’s tattoo gives Jesus a leg up.” The articles all link the tattoo to the singer’s openly Christian faith.

Back in 2008, the beliefs of actor Tom Cruise were thrust into the spotlight with a video of him talking about Scientology. According to a 2008 Reuters article, “Tom

Cruise lauds power of Scientology in Web video,” the video was from 2004. But its 2008 appearance on the Internet is what drew attention. The story even had international interest. From the UK, an article in the *Guardian* explains the award Cruise was receiving in the 2004 video. The writer, Patrick Barkham, ends with this thought: “So, Cruise gets some bling, but Scientology gets something far more valuable: an A-list Hollywood actor, ever ready to extol the virtues of his movement.”

Beyond bursts into the spotlight, celebrity followers now have a new way to find out what their favorite famous person believes. Beliefnet recently launched its Celebrity Faith Database, which allows a search by name, faith or profession to find the affiliations of the rich and famous, along with stories and background about each person’s beliefs. A quick search reveals that actress Natalie Portman attended Jewish schools until college, Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg was raised Jewish but now describes himself as an atheist and heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson converted to Islam after serving a prison sentence.

Curiosity about the beliefs of those in the public eye is often pervasive in another realm: politics. This is particularly true in an election year. In the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections, for example, candidate Mitt Romney’s Mormonism and candidate Rick Santorum’s Catholicism have been in and out of the spotlight. *The Atlantic* ran a story called, “Are Mormons Keeping Mitt Romney Afloat?” A *Washington Post* piece was headlined, “Rick Santorum, cafeteria Catholic?”; the *Huffington Post* reported, “Rick Santorum frustrated by low support from fellow Catholics.” In a *Rolling Stone* piece called “Why Mitt Romney’s Mormonism doesn’t matter,” writer Rick Perlstein contends,

“In American religious history, theological qualms tend to get pushed aside when politics intervenes,” noting the storied history of the role politics has played in elections. He writes about when Billy Graham “reassured his followers in 1960 that it was legitimate to vote against Catholic John F. Kennedy out of religious prejudice,” noting that where anti-Catholicism was once the major religious prejudice in America, it has been replaced by anti-Mormon and anti-Islam sentiment. However, Perlstein says the prejudice will cycle through in time; as some discard a prejudice, others will follow. “That’s the way cultural change works in America,” he writes.

All of this, whether technology, sports and celebrity news or political news, testifies to something stated in *The Revealer*: “As journalists, as scholars, and as ordinary folks, we cannot afford to ignore the role of religious belief in shaping our lives.” This religion coverage — breaking news and headlines in other beats — provides context for the focus of this study: religion sections, where intentional religion coverage takes place.

Religion news in the community

Intentional religion coverage reached a height in the late 1990’s. In an article written during that time, Luecke (1999) writes, “Just as ‘women’s pages’ yielded to ‘life’ and ‘style’ pages when their scope grew beyond recipes and engagement announcements, so too have church pages outgrown their name” (131). She outlines different approaches to covering religion: The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* included “religion, spirituality and volunteerism” with “Faith & Values,” the *San Jose Mercury News* put religion and ethics together, and the *Bradenton (FL) Herald* had a “WellBeing” section for stories about “body, mind and spirit” (Luecke 1999, 132). In a timeless way, Luecke (1999) also notes

the significant role religion news plays in a community. She quotes Tim McGuire, then-editor of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, as saying, “It is a kind of local news that connects us to the community in ways that political and business coverage doesn’t” (125). A recent report from The Knight Commission (2009) lists religious resources as a basic information need of a community, alongside needs for information on jobs, safety, taxes, food and health care, to name a few.

However, as noted in the introduction, the religion beat has faced its share of cutbacks, much like the rest of journalism. Back in 2007, for example, *Christianity Today* reported on the cutting and shifting of religion beats and sections in *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *The Wichita Eagle* (Pulliam 2007).

Regardless of the model, method or magnitude, it is important to understand how religion is covered at the community level, particularly how stories are told, or framed. Just as an image can be placed in a variety of picture frames, each with a different look, a story can be told in different ways, through different perspectives or with emphasis on different details. The journalistic theory behind this framing will be discussed later.

In his book *Unsecular Media*, Silk (1995) writes, “... it is my contention that news coverage of religion in America can be properly understood only as the expression of values that derive from our religious traditions” — in other words, the media cover religion not from a purely secular point of view, but from a foundation of values. He writes, “These values are embodied in a series of moral formulas, or *topoi*, that shape the way religion stories are conceived and written” (Silk 1995, xii). He writes about the

tensions between religious institutions and the press, among them, the challenge of addressing a religiously diverse audience (Silk 1995, 8). According to Silk (1995):

[Religion coverage] must tread carefully in the presence of articles of faith and maintain a cautious distance from supernatural events Yet it is worth considering the degree to which the constraints may reflect not a secular bias on the media's part but a common understanding of what is acceptable discourse in the public square. (8)

But despite the challenges, and despite what people may think, Silk (1995) holds that religion is not covered from a secular standpoint, but rather, with nuances of religious symbolism that underlie American culture.

These *topoi* he identifies are basically character themes that come from classic forensic rhetoric. He writes about how news, regardless of beat, often falls into a conventional format, a general conception, an almost formulaic mode of storytelling (Silk 1995, 50). In rhetoric, he explains, “general conceptions of this sort were literally called commonplaces — *koinoi topoi* in Greek” (50.) These *topoi* resemble frames of news stories; they are basically lenses through which stories are told. Though not exhaustive, Silk (1995) identifies seven general categories into which religion news falls: “good works, tolerance, hypocrisy, false prophecy, inclusion, supernatural belief, or declension” (55). These will be explained in more depth later. Although some of these have different levels of nuance or subcategories, Silk (1995) holds that most religion news stories are told with one of these underlying themes.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that 16 years have passed since Silk's (1995) book was published. New frames could have emerged as time has passed, and the religious landscape has continued to develop. In a 2009 *Huffington Post* article entitled "The Religious Decade: 2000 to 2010," Paul Raushenbush notes, "As the original superpower, religion reasserted its perennial influence in both national and international affairs." He details 10 religion-related events that, as he sees it, shaped America and the world during that decade. The September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, the death of Pope John Paul the II after 26 years in leadership, the denial of the Holocaust by prominent figures such as Iranian President Ahmadinejad, and the Episcopal Church's appointment of openly Gay bishops are among them.

The news platform has also changed since Silk's (1995) book was written, with an upswing in Internet use, as noted in the introduction to this study. Of Americans surveyed in 2010, 66 percent said television was their main source of news, 41 percent chose the Internet, 31 percent chose newspapers and 16 percent chose radio (Pew 2011, 2). Among 18- to 29-year-olds alone, the Internet was the main news source, beating television (3). In the western United States, 47 percent of people said the Internet was their main news source — a higher percentage than in other parts of the country and the United States as a whole (4). Although these statistics are an across-the-board look at national and international news, they demonstrate the prominence of the Internet. Waldman (2011) connects the change in media delivery with the change in staff: "The number and variety of websites, blogs, and tweets contributing to the news and information landscape is truly

stunning, but it parallels the trend of a shortage of full-time reporting (16). Considering all of that, the Internet became the outlet of focus for this study.

This is not to say that Silk's (1995) *topoi* are inherently outdated or irrelevant, but simply that changing times and practices require his findings to be reconsidered in a new context. Thus, Silk's (1995) *topoi* act as a guide for the analysis in this study — though by no means a definitive guide.

Theoretical foundation

What Silk (1995) refers to as *topoi*, others would call frames. Entman (1993) describes framing as “a way to describe the power of a communicating text” (51). Silk's (1995) *topoi* involve general conceptions and ways of viewing religion that are informed by ideas that are sometimes almost unconsciously, ingrained in American culture. Entman's (1993) frames involve “perceived reality” (52) and “culturally familiar symbols” (53). He elaborates on framing:

Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. (52)

In other words, framing is choosing certain elements or ideas and presenting them in a noticeable way, thereby telling a story through a certain lens.

As Entman (1993) notes, framing is not just about the person doing the communicating — in this case, the reporter — and the text. Rather, it involves “the communicator, the text, the receiver and the culture” (Entman 1993, 52).

This study will focus on two of those four aspects, namely, the text and the culture. That being said, there is certainly room for a study on how a consumer of news interprets and responds to perceived frames, and the process (albeit sometimes unknowingly) that a reporter goes through in choosing those frames. This idea of the reader’s connection with framing is also noted by Scheufele and Tewksbury (2002), who describe frames as “the devices that build the associations between concepts” and “can exert a rather substantial influence on citizens’ beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors” (19).

Despite Entman’s (1993) early attempt to define framing, it’s not a theory that is clearly or easily defined, as scholarly debate about it reveals. Entman (2007) later writes about how closely intertwined framing is with agenda-setting and priming, connecting the three as a way of conceptualizing media bias, particularly where politics are concerned. He defines bias as “consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts over the use of government power” (Entman 2007, 166). Although Entman (2007) is focused on government and politics, there is yet another connection to Silk’s (1995) *topoi*: a consistent pattern in coverage.

While Entman (2007) highlights the similarities among agenda-setting, priming and framing, using them as a package to describe bias, Sheufele (2000) makes a strong differentiation among the three theories, contending that while framing is related to the other two and is often considered second-level agenda setting, framing has a different

premise than the other two. Sheufele (2000) writes that agenda-setting and priming are based in salience, which he describes as “the ease with which these issues can be retrieved from memory (300); this is a contrast to Entman’s (1993) emphasis on salience. Rather, Sheufele (2000) writes that the premise of framing is attribution, which is defined in terms of psychologist Fritz Heider’s explanation: inferring causality between an action and the force responsible. Like Entman (1993, 2007), Sheufele (2000) notes the power of framing in terms of media effects — an effect on the media consumer, in this case, the reader. Reese et al (2001) define framing as follows: “Frames are organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world.”

Aarøe (2011) explores the factors that determine how strong a frame is, among them, the emotions and cognition of the information receiver. Aarøe (2011) looks at frames in two categories: episodic and thematic, with episodic being more focused on a specific instance or person, and thematic at an overarching issue or theme.

Other studies about religion news have relied on framing for a theoretical foundation. Boynton and Straughan (2003) analyzed frames of a sex abuse scandal involving John J. Geoghan, a Catholic priest in Boston. They found that the focus tended to be on the criminal aspects of the situation, rather than the religious aspects, with sexual deviance as the main frame. Jankowski (2008) looked at the same scandals, with a focus on who framed them: namely, victims and church officials. Jankowski (2008) also looked at frames that were cause-focused and solution-focused.

This study focuses on the Entman (1993, 2007), Sheufele (2000) and Reese et al (2001) conceptions of framing, rather than on the episodic/thematic conceptions of Aarøe (2011) and others. Although it could be interesting to look at religion in terms of episodic or thematic frames, the intention of this study is more nuanced, and more message-based.

Research Question

Considering all of this — the significance of Internet news, the importance of religion in American life, and the role of the media in framing what the public receives as news — this study investigates the following question, with Silk's (1995) *topoi*, referred to as frames from this point forward, as a starting point:

RQ: How do community news sites frame religion?

1. Textually, which of Silk's frames emerge from the stories in the religion sections of these community news websites?
2. What new/different frames, if any, emerge in coverage of religion news in a community?
3. Given the textual frame findings and editors' insights, what kind of model are these three newspaper websites setting for religion coverage?

These questions are answered in a comparative way, to better highlight what each site is doing. This study will also touch briefly on what kinds of stories are missing from religion news coverage.

The study evaluates the religion sections of the three news websites previously mentioned: the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Faith in Memphis*, an offshoot of the *Commercial Appeal*. The three have several differences in how they cover

religion; these differences will be examined later. Although this is not an all-inclusive study, these three major metropolitan papers can help shed light on how religion news is covered online at a community level. It is important to note that the focus is community, meaning this study is not investigating national news publications — it explores local publications. That does not mean, however, that all the stories are purely local.

Although there has been research done on religion news, there has been little to no research done on the way presentation of religion news varies among different news websites at the community level. The different ways that news is presented have a bearing on what readers see and know. It is true that something such as this could be done and said with other beats — the arts, health, sports, etc. However, it is worth noting that, as mentioned, religion is intertwined in many aspects of American life, and even other news beats. Unlike other news subjects, as Silk (1995) notes throughout his work, religion news deals not only with the physical, empirical world, but with the supernatural in the beliefs of those it covers.

METHODS

In conducting the analysis for this study, the researcher explored the online religion sections of the *Houston Chronicle*, *The Salt Lake Tribune* and *Faith in Memphis* from the *Commercial Appeal*. Additionally, the researcher conducted interviews with a top religion editor or reporter from each publication.

The researcher chose these newspaper websites for several reasons, one of them being limited availability — not many community newspapers have strong local religion coverage, let alone religion staff. Of those that do, few have a robust online presence. That limitation is the simplest selection reason.

The researcher did not want to focus on national newspapers, nor was the focus small-town, so population was also a consideration. Although the actual populations do differ, each of the papers is in a major metropolitan area. According to the 2010 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the cities each of the papers serve have the following populations: Memphis, 246,899; Salt Lake City, 186,440; Houston, 2,099,451.

Each of the three states has a religious demographic that is either aligned with the national average or higher. In the U.S. overall, about 16 percent of the population surveyed claim no religious affiliation; in that regard, Utah is on target with the national average — 16 percent of Utah's adult population surveyed claims no affiliation (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008, p. 100). Texas and Tennessee have more people than average claiming some kind of affiliation; only 12 percent of each of their populations claims none (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008, p. 100). As will

be seen later, is important to note the high concentration of Mormons in Utah; according to the Religious Landscape Survey, Mormons make up 58 percent of adults surveyed in the total population of Utah (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008, p. 99).

A significant reason why these three newspaper websites were chosen is the obvious contrast in how they present religion news. This context, though not the focus of the study, is important for better understanding the content. Emmison and Smith (2000), who write about visual analysis, note that context is key, as “interpretation involves relationships between the part and the whole” (67). The principle of looking at both the part and the whole can be applied here: Religion news is not just a set of parts, or individual articles, but the overall context in which they appear.

Figure 1. Houston Belief screenshot

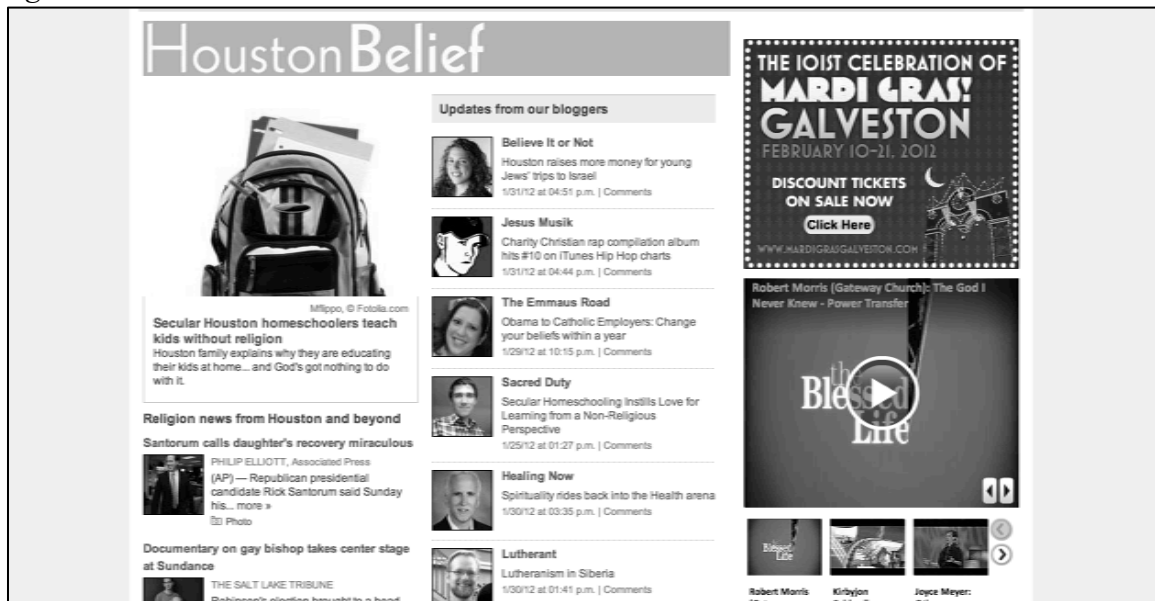


Figure 1. Houston Belief screenshot. The above image is of the Houston Chronicle’s faith section was taken on Feb. 1 — the first day of gathering articles.

At first glance, the *Houston Chronicle* places religion news with light, soft news — if it could be called news. Houston Belief, the religion section, is filed under

chron.com’s Life tab. Listed between Mom Houston and Health, the belief section also falls in the same lineup as, Pets, Food, and Weddings and Celebrations. The section’s alignment with lighter news does not mean it is light on content. On the contrary, it is rich with content. Most of that content, however, does not come from reporters. It comes from bloggers — about 30 of them, coming from different backgrounds and perspectives: Muslim, Catholic, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Mormon, Jew, Wiccan, Humanist, Buddhist, Hindu and more. All have a place in Houston Belief.

Figure 2. Salt Lake Tribune *faith* screenshot

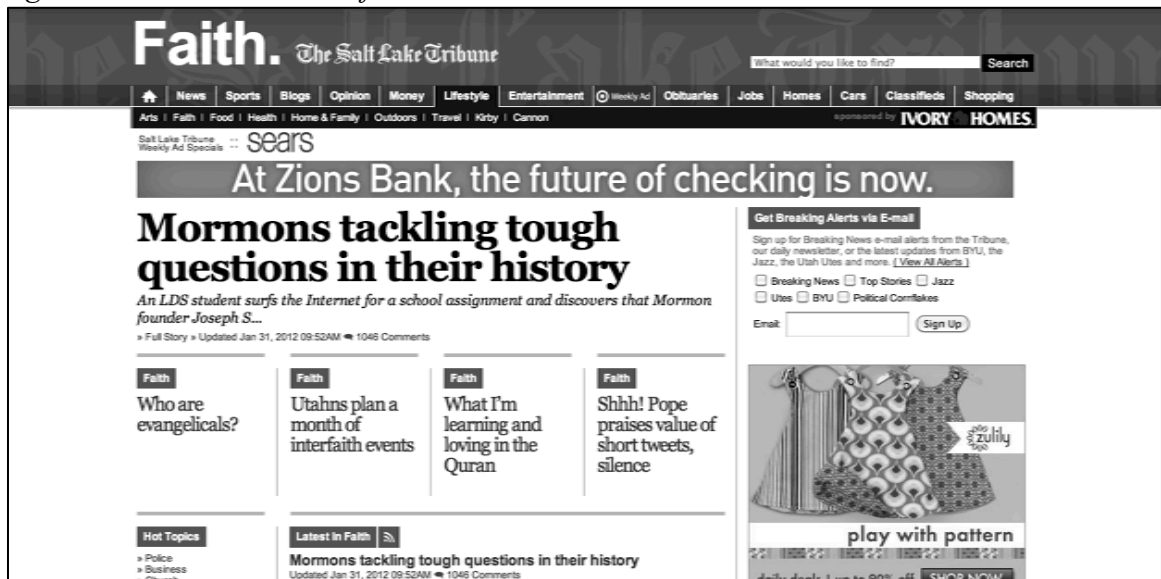


Figure 2. Salt Lake Tribune *faith* screenshot. The above image shows the display of the Salt Lake Tribune’s religion section, *Faith*, on Feb. 1.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* takes a different approach. Under the News tab — the same tab that includes Politics, Justice, Education and Nation and World — are two religion-related sub-categories: Polygamy and The LDS Church. Additional religion coverage, and the coverage this study will focus on, is under the Lifestyle tab. Faith appears between Arts and Food, and in the lineup with Outdoors, Health and Home and

Family. The section includes two blogs: One from the staff reporter, the other from a columnist.

Figure 3. Faith in Memphis screenshot

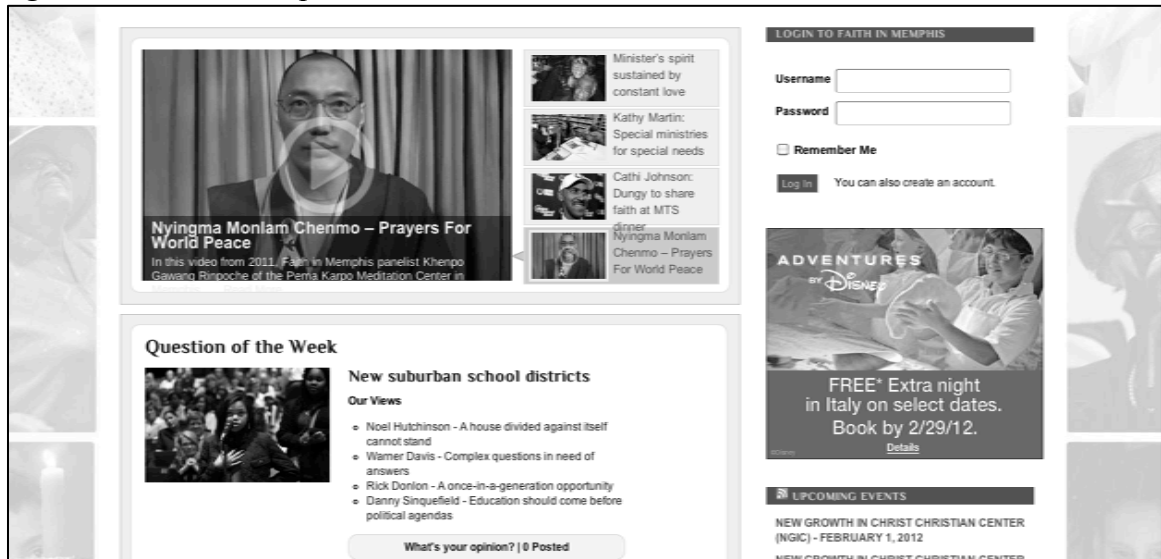


Figure 3. Faith in Memphis screenshot. This image was captured on Feb. 1 and is a sample of what the Faith in Memphis website looks like. Although it is not visible in this image, a Faith in Memphis banner runs across the top of the page.

The *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, TN, has a dual approach. Under Lifestyle, aligned with Weddings, Profiles, Family, Health and Fitness and the like, is a section called Faith in Memphis. It consists of guest commentaries, event postings and news stories. But the Appeal also has a separate *Faith in Memphis* website, faithinmemphis.com. It appears as a separate entity, save for a small link to the *Commercial Appeal* website. *Faith in Memphis* has some of the same content, but it also adds a question of the week, a regular column called Faith Matters, blog posts from other contributors and inspirational videos from the community. Since the website *Faith in Memphis* is the section of focus for this study, the site is referred to by that name, rather than the *Commercial Appeal*.

The researcher analyzed each site's news coverage primarily based on the text published. A quantitative approach, such as a content analysis, could reveal an overall look at what is being covered. This study dips into the quantitative with a light numerical analysis of how many stories were categorized in each frame. However, the primary method is a qualitative textual analysis, which allowed the researcher to understand the nuance of the text. After all, the aim of this study is to understand not just the "what" of religion news in these communities, but the "how."

Simply put, textual analysis helps reveal how people make sense of the world and "allows us to see how similar or different the sense-making practices that different people use can be" (McKee 2003, 14). Other studies involving frames and religion have been primarily text-based. Dixon (2005), for example, studied the contrasting frames in Christian mission-related incidents in Afghanistan and Yemen in 2001 and 2002, noting the power of subtle differences in language, particularly when reporting on religion.

In one non-religion example, Dickerson (2001) did a textual analysis to compare the frames in a political correctness debate involving two college professors. In order to determine the frames, his textual analysis included both structural and rhetorical elements. Structural elements included headlines, quotes and number of stories. He discusses how words shape frames — "Repetition of certain words and phrases across the life of a story shapes meaning by telling readers what the important story elements are and how to think about them" (168). In analyzing texts, the researcher used Dickerson's approach, examining both what was said in each story through the rhetoric and language used, along with the headlines and overall treatment of the story.

This textual analysis also follows McKee's (2003) model, focusing on "the ways in which these forms of representation take place, the assumptions behind them and the kinds of sense-making about the world they reveal" (17). This idea of representation and assumption aligns with Silk's (1995) assertion that media coverage of religion is not secular, but rather, informed by cultural presuppositions.

Thus, as a means of categorizing the frames that emerge from the textual analysis, Silk's (1995) *topoi*, or frames, are used. As McKee (2003) notes, when researching, it is essential to keep the questions in mind so that the analysis remains relevant. Since every element of every text cannot be explored, Silk's (1995) frames help provide a guide for categorizing articles. Silk's (1995) frames are described briefly as follows:

Good Works: This frame focuses on the presupposition of religion as a force for good. It includes stories about social activism and volunteerism, "evergreen" holiday stories and morality. Silk (1995) also says this includes the morality, hope and values that emerge in Hollywood productions such as *Mrs. Doubtfire* and *It's a Wonderful Life*.

Tolerance: This frame is focused on a desire not to offend, the right to free exercise of religion, constitutional controversies and the like.

Hypocrisy: This frame includes the "corrupt evangelist" theme, complete with scandals, moral defects and violations of norms within institutional religions.

False Prophecy: While hypocrisy deals with supposed corruption within a religious body or pertaining to an individual, false prophecy is external. It involves so-called cults and marginalized religions, along with those that are questioned because their

practices, as a matter of doctrine, go against cultural norms. In other words, it is as if something is at fault with the religion as a whole.

Inclusion: This frame is best understood in terms of what it is not: its “anti-topos” is foreignness, or pitting certain religious groups as “others.” These stories are about how religious groups, often those with foreign ties, such as Islam and Judaism, fit into American culture.

Supernatural Belief: This frame is about events that go beyond the empirical and physical — “proof” stories, “miracle stories,” spiritual encounters and the like. These deal not so much in phenomena as in the faith of the believers, and they present a challenge in terms of how much skepticism should be exercised. This frame is frequently seen in tabloids.

Declension: This frame emphasizes “religious upheaval,” religious decline and trends in megachurches, such as marketing, multimedia and shifting from traditional religious practices.

These frames can be summed up thus: “Applause for good works. Embrace of tolerance. Contempt for hypocrisy. Rejection of false prophets. Inclusion of worthy religious others. Appreciation of faith in things unseen. Concern about religious decline” (Silk 1995, 142). These frames were not used as a comprehensive list, but as a guide list with room for anticipated expansion.

Gathering process

To parallel the ever-updated nature of the web, the researcher focused on current news, not past news. Rather than looking through archives, the researcher looked at the

stories that were live on each website during a prescribed period. One limitation on the research was the ever-changing nature of websites; they are not like static print products that have articles fixed on a page. Thus, the researcher had to consider website updates, which could change a site's coverage from morning to afternoon to evening. To address this concern, the researcher carefully developed a plan for gathering the text to analyze.

The researcher initially planned to borrow from the quantitative concept of the constructed week. Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) describe constructed weeks: "In a constructed week sample, all Sundays are identified, and one is then randomly selected, as is a Monday, a Tuesday, etc., until all seven days of the week are represented" (134). This method is better than studying consecutive days, as it allows for variations that happen from week to week, and thus, is more reliable (Riffe, Aust and Lacey 1993). From a quantitative perspective, two constructed weeks give a reliable picture of a year's worth of local stories (Riffe, Aust and Lacey 1993); though this study is qualitative, the researcher wanted to use two weeks, based on that model.

The researcher began with the first full week of 2012 without a holiday. However, after two calendar weeks of trying the constructed week, the researcher realized that the timing of the content posting did not yield enough results to analyze. Some days, there was not enough new content to gather from a particular day.

Initially, the researcher planned to examine the 10 most prominently displayed stories on each site, but when the time came to pull the articles, some days, it was hard to find 10, or even five. So, the researcher did a test-run of pulling every article, every day for two weeks in January. This yielded better, more consistent results.

Text was gathered at the same time each day: between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m. This allowed the researcher to see all content posted in the past 24 hours. This was done Monday through Friday. During the test runs of pulling articles, the researcher determined that she would not miss any content by not pulling articles on Saturdays and Sundays; content posted on the weekend was still prominent on Mondays.

Articles were pulled every weekday morning during February 2012. Some of the articles pulled were published in January, but they were among the articles displayed on the sites during the first few days of text gathering, so they are included in this study. All gathering was complete before the 2012 presidential primary elections took place in any of the three newspapers' states. The primaries for Utah were in June; the primaries for Tennessee and Texas were in early March.

The following criteria were used in pulling articles for analysis:

- Each article was visible on the main religion page. The researcher did not find articles by clicking through other sections or pages.
- Content was created by a staff member, blogger or community member. Associated Press stories and Religion News Service stories were excluded.
- Video-based stories, such as Expressions of Faith pieces from *Faith in Memphis*, were excluded.
- Music reviews, namely, two music blogs from the *Houston Chronicle*, were excluded because they didn't fit with the other types of stories. The researcher wanted to focus on non-music news.

- Texts that were not reported, but basically transcribed or copied, were excluded. These included statements from religious and political figures, along with the *Houston Chronicle's* aggregated quotes from different religious texts.

Reading process

To begin with, after the text gathering was complete, each article was read once and annotated. The researcher then determined which frame or frames a given article fit in. Some were distinctly Silk's (1995) frames; others were variations, or new frames altogether. Many of the articles were labeled with more than one possible frame, as they could have fit into multiple categories in subtle ways. After the first reading of each article, the researcher analyzed them again, grouping them in like categories to finalize the frames. At the end, each article was categorized with only one frame. Grouping the articles during the second reading also allowed the researcher to compare the articles for similarities and variations, and to see how many stories were in each frame. At the end, the researcher reviewed the analysis, noting which frames were most prevalent overall and on each site, which new frames emerged and what kind of model the sites demonstrated. Again, the significance of frames is not just that frames are built on perceptions, but that they can shape the social world (Reese et al 2001).

By looking at these textual frames in terms of underlying organizing principles, rather than categorizing them in binary ways (positive or negative, episodic or thematic), this study aims to reveal something about the conversation these texts create. As noted earlier, one normative function of the media is to facilitate discourse (Christians et al

2009). Thus, by doing this textual analysis of religion news on community newspaper websites, this study will not only reveal what the texts say and how they say it, but what kind of discourse they are creating for the community. Indeed, “The study of news reports in the press is one of the major tasks of discourse-analytical media research,” (van Dijk 1991, 110), and when it comes to community, religion, as noted earlier, has been deemed an essential need — hence, this exploration on the frames employed by newspapers in presenting textual discourse about religion.

Interviews

To add another dimension to this study, the researcher conducted interviews with an authority figure from each religion section: Kate Shellnutt, the web producer for *Houston Belief*; Peggy Fletcher Stack, a long-time religion reporter, blogger and the creator of the Faith section at the *Salt Lake Tribune*; and David Waters, editor of *Faith in Memphis*.

Fontana and Frey (1994) highlight the importance of interviews in human history and discuss different interview types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are based on predetermined questions with response categories and allow for little variation; thus, they are too narrow and close-ended for the nature of this study. Unstructured interviews, according to Fontana and Frey (1994), tend to be used in fieldwork and ethnographic research and allow for more open-ended understanding. The semi-structured nature of the interviews in this study allowed for a balanced blend — a list of pre-determined questions, but with open ends and allowance for variation from publication to publication and person to person.

Fontana and Frey (1994) discuss this practice of blending methods, “triangulation,” and note that it can lead to stronger research results. In two separate studies that complement one another, Schmalzbauer (1999, 2002) used the “triangulation” approach in exploring how personal religious beliefs influence the work of the journalists who hold those beliefs. Although each individual study primarily used one of the methods, together, they make a triangulated pair. He first interviewed Catholic and evangelical journalists in New York and Washington, D.C. (1999). He later examined the stories those reporters had written, and he identified common “storylines” among them. He concludes that their stories “embody” their theological beliefs. Although this study is not about the religious beliefs of the writers, Schmalzbauer’s work is an example of how text and interviews can come together in researching a topic.

In this study, the interviews were done after the first round of textual analysis to prevent editor comments from giving the researcher pre-conceptions about each publication. This also allowed the researcher to have more insight before talking with each individual. Interviews were conducted via telephone. The researcher contacted the interviewees three times: once to coordinate a time to talk, once for the in-depth interview and once to thank them.

This study used in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This maintained the uniformity of conversations while allowing for variation based on the differences among the publications. Interviewees were asked the following questions, with variations:

1. *Please describe your role and how the religion beat at your publication works.*
2. *What is the perception about religion news at your publication?*

3. *Is there conversation among staff or intentional thought from you about religion story frames? If so, please tell me more about that.*
4. *Have you noticed a dominant frame in your publication's religion coverage? If so, what is it?*
5. *At this publication, what makes a religion story newsworthy?*
6. *What role do web analytics play, if any, in determining what to cover?*
7. *What role do user comments and user-generated content play in religion coverage?*
8. *What are the determining factors in how a religion story is told? In other words, what shapes the way the story is presented? Who/what are the key players/influences?*
9. *(The researcher's observations from the textual analysis will be mentioned to the interviewee prior to this question.) Based on the research, these frames seem to be common at your publication. As someone at that publication, does that seem accurate? How does that fit with what you've noticed?*

Through conducting these interviews, the researcher better understood the newsroom context of the stories analyzed and gained a better grasp on what may have shaped those stories. Although the focus of this study is not a causal one, and though influences are not causes, it is important to understand what influences frames in order to better understand the frames themselves. This discussion can also lead to further discussion about community conversation of religion.

Ultimately, this study aims to provide a better understanding of how these three news publications in major metropolitan areas frame religion, which can lead to a better understanding of the current religious discourse. This research expands knowledge of the framing of religion news in a community context — an area of knowledge with a serious gap. Prior to this, no study has been conducted of online religion coverage at the community level. This study blends textual analysis of news articles with interviews from newsroom staff to get a sense of how the text and the newsroom mentality fit together contextually. Through looking at these three papers, which are among the few with strong local religion coverage, this research shows what a current model of covering community religion looks like. Beyond that, this study identifies new frames that have emerged, or more important, the kind of coverage that is missing. This can lead not only to a gain in knowledge, but to an opportunity for improvement in local religion news coverage at the community level.

RESULTS

Every article within the criteria described was pulled from the religion sections of the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Faith in Memphis* during weekdays in February 2012. The text of each article was analyzed, and articles were categorized into Silk's (1995) frames: good works, tolerance, inclusion, hypocrisy, false prophecy, supernatural belief and declension. The researcher also identified new frames: intersection, peace and resurrection, which are discussed at length later in this section.

The researcher supplemented the qualitative analysis with a quantitative summary of findings. The analysis included 192 articles: 91 from the *Houston Chronicle*, 51 from the *Salt Lake Tribune* and 50 from *Faith in Memphis*. A list of every article read, the byline, the publication date and the frame can be found in the Appendix. The numerical breakdown of how many articles fit into each frame can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Total articles in each frame

Frame	Houston Chronicle	Salt Lake Tribune	Faith in Memphis	Total articles
Good works	45	12	22	79
Tolerance	9	7	5	21
Hypocrisy	4	11	3	18
False Prophecy	1	0	0	1
Inclusion	9	13	5	27
Supernatural	5	1	2	8
Declension	0	1	1	2
Intersection	6	1	11	18
Peace	3	6	0	9
Resurrection	9	0	1	10

Table 1. Total article in each frame. This table shows how many articles are in each frame at each publication, along with among all publications together.

Figure 4. Overall breakdown of frames

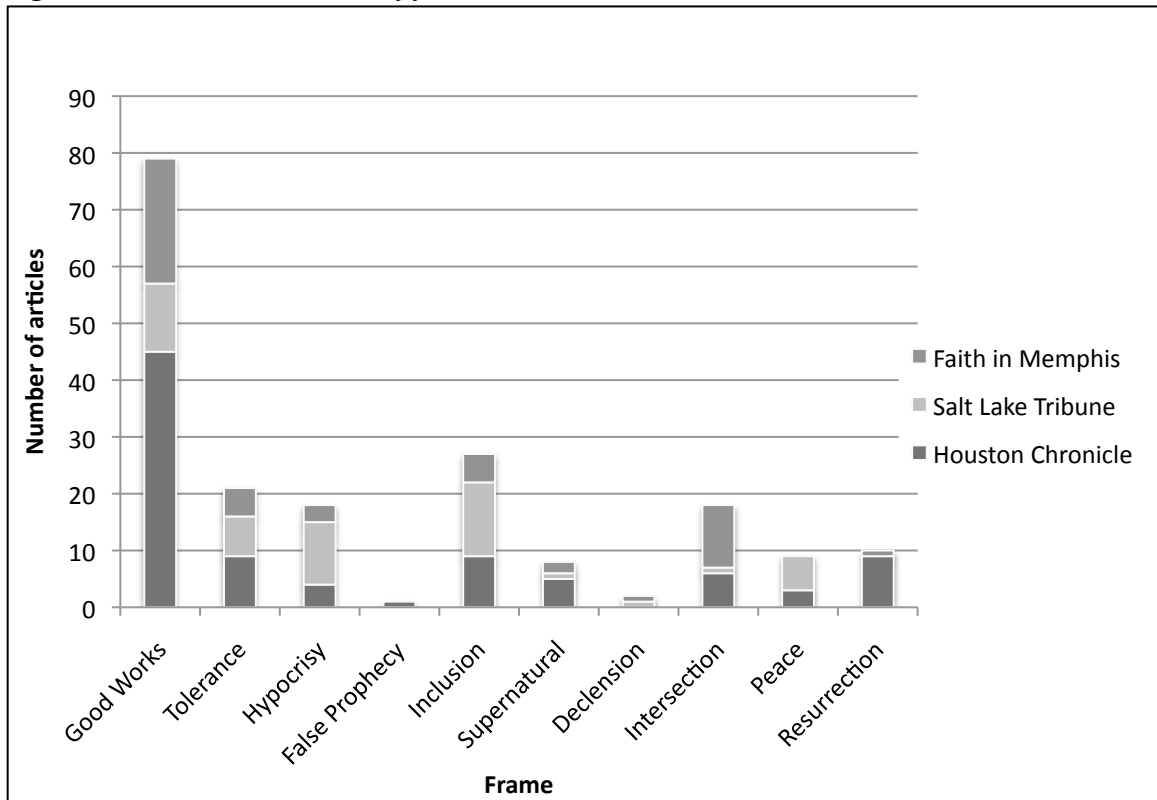


Figure 4. Overall breakdown of frames. This figure is a visual representation of how many articles total in this study are in each frame category. Each column total is also divided by publication to show how the frames at each one fit into the overall context.

Textual results: Silk’s frames

The presence of Silk’s frames will be discussed first; an explanation of new frames will follow. The interview results and their relationship with the text will be discussed last.

Good works

As Silk (1995) notes, “The American news media presuppose that religion is a good thing” (57). This notion is still present in the good works frame — unsurprisingly, the most common frame to emerge in stories from the three publications examined in this

study. This includes coverage of religious bodies conducting service projects or holding special events, along with traditional holiday pieces and profiles of “good examples” within a community of faith. It could be described as traditional “church page” news.

Within the good works frame, a few distinct categories emerged: Feature-like profiles of, to put it simply, good groups doing good things; straightforward, short news pieces about goings-on; and devotion-like pieces, written by believers, for a mainstream audience that consists of some believers. Some of the former categories act as a call to action. Overall, stories in the good works frame focus on what is going well in the world of religion, and if something is amiss, then what is being done to fix it.

The profile pieces, as mentioned, tended to be about a person or group doing something exemplary, as if to say, “Look at this good religious person and all the good he or she is doing.” For example, a Feb. 2 *Houston Chronicle* article by Diane Cowen talks about a Christian seminar speaker, Kirk Cameron, and the way his family is a good example of a family of faith. In a Feb. 1 *Houston Chronicle* post by Sacred Duty blogger Ken Chitwood, triumphant battle language is used about a Christian nonprofit organization fighting human trafficking. Chitwood refers to some organizations as “an entrenched alliance,” with one, in particular, “taking the fight one step further,” and emphasizing the unity between “both secular and religious” in this fight. In this case, religion is doing something victorious.

In another example, a Feb. 11 article by Larry Rea in *Faith in Memphis* highlights an outdoor expo held by a men’s group at a church. It has an uplifting tone, full of joy and evangelism. “It’s 5:30 on a Saturday night at Germantown Baptist Church, and two

lines of people are engulfed in the smell of poppy-seed pheasant, buffalo burgers, Mongolian venison and pizza with venison pepperoni,” the article begins. “There are lots of hungry folks, about 900 men, women, and children,” it continues, invoking something akin to a Biblical story about Jesus feeding 5,000 people, not including women and children. The story goes on to describe venison enchiladas and “duck’derves,” then includes part of the message from a legless angler about overcoming obstacles, with insights woven in about what it means to be a Christian man.

In the straight news sub-category of good works, a Feb. 29 *Salt Lake Tribune* piece by Peggy Fletcher Stack introduces an upcoming new reality television show about a “Mormon matchmaker.” Like a news brief from any other beat, it outlines the basic news items in a straightforward tone. A *Faith in Memphis* piece by David Waters titled “Cynthia Ham Named President of Bridges” is another example of this. It is a news story about a woman who was named the president of a nonprofit organization. Basically, the article leads with her being named to the role, then gives a brief overview of her history.

In addition to the stories in these two sub-categories, there are the blog posts — articles that read like a mix of devotions for believers and spreading a religious message to non-believers. These were mostly found in the *Houston Chronicle*; as mentioned earlier, a large portion of that publication’s religion coverage comes through bloggers.

In one, “Moods and Free Will,” published Feb. 9 on the *Houston Chronicle*’s Bhakti Yoga blog, the author writes about spiritual reflection with many references to the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*. Heather Hemingway, the Mormon Voice blogger at the *Houston Chronicle*, has an article about striving for perfection and what it means to believe in

Christ, particularly as she reflects on a book called *Believing Christ*. She gives her readers this urging: “Remember the message of this book: believe Jesus Christ since he has promised to be your personal Savior, to yoke Himself to you, carrying the heavier part of your load.” Throughout, she uses personal examples and stories, including a parable told in her church. In a blog by Marty Troyer, The Peace Pastor, readers are challenged to be good stewards. The text is reminiscent of a sermon, with its opening scripture, “Psalm 24:1 says...,” and its personal application: “Here are excerpts of several resources that might help you, like they’ve helped me, to be good Stewards.” These are only a few examples.

Another important aspect of this frame to realize is there are new types of stories within it — stories such as a *Houston Chronicle* piece by Andy Lambert of the Zen Chalice blog about not working for money. Lambert has another post about the spiritual joys of coloring. The focus is not on established religion, but spirituality. Along with this, groups that could be seen as marginalized have a place within this frame, included alongside and with the same treatment as main groups, instead of being placed in the inclusion frame, which will be discussed later.

Some of the stories in this category are strong examples of how one story can be told through different frames, and depending on which one is chosen, the meaning of the story can be altered. A Faith in Memphis piece, “Grace Moves GBC Pastor to Humble Himself,” delves into the renewal of a congregation that had been struggling. This story could have been told through a frame of hypocrisy: church members not living according to what they believed. Instead, it was told as a story of healing and renewal, and of a

minister with a job well done. In the article, David Waters writes, “[The pastor] knew he was being called to serve a wounded congregation. At first, he had hoped the wounds would heal with time, but he had no idea how deep they were.” He goes on to describe the struggles, listing them with a melancholy tone: “Hurtful things were said and done during those years, not only behind closed doors but also in the worship center during Sunday evening business sessions.” But the focus is not on the past — it is on renewal: “Fowler called his flock together to confess, forgive and repent corporately in a special service...” The focus is on the foot washing, the hugs and “the teary-eyed congregation.” Reading the story, the frame seemed fitting. It matched what happened that night. But the story could have been told with a focus on past tensions and how a pastor tried to bring his congregation together after years of drama, with a tone of, “Look at those hypocrites — the pastor is calling them out.” Instead, the good works frame was used, and it seemed to reflect the situation accurately.

As dominant as the good works frame is overall and within each publication, other frames are still present. And as noted by Silk (1995), “Journalists live in a world where heart-warming fables of moral uplift are harder to come by, or at least harder to spin into gold. For better or worse, it comes more naturally to the news media to define good religion *via negativa* through recounting tales of intolerance, hypocrisy, false prophecy and spiritual decline” (63). Yet, as the rest of the results will reveal, the stories in the frames are not as dismal as they appear to be — at least, at the community level.

Tolerance

Silk (1995) points out that for journalists, “separation of church and state” carries too many complications, so instead, the focus is on tolerance — at its simplest, “merely an expression of secularist indifference or the desire not to offend” (66). Still, many of the stories in this frame have to do with tensions between religion and government. Silk (1995) notes that this frame is often used in the context of court reporting, and the examples will demonstrate that.

In a Jan. 29 *Houston Chronicle* piece by blogger Kristan Doerfler, the tension is highlighted as one of the government being disrespectful toward religion — specifically, Catholicism. The story is a response to the ongoing debate at the time about a healthcare mandate that would require employers, even religious organizations, to provide contraceptive coverage in their insurance policies. But some saw this as problematic, as Catholic doctrine is against contraceptive coverage; the mandate would require Catholic employers to provide something that opposes their religious convictions. At the time of the Doerfler blog post, the mandate had a provision to give religious organizations one extra year to comply. Doerfler responds to the debate. She writes:

If a food shelter run by a Jewish Synagogue is closed for Passover, Yom Kippur, or another Jewish observance, it would be intolerant for the government to mandate that devout Jews work on a day where they observe their faith. If a Muslim faces discrimination during Ramadan for not eating with clients at a business luncheon, the employer would be rightfully accused of religious discrimination. I could cite examples for other religions, but I think you get my

point. Which is precisely why many Catholics across America (myself included) have reacted with such disdain to the recent HHS mandate, issued on January 20. The piece continues in that manner.

Another example of the tolerance frame appears in the Feb. 11 “Question of the Week” from *Faith in Memphis*. The question is about whether religious groups should be allowed to rent and use public school facilities for worship and comes after a decision in the New York Senate to allow religious groups to use schools in that way, though such use was prohibited last year. Several of the respondents took the tolerance response. One of them, Rick Donlon, writes that he would like to think the ban “arose from a misunderstanding of the so-called separation of church and state.” But he continues, “A less charitable interpretation: they’re trying to scrub any hint of religious expression from our public spaces.”

But this frame is not just about the state’s tolerance, or lack thereof, toward the church — there is also a reverse tolerance at play. In other words, this frame is also used when a religious body is thought to be intolerant of secular or government action, or even of a certain lifestyle, as the following examples reveal. In the publications reviewed, this reverse tolerance rose up most frequently in stories about gay marriage.

In a Jan. 18 piece in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, writer Peg McEntee takes issue with a multifaith statement the LDS church joined regarding gay marriage as a threat to man-woman unions “and, evidently, the very foundation of religious freedom in the United States.” The language she uses is loaded with disapproval toward the religious groups behind the statement: “worse,” “warped assumption,” “nonsense” and the like. She also

parallels gay marriage and mixed-race marriage, noting how long the latter took to go through the legal system. She does not imply a lack of tolerance; she declares it.

The topic of gay marriage is also addressed in a Wiccan Way column in the *Houston Chronicle*. In it, blogger Ed Nelson writes that same-sex rights are “heading in the right direction lately,” that he is “glad to be alive now, as the Civil Rights has won on the Race issue and getting close to the winners circle for Sexual issues too.” He goes on to emphasize love, namely in the context of Wicca: “Wicca accepts All of the LGBTQ and Straight communities,” and “Love is a common theme in our faith.” It is an example of what tolerance, according to that writer, should be. It is also an example of critically looking at the intolerant, even calling them out.

Hypocrisy

The hypocrisy Silk (1995) describes is focused on scandal — the “corrupt evangelical” leader who has extra-marital affairs, the hypocrite revivalist and the like. That obvious hypocrisy is absent in the three publications during the time examined. Instead, the hypocrisy frame is used in another way — a gentler way. It is as if the hypocrisy Silk (1995) describes has been scaled back to a more intimate, personal level. The hypocrisy frame at play in these publications is about self-examination, or calling into question day-to-day practices that don’t align with what a particular religious body professes. In addition, hypocrisy at these publications is less about action than Silk’s (1995) hypocrisy and more about speech.

The closest event to scandal came in a Feb. 17 *Faith in Memphis* article by Linda Moore about a woman facing excommunication from her church. The story goes like this:

Nan Hawkes goes to an Evangelical Presbyterian Church. She's charged with "slander, bickering and gossip" about church leaders, with incidents dating back a few years. Church officials won't comment. She's been barred from Sunday School, and a friend who defended her was told to leave the choir. Hawkes has, apparently, resisted the pastor's efforts to help.

The hypocrisy frame on this story could have taken several directions. It could have focused on Hawkes, or it could have focused on the church. As it is, the frame's target is a bit murky, though it leans slightly toward painting the church as hypocritical and defending Hawkes. It starts, "Dr. Nan Hawkes has been a member of Second Presbyterian Church for 35 years. That would end if she's excommunicated over charges of 'slander, bickering and gossip' against church leadership." Instantly, the reader has a connection with Hawkes. The story is told through interviews with Hawkes, though this is in large part because, as the reporter states, "Officials...would not comment." There are a few comments from a spokesman. Still, the church is regarded critically, with a subtle sense of, "How could the church do such a thing?" Hawkes' "problems escalated," she was "barred" from Sunday School, and the like. The quote selected for the ending is the most telling: "It's God's church," Hawkes is quoted as saying. The hypocrisy frame could have leaned the other direction, painting Hawkes as a terrible hypocrite. But either way, this is the most extreme example of hypocrisy from these publications.

This church body hypocrisy is also seen in a Feb. 17 Iconia blog post from the *Houston Chronicle*. The writer, Menachem Wecker, criticizes Pastor Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church in Seattle for his church's discipline — according to the post, the

discipline is extreme. The problem is not discipline, but hypocrisy: “Driscoll is fond of criticizing the ‘rabbis’ and Pharisees of Jesus’ day for being too devoted to the law (and discipline) and not enough to common sense,” yet Driscoll’s own church recently tried to excommunicate a member for having physical intimacy with two women. Wecker comes right out in calling Driscoll and his church hypocritical:

As critical as Driscoll is of the Old Testament — and as ignorant of parts of it as he sometimes reveals himself to be — he and his church have revived on of the very practices that Jews may have leveled against Jesus for his own radical teachings.... There is perhaps irony in Mars Hill Church being scrutinized for one of the ‘legalistic’ practices of which it has been so critical.

This hypocrisy is also part of another niche within this frame: hypocrisy in words people use. A Feb. 21 article by Peggy Fletcher Stack in the *Salt Lake Tribune* begins, “Mormon presidential candidate Mitt Romney is betraying his church with his hard-edged stand on immigration.” The blow is softened in the next paragraph, but only slightly: “At least, that’s the view of some Latino Mormon activists....” In another example, *Houston Chronicle* blogger Kristan Doerfler, in a Feb. 15 blog, addresses Stephen Colbert “from one Catholic to another” to let him know how disappointed she is with him for comments he made about the Catholic response to the aforementioned healthcare mandate. She lists his offenses, but the most telling moment comes near the end: “As The Catholic, I’d expect more from you.”

Another example falls between extreme and speech. *Houston Chronicle* blogger Jesse Muhammad points a finger at someone who was the subject of scandal being hailed

as a great man. In a Feb. 4 article, he writes about Bishop Eddie Long, a man who “settled out of court with four young males who accused him of coercing them into inappropriate sexual relationships.” This, if anything, is an opportunity for the kind of hypocrisy story Silk (1995) describes. As the writer acknowledges, the blog is not about Long, but about a rabbi saying of Long, among other statements, “He is king.” The writer questions this behavior: “Does this mean this rabbi, the Jewish people, the state of Israel and the ‘God of Israel’ condones the actions of Long against those young boys?” The conclusion of his blog reads as follows: “If the blind lead the blind....well, that ditch runneth over by now.” Again, it is hypocrisy in speech, though this story admittedly has more traditional hypocrisy than others. But the bishop isn’t the focus — the rabbi is.

The other kind of hypocrisy at play in this frame is hypocrisy of self, or a hypocrisy of one’s own group — hypocrisy seen through self-examination. This is primarily seen in blogs from the *Salt Lake Tribune*’s Robert Kirby, who writes with a snarky tone that makes his articles difficult to categorize. He writes with irreverence and a strong measure of skepticism, but he has a point. Most often, that point is to take a closer look at a religious practice or claim that, in his eyes, is too easily accepted. The hypocrisy is subtle, mostly read between the lines through the tone. The clearest example is a Jan. 19 column called, “Soul searching needn’t always end in strict adherence.” He tackles birth control and gay marriage in the post, and his ultimate point is that people should not just believe what they are told, but should instead question it and believe it for themselves. He uses sarcasm: “Still, I can’t dismiss the idea that married gay people constitute a horrible threat to the plan of salvation. After all, church leaders say so.” He

later recounts a story of a man who claimed never to have disagreed with a church leader, and he calls out the ridiculousness of such a thing: “Never disagreeing with a church leader is a pretty neat trick considering they don’t always agree with one another.” He is not calling out a corrupt evangelical, but is examining himself and the people he sits in the pews with in an irreverent, yet profound way, identifying the hypocrite in everyone.

False prophecy

Of all the frames, false prophecy appears least in this study. There was only one story that fell into this frame, and it was a gentle example about a translation of the Bible. Rather than straight false prophecy, it is an echo of false prophecy.

Silk (1995) contrasts hypocrisy and false prophecy. He notes, “Hypocrisy takes place within the fold,” while false prophecy is external; when norms “are rejected as a matter of religious doctrine, then the religion itself can be called into question...” He notes that coverage of the Mormon church in the nineteenth century is the strongest example of false prophecy — an interesting contrast to today’s coverage of Mormons, particularly in the *Salt Lake Tribune*. As upcoming discussion will reveal, coverage of Mormons has since swung to the frame of inclusion.

But again, the only example of false prophecy is a gentle one in a Feb. 15 *Houston Chronicle* article by Kate Shellnutt. The story is about the latest New International Version of the Bible, which uses gender-neutral language; for that reason, Southern Baptist leaders recommended against it. Nevertheless, LifeWay Christian bookstores will still sell the new version. The echoes of false prophecy are toward the Bible translation itself and the store’s decision to carry it. Shellnutt gives several

examples of those opposed: “Southern Baptist leaders denounced the newest NIV translation over accuracy concerns,” “[a Houston pastor] decided to stop preaching from the NIV,” and the Southern Baptist Convention will not use the NIV in its Bible bee. Only one church in the story did not have big concerns about the new version. Still, this is not a strong false prophecy frame.

Inclusion

Although false prophecy is rare in these three publications, at least, during the sample period, inclusion is strong and has a new leaning. Silk (1995) describes inclusion as a frame “in which a suspect of faith is shown to be composed of good Americans worshipping according to their own worthy lights” (106) — in other words, “Jew in America” and “Islam in America” type stories. The work of CNN anchor Soledad O’Brien’s on “in America” documentaries — namely, *Black in America* and *Latino in America*, are racial examples of the inclusion frame. Silk (1995) also notes an anti-topos: foreignness. To put it simply, the inclusion frame takes a cultural or religious “other” and folds the group into the norm.

In the *Houston Chronicle*, Wardah Khalid of the Young American Muslim blog writes a traditional inclusion story in response to news about the New York Police Department spying on Muslim students. She writes about “fond memories” of days when she “facilitated sisterly bonding” as part of the Muslim Students Association at Texas A&M University and about the “atrocities” of the police department in saying these “seemingly harmless activities were grounds for criminal suspicion.” This story has echoes of tolerance in that it touches on the right to exercise religion, but it is more of a

plea for understanding and inclusion, based on the language — universities serve as a “line of defense” — and the perspective of someone within the population.

Other *Houston Chronicle* pieces also take this perspective, this plea for inclusion. Ed Nelson of The Wiccan Way blog sarcastically explains certain aspects of Wicca in a Feb. 28 article. The headline, “Wiccans Are Evil, and Are Trying to Wipe Out Christianity,” leads into the first sentence: “Yea, I know, silly thought, but one that seems to permeate the evangelistic fundamentalists like New Gingrich, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Kristi Watts of the 700 Club.” It seems to be written in response to being treated as a “false prophet” religion, not necessarily in media coverage, but by people. Nelson writes, “Pat, Newt, Jerry, Kristi and the millions that follow them need an enemy to hate, and after several thousands of years, they still need us to rally the troops behind. In order to get more people afraid, and hence join their club, they have to have an evil enemy to hate....” Wiccans, he says, are that “enemy,” and wrongfully so. Thus, he responds to false prophet treatment with an inclusion story.

Some of the most obvious inclusion stories are about the Mormon church. As noted previously, this particular church was once the subject of false prophecy stories, but in these publications that is not the case. Two *Houston Chronicle* blog posts, in particular, stand out: one by Menachem Wecker of the Iconia blog, and another by Ken Chitwood of the Sacred Duty blog. Both are responses to a poll, *Mormons in America*, released in January 2012 by the Pew Forum on Religion Public Life. Among other findings, the poll revealed that “many Mormons feel they are misunderstood, discriminated against and not accepted by other Americans as part of mainstream

society.” Wecker shares a question-and-answer session with a Mormon church representative about how television and films do not often depict the church accurately. It is a response to a lack of understanding. Chitwood’s piece takes another direction from the same poll through a conversation with a local author who delved into the ongoing debate about whether Mormons are Christians. The author interviewed, Chauntelle Baughman, makes a distinction between the two, and the story reads as an explainer. The *Salt Lake Tribune*’s Peggy Fletcher Stack has a similar story about a book by author Matthew Bowman, headlined, “Author: Media missing real story about Mormons.”

These explanation stories are an example of a new branch of inclusion: understanding. There is not quite enough distinction to identify a new frame, but there is certainly a new direction, a new niche. Silk’s (1995) inclusion is opposed to foreignness; a new direction of the inclusion frame is opposed to misconceptions. No longer is the frame just about minority groups or those with foreign roots, but about major groups that have storied pasts within the U.S.

Another explainer story from the *Houston Chronicle*, a Feb. 1 article in The Peace Pastor blog by Marty Troyer, seeks to promote understanding about Mennonites. “What’s a Mennonite anyway? Hint: I don’t drive a buggy, but I do believe in Jesus,” the headline reads. After explaining more about the Mennonite faith and providing several resources, Troyer concludes thus: “Perhaps — given that being Mennonite has nothing to do with dress or food, and everything to do with believing Jesus — you’re an urban Mennonite too, and didn’t know it!” He brings Mennonites into the mainstream within societal and cultural norms, and he tries to create understanding and a way to relate.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* has several of these explainer stories. One is simply a Q-and-A about Evangelicals. Peggy Fletcher Stack writes:

Evangelicals have been in the news a lot lately — from Denver Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow, who plays and prays football with scriptures stenciled to his face, to the Texas pastor and his wife, who spent 24 hours in bed preaching the virtues of sex in Christian marriages. So who are these Christians? What do they have in common and how are they different from other believers?

Thus, Stack at once sets Evangelicals up as similar, different and misunderstood. In another example, Stack writes about Mormon proxy baptism, which exploded into the news when Anne Frank, a storied Holocaust victim, was among those to be baptized in the Mormon practice of baptism for the dead. Stack did a few explainer pieces, not scandalizing the baptism, but clarifying the practice and getting the church's response.

Inclusion is not just about faith, established religion or spirituality — it also includes the religious “nones” mentioned in the literature review (Chaves 2011). A Jan. 25 *Houston Chronicle* article by Ken Chitwood of the Sacred Duty blog illustrates this. The blog post is about secular homeschooling, and Chitwood writes, “As with anything out of the mainstream, homeschooling has its fair share of misperceptions,” he begins, continuing by debunking the stereotype of homeschoolers as religious. While that is partially true, Chitwood takes a look at another niche and normalizes it, bringing understanding through the story of a secular family who emphasizes “non-religious values.” It is inclusion of the group Chitwood describes as “irreligious.”

In another example, a small circle of Christians becomes the topic of inclusion: Christians with tattoos. *Faith in Memphis* and the *Houston Chronicle* both covered this group, but with different frames. The *Houston Chronicle*'s Kate Shellnutt took a good works approach in her Feb. 23 article "Tattoo Artist Finds His Ministry in Ink," while Lindsay Melvin of *Faith in Memphis* went with the inclusion frame. The Melvin piece seemed to be a response to a feeling that Christians with tattoos were hypocrites, with a headline that reads, "Some glorify God through tattoos." It starts out by applying a label to one of the story subjects: "Devoted Christian Stephen Day has religion-themed tattoos on much of his body...." Not only is the subject labeled as a Christian, but as a "devoted" Christian. Melvin goes on to write, "Long considered blasphemous among Christians, tattoos are being adopted by a new generation of believers who are not only getting tattoos but also choosing religious designs to showcase their faith." In other words, the piece normalizes something and makes it acceptable.

A different type of inclusion story also emerges in these publications: putting oneself in another's shoes. The *Salt Lake Tribune*'s Peggy Fletcher Stack held her own Ramadan fast as an experiment during the beginning of 2012. Although the Muslim Holy Month doesn't happen until July, she went ahead and tried to see what it was like, on her own time, blogging as she went. In one article, she writes about what she's "learning and loving in the Quran," describing how she is "amazed" about "familiar figures" and "intrigued" by "the role Satan plays," and how the text is, overall, "largely inspiring and engrossing." In another piece, this time on prayer, she writes about how "Muslims view prayer" and how it was an "unexpected but welcome oasis." She used the inclusion

frame, but she did it from an outsider's perspective stepping in, as if to say, "See? I'm doing this — it's not that unusual."

With all this in mind, particularly considering the explanatory pieces, the inclusion frame could be revised to include "Understanding fill-in-the-blank-with-name-of-religion-here." As shown, many of these stories are told through the lens of the people in the group, as in the case of the *Houston Chronicle* bloggers. This element of understanding in explanatory stories was not divergent enough from inclusion to justify a new frame, but it does merit mention as an offshoot or update.

Supernatural belief

The supernatural belief frame emerges in this study, but like hypocrisy and false prophecy, it is subtle — a supernatural frame that borders closely on good works. Silk (1995) discusses the difficulty with this frame: "It is sometimes claimed that journalists have trouble with religion because they cannot cope professionally with matters that are beyond empirical determination" (117). He discusses the difficulty news organizations face with "word of a miraculous healing, an apparition of the Virgin Mary, a poltergeist" (119). In supermarket tabloids, such work is displayed among the "bizarre and amazing fare" (119). Primarily, these involve "proof stories" about something physical giving credit to the spirit.

The three publications in this study offer nothing of that sort, but there is a strong sense of the supernatural in the subtle sense. The stories have miraculous leanings, but they are focused on smaller moments or on the importance of religion, with a sense of "this stuff really works."

The most common examples of these stories are the blogs written by Keith Wommack of the *Houston Chronicle*. His blog, *Healing Now*, focuses on spirituality and its benefits, primarily using research from others. “Want healing? Try church,” one headline reads. The story links health and church together, primarily by explaining the major points of a book by Jeff Levin entitled *God, Faith, and Health: Exploring the Spirituality Healing Connection*. Wommack writes, “In my years of active membership in Christian churches, I’m beginning to recognize that there is something to an attender’s relationship with God that enables him or her to experience health and longevity.” In another article, Wommack links health to thought, and thought to spirituality. He talks about his own experience with how “higher quality of thought” — which often involves something of the spiritual nature, and in his case, the Bible — can influence physical health.

Some stories in this category border on miracle stories. A Feb. 11 *Faith in Memphis* piece by David Waters headlined “Pastor returns to God’s unfinished work” details a pastor’s seemingly miraculous recovery. The pastor, Dwight Ray Montgomery, had spent two weeks in the hospital as the result of pneumonia and a staph infection. The story recounts the work the pastor had yet to do and his history as a minister. As in other stories, the ending quote is key to the frame: “‘God is able,’ the church sang. ‘God is able,’ Montgomery said. ‘We are too.’” There are also several references to prayer. Beyond that, the story includes Biblical allusions: “This is the day. This is the day members of 114-year-old Annesdale Cherokee Missionary Baptist Church have been praying about for weeks. This is the day their pastor of 27 years is returning to the pulpit

after an illness took him away, nearly forever.” This likens to a Bible passage, Psalm 118:24 (ESV): “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Of the *Salt Lake Tribune* articles in this study, only one is in this category. It is a Feb. 10 article about how religion can be both healing and harmful in the face of grief. “Faith can provide some answers for believers,” Peggy Fletcher Stack writes. “It can offer hope of eternal rest and joyous reunions in the hereafter for victims and swift justice for wrongdoers.” In the story, Stack speaks with grief counselors, but also with believers, about the role of faith, with the stance of assuming those beliefs to be true.

This frame, particularly in its subtler form, could be the same as good works; the stories are hopeful and treat religion as good. The difference is in the focus. Good works stories are focused on deeds — external action. Supernatural belief stories are internally focused; as Silk (1995) notes, they are not in the empirical realm.

Declension

Silk’s (1995) declension frame focuses on “endemic institutional decline” (133). He discusses various assessments that point to disproportionate or dropping media coverage of religion, but that’s not the point: “The point to note is that the decline in media attention to the mainline precedes the awareness — and even the reality — of the mainline’s numerical decline” (134). The frame is focused on “shifts of spiritual allegiance” (138). Among these publications during the sample time, the frame hardly had a presence.

Only two stories fall into this category, both about the Southern Baptist Convention and the possibility of changing “Southern” to “Great Commission.” The

decision was ultimately to keep “Southern,” with “Great Commission” as optional. A *Faith in Memphis* piece by Bob Smietana highlights the tensions within the convention regarding the name change. The focus isn’t necessarily on decline, as the lead refers to the convention as “the nation’s largest Protestant denomination,” but it highlights the tensions. The decline element is hard to ignore: “The idea of offering an alternative name is part of an effort to reverse the decline in membership and baptisms in the 16.2 million-member convention. Southern Baptists baptized 332,321 people last year, the fewest since the 1950s.” It goes on to discuss a membership drop. Again, the focus is on the tension at play, rather than a unified, harmonious decision.

The other article that fits into this category is a Peggy Fletcher Stack column from the *Salt Lake Tribune*. The emphasis, again, is on the tension and trouble within the denomination, focusing on “negative views” of the denomination because of the role of slavery in the church’s history, along with “stagnant or declining” membership.

The *Houston Chronicle*’s brief coverage of this issue, in contrast, falls into a new frame category: resurrection. The new frame, which seems to have taken the place of declension, is discussed at length later in the study.

Textual results: new frames

For a new frame, the researcher determined that the frame must emerge in two of the three publications. Although at least five new frame possibilities emerged, the researcher determined that they were actually new directions within existing frames. For a numerical threshold, the researcher determined that each new frame must have at least as many stories in it as the lowest number of stories present in one of Silk’s (1995)

frames. Since the lowest story counts in a given frame were one in false prophecy and two in declension, the researcher decided to use the third-lowest number: the eight stories in supernatural belief.

As mentioned earlier, Silk (1995) begins each chapter with a verse from the Bible that goes with the theme. In keeping with this idea, a verse has been chosen for the introduction of each new frame, though not all are from the same religious text.

Intersection

This frame is similar to good works; it presupposes that religion is good. The distinction is that religion is not the entry point into the story: Either it is not explicitly mentioned, or it is connected with something secular. In other words, this frame is where faith intersects with day-to-day life. Some of this comes through writers making direct connections — how faith intersects with art or with a certain viewpoint. That intersection often appears indirectly in stories that seem to have nothing to do with faith, yet are included in the section. This is also where stories about ethics come into play.

This frame is most commonly seen in the “Question of the Week” postings on *Faith in Memphis*. Not all of the questions and responses fall into this category, but enough did to make it noteworthy. One question refers to Memphis suburbs working toward forming their own school systems so they don’t have to be part of a forthcoming unified district. Responders are asked, “How do you feel about that? Should our suburbs form their own school systems? How might this help or hurt the community at large?” In similar fashion, one answer, written by Warner Davis, has no mention of faith, but focuses on the “best interests of all children in Shelby County.” There is no mention of

faith, religion or spirituality, yet this appears in a site devoted to faith. It has a connotation that faith has something to do with it.

Similarly, another question posed is this: “What concerns you most about Memphis?” Another is this: “What concerns you about immigration?” The latter references a “Clergy for Tolerance” letter, but other than that, there is no reference to anything religious. Still, these questions appear in the section.

The Feb. 4 question has a slightly more direct connection to faith but is still not explicitly about faith. In this case, the question is about whether grieving should be considered a psychiatric disorder and how to minister to people who are grieving. A response by Carol Richardson is linked directly to God, beginning with “As a Christian minister,” and continuing with a reference to Hebrew scripture. Another response, by Barbara Holmes, references “the holy texts of many faiths.” A response by Scott Morris has a mention of “spiritual problems” and “spiritual solutions” for a slightly less direct correlation.

Other examples of this frame come in the form of linking the spiritual to the sacred. A *Faith in Memphis* article by a doctor named Julie Ware discusses how breast-feeding is a “gift from God,” linking a physical practice to the spiritual, bringing together the earthly and the heavenly, pointing out God’s role in a human practice.

The results from *Salt Lake Tribune* do not include articles in this frame, but the *Houston Chronicle* does. One Kate Shellnutt article, “Worshipping at the Temple of Football,” links Super Bowl Sunday with spirituality. “Could something so violent and so, well, profane as the Super Bowl be a religious occasion?” the story begins. It then

continues to reference a *Washington Post* piece: “There is, of course, nothing inherently sacred about football, Jacques Berlinerblau writes at the *Washington Post*’s On Faith blog, but Americans ‘imbue it with sanctity.’” The article concludes, “This makes Super Bowl Sunday the High Holy Day for football-worshipping Americans.” In another example, Charles St. Onge of the Lutherant blog writes about society, equity and inequality, tying in a “Christian standpoint.” Farah Lalani of The Human Religion blog discusses a new art display and its connections to spirituality.

A piece by Kate Shellnutt could have fit into the subtle supernatural category, if it weren’t for the perspective. Headlined “Just in time for Lent: Fasting found to help protect brain,” it outlines study results that demonstrate a link between fasting, which is sometimes a religious practice, and possible protection against ailments such as such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s diseases. In subject matter, it is similar to the aforementioned articles by Keith Wommack of the Healing Now blog about the physical benefits of faith. However, it is written without the sense of “this spiritual practice can benefit you,” and instead from a stance of sacred and secular being scientifically linked. While Wommack’s work is written with a voice and insider opinion, Shellnutt’s piece holds traditional journalistic objectivity, sticking to the study results and practices by believers, outlined in a straightforward, non-supernatural way: a purely scientific report.

Thus, this frame gets at a practice, at least among these community papers, of connecting the sacred and the secular and finding religious moments in day-to-day life, whether the connection is made explicitly or simply implied.

Peace

This frame could have several names: interfaith, harmony, acceptance, togetherness, plurality. It is a frame about groups coming together. It is about accepting each other. While tolerance is focused more on church and state, and though inclusion is focused on acceptance within society as a whole, peace is focused on church and church, faith with faith, religion beside religion. It includes articles that seem to apply to all believers and features the notion of getting outside one's own faith and coming together.

The *Salt Lake Tribune* had six peace articles, and the *Houston Chronicle* had three from the sampling period. *Faith in Memphis*, during the same period, had none.

The word "interfaith" appeared a few times in *Salt Lake Tribune* pieces, in part because of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable. With an event that could have been covered merely as a calendar item, Peggy Fletcher Stack heralds the idea of faiths coming together "to get a glimpse into faiths beyond their own." There is also a story about Muslims and Jews coming together "to feast on food, friendship." The frame, in large part, is due to the nature of the event. But the article includes language of unity: "side by side," "mutual friendship and awareness," "build bridges of understanding," "set the example" and the like. Stack also has a blog post about the similarities between the Book of Mormon and the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Another example, in a story about Mormon baptisms for the dead, the frame is also unity. This story could have been framed as false prophecy, taking a stance of "misdeeds of the Mormons." As mentioned, other baptism stories are part of the inclusion frame. Instead, this article has a unity stance. The headline reads, "Mormon church

apologizes for baptism of Wiesenthal’s parents.” The story focuses on officials being “quick to apologize,” and a Jewish representative being “cautiously optimistic” about the situation. Although there is a hint of concern about whether the situation would really be resolved, the focus is more on explaining proxy baptisms, a “moral obligation” to Mormons, and about what the church was doing to smooth the situation over. Rather than focusing on the problem or the tension, the story is about the fix.

The interfaith reconciliation idea is also present in a *Houston Chronicle* piece by Aaron Howard about a new book aimed at bringing Judaism and Christianity together. The article starts with Judaism and Christianity being “one family,” then jumps to how “the two communities went their separate — and often, hostile — ways” and are now being joined. The focus, which mirrors the book, is on unity, understanding, connecting.

In another example from Houston, all faiths are embraced. Ken Chitwood of Sacred Duty writes about a tea shop that “serves up spirituality, offers path of peace.” He contrasts the stressful world with the inside of the “café offering tranquility,” explaining the various significances of tea. “The shop’s plurality of tea is not without precedent,” he writes. “It seems various religions have co-opted tea as part of a devotee’s spiritual path or religious devotion.” Again, it is the idea of many faiths having something in common, and this commonality is what underlies the frame of peace.

Resurrection

To put it simply, resurrection is the opposite of declension. Silk (1995) writes, “And, just as the existing religious establishments are always doomed to decline, just as the latest generation always seems worse than the one before, so there is always the hope,

the promise, the necessity of a religious revival just around the corner” (138). The resurrection frame is that hope coming to fruition. It could also be called the growth frame, or perhaps the “alive-and-well” frame. In any case, it points to the strengths of religion, spirituality and the church.

A *Faith in Memphis* piece by Burnett Brown talks about an interdenominational congregation that belongs to a group of “churches without walls.” It could be seen as a peace frame or a good works frame, but what makes it resurrection is the sense of triumph expressed. Members “typify a new breed of pastors and congregations” who are shifting from “institutional upkeep to inspirational uplifting.” The focus is on the future, particularly the growing membership.

The *Houston Chronicle*’s Kate Shellnutt writes about Baylor University, a preeminent Baptist school, and its success in sports and the praise it received in an issue of *Sports Illustrated*. “Baylor University going big time with sports success,” the headline reads. But based on the article and the frame, it could just as easily say something like, “Religious school gets into the secular arena with triumph.”

A Keith Wommack Healing Now blog post also has this triumphant appeal: “Spirituality rides back into the Health arena,” the headline reads. He discusses the role spirituality has had in health care through time, highlighting a “spiritual awakening.” Charles St. Onge of the blog Lutherant writes of the past decline and recent growth of Lutheranism in Siberia. “The Soviet Union fell, and Lutheranism rose up,” he writes. Lee Wunsch of Around the Jewish world writes about Houston’s Jewish population: Houston is “front and center on the radar screen of the Orthodox Union” with a “significant Jewish

community infrastructure, a diverse but harmonious Jewish population and a welcoming culture.” Again, these are examples of faiths not only alive and well, but growing.

Perhaps the most interesting story in this frame is Kate Shellnutt’s piece about the Southern Baptist Convention’s name change. As noted earlier, both the *Faith in Memphis* story and the *Salt Lake Tribune* story are written with the declension frame. Shellnutt’s piece, however, is optimistic. The convention is not only referred to as the largest, but “America’s most popular Protestant denomination.” Instead of focusing on the tensions surrounding the name and the lack of unity about the change, Shellnutt writes that the convention “let local churches that don’t like the ‘Southern’ label call themselves Great Commission Baptists instead.” In other words, she focuses on an allowance, not a tension. The closest she comes to tensions is noting “mixed feelings on the idea.” Instead of focusing on troubles with a hint of decline, the article looks forward.

Thus, the resurrection frame looks to the future and embraces the triumphs of the present, whether through a new church, a growing population or a religious group doing well in the secular world. It is the opposite of declension — the hope anticipated.

Interview results

The interviews were conducted on three separate dates in March. As mentioned in the methods section, interviews were conducted after the first reading of each article, but before the second reading. This allowed the researcher to form her own early conclusions about frames without being influenced by the publication staff, and it gave her a sense of understanding as she went into each interview. Doing the interviews before the second reading and final categorization of articles allowed the researcher to make connections

between what she observed and what editors stated in the interviews. This section features highlights from each interview; full interview notes are in the appendix.

Houston Belief

Figure 5. Breakdown of frames at the Houston Chronicle

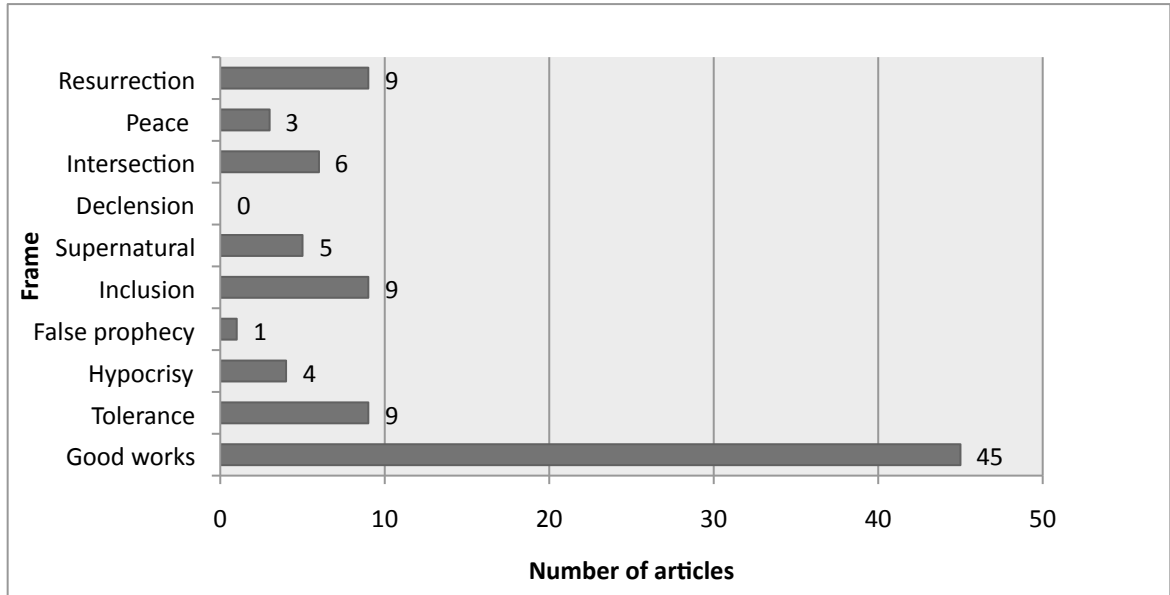


Figure 5. Breakdown of frames at the Houston Chronicle. In this chart, the number of stories in each frame are shown, specific to the Houston Chronicle. Note that there are no declension stories, and good works stories comprise much more coverage than any other category. The total number of good works stories is 45 — one less than to total number of stories in all other categories combined.

In addition to being a reporter, Kate Shellnutt is the web producer for houstonbelief.com, the religion section at the *Houston Chronicle*. She blogs almost every day and coordinates with community bloggers, who make regular contributions to the site, as seen in the textual analysis. She does not have editorial control over the bloggers, but rather, supports them and promotes their work. On top of that, a religion section comes out in the print publication on Fridays, and Shellnutt does reporting for that.

Shellnutt said religion is well-regarded in the newsroom. “It would be silly for colleagues or others to dismiss it because Houston is home to an unignorable religion

presence,” she said, noting that some of the largest congregations in the country are located there. In addition to Lakewood, known for its pastor Joel Osteen, Houston is also home to the largest Catholic, Methodist and Episcopal churches in the country.

“Even if journalists aren’t people of faith, they know their neighbors and people around them are,” Shellnutt said. One example of awareness of strong religious presence comes in holiday stories: the *Houston Chronicle* acknowledges the religious connections, not just the secular, with holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

As for newsworthiness, Shellnutt said the same qualities that make a story newsworthy on another beat apply to religion. Prominence, for one, is a determining factor — people such as Joel Osteen and Rick Santorum come to mind. “Weirdness and outrage” also make good news stories, as does blending religion and pop culture. Shellnutt also looks for ways to bring a religion angle to a non-religion story.

She tries to frame stories neutrally. “I’m very deliberate to try not to come off as anything, in terms of my own faith,” she said. The way she sees it, the bloggers can openly express a certain view, but as a professional, she is an observer. But she does not downplay the faith of her sources — she tries to “let their faith shine through.”

Shellnutt tries to match her frame and tone to what she is covering — if the topic is more serious, such as poverty, she tries to be sensitive to that. Beyond that, she tries to frame a story based on how an interview subject regards it. “There are sites that cover religion and like to take a little thing and make it a giant thing,” she said, giving examples of fixating on small teachings and making them look like they are a bigger part of a person’s religious tradition than they really are. Mormon baptism is one such example:

“Yes, it’s troubling, but we shouldn’t act like all they do is baptize people,” she said. It is important to her that someone within a tradition a story is about could read it and say, “Yes, this makes sense.”

As for web analytics, “I write knowing that not everything I write about or want to write about will get all the clicks or get read,” Shellnutt said. But she balances web and print — some stories are more popular online, and others have a higher print readership. In writing headlines and stories she tries to think about what would make a given story appealing to an audience that would not consider itself religious.

User-generated content play a large role in the *Houston Chronicle*’s religion coverage — it is “hugely” important, Shellnutt said. “I can only offer one voice, and it’s not a personal one. That’s not always the best voice for a story about faith, because faith is so personal.” For that reason, she likes having bloggers write in first-person. Having bloggers from so many different faiths, including minority faiths, is “like having eyes on the ground,” she said.

Although some blogs appeal to people of specific faiths, she said bloggers also try to appeal to a mainstream audience. When the section first began to include bloggers, churches were not on social networks or the Internet as much as they are now, so the purpose of the blogs has shifted through time.

When it comes to public comment, “This can be a tough beat to be on,” Shellnutt said. “People like to get angry.” Sometimes, it is a no-win situation — one person says a writer is being like a victim, another claims favoritism is being showed and the list goes

on. Still, Shellnutt said comments often create good dialogue, particularly because of a community of people who have been around for years.

In talking with Shellnutt, the researcher shared an observation that the stories in Houston often explore and explain a tension, and Shellnutt said that is important — making tensions make sense to people. The researcher also brought up tolerance and inclusion. Shellnutt said she tries to include everyone. “To me, if I didn’t include minority groups, I’d be taking a stand against them,” she says. She acknowledges that coverage isn’t necessarily proportionate to the religious population of Houston. But that, she says, is much better than not covering them.

Salt Lake Tribune

Figure 6. Breakdown of frames at the Salt Lake Tribune

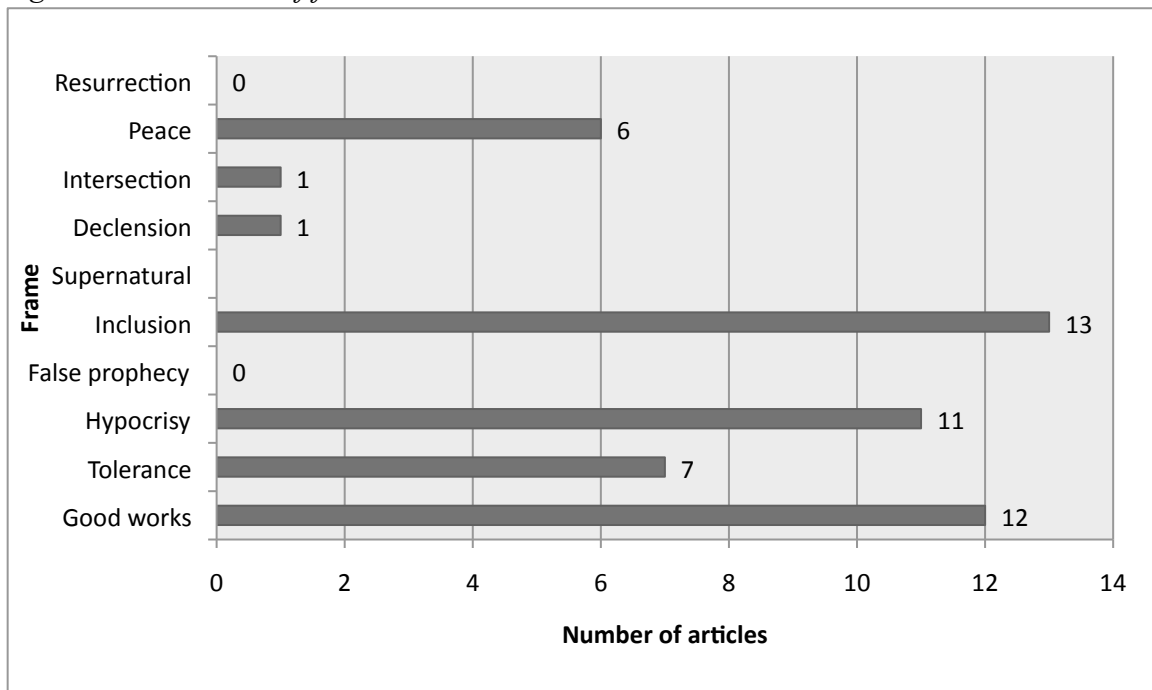


Figure 6. Breakdown of frames at the Salt Lake Tribune. This chart shows the number of articles in each frame at the Salt Lake Tribune. Note that unlike at the Houston Chronicle, no single frame has a strong lead in numbers.

Peggy Fletcher Stack was tasked with launching a religion section at the *Salt Lake Tribune* about 20 years ago. Although the name has shifted from “religion” to “faith,” with several others in between, she said the approach is the same as it has always been: “To cover faith in all its various forms.” That means covering institutions, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints — often called the Mormon church — along with the Catholic church and various Protestant denominations.

She discussed the dominance of the Mormon church — since it is headquartered in Salt Lake City, much religion coverage at the paper focuses on that religious body. However, Stack said coverage is not limited to institutions — it also means writing about non-believers and moral issues in the secular realm. Logistically, similar to with the *Houston Chronicle*, there is a Saturday faith section to fill in the print edition, plus the website news and Stack’s blog for the paper.

Stack said that before the section was created, religion was only covered during a controversy or a big event, but there was nothing in between — no consistent coverage, no looks at ongoing trends. There was not a neutral place to go for good religion coverage. Since the section was created, Stack said, “It’s been wildly popular.”

Type of coverage varies. As with other beats, there are light features, profiles and breaking news. Stack said investigative reporting is not done much, but the lack isn’t because of unwillingness, but a lack of resources.

As for framing, it is significant and intentional. “Yes, we absolutely talk about how to frame the story, whose voices to emphasize or de-emphasize, what background is needed, all those kinds of things,” she said. She emphasized the importance of including

background and awareness of a topic, regardless of the frame — she cannot assume that “everyone knows” what she knows about a given topic.

In her own reporting, Stack said she tries to take a believer’s point of view: “I try to see every faith through the believer’s eyes, first and foremost.” For example, one time, she was writing a story about a man who left tarot cards at the site of murders. She spoke with tarot card readers and tried to see what the action meant and what the cards meant from their point of view, rather than doing a critique or trying to debunk what they believe.

During the interview, the researcher pointed out that many pieces seemed explanatory. Stack agreed — “I do a lot of explainers,” she said, giving a story on proxy baptism in the Mormon church as an example.

That said, the perspective of “critics” in a given situation makes it into her stories — but not dominantly. “If I lean in one direction or another, it would be more to the side of the believers themselves, more than the critics. I don’t see my job as critiquing beliefs or institutions, unless, of course, there is abuse,” she said. She is also careful in controversy: “I don’t let the critics dominate all these stories about these groups that are controversial.” Similarly, she tries not to let a few people dominate the whole faith.

Regarding web analytics, the editors are “keenly aware” of what gets read, but she does not know much about it. Her coverage is influenced by knowing the demographics of the area: “just knowledge that half of readers are Mormon and that the Mormon stories we do are national and local.”

The Mormon coverage has been especially dominant since church member Mitt Romney announced in 2007 that he was campaigning for the presidency. Although the church has a newspaper, *The Deseret News*, some readers are skeptical of its content because the church owns it. Because of that, the *Tribune* is “the paper of record on Mormonism,” Stack said. Not only is it an authoritative source for the Utah region, but for the nation.

While some papers, such as the *Houston Chronicle*, emphasize user-generated content, the *Salt Lake Tribune*'s approach is more traditional: content comes primarily from those within the news organization rather than from the public. Still, Stack gets tips from readers, along with feedback — the usual blend of both praise and criticism.

Some stories from the *Salt Lake Tribune* include phrases such as “including Mormons” or “not just Mormons.” Stack said that is because of the readership — as mentioned earlier, about half the readers are Mormon. When big national religion stories break, Stack says the paper might add that group to the list of those affected to give the story a stronger connection to the particular demographic.

During the conversation, the researcher named the other people who would be interviewed for the study. Stack contrasted her work with that of David Waters from *Faith in Memphis*: “We have such different assignments because he lives in the Bible belt, and they’ve got a lot of Protestants. He’s got a lot of smaller churches doing different things, and I’ve got one big church.”

Faith in Memphis

Figure 7. Breakdown of frames at Faith in Memphis

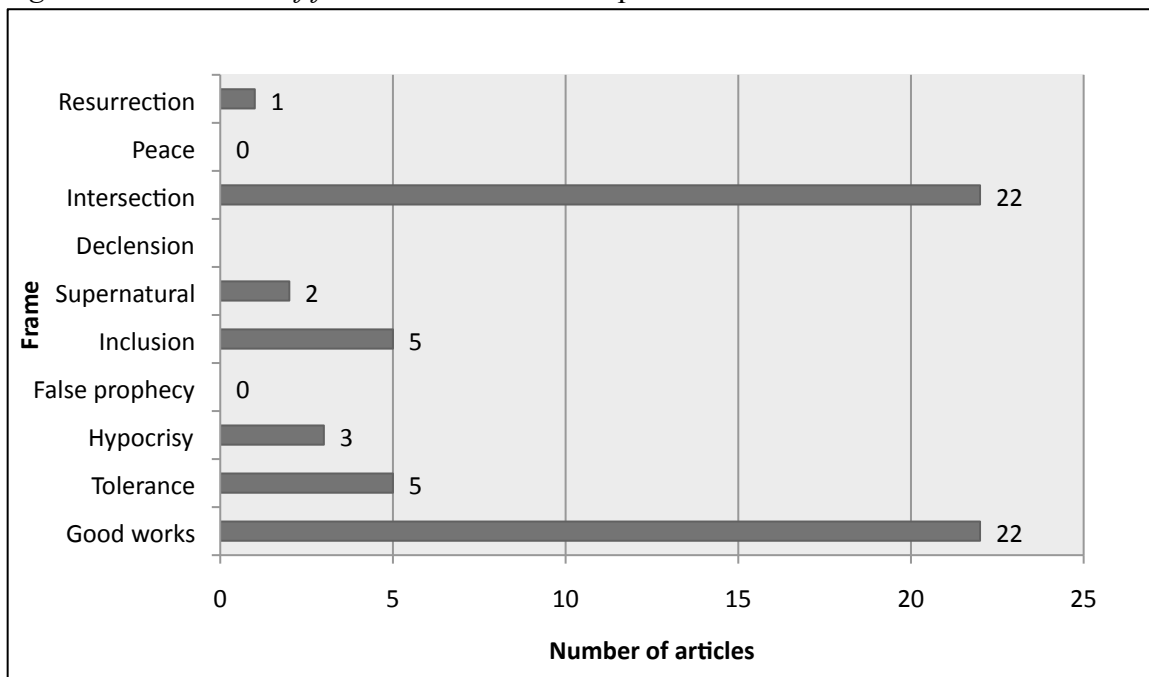


Figure 7. Breakdown of frames at Faith in Memphis. This chart shows how many articles fit into each category at Faith in Memphis. Note that intersection and good works lead for the most common frame. Each of them has more articles included than the total of the smaller categories combined.

David Waters, editor of *Faith in Memphis*, said the purpose of the site, as name suggests, “is to acknowledge and recognize how important faith is to the people of Memphis.” The section in the *Commercial Appeal* started in February 2010, and with it, so did the separate *Faith in Memphis* website. At first, there was talk of having only the website, but the print edition was significant enough in Memphis to warrant the existence of a printed faiths section. The print section was also a way to tell people about the site. Initially, the site was to have more daily coverage, but Waters said that is not possible with staffing. He still hopes to make the site a daily product, “although that’s also iffy at this point because there’s a change away from web and more to apps, mobile, etc.”

He said religion is recognized as important at *The Commercial Appeal* — years ago, an editor said there were “bedrock” beats to pay attention to, and one of those beats was religion. Waters said part of this is because Memphis is in the Bible belt — some even say it is the buckle. He said, “Faith matters to just about everyone in some way in this town, and it has to do with everything — like money in New York or power in Washington, it informs everything we think, or do or say.” He said “faith beat” is too narrow a term — the beat is much broader and has more to do with daily life. “Even if you’re an atheist,” he says, “faith in Memphis affects your life.”

His definition of “newsworthy” is probably broader than most, he said. Timeliness is, of course, important, but a big focus is on what matters to people — the ongoing story of how faith impacts daily life. Some people think religion news means “church moving” or “pastor leaves town,” but to Waters, less “eventful” stories are just as newsworthy.

Conversation about frames happens on a case-by-case basis, he said. When he asks people in the community to write, he wants their perspective. “Some people try to write like a reporter, and that’s not what we’re looking for,” he says. With journalists, it is a different process — the emphasis is on news judgment and accuracy.

In framing, he tries to find the universal in the particular. A story about a man with Down syndrome who played high school basketball, for example, had universal themes of love, risk, overcoming odds and unity.

Since religion is everywhere, Waters said it can be difficult to find a focus. The other challenge is the tension between subjectivity and objectivity. “How do you cover

something so subjective when you're supposed to be objective?" He cited Harold Kushner for an answer: "For the religious mind and soul, it's not the existence of God, but the importance of God." Waters said the focus should be on what people do and say, how they act, how they relate to others and the impact of their belief and practice.

For Waters, like Stack, web analytics play no role. He said they probably do for other editors, but there have been web shifts lately, since access recently moved from free to paid. Like in Houston, user content plays a "huge role." Waters said having a lot of content generated by users is a main goal of the site. "As a reporter, my job is to get information and bring it back," he said. "I go get it from people with expertise, awareness, etc. — those who know what I need to know. But there are millions of people, and only one me." He wants to have coverage from people with their own expertise. One way that idea played out is with coverage of homelessness — a big issue in Memphis. One local ministry is a creative writing program for the homeless, and *Faith in Memphis* published writing that came from the people involved and their thoughts on Memphis' initiative to end homelessness.

During the interview, the researcher noted the overlap on the site between the sacred and the secular. Waters said, "I've always thought it was important to find them in each other — especially in this country, and especially in the South." The researcher also noted the amount of positive coverage — features and profiles of good things being done. "There are enough reporters looking for stuff that is wrong," he says. "Part of our editorial balance should be finding things that are good, positive.... There are countless people out there who, because of their faith, are trying to make this world a better place."

Based on the textual analysis and the interviews, connections and distinctions can be made among the publications, and models of religion coverage emerge. These, along with specific answers to the research questions, will be explored in the next section.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through looking at the results, both in terms of text and interviews, answers to the research questions emerged. The research questions were as follows:

RQ: How do community news sites frame religion?

1. Textually, which of Silk's frames emerge from the stories in the religion sections of these community news websites?
2. What new/different frames, if any, emerge in coverage of religion news in a community?
3. Given the textual frame findings and editors' insights, what kind of model are these three newspaper websites setting for religion coverage?

The answers to these questions come from analysis of local content created by staff and bloggers. National wire stories, such as those from the Associated Press and Religion News Service, were excluded. If those articles had been included, the results of this study could be different. This study focuses on locally generated community news online; these online religion sections are the successor to the once-popular print sections that are now so rare. Ultimately, this study both documents previous assumptions about online religion news and expands knowledge. This is the first study delineating frames in online religion news at the community level.

This study also provides groundwork for answering the question of whether online sections frame religion similarly to print sections. Following that question, another remains: If there are differences, are those differences because of the online platform, or

are they the result of something else? This study did not attempt to answer questions such as these, but it provides details that will help future researchers tackle their inquiries.

Based on the study results, some of Silk's frames — particularly good works, tolerance, and inclusion — are still relevant in community online religion news coverage at the publications reviewed. However, some shifting of frames has occurred. Declension and false prophecy were rare in the publications reviewed. The frames of supernatural belief and hypocrisy, although present, were different from the way Silk (1995) described them.

Examples of Silk's (1995) frames in this study are much less extreme than they are in his original text. Silk's (1995) description of the hypocrisy frame includes examples of corrupt church leaders involved in sex scandals. In this study, most of the hypocrisy stories were columns about internal hypocrisy by the *Salt Lake Tribune's* Robert Kirby. The most extreme example was the previously mentioned *Houston Belief* article criticizing Mars Hill Church for its disciplinary procedures not aligning with its views. Silk's (1995) inclusion frame deals primarily with foreign-based "others," such as Muslims and Jews; the inclusion stories in this study dealt with groups based within the U.S., such as Mormons. In his explanation of the supernatural belief frame, Silk (1995) uses stories about miraculous healings or sightings of the Virgin Mary as examples. However, the supernatural belief frames in this study were about religion's positive, personal impact in everyday life, as seen in stories by Keith Wommack of *Houston Belief*, which link health and spirituality.

These differences between Silk's (1995) frames and their interpretation in this study reflect the information about religion in the literature review: There are nuns, yet there are also "nones" and varying definitions of what religion is (Chaves 2011). Religion is not static. The coverage in these publications attests to that. The new peace frame reflects religions trying to get along with one another, accepting each other in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and in an era of declining religious influence. The dominance of inclusion and the absence of false prophecy reflect a greater societal recognition of the importance of faith in individuals' lives, or at least the need to understand faith.

These divergent views bring to mind a 2008 song by the Michael Gungor Band, "White Man." The song lyrics begin, "God is not a man. God is not a white man." The idea of the song is that God loves everyone, as demonstrated in the lines, "Atheists and Charlatans and Communists and Lesbians / And even old Pat Robertson, oh God he loves us all. / Catholic or Protestant, Terrorist or President / Everybody, everybody, love, love, love, love love." Whether intentional or not, the song has a sense of all-inclusive pluralism: Not only does God love everybody, but God can be for everybody in different ways, as in the lines, "God cannot be bought / God will not be boxed in / God will not be owned by religion." Although it might not be the aim of the song, it still demonstrates a point: diversity of religion and views about God as a cultural value. This diversity and value are evident to some degree in reporting about religion in online community news.

Differentiation of coverage

In addition to saying something about the character of religion in America, the study also demonstrates the character of each publication, not only through the frames, but also through editor interviews. Part of this is reflected in the demographics of each community.

As Stack said, the *Salt Lake Tribune* serves a community that is home to the international headquarters of the Mormon church, which Silk (1995) notes was formerly attached to a false prophecy frame. Yet now, coverage of that church body emphasizes inclusion and good works, perhaps as a result of intentional church publicity and strategic attempts to mainstream Mormonism. Among the most recent is the “I’m a Mormon” campaign, which was launched in 2011. A *New York Times* article describes how the church is trying to defy stereotypes and address its “perception problem,” linking the church campaign to the presidential campaign and candidate Mitt Romney (Goodstein 2011). With the church campaign in mind, a question arises: How likely would it be for *Salt Lake Tribune* to critique the Mormon church, given that its prime audience is so closely intertwined with the church?

Although the hypocrisy frame ranks high at that publication, a closer look reveals that columnist Robert Kirby, who is a Mormon himself, writes most of the hypocrisy stories. He uses self-criticism and snark to write about his church, so the hypocrisy tone does not come across as blatant. Silk (1995) uses past coverage of the Mormon church as an example of the false prophecy frame, and the way the *Salt Lake Tribune* covers Mormonism seems to be a response to past coverage. Regardless of the religion covered

by that publication, Stack said she tries to view each religion with legitimacy, respecting and taking the views of her sources.

Houston is a religiously diverse community, as Shellnutt said. The number of bloggers with different religious viewpoints allows many religions to be covered, even if that coverage does not proportionally reflect each faith's demographic in Houston. But as Shellnutt said, the paper believes it is better to over cover those in minority faiths — such as Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and Jews — than to exclude certain groups. Another interesting note about *Houston Belief* is the fairly equal number of stories in each frame. False prophecy and declension were outliers, with one story and no stories, respectively. The good works frame overwhelmed *Houston Belief* with 45 stories, in large part due to the number of devotion-like pieces from bloggers. But the frames of tolerance, hypocrisy, inclusion, supernatural belief, intersection, peace and resurrection were each used on three to nine articles, creating a balanced spread of frames.

In *Faith in Memphis* within the Bible Belt — perhaps even considered the “buckle,” as Waters observed — intersection played out as the second most frequent frame. This, in part, is due to the mission of the section. Waters noted the role faith plays in every aspect of life in Memphis, which the coverage reflects. This also reflects the interpretation of faith described in *The Revealer*: “Politics, pop culture, high art, NASCAR — everything in this world is infused with concerns about the next.” It also reinforces the work of Kosman and Keysar (2006) and their conclusions about religion permeating other elements of life, including the food industry, the health industry and even the greeting card industry.

Based on the frames and interviews, two primary models for covering religion emerge in this study: The Exterior Model and the Interior Model. As important as the publication-specific or model-specific findings of this study are, conclusions can also be drawn about overall religion coverage online at the community level.

The Exterior Model is evident at the *Salt Lake Tribune*. There, religion is still covered in a more traditional way with staff writers, though that staff is limited. Religion itself is still an institution in Salt Lake City because of the strong presence of the Mormon church, and religion is covered as such. There are no community blogs, though there is an occasional guest writer. Although, as Stack noted, the focus does involve trends and ongoing issues — not just breaking news and scandals — coverage doesn't concentrate as much on day-to-day routine. Along with that, the voices of religious practitioners are evident in their quotes in stories, not in personal writing. In other words, religion is covered from the outside.

The Interior Model is demonstrated at the *Houston Chronicle* and *Faith in Memphis*. Both use community contributors — not just paid staff. There is still objective reporting by staff writers such as Shellnutt and Waters, along with stories pulled from the Associated Press and Religion News Service. However, bloggers and other community contributors submit most updates on both sites. One aspect of *Faith in Memphis* that was not included in this study but reinforces the Interior Model is the Expressions of Faith contributions — multimedia pieces from the community. The news is not told from the outside, but from those who practice it — those on the inside of each religion.

Overall religion coverage: The big picture

As demographics and discussions with staff reinforce, religion is important in each of the communities covered in this study, and thus, to each newspaper. That importance is, in large part, why they have strong religion sections. Aside from that, other similarities are clear from the results of this study. One similarity is a respect for religion and religious expression as a vital aspect of the audience's lives. This is apparent in the frames discussed in this study. The interviews also support this notion: Shellnutt desires to be all-inclusive, Stack writes from a believer's point of view and Waters has a community-driven mentality.

The publications in this study also share a positive stance toward religious institutions and spiritual beliefs. The gentler versions of frames and dearth of negative-leaning frames, such as hypocrisy and false prophecy, attest to this. Practices and views at each publication also shape this stance. *Houston Belief* bloggers have their own voices, Stack of the *Salt Lake Tribune* does not dwell too heavily on critics and that Waters thinks there are "enough reporters looking for stuff that is wrong." Part of this positivity comes from who is doing the coverage. Particularly in the case of *Houston Belief* and the *Salt Lake Tribune*, religion is covered by the people who profess it, live it and experience it for themselves. Staff sizes are small, but the bloggers and community contributors who generate this coverage have allowed the beat to be robust. Discussion is free to happen, whether through individual bloggers or respondents to a single question, such as the *Faith in Memphis* question of the week. However, sometimes the discussion is less of a back and forth and more of a juxtaposition: There is no moderator to tie the voices together

like there would be in a traditionally reported story. The voices aren't made to relate to each other, but are simply placed in the same context. This allows for a variety of views to be delivered, but it does not necessarily lend itself to dialogue.

Even though the publications in this study have made the religion beat strong despite having a small staff, they are not perfect examples; some kinds of religion coverage are still lacking. Identifying what is not being done is one goal of this research. Looking at the data, it is clear that there are only a few false prophecy and declension stories. That observation, however, is not necessarily of a wrong that needs to be righted, but could simply be a sign of the times and of culture. It could also be a by-product of so much positive coverage from the inside of religion through bloggers. This begs the question: Are community papers relying on wire service for critical and watchdog reporting? This study does not address that question, but the interviews provide clues.

What community religion coverage of the three sites studied have in contributions, they lack in investigative stories. There is little to no investigative work being done at the community level at these three publications, which means the watchdog role of journalism is not being fulfilled as much as it could be. Stack mentioned this shortage of investigative work in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, and as she said, part of this can be attributed to staff cuts. As Waters noted in his interview, one person can only do so much. Religion is personal and can be covered by those with insider knowledge, but only to a certain extent. If the internal workings of a religious group need critical exploration, it better be done from someone outside. Without staff, the question remains: Who will

investigate? In some cases, the answer is easy: a wire service. At the local level, however, the shift to blog-style coverage would not lend itself well to unbiased investigative work.

For good or ill, the web coverage of religion discussed in this study has replaced traditional print pages as the primary means of getting religion news. While the publications analyzed in this study do have print religion sections, those sections are supplemental — the interviews pointed to the web focus. In some ways, the shift to web is good: More voices can be included, thanks to the possibilities of the Internet, and those voices can take on more casual forms by way of blogs. The inside of a religion can really be explored and explained by one who knows it well. But subjectivity has its downside: internal assets can also limit the information that gets out to the public. As mentioned previously, the many-voiced web shift can mean a downshift in the watchdog function.

Limitations and future studies

One limitation of this study is the fact that other publications were not explored, so it is not clear how widespread these models are. Another limitation was the number of people interviewed at each publication. People with different roles within each newsroom could have shared different insights. Additionally, the time period of this study was limited to one month. A time frame that included denominational meetings or controversial votes also could have influenced these results in important ways. Because wire articles, among others, were excluded from review, this study is also limited in giving a holistic view of each site. If wire articles were included, the spread of frames could have turned out differently. But national stories were not the focus of this study.

There is plenty of room for future studies. One study could involve comparing the print editions of each section with the web product to see which frames prevail in print and whether and how they are different than those on the web. Another study could focus on interviews with bloggers, and still another could be done about how religious leaders respond to each paper's coverage. It would also be interesting to do this study again during a different time period, either another month, or the same month in a different year, and compare the results. This study could also be traced over the course of the year, to see whether and how frames shift according to seasons or major events, such as holidays and elections. Studies could also be done on specific frames, either exploring them in-depth or dividing them into more sub-frames. This study could also be repeated on a national scale, as well as on a small-town scale. The possibilities go on; this study leaves much room for further exploration, as little has been done in this area.

Final thoughts

All things considered, Silk's (1995) work is still relevant, though in an altered way. Some of his frames emerge in this study; others appear to a much smaller degree. As years have passed, bringing changes not only in culture, but also journalism, new frames have developed. With those frames have come new ways of telling a religion story. At the publications analyzed in this study, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Faith in Memphis*, two models emerged. One of those models, the External Model, is focused on religion from an outside, objective view. The Internal Model demonstrates the changes taking place within religion reporting, and within journalism as a whole — the community helps tell the story.

These findings, too, tell a story. They tell the story of how the news media act as a facilitator of public conversation. As noted earlier, the responsibility for creating that discourse rests, in large part, with the media — at least, as Hoover (1998) sees it. But “the media” are no longer a set of reporters going out and providing the only coverage, particularly when it comes to religion. The coverage is no longer just about the community, but by the community. It is no longer about faith, but often through eyes of faith. Silk’s (1995) *Unsecular Media* illustrated that though religion was hard for reporters to cover, the values underscoring American life were significant forces behind the shape of that reporting. And that was in the context of reporting done by professional reporters. Now, it is not just the objective reporters who are almost unknowingly shaped by values in their religion coverage, but the subjective community members who freely allow those values to shape what they write. The media has only become more unsecular.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Articles analyzed: *Houston Chronicle*

Headline	Byline	Pub. Date	Frame
Secular homeschooling instills love for learning from a non-religious perspective	Ken Chitwood, Sacred Duty	Jan. 25	Inclusion
\$5 million gift funds inner-city Catholic schools in Houston	Kate Shellnutt	Jan. 19	Good Works
Lisa Osteen Comes talks faith, moving forward	Diane Cowen	Jan. 19	Supernatural
Houston raises more money for young Jews' trips to Israel	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Jan. 31	Good Works
Obama to Catholic employers: Change your beliefs within a year	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Jan. 29	Tolerance
Spirituality rides back into the Health arena	Keith Wommack, Healing Now	Jan. 30	Resurrection
Lutheranism in Siberia	Charles St.-Onge, Lutheran	Jan. 30	Resurrection
Why I can no longer work for money	Andy Lambert, Zen Chalice	Jan. 30	Good Works
Is religious freedom really just a dream?	Saadia Faruqi, guest, Spirited Chat	Jan. 30	Tolerance
Houston churches adjust schedules on Super Bowl Sunday	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 1	Good Works
What's a Mennonite anyway? Hint: I don't drive a buggy but I do believe in Jesus	Marty Troyer, the Peace Pastor	Feb. 1	Inclusion
Christian non-profit takes fight against human trafficking to mayor's office	Ken Chitwood, Sacred Duty blog	Feb. 1	Good Works
Hawkins puts humor into improving marriages	Diane Cowen	Feb. 2	Good Works
New text attempts to bring Christians, Jews closer	Aaron Howard	Feb. 2	peace
Kirk Cameron works at happy home life	Diane Cowen	Feb. 2	Good Works

Catholics still favor Obama over GOP candidates	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 2	Tolerance
Keeping yourself (and your horse) healthy	Keith Wommack, Healing Now	Feb. 6	Supernatural
Life lessons from Komen and Planned Parenthood	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Feb. 5	Intersection
Two Mormons played against each other in Super Bowl	Heather Hemingway, Mormon Voice	Feb. 5	Good Works
Jewish Rabbi declares Bishop Eddie Long a King?	Jesse Muhammad, Brother Jesse	Feb. 4	Hypocrisy
Mormon Church rep: Few TV shows, movies try to accurately depict LDS faith	Menachem Wecker, Iconia	Feb. 3	Inclusion
Christians campaigned against pedophile's now-banned Super Bowl song	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 3	Good Works
Has Obama declared war on Christianity	Charles St.-Onge, Lutheran	Feb. 6	Tolerance
Local author weighs in on debate about Mormons, Christianity	Ken Chitwood, Sacred Duty blog	Feb. 8	Inclusion
Why I need Black History Month; Or, White History Month anyone?	Marty Troyer, the Peace Pastor	Feb. 7	Intersection
Diverse Houston congregations part of multicultural Baptist movement	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 8	Good Works
Love and marriage equality is in the air	Ed Nelson, The Wiccan Way	Feb. 8	Tolerance
Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast CEO calls work a "sacred duty"	Ken Chitwood, Sacred Duty blog	Feb. 10	Hypocrisy
Are you an owner, or steward, of all you "have"?	Marty Troyer, the Peace Pastor	Feb. 9	Good Works
A gathering of Jewish women: Some personal reflections	Lee Wunsch, Around the Jewish World	Feb. 9	Good Works
Moods and Free Will	Advaita, Bhakti Yoga	Feb. 9	Good Works
Christian Victoria's Secret model quits to become better wife, role model	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 9	Good Works

That four-letter word	Ellen Cooper-Davis	Feb. 9	Good Works
Bringing ex-Anglicans into the Catholic fold	Kate Shellnutt	Feb. 9	Resurrection
Conservative Presbyterians launch new denomination	Kate Shellnutt	Feb. 9	Resurrection
Sometimes, teens need compassion	Rabbi Amy Weiss	Feb. 9	Good Works
Catholic groups opposed to mandate	Kate Shellnutt	Feb. 9	Tolerance
Want health — try church?	Keith Wommack, Healing Now	Feb. 13	Supernatural
Christlike love, the best Valentine	Heather Hemingway, Mormon Voice	Feb. 12	Good Works
Houston: The new epicenter for observant jews	Lee Wunsch, Around the Jewish World	Feb. 12	Resurrection
Striving for racial harmony and economic justice: The NAACP turns 103	Marty Troyer, the Peace Pastor	Feb. 12	Good Works
The gift and the curse: How will Whitney Houston be remembered?	Jesse Muhammad, Brother Jesse	Feb. 12	Good Works
Departure of Byzantine frescoes at the Menil is just, bittersweet, and humbling	Menachem Wecker, Iconia	Feb. 11	Good Works
The tongue is mightier than the sword	Howard Siegel, Faith and Reason	Feb. 10	Good Works
Celebrating marriage	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Feb. 13	Good Works
Inequality or immorality: Which threatens society more?	Charles St.-Onge, Lutherant	Feb. 13	Intersection
Joel Osteen dedicates giant Dallas-area cathedral	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 14	Resurrection
Blogging about blogging not about Israel	Lee Wunsch, Around the Jewish World	Feb. 14	Inclusion
Whitney and the greatest love of all	Ken Gurley, The Pentecostal Perspective	Feb. 14	Good Works

From one Catholic to another — a letter to Stephen Colbert	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Feb. 15	Hypocrisy
LifeWay to continue carrying NIV despite Southern Baptist recommendation	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 15	False Prophecy
Politicians Say the Darndest Things! (Islam Edition)	Wardah Khalid, Young American Muslim	Feb. 15	Inclusion
Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism: What's the difference?	Lee Wunsch, Around the Jewish World	Feb. 15	Inclusion
Houston tea shop serves up spirituality, offers path of peace	Ken Chitwood, Sacred Duty blog	Feb. 15	Peace
Faith plays a role, in abstract and ancient art	Menachem Wecker	Feb. 16	Intersection
Christians against birth control still speaking out	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 16	Tolerance
60 Minutes — Explosive — What mind can do to affect health	Keith Wommack, Healing Now	Feb. 20	Supernatural
The road to perfection and the saving power of Christ	Heather Hemingway, Mormon Voice	Feb. 19	Good Works
In its church discipline, Mars Hill takes a page from the Old Testament	Menachem Wecker, Iconia	Feb. 17	Hypocrisy
Halftime in America	Howard Siegel, Faith and Reason	Feb. 17	Good Works
Church meets state: The day after	Charles St.-Onge, Lutherant	Feb. 17	Tolerance
Chef showcases the food of Lent in upcoming class	Ken Chitwood, Sacred Duty blog	Feb. 20	Good Works
NYPD goes too far by spying on Muslim students	Wardah Khalid, Young American Muslim	Feb. 20	Inclusion
Lin wearing Christian wristbands made by Lakewood members	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 20	Good Works
Wisdom with margins: Picking up a new set of [contextual] glasses for Lent this year	Marty Troyer, the Peace Pastor	Feb. 20	Good Works

Judge favors Lakewood in music copyright suit	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 21	Resurrection
To any young woman who imagines herself Katniss	Ellen Cooper-Davis, Keep the Faith	Feb. 21	Good Works
A new bishop for Houston Catholics	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Feb. 21	Good Works
A funeral is better than a party	Ken Gurley, The Pentecostal Perspective	Feb. 21	Good Works
For Lent, I'm giving up (under headline "Houstonians mark the start of Lent.")	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Feb. 22	Good Works
Just in time for Lent: Fasting found to help protect brain	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 20	Intersection
New art installation symbolic of dialogue and reflection	Farah Lalani, The Human Religion	Feb. 22	Intersection
Houston, A&M groups urge penalties for men who buy sex	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 22	Good Works
The 'greatest' worship song ever	Ken Gurley, The Pentecostal Perspective	Feb. 22	Good Works
New graphic novel illustrates a more vulnerable Goliath	Menachem Wecker, Iconia	Feb. 22	Good Works
Tattoo artist finds his ministry in ink	Kate Shellnutt	Feb. 23	Good Works
"Linsanity" helps launch Active Faith sportswear brand	Jason Bellini	Feb. 23	Good Works
Pastor to be inducted into Wheatley High 'Hall of Fame'	Erica Quiroz	Feb. 23	Good Works
Southern Baptists offer an alternative name	Kate Shellnutt	Feb. 23	Resurrection
Pope takes up tweeting for Lent	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 23	Good Works
Pain-busting distraction	Keith Wommack, Healing Now	Feb. 27	Supernatural
Praying with 40 Days for Life	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Feb. 26	Good Works

"Who is my neighbor?" What Jesus expects of us.	Heather Hemingway, Mormon Voice	Feb. 26	Good Works
Be happy! It's Adar!	Lee Wunsch, Around the Jewish World	Feb. 24	Good Works
Texans respond to black atheist billboards	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 24	Peace
Best dressed at the Oscars: Catholic nun on the red carpet	Kristan Doerfler, The Emmaus Road	Feb. 27	Good Works
The senselessness of soundbite spirituality	Charles St.-Onge, Lutherant	Feb. 27	Good Works
The spiritual practice of...coloring?	Andy Lambert, Zen Chalice	Feb. 27	Good Works
Why Rick Santorum should read John Locke	Jill Carroll, Talking Toleranace	Feb. 28	Tolerance
Baylor University going bigtime with sports success	Kate Shellnutt, Believe it or Not	Feb. 28	Resurrection
Wiccans are evil, and are trying to wipe out Christianity	Ed Nelson, The Wiccan Way	Feb. 28	Inclusion

Appendix B. Articles analyzed: *Salt Lake Tribune*

Headline	Byline	Pub. Date	Frame
Mormons tackling tough questions in their history	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 30	Inclusion
Who are evangelicals?	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 27	Inclusion
Utahns plan a month of interfaith events	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 27	Peace
What I'm learning and loving in the Quran	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 27	Inclusion
Kirby: Stop reading if you believe fact and faith are synonymous	Robert Kirby	Jan. 27	Hypocrisy
Utah Muslims and Jews to feast on food, friendship	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 27	Peace
Evangelical speaker: True Christians don't demonize Mormons, Obama	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 24	Hypocrisy
Can Muslim athletes run faster if they're fasting?	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 20	Inclusion
Kirby: Soul searching needn't always end in strict adherence	Robert Kirby	Jan. 19	Hypocrisy
McEntee: Mormons join a misguided warning about gay marriage	Peg McEntee, columnist	Jan. 18	Tolerance
Is prayer a blessing? Good heavens, yes	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 13	Inclusion
Book of Mormon, Tibetan Book of the Dead boast similar roots	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Jan. 31	Peace
Kirby: A lord of the castle learns his lesson	Robert Kirby	Feb. 2	Hypocrisy
Utah Interfaith leaders join to promote civility	Katie Drake	Feb. 2	Peace
Yes, my monthlong fast changed me — now pass the water	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 3	Inclusion
Dickens and religion: A tale of two views	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 3	Good Works
Utah faithful to join 'green' preach-in	Lisa Schencker	Feb. 3	Good Works
Corey J. Hodges: Evangelicals still candidate shopping in GOP campaigns	Cory J. Hodges	Feb. 3	Tolerance
Faith in action: Family history, interfaith events, music lectures and more	Staff	Feb. 3	Tolerance
Under Mormon doctrine, will Josh Powell be in hell?	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 6	Inclusion

Lesbian couple selling birthplace of Mormon prophet	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 7	Tolerance
McEntee: Who, exactly, does gay marriage harm?	Peg McEntee, columnist	Feb. 8	Tolerance
Worshipping at the Temple of Football	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 8	Intersection
Utah bishop joins fight against contraceptive coverage	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 9	Tolerance
Post-Powell Grief: Religion can heal or hurt	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 10	Supernatural
Utah bishop welcomes contraceptive compromise	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 9	Tolerance
Kirby: It's hard to forgive in face of true evil	Robert Kirby	Feb. 10	Hypocrisy
French kiss-off? Mormon temple near Paris facing opposition	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 10	Tolerance
Mormon church seeks to boost party caucus turnout	Lee Davidson	Feb. 13	Good Works
Mormon church apologizes for baptisms of Wiesenthal's parents	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 13	Peace
Touched by an Angel' star plans more heavenly missions	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 13	Good Works
Author: Media missing real story about real Mormons	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 14	Inclusion
Faiths rally to restore historic Salt Lake City church	Donald W. Meyers	Feb. 14	Good Works
Wiesel asks Romney to help stop Mormon proxy baptism	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 15	Inclusion
Kirby: Religion is more about your present than its past	Robert Kirby	Feb. 16	Hypocrisy
Remembering the 'Mormon' Olympics that weren't	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 17	Inclusion
Created for the Salt Lake Olympics, Interfaith Roundtable still collaborates	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 17	Peace
Will Southern Baptists drop the 'Southern'?	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 17	Declension
Romney's immigration stance draws fire from Latino Mormons	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 20	Hypocrisy
Another proxy baptism of Anne Frank triggers strong Mormon condemnation	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 21	Inclusion
Utahns mark Ash Wednesday	Staff	Feb. 22	Good Works
BYU student turns nasty note into opportunity	Scott D. Pierce	Feb. 22	Good Works
Do proxy baptisms inflate Mormon membership figures	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 22	Inclusion

Lent may not be necessary, but it's nice	Corey J. Hodges	feb. 23	Good Works
Kirby: The perils of using Christianity as a hammer	Robert Kirby	Feb. 23	Hypocrisy
Salt Lake Buddhists mark Tibetan New Year	Staff	Feb. 23	Good Works
Q&A: All about a bar or bat mitzvah	Lisa Schencker	Feb. 24	Inclusion
Mormon feminists, LDS Church unite in scholarship drive	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 24	Good Works
2 top Mormon leaders donated to Romney	Tony Semerad	Feb. 24	Good Works
Republican party started out anti-Mormon	Thomas Burr	Feb. 27	Inclusion
Mormons at BYU to discuss apostacy	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 27	Peace
Coming soon to a TV near you: a 'Mormon Matchmaker' reality show	Peggy Fletcher-Stack	Feb. 28	Good Works

Appendix C. Articles analyzed: *Faith in Memphis*

Headline	Byline	Pub. Date	Frame
Blog: Cathi Johnson: Dungy to share faith at MTS dinner (blog)	Cathi Johnson	Jan. 28	Good Works
Blog: Minister's spirit sustained by constant love	David Waters	Jan. 28	Good Works
Kathy Martin: Special ministries for special needs	Kathy Martin	Jan. 28	Good Works
Question of the Week: New suburban school districts	Teri Hayslett	Jan. 28	Intersection
Answer: A house divided against itself cannot stand	Noel Hutchinson	Jan. 28	Hypocrisy
Answer: Complex questions in need of answers	Warner Davis	Jan. 28	Intersection
Answer: A once-in-a-generation opportunity	Rick Donlon	Jan. 28	Hypocrisy
Answer: Education should come before political agendas	Danny Sinquefel	Jan. 28	Good Works
Serman new director of Jewish Family Service	David Waters	Jan. 26	Good Works
Cynthia Ham named president of Bridges	David Waters	Jan. 23	Good Works
Blog: Obama sings Al Green	David Waters	Jan. 20	Good Works
Keith: East Win volunteers find 'inner missionary'	Patsy Keith	Feb. 1	Good Works
Praying for a miracle: school unity	David Waters	Feb. 4	Supernatural
Burnett Brown: Churches without walls free to serve	Burnett Brown	Feb. 4	resurrection
Dr. Julie Ware: Breast-feeding is a gift from God	Julie Ware	Feb. 4	Intersection
Question of the week: Grief as a psychiatric disorder?	Teri Hayslett	Feb. 4	Intersection
Answer: Grief should not be excluded from disorders	Carol Richardson	Feb. 4	Intersection
Answer: Grieving is God's designed response to emotional pain	L.LaSimba Gray, Jr.	Feb. 4	Intersection
Answer: Reclaim the art of lamenting	Barbara A. Holmes	Feb. 4	Intersection
Answer: There are no pills for a broken heart	Scott Morris	Feb. 4	Intersection
Lindsay Melvin: Some glorify God through tattoos	Lindsay Melvin	Feb. 8	Inclusion
COGIC Bishop dies in pulpit	David Waters	Feb. 9	Good Works

Pastor returns to God's unfinished work	David Waters	Feb. 11	Supernatural
Larry Rea: Using love of outdoors to gain converts	Larry Rea	Feb. 11	Good Works
Question of the week: Churches renting schools for worship services	Teri Hayslett	Feb. 11	Tolerance
Answer: Unjust discrimination	Cole Huffman	Feb. 11	Tolerance
Answer: Misunderstanding the separation of church and state	Rick Donlon	Feb. 11	Tolerance
Answer: Being good stewards of our resources	Pat Hardaway	Feb. 11	Good Works
Answer: Fear of government sanctioned religion	David Mason	Feb. 11	Tolerance
Moore: 2nd Pres. Member faces excommunication	Linda Moore	Feb. 16	Hypocrisy
Fr. Kerrigan elevated to monsignor in N.J.	David Waters	Feb. 16	Good Works
Bishop Steib: Mandate imperils religious freedom	J. Terry Steib	Feb. 18	Tolerance
L. LaSimba Gray: Lives derailed by poor choices	L. LaSimba Gray, Jr.	Feb. 18	Good Works
Question of the week: What concerns you most about Memphis?	Teri Hayslett	Feb. 18	Intersection
Answer: Talking about race is still problematic	Andre Johnson	Feb. 18	Intersection
Answer: A test of our values	Danish Siddiqui	Feb. 18	Good Works
Answer: 600,000 not active in Christ's Church	Sandy Willson	Feb. 18	Good Works
Answer: Self-assessment questions	Micah Greenstein	Feb. 18	Good Works
Will Southern Baptists change their brand?	David Waters	Feb. 17	Good Works
Homeless man returns to Memphis	David Waters	Feb. 17	Good Works
Bob Smietana: SBC adopts 'Great Commission'	Bob Smietana	Feb. 21	Declension
Bobbit and Stirek: Women, God delights in you!	Karen Bobbit, Victoria Stirek	Feb. 21	Good Works
Jeffrey Stayton: Race, redemption and Memphis' future	Jeffrey Stayton	Feb. 23	Good Works
Grace moves GBC pastor to humble himself	David Waters	Feb. 25	Good Works
Gary Agee: Black publisher believed Catholic message	Gary B. Agee	Feb. 25	Good Works
Questions: Clergy for tolerance	Teri Hayslett	Feb. 25	Intersection

Answer: Reform based upon fact, not misconceptions and fear	Greg Diaz	Feb. 25	Inclusion
Answer: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has issued its own statement	Rich Floyd	Feb. 25	Inclusion
Answer: Reject negative politics	Aaron Rubinstein	Feb. 25	Inclusion
Answer: Tough stance on immigration is dishonest and manipulative	Maxie Dunnam	Feb. 25	Inclusion

Appendix D. Interview notes: Kate Shellnutt, *Houston Belief*

Interview conducted at 11 a.m. Thursday, March 16, 2012

For the sake of clarity, answers include a mix of direct quotes and paraphrases.

1. Please describe your role and how the religion beat at your publication works.

“I’m the web producer first, so I work on the website, houstonbelief.com. I blog almost every day in my blog, ‘Believe it or Not.’ I also work with community bloggers we’ve recruited.”

Shellnutt does not have editorial control over bloggers, but instead acts as a support to them. She also shares their work not only within *Houston Belief*, but on the *Houston Chronicle* homepage, along with Facebook and Twitter. *Houston Belief* also has a print section that is published every Friday. Shellnutt reports once or twice a month for that section, which features the stories she has written and some reprinted blogs. She works with an editor on creating that section.

Shellnutt is the only religion reporter — there used to be three. However, some bloggers do reporting for their posts, so she has people who can add some strong writing.

2. What is the perception about religion news at your publication?

“I think that it’s well regarded just because of the location that we’re in. It would be silly for colleagues or others to dismiss it because Houston is home to an un-ignorable religion presence.”

That religious presence includes major churches such as Lakewood and Second Baptist, plus a strong Catholic presence, plus the largest Methodist and Episcopal churches in the U.S.

Shellnutt said that even if journalists aren't people of faith — she cited a statistic that about 7 percent of all reporters attend a service regularly — they know their neighbors and people around them are people of faith. As one example, Shellnutt said she is intentional at covering the religious angles of holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

3. At this publication, what makes a religion story newsworthy?

“A couple of things, the same factors that go for other beats as well.” Among those factors is prominence of a person, “especially online.” What is popular? What will do well and get clicked on? Big-name people relevant to *Houston Belief* include Joel Osteen, Cardinal Daniel, Rick Santorum and Rick Perry, to name a few.

She also listed other factors: “Weirdness and outrage, confusion over stuff, religion and pop culture, what is this church giving away, non-sensical stories.” She also looks for news stories with a religion angle. For example, if the health care debate is in the news, what are the religions implications of that debate?

4. Is there conversation among staff about framing, whether that's among you and editors, or you and bloggers? If so, please tell me more about those conversations.

“Well, it's a tricky question. The lens for me is always one of religious neutrality. I'm very deliberate to try to not come off as anything, in terms of my own faith.” Commenters on the site used to accuse Shellnutt of touting certain views. “Let the bloggers do that,” she said. “But for me, the frame is always the neutral observer.”

As for people in a story, she tries to “let their faith shine through and not downplay the religion.” She looks at “not only what they are doing, but why are they doing it?” But, let people in story, let their faith shine through, and not downplay the

religion. Not only what are they doing, but why are they doing it. She tries not to let her own faith influence things.

Sometimes, Shellnutt tries to frame within a demographic, or a broader cultural frame, such as young people in a city, or a growing Hispanic population.

5. Have you noticed a dominant frame in your paper's religion coverage? If so, what?

In other words, what lens are religion stories most commonly told through?

Primarily answered in response to question 4.

6. What are the determining factors in how a religion story is told? In other words, what shapes the way the story is presented?

“The tone of whatever I’m reporting on — there are some things I cover that, because they are spiritual, do take a more serious nature: mourning, poverty, ... out of respect for subject matter, I [have to be] keen to that. I can’t be super sassy all the time.”

“The way the subject regards it. There are sites that cover religion and like to take a little thing and make it a giant thing, [like saying], ‘Here’s a teaching that’s small, but we’re going to make it a big thing.’ That part of that person’s tradition would actually be small.” She asks herself, “Does it make sense to the people in the group?” She used Mormon proxy baptism as an example. “Yes, it’s troubling, but we shouldn’t act like all they do is baptize people. Making sure that someone from that tradition can read it and say, ‘Yes, this makes sense,’ instead of ‘Why did they write it’ [is important].”

7. What role do analytics play, if any, in determining what/how to cover religion?

“I write knowing that not everything I write about or want to write about will get all the clicks or get read. But some of the stuff I write for print doesn’t get a lot of clicks

online, but it will get read in print. There are stories that I think about how to write a headline, or how to frame it, that would make it appealing to an audience that would not consider itself religious.” This appeal comes in “big-name stories” about churches such as Lakewood. Other appeal can come in occasional stories about sex, to list one example.

8. What role do user comments and user-generated content play in religion coverage?

They are “hugely” important. “I can only offer one voice, and it’s not a personal one. That’s not always the best voice for a story about faith, because faith is so personal. In this avenue, it’s great to have people talking in the first person.”

She said the bloggers are of many different minority faiths. There are Muslim Jewish, Mennonite, Christian Scientist, Buddhist, Wiccan and Mormon bloggers, to name a few.

“It’s like having eyes on the ground. Things they’ve blogged about have led to bigger stories, or [blogs have] been grown into a centerpiece for a belief section.” She talked about how because of the diversity, overlapping subject matter is OK — they might have 10 different perspectives on Mothers Day or 9/11. “Don’t think, ‘We already have a fasting thing,’ but get ideas from each other.”

As for the background of the blogs: “We’re one of the older sites doing it. When we first did it, churches weren’t on Facebook or the web so much, so we were kind of ahead, but now, as that proliferates, people of faith can go to other places within their tradition, so it’s kind of a different purpose. It’s for a mainstream audience instead of audience of faith.”

“This can be a tough beat to be on, in terms of commentors. People like to get angry.” Believers can take on the victim mentality, and non-believers might accuse of favoritism. Some of the challenge comes from people who seem to read the headline and comment without actually reading the story. Shellnutt said she is lucky to have a community of people who have been around for years, and she knows who the main commentors are and which ones defend each other, so good dialogue can be created.

9. In my research so far, I've noticed several devotion-style pieces, along with several that seem to explain a tension. There also seems to be a sense of tolerance and inclusion. Does that seem accurate, from your perspective?

Shellnutt said it is important to explain tensions: “Make it make sense to people.”

“It really is a two-perspective thing; balance is also an important thing.”

As for tolerance and inclusion, that “completely” makes sense. She said coverage is sometimes disproportional to the actual religions population, especially when it comes to minority groups, but that’s OK. “To me, if I didn’t include minority groups, I’d be taking a stand against them, and that would be a bigger mistake. I don’t do proportions exactly with Houston.” She said Christians are the biggest part of the population, with megachurches, evangelicals and Catholics. “But I write about the others more than the percentage that there are of them.”

Appendix E. Interview notes: Peggy Fletcher Stack, the *Salt Lake Tribune*

Interview conducted at 11 a.m. Friday, March 9, 2012.

For the sake of clarity, answers include a mix of direct quotes and paraphrases.

1. Please describe your role and how the religion beat at your publication works.

“I began at the paper 20 years ago, and it was my assignment to launch a religion section, which has had various names from religion, to faith, to a bunch of different names in between.” The approach today is the same as it was back then: “To cover faith in all its various forms.” That includes institutions, such as the Mormon church, the Catholic church, Protestant churches and various denominations. It also includes coverage of “non-believers, secular people, and how they approach moral issues.”

“Because I write in a place where Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is dominant — it’s its headquarters — that means we end of writing a lot of stories [about the Mormon church].”

The religion section has been “wildly popular.” It used to be that religion was only covered when there was a controversy or a big event, but there was nothing in between. After the section was created, people loved it. “They wanted a neutral place” for religion news.

2. What is the perception about religion news at your publication?

From the editors’ perspectives, “It can be light features, profiles, breaking news... the only thing we haven’t done much with, frankly because of a lack of resources, is investigative reporting about the LDS church. It isn’t because any of us are unwilling to

do that, but it's really about resources." Other than that, Stack said they cover just about everything.

The paper has a faith section that comes out on Saturdays, and that needs to be filled each week. There is also breaking religion news, and Stack's blog. "Having enough time to do all of it is hard."

3. At this publication, what makes a religion story newsworthy?

Answered through other responses.

4. Is there conversation among staff members about framing, whether that's among reporters, or between editors and reporters? If so, please tell me more about those conversations.

Stack has regular conversations with an editor about framing. "Yes, we absolutely talk about how to frame the story, whose voices to emphasize or de-emphasize, what background is needed, all those kinds of things. I obviously am an imperfect reporter, I need to run my ideas by other people to make sure I know the context, and I can keep my balance." Often, Stack said, she makes presumptions in her writing that "everyone knows" something, simply because she's so familiar with the content she's been covering 20 years. She has to remember to include background and awareness for first-time readers.

5. Have you noticed a dominant frame in your paper's religion coverage? If so, what? In other words, what lens are religion stories most commonly told through?

"If I had to lean towards anything, I pretty much take seriously a believer's point of view. I don't necessarily think it's the final or most authoritative, but I try to see every

faith through the believer's eyes, first and foremost. Even though I myself might think their faith is not what I would choose, I still try to see it through their eyes.”

For example, a man was leaving tarot cards at the site of murders. Stack wrote a story about it. She talked to a bunch of tarot card readers and tried to see it from their point of view, rather than trying to debunk their perspective, or critiquing it.

“If I lean in one direction or another, it would be more to the side of the believers themselves, more than the critics. I don't see my job as critiquing beliefs or institutions, unless, of course, there is abuse. But in general, I don't see it my job to critique the beliefs themselves or people who believe them. So, of course, I take those very seriously.”

She said she does, however, try to include critics. And she leans toward believers of all kinds, not just Mormons.

“I don't let the critics dominate all these stories about these groups that are controversial. Nor do a few dominate the whole faith.”

6. What are the determining factors in how a religion story is told? In other words, what shapes the way the story is presented?

Answered in other responses.

7. What role do analytics play, if any, in determining what/how to cover religion?

Although editors are “keenly aware” of analytics, they do not specifically affect Stack. Still, she is aware that half of the readers are Mormon, and that the Mormon stories done at the *Salt Lake Tribune* are both national and local.

Since Mitt Romney announced campaigning in 2007, there has been even more coverage of Mormons. “We are the paper of record on Mormonism. There is the *Deseret News*, the church paper, but some readers have skepticism because it is owned by LDS church.”

8. *What role do user comments and user-generated content play in religion coverage?*

“Pretty much not at all.”

“Like everyone else, I get tips from readers, and I definitely get critiques. Every single day, I get people who hate what I write, or love what I write. People think I’m pro-Mormon or anti-Mormon.”

She also said that people come to the *Tribune* to read about Mormonism. “People aren’t coming to read about national Catholic movements, or other local faiths.”

9. *I’ve noticed a lot of explainers — sort of a frame of inclusion, promoting better understanding, harmony. It also seems like there are some traditional “church page” or good works-type stories. I’ve also noticed several instances when you’ve written phrases like “not just Mormons” or “including Mormons.” What is your response?*

“It’s because of our readers; it’s definitely aimed at our readers. We estimate that about half of our readers are Mormons, so when there are some big national stories, we might add them to the list of people, just to add them to that.”

“I do a lot of explainers because I think that there’s a lot of misinformation.” She talked about her explainer on Proxy baptism, and another on Evangelicals. “Readers may not like them, but know who and what you’re talking about. I do those kinds of things.”

As for good works stories, Stack said those happen “occasionally — there are too many. Everybody does humanitarian works...”

“I do some of that conflict story, though I try to do it with the most civil voices, rather than the most outrageous ones.

10. The researcher mentioned in the flow of conversation that she would be speaking with Kate Shellnut and David Waters. Stack responded.

On Waters: “We have such different assignments, because he lives in the Bible belt, and they’ve got a lot of Protestants. He’s got a lot of smaller churches doing different things, and I’ve got one big church.”

“Where we live, it’s so divided between Mormons and everyone else.”

Appendix F. Interview Notes: David Waters, *Faith in Memphis*

Interview conducted at 1 p.m. Thursday, March 22, 2012.

For the sake of clarity, answers include a mix of direct quotes and paraphrases.

1. Please describe your role and how the religion beat at your publication works.

“*Faith in Memphis* is a weekly section that we started in February 2010, and the idea is to acknowledge and recognize how important faith is to the people of Memphis — how faith impacts people there. We started site at the same time, and we’d talked about only doing a website, but we realized that this is still a very heavy newspaper town, and the newspaper still matters here, but initially we wanted to let people know about how it through the paper. The idea initially was that the site would be more daily. Of course, there are staffing issues ... What we hope is that we can turn the site into a daily product, although that’s also iffy at this point because there’s a change away from web and more to apps, mobile, etc.”

2. What is the perception about religion news at your publication?

“I think we realize how important it is. The editor several years ago said there were bedrock core beats to pay attention to, and one is religion. This is Bible belt — a lot of people say that it’s the buckle. Faith matters to just about everyone in some way in this town, and it has to do with everything — like money in New York, or power in Washington, it informs everything we think, or do, or say.”

“Even if you’re an atheist, faith in Memphis affects your life.”

3. At this publication, what makes a religion story newsworthy?

“That’s a good question. My definition of newsworthy is probably broader than most, especially with my focus on the weekly [print] section. Obviously, timeliness is a major factor. Do we need to get it on the site right away, or the paper tomorrow. But also to focus on what really matters to people. It’s just as newsworthy to talk about how faith impacts their daily life, and that’s an ongoing story.”

“Some people go, ‘Religion news: church moving, pastor leaves town.’ I think that it’s just as newsworthy when something less eventful happens — something that says something about life in the community. It’s a pretty broad definition.”

4. Is there conversation among staff members about framing, whether that’s among reporters, or between editors and reporters? If so, please tell me more about those conversations.

“It’s a case by case basis. When I ask people from this community to write, I want them to be personal — their own knowledge and understanding. It’s their stuff. Some people try to write like a reporter, and that’s not what we’re looking for — we want their perspective, context, story. But with a journalist, it’s a totally different process. It has to start where the news judgment is.” It also has to do with what’s accurate

5. Have you noticed a dominant frame in your paper’s religion coverage? If so, what? In other words, what lens are religion stories most commonly told through?

Waters said he doesn’t think he frames things in a personal way. He also said he tries to find a universal theme in a particular instance. For example, there was a story about a man with Down syndrome who played basketball for his high school team. That

is an individual story. “But there are universal themes of love, risk, overcoming odds, unity, community, etc. It’s a really inspiring story.”

“There’s a quote from a guy, Harold Krishner,” that helps answer important questions, such as, “How do you cover something so subjective when you’re supposed to be objective? What do you focus on?” Here is the quote, as stated by Waters: “For the religious mind and soul, it’s not the existence of god, but the importance of God.”

“What people do and say, how people act. How they relate to other people. Try to write about the impact religious belief and practice has on everything.”

6. What are the determining factors in how a religion story is told? In other words, what shapes the way the story is presented?

Answered through other questions.

7. What role do analytics play, if any, in determining what/how to cover religion?

“None for me. Bosses probably look, but we just switched from free to paid access. That’s changed analytics, and I’m not sure what new ones mean.” He tries not to let numbers dictate what he does.

8. What role do user comments and user-generated content play in religion coverage?

“That plays a huge role — that was one of the main goals of *Faith in Memphis*, was to have a heavy UGC. We should use our editorial functions in the community. As a reporter, my job is to get info and bring it back. I go get it from people with expertise, awareness, etc.—those who know what I need to know. But there are millions of people, and only one me. I hope to open pages to people who have that expertise.”

Waters talked about the homeless initiative in Memphis — an initiative to end homelessness in 10 years. There are several people in the faith community with partnerships to the initiative, and the mayor wrote a guest column. There is also a local homeless ministry in which homeless people do creative writing, and they were asked to write something for the paper also: “What is their view on the plan? What do they want, given their experience?” Waters posed a question about why report, when one can go straight to the source and “open them up in a guided discussion.” He talked about an upcoming discussion about domestic violence and relationship abuse. A guest pastor would be leading, and it was opened up to about 12 clergy who could share what they thought about the issue.

9. I’ve noticed a lot of what would fall into a good works category — stories about religious bodies or people doing good things, more profile/feature-ey. Also, with the Today’s Question, there seems to be a lot of tying faith to something else — a blend of sacred and secular, if you will. Does that ring true to you?

“I’ve always thought it was important to find them [sacred and secular] in each other — especially in this country, and especially in the South.”

On positive coverage: “Absolutely, that’s my focus. There are enough reporters looking for stuff that is wrong. Part of our editorial balance should be finding things that are good, positive, working. A community is filled with more of that than negative and problems—especially when you’re dealing with faith. There are countless people out there who, because of their faith, are trying to make this world a better place.”

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