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A RHETORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF *ARGUMENTUM AD BACULUM* IN THE
PUBLISHED SERMONS OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Frankie Joe Melton, Jr.

May 2010

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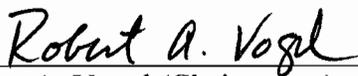
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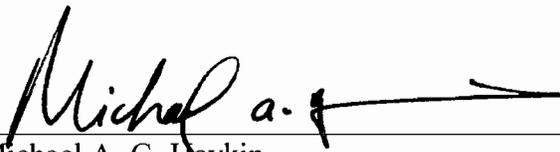
A RHETORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF *ARGUMENTUM AD BACULUM*
IN THE PUBLISHED SERMONS OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD

Frankie Joe Melton, Jr.

Read and Approved by:



Robert A. Vogel (Chairperson)



Michael A. G. Haykin



Gregg R. Allison

Date April 21, 2010

To Amy,

“he who finds a wife finds a good thing,”

and to

Lydia Catherine,

Sarah Elizabeth,

and

Noah Franklin,

“the fruit of the womb is a reward.”

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PREFACE

The completion of this dissertation is the work of one and many. It would not have been possible without the sacrifice and assistance of multiple individuals. All three members of my committee of instruction, Professors Robert Vogel, Gregg Allison, and Michael Haykin, have contributed helpful and timely insights over the past couple of years through conversations, e-mails, and seminars. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my PhD supervisor, Dr. Robert Vogel. He trained my thoughts on issues of rhetoric and kindly helped me focus my ideas in this dissertation. His thorough use of class time, courteous interaction with students, promptness, and preparation for class distinguish him as a consummate Christian gentleman and faithful minister of the gospel. I am grateful for his example. I am also grateful to Dr. Haykin, who provided me with twenty of Whitefield's sermons and a number of other illuminating historical insights.

I would also like to express gratitude to Helen and Lucy Bailey of Munfordville, Kentucky. In addition to providing many meals during my tenure as their pastor, they also washed and ironed my clothes and purchased two pairs of eyeglasses to assist me during my studies. I am also grateful to Jim and Suzie Erskine of Canmer, Kentucky, who supplied the finances to cover my tuition for several semesters.

The kind people of Heath Springs Baptist Church in Heath Springs, South Carolina, have given me all the time a doctoral student could ever ask for to complete this dissertation and encouraged me to take even more time. They have prayed for me and

offered many words of encouragement during the past year. I am especially grateful to John Mobley for his proofreading skills.

My mother, father, brother, and sister have done more than their duty in offering assistance, both financial and otherwise, to bring this endeavor to conclusion.

Finally, I would like to thank those who have suffered the most. My wife, Amy, daughter Lydia, and son Noah have been graciously accommodating to my study schedule and endured my many hours of study and seclusion. I am deeply grateful to God for His gift of a family, for which my love grows every day.

I pray that the Lord Jesus Christ would receive glory and honor as a result of this dissertation. He is the only one worthy of any praise and without His daily strength there would be no tomorrow. The most quoted verse in Whitefield's journals is the desire of my heart now: "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake" (Ps 115:1).

Frankie J. Melton, Jr.

Heath Springs, South Carolina

May 2010

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a rhetoriographical study of *argumentum ad baculum* in the published sermons of George Whitefield. John Angus Campbell and Angela G. Ray defined rhetoriography as “the application of rhetorical methods to the study of historical objects, agents, movements, arguments, ideas, or ‘ideographs.’” They further stated, “While rhetoriography holds much in common with historiography, it is distinguished by its persistent emphasis on problems of communication and persuasion.”¹ Rhetoriography is concerned not only with rhetorical texts, but with agents, contexts, and time as well. In this sense, rhetoriography is a multidimensional methodological approach to rhetoric incorporating not only the words of a text, but the historical context, the audience, and the speaker. Campbell and Ray identified the crux of rhetoriography as critical invention. Invention flows from interpretive insight.²

Argumentum ad baculum is a tool of persuasion in which a threat or a warning is issued to arouse fear and effect an attitudinal change. The threat or warning can take multifarious forms from verbal to visual via anecdotes, quotations, assertions, gory imagery, biblical allusions, direct address, metaphors, and exclamations.

¹John Angus Campbell and Angela G. Ray, “Rhetoriography: An Essay in Method,” unpublished essay given to me by the authors, 2.

²Ibid.

The dissertation is an assessment of how Whitefield used fear as a methodological approach to persuasion. The thrust of the dissertation is to identify the categories of fear appeals Whitefield used, the nature of the materials which form the appeals, and an evaluation of the effect and ethicality of the appeals. This dissertation is a work of rhetoriology because it seeks to discover Whitefield's rhetorical use of fear to persuade his hearers in the context of the Great Awakening.

Portraiture

George Whitefield was the premier preacher of the Great Awakening in America. Samuel Davies called him "the wonder of the age."³ Lord Bolingbroke acknowledged him as "the most extraordinary man in our times. He has the most commanding eloquence I ever heard in any person."⁴ Benjamin Franklin extolled Whitefield, saying "[I] never had the least suspicion of his integrity, but am to this day decidedly of the opinion that he was in all his conduct a perfectly honest man; and methinks my testimony in his favour ought to have more weight, as we had no religious connection."⁵ Maxson called him the chief figure of the Great Awakening.⁶ Stout

³John Lewis Gilmore, "Preparation: the Power of Whitefield's Ministry," *Christianity Today* 24 (1980): 22.

⁴J. C. Ryle, *Select Sermons of George Whitefield With an Account of His Life* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 33.

⁵Benjamin Franklin, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin* (Buffalo, NY: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1854), 118 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

⁶Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1920), 3 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

labeled him Anglo-America's first modern celebrity⁷ and called his 1740 preaching tour of the colonies "the most sensational event in the history of New England preaching."⁸ Noll contended that Whitefield's 1740 preaching tour of New England was the key event in the Great Awakening.⁹ His life work was his pulpit ministry and according to Noll "his most enduring monument."¹⁰ Philip, an early biographer, said of him, "No man ever lived nearer to God, or approached nearer to the perfection of oratory."¹¹ David Garrick, the famous British actor, reportedly said, "Whitefield could make his audiences weep or tremble merely by varying his pronunciation of the word Mesopotamia."¹² On another occasion Garrick lamented, "I would give a hundred guineas if I could only say 'O' like Mr. Whitefield."¹³ Even philosopher and historian David Hume admitted it was worth walking twenty miles to hear Whitefield preach.¹⁴

⁷Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), xiii.

⁸Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 189.

⁹Mark A. Noll, "George Whitefield," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 1170.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of George Whitefield* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 560.

¹²Jerome Dean Mahaffey, *Preaching Politics: The Religious Rhetoric of George Whitefield and the Founding of a New Nation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 47.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ryle, *Select Sermons of George Whitefield*, 33.

Information about Whitefield's life is scanty. Nearly all of the primary sources (i.e., private papers and diaries) from his life have been lost.¹⁵ He was born on December 16, 1714, at the Bell Inn in Gloucester, England, and was the youngest of seven children. His father and mother were keepers of the Inn and Whitefield worked there as a boy. His father died when Whitefield was only two years old. In *A Short Account of God's Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield*, he described himself as a mischievous young man. His youthful indiscretions included "lying," "filthy talking," "stealing from my mother," breaking the Sabbath, irreverence in God's sanctuary, "sauntering from place to place," and he lamented, "I at length fell into abominable secret sin, the dismal effects of which I have felt and groaned under ever since."¹⁶ In a lecture on the Prodigal Son given on September 27, 1740, when Whitefield was twenty-five years old, he inveighed against going to balls and dancing. In a brief biographical aside he confessed,

Before I go forward, give me Leave to tell you who (because Musick [*sic*] and Dancing is mentioned) may think it lawful to dance and have Balls.—But my dear Friends, such Things are as much contrary to the Gospel of Christ, as Light is to Darkness. And whatever you may think, if God ever touch your Heart, and make you new Creatures, you will be sick of these things; you will no more be present at a Ball or Assembly, than you will thrust your Head into the Fire. I speak this by Experience. No one hath been a greater Sinner that Way, than that poor Creature that is now preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ to you. Many a precious Hour and Night have I spent this Way, and thought it no Harm, as you may do: I went to the Sacrament, I kept Fasts before the Sacrament; I thought it no Harm to go to dancing for all that. But my dear Friends, take Warning, it hath cost me many a Tear, many a gloomy Hour to reflect upon the many precious Hours I have spent this Way, and I

¹⁵Stout, *Divine Dramatist*, xv.

¹⁶Robert Backhouse, ed., *The Journals of George Whitefield* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), 12-16.

am amazed that God did not send me to Hell. Take Warning by me, it cost me many a bitter Hour, as it will cost you if ever you come to God.¹⁷

Even as a mischievous young boy however, he had an interest in spiritual matters. He said, “I was always fond of the idea of being a clergyman, used frequently to imitate the ministers reading prayers”¹⁸ He exhibited an early giftedness for a public ministry of the Word. Whitefield was gifted with a good elocution and memory and was noted for making speeches before the corporation at their annual visitation while attending elementary school at St. Mary de Crypt in Gloucester.¹⁹

From an early age Whitefield had an affinity for acting. He admitted, “During my time at school, I was very fond of reading plays, and have kept away from school for days together to prepare myself for acting them. My master seeing how my and my schoolfellows’ vein ran, composed something of this kind for us himself, and caused me to dress myself in girls’ clothes, which I had often done, to act a part before the corporation.”²⁰ This desire for acting had not been forgotten even while preaching near the end of his life. He shared in one of his last sermons, “I had a mind to be upon the stage, but then I had a qualm of conscience . . . and I thought to act my part for the devil as well as any body; but, blessed be God, he stopped me in my journey.”²¹

¹⁷George Whitefield, *A Lecture on the Prodigal Son* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1742), 15 [on-line]; accessed 14 September 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

¹⁸Backhouse, *Journals*, 13.

¹⁹Ibid., 14.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Joseph Gurney, “All Men’s Place,” in *Eighteen Sermons Preached by the Late Rev. George Whitefield* (Boston: Printed for the Publisher, 1820), 236.

After the death of his father, the Whitefield family's financial situation fluctuated. As a result, Whitefield gained entrance to Oxford as a servitor. This "work study" program allowed Whitefield to perform chores for other, more affluent students in exchange for free tuition. "He might be required to waken them in the morning, black their shoes, run their errands and tidy their rooms, and might even be asked to do their college exercises for them."²² As a result of serving in this humble position, Whitefield was required to wear an identifying garment and could not talk to students of higher rank.²³ Dallimore stated, "It was not uncommon for men who began in a servitorship to leave the University rather than endure its humiliations."²⁴ Whitefield matriculated at Pembroke College, Oxford on November 7, 1732.²⁵

While at Oxford two very significant events took place in Whitefield's life. He met the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, and was converted to Christ. Whitefield had heard much about the "Methodists" before going to Oxford, and he longed to be in their company. However, because he was a servitor, he was forbidden from introducing himself to them. Fortunately and providentially, Whitefield's sober and grave manner caught the eye of Charles Wesley. Wesley invited Whitefield to breakfast and he promptly accepted the invitation.²⁶ Whitefield exulted, "I thankfully embraced the

²²Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth Century Revival*, (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 1:61.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 61-62.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 65.

opportunity and blessed be God, it was one of the most profitable visits I ever made in my life.”²⁷ Gillies, Whitefield’s first biographer, asserted Whitefield considered Charles Wesley his spiritual father.²⁸ In the sermon mentioned above, in which he addressed his desire to be an actor, he shared that his life’s direction was changed by a book titled *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* given to him by Charles Wesley.²⁹ After becoming friends with the Wesleys, Whitefield joined the “holy club,” which maintained a strict regimen of prayers, fastings, study, and religious work. Whitefield took these activities to an extreme. In the end, he was so weak from fasting he could barely walk up stairs.³⁰ Whitefield wrote, “Whole days and weeks have I spent in lying prostrate on the ground in silent or vocal prayer; and, having nobody to show me a better way, I thought to get peace and purity by outward austerities.”³¹ All three of the men at that time were unconverted. Whitefield, however, had his conversion experience three years before the Wesleys. His conversion resulted from his reading of *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. He recounted,

At my first reading it, I wondered what the author meant by saying that some falsely placed religion in going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in private devotions, and now and then reaching out their hands to give alms to their poor neighbours. ‘Alas!’ thought I, ‘if this be not true religion, what is?’ God soon

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸John Gillies, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1772), 6-7 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 8.

³¹Backhouse, *Journals*, 20.

showed me; for in reading a few lines further, that true religion was union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us, a ray of divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must be a new creature.³²

Although the bishop of Gloucester had a policy of not ordaining any man until he was twenty-three years old, he ordained Whitefield at the age of twenty-one.

Whitefield was ordained a deacon on June 20, 1736, and began preaching immediately.³³

He preached his first sermon on a Sunday afternoon at St. Mary de Crypt, the church in which he was baptized and first took the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He preached on the subject, "The Necessity and Benefit of Religious Society," to what he calls "a large congregation" drawn together by curiosity.³⁴ After the sermon, someone complained to the bishop that he had driven fifteen people mad. The bishop responded by saying he hoped the madness would not be forgotten by the next Sunday. Whitefield became an immediate sensation. Invitations poured in from all over London for Whitefield to preach. Transcripts of his sermons began to be printed to meet the demand for his preaching.³⁵ This goodwill soon abated, however, and Whitefield was forced to turn to field preaching. The unwise publication of his journals, containing thoughts unfit for public consumption, turned many clergymen against him and they no longer invited him into their pulpits. Void of church or lyceum, Whitefield took his message of redemption to the fields and city squares.

³²Ibid., 18.

³³Gillies, *Memoirs*, 9.

³⁴George Whitefield, *Letters of George Whitefield For the Period 1734-1742* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 18.

³⁵O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 432.

On February 17, 1739, Whitefield took the unusual step of preaching out-of-doors after several pulpits had been closed to him. Tyerman said it was “the boldest step that any of the Methodists had yet taken; and perhaps none of them but the impulsive, large-hearted Whitefield would have had sufficient courage to be the first in such a shocking departure from church rules and usages.”³⁶

Whitefield made thirteen Atlantic crossings between 1738 and 1769, and toured the American colonies seven times. Belden stated, “Thirteen times he crossed the Atlantic, in days when one such voyage was deemed a great adventure, and never in a vessel bigger than fifty tons, and for the sole purpose of commending Christ to the American people.”³⁷ He first made landfall in North America on May 7, 1738, in Savannah, Georgia. His most successful trip to the colonies extended from October 30, 1739 to January 16, 1741. This preaching tour stoked the fires of the Awakening and fixed Whitefield as its leader. Noll described this preaching tour as the most spectacular of that era and “among the most remarkable events in American religious history.”³⁸ He preached in seven of the American colonies to throngs estimated to total half the population of those colonies.³⁹ Stout insisted that prior to 1740 “hellfire and brimstone” preaching was tempered in the American colonies with the exception of special days like

³⁶Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1872), 1:227 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

³⁷Albert D. Belden, “What America Owes to George Whitefield,” *Religion in Life* 20 (1951): 445.

³⁸Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 104.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 13.

fasts or executions. Stout maintained, “Although sin and damnation were not ignored in regular preaching, neither were they used to dominate and terrorize congregations, at least not before 1740.”⁴⁰ Although Stout did not directly connect Whitefield with this shift, one is left to wonder what influence he had on this development as a result of his 1740 preaching tour of the American colonies.

Whitefield was a relentless preacher. Stout asserted that on many of his tours he spent as many as forty to fifty hours per week in the act of preaching.⁴¹ That did not include preparation time, prayer, and traveling from location to location for services. One journal entry in 1739 was typical, saying, “Near nine Times has God enabled me to preach this Week, and to expound 12 or 14 Times.”⁴² At the age of fifty-five, he stated that he seldom slept past 3 a.m. so that he might spend time in prayer.⁴³ He was a man always in a hurry. His most fruitful times of writing were during the confines of his sea crossings. On his last preaching jaunt in America, Whitefield preached for two hours, despite bad health, in an open-air service in Newburyport, Massachusetts, on September 29, 1770. In all of his many labors, Whitefield stated, “My one design is to bring poor souls to Jesus Christ.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 155.

⁴¹Stout, *Divine Dramatist*, xv.

⁴²George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Arrival in London, to His Departure from thence on His Way to Georgia*, 4th ed. (London: James Hutton, 1739), 17.

⁴³Gurney, *Eighteen Sermons*, 92.

⁴⁴Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 105.

Dallimore painted an inspiring portrait of his last night alive. He retired to the home of Rev. Jonathan Parsons and was having dinner. He rose from the table and said he was tired and would go to bed. However, as he was ascending the stairs for bed, people came entreating him to preach once more. He turned on the stairs, holding a candle, and preached until the candle burned into the socket and went out. At 2 a.m. the next morning he awoke unable to breathe. Richard Smith, his young traveling companion, related how Whitefield expected a “good pulpit sweat” that day would be good for him. Smith told him it was probably best if he did not preach so much. Whitefield responded, “I had rather wear out than rust out.” At 4 a.m. he awoke again and opened a window saying, “I am almost suffocated, I can scarce breathe.” Witnesses described him running from one window to another trying to catch his breath. A doctor was summoned, but nothing could be done to save him. He died from an asthma attack at 7 a.m. on Sunday, September 30, 1770, in the Parson home.⁴⁵

Whitefield’s preaching could be both topical and running commentary. He had a great tendency to allegorize texts of Scripture and his habit was always to preach extemporaneously. He had great gifts of oratory that are unmatched in history. Stout contended that Whitefield “applied the methods and *ethos* of acting to preaching with revolutionary results.”⁴⁶ Stout became more caustic in his assessment when he claimed, “From his youth, Whitefield wanted to be a star, and the particular egotistical self-promotion he displayed in his career was very much in the manner of the great actor.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: God’s Anointed Servant in the Great Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 193-95.

⁴⁶Stout, *Divine Dramatist*, xix.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, xxi.

He further stated that Whitefield lived his life exclusively for public performance.⁴⁸ This low estimate of Whitefield's motives is belied by the merciless pace he maintained and his passionate display of empathy for sinners. Though Whitefield's critics charged him with malversating offerings taken for the orphan house, no substantive evidence was ever presented.

Whitefield the Preacher

As a preacher Whitefield was an innovator. His pulpit ministry brought about several of only a handful of major shifts in the history of preaching. An anonymous Scottish author wrote of Whitefield's preaching, "The dead, cold moderatism of the predominant body in the church was pervaded by the electric influence of a style of preaching that commanded and compelled attention"⁴⁹ Philip agreed saying, "His doctrine, as well as his manner, was a novelty then, even in London, to the multitude."⁵⁰ The doctrine of which Philip speaks is the doctrine of the new birth.

One facet of Whitefield's pulpit innovation was the interjection of passion in the delivery of his sermons. The sermons in publication are far more acclaimed for their passion than their profundity. This stratagem of emotion was not something Whitefield did unconsciously. He was very aware of his approach and the lack of passion in other

⁴⁸Ibid., xv.

⁴⁹George Whitefield, *Sketches of the Life and Labours of the Rev. George Whitefield* (London: John Johnstone, n.d.), 90 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

⁵⁰Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of George Whitefield* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 555.

sermons. In his letter to Dr. Durell, Whitefield attributed the success of the stage and the foundering of the pulpit to the presence of passion in one and its lack in the other.

Whitefield lambasted those clergymen who preach in a cool and indifferent manner. He exhorted them to preach with “persuasive pathetic address” and seek to “move the affections, and warm the heart.”⁵¹ He bemoaned the absence of *pathos* in the pulpit and hypothesized how other professions would fare if their passion equaled that of the clergy. He contended,

Were our Lawyers, our Counsellors, or our Players to act thus, both the Bar and the Stage would soon be deserted; and therefore that answer of Mr Betterton, to a worthy prelate, when he asked him “how it came to pass that the clergy, who spoke of things real, affected the people so little, and the Players, who spoke of things barely imaginary, affected them so much,” is worthy of lasting regard. “My Lord, says Mr Betterton, I can assign but one reason, which is, We Players speak of things imaginary as though they were real, and too many of the Clergy speak of things real as though they were imaginary.” Thus it was in his, and all know it is too much the case in our time.⁵²

Whitefield burst on the scene in the American colonies at a time when preaching was said to be easily described with the simple vocabulary of dull, duller, and dullest.⁵³ His passionate, extempore preaching accompanied by his loud, dramatic voice, clapping of the hands and stomping of the feet was indeed fundamental to awakening New England. It was this preaching that jolted the colonists and ignited what is commonly called the First Great Awakening.

⁵¹George Whitefield, *A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Durell, Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford* (London: J. Millan, E. and C. Dilly, and M. Folingsby, 1768), 46 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁵³Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper, 1957), 14.

A further innovation Whitefield brought to the evangelical pulpit was his use of extemporaneous preaching. He recorded in his journal of 1739, "Friday, February 2. Slept about two Hours, rose and went and preached at Islington, and collected twenty-two Pounds for my Orphan-house. Had a great Number of Communicants, and was told my preaching was attended with uncommon Power. This is the first Time I have preached without Notes (for when I preached at Deptford and Gravesend, I only repeated a written Sermon) but I find myself now, as it were, constrained to it."⁵⁴ Maxson asserted that extemporaneous preaching during this period was a sign of an extreme evangelical.⁵⁵ With no manuscript before him, Whitefield was able to preach spontaneously, engage the audience, unleash his emotions, and use improvisation while preaching. As Philip stated, "every accent of his voice spoke to the ear; every feature of his face, every motion of his hands, every gesture, spoke to the eye; so that the most dissipated and thoughtless found their attention involuntarily fixed."⁵⁶ Gaustad said of his preaching, "To congregations accustomed to sermons stolidly read from closely written manuscripts, the free-flowing eloquence of the youthful and impassioned orator had much appeal. His sermons were simple, intrinsically logical, emotional, extemporaneous."⁵⁷ Whitefield disdained the use of notes by others. He said, "I think the ministers preaching almost universally by note, is a mark that they have, in great measure, lost the old spirit of preaching. Though they are not to be condemned who use notes, yet it is a symptom of the decay of religion,

⁵⁴Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Arrival in London, to His Departure from thence on His Way to Georgia*, 16.

⁵⁵Maxson, *The Great Awakening*, 26.

⁵⁶Philip, *Life and Times*, 558.

⁵⁷Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 28.

when reading sermons becomes fashionable where extempore preaching did once almost universally prevail.”⁵⁸ Josiah Smith, in a sermon defending Whitefield’s doctrine and character, said of his preaching, “his Discourses were very extraordinary, when we consider, how little they were premeditated.”⁵⁹

A final innovation was Whitefield’s preaching out-of-doors. Having the pulpits of the established church closed to him, Whitefield rebelled against the common mores and preached in fields, city squares, graveyards, private domiciles, and events of fete to proclaim his message of the New Birth. He used as a place to stand whatever was available. He used once a tombstone, the coffin of a condemned criminal under the gallows, a mount, steps, a wall, a horse-block, some turf, a porch window, a wagon, a balcony, a scaffold, a chaise, stairs of a windmill, a starting-post, a stump, a staircase in a house, and a table in the street. Eventually, an old Quaker built him a collapsible pulpit for open-air preaching.⁶⁰ Belden asserted, “It is estimated that from this pulpit alone he preached the gospel, with overwhelming power every time, to no less than ten million souls in England, Wales, Scotland, and America.”⁶¹

Itinerancy was a major area of contention and one of five points of antagonism from the anti-revivalists during the Great Awakening.⁶² In fact, Charles Chauncy, the

⁵⁸Stout, *The New England Soul*, 192.

⁵⁹Josiah Smith, *The Character, Preaching, Etc. of the Reverend Mr. Geo. Whitefield* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1740), 14 [on-line]; accessed 14 September 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

⁶⁰Ibid., 387. Whitefield’s pulpit is now in the possession of the American Tract Society in Garland, Texas.

⁶¹Belden, “What America Owes George Whitefield,” 446.

⁶²Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 70.

chief antagonist of the Awakening, put itinerant preaching first in his list of grievances with the leaders of the Awakening. Chauncy said, “Among the bad Things attending this Work, I shall first mention Itinerant Preaching. This has its Rise (lest in these Parts) from Mr. Whitefield; though I could never see, I own, upon what Warrant, either from Scripture or Reason, he went about Preaching from one Province and Parish to another, where the Gospel was already preach’d, and by Persons as well qualified for the Work, as he can pretend to be.”⁶³ Whitefield was suited to such work, for Benjamin Franklin said of him, “He had a loud and clear voice, and articulated his words so perfectly that he might be heard and understood at a great distance, especially as his auditories observed the most perfect silence.”⁶⁴

Whitefield first took to the field on Saturday, February 17, 1739, preaching from a mount at Rose-Green near Kingswood. His audience was composed of around two hundred colliers.⁶⁵ This move made Whitefield’s message accessible to common people and cleared a vista for massive crowds to hear him. As for Whitefield, he reveled in preaching out-of-doors. He declared, “My preaching in the Fields may displease some timorous bigotted Men; but I am throughly perswaded [sic] it pleases God; and why should I fear any Thing else?”⁶⁶ Again he exclaimed, “Blessed be God, all Things

⁶³Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England, A Treatise in Five Parts* (Boston: Printed by Rogers and Fowle for Samuel Eliot, 1743), 36 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

⁶⁴Franklin, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*, 257.

⁶⁵Hay, *Whitefield*, 14.

⁶⁶Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, From His Arrival in London, to His Departure from thence on His Way to Georgia*, 46.

happen for the Furtherance of the Gospel. I now preach to ten Times more People than I should, if I had been confined to the Churches.”⁶⁷ Maxson concluded, “Itinerancy of this sort was then a novelty and one of the most effective engines of the movement.”⁶⁸

Whitefield wrote of the experience, “The firmament above me, the prospect of the adjacent fields, with the sight of thousands, some in coaches, some on horseback, and some in the trees; and at times all affected and drenched in tears together; to which sometimes was added the solemnity of the approaching evening,—was almost too much for me, and quite overcame me.”⁶⁹ Hay describes scenes pulsating with excitement as Whitefield preached at Kennington Common. He wrote,

Kennington Common soon became one of Whitefield’s favourite grounds, especially on week–days. Here prodigious multitudes gathered together to hear him. He had sometimes eighty carriages, (in those days no inconsiderable number for even London to send forth on such an occasion) very many on horseback, and from thirty to forty thousand on foot. Their singing could be heard two miles off, and his own voice a mile. Waggon and scaffolds were hired by the people, that they might the better see and hear the wonderful preacher, who, ordained by a bishop, and gowned as a clergyman of the Established Church, had broken away from its rigid decorum, and, like his Divine Master, had gone into the highways and hedges to save the neglected souls of the masses of his countrymen.⁷⁰

Historians estimate Whitefield preached eighteen thousand times over the course of his thirty-four year ministry by utilizing such venues.⁷¹ If his times of group exhortation in society meetings and homes are calculated, it is estimated he expounded

⁶⁷Ibid., 53.

⁶⁸Maxson, *The Great Awakening*, 145.

⁶⁹Ibid., 17.

⁷⁰Hay, *Whitefield*, 22.

⁷¹John Gillies, *Memoirs of Rev. George Whitefield* (New Haven, CT: Whitmore & Buckingham and H. Mansfield, 1834), 284 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

the Word of God thirty thousand times *in toto*.⁷²

Thesis

The thesis of this dissertation is that Whitefield consistently employed *argumentum ad baculum* as a persuasive strategy in his sermons by using a variety of fearful messages which were nonfallacious and intended to effect a fearful response in the target audience. The goal of the dissertation is to locate fearful messages in Whitefield's sermons and identify the category of fear to which he is appealing. These appeals are analyzed to determine the kinds of material he used to formulate the individual appeals (i.e., his use of frightening anecdotes, gory word pictures, propositional statements, dramatic dialogue, frightening metaphors, historical quotes, and/or Scripture references). An assessment of the effect of these appeals on the audience is made through the examination of a small number of historical reports from eyewitnesses and Whitefield himself. This assessment seeks to establish a correlation between fear-laden responses from Whitefield's auditors and fear appeals in his extant sermons.

The dissertation presents a taxonomy of fear appeals used which include appeal to death, appeal to judgment, appeal to hell, appeal to spiritual failure, appeal to national suffering, appeal to personal suffering, appeal to the brevity of time, appeal to the Second Coming of Christ, appeal to the end of the world, and appeal to temptation. The dissertation argues that Whitefield used these fear appeals nonfallaciously. An assessment of whether a fear appeal is a fallacy or not, according to Walton, is made

⁷²Timothy K. Beougher, ed., *Is Your Christian Faith Real? Sermons by George Whitefield* (Wheaton: The Institute of Evangelism, 1999), 9.

based on the context of the argument. Walton points out that the *ad baculum* argument is nonfallacious when it takes the form of a warning as opposed to a threat.

Determining the effect of Whitefield's fear appeals on his audience is a difficult task. The success of a fear appeal may be evaluated in two ways: personal observation and verbal self-reports. Through personal observation one can see the reactions of audience members to certain messages in a live setting or via video. These reactions may include crying, shaking, facial contortions, body language, perspiration, fainting, a turning away of the eyes, exclamations of anxiety, and/or non-verbal sounds such as a gasp. Verbal self-reports can be attained through interviews with those who have been exposed to fear appeal messages. In such a report, the interviewer would ask questions about the fear level experienced from a message. Obviously, both of these avenues are impossible with Whitefield's audiences. The researcher is forced to observe through the extant historical records. Therefore, an attempt is made to ascertain audience reaction through written reports of those who heard Whitefield, those who may have observed one of his meetings and recorded their observations, and Whitefield's own observations of his auditors as noted in his *Journals* and letters.

Though there has been a significant amount of research into fear appeals in a variety of disciplines in the past fifty years, religious fear appeals in sermonic discourse have largely been ignored. Research that combines fear appeals and preaching is almost nonexistent. This writer knows of no examination of fear appeals in the sermons of any preacher.

Additionally, the sermons of Whitefield are widely overlooked for study. Though much has been written on the life of Whitefield, his place in the Great

Awakening, and his influence on Evangelicalism, little attention has been given to the content of his sermons. Jerome Mahaffey concurred, inveighing, “The focus of previous Whitefield studies has been largely contextual, discussing events of his life and his responses as recorded in his *Journals* and other primary sources penned by his contemporaries. Explanations for his eloquence have been posited that include his solid character, dramatic acting ability, marketing skills, public relations efforts, and even a spiritual anointing. However, these studies seldom investigated the substance of his preaching and the logic of his arguments. Successful persuasion will always contain a component of logic.”⁷³ In addition to clearing a vista into the substance of Whitefield’s sermons, this research project will suggest principles for fear appeal usage in the pulpit in an age when they are virtually extinct.

Research Limitations

Although this research is based on one hundred extant sermons, the scope of this research must be limited due to the preponderance of issues concerning preaching and persuasion. Whitefield used multiple types of emotional appeals and persuasive techniques. Beyond the study of Whitefield’s sermons, there is a treasure trove of sermons from the same period that could produce similar research results. This dissertation does not attempt to present an exhaustive analysis of fear appeals in the preaching of the Great Awakening. Nor is the dissertation a comprehensive study of Whitefield’s sermons and their substance. Also, Whitefield produced a large number of

⁷³Jerome Dean Mahaffey, *Preaching Politics: The Religious Rhetoric of George Whitefield and the Founding of a New Nation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), x.

letters, tracts, and pamphlets, which are not part of this fear appeal study. This dissertation is strictly concerned with fear appeals in the published sermons of George Whitefield.

Research limitations. This dissertation is limited to the sermons of one preacher among many during the First Great Awakening. Though many other worthy revivalists could be selected for study, Whitefield is the subject of this dissertation because of his significant influence during the First Great Awakening and its aftermath. Noll contended that Whitefield's 1740 preaching tour of New England was the key event in the Great Awakening.⁷⁴ Noll described this preaching tour as the most spectacular of that era and "among the most remarkable events in American religious history."⁷⁵ As previously stated, Stout called it "the most sensational event in the history of New England preaching."⁷⁶ Gaustad asserted that it was "the greatest single evangelistic tour in New England's history."⁷⁷ Therefore, Whitefield is selected because of his wide sphere of influence on his time and ours.

Methodological limitations. Unlike the country domine, as an itinerant evangelist Whitefield preached his sermons to multiple audiences throughout the course of his ministry. As such, the content of his sermons evolved over time. Additionally, Whitefield may have altered the content of sermons depending on his context and the

⁷⁴Noll, "George Whitefield," 1170.

⁷⁵Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 104.

⁷⁶Stout, *The New England Soul*, 189.

⁷⁷Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England*, 25.

inspiration of the moment. On some occasions, Whitefield did not even select a text to preach before entering the pulpit. He also used improvisation and adjusted his sermons to the contours of his context. Therefore, the focus of this dissertation is limited to the content of the sermons Whitefield actually committed to paper.⁷⁸ Since Whitefield did not manuscript all of his sermons before preaching them and altered those written for publication, this dissertation may not treat Whitefield's messages precisely as they were preached, but one must assume that printed versions are fair representations of his preaching.

Background

I have been interested in the life and preaching of George Whitefield for nearly ten years. His relentless quest for holiness and unquenchable thirst for souls were seared into my heart after I acquired and read Arnold Dallimore's thorough two volume biography as a Master of Divinity student. When I read of the enormous effect his preaching had on his auditors, I became more interested in the methods he used to move them. I became enamored with Whitefield's gifts of oratory and persuasion. During my Ph.D. course work, I stumbled across a statement by Harry Stout in *The New England Soul* that set me on the path of fear appeals in connection with Whitefield. Stout claimed, "Although sin and damnation were not ignored in regular preaching, neither were they used to dominate and terrorize congregations, at least not before 1740."⁷⁹ I began to

⁷⁸This includes the Gurney sermons which were not actually published by Whitefield. These sermons were taken down in shorthand as Whitefield preached them on Wednesday nights at his London Tabernacle. Gurney claims they are verbatim. They were published without Whitefield's knowledge or consent.

⁷⁹Stout, *The New England Soul*, 155.

question what influence Whitefield may have had on this apparent shift, considering his celebrated 1740 preaching tour of New England. Was there an injection of “fire and brimstone” in sermons as a result of Whitefield’s preaching? Did Whitefield rely heavily on fear appeals as tools of persuasion?

Though it cannot be stated dogmatically, it is plausible that Whitefield set the tone and pattern for the preaching of fear witnessed in evangelical sermons to the present time. That is by no means to suggest Whitefield originated such preaching. Others before him and contemporary with him could certainly evoke images of fear to surpass that of Whitefield. Tracy maintained that Whitefield’s meeting and subsequent friendship with Gilbert Tennent was one of the most important facets of Whitefield’s first tour of the American colonies.⁸⁰ In fact, Maxson asserts Whitefield was noticeably influenced in his preaching by Tennent. When he visited New York the next year, his hearers recognized a roughness in his preaching that had not been there before.⁸¹ Maxson described Tennent’s preaching style as containing such vituperation that some left his sermons with disgust.⁸² Tennent also made use of fear in his preaching. The use of fear by Tennent may have been part of his influence on Whitefield’s preaching.

When Whitefield heard Tennent preach in his pulpit in Brunswick, New Jersey, the experience had a profound effect on him. Whitefield’s impressions of the event were later recorded in his journal. He wrote,

⁸⁰Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening. A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (Boston: Published by Charles Tappan, 1845), 53 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

⁸¹Maxson, *The Great Awakening*, 49.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 31.

Then I went to the Meeting House to hear Mr. Gilbert Tennent preach, and never before heard such a searching sermon. He went to the Bottom indeed, and did not daub with untempered Mortar. He convinced me more and more that we can preach the Gospel of Christ no further than we have experienced the Power of it in our own hearts. Being deeply convicted of Sin, and driven from Time to Time off his false Bottom and Dependencies, by God's Holy Spirit, at his first Conversion, he has learned experimentally to dissect the Heart of the natural Man. Hypocrites must either soon be converted or enraged at his Preaching. He is a Son of Thunder, and does not fear the Faces of Men. After Sermon we spent the Evening together at Mr. Noble's House. My Soul was humbled and melted down with a Sense of God's Mercies, and I found more and more what a Babe and Novice I was in the Things of God.⁸³

Though Whitefield may not be the originator of fearful preaching, he may very well be the popularizer of it.⁸⁴ Whitefield conducted seven preaching tours of the American colonies during which he preached multiple times each day to throngs of thousands. During his 1740 preaching tour, which intensified the Great Awakening, Whitefield preached to audiences equaling half the population of the seven colonies.⁸⁵ The magnitude of his labors during this preaching tour is capsulized in one statement: "Preached to ten thousand persons every day for twenty days."⁸⁶ In all, it is estimated eighty percent of the colonial population heard Whitefield preach through his seven

⁸³Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Embarking After the Embargo, to His Arrival at Savannah in Georgia*, 35.

⁸⁴Many itinerants, including Davenport and Tennent, also employed fear appeals in their preaching. Gaustad stated, "Throughout New England, other itinerant ministers had begun to follow the example of Whitefield and Tennent, while many resident pastors became zealous evangelists in and around their own respective parishes," Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 35. Also, in 1713 Solomon Stoddard had published *The Efficacy of the Fear of Hell to Restrain Men From Sin*, in which he advocated using the fear of hell to persuade auditors.

⁸⁵Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 13.

⁸⁶Edwin Noah Hardy, *George Whitefield: The Matchless Soul Winner* (New York: American Tract Society, 1938), 278.

preaching tours of the colonies from 1738 to 1770.⁸⁷ With such broad exposure, Whitefield's style of preaching would have had a tremendous influence on local pastors and other itinerants. In short, Whitefield changed people's expectations of preaching.

Noll concurred, saying,

By the mid-1740s, evangelical preaching had also emerged as a distinct form of Christian proclamation. Whitefield was critical in this process, since he influenced so many people in so many places by what he said, as well as how he said it. Forthright preaching of repentance, the redemptive work of Christ, the necessity of faith and the privileges of holy living were Whitefield's sermonic stock in trade. But because he usually dispensed with a written-out sermon text, because he preached intentionally for emotional as well as intellectual effect, and because he called on individuals to respond as individuals to his message, these traits also became characteristic of evangelical preaching in general.⁸⁸

Gaustad agreed, saying, "Sermon style, primarily by reason of Whitefield's example, was altered to a looser, more extemporaneous delivery."⁸⁹

As I investigated the use of fear in preaching and communication, I was introduced to the logical fallacy *argumentum ad baculum*. This fallacy serves as an umbrella term for a number of other strands of research in communication and persuasion. One of those strands is fear appeals, which flow from the study of *argumentum ad baculum*. The study of fear appeals pinpoints the intersection of a plethora of disciplines. For example, in logical reasoning (or empirical logic) fear appeals are studied under the fallacy *argumentum ad baculum*. In sociological and psychological research fear appeals are studied for their effect on consumers and the public at large. In classical rhetoric, fear appeals would be a subsidiary of *pathos* in Aristotle's classical triad of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*.

⁸⁷Kevin A. Miller, "Did You Know?" *Christian History* 38, no. 2 (1993): 2.

⁸⁸Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 132.

⁸⁹Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 107.

Methodology

The materials for this study include the books and articles discussing fear appeal research. As a relatively new area of research and interest, these books and articles are readily available at most university libraries. Of course the primary material needed for this research project is the sermons of George Whitefield. *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield*, which includes his sermons, letters, journals, and tracts, was published not long after his death.

Availability is less of a problem than the editing process the sermons went through over years of repeated editions being published. More is said about the editing process below. However, through the Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800, books.google.com, and openlibrary.org, first editions of Whitefield's sermons were readily obtained for study. Most treatments of Whitefield's sermons are produced using later editions of *Works*. However, by using early editions, Whitefield's purest words and thoughts were available for study. Whitefield's journals, letters, and tracts were used to place the sermons in their proper context.

The first editions or earliest editions available of Whitefield's one hundred extant sermons used for this dissertation were scoured for fear appeals, considering a fear appeal to be any message containing frightening content. Fear appeals were not limited by length or word count. They can be as short as a simple sentence or as long as several paragraphs.

After the fearful messages were identified in Whitefield's sermons, a determination was made as to what is being appealed to that arouses fear. Possibilities included, but were not limited to, death, hell, judgment, failure, shame, suffering, disaster, physical sickness, and the brevity of time. The items in the above taxonomy

have the potential of causing fear in individuals.

In addition to cataloguing the various appeals to fear, the appeals were studied to identify the kind of material of which they consist. For example, the appeal to fear could be made through a scary anecdote, a Scripture reference about hell, a sharp propositional statement, a gory word picture, an analogy, a powerful exclamation, a dramatic dialogue, or a metaphor.

After determining the categories of fear appealed to and the types of material used to construct them, I investigated the context of the appeals. In order to do this, other primary and secondary materials were used to discover the context of the sermons. The context of a sermon could be a funeral, a natural disaster, a war, an execution, a bout of terrible weather, or a strenuous sea voyage. The goal was to uncover whether or not Whitefield used his surroundings to enhance the audience's sense of fear when circumstances provided him an opportunity. There is evidence that he did so. Primary material such as Whitefield's journals and letters, as well as secondary biographical and historical studies, aided in this discovery process. Similar sources were used to determine audience response.

Finally, the dissertation evaluates the ethicality of these appeals. Ethicality was determined based on Whitefield's faithfulness to Scripture, his motivation, and whether or not he used the direct or indirect form of *argumentum ad baculum*. My conclusion was that Whitefield acted ethically in the use of fear appeals.

The rhetorical study of Whitefield's preaching presents the rhetorician with several limitations. First, the availability of his sermons is minimal. Although it is

estimated that Whitefield preached over fifteen thousand times,⁹⁰ only approximately one hundred sermons are extant.⁹¹ As an itinerant who preached extemporaneously, Whitefield preached his sermons multiple times and did not manuscript them all. This paucity of sermons renders any rhetorical research limited in scope and the conclusions tentative.

Eighteen of the one hundred sermons were published by Joseph Gurney.

Dallimore claimed that, at the time the sermons were delivered, Whitefield was practically an invalid. He further stated the so called sermons were “Wednesday evening

⁹⁰Noll, “George Whitefield,” 1170. Gillies, Ryle, and Beougher estimate the number to be 18,000 times. It is unknown the method used to arrive at either number.

⁹¹There is disagreement over the exact number of extant Whitefield sermons. Dallimore, who wrote a thorough and definitive biography of Whitefield, stated there are 63 authentic Whitefield sermons. He adopted this number from Tyerman’s biography. O. C. Edwards in *A History of Preaching* adopts the number 63 from Dallimore. However, Shankle, in her 1990 Ph.D. dissertation, claimed there were 110 Whitefield sermons. The discrepancy is in what is considered a sermon. Shankle is calculating other types of discourse as sermons (e.g., lectures, tracts, addresses, published letters). Shankle stated, “Scholars do not agree on the number of sermons. Tyerman asserts that there are sixty-three authentic sermons, arguing that the eighteen shorthand sermons published near the end of Whitefield’s life are not authentic. Dallimore accepts Tyerman’s estimate while Houser, on the authority of Bishop J. Ryle, said there are only fifty sermons. I have compiled a list of one hundred and ten. It may be that further research will show some of these sermons to be duplicates or that some sermons listed as having the same scripture will actually be distinct sermons. Nonetheless, without a comprehensive list of the sermons, no one really knows how many are extant,” Nancy Wilhite Shankle, “George Whitefield (1714-1770): A Critical Edition of *The Marks of the New Birth* and *A Sermon on Regeneration* Together with a Descriptive Calendar of his Sermons” (Ph.D. diss., Texas A & M University, 1990), 251-52. Flavius Leslie Conrad, Jr. in his 1959 dissertation, “The Preaching of George Whitefield, With Special Reference to the American Colonies: A Study of His Published Sermons,” settled on 78 sermons. Mahaffey, in *Preaching Politics* also accepts the number 110. Lambert stated in his 1990 dissertation that there are about 100 extant Whitefield sermons. J. I. Packer contended there are 75 Whitefield sermons. This dissertation uses the 57 sermons in *Works*, 2 sermons published by D. McFarlan in *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century, Particularly at Cambuslang*, 18 sermons published by Joseph Gurney, an address called *A Short Address to Persons of All Denominations*, and 23 sermons recently located and published by Quinta Press. Accounting for several sermons which appear in more than one of these lists, the total comes to 100 sermons. See the Appendixes for these sermons.

talks” and “rambling conversations with his own people and were faultily transcribed.”⁹² Whitefield had no knowledge of the forthcoming publication and had not given his permission for publication. When he saw them, he was “shocked” and wished they had never been published.⁹³ Gurney claimed to have written these sermons down in shorthand and asserted they were verbatim reproductions of Whitefield’s preaching,⁹⁴ though Whitefield’s executors denounced the sermons as unfair representations of his preaching.⁹⁵ However, the “talks” look very much like sermons. They are lengthy, have structure, are based on texts, are addressed to saints and sinners, contain illustrations, and call for a commitment to Christ. Most objective historians accept the “talks” as sermons.⁹⁶ However, Whitefield was tired and physically sick during the period of time the sermons were delivered, which may have robbed him of his characteristic power of recall and expression. Cornelius Winter, one of Whitefield’s young assistants, said of the sermons, “The eighteen taken in short hand, and faithfully transcribed by Mr. Gurney, have been supposed to do discredit to his memory, and therefore they were suppressed. But they who have been accustomed to hear him, may collect from them much of his

⁹²Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 193.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Gurney, *Eighteen Sermons*, title page.

⁹⁵George Whitefield, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 3:406-07. A footnote on p. 406 states that Whitefield’s executors originally agreed to recommend Gurney’s sermons to the public for sale, in exchange for a portion of the profit to be given to Whitefield’s estate. However, after receiving nine of the sermons for review the executors refused to recommend them to the public or to be connected with them in any way. They said they could not authenticate them in language or sentiment and judged them unfit for publication. The executors were so concerned about the sermons tarnishing Whitefield’s reputation that they offered to pay all expenses incurred by Gurney if he would desist with plans to publish them.

⁹⁶See Appendix 2 for a list of the Gurney sermons.

genuine preaching. They were far from being the best specimens that might have been produced. He preached many of them when, in fact, he was almost incapable of preaching at all.”⁹⁷

A second limitation to the study of Whitefield’s sermons is the editing process they endured. As an extemporaneous preacher, he likely preached his sermons in various ways, adding and subtracting material to suit the audience, the particulars of the occasion, the impressions of the Holy Spirit, or his own disposition. The sermons that are available are thus probably not word for word representations of how Whitefield preached them. Though they are complete, they were edited by Whitefield for publication. As the sermons were published in subsequent editions, they were edited further in response to his critics.⁹⁸ As Whitefield matured in years, he sought to remove from his works questionable passages that may have been more palatable to a young man.⁹⁹ Moreover, some of his sermons were edited by printers and republished without his permission during his lifetime and after his death. Due to this extensive editing, the research for this dissertation, where possible, was based on the earliest editions of these sermons, as they are closest in time to the actual delivery and believed to be the best representation of what was preached.

A third limitation is the time frame represented by most of his published sermons. Though Whitefield preached until his death on September 30, 1770, forty-six of the sermons edited and published by Whitefield were written before he was twenty-

⁹⁷William Jay, *Memoirs of the Life and Character of the Late Rev. Cornelius Winter* (New York: Samuel Whiting & Co., 1811), 27 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

⁹⁸Shankle, “George Whitefield,” iv.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 172.

five years old.¹⁰⁰ Most of his one hundred extant sermons were published at the beginning of his ministry, the latter part of the 1730s and the first half of the 1740s, or in the last year of his life. From the mid-1740s to 1771, only a handful of sermons were published. Those that were published were taken down in shorthand and published by someone else. The sermons published at the end of his life are Gurney's transcriptions, published without Whitefield's consent. Therefore, nearly three decades of Whitefield's preaching ministry is poorly represented by the extant sermons. The breadth of Whitefield's preaching ministry is unaccounted for and especially leaves a void of his more mature and developed sermons. This is due in part to the fact that Whitefield stopped publishing altogether. Much of the controversy and grief Whitefield experienced early in his ministry was a result of unwise publications containing overzealous statements.

A final limitation in the study of these sermons is the move from oral to written communication. Cicero stated, "Delivery, I say, has the sole and supreme power in oratory; without it, a speaker of the highest mental capacity can be held in no esteem; while one of moderate abilities, with this qualification, may surpass even those of the highest talent. To this Demosthenes is said to have assigned the first place, when he was asked what was the chief requisite in eloquence; to this the second, and to this the third."¹⁰¹ Delivery was Whitefield's number one asset as a preacher. Philip stated, "Foote and Garrick maintained that his oratory was not at its full height, until he had repeated a

¹⁰⁰Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, 128.

¹⁰¹Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Oratory and Orators*, trans. and ed. John Selby Watson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), 255.

discourse forty times.”¹⁰² This study is limited to words on paper.

Whitefield was primarily an oral preacher. He did very little writing of sermons. Winter said, “I never knew him engaged in the composition of a sermon until he was on board ship, when he employed himself partly in the composition of sermons, and reading very attentively the history of England, written by different authors. I never met with any thing like the form of a skeleton of a sermon among his papers, with which I was permitted to be very familiar, nor did he ever give me any idea of the importance of being habituated to the planning of a sermon.”¹⁰³ Much of the emotion communicated through the delivery is lost in the printed form of the sermons. They simply cannot mimic the dramatic and emotional oratory of hearing Whitefield in person. His patterns of pitch, pace, intonation, volume, facial expression, and gesture cannot be duplicated in written form. As John Broadus stated, “The sermons we have were mere preparations, which in free delivery were so filled out with the thoughts suggested in the course of living speech, and so transfigured and glorified by enkindled imagination, as to be utterly different from the dull, cold thing that here lies before us.”¹⁰⁴ Luke Tyerman agreed, saying, “His printed sermons fail to convey a correct conception of his spoken ones. The preacher’s sonorous voice, his intonations, his actions, his facial expressions, are things which could not be embodied in his published discourses; and yet, to things like these,

¹⁰²Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of George Whitefield* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 558.

¹⁰³Jay, *Memoirs*, 17.

¹⁰⁴John A. Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004), 222.

the discourses were greatly indebted for their astonishing effects.”¹⁰⁵ However, the essential message that Whitefield preached remains intact. Whitefield’s pattern in using *argumentum ad baculum* is in no way clouded by the move from oral to printed communication.

Conclusion

This dissertation seeks to focus attention on the appropriate means for the use of fear in preaching. Logical reasoning and social science give aid in this endeavor through the explanation of *argumentum ad baculum* and fear appeals. The use of fear for persuasion is examined in the sermons of George Whitefield, who popularized emotional preaching. Whitefield’s published sermons reveal a wide use of the *ad baculum* argument, which was employed effectively and ethically.

¹⁰⁵Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876-1877; reprint, Azle, TX: Need of the Times Publishers, 1995), 1:94.

CHAPTER 2

ARGUMENTUM AD BACULUM

This chapter attempts to give a summation of *argumentum ad baculum*. The literature dealing with the *ad baculum* argument is convoluted, inconsistent, and contradictory. Few logicians seem to be able to agree on its scope or the nature of its fallaciousness. In fact, Wreen's critique of the two most popular logic textbooks in North America is that they offer superficial explanations and examples and that their treatment of the argument is not only incomplete but wrong.¹ Actually, few textbooks of logic give an extensive treatment to the argument and many do not even mention the *ad baculum* argument at all.² A survey of approximately one hundred and thirty textbooks of logic and reasoning for this dissertation found that only thirty-one have any kind of discussion of the argument. Additionally, no more than a handful of articles have been devoted to the *ad baculum*. It is not within the purview of this dissertation to reconcile the many

¹Michael J. Wreen, "A Bolt of Fear," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 22 (1989): 131-40. The textbooks are those by Copi and Hurley.

²Douglas N. Walton, *Scare Tactics: Arguments that Appeal to Fear and Threats* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 31. Walton stated, "It would seem to be a characteristic of the standard treatment that a slight preponderance, that is, somewhat over 50 percent of the books that do have sections on fallacies or treat of informal logic, do not mention the *argumentum ad baculum* at all, and many of the textbooks that do mention it . . . treat it very briefly as just another species of irrelevance."

views and nuances of *argumentum ad baculum*. Rather, this dissertation is concerned with *argumentum ad baculum* as the rhetorical use of fear for persuasive ends in pulpit discourse.

A History of the *Ad Baculum* Argument

The history of *argumentum ad baculum* is vague. Textbooks on logic give its origin only a passing reference. Rescher said merely that the fallacies of relevance have been the subject of study by logicians for centuries.³ Woods argued that the first use of *argumentum ad baculum*, though unnamed, is found in *Port-Royal Logic*, published anonymously by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole in 1662.⁴ In chapter XIX Arnauld and Nicole list twenty-seven fallacies under the title “Of The Different Ways of Reasoning Ill, Which Are Called Sophisms.”⁵ This list of sophisms continues into chapter XX, which is titled “Of The Bad Reasonings Which Are Common In Civil Life And In Ordinary Discourse.”⁶ Under this head, the authors described a sophism that very much resembles *argumentum ad baculum*. Arnauld and Nicole described the use of force, fear, and/or intimidation for the purposes of persuasion:

³Nicholas Rescher, *Introduction to Logic* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964), 78.

⁴John Woods, “*Argumentum Ad Baculum*,” *Argumentation* 12 (1998): 494. Charles L. Hamblin, *Fallacies* (London: Methuen, 1971), 156-57, arrives at the same conclusion as Woods as to the first use of the *ad baculum* argument.

⁵Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *The Port-Royal Logic*, 5th ed., trans. Thomas Spencer Baynes (Edinburgh: James Gordon, 1861), 246 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

⁶*Ibid.*, 266.

We may derive, moreover, convincing arguments in matters of religion from the manner in which they are advanced. When we see, for example, in different ages of the church, and principally in the last, men who endeavour to propagate their opinions by bloodshed and the sword; when we see them arm themselves against the church by schism, against temporal powers by revolt; when we see people without the common commission, without miracles, without any external marks of piety, and with the plain marks rather of licentiousness, undertake to change the faith and discipline of the church in so criminal a manner, it is more than sufficient to make reasonable men reject them, and to prevent the most ignorant from listening to them.⁷

What Arnauld and Nicole called the sophism of manner is very much like *argumentum ad baculum* when defined as appeal to force.

Logicians are unsure where the phrase *argumentum ad baculum* was first used or who conceived it.⁸ Three of the more well-known *ad* fallacies were created and introduced by John Locke in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* written in 1690.⁹ Locke explained the three arguments along with the *ad hominem* argument, which he stated was already known, but does not mention an *ad baculum* argument. Hamblin contended that since these *ad* fallacies gained popularity and were copied by other logic textbooks up to the twentieth century, someone along the way must have added the *ad baculum* fallacy to the list. However, no one is sure exactly when or who did so.¹⁰ Walton stated that in his comprehensive search, he found the first use of the term

⁷Ibid., 289-90.

⁸Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 32.

⁹John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Edinburgh: Mundell & Son, 1801), 3:185-86 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

¹⁰Charles L. Hamblin, *Fallacies* (London: Methuen, 1970), 159-60. These are *argumentum ad iudicium*, *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, and *argumentum ad verecundiam*. Locke states that *argumentum ad hominem* was already known by that name.

argumentum ad baculum in John Grier Hibben's *Logic: Deductive and Inductive*, published in 1906.¹¹ Walton also cited Mellone's definition from the 1913 edition of his *An Introductory Text Book of Logic*, acknowledging that the first edition of Mellone was published in 1902 and that Mellone may have mentioned the *ad baculum* argument before Hibben did.¹² Walton left this question unanswered in what is purported to be the first book devoted wholly to the *ad baculum* argument. As it turns out, Walton was right about Mellone's 1902 edition. Mellone did mention the *ad baculum* in his 1902 publication. In that first edition, Mellone defined the *ad baculum* as an appeal to physical force.¹³ Walton, however, was not only mistaken about Hibben's text being the earliest use of *argumentum ad baculum*; Mellone's text is also not the earliest. The earliest text of logic I have been able to locate containing this phrase is Thomas Fowler's 1883 text, *The Elements of Deductive Logic*.¹⁴ Fowler listed *argumentum ad baculum* in a list of

¹¹Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 33. Walton's research and findings are important because he claims to have written the first book devoted wholly to the *ad baculum* argument.

¹²*Ibid.*, 35. It is probable Walton was guessing because he did not have access to a 1902 edition of Mellone.

¹³Sydney Herbert Mellone, *An Introductory Text Book of Logic* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1902), 321-22 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

¹⁴Though Fowler's 1883 publication is the earliest appearance of *argumentum ad baculum* in a logic text discovered to date, I did find it much earlier in a number of other types of publications. In *Notes, During a Visit to Egypt, Nubia, the Oasis Boeris, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem*, a travel log published in 1824, Sir Frederick Henniker used the *ad hominem* and *ad baculum* phrases in relating an incident during his journey. Henniker related visiting Mahabdie on New Year's Day and seeking to visit the crocodile mummy pits. As Henniker and his party traveled, they encountered a village of Arabs from which they sought a guide. The Arabs were deathly afraid of the place and agreed

sub forms of the fallacy *ignoratio elenchi*.¹⁵ Likewise, Welton, in an 1896 text also mentions the *ad baculum* argument. He also called it a sub form of *ignoratio elenchi*.¹⁶ Additionally, Stock wrote of the *ad baculum* in his 1888 work and the 1903 revision of it, putting both before Hibben's 1906 text. It cannot be stated dogmatically that Fowler's text is the earliest use of the *ad baculum* phrase; however, it appeared twenty-three years earlier than the one found by Walton. In spite of the discovery of the earlier texts, the *ad*

to guide Henniker's party only on the condition they would not enter the place and could run away on immediate sight of it. A group of thirty Arab men began preparing for the journey as if they would never return. Henniker related they took an hour to say good-bye to their children and wives as if they would never return. The place was greatly feared by the Arabs and they believed they would face certain death. One father gave his son his turban and another his shoes, indicating they would take their father's place, for they did not expect to ever see them again. Henniker stated, "This treaty and ceremony lasted more than an hour—at length we set forth with our posse comitatus all armed. We had not yet cleared the village when we were beset by women and children, who, with frantic cries and gestures, took up dust by handfuls, and threw it in the air: as yet, however, there was no harm done, for the dust fell in their own faces. We were still advancing when a woman, brandishing a long staff, iron bound at either end, stepped forward, like Hercules in petticoats, and placing herself between our would-be-guides and us, made such a display of the *argumentum ad hominem* as well as *ad baculum*, that our thirty armed men positively refused to accompany us another step. I must confess that it was a disappointment without sorrow, and we commenced a retraite honorable," Frederick Henniker, *Notes, During a Visit to Egypt, Nubia, the Oasis Boeris, Mount Sinai, and Jerusalem* (London: John Murray, 1824), 99.

This incident, though not in a text of logic, proves that the phrase was used as early as 1824 in reference to a verbal display of persuasion using threat of force. The first edition of Henniker's work was published in 1823, but does not use the *ad baculum* phrase.

¹⁵Thomas Fowler, *The Elements of Deductive Logic* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1883), 147 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet. "Ignoratio elenchi, or ignoring the question, is an evasion of the real question in dispute, and attempting to prove something else that apparently includes the thing in dispute," W. H. Hill, *Elements of Philosophy Comprising Logic and Ontology Or General Metaphysics* (London: Hervey Press, 2008), 57.

¹⁶James Welton, *A Manual of Logic* (London: W. B. Clive, University Correspondence College Press, 1896), 2:289 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

baculum still receives a paucity of attention compared to other fallacies. The lack of attention to the *ad baculum* may be attributable to its ambiguity and the fact that some authors may not have been aware of it.

Defining the *Ad Baculum* Argument

Argumentum ad baculum may literally be defined as an argument to the stick, club, or rod¹⁷ (i.e., an appeal to force). The argument is considered by most logicians to be an informal fallacy of relevance in logical reasoning.

Copi contended there is no universally accepted classification for fallacies.¹⁸ However, a fallacy in logic is simply a type of incorrect argument, an error in reasoning and argumentation.¹⁹ Whately held that all weak arguments are fallacies.²⁰ Copi reasoned that some fallacies may seem at first to be correct, but upon further investigation are found to be incorrect.²¹

Fallacies are typically divided into two categories, formal and informal. A formal fallacy is fallacious in its form or abstract logical structure and does not pertain to the content of the argument. An informal fallacy makes errors in content including

¹⁷John B. Bennett, *Rational Thinking: A Study in Basic Logic* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), 46.

¹⁸Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 59.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Richard Whately, *Elements of Logic*, 4th ed. (London: B. Fellowes, 1831), 186.

²¹Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 59.

evidence, relevance, and clarity.²² Walton asserted, “A fallacy is an underlying, systematic kind of error or deceptive tactic of argument used to deceptively get the best of a speech partner.”²³ A fallacy of relevance is when an argument is not logically germane to the issue at hand.²⁴ It is, therefore, irrelevant and unrelated. The fallacy is often used in logic and rhetoric when rational argument has failed.²⁵

Argumentum ad baculum is considered to be this type of fallacy by most logicians. Rescher declared, “The logical inadequacy of such methods is generally so transparent that the *argumentum ad baculum* is usually employed as a last resort, after other, more logically persuasive tactics have proven unsuccessful.”²⁶ Werkmeister agreed, saying, “Threats of retaliation, of economic or social pressure, and of brute force have been substituted for evidence and for logical argumentation. But threats and the use of force cannot validate a single argument; they cannot establish the truth or falsity of a proposition or a theory; for truth is nothing but accordance with facts, and such accordance cannot be established by force if it does not exist in itself.”²⁷ Carmichael observed, “Seeing that they cannot refute an argument logically, some persons will resort

²²Daniel Bonevac, *Simple Logic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 87.

²³Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 25.

²⁴Rescher, *Introduction to Logic*, 78.

²⁵Paul Herrick, *The Many Worlds of Logic*, 2nd ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 2000), 245.

²⁶Rescher, *Introduction to Logic*, 79.

²⁷W. H. Werkmeister, *An Introduction to Critical Thinking: A Beginner's Text in Logic*, rev. ed. (Lincoln, NE: Johnsen Publishing Company, 1957), 57.

to coercion, or intimidation, or some other kind of force in order to prevail. Of course nothing of the kind can make two plus two anything but four, and logical conclusions have the same rigor as arithmetic.”²⁸

Stock addressed the *ad baculum* in his 1888 and 1903 texts via examples rather than a formal definition. He wrote, “The *argumentum ad baculum* is unquestionably a form of irrelevancy. To knock a man down when he differs from you in opinion may prove your strength, but hardly your logic.”²⁹ Stock attributed all the invention of the *ad* fallacies, including the *ad baculum*, to “the Latin writers.”³⁰ Hibben described the *ad baculum* argument as that which “repudiates all argument and resorts to force in order to establish one’s point.”³¹ Schiller included the *ad baculum* in his 1912 textbook in a list of fallacies of irrelevance, but makes no comment on it.³² Sigwick placed the *ad baculum* first in a list of *ad* fallacies and refers to it as appeal to force.³³ McNair offered this commentary on the argument in his 1914 text, “In this all argumentation is made to

²⁸Peter A. Carmichael, *Reasoning: A Textbook of Elementary Logic* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1978), 24.

²⁹George Stock, *Deductive Logic* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1888), 379 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 378.

³¹John Grier Hibben, *Logic: Deductive and Inductive* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1906), 163-64 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

³²F. C. S. Schiller, *Formal Logic: A Scientific and Social Problem* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1912), 359 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

³³Alfred Sigwick, *Elementary Logic* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1914), 145 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

give way to the forces of personal opposition and to the power of money.”³⁴ Castell does not mention the *ad baculum* argument in the text of his 1935 college textbook on logic, but he does offer a brief definition in the glossary. He defined it as appeal to force.³⁵ Wolf applied two sentences to the argument in his 1930 text of four hundred and fifty-five pages. Though he does not use the term ‘appeal to force,’ he defined the argument in that sense. He said the argument is akin to putting a pistol to someone’s head and that it is a favorite of gangsters and dictators.³⁶ Likewise, Copi defined the *ad baculum* argument as appeal to force. He devoted approximately half a page to the explanation of the argument, which consists primarily of examples.³⁷

Unlike the above mentioned logicians, Coffey called the argument a minor form of *ignoratio elenchi* and defined it as appeal to physical force.³⁸ Eaton also described the argument as appeal to physical force.³⁹ This definition is more narrow than those in the vast majority of other logic texts. Rescher defined it as “any argument

³⁴George Hastings McNair, *A Class Room Logic* (New York: The Ethlas Press, 1914), 338 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

³⁵Alburey Castell, *A College Logic: An Introduction to the Study of Argument and Proof* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 372.

³⁶A. Wolf, *Textbook of Logic* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1930), 364 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

³⁷Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 60-61.

³⁸Peter Coffey, *The Science of Logic: An Inquiry into the Principles of Accurate Thought and Scientific Method* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 2:316 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

³⁹Ralph M. Eaton, *General Logic: An Introductory Survey* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1931), 347.

that rests on a threatened use of force to cause acceptance of its conclusion.”⁴⁰ Creighton concluded a long discussion of the more common fallacies with a truncated paragraph on the *ad baculum* argument. He indicated, “When all these forms of the fallacy fail, there is still one recourse remaining, which takes the matter beyond the boundaries of logic; though, indeed, the other forms are in their way quite as irrelevant. This is the *argumentum ad baculum*, which we may translate in current phrase as the ‘appeal to the big stick.’”⁴¹ Toohey, in his 1918 text elaborated on the argument, saying, “The *argumentum ad baculum* is an appeal to physical force; as when a strong nation, by the threat of invasion, extorts a concession from a weaker nation, or when a disputant, by loud and continuous talking and by pounding on the table, attempts to stifle all opposition to his contentions.”⁴²

⁴⁰Rescher, *Introduction to Logic*, 79. Bennet also defined it as appeal to force on p. 46 of his work and Werkmeister does as well on p. 56 of his text.

⁴¹James Edwin Creighton, *An Introductory Logic* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 221. This volume was originally published by Creighton in 1898. The 2nd edition, published in 1900 does not mention the *ad baculum* argument. On p. 168 of the 1900 edition Creighton states, “But, on the other hand, there are the following special ways of obscuring the issue:—*argumentum ad hominem*, *argumentum ad populum*, *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, and *argumentum ad verecundiam*.” Creighton does not include the *ad baculum* in this list. In fact, since Mellone was published in 1902 and Hibben in 1906, Creighton may have gotten the idea to include the *ad baculum* from them or another text of logic published in the same time frame. Though the author of this dissertation has been unable to locate a copy of the 1898 edition it is unlikely Creighton included the *ad baculum* and then took it out for the 1900 edition. The edition cited is the 3rd which was “thoroughly revised with the addition of new problems and examples” in 1909. Harold Smart revised Creighton’s work in 1932 for the 5th edition, but left the paragraph on the *ad baculum* argument as it is in the 1909 publication.

⁴²John Joseph Toohey, *An Elementary Handbook of Logic* (New York: Schwartz, Kirwin and Fauss, 1918), 184 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

More contemporary logic texts define *argumentum ad baculum* in a variety of ways. Some define it as appeal to fear, others as appeal to force, and yet others as a mixture of both appeal to force and fear. Joseph stated, “*Argumentum ad baculum* is the appeal to the ‘big stick.’ The issue is ignored in an attempt to inspire fear of the consequences of adopting a proposed opinion or program, or of allowing a movement branded as dangerous to gain strength. The threat of social ostracism or loss of position might be used to deter a person from exposing fraud in the work place. A bully might persuade by threatening violence.”⁴³ Joseph added that the fallacy, along with *ad populum*, *ad misericordiam*, *ad baculum*, *ad ignorantiam*, are unsound uses of *pathos*.⁴⁴

In a 1996 publication, Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Henkemans noted, “The *argumentum ad baculum* (“argument with the stick”), appeal to force, amounts to resorting to the use of threats against an adversary who refuses to accept one’s standpoint. The threat may involve physical force, but also other measures. Usually, threats are used indirectly, sometimes preceded by an emphatical assurance that no pressure is being put upon the listener or reader.”⁴⁵

Walton postulated that the first instance of a logic textbook defining the *ad baculum* argument as appeal to fear did not come until 1956.⁴⁶ This work, *Guides to*

⁴³Miriam Joseph Rauh, *The Trivium: The Liberal Arts of Logic, Grammar, and Rhetoric*, ed. Marguerite McGlinn (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2002), 203.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 204.

⁴⁵Frans H. van Eemeren et. al., *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1996), 68-69.

⁴⁶Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 38.

Straight Thinking, was written by Stuart Chase. Chase simply listed the *ad* fallacies and gave a brief definition of each. He defined the *ad baculum* with the mere phrase “appeal to fear,” with no other elaboration.⁴⁷ Also, one year after Chase’s book, Blyth defined the argument as appeal to fear and added the caveat of it being a “scare technique.”⁴⁸

Terrell further defined *argumentum ad baculum* as a logical fallacy which seeks to change or influence a person by issuing a threat with some kind of unwanted consequences.⁴⁹ The Latin translation of *argumentum ad baculum* is argument by force; however, the key ingredient is the fear that comes with the threat of force. For example, if a bully says to a classmate, “give me your lunch money or I will punch you,” the classmate may give the bully his lunch money, but only out of fear of being punched. This is an appeal to force and/or appeal to fear. The force is only effective because of the fear it causes.

Consequently, the basic argument form of *argumentum ad baculum* is as follows:

Person L says accept argument A or event X will happen.

Event X is bad, dangerous, or threatening.

Therefore, argument A is a good argument.

⁴⁷Stuart Chase, *Guides to Straight Thinking: With 13 Common Fallacies* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 203.

⁴⁸John W. Blyth, *A Modern Introduction to Logic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), 40.

⁴⁹D. B. Terrell, *Logic: A Modern Introduction to Deductive Reasoning* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), 172.

In most cases, this is considered a fallacy because it has nothing to do with truth, evidence, or worthiness of an argument. Auditors are not being convinced of the truth; they are being forced to acquiesce out of fear. For this reason many have doubted the accuracy of calling *argumentum ad baculum* a tool of logical argument.

Griffin referred to lasting persuasion as “significant persuasion.” He explained three criteria for significant persuasion as persuasion that endures over time, brings about a real change in behavior, and, as he described, “vital change in one area of life will seep into related areas.”⁵⁰ He added: “Persuasion that fails to break out into behavior is trivial. Our Christian lingo reflects the importance of these criteria. The short-term convert is labeled a ‘backslider.’ The man whose behavior doesn’t match his word is scathingly called a ‘hypocrite.’ When a person refuses to let his faith in God broaden out into other activities, we dismiss him as a ‘Sunday Christian.’ If, on the other hand, our attempts at influence bring about a widespread, permanent, behavioral change, then we’ve really got persuasion worth talking about.”⁵¹

The long term results of fear tactics are debatable. Examples abound of false decisions at high pressure crusades and revivals. Many evangelists have techniques that they have found successful at getting people to make superficial decisions. In order to be significant, appeals to fear must result in long term change. Evidence as to whether or not this is possible is mixed.

⁵⁰Emory A. Griffin, *The Mind Changers: The Art of Christian Persuasion* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1976), 4-5.

⁵¹Ibid., 5.

The *Ad Baculum* and Fallaciousness

The *ad baculum* argument has traditionally been considered fallacious in the study of logic.⁵² It is thought fallacious because the threat of harmful consequences usually is not an argument at all. Walton gives the example of a utility company who threatens a community leader who is criticizing the company. The company representative asks the community leader, “You wouldn’t want our company to withdraw its business from your fair city, would you?” The company is threatening the community leader with withdrawing its services if he doesn’t stop criticizing the company. This is a fallacious use of the *ad baculum* argument because the threat to cut off service to the city is an effort to force the community leader into subjection. The threat has no relation to the issue at hand. The term “threat” as used in the social science literature is a technical term intended to convey anything that is “threatening” or “dangerous.” The use of the term “threat” is not meant always to be taken in the literal sense of someone making a threat to another person.⁵³ Jason differentiated between a direct threat and an indirect threat, saying, “A direct threat is one in which the person articulating the threat would be involved in carrying it out if it is indeed carried out.”⁵⁴

Walton demonstrated that *argumentum ad baculum* is not always fallacious. It is not necessary for a warning or threat of dangerous or harmful consequences to be a

⁵²Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 24.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Gary Jason, “The Nature of the *Argumentum ad Baculum*,” *Philosophia* 17 (1987): 495.

fallacy (e.g., penalties for drunk driving).⁵⁵ Walton maintained that distinguishing *argumentum ad baculum* as fallacious or nonfallacious is a matter of context.

Additionally, Damer stated, “There is nothing wrong . . . with pointing out the consequences of a particular course of action. In fact, if certain consequences are a natural outcome of an action, calling attention to them might be very much appreciated. In some such cases, being aware of the consequences of an action might even cause one to alter one’s course.”⁵⁶ In many cases where a person is in danger, there is an ethical obligation to issue a warning.

On the contrary, Jason viewed all *ad baculum* arguments which use scare tactics (i.e., fear appeals) as fallacious arguments. He put *ad baculum* arguments into three categories. They are the prudential arguments, the unpersuasive arguments, and the indirect threats and scare tactics.⁵⁷ Jason gave the following three examples of each.

Case 1: Give me your money or I will blow your head off.

Case 2: I’m sure that you’ll agree that our bill deserves your support, Senator Jason. Don’t forget that our organization has over one million members, all of whom vote the way we tell them to.

Case 3: Do you want to die a horribly painful death? There is no more painful death than Beri-Beri, where your gums rot and your bones crumble, when you can only scream and scream again in desperate pain. This disease is caused by vitamin deficiency. Protect yourself. Buy these vitamin supplements.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Douglas N. Walton, *Informal Logic: A Handbook for Critical Argumentation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 94-95.

⁵⁶Edward T. Damer, *Attacking Faulty Reasoning* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1980), 91.

⁵⁷Jason, “The Nature of the *Argumentum ad Baculum*,” 494.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

Jason considered the first example as logical if it is taken prudentially. He asserted that no fallacy takes place and therefore this is not an *ad baculum* argument.⁵⁹ Jason considered the conclusion of the second case to be about the goodness of the bill and not about the potential force of “you ought to vote for this bill.” He admitted the politician in Case 2 could be a “polite mugger,” but prefers to focus on the “goodness of the bill” aspect of the argument.⁶⁰ Therefore, according to Jason, the second case is not a fallacy. Yet, the third case he viewed as a fallacy. The other two cases he labeled as direct threats. The third case he viewed as an indirect threat. It is indirect because the potential harm will not be caused by the vitamin company. As a result, Jason labels the third case a scare tactic. He defined scare tactics as “statements or other devices (such as verbal imagery, sounds, or pictures) which make the listener feel threatened, but which don’t actually constitute evidence that he (the listener) is in fact threatened to any great degree.”⁶¹ Jason understood the third case as fallacious because the vitamin company gave no evidence or facts to back up their claim on the effects of vitamin deficiency. Rather than use what Jason called “rational persuasion,” they used scare tactics. Jason stated, “to use scare tactics is to manipulate rather than persuade.”⁶²

Jason is correct if the use of the scare tactics is for selfish motives. However, if the fear aroused by the scare tactics is real and a genuine danger to the recipients of the

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., 496.

⁶²Ibid., 498.

appeal (i.e., the fear has not been created in an effort to get the recipients to do something which will benefit the source of the appeal), then it is not manipulation. It is not always possible to give evidence of a threat. The lack of evidence should not preclude the issuance of a warning of harmful circumstances, if indeed the source believes the harm exists.

As with many aspects of the *ad baculum* argument, there is little consensus on whether or not the argument is always a fallacy. Van de Vate contended that it is always fallacious, though he stated that many logicians have been hesitant to call the *ad baculum* argument a fallacy.⁶³ But Van de Vate declared, “the *argumentum ad baculum* is not an *argumentum* at all, but an abandonment of reasoning in favor of other activities.”⁶⁴ He asked, “What in the world, then, can the arguer be thinking about the respondent (as I call them) when in one breath he invites him to reason and declares that he isn’t going to reason with him?”⁶⁵

The determination of whether or not *argumentum ad baculum* is fallacious depends on whether it is acting as an appeal to force or an appeal to fear. If it functions as an appeal to force, which means harmful threats are being made by one individual to another, then the argument is fallacious. However, if *argumentum ad baculum* functions as an appeal to fear, which means someone is being warned of harmful potentialities (e.g., cancer from smoking, injuries from a car crash in which a seatbelt was not worn,

⁶³Van de Vate, “Reasoning and Threatening,” 178.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 177.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 179.

the potential of dying without life insurance for the family), then the argument is not a fallacy. However, the key to nonfallaciousness in the appeal to fear is that the danger must be real and the issuer of the appeal must have a genuine concern for the recipient of the appeal. A fear appeal that seeks to warn of a real and present danger such as drunk driving, smoking, drug use, and/or AIDS is not fallacious. In the appeal to fear, the person receiving the fearful message has the option to reject the warning. The target audience of an anti-smoking commercial has the liberty to continue smoking. The recipients of a fear message about future punishment in hell have the option of continuing in their sinful lifestyle. Additionally, a warning in the appeal to fear is based upon real and harmful circumstances that are not created by the bearer of the fearful message. The danger exists independent of both the source of the fear appeal and the recipient of it. If the source of the fear appeal fabricates the danger, the appeal would be not only fallacious, but also unethical in that case.

That is not to say that a fear appeal, which on the surface appears to be a real danger and issued by an individual or group of individuals who appear to be genuinely concerned, is always nonfallacious. A fallacious fear appeal occurs when a company fabricates a danger of some kind and then seeks to sell a product to meet the consumer's "need." Politicians may use a fallacious fear appeal by creating 'war fever' and portraying themselves as the best candidates to face this danger for the country. The creating of a false threat and subsequent warning is a favorite tactic of marketing and politics.

Wreen concurred with the above mentioned conclusions about the definition and fallaciousness of *argumentum ad baculum* in regard to appeal to force or appeal to

fear.⁶⁶ Wreen wrote to critique Hurley's definition of the *ad baculum* argument. Hurley's definition stated, "The fallacy of *ad baculum* occurs whenever an arguer poses a conclusion to another person and tells that person either implicitly or explicitly that some harm will come to him or her if he or she does not accept the conclusion. The fallacy always involves a threat by the arguer to the physical or psychological well-being of the listener or reader, who may be either a single person or a group of persons."⁶⁷

The first point of contention Wreen had with Hurley's definition is the idea that the *ad baculum* argument seeks to convince someone of a conclusion. Wreen asserted this is not always true or necessary. He provided the example of someone who says, "If you don't give me all your money, I'll blow your head off."⁶⁸ Wreen stated that the arguer is not interested in the acceptance of a conclusion, but in the bringing about of an action. The man with the gun wants the money, period. Wreen admitted that the *ad baculum* can serve as an argument and that a conclusion must be present somewhere, but the intention of the arguer is action, not belief.⁶⁹ Wreen's arguments in this respect are consistent with the *ad baculum* being defined as both appeal to force and appeal to fear.

A second problem Wreen identified in Hurley's definition is the recipient of the harm in an *ad baculum* argument. Hurley stated that the intended harm must be inflicted upon the person to whom the threat is issued. Wreen showed this to be untrue.

⁶⁶Wreen, "A Bolt of Fear," 131-40.

⁶⁷Patrick Hurley, *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1985), 102.

⁶⁸Wreen, "A Bolt of Fear," 132.

⁶⁹Ibid.

He gave several examples to prove the point. One of his examples is that of a gunman saying to someone, “If you don’t give me your gold ring, I’ll shoot at random into the crowd.” In this case the threat is issued to one person, but the harm is directed to the crowd. Or, a terrorist could make demands that are accompanied by threats of blowing up an airplane. The people on the airplane would be in no position to bring about the terrorist’s demands. Wreen argued that examples of this nature prove that the *ad baculum* can apply to more than prudential matters. The argument can also deal with moral values. Wreen stated that even aesthetic values can be part of the *ad baculum*.⁷⁰

Wreen thirdly attacked Hurley’s definition by enunciating that the *ad baculum* does not always contain a threat of physical harm. A store manger could announce to his employees that the raise they were going to receive will be null and void unless they work a second shift for a week without pay. The threat is not of physical harm, but it is a threat of unwelcome or unpleasant consequences. Wreen contended this is also an *ad baculum* argument. Likewise, he offers the example of a mother who threatens her child with not going to the circus if the child’s good behavior does not continue. He articulated, “force isn’t a necessary component of an *ad baculum*, despite the fact that the argument is frequently said to be an appeal to force.”⁷¹

Wreen is basically supporting the idea that *argumentum ad baculum* is both appeal to force and appeal to fear. As the title of his article suggests, an *ad baculum* is effective only because of the “bolt of fear” which confronts the interlocutor. Force is not

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid.

always necessary for a bolt of fear to take place, but without the fear a fear appeal cannot be successful.

A fourth point of contention Wreen had with Hurley's classic definition is the affirmation that the argument involves two persons or groups of people. Wreen asserted that the *ad baculum* can involve a person and a languageless creature. He gave the example of a dog who understands what a rolled-up newspaper means. Wreen further stated that an *ad baculum* argument can be used on oneself. A person can threaten himself or herself with no milkshake if he or she does not complete a certain task by day's end.⁷²

The fifth criticism Wreen distinguished as most important. He said it is not necessary for an *ad baculum* argument to contain a threat of any kind.⁷³ By threat, Wreen meant the intention of doing harm or causing injury to someone. He contended that the *ad baculum* can be a warning of potential danger instead. As Wreen sees it, a threat is what will be done to an individual by the interlocutor presenting the *ad baculum* argument. A warning is an act that most people would appreciate and has no evil intent at all. The warning type of *ad baculum* is the appeal to fear.

Kimball gave helpful guidelines for determining the fallaciousness of an *ad baculum* argument. First, he attested that a robber threatening to blow someone's head off if he does not give up the money is not necessarily fallacious. He, like Jason and Wreen, argued the postulate may be a good prudential argument. The giving up of

⁷²Ibid., 133.

⁷³Ibid.

money so as not to be killed is a prudent thing to do.⁷⁴ Second, Kimball asserted that in order to discover what is wrong in the *ad baculum* argument one must go beyond the premises of the argument and look at the larger context.⁷⁵ The larger context Kimball referenced includes the character of the one extending the threat. He averred, “In general, what’s wrong with *argumentum ad baculum* should be explained in terms of the intentions, purposes, and character of threateners, and the differences in intentions and purposes for which threats are made. The characters of those who make the threats will provide the criteria for distinguishing benign and malicious threats.”⁷⁶ It is the subjective nature of judging another person’s intentions that makes Kimball’s advice difficult to implement. Kimball offered a number of guidelines for determining whether or not using a threat is legitimate in argumentation:

A threat might be a legitimate resource in argumentation if – and only if –

- (1) the speaker has good reasons for believing that a threat would be an effective means of persuasion,
- (2) she uses the minimal threat necessary for persuasion,
- (3) she herself has good reasons for what she is trying to persuade her audience of, and
- (4) she had good reasons for believing that her audience would not be persuaded by reasons.⁷⁷

Kimball’s perspective is unique and forges new vistas into the study of the *ad baculum* argument and the question of fallaciousness. Though Kimball’s list of criteria is helpful, his four points are difficult to measure. The speaker can assess his or her own reasons,

⁷⁴Robert H. Kimball, “What’s Wrong with *Argumentum ad Baculum*? Reasons, Threats, and Logical Norms,” *Argumentation* 20 (2006): 91.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., 96.

⁷⁷Ibid., 97.

but evaluation by others remains ambiguous and subjective. However, the criteria given by Kimball is characterized by goodwill and benevolence on the part of the speaker toward the audience. *Argumentum ad baculum* distinguished by goodwill and benevolence uses a threat in the sense of a threatening situation, not in the sense of a threat of injury or malevolence from the primary interlocutor. Kimball called this a “justified threat” and via its use an action is caused without persuasion necessarily taking place.⁷⁸

In addition to the warning of appeal to fear and the threat of appeal to force, Woods suggested yet another nuance of *argumentum ad baculum*. He called it “veiled intimidation.”⁷⁹ As Walton described, the fear appeal may not always be straightforward. He stated that some appeals can take the form of suggestion. He attested, “Some fear appeal arguments work by sketching out a picture that suggests (often rather vaguely) something that is highly fearful to a target audience. This type of fear appeal argument tends to be logically weak, because it is based on suggestions instead of hard evidence that the fearful event really will occur.”⁸⁰ A veiled intimidation is an indirect threat in an appeal to force.

Fear Appeals within the *Ad Baculum* Argument

As demonstrated above, there is a wide range of scholarly opinion on the various aspects of *argumentum ad baculum* in textbooks of logic. Fear appeals and

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Woods, “*Argumentum ad baculum*,” 501.

⁸⁰Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 14.

argumentum ad baculum are related in that fear appeals are one form or type of *argumentum ad baculum*, though some contend that *argumentum ad baculum* and fear appeals are terms used by two different disciplines to refer to virtually the same thing. However, Walton explained that the best understanding of fear appeals is achieved when the empirical and logical study of fear appeals are combined.⁸¹ Fear appeals are the empirical research portion of *argumentum ad baculum* used by social science. This empirical research consists of studies in behavioral psychology, sociology, and marketing that seeks to determine how and why people respond to fear appeals in various kinds of health campaigns and marketing strategies. *Argumentum ad baculum* deals with the logical reasoning aspect of fear appeals. Both the empirical and logical aspects of *argumentum ad baculum* can act as fear appeals. One uses primarily a warning (empirical) and the other uses primarily a threat (logical).

As stated previously, the warning is given to the audience out of concern for its safety and prosperity. Walton gave the example of a commercial advertising a new mouse bait. The commercial warned the viewers of the grave danger of going near a dead mouse because, the commercial claimed, they could contract Lyme disease. With the new bait being advertised, the viewers are informed that they will never need to go near a dead mouse. After eating the bait, the mouse goes off to die somewhere else.⁸² If it is true that Lyme disease can be contracted from a dead mouse, the company selling the new mouse bait has performed a good deed by helping the uninformed avoid this

⁸¹Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 1.

⁸²Douglas N. Walton, *The Place of Emotion in Argument* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 230-31.

potential danger. However, the commercial does not say what happens if the mouse dies in the house. If the mouse dies in the house, someone needs to go near the mouse to extract it. Or, worse, the mouse could potentially die and go undetected. The potential harm of a decomposing rodent under a piece of furniture could be a grave danger as well. The company selling the new bait seems to ignore this possibility. In this sense the commercial is misleading.

Nonetheless, *argumentum ad baculum* is defined as appeal to force in some logic textbooks and as appeal to fear in others. This inconsistency is reconciled by acknowledging that both definitions are correct. The *ad baculum* argument can act as an appeal to force or an appeal to fear. Fear is the vital component of both types of appeal. Therefore, the appeal to force is only effective if fear is aroused. If a mobster threatens a witness with harmful consequences if he testifies in court, the threat is only effective if the witness is prompted not to testify because of fear of the harmful consequences. As a result, the appeal to force is essentially the appeal to fear. The only difference between the two is that appeal to force contains a threat and appeal to fear contains the warning of a threatening situation (threat being used as a technical term meaning anything threatening). Both seek to persuade with potentially unpleasant outcomes.

Notwithstanding, it is at this point that confusion surfaces and differences evolve in the defining of fear appeals and *argumentum ad baculum*. Since the argument has traditionally been defined as an appeal to force, some have thought fear appeals do not properly belong as part of the *argumentum ad baculum* by definition. However, there is sufficient evidence from the pertinent literature that fear appeals do belong within the *ad baculum* argument and that is the position of this dissertation.

Argumentum ad baculum is the term used in logical reasoning, rhetoric, and philosophy. Social science prefers the term “fear appeal.” A fear appeal is “recognized as a distinctive type of argumentation by empirical researchers, where it is seen as a kind of argument used to threaten a target audience with a fearful outcome (most typically that outcome is the likelihood of death), in order to get the audience to adopt a recommended response.”⁸³ Bowell and Kemp defined fear appeals as “the tactic of trying to elicit a fear in one’s readers or listeners in order to influence their behavior or attitudes.”⁸⁴ Witte provided a more comprehensive definition. She defined a fear appeal as “a persuasive message that attempts to arouse the emotion of fear by depicting a personally relevant and significant threat and then follows this description of the threat by outlining recommendations presented as effective and feasible in deterring the threat.”⁸⁵ Basically, a fear appeal is a fearful communication with a motive. The appeal seeks to persuade the audience to affect a change in behavior. This change may mean stopping a harmful behavior or the incorporation of a new behavior in one’s life. Walton, responding to Witte’s definition of fear appeals, contended, “The use of the term ‘threat’ in the social science literature is unfortunate, because fear appeal arguments, of the kind the empirical research is concerned with, do not use a threat . . .” in the normal sense of the word.⁸⁶

⁸³Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 1.

⁸⁴Tracy Bowell and Gary Kemp, *Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 119.

⁸⁵Kim Witte, “Fear Control and Danger Control: A Test of the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM),” *Communication Monographs* 61 (1994): 114.

⁸⁶Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 1.

Noting several characteristics of fear appeals will serve to illumine their nature. First, a fear appeal is always part of a form of communication. The communication can be verbal, visual, or a combination of both. The communication can be interpersonal, a form of mass media, or a speaker before an audience. The fear appeal can be presented in a variety of ways. The appeal could take the form of an anecdote, a rhetorical question, a frightening image, statistical information, a simple proposition from a credible source, a Scripture reference, an analogy, and/or a metaphor.

Second, a fear appeal always has the aim of persuasion. The auditors are being asked to make some kind of change in their actual lives. Fear appeals are not intended to scare without cause or intention. As a type of *argumentum ad baculum*, fear appeals are arguments which seek to elicit a change in attitude and behavior. Perelman commented on the necessity of argumentation leading to action. He acknowledged, “We should note in this regard that argumentation does not aim solely at gaining a purely intellectual adherence. Argumentation very often aims at inciting action, or at least at creating a disposition to act.”⁸⁷

Third, as their name indicates, fear appeals are fearful. Their intention is to arouse fear. For this reason, they have been referred to as “scare tactics,” “fear mongering,” and/or “manipulation.” If a fear appeal does not arouse fear it will not achieve the intended goal. The fear is what prompts action on the part of the auditors. The mechanism for arousing fear can be anything that a target audience may find fearful. The fear arousing mechanism, therefore, varies from one audience to the next. What one

⁸⁷Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, trans. William Kluback (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 12.

individual or group finds fearful will not produce such results in all individuals and groups. Fears can vary according to age, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, mental health, education, and past experiences. However, no matter what it is, if it produces the emotion of fear in a person or group it could qualify to be used in a fear appeal.

Fourth, fear appeals have a target audience. A target audience is necessary because a communicator will need to know the characteristics of his hearers to achieve an effective fear appeal message. An example of different reactions to a fear appeal by different audiences is the well known “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up” commercial. The commercial began running in 1989 by a company called LifeCall. The commercial advertised a medical alert device that a senior adult living alone could press to call for help in the event of an emergency. For senior adults living alone, the prospect of falling or having a heart attack and being unable to get help is an extremely serious matter. The device was worn around the neck and had a button to press if an emergency occurred. The commercial showed a bank of operators wearing uniforms answering calls from senior adults in distress. A testimonial is given by an elderly lady who said, “Recently when I became deathly ill I was able to summon an ambulance, my next door neighbor, my family, and my doctor without picking up a telephone. I used this remote control to contact LifeCall.” Then, the commercial showed a Mrs. Fletcher lying in her bathroom floor saying, “I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.” That phrase became a jocose punch line in popular culture and elicited countless comedic routines and reenactments. Younger adults found the commercial mirthful. What frightens one audience can be not only ineffective with another, but an object of derision suitable for lampooning. For this reason, audience analysis is essential for the success of a fear appeal.

Fifth, fear appeals are a more common part of every day life than most people may realize. They are used by parents, doctors, teachers, preachers, coaches, and spouses on a regular basis. Almost daily parents warn children they will get no ice cream if they do not eat their vegetables and teachers admonish students to complete their assignments or they will get detention. Politicians regularly warn that if a certain opponent is elected he or she will raise taxes or limit abortion rights.

Society is bombarded with fear appeals daily through television. An example of a fear appeal argument in advertising is described by Clark. A Pakistani father finishes dinner and lights up a cigarette in a commercial. As he lights the cigarette he immediately falls to the floor dead. A doctor then pulls a sheet over the man and says to the camera, "This could be you if you don't give up smoking."⁸⁸ The method of persuasion in this commercial is clearly fear, specifically the fear of death. A more recent example of an anti-smoking commercial which employs fear appeal was unveiled by the city of New York this year. The commercial shows a mother walking with her son in a train station bustling with people. The child looks to be around three or four years old. Suddenly the boy is alone, having lost his mother in the throng. After looking around briefly, he begins to sob pitifully, as eerie music plays in the background. A voiceover then says, "If this is how your child feels after losing you for a minute, just imagine if they lost you for life." The camera then pans to a sign advertising a quit smoking hotline. Walton would describe this as a fear appeal using suggestion.

⁸⁸Erik Clark, *The Want Makers* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988), 111.

Marks of A Fear Appeal

Fear appeals contain at least four marks that describe the message of the appeal. The first mark is the degree of the fear appeal. The degree of a fear appeal can be high or low,⁸⁹ addressing the level of fear the audience is expected to experience. Determining the degree of fear experienced during the appeal is subjective, and the degree will vary from one audience to another. Other researchers also recognize a third level of fear called moderate.⁹⁰ One or another of these levels of fear has been found to be more effective than the others by various researchers.⁹¹ Therefore, the degree of fear for a successful fear appeal message is still a matter of debate.

A second mark of fear appeals is the type of appeal. The type of appeal concerns whether it is an appeal that threatens physical or bodily harm or only social ostracism and disapproval.⁹² Fear appeals in preaching have the added dimension of spiritual and eternal consequences which fall into neither of these categories. Physical injury is malapropos to preaching, but social ostracism and disapproval could be germane in certain circumstances.

⁸⁹Charles R. Duke et al., "A Method for Evaluating the Ethics of Fear Appeals," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 12 (1993): 124.

⁹⁰John R. Rossiter and Jennifer Thornton, "Fear-Pattern Analysis Supports the Fear-Drive Model for Antispeeding Road-Safety TV Ads," *Psychology & Marketing* 21 (2004): 946.

⁹¹Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) found low fear appeals most effective; Janis (1967), Keller and Block (1996) found moderate appeals most effective, and LaTour and Pitts (1989) found high fear most effective. This is one of the inconsistencies in fear appeal research yet to be fully explained.

⁹²Duke et al., "A Method for Evaluating the Ethics of Fear Appeals," 124.

The third mark is positioning. Duke, Pickett, Carlson, and Grove explained positioning as “appeals describing undesirable actions leading to negative consequences vs. desirable actions leading to avoidance of negative consequences.”⁹³ The difference is starting from a positive or negative position in the appeal.

A fourth mark of fear appeals is execution style. Execution style concerns how the fear appeal is presented. An appeal on television could be presented using expert testimony, a reenactment, or a news clip.⁹⁴ In preaching and other types of public address one might use an anecdote, an authoritative quote, or a metaphor.

Fear appeals are often characterized by “gruesome content” communicated through vivid language, the use of direct, personalized address (e.g., “you are going to die”); and/or gory pictures (e.g., victims of an automobile accident in a seat belt ad).⁹⁵ A recent seat belt commercial shown in the United Kingdom demonstrated the graphic content that can be a part of such appeals. The commercial portrayed a man named Richard driving pleasantly along a city road. He suddenly crashes head-on into another vehicle. The camera zooms in as Richard hits the windshield of the car. Then there is the image of what appears to be actual internal organs plowing through a rib cage and a heart artery being torn. When the organs hit the ribcage, the ribs snap and a cracking sound is clearly audible. During these images a voiceover methodically stated, “Richard didn’t want to die, but he couldn’t stop himself. The collision with the car didn’t kill him, but

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Kim Witte, “Putting the Fear Back into Fear Appeals: The Extended Parallel Process Model,” *Communication Monographs* 59 (1992): 331.

he wasn't wearing a seat belt, so he continued on his journey. When he hit the inside of the car, that didn't kill him either. But his internal organs carried on traveling until they hit his rib cage and his lungs were punctured and the main artery from his heart was torn. And that's what killed Richard." The commercial never tells the audience that this is going to happen to them. The warning is given indirectly through the narrative about Richard.

The Basic Components of a Fear Appeal

A fear appeal, as currently understood in social science, consists of three primary components: the threat, the fear arousal, and efficacy. First, a fear appeal is initiated with the issuance of a credible threat of high, moderate, or low degree. A threat is "an external stimulus variable that exists whether a person knows it or not."⁹⁶ A cognitive awareness of the threat results in threat perception. Perceiving the threat leads to perceived severity and perceived susceptibility. Perceived severity is the auditor's assessment of the seriousness of the threat while perceived susceptibility informs the auditor of the probability of him or her facing the threat personally.⁹⁷ The severity of the threat determines whether it is categorized as high (e.g., "drunk driving kills") or low (e.g., "drunk driving may get you arrested"). Without threat perception a threat will be ineffective. Even when threat perception exists, it may be ineffective if the auditors feel it is not severe enough to warrant alarm or if they feel they are not susceptible to the threat. When auditors do not feel susceptible to the threat, the severity of it makes no

⁹⁶Ibid., 332.

⁹⁷Ibid.

difference. In this regard, the target audience of the threat/warning is very important. Some target audiences are more susceptible to fear campaigns than others (e.g., the elderly).

The term “threat” is being used in the sense of a “threatening situation,” not in the sense of an individual making a threat to another individual. As Walton observed, when social science uses the term “threat,” it is doing so in a technical sense referring to anything that is threatening. A helpful distinction is to think of appeal to force as a threat and appeal to fear as a warning. However, the technical term “threat” encompasses both.

The second component of a fear appeal is fear arousal. The purpose of the threat is to arouse fear. Fear arousal is essential to the effectiveness of a fear appeal. Regardless of the content of the threatening message, if it does not arouse fear it will fail as a fear appeal. Fear is aroused only after a threat has been perceived to be genuine, serious, and capable of affecting the auditor. Fear arousal may be expressed psychologically and physiologically, depending on the level of fear. Fear arousal that is merely psychological results in mental cognitions of fear. Physiological expressions of fear arousal may be manifested “through language behavior (verbal self-reports), or through overt acts (facial expressions).”⁹⁸ In addition to facial expressions, more severe physiological reactions could result, such as trembling, crying, and increased heart rate. In order to determine the fear arousal of a threatening message, the auditors must be observed, questioned, and/or interviewed after the fearful experience. Using audience analysis and tailoring the appeal to the proper target audience is the desideratum of fear arousal.

⁹⁸Ibid., 331.

The third component that constructs a fear appeal is efficacy. In order to achieve attitudinal and behavioral change, a fear appeal must offer a recommendation of how to avoid the perceived threat. The recommended threat response must be perceived by the auditor as efficacious. This is referred to as response efficacy.⁹⁹ However, the perceived efficacy must not only propose a response that is efficacious in general, it must be efficacious for the particular auditors in question. The individual auditor must feel that the proposed response is something he or she is personally capable of performing. Without this perceived self-efficacy the recommended preventative measures will not result in attitudinal or behavioral change.¹⁰⁰

Fear Appeal Outcome Variables

Outcome variables in response to fear appeals may be adaptive or maladaptive. These outcome variables are also called coping responses. When presented with a fear appeal message, individuals will respond with a coping response. An outcome that is adaptive results in message acceptance. Message acceptance is when there is attitudinal and/or behavioral change in the auditors.

Maladaptive outcomes are the result of message rejection. A maladaptive outcome seeks to reduce the level of fear being experienced, but does not address the harmful consequences of the fear appeal.¹⁰¹ Message rejection is seen in defensive

⁹⁹Ibid., 332.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹John F. Tanner, Jr., James B. Hunt, and David R. Eppright, "The Protection Motivation Model: A Normative Model of Fear Appeals," *Journal of Marketing* 55 (1991): 39.

avoidance, reactance,¹⁰² denial, and/or ignoring the threat all together.¹⁰³ Defensive avoidance is “a motivated resistance to the message, such as denial or minimization of the threat. Individuals may defensively avoid a message by being inattentive to the communication (e.g., looking away from the message), or by suppressing any thoughts about the threat over the long term.”¹⁰⁴ Reactance takes place when the auditor feels that his or her freedom is being reduced and that the communicator is trying to manipulate.¹⁰⁵ Reactance can result in an increase in the undesirable behavior.¹⁰⁶ This has been called the “boomerang effect.” Some fear appeal research has suggested that a high fear appeal can actually result in a more favorable attitude toward the behavior seeking to be averted.¹⁰⁷ Denial is simply refusing to believe the information in the fear appeal message. Ignoring the message is evidence of no apparent effect on the individual who received the appeal.

¹⁰²Witte, “Putting the Fear Back in Fear Appeals,” 332.

¹⁰³Ioni M. Lewis et al., “Promoting Public Health Messages: Should We Move Beyond Fear-evoking Appeals in Road Safety,” *Qualitative Health Research* 17 (2007): 211.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵Griffin calls this “psychological reactance” which he defines as a “built-in antagonism toward anyone trying to change” someone with this response to a persuasive effort. Griffin, *Mind Changers*, 5.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷Omar Shehryar and David M. Hunt, “A Terror Management Perspective on the Persuasiveness of Fear Appeals,” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 15 (2005): 276.

Tanner, Hunt, and Eppright explained that a maladaptive outcome is heavily influenced by the message recipient's past experiences.¹⁰⁸ They give the example of college students who are sexually active responding to a fear appeal message about sexually transmitted diseases. As a result of having chosen partners in the past who did not have an STD, the college students may feel they are good at choosing such partners. Therefore, they may discount future fear appeals as being irrelevant to their situation because such an event will never happen to them.¹⁰⁹ In such a case, the maladaptive response to the appeal would be a failure to demonstrate vulnerability to the threat.

Leventhal, Singer, and Jones concluded that the most at-risk audiences are the most difficult to convince of the need to adopt the recommendations of a fear appeal.¹¹⁰ The hypothesis to explain this behavior is that those who are most active in an undesirable behavior may have already built up strong maladaptive responses because of previous exposure to such threatening messages.¹¹¹ These stored coping responses become active when assessing vulnerability to a threat and severity of a threat.¹¹² An example is a person who has driven for twenty years without wearing a seat belt with no harmful consequences. A fear appeal message about the harmful consequences of not wearing seat belts will likely result in a maladaptive response by this kind of individual.

¹⁰⁸Tanner, Hunt, and Eppright, "The Protection Motivation Model," 39.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Howard Leventhal, Robert P. Singer, and Susan Jones, "Effects of Fear and Specificity of Recommendation Upon Attitudes and Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2 (1965): 20-29.

¹¹¹Tanner, Hunt, and Eppright, "The Protection Motivation Model," 39.

¹¹²Ibid.

Based on prior experience, he or she may respond by reminding himself or herself that an accident has never occurred and it will likely not happen to him or her. This kind of response succeeds in removing the fear, but not the danger.¹¹³ Weinstein found that many individuals exhibited an “optimism bias.”¹¹⁴ That is, people tend to be unrealistically optimistic about the future and the chances of something negative happening to them. This optimism bias led individuals to believe that an automobile accident or getting caught driving illegally was a real threat, but that it would not happen to them. Related to that was the perception by some drivers that they were better drivers than the average driver and therefore the bad outcomes would not happen to them.¹¹⁵

A further maladaptive response found in certain kinds of fear appeals is what researchers have labeled othering.¹¹⁶ When a receptor engages in othering he or she dismisses the message as being for some other person or group. This variable has also been called the third-person effect (TPE). Lewis, Watson, White, and Tay found this to be a factor in anti-speeding and anti-drinking and driving appeals.¹¹⁷ According to Davison, the third-person effect is “a perceptual disparity whereby individuals deem a

¹¹³Ibid., 43.

¹¹⁴Neil D. Weinstein, “Unrealistic Optimism About Future Life Events,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39 (1980): 806.

¹¹⁵P. Delhomme, “Comparing One’s Driving With Others: Assessment of Abilities and Frequency of Offences. Evidence for a Superior Conformity or Self-Bias?,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 23 (1991): 493.

¹¹⁶S. Slavin, C. Batrouney, and D. Murphy, “Fear Appeals and Treatment Side-effects: An Effective Combination for HIV Prevention?,” *AIDS Care* 19 (2007): 135.

¹¹⁷Lewis et al., “Promoting Public Health Messages,” 211.

persuasive message as being more likely to influence others in general than themselves.”¹¹⁸

Ray and Wilkie found that some audiences engage in message distortion. As a way of reducing the fear of the message, they rationalize a false understanding of the ad. Also, adolescents may reject a fear appeal due to feelings of immortality or insusceptibility and because the threat may seem too far into the future to be relevant to them at the time.¹¹⁹

Fear Appeal Models

There have been four fear appeal models developed over the past six decades. These models are a theoretical attempt to explain how a fear appeal works and each one of them builds on the one before it. The models are the Fear-as-Acquired Drive Model, the Parallel Response Model, the Protection Motivation Model, and the Extended Parallel Process Model. A brief description of each follows.

The Fear-as-Acquired Drive Model

The Drive Model was produced by Hovland, Janis, and Kelly in 1953.¹²⁰ The idea behind this model is that when fear is aroused the fear will act as a driving

¹¹⁸W. Phillips Davison, “The Third-person Effect in Communication,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47 (1983): 1.

¹¹⁹Karen H. Smith and Mary Ann Stutts, “Effects of Short-term Cosmetic Versus Long-Term Health Fear Appeals in Anti-smoking Advertisements on the Smoking Behavior of Adolescents,” *Journal of Consumer Behavior* 3 (2003): 159.

¹²⁰C. Hovland, I. Janis, and H. Kelley, “Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953).

mechanism to bring about action for change.¹²¹ When an individual is in an unpleasant state, the theory posits that the person will strive to reduce the level of unpleasantness. This striving is called a “drive.”¹²² Newcomb, Turner, and Converse defined drives as “bodily states that initiate tendencies to general activity. These states are frequently experienced as states of tension or restlessness.”¹²³ According to the Drive Theory, when an individual encounters a fearful message, the drive seeks to reduce the level of fear being experienced.¹²⁴ As Dillard stated, the testing of fear appeals using the Drive Theory involves two phases of testing. One test at the conclusion of the arousal phase and another test at the end of abatement phase.¹²⁵ The Drive Theory has three stages of development. The first stage is fear arousal. This occurs after the issuance of the fear appeal and assumes the appeal is appropriate for the target audience. The second stage is the need for fear reduction. It is this need that prompts the drive that leads to a reduction of the fear. The third stage is message acceptance evidenced in the recommended change in behavior being implemented.¹²⁶

¹²¹I. Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety: A Review of the Effectiveness of Fear-Arousing (threat) Appeals in Road Safety Advertising,” *International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy* 3 (2007): 204.

¹²²Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 17.

¹²³T. M. Newcomb, R. H. Turner, and P. E. Converse, *Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1965), 23.

¹²⁴Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 17.

¹²⁵James Price Dillard, “Rethinking the Study of Fear Appeals: An Emotional Perspective,” *Communication Theory* 4 (1994): 297.

¹²⁶Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 17.

Some early studies following the Drive Theory led to the belief that higher levels of fear arousal produced the most conducive atmosphere for persuasion (i.e., more fear meant more persuasion).¹²⁷ The Drive Theory supported the linear relationship between fear arousal and the level of persuasion achieved. However, other early studies found the exact opposite. Janis and Feshbach found that lower levels of fear arousal brought about greater levels of persuasion and that high levels of fear could actually have an adverse effect on persuasion.¹²⁸ Higher levels of fear were discovered actually to “backfire” and cause the fear appeal to fail. Walton called this the “double effect” of the Drive Theory.¹²⁹ Beck and Frankel explained this phenomenon, saying, “The more fear and the more subsequent reduction of the fear by reassuring information, the greater the motivation to engage in the recommended health activity. However, when the fearful drive state becomes so intense that the recommended actions are no longer sufficiently reassuring, individuals become motivated to reduce their fear by other means such as not attending to the message, minimizing their perceived susceptibility to the health threat, or impugning the credibility of the communicator.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷M. J. Goldstein, “The Relationship between Coping and Avoiding Behavior and Response to Fear-Arousing Propaganda,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 58 (1959): 247-52.

¹²⁸I. L. Janis and S. Feshbach, “Effects of Fear-Arousing Communications,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 48 (1953): 78-92.

¹²⁹Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 17.

¹³⁰Kenneth H. Beck and Arthur Frankel, “A Conceptualization of Threat Communications and Protective Health Behavior,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 44 (1981): 206.

As a result, the linear relationship was considered inadequate to explain this inconsistency. A curvilinear relationship was therefore proposed in an effort to compensate for the inconsistencies. In the curvilinear relationship, or inverted “U,” the contention is that higher levels of fear produce greater levels of persuasion to a certain “critical point.”¹³¹ Once this critical point is breached, the fear arousal becomes too intense which results in maladaptive responses and ultimately message rejection.¹³² Determining this optimal level of fear is difficult, but Boster and Mongeau contended that a number of variables contribute to it, including the situation, the content of the appeal, and various dispositional factors in the individual.¹³³ With the curvilinear theory, the optimal level of fear is the *sine qua non* of an effective fear appeal. If the message is accepted the fear arousal did not exceed the critical level. If the message is rejected the critical point was exceeded. However, as Lewis et al. explained, that makes the theory ambiguous and difficult to refute.¹³⁴

The Parallel Response Model

Walton asserted that the Fear-as-Acquired Drive Model was not substantiated

¹³¹I. L. Janis, “Effects of Fear Arousal on Attitude Change: Recent Developments in Theory and Experimental Research,” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 3 (1967): 167-25.

¹³²Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 204.

¹³³F. J. Boster and P. Mongeau, “Fear-arousing Persuasive Messages,” in *Communication Yearbook*, vol. 8, ed. R. N. Bostrom (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1984), 330-75.

¹³⁴Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 205.

by empirical research findings.¹³⁵ Rogers stated the Drive Model did not sufficiently explain the relationship between the driving mechanism prompted by fear and attitude change.¹³⁶ As a result of the ambiguity of the Drive Theory and the complexity of the fear-persuasion relationship, other fear appeal models were developed. The Parallel Response Model is one of these additional models, developed by Leventhal.¹³⁷ This theory divides persuasion into two categories, the emotional “fear control response” and the cognitive “danger control response.”¹³⁸ These two responses work simultaneously to deal with the fear experience. Leventhal stated, “Responses to control danger are aimed at manipulating the external environment, by changing the danger agent and its ability to strike us. Responses to control fear are concerned with avoiding contact with stimuli which are fear-producing and to engage in reactions, such as eating, sleeping, intense laughter, etc., that will interfere with or disrupt unpleasant emotional responses.”¹³⁹ The point is, an individual may respond to a fear appeal message by addressing the danger at hand or by addressing the fear being experienced. Addressing the danger leads to message acceptance. Addressing the fear does not result in message acceptance; it only

¹³⁵Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 17.

¹³⁶Ronald W. Rogers, “Cognitive and Physiological Processes in Fear Appeals and Attitude Change,” in *Social Psychophysiology*, ed. John T. Cacioppo and Richard E. Petty (New York: Guilford (1983): 156.

¹³⁷Howard Leventhal, “Findings and Theory in the Study of Fear Communications,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. L. Berkowitz, vol. 5 (New York: Academic Press, 1970), 119-86.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, 119.

¹³⁹Howard Leventhal, “Fear Appeals and Persuasion: The Differentiation of a Motivational Construct,” *American Journal of Public Health* 61 (1971): 1211.

affects the emotion of fear. Consequently, the emotion of fear may be removed through one of several maladaptive responses.

The Drive Model did not make allowance for dealing with fear beyond message acceptance through a fear reduction response. However, the Parallel Response Model contended that individuals can control their response to the fear appeal in one of two ways. The cognitive “danger control response” was more likely to result in message acceptance by attempting to control the danger through protective behavior. This protective behavior was commensurate with accepting the attitudinal changes suggested in the fear appeal. Leventhal explained, “Danger control involves the selection and execution of responses aimed at averting the threat. Because the threat exists in the environment, the individual must alter her or his relationship with the environment in order to reduce the danger. Consequently, the danger control process depends heavily upon external cues.”¹⁴⁰

The emotional “fear control response” was more likely to result in maladaptive outcomes through defensive avoidance or minimizing the threat. These maladaptive outcomes addressed the fear being experienced only and did not result in message acceptance.¹⁴¹ Beck and Frankel explained that the Parallel Response Model is incomplete in that it fails to explain under what conditions an individual initiates the “danger control response” over the “fear control response” and vice versa.¹⁴² However, it

¹⁴⁰Dillard, “Rethinking the Study of Fear Appeals,” 298.

¹⁴¹Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 205.

¹⁴²Beck and Frankel, “A Conceptualization of Threat Communications and Protective Health Behavior,” 209.

was seen as a first step in developing a theory of fear appeals.¹⁴³ As Walton posited, “This major weakness led empirical researchers to see the parallel response model as not adequate, by itself, to predict experimental outcomes of fear appeal messages.”¹⁴⁴

The Protection Motivation Theory

The Protection Motivation Theory, developed by Rogers, also focused on cognitive responses to fear appeals. This theory suggested four variables of a fear appeal that are essential. The first is perceived severity. Perceived severity has to do with the level of fear involved in the appeal as it is perceived by the target audience.¹⁴⁵

The second variable in the Protection Motivation Theory is the perceived probability that the warning or threat will happen to the target audience. This is the likelihood that the threat will occur.¹⁴⁶ This variable has also been referred to as vulnerability or susceptibility.¹⁴⁷ Regardless of how fearful an appeal is, if the target audience feels there is a low probability of it happening to them the appeal will likely fail. Audience analysis becomes critical at this point.

A third variable in this theory is the perceived efficacy of the recommended response. This variable determines whether or not the audience believes the solution to

¹⁴³Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 18.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵R. W. Rogers, “A Protection Motivation Theory of Fear Appeals and Attitude Change,” *Journal of Psychology* 91 (1975): 93-114.

¹⁴⁶Rogers, “Cognitive and Physiological Processes in Fear Appeals and Attitude Change,” 157-58.

¹⁴⁷Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 205.

the warning/threat will work.¹⁴⁸ This variable is also referred to as response efficacy.¹⁴⁹ For example, in AIDS prevention campaigns, success in fear appeal strategies depends upon whether or not the target audience believes wearing condoms would be an effective answer to the danger.

The fourth variable is similar to the third. Perceived self-efficacy goes a step further than perceived efficacy. A person could believe a recommended response to be effective, but feel it is something that they personally cannot perform. In order for a fear appeal to be successful, the target audience must not only believe the response to be adequate, but also believe they have the ability to perform it.¹⁵⁰ For example, the ability to execute the recommended response could be a factor in the case of men having an annual test for colon cancer. Having the annual examination may be perceived as an effective action to take in preventing colon cancer. However, that does not mean that an individual feels it is effective for them personally. This feeling may be a result of not having health insurance, a fear of doctors, or something as simple as not having transportation to a health facility.

These four variables divide into two cognitive appraisals. Severity and vulnerability function as the threat appraisal while efficacy and self-efficacy function as the coping appraisal. High levels of threat appraisal and coping appraisal produce the greatest message acceptance. Walton explained,

¹⁴⁸Rogers, "Cognitive and Physiological Processes in Fear Appeals and Attitude Change," 157-58.

¹⁴⁹Lewis et al., "The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety," 205.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

The protection motivation model expresses the structure of the fear appeal as based on a kind of rational calculation of the probability and severity of a set of outcomes. This structure, sometimes called ‘subjective expected utility,’ is familiar to those who study reasoning and cognition, and is similar to the kind of structure often called ‘cost-benefit analysis.’ This model of human cognition sees the agent or human subject as a kind of rational calculator who weighs alternative courses of action by estimating the probability of occurrence in with the appraised positive or negative values of the alternatives.¹⁵¹

Tanner, Hunt, and Eppright criticized the Protection Motivation Model because it does not place enough emphasis on the emotional response to fear appeal messages.¹⁵²

They posited, “Emotion may increase attention to and belief in a persuasive message.

The audience is then more likely to continue processing threat-related information, which in turn increases the likelihood of adaptive behavior.”¹⁵³ Further highlighting the importance of fear, they contend that fear can change attitude without changing behavior.¹⁵⁴

The Extended Parallel Process Model

The Protection Motivation Model is considered an adequate approach for explaining how and when threat messages are successful, but fails to offer a similar explanation for why they fail.¹⁵⁵ In an effort to fill this gap, Witte developed the Extended Parallel Process Model. This model incorporates aspects of several of the models that came before it. Witte, as seen in the name of the model, utilizes the parallel

¹⁵¹Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 19.

¹⁵²Tanner, Hunt, and Eppright, “The Protection Motivation Model,” 37.

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Witte, “Putting the Fear Back into Fear Appeals,” 329-49.

process developed by Leventhal's Parallel Response Model and the concept of protection motivation from Rogers' Protection Motivation Theory. Witte also adopted Rogers' four variables of severity, vulnerability, efficacy, and self-efficacy.¹⁵⁶

The Extended Parallel Process Model is similar to the Protection Motivation Model in that it hinges on two appraisals. The first appraisal has to do with the degree to which the message is perceived to be a threat.¹⁵⁷ If the individual perceives that he or she is vulnerable to the threat, a second coping appraisal is triggered. The threat must be to such a degree that the individual feels personally vulnerable for the coping mechanism to take place. This coping appraisal could produce one of three responses: a danger control (cognitive) process, a fear control (emotional) process, or ignoring the fear appeal.¹⁵⁸

Lewis, Watson, White, and Tay offered a clarification:

More specifically, if the threat is perceived as high (i.e., perceptions of personal vulnerability and threat severity are high), then there is greater motivation to evaluate the efficacy inherent in the message. If, in turn, efficacy is high (i.e., perceptions that the recommendations of the message and their ability to enact them is high), then cognitive processing and protection motivations are adopted. In other words, adaptive behaviors are adopted and the appeal may be regarded successful. Alternatively, if the threat is perceived as high (i.e., high severity and personal vulnerability perceptions) but perceptions of efficacy are low (i.e., individuals do not believe that they could successfully enact the strategies), then emotional processing occurs whereby an individual will aim to control their [sic] fear through maladaptive strategies such as denial or avoidance. The final outcome possible in the EPPM is where individuals simply ignore the message. This outcome is likely to occur in instances where individuals' perceptions of a threat are low because it is regarded as irrelevant. Consequently, there is no motivation for continuing with any processing of the message (Witte, 1992).¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹Lewis et al., "The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety," 206.

The Effect of Fear Appeals on the Target Audience

Research on the effectiveness of fear appeals is inconclusive, for a number of studies are contradictory in their assessment of effectiveness. LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss concurred, saying there is a lack of “concrete information on its effectiveness.”¹⁶⁰ A landmark 1953 study conducted by Janis and Feshbach found that high fear appeals were less effective than moderate fear appeals in the adoption of dental hygiene practices.¹⁶¹ However, Insko, Arkoff, and Insko used high and low fear appeals on one hundred and forty-four seventh graders in an anti-smoking message. They found that the high fear appeal message was more effective than the low fear appeal message on minimizing the intention of the target audience to smoke in the future.¹⁶² Likewise, Berkowitz and Cottingham found that strong fear appeals were more effective than mild fear appeals when used to convince inexperienced drivers to wear seat belts.¹⁶³ Kraus, El-Assal, and DeFleur also found that strong fear appeals can be successful.¹⁶⁴ They conducted a study

¹⁶⁰Michael S. LaTour, Robin L. Snipes, and Sara J. Bliss, “Don’t Be Afraid to Use Fear Appeals: An Experimental Study,” *Journal of Advertising Research* 36 (1996): 61.

¹⁶¹I. Janis and S. Feshbach, “Effects of Fear-Arousing Communications,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 48 (1953): 78-92.

¹⁶²C. A. Insko, A. Arkoff, and V. M. Insko, “Effect of High and Low Fear-Arousing Communications Upon Opinions Toward Smoking,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 1 (1965): 256-66.

¹⁶³L. Berkowitz and D. Cottingham, “The Interest Value and Relevance of Fear-Arousing Communications,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 60 (1960): 37-43.

¹⁶⁴S. Kraus, E. El-Assal, and M. DeFleur, “Fear-Threat Appeals in Mass Communication,” *Speech Monographs* 33 (1966): 23-29.

of the mass media's use of fear appeals concerning the possibility of eye injury from viewing an eclipse of the sun without proper protection.

The research of Janis and Feshbach is approximately fifty-six years old. The findings of Insko, Arkoff, and Insko are approximately forty-four years old. A more recent finding by LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss substantiates the effectiveness of high fear appeal communications. LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of high fear appeals and the perceived ethicality of high fear appeals by consumers. Over a nine week period LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss used the method of mall-intercept to garner participants for the study. Two video ads were used for participant viewing. One of the ads was considered a mild fear appeal message and the other was considered a high fear appeal message. The product for both ads was a stun-gun device and were part of a real infomercial which targeted women who wanted to prevent assault and rape. Both the moderate and high fear appeal segments from the infomercial were selected with the aid of focus group sessions.¹⁶⁵

The moderate fear appeal video was a portion of the infomercial which showed actual testimonies from police officers of the effectiveness of the stun-gun device and how the device could be used by women in the prevention of assaults. The strong fear appeal segment of the infomercial contained the same set of police officer testimonials followed by a written statement on a black screen stating, “The following is an actual 911 call to police from a suburban neighborhood. The police were too late. The woman was viciously assaulted and raped.” Following that was another short segment which showed a suburban neighborhood at night with a voiceover of an actual 911 call. The

¹⁶⁵LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss, “Don’t Be Afraid of Fear Appeals,” 62.

call was made by a woman who was at home alone while someone was breaking into her house. The woman's words were superimposed on the screen as she became frantic and the situation became dire. The woman is still on the telephone when the assailant breaks into her bedroom. LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss described her last words before the telephone went dead as "hysterical, guttural, and desperate" as she screamed, "'Why are you here?! Why?! Why?! . . .'"¹⁶⁶

One hundred and fifty women were randomly selected to view the moderate segment of the infomercial and one hundred and fifty-five women were similarly selected to view the strong segment. An additional fourteen women were analyzed for each group separately (i.e., twenty-eight total).¹⁶⁷ The women were given a set of headphones and shown the videos in a concealed area to avoid distractions in the mall area. The subjects of the study were then presented with a questionnaire which they completed immediately after watching the video segments.

The results of the study indicate that the perceived ethicality of the two groups did not significantly differ. This indicates that subjects did not consider the strong fear message to be unethical. However, in the area of attitude toward the ad and intention to purchase, the subjects viewing the strong fear message were significantly more positive. The strong appeal was more effective in persuading the subjects to buy the product and did not cause them to have a negative reaction to the brand.¹⁶⁸ LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss summarized their study stating, "While this experiment tested only one type of fear

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 64-65.

appeal, the results have clear implications. This was certainly a strong ‘true to life’ ad (given the actual rape) shown to a demographically diverse and experimentally balanced sample that should have a very difficult time denying their vulnerability to this ‘omnipresent’ threat. The ‘stronger’ fear appeal was superior in terms of performance, and there were no problems with the perceived ethicality of its use, even among women who had been previous victims of violent crime.”¹⁶⁹ Hyman and Tansey found that fear appeal ads not only increase the consumer’s level of interest and persuasiveness, but audiences are able better to remember and recall ads more quickly that used fear appeals than ads that contain no emotional content.¹⁷⁰

In contradistinction, Ragsdale and Durham researched retention rates in two sermons on Hell. One sermon was considered a high fear appeal message and the other sermon a low fear appeal. Two homogeneous groups were exposed to one of the two sermons. They found no significant difference in retention between the two groups.¹⁷¹ Ragsdale and Durham concluded, “As has been the case with most other studies, high fear arousal techniques appear neither to enhance recall of information nor to inhibit it.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 65.

¹⁷⁰Michael R. Hyman and Richard Tansey, “The Ethics of Psychoactive Ads,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 9 (1990): 105-14.

¹⁷¹J. Donald Ragsdale and Kenneth R. Durham, “Effects of Religious Fear Appeals on Source Credibility and Information Retention,” *The Journal of Communication and Religion* 10 (1987): 12. This research was concurrent with one on source credibility mentioned later in this chapter.

¹⁷²Ibid.

Walton admitted that though the use of fear appeals has grown, opinions as to their effectiveness and legitimacy are divided among researchers.¹⁷³ LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss contend that fear appeal advertising is widely used today even though it is not universally accepted as a legitimate form of persuasion.¹⁷⁴ Opinions have been described as “contentious,” “inconsistent,” “risky,” “characterized by issues of long-standing debate”¹⁷⁵ and controversial.¹⁷⁶ Some scholars believe that because of the mixed results of fear appeals, contradictory findings, and the ethical concerns of purposely eliciting fear to change behavior, fear appeals should be avoided or at a minimum approached with great caution.¹⁷⁷ Job bemoaned that fear appeals have “met with little success” in health promotion campaigns.¹⁷⁸ Others contend that given the right circumstances fear appeals can be very effective.¹⁷⁹ Ray and Wilkie posited that based on the research evidence and practical evidence fear appeals should be considered as a tool of persuasion in marketing and advertising.¹⁸⁰ They also contended that when the American Cancer Society began

¹⁷³Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 1.

¹⁷⁴LaTour, Snipes, and Bliss, “Don’t Be Afraid to Use Fear Appeals,” 60.

¹⁷⁵Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 204.

¹⁷⁶Homer E. Spence and Reza Moïnpour, “Fear Appeals in Marketing—A Social Perspective,” *Journal of Marketing* 36 (1972): 43.

¹⁷⁷Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 204.

¹⁷⁸R. F. Soames Job, “Effective and Ineffective Use of Fear in Health Promotion Campaigns” *American Journal of Public Health* 78 (1988): 163-67.

¹⁷⁹Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 204.

¹⁸⁰Michael L. Ray and William L. Wilkie, “Fear: The Potential of an Appeal Neglected by Marketing,” *Journal of Marketing* 34 (1970): 54.

using fear appeals in anti-smoking campaigns in 1967, 1968, and 1969, there was the first drop in per capita smoking since the Surgeon General's report on smoking in 1964.¹⁸¹

Research has shown that personal vulnerability and efficacy are the two greatest factors in fear appeal message acceptance. Therefore, an effective appeal must contain high levels of perceived vulnerability and provide sufficient coping strategies (i.e., response efficacy and self-efficacy).¹⁸² Vulnerability and efficacy have been found to be even more important than the level fear in an appeal.

In the case of youth drug prevention strategies, fear appeals were among the first to be used. However, a 2008 study concluded that “though scare tactics have been widely used in our field for decades, research has shown that they are not effective in preventing or producing sustained reductions of ATOD¹⁸³ use among youth.”¹⁸⁴ Likewise, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, found in 1997 that, “Information or education programs using scare tactics are used less often because research and experience have demonstrated that they are either counterproductive or ineffective, and that students learn better with a low fear appeal message and with a credible communicator.”¹⁸⁵ Ray and Wilkie concurred saying, “Overly mild threats won't arouse fearful reactions enough, but overly strong threats may be counterproductive as the

¹⁸¹Ibid., 55.

¹⁸²Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 210.

¹⁸³Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

¹⁸⁴Prevention First, *Ineffectiveness of Fear Appeals in Youth Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug (ATOD) Prevention* (Springfield, IL: Prevention First, 2008), 2.

¹⁸⁵Karol L. Kumpeer and Gladys B. Baxley, *Drug Abuse Prevention: What Works* (Rockville, MD: National Institutes of Health, 1997), 26.

receiver defensively avoids attention, denies personal vulnerability or distorts the message.”¹⁸⁶ As a result, substance abuse preventionists now strongly discourage the use of fear appeals as an approach to eliminating and reducing substance abuse.¹⁸⁷

Another area in which fear appeals are widely used is driver safety. Lewis et al. conducted a 2007 study to assess the effectiveness of these appeals in Australia.¹⁸⁸ They indicated that fear appeals in driver safety campaigns became very prominent in Australia in the early 1990’s and the underlying assumption was higher levels of fear brought about higher levels of persuasion.¹⁸⁹ Driver safety appeals are especially given to displaying gory and graphic scenes of accidents and victims in an effort to scare the public into driving safely. Donovan, Jalleh, and Henley discovered that high threat appeals in driver safety campaigns were no more effective than other types of advertisements which did not include threatening content (i.e., testimonials, talking heads).¹⁹⁰ Lewis, Watson, Tay, and White concluded from Donovan’s study that his findings are consistent with the increasing amount of research that indicates the

¹⁸⁶Ray and Wilkie, “Fear,” 54-61.

¹⁸⁷Prevention First, *Ineffectiveness of Fear Appeals*, 2.

¹⁸⁸Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 203-22.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁹⁰R. J. Donovan, G. Jalleh, and N. C. Henley, “Executing Effective Road Safety Advertising: Are Big Budgets Necessary?,” *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 31 (1999): 243-52.

effectiveness of a fear appeal is a result of high levels of susceptibility rather than high levels of threat.¹⁹¹

Zimmerman explained some causes for the ineffectiveness of fear appeals. He stated, "Research has indicated that campaigns based on fear are difficult to carry out and may actually be counterproductive by appealing to risk-taking in some members of the target audience. If the threat is too remote in time or too mild, people will not be motivated by it. If the threat is too strong, people may tune out the message, refuse to believe it or adopt a fatalistic attitude."¹⁹² Leventhal explained that an intense fear from a fearful communication paralyzes the individual's coping skills. He goes on to say, "The data strongly imply that the unpleasant feelings and ideas stimulated by the communication led to withdrawal behavior."¹⁹³

Another factor contributing to the failure of fear appeals is a misunderstanding of the target audience. Audience analysis is essential for producing fear, vulnerability, efficacy, and self-efficacy. Lewis, Watson, Tay, and White provided an example of a misunderstanding of the target audience in driver safety commercials. They point out that most of these fear appeals have usually been aimed at males and/or young males.¹⁹⁴ Studies have found that appeals that contain a strong physical threat, resulting in the

¹⁹¹Lewis et al., "The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety," 207.

¹⁹²Robert Zimmerman, *Social Marketing Strategies for Campus Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problem* (Newton, MA: Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, 1997). Ray and Wilkie, "Fear," 55, agree with this assessment.

¹⁹³Howard Leventhal, "Findings and Theory in the Study of Fear Communications." *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 5 (1970): 119-86.

¹⁹⁴Lewis et al., "The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety," 207.

death of a passenger, were most effective on females. Males displayed far less intention to comply with the recommended messages about safe driving. Also, the males reported that the messages were more likely to influence others than themselves.¹⁹⁵ Yet another study, conducted by Tay, found that advertisement campaigns seeking to reduce drinking and driving did reduce the self-reported intentions of drivers to do so. However, the campaign showed the weakest results among young males, which were the target audience.¹⁹⁶ The conclusion is that young males do not respond to fear appeals with high levels of physical threat because they do not feel vulnerable to such threats. This evidence suggests that gender and age have an influence on fear appeal message acceptance. However, Witte and Allen verified, “individual differences do not appear to have much influence on the processing of fear appeals . . . generally, studies have found no effect on acceptance of fear appeal recommendations due to gender, age, ethnicity, or group membership.”¹⁹⁷ This is a yet to be explained inconsistency in the social science literature. Though identifying the most relevant threat for a target audience is crucial to message acceptance, evidence is available that suggests a message that is “too relevant” may be rejected by those targeted.¹⁹⁸

Lewis, Watson, Tay, and White identified another reason for fear appeal ineffectiveness in driver safety campaigns. They noted that car crashes are statistically

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 207-08.

¹⁹⁷Kim Witte and M. Allen, “A Meta-analysis of Fear Appeals: Implications for Effective Public Health Campaigns,” *Health Education and Behaviour* 27 (2000): 602.

¹⁹⁸Lewis et al., “The Role of Fear Appeals in Improving Driver Safety,” 208.

rare. The rarity of crashes combined with the fact that a person who speeds while drinking and driving will likely not be detected every time he or she engages in such behavior, causes the fear appeal advertisements to lose some credibility. The diminished credibility results because the content of the advertisement sounds unrealistic to individuals who have engaged in such activity in the past without suffering any consequences.¹⁹⁹

The Ethicality of Fear Appeals

The ethicality of fear appeals is an issue of continual and sharp debate. Spence and Moinpour questioned the ethicality of fear appeals in advertising. They contended that the use of fear appeals is “open to question because of the possible negative social effects of anxiety stimulation.”²⁰⁰ They further asserted that little justification for fear appeals has been given or required because much of this type of advertising has been used in health promotion campaigns. Trying to get someone to stop smoking or adopt better health habits are more noble goals than the selling of cosmetics, clothing, and/or deodorant.²⁰¹ Therefore, the ethicality of such appeals has been of little concern to most people. Similarly, Duke, Pickett, Carlson, and Grove contended that very little attention has been given to the ethicality of fear appeals in the area of advertising by the marketing literature.²⁰² This lack of research leaves many questions about ethicality unanswered.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 210.

²⁰⁰Spence and Moinpour, “Fear Appeals in Marketing,” 42.

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²Duke et al., “A Method for Evaluating the Ethics of Fear Appeals,” 120.

Duke, Pickett, Carlson, and Grove contended that the ethical evaluation of fear appeals has largely been intuitive.²⁰³

An evaluation of the ethicality of fear appeals raises a number of issues. First, Duke et al. questioned the ethicality of fear appeals because of the response they generate in the recipients. A fear appeal intentionally seeks to cause a negative and/or unhealthy stimulation in a target audience.²⁰⁴ The whole premise behind fear appeals is to bring about this negative reaction.

A second issue is that of fear appeal exposure to an unintended audience. Duke, Pickett, Carlson, and Grove pointed out the advertising industry's response to criticism that they engage in manipulation. Advertisers said this perceived manipulation is a result of the unintended audience's viewing of the material. The fear appeal message is not, therefore, inappropriate for the intended audience.²⁰⁵ This problem arises from a use of segmentation. Segmentation is essentially targeting one segment of society. Realizing that all fear appeal messages will not be successful with all audiences, marketing experts craft fear appeal messages to impact one segment of society (i.e., teenagers, mothers, the elderly). Unfortunately, it is impossible to guarantee other segments will not view the material. The unintended audience could be harmed through the perpetuation of existing fears or the creation of new ones. Also, the unintended audience could perceive false concepts of societal norms.

²⁰³Ibid., 127.

²⁰⁴Ibid., 120.

²⁰⁵Ibid.

A third criticism of the ethics of fear appeals is the manipulation of social norms for the general public. Critics suggest fear appeal messages “mold” social norms which individuals then act to prevent by purchasing a particular product.²⁰⁶ As an example, Duke, Pickett, Carlson, and Grove pointed to the “ring around the collar” commercials used by Wisk laundry detergent in the 1970s. The question of ethicality is, Did this fear exist already in society or was it created by the detergent manufacturers? Duke, Pickett, Carlson, and Grove suggested this was an “unknown” problem until it was exploited by the detergent commercials.²⁰⁷ After creating and arousing the fear, the company then capitalizes on the sale of laundry detergent. Duke, Pickett, Carlson, and Grove called this “social anxiety fabrication.”²⁰⁸ For a fear appeal to warn an audience of a real and present danger is ethical. However, to fabricate fears and then benefit financially from the sale of a product that addresses the fear is unethical.

A fourth concern in fear appeal ethicality is discussed by Spence and Moinpour. They addressed the frequency with which fear appeals are used in advertising. They argued that with increased use of fear appeals, the public’s threshold for anxiety will be affected in some way. However, they are unsure how and to what extent.²⁰⁹ They explained, “The preceding research has shown that with an increased level of anxiety the individual usually responds in some fashion either to avoid the

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 120-21.

²⁰⁹Spence and Moinpour, “Fear Appeals in Marketing,” 40.

aversive situation or responds in a manner that is concurrent with the anxiety situation.”²¹⁰

Spence and Moinpour expostulated that anxieties are learned behaviors. They indicated that anxiety can be learned through observation of another person experiencing the same anxiety. As a result, many children exhibit the same fears as their parents. Consequently, Spence and Moinpour raised the prospect of fear appeal advertising in the mass media creating new anxieties in adults and children and perpetuating existing anxieties. They gave the example of a commercial for dish soap in which the contention of the advertisement is that mother’s hands will be as smooth and soft as her daughter’s and therefore, by implication, the mother will appear as young as her daughter. According to Spence and Moinpour, this commercial perpetuates the fear of growing old.²¹¹ Other examples of advertisers creating or feeding social fears include perpetuating the fear of bad breath, wearing out-of-date clothing, or driving old cars.²¹² Marketers have a vested interest in the continuation of these fears because they are good for business.²¹³

Ray and Wilkie questioned the use of fear appeals, saying, “The basic question here is whether the fear necessary for effective marketing communications may have deleterious consequences for those high-anxiety persons who happen to be in the message

²¹⁰Ibid.

²¹¹Ibid.

²¹²Ibid., 41-42.

²¹³Ibid., 42.

audience.”²¹⁴ Their concern was the effect fear appeals have on those individuals who are already considered “high-anxiety” persons. Since society is already inundated with anxiety causing circumstances (e.g., disease, financial pressure, world conflicts, etc.), what is the effect of further exacerbating an individual’s anxiety levels.²¹⁵

Spence and Moinpour suggested three areas for further study in the area of fear appeals and their effect on individuals. First, they suggested the need to determine whether continuous exposure to high intensity fear appeals in marketing could possibly produce more high-anxiety people in society. Second, they suggested further study to determine if the effect of fear appeal advertising is the same on high-anxiety persons as it is for low-anxiety persons.²¹⁶ Third, they suggested further research on the effect of fear appeals on socioeconomic classes of consumers and on children.²¹⁷

Finally, a further concern raised by Spence and Moinpour is the outcome of a successful fear appeal in marketing. When a person seeks to reduce his or her level of fear by purchasing a product that is the remedy for the fear that has been aroused, does the product deliver on its promise? For a company, success is the selling of the product. However, a question that Spence and Moinpour raised is the effect of a lack of results. What happens to the individual when the product fails to do what the company explicitly

²¹⁴Ray and Wilkie, “Fear,” 62.

²¹⁵Spence and Moinpour, “Fear Appeals in Marketing—A Social Perspective,” 41.

²¹⁶Ibid.

²¹⁷Ibid., 43.

or implicitly said it would accomplish?²¹⁸

Fear Appeals as a Tool of Persuasion in Preaching

A survey of homiletic texts reveals that the mention of fear as a persuasive tool in preaching is rare. In his lectures on preaching, Dabney addressed the need to use emotions in the rhetorical art. He instructed, “the rhetorical discourse should deal not only with the intellect (to produce mental conviction), but with the affections to direct the motives.”²¹⁹ Moreover, Dabney went further in giving numerous examples of the types of emotion applicable in preaching. Broadly speaking, Dabney alleged that the emotions to which the preacher may appeal are the moral and spiritual ones. The “sensual and malignant passions” he asserted, must never be aroused. He listed fear as one of the moral and spiritual affections.²²⁰ He stated,

Since the legitimacy of the art of persuasion depends upon our resorting to the appropriate feelings, the first question to be answered is: To what class of emotions may the preacher appeal? I reply, only to the moral and spiritual.

The attempt to propagate suitable emotions is . . . lawful for the speaker; yea, there is no argument which does not implicitly do it. You will reason with men: “This conduct is for your interest.” You may profess to have restricted yourself to simple evidence; but just in the degree in which your argument is conclusive, you make a virtual appeal to self-love. You demonstrate: “This course is for the good of our neighbour.” You have made an appeal to benevolence. You show: “This act is dangerous.” You resort to your hearer’s fear. Again, every man practices this rhetoric of persuasion upon himself. We are continually aware that our right affections are too low for their proper objects. We feel that it is not only right, but obligatory, to use expedients for their enhancement, and we recognize him as our

²¹⁸Ibid., 41.

²¹⁹Robert L. Dabney, *Evangelical Eloquence: A Course of Lectures on Preaching* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 233.

²²⁰Ibid., 238.

moral benefactor who assists us to effect it.²²¹

Dabney explained that in the use of the emotions the preacher has a disadvantage and an advantage. The disadvantage is that all the emotions of man have been corrupted by the Fall; however, they are not destroyed.²²² They are perverted and man cannot always trust them. The advantage for the preacher is that in his work of persuasion using the emotions, he has the aid of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit to quicken dead souls is promised, and it is this power that separates the gospel preacher from the secular orator.²²³ Dabney admitted that many look at the appeal to feelings as an illegitimate form of persuasion, but he argued that it is the emotions which prompt man to action.²²⁴ Therefore, the fear appeal in preaching can be not only a legitimate form of argument, but a necessary one.

George Campbell, the eighteenth-century philosopher, theologian, and rhetorician, viewed fear as an emotion that can profitably be employed in preaching. In his *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, Campbell constructed a taxonomy of three classes for emotions. In Book I, chapter I he commented that there are four ends to speaking. He asserted, "All the ends of speaking are reducible to four; every speech being intended to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, or to

²²¹Ibid., 237-38.

²²²Ibid., 238.

²²³Ibid., 239.

²²⁴Ibid., 233-35.

influence the will.”²²⁵ Campbell proceeded to address each of these ends. In his discussion of the passions, he explicated three classes of emotion. He explained that “every kind of *pathos*” does not achieve the same level of “ascendancy over the minds” of the audience.²²⁶ Campbell is basically asserting that some emotions are more conducive to persuasion than others. He views fear as being effective for persuasion, though not the highest motive. Therefore, his first class of emotions he called “inert and torpid.” He argued that these emotions deject the mind. The emotions he placed in this class are sorrow, fear, shame, and humility.²²⁷ This first class of emotions are most contributive to dissuading, according to Campbell.

The second class of emotions Campbell described as contrary to the first class. They “elevate the soul, and stimulate to action.” The emotions he included in this class are hope, patriotism, ambition, emulation, and anger. These emotions facilitate action and/or move arguments in the direction of action. Campbell stated this second class of emotions is best for persuading.²²⁸

The third class of emotions he called “an intermediate kind of passions.” Campbell avowed these emotions neither hinder an individual from acting nor motivate them to action, but are suitable for either. The emotions in this class are joy, love, esteem, and compassion. However, Campbell concluded his discussion of these three

²²⁵George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Harper, 1868), 23.

²²⁶*Ibid.*, 27.

²²⁷*Ibid.*

²²⁸*Ibid.*

classes of emotion by saying, “Nevertheless, all these kinds may find a place in suasory discourses.”²²⁹

Augustine, in *On Christian Doctrine*, maintained that a preacher must do more than merely inform. He called on the preacher to persuade the auditors and not merely inform them. He declared,

When such things are taught that it is sufficient to know or to believe them, they require no more consent than an acknowledgement that they are true. But when that which is taught must be put into practice and is taught for that reason, the truth of what is said is acknowledged in vain and the eloquence of the discourse pleases in vain unless that which is learned is implemented in action. It is necessary therefore for the ecclesiastical orator, when he urges that something be done, not only to teach that he may instruct and to please that he may hold attention, but also to persuade that he may be victorious.²³⁰

Augustine elaborated by instructing the orator to use many types of emotion and fear is one he gives as an example.

Just as the listener is to be delighted if he is to be retained as a listener, so also is he to be persuaded if he is to be moved to act. And just as he is delighted if you speak sweetly, so is he persuaded if he loves what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you condemn, embraces what you commend, sorrows at what you maintain to be sorrowful; rejoices when you announce something delightful, takes pity on those whom you place before him, in speaking, as being pitiful, flees those whom you, moving fear, warn are to be avoided.²³¹

The evidence from these three eminent theologians and rhetoricians confirms that the use of fear has at least some place in the history of preaching.

One of the main concerns of using fear appeals in preaching is the danger of manipulation. However, as Dabney stated above, the use of emotion to persuade is not

²²⁹Ibid.

²³⁰Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, ed. D. W. Robertson (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958), 138.

²³¹Ibid., 136-37.

necessarily wrong. There is, of course, a fine line between the use of fear and manipulation. Clyde Fant defined manipulation as “persuasion that is deliberately not in the best interest of the individual involved but is deceptively intended for the advantage of the persuader; or that attempts to get people to do something they would not do if they had the facts.”²³² When the preacher uses biblical truth to warn hearers of the danger of Hell, it is in their best interest. If a preacher arouses fear by broaching the prospect of sudden and/or tragic death to those who are unconverted, the preacher is acting in their best interest.

As a tool of persuasion in preaching, fear appeals must be grounded in biblical truth. The fear-arousing threat must be biblical. If a preacher seeks to arouse fear through a description of Hell, the description must be supported by biblical evidence. However, if the preacher attempts to scare his hearers with that which cannot be biblically substantiated, that is a questionable arousal of fear. Scaring hearers unnecessarily is not only manipulation; it is also cruel and abusive.

In like manner, the recommendations to abate the danger of a fear appeal must be biblical. In an evangelistic sermon, the recommendation is typically a call to repentance and trust in Christ for salvation. This is a legitimate recommendation because it is biblical. However, if a preacher threatens hearers with the fire of Hell unless they give generously to his ministry, that is not biblically accurate and is therefore manipulation. More is said about the appropriate use of fear in preaching in chapter six.

²³²Clyde Fant, *Preaching for Today*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 117-18.

Walton explained that social scientists have only been interested in the empirical aspect of explaining why, how, and when fear appeal arguments work.²³³ However, Walton suggested that the cognitive emphasis by social scientists demonstrates a logical component involved in fear appeals.²³⁴ One place where the empirical and logical touch is dichotomization. Dichotomization is a form of argumentation in which the recipient is given only two courses of action. When given only two courses of action in this form of argumentation, the individual is forced to choose one of the two. Walton explained that the rhetorical force of the fear appeal argument hinges on dichotomization.²³⁵ The argument offers no third option and no way around choosing. In the case of fear appeals, the choice is between the fearful threat or the recommended attitude change.

Preaching utilizes this form of argumentation in the form of fear appeals. Heaven or hell, the blessing of God or the cursing of God, obedience or disobedience, prosperity or loss are all dichotomizations. In preaching there are typically only two choices, and this is especially true in the preaching of fear appeals.

An important question for preaching is whether or not fear appeals in preaching are more successful than preaching that communicates the same truth but without the use of fear. Though research has been inconsistent, Evans et al. found that in

²³³Walton, *Scare Tactics*, 20.

²³⁴Ibid.

²³⁵Ibid.

marketing fear appeals were not more effective in changing attitudes and behaviors than positive appeals.²³⁶ However, Ray and Wilkie contended, “Considerable social psychology and communications research show that intelligent use of fear messages can have favorable effects on attitude change and action.”²³⁷ Further, what is successful preaching? Measuring message acceptance in preaching is not easily determined. In the case of evangelistic preaching, message acceptance can tenuously be measured by the number of people who respond to a public invitation. However, everyone who accepts the message may not respond publicly and some of those who do respond publicly may not actually accept the message.²³⁸ Also, a positive response to a sermon may not be wholly a result of the success of that sermon. The positive response may be the combined effect of several sermons heard over a period of time.

Christian preaching is unlike other types of rhetoric in that it proceeds with a divine mandate and rests upon the foundation of biblical authority. As Farmer asserted, “For Christianity is a religion of revelation; its central message is a declaration, a proclamation that God has met the darkness of the human spirit with a great unveiling of succoring light and truth. The revelation moreover is historical, that is to say, it is given primarily through events which in the first place can only be reported and affirmed. As

²³⁶Richard I. Evans et al., “Fear Arousal, Persuasion, and Actual Versus Implied Behavioral Change; New Perspective Utilizing a Real-Life Dental Hygiene Program,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16 (1970): 220-27.

²³⁷Ray and Wilkie, “Fear,” 54.

²³⁸Jesus illustrated this in the Parable of the Soils in Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15.

we have already said, no merely internal reflection can arrive at historical events.”²³⁹

Fear appeals in Christian preaching have a very different aim than fear appeals in marketing and politics. In marketing the goal is to sell a product or, in preventative health and safety campaigns, an idea. In politics the objective is to win an election or pass a piece of legislation. The goal of preaching is the glory of God. Piper agreed, saying, “The goal of preaching is the glory of God reflected in the glad submission of the human heart.”²⁴⁰

Pathos within Argumentum ad Baculum

Aristotle did not discuss anything akin to the term *argumentum ad baculum* in his works. However, he did address the use of fear in persuasion. In his catalogue of emotions in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle included fear. As stated in chapter one, Aristotle developed three types of artistic proof: *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. *Pathos* is the use of the emotions to persuade, and *pathos* is an umbrella term under which multiple emotions are placed. Therefore, any appeal to emotion is considered *pathos*, and the use of *argumentum ad baculum* is the use of *pathos* for the purposes of persuasion.

In Book II of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle said that in order to persuade, the orator must put his hearers in the right frame of mind.²⁴¹ In order to bring the hearers into a frame of mind that is most suitable for persuasion the orator must affect their emotions. Aristotle

²³⁹Herbert H. Farmer, *The Servant of the Word* (London: Nisbet and Company, 1941), 86.

²⁴⁰John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 26.

²⁴¹Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 243.

claimed, “The emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain and pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear and the like, with their opposites.”²⁴² Aristotle’s averments are especially applicable to the amicable warning aspect of *argumentum ad baculum*.

Aristotle’s teaching on fear is amazingly consistent with the findings of fear appeal research. First, he affirmed people do not fear those things that are far off. He used death as an example. Everyone knows he or she will die, but unless it is close at hand, death is not feared. In order to make men fear, they must feel that the danger is close at hand.²⁴³ This is in keeping with the findings of empirical research. Appeals to death are only successful on the elderly, because young people do not feel vulnerable to such appeals. Young people feel death is far into the future for them. Aristotle contended that fear is aroused by that which seems to be imminent and capable of harming an individual. Therefore, Aristotle was making the vulnerability argument. Aristotle expostulated, “Consequently, when it is advisable that the audience should be frightened, the orator must make them feel that they really are in danger of something, pointing out that it has happened to others who were stronger than they are, and is happening, or has happened, to people like themselves, at the hands of unexpected people, in an unexpected form, and at an unexpected time.”²⁴⁴

²⁴²Ibid., 245.

²⁴³Ibid., 271.

²⁴⁴Ibid., 275, 277.

Second, Aristotle said “fear sets us thinking what can be done.”²⁴⁵ By that he meant fear forces people to begin thinking and deliberating what they need to do about the danger they are facing. Fear forces action. This is consistent with the first model of fear appeals. The drive model of fear appeals contended that fear activates a driving mechanism to deal with the experience of fear. An individual experiencing fear will take action against the fear or the danger. Either way, the feeling of fear is reduced. The “thinking” Aristotle mentions is also consistent with the aspects of fear appeals discussed earlier. For a fear appeal to be effective, the auditor must experience a perceived severity and susceptibility. Severity and susceptibility are followed by a perceived self-efficacy. This is a cognitive process through which an assessment is made by the auditor of the danger at hand.

Fear Appeals and Source Credibility

Aristotle delineated the credibility of the speaker as one of his primary modes of persuasion. The *ethos* of the speaker is an important factor in all discourse, but is especially true in *argumentum ad baculum*. A threat must be believable for an *ad baculum* argument to be successful. If the threat is so outrageous as to be ignored, or if the speaker has little or no credibility in such matters, the appeal will fail. Strong and Cook exposed three levels of credibility: external, internal, and ending credibility.²⁴⁶ A source’s external credibility is what the audience knows about him or her before the rhetorical exchange. Internal credibility is what the speaker establishes during the speech

²⁴⁵Ibid., 275.

²⁴⁶W. F. Strong and John A. Cook, *Persuasion: A Practical Guide to Effective Persuasive Speech* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1987), 22.

event. Ending credibility is the conclusion of the audience after the speech event that coalesces external and internal credulity.²⁴⁷ Strong and Cook drew this conclusion, “Credibility is a perception. It is not some amount of ‘good’ that a person owns. It is granted by the audience and it can be taken away at any time. Since credibility is a perception, there are many technically illogical uses of it, but still, highly effective ones.”²⁴⁸ Therefore, perceived credibility is one of the most important factors in persuasion.

It is almost impossible to separate the source of the message from the message itself.²⁴⁹ Hovland, Janis, and Kelley asserted, “Whenever a communication contains predictions about potential threats, the emotional impact will depend to a considerable extent upon appraisals of the communicator. For instance, if the communicator is regarded as completely uninformed, his predictions may be immediately discounted and therefore fail to arouse the sort of anticipations which cue off emotional reactions.”²⁵⁰ This was cleverly demonstrated through a study conducted by Franklyn Haiman in 1947.²⁵¹ Three groups of college students listened to the same fifteen minute prerecorded speech supporting compulsory health insurance for all Americans. All three groups

²⁴⁷Ibid., 22-23.

²⁴⁸Ibid., 24.

²⁴⁹Ibid., 18.

²⁵⁰Carl I. Hovland, Irving L. Janis, and Harold H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953), 73.

²⁵¹Franklyn S. Haiman, “An Experimental Study of the Effects of Ethos in Public Speaking,” *Speech Monographs* 16 (1949): 190-02.

listened to the exact same recording. One of the three groups was informed the speech was given by Eugene Dennis, Secretary-General of the Communist Party of America. Another group was told the man speaking was Dr. Thomas Parran, Surgeon General of the United States. The third and final group was told the speech was given by an anonymous Northwestern University sophomore.

Before listening to the speech, each student was given a questionnaire to gauge their existing feeling about compulsory health insurance. They were asked to check yes, no, or undecided. At the conclusion of their respective listening sessions, the students were again asked to take a questionnaire to gauge the change in their opinions. The results revealed that the students who thought the voice was that of Dr. Thomas Parran caused more people to change and change to a greater degree than the other two speeches. Since the content heard by all three groups was the same, the only factor to which the changes in opinion about compulsory health insurance can be attributed is credibility.

Ragsdale and Durham also discovered that the credibility of the source of the fear appeal is a factor in adaptive outcomes. Their research revealed that “a highly esteemed source” coupled with a high fear appeal brings about greater compliance in auditors.²⁵² Janis and Feshbach found that in high fear appeal environments listeners “showed the greatest amount of subjective dislike of the communication and made more

²⁵²Ragsdale and Durham, “Effects of Religious Fear Appeals on Source Credibility and Information Retention,” 12.

complaints about the content.”²⁵³ Smith discovered that in situations where the audience objected to the message they were likely to denigrate the source of the message.²⁵⁴

Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma found that audiences are more compliant when there is a high fear appeal and a highly credible source.²⁵⁵ Additionally, Insko contended that when the source of a fear appeal has a high level of credibility, the recipients of a fear appeal have more difficulty responding maladaptively.²⁵⁶

Ragsdale and Durham conducted a study to discover the effect of high and low fear appeals on source credibility in a specific, homogeneous religious group. The goal was to see if credibility was significantly altered by a preacher using strong fear appeals in a sermon. They chose a homogeneous group because “demographic characteristics and personality traits of audiences appear to moderate the effects of fear arousal techniques.”²⁵⁷ The study included sixty-two people gathered for an adult Bible class at the North Boulevard Church of Christ in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The group was randomly divided into two treatment groups. The two groups were informed that they would be listening to a short sermon of about ten minutes length and then asked to

²⁵³Janis and Feshback, “Effects of Fear-Arousing Communication,” 92.

²⁵⁴Mary J. Smith, “The Effects of Threats to Attitudinal Freedom as a Function of Message Quality and Initial Receiver Attitude,” *Communication Monographs* 44 (1977): 196-06.

²⁵⁵James T. Tedeschi, Barry R. Schlenker, and Thomas V. Bonoma, “Compliance to Threats as a Function of Source Attractiveness and Esteem,” *Sociometry* 38 (1975): 81-98.

²⁵⁶Kenneth L. Higbee, “Fifteen Years of Fear Arousal: Research in Threat Appeals: 1953-1968,” *Psychological Bulletin* (1969): 437.

²⁵⁷Ragsdale and Durham, “Effects of Religious Fear Appeals on Source Credibility and Information Retention,” 11.

answer a few questions. Two sermons on Hell were prepared for the groups. One sermon was considered a high fear message while the other was considered a low fear message. Ragsdale and Durham indicated that both messages could be taken as high and/or low fear appeals depending on the audience, highlighting the ambiguity in determining high and low appeals. In an effort to balance this ambiguity, traditional methods of fear arousing material were used in the sermons. They reported, “These methods involved the use of personalized language, loaded words, and a literal interpretation of biblical texts.”²⁵⁸ The high fear appeal message made heavy use of direct personal address such as “you,” “your,” “we,” “us,” and “our.” The listeners were referred to as “friends,” “brother,” and “sister.” “I,” “me,” and “my” were used for the speaker. In the low fear appeal sermon, the speaker was only mentioned once and the listeners were never mentioned. The high fear appeal message used “more descriptive and potentially frightening words” than the low fear appeal message. They explained, “Loaded words with negative connotative meaning appeared 44 times (2.6%) in the high fear message but only seven times (0.4%) in the low fear one. The word ‘Hell’ itself appeared 39 times in Sermon 1 as compared to 24 times in Sermon 2. Typical loaded language used in Sermon 1 to arouse high fear are such phrases as ‘rotten bodies of dead swine,’ ‘as you scream and beg for mercy,’ and ‘hell is a loathsome, ghastly place reserved for all the wretched damned of history.’”²⁵⁹

The authors indicated that both messages were similar in outline, but interpreted Hell differently. The high fear appeal message interpreted Hell literally and

²⁵⁸Ibid.

²⁵⁹Ibid.

“attempted to personalize the message by appealing to human sensations and fears.” The low fear appeal message approached the subject of Hell from a metaphorical position and presented it in an impersonal fashion.²⁶⁰ The sermons were rehearsed and read onto an audio tape by an experienced male speaker. An attempt was made to prevent, as much as possible, fluctuations in rate, pitch, and volume. After the listening experience, the two groups were given a three part questionnaire which included measurements of their perceptions of the speaker’s credibility, sentence completion items, and two exploratory questions: “Was there anything about this message that you disliked?” and “Did you feel that the speaker was trying to frighten you with this message?”²⁶¹

Ragsdale and Durham summarized their findings, saying, “In general it must be concluded that this conservative religious group regarded the source of the high fear message as more credible than the source of the low fear one.”²⁶² This is consistent with the findings of similar studies. They concluded, “The positive evaluation of source credibility by the high fear group may help to explain how contemporary preachers seem to ‘get away with’ using such a time-worn technique as fear arousal.”²⁶³ However, they offer several reasons for these findings. First, they admitted that the groups were made up of fundamentalist Church of Christ members. They would have been accustomed to such fear messages on Hell and may have been more predisposed to like a source whose message was consistent with their existing beliefs and prior experience. Second,

²⁶⁰Ibid.

²⁶¹Ibid., 12.

²⁶²Ibid.

²⁶³Ibid., 13.

Ragsdale and Durham suggested that because of the personalized and loaded language of the high fear message the interest factor may have been higher for it. They cited Robbins, who “found that the interest level of listeners increased as fear arousal increased in messages on cancer.” They also cited Berkowitz and Cottingham, who discovered that low fear appeals were uninteresting to listeners.²⁶⁴ Therefore, the findings of Ragsdale and Durham, Insko, and Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma are uniform. High fear appeal messages are a contributing factor to higher source credibility.

Conclusion

Argumentum ad baculum, fear appeals, and *pathos* are closely related persuasive forms. They all three have a point of connection in the use of fear to persuade. Positions on the fallaciousness of *argumentum ad baculum* and the ethicality of fear appeals run the gamut of possibilities. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that the use of *argumentum ad baculum* in the form of direct and indirect warnings of real danger, motivated by genuine concern on the part of the source of the message, are a nonfallacious and ethical speech act.

The next chapter examines the use of *argumentum ad baculum* in the form of fear appeals in the published sermons of George Whitefield. The various fear appeal categories Whitefield used are given, along with excerpts from the sermons.

²⁶⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

FEAR APPEALS IN WHITEFIELD'S SERMONS

An examination of Whitefield's extant sermons reveals his use of at least ten categories of fear appeals. The identification of these fear appeals demonstrates a measure of subjectivity which is unavoidable. What arouses fear in one group may be ineffective in another. Fears in general transcend time and culture, but vary according to age, socio-economic status, religious belief, past experiences, and cultural distinctives. Thus, the selecting of these appeals must be subjective. However, a general knowledge of what arouses fear in the majority is innate in most people. Most individuals, for example, are afraid of death, as this fear transcends time and culture. The fear of hell and future judgment presupposes a belief in these realities by particular groups of people.

As described in chapter 2, *argumentum ad baculum* can be defined as appeal to force or an appeal to fear. Whitefield never used *argumentum ad baculum* as an appeal to force, for an appeal to force uses a threat of harmful consequences to be inflicted by the primary interlocutor. Whitefield never made such a threat in his preaching. He did, however, make extensive use of the appeal to fear. The appeal to fear utilizes a warning of harmful or unpleasant circumstances which is given out of a benevolent concern for the target of the appeal. Fear appeals in Whitefield's sermons are identified based on their potential for arousing fear in the time and culture in which he preached.

The appeals in Whitefield's sermons are not fallacious because his intent was to give a genuine and sincere warning to his hearers. Even if a person in his audience did not believe his appeal, if Whitefield believed it, the appeal was nonfallacious. As Kimball noted, the intent of the speaker determines whether or not the appeal is fallacious.¹ Also, Witte defined the threat/warning as a "variable that exists whether a person knows it or not."² Threat perception takes place when the individual is made aware of the threat or warning. Belief or disbelief is apropos at the point of perceived susceptibility. For a fear appeal to be effective, the likelihood of a person experiencing the danger must be perceived. Disbelief would be considered a maladaptive response and the fear appeal would fail for lack of susceptibility. A person who rejects the teaching of hell would not be susceptible to a fear appeal about hell, just as a person who disbelieves the surgeon general's warnings about the dangers of smoking would not feel susceptible to the danger. Accordingly, a fear appeal would be ineffective on them.

Naturally, the response to Whitefield's fear appeals would not have been uniform in any audience. Some in the audience would have felt susceptible to the danger, others would not have. Some would have responded with Weinstein's optimism bias, thinking it would happen to others, but not to them. The optimism bias leads to delay and the belief in a future opportunity for response. Others hearing Whitefield preach may have dismissed the idea of hell and judgment altogether.

¹Robert H. Kimball, "What's Wrong with *Argumentum ad Baculum*? Reasons, Threats, and Logical Norms," *Argumentation* 20 (2006): 96.

²Kim Witte, "Putting the Fear Back into Fear Appeals: The Extended Parallel Process Model," *Communication Monographs* 59 (1992): 332.

The fear appeals in Whitefield's sermons vary in length and degree. A fear appeal may be a truncated phrase or extend for several paragraphs or even pages. Whitefield used both, and everything in between. He also used fear appeals of varying degrees. Some of his appeals were of high degree. That is, they contained elements which give them the potential to be very effective and frightening. Fear appeals of high degree are characterized by more personal and direct language combined with more vivid and detailed language. He also made wide use of fear appeals of low degree. These are appeals with less detail, fewer scary images, and do not use direct address as much as appeals of high degree. These appeals tend to be more vague in nature and have an inferior quality for arousing fear. They arouse less fear because they are less severe. For example, a high fear appeal would warn of the danger of death as a result of not wearing a seat belt. A low fear appeal would only warn of the possibility of getting a ticket for violating the law.

Fear appeal research judges a fear appeal on its positioning style. The positioning of a fear appeal is whether it is presented from a positive position or a negative position. The positive position is a fear appeal that uses "desirable actions leading to avoidance of negative consequences." The negative position is found in appeals "describing undesirable actions leading to negative consequences."³ Whitefield used both the positive and the negative positions in his fear appeals. He used the positive position when he urged his hearers to repent and turn to Christ. Through this positive

³Charles R. Duke et al., "A Method for Evaluating the Ethics of Fear Appeals," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 12 (1993): 124.

action, they would avoid the negative consequences of dying and facing eternal torment. Whitefield used the negative position when he described such undesirable actions as going to balls and plays or of parents not setting a godly example for their children. These negative actions could lead to debauchery and damnation.

Another aspect of fear appeals is the type of appeal used. This concerns whether the appeal threatens physical harm or some type of social disapproval. The social science literature does not entertain the third option of spiritual consequences. Whitefield's appeals use the physical harm type of appeal. He not only threatens his hearers with physical suffering as a result of sin, but he also holds before many of his congregations the possibility of physical death. In addition to the physical type of appeal, his appeals also concern spiritual consequences.

A taxonomy of ten kinds of fear appeals used by Whitefield, representative, but not exhaustive, is presented here. The ten categories represent Whitefield's use of fear as a persuasive tool. They are appeal to judgment, appeal to hell, appeal to death, appeal to national suffering, appeal to personal suffering, appeal to spiritual failure, appeal to the return of Christ, appeal to temptation, appeal to the brevity of time, and appeal to the end of the world. These categories may overlap one another at points and some appeals could be placed in several categories. The sermon excerpts discussed below may also contain multiple types of fear appeals. When multiple fear appeals appear in one sermon excerpt, it is referred to as a fear appeal cluster. Though one appeal may be selected for illustration from such a cluster, the other appeals in the cluster will have been illustrated under a different head. These appeals are located in and are illustrated from approximately one hundred of Whitefield's sermons.

Types of Material Used in Whitefield's Appeals

The fear appeals in Whitefield's sermons take versatile forms. Each appeal was constructed using one or more types of supporting material. In fear appeal literature this is referred to as the execution style of the appeal. In Whitefield's case, he used a number of different execution styles. In some instances, he extended a simple assertion of fact about the potential danger. In other cases, he utilized a rhetorical tool to frame the appeal. In advertising, the supporting material may be a testimonial from a satisfied customer, an expert witness, endorsement by a credible source, or a dramatization. In preaching, fear appeals are constructed using Scripture quotations, biblical allusions, anecdotes, word pictures, metaphors, pisma, prosopopoeia, erotesis, pathopoeia, sermocinatio, palilogy, and a multitude of other rhetorical devices. These rhetorical tools provide evidence, ornamentation, illustration, and authority to the assertions being made in the appeals.

Whitefield used a number of rhetorical devices which are called schemes or figures in classical rhetoric. These schemes or figures have received the appellative Gorgian schemes or figures because they originated in a school of classical rhetoric led by a teacher of rhetoric named Gorgias.⁴ Gorgias (c. 480–375 BC) was part of the First Sophistic and one of the first teachers of rhetoric in Athens.⁵ He was a native of Leontini, Sicily and one of the most well-known of the older sophists. The public

⁴O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 19.

⁵According to David E. Aune, sophism was a movement that flourished in Athens from 450-400 BC. Many of the sophists were not considered serious thinkers and their teachings were thought to be profoundly immoral. They would teach anyone who

rhetoric of Gorgias was arresting because of his use of schemes (Greek: *schemata*) or figures (Latin: *figurae*).⁶ Kennedy stated of the Gorgianic style, “Although the devices he used were largely drawn from Greek poetry and can individually be found in some earlier Greek prose, he exploited them to an unprecedented degree. On Gorgias’s lips oratory became a tintinnabulation of rhyming words and echoing rhythms. Antithetical structure, which is native to Greek syntax, became an obsession.”⁷ Gorgias’s purpose in utilizing schemes was to develop a more oratorical style of formal speech as opposed to conversational language.⁸ He saw great power in speech over the human will. He stated in *The Encomium of Helen*, “But if it was the power of speech that moved and beguiled her soul, it will not be difficult to free her of all blame on this score. For the power of speech is mighty. Insignificant in themselves, words accomplish the most remarkable

was willing to pay them their arts of rhetoric regardless of the individuals motives. They were condemned by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. He stated, “Aristotle also regarded the sophists negatively, referring to the sophistic art as consisting of apparent wisdom that is not real wisdom and to the sophist as one who makes money from apparent but not real wisdom.” The sophists practiced their art through public lectures, public debates, and private classes. The Second Sophistic began in the 2nd century AD and was very concerned about language and rhetoric rather than philosophy as well. The works of the First Sophistic were highly valued among those in the Second Sophistic. David E. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 433, 446.

⁶George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 34.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

ends. They have power to remove fear and assuage pain. Moreover they can produce joy and increase pity.”⁹ Of course, it cannot only banish fear, it can also generate fear.

Many Gorgian figures are common in any kind of rhetoric without the source having a technical knowledge of their presence. Whitefield, though probably unwittingly, used a number of Gorgian figures throughout his sermons, in the construction and presentation of his fear appeals. The Gorgian figures Whitefield employs to frame his appeals are prosopopoeia, puma, ecphonema, pathopoeia, sermocinatio, erotesis, palilogy, metaphor, and hypotyposis.¹⁰

Fear Appeals In Whitefield’s Sermons

Appeal to Death

Death was one of Whitefield’s most frequently mentioned subjects in his sermons. Conrad tallied a list of eighty of the most mentioned subjects addressed in seventy-eight of Whitefield’s sermons. Death was in the top ten.¹¹ In using the appeal to

⁹Gorgias, *The Encomium of Helen, in Orations From Homer to William McKinley*, ed. Mayo W. Hazeltine (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1902), 1:51.

¹⁰Prosopopoeia is the rhetorical use of personification. Puma is a figure of question the answer to which cannot be yes or no. Ecphonema is the use of exclamation. Pathopoeia is the use of a rhetorical act or device with goal of arousing emotion. Sermocinatio is the creation of dialogue between two persons or imaginary speech in the first person. Erotesis is the Palilogy is the repetition of a word or phrase for emphasis. Metaphor is a comparison using a word or words normally used to designate something else. Whitefield’s use of metaphor could be striking and vivid. Metaphors can target all the senses. Whitefield used visual, auditory, gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), tactual (touch), kinaesthetic (muscle strain), and organic (internal) metaphors. Finally, hypotyposis is the use of vivid imagery in a speech.

¹¹Flavius Leslie Conrad, Jr., “The Preaching of George Whitefield, With Special Reference to the American Colonies: A Study of His Published Sermons” (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1990), 61.

death, Whitefield sought to convince his hearers they might never have another opportunity to respond to his message. “Death may come on you suddenly and quickly, so don’t wait” is the general nature of this appeal. The appeal attempts to cultivate urgency concerning the new birth and discourage the proclivity to delay, for the maladaptive response of the optimism bias would likely have been a primary response to this appeal from the auditors. Whitefield used a variety of rhetorical devices to frame the appeal to death. These include: simple assertion, metaphor, prosopopoeia, biblical reference, anecdote, pisma, improvisation (i.e., immediate context), Scripture quotation, and current event. Examples of each of these schemes for the appeal to death are given below.

Whitefield’s target audience in using the appeal to death was largely the young. Specifically, he targeted children, young women, young men, and the young collectively. According to contemporary fear appeal literature, the young are probably the most insusceptible to appeal to the fear of death. Because it seems so far removed from them, they simply do not feel vulnerable to it. However, he did not limit the appeal to death to the young. He also addressed it to the elderly, to high society, to parents, to the middle aged, to senior adults, to sinners, and to a general audience.

Simple Assertion. In a number of cases, Whitefield used a simple assertion and straightforward warning of the possibility of sudden and unexpected death. Whitefield warned his hearers they could die suddenly as a result of sickness or some other unpleasant fortuity. For example, in the sermon “The Method of Grace,” he admonished, “Shall I prevail upon any of you this morning to come to Jesus Christ? There is a great multitude of souls here; how shortly must you all die, and go to

judgment! Even before night, or to-morrow's night, some of you may be laid out for this kirk-yard. And how will you do if you be not at peace with God, if the Lord Jesus Christ has not spoken peace to your heart? If God speak not peace to you here, you will be damned for ever. I must not flatter you, my dear friends; I will deal sincerely with your souls."¹² Here Whitefield combined the appeals of death and judgment since they naturally go together. He made a simple assertion—you may be in your grave by tomorrow night. He urged them to hasten to Christ while they were able.

This is a fear appeal of high degree. It warns of the most grave of potentialities. Whitefield's repeated use of direct address made the appeal personal and urgent. Furthermore, the appeal is in the positive position. He called his hearers to take the positive action of coming to Jesus Christ so that they might avoid the negative consequence of being damned forever. His target audience for the appeal is the entire multitude.

Another poignant example is found in the sermon "The Lord Our Righteousness." In this sermon Whitefield was speaking directly to children he identifies as being "nine or ten years old."¹³ To these young ones Whitefield urged, "Come then, while you are young. Perhaps you may not live to be old." Clearly, he is attempting to arouse the fear of premature death in the children. The impression he gave them was they did not have long to live. This is also an appeal of high degree from a positive position.

¹²Duncan MacFarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century, Particularly at Cambuslang* (Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts Publishers, 1980), 31.

¹³George Whitefield, "The Lord Our Righteousness," in *Nine Sermons*, 2nd ed. (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1743), 26-28 [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

In this appeal, unlike the previous one, Whitefield is very specific about his target audience.

In yet another example from his sermon “The Righteousness of Christ, An Everlasting Righteousness,” Whitefield expounded, “For God’s sake accept it this night: you do not know but ye may die before tomorrow. How do you know, but while I am speaking, a fit of the apoplexy may seize, and death arrest you?”¹⁴ This is an example of the versatility of fear appeals. They can be long and elaborate or a brief premise as stated in this sermon. This appeal should be considered of high degree because death is used as the device to arouse fear.

In a sermon titled simply “The Pharisee and Publican,” Whitefield extended the possibility of a sudden death through apoplexy again. He said, “What if a Fit of the apoplexy should seize you, and your Souls be hurried away before the awful Judge of Quick and Dead?”¹⁵ Whitefield yet again aroused the fear of sudden death and subsequent judgment. He was seeking to prevent his hearers from returning home “unjustified.”

In the sermon “Christ the Best Husband: Or an Earnest Invitation to Young Women to Come to See Christ,” preached to a society of young women at Fetter-Lane, Whitefield called the young women to make Christ their husband. He admonished them

¹⁴George Whitefield, “The Righteousness of Christ, An Everlasting Righteousness,” in *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 5:249 [on-line]; accessed 28 August 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet. This sermon was not published before its appearance in *Works*.

¹⁵Whitefield, “The Pharisee and Publican,” in *Nine Sermons*, 172.

to be espoused to Christ immediately. He intoned, “Some of you have stayed a long time; and will you defer any longer? If you will not now, perhaps you may never have another opportunity; this may be the last time of asking; and therefore it is dangerous to refuse; some of you are very young, too young for other espousals; but none of you, my dear sisters, are too young to be espoused unto the Lord Jesus Christ: in other espousals, you must have the consent of your parents; but in this you are at your own disposal; you may give, and ought to match yourselves to Christ, whether parents do consent or not.”¹⁶

Again, a paragraph later, he said, “But if any of you die before this espousal unto the Lord Jesus Christ, then woe, woe, unto you, that ever you had a being in life; but if you go to Christ you shall be espoused unto the Lord Jesus; though your sins have been never so great, yea, the blood of Christ will cleanse you from them; the marriage covenant between Christ and your souls will dissolve all your sins; you will then be weary of your old ways, for all things will become new in your souls.”¹⁷ Again, in this appeal his target audience is clearly the young women of the society. The appeal is urgent, direct, personal, and severe.

In “What Think Ye of Christ?,” Whitefield specifically targeted high society. He first scolded them for thinking of Christ so infrequently while wasting time on worldly pursuits. He lambasted, “Some, and that I fear a Multitude which no Man can easily Number, there are amongst us, who call themselves Christians, and yet seldom or never seriously think of Jesus Christ at all. They can think of their Shops and their

¹⁶Whitefield, “Christ the Best Husband: Or an Earnest Invitation to Young Women to Come to See Christ,” in *Works*, 5:76.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 77.

Farms, their Plays, their Balls, their Assemblies, and Horse-races (Entertainments which directly tend to exclude Religion out of the World); but as for Christ, the Author and Finisher of Faith, the Lord who has bought poor sinners . . . he is not in all, or at most in very few of their thoughts.”¹⁸ Then, Whitefield presented the fear producing argument. He reminded them that “there is a Time coming, when you will wish you had thought of Christ more, and of your Profits and Pleasures less. For the Gay, the Polite, the Rich also must die as well as others, and leave their Pomps and Vanities, and all their Wealth behind them. And O! what thoughts will you entertain concerning Jesus Christ, in that Hour?”¹⁹ This appeal could be considered an appeal of low degree because Whitefield simply says “there is a Time coming.” He does not specify exactly what time he is referring to. He may have been referring to the final judgment or some future time in life when the auditors would regret wasting their lives on worldly pursuits.

Metaphor. Whitefield used a number of metaphors to paint the appeal to death. In the sermon “Christ the Support of the Tempted,” Whitefield used the appeal to death to press the need for conversion upon his hearers. He urged them to turn to Christ immediately. If his hearers would not turn to Christ, he warned that Christ may take them before they are ready. He declared, “Why do ye delay? What! Do you say, you are poor, and therefore ashamed to come? It is not your poverty the Christ mindeth; come in all your rags, in all your pollution, and he will save you. Do not depend upon any thing but

¹⁸George Whitefield, *What Think Ye of Christ?* (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by Andrew and William Bradford, 1739), 5-6 [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 6.

the blood of Jesus Christ; do not stand out an hour longer, but give your hearts to Christ, give him the firstlings of the flock; come unto him now, lest he should cut you off before you are prepared, and your soul be sent to that pit from whence there is no redemption.”²⁰

The threat in this appeal is clear: Christ may “cut you off.” In this appeal Whitefield used “cut you off” as a tactual metaphor for death and dying. The metaphor gives the impression of death coming quickly and suddenly. Whitefield was seeking to prevent his hearers from delaying their conversion by reminding them that death could come before they are ready for it. The fear Whitefield was seeking to arouse was the fear of dying suddenly and unprepared. The fear level for this appeal was increased by an additional fear appeal concerning hell. He referred to hell as “that pit from whence there is no redemption.” At the beginning of the paragraph containing this appeal he asked, “Why do ye delay?” His aim was to persuade his hearers to “come unto him now.”²¹

In his sermon “The Lord Our Righteousness,” Whitefield used a succession of two metaphors to threaten his hearers with their coming death. The first was a gustatory metaphor and the second a visual one. His primary target for the two metaphors was the “many hoary heads here.”²² This appeal was trained especially on those of advanced years. According to fear appeal research, the elderly are more susceptible to appeals to death than the young. Whitefield used it on both, though in this case he trained his appeal toward the elderly. He enunciated, “Alas, you have one foot already in the grave, your

²⁰Whitefield, “Christ the Support of the Tempted,” in *Works*, 5:294.

²¹Ibid.

²²Whitefield, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” *Works*, 5:233.

glass is just run out, your sun is just going down, and it will set and leave you in an eternal darkness, unless the Lord be your righteousness.”²³ Whitefield used the gustatory metaphor of the emptying glass and the visual metaphor of the setting sun to vividly portray life’s approaching demise. To senior adults in his audience he sought to communicate a simple truth—time is running out. Yet again, he created urgency. The fear aroused and the intended goal in the appeal is the same as the previously mentioned metaphor of being “cut off”—repent while you are able. This appeal is issued from a negative position, for he begins with the negative and undesirable idea of having one foot in the grave. The appeal could be considered high because it asserted the certainty of death.

In his sermon “The Lord our Light” Whitefield used a visual metaphor to appeal to death. As tears were literally flowing from his eyes, he reminded his hearers that “the sun is going down, and death may put an end to all to-night.”²⁴ He used that phrase literally and figuratively. Whitefield was preaching in the evening and the sun was literally setting. He drafted the setting sun as a visual illustration for his sermon to impress upon his hearers that the sun of their life was also setting. This is an example of Whitefield using improvisation in regard to his surroundings to create fear in his audience. He was seeking to arouse fear of death without conversion. His goal was to

²³Ibid., 15.

²⁴Joseph Gurney, *Eighteen Sermons* (London: Printed for and sold by Joseph Gurney, 1771), 136 [on-line]; accessed 28 August 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

persuade his hearers “to come though it is the eleventh hour.” The behavior, as in most of his appeals to death, he sought to avert was delay in coming to Christ. The intended outcome of the appeal was that they would “fly this night to Christ.”²⁵

Prosopopoeia. Prosopopoeia is the rhetorical use of personification. In the sermon “Persecution Every Christian’s Lot,” Whitefield used the appeal to death via personification. Addressing those who persecute their neighbors for being followers of Jesus Christ, he warned, “To those, who persecute their neighbors for living godly in Christ Jesus. But, what shall I say to you? Howl and weep for the miseries that shall come upon you; for a little while the Lord permits you to ride over the heads of his people; but, by and by, death will arrest you, judgment will find you, and Jesus Christ shall put a question to you, which will strike you dumb, why persecutist [*sic*] you me?”²⁶ Death is personified as the arresting agent along with judgment. He sought to arouse the fear of unexpected death in those who think they will get away with persecuting the Lord’s people. The appeal is from a negative position, used direct address, and was aimed at the target audience of persecutors of the followers of Jesus Christ.

Pusma. Another appeal to death is found in a sermon titled “Worldly Business no Plea for the Neglect of Religion.” In this appeal Whitefield used a biblical reference within a rhetorical device to create the appeal. This appeal to death is formulated in three figures of question called pusma. Pusma is a question which must be answered with an

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Whitefield, “Persecution Every Christian’s Lot,” in *Nine Sermons*, 78.

answer other than yes or no.²⁷ Whitefield asked, “But what will be the hope of such worldlings, when God shall take away their souls? What if the almighty should say to each of them, as he did to the rich fool in the gospel, ‘this night shall thy soul be required of thee;’ O then, what would all those things profit them, which they are now so busy in providing?”²⁸ Whitefield was alluding to the rich fool in Luke 12:13–21.

The threat Whitefield used was—what happened to the rich fool could also happen to those who neglect spiritual duties over worldly business. The fear aroused by this appeal was sudden death, as happened to the rich fool. The behavior Whitefield sought to abate was the pursuit of worldly business to the neglect of spiritual business. Whitefield’s desire was that the hearers would “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”²⁹ This appeal is from a negative position and used a biblical reference as part of its execution.

Anecdote. In “Marks of a True Conversion,” Whitefield used the appeal to death by citing the sudden deaths of multiple individuals as proof that it can happen. In a long section of the sermon where he was imploring his hearers “to see whether ye are converted,”³⁰ he warned of the danger of postponing such an action. He proclaimed,

²⁷Stanley E. Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B. C.–A. D. 400* (New York: Brill, 1997), 140.

²⁸George Whitefield, “Worldly Business No Plea for the Neglect of Religion,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects* (London: C. Rivington, 1739), 10 [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Whitefield, “Marks of a True Conversion,” in *Works*, 5:345.

Give me leave to deal faithfully with your souls. I have your dead warrant in my hand: Christ has said it, Jesus will stand to it, it is like the laws of the Medes and Persians, it altereth not. Hark, O man! Hark, O woman! He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Lord Jesus Christ says, ‘Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ Though this is Saturday night, and ye are now preparing for the Sabbath, for what you know, you may yet never live to see the Sabbath. You have had awful proofs of this lately; a woman died but yesterday, a man died the day before, another was killed by something that fell from a house, and it may be in twenty-four hours more, many of you may be carried into an unalterable state. Now then, for God’s sake, for your own souls sake, if ye have a mind to dwell with God, and cannot bear the thought of dwelling in everlasting burning, before I go any further, silently put up one prayer, or say Amen to the prayer I would put in your mouths; ‘Lord, search me and try me, Lord, examine my heart, and let my conscience speak; O let me know whether I am converted or not! What say ye, my dear hearers? What say ye, my fellow-sinners? What say ye, my guilty brethren? Has God by his blessed Spirit wrought such a change in your hearts.’”³¹

Whitefield used a number of vivid images in this appeal. In his effort to get them to make sure of their salvation, he said he had their “dead warrant” in his hand. He intended to communicate the fact that the date of their death was set and nothing could alter it. He made it clear they were in danger of not living to see the next day.

Whitefield cited three examples of recent and apparently sudden deaths. He called them “proofs.” He pointed to these deaths as real life illustrations of the argument he was trying to make in the fear appeal. Whitefield did not name the individuals who died or give the circumstances surrounding all of their deaths, but he did point out the nearness of the deaths in time. One can imagine a feeling of alarm running through the hearers at the recounting of so many examples of sudden death at once. Whitefield’s goal was to arouse the fear of sudden death in an unconverted state. He sought to prevent

³¹Ibid., 345-46.

delaying on the part of his hearers. Whitefield wanted his hearers to “know whether I am converted or not!” The combined effect of all of these anecdotes together would have served to increase the sense of severity of the danger and the susceptibility of the auditors. Three anecdotes of sudden death could have made the hearers think the potential for the same thing happening to them really existed. Also, the degree of the appeal was high because three anecdotes were used. The appeal was given from a negative position.

In “Soul Prosperity,” Whitefield used the appeal to death to prompt his hearers to give attention to the salvation of their souls. He utilized an anecdote of a woman who died suddenly from a serious illness. Whitefield narrated, “I was told to-day of a young woman, that was very well on Sunday when she left her friends, when she came home was racked with pain, had an inflammation in her bowels, and is now a breathless corpse.”³² His message was simple: You may be fine now, but death may come at any time. Whitefield was seeking to persuade his hearers to be converted before this unhappy prospect came upon them as well.

In addition to using the story of the woman who died in horrible pain, Whitefield used vivid imagery to construct this appeal. His description of inflamed bowels and a breathless corpse are not only vivid, but also gory. Whitefield was obviously not concerned about offending the sensibilities of his hearers in his effort to persuade them to turn to Christ. Whitefield’s use of stories so recent in occurrence provides evidence that though he preached his sermons many times, he supplemented them with current events when appropriate. One common thread of his death narratives

³²Gurney, “Soul Prosperity,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 56-57.

was their freshness in time. This proximity brought increased awareness of susceptibility to the hearers.

In the sermon “Repentance and Conversion,” Whitefield warned his hearers of allowing material possessions to hinder them in turning their lives to Christ. He said, “I have heard of one who began low; he first wanted a house, then, says he, I want two, then four, then six; and when he had them, he said, I think I want nothing else; yes, says his friend, you will soon want another thing, that is, a hearse and six to carry you to your grave; and that made him tremble.”³³ This appeal to death is unique from the ones mentioned above in that it is an indirect appeal. Whitefield did not tell his hearers this was going to happen to them. He simply presented this anecdote about one to whom it did happen. He described a man who was hungry for material possessions. A friend of the man informed him that he would soon need a hearse and six men to carry his coffin to the grave. Upon hearing this the man greedy for possessions trembled. The same prospect should cause Whitefield’s hearers to tremble in fear as well. The purpose of the anecdote was to warn his hearers that they will soon die and their material goods will mean nothing. Whitefield intended to arouse the fear of death in those who were focused on the wrong things in life (i.e., material possessions). Since the appeal is indirect, it should be considered an appeal of low degree.

Whitefield preached “Thankfulness for Mercies Received, A Necessary Duty” when he landed at Savannah, Georgia at the end of his first crossing of the Atlantic Ocean on May 17, 1738. On arrival in America, he preached on deck to the crew and passengers. He avowed,

³³Gurney, “Repentance and Conversion,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 85.

And O that you would be wise in time, and hearken to his voice today, “whilst it is called to-day!” For ye yourselves know how little is to be done on a sick bed. God has, in an especial manner, of late, invited you to repentance: two of your crew he has taken off by death, and most of you he has mercifully visited with a grievous sickness. The terrors of the Lord have been upon you, and when burnt with a scorching fever, some of you have cried out, “What shall we do to be saved?” Remember then the resolutions you made, when you thought God was about to take away your souls; and see that according to your promises, you show forth your thankfulness, not only with your lips, but in your lives. For though God may bear long, he will not forbear always; and if these signal mercies and judgments do not lead you to repentance, assure yourselves there will at last come a fiery tempest, from the presence of the Lord, which will sweep away you, and all other adversaries of God.³⁴

In the sermon, Whitefield urged thanksgiving to God for the mercies He bestowed upon them during the difficult and tumultuous sea crossing. In particular, he called for the crew to respond to the voice of God calling them to salvation. As part of his argument, he reminded them that “two of your crew he has taken off by death.” He reminded the remaining crew members that many of them came close to death and during their time of sickness they made certain “resolutions” to God. Whitefield sought to hold them to their commitments and warned them that if they do not God may yet visit them with calamity. He asserted, “For though God may bear long, he will not forbear always.” He warned that if the previous hardships were not enough to bring them to repentance, more would come.

Immediate Context. In “Christ the Believer’s Refuge,” Whitefield also used the appeal to death. This sermon is unique in that it was preached during a funeral and at night. Whitefield made his purpose clear, “I intend to speak about this death to the surviving friends; but, my dear hearers, the grand intention of having the funeral sermon

³⁴George Whitefield, “Thankfulness for Mercies Received, A Necessary Duty,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 249-50.

to night, is to teach the living how to die.”³⁵ Though it was a funeral occasion, Whitefield intended to make it an evangelistic opportunity. In doing so, Whitefield used the event of death to remind his hearers that they will also die. He stated, “Some pulpit may e’er long be hung in mourning for you; the black, the dreary appendages of death may e’er long be brought to your home; and if you move in a high sphere, some such escutcheon as this, some achievement may be placed at your door, and woe, woe, woe be to those who in an hour of death cannot say, God is my Refuge.”³⁶

In this appeal, Whitefield sought to arouse the fear of death in his hearers. His goal was to persuade them to make Christ their refuge (i.e., to be converted). The behavior he sought to avoid was delay or a rejection of Christ as their refuge. In addition to using the surroundings of a funeral to convince his hearers of their coming death, he conjured images of “the black, the dreary appendages of death” at their own homes. He basically said to the funeral audience, “Your home could be next.”

A few paragraphs later in this same sermon, Whitefield became more forceful in his use of the appeal to death. This time he pressed the prospect of the nearness of death on his hearers. He warned, “The avenger of blood, this grim death, is just at thy heels [*sic*], and if thou dost not this moment take refuge in God, to night before tomorrow, you may be damned for ever.”³⁷ As Whitefield drew these images, the widow and other family and friends of the deceased man were in attendance. He painted a picture of a disconsolate widow who would leave the room of her husband “when the

³⁵Gurney, “Christ the Believer’s Refuge,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 36.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, 38.

hiccoughs came and death was supposed to be really come.”³⁸ Whitefield seized this emotionally charged moment to increase the fear of death in his hearers. It is as if the grieving family is an object lesson of sorrow. This should certainly be considered an appeal of high degree, as it was delivered in the emotionally charged setting of a funeral. The grieving family served as part of his execution for the appeal.

In the construction of this appeal to death Whitefield used not only his immediate context, but also the visual metaphor “at thy heels [*sic*].” By the use of “at thy heels [*sic*]” Whitefield intended to communicate the closeness of death to some who were listening to him at that very moment. He also used the metaphor of “fly.” This word was intended to communicate the speed with which he desires his hearers to be converted. He exhorted them to “fly, fly, God help thee to fly.” Whitefield also used the metaphor “avenger of blood.” However, it is unclear what he intended to convey by it.

Current Event. Yet another appeal to death is found in the sermon “Soul Dejection.” In this sermon Whitefield used a biblical allusion and a current event to arouse the fear of death in his hearers. He explained, “Why, as the Lord liveth, I speak out of compassion, there is but one step between thee and death. Don’t you know the sessions began at the Old Bailey to-day, if there were any capitally convicted, what would you think to see them playing at cards, or go on rattling and drinking, and swearing? Would not you yourselves cry, and if it were a child of your own, would it not

³⁸Ibid., 39.

break your heart? But yet thou art that wretch; I must weep for thee, my brother sinner; we had both one father and mother, Adam and Eve; this was our sad original.”³⁹

In this appeal Whitefield first referenced 1 Samuel 20:3, in which David was being pursued by King Saul. David told Saul’s son Jonathan that his father was seeking to kill him. When Jonathan expressed disbelief, David declared “but truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.” However, Whitefield’s discussion of condemned criminals was even more vivid and pertinent. He asked his hearers what they would think to see criminals condemned to die “rattling and drinking, and swearing.” His point was that those who have been condemned to die respond in a certain way. In like fashion, those who are near death and unconverted should take note of their condition and respond in an appropriate manner. Whitefield’s use of the impending death of the condemned criminals is vivid imagery and part of his execution of this appeal.

Vivid Imagery. Whitefield used an organic image in the appeal to death to frighten parents and move them emotionally. He applied the appeal to death not only to the individual, but also to his near relatives. In the sermon “The Care of the Soul Urged as the One Thing Needful,” he used the appeal to death as a pathopoeia device with parents concerning their children. Pathopoeia is a type of speech or rhetorical act aimed at moving an audience emotionally. In this sermon segment, Whitefield sought to arouse the emotion of parents. He used the story of Mary and Martha to demonstrate that the care of the soul in preparation for eternity is the most needful thing in life. At the end of

³⁹Ibid., 191-92.

the sermon he addressed two groups, those who see the care of the soul as the one thing “needless” and those who see it as the one thing “needful.” To those who have attended to the one thing needful and have faith in Christ, Whitefield warned them about the lost opportunity of impressing the “one thing needful” on their children. He enunciated,

Let parents especially attend to this exhortation; whose care for their offspring often exceeds in other respects, and falls in this. Remember that your children may never live to enjoy the effects of your labor and concern to get them estates and portions: the charges of their funerals may, perhaps, be all their share of what you are so anxiously careful to lay up for them. And O think what a sword would pierce through your very heart, if you should stand by the corpse of a beloved child with this reflection: ‘This poor creature has done with life, before it learnt [*sic*] its great business in it; and is gone to eternity, which I have seldom been warning it to prepare for, and which, perhaps, it learned of me to forget.’⁴⁰

Whitefield used the vivid image of a dead child lying in the coffin. One can only speculate about the effect of this visual image on the audience, but Whitefield’s threat was to remind indifferent Christians that their children may die without faith in Christ and that their opportunities to influence them will be lost. His call to them was to care for their souls and to urge the same upon their children. The appeal is positioned negatively, for it is centered on the death of children. Due to the intense nature of the imagery, the appeal is of high degree. The target audience, parents, could have experienced enormous anxiety at the thought of “the charges of their funerals,” “the corpse of a beloved child,” and “this poor creature has done with life.”

Appeal to Judgment

A second category of fear appeal used by Whitefield is appeal to judgment. Whitefield’s use of this fear appeal vividly portrays the eternal punishment of the

⁴⁰Whitefield, “The Care of the Soul Urged as the One Thing Needful,” in *Works*, 5:474.

damned. In his development of the appeal to judgment he used a number of different types of source material, including simple assertions, Scripture quotations, vivid imagery, anecdotes, and sermocinatio.

In his preaching on judgment, Whitefield used various aspects of the doctrine to arouse fear. In the first place, Whitefield explained that at the judgment there will be no difference between “the king on the throne” and “the beggar on the dunghill.”⁴¹ The wealth of the world will not improve the estate of the lost at the judgment. He declared, “You will not be excused because you have had a great estate, a fine house, and lived in all the pleasures that earth could afford you; no, these things will be one means of your condemnation; neither will you be judged according to the largeness of your estate, but according to the use you have made of it.”⁴²

A second aspect of judgment Whitefield distinguished was the immediacy of judgment after death. In “The Method of Grace” he indicated judgment comes in tandem with death. His usual practice was to quote Hebrews 9:27 to buttress this argument.

Whitefield also mentioned the summoning of “swift witnesses” to rise up at the judgment to testify against sinners. In “Christ the Only Preservative Against a Reprobate Spirit,” Whitefield pledged to his hearers that he would be such a witness against them if they did not repent. He bemoaned his distaste at doing so, but asserted if they would refuse the gracious invitation of Christ he must do it.⁴³ In another example, described

⁴¹Ibid., 459.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Whitefield, “Christ the Only Preservative Against a Reprobate Spirit,” in *Works*, 6:300.

below, Whitefield warned ungodly fathers that their own children would be witnesses against them on the Day of Judgment.

Whitefield also sought to communicate the shame which would be connected with the judgment. In his sermon “The Conversion of Zaccheus,” the preacher warned his hearers with the fearful prospect of having all of their sins confessed before men and angels. He informed them the only way to avoid the shame was to make restitution right away.⁴⁴

Finally, Whitefield tried to impress upon his hearers the immanency of judgment. He wanted them to know judgment was not something in the far distant future, but very near. Thus, Whitefield was bridging the susceptibility gap mentioned in chapter two by making his hearers feel susceptible to this danger. The level of severity and susceptibility for the appeal to judgment would likely have been far less than for the appeal to death. The appeal to death was an appeal known by experience and witnessed in daily life. The appeal to judgment may have been considered so far into the future as to cause little concern at the time. Whitefield sought to overcome the susceptibility challenge by using direct address, dialogue, and forceful language.

He invoked the immanency of judgment in the sermon “Spiritual Baptism.” In this sermon Whitefield informed his hearers that the Judge is ready to mount the throne and the books are already open for judgment.⁴⁵ That was why he pleaded with them to “turn ye, turn ye, Lord help you to turn to him, turn ye to Jesus Christ, and may God turn

⁴⁴Whitefield, “The Conversion of Zaccheus,” in *Nine Sermons*, 212.

⁴⁵Gurney, “Spiritual Baptism,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 208.

your inside out to-night.”⁴⁶ Whitefield used palilogy, the repetition of the same word or phrase for emphasis, with “turn ye, turn ye” to create a sense of urgency and immanency in his hearers. He evoked the same urgency in a similar appeal to judgment in his sermon “Soul Dejection.”

Whitefield’s target audience for the appeal to judgment especially focused on the sinful and wicked. He warned harlots, liars, drunkards, persecutors, Pharisees, adulterers, whoremongers, fornicators, and extortioners that they would give an account for their sins at the judgment.

Simple Assertion. In the sermon “Worldly Business no Plea for the Neglect of Religion,” Whitefield made the simple assertion that judgment was coming.

Let me therefore, by way of conclusion, exhort all persons, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to make the renewal of their fallen nature, the one business of their lives; and to let no worldly profit, no worldly pleasure, divert them from the thoughts of it. Let this cry, “Behold the bridegroom cometh,” be ever sounding in our ears; and let us live as creatures that are every moment liable to be hurried away by death to judgment: let us remember, that this life is a state of infinite importance, a point between two eternities, and that after these few days are ended, we had lived when we leave the world? And then we shall always live in such a state, as we shall never fear to die in. Whether we live, we shall live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we shall die unto the Lord; so that living or dying we may be the Lord’s.⁴⁷

In concluding the sermon, he exhorted his hearers to live as if they might at any moment be hurried off to stand in the judgment. Such an assertion has the potential of arousing fear and creating anxiety over a sinful lifestyle. This appeal is in a fear appeal cluster which also includes appeals to the second coming of Christ, death, and

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Whitefield, “Worldly Business No Plea for the Neglect of Religion,” in *Sermon on Various Subjects*, 13.

neglect of spiritual duties. This appeal is of low degree because he did not use direct address. Rather than using “you” and “your,” he used “we,” “us,” and “our.” The appeal is presented from a negative position.

In another simple assertion of coming judgment Whitefield attempted to bring conviction to those who delight in the entertainments of the age. In this appeal from the sermon “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden,” Whitefield targeted those who attend balls, assemblies, play-houses, and horse-racing. He inveighed,

Now they can go to balls and assemblies, play-houses and horse-racing; they have no thought of their sins; they know not what it is to weep for sin, or humble themselves under the mighty hand of God; they can laugh away their sorrows, and sing away their cares, and drive away these melancholy thoughts: they are too polite to entertain any sad thoughts; the talk of death and judgment is irksome to them, because it damps their mirth; they could not endure to think of their sin and danger; they could not go to a play, and think of hell; they could not go quietly to a masquerade, and think of their danger; they could not go to a ball or an assembly in peace, if they thought of their sins.

And so it is proved, even to a demonstration, that these are not weary and heavy laden: for if they are not thoughtful about their sins, they will never be weary and heavy laden of them. But at the day of judgment all will be over; they shall lose all their carnal mirth, all their pleasure, all their delight will be gone forever.⁴⁸

He called these activities “wasters of precious time.” He simply reminded them that at the day of judgment all of their amusements and mirth will be over.⁴⁹ This appeal is also of low degree. Whitefield did not use direct address. He preached against “they” rather than “you.” The positioning of the appeal is negative because Whitefield began with the undesirable activity of attending balls, assemblies, play-houses and horse-racing.

⁴⁸Whitefield, “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden,” in *Works*, 5:313.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

Scripture Quotation. Whitefield made another simple assertion of judgment in the sermon “Intercession Every Christian’s Duty.” However, in this assertion he quoted a phrase from 2 Corinthians 5:10, appealing to the authority of Scripture. He contended, “For it is but a little while, and ‘we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;’ where I must give a strict account of the doctrine I have preached, and you of your improvement under it.”⁵⁰ The Scripture quotation added authority and credibility to his claim of future judgment. This is an appeal of low degree with a negative position.

In “The Gospel Supper” Whitefield used a triad of Scripture quotations. Declaring the certainty of judgment, he quoted Hebrews 9:27. In commenting on the verse, he warned his hearers that they would not live in the world always and that many of them would be driven from the judgment seat if they did not turn to Christ. In addition to quoting Hebrews 9:27, he also used 2 Corinthians 5:10, mentioned above. The third Scripture quotation Whitefield used in this triad and frequently throughout his sermons is Matthew 7:23, “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” As with the previous example, Scripture quotations contributed to the authority and credibility of Whitefield’s claims of coming judgment. The Scriptures were used as proof and expert testimony. The appeal from the Scripture quotations is from a negative position because death, judgment, and damnation are in view.

Vivid Imagery. In the sermon “The Great Duty of Family Religion”

⁵⁰George Whitefield, “Intercession Every Christian’s Duty,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 133.

Whitefield exhorted governors⁵¹ of families to lead all under their charge to serve the Lord. In the third division (i.e., head, according to Whitefield) of the sermon, Whitefield offered “some motives, in order to excite all governors, with their respective households, to serve the Lord in the manner that shall be recommended.” Whitefield’s fifth and last motivation was a fear appeal concerning the final judgment. He warned,

If neither gratitude to God, love to your children, common justice to your servants, nor even that most prevailing motive self-interest, will excite; yet let a consideration of the terrors of the Lord persuade you to put in practice the pious resolution in the text. Remember, the time will come, and that perhaps very shortly, when we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ; where we must give a solemn and strict account how we have had our conversation, in our respective families in this world. How will you endure to see your children and servants (who ought to be your joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ) coming out as so many swift witnesses against you; cursing the father that begot them, the womb that bare them, the paps which they have sucked, and the day they ever entered into your houses? Think you not, the damnation which men must endure for their own sins, will be sufficient, that they need load themselves with the additional guilt of being accessory to the damnation of others also?⁵²

The threat Whitefield issued was a stern one. If fathers did not lead their homes properly, their children would rise up at the final judgment and serve “as so many swift witnesses against you” and that these delinquent fathers would be “accessory” to their children’s damnation. Whitefield’s recommended attitudinal and behavioral change was to be convinced of the importance of family religion and for governors of families to not forsake leading their families in serving the Lord. Whitefield used direct address in this appeal. The appeal is presented from a negative position and has a clearly defined

⁵¹Whitefield used the term “governors” in this passage to refer to fathers and husbands.

⁵²George Whitefield, *The Great Duty of Family Religion* (Boston: T. Fleet, 1739), 21-22 [on-line]; accessed 23 October 2007; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

target audience. This appeal is of high degree not only because of the direct address, but also because of the strong, startling image of children rising up in the judgment to witness against their fathers.

Whitefield used an auditory image for the appeal to judgment in the sermon “All Men’s Place.” He instructed his listeners that those who die without saving faith will be summoned to the judgment bar by the archangel. The voice of the archangel would sound forth, “arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.”⁵³

In a sermon titled “Persecution Every Christian’s Lot,” Whitefield warned those who persecute followers of Christ of their coming judgment and damnation. After comforting the persecuted and encouraging them to remain steadfast, Whitefield turned his verbal canon on the persecutors. “Howl and weep for the Miseries that shall come upon you,”⁵⁴ he implored them. He emphatically assured them that God would bring them to judgment. Whitefield then painted a picture of a most horrid and frightening scene of judgment. He warned the persecutors with the fact that those whom they now persecute would become their judges and would “sit on the Right-Hand of the Majesty on High.”⁵⁵ However, the preacher’s denunciation became even more frightening. Whitefield trounced the persecutors as he described that while this judgment was taking place they would be dragged to the lake of fire by infernal spirits. The preacher did not elaborate on the identity of these infernal spirits. He portrayed the lake of fire as that which burns with fire and brimstone and, he said, “the Smoke of your Torment shall be

⁵³Gurney, “All Men’s Place,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 232.

⁵⁴Whitefield, “Persecution Every Christian’s Lot,” in *Nine Sermons*, 78.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 79.

ascending up for ever and ever.”⁵⁶ This appeal is negatively positioned and of high degree. Whitefield offered sharp images of being dragged by infernal spirits and howling and weeping in pain.

Anecdote. Whitefield used a brief anecdote in his sermon “The Marks of True Conversion” to further terrorize ungodly parents. He attempted to convince parents of the need for spiritual disciplines with children as opposed to the entertainments of the devil. He warned parents not to allow their children to attend balls, assemblies, and plays as these activities would debauch the mind. He lamented the fact that many parents live as if they did not believe their children were conceived in sin. He told his hearers of a woman he heard of who constantly prayed, “Lord Jesus, let me never bear a child for hell or the devil.”⁵⁷ Whitefield predicted that thousands of children would appear at the great day of judgment and say in the company of the angels, “Father and mother, next to the wickedness of mine own heart, I owe my damnation to your bad education of me.”⁵⁸

In “Improvement of Afflictions,” Whitefield related an additional two anecdotes in an appeal to judgment. Though brief, these anecdotes are revealing of Whitefield’s extemporaneous preaching style. They both have the feel of arising on the inspiration of the moment. He stated that when Jesus Christ pronounces the dreadful

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Whitefield, “The Marks of True Conversion,” in *Works*, 5:341.

⁵⁸Ibid.

sentence on the damned, God's people would lift up their voices in triumph. He said the thought of that made one man who was dying say to his son, "I am afraid I shall never see thee any more till I hear Jesus Christ say unto thee, depart thou cursed!"⁵⁹

In the second anecdote from "Improvement of Afflictions" he recounted a scene when a crowd was waiting to hear the fate of a criminal. He said when the verdict came down as guilty, the crowd demonstrated an *éclat* at the news. Whitefield compared this to that day when God condemns all sinners to that eternal dungeon for their rejection of Him. At that time, Whitefield asserted, the angels and the saints will say together "Amen."⁶⁰

Sermocinatio. Sermocinatio is the creation of statements, conversations, soliloquies, and/or unexpressed thoughts attributed to actual or imaginary people.⁶¹ This is a kind of dramatic dialogue. Whitefield described a terrifying scene in "The Method of Grace" in which he framed the fear appeal with sermocinatio. Speaking to sinners and begging them to repent and turn to Christ, Whitefield painted an image of what would happen on the day of judgment to those who reject Jesus Christ.

Whitefield described how the devil would drag them out of their graves as they cry and tremble in fear. They would cry out in vain for the hills and the rocks to cover them, he said. The devil would say to them in solemnity, "Come, I will take you

⁵⁹Gurney, "Improvement of Afflictions," in *Eighteen Sermons*, 141.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹Porter, *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric*, 144.

away.”⁶² Suddenly, they would find themselves standing before the imposing judgment seat of Christ. As the poor sinners stand before the judgment seat, Christ Himself pronounced the sentence saying, “Depart from me, ye cursed.” The subjects protest, desiring someone else to pronounce the dreadful sentence on them. Whitefield dramatically cried, “Methinks I hear the poor creatures saying, Lord, if we must be damned, let some angel pronounce the sentence. No, the God of love, Jesus Christ, will pronounce it.”⁶³ Their entreaties are to no avail. He concluded the sermons, saying, “Will ye not believe this? Do not think I am talking at random, but agreeably to the Scriptures of truth. If you do not, then show yourselves men, and this morning go away with full resolution, in the strength of God, to cleave to Christ. And may you have no rest in your souls till you rest in Jesus Christ!”

This appeal was made from a negative position using dialogue as its execution style. The appeal not only used sermocinatio, but vivid imagery and shocking detail. The scenes of the devil dragging sinners out of their graves and the subjects begging for someone other than Christ to condemn them makes it an appeal of high degree.

Appeal to Hell

A third category of fear appeal in Whitefield’s extant sermons is appeal to hell. The appeal to hell is an appeal that seeks to arouse fear of suffering and agony in the afterlife. He used the appeal to hell more than any other appeal. Conrad’s tally of

⁶²MacFarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century*, 32.

⁶³Ibid.

subjects in Whitefield's sermons found that Whitefield mentioned hell or eternal damnation four hundred and ninety-two times and the devil seven hundred and ten times.⁶⁴ One reason for the frequent use of hell is because it is so intertwined with the appeals to death and judgment. The appeal to hell logically follows any discussion of the two previous appeals. Whitefield saved his most startling and frightening imagery for the appeal to hell.

The appeal was most often used as a persuasive tool with those who were unconverted. Therefore, the target audience for the appeal to hell consisted of harlots, drunkards, liars, formalists, and publicans. However, the appeal was not limited to evangelistic ends. For example, Whitefield also used it to motivate parents to godly living on behalf of their children.

Whitefield used the appeal to hell in a number of variations. These variations are all appeals to hell, but highlight a different aspect or consequence of hell. The variations focus on nuances of the doctrine of hell and include an innumerable list of creative metaphors. He used especially vivid language in this appeal. In his development and construction of the appeal to hell, Whitefield used simple assertions, Scripture allusions, Scripture quotations, metaphors, pisma, anecdotes, and hypotyposis (i.e., vivid imagery) to advance his argument. The appeal to hell was presented using both the positive and negative positions. Due to the perceived distance of hell in time, the appeal likely suffered from the susceptibility challenge, as did the appeal to judgment. The optimism bias may have led auditors to believe everything would work out for them in the future or that they had plenty of time to prepare for eternity.

⁶⁴Conrad, "The Preaching of George Whitefield," 61.

Simple Assertion. In many cases, Whitefield used no rhetorical devices, but merely extended the threat of hell with no ornamentation.⁶⁵ For example, in “The Pharisee and Publican” he addressed those who depend on their own righteousness and good works to get them into heaven. He observed, “He shall be abased to live with Devils, and make his Abode in the lowest Hell for evermore.”⁶⁶

From the text “Take heed, therefore, how ye hear” found in Luke 8:18, Whitefield preached a sermon titled “Directions How To Hear Sermons.” In the first division of the sermon, Whitefield sought to prove that persons ought to take every opportunity available for the hearing of sermons. He remonstrated that ministers are duty bound to preach and therefore the people are obliged to hear their sermons. Whitefield reminded his hearers that God sends pastors and teachers for the benefit of the church. The fear appeal in this sermon was to those who would refuse to attend these sermons. To those who do not take every opportunity to hear sermons Whitefield decried,

Oh! how insensible are those persons of this unspeakable Gift, who do Despite to the Spirit of Grace, who crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open Shame, by willfully refusing to attend on so great a Means of Salvation? How dreadful will the End of such Men be? How aggravating, that Light should come into the World, that the glad Tidings of Salvation should be so very frequently proclaimed in this populous City, and that so many should loath this spiritual Manna, this Angels Food, and call it light Bread? How much more tolerable will it be for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for such Sinners? For better

⁶⁵Whitefield also used a simple assertion of hell in “Christians, Temples of the Living God,” “The Folly and Danger of Parting with Christ for the Pleasures and Profits of Life,” “Repentance and Conversion,” “The Furnace of Affliction,” “Christ the Only Preservative Against a Reprobate Spirit,” “The Wise and Foolish Virgins,” “Thankfulness for Mercies Received, A Necessary Duty,” “The Method of Grace,” “The Lord Our Righteousness,” “Directions How to Hear Sermons,” “The Holy Spirit Convincing the Word of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment,” and “All Men’s Place.”

⁶⁶Whitefield, “The Pharisee and Publican,” in *Nine Sermons*, 169.

Men had never heard of a Savior being born, than after they have heard, not to give heed to the Ministry of those, who are employed as his Ambassadors, to transact Affairs between God and their Souls. We may, though at a Distance, without a Spirit of Prophecy, foretell the deplorable Condition of such Men; behold them cast into Hell, lifting up their Eyes, being in Torment, and crying out, How often would our Ministers have gathered us, as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her Wings? But we would not. Oh that we had known in that our Day, the Things that belonged to our everlasting Peace! But now they are for ever hid from our Eyes.⁶⁷

The fear to which Whitefield was appealing in this excerpt was the torment of hell. He said, “How dreadful will the end of such men be?,” speaking of those who would not hear the grace of God through the preaching of sermons. The “end” he speaks of was certainly the damnation of lost sinners to hell. In another question he asked, “How much more tolerable will it be for Tyre and Sidon, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for such sinners?” The wrath of God would be poured out on these sinners since they did not avail themselves of God’s grace proclaimed through preaching.

Whitefield’s aim in this fear appeal was to prompt sinners to give heed to those who are employed as ambassadors for Christ. By attending the preaching of the grace of God, these sinners may avert the wrath of God and being cast into hell. For only by hearing of this grace could one have the potential of experiencing it. The appeal is of high degree from a negative position.

Whitefield continued elaborating on the peril of ignoring the preaching of the Word of God and the consequences of it. In the same sermon, “Directions How To Hear Sermons,” Whitefield again pointed to hell as motivation to heed the preaching of the Word of God. However, this time he also included a fear appeal for

⁶⁷George Whitefield, *Directions How To Hear Sermons*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Printed and Sold by G. Rogers and D. Fowle, 1740), 7 [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

the preacher. He declared,

Take heed, therefore, ye careless professors, if any such be here present, how you hear. Remember, that whether we think of it or not, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ;” where ministers must give a strict account of the doctrine they have delivered, and you as strict a one, how you have improved under it. And, good God! How will you be able to stand at the bar of an angry, sin-avenging judge, and see so many discourses you have despised, so many ministers, who once longed and labored for the salvation of your precious and immortal souls, brought out as so many swift witnesses against you? Will it be sufficient then, think you, to allege, that you went to hear them only out of curiosity, to pass away an idle hour, to admire the oratory, or ridicule the simplicity of the preacher? No; God will then let you know, that you ought to have come out of better principles; that every sermon has been put down to your account, and that you must then be justly punished for not improving by them.⁶⁸

As stated above, this fear appeal had a two fold audience. The appeal was to the final judgment. Whitefield quotes a portion of 2 Corinthians 5:10 concerning the judgment seat of Christ. Then he applied it to two audiences. First, the appeal was to those who preach the Word. Whitefield reminded ministers that they would give a “strict” account of the doctrine they have preached at the judgment seat of Christ. The goal of this fear appeal to ministers was to motivate them to preach correct and profitable doctrine to their auditors.

The second audience was those who hear the preaching of the Word. Whitefield reminded them that they would give account for how they have improved under the preaching of the Word. Whitefield increased the vividness of this appeal by alluding to an “angry, sin-avenging judge” and to the fact that the very ministers who have done the preaching would witness against those who refused hear. He stated, “every sermon has been put down to your account.”

Whitefield’s goal in this appeal was that auditors might not only hear the

⁶⁸Ibid., 14.

sermons they attend, but apply them to their lives. Whitefield made clear that every sermon was an opportunity for improvement in the Christian life and should be taken seriously. For Whitefield, the preaching of the Word of God was never a minor event.

In “The Pharisee and Publican” Whitefield used the appeal to hell torments as a motivator for those who exalt themselves. He restated in the words of the text that everyone who exalts him or herself would be abased. Whitefield pointed out this abasement was ultimately hell. He said,

“Every one,” without exception, young or old, high or low, rich or poor (for God is no respecter of persons) “every one,” whosoever he be, that exalteth himself, and not free-grace; every one that trusteth in himself that he is righteous, that rests in his duties, or thinks to join them with the righteousness of Jesus Christ, for justification in the sight of God, though he be no adulterer, no extortioner, though he be not outwardly unjust, nay, though he fast twice in the week, and gives tithes of all that he possess; yet shall he be abased in the sight of all good men who know him here, and before men and angels, and God himself, when Jesus Christ comes to appear in judgment hereafter. How low, none but the almighty God can tell. He shall be abased to live with devils, and make his abode in the lowest hell for evermore. Hear this, all ye self-justiciaries [*sic*], tremble, and behold your doom! A dreadful doom, more dreadful than words can express, or thought conceive! If you refuse to humble yourselves, after hearing this parable, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that God shall visit you with all his storms, and pour all the vials of his wrath upon your rebellious heads; you exalted yourselves here, and God shall abase you hereafter; you are as proud as the devil, and with devils shall you dwell to all eternity. “Be not deceived, God is not mocked;” he sees your hearts, he knows all things.⁶⁹

This appeal was of high degree and from a negative position. Whitefield pressed upon the audience the doom that awaited them and the devils with which they would live. He also used Scripture, vivid imagery, and some direct address in this appeal.

⁶⁹Whitefield, “The Pharisee and Publican,” in *Nine Sermons*, 169-70.

In the sermon “Abraham’s Offering Up His Son Isaac,” Whitefield used an appeal to hell of low degree. Whitefield addressed those who have only a religion of the head and not of the heart. These are those who would refuse to give up their most precious comforts as Abraham was called on to sacrifice his son Isaac. To these Whitefield admonished, “But if you are only talking believers, have only a faith of the head, and never felt the power of it in your hearts, however you may bolster yourselves up, and say, ‘We have Abraham for our father, or Christ is our Savior,’ unless you get a faith of the heart, a faith working by love, you shall never sit with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Jesus Christ, in the kingdom of heaven.”⁷⁰ The implication was that if these individuals are unable to sit in the kingdom of heaven, they will be cast into hell. However, Whitefield leaves the converse unsaid. The appeal contains no vivid language, sparing use of direct address, and no strong condemnations from the preacher.

Scripture Quotations. Whitefield used six common Scripture texts on hell as supporting material for his appeal to hell. He provided more biblical evidence for this appeal than any of the others. The following Scripture texts Whitefield included in one or more appeals to hell.

In “The Righteousness of Christ, An Everlasting Righteousness” Whitefield quotes a portion of Matthew 25:41.⁷¹ He often used the verse in connection with the

⁷⁰Whitefield, “Abraham’s Offering Up His Son Isaac,” in *Nine Sermons*, 101.

⁷¹Whitefield stated, “Depart, depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” In “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden” Whitefield paraphrased the verse saying, “Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, into that place of torment, prepared for the devil and his angels.” From the King James Version the verse actually states, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” He also quotes or alludes to this verse in

appeal to judgment and the appeal to hell in a fear appeal cluster. He used this verse more than any other to warn of hell and describe the moment at the final judgment when condemned souls would be cast into the abyss.

In a sermon titled “The Gospel Supper” Whitefield quoted Mark 9:48 to remind his hearers where they would be if it were not for “God’s infinite condescension.”⁷² He pleaded with his hearers to come “now” for “you might have been in hell.”

In “The Gospel a Dying Saint’s Triumph” Whitefield quoted Mark 16:16 as a warning to his hearers. After he quoted the Scripture he said, “Pause,—I will give you time to think a little; if you would have Christ as good as his word of promise, remember he will be as good as his word of threatening.”⁷³

Whitefield used multiple quotations and paraphrases from the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. In “The Gospel Supper” and “Directions How to Hear Sermons” he referenced the lifting up of the eyes in torments. In the sermon “The Furnace of Affliction” he quoted “son, thou in thy lifetime.” In “The Method of Grace” Whitefield referred to the “great gulf” and “a drop of water to cool your tongue” to remind his hearers of the horrors of hell.⁷⁴ This passage of Scripture is ripe fruit for preaching on hell and torment and Whitefield made abundant use of it.

“The Lord Our Righteousness,” “The Extent and Reasonableness of Self-Denial,” and “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden.”

⁷²George Whitefield, “The Gospel Supper,” in *Five Sermons*, 71.

⁷³Gurney, “The Gospel A Dying Saint’s Triumph,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 74. He also quoted this verse in “Repentance and Conversion,” Gurney, 87.

⁷⁴MacFarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century*, 30.

Whitefield used 2 Timothy 3:2 in “Thankfulness for Mercies Received, A Necessary Duty” as support for the “unthankful” being thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone.⁷⁵ Whitefield’s intention was to encourage an attitude of thanksgiving for God’s mercy on the sea. Whitefield warned that unthankfulness to God was a characteristic that normally accompanied the unconverted.

Whitefield alluded to 2 Peter 2:4 in “The Extent and Reasonableness of Self-Denial” saying, “Think how many thousands there are now reserved with damned Spirits in Chains of Darkness unto Judgment of the Great Day, for not complying with the Precept in the Text. And think withal that This, this must be our own Case shortly, unless we are wise in time, and submit to those easy Conditions our Savior has prescribed us, in order to avoid it. Think you they now imagine Jesus Christ to be an hard Master; or rather think you not they would give Ten thousand times ten thousand Worlds, could they but return to Life again, and take Christ’s easy Yoke upon them?”⁷⁶ Whitefield used this verse to heighten the fear and increase the imagery of judgment and hell.

Metaphor. In developing the appeal to hell Whitefield utilizes metaphorical figures of speech. Whitefield’s metaphors are graphic and can therefore be classified as organic (internal), auditory, visual, tactual (touch), gustatory (taste), kinaesthetic (muscle strain), and olfactory (smell).

In a sermon titled “Christ the Believer’s Husband,” preached from Isaiah 54:5, Whitefield used the appeal to hell. He used the organic metaphor of being “wedded to

⁷⁵George Whitefield, “Thankfulness for Mercies Received, A Necessary Duty,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 177.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 92.

the devil.” He proclaimed, “And above all, how can ye bear the thoughts of being wedded to the devil, as every natural man is: for thus speaks the scripture, ‘He now ruleth in the children of disobedience.’ And how can ye bear to be ruled by one, who is such a professed open enemy to the most high and holy God? Who will make a drudge of you, whilst you live, and be your companion in endless and extreme torment, after you are dead? For thus will our Lord say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.’”⁷⁷ The metaphor pictures ownership and union with the devil.

In “Spiritual Baptism” Whitefield concluded the sermon with a strong appeal for the unconverted to come to Christ, using the auditory metaphor of “howling in hell.” He urged his hearers to thank God they are not “now among the damned” and “are not now howling in hell.”⁷⁸ “Howling in hell” is an auditory metaphor of the terrible agony and pain awaiting those who die in an unconverted state. Whitefield was warning his hearers that they are not “now” in hell, but that they will be if they continue in their present condition. He offered them Christ saying, “Jesus stands with pitying eyes and outstretched arms to receive you now; will you go with the man? Will you except [*sic*] of Christ?”⁷⁹

In the sermon “Marks of a True Conversion” Whitefield employed another metaphor for going to hell. In this sermon he used a visual metaphor of God frowning. He reminded his hearers that God had the capacity to “frown you to hell for your secret

⁷⁷Whitefield, “Christ the Believer’s Husband,” in *Five Sermons*, 38.

⁷⁸Gurney, “Spiritual Baptism,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 208.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

sins.”⁸⁰ “Frown you to hell” was a visual metaphor of the awful displeasure and rejection of the unconverted.

In “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy–Laden” Whitefield said, “But when once you are sensible of your being lost, damned creatures, and see hell gaping ready to receive you: if God was but to cut the thread of life, O then, then you would cry earnestly unto the Lord to receive you, to open the door of mercy unto you.”⁸¹ “Hell gaping” is a frightening metaphor that enhances and vividly portrays hell for Whitefield’s audience. He goes on to declare to his hearers that the Lord is a gracious Master and long–suffering. “Thread of life” is another visual metaphor in this fragment which communicates the fragility of life and certainty of hell. Both metaphors point to the fact that hell is near and ready to receive the unconverted.

In “The Method of Grace” Whitefield called on his hearers to examine their hearts. He used the visual metaphor of “hanging over hell.” According to Whitefield, if they did so, they would find that most of them had never heard God speak peace to their hearts. He called them “children of the devil” and says they are in “a cursed condition.” Then, he made this minatorial statement, “I would not be in your case for ten thousand, thousand worlds. Why? You are just hanging over hell.”⁸² This metaphor portrays the certainty of hell were it not for the mercy and grace of God.

In a sermon titled “The Folly and Danger of Parting with Christ for the Pleasures and Profits of Life,” Whitefield warned those who think they are at peace with

⁸⁰Whitefield, “The Marks of a True Conversion,” in *Works*, 5:250.

⁸¹Ibid. 23.

⁸²MacFarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century*, 31.

God because they attend church, say their prayers, participate in the sacrament, and have been good to everyone. In this sermon he used the tactual metaphor of lying “down in everlasting flames.” Whitefield informed them that this is a false peace and if that is all the peace they have they would “lie down in everlasting flames.”⁸³ “Lie down in everlasting flames” is Whitefield’s warning of going to hell after death. Whitefield’s recommendation was that those with false peace go to Christ and pray, “Lord, save us, we perish.”⁸⁴

Whitefield used the tactual metaphor of “the devil’s hellish arms” in “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden.” He affirmed, “the devil longs to embrace you in his hellish arms.”⁸⁵ The metaphor communicated the fact that those who are unconverted belong to the devil and are promised an eternity with him.

Yet another metaphor of Whitefield’s use of the appeal to hell was that those who go to hell will “dwell with devils.” He explained in *The Marks of the New-Birth*, that those who die without Christ will dwell “with devils” and “share the same doom.”⁸⁶ He immediately offered the remedy to avoiding such a fate. He quoted Acts 3:19,

⁸³Whitefield, “The Folly and Danger of Parting With Christ for the Pleasures and Profits of Life,” in *Works*, 5:325.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Whitefield, “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden,” in *Works*, 6:312.

⁸⁶George Whitefield, *The Marks of the New-Birth* (Boston: Printed and Sold by G. Rogers and D. Fowle, 1740), 14. Whitefield also spoke of “living with the devil for ever” in “The Method of Grace,” dwelling “with devils and damned spirits to all eternity” in “A Penitent Heart, the Best New Year’s Gift,” in “All Men’s Place” he stated, “if we live like and are devils here, we must go and be with them when we die forever!” in “Christ the Believer’s Refuge” he explains, “I know but of one place you can go to, that is to the devil . . . you will only be a sport for devils.”

“Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” This appeal Whitefield addressed to those who are “dead in trespasses and sins.”⁸⁷

Also in “The Heinous Sin of Profane Cursing and Swearing,” Whitefield introduced the image of chains with the appeal to hell. He said, “The damned devils, and damned souls of men in hell, may be supposed to rave and blaspheme in their torments, because they know that the chains wherein they are held, can never be knocked off; but for men that swim in the river of God’s goodness, whose mercies are renewed to them every morning, and who are visited with fresh tokens of his infinite unmerited loving-kindness every moment; for these favorite creatures to set their mouths against heaven, and to blaspheme a gracious, patient, all-bountiful God; is a height of sin which exceeds the blackness and impiety of devils and hell itself.”⁸⁸

In “Christ the Believer’s Refuge” Whitefield again used the image of chains in hell. Preaching from Psalm 46, he said, “There is no river to make glad the inhabitants of hell, no streams to cool them in that scorching element: were those who are in hell to have such an offer of mercy as you have, how would their chains rattle! How would they come with the flames of hell about their ears!”⁸⁹ Whitefield aroused the fear of hell by his description of it as a place where there are “no streams to cool them in that scorching element.” His goal was for his hearers to make Christ their refuge. He directed his hearers to his desired goal by pointing out what those in hell would do with such an

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Whitefield, “The Heinous Sin of Profane Cursing and Swearing,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 168.

⁸⁹Gurney, “Christ the Believer’s Refuge,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 37.

invitation. He explained, “How would they rejoice even there, if a minister was to tell them, Come, come, after you have been here millions and millions of years, there shall come a river here to make you glad.”⁹⁰

In “The Gospel Supper” Whitefield painted a picture of dining with the devil and his demons. He used the gustatory metaphor of having dinner with the devil. He called his hearers to come to God’s table for salvation instead. “If you do not come, I know the master will be angry,” he declared.⁹¹ Whitefield pleaded with his audience to come into God’s rest. He warned them that if they would not taste of Christ’s supper they would “sup with the damned devils,”⁹² a metaphor of being in hell.

Another gustatory metaphor Whitefield used was the devil “gnawing” the soul of the Rich Man. In the sermon “All Men’s Place,” Whitefield described the experience of the Rich Man from Luke 16:19–31 in hell. He said the man was a “vile wretch” and had a “pompous” funeral with two “mutes” standing around his coffin. However, while the pompous funeral was underway and the man laid in state, Whitefield said “damned devils were gnawing his soul.”⁹³ Then, in a moment of dramatic display, Whitefield shouted, “Hark! don’t you hear him; I will stop a little that you may; you ungodly ones, do not you hear your brother cry?”⁹⁴

⁹⁰Ibid. Whitefield also uses the metaphor of “chains of darkness” in “The Extent and Reasonableness of Self–Denial.”

⁹¹Whitefield, “The Gospel Supper,” in *Five Sermons*, 69.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Gurney, “All Men’s Place,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 234.

⁹⁴Ibid.

In the sermon “Jacob’s Ladder,” Whitefield used the metaphor of a ladder to illustrate the entrance of a lost soul into hell. He intimated that when an unconverted person dies, the devil’s ladder comes up and stretches from hell to earth. He explicated that the devil comes up the ladder to “let you down.”⁹⁵ He proceeded to call his hearers away from the devil’s ladder. He importuned, “climb, climb, dear young men.”⁹⁶

Climax/Pusma. In “Self-Enquiry Concerning the Work of God,” Whitefield used the appeal to hell through a combination of climax and pusma. In this sermon excerpt, Whitefield fired question after question upon his hearers and then rises into a climax. He said, “If we may ask what God has wrought, let me ask you what the devil hath wrought in you; O thou unconverted soul, sin has made thee a beast, made thy body, which ought to be the temple of the living God, a cage of every unclean bird; what hath Satan wrought in thee? but made thee a nest of vile stinking swine; and what will he give thee? hell, hell, hell.”⁹⁷ There is no way to know from the printed text, but one can imagine Whitefield’s voice rising higher and becoming more passionate with each use of the word hell.

This appeal is made even more vivid by Whitefield’s use of the metaphors of “a cage of every unclean bird” and “a nest of vile stinking swine.” He used direct address along with vivid imagery to make this appeal of high degree.

⁹⁵Ibid., 272.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Gurney, “Self-Enquiry Concerning the Work of God,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 164-65.

However, Whitefield does not stop with the threat of hell. He extended the antidote. He consoled,

The wages the devil gives no man can live by; the wages of sin is death: and here I come to bring you good news, glad tidings of great joy; O that God may now counter work the devil, and take thee into his own workmanship, create thee anew in Christ Jesus, give thee to feel a little of his Spirit's work on thy heart, and make thee, of a child of the devil, a child of God! Say not, it cannot be; say not, it shall not be; say not, it is too late; say not, it is for others but not for me; my brethren, God help you to cry, and to try to-night, if thou canst turn the text into a prayer, Lord God, let me know what it is for thee to work in me; make me a new creature, create a new spirit within me, that I may join with thy dear people in singing, what hath God wrought! O remember, if this is not the case with you, you must have a dreadful different ditty in hell; the note there will be, what hath the devil wrought! what hath he wrought! how am I come to this place of torment! I sold my birthright for a mess of pottage! Heaven or hell is set before you to-night; Jesus grant, that the terrors of the Lord may awaken you to-night, and that you may not rest till you have comfort and support from God.⁹⁸

Anecdotes. Whitefield used few anecdotes in the forging of the appeal to hell. However, when he does, it serves as an indirect warning of hell to his hearers. In the sermon "The Lord Our Righteousness," Whitefield told the story of a prelate who argued consistently and fruitlessly with the Earl of Rochester concerning the afterlife. After much debate and argument, the prelate excused himself from the Earl's company saying, "Well, my Lord, if there be no such thing as Christ, no such thing as Heaven, what will become of me? But, my Lord, if there be such thing as Hell, what will become of you?"⁹⁹ Whitefield used the prelate's piercing question to urge his hearers to accept the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is an appeal of low degree

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹George Whitefield, *The Lord Our Righteousness* (Boston: Printed and Sold by S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1742), 21 [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

because it is indirect.

Whitefield used a startling anecdote in “All Men’s Place” to warn his hearers of hell. He told the story of a minister who was attending the bedside of a dying woman. The minister asked her where she hoped to go when she died. The woman replied she did not care where she went. The minister was of course shocked and pressed her for an answer. She said again she did not care whether it was heaven or hell. A third time the minister asked her saying, “if you was put to your choice where would you go?” The woman said she would choose hell. The minister was understandably taken aback and asked her if she was mad. However, she insisted she would go to hell. When the minister asked why, she responded, “all my relations are there.” Whitefield explained that the minister told this dreadful account of being at the woman’s bedside at her funeral. Then, Whitefield aimed at the heart of his hearers saying, “why, you that are unregenerate must go to hell, for all your unregenerate relations are there; your father the devil is there; all damned angels and damned spirits are there; your brothers and sisters are there; as they went one way here, so they must be banished from Jesus Christ to one place hereafter.”¹⁰⁰ This appeal is from a negative position and can be considered of low degree, because it is indirect and Whitefield does not use direct personal language in it.

Pusma. In “Walking With God,” Whitefield pierced the heart of his hearers with the figure of question pusma. With urgency he cried, “Stop, stop, O sinner! Turn ye, turn ye, O ye unconverted men, for the end of that way you are now walking in, however right it may seem in your blinded eyes, will be death, even eternal destruction

¹⁰⁰Gurney, “All Men’s Place,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 233-34.

both of body and soul. Make no longer tarrying, I say: at your peril I charge you, step not one step further on in your present walk. For how knowest thou, O man, but the next step thou takest may be into hell? Death may seize thee, judgment find thee, and then the great gulf will be fixed between thee and endless glory for ever and ever.”¹⁰¹ In this emotional and passionate plea, Whitefield inserted a fear-arousing rhetorical question. This is an example of a fear appeal cluster. The appeals of death, judgment, and hell are all found in this excerpt.

Another example of Whitefield’s use of *pusma* comes from “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy–Laden.” In the example above, he used only one question. In the following example he bombarded his audience with a cluster of questions. He queried,

And must these discreet polite creatures, who never did any one harm, but led such civil, decent lives, must they suffer the vengeance of eternal fire? Cannot their righteous souls be saved? Where then must the sinner and the ungodly appear? Where wilt thou, O Sabbath–breaker, appear, thou, who canst take thy pleasure, thy recreation, on the Lord’s–day, who refuseth to hear the word of God, who wilt not come to church to be instructed in the ways of the Lord? Where will you, O ye adulterers, fornicators, and such–like of this generation appeal? Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge, and them he will condemn. Then you will not call these tricks of youth: no, but you will call on the rocks and the mountains to fall on you, to hide you from the fury and anger of the Lord. Where wilt thou, O man, appear, that takes pleasure in making a mock of sin, who despiseth all reproof, who throws about thy jests as a madman does fire, and asks whether thou art not in sport? Where wilt thou, O man, appear, that makes it thy business to preach against the children of the Most High; thou, who art inventing methods in order to stop the progress of the gospel, and using thy utmost power to quash the preaching thereof; who art raising of evil reports against the disciple of Christ, and esteemest them madmen, fools, schismatics, and a parcel of rabble? Thou, O man, with all thy letter–learning, wilt surely see the judgment seat of Christ, though, perhaps, sorely against your will; to be cast by him into eternal fire, a place prepared for the devil

¹⁰¹Whitefield, “Walking With God,” in *Five Sermons*, 124.

and his angels. There is a burning tophet¹⁰² kindled by the fury of an avenging God, which will never, never be quenched. The devil longs to embrace you in his hellish arms, whenever the sentence is past, where you must for ever bear the weight of your sin: there is no redemption then; the day of grace is past; the door of hope is shut; mercy will be no more offered, but you must be shut out from God for ever. O who can dwell with everlasting burnings!¹⁰³

In the above excerpt, Whitefield posed seven questions to his hearers. The questions are all connected with the eternal fire mentioned in the first question.

In addition to the rhetorical devices highlighted above, Whitefield focused on various threatening aspects of hell from sermon to sermon. Each variation presented a different unpleasant nuance of hell.

In “Christ the Only Preservative Against a Reprobate Spirit,” Whitefield cautioned his hearers against depending on good works to gain them admittance into heaven. He explicated that their good works would not prevent them from sinking into an “eternal abyss, where there is no bottom.”¹⁰⁴ “Eternal abyss” is a description for hell which enhances hell’s frightening nature.

Whitefield also described hell as being absent from Christ in “The Method of Grace.” He stated that if that were the only torment of hell it would be hell enough.¹⁰⁵ His call was for his auditors to embrace Christ immediately before they went to a place where they would never have another opportunity to embrace him.

¹⁰²A reference from 2 Kings 23:10.

¹⁰³Whitefield, “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy-Laden,” in *Works*, 6:311-12.

¹⁰⁴Whitefield, “Christ the Only Preservative Against a Reprobate Spirit,” in *Works*, 6:297.

¹⁰⁵MacFarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century*, 29.

In “The Extent and Reasonableness of Self-Denial,” Whitefield encouraged his hearers to think often on the pains of hell as a source of motivation for self-denial. The sermon was based on Luke 9:23, “And he said unto them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.” He addressed this appeal under the third major division of the sermon in which he offered motivations for self-denial. His first motivation to self-denial was to meditate on the life of Jesus, the second was to meditate on the lives of the apostles, and third was to “think often on the Pains of Hell.”¹⁰⁶ Whitefield admonished his audience to “think how many thousands there are now reserved, with damned Spirits, in Chains of Darkness unto the Judgment of the Great Day, for not complying with the Precept in the Text. And think withal that This, this must be our own Case shortly, unless we are wise in Time, and submit to those easy Conditions our Saviour has prescribed us, in Order to avoid it.”¹⁰⁷ He implored them to think of the thousands of damned spirits in chains of darkness, of the everlasting burnings, and of the sentence from Christ’s lips to depart from Him. Whitefield was essentially asking his hearers to motivate themselves with the fear of hell. For, if they would only think of these things, they would certainly turn from sin and thus deny the flesh. He said of the chains of darkness, “this must be our case shortly, unless we are wise in time, and submit to those easy Conditions our Saviour has prescribed us, in order to avoid it.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Whitefield, “The Extent and Reasonableness of Self-Denial,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 92.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

In “The Heinous Sin of Profane Cursing and Swearing,” Whitefield threatened those who persecute the saints with “a lake of fire and brimstone.”¹⁰⁹ He said, “God will put the tears of the one [the persecuted] into his bottle, so it will be just in him to punish the other with eternal sorrow, for all their ungodly and hard speeches, and cast them into a lake of fire and brimstone, where they shall be glad of a drop of water to cool those tongues, with which they have so often blasphemed the Lord of Hosts, and grieved the people of our God.”¹¹⁰

In “The Gospel a Dying Saint’s Triumph,” Whitefield reminded his hearers that hell was a place of separation from family members who are followers of Christ. In this section of the sermon, he was begging for sinners to come to Christ. He pleaded, “What, will you laugh at the minister that cries out, Lord help you to come; come, come, do you think that we have nothing else to say, and are at a loss for words, when we cry come, come, come, to fill up our sermons?”¹¹¹ One of his arguments to persuade his hearers to come was the prospect of being separated in eternity. He said, “. . . how will you rave, how will you tear, and how will you wring your hands, when you see your relations, your friends, those whom you despised, and were glad they were dead out of your way, see them in Abraham’s bosom, and yourselves lifting up your eyes in torment!”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Whitefield, “The Heinous Sin of Profane Cursing and Swearing,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 167.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Gurney, “The Gospel, A Dying Saint’s Triumph,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 74-75.

¹¹²Ibid., 75.

Whitefield enhanced the fear of hell by explicating the fact that not only would a damned soul endure the torment of hell, but also damned souls would know each other in hell. This recognition would increase the misery of hell. In a quintessential excerpt, Whitefield declared in “Christ’s Transfiguration,”

But O what a dreadful consideration is this for damned souls! I believe, that as glorified spirits will know one another, so will damned souls know one another too. And as the company of the blessed increases the happiness of heaven, so the company of the damned will increase their torments. What made Dives to put up that petition? “I have five brethren; send somebody to my father’s house to testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” One would imagine at first reading, that hell had made Dives charitable, and that though he was ill natured on earth, yet he had acquired some good nature in hell. No, no, there is not a spark of good nature in the place of torment. But Dives knew, if his five brethren came there, they might say, We may thank you, next to an evil heart, for coming hither; you made us drink healths [*sic*], till we were drunk; you taught us to game, to curse, to swear, &c. He knew very well, that his five brethren being brought to hell by his example, hell would be heated five times hotter to torment his soul. One will cry out, Cursed be the day that ever I was companions with such an one in sin; cursed be the day that ever we hearkened to one another’s advice, and were allured by each others example to sin against God!¹¹³

On four occasions Whitefield contended that there would be a special deformity in hell for those who may have given too much attention to their dress and appearance in life. In “Christ’s Transfiguration” Whitefield made this assertion. He insisted,

It is the opinion of Archbishop Usher [*sic*], that as the bodies of the saints shall be glorified, so the bodies of the damned shall be deformed. And if this be true, alas! what a poor figure will the fine ladies cut, who die without a Christ! What a poor figure will the fine gentleman cut in the morning of the resurrection, that now dresses up his body, and at the same time neglects to secure an interest in Christ and eternal happiness! It is the opinion, likewise of Archbishop Usher [*sic*], that damned souls will lose all the good tempers they had here; so that though God gave unregenerate people a constitutional meekness, good nature, and courage, for the benefit of the commonwealth; yet, the use of those blessings being over, and they

¹¹³Whitefield, “Christ’s Transfiguration,” in *Works*, 5:453-54.

having died without Christ, and it being impossible there will be an appearance of good in hell, their good tempers will be forever lost. If this be so, it is an awful consideration; and I think persons who love their bodies, should also hence take care to secure the welfare of their souls.¹¹⁴

Again, in “The Lord Our Light,” he made the same claim. He postulated, “Bishop Usher’s [*sic*] opinion was, and I heartily concur in it, that those who value themselves most on their beauty and dress, and do not love God on earth, will be most deformed in hell, and their bodies suffer proportionally there. There is no dressing in hell, nothing but fire and brimstone there, and the wrath of God always awaiting on thee, O sinner, whoever thou art, man or woman.” He made this assertion in a section where he was speaking generally about the suffering of hell. Whitefield was referring to James Ussher (1581-1656), a respected Irish preacher and theologian, who became bishop of Meath in 1621 and Archbishop of Armagh in 1626.¹¹⁵

In a third sermon, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” Whitefield did not mention Ussher or deformity, but does rail against the malignancy of bodily adornment. He vociferated, “But I speak a word to you, young maidens, as well as young men. I see many of you adorned, as to your bodies, but are not your souls naked? Which of you can say, the Lord is my righteousness? Which of you was ever solicitous to be dressed in this robe of invaluable price, and without which you are no better than whited sepulchers in the sight of God? Let not then so many of you, young maidens, any longer forget your

¹¹⁴Ibid., 452.

¹¹⁵Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1130-31.

chief and only ornament. O seek for the Lord to be your righteousness, or otherwise burning will soon be upon you, instead of beauty!”¹¹⁶

In “Soul Prosperity” Whitefield warned those who are “negligent about the prosperity of your souls, who only mind your bodies, who are more afraid of a pimple in your faces, than of the rottenness of your hearts” of their impending torment.¹¹⁷

However, he becomes more specific when he spoke of “a Christless preacher, that always minded his body.” Whitefield claimed that when the preacher was near death he cried to his wife that he saw hell opened and the damned tormented. The preacher saw someone in hell he debauched. In the midst of such crying the preacher yelled, “I am coming to thee, I am coming, I must be damned, God will damn my soul,” and then died.¹¹⁸

Whitefield’s point was that people should be careful not to give more attention to the body than to the soul. He concluded the anecdote of the Christless preacher saying, “Take care of jesting with God; there is room enough in hell, and if you neglect the prosperity of your souls what will become of you?”¹¹⁹

These sermons were preached over the span of Whitefield’s ministry. This is evidence that Whitefield probably maintained the teaching on deformity in hell and disdain for giving too much attention to bodily appearance most of his life. The source of the information on deformity he cites as “Bishop Usher [*sic*].”

¹¹⁶Whitefield, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” in *Nine Sermons*, 20.

¹¹⁷Gurney, “Soul Prosperity,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 56.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 57.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

In “Neglect of Christ the Killing Sin,” Whitefield called hell a spiritual death. He remonstrated, “there is a spiritual death, and the consequences of that is eternal death; if I die in that state I must die forever; that is, I must be a creature living eternally banished from God: if I be annihilated when I die, then, indeed, temporal death is all; but it is not so, I am to live in another world; the wisest man upon earth tells us, that there is a future state; and therefore by legal and spiritual death, I am liable to death eternal.”¹²⁰

In “Spiritual Baptism” Whitefield made the point that many will go to hell by way of heaven. He meant that many would go to hell who have been religious, but unconverted. He called them “formalists” who have a name to be alive, but are truly dead. To these religious formalists Whitefield gave a sobering warning. He bellowed, “Think what it will be to go to hell to–night, to want a drop of water, wherewith you was sprinkled, to cool your tongues in hell; think what it will be to go to hell by the way of heaven, which is the worst way you can take; think what it will be to be just at the threshold, and not have religion enough to take you over; my heart bleeds for you.”¹²¹ He emphasized the fact that in hell it will not matter what mode of baptism was used.

In “Persecution Every Christian’s Lot,” Whitefield used a cluster of fear appeals in his final call to repentance. In an appeal to hell, Whitefield informed those who persecute Christians that “infernal spirits” would one day drag them to a lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Whitefield roared, “. . . the smoke of your torment shall be ascending up for ever and ever. Lay down therefore, ye rebels, your arms against the

¹²⁰Gurney, “Neglect of Christ the Killing Sin,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 215.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 207.

most high God, and no longer persecute those who live godly in Christ Jesus.”¹²²

Whitefield’s intention was that the persecutors would be scared into ceasing their persecution of the godly in Christ Jesus.

Whitefield stated in “The Furnace of Affliction” that those in hell could see all they could have had which they will have lost. He divulged to his hearers that they would see God, Christ, heaven, and all he had from their vantage point in hell. This knowledge of what could have been would serve to enhance their torment forever.¹²³ Again, in “All Men’s Place” Whitefield contended, “I verily believe, the damned will have a sight of those that are in heaven, to let them know what a heaven, what a Christ, what a glory they have lost.”¹²⁴

In “The Lord Our Light” Whitefield informed his hearers that those in hell are mourning. This mourning began as soon they entered hell.¹²⁵ He elaborated on this theme saying, “When you are damned, the days of your mourning will be but at their beginning; there is no end of you mourning in hell. There is but one song, if it may be called so, in hell, to wit, that of Dives, which will be always repeating, How am I tormented in this flame!”¹²⁶

In “The Folly and Danger of Parting with Christ for the Pleasures and Profits of Life,” Whitefield posited the danger of going to sleep and waking up in hell. This

¹²²Whitefield, “Persecution Every Christian’s Lot,” in *Nine Sermons*, 45.

¹²³Gurney, “The Furnace of Affliction,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 119.

¹²⁴Ibid., 234.

¹²⁵Ibid., 128.

¹²⁶Ibid., 136.

particular appeal to hell is the epitome of a fear appeal. Whitefield extended the fearful message and then followed with the solution to the danger. He contended,

If you are easy under the storm and tempest of sin, and do not cry to Christ for salvation, thou art in a dangerous condition; and it is a wonder to consider, how a man that is not sure of having made his peace with God, can eat, or drink, or live in peace; that thou art not afraid, when thou liest down, that thou should'st awake in hell: but if Christ speak peace unto thy soul, who can then speak trouble? None; no, not men or devils. Therefore, lie down at the feet of Christ whom you have resisted, and say, Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do? And he will rebuke the winds and seas of thy troubled mind, and all things will be calm.¹²⁷

In “Marks of a True Conversion,” Whitefield referred to hell as “everlasting burnings.”¹²⁸ Whitefield aroused this fear by bluntly asking his hearers, “what will become of you when you die, if you die without being converted?”¹²⁹ He answered the question saying, “God will strike you speechless, and ye shall be banished from his presence for ever and ever. I know ye cannot dwell with everlasting burnings.”¹³⁰

However, Whitefield immediately followed with the antidote to the fear. He said, “I show you a way of escape; Jesus is the way, Jesus is the truth, the Lord Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life.”¹³¹

¹²⁷Whitefield, “The Folly and Danger of Parting With Christ for the Pleasures and Profits of Life,” in *Works*, 5:328. Whitefield also used the concept of being lulled into sleep and awakening in hell in “The Method of Grace.” In “The Folly and Danger of Parting With Christ for the Pleasures and Profits of Life,” Whitefield presents the prospect of dying during sleep and waking up in hell.

¹²⁸Whitefield, “Marks of A True Conversion,” in *Works*, 5:352.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Ibid.

Another variation of the appeal to hell is found in “The Lord Our Righteousness.” In this sermon Whitefield devoted a large section to an appeal to hell in which he contended that Christ would pronounce the sentence of hell. He declared,

For God’s justice must be satisfied; and, unless Christ’s righteousness is imputed and applied to you here, you must hereafter be satisfying the divine justice in hell—torments eternally; nay, Christ himself shall condemn you to that place of torment, And how cutting is that thought! Methinks I see poor, trembling, Christless wretches, standing before the bar of God, crying out, Lord, if we must be damned, let some angel, or some archangel, pronounce the damnatory sentence: but all in vain. Christ himself shall pronounce the irrevocable sentence. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, let me persuade you to close with Christ, and never rest till you can say, “the Lord my righteousness.” Who knows but the Lord may have mercy on, may, abundantly pardon you?¹³²

In “Improvement of Afflictions,” Whitefield compared the fire of hell to the devil’s fire in life. He addressed those who were in the furnace of affliction in their personal lives. He informed his hearers that there were two fires in life. There was the devil’s fire and God’s fire, and every man will be put in one or the other. Whitefield warned that the devil’s fire was the hottest because there was no God to support the troubled soul in that fire. Then, he brought forth the appeal to hell, declaring that many would go from the devil’s fire in life to burn with the devil in hell hereafter. Whitefield used this unique comparison to arouse the fear of hell in his hearers.¹³³ Whitefield’s call to action was “the Lord Jesus Christ help you to bear the fire now, that you may never be cast into the fire of hell. God hasten you, hasten you that are out of the devil’s fire to flee, flee, ye weary souls, to Jesus Christ; fly to the Lamb of God from hell to heaven, as

¹³²Whitefield, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” in *Works*, 5:231-32.

¹³³Gurney, “Improvement of Afflictions,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 149.

far as you can from these hellish fires, to the fire of his blessed merit and love.”¹³⁴

Appeal to Spiritual Failure

A fourth category of fear appeal used by Whitefield is appeal to spiritual failure. This appeal was directed toward a target audience of believers. The appeal was identified in only one sermon. In the sermon “Walking With God,” Whitefield expounded on the need to walk with God as did Enoch. In describing ways in which believers can “keep up and maintain” their walk with God, Whitefield extrapolated the danger of neglecting spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and secret prayer. In his development of this appeal he used a simple assertion and an historical anecdote from the life of Origen, the early Christian scholar from Alexandria. He stated, “If we once get above our Bibles, and cease making the written word of God our sole rule both as to faith and practice, we shall soon lie open to all manner of delusion, and be in great danger of making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.”¹³⁵ And again he said, “A neglect of secret prayer has been frequently an inlet to many spiritual diseases, and has been attended with fatal consequences. Origen observed, ‘That the day he offered incense to an idol, he went out of his closet without making use of secret prayer.’”¹³⁶ The threat was that those who neglect the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and secret prayer are in danger of falling into sin and spiritual disease. The recommended response was to take

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵George Whitefield, “Walking With God,” in *Five Sermons* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1746), 110 [on-line]; accessed 23 October 2007; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

¹³⁶Ibid., 111. Whitefield does not reference his source for this information and I have been unable to determine its historical accuracy.

up these practices and avoid sin and spiritual disease. The neglect of spiritual disciplines arouses the fear of spiritual failure. This is an appeal of low degree and from a negative position. He did not use direct address or any vivid images.

Appeal to National Suffering

The fifth category of fear appeal found in Whitefield's sermons is appeal to national suffering. This appeal is found in one sermon titled "Britain's Mercies, and Britain's Duty." The target audiences were the subjects of the British Empire and the King of England. Whitefield preached this thanksgiving sermon in Philadelphia on Sunday, August 14, 1746. He specifically addressed the suffering that arises as a result of war, disease, and natural disasters. In "Britain's Mercies, and Britain's Duty," Whitefield preached not only to offer thanksgiving to God and celebrate Britain's victory in the Battle on Culloden Moor over the Young Pretender, Charles Stuart, but also to warn his hearers of the potential of future suffering. Whitefield reminded the audience, using a visual metaphor, that though the war has been won and the storm past, that "the clouds may again return after the rain." He averred,

God has other arrows in his quiver to smite us with, besides the French King, his Catholic Majesty, or an abjured Pretender. Not only the sword, but plague, pestilence, and famine, are under the divine command. Who knows but he may say to them all, 'Pass through these lands?' A fatal murrain¹³⁷ has lately swept away abundance of cattle at home and abroad. A like epidemical disease may have a commission to seize our persons as well as our beasts What great numbers upon the continent have been lately taken off by the bloody-flux, small-pox, and yellow-fever? . . . the rod is yet hanging over us: and I believe it will be granted on all sides, that if such various dispensations of mercy and judgment do not teach the

¹³⁷A pestilence or plague.

inhabitants of any land to learn righteousness, they will only ripen them for a greater ruin.¹³⁸

Whitefield threatened the nation to avoid becoming prideful and turning from God, for God can still humble them with disaster and disease. Using a kinaesthetic metaphor, he reminded them that “the rod is yet hanging over us.”¹³⁹ His recommended response was that the land may “learn righteousness” and fear the Lord God.¹⁴⁰ This is an appeal of low degree and from a positive position. Whitefield began with the positive nature of the nations victory in war and the need for thanksgiving to God and repentance. The thanksgiving and repentance Whitefield called for could prevent future times of national suffering.

Appeal to the Brevity of Time

Appeal to the brevity of time is the sixth category of fear appeal Whitefield employed in his sermons. The use of this appeal was found only a few times, but it is a potent appeal. Having much in common with the appeal to death, the appeal to the brevity of time used Scripture quotations, anecdotes, pisma, and simple assertions to develop the appeal. The target audience was the unconverted, the backslidden, and the wicked.

Preaching a sermon on *The Marriage of Cana* from John 2:1-12, Whitefield warned his listeners the time was coming when the Lord would no longer call them to His

¹³⁸George Whitefield, *Britain's Mercies, Britain's Duty* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1746), 21 [on-line]; accessed 23 October 2007; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

supper. Time was running out. Whitefield's answer to the audience was to "suffer him then to shew forth his Glory, even the Glory of the exceeding Riches of his free Grace, by believing on him."¹⁴¹ The appeal was of low degree. It included no imagery, metaphors, or rhetorical devices. It was a straightforward assertion of fact.

In the sermon "Repentance and Conversion," a sermon taken in short-hand by Joseph Gurney from Acts 3:19, Whitefield warned his hearers that time was slipping away. Illustrating his assertion with a story from Catholicism, Whitefield urged his hearers to repent and be converted. He used the appeal to the brevity of time in his effort to persuade those present of their need for Jesus Christ. He importuned,

Is there any person here that will give himself time to consider a moment that will not say, though you speak in a rough, incoherent manner, yet there is some truth in what you say; I believe men ought to be converted, but the common saying is, I don't care to be converted yet; we think it is time enough to be converted. Is not this acting like the cardinal, when told he was elected pope, and desired to come that night and have the honor of pope conferred on him; because it was pretty late said, it is not a work of darkness, I will put it off till the morning; before which they chose another pope, and he lost his triple crown. You may think to put it off till the morning, though before the morning you may be damned.¹⁴²

Whitefield emphasized the peril of delay in this excerpt. He sought an immediate response from his hearers, strongly discouraging procrastination concerning their conversion to Christ. Whitefield sought to arouse the fear of delaying too long and being damned to hell. The concept Whitefield used to arouse fear is the shortness of time. The behavior he sought to abate was the desire of some to postpone conversion.

¹⁴¹George Whitefield, *The Marriage of Cana* (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by W. Bradford, 1742), 35 [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

¹⁴²Gurney, "Repentance and Conversion," in *Eighteen Sermons*, 88.

In the same sermon, Whitefield used another appeal to the brevity of time.

This second one used a higher degree of fear and more vivid language. In this appeal Whitefield was continuing to address the need to be converted without delay. He reasoned,

But say you, all in good time, I do not choose to be converted yet; why, what age are you now? I will come down to a pretty moderate age; suppose you are fourteen: and do not you think it time to be converted? and yet there are a great many here, I dare say, twenty years old, and not converted. Some are of opinion, that most people that are converted, are so before thirty. There was a young man buried last night at Tottenham Court but seventeen, an early monument of free grace! Are you forty, or fifty, is not that time? Is it time for the poor prisoners to be converted that are to be hanged tomorrow morning? If it is time for them, it is time for you, for you may be dead before them. There was a poor woman, but two or three days ago, that was damning and cursing most shockingly, now she is a dead corpse, was taken suddenly, and died away. God grant that may not be the case with any of you; the only way to prevent it is, to be enabled to think that now is an accepted time, that now is the day of salvation. Let me look round, and what do you suppose I was thinking? why, that it is a mercy we have not been in hell a thousand times. How many are there in hell that used to say, Lord convert me, but not now? One of the good old Puritans says, hell is paved with good intentions.¹⁴³

In this second appeal to the brevity of time Whitefield also used the appeal to death. He recounted the sudden deaths of two individuals—a teenage boy and a poor woman. The appeal to death and the appeal to the brevity of time are closely related and overlap to an extent. One of the reasons for the brevity of time is death. However, this is certainly an appeal to the brevity of time because Whitefield was pressing upon his hearers the need to be converted immediately, while there is time. He warned that time was running out.

Whitefield developed this fear appeal by using a Scripture quotation, two anecdotes about sudden deaths, a quotation from a Puritan, and a current event. The

¹⁴³Ibid., 89.

anecdotes were recent in occurrence. Whitefield had possibly read of the deaths in the newspaper or they were perhaps reported to him personally. However, his knowledge of the events revealed more information than would be included in the newspaper. The first anecdote is of a “young man” who died and was “buried last night.” Whitefield did not give his cause of death, but described him as “an early monument of free grace,” indicating his apparent conversion to Christ. Whitefield’s message to those in his audience who were young was that they could not guarantee they would live to be old. Therefore, they should not postpone their conversion.

The second anecdote was of a woman who died unconverted. The woman was “taken suddenly” the day of the sermon or the day before. Whitefield did not give her cause of death nor her age. His point was that this woman “two or three days ago” was “damning and cursing most shockingly” and did not expect death to come so soon. Whitefield described her using vivid language, saying, “now she is a dead corpse.”

Whitefield used a quotation from Scripture in this appeal. He said the only way to prevent dying suddenly unconverted was to think upon 2 Corinthians 6:2. He also used a quotation from an “old Puritan” which stated, “hell is paved with good intentions.”

Lastly, Whitefield used what was going on around him in this fear appeal. A number of prisoners were to be executed by hanging the day after the sermon was preached. Whitefield used these condemned prisoners to advance his argument. He explained to his hearers that as close as death was for those prisoners, it might even be closer for them. Time was running out for the condemned criminals and so time is also running out for the unconverted.

The above two fear appeals concern the brevity of time as a result of delay and

sudden death. The following appeal to the brevity of time concerns the calling of Jesus Christ. In the sermon “The Conversion of Zaccheus,” preached from Luke 19, Whitefield used the appeal to the brevity of time. He intoned, “Make haste then, O sinners, make haste, and come by faith to Christ. Then, this day, even this hour, nay, this moment, if you believe, Jesus Christ shall come and make his eternal abode in your hearts. Which of you is made willing to receive the King of glory? Which of you obeys his call, as Zaccheus did? Alas! why do you stand still? How know you, whether Jesus Christ may ever call you again? Come then, poor, guilty sinners; come away, poor, lost, undone publicans: make haste, I say, and come away to Jesus Christ.”¹⁴⁴

Whitefield implored his audience in this excerpt to come to Christ immediately for the time of Christ’s calling may expire and never return. He used *pusma*, a figure of question, repeatedly to drive home his verdict. In this appeal Whitefield sought to arouse the fear of running out of time to be converted. The instrument he used to arouse this fear was the call of Christ to salvation and the possibility of it never being extended again.

In *The Balm of Gilead* Whitefield used the appeal to the brevity of time coupled with the appeal to hell torments. However, the thrust and capstone of the appeal is the brevity of time. The mention of hell was the result of delay and procrastination. Preaching in the Orphan-Hospital Park, on Thursday evening, July 8, 1742, Whitefield warned,

Say not ye, says our Saviour, there are yet four Months, and then cometh Harvest: Behold I say unto you, Lift up your Eyes, and look on the Fields, for they

¹⁴⁴Whitefield, “The Conversion of Zaccheus,” in *Nine Sermons*, 215-16.

are white already to Harvest. Blessed be God, we can lift up our Eyes and see a great Ingathering of Souls to the Lord; The Harvest Time does not last always; by and by the Harvest will be past; by and by the Summer will be ended: And if thou do'st not believe, thy Soul shall be damned; thou shalt find no Balm in Hell; thou shalt find, O Sinner, no Physician there. Thou will then find, crying in vain, tho' thou cryest to Eternity, The Health of thy Soul will never be recovered, when once the Doors are shut; When God's Gulf is fixed between thee and these Souls that are gathered into God's Granery, then thou shalt eternally remain in Hell. Would to God, every awakened Sinner would know the Time of their Visitation, before 'tis eternally hid from their Eyes!¹⁴⁵

Later in *The Balm of Gilead*, Whitefield addressed the children listening to him. He warned them that time was also running out for them. He said,

Little Lambs of the Flock, now is the accepted Time, now is the Day of Salvation; your Harvest Day, your Summer Time will soon be over; O my little Boys and Girls, your Time may be soon gone, and there is a Hell for little Boys and Girls, as well as for old Folk: There are little Boys and Girls that are coming to Christ in the West. Young Lads and Lasses, how soon will your Harvest and Summer be past, awake out of your Sleep; it will be a dreadful Thing to lift up your Eyes in Torment, and there say, I will never see the Face of Christ again; I thought I came near it, one Day I was at the Gate of Heaven, but I stepped back; and now I am in Hell. O how dreadful will that be! Would to God, that every one of you, had that Concern for your Souls; as I have for you! I think I see the Lord calling the Angels to gather you in Bundles, to be cast into Hell.¹⁴⁶

Appeal to the Return of Christ

The seventh category of fear appeal was surprisingly rare in Whitefield's sermons.¹⁴⁷ Whitefield used an appeal to the return of Christ, but his published sermons reveal a sparing use of this appeal. This appeal was identified only three times in Whitefield's extant sermons. Only one of the three sermons use the return of Christ as

¹⁴⁵George Whitefield, *The Balm of Gilead* (Shropshire, England: Quinta Press, 2008), 6.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁷Whitefield used the appeal to the return of Christ sparing most likely because of his postmillennial eschatology.

the direct fear appeal. The other two use His return in connection with the judgment it will bring and therefore the force of the fear appeal in those cases was with judgment. Those two were considered under appeals to judgment.

In his sermon “Worldly Business no Plea for the Neglect of Religion,” Whitefield used a number of fear appeals in rapid succession which included the appeal to the return of Christ. He maintained,

Let me therefore, by way of conclusion, exhort all persons, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, to make the renewal of their fallen nature, the one business of their lives; and to let no worldly profit, no worldly pleasure, divert them from the thoughts of it. Let this cry, “Behold the bridegroom cometh,” be ever sounding in our ears; and let us live as creatures that are every moment liable to be hurried away by death to judgment: let us remember, that this life is a state of infinite importance, a point between two eternities, and that after these few days are ended, there will remain no more sacrifice for sin; let us be often asking ourselves, how we shall wish we had lived when we leave the world? And then we shall always live in such a state, as we shall never fear to die in. Whether we live, we shall live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we shall die unto the Lord; so that living or dying we may be the Lord’s.¹⁴⁸

In the conclusion to the sermon Whitefield called on his hearers to “make the renewal of their fallen nature, the one business of their lives.”¹⁴⁹ In keeping with the sermon’s theme, Whitefield warned about the distraction of “worldly profit” and “worldly pleasure” in pursuing this goal. He encouraged his hearers to not be diverted by such things. Whitefield reminded those who may be drawn away from spiritual endeavors by the things of the world that Christ is going to return and His return is imminent. Whitefield trumpeted, “Let this cry, ‘Behold the bridegroom cometh,’ be ever

¹⁴⁸Whitefield, “Worldly Business no Plea for the Neglect of Religion,” in *Sermons on Various Subjects*, 13-14.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 13.

sounding in our ears.”¹⁵⁰ He quoted from the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25, pressing upon his hearers the continual prospect of Christ appearing at any moment. By keeping this in mind, his hearers would be deterred from worldly business and worldly pleasure for fear of being in a sinful condition when Christ returns.

The fear Whitefield seeks to arouse was the fear of being unprepared when Christ returns. The behavior Whitefield was seeking to avert was “worldly profit” and “worldly pleasure.” The response he sought to engender was the continual focus by his hearers upon spiritual pursuits to the exclusion of worldly business. Whitefield identified his target audience for this appeal as “all persons, high and low, rich and poor, one with another.”¹⁵¹ The appeal could be consider of moderate or low degree. The susceptibility of the auditors to this appeal would have been equally as challenging as those of appeal to hell and judgment. The return of Christ may have seemed to them a distant reality.

Appeal to Personal Suffering

A further appeal to fear Whitefield used in his published sermons is the appeal to personal suffering. This is the eighth category of fear appeal found in the sermons. The appeal to personal suffering is to be distinguished from the appeal to national suffering discussed earlier. Whitefield used the appeal to national suffering in “Britain’s Mercies, and Britain’s Duty” as a warning to an entire nation of the potential for disaster and disease and was applied to the nation of Great Britain as a whole. In

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

contradistinction, the appeal to personal suffering was the threat of sorrow and sickness in the personal life of an individual. The personal suffering Whitefield addressed could include physical sickness, physical pain, the death of friends, the death of family members, the loss of material possessions, spiritual struggles, and/or the knowledge a child has gone to hell.

Whitefield used the appeal to personal suffering to persuade his hearers to be converted, to seek spiritual growth, to seek first the Kingdom of God, and to live a life of holiness before God. His goal in the appeal to personal suffering was to convince his hearers to make behavior changes in their lives in order to avoid the unpleasant experiences he describes. Three appeals to personal suffering were identified in Whitefield's sermons. In developing and framing these three appeals, he used a mixture of rhetorical devices. The first example is categorized as an appeal to personal suffering using immediate context. Though he used an anecdote, Scripture, and simple assertions, the appeal was encompassed by the occasion of the sermon, which was an evening funeral for a faithful Christian worker and philanthropist. The second example used a gruesome anecdote while the third employs biblical metaphors.

Whitefield's target audience for the appeal to personal suffering varies according to the occasion, for the appeal to personal suffering is more versatile than those appeals which have purely evangelistic ends. The sermon titled "Christ the Believer's Refuge" was preached to a funeral audience at Whitefield's Tabernacle in London. Included in that audience was the widow of the deceased, his extended family, friends, the servants of the household, and those Whitefield called "wicked."¹⁵² He

¹⁵²Gurney, "Christ the Believer's Refuge," in *Eighteen Sermons*, 36.

described the wicked as those who have come to the funeral out of curiosity “to hear what the babbler has to say on a funeral occasion.”¹⁵³

In “The Holy Spirit Convincing the World of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment,” the appeal to personal suffering was directed to believers only. Whitefield addressed the unconverted with another type of fear appeal later in the sermon. However, the appeal to personal suffering was addressed to “O believers.”¹⁵⁴ In “The Great Duty of Charity Recommended” Whitefield addressed the appeal to personal suffering to the rich.

Immediate Context. In the funeral sermon “Christ the Believer’s Refuge,” Whitefield used the appeal to personal suffering as he preached from Psalm 46. He declared,

We may apply it to civil commotions: David had lately been beset with the Philistines, and other enemies, that threatened to deprive him of his life; and there are certain times when we shall be left alone. This also, my brethren, may be applied to creature comforts: sometimes the earth seems to be removed, what then? why all the friends we take delight in, our most familiar friends, our soul-friends, friends by nature, and friends by grace, may be removed from us by the stroke of death; we know not how soon that stroke may come, it may come at an hour we thought not of; the mountains themselves, all the things that seem to surround and promise us a lasting scene of comfort, they themselves may soon be removed out of our sight, what then shall we do? they may be carried into the midst of the sea; what is that? our friends may be laid in the silent grave, and the places that knew them, may know them no more. It is easy talking, but it is not so easy to bear up under these things: but faith, my brethren, teaches us to say, though all friends are gone, blessed be God, God is not gone.¹⁵⁵

Expounding on the phrase “though the earth be removed,” from Psalm 46:2,

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴Whitefield, “The Holy Spirit Convincing the World of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment,” in *Nine Sermons*, 191.

¹⁵⁵Gurney, “Christ the Believer’s Refuge,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 31.

Whitefield riveted the application to what he called “creature comforts.” By creature comforts he intended the pleasures and securities of life which human nature was prone to put before spiritual matters. He referred specifically to two creature comforts: that of relationships with friends and material possessions.

Whitefield was urging his hearers to make Christ their refuge and forsake all else. He asked them what they would do at “the great day” when the earth would be “burnt up” if Christ was not their refuge. On that day all the pleasures of the world would be destroyed. Whitefield reminded his hearers that if God was not their refuge they would be hopeless when they lost their cherished friends to death. He called them “the friends we take delight in, our most familiar friends, our soul-friends, friends by nature, and friends by grace.” These “friends,” Whitefield warned, “may be removed from us by the stroke of death.” Whitefield explained that these friends may be taken at any time: “We know not how soon that stroke may come, it may come at an hour we thought not of.” A few sentences later Whitefield said, “our friends may be laid in the silent grave, and the places that knew them, may know them no more.” Whitefield’s point was that if these friends were suddenly taken from his hearers and Christ was not their refuge, they would be hopeless and have no place to turn for consolation. This was a warning to find ultimate joy and delight in the person of Jesus Christ as opposed to family and friends who would be taken away at any moment.

Whitefield not only invoked the personal suffering of losing close friends, but he went even further by applying the same measure of loss to “all the things that seem to surround and promise us a lasting scene of comfort.” Whitefield warned that these “things” “may soon be removed out of our sight.” He did not elaborate on what “things”

to which he was referring. One may assume he was speaking of worldly possessions. Nevertheless, Whitefield presented the prospect of losing these things and then asked the question, “what then shall we do?”

In the two appeals above, Whitefield sought to arouse fear with the warning of personal suffering. Whitefield’s goal was for his hearers to make Christ their sole refuge (i.e., to be converted to Christ). He concluded the section containing these two appeals to personal suffering by stating, “It is easy talking, but it is not so easy to bear up under these things: but faith, my brethren, teaches us to say, though all friends are gone, blessed be God, God is not gone. As a noble lady’s daughter told her mother, when she was weeping for the death of one of her little children, a daughter four years old said, dear mamma, is God Almighty dead, that you cry so long after my sister? No, he is not dead, neither does he sleep.”¹⁵⁶ Here Whitefield used the anecdote of a mother losing a child to death and the comfort of knowing that God was not dead to buttress his argument for making Christ the refuge of the soul. Entreating his hearers to turn to Christ, he added the benefits that Christ offers at times of death—he is not dead, neither does he sleep.

Whitefield described the deceased as a Mr. Beckman who was a generous benefactor to the Tabernacle.¹⁵⁷ No mention was made of the circumstances surrounding his death; however, Whitefield does mention that both Mr. Beckman’s sons preceded him in death within the past two years. Whitefield pointed out the extreme sorrow of the

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 31.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 38.

widow, which enhanced the effect of the appeal to personal suffering. Whitefield called the deceased a close friend and mentioned the “mournful widow here before me.”¹⁵⁸ The widow offered Whitefield a living illustration of the argument he made. Intensifying the picture of suffering, Whitefield described the woman’s struggle over her husband’s sickness and death. He stated, “Surely I shall never forget the moment in which I visited your deceased husband, when the hiccoughs came and death was supposed to be really come, to see the disconsolate widow flying out of the room unable to bear the sight of a departing husband: I know that God was then your refuge, and God will continue to be your refuge.”¹⁵⁹

Whitefield did not hide his intention to use the occasion for evangelistic ends. He said, “I intend to speak about this death to the surviving friends, but, my dear hearers, the grand intention of having the funeral sermon to night, is to teach the living how to die.”¹⁶⁰ Whitefield sought to capitalize on the funeral as a persuasive appeal. It is possible Whitefield may have been inspired to use the appeal to personal suffering by way of the death of close friends as a result of the grieving friends present at the funeral. One can imagine Whitefield pointing to those grieving friends as he made these statements of warning. The grieving friends present at the funeral served as a kind of visual aid. This is an example of Whitefield using his environment to engender fear in his hearers. This visual support for his argument could potentially have served as strong evidence to his audience.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 39-40.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 36.

Anecdote. In “All Men’s Place,” Whitefield related a gruesome account of the death of a child who had become an idol to its father. The story contained gory details that enhance its level of fear. He was preaching on the certainty of death for all. He said, “Do not all go, both the abortive and the aged, young and old, high and low, rich and poor, whether blessed with children, or have no children, whether like Lazarus, that beg their bread, or Dives, clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day, Do not all go to one place?”¹⁶¹ He broached the subject of the death of children as proof of the imputation of Adam’s guilt and original sin on the entire human race. He detailed a gruesome account about the death of a child and suggests the child died because the father had made the child an idol. On the one hand, this story illustrated Whitefield’s argument that all die as a result of Adam’s fall. On the other hand, the story indirectly warned of making an idol out of children. The story came from Whitefield’s personal experience, which, considering his credibility, gives it all the more shock value. He stated, “A friend of mine in London, about thirty two years ago, that was doatingly [*sic*] fond of every child he had, to whom I wrote a letter from Georgia, beginning with these words: Is your idol dead yet? For I thought it was such an idol that would soon go. The account he gave me the first time I saw him was, that the day before my letter was received, the child died in such agony and torture, that its excrements came out of his mouth, which made the fond and too indulgent parent wish to have rather died a thousand deaths himself, than that his child should die in such a way; and added, I was obliged to go to God, and desire him to take my darling away.”¹⁶² The warning was to parents who

¹⁶¹Ibid., 228.

¹⁶²Ibid., 229.

idolize their children above the things of God.

Biblical Metaphors. A third appeal to personal suffering is found in the sermon “The Holy Spirit Convincing the World of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment.” In this appeal Whitefield was seeking to arouse the fear of personal suffering to promote holiness and avert backsliding in believers.¹⁶³ He pressed his hearers to walk in the Holy Spirit or the Holy Spirit would “depart from you.”¹⁶⁴ Whitefield offered his hearers a solemn warning. He intoned, “If you backslide, grow luke-warm, or forget your first love, the Lord will visit your offenses with the rod of affliction, and your sin with spiritual scourges. Be not therefore high-minded, but fear. Rejoice, but let it be with trembling.”¹⁶⁵

In this appeal Whitefield used two biblical metaphors to communicate the potential for personal suffering. One was a tactual metaphor concerning physical suffering while the other was an organic metaphor dealing with internal spiritual suffering. First, he warned of the “rod of affliction.” The “rod of affliction” is a biblical metaphor found in Lamentations 3:1. The “rod” was a common Old Testament symbol

¹⁶³Whitefield used a similar appeal to personal suffering in “The Method of Grace.” In that sermon he uses biblical examples of suffering, saying, “It will be sad to be under the scourge of a correcting Father; witness the visitation of Job, David, and other saints in Scripture.”

¹⁶⁴Whitefield, “The Holy Spirit Convincing the World of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment,” in *Nine Sermons*, 176. The context of Whitefield’s warning that the Holy Spirit would “depart” from his auditors offers no clue as to what he meant by the statement.

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

of punishment and chastisement. The metaphor connotes physical pain and suffering. It is a clear warning that those who become spiritually decadent will suffer physically as a result. Second, he warned of “spiritual scourges.” “Spiritual” indicated that what he intended in this metaphor was not physical. However, “scourges” harkens tableau accounts of the physical suffering of Jesus, which serve to enhance the horrid nature of these spiritual troubles. With his admonition to fear, Whitefield made it clear that it was his intention to arouse fear in his hearers with the use of these metaphors.

Scripture Quotation. In “The Great Duty of Charity Recommended,” Whitefield used yet another variation of the appeal to personal suffering. In this case, the thrust of the appeal was a Scripture quotation through which he warned against the misuse of wealth and the consequences for doing so. He sought to arouse the fear of personal suffering in those who fail to do good with their wealth, but rather use it for personal pleasure. He explained, “Consider, that there is a curse denounced against the riches of those, who do not thus do good with them.”¹⁶⁶ Whitefield proceeds to quote James 5:1-3, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.” Whitefield offered meager elaboration on the text. However, his message was clear—voluptuaries would experience the “miseries” described in this text. They would “weep and howl” under the horridness of miseries coming upon them.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 45.

Appeal to the End of the World

The ninth category of fear appeal, the appeal to the end of the world, was found in only one sermon. Whitefield used the appeal to the end of the world in “Christ the Believer’s Refuge” on two occasions. Both occurrences are brief. In the first, Whitefield used a figure of question to frame the appeal. In the second, he used a number of metaphors and biblical references in the appeal. The thrust of the appeal to the end of the world was that on that day there would be no hope if God was not an individual’s refuge and strength. Whitefield’s goal in this appeal was to convince his hearers to make God their refuge by being converted to Jesus Christ. Only by making God their refuge can they prepare for “the great day.” The target audience for the appeal was those who were unprepared for eternity, who were part of the larger audience of mourners at the funeral for Mr. Beckham.

Erotesis. The first appeal to the end of the world is another example of Whitefield’s use of erotesis to frame an appeal. Whitefield asked his hearers what they would do on “the great day” when “the earth and all things therein”¹⁶⁷ are destroyed by fire, if God is not their refuge. This appeal is intertwined with other appeals including the appeal to personal suffering discussed previously. Whitefield’s phrase “the great day” refers to the destruction of the earth at the end of time. When the earth and all things therein are burned up, there will be no hope for those who do not have God as their refuge and strength. They will be cast into the lake of fire.

¹⁶⁷Gurney, “Christ the Believer’s Refuge,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 36.

Metaphor. In the second appeal to the end of the world, Whitefield used a number of metaphors along with anaphora¹⁶⁸ and erotesis to communicate his point. He bewailed,

You may form schemes as you please; after you have been driven out of one fool's paradise, you may retreat into another; you may say, now I will sing a requiem to my heart, and now I shall have some pleasant season; but if God loves you he will knock off your hands from that, you shall have thorns even in roses, and it will imbitter your comforts. O what will you do when the elements shall melt with fervent heat; when this earth, with all its fine furniture, shall be burnt up; when the archangel shall cry, time shall be no more! whither then, ye wicked ones, ye unconverted ones, will ye flee for refuge? O, says one, I will fly to the mountains; O silly fool, O silly fool, fly to the mountains, that are themselves to be burnt up and moved. O, says you, I will flee to the sea; O you fool, that will be boiling like a pot: O then I will flee to the elements; they will be melting with fervent heat. I can scarce bear this hot day, and how can you bear a hot element? there is no fan there, not a drop of water to cool your tongue. Will you fly to the moon? that will be turned to blood: will you stand by one of the stars? they will fall away: I know but of one place you can go to, that is to the devil; God keep you from that!¹⁶⁹

He said, "O what will you do when the elements shall melt with fervent heat; when this earth, with all its fine furniture, shall be burnt up."¹⁷⁰ Whitefield used the visual metaphor "fine furniture" for the material goods of earth. At the end, all of it will be destroyed. This is an appeal of high degree. It contains repeated direct and personal address along with a vivid portrayal of what will take place when the world is destroyed by fire. It is in the negative position and used a number of rhetorical devices in its execution.

A second metaphor is found a few sentences later. Addressing those who

¹⁶⁸Anaphora is using successive clauses that begin with the same word or words.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., 37.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., 36.

would seek to escape the fire of the great day, Whitefield said, “O, says you, I will flee to the sea; O you fool, that will be boiling like a pot.”¹⁷¹ The visual metaphor “boiling like a pot” painted a vivid picture of the conditions of that day for his hearers, starkly enhancing the fear appeal. Whitefield made clear that there would be nowhere to hide in that day.

Appeal to Temptation

The appeal to temptation is an appeal to fear that cautions believers against falling into a sinful state. This is the tenth and final appeal identified in Whitefield’s sermons and it only occurred once. The appeal is found in the sermon “The Temptation of Christ” preached from Matthew 4:1-11. He framed this appeal using the biblical example of temptation from the life of Christ. The target audience for this appeal was “the rich and high in this world.” Whitefield said, “I charge, therefore, all of you, who are rich and high in this world, to watch and pray, lest ye fall by Satan’s temptation.”¹⁷² The appeal to temptation as Whitefield used it in this example was an appeal of low degree.

Whitefield cautioned his hearers to “holy watchfulness” when they find themselves elevated to “high places.”¹⁷³ “High places are slippery places,” he explained. The thrust of his message was that those in high places should be concerned about Satan’s temptations. The fear aroused was the fear of falling into sin. The remedy

¹⁷¹Ibid., 37.

¹⁷²Whitefield, “The Temptation of Christ,” in *Works*, 5:272.

¹⁷³Ibid.

Whitefield offers was “to watch and pray.”¹⁷⁴

Observations on Whitefield’s Use of Fear Appeals

In conclusion of this chapter, several observations concerning Whitefield’s use of fear appeals can be made. Whitefield consistently used fear appeals in his sermons. In thanksgiving sermons, funeral sermons, evangelistic sermons, discipleship sermons, in lectures, and in farewell sermons he used fear appeals. There is no class discrimination in Whitefield’s use of fear appeals. He used them with the poor, as well as the rich, with the upper class as well as the lower class. Whitefield pressed the terrors of the Lord to every strata of society. Fear appeals are found in sermons that stretch across the length of his ministry, from his earliest sermons to those preached in the last year of his life.

Whitefield used all of the characteristics of fear appeals mentioned in chapter two including the use of target audience, gruesome content communicated with vivid language, direct address, and gory pictures. His use of gruesome content communicated through vivid language can be seen in the following samples from the Gurney sermons: “howling in hell,”¹⁷⁵ “while damned devils were gnawing his soul,”¹⁷⁶ “the devil’s children,”¹⁷⁷ “a breathless corpse,”¹⁷⁸ “a hearse and six to carry you to your grave,”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Gurney, “The Burning Bush,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 208.

¹⁷⁶Gurney, “All Men’s Place,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 234.

¹⁷⁷Gurney, “Jacob’s Ladder,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 272.

¹⁷⁸Gurney, “Soul Prosperity,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 57.

¹⁷⁹Gurney, “Repentance and Conversion,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 85.

“shaking over hell,”¹⁸⁰ “will be most deformed in hell,”¹⁸¹ “the devil’s fire,”¹⁸² “made thee a nest of vile stinking swine,”¹⁸³ “the sea boiling like a pot,”¹⁸⁴ “catching at shadows,”¹⁸⁵ and “my blood . . . is ready to curdle in my veins.”¹⁸⁶

His use of direct address in his fear appeals is equally evident. Whitefield used direct address throughout his sermons and especially in his use of fear appeals. He tailor made fear appeals for target audiences and spoke directly to those groups. When speaking to a target audience he did so with force and boldness. He often addressed several target audiences in one sermon. In “The Lord Our Righteousness,” as discussed previously, Whitefield directly addressed “you, young maidens, as well as young men,” “to you middle aged,” “you busy merchants,” “O gray-headed sinner, I could weep over you,” “come then, ye little children,” and “the poor negroes.” After addressing each one of these groups directly, Whitefield proceeded to use a fear appeal germane to each audience. When using the appeal to death in any sermon, Whitefield’s target audience was usually young people. By targeting young people with multiple stories of youthful

¹⁸⁰Gurney, “The Lord Our Light,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 128.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 135.

¹⁸²Gurney, “Improvement of Afflictions,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 149.

¹⁸³Gurney, “Self-Enquiry Concerning the Work of God,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 164.

¹⁸⁴Gurney, “Soul Dejection,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 193.

¹⁸⁵Gurney, “Spiritual Baptism,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 196.

¹⁸⁶Gurney, “The Lord Our Light,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 135.

deaths, he no doubt sought to combat the maladaptive response of immortality and insusceptibility.

Whitefield's fear appeals are also characterized by the use of gory pictures. He was exceptionally adept at painting gory word pictures in his sermons. These are typically illustrative anecdotes about death and deathbed experiences. The anecdotes he used were often either of recent occurrence or from church history. Personal illustrations are rare in Whitefield's sermons.

A further observation concerning Whitefield's use of fear appeals surrounds his use of Scripture. Many of Whitefield's fear appeals are accompanied by a biblical quotation, reference, or allusion. This is an indication that his fear appeals came from the Bible and that he viewed them as authoritative. Whitefield's firm acceptance of the Bible as God's Word made his use of biblical based fear appeals a benevolent act. From Whitefield's standpoint, he was warning his hearers of real danger. As a source of authority, the Scripture lends credibility to the appeals. As Ragsdale and Durham, Walton, and Witte describe, a fear appeal must be credible to be effective. Whitefield enhanced his own credibility by appealing to the authority of the Bible.

Whitefield used fear appeals of wide ranging degree. Some are intense and vivid. Others seem to have been issued in passing or as an after thought. The primary difference in appeals of high and low degree concerns development. High degree appeals are more developed, lengthy, and forceful. Low degree appeals tend to be brief and vague. Fear appeals of low degree do not have the potency and force of fear appeals of high degree. Most, but not all, of the fear appeals listed above are considered of high degree. However, Whitefield also used fear appeals of low degree. A fear appeal of low

degree was less frightening and contained fewer vivid images, uses of direct address, and often left the consequences of an action unstated, but implied.

Identifying fear appeals of low degree is subjective; however, low degree appeals definitely lack the force, vividness, and scary elements of appeals of higher degree. Some fear appeal articles also identify a middle degree of fear appeals called moderate or mild appeals. However, the insertion of a third degree makes the subjectivity even more ambiguous.

Another aspect of Whitefield's use of fear appeals worthy of note is their location in his sermons. The brief appeals which consist of a phrase or sentence can be found throughout the sermons. The more extensive appeals which run for several paragraphs and even pages are almost always at the conclusion of the sermons. This is certainly intentional by Whitefield as he comes to the point when he is pressing for hearers to repent and turn to Christ. Though Whitefield did not use the public invitation model, he did press and plead for a response to the gospel message. He often met with those under conviction and who wanted further counseling on a weekday.¹⁸⁷ Intense pleadings, urgings, tears, and warnings typically characterize these sections of his sermons. Whitefield referred to this part of the sermon as the "Exhortation." The most substantive and alarming appeals always appear in this section at the end of the sermon.

Additionally, Whitefield's regular use of fear appeals is just one aspect of his emotionally laden sermons. Whitefield used many other means to generate emotion. For example, in the sermon titled "Blind Bartimaeus," Whitefield sought to persuade the audience by appealing to their good will for him personally. He urged them to come to

¹⁸⁷See chapter 4 for examples of this practice.

Christ in order that he (i.e., Whitefield) would not “return home with a heavy heart.”¹⁸⁸ In “The Conversion of Zaccheus” he stirred emotion by encouraging his listeners to “suppose you saw the King of glory dying.”¹⁸⁹ In “The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough” he queried, “Can you bear to think of a bleeding, panting, dying Jesus, offering himself up for sinners, and you will not accept of him?”¹⁹⁰

Also, the *ad baculum* argument used by Whitefield was indirect. He never threatened his auditors with actions that he personally would carry out. His threats were covert in the form of warnings about harmful things that would happen to them, though they were outside of his control. In this sense, Whitefield’s use of fear was always ethical and nonfallacious. He sought to help, not harm his auditors. He did not threaten, he warned of real and serious dangers facing his audiences.

Another observation worthy of note in regard to Whitefield’s use of fear appeal is their relation to the text of the sermon in which they appear. The primary text of Whitefield’s sermons rarely offers any indication of the fear appeals he might use in the sermon. Regardless of the text, a sermon may contain appeals to hell, judgment, death, and suffering, even if the primary text does not address these issues. The one exception to this is the sermon “The Temptation of Christ” in which is found an appeal to temptation, an appeal which naturally flows out of the text.

The complete picture of Whitefield’s position of the use of fear for persuasion

¹⁸⁸Whitefield, “Blind Bartimaeus,” in *Five Sermons*, 96.

¹⁸⁹Whitefield, “The Conversion of Zaccheus,” in *Nine Sermons*, 219.

¹⁹⁰Whitefield, “The Folly and Danger of Being Not Righteous Enough,” in *Works*, 5:139.

is somewhat contradictory. He viewed fear as a poor motive for repentance, but used it extensively. He declared his view of using fear to persuade sinners in the sermon “A Penitent Heart, the Best New Year’s Gift.” Whitefield addressed the need for more than fear in conversion, saying, “Our sorrow and grief for sin, must not spring merely from a fear of wrath; for if we have no other ground but that, it proceeds from self-love, and not from any love to God; and if love to God is not the chief motive of your repentance, your repentance is in vain, and not to be esteemed true.”¹⁹¹ Likewise, in the sermon *The Marriage of Cana*, he stated, “I could urge many terrors of the Lord to persuade [sic] you; but if the Love of Jesus Christ will not constrain you, your case is desperate.”¹⁹² Also, in a letter to a woman in Edinburgh dated February 27, 1742, Whitefield counsels concerning the lost around her. He advised, “Pity the poor christless creatures about you. Pray for them, as the Holy Spirit gives you freedom. Tell them of the love of Jesus. They need no other motive. This, backed with almighty power, must break the most hardened heart.”¹⁹³ Again, in *The Happy Mourner Comforted*, Whitefield admitted fear was not the best of motives. He said,

Blessed, are they then that see their Sins set in Order, as it were, before them; not because they fear Hell, or because God will damn them; but because 'tis contrary to the Nature and Holiness of God, 'tis contrary to the Mind of Christ, that brought him to Death; had any of you murdered your Father, Mother, or Brother, you would say, This was the Hand by which I murdered my dear Friend: Thus a Sinner, touched with godly Sorrow, he cries out, These are the cursed Sins that

¹⁹¹Whitefield, “A Penitent Heart, the Best New Year’s Gift,” in *Works*, 6:5.

¹⁹²Whitefield, *The Marriage of Cana*, 37.

¹⁹³Whitefield, *Letters of George Whitefield For the Period 1734-1742*, 373.

brought my blessed Saviour to Death, these were the Sins that made my blessed Saviour bleed and die!¹⁹⁴

In a letter written on July 25, 1741 to an orphan named Betty, Whitefield seemed to imply that fear of hell is not a sufficient motivation for repentance. He wrote,

I am glad you begin to feel the hardness of your heart, and your utter inability to pray. I pray God you may in all things see your helplessness, that you may come as a poor helpless nothing to Jesus Christ, and take him for your all in all. I wonder not that Satan endeavours to terrify your soul. You know how he tore the young child in the Gospel, whilst he was coming to Jesus Christ. Your convictions at present seem to arise from a fear of hell; but before you receive this, I hope the Lord Jesus will have sealed your pardon, and have said, “Be of good cheer, they sins are forgiven thee.” O Betty, why has God singled you out? Why was [*sic*] you brought to Bethesda? Away when you read this, and bless God for it, and devote yourself again and again to that Lord, who has bought you with his precious blood. Having much forgiven you, love much. Lie down in the dust, and be continually looking to the rock from whence you are hewn.¹⁹⁵

In a sermon titled “The Lord our Light,” Whitefield discussed the variation in genuine religious experience. He scolded those who insist others must have a religious experience that rivals their own. In so doing, he explained it is not necessary for every true believer to have an experience of fear. He said,

Do you know God in Christ? let me tell you, the more you are acquainted with him, the more your souls will be kept in a mourning state. A mournful state!—O, say you, people will mourn before they are converted. Ah, that they will,—I don’t love to hear of conversions without any secret mourning; I seldom see such souls established. I have heard of a person who was in company once with fourteen ministers of the gospel, some of whom were eminent servants of Christ, and yet not one of them could tell the time God first manifested himself to their soul. Zacheus’s was a very quick conversion, perhaps not a quarter of an hour’s conviction; this I mention, that we may not condemn one another. We do not love the pope, because we love to be popes ourselves, and set up our own experience as a standard to others. Those that had such a conversion as the jailor, or the Jews: O, say you, we

¹⁹⁴George Whitefield, *The Happy Mourner Comforted* (Shropshire, England: Quinta Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁹⁵Whitefield, *Letters of George Whitefield For the Period 1734-1742*, 373.

do not like to hear you talk of shaking over hell, we love to hear of conversion by the love of God; while others that were so shaken, as Mr. Bolton and other eminent men were, may say, you are not christians because you had not the like terrible experience. You may as well say to your neighbor, you have not had a child, for you were not in labor all night. The question is, whether a real child is born, not how long was the preceding pain, but whether it was producing of a new birth, and whether Christ has been formed in your hearts; it is the birth proves the reality of the thing.¹⁹⁶

However, Whitefield expressed his intention to use fear to persuade against drunkenness because the power of the civil authorities seemed powerless to curb it. He exclaimed,

But alas! though their labor, we trust, has not been altogether in vain in the Lord, yet thousands, and I could almost say ten thousands, fall daily at our right-hand, by this sin of drunkenness, in our streets; nay, men seem to have made a covenant with hell, and though the power of the civil magistrate is exerted against them, nay, though they cannot but daily see the companions of their riot hourly, by this sin, brought to the grave, yet “they will rise up early to follow strong drink, and cry, Tomorrow shall be as today, and so much the more abundantly; when we awake, we will seek it yet again.” It is high time therefore, for thy ministers, O God, to lift up their voices like a trumpet; and since human threats cannot prevail, to set before them the terrors of the Lord, and try if these will not persuade them to cease from the evil of their doings.¹⁹⁷

One of the assessments of Whitefield’s preaching made by Ryle is that his preaching was bold and direct. Ryle attested, “He never used that indefinite expression ‘we,’ which seems so peculiar to English pulpit oratory, and which only leaves a hearer’s mind in a state of misty confusion. He met men face to face, like one who had a message from God to them, ‘I have come here to speak to you about your soul.’”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶Gurney, “The Lord Our Light,” in *Eighteen Sermons*, 127-28.

¹⁹⁷George Whitefield, *The Heinous Sin of Drunkenness* (Philadelphia: Andrew and William Bradford, 1740), 4 [on-line]; accessed 23 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

¹⁹⁸J. C. Ryle, *Select Sermons of George Whitefield With an Account of His Life* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 35.

Therefore let me beseech you, in all love and compassion; Consider, you, who are Pharisees; you, who will not come to Christ, but are trusting to yourselves for righteousness; who think, because you lead civil, honest, decent lives, all will go well at last; but let me tell you, O ye Pharisees, that harlots, murders, and thieves, shall enter the kingdom of God before you. Do not flatter yourselves of being in the way to heaven, when you are in the broad way to hell; but if you will throw away your righteousness and come to Christ, and be contented to let Jesus Christ do all for you, and in you, then Christ is willing to be your Savior; but if you bring your good works with you, and think to be justified; no, it is only the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanseth us from the filth and pollution of all our sins; and you must be sanctified before you are justified. As for good works, we are justified before God without any respect to them, either past, present, or to come: When we are justified, good works will follow our justification, for we can do no good works, until we are cleansed of our pollution, by the sanctification of the Spirit of God.¹⁹⁹

The examination of Whitefield's sermons in this chapter demonstrates his use of fear appeals. His use was consistent over a long ministry and in multiple venues. He used appeals of high and low degree along with a variety of material to construct them. The next chapter is an assessment of the effectiveness of Whitefield's use of fear for persuasion. Historical accounts are presented that show the effectiveness of Whitefield's sermons in arousing emotion generally, and fear in particular.

¹⁹⁹Whitefield, "Christ the Support of the Tempted," in *Works*, 5:296-97.

CHAPTER 4

THE EFFECT OF FEAR APPEALS ON WHITEFIELD'S AUDITORS

The intention of this chapter is to assess the effectiveness of Whitefield's use of fear appeals. He viewed fear as an instrument that could bring auditors to repentance and faith. Fear was not an end in itself, but a means to an end. He said in *The True Nature of Beholding the Lamb*,

Thus we hear of a Judas his repenting, and of an Esau crying out with an exceeding bitter Cry, but the one all the while was a prophane [*sic*] Person, and the other immediately went and hanged himself. And why? Their Sorrow was only extorted by a Fear of Hell, and a despairing Sense of impending Ruin. 'Tis true, a godly Sorrow may, and I believe generally does, begin with something of this Nature; but then it does not end there. Thro' Want of a due Consideration of this, 'Tis to be fear'd, many seeming Converts have taken up with a few legal Convictions, which never ended in savingly and truly beholding the Lamb of God.¹

Though fear could be effective in leading someone to godly sorrow, Whitefield acknowledged its effectiveness was limited. In his 1742 sermon on John 2, *The Marriage of Cana*, Whitefield entreated his audience to "Let this be the Day of your Espousals with Jesus Christ."² Though he had used fear appeals in most of his previous sermons and

¹George Whitefield, *The True Nature of Beholding the Lamb* (Shropshire, England: Quinta Press, 2008), 10.

²George Whitefield, *The Marriage of Cana: A Sermon Preached at Black-Heath and Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed and Sold by W. Bradford, 1742), 32 [online]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

would use them in the future, Whitefield informed his audience, “I could urge many Terrors of the Lord to perswade [*sic*] you; but if the Love of Jesus Christ will not constrain you, your case is desparate [*sic*].”³ He recognized the limited value of using fear as a tool to motivate his hearers. Nevertheless, he made much use of fear for persuasion. Additionally, Whitefield was not unaware of when he was using fear. In a journal entry for October 2, 1740, he recorded a rather enigmatic expression, but it nonetheless reveals his consciousness that he was using fear. He stated, “Was comforted to hear good Mr. Moody tell me, ‘That he believed I should preach to a hundred new Creatures this Morning in his congregation.’ And indeed I believe I did. For when I came to preach, I could speak little or no Terror, but almost all Consolation.”⁴ In *The Amazing Love of Christ*, Whitefield gave a clear statement of his desire to preach only the love of Christ. However, he felt he was unable to do so. He opined, “If I could help it, I would never preach upon any other Subject, than the Love of Jesus Christ; if I could help it, I would use no other Motive to the Gospel Obedience, than the Love of the dear Redeemer to precious and immortal Souls: But, it seems, they must have the Terrors of the Law to alarm them; their Hearts are rocky, and they have need for the Word to be like a Hammer, before it comes with Awe to melt down their Souls.”⁵ Whitefield recognized

³Ibid., 37.

⁴George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal From a Few Days After His Return to Georgia to His Arrival at Falmouth, on the 11th of March 1741*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed by W. Strahan, 1744), 36.

⁵George Whitefield, *The Amazing Love of Christ* (Shropshire, England: Quinta Press, 2008), 3.

the inferior quality of fear to persuade when compared to the love of Christ, but he also knew it could be effective and apparently necessary at times.

When assessing the effectiveness of Whitefield's use of fear, two observations must be acknowledged: Whitefield used some level of fear in nearly all of his recorded sermons, and his preaching had an emotional effect on his hearers. Linking the fear appeals to the emotional effects is a difficult task. However, in order to assess the effectiveness of a fear appeal, the evaluator must know how the particular fear appeal affected the hearers. Effects from a sermon that is one large fear appeal can be linked to the use of fear in that particular sermon. Effects from a sermon that utilizes one or two fear appeals in one paragraph of the whole sermon are much more difficult to link to the use of fear. The evaluator would need to know exactly what brought about the effects in the hearers for a successful evaluation. Determining exactly what in Whitefield's sermons brought about the emotional effect in his hearers is difficult to ascertain.

Therefore, measuring the effectiveness of fear appeal arguments involves some limitations for the rhetor. If a fear appeal does not arouse fear in the target audience, and move the auditor to act, it fails as a method of argumentation and persuasion. If the desired result takes place at the end of a sermon, it is still no guarantee that it was the fear appeals in the sermon that brought about the result. For example, a preacher could have as his goal the conversion of his hearers. The preacher, in seeking to bring about this intended goal, could use fear appeals about hell and judgment to persuade the audience. If at the conclusion of the sermon, a number of audience members are converted to Christ, it may not be clear that fear was the persuasive factor for each of the audience

members converted. Some may have been persuaded by other factors. To deem the fear appeal successful, the arousal of fear must be linked to the persuasion of the converts.

There are three ways to determine the effectiveness of fear appeals on an audience. The first involves observation. This observation can be conducted in a live situation or via video recording. Fear appeal effectiveness may be seen in facial contortions, sweating, gasps, crying, fainting, shaking, avoidance (i.e., turning away), groaning, or other physical and audible reactions. Through observation of a listener's reaction, the effect of a fear appeal can be assessed at the moment a speaker is issuing the appeal. In the case of Whitefield's preaching, it is obviously impossible to observe his audience in a live setting or via video. The closest proximity a rhetor can get to Whitefield's hearers is extant observations from those who were present. Though Whitefield's letters, sermons, and journals record many audience effects from his preaching, very little can be traced to a specific fear appeal.

The second method of determining the effectiveness of fear appeals is verbal self-reports. This includes interviewing or providing some other method (i.e., a questionnaire) for the auditor to report on how the fear appeal made them feel. For best results, hearers should be interviewed and questioned right after the rhetorical experience. However, even an interview separated from the event by decades could be of some benefit, depending on the memory of the hearer. In the case of Whitefield's hearers, there are extant accounts of experiences from his sermons, but few link their experience to the exact motivating factor.

A third method for evaluating the effectiveness of a fear appeal is what Robert

Cialdini called “participant observation.” Cialdini explained that through participant observation, the researcher becomes an undercover investigator. He stated, “With disguised identity and intent, the investigator infiltrates the setting of interest and becomes a full-fledged participant in the group to be studied.”⁶ This method is equally impossible where Whitefield is concerned.

All three of these methods for fear appeal evaluation are impossible in the case of Whitefield’s audiences. The members of his audiences cannot be interviewed and they cannot be observed. Additionally, it is impossible stealthily to attend one of Whitefield’s meetings and discover firsthand the impact of his preaching. The only clue the rhetor might have in judging the response of Whitefield’s audiences is the extant documents from Whitefield, his associates, and his hearers. Though they offer little evidence of the effect of his use of fear appeals, they do give abundant evidence of his effect on his hearers in a general sense.

The Effect of Whitefield’s Preaching Generally

There is ample evidence of the effect of Whitefield’s preaching generally. His preaching moved men and women of every socio-economic class and every age group. Whitefield’s ability to move his hearers appeared early in his ministry of preaching. His first sermon, preached in the church where he was baptized as an infant and first partook of the sacrament, produced an unusual effect on the congregation. The nature of the congregation’s reaction is uncertain and somewhat ambiguous. Whatever their

⁶Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: How and Why People Agree to Things* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 13.

response, it was out of the ordinary and prompted complaints to the bishop. Whitefield gives the only known account of the occasion. He said in a letter dated June 30, 1736,

Glory! glory! glory! be ascribed to an almighty triune God. Last Sunday in the afternoon, I preached my first sermon in the church of St. Mary de Crypt, where I was baptized, and also first received the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Curiosity, as you may easily guess, drew a large congregation together upon the occasion. The sight at first a little awed me; but I was comforted with a heart-felt sense of the divine presence, and soon found the unspeakable advantage of having been accustomed to public speaking when a boy at school, and of exhorting and teaching the prisoners and poor people at their private houses, whilst at the university. By these means I was kept from being daunted over much. As I proceeded, I perceived the fire kindled, till at last, though so young, and amidst a crowd of those, who knew me in my infant childish days, I trust, I was enabled to speak with some degree of gospel authority. Some few mocked, but most for the present seemed struck; and I have since heard, that a complaint had been made to the bishop, that I drove fifteen mad the first sermon. The worthy prelate, as I am informed, wished that the madness might not be forgotten before next Sunday.⁷

Historians are left to ponder the exact nature of the madness experienced by Whitefield's hearers. One thing is certain: the sermon had an unusual effect on them which was likely of an emotional nature.

Whitefield's Journals

The bulk of the accounts of the effects Whitefield's preaching come from his own observations recorded in his journals. These accounts are of congregations weeping, of individuals under conviction, and of fainting and groaning episodes. The journals are eyewitness accounts, written in close proximity in time to the events themselves.

However, they are not unbiased and were written, for the most part, with publication in view.

⁷George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Letters for the Period 1734-1742* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 18-19.

The magnitude of the emotional effect of Whitefield's sermons is evidenced in his journals. In one entry he stated, "Received a Letter from one under strong Convictions; and, indeed, there is scarce a Day passes over my Head, but God shews me that he works effectually upon the Hearts of many by my Ministry."⁸ Again, after preaching in Charleston, South Carolina in 1740, Whitefield recorded the effect of his preaching on his hearers. Though the journal entry does not mention the use of fear, it does show his general effect on a congregation.

Tuesday, March 18. Preached twice again this Day, and took an affectionate Leave of, and gave Thanks to my Hearers for their great Liberality. Many wept, and my own Heart yearned much towards them. For I believe a good Work is begun in many Souls. Generally every Day several came to me, telling me with weeping Eyes, how God had been pleased to convince them by the Word preached, and how desirous they were of laying hold on and having an Interest in the compleat [*sic*] and everlasting Righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Numbers desired privately to converse with me.⁹

The same year, preaching on Sunday, March 30 in Savannah, Georgia, Whitefield recounted the marked change in attitude of several converted as a result of his preaching.

One Woman, that had been a constant Attender on the Means of Grace, and thought herself a Christian for many Years, came to me acknowledging, that she had been a Self-Deceiver, and knew nothing of the Righteousness or true living Faith in Jesus Christ. A Tradesman of the same Stamp, having felt the Power of the Doctrines of

⁸George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Arrival at London, to His Departure from thence on his Way to Georgia*, 4th ed. (London: James Hutton, 1739), 78 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

⁹George Whitefield, *A Continuation of Mr. Whitefield's Journal, After His Arrival at Georgia, To a Few Days After his Second Return Thither From Philadelphia* (London: Printed by W. Strahan for James Hutton, 1741), 13 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

Grace, sent me seventeen Volumes of Archbishop Tillotson's Sermons, of which he had been a great Admirer, to do what I would with them. A Captain of a Ship, who had been a strong Opposer of the Truth, wrote and came to me under great Conviction, confessing his Sin, and desirous to be a Christian indeed. Some others also there are who have received the Love of God in the Truth of it.¹⁰

Whitefield did not extend a public invitation nor did he count converts.

Maxson asserted, "It was not the custom of Whitefield or of the various pastors who published detailed reports of the course of the revival in their congregations to state the number of conversions."¹¹ However, he did spend many hours privately counseling those under conviction and spiritual distress. His journals are replete with examples of extended times of work with inquirers. On Tuesday, January 3, 1738, Whitefield stated, "Staid [*sic*] at Home on purpose to receive those, who wanted to consult me.—Blessed be God, from seven in the Morning till three in the Afternoon, People came, some telling me what God had done for their Souls, and others crying out, What shall we do to be saved? Being obliged to go out after this, I referred several 'till Thursday—God enabled me to give them Answers of Peace! How does God work by my unworthy Hands! His Mercies melt me down. Oh that I was thankful!"¹² Again, the next week, Whitefield followed the same pattern of staying in to talk privately with those under conviction. His journal for

¹⁰George Whitefield, *A Continuation of Mr. Whitefield's Journal, After His Arrival at Georgia, To a Few Days After his Second Return Thither From Philadelphia* (London: Printed by W. Strahan for James Hutton, 1741), 15-16 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

¹¹Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1920), 33.

¹²Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Arrival at London, to His Departure from thence on his Way to Georgia*, 5.

Tuesday, January 10, reported, “Stayed at home again to day to talk with those that came to consult me, and found that God has awakened several, and excited in them a Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness by my Sermon on the Power of Christ’s Resurrection, and Have ye received the Holy Ghost? Every Day I hear of somebody or another quickened to a Sense of the divine Life.”¹³

Whitefield typically did not mention the titles of the sermons he preached on a day-to-day basis in his journal, but in this case he did. The sermon “The Power of Christ’s Resurrection” does not contain a fear appeal. The sermon “Have Ye Received the Holy Ghost?,” later titled “Marks of Having Received the Holy Ghost,” contains a fear appeal at the end of the sermon. In the part of the sermon where Whitefield called for a response, he addressed various segments of the audience. The first was “those who are dead in trespasses and sins.” To them he extolled, “It is true, you, as well as the Righteous, in one Sense, shall see GOD (for we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ) but you must see him once, never to see him more. For as you carry about in you the Devil’s Image, with Devils you must dwell: being of the same Nature, you must share the same Doom. ‘Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your Sins may be blotted out.’ See that you receive the Holy Ghost, before you go hence: For otherwise, how can you escape the Damnation of Hell?”¹⁴ This is a strong appeal of high degree. The fear appeal may have contributed to those who came to Whitefield seeking spiritual

¹³Ibid., 7.

¹⁴George Whitefield, *The Marks of the New-Birth* (Boston: Printed and Sold by G. Rogers and D. Fowle, 1740), 14 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

guidance. However, there is no direct evidence to prove the appeal was effect on those who were persuaded toward conversion.

Then again, on Tuesday January 23, he stated, “Staid [*sic*] at Home to Day as usual, to receive People, and still had the Comfort of hearing many coming to me, who have been awakened to a Sense of the New–Birth. What Reason have I to bless God for sending me to England! How does he daily set his Seal to my Ministry!”¹⁵ Whitefield reserved Tuesdays for dealing with those under conviction, as is clear in this succession of Tuesday counseling sessions.

However, his Tuesday sessions did not preclude others from coming to him for help on other occasions. On Wednesday, February 21, 1738 his journal stated, “Had several come to me this Morning, to inquire about the State of their Souls, amongst whom was a little Girl of thirteen Years of Age, who told me in great Simplicity, ‘She was pricked through and through with the Power of the Word.’”¹⁶ On Friday, April 18, 1740 he wrote, “Was employed for two Hours this Morning in giving Answers to several that came to me under strong Convictions; amongst whom was a Negroe or two, and a young Girl of about fourteen Years of Age, who was turned out of the House where she boarded,

¹⁵George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Arrival at London, to His Departure from thence on his Way to Georgia*, 4th edition (London: James Hutton, 1739), 11 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

¹⁶George Whitefield, *A Continuation Of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Arrival at London, to His Departure From Thence on his Way to Georgia* (London: Printed for James Hutton, 1739), 36 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

because she would hear me, and would not learn to dance.”¹⁷ Again, on April 21, his journal stated, “Had fresh Application made to me by Persons under Convictions.”¹⁸

The next day, a Tuesday, he stated, “Went in the Evening to visit a young Woman under deep Convictions. She was struck down by the Power of God’s Word on Sunday, and has continued, as Paul did, ever since sick in Body and under great Agony of Soul. I talked and prayed with her, and with near twenty more that came into the Room.”¹⁹ Again, on Wednesday, April 23 Whitefield stated, “Great Numbers were much melted; and one in particular, after Sermon came to me under deep Convictions, what shall I do to be saved? I gave him the Apostle’s Answer. Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved. Upwards of fifty, I hear, have been lately convicted about this Place.”²⁰

Whitefield’s preaching moved his hearers to a great degree. Considering the amount of fear Whitefield incorporated in his sermons, one might surmise that his use of fear appeals played at least some part in moving his hearers. Although cause

¹⁷George Whitefield, *A Continuation of Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, After His Arrival at Georgia, To a Few Days After his Second Return Thither From Philadelphia* (London: Printed by W. Strahan for James Hutton, 1741), 21 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

¹⁸George Whitefield, *A Continuation of Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, After His Arrival at Georgia, To a Few Days After his Second Return Thither From Philadelphia* (London: Printed by W. Strahan for James Hutton, 1741), 23 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

¹⁹Whitefield, *A Continuation of Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, After His Arrival at Georgia, To a Few Days After his Second Return Thither From Philadelphia*, 24-25.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 25.

cannot be established, there is a correlation of emotional outpouring at Whitefield's meetings and the use of fear in his sermons. A "melting" took place among the people at almost every meeting Whitefield recorded in his journals and approximately 90% of Whitefield's sermons contain fear appeals.

The Effect of Whitefield's Preaching As It Was Linked to Fear

From the above mentioned journal and letter excerpts, it is clear that Whitefield's preaching elicited an effect on his hearers. However, the accounts address his general effectiveness and not the effectiveness of his use of fear appeals. The excerpts cannot be linked to a fear appeal, though the use of fear may have wholly or partially contributed to them.

However, a small number of accounts from Whitefield's pen give an indication that his fear appeal usage was effective in producing fear in his hearers. These accounts are characterized by crying, fainting, and groaning as a result of great soul distress. Whitefield observed in his journals that his hearers were almost always "melted down with tears" or "many people wept bitterly." However, there were episodes of more intense and unusual effects on the hearers. These excessive emotional occurrences were rare in Whitefield's meetings compared to those of Davenport and Tennent, but Whitefield did record several unusual scenes.²¹ One such account he recorded during his 1740 preaching tour of the colonies. While in Philadelphia, on Monday, May 12, he chronicled, "Rose very early to answer those who came for private Advice. Visited three

²¹Maxson, *The Great Awakening*, 145.

Persons, one of whom was under such deep Convictions, that she had taken scarce any Thing to eat for near a Fortnight. Another had a Prospect of Hell set before her last Night in the most terrifying Colours; but before the Morning received Comfort.”²² Whitefield did not relate in his journal the sermon the woman had heard him preach. Nor does the corresponding time period in his letters provide information on the sermon. There are no extant letters between March 19 and April 28, 1740. What can be deduced is that the woman was overcome with the fear of hell. Another was so engulfed in such fearful thoughts she could not even eat. The “terrifying Colours” may very well have been placed in her thoughts by Whitefield’s own description of hell.

Whitefield reported three episodes that reveal strong reactions from the hearers. Preaching in New Brunswick on April 27, 1740, he stated, “Preached Morning and Evening to near 7 or 8000 People: And God’s Power was so much amongst us in the Afternoon Sermon, that had I proceeded, the Cries and Groans of the Congregation, I believe, would have drowned my Voice. One Woman was struck down, and a general Cry went through the Assembly. The Power of God fell much upon my Heart, and I believe the Word was sharper than a two-edged Sword.”²³

Whitefield recounted a scene that took place in Nottingham, which represents some of the most intense manifestations of physical reactions to his preaching. Two episodes occurring in 1740 on the 14th and 15th of May could indicate a physical reaction

²²Whitefield, *A Continuation of Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, After His Arrival at Georgia, To a Few Days After his Second Return Thither From Philadelphia*, 41.

²³*Ibid.*, 28.

produced by the use of fear. At Nottingham, he preached in the woods to 12,000 people. As he preached, the people's emotions began to rise. He said, "I had not spoke long, but I perceived Numbers melting. As I proceeded, the Power increased, till at last, both in the Morning and Afternoon, Thousands cried out, so that they almost drowned my Voice. Never before did I see a more glorious Sight! Oh, what strong Cryings and Tears were shed and poured forth after the dear Lord Jesus. Some fainted; and when they had got a little Strength, they would hear and faint again. Others cried out in a Manner, almost, as if they were in the sharpest Agonies of Death!"²⁴

The use of fear in imaginative descriptions of hell and torment could contribute to such faintings and crying as Whitefield described. On the next day, May 15th, he again described a congregation that appeared to be overcome with fright. Preaching at Fog's Mannor, he said the congregation was in a greater commotion than the one in Nottingham. He said their faces were "struck pale as Death" and they were "wringing their Hands, others lying on the Ground, others sinking into the Arms of their Friends."²⁵ What would cause such outward manifestations except fear? The reactions of the people reveal distress and anxiety. The activities Whitefield described typically occur in those who are experiencing a feeling of fear. Unfortunately, it is not possible to know the fear appeals Whitefield was using, but it appears that fear was successfully aroused in the hearers.

In a letter to John Cennick, dated June 19, 1742, Whitefield recounted similar scenes of great distress of soul at Cambuslang. He wrote,

²⁴Ibid., 43.

²⁵Ibid., 44.

Yesterday morning, I preached at Glasgow, to a large congregation. At mid-day, I came to Cambuslang, and preached, at two, to a vast body of people; again at six, and again at nine at night. Such commotions, surely, were never heard of, especially at eleven o'clock at night. For an hour and a half, there was such weeping, and so many falling into such deep distress, expressed in various ways, as cannot be described. The people seemed to be slain in scores. Their agonies and cries were exceedingly affecting. Mr. M'Culloch preached, after I had done, till past one in the morning; and then could not persuade the people to depart. In the fields, all night, might be heard the voice of prayer and praise. The Lord is indeed much with me. I have, to-day, preached twice already, and am to preach twice more, perhaps thrice. The commotions increase.²⁶

Whitefield's description of the emotional responses of his hearers sounds very much like those of people in a fearful state. Since he does not mention the sermons he preached during the meetings, however, nothing definitive can be concluded about what may have aroused the fear or that any fear appeals were used. He simply stated he preached three times in Cambuslang, at six, nine, and eleven.

Whitefield reported one episode of the effect of the appeal to death, this involving the death of a child. Understandably, the hearers became very disturbed and upset. The account is found in his seventh journal and is dated Wednesday, October 8, 1740. He wrote,

Went with the Governor in his Coach to Mr. Webb's Meeting-House, where I preached both Morning and Evening to very great Auditories. Both Times (especially in the Morning) Jesus Christ manifested forth his Glory. Many Hearts melted within them, and I think I never was so drawn out to pray for and invite little Children to Jesus Christ, as I was this Morning. A little before, I had heard of a Child, who was taken sick just after it had heard me preach, and said, "He would go to Mr. Whitefield's God," and died in a short Time. This encouraged me to speak to little Ones. But, oh how were the old People affected, when I said, "Little Children, if your Parents will not come to Christ, do you come and go to Heaven without them." There seemed to be but few dry Eyes. Look where I would, the Word smote them, I believe, through and through, and my own Soul was very much carried out.

²⁶Whitefield, *Letters*, 513.

Surely it was the Lord's Passover. I have not seen a greater Commotion since my Preaching at Boston. Glory be to God who has not forgotten to be gracious. Went with the Governor, who seemed more and more affected, in his Coach to my Lodgings.²⁷

By addressing the death of children and their need for salvation, Whitefield elicited an outpouring of emotion from his hearers. The emotion very likely included fear of death for their little ones and perhaps separation from them in eternity.

On a voyage from London to Georgia, Whitefield related an instance of sharing with a group of sailors about righteousness, temperance, and judgment. Whitefield was not preaching in the formal sense, for he says he sat down among them; however he was sharing the Word of God. He stated that some of the sailors almost trembled.²⁸ Even in that context, Whitefield successfully aroused fear.

Reports from Others On Whitefield's Effectiveness

Reports from those who heard Whitefield are numerous. However, the same problem exists as with Whitefield's personal reports. Making a link between effectiveness and fear appeals is difficult.

The uncommon friendship of Benjamin Franklin and Whitefield has been widely reported. Franklin was a great admirer of Whitefield's oratorical ability and did not shy away from going to hear him preach. In his autobiography, Franklin attested to

²⁷Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From a Few Days After His Return to Georgia to His Arrival at Falmouth, on the 11th of March 1741*, 39-40.

²⁸George Whitefield, *A Journal of a Voyage From London to Savannah in Georgia* (London: Printed by W. Strahan for the Author, 1743), 15 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

Whitefield's preaching and the effect he had on his hearers. He asserted that Whitefield abused his hearers by calling them half beasts and half devils. Regardless of what Franklin perceived to be abuse, he also admitted the ability of Whitefield to move his hearers. Franklin stated,

The multitudes of all sects and denominations that attended his sermons were enormous, and it was a matter of speculation to me, who was one of the number, to observe the extraordinary influence of his oratory on his hearers, and how much they admired and respected him, notwithstanding his common abuse of them, by assuring them they were naturally half beasts and half devils. It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.²⁹

Nathaniel Appleton was the pastor of the First Church in Cambridge, Mass.

He acknowledged the effect of Whitefield's preaching and the subsequent benefits to his own congregation. In a sermon, he stated,

It has been but a dead and dull Time with us upon spiritual Accounts of late, but small Additions made to the Church, but few coming in to own the Covenant, and give themselves up to GOD. But blessed be GOD, there seems now some Revival among us, there are more affected, awakened, and convinced, and put upon their Duty, than is common among us: The Word preached seems to have come with greater Power upon the Souls of the People, especially of the younger Sort. I have planted, Mr. Whitefield has watered, and GOD has given some increase. I mention the Name of that young Apollos, because the most of those that are to be received to the Communion and Fellowship of the Saints, have declared to me, what powerful Influence his fervent Preaching had upon them.³⁰

²⁹Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 103 [on-line]; accessed 18 August 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

³⁰Nathaniel Appleton, *God, And Not Ministers to Have the Gory of All Success Given to the Preached Gospel: Illustrated in Two Discourses, From I Cor. iii. 6. Occasioned by the Late Powerful and Awakening Preaching of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield* (Boston: Printed by G. Rogers and D. Fowle, 1741), 21 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

Jonathan Edwards gave an account of Whitefield's preaching in Northampton. Whitefield arrived in the middle of October 1740. He preached four sermons in the meeting house and delivered a lecture in Edwards' home. Though the congregation and the church were already experiencing signs of revival before Whitefield visited the town, his sermons had an enormous effect on the populace. Edwards attested, "The congregation was extraordinarily melted by every sermon; almost the whole assembly being in tears for a great part of sermon time. Mr. Whitefield's sermons were suitable to the circumstances of the town; containing a just reproof of our backslidings, and in a most moving and affecting manner making use of our great professions and great mercies, as arguments with us to return to God from whom we had departed."³¹

Though Edwards does not mention the sermons Whitefield preached, he did say that the sermons contained a just reproof of the town's backslidings. Whatever the arguments Whitefield used, they had an emotional effect on the people.

John Marrant was born in New York in 1755. He was born free and later moved to South Carolina to become a tradesman's apprentice. Marrant became a skilled musician and was able to earn a living; however, he became profligate.³² While in Charleston in 1770, Marrant was coaxed into disturbing a meeting in which Whitefield was preaching. He was on his way to play at another venue when he passed by Whitefield's meeting. When he inquired about the nature of the meeting, he was told a

³¹Jonathan Edwards, "Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (London: Printed by John Childs and Son, 1839), xcix [online]; accessed 18 August 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

³²Thomas S. Kidd, "John Marrant," in *The Great Awakening: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 86-87.

crazy man was inside “halloing.” Marrant was persuaded to go in and blow his French-horn in the midst of the meeting.³³ As he and his companion pushed their way through the crowd, the unexpected happened. The place was so crowded, Marrant did not have time to get his horn off his shoulder before he was struck to the floor. He said, “I was pushing the people to make room, to get the horn off my shoulder to blow it, just as Mr. Whitefield was naming his text, and looking round, as I thought, directly upon me, and pointing his finger, he uttered these words, ‘Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.’”³⁴ Marrant said he was struck to the ground with such force that he lay for half an hour speechless and senseless.³⁵ He was eventually awakened by several men and a woman throwing water on his face. As he continued listening to Whitefield preach, his condition worsened. He said, “every word I heard from the minister was like a parcel of swords thrust in to me, and what added to my distress, I thought I saw the devil on every side of me. I was constrained in the bitterness of my spirit to halloo out in the midst of the congregation, which disturbing them, they took me away; but finding I could neither walk or stand, they carried me as far as the vestry, and there I remained till the service was over.”³⁶ Several days passed before Marrant recovered from this experience.

Though the sermon Marrant heard is not extant, the text itself is a fear appeal

³³Ibid., 87.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 87-88.

and a passionate reading or quoting of it aroused fear in Marrant. The only thing known about the remainder of the sermon is, as Marrant describes, it continued to arouse fear. In the case of Marrant, Whitefield successfully aroused fear.

Hannah Heaton was from a farming family in Connecticut. She heard Whitefield preach sometime before 1741 in New Haven. She recorded the sermon Whitefield preach as being upon the marks of an unconverted person.³⁷ She described Whitefield's preaching, saying, "Oh strange it was, such preaching as I never heard before. 'Don't you,' said he, 'when you are at the house of God long [that the] service should be over that your minds may be about your worldly concerns and pleasures. Is it not a weariness to you,' said he, 'if one day's serving God is so wearisome to you? How could you endure to be in heaven in this condition? The first prayer you would make would be that you might go into hell, for that would be more agreeable to your natures.'"38

That is the extent of the content Heaton mentions in her account. Certainly, more fearful content was used, for Heaton was thrown into terrible soul distress as a result. She first heard a whisper in her ear saying, "it is too late, too late, you had better hang your self."³⁹ She was afraid to pray for fear of seeing the devil. Once when she was alone praying, she felt the devil "twitch" her clothes.⁴⁰ She stared out the windows at

³⁷Kidd, "Hannah Heaton," in *The Great Awakening*, 67.

³⁸Ibid., 68.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

night to see if Christ was coming in judgment. She said, “Many a time I kneeled down to pray and my mouth was as it were stopped, and I did vent out my anguish with tears and groans and a few broken speeches. Now it cut me to think how I had spent my precious time in vanity and sin against God.”⁴¹

Heaton went to more revival meetings, until she was finally converted. The night her conversion took place she said, “A great melting of soul came upon me. I wept bitterly and pled hard for mercy, mercy. It seemed to me I was sinking down into hell. I thought the floor I stood on gave way, and I was just going, but then I began to resign, and as I resigned, my distress began to go off till I was perfectly easy, quiet, and calm.”⁴²

Hannah Heaton experienced the new birth as a result of Whitefield’s preaching. The exact fear appeals and word Whitefield used is unknown, however, their effect on Heaton is obvious. Whitefield aroused fear that tormented her for days.

The Revival at Cambuslang

The most blatant effect of Whitefield’s use of fear appeals is found in first hand testimonials from the revival at Cambuslang. A great awakening erupted at Cambuslang in 1742 under the preaching of William M’Culloch and Whitefield. M’Culloch, in an effort to preserve and attest to the awakening, collected verbal accounts from those who experienced it. He said of this effort,

But besides what concerns a credible profession, and a suitable walk and conversation, some require that persons, who would have a place in their good opinion, should be able to give some account of their experience of the grace of

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 69.

God. And this also has been done by not a few. Upwards of a fourth perhaps, of the persevering subjects of the revival in 1742, gave me very particular accounts of God's dealings with their souls, as regards their first awakening, their outgates, their distresses, their deliverances, and their comforts in 1742, 1743, and 1744; and some of them continued their accounts down to 1748. I took down many of these from their own mouths, always in their true sense, and very much also in their own words. Many of the statements so prepared have appeared, to competent judges, to whom they were submitted, and who perused them with care, to be very rational and scriptural, and worthy of seeing the light; which perhaps may be done hereafter.⁴³

M'Culloch recorded one hundred and five cases in this fashion. Though he intended to publish them right way, they were not published until 1847, when they appeared in MacFarlan's *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century, Particularly at Cambuslang*. The documents had been preserved for nearly one hundred years by M'Culloch's family.⁴⁴

In two cases, individuals recount their experience of hearing Whitefield preaching in Cambuslang. They leave little doubt as to Whitefield's success in arousing fear. The first of the accounts comes from a fifteen-year-old boy named Alexander Roger. He said he went to Cambuslang to hear Whitefield preach in June of 1742. Roger remembered that it was a Thursday and Whitefield preached on Jeremiah 8:20. He remembered Whitefield saying, "Many come out of curiosity to hear a poor child preach; and the same curiosity would induce them to go to the devil." Roger felt that Whitefield had accurately described his own motive. Whitefield also said, "O Lord, how many trample thy blood under their feet, and despise thee and thy gospel!" The prospect of

⁴³Duncan MacFarlan, *The Revivals of the Eighteenth Century, Particularly at Cambuslang* (Wheaton: Richard Owen Roberts Publishers, 1980), 105.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 106.

going “to the devil” and trampling the blood of Christ was too much for Roger. He described his reaction,

This led me to such a view of my sins, that I saw nothing but the wrath of God awaiting me, and hell ready to receive me. I was also deeply pierced with a sense of the evil of those sins which I could remember, as well as of the corruption and depravity of my nature and of my unbelief in not receiving but rejecting Christ, when offered to me in the gospel. My sense of guilt was such, that I would have thought it no injustice, on God’s part, had he cast me immediately into hell. I even felt as if I were sinking into the bottomless pit, and that all around were ready to drag me down to it. My feelings of repentance were deep and sincere, and above all, on account of the dishonour which I had done to God. Under these awful feelings, I at last fainted away; and on recovering, I was enabled to return with a comrade to my father’s house, which was about five miles distant.⁴⁵

Whitefield obviously aroused the fear of hell and the bottomless pit in this teenager. Whitefield, of course, said much more than the two statements Roger remembered in this account. However, the fear induced by these expressions became so severe, that the boy fainted. The fear led Roger to sincere repentance. Whitefield’s use of fear accomplished exactly what was intended.

The second account is that of James Tenant. M’Culloch describes Tenant as an unmarried man about twenty years of age. Tenant heard Whitefield preach at the end of June in 1742. This time Whitefield preached on the Philippian jailor. Tenant said as Whitefield described the jailor falling to his knees trembling and crying, “What must I do to be saved?” that he likewise became fearful. Tenant, overcome with fear, felt his conscience tell him that he was lost and undone. He said, “I fell into great terror, and trembled so much, that I had to be supported by those near.” However, Tenant was not converted that night. Sometime later, he heard Whitefield preach again and was a second

⁴⁵Ibid., 140-41.

time overcome with fear and trembling. He became so fearful the second time that he could not follow all that Whitefield said. All of this led to Tenant's "change of heart" sometime later after a barn prayer meeting.⁴⁶ Whatever Whitefield preached in the two sermons Tenant heard, it aroused tremendous fear in him. Tenant responded to the fear with a season of soul distress and agony, which eventually led to his conversion.

Conclusion

Whitefield aroused an emotional response from his hearers nearly every time he preached. The effect of his preaching was deep and wide spread. Whitefield reported most of the effects of his preaching in his journals. However, he gave only a general report, with no details of the specifics of his sermons. Had he been more specific, additional evidence of the effect of his fear appeals would certainly be available. Though only a few indications of the effects of Whitefield's use of fear are extant, the ones that are available reveal that his fear appeals were effective in arousing fear and persuading individuals.

Although his preaching caused a "melting" in most of his meetings, the influence of his emotional and passionate delivery was not without detractors. Stephen Bordley, an Anglican layman and lawyer, was sharply adverse to Whitefield's abundance of emotionalism and lack of doctrine in his sermons. After hearing Whitefield preach, Bordley wrote to a friend, "He has putt [*sic*] some among us here on a Wild goose Chase, in quest of that degree of the Spirit Which perhaps they never will find. Others he has thrown into the Vapours & Despair . . . & 'tis really a difficult matter to perswade [*sic*]

⁴⁶Ibid., 168-69.

some among us here to make a difference between his Doctrine & Delivery. If he is Sincere, he Certainly is a Violent Enthusiast. If not, he is a most Vain & Arrogant Hypocrite, & I own I should rather Support the latter. In short, he has the best delivery with the Worst Divinity that I ever mett [*sic*] with.”⁴⁷

Bordley’s statement shows that Whitefield’s emotional appeals did not bring about the same response in everyone. There is evidence to suggest that Whitefield’s fear appeals aroused fear in some, but they were ineffective on others.

⁴⁷Kidd, “Stephen Bordley,” in *The Great Awakening*, 52.

CHAPTER 5

THE ETHICALITY OF FEAR APPEALS IN WHITEFIELD'S SERMONS

This chapter is an assessment of the ethicality of Whitefield's use of fear to persuade his hearers. The chapter is not an assessment of the ethical use of persuasion in general, but rather pertains to persuasion as intrinsically a part of preaching. Persuasion and preaching are inseparable. As Broadus stated, "The chief part of what we commonly call application is persuasion. It is not enough to convince men of truth, nor enough to make them see how it applies to themselves, and how it might be practicable for them to act it out,—but we must 'persuade men.'"¹ Bettinghaus defined persuasion as "a conscious attempt by one individual to change the attitudes, beliefs, or the behavior of another individual or group of individuals through the transmission of some message."² Oliver called persuasion, "the process of inducing auditors, through the use of facts, logic, rationalization, or emotional appeal, to change their minds and attitudes, deepen existing feelings, or proceed to actions in which they would otherwise not engage."³

¹John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, ed. Jesse Burton Weatherspoon (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), 215.

²Erwin P. Bettinghaus, *Persuasive Communication*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973), 10.

³Robert T. Oliver, *The Psychology of Persuasive Speech* (New York: David McKay, 1950), 8.

Brembeck and Howell defined persuasion as “communication intended to influence choice.”⁴ Larson called it “the co-creation of a state of identification or alignment between a source and a receiver that results from the use of symbols.”⁵ He continued by saying that the focus of persuasion is equally upon the source, the message, and the receiver. Therefore, he concluded that all persuasion is self-persuasion because of the cooperative component within it.⁶ The contribution of the receiver in the persuasive process explains why a message is effective with one group and not with another. Persuasion breaks in upon an individual’s existing belief system and lifestyle and seeks to bring about a change in one or more areas.

The persuader must make choices regarding the methods and strategies he will use to persuade the receiver. The use of fear appeals is one tool of persuasion among many. Doubt exists as to whether a fear appeal should be considered a tool of persuasion since auditors may acquiesce out of fear rather than experiencing a genuine attitude change. An acquiescence from fear is mere self-preservation. It must be acknowledged that both acquiescence from fear and real persuasion take place as a result of fear appeals. This is unavoidable and depends on a multitude of factors. Distinguishing the difference between the two responses can be difficult. However, genuine persuasion has a lasting effect.

⁴Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell, *Persuasion: A Means of Social Influence*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 19.

⁵Charles U. Larson, *Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1983), 5.

⁶Ibid., 6.

An ethical evaluation of fear appeals is necessary because any appeal to the emotions, and especially fear, is often considered manipulation. Persuasion and emotion, however, cannot be separated. As Campbell asserted in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*,

When persuasion is the end, passion also must be engaged. If it is fancy which bestows brilliancy on our ideas, if it is memory which gives them stability, passion doth more: it animates them. Hence they derive spirit and energy. To say that it is possible to persuade without speaking to the passions, is but, at best, a kind of specious nonsense. The coolest reasoner always, in persuading, addresseth himself to the passions some way or other. This he cannot avoid doing if he speak to the purpose. To make me believe, it is enough to show me that things are so; to make me act, it is necessary to show me that the action will answer some end. That can never be an end to me which gratifies no passion or affection in my nature. You assure me, "It is for my honour." Now you solicit my pride, without which I had never been able to understand the word. You say, "It is for my interest." Now you bespeak my self-love. "It is for the public good." Now you rouse my patriotism. "It will relieve the miserable." Now you touch my pity. So far, therefore, is it from being an unfair method of persuasion to move the passions, that there is no persuasion without moving them.⁷

Campbell listed two categories of passions that could be used for the purposes of persuasion. They were the pleasant and the painful. He placed fear in the second category, because fear is a negative emotion which causes discomfort in those who experience it.

Several problems arise in the ethical evaluation of fear appeals in Whitefield's sermons. The first problem is the ambiguous nature of ethical standards. What one group finds ethical may be considered unethical by another group. As will be seen, multiple ethical standards exist.

A second problem with the ethical assessment of fear appeals is the degree of the appeal. As discussed in chapter 2, a fear appeal can be considered low, moderate, or

⁷George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1849), 99-100 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet

high in degree. A fear appeal could be considered ethical when presented as a low degree appeal. The same appeal, when enhanced through vivid language, gory images, or scary anecdotes, could become an appeal of high degree and then deemed unethical.

Determining the degree of a fear appeal can also be subjective and vary according to the audience and situation.

A third problem focuses on the audience. Regardless of the established ethical standards, every individual has a built in, intuitive ethical standard. This ethical standard may be based on emotion, past experiences, or bias. An individual critic may have little or no justification for finding an appeal offensive or unethical.

Larsen contended that “neither logical nor emotional appeals are inherently unethical.”⁸ McCroskey stated that an evaluation of the ethics of a rhetorical act is a subjective endeavor.⁹ Every culture and every age develop their own idea of what is right and wrong. For the Christian community, however, there are ethical absolutes. But, even there, individual cases can become confused and ambiguous. What appears unethical to one group, may seem legitimate to another. Therefore, the ethical evaluation of *argumentum ad baculum*, when in the form of fear appeals, may produce mixed results.

There are multiple criteria by which a speech act may be ethically evaluated. To begin, it will be helpful to understand what is meant by a discussion of something being ethical or unethical. Feinberg and Feinberg described what is meant by a discussion of something being ethical. They asserted, “Thus, to act ethically or morally

⁸Larsen, *Persuasion*, 286.

⁹James C. McCroskey, *An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication: A Western Rhetorical Perspective*, 9th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2006), 291.

means to act in accord with accepted rules of conduct which cover moral (as opposed to non-moral) matters. To have ethics or a morality is to hold a set of beliefs about that which is good and evil, commanded or forbidden.”¹⁰ Nilsen defined ethics as “that branch of the humanities studying values which relate to human behavior. Students of ethics concern themselves with the rightness and wrongness of human behavior and also with the goodness and badness of the results of behavior.”¹¹ Pinson said, “Ethics is concerned with standards, values, and duties for human conduct. It seeks to determine what ought to be done and how to do it—in individual action, interpersonal relations, family life, and society.”¹² This dissertation is concerned with the ethics of using fear in persuasion and preaching. The ethical standard for Christian preaching is God’s divine revelation of Himself in the Bible. In fact, the Christian preacher is obligated to evaluate methods by this standard. Therefore, a biblical assessment of the rightness or wrongness of the use of fear appeals for persuasion is appropriate.

A number of ethical standards have been developed in normative ethics to provide a basis for moral judgment. The most pertinent of these standards are discussed below and applied to Whitefield’s use of fear appeals. The following is an overview of various ethical canons that have been applied to rhetoric.

¹⁰John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 17.

¹¹Thomas R. Nilsen, *Ethics of Speech Communication*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1974), v.

¹²William M. Pinson, Jr., “Ethics in the Bible” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Clifton J. Allen, ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 12:373.

Morally Permissible, Morally Obligatory, and Morally Supererogatory

The terms morally permissible, morally obligatory, and morally supererogatory are broad categories of what may or may not be done in ethics.¹³ Morally permissible decisions and actions are not forbidden or commanded. One is subject to no moral guilt by doing such actions or not doing such actions. A morally obligatory act is an act that must be done or avoided. This is an action commanded or forbidden. Feinberg and Feinberg affirmed, “While there is debate about which acts are morally required, it is agreed that moral duties may not be ignored without incurring moral rebuke.”¹⁴ The morally supererogatory¹⁵ act is that which goes beyond the call of duty. This type of action is not obligatory, but is permissible. An action that is morally supererogatory is more than is required by morality. The Feinbergs gave the example of saving someone whose life is in danger. If an individual can save the other person’s life without endangering his/her own, the act is obligatory. However, if saving the other person’s life would endanger the rescuer’s life, the act is not obligatory, but supererogatory, for moral philosophers would say a person is not required to sacrifice his/her life for another.¹⁶

Whitefield’s use of *argumentum ad baculum* to intercept the path of sinners was a morally obligatory act. This is so because Whitefield rightly believed the Bible to be the literal Word of God. He believed the doctrines of hell, judgment, and return of

¹³The discussion of these concepts is taken from Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics*, 19-20.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵Something done beyond the degree required or expected.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

Christ to be true. As a result, for Whitefield to have refrained from warning his hearers was not a morally permissible act. For him to refuse to warn would have brought moral guilt on his part; therefore, he was obligated to warn his hearers of these approaching realities. The Scriptures, which Whitefield accepted without reservation as authoritative and trustworthy, commanded that he do so. In the main, by this criterion, Whitefield's use of fear was ethical, for he only warned of that which the Scriptures teach. Whitefield was simply following the prescriptions of a Divine Command Theory. Feinberg and Feinberg explained the Divine Command Theory, saying,

Thus, because God is just, for example, he knows which acts are just and prescribes them; unjust acts are forbidden. On our view, certain acts are inherently right and others inherently wrong. They are so because they either reflect or do not reflect the character of the God who made the world and all in it. In sum, our view is a modified form of the divine command theory and comes closest to what Frankena calls metaphysical moralism. Because we take our norms from Scripture and hold that Scripture is God's revealed word, the source of our norms is revelation, not reason.¹⁷

It is upon this criterion that this dissertation assesses Whitefield's use of fear appeals.

The one significant key to this assessment is that Whitefield supported the majority of the fear appeals he used with biblical quotations and references.

The terms morally permissible, morally obligatory, and morally supererogatory involve a broad approach to assessing the ethics of fear appeals. The following standards enable critics to determine what is permissible, obligatory, and supererogatory. Also, as Feinberg and Feinberg indicated, just because an act is considered a moral act, does not mean the agent performing that act is acting morally. The performing of a moral act is

¹⁷Ibid., 30.

not a conclusive statement about the motivations of the agent performing the act.¹⁸ Even if the use of fear appeals were to be determined a moral act, it does not mean also that Whitefield had proper motives in using fear appeals. Also, the outcome of an act does not mean a person has acted morally.¹⁹ If it could be proven that Whitefield's use of fear resulted in the salvation of throngs of colonists, that still does not answer the question of his own personal motivations. If it is true, as McCroskey stated, that selecting an ethical standard is a subjective decision, it is even more so with judging another's motivations. More will be said about Whitefield's motivations later in this chapter.

The Feinbergs offer three criteria for determining the morality of the agent of an action. First, they contend an agent must act freely. One who acts out of compulsion or force is not acting freely. Second, they maintain an agent's motives and intentions are a key component to evaluating morality. They appeal to Immanuel Kant's theory that one acts to do one's duty or to further one's own interests. Kant advocated that an act performed out of duty is always moral. However, an act performed from self-interest, though it may be prudential, is not moral.²⁰ Even moral acts may be performed out of self-interest. In such cases, the agent did not act morally, according to Kant. Third, to be a moral agent, the agent must be performing a moral act. Feinberg and Feinberg explained, "It is not enough to act from a sense of duty if one misjudges what is his duty. Even if an agent freely acts solely motivated by duty, his act is not moral if he does an

¹⁸Ibid., 20-21.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 22.

immoral act.”²¹

In Whitefield’s case, it is clear that he acted freely. He was not acting under compulsion or force. Whitefield’s motives can only be determined by his words, his actions, and what those who knew him said about him. The act Whitefield was performing, utilizing fear appeals in his preaching, where the following standards are concerned, was a moral act.

The Ethicality of An Act

Feinberg and Feinberg described two categories for determining the ethicality of an act. These two categories are appropriate for assessing a speech act which uses fear as a persuasive tool. The two categories are teleological and deontological.

Teleological theories determine the goodness or badness of an act based on the results. Feinberg and Feinberg stated, “If the deed generates more non-moral good than evil, the act is considered morally good.”²² Consequences determine morality. The Feinbergs continue, “Many teleogists have been hedonists, identifying good with pleasure and evil with pain. Others have identified good with power, knowledge, self-realization, or other non-moral goods.”²³ They point out two types of teleological theories. The first type is self-centered and seeks the greatest good for oneself. This is called ethical egotism.²⁴ The second type attempts to garner the greatest good for the largest number of

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 27.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

people. This is referred to as ethical utilitarianism.²⁵

Deontological theories do not judge the rightness or wrongness of an act based on non-moral consequences or results. For deontologists, morality is assessed because something is one's duty and not because of the outcome. Feinberg and Feinberg contended, "The key for deontological theories is that an act is right because it is one's duty to do it, and it is one's duty for some reason other than the consequences stemming from the act."²⁶

Standards for Judging the Ethicality of Fear Appeals

Many standards for ethical evaluation have been posited. Since ethical standards vary according to culture, time, religious background, and individualistic intuition, the outcome of an ethical evaluation will depend on who is making the assessment. Larson presented a list of six standards that could be used for ethical evaluation.

First, he discussed the religious standard. This standard takes its criteria for judgment from its ideology and sacred texts. As a result, ethical standards will vary from one religion to the next. The religious system which is most dominant in the culture will typically set the ethical standards for others.

Second, he listed the human nature standard. This standard values those things which make a human fundamentally human. These characteristics include the ability to reason, create, appreciative understanding, and the ability to make value judgments.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 28.

Larson stated, “The assumption is that uniquely human attributes should be promoted, thereby promoting fulfillment of maximum individual potential.”²⁷

Third, he discussed the political standard. The political standard values those criteria which are held as essential to the health and growth of individual political-governmental systems. Larson indicated that these values may be implicit or explicit. He stated, “Such values and procedures might include enhancement of citizen capacity to reach rational decisions, access to channels of public communication, access to relevant and accurate information on public issues, maximization of freedom of choice, toleration of dissent, honesty in presenting motivations and consequences, and thoroughness and accuracy in presenting evidence and alternatives.”²⁸ Likewise, Wallace based his ethics of communication on the values of a democratic society: 1. The individual’s worth and dignity; 2. Equal opportunity for all members of the society; 3. The freedom to live and act unless our actions infringe on the freedom of the other members of the society; and 4. The ability of each member of the society to understand the nature, goals, values, procedures, and processes of democracy.²⁹

Fourth, Larson addressed the situational standard. The situational standard avoids all absolute and universal standards in favor of the particularized contexts of each situation. All other standards are minimized. Larson offered a list of six contextual factors relevant to instances of situational ethical evaluation: 1. The role or function of

²⁷Larson, *Persuasion*, 283.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 284.

²⁹Karl R. Wallace, “An Ethical Basis of Communication,” *The Speech Teacher* 4 (1955): 1-9.

the persuader for the audience. 2. Expectations held by receivers concerning such matters as appropriateness and reasonableness. 3. Degree of receiver awareness of the persuader's techniques. 4. Goals and values held by the receivers. 5. Degree of urgency for implementation of the persuader's proposal. 6. Ethical standards for communication held by receivers.³⁰

Fifth, Larson presented the legal standard. This standard is straightforward in that communication which is illegal is considered unethical. Communication which does not violate the law is considered ethical. According to this standard, one need only consult the current laws of communication to determine ethicality.

Sixth, Larson discussed the dialogical standard. This standard views communication as a dialogue rather than a monologue. As a dialogue, communication

is characterized by such attitudes as honesty, concern for the welfare and improvement of others, trust, genuineness, openmindedness, equality, mutual respect, empathy, humility, directness, lack of pretense, nonmanipulative intent, sincerity, encouragement of free expression, and acceptance of others as individuals with intrinsic worth regardless of difference over belief or behavior.

Communication as monologue, in contrast, is marked by such qualities as deception, superiority, exploitation, dogmatism, domination, insincerity, pretense, personal self-display, self-aggrandizement, judgmentalism that stifles free expression, coercion, possessiveness, condescension, self-defensiveness, and viewing others as objects to be manipulated.³¹

Therefore, the methods and strategies of a communicator would be evaluated to determine if he used an ethical dialogical attitude or an unethical monological attitude toward the receivers.

Though all of these standards are used by various groups, the Christian

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 285.

preacher is called to a higher standard of ethical assessment. Ultimately, the standard of ethical treatment for the preacher comes from the Word of God. This chapter will consider the ethicality of Whitefield's use of fear appeals using the truth standard, the love standard, the utilitarian standard, the freedom standard, and the biblical standard.

The Truth Standard

The first standard is the truth standard, which has already been mentioned in the previous discussion. Were the fear appeals Whitefield used statements of truth? Whitefield accepted the Bible as authoritative and literal. Since Whitefield believed the absolute truthfulness of the Bible, if he preached the truth of the Bible, he perceived himself to be preaching the truth. Further, the truths Whitefield preached in his sermons were biblical truths. Whitefield took the content of his fear appeals from the biblical text. He warned of those things which the Word of God warned. The Divine Command Theory explains God's requirement that Whitefield preach warnings (2 Tim 4:1-2) about death, hell, judgment, sin, suffering, the return of Christ, and temptation. God's Word prescribed for Whitefield his obligation to preach the whole counsel of God. Therefore, to accept Scripture as God's Word is to place oneself under the Divine Command Theory and obligation to do one's duty of warning of these harsh realities.

In the appeal to death, for example, Whitefield taught his subjects death was near and they ought to accept his appeals immediately. He admonished them to repent, use time wisely, and live a holy life while they had time, for they could die at any moment. He illustrated the appeal to death with anecdotes, Scripture, and Gorgian figures. Whitefield's teaching on death was true on two levels: experience and Scripture. Whitefield and his hearers knew death could come at any moment experientially. Not

only did they hear the death stories in Whitefield's sermons, but they had also witnessed family, friends, and neighbors taken prematurely. Whitefield supported his appeal to death with ample Scripture references. By doing so, Whitefield was operating within the realm of what he considered true, for he had an unwavering confidence in the Bible.

The closest thing we have to a philosophy of preaching from Whitefield is his sermon *Directions How to Hear Sermons*. In the sermon, he put grave importance upon the preaching and hearing of the Word of God. He said, "First, I am to prove that every One ought to take all Opportunities of hearing Sermons. That there have always been particular Persons set apart by God to instruct and exhort his People to practice what he should require of them, is evident from many Passages of Scripture. But if it be the Duty of Ministers to preach (and Woe be to them if they do not preach the Gospel, for a Necessity is laid upon them) no doubt, the People are obliged to attend to them: for otherwise, wherefore are Ministers sent?"³² For Whitefield, preaching was a necessity which he could not avoid.

The Love Standard

Another standard for judging the ethicality of fear appeals is the love standard.³³ This standard has also been called the Golden Rule and is especially apropos to the Christian preacher. The love standard states that a person should only commit acts

³²George Whitefield, *Directions How to Hear Sermons*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Printed and Sold by G. Rogers and D. Fowle, 1740), 5-6 [on-line]; accessed 14 September 2009; available from <http://infoweb.newsbank.com>; Internet.

³³Raymond W. McLaughlin, *The Ethics of Persuasive Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 118.

that are loving toward another person. These acts are those which seek the good and well-being of the other person. In the case of fear appeals, a person should use only those arguments which are made out of love for the recipients of the message.

The love standard was established by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40. When one of the Pharisees asked Jesus which commandment was the greatest, Jesus replied, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Jesus’ designation that “the second is like it” likely means the two commandments are equal in importance.³⁴ Love for others and the pursuit of goodwill toward others flows from an individual’s love for God. Although this standard may not motivate secular communicators to seek the well-being of others, the Christian communicator is bound to aim for this standard out of a desire to obey God. McLaughlin asserted that the two great commandments are the basic biblical foundation for the ethics of persuasion.³⁵ He further contended that the Christian communicator must ask two questions before engaging in any kind of persuasion: will it be pleasing to God and will it benefit mankind?³⁶ Any end or means of persuasion that does not pass the requirements of the two great commandments should be avoided. A Christian persuader must seek to be pleasing to God in the rhetorical decisions made for persuasion. If the Christian communicator loves the Lord with all of his heart, there will

³⁴Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew in The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 22:335.

³⁵McLaughlin, *Persuasive Preaching*, 121.

³⁶*Ibid.*

be a desire to please the Lord in his treatment of his neighbor.

Several rhetorical actions would be a violation of this standard. First, using fear to persuade for selfish ends would be an unloving act. The apostle Paul described love in 1 Corinthians 13 at that would does not “seek its own way.” A Christian communicator could be motivated by a desire for success through large offerings or conversions.

A second violation of the love standard is the use of fear for a mere emotional response. Creating fear and anxiety unnecessarily in an audience does not achieve their well-being. The goal of persuasion must be a benevolent benefit to the hearers.

A third violation of the love standard is the intentional use of false information. Misleading an audience with information that causes fear is cruel and unloving. The Christian preacher must be driven by the desire to share the truth of God’s Word. This is also a violation of the truth standard discussed above.

Did Whitefield act out of love and concern for the good and well-being of his hearers? Since Whitefield held to the veracity of the Bible, he believed in the reality of the afterlife, heaven, hell, and the devil. Whitefield displayed genuine concern for his hearer’s future state. By seeking to turn his hearers away from the danger of hell and toward the bliss of heaven, Whitefield sought their well-being. Therefore, according to the love standard, Whitefield acted ethically.

The Utilitarian Standard

Brembeck and Howell called the utilitarian standard social utility.³⁷ They

³⁷Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell, “The Ethics of Persuasion” in *Ethics and Persuasion: Selected Readings*, ed. Richard L. Johannesen (New York: Random House, 2006), 16.

called this standard the long view of ethical assessment. In this standard, the question is asked, What will be the effect on the social group involved in the long run? Brembeck and Howell defined social utility as “usefulness to the people affected.”³⁸ They elaborated, “Because persuasion is, essentially, rearranging the lives of other people, we believe that the persuader’s sincere effort to abide by some social utility principles is the first and perhaps most important step toward being ethical.”³⁹ That which benefits a social group can be determined through experience and nonexperimental propositions. Nonexperimental propositions are social group specific and may be accepted as fact, whether they are or not. Therefore, social utility is subjective.

In his list of rhetorical standards, Hart also listed the utilitarian standard as an avenue of judgment. He stated that this standard asks the questions, “Given the limitations of the situation, did the message do what it was intended to do? Did people react as the speaker hoped? Compared to other speakers on this topic in situations like this, did this speaker do as well as could be expected?”⁴⁰

McLaughlin referred to the utilitarian standard as Social-Effects ends. He asserted that for many rhetoricians “the ethics of rhetorical methods and techniques . . . should be measured in terms of whether they help or hurt people.”⁴¹ Advocates of this standard view the betterment of society as the ultimate good. The problem with this

³⁸Ibid., 17.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Roderick P. Hart, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 35. Hart’s list also included the artistic standard, the moral standard, the scientific standard, the historical standard, the psychological standard, and the political standard.

⁴¹McLaughlin, *Persuasive Preaching*, 60.

standard arises with determining what is the ultimate good. Oliver supported the utilitarian standard, stating, “what is good for society as a whole, in the long run is ethical; what is detrimental to society is unethical.”⁴² Also, Brembeck and Howell asserted that the social utility standard is the most suitable end of persuasion.⁴³

The problem with the utilitarian standard rests in who is defining what is good for society. The ultimate good is defined differently by an evangelical Christian and a rationalistic atheist. From an evangelical standpoint Whitefield’s use of persuasion through fear appeals can be judged ethical by the social utility standard. Those who converted to Christ as a result of Whitefield’s fear appeals lived more moral lives and became better members of society. Personally, Whitefield’s converts received the peace that they would go to heaven at death and that their sins had been forgiven. As a result, Whitefield’s use of fear appeals was useful to the social groups he influenced in the long run. Therefore, from an evangelical perspective, Whitefield acted ethically. However, other groups would certainly define the ultimate good differently.

The Freedom Standard

Strong and Cook explained the freedom standard, saying, “For persuasion to be persuasion, the person or audience being persuaded must be free to accept or reject the argument presented. The person or audience must be free to comply with or refuse to comply with the action requested.”⁴⁴ The persuasive technique used must leave the

⁴²Robert T. Oliver, *The Psychology of Persuasive Speech*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1957), 24ff.

⁴³Brembeck and Howell, *Persuasion*, 245.

⁴⁴W. F. Strong and John A. Cook, *Persuasion: A Practical Guide to Effective Persuasive Speech* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1987), 3.

subject of the persuasive message with the freedom to reject the message. The determination of whether or not *argumentum ad baculum* as a whole achieves this standard depends on whether a threat or a warning is being used. A threat is often said to leave a person with no choice. For example, if a mobster threatens to burn a client's house if he does not pay protection money, he seems to leave the client few options. However, it is not accurate to say the client is left without the freedom to choose. The client does have a choice. He can choose to pay the protection money, have his house burned, or seek an unknown third option (i.e., police intervention). However, the problem is that the options are all undesirable and it is unjust that the client has been placed in a position to make these choices. Therefore, *argumentum ad baculum* in the form of a threat is not persuasion and is unethical. This type of *argumentum ad baculum* is coercion and manipulation.

A fear appeal is a form of *argumentum ad baculum* that uses a warning of real and potentially dangerous consequences to an individual. When a fear appeal is issued, the recipient of the message has the freedom to accept it or reject it. With a fear appeal, no force is involved. If the recipient of the message disbelieves the fear appeal message or does not feel susceptible to the danger, he or she has the freedom to reject the appeal.

Whitefield's use of *argumentum ad baculum* was always in the form of fear appeals. He sought to warn his hearers of real and serious dangers, but hearers had the freedom to reject his appeals and many of them did. Whitefield did not give a public invitation and did not count converts; therefore his hearers had ample time to consider the appeals and their response to them. Therefore, according to the freedom standard, Whitefield acted ethically in his use of fear appeals.

The Biblical Standard

The biblical standard uses the Bible as a standard for ethical conduct. This standard accepts God's revelation as authoritative and trustworthy. The Word of God is the ethical standard for the Christian communicator and trumps all other philosophies and humanistic standards. Many other standards flow out of the biblical standard and overlap with it. For example, the truth standard and the love standard are certainly included in the biblical standard. Furthermore, the biblical standard is the most important standard for the Christian community. The biblical standard provides a guide for living Christianly.

Jesus is the example for the Christian communicator in using the biblical standard. In Matthew 4 Jesus faced a series of ethical questions as He was being tempted by the devil. In each case, Jesus quoted Scripture to answer the devil. McLaughlin asserted that the Christian communicator can do no less than Jesus.⁴⁵ He stated, "The entire Bible forms the ethical backdrop for the persuasive preacher—not necessarily as a legalistic catalogue of detailed rules to master and obey to the letter, but as a reference guide that he may consult when needed. It is true that the more the preacher saturates himself with the biblical law and lore, the more sensitive he will be to God's will on at least general ethical matters."⁴⁶

The Christian preacher has received a mandate from God to preach the Word of God. God told Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:9, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth." Paul implored Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-2, "I solemnly charge you in the

⁴⁵McLaughlin, *Persuasive Preaching*, 118.

⁴⁶Ibid.

presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”

Did Whitefield act within the ethical standards of the Bible in using fear appeals? The conclusion of this dissertation is that he did. In using fear appeals, he followed the example of the Bible, for the Bible certainly contains fearful messages. In fact, Lewis concluded that the gospel of Mark is 60.9% appeal to faith and 39.1% appeal to fear, the Sermon on the Mount is 60% appeal to faith and 40% appeal to fear, Hosea is 20% appeal to faith and 80% appeal to fear, Micah is 30% appeal to faith and 70% appeal to fear, and Amos is 10% appeal to faith and 90% appeal to fear.⁴⁷ Therefore, Whitefield’s use of fear is consistent with the preaching of Jesus and the Minor Prophets.

He also followed the commands of the Bible in using fear appeals. The Bible instructs believers to proclaim God’s decrees. In doing so, Whitefield announced the good news of faith and the bad news of judgment. Preachers who preach the whole counsel of God will eventually be faced with preaching frightening material. The level of fear will be determined by the degree of direct address, vivid imagery, and *pathos* employed in the sermons.

Of Means and of Ends

Another means of making an ethical judgment in rhetorical communication is based on the means used or the ends achieved. Larson offered the following as an example of means justifying the ends.

⁴⁷Ralph L. Lewis, *Persuasive Preaching Today* (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Theological Seminary, 1982), 119-20.

Imagine that you are an audience member listening to a speaker, call him Mr. Bronson. His aim is to persuade you to contribute money to the cancer research program of a major medical research center. Suppose that, with one exception, all the evidence, reasoning, and motivational appeals he employs are valid and above ethical suspicion. However, at one point in his speech, Mr. Bronson consciously chooses to use a false set of statistics to scare you into believing that, during your lifetime, there is a much greater probability of your getting some form of cancer than there actually is.⁴⁸

Although the speaker in Larson's example may have had good intentions and even though his speech produced desirable ends, he acted unethically. His desire for good ends led him to fabricate information which misled his auditors. Larson's example not only demonstrates why ends do not always justify means, but also it shows why an ethical evaluation of rhetoric cannot be conducted with one isolated standard. Multiple standards must be used

Minnick asserted that ends and means have historically been the two central approaches in the ethical assessment of persuasion.⁴⁹ McCroskey concluded, when a person uses good means to achieve a good end, few question the ethicality of the communication. When a person uses bad means to achieve bad ends, everyone can agree that it is unethical. However, when a person uses bad means for good ends, or good means for bad ends, the issue can become blurry.⁵⁰

Ethical assessment using an ends-centered approach is difficult. There are good ends and bad ends, but opinions could vary widely on exactly what is good and what is bad. Aristotle contended that an ends-centered philosophy could be used for bad

⁴⁸Larson, *Persuasion*, 280.

⁴⁹Wayne C. Minnick, "The Ethics of Persuasion" in *Ethics and Persuasion: Selected Readings*, ed. Richard L. Johannesen (New York: Random House, 1967), 30.

⁵⁰James C. McCroskey, *An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication: A Western Rhetorical Perspective*, 9th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2006), 291-92.

ends. He stated, “If it is urged that an abuse of the rhetorical faculty can work great mischief, the same charge can be brought against all good things (save virtue itself), and especially against the most useful things such as strength, health, wealth, and military skill. Rightly employed, they work the greatest blessing; and wrongly employed, they work the utmost harm.”⁵¹ The problem comes with interpretation. What one person views as a terrorist, another may view as a freedom fighter. McCroskey continued by adding that most individuals reject the ends justifying the means philosophy. Regardless of how desirable an end may be, there are some means that should not be used to achieve it.⁵² McLaughlin declared, “As a general rule . . . many reject in persuasion the “end justifies the means” philosophy. Exceptions for extreme circumstances are usually cited and accepted, but falsification, distortion, or deception are normally rejected as ways of life. Most scholars are wary of the philosophy of the end justifying the means because they know the vicious results of it in witch hunts, inquisitions, and character assassinations. Accordingly, Christians reject the idea that the end justifies the means, except in certain extreme circumstances where it clearly applies.”⁵³

Likewise, in regard to a means-centered approach to rhetorical ethics, McCroskey points out a problem. The problem is that individuals often use a double standard in judging the use of means. He gave the example of the United States lying to Cuba about involvement in the Bay of Pigs debacle. At the time, the means of lying was

⁵¹Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, trans. Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), 6.

⁵²McCroskey, *Rhetorical Communication*, 292.

⁵³McLaughlin, *Persuasive Preaching*, 72.

considered ethical by the United States government. However, during the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy castigated Russia for lying about the placement of missiles in Cuba. McCroskey's point was that what is considered to be an ethical means for some may not be for others, and that people may adjust their ethical rule depending on who is acting.⁵⁴ Because of this ambiguity and uneven application of a means-centered approach to rhetorical ethics, McCroskey stated it was ineffective as a tool of ethical assessment. Therefore, according to McCroskey, because society disagrees on what are good means and good ends, they are of little use.

The subjectivity of the ends/means debate is less of a problem for the Christian preacher, for he has a standard for judging means and ends in the Bible. Loscalzo stated,

The aim of preaching is to evoke a response to the gospel, a response that leads to intentional action in the lives of our hearers. Preaching requires hearers do more than merely agree with a sermon; persuasive preaching aims at a change in behavior.

Yet people often misunderstand persuasion as manipulation, and this raises ethical questions. The ethical demands of Christian preaching require that the preacher never coerce or manipulate the congregation. Exploiting the hearers is never in their best interest and is antithetical to the gospel. In preaching, as in all aspects of Christian ministry, a worthy end never justifies unworthy means. Both ends and means are the concern of the gospel of Jesus Christ, if it is to remain good news. How we lead someone to experience salvation is of vital significance.⁵⁵

Minnick rightly declared, "There is general agreement that some means of persuasion are unethical."⁵⁶ He offers four criteria for distinguishing unethical practices in rhetorical persuasion. He said,

⁵⁴McCroskey, *Introduction to Rhetorical Communication*, 292.

⁵⁵Craig A. Loscalzo, *Preaching Sermons That Connect: Effective Communication Through Identification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 20.

⁵⁶Minnick, "Ethics of Persuasion," 36.

1. It is unethical to falsify or fabricate.
2. It is unethical to distort so that a piece of evidence does not convey its true intent.
3. It is unethical to make conscious use of specious reasoning.
4. It is unethical to deceive the audience about the speaker's intent.⁵⁷

According to this minimalistic ethical reasoning, Whitefield acted ethically in his use of fear appeals. Minnick's first criterion concerned truth telling. A speaker and/or preacher is expected to convey the truth without lying. Speakers might be tempted to do so out of a desire to impress the audience, hide something from them, or cause an emotional response in them. There is no evidence or suggestion that Whitefield falsified any of the fear appeals he used.

Minnick's second criterion concerned distortion of evidence or facts. Under this head could be placed hermeneutically sound interpretation of the biblical text. Whitefield also used illustrative material to which this criterion could be applied. On several occasions he reported on the sudden deaths of individuals to remind his auditors that the same thing could happen to them. There is no way to verify whether or not Whitefield distorted the facts of these anecdotes.

Minnick's third criterion is closely akin to the first two. Specious reasoning involves the use of fallacious arguments. Whitefield warned of real and present danger to his auditors. He warned in the sermon *The Happy Mourner Comforted*,

Howl and weep; however merry you may be now, in a little Time you shall be thrown into the infernal Pit; and there you shall be made to mourn with Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth, when 'tis too late. In a little you shall go to Esau your Grandfather, and to Judas, and there you shall be tormented, and not allowed one Drop of Water to cool the tip of your Tongues. O what Howling and Mourning is there! O how many are there in Hell, that have never sinned so as you and I have done! Beg of God to break your hard Hearts; beg of God, your dear Saviour, to let

⁵⁷Ibid.

you see what a bitter Thing it is to depart from the Lord: O! my dear Friends, my Heart is warmed with Love to you⁵⁸

Whitefield's reasoning in this example is straightforward and simple. His auditors will soon be in Hell if they do not call on God in repentance and faith. This message is a fear appeal to the unconverted about waiting too long to be saved. The appeal is not specious because the prospect Whitefield presents is a real one.

Minnick's fourth criterion addresses the intent of the persuader. In the sermon *The Happy Mourner Comforted*, Whitefield repeatedly declared his intentions toward his auditors. He admonished, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. O that I could weep over you; I could wish that my Head were Waters, and mine Eyes a Fountain of Tears, that I might weep Day and Night for you that do not see your own Misery!"⁵⁹ Again he said, "O it makes me mourn, fearing it will be a Parting for evermore; that many of you shall bid an everlasting Adieu to one another! O it will be a dreadful Parting!"⁶⁰ Near the close of the sermon he asserted, "O how shall I leave you; my Heart burns for you, 'tis my Meat and my Drink to bring you to Christ; I live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. I care not, tho' this were my last Moment, if I could bring some of you to Christ; O my Bowells hath yearned for you, I have been with Jesus the last Night, and blessed be God, ye shall hear the Sound of my Master's Feet behind me; blessed, be

⁵⁸George Whitefield, *The Happy Mourner Comforted* (Shropshire, England: Quinta Press, 2006), 10.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 11

God, he will not let me preach in vain.”⁶¹ These three excerpts make clear Whitefield’s intentions toward his auditors. He desired their salvation.

There is no evidence that Whitefield fabricated any fear appeal, there is no indication that he distorted evidence, that he consciously used specious reasoning, or that he sought to deceive his audience about his true intent.

“What You Can Get Away With”

McLaughlin and Brembeck and Howell discussed the “what you can get away with” ethical standard for persuasive communication.⁶² This standard is willing to allow any means necessary to achieve persuasive goals if it is possible to get away with it. Communicators who use this standard essentially have no standards and resort to chicanery to manipulate and extort their auditors. The “what you can get away with” standard and the ends justifies the means standard differ in that the former standard is not concerned with the ethicality of means or ends. Those holding this standard are seeking to reach their own personal goals whether they are ethical or not.

Brembeck and Howell maintained that two powerful negative forces control and restrain the ethics of the persuader operating under the “what you can get away with” standard. They describe these forces as social sanctions and the law.⁶³ Brembeck and Howell further explained that this ethic has the advantage of simplicity. The persuader

⁶¹Ibid., 13.

⁶²McLaughlin, *Persuasive Preaching*, 72-73.

⁶³Brembeck and Howell, *Persuasion*, 239.

has only to “worry about staying out of jail and avoiding ostracism and retaliation.”⁶⁴

The Intent of the Speaker

McCroskey stated emphatically, “The only meaningful way in which we can evaluate the ethics of a source is on the basis of intent.”⁶⁵ A few pages later he reasserted this statement and added that intent should be used in ethical evaluations exclusively. Regardless of the means used and the ends achieved, if the speaker intends good will toward the audience he is acting ethically. When a speaker seeks to harm the audience, no means or ends can prevent the rhetorical act from being unethical. McCroskey stated the means used by a speaker are ethically neutral.⁶⁶ In the same way, an ends-centered approach offers little insight into the intent of the source. Good ends do not guarantee goodwill on the part of the speaker. A similar approach was postulated by Kimball. As stated elsewhere, he said, “In general, what’s wrong with *argumentum ad baculum* should be explained in terms of the intentions, purposes, and character of threateners, and the differences in intentions and purposes for which threats are made. The characters of those who make the threats will provide the criteria for distinguishing benign and malicious threats.”⁶⁷

I would argue for a combination of ends, means, and intent under a biblical umbrella as an ethical approach for the Christian community. Though an ends-centered

⁶⁴Ibid., 240.

⁶⁵McCroskey, *Introduction to Rhetorical Communication*, 294.

⁶⁶Ibid., 295.

⁶⁷Robert H. Kimball, “What’s Wrong with *Argumentum ad Baculum*? Reasons, Threats, and Logical Norms,” *Argumentation* 20 (2006): 91.

approach to rhetorical ethics and a means-centered approach are both subjective, judging intent suffers from an equal or greater degree of subjectivity. A speaker's true intent is impossible to determine with finality. Intent can tentatively be assessed by a person's stated intentions and actions. However, time may prove those to be misleading. Even if a persuader's intent could be fully known, and assuming the intent was one of goodwill, that still does not ensure ethicality. In addition to the intent, the ends and means must be considered. Good intentions alone do not guarantee ethicality.

Whitefield's Intent Toward His Audience

According to McCroskey and Kimball, if Whitefield acted with goodwill toward his hearers, seeking their good, he acted ethically in the use of fear appeals. The only determination available of Whitefield's intent toward his hearers is what he expressed in his sermons and other writings and his actions.

Whitefield's Actions As an Indicator of His Intent

First, Whitefield drove himself to absolute physical exhaustion that he might preach to the unconverted. He put himself in physical danger and impaired his own health through lack of sleep. His incessant traveling and preaching cost him not only his health, but a normal family life as well. He made thirteen treacherous sea crossings. Even his ardent pursuit of spiritual disciplines served to pommel his body. In one sermon he confessed, "God knows I seldom sleep after three in the morning."⁶⁸ He rose early for prayer. Second, he did not offer a public invitation and did not count converts. He was

⁶⁸Joseph Gurney, *Eighteen Sermons* (Boston: Edmund M. Blunt, 1820), 92.

cautious about pronouncing a person saved too quickly. Third, Whitefield spent an enormous amount of time in the act of preaching each week. Accordingly, Whitefield's actions portray a man genuinely concerned about the unconverted. He was a man always in a hurry. The night he lay dying, he could only think of preaching the next day.

Additionally, Whitefield engaged in multiple humanitarian and educational projects. For example, he founded the first charity in America, the Bethesda orphanage, which became a heavy burden to him for the remainder of his life. If one were to judge solely on his activities and labors, there is good evidence that his intentions were honorable.

In spite of his selfless labor, Whitefield had detractors who lampooned his character. Stout called his motives "egotistical" and said he lived solely for performing. He said, "Few great people achieve fame without aspiring to it, and Whitefield was no exception. But the fame he sought was not that of the metaphysical theologian or the denomination-builder. Rather he strove to achieve the actor's command performance on center stage. From his youth, Whitefield wanted to be a star, and the particular egotistical self-promotion he displayed in his career was very much in the manner of the great actor."⁶⁹ This statement is difficult to reconcile with Whitefield's repeated condemnations of the theater in his sermons. Whitefield certainly used his acting ability in the pulpit with great effect; however, that is far from attributing egotistical motives to Whitefield as Stout does.

⁶⁹Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), xxi.

Whitefield's Intent from His Writings

In his journals and letters, Whitefield consistently expressed his concern and compassion for his hearers and correspondents. If his own words are indicative of his intent, he had the best of intentions toward his hearers. His own words do not reveal evil intent or selfish motives. He consistently showed sorrow and distress for the condition of his hearers. The argument could be made that Whitefield's journals and letters were written with publication in view and are therefore not reliable sources. However, even if they were written for publication, that is no indication that the words do not accurately reflect the intent of his heart.

On May 16, 1747 Whitefield wrote in a letter, "The heat tries my wasting tabernacle, but, through Christ strengthening me, I intend persisting till I drop."⁷⁰ Again on June 24, 1748 he stated, "I have not preached yet; this may spare my lungs, but it grieves my heart. I long to be ashore, if it was for no other reason."⁷¹ On July 12 of 1748 he remarked, "Never mind me, let my name die every where, let even my friends forget me, if by that means the cause of the blessed Jesus may be promoted."⁷² Concerning his many labors, Whitefield asserted on July 22, 1748, "I think his glory is the main principle of my acting. I want to bring souls, not to a party, much less to lead them from the established churches, but to a sense of their undone condition by nature, and to true faith

⁷⁰George Whitefield, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 2:100.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 2:143.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 2:150.

in Jesus Christ, which will be evidenced by a holy life, and an universal, cheerful obedience to all the commands of God.”⁷³

Conclusion

Whitefield used fear appeals ethically, when evaluated based on the standard of truth, love, freedom, utility, and the Bible. Using an ends-centered and a means-centered approach produces mixed results. However, McCroskey contended that intent is the only true means of evaluation. Another person’s motives can never be completely known, but on the basis of Whitefield’s own word and actions, his intent was one of goodwill toward his hearers. A combination of the ends-centered approach, the means-centered approach, and the intention of the speaker, using the Bible as an authoritative guide, is the best ethical standard for the Christian preacher.

Whitefield’s use of fear to persuade was intentional, effective, and ethical. With fear he sought to awaken souls to their need for conversion. Whitefield had a rare combination of imagination, oratorical skill, burning passion, an uncompromising trust in the Bible, and deep empathy for sinners that turned his fear appeals into fiery arrows to pierce the hardest of hearts.

⁷³Ibid., 2:155.

CHAPTER 6

PRINCIPLES FOR THE CONTEMPORARY USE OF FEAR APPEALS

Argumentum ad baculum is nearly extinct in the contemporary pulpit. The fields of marketing, health promotion, and politics may find it a helpful tool, but homiletics views it as antiquarian and unproductive. Preachers who engage in the use of fear are labeled “hell-fire and brimstone” preachers who manipulate their hearers. This chapter attempts to offer considerations for the contemporary use of *argumentum ad baculum* in the rhetoric of the pulpit.

The Rejection of the Use of Fear for Persuasion

The flames of the Great Awakening were stoked by fear appeals, as colonists were confronted with the truth of their condition without Christ. Multitudes were moved from the vicissitudinary nature of everyday life to a passionate devotion to Christ as they glimpsed visions of future punishment in hell. Modern audiences, however, are largely unconditioned for such preaching. Sermons that once again train hearers’ hearts on eternity rather than encouraging them to seek “your best life now” could be a contributing factor to a fresh awakening. Miller declared,

In a simple word sermon hearers don’t want to hear about transcendence, and they particularly don’t want to hear about hell. It does little good to remind them that Jesus spoke more of hell than of heaven. To them hell is a bygone notion no matter

how often Jesus spoke of it. Even among the most conservative churches I visit, I rarely hear the word brought up. It's not that I have some morose need to hear a lot about it. It's just that its absence in sermons triggers in me a huge doubt about the continuance of the faith. Hell is on the opposite end of the teeter-totter with heaven, and things have gotten so light on the hell end, that the heaven end is flat on the ground and being nibbled at by nuances of all kinds.¹

Piper concurred saying,

The use of threat or warning in preaching to the saints is rare today for at least two reasons: It produces guilt and fear, which are considered to be unproductive, and it seems theologically inappropriate because the saints are secure and don't need to be warned or threatened. Edwards rejected both reasons. When fear and guilt correspond with the true state of things it is reasonable and loving to stir them up. And the saints are only as secure as they are willing to give heed to biblical warnings and persevere in godliness.²

Warnings of demons laying hold of their souls and dragging them to hell is unpalatable to the majority of worship attendees today. Even Adrian Rogers, a prominent Southern Baptist pastor, said of preaching on hell, “. . . hell is not a good evangelistic subject. I preach on hell; I think we ought to preach on hell more than we do because that is almost a forgotten note in the modern church. But don't expect a lot of decisions for Christ when you preach on hell, not immediately. A sermon on hell has a delayed detonation. But it's a negative thing when you are preaching, and most negative things don't receive a positive response, although sometimes it may.”³ However, Edwards

¹Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 47.

²John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 91.

³Michael Duduit, ed., *Preaching With Power: Dynamic Insights From Twenty Top Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 171.

stated, “Some talk of it as an unreasonable thing to think to fright persons to heaven; but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from hell—tis a reasonable thing to fright a person out of a house on fire.”⁴

Individuals reject the use of fear in persuasion in general and preaching in particular for a variety of reasons. In some cases, it is a matter of unbelief. The individuals do not accept the biblical doctrines concerning hell and judgment. In other cases, there is the feeling that any use of fear is a means of manipulation. Since manipulation is always unethical, the use of fear is always wrong. Fear is also rejected based on a misunderstanding of the nature of God. The argument goes, “God is a god of love and He would never cause anyone harm or pain. He is just too loving to send anyone to hell.” However, this is a misunderstanding of the justice and righteousness of God. Others demur the use of fear because they do not see fear as a genuine motive. Whitefield himself said those who are motivated by fear are acting selfishly. The use of fear also brings negative reactions from hearers because it is by nature uncomfortable. Fear appeals cause fear, and no one finds fear a comfortable experience. Then, lastly, individuals reject the use of fear because of sin. Those who are living in disobedience to God will find fear appeals directed at them undesirable. They prefer a rebellious and lascivious lifestyle.

⁴Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of A Work of the Spirit of God*, in *The Works of President Edwards* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830), 3:577-78 [on-line]; accessed 27 September 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

Principles for the Use of Fear for Persuasion

The use of fear for persuasive means in the pulpit is not only appropriate; it is necessary. For one thing, there are many passages of Scripture which cannot be preached without arousing fear in the hearers. The fact is plain, the Bible uses appeal to fear, and to preach the whole counsel of God preachers must do the same.

There are certain truths that are fearful, yet they cannot be ignored. Hell, death, the return of Christ, suffering, and judgment are realities of which a faithful shepherd will desire to warn his congregation. A preacher who refuses to do so preaches an incomplete gospel.

It is this fear that prevents some things and prompts others. Jonathan Edwards knew this well. In response to the charge he and other leaders of the awakening were fanning the flames of emotionalism with the vivid preaching of terror, he stated,

If any of you that are heads of families, saw one of your children in a house that was all on fire over its head, and in eminent danger of being soon consumed in the flames, that seemed to be very insensible of its danger, and neglected to escape, after you had often spake to it, and called to it, would you go on to speak to it only in a cold and indifferent manner? Would not you cry aloud, and call earnestly to it, and represent the danger it was in, and its own folly in delaying, in the most lively manner you were capable of? Would not nature itself teach this, and oblige you to it? If you should continue to speak to it only in a cold manner, as you are wont to do in ordinary conversation about indifferent matters, would not those about you begin to think you were bereft of reason yourself? If we who have the care of souls, knew what hell was, had seen the state of the damned, or by any other means, become sensible how dreadful their case was . . . and saw our hearers in eminent danger, and that they were not sensible of their danger . . . it would be morally impossible for us to avoid abundantly and most earnestly setting before them the dreadfulfulness of that misery they were in danger of . . . and warning them to fly from it, and even to cry aloud to them.⁵

⁵Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. Goen, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 4:272.

Unfortunately, many preachers measure success by numbers. There is a fear on the part of some preachers of doing anything that might infringe on this chimera of success. Cox said some preachers are so afraid of doing the wrong thing they end up doing nothing. He remarked,

As a boy, I used to listen regularly to a radio comedian who played the role of a salesman. He was the world's lowest low-pressure salesman. Knocking at a prospective customer's door, he invariably muttered, "There's nobody home here, I hope, I hope, I hope!" This approach may easily become the *modus operandi* of a well-educated, cultured, open-minded minister who fears to intrude on the privacy and sanctity of another personality. Though we are personally ethical by the best community standards, we may be so permissive that we have nothing but weakness to offer the guilty and bewildered. We are responsible not only when we do the wrong thing but also when we fail to do the right thing.⁶

A preacher who attempts the use of fear should expect a negative response from some in the congregation. The use of fear will likely be foreign to them. Moreover, the rhetoric of fear is often unpopular. Whitefield was well aware of this even in his context. In his sermon "Repentance and Conversion" he bemoaned,

I mention one thing more, which is, that you must be converted, or be damned, and that is plain English, but not plainer than my Master made use of, He that believeth not, shall be damned. I did not speak that word strong enough that says, He that believeth not shall be damned; that is the language of our Lord; and it is said of one of the primitive preachers, that used to speak the word damned so that it struck all his auditory. We are afraid of speaking the word damned for fear of offending such and such a one; at the same time they despise the minister for not being honest to his master.⁷

However, those who occupy the pulpit must sometimes choose between unpopularity

⁶James W. Cox, *Preaching: A Comprehensive Approach to the Design and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 214-15.

⁷Joseph Gurney, *Eighteen Sermons, Preached By The Late Rev. George Whitefield, A. M.* (Boston: Printed by the Publisher, 1820), 87.

with people or unpopularity with God. Unfortunately, many are afraid to preach the simple truths of Scripture which contemporary society have deemed distasteful.

A second consideration is the authority of Scripture. A preacher must be sure the fear he seeks to arouse has its foundation in Scripture. As Broadus stated, “Argument in preaching has one peculiarity. There is a great authority, the Word of God, whose plain utterances upon any question must be held by the preacher as decisive and final.”⁸ The preacher has no authority to create fears that do not flow out of God’s Word. This does not mean that the appeal must come from the primary text of the sermon. Nearly all of Whitefield’s fear appeals were based on supporting texts in the body of the sermon and not on the primary text.

R. W. Dale, in his Yale lectures on preaching, discussed the use of fear as a motivation to conversion. He asked the question, “I think that we have to ask ourselves, first of all, whether those who continue in revolt against God, and who refuse to receive the Christian redemption, have anything to fear?”⁹ If Scripture is our authority, we must without hesitation answer that question in the affirmative. Dale does not give a clear answer to his question. He does confess his belief that the lost being punished in material fires is “irrational.”¹⁰ Dale even suggests that the damned may be called back to “light

⁸V. L. Stanfield, *Favorite Sermons of John A. Broadus* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 161.

⁹R. W. Dale, *Nine Lectures on Preaching* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1878), 212.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 214.

and to God” sometime in eternity future after the Lord has pronounced them doomed.¹¹ Therefore, the crucial question for the preacher is the meaning of the Scriptures. If a preacher believes the biblical teaching of hell, judgment, and damnation and refuses to preach them, he is worse than the coetus of R. W. Dale. At least Dale and his kind are faithful to the positions they hold. The preacher who believes the lost indeed have something to fear and does not warn them is cruel and cowardly. Scriptural authority must be the preacher’s guide in the rhetoric of fear. The preacher must be willing to proclaim boldly the words of a holy God.

Audience analysis is a third consideration to aid the preacher in the use of fear in the pulpit. Audience analysis will prevent the preacher from making inappropriate, offensive, and humorous mistakes in the use of fear for persuasive purposes. The preacher must know to whom he is speaking for a fear appeal to be successful. Fashioning a fear appeal for a target audience is crucial to persuasion.

A preacher should seek to answer a number of questions about the audience before preparing the fear appeal. For example, What is the context of the sermon? Will the sermon be preached on Sunday morning, during a revival meeting, or crusade setting? Will the sermon be preached in a traditional church setting or in a contemporary worship service? Have any major local, national, or international events taken place that would influence the context?

Another question a preacher should contemplate in the process of audience analysis is, What is the composition of the audience? Does the audience have any

¹¹Ibid., 215.

biblical or church background? Is the audience churched or unchurched? What age groups are represented? What ethnic backgrounds are present? What type of preaching, if any, is the audience accustomed to hearing?

If the audience is composed of those who have already been converted to Christ, an appeal to hell would be superfluous. An audience consisting of teenagers may be less receptive to an appeal to death since they may not feel susceptible to death at that time in their lives. However, anecdotes about young people who have died suddenly may mitigate such responses. Without an assessment of the composition of the audience, an appeal to fear could impair the preacher's credibility.

A third question for audience analysis is, What is the purpose of the assembly from the perspective of the audience? Why do they think they are there? It makes a tremendous difference if the audience knows they have gathered for a crusade as opposed to a graduation commencement.

Yet a fourth question to ask when doing audience analysis is, What is the disposition of the audience? This question seeks to discover the audience's feelings toward the subject to be addressed and the preacher. Lucas admonishes a speaker to assess an audience's interest in the subject, knowledge of it, and attitudes in regard to it.¹² The preacher must also assess the audience's temper toward him and/or preachers in general. If an audience has a negative view of the preacher or preachers, a fear appeal may be dismissed immediately.

¹²Stephen E. Lucas. *The Art of Public Speaking*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 111.

A fourth consideration which is separate from, yet related to the third, is the use of audience segmentation. Segmentation is the practice of dividing the audience into segments and tailoring an appeal to one or more of those segments. For example, a preacher may preach to a Sunday morning congregation consisting of an eclectic mix of people. Christians, non-Christians, young, old, educated, uneducated, and agnostics may all be present on that particular occasion. A preacher may find it difficult to prepare one or more appeals that would be appropriate for the entire audience. Therefore, the preacher may use segmentation. He could extend an appeal to one segment of the audience, constructed for that segment alone. Other appeals may be used in the same sermon for the other segments of the audience. In such a diverse setting, it will be obvious to the members of the other segments that the appeal is not meant for them.

Segmentation is a technique Whitefield often employed. In the sermon “Walking With God” he divided the congregation into three segments. The first segment he called “strangers to Christ.”¹³ This segment of his audience are those who are unconverted. The second segment he referred to as “you that are saints.”¹⁴ He styled an appeal not only to the unconverted, but also to those who are already Christians. The third segment Whitefield addressed was “my brethren in the ministry.”¹⁵

In the sermon “The Lord Our Righteousness” Whitefield’s use of segmentation reached its apogee. At the end of the sermon, when Whitefield began pleading for souls

¹³George Whitefield, *Five Sermons* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1746), 124.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 126.

to turn to Christ, he said, “Alas, my heart almost bleeds! What a multitude of precious souls are now before me! How shortly must all be ushered into eternity! And yet, O cutting thought! Was God now to require all your souls, how few, comparatively speaking, could really say, the Lord our righteousness!”¹⁶ After this introduction, Whitefield singled out nine segments of the audience with appeals. This is the highest number of segments in any of his sermons. His segments included “O sinners,” “young maidens,” “you of a middle age,” “you busy merchants,” “you cumbered Martha’s,” “hoary heads,” “ye little children,” and “poor negroes.”¹⁷

A contemporary preacher preaching to a Sunday morning congregation might attempt a similar pattern. He could address the youth, the married, the single, the troubled, the senior adults, the middle aged, the unconverted, the sinful, and/or the children.

A further consideration is the need for an engaging delivery. A preacher should seek to preach with passion and insert feeling into the delivery of the appeal.

Edwards wrote,

When ministers preach of hell, and warn sinners to avoid it, in a cold manner, though they may say in words that it is infinitely terrible; yet (if we look on language as a communication of our minds to others) they contradict themselves; for actions, as I observed before, have a language to convey our minds, as well as words; and at the same time that such a preacher’s words represents the sinner’s state as infinitely dreadful, his behavior and manner of speaking contradict it, and shew that the preacher don’t [*sic*] think so; so that he defeats his own purpose; for the language of

¹⁶George Whitefield, *Nine Sermons*, 2nd ed. (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1743), 23.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 23-28.

his actions, in such a case, is much more effectual than the bare signification of his words.¹⁸

Jones asserted preaching must have within it an element of drama. He maintained, “It means simply that the preacher must employ dramatic techniques if he is effectively to convey the meaning of his message and influence character.”¹⁹ Again he insisted, “It has been demonstrated over and over again in the experience of men that, apart from right feelings, the clearest logic and soundest principles are utterly without power to affect human life.”²⁰ Extemporaneous delivery, as used by Whitefield, can allow more freedom for passion and engaging communication. A preacher who shares an anecdote about the final moments of a terminally ill person to communicate the reality of death will blunt the impact of the story if he reads it with little passion and a monotone voice. The content of the anecdote should match our facial expressions and vocal variety. York and Decker contend that the trust factor is the most critical element in communication.²¹ This trust is endangered when our facial and vocal expressions are not consistent with our words. York and Decker explained, “Good communicators understand that the audience gets what they see.”²² Whitefield’s early affinity for acting

¹⁸Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks*, in *Works*, 577.

¹⁹E. Winston Jones, *Preaching and the Dramatic Arts* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), 3-4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 4.

²¹Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching With Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 199.

²²*Ibid.*, 205.

and his dramatic ability was a contributing factor in the visual presentation of his sermons.

Another consideration in using fear appeals in preaching is the need to rely on the Holy Spirit. There could be a temptation to trust clever devices and arguments rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. As stated in chapter two, Dabney views the power of the Holy Spirit the advantage the preacher has in using appeals to emotion.

The preacher should also consider his motivation for using a fear appeal. As stated in chapter two, the fallaciousness of a fear appeal depends largely on the purpose and intent of the speaker. Using a fear appeal for the sole purpose of bringing people down the aisle during the invitation is self-serving. Seeking to scare individuals into making some kind of a decision so an evangelist will have something to report in his monthly newsletter is mountebanking. (It is striking that Whitefield never made an attempt to count converts.) A preacher's motivation must be the constraining love of Christ for the lost. In extending a fear appeal of such unpleasant consequences as hell, judgment, and death, the preacher should do so with a broken heart and with tears. The preacher must seek to warn of real and present dangers facing sinners. Tears were characteristic of Whitefield's preaching in general and of his use of fear in particular. Nearly every page of his letters, journals, and sermons is stained with tears. Cornelius Winter, the young assistant who was constantly at Whitefield's side for the last two years of his life said of his preaching,

I hardly ever knew him go through a sermon without weeping, more or less, and I truly believe his were the tears of sincerity. His voice was often interrupted by his affection; and I have heard him say in the pulpit, "You blame me for weeping, but how can I help it, when you will not weep for yourselves, though your immortal souls are upon the verge of destruction, and for aught you know, you are hearing

your last sermon, and may never more have an opportunity to have Christ offered to you.” His freedom in the use of his passions often put my pride to the trial. I could hardly bear such unreserved use of tears, and the scope he gave to his feelings, for sometimes he exceedingly wept, stamped loudly and passionately, and was frequently so overcome, that, for a few seconds, you would suspect he never could recover; and when he did, nature required some little time to compose herself.²³

As Hoyt stated, people love a “sincere, fearless preacher.”²⁴

A consideration for the pastor-preacher is the frequency with which fear appeals should be used. The itinerant evangelist has the luxury of speaking to new audiences weekly. Therefore, the evangelist will likely use the fear appeal more than the pastor. A pastor who preaches to the same congregation week after week will need to temper his use of fear. A continuous use of fear on the same audience by the pastor will inoculate the congregation and become ineffective. If the pastor’s primary preaching text contains a fearful message the pastor should never hesitate to preach it with love. However, the repeated use of fear appeals emanating from places other than the primary text calls for wisdom and caution.

An additional consideration for contemporary preachers and the use of fear appeals is the use of a sermon pericope. Whitefield’s use of fear did not dominate his entire sermon the majority of the time. His use of the *ad baculum* argument might be contained in one or two pericopes distributed throughout the sermon or in the conclusion

²³William Jay, *Memoirs of the Life and Character of the Late Rev. Cornelius Winter* (New York: Samuel Whiting, 1811), 21-22 [on-line]; accessed 17 July 2009; available from <http://books.google.com>; Internet.

²⁴Arthur S. Hoyt, *The Work of Preaching: A Book for the Class-Room and Study* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), 283.

of the sermon. Though these pericopes can be found throughout his sermons, Whitefield saved the bulk of his use of fear for his last division which he considered the “exhortation.” Therefore, a pastor could preach for thirty minutes and use a one minute pericope containing a fear appeal somewhere in the sermon. The point is that it is not necessary for fear to monopolize the sermon to be a useful tool of persuasion.

Conclusion

Preachers who preach the whole counsel of God, who have a conviction that the Bible is the authoritative word of God, and who have a passion to see lives changed will eventually need to use *argumentum ad baculum* in the form of fear appeals. The degree of fear in these appeals will vary according to the preacher’s own imagination and ability to create such things as vivid imagery and metaphors. Preachers, however, must proceed with caution and compassion. The tone and demeanor of the preacher must always fit the subject matter at hand. Death, hell, and judgment should be approached with a sad and heavy heart. Fear will bring discomfort to many, but a strategic use of it can be effective for persuasion.

This dissertation has identified and evaluated fear appeals in Whitefield’s extant sermons. Whitefield’s fear appeal usage was extensive, and though ten categories of fear appeals are delineated, death, hell, and judgment are the primary focus of his appeals. Using a combination of the truth standard, the love standard, the utilitarian standard, the freedom standard, and the biblical standard, Whitefield’s use of fear appeals is deemed ethical. The effect of Whitefield’s fear appeals on his auditors is difficult to

prove conclusively. However, evidence suggests the appeals may have had some success in arousing fear.

The fear that Whitefield preached was unpleasant and many of his auditors would have rather not thought on such themes. Truth that is ignored is no less true, however. Whitefield considered it his divine mandate to confront his auditors with the hard truth.

Within a month of his first arrival in North America, Whitefield visited a dying Indian named Tomo Chachi. The Indian's nephew, Tooanoowee, spoke English and served as a translator for the meeting. Whitefield got right to the point by asking Tomo Chachi where he thought he would go after death. Tomo Chachi responded, "to heaven." Whitefield then asked Tooanoowee if he himself believed in heaven, to which he answered yes. He then asked if he believed in hell, pointing to the fire before them for emphases. To this question Tooanoowee responded, "no." Whitefield concluded from the exchange, "We may easily gather how natural it is to all mankind to believe there is a place of happiness, because they wish it to be true, and on the contrary how averse they are to believe in a place of torment, because they wish it may not be so."²⁵

Whitefield would spend the remainder of his life pointing to the fire of future judgment and hell to convince those who "wish it may not be so." In doing so, multitudes were converted to Christ and found eternal peace.

²⁵George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, From His Arrival at Savannah, to His Return to London*, 2nd ed. (London: W. Strahan, 1739), 3 [on-line]; accessed 14 August 2009; available from <http://openlibrary.org>; Internet.

APPENDIX 1

THE SERMONS IN *THE WORKS OF THE REVEREND GEORGE WHITEFIELD*

1. “The Seed of the Woman, and the Seed of the Serpent”—Genesis 3:15
2. “Walking With God”—Genesis 5:24
3. “Abraham’s Offering Up His Son Isaac”—Genesis 22:12
4. “The Great Duty of Family-Religion”—Joshua 24:15
5. “Christ the Best Husband” or “An Earnest Invitation to Young Women to Come and See Christ”—Psalm 45:10, 11
6. Britain’s Mercies and Britain’s Duty”—Psalm 105:45
7. “Thankfulness for Mercies Received, a Necessary Duty”—Psalm 107:30, 31
8. “The Necessity and Benefits of Religious Society”—Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
9. “The Folly and Danger of Not Being Righteous Enough”—Ecclesiastes 7:16
10. “A Preservative Against Unsettled Notions, and Want of Principles, in Regard to Righteousness and Christian Perfection”—Ecclesiastes 7:16
11. “The Benefits of an Early Piety”—Ecclesiastes 12:1
12. “Christ the Believer’s Husband”—Isaiah 54:5
13. “The Potter and the Clay”—Jeremiah 18:1-6
14. “The Lord Our Righteousness”—Jeremiah 23:6
15. “The Righteousness of Christ an Everlasting Righteousness”—Daniel 9:24
16. “The Observation of the Birth of Christ, the Duty of All Christians” or “The True

Way of Keeping Christmas”—Matthew 1:21

17. “The Temptation of Christ”—Matthew 4:1-11

18. “The Heinous Sin of Profane Cursing and Swearing”—Matthew 5:34

19. “Christ the Support of the Tempted”—Matthew 6:13

20. “Worldly Business No Plea for the Neglect of Religion”—Matthew 8:22

21. “Christ the Only Rest for the Weary and Heavy Laden”—Matthew 11:28

22. “The Folly and Danger of Parting With Christ for the Pleasures and Profits of Life”—
Matthew 8:23ff

23. “Marks of a True Conversion”—Matthew 18:3

24. “What Think Ye of Christ?”—Matthew 22:42

25. “The Wise and Foolish Virgins”—Matthew 25:13

26. “The Eternity of Hell-Torments”—Matthew 25:46

27. “Blind Bartimeus”—Mark 10:52

28. “Directions How to Hear Sermons”—Luke 8:18

29. “The Extent and Reasonableness of Self-Denial”—Luke 9:23

30. “Christ’s Transfiguration”—Luke 9:28-36

31. “The Care of the Soul Urged as the One Thing Needful”—Luke 10:42

32. “A Penitent Heart, the Best New Year’s Gift”—Luke 13:3

33. “The Gospel Supper”—Luke 14:22-24

34. “The Pharisee and Publican”—Luke 18:14

35. “The Conversion of Zaccheus”—Luke 19:9, 10

36. “The Marriage of Cana”—John 2:11

37. “The Duty of Searching the Scriptures”—John 5:39

38. "The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of All Believers"—John 7:37-39
39. "The Resurrection of Lazarus"—John 11:43, 44
40. "The Holy Spirit Convincing the World of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment"—John 16:8
41. "Saul's Conversion"—Acts 9:22
42. "Marks of Having Received the Holy Ghost"—Acts 19:2
43. "The Almost Christian"—Acts 26:28
44. "Christ, the Believer's Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption"—I Corinthians 1:30
45. "The Knowledge of Jesus Christ the Best Knowledge"—I Corinthians 2:2
46. "Of Justification By Christ"—I Corinthians 6:11
47. "The Great Duty of Charity Recommended"—I Corinthians 13:8
48. "Satan's Devices"—I Corinthians 2:11
49. "On Regeneration"—II Corinthians 5:17
50. "Christians, Temples of the Living God"—II Corinthians 6:16
51. "Christ the Only Preservative Against a Reprobate Spirit"—II Corinthians 13:5
52. "The Heinous Sin of Drunkenness"—Ephesians 5:18
53. "The Power of Christ's Resurrection"—Philippians 3:10
54. "Intercession Every Christian's Duty"—I Thessalonians 5:25
55. "Persecution Every Christian's Lot"—II Timothy 3:12
56. "An Exhortation to the People of God Not to be Discouraged in Their Way, by the Scoffs and Contempt of Wicked Men"—Hebrews 4:9
57. "Preached Before the Governor and Council, and the House of Assembly, in Georgia, January 28, 1770"—Zechariah 4:10

APPENDIX 2

THE SERMONS TAKEN IN SHORTHAND BY JOSEPH GURNEY

1. "A Faithful Minister's Parting Blessing"—Revelation 22:21
2. "Christ, the Believer's Refuge"—Psalm 46:1-6
3. "Soul Prosperity"—3 John 2
4. "The Gospel, A Dying Saint's Triumph"—Mark 16:15, 16
5. "Repentance and Conversion"—Acts 3:19
6. "The Beloved of God"—Deuteronomy 33:12
7. "The Furnace of Affliction"—Isaiah 48:10
8. "The Lord Our Light"—Isaiah 60:19, 20
9. "Glorifying God in the Fire" or "The Right Improvement of Affliction"—Isaiah 24:15
10. "Self-Enquiry Concerning the Work of God"—Numbers 23:23
11. "The Burning Bush"—Exodus 2:2, 3
12. "Soul Dejection"—Psalm 42:5
13. "Spiritual Baptism"—Romans 6:3, 4
14. "Neglect of Christ the Killing Sin"—John 5:40
15. "All Men's Place"—Ecclesiastes 6:6
16. "God, A Believer's Glory"—Isaiah 60:19
17. "Jacob's Ladder"—Genesis 28:12ff

18. “The Good Shepherd”—John 10:27, 28

APPENDIX 3

THE SERMONS PUBLISHED BY QUINTA PRESS

1. *The Serpent's Beguiling Eve Explained, Considered, and Applied to All Under Temptation*—Genesis 3:15
2. *Aaron's Blessing the Children of Israel*—Numbers 6:25, 26
3. *A Lecture on II Kings 4:1-8*—II Kings 4:1-8
4. *A Farewell Sermon: Psalm 105:45*—Psalm 105:45
5. *Christ Our Friend*—Song of Solomon 5:16
6. *The Best Match*—Isaiah 54:5
7. *The Balm of Gilead Displayed or Christ the Physician of Souls*—Jeremiah 8:20-22
8. *Fleeing From the Wrath to Come*—Matthew 3:7
9. *The Happy Mourner Comforted*—Matthew 5:4
10. *Christ the Physician of the Soul*—Matthew 11:12
11. *The Polite and Fashionable Diversions of the Age, Destructive of Soul and Body*—
Matthew 16:26
12. *Peter's Denial of His Lord*—Matthew 26:75
13. *The Invaluable Worth of a Soul*—Mark 8:36, 37
14. *The Barren Fig-Tree*—Mark 11:13-14
15. *The Spirit, Doctrines and Lives of Our Modern Clergy*—Luke 4:29
16. *The Prodigal Son*—Luke 15

17. *An Exhortation to Come and See Jesus*—Luke 19:9, 10
18. *The True Nature of Beholding the Lamb of God*—John 1:35, 36
19. *Jesus Christ the Only Way to Salvation*—John 3:3
20. *The Amazing Love of Christ*—John 11:36
21. *The Promise of the Spirit*—John 14:16
22. *The Unbeliever Convicted*—John 20:29
23. *Sermon on Romans 4:16*—Romans 4:16
24. *Farewell Parochial Sermon at Stonehouse*—Romans 8:30
25. *The Great Danger of Conformity to the World*—Romans 12:2
26. *The Kingdom of God*—Romans 14:17
27. *The Believer's Golden Chain*—I Corinthians 1:30
28. *The Putting on the New Man a Certain Mark of the Real Christian*—Ephesians 4:24
29. *The Faith of the Gospel*—Philippians 1:27-28

APPENDIX 4

THE SERMONS PUBLISHED BY MCFARLAN
FROM CAMBUSLANG

1. "The Method of Grace"—Jeremiah 6:14
2. "The Good Shepherd, A Farewell Sermon"—John 10:27, 28

APPENDIX 5

AN ADDITIONAL ADDRESS BY WHITEFIELD

A Short Address to Persons of All Denominations, Occasioned by the Alarm of an Intended Invasion—Job 32:10

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ABSTRACT

A RHETORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF *ARGUMENTUM AD BACULUM* IN THE PUBLISHED SERMONS OF GEORGE WHITEFIELD

Frankie Joe Melton, Jr., Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009
Chairperson: Dr. Robert A. Vogel

This dissertation examines the use of *argumentum ad baculum* in preaching in general and the sermons of George Whitefield in particular. *Argumentum ad baculum* has traditionally been considered an informal fallacy of relevance. The fallacy can be defined as an appeal to force or an appeal to fear. Chapter 1 discusses the relationship of *argumentum ad baculum* with the empirical study of fear appeals and the rhetorical use of *pathos*. Attention is also given to the preaching of Whitefield and his place in the history of preaching as an innovator. Whitefield's role in the shift to a more passionate and emotional sermon style is noted. The chapter also addresses the challenges a study of Whitefield's sermons presents.

Chapter 2 is devoted to defining *argumentum ad baculum*, examining the history of the phrase, the two ways it has been defined, the nature of it as a fallacy, and fear appeals as a part of the definition. The chapter includes a discussion of source credibility in relation to fear appeals.

Chapter 3 analyses the sermons of Whitefield to identify his use of fear appeals. The types of fear appeals he used in his sermons are listed along with

evidentiary sermon material. The types of material Whitefield used to formulate the appeals are also discussed.

Chapter 4 gives attention to the effect of Whitefield's fear appeals on his auditors. In order for an appeal to be effective, it must first arouse fear in the recipients of the appeal. Historical narratives are examined from Whitefield himself, eyewitness accounts, and personal testimonies of those who were present at his meetings. The chapter provides evidence of the general and specific effect of Whitefield's fear appeals.

Chapter 5 concerns the ethicality of Whitefield's appeals. The chapter surveys a number of standards for ethical judgment. The chapter argues that Whitefield's use of fear in his published sermons was ethical, primarily because of the intention with which he used them.

Chapter 6 offers guidelines for the contemporary use of *argumentum ad baculum* in preaching. Modern audiences are unaccustomed to the use of fear for persuasive means. However, this type of argumentation can be used ethically and effectively.

VITA

Frankie Joe Melton, Jr.

PERSONAL

Born: August 8, 1974, Chesterfield, South Carolina
Parents: Frankie, Sr., and Patsy Melton
Married: Amy Suzanne Brigman, May 10, 2005
Children: Lydia Catherine, born November 8, 2006
Sarah Elizabeth, stillborn October 19, 2008
Noah Franklin, born June 4, 2009

EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Andrew Jackson High School, Kershaw, South Carolina
B.A., Charleston Southern University, 1995
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001

MINISTERIAL

Interim Pastor, Evergreen Christian Church, Walterboro, South Carolina,
1994-1995
Pastor, Mt. Olivet Baptist Church, Patrick, South Carolina, 1995-1999
Pastor, New Hope Baptist Church, Cross Anchor, South Carolina, 2001- 2002
Pastor, Leitchfield Crossing Baptist Church, Munfordville, Kentucky, 2004-
2008
Pastor, Heath Springs Baptist Church, Heath Springs, South Carolina, 2008

ACADEMIC

Grader, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999
Visiting Lecturer, Moldova Bible Seminary, Kishinev, Moldova, 2002
Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer 2008

ORGANIZATIONAL

Evangelical Theological Society
Evangelical Homiletics Society
The Academy of Homiletics