

THE RHETORICAL PARADIGM IN THE SERVICE  
OF THE SNAKE HANDLING CULT

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Presented to the  
Department of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Western Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by

Kala Van Hoorebeke

August 1980

Chairman: Professor Clyde J. Faries

## ABSTRACT

A unique religious movement began in the rural area of eastern Tennessee in the early 1900s. The Snake Handlers, or Holiness people, took the Bible verses of St. Mark, Chapter 16, verses 17 and 18, as a literal commandment. Members of this group practiced the "five signs" of a true Christian discussed in the verses of St. Mark. The signs they practiced were: speaking in tongues, laying on of hands (faith healing), casting out devils, drinking poison and handling snakes. Their unusual practices drew media coverage in the 1930s which resulted in the passage of state laws prohibiting the handling of snakes in public. In 1976, the Snake Handlers took their case to the Supreme Court. They wanted the right to practice their religion as they saw fit. They lost. Though still outlawed, the Snake Handlers continue to practice the "signs" they believe in.

This study investigates the rhetorical methods and responses found in the Holiness movement. Historical, political and sociological data are used to describe the forces that brought about the development of the movement. Book, newspaper and magazine accounts of services and deaths due to snake bites are used to document the spread of the movement throughout the southern states. Taped interviews with a Holiness preacher and tapes of Holiness church

services are used to determine the kinds of rhetorical methods and responses found in a Holiness service. The rhetorical methods and responses are evaluated utilizing Lloyd Bitzer's theory of situational rhetorical responses. Findings and suggestions for further research are discussed.

APPROVAL PAGE

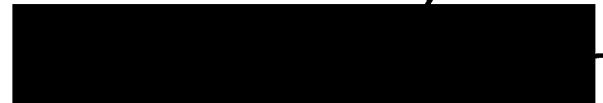
This thesis by Kala Van Hoorebeke is accepted in its present form by the Department of Communications and Arts of Western Illinois University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree Master of Arts.



Chairman, Examining Committee



Member, Examining Committee



Member, Examining Committee

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

THE RHETORICAL PARADIGM IN THE SERVICE  
OF THE SNAKE HANDLING CULT

A Thesis

Presented to the  
Department of Communication Arts and Sciences  
Western Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
Kala Van Hoorebeke  
August 1980

Chairman: Professor Clyde J. Faries

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one ever writes a thesis alone. Many people offer help along the way. I wish to thank those people who helped me along the way.

This study owes its existence to the faith and unending patience of Dr. Clyde Faires. His thoughtful advice and guidance gave substance and direction to my work.

Thanks also goes to my other committee members, Dr. Ned Shearer and Dr. Robert Holton. They provided assistance in many ways in addition to critiquing my work. Their support for my unusual topic is greatly appreciated.

A special thank you belongs to Reverend Alfred Ball and his congregation in Newport, Tennessee. Reverend Ball provided invaluable information about the Snake Handlers. Both he and his followers were very kind and hospitable to me during my visit.

## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis to my mother and father, Loyd and Corinne Van Hoorebeke. Their love and support have sustained me throughout my life.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements . . . . .	ii
Dedication . . . . .	iii
Chapter	
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
The Problem . . . . .	2
Justification . . . . .	3
Procedure . . . . .	6
Review of Literature . . . . .	6
Method of Investigation . . . . .	15
Benefits of Study . . . . .	20
1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND . . . . .	24
The Holiness Movement . . . . .	34
2. THE RHETORICAL SITUATION . . . . .	62
The Exigence . . . . .	62
The Rhetorical Audience . . . . .	64
Constraints of the Situation . . . . .	66
3. THE RHETORICAL ACT . . . . .	81
A Holiness Church Service in the 1940s . . . . .	81
A Holiness Church Service in the 1970s . . . . .	84
Components of a Service . . . . .	90
The Music . . . . .	90
Rhetorical Application . . . . .	94

	Page
Signs Practiced By Audience Members . . . . .	96
Prayers, Tongues and Anointing . . . . .	97
Snake Handling . . . . .	102
Handling Fire . . . . .	111
Drinking Poison . . . . .	112
Rhetorical Application . . . . .	116
The Preacher and Signs . . . . .	124
Faith Healing . . . . .	124
Casting Out Devils . . . . .	127
The Preacher and the Message . . . . .	130
Rhetorical Application . . . . .	140
Rhetorical Evaluation of the Holiness Movement . . . . .	149
4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	168
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	172
APPENDICES	
Appendix A - Letter from Cecil Browning dated July 27, 1974 . . . . .	182
Appendix B - Letter from Cecil Browning dated August 12, 1974 . . . . .	185
Appendix C - Song - Darkest Hours . . . . .	187
Appendix D - Song - Zion, Oh Zion . . . . .	189
TAPES (On file with original thesis in Western Illinois University Archives, 6th Floor, Western Illinois University Library)	

## INTRODUCTION

During the 1930s, public attention was drawn to newspaper and magazine accounts of dramatic acts of faith performed by members of small rural churches in the hills of the South. The media labeled these people the Snake Handling Cult.<sup>1</sup> Today, there exists a variety of churches that follow the dictates of the Bible verses that drew so much attention years ago. Alfred Ball, Holiness pastor, in Newport, Tennessee, stated in a personal interview on May 27, 1978 that there is no central organization for the Holiness churches.<sup>2</sup> Each church has its own doctrine and methods for practicing the signs. For example, the Jesus Only sect also handles snakes but in a manner quite different from the Holiness churches. To an outsider, the Holiness and Jesus Only services might look similar, but to the members, the differences are very real. The Snake Handlers, as they were named, based their belief on verses found in the King James version of the Bible, St. Mark, Chapter 16, verses 16, 17 and 18, which read:

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils, they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.<sup>3</sup>

### The Problem

It is the author's opinion that the beliefs and practices of the Holiness and Jesus Only church services serve to fulfill needs that these people have, needs that they have not been able to satisfy in any other setting. The church services are rhetorical settings for the members' affirmations of faith and communication with their God and fellow believers. The practices they encourage may be beyond the realm of possibility for the outsiders, but provide comfort and feelings of security to those who believe.

One of the purposes of this study will be to describe the rhetorical situation in which these practices are brought into being. The author will seek to identify those forces that made this type of service popular. There are other churches, Baptist and Pentecostal, for example, which practice the less dangerous signs of speaking in tongues and faith healing.<sup>4</sup> These churches may be found over a fairly wide geographical area and their members represent diverse social and economic backgrounds. Members of the churches who practice all five signs come from a distinct geographical location, and except for migration to industrial cities for jobs, have remained a localized phenomenon. Therefore, these churches offer an opportunity for the study of an unusual rhetorical situation.

The author shares the belief with writers in the fields of sociology (Cobb) and psychology (Wood; La Barre)

that certain historical, cultural, sociological and economic circumstances were responsible for the birth and maturity of these churches in the rural areas of the South. The findings of the authors mentioned will be discussed in detail later in the study in order to describe how the scene was set for the rhetorical situation.

Identifying and describing the factors that brought about the unique practices of these churches is a necessary first step. The next step is to study the church services and discover what rhetorical strategies and tactics were employed and how well they were adapted to the needs of the audience and the circumstances.

It is the author's hypothesis that all of the acts performed during the church services such as snake handling, speaking in tongues, faith healing, handling fire, casting out devils and drinking poison are utilized by the leaders and members of these churches as dramatic persuasive proofs in the rhetorical acts of the religious service.

#### Justification

Briefly, the church service is a rhetorical act because it contains all the elements needed for communication as defined by a leading communication theorist, Thomas M. Scheidel.<sup>5</sup> These components include communicators who participate in verbal and nonverbal exchanges within a given context.<sup>6</sup> This exchange is bound by the physical dimensions of the setting and the psychological character of the

participants which encompasses their backgrounds and expectations. The exchanges are modified by feedback in an attempt to better meet the needs and expectations of the participants. The church services of the Holiness movement employ several channels of communication including singing, preaching, praying and practicing the signs. Examples of church sermons provided in this thesis illustrate how important audience participation is in providing feedback to the preacher and how the audience acts as a modifying agent in the communication process.<sup>7</sup>

The practices of these churches might appear to be beyond the scope of rhetorical criticism. So much attention has been focused on the snake handling activities that the interactions of the rest of the service have been neglected. Each component of the service plays an integral role in the exchange among members and serves to strengthen the bonds between them.

Aristotle stated in his classical work that rhetoric is the "faculty of discovering all the possible means of persuasion in any subject."<sup>8</sup> The church services demonstrate how the message of the preacher and the action of the congregation are interrelated; how they communicate with each other.

Not all snake handling services are alike; different churches modify the meaning of the Bible verses found in St. Mark to fit the needs of their congregations. For example,

one church may put emphasis on snake handling exclusively. Another may choose to practice snake handling only on special occasions. It was the author's initial impression that snakes were handled at each service throughout the year. Because of the habits of snakes, this isn't possible.<sup>9</sup> When snakes aren't available, other signs will take on more importance.<sup>10</sup>

Another problem in studying a movement such as this is the changing nature of the service itself. Early services might appear to be little more than gatherings of collective hysteria. Some published accounts make the services appear to be leaderless. This may be due in part to the tremendous amount of attention spent on describing the dramatic practices performed during the service.

Charismatic leaders have been important in the spread and continuation of the movement. The Holiness and Jesus Only churches (for the purposes of this study, these two groups will be considered as one with regard to the practice of the five signs and will be referred to collectively as the Holiness movement) have pastors and church elders who are responsible for conducting services. These leaders are responsible for determining what signs are practiced in their respective churches. The fact that the audience participation is high in the services only confirms a basic concept of rhetoric: that the audience is the end and object of the communication.<sup>11</sup> The messages conveyed in these services

are purposeful; they provide a form of social interaction that is denied to these people in other aspects of their daily lives. The end effect of the message of the service is consistent with the intention of the speaker and the audience.<sup>12</sup> Since the nature of the church services contains all the essential components of a communication situation, and since these services meet specific needs for their members, it is a topic that is worthy of rhetorical study.

#### Procedure

The study is descriptive in nature. Materials gathered from books, newspapers, magazine articles and personal correspondence provide the bulk of the historical data. Taped interviews, a film and taped copies of Holiness church services are used to study the rhetoric of contemporary services as they are conducted in one church. All the data will be utilized to identify the rhetorical situation, to identify the strategies and tactics used in the services and to evaluate how well these strategies meet the needs of the rhetorical situation.

#### Review of Literature

Early historical data about the church are limited to newspaper and magazine accounts of the more spectacular feats of snake handling and brief notices of deaths due to snake bites and the ingestion of deadly poisons.

Harold Preece and Celia Kraft<sup>13</sup> devote one chapter of their book about little known religious groups in the

South to an account of a snake handling service attended by Mr. Preece. Keith Kerman published an article about the activities on one of the early churches.<sup>14</sup> Both accounts are colorful and capture the setting and emotional flavor of the services. Mr. Preece's account is cut short by his hasty retreat from the unfamiliar and dangerous surroundings.

Weston La Barre's book, They Shall Take Up Serpents: Psychology of the Southern Snake Handling Cult, provided the most extensive historical account of the origin and growth of the churches.<sup>15</sup> The historical information helps explain the forces that shaped the psychological make-up of the members he studied. La Barre compared the practices of the Holiness movement with other cultural groups who handled snakes in religious services. He used Freudian concepts to analyze a Holiness preacher and to illustrate his theory about why the practice of handling snakes was popular with these people.

Berthold E. Schwartz attended a service and described the rituals (practicing the signs) done by the members.<sup>16</sup> He attempted to explain why the members were able to survive snake bites, handle flaming torches without getting burned and ingest large doses of strychnine without suffering any ill effects. He discussed the effects of snake venom and strychnine on the central nervous system and described physiological and psychological mechanisms that could account for the success of the faithful in escaping injury and death.

One reason offered as an explanation for their ability to withstand great pain was that the "ordeals" are known about since early childhood, so the "expectation" of being free from pain and have immunity to fire and strychnine is anticipated.<sup>17</sup> Anton J. Boisen and William Wood examined the believer's behavior in terms of personality formation. Boisen described several religious groups and used them to demonstrate the relationship between an emotional religious experience and a personality crisis that originated in social and economic disorganization.<sup>18</sup> He stated that the deep emotional religious experiences of these groups sprang from the need to reintegrate the personality of the individual as well as reinstate personal relationships with others and redefine values.

While Boisen contended that it was a "reorganization" of the personality that took place as a result of a "crisis," Wood's study sought to prove that the personality types who participated in highly emotional religious services would vary in some regular way from the personality types who participated in more sedate religious services.<sup>19</sup> He studied a group of Holiness people as well as a group of more sedate church goers in the same geographical location in the rural South. The Rorschach ink blot tests were used to isolate personality variables. The ink blot test results were different for the two groups. Wood's explanation agreed with Boisen's theory. He felt that the motivating force for

participation in the emotional services was a response to a crisis and that the religious practices were attempts to reorganize one's personality in the face of a crisis. He suggested that the continual need members felt to fight "backsliding" (reverting to old sinful ways of behavior) was an indication that the process was not complete.<sup>20</sup>

The above psychological studies dealt with the Holiness religious movement from a personal perspective. They were concerned with the individual's psychological adjustment to the changes and stresses that confronted them. Alice Cobb's dissertation is a sociological study of a community in transition. The study covers a thirty-year span and describes how changing economic conditions affected the values, attitudes and beliefs of the citizens.<sup>21</sup> The author traced the historical background of the area and how the Great Depression brought about unwelcome interference from the "outside." Agencies came into the communities of Mutton Valley and tried to better the economic conditions of the people living there. A school was established; a religious organization founded; a mission in the area and the federal government provided food and work assistance programs. All fell far short of their intended goals because they neglected to take the local values and customs into consideration when they entered the area. The author traced the development of the Holiness faith in Mutton Valley, Kentucky, and explained why it was successful when other religious groups failed to gain a following.

The Holiness religion, unlike the other religious groups and the other programs, grew from the beliefs of the people of Mutton Valley. It was their way of incorporating existing values, customs and beliefs into a more acceptable form. It was their way of coping with the tremendous amount of change brought about by the fall of the agricultural economy in the rural South. It was their way of dealing with the industrialization and urbanization of the South.

These studies of the Holiness movement provide academic perspectives to the motivations of the people involved in this movement. Until recently, information about the people themselves, their personal views and reasons for practicing their faith was limited to sporadic media quotations. Interest in the Holiness religion in the early 1970s produced materials written from the standpoint of the church members themselves.

Karen Carden and Robert Pelton are native Tennesseans who have published two books, The Persecuted Prophets: The Story of the Frenzied Serpent Handlers, and Snake Handlers: God Fearers? or Fanatics?<sup>22</sup> about the practices of the Holiness people. Both books have an abundant supply of pictures of Holiness people practicing the five signs they believe in. The authors have traveled to churches in several states and attended the "Homecoming" in Carson Springs, Tennessee, in July, 1973.<sup>23</sup> There is no attempt made by the authors to explain why the practices are done. They simply

wanted to portray the people as they are. The faithful are allowed to speak for themselves and tell their side of the story.

The pictures and quotations in the books by Carden and Pelton offer the closest look at the people who practice this religion today. The disadvantage of this type of material is that it doesn't capture the process of the service nor its emotional fluctuations. An early attempt was made by this author to obtain a copy of a documentary film, "They Shall Take Up Serpents," produced by Mr. Joseph Weber. The film was owned by station WKYC-TV in Cleveland, Ohio. A reply from the station stated that the film could not be rented or purchased. A later attempt by the author located another film by the same name that was produced by Thomas Burton of the English Department of East Tennessee State University. Viewing the film provided information about the Holiness church services that had not been available in other sources. The acts of handling snakes, drinking a solution of carbon tetrachloride, speaking in tongues, and faith healing were all performed. One member was bitten by a snake, and the faithful prayed for healing. Part of the message delivered by the preacher was included in the movie, but due to poor editing and sound recording methods, it lacked clarity.

The most neglected part of the service in all of the sources discussed thus far has been the preacher's message.

Early accounts give bits and pieces of messages given by different church leaders. The only recorded messages were quotes in newspaper reports of services such as the piece done by Keith Kerman. La Barre has a few examples of the types of messages delivered during early years of the movement, but no complete script appears in his text. Carden and Pelton documented messages from several meetings they attended, but none in their entirety. The preachers of the early years were men of sparse educational backgrounds. They were not in the habit of preparing sermon texts; most were lucky to be able to read the Bible they preached from.<sup>24</sup>

Early attempts to contact Holiness ministers were not successful. One member of a church, Mr. Cecil Browning of Switzer, West Virginia, did respond to the author's letters. Talk of taping a church service by Mr. Browning did not produce any results.

Finally, the author was able to travel to Newport, Tennessee, in May, 1978. There she met Reverend Alfred Ball, a Holiness preacher. In the short span of a weekend, Reverend Ball answered questions in three taped interviews about such topics as his church, the history of the movement, the signs practiced in his church, and the role he played in the church services. Reverend Ball permitted this writer to attend a radio broadcast he and some of his flock made and to witness the service held that Sunday evening. He permitted the taping of the service on two Sunday evenings. The experience of attending a Holiness church service was by far the most vivid

source of information. It provided the most important data about the role of the preacher in the church and his influence on the extent to which the signs are practiced and how they are practiced during the service.

The literature that dealt with the Holiness movement communications viewpoint was limited to two sources. One was an article by Charles Braden that listed the types of appeals used by the Holiness and other religious groups that were growing in number in the 1940s. It was Braden's contention that the groups attracted large numbers of people because they fulfilled basic needs that the more sedate churches could not. One appeal,<sup>25</sup> for example, was the appeal of security. The author stated that churches that maintain a more intellectual and liberal interpretation of the Bible may meet the needs of those church members who can appreciate and respond to complicated logical reasoning. He felt that those who did not possess a good educational background found the authoritative statements of faith and belief made by churches like the Holiness movement more satisfying.<sup>26</sup> Another appeal<sup>27</sup> used was the need for excitement and new experiences. Mr. Braden felt that some people wander from group to group seeking the widest possible range of encounters.

A recently published book takes a much different approach to the reasons why some of the newer religious groups have attracted so many converts from middle-class

college-educated young people and discusses how these groups maintain their membership.<sup>28</sup> The Holiness churches are mentioned and discussed briefly in the book but are not a prime example of the groups the authors studied.

An interview with Marjoe Gortner, former child evangelical preacher, in Conway and Siegelman's book, offers some ideas about the place of rhetoric of religious movements.<sup>29</sup> Marjoe wanted to alert the public to the danger of believing too deeply in some ministers who might be more interested in financial gain than in heavenly rewards.

Conway and Siegelman's focus was on various groups that, to outward appearances, took over the personalities of their adherents. Instead of speaking about persuasive tactics, they talked to "brainwashing" and "snapping" (the latter is a term coined by the authors to indicate a sudden personality change undergone by people who join such groups as the moonies, Hare Krishnas, Love Israel, et cetera) to describe the tactics and results obtained by the group's methods. Rather than this change of behavior being a result of "reorganization of the personality in the face of a crisis," as Boisen and other authors contend, Conway and Siegelman contend that the "crisis" is really an "alteration of the complex organization of the brain."<sup>30</sup> For a variety of reasons, the way the person has been accustomed to processing information comes under stress and finally "snaps." "Information disease" is the result of the breakdown of the old personality. A new personality then takes its place.

The authors integrated knowledge from the fields of traditional rhetoric, communication theory, cybernetics, systems theory and theoretical biology to support their hypothesis.

Their work offers insights into traditional techniques and methods of attitude change and provides an explanation why certain charismatic groups are able to control the thinking processes of their adherents. The authors also contend that the cults represent collective extremes of snapping. They feel that forces in our society can drive the average person to snap and bring about extreme changes in personality on an individual basis.<sup>31</sup> The work offers the rhetorical critic a different perspective on the effects of the historical background and the influence of the mass media in modern society.

#### Method of Investigation

This study is descriptive in nature. Using material gathered from library research, taped interviews and personal experiences, this author describes the rhetorical acts of the church services, the historical background that influenced the development of the Holiness movement, and the responses of the members to the situation. It is the author's opinion that the religious practices of this movement constitute an answer to an urgent unmet need in the lives of these people.

This study will look closely at the importance of the rhetorical situation as the compelling force that seeks fulfillment through the implementation of a fitting response. The concept of the rhetorical situation as a prime motivating

the concept of the rhetorical situation as a prime motivating force in the development of rhetoric has been treated as a background factor by some rhetorical critics.<sup>32</sup>

Lloyd Bitzer defined the rhetorical situation as

a complex of persons, events, objects and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation can so constrain human decision or action as to bring<sub>3</sub> about the significant modification of the exigence.

To illustrate this concept Bitzer qualified when rhetoric is situational.<sup>34</sup> It is: 1) when rhetorical discourse comes into existence as response to a situation; 2) when the situation needs discourse that is capable of participating with the situation and thereby altering its reality; and 3) when the discourse attempts to serve as a fitting response to the situations that needed it. Finally, the rhetoric is situational when the situation, not the speaker nor the persuasive intent of the message, controls the rhetoric utilized in that situation.

This approach to criticism of rhetorical discourse shifts the emphasis of the controlling factors of the communication process from the speaker's intent, or the message he hopes to deliver to the audience, to the reason for the gathering or the unmet need that looks for ways of resolving itself. Once the need for the rhetoric is discovered, the methods chosen by the speaker to help meet that need can be identified and evaluated in light of the circumstances of the situation.

Bitzer described three constituents of the rhetorical situation: the exigence, the audience, and the constraints which shape the message and which can help influence the audience about the message. An exigence is defined by Bitzer as "an imperfection marked by urgency: it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be."<sup>35</sup> This exigence, or urgent need is something that can be modified by discourse. A horrible earthquake certainly brings about urgent needs, but the quake itself cannot be modified by a speech.

There may be a number of exigencies in any rhetorical situation. The people involved in the situation may or may not be aware of the exigencies, but they are there just the same. One exigence will usually prevail as the controlling factor in the situation. It will "specify the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected."<sup>36</sup>

The audience of the rhetorical situation must be one that is affected by the exigence and will participate in modifying the situation.<sup>37</sup> While there may be a large number of people in attendance on any given occasion, the true rhetorical audience consists only of those people who can in some way change that situation. For example, a political candidate may address a large crowd at a ball game and only those who are registered voters can be mediators of change.

The rhetorical situation also contains a set of constraints made up of "persons, events, objects and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power

to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence."<sup>38</sup> Examples of sources of constraints include: beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests and motives.<sup>39</sup> These forces need to be recognized by the speaker in order for him to use them and adapt his own constraints such as his character, logical proofs and style. Thus, Bitzer identifies two main classes of constraints; those used by the speaker and his method (classically referred to as "artistic proofs"), and the constraints within the situation that are engaged ("inartistic proofs").<sup>40</sup>

When these three constituents are present, an urgent exigence, an audience that is able to bring about change and constraints that govern what tactics and methods are suitable to use to effect this change, then a rhetorical situation exists. When a speaker enters a rhetorical situation, his presence and his message are additional parts of the situation.<sup>41</sup>

The author uses historical, sociological and psychological data to describe the constituents of the rhetorical situation in the snake handling services. The material will be used to determine what forces and events brought about the need for the Holiness movement. An attempt will be made to discover the ruling exigence of the situation and what modifications it might have undergone over the years. Examples of past and present services will be used to identify what aspects of the services are common to both and what changes if any have taken place.

Whether the ruling exigence weakened or changed altogether will be examined. Bitzer stated that one reason for change in the manner in which the audience responds to the situation is that the very act of the recurrence of the situation and the rhetorical responses to them causes the form of the discourse not only to be established but to gain a power of its own; "the tradition itself tends to function as a constraint upon any new response in the form."<sup>42</sup>

The audience of the rhetorical situation will be studied in part from the standpoint of accounts of participation in the rhetorical situation of the church service. Historical data will be used to describe the audiences of the early services and data from the author's visits and the materials in the books by Pelton and Carden will be used to describe the audiences of present day churches. Information about the background of the audience and the constraints they bring to the situation will be analyzed.

The constraints of the situation that are connected with the speaker will be identified by the artistic proofs utilized in the situation. Artistic proofs consist of the ethical, emotional and logical appeals employed by the speaker.<sup>43</sup> Interviews with the Reverend Alfred Ball will be used to provide insight into the proofs he uses. His sermons as well as samples from other ministers will be used to identify the types of proofs used and the importance placed on each.

Once the aspects of the rhetorical situation are identified, it will be necessary to determine if the discourse was successful in bringing about a response appropriate to the situation.<sup>44</sup> It is necessary to identify the rhetorical methods and responses used in the services in order to evaluate how appropriate they were.

The rest of this paper is devoted to describing the rhetorical situation, identifying the rhetorical methods and responses found in the situation and evaluating the effectiveness of those methods with regard to the constraints of the situation. Chapter I describes the historical setting and the forces that helped bring about the need for the Holiness movement and how the movement has evolved to date. Chapter II identifies the rhetorical audience and the constraints of the situation. Chapter III describes the rhetorical methods and responses. The focus will be on the relationship each part has to the other. Chapter IV is a summary of the findings.

#### Benefits of the Study

It is hoped that this study will provide a better understanding of the Holiness movement, especially its beliefs and practices, and provide an understanding of the kinds of rhetorical methods that are employed and their relationship to the changes that transpire.

FOOTNOTES - INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Weston La Barre, They Shall Take Up Serpents; Psychology of the Southern Snake Handling Cult (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball, May 27, 1978 in Newport, Tennessee.

<sup>3</sup>Mark 16: 16-18.

<sup>4</sup>Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1958), pp. 82-84.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas M. Scheidel, Speech Communication and Human Behavior Interaction (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1968), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-46.

<sup>8</sup>Rhetoric, translated by J. E. C. Welldon (London: 1886), pp. 1, 10. In Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird and Waldo W. Braden, Speech Criticism, 2nd ed. (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1970), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup>Harold Preece and Celia Kraft, Dew on Jordan (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1946), p. 46.

<sup>10</sup>Karen W. Carden and Robert W. Pelton, The Persecuted Prophets: The Story of the Frenzied Serpent Handlers (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, 1976), p. 150.

<sup>11</sup>Lester Thonssen, A. Craig Baird and Waldo W. Braden, Speech Criticism, 2nd ed. (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1970), p. 18.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Keith Kerman, "Rattlesnake Religion," In Lealon Jones, ed., Eve's Stepchildren: A Collection of Folk Americana (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1942), pp. 93-102.

<sup>15</sup>Much of La Barre's historical information was borrowed from a work done by J. B. Collins, entitled: Tennessee Snake Handlers (Chattanooga Free Press, 1947), pp. 36. This publication has since gone out of print.

<sup>16</sup>Berthold E. Schwartz, "Ordeal by Serpents, Fire and Strychnine," Psychiatric Quarterly, 34, March 1960, pp. 405-429.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

<sup>18</sup>Anton J. Boisen, Religion in Crisis and Custom: A Sociological and Psychological Study (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958).

<sup>19</sup>William Woodhull Wood, "Culture and Personality Aspects of the Pentecostal Holiness Religion." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1961.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>Alice Lucy Cobb, "Sect Religion and Social Change in an Isolated Rural Community of Southern Appalachia (with) Cast Story Fruit of the Land." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1965.

<sup>22</sup>Robert W. Pelton and Karen W. Carden, Snake Handlers: God Fearers? or Fanatics? (New York: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1974).

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>24</sup>La Barre, They Shall Take Up Serpents, p. 12.

<sup>25</sup>Charles S. Braden, "Why are the Cults Growing?" Christian Century, LXI (January 1974), pp. 45-47.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Flow Conway and Jim Siegelman, Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1978).

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-52. Marjoe Gortner was hailed as the "world's youngest ordained minister," having embarked on a tremendously successful career as the "Shirley Temple" of the Bible Belt at the age of four. Marjoe later revealed his rhetorical tactics in a documentary he made in the late 1960s. In the interview mentioned in Conway and Siegelman's book, Marjoe discussed some of the age-old revival tactics used by countless evangelical preachers. He has even lectured

to college students and has one lecture entitled, "Rhetoric and Charisma." In it, he demonstrates that faith healing is a trick that will adhere to those very same tactics.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 183-192.

<sup>32</sup>Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," Philosophy and Rhetoric, I (January, 1963), p. 2.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>Patrick O. Marsh, Persuasive Speaking (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 191, 192.

<sup>44</sup>Bitzer, p. 10.

## Chapter I

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The activities of the Holiness movement need to be viewed from their historical antecedents in order to put them in a proper perspective. This chapter will deal with the historical, religious, economic, technological and cultural forces that helped shape this movement.

Emotional religious activities did not originate with the Holiness movement. Their roots are to be found in the history of Methodism. The first Great Awakening originated in the New England states in the year 1734.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, this first wave of religious revivals resulted in a modification of Calvinistic beliefs. Some of these basic beliefs<sup>2</sup> included: 1) the importance of one supreme deity; 2) the worthlessness and sinfulness of man; 3) the importance of the Bible as the sole authority for beliefs and actions in religious and ethical matters; and 4) the duty of man to follow without question the will of God (predestination).

These beliefs fostered the development of strong attitudes of submission to authority and the importance of duty which included the suppression of secular pleasures. According to Wood, such attitudes could only be supported by feeling of guilt and anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

The First Great Awakening<sup>4</sup> provided hope to those who would have been lost under Calvinism. The most important change that resulted was the belief that salvation was available to those who earnestly sought it. To obtain God's promise of a joyous afterlife, the sinner had to change his ways and give up "sinful" behavior and fight the temptation to backslide.<sup>5</sup> Some results of the First Great Awakening included: 1) visitors in the pulpits; 2) traveling spellbinders; 3) threats of Hell-fire; 4) prayer meetings and special religious gatherings; 5) rushes of members; 6) controversies; 7) secessions from churches; and 8) limited sanction for the expression of religious emotion.

The impact of the First Great Awakening spread to the South. John and Charles Wesley, under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Christian Gospel, set sail with the purpose of saving the souls of the Indians and landed at Savannah, Georgia on February 5, 1736.<sup>6</sup> Their journeys extended as far west as Alabama and as far north as Virginia. The Holiness and Pentecostal groups were offshoots of this early evangelical expedition.<sup>7</sup>

The Second Great Awakening added its own influences to Evangelical Christianity in America. It occurred during a wave of migration across the Appalachian region through the Cumberland Valley into Kentucky and Tennessee. The area was known for its lawless, violent population. In 1796, Logan County, Kentucky was known as "Rogues Harbor"<sup>8</sup> because it

was inhabited by horse thieves, absconding debtors, bank robbers and criminals that had escaped from other states.<sup>9</sup>

James McGready, a hell-fire and damnation preacher from North Carolina, arrived in Kentucky to preach repentance. McGready, along with the McGee brothers and Peter Cartwright, a Methodist, were among the most influential preachers in this era.<sup>10</sup> Large camp meetings were held in the open air; McGready would "pace up and down exhorting the audience to repent and escape eternal damnation."<sup>11</sup>

Although the message was the same, the need for repentance of sin and the promise of salvation, some very curious practices were born out of this movement. Meetings would last for days. There were constant preaching and singing. Hysteria was common, and both men and women would pass out from the excesses of the meetings, only to revive later and claim to be saved.

Probably the most extraordinary meeting was held in 1801 at Cave Ridge, Kentucky where almost 20,000 people gathered outdoors to seek their salvation.<sup>12</sup> The hysteria of the meeting exhibited itself in several ways. Some people would be overtaken by the "Jerks"--snapping bodily movements that would bend the body over double, or jerk the head backward or forward or side to side so quickly that it would be difficult to distinguish the features. Persons were seen to "sway forward and backward, almost to the floor without falling."<sup>13</sup>

Others would express their feelings with a "holy laugh," or "bark," and engage in activity known as "treeing the Devil."<sup>14</sup> This activity consisted of falling down on all fours, barking like a dog and forming a pack of "dogs" that would gather at the base of a tree, yelp, bark, and snap in a symbolic effort to "tree the Devil." If the participants didn't care for acting like a dog, they were free to engage in "frog hopping" instead.<sup>15</sup>

The continual day and night preaching, as well as the rugged conditions, contributed to the emotional atmosphere of the meeting. People shouted, sobbed, leaped in the air, writhed on the ground, danced, and finally collapsed from the ordeal. The revival spread like a contagion to Tennessee and surrounding areas. Preachers rode through the hills to maintain the religious fervor started in Kentucky. The movement was able to sustain itself for several more years.<sup>16</sup>

The effects of this revival era are still influential in parts of the South today. Some of the more important elements of the frontier religion were: 1) preaching by uneducated men; 2) use of the institutionalized camp meeting; 3) socializing at religious gatherings; 4) emphasis upon individual experience; 5) energetic religious participation; and 6) belief in a God who could and would intervene miraculously in a person's life.<sup>17</sup>

The primitive frontier conditions provided an ideal setting for the revival of emotional expression. There was

an absence of emotional outlets for the pioneers; settlements were few and far between. Most people were poor and uneducated. The camp meetings provided a welcome relief from isolation and hardships. The traveling preachers brought the "Word" to people in a way that they could understand and thus created a freedom of expressing emotions that was denied in their everyday lives.<sup>18</sup>

The South has been host to many sects of religious belief.<sup>19</sup> There are those, like the Baptist, that have evolved from sect to denomination. The Baptist and other Protestant religions incorporated beliefs from Calvinism and Evangelicalism to form their own hierarchy of values. The Pentecostals are a sect that has also formed along the sect-denomination-church line of development. The Pentecostals and Holiness Churches share some basic beliefs about salvation and how one should conduct his or her daily life. In order to see how the Holiness movement adapted beliefs from the Pentecostals, a brief summary of some Pentecostal tenants follows:

The Pentecostals share the Calvinistic belief that "worldly" pleasures should be restrained.<sup>20</sup> For example, members should not drink, smoke or dance. They believe in the literal translation of the Bible and believe that salvation is of prime importance. As in the Kentucky Revival days, it is acceptable for preachers to practice without any specified amount of formal education. Salvation is obtained

by conversion; for the Pentecostals, this must be an intense, emotional experience. It is their belief that as a result of this experience, man can become holy, but he can slip back into bad behavior ("backsliding") and lose his salvation as a result of his lapse of faith. Other churches in the South have emotional services (usually not to the degree of the Pentecostal or Holiness churches); they may use threats of "hellfire and damnation" to rouse the emotions, but the Pentecostals emphasize acceptance and reward by the supernatural to generate enthusiasm.<sup>21</sup>

Such beliefs would explain how the Pentecostals view themselves in relation to other religions. They feel that 1) they are "different" from other people in both ethical behavior and religious experience; 2) Pentecostalism provides hope to its followers that they may become good, or holy in the sight of God; and 3) Pentecostalism provides its members with immediate emotional satisfaction of a very intense nature.<sup>22</sup>

It is from this religious heritage that the Holiness movement evolved. Other factors need to be considered to discover why the Holiness movement developed and why the needs of the people were not satisfied in the services offered by the Baptists, Methodists and other conventional religions.

One only needs to consult a map of the Cumberland area to see how the geography of the area affected the people. The area is known for its mountains and isolated valleys.

Progress has not arrived for all areas of the country at the same time. While cities were caught up in congestion and super highways, the first blacktop road was not completed across Pine Mountain in Harlan County, Kentucky until 1957.<sup>23</sup> The coal industry had an impact on the local economy; people came and went as the demand for coal fluctuated. Regardless of this outside force, there are still areas, hollows and backwater areas that have remained "pockets of poverty" where generations have lived in the same houses under intensely poor, rural living conditions.

John Holt noted that even as people migrated from these areas to the southern cities and to the north for jobs and better living conditions, they did not make noticeable attempts to join the urban culture. Wherever they went, these people strove to cluster with their own kind, trying to "recapture" their sense of security through revival and reform,<sup>24</sup> rather than blending into the urban surroundings they were forced to move to.<sup>25</sup> Such a migration took place during the 1920s and 30s in the Southeast from the rural farm areas to the small towns and cities.<sup>26</sup>

There was a shift in occupations from farming to industrial jobs in the cities. Manufacturing concerns offered long hours for low pay in harsh working conditions. The recent movie "Norma Rae" depicts life today in a small, southern town and its dependence on its largest industry, a textile factory.

The film was made on location in a small town in Alabama. Like coal miners, textile workers suffer their own occupational hazards. They are susceptible to "brown lung" from all of the dusty material floating in the air. Because of the noise level, hearing loss is common. Workers generally are paid piece rates--paid for the number of completed units they produce. They are bound to their machines, keeping them fed and making sure the process runs smoothly. When a machine breaks down, the worker puts in the most effort and is paid least for it--he must get the machine back in working order as fast as possible. Each minute he is not producing reduces his piece rate and lowers his wages. Because of the constant demands of the machines and the incredible noise levels they create, workers may stand side by side all day and never say a word. Workers are dependent on each other for production purposes and for little else. The jobs usually offer few fringe benefits and little hope for advancement. One might move from one machine to another; learning to operate a machine can be done quickly, but the conditions of social isolation don't change.

The movie "Norma Rae" also illustrated the difficulty unions have in getting accepted in the South; even the union organization in the Harlan County coal fields during the 30s brought its own tension to the area. Like the Emergency Relief provided by the federal government, unions

were viewed as "foreign" solutions to local problems. These problems were amplified by the effect of the Depression.<sup>27</sup>

Local communities had a history of "taking care of their own" even if the care was inadequate. TVA work projects and federal assistance programs were viewed as a mixed blessing. Education programs, like the Settlement School<sup>28</sup> established in the area of Cobb's study, were tolerated but not totally accepted. It, like the attempts made by missionary of the limited Brethren Church in the same area in the late 1930s and the efforts of the Missionary Baptists in the early 60s, did not prove successful.<sup>29</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into a detailed examination of all the forces that brought about the Holiness movement. As discussed earlier, Cobb did a study of the changing influences that affected the inhabitants of Mutton Valley, Kentucky. This author has borrowed extensively from Cobb's exhaustive sociological study in clarifying the religious, geographical and economic background of the area where the Holiness movement began.

The social heritage of this area is also important to this study. Many of the people in these rural areas are descendants of the Scotch and Scotch-Irish frontiersmen who migrated to the area two centuries ago.<sup>30</sup> Some traits of their ancestors survived to this century, such as some habits of speech, and heritage of names (e.g., "Shakespeare," "Oceana"). One tradition that had a direct effect on the Holiness religion was the Kentucky - "running sets" -

English folk dances that were rediscovered by Cecil Sharp in 1916.<sup>31</sup> There exists a mountain personality that is marked by humor, loyalty and independence that endures even through the most severe economic hardships.<sup>33</sup> The people of the area are religious, even in the face of disagreement with each other.

The stereotype of the "Hatfields and the McCoys" has a basis in fact; the area has a history of violent family feuds. While the days of shooting matches may be over, a strong sense of "family" and "territory" still exists. Feelings between two groups may be expressed today as an attitude of noncooperation or veiled resentment instead of open warfare.<sup>33</sup>

The area Cobb studied provided what appears to be a typical example of social stratification in a rural area in the South. Cobb discussed how the neighborhoods, or communities of the Mutton Valley area maintained their status among their own members and in relationship to the other communities. The residents of the community that had the highest status lived in the better houses and were most closely associated with and cooperated the most with outside attempts (such as the Settlement School) to improve the area.<sup>34</sup>

Each community had its own creek, a predominant family, a religious unit and a socio-economic "level." The communities were aware of their "place" in relation to each other and maintained their own beliefs and way of life.<sup>35</sup>

Each person was aware of his or her "place" within the community. Attempts to better by "marrying up" or using education as a stepping stone were not encouraged by the lower communities.

These conditions of poverty, fierce independence and pride in self-determination, were factors that were incorporated into the beliefs of the Holiness movement. Use of strong traditional beliefs of the area allowed the Holiness movement to become established and flourish. The following section briefly traces the history of the Holiness movement in the rural regions of the South.

#### The Holiness Movement

The history of the Holiness movement is difficult to document. There is no central governing body; each church governs itself. The preachers were illiterate for the most part and left no written documents about their ministry. The following is a brief history of the movement, some of its preachers, descriptions of services and noted events.

It was in these isolated, rural areas that the Holiness religion originated. A Holiness church was established in Mutton Valley in 1932 after the area was visited by members of the Jesus Only sect.<sup>36</sup> The fact that the area produced its own church, the founder, The Reverend Hi Corn, based the need for his church on a difference in doctrine about the baptism ritual. In all other respects, his church's beliefs and practices resembled the Jesus Only church.<sup>37</sup>

There is some controversy as to when the movement actually began. The Reverend Alfred Ball stated that he believed there had been people "practicing the faith" ever since the days of the apostles.<sup>38</sup> Few other Holiness people agree with his viewpoint. Most sources credit George W. Hensley with the origination of the movement in rural Grasshopper, Tennessee in 1909.<sup>39</sup> After reading the Bible verses of St. Mark 16: 17, 18, and seeking God's understanding for them, Hensley found a rattlesnake and took it to a religious meeting a few days later at Sale Creek. There he cited the Bible verses and urged people to take up the serpent to prove their faith.<sup>40</sup>

Hensley's ideas were slow to catch on. The area around Sale Creek, Tennessee was sparsely populated. Meetings were reminiscent of the revival days, where people met in "brush arbor" churches in the open. The snakes were brought to the meetings where they were handled while other members chanted, spoke in tongues, and experienced ecstatic seizures. La Barre reported that the meetings continued for approximately ten years until Garland Defriese, a member, was bitten by a rattlesnake during a service.<sup>41</sup> He fell to the ground and later recovered. The incident was enough to upset people's faith to the point that snake handling was suspended.

Hensley left Sale Creek and took his beliefs to Kentucky. There he became the pastor of the East Pineville Church of God. He later introduced snake handling at the

Church of God at Pine Mountain. In 1934, J. D. Browning reintroduced snake handling at the Pine Mountain Church.

Cobb's study does not give any detailed information about the Jesus Only people who visited Mutton Valley. Hensley's name was not mentioned. Part of the difficulty in tracing the origin of the movement is related to the use of "traveling preachers" to spread the faith. Harlan, Kentucky is about twenty miles from Mutton Valley (located on the west side of Pine Mountain).<sup>42</sup> It is possible that Hensley, or one of his followers visited the area. The preacher who founded the Holiness church in Mutton Valley, the Reverend Hi Corn, was the only preacher the church had throughout its history. When Cobb was investigating the area, the Reverend Corn was in his seventies. No talk was heard of finding a successor for him. It remains to be seen what effect the loss of his leadership will have on the development of the church.<sup>43</sup> La Barre's work made no mention of the Reverend Corn upon the establishment of his church in 1932, even though it, too, is on Pine Mountain.

A dramatic demonstration of faith drew attention to the snake handlers on August 6, 1934. Albert Teester of Sylva, North Carolina

stood in the pulpit of his mountain church, waved a five-foot rattlesnake before him and let the reptile sink its fangs into his arm, to prove to his congregation that 'God will not let me die.'<sup>44</sup>

Some members were confused. They did not understand how God could allow for a faithful member to be bitten and

suffer. One reason given for such a happening was that it was possible for a member to "backslide" and be punished by God to bring the wandering member back into the fold.<sup>45</sup>

Teester's act baffled some. He said, "I am not doing this for the glory I may get out of it, but I am doing it so the people all over the world who need the Word of God may know it."<sup>46</sup>

After the snake bit him Teester ran screaming with pain. The skin on his arm swelled and burst. Throughout the terrible ordeal he refused all medical help and relied on his God and the prayers of the faithful to heal him. He was close to death for several days. Later, Teester was well enough to preach to his congregation.

He addressed his congregation, his arm still visibly swollen by the bite. There were "outlanders" present, people who had traveled from so far away as 100 miles to hear him. His words fell on a rapt audience. Below is part of the message they heard.

I am going to explain from God's Book why I picked up the serpent and let it bite me.  
 In the name of Jesus Christ, I took up the rattlesnake. I have one of the best physicians in all the world. I'll tell you who he is. He is Jesus Christ! Hallelujah!  
 There are not enough people from here to New York to have got me to pick up that rattlesnake if I didn't want to. But God told me to do it and that's why I did it.  
 God, I want you to have every bit of glory out of this right hand of mine.<sup>47</sup>

After Teester concluded his sermon, a "healing service" was conducted by the "saints"--ranking people in his

church. Teester's belief in the power of faith healing proved to be a powerful attraction for the church.<sup>48</sup>

The 1930s was a period of rapid growth for the Holiness Movement. It was also in the 30s that the group began having trouble with the law. In 1938, John Day, a farmer, brought charges against three members of the Pine Mountain Church. He did so because his wife attended the services, and he objected to her handling snakes. The trial attracted the attention of the media. A reporter, Keith Kerman, and a photographer, Arthur Whitmar, from the St. Louis Post Dispatch, came to investigate the story. Kerman's report was the first journalistic account of the church services.<sup>49</sup>

While Hensley kept the faith alive in Kentucky, one of his followers, Raymond Hays, went to Grasshopper Valley, Tennessee, to revive the faith in 1943. He spoke at a revival meeting to some who had been part of Hensley's original flock years ago. A new church was built to renew the faith. "The Dolly Pond Church of God With Signs Following."<sup>50</sup> Its establishment was important to the survival and diffusion of the movement since snake handling had been outlawed in Kentucky in 1940 and in Georgia in 1941.<sup>51</sup>

During the 1940s, the movement spread throughout the states of the Southeast. Data about this time period lacks consistency. It is difficult to judge who the most important leaders were. There does seem to be evidence of a split in the movement over the manner in which the snakes were to be handled. Each church made up its own name. Unfortunately,

the names can't always be traced to a branch of the movement. The general names of the groups that practiced the signs included: Holiness churches, the Jesus Only churches, and the Signs Following churches.

Until his death, George Hensley was always associated with the movement. According to LaBarre, the leader of the movement in the mid-1940s was Tom Harden.<sup>52</sup> Harden had little formal education. He claimed that although he was not able to read or write, the power of the Lord enabled him to pick up the Bible and read it. Reverend Hays taught him snake handling. Harden was bitten in a meeting and survived. His recovery confirmed his belief and subsequent bites did not shake his faith.

John Womeldorf claimed that the headquarters of the movement was the Shrine of Divine Healing located in Stone Creek, Virginia.<sup>53</sup> The church was the site of a large gathering in 1945. Its meetings attracted up to 2,000 people a week for two weeks in the summer months of that year.<sup>54</sup>

The movement was attracting more attention from the press in the 1940s. The death by snakebite of Lewis Ford, a member of the Dolly Pond congregation, brought a reporter from the Chattanooga.<sup>55</sup> His report was picked up by the Associated Press and whetted the curiosity of the outside world.

The attention from the press prompted the congregation to go to Chattanooga to hold a revival meeting for the benefit of the "city folk."<sup>56</sup> The members gathered in a small tent

and held nightly revival meetings. Their preservice drew a large crowd; streets were blocked off and traffic was congested. Chattanooga police arrested Harden and Hensley as well as some of the congregation. The faithful were pleased with the attention and thought that it was an honor to be "in jail for the Lord" just like the apostles of biblical times. Their spirit was kept alive in jail by singing and praising God. When some were released under bond, they conducted a service outside the jail cell. Harden and Hensley remained in jail overnight singing and praying to God. The two leaders were each fined fifty dollars for disorderly conduct. They refused to pay, or let anyone else pay the fine, objecting to it on religious grounds. The noble gesture was hard to live up to when working off the fine at a dollar a day on a road gang became a reality. Friends of Hensley hired an attorney and appealed the case. The charges were dropped, and the congregation felt that a modern day miracle had been done.<sup>57</sup>

This run-in with the law convinced the Dolly Pond congregation to go elsewhere to practice their faith. C. D. Morris, the preacher of the Faith Tabernacle in LaFollette, Tennessee, offered his church to Hensley and his followers for the practicing of their beliefs. Morris made this offer with the stipulation that the snakes must be handled in "an orderly fashion, and by one person at a time."<sup>58</sup> Hensley did not like being told how to practice his faith. A preacher

from Kentucky named O. U. Shoupe came to Morris' church and conducted his services according to Morris' wishes.

It is from this point that the movement appears to break into two branches, one that practiced the signs in an orderly fashion (the Morris plan), and one that followed the more spectacular methods (the Hensley plan).<sup>59</sup>

The church service Harold Preece attended and described in his book, Dew on Jordan, was that of a "Signs Following" church. The preacher, Jeth Henderson, explained that the split resulted from an accusation made by a Holiness leader against a Signs Following preacher. The accusation was that the Signs Following people were using defanged snakes in their turbulent services. Jeth informed Preece, "That was the blackest lie any cussed jackleg ever stewed up down there in Hell."<sup>60</sup> Whatever the reason, there exist today different approaches to the practicing of this dangerous sign of handling serpents. The animosity between the two groups may not be as strong now as it was then (Jeth called the Holiness Faith Healers the "Helliness Fake Peelers"), but the difference does affect the church a believer will join.<sup>61</sup>

Public opinion began to turn against the movement in the 1940s by more reports of snake bites and deaths. John Hensley had been a preacher who "forfeited the Lord's protection" by sinfully taking a defense job at LaFollette, Tennessee.<sup>62</sup> On July 28, 1944 he was bitten by a rattlesnake and died two days later. Reverend O. U. Shoupe held the

memorial services. The same snake that killed Hensley was handled that day by the "saints."<sup>63</sup> The service was attended by outsiders. In order to protect themselves from the law, those who wished to take part in the snake handling activities were roped off from the 3000 spectators.

News coverage of other deaths brought more unwanted attention and criticism to the movement. Clint Jackson was bitten at a meeting held near Daisy, Tennessee. He died in July, 1946. Lewis Ford's death was ruled nonaccidental. This ruling denied his widow double indemnity. This was one of many legal setbacks the Holiness movement suffered.<sup>64</sup>

An even greater setback occurred when Senator Willard Hagan and Representative F. D. Beasley introduced a bill to prohibit snake handling in Tennessee on February 4, 1947. The bill was passed on February 28, 1947. Governor Jim McCord signed the bill into law.<sup>65</sup>

The persecution in Tennessee caused the sect to spread into a number of states in the Southeast. The press followed their movement and covered the deaths that followed them. Ernest Davis, a thirty-four year old farmer, died from drinking a "salvation cocktail" made with strychnine in a meeting held by Reverend Gordon Miller in Summerville, Georgia.<sup>66</sup> Two other people died from strychnine in that same year, 1947.<sup>67</sup>

Press coverage then dwindled to sporadic accounts of snake bites. The scene for renewed interest and media coverage

of the group was set in Durham, North Carolina. Benjamin J. Massey brought snake handling to Durham. He convinced Reverend Colonel Hartman Bunn, pastor of the Zion Tabernacle in Durham, to institute the practice in the church after introducing the experience to Reverend Bunn in 1947.<sup>68</sup>

The police seized snakes at a meeting in Durham in the winter of 1947-48. The snakes were taken to be examined and found to have their poison sacs intact. Bunn and Massey were then convicted of violating a municipal ordinance that prohibited the public handling of serpents, an ordinance that had been passed in response to reports of snake-handling activities.<sup>68</sup>

Before the cases were settled, Bunn announced to the local papers that there would be an interstate convention of snake handlers in Durham the weekend of October 15-17, 1948.<sup>69</sup> Many preachers and members from churches all over the Southeast were supposed to be in attendance. The activities were announced in advance.

Friday and Saturday were days set aside for fasting and praying for the power of God. The actual snake handling was not to take place until the Sunday service; it would last as long as the spirit continued.

The police waited to see if the members were going to carry through with these public announcements. Life magazine was on hand to record the historic event. Snakes were handled, and the lawmen intervened. Members could be

arrested for handling snakes since it was in violation of the city ordinance. There was no law against handling fire.

The city ordinance clearly stated that the snakes had to be tested to be proven to be venomous before anyone could be arrested for handling them in public.<sup>70</sup> No one was arrested at the time of the meeting because of this; the snakes were taken for examination.

After the tests were performed on the snakes, Bunn and six other people were served with warrants for violating the city ordinance. The news brought the largest crowd to the convention. The meeting included a brief snake-handling episode along with faith healing and speaking in tongues. Bunn himself handled snakes at the meeting.

A later meeting was moved outside the Durham city limits to escape prosecution from the law. Reporters also wished to get photographs of the activities in a more rustic setting.<sup>71</sup> A photographer from Life magazine was there. This was one of the first times that the media could sensationalize the events of the services.

Finally, after meetings were returned to the Tabernacle in Durham, Bunn was issued a third warrant for violation of the snake-handling ordinance. The convention was over, and the movement appeared to die down for a while.

Bunn later appeared in the state supreme court in Raleigh, on December 14, 1948, to appeal the fifty dollar fine levied after his original Recorders' Court conviction

in Durham. He argued his own case before the court. His contention with the Durham's city ordinance was that it did not try to regulate the snake handling; it tried to remove it.<sup>72</sup> Bunn argued that it was God's commandment that the snakes be handled and that no one was forced to participate.

Bunn lost his case and refused to pay the fine. He was ordered to serve a thirty-day jail sentence. There was a farewell meeting held for Reverend Bunn on May 21, 1949. He stated,

I don't intend to pay anything, because all the money I have and all that's given to me is dedicated to the cause for which I'm persecuted--not from serpent handling, but for the religion in which I so deeply believe.<sup>73</sup>

After the "Interstate Convention" of 1948, the movement did not make news for several years. Mrs. Ruth Craig of New Hope, Alabama held a service in her home on July 15, 1951. She was bitten four times on the upper arm and shoulder. Mrs. Craig collapsed, lapsed into a coma and died. Her death was the first to be reported in several years. Since Alabama did not have laws banning such services, her death was ruled accidental.<sup>74</sup>

The next report of a large gathering of snake handlers was on August 21, 1955, near Harlan, Kentucky. Four thousand people attended a memorial service for Reverend Lee Valentine, who had been bitten by a large rattlesnake at Fort Payne, Alabama. Reverend William Vernon, of Keokee, Virginia, conducted the service for the fallen preacher, Reverend

Williams was arrested by the Kentucky state police for handling snakes, a violation of that state's statute forbidding public snake handling.<sup>75</sup>

According to press accounts, fifteen people had died of snakebites by 1955. The most famous death was that of the movement's founding father, George Hensley.<sup>76</sup> On July 24, 1955, Hensley was bitten on the wrist by a diamond-back rattlesnake during a prayer meeting at Lester's Shed near Altha, Florida. The leader was seventy years old and had claimed to have lived through 250 snakebites. George refused all medical help and died the next morning.

The late 1950s saw more summer meetings where the faithful would try to practice their beliefs, and the police would try to stop them. On August 9, 1961, Mrs. Sally Hall of Stollings, West Virginia became the nineteenth victim of snake handling. She was bitten on August 6 during a service at the Church of Jesus Only in Nolan, West Virginia. Mrs. Hall refused medical help and was finally taken to the home of Reverend Kelly Williams of Switzer, pastor of the Church of Jesus Only. Church members prayed for her recovery. When her daughter arrived, she took her mother to a hospital for treatment, but was too late.<sup>77</sup>

Another death in West Virginia, later in 1961, aroused the anger of the citizens. There was talk of passing a law against the snake-handling practices. Some communities have passed local ordinances, but no state statute has been passed to outlaw the handling of poisonous reptiles.<sup>78</sup>

Accounts of deaths continued into the 1970s.

September, 1972, A. L. Parsons from Georgia died from a rattlesnake bite he received in a church service held at Wade Chapel.<sup>79</sup> A reporter was sent from the St. Louis Post Dispatch in early 1973 to report on the meetings held at the Chapel. The pastor, Reverend James Wade, was a twenty-nine year old construction worker who led the congregation in the practicing of the signs. The pictures taken by the reporter bore a striking resemblance to those taken of meetings held thirty years earlier.<sup>80</sup> The church was a small, whitewashed building with wooden benches and a simple pulpit. The men sat on one side of the church and the women on the other. Snakes were held when the faithful felt that the spirit was right. The pastor said that because of the adverse publicity due to Parson's death, the church did not advertise its services or handle snakes as often as they had in the past.<sup>81</sup>

Death from snake handling far outnumber deaths from practicing the other signs. No account was found of death, or even serious injury, of anyone who handled fire. The two deaths by strychnine reported in the 1940s were the only ones found until April 7, 1973.

Drinking poison was not practiced much at the Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name, located outside Carson Springs, Tennessee. Quantities of carbon tetrachloride had been consumed at least twice a year earlier by assistant pastor Jimmy Ray Williams.<sup>82</sup>

On April 7, 1973, the service was attended by members and visiting singers, the Cramerton Mountain Gospel Boys of North Carolina.<sup>83</sup> The service was lively; snakes were handled with great enthusiasm, and the Spirit filled the tiny church. Brother Williams had a premonition five years earlier. He said the Lord had told him "he had five years to go."<sup>84</sup> That night he brought strychnine powder to the church.

During the service, Jimmy Ray Williams mixed the powder with water and swallowed half a glass of the potion. This act prompted more cries of enthusiasm from the church members. Later, Buford Pack, the thirty year old brother of the pastor of the little church, drank some of the remaining liquid. Another member, Burl Barbee took the glass later in the service to finish off the last of the strychnine. He hesitated and Jimmy Ray Williams took it and finished it.<sup>85</sup>

Both men refused medical aid and died later that night. Buford Pack had foretold of a funeral to be held in four days at the service that same evening. Jimmy Ray Williams had written instructions for his funeral in the family Bible three months before.<sup>86</sup> Reverend Pack told newspaper reporters that both Williams and Pack had consumed strychnine on other occasions.<sup>87</sup>

The deaths shocked the church members and brought renewed interest in the group from the press and the police. The officials of Coker County did not like the attention they were receiving because of the practices of the Holiness people.<sup>88</sup>

Circuit Judge George R. Shepherd had shown mercy when he dealt with the Holiness people in 1970. At a revival held at the Sand Hill Church in Del Rio, Tennessee, several members, including Alfred Ball, were arrested for handling snakes. They were found guilty, and the Judge suspended punishment. He said,

We are dealing with men and women who conscientiously believe that they are right. I cannot agree with them. I cannot interpret the scriptures as they do, but I still give them credit for their honesty and sincerity.<sup>89</sup>

Despite the law against snake handling, the Judge told the defendants that if they purchased their own land and church, they could do as they pleased.

This is how the church at Carson Springs came to be established in the spring of 1969. It was common knowledge in Newport that snakes were being handled in the services. The church was left alone until the deaths in April, 1973.

Alfred Ball felt that the District Attorney General, Henry F. "Dutch" Swann, had political rather than legal reasons for going after the church.<sup>90</sup> Publicly, Swann sought to halt the practices of the Holiness church, because "If snake handling is not stopped at this fundamentalist church, Cocke County, Tennessee will become the snake handling capital of the world!"<sup>91</sup> Whatever his motive, Swann filed injunction proceedings in Cocke County Circuit Court on April 14, 1973 to stop snake handling and the drinking of deadly poisons.

On April 21, 1973, Alfred Ball and Liston Pack appeared before Judge Shepherd. Reverend Ball pleaded his own case citing Bible verses as his defense. Although he explained his faith, the lack of professional counsel left the co-pastors at a disadvantage.

Swann argued for the enforcement of the law. The fact that there was no law against drinking deadly poisons didn't seem to bother him. The Judge noted this error and corrected the temporary injunction against the practices to read, "However, any person who wishes to swallow strychnine or any other poison may do so if he does not make it available to any other person."<sup>92</sup>

The church members accepted the injunction. Police checked up on church services and found that snakes were present, but were not handled. Gradually, the interest died down and so did the supervision. All of this changed July 1, 1973 when the church celebrated their Homecoming.

The gathering attracted church members from several states. Reverend Ball stated in a personal interview that the Jesus Only churches pastored by Reverend Kelly Williams and his son Richard contacted him after the strychnine deaths in April. The publicity given to those deaths was followed by a multitude of newspaper and television cameramen who wanted to be ready to record any spectacular happenings at the "National Convention" as they named it.

The meeting was held at the Carson Springs church on English Mountain outside of Newport, Tennessee. Reverend Ball

greeted members from other churches, visitors and news people alike. He said, "We want you to see and judge for yourself. We don't require people to handle serpents. We welcome people to come to our church, no matter who they are."<sup>93</sup> There was even a professional snake exhibitor from Pensacola, Florida at the meeting. He brought his own snakes to display. Among them was a deadly cobra. He voiced his opinion about the snake handling practice when he said, "If you leave their heads alone, you can get away with it. Faith has not one iota to do with it."<sup>94</sup>

The All for Jesus Singers provided lively tunes that stirred the emotions of the participants. Snakes were handled. One man, Dexter Callahan of Harlan, Kentucky, held a homemade torch to his hand. A woman named Nellie joined him in the fire handling.

Reverend Ball handled four rattlesnakes and then gave them to Brother Murl Bass. Murl dropped one of the snakes. He grabbed it by the tail, the snake reared back and struck Murl on the wrist. He had been bitten the night before in a church service with no ill effects. This time, he wasn't so lucky.

Bass shook loose the snake, and it was put back in the snake box. It was evident by Bass's behavior that the venom was taking its toll. Murl was taken back to his home in Chattanooga and ended up in the hospital.<sup>95</sup>

The incident interrupted the morning services. The church members were angry with the behavior of the news

reporters. Reverend Ball stated in an interview that while he was holding the snakes before he gave them to Murl Bass, a television cameraman tapped him on the shoulder and told Ball to turn around so that he could take a picture of him holding the snakes. Because of the interference with the service, the reporters and cameramen were asked to leave.

The pace of the meeting slowed at noon. Many sat down to share picnic dinners and offer testimony about their faith. Some thought that the confusion of the morning would end the Homecoming early.

The spirit returned that afternoon and moved upon Clyde Ricker.<sup>96</sup> Clyde became anointed to take up the deadly cobra brought to the church by Doc Walls, the snake exhibitor. The six-foot Indian Cobra was kept in a plastic cubicle. On the side of the container was a sign that read, "ONE BITE WILL KILL AN ELEPHANT."

Once Ricker's intentions became clear to the others, many gathered around him and shouted praises to God. He grasped the cobra's tail and stroked the snake gently. He slowly pulled the snake out of the cage.

Once the cobra was in his hands, Clyde danced about, jerked and spoke in tongues. The crowd around him went wild. They, too, danced, shouted and spoke in tongues.

Seven other men fell under the anointing that day and handled the cobra. No one was hurt. Clyde was the most daring in his handling of the snake. At one point he opened

his shirt and put the cobra inside. He pulled the cobra out again. Later he dropped the cobra around his neck and held its head close to his face. Ricker stared into the serpent's eyes and lightly kissed it on the mouth. The snake made no attempt to strike.<sup>97</sup>

It was because of this service that Reverend Ball and Reverend Liston Pack were found guilty of violating the injunction.<sup>98</sup> Pack was fined \$150 and sentenced to thirty days in the county jail, and Ball was fined \$100 and sentenced to twenty days. The sentences were suspended, but the two were jailed for four days when the court found that neither had paid his fine. The fines were paid later. On September 27, 1973, the circuit court declared that the defendants' activities constituted a public nuisance and made the injunction permanent.

The American Civil Liberties Union had taken an interest in the case and represented Ball and Pack at the trial in September 1974. A later trial at the State Court of Appeals, Eastern Section [State ex rel. Swann v. Pack (Oct. 25, 1974)], ruled that a State Circuit Courts permanent injunction prohibiting the minister and a deacon of the Holiness Church of God in Jesus' Name from handling, displaying or exhibiting dangerous and poisonous snakes is "unconstitutionally broad."<sup>99</sup>

The case for religious freedom to handle serpents was fought at the Tennessee Supreme Court, and the snake

handlers lost. Later, in 1976, the case was taken to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court upheld the decision made by the State Supreme Court that snake handling and drinking of poison can be enjoined as public nuisances even when they are part of a religious ritual.<sup>100</sup>

The case was a set back for those who practiced the sign of snake handling. It has not been a deterrent to many. There are still accounts of deaths from snake bites. In October of 1974, Lonnie Richardson from Wayne County, West Virginia died from a snake bite he received in a service. His father-in-law, Tallmade Adkins, had died the same way in August.<sup>101</sup> Their deaths followed that of a man in Kentucky who was bitten a year earlier.<sup>102</sup>

Probably the most publicized death to occur since the Carson Springs Homecoming was that of Reverend Richard Williams, pastor of a Jesus Only Church in Ohio, son of Bishop Kelly Williams of Kistler, West Virginia.<sup>103</sup>

Richard Williams was a popular, charismatic leader of his faith. He had participated in the cobra handling at the Homecoming as well as some spectacular feats of serpent handling at other services. He was supposed to have power over serpents to the point that he could command a snake to lie still in "Jesus Name," and the serpent would obey.<sup>104</sup>

On Tuesday, April 2, 1974, Richard was conducting revival services at his father's church, the Full Gospel Jesus Church in Kistler, West Virginia. He had handled a

large diamondback rattlesnake and placed it back in its box. Richard pointed at the box and said, "That serpent is here tonight for a purpose."<sup>105</sup>

Later in the evening, Richard returned to the box to get the snake. The rattlesnake struck him on the palm of his left hand. He dropped the snake and quickly tried to retrieve it. As he reached for it, the snake quickly bit him and punctured the artery on his wrist.

Richard was taken to the house of a church member where the faithful prayed over him. He remained calm to the end, as if he knew it was his time to die. At approximately 3:00 p.m., April 3, 1974, Richard Lee Williams, thirty-three years old, died.

The movement again appears to have quieted down. Reverend Ball stated that he felt the publicity given the Homecoming in 1973 hurt the churches.<sup>106</sup> Media accounts again are terse accounts of snake bites and deaths.

It is difficult to estimate exactly how many people have died from snake bites. A rough estimate would be between twenty-five and thirty people dead since the movement first started back at Sale Creek, Tennessee by George Hensley in 1909. The history of the Holiness movement reveals that the growth and spread of the beliefs followed a haphazard path. The brief discussion of the historical background of the area puts the movement into perspective. Some general observations that can be made about the discussion of the background include:

1) The geography of the area has had a significant influence on the economic and cultural development of the area.

2) Religious services with dramatic displays of emotion and a high degree of audience participation are part of the heritage of the area.

3) The Depression introduced outside (state and federal agencies) solutions to local problems of poverty in the form of work and food assistance programs.

4) Urbanization and industrialization of the rural South dramatically changed the lifestyle of the people in the area.

Chapter II focuses on the rhetorical situation. The historical background is utilized to describe how past happenings shaped the form and substance of the Holiness services.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Elmer T. Clark, The Small Sects in America, Rev. Ed. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 89.

<sup>2</sup>Wood, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>Weisberger, pp. 52-60.

<sup>5</sup>Wood, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>La Barre, p. 29.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Clark, p. 91.

<sup>9</sup>J. A. C. Brown, Techniques of Persuasion from Propaganda to Brainwashing (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 235.

<sup>10</sup>Clark, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup>Brown, p. 235.

<sup>12</sup>Clark, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup>North Callahan, Smoky Mountain Country (New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearce, 1952), p. 90.

<sup>14</sup>Frederick M. Davenport, Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1917), p. 80.

<sup>15</sup>Brown, p. 235.

<sup>16</sup>Clark, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup>Weisberger, pp. 20-50.

<sup>18</sup>Clark, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup>La Barre, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup>Wood, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

- <sup>22</sup>Wood, p. 15.
- <sup>23</sup>Cobb, p. 11.
- <sup>24</sup>Holt, p. 741.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 743.
- <sup>26</sup>Cobb, p. 184.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 185.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 16.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 187.
- <sup>30</sup>W. D. Weatherford and Earl D. C. Brewer, Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia, Part 1, "Early Settlers in the Southern Appalachians" (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), pp. 1-5.
- <sup>31</sup>Cobb, p. 13.
- <sup>32</sup>Thomas R. Ford (ed.), The Southern Appalachian Region, A Survey (Lexington, KY.: University of Kentucky Press, 1962), pp. 6-21.
- <sup>33</sup>Cobb, p. 15.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-24.
- <sup>36</sup>Cobb, p. 184.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 55.
- <sup>38</sup>Personal Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball in Newport, Tennessee. May 27, 1978.
- <sup>39</sup>La Barre, p. 12.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup>Cobb, p. 14.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 187.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 15.
- <sup>44</sup>New York Times, 10 August 1934, p. 4:3.

- <sup>45</sup>La Barre, p. 12.
- <sup>46</sup>New York Times, 13 August 1934, p. 30:2.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 30:2, 3.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 30:3.
- <sup>49</sup>La Barre, p. 13.
- <sup>50</sup>La Barre, p. 15.
- <sup>51</sup>"They Shall Take Up Serpents." Newsweek, Volume 24, 24 August 1944, p. 89.
- <sup>52</sup>La Barre, p. 15.
- <sup>53</sup>John A. Womeldorf, "Rattlesnake Religion," The Christian Century, LXIV, No. 50, December 10, 1947, p. 1517.
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>55</sup>La Barre, p. 24.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 24, 25.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 25.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 25, 26.
- <sup>60</sup>Preece, p. 44.
- <sup>61</sup>Personal interview with Reverend Alfred Ball, May 27, 1978.
- <sup>62</sup>Preece, p. 43.
- <sup>63</sup>"They Shall Take Up Serpents," Newsweek, Volume 24, 24 August, 1944, p. 88.
- <sup>64</sup>Callahan, p. 92.
- <sup>65</sup>La Barre, p. 26.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 28.
- <sup>67</sup>Womeldorf, p. 1518.
- <sup>68</sup>La Barre, p. 34.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>73</sup>Durham Herald, 22 May 1949, p. 1.

<sup>74</sup>Taken from a United Press dispatch from Huntsville, Alabama, 17 July 1951. Found in La Barre, p. 60.

<sup>75</sup>La Barre, p. 47.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., pp. 48, 49.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>78</sup>Karen Carden and Robert Pelton, The Persecuted Prophets, p. 184.

<sup>79</sup>"They Shall Take Up Serpents," St. Louis Post Dispatch, 18 March 1973, pp. 32, 37-39.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>"They Shall Take Up Serpents." Film produced by Thomas Burton of the English Department of East Tennessee State University. September 1972.

<sup>83</sup>Karen Carden and Robert Pelton, The Persecuted Prophets, p. 81.

<sup>84</sup>Personal Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball. May 28, 1978.

<sup>85</sup>Carden and Pelton, The Persecuted Prophets, pp. 88-94.

<sup>86</sup>"Two Holiness Church Members Dead After Taking Strychnine," Newport Plain Talk, Vol. 73, No. 120 (9 April 1973), pp. 1, 2.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>88</sup>Personal Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball. May 28, 1978.

<sup>89</sup>Carden and Pelton, The Persecuted Prophets, pp. 103, 104.

<sup>90</sup>Personal Interview with Reverent Alfred Ball.  
May 28, 1978.

<sup>91</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 107.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 27, 28.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-35.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., pp. 36, 37.

<sup>98</sup>Richard Bauman, "Snake Handling: Should It Be Banned?" Liberty, Vol. 70, No. 3 (May-June 1975), p. 2.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>100</sup>New York Times, 9 March 1976, p. 19:1

<sup>101</sup>New York Times, 23 October 1974, p. 48:2.

<sup>102</sup>New York Times, 30 October 1973, p. 27:1.

<sup>103</sup>Karen Carden and Robert Pelton, The Persecuted Prophets, pp. 162, 163.

<sup>104</sup>Personal Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball.  
May 28, 1978.

<sup>105</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 162.

## Chapter II

### THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

According to Bitzer, the rhetorical situation has an exigence, a rhetorical audience and constraints that modify the situation. It is the purpose of this chapter to describe what urgent need the Holiness movement tries to modify, who the rhetorical audience is and what constraints are influential upon the situation.

#### The Exigence

The exigence specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected. The historical data presented in Chapter I described the circumstances that affected the area where the Holiness movement was born. Change in the rural South caused a tremendous amount of stress and anxiety. This change was the transition from an agrarian, independent culture to an industrial, inter-dependent urban society.

Migration from the hills to the coal fields and to towns for factory jobs modified the old social order. Families moved from homes where they had a "place" in the community to towns where they were ranked at the bottom of the economic ladder. Cash was not an important commodity in the agrarian society where a farmer could provide most

all of his needs by his own hands. Hunting and farming provided food. The land provided the raw materials for shelter. Other goods could be obtained by trading farm products for the item in question. A man could be measured by his ability to perform these tasks and deal with problems in an independent fashion.

In town, cash was the means of obtaining all the basic needs of the family. Cash was also a measure of the family's status in the community. Since the migrants were the last to arrive in the town, their jobs were the lower paying ones.

The reaction to this stress was the formation of the Holiness movement.<sup>1</sup> It was a means of coping with the changes and reestablishing a sense of security through religious revival and reform. The people did not know how to join the new society, so they withdrew from it to shape the world using the values and attitudes they already had.<sup>2</sup>

The exigence that emerges is one of reestablishment of the rural ethic in the face of conflicting, urban values. Smelser would label the movement a "value oriented movement" because it sought to "restore, protect, modify or create values in the name of a generalized belief."<sup>3</sup> The Holiness movement sought a way to cope with the changes in a way that would restore their lost status and dignity. Cobb stated that the movement was a manifestation of an internalized "religious attitude" which acted overtly and covertly to

protect the socio-religious norms against any imposed social change.<sup>4</sup>

As Bitzer stated, an exigence is an unmet need; something desired but not easily attainable. The exigence was specific for this group of people who had been displaced by modernization. They were the rhetorical audience in the Holiness movement.

### The Rhetorical Audience

It is difficult to comprehend just how frustrating the transition from one lifestyle to another was for these people to make. The Depression was hard for most people in the country but not everyone who found themselves broke joined the Holiness movement. This was a time, however, when other sects attracted a large number of people from many walks of life.<sup>5</sup> Poverty was not new to the people from the hills of the South. It was poverty in a new environment; one where they were segregated occupationally and economically and discriminated against socially.<sup>6</sup> The stereotype of "hillbilly" was a painful slap in the face to people who had lived their lives by their own code of ethics and never felt that code was a source of shame or backwardness.

The rhetorical audience for the Holiness movement included people from the Southeastern states who left the agrarian lifestyle either by migration to the coal fields,

towns and cities or by remaining on the land but depending on jobs outside the farm for their economic survival.

Time has not changed the economy of the area to any great degree. Coal mines still dominate some areas in the South as the major industry. Factories from the North are moving South because they can find cheaper, non-unionized labor.<sup>7</sup> Those that were small farming communities are now inhabited by those that rely heavily on welfare and factory jobs for support.<sup>8</sup> A worker can be old and expendable at age forty-five. The only support they receive is the social security and welfare checks that are referred to as "pensions."<sup>9</sup>

These people needed an outlet for the emotions they could not express in their daily lives. The factory routine was vastly different from the natural rhythm of the farm. They had been isolated from the mainstream of American civilization. The transition between the old and new world view left them confused and frustrated. They turned to their own values and beliefs to find a way to deal with the new circumstances.

The effects of the cultural depravation were as painful to these people as the effects of the economic stress that compelled people in other walks of life to join new religious groups in the Depression. Denied the right to obtain material proofs of success needed in the new life,

they chose to retreat to the comfort of established "eternal truths" to reduce the "cultural dissonance" they felt.<sup>10</sup>

These people were able to make the transition into the new society by rejecting part of their past (sinful behavior) in the name of God and incorporating some of those beliefs into the new religion. Their backwardness was rationalized by the Holiness religion.<sup>11</sup> It is through this process that the rhetorical audience evolved. They gathered to fulfill an unmet need (exigence) in a way that was acceptable to them. This movement did not take place in a vacuum. The beliefs, attitudes and values of the people contributed to the situation. These constraints were important to the growth and development of the movement.

#### Constraints of the Situation

The movement was a way to deal with the "culture shock" these people were subject to. It was a reactionary effort, one that attempted to reintegrate the old values rather than bring about a revolutionary change in values.<sup>12</sup> It did not promise to erase the conditions that brought about the stress. It was an attempt to elevate the status of the group by glorifying the very values, attitudes and beliefs that the outside world ridiculed.

The social heritage of the mountain people shaped their attitudes. The culture that promoted an independent, patriarchal society<sup>13</sup> developed characteristics of fearlessness, clan loyalty, and a sense of dignity even in extreme

conditions of poverty.<sup>14</sup> Justice was a personal matter as were most other aspects of their lives. The isolated conditions encouraged self-reliance and a distrust of outsiders and progress.<sup>15</sup> The collection of Foxfire books is an excellent illustration of the extent to which the mountain culture was self-sufficient.<sup>16</sup>

Some of the beliefs, values and attitudes that were part of this culture included:

1. The Puritan ethic. This ethic structured the behavior of the person in the family and community. In family life, for example, children are to obey their<sup>17</sup> elders. If they do not, punishment is swift. In the church, the believer is likewise expected to submit to the authority of God. Failure to do so will be followed by the denial<sup>18</sup> of salvation and the punishment of Hell.

Another example of how this ethic operated was the prohibition of worldly pleasures. Attention and energy was focused on the life to come, not on piling up treasures in this life. The Protestant ethic of working hard, saving and demonstrating one's worth by achieving worldly<sup>19</sup> success as proof of God's favor is denied.

2. Anti book learning. Education is not viewed as a way to achieve or better one's situation. The Bible is the only book worth having. The Holy Spirit is the only source of inspiration and revelation that is necessary. There are no formal religious educational programs for preachers or for the young. Illiteracy, poverty and innocence are equated with virtue and<sup>20</sup> are qualities to be extolled, not condemned.
3. Anti progress. Science was viewed with disdain and suspicion. It was progress that helped bring about the changes they did not want. Great pride was<sup>21</sup> taken in one's ability to use "common sense." Attention was focused on local issues. News from the outside world had little impact on their lives.

4. Folk traditions. The culture was rich in songs, stories and practices. Two traditions that were in existence in the area that Cobb studied were the "set running party" and the "molasses stir off."

The set running party was a public affair usually held at a home in the community on a Saturday night. This practice had a long historical tradition and was still part of the culture in the 1930s.<sup>22</sup>

The purpose of the set running party was dancing. Little news or gossip was exchanged on such an occasion. The caller was the central figure in the set-run. He dictated the figures and steps and took responsibility for the routines performed. The caller usually participated in the dance.

Music could be provided by a fiddler or guitar player. It was the caller who established the rhythm. He was aided in this by the stomping and clapping of the dancers. No one was excluded from the dance for lack of skill or due to age. Older members taught younger ones the steps and routines.

Those who observed included people who were too "crippled up" to dance, young children and those who felt that it was a sin.<sup>23</sup> The religious objectors could have been Baptist, Holiness or members of other fundamentalist religious groups.

The Kentucky sets had a repertoire of figures that could last for several hours. Most were done in a circle. Some figures were descended from ancient sacrificial dances. Dancers were carried about the circle as if by some power outside themselves. Women let their hair fly about, men would jerk. Even though many dancers would have their eyes closed, there was no problem bumping into another dancer. Physical contact, if any, was brief but each movement carried its own suggestion.

The party would last usually from dusk till around ten o'clock. There was no formal ending to the party. When the caller was tired, the party was over. People would then leave quickly and quietly.

The "stir-off" occurred in the fall when the cane was ready. It too was a public affair. The men would go from creek to creek to attend stir offs; the women would attend only those that were held on their own creeks.

The stirring off was a process that lasted several hours. The ground-up cane juice was boiled over an open fire and the foam it produced was skimmed off until the molasses was done. This was done out of doors in an informal atmosphere. People were free to come and go. Some men chopped the cane, replenished the trough with cane juice and poured off the molasses. Others kept the fire going.<sup>24</sup>

The activity continued into the evening. The women and children were usually at the house. Young men and women might be found in other rooms of the house playing music or running sets. It was a social event where news could be discussed and young people could meet each other. It served an economic function that has since been taken over by granulated sugar and the machine age.

5. Honesty. This belief was qualified in its usage. Transactions between members in the community were for the most part honest. An outsider, if trusted, would be treated fairly.
6. Obeying the law. The area was settled by people escaping the law in other states. Lawlessness is still part of the culture even today. Carden and Pelton wrote that Cocke County Tennessee has been infamous for many years for its acceptable corruption and a not-so-open-hearted citizenry. In the words of a long time resident of a nearby community, "There's hardly a day passes that somebody isn't killed in Cocke County. Moonshine running makes it dangerous. The people will do anything in the world for you if they like you. If they don't like you, you might accidentally not live."<sup>25</sup> Another industry thrives in the area. A local resident stated, "If you could put a tent over the whole city of Newport, you'd have the largest whorehouse in the country."<sup>26</sup>

These beliefs, attitudes and values are the major forces that shaped the people of the area. It was from

these that the Holiness religion drew its beliefs, values and practices. The Holiness movement was indigenous to the area. Its purpose was to support the values, attitudes and mores that existed and to justify the old local standards of living.<sup>27</sup> The movement took some of the practices of the old order that they found "sinful and worldly" and sanctified them and supported them with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In this way, they were able to absorb all the elements of community mores, both religious and secular, strengthen and unite them into a stable unit that was more acceptable to the community than the attempts made by outside liberal agencies.

The religious attitude the Holiness movement sprang from was the conservative attitude and mores of the depressed rural area they originated in.<sup>28</sup> Summer stated:

We see that we must conceive of the mores as a vast system of usages covering the whole of life and serving all of its interests; also containing in themselves their own justification by tradition, use and want and approved by mystic sanctions until, by rational reflection, they developed their own philosophical and ethical generalizations, which are elevated into "principles" of truth and right. They coerce and restrict the newborn generation. They do not stimulate thinking; they restrict it. The thinking is already done and is embodied in the mores. They never contain any provision for their own amendment. They are not questions, but answers to the problems of life. They present themselves as final and unchangeable, because they present answers which are offered as the truth."<sup>29</sup>

The church represented an intensification of an already internalized conservative religious attitude that existed in the mores before the movement was born.<sup>30</sup> This

incorporation of old values into the Holiness religion necessitated an establishment of a set of practices, taboos and rituals. The signs, practices and beliefs were necessary for proof of membership in the elect group. All of this was necessary to reestablish the social order and justify their lifestyle. The reward for membership was the reestablishment of their lost status as a member of God's chosen people and provision of an acceptable outlet for emotional release.<sup>31</sup>

The Holiness movement meets the qualifications of a sect according to Clark's definition. He states that a sect has strong attachment to definite earmarks of its own such as: 1) peculiarities of worship, 2) literal interpretation of scripture, 3) specific form of emotional reaction, 4) rejection of innovations which depart from alleged ancient practices, 5) disproportionate elevation of some tenet (principle, doctrine, belief), 6) regards itself as the true church - its practices conform to the biblical and divinely-sanctioned pattern, 7) narrow dogmatism and 8) voluntary association.<sup>32</sup>

The type of sect the Holiness movement represents appears to be a combination of perfectionistic and legalistic. A perfectionistic sect seeks holiness and personal perfection of life and freedom from the temptations and desires of the flesh. They realize their hopes through strong emotional reactions.<sup>33</sup>

A legalistic sect stresses certain "rules, objective forms, observations or 'things' which can be definitely performed as essential to the true religion."<sup>34</sup> The sect gets its rites or taboos from part of the Bible. Because the Bible is the authority for their actions, they see themselves as restorers of the true church of primitive Christianity.

The Holiness sect was able to incorporate the prevailing beliefs of the area. It was the situations that were offensive, not the beliefs. This new world code had to reject the old form of conduct that did not support the religious beliefs. The running-sets provided a needed emotional outlet, but many times led to sexual excesses that were offensive to the new moral code. Dancing was considered a sin until the church sanctified it as a sign of possession by the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup> "If you don't dance with the spirit of the Lord, why it's a sin."<sup>36</sup>

Other modifications of secular beliefs that were incorporated into the Holiness beliefs included:

1. Telling a lie. Any story that could not be vouched for was considered a sin. Yet folk tales were an important part of the heritage of these people. "Tall tales" have been replaced with tales of miracle cures, descriptions of spectacular feats of snake handling, fire handling, and poison drinking. Carden described the noon meal at the Homecoming in Carson Springs: "about 12:30 everyone gathered for fried chicken, roast beef, country ham, and all the fixings for an old fashioned dinner-on-the-grounds. It was easy to feel the warmth. It was fun to see the happiness. It

was thrilling to know the Spirit walked among them. They ate. They laughed. They mingled. They recounted the events of the morning. They swapped stories about miracles of healing and victory as if they were recipes or old-time mountain tales. These people are as comfortable with talk of God's miracles as most people are with gossip. It's simple a way of life."<sup>37</sup>

Reverend Alfred Ball recounted tales of miracle cures in his interviews with this author. One girl grew back part of a finger that was severed and smashed. A member of his congregation was able to use a broken arm with no pain. He even claims one man died and was brought back to life.<sup>38</sup>

The Bible stories are told in the folk tale tradition using folk speech. Some examples are included in Chapter III. These stories used the old traditions to convey the new religious content while serving the original function of providing entertainment. The church forbids other forms of entertainment such as movie theatres, television and fictional books.

2. Folk songs were forbidden.<sup>39</sup> Any song that is not religious is called a "love song" and is banned. The singing tradition is strong and many Holiness songs are old folk song tunes with new religious lyrics. Music plays an important role in the Holiness religion. Its ability to absorb this part of the tradition adds to its success. Examples of the songs appear in the Appendix.
3. Folk cures<sup>40</sup> as well as modern medicine are refused. The true believer rejects both the old and new when it comes to healing the sick. God will provide healing through faith and the laying on of hands by the faithful.
4. Telling riddles, jokes or rhymes is sinful. This belief counters the folk tradition of tales and amusing stories. The Holiness religion does allow such stories, if they are religious in nature. One such example is: Question - What Bible character was born without a soul, received a soul, gave up a soul and when he died he neither went to Hell nor to Heaven? Answer - The whale that swallowed Jonah.<sup>41</sup>

5. Modest dress and sober behavior. Clothing is plain. Men wear no neckties (they are not mentioned in the Bible).<sup>42</sup> Women wear long dresses, no make-up and do not cut their hair. About women and hair cuts, sister Eunice Ball stated, "The Bible plainly speaks that it's wrong. It says a woman's hair is her glory. One place it says if she be shorn, she might as well be shaven. In other words, if you cut it a little, you might as well shave it all off. I don't cut mine for any reason."<sup>43</sup>
6. The Bible is the supreme authority. It provides the rules for daily behavior and dress as mentioned above, it provides the guidelines for religious behavior (the signs to practice and believe in) and it can be interpreted by the average man through spiritual guidance. It provides proof of God's favor by practice of the signs.

As discussed in Chapter I, the Holiness sect has its religious roots in Methodism. Like other fundamentalist groups, they believe that personal salvation is of the utmost importance. It is attained by a personal, emotional experience and followed by a change in behavior. The Holiness sect chose signs to show that they had faith and were, therefore, saved.<sup>44</sup> The activities (singing, dancing, practicing the signs) are all made possible by a belief in the ability of a person to be possessed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>45</sup> Theirs is not a social religion. Their concern is with personal salvation, not the betterment of mankind.<sup>46</sup>

The Bible is "interpreted" literally. Reverend Robert Grooms stated, "We've got to take the Bible like it is written. If you're going to take part of it and lay part of it down, you might as well let it all go. The Word is spiritually understood. And without the Spirit of the Lord,

nobody can understand it. That's what's wrong with a lot of churches today. They don't have enough of the Spirit to understand what the Bible really means."<sup>47</sup>

Reverend Alfred Ball said, "We always urge people to find a church that teaches the scriptures. We never ask anybody to blindly believe anything we can't back up with Bible scripture."<sup>48</sup>

Brother Dewey Chafin declared, "Jesus spoke the words. They are exactly as Jesus said them. Jesus said it Himself. They just can't take it out of the Bible." (Referring to criticism of the group of theologians who doubt that the verses of Mark 16: 17-18 belong in the Bible.) Said Chafin, "I just don't think God would want us to do it if it were wrong. If it was wrong, God wouldn't have left it in the Bible."<sup>49</sup>

The Bible verses that list the signs are seen as a direct commandment by God to those who have the faith. Reverend Floyd McCall, pastor of the Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name, Greenville, South Carolina stated, "The average man can't sit down and read the Bible with understanding. It takes God. This, Mark 16: 17-18, is a one way thing. God put it there and that's exactly what He meant."<sup>50</sup>

The internal constraints discussed reveal that the beliefs, values and attitudes were deeply grounded in the rural lifestyle in which they originated. The pioneer lifestyle of independence, honesty and pride in a job well done

all contributed to the beliefs of the people. The changed circumstances of having to rely on "outsiders" for help and support was not easily accepted. Heritage, tradition, independence and a strong individual ethical and moral code were important internal constraints for the members of the Holiness movement.

Constraints that originated from outside sources also affected the growth of the movement. The laws that were passed in an effort to ban the practices had a reverse effect. Reverend Ball stated, "We're going to go on taking up serpents every time we get anointed by God. Anytime God anoints us we're going to take them up. Regardless of how many laws they pass or how many times they put us in jail or how long they keep us, we're going to take up serpents. It's God's Word, and we feel that we have to obey the scriptures or else we'll be lost."<sup>51</sup>

Media coverage also has an affect on the number of followers in the movement and the degree to which the signs are practiced. For example, large numbers of followers showed up at the memorial service for Reverend Lee Valentine in 1955 in Harlan, Kentucky. The media coverage of Reverend Bunn in Durham, South Carolina in 1948 contributed to the turn out and subsequent press coverage by Life magazine. In more recent times, Reverend Alfred Ball stated that the church at Carson Springs has held a homecoming every year since its opening in 1969. It was only after the two strychnine deaths in April 1973 of Jimmy Ray Williams and

Buford Pack and resulting court trials of Reverend Lester Pack and Alfred Ball that attendance at the homecoming became much larger.<sup>52</sup>

The purpose of this chapter was to identify the exigence, rhetorical audience and constraints of the rhetorical situation. Bitzer stated that at any one time, there may be several exigencies, but that one usually dominates. It is the author's opinion that the need to adapt to a new social structure and reduce dissonance were the most important needs of these people. The rhetorical audience includes only those people who are directly affected by the situation; the displaced Southern, rural population. The constraints of the situation include the internal constraints brought to the situation by the people themselves, their beliefs, attitudes and values, as well as external forces, laws, etc., that affect the behavior and beliefs of the rhetorical audience.

The constraints are seen as the foundation on which the Holiness movement was built. They formed the basis for answering, or fulfilling the needs of the people. Chapter III discusses these constraints in more detail and describes how they were justified by the religious beliefs chosen by the people.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter II

<sup>1</sup>John B. Holt, "Holiness Religion: Cultural Shock and Social Reorganization," American Sociological Review, Volume 5, 1940, p. 741.

<sup>2</sup>Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," American Sociological Review, Volume 24, February 1959, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Neil J. Smelser, Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: Free Press, 1962), p. 313.

<sup>4</sup>Cobb, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Braden, "Why Are the Cults Growing?," p. 45.

<sup>6</sup>Holt, p. 746.

<sup>7</sup>Letter received by the author from Cecil Browning, a member of the Jesus Only Church in Switzer, West Virginia dated July 27, 1974.

<sup>8</sup>Stekert, p. 320.

<sup>9</sup>La Barre, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup>Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone, (ed.), Religious Movement in Contemporary America (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 442.

<sup>11</sup>Stekert, P. 321.

<sup>12</sup>Holt, p. 741.

<sup>13</sup>Schwartz, p. 405.

<sup>14</sup>W. D. Weatherford and Earl D. C. Brewer, "Early Settlers in the Southern Appalachians" in Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), P. 19.

<sup>15</sup>Cobb, p. 31.

<sup>16</sup>The Foxfire books consist of five volumes of recorded interviews with people living in the Appalachian mountains today. Eliot Wigginton started Foxfire magazine

with his ninth and tenth grade English classes in 1966 in Rabun, Georgia. The people interviewed by the students demonstrated crafts, explained folk cures for illness and other "affairs of plain living." The books are the product of the earlier magazine. Mr. Wigginton is the editor of the books; Foxfire (New York: Anchor Books, 1977).

<sup>17</sup>La Barre, p. 167.

<sup>18</sup>Wood, p. 96.

<sup>19</sup>Cobb, p. 76.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Boisen, Religion in Crisis and Custom, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup>Cobb, pp. 92-97.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-114.

<sup>25</sup>Carden and Pelton, pp. 112-113.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>27</sup>Cobb, p. 193.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>29</sup>William Graham Sumner, Folkways (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), p. 82.

<sup>30</sup>Cobb, p. 170.

<sup>31</sup>Smelser, p. 129.

<sup>32</sup>Clark, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup>Smelser, p. 314.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Cobb, p. 107.

<sup>36</sup>Stekert, p. 318.

<sup>37</sup>Carden, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup>Personal interview with Reverend Alfred Ball in Newport, Tennessee on May 28, 1978.

<sup>39</sup>Stekert, p. 319.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Callahan, Smokey Mountain Country, p. 91.

<sup>43</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 160.

<sup>44</sup>Stekert, p. 316.

<sup>45</sup>La Barre, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>47</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 155.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>50</sup>Robert W. Pelton and Karen W. Carden, Smoke Handlers, quote found in appendix of book.

<sup>51</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 103.

<sup>52</sup>Personal interview with Reverend Alfred Ball in Newport, Tennessee on May 27, 1978.

## Chapter III

### THE RHETORICAL ACT

The services of the Holiness sect serve to modify the exigence discussed in Chapter II. In order to understand the importance of the components of the service and how each part helps to modify the exigence, a description of an early service and a modern day service is described first and each part of the service is discussed separately in detail.

#### A Holiness Church Service in the 1940s

The following description is drawn from La Barre's research of the kinds of meetings that were held at the Dolly Pond Church of God With Signs Following at Grasshopper Valley, Tennessee that occurred during the early years of the movement's development.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike modern day churches with beautiful architecture, the Dolly Pond Church was a simple wooden framed structure made of unpainted lumber. The roof was covered with tar-and-gravel paper. Inside was a dirt floor and a rough wooden table with legs planted in the earth. Located at the pulpit end of the building, this table was covered with a cloth and used as a gathering place by the members during the service. A Bible and kerosene lamp was placed on the table. Members could stand freely around the table. On

the wall behind the pulpit was the name of the church in neat block letters on a wooden sign, with Bible texts in smaller lettering. Benches for the women and a few folding chairs were in the room, mostly along the walls.

Members reflected their beliefs in the clothes they wore. Men wore bibbed overalls or open necked shirts (ties were not mentioned in the Bible) and pants. Women wore plain cotton dresses. Any form of artificial beauty, jewelry, make-up, was looked down upon. Anything related to appearance should be found in the Bible or should be avoided.

The lifestyle of the people was also influenced by their religion. Even though the Bible states that Jesus drank wine, alcohol was forbidden. Few people had enough education to read the Bible. It was felt that God would make His meaning clear to the members through the Spirit.

Meetings were held on Saturday and Sunday evenings. People got cleaned up after chores were done and arrived at church sometimes two hours before services started in order to exchange news and visit.

The devoted greeted one another with a mouth to mouth "holy kiss," and a formal hug. Men kissed men and women kissed women; there was no exchange of kisses with members of the opposite sex.<sup>2</sup> Men usually gathered together to talk. It was the women's responsibility to watch after the children.

The arrival of the preacher and musicians, usually a guitar player and tambourine shaker, signaled the church

members that the service would soon begin. The service began with some informal remarks by the preacher that were followed by songs. The singing increased in intensity and the Spirit began to move. Members would jump up and down; some kicked the wooden box that contained the snakes. The chanting of old familiar hymns became stronger and louder.

All joined in and clapped and kept time with the guitar player. Shouts of "Praise the Lord," and "Glory to God," were heard throughout the church. The members prayed in their own manner, outloud, sometimes in unison with others. While some prayed, others spoke in tongues.

The climax of the service came when the spiritual feeling among the members had grown through the collective praying and preaching by the minister. At that point, a rope was stretched across the front of the church to separate those who planned to handle the snakes from those who watched.

Snakes were held in a variety of ways. Some members held them draped around their waists. Others placed snakes around their necks like necklaces. Handlers displayed a wide variety of emotions during the ordeal. Some looked serene and calm; others wept while a few danced, screamed and jerked.

Handling fire is another sign practiced at this point in the service if the members feel called to perform it. The kerosene lamp that was placed on the table near the

pulpit area was kept there for such an occasion. The chimney of the lamp was removed and believers passed their hands over the flames. Strychnine mixed with water was kept on hand for anyone who wished to drink it.

After the Spirit had passed, snakes were carefully put back into the wooden box. The preacher made a few remarks and completed the service with prayer for the sick. Members departed soon after the service was over.

#### A Holiness Service in the 1970s

The following account is a description of the service the night Jimmy Ray Williams and Buford Pack died on April 7, 1973.<sup>3</sup>

The service started with music from guitars, drums and tambourines. The Cramerton Mountain Gospel Boys sang. Visitors from other churches filled the room.<sup>4</sup> The church itself was a small, wooden framed, one room structure located in the forest of English Mountain outside of Carson Springs, Tennessee. Folding chairs were used instead of pews and the pulpit was made of rough plain wood.

The Spirit moved quickly. Men were soon standing in front of the congregation handling snakes. As fast as one person put a snake back into the screened wooden box, someone else would pull it out again.

Jimmy Ray Williams was an assistant pastor of the church. He brought strychnine powder to the service. He

handled snakes and spoke in tongues with the others. The music was loud and so were the shouts of praise as the snakes were handled.

The excitement grew. A great number of people felt the Spirit enter as was evident in the loud screams of joy and the dancing in the aisles. Hand clapping accompanied by a wide assortment of tongues added to the mood. The magnetic musical beat affected "saints" and sinners alike. A spiritual blanket of emotion covered everyone.

Jimmy Ray handed the snakes he held to another brother. He mixed the strychnine powder into a glass of water. He drank half of the liquid. Afterwards, he danced, sang and prayed for the sick. The music intensified and the audience responded physically and verbally.

Burl Barbee began to preach. "Hallelujah!" "I told Brother Williams tonight; I said, 'This is the biggest crowd I've seen since the night I got thrown in jail over serpent handling.'" The audience laughed. He strutted like a peacock. His sermon was constantly punctuated with words of encouragement, amens, praises to God, screams and speaking in tongues by members of the audience. Barbee referred to snake handling. "They can't put you in jail for preachin' it! They can't put you in jail for shoutin' it! Then why do they put you in jail for doin' it?"

"Glory to God!"

"Praise the Lord!"

"How can they - I said how can they put you in jail for doin' it? After you get out of jail, you are still going to do it! Jesus said, He said, 'They shall take up serpents!' I got bit in Copperville about seven years ago. Last year I got bit at Dolly Pond." Barbee delivered his sermon while he stalked, jumped and quivered back and forth in front of the congregation.

"My daughter came around - my daughter that's married - her husband's here, and I seen the night he handled rattlesnakes. Praise the Lord. And she said to me, she said, 'Daddy, I believe you're all swelled up.' She said, 'Daddy, what do you think about snake handlin' now?' I said, "That's just a bite mark. That can't hurt!"

The throbbing music had stopped. Shouts filled the air. Barbee paused. Then he continued, "When Barbee gets himself in trouble - you may get yourself in trouble - but I'm here tonight to tell you, with a heart full of love, that God don't never get you in trouble."

"Praise the Lord!"

"Amen!"

"Those of us who still live close to Him won't never be hurt, if they have the anointment from God. But just a good feeling will get you hurt!"

The audience responded.

"You won't be bit if you live close!"

"Praise the Lord!"

"In Jesus name!"

Barbee answered. "Brotherly love will take care of everything. Brotherly love will take care of everything!" He interrupted the sermon and broke into tongue speaking. He waved his arms wildly and slithered across the front of the church. A few audience members responded in tongues. Others yelled. Women screamed. The excitement mounted. As Carden put it, "The brothers and sisters were being incited to act."

Barbee resumed giving the sermon. "In St. John 5:43, Jesus said, 'I am come in my Father's name, and yet ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.' I'll give you another one. Acts, the fourth chapter and the twelfth verse, '. . . for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' All preachers, I want to say this with a full heart of love, Brother Pack. All preachers will go to the table in the name of unity: The Methodists, the Baptists, the Church of God, the Church of the Living God, the Church of Bible Prophecy, the Church of Jesus, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Free Holiness, and all the rest of them. They will go to the table, and when they get through passing the blessing, they'll say, 'We've asked it all in Jesus name.'"

The audience answered with shouts of "In Jesus Name!," "Amen!" and other shouts of praise. Barbee was continually interrupted by fervent believers.

"They'll lay hands on sick men. All of 'em do it. They'll lay hands on sick men - in Jesus name. They'll get hold of a devil possessed person. They'll try their best to cast that devil out - in Jesus name. Why do they use that name? Why - do - they - do - that?"

The crowd went wild. The air was filled with shouts of praise. A feeling of bliss enveloped everyone; Burl Barbee had reached his pinnacle.

At this point in the service, Buford Pack came forward and picked up the glass of strychnine. He had injected pure battery acid at a tent revival in Brevard, North Carolina and survived.

Buford raised the glass and said, "I do this to confirm the Word of God." He quickly swallowed some of the mixture. After this, Buford addressed the audience and delivered an emotionally stirring message about the importance of faith and practicing the signs.

Music started up again with a spellbinding version of "When the Saints Go Marching In." Buford left the pulpit, went down the aisle and out the door. It had been less than ten minutes since he drank the poison. The audience was busy praising God and few noticed that he had left.

The congregation broke into song. People clapped, stomped, shouted, danced and screamed to the melody. The high pitch of the electric guitar could be heard through the noise. The gospel group played the same "dirge-like hypnotic medley" over and over again.

Burl Barbee picked up the glass of poison from the pulpit. It looked like he would drink from the glass, but Jimmy Ray took the glass from Barbee and drank it himself. Shortly thereafter, Jimmy Ray fell to the floor and couldn't get up.

Members first thought Jimmy Ray might have passed out "under the Power" as many people do. When they realized he couldn't move, some of the men first prayed over Jimmy and then picked him up off the floor. They sat him down and gathered around him to pray over him and "lay hands" on him. Jimmy Ray was conscious. He told them, "Everything will be all right."

Burl Barbee screamed over the confusion "You don't never see nothing like this in Chattanooga." The congregation answered with shouts of agreement. "If you ain't got sense enough to believe, you ain't got sense enough not to believe."

"In the name of Jesus," was repeated as members laid hands on some of the faithful. The bedlam continued until some realized that Jimmy Ray was getting worse and that Buford Pack was dying outside.

Some left the church to lay hands on Buford. Jimmy Ray was taken to his home where he died later that night. The deaths left the people frightened and confused.

The above descriptions give an insight into the components of a typical service, their place in the

sequence of events of a service and how the sequence of events has changed over the years. The rhetoric of the service evolved as the movement became more established. The interrelationship of each part of the service and the importance of the roles of the preacher and audience are discussed in the following pages.

### Components of a Service

To analyze the service each part, its relationship to each other and its relative rhetorical importance will be described.

#### The Music

Music plays an important part in the Holiness services. It occurs at the opening of the service, is usually present during the practicing of the signs and can be continued throughout the service as described in the meeting at Carson Springs.

Each church has its own special singers and musicians who lead the others in song. Those considered especially talented will travel to other churches to share their talents as did the group that attended the meeting at Carson Springs. Audience members are encouraged to offer their own songs. Everyone is expected to join in the singing part of the service.

Musical instruments used vary with the affluence of the church. Electric guitars are popular.<sup>4</sup> The instruments

used at the Carson Springs meeting recorded by Thomas Burton included acoustic guitars, electric guitars, a tamborine and a set of drums.

Reverend Ball's singers used acoustic guitars, electric guitars and a tamborine. There was an elaborate set-up of large speakers and a sound system that amplified the music and sermon to a level much greater than needed for the size of building.

Music is accompanied by hand clapping to the rhythm of the song. Even if a church lacks a number of instruments, the congregation can supply reinforcement of the beat of the songs. The rhythms established can be slow and easy or frenetic and compelling. Rhythm is an important factor in the establishment of the emotional tone of the meeting.

The content and themes of the songs play an important part in reinforcing the beliefs of the participants and in establishing the mood of the meeting. The selection of "When the Saints Go Marching In" at the close of the Carson Springs meeting was like an ominous forboding of what was to happen shortly thereafter to Jimmy Ray Williams and Buford Pack.

Many songs contain lyrics that dwell on the rewards of the next life. Titles like "I Won't Have to Worry Anymore"<sup>5</sup> suggest the benefits of a life to come which would be free from trials and tribulations. Emphasis is put on the endurance of hard times here on earth and how they

prepare the believer for future blessings and confer the rights to a better afterlife. The lyrics of "Wading Through Deep Waters" are typical of this type of song.

### Wading Through Deep Waters

#### Chorus:

I've been wading through deep waters trying to get home.

(repeat)

I've been wading through deep waters, wading through deep waters,

I've been wading through deep waters trying to get home.

I'm gonna see the One who saved me, when I get home.

(repeat)

I'm gonna see the One who saved me, see the One who saved me. I'm gonna see the One who saved me, when I get home.

All my sickness will be over, when I get home.

(repeat)

All my sickness will be over, all my sickness will be over, when I get home.

I'm gonna eat at a welcome table, when I get home.

(repeat)

All of my troubles will be over, troubles will be over, all my troubles will be over, when I get home.

I'm gonna see my Jesus, when I get home.

(repeat)

I'm gonna see my Jesus, gonna see my Jesus, I'm gonna see my Jesus, when I get home.

Other songs may warn of the danger of doubting the need to maintain rigid standards of behavior and avoidance of the sinner's influence.

### I Believe There's a Heaven

I believe there's a Heaven. I believe there's wrong  
and right.

I believe there's a Savior. I pray day and night.  
I know for sure there is a God, and this is true.

If you, a sinner, keep giving excuses for refusing  
to see the light.

They say there's so many religions that they can't  
all be right.

They say they can't be holy enough and with a  
troubled soul,  
Well, I haven't got much learning, but there's one  
thing that I know.

There are people who go out dancing in the  
jump-joint every night.  
They say if you don't overdo it, a little bit's  
all right.  
They say they only go to see, but I know it's a  
fact.  
That you can't go down the chimney without getting  
a little black.

There are so many people, and I know they're very  
wrong.  
And if they keep on sinning, their religion can't  
be strong.  
I know there's lots of hypocrites, and there's one  
thing I've found,  
If a sinner can't climb higher, he'll try to pull  
you down.

Hymn books usually are not used in the Holiness  
meetings. Many songs are composed by the people themselves  
and most are known by heart. Reverend Ball stated that some  
songs are composed as the singers perform. He said that no  
one in his church could write music. Cecil Browning stated,  
"We love songs that are spiritual and not in books."<sup>8</sup>

Songs relate to personal problems and to the signs  
they practice. Some are old gospel songs and old folk songs

with new lyrics. An old favorite tune "Little David Play Your Harp" was updated this way:

Well Moses, Moses what you got in your hand?  
It's a serpent, Lord; not a sunner man.

Well, perfect love, it will cast out fear.  
Just bring your box\* and set it over here.

Well, brother, brother why do you doubt.  
I'll take up serpents and sing and shout.

I'll take up serpents if I go to jail.<sup>9</sup>  
Don't want my brothers to pay my bail.

Other examples of the gospel rock style of music used in these services can be heard on the tapes of the recorded sermons. Singers often give testimony before singing a song that has special meaning for them.

Rhetorical Application. The music chosen for the services is used as an important auditory channel of communication. It is a response to the need to set an appropriate mood and focus the attention of the audience on the situation.

The music was used to call people into worship and begin the service. It served to set the tempo and rhythm of the meeting. When a high level of emotional involvement of the audience was needed, the musical rhythms were compelling and insistent; almost hypnotic in nature. Wood stated that the audience was very responsive to the music. There were "particular qualities of musical sound or combinations of sounds to which the audience responded with enthusiasm;"

enthusiasm mounted as the music approached the same points in each verse.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to declare how much of the music selection, or other decisions about the methods used in the church service are intentional. The rhythm established by different song choices may be spontaneous, or may be a result of deliberate choice. Reverend Ball has encouraged the use of songs with a slower tempo in his church services. It is the author's opinion that his preference for slower songs is an important method of response used to alter the direction he has chosen for his church.

Besides the use of rhythm, the words of the songs are an important part of the service. They reflect the trials and tribulations of the members and glorify their suffering in this world in exchange for glory and happiness in the next. Like popular country songs, themes of hardship and stories of struggle are ever popular. They help to provide a sense of belonging and identification to the group.

The music is also used as a form of indirect suggestion for the audience. The rhythm, beat and placement of musical selections in the service serves as a guide to the audience to indicate the desired level of emotional response. Altering the loudness, as well as the rate of the tempo, established acts to stir religious enthusiasm.<sup>11</sup>

Another use of the music is as a vehicle of repetition. Choruses can be repeated over and over to create a

trance like atmosphere. In this way, a specific mood can be maintained once it is established. Repetition is also important as a way to reinforce beliefs via the repetition of specific lyrics and phrases of belief. This helps to instill and rekindle interest in the audience.

Music plays an important, though not dominant, part in the services. Other parts of the service appear to contribute more to the overall acceptance of the practicing of the signs. The most important function the music selections fulfill is the establishment of an appropriate emotional climate and an expression of the hardships the people face in life. Songs contribute to the willingness of people to lose their identity in that of the crowd.

Music is an element that audience and preacher alike join in and participate in. Practicing the signs is another area of audience participation that is very important. Some signs are practiced by preachers and members alike; others are left more to the authority of the preacher. In the following paragraphs those signs practiced mainly by audience members are discussed as a unit and those practiced mainly by the preacher are handled as part of the description of the activities engaged in by the preacher.

#### Signs Practiced By Audience Members

Audience participation is an integral part of the Holiness church services. Members are encouraged to speak up and give testimony and support to the group. The

activities of speaking in tongues, handling snakes and fire, as well as drinking poison, are the signs usually participated in by audience members. They may also play a part in laying hands on the sick, but the minister usually leads in this activity.

Prayers, Tongues and Anointing. Audience participation begins with singing and clapping. Once attention is focused on the meeting, the faithful concentrate on their beliefs and share their feelings. The size of the attendance varies, depending on the time of year and the interest of the faithful.<sup>12</sup> The more people available, the quicker it seems the rest of the activities begin.

People are free to pray during the singing. At the Homecoming in Carson Springs, people sang, chanted, clapped and praised God with uplifted palms and raised faces. Each person prays his own prayer aloud.<sup>13</sup>

As the faithful pray, some will "break out in tongues." At the service the author attended, the group prayer sounded like a collective garble of voices. It seemed that a few people were speaking in tongues, but the number of people praying and the loudness of their prayers made it impossible to pick out any one voice. Wood wrote: "prayer is practically always concert prayer. Whenever an individual leads in prayer the others join in as they wish; this involves most of the congregation at one time and the

exhortation is engaged in with a building up of feeling toward the most intense supplication."<sup>14</sup>

There are different views as to when the gift of tongues should be expressed. Some feel it is acceptable to speak in tongues at the service at any time. It is meant to be a witness. Everett Fraley, a member, said, "I believe it is a witness when you speak in tongues that you've got the Holy Ghost. This is the Lord's way of showing you you've got it. I believe you've got to have something there to quicken (jerk) the mortal body."<sup>15</sup>

Floyd McCall, a Holiness preacher agrees. According to McCall, "Tongues is a sign to the unbelievers. They don't understand it. It takes a person with the Holy Ghost and the knowledge of God to understand the mystery of tongues. It is to let the people know what the Spirit is speaking about. If you speak in tongues, Paul says to pray that you can interpret it. McCall also believes that there are different types of tongues. He explained that "new tongues" means you don't speak like you did when you were out in sin. "Other tongues" he said are those spoken directly to God. No person is able to understand the words that are meant for God."<sup>16</sup>

Ralph Eslinger states, "When anyone speaks in tongues, they're speaking to God. Nobody can understand that. If God wants it to go to the church, He will give a person the gift of interpretation."<sup>17</sup>

Churches differ on this point of whether tongues spoken in church should be interpreted. Reverend Ball believes that tongues should be interpreted. Everett Fraley explained, "The gift of tongues should always be interpreted. If somebody stands up in church and speaks in an unknown tongue and it is not interpreted, someone in the congregation has disobeyed God."<sup>18</sup>

The content of the message, interpreted or not is thought to be a message to a member in the congregation, or to the entire church.<sup>19</sup> Whether the message is to be interpreted could be a method to discourage false tongues, people just pretending to have the gift. Reverend Ball states, "I believe when you get the Holy Ghost, it'll talk. It'll sure manifest itself. But the devil's got a tongue, too. There's some people who speak in tongues, who simply do it. They've heard it done and they mock. They put on a pretty good act. But they're not fooling God or anybody who's got the Spirit of God."<sup>20</sup>

The one point the faithful do agree on is that it takes the Holy Ghost to have a true manifestation of tongues. Willie Sizemore, pastor of the Full Gospel Jesus Church in Columbus, Ohio described the need for the Holy Ghost and why he speaks in tongues. "If you have the Holy Ghost," he said, "you have to speak in tongues. Everyone who has the Holy Ghost speaks in tongues, but everyone who speaks in tongues doesn't necessarily have the Holy Ghost. You would

have to have the genuine Holy Ghost yourself to be able to know the difference. I speak in tongues for the same reason I handle serpents. I do it because it's one of the five signs, that's all. It's not our purpose. The Word of God just says that we would do it. Speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues are also given to us as spiritual gifts."<sup>21</sup>

Receiving the Holy Ghost and gaining the "anointing" power to practice the signs is not an automatic condition of repentance and salvation. It must be diligently sought out. Murl Bass, a member stated, "Repentance is empty. Your vessel's (body) empty. The water baptism is to clean it. And the Holy Ghost is to fill it back up, to serve the purpose." For Murl, it took a year to receive the Spirit. According to his testimony, when he did, he was able to speak in tongues.<sup>23</sup>

Some members believe that the Spirit descends upon you; others feel it dwells in you.<sup>24</sup> Members may differ as to how the Holy Ghost is received, but they agree that the Spirit is essential for victory when practicing the more difficult signs. The members take an active part in receiving the Spirit. While the music plays, people "press" to receive the Spirit. A few leave their seats to dance. A person may hop and skip in a manner that resembles the old Kentucky running sets. The more enthusiastic followers may dance in a lively fashion like the old Charleston.<sup>25</sup> Even

though several people may be dancing, eyes closed, no one appears to run into anyone else.<sup>26</sup>

Each person must learn how to recognize the anointing. Kelly Williams, preacher of the Full Gospel Church at Mico, West Virginia stated that a person's anointing was an individual experience. He said his anointing could be a calm spirit, or a motion anointing that makes him want to move.<sup>27</sup>

Reports of people in various media accounts of services portray the people as not in control of their faculties. Reverend Ball stated that he was always aware of what he was doing while under the anointing power.<sup>28</sup> Richard Williams, son of Kelly Williams, who died of a snake bite in 1974 described his anointing by saying, "When the anointing comes over me, I feel a spirit. I do things automatically. I don't have control over them. But I always know what I'm doing. We're not in a trance or out of our minds like a lot of people think we are."<sup>29</sup>

Most agree that the anointing power comes from the same source, the Holy Ghost. Some perceive the anointing power to enable the believer to perform any of the signs. Others feel that the anointing power will specify which sign is to be practiced. For example, a tingling in the mouth or jaw is thought to specify tongues. Some of the faithful are known for their ability to practice a particular sign.<sup>30</sup> Reverend Ball is known for his ability to cast out devils.

Clyde Ricker was known for his ability to handle serpents before he became the first believer to handle the deadly cobra at the Carson Springs Homecoming.

Praying is an essential ingredient to participating in the signs and becoming anointed. It is an important, initial individual expression of feeling that helps to set the emotional climate for the activities to come. Speaking in tongues is a sign practiced by a majority of the faithful. It can be the first outward sign that the person has received anointing. Participation in the more dangerous signs usually follows this initial step. There are differing opinions about how one receives the Spirit, but the importance of receiving the anointing itself as a prerequisite to practicing the signs is universally agreed upon.

Snake Handling. Snakes are caught and kept in wooden boxes with wire screens in them. The boxes are carried to the meetings and are available for those who wish to participate. Churches differ in regards to when the snakes are placed on the pulpit; some keep the box visible at all times, other keep the box behind the pulpit and bring the snakes out only when the Spirit is right.

Snake handling is the most widely practiced of the more dangerous signs of snake handling, fire handling and poison drinking. It is the sign that has received the most attention from the media as well as from many curious

observers. When it is known that snakes will be present at a meeting, the turn out usually is greater.<sup>31</sup>

In accounts of some present day meetings studied by this author, there appeared to be an informal seating arrangement that separated those who wished to participate in the snake handling from those who only wished to observe. Cobb stated that the saints usually sat in the first few rows of the church. The next rows were filled with those members who had been saved, but who had not received any of the spiritual gifts. The remainder of the rows were filled with the unsaved; some were sympathetic observers, others were known "sinner" people.<sup>32</sup> Alfred Ball was very firm in his statement that no one in his church was ever allowed to take a serpent past the first row into the back of the congregation. His reasoning was that there were Christians back there who were scared to death of a snake and sinner people too.<sup>33</sup>

Anointing power is needed in order to handle the snakes. The enthusiasm generated by the hymns, prayers, shouting and dancing help put the believer in the proper frame of mind. The faithful report different sensations that indicate to them that they are under the anointing power and that it is safe to pick up a serpent. Lester Ball stated, "I'll sorta look up and tell God, 'Lord this is your Word. I'm your servant and I'm your child. If it is Thy will, I want to do it.'" Then a spiritual feeling will come

upon me, so I know without a doubt, I can take up a serpent."<sup>34</sup>

Some members indicate a special feeling when it comes to anointing. The believer knows what purpose the anointing is for (handle serpents, drink poison, etc.) by the type of anointing they receive. Bea Eslinger stated, "I begin to get a numbness and it starts in my hands. It's usually more in my right hand than it is in my left, when it's to take up serpents. Sometimes I cry. And God speaks clearly to me. He tells me that He'll shield me. When He tells me that, then I know I'm alright (sic). He actually says, 'Go take it up.'"<sup>35</sup>

Other handlers wait for a sign to be sure that it is really God's will that they handle serpents. Reverend Alfred Ball recounted the time he first took up a serpent. He stated that the first time he felt anointed, he asked God if that was what he was supposed to do. Reverend Ball asked God to indicate if it was His voice speaking to him and asked God to give him a sign by having another church member offer a serpent to Reverend Ball with the words, "If you want to take this, take it, it won't bite you." A few minutes later, that same person offered Reverend Ball a serpent with the words, "If you feel like taking this serpent, take it, it won't hurt you, it will be alright (sic)."<sup>36</sup>

Murl Bass was bitten by a rattlesnake at the Carson Springs Homecoming in 1973. He described his anointing to

pick up serpents by saying that it felt like having a clear plastic capsule placed over him. He stated that he was scared to death of snakes when not under God's anointing power.<sup>37</sup>

Sometimes the anointing power is so strong that it is transferred from one believer to another. When Clyde Ricker handled the cobra for the first time at the Carson Springs Homecoming in 1973, Carden and Pelton reported that it spilled over to other members who handled the cobra after Ricker.<sup>38</sup> Reverend Ball stated that some people have been foolish enough to handle snakes off another person's anointing. He said that God allowed this to happen occasionally, but that such a practice was very dangerous.<sup>39</sup> Unlike transference of anointing, the person who handles snakes without being anointed never received the full experience. He relies on the anointing of the believer he takes the serpent from.

The reasons for handling snakes are like those for practicing any of the signs. The most important reason seems to be to "confirm the Word of God."<sup>40</sup> Reverend Alfred Ball stated, "All they've got is something they've read. But once they've seen it done, they can say, 'Well the Bible says that and I've witnessed it. So now I know it's possible. I know now that you can do just what God's Word says you can do.'"<sup>41</sup>

There seems to be a great desire to practice the more dangerous act of handling snakes because it not only confirms the Word but also it shows other members that the practitioner is "living right." Ruth Dillon expressed this sentiment when she said, "Taking up serpents is the Word of God just as much as laying hands on the sick. People love to lay hands on the sick for they can't do no harm if they aren't healed. But to take up serpents, one must live clean and be a believer. The five signs in Mark 16 are for the real believers."<sup>42</sup>

Reverend Richard Williams felt that the serpent handling was the first step towards a return to the original Eden. "In the beginning," he said, "man had dominion over all things, lions, tigers, all the fowls of the air and the beasts of the earth. And I say that the real church is going to come back to that dominion. The serpents to us are just a stepping stone. If we continue to know the Lord in this way, it'll only be a matter of time till we'll be able to handle or play with anything."<sup>43</sup>

Finally, besides confirming the Word of God and showing others that one is a true believer, the act of handling a serpent can be a persuasive device to convince non-believers of the rightness of the doctrine the believers follow. Reverend Ball stated, "They come a lot of times just to see these things done, to see people take up serpents. Once they are in church, the Word of God can be preached. And so, they've heard the truth and have had a

chance to repent. God uses the signs to let people know that there are those who still practice the Word of God."<sup>44</sup>

The act of handling the cobra at the Carson Springs Homecoming in 1973 was an extremely emotional event. People crowded around Clyde and the other men who handled the snake. This handling was thought to be a powerful sign to believers and non-believers alike about the depth of faith held by Clyde Ricker and his fellow believers.<sup>45</sup>

Probably the hardest question to answer to the satisfaction of both believers and non-believers is why God allows people to suffer snake bites. Some of the more popular beliefs about why snakes bite include that: 1) it is a sign of faith to the unbeliever, 2) it is a punishment for some sin and 3) that suffering is part of being a true Christian.

Many outsiders believe that the snakes at the services have been tampered with before the meeting. Defanging or milking the snakes ahead of time are two beliefs held by those who doubt the honesty of the church members. Because of this, many churches get their snakes supplied to them by "sinner men," other members in the community who trap the snakes, but do not attend the church services. Clyde Ricker is one of many snake handlers who feels that God lets the serpent bite to prove a point. "I'd say that if I get bit, and I swell up, that's not a sign that I denied the faith, or that I wasn't anointed. God was

just using me to prove to somebody that the serpents have teeth and to show what snakes can do to you."<sup>46</sup>

The reasons why God would allow a snake to bite as a form of punishment are varied. A person may be bitten for some particular wrong doing, or because he is harboring sinful thoughts about another church member.<sup>47</sup> The faithful believe that God puts a "hedge," a barrier or form of protection around anyone who is anointed. If the person takes his mind off God while anointed and in possession of a snake, he might be punished. God can break the hedge and allow the serpent to bite.<sup>48</sup>

The faithful believe that their church is like the early Christian churches and that they, like the original disciples, must suffer for their faith. In the documentary film, "They Shall Take Up Serpents," a man named Bill handled a snake and was bitten during the service. He was taken to a member's home where prayers were offered for his recovery. Jimmy Ray Williams was the assistant pastor of the Carson Springs Church where the film was made, and he explained, "Jesus said, 'They shall send serpents and cockertribes amongst you and they will bite you,' saith the Lord. Amen. We believe that serpents will bite you. Amen. Lots of denominations and lots of people, they teach that the serpent the Bible speaks of is a man or an unclean spirit, but we teach and believe that the serpent crawls on

his belly and eats the dust of the earth and he is what we know of today as a rattlesnake or copperhead."<sup>49</sup>

Kelly Williams, another pastor, believes that suffering a snake bite is like the suffering the early Christians endured and that the suffering serves as a purification process. Rather than scaring the bitten person and making him give up the practice, it usually strengthens the faith and sparks a greater desire to participate in the snake handling activities.<sup>50</sup>

Even though there are a number of reasons proposed as to why a snake might bite a person, there is no disagreement about what should be done after the snake has struck. The faithful believe that God will heal them. The bitten person may be prayed over; some may "lay hands" on a stricken person, but a true believer will never go to a doctor for a snake bite. Billy Jay Forrester, the man bitten during the filming of the documentary at Carson Springs said, "I didn't go to any doctor when I was bitten by a rattlesnake. I wanted to put my faith in the Lord for healing and protection. I was afraid I'd lose my arm. The doctor might have wanted to cut it off. I do feel the Lord moved and took care of me. He healed me. I have no doubt about it."<sup>51</sup>

Many share this fear of doctors. It is difficult to determine which is stronger, the person's belief that God will heal all wounds or the fear that a doctor's cure will

be worse than the bite. Richard Williams, the young minister who died of a serpent bite, said, "When a person gets serpent bit and suffers it out, there are no marks, no scars, and they can use their limbs. But if they go to a doctor, he'll cut that arm from one end to the other, or cut it all the way off."<sup>52</sup>

Those who do go to a doctor are looked down upon for not having enough faith. Still, some believe that going to a doctor is the best thing to do if the person does not have faith enough to "suffer it through." The faithful can even justify this action by declaring that healing from a doctor comes from God. Jimmy Ray Williams explained it by saying, "We believe in divine healing - that all healing comes from God regardless if you're in the hospital and get healed; we believe that it's God that does the work. The doctor can only do what he has knowledge to do and it's God that does the healing."<sup>53</sup>

When a person is bitten and dies from a snake bite, his death has not been in vain. For all the public concern and fear about the dangers inherent in snake handling, not one death reported has been an outsider; all have been in the ranks of the faithful. God has reasons for letting a person die from a snake bite, they believe.

Reverend Ball stated, "If a person in the faith does suffer a bite and dies under the anointment, I believe God has used their death to help spread the Gospel. By their

death, they could do more to get the Gospel spread nationwide or worldwide than they ever did in their lives."<sup>54</sup>

God can also take a person from this life in order to prevent him from falling from grace. "There's always the possibility that God, knowing the person was very sincere, a good Christian, called them out of this life because of some trial that was to come upon them in the future that would maybe overthrow them; and they would be lost. God could possibly call a person out of this life for that reason," explained Reverend Ball.<sup>55</sup>

No matter what the reason, deaths due to snake bites are accepted as God's will. The people do not try to second guess God or question why the death happened. They believe that all things are part of God's plan for his people. Snake handling has been the most publicized sign practiced by the Holiness believers, but it is not the only one that is dangerous.

Handling Fire. The practice of handling flaming torches means different things to different members. Schwarz recorded the happenings of a service where fire was handled and attempted to measure physical responses of the participants.<sup>56</sup> One interesting observation made by Schwarz was that while participants were under the "power," there was no evidence found of burns to the skin or damage to clothing.<sup>57</sup> Once out of the trance, as Schwarz labels it, the person who handled fire without a trace of damage

minutes earlier suffered a burn when an attempt was made to prevent a kerosene lamp from falling to the floor.

Members cite additional Bible verses (Isaiah 43: 2, Daniel 3: 25) to support the belief in handling fire. It appears that handling fire is done by some churches more than others.<sup>58</sup> Fire has been handled during the winter months when snakes were not available.

Anointing for fire is similar to that for practicing the other signs. Clyde Ricker said, "It takes a little more anointing to stick the flame to your flesh and just hold it there. But if God told me to stick it right in my face, I would."<sup>59</sup> Clyde was able to do just that at a meeting in Carson Springs. He walked around the church with his face totally engulfed in flames from a Coke bottle torch. His skin was not burned or even flushed; no hair was singed.<sup>60</sup>

Fire handling appears to be popular according to the season and availability of snakes for handling. It is a sign practiced by fewer members, but usually the same members that are active practicing one dangerous sign are more likely to practice some of the others. The condition of being anointed appears to be similar for snake handling and for fire handling. There have been no known deaths attributed to fire handling. It is thought to be safer than snake handling and much less dangerous than poison drinking.

Drinking Poison. There is much controversy over whether or not drinking poison is one of the five signs.

Disagreement stems from the wording of the King James version of the Bible verses found in St. Mark. Everett Fraley stated that the debate is over the word "if." The other signs are prefaced by the word shall; you shall take up serpents and you shall lay hands on the sick. The part of the Bible verse pertaining to drinking poison reads "if you drink any deadly thing." Fraley believes that the word "if" does not make it a command to drink poison, but that if a person drank poison accidentally, they would be saved.<sup>61</sup>

Reverend Grooms echoed this belief when he said, "There are five signs and nine spiritual gifts to be worked in the church for the edification of the church. The Bible says the apostles were preaching with signs following them in order to confirm that His Word was true. It never did say one time that they drank any deadly poison. The word "if" can have a lot of different meanings to it. I believe that if somebody was to come over to your house while you were gone and poison your food, I believe God would let you live to show them people He could do it. I don't believe you should mix poison up and drink it on purpose. That's just not what Mark 16: 18 means to me."<sup>62</sup>

Although both snake handling and poison drinking can be deadly, poison drinking is practiced with greater caution. Even in the early days of the church, this sign was the least practiced of the five. Schwarz noted that the emotional climate of the services was at its peak before members would drink any poison.<sup>63</sup>

Even though this sign has been practiced and witnessed by church members since the church began, present day practitioners desire a confirmation from God that this truly is His wish. The Bible does not specify what poison is to be consumed. There have been reports of people drinking carbon tetrachloride,<sup>64</sup> battery acid<sup>65</sup> and gulping down handfuls of Draino.<sup>66</sup> The poison that is the most respected, however, is strychnine.

Strychnine works by disturbing the central nervous system. Some of the early symptoms of strychnine poisoning include: slurred speech, stiffening of the joints, jitters and jerking uncontrollably. In the final stages, a strychnine overdose results in strong convulsions, nausea and death by restricted breathing.<sup>67</sup>

Churches in different parts of the South practice this sign with varying degrees of regularity. Reverend Richard Williams had consumed strychnine over 200 times before his death.<sup>68</sup> Churches in West Virginia seem to practice this sign most frequently. They are followed by a few churches in Ohio and transplanted churches in Michigan. Serpent handling is more popular in Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia.<sup>69</sup>

Those that do practice poison drinking do so after prayerful consideration. Billy Jay Forrester summed up how many faithful feel about the practicing of this sign when he said, "Maybe I would if the Lord showed me in a dream or a vision in a way I'd really know. Or maybe if the Lord

spoke to me and told me He was with me. Nobody will go up and drink it just out of the blue. I'd have to be more certain than for taking up serpents. All of these signs are done under the anointing of the same Spirit. You just have to have more power and more anointing upon you to drink the deadly thing."<sup>70</sup>

Evidence to back up Schwarz's early observation about the need for intense emotional involvement for poison drinking to take place can be found in present day examples. John Holbrook of Warren, Michigan stated that "In a revival, it's (strychnine) drunk just about every night. You're in the Spirit. You have more people, too. You have more people seeking the sign. When you're in a revival, preaching every night, praying every day and fasting, God gives you the anointing more abundantly."<sup>71</sup> The emotional climate at the Carson Springs church the night Jimmy Ray Williams and Buford Pack died was similarly charged with strong emotion.

Despite differing opinions as to whether or not poison drinking is a sign, most members agree that those who do practice this are strong in their faith. Reverend Ball expressed it this way, "The 'if' they drink any deadly thing is not a commandment of God. But if you get anointed, and if God should move on you to drink poison, you are one of the people chosen by the Lord to do that. The 'if' doesn't make it necessary to carry this sign out unless there's a special purpose and a special anointing for it. It's not as

much a commandment as the others, but there comes a time when that sign will carry more conviction to some people than taking up serpents. They would say you could take up a serpent and maybe not get bit by it. But they see a man turn up a glass of strychnine and drink it, knowing full well it's enough to kill a bull, (there is no exact procedure followed when mixing up the strychnine and water - one batch may be extremely weak and another lethal) and it doesn't hurt him, then they're going to have to admit there was a higher power behind that. If you drink poison and it doesn't hurt you, it sure wasn't an accident that it didn't."<sup>72</sup>

Poison drinking is a sign not lightly practiced. It is probably the strongest test of a believer's faith. Whether or not it is a sign commanded by God is still an issue debated among members. Its place in the service is one of audience participation and strong testimony of the beliefs of the faithful.

Rhetorical Application. Audience prayer and participation in the signs of speaking in tongues, handling serpents, drinking poison and handling fire all help serve common goals. Practicing the more dangerous signs helps achieve the goals in a more convincing manner. Participation in the signs serves as a method of response in order to modify the situation. In other words, practicing the signs helps the members feel better about their lifestyle and lack

of opportunity to significantly change their lives for the better.

These people needed a way to make the transition from the rural agrarian lifestyle of the early 1900s to a modern industrialized society in the 1930s. As a group, these people had little voice in the change to industrial jobs and government intervention into their lives. One way to cope with the loss of status they suffered was to glorify previously anti-social behaviors and modify them to fit into the constraints of their version of Bible "truth." Wood summarized the conditions of the lives of these people during this transitional period of time as follows:

1. Lack of adequately structured value/attitude system. The former life was filled with hostility and harsh conditions. There was a need to defeat the evil that contributed to their lives. This personal disorganization was reflected in the home life and lack of neighborhood organization.
2. Inability to believe they will be able to have good interpersonal relationships. There is tremendous stress due to harsh conditions and a drive to find secure relationships.
3. A strong desire to seek spiritual blessings (relief) through prayer and personal acts. There is no complete resolution to the problems of the people. The Holy Spirit must continue to work or they will lose their holiness.

The Holiness movement was native to the area. It offered nothing new, only support and extension of the values that were already there and justification of the old local standards of living. The movement was able to include all the elements of the community mores, religious and

secular, and strengthen and unite them into a more stable unit that was more acceptable to the outside world than was their past behavior. Poverty was looked upon as a sign of God's blessing. Suffering a snake bite and surviving by praying to God for healing was proof that they were chosen for a better life to come. People were still able to rely on their own wits to survive; if their ideas were odd to outsiders, it was because the outsiders were sinful people.<sup>74</sup>

The church activities provided what the people did not get in other areas of their lives; namely approval, status and affection. The pleasure prohibiting background of the people created a need for an approved form of emotional release.<sup>75</sup> Activities are performed in a prescribed manner under the sanction and approval of the church leader (preacher) and members.

This need for status and approval is a response to an emotionally painful situation. The Holiness people believe that successful completion of the signs prove that they are right. The Bible says it can be done; they do it and prove that their belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible is correct. Those who perform the acts have a higher status in the group than those who don't. This makes performance of the acts a means of determining who belongs and who doesn't. The larger the number of people who join the group, the more justified they feel. People who join strongly emotional groups do so because of intense needs for

structured opportunities to make emotional connections with others. This is viewed as difficult to do before joining the group.<sup>76</sup> The positive feelings of warmth and love that the members report feeling when performing the signs demonstrate the importance of membership in the group in order to obtain acceptance and positive interpersonal feelings.

Kildahl, who has studied people who only speak in tongues reported that conforming to the group belief (the rightness of speaking in tongues as a sign of being one of God's chosen people) led to: lessened depression (almost near euphoria for some), a sense of power - some reported a stronger sense of identity and more self-confidence in interpersonal relationships, they were more involved with religious convictions and felt a greater sense of community (more caring, loving each other).<sup>77</sup>

These people have been dispossessed from their former place in society. The need to belong and be accepted is a powerful one. Membership in a group "chosen by God" could help alleviate some of those feelings of alienation. Therefore, a person's opinions and attitudes can be strongly influenced by the groups to which he or she belongs or wants to belong to.<sup>78</sup> Desire to join a select group could motivate a person to accept a literal interpretation of the Bible that specifies what signs should be performed in order to demonstrate membership in that group.

Practicing the signs is also a persuasive form of direct suggestion. Members who offer testimony about the

benefits of living according to the Word of God and the visual expressions of joy are strong stimuli to those who may be debating about following the lead of others.

This kind of appeal is more emotional than logical. Some of the appeals used on a regular basis are joy (being able to practice the signs appears to provide feelings of well being) and the feeling of belonging to a special group. Fear appeals are used when there is doubt about backsliders; those who have returned to past sinful ways, or for new people who have not yet joined the group. When such people are present, fear appeals appear to be more numerous. They build up tension that can only be reduced by acceptance of the new idea (doctrine, action).

The use of suggestion and emotional appeals appear to be equally important in the Holiness movement; both are used on a consistent basis. Both work together to reinforce each other. For example, fear appeals are made more effective by their ability to spread from one person to another.<sup>79</sup> This kind of crowd behavior begins with the most susceptible person and spreads by contagion and imitation. The behaviors (practicing the signs) found at the services are rarely practiced in solitude; they are introduced under the mass pressure of the group.<sup>80</sup>

The personality of the audience members indicate the success of different kinds of tactics based on their persuasibility. In general, audience members are more

submissive, suggestible and dependent in the presence of an authority figure (preacher).<sup>81</sup>

The level of intelligence of the audience determines the effectiveness of some kinds of appeals.<sup>82</sup> If self-esteem and educational levels are low, audience members will be more persuaded by emotional techniques.<sup>83</sup> Acceptance of the doctrine and practicing the signs is based upon "faith" - emotional agreement. The positive feelings of heightened self-esteem, group belonging and better interpersonal relationships evolve from the emotional acceptance of the desired behavior. The actual demonstration of the gift (practicing a sign) puts the person in an exalted position and emotional climate, brushes away all doubts, opposition, psychological obstacles and inhibitions. The psychological crowd develops by mass suggestion. A contagion sweeps over those present in the audience during the praying and practicing of the signs and soon a oneness of purpose is present.<sup>84</sup>

Practicing the signs as a form of audience participation is a response that is reported over and over. The ability to perform is not accepted after an initial demonstration. Each member must review his or her faith in order to continue the successful completion of each sign. The need to repeat this response is enhanced by the use of revival techniques to encourage repetition and generate enthusiasm.

The revival meeting is an age old method used to rekindle interest in religious movements. Its techniques serve to breathe new life into the group.

Revival meetings usually attract larger crowds than does the regular Sunday service. For example, the Homecoming in Carson Springs, Tennessee attracted a much larger crowd than anyone anticipated.<sup>85</sup> The size of the crowd can help provide a more conducive atmosphere for the acceptance of the beliefs. A single person feels lost in the crowd and becomes part of it. Davenport stated that the emotion of a crowd is greater than the combined emotion of the individuals in the crowd.<sup>86</sup>

Because of this crowd feeling, the collective attention of the individuals is directed to the occasion at hand; common ideas (such as salvation or the rightness of practicing the signs) are accepted in part because the individual is aware that every other person in the crowd believes and is stirred too. This circumstance increases the volume of the individual's emotional response and tends to magnify the total volume of crowd emotion.

Auto suggestion is another important factor in audience participation during the service. This revival technique allows an individual to hear the message to join the group (via prayer, testimony and preaching) from the voices of others and he reinforces that message with his own voice joining in. Pratt explained that by singing out at the top of his lungs the sentiment and ideas the group

desires to instill in him, each person suggests these ideas to himself.<sup>87</sup>

The atmosphere is charged with excitement and expectation. The faithful have met with a common purpose in mind; their attention is easily riveted by the sense of urgency conveyed by the preacher and by the exclamations of the members.<sup>88</sup> Meetings are often prolonged and strained; this added stress helps break down the individual's inhibitions and encourages him to participate in the service.<sup>89</sup> Regular members may need little stimulation to engage in activities because continuous participation lessens the need for strong and repeated emotional stresses to the point that their reactions become a conditioned response (the trance or anointed state comes more easily the more it is experienced) that can be attained with less effort and concentration.<sup>90</sup>

Repetition without reward does not achieve its purpose of firmly instilling ideas in the minds of the audience. The revival is usually conducted over a period of days, or weeks. Night after night, the same sequence of events is followed; the same songs are sung, the signs are practiced nightly and similar Bible stories are told night after night. The messages are reinforced by the participation of the audience so that the ideas are retained and internalized.<sup>91</sup>

Active audience participation in the services is an important component of the movement. They needed a way to make a more orderly transition from the old order to the new

modern life that held no promise of happiness for them. They were able to make this transition through glorifying the very attributes outsiders ridiculed them for and turning them into Christian virtues. They were able to do this through conferring status and group membership to those who practiced the signs. This membership was made easier to attain through the use of emotional appeals, revival techniques, suggestion and repetition to reduce the fears of performing the signs. These methods, along with those employed by the preacher and the outside events that helped solidify the group, were able to attract and hold members in the Holiness movement.

The preacher played an important role in the spread of this movement. Historical accounts refer to traveling preachers who went throughout the South spreading the Word. The next section discusses the preacher's role in the Holiness church service and the rhetorical application of his part in the movement.

### The Preacher and Signs

The preacher plays a varied role in the Holiness church service. He practices the signs and he presents the message in such a way as to promote the movement.

Faith Healing. Faith healing can be practiced by audience members on occasion. The preacher plays a leading role by directing the faithful and asking for the prayers and support of the entire congregation. The faithful may

join the preacher by laying hands on the afflicted person. Any person who wishes to be healed is asked by the preacher to come to the front of the church. Healing is usually done toward the end of the church service. The preacher will pray for God's mercy and seek a cure for the person's affliction.

The faithful believe that the ability to heal is yet another confirmation of their faith and worthiness. Some believers feel that fasting can enhance the healing abilities they possess. Willie Sizemore explained, "I fast for other people and for the church. I expect greater benefits and more spiritual power from it. I believe fasting takes you a whole lot closer to God. It makes you more spiritual."<sup>92</sup>

Reverend Alfred Ball is an experienced faith healer; he has been healed of a heart problem himself.<sup>93</sup> He stated that he felt that it wasn't loud prayers or fancy words, but rather an earnest desire for God to heal the affliction and belief that He is powerful enough to do so. Reverend Ball described his method of healing when he said, "I don't try to make a big show out of praying for people, I just place my hands upon them or raise my hand, or whatever, having a lot of the other folks in the church to help pray also and God just moves on them and heals 'em. . . . and this is the way that it works."<sup>94</sup>

The author witnessed an example of faith healing at the service attended on May 28, 1978 at Reverend Ball's

church. A young girl named Sharon had been bothered by eye problems all day. Earlier in the afternoon her eyes were tearing, swollen and blood shot. When she approached the pulpit to be healed Ball asked her what was wrong. After she told him, he asked her if she believed God could and would heal her. She replied that she did believe.

Reverend Ball shouted that if God's power wasn't with him, if Sharon wasn't healed of her affliction that he would hand over his ministry to the assistant pastor. While saying this, Reverend Ball had his Bible in his outstretched hand pointing it skyward. Reverend Ball stated that he knew God was going to work because his threat to leave the ministry was not an idle one. At this point in the service several church members joined him by laying hands on Sharon and praying. Reverend Ball placed a hand over her eyes and shouted that she should be healed. Sharon stood rigid for a few seconds (the others had stepped aside) and fell to the floor.

Reverend Ball then told the congregation not to worry, that like Daniel, Sharon might appear to be dead but was fine. Sharon lay on the church floor for a few minutes. When she awoke and stood up, her eyes were clear and bright. All signs of swelling and discomfort were gone.

Reverend Ball related other examples of faith healing that had occurred in his church. Some instances were of minor illnesses. The most dramatic was a story of a man who had what appeared to be a heart attack in church.

Reverend Ball said the man was placed on a bed, had ceased to breathe, had even turned cold. Members prayed along with Ball and the man was restored to life.<sup>95</sup>

Other stories are similar in nature to those mentioned above. Sometimes the sick person may be healed from a distance if they are unable to attend. This can be done by using a prayer cloth that has been blessed and prayed over by the faithful and sent to the afflicted person. Generally, people go to the church to be prayed for and healed.

The amount of faith healing and the style used to heal the afflicted appears to depend on the techniques used by the preacher. Some preachers encourage more audience participation in healing than do others. A preacher may also influence the number and kinds of afflictions that are prayed for in the services. The last sign, casting out devils, is usually practiced by the preacher alone.

Casting Out Devils. The ability to cast out a devil is reserved for the preacher. Some ministers are known for their success in practicing this sign. Many church members are afraid of the ritual. They feel that the evil spirit expelled will try to enter another person as quickly as possible (usually the weakest believer).<sup>96</sup>

The belief that devils possess people is taken seriously by the congregations. The ritual of exorcism is described in the Bible and, therefore, must be believed.

The preacher who recognizes those possessed and who knows how to free them is a very important person. He can also see when a person is "obsessed" (i.e. when the devil is around the person just waiting to enter and take possession) and save them from being possessed. Some members can sense the presence of the devil with their spiritual eyes. Ralph Eslinger stated that the devil can assume a variety of shapes including a flock of black birds, a ball of fire, or even serpents.<sup>97</sup>

A person who feels that he is possessed by a devil must be willing to submit to the exorcism ritual if he desires to be freed. No person can be freed of devil possession against his will.<sup>98</sup>

There are many kinds of devils. One kind of devil is religious in nature. These devils are dangerous and tricky because they may cause the possessed person to act like a person who is in the Spirit. This person possessed by a religious devil may display the behavior of a believer while in church, but may step outside the church and display sinful behavior and act like any other sinner person. A religious devil deceives a person into believing that he is a Christian. Then the person who is fooled dies and is lost.<sup>99</sup>

Casting out a devil is a difficult process. Robert Grooms stated that when prayer starts for the possessed person, it is possible to feel the evil force fighting against being expelled. Grooms also stated that if God

grants the preacher enough power, the devil must be cast out. When this happens, the devil may come out crying, or may cause the possessed person to attack, even bite those close by.<sup>100</sup>

Some typical phrases used to exorcise a demon spirit include:

"You are commanded in the name of Jesus to leave."

"I rebuke you in the Spirit of God!"

"Devil - come out! In Jesus name!"

"You must come out! By the Blood of Jesus - out!"

"By the power of God - you will come out!"<sup>101</sup>

Some preachers anoint their hands with oil before laying hands on the afflicted person.<sup>102</sup> At times the displaced spirit will talk back to the preacher and fight to remain inside the person.

Reverend Ball has a reputation for his ability to cast out devils. He states that the anointing to cast out devils is specific. The anointing feels like holding a hand to a flame in reverse; there is heat flowing from the preacher's hands into the body of the possessed person.<sup>103</sup>

According to Reverend Ball, the anointing power comes from the Holy Ghost to cast out evil spirits. He believes that another kind of evil spirit is epilepsy. He stated that epilepsy is a devil in disguise. Reverend Ball has cast them out of many people. He stated that the people never had another seizure after their exorcism.<sup>104</sup>

The ability to cast out a devil, regardless of the type of devil, is regarded as a special gift. The preacher who has this ability is looked upon as an exceptional leader. Casting out devils is the province of the preacher. It is one sign that is usually reserved for him alone even though in theory all believers should be able to practice all of the signs. This sign, along with leading the sermons is where a preacher has the opportunity to be seen as a true believer of God by those to whom he ministers.

#### The Preacher and the Message

Preaching is done by lay ministers. Often visiting preachers contribute to the services. As with other speaking situations, the preachers formulate their messages in light of the way they perceive their audience. The materials selected, the organization of ideas and delivery of the sermon are done with the needs of the audience in mind.<sup>105</sup>

Preachers in Holiness churches exhibit common characteristics with regard to message content, language usage and delivery. This is true in part because of the common background they share. Few have much formal education because they feel that book learning is antagonistic to what is taught in the Bible.<sup>106</sup>

Another common trait of Holiness preachers is condemnation of worldly pleasures and a simple lifestyle. Reverend Ball lived in the basement of his church and

supported his three children by working at odd jobs in the community. Poverty is thought of as a virtue, a sign that the person will be rewarded in the next life.<sup>107</sup>

Since preachers do not receive any formal training to prepare them for the ministry, they must learn their trade from each other. The sermon is not the heart of the service, but it is still important for the reinforcement of the group's values and beliefs. A person who desires to take up the ministry usually will make the decision after receiving some sign of divine calling from God. The ministry might begin in the parent church, or the newly called preacher might start a new church.<sup>108</sup>

The sermons are based on Bible stories that church members have heard since childhood. The members know endings to the stories and the kinds of rhythms the preachers use to relate them. Delivery of the stories is usually done under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Reverend Willie Sizemore pointed out, "I don't believe you can really preach until you've got the Holy Ghost. Because if the Word was written by the prophets as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, then it would take that same Holy Ghost to break the Word down to people where they could see and understand it. It was written and inspired by God. I believe it has to be read and preached with the inspiration of God or the Holy Ghost."<sup>109</sup>

The preacher's authority comes from the Bible and his ability to lead others comes from the perception that he

is a man of God. Reverend Ball related examples of his ability to foretell the future of members in his church.<sup>110</sup>

He also related his own theory of evolution that stated that the snake is the missing link in the evolutionary chain.<sup>110</sup>

Practicing the signs is another proof of their sincerity of belief. Reverend Richard Williams said, "The Bible says 'faith is the evidence of things not seen.' When I handle a serpent, you can't see my faith. But you can see the evidence of it - the serpent in my hand. A lot of times I'll handle them just because the Word of God tells me to. A lot of people put the signs before the rest of the Word. What I've got to do is preach Jesus and Him crucified. When I preach the Word of God, the signs will follow me. Wherever I go, at least one of the five signs is going to be there."<sup>111</sup>

Sermons follow basic guidelines. The themes are Bible stories embellished with the language of the preacher. Stories of miracles that have happened in the preacher's life and in the lives of the church members add to the personalized storytelling style of the preacher.<sup>112</sup>

Messages about persecuted prophets from Biblical times are favorites because they can be used to draw parallels to the troubles faced by the Holiness people.<sup>113</sup>

The character of the preacher is important to his continued ability to hold his place in the church. His reputation should be beyond reproach; all his actions and words should reflect favorably upon him.<sup>114</sup> The way he

conducts his daily life, how he runs the church and how he handles the public are actions viewed by church members as important character attributes of their leader.

Circumstances surrounding Reverend Alfred Ball during the time the author interviewed him clearly demonstrated the importance of a preacher's character being above suspicion. Three weeks before he was contacted by the author, his wife, Eunice, had left him, claiming that he was guilty of involvement with women in his church. She was in the process of obtaining custody of their three children and filing for a divorce.

The situation was aggravated by the fact that there were bitter feelings between Reverend Ball's church and the original Holiness church in Carson Springs. After Jimmy Ray Williams and Buford Pack died of strychnine poisoning in April, 1973 and the Homecoming that following summer, Ball (then an elder in the Carson Springs church) felt that too many people were more concerned with snake handling and the publicity from the media than the Word of God. Ball, along with a few others, founded the new church.<sup>115</sup>

The preacher from the Carson Springs church used radio broadcast time on May 28, 1978 to attack Reverend Ball for his alleged romantic involvement. Reverend Ball said some of his followers had left the church because of this. His sermons were mingled with references to his current problems and how he was confident that God would vindicate him, or he would leave the ministry.<sup>116</sup>

Those who remained loyal to Reverend Ball appeared to be drawn closer than ever by this attack on their leader. Members interviewed by the author felt that this was one more example of how the devil worked to destroy them and their victory would be a sign that they truly were God's chosen people.

Reverend Ball's sincerity was not limited to concern for his flock. When the author approached him on May 27, 1978, he was warm, friendly and very responsive to all the questions put to him. He assisted this author with an automobile problem and was a gracious host the following day at the radio station and at the church later that day. Reverend Ball believed that he would be vindicated of any wrong doing and showed no bitterness towards his ex-wife. He appeared to live by the principles he taught; his concern for others and depth of faith was evidenced by his behavior during my visit.

Reverend Ball is like other preachers when it comes to standing by the Word of God to heal them when bitten by a snake. He was bitten by a snake and refused medical attention.<sup>117</sup> Richard Williams refused medical treatment and eventually died of a snake bite. Reverend Ball summed up how many preachers feel about living what they preach when he said, "I haven't yet gone to a doctor when I get serpent bit. I would definitely try not to. Because I feel that if I'm going to preach the Word, minister the Word and

handle serpents, I'm going to try to stand by for healing too."<sup>118</sup>

Obtaining sermons from Holiness preachers is extremely difficult because sermons are not prepared (written down) ahead of time. Also, suspicion of outsiders has made it hard to record some preachers. Reverend Ball is the only Holiness preacher this author is aware of who tapes his sermons. The taping is done as a service to those who listen to the radio ministry and are unable to attend church. Preparation techniques vary slightly with each preacher. Generally, it is assumed that no one can preach without the divine inspiration of God. Reverend Ball described his method in the interview on May 27, 1978:

In preparing for a sermon, I just, well I have read the Bible through several different times. I study the scriptures and pray. . . . Well, sometimes I'll have the different scriptures, maybe verse, book and chapter wrote on a piece of paper sticking in my Bible so that I can refer to these scriptures under the leadership of the Spirit. I don't, in other words, write my sermons out. . . . (Referring to how he presents the message Reverend Ball replied): It comes out of the inspiration of the Spirit of God. You'd have to see it to believe it. I mean I sometimes in preaching - it seems as if God comes upon me so strong that it seems - well you may not ever be able to understand this, but I learn as much sometimes when I am preaching as the people that I'm preaching to do because the inspiration of the Spirit of God is coming upon me so strongly - of course I realize what I'm saying. . . . Sometimes it's as if I'm standing aside just watching someone else preach. . . .

I'm only a vessel of God and I can't preach unless he anoints me with His Spirit and comes into me, moves upon me - however you want to put it. I can't preach. I couldn't stand 30 minutes before a congregation of people and just talk. I'd run out

of something to say; and yet under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, I've been known to preach 2 1/2 hours.<sup>118</sup>

The origin of the message may be inspired by God. The presentation of that message is couched in familiar words and phrases and punctuated with activity, rhythm and the preacher's manner. Verses are read from the Bible and explained by the preacher with informal story telling directness.<sup>120</sup>

The sermon is usually presented after the singing and testimony giving portions of the service. Reverend Ball's sermon<sup>121</sup> resembled that of other Holiness preachers studied by other authors<sup>122</sup> in both the choice of words and the manner of presentation.<sup>123</sup> Zartsky and Rosenberg summarized the method of delivery this way:

The preacher begins the sermon in normal, conversational prose. Passages from the scripture are introduced (what 'text' the sermon is based on). His tone and diction are normal to him. The voice is clear and rhythms are those of prose delivery.

As he gets further in his message (the application of the 'text' to everyday life) the voice becomes tense and dramatic. He becomes more animated and begins to speak more rapidly. The tone of voice may become lower in pitch and grating in timbre. . . .

As the tempo and intensity of the sermon increase, the preacher usually chants his lines; a decided tonal center may emerge. Chanting becomes well regulated and proceeds with well timed ups and downs to an emotional climax at which point the preacher breaks off and concludes the sermon with remarks in a more conversational like tone.

During the chanting, the language is regularized rhythmically, the determinant being the length of time between lines rather than a syllable

or stress count. The lines are punctuated by a loud, audible gasp. . . . This kind of preaching cuts across denominational grounds; it is used by Baptist, Pentacostal and Methodist and is in the oral tradition.<sup>124</sup>

Reverend Ball's delivery was animated and filled with changes of rhythm, volume and tempo. Once into the "spirit" of the message, he utilized the length of the pulpit area and the main aisle to walk in while delivering his sermon. When particularly moved, he would leap to the railing that separated the congregation from the pulpit and speak from that elevated position.

His gestures were used to accentuate particular points; he would use his entire body to reinforce a particular point. His facial characteristics appeared to change shape and distort as the intensity of the delivery increased. At times, he almost appeared to lose control of his movements. At the time, he said he was under a particularly heavy anointing from God and that this was how it was affecting him.

Many times he brought the message to a single member by standing in front of him and even calling him by name. This practice has been reported by other investigators.<sup>125</sup> This technique was used as part of the sermon when Reverend Ball scolded a couple of people for not paying attention to a point he felt was very important.

The role of the preacher is that of superior and equal; leader and follower. The method of sermon delivery

is dictated by the role the audience (church members) have assigned to the preacher. By walking up and down the aisles, the preacher maintains a closer contact, more of a "we" feeling with his flock than if he remained behind the podium in the pulpit.<sup>126</sup>

The audience responds to the common ground established by the preacher's choice of words, rhythms and gestures.<sup>127</sup> Frequent "Amens" and "Bless him Lord" and other phrases were heard throughout Reverend Ball's sermon. These phrases helped to reinforce the rhythm of the sermon as well as provide an avenue of participation for the congregation. Many of the phrases and clichés used by the preacher are expected, almost demanded by the audience.<sup>128</sup>

Participation by the congregation may act as a feedback device to the preacher. By the tone and level of response, he can alter his delivery to meet the expectations of the audience.<sup>129</sup> Rosenberg stated that:

The audience determines the length of the sermon; they can urge him on. They like hearing the same stories over and over again - there is comfort in the familiar stories in familiar words ritually intoned and in the well known music. These stimulate feelings of solace and release due to many years of association with these elements in the church.

Repetition is meaningful and important - its appeal is that it frees the mind of the audience from concern with language, music or the story element to come next so that they are free to be more involved with the rhythm, music and emotion of the performance. They are freer to actively participate in the service with their cries, clapping, shouting, etc.

The church member in a sense creates his own service. He influences the preacher and creates a personal religious experience and expresses it while the rest of the congregation is doing the same. They are all part of the sermon. The preacher leads and is the most influential member - but the music of the congregation is individual.

Self expression is encouraged and is implicitly and explicitly encouraged - the singing, etc. are signs that the worshipper is sincere and in the spirit.<sup>130</sup>

The audience is able to initiate new members into the activities of the service. A person who wishes to belong may begin by participating in the responses during the sermon. Further participation is aided by practicing the signs. For example, the healing act takes place in front of the congregation and is conducted by the preacher and some of the faithful. As with all the signs, the participant actively seeks to join in and perform the act. These are intense efforts by those seeking the "gift" of supernatural contact to direct their emotion in an acceptable way. The "saints" help the new person by adding suggestion to autosuggestion and they concentrate upon those who are becoming emotionally involved in order to help them "through" so that they receive the blessing.<sup>131</sup>

The preacher practices all of the signs to some degree, but he is allowed a more specific role as a leader in the practicing of faith healing and casting out devils. He is called by God to serve and relies on the Holy Spirit for guidance. His sermons are based on traditional Bible stories told in a familiar manner the audience knows. As a

speaker, he follows the lead of his audience in anticipating their needs and paying attention to audience feedback to determine whether he has accomplished his purpose. The preacher must be a credible person who is held in esteem by his flock if he is to be effective. Personal testimony in everyday living is important to the members as an example for them. The preacher leads and follows and identifies with his audience. The rhetorical methods he uses are discussed below.

Rhetorical Application. The Holiness movement is democratic in nature in that leaders and members alike are encouraged to express their opinions and interpretations of Bible meaning. The preachers still provide leadership in the movement and their individual interpretations about how to practice the signs and other spiritual matters influence the practices which occur in their respective churches. The preacher's character as well as the methods he employs to preach to his flock are important to his credibility.

The preacher exerts an influence on his followers by his actions in his daily life as well as in his preaching. The importance of the preacher's credibility in his daily life has been discussed in the previous section. His ability to speak to his audience in the manner they expect is another source of credibility for the preacher.

Members believe that one can preach only under the anointing of God. The preacher is aware of this and demonstrates his ability to speak in such a manner to the

audience. The speaker's rhythm communicates on one level.<sup>132</sup> The vocabulary selected communicates on another level.

The attention of the audience is drawn by the musicality of the preacher's delivery. Lines are chanted; there are pauses in sentences punctuated by audible gasps and a fall at the end of a major component in the sermon. The audience may perceive the breaks before they happen because the audience's rhythm is the same as the preacher's - they help him regulate it with their own introjection and words of praise.

The visual image of a preacher striding the length of the aisle, jumping up onto the rail dividing the pulpit area from the seating area for the audience is a striking one. The enthusiasm and energy radiating from a dynamic, extemporaneous speaker is a compelling force in and of itself. Reverend Ball knew how to pace himself and punctuate his language with signs, silences and gestures that reinforced the ideas he was presenting.

The preacher substantiates his position of authority by practicing the signs he professes to believe in. His ability to perform the acts is viewed as another source of credibility by his followers.

These actions performed by the preacher are effective because he knows what the expectations of the audience are and anticipates their needs. This audience brings expectations to the church service about what kind of

music should be played, the Bible stories to be retold, the proper sequence of events of the service and the kind of behavior that is acceptable during each phase of the service. The congregation enjoys the service because they know what comes next. Experiments with audience participation showed that the members of the congregation could anticipate the preacher and the language he would choose to use. The message is the medium (the "act" of the service) because many times the words of the preacher or of the members (during testimonials) are unintelligible. The audience "hears" and "sees" what it chooses to hear and see.<sup>133</sup>

Several methods are used by Holiness preachers to formulate and deliver their sermons. They employ distinctive choices with regard to the kinds of appeals they use, the arrangement of arguments, methods of suggestion and persuasive methods to obtain commitment from audience members.

The Holiness preachers have developed a line of reasoning used in their sermons that received some encouragement from outside attitudes against their practices. Because of adverse publicity against them, especially when a person dies as a result of practicing the signs, the preachers have been outspoken in defending the rightness of their actions. They point to the Bible as the supreme authority for justification of their practices.

Reactions to questions about their faith can be summed up by the following Bible verses as support for their beliefs:

. . . and whose breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.

Ecclesiastes 10: 8

For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto man, but unto God; for no man understandeth him . . . he speaketh mysteries.

I Corinthians 14: 2

. . . the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither was their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

Daniel 3: 27

All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

II Timothy 3: 16

Robert Fraley stated, "I believe you have the right to do anything God tells you to do inside the lids of the Bible. If they ask us why we take up serpents, we can turn to Mark 16: 18 and read it to them."<sup>134</sup>

Even if outsiders don't agree with the interpretation of the Bible verses as a command to practice the signs, the Holiness preachers justify their belief in the Bible as a right guaranteed under the Constitution; freedom of religion.

Member reaction to outside criticism of their beliefs has included a defense of their right to speak and worship as they choose. They argue that they were obeying the commandments of God and no man made law is powerful enough to interfere with their practices. Persecution by

officials was proof that they were right; the early Christians were persecuted too. The following excerpt from a message delivered by Reverend Bunn before the meeting held in Durham in 1948 illustrates their perception of their obligations to God and to man-made laws:

. . . We will have serpents for those who wish to handle them but I would like to emphasize that this is not done with the idea of breaking a law. We have this experience from God, we enjoy the plain words of Jesus and we will not bow to man-made laws that contradict. We want no harsh feelings from anyone. I hope and pray that this announcement will bring a sacredness upon all who expect to attend. Let us stop from worldly fashions and return to the God of Power. This meeting is called for only such. <sup>135</sup>

The right to religious freedom is one on which this country was founded. While some may disagree with the beliefs of the Holiness people, their right to practice their beliefs is seen as a right protected by the Constitution. The Supreme Court denied the Holiness people the right to endanger other lives with regard to the practice of handling snakes in public (on the grounds that an innocent bystander might be harmed, which has not happened to date); they have not ruled against them with regards to practicing the other signs.

The Bible is the supreme authority. Preachers act to reveal Bible truth as God reveals it to them. This ability to interpret Bible truth is desirable for members but is a requirement for the preacher. The preacher is able to interpret daily events in light of the Divine revelation he receives.

Sign reasoning is used by the preachers to interpret events. A claim is thought to be true because certain circumstances are a sign of its truth.<sup>136</sup> For example, when this author's car had a badly damaged tire that did not blow out, it was interpreted by Reverend Ball as a sign from God that the author was not there to do them harm.

This use of sign reasoning to explain daily events reinforces the importance of Bible directives. The audience (Holiness members) determine in large part the end and object of the service.<sup>137</sup> The preachers and congregations have chosen the directives that best suit their needs and found justification for the directives through the use of the Bible as the supreme authority, and interpretation of signs favorable to their beliefs.

Fear appeals are also a part of the techniques used by Holiness preachers. Historically, fundamentalist preachers have relied on the audience's fear of hellfire and damnation to arouse emotions. Relief of the aroused fear is offered through the acceptance of the new belief (salvation, being born again, practicing the signs as proof of one's belief). The success of this technique is dependent upon the person's belief that this is the only way to avoid the undesired consequence (i.e., loss of the promised rewards in the hereafter). The members find comfort in the unshakable truths presented by their faith; theirs is not the religion of the intellectual middle class.<sup>138</sup>

The Holiness doctrine is one of personal salvation, not social reform. Retreating into the values of the past when faced with the stress of the demands of modern life helps to reduce the "cultural dissonance" they feel.<sup>139</sup>

The radical changes that affected the people brought about the need for the comfort provided by the services. The circumstances dictated that the old values had to be seen in a dignified light in order to escape ridicule by the people in the cities. References to resistance to adapting to modern ways and pressure from the "outside" can be found in past<sup>140</sup> and present services.<sup>141</sup>

Relief from the pain brought about by cultural dissonance is described in joyful terms. Believers are seen with serene faces as they practice the signs. Joyful descriptions of the positive changes that will occur if one becomes a member are also part of the appeals used by the preacher. He describes positive life events in the lives of others who have become members. The acts are demonstrated to new members and are actions within the capabilities of the audience.<sup>142</sup> This successful experience described and demonstrated by the preacher and other audience members is a reality that can enhance their lives.<sup>143</sup>

The preacher does not dwell on argument arrangement. There is no debate about the rightness of their actions. Appeals tend to be more emotional than logical. Stress is put on the benefits of practicing the signs. This use of

one-sided arguments is a useful method of presentation for audiences with little educational background.<sup>144</sup>

Suggestion is a method used directly and indirectly by the preacher as well as the audience. The preacher can decide to display the snake box, or bottle of strychnine in a prominent place to emphasize the practicing of the signs. He leads others into the practicing of the signs by his actions and his words. Phrases like, "I call attention to," or a rhetorical question such as, "Do you know what I'm talking about?" and direct confrontations of the audience such as, "It's getting quiet in here,"<sup>145</sup> all serve to suggest to the audience which response to make. The preacher teaches the audience how to respond.

The preacher uses repetition as well as suggestion in his sermons. The retelling of the same, familiar Bible stories not only helps to firmly plant the ideas in the mind's of the audience, but also aids the preacher in the extemporaneous delivery of this sermon. The preacher uses repetition as a method to enhance his ethical appeal (as proof that God has "anointed" him to preach) as well as to serve as a device for construction of the message. Repeated phrases help to establish the meter; increasing the rhythmical intensity of the sermon is an effective method of arousing the emotions in the audience. The preacher subordinates all else to the demands of the meter. Word choices are made to fit into the established rhythm. Repetition is an essential technique of the oral formula.<sup>146</sup>

The goal of the preacher is to convince the audience to accept the ideas and actions that are consistent with the group's beliefs. This can only be accomplished by the person's active participation and acceptance of the new doctrine. The preacher uses public confession as an affirmation of belief to gain active involvement of new and established members. Altar calls are used to provide an opportunity for a newly converted member to come forward and publicly declare their faith. Established members are encouraged to come forward to be prayed for for sickness or forgiveness of sins. These public acts of declaring a new belief, confessing sins and asking for healing prayers help to reduce the distance between the individual and the group.

The importance of becoming a member of the group is stressed by the preacher. Successful performance of the signs allows a person to join the elect. Members are able to break out of their own loneliness and join a loving, supportive group. The Holiness faith provides collective individualized experiences - each prays in his or her own way; each speaks in tongues and practices the other signs in a manner and to an extent that meets his needs; each has a direct communication link with God. All this is done within the constraints of the group;<sup>147</sup> conformity to group norms is an indication of divine worth.<sup>148</sup>

The preacher's role in the Holiness church service is a varied one. He acts as an example of how to live right and how to practice the signs. His personal life is

supposed to reflect the kind of behavior that will add to his credibility as a man of God. Preachers learn their skills from each other rather than from theological schools. Their sermons consist of familiar Bible stories delivered extemporaneously in an animated, compelling style. The preacher uses more emotional than logical arguments and relies on suggestion, repetition and public confession methods to help win over new members and sustain the interest and support of the established members. Fear appeals are part of the services, but the rewards of successfully performing the signs and becoming a member of the group appear to be more numerous.

#### Rhetorical Evaluation of the Holiness Movement

The Holiness faith is not a social religion; it does not seek out new members through evangelistic methods, nor does it actively seek to better the conditions of its followers through social or political action. They feel they are the "true children of God"<sup>149</sup> and will be rewarded in the next world for all the troubles they had in this life. Robert Parker stated that religious sects withdraw from this world in order to preserve their faith in the next: "What it (a sect) seeks through these exercises and ecstasies is something approaching a collective trance, in which each individual has a sense of personal completeness, of mystic solidarity and of community with every other individual in the group. It is in this way that the faith

of the faithful is continuously renewed and the integrity of the organization and of its heritage is preserved."<sup>150</sup>

The tactics used to obtain a long range commitment have sustained the Holiness movement for over seventy years. Their success is based on the use of tested communication principles. The conversion process used in revivals since the 1700s is based upon the use of fear and its alleviation.<sup>151</sup> Once the tension state is introduced, the person will be more likely to be persuaded if he believes this acceptance will bring relief. His will to believe will become strong enough to overcome any final reservations he might have about accepting the new doctrine.<sup>152</sup>

Public confession of the new belief strengthens it because opinions that are made public are harder to change than those that are kept private.<sup>153</sup> Active role playing (coming forward, practicing the signs, etc.) also increases the likelihood of retention of the new idea.<sup>154</sup>

Once the new doctrine has been accepted, the person will be influenced by the norms of the group. The stronger the desire to belong to the group, the more powerful the motivation to conform to the group's attitudinal and behavioral norms. Situational cues (expectations in a service, i.e. practicing the signs to demonstrate faith and group membership) operate to heighten a person's awareness of his membership in a given group.<sup>155</sup>

The Holiness church services were able to meet the needs of the people. The church is the only acceptable

avenue open to these people to act out their feelings as they make the transition from the rural to an urban culture. As long as there is no other outlet for their emotions, it will remain a viable movement. The rigid rural ethic was replaced by the ethical rules of the religion. This provided them with a stable reference point in a world that was changing too quickly.

The movement was successful because the religious ethic is inherent in the area. The Holiness faith offered no new solutions to their problems - but a return to the traditions of the past. This allowed them an avenue to maintain their dignity in a society that looked down upon them.

The movement found a powerful tool in the Bible. The Holiness people found justification in the Bible for their practices. There was no possibility of being proven wrong because of acceptance of lay interpretation of Bible meaning. This strategy was effective because even though other fundamentalist religions in the area may disagree with the Holiness interpretation of the Bible verses in St. Mark, they believe in their right to the interpretation. As more people practiced the signs successfully, this too became a justification for the movement.

When the first person died from a snake bite, the faith was shaken. This was compensated for by rationalizing the death as a "sign to others" that the snakes had not been milked and were deadly. After this initial set back, the

movement adopted a more liberal attitude about interpretation of other Bible verses to explain any problems. Failure (death) to practice the signs was turned around and made into a sign itself - this time the sign was for the benefit of the unbelievers.

If the movement had not been able to justify these failures (death from the snakes and poison drinking especially) it probably would have died out soon after the first incident. Bible interpretation is the only means available to them to defend their practices. If the interpretations become more and more liberal, it is possible that the movement could lose its identity. The people need to feel set apart from others in their area. If interpretation fails to meet their needs, some members may leave and join another church that suits them. Leaving churches because of differences in doctrine is quite common in the area. Reverend Alfred Ball's church is an example of such a split.

Another factor that contributed to the success of the Holiness movement was their use of time tested revival techniques. These techniques have been used successfully by other fundamental religious groups. The use of lay preachers, extemporaneous sermons, and audience participation in the service are all effective avenues for stirring the emotions and paving the way for attitude and behavior change.

The methods used can all be defended by the Bible's authority. To them, this is the only authority. Practicing the signs fulfills the need for an objective display of divine power. It allows them a way to prove their worth to others as well as act as a demonstration to others as to how the signs are performed. This helps to insure continuation of the movement because new people are being exposed to the proper techniques of practicing the signs.

The kinds of appeals used in the service are based more on emotional appeals than logical ones. Emotional techniques and methods are more persuasive to a group that has little formal education. They are also effective with people who suffer from low self-esteem. As long as book learning is seen as a hindrance to salvation, the use of one-sided emotional appeals will continue to be effective.

The growth and spread of the movement has been affected by internal and external circumstances. External factors that have influenced the growth of the movement include economically stressful conditions, population shifts and media coverage. Public opinion and press coverage tend to stimulate interest in the movement. Deaths by strychnine and snake bite attract considerable press attention. This had led to public persecution which heightened the members' feelings of being God's chosen people by virtue of their suffering. As coverage lessens, revival techniques are relied upon more to renew interest in the group.

Generated interest is sustained through public demonstrations of faith. Confession of sins, practicing the signs, etc., are sound methods of firmly establishing new attitudes and behaviors. The people need to feel special and prove that their lives are meaningful and important. Group membership in the Holiness movement will continue to be as long as the people feel they can't meet their needs any other way.

As the churches grow and mature and the people become more prosperous, the movement will lose its identity. The church may develop along the sect - denomination continuum. Beliefs become more formalized and the emotional fever of the original members is lost. One way to avoid this is to have continual breaking away of members who go out and form a new church that tries to rekindle the original emotions. The leaders in the new churches are important for the emotional climate of the new group. Loss of faith in a leader may lead to the disintegration of a church.

The Holiness people are not people coerced to handle snakes against their will. Their needs (a sense of order in a changing world, answers to present and future uncertainty, relief from the strain of economic, social and political depravation) determine their response to the situation. They "prove" to others that they are worthy by practicing the signs.

The rhetorical act (church service) is a response to the needs of the situation. Inhibitions are lowered by the music, clapping and shouting; the signs are practiced, the message delivered to confirm the faith and all leave with a feeling of well-being that their lives are serving a purpose; if not in this life then in the next. Communication links the members into a perceived group of chosen who demonstrate membership by completing prescribed rituals and actions using accepted utterances and behaviors.

The verbal responses to the constraints of the situation are functional and necessary as much as the physical responses. All are performed within accepted limits. Just as a dance may be modified by the dancers (within limits) the members have some freedom of expression within limits. Dancing is forbidden, but jerking and shuffle step dancing under the anointing of God is sanctioned. Verbal expression of faith too can be modified within given limits. Both serve to solidify membership in the group.

The "exigences" of the situation cannot be modified with any other action (not in terms of the values and beliefs) already held by the group. They don't feel that their needs will be fulfilled by education or the work ethic. Middle-class values and practices are beyond their reach, so they react by retreating to the past and turning their vices into virtues. The situation (lack of participation in urban society) does not change; economically they

are no better off, but they feel better about their plight. Relief from the frustration of unmet needs is fulfilled by their religious beliefs and practices.

Discourse plays a vital role in meeting their needs by allowing them a platform (via the church service) to declare how God has changed their lives for the better. Lay preaching allows an avenue for heightened status in the group; it is a democratic church that permits anyone to become a member. The communication acts as a modifying agent in the situation because it alters their beliefs about the situation; they are not poor and ignorant because they are no good, but because God's people are supposed to suffer in this life and be rewarded in the next.

The controlling exigence specifies the audience for the communication. For the Holiness faith, it is the poor, rural Southern whites who hold marginal jobs and live in near poverty level conditions.

Does the exigence (lack of status in the new urban culture) exist in spite of the modification (discourse)? Yes. Conditions vary in intensity (economic deprivation has been more severe at times) but basically still exist. The rise and fall in interest can be related to economic conditions of the time; the more severe the stress, the more interest there is in the church.

The rhetorical audience includes only those who are capable of being influenced by the discourse and being mediators of change. This is why the phenomenon has

remained localized even though it uses revival techniques. The conditions experienced by these people exist in a distinct social atmosphere. The values, attitudes and beliefs of the rural South are unique to the area. There are poor whites all over the country, but the conditions and beliefs in other areas are different.

The rhetorical audience must be able to carry out the actions the discourse functions to produce. The beliefs of the Holiness faith are within their capabilities. They cannot go out and better their lives living where they are, but they can perform the signs listed in the Bible. Since anyone who is anointed can interpret the meaning of the Bible, each member can determine the extent of his involvement in the response. God might only anoint a member to practice speaking in tongues if that was the only sign he or she felt comfortable (capable of performing) with. Belief that all the signs can be practiced is a way for all to belong even if their status in the group is less because they don't actively practice the signs.

The preachers use the constraints of the situation (poverty, people's distrust of outside authority, illiteracy, emotional hunger, lack of status in society) and add their own constraints via character, selection of appeals and style. They serve to reinforce the message and formulate the degree of involvement in practicing the signs for the group. The constraints of the situation are more important than the constraints of the preacher (unless the

preacher violates the norms of the group). As long as the preacher is perceived to be one of the group, he will be able to influence the attitudes and behavior of the group by meeting their needs with the content and style of service they desire.

A rhetorical act asks for a response that is appropriate to the situation. By practicing the signs, the audience is confirming the Word of God. They are justifying their existence and meeting the needs of the situation. The situation prescribes the response; the purpose - to confirm the Word, the theme - salvation from sin and a better life in the next world; the style of response - active praise and practicing the signs.

The rhetorical situation is real - the people live marginal lives. Their jobs lack security or promise; they lack membership in outside clubs or organizations other than the church. This stress created a need for relief. Historically emotionally active churches attract large numbers of people in times of hardship and uncertainty.

The church service exhibits structure and has organization and so qualifies as a rhetorical situation. All the necessary objects are there for the purpose of the service; snakes are kept in a box, the poison is available to mix and instruments are there for the music. The services are structured in that the audience knows what to expect. They come to participate in the activities they have witnessed time and time again.

Rhetorical situations come into existence and mature and decay, or mature and persist. The services themselves follow a prescribed pattern; they have a beginning, climax and ending. Responses are fitting at specific times - snakes are handled at one time and put away - not picked up at will throughout the service.

Since the conditions that brought about the original frustration persist, there exists a continued desire for the same kind of services. The extent to which these services continue depends upon the degree to which the people change their beliefs and attitudes in the future. If they are able to gain status and a better life in the future, the need for the services will lessen. As long as the need persists, rhetoric will be necessary to provide principles, concepts and procedures by which the people can alter their reality.

The short term gains for the Holiness movement are the relief of frustration and sense of immediate feeling of well-being the members gain from participating in the services. The long term gain is the justification of the rural ethic in the South in the face of a changing culture. It has served as a means of transition from old to new and has acted to reduce community disintegration.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter III

<sup>1</sup> La Barre, pp. 15-22.

<sup>2</sup> In a personal conversation on May 28, 1978, Reverend Ball described a modern day church that exchanged "holy kisses" between the sexes. He felt that this was a misuse of the custom. The church Reverend Ball referred to believes in a "Free Love" doctrine. The church is located in Monterey, Tennessee. Unlike the custom of exchanging the kisses only before the service begins, the members of the church in Monterey exchange "holy kisses" before, during and after the services.

<sup>3</sup> Carden and Pelton, pp. 81-94.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to the author from Cecil Browning, member of Pastor Kelly William's church in Switzer, West Virginia, dated July 27, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Carden and Pelton, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Original song. Author unknown. Found in Carden and Pelton, pp. 169, 170.

<sup>7</sup> Original song. Author unknown. Ibid., pp. 171, 172.

<sup>8</sup> Letter received by the author from Cecil Browning of Switzer, West Virginia, dated August 12, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Stekert, pp. 318, 319.

<sup>10</sup> Wood, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> William Sargant, Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing (New York: Perennial Library, Harper and Row, 1957, 1959), p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Cobb, p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Carden, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> Pelton and Carden, p. 77.

<sup>16</sup> Carden and Pelton, pp. 147, 148.

<sup>17</sup> Pelton and Carden, p. 101.

- <sup>18</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 146.
- <sup>19</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 102.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 101.
- <sup>21</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 146.
- <sup>22</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 74.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 77.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 73.
- <sup>25</sup>Stekert, p. 318.
- <sup>26</sup>Film. "They Shall Take Up Serpents" filmed by Thomas Burton.
- <sup>27</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 61.
- <sup>28</sup>Personal interview with Reverend Ball, May 27, 1978.
- <sup>29</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 103.
- <sup>30</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 58.
- <sup>31</sup>Cobb, p. 64.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 66.
- <sup>33</sup>Personal interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 27, 1978.
- <sup>34</sup>Pelton and Carden, found in the appendix.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 41.
- <sup>36</sup>Personal interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 27, 1978.
- <sup>37</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 62.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid, p. 45.
- <sup>39</sup>Personal interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 28, 1978.
- <sup>40</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 22.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 156.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>44</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 24.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>47</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 51.

<sup>49</sup>"They Shall Take Up Serpents," filmed by Thomas  
Burton.

<sup>50</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 130.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>53</sup>"They Shall Take Up Serpents," filmed by Thomas  
Burton.

<sup>54</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 67.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Schwarz, "Ordeal by Serpents, Fire and  
Strychnine," Psychiatric Quarterly, pp. 405-427.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 405.

<sup>58</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 150.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 107.

<sup>62</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 78.

<sup>63</sup>Schwarz, p. 422.

<sup>64</sup>"They Shall Take Up Serpents," filmed by Thomas  
Burton.

<sup>65</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

- <sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 75.
- <sup>68</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 109.
- <sup>69</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 70.
- <sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 73.
- <sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 71.
- <sup>72</sup>Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 28,  
1978.
- <sup>73</sup>Wood, pp. 144-146.
- <sup>74</sup>Cobb, pp. 193, 194.
- <sup>75</sup>La Barre, p. 126, Clark, p. 219.
- <sup>76</sup>Thomas J. Ungerleider and David K. Wellsch,  
"Coercive Persuasion (Brainwashing) Religious Cults and  
Deprogramming," American Journal of Psychiatry, March 1979,  
136: 3, p. 280.
- <sup>77</sup>John P. Kildahl, The Psychology of Speaking in  
Tongues (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 84.
- <sup>78</sup>Phillip Zimbardo and Ebbe B. Ebbensen,  
Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior (Reading,  
Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969), p. 22.
- <sup>79</sup>Davenport, p. 225.
- <sup>80</sup>Kildahl, p. 59.
- <sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 40.
- <sup>82</sup>Zimbardo and Ebbensen, p. 22.
- <sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>84</sup>Clark, p. 95.
- <sup>85</sup>Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 27,  
1978.
- <sup>86</sup>Davenport, p. 27.
- <sup>87</sup>James Bissett Pratt, The Religious Consciousness  
(New York: Harper and Row, 1920), p. 172.
- <sup>88</sup>Davenport, pp. 247-250.

- <sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 233.
- <sup>90</sup>Sargant, p. 117.
- <sup>91</sup>Carl L. Hoveland, Irving L. Janis and Harold H. Kelley, Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 247.
- <sup>92</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 139.
- <sup>93</sup>Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 27, 1978.
- <sup>94</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>95</sup>Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 28, 1978.
- <sup>96</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 97.
- <sup>97</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 144.
- <sup>98</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 142.
- <sup>100</sup>Ibid., pp. 142, 143.
- <sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 143.
- <sup>102</sup>Pelton and Carden, p. 95.
- <sup>103</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 142.
- <sup>104</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>105</sup>Carl L. Hoveland and Irving L. Janis, Yale Studies in Attitude and Communication Volume II: Personality and Persuasibility, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 32.
- <sup>106</sup>Bruce A. Rosenberg, The Art of the American Folk Preacher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 25.
- <sup>107</sup>Cobb, p. 71.
- <sup>108</sup>Rosenberg, p. 32.
- <sup>109</sup>Carden and Pelton, p. 152.
- <sup>110</sup>Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May, 28, 1978.

- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Carden and Pelton, pp. 87, 94.
- 113 Sermon delivered on May 28, 1978, by Reverend Ball illustrates this device.
- 114 Thonssen and Baird, pp. 458, 459.
- 115 Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 27, 1978.
- 116 Taped sermon delivered by Reverend Ball on May 14, 1978.
- 117 Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 27, 1978.
- 118 Pelton and Carden, appendix.
- 119 Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball on May 28, 1978.
- 120 Carden and Pelton, p. 150.
- 121 Sermons given by Reverend Alfred Ball on May 14, 1978 and May 28, 1978.
- 122 La Barre, pp. 6, 9.
- 123 B. A. Botkin, "Folk and Folklore," in Culture in the South, edited by W. T. Couch (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1934), pp. 685, 686.
- 124 Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone (ed.), Religious Movements in Contemporary America (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 137.
- 125 Cobb, p. 74.
- 126 Ibid.
- 127 Paul D. Holtzman, The Psychology of the Speaker's Audience (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1970), pp. 43-45.
- 128 Ibid., pp. 4, 7.
- 129 Rosenberg, p. 35, Holtzman, pp. 34, 35.
- 130 Rosenberg, p. 105.
- 131 Cobb, p. 22

- 132 Zaretsky and Leone, p. 147.
- 133 Ibid., p. 145.
- 134 Carden and Pelton, p. 159.
- 135 Appeared in the Durham Herald, October 7, 1948.  
Reprinted from La Barre, p. 35.
- 136 Zimbardo and Ebbensen, p. 24.
- 137 Thonssen and Baird, Speech Criticism, p. 16.
- 138 Charles S. Braden, "Churches of the Dispossed,"  
The Christian Century, Volume LXI (#4), 26, January (1944),  
pp. 109, 110.
- 139 Zaretsky and Leone, p. 442.
- 140 Cobb, p. 146.
- 141 Taped sermons delivered by Reverend Alfred Ball  
on May 14 and 28, 1978.
- 142 Hoveland, Janis and Kelley, p. 270.
- 143 Felicitas D. Goodman, Speaking in Tongues A Cross  
Cultural Study of Glossolalia (Chicago and London: The  
University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 87.
- 144 Ibid., p. 73.
- 145 Rosenberg, "The Formulaic Quality of Spontaneous  
Sermons," pp. 9, 10.
- 146 Parry Milman, "Studies in the Epic Technique of  
Oral Verse - Making I: Homer and Homeric Style," Harvard  
Studies in Classical Philology, 31 (1930), p. 80.
- 147 Cobb, p. 80.
- 148 Davenport, p. 251.
- 149 Schwarz, p. 409.
- 150 Robert E. Park, On Social Control and Collective  
Behavior (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967),  
p. 245.
- 151 Hoveland, Janis and Kelley, p. 270.

<sup>152</sup>J. A. C. Brown, Techniques of Persuasion From Propaganda to Brainwashing (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 54.

<sup>153</sup>Zimbardo and Ebbensen, p. 21.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 22

<sup>155</sup>Hoveland, Janis and Kelley, p. 155.

## Chapter IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Holiness movement is populated by a group of fundamentalist, poor, rural, white Southerners who have taken the Bible verses of St. Mark, Chapter 16, verses 17 and 18 as commandments of five signs to be practiced by the true followers of Christ. These signs include: speaking in tongues, faith healing, handling fire and serpents and drinking deadly poisons. The movement began in the early 1900s in the rural region of the Southeast and attracted public attention in the 1930s with its spectacular demonstrations of snake handling. The movement remained localized in the original rural setting it was born in.

The church services of the Holiness movement incorporate time tested revival techniques, such as the use of strong emotional appeals, suggestion, repetition and public confession of faith. These methods coupled with highly motivated lay preachers who utilize an extemporaneous of frenetic style of preaching and familiar Bible stories have helped sustain the movement over a number of years.

The movement has lasted because it met needs the people could not fulfill anywhere else. The services provided needed emotional relief from the cultural dissonance the people felt as they moved to urban areas and

were exposed to life in modern industrial towns. They did not feel that they had a place in this new society, so they retreated into the past to find dignity, approval and status. They found these things by proving their worth to outsiders by performing the signs; acts that declared them God's chosen people.

The Holiness movement is worthy of study because it illustrates how a struggling group of people utilize communication to cope with and modify circumstances to better meet their needs. The history of the movement demonstrates how values help shape the needs of the audience. A speaker must understand the needs and values of an audience in order to engage in effective attitude and behavioral change. Currently, there are a number of religious groups gaining popularity and strength. A study of the history of the group, the people attracted to the group and the methods employed by the group could enhance our understanding of religious cults and sects.

The study also serves as a means of preserving some of the cultural heritage of the people studied. Recorded original hymns are examples of the feelings, values and creative abilities of the people. The recorded sermons preserve a part of the oral tradition found in the South.

A study of this nature has drawbacks. Initially, it was very difficult to obtain sufficient material to conduct the study. Since the movement is concentrated in the South,

many newspaper articles were not available. Travel to the area to obtain recorded data proved successful. Many times, however, groups are reluctant to talk to outsiders about their beliefs. Some new cults use brainwashing techniques and physical force to gain members. Study of such groups could prove dangerous to the investigator.

A study of this nature does not necessarily need to utilize a specific method of criticism, such as Bitzer. Rhetorical criticism should fit the material; not force the material to fit a specific method, or mold. Criticism needs to explore all avenues of information to discover the means employed by the communicators. Once discovered the means should be evaluated in light of appropriate communication principles.

It is hoped that the information gathered in this study can be utilized for further investigation. It would be interesting to study Reverend Alfred Ball in more detail to learn more about him as a speaker and how he has influenced the kind of practices that are performed in his church. A more in-depth study of the influence the preacher has on the church could provide information about the growth cycle of a single church; whether the church will settle into respectability or disintegrate as time goes on.

The Holiness movement represents a group of people who sought their own answers to the problems they faced in

their struggle to survive. Understanding their values and motives will enhance our understanding of them and ourselves.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aldridge, Larry. "Venomous Testimony: Snakehandling Services Test Faithful With Fangs." The Knoxville Journal, Volume 115 (162), 7 July (1980), p. 1.
- Allport, Gordon Willard. The Individual and his Religion; a Psychological Interpretation. New York: Macmillan, 1970.
- Ames, Edward Scribner. The Psychology of Religious Experience. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1910.
- Arnold, Carroll C. Criticism of Oral Rhetoric. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1974.
- Barrett, C. K. The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition. New York and London: Macmillan and Co., 1947.
- Bauman, Richard. "Snake Handling - should it be banned?" Liberty, Vol. 70, No. 3, May-June (1975), pp. 2-5.
- Bitzer, Lloyd F. ed. and George Campbell. The Philosophy of Rhetoric. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Rhetorical Situation." Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 1, Jan. (1964), pp. 1-14.
- Boisen, Anton T. "Economic Distress and Religious Experience: A Study of the Holy Rollers." Psychiatry, Vol. 2 (1939), pp. 185-194.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Religion in Crisis and Custom - A Sociological and Psychological Study. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955.
- Botkin, B. A., ed. A Treasury of Southern Folklore. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1949.
- Braden, Charles S. "Churches of the Disposed." The Christian Century, Vol. LXI, No. 4, Jan. 26 (1944), pp. 108-110.
- \_\_\_\_\_. These Also Believe: A Study of Modern American Cults and Minority Religious Movements. New York: Macmillan, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Why Are the Cults Growing?" The Christian Century, Vol. LXI, No. 4, Jan. 26 (1944), pp. 45-47.

- Brown, J. A. C. Techniques of Persuasion From Propaganda to Brainwashing. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963.
- Burton, Thomas. "They Shall Take Up Serpents." (film) East Tennessee State University Library, 1973.
- Callahan, North. Smokey Mountain Country. New York: Duel, Sloan and Pearse, 1952.
- Carden, Karen W. and Robert W. Pelton. The Persecuted Prophets: The Story of the Frenzied Serpent Handlers. New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1976.
- Chaffee, G. E. "The Isolated Religious Sect as an Object for Social Research." American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 35 (1929-30), pp. 618-30.
- Clark, Elmer T. The Small Sects in America. New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965.
- Clough, Ben C. ed. The American Imagination at Work: Tall Tales and Folk Tales. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947.
- Conway, Flo and Jim Siegelman. Snapping: America's Epidemic of Sudden Personality Change. Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincotte Co., 1978.
- Cobb, Alice Lucy. "Sect Religion and Social Change In An Isolated Rural Community of Southern Appalachia (with) Case Story." Fruit of the Land. Boston University Graduate School dissertation, 1965.
- Collins, J. B. Tennessee Snake Handlers. Chattanooga: Chattanooga News Free Press, 1947.
- Couch, W. T., ed. Culture in the South. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1934.
- Davenport, Frederick Morgan. Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals. New York: Macmillan Co., 1917.
- Douthat, Strat. "'They Shall Take Up Serpents' Minister of Snake-Handling Sect Recalls His Son's Death." Los Angeles Times, Sunday, June 16, 1974, part 1-A, pp. 1, 2, 4.
- Durham Herald, 22 May, 1949, p. 1:1.

- Ford, Thomas R. ed. The Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1962.
- "Georgia: Any Deadly Thing." Time, Vol. 50 (10), September 8, 1947, p. 25.
- Gillin, J. L. "A Contribution to the Sociology of Sects." American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 16 (1910-1911), pp. 236-252.
- Goodman, Felicitas D. Speaking in Tongues A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- Gordon, George N. Persuasion: The Theory and Practice of Manipulative Communication. New York: Communication Arts Books Hastings House, 1968.
- "Handling Deadly Snakes Tests Churchgoers Faith." Peoria Journal Star, June 16, 1974, pg. A-10.
- Hawley F. "The Keresan Holy Rollers: An Adaptation to American Individualism." Social Forces, Vol. 26 (1948), pp. 272-280.
- Hine, Virginia H. "Pentacostal Glossolalia: Toward a Functional Interpretation." Journal For The Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 8 (2) (1969), pp. 211-226.
- Hoffer, Eric. The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements. New York: Harper and Row, 1951.
- "Holiness Faith Healers." Life, Vol. 17 (1), July 3 (1944), pp. 59-62.
- Holt, John B. "Holiness Religion: Cultural Shock and Social Reorganization." American Sociological Review, Vol. 5 (1940), pp. 740-747.
- Holtzman, Paul D. The Psychology of the Speaker's Audience. Glenview Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1970.
- Hoveland, Carl L., Irving J. Janis and Harold H. Kelley. Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966.
- Hoveland, Carl L. and Irving L. Janis. Yale Studies in Attitude and Communication Volume II: Personality and Persuasibility. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball, May 27, 1978 in Newport, Tennessee.

Interview with Reverend Alfred Ball, May 28, 1977 in Newport, Tennessee.

James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature. New York: Modern Library, 1929.

Janis, Irving L. "Personality Correlates of Susceptibility to Persuasion." Journal of Personality, Vol. 22 (1954), pp. 504-518.

Jones, Lealon N., ed. Eve's Stepchildren: A Collection of Folk Americana. Idaho: Caxton Printers Ltd., 1942.

Kildahl, John P. The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1972.

La Barre, Weston. They Shall Take Up Serpents: Psychology of the Southern Snake Handling Cult. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962.

Le Bon, Gustave. The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind. London: T. F. Univin, 1903.

Lindzey, Gardener, ed. Handbook of Social Psychology. Cambridge, Mass.: Addison Wesley Publishing Company Incorporated, 1954.

Marsh, Patrick O. Persuasive Speaking. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Maslow, Abraham, H. Toward a Psychology of Being. New York: Van Nostrad Reinhold Company, 1968.

Mathison, R. R. Faiths, Cults and Sects of America: From Atheism to Zen. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960.

Meyer, L. B. Emotion and Meaning in Music. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

Miller, Arthur B. "Rhetorical Exigence." Philosophy and Rhetoric, Vol. 5 (2), Spring (1972), pp. 111-ff.

Milman, Parry. "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse Making I: Homer and Homeric Style." Harvard Studies in Classical Philosophy, Vol. 31 (1930), pp. 75-83.

Minnick, Wayne C. The Act of Persuasion. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1957.

- Mc David, J., Jr. "Personality and Situational Determinants of Conformity." Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology, Vol. 58 (1959), pp. 241-246.
- Nadeau, Ray E. A Basic Rhetoric of Speech Communication. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969.
- New York Times, 9 March 1976, p. 19:1.
- New York Times, 13 August 1934, p. 30:2.
- New York Times, 10 August 1934, p. 4:3.
- New York Times, 23 October 1974, p. 48:2.
- New York Times, 30 October 1973, p. 27:1.
- Oliver, Robert T. The Psychology of Persuasive Speech. New York: David McKay Company, Incorporated, 1957.
- Park, Robert E. On Social Control and Collective Behavior. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Pelton, Robert W. and Karen W. Carden. Snake Handlers: God Fearing? or Fanatics? Nashville and New York: Thomas Nelson, Incorporated, 1974.
- Polansky, N., R. Lippitt and F. Redl. "An Investigation of Behavioral Contagion in Groups." Human Relations, Vol. 3 (1950), pp. 319-348.
- Pratt, James Bissett. The Religious Consciousness. New York: Harper and Row Publishing Company, 1920.
- Preece, Harold and Celia Kraft. Dew on Jordan. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Incorporated, 1943.
- "Right With the Lord?" The Peoria Journal Star, March 11, 1973, p. A-11.
- Robertson, Archie. That Old Time Religion. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1950.
- Rosenberg, Bruce A. The Art of the American Folk Preacher. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Formulaic Quality of Spontaneous Sermons." Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 83 (1970), pp. 5-20.

- Samarin, W. J. Tongues of Men and Angels: The Religious Language of Pentacostalism. New York: Macmillan Company, 1972.
- Sargant, William. Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brainwashing. New York: Perennial Library, Harper and Row, 1957, 1959.
- Scheidel, Thomas M. Speech Communication and Human Interaction. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1972.
- Schwarz, Berthold E. "Ordeal by Serpents, Fire and Strychnine." Psychiatric Quarterly, Vol. 34, March (1960), pp. 405-429.
- Scott, Robert L. and Bernard L. Brock. Methods of Rhetorical Criticism. New York: Harper and Row, 1972.
- Service. Taped church service held at Reverend Alfred Ball's church in Newport, Tennessee on May 14, 1978.
- Service. Taped church service held at Reverend Alfred Ball's church in Newport, Tennessee on May 28, 1978.
- Smelser, Neil J. Theory of Collective Behavior. New York: Free Press, 1962.
- "Snake-Handling Cultists Resemble Other Groups." Science News Letter, Vol. 38, 17 August (1949), p. 103.
- "Snake Handling Cults Flourish." The Christian Century, Vol. LXIV (44), 29 October (1947), p. 1308.
- "Snake Power." Time, Vol. 92 (18), 1 November (1968), p. 86.
- Stekert, Ellen. "The Snake-Handling Sect of Harlan County, Kentucky." Southern Folklore, Vol. XXVIII (4), December (1953), pp. 316-322.
- Stark, Rodney. "A Taxonomy of Religious Experience." Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol. 5 (1) (1965), pp. 97-116.
- Sumner, William Graham. Folkways. New York: Mentor Books, Ginn Company, 1960.
- Sweet, William Warren. Religion in the Development of American Culture. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.

The Bible, King James Version.

"The Lord's Bidding." Newsweek, Vol. 81, 23 April (1973), p. 23.

"They Shall Take Up Serpents." Newsweek, Vol. 24, 24 August (1944), pp. 88, 89.

"They Shall Take Up Serpents." St. Louis Post Dispatch, 18 March (1973), pp. 32, 37-39.

Thomas, Jean. Blue Ridge Country. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942.

Thonssen, Lester, A., Craig Baird and Waldo W. Braden. Speech Criticism, 2nd ed. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1970.

"To Let Snake Bite." The New York Times, 13 August (1934), p. 30:2.

"Two Holiness Church Members Dead After Taking Strychnine." Newport Plain Talk, Vol. 73 (120), 9 April (1973), pp. 1, 3.

Ungerleider, Thomas J. and David K. Wellsch. "Coercive Persuasion (Brainwashing) Religious Cults and Deprogramming." American Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 136 (3), March (1979), pp. 279-282.

Weatherford, W. D. and Earl D. C. Brewer. Life and Religion in Southern Appalachia. Part I, "Early Settlers in the Southern Appalachians." New York: Friendship Press, 1962.

Weisberger, Bernard A. They Gathered at the River. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1958.

Wigginton, Elliot, ed. The Foxfire Book. Vol. I, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1972.

Wilson, Bryan R. "An Analysis of Sect Development." American Sociological Review, Vol. 24, February (1959), pp. 3-15.

\_\_\_\_\_. Religious Sects: A Sociological Study. New York: World University Library, McGraw Hill, 1970.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Pentacostalist Minister: Role Conflicts and Status Contradictions." American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 64 (1959), pp. 494-504.

- Wilson, John F. and Carroll C. Arnold. Public Speaking as a Liberal Art. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Incorporated, 1964, 1968, 1974.
- Wolberg, L. R. and J. P. Kildahl. The Dynamics of Personality. New York: Greene and Stratton, 1970.
- Womeldorf, John A. "Rattlesnake Religion." The Christian Century, Vol. LXIV (50), 10, December (1947), pp. 1517-1518.
- Wood, William Woodhull. "Culture and Personality Aspects of the Pentacostal Holiness Religion." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of North Carolina, 1961.
- Yinger, Milton J. "Religion and Social Change: Functions and Dysfunctions of Sects and Cults Among the Disprivileged." Review of Religious Research, Vol. 4, Winter (1962), pp. 65-84.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Sociology Looks at Religion. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963.
- Zaretsky, Irving I. and Mark P. Leone (ed.). Religious Movements in Contemporary America. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Zimbardo, Phillip and Ebbe B. Ebbensen. Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1969.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letter from Cecil Browning  
Dated July 27, 1974

Switzer, W. Va.  
July 27, 1974

Greetings in Jesus Name.

Dear Kala Murphy,

Just a few lines in answer to your letter I received. You say you are interested in our religion (or belief). We don't call ourselves snake handlers. We are the Jesus people. The Word of God calls them Serpents and not snakes. We call them Serpents too. I love this way - this great truth. The truth is Jesus, he said he was the way, the truth and the light.

You asked me why did I join this church. I didn't join it. I was born into this church. I was searching for a belief I could feel deep inside me and God led me to Micco, W. Virginia Church (Jesus) Church. Here I was really born into this great truth. Now I'm happy and satisfied. I have a deep settled peace inside me. My soul is anchored in Jesus.

As for my feeling of how I feel when I take up Serpents. I feel love move in me for the Serpent and I feel the Spirit of God move in me to take it up. That's the anointing power. This is your protection. You'll find scripture in Mark - Chapter 16. Start with verse 16 - verse 17-18. There is (sic) 5 signs that follow the true believers that believe in the name Jesus. One must really see Jesus and be baptized in the single name (Jesus). This is our belief. We know he (Jesus) is the Father (Spirit), Son (Jesus), Holy Ghost (Spirit). These 3 are one. The word of God says so.

We want to help you as much as I can. We have service on every Saturday night at Micco, W. Virginia. Plesae come and attend these services for yourself and you will learn and see a lot. Our Pastor Rev. Kelly Williams will answer your questions much better than I can. Come to Logan, W. Virginia. Call me, and I'll meet you at Logan. My name and phone is Cecil Browning, 946-2501. I live at Micco.

We use for music large drum, small drum (played or beat by to (sic) sisters), guitar electric (Kelly Williams, Brother Ralph Spense - one of the best guitar players I've ever known), tambourines, cymbals, special singing by sisters and brothers.

For jobs the Saints of God hold - vary from one another. Myself, Rev. Williams, Deacons, Sizemore, Dave Sexton are retired coal miners. Some sisters work as secretarys - School Board of Education, some for doctors, some housekeepers, some brothers coal miners, some work for the School Board of Education.

Switzer, W. Va.  
July 27, 1974  
Page 2

We have another church at Kistler, W. Virginia. Rev. Williams is pastor of it too. It's a beautiful church carpeted with new red carpet. Our people are well dressed people. Had jobs of good position and are a spiritual people. We believe in holiness, cleanness.

Please come and be with us in these services. I ask you to only write the truth. For we (are) one God's people. We have a news reporter out of Columbus, Ohio. He's retired now but he comes to our services. You are welcome, please come.

Mr. Cecil Browning  
Switzer, W. Virginia

Appendix B

Letter from Cecil Browning  
Dated August 12, 1974

Switzer, W. Va.  
August 12, 1974

Dear Miss Murphy,

I am trying to help you all I can. Believe me because it's my duty to help people that don't understand as you know people didn't understand Jesus, when he was here upon earth. But now he has gone back to Heaven to prepare a place for them that love and obey him.

Please Miss Murphy all of this can't be expressed. It is on the inside of a true believer. Yes Jesus does talk to his people only them that are his. Now I can write you a hundred letters, explaining my thoughts to you and how I really feel down inside of me and it wouldn't help you much. Oh, I do want to help you if you are concerned as you say you are and I believe you are concerned.

You ask me if we sing out of books. Not very much. We sing and press into service and get hold of the Spirit. We have songs that are spiritual and not in books. Kala, I'm mailing you a tape of one of our services. Please record yourself one from mine and mail mine back to me please.

You never did say if you are a white lady or colored. I'd like to know how old you are. Not that it would make any difference.

We play electric guitars, straight guitars, 2 drums, tambourine, sometimes a piano in service. We now have plenty serpents. Here is a picture of Sister Ruth Dillon a member of our church handling serpents about 20 or more rattler snakes or Copper Heads. We wait upon the Spirit before we ever take any serpents.

We start off our service with singing and move according to the way the Spirit of God moves. Yes God talks to me and to everyone at times more so to others that really know his voice. You know when the anointing begins to leave you, then you put the serpent down. I hope this helps you some.

Mr. Cecil Browning

Appendix C

Song - Darkest Hours

## Darkest Hours

I walked down many roads in my lifetime,  
Not knowing what my life held for me.  
Troubles come, couldn't find no answer,  
But I found Jesus in my darkest hours.

### Chorus:

I found Him on a moutain top, in valleys so low,  
And when my burdens got heavy, I knew where to go.  
Trials came and no one seemed to care,  
But I found Jesus in my darkest hours.

Oh, there'll be mountains to climb, valleys to go through  
And there'll be burdens that we will have to bear  
Your friends will be few, when there were so many.  
Yet, Jesus was there in my darkest hours.

Written by Sister Eunice Ball, Holiness Church of God in  
Jesus Name, Carson Springs, Tennessee.

Appendix D

Song - Zion, Oh Zion

## Zion, Oh Zion

Chorus:

Oh, Zion, oh, Zion  
What's the matter now?  
Oh, Zion, oh, Zion,  
What's the matter now?

We used to sing and shout,  
What's the matter now?  
We used to sing and shout,  
What's the matter now?

We used to speak in tongues,  
What's the matter now?  
We used to speak in tongues,  
What's the matter now?

We used to pray for the sick,  
What's the matter now?  
We used to pray for the sick,  
What's the matter now?

We used to cast out devils,  
What's the matter now?  
We used to cast out devils,  
What's the matter now?

We used to take up serpents,  
What's the matter now?  
We used to take up serpents,  
What's the matter now?

We used to love our brothers,  
What's the matter now?  
We used to love our brothers,  
What's the matter now?

We used to believe the Bible,  
What's the matter now?  
We used to believe the Bible,  
What's the matter now?

An original song. Author unknown. Courtesy of Sister Eunice Ball, Holiness Church of God in Jesus Name, Carson Springs, Tennessee.