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**The Relationship Between Religious Followers' Functional and Relational Goals and Perceptions of Religious Leaders' use of Instructional Communication**

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Abstract

The goal of this study was two fold: (1) initiate a dialogue about religious instructional communication and (2) demonstrate how Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe's (2006) rhetorical/relational goal theory of instructional communication could be applied to religious instructional communication. This study found that a religious followers' functional goals positively related to perceptions of religious leader trustworthiness and religious follower perceived cognitive learning and motivation to comply with religious leaders. Religious followers' relational goals positively related to perceptions of religious leader credibility, use of humor, perceived cognitive learning, motivation to comply with religious leaders, and religious climate.

An estimated 150 million people in the United States attend some form of religious services every week (Barna, 2006). With so many people attending religious services in the United States, a variety of books examining best practices for teaching religious ideology have been written (Bryan, 1993; Hogan & Reid, 1999; Littauer, 1983; Littauer & Littauer, 1998; McNabb & Mabry, 1990; Stone, 2004; Vassallo, 2005). Not surprisingly, much of the writing about religious instruction has focused specifically on public speaking. Understanding religious instructional communication is hardly a new endeavor. Debates about the place of rhetoric in Christianity date back to the creation of the religion itself (Athanasius of Alexandria, 1996; St. Augustine, 1996; Chrysostom, 1997; Tatian, 2001). However, little academic scholarship has approached the issue of religious instruction as instructional communication. Furthermore, most of the writings about religious instruction focus on the delivery of religious instructor's public speaking skills with little attention placed on the perceptions and goals of the religious follower. While presentation skills are extremely important in any kind of instructional environment, effective and affective instructional communication involves a range of competent communicative behaviors beyond public speaking (Bryan, 1993; Hogan & Reid, 1999; Richmond, Wrench, & Gorham, 2001).

Research in instructional communication has noted that a learner's perceptions and goals impacts educational outcomes (McCroskey, Richmond, McCroskey, 2006). Recently, Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe (2006) proposed that a learner's specific rhetorical and relational goals have a direct impact on instructional outcomes. If religious instruction functions in a manner similar to classroom instruction, then religious followers will have specific rhetorical and relational goals that impact communicative and learning outcomes in the religious instructional context.

#### Review of Literature

##### Rhetorical/Relational Goal Theory of Instructional Communication

Over the last thirty years, scholars in instructional communication have attempted to understand and theorize about how the instructional communication process works. In 2006, Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe proposed the rhetorical/relational goal theory of instructional communication. There are two historic traditions examined within human communication: rhetorical and relational. "These two traditions also reflect two of the primary purposes we have when communicating: (1) to influence and/or achieve goals and (2) to develop and maintain relationships" (Mottet et al., 2006, p. 266). Both teachers and students have rhetorical and relational goals within the classroom setting. Students in the instructional context have both academic needs (ability to make good grades) and relational needs (feel affirmed as a person). While not all students are driven by academic and relational needs the same way, meeting these needs is important for successful instructional outcomes. Teachers, on the other hand, are basically driven by the two primary communicative goals.

First, teachers have specific rhetorical goals, therefore "teachers focus on influencing students to learn and understand the content as presented by the teacher" (Mottet et al., 2006, p. 267). Second, teachers have specific relational goals, or communicative goals associated with establishing specific types of relationships teachers want to have with their students (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). Teachers who emphasize relational goals attempt to create closer relationships with their students; whereas, teachers who deemphasize relational goals will attempt to create more relational distance between themselves and their students.

Historically, the two communicative goals described above (rhetorical & relational) have been described as instructor-centered (focus is on the content) or student-centered (focus is on the receiver); with instructor-centered and student-centered teaching existing on a continuum

(Chall, 2000). Mottet et al. (2006) argue that the two teaching goals may not be a dialectic of teaching, but instead are two basic goals that are relatively independent of each other. In fact, teachers who emphasize both rhetorical and relational goals in the classrooms are probably the most likely to satisfy students' academic and relational needs within the classroom, which leads to both an increase in student motivation and positive academic outcomes. Furthermore, Mottet et al. argue that teachers who emphasize both relational and rhetorical goals will more "successfully utilize communication behaviors such as immediacy, relevance, clarity, and compliance-gaining to achieve those goals are most likely to meet students' relational and academic needs" (p. 269). If, however, a teacher emphasizes one goal over the other, then he or she is naturally limiting her or his ability to meet all student relational and academic needs. While rhetorical and relational goals are important at all education levels, Mottet et al. predict that as "students mature and develop, their relational needs lessen, however, some students will always desire affirmation from their teachers and need ego support to maintain motivation for the course" (p. 269). In essence, as students age, the relational needs are probably not as important as their academic needs.

#### Rhetorical/Relational Goal Theory in Religious Contexts

While the rhetorical/relational goal theory is fairly new and only recently began empirical testing (Frymier, 2005, 2006), the theory as proposed by Mottet et al. (2006) is limited to the traditional classroom context. However, if the theory is truly a theory of instructional communication and not classroom education, then the theory should be applicable to a wide range of instructional communication contexts like the religious leader-follower instructional context. In religious leader-follower instructional communication, both participants clearly have rhetorical and relational goals.

Religious followers' rhetorical and relational goals. For religious followers, they have both functional and relational goals. While the traditional classroom focuses on more concrete academic goals for students, students undergoing religious instruction are less concerned about making the almighty "A" than they are about gaining insight on concerns of spirituality. In other words, Milton, Pollio, and Eison's (1986) learning and grade orientations are not useful when discussing religious followers because people do not attend religious services for grades. Instead understanding what motivates religious followers to interact with their spiritual leaders would be a useful way of understanding religious followers' goals.

Martin, Myers, and Mottet (1999) created a scale to measure students' communication motives based on the original research examining interpersonal communication motives by Rubin, Perse, and Barbato (1988). In the Martin et al. study, they found that students are motivated to communicate with their teachers for five reasons: relational, functional, excuses, participation, and sycophancy. First, students communicate with their teachers in order to build interpersonal relationships (relational). Second, students communicate with their teacher for more functional reasons to learn about material or course work (functional). Third, students communicate with their teachers to provide excuses for bad behavior, late work, or poor work (excuses). Fourth, students communicate with their teachers to demonstrate that they are interested in the class and they understand the material (participation). The final reason students communicate with their teachers is sycophancy, or to attempt to get on their teacher's "good" side.

However, when one looks at these five motives, two of them (functional and relational) mirror the goals discussed by Mottet et al. (2006). For the purposes of religious instructional

communication, we propose that religious followers' functional goals are related to issues involving spiritual clarification. When religious followers need further information to live a spiritual life as defined by their religious leaders, the religious followers must seek out clarification from their leaders (Bryan, 1993). Religious followers' relational goals, on the other hand, are concerned with a religious follower's desire to build an interpersonal relationship with her or his religious leader.

As Mottet et al. (2006) argue, rhetorical/relational goals are also coupled with specific learner needs. Religious followers have two distinct needs that religious leaders should address: personal confirmation and belongingness needs. Personal confirmation needs are similar to the needs discussed by Mottet et al. (2006) for students. Religious followers have a desire to feel confirmed as both religious followers and as people. In addition to confirmation needs, religious followers also innately need to feel that they belong to both a specific religious group but to the religious tradition as a whole. Research has shown that belongingness is created in religious groups through religious rituals, attendance, active participation, and understanding of beliefs (King, 2003).

Religious leaders' rhetorical and relational goals. Now that we have focused on the needs of the religious followers, we can discuss the rhetorical and relational goals of religious leaders. The bulk of writings in both homiletics (the discovery of the available means to persuasively presenting an exegesis, or the critical explanation of a religious text or idea) and hermeneutics (field of study that examines the interpretation of religious texts) have clearly been rhetorically focused (Jost & Hyde, 1997). In fact, most of the training new religious leaders receive in seminaries is focused on communicating the theological tenants of one's faith (Hogan & Reid, 1999). Clearly, within every sermon, a religious leader must pick among the many different theological tenants and focus her or his sermon on just one. This is the same process that teachers must go through when determining what content should be discussed within a traditional classroom. As previously discussed, there are many texts that aid in the explanation of how to carefully construct persuasive, informative, and entertaining sermons (Hogan & Reid, 1999; Littauer & Littauer, 1998; Stone, 2004; Strom, 2003; Vassallo, 2005).

In addition to the basic rhetorical goals a religious leader must have, religious leaders must also have relational goals. Just as we discussed with teachers, there are some religious leaders who emphasize relational goals and there are some who do not. Religious leaders who emphasize relational goals will actively seek to deepen their interpersonal relationships with their religious followers. While religious leaders who do not emphasize relational goals, will attempt to create more relational distance between themselves and their followers. According to Bryan (1993), "People have the capacity for relationships with each other. Consequently in a teaching/learning situation, the relationship between teacher and learner is crucial. The quality of the relationship can either strengthen or weaken the teaching/learning process" (p. 35). Bryan goes on to note that "Christian teaching involves a long-term investment. Investing time means being available and accessible" to establish relationships (p. 36). Bryan ultimately believes that learning and relationships are intertwined in religious instruction because "relationships influence what is learned" and "relationships influence what is taught" (p. 36). While Bryan is specifically writing about teaching in religious instruction, his ideas are very much in line with instructional communication research that has noted the necessity of developing interpersonal relationships (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006).

While relational goals clearly hold true for educational environments, there may be a mediating factor that determines the impact of the extent to which this goal is realistically

possible based on congregation size. With the increasing trend towards megachurches (church with a weekly attendance over 2000), the ability of relational goals must be questioned. According to Thumma, Travis, and Bird (2005), there are 1,210 Protestant megachurches in the United States, which is double the number of megachurches in 2000. In these instructional situations, can the personality of the minister actually overcome the distance to create perceptions of immediacy, which leads to people to perceiving a relationship where none actually exists? This problem is actually very much akin to the problem that distance education plays for the traditional classroom. Except in the megachurch, many religious followers will never have any direct contact with the religious leader.

Overall, the rhetorical/relational role theory of instructional communication does inform the religious instructional communication process. For this reason, we believe that rhetorical/relational role theory can be used to inform a series of hypotheses about religious instructional communication. However, for the current project, we will focus on the religious follower half of the relational/rhetorical goals theory of instructional communication.

#### Communication Variables of Interest

The discussion thus far in this paper has focused on how the rhetorical/relational goals theory of instructional communication can help inform the religious instructional communication process. Based on this discussion, our goal then must be to determine if the patterns found in previous instructional communication literature examining traditional classroom settings holds true for religious instructional communication. For this reason, we grouped our proposed variables into two basic categories, perceptions of religious leaders (source credibility & humor assessment) and outcome variables (perceived learning, religious motivation, & religious climate).

#### Perceptions of Religious Leaders

**Source Credibility.** The importance of religious leader credibility is hardly a new discussion (St. Augustine, 1996). In fact, Aristotle's concept of ethos was widely known to early Christian theologian-rhetoricians (Hogan & Reid, 1999). In communication research, McCroskey and Teven (1999) developed a three factor model for examining ethos: competence, trustworthiness, & caring/goodwill. Competence is the extent that an individual truly knows what he or she is discussing. One of the primary goals of seminaries is the development of religious competence (Bryan, 1993; Hogan & Reid, 1999). In fact, books written about religious teaching all stress the necessity of knowing the material one is going to be teaching (Bryan, 1993; Hogan & Reid, 1999; Littauer, 1983; Littauer & Littauer, 1998; McNabb & Mabry, 1990; Stone, 2004; Vassallo, 2005). However, Littauer (1983) warns religious leaders that actual knowledge is not enough to be seen as competent. To Littauer, competence involves both topic selection and presentation components.

The second component of McCroskey and Teven's (1999) three factors of credibility is trustworthiness, which is the degree to which one individual perceives another person as being honest. Bryan (1993) notes that "Without trust, no learner is willing to put himself at risk to explore the unknown. . . Since time is required to build trust in a relationship, Christian teaching involves a long-term investment" (p. 35-36). In this quotation, Bryan stresses the importance of building relationships between religious leaders and religious followers because trust is not something that is built overnight. Furthermore, Bryan realizes that for effective religious instruction to occur, trust must be built between the religious leader and religious follower.

The final component of credibility, caring/goodwill, is the perceived caring that a receiver sees in a source. Bryan (1993) discussed the spirit of caring/goodwill when he wrote “The teacher should be a spokesman for interest in the social issues of life which focus upon the needs of the learner and others around him. The teacher needs to be vitally interested in people and, in turn, with those social issues and concerns” (p. 77). In essence, Bryan is arguing that an effective religious leader must clearly care about her or his followers and the issues and concerns in their lives. According to McCroskey (1998), caring/goodwill may be the most important aspect of credibility.

Since the final synthesis of source credibility measurement work by McCroskey and Teven (1999), a number of research studies have utilized the source credibility scale to examine instructional communication. Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) found a negative relationship between student perceptions of a teacher’s credibility (competence, trustworthiness, & caring/goodwill) and student perceptions of teacher misbehaviors. Furthermore, students perceived nonverbally immediate teachers as more credible. Toale (2001) found a positive relationship between student perceptions of teacher clarity and credibility, and found a negative relationship between credibility and the three types of teacher misbehaviors (indolence, incompetence, and offensiveness). Banfield, Richmond, and McCroskey (2006) later experimentally tested the relationship between perceived credibility and teacher misbehaviors finding still a negative relationship between teacher credibility and teacher misbehaviors. Furthermore, a positive relationship was found between teacher credibility and affect for one’s teacher. Overall, teacher credibility has been shown to be a very important part of instructional communication.

The first person to explore the relationship between student communication motives and perceptions of credibility was Cayanus, Martin, and Goodboy (2004). In this study, the researchers examined the relationship between students’ communication motives and perceptions of instructor credibility finding that students who viewed their instructors as credible were more likely to be motivated to communicate for functional and relational reasons. Since the current study is only exploring relational and participatory motives for communication, we would also expect that the motives religious followers have for communicating with their religious leaders would also be positively related to the religious followers’ perceptions of religious leaders’ credibility; therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

H1: There will be a positive relationship between religious followers’ communication motives with religious leaders and religious followers’ perceptions of religious leader credibility.

*Humor Assessment.* Teacher use of humor in the classroom has been shown to be positively related to student affective and cognitive learning in the classroom (Martin, Preiss, Gayle, & Allen, 2006; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; Wrench & Richmond, 2004), classroom motivation (Wrench & Richmond, 2004), formal and informal out-of-class communication (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003), perceptions of teacher credibility (Wrench & Richmond, 2004), perceptions of teacher nonverbal immediacy (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; Wrench & Richmond, 2004), perceptions of teacher use of power strategies in the classroom (Punyanunt, 2000). In resources designed for religious leader-teachers, there is a consistent emphasis on the use of humor during religious instruction (Bryan, 1993; Hogan & Reid, 1999; Littauer, 1983; Littauer & Littauer, 1998; McNabb & Mabry, 1990; Stone, 2004; Vassallo, 2005). Vassallo (2005) notes that “Humor creates interest and attention. It makes the speaker appear more human and gets the audience in the speaker’s camp” (p. 78). In essence, humor is a tool that is often used by teachers in both classrooms and religious contexts to get an audience’s attention and keep that attention.

Stone (2004) defines communicative humor as a “combination of body language, facial expressions, eye contact, voice inflection, rate of delivery, timing, and – of course- the words you use” (p. 91). Stone goes on to note that the “better your class or church knows you, the funnier a facial expression or phrase becomes” (p. 91). In other words, the more people feel relationally connected to a religious leader during religious instructional communication, the more likely the religious follower will be attuned to the religious leader’s specific usage of humor. If Stone is correct, then individual who are motivated to communicate with religious leaders for relational reasons will find those religious leaders more humorous than those religious followers who are not motivated to communicate with religious leaders for relational reasons. Furthermore, Bryan (1993) agrees with Stone (2004) that having a sense of humor is essential for developing relationships with one’s followers. Based on these ideas, the following hypothesis can be posed:

H2: There will be a positive relationship between religious followers’ communication motives with religious leaders and religious followers’ perceptions of a religious leader’s use of humor.

#### Outcome Variables

For the purposes of this study, there are three specific outcome variables that will be examined: perceived learning, religious motivation, and religious climate. Since these are commonly used outcome variables, an in-depth review of literature for each variable is not necessary. However, we do want to provide a definition for each variable as it is used in the current study and a brief review of relevant literature.

**Perceived Learning.** Research in the field of instructional communication has consistently shown that measuring a student’s belief of her or his own cognitive learning is important for ascertaining the impact of instructional communication (Richmond, Lane, & McCroskey, 2006). For religious instruction, Bryan (1993) argued that cognitive learning was impacted by a combination of a range of variables including: the relationship between religious leaders and religious followers, religious leader feedback, religious leader clarity, religious leader’s use of a variety of educational methods, religious leader competency, relevancy/application of content to the religious followers’ lives, religious follower involvement, and supernatural forces (e.g. God, The Holy Spirit, etc.). Two of these factors (religious leader-follower relationship & religious leader feedback) mirror the goals for communicating discussed in rhetorical/relational goal theory. Furthermore, research by Martin, Mottet, and Myers (2000) found that relational and functional motives were positively related to both affective and cognitive learning in the classroom. If the religious instructional context is similar to the classroom context, then the following hypothesis can be posed:

H3: There will be a positive relationship between religious followers’ communication motives with religious leaders and religious followers’ perceived cognitive learning.

**Religious Motivation.** Understanding what motivates students to do well in the classroom has consistently been an important avenue of research in the classroom (Millette & Gorham, 2002). Research has shown us numerous factors related to student motivation: grade orientation, interest in the subject area, student participation, and many factors related to the teacher including use of humor, feedback, enthusiasm, organization of course material, clarity, and relationship with students (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Gorham & Millette, 1997). Research has also indicated that motivated students are “‘motivated’ to attend and prepare for class, turn in assignments, study for exams, ask questions, please the instructor,

understand material, and receive good grades. Such students are active, excited, persistent, optimistic, challenged, focused, and task-oriented” (Millette & Gorham, 2002, p. 141). Bryan (1993) has also noted that motivation in religious instruction is very important. Bryan argues that motivation in the religious instructional context occurs primarily through the development of relationships with one’s religious followers, “People are more motivated if significant relationships are being established and nurtured in the teaching/learning process” (p.103). Furthermore, Bryan argues that to motivated religious learners a religious leader must concentrate on the learner’s interests, “the interests of the learners must be used not only in the teaching methodology but also in the learning content” (p. 104). If religious followers are interested in a religious leader’s message, religious followers are more likely to be engaged by that content and seek clarification and further understanding of the content. In other words, people who are motivated to interact with their religious leaders for relational and functional purposes will be more motivated to follow that religious leader’s instruction. In the classroom context, Martin, Myers, and Mottet (2002) noted that when students are motivated to communicate with their instructors for relational and functional reasons, they also report being more motivated in the class as well. If the religious instructional context is similar to the classroom context, then the following hypothesis can be posed:

H4: There will be a positive relationship between religious followers’ communication motives with religious leaders and religious followers’ motivation.

*Religious Climate.* Dwyer, Bingham, Carlson, Prisbell, Cruz, and Fus (2004) designed the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory to measure student perceptions “of a supportive and cooperative communication environment in the classroom” (p. 269). Previous research in education has noted that student perceptions of community within the classroom affect academic motivation and student affect (Battistich, Solomon, Kim, Watson, & Schaps, 1995). While the Dwyer et al. (2004) scale was designed to measure the impact of student-student relationships, for the purposes of the current study an examination of religious followers perceptions of their connection to their religious bodies (instead of classrooms) is useful.

Much of religious instructional communication does not happen within a classroom environment; however, the learning climate is extremely important to religious education (Bryan, 1993). Bryan argues that the learning climate in religious education is impacted by both the physical surroundings and the spiritual climate. Bryan argues that the spiritual climate is more important for religious instruction than the physical environment because “quality learning can occur in the most humble dwellings” (p. 47). When one filters out the supernatural implications of Bryan’s spiritual climate, the similarity between Bryan’s spiritual climate and Dwyer et al.’s (2004) classroom climate can be made. While Dwyer et al. discuss the necessity of an open communication environment, Bryan refers to the spiritual climate as one where “learners are given the opportunity to try – both to succeed and to fail” (p. 47). In both concepts, students most have the ability to openly communicate. Furthermore, both Dwyer et al. and Bryan believe that for affective and effective instruction to occur relationships among the members of the context must be developed. Climate is innately about developing an instructional context where people can develop interpersonal relationships and openly discuss ideas. In essence, a positive climate has resources for an individual to achieve her or his rhetorical and relational goals. For this reason, the following hypothesis is posed:

H5: There will be a positive relationship between religious followers’ communication motives with religious leaders and religious followers’ connection with her or his religious body.

## Method

### Procedures & Participants

**Procedures.** Participants in this study were recruited through a series of targeted e-mails to various religious listservs using either Yahoo Groups or other known listservs. Specifically, Yahoo Groups lists thirty different religious categories specifically associated with specific religions. The top ten most populace groups in each category were contacted for participation in the study. The listservs chosen were ones the authors had personal access to and were selected out of convenience. The initial contact e-mail asked the moderator of the listserv to distribute the call for participants on her or his listserv. The call for participants explained the basic goals of the project along with a link to the questionnaire website. When participants clicked on the link to the questionnaire website, they were greeted with a standard informed consent letter that explained that filling out of the survey was an indication of consent to participate in this project. Below the consent letter was a link to the survey itself. Upon completion of the survey, participants were asked to submit their answers. When a participant submitted her or his answers, he or she was taken to a “thank you” website that contained a link to the researcher’s institution. The participants’ answers were stored on a secure website that could only be accessed by the researchers.

**Participants.** The sample consisted of 255 participants with a mean age of 36.68 ( $SD = 14.79$ ) and a range of 18 to 76. The sample consisted of 156 females (61.2%), 90 males (35.3%), and 9 individuals who did not respond, which is demographically similar to the percentages of female (60%) and male (40%) who attend religious services within the United States (Podles, 2001). 90.6% of the sample was Anglo/Caucasian. 62.4% of the sample were Protestants, 16.5% were Roman Catholic, 5.1% were Eastern Orthodox, and the rest of the sample consisted of a variety of religions none accounting for more than 5%: Hindu, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon, Muslim, Neo-Paganism, Sikhism, Unitarian-Universalist, and Other. We also asked the participants how many years they had been active in their religious body ( $M = 14.31$ ,  $SD = 13.69$ ). 73.6% of the participants went to churches with less than 500 active members, and only 10.6% attended megachurches.

Lastly, participants were asked three demographic questions related to the participants’ religious leaders. First, the participants indicated that 76.9% of their religious leaders were male, 13.3% of their religious leaders were female, and 9.8% did not respond. Next, we asked the participants how old their religious leaders were: 3.6% were under 30, 12.2% were between 31 and 40, 33.3% were between 41 and 50, 30.6% were between 51 and 60, and 15.3% were over the age of 61. Finally, the participants indicated that 87.8 percent of their religious leaders were Anglo/Caucasian.

### Instrumentation

**Religious Followers’ Communication Motives.** Communication Motives for interacting with a religious leader in this study was measured using a revised version of Martin, Myers, and Mottet’s (1999) Classroom Motives Scale’s functional and relational factors. The Religious Followers’ Communication Motives Scale consists of 12 Likert type ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree* designed to measure a religious follower’s motive to communicate with her or his religious leader for functional or relational reasons (Table 1). The items on the Religious Followers Communication Motives scale should be coded so that higher scores are given to those participants who are more motivated to communicate with their religious leaders.

The dimensionality of the twelve items for the Religious Followers' Communication Motives Scale in the current study was analyzed using a principal component factor analysis with a varimax rotation. To examine sampling adequacy, Kaiser's Measure of Sampling Adequacy was used. The MSA obtained was .90, which is considered "marvelous" for conducting a factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). The principal component factor analysis indicated that two eigenvalues were above 1 accounting for 74.77 percent of the variance (factor loadings can be seen in Table 1).

Table 1 *Factor Loadings from Principle-Components Analysis: Religious Follower's Communicative Motives Scale*

I talk to my religious leader:		Factor Loading	
		Functional	Relational
1.	to learn about him/her personally.	.11	<b>.88</b>
2.	so we can develop a friendship.	.24	<b>.86</b>
3.	to build a personal relationship.	.23	<b>.84</b>
4.	to learn more about my religious leader personally.	.16	<b>.92</b>
5.	because I find my religious leader interesting.	.26	<b>.80</b>
6.	because we share common interests.	.28	<b>.67</b>
7.	to clarify her or his sermons.	<b>.74</b>	.21
8.	to get assistance on living a spiritual life.	<b>.88</b>	.21
9.	to learn how I can improve my spiritual life.	<b>.87</b>	.21
10.	to ask questions about her or his sermons.	<b>.79</b>	.20
11.	to get spiritual advice.	<b>.89</b>	.23
12.	to get more information on the parts of spirituality.	<b>.87</b>	.20

*Note.* Boldface indicates highest factor loadings.

Upon examining the items that loaded on each factor, clear functional and relational communication motives were revealed. Each factor consists of six items with a possible range of 6 to 30, which was seen for both factors in the current study. Alpha reliability for the relational factor was .93 ( $M = 19.03$ ,  $SD = 6.16$ ). Alpha reliability for the functional factor was .93 ( $M = 18.13$ ,  $SD = 6.63$ ).

**Religious Leader Credibility.** To test for credibility, an 18-item scale was created by McCroskey and Teven (1999) that looks at a receiver's feelings and perceptions of a source's competence, trustworthiness, and caring/goodwill was used. The scale consists of 18 oppositely worded adjective pairs with seven steps, and each factor has six items. The target source used in the current study was a participant's religious leader. Higher scores indicated that a religious leader was perceived as highly credible by her or his religious follower. Each factor has a possible range of 6 to 42. The ranges seen in this study were as follows: competence, 10 to 42; trustworthiness, 11 to 42; and caring/goodwill, 6 to 42. The alpha reliability for competence in this study was .90 ( $M = 37.60$ ,  $SD = 5.06$ ); trustworthiness was .93 ( $M = 38.54$ ,  $SD = 5.12$ ); and caring/goodwill was .93 ( $M = 35.83$ ,  $SD = 6.97$ ).

**Religious Leader use of Humor.** The Humor Assessment (HA) instrument was created by Wrench and Richmond (2004) to measure an individual's use of humor as a communicative device in interpersonal relationships. The HA can be used to measure either an individual's own trait use of humor, or measure a receiver's perception of a source's use of humor. The scale

consists of 16 Likert-type items range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with higher scores indicating higher degrees of humor use. In the study, participants were asked to rate their religious leader's use of humor. The HA contains a possible range of 16 to 80, but the current study yielded a range of 32 to 80. Alpha reliability for the HA was .93 ( $M = 63.68$ ,  $SD = 9.77$ ).

**Cognitive Learning.** Using a method originally developed by Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney, and Plax (1987), religious followers were asked to assess their perceptions of their own learning. Religious followers were asked "How much have you learned from your religious leader?" The participants were instructed to respond to this question using a 0-9 scale with 0 indicating you have learned nothing from your religious leader and "9" indicating you have learned more from this religious leader than anyone else you know has. While one cannot equate perceived learning with actual learning, using a single question to measure perceived learning is useful because the question easily measures the participants' perception of learning on a clear continuum. The range for this question went from 0 to 9 with a mean of 6.19 ( $SD = 2.17$ ).

**Religious Motivation.** The Student Motivation Scale was created by Richmond (1990) to measure the degree to which students are motivated to succeed within a specific class. The scale consists of five oppositely worded adjective pairs with seven steps. In this study, participants were asked to what degree they were motivated to live the recommendations of their religious leader. Higher scores indicated higher motivation levels to follow one's religious leaders' teachings. The religious motivation scale contains a possible range of 6 to 35, which was seen in this study. Alpha reliability for religious motivation was .97 ( $M = 29.80$ ,  $SD = 5.94$ ).

**Religious Climate.** The Connected Classroom Climate Inventory was created by Dwyer, Bingham, Carlson, Prisbell, Cruz, and Fus (2004) to measure the degree to which a student feels connected to her or his classroom experience. The scale consists of 18 Likert type items range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) with higher scores indicating stronger perceptions of connectedness. In this study, participants were asked to rate their connectedness with their religious body. The religious motivation scale contains a possible range of 18 to 90, and a range of 34 to 90 was seen in this study. Alpha reliability for religious body connection was .96 ( $M = 72.52$ ,  $SD = 12.28$ ).

#### Data Analysis

In previous research, functional and relational motives have been found to be positively related constructs (Martin, Myers, & Mottet, 1999). The two communicative motives were also found to be positively related in this study as well,  $r(237) = .47$ ,  $p < .0005$ . Because the two factors are clearly related constructs, using simple correlations in this study will not be beneficial (see Table 2). In order to test the specific hypotheses made in the current study, a series of simple linear regressions and multiple linear regressions will be calculated using functional and relational motives as the independent variables and the other variables in the study (credibility, humor assessment, cognitive learning, motivation, and religious climate) as separate dependent variables.

Table 2 Correlations Between Functional &amp; Relational Communication Motives and Study Variables

	Communication Motives	
	Functional	Relational
Source Credibility		
Competence	.24***	.34***
Trustworthiness	.19**	.27***
Caring/Goodwill	.29***	.31***
Humor Assessment	.18*	.39***
Cognitive Learning	.38***	.38***
Religious Motivation	.41***	.31***
Religious Climate	.27***	.40***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .005$ , \*\*\*  $p < .0005$

## Results

The first hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between religious followers' communication motives (functional & relational) with religious leaders and religious followers' perceptions of religious leader credibility (competence, caring/goodwill, & trustworthiness). Using relational and functional communication motives as the independent variables and the three factors of source credibility (competence, caring/goodwill, & trustworthiness) as the dependent variables a series of linear regressions were calculated. The linear combination of the relational and functional communication motives was significantly related to participants' perceptions of her or his religious leader's competence,  $F(2, 223) = 15.41, p < .0005$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was .35, which indicates that approximately 12% of the variance in an individual's perception of her or his religious leader's competence could be accounted for by the linear combination of relational ( $t = 4.00, p < .0005, \beta = .28$ ) and functional ( $t = 1.62, p > .05, \beta = .11$ ) communication motives.

The linear combination of the relational and functional communication motives was significantly related to participants' perceptions of her or his religious leader's caring/goodwill,  $F(2, 223) = 15.89, p < .0005$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was .35, which indicates that approximately 13% of the variance in an individual's perception of her or his religious leader's caring/goodwill could be accounted for by the linear combination of relational ( $t = 3.08, p < .005, \beta = .22$ ) and functional ( $t = 2.85, p < .005, \beta = .20$ ) communication motives.

The linear combination of the relational and functional communication motives was significantly related to participants' perceptions of her or his religious leader's trustworthiness,  $F(2, 228) = 9.17, p < .0005$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was .27, which indicates that approximately 7.4% of the variance in an individual's perception of her or his religious leader's trustworthiness could be accounted for by the linear combination of relational ( $t = 2.99, p < .005, \beta = .21$ ) and functional ( $t = 1.40, p > .05, \beta = .10$ ) communication motives.

The second hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between religious followers' communication motives (relational & functional) with religious leaders and religious followers' perceptions of a religious leader's use of humor. Using relational and functional communication motives as the independent variables and perceptions of religious leader humor as the dependent variable, a multiple linear regression was calculated,  $F(2, 223) = 19.09, p < .0005$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was .38, which indicates that approximately 15% of the variance in an individual's perception of her or his religious leader's use of humor could be

accounted for by the linear combination of relational ( $t = 5.40, p < .0005, \beta = .38$ ) and functional ( $t = 0.04, p > .05, \beta = .00$ ) communication motives.

The third hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between religious followers' communication motives (relational & functional) religious leaders and religious followers' perceived cognitive learning. Using relational and functional communication motives as the independent variables and perceptions of cognitive learning as the dependent variable, a multiple linear regression was calculated,  $F(2, 228) = 27.45, p < .0005$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was .44, which indicates that approximately 19% of the variance in an individual's perception of cognitive learning could be accounted for by the linear combination of relational ( $t = 3.76, p < .0005, \beta = .25$ ) and functional ( $t = 3.93, p < .0005, \beta = .26$ ) communication motives.

The fourth hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between religious followers' communication motives (relational & functional) religious leaders and religious followers' motivation. Using relational and functional communication motives as the independent variables and perceptions of cognitive learning as the dependent variable, a multiple linear regression was calculated,  $F(2, 225) = 26.58, p < .0005$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was .44, which indicates that approximately 19% of the variance in an individual's level of motivation could be accounted for by the linear combination of relational ( $t = 2.11, p < .05, \beta = .14$ ) and functional ( $t = 5.26, p < .0005, \beta = .35$ ) communication motives.

The fifth hypothesis predicted a positive relationship between religious followers' communication motives (relational & functional) religious leaders and religious followers' connection with her or his religious body. Using relational and functional communication motives as the independent variables and perceptions of cognitive learning as the dependent variable, a multiple linear regression was calculated,  $F(2, 219) = 22.27, p < .0005$ . The sample multiple correlation coefficient,  $R$ , was .41, which indicates that approximately 16% of the variance in an individual's connection with her or his religious body could be accounted for by the linear combination of relational ( $t = 4.90, p < .0005, \beta = .34$ ) and functional ( $t = 1.69, p > .05, \beta = .19$ ) communication motives.

#### Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to apply Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe's (2006) rhetorical/relational goals theory to the religious follower-leader instructional communication context. The logic behind the current study purported that if the rhetorical/relational goals theory was a general model of instructional communication, then it could be applied to the religious instructional communication context. Specifically, the current study was designed to examine the student (religious-follower) half of the rhetorical/relational goals theory. Mottet et al. (2006) suggested that students in the instructional context have both academic needs (ability to make good grades) and relational needs (feel affirmed as a person). Integrating Martin, Myers, and Mottet's (1999) student communication motives into the theory, we suggested that religious followers would be motivated to communicate with religious leaders for functional and relational reasons, which equates with the rhetorical and relational goals of the religious followers originally alluded to by Mottet et al.'s rhetorical/relational goals theory. To examine the findings in this study, Rhetorical and Relational goals will be examined separately.

#### Rhetorical Goals

In the current study, Martin, Myers, and Mottet's (1999) functional communicative motive was utilized to operationalize the rhetorical goals religious followers have. The retooling

of Martin et al.'s Student Communication Motives Scale to measure Religious Followers' functional motives clearly obtained factorial validity. When analyzing the principle component analysis, the six items used to measure functional communication motives all clearly loaded on a single factor. Furthermore, the factor also was internally reliable as well. To examine the results from this study related to functional communication motives, source credibility, humor assessment, learning and motivation, and religious climate will each be examined separately.

**Source Credibility.** As for the specific results, functional communicative motives accounted for unique variance in three variables: trustworthiness, learning, and motivation. Ultimately, the positive relationship between religious followers' functional communicative motives and perceptions of religious leaders' trustworthiness mirrors the discussion Bryan (1993) had about time. Building trust is not something that happens quickly, so time is an important element. People who seek out religious clarification from a specific religious leader have probably spent more time getting to know that leader; and therefore, are more trusting of that religious leader's advice and teachings. The opposite is probably also true, the shorter the period of time a religious follower has spent with a religious leader, the less trusting the follower is.

As for the lack of a relationship between the functional communicative motives and competence and caring/goodwill, the lack of a relationship could also be a function of time. Religious followers seek out religious teachers (Stone, 2004). With the plethora of religious institutions and religious leaders in any community, there could be an innate expectation of competence and caring. In most religious traditions in the United States, there is a formal period of learning for religious leaders (Hogan & Reid, 1999). Ultimately, whether a religious follower feels the need to seek out religious clarification from a religious leader may involve other intervening variables not measured in the current study. In essence, a religious follower could have high or low functional communication motives and still perceive the religious leader as competent. The same argument can also be made about caring. There could be an expectation of caring on the part of religious leaders that has nothing to do with a religious follower's functional motives for communicating with the religious leader.

**Humor Assessment.** As for the lack of a finding between functional rhetorical communicative motives and a religious leader's use of humor, the finding is not completely unsurprising. While using humor may get someone to listen to you (Vassallo, 2005), people's desire to interact with for clarification and extension of spiritual ideas may not impact their perceptions of someone's use of humor. Just because a religious follower seeks out clarification from a religious leader does not innately mean that the religious follower will perceive that leader as humorous. While use of humor may make religious leaders more approachable (Stone, 2004), this use of humor can exist with or without a religious follower's functional communication motive.

**Learning and Motivation.** The next two variables examined using functional communication motives (perceived cognitive learning and motivation to comply with one's religious leader) are both internalized perceptions of an individual religious follower. The findings from the current study indicate that religious followers' functional communicative motives are positively related to both perceived cognitive learning and motivation to comply with one's religious leader. In essence, if an individual has a goal of seeking spiritual clarification from a religious leader, then the religious follower already perceives higher levels of cognitive learning compared to those who do not seek out further clarification. Furthermore, religious followers who have a spiritual clarification goal are more motivated to follow a

religious leader's teachings when compared to those religious followers who do not have spiritual clarification goal. Finding that an individual's functional communicative motives positively relate to cognitive learning and motivation could allude to the importance of the fundamental relationship Bryan (1993) discussed between learning and motivation.

Another possible explanation for the relationship between functional communication motives and perceived cognitive learning and motivation to comply with one's religious leader could imply initial cognitive states. If a religious follower has no desire to learn more from a religious leader and seek spiritual clarification, then that religious follower may not perceive that he or she learned anything from that religious leader in the first place. In essence, if the religious follower's basic confirmation and/or belongingness needs were not fulfilled because of a lack of applicable information, the religious follower may not be inclined to express her or his rhetorical goals to the religious leader (Mottet et al., 2006).

**Religious Climate.** The lack of a relationship between religious followers' functional communicative motives and religious climate probably has to do with the nature of climate. The religious climate is ultimately made up not only of the religious leader but is also made up of all of the religious followers within the specific religious body (Bryan, 1993). While the religious leader may have an impact on the overall functioning of the climate, an individual's perception of the climate is not apparently impacted by that individual's desire for spiritual clarification from the religious leader.

**Conclusion.** Overall, the results for functional communication motives led to a mixture of both supported and unsupported hypotheses. One possible reason for the lack of unique variance accounted for by functional communication motives could have to do with the relationship between functional and relational motives. While simple Pearson correlations did support the hypotheses in this study, the regressions indicated that often relational communicative motives were more indicative of participants' perceptions of religious leaders.

#### Relational Goals

As a whole, the hypotheses made in this study about religious followers' relational motives were supported in this study. As Bryan (1993) noted, interpersonal relationships between religious leaders and religious followers are extremely important for learning and creating a thriving religious body. As predicted, a religious follower's relational communicative motives positively related to her or his perceptions of religious leader credibility (competence, trustworthiness, & caring/goodwill), religious leader use of humor, perceived cognitive learning, motivation to comply with a religious leader's teachings, and the religious climate. These results indicate that people who are looking to establish relationships with religious leaders clearly have a much more positive outlook on the religious experience as a whole.

However, the results from this study indicate that an individual's relational goals do not completely explain religious follower perceptions and religious instructional outcomes. Based on the results in this study, functional and relational motives accounted for only a small percent of the variance (7%-20%) in the study variables. Clearly, more research needs to be conducted to determine what impacts religious follower's perceptions of religious leader credibility (competence, trustworthiness, & caring/goodwill), religious leader use of humor, perceived cognitive learning, motivation to comply with a religious leader's teachings, and the religious climate

#### Implications

Ultimately, the results from this study allow us to make two very important implications. First, instructional communication variables can be used to study the religious instructional communication context. Second, the Relational/Goals Theory of instructional communication can be applied to non-classroom instructional contexts. The rest of this section will explore each of these implications separately.

One of the original purposes of this research was to determine if instructional communication could help understand the process of modern religious leader instructional communication. While linking traditional notions of rhetoric to religious leader communication has previously occurred (Burke, 1970; Hogan & Reid, 1999; Jost & Olmsted, 2000; Kennedy, 1980; Smith, 1998), this is the first study to apply the 30 years of understanding of instructional communication to the religious context. Within the current study, we have found that instructional communication variables within the classroom context function similarly within the religious instructional context. Specifically, there exist interrelationships among perceived religious leader credibility (competence, trustworthiness, & caring/goodwill), religious leader's use of humor, and a religious follower's perceived learning, religious motivation, and connection with one's religious body. While not all of these relationships have been studied in the classroom context, the theoretical underpinnings can easily link all of the variables together within the classroom context. In essence, this study has demonstrated that modern understandings of instructional communication can be used to help religious leaders understand how to be more effective communicators in a way similar to how Hogan and Reid (1999) suggested that modern rhetorical principles could help or as suggested by a variety of writers that modern training in public speaking training could also be used to help religious leaders communicate more effectively (Hogan & Reid, 1999; Littauer, 1983; Littauer & Littauer, 1998; Stone, 2004; Vassallo, 2005). Hopefully, this understanding will open up a new avenue of inquiry for instructional communication researchers.

The second major implication of this study is that the Relational/Goals Theory of instructional communication can be applied to non-classroom instructional contexts. In essence, this study demonstrated the importance of functional and relational goals within religious follower-leader interactions. While we operationalized the rhetorical and relational goals through functional and relational communication motives, our results are ultimately similar to the results found by Frymier (2006) who examined students' relational and academic goals in the classroom. The current study has shown that the Relational/Goals Theory of instructional communication can be applied to non-classroom settings, so future research should expand on this notion to other areas of instructional interest.

Furthermore, if an individual's motives are indeed good indicators of rhetorical and relational goals, relational goals may actually be more important when examining learning outcomes. In essence, when thinking about rhetorical and relational goals, the results from the current study indicate that the relational goals a learner/religious follower has may be the most important goals when predicting affective learning but not necessarily cognitive learning. Future research should investigate this notion further both in the religious context and in the classroom context.

#### Limitations

As with any study, the current study has a number of limitations that should be addressed. First, the study relied on internet participants opting to participate in the current study. For this reason, we can suspect that most of the participants were fairly religious people who had long term connections with their religious bodies and their religious leaders, which is clearly indicated

in the fact that the average number of years an individual had been active within a religious body was 14 years. At the same, our demographic pool closely mirrored the national statistics with regard to biological sex, so our sample appears to at least be fairly representative of religious people within the United States.

Second, since this study was conducted anonymously online, we have no way to determine if there was a problem related to unit nonresponse, or “failure to obtain any survey measurements on a sample unit” (Dillman, Eltinge, Groves, & Little, 2002, p. 6). In essence, we have no idea if any potential participants examined the questionnaire and opted out of the study, and if these participants who opted out of the study varied in a specific way from those who did participate, which is always a problem with Internet based research (Best & Krueger, 2004; Dillman, 2000).

#### Future Research Directions

This study opens up many new lines for research; however, for the sake of brevity we will only examine three. First, to complete the theoretical model discussed by Mottet, Frymier, and Beebe’s (2006) rhetorical/relational goal theory, an analysis of perceptions of religious leaders’ rhetorical and relational goals is also necessary. Future research examining rhetorical/relational goal theory should include perceptions of both religious followers and their religious leaders to ascertain if the theoretical model proposed by Mottet et al. is accurate in making predictions about instructional communication.

Second, further research is needed to determine if religious follower communication motives, as proposed within the current study, is consistently applicable among different samples. While one study can generate thought about a specific subject, science is generated out of multiple sets of data finding similar results. Hopefully, this study will initiate a dialogue among instructional communication scholars and the use of the Religious Follower’s Communication Motives scale will generate consistent results.

Third, a great understanding at one makes religious followers motivated to communicate with religious leaders should also be examined. For example, in the current study there was an unclear picture of the impact of functional communication motives. One possible explanation that should be investigated is how variables like tolerance for disagreement and communication apprehension possibly affect functional communication motives.

Lastly, if instructional communication is applicable in the religious context, maybe other avenues of communication research can help inform our understanding of religious communication. Whether a scholar studies instructional, interpersonal, family, group, organizational, health, or applied communication, all have applications in the religious communication context.

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