

Georgia State University

ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University

English Theses

Department of English

Spring 5-4-2022

Considering the Agency of Faith in Reimagining Narrative and Shared Space in Beth Moore?s Departure from the Southern Baptist Convention

Samantha Joann Rae
Georgia State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/english_theses

Recommended Citation

Rae, Samantha Joann, "Considering the Agency of Faith in Reimagining Narrative and Shared Space in Beth Moore?s Departure from the Southern Baptist Convention." Thesis, Georgia State University, 2022. doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/28834706>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ Georgia State University. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gsu.edu.

Considering the Agency of Faith in Reimagining Narrative and Shared Space in Beth Moore's
Departure from the Southern Baptist Convention

by

Samantha Joann Rae

Under the Direction of Ashley Holmes, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

2022

ABSTRACT

The aim of the following thesis is to unite Giambattista Vico's conception of imagination and necessity within rhetorical theories of narrative and shared space. Grounded in a case study of Beth Moore's exit from the Southern Baptist Convention, this research demonstrates the ways in which faith responds to the necessity of reimagining. The role of faith as a rhetorical agent of identity guides this discussion, which is framed in feminist rhetorical theory to highlight the precarious position of women's roles within the church from historical to contemporary contexts. Recognizing the reciprocity of narrative and shared space within the findings of this study demonstrates the importance of understanding particular rhetorical agents of identity. It is in this way that the field of rhetoric and composition can work toward a more consistent means of approaching topics of faith within the classroom through cultivating an appreciation for the language we use, the assertions we make, and the way we promote the inclusivity of ideas.

INDEX WORDS: Faith, Agency, Identity, Narrative, Shared Space, Imagining, Reimagining

Copyright by
Samantha Joann Rae
2022

Considering the Agency of Faith in Reimagining Narrative and Shared Space in Beth Moore's
Departure from the Southern Baptist Convention

by

Samantha Joann Rae

Committee Chair: Ashley Holmes

Committee: Michael Harker

Lynée Gaillet

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2022

DEDICATION

For Judy and Lindsey—thank you for going on this journey with me. We did it!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first want to extend my sincerest gratitude to my committee. To my director, Dr. Ashley Holmes, I cannot thank you enough for your encouragement throughout the process of compiling the research and actually writing this thesis. Your belief in my potential as a scholar in this field has both inspired and challenged me in so many ways and I look forward to the next phase of my studies and future career. As well, I am so thankful for your unwavering kindness and patience as I navigated the many challenges that I have faced during my journey through graduate school. To Dr. Lynée Gaillet, thank you for your enthusiasm for this project and your detailed feedback that pushed me to take necessary new approaches. Without your help, this research would not have reached its full potential. To Dr. Michael Harker, thank you for providing your expertise in Enlightenment rhetoric and imagination. Your support helped me to truly understand the nuances by which I was using these terms.

Additionally, I am truly grateful for all of the classes and conversations I have had the opportunity to share with Dr. George Pullman, Dr. Baotong Gu, Dr. Mary Hocks, and Dr. Elizabeth Lopez. You all have had such a wonderful impact on the way that I approach our field and academia overall. Likewise, I extend my thanks to the Director and Associate Directors of the GSU Writing Studio—Dr. Michael Harker, Nicole Turner, and Brittny Byrom. Having such a wonderful opportunity to serve as a tutor provided ways to further incorporate my research within the field of Writing Studies as well as develop relationships not only with my colleagues in the English department but with the amazing tutees who visit the studio. In this regard, I would like to explicitly thank Haris Haq. I cannot imagine how I would have survived the whole graduate school experience without your friendship.

I am forever thankful for my family and friends, who have contributed to, supported, and endured many conversations and ramblings about my research. To my little brother, Andrew, you are my biggest inspiration. To Della, thank you for always providing a listening ear and a voice of reason. To my church family, thank you for keeping me grounded. For Judy and Lindsey, to whom I dedicate this thesis, none of this would have been possible without your love, support, and consistent reassurance. Thank you for seeing the best in me when I could not see it myself. Lastly, I am eternally thankful for my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—“all to Him I freely give.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
LIST OF TABLES	IX
LIST OF FIGURES	X
INTRODUCTION	1
1 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
1.1 Characterizing Faith	8
1.2 Establishing Identity	13
<i>1.2.2 Preaching, or Positions of Authority</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>15</i>
1.3 Determining Shared Spaces	18
1.4 Imagining and Reimagining	20
2 A CASE STUDY OF BETH MOORE’S DEPARTURE FROM THE SBC	25
2.1 Contextualizing Beth Moore’s Career	25
2.2 Qualitative Analysis	29
2.3 Methods and Methodology	30
2.4 Setting Parameters	31
<i>2.4.1 The Religion News Source article</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>2.4.2 Identifying Opinion Articles</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>32</i>
2.5 Coding	35
<i>2.5.1 First Code Set</i>	<i>.....</i>	<i>35</i>

2.5.2	<i>Second Code Set</i>	36
2.6	Collecting the Data	37
2.6.1	<i>Limitations and Acknowledged Biases</i>	38
3	FINDINGS	39
3.1	Contextualization of the Conversation Trends	39
3.1.1	<i>Faith as a Rhetorical Agent of Identity</i>	39
3.1.2	<i>Narrative Enacted</i>	44
3.2	The Reciprocity of Narrative and Shared Space	46
3.3	Imagining and Reimagining	48
3.3.1	<i>Imagining</i>	48
3.3.2	<i>Reimagining</i>	51
3.3.3	<i>Faith at the Center</i>	52
	CONCLUSION	53
	WORKS CITED	57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Excel spreadsheet of article collection	34
Table 2: Second code set.....	36

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Beth Moore Tweet from 2016 10

Figure 2: Beth Moore Twitter thread from 2016 27

Figure 3: RNS original Twitter post 33

Figure 4: Moore Twitter post from 2016 40

Figure 5: Original article title list..... 42

Figure 6: Direct quote from RNS article..... 44

Figure 7: 2019 Twitter thread between Vicki Courtney and Beth Moore 49

INTRODUCTION

I'm not looking to take a man's place...
I'm just looking for *my* place.
--Beth Moore, *Living Proof Live*, Norfolk, VA. 2016

Beth Moore's influence as a Christian speaker and author is undeniable. As a prolific voice in women's ministry, Moore has become a leading personification of evangelical womanhood within the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Over her near thirty-year career, Moore has been a prominent representation of the trajectory by which evangelical women pursue the Christian life. Still, her history with the SBC is complicated. Despite criticism of the role of women preaching in the church, Moore worked to develop and lead the rise of women's Bible studies throughout the 1980's and 1990's to date. She has also been consistently proactive in speaking out against sexual abuse and misconduct against women among the denomination with which she identified.

This proactivity reached a boiling point in 2016. In a series of tweets, Moore spoke out against then presidential nominee Donald Trump for a leaked recording in which he joked about groping and making unwanted and inappropriate sexual advances on women. "She expected her fellow evangelicals, especially Southern Baptist leaders she trusted, to be outraged," Bob Smietana says in his article for Religion News Source, "especially given how they had reacted to Bill Clinton's conduct in the 1990s." Instead, Trump became the choice candidate and was elevated as what Moore considered to be a beacon of Christianity. For the next few years, Moore continued to challenge the "misogyny, objectification and astonishing disesteem of women" that she felt was manifesting through the SBC's support of Trump (Moore 2018). For SBC leaders and members who opposed Moore's stance against Trump, the predominant issue surrounding her brand was whether or not she was in a position to oppose anything. Put simply, women have

unique and distinct roles, according to SBC doctrine; preaching is not one of them. Interestingly, even as Moore consistently rejected the title of preacher for herself, speaking, for her, has always equated as preaching. While Moore unfailingly embraced SBC doctrine, her right to speak from a Biblical standpoint has remained the center of controversy. It was this point of controversy that brought her to a necessary crossroads in her career. At the risk of being mislabeled or even exiled from the denomination with which she had so intertwined her name, Moore pushed back at the trivial arguments surrounding her position of authority within the SBC—or lack thereof—in favor of using whatever position she did have to shed light on the marginalization of women. Finally, citing this marginalization as one a key factor, Moore announced her departure from the SBC in an interview with Religion News Service in April of 2021.

Coupled with the complicated history of her career, when Beth Moore announced her departure from the SBC, I had to consider the rhetorical agency that her faith both embodied and enacted. As I learned about Giambattista Vico's concepts concerning necessity and imagination with regard to language in an Enlightenment Rhetoric class, I started to think about the ways that faith as a rhetorical agent evokes those same concepts in terms of the representation of self. In this consideration, I asked: How does faith help to maintain identity while we navigate changing circumstances? To what extent does faith allow us to reimagine and respond to those circumstances with respect to our identity? (Circumstances, here, refer to the language with which we discuss our identity as well as the spaces, both physical and theoretical, that we share with others.) Finally, in what ways do the spaces we share determine the ways in which our narratives are articulated? Now in the months following Moore's departure from the SBC, I have taken a particular interest in how such rhetorical agency has helped and continues to help her both imagine and reimagine her own narrative and the spaces that she shares.

Imagination, based on Vico's conceptions, refers to the ways in which we as individuals process and apply knowledge. Within this context, understanding the faculties of the mind becomes key. We respond to knowledge in ways that are familiar, in ways that we think are appropriate, or in ways that we believe to be true. Here, Vico's idea of *verum factum* is illustrated. To introduce briefly, *verum factum* posits the idea that whatever is true is what is right. For the purpose of this project, I argue that how we understand truth ultimately stems from an assumed identity; one that has been generated through a particular agent with which we have agreed. Most often, such agents are cultivated through a sense of community in that we process knowledge first based on our own experiences and then in relation to others. We apply knowledge in accordance with the ways that we identify ourselves, which grants opportunities for engaging with inquiry. Thus, our identity enacts our approach to such engagement.

My own faith, for example, is an integral part of my identity. It was constructed out of a body of knowledge that I agree with and is the basis by which I determine how I engage with opportunities of inquiry, or what I define in this research as "moments of necessity." These moments also provide, for me, practical methods to apply knowledge in ways that are in keeping with what I deem to be true and right. So, my faith allows me to construct my own narrative through the enactment of my identity and to decide how that narrative engages with the spaces that I share. The nature of both narrative and shared space, in this way, is reciprocal; the spaces I share have as much impact on me as I do on them. In short, my faith makes it possible for me to locate myself within these spaces because it is the rhetorical agent that helps me to maintain my identity as nuances in both them and my narrative occur. Similar to the case of Beth Moore, acknowledging the role of my faith in this way demonstrates the idea that lines typically separating the communities of which we are a part are often blurred when imagining narrative

and shared space. I argue that these blurred lines become the catalyst through which reimagining takes place. Thus, I maintain that faith, as a rhetorical agent, responds to the necessity of such reimagining.

It is important to note, here, that imagining, and reimagining have distinct, albeit shared, meanings. Understanding imagination as the faculty of the mind by which knowledge first becomes active is a key starting point. Active knowledge implies movement—that knowledge is not sedentary. Our day to day lives are not always predictable and many times call for us to consider the current moment as opposed to relying on what has worked historically. As mentioned previously, throughout this research, I have deemed these to be “moments of necessity,” or moments that make new inquiry necessary. Moments of necessity ultimately call for shifts in the way that we have traditionally applied knowledge. As noted, identity remains the same in spite of these shifts. What is subject to reconsidering are narrative (the enactment of identity) and shared space (where that enactment takes place). With an eye on rhetorical agency, navigating moments of necessity are better understood. The common factor in each of these moments, evidenced in the case of Beth Moore, is that a particular rhetorical agent—faith—is the basis for identity. We do not abandon a certain truth with which we agree, but we make room for seeing it in new contexts. Thus, what has been imagined affords opportunities for reimagining.

We see opportunities for reimagining in the fact that much of the criticism and pushback Moore has received over the course of her career has been centered on the question of whether or not women should be preaching. Again, Moore has never labeled herself or identified as a “preacher” (even explicitly stating so), but other SBC leaders and members have both defined and judged her as one. So we must ask, how is the term “preacher” being defined? Is simply speaking from an assumed place of authority within the church considered preaching? Likewise,

would this same insistence upon a particular title be so prominent if Moore were not a woman? Again, the push and pull of narrative and shared space is undeniable.

While there is substantial scholarship available with regard to rhetorical concepts in imagination, agency, and shared space, bringing these concepts together within one conversation has remained underexplored. Likewise, composition scholars like Lizabeth Rand have begun such conversations under the lens of faith-focused narrative discourse within the classroom. Still, there is a gap between theory and practice. Beth Moore's complicated history with, and eventual departure from, the SBC provide a clear meeting point for two key threads of rhetorical praxis: narrative and shared space are reciprocal, and this reciprocity is enacted through a particular agent of identity. Limiting the case study to Moore's departure announcement and subsequent reaction from those with whom she shares space—theoretical and physical—demonstrates these key threads. Similarly, this parameter allows us to navigate the underlying question of the rhetorical authority to speak. Acknowledging faith as a significant rhetorical agent by which many identify and locate themselves within the classroom, their writing, and the world at large is essential to creating a foundation for diversity that does not ignore, alienate, or silence an entire sector of students and faculty whose identity is formed around and enacted through their faith. Therefore, this research aims to bring each of the rhetorical concepts mentioned above into focus with faith as a rhetorical agent at the forefront. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to open the discussion of rhetorical reciprocity and the necessity of reimagining. Within the context of this Beth Moore case study, this research also highlights the uniquely feminine aspects of such reciprocity. As a result, my guiding research questions are:

- To what extent can Beth Moore's decision to leave the SBC be considered a reimagining of her own narrative?

- In what ways does faith respond to this decision?
- Where can Vico's conception of imagination and necessity be evidenced in Moore's decision to leave the SBC and in the aftermath of her announcement?
- What evidence can be found of the reciprocity of narrative and shared space?

I begin in chapter one with literature review to help frame this research within existing scholarship. In this section, I first contextualize the definition of faith within rhetorical theory. With Vico's concept of *verum factum* as the underlying thread, Lizabeth Rand's idea of faith as an agent of identity provides a foundation while Michael Calvin McGee and Hugh T. Miller's explanation of the rhetorical ideograph situate this agent within the broader discussion of narrative, shared space, and imagination. I then rely on Marilyn M. Cooper's work to foreground an understanding of establishing and enacting identity. Michael Warner's concepts regarding public and communities begin the discussion of shared space, while the feminist lens of Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch contextualize shared space and imagination within the framework of this research. Under this contextualization, I also work through the complicated definition of "preacher" and women's roles within the church. For this task, I depend on the scholarship of Charlotte Hogg and Vicki Tolar Collins. I also pull in the historical example of Catherine Mumford Booth, which allows us to see how persistent this issue has been and ultimately remains. In the last section of this literature review, Vico's idea of imagination and my usage of the term *reimagining* is further clarified.

Chapter two begins with a contextualization of Beth Moore's career and history with the SBC and then recounts the methodology of this study, which involved a qualitative analysis of selected articles published in response to her departure announcement. The findings of this study

are detailed in chapter three. With special attention, still, to Vico's concept of imagination, I observe the importance of contextualizing conversational trends, show how these trends illustrate the reciprocity of narrative and shared space, and provide examples of both imagining and reimagining drawn from the articles. Throughout each chapter, I also include various direct quotes from Moore—some from Tweets, some from her blog—to further develop an understanding of her position both as an evangelical speaker and as an advocate for women. In doing so, this project sought to align an understanding of faith as an agent of identity with theories of narrative and shared space within our current moment. Ultimately, this project relies on moments of necessity to challenge our field to identify the points at which faith and composition intersect in order to better understand the contemporary role of reimagining in the context of forming identity, enacting narrative, and engaging in shared spaces.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

To develop the basis for considering faith as a rhetorical agent of identity in reimagining narrative and shared space, it is necessary to first understand the nuances by which these terms are used. We also should develop a good understanding of terms like “preacher,” “evangelist,” “Biblical teacher,” and “leader” in contrast with positions of authority. So, it is necessary to situate all of these terms within the case of Beth Moore. This literature review serves to illustrate the implied reciprocity of all of these terms within existing scholarship.

1.1 Characterizing Faith

If we remember that rhetoric is the art of persuasion and that the Greek work for persuasion was *pistis* and that the Christian word for faith was also *pistis*, the embodiment of both meanings in the same word suggests that the two notions may not be too far apart
--James Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith: An Inquiry*

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.
--Hebrews 11:1 (English Standard Version)

In general, we understand faith as a belief system. Some definitions according to Merriam-Webster online characterize faith as “allegiance to duty or a person,” “belief and trust in and loyalty to God,” and “firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (n.d.). For the purposes of this project, faith is in reference to religion. Thus, the terms “allegiance,” “duty,” “belief,” “trust,” and “loyalty” take on particular meanings when juxtaposed with the idea that they apply to something that cannot be proven in a secular sense. Still, religious doctrine, tradition, and practice often provide a basis for collective understanding even for those who do not identify with a particular religious belief system. As Lizabeth Rand points out in the article

“Enacting Faith: Evangelical Discourse and the Discipline of Composition Studies,” even the “rejection of ‘outdated’ and seemingly ‘naïve’ approaches to learning [...] have at times called upon Christian metaphors to indicate [a] distaste for what we find unconvincing or disagreeable” (354). Comparatively, knowledge is typically considered as something that has evidence to support it. So, faith becomes the thread through which common knowledge circulates. That is, faith is a means of making sense of things, both individually and collectively.

As mentioned in the introduction to this project, faith is a rhetorical agent that helps to form identity. Such an agent ultimately serves as an immutable characteristic of our identity. That is to say that the way we process and apply knowledge, as well as explore and reflect on that knowledge, determines what we consider to be true and right. So, faith has a specific role when we consider it in terms of individual meaning making. Vico’s *verum factum* theory and conceptualization of imagination (discussed in more detail later in this chapter) underscore this argument. How we understand truth and agree on what is right is first generated through a sense of community as knowledge is processed in accordance with both individual experiences and in relation to others. Still, it becomes up to the individual to locate truth and what is right within all situations. This positions imagination as what Gesa E. Kirsch and Jacqueline Jones Royster call “one of several inquiry tools available for developing a critical stance in order to engage more intentionally” (Royster & Kirsch 71). Beth Moore’s departure from the SBC demonstrates intentional inquiry. That she remained a part of the denomination that has consistently criticized and fallaciously labeled her is a testament to her faith as the rhetorical agent of her identity. That she has consistently spoken out against the manifestation of misogyny within the SBC is also a testament. Both the will to stay and the eventual decision to leave speak to intentional analyses.

It is interesting to consider, here, the ways in the ways in which these two activities are uniquely feminine. That is to say, how is Moore’s embodiment and enacting of her faith both complicated and facilitated because of the fact that she is a woman? A look into the history of her career shows many points of inquiry to this question. We see a specific example in one Tweet from 2016, seen in Figure 1.1, where Moore notes that she “is familiar with the concept” of being threatened for speaking out against what is not true or right in accordance with her faith. As Kirsch and Royster point out, such analyses “encourage us to look for alternatives to first looks, first thoughts, and first impressions, or even second and third ones, in order to engage possibility as a generative dynamic concept, rather than a static one” (90). Again, as Moore Tweeted, despite the threats “[still], we speak.” Ultimately, here, identity is invariable.



Figure 1: Beth Moore Tweet from 2016

Faith as a rhetorical agent of identity is a concept that has been explored within the field of rhetoric and composition. Rand argues that faith can be viewed as a gaining of freedom. Applied to the composition classroom, this freedom takes the form of voice. Freedom, then, can refer to the ways in which students feel comfortable speaking through their own identity. How

religious students approach their writing and their interactions within the classroom stem from this conceptualization of freedom. Likewise, how these students feel that the classroom will perceive them plays an important role. “Christians don’t seem to perceive themselves as ‘rigidly defined,’” Rand says, “because of their belief in salvation; rather, they often testify to gaining a whole new freedom after turning their lives over to God” (362). In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis explains this a little more, saying in part that “[human life] will become truly creative and truly our own when it is wholly God’s” (91). By faith in a higher power, one can grapple with the complexity of the self and world rather than simply turn away from it. Still, the spaces in which exploration takes place affect how such exploration is approached. That is to say that if a particular space is perceived as having a “rigid definition” of any aspect of an individual’s identity, this exploration is limited.

Therefore, faith, for the purposes of this project, is the agent by which identity shapes narrative and determines where that narrative takes place—and vice versa. Daniel Reynaud, in “Secular Theory and Religious Faith: How to Think Christian in a Postmodern Society,” addresses this reciprocity through a call for breaking down the postmodern/religion binary. “[Rather] than offering a universal model for approaching texts,” Reynaud says, “[postmodern thoughts] provide only a partial explanation of the process of generating meaning” (9). Acknowledging limitations relieves the hesitation toward responsive faith within identity construction and the reciprocity of narrative and shared space. In this same way, Jeffrey Ringer in “The Dogma of Inquiry: Composition and the Primacy of Faith,” posits that “humble dogma,” defined as the meeting point between inquiry and religious thought, “allow for and even prompt reflection into one’s own beliefs, research into unfamiliar topics, or exploration of various sides

of a debate” (350). Again, we recognize faith as a gaining of freedom; one that at once sustains a particular belief while making room for exploration and reflection.

As Rand further argues, “spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood” by which students make meaning of themselves and the world in which they live (350). Making meaning equates to determining a narrative within a particular emerging situation. With faith as a rhetorical agent within narrative, the narrative at hand then acts as a formative one; the one that determines the way every other narrative is formed (Rand 350). Inasmuch as faith serves as a rhetorical agent, it follows that faith is also active and enabling. Likewise, James Calvin Schaap in “Singing and Preaching: Christians in Writing” asserts that “each of us has to choose a primary identity to hold with the most spirited conviction” (22). Faith, in this way, essential in order to face the hope and conviction of divine intervention in the way meaning is made. To make meaning of oneself is to then pave the way to make meaning of the world at large. More specifically, to make meaning of the spaces that we share with others.

Everything aforementioned considered, faith is best understood in ideographic terms. Michael Calvin McGee defines the rhetorical ideograph as an “ordinary-language term,” one that serves to normalize a particular and collective goal (McGee 15). An ideograph employed to normalize the goal of any given shared space becomes subject to the individuals within that shared space. Understandably, an ideograph can prove problematic when it is elevated above reproach. Motives for the employment of faith in this way go back and forth between the individual and the collective. That is, the overarching goals of a shared faith “influence (if not determine) the shape and texture of each individual’s ‘reality’” (McGee 4-5). As we move forward to wrestle with the question of how exactly to define terms like “preacher,” particularly when such terms are the cause of major controversies, we also must consider the reality of both

individual and collective experiences. Hugh T. Miller further explains: “In contrast to the individual as the unit of analysis, ideographs are potent yet changeable framing constructs, mere abstractions nonetheless capable of altering peoples' sense of what is and what is not appropriate action” (Miller 470). Under these terms, again, faith becomes active and participatory based in the dichotomy of individual and collective.

1.2 Establishing Identity

Acknowledging the necessity for exploration and reflection is a key component in the formation of identity. Marilyn M. Cooper, in “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted,” provides a theoretical framework by which we can understand agency as both emergent and enacted within this formation. Rather than concurring that an agent is best understood as one that brings about change with intention, “agency is instead based on an individual's lived knowledge that their actions are their own” (Cooper 421). That is to say that when Beth Moore followed what she felt was her calling to teach as an evangelical woman despite the challenges that she might face, she was first acting out of a knowledge of her own teaching abilities. As she rose to prominence among evangelical women, this action was supported by faith in the evidence that this was her calling. Faith as a rhetorical agent, in both instances, maintains a particular commonality by which necessary shifts can take place. Cooper explains:

Order is always a provisional and temporary achievement, because agents are always doing things that make a difference. Unlike subjects, agents are defined neither by mastery, nor by determination, nor by fragmentation. They are unique, embodied, and autonomous individuals in that they are self-organizing, but by virtue of that fact, they, as well as

the surround with which they interact, are always changing. (Cooper 425)

It necessarily follows that the emergence of an identity produces a narrative, or the articulation of said identity. Henceforth, it is important to understand narrative in terms of changeability. Cynthia Selfe notes in “Narrative Theory and Stories that Speak to Us” that “the articulation of self [...] is resolved only temporarily at the moment of utterance,” in accord with the “fluidity and multiplicity of identities/selves” (Selfe 2013). Kendall Phillips terms such accordance as a *rhetorical maneuver*. In the essay, “Rhetorical Maneuvers: Subjectivity, Power, and Resistance,” Phillips explains that these maneuvers are “performed at those moments when we choose to violate the proscriptive limits of our subject position and speak differently by drawing upon the resources of another subject position we have occupied” (Phillips 312). Faith as a rhetorical agent of identity bolsters an articulation of self that resolves to respond to a particular moment.

Interestingly, this project asks us to consider moments of response—or necessity—with respect to gender. That is, in the case of Beth Moore, we must look at the ways in which her moments of necessity were uniquely feminine. Such exploration begins with addressing the issue of Moore’s right to speak. This right to speak stems from the establishment of a position of authority and is two-fold: 1) her position within the church, and 2) her position as a feminist. As a more conservative female voice, advocating for more traditionalist ideals in terms of women’s roles, Moore has not only faced criticism from the SBC but also from contemporary liberal voices. In “Including Conservative Women’s Rhetorics in an “Ethics of Hope of Care,” Charlotte Hogg helps to clarify here by utilizing the framework of Royster and Kirsch’s “ethics of hope and care” to situate two “parameters that feminist scholars are comfortable with: radical and

sophisticated” (392). Traditionally, and presumptively, these parameters have been attached only to women who have challenged oppression in ways that place them comfortably within the standards of feminism. That is, explicit and direct challenges to patriarchal and antifeminist systems usually constitute the definition of a feminist. Any such challenges that still uphold what is considered as patriarchal and antifeminist are simply resistant to the necessary moments that get the messages heard. However, there is a rhetorical situation present corresponding each moment. In this way, the audience responds, or reacts, accordingly. Many times, Moore finds herself at the intersections; a conservative feminist voice who is ultimately both accepted and rejected by both conservatives and feminists alike—depending upon the situation. Hogg clarifies in the article “What’s (Not) in a Name”: “As the sense of audience shifts for each rhetorical situation, tracing a discernable trend with regard to our nomenclature proves somewhat elusive, though faint patterns do appear” (194). Trends, in this way, refer to basic understandings; or, to relate back to the first Hogg’s reference, the two parameters most comfortable within feminist scholarship.

1.2.2 Preaching, or Positions of Authority

Until this point, whether such moments of necessity are bound to a specific community, or denomination, becomes irrelevant. Necessary articulation relies first on a self-reflective identity. As Royster and Kirsch explain, “strategic contemplation opens up spaces for observation and reflection, for new things to emerge, or rather, for us to notice things that may have been there all along” (90). In a sense, such contemplation gives way to understanding what is changeable and what is not when reimagining a narrative becomes necessary. Drawing on the idea of *verum factum*, our understanding of truth may not change but what is considered to be right largely

depends upon context. Thus, limitations in how identity is articulated, or enacted, become apparent.

With faith as the rhetorical agent, recognition of our own limitations becomes more available. This is because these limitations are often found within the language used to articulate faith based agency. In the article “Frankenstein or Jesus Christ: When the Voices of Faith Creates a Monster for the Composition Teacher,” Juanita Smart posits that “[faith] embarrasses our attempts to articulate it because it is otherworldly and thus other-word-ly” (14). In other words, faith, here, responds to the necessity of self-reflexivity, or contemplation. For example, the language that Beth Moore used to articulate her agency by way of a changing narrative ultimately remained rooted within her faith. In this same way, her self-articulation positioned her to adapt whatever titles she deemed necessary for accurately enacting this agency. Throughout her career, Moore consistently and explicitly rejected the title of preacher—at least as she has defined it. So, it becomes necessary to understand what is meant, and not meant, when we use terms like “preacher.”

Summarized loosely, we can infer that “preacher” entails addressing an unsegregated religious audience from a position of Biblical authority. Traditional SBC orthodoxy limits such positions to men. We can conclude this both from a body of common knowledge as well as from specific example statements from leaders in the SBC church like John MacArthur, who has accused the SBC of overturning “the teaching of Scripture to empower people who want power” (“Accusing SBC”). Biblical authority, according to sentiments such as this, is conflated with power. The motives of women who are maintaining a more conservative stance, as in the case of Beth Moore, are called into question. Is it justified to say that simply wanting fair treatment and

acknowledgement of the unique experiences of women is a power grab? Moreover, why does such a power grab instantaneously equate to a definition of preaching?

Cheryl Glenn, in *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope*, points out that “anchored in hope, rhetorical feminism offers ways to disidentify with hegemonic rhetoric, with the dominant rhetorical histories, theories, and practices articulated in Western culture” (4). If we consider this dominance in our understanding of preaching, hope becomes the catalyst for empowering women with Biblical truth within the context of the unique feminine experience. Regarding what has been presented thus far, in what ways does Moore establish her authority to teach the Bible to other women? The studies that she has authored are not limited to “women only” audience. The homepage of her Living Proof Ministries website explicitly states that she is “dedicated to encouraging *people* to know and love Jesus Christ through the study of scripture” (emphasis mine). Still, moving into the “About Beth” page positions her as having a passion to “[reach] women all across the globe.” Moore’s impact on Biblical study is not limited, but it is unique.

Thus, as she could no longer identify with the SBC, the language by which she would articulate her reimagined narrative needed to change even if her the language by which she articulated her faith did not. This recognition allows us to understand that “agency cannot be asserted until the self becomes reflexive enough to gain a ‘sense of itself’ as socially produced in and through language” (Rand 360-361). Production of a sense of self ultimately refers to a production of authority; the ways in which the sense of self permeates the limitations of how and where this sense can be enacted. Vicki Tolar Collins, in “The Speaker Respoken: Material Rhetoric as Feminist Methodology,” explains that “[r]espeaking can be a way for the production authority to modify the ethos of the original speaker” (548). It is from a position of authority, as

having been established through her prominence among Christian women, that Moore speaks. From this position, she labels herself an “evangelical,” a “teacher,” and a “speaker.” Others give her titles like “preacher” and “leader.” Opposition from leaders in the SBC to her authority to speak stems from a concern of modifying tradition and doctrine. Curiously, Moore’s upholding of and compliance with this tradition and doctrine were seemingly canceled out as she became more vocal in advocating for the issues that women face. In both instances, her authority is called into question. It is in this way that we can conclude that the way we make meaning, thus speak this meaning, is directly affected by the spaces that we share.

1.3 Determining Shared Spaces

Shared space is a complex term. The influx of online and digital presence now blurs the lines of physical location to a multifaceted connection in almost every area of everyday life. There is, also, an undeniable distinction between a community and a shared space, or what can also be understood as a public. For the purposes of this research, I rely on Michael Warner’s concept that there are three senses of a public: total, concrete, and relational. Organization of a public implies that there is a consensus by which something is being addressed within a particular field. Such implication invites the understanding that something outside of that field exists (Warner 49). Formation of a tangible, “visible space,” likewise binds a public within a “shared physical space” that is formed, again, within the confinements of a commonality (Warner 50). It is within these confinements that the thing being addressed reaches its appropriate audience. Relational public, then, combines the previous two senses inasmuch as a public creates the momentum and space by which a commonality circulates. In each of these three senses, narrative plays an important role in determining *how* commonality circulates. Faith, as a responsive agent, perpetuates activity within a shared space.

Ellen Cushman, in “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change” posits that “any kind of identification we may have with people in our communities, to some extent, acts as a point of commonality where our perspectives overlap, despite our different positions” (18). While communities solicit membership, publics need only a momentary utterance of commonality. As Abbie Levesque Decamp and Ellen Cushman further point out, “[communities] exist regardless of being addressed and are cohered by factors other than being addressed.” (2020, 99). In terms of this project, an expression of faith permeates any presupposed boundaries of a public because such faith embodies a community that exists beyond the scope of the public sphere. Indeed, faith based discourse often addresses a public that is outside of its immediate community or denomination. However, such discourse is not dependent on the public that it addresses. That is to say that the underlying premise of any community will withstand the audience that it presents itself to. Consequently, our understanding of truth informs what we deem to be “right,” morally and legalistically. From this standpoint, the binary between feminist and antifeminist collapses. In terms of liberal versus conservative, Hogg explains that “part of the imaginative identification [...] means, among other things, not lumping all conservative women together” (“Ethics” 394). So, while Moore adheres to more conservative positions that seemingly disagree with the more liberal stances, we cannot deem her to be antifeminist. Instead, we see Moore exhibiting feminism in ways that are in keeping with her understanding of truth. That she does not challenge the idea that men, alone, are held to positions of authority, like preaching, within the church demonstrates this. That she *does* challenge the behaviors of the men who are in these positions, especially in their regard for and treatment of women, demonstrates both the radical and sophisticated parameters of feminism. Through these parameters, faith transcends the lines

of shared space and community in that it forms the basis by which identity determines how one will respond to the space that is being shared.

1.4 Imagining and Reimagining

Enlightenment era theorist Giambattista Vico presents a nuanced approach to community and relationship, which is ultimately rooted in a concern for language and the way knowledge is both understood and obtained. In *The First New Science*, Vico explains:

[The] science of civil things, divine and human, i.e. of religion and law, which constitute a theology and morality of command and acquired through habit would be supported by the science of natural things, divine and human, which constitute a theology and morality of reason acquired through reasoning (11).

This underscoring of reason suggests the prevailing need for ethical character development. If, indeed, reason unfolds in accordance with necessary truths, then the end goal of any intellectual pursuit is to move from abstract understanding to actual application (Vico 58). As language, for Vico, is the gateway for the processing and creation of knowledge, imagination is the key to moving this knowledge from abstract to actual. We must be able to take what we know and apply it critically, and prudently, in order for it to really accomplish anything. Relatability—or the formation of relationship—is grounded on this development of character alongside that of language and knowledge.

Under this context, Catherine Hobbs argues that, for Vico, “rhetoric remains necessary for our social existence because in our origin, humans begin to speak as rude poets, bound to

their bodily passions” (Hobbs 60). In order to foster healthy and active shared spaces, the individual necessarily intertwines with commonality. Indeed, Hobbs asserts that Vico is primarily concerned with relatability, or what she terms as “unification.” That is, “Vico always saw rhetoric, or eloquence, as the power that leads the social body to wisdom” (Hobbs 65). The basis of unity, here, is necessity. The key role of imagination, as Vico posits, is in embracing a necessary knowledge that serves the greater good of commonality. Hobbs concurs: “The purpose of humans creating the good life together should nonetheless be conserved along with arts necessary to produce effective citizens.” (Hobbs 162). Effective citizens are ultimately enacted through agency.

Along these same lines, Robert Miner makes the case for Vico’s reliance on practical wisdom. In part, Miner posits that “no matter how comprehensive our ethical manuals,” the predicament of total objectivity is three-fold: uncertainty, conflict, and exception (55). This is the predicament Vico faces as he straddles the line of the ancients and the moderns. With the growing concern of his time for clear and objective science, Vico rests on the classical notions of *topos* while also maintaining that “the true and the made are convertible” (*verum et factum convert*) (Miner 53). If there is no clear division between the constructed and the truth, the need for relation becomes more apparent. Vico, Miner says, marries the categories of practical and constructive knowledge in keeping with the shift in rhetoric of his era (72). “Practical reason,” Miner concludes, “aims at the end to be achieved and contemplated, but the content of the end is known through the construction of cultural mode” (72).

With our understanding that the *verum-factum* principle suggests that whatever is true how whatever is right is made, we conclude that imagination makes the “making” possible. Moreover, imagination is invoked out of necessity within a particular moment, in a particular

context. This necessity is further influenced by both internal and external factors. Continuing the pursuit of understanding Vico's nuanced approach to relationship and community, we should maintain that in order for relationship and community to form, both sensitivity to the moment and understanding of the past is key.

Therefore, the agency of Moore's faith in maintaining a Christian identity ultimately provokes a need for commonality. Vico determines that practical knowledge remains key in cultivating such commonality. Experience should be at the forefront of any shift in collective ideology. For Vico, "Our experience is infinitely richer than our language [...] the tropes and figures we devise are not mere ornaments; they are necessities of communication arising from the poverty of our language." (Bizzell, Herzberg, Reames, p.2860). Acknowledging this poverty as we attend to necessary shifts in collective thought is evidence of a general concern for empirical knowledge. It is from this concern that commonality can reform in such a way that language ultimately bridges the empirical with the imagined—a place where reimagining can begin.

It becomes important, here, to explicitly attend to what Royster and Kirsch mean by an "ethics of hope and care." Hope, as they define it, is ultimately an "effort [to] think beyond the concrete in envisioning alternative possibilities in order that we might actually work, often collaboratively, toward enacting a better future" (Royster and Kirsch 145). Applied to Hogg's parameters of feminism, we see, first, this idea of concrete. That feminist positions are unequivocally situated within the ideals of both radical and sophisticated is not the prevailing issues. However, what we understand as radical or sophisticated most often depends upon the context in which these ideals are being promoted. This leads into a precarious moment by which historical trends do not suffice in generating an appreciation for nuances in these terms. As Vicki

Tolar Collins posits in “Walking in Light, Walking in Darkness: The Story of Women’s Changing Rhetorical Space in Early Methodism:”

This redefining, searching, and remapping has a scent of danger, for we are wandering into unknown territory, places our mothers or department chairs might not approve: too risky, too far from traditional rhetoric, too speculative, too sexual, too spiritual, too undocumented, too imaginary, too practical, too real. As we search historical traditions for spaces where women’s discourse entered the public arena and identify the women whose rhetoric filled these spaces, we are marking new outposts in the historical territory of rhetoric and inviting others to follow (336).

What is interesting, here, is the idea that historical trends are not replaced or even reimagined. After all, the controversy of women’s right to preach is not new. In the same way that Moore has challenged the SBC to consider its treatment of women with respect to the complementary roles with which traditional doctrine holds, Catherine Mumford Booth’s essay from 1859 “Female Ministry; Or, Women’s Right to Preach the Gospel” attests that “by nature [the Christian woman] seems fitted to grace” for both traditional and rare (3). This, of course, is not in effort to challenge doctrine. Rather, Booth goes on to explain the unique position that women command in the upholding of such doctrine:

No one will suppose that the apostle [Paul] forbids a woman to ‘teach’ absolutely and universally. Even objectors would allow her to teach her own sex in private; they would let her teach her servants and children, and perhaps, her husband too. If he were ignored to the Saviour, might she not teach him the way to Christ? (13)

Instead of disappearing into the fault lines between tradition and new age, conservative and liberal, we find opportunities for inclusivity; ways that seemingly opposing positions can coexist and have the same goals. Again, Beth Moore uniquely appears at the intersections of such coexistence in a couple of ways. First, as she situated her faith within the orthodoxy of the SBC, she inevitably agreed to comply with those standards. Staying on the side of conservatism, Moore might not, at first glance, fit the mold of “feminist.” Particularly, her adherence to and support of SBC understandings of complementarianism have perpetuated many of the conflicts that have surrounded her career. Though Moore has explicitly stated that she wouldn’t “become a [...] pastor to ‘save my life,’” the problem is that many in her audience and religious leaders in her denomination already saw her as one (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”). While her faith provides the agency she needs to speak with the same goals as her denomination, her individual narrative within the spaces that she shares is ultimately defined by these opinions.

The meeting point for imagination, narrative, relationship, and identity, then, is faith. Each factor, while distinct, intersect one another as faith serves as the agent by which identity supports the way they all enact and emerge. Truth, here, is enacted from knowledge of and agreeance with a belief system. Determining what is right emerges from truth in this way. When moments of necessity call for a reflection of what is right, truth will ultimately stay the same. This consistency allows for the emergence of new, or reimagined, understandings of what is right with regard for the moment. There is room for narrative to make necessary changes whether the spaces we share change or not—and vice versa—because the foundation of identity does not.

2 A CASE STUDY OF BETH MOORE'S DEPARTURE FROM THE SBC

This chapter details the steps taken and methods employed in my case study. I start by providing background information regarding Beth Moore's career and history as a speaker, teacher, and prominent religious figure. More specifically, this background information lays the groundwork for understanding the impact of her departure from the SBC. In this way, the rationale for the chosen methods of this study is better understood. Likewise, the resources chosen to help guide my qualitative analysis are better contextualized.

2.1 Contextualizing Beth Moore's Career

Women in the church don't need a room of their
own as much as the church needs both women
and men in the room.
--Karen Swallow Prior, *Beth Moore left the SBC after
the SBC left women to fend for themselves*

With an eye on the definitions and usage of the key concepts of this research—faith, identity, narrative, shared space, and reimagining— as discussed in the previous chapter, it is important to first introduce an overview of Beth Moore's career and history with the SBC. While the next chapter will provide a more in depth analysis, this section works to contextualize what I am considering to be the moments of necessity by which reimagining takes shape. Mapping the abovementioned key concepts, in this way, becomes more available.

Beth Moore is a prominent evangelical Christian author, speaker, and teacher. A statement on the Living Proof Ministries website explains that “at the age of 18, Beth sensed God calling her to work for Him” and “after years of being encouraged to develop homework by those attending Bible Study [classes that she led], she realized what she had on her hands was a ‘ministry.’” So, having begun her ministry career in the 1980s, Moore rose to fame by stepping

out in faith to follow what she believed to be her calling: teaching scripture to women. The first challenge Moore faced in following this call was obtaining the theological education necessary to teach. Since many of the leading seminaries were limited to only men at that time, Moore met with private tutors as she continued to teach Sunday school at her local church. She self-published her first study, “A Woman’s Heart: God’s Dwelling Place,” in 1995 with dozens to follow. Today, as Kate Bowler explains in *The Preacher’s Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities*, “with over 11 million of her products sold, Beth’s name has become synonymous with women’s Bible studies” (23). Moore is also

In 1994, Moore founded Living Proof Ministries (LPM), an organization “dedicated to [encouraging] people to come to know and love Jesus Christ through the study of Scripture” (lpm.com). In 2016, LPM reported its assets as valued at \$15 million (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”). “Moore’s success,” Emma Green wrote in a 2018 article for *The Atlantic*, “was possible because she spent her career carefully mapping the boundaries of acceptability for female evangelical leaders.” These boundaries kept Moore within the ideals of the faith that ultimately helped her to create her own narrative as an evangelical woman who has been called to reach other women through Biblical study. Her faith, essentially, serves as the agent by which she pursued, and continues to pursue, this calling.

Within the achievements of her ministry, Moore has become a proactive voice for sexual abuse survivors. Speaking candidly in early 2020 during an episode of *Ainsley’s Bible Study* on *Fox and Friends* about her own experience, Moore stated that she “fell victim to a childhood sexual abuse within [her] own home” (Writer). She went on to explain the trauma she experienced in that though she wouldn’t “identify publicly who it was, [she would] simply say that when anyone that should be in a protective role around you becomes not the protector, but

the perpetrator, I cannot tell you how that will mess with you” (Writer). Because of her stance on issues of abuse as well as her own experiences, Moore rejected the SBC’s embracing of Donald Trump. She saw this embracing combined with other rising allegations in 2016 of sexual abuse with the SBC as a “tolerance for leaders who treated women with disrespect” (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”). In keeping with the mission of her ministry, she did not stay silent.



Figure 2: Beth Moore Twitter thread from 2016

In a series of Tweets from 2016 to 2020, Moore challenged the tolerance that she felt was manifesting. Reaching nearly one million Twitter followers, Moore consistently upheld the position that “politics and Christian nationalism have crowded out the gospel” (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”). Seen in Figure 2.1, a thread posted by Moore in October 2016 asks followers to “[try] to absorb how acceptable the disesteem and objectifying of women has been” among Christian leaders who “don’t think it’s that big a deal.” The surprising polarization of this position became evident within the responses to her Tweets. One Twitter user reply cited the

importance of forgiving and acknowledging repentance. Forgiveness of “past sins” was not the issue, Moore responded. Rather, it was the “present shoulder shrugging” that indicated a lack of regard for issues that women face within and outside of the church. Suddenly, Trumpism itself was not the focal issue. Rather, the questioning of whether or not women have a right to speak on issues that have direct and unique consequences on the way they pursue the Christian life was at the forefront. This right brought into focus positions of authority, and ultimately the ways in which women’s positions threaten the positions of men. Disheartened by such a misplaced focus, Beth Moore announced in an interview with Religion News Service in March of 2021 that she was leaving the SBC, the denomination by which her brand and her narrative had long been intertwined. “I am still a Baptist,” Moore explained, “but I can no longer identify with Southern Baptists” (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”).

Reimagining her identity as a “Southern Baptist” clearly demonstrates a key moment of necessity. Through this declaration, Moore’s faith as an active rhetorical agent of her identity is unquestionably on display. Likewise, the reciprocity of narrative and shared space is illustrated. It is ultimately her faith that allows Moore to maintain a Baptist Christian identity while the shared space of her ministry begins to shift as a result of a changing, or reimagined, narrative. In order to maintain a case study that could produce responses to my initial research questions within the scope and time restraints of this project, particular approaches to supporting these claims had to be established. Thus, the methodology used in this case study was chosen for two reasons. First, because the conversation surrounding Beth Moore has such complicated and polarized positions, locating key moments of faith, identity, narrative, shared space, and imagination needed appropriate contextualization. That is, these key moments were explored under the lens of understanding those terms as set forth within the literature review in the

previous chapter. Secondly, illustrating and providing examples of imagination and reimagining was limited in order to demonstrate how the historical implications of these issues present themselves with sensitivity to the current moment.

2.2 Qualitative Analysis

A prominent resource that informed my perspectives and shaped my qualitative analysis was Jacqueline Jones Royster's piece "When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own." Jones' consideration of voice as going beyond the "spoken or written phenomenon" to become "the manifestation of subjectivity" spoke directly to my main focus of faith as an active agent of identity and, thus, narrative, and shared space (Royster 30). Understanding that assumptions of authority by strangers to a community are interpretive exposes the positionality of the subject matter as well as the speaker. These interpretations, that is, are always viewed within a context, which can be either welcoming or intrusive. Royster uses a personal concept of "home training" to acknowledge "that when we are away from home, we need to know that what we think we see in places that we do not really know very well may not actually be what is there at all." (32). Faith as a rhetorical agent of identity essentially normalizes the goal and determines the reality of a shared space.

In a similar way, Lisa Blankenship's *Changing the Subject: A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy* helped to inform my understanding of imagining and reimagining. For Blankenship "the act of writing stories...consists largely in trying to inhabit the world" (4). Writing, for the purposes of this project, expands to include multiple ways of conveying a story—in this case study, an interview and published news articles. Still, the idea that conveying a story is an effort to inhabit the world aligns with the prevailing argument for the reciprocity of narrative and

shared space. There generally is an underscoring motivation to seek solidarity over conflict (for the most part) which encourages us to seek points of connection. Without this underscoring, I don't think that we would seek out opportunities to broaden the scope of what we read, learn, and discuss. Most certainly, we wouldn't seek to change our understanding of the world in which we live. There is still room for critique and the sharing of stories which ultimately promotes deeper connection rather than a reinforcement of differences.

A final resource that informed my perspectives of this analysis is Krista Ratcliffe's understanding of stereotyping in the book *Rhetorical Listening*. This work helped me to create a connection between each of the concepts that I was juggling. Ratcliffe argues that as "people's identities are interpreted as identical in terms of single identification...or in terms of a single cultural category then opportunities for stereotyping abound" (51). While not explicitly the same in terms of content, this argument ultimately informs the conversations surrounding Moore's departure from the SBC.

2.3 Methods and Methodology

Though I have followed Beth Moore's career for quite some time, familiarizing myself a little more with her background afforded me the opportunity to understand her departure from the SBC within the framework of my research questions. Thus, to illustrate faith as an agent of identity in reimagining narrative and shared space, I chose to conduct a qualitative analysis of opinion articles published regarding this departure. I intentionally chose articles from a variety of platforms in order to track both similarities and differences in the opinions being published. This was also an effort to reaffirm how this research defines and uses the term "shared space." Again, my developed familiarity helped me keep Moore's original departure statement in focus as I compared it to the opinions being published. Moreover, it was this familiarity that helped support

my argument that the reciprocal relationship between narrative and shared space, with faith as a responsive agent, provides the catalyst by which the necessity of reimagining takes place.

2.4 Setting Parameters

Because of the widespread media attention given to Moore's departure, I limited the scope of my search to opinion articles. From there, it became obvious that I would need to set additional parameters in order to maintain the focus of my research. Further, these parameters helped to solidify the argument that faith as a rhetorical agent of identity is the common thread by which narrative and shared space provoke conversations in reimagining. In what follows, I provide the details of how these parameters evolved during the process of this case study.

2.4.1 The Religion News Source article

The original interview in which Moore announced her departure from the SBC was the leading focus. This interview was published exclusively by Religion News Source (RNS) on March 9, 2021. For this reason, I considered this article as the primary source for this case study. Likewise, I created additional parameters to locate the necessary opinion articles based upon the details by which it was published: date, content, and general context. To better define these details, the date refers to the original publication of Moore's interview on March 9. Content, then, refers simply to the news of her departure.

General context becomes a bit more involved. This RNS article was not just a transcription of the original interview but, rather, included an overview of Moore's career, various highlights, past conflicts with the SBC, and expressed opinions about the trajectory of Moore's role in women's ministry. In short, the RNS article provided the same type of contextualization that I have provided in the beginning of this chapter. So, understanding the

context by which Moore's impact within the SBC is discussed became important. From the outset, the prominent theme of this context is that Moore's departure was a long time coming. Her complicated history with the SBC proved to be consistently in focus, regardless of individual opinion. The detail of general context, then, addresses the situation of her departure with respect to this history. Combined, these three details exemplified my focus on the reciprocity of narrative and shared space as well as my argument that faith responds as an active agent of identity when reimagining this reciprocity. Thus, the opinion articles I chose followed this same set of details.

2.4.2 Identifying Opinion Articles

Originally, I had hoped to use the RNS article as primary source, as mentioned above, while going to social media sites (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook) to investigate communal responses. My thoughts were that the instantaneous reactions—the ability to share the RNS article and post an opinion immediately—would be the best evidence of the reciprocity of narrative and shared space. Likewise, faith as an active agent would be more available in terms of language used within the post as well as interaction between community members. However, a quick skim of Twitter proved that this approach would be futile. The original RNS post had 1.1k shares (figure 2.1), each of these shares commencing a unique thread of comments.



Figure 3: RNS original Twitter post

Deviating from my original plan, I decided to focus, instead, on opinion articles published in response to the RNS interview article. The reason for moving toward opinion articles was two-fold. First, since the original interview was published as an article, I felt that keeping the genre consistent would support the trajectory of my analysis. Secondly, opinion articles would inevitably maintain the availability of date, content, and context.

After I settled on opinion articles, it became clear that I would again need to reconfigure my parameters. I noticed that while the attention given to Beth Moore’s announcement was widespread, finding articles that checked off each of the three details—date, content, and context—would be tricky. Some articles simply reported the facts with headlines such as “Beth Moore splits with the SBC.” These articles met the date and content criteria but lacked the

general context aspect that this research needed. Likewise, some articles had both content and general context, but were not published on March 9. I realized, then, that I would need to open up my timeline for publication dates in order to maintain each of these three details. Still, to demonstrate the reciprocity of narrative and shared space, I needed the chosen articles to have been published as close to the date of the RNS article as possible. Therefore, I decided to try limiting my search to a three-day window, or articles published between March 9 and March 12. I logged the responding articles in an Excel spreadsheet. As seen in Table 2.1 below, there were 15 articles that met the new criteria of the three detail set.

Table 1: Excel spreadsheet of article collection

Author/News Site	Article date
Bob "Bible teacher Beth Moore" (RNS)	9-Mar-21
Harmeet Kaur (CNN)	10-Mar-21
Holly Meyer (USA Today)	11-Mar-21
Mark Wingfield (Baptist News Global)	10-Mar-21
Lauren Wamsley (npr)	11-Mar-21
Ruth Graham & Elizabeth Dias (NY Times)	10-Mar-21
no author (Relevant Magazine)	9-Mar-21
Michelle Lesley (Blog)	12-Mar-21
Holly Meyer (Tennessean)	9-Mar-21
John Tedesco (Houston Chronicle)	10-Mar-21
Kelsey Vlami (insider.com)	11-Mar-21
Brian Niemietz (NY Daily News)	10-Mar-21
Leah MarieAnn Klett (Christian Post)	9-Mar-21
Thomas Kidd (The Gospel Coalition)	12-Mar-21
Robin Roste (faithstrongtoday.com)	11-Mar-21

I logged each of the 15 articles by author and news site, article date, and article title.

Since I knew that each of the articles had been published between March 9 and March 12, I was

not concerned with logging them in date order. I also kept the RNS article highlighted so as to solidify that it was the primary source.

2.5 Coding

Having each of the articles logged in one spreadsheet, I began developing the first coding scheme to help narrow the results for the final analysis. For this, I relied heavily on Cheryl Geisley and Jason Swarts' text "Coding Streams of Language." In particular, chapter six of this text focused on locating what Geisler and Swarts define as "patterns," or "the way that [the] data is spread among the categories in [the] coding scheme" (204-205). In this same way, Geisler and Swarts go on to discuss investigating these patterns "across dimensions," that is, across two or more code sets (235). I knew that I would have at least two multifaceted code sets, one that categorized the article titles and one that categorized the content of the articles. So, while my own code sets did not follow a specific line of development, this broader understanding of juggling multiple code sets was crucial.

2.5.1 *First Code Set*

As mentioned, my first code set focused on the article titles. There were three overarching categories: Narrative, Space, and Identity. I decided that the role of faith as it has been discussed thus far and will be discussed in my analysis would be present within each of these three categories and therefore did not require a separate category. Within each of these three, I created subcategories in effort to map the themes of my research. Under the Narrative category I chose to use two additional filters. The first filter, Moore Quote (MQ), indicated that the title used a direct quote from Moore's interview, and the second, Says (S), indicated that the title paraphrased one of those quotes. For the Space category, I also had two additional filters:

Leaving (L) and No Longer (NL). Because of Moore’s place in the church—the public’s perception of her—I decided that the Identity category needed extra space to include necessary filters. This decision broke the Identity category into four subcategories: Popular/Prominent (PP), Teacher (TE), Leader (LR), and Evangelical (EV).

2.5.2 *Second Code Set*

Table 2: Second code set

Category	Code
Faith	FA
Normalize the goal of a shared space	NG
Determine reality	DR
Identity & Narrative	IDN
Necessity	N
Exploration	EX
Reflection	RF
Shared Space	SS
Public (consensus)	PC
Audience	A
Position	P
Imagining	IMG
Knowledge applied	KA
Reimagining	RIMG
Known	KN
New	NW

My second code set to categorize the content of the articles followed this same strategy but with an extended focus on each of the key concepts of my research. Shown in figure 2.3, the five overarching categories were Faith, Identity and Narrative, Shared Space, Imagining, and Reimagining. Since there would be more data derived from the content of the articles, I knew

that it would be necessary to include Faith as its own category. From there, I instituted two subcategories: Normalize the goal of a shared (NG) and Determine Reality (DR). The close relation between Identity and Narrative in terms of article content allowed me to categorize them together for this code set. This category then broke into three subcategories: Necessity (N), Exploration (EX), and Reflection (RF). Shared Space, likewise, included three subcategories that I termed as Public/or Consensus (PC), Audience (A), and Position (P). Imagining only required one subcategory, Knowledge Applied (KA), while Reimagining needed two, Known (KN), and New (NW). As a result of these codes, the data for this set was further reduced to thirteen articles.

2.6 Collecting the Data

It was important that I establish the code sets that I would be using before I started to collect my data for a few reasons. First, I needed a concise way of keeping track of many concepts at play within my research. Though I believe, and argue, that each of these concepts are reciprocal, it was easy for my usage of them to get lost within the existing scholarship. Essentially, I wanted a clear and succinct way of communicating how this case study employed each of these concepts. Another reason for establishing my code sets before collecting the data is that these sets allowed me to quickly identify which articles would work for this study. Given the scope and timeline of this project, I was able to read through each article once and assign the necessary codes. From there I logged the codes into an accompanying spreadsheet titled “Occurrences.” These “occurrences” helped me to gauge the relevance of my key research concepts within each article’s title and content. A final reason for instituting my code sets first allowed me to see the attention being given to Moore’s announcement as one overarching

conversation. Again, this bolstered my approach to the idea that the concepts of this research are reciprocal.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it was my intention to choose articles from a variety of platforms and sources. For this reason, it is necessary to note here that by “variety” I am referring to both faith-based and secular publications and platforms. In this way, the context of each article proved to include many similarities and differences. Again, using the RNS article as my primary source helped to establish my own understanding of similarities and differences in terms of the goals of this research. Moreover, these similarities and differences were reflected in the “occurrences” spreadsheet.

2.6.1 Limitations and Acknowledged Biases

While I did not incur many limitations in the conducting this study, there are a couple that should be noted. The first has been covered throughout this chapter—the ways in which I set parameters and formulated my coding sets in order to collect the data. Another underlying limitation throughout this research and subsequent case study are my own biases. The scope of this project was determined by my own faith (or the ways in which my faith informs and enacts my identity). Thus, I found that the way I included or excluded particular information was largely determined by what I was more familiar with. Given the timeframe of this project, I was not able to fully incorporate information that I was less familiar with in a productive way. That is not to say that I imposed my truth in ways that altered information, but rather, I incorporated such information as ways to expand upon the research of this project in the future.

3 FINDINGS

The scope and context of this project provided opportunities for illustrating the intersections of identity, narrative, shared space, and imagination with faith as the meeting point. These opportunities were particular moments that made reflection necessary. Therefore, the case study revealed three types of findings: 1) the ways in which the contextualization of the conversation trends demonstrated faith as a rhetorical agent of identity and ultimately, narrative, 2) the emergence within these trends of the reciprocity of narrative and shared space, and 3) examples of imagining and reimagining.

3.1 Contextualization of the Conversation Trends

As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, Beth Moore's departure became part of a larger conversation involving the SBC as a whole. Ongoing controversies point to a plethora of issues within the denomination, which include racism, misogyny, and sexual abuse. Most of the articles examined in this case study attribute more recent controversies to the SBC's endorsement and support of former President Trump, something that will be addressed throughout the next few sections in this chapter. Since I wanted to maintain the focus on Moore's departure and what that means for her identity and narrative, I needed to contextualize the conversation in a way that explained her position both as prominent figure in Biblical teaching and as an evangelical woman more generally. Therefore, implementing the parameters and code sets mentioned in the previous chapter of data collection helped to maintain this focus.

3.1.1 *Faith as a Rhetorical Agent of Identity*

Faith in this case study had two sub-categories in the second code set. The first was NG, used when it was apparent that faith was aiding in normalizing the goal of a shared space. This

meant that article content which provided evidence that Moore had attempted to normalize the goals, henceforth the doctrine, of the SBC. From the RNS article, we read that “Moore was above reproach, supporting Southern Baptist teaching that limits the office of pastor to men alone and cheerleading for the missions and evangelistic work that the denomination holds dear.” Unsurprisingly, this was the only article that garnered the NG code. Still, since the RNS article was the one to which all other were responding, it was worth taking note of.



Figure 4: Moore Twitter post from 2016

Most important was the second sub-category, DR, which indicated that faith was being invoked as a means of determining reality. All thirteen articles coded as DR for their content. Determining reality, in this case study, meant that Moore’s announcement was a result of her concerns over the reality of the situation, i.e. the persisting controversies involving the SBC and her position there. This, again, was first evidenced in the series of Tweets posted by Moore in 2016, which were largely in response to growing sexual abuse and misconduct against women in the SBC. Another Tweet from this thread is referenced in figure 3.1 for context; Moore says “I’m one among many women . . . “. While my research did not intend to dive deep into the political side of this discussion, it is important to understand that the SBC’s support of Trump became synonymous for Moore with church members’ ignorance—or lack of concern for—victims of sexual abuse. The RNS article provided the first instance of evidence that suggested this, reading

in part that “Moore’s criticism of the 45th president’s abusive behavior toward women and her advocacy for sexual abuse victims” became the catalyst for her eventual departure (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”). Likewise, Holly Meyer’s article in the *Tennessean* that categorizes Moore as both “a critic of former President Donald Trump and an advocate for victims of sexual abuse” provides evidence that this suggestion was widely accepted amongst the public. Thus, the reality of the situation for Moore was understood accordingly.

My initial gathering of articles within the aforementioned date range (March 9-March 12) responded to both content and context criteria. All but one of the fifteen titles overtly included “Beth Moore.” Moreover, from the first coding set, fourteen of the fifteen titles coded under EV—describing Moore as an “Evangelical.” As discussed in the contextualization of Moore’s career, this point is, of course, quite obvious given the nature and scope of her position of prominence within the religious community; she is an established evangelical. It is important to note, here, that most of the article titles implied Moore’s status as an evangelical rather than explicitly stating it. So, the term “established evangelical” refers to the consistency by which Moore represents, and has historically represented, evangelicalism. Some of her career accolades are talked about on the Living Proof Ministries “About Beth” page:

[Moore] self- published her first book, *Things Pondered*, in 1993, and published her first Bible Study, *A Woman’s Heart: God’s Dwelling Place* in 1995. Since then, the studies have been translated into over 20 languages and have reached women in countries all across the globe. In addition to her writing, Beth enjoys ministering to women at live events. Beth recently celebrated over 20 years of Living Proof Live conferences. She can also be seen teaching Bible studies on the television program

Living Proof with Beth Moore, aired on the Trinity Broadcasting Network.

Still, it was significant to define her identity as an evangelical, and the fact that this is how she is known to the public, in order to situate the role of faith within this research. In this way, it became obvious that eliminating the one article that did not code as EV was necessary in order to contextualize the conversation as needed. Figure 3.2 illustrates this.

Article title
Beth Moore says she's no longer a Southern Baptist
Popular evangelical Christian and Bible teacher says she's no longer a Southern Baptist
Beth Moore leaves Southern Baptists: Will it be a wake up call?
Why Beth Moore's departure from the SBC really matters
Beth Moore Says She is 'No Longer a Southern Baptist'
Beth Moore, a Prominent Evangelical, Splits with Southern Baptists
Beth Moore is Leaving the Southern Baptist Convention
Bye-Bye Beth: What Beth Moore's Split with the SBC Means
Beth Moore: I'm no longer Southern Baptist, cutting ties with Lifeway
This is not who I am': Popular Christian Leader Beth Moore Leaves Southern Baptist Convention
Evangelical Bible Teacher Beth Moore Splits with Southern Baptists
Evangelical Beth Moore steps away from Southern Baptists
Beth Moore leaves Southern Baptist denomination, Lifeway contract
Denominations: To Leave or Not to Leave?
Beth Moore Leaves Southern Baptist Convention, Church Community Reacts Online

Figure 5: Original article title list

Ultimately, we can assume that each of the aspects of her career—Bible curriculum publications, live speaking events, formation of Living Proof Ministries—began out of Moore’s identification of through her faith as an evangelical Christian. This self-identification provided the framework for her public persona. In other words, as Karen Swallow Prior posits, “Beth...had made a room of [her] own” within the SBC (Prior). Moore’s identity, in this way, was not subject to any backlash or support from fellow community members on how she approached women’s roles in the church, and the glaring question of whether she could even have a role as a Biblical teacher on a grander scale. Rather, her faith acted as the rhetorical agent of her identity within

whatever context was necessary. Such moments of necessity relied on her faith while changes were taking place.

The second code set for the content of the articles further supported this point. As a quick reminder, the data for this set was further reduced to thirteen articles. Out of these thirteen articles, twelve coded as RF—Reflection—within the Narrative and Identity category. These articles were given this code if they used all or part of the following direct quote from Moore’s interview with RNS, shown in Figure 3.3 below, as the lead into the article: “I love so many Southern Baptist people, so many Southern Baptist churches, but I don’t identify with some of the things in our heritage that haven’t remained in the past.” Ultimately, this meant, for me, that the content of these articles predominately suggested that Moore’s departure from the SBC demonstrated her faith and, thus, reflected her identity. Likewise, regardless of whether they agreed or not, the public had to acknowledge this identity. That fourteen of the fifteen articles titles coded as EV, which was a subcategory of the Identity category, illustrated this, as did the twelve that coded as RF under the Identity and Narrative category for article content. Thus, the major noteworthy finding to help contextualize the conversation of Moore’s departure from the SBC was this acknowledgement of her identity as it is enacted through her faith as a rhetorical agent.

Because of her opposition to Trump and her outspokenness in confronting sexism and nationalism in the evangelical world, Moore has been labeled as “liberal” and “woke” and even as being a heretic for daring to give a message during a Sunday morning church service.

Finally, Moore had had enough. She told Religion News Service in an interview Friday (March 5) that she is “no longer a Southern Baptist.”

“I am still a Baptist, but I can no longer identify with Southern Baptists,” Moore said in the phone interview. “I love so many Southern Baptist people, so many Southern Baptist churches, but I don’t identify with some of the things in our heritage that haven’t remained in the past.”

RELATED: Like Beth Moore, many women have had to break free to follow their call

Moore told RNS that she recently ended her longtime publishing partnership with Nashville-based LifeWay Christian. While Lifeway will still distribute her books, it will no longer publish them or administer her live events. (Full disclosure: The author of this article is a former Lifeway employee.)



Figure 6: Direct quote from RNS article

3.1.2 Narrative Enacted

I made the choice to keep Narrative and Identity as separate categories in the first code set to promote clarity. As I continued to work toward noting trends within contextualizing the conversation here, this clarity became crucial. Again, fleshing out the controversies surrounding Moore’s career helps with distinguishing both narrative and shared space. Twelve out of the fifteen articles in this data set were attributed with the code SY, which was used when the title did not use part of a direct quote from Moore. These titles either paraphrased or implied Moore’s own choice of words to simply read as “Beth Moore says she is no longer a Southern Baptist” or even more simply, “Beth Moore is leaving the Southern Baptist Convention.” Again, it was not

critical that the title explicitly include the word “says,” it just needed to be implied. This point was because of the acknowledgement of Moore’s status and ultimate acceptance of her identity within the religious community. Given the establishment of identity through faith as discussed in the previous section, this finding was not unexpected. More important, here, is that this established identity enacted a particular narrative that was historically based but could be sensitive to the moment. That is, the issues that Moore was facing—whether or not she was entitled to a position of authority in the church—were not new. Women’s roles have been a perpetual theme of controversy throughout the history of religion, regardless of denomination. Still, recognizing the ways in which this theme has been adapted to our current moment helps us to see the relevance and importance of research that case studies such as this one provides. For this reason, I determined that Narrative and Identity functioned better as one category for the second code set. This is because the articulation of women’s roles is directly affected by the spaces in which this articulation is taking place. Conversely, those spaces directly affect the ways in which articulation becomes available. Under this second code set, the twelve that coded as RF demonstrated that both identity and narrative involve reflection. The articles using Moore’s quote in which she states “This is not who I am” when referring to the controversies of the SBC was evidence.

The second most prominent code for Identity and Narrative in this second set was N, used when the context of the article was deemed to illuminate necessity. Necessity, in terms of this category, referred to any instance when Moore’s expectations of the SBC were not met. For example, as we read in Robin Roste’s article “Moore expected the leaders to be livid” about the transcripts boasting of Donald Trump’s sexual exploitations in 2016, “became concerned about the tolerance towards men in leadership who treated women with disrespect,” and ultimately has

said that “race, politics and Christian nationalism have dominated the conversation in the denomination, drowning out the gospel.” Again, in contextualizing the conversation trends, it became clear that Moore’s identity—both self and perceived by the public—was not changing even though her narrative was. She could, essentially, still maintain her identity as an evangelical Christian as the narrative that expressed this identity was undergoing change because of the rhetorical agency of her faith.

3.2 The Reciprocity of Narrative and Shared Space

The second type of finding from this case study revealed the reciprocal relationship between narrative and shared space. Again, shared space has both theoretical and physical implications. Trends that emerged within the contextualization of this conversation served as starting point for this finding. Indeed, as identity necessitated a particular narrative, narrative provoked involvement with shared space. That is, Moore’s identity produced the narrative that would determine how and where—physically and theoretically—she shared spaces. Even more importantly, these findings illustrated that these spaces she shares and has shared effected the way she approached generating this narrative.

Under the category of Shared Space in the first code set, four article titles coded as NL while eleven coded as LV (“No longer” and “Leaving,” respectfully). On the outset it appears as though it was unnecessary to give these two sub-categories their own separate codes. However, the expression used to generate the discussion of Moore’s departure from the SBC is deserving of attention. The four titles that tell us, in part, that “Beth Moore is no longer a Southern Baptist” draw from the first finding in that faith is acting as a rhetorical agent that is determining and enacting a particular narrative. Here, Southern Baptist can refer to another facet of identity or the SBC as a place. This ambiguity forces us to interpret based on context. On the other hand, the

eleven articles that explicitly state that Moore “is leaving” or “leaves,” or even “splits,” the SBC gives no room for interpretation. The SBC in those titles refer to a place, one that has given Moore a space to enact a narrative based on her identity but that is not so intertwined with that identity that it is immutable.

Within the second code set, the content of all thirteen articles coded under both PC and P. So, the public consensus on Moore’s role was an important factor, as was her position, or the ways in which she enacts that position. To reiterate, Moore’s identity was not changing based on this public consensus or her position within the SBC (or the church overall). Instead, we see even more evidence that Moore is acknowledged and accepted by the spaces that she shares based on this identity. It is, essentially, what she is known for. Regardless of whether the public likes or dislikes, agrees or disagrees, on this identity, they accept it. Harmeet Kaur’s article for CNN read in part that “for decades, [Moore] has been teaching people to love Jesus and model their lives on the word of the Bible. Millions of evangelical Christian women have purchased her books and flocked to hear her speak before stadium-sized crowds across the country.” These facts are obvious and indisputable, and ultimately, have generated the consensus by which the public acknowledges Moore’s position as a Biblical teacher.

It is important to remember that Moore’s identity, thus her position as a Biblical teacher, was never bound to a particular space. Though she chose the SBC as the denomination with which she identified most, her position and acknowledgement from the public allowed her teachings to permeate any presupposed doctrinal confinements. That is to say that Moore’s audience did not need to agree on every jot and tittle of theological concern in order to engage with her, and vice versa. There has always been two predominant focal points: 1) Jesus, and 2) the Bible (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”). “I am going to serve whoever God puts in front of me,”

Moore said in the RNS interview. Her faith enables her to move forward with those two focal points and to acknowledge that while her narrative changes through the ways that she determines the reality of any situation it is not confined by the spaces that she shares.

3.3 Imagining and Reimagining

Both the contextualization of the conversation and the emergence of within them of the reciprocal relationship between narrative and shared space provided examples of imagining and reimagining. Through these examples, I provide specific instances within the articles examined that help to understand Vico's concept within the framing of faith as a rhetorical agent.

Moreover, this framing helps to generate a more concrete understanding of the term reimagining as it relates the scope of this research. To note, these examples come explicitly from the second code set.

3.3.1 Imagining

I stated early in this paper that imagination, and imagining more specifically, is rooted in a concern for the way that knowledge is both understood and obtained. Further, such concern is relayed through application of language—what Vico determines to be the gateway for both creating and processing knowledge. That is to say that through language we come to form relationships both with information and with others with whom we share this information. Practicality necessitates commonality. In keeping with this argument, Moore's experiences, and the language by which she expressed those experiences, cultivated the way that she created and processed the knowledge needed to establish the way she engaged her identity and enacted her narrative. Likewise, practical application of this knowledge and language evoked particular expectations for the community in which she was apart. Moore's statement, mentioned above, that she will "serve whoever God puts in front of" her is evidence of this ("Bible teacher Beth

Moore”). More than that, this statement is led by her faith as it is acting to provide the immutable facet of her knowledge and language by which these expectations formed.



Figure 7: 2019 Twitter thread between Vicki Courtney and Beth Moore

Framing Moore’s knowledge of as well as her identification and involvement with the SBC is needed in order to provide appropriate context, here. Many of the articles examined in this study reference a Tweet (see figure 3.4 above) posted by Moore in May of 2019 in which she responds to her friend and fellow writer Vicki Courtney about preaching on Mother’s Day. The backlash that Moore received is noted in these articles as stemming from the SBC’s doctrine against women holding the role as preacher within the church. Many of those speaking out against Moore held firmly to the belief that the “preaching voice [is intended] to be a male voice,” as summarized by Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert J. Mohler on an episode of his podcast shortly after this Tweet was posted. Though not a new phenomenon for Moore with respect to her history with the SBC, this Tweet further led to her being labeled as a “liberal” or even as a threat to the denomination more generally. However, as Mark Wingfield points out:

Make no mistake about Moore's own theology: She is not a "liberal" by any definition of the word. Her Bible studies, books and videos hew a traditional Southern Baptist line in orthodoxy, and she describes herself as "pro-life from conception to grave." She also has repeatedly dodged the thorny question of whether she is a "preacher" or just a "teacher," deflecting the debate over women's role in the church by saying she is not called to be a pastor.

Moore's faith is a result of the knowledge of this orthodoxy. Moreover, that she has identified with the knowledge of this orthodoxy has ultimately effected the way that she has enacted, or imagined, this identity. Faith, here, becomes the rhetorical agent that determines whether or not this imagined identity is practical in terms of reacting to moments that elicit response. This can be seen in Moore's concern that though "[The SBC was] in the middle of the biggest sexual abuse scandal that has ever hit our denomination... suddenly the most important thing to talk about was whether or not a woman could stand at the pulpit and give a message" ("Bible teacher Beth Moore"). Indeed, there was "poverty" of language, in Vichian terms, that misconstrued the more important concern of the moment. As her denomination focused solely on the perceived challenging of the immutable aspects of their doctrine, Moore was focused on how this doctrine could hold up with sensitivity to the moment. Thus, I agree that she was not trying to de-elevate men from their positions within the church, nor was she advocating for a higher position for herself. Rather, Moore was offering her voice to generate a conversation for the experiences of women and an appreciation across the denomination for those experiences.

3.3.2 *Reimagining*

Reimagining emerges from Moore lending her voice in this way. Important to note, here, that voice takes on two distinct and simultaneous meanings. First, voice refers to Moore’s position both within the church and among the community. Refer, again, to section 4.2, and the analysis of the public consensus on Moore’s role in the religious community. While everyone may not agree on what her particular position as a Biblical teacher is, she is nonetheless acknowledged and accepted as Biblical teacher. Likewise, her voice, in the second distinct meaning of this term, enables her to speak with a certain language. Voice, here, essentially refers to her narrative—the way that she communicates her understanding of her own position. Both her position and her understanding of that position unfold according to the way that she identifies with the knowledge she has created and processed. As her interview with RNS indicated:

She still loves the things Southern Baptists believe, she said, and is determined to stay connected with a local church. Moore hopes at some point, the public witness of Southern Baptists will return to those core values and away from the nationalism, sexism and racial divides that seem to define its public witness. (“Bible teacher Beth Moore”)

It is in this way that reimagining begins to take shape. Explicitly stating—as I’ve quoted before—that she does not “identify with some of the things” in the history of the SBC that have not “remained in the past” is clear evidence. Moore has a knowledge of the SBC’s history and had until her official announcement established her faith, identity, and narrative within the constraints of this knowledge. Not without complication, of course. As we have established, Moore has faced many challenges throughout her career that stem from the simple fact of her trying to have this career in the first place. Evidenced in the block quote above, these challenges

manifested in what Moore is defining as the SBC's departure from core values. From this point, we see that reimagining begins out of necessity; out of the need to respond to disappointment. In this case, Moore's disappointment with the SBC's handling of a gospel-centric focus above all else became her catalyst for reimagining. To support this idea, Leigh MarieAnn Klett's article for Christian Post referenced Moore's statement to RNS that she "and her husband have begun visiting a new church she described as 'gospel-driven'" and has also indicated that "while she might join another denomination, she remains Baptist in her heart." Commonality, again, is a key factor. In keeping with Vico's verum-factum principle, whatever is true is what is right. Likewise, whatever is right creates a basis for engaging identity, enacting narrative, and sharing spaces in a way that responds to the demands of the moment.

3.3.3 *Faith at the Center*

To summarize, Moore's imagined identity formed around the knowledge of her faith. This identity was, and is, the basis for which she enacts her narrative and determines the spaces that she shares. Thus, in the moments in which that narrative and those spaces oppose her identity, she is required to respond. In this case, what Moore determined to be a departure from "gospel-driven" motives in the SBC forced her to begin reimagining what those motives meant for her—how those motives were ingrained in her own identity. Motives, here, refer to focal points that do not center on sound Biblical teaching. Rather, these motives conjure up complicated yet familiar histories; those that, although exhausted, still play a major role in how women in particular approach their right to speak in Biblical contexts. In both instances, imagining and reimagining, faith is at the center.

CONCLUSION

Much of what we learn from Vico about the faculty of imagination must be understood within the context of the Enlightenment era. For this, I maintain my agreement with Catherine Hobbs' accounting of Vico: that he was "critic of modernity"; not an "anti-modern" but with an aim toward the "transformation of tradition" in the production of active citizens (4).

"Transformation of tradition" is ultimately demonstrated in the way that identity forms and is enacted and engaged. Thus, the findings of this research that contextualized the demonstration of faith as a rhetorical agent of identity, showed instances within these trends of the reciprocal relationship between narrative and shared space, and provided examples of imagining and reimagining within these instances highlight the importance of understanding imagination within appropriate nuances relevant to our day.

Bringing ideas of identity, narrative, and shared space under the lens of Vichian concepts of imagination and necessity together within one conversation opens up a new avenue for rhetorical scholarship, and more specifically, feminist rhetorical scholarship. Recognizing the reciprocity of narrative and shared space within the findings of this research demonstrates the importance of understanding particular rhetorical agents of identity. It also becomes important to understand the gendered complications of such rhetorical agents. By generating a better understanding in this way, we can promote relationship—both between individuals and for individuals within the various physical spaces in which they are apart. This brings about a mode of transparency which can certainly be applied to the composition classroom. Individual ways of making meaning help us to locate and engage within the spaces we share. Moreover, this engagement promotes the emergence of how we articulate the ways we make meaning. Both are fluid—sensitive to the moment. As we see from this case study, women's roles in the church

continue to be an immense point of debate. Correspondingly, women's rights to speak and the ways in which they obtain and hold positions of authority also continue to endure interrogation. Still, particular aspects of identity remain unchanged, even in the face of significant opposition. In this way, such debates and interrogations become the catalysts that propel us toward true inclusivity. At the basis of this research is one key takeaway: the meeting point of identity, narrative, and shared space is the predominant rhetorical agent by which identity has formed. Likewise, it is at this meeting point that, when necessary, reimagining takes place.

There is, still, much to be done in terms of this research. Though the findings here provided an excellent starting point for understanding faith as a rhetorical agent of identity, within a feminist lens, they were limited to conversations circulating specifically within religious contexts. It becomes important, here, to take note of possible limitations for the expansion of this research. First, the case of Beth Moore was unique in that she holds a position, both publicly and within the religious community specifically, that allows her to speak up. As I discussed in chapter four, Moore's voice is known by particular features. These features have given her a sort of "celebrity" status; a certain prominence within the religious context. Though she faces many challenges and criticisms, she is able to speak out and advocate without serious threat to her economic or social status. Likewise, while not everyone agrees on the precise title to give her—preacher, teacher, leader, etc.—it is clear that she easily fits into any one of them in some capacity. When we look beyond the scope of this case study, we must consider the fact that not every individual holds such a position. Approaching important topics like racism, misogyny, and sexual abuse as it relates to faith should not be unavailable. The fact, however, is that a lot of times it is. Perhaps Moore can be an inspiration for others who are facing similar challenges to their faith but how likely are these individuals to engage in difficult and often controversial

conversations? Moreover, to what extent is this a result of the spaces that these individuals share?

That last question posits a second possible limitation as it applies specifically to pedagogical implications for rhetoric and composition. Royster and Kirsch elude to this in their chapter entitled “Social Circulation.” In part, “social circulation enables us to see how the past metaphorically how ideas circulate not just across generations but also across places [...and] helps us to see how ideas resonate, divide, and are expressed via new genres and media.” (Royster and Kirsch 101). If we are to promote an appreciation for the fact that “spiritual identity may be the primary kind of selfhood,” as Rand posits, then we must also cultivate an understanding for how that identity formed in the first place. As in Beth Moore’s case, faith was the result of her creation and processing of a particular knowledge. We can assume this to be true of students as well. So, in order to promote healthy discussions students must feel that they are in an environment that acknowledges this identity and allows rooms for expression of it. It is in this way that students can explore the way they have imagined their own identity through their faith and understand that reimagining the narrative through which that identity is enacted is possible.

In summary, the faculty of imagination, as theorized by Giambattista Vico, is the connection by which rhetorical agents of identity are enacted through both narrative and shared space. While pulling each of these threads together into one conversation appears daunting at first glance, the reciprocity of identity, narrative, and shared space is ultimately undeniable. The findings from this case study highlight important trends regarding the conversation of faith as the rhetorical agent that ties each together. It is in this way that composition instructors can look toward a more consistent means of approaching topics of faith within the classroom: cultivating an appreciation for the language we use, the assertions we make, and the way we promote

inclusivity in terms of ideas. Beth Moore's case almost explicitly involved her advocacy for women's rights and addressing sexual misconduct. Even with this explicit focus, there is much left to explore in terms of faith, misogyny, and sexual misconduct within the context of composition studies. As well, racism is yet another underexplored area in which faith and composition intersect and where researchers can gather evidence for the moments of imagination and reimagining in the context of forming identity, enacting narrative, and engaging in shared spaces.

WORKS CITED

“About Beth.” *Living Proof Ministries*, 2021, <https://www.lproof.org/about>.

Bizzell, Patricia, Herzberg, Bruce, Reames, Robin. *The Rhetorical Tradition*. Bedford/St. Martin's. Kindle Edition.

Blankenship, Lisa. *Changing the Subject: A Theory of Rhetorical Empathy*. Utah State University Press. 2019. Print.

Booth, Catherine Mumford. “Female Ministry; or, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel.” London. Morgan & Chase, 1859. 23 p.

Bowler, Kate. *The preacher's wife: the precarious power of evangelical women celebrities*. Princeton University Press, 2019.

Collins, Vicki Tolar. “The Speaker Respoken: Material Rhetoric as Feminist Methodology.” *College English*, vol. 61, no. 5, National Council of Teachers of English, 1999, pp. 545–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/378973>.

Collins, Vicki Tolar. “Walking in Light, Walking in Darkness: The Story of Women’s Changing Rhetorical Space in Early Methodism.” *Rhetoric Review*, 14 (Spring 1996) 336-54.

Cooper, Marilyn M. “Rhetorical Agency as Emergent and Enacted.” *College Composition and Communication* 62, no. 3, February 2011, pp. 420-449.

Cushman, Ellen. “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change.” *College Composition and Communication* 47, 1996, pp.7-28.

DeCamp, Abbie Levesque, and Ellen Cushman. "Intersectional Community Thinking : New Possibilities for Thinking About Community." *Reflections Journal*, Vol. 20, Issue 1, Spring/Summer 2020.

<https://reflectionsjournal.net/wpcontent/uploads/2020/09/V20.N1.DecampCushman.pdf>

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV Text Edition: 2016. BibleGateway.com, www.biblegateway.com/versions/English-Standard-Version-ESV-Bible/#booklist

Faith. (n.d.) *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved 1 January 2022 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>.

Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetorical Feminism and This Thing Called Hope*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2018. EBSCOhost, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=nlebk&AN=1905143&site=eds-live&scope=site>

Green, E. (2021, May 17). "The tiny blond bible teacher taking on the evangelical political machine." *The Atlantic*. Retrieved September 20, 2021, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/beth-moore-bible-study/568288/>.

Geisler, Cheryl, and Jason Swarts. *Coding Streams of Language: Techniques for the Systematic Coding of Text, Talk, and Other Verbal Data*. WAC Clearinghouse, 2019.

Hogg, Charlotte. "Including Conservative Women's Rhetorics in an 'Ethics of Hope and Care.'" *Rhetoric Review* 34.4 (2015): 391-408.

- Hogg, Charlotte. "What's (Not) in a Name: Considerations and Consequences of the Field's Nomenclature." Peitho, 2017.
- Kinneavy, James. *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith: An Inquiry*. Oxford UP. 1987.
- Kirsch, Gesa E. and Royster, Jaqueline Jones. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2012.
- Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1996.
- McGee, Michael Calvin (1980) The "ideograph": A link between rhetoric and ideology, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 66:1, 1-16, DOI: 10.1080/00335638009383499
- Miller, Hugh T. "The Ideographic Individual." *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, vol. 26, no. 4, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 2004, pp. 469–88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25610696>.
- Miner, Robert C. "'Verum-Factum' and Practical Wisdom in the Early Writings of Giambattista Vico." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 59, no. 1, 1998, pp. 53–73. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3654054. Accessed 4 March 2021
- Moore, Beth. "A Letter to My Brothers." *Living Proof Ministries Blog*, 31 May 2018, <https://blog.lproof.org/2018/05/a-letter-to-my-brothers.html>.
- Moore, Beth. *Living Proof Live*. Norfolk, Virginia. April 29, 2016.
- Phillips, Kendall R. "Rhetorical Maneuvers: Subjectivity, Power, and Resistance." *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 39, no. 4, Penn State University Press, 2006, pp. 310–32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20697165>.

- Swallow Prior, Karen. "Beth Moore Left the SBC after the SBC Left Women to Fend for Themselves." Religion News Service, 7 Apr. 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/04/05/beth-moore-left-a-denomination-that-had-left-her/>.
- Rand, Lizabeth A. "Enacting Faith: Evangelical Discourse and the Discipline of Composition Studies." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 52, no. 3, National Council of Teachers of English, 2001, pp. 349–67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/358623>.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP. 2005. Print.
- Reynaud, Daniel. "Secular Theory and Religious Faith: How to Think Christian in a Postmodern Society." *Spectrum* 28, 2000, pp. 4-11.
- Ringer, Jeffrey. "The Dogma of Inquiry: Composition and the Primacy of Faith." *Rhetoric Review* 32, no. 3, 2013, pp. 349-365.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones. "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1996, pp. 29–40. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/358272.
- Schaap, James Calvin. "Singing and Preaching: Christians in Writing." *Poets and Writers Magazine* 26 (Jan/Feb. 1998), pp. 18-26.
- Selfe, Cynthia L., and the DALN Consortium. "Narrative Theory and Stories That Speak to Us." *Stories That Speak to Us: Exhibits from the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives*. Eds.

H. Lewis Ulman, Scott Lloyd DeWitt, and Cynthia L. Selfe. Logan, UT: Computers and Composition Digital Press, 2013.

Smart, Juanita M. "Frankenstein or Jesus Christ?: When the Voices of Faith Create a Monster for the Composition Teacher." *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom*. ed. Elizabeth Vander Lei and Bonnie Lenore Kyburz. Boynton/Cook, 2005, pp. 11-23.

Smietana, B. (2019, October 19). "Accusing SBC of 'caving,' John MacArthur says of Beth Moore: 'Go home'." Religion News Service. Retrieved November 13, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2019/10/19/accusing-sbc-of-caving-john-macarthur-says-beth-moore-should-go-home/>.

Smietana, B. (2021, March 30). "Bible teacher Beth Moore, splitting with Lifeway, says, 'I am no longer a Southern Baptist'." Religion News Service. Retrieved September 19, 2021, https://religionnews.com/2021/03/09/bible-teacher-beth-moore-ends-partnership-with-lifeway-i-am-no-longer-a-southern-baptist/?gclid=CjwKCAjw2bmLBhBREiwAZ6ugo4mpOueGXkGUGq5qNfqgVuXU9T_eWIKMNpeX6MJ__enm87vOhcXILRoCEv4QAvD_BwE.

Staff Writer. "Beth Moore says memorizing Scripture helped her to heal from sexual abuse." *Christianity Today*, March 2, 2020. <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/beth-moore-says-memorising-scripture-helped-her-to-heal-from-sexual-abuse/134342.htm>.

Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture*, vol. 14 no. 1, 2002, p. 49-90. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/article/26277.

Vico, Giambattista, and Leon Pompa. Vico: The First New Science. Cambridge University Press, 2002. EBSCOhost, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=nlebk&AN=120235&site=eds-live&scope=site.