

**WORK OF THE LORD:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY OF AN EVANGELICAL ENTREPRENEUR**

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This paper is an ethnographic case study of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania-based chiropractor Daniel Pompa's use of Christianity to market his company, Pompa Health Solutions. In addition to interviews and participant observation, this paper employs narrative ethnography to bridge the gap between Pompa's rhetoric and the circumstances in which he shares it. This paper explores his use of Christian rhetoric to sell his services, legitimize his practice, and establish a trusting relationship with his patients. Pompa uses biblical references, his own illness/conversion narrative, and an evangelical worldview to promote his company to a Christian audience. In interactions with patients and advertisements, Pompa makes explicit and implicit Christian references in relation to current cultural issues (e.g. swine flu, vaccines, and weight loss) as a means of marketing. Pompa promotes his company by using the existing evangelical brand and adjusts his message to address the concerns of his audience. I argue that he positions himself as a supplement to evangelicalism as a means for his patients to practice their faith, and in doing so effectively attracts and maintains his audience. I conclude that Pompa successfully markets his secular services by using the evangelical brand. While this is a study of only one person, his affiliation with many like-minded evangelical entrepreneurs and his efforts to spread these marketing methods to other entrepreneurs indicates that more scholarship is warranted to determine the implications of this approach on business and evangelicalism.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

“I can’t eat that because it isn’t ‘God’ food,” my mom said as she pointed to a sandwich made with white bread. I questioned what she meant by “God food,” and she explained the details of an all-natural wellness plan developed and promoted by Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania-based chiropractor and wellness consultant, Dr. Daniel Pompa. What interested me were not the specifics of his dietary guidelines (an all-natural diet is not a new idea), but the terminology he uses to frame it. “God food.” It soon became clear that Pompa uses the existing marketing brand developed by evangelical Christian leaders including specific rhetoric and conversion narrative, in order to promote his company to an audience who is familiar and comfortable with his techniques.<sup>1</sup>

Evangelical Christians make up approximately 26% of the United States population, and have effectively created a successful brand that translates into best-selling books (*The Left Behind* series), blockbuster movies (*The Passion of the Christ*), and celebrity preachers (Rick Warren).<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have analyzed how evangelicals use classic marketing techniques such

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<sup>1</sup> In *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*, Mara Einstein argues that evangelicals have successfully molded a brand such as that which would be used by a company to market a product. She argues that this brand has helped to unify this group and develop a cohesive worldview among adherents.

<sup>2</sup>Though there is no exact definition for an evangelical Christian, in *Evangelicalism in Modern America*, George Marsden describes evangelicals as those who typically emphasize: 1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real, historical character of God’s saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and mission; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life; John C. Green. “The American Religious Landscape and Political Attitudes: A Baseline for 2004,”

as media advertising, stylistic changes, and organized leadership to position themselves as a powerful and vocal religious group. The marketing efforts of evangelicals have led to a subculture that looks to “the Church” and the Bible to guide them in a variety of areas of their lives.

The efforts of the evangelical organization to have a unified worldview through mass media create a metaphorical compass to guide Christians on personal and professional decisions. Within this framework and in the midst of cultural concerns about healthcare, vaccinations, and weight loss, some evangelicals are seeking a “God-centered” approach to their medical needs.<sup>3</sup> Many chiropractors encourage vitamins, organic foods, and exercise; what makes Pompa remarkable is how he successfully positions his wellness plan as a means for “believers” to practice their faith.<sup>4</sup> Evangelicals have a history of integrating their spiritual life with physical pursuits such as healing and weight loss, which presumably contributes to their interest in alternative healthcare options.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis analyzes how Pompa uses Christian themes, his own illness narrative, and insider/outsider language to promote and market his non-religious company. My interviews with Pompa and his patients were conducted over one year in group settings and one-on-one. Additionally, I observed Pompa interacting with patients in his Nutrition Café seminars, which

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*The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life*, 2004; Despite being produced by conservative Catholic, Mel Gibson, the promotion and marketing of this film relied heavily on evangelical churches and their pastors.

<sup>3</sup> Erling Jorstad, *Popular Religion in America: The Evangelical Voice*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> This term is used by evangelicals for evangelicals and excludes anyone who is not a “born-again” Christian.

<sup>5</sup> R. Marie Griffith, *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

are question-and-answer forums held in his office twice per month for patients, prospective patients, and skeptics. (They have since been replaced with weekly “webinars.”<sup>6</sup>)

Pompa’s reach into the community is broader than many medical practitioners due to his seminars (which are conducted both locally and nationally), webinars, and television appearances on Cornerstone Television, a Pittsburgh-based television station founded in 1979. Because this is a critical part of Pompa’s marketing efforts, it was necessary to conduct rhetorical analysis on his message during these appearances to examine his use of Christian themes and language to market his wellness plan outside of his office (and on a larger scale).

The participant observation, interviews, and narrative ethnography conducted inform the four claims of this thesis: first, that Christian rhetoric is integrated into Pompa’s public appearances, website, and interactions with patients; second, that Pompa’s illness narrative serves as a “conversion testimony” similar to that of evangelical leaders; third, that Pompa markets a secular company by framing his wellness plan as a means for evangelicals to practice their faith; and, finally, that his audience is attracted to and accepts his message due to their familiarity and comfort with an evangelical worldview established by its leaders.

In considering these claims, one should also be aware that Pompa is a member of a group of like-minded medical professionals called Maximized Living that believes in the integration of faith and wellness, and he trains other chiropractors in his methods.<sup>7</sup> So while Pompa alone does not represent a group or phenomenon, we can see that he is not alone in his techniques. Additionally, Pompa’s use of evangelical themes in his marketing demonstrates one way that Einstein’s brand of evangelicalism is being used for non-religious ends.

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<sup>6</sup> Webinars are seminars offered via Internet allowing prospective patients and students to listen to his message from anywhere in the world. By conducting these webinars, Pompa hopes to broaden his base beyond western Pennsylvania.

<sup>7</sup> [www.maximizedliving.com](http://www.maximizedliving.com)

Among the considerations of the rhetorical analysis will be how he establishes authority, his use of persuasion, his intent, and the cultural concerns of the audience. The rhetorical analysis will focus on his use of Christian language in his television appearances, seminars, and website, which include general religious overtones, specific biblical stories, and references to Christian cultural issues such as “family values” and abortion.

Pompa frequently recounts his illness narrative to prove he understands the plight of his patients and as evidence that his wellness plan is effective.<sup>8</sup> This tactic and its result are virtually identical to that of the preachers who describe their born-again testimony to relate to their audience and show evidence for the power of salvation.<sup>9</sup> Although Pompa is not a pastor, he replicates many pastoral strategies in an attempt to increase his credibility and create a comfortable atmosphere for his patients. I argue that because his targeted audience is already at ease with these strategies, he creates a trusting relationship, and consequently a successful business. Furthermore, his emphasis on his illness narrative instead of his academic record plays to the evangelical focus on experience.<sup>10</sup> Pompa’s efforts to gain a following and “convert” his patients away from mainstream medicine resemble those of evangelical preachers to save the “lost.”

For the purposes of this thesis, the term “evangelical leaders” will be used to refer to both national figures such as Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, and Pat Robertson, but also as a generalization of the countless lesser-known leaders who make up the evangelical organization

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<sup>8</sup> Illness narratives are stories of disease or suffering that can show how “life problems are created, controlled, and made meaningful,” Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Human Condition*, (New York: Basic Books, 1989): xiii. Pompa’s illness narrative deals with a three-year case of chronic fatigue syndrome, which he claims is the inspiration for his wellness philosophy.

<sup>9</sup> Born-again is a term used to describe the moment at which evangelical Christians accept Jesus as their personal savior.

<sup>10</sup> Susan F. Harding, “Convicted in the Holy Spirit: the Rhetoric of Fundamental Baptist Conversion,” *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 14, No. 1, “Frontiers of Christian Evangelism,” (February 1987): 167-181.

in the U.S. including evangelists, televangelists, and other local figureheads. While there are a substantial number of prominent evangelicals who have adopted a progressive version of Christianity known as social justice evangelicalism such as Tony Campolo and Jim Wallis, they make up the minority of those within the evangelical Christian community and are not implied through the use of the term herein.

In addition to the general questions regarding technique, content, and audience often asked through rhetorical analysis, my study will be informed by the research of James Phelan, Peter G. Stromberg, and Gerald Peters.<sup>11</sup> I analyze the critical role conversion narratives (of any kind) can play in one's autobiography as well as the fundamental change and deep commitment that the stories imply. By exploring Pompa's illness (conversion) narrative, for example, we see how it has power for the speaker and the audience as a familiar evidentiary tool of persuasion. I argue that his narrative is not simply a story, but also an action, or perhaps more accurately a transaction, between speaker and listener.<sup>12</sup>

This thesis aims to show how the existing evangelical brand is being used as a tool to promote and increase the profits of non-religious businesses and organizations. Despite being a study of just one person, Pompa's example sheds light on the specific techniques he uses to market with the image of evangelicalism and the response to his efforts from a particular group of Christians. While a case study cannot offer the broad findings that a large-scale study can, it can show far greater detail and reveal the areas that warrant future research. Additionally, case study participants can reveal that there is an understudied element, group, or movement that

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<sup>11</sup> James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996); Peter G. Stromberg, *Language and Self-Transformation: A Study of the Christian Conversion Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gerald Peters, *The Mutilating God: Authorship and Authority in the Narrative of Conversion* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> *Narrative as Rhetoric*, 19.

deserves further investigation. It is my hope that through the example of Pompa we can begin to see how over the last thirty years the *brand* of evangelicalism in the United States has become powerful, persuasive, and pervasive.

This thesis analyzes the ways Pompa uses Christian language in his various marketing efforts and the audience to whom he is speaking. Chapter 2 is an introduction of Pompa, his company, and his beliefs. Chapter 3 explores his use of biblical rhetoric in his interactions with patients, his seminars, and on television. Pompa's use of illness narrative as a marketing tool and how this method mirrors the use of conversion narrative by evangelical preachers will be covered in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 describes how Pompa mimics the marketing techniques of religious leaders and supplements their message as a means of practicing their faith. Finally, Chapter 6 will explain why the worldview established by evangelical leaders contributes to Christians' inclination to subscribe to Pompa's message. I also analyze specifically how Pompa markets to the evangelical audience through their existing preferences, fears, and beliefs.

## 1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Max Weber published *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1904, there has been an interest in the complicated relationship between religion and capitalism. In the 1970s, scholars took notice of evangelical leaders using mass media as an effective marketing and business tool in the United States. This scholarship examines how Protestant evangelicals have successfully created a brand that has sold millions of books, turned churches into "megachurches," and made celebrities out of their pastors.

Most scholars agree that religion has an important relationship with the cultural marketplace in the United States, and that this relationship has contributed to the public image of evangelicalism in the same way that any secular business or product is branded to attract and maintain an audience.<sup>13</sup> Lynn Schofield Clark and R. Laurence Moore argue that the evangelical Christian immersion in the market transforms religion by making it compete with the secular world for the attention of the people. In Moore's analysis of this transformation he states, "It is always the pattern of the religious and the secular, not the assumed eclipse of one by the other, that is interesting."<sup>14</sup>

While some might find this relationship between marketing and religion to be incompatible, Mara Einstein sees it as a symbiotic relationship. She believes the increase in media and advertising has intensified the connection between religion and the marketplace. She argues, "In order to be heard above the noise of the rest of society, religion too, must participate in order to survive."<sup>15</sup> To accomplish this, evangelical churches in particular are attempting to show that their services are valuable through the "symbols that designate it" or branding.<sup>16</sup> Just as the Nike "swoosh" has come to be associated with endurance, athleticism, and even exploitative factory practices, Einstein claims that evangelicalism has become a "brand" complete with an established language and worldview.<sup>17</sup>

Some scholars argue that this branding was accomplished in part through the intentional efforts of evangelical leaders to adjust their message to ever-changing needs and interests of their

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<sup>13</sup> R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Lynn Schofield Clark, ed., *Religion, Media, and the Marketplace* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007); Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> *Selling God*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Brands of Faith*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Selling God*, 12.

congregants. In *Holy Mavericks*, Shayne Lee and Philip Luke Sinitiere profile leaders such as Joel Osteen, T.D. Jakes, and Rick Warren, all of whom they say employ techniques that serve to keep their message in line with the interests of their audience. They reject arguments explaining the success of evangelicalism through a “sacred canopy against modernity (Berger 1967), being stricter than liberal counterparts (Kelley 1972; Ianacconne 1992; Finke and Stark 2005) confronting modern pluralism (Smith 1998),” luck, or tradition.<sup>18</sup> Instead, they argue that evangelical leaders are savvy marketers who are quick to react to cultural trends to meet the changing needs of their congregants.<sup>19</sup> Joel Osteen, pastor of Lakewood Church in Texas, is described as a pastor who uses “cognitive psychology in American culture,...neo-Pentecostal expressions of faith,” and criticism of denominationalism to connect with the preferences of his audience.<sup>20</sup> These efforts to meet the demands of the consumer are the same as secular companies to sell their products, only for churches, the product is Jesus and a Christian worldview. Randall Balmer says, “The genius of evangelicalism throughout American history is the almost uncanny ability of evangelicals to speak the idiom of the surrounding culture...”<sup>21</sup> He argues that the leaders of megachurches in particular have taken advantage of the attraction Americans have to “size, consumerism, and formula.”<sup>22</sup>

Rev. Jerry Falwell is another example of an evangelical leader who used business savvy to turn his ailing organization into a thriving company through clever marketing strategies,

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<sup>18</sup> Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, *Holy Mavericks: Evangelical Innovators and the Spiritual Marketplace* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 26; 31.

<sup>21</sup> Randall Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: Evangelical Subculture in America Fourth Edition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 324.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

polarizing public statements (which endeared him to his base), and charisma.<sup>23</sup> Falwell is an example of someone who blurred the line between business and religion, thereby achieving great financial success. In addition to adapting to cultural trends and the power of personality, evangelical leaders rely on rhetoric to relate to their audience.<sup>24</sup> Part of Jerry Falwell's success was in his use of specific Christian language with its power to persuade as a means to produce financial increase.<sup>25</sup>

One form that this rhetoric often takes among evangelical preachers (and their congregants) is the conversion narrative, which tells the sinner's lost-and-found salvation testimony.<sup>26</sup> These narratives can serve a variety of purposes such as separating the saved individual from "the world" and creating a common bond between speaker and listener.<sup>27</sup> Religious scholars and rhetoricians have analyzed the power of religious language in conversion narratives.<sup>28</sup> Harding believes "at the center of the language of fundamentalism is a bundle of strategies—symbolic, narrative, poetic, and rhetorical."<sup>29</sup> In addition to these strategies, Stromberg argues that the performance of recounting the narratives also adds depth to the story of fundamental change.

Such narratives, however, are not limited to Christianity or even religion. "Conversion" can take many forms including the transformative experience of illness that can be empowering

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<sup>23</sup> Dick Smillie, *Falwell, Inc.: Inside a Religious, Political, Educational, and Business Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008).

<sup>24</sup> Harding, "Convicted in the Holy Spirit"; *Language and Self-Transformation*.

<sup>25</sup> Harding, "Convicted in the Holy Spirit."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; Danielle R. Egan, "You Either Get It or You Don't: Conversion Experiences and the Dr. Phil Show," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 10 (Summer 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Harding, "Convicted in the Holy Spirit."

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

and have meaning to the storyteller and the audience.<sup>30</sup> Illness narratives also serve to create a common ground, deepen trust, and ideally convince the audience that they too need to be healed or “saved.”<sup>31</sup> Conversion and illness narratives are virtually identical, and both can be effectively used as a marketing tool in their ability to convey a transformation of self through rhetoric.<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of the preachers’ method, the audience is the element that brings meaning to the charisma, conversion, and adaptation to culture. The evangelical community has been conditioned to the subculture’s branding on a large scale thanks to the use of media over the last thirty years, which has contributed to the development of a strong group identity and worldview.<sup>33</sup> Two of the major talking points of the national evangelical leaders include a well-documented tension with government (e.g. abortion) and science (e.g. evolution), which has contributed to a tense relationship with secular society.<sup>34</sup> The Religious Right has “chosen to portray itself as an embattled minority despite its huge following,” which could contribute to the appeal of alternative services and products marketed under the presupposition that the mainstream is oppressive to evangelicals.<sup>35</sup>

The evangelical tension with secular society might account for why some evangelicals seek alternative medical options, and help to explain why for many there is a close relationship

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<sup>30</sup> Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Harding, “Convicted in the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>33</sup> *Selling God*, 67.

<sup>34</sup> *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, 100.

<sup>35</sup> The Religious Right is classified as “a loose federation of politically conservative evangelicals,” according to Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: An Evangelical’s Lament*, (New York: Basic Books, 2006): x.; Randall Balmer, *Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999): 109.

between alternative medicine and religiosity.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, R. Marie Griffith argues that evangelicals are prone to bodily concerns and have a history of seeking religious-based resources to help them lose weight and stay healthy. Evangelical leaders have exploited this interest in bodily issues as they became spokespeople for vitamins (James and Betty Robison), weight loss pills (Paula and Randy White), and supplements (Pat Robertson).<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Balmer evangelicals have found non-threatening ways to introduce science into their faith. He argues that where religion once “explained the vagaries of the natural world, advances in science have relegated religion more and more to issues of personal well-being.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the allure of alternative medical options to the religious, along with the evangelicals’ history with bodily concerns places Pompa’s practice within a framework that helps explain the success of his marketing approach.

While some might see evangelical attraction to alternative medicine as a way to distance themselves from mainstream society, Erling Jorstad claims they are actually using their involvement in the wellness movement in an attempt to stay current with the interests of the secular world and react to them. He says, “In sum, the evangelical acceptance of the new therapeutic/wellness movement has demonstrated its willingness to keep abreast of certain secular trends, its concern to stay faithful to scriptural teachings, and its adaptability to the populist, high technology tenor of popular religion.”<sup>39</sup> This position helps to explain how because “alternative” medicine might evoke New Age connotations to some, using Christian language might persuade some otherwise hesitant evangelicals to accept this option.

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<sup>36</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Alternative Medicine and American Religious Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Scott Billinsly, *It’s a New Day: Race and Gender in the Modern Charismatic Movement*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> *Blessed Assurance*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Popular Religion in America*, 76.

One reason alternative medicine might appeal to evangelicals is their use of and comfort with small, organized, support groups. Evangelical churches often break up their congregations into “small groups” or “home groups” that meet periodically to offer support and personal attention to their members in a more intimate setting than a church service.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, alternative therapies often conduct meetings in groups for the same reasons. Jorstad argues that evangelicals are comfortable in these settings and therefore are inclined to participate in alternative therapies where they simultaneously feel at home and supported by their peers.<sup>41</sup> He claims research has shown that evangelicals are inclined to meet in small groups to pray for healing and testify to the healing they have already received. This helps show how Pompa’s Nutrition Cafés are a comfortable environment for his audience.

There is a substantial amount of scholarly literature on the marketing *of* religion, but little on marketing *with* religion. Though scholars have established that evangelicals have created a successful and thriving brand, the scholarship on how this brand is being used beyond “the Church” has to date been limited to secular companies cornering a market rather than evangelical entrepreneurs using their own faith to increase profits.<sup>42</sup> It is my goal to add to this literature by showing how Pompa not only utilizes many of the same techniques as his religious counterparts, but also supplements their message by using the evangelical brand to market his company which he claims can help the audience effectively practice their faith.

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<sup>40</sup> James S. Bielo, *Words Upon the Word: An Ethnography of Evangelical Group Bible Study*, (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> *Popular Religion in America*: 74-76.

<sup>42</sup> Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

## 2.0 POMPA HEALTH SOLUTIONS

Dr. Daniel Pompa, 45, is a chiropractor and wellness consultant who founded his Wexford, Pennsylvania-based company, Pompa Health Solutions, in October 2004. From January 2009 to February 2010, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork where I observed and interviewed him and some of his associates and patients, attended his seminars, and watched his segments on Cornerstone Television. During this time, I learned about his practice, wellness plan, and patients.

Pompa received his Doctor of Chiropractic degree from Life University's College of Chiropractic in Marietta, Georgia. Their mission statement says, "From its founding in 1974 as a college of chiropractic, Life University has embraced the idea that humans are spiritual beings whose lives are directed by universal laws including the natural, vitalistic, innate ability to develop, heal and adapt as long as the body is kept free of interferences."<sup>43</sup> Pompa claims many of these same beliefs, and was clearly influenced by his academic experience.

He and his wife Merily are self-proclaimed born-again Christians who regularly attend Northway Christian Community, a non-denominational evangelical church in Wexford, Pennsylvania. Pompa claims his entire family follows his Basic Diet program, a chiropractic regimen, and "detoxification" process including the use of natural cleaning products and abstaining from vaccines (both childhood and adult varieties) and that all of these practices

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.life.edu/OurMission>

follow from his own religious convictions. He claims to have suffered from and overcome a debilitating case of chronic fatigue syndrome, which led to a deeper faith in God and a commitment to help people become healthy through alternative medicine. When describing his “victory” over illness, Pompa’s website says, “Truly, God does ‘work all things for good for those who love him and who are called according to his purpose.’ (Romans 8:28).”<sup>44</sup>

Pompa sticks to specific talking points both in our private meetings and his public speaking engagements. Regardless of the setting, he speaks openly about his faith and the role it plays in his personal and professional life. He says that our bodies were created by God to heal themselves, and that it is our responsibility to take care of “God’s Temple.” Pompa bases this belief on his understanding of the body as intelligently designed, and therefore all that goes wrong within it is a result of outside “interference.” To Pompa taking care of the body includes the avoidance of particular foods and “toxic” substances such as vaccines. He claims his company and its message are his “ministry,” and says God “called” him to this profession.

Pompa objects to the approach that he claims the mainstream takes to the practice of medicine. He states that the current system is not healthcare, but “sickcare” in that little to no attention is paid toward preventing disease, but instead waits for a problem before action is taken. Pompa sees himself as an antidote to the poor care offered by mainstream medicine and says his services can help “restore the amazing healing potential with which God created the human body—Body by God.”<sup>45</sup> He says that people are called by God to maintain optimum health, and he can help facilitate this process through his wellness plan. Pompa contends that what he can provide is inspired by the principles and guidelines found in the Bible and that Christianity implores its followers to be healthy. Consequently, he uses biblical rhetoric to

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<sup>44</sup> [www.pompahealthsolutions.com](http://www.pompahealthsolutions.com)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

appeal to and connect with his patients. His practice offers chiropractic services, detoxification, and diet and nutrition counseling. Pompa's patients are also encouraged to purchase prescribed supplements and vitamins offered in his office. Pompa (like most business owners) uses many methods to attract and maintain his patients including his website, e-mails, and seminars. However, unlike most business owners, Pompa utilizes the rhetoric and worldview of the evangelical subculture in his business model to gain credibility, increase his client-base, and establish a connection with his patients.

In addition to chiropractic services, he offers consultations and products designed to help with weight loss, chronic fatigue syndrome, and other (what he calls) "New Millennium" diseases, which according to Pompa, often have symptoms that are difficult to diagnose (e.g. fatigue, "brain fog," nervousness) that result from "toxicity." Pompa sees toxicity as the result of "natural and manmade poisons such as mold and dental fillings," respectively.

One of the most striking elements to the Pompa wellness plan, and indeed what initially inspired this thesis was the language used to describe the diet and wellness regimen. While this will be handled fully in other sections, it is important to note the terminology found even in some of the basic element of his wellness plan. For example, his more strict diet plan, which is reserved for his severely ill patients, is the Healing Diet. Healing is an important element to the evangelical belief system, and a notable choice for this diet when other, more clinical, words could have been chosen (e.g. therapeutic, advanced). Obviously his use of "God food" and "God fats" to designate the foods that Pompa deems beneficial is an overt display of religiosity. Less obvious, but equally curious, is the diseases he calls "New Millennium" diseases. For non-evangelicals, it might sound like an innocuous name for diseases that are more diagnosed in recent years, but for evangelicals the word "millennium" is an important word in their reading of

the apocalyptic literature found in the Bible. When asked, Pompa said his goal was not to conjure up “end times” connotations, but it is not surprising to find such language a comfortable choice for a person familiar with the terminology in personal ways.

Though Pompa has hundreds of patients, there do seem to be trends with regards to who is most attracted to his message. According to Pompa, his “typical” patient could be described as a white, suburban, middle-class, evangelical, woman between 35-55 years old. She often comes with existing concerns about mainstream medicine and the government including suspicions about vaccinations and/or trouble losing weight. Pompa confirms that the majority of his patients are women because, “they are the ones who take care of the family and have the most concerns about what to feed their families.” He also said he believes many women take on the burden of the entire family’s health and are frustrated with the existing medical system with its “dead-ends, long waits, and frustration.” Many of the women who attended the Nutrition Cafés had questions on how to convince their husbands and friends on the legitimacy of his methods. Pompa’s theory about why women make up the bulk of his clients could stem from the evangelical preference for “traditional” gender roles within the family. He claims to see over 150 patients every week.

In addition to the staff and children, patients will often find Pompa’s children and his wife in office as well. He and Merily have three biological children and two more that they adopted from a family member. Merily is an active part of the office as she performs administrative functions, speaks at seminars, and demonstrates his exercise regimen on website videos. Pompa believes having his family present in the office allows them to be together despite his hectic schedule and makes his patients “feel like they are a part of our family.”

### **3.0 CHRISTIAN RHETORIC AS MARKETING TOOL**

Pompa consistently uses rhetoric as a tool to create camaraderie with his audience and convince them of his authority on wellness techniques. This chapter uses rhetorical analysis to explore Pompa's intention, content, and language, and analyzes how they serve to legitimize him in the eyes of his evangelical audience. The specific language and references he chooses are familiar and comfortable to evangelicals and serve to establish a bond between speaker and listener. His use of biblical rhetoric includes Old and New Testament references, and usually is employed as evidence for the legitimacy of his wellness plan.

Regardless of the setting, Pompa employs rhetoric with the intention of creating a powerful psychological effect. By using particular phrases, terms, and references, Pompa plays into their existing emotions, hope, fears, and beliefs, with the goal of creating and maintaining a relationship. The power of rhetoric serves to establish his authority over his audience and persuades them that he and his services are valuable and righteous.

### 3.1 CHRISTIAN RHETORIC AT SEMINARS AND ON TELEVISION

Pompa's Nutrition Cafés are seminars that are offered twice monthly and allow him to interact directly with his patients (and potential patients).<sup>46</sup> These question-and-answer forums are advertised in the office and through word-of-mouth. Here, attendees are encouraged to inquire about health, nutrition, and wellness. These seminars allow current and prospective patients and even skeptics the ability to engage Pompa without any commitment or fees that accompany a traditional office visit.

The seminars are loosely organized, but usually begin with a five-to-ten minute introduction by Pompa, followed by the question-and-answer session, and conclude with secular inspirational or informational videos from YouTube. The videos are typically chosen by Pompa's office manager, Warren, and are presented as a representation and/or validation of Pompa's message.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the seminars, much of Pompa's discussion is couched in Christian language and he often speaks with authority about "what God wants for us." Many of the Christian references are passing, general, and non-denominational such as his frequent assertion that, "God made the human body with amazing ability to heal itself," (an ability which he claims he can help facilitate) or his claim that, "God wants you to be healthy." He contends that, "God and our bodies do not need help healing, they just don't need interference."<sup>48</sup> Pompa goes on to say that if we simply follow his wellness plan, "our bodies can do what God intended them to do."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> After my research was completed, the Nutrition Cafés were replaced with weekly webinars conducted and promoted online.

<sup>47</sup> I saw no evidence suggesting that Warren is a governing force of Pompa Health Solutions, but rather he acts out the role of a typical office manager.

<sup>48</sup> [www.pompahealthsolutions.com](http://www.pompahealthsolutions.com)

<sup>49</sup> Nutrition Café, February 10, 2009.

During my visits to the Nutrition Cafés, Pompa frequently described his diet plans (Basic Diet and Healing Diet), which he said are based on his concept of “God food.” The Basic Diet plan is the one that prohibited my Mom from eating the sandwich made with white bread and is based on eating grass-fed meat, eating only “God fats,”<sup>50</sup> and eliminating processed sugar. He believes the foods that exist naturally on the earth and are free of chemicals are the ones that can heal and protect the body. Most people call these foods simply “organic” or “all-natural,” but for Pompa, they are “God Food.” According to Pompa, God placed foods on the earth for us to enjoy and use for strength, and we have sabotaged his efforts by modifying what is already “perfect” through additives, processing, and chemicals. Pompa presents his position as not simply an issue of altering one’s food choices, but also about looking to the Bible and God as a solution to the problem.

Pompa repeats many of his talking points each week at the Nutrition Cafés and while he uses Christian references frequently, he usually limits them to small phrases. Much of the content is what he calls “tough love” about our eating and exercise habits, but others might call scare tactics. He warns that because of our diets most Americans will die of disease, which is not God’s will for us, and “prevents people from glorifying God in the way that he would want it.” Here he is rhetorically offering the choice to his audience between what he considers unnatural death through disease and glorifying God. He says, “My hope and prayer for you is that you are willing to make these important dietary changes to avoid becoming another health statistic.” By claiming he is praying for them to make this change he is positioning his services as God’s will and eliciting the help of the Holy Spirit to intercede in their life choices. His

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<sup>50</sup> God fats, according to Pompa, are what he considers to be good fats (e.g. olive oil, grass-fed meat, organic butter).

prayers are being used as another form of marketing. Rather than buying more commercial time or an advertisement in the paper, Pompa is praying for his audience to choose his services.

Pompa often used biblical stories as evidence that his advice in treating medical questions is simple, obvious, and God-approved. For example, he said, “I think it is so funny how people think vegetarianism is a Christian practice. The Israelites were meat-eaters! If it was good for them, why wouldn’t it be good for us today?” This example illustrates how he uses the Bible as a guide for daily living as well as a means of legitimizing his position among his audience. Furthermore, he creates a tone of authority that his interpretation of the Bible and its message is clearly accurate and all other views on the relationship between Christianity and vegetarianism is flawed. Pompa’s advice on eating meat is one example of his practical use of the Bible to facilitate optimal health, but this example also demonstrates that the general tone of his monologues as one of authority in order to persuade his audience of his legitimacy.

During one television appearance Pompa claimed that the food rules of the Old Testament were not arbitrary or designed as punishment, but were prescribed to guide people on how to best take care of their bodies. He said, “God gave the Israelites very specific laws, and he did it for spiritual reasons and physical reasons...and it still applies today.”<sup>51</sup> He added it is “obviously not a sin anymore” to eat the wrong foods, but the Bible should be used as a tool to reveal to Christians what is best for their bodies. Pompa might be claiming his point is “obvious” because he believes it is common sense and demands no further discussion, however, I would argue that it reveals that he and his audience are already in agreement on this and most religious statements.

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<sup>51</sup> Cornerstone Television, “Focus 4.”

Despite many of his biblical references being drawn from the Old Testament, Pompa makes seemingly arbitrary distinctions between what is and isn't applicable today. When asked how he determined what was timeless biblical advice and what was merely a culturally contextual guideline, Pompa said that he used common sense to help him determine modern applicability.

The informational or inspirational videos played at the end of Nutrition Cafés are meant to be an uplifting or helpful way to end the evening, but they also often offer a glimpse into the worldview of the doctor and his patients. While these videos do not include rhetoric directly from Pompa, they are shown because they represent his opinions, advice, and worldview. As such, I include them in this section as an indirect expression of Pompa's rhetoric.

At one Nutrition Café, a segment from the popular evangelical television show, "The 700 Club," was shown describing the importance of getting enough vitamin D. In the video, a doctor is shown in an interview stating that despite the fact that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends 1200 milligrams of vitamin D per day we really need at least 2000 milligrams and ideally much more. He concludes by saying, "Who do you want to believe-- God or the government?" An "us versus them" mentality is not uncommon in the evangelical community, and their concerns are often directed towards the government and mainstream science, which is present in much of the rhetoric at Pompa's Nutrition Cafés. From this example, we can see a distrust of the government and the inclusion of divine authority to determine wellness decisions. The video helps show how Pompa uses the existing Christian worldview to position himself as a part of the subculture and his services as a means of being in line with God's will.

### 3.2 CHRISTIAN RHETORIC IN CONVERSATION

Pompa's use of Christian references occurs in his one-on-one conversations with me as well as with his patients. These conversations tend to be more intimate and often convey a more personal sense of the evangelical subculture including references to other faiths, his ministry, and the ways "God is working in [Pompa's] life."

During one of our interviews, I asked him whether he believed being overweight was a sin. He said that while it is not a sin to be overweight, it could be indicative of sinful behavior such as gluttony. Because Pompa uses the Bible as a guidebook for his dietary choices (and encourages his patients to do the same), it is not surprising that Pompa would frown upon gluttony, however he is careful not to offend his patients by claiming their condition was sinful. By focusing more on "toxic" substances that can prevent weight loss he is sidestepping a potentially offensive element to his biblical focus.

Patients often ask for his opinion on alternative remedies as well as on other homeopathic practitioners in the area. When one patient asked Pompa whether another local doctor was a Christian, Pompa said he was not sure if she could be trusted saying, "I like her, but I am suspicious. If you look on her bookshelf, you'll see books about Buddhism and other mystical stuff." From this appraisal/admonition by Pompa of his competitor, it is apparent that there is an understanding between him and his patients that they share a common faith and that Christianity is the preferred faith of one's medical practitioner. Given that preference, it is not surprising that Pompa chooses to openly market his products and services by using Christianity.

Pompa's patients claim the office environment makes them feel comfortable and at home. The personal nature of Pompa's testimony and the presence of his family in the office are two factors that patients mentioned that serve to create an environment where his patients feel

comfortable sharing the details of their health and private life with him. They often approach him in the office to share struggles they're having. At times, Pompa says he will ask them to pray with him and they often agree. Pompa claims that he only suggests this when he is certain they are a "person of faith." Presumably by this he means a person of *his* faith. While most physicians would consider this practice to be unconventional or inappropriate, for Pompa and his patients, this practice fits with his philosophy and their preferences.

### 3.3 CHRISTIAN RHETORIC ON WEBSITE

Pompa uses his website, [www.pompahealthsolutions.com](http://www.pompahealthsolutions.com), to articulate his wellness plan, describe his testimony, and gain credibility. Evangelical organizations were quick to embrace the Internet as a new, efficient, and effective means of communicating with members and potential members.<sup>52</sup> Like them, Pompa embraces technology as a means to market by using his website (and social networks) to communicate with and generate additional income from his patients. Much like a church, the techniques create an active community in which evangelicals feel comfortable. Amidst the information offered on the site, Pompa also posts videos showcasing testimonials, interviews, and clips from his seminars. The site uses general Christian references as well as specific Bible verses throughout, particularly in the section where he describes his own experience with chronic fatigue syndrome. It is clear from the website's content that not only is Pompa proud of his Christian faith, but it is an integral part of his wellness plan itself.

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<sup>52</sup> Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002): 232.

The “About Pompa” section of the website also claims that, “The most rewarding aspect of his career are the walking miracles seen in his office each day, the lives changed, and the minds renewed to God-guided principles of health and healing.” Here he is using many traditionally evangelical rhetorical devices including “miracles” and “healing” and he is also claiming his wellness plan to be “God-guided.” Once again Pompa uses rhetoric to gain a connection to his audience and establish his own authority.

Among the many videos featured on [www.pompahealthsolutions.com](http://www.pompahealthsolutions.com), there is one particular promotional video in which host Doug Llewelyn (formerly of “The People’s Court” fame) claims Pompa “has become a medical messiah” to his patients. When describing his mission, Pompa says that there are threats in the world of disease, medicine, toxins, and false information, which he has been “called to inform people about so that their bodies can live up to their God-given potential.” The use of the word “threats” and his frequent admonitions about toxins, disease, and poisons amount to ominous rhetoric intended as a warning, but also to encourage them to see his services as the cure. Yet, he doesn’t use the word cure and instead opts for the more religious equivalent of “healing.”

Pompa says his goal is to bring healing to others and says he is able to accomplish this because he too has suffered with illness. He quotes II Corinthians 1: 3-4 and says that God “comforts us in all our tribulation, so that we may be able to comfort them who are in trouble by the same comfort with which ourselves are comforted by God.”<sup>53</sup> His self-proclaimed title of “medical messiah” combined with his particular use of scripture illustrate how Pompa claims to have God-given power and how he treats his company as a ministry.

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<sup>53</sup> [www.pompahealthsolutions.com](http://www.pompahealthsolutions.com)

This chapter analyzed evidence of Pompa's use of Christian rhetoric to establish his authority, create a sense of familiarity for his audience, and equate his services with infallibility they associate with the Bible. While much of Pompa's religious rhetoric is not explicitly evangelical, he clearly demonstrates an assumption that his audience has knowledge of the Bible and a desire to integrate their faith into their lifestyle choices. His Nutrition Cafés and television appearances provide a forum for him to describe and promote his services. Couching his otherwise secular wellness plan in Christian rhetoric allows Pompa to achieve authority in the eyes of his audience. Pompa uses familiar terminology to illicit comfort and legitimacy by stirring their existing fears and beliefs. Appearing on Christian television and playing videos from well-known Christian leaders persuades the audience that Pompa is a fellow "believer" and that his plan is in line with their faith.

#### **4.0 PERSONAL NARRATIVE: HOW POMPA USES ORAL TESTIMONIES TO MARKET HIS BUSINESS**

This chapter illustrates how Pompa uses his own illness narrative to validate his authority and his services to his audience. Using rhetorical analysis, this chapter shows how his illness narrative is a tool used to relate to his patients' suffering as well as a means to prove that his wellness plan is effective in curing illness. In doing so, Pompa is mimicking religious leaders who use conversion narrative to produce a common bond with their audience. While Pompa is not a preacher, he replicates the marketing approach of evangelical religious leaders to an audience who is receptive due to their familiarity with the content and technique. Furthermore, I demonstrate that by focusing on his own testimony rather than his formal training, he is appealing to an audience who is skeptical of higher education and receptive to personal experience.

#### **4.1 CONVERSION NARRATIVE**

The recounting of one's conversion narrative, or what is commonly called one's "testimony," is a frequent occurrence in evangelical circles. The sinner's lost-and-found salvation story is often used as a tool to inspire others to convert, convey extreme devotion, and/or separate the speaker from "the world" while creating a sense of cohesion among those in the audience who have also

had such an experience.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, these narratives develop the sense of separation these Christians feel towards non-Christians and are a part of their insider/outsider rhetoric. They can be powerful for the speaker and his/her audience and also can persuade the listener that the alleged source of salvation is indeed valuable and authentic. While many traditions make use of the conversion narrative, the evangelical conversion history is frequently the subject of inquiry in academic scholarship. This might be because conversion narratives are definitive of the “born-again” experience, and are a fundamental part of the evangelical subculture’s expression of their faith.

Within evangelicalism, both preachers and laypeople use conversion narratives as a description of the changes to their life through salvation as well as proof for the power of their faith. By definition, all born-again Christians have a conversion narrative with some boasting extreme behavioral and attitudinal shifts due to what they claim to be the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The greater the redemption, presumably the more powerful the testimony is for the audience. Conversion narratives usually tell of the speaker’s decision to turn away from a “sinful” life. The speaker is creating a distinction between his/her life and that of all non-believers, and separating him/herself from the secular world (and adherents of other religions). Often conversion narratives are showcased from the pulpit (though not necessarily), and are expressed with the hope of inspiring others to join the faith. If the listener has also experienced a conversion, the preacher’s story can serve to strengthen their bond through camaraderie. If the listener is a non-believer, the hope is to convince him/her of the speaker’s legitimacy and authority.

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<sup>54</sup> Evangelicals often refer to non-Christians and all that is secular as “the world” as a way of delineating between themselves and everyone else. This language contributes to the insider/outsider framework evangelicals use to create a stronger sense of identity and unity amongst each other.

## 4.2 ILLNESS NARRATIVES AS A MARKETING TOOL

A conversion narrative of any kind is identified by the speaker's claim of shifting to a new (presumably superior) way of thinking or living. Though associated with evangelicalism and used in many other traditions, conversion narratives are not limited to the religious sphere. For example, illness narratives are often characterized by transformative experiences, and can sometimes include a redemption element or life transformation as a result of sickness, thus placing some of them within the parameters of a conversion narrative. They describe the journey one experiences during illness, which often includes eventual meaning brought upon by the illness experience itself. Their format and effect is virtually identical to the born-again testimony. Through the recounting of his "testimony," Pompa establishes credibility. He overcame the obstacle of illness, and in doing so established credibility.

Pompa's own illness narrative details a multiple-year case of chronic fatigue syndrome, which he claims inspires him as a wellness consultant and allows him to relate to his patients. Pompa includes a religious component when detailing his illness narrative, but the focus is on how his own ailment helped him create the wellness plan he now promotes to his patients. He uses his story of overcoming chronic fatigue syndrome to gain credibility, authority, and ultimately trust in the same way that preachers use their conversion narratives from the pulpit. Pompa, like many with a disease or severe illness, says he found strength, meaning, and peace through his battle with illness. Just as a preacher will tell his/her story of overcoming adversity and finding salvation, Pompa applies the same tactic to create a common bond and convince his audience that because he suffered, he now can cure.

Pompa claims amalgam dental fillings were responsible for his 3-year battle with chronic fatigue syndrome. On his website, Pompa says the symptoms were debilitating and included

anxiety, insomnia, “brain fog,” and other symptoms.<sup>55</sup> Because of his “victory” over illness, Pompa says he can help prevent the poor health of others by helping them gain the proper knowledge.<sup>56</sup> In one Nutrition Café, Pompa was discussing the problem of “New Millennium Diseases” and quoted Hosea 4:6 by saying, “My people perish for lack of knowledge,” as a means of encouraging his clients to maintain their journey to understanding the “awesome design God gave our bodies.”<sup>57</sup> This warning might seem incongruous with the threat perceived by evangelicals of secularization in higher education. By using this biblical reference, however, Pompa offers a familiar admonition to his Christian audience and positions himself as the source of the knowledge advocated in this verse as a means of overcoming “mysterious” diseases.

Pompa’s testimony of his experience with chronic fatigue syndrome is central to his marketing campaign. On his website and when speaking with current and prospective patients, Pompa uses his illness narrative to connect with his audience. He says that without the illness experience he would never be able to relate to the suffering and desperation of his patients. Based on the amount of space devoted to it on the website and the number of mentions it receives in seminars, Pompa’s illness narrative is a more important part of his résumé than education and work experience. He says, “My illness offered me more than traditional education because I experienced it firsthand. I know what my patients are going through.” His illness narrative is portrayed as the critical event in his professional life despite its personal nature. While he claims on his website that “science makes the difference” between him and other alternative doctors, the focus of his marketing campaign is on experience, not education.

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<sup>55</sup> [www.pompahealthsolutions.com](http://www.pompahealthsolutions.com)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Hosea 4:6 is referenced again in the Christian Merchandise section as it is quoted on a banner in his office.

Pompa's website outlines the details of his illness narrative, and scripture is often employed as a testament to the power of God to heal, but also as way to show how Pompa is aligned with the way and wisdom of God. In the "About Pompa" section of his website, he quotes Romans 8:28, "For God works all things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose," to impress upon his patients that his experience with chronic fatigue syndrome was his "call" to help others now. He says that being healed from this illness made him a better husband, father, and doctor.<sup>58</sup> In doing so, he claims healing through Jesus, and also places himself in the category of those who are "called according to his purpose." By stating that he was "called," Pompa's rhetoric places him (as a chiropractor) in the same category as missionaries, pastors, and others who claim to be "called" by the Holy Spirit to do God's work. This can serve to convince potential customers that Pompa's services are a ministry rather than a traditional for-profit company thus gaining their trust, and ultimately increasing his profits.

Pompa relies on his illness narrative within his marketing campaign because as he says, "Just like the patients that God sends to me, I know what it's like to suffer." My interviews with patients reveal that his testimony resonates with his audience. Many of Pompa's patients told me his illness narrative contributed to their trust in him. One woman said, "He's been where I am. He knows how to treat illnesses other doctors just ignore. I believe his victory over illness gave him insight and allows him to relate to people like me." Patients are impressed with his testimony and are comfortable with this approach because of their familiarity with the conversion narrative. Presumably, their experience with the conversion narrative and association it has with their pastor and peers, who they presumably trust and admire, allows Pompa to gain

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<sup>58</sup> [www.pompahealthsolutions.com](http://www.pompahealthsolutions.com)

the same effect despite his narrative's largely secular content. Additionally, by focusing on his personal experiences rather than his education or professional experience, Pompa is appealing to the preferences of the evangelical audience in the hope that they will place their trust in those who share their worldview.

The process of sharing his illness narrative involves the action of the speaker and reaction of the listener and because this technique is familiar to evangelicals it can be a powerful tool of persuasion. In addition to the authority gained in the act of telling the story, there are other powers at work including the audience's belief in his story as evidence that he is able to meet their medical needs. To describe this exchange as a transaction is fitting in two ways. First, both parties are offering something the other needs; Pompa is giving the audience a supposed solution to their wellness concerns, and the audience is giving Pompa a livelihood. Second, Pompa's use of an illness narrative ultimately results in the exchange of money when/if his audience members become his clients. Pompa uses his illness narrative as a tool of persuasion and accomplishes this by demonstrating to his audience that he was in their position and used his own wellness plan to heal his illness. In doing so he takes the emphasis off his education and training, and onto experience. Evangelicalism's focus on experience and their familiarity with this technique makes Pompa a credible source of healing.

### **4.3 TESTIMONIES AS A MARKETING TOOL**

In addition to his own illness narrative, Pompa encourages his patients to share their "testimonies of healing." These testimonies are used to legitimate his services to other members of the audience. To many, the word "testimony" has judicial implications, but within the Evangelical

and other Christian traditions, this word connotes confession, redemption, and salvation. Indeed, Pompa claims that patients should turn from their dietary, exercise, and lifestyle choices that are making them sick and in doing so they will be saved from poor health. This technique is effective both because of us his religious beliefs, but also those of the audience. Pompa positions his wellness plan as the salvation to his audience's physical challenges.

In many of the Nutrition Cafés I attended, Pompa introduced a young man and asked him to share his “testimony.” The man shared his story of losing over 100 pounds through Pompa's Healing Diet. He described his life before and after coming to Pompa and said:

Before I walked into this office I was living a life of sinful gluttony. These are the pants I used to wear. [Holds up the clichéd oversized sweatpants as the audience gasps.] They knew me by name at the Chinese all-you-can-eat buffet! I was just walking through life going through the motions. Since meeting Dr. Pompa and using his Healing Diet and supplements I am living not just existing...I am a walking miracle—if I would have continued down that path I would have died. People my size don't become elderly—they die of disease. Now I am living a life of truth and freedom, and it's all thanks to this man right here. [Points to Pompa.]

Here we can see his understanding of over-eating as sinful and his belief that losing weight (through diet change) is a ‘miracle.’ After sharing his testimony, Pompa said the young man had “once been lost, but now is found,” which is a common refrain in Christian rhetoric and a clear reference to the famous 18<sup>th</sup> century hymn, “Amazing Grace.” His use here of Christian rhetoric simultaneously offers familiarity to the audience as well as positions Pompa as the one who brought redemption to his patient. While this and many of his references are generic and not necessarily related to a particular denomination or worldview, it is the open and perpetual use of them that is distinctly evangelical.

At another Nutrition Café, Pompa told the story of a woman who brought in her severely “toxic” son who couldn’t hold his head up (his diagnosis was not mentioned aside from being referred to as toxic). He said she couldn’t be there to share their story, but that he thought he should share it with the group.

A woman comes into my office with a son who is visibly ill. His spine was so out of alignment that he couldn’t even hold up his head. I began to work on him, adjust him [through chiropractic spinal manipulation], and give him vitamins and supplements. The whole office just fell in love with this little boy and we all were praying for God to work a miracle in his life. It took many months, but now that boy comes running into this office for his appointments! I am so grateful to have witnessed this transformation—he truly is a new creature. God works all things together for good!<sup>59</sup>

Through this story we see a variety of rhetorical examples of Pompa’s use of biblical/spiritual references. He clearly sees himself as a vessel through which miracles are performed. Additionally, he believes he should pray for his patients and see this as a supplement to their care in his office. Finally, he specifically refers to Romans 8:28 again as well as his reference to the boy being a “new creature,” which is a common synonym for being “born-again” found in II Corinthians 5:17. Additionally, by sharing this story at the Nutrition Cafés, Pompa is encouraging an atmosphere of intimacy and testimony commonly found in evangelical Bible studies or home/small groups.<sup>60</sup>

Often called Bible studies, home groups, or small groups, these meetings often take place in a small area of the church (usually not the sanctuary) or one of the group member’s homes.<sup>61</sup> They are typically a setting where congregants can open up with each other, pray with each

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<sup>59</sup> Nutrition Café, February 17, 2009.

<sup>60</sup> *Words Upon the Word*, 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

other, and enjoy more intimacy than one typically finds in the church. They are also more casual and typically have refreshments supplied by those in attendance. Through the encouragement of personal testimony and the general atmosphere at the Nutrition Cafés, Pompa is appealing to the evangelical familiarity with this type of setting. Similarly to home groups, Nutrition Cafés usually draw a crowd of between 15 and 40 and often have refreshments for attendees. The number of people creates a sense of intimacy that encourages closeness not typical of a doctor's office. The food supplied is made only with ingredients allowed by Pompa's Basic Diet, and are used as evidence that one can eat tasty foods while submitting to his food standards. Pompa encourages attendees to ask him questions, share their testimonies, and talk to each other about their needs. These events are an intimate setting that evangelicals would most likely be familiar with and comfortable in because of their similar experiences with church groups.

## **5.0 REPLICATING THE EVANGELICAL MESSAGE**

Chapter 5 describes how Pompa replicates evangelical leaders to market his products and services to his audience. He accomplishes this through office atmosphere (including décor and the small groups of Nutrition Cafés), adapting to cultural trends, and focusing on bodily concerns in a way that is familiar to his audience. His office décor consists of many items that present the evangelical perspective through Bible verses, poems, and symbolism. This décor is a way that Pompa aligns his practice with Christianity and replicates its message. In order to stay relevant, he adapts his message to trends within American culture (e.g. fear of vaccines), couches the answer in evangelical rhetoric, and prescribes his own services as the solution. This prompt adaptation to societal concerns illustrates how Pompa resembles his religious counterparts who also employ this technique. Furthermore, Pompa uses the insider/outsider language common to the evangelical community as a means of developing familiarity, legitimacy, and ultimately trust.

### **5.1 CHRISTIAN MERCHANDISE**

As with any company, its image is not solely based upon interactions with customers, but also occurs indirectly through office atmosphere. The feeling a customer gets when visiting a business is at least in part due to the image developed through the ambiance therein. There are numerous decorative items throughout Pompa's office that refer to his work as a ministry, quote

Scripture, and/or include Christian symbolism.<sup>62</sup> Amidst the frequent expressions of Christianity throughout American culture, these items might go unnoticed by some, yet they were mentioned by a few of his patients as a reason they felt comfortable in the office and they knew they could trust him. As shown in Chapter 4 regarding Pompa's use of language, he also uses office atmosphere to imply the existence of an inextricable connection between Christianity and wellness. Pompa claims not one patient has ever complained about his overt religiosity though he is sure that "a certain percentage of [Pompa's] patients are non-believers." In addition to the use of these decorations as a form of self-expression and relationship building, they serve to effectively align Pompa Health Solutions with the evangelical brand.

Greeting his patients as they enter the office is a receptionist as well as a framed poem entitled, "The Road of Ministry." Under the title it reads:

As you travel this special road of ministry, may the Spirit of God surround you. Always remember that the Lord has promised to be there, whether you are in a valley or on top of the mountain. His hand will guide and protect you from harm, as long as you stay close to His side. If you should get ahead of him, he will humble you. If you should falter, He will encourage you. His grace will be sufficient for you to carry out the ministry He has anointed you walk in. His blessings will follow you wherever you go.

Pompa said he does see his business as a ministry, for while he recognizes that it is not a church or even an explicitly "Christian" company (i.e. selling Christian products), he sees his role as an ambassador of God's message of wellness to Christians and non-Christians. He claims to be called and inspired to do this "work of the Lord."

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<sup>62</sup> These include common Christian symbols such as a fish, dove, and cross. All of these are frequently associated with evangelical subculture and often represent peace and/or salvation for "believers."

Once past the receptionist, patients can find a decorative abbreviated version of the ubiquitous “Footprints in the Sand” poem amidst his selection of supplements and vitamins for sale. This poem is commonplace in American religious life, and Pompa says that this poem’s Christian message is an “encouragement to me and my patients.” Indeed one man I interviewed said, “I appreciate Dr. Pompa giving God the glory for healing his from chronic fatigue syndrome, and that poem says it all—that God carried him. And I know now that God is carrying me through tough times.”

Another element of Pompa’s office décor is a large banner quoting a series of verses from the Bible. This item hangs on the wall in the waiting room directly adjacent from the office entrance. This item spans almost the entire height of the wall and measures approximately three feet wide. Its style is reminiscent of the famed Franklin Covey posters, which came to adorn the walls of businesses and homes in the 1990s, with its black background and white and blue script. It is the most overt Christian expression in the office aside from Pompa himself including the phrases “honor God with your body,” and “your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.” The overlay is a biblical quote reading, “All my inmost praise his holy name, praise the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heal all your diseases.” Additionally, this item features quotes about the biblical figure Daniel who became a model of eating among some evangelical dieters, many of whom practice the “The Daniel Diet.”

The Daniel Diet (also known as The Daniel Fast in a book of the same name by Susan Gregory) is a popular evangelical fast/diet based on the foods eaten by Daniel during a three week period detailed in Daniel chapter 10. Oddly, Pompa encourages the consumption of meat (as long as it comes from grass-fed animals), while the Daniel diet allows only vegetables, fruit, and water. As a result, Pompa does not advocate the Daniel Diet for his patients, but its

popularity helps demonstrate the interest evangelicals have in connecting their faith and their lifestyles, and how they see the Bible as a guidebook for daily life.

## 5.2 ADAPTING TO CULTURAL CHANGES

Many evangelical churches in the United States now seem like concert venues or sports stadiums rather than traditional religious sanctuaries thanks to their architectural changes over the last thirty years.<sup>63</sup> These stylistic changes are a visual example of the evolution of the evangelical experience. Evangelicals have developed a reputation for their willingness and ability as an organization to quickly address and adapt to evolving cultural preferences. Evangelical leaders address cultural issues from the pulpit in response to the concerns and preferences of their congregants.<sup>64</sup> In doing so, evangelicals have successfully become a group, largely united in beliefs, who adapt their message to relevant political and social issues.<sup>65</sup> This has helped turn this religious group into a powerful brand, and offered its adherents an important niche in American culture.

While the born-again message is still the focal point of evangelicalism, wellness is one example of a new element being integrated into the worldview. Furthermore, the packaging, presentation, and promotion are ever evolving to reflect the tastes of churchgoers and, perhaps more importantly, to the people the leaders want to attract. Like his religious counterparts,

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<sup>63</sup> Megachurch architecture (as an example of Evangelical culture) often utilizes an amphitheatre layout frequently including stadium-style seating and a larger stage/platform, which facilitates more theatrics and performance. Accompanying these changes has been more stylistic alterations including smaller lecterns, advanced sound equipment, and contemporary worship music. From, Anne C. Loveland, Otis B. Wheeler, *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003): 229-257.

<sup>64</sup> *Holy Mavericks*, 19.

<sup>65</sup> *Thy Kingdom Come*.

Pompa adapts to cultural trends and uses them as a platform from which he can market his company. He frequently uses this approach during his appearances on Christian television and in his Nutrition Cafés. He responds to the questions by adapting points from his wellness plan to each issue, and using Bible verses as evidence of their validity. While his core message remains the same (much like the evangelical message of salvation), the framework around it is adapted to appeal to the current tastes and concerns of the audience.

One of the most pressing cultural issues among American parents is autism, with its rate of diagnosis at approximately 3 in every 2,000 children.<sup>66</sup> Many parents who are desperate for answers regarding autism's cause and cure come to Pompa as a last resort in their search. He is often questioned about his treatment plan for this developmental disorder. Concern for this issue is clearly not limited to the evangelical community, but through it we can see that like the effort of evangelicals to adapt to pertinent concerns of the congregation, so too must Pompa structure his message to speak to the needs of his patients. To accomplish this he has taken a strong anti-vaccination stance and informs his audience that some of ingredients in vaccinations are poisonous and compromise their Christian faith.

At the Nutrition Café on February 3, 2009, Pompa and his employee, Warren, showed a video that, while seemingly light-hearted, revealed some of the disturbing ingredients that the unnamed video producers claim to find in vaccines. The video showed a man in a lab coat costume and silly glasses, casually adding different ingredients into a blender. Each ingredient was repulsive and was allegedly an ingredient in vaccines. The message of the video was that one would most likely not want these ingredients injected into their body. After the clip was finished, Pompa said people could “opt out of these toxic vaccinations by using a ‘religious

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<sup>66</sup> Eric London and Ruth A. Etzel, “The Environment as an Etiologic Factor in Autism: A New Direction for Research,” *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 108, Supplement 3, (June 2000): 401.

exemption’ on the grounds that these shots contain aborted fetuses, and a lot of people don’t know that.”<sup>67</sup> They did not state the source of the video or the information, and no one in the group questioned its authority. This video was shown as a means of discouraging the use of vaccines, which Pompa sees as toxic, by using a well-established evangelical anti-choice stance.

This point was reaffirmed in a message sent out from Pompa to his “friends” on Facebook with a link to a website that outlined the ingredients in vaccines.<sup>68</sup> Neither the website nor the video specify which vaccines include these ingredients or how they got their information. The website states, “[Abstention from vaccines] is something you might like to consider if you are against abortion. Also from a health point of view tissue from another human (not just animals) is still foreign and therefore toxic to the body.”<sup>69</sup> By claiming that aborted fetuses are in the vaccines, many evangelicals (who have been largely anti-choice since the 1980s) would presumably be inclined to opt out (and would undoubtedly be outraged).<sup>70</sup>

### 5.3 BODILY CONCERNS

Pompa’s replication of the evangelical message includes his adaption of traditional diet/exercise advice to mimic the language of evangelical leaders. His prescription for weight loss is for his patients to follow his Basic and Healing Diets, and while they are not directly connected to the Bible, he finds overlap by applying his “God food” label to all-natural foods. Pompa claims that

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<sup>67</sup> Nutrition Café, February 10, 2009.

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.vaccination.inoz.com/ingredie.html>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> *Thy Kingdom Come*, 6.

the Bible holds the answers to weight loss and toxicity concerns. He says, “The Bible shows us what we should eat. Just look at the diet of the Israelites. God gave us everything we need to eat: a diet that can help us and heal us.” Like many religious leaders, Pompa sells supplements, vitamins, and (all-natural) energy boosters. The language Pompa uses to market his services are a perfect fit with the existing evangelical interest in the body and healing.

The evangelical association with bodily concerns also plays to Pompa’s advantage in marketing his services. This religious tradition is known for having a focus on healing and weight/body issues among members.<sup>71</sup> Pompa’s services also focus on these issues and because he justifies his wellness philosophy with scripture, evangelicals are naturally drawn to his message and believe that he is trustworthy and qualified. Their efforts to lose weight through prayer appear in books like *Slim for Him* and *Help Lord...the Devil Wants Me Fat*.<sup>72</sup> Many evangelicals come to Pompa for weight loss advice and he offers Bible-based responses to their questions. This overlap of interests makes Pompa the perfect fit for their belief that religion can affect interest in healing and weight control.

It is not clear whether Pompa purposefully set out to mimic religious leaders, and he accounts any similarity to them to the fact that he’s a Christian too. “I am just sharing what I know to be the best way to take care of the human body, and because this is in line with God’s plan it makes sense that so many Christian leaders are interested.” The Christian leaders he is referring to are many including many nationally recognized televangelists. Despite being known more for its Christian (and often controversial) news segments and interviews, “The 700 Club” is now integrating a focus on wellness into the show regularly. “The 700 Club” hosts a weekly segment on weight loss called “Skinny Wednesday” where host Pat Robertson gives advice, sells

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<sup>71</sup> *Born Again Bodies*, 16.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

nutritional supplements, and offers tips on “looking younger.”<sup>73</sup> Additionally, James and Betty Robison, well-known televangelists, are spokespeople for TriVita B12 vitamins and Paula White and her then-husband Randy promoted Omega XL fatty acid pills.<sup>74</sup> “Although there is historical precedent for similar activities, televangelists serving as pitchmen for such products highlights evangelicals’ growing commercial interest in health –related issues.”<sup>75</sup> Pompa says “whole body wellness just makes sense for Christians wanting to live as God wants us to live.” While it is unclear if Pompa is influenced by these leaders, their general success and Pompa’s frequent appearances on Christian television is evidence that evangelicals have an interest in wellness as a part of their religious practice.

Through the evidence of Pompa’s efforts to replicate the message of the evangelical church, we see how the cultural concerns of the evangelical community help provide an ever-changing framework around which Pompa’s message can be structured. While his basic talking points remain constant, Pompa uses the same approach as pastors and televangelists who must keep their message in line with the tastes of those whom they wish to attract. He is taking his secular products and services and adjusting his message to the short-term, societal-driven interests of the evangelical subculture with the foundation of their theological views.

This message is validated by the many churches such as Pompa’s home church, Northway Christian Community, that support him by allowing him to conduct his seminars in their facilities. These seminars, which are conducted periodically throughout the year, are advertised through radio, social networking sites, and word-of-mouth. It is unclear whether the

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<sup>73</sup> [www.cbn.com/700club/features/skinnywed](http://www.cbn.com/700club/features/skinnywed)

<sup>74</sup> *It’s a New Day*, 89.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

host churches actually subscribe to Pompa's wellness plan, but by hosting a seminar there, Pompa gains legitimacy through their implied stamp of approval.

## **6.0 AUDIENCE: WHO POMPA IS TARGETING AND WHY IT'S WORKING**

Chapter 6 describes the audience to whom Pompa's marketing is aimed. Pompa's techniques are geared specifically towards an audience of evangelical Christians who are familiar with his rhetoric and approach, and trust him with their health as a result of their common faith. There are many different types of evangelical Christians, and among them there are a variety of different and even, at times, conflicting beliefs. Pompa's marketing is geared toward a very specific type of "tuned in" evangelical Christian who participates in online social networking, listens to Christian radio, watches Christian television, and perhaps most importantly, considers him/herself to be a part of a religious minority. His audience believes they are on the "outside" of the American majority and believe the mainstream media, academia, and other organizations oppress them. Pompa's message targets and appeals to this presupposition about their status in U.S. culture.

This chapter analyzes how his efforts attract new members and maintain his existing clients and will also discuss the potential for backlash from patients who are uncomfortable with his rhetoric. This chapter explores the tension evangelicals have with government, higher education, and mainstream medicine. Additionally chapter 6 will show how by claiming that he is a member of the evangelical community, he is seen as a fellow "outsider" (of the mainstream) to his audience. This helps build rapport and strengthens his position as an ally to fellow

believers. Finally, this chapter describes how Pompa positions his wellness plan as a supplement to Christian practice.

Pompa balks at labeling his faith with any particular denomination or tradition, and when pushed he says he considers himself “non-denominational” and insists he is “simply a Christian.” Despite his discomfort with labeling his faith, his Christian references clearly resemble the talking points of evangelical leaders, yet they can pass as generally Christian in most instances. By advertising on local Christian radio station, WORD-FM, hosting seminars in churches, and appearing on Cornerstone Television, it is apparent that evangelicals are indeed his target audience, though he welcomes customers of all backgrounds. Pompa’s message and marketing tools work because he exploits their existing preferences, fears, and beliefs. This worldview is developed and promoted by evangelical leaders, which causes this community to be particularly receptive to Pompa’s message.

## **6.1 EVANGELICALS IN THE UNITED STATES**

Evangelicals are now a sizable and influential group in the United States, and while there is documented tension with science and the State dating back to the Scopes Trial of 1925, the rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s highlights a purposeful rejection of what evangelicals see as the decline of morality, rise of feminism, and lack of family values in America.<sup>76</sup> As a powerful voting bloc, they attempt to legislate their religious-based positions on political issues such as abortion, evolution, and homosexuality. Despite they large number of evangelicals in America,

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<sup>76</sup> *Thy Kingdom Come*, x, xv.

they continue to perceive themselves as a minority, and the tension between evangelicals and “mainstream” society continues because the Religious Right propagates the “language of victimization.”<sup>77</sup> These issues are often in conflict with popular culture and science, and as a result evangelicals claim a sense of victimization by the progressive mainstream. Regardless of their great political and cultural influence, evangelicals maintain a belief that they are victims of oppression and/or ridicule from the masses. However, evangelical leaders have used this perceived victimization to increase their strength through organization and cohesion.

The cohesion of evangelical leaders has allowed them to develop a strong group identity. Among the characteristics is a tension with science that is driven by a perceived conflict between their faith and such scientific developments such as evolution. This tension makes it easier to accept assertions such as those made by Pompa that the mainstream medical community does not have your best interest in mind. His claims that vaccinations of all kinds are dangerous and are made with questionable ingredients prey upon the existing fears of the evangelical community towards science and government.

The dissonance between evangelicals and the mainstream serves to strengthen unity within the group by fostering an “us vs. them” mentality. All of the components that contribute to this mentality (e.g. pop culture, media, politics) create the perfect atmosphere for Pompa to market his alternative medical practices. Evangelical leaders successfully created a sense of outsider status from the mainstream within the community, which makes companies within that community more appealing.

Part of the branding of evangelicals included the use of particular language by leaders and their adherents. This rhetoric is replicated by Pompa, and serves to make him a reliable and

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 200.

trustworthy Christian and businessman. Both his illness narrative and his seminars include traditionally religious language such as the terms “blessed,” “miracle,” and “healing.” He also uses terms more specific to the evangelical community such as encouraging his patients to gain “victory” over illness. This usage, while subtle, creates an environment in which evangelicals are comfortable.

Thanks to their largely cohesive worldview, evangelical voting choices, cultural tastes, and societal fears converged to form a full-blown evangelical subculture and consequently a brand. One example of this subculture’s marketing savvy was the film, *The Passion of the Christ*. While conservative Catholic, Mel Gibson, produced this film, it was marketed to and through evangelicals.<sup>78</sup> The marketing campaign of the movie included sending promotional packets to evangelical churches and encouraging these churches to sponsor viewing nights for their congregants.<sup>79</sup> The movie’s success was in no small part due to the mobilization efforts of evangelicals, and this marketing strategy demonstrates the power of the evangelical brand to convince this demographic to participate in activities that are not explicitly religious. It is through this same strategy that Pompa appeals to evangelicals based upon their preexisting worldview.

## **6.2 WHY EVANGELICALS ARE ATTRACTED TO HIS MESSAGE**

Food is featured in biblical stories like the Last Supper, Jesus feeding the multitudes, and even the Garden of Eden. At times sacred (communion), life-saving (manna), and sinful (the fruit in

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<sup>78</sup> *Brands of Faith*, 1-4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

the garden), food is a powerful element in the Christian tradition. By marketing his wellness plan as an evangelical application of faith, Pompa targets this group's relationship with food rules and rituals. By promoting his wellness plan as holding the key to weight loss he makes his services even more desirable to anyone dealing with weight issues, but especially to those who might otherwise be put off by the perceived "New Age" elements of other alternative medical practices. Through Pompa's services, evangelicals can gain what they believe to be the secret to weight loss and other medical issues all while practicing their faith.

Much of Pompa's wellness plan hinges upon skepticism about the way traditional medical practitioners in the U.S. diagnose and treat illness, which appeals to the existing sensibilities of evangelicals. Pompa emphasizes his desire to approach medicine holistically and he argues that this is a common sense approach that is implicit throughout the Bible. He says, "People are looking for a magic bullet that will treat their problems from the outside, and that's what the medical community is trying to offer. What I'm interested in is treating their pain and problems from the inside out." Many of his patients are Christians who are frustrated by the care that they have received from the mainstream and see their poor health as confirmation that God is the missing ingredient from mainstream medicine.

At his seminars, Nutrition Cafés, and during his television appearances, Pompa encourages the use of mainstream medical options only in event of emergencies. He says his wellness approach can be use to treat large and small medical concerns as well as "everyday maintenance." His efforts to "convert" the public away from mainstream medicine resemble those of Christian pastors and laity to bring non-Christians into the fold. It is within this framework that Christianity employs business practices to market their faith, as both business and religious alike attempt to persuade the public to believe in their products.

In order to persuade them, Pompa must first get them in the door, and one of the main reasons the patients I interviewed came to Pompa is a hope that he can help them lose weight. Americans (despite, or perhaps because of, their collective heaviness) have developed an obsession with body image, fitness, and weight, and many evangelicals are among them. For many of Pompa's patients, weight has been an ongoing frustration and they are looking for the "trick" to beat the bulge. Food rituals and fasting have always been a part of religion, and Christianity is no exception. Pompa taps into the biblical elements of food as a way to convince his audience that he has the answer to their weight problem.

A number of his patients (along with many Americans) claim they have "tried everything" without weight loss success. One woman who I saw at nearly every Nutrition Café said:

"I had completely given up hope on the medical system. I was in constant pain due to fibromyalgia, and now that Dr. Pompa is helping me restore my health, I am doing much better. Even though I don't have a lot of money, I am happy to pay for his services because unlike my traditional doctors, Dr. Pompa actually works! Some of my friends think chiropractors are not real doctors, but I'm just happy I feel better. Plus he's a Christian, so I feel comfortable knowing I can trust him."

Many of his patients echoed her frustration with the medical system with one man saying, "Mainstream medicine brought me nothing but more pain. Dr. Pompa really knows what it's like to be in my shoes." This frustration coupled with their suspicion of science (and by extension, medicine) makes Pompa's services appealing. Pompa claims that the Bible contains answers to all life's big and small questions, so by putting their faith in God (through Pompa), they will lose weight. Furthermore, there is a contingent within evangelical Christianity who believes their faith and lifestyle are linked, and utilize nutrition and health as a means for devotion, dedication, and even worship. This group accounts for many of Pompa's patients. As

mentioned earlier, he showcases his patients who have lost weight, and before introducing one of these patients at a seminar, Pompa claimed that it was the patient's use of Pompa's techniques and products and the patient's "faith in God" that facilitated his dramatic weight loss.

Many of the people who attend his forums actively participate in the question-and-answer sessions by inquiring about his products and services and getting general advice for their particular circumstances/symptoms. His contention that "science makes the difference" between him and his unnamed competitors indicates that he believes he is the only one actually relying on legitimate science, and that those in mainstream medicine are mere pretenders. The patients I interviewed all said they trusted Pompa, and one woman said, "He combines his traditional education with The Word [the Bible], which gives me reassurance that he is on the same page as me."

In the Nutrition, no one questioned his credentials, education, or even where he got his "facts." Perhaps due to their frustration with mainstream medical care, most of the Nutrition Café attendees seemed inclined to accept his answers without question as if they were finally hearing the truth. One woman confirmed this by saying, "I knew in my heart that my doctor didn't have my best interest in mind, but with Dr. Pompa I felt he was called by God to show us how to improve our lives from the inside out." Believing that Dr. Pompa is "called by God" gives him immediate credibility and establishes a trusting relationship with his Christian patients.

Pompa's appearances on Cornerstone Television involve either a round-table discussion with other healthcare professionals or a one-on-one interview where Pompa answers topical wellness questions posed by the hosts and viewers. Because the format is explicitly religious, he is predictably more candid about the relationship he sees between Christianity and wellness during these appearances. Notably, Pompa is introduced and referred to as Dr. Dan Pompa

during his television appearances without greater detail about what kind of doctor he is. This omission leaves viewers in the dark about his qualifications and could potentially lead viewers to believe that he is a medical doctor rather than a chiropractor.

### **6.3 PRACTICE THROUGH POMPA: SUPPLEMENTING THE EVANGELICAL MESSAGE**

Pompa also uses the Bible to give advice on dealing with “toxicity,” which he believes can infect anyone and is caused things like mold and dental fillings both of which he considers to be poisonous. He argues that the toxicity in one’s body causes a variety of symptoms and diseases and he looks to the Bible for guidance on the subject. In one television interview, a caller asked how to deal with a severe reaction she has to mold. In response, Pompa offered a passage in the Old Testament book of Leviticus, to define mold in the home as a defilement demanding immediate and drastic measures. He said based on the biblical story we know that the prescription for dealing with severe and incurable cases of mold is to vacate the home permanently. While many would consider this to be excessive and unnecessary, Pompa wholeheartedly believes this is the answer as dictated by God, and therefore recommends this when necessary to his patients.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to his replication of evangelical talking points, Pompa frames his wellness plan as a form of religious practice by stating that we are all called to take care of our bodies. He

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<sup>80</sup> The biblical passage Pompa referenced is found in Leviticus 14:33-50 and states that if a person’s home is infected with mold, “He shall therefore tear down the house, its stones, its timbers, and all the plaster of the house, and he shall take them outside the city to an unclean place.” *New American Standard Bible*, Kindle Edition, (LaHabra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 2008).

argues that our bodies and health are a gift from God and that it is our job to honor that gift with the best possible care. He claims that it is a form of stewardship to encourage total body wellness. Not surprisingly, this care includes all of his plan, products, and services. Pompa uses Christian language to effectively position his company as a means through which Christians can practice their faith and he uses biblical principles to legitimize his wellness plan.

Pompa positions his plan as religious practice by claiming his business is a ministry, which implies his ideas are in line with Christianity. If his role as owner is equivalent to that of a pastor, then the advice he offers would be akin to their Christian guidance. Furthermore, his appearances on Christian television imply that his advice is God-approved and biblically sound. Many of Pompa's patients also stated that they believe God wants them to live as Pompa advocates, and while they fall short of saying to not do so would be a sin, they see their body as part of the offering that they can give in their commitment to Christ.

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

There is a long history of scholarship on marketing *of* religion, but Pompa's example shows that marketing *with* religion is also a contemporary trend in America's evangelical subculture. The language and cultural perspective that was successfully developed by a strong national evangelical organization and network of pastors has created a lively subculture within this powerful and united group. By tapping into this brand to market Pompa Health Solutions, Pompa offers familiarity and commonality with his audience, and persuades them that he is trustworthy. Pompa's marketing techniques show how the existing evangelical brand serves to legitimize and familiarize him to his client base.

While his practice offers basic chiropractic and wellness services, his marketing creates the impression that what he is offering is rare and biblical. When he uses biblical terminology, his patients make a connection from the pulpit to the personal. When he links his own wellness philosophy to the Bible, he earns their trust. The scholarship on the marketing and branding of evangelicalism helps to show that the worldview of its adherents was carefully constructed and strategically communicated, and is integrated into every area of the lives of believers. Pompa helps to show how one person is using this brand to market a non-religious company. His example shows how that brand is no longer being used only to perpetuate itself, but can be utilized by companies who see the potential for marketing to this demographic.

In addition to Pompa's efforts to market to evangelicals, there is also evidence that he employs the same techniques and rhetoric as church leaders to adapt to their needs and cultural trends. I do not believe the similarities between evangelical preachers and Pompa are coincidental, but are the efforts of a savvy businessman to appeal to evangelicals with the traits they associate with their faith. I argue that these marketing strategies are effective because the audience to whom Pompa is speaking is predisposed to be comfortable with his techniques and therefore see his testimony and wellness plan as attractive and legitimate. The brand of evangelicalism has been so effectively developed, that "believers" are drawn to its perceived affiliates even when their products/services are unrelated to the faith. By tapping into the existing evangelical brand, which is developed by pastors and leaders, Pompa creates a sense of familiarity, legitimacy, and ultimately trust, to facilitate the success of Pompa Health Solutions.

While he employs many of the tools of evangelical leaders to market his business, the leaders are also embracing the wellness trend by blurring the lines further between consumerism and business. "An emphasis on healthy living and divine healing was certainly not new in American religious history, but the nexus between the consumer culture and contemporary notions about health was noteworthy in modern evangelicalism."<sup>81</sup> No matter what the topic of the day is on his Cornerstone Television appearances or the concerns brought up by patients at the Nutrition Cafés, Pompa can make the case that his services are valuable to Christians. *Holy Mavericks* argued recently that this ability to shift and accommodate the public's needs is critical to the success of evangelical leader, and Pompa's use of the same technique shows that it is not limited to religious leaders, but can serve to market a secular product through a religious

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<sup>81</sup> *It's a New Day*, 90.

worldview. Furthermore, this technique shows the overlap between secular and religious spheres and their influence on each other.

Besides framing his message with biblical stories and evangelical references, Pompa also uses his audience's perception that they are societal outsiders to attract them. Pompa convinces his audience that he is superior to the other options by reinforcing their belief that mainstream medicine does not have their best interests in mind. By assuring his patients that because he is a fellow believer and shares their worldview, he convinces them that he is trustworthy. Their common faith helps create a sense of trust and unity, which serves to legitimize his practice.

Pompa's example indicates the evangelical brand is being used to create secular profit, and offers great detail on his techniques and their effects; however this is merely the beginning of research opportunity on the techniques of evangelical entrepreneurs. Through this one example, we were able to see specific techniques such as rhetoric, illness narrative, and adaptation of the message that warrant greater attention on a larger scale to determine trends among the group as a whole.

Pompa's use of illness narrative leads to questions about whether this type of conversion narrative is commonly used among religious entrepreneurs as a powerful rhetorical tool. A larger sample of Christian entrepreneurs might show that illness narrative is a common marketing technique among them, which could shed light on the effects of this rhetorical strategy. Additionally, determining the degree to which evangelicals are promoting and participating in alternative wellness therapies could indicate whether their distrust for mainstream medicine is increasing. The findings could implicate the perception of evangelicals about their status as insiders/outsideers in America. Furthermore, research on whether evangelicals are more inclined to patronize establishments they understand to be Christian, and

likewise whether non-evangelicals tend to avoid these businesses, can help show whether this trend will likely grow or stagnate.

Pompa's success implies that evangelicals could be increasingly interested in alternative medicine, less inclined to participate in immunizations, and more isolated from mainstream scientific and medical concepts and procedures. Such developments would have effects on many areas of American life (e.g. medicine, public health, education) and therefore warrant greater research. While Pompa's example might simply be the case of someone who happens to be evangelical, whose religious leanings seeped into his business model, his involvement in a larger group and efforts to spread his methods to other professionals using mass media marketing strategies indicates the possibility of a larger movement. There is a need for scholarship on religious entrepreneurs based on the implications of Pompa and the success of his company.

Future research could also lead to evidence of how this consumer culture among evangelicals effects the evangelical organization. If secular companies are increasing from evangelical niche marketing, questions arise about whether this will in any way have benefits or consequences for the brand of evangelicalism. If this is indeed a trend throughout the country it could potentially result in shifts in the evangelical worldview from outside of the organization itself. While these questions are highly speculative, they are just a few examples of how the evidence skimmed from Pompa and his company can help guide broader research endeavors in the future.

While Dr. Daniel Pompa is a chiropractor, this trend is not limited to a medical field; there are dozens of small-businesses and national companies that advertise on Christian radio, many of which claim in their advertisements that they are members of the Christian community. Whether or not they actually are "believers" is not as important as the fact that they are using the

existing evangelical brand to attract the evangelical subculture. Like Pompa they are attempting to convince the audience that they are indeed doing the “work of the Lord.”

## POSTSCRIPT

Upon completion of my research, Dr. Daniel Pompa was again in the public eye, though this time it was not for a television broadcast or local seminar. He and his wife Merily were brought under investigation for allegedly siphoning money from the trust funds of their two adopted children. The Pompas adopted the children after the children's father killed their mother and himself. The mother was a relative of Merily's. The children were left with a \$1.4 million trust fund.

The Pompas have been charged with "criminal conspiracy, a felony because of the huge amount of money, four counts each of theft by failure to make proper distribution of funds and misappropriation of entrusted funds."<sup>82</sup> The investigation is on-going, and if found guilty in a criminal trial, one of the Pompas could face jail time.

It is impossible to predict how this will affect the business of Pompa Health Solutions, but for many patients (especially those basing their choice of chiropractor on ethical/moral/spiritual preferences), questions of trust, money, and integrity will certainly be raised. Presumably because he bases his marketing approach and wellness plan on his religious beliefs, there is necessarily a higher expectation of financial integrity and general business ethic in the relationship between him and his patients.

When I contacted the Pompa Health Solutions office regarding this matter Pompa stated

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<sup>82</sup> <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10296/1097527-455.stm>

(through his receptionist) that he expects to be vindicated and that he will keep his office open as long as it is bringing in revenue. Regardless of the outcome, such a public fall surely stains his Christian image, and raises questions about his ethical standards. If he were found guilty of stealing money from his own children, it would undoubtedly be difficult to convince the public that his services are legitimate and not motivated solely by money. Pompa did not state whether business has suffered since this story broke, but his office has cut hours as he is no longer living in the Wexford, Pennsylvania area.

Evangelicals have a long history of forgiveness for their leaders who have fallen. From Jim Bakker to Ted Haggard, Christians have experienced heartbreak when their leaders failed them, however the leaders, almost without exception, are only temporarily scorned. Many revive their ministries and return to the good graces of their audience. Whether this forgiveness extends to secular business-owners is yet to be seen.

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