

TV Evangelism

[Joint Pastoral Conference, First Lutheran, La Crosse, Wisconsin, April 28, 1981]

by Neal D. Schroeder

The Salvation Show: Elmer Gantry in the Electronic Age, or Lord How the Money Rolls In!

Lights! Camera! Action! And the show begins, with the cameras sweeping the gaudy and garish magnificence of the United Palace, a \$10,000,000, 5,000-seat recycled cinema in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. They take in the two huge organs, the gardens of potted plants, the stage with its acres of drapery, huge chandeliers, and two scarlet and gold thrones. They pan to the audience, capacity as usual, mostly middle-class (or those attempting to appear such in their furs and pearls and overlarge hats), all by now primed for the *moment*.

The moment arrives in the person of The Right Reverend Father in God, His Divine Eminence, Dr. Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II, known affectionately to his followers as “Rev. Ike,” self-billed as the “Apostle of Green Power,” sent to preach the good news of the good life here on earth. After prancing and parading through the audience in all his glory, pressing the flesh and receiving the adoring strokes of the faithful, he bounds to center-stage in all his glory, and the “service” begins.

There are overdone organ numbers, gospel hymns crooned by a jiving chorus, shouts of praise and amen from the auditorium, but the focal point is always Ike himself, resplendent in diamond stickpin and rings, and in duds that would make Liberace drool—all ruffles and rhinestones and embroidery, in colors to make the NBC peacock appear drab (and casting a cool \$1,000 a week to acquire and maintain.)

Ike’s attire is tame compared to his message, and to the fervor and sincerity with which he delivers it, however often repeated and unvaried in basic content:

“God is the Presence of Infinite Good within you here and now...and this presence is within everyone... You unlearn sickness and learn health. You unlearn poverty and know prosperity... You solve every problem *yourself!*”

“When you kneel down to pray, you’re putting yourself in a good position to get a kick in the behind!”

“Enough of that talk of the sweet bye-and-bye and pie in the sky! I want my pie *now*, with ice cream on top!”

“I like money. I need money. I want money. I love money in its right place. The *lack* of money is the root of all evil! Money is good! I bless the idea of money in my mind...” And to make sure that much of the money winds up in the right place, that Ike at least will not be cursed with the evil lack of money, there is the altar call—not to stirred-up sinners, but to would-be winners, to those with faith in Ike and his vision of God and his Blessing Plan. “Give, and God will give to you! The more you give, the more you get!” First those with enough faith to give a hundred dollars are urged to come forward, then those with seventy-five, fifty, and so on down. All the way to those with a faith so small, a purse so meager as five dollars, or even one. Forward they come, as Ike prays his version off, the prayer of Abraham, fleecing sheep, goats, and all stages in-between. The hallelujahs echo off the ornate ceiling as Ike chants “Hold those bills high! I want everyone to *see* your faith! I want to hear the rustle, not the jingle!” And the

army of ushers in front of the stage gather the offerings of the multitudes who are not faithless, but believing, into white plastic buckets—an incongruous, but very pragmatic substitute for the expected, but far too small, offering baskets or plates.

So it goes, week after golden week, broadcast to a much larger (1-2 million) congregation by the marvels of radio and TV. There are prayers a-plenty, music galore, a healing now and then by way of special theatrics, but the message remains money, and it loses nothing by transmission over the airwaves. The larger audience (this time integrated both racially and economically) takes it and Ike to heart. Those not fortunate enough to be there in person enroll in the Blessing Plan by mail—\$100 minimum, please, payable in monthly or bi-weekly installments. Renewable at the same or higher level, of course. And there are the special bonus buys, like the Ike-blessed Prayer Cloth—so wonderful that a single thread of one of these bargains, falling by chance across the newly-slit throat of one of New York’s recent crime victims, brought instant and total healing! Or the plastic “money rake,” to symbolically and magically rake prosperity in (which is just around the corner, you know.)

For Ike, prosperity is not around the corner, but *now*, as proven by three Rolls-Royces, two Mercedes, a Bentley, and all that goes well with them. Not bad at all for a mixed-blood Dutch-Indonesian who preached standard fundamentalism in standard poverty and obscurity for years, until making his own miracle happen in 1965...

The scene shifts. This time, no klieg lights, microphone booms, or television cameras, but *action* enough, all the same. We’re in a WELS parsonage in SE Michigan a couple years back. The young pastor (who will, by convention, remain nameless even though all of you can figure out who he is) and his wife await important and mysterious visitors. Finally they arrive, master and yes-man cum apprentice, in a 32’ Winnebago with all the options. (The pastor, you see, had as a lark filled out a questionnaire thrust into his palm at a local shopping center, indicating that for the right rewards he might be tempted into a switch of careers. A phone call followed within the week, the auspicious meeting was arranged, and the rest is history—or hilarious, depending on your viewpoint.)

Back to the scene: The two harbingers of the better life move in, attendant with books and charts, graphs and blackboard. They radiate *prosperity* and *happiness*, from blown-dry pompadors and stamped-on smiles, to nicely tailored three-piece doubleknits (a tasteful beige), showy rings and watches, and regulation white patent-leather bucks. What follows is no less than 21/2 hours of soft-sell, hard-sell, desperate-not-to-leave-with-mission-unaccomplished anything-goes sell. All with intricate diagrams, flip charts, promotional pitches and strings of leading questions which *everyone* has to answer in the affirmative. (My wife, as some of you might guess, managed quite a few negatives—but she never did have a sense of either humor or fair play.) The ongoing theme, without the blatant “theological tie-ins of Rev. Ike, was the same: *money*. “How wonderful it is. How much *I* now enjoy it. How wonderful life could be if *you* had more of it! Wouldn’t you *like* more of it? What dollar sign, what price tag is attached to your dreams? Wouldn’t you like to see all of those dreams start to become a reality, *now*?”

After less than an hour, I began to tire of the pitch and the game, and Marilyn was becoming more than slightly inhospitable to our would-be benefactors. From then on, I attempted every ten minutes or so to find out whom they represented, what they wanted of us, what the bottom line was that they expected us to sign. Only on seeing that they were getting no place at all as benefactors anonymous did they reveal that they represented *Amway International* of Ada, Michigan, and that we appeared ideal candidates for joining the happy thousands in the soap firm’s pyramid of salesman/distributors. Even though it *was* the fastest-growing sales

organization in the USA at the time (fact, though not looked on with favor by the federal government and forced to change some of its tactics by court order), even though its founders were model capitalist-entrepreneurs and great Americans who stood not only for prosperity for all, but for God, motherhood, the family, the flag, *et at*, we managed to let the opportunity of a lifetime slip right through our ungrateful fingers. And the Winnebago, now carrying two perspiring and dejected supersalesmen, whooshed off to greener pastures or more gullible pastors. (Marilyn did, however, talk them into selling her one of their portable blackboards with telescoping tripod—at about half the market price.)

By now, you may be wondering what all this has to do with the assigned topic “Television Evangelism.” (Or why it had to be assigned to me, as I too have not ceased wondering.) Perhaps very little. Perhaps very much. It’s not just that I failed to learn the basics of good composition—that a good writer always throws out the first few paragraphs or pages he writes on any given subject. To me, both Rev. Ike and *Amway* are extremely relevant, since as Australian Peter Smark commented on surveying the current American evangelical scene, “Homogenized Christianity is being marketed like soap, and the people are buying it in extraordinary numbers.”

Certainly, none would question why the topic itself was chosen. TV evangelism is big business, growing exponentially, and its explosive growth has just about everyone running scared, from Better Business Bureaus to politicians, to theologians ranging from liberals like John Neuhaus and the National Council of Churches to the lunatic-fringe Jehovah’s Witnesses. Even the *Northwestern Lutheran* has issued several timely warnings, instead of waiting till 1990 or 2000. From whatever corner, the criticism runs remarkably similar: “Bad theology! Indulgences over the air! Denial of salvation by grace! Thin gruel in place of the meat of the Gospel! Simplistic solutions to complex issues! Mind control! At times, utter sham and outright fraud!” On at least this one issue, you’d very likely find Carleton Toppe and Martin Scharlemann willing, albeit strange, bedfellows.

The topic is also a good choice because it touches each of us in our own ministry. If it hasn’t yet done so, perhaps you just haven’t noticed. In Michigan it has been a problem that I met face too face all too often. Whether it was the shut-in or the church-shy or the hard-core delinquent who clung to his place on the rolls despite complete absence from the pew, the story was all too often the same: “But I worship at home.” With Oral, or Rex, or Schuller, or Graham, or whatever. Each time I winced, not only from the questionable theology purveyed by the current favorite, but because of the realization that armchair Christianity had won another convert, that one more poor soul expected to be admired for making his faith a spectator sport (as all too many in pastoral ranks feel watching one sports event after another on the tube somehow renders them athletes and immune to exercise or sport of any sort as participants.)

Perhaps even *Milwaukee* is afraid, though not at all sure what to do—alternately sending out dire notices of repeated, horrible budget deficits and promotional material for the new Mass Media Ministry and hints of a much-needed new synod headquarters building and publishing house. (Lutheran High Schools and niggardly stewardship may not be the only villains on the stewardship scene.) Certainly the numbers involved, both in people and dollars, are enough to bring a chill of fear, or thrill of, secret envy, to the soul of even the most seasoned synodical bureaucrat. Any statistics published by LCUSA or trumpeted in press releases from the Big Three of American Lutheranism pale by comparison.

From its tiny beginnings with a 15-minute religious radio broadcast over KOKA (Pittsburgh) in 1921, religious programming over the airwaves has mushroomed beyond all

expectations—especially given the fact that our nation is becoming each year less “under God.” There are currently 50 television stations and 1,300 radio stations devoted exclusively to religious programming. Hundreds of “ministries” and religious specials vie for air time (at going rates) on countless commercial channels and cable networks. New religious radio stations are born at the rate of one per week, new exclusively religious TV channels at one a month. Just four years ago, estimates were that over a half-billion dollars was spent on religious programming a year in our country alone. Since then, the major dozen TV/radio ministries have been taking in that and more in contributions (\$600,000,000 last year.) The following are the approximate latest figures for the leading eight—all from two years back, except those for Rex Humbard, which date to 1977:

Armstrongs/Worldwide Church of God:	\$75 million
Oral Roberts Evangelistic Association:	60 million
Pat Robertson/700 Club/CBN:	58 million
Jim Bakker/PTL Club:	50 million
Jerry Falwell/Old Time Gospel Hour:	46 million**
Billy Graham Evangelistic Association:	40 million
Rex Humbard/Cathedral of Tomorrow:	15 million
Robert Schuller/Garden Grove Community Church:	12 million

**Figures are approximate for all because most of these organizations and their heads are understandably reluctant to release the information to interviewers, though compelled to do so in reports to various agencies of state and federal governments. By the time of this writing, not only may the totals for each be much higher (most grow by 25%+ compounded annually), but ranking may be radically altered. Case in point is that of Jerry Falwell, propelled by the successes of both his Moral Majority and personal climbing on the Reagan bandwagon (or providing much of its motive force, depending on whom you believe and read), declared late last year that he was “neck and neck” with Oral Roberts, and projected offerings, for 1981 of over \$70 million

Such large sums, because of their very size, easily become meaningless. Don’t ask me why, but it works that way, as attested to by the ease with which people like economists and government planners throw millions, or even billions, around. To put the above figures in perspective, get out your must reading for this month, the 1980 WELS Statistical Yearbook. In it, you will find that the total contributed for synod work in 1980 was \$12 million; total contributions of the 1,146 congregations for all purposes were “only” \$77 million. As it is possible to do almost anything with statistics, the correlation with the top and bottom figures on the table is more curious than uncanny. But the comparison does remind us how comparatively lucrative the TV evangelism business is, how right those who claim that many one-man TV ministries take in more each year than many a denomination in the USA.

And remember, the figures are for only the most glittering and visible tip of the electronic evangelical iceberg. For every Oral Roberts, there are a half-hundred more faith-healers; in every market, there is more than one second-rate, third-rate, or tenth-rate Billy Graham. And each of them has his loyal regional audience, who tune him in and bankroll his ministry, whatever the theology or morality of their chosen televangelist. (Leroy Jenkins, now serving a 12-year term in the South Carolina State Prison, took in a tidy \$3 million a year merely by airing the re-runs of his “Revival of America” program. Evangelist James Whitby of Oklahoma—whom we have to thank for the conversion of Anita Bryant back in her high school cheerleader days—was convicted in 1978 of swindling an 83-year-old woman out of \$25 thousand, and indicted

subsequent to his incarceration for selling \$4 million in Worthless “Gospel outreach” bonds.) Marjoe Gortner, infamous on the sawdust trail for his 1972 documentary-expose of tent-style evangelism (the movie *Marjoe*), switched careers to become a TV actor. His brother evangelists, who are Legion, have also apparently found their salvation in TV, but with no change of career—or, change of role, depending on your view of them.

It’s hard to grapple with and grab onto a topic like “TV Evangelism” (yes, Virginia, I’m afraid we’ve still not left the introductory part of the paper.) To deal with it adequately would require a book or books; even if one attempted it, by the time it was finished it would be horribly out of date. TV evangelism is a hydra monste- which grows heads and mouths faster than those now preaching can be identified, much less analyzed—a quicksilver topic which is in a constant state of flux. Yet you, via the blind Parcae on the assignment committee, have asked me to do my best with the theme.

It would seem to me that the only workable methodology is to examine representative sample—and what better sampling than those on the earlier list of leaders, since information on them is readily available through many magazine articles, and even a few books? (We will omit the Armstrongs for purposes of discussion, not because they are not significant, but because they are outside the pale by anyone’s definition of Christianity but their own.) And since you’ve already gathered that this is not to be the standard conference or research paper, I take the liberty of omitting the customary footnotes—I’ll be happy to relocate any citation you may need. With no further delay, then, a somewhat jaundiced look at “TV Evangelism” (hence the yellow paper, not merely because Grace had it on hand):

“God will allow millions to pass through my hands for the work of God, if none of it sticks to my hands.”—D.W. Moody

“To be a successful evangelist, you have to be a good actor.”—Marjoe Gortner

Billy Graham

Born to pious rural Presbyterian parents near Charlotte, N.C., in 1918, William Franklin Graham spent a typical gangling country bumpkin youth milking the cows and doing the chores. When Billy was 15, his father’s pasture became the site of a revival led by one Mordecai Fowler Ham. When Billy and sidekick Grady Wilson answered the altar call, his parents jumped for joy. Despite answering that appeal, Billy’s other interest (girls and sports) far out-weighed any he had for matters religious. As he finished high school, he felt other callings, but not that into the ministry (which young Billy lumped with the job of mortician, vowing never to become either.) The summer before his senior year, Billy tried selling Fuller brushes, overcame native shyness, and became the best in the state; the summer after, he played semi-pro baseball in Charlotte.

Billy intended to go to the university, but on his mother’s insistence went instead to Bob Jones College (now University), then in Cleveland, Tennessee. The atmosphere of this “evangelical boot camp” proved too stifling, and Billy transferred to Florida Bible Institute, located in a converted country club in rural Tampa. There he became a Baptist and spent three years in scripture study sandwiched between many hours of dishwashing, bellhopping and caddying, since a major part of the operation of the school was running its own resort hotel. Then it was off to Wheaton, Illinois, where Billy spent 3 1/2 more years (virtually no credits had transferred), met and married wife Ruth, and graduated in 1943.

Billy became an evangelist, active chiefly in the new Youth for Christ movement, and then made the rounds on revival circuit with no more success than many others until 1949, the

year of the Los Angeles Revival, turning point of his career. The tent meetings and local reaction was nothing out of the ordinary until three notable “decisions” in quick succession: first a popular Los Angeles celebrity, radio cowpoke/singer Stuart Hamblen; then gangster Jim Vaus; then ‘36 Olympics winner and WWII war hero Louis Zamperine. Crowds swelled, the revival was extended week after week, and conversions multiplied. All this caught the eye of William Randolph Hearst, who sought a suitable spokesman for the fight against godless communism. Extensive coverage by the Hearst media brought Billy national fame, and his name became a household word almost literally overnight. Billy attracted other influential men, among them Henry Luce of *Time* and *Life* and powerful oilman Sid Richardson of Texas. The one accorded his every move lavish publicity, the other introduced him to national politics and politicians. On Richardson’s suggestion, Billy urged a seemingly reluctant Eisenhower, both by letter and personal visit to his European headquarters, to run for president. Eisenhower listened, was impressed by Billy, and Graham became unofficial preacher to the presidents of the USA, and has remained so ever since, although less so under both Kennedy and Carter.

Billy heads the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, an extensive non-profit empire run from a large but unornate headquarters in Minneapolis. His “Hour of Decision” programs are aired over a network of above 1,000 stations each week; his magazine *Decision* mails out over 5,000,000 copies of each issue; his televised crusades are broadcast both from and to the world. One subsidiary, World Wide Pictures, has produced numerous films, some of them first-rate in just about every respect (*The Hiding Place*, *Joni*.) Another, the World Evangelism and Christian Education Fund, aids evangelical causes around the globe. Graham himself makes his home in Montreat, North Carolina, where he enjoys a 200-acre mountaintop estate.

Even though he is no longer the top box office draw in TV evangelism, any discussion of the subject must begin with him, not only because he was one of the first, but because he remains one of the best when compared to his peers. Despite several minor setbacks, America reveres him as “the greatest evangelist since the Apostle Paul,” or, as John Connally styled him, “the conscience of America.”

Whatever the faults of his theology, Billy can preach. Billy can be faulted for his lack of depth, some of which can be laid to his background, and some of which to his high-powered, fast-paced ministry. Billy himself now sees that, and regrets it: “I’ve spent too much time giving speeches, travelling the world. I probably could have better spent the time studying, thinking, praying.” But *some* of that lack of depth may be assumed rather than real. Billy’s whole career, especially after TV coverage, has been a flight from fundamentalism. (Bob Jones’s, both Sr. and Jr., saw this: Senior told Billy after he left Bob Jones college that he would “always be a misfit.” Jr. let Billy know that neither he nor anyone to represent him would be welcome at Bob, Sr.’s funeral.) Already back in the beginning, he was very reluctant to assume the presidency of the Northwestern school in Minneapolis, because it was famed for its extreme fundamental stance. Over the years, Billy has sought a wider and wider audience and to get it has embraced a more and more diverse, more liberal “congregation.” He carefully sought to include everyone, from Oral Roberts to the Archbishop of Canterbury. At one point—although I confess I am relying totally on memory for this and lack proper documentation—Graham had liberalized sufficiently to announce that salvation in Christ was possible even for those who never hear the Gospel, and then beat a hasty retreat after the howls of protest with the lame but standard explanation that he had been both misunderstood and misquoted.

A second charge that can be made against Graham is that he has been too much influenced by, or even created by, powerful men, both in the media and in politics. Explaining any

misgivings he may have had on that account, Billy explains that he saw it as “God opening doors which otherwise would not be opened to him.” After a notable failure to impress Harry Truman, Billy has been the confidante/spiritual advisor/dupe of Presidents from Eisenhower on down to Reagan. Each time, carefully staying “out of politics,” Graham endorses his new friend in power as a “sincere Christian” or some such, a great leader who will surely lead the country back to God. That includes Johnson, who made use of Billy as a “backdrop of piety to offset his normal blasphemy,” and later boasted: “Whenever I was being called a crook and a thug and all, (after inviting Billy for a weekend) we bragged on each other. I told him he was the greatest religious leader in the world, and he said I was the greatest political leader.” When they weren’t bolstering one another’s egos, Johnson delighted in revealing inside international gossip and state secrets to Billy, and Graham drank both in. It also includes Nixon, even more than all the others. Billy endorsed Nixon from the McCarthy era, through the debates with Kennedy, all the way through Watergate. Only after Nixon’s star was clearly fallen forever did Billy read the transcripts of the Watergate tapes, and then became “physically, retchingly sick.” And even then, his final analysis is really an excuse for Nixon (and his own symbiotic relationship with him), as Billy sees the events only as the decline of a true believer who opened the way to demonic possession by over-dependence on sleeping pills.

Attendant with his rise to prominence in political circles, the “nation’s conscience” began increasingly to shift with the wind, each time endorsing current policy and the status quo. He shifted on hippies, Vietnam, even communism, proclaiming both the freedom of the Gospel and the wonderful state of society in Hungary after his first crusade behind the iron curtain. Billy made it a rule to avoid anything controversial, especially issues dividing the nation. He continues to steer clear of abortion and any political solution (even though supposedly personally opposed to it) with the lame excuse that, “If we start fooling around with the Constitution, we’re going to have problems.” The same with ERA and homosexuality: “I want to preach to homosexuals and women’s libbers without having them feel I’m already prejudiced against them.” Even his most egregious abandonment of his avowed policy to avoid divisive issues, the hasty organization and implementation of a series of pro-integration crusades in the deep South just weeks after King’s march in Selma, might be viewed, however courageous, more as making the most of the opportunity to gain attention and headlines after the comparative quiet of the Kennedy years, rather than the result of conviction that truth must be preached for its own sake. For most of his ministry, Billy has been less meaningful conscience to the nation, more the voice of America extolling the American way of life and closely equating it with the kingdom of God on earth. (He once prayed, “God bless America, and God bless the Holiday Inns!”) Billy now sees this, admits it, and says he regrets it.

Whatever his maneuvering in his rise to power, however both his message and ministry have been watered down to suit the need, few doubt his personal integrity or that of his organization. And both of these are open to question. Graham now endorses full financial disclosure by all religious organizations, especially those involved with TV evangelism. Yet for years just such information requested by the state of Minnesota, was not forthcoming. The envelopes kept coming back from Minneapolis headquarters “*Addressee Unknown.*” A partial explanation may be the creation in 1970 of the little-publicized World Evangelism and Education Fund. Ostensibly begun the better to aid world-wide evangelistic projects, it had grown to \$22.9 million before its existence became generally known in 1976. The continuing refusal of Billy or his association to reveal how much of the general revenues are channeled into it each year has not soothed the critics one bit. Nor has the announcement that \$15.5 million of those funds are

earmarked for the creation of a Billy Graham Graduate School of Theology and Billy Graham Ministry Museum on the Wheaton campus. Even Billy's own comparatively modest \$30,000 salary is held to be misleading, since revenues and royalties from his many books are channeled into a trust fund for the exclusive use of his family and heirs.

The final, and most serious, charge that can be made against Billy and his entire organization is that many of the statistics regarding his many crusades are meaningless, or even rigged. A Baptist supporter, a systems analyst, examining data from the 1976 Seattle Crusade, found that over half of those who heard the altar call were merely renewed commitments by those who were already members of churches. Of the rest, only 15% *ever* became members of any church. (Billy explained that it is better to "see the cup of faith as 15% full, rather than 85% empty," and challenged all comers to match him.) Far too many among the "converts" are like the British woman who attended a crusade contrary to advice from her husband, who became caught up in the excitement of the moment and was swayed by Billy's salesmanship, and later wondered what had come over her. Perhaps this explains the findings of the *Christian Century* after the 1971 Oakland Crusade, that fully one-third of the names and addresses given the counselors in sessions after the altar call were false. And possibly, the real explanation is even more sinister: Four researchers from the Arizona State University, attempting to cover the 1974 Phoenix Crusade and denied any interviews, infiltrated the event, posing both as area clergy in the pre-crusade strategy sessions and as converts during the event itself. They reported that many in the crowd were "ringers," planted in the audience with instructions to come forward in a seemingly spontaneous tide of souls which was really a staged and well-timed parade, complete with secret hand signals and instructions to flank the pigeons who went on their own, in order to keep them from backing out. Most disturbing of all is the revelation that the "conversion" of mobster Mickey Cohen during Billy's first New York Crusade was a paid-for performance. When Cohen himself asked to be "saved," Graham piously and incongruously replied, "You can't put a price on salvation." Possibly, all along, even though many admittedly have come to know the Savior by his preaching, Billy has been doing just that.

Oral Roberts

Granville Oral Roberts, born to Indian/white parents in tiny Ada, Oklahoma, back in 1918, had no use at all for religion as forced on him by his strict parents. He left home at 16, taking refuge in the home of a judge in a nearby town, where he dreamed of a career in law and politics and the governorship of the state. As he tells it, Oral was caught up in his studies and sports until he fell to the floor in a basketball game coughing up blood and unable to breathe. The diagnosis was tuberculosis, the prognosis poor. In an act of desperation Oral's brother hauled him to a nearby revival hosted by a small-time faith healer. Oral was miraculously cured and instructed by God, "I have chosen you to take the message of my healing power to your generation."

Oral became an evangelist, spending 11 years at his obscure calling, all in a non-healing ministry. In an attempt to better himself, he took up residence in Enid, Oklahoma, where he signed up for classes at a local Disciples of Christ school. On the side, he assumed the pastorate of a local Pentecostal Holiness Church, where the salary was so low and conditions so grim (he and his family had to live with one of the members) that his wife threatened to leave him.

Conveniently, when all was blackest and bleakest, Oral and one of his deacons happened on the scene just after another deacon, Clyde Lawson, had dropped a heavy motor on his foot

one day in 1947, crushing it. Oral looked to heaven, touched the shoe with his divinely-energized right hand, and the instant total healing inaugurated his ministry as a healer.

Oral moved to Tulsa, invited by a local evangelist to do his stuff in a local revival tent. Asking God for an audience 1,000, continued power to heal, and offerings to more than meet expenses, Oral received all three. He also received national fame, by the fortunate act of a deranged man who fired a revolver into the tent from across the street (hitting no-one.) With his new-found notoriety and the backing of Tulsa creditors made possible thereby, Oral bought a 10,000-seat revival tent of his own, christening it the "Canvas Cathedral." With such an imposing vehicle and the newly-hired talents of Tulsa public relations man L.E. "Pete" White, the work took off. Already in 1947 Oral had been on radio; by 1954 he was on television. All through the '50's, Oral's organization, incorporated as "Healing Waters" in 1951, grew in prominence and financial clout, far out-distancing that of the many other faith-healers of the era. When the TV critic of the New York *Times* attacked all paid religious TV programs in general and Oral's in particular, Roberts orchestrated 1,500 letters of protest to the paper in a matter of days. The Canvas Cathedral continued to draw capacity crowds as it toured the country, even after a believer in Detroit, touched by his wonder hand in 1959, threw away her insulin and died within days. This event touched off blistering attacks on the Roberts brand of Christianity by major denominations, most notably the Presbyterians and the United Lutheran Church. But even thus labeled and explained as "religious quackery," it flourished. So well that in 1960 Oral felt it prudent to give up the practice of accepting all "love offerings" to his personal purse and went on salary.

When the country moved from the innocence of the '50's to the protest decade of the '60's, Oral had a vision from God to found a university, and lost no time purchasing a large tract of land in Tulsa and filling it with modern buildings and students eager for both a highly structured campus life and proximity to Roberts himself. It has since blossomed into a \$100 million campus with several thousand students and the most modern communications equipment obtainable. After its dedication and Oral's investiture as president (both blessed by an attending Billy Graham), he left TV for two years. In the interim, he was ordained into the ministerial ranks of the United Methodist Church, alienating many of his Pentecostal followers and temporarily suffering a drastic drop in revenues. No problem. When Oral returned to TV in 1969, he still billed himself a healer sent by God, but this time to aid in healing "the emotions, the intellect, and financial situations." The emphasis on campus was shifted from prayer power alone to include modern medicine; Oral founded his own medical school and had his pick of applicants, both faculty and students. Following that success of the early '70's, Oral had yet another vision and call from God, this time to begin construction of the "City of Faith," a \$150 million medical complex on the campus which was to combine the best of prayer and medical science and offer it to the world. There were problems in raising the funds, and even more in getting government approval. (Tulsa hospitals were at 60% occupancy, and the federal government denied the required certificate of need.) But Oral and associates rose above it all, thanks largely to his huge TV audience and thousands of prayer partners who were hit for frequent contributions and used to sway the bureaucracy.

Today, having gotten approval for the "City of Faith," is completing construction of its first stage at the height of his success. His TV program, "Oral Roberts Presents," has been transformed into a slick variety show offering both entertainment and "free" booklets, and is currently the most widely syndicated TV show in the world of any type. Its quarterly specials air

to over 50 million viewers, and by it 25 million booklets are sent out each year, printed in 115 languages. Its periodical, *Abundant Life*, enjoys similar success.

No matter at which point you take him in his protean career, Oral Roberts makes Billy Graham look like a genuine saint. What is good in Bill is entirely absent in Oral; what is quietly suspect in Graham is patently false in Robert's. If Billy has profited by the Gospel, for Oral the gospel *is* profit. If several things are questionable in Billy Graham and the BGEA, everything is questionable about Oral Roberts and his organization and activities. So much, so that it hardly pays to treat each of the abuses either individually or in great detail. But it is, worthwhile to examine in summary the charges that can well be made against Roberts.

First there is the matter of the faith-healing, since it catapulted Oral to fame and keeps him in the hearts of most of his followers. Oral's own cure from tuberculosis may or may not have happened, since there is no proof, other than from his own testimony, that Roberts ever had TB. The same is true of the foot healing 11 years later, which again we are to accept as having happened merely because Oral and his closest co-workers say it did. As for the many other claimed cures, *none* has ever been diagnosed as an organic illness before the fact—at least none that was permanently cured. Cures there have been, some of them temporary (those who leave their wheelchairs for the camera were able to leave them earlier to use the bathroom, when the need arose), others lasting, but from ills of purely psychosomatic origin. And those who come forward are first screened to remove chances of embarrassment. Those that slip through the screening process are either told they have insufficient faith, or that Oral will get back to them later—which he conveniently doesn't. On one particularly pitiful campaign, this time to the Navajo living near Window Rock, Arizona (1959), Oral laid hands on most of a line of woe-begone Indians who stretched in a line 2,000 long around an athletic field. It was a matter of quickly moving from one to the next, and each poor suffering Indian was left with nothing better than a sad look of amazement on his face—all but the last 250 or so, whose faces probably also registered anger, since Oral left off right in the middle of it all to catch his plane back to civilization. (It wasn't those Indians who named Oral "Indian of the Year" in 1963.)

You'd also question the ego of a man who names almost everything connected with his work after himself, most of whose writings are unashamedly autobiographical. You question his effrontery in assuming the presidency of a university (even if self-created) with no higher learning whatsoever to his own credit. You wonder about the overdone atmosphere of the ORU campus itself, with its 200-ft. prayer tower and acres of million-dollar buildings (prompting some to style it "Six Flags Over Jesus") for a few thousand students who are willing to march to the Roberts drum, at least publicly. You can't figure out why the newly-established ORU basketball team had to achieve national prominence in a year or two, even if that took offers of \$21/2 million in ten years to one ranking coach, and coercion to keep the stars once recruited, even if keeping such athletes on campus meant allowing a tacit cover-up of their sins both against the rules of Roberts and the law of God, and ensuring that such a code of silence would work by erection of a special athletic dormitory.

Oral Roberts' personal integrity is much more questionable than his ego. Not only has he frequently resorted to "visions" and direct commands from God no less than 21 times (by Roberts' own count) to show the way out of career slumps and financial crises; Roberts has periodically updated and revised his autobiographical details to render them more fitting to his current desired image and ends. (For example, in all the early versions, Oral was cured of TB completely, immediately. When the "City of Faith" was given to him by vision, the next version stated that his healing began that day, and was completed only after a year.) The language, the

quotations (even the commands of God), the very titles have been improved to transform Oral from a hillbilly healer to the quintessence of the modern educator/intellectual. Oral makes much, even in his current programs, of how much the letters of his listeners mean to him. He desires them and promises to read them, pray over them, and respond to them. What Oral himself actually lays hands on, though, is only a stack of computer printout pages listing names and problem neatly sorted out by category. If he prays at all, the prayers are very general. The replies, cleverly spliced together by computer from Oral-approved paragraphs on any given problem or variation thereof, are sent out over a facsimile signature which appears written by Oral's own pen. (Simply signing the 20,000+ replies that go out each day would keep him more than busy.)

Much is also amiss with the television program and specials. In the early days, Oral implied that the listener/viewer could receive his healing power over the airwaves by touching the radio or TV. He's more subtle now, especially since he's switched away from miraculous physical healings. Now the audience is invited to the benefits he offers in books and pamphlets, all offered free, but guaranteeing a place on the hard-sell mailing list. (For the more gullible, there is Oral's version of the Rev. Ike prayer cloth, this time with a print of Oral's right hand, accompanied with the note that it will be much more beneficial for any ills if the recipient sends in \$38 by return mail to pay for a square foot of the City of Faith.) The shows themselves are highly skilled affairs, with expert editing—have to be to remove Oral's occasional stuttering, since one of the latest autobiographies claims that as a cure which he received with his conquest in God over tuberculosis.

Roberts, though at the same official salary as Graham, is deriving far more by way of material benefits from it. At the same time, he is both far more reluctant to let it be known just how he manages to live as well as he does (even resorting to attempted bribery, intimidation, and physical force by proxy to stop an unfavorable book by one of his underlings, Jerry Sholes, who dared to leave the association and tell all) and eager to be as conspicuously successful as possible. Not only vicariously, by presiding over his glittering Disneyland campus, but personally—with 1,000 dollar Brioni suits, homes and expensive country, club memberships both in Tulsa and in Palm Springs and a personal fanjet to shuttle back and forth, and even Ike-like diamond rings and golden jewelry (which, since none dare tell him might appear a bit much to potential givers, are carefully airbrushed out of the promotional literature.)

And the gifts, continue to pour in, as Oral reworks and reissues his own style of Blessing Plan, "Seed-faith." Give out of your need, give looking to a blessing from God in the future, and you surely will be blessed. After all, a tithe of past benefits is really only an act of little faith—and Oral reaches out to the millions who swallow his definition of great faith.

Rex Humbard

The third of the TV evangelists who broke into the medium early and have remained powerful and popular thereby is Rex Humbard, an Arkansas native also born (as nearly as I can figure it) in 1918. He joined his father in calling sinners to repentance as they toured the revival circuit with their Gospel Big Top. In Akron shortly after 1950, Rex saw a crowd before a department store window, in which was a television. He immediately got the idea of a television ministry, to be headquartered in Akron. When he told his father his idea, dad pushed on and Rex remained, with a wife and two children and \$65 in his pocket.

Since it had been his duty in their travels to contact radio stations en route and thereby promote the revival, Rex was an accomplished singer and guitarist. Displaying his talents, he

gained for himself three time slots for a radio Gospel program—one at the unenviable time of 12:30 a.m. He gathered a following, converted a theatre to Calvary Temple, and within a year way filling its 1,200 seats five times a Sunday and reaching many more by TV via six channels.

By 1958 the Temple was replaced with the Cathedral of Tomorrow, a 5,000 seat evangelistic, amphitheater costing \$3.5 million and located in nearby Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. From the first days on, services there, as at the former Temple, were by-the-book fundamentalist/revivalist in content, but with heavy emphasis on a great variety of musical numbers. They remain the same today, earning Rex the not necessarily too flattering sobriquet, “the Lawrence Welk” of religious programming. As has been his dream for years, Humbard hopes to reach the entire world with the Gospel via television before 1983, and he well do just that.

In many ways, Rex Humbard comes across as a hybrid between the latest version of Oral Roberts and the early Billy Graham. Like Billy, he stresses Scripture; like Oral of today, he makes excellent use of the magic of TV. Like Billy, he is integrity personified; like Oral, he enjoys very much of the good life, expensive homes, personal turboprop jet, the works. Like Billy, Rex apparently means every word he says; like Oral, he resorts to computer-sorted stacks of names and problems, though more for his personal feeling that he has at least prayed for all those who send in prayer requests than for a Roberts-like pretense of really reading and praying over each one of the letters listeners and viewers send in.

More than either Billy or Oral, Rex is living proof of the power of a solid TV following to carry through even the worst crises. The Cathedral of Tomorrow was built largely from borrowed funds (quite a large chunk, oddly enough, from the Teamsters’ Pension Fund), and no sooner would one mortgage be paid off than Rex would look for another, always overextending himself. By the mid-sixties, he had borrowed again from the Teamsters and others, this time even more extensively. Everything appeared to be going well, as one project after another was announced. First it was the acquisition of several businesses and buildings in Akron, then the purchase of the Real Form Girdle Company of Brooklyn, N.Y., and with it two New Jersey firms, one in wire and the other in electronics. Then came Macinac College, and more was poured into it to ready it for a projected enrollment of 600 students. A month later, Humbard announced that he was starting a UHF TV station in Akron, for which he was building a 750-foot transmission tower, complete with revolving restaurant on top. In 1972, papers were signed to make Rex and the Cathedral the proud new owners of the biggest and newest office building complex in Akron, the \$10 million Cascade Plaza. Soon after, the ministry went multinational, paying out large sums to syndicate his broadcasts in Japan, West Germany, and other lands.

All along, needed movies came in by mail. And what was lacking in outright contributions was supplied by proceeds from bonds, which Humbard’s men were selling all over the midwest. The whole house of cards began to fall when Wisconsin took the lead in denying the further sale of such unregistered notes, and the SEC not only banned further sales in all states, but demanded the immediate establishing of a fund to repay every outstanding. Court order forbade Humbard from either any unapproved expenditures or tear-jerk appeals in the interim. (Humbard couldn’t resist chancing one \$100/person appeal by letter, and narrowly escaped citation for contempt of court, as he also did when he attempted to unload some of the assets without prior court approval.) One by one the new acquisitions were disposed of (the “firm foundation” represented by Real Form Girdle was no longer much of an asset, since Rex had managed to buy in just before the advent of pantyhose), and all the notes were paid off.

Through it all, Rex kept broadcasting, and has continued to do so. To his credit, construction of the 750-ft. tower, broken off as the crisis began in 1972, has not yet been resumed. Humbard now says money will be for world evangelism, and the stub of a tower serves to remind him not to make the same mistake he made in the past so easily in the future.

“Tweedle-Dee & Tweedle-Dum”

Both of whom aspire to be “the Johnny Carson” in the charismatic answer to commercial television’s talk shows and their popularity Marion Gordon Robertson is on the right, Jim Bakker is on the left. Details of personal biography are unimportant, except, to note that Robertson is a Yale Law School grad and son of a Virginia senator, Bakker the poor son of a machinist who once worked for Robertson’s “700 Club,” leaving it to form the “PTL Club.” Possibly it is not fair to give these two rising stars such short shrift, but as this paper is already overlong and I find it hard to stomach either of them I am more than happy to do them the disservice.

As explained above, both try to out-Carson each with his own imitation Carson set and props, the great Johnny himself. For Ed MaMahon, each has a sidekick announcer (Robertson’s is a black, Ben Kinchlow; Bakker’s is white.) Each has his laid-back-version of Doc Severinson, and with him the semblance of Doc’s *Tonight* show orchestra. Both imitate the pacing and the mix of Carson’s show, substituting only the religious for the risqué, replacing Johnny’s witty remarks with numerous “Hail Jesus” and “Praise Him” charismatic catchwords. The guests parade by and sit for a spell, with each his born-again Spirit-filled tale to tell or book to sell.

For some reason, Robertson is rated as intellectual by those who have interviewed him. If so, it must be only in comparison to Bakker, for the one or two “700 Club” telecasts I’ve seen struck me as moron material, for all the pious cheers. On one show, Robertson interviewed a quack doctor who had fallen, split his head open and (by his account) died and been given a tour of heaven before God sent him back to earth to bring all of us the word. To each new conflicting detail the zany provided for his heavenly portrait, Pat responded only with a fervent, “Hail, Jesus!” An intellectual interviewer, I thought would at least have asked the man what he *did* see when he looked down and saw that he was neither male nor female, but sexless... I confess that after brief exposure to the “700 Club,” I will probably never get around to PTL. (Perhaps the appearance of Bakker, which somehow reminds me of Baretta and Howdy Doody rolled into one has more than a little to do with it.)

If their shows are alike, the equipment which grinds them out is too: Both “700 Club” and “PTL Club” are broadcast from studios which are among the best equipped and most expensive in the entire industry. Robertson’s, the heart of the Christian Broadcasting Network, are part of a \$20 million complex in rural Virginia Beach, Virginia. The buildings are pure Georgian, and the floors marble, the furniture genuine antiques. Both buildings and walkways and mood remind the visitor of colonial Williamsburg. Bakker, to do his erstwhile mentor at least one better, if only in his own estimation, has duplicated Williamsburg itself in a scaled-down version outside Charlotte, N.C., naming it “Heritage Village.” How the Olympic swimming pool, complete with imitation Grecian columns, arched mirrors, and trailing plastic vines, fits into colonial Williamsburg, only Bakker can tell. Equally weird is the mix at “Heritage, USA,” fifteen miles down the pike. Ultramodern recreational facilities clash with rustic but steeply-priced (\$150/night) log chalets. Completing the mess will be high-rise condominiums and imitation Polynesian pyramid to house “Heritage University.” And! a replica Main Street!

What neither Robertson nor Bakker feels compelled to explain to anyone is how such expansive and expensive headquarters complexes can be construed as essential to the spread of the Gospel. The well-equipped studios, yes; the best cameras and other telecasting equipment money can buy, yes; the rest, hardly. And yet the viewers and faithful members of both the “700 Club” and “PTL Club” send in their small and sometimes large gifts, hearing clearly the now-familiar pitch: “If you give, God will bless you greatly!” Bakker, at least, appears to have lost all touch with reality, since he failed to understand the outcry which arose when he and his wife purchased a \$24,000 Drifter houseboat the same week a letter went out telling the true believers, that; “Tammy and I are giving every penny of our life’s savings to PTL.” (Looking at it from the charitable side, maybe he was just rushing to reduce those savings somewhat before turning the rest in...Fat chance.)

Jerry Falwell

Jerry Falwell was born in 1934, the grandson of a boot-legger. His pious and churchgoing mother made sure each Sunday to leave the radio tuned to Charles E. Fuller’s “Old Fashioned Revival Hour” knowing full well that her husband and sons would be too lazy to get out of bed, even to shut religion out. Jerry listened for years, and the broadcasts had their effect, finally awakening in his soul a hunger for things religious. Accompanied by his best friend and drinking buddy, Jim Moon, Jerry first entered church at 18 in 1952. He was impressed both by the preacher’s style and by the pianist, Macel Pale (who six year later was to become his wife).

That same service Jerry answered the altar call, and his life changed radically. He gave up drinking, dancing, dating, movies, and most of his friends. He turned down an offer to play basketball for the St. Louis Cardinals. By the end of his Sophomore year at Lynchburg College he decided to switch schools to prepare for the ministry, against the advice of his teachers. He enrolled in Baptist Bible College, Springfield, Missouri, taking Jim Moon with him. There he built a Sunday School class from an enrollment of one to 56 students in a school year; returning to Lynchburg as valedictorian of his class, he married Macel and set out to found a church. Thirty-five laymen, with combined resources of, \$1,000, urged him to locate on the west side of town, and he began holding services in a rude 35x50’ building, the former Donald Duck Pop Bottling Company. By a vigorous campaign of door-to-door evangelism and a local radio program, he built the membership to the second largest in the city, averaging 864 per week. Today his congregation embraces a quarter of the population of Lynchburg (which has 124 other churches) and is the second-largest in the country. The TV broadcast of his service from Thomas Road Baptist Church has an audience of 18 million viewers, who tune in to it under the title, “The Old-Time Gospel Hour.” Falwell has used the program as a political platform to promote a newly-created fundamentalist force in national affairs, The Moral Majority. As the head of this grassroots conservative movement, Falwell is even now continuing to push his “agenda for the ‘80’s.” It is pro-family, pro-life, pro-morality, but is usually known for its strong negative stance against abortion, ERA, gay rights, sex education, drugs, pornography, SALT II, the Department of Education and liberal textbooks, and defense cuts. It demands a return to free enterprise, balanced budgets in government, and prayer in the public schools.

When Billy Graham came to prominence, he left his fundamentalism in his past; Rex Humbard continues to practice his, but soft-pedals it to reach a wider audience. In contrast, it was strident fundamentalism which brought Falwell to power, and he is not about to leave it behind or allow anyone to doubt where he stands. If anything, he goes out of his way to appear strident (without the attendant histrionics) and succinct in denouncing any and all opposition to

his beliefs. On homosexuality, he pronounces, "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!" To those who accuse that he is seeking a Khomeni-style takeover of the country, he vows, "We support the separation of church and state... We want influence, not control." Yet it is a bit ominous when Jerry and Moral Majority prepare a "hit list" of liberal politicians (many re-elected for years as a matter of course), and they are one by one voted out of office, losing to unknowns.

However much we would agree with Falwell on many of the issues, we would share the fear of just where he and his movement propose to take us. While admiring his zeal and drive, we would at times say it was excessive, especially when it leads him to exaggerate to the point of telling outright lies. (As happened when Jerry claimed after a meeting with Jimmy Carter that he had bearded the President on the issue of known presence of open homosexuals in the federal government, and Carter had given his usual mealy-mouthed response. As White House transcripts released by an indignant Carter and staff revealed, the whole exchange never happened; Jerry had woven it out of whole cloth for effect. Caught, he lamely answered, "I shouldn't have said it. It was a reckless statement." That's a bit short of admitting a lie.)

Even if we agree with many of his goals, we would also question the financial means Falwell has used to obtain them. Like Humbar, he was forced to repay \$6.6 million in unregistered bonds, sold to build his new church in 1971. The way he managed to evade the crisis, while legal, was questionably moral: Numerous members of Thomas Road mortgaged their homes. Even before the service proper each Sunday, the money pitch is made, since the needs of his expanding empire are always ahead of the funds. That empire includes a school system from kindergarten through college, all of it totally regimented. We would also question Falwell's accounting for the funds, not only because his own lifestyle is far more lavish than a \$42,000 salary would allow (the by now almost expected private jet, which allows him and his family to take in World Series games by way of "church business; the mansion cum huge swimming pool; the fine clothes and fancy cars), but because Jerry's explanation of fund-raising expenses does not tally with that revealed by his co-workers and underlings. In contrast to Billy Graham's claimed 11 cent spent for every dollar raised, Falwell admits to 171/2 cents spent to gather in each buck. Others in the organization say it is three to four times that much, putting Falwell & Co., outside of the ranks of approved charities.

Up till now, Jerry's drive and ability and ego have been able to meet all challenges and challengers, even though the work is always lurching from one crisis to the next. Revealing that he thinks at least as much of himself as the work, Falwell at least once a year settles back in his office and tapes a lengthy cassette, specifying his plans for Thomas Road, media strategy, possible schemes of financing, suitable cutbacks if necessary, even lists of men who might be able to assume his mantle. But the very act of doing all this shows him in his own eyes close to indispensable.

Robert Schuller

Biographical information on Robert Schuller is not very complete in the articles which treat his Garden Grove Community Church (over 10,000 members) and his TV services, the "Hour of Power." An Iowa farm lad who has attended Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, Schuller is an ordained minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. Sent by his denomination in 1955 to do mission work in California, he arrived in Los Angeles with wife Arvela and only \$500 in his pocket.

The only site within his means to begin his ministry to greater Los Angeles and the world was a seedy outdoor theatre, from the top of whose refreshment stand Schuller began to preach. The Angeleonos liked the novelty of it all—"Come as you are, worship in your car!" And as Schuller got to know them better, he gradually altered his preaching to suit their lifestyle and interests. Above all, he sought to reach those who had never been connected to a church. And, since his messages were not like those preached in churches of the standard denominations, they came. They heard the "sermon" on their car radios and willingly contributed when the ushers made the rounds with the collection baskets.

By 1971, Schuller had a real church building, albeit unlike most others, its focal point a multi-story "Tower off Hope," through whose 20-foot glass doors he was clearly visible to the parking lot segment of his congregation. That congregation grew, and Schuller's dreams grew as his televised services brought ever more members and offerings by mail. The original building far too small for either the congregation's needs or Schuller's ego, was replaced by a \$16.5 million "Crystal Cathedral" designed by famed architect Philip Johnson and paid for in less than four years. By means of it, Schuller and his multi-man ministerium and staff of hundreds dole out Schuller's version of Christian faith, summed up in his creed:

When faced with a mountain, I will not quit. I will keep on striving until I climb over, find a pass through, tunnel underneath or simply stay and turn the mountain into a gold mine with God's help.

Schuller's credo and theology are nothing more than the "positive thinking of his fellow Reformed media star of a slightly earlier era, even though Schuller styles it "Possibility Thinking." If not a mountain, he has certainly managed to turn his Garden Grove Community Church and tied-in TV ministry into a personal goldmine. Every inch a success, Hollywood star handsome, he appears to be walking proof of eating his brand of theological pudding. And, with the Californization of America's heartland over the last decades, countless others are joining him in swallowing it (not questioning whether it is wholesome), and hoping for similar success.

Two images keep re-appearing in any discussion of Schuller and his church. The first is that of retailing, which is not at all surprising, as Schuller himself unabashedly admits that he is in the business of selling religion. That being the case, everything at Garden Grove has a price, from donated parts of the building to Schuller-authored pamphlets which are hawked both in the church sales office and by the ushers who still make the rounds of the parking lot to gather in the offerings. (Oddly, or not so oddly, there are no Bibles for sale.) The second thing that you are never allowed forget is that this is the first and largest drive-in congregation. Schuller describes members who come as needing to recharge their batteries. Those who see Robert Schuller ladling out optimism in place of theology do just that (though in the new building the sliding doors are a more impressive 80 feet high) but hear little of God or what God would want them to hear.

The repeated message, available to all who want to replay it later through cassettes, is really more psychology (of the transactional analysis "I'm OK, you're OK" type) and raw salesmanship than religion. Give him a 32' Winnebago instead of his glass house, a three-piece suit instead of his impressive pulpit robe, and both his person and message would be hard to distinguish from the *Amway* salesman. Sad to say, many more listen to him and think in him they are hearing God's good news of salvation, to the eternal peril of their souls. Buying what he has to sell at his "spiritual shopping center," they go after the good life and miss life everlasting.

Having come this far, any summary statement about “TV Evangelism” is perhaps neither necessary. But, for those who wish one, TV Evangelism, as it is presently practiced, is to be avoided for both theological and financial considerations. *Caveat Emptor!*

Caveat also, would-be entrants into the field of TV Evangelism, which is loaded with many dangers:

- 1) It is too easy for those who go into competition with the bad crop to be lumped with them
- 2) Worse still, it is too possible that even the best-intentioned attempt at TV evangelism will become like them
 - a) Because of the huge sums of money needed for such a ministry, the message will be changed so as to appeal more widely
 - b) The person of the evangelist can easily become more important to audience and evangelist than the person of Christ
 - c) TV evangelism may become an end in itself, with little left for other vital, if less-exciting work of the Church
 - d) Rather than awakening souls to repentance and bringing them to an active participation in the life of the Church, it may give them a better excuse than they now have to become less actively involved
- 3) Anything less than a full-scale, first-rate effort in the area of TV evangelism will be either totally ignored or ridiculed

For all of the above reasons, attempts to provide a solution to the problems TV evangelism by providing still more TV evangelism do not seem the best or wisest solution at all, but simply more of the problem.

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