

Opinion

The Battalion

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The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in *The Battalion* are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

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Keeping up with the Bakkers

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Jessica Hahn is in town to testify before the grand jury, and Charlotte is abuzz.

Like most of the nation, I've kept up with the Holy Wars. I've watched the news reports and laughed at the editorial cartoons about "evanscam" or "pearlygate," as the pundits have called it. Keeping up with the Bakkers has become a national pastime. Like Ollie North, the Bakkers have that sensationalistic glow that causes fortunes to be made on "I ran into Tammy Faye at the mall" T-shirts.

But the national pastime of Bakker-watching is more intense here, just across the state line from the Heritage USA complex. In the pages of the *Charlotte Observer*, the grand jury hearings displace Robert Bork's confirmation hearings and events in the Persian Gulf. The morning disc jockeys joke about Jim and Tammy, and in the restaurants and offices, the citizens of Charlotte debate the future of PTL.

I'm in town with the editor of *The Aggie* to do some planning for the 1988 yearbook, and Frank, our sales representative, is talking about the Bakkers. More specifically, he's telling how he got in great trouble once for

criticizing Jim Bakker's fundraising techniques in front of his wife's aunt, a devoted Bakkerite. In almost the same breath, he says the authorities here have been trying for years to nail Bakker for fraud and finally may have done it with these grand jury hearings.

That kind of duality is everywhere, and for good reason: This is Jim Bakker's old stomping ground, the region of the country where his ministry began. His most loyal followers are here — and so are the most skeptical of his critics.

But one thing Frank says sticks out in my mind — more than the headlines in the *Observer*, more than the Word of Faith bookstores and other signs of the Bible Belt.

Frank compares Jim Bakker to Jim Jones. He says PTL is a cult.

This seems fairly harsh to me. My view of TV evangelism is hardly favorable: I think there will be a special place in hell for those who bilk lonely little old ladies out of their money — which they then use to finance mansions and Rolls Royces. But a cult? No way.

For me, the word "cult" always has brought to mind images of the Moonies and Hare Krishnas, people who dress in saffron robes and have topknots. Cultists are those people who try to sell you flowers in airports, the kind who lure you off and brainwash you until you're willing to give all your material wealth to the Bhagwan and have sex with whoever he tells you to.

Which, come to think of it, is what Jim Bakker did at PTL. He and Tammy apparently convinced people to send in quite a bit of material wealth enough to create a \$172 million enterprise that includes a TV network and a religious theme park. And Jessica Hahn certainly submitted to Bakker's decrees.

But, my preconceived notions of cults out, cults don't promote Christianity.

But did PTL promote Christianity? It's hard to uncover any sign of muckraking the PTL scandal has generated. It's certainly hard to see Christlike poverty when you're

with Jim and Tammy, a pair who own personal holdings including a 1987 Rolls Royce, a \$1.5 million home, four condos, homes in California and Tennessee and two Mercedes-Benzes.

Granted, it doesn't quite match the Bhagwan's jillions of Rolls Royces, but somehow I think the motivation is much the same. And the unbridled devotion to an individual that characterizes cults? That is here. Jerry Falwell has discovered to his dismay, the financial windfall exists now that Jim and Tammy are running the show.

It looks like Frank may be right. Sue Krenek is a senior journalism major and opinion page editor at The Battalion.



Sue Krenek

Write on

The Battalion is under siege. From under a mound of letters to the editor, the Editorial Board writes this.

But it is not a complaint — far from it. We welcome the outpouring of opinion. This is instead an explanation of our letters policy. Commonly asked questions about letters to the editor:

If I write something that disagrees with a Battalion editorial, will it ever make page 2?

Whether we agree or disagree with a letter is not a criteria for publication. In fact, letters that disagree with us help us present opposing viewpoints.

Then why didn't my letter calling The Battalion a bunch of commie pinkos ever appear?

Many reasons. Did you follow the letters policy that appears every day? It reads: "Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer."

Also, many letters we receive are not legible. So typing or at least printing the letter helps.

Why is the name, classification, address and telephone number of the writer requested?

First, so the newspaper staff can verify that the person submitting the letter is a real person and that they are the true author of the letter. Second, it is against our policy to run anonymous letters.

Lack of space on the opinion page also keeps some letters from running. Columns and a staff box — which includes information the law requires us to run every day — take priority, with letters getting the remaining space. That space differs from day to day, but there is never enough space to print every letter. So follow the guidelines above, and be timely. Three weeks after a story or event is too late to run a letter concerning it.

Letters can be brought to 216 Reed McDonald or mailed to *The Battalion*, Letters to the editor, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, 77843.

Think on. Then write on.

'Pope scopes,' papal punch: Only in the U.S.

Leave it to Americans to commercialize just about anything, including the pope's visit.

I don't know if you heard about pope hats (the ones that look like the Cisco Kid used to wear) being on sale in Florida when his holiness hit Miami, but they were. Sales were reported as brisk.

I have a friend in Miami who is Catholic, and I called to see if he had purchased a pope hat or knew of anybody who had.

"My neighbor got one for his kid," my friend said. "They were going for 40 bucks apiece when the pope first came to town, but he waited until the pope left and got one marked down for five."

Pope hats weren't the only thing that have been on sale during the papal visit.

I have another friend in Chicago who was telling me about his cousin's idea.

"She invented something called a 'pope scope,'" he explained.

"Do what?" I asked.

"You remember those things they used to sell at golf matches and parades with the mirrors?" he began.

"They were sort of L-shaped, and when you looked in the short end, the image of what you were looking at was sent down from a mirror in the tall end. You could see over people's heads with those things."

"My cousin found some of those things in a warehouse and bought them and called them pope scopes and she's been selling them all over the country."



Lewis Grizzard

Another report came in on somebody who had heard of an item called "pope on a rope."

It's a statue of pope with a rope tied around it. The idea, it seems, is to tie the rope to your belt buckle and have the pope with you at all times.

"For good luck?" I asked.

"For 30 bucks," I was told.

A guy who runs a bar in Atlanta was telling me he had a special drink to honor the pope's visit.

"I'm calling it 'papal punch.' It's gin, vodka, rum, orange juice and three shots of holy water."

I suppose some might be outraged by the attempts to make a few bucks off the pope's visit, but money and religion do have a powerful bond.

I visited the Vatican once. What I remember most were the countless shops in the area where people were shelling out cash for various items with religious themes.

And on the Protestant scene, I saw television minister Dr. Robert Schuller the other morning. He was pushing holy letter openers, and let us not forget Jim and Tammy's waterslide for Jesus.

But back to the pope's hat. It's the subject of one of my favorite stories that must be repeated at least once during the papal visit:

Two Americans, one Catholic and one Protestant, are visiting the Vatican. The pope appears on the balcony in full regalia.

"Where did he get that hat?" the Protestant asked.

"The cardinals gave it to him," answers the Catholic, to which the Protestant replies:

"Looks like the Giants would do something like that for Willie Mays."

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Mail Call

A man of character

EDITOR:

Commendation is in order for the great football that was displayed at Kyle Field this Saturday, but I think one individual needs to be singled out for a particular show of thanks: Craig Stump. I was truly impressed by the character and team spirit that Stump showed on Saturday.

Here is a veteran who sat in the shadow of a record-setting quarterback for three of his four years of eligibility. Stump's last year has arrived and he hopes to play the starting position, but he is replaced by an up-and-coming first-year player who has seen little action.

Does Craig Stump resign himself to the bench dejectedly? No.

Instead he applies himself to the game in any manner he can, first replacing the faltering punter and then whipping up spirit by playing the line positions during punts and kickoff returns.

These are the signs of a true team player and a man of character, one who shrugs off his defeats and goes on as best as he knows how, showing good spirit and grace.

Thank you again, Craig, for showing us that there still athletes left with a sense of integrity and dignity.

Nadine Miller '87

Embarrassing Tigers

EDITOR:

As an LSU alumni supporter, Tiger fan, track coach and retired teacher, I wish to apologize to the Corps of Cadets and staff of Texas A&M for the obnoxious behavior of a small percentage of the LSU student body. Their behavior before and after the football game on 5 was definitely uncalled-for.

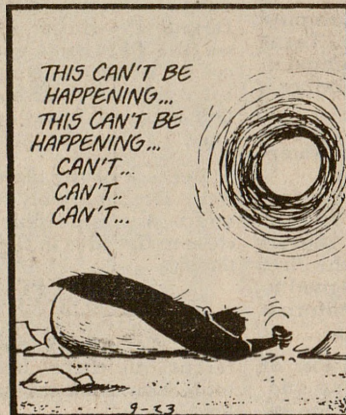
I feel that the people who caused the problems are true "Fightin' Tigers" and do not represent the vast majority of students, faculty, alumni and supporters of LSU. I, for one, would like to say that all of the Texas Aggie people that I came in contact with were very polite and always helpful. Please accept an apology from me and my fellow Aggie fans.

John B. Fly Jr.

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BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed



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