

Trinity Broadcast Network brings religion to low level

Religion. Once this sacred institution inspired reverent worship. Religiosity was private, a sort of inner-exploration and self-realization. Worship was brought into the public sphere only in the domain of sanctuaries and for the purpose of ritual ceremony.

Today Mecca is miles away. This is the United States, 1997; Crusades are like ancient history, and religion is becoming a circus.

Like everything else in America today, religion is but a couple of key punches away. Don't break out the Bibles and rosaries just yet, for this is a new religion. This religion breaks practically all ties with its respectable predecessors. Sermons are now on sound cards, pulpits have become TV screens and computer monitors and the "missionaries" are hardly saints.

Americans got their first taste of electronic religion with Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker and their PTL ministry in the 1980s. This king and queen of televangelism amassed quite an empire thanks in large part to Tammy's tear-stained (or maybe mascara-stained) pleas for donations and Jim's Plasticman-like overdramatism. These "messengers of God" accumulated an empire whose holdings included a theme park



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(Heritage USA) and television programming. Unfortunately, a fortune was not all these two ended up with; Jim has a rap sheet for mail and wire fraud and a reputation for adultery, and Tammy, well, Tammy has really bad make-up.

Jim and Tammy were only the Adam and Eve of this new Garden of Eden. This couple's fame (despite a less than heavenly downfall) gave birth to a stream of eager followers, hungry to get a piece of the action, I mean, spread the gospel.

Perhaps a clarification is in order. There are some very legitimate religious programs on the air. Programs like *The 700 Club* and Billy Graham specials at least encourage some sort of intelligent debate, and of course, there are broadcasts of actual Sunday morning services. This category of programming should not even be grouped with "religion as entertainment" shows that are popping up across the dial.

Case in point. One particular cable channel solely is devoted to "religion," and viewers can tune in 24 hours a day to be "enlightened." Just a click of the remote, and an individual can be right in the middle of a full-fledged tent revival every day of the week.

These Bible-thumping jamborees

seem like worship time at Jim Morrison's "House of Acid." There is arm waving, speaking in tongues, gospel singing and plenty of "hallelujahs." Some days, one can even catch a performance of the channel's Christian rapper, complete with M.C. Hammer-style dancers. The sets, I mean pulpits, are even reminiscent of some Dr. Seuss tale gone bad, complete with Rustoleum gold altars and almost neon backdrops.

Dare we even mention the players themselves. The ringleader is a garish apparition of blue eye shadow and cotton candy-colored curls who sporadically, and usually inappropriately, breaks into song or laughter. Providing back-up is a seemingly endless parade of pompadoured pledge-seekers who sing, preach and "take testimony" from washed-up celebrities on guest spots. Perhaps the most entertaining, not to mention downright scary, feature is the casting out of demons. That's right, real-life exorcisms, complete with seizure-like reactions in the followers. The sick and maligned simply can make their way to the front of the church, and with just a hand to the forehead and a quick abracadabra, the believers fall to the floor completely "healed."

This is not religion. Filling a packed auditorium with paid audiences and whipping them into semi-hypnotic frenzies with chanting and singing is

not "church," but some sort of evangelistic Lollapalooza that is a cross between *Mama's Family* and *The Exorcist*. This is scary stuff.

Religion simply is not what it used to represent. This is the institution that begat the likes of Martin Luther and Mother Teresa, and inspired works like *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*. People risked their lives in catacombs and made pilgrimages across great distances to places such as Mecca and Canterbury for the sake of religion. In addition, our country was created for religious freedom. One can be fairly certain Pilgrims did not cross the Atlantic and die by the hundreds so Americans of today could be zombified by Aqua Net nightmares on the boob tube.

Whatever a person believes, he or she should stand by that and want to see that belief respected. If people want religious inspiration or to share worship with others, they should go to a local church, synagogue or temple.

Religion inspires a great many unanswered questions, but here's a fact to ponder: When the 24-hour donation line is constantly up on the screen, your religious fulfillment is not top priority. And while it might be fun to sing along with "Betty Sue" on Trinity Broadcast Network's *Ugly Melody Mountain*, remember, even "Betty Sue" has to make a buck.



GRAPHIC: Brad Gruber

CAMPUS

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According to the library construction update on the library's Web site, the "library village" will include a six-floor student computing center connected to the library and a renovation of Cushing Library.

Hedleston said a Rapid Response Group (RRG) was recently set up by the library administration to let patrons and employees know how construction will affect the library's services.

The Rapid Response Group is made up of people within the library departments, including reference, acquisition and public relations, who compile messages about construction for flyers, Battalion advertisements and updates on the library's Web page.

According to the Evans Library Web site, a new parking garage with 621 parking spaces will be built next to the complex.

Williams said this garage should open around January 1, 1998. He said the large columns in the area near Lubbock Street next to the new garage are part of the garage toll plaza, which will be similar to the one on Houston Street.

Williams said the toll plaza will close up Main Campus, and it will no longer be a free-entry area.

"Motorists won't be mixing with students in the Commons area especially," Williams said.

The Kyle Field renovations will be completed in October 1997 and construction on the Reed Arena Special Events Center will be completed in January 1998 according to a monthly construction status report compiled by Facilities and Construction Planning.

The area outside Blocker is one of the most visible areas under construction. Les Swick, assistant director of Physical Plant, said trees, raised planters and stone benches have been removed outside Blocker so that the concrete in front of the building can be replaced.

Swick said the area experiences lots of pedestrian traffic and water had been getting under the building, fracturing the concrete and causing a tripping danger.

"We've had a lot of settlement in front of the building, in excess of six to eight inches in some spots," Swick said.

Swick said trees were removed because some were blocking the view of building, others were too close together and roots were pushing up the concrete. But he said the area will get a face lift after the concrete is replaced.

"We'll reestablish some additional or new landscaping," Swick said.

Many students said campus construction does not bother them, and they are excited about the new facilities.

Thai Ho, a senior chemistry major, said construction has not been a problem for him because he does not drive on campus. He also said he is looking forward to the changes at the library.

"A parking garage and computing center will make the library better," Ho said.

Janean Mann, a freshman architecture major, agrees with Ho.

"I think the new facilities will be great," Mann said.

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