

Corn-pone ayatollahs

Obscenity is in the eye of the beholder. I, for one, find girlie magazines, the target of so much recent anger in the U.S., boring and inoffensive. But what I do find thoroughly obscene and offensive is the growing number of TV evangelists who nightly fill the airwaves with fraud, voodoo, hate and outrageous bunkum.

They fit into two broad categories. First and largest are the old-time hucksters selling Jesus with the same gusto that they would devote to snake oil or aluminum siding. I am fascinated watching such early-American gothics shout, froth, twitch and yell.

Include in this group of three-piece suited entertainers accomplished humbugs like tubby Ernest Angley, drooling Peter Popoff and the saccharine Barbie dolls of evangelism, tiny Jim and blue-eyed shadowed Tammy Bakker.

Then there are the likes of Jimmy Swaggart. Watching him the other night produced no laughs, only a cold feeling running down my chest. For Brother Jimmy knows Satan when he sees him, and is determined to run the devil out of the U.S. Only problem is that so many of us will have to go off with Old Nick, if Jimmy has his way.

Swaggart's charisma, eloquence and vast TV audience make him particularly frightening. His latest target is the devil's helpers whom Swaggart calls "secular humanists." These miscreants are people who believe in free speech, keeping state and religion apart, free expression and a ban on censorship.

They, thunders Swaggart, are the men who control TV, degenerate trying to force pornography, homosexuality and pre-marital sex on pristine America. "America is a Christian country," shouts Swaggart and "they", the poisoners of America are "not Christians." Interesting.

We have heard identical venom before — in Hitler's Germany. Back in 1936 the Nazis said that their pure nation was being corrupted by pornographers, "cosmopolitans," and ruthless financiers — in short, the Jews. And who does brother Jimmy have in mind when he fulminates against "the people who own TV and the rest of the media," or "that small group of men in New York City?" Well, down South, when you refer to people from New York City it's a code for Jews.

Why the B'nai Brith and other Jewish organizations are doing so little to counter such dangerous hate-mongering escapes me. Perhaps they are too busy chasing 75-year-old Nazis to notice today's new-wave religious fascists. Perhaps they have also been so beguiled by the loudly pro-Israel policy of many Christian fundamentalist groups that they have failed to notice the underlying hatred of American Jews.

Nor is Swaggart the only threat to American secular democracy. Presidential candidate Rev.

ERIC MARGOLIS



Pat Robertson's campaign is picking up steam. Frankly, the thought of these corn-pone ayatollahs telling the rest of America what to do and think fills me with dread. To them, Jesus is more a campaign manager or fund-raiser than the son of God.

What bothers me the most about electronic evangelists is that their false advertising goes into the homes of America as if it's the gospel truth. A manufacturer can't make phony claims without getting the feds after him. But these Jesus franchisers can hawk "anointing oil from the Holy Land," "genuine Jordan River water," and "earth from Gethsemane" — only \$14.95, add \$3 for han-



dling — without any apparent restraint. Worse, under the guise of religion, they fill the credulous minds of the rubes, hicks and the many good people who watch such carnivals with false hope and hate. And regularly fleece their flocks.

It's time for the U.S. Federal Communications Commission and Canada to crack down on such charlatans. Just because they claim to speak for Jesus does not exempt them from laws regarding truth in advertising, slander, stirring up racial hatred or lying. If they do speak every morning to Jesus, I'd like to see them prove it by having Him make a guest appearance on their TV shows.

Way back in 1881, the cynic Ambrose Bierce aptly defined such preachers as "men who undertake the management of our spiritual affairs as a method of bettering their temporal ones." He should be watching TV today. If our corn-pone ayatollahs have their way, America and Canada will become good, God-fearing nations, just like that other theocratic paradise, Iran.