

The Electronic Church

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[NB-This paper is merely an outline for a presentation given by the author on this topic—ed.]

It was bound to happen that certain segments of the religious world would turn to the latest means of mass communications like radio, TV, computerized mail, WATS phone lines. Names like Oral Roberts, Robert Schuller, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, Rex Humbard have as a result become known in millions of households. 47 per cent of Americans see at least one religious program a week on TV, but only 42 per cent leave their homes to attend some kind of religious service. 1400 radio stations and 35 TV stations are owned by religious broadcasters and close to a billion dollars a year is spent on religious broadcasting.

I. Is There Any Good to the Electronic Church?

1. We have to answer “Yes” or else cancel some of what we are doing.
2. Part of the benefit is to make contact with those who have never had or who have drifted away from a relationship with Christ.
3. Another part is to supplement the work of the church such as with our shut-ins.
4. Christ is preached by some of the electronic preachers and therein we rejoice Philippians 1:15f.

II. Is There Any Bad in the Electronic Church?

A. We start with doctrine

1. Note God’s commands that we teach “all things” (Matt 28:19) and “declare the whole counsel of God’s commands (Acts 20:27),” but electronic preacher dare not do this or else risk losing a segment of his audience and his contributors.
2. So often it is religion based not on doctrine, but on the one who is doing the talking. When the image on the TV tube fades, the speaker is remember, and not the creeds.
3. Look at the examples of Robert Schuller and Oral Roberts.so at finances.

B. Look also at finances

1. In 1978 Oral Roberts receipts exceeded \$60 million; Herbert Armstrong’s World Wide Church of God took in more than \$75 million, Pat Robertson’s “700 Club” \$30 million, Jim Bakker’s PTL \$25 million, the Graham Evangelistic Association \$27.8 million, and the Cathedral of Tomorrow \$18 million.
2. Is there a contradiction here of tailoring the message so that they will open the pocketbook? Is this trying to get into man’s heart and his pocketbook at the same time?
3. What about the false impressions which are given that if you give to this preacher and his cause, you will be closer related to God and all your desires will be fulfilled. This comes to the roman catholic “indulgence selling” in middle ages.
4. Is this good stewardship? A study by the Institute of American Church Growth indicates that less than one per cent of new church members are attracted by mass media. Most came to church because of someone personally speaking to them or because of strong pastoral leadership.

C. Consider also the social problems involved.

1. Television has already damaged society by isolating the individual. Look at what has happened to community life, clubs, etc., families. Now TV is also reaching into the church and changing religious life from a Christian community called the church where people gather together to hear the Word, to mutually shore up each other’s faith, to rejoice together in God’s

forgiveness, to discipline each other when sin has entered life, to an individual sitting alone ahead of his TV. Cf. Matt. 18:20, Heb. 10:25.

D. Consider also what the electronic church cannot do.

1. It cannot use the Sacraments through which faith is nourished.
2. It leaves no room for the pastoral work of “being a *seelsorger*” caring for individuals and their needs. Who will comfort the sick, bury the dead, train the children.
3. Statistics from a Gallup poll in United Presbyterian Church indicates that 86 per cent felt their local pastors’ preaching was most helpful for spiritual growth and that some 80 per cent felt most a sense of being at worship with God during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

What’s the answer? Not to panic and try to beat electronic preachers at their own game, but to keep on doing what God gave the Church to do, preach the whole Word in every way and as vitally as possible.