

METROPOLITAN NORTH CONFERENCE

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WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

"THE 700 CLUB"

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In speaking about the "700 Club", two other names are synonymous. They are CBN, or the Christian Broadcasting Network and Pat Robertson. Pat Robertson is the founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network which in turn is the producer of the television program which gives title to this paper, namely, the 700 Club. I mention this now since I probably shall be using CBN and the 700 Club interchangeably at times, and when we try to delineate the theological peculiarities of the 700 Club, we must listen to Pat Robertson, his life and his writing, since he in essence is the 700 Club, being the founder, host and head of CBN.

CBN is just 21 years old, having been chartered in the State of Virginia on January 11, 1960. Since it is comparatively new, it is not surprising that there is little information compiled within our circles. For example, our Seminary library has already laid claim to the couple of books I have gathered which will be the first two on the 700 Club. However, Professor Westerhaus did steer me in the right direction, namely, to the center in our city where the 700 Club holds forth. The gentleman who supervises the center was very cordial and very willing to share information. From him I received what has ended up being the entire basis for this paper: a paperback entitled, "Shout It From The Housetops", a biography of Pat Robertson; the "CBN Counselors Manual", and the "CBN Counselor Handbook". The biography was a loan, the manual was a gift and the Handbook was purchased.

The CBN has centers similar to the one here in Milwaukee throughout the country. It perhaps would be interesting to you, therefore, to have it described. The center is located in an office building on Capitol Drive. It is not a very large suite, containing a small office for the supervisor and a larger room for the counselors. The larger room has approximately 4 or 5 telephone booths on two of the walls, similar to the newer open type booths that Bell has around town. The center operates only when the 700 Club is broadcasting on the TV station (in Milwaukee, Channel 18). The telephone

number of the local center is flashed on the screen and the counselors simply wait for calls to come in. The day I visited, Channel 18 was carrying the broadcast and free Bibles were being offered callers. Three counselors were present and all three were kept busy with the supervisor himself taking the extra calls that were coming in. Of course, once the caller received an answer, the counselor went into much more detail concerning the caller's life. Now, all of this is not said to try to take up time, but rather to give you some idea of the organization that exists within CBN. The more I read, the more impressed I became with the organization and its use of the TV and radio in its efforts to reach and evangelize people throughout our country and the world.

Now, as I mentioned, the Christian Broadcasting Network is just 21 years old. Its first live broadcast was on October 1, 1961, just twenty years ago. Its program, the 700 Club, came into existence in 1963. And the name came about in a very simple way. Robertson's budget for his CBN for 1964 was \$7000.00. He figured that if 700 people gave just \$10, he would easily make his budget. He then conducted his first telethon asking for money, with the pitch being \$10 from 700. And the name has remained to this day. And even though that first telethon brought in only \$3500.00, since that was the most he had ever received before, Robertson knew this was the way God wanted him to go.

And what has happened since? By 1969, CBN had grown to where it had six radio stations in North America, one in South America, one color television station, a television permit for the entire Atlanta area, and a new headquarters and production center. Furthermore, they covered a population area of over 10 million people. Today the statistics are even more impressive. A little pamphlet is available which lists all of the TV stations which carry the 700 Club program. Hopefully, having counted right, CBN is an international communications network of over 175 television stations. Four stations are owned by CBN. Furthermore, the 700 Club can also be seen daily via satellite on 3500 cable systems reaching 12 million families. Who can say that these statistics are not impressive. The program is viewed by millions, it attracts many popular people to its stage and its growth has been phenomenal.

Its public relations material claims a potential audience of 86% of the world's population, with its programming seen in the 50 states and 20 foreign countries.

And Robertson is not through. His vision is to reach the world, the whole world through the media of television. He has a number of projects, for example: the English Language Outreach with a population potential of 819 million; Foreign Language Broadcasts with population potential of 14 billion; televised crusades; Training of Nationals; and a Christian Communications Center on a 142 acre tract of land in Virginia Beach, Virginia, to serve as the hub of CBN's world outreach.

What makes CNB - 700 Club tick? Where did it all start? Let's take the first question first. What makes it tick? What is its message and purpose? What is its creed and theology? CBN does have a Statement of Faith. In the Counselor's Manual, page A7, the following is written: "CBN Statement of Faith - Following is the official statement of faith found in our CBN charter. Each Telephone Counselor is expected to be thoroughly acquainted with its truths so that our Telephone Ministry presents a united witness to persons calling in. CBN comprises people from many churches and branches of the Christian faith, and the statement below represents basic foundational truths. We want counselors to refrain from teaching doctrines not thoroughly grounded on the Scriptures. The Counselor's one aim should be to present those truths from the Bible which enlighten the caller so he can confess Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour, to know Him as Lord, Healer, and the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit. Our aim is to help persons then grow in Christian maturity and be found ready for the Lord when He comes.

- 1) We believe that the Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible, and authoritative source of Christian doctrine and precept.
- 2) We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- 3) We believe that man was created in the image of God, but as a result of sin is lost and powerless to save himself.

- 4) We believe that the only Hope for man is to believe on Jesus Christ, the virgin born Son of God, who died to take upon Himself the punishment for the sin of mankind and who rose from the dead so that by receiving Him as Lord, man is redeemed by His blood.
- 5) We believe that Jesus Christ in person will return to earth in power and glory.
- 6) We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells those who have received Christ for the purpose of enabling them to live righteous and Godly lives.
- 7) We believe that the Church is the body of Christ, and is composed of all those who through belief in Christ have been spiritually regenerated by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The mission of the church is a world-wide evangelization on the one hand and the nurture and discipline of Christians on the other.

When I had finished reading all I was going to about Robertson, CBN and the 700 Club, I sort of wished I had been given a different topic, something like, "What are the Jehovah Witnesses?". I already knew they were about as false as false gets. With the CBN story I got ambivalent. As a citizen of our great country with the knowledge of the moral deterioration that has set in and knowing now the magnitude of CBN together with its goals for the future, my emotions said, "Good going, Pat - keep it up". And really at first blush, this statement of faith is not so bad; not much, but not bad; a lot left out, but not bad. But there is another side of us and that is, the keepers of Israel, the pastors of our flock with the responsibility of proclaiming all of the truth of Scripture and guarding against all error.

Thus, while statements one through five may be good and sound as far as they go, statements six and seven do begin to present the fundamental errors incorporated in the teachings of CBN. The work of the Third Person of the Trinity is confused. Very seldom did I read of the work of the Spirit bringing man to faith; the stress is His coming to man once he has come to believe. Statement six talks about the indwelling of the Spirit after faith in Christ is present. And statement seven indicates that

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through faith in Christ man is regenerated by the indwelling Spirit and not that through the creation of faith by the Holy Spirit man comes to Christ. I believe the confusion in the understanding of the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit is the key to the aberrations in doctrine and practice that we find in the CBN. This is evidenced in their literature and in the life of Pat Robertson who is the force behind all that CBN does.

As an outgrowth of this confusion, three main themes keep recurring throughout the literature I had at my disposal. The first is the continual talking and teaching of the Baptism of the Spirit. What is referred to is not the Spirit's work in bringing us to Christ through the means of Grace, but rather that special outpouring of the Spirit similar to the teaching of the Holiness Bodies and the Charismatics - a special outpouring which brings special gifts of knowledge, understanding, speaking in tongues and the like. I have referred to statements six and seven of the Statement of Faith. We also find such statements as, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is not a requirement for CBN counselors. It is an experience, however, that is much recommended and is able to equip the counselor for his duties." (The Counselor's Manual, page A8) and, "Tragic mistakes have been made when well-meaning Christians have moved ahead of the Holy Spirit and have given counsel which has not been prompted by the Holy Spirit" (ibid). Also, in the CBN Counselors Handbook, page 64, the statement is made: "The gifts of the Spirit are supernatural endowments for service and are given according to the character of the ministry that is to be fulfilled." And one more from the same book, page D1: "In this empowering (speaking of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit), the soul is introduced by the Lord Jesus to the Holy Spirit. The role of Christ and the Spirit are thus reversed from that of salvation. The Holy Spirit has introduced the soul to Christ; now Christ makes the indwelling presence of His Spirit real to the believer. The climax of this energizing process is the flooding up of God's reality in the soul like a fountain until the believer is utterly immersed in His power and love."

The second recurring theme is "deeds, do, holiness" or what I choose to call an

inordinate stress on the life of sanctification. Not that any statement refers to meriting eternal life, but rather the silence on how eternal life is gained is the bothersome point. And because of that inordinate concern and concentration on "do" and "be" we find such statements as (all the following are found on pages B2 & 3 in the Counselors Manual):

"Christ showed us that the kingdom of God comes and He takes up His reign when a person chooses to follow and obey Him. You will find the words, "follow me" over and over again in the Gospels. Never did Jesus leave those He encountered in any doubt as to His Lordship. He did not give "invitations". The reason is simple: Salvation is not an invitation, but a command. Everyone who encounters Him has a choice, he must obey or disobey.

"Obedience places the person under the one he obeys. Salvation is not inviting people to come to Jesus, but a command to obey Him.-----

"Repentance, then, is the first step into the kingdom of God. The Spirit of God awakens us and we sense our need and see the situation as it really is - - we are rebels against God and His Government and must choose to turn from our selfish purpose in life and resolve firmly to obey Jesus Christ as our new Lord. This leads us to Faith which is a commitment to the atoning death of Christ who suffered in our place. The result is that we will be transformed by the power of God.

"Saving faith consists of throwing down our weapons of rebellion and taking up our cross and following Him. - - Salvation consists, then, not in an invitation to come to Jesus, but bringing our lives under His authority and rule."

And all of this leads up to the following: "Our thinking has been, 'Just tell people about Jesus so we can get them to heaven.' Little have we realized that God's main

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purpose in saving us is not to get us to heaven but to help us grow into the kind of people He created us to be. This Gospel which appeals to man's desires (we're all guilty I'm afraid) presents Jesus as man's need and not as God's requirements. ---- We have presented a cheap grace which costs little and demands practically nothing." Very evidently these statements run deeply counter to Lutheran Bible theology, to "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling", to Spirit wrought faith which unites us with Christ, and which faith, not because it's required but because it wants to, produces those works which are pleasing to God and which give evidence of the Lordship of Christ in our lives.

The third recurring theme that is spoken refers also to the work of the Holy Spirit..... the immediate outpouring of the Spirit, the immediate work of the Spirit without means. Again this is a logical direction to take when the supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit outside of Baptism ~~and~~ the other means of Grace is the premise. Its manifestation in the theology of CBN is seen in the life of Pat Robertson himself.

Robertson was born March 22, 1930, the son of a U.S. Senator. He was trained to be a lawyer; he married well and determined to take up his life on the east coast and reap the benefits of his heritage and training. One day he came home and told his wife, "I think I will become a minister." His wife's answer was that perhaps the first step would be to join a church and find out what it is all about. They checked out the Roman Catholic Church, the Moravian Church and then the Evangelical Free Church. Here they felt they might belong.

This basically was the start of the CBN. Robertson did go to a Seminary - he did become a minister - he did receive the Baptism of the Spirit and he had a vision. He envisioned his call from the Lord to be evangelizing the world thru the medium of television. He became the man whom Pat Boone characterized in the introduction to the biography as "the rich young ruler who did sell all and follow Christ."

The biography is interesting and if what is written is true, then Pat Robertson is indeed a highly gifted spiritual and organizational man. He speaks of his first experience of the outpouring of the Spirit; he tells of his cure from cursing; of his own conversion with "all of a sudden....."; he describes in graphic detail the conversion of a hippie, almost instantaneous to the suggestion by a co-worker that the hippie wanted to be saved. Throughout the book there are the recorded instances of use of Bible passages, coming to his mind like a bolt of lightning, to give direction to his organizational endeavors. He says in referring to a worship service in which a hymn number flashed into his mind of a hymn which he didn't know but which happened to be the Scripture lesson set to music: "Such experiences led me to realize that God could lead me directly through the Scriptures and personal revelation. I recognized it as training for whatever ministry the Holy Spirit was preparing me, even though I had no idea what that ministry was to be. All I knew was that it was to be the kind of ministry where I would often have to rely on just such revelations, and that this time was to be used in purifying myself so the percentage of error would grow less." And rely he did. This was his course in life. He struggled; he was broke; he borrowed money and solicited for it. The result of twenty years is the CBN as it is known today.

And perhaps that success is the biggest problem that we encounter in CBN and its program, "The Seven Hundred Club". What it seems to be saying is, "Look what Jesus can do for you", and not referring to eternal salvation. The CBN Counselor Handbook likewise gives that impression. It contains a wealth of information on how to get relief from anxiety, worry, tension, bitterness, depression, discouragement, etc. But all of this follows what Robertson preaches, basically that "when God Almighty sent His Son to die on the cross, He did not give us a partial salvation. He gave us a restoration of the total being of mankind, body, soul, and spirit - - to help us grow to be the kind of people He wants us to be."

Richard John Neuhaus, not too popular among conservative WELS theologians, asked the question in a recent article: "What is being promoted through the electronic Church?"

Succinctly the answer was: It is as in all advertising - the image of ourselves. In this case the product that will help you to be the new you is Jesus. And then quoting from the book, "The Total Image: or Selling Jesus in the Modern Age", Neuhaus continued: "Christian advertisers are supposedly selling Christ. Yet Christ is nowhere to be found in the picture. If He were, it would severely limit the marketing potential of the picture. Christ is motivationally equivalent to, say, Geritol. Any ad man knows there is no point in pulling out a picture of a bottle of Geritol. Instead, he shows a picture of a youthful, happily married couple who attribute their health and success to Geritol. The same with Jesus. He Himself doesn't sell well, any more than a bottle of tonic. So the ad shows pictures of people who can testify to the therapeutic results in their lives."

Another writer becomes even more explicit, mentioning Pat Robertson by name. In reference to evangelism in the fundamental churches, referring especially to the electronic church, he says: "It is observed that fundamentalist styles of evangelism are incompatible with Lutheran theology. That is true. In the electronic church versions, spiritual terrorism is combined with material pandering. 'Here's what Jesus did for me. Give Him a try and see what He will do for you'.

"Jesus pays off. In cash, in business success, in happy homes, in sexual satisfaction, in whatever currency you are in the market for. Following a recent testimonial from a squeaky-clean, ebullient young actress, Pat Robertson turns to the camera and says, 'You too can have that Jesus glitter!'

"Very positive to be sure, but having little to do with the Jesus of history and Christian faith. Note that Jesus seldom appears in these programs. He is not even talked about very much. Jesus does not sell well. What sells is what Jesus can do for you. There is a Lutheran axiom that says to know Christ is to know His benefits. The TV version turns that into knowing Christ in order to get His benefits. Or, more precisely, in order to get our benefits. And, of course, running through the sales

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pitch is the not so veiled threat that, if you don't accept Jesus, God's going' to gitchya!"

Another major error in the gospel of CNB is its doctrine of healing. While the power to heal is not required to be a Christian, yet if a Christian has strong enough faith he can heal. And this power of healing is directly connected to the atonement. The Counselor's Manual says (page F 1, the following) 'God is doing everything He can to reduce suffering. He died to reduce it. The atoning death of Jesus Christ secured for us not only physical healing, but the resurrection and perfecting and glorifying of our bodies. We don't get the full measure of what Jesus secured for us by His atoning death on the cross in this present life, but at His coming again. --- Our resistance to disease depends directly upon the quality of our living. My physical life, my intellectual life, my spiritual life depends directly upon my obedience to God's commands and on the total sovereignty of Jesus Christ over my body, mind and spirit - - - Without God and the strength that He gives, most people prefer to ask for medicine since it makes no demands on them to change their lives - - - In the measure that we draw closer to God, physical disease loses its hold on us."

What this says, of course, is that our lack of faith, faith in Jesus' death upon the cross, is that which keeps God from healing us. To connect healing with the atonement is to deny the real purpose of the atonement which lies in the forgiveness of our sins thru which deliverance from eternal pain and death is ours; and ours now, not to be fulfilled at some future date. It is also to deny that the substitutionary death of Christ has paid the full penalty for sin and that the resurrection has broken the power of death even though we still must participate in the discomfort of pain or sickness and eventually physical death.

Very evidently, this has turned out to be a, "What is wrong with the 700 Club" paper. This does not mean that there is not good connected with it. In both the manual and the handbook there are many statements about Christian life, the Lordship of Jesus,

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the submission of the Christian to God and His Will which can be beneficial both to us and our people. However, the question always remains, Is it worth it? Are the dangers such that souls can be led astray? Are there areas of theology and practice which run counter to Scripture? Obviously the answer to those questions is yes and hopefully the purpose of this assignment was to try to delineate some of the errors and dangers while at the same time giving an idea of what the 700 Club is all about.

Therefore, I would like to summarize what I see as the errors associated in the theology of CBN.

- 1) Unionistic - Lack of fellowship principles. While it does not contend to be a church, it sees itself as an evangelizing agent to the world. It refers to churches and looks for support from churches. By the way, the director of our Milwaukee center told me they are in need of Lutheran Churches for referral purposes. Any takers?
- 2) Body, mind and spirit - - Trichotomy versus dichotomy.
- 3) Confusion/lack of understanding of the work of the Spirit.
- 4) Charismatic, in the sense of the special indwelling of the Spirit - two classes of Christian.
- 5) The Spirit working without means through personal revelation.
- 6) Heavy emphasis on doing - perfection of self. Robertson said: Before I could come into His presence, I first had to have clean hands and a pure heart.
- 7) Purpose of atonement also to provide healing for our bodies here in time.
- 8) Jesus glitter rather than Jesus glory.
- 9) Because of the use of "cheap grace", the failure to stress Grace.
- 10) John 3, 16 - not a passage in their vocabulary.

11) The Lord-Christ vs. the Savior-Christ

And perhaps the greatest lesson of all to be learned is to be reminded once again that in all of our efforts as congregations, as a church body, - - whether it be in the pulpit or in the written word or in our various ministries - - we are determined to know

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only Jesus and Him crucified, to point our people and all people to Jesus - the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. That may be oversimplifying our entire purpose, but that finally is the bottom line. And it is the line that CBN has forgotten; and if not forgotten, at least not used.

J. Berger
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