

Opinion

No cheap grace: A night at Heritage USA

Personally, I think Jim Bakker would be lucky to get off with only 120 years when he gets sentenced in a few weeks. However, I might be a little biased. His conviction on 24 counts of fraud and conspiracy will obviously impress a judge, but I understand these impersonal charges may not be enough to convince everyone that Jim Bakker deserves to spend the rest of his life dressed in a green jumpsuit, showering with big hairy guys named Bubba and Lou. I invite those skeptics to read on and hear of my encounter with Jim Bakker's superficial and deceitful world. A dose of personal reality might change their minds.

When I was a high school sophomore, I took a trip to Heritage USA, the Bakker's former PTL headquarters outside of Charlotte, to do some research for my term paper on evangelism. I journeyed there with an open mind, trying to find some redeeming qualities about the PTL. I returned with a lighter wallet convinced that Jim Bakker was a lying hunk of charisma.

Of course, opportunities to become a life-time PTL member for \$1,000 abound. As soon as the check is written, PTL workers take new members' pictures for an ID card which immediately signifies they have joined the ranks of the "elite." Eight times I was asked to join during my visit, and eight times I

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declined.

But, with the exception of lifetime memberships, most of the other luxuries I have mentioned are only available to those who can afford the trip to South Carolina. The Bakkers could not have scraped together enough donors to pay for their air-conditioned doghouse if it hadn't been for the power of television. And it was their grotesque misuse of this power which left the most lasting impression on me that weekend.

The PTL Inspirational Network broadcasted a nationally-televised religious service every Sunday in the 3,000 seat Heritage Village Church. This is the program on which Jim and Tammy gathered their fame and followers. The weekend I went to the PTL compound, the couple had just been exiled as retribution for Bakker's intimate encounter with Jessica Hahn. When I discovered the church service would proceed as usual at Heritage, despite the absence of its exalted leaders, I made plans to attend.

On Sunday morning, after accidentally wandering in through the hand-

capped entrance, I quickly slipped into a seat behind the cameras with a skinny, freckled woman who looked as if something was pinching her somewhere sat on one side of me and my parents on the other. My parents, who were not pleased to have been dragged on this journalistic outing of mine and sat yawning and pointedly looking at their watches.

All seats in the front of the church were reserved for various guests with PTL clout and the rest of the seats filled quickly, with people left standing in the back. At 10:30 a.m. prompt, a dramatic drum roll reverberated throughout the plush assembly hall and a voice announced, "And now, live from Heritage USA, the Heritage Village Gospel Choir." As lights burned, film rolled and more than 3,000 people joined together clapping and singing, I felt a tremor of electric energy sweep through the crowd like a wave. Sam Johnson, who was substituting as pastor for Jim and Tammy, commanded the congregation to stand up and join him in "Praising the Lord."

Everyone, and I do mean everyone, obeyed; except for me. I just couldn't believe what I was seeing. It was as if these people were puppets having all their strings pulled the same way at the same time. And most of their faces wore an enraptured look I could only

attribute to utter devotion.

The first half hour was like a staged performance with members of the congregation acting their parts beautifully. Some shouted "Praise God, Praise the Lord," while reaching their arms up in the air as if they wanted to grab him. Others simply nodded at Reverend Johnson's impassioned sermon with tears streaming down their faces. At one point, a member of the choir broke out speaking in tongues, screaming and moaning the biggest bunch of gibberish I've ever heard (except maybe in the Pit).

And of course there was the passing of the collection plates, more symbolic at this church than any other activity they did. I had expected a collection to be taken but was shocked when I realized how they were doing it. In front, within range of the cameras, silver and pewter plates were being handed out. But behind the camera's eye, paper buckets much like those found at Kentucky Fried Chicken were being passed around. Blatant deception, I thought; how long can it last?

About an hour and a half into the program, Sam began to ramble on to the monstrous crowd about the need to be cleansed of sin and healed from the horror of the world. He invited those members of the congregation who felt the weight of sin in their souls to come

forth and be anointed with holy oils in front of the cameras. I watched carefully as only 10 to 15 people out of 3,000 went forward. I now believe this part of the ceremony was staged, and no one went up who had not been previously asked to do so. But at the time I did not consider this possibility and simply watched the pathetic souls go forward, swaying to the band's hypnotic humming.

There was an aura of chaos and fervor about the church and somehow it wove its way inside of me. I stood up, excusing and pardoning my way to the aisle, much to the surprise and horror of my parents. Slowly walking towards the stage I tried to look distressed and tormented. When I reached the front, I pulled my straw hat over my eyes. Television cameras were swarming around the kneeling people and mumbling healers. I was shocked and physically hurt when an usher with a diamond tie-clip gripped my arm tightly and yanked me over to the line of distraught waiting to be healed. This was when I realized I was not supposed to be up there.

When it was my turn, I was pushed forward and forced to kneel as an older man grabbed my hand and put an oily finger smelling of almonds on my forehead. He mumbled under his breath about "the divine gift of beauty and

intelligence..." A camera zoomed in close to my face and I felt confused and disoriented as thousands of distorted but enthralled faces stared down at me. Then, suddenly, I was being yanked to my feet and pushed back down the aisle, my stomach lurching, the anointing over, and my supposed affliction cured.

Two years later, I still remember the emotional power Sam Johnson had over the people in the church. I do not blame Johnson; they were Jim Bakker's followers. And I do not condemn Bakker for being an idol to these people, because this is nothing worse than what singers or actors do. What makes Jim Bakker an abhorrent man is the way he abused his power. With his glamorous theme park and passionate rhetorics, he lured in the hopeless and kept them hypnotized while he picked their pockets clean, all in the name of God. As a witness to some of his ploys, I promise skeptics that Bakker deserves 120 years and much, much more. He chose to make a living selling lucrative grace, and his earnings should buy him a nice 8-by-12 foot cubicle and membership into some of the more "exclusive" clubs on his cell block.

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Another center for UNC

To the editor:

After having been here at UNC for more than two years, I have seen several controversies arise. However, three of these seem to stand out in my mind as current and very pressing concerns: the construction of a Black Cultural Center (BCC), the construction of the Alumni Association building in the Big Woods and the construction of a Student Recreation Center adjacent to Fetzer Gym. I have a proposal for a solution to the problem of the first two that will help with the third.

It seems fairly evident that the BCC that is now located in the Student Union is cramped into a space that is far too small to fulfill its needs. It does not appear very likely that the BCC will get funding for their own building. The powers that be are probably not highly motivated to provide money/land/building when black enrollment annually runs between 7 percent and 8 percent, despite the fact that the BCC is an educational resource for use by all students regardless of race, religion...

The destruction of a sizable portion of Big Woods in preparation for the construction of another alumni build-

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ing has already occurred. I haven't personally met an alumnus who wants the building to be constructed, nor have I met a person on campus (student or administrator) who wants the building built. Probably fearing a confrontation over the construction, the Alumni Association delayed the destruction of the land until the summer when most students are gone from Chapel Hill. Basically, I don't think the building is necessary, and it is unfortunate that the alumni were allowed to push this project through.

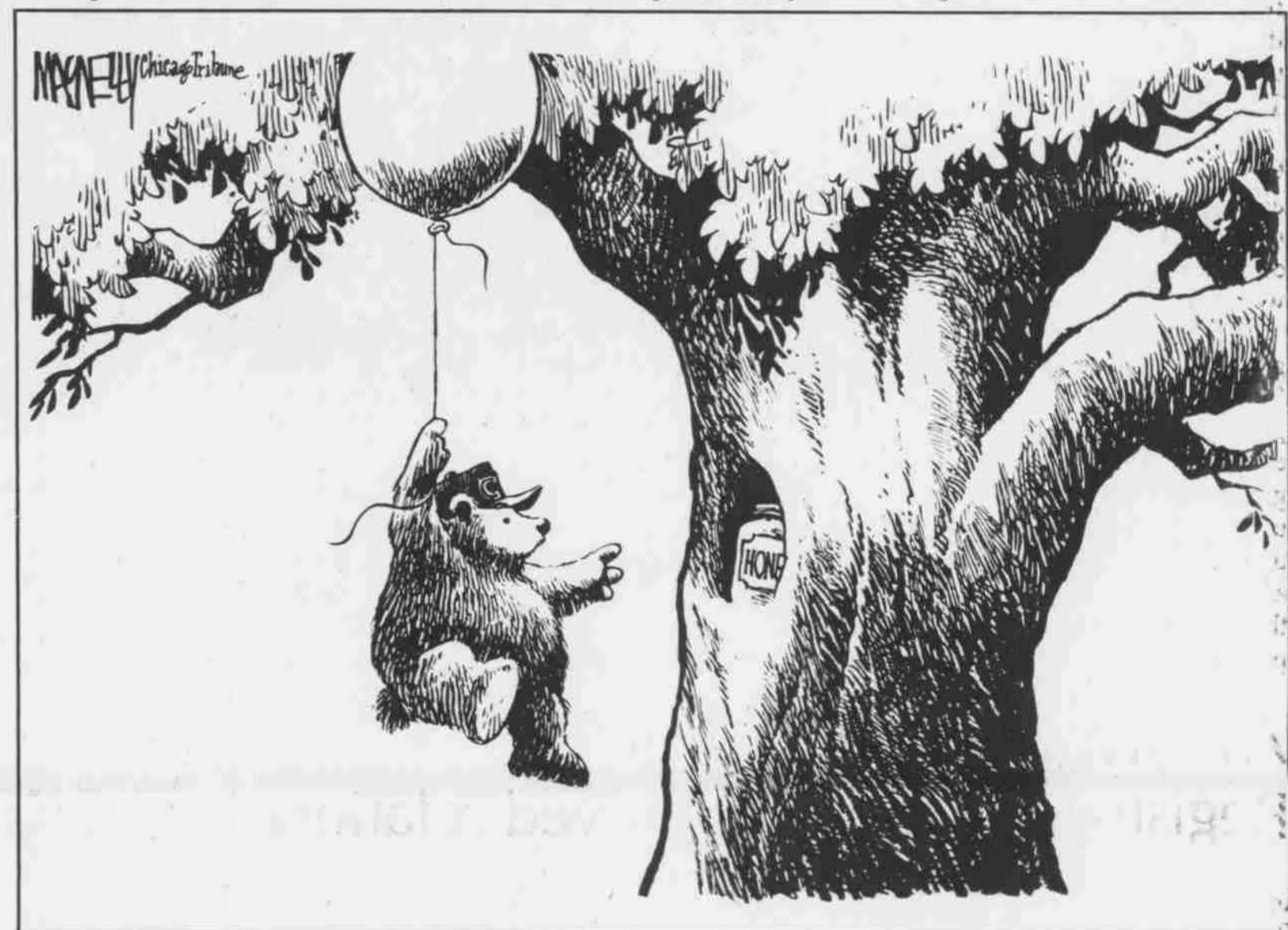
So, the land is cleared, and a building is in the wings. The BCC is anxiously awaiting the opportunity to have a larger area and desires a separate building. Since there are many other cultural groups on campus desiring some form of a cultural center, I have a proposal.

I propose that the BCC unite with all other cultural groups on campus in the formation of a UNC Cultural Aware-

ness Council which will petition the General Alumni Association to donate the already-cleared land and the proposed building to be a UNC Cultural Center, shared by the members of the UNC Cultural Awareness Council, and with recognition of the very kind and generous donation of the alumni.

Since the building would be donated, I would propose that the annual operating costs of the building and Cultural Awareness Council be funded by the increase in student fees originally proposed for the Student Recreation Center. Yes, I oppose the SRC because it is not necessary, and if you haven't heard about the gross misrepresentation of student opinion on this campus by the CAA, you need to read the DTH, among other publications. At the very least, a new referendum is in order as only 13 percent of the 1988-89 student body voted for such a center. At any rate, this would provide funding for an educational, inspirational and badly needed cultural center.

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Board needs to check facts before accusing fraternities

Editor's note: Gilreath is president of the UNC Interfraternity Council.

To the editor:

I would like to respond to the board opinion appearing Oct. 2 ("Rush Without Alcohol").

First, I am not opposed to dry rush and have yet to choose my position on the subject, as I can see both sides of the argument. The discussion of dry rush is not a new one, however. It has been bantered around since I became a member of the Interfraternity Council in 1986. It has always been a concern. In light of the many recent alcohol-related incidents on other campuses that have resulted in serious personal harm, it has gained new momentum and much more attention.

In addition, approximately 20 percent of this campus belongs to Greek-letter organizations, which leaves 80 percent of the campus at large. To imply that the largest problem with alcohol lies in the 20 percent of the students who are Greek is ludicrous. At most major campus event, alcoholic beverages abound for the legal and the underage. The stereotype of Joe Frat with beer in tow can also be applied to Suzie

Student on this campus. At any party or "social event," Greek-sponsored or not, there will be alcohol. Otherwise, the event will be very poorly attended. Springfest is a prime example. If carding was occurring and arrests were being made for public consumption, I doubt that anyone would stick around. And, contrary to popular belief that has persisted for years, fraternity members do not drink alcohol seven days a week! Alcohol is not the end-all and be-all of fraternity life, and it does not have a central role! In fact, I know quite a few fraternity members who do not drink at all. Now so far as the "editorial board" stating what rush should and should not be, I think that is a matter best left to those who know more about the process and who are an immediate part of it. The board is not, nor will ever be, seen as a source or authority for determining what rush should be, nor what fraternities should do. Besides, does the board know what happens at rush functions? Are there statistics, proof, evidence, FACTS?! The board is not a governing body of this campus, nor of the fraternities and should not mandate anything to any campus organizations.

In regard to freshmen and sophomores, the board implies that fraternities cater to their desire for alcohol. On the contrary, fraternities are seen as the easiest means of getting alcohol. If freshmen and sophomores cannot get it there, they will get it elsewhere. The problem of underage drinking on this campus cannot and will not be shouldered by the fraternities. Do not get me wrong. I am not condoning underage drinking, yet neither can I condemn it considering most of us on this campus, myself and the board included, live in Glass Houses on this subject. Now, I do not intend for this argument to stand as an endorsement for things to stay at their present state. I am simply clearing up some accusations and injustices in print.

Drinking is an individual decision. If a rushee feels pressure from a fraternity to drink, that alone should tell him that he should re-evaluate this particular house and his decision to be a part of it. After all, there are 23 to choose from. This one may not be for him. In my four years of voting in my house, never has it been said, "I don't want him in my fraternity because he does not drink,"

and I would think that it is the same in other houses. To assume that fraternity members drink more than the average student is wrong and another unjust accusation.

Now, I do agree that "the implementation of a dry rush policy will be difficult." And, at almost all the other schools, dry rush is mandated and controlled by the IFC, even to the point of the IFC members policing the events. But, for a system as large as ours that has been, for the most part, autonomous for a number of years, such a shot-gun approach to this problem can be detrimental at best. The fraternities cannot be compared to sororities in this case. Sororities still fall under the *in loco parentis* policy of the University and are required by their national organizations to be more directly connected to the University. Not to mention they receive services from the University that would make their existence here next to impossible were they not offered. Moreover, there are literally worlds of differences between the white fraternity rush process and the black fraternity rush process.

Furthermore, this is the second time

alcohol and sexual harassment, racial harassment and hazing incidents have been linked in a cause-and-effect relationship. In the manner of the board, it would be wrong to say that alcohol does not play a part. However, to imply that alcohol leads to these offenses is also wrong. I can't help but think that the initial urge is there and is heightened by the consumption of alcohol. Not to mention the fact that women drink alcohol also. I myself have not seen too many reports of these offenses with women as the offender.

Now, the implementation of a dry rush policy does lie with the IFC. However, the IFC is a conglomerate organization of all the fraternities on this campus, and it will take a majority decision of these member organizations to make such a policy a reality. And, believe it or not, we already know what is and is not in our best interest. We are more than capable of making this decision ourselves without input from sources other than the University. Neither will we seek the advice of other organizations that do not have similar interests in nor experience with adopting such a policy.

In closing, I would like to advise the DTH of a couple of things concerning this issue. First, before any allegations, accusations and implications are made, I would ask that they be completely and thoroughly researched and backed-up with facts.

I have interviewed with the DTH before on fraternity issues. I have tried to be very helpful and tried to answer their questions as thoroughly as possible. I see no reason why this opinion should have appeared with so little basis on facts. An opinion without facts is probably one of the worst opinions of all. If facts could not be gained, some kind of credibility should have been established instead of that of "board opinion," which tries to connote some sort of authority.

Second, do not tell any organization what is in their "best interest." You know what is in the DTH's best interest, we know what is in ours, and all other campus organizations know what is in theirs.

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Pit sleeping, parking and protests

"I do apologize for people having been offended. I never meant for that to happen. I knew people were offended, but we can't be tagged as a weirdo bar. One person can run away a lot of people even though that person is trying to express himself." — Sheila Brown, manager of the Franklin Street bar On the Hill, commenting on reaction against the bar's new, informal dress code intended to keep out people who, by their dress, would offend typical students.

"It takes more than a group of students sleeping in the Pit to make sure that everyone in Chapel Hill and Carrboro has affordable housing." — Malini Moorthy, co-president of the Campus Y, speaking on the Y's Student Homeless Outreach Coalition, which held a sleepout in the Pit to call awareness to the problems of the homeless. SHOC sponsored the sleepout as a prelude to the weekend march for the homeless in Washington, D.C.

"My teddy bear is sitting here with the crown on. Maybe if I keep looking at him, the idea will settle in." — Tonya Blanks, on being chosen from eight

Week in Quotes
finalists as UNC's 1989 Homecoming Queen.

"We did not heckle. We simply voiced our disapproval of this terrorist party. He thought he was dealing with uneducated students who had not read about the FMLN, but we had documentation of the FMLN's terrorist activities." — Sharon Sentelle, chairwoman of the UNC College Republicans, justifying the group's protest of Arnoldo Ramos, who spoke on campus Wednesday. Ramos is associated with the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN), an anti-government group in El Salvador that has ties to the Communist Party.

"I want this parking facility to be open and airy, not a cave buried down in a hole. People still feel unsafe when they are underground no matter how many lights there are." — Michael Hining, an architect, explaining one of his ideas for the parking garage Chapel

Hill plans to build on Rosemary Street. Hining's firm and one other were chosen by a town subcommittee to help design the proposed garage and public plaza.

"It is so bad, so wrong for the economy. It will do for the deficit what crack does for the user: a quick short high followed by a long, painful depression." — George Mitchell, U.S. Senate majority leader, describing his view of President Bush's version of a capital gains tax. The plan, which was approved by the House of Representatives, would lower the maximum tax rate on capital gains.

"I see the amount of pressure the whole Greek system is undergoing. The whole system is being looked down upon right now." — Kristin Rosenkampff, president of Kappa Delta sorority, commenting on a national resolution prohibiting KDs from being little sisters to fraternities after 1992. Other sororities are expected to follow.

Compiled by Mary Jo Dunnington, editorial page editor.

