

PASTOR GENERAL'S REPORT

TO THE MINISTRY OF THE
WORLDWIDE CHURCH OF GOD



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REPORT FROM THE TREASURER'S OFFICE

February has now come and gone, but not without its problems for the financial area. On the positive side, we had a good income month with an increase over last February of 15.3%. This brought the year-to-date increase to 15% over last year. This shows a slightly increasing trend over January. At the same time, expenses overall have been within budget.

But we do have a problem, and that is "cash flow." As I previously reported, we ended 1983 with lower bank balances than expected. This was due to several factors, including lower than expected income and higher than expected expenses for November and December. This lower "altitude" in the bank was not sufficient to provide for our normal low points just before the spring and fall holy days. Therefore, we have had to request all departments to decrease their expenditures until balances are again sufficient. In addition, some budget and financial changes are being implemented. We expect to work through this problem, but it will take time and effort.

I hope that you and all the brethren in your area will be prepared in a special way for the soon-coming holy day offerings. Even though we have had good income, the need is even greater. If we all prepare ahead of time, I am sure that the offering will be even more generous than usual. In addition, our fervent prayers could have an even greater effect. God could inspire co-workers and donors to give greater amounts, and inspire noncontributors to begin giving. This would certainly help us in our continuing efforts to increase the power with which the gospel is being preached for a witness to the nations.

--Leroy Neff, Treasurer

FROM MINISTERIAL SERVICES

International News

Australian Update January was one of the highest months ever for mail. Twenty-six thousand eight hundred twenty-one letters were received--an 85.9% increase over the same month last year! The increase in mail was primarily due to the excellent response from Australian subscribers to Mr. Armstrong's latest semiannual letter. So far 12,508 requests have been received--20.8% of the mailing list. Of the two publications offered by Mr. Armstrong in his letter, YOUR AWESOME FUTURE is more popular by only a few percentage points than the other booklet offered, DID GOD CREATE A DEVIL? Of all the requests received, 70% asked for both booklets.

Responses to a semiannual letter from Asian countries will usually continue to come in for twelve months or more. Responses to Mr. Armstrong's May semiannual letter are still being received and so far 12,468 requests have been processed, representing 30.1% of the Asian mailing list.

In December of last year, all Bible correspondence course students not receiving the GOOD NEWS magazine were mailed a letter from Mr. Armstrong offering a subscription. By the end of January, 2,257 replies had been re-

ceived--an excellent 22.6% response. These responses have lifted the GOOD NEWS circulation to just under the 10,000 mark, providing a 128.8% increase over January of last year.

The YOUTH magazine renewal program has brought a fine response, with 83.8% of Australian recipients wishing to continue receiving the magazine, and 86.6% of Asian subscribers.

The number of co-workers supporting the work of God's Church in Australia has risen considerably over the past twelve months--up 63.2% compared to January, 1983.

Comments From Monthly Church Reports

From the Caribbean

HAMILTON, BERMUDA--CECIL PULLEY: Members are becoming aware of the need for more urgency in their spiritual lives. Many are now redoing the Bible correspondence course and going over many of the Church's booklets. Church attendance is increasing as more and more people are becoming aware of the Church.

GEORGETOWN, GUYANA--PAUL KRAUTMANN: Family, financial and unemployment problems are the most prevalent trials among members presently. Most are striving to overcome, but some are taking a long time to get moving.

BRIDGETOWN, BARBADOS--ARNOLD HAMPTON: We are now on radio three times a day, and are awaiting results. The Church is excited about the possibility of getting on TV here again.

From the United States

SANTA FE, NM--WALTER DICKINSON: The members continue to be responsive to the direction Jesus Christ is giving to the Church through Mr. Armstrong. All recognize more fully how the end of this age is approaching faster than many had thought. They are sobered by this realization.

FAYETTEVILLE, AR--JOHN R. ELLIOTT: All the brethren are on their toes and working with more diligence than ever as Mr. Armstrong leads the way. A strong feeling of our being on the home stretch is felt by all. The publications and the telecast are full of so much meat these days. All are very inspired!

ROCHESTER, NY--LESLIE SCHMEDES: Sensing that we are in the last days, the congregation appreciates Mr. Armstrong's sermon tapes. They realize that what he is giving them can only come from him, and are most thankful.

ANN ARBOR, MI--RAY WOOTEN: Some of the brethren in the area have been undergoing several pretty big trials. Most are handling the pressures very well, and are still enthusiastic about God's work. Mr. Armstrong's broadcasts about the impending holocaust and about the Kingdom of God have generated a lot of interest.

WEST BEND, WI--CARL McNAIR: I have received quite an increase in calls from people watching The "WORLD TOMORROW" telecast who want to know just exactly what is going to happen in the near future. This is as a result of Mr. Armstrong's telecasts on nuclear war.

ST. PETERSBURG, FL--ROBERT C. JONES: Everyone was delighted by Mr. Armstrong's visit to Central Florida. In his meeting with the ministers afterwards, he was lamenting that he tires easily these days--that he gets tired after only two or three hours of typing. If it's any consolation to him, I'm only 48 and if I typed for two or three hours someone would probably have to carry me away from the desk. Mr. Armstrong continues to set all of us an excellent example of leadership and hard work which we younger men are pantingly trying to emulate.

ORLANDO, FL--ROBERT BERTUZZI: Y.O.U. and Y.E.S. programs are making a difference. The "generation gap" is being bridged as parents turn to children with an affectionate gift of time and resources. This kind of investment is sure to pay big dividends in the future.

HOUSTON (NORTH), TX--JOHN OGWYN: The lack of proper instruction many of the parents seem to have given their teens regarding sex and dating is appalling. Most teens have not read Mr. Armstrong's book, THE MISSING DIMENSION IN SEX; in fact, I really don't think most of the parents have either.

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO--CLINT ZIMMERMAN: Our children are becoming increasingly interested in what we're doing in Y.O.U. and Y.E.S., but I have the uncomfortable feeling that parents just do not realize how awesome is their responsibility toward their children in these latter days. My sermons this month have attempted to spell it out in more complete detail than ever before, but there is still much to be done here and in the Church worldwide. I'm not referring to children's activities but to parental education and involvement.

MONROE, LA--BRISCOE ELLETT II: We are currently counseling with many second generation youth of the Church and they are beginning to see that (as one put it to me) "this is the only place where it's at!" I believe several will be baptized by Passover. Quite a few of the PMs we are contacting are experiencing difficult trials as they strive to be obedient to God. It is so obvious though that God is calling more people to work with. It is encouraging to see them come along.

BAKER, OR--JEFF MCGOWAN: The winter weather with extreme cold wind and snow has made life difficult for members in this area. Some of the people were without electricity for eight or nine days in very bitter cold. The ice and snow were so bad--coupled with the wind--that not only did power lines break but power poles by the score cracked in two and had to be replaced. Most people in the area were inconvenienced to say the least. The members did all right and God took care of them. Many linemen and construction workers had to be brought in from out of state in order to restore power. Crews worked around the clock to get the job done.

FT. COLLINS, CO--CHUCK ZIMMERMAN: The growth of the congregation spiritually, as well as in size, is a gift from God. Many people are moving into the area and new visits are turning into PMS at a good rate. Attendance is up despite very hard winter weather.

NEW BERN, NC--JOHN MOSKEL: I visited a minister of another religion who, once he realized that Saturday was the true Sabbath and personally kept it, preached about it on Sunday and was voted out of his local church. He still keeps the Sabbath at home with five of his "faithful" members. He wants to attend the Church of God and sees a great need to be taught. I am going slowly with him.

MINNEAPOLIS (SOUTH), MN--VICTOR KUBIK: A new former Seventh Day Adventist family is now attending. After they came one week, they brought a friend from their former church. Now they say that there are others who want to come. They have been told by their minister that they are spiritually dead--and now a number in that congregation want to find a Sabbath-keeping church that is alive!

--Joe Tkach, Ministerial Services

UPDATE FROM MAIL PROCESSING

800 Million Pieces of Literature Mailed!

Since the Philadelphia era of God's Church began in 1934, a grand total of 800 million pieces of literature have been published and distributed. About 637 million pieces were sent out in the United States alone. If the present rate of growth continues, we will pass the one billion mark before the end of 1985!

Local Churches Provide Volunteer WATS Operators

For nearly three years, members of local churches in Southern California have served as Sabbath volunteer WATS operators, answering more than a quarter of a million phone calls.

We receive hundreds of calls every Sabbath--two-thirds or more of which are from first-time callers. The "WORLD TOMORROW" telecast airs on several stations on the Sabbath, including Chicago superstation WGN and the large independent station WPIX in New York City.

If volunteers were not here to answer phones on the Sabbath, the callers would have to leave a message on call-answering devices. However, because these automatic machines lack warmth and the human touch, up to 50% of those calling in would probably hang up. Literally thousands of literature requests from potential members of God's Church are taken thanks to the efforts of these volunteers.

Currently, about 1,600 brethren are involved in the Sabbath volunteer program. Each Sabbath, 150 operators are needed. Most volunteers serve once every six to eight weeks. Incidentally, calls begin coming in before 4:30 a.m.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to those who faithfully donate their time and energy to answer these calls, and would like to commend them for their valuable service.

God's Sacred Calendar for 1984-85 to Be Mailed Shortly

A new edition of God's Sacred Calendar has been prepared, and plans now call for it to be mailed to all member heads-of-households during the month of March. This year, the new calendar contains beautiful color photographs and interesting background information about God's calendar.

Booklets Have Powerful Impact!

Most of us in God's Church can probably remember one or two booklets that especially caught our attention during the initial stages of our spiritual education. Many of our readers are prompted to write in after a particular booklet has brought them great enlightenment or taught a valuable lesson. The following letters show the impact our literature can have.

I have just finished reading your booklet on water baptism, and feel I am definitely ready to be baptized. I was born into a Catholic family and was baptized as an infant. I had water either poured or sprinkled on me, but I know I was not immersed.

One night I came across The "WORLD TOMORROW" program and it literally changed my life. Now I know and understand that I must obey God, His laws and commandments. I fear God and want to do what pleases Him--now I need some help. I would like to have some questions answered:

Can I baptize myself? For I have baptized myself with the aid of my wife. Can I baptize my wife? I also did that just before baptizing myself. Do you need witnesses? If what I did was not valid, then I would like very much if one of your ministers would come to my house and baptize my wife and myself.

R.B. (Brooklyn, NY)

I have picked up a couple of your magazines at the supermarket, and just sent in a card to subscribe. My son (age 11) looked over my shoulder at the magazines and some of the ads for your free booklets really caught his eye--particularly WHO IS THE BEAST? and THE FOUR HORSEMEN.

Please send these booklets--the ad sent him running to get his Bible when I told him what the booklets were about! He's sitting now with his nose buried in the book of Revelation instead of being glued to the TV. I must thank you with all my heart. Your clever ads got his attention and interest, which is more than I've been able to do.

M.S. (West Terre Haute, IN)

Your booklet PAGAN HOLIDAYS OR GOD'S HOLY DAYS--WHICH? came on March 15th almost a year ago. I decided to read it when I got the chance. After a long day I was looking forward to retiring. On doing so, I found I couldn't sleep. Shortly before 2 a.m. I got up, wide awake, and went downstairs to read the booklet.

By the middle of the booklet, I was so excited about Passover and the holy days I was ready to write in for a calendar adhering to God's timetable. My curiosity urged me to read ahead in hope I

would find the answer, and I did. Under 1983, March 15th was the first day of God's Sacred Year--the day the booklet arrived! I could see that God was actually leading me and answering my questions.

L.L. (Walworth, NY)

I have learned more from a couple of your booklets--THE TEN COMMANDMENTS and THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN IN PROPHECY--than I could have learned at the local Bible college. I have read and studied both booklets twice. I learned that the Ten Commandments are for me today. They are not some obsolete laws that were done away with by Jesus Christ as some churches teach. I guess I really knew this all along but I hadn't given them much thought or study. I now feel like I know who I am and where I came from; also where I'm going. I feel like I'm finally on my way and will make it by the grace of God.

R.B. (Plant City, FL)

I'd just like to say how much I've learned from reading some of the literature you have sent me. I am surprised at some of the things that I'm learning and would like to thank Mr. Armstrong, especially for the booklet WHAT DO YOU MEAN--THE UNPARDONABLE SIN? For the past few months I've wondered if I'd blown it all in one fell swoop of stupidity. Thank God I haven't!

S.S. (Ontario, CA)

--Richard Rice, Mail Processing Center

ON THE WORLD SCENE

NEW PAPAL APPEAL TO ORTHODOX; VATICAN AND ITALY SIGN NEW CONCORDAT; AMERICA'S LOSS OF WILL; DESENSITIZING MUSIC

The world is careening from crisis to crisis. With most of the ill-fated Western multi-national forces now out of Lebanon, action there is tapering off for now while Syria's President Assad, the big winner, pauses to see what he will do next. The world's attention is therefore riveted on the deepening Gulf War between Iraq and Iran. Iraq apparently attempted--to no avail--a high altitude bombing run on Iran's oil export facility on Kharg Island. Meanwhile, as all this is occurring, Pope John Paul II is quietly pursuing his dream of East-West reconciliation, based upon overtures to the Orthodox churches. Here is a UPI dispatch from Bari, Italy dated February 26:

Pope John Paul II, making the first papal visit to the historic port of Bari in nearly 850 years, Sunday urged the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches to work together for peace between the peoples of Europe. The pope issued the appeal during a 12-hour trip to the southern Adriatic town, 280 miles southeast of Rome, where he met with orthodox prelates and celebrated an ecumenical mass before a stadium crowd of about 350,000 people....

Meeting with the orthodox prelates in the 11th century basilica St. Nicholas, John Paul called on their churches to work with him for peace among European peoples. "Can the two sister churches that generated the spiritual dynamism of Europe, conditioning its destiny, ever abandon it to itself in such a critical moment of

its history? he asked. The churches, he said, must show a united concern "to offer a contribution of primary importance to the development of a peaceful and prosperous coexistence between the European peoples."

The pope met with Metropolitan Cysostomos Konstantinid, representing the Orthodox ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Monsignor Gennadios Zervos, a leader of the Greek Orthodox Church in Italy, and priests from all other orthodox churches except that of the Soviet Union. A Vatican source said church-state tensions made it "a bad moment" to invite a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The meeting climaxed the first papal visit to Bari since Innocent II stayed in the port nearly 847 years ago. It recalled an unsuccessful attempt at church unity when Innocent's predecessor, Urban II, met in the city in 1098 with Greek church leaders. Because of its geographical location, Bari has been a traditional bridge between east and west for Christians since the Middle Ages when King Richard I of England used it to launch his crusade against Islam.

The pope has certainly not embarked on any crusade toward either Islam or the Orthodox Christians, but he seems to be stepping up his challenge to Moscow. He will soon be making a trip to South Korea, and in a manner not likely to please the Kremlin. The "Periscope" section of the March 5 NEWS-WEEK reports:

John Paul II may be flying in the face of the Russians when he journeys to South Korea in May. His special Alitalia flight from Rome will go via Anchorage to Seoul, the same path flown by Korean Air Lines Flight 007 last September before it strayed off course and was struck down by Soviet missiles. According to Vatican sources, John Paul elected not to take the slightly more logical route from west to east for a variety of reasons, including his wish to demonstrate solidarity with his hosts. "It is not an anti-Soviet decision," said one Vatican official, "but it is pro-Korean."

It turns out, too, that there may have been a bit more to that highly-publicized "forgiveness" that the pope recently expressed personally to his intended assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca. Here's what THE TIMES of London, on February 17, said:

The Turkish terrorist Mehmet Ali Agca, serving a life sentence in Rome for attempting to kill the pope in May, 1981, gave the pope full details of the plot when the two met in Agca's cell on December 27 last year, the Turkish Daily HURRIYET claimed yesterday. Publishing a transcript of the filmed conversation, the paper said it got hold of the film, of which the only two copies were kept in the state archives of Italy and the Vatican, through a mysterious Italian who contacted its Rome correspondent a month after the meeting.

As the film was without sound, the conversation was deciphered by lip-reading experts from Rome's school for the deaf and dumb,

HURRIYET said. However, a crucial two-minute sequence had been clipped from the film recording Mr. Agca's answer to the pope's question "Who was the one that wanted me destroyed? Who sent you to St. Peter's Square?" In an earlier sequence, the pope remarked "I believe what you have told me so far, but how did you do it? I want to know for myself." Agca's answer was lost because his lips were behind the pope's ear during the whispered conversation.

Shades of Watergate. That "lost two minutes" reminds one of the "missing eighteen minutes" of one of President Nixon's tapes.

On another front regarding the Vatican, it has now been made official: Under terms of a new concordat with the Italian government, Roman Catholicism is no longer to be the state religion of Italy and Rome's status as a "sacred city" has been dropped. The changes do not alter the status of Vatican City as an independent state run by the pope, but the new pact, terminating the 55-year-old concordat signed between the Vatican and the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini, is a significant milestone nonetheless. Correspondent Henry Tanner, writing in the February 20 INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, summarized the new development in this manner:

The steady decline in recent years of the influence of the Catholic Church on life and politics in Italy was formalized Saturday when Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the Vatican's secretary of state, signed a new state-church concordat in a solemn ceremony. Catholicism is no longer Italy's "state religion," as the concordat signed 55 years ago said.

Rome no longer has "the sacred character of eternal city," which under the previous concordat made it "the duty of the Italian government" to keep anything out of the city's life that could be "in conflict with this character." Covered by this were some films and books regarded as morally offensive to Catholicism or the papacy.

Religious instruction in state schools becomes optional instead of being "the foundation and crowning of public education," as under the other concordat.... Annulments of marriages by the Vatican are made subject to review by an Italian court if requested by one of the parties. But the state continues to give automatic recognition to church marriages....

Mr. Craxi pointed to the church's diminishing influence when he said the new concordat reflected "the new relations between the church and the political community"... Within six months the full text will...go to Parliament for ratification. Approval is virtually certain since Mr. Craxi had no trouble getting the draft of the text he signed Saturday through Parliament.

The greatest single setback for the church in recent years came in 1981, when Italian voters decisively opposed repeal of a law permitting abortion.... In 1974, voters refused to repeal a three-year-old law on divorce.... "We are a secular country," wrote the daily newspaper LA REPUBBLICA after the [abortion] vote in 1981. Mr. Craxi, not yet prime minister, said: "The pope thinks we are Poland, but we are not."...

Although virtually every Italian is a baptized Catholic, church attendance is not much greater than in Catholic and Protestant regions elsewhere in Europe. Contrary to church doctrine, birth control is widely practiced....

Pope John Paul II said Sunday that the new concordat was an ideal inspiration for the church's contribution to Italy's moral good and civil progress.

The new state-of-affairs could certainly benefit the Church of God. Premier Craxi, for example, called the changes "a modern separation" of church and state under which people "without distinctions of belief, in full and consolidated liberty, can make conscious religious choices." And since Rome no longer enjoys the status of a "sacred city," this means the Catholic Church can no longer ban literature or films, etc., it considers offensive. (Gear up the newsstand program!)

Then, too, one thinks of the future of the papacy itself. Given the loss in stature of the "Eternal City," might it not be easier for the papacy to someday relocate itself elsewhere--like, say, Jerusalem?

America the Has-been Superpower: It's the Will that's Lacking

One of the most incisive American news analysts is Patrick J. Buchanan. In his February 13 syndicated column, Mr. Buchanan looked at the U.S. role in the world in the aftermath of the debacle in Lebanon:

As the Soviet missiles were withdrawn from Cuba, in resolution of the 1962 crisis, Charles de Gaulle observed, "There is only one superpower." Observing the Marine retreat from Beirut under the covering fire of the Sixth Fleet, he might make the same observation. If it remains the defining characteristic of a superpower that, once its prestige and military are committed, it prevails, the United States no longer belongs in the category.

The British and French debacle at Suez demonstrated that Britain and France no longer qualified as great powers. So, the coming debacle in Lebanon provides a clear and useful snapshot, dated 1984, of the true correlation of forces in the world. For a long, long time the United States has been living off the tremendous inherited capital of World War II. The belief burnished in the minds of men everywhere that the United States was the most dangerous of enemies, that, once aroused, this sleeping giant would mercilessly pound to rubble any nation that threatened its vital interests. Americans were not to be trifled with. Today, in the Chouf [mountains of Lebanon], Druse militia are echoing Mao's taunt about the "paper tiger."

Consequences are certain to flow from the altered perception. While important that the Americans recognize the new realities, it is more critical that nations dependent upon American commitments adjust their policies accordingly. For all its quality weaponry, the United States as a nation today has nothing remotely similar to the national determination, unity and stomach it had in 1861 or 1941, or even 1917 and 1965. If the Chinese in Peking were astonished the Americans would abandon Vietnam after only 50,000 dead, what must they think today?

Setting aside the press blather about the "greatest military buildup in history," the U.S. Navy is half the size it was in 1964.... Domestically, the nation's largest party, the Democrats, has become an active impediment to a realistic foreign policy--with its "leaders" falling all over one another, demanding immediate U.S. withdrawal from the small threatened, friendly country of Honduras, where we have every right to be, after a single American pilot was killed by the Sandinistas.

American conservatives, and the military, too, are reluctant to commit American forces where vital national interests are not directly and visibly threatened--because they believe the American left will discredit, undermine and eventually destroy the effort. Most important, the American people are no longer willing to allow the shedding of American blood...because of domestic disunity and policy disagreements.... The reason the Kissinger Commissions's recommendations were so warmly received is that Henry urged we send money, not men, to win the war in Central America.

The future has always belonged to those willing to fight for it, no matter their motive. We Americans, and Westerners, are not.... Twenty years ago, James Burnham wrote of a philosophy of suicide that had taken hold in the West, a death wish. One manifestation is that all the offspring and allies of the West, still fighting to defend their liberty and national identity--South Africa and Israel, the Afghan rebels and the Nicaraguan "Contras," the regime in El Salvador and the UNITA force of Jonas Savimbi are condemned, disparaged or abandoned.

The "Grammy's" and Today's Music: A Reflection of America's Rotting Culture

On February 28, pop-and-rock sensation Michael Jackson set a "Grammy" record by finishing first in eight categories in the record industry's 26th annual awards ceremony. Jackson is such a sensation that his "smash" album, "Thriller," could sell as high as 35 million copies worldwide this year. No solo album has ever sold more than 12 million.

For the awards ceremony, Jackson was dressed gaudily as usual, in a spangled uniform with epaulets and sequined right glove. His high, squeaky voice showed that he would never pass first-year speech class at Ambassador College. (I can see it now: "Michael, you have to lower your voice and speak out! Repeat after me: Up, up, up, around, around, around, down, down, DOWN!")

However, for sheer abominability a group performing a number from a certain stage-show album stole the show. Five men came out dressed in "drag" (women's clothes). Four of them receded, with the fifth proceeding into a solo. Dressed in evening gown, make-up, the works, the baritone boomed out the words, "I am what I am." In the song, he defiantly defended his right to be and act the way he appeared. Afterwards, the audience applauded, naturally--confirming the truism of Proverbs 28:4: "Those who forsake the law praise the wicked."

Much can be said of the wickedness of today's rock--and especially rock-video--music. The television critic of the SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER, Michael Dougan, wrote an exceptional piece in his paper's January 12 edition:

One of the worst things about MTV, the rock video channel shown on most local cable outlets, is its rejection--through song lyrics and visual symbolism--of qualities like warmth, humor or interpersonal affection. Alienation is the operative mood and, considering most viewers are at an impressionable age, that's not healthy.

Now the National Coalition on Television Violence...has quantified the problem. After monitoring MTV for an unspecified period of time, NCTV has issued a report claiming more than half of MTV's videos "featured violence or strongly suggested violence." NCTV counted an average of 18 instances of "violent or hostile" action each hour, with 35 percent of the violence being "of a sexual nature."

"Rock video's combination of lyrics and images adds a new dimension to television violence," said NCTV project director Phil Galli. "Many of the videos added violent imagery that wasn't even present in the lyrics." NCTV Chairman Thomas Radecki had his own objections: "The message is that violence is normal and OK, that hostile sexual relations between men and women are common and acceptable, that heroes actively engaged in torture and murder of others are fun."...

Among the...examples from the NCTV report: "'Fight Fire With Fire,' by Kansas, features slave torture and sadistic women. 'Murder Weapon,' by T-Bone Burnett, features the stalking of a woman to kill her with a gun. Golden Earring's 'Twilight Zone' features slow-motion murder and repeated interrogation torture. MTV has women boiled alive while other women are portrayed as cold-hearted and enjoying torturing men...."

Nor was NCTV enamored by the names of some rock groups, including Three Teens Kill Four, Sadist Faction, Pseudo Sadists, Rash of Stabbings and...Dead Kennedys. (It's interesting to note that two of these titles--"Three Teens Kill Four" and "Rash of Stabbings"--are clearly inspired by newspaper headlines.)... It's not that everyone who watches MTV is bound for rape and mayhem, of course, but the desensitization issue is a real matter of concern.

It has always amused me a bit that some outside church groups have devoted so much energy to try to decipher alleged diabolical backward messages ("backward masking") in rock songs. Such plotting has undoubtedly occurred. But this misses the much bigger picture: There is plenty of harm "up front" in what young people plainly hear and see. Ours is a society increasingly "without natural affection" (II Tim. 3:3).

--Gene H. Hogberg, News Bureau