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New York

## Fair Enough

By Westbrook Pegler

A correspondent gives me quite a going-over because I have neglected to expose a man whom he regards as a religious faker who advertises extensively in the papers that he talked with God and got rich. The papers live on advertising revenue, I get mine from the papers, therefore I lay off the man who says he talked with God and therefore I am venal.



The religion in question is a mail-order operation and I have examined it rather carefully and regard it as nonsense. It consists of a "course" of lessons and sells for a price and, a couple of years ago, subscribers who had been disappointed in it sent me heckling letters which they had received from a collection agency in Delaware, demanding that they pay up.

About a year ago a man in the business management of a chain of papers told me they had been offered \$20,000 worth of this prophet's advertising copy and had decided to turn it down. Others papers, however, accepted it and I can understand how they could do so with good conscience because rejection could be interpreted as interference with religious freedom.

I have read the story of Joseph Smith and personally can't believe a word he said, but his people fought their way across the country, persecuted every step of the way, and the religion which he founded survived and thrived and those who believe in it include some of our best citizens.

Mark Twain whipped himself into lathers in his campaign against Mary Baker Eddy. He and she are dead, but Christian Science is still with us and, passing no controversial judgment on her teaching which I know very little about, I have observed that those true believers in Christian Science whom I have known have been uncommonly gentle and kind individuals who wouldn't do you dirt.

A few years ago I got excited about a man named Ballard who called himself The Great I Am and operated, of course, out of Los Angeles, but had a big following in Chicago and chapters in Washington and Philadelphia. He claimed to have

a lake of gold in a mountain in California and he and his wife would get up in meeting and talk about gas belts in the atmosphere while pointing with a long stick to peculiarities on magic lantern slides which looked pretty much like the ordinary weather map. They had half a dozen expensive yellow automobiles in which they traveled from place to place, and certainly were in the money, and the relatives of some of Ballard's joiners were in a terrible state because they would draw away from their families and give their money to him. But apparently there is no way to prevent anyone from giving his money to the prophet or priest of his religion and if you try to have such a person declared insane you are plunging into deep trouble.

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Ballard and his followers had a rite in which they would stand up, whang themselves on the chest with both fists and roar "Annihilate! Annihilate! Annihilate!" This was supposed to invoke the wrath of the ascended masters, who were the spirits of his teachings, against anyone who opposed him. He warned me that in Chicago this process had annihilated a paper, caused an editor to die of natural causes and thrown a reporter out of work and when the warning was ignored, gave me the annihilation treatment. But it backfired and he died himself.

Father Divine's people actually think or make a very passable pretense of believing that he is God and this uneducated Negro preacher, who seems to have amassed enormous wealth through the gifts of his believers, white as well as colored, is so smart that the best men in the Internal Revenue could not pin him down on anything. He would give them double-talk until they were dizzy themselves and they had to give up on him.

John Alexander Dowie insisted that the world was flat and this was an article of religious faith with his people, and Los Angeles is positively creeping with nuts who preach religions of their own devising and other nuts, poor bothered souls, who believe them.

So I think it is better, or anyway, less worse, to let things rock along and let them advertise than to put some advertising manager or anyone else in the position of saying that any religious faith is crazy and its inventor a fraud. You can never tell when someone might say the same about your own.