“Mutant Hellspawn” or “More Human than You?” The X-Men Respond to Televangelism

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The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the rapid increase in popularity and power of televangelists—pastors emphasizing “that old-time religion” embraced modern media, resulting in droves of Americans tuning in religiously to view their sermons. This was the golden age of Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, Jerry Fallwell, and Pat Robertson. It was in this milieu that Chris Claremont and Brent Anderson produced the graphic novel *God Loves, Man Kills* (1982). In a rare story where the superhero team known as the X-Men does not fight a costumed villain, *God Loves, Man Kills* focuses on the threat posed by Reverend William Stryker, whose vitriolic anti-mutant message mobilized Americans against mutants. In a revelatory moment, Reverend Stryker turns out to be the father of a mutant, introducing an element of both hypocrisy and irony. Such a storyline highlighted the potential dangers of televangelists wielding substantial religious and political power by warning of its abuse. This story turned somewhat prophetic when in the late 1980s a number of prominent televangelists were exposed for committing the very acts against which they had been preaching. *God Loves, Man Kills* was an active participant in the discussion of televangelism in the United States by identifying intersections between the graphic novel and public opinion during the 1980s and the story forecasted the downfall of major figures in televangelism later that decade. In spite of its sometimes skeptical view of televangelism, *God Loves, Man Kills* responded to this complex situation with a heroic sense of hope that ultimately empowered its readers to make positive, lasting changes in the world.

A Very Short Introduction to Religious Broadcasting

From its inception, broadcasting has been associated with religion. When Reginald Fessenden sent the first successful voice transmission on Christmas Eve in 1906, he chose to include not just sacred music, but also a reading of passages from the New Testament (Hadden 114). By the 1920s, diverse groups were scrambling to have their voices heard on the air, among them, religious organizations. One author alliteratively described this period in public broadcast history as a "frenzied frequency free-for-all" (Neuendorf 73). The first religious broadcaster to amass a large audience was a Roman Catholic priest, Father Charles E. Coughlin. After broadcasting his sermons locally in 1926, his popularity boosted him to the national stage in 1930 when his program was picked up by CBS Radio, reaching approximately 45 million Americans weekly by 1932 (Hadden 115). His "bellicose attacks on communists, socialists, international bankers, Jews, labor union leaders and, finally, President Franklin Roosevelt led many to fear Coughlin more than Germany's Hitler" (Hadden 125). As a result, broadcasting companies became much more reserved in selling airtime to religious organizations, and the National Association of Broadcasters created a code of ethics that banned "controversial" speakers (Hadden 125).

However, with the development of FM and daytime-only AM radio in the 1950s, the amount of religious broadcasts increased dramatically, especially among the more religiously conservative organizations (Howley 25). With the development of television, Roman Catholics led the way as Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was first to televise a sermon in 1940 (Korpi and Kim 410). These groups took full advantage of advances in technology, quickly moving from the use of filmstrips (which were expensive and time-consuming to produce) to VHS tapes (which were easier to copy and distribute) to satellite transmission, which finally allowed for live broadcasts of religious messages (Hadden 119). In the 1970s, satellite and cable television spurred the creation of full-time religious broadcast services, whose on-air solicitations for donations provided funding for an ever-expanding market (Howley 25).

Because of their theological focus on proselytizing, it was largely evangelical[1] Christian organizations that were willing to put so much time and effort into running such large and far-reaching broadcast services. Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network was the first to utilize satellite broadcasting for religious programming, which was quickly followed by Paul Crouch's Trinity Broadcasting Network, and Jim Bakker's "Praise The Lord" PTL Network (Hadden 120). This movement gained so much momentum that theologian Harvey Cox described the blossoming relationship between evangelicals and the electronic media as the most significant religious event in the United States during this period (Cox 43–44).

The X-Men Respond to Televangelism

For author Chris Claremont, *God Loves, Man Kills* is the distillation of what has made X-Men graphic novels socially relevant. In a recent interview, he stated:

> If you wanted one book to summarize all that the X-Men is about, in terms of character and conflict and theme, I'd have to say that [*God Loves, Man Kills*] was it. If you could only read one X-Men [graphic novel], start with that. Because for me, the X-Men is not about superheroes and super-villains; it is about people, and how you deal with the challenge of life and the choice you have to make every day [Claremont].

While other storylines dealing with such challenges are much more metaphorical in nature, *God Loves, Man Kills* describes a conflict where the X-Men are confronted by a human devoid of any super power (let alone a flashy costume). Instead, they struggle to fight a single man with a message, which introduces plot complexities that could not be easily dealt with in other settings. These complexities were tied up in American public discourse, and this story reflects the author's familiarity with and responses to that discourse.

There was a wide spectrum of opinion regarding the televangelism movement—at one end of that spectrum, there were those who were fearful, skeptical, and hostile toward televangelists and those who tuned in to their sermons. On the other end of the spectrum were a rather sizable number of people who found fulfillment and happiness through the easily-accessible Christian messages broadcast from these remote pulpits. The viewpoints expressed in *God Loves, Man Kills* fall somewhere in the middle, but more often than not express a skeptical view of these religious leaders and their adherents. In the end, the author presents a story about something more than the X-Men confronting organized religion; he creates a story portraying socially responsible people fighting against certain strands of religious extremism.

The story begins with a lynching. Two children (presumably black) flee from unidentified pursuers late at night. Their parents have been killed for no apparent reason, and these frightened children are running for their own lives. Their assailants, who describe themselves as "Purifiers" catch up with them and shoot one of the children. It is at this point that the child's eyes begin to glow, revealing his identity as a mutant before being killed. When the second child asks why they are being targeted, the head "Purifier" shoots her before responding: "because you have no right to live." The children are then hung from a schoolyard swing with signs reading "MUTIE" fastened to their chests. Beginning the story in this way prepares the reader to deal with the theme of bigotry that runs throughout, while remaining ambiguous as to the specific motivations of the killers.

This ambiguity is resolved in the next scene. It begins with a panel stretching the page's entire height of an expensive-looking high-rise building, explained as "The Stryker Building, Headquarters of the Worldwide Evangelical Stryker Crusade." Reverend Stryker is in his office, reading the following passage aloud from the Bible: "If there be found among you … man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them … [thou] shalt stone them with stones, till they die" (Deuteronomy 17:2–5). Having read this, the audience now begins to understand the killing in the previous scene as one motivated by a particular religious worldview, setting the stage for a rather lengthy discussion of televangelism that runs throughout *God Loves, Man Kills*.

In the scene that immediately follows, yet another recurring theme is introduced. X-Men member Kitty Pryde is shown fighting with a young man because of his support for Revered Stryker's anti-mutant position. Fellow X-Men member Colossus breaks up the fight, and when his comrade Wolverine asks Kitty why she's bruised, she responds: "I wasn't fighting an evil mutant, or super-villain, or murder machine … just a kid with a big mouth. It was no big deal." A few pages later, the stakes of such a conflict with ideas (as opposed to specific super-villains) are articulated by the leader of the X-Men, Professor Xavier: "An evil mutant—such as our arch-foe Magneto—can be confronted physically. We have no such option with Stryker, whose stocks-in-trade are words and ideas. We can only counter them with saner, gentler words of our own … and hope for the best" (Claremont, *God Loves*). While the X-Men have been trained in hand-to-hand combat, they are much less experienced in arenas of public relations, philosophy, and theology (the X-Men's technologically advanced combat training "Danger Room" appears not to have a "debate" setting). Perhaps this is why *God Loves, Man Kills* is so intriguing—the X-Men are taken from a world of physicality and thrust into a world of ideology.

From the outset, Claremont makes clear that the villain, Revered Stryker, is a televangelist. Toward the beginning of the story, Professor Xavier engages in a televised debate with Reverend Stryker, who is described by a news anchor as "The Reverend William Stryker, founder of the Stryker Crusade, one of the foremost—and most influential—electronics evangelical ministries" (Claremont, *God Loves*). The use of the phrase "electronics evangelical ministries" puts Stryker squarely in the arena of televangelism, not just any church group. For instance, a 1980 Forbes magazine article on televangelism carried the title "The Electronic Pulpit" (Sloan and Bagamery), and one of the earliest influential leaders of the televangelist movement wrote a book entitled *The Electric Church* (Armstrong). As a confirmed televangelist, Stryker serves as a symbol for what this sort of organization is capable of.

In *God Loves, Man Kills*, even the television studio control room operators participate in this larger dialogue about televangelism. As the debate between Reverend Stryker and Professor Xavier continues, one of the operators says, "Stryker knows television—and he's playing to the audience. He comes across as such a nice, personable guy... Too bad—'cause the man's message is pretty damn scary" (Claremont, *God Loves*). As televangelism became more and more popular among Americans, some, like these fictional television operators, were worried that the televangelists were "playing to the audience" and therefore not being completely genuine in their sermons. Contemporary authors voiced similar concerns—one analysis of 1980's televangelists observed that they were required to "adjust what they preach to accommodate the structurally established needs of a modern television ministry" (Hughey 34). The author went on to write, "To raise the huge sums needed for TV production costs, televangelists have turned to some of the more specialized techniques of the retail trade and, as might be expected, to advertising strategies" (35).[2] This sort of fear was apparently confirmed to skeptics when the Executive Director of the National Religious Broadcasters stated, "you can get your share of the audience only by offering people something they want" (Krohn 26).

These carefully crafted televangelist sermons drew in what was, for some, an alarming number of followers. While watching Revered Stryker make a religious statement about mutants being less-than-human in his debate with Professor Xavier, Kitty says, "It seems impossible, but Stryker's so popular. Millions of people believe his every word" (Claremont, *God Loves*). According to some figures, American viewership of religious programming went from around 5 million in the late 1960s to almost 25 million by the mid–1980s (Hadden 120). While the reasons behind such phenomenal growth were varied,[3] the sheer number of consumers was startling and served as a cause for concern for those who wondered why seemingly intolerant televangelists were amassing such large audiences. Similarly, it wasn't just the number of viewers that surprised Kitty; it was the blatantly negative tone of Stryker's arguments.

Following the debate, X-Men member Cyclops voiced similar concerns to his teammate Storm when he said, "We were slaughtered... [Professor Xavier] was speaking to people's ideals, Stryker to their fears" (Claremont, *God Loves*). This echoes the concerns of contemporary skeptics regarding the seemingly fear-inducing messages of televangelists. One author wrote:

> Modern televangelists generally imply that Hell is reserved for others. The viewing audience is usually assumed to belong to the ranks of the "Righteous We," to the saving remnant of the virtuous, while responsibility for any moral or other deficiencies in the larger society are pointedly attributed to "Sinful Others" who are the enemies of the godly—i.e. to abortionists, pornographers, homosexuals, rock stars, secular humanists, and liberals in general [Hughey 42].

This served the double purpose of affirming the faith of those already committed, as well as creating a compelling storyline for viewers to follow. In other words, "a message of love, universal brotherhood, and Christian humility may be a pleasant message, but it makes for boring television viewing. By contrast, assailing the sinful adds dramatic tension to sermons, provides a sense of urgency to the televangelist's message, and helps to hold the viewer's attention" (Hughey 42–43).

This rhetoric of the "Sinful Others" employed by some televangelists and its ultimate effects are paralleled throughout *God Loves, Man Kills* by Claremont's subtle references to the Jewish Holocaust. In the fight between Kitty and the young man referred to above, the artist clearly shows her wearing a Star of David necklace (which is consistently shown whenever Kitty isn't wearing her costume).[4] The X-Men's arch-nemesis Magneto plays a prominent role in this story, and his involvement and frequent appearances in this particular religiously-charged story is significant. His role in this conflict reminds readers that just the previous year in *The Uncanny X-Men* #150 (Oct. 1981), Magneto revealed that he lived as a child at the Auschwitz concentration camp where "the guards [were] joking as they herded my family to their death"[5] (Claremont, "I, Magneto"). In the current story, when Magneto discusses the murders committed by Reverend Stryker's Purifiers, he comments dryly, "Once more, genocide in the name of God" (Claremont, *God Loves*). When Magneto later enters into an argument with Cyclops about the futility of helping humanity and suggests creating a world regulated by mutants instead, Cyclops says, "Is your way any better? A mutant dictatorship?" Magneto responds: "Do not take that tone with me, boy. I have lived under a dictatorship ... and seen my family butchered by its servants" (Claremont, *God Loves*). Magneto emerges here as a complex character whose motivations to create a different world—at all costs—emerged from a childhood where he witnessed the wholesale slaughter of his family and his people, and as such, is wary when others use religious language to enforce a discriminatory worldview. American televangelists were not calling for extermination, however Claremont attributes this motive to Stryker to demonstrate what might be on the horizon if certain types of televangelists continued to flourish.

Throughout the narrative, Reverend Stryker quotes Bible passages that seem to reinforce his view that mutants are evil and must, therefore, be killed. In fact, the first words that come out of Stryker's mouth in the narrative come from Deuteronomy and in a subsequent discussion with Professor Xavier, Stryker quotes the following passage: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father ... he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:34–35, 37). Toward the end of the story,

Stryker quotes several Bible passages at Magneto: Ecclesiastes 12:13, Isaiah 1:4, and Ezekiel 18:20, culminating in his own summary: "We have sinned. And must atone for our transgressions ... with blood! [implying the blood of mutants]" (Claremont, *God* Loves). These passages provide Stryker (and his audience) with a religiously-authorized rationale for violence—a rationale rooted not in religion per se, but rather in a perverted sense of justice that uses religious overtones for its own purposes. This extreme form of proof-texting demonstrates that biblical passages could be dangerous if taken out of context. It is in Stryker's final sermon, however, that the Reverend most completely lays out the scriptural and ideological framework for his position that mutants should be exterminated.

The final chapter of *God Loves, Man Kills* begins with a news anchor announcing that shortly, "Reverend Stryker will give what is being heralded as the most significant sermon of his ministry" (Claremont, *God Loves*). This culminating, concluding sermon deserves special attention for a number of reasons-not the least of which is that this sermon is set in Madison Square Garden (no small venue). Stryker outlines his hyper-literal interpretation of the Bible's creation narrative, his views on the theory of evolution, and the implication of this view for a world where mutants exist. Stryker begins by quoting the biblical account of earth's creation (Genesis 1:1, 27), followed by the creation of humanity by God (Genesis 2:7). He continues:

> We are beings of divine creation, yet there are those among us whose existence is an affront to that divinity. God created man—the human race! The Bible makes no mention of mutants. So where do they come from? Some—so-called scientists, humanists—say they are part of the natural process of evolution... Are we now to let those who put forward the proposition that we are descended from apes tell us that our descendents—our children—will be born monsters?! And that this is natural?!? I say, no! I say, never! We are as God made us! Any deviation from that sacred template—any mutation—comes not from heaven, but hell! [Claremont, *God Loves*].

Stryker's extreme view not only served to vilify an entire race, but endorsed an antagonistic posture against scientific endeavours. A concern that American televangelism would foster a sense of hostility toward the scientific community was held by some during the 1980s. One observer stated that he was "fascinated by the seemingly effortless employment of the most modern skills of the technological age in the service of the positively antideluvean [*sic*] ideal of a pre-enlightened mentality, and repelled by the unapologetic assertion of beliefs presumed dead since Darwin" (Green 136). While this view is rather reductionist and extreme, it nevertheless reveals the thoughts and feelings of some in the public square who feared that the televangelist movement was opposed to modern science and would somehow impede beneficial scientific research.

The second reason why Reverend Stryker's final sermon is noteworthy is that it reflects the public concern that the televangelist movement could—and would—influence, if not highjack, the political process because the opinions of its loyal followers were being shaped by the increasingly influential televangelists. Before Stryker delivers his sermon, a news anchor notes that "invitations have been sent to every major national political figure—of both parties—and the few refusals are eloquent testament to the Crusade's clout" (Claremont, *God Loves*). This point is emphasized further when some of these "political figures" are shown in the story. During Stryker's sermon, an unnamed United States Senator asks a presidential aide how the President feels about Stryker's views: "Does the President have any idea what Stryker's saying?! Does he support it?!" The aide responds with the following: "The President is a fair-minded man. He believes the reverend's views deserve a hearing" (Claremont, *God Loves*). The suggestion that so many politicians-and even a United States president—would be interested in a televangelist's message is worth exploring.

During the 1980s, a frequent topic of conversation and contention was church-state relations. According to one study published during this period, "there is a contentious movement to change the relation between religious values and government actions.... Recent actions by the Christian Right ... concerning private religion and public duty have aroused considerable criticism" (Tamney and Johnson 3). The televangelist movement became an increasingly significant political force in America, as many observers noticed an "insatiable urge on the part of some [televangelists] to mix religion and politics to the point that the two become virtually undifferentiated" (Hadden 121). A number of factors contributed to the "political clout" of televangelists, which are summarized by Litman and Bain:

> While religious broadcasting traces back to the earliest days of radio, the recent swing toward political conservatism, escalation of the public debate about moral issues such as abortion and prayer in public schools, and the pervasiveness of television have created a favorable arena for these preachers to spread their influence and, for [prominent televangelist] Pat Robertson, to run for the president [329].

The convergence of these factors created a social, technological, political, and religious environment where strong-willed and charismatic preachers could not only influence election and ballot results, but could also run for the office of president. As seen above, *God Loves, Man Kills* deals with the issue only in passing, but nevertheless acknowledges this very real concern.

The third and final reason why Reverend Stryker's last sermon is significant foreshadows one of the contributing factors behind televangelism's eventual decline: the fear of hidden motives and hypocrisy. As his sermon reaches its crescendo, Stryker exclaims, "Are we now to let [others] ... tell us that our

descendents—our children—will be born monsters?! And that this is natural?!? I say, no! I say, never!" (Claremont, *God Loves*). In the context of the sermon, this mention of children is somewhat unexpected. However, this impassioned plea to prevent the births of mutant children takes on a much deeper significance in light of Stryker's past.

As a U.S. Army Ranger, William Stryker was on a special assignment to the military's nuclear testing facility. Following this assignment, Stryker and his pregnant wife were involved in a car accident in the Nevada desert. Forced to deliver his child, Stryker sees that the child is a "monster," and "faced with that abomination, [he] did what had to be done." After killing his newborn child, Stryker then kills his wife and attempts to kill himself. He survives the suicide attempt, however, and lives in a constant state of depression and anger, eventually losing his high position in the military. Later, when he reads a magazine article written by Professor Xavier about mutants, Stryker makes the following realization:

> After months of torment, I knew what the monster was. A mutant. But-could I have fathered such a creature? Was my life so wicked that the Lord sought to punish me through my son? And if so, why then let me live? If I was evil, shouldn't I have been condemned to eternal damnation? I prayed for guidance. It was given me. The evil-the sin-was [my wife's], not mine. She was the vessel used by God to reveal unto me Satan's most insidious plot against humanity—to corrupt us through our children, while they were still in the womb. The Lord created man and woman in His image, blessed with his grace. Mutants broke that sacred mold. They were creations, not of God, but of the Devil. And I had been chosen to lead the fight against them [Claremont, *God Loves*].

From these scenes, the reader learns that Reverend Stryker's religious zeal against mutants ultimately arose from the fact that he himself was the parent of a mutant child, whom he killed. Stryker was finally able to view his deplorable condition through a lens that allowed him to place the blame for his reprehensible actions, the murder of his wife and child, on others instead of himself. This particular type of fundamentalist religious framework allowed Stryker to justify what he had done to his own child, while providing him with the motivation to organize a "crusade" against all mutants.

As mentioned above, some Americans in the 1980s feared that lurking beneath the surface of the wildly successful televangelism movement were hidden motives or hypocrisy on the part of its leaders. More specifically, there was a concern that televangelists were preaching against those things that were most alluring to them or things of which they themselves were guilty (see Hughley). These fears began to be realized in 1987 when some very prominent televangelists admitted to committing the very acts against which they themselves were preaching. A prime example of this was the public discovery that

Jim Bakker—televangelist pioneer and superstar—had admitted to "committing adultery, [... hiding] financial irregularities, and homosexual behavior" (Hougland, Billings, and Wood 56). Other well-known televangelists admitted to similar actions, and national news organizations effected a massive change in public opinion. One observer wrote,

> In most news accounts ... [these] episodes ran mainly as sensational stories of personal corruption, as morality plays in which the greed and lust of [the guilty televangelists] caused their dramatic falls from grace and shook the foundations of their evangelical empires. The attention cast on these ... wayward evangelists has caused many to regard all televangelists as corrupt and hypocritical [Hughey 31].

It goes without saying that this was not true of all televangelists, but the tide of public opinion had turned—for instance, one poll found that during this period of scandal "more than half of the respondents said that their respect for television evangelists had decreased" (Houghland, Billings, and Wood 59). Following these events, *all* televangelists were now under suspicion by an increasingly skeptical public.

God Loves, Man Kills was surprisingly accurate in its prediction of these rather extreme acts of hypocrisy within the televangelist movement, but Claremont also tempered his skepticism by noting that these sorts of actions would be outliers, and not the norm. Preceding Reverend Stryker's speech, a news anchor made it clear that

> ...a growing number of religious leaders—including fundamentalist Evangelical ministers who only a short while ago were Stryker's friends and allies—have begun to question the direction of his Crusade. It is one thing, they note, to criticize government policy and the moral state of the nation, quite another to single out a specific group of people and brand them as literally less than human [Claremont, *God Loves*].

The narrative is not opposed to televangelism per se, and implies that televangelism and religion in general could play a positive role in discussions of politics and morality. This sort of veiled optimism was also realized in the aftermath of the aforementioned scandals of American televangelism—instead of destroying the evangelical movement in America, these scandals in the late 1980s actually served to refocus the movement and bring it into greater alignment with the attitudes of its congregants.[6]

In the story, while Reverend Stryker is concluding his final sermon, the X-Men foil Stryker's hidden plan to brainwash Professor Xavier into using his special powers to eliminate the world's mutant population. At this point, Colossus believes that the X-Men have "won." Cyclops responds by explaining that it wasn't the physical weapons Stryker used that "are dangerous, but the

man himself. His beliefs. His ideas. If we don't stand up to those—here and now—then all we've done is delay an inevitable holocaust." Cyclops then leads the X-Men to Stryker's pulpit, where he affirms Xavier's earlier statement that "we can only counter [hateful speech] with saner, gentler words of our own … and hope for the best" (Claremont, *God Loves*).

Cyclops' speech offers a different approach to the human/mutant, heaven/hell dichotomy that Reverend Stryker has created in his preceding sermon. When Cyclops challenges Stryker on his willingness to kill anyone who is a mutant—even children—Styker replies: "Whatever a man's color or beliefs, he is still *human*. Those children—and you X-Men—are *not*!" Instead of lashing out physically against such hate, Cyclops proceeds to challenge Stryker's fundamental assumptions:

> Says who? You? What makes your link with heaven any stronger than mine? We have unique gifts—but no more so, and no more special, than those granted a physician or physicist, or philosopher or athlete. It could be due to an accident of nature or Divine providence, who's to say? Are arbitrary labels more important than the way we live our lives, what we're supposed to be more important than what we actually are?! For all you know, *we* could be the real human race … and the rest of you, the mutants [Claremont, *God Loves*].

This sentiment ties back to the interview with Claremont referred to above, where he stated, "For me, the X-Men is not about superheroes and supervillains; it is about people, and how you deal with the challenge of life and the choice you have to make every day" (Claremont). In Cyclops' statement, we see this principle articulated—how we judge others should not be dictated by labels, but rather by how others live their lives.

God Loves, Man Kills ends with a discussion about the ways one can and should effect change in the world. With Reverend Stryker finally behind bars due to his involvement with the Purifiers' murders, the X-Men regroup at Professor Xavier's mansion. At this point, Magneto enters the room, claiming that their earlier efforts against Stryker were only a hollow victory: "The *man* was beaten. His cause lives on. Already it's being said that Stryker's goal was right, only his methods were flawed. No matter how hard you try, you cannot truly win" (Claremont, *God Loves*). Magneto suggests another solution: Xavier and the X-Men should join his own crusade for the global dominance of mutants by means of force. Xavier is initially persuaded, but once again it is Cyclops that provides the most meaningful response:

> Granted, times are tough for us and they'll probably get a lot worse. Granted, we probably could conquer the world—though the cost in blood would be staggering. But don't you see—either of you—we're human, too! …Such a fundamental shift in attitude can't be imposed—to have any meaning, it must grow from within. You brought us together to fulfil a dream, [Professor Xavier]—one born

> out of hope and the noblest of human aspirations ... I'm not prepared to give up. The means are as important as the end—we have to do this right or not at all. Anything else negates every belief we've ever had, every sacrifice we've ever made [Claremont, *God Loves*].

Xavier sees the merit in this view, and rejects Magneto's method of changing the behaviour of others through force. Immediately after recognizing that he was wrong to consider joining Magneto, Xavier says to the X-Men, "I feel so ... ashamed." Cyclops replies: "To be proven only human, as flawed and vulnerable as the rest of us? Where's the shame in that?" (Claremont, *God Loves*). This statement is a subtle response to the air of "holiness" maintained by American televangelists, which was revealed, in some instances, to be nothing but a front. According to Cyclops, the important thing is not to expect perfection from ourselves or others, but rather to understand our own flaws and vulnerability, recognize the same in others, and do one's best to overcome such shortcomings.

The last page of the story concludes with a slightly different articulation of this philosophy. When Storm expresses her admiration for Cyclops' strong words, he replies, "[Xavier] was in need. I helped him. As he would me. That's what it's all about, really. Needing and helping. Caring for one another. And that caring comes from love. Which makes the world go 'round" (Claremont, *God Loves*). Such a view of love and hope was desperately needed in the United States during a period where the public was already anxious about the federal deficit, poverty, and communism (Zinsmeister 111, 117). *God Loves, Man Kills* was a timely reminder of the power that charisma, excitement, and ideas can hold over a population, and warned its readers that a degree of healthy skepticism should be exercised when considering the messages delivered by televangelists and other popular figures. Although the author clearly had reservations about the televangelist movement, he nevertheless acknowledged that televangelism has a proper place in public discourse, and, through the characters of Professor Xavier and Cyclops, held up a standard of respectful dialogue with those who held differing views. *God Loves, Man Kills* demonstrates the positive role that graphic novels can have in public discourse, and stands as a testament to the creative genius—or perhaps inspiration—of its creators.

Notes

1. In using the term "evangelical," I follow Hadden's definition that includes "the wide spectrum of conservative Christian traditions that are known by and call themselves 'fundamentalist,' 'Pentecostal,' 'charismatic,' and, simply, 'evangelical'" (114). Because of their focus on the use of television broadcasts, these evangelicals became known as "televangelists."

2. For a detailed comparison of contemporary television sales techniques and televangelist's techniques for raising money, see Hughey 34–41.

3. E.g. Korpi and Kim, "The Uses and Effects of Televangelism" and Litman and Bain, "The Viewership of Religious Television Programming."

4. A few years later, Kitty would be shown participating in a special reception at the National Holocaust Memorial to honor her grandfather. See *The Uncanny X-Men* #199 (Nov. 1985).

5. This connection would have only been reinforced by the fact that around the time that *God Loves, Man Kills* was published, readers also discovered in *The Uncanny X-Men* #161 (Sep. 1982) that Xavier and Magneto had originally met and befriended one another as they volunteered at a psychiatric facility for Holocaust survivors.

6. For a full discussion of the evangelical movement's refinement during this period of turbulence, see Janice Peck's *The Gods of Televangelism*.

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