

Immortal urban legend

April 7, 2009

I've been newspapering for 30 years, and practically everything about the job has changed, except this: Every so often, I still have to stamp out the world's most persistent rumor—namely, that nefarious forces are trying to get religion thrown off the American airwaves.

In the beginning (yes, it seems that long ago), the rumor went like this: Madalyn Murray O'Hair, whose court battles impacted Bible reading and sanctioned prayer in public schools, appealed to the Federal Communication Commission to get Bible reading and religious programming removed from TV broadcasts.

Madalyn is playing poker with Jimmy Hoffa

Wasn't true then; ain't true now.

Years after O'Hair went missing and even after she was confirmed dead, the rumors persisted. (Rumor-mongers can't be bothered with facts, like the death of their antagonist.)

Later, the villain in the rumor morphed from O'Hair into the ever-ominous "they." And the threat transfigured into the ominous specter that "Dr. Dobson" would be thrown off the airwaves.

Now, James Dobson is semi-retired and no longer the dominant Religious Right figure of yesteryear, so the rumor has evolved, yet again. And now, we're supposed to be worried Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Charles Stanley and David Jeremiah will be "removed" from the airwaves.

Still ain't true.

This should be the mark of the (urban legend) beast

The common denominator is the number "2493." It's been called variously "Petition 2493" and "RM 2493." It's supposedly a petition or resolution designed to toss Jesus and/or his preachers out of your TV set and/or radio.

Links to the truth

I could tell you all about this history of "2493," but I'm tired of writing about such nonsense. So, thanks to the magic of the blogosphere, I'm going to give you links to web pages where you can get all the information you want (and more, believe me, more):

- Here's an [editorial](#) I wrote in the fall of 2003.
- And here's another, from the following [summer](#). (I've written many other editorials on this rumor. In fact, the only good I can imagine that has ever come from this never-true ruse has been that, on a few deadlines, I had "fresh" material to write about.)
- Here's an entry on "RM-2493" from [Wikipedia](#). It reminded me of another variation of the rumor, which would have deep-sixed the popular TV show *Touched by an Angel*. Seems it wasn't enough to remove God and Jesus; those sorry sinners also had it in for angels.
- And here's the link to [Snopes](#). If you ever hear (or read in your e-mail) about something "they" are doing, just go to www.snopes.com, type in a few key words, and learn the truth.

In the latest version, the forces of light are battling "Number 2493" to protect Joel, Joyce, Charles and David so they can keep on preaching through the cables and satellite dishes of America. The fearmongers want to collect a million signatures of decent Christian folks who will risk their reputations for level-headedness to win this battle. They're more likely to make buffoons out of a million well-meaning folks.

So, do these friends a favor. If they send you an e-mail asking you to sign the petition, tell them the truth.