

Popular 'Rev. Ike' Preached the Gospel Of 'Get Yours Now'

By Joe Holley
Washington Post Staff Writer
Friday, July 31, 2009

F.J. Eikerenkoetter II, 74, who as "the Rev. Ike" was among the first preachers to harness the power of electronic media with the gospel of prosperity and drew millions of listeners on television and radio with such proclamations as "Jesus was a capitalist," died July 29 in a Los Angeles hospital. He had a stroke in 2007 and never fully recovered.

For nearly three decades, Rev. Ike presided from a red velvet throne on the stage of the Christ United Church's Palace Cathedral, a Moorish-rococo former Loews movie theater in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan.

At his height in the 1970s, he preached to roughly 5,000 congregants every Sunday. He also appeared on more than 1,700 TV and radio stations across North America. His followers not only tuned in to his message of divinely ordained consumption and "positive self-image psychology" but also responded to his incessant pleas for financial support.

"The best thing you can do for the poor is not be one of them," the flamboyant minister proclaimed. Saint Paul was wrong about the love of money being the root of all evil, he liked to say. "The lack of money is the root of all evil."

Claiming more followers during his heyday than any evangelist except Billy Graham, he earned an estimated million dollars a month from listeners across the hemisphere.

He owned mansions on the East and West coasts, was partial to designer suits and had a fleet of mink-appointed Rolls-Royces and several yachts. He dropped hints about his bevy of mistresses.

As the collection basket made its way among the movie-house rows of his New York church, he reminded his congregants that the clink of loose change was offensive to his ears, and to God's. The whisper of paper currency is what he delighted to hear.

The Boston Globe noted in 1998 that he targeted the elderly and the poor in his mailings, with a particular emphasis on those of African and Caribbean descent.

One of his fundraising techniques was to send a letter containing a piece of yarn or a sliver of prayer rug that could be used as either a charm or a curse. The letter exhorted the recipient to mail it back the following day with a donation of at least \$20, so that Rev. Ike could bless it. Failure to return it, with a donation, could have dire consequences, the letter claimed.

Both the Internal Revenue Service and the U.S. Postal Service investigated his business dealings, but he was never prosecuted.

Frederick Joseph Eikerenkoetter II was born June 1, 1935, in Ridgeland, S.C. to a Dutch-Indonesian father who was a Baptist minister. His mother was an elementary school teacher who taught her son in a one-room schoolhouse. The couple divorced when he was 5.

He told the Newark-based Star-Ledger in 1998 that he hadn't really felt the spirit until "a band of Pentecostals" came through town when he was 12. Within a year, the Pentecostal congregation in Ridgeland, meeting in a juke joint-turned-church, appointed him as its pastor.

In 1956, he graduated as valedictorian from the American Bible College, a Pentecostal school in Chicago, but ran afoul of church authority when he referred to "Lord Buddha" in his thesis. The Pentecostal Church excommunicated him three years later.

He moved to Boston in 1964, where he founded Miracle Temple with a focus on faith-healing. "That was the big thing at the time," he told the late radio host and writer Clayton Riley, "and I was just about the best in Boston, snatching people out of wheelchairs and off their crutches, pouring some oil over them while I commanded them to walk or see or hear. I don't know if I cured many folks -- it's a wonder I didn't kill somebody, though."

He continued to preach orthodox Pentecostal doctrine, he told the Star-Ledger, until he realized that the usual religious answers seemed inadequate to the problems people faced. "As a minister I had to help find an answer."

He moved to New York in 1973 and developed what he called "the Science of Living." It was a mix of Christianity and consumption, seasoned

with elements of Norman Vincent Peale's "The Power of Positive Thinking" and Napoleon Hill's "Think and Grow Rich."

"Don't wait for pie in the sky by-and-by when you die," he proclaimed. "Get yours now with ice cream on top!"

He began to scale back in 1998, when he turned over his Sunday preaching duties to two younger ministers. He also gave up his television show, although the money continued to flow in. His church maintains its tax-exempt status as a religious property.

Survivors include his wife of 45 years, the former Eula Mae Dent, of Bal Harbour, Fla.; and a son, Xavier Frederick Eikerenkoetter of Malibu, Calif.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/30/AR2009073003990_pf.html