

# RELIGIOUS HOAXES THAT WON'T GO AWAY

## Have you heard that...

- famed atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair is petitioning the federal government to ban all religious broadcasting?

- the head of Procter & Gamble is appearing on talk shows to admit his company's ties with the Church of Satan?

These stories are shocking, outrageous . . . and completely false. They are examples of hoaxes which continue to circulate in the church, even though there is no credible evidence to support them.

**Petition R.H. 2493.** You've probably been exposed to this hoax through its most common form: a photocopied petition warning "R.H. 2493 would ultimately pave the way to stop the reading of the gospel on the airwaves of America." It says 1 million signatures are needed; readers are urged to sign and mail a form to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

The FCC has received more than 30 million pieces of mail on the subject, and has worked to advise the public that the rumor is false. In fact, the FCC has "religious petition" as one of the options you can select with your Touch-Tone phone when calling the agency's consumer switchboard.

**Moon and Stars.** The president of Procter & Gamble is falsely alleged to have appeared on Phil Donahue's talk show and admitted that his company gives

its profits to the Church of Satan, and that its familiar "moon and stars" logo is a satanic symbol. Variations have had the president of McDonald's appearing on *The Tonight Show* and Liz Claiborne appearing on *Oprah* to make similar admissions about their alleged corporate ties to satanism.

In reality, the president of Procter & Gamble has never appeared on any talk show to discuss satanism. The company has successfully filed lawsuits over the years against a number of people who were intentionally spreading this rumor—including some businesspeople whose products compete with Procter & Gamble's.

**More Legends.** Some other well-worn hoaxes are these:

- The Christian version of the "Vanishing Hitchhiker," in which someone picks up a hitchhiker who delivers a prophetic warning, then disappears.

- Amsterdam and Brussels are popular locations for a rumored supercomputer nicknamed "The Beast" that will help the Antichrist rule the world.

- A retired minister goes to the Social Security office and is mistakenly given a check with the number "666" in the lower left-hand corner. The clerk quickly takes back the check, explaining a mistake has been made—those checks aren't supposed to be used yet.

- Russian scientists, while drilling the deepest hole ever, stop when they hear cries of anguish and smell sulfur—leading them to believe they have drilled straight into hell.

- While calculating the historical orbits of the planets, NASA scientists discover a "missing day." Their dilemma is resolved when a Christian member of the team shows them biblical passages in which God stopped the sun—and these stoppages exactly equal the "missing time" that had stumped the scientists. This rumor persists despite NASA's denials, and despite the scientific impossibility of a "missing day"—a finding that would presuppose a precisely known starting date for the universe.

Gretchen Passantino, a cult research expert, offers three tips in identifying hoaxes, saying, "Use extra caution if the story fits any of the following characteristics":

- There's no evidence to back it up.

- It's so detailed or bizarre that we can't believe someone could make it up.

- Its strongest commendation is that we wish it to be true. (*EP News*)

