



## Business and Religion

**Avoid like the plague a clergyman who is also a businessman.**

**Saint Jerome 340? - 420 C.E.**

### **Oil Firm Seeks Divine Help**

BBC News November 20, 2001

The church and big business enjoy close links. Celebrity product endorsements are nothing new, but one Russian firm has taken the idea to a new extreme.

Lukoil, Russia's biggest oil producer, has hired Patriarch Alexy II, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, to star in its new TV commercial. The advertisement is the first time that the head of a major religion has explicitly promoted a company. And it underlines the close links that have developed between the Orthodox Church, big business and the state in post-communist Russia.

Alexy's blessing Patriarch Alexy, the leader of most of Russia's estimated 80 million Orthodox believers, is shown in the advertisement surrounded by Lukoil officials. Lukoil is by far Russia's biggest oil firm. The advertisement is also noteworthy for what it says about the modern Orthodox Church. After suffering decades of persecution - although never complete abolition - under Soviet rule, the Orthodox Church has enjoyed a remarkable renaissance in recent years. It now boasts close to 500 monasteries, compared with just 18 in the 1980s.

Patriarch Alexy has considerable influence over Russian political leaders, who have in turn granted the church generous privileges, including restrictions on

competing religions.

At the same time, the church has developed extensive business interests, and was for a time in the 1990s one of the biggest importers of consumer goods. Earlier this year, for example, the church signed a deal with Lukoil to create a string of joint ventures, including craft workshops and petrol stations.

### **Religious Shop Keeping**

Eugene Peterson, in his book *Working the Angles*, (this may sting a little bit, but like an injection it can bring healing ) says, "There is no other profession in which it's easier to fake it than ministry." By adopting a reverential demeanor, cultivating a stained glass voice, doing creative plagiarism, creating a terrifically busy image, one can do quite well in ministry today. He says, "American pastors are abandoning their calling, they have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are the churches. They are buried with shopkeepers' concerns - how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package goods so the customers will lay out more money. Some are very good shopkeepers, attracting lots of customers, pulling in big dollars, and developing splendid reputations. Yet, it is still shop keeping - religious shop keeping."

Pastor Gary Crawford

Westside Baptist Church, Gainesville, Florida

Excerpt from "Convention Sermon: Increasing our integrity"

Florida Baptist Witness, November 22, 2001

**MEETING: 7:30 p.m., Monday, January 14, 2002**

**Dr. M. J. Hardman**

**Professor of Anthropology, University of Florida**

◆ This month's meeting will be held in the Board Room at SFCC Downtown Campus ◆



*Please note the date printed on the address label to determine when you need to renew your membership!*

**The Vatican has announced plans to “rewrite” the Bible,** adding information from the Dead Sea scrolls about the “life and times” of Jesus as a “political activist”. This won’t cause consternation among believers around the world, says one Biblical scholar. “There has never been a settled, definitive version of the Bible,” explains Dr. Martyn Percy of England’s Sheffield University. “Only fundamentalists think it came in a fax from heaven.” (Manchester Guardian) ...Surely in this day and age, no one will get upset by a few subjective Biblical clarifications.

### **Humanistic Jews Reject Supernaturalism**

There are no prayers recited during Shabbat. The liturgy is bereft of any mention of a deity. The weekly Torah portion is ignored altogether.

At Congregation Beth Adam in Boca Raton, South Florida’s only temple affiliated with Humanistic Judaism, there’s no higher authority than human conscience.

Its 80 members identify intensely with Jewish culture, but they would squirm their way through a traditional Shabbat service with its emphasis on reverence before God, because they don’t believe in the Divine. They believe in themselves.

They belong to a tiny denomination that claims 30,000 members worldwide, who nevertheless consider their movement the fifth branch of Judaism, behind Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist. Many traditional rabbis question the legitimacy of Humanistic Judaism -- Judaism by definition is a theistic faith, they say -- but its followers say their contemporary take on the religion is the next wave of Judaism’s future.

Humanistic Jews embrace intermarried families, a growing segment of the Jewish population that is shunned by many traditional synagogues. And they say their philosophy -- that an individual has the power to direct his or her life, independent of a supernatural authority -- is a natural fit for

the unaffiliated, meaning they have no identification with any of Judaism’s branches.

“Everybody’s concerned about Jewish survival, and we represent a constituency -- cultural and secular Jews -- that is hard to reach,” said Rabbi Sherwin Wine, the young movement’s septuagenarian founder. “We [Humanistic Jews] are provocative, but also useful: we’re able to bring people into the fold who otherwise might not be here.”

Of the about 6 million Jews in America, at least 26 percent are unaffiliated. About 32 percent identify as Reform, another 31 percent as Conservative, 1 percent as Reconstructionist, and 9 percent as Orthodox, according to the 1997 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion.

**Subscription to  
THE PROMETHEAN HUMANIST  
Newsletter of the  
Humanist Society of Gainesville  
\$15.00 / year**

#### **HUMANIST SOCIETY OF GAINESVILLE**

**President:** Louis Clark  
klouisc@gainesvillehumanists.org  
352 373-5377

**Treasurer:** Pierce Butler  
352 377-4601

MEMBER OF:

**American Humanist Association  
and  
Alliance of  
Secular Humanist Societies**