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Chick Magnet: The Allure of Hate and Conspiracy in the Works of Jack Chick

by

Crow Stacy

A Master's Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of
Master of Divinity
Harvard Divinity School
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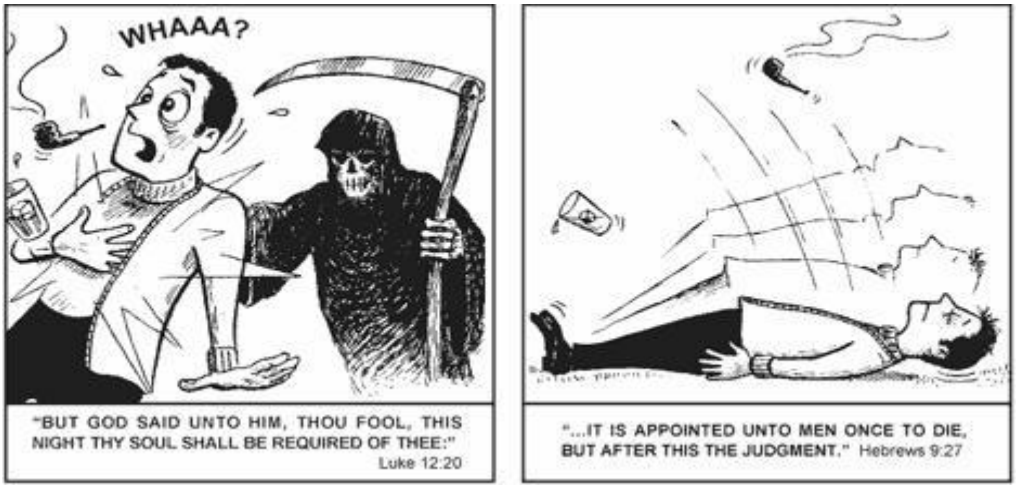
I give thanks to Satoru Kimura, whose obliging disposition, frequent helpful feedback, and enduring encouragement were instrumental in the completion of this scholarly work, and his confidence and enthusiasm in me throughout the entire process made this thesis a more refined and enjoyable work. His amiable presence and ardent support for me made the completion of this thesis a possibility.

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Introduction

"I will permit no man to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him." — Booker T. Washington

When Columbia University historian Richard Hofstadter penned the "The Paranoid Style of American Politics" in 1964, he observed a conspiratorial framework within American politics in which political actors and figures utilized demagoguery, fear-driven rhetoric and conspiracy in order to undermine the existing sociopolitical structures of American society by pointing to the presence of a nascent threat: there are few American individuals who encapsulate this Manichean worldview more than Jack Chick.



A panel from Chick's breakthrough 1964 tract *This Was Your Life*

Hailing from southern California, Jack Chick was an American cartoonist who published comic strip booklets, colloquially referred to as "Chick tracts," which propounded a fundamentalist Christian message and nominally served the purpose of proselytization. The inaugural Chick tract, *Why No Revival?,* was published in 1961, but the height of their prevalence (and infamy) was in the 1980s, where the tracts took on an even more sinister and

alarmingly conspiratorial tone (not that they were ever completely benign in tone). Additionally, their popularity was elevated by a burgeoning and nascent Religious Right in the aftermath of the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980 (Burack 49).

The tracts often took an incendiary tone, castigating a myriad of groups and peoples Chick deemed to be malevolent forces in the world, with the narratives of the tracts usually containing conspiratorial underpinnings. His tracts proliferated unsubstantiated and calumnious assertions, ranging from accusing Roman Catholics of being the architects of the Holocaust, to demonizing homosexual men as aberrant sexual predators with a rapacious desire for young children. It is the acrimonious disposition of Chick tracts that earned Chick the moniker of "the Dr. Seuss of hate literature" (Zadrozny), which many of his opponents would deem to be a title well deserved; in addition, Chick Publications was also designated as a hate group by the Southern



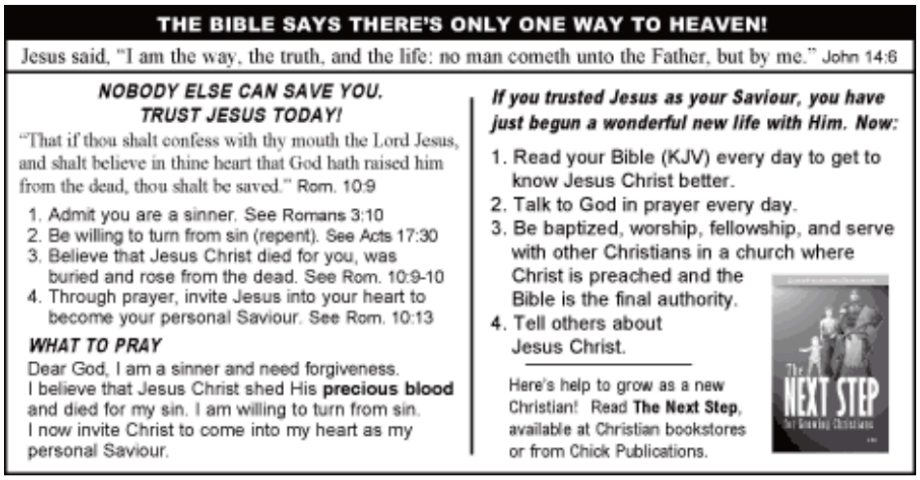
An illustration from a circa 1930s Tijuana bible titled *Jesse James in "Might"*

Poverty Law Center in 2010 (Davis 117).

The illustrations and stylistic themes [of Chick tracts] have been noted by some to bear a strong resemblance to "Tijuana bibles," which were pornographic tracts illegally distributed during the early 20th century that heavily leaned into racial stereotypes and slanderous

depictions of other ethnic groups (Dowd and Hignite 40). Considering the term for Tijuana bibles originated in southern California (La Cour et al 325), where Chick was born and raised, there is a strong possibility he had exposure to them, though nothing can be confirmed. (He would not have admitted it for the sake of preserving his fundamentalist Christian credibility and bonafides).

Chick tracts were a prevailing instrument of proselytization among evangelical Christian churches in the United States, with proponents asserting that the tracts could easily distributed in large volumes and contained a relatively accessible message about salvation through Jesus Christ (Bivins 19), all of which would have been significantly advantageous in a pre-digital era; additionally, these tracts could be left anonymously in a myriad of locations, from mailboxes to truck stop bathrooms.



THE BIBLE SAYS THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO HEAVEN!

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 14:6

NOBODY ELSE CAN SAVE YOU.
TRUST JESUS TODAY!

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Rom. 10:9

1. Admit you are a sinner. See Romans 3:10
2. Be willing to turn from sin (repent). See Acts 17:30
3. Believe that Jesus Christ died for you, was buried and rose from the dead. See Rom. 10:9-10
4. Through prayer, invite Jesus into your heart to become your personal Saviour. See Rom. 10:13

WHAT TO PRAY

Dear God, I am a sinner and need forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ shed His **precious blood** and died for my sin. I am willing to turn from sin. I now invite Christ to come into my heart as my personal Saviour.

If you trusted Jesus as your Saviour, you have just begun a wonderful new life with Him. Now:

1. Read your Bible (KJV) every day to get to know Jesus Christ better.
2. Talk to God in prayer every day.
3. Be baptized, worship, fellowship, and serve with other Christians in a church where Christ is preached and the Bible is the final authority.
4. Tell others about Jesus Christ.

Here's help to grow as a new Christian! Read **The Next Step**, available at Christian bookstores or from Chick Publications.

The end page of a typical Chick tract, which emphasized reading *only* the King James Bible

The theological underpinnings of these tracts were rooted in a premillennial dispensationalist worldview (Dittmer 280), a *sola fide* understanding of soteriology and the asseveration that the

King James Bible is the *only* acceptable (and "God-inspired") translation of the Bible (Misiroglu 146); these beliefs (especially premillennial dispensationalism) have been quite prominent among many evangelical Christian adherents in the United States, in particular the belief in a "rapture" event (Sutton 17), an event Chick himself promotes in tracts such as *Where Did They Go?*

Given that Chick Publications has claimed to have sold nearly 900 million tracts in over 100 languages (Gates) (a claim for which corroborating evidence is admittedly scant), he has undeniably had a significant impact on American culture and evangelical Protestant Christianity, despite being a relative recluse during his lifetime compared to evangelical contemporaries (Brenneman 128), such as Jerry Falwell Sr and Pat Robertson, who were quite comfortable being in the public eye.



An image from *This Was Your Life* translated into Modern Standard Arabic

The overarching aim of this paper is both historical and ministerial. Over the course of three chapters, I will take a research oriented approach in order to explore Chick's background, how Chick tracts both reflected and influenced evangelical Christian thought in the United States,

how they contributed to anti-Catholic thought, and their role in the mass hysteria of the 1980s Satanic panic in the United States

In my conclusion, I will briefly explore how the conspiratorial and adversarial approach of Jack Chick causes more harm than good, particularly in how such a thought process and style of proselytization inculcates a conspiratorial mindset among evangelical Christians, especially one that embodies an isolationist bunker mentality towards the world and a venomous hostility to various “others”.

In this project, the fear-driven and hate-centric worldview of Jack Chick will be thoroughly examined and analyzed. Conspiratorial dispositions, rooted in an execrable view of humanity encourage enmity and hatred that runs contrary to the message of redemption, mercy, and love found within the teachings of Jesus Christ. There exists a contemporary idiom which states, “Don’t shoot the messenger”; however, when the messenger’s delivery is violent in nature, a forceful repudiation is a mechanism of self defence. In essence, I aim to counter the astringent rhetoric and vitriolic assertions of Chick with a message of benevolence and hope.

Chapter One

A Jack of No Trades But Hate: A Brief Primer on The Origins of Jack Chick

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" - Luke 6:27-8 (NRVS)

The life of Chick is composed of reconditeness and mystery, partly from Chick's own reputation as a deeply unreliable narrator, with various shifting accounts of his own life as well as his hermetic disposition towards the world around him. During his lifetime, any attempt to reach out to Chick was usually a fruitless endeavor, as any attempts at contacting him were intercepted by secretaries of Chick Publications who informed individuals that Chick always refused interviews (Wallin and Sandin 72).



An image of Jack Chick displaying some of his work, date unknown

To further complicate matters, Chick Publications has published an authorized biography about Jack Chick entitled *You Don't Know Jack* in 2017 (a year after his death), but the

biography is more reminiscent of Soviet-era partisan propaganda literature than a biographical account, with chapter titles such as “Hitting the Whore of Babylon” (the Roman Catholic Church) and “Who’s the Real Jesuit?”. Essentially, it is a hagiography that serves as a deification of Jack Chick as a “faithful servant of Christ,” not a nuanced, careful biographical recollection of his life.

While his biography asserts we “don’t know Jack,” the Jack we *do* know about was born in Los Angeles, California in 1924 (and remained around Los Angeles County until his death in 2016) and had an affinity for art from a young age (Cearley 17). After high school, Chick eagerly began to pursue studies at Pasadena Playhouse in theatre arts, but quickly had his artistic aspirations cut short by the United State’s involvement in World War II. As a result of the draft during the war, Chick was conscripted in the US Army in 1943 (Cearley 18). After returning back to the United States and marrying a Canadian woman named Lola Priddle in 1948, he experienced a conversion to evangelical Christianity after his Canadian mother-in-law implored him to listen to *Old Fashioned Revival Hour,* a radio broadcast hosted by Charles E. Fuller (Misiroglu 146).

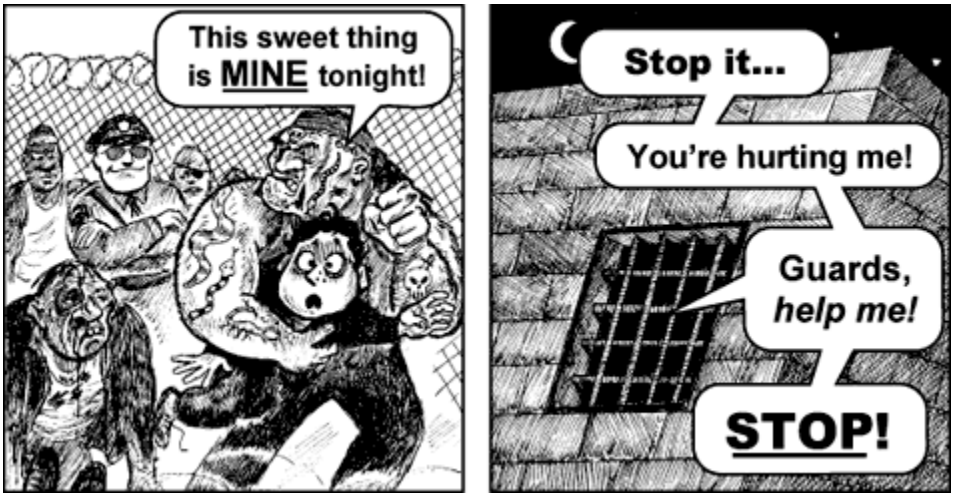


An image from 1972’s *The Gay Blade* detailing what Chick views as a pernicious “homosexual agenda”

Chick founded Chick Publications in 1961. None of his tracts ever had a convivial or

welcoming tone, but their bellicose and provocative nature accelerated with the publication of *The Gay Blade* in 1972, which asserted that a "gay revolution" was plotting a hostile takeover of the United States for the purpose of transforming it into a modern day Sodom. Chick may have been motivated by witnessing the burgeoning gay liberation movement of the 1970s that was gaining traction within the United States in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots of 1969.

In *The Gay Blade*, as some biblical scholars have noted, Chick alluded to violence being an acceptable response to homosexual behavior, and he correlated disgust with homosexuality (Hornsby and Stone 50). Chick himself has stated it was *The Gay Blade* that gained him infamy, because it offended "sodomites," who he proclaimed had been "emboldened" by new legislation to spread what he viewed as sinful behavior, and opined that God would punish them to keep "[their] filth and brutality from spreading." (Kuersteiner 160). Chick viewed homosexuality as an especially inimical demonic force while simultaneously labeling it as a "lifestyle choice," categorically rejecting any biological explanations for homosexuality, deeming it to be "unnatural." (Davis 119).

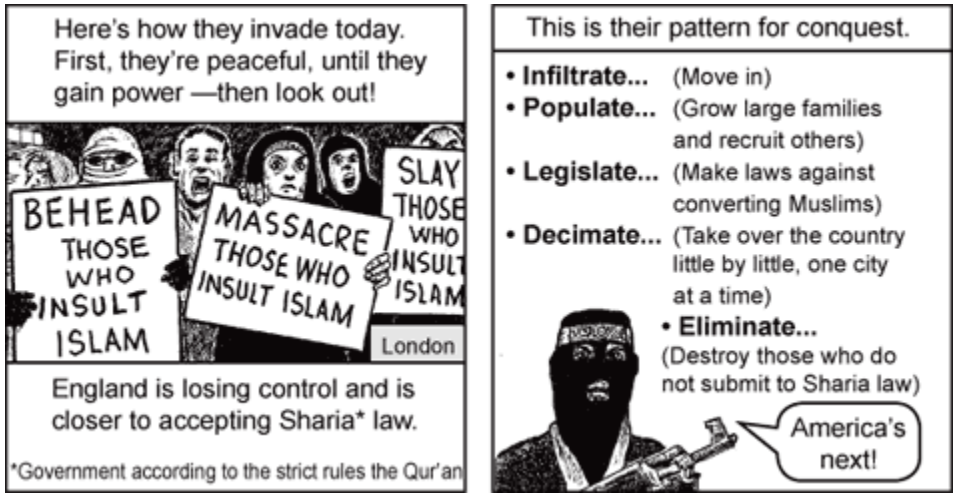


An unsettling depiction of prison rape from the 1994 tract *Trust Me!*



A depressed teen depicted as going to hell for committing suicide in the 1997 tract *No Fear?*

The illustrations within Chick tracts were often grotesque and violent, with graphic depictions of disturbing content such as murder, brutal assaults, child abuse, prison rape, drug use, and suicide. Observations have also been made about the way various ethnic groups have been portrayed in Chick tracts, such as most of the Latino characters in Chick's work being portrayed as unkempt, heavily tattooed, and involved in organized criminal activity (Davis 120).



An image from Chick's 2012 anti-Islam tract *Camel's in the Tent* portraying Muslims as "invaders"

Furthermore, he reinforces European xenophobia of Muslim migrants in his 2012 *Camel's in the Tent,* contending that Muslims "grow large families" to outnumber the population of countries they "invade" (Chick 12), inadvertently echoing and affirming the Great Replacement Theory disseminated by French novelist Renaud Camus (Walle 34) that is prevalent among nationalists and far-right leaders throughout Europe such as Italy's Giorgia Meloni (Subedi et al 77) and Hungary's Viktor Orban (McAdams et al 29). The tract further proclaims England's rapid acquiescence to Shariah law and Muslim conquest, with a gun wielding *jihadist* declaring, "America's next!" (Chick 12).

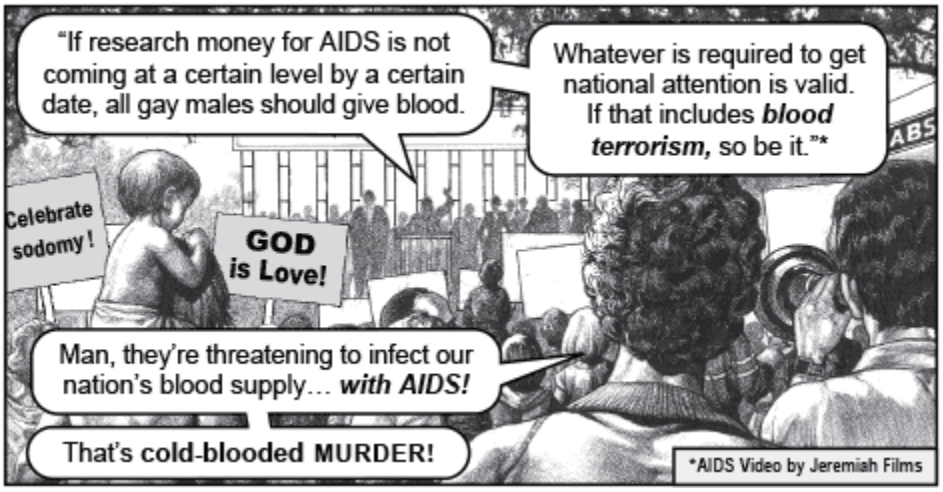


An example of a *lianhuanhua* (连环画), the Chinese literature that Chick says inspired his own comics

Ironically, despite his ardent anti-communist views (seen in tracts such as *Mama's Girls* in 2012), Chick derived inspiration for the Chick tract format from communist literature, specifically cartoon pamphlets disseminated by the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Zedong (Gates). He was impressed by the Communist Party's efficacy in inculcating Maoism in the Chinese populace (Gates), and this would be far from the last time Chick appropriated

elements of a culture for which he held particular disdain.

Interestingly enough, despite being influenced by political literature, Chick himself never explicitly advocated for any political action or ideology in his tracts, setting him apart from other members of the Religious Right who were more than comfortable doing so; in fact, Chick had a perennially negative view of government and politics, castigating Ronald Reagan as a Freemasonic pawn and censuring him for appointing Catholic judges (Saunders 762), and ironically was against prayer in public schools because he believed it would allow Roman Catholics to indoctrinate children (Saunders 752); however, he still weighed in on certain political topics, usually when they concerned "moral issues."



An image from 1989's *Doom Town* depicting gay rights activists as domestic terrorists

In *Doom Town* (published in 1989), he posited that homosexual men were aiming to deliberately infect national blood supplies in the U.S. with AIDS for the purpose of killing people (despite homosexual men being the *disproportionate* casualties of the AIDS crisis in the United States) (Chick 2-3). He even published a tract in 2011 titled *Uninvited* that caustically declared AIDS to be divine punishment from God on homosexual men (Chick 7).

Certainly, he may have never encouraged political activity in the manner of Religious Right contemporaries such as Phillis Schafly or James Dobson, but he certainly weighed in on topics within the political sphere as he deemed appropriate.

Chick was confident, if not quixotic, that the format of Chick tracts, with their disquieting themes, gruesome displays of violence, and overtly simple dialogue would be effective proselytizing tools in converting people to evangelical Christianity. And, despite the revulsion experienced by many who read his tracts, the hostility towards the ministry of Chick Publications, and the disavowal of Chick by other Christian figures, religious studies scholar James R. Lewis asserts that the theology of Chick Tracts is neatly congruent with that of fundamentalist Protestant Christianity in the United States (Lewis 46).

Chick never moderated his approach or his views, continuing the polemical and aggressive tone of Chick tracts even as various mainstream Christian groups and publishers over time denounced him for his methods (Woods 185), with Chick even resigning from the Christian Booksellers Association in 1981 amidst his imminent expulsion from the group due to their abhorrence over the content of his tracts (Misiroglu 147). However, despite his exclusion and repudiation from mainstream Christian circles, Chick tracts experienced a surge in popularity and significant increase in sales numbers after televangelist Jimmy Swagart began promoting the works of Chick (specifically his *Battle Cry* editorial) on his programs (Lewis 46).

Further compounding the ever elusive narrative surrounding Jack Chick is that he entertained the company of rather unscrupulous characters, namely Alberto Rivera and John Todd, both of whom he claims to have met in the 1970s, not specifying an exact year (Cearley 25). Alberto Rivera, a Spanish national with discredited claims to being a former Jesuit priest who “escaped the Catholic Church,” appears to have been a significant source and influence

for Chick's anti-Catholic tracts. Chick named Rivera's works as primary sources in the footnotes of several tracts and even created a graphic novel series, *Alberto,* featuring Rivera as the titular protagonist. Rivera attributed numerous historical atrocities to the Roman Catholic Church, and most notably convinced Jack Chick that the Catholic Church was the true culprit behind the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Chick published *The Big Betrayal* in 1981*,* which echoed this theory, which had initially been propounded by ex-Catholic priest Charles Chinquy (Sobiech 26).



A 1983 picture of Alberto Rivera

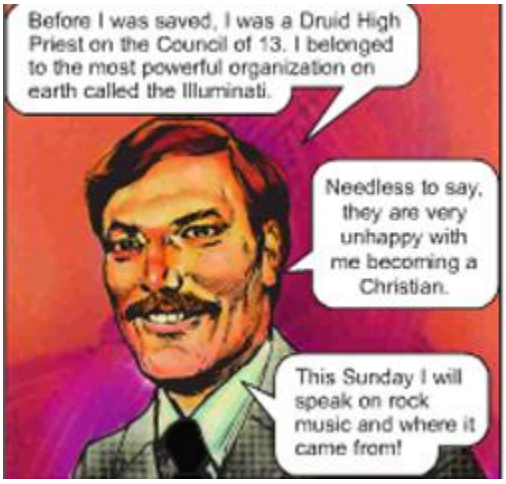


An undated picture of John Todd

Rivera's life story and accounts of being a Jesuit priest are littered with inconsistencies and unsubstantiated assertions. Several independent journalists (most notably the *Cornerstone* publication), after heavily scrutinizing his life and claims (Cearley 26-7), deemed him to be a fraudster. Additionally, Rivera had an extensive criminal history, with warrants across several states in the U.S. for financial crimes (Bivins 61). He fabricated documents for the purpose of attaining a U.S. passport (Bivins 61), which is his only "evidence" for having ever been a Catholic priest (Bivins 61). Chick remained steadfast in his defense of Rivera, even claiming that his death from colon cancer in 1997 had actually been an assassination at the hands of the

Roman Catholic Church (Cearley 28).

John Todd, another duplicitous character with a penchant for conspiratorial postulations, was a primary source for a myriad of Chick tracts concerning Satanism and the occult, with Todd himself professing to have originated from an occultist or witchcraft practicing family (Medway 169). He even appeared as a character named Lance Collins in the full color comic book *Spellbound?* (Medway 169), published in 1978. Todd's assertions and fabrications were even more extensive than Rivera's. He claimed to have been a Special Forces soldier in the US Army who fought in the Vietnam War (Medway 170), and to have been a deeply entrenched member of the Illuminati who assisted them in creating Christian rock as a weapon of Satanic influence (Hertenstein and Trott 164).



John Todd as depicted by Chick in 1978's *Spellbound?*

Much like Rivera, Todd also had a history of reprobate behavior, though much more egregious and dissolute in nature, having displayed a noxious predilection for adolescent girls, including impregnating a teenage girl (the sister of his then-girlfriend) in Arizona in 1973 and receiving a short prison stint in 1976 for the sexual exploitation of a sixteen-year-old girl in Ohio (Medway 171-2).

Eventually, Todd was convicted in 1988 of raping a female student at the University of South Carolina after luring her into his apartment with the promise of a job opportunity (Hook). He received the penalty of a thirty-year sentence, the maximum penalty for such a crime in South Carolina at the time (Hook). *You Don't Know Jack,* the authorized biography of Chick, states that Chick never believed Todd committed the heinous acts he was accused or convicted of. He suggested that Todd had been the victim of a setup by a shadowy cabal (probably the Roman Catholic Church) and believed that any evidence against him was either inadequate or outright fabricated (Daniels 22). (This calls into question what would even pass muster as sufficient evidence for an individual such as Chick).

Chick's association with disreputable individuals such as Rivera and Todd could suggest that he was susceptible to the guileful influence of conniving actors, or was simply seeking the company of those who would display congruence with his already deeply held beliefs and convictions. The more harrowing (and likely) alternative is that Chick knew of their various misdeeds and simply did not care. This makes the 1984 publication of *Lisa,* an implacable defense of a child rapist, even more unsettling. The tract features the rapist's immediate forgiveness (of raping his daughter) after being witnessed to by his doctor (who did not report the crime), and with his victim being made to forgive him (Barr). The tract was quickly pulled out of publication, upsetting even Chick's most ardent supporters (Barr).



A circa early 1970s photo of Fred Carter

However, Chick had additional assistance behind the scenes. In addition to his associates, not all Chick tracts were illustrated by Chick himself, as he would, in 1972, abdicate some of his illustrating duties to another artist named Fred Carter (Thielman), owing to the sheer output of his workload, and it is said that Carter has illustrated approximately half of all Chick tracts since that time (Chapman 109). Interestingly enough, Chick did not formally acknowledge the contributions of Carter to the public until 1980, citing Carter's "shyness," yet some have postulated that Chick was appropriating the work of a black artist as his own (Silliman).

Additionally, even though Chick claims to have written all of the storylines for Chick tracts published during his lifetime (Chapman 84), there have been speculations Carter contributed to plots involving "black issues" such as crime and the presence of other religions (such as Islam) in African-American communities, such as 1977's *Soul Story,* which featured graphic depictions of inner city violence (Chireau 11), and Carter even worked outside of Chick Publications in 2000 to illustrate *The Holy Bible for Children of Color* (Chireau 12),

perhaps demonstrating that Carter was more acutely concerned with matters of race and representation of blackness than Chick was.



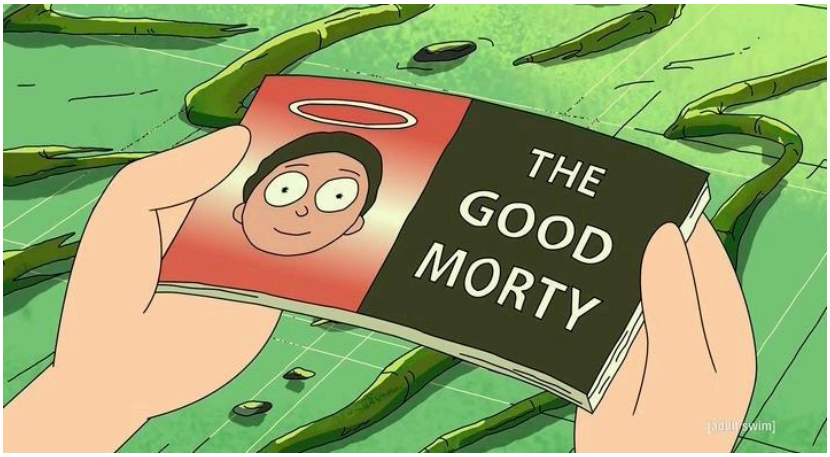
An example of Fred Carter's artistic work from the Chick tract *Soul Story*

Chick relentlessly continued writing and publishing Chick tracts throughout the rest of his life, with the overall tone and content of the tracts remaining provocative and execrable. He would lose his wife in 1998 and later his only child, Carol, in 2001 (Gates) and experienced health complications throughout the 2000s. On his website, he announced that his diabetes had worsened and that he had experienced a heart attack that necessitated a triple bypass surgery (Chick). Eventually, Chick died at the age of 92 in his California home on October 23rd 2016 (Sherwood), a mere eight days before Halloween, a holiday he harbored considerable enmity towards; and, in true Chick fashion, his widow and closest associates refused to provide any other details about his death other than attesting to the veracity of it having occurred (Thielman).

Given his controversial and infamous reputation, some online editorials observed that people on various social media platforms were celebrating his death (Kriss), with some

recounting memories of how Chick's works deeply terrified them as children (McCulloch), and *The Nib,* an online comics publication site that heavily featured satirical comics of a political nature, "memorialized" the life of Jack Chick by publishing a tract called *Jack Chick: This Was Your Life* (a reference to Chick's best selling tract from 1964, *This Was Your Life*) several days after Chick's death, which featured Chick dying and being condemned to hell by God, with the art lampooning Chick's art and literary style (Bors).

Chick Publications still continues to publish existing and new tracts to this day, with David W. Daniels currently writing and illustrating newer Chick tracts, according to the Chick Publications website. Chick, paradoxically, has amassed a cult status among other cartoonists and artists who hold an atypical admiration for him *despite* his reactionary belief system, citing his anti-mainstream disposition (analogous to being "underground"), sedulous dedication to his craft, and idiosyncratic artistic style (Heer).



A parody of a Chick Tract from the animated television series *Rick and Morty*

Robert Crumb, renowned U.S. cartoon artist of the underground comix movement and creator of Fritz the Cat, even expressed exuberant admiration for Chick, praising the world of Chick tracts as "twisted" but "well done," and stated that *Somebody Loves Me* is his favorite

Chick tract (Fernández). Even more recently, Dan Harmon featured a satirical tribute to Chick tracts in his animated show *Rick and Morty* on the 2014 episode "Close Rick-counters of the Rick Kind," which features a religious pamphlet that Harmon and co-creator Justin Roiland stated was directly modeled after Chick tracts (McLean).

Additionally, some individuals have attributed positive influences to Chick tracts, such as actor Danny Trejo stating in his 2021 autobiography *Trejo: My Life of Crime, Redemption, and Hollywood* that he became a Christian after reading a Chick tract (which exactly he read was not specified) while incarcerated (Davis 118), and Massachusetts based contemporary Christian musician Kathleen Carnali is featured on the Chick Publications YouTube channel in a testimonial video where she became "born again" after receiving Chick's 1964 tract *This Was Your Life* on a field trip in Boston ("I'm forever grateful," 00:01:00-00:03:29).

Chick may have died, but his medium, ideas, and influence have left an influence and legacy that has persisted, imbued within both evangelical Christianity and 20th century Americana.

Chapter Two

The Road to Hell is Paved by Rome: The Anti-Catholicism of Jack Chick

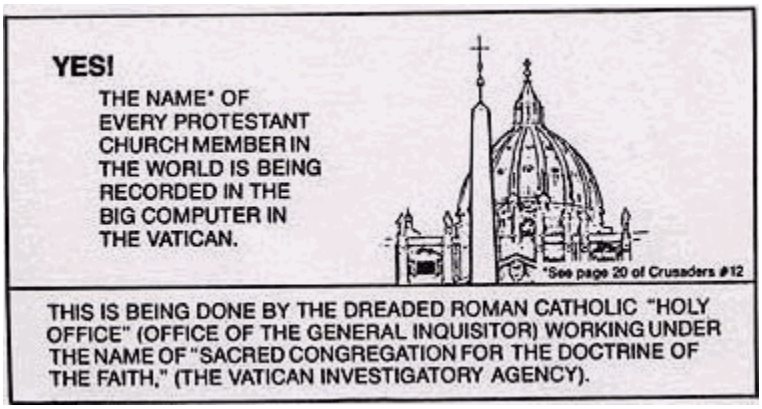
"Anti-Catholicism has always been the pornography of the puritan" — Richard Hofstadter

Anti-Catholicism has a storied history within the broader history of American evangelical Christianity, and Jack Chick certainly played a role within that grand, overarching narrative of the juxtaposition between "Bible-believing Christians" and "Romanism". Throughout the twentieth century, there were a number of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians who took aim at the Roman Catholic Church.

In the midst of the 1928 United States Presidential election, South Carolina Methodist minister Bob Jones Sr. (future founder of Bob Jones University) vociferously opposed the presidential campaign of Governor Al Smith on the basis of his Catholicism, saying of the Democratic nominee that he would rather the South be overwhelmingly populated with liquor establishments (a statement uttered during the Prohibition era) than to have a Catholic elected as President of the United States (Farris 98). Harold Ockenga's "The Unvoiced Multitudes" at the inaugural meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals (of which he was a co-founder) in 1942 spoke of Roman Catholicism as a potential (if not imminent) threat to the United Stated and Christianity as a whole (Chapman 40).

Yet in regard to Chick, what makes him distinct from other evangelical figures isn't merely his anti-Catholicism, but his irrefutably virulent enmity for Roman Catholics, far exceeding disagreements over doctrinal matters within the confines of a theological debate; for Chick, Roman Catholicism was the apotheosis of a innumerable degree of material evil in the world and a progenitor of obstreperous malevolence.

His detestation of Roman Catholicism was so palpable that it often appeared that anti-Catholicism was the *raison d'etre* of his literary career, especially given the inordinate focus of his tracts on anti-Catholic screeds. The polemical content within Chick tracts made evident that Chick was unwavering in his pertinacious disdain for Roman Catholics, seeking to ritualistically humiliate and denigrate the Roman Catholic religion and its adherents.



The description of the purported computer documenting all Protestants in the tract *My Name?...In the Vatican?*

The accusations were numerous. In the 1980 tract *My Name?...In the Vatican?*, Chick states that the Vatican has a supercomputer of every "Bible-believing" Christian in the world for the logistical purpose of carrying out a future mass murder [of them] (Chick 2, 4). In *Holocaust,* published in 1984, he makes a historically ungrounded claim that the Roman Catholic Church orchestrated and carried out the Holocaust, inadvertently absolving those such as Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler as the true architects of this harrowing genocide, stating explicitly, "it is a documented fact that the Gestapo was run by the Jesuits" (Chick 7), and using another Chick tract as the source for this claim in his footnotes.

Additionally, he further diminishes the leadership of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) of culpability and agency in their heinous war crimes, as he asserts in *Mama's Girls*, published in 2012, that the Roman Catholic Church created Nazism (as well

as communism, Islam, and Freemasonry), stating, “Nazism was born to use Catholics to destroy Communism and make the world Catholic” (Chick 18), confounded by Chick’s assertion in this same tract that the Catholic Church also created communism to eliminate the House of Romanov in Tsarist Russia (Chick 16).



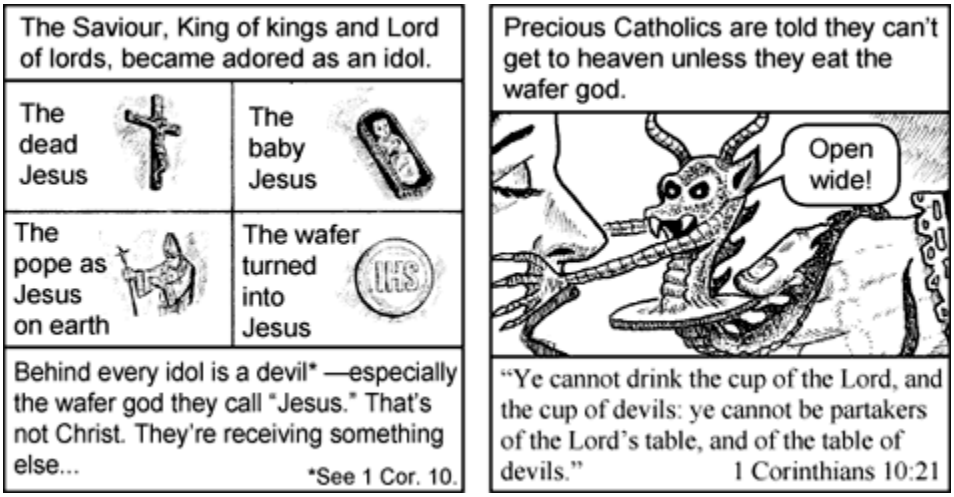
An 1875 political cartoon from Thomas Nast depicting the infiltration of U.S. legislatures by Roman Catholics

From a cursory glance of a Chick tract, one cannot help but notice the sinister and exaggerated manner in which Catholic clerics are illustrated, which harkens back to the depictions of Roman Catholics in political cartoons of the nineteenth century from artists such as Thomas Nast, which were propagandistic in nature and depicted Catholics as hostile to the citizens of the United States and her people, wholly incapable of being “true” Americans and being deserving of violent rejection (Halloran 36).



The pope, under the auspices of Satan, as portrayed in the Chick tract *Papa*

In the tract *Papa*, published in 2009, the pope is depicted in a sinister manner and often accompanied by Satan, and a Catholic priest in *Twin Towers*, published in 2013 (and the namesake unrelated to 9/11), is seen being given guidance by a demon, who places their hand upon the priest's shoulder whilst exhibiting a baleful grin; additionally, a demonic entity in *Twin Towers* manifests itself out of the Eucharist a priest is holding, threatening entry into the mouth of the unexpecting recipient (Chick 18).



The theology of the Eucharist according to Chick, with it being portrayed as demonic in *Twin Towers*

Though these tracts were written and published later into his career, his tendency to draw or depict Catholic clergy as evil or demonic entities has been consistent across all of his tracts that were written about (or more appropriately, against) Roman Catholicism. The pernicious illustration of the Eucharist in *Twin Towers* distorting itself into a mephistophelian creature simultaneously shows a deliberate denigration of Catholic belief on the Eucharist as well as being a wholesale rejection of the legitimacy of this theological dogma.

In one of Chick's earliest anti-Catholic tracts, *Are Roman Catholics Christian?,* published in 1981, Chick posits a young Roman Catholic woman named Helen throughout the tract, noting that, by the virtue of being Roman Catholic, Helen is a citizen of two countries, Vatican City and the United States, and she is intrinsically more loyal to the former (Chick 4).



The "dual loyalty" of Roman Catholics depicted in the Chick tract *Are Roman Catholics Christian?*

This notion of "dual loyalty" is a xenophobic and nativist holdover belief that flourished in the 19th century United States, proliferated by groups such as the Know Nothing Party, who believed that Roman Catholics would utterly vanquish the very notions of civil liberties and religious freedom, and subject the nation to papal subjugation (Anbinder 112), as well as the

Ku Klux Klan, who deemed Roman Catholicism to be a religion irrefutably incompatible with American values, going as far as seizing control of school boards in Oregon during the 1920s to purge Roman Catholic school teachers in public schools (Racine 68) and passed a piece of legislation in the state, the Compulsory Education Act of 1922, that necessitated compulsory attendance in public schools with the intent of eradicating Catholic parochial schools (Horowitz 21).

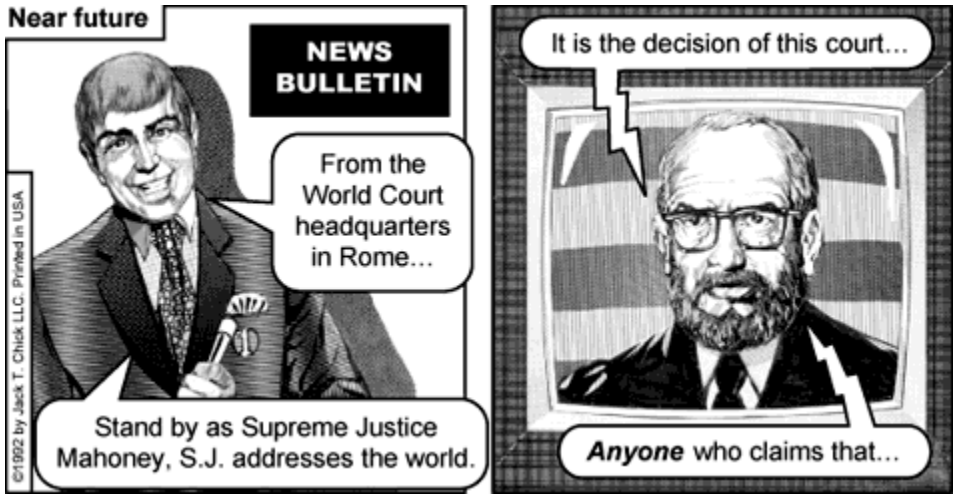
Chick also continued to demonstrate this storied brand of xenophobia that echoed Lyman Beecher's 1835 work *A Plea for the West* in the tract titled *Holocaust,* published three years after *Are Roman Catholics Christian?*. In this tract, he states that the United States government so frequently capitulates to Catholic immigrants that it allows "as many as 100,000" to cross the southern border as a part of an elaborate scheme to turn the United States into what would essentially be a Catholic fiefdom of the Vatican, a country under the subjugation of the Catholic Church (Chick 16).



Chick warning of an "invasion" of Catholic immigrants into the U.S. in the tract *Holocaust*

Beecher expressed similar sentiments concerning Catholic immigration, foreboding the

imminence of "European paupers" surging into the United States (Beecher 178). Chick further proclaims in *Holocaust* that Catholics already control the U.S. media apparatus, have infiltrated the federal government, and ultimately seek to utterly eviscerate the Constitution and purge all Protestants from the country's institutions (Chick 14).



The depiction of the world under Catholic control in the 1992 revision of the tract *The Last Generation*

Indeed, Chick's ceaseless perturbation concerning apocalyptic fears of the Catholic Church were explicitly displayed in a 1992 update of his 1972 tract *The Last Generation,* which showed the "one world government" being headquartered in Rome (Chick 2), with a supreme court of Jesuits proclaiming Gulag-esque internment or capital punishment as penalties for professing the salvific necessity of faith (alone) in Jesus Christ (Chick 3). Chick's apocalyptic predictions also entailed a world under Rome rule where monogamous marriage and heterosexuality is condemned by government institutions such as public schools (Chick 7), running contrary to the Roman Catholic Church's long-standing teaching on homosexuality (CCC 2357).

Much of these accusations of a surreptitious Catholic domination strongly resemble the

overarching narrative of the 1903 propaganda literature *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* which (falsely) asserts the existence of an Jewish plot to depose existing institutions and governments across the globe for the purpose of subjugating nations to Jewish domination (Singerman 48), except with a Roman Catholic cabal instead of a Jewish one in the case of Jack Chick's worldview.

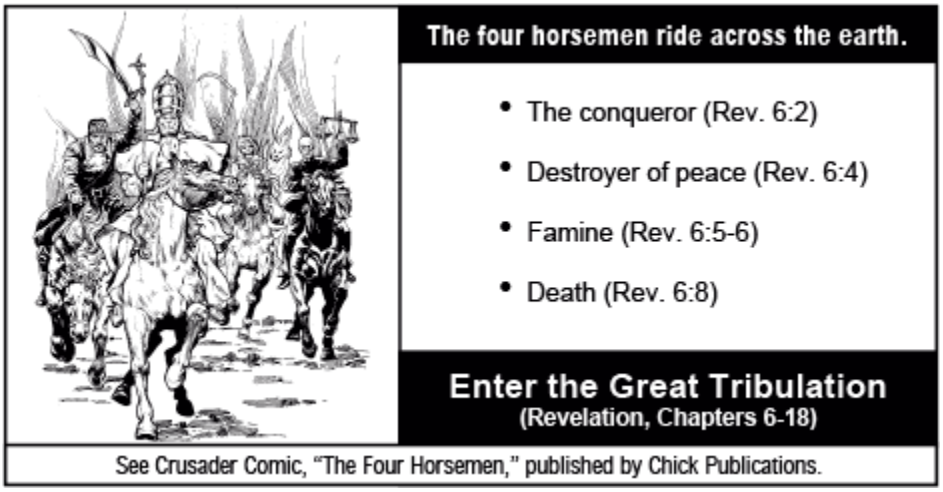
That Chick still firmly adhered to these convictions twenty years after the election of the first Catholic US President, John F. Kennedy, is a peculiarity, but perhaps not anomalous for evangelical Christians. Quantitative research that has been conducted on Christian nationalism in the United States reveals that a majority of those who sympathize with this ideology are evangelical Protestant Christians (PRRI), and that there is a stronger correlation of identification with Christian nationalism among "born-again Protestants" than there is with other Christian groups in the United States (Perry et al); along with this, and given that Christian nationalism acts to bolster religious identity among evangelical Protestants (Bean 80), I assert that the mythic core of Christian nationalism as manifested in the United States carries the implied assumption that the "Christian" component is the preeminence of evangelical Protestant Christianity.



A young child is chastised for having married heterosexual parents in *The Last Generation*

Essentially, Chick bore the torch of his xenophobic predecessors, and within the confines of this tract, propagated this polemical indictment concerning the equivocal national identity of Roman Catholics, and it is a belief that I posit is implicitly imbued within the American evangelical Christian conscience, even if such a sentiment is not explicitly expressed. Another manner in which Chick tracts potentially influenced evangelical Christians in the United States is through conspiratorial ruminations, and Chick's conspiracies concerning the Catholic Church were plentiful.

Among the more prominent accusations was the pope being the Antichrist, the central focus of the Chick tract *The Beast.* Published in 1988, in the midst of a U.S. Presidential election that would eventually see Vice President George HW Bush defeat Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis by sweeping margins, and the Moral Majority experiencing death rattles due to a confident presumption that moral declines in American culture had been rectified (Allitt 198), these events might have caused evangelical Christians to once again take an acrimonious disposition against Catholics in the aftermath of political ecumenism.



The portrayal of the pope as one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in the 1988 tract *The Beast*

In the tract, Chick invokes Revelation 13:8, stating that Satan will install an authoritative figurehead that “the whole world” will be enthralled about and infatuated with, and categorically centers the Vatican as the central demesne of the Antichrist (Chick 10). “The Beast " is depicted as a papal figure standing before an enamored crowd who assume a servile disposition towards him. The tract further elaborates that the pope will converge all religions across the globe (Chick 6) and cement the crystallization of a one world economy (Chick 10), giving heavy credence to the conspiracy of a “New World Order” (or a one-word government), a conspiracy theory that would flourish in the aftermath of President George HW Bush’s 1991 State of the Union Address, which invoked fears concerning increasing globalization, and was the conspiracy of a “one world government” was already popularized by the John Birch Society in the 1960s (Knight 559).

Much of this is heavily related to Chick’s premillennial dispensationalist theology, and Chick himself explicitly states in this tract that the ushering of this dismal and harrowing regime is a “one world government” (Chick 5), one that is installed under the guise of initiating “world peace,” as well as a “great tribulation” that will occur with the arrival of the Antichrist (Chick 6).

The conspiratorial suspicions of a clandestine organization headed by a charismatic leader with surreptitiously malicious objectives is not the exclusive domain of evangelical Christian thought, as such a machination is the basis of the dystopian novel *Lord of the World*, authored by Roman Catholic Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson in 1907; however, such though has enjoyed immense popularity in evangelical Christian circles, with a myriad of political events, such as the formation of the United Nations, being seen as a prophetic sign of the inevitable occurrence of the arrival of the Antichrist (Sutton 300).

Additionally, *The Beast* takes aim at the Catholic Church by calling it the "Whore of Babylon," a moniker with origins in the Book of Revelation (Rev 17.5, NRSV) and a long enduring canard against the Roman Catholic Church. For the purpose of contextualization, lurid aspersion of the Roman Catholic Church as the "Whore of Babylon" predate Chick tracts, as Protestant figures such as Martin Luther made the association with the Roman Catholic Church as the Whore of Babylon(Whitford 27), and the Scofield Reference Bible proclaimed the Whore of Babylon to be the papacy (Mangum and Sweetnam 84).

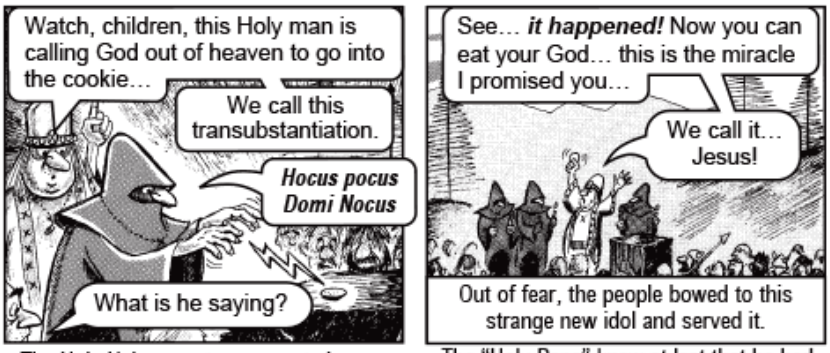


Chick's association of the Catholic Church with the "Whore of Babylon" in *The Beast*

One Protestant denomination that remains resolute in the certainty of the pope being the Antichrist are the Seventh Day Adventists, whose eschatology prominently features the office of the papacy (Stevens 61), with fears of the pope as the Antichrist circulating in the early days of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, citing encyclicals such as *Mirari vos* as evidence of the Roman Catholic Church's portentous stratagem of domination (Osborn 236).

The Seventh Day Adventist Church during the 1980s began to undertake a similar evangelization approach to Chick tracts by mass distributing a work of literature called

National Sunday Law by Jan Marcussen in 1983, which asserts the pope (who is controlled by Satan) will carry out the Mark of the Beast and enact a law legally recognizing Sunday as the day of the Sabbath (Robbins and Palmer 219-0). While this isn't necessarily indicative of a *vis-à-vis* influence, it is interesting to note that the Seventh Day Adventists began to produce vituperative and conspiratorial literature after Chick had been making a cottage industry of it for over a decade by that point.



Chick's mockery of Latin as a liturgical language in *The Death Cookie*

Marcussen's basis for the pope being a puppet of Satan is because of the pope being referred to as *Vicarius Filii Dei* (Mount) which translates to "Vicar of the Son of God"; this method of highlighting a Latin honorific as evidence of a Satanic subversion was also utilized by Chick in the 1983 tract *Is There Another Christ?,* in which he states the phrase *Alter Christus* ("Another Christ") is demonstrable evidence of Satan putting forward fraudulent figureheads pretending to be Christ (Chick 13). Chick himself has consistently taken issue with the use of Latin in Roman Catholic liturgy and ecclesial documents, such as in *The Death Cookie,* published in 1988, where he labeled the Latin used in the Roman Catholic Mass as a language so surreptitious and obscure that "no one understands" [it] (Chick 4), and

even explicitly mocks the use of Latin in the Mass as garbled and unintelligible jargon (Chick 11).

The very presumption of Latin being inaccessible language is demonstrably false, since Latin had a long enduring tradition of being the language of the academy (Campbell 308), despite [the academy] historically being a relatively insular and exclusionary institution, as well as overwhelming evidence of Latin being understood by a myriad of groups under Roman Imperial rule due to the ubiquity of the language (Clackson and Horrocks 82).

Another observable similarity with Chick tracts in portraying the pope as an apocalyptic harbinger of imminent ruination and world domination is in the work of the *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye, a prominent figure in the Religious Right and co-founder of the Moral Majority (Wilcox 124). For the duration of much of LaHaye's life, he was a clamorous detractor of the Roman Catholic Church, abjuring the institution as a progenitor of a false religion, a stance so acrimonious that it sometimes put him at odds with his own colleagues in the Religious Right, such as when he resigned as co-chairman of the 1988 US Presidential campaign of Jack Kemp after anti-Catholic screeds of his were resurfaced and publicized (McFadden); indeed, individuals such as LaHaye and Chick both illustrate that the political ecumenism of Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants that led to the formulation of the Religious Right was not a seamlessly congruent process, and at times fraught with inner turmoil.

According to LaHaye, the Roman Catholic Church was the most perilous of "false religions" because it extracted the "truthful fruits" of Christianity into its "non-Christian" structure and belief system (Gribben and Sweetnam 70). In fact, some scholars have posited that Chick spearheaded a genre of "rapture fiction" that played a role in the inspiration the

Left Behind series, an assertion that becomes more discernible when taking into account the graphic novel adaptations of the apocalyptic series that were published in the early 2000s (Gribben and Sweetnam 19).

Although the anti-Catholicism of Chick tracts are markedly more explicit than that of the *Left Behind* series, the undertones of the anti-Catholic constitution of Chick tracts bear similarities to those prevalent throughout LaHaye's *Left Behind* series, even if LaHaye never credits or references the influence of Chick tracts. LaHaye himself ascribes much of his anti-Catholic beliefs (or rather what he purports to be his "knowledge" on Catholicism) to Alexander Hislop's 1858 work *The Two Babylons,* even proclaiming it to be, "the greatest book written [on Babylon]" (LaHaye 266), and Chick praised the book in a September 2006 issues of his newsletter *BattleCry* as "one of the best books I've ever read about Roman Catholicism" (Chick).

Despite this, the *Left Behind* series is less of a theological treatise and more of an ecclesial polemic, with a bifurcated perspective and portrayal of the Roman Catholic Church that closely mirrors the worldview of the anti-Catholic Chick tracts; indeed, even other evangelical Protestant readers have noted the candid portrayal of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution of unparalleled malevolence, malevolence, sometimes expressing disconcerting with such an odious characterization (Frykholm 70-2).

Additionally, some scholars have noted the similarity between the belief systems in both Chick and Lahaye's works (Saunders 739), but posit that LaHaye possibly never cited Chick as an influence because of Chick's explicitly open scorn for him due to his political ecumenism with Catholics on the Religious Right (Saunders 741); this is especially considering that Beverly LaHaye, Tim LaHaye's wife, collaborated with Catholics such as

Phillis Schaffly through the organization she founded in 1978 called Concerned Women for America, although she (like many evangelical Protestants) considered this alliance to be strategic and situational (Johnson 87-8).

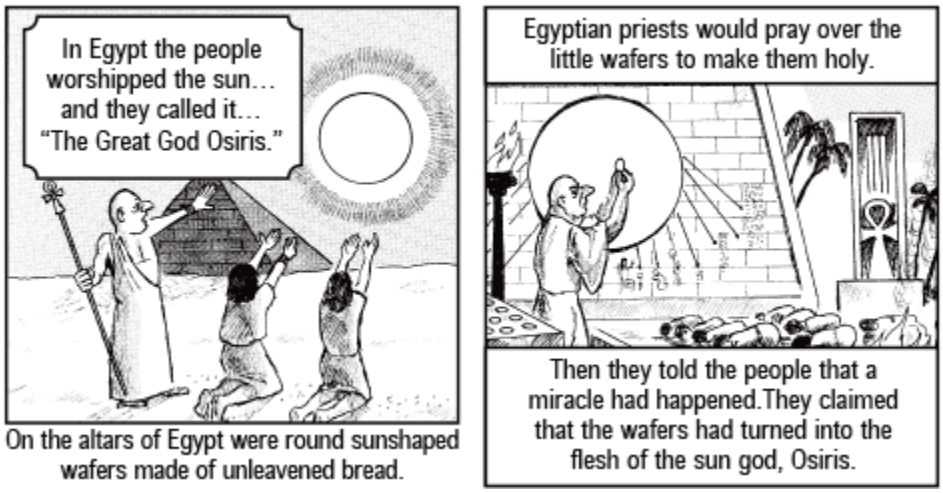


The "demonic" origins of the Eucharist according to Chick in the tract *The Death Cookie*

Taking this into consideration, although there is no definitive way of knowing if Tim LaHaye took inspiration from Chick tracts, there's something to be said about the similarities between the two mens' works: if "rapture fiction" was the "house that Jack built," LaHaye performed the renovations that made it much more appeasable for a wider and more mainstream audience. Moreover, *The Death Cookie* tract succinctly expressed the absurdity of much of anti-Catholic thought in evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity: that a considerable amount is predicated upon erroneous caricatures of the Catholic Church, uncorroborated accusations, and obloquies about Catholic adherents and clerics.

Chick is far from the earliest innovator of such a polemical approach; going back to the 19th century United States, propaganda literature such as *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* falsely asserted that Catholic convents were hotbeds of infant murder based on her

(discredited) allegations about activities in the Hotel Dieu convent, which deeply resonated with the American public and became widespread in its popularity; moreso, when a team of independent Protestant ministers investigated the Hotel Dieu convent and found no evidence of her claims, they were almost immediately discredited as undercover Jesuits (Billington 289).

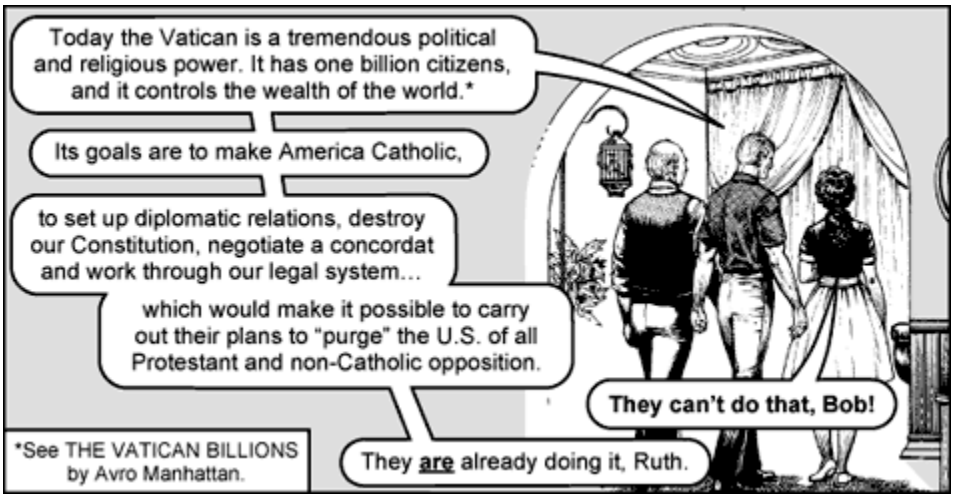


The ancient Egyptian origins of the Eucharist according to Chick in *The Death Cookie*

This demonstrates how the prevailing power of a narrative often supersedes the actual material reality, and Chick both reflected evangelical Christian thought and influenced it in this sense, especially in *The Death Cookie*. As an example, he states that the Eucharist has its origins in ancient Egyptian religion, and that the Eucharist wafer was modeled after a ritual involving the "Egyptian sun god Osiris" (Chick 8). He offers no evidence for this preposterous assertion, reflected in the fact that the Egyptian sun god was not Osiris, but rather Ra (Morenz 267). Poor historicity aside, unwavering claims made in these tracts, combined with their popularity, are possibly a tangible way in which Chick influenced evangelical Christian thought, as Catholics are still pilloried in many evangelical Christian

circles as “pagans” (Longenecker). Additionally, the claims these tracts make are not new, as similar uncorroborated claims were made in works such as the aforementioned book *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop, and also by Ralph Woodrow in his 1966 book *Babylonian Mystery Religion,* the latter of whom has since abjured the thesis of his book, wherein he previously referred to Roman Catholicism as a continuation of an “ancient Babylonian religious system” (Woodrow).

Even more perturbing was the historical distortions proliferated in the Chick tract *Holocaust*, which charged the Roman Catholic Church with being the true progenitors and overseers of “The Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” more colloquially known as The Holocaust. While this tract doesn’t engage in the Holocaust denialism of those such as Arthur Butz (author of *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century*) or David Irving, who accuse the Holocaust of being largely fabricated, it is scholastically paramount (as well as an academic responsibility) to note that the Chick tract *Holocaust* is *still* a form of historical negationism because it attributes the perpetration of the Holocaust to external agents rather than the leaders of the Third Reich.

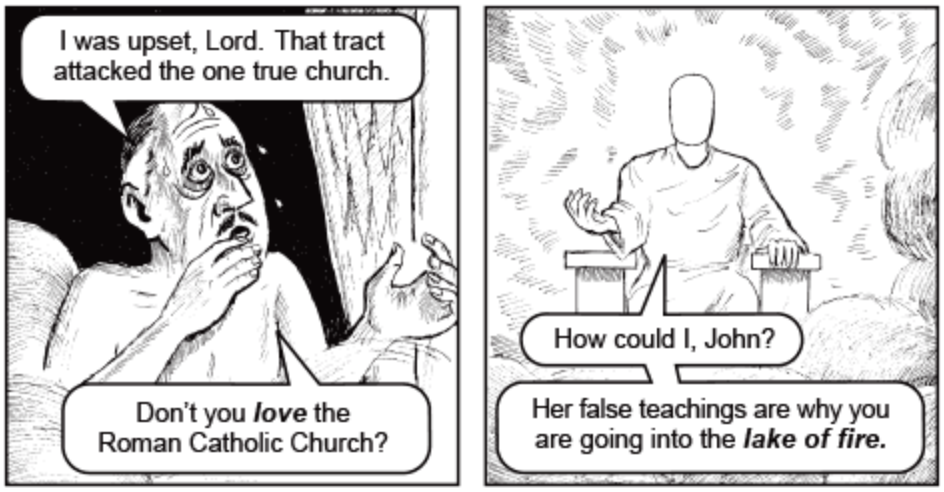


Fearmongering about Roman Catholic domination of the United States in the Chick tract *Holocaust*

The tract asserts that Adolf Hitler was merely "following the laws" as prescribed by the Vatican through ecumenical councils, and that it was the Roman Catholic Church (and more specifically, the Jesuits) who planned out the Holocaust (Chick 6-7), with Chick even referring to the Holocaust as an "Inquisition" (Chick 5-6). Furthermore, the tract states that Hitler was a faithful adherent to the Roman Catholic faith, and was even heralded as a "hero" by the Vatican (Chick 10). The relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Third Reich is undoubtedly complicated, especially with the *Reichskonkordat* in 1933 that attempted to preserve the Catholic religion's status in Germany, with Pope Pius XII aiming to accomplish a negotiation similar to the Lateran Pact of 1929 made with Fascist Italy (Coppa 121).

However, the assertion that Hitler was a faithful "son of the Catholic Church" is demonstrably false, as he often had disdain for the Roman Catholic Church when they conflicted with his ideological pursuits, such as the suppression of the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (Brendon 551) or the targeted removal of Catholic crucifixes in Bavarian classrooms (Kershaw 425); additionally, the tract deliberately obfuscates the persecution the Catholic Church in Germany suffered under the Third Reich, including the extermination of Catholic clergy (especially Polish clerics) in concentration camps (Kershaw 427, 702).

There is no reliable evidence that Hitler, or anyone in the Nazi Party, carried out the Holocaust at the behest of the Vatican, and the only "source" Chick provides for this claim is another work of his (hostility to external and independent corroborations are a perennial characteristic of Chick tracts).



A Roman Catholic making a futile plead for mercy to God before being sent to hell in the Chick tract *Last Rites*

Additionally, Chick has stated on the "Does Jack Chick Hate Catholics?" section of the Chick Publications website that he "loves" Roman Catholics and only loathes the Catholic religion (Chick), yet his inflammatory language and harsh illustrations often encompass lay Catholics, such as in the 1994 tract *Last Rites,* which is a scalding humiliation of a lay Catholic who is chastised and berated by God for his Catholic devotions and beliefs, with God stating, "You should have believed My Word instead of your catechism" (Chick 15) and with the lay Catholic man eventually being sent to hell, with God emphasizing the rejection of an anti-Catholic Chick tract from a proselytizer by the man during his time on earth as demonstrable evidence of his "unrepentant" sin. Despite Chick's axiomatic position of "loving the sinner and hating the sin" regarding Roman Catholics, tracts such as *Last Rites* demonstrate that his antipathy extends to Catholic individuals.

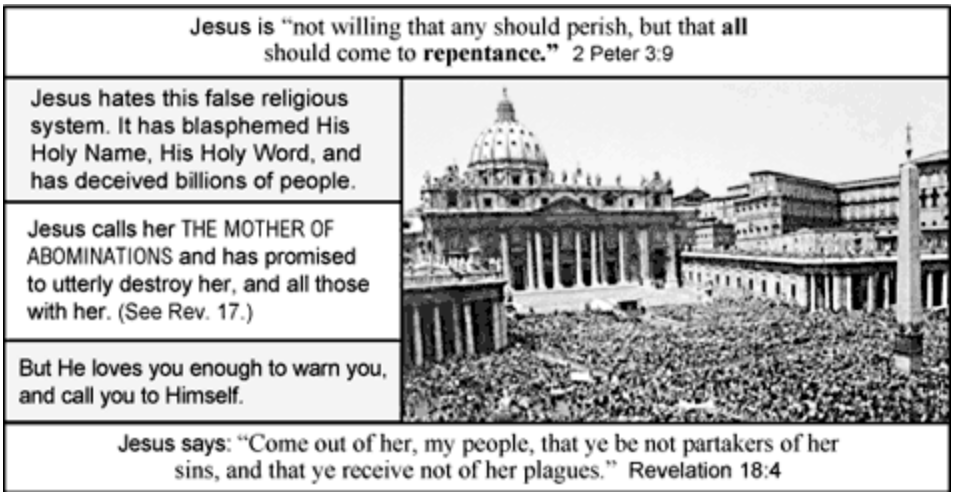
When considering the intrinsic significance of a person's religious identity, such as its importance in a individual's psychological health (Koenig 4) as well as its role in an individual's self-conceptualization (Greenfield and Nadine 246), Chick's assertion of not

hating Catholic *individuals* crumbles from an observation of the anti-Catholic content of Chick tracts. In fact, in the tract *Is There Another Christ?,* Chick emphasizes that not only does Jesus hate Roman Catholicism, but that Christ himself will destroy the Catholic Church and "all those with her," implying that any Catholic who refuses to renounce Catholicism will be spared no mercy (Chick 22).

Even moreso, some scholarly observations have been made that "loving the sinner, but hating the sin" is ultimately incongruent when the "sin" of a person is an innate part of their identity (Green 517). Taking this into account, it can be said that the hateful positions of Chick towards Catholicism throughout his works, in practice and in actuality, also extend towards individual Catholics as well as the institutional Catholic Church and its belief system.

The abiding prevalence of anti-Catholicism in Chick tracts is not to be overlooked, and it would be irresponsible to dismiss the anti-Catholicism of Chick tracts as the tumultuous balderdash of a fringe individual in Protestant evangelical Christianity. What also cannot be dismissed is his earnest sincerity concerning these beliefs.

One prominent Catholic apologist, Jimmy Akin of the California-based organization Catholic Answers, was invited to a private screening of Chick's film *The Light of the World* in 2003*,* and was able to meet Chick himself, who did not realize he had invited a Catholic into his private event (Akin). Upon Akin revealing himself to be a Catholic, Chick interrogated him and asked if he was a Jesuit, and refused his requests of tours or pictures, claiming that he was on numerous "hit lists." (Akin). Akin noted the unquestioned conviction of his demeanor, and Chick ended their interaction with a parting statement, "We're in the war…I'm sure we'll be hearing from you in the future." (Akin).



Chick's apocalyptic warning to Catholics in the Chick tract *Is There Another Christ?*

While Chick tracts embody the most pronounced permutation of anti-Catholicism, similar beliefs and conspiratorial accusations still persist today among many evangelical Protestant Christians, with even adherents of QAnon in the current age conflating the Roman Catholic Church with "Satanism" (Sommer) or evangelical Christians in elected office within the United States publicly proclaiming the pope to be the Antichrist (Strauss). The assiduous efforts of Chick tracts in their relentless efforts to demonize the Roman Catholic Church were not in vain, as their vast dissemination and distribution among evangelical Christians may very well have prevented fears of "popery" from becoming an outdated relic of a bygone era.

Chapter Three

Scaring is Caring: Chick Tracts as a Weapon in the Satanic Panic

"There is something at work in my soul which I do not understand" —Mary Shelley

The United States in the 1980s and early 1990s, with the backdrop of the Reagan and HW Bush presidencies, was a battleground for a myriad of culture wars marked by grievances and hysteria, and the Satanic Panic was one of the more prevalent "battles" of this decade. The Satanic Panic, a moral panic fraught with heightened anxieties concerning Satanic influence and ritual abuse, skyrocketed after a (debunked) book, *Michelle Remembers,* was published in 1980 by a Canadian psychologist named Dr. Lawrence Pazder, with the book attesting to the legitimacy of satanic ritual abuse and recovered-memory psychotherapy (Beck 24-6). The Satanic panic didn't necessitate a belief in the supernatural or demonic; more specifically, the mainstream fears concerning the Satanic panic were predicated on ominous groups of execrable figures utilizing psychological manipulation to ritually abuse children or induce them into deviant behavior (Hughes 692), and figures such as Oprah Winfrey and Phil Donahue ran television specials that legitimized this moral panic to mainstream audiences (Hughes 701).

However, for Chick, the demonic component was very palpable for him, and the only aspect that actually mattered and thus, in his mind, required directly combative strategies and approaches. Numerous Chick tracts sounded the alarm about the Satanic Panic, with one of the more infamous tracts being *Dark Dungeons* in 1984*,* which warned that the role playing tabletop game of *Dungeons & Dragons* was not merely an innocuous venturing into an enactment of fantasy scenarios, but a minacious gateway into Satanism and all the malefic

influence it entailed; essentially, to Chick (as well as many evangelical Christians of the 1980s), *D&D* loomed in the shadows as a demonic and existential threat to the souls of all children who partook in the game.



James Dallas Egbert . . . computer whiz dies

James Dallas Egbert enters death's dungeon

DAYTON, Ohio (AP) — James Dallas Egbert was the subject of national curiosity when his disappearance sparked speculation that he was the victim of a "Dungeons and Dragons" game gone awry. Now he's dead of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound, but questions about his life are unanswered.

Egbert died Saturday at Grandview Hospital, five days after police said he shot himself in the head, and a year and a day after he vanished from the campus of Michigan State University.

His parents, optometrist James Egbert and Anna Egbert, said yesterday a private graveside service will be held for family members only, but would not give the date of the funeral.

When Egbert dropped from sight for 28 days last year, his friends described the 17-year-old computer whiz as brilliant, aloof and intellectual.

"All his hobbies had to do with challenges to his mind," said Capt. Ferman Badgley of the MSU campus police. "Competition for him was in his brain. Without a challenge, he got bored — consequently he turned to the bizarre."

Private detective William Dear of Dallas found the youth and reunited him with his parents last Sept. 13. Since then, Dear has said he's the only one who knows all the details of the case. He said he found Egbert locked in a dingy room with two single beds in an undisclosed location.

Dear said he will decide after Egbert's funeral whether to reveal details of his investigation.

Egbert had been on a life-support system at Grandview since last Monday. The hospital did not immediately reveal the youth's death at 3:50 p.m., giving notification of relatives and removal of the organs as the reason for the delay.

A hospital spokesman said many of Egbert's organs would be donated to hospitals. Montgomery County Coroner Jim Davis said at a news conference yesterday that doctors tested Egbert's brain waves and found no activity on Saturday. They pronounced him legally dead and removed the life support systems, Davis added.

The coroner's office has made no official ruling on the death.

Family members and hospital officials said Thursday that the boy would not recover from brain damage caused by the single .25-caliber gunshot wound to the temple.

Egbert disappeared Aug. 15, 1979, from Michigan State, where he entered school as a 15-year-old freshman studying computers. He didn't return to school after his mysterious return, and spent the last year working for his father's business near the family home in Huber Heights, a Dayton suburb.

At one time, officials believed the fantasy game "Dungeons and Dragons" — a game usually played on paper — might hold the key to his disappearance. Egbert told his mother he played the game in the more than eight miles of steam tunnels under the Michigan State campus, and police searched the tunnels for him.

The complex game pits players against obstacles and medieval monsters, and is normally played with dice and a map of a dungeon or caves the players travel through.

When Egbert disappeared, police and Dear speculated he might be involved in a real life episode of the game.

"We've sat here many an hour, all of us wondering — is Dallas (Egbert) the dungeon master," Dear said last year. "Or if he isn't the dungeon master, is there some other dungeon master who has pulled all of us into this game by using him as some sort of pawn."

A 1980 issue of *The Morning Call* newspaper linking James Egbert's suicide to *Dungeons & Dragons*

One of the more harrowing aspects of this comic was the possible allusion to the real-life 1979 disappearance and eventual suicide of James "Dallas" Egbert, whose disappearance was attributed to *D&D,* a story concocted by a private investigator named William Dear who purported that the Michigan State University student had become deeply enmeshed in the world of *D&D,* to the point of recreating the game in real life and culminating in a suicide attempt (Laycock 81). However, the more likely (and depressing) explanation for Egbert's suicide was his declining mental health fueled by his perceived inability to meet his parents' expectations for him, as well as his own deep-seated of shame regarding his homosexual orientation (Witwer 148), the latter being especially salient considering Egbert lived in a time when homosexuality was still heavily stigmatized in the U.S.

The case was so riveting and horrifying that it inspired the novel *Mazes and Monsters,* largely based on the case of Egbert and proliferated the fearmongering about *D&D* as an

instrument of the occult (Laycock 96), even being made into a film adaptation featuring Tom Hanks (Laycock 90). The association of *D&D* with Satanism and the occult had entered the mainstream, and Jack Chick seized the opportunity to further cement that connection with *Dark Dungeons.*



Marcie committing suicide in the infamous Chick tract *Dark Dungeons*

Conversely, *Dark Dungeons* features a character named Marcie, who becomes so utterly despondent over the death of her *D&D* character, Black Leaf, in a campaign that she shortly thereafter commits suicide by hanging (Chick 11), with her deeply solicitous mother foreshadowing her death by stating that a part of Marcie died when Black Leaf did (Chick 10). The death of Marcie drawing parallels to that of Egbert is possibly not a coincidence, and the tract illustrates this suicide as cautionary tale of the potential inimical effects of children playing *D&D.*

Additionally, a woman named Patricia Pulling became a darling figure of gravely concerned evangelical Christians when she founded Bothered About Dungeons Dungeons and Dragons in 1983, a year before the publication of *Dark Dungeons*. Pulling attributed her sons

suicide to *D&D,* and relentlessly campaigned against the game on the basis of it being a viciously corrupting source of Satanic influence on vulnerable children that encouraged suicide among its participants (Hicks 287).

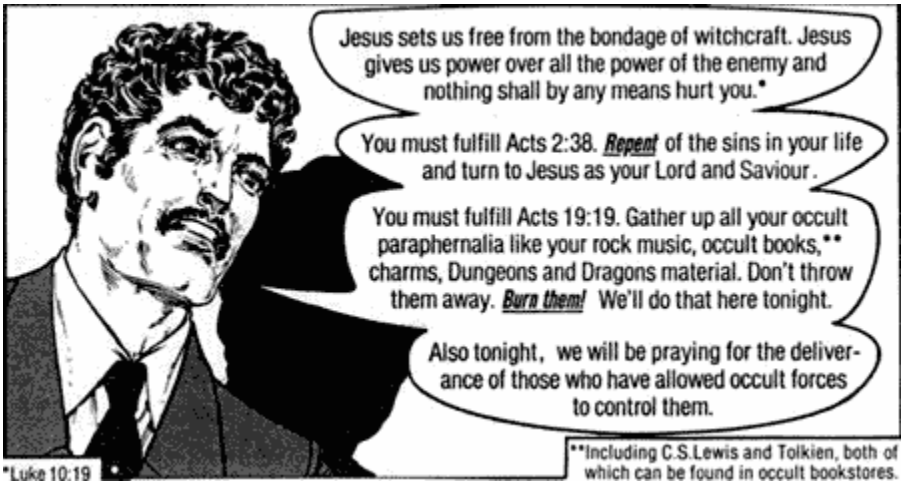


Dungeon Master Ms. Frost recruiting the young girl Debbie into the occult in *Dark Dungeons*

Dark Dungeons possibly capitalized on these facets of evangelical Christian concerns about the tabletop game, with Chick utilizing the medium of his tracts to propagate remonstrances against *D&D* on the basis of it being a dangerous and Satanic influence on children. And throughout the tract, it is made clear that Satanic figures, cloaked in dark robes and circled around a pentagram, utilize *D&D* to recruit unwitting children into "occult training" via the tabletop game (Chick 5), with a guileful woman named Miss Frost entrancing the youthful participants into the fold. The beguiling Miss Frost initially recruits Debbie into a *D&D* campaign, only to reveal that she innately has supernatural abilities to endow Debbie with the capability of casting *real* spells (Chick 4).

The character of Miss Frost reflects the evangelical Christian anxiety of alluring, shadowy figures with menacing ulterior motives negatively influencing children that has been present

in the evangelical Christian subconscious since the 1960s, largely rooted in their viewing of children as being easily inveigled into demonic activities and influences (Bivins 37). In a rather bizarre anecdote, a footnote in the original printing of *Dark Dungeons* on page 19 even deems the literature of J.R.R Tolkien and C.S. Lewis as "occult" in nature, offering no explanation as to the castigation of these authors' works (though in the case of Tolkien, him being a devout Roman Catholic would likely suffice as evidence of being Satanic in the eyes of Chick).



Original printing of *Dark Dungeons* that labeled C.S. Lewis and Tolkien books as "occult" works

Vestiges of Chick's potential influences on evangelical Christians concerning *Dungeons & Dragons* (and other fantasy role playing games) can still be observed today, with Focus on the Family even creating an episode of *Adventures in Odyssey* entitled "Castles and Cauldrons" that warned of the demonic influences of *Dungeons & Dragons* (Cuthbertson), and Focus on the Family still today even admonishes the game on the *Teens Q&A* portion of their website, with their website exhorting parents to prevent their children from engaging with *D&D.*

Chick tracts embody the evangelical Christian penchant of adopting various mediums and media formats, and Chick tracts such as *Dark Dungeons* meant that if an evangelical Christian

didn't see Patricia Pulling on CBS's *60 Minutes* in 1985, or follow the news closely enough to hear about the disappearance of James Egbert, they certainly could receive the message about the perils of *D&D* through these widely distributed tracts.

Though *Dark Dungeons* wasn't the initial rallying cry against D&D as an instrument of the occult, it was a prominent component of it, and it remains as a significant cultural artifact of the Satanic Panic of the 1980s, enough to have prompted a short film adaptation being released in 2014 that was named after and based upon the content material of *Dark Dungeons*. The film accurately portrays (but subtlety lampoons) the overall message of the tract, and was even created with the permission of Jack Chick himself (and he gave the rights at no cost), who seemed unaware that the film was burlesque in nature (Edidin).



Miss Frost as portrayed by Tracy Hyland in the film adaptation of *Dark Dungeons*

However, the film was a fairly faithful adaptation of the tract, a method by the writer, JR Ralls, to demonstrate that the source material was so comically absurd to the point that attempting satire would have been a fruitless endeavor (Edidin). Interestingly enough, the actress in the film who portrayed Miss Frost (with lesbian undertones no less) said she was

exposed to *Dark Dungeons* in churches she was taken to in her pre-adolescent years (Edidin), which demonstrated the *reach* of Chick tracts, but not necessarily their *efficacy* (demonstrated by the actress insinuating the tract was more jocose than it was persuasive).

However, for Chick tracts, the lurking and elusive presence of satanic influence was not merely restricted to the confines of the home, but was pervasive outside of it as well, and the celebration of Halloween was tantamount to an open invitation for demonic entities for Chick. Urban legends and moral panics surrounding the enchanting holiday were fairly interwoven into the public discourse by the time Chick tracts were being distributed; yet, Chick tracts were prepared to illustrate that Halloween festivities were more ominous than jovial, an “all tricks" and “no treats” type of affair.

To clarify, Christian opposition to Halloween is largely relegated to evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, with Gallup in 2006 finding through quantitative polling that “religious objection” as a reason to not celebrate Halloween was only expressed by about one in ten Americans (Carroll), contrasted with the roughly 80% of Americans who considered themselves to be Christian in the year 2008 (Newport), demonstrating that Christian opponents to Halloween are in the relative minority within their own (albeit broad) in-group.



A witch named Brenda poisoning a young trick-or-treater with contaminated candy in the tract *The Trick*

One tract that illustrates the stoking of evangelical (and American) concerns surrounding Halloween was *The Trick*, published in 1986, which immediately opens with a furtive and secluded coven of satanic witches who are deviously concocting a scheme to poison trick-or-treaters with Halloween candy embedded with contaminants such as razor blades,



Satanic witches depicted as plotting to murder trick-or-treaters in *The Trick*

"special poisons," and drugs (Chick 4), with the leading witch, named Sister Charity (the moniker possibly being a subtle anti-Catholic dog whistle) explicitly remarking that the sinister machination is being executed at the behest of Satan (who they refer to as "father," yet another possible anti-Catholic swipe). Additionally, one child, Johnny, who embarked on a trick-or-treating trip, is later said to have met a fatal demise upon consumption of the aforementioned poisoned candy (Chick 8), and Sister Charity shortly thereafter died of a heart attack and is shown being mercilessly incinerated by Satan himself in hell (Chick 10).



The mugshot of convicted murderer Ronald Clark O'Bryan, dubbed "The Man Who Killed Halloween"

There is a multi-faceted purpose for the proliferation of this variant of Satanic panic hysteria. Firstly, *The Trick* works to further entrench within the American conscience the urban legend of poisoned Halloween candy, the mythology of which likely originated in the conviction (and later execution) of a Texas man named Ronald Clark O'Bryan who murdered his male child in 1974 by mixing cyanide in his son's Pixie stick with the motive of collecting life insurance money (Bannatyne 143). Except for this repugnant and premeditated crime, there have been no documented cases of children receiving poisoned Halloween candy, especially not from strangers (Best 136), yet the myth continues to persist into the present day. *The Trick* additionally serves to reinforce the attitude of fear and suspicion in evangelical Christians concerning anything that can be construed as demonic or evil, and also demonstrates that those who are not evangelical Christians (especially "witches" or "pagans") are a pernicious "other" with homicidal proclivities, particularly towards young children.

Historian Ronald A. Hutton theorizes that evangelical Protestant Christian (specifically those within the U.S) trepidations and repulsions towards Halloween persist because they

perceive it to be a glorification of the wicked and the macabre, and believe that the holiday is also emphatically anti-Christian in nature (Hutton 384), and this is illustrated viscerally (both in message and visuals) in the Chick tract *Boo!,* published in 1991, which asserts that Halloween is a holiday of great significance to Satan and his followers, cleverly disguised as an innocuous cultural expression of festivities and an extension of general Americana.

The illustrations throughout this tract are conspicuously grisly for literature of an evangelical Christian variety that purports itself to be appropriate for all ages, since Chick himself has stated that children *especially* should be recipients of his tracts on the basis that they are more likely to be receptive to the Gospel and experience salvation than adults (Abate and Tarbox 273).



Satan in jack-o-lantern garb preparing to murder teenagers with a chainsaw in the tract *Boo!*

Taking this into consideration, it becomes perplexing that Chick frequently condemned violent media and entertainment as a didactic imperative, even stating in his *Battle Cry* editorial in 2004 that it made children less empathetic (Chick), yet displays no apprehension about portraying a campground massacre at the beginning of *Boo!*, where Satan, attired in a

jack-o-lantern headpiece, enacts a mass killing of participants in a (presumed) Black Mass (Chick 7), as well as the violent dispatching of law enforcement officers who arrive thereafter (Chick 8). Further highlighting the satanic undertones of Halloween, the name of the camp in *Boo!* is Camp Basil Bub, a paronomasia on Beelzebub, a title for Satan in who's etymological origins are within the *Nevi'im* book of 2 Kings in the *Miqra,* or Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 1.3, *NRSV*).

Boo! displays an interesting paradox among some evangelical Christians who position themselves as being vociferous combatants against flagitious satanic influences: they often embody some of the very attributes they determine to be reprehensible. In a strident effort to expose the violent underpinnings of a furtively satanic celebration (Halloween), Chick proliferates a media that itself contains violent illustrations of the macabre.

Taking into consideration that *Boo!* was published in 1991, a further scrutinization of the tract demonstrates that it inadvertently encapsulates the surprisingly conservative undertones of the most predominant type of horror film during the Satanic Panic: slasher films. The backdrop of Chick tracts and slasher films during this decade was the Reagan administration, in which the United States experienced a political conservative renaissance that trickled down (to borrow a Reagan-esque term) into culture, and the slasher films of the 1980s often reflected these values.



An image of Jason Voorhees, portrayed by Richard Brooker, from *Friday the 13th Part III*

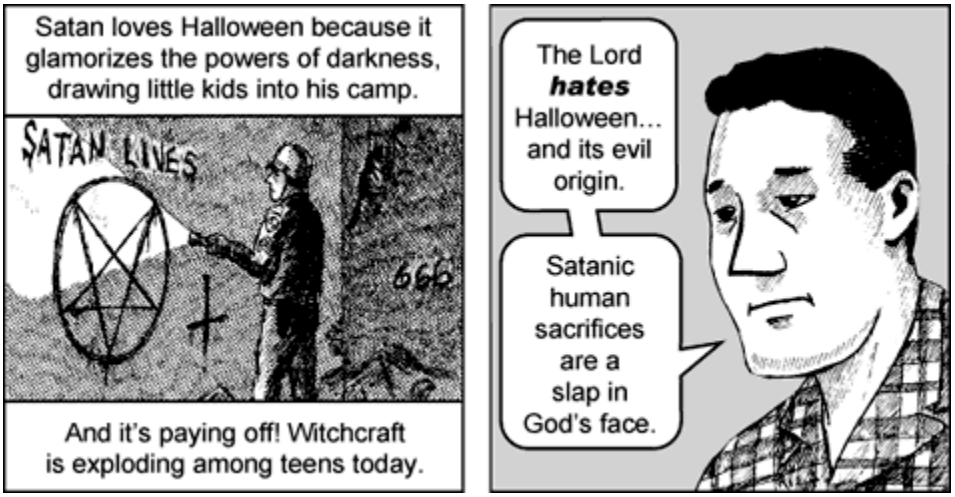
Slasher films were often suffused with a subdued conservative morality, depicting characters of moral turpitude that were violently punished for their depraved iniquity by the sanguinary antagonist (Petridis 64), especially if they displayed any concupiscent desires or salacious behaviors (Ménard et al 631), as well as the survivor (often a woman categorized as the "final girl") being a personification of exemplary morality that reflected conservative values. An example of a slasher film that encapsulates this is *Friday the 13th Part III,* where most of the characters who are murdered by the Oedipal, vengeful Jason Voorhees are the archetypal bogeyman of American conservatives, such as hippies, criminals (of which a majority in the film were ethnic minorities), sexually libidinous young women, and recreational drug users.

Boo! reifies these conservative tropes of slasher films, portraying a group of high schooler students renting out a campground to celebrate Halloween by conducting a Black Mass (Chick 2), with one high school boy, sporting a devilish grin, remarking with morbid ebullience that a cat would be murdered during the ceremony as a sacrificial offering to Satan (Chick 5). However, their sacrifice was deemed insufficient and their enthusiasm turned into alarm upon the sudden arrival of a chainsaw wielding, jack-o-lantern masked Satan, who proceeded to viciously slaughter the ill-fated high school students (Chick 7-8).

As a further reflection of slasher film tropes, the only character in this tract who survives an encounter with Satan is an unsuspecting evangelical Christian who is ambushed by Satan during prayer, and this evangelical Character near immediately triumphs over Satan by invoking a biblically infused verbal repudiation (Chick 11), one so efficacious that it surpassed even gunfire from law enforcement officers that Satan easily survived earlier in the

tract (Chick 8).

Chick curiously expresses and propagates elements of what he considers a deviant and morally bankrupt culture that he juxtaposes himself against, and an objurgation of Chick as being immersed in a dissonant position would perhaps be a maladroit and facile conclusion to make; rather, it can be argued that Chick (and this tract) acts as both a reflection and continuation of the conservative evangelical Christian impulse to interact with the culture they are surrounded by, including appropriating and utilizing components of that culture if doing so is advantageous in the culture war arena, thus demonstrating the malleable and opportunistic stratagem of these evangelical Christians; in essence, evangelical Christians are not only adept at adopting *mediums*, but also *methods* of promoting an evangelical message and theology as well (though for Chick tracts, as Marshall McLuhan once stated, perhaps the medium is the message as well).



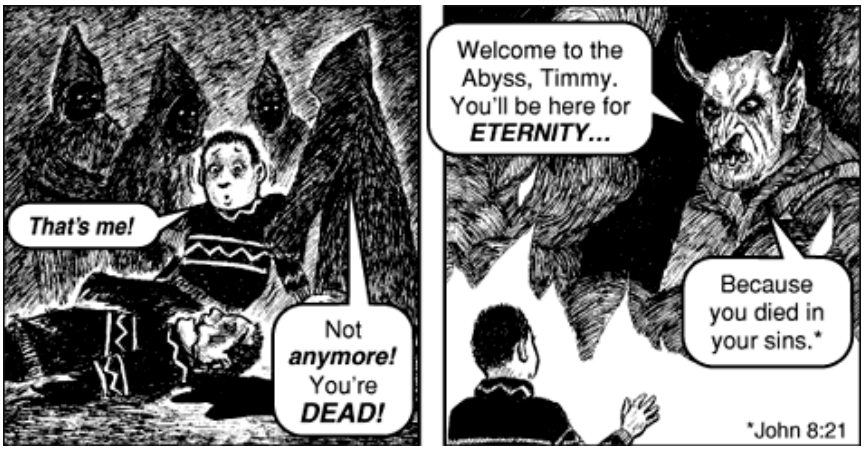
Chick emphasizing the enchanting Satanic effects of Halloween on children in *Boo!*

Most crucially, *Boo!* best reflects evangelical Christian anxieties concerning the Satanic Panic (and other moral panics) by emphasizing the corrupting nature of Halloween on

children, asserting that Satan himself is enamored with Halloween for its beguiling effect on small children in entrancing them towards Satanism and witchcraft (Chick 19). The centrality of children in the Satanic Panic is a prevalent theme, from the McMartin preschool trials fraught with (long discredited) accusations of satanic rituals and child sexual abuse (Cheit 152), to the 1998 wrongful conviction of four Latina lesbian women in Texas (dubbed the San Antonio Four) for raping two young girls, who were eventually exonerated (Nadal 91).

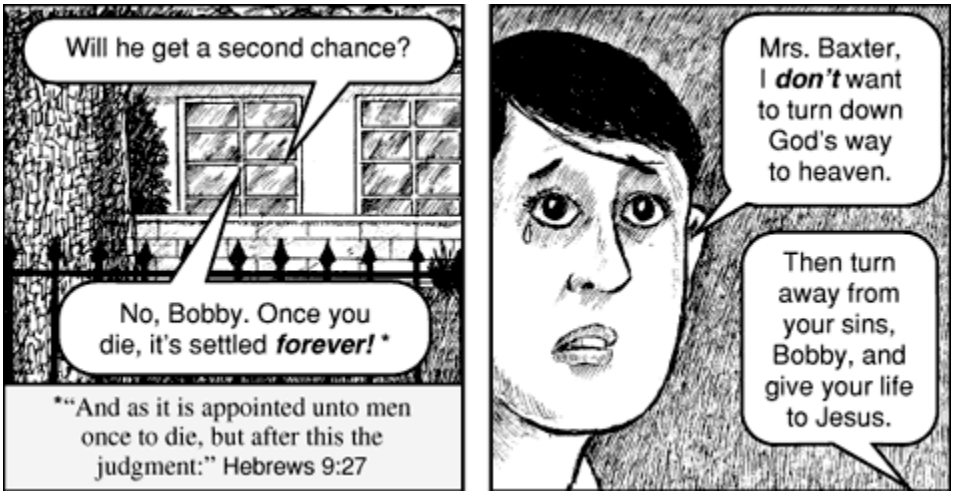
In essence, it was the inordinate trepidations concerning the myth of harm to children by demonic influences and figures that allowed the Satanic panic to flourish and become as pervasive as it did throughout the United States (Cleary 168), and Chick tracts saw the preservation of children's safety, innocence, and (especially) their souls as paramount.

However, despite Chick's concerns for children, his tracts demonstrated that not even he believed children to be safe from eternal damnation. In the 1996 Chick tract *Happy Halloween,* published in a period where the Satanic panic in the United States was abating, a a trio of children are navigating a haunted house tour, and interestingly enough, a decoration of Jason Vorhees is shown at the entrance (Chick 2), implying Chick *does* indeed have some familiarity with the slasher film genre.



The bloodied corpse of Timmy and Satan informing the child of his eternal damnation in *Happy Halloween*

One of the children, Timmy, becomes so petrified from encountering a portrayal of hell that he rapidly flees from the house (Chick 7-8), only to be immediately struck by a car and killed, with a graphic portrayal of his corpse after his friends were seen distraught by his death (Chick 11). Timmy then comes to the horrifying realization that he is in hell, with a ghastly and towering Satan informing him that he will suffer in hell for eternity because he "died in [his] sins" (Chick 11); additionally, Timmy's own sunday school teacher even confirmed his fate in the fiery inferno of hell as indisputable, offering no consolation to the grief stricken children, and attributing Timmy's ghastly punishment to his decision to no longer attend sunday school (Chick 13); indeed, the teacher even boldly affirmed that the young boy would be spared no mercy or given a second chance at redemption of any kind after one of his friends expressed gripping consternation and disquietude concerning Timmy's eternal torment (Chick 20).



The child Bobby's Sunday school teacher offering a heartwarming consolation concerning his deceased friend

The grim notion of children being susceptible to eternal damnation is not unprecedented in evangelical Christianity, as the Congregationalist American preacher Johnathan Edwards once

asserted in a 1746 sermon reflecting on the "parable of the net" in the 13th chapter of Matthew, "[it is] doubtless many children go to hell while they are children" (Minkema and Neele 29), and evangelical Christians in the present day conduct their own versions of haunted house attractions aptly named "hell houses," where adolescents and preteens are subjected to disturbing and gruesome displays of what the consequences of a carnal life of unrepentant sin will entail (Pellegrini 915), with these hell houses not being without their own controversy, even among many evangelical Christians who consider them to be inadvertently counterproductive for bringing about a salvific experience among young people (Jackson 38).



An image from a hell house tour in Cedar Hills, Texas taken from the 2001 documentary *Hell House*

For Chick (as well as other evangelical Christians), the foreboding threat of hellfire on children is a tangible consequence, and one that serves as an impetus for them to inform children about; the (perceived) corrupting influence of the demonic on young children is palpable for Chick, and *Happy Halloween* warns that the threat of an inescapable descent into hell is not a consequence that young children are absolved from by the virtue of their youth,

because they too are sinners. *Happy Halloween* acts as a pernicious continuation of a prevailing trend in evangelical Protestant Christianity where children are stripped of their agency yet still saddled with culpability, having little to no say in matters concerning their own lives but still bearing the moral responsibility of their own sinful nature and disposition.

Additionally, this tract demonstrates a harsh departure from early Chick tracts involving children, such as 1972's *Somebody Loves Me*, which depicts a young child being so violently beaten by their alcoholic father that they succumb to the severity of their injuries and die outside in the rain, and are then depicted being carried to heaven in (to borrow a line from Sarah McLachlan) the arms of an angel. *Happy Halloween* further demonstrates Chick's incorrigibility and obdurate stance in moderating his views, only becoming more caustic and malicious as the years passed.

Another Chick tract that seems to be perplexing and even contradicting on the surface is *The Little Princess*, published in 1988, and is an anomalous work of Chick's in the sense that the overarching tone is more heart-wrenching than ghastly, as well as not showcasing the merciless excoriation of someone for moral deviance or depicting someone as being condemned to hell. The tract's protagonist is a terminally ill young girl named Heidi whose dying wish is to participate in trick-or-treating and celebrate Halloween. Chick makes no negative references (even subtle) to Halloween throughout the tract, with the suffering girl's father assenting to her request (Chick 4) and showing the young girl receiving an affable response when revealing her costume, that of a princess (Chick 6). However, in an *Inception* level of fourth wall breaking, the young girl is seen being the recipient of a Chick tract via a (presumably) married couple during trick-or-treating, from which she later accepts Jesus Christ as her savior after reading, and shortly thereafter succumbing to her illness (Chick 12,

21).

It is initially perplexing that Chick admonishes evangelical Christians not to partake in Halloween, deeming it execrable and satanic, yet would illustrate a Christian couple handing out a Chick tract along with candy to trick-or-treaters. Yet, this is Chick perhaps tacitly pushing the evangelical Christian conventional tenet of being "in the world, but not of the world," which (roughly) is a manner for which an evangelical Christian can navigate their culture and community and proselytize while not fully endorsing said culture and its norms (Meyer 55), as well as reinforcing the notion that Chick tracts are an appropriate and effective tool of proselytization that serves as advantageous for facilitating conversions and salvation.



The young trick-or-treater, Heidi, being handed a Chick tract during her trek in the tract *The Little Princess*

However, it *is* puzzling that Chick would appropriate elements of slasher films and Halloween while excoriating rock music in the tract *Angels?* to such a severity that even Christian rock music is deemed to be satanic (Chick 12). Regardless, there is demonstrable evidence that Chick's advice to evangelical Christians has been carried out to some degree, as the Wesley United Methodist Church of Salem, Massachusetts raised thousands of dollars in

2000 to distribute anti-Halloween Chick tracts to visitors and celebrants in Salem during the Halloween season (Skal 82); additionally, a LifeWay poll of approximately 1,000 Protestant pastors conducted in 2016 determined approximately a quarter of the respondents encouraged their congregants to hand out Chick tracts on Halloween night to trick-or-treaters as an evangelizing method (Smietana), though not without controversy, as numerous parents of trick-or-treaters in Ohio in 2011 expressed grievances that Northview Baptist Church distributed copies of a Chick tract entitled *Mean Momma* to their children, which featured graphic depictions of child abuse, including explicitly showing a young child committing suicide by hanging themselves in a basement (Nelson).



The depiction of child suicide in the Chick tract *Mean Momma*

Throughout the Satanic panic, the pure innocence and stark vulnerability of children is contrasted with the corrosive and sinister influences of satanic forces and influences, and Chick tracts serve to buttress that narrative, viewing non-Christian components of American culture, from *D&D* to Halloween, as satanic siren songs that threatened the safety and souls of children. Chick tracts are a link in the continuing chain of the enduring theme of "protecting

the children" that permeates evangelical Christian narratives, from the anti-homosexual Save Our Children movement spearheaded by Anita Bryant that preceded the publication of some of the more infamous Chick tracts (Strunk 60), to the present day conspiracy theory of Qanon and its disproportionate focus on child sex trafficking (Prakash et al).

Conclusion

Anger Stewin' About Thoughts A' Brewin':

The Dangers of Conspiratorial Thinking in Christian Communities

"Truly, whoever is able to make you absurd is able to make you unjust." – Voltaire

This section will briefly touch upon the ministerial implications of how to approach the work of Chick tracts and similar literature and media, which promote a conspiratorial and harmful worldview that degrades numerous groups and individuals (especially if such harm is done under the guise of "ministry"), and why the messages and approaches of these tracts must be repudiated as contrary to Christ's command to "...love your neighbor as yourself" (*NRSV,* Matt. 22.39).

A cursory glance at the world can instill among even the most jubilant and optimistic a sense of disconcerting dread, as one attempts to rationalize the abject cruelty, inextricable disorder and relentless disconsolateness that permeate the landscape of various nation-states and societies, and an individual's religious faith is often utilized to decipher the cacophony of destructive chaos that lacerates the social fabrics of the environment that someone resides in; indeed, there are times where this sense of faith is rattled, such as when the notion of Christendom throughout Europe was fragmented in the aftermath of the Holocaust, encapsulated in Murray Haar's 1999 article, "God, the Bible, and Evil After the Holocaust" where the troubling inquiry was propounded of where God was during the Holocaust. The questions of "how" and "why" often necessitate in people a way to attribute abrupt changes and relentless evils to *something,* and conspiracy theories act as a convenient conduit to reaching those conclusions, and Christians are still susceptible to this.

From a psychological viewpoint, conspiracy theories are utilized not only to disseminate an easily understood explanation for complex events and phenomena (Leman and Cinnirella 1), but also provide an alleviating comfort and intrinsic sense of purpose to its adherents even when commitment to conspiracy theories exacerbates existing fears and perilous apprehensions (Prooijen 2); additionally, conspiracy theories often act as a way of rationalizing the actions and preconceived beliefs of an individual actor and their existing worldview (Mercier 211).

For evangelical Protestant Christians, their relationship with conspiracy theories has been investigated under a scholarly lens, and explanations have been posited that the propensity of US evangelical Christians to adhere to conspiracy theories is correlated with fears of their society and nation being corrupted or destroyed by external agents (Walker and Vegter 281). Taking this explanation into consideration, Chick tracts certainly hinged on this rationalization, as the plots of many tracts attributed malice and acts of subversion to numerous outgroups such as Catholics, LGBT peoples, feminists, public school teachers, scientists, and any group that Chick deemed to be an enemy of fundamentalist Christianity and a threat to the United States. For Chick and many evangelical Christians, the act of scapegoating numerous outgroups is done without thought or care to the detrimental effects the proliferation of these conspiracy theories might (and often will) have on the mistreatment of various groups who these conspiracies objurgate.

As an example (as aforementioned in this work), Chick believed that same-sex attracted men who became infected with AIDS were the recipients of a divinely originated comeuppance, and largely attributed the AIDS crisis to being deliberately created by homosexual men as well; the belief of AIDS as a “God-ordained” punishment flourished

among conservative Christians during the AIDS crisis, who believed it was God's punishment towards those who were seeking to subvert and destroy the moral fabric of American society, with some who also saw it as the natural consequence of an overarching "gay agenda" that encroached upon the United States, such as Jerry Falwell Sr, who deemed the passing of gay civil rights as tantamount to a public health risk (Kowalewski 93).

Conspiracies about homosexuality among evangelical Christians continue to flourish into the present day, from conspiratorial books such as *The Pink Swastika*, written in 1995 by Massachusetts based evangelical activist Scott Lively, which attributed homosexuality as the primary driver of German National Socialist ideology, to the present day "groomer" conspiracy theories which postulates that LGBT peoples are committing mass acts of child molestation and sexual exploitation of children (Brightman et al 6).

The conspiratorial worldviews expressed in Chick tracts are found in many evangelical Christian congregations, especially taking into consideration that some scholarly research has established a positive correlation between higher degrees of religiosity and adherence to the belief in conspiracy theories (Frenken et al); furthermore, the harm to the groups who are scapegoated as a part of these conspiracy theories are antithetical to the messages of love, compassion, and forgiveness propounded by Jesus Christ in the Gospels.

It becomes immensely difficult to "love thy neighbor" when one's neighbor may fall under any of these groups that are castigated within conspiracies posited not only by Chick tracts, but also by other evangelical Christians as well; even moreso, conspiracy theories often beget the abhorrent consequence of being a "radicalizing multiplier" that inspires violence being committed against groups that are deemed to be "villains" in these conspiracies (Jolley et al 3), and those who believe that external agents are a part of a larger conspiracy are more likely

to support or engage in violent extremism, particularly among scapegoated groups (Imhoff et al 77). Taking all of this into account, it becomes paramount for ministers, as well as all Christians, to not only consider that the message found in Chick tracts are possibly antithetical to the efficacy of proselytizing, but also realizing they (as well as other materials that denigrate others) are also propagators of harm to the myriad of outgroups that they demonize within their pages.

Though Jack Chick has been dead for several years now, Chick Publications still disseminates Chick tracts, both old and new, and are still utilized by a myriad of evangelical Christians in the United States both as tools of proselytization and a method of further inculcating religious and cultural values in those who are already evangelical Protestant Christians. The incendiary rhetoric that characterizes the dialogue within the tracts, as well as the brazen derogatory (and often irrefutably odious) caricatures of various out-groups, have potentially influenced the behaviors, beliefs, culture, and even actions of various evangelical Christians; though not all evangelical Protestant Christians endorse the beliefs proliferated by Chick tracts, a sizeable amount do, and thus still make Chick tracts a significant sociocultural facet of the American religious landscape, as well as an invidious variant of Americana.

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