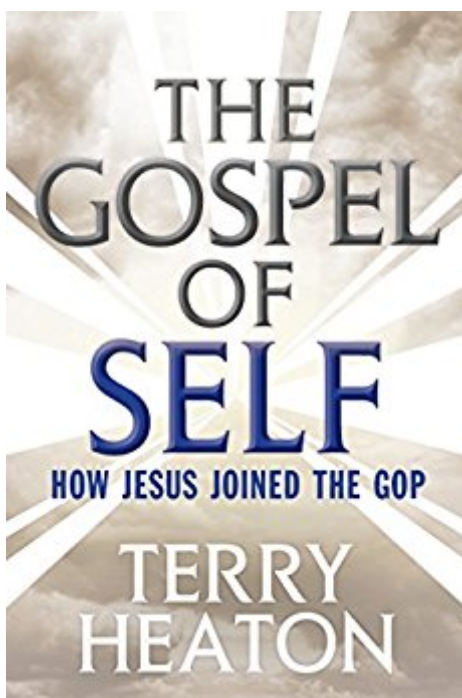


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The Gospel Of Self: How Jesus Joined The GOP



Synopsis

The bitter political and religious divides we see today in America have roots that go back many decades. The televangelist Pat Robertson was one of the first to determine how battlelines were drawn. Robertson, now a leading and unflinching Trump supporter, rose to national prominence in the 1960s with his Christian Broadcasting Network and his hit show The 700 Club. Terry Heaton, who worked alongside Robertson at The 700 Club and became its executive producer, provides the inside story of how evangelical Christianity forced itself on a needy Republican Party in order to gain political influence on a global level. Using deliberate and strategic social engineering, The 700 Club moved Christians steadily into the Republican Party and moved the party itself to the right. With a gospel message that appealed to self-interest, The 700 Club violated numerous laws in an attempt to create a Shadow Government of Evangelicals, all in the name of doing God's work on earth. The results of this longterm campaign were fully on display in the 2016 electoral season. "When a former right-hand man of Pat Robertson and one of the key players of the religious right tells you what he really thinks, you'd better listen. I'm grateful for Terry Heaton's courageous new book, *The Gospel of Self: How Jesus Joined the GOP*. It could not be more timely." •Brian McLaren, author, *The Great Spiritual Migration* "Heaton's stories of his involvement with Pat Robertson and The 700 Club, as well as other fascinating stories, pepper his incredibly deep and insightful analysis of contemporary Christianity in the West. I recommend this book to anyone who wants a thorough exposition of the state of Christianity, theology, and the Church today." •David Hayward, *The Naked Pastor and Questions Are The Answer* "In this masterful apologetic, Terry Heaton has skillfully analyzed the trend of modern Christian politics from a self-incriminating perspective as the former executive producer of the Christian Broadcast Network's flagship program, The 700 Club with Pat Robertson. ...The Gospel of Self is a must-read for anyone grappling with the great taboos of polite society—the corruption of politics and religion" •Danuta Pfeiffer, author, *Chiseled, A Memoir of Identity, Duplicity and Divine Wine* and former co-host, The 700 Club

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Customer Reviews

I was there, and part of the religious right. I fled in the late 1980s. This book tells the truth about the creeping replacement of the ethics of Jesus with a conman game of Ayn Rand-style greed for power and money. If you want to understand the utter corruption of the evangelical world--that wound up giving us Trump with 81% of white evangelicals voting for him--read this book.

I found Heaton's stories, commentary, and conclusions on his days of working with Pat Robertson to be illuminating and instructive. Never malicious, always curious, he strikes the right tone. That he has had a couple of decades to put things in perspective (he left work with CBN in the later 80s), this is a needed maturity for this conversation. Anyone wanting to understand how modernism, evangelism ("getting people saved"), the rise of the Religious Right, and surprises in presidential candidates (Robertson ran for president in 1988) will be pleased with this presentation.

In this insider's view of Pat Robertson's 700 Club, Terry Heaton describes how the show helped to create a conservative culture that would ultimately elect President Trump. In a brisk narrative, Heaton describes his activities as 700 Club executive producer with fairness and honesty no doubt burning bridges here and there. He confesses to ethical and theological lapses and even describes his own faux faith healing, providing insight into how intelligent, sincere people can get caught up in the moment. Heaton also offers some

excoriating observations about the anti-intellectual climate of charismatic Christianity (he calls Sarah Palin "dumber than a bucket of hair.") Heaton perhaps overstates the 700 Club's influence in creating contemporary American conservatism. While he reasonably claims that the 700 Club is a progenitor of Fox News, Pat Robertson, while a central figure, has always been the crazy uncle of the faith, somewhat embarrassing because of his nutty predictions. The last two chapters are a muddled theoretical analysis of postmodern journalism. Heaton discusses the move from journalistic objectivity to transparency but doesn't address a fundamental problem: like the glass on a Mies skyscraper, transparency itself is a modernist ideal. [Side note: Robertson's theology, like most prosperity-based belief systems (e.g., *The Secret*) sees spirituality in terms of physics-like laws. God--the universe--whatever--rewards those who pull the levers correctly, a modernist notion if there ever was one.] Tip: Frank Schaeffer's *Let Me Be Frank* film (available on YouTube) is an excellent companion piece to this discussion.

I found this just a bit disappointing, since I had expected more of a juicy expose of the shenanigans going on in Robertson's organization (and other TV ministries). The great majority of the book describes Heaton's years working at CBN as a producer in the 1980's, and his experiences and evaluations of the people working there. It's particularly interesting to read his evaluation of Robertson as brilliant rather than loony. I guess this all depends on where you're coming from. It's worth reading as autobiography, but this was about 30 years ago and is now mostly just of historical interest. Heaton correctly skewers Robinson for promoting a gospel of selfishness, and does a good job of describing what's wrong with this. Though it looks like his departure from CBN was more a matter of strife with others in management rather than concerns over the morality of what he was doing. And I wish he had said more about where he is now: he describes himself as "post-Christian" but doesn't say exactly in what sense (other than to decry the term as an oversimplification).

The author is a very good writer, articulate and plain speaking; the book held my interest. I give it three stars because of two things: 1. The "gospel of self" does not explore how it brought us to the "prosperity gospel" of Joel Osteen et al, the natural progression of the gospel of self.. 2. He did not explore the real and most important way "Jesus joined the GOP". although he does touch upon it. That would be the Church's outrageous special tax exemption that Robertson et al exploited to the max; he only discusses Robertson's role and subsequent investigation by the IRS. Left unexplored is the fact that

out of 450,000 known churches and countless unknown (since a religious group doesn't even have to apply for non-profit status; they are automatically granted it). For decades these groups have created, accumulated and greatly expanded their wealth through tax avoidance. This has enabled them to buy up media, property (which they pay no property tax on), politicians, do lobbying and now they own the White House. But even more egregious (and unexplored) is the fact that they don't even have to file tax returns which means no one knows how much money they really take in, who it comes from or where it goes. Behind that Jesus Curtain lies the largest pool of untaxed, unregulated and non-transparent dark pool of money in the world. The books are not even open to the IRS unless a major egregious act is committed such as what Robertson did (see IRS vs. Scientology) I call the guys behind the curtain the Religious Mafia because their minions extort money not by breaking kneecaps but by threats of eternal damnation and promises of eternal salvation. So the church used politicians to spread their message but the politicians use Jesus and religion to control the people's votes and expand their wealth and influence. It is no surprise that those in office now hell bent on cutting all social programs proclaim themselves to be "Christian". I do have some sympathy for Mr. Heaton who seems to have one foot in the religious/industrial business and the other in a real spiritual longing one and has suffered the consequences of the inevitable stress this tug of war brings. I appreciate his writing on the importance of transparency since the church's special status makes them the least transparent of all businesses and I realize Mr. Heaton can only write what he knows about but if he could penetrate the shroud of secrecy that is the church it would be the story of the century..

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