

Article

# Societal Perception of New Religious Movements' Televangelism: A Study of House of Power Ministry International and Gilgal Pentecostal Prayer Ministry International in Dunkwa-On-Offin in the Central Region of Ghana

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**Abstract:** This aimed to examine the societal perception of new religious movements' televangelism in Dunkwa-On-Offin, Ghana's Central Region. The study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, using the mixed methods approach to research. The population of this study comprised Women, Regular churchgoers, believers, and those listening to televangelism services by new religious movements, as well as clergy, lay leaders, and other male worshippers. Random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 200 women and 20 men from House of Power Ministry International and GILGAL Pentecostal Prayer Ministry International as the respondents for the study. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and interview guides. IBM SPSS statistics software version 23 was used to analyse the quantitative data, while qualitative data was analysed thematically with an interpretative lens. The study has revealed that society perceives the televangelism movements as helpful and encouraging but could also create trouble in fundamental Christian worship principles. The study also indicates that televangelists emphasise material things rather than spiritual matters. Other concerns included that televangelism brings about the separation of family and friends because they always inform members that their friends and family are evil. It is recommended that there is the need to change or improve the credibility perception among Christians in Ghana about televangelism. Televangelists must exhibit accountability and integrity to their worshippers by providing adequate information to encourage viewers to support their ministries.

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## 1. Introduction

African new religious movements often arise due to intense interest in “personal identity, religious identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, and academic identity” [1]. The new religious movement is a religion of the oppressed in cultural, social, religious and political spheres. These new religious movements are often characterised by certain factors associated with the emancipation of the body and soul. These factors are highly instrumental to the development of new religious movements. Such factors include, but are not limited to, political, economic, social, doctrinal and pastoral maladministration [1]. The recent increase in Pentecostal and other religious movements can be attributed to modern technological media, especially television [2]. The increase in digital media technologies has dramatically impacted mediated communication in the public sphere, especially in religion [3]. This modern gadget facilitates religion's production, distribution

and consumption [4]. Carter's nomination to the White House in the United States in 1976 catalysed a new religious movement's televangelism or evangelical television. He was known to be a "self-proclaimed" born-again Christian who worshipped at the Southern Evangelical Church [5].

New religious movements' television programmes often contain various messages through preaching, singing and talk shows. These programmes aim to persuade people "to become religious and give monetary support to religious activities and organisations" [6]. These television programmes often combine modern music, instruments and dances [6]. Hence, the evangelical approach of new religious movements has amalgamated every genre of religion and entertainment in the contemporary media culture [7]. Nonetheless, there has been some controversy over the impact of these religious programmes on their viewers among scholars and religionists. Several schools of thought have emerged in this regard. For example, one school of thought believes that all things being equal, new religious movement programmes supplant or, in some cases, satisfy some people's religious needs, thirst, aspirations and leanings [2, 8]). Another school of thought claims that the proliferation of these religious programmes is likely to affect the religious involvement of the viewer, which may include both women and children.

In the wake of the proliferation of new religious movement's televangelism on the Ghanaian scene, there has been a broader reach of the gospel by "preachers" via the television and more telling; it has become a way that people choose to attend religious services (virtually). Nonetheless, there has been some controversy over the impact of these religious programmes on their viewers among scholars and religionists, and the key among the viewers is women. It is now a fact that the "television church" or "televangelism" is booming and pervasive with rapid expansion worldwide, and it is a process of social change [6, 7]. Another process of social change is the persistent controversy surrounding new religious movements' impact on society, especially women [1, 9]. A study asserted that "the result of empirically driven studies on the impact of new religious movements from the perspective of televangelism is conclusive. The study further underscored that the sermons or messages of some new religious movements revolve around removing the traditional bar restricting women's leadership, opening several possibilities for women to "exercise public positions of authority" [10]. Whereas in some other new religious movements, gender inequality is emphasised; they insist on the traditional gender roles so much so that they strongly deny women any access to public prominence. There are still others whose television programmes believe that femaleness is a gift and that the nature of femaleness grants divine or feminine principles upon which the universe is built. There is also a particular set of new religious movements that discourages women from fulfilling their traditional gender roles as wives and mothers in a physical sense but encourages "spiritual wifhood or motherhood" [10].

Seeing the paradoxes, complexity and difficulties associated with the influence of new religious movements' "televangelism" or television programmes on women, an objective observer should refrain from generalising their impact on women in society; a case-by-case study of these television programmes will suffice. Findings of several studies claimed that mainline churches restrict women's freedom and see new religious movements as beacons of hope and emancipation from ill-treatment and gender-related issues in society [1, 1-11]. It has also become a well-worn refrain that cynical televangelism viewers typically challenge the motives of new religious movements televangelism as some consider televangelism itself as an avenue for the self-aggrandisement of the televangelist and his cronies but not influencing viewers positively. A deeper consideration of the differing opinions regarding the influence of the new religious movement's televangelism on women suggests that it is unwise to generalise their impact on women, especially concerning their roles in the family and religious attendance.

Several schools of thought have emerged concerning the nature of televangelism, too. For example, one school of thought believes that all things being equal, new religious

movement programmes supplant or, in some cases, satisfy some people's spiritual needs, thirst, aspirations and leanings [2, 8]. Another school of thought claims that the proliferation of these religious programmes is likely to affect the religious involvement of the viewer, which may include both women and children. However, another school of thought is that any type of impact or influence of television programmes on its viewers could be long-lasting, and it depends on the extent to which the person viewed the programme [12]. The inconclusive viewpoints regarding the nature of televangelism in Ghana and its operations were identified as a burden for this study.

It is relevant to conduct an in-depth inquiry into the issue of new religious movements' television programmes to address the gaps highlighted above and, more importantly, given the emergence of several processes of social change. Hence, the study would conduct an in-depth inquiry into ascertaining the societal perception concerning new religious movements' televangelism in Dunkwa-On-Offin, situated in the Central Region of Ghana. Televangelism on ELIJAH TV and GILGAL TV would serve as the data sources for the proposed study. This research question guided the study - How does the society perceive new religious movements' televangelism?

### *1.1. Televangelism from a broader perspective*

Some churches, particularly new religious organisations, have recently accepted modern media technology in their religious activities. Scholars have shown how much media usage on religion has become integrated into public spaces. Television for evangelical purposes is known as televangelism [13]. It is a term that combines the words "television" and "evangelism." The purposeful efforts by religious organisations and interests to buy airtime to communicate their operations to the populace for particular objectives, such as the "winning of souls," is called televangelism [14, 15]. Jeffrey K. Hadden and Charles E. Swann coined "televangelism" in their book "Prime Time Preachers". When the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) modified its policy of enforcing free time for religious programs in the 1970s and 1980s, televangelism took off. Due to this legislative reform, more than a few preachers have been motivated to use television to fund their missions [16].

Televangelism is a uniquely modern ritual, intrinsically linked to the current media technology that enables its creation, dissemination, and reception. (Technology and faith: Televangelism and the mediation of direct experience). "Televangelism is inherently a modern form of religious practice." However, it is to be noted that the religious practice of believers is expressed in the religious cults of the adherents. Therefore, the religious practices of the adherents include searching overt and manifest practices in the forms of prayers, singing, dancing, fasting, pilgrimage, libation pouring, etc. These practices are expressed physically or profanely but are believed to have spiritual meaning for the adherents. Therefore, one could not suggest that televangelism is an "inherent religious practice" since using television to reach the people is not a religious ritual [4].

"Electric church" refers to all religious transmitters who preach an evangelical Christian gospel [17]. Drumming home the definitions once again, the use of television for evangelical purposes is known as televangelism [13]. It is a term that combines the words "television" and "evangelism." Televangelism can be seen as the purposeful attempts by religious organisations and other interest groups to buy space on the airwaves to transmit their operations to the public for specific objectives, such as the "winning of souls." Televangelism arose due to evangelism following World War II [14, 15].

Studies suggest that the specific ends of televangelism include winning souls and also for evangelical activities [13, 14-15]. However, in Ghana's neo-prophetic, winning souls and evangelical activities are not the occupied business of the televangelists. From the various assertions regarding the nature of evangelism as posited above, one is tempted to conclude that neo-prophetic televangelists in Ghana are not occupied with the gospel and evangelical business. Their various advertisements are geared towards self-

aggrandisement, promote personal power, show how powerful they are as far as exorcism is concerned, acquire large congregations, and use '*akwankyere*' (directions) to acquire their self-wealth and perform magico-prowess in the name of the Prophet.

## **1.2. History of ELIJAH and GILGAL Television Stations**

### **1.2.1. ELIJAH Television Station**

According to the General Overseer of the House of Power Ministries International, ELIJAH TV was named after the divine heroic Prophet Elijah in the Old Testament. The station was named after the Prophet Elijah to achieve a specific purpose. Thus healing, prophesying, and declaring the righteousness of God. ELIJAH TV started broadcasting in 2012. It transmits its broadcast from the church headquarters Ahofadiekrom at Adjamasu, off Kumasi-Anhwiaa Nkwanta Road. According to the Prophet, the motivating factor is to use the TV (ELIJAH) to spread the message of God to people, as it is proven to be one of the effective ways to reach people at their homes, workplaces and offices. The founder, Prophet Francis Kwateng, is the sole proprietor of ELIJAH TV. ELIJAH TV does not broadcast secular activities like football, secular songs, secular films, or secular advertisements. The TV is mandated to show gospel programmes, especially telecast sermons and gospel films. The founder told the researcher that he has to ban all types of gospel songs played on his TV. This is due to the type of dress the dancers use. According to him, some of these dancers expose their nakedness to the unsuspecting public, all under the disguise of gospel dancing.

The church pays the whole crew. Almost all of them have received training in their respective areas of operation. ELIJAH TV is financed through a process called "The Covenant". Some church members pledge monthly to assist in sponsoring evangelism. The minimum pledge per month is GH¢100.00. (One Hundred Ghana Cedis). The money pledged could be paid monthly through mobile phone accounts or accumulated for three (3) months to be paid at the headquarters. A unique programme called the COVENANT is held at the headquarters every three months. Faithfuls who form part of the covenant pledgers converge and redeem their vows. That is, paying the three months accumulated pledge. A week of intensive prayer is held quarterly, and the Prophet prays for the adherents. Financial challenges could not be ruled out. However, this is overcome by the "Covenant Vow," whereby church adherents pulled resources together to ensure that ELIJAH TV operates.

### **1.2.2. GILGAL Television Station**

GILGAL television started in July 2019. It transmits from GILGAL Pentecostal Prayer Ministry International headquarters at Mfuom, about one kilometre from Dlunkwa-offin, the Municipal capital of Upper Denkyira East in the Central Region. According to the church's founder, GILGAL television is owned by the entire church. The founder, Apostle Stephen Anarfi Kwateng, is the Chief Executive of the TV station. The founder believes that in modern times, the word of God would reach many people through the use of media, especially the airwaves. He also asserts that evangelism has become accessible through the media. Apostle Anarfi Kwateng posited that breaking the current grounds for evangelism is very hard, and television makes it easier to break. He added that when a man of God is famous through TV, it helps to some considerable extent for people of all lives to listen to him when crusades are being organised. This is so because through watching television, people might have witnessed his powerful preaching, healing, prophesizing, and anointing.

The television crew of GILGAL TV is not limited to church members only. The founder asserts that it is a whole worldwide mission. Therefore, individuals who, in one way or another, possess knowledge of media technology and ethics are constantly called upon to assist. The TV crew is given a token as a good gesture for their selfless service.

The core mission is to use TV as a media source to propagate and preach the gospel. It is observed that many homes in Ghana now have access to television, and people of all sorts of lives nowadays spend part of their time watching it. Perhaps this supports the assertion that ICTs in general, and the Web in particular, have become many people's favourite places; they have been viewed as the ultimate place for the expression of true democracy, the liberation of all, the infusion of all, for citizens from all corners of the world to exercise their right to free speech; and for humanity to be freed from thralldom [18]. GILGAL Pentecostal Prayer Ministry International perceives TV as an advantageous environment that offers unlimited opportunities for religious devotion, practice, healing, performing miracles, and interaction. The founder asserted that the sacred could not be strictly separated from the secular. Therefore, GILGAL TV transmits secular programmes such as football matches, movies, and entertainment. It also carries on social announcements like funerals, weddings, advertisements, youth debates, and broadcast programmes of other churches to raise revenue to carry out other activities in the church. The TV station operates 24 hours a day.

Many religious movements in Ghana own television stations. The number of television stations owned by religious bodies has increased tremendously. A deeper understanding suggests that this is not a matter of choice but a means to enable them to survive amid new waves and the proliferation of New Religious Movements in Ghana. Televangelism has permitted some New Religious Movements in Ghana to reach millions of audiences, and House of Power International Ministry and GILGAL Pentecostal Prayer Ministry International Ministry are no exception.

## 2. Materials and methods

The study used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, using the mixed methods approach to research. There are two parts to the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design: quantitative and qualitative [19, 20]. A researcher initially collects and analyses quantitative data under this design. The qualitative data is collected and processed second in the sequence, and it aids in explaining or expanding on the quantitative findings from the first phase. The qualitative phase builds on the quantitative phase, connected to the study's intermediate stage. This strategy is justified because quantitative data and subsequent analysis provide a broad grasp of the research subject. The qualitative data and analysis clarify and explain the statistical results by delving deeper into the participants' perspectives [20, 21].

The study Dunkwa-On-Offin, or simply Dunkwa, is a town in the Central Region of Ghana and the capital of the Upper Denkyira East Municipal District. The Upper Denkyira East Municipality has a total land area of 501.9 square kilometres, accounting for nearly 17% of the Central Region's total land area. In the north, the Municipality shares borders with Adansi South. In the east, the Assin North Municipality; in the west, the Atti-Morkaw District; and in the northwest, the Upper Denkyira West District. Upper Denkyira East Municipal Assembly is one of the Central Region's twenty (20) Administrative Districts. The Legislative Instrument (LI 1877) established the Municipality in 2007 from the then-Upper Denkyira District. In February 2008, it was officially opened. Dunkwa-On-Offin is the administrative capital.

The population of this study comprised Women, Regular churchgoers, believers, and those listening to televangelism services by new religious movements, as well as clergy, lay leaders, and other male worshippers. Random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select the respondents for the study. 200 women were chosen for the study using a basic random sampling technique (probabilistic sampling technique). Two hundred women were chosen because in 1970 Krejcie and Morgan asserted that for a population of 400 (for both churches), it is appropriate to pick a sample of 196, which the researcher rounded up to 200 to make room for any lapses. House of Power Ministry

International, with three assemblies in the Dunkwa-on-Offin Municipal, contributed 230 congregants for the sample size.

In contrast, GILGAL Pentecostal Prayer Ministry International, with two assemblies in the Dunkwa-on-Offin Municipal area, contributed 170 congregants to make up for the sample size. A purposive sample technique was used to pick twenty (20) participants for an interview, including clergy, lay leaders, and other worshippers (male). The clergy, lay leaders, and men available in the selected churches were selected based on their qualifications and characteristics. These met the study's objectives because they oversee church administration and family heads. Their perception and contribution to the study enhanced the findings of the study. Simple random sampling also gave women equal opportunity to participate in the study. This means the selection was free of the researcher's bias.

The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and interview guides. Self-designed questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data. The questionnaire comprised both close-ended and open-ended questions to the selected participants. A study intimated that it is a simple, inexpensive, and result-oriented approach to data collection [20]. On the other hand, a semi-structured interview was designed to elicit relevant information from participants. This instrument is very useful in gaining insight into the value system of participants, and it allows them to freely express their opinions regarding the issue at hand [22]. Quantitative data was analysed using the IBM SPSS statistics software version 23 to compute frequency distributions, percentages, tables, and cross-tabulation. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis were employed in the analysis of the data. Data on focus group discussion was analysed thematically by identifying relevant information, coding, classification, and summaries.

### 3. Findings on Societal Perception of New Religious Movements' Televangelism

A previous study examined the impact of new religious movements' television programmes on local church attendance among worshippers and their perception of the sermons from those aired programmes. The study revealed that only 11.9% of Christians preferred watching new religious movements' television programmes to church attendance. The study also revealed that the conception that new religious movements' television programmes draw away worshippers in local churches is a misconception because most perceived new religious movements' television programmes as a means of promoting their (NRMs) popularity and personal gain of ministers thus, viewers were well informed not to toe their lines. Mokaya's study underpins the proposed study because it shows that the new religious movement's televangelism is perceived as a selfish enterprise that is far from promoting Christian virtues. Hence, Mokaya indicated that in the research area where the study was conducted, the televangelism of NRMs does not influence women's role in the family or their church attendance in the mainline religions [7]. However, a similar study revealed that new religious movements' televangelism has a profound influence on women, especially those desiring to join church leadership, barren women desiring to have a child and some women who hated men's domination [10]. The findings of Gale's study are inconsistent with those of Mokaya's study. Hence, there is a need to address this gap [7, 10].

Table 1 presents the societal perception of new religious movements' televangelism. Concerning faith building in God, the majority (91.0%) of the respondents indicated that the new televangelism builds believers' faith in God; meanwhile, 9.0% of the participants responded otherwise. Regarding promoting unity in the family and encouraging wifely subjection and women's role in the family, the majority (89.5%) of the participants asserted that televangelists did ensure unity and encouraged wifely subjection and women's role. The least (10.5%) of the respondents responded "No". The study revealed again that slightly more than half (53.0%) of the respondents asserted that televangelists placed more emphasis on material than spiritual matters, 24.0% opined that they did not know, and

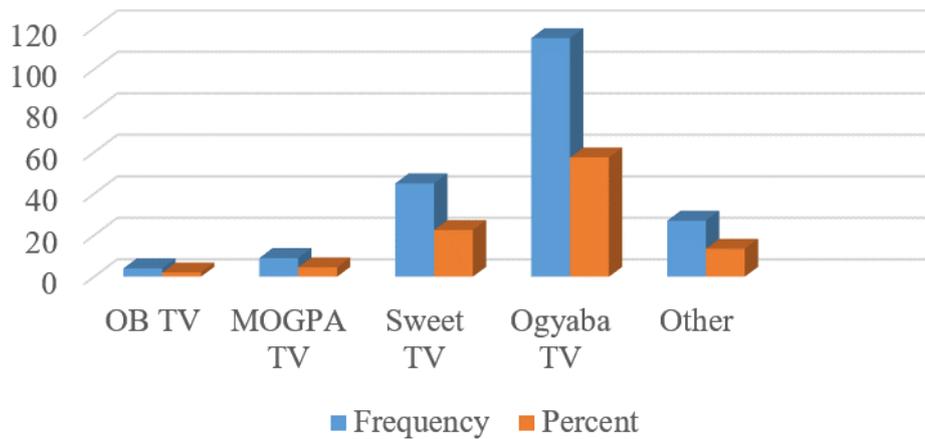
the rest (23.0%) of the participants indicated that they did not think televangelists focused on material things than spiritual matters.

**Table 1. Perception of New Religious Movements' Televangelism**

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>1. Televangelism helps in building believer faith in God</b>		
Yes	182	91.0
No	18	9.0
<b>2. Televangelists promoting unity in the family and encouraging wifely subjection and women's role in the family</b>		
Yes	179	89.5
No	21	10.5
<b>3. Televangelists place more emphasis on material things than spiritual matters</b>		
Yes	106	53.0
No	46	23.0
Do not know	48	24.0
<b>4. Church services attendance after listening to televangelists on television</b>		
Yes	158	79.0
No	42	21.0
<b>5. Church encouraging men's domination over women</b>		
Yes	91	45.5
No	109	54.5
<b>6. New Religious Movement televangelism granting more freedom and responsibilities to women in the church</b>		
Yes	101	50.5
No	99	49.5
<b>7. New Religious Movement televangelism building family and societal values in believers</b>		
Yes	57	28.5
No	87	43.5
Do not know	56	28.0

*Source: Field Data, (2023)*

Regarding attending church services after listening to televangelists on television, most (79.0%) of the respondents replied Yes, and the least (21.0%) of the participants replied No. Concerning respondents' opinion about church services encouraging men's domination over women, most (54.5%) of the respondents responded "No," and the rest (45.5%) responded "Yes". The study found that half (50.5%) of the respondents believed that the new religious movement televangelism grants more freedom and responsibilities to women in the church, while the rest (49.5%) were of the contrary. Regarding the new religious movement, televangelism builds family and societal values in believers; 43.5% of the respondents replied "No", 28.5% replied "Yes," and 28.0% indicated they did not know.



**Figure 1.** New Religious Movement televangelism readily in mind (Source: Field Data, 2023)

As portrayed in Figure 4.1, the majority (57.5%) of the respondents indicated that among the new religious movements involved in televangelism, the one that readily comes to mind was Ogyaba TV. 22.5% asserted that Sweet TV, 13.5% identified other TV channels, 4.5% showed MOGPA TV, and at least 2.0% of the respondents indicated that OB TV came to their minds.

**Table 2. General perception of the preaching of televangelists**

Variables	Frequency	Percent
It brings about the separation of family and friends because they always inform members that their friends and family are evil	179	89.5
Preaching the word of God to people	21	10.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Field Data, (2023)

Regarding respondents' perceptions of televangelists' preaching, the majority (89.5%) believe that the activity brings about the separation of family and friends because they always inform members that their friends and families are evil. The least (10.5%) of the participants revealed that they see televangelists as a way of preaching the word of God to people.

Regarding Societal Perception of New Religious Movements' Televangelism, the interview revealed that the effectiveness of the new televangelism is influenced by socio-economic factors such as education, health, income, age and marital status. There was a consensus among the interviewees that people of lower socio-economic status are more likely to be influenced by televangelists than those of a higher socio-economic status. They observed that the rich and more informed persons are less likely to be influenced by televangelists who play on the art of persuasion than those who are less financially endowed and educated. One of the congregants asserted as follows:

.... "even the rich are sometimes vulnerable because they need solutions in their families that money cannot fix, or those who go to these preachers to protect the wealth and power they might have gained through illegal means. Therefore, televangelistic messages are geared towards attracting both the rich and the poor, young and old, male and female. The attention is on the kind of problems they need solutions for."

(28-year old female congregant).

#### **4. Discussion on Societal Perception of New Religious Movements' Televangelism**

The present study found that society perceives the televangelism movements as helpful and encouraging but could also create trouble in fundamental Christian worship principles. However, some believe that televangelists emphasise material things rather than spiritual matters. Other concerns included that televangelism brings about the separation of family and friends because they always inform members that their friends and family are evil. The findings emanating from the present study partially corroborate those of earlier studies. A writer conducted extensive research on the effect of televangelism on worship habits in Kenya. The study examined the impact of new religious movements' television programmes on local church attendance among worshippers and their perception of the sermon from those aired programmes. The study revealed that only 11.9% of Christians preferred watching new religious movements' television programmes to church attendance [7]. The study also revealed that the conception that new religious television programmes draw away worshippers in local churches is a misconception because most perceive new religious movements' television programmes as promoting their popularity and personal gain [7]. Moreover, the study conducted by Gale revealed that new religious movements' televangelism has a profound influence on women, especially those desiring to join church leadership, barren women desiring to have a child, and some women who hated men's domination [10].

#### **5. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study has revealed that society perceives the televangelism movements as helpful and encouraging but could also create trouble in the fundamental Christian worship principles. For example, the respondents identified that televangelism helps believers to build faith in God. Others also asserted that televangelism promotes unity in the family, discourages wifely subjection, and amplifies women's role in the family. However, some believe that televangelists emphasise material things rather than spiritual matters. Other concerns included that televangelism brings about the separation of family and friends because they always inform members that their friends and family are evil. These imply that the general society agrees with the activities of the televangelists, although they have some social impact.

Moreover, televangelism practices have negative and positive effects on congregants and the Christian community at large. Among the negative teaches about televangelism were that the televangelists used the airwave to promote personal views, lavish lifestyles and greed. Also, televangelists discourage wifely subjection and encourage an independent attitude in women. The positive side of televangelism is that it touches on several things not often discussed during church services. Thus, televangelists are more liberal and understanding than mainline church services. It is recommended that there is the need to change or improve the credibility perception among Christians in Ghana about televangelism. Televangelists must exhibit accountability and integrity to their worshippers by providing adequate information to encourage viewers to support their ministries. The perception that any form of donation is for the personal gain of the preacher has an origin, and for these televangelists to be supported financially, they should deal with this perception problem.

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