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When the stars really shine





KEN HARRISON

When the stars really shine

It seems that increasingly people in the public eye — the stars, personalities, celebrities — are turning to the Christian faith as a code to live by and are committing their lives in a determined way to Christ.

Of course there is always great danger in placing too much store in the fact that a star has seen The Light, because like all humans they are capable of falling, of stumbling and of bringing the faith they proclaim into disrepute because of unseemly behaviour.

They, like us, have feet of clay, and it is only by the grace of Jesus that we can ever hope to climb out of the gutters of our lives. Not because we are any great shakes.

This sort of problem arose in 1970, when rock star Jerry Lee Lewis was

Another AIO Publication

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Printed in Australia by J. Bell & Co. Pty. Ltd., Sydney.

Published by the Anglican Information Office, St. Andrew's House, Sydney Square, N.S.W., Australia 2000.

widely reported as having been converted and having given up show business forever. Lewis confirmed the report and rashly announced that he was turning to clean living and the pulpit. However, unfortunately his 'new life' disintegrated within two months. After the disintegration he said to friends, "Yeah, I'm back to smoking, drinking, playing in clubs, and running around with women. I meant it when I said it, and I was going good for awhile, but I just couldn't keep it up. I tried and failed. At least I'm man enough to admit it".

Billy Graham well realises the problem of 'endorsing' a star who may not 'truly' be converted, who may later embarrass him and the Christian faith at some later date.

I can well remember sitting in the office of the manager of a Sydney television station when Mr. Graham was asked this very question by the station manager regarding Cliff Richard, who had recently 'gone public' regarding his new-found Christian faith and was being used by the Billy Graham organisation in crusades and films.

Billy Graham said he recognised the problem, but felt he was on safe ground with Cliff Richard and the years seem to have borne this out, because Cliff still sticks to his faith and to Christian service many years later.

Latest to join the galaxy of Christian stars is New Zealand born 'King of the Cooks' Graham Kerr, who is now seen on ABC television with his new program Take Kerr.



He was converted to Jesus Christ in March 1975. His wife Treena was converted at a small church in Bethlehem, Maryland in the United States, just before Christmas 1974. Graham noticed a distinct change in her life and was impressed.

Though still sceptical, he tried praying and reading the Bible, but didn't seem to get anywhere. Then all of a sudden he got the message. One evening he was brought to his knees. He says he wanted more than anything else to be able to talk to Jesus. He lifted his arms and simply said, "Jesus, I love you".

"As I reached up to Him, Jesus reached down to me and we had our first wonderful talk together. Praise and glory to Him".

Since the change in his life he is more concerned with promoting nourishment, economy and effort-saving in his TV programs than over-indulgence in eating as he used to.

Commenting on the problem of excess weight he said, "Most people just over-eat. They worry, they eat more and get fatter because they rebel against themselves.

"I have come to the wonderful conclusion that God is the only person who can really help lose weight".

An unusual outcome of Graham Kerr's conversion was the recent move to spend some of his television earnings building 25 "love cottages" in the Colorado mountains where unhappy couples can go to sort out their marriage problems.

The names of many celebrities to be outspoken about their faith reads like a who's who of show business. They include — Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary fame, Pat Boone, Cliff Richard, Johnny Cash, Roy Rogers and his wife Dale Evans, Malcolm Muggeridge, Australian swimming star Shane Gould and stage-star of the hit musical Irene, Australian Robert Coleman, Colonel 'Finger Lickin' Good' Sanders, singer Anita Bryant, cricketer Ted Dexter.



Recently the radical rock magazine "Rolling Stone" paid quite a compliment (in a backhanded sort of way) to one of these stars. In an extensive five page article and editorial the magazine outlined and commented on Pat Boone's Christian faith. The editorial said in part, "Frankly, Pat Boone is the sort of religious nut one has to admire . . . Boone's faith is passionate but mercifully private, and woven indelibly into the fabric of his life. For 20 years he stood firmly in those dumb white shoes on matters of the highest moral principles. Before anyone ever heard of the surgeon general (who held an inquiry into television violence, etc.), Pat Boone refused a lucrative television offer rather than accept cigarette advertising".

Here's what some of the others have to say about their new-found faith:



Roy Rogers, famous King of the Cowboys star of western movies, who at 63 is making a comeback with his first movie in 21 years called Mackintosh and TJ and his first record in 25 years Hoppy, Gene and Me. "We have a Devil and we have a God, and the Devil's working wide open at all times, so I don't think there's any such thing as perfect people. We only had one, and He was crucified. That was Christ".

Dale Evans, famous wife and co-star of Roy Rogers. Dale has carved out her own career however, and now does a great deal of public speaking engagements and has just completed writing her 13th book. She is the mother of six and grandmother of fifteen. Another three of her children, one of her own and two adopted have died. Speaking of these tragedies she says that God was testing her through it all, "But as he tested me, he blessed me also. He has a wonderful system of checks and balances. I praise Him and

love Him with all my heart. As long as I have strength, I intend to witness for Jesus Christ".



Robert Colman, who has now left the theatre to become a Baptist worker. He won the Sydney Sun Aria contest in 1961, which was followed by plum roles in numerous London stage shows, culminating in his role in the Sydney production of the musical Irene with Julie Anthony. "I became a Christian at the Billy Graham Crusade in Sydney in 1959. Not actually at the Crusade — even though I went forward — but at home at night, lying on my bed I tossed and thought about what Billy Graham had said and decided that the only way for me to go was the way that he spoke about. By asking Christ to become my saviour".

Shane Gould, the famous gold medal-winning Australian swimming star. "One guy sat down with me at

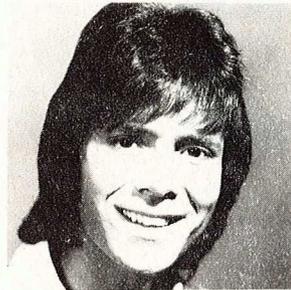


Easter and asked me if I knew what it was to be a Christian. I told him what I knew, and he told me I had a pretty shallow idea, and rattled off the four spiritual laws. Then he asked me if I wanted to commit my life to Jesus. I thought for a while and said to myself: It will be hard, it's a commitment. So I said 'I will'. We prayed and next morning I suddenly felt so light as if all my cares were carried away”.



Malcolm Muggeridge, former editor of English humour magazine *Punch*,

journalist and broadcaster. Asked about what hope he saw for the world, replied: “I would love to be able to say that I think the United Nations is the hope, or that I think that Dr. Kissinger is the hope, or that I think that some economic conference coming up is the hope — but I've explored these things in my life as a journalist and I have not found any hope in this world at all, except the Christian one”. Malcolm Muggeridge continued . . . “which is why, with some reluctance I've been driven to call myself a Christian”.



Cliff Richard has for years ridden the crest of the pop world wave. Consistently named as the performer of the year, he is approved by fans across the whole age spectrum. “I say this, that if Christianity didn't offer anything other than to take away people's disillusionment with life, it's absolutely valid and worthwhile. But, as a Christian, I know it offers much more

than that, it's the most perfect, fantastic thing to live by. Once you've heard about Jesus, once you've heard the answers about Him, there is a step you have to take. You have either to reject Him or accept Him for what He is. I know Him because He's changed my life, and I'd like to think you might get to know Him too".



Colonel James Irwin, the man who served as the pilot of the lunar module for Appollo 15 and the first man to visit and explore the Hadley Rille and Appenine Mountains of the Moon in the Lunar Rovermobile. "When we got to the moon there was that beautiful valley we camped in for three days. They were exciting days because we had that lunar dune-buggy, "Rover", and I was to drive around, exploring a place on the moon where man had never been before. But what really touched my soul and changed my life

was the fact that I could feel God's presence there: feel it so close, in so many ways".



Johnny Cash, rough, tough singer who has seen most sides of life, including the inside of a prison. "Lot's of people go all their lives thinking Jesus was a kind of pious pushover, He's portrayed as a sissy, and I'm not buying that concept of Him. He didn't bawl on that cross; I think if you and I had been up there we would've squalled and bawled and tried to get down. Not Jesus. He was a real man . . . I began to really **know** Jesus rather than just know about Him".

Roger Whittaker, who became famous for his own songs 'New World in the Morning', 'Durham Town', 'The Last Farewell', 'I Don't Believe in If', recently expressed his deep faith in Christ in a very frank interview. He said: "I'm a Christian, to my fingertips. I believe utterly in Christ. I believe He



was telling the truth when He said He was the son of God. I believe every word He said. This is the thing you have to ask yourself. Was He a liar? A lot of people just sail along, seeing Christianity as a kind of life insurance or death insurance . . . there's a good thought for a song. But it isn't really. I am sure that it won't do them any good. When I was younger I felt alone. I had a need for something to base myself on, and I turned to Christianity".

What has been the reason for this star-studded influx into the Kingdom of God? Who knows but God Himself. It is enough however to realise that God is working out the plan of each person who puts trust in Him. He has a plan for Cliff Richard's life, just as He has a plan for me and for you. All we have to do is place our trust in Him . . . and then for us too, the stars will begin to really shine!

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