

MORE LATE-NIGHT TV

Late summer/early fall can be a busy time of year around Cedar Crossing, what with harvesting and all. I needn't remind you, though, that harvesting is not always limited to the crops of the field. While the setting sun may slow some activities outdoors, the harvesting of ideas continues throughout the fullness of the day.

Pastor Arnold Schmidt

Not having ventured into the often-underappreciated world of late-night television in several months, I felt it was the right time to fulfill my obligation to my flock to monitor the influences on their lives. I didn't want to go so far as to say that it was the Holy Spirit calling me to do it on that particular evening, but I've always tried to remain open-minded about such things. Yet being too open-minded has its own dangers. Although not a fan of the English novelist, Samuel Butler, I do remember one comment from an English literature

class in college that he made on open-mindedness, “An open mind is all very well in its way, but it ought not be so open that there is no keeping anything in or out of it. It should be capable of shutting its doors sometimes, or it may be found a little drafty.” Whether that has any meaning or relevance to someone not sitting in front of a television at 1:00 o’clock in the morning, I couldn’t say.

I felt encouraged when I learned that our satellite subscription service now included an additional fifty channels. As I scrolled down the list of programming, I took note of a show coming up at 1:30 am on the Theology Channel that held some possibility. Dr. Merle Schmidt (no relation), eminent scholar and professor of theology, would be giving the second segment of his lecture series to seminarians on communicating with the masses. It would probably take me a good thirty minutes just to give adequate consideration to 550 channels, so that might work out. A slight negative came when I learned I would have to pay an extra \$9.99 for viewing that channel, but it remained under consideration. Apparently, my failure to work out regularly with the remote control somehow slowed my reflexes, because I only reached channel 342 by the

time the 1:30 am deadline rolled in. I had to decide quickly, so I walked into my den, opened a tin on my desk that contained ‘mad’ money, and returned to my easy chair in front of the television. Dr. Merle Schmidt would be shining a light upon my intellect tonight.

Dr. Schmidt’s lecture certainly reinforced his stature as a learned and eminent scholar. I had to use the backs of six junk mail envelopes just to list words I needed to look up later to refresh my memory of the meaning. Fortunately, my intellect has always had a natural bent to be a shepherd rather than an academic. I fear that if I started communicating with the masses of St. John in Cedar Crossing with the same terms that Dr. Schmidt did to the seminarians, someone might come up to me after the service and say, “Been watching the Theology Channel again?” But, I suppose we never know whether that first call might come from a church with a university setting or not. The hour dictated that my stimulation for the night was over.

The schedule for the following day was rather light, and no emergencies came up, so I felt I had the endurance for another date with the television in the quiet hours. Since I had only made it to

channel 342 the night before, I worked backwards surfing from 550 down for a little variety. When I hit the grouping of financial channels, I saw a listing that looked vaguely familiar. Channel 402 was a channel that specialized in currency exchange rates, stories, and news, but the description shown on the guide appeared to be of a theological nature. Undoubtedly, this was a glitch in the listing, but I clicked on the channel for the full-length description. It said that Dr. Merle Schmidt, eminent scholar and professor of theology, would be giving the second segment of his lecture series to seminar-ians on communicating with the masses. With only fifteen minutes until the scheduled showing, and since I felt there was a principal at stake here forcing me to see if it was the same show or not, I went to the kitchen to assemble some adequate nourishment. Of course, all this activity must be done quietly so not to disturb my wife and children. They don't always appreciate it when I have to work late.

When the time neared for the program, I clicked on channel 402 and waited. A screen soon came up saying it would cost \$1.99 to view the program with Dr. Merle Schmidt. Flush with 'mad' money, I decided to take a risk. Prior to the

program starting, a commercial of sorts came up saying that this program cost \$9.99 on many other channels, but on the Currency Exchange Channel they could run it through all their exchange rates and eventually arrive back at the low cost of only \$1.99. In the bottom left of the screen a box showed these words, “We take ten-dollar words and exchange them for two-dollar ones.” Sounded like a good free market concept to me. When the program finally started, it showed Dr. Schmidt beginning his lecture just as in the \$9.99 version. Shortly into the program, a split screen came up. On one half of the screen was Dr. Schmidt, and on the other half was a man standing in front of an old-fashioned blackboard. Dr. Schmidt continued his lecture as before and after he finished making an important theological point with his elegant and erudite language, his half of the screen froze. The man in front of the blackboard then took his stub of chalk and wrote, “Jesus is the Son of God”. This process continued throughout the length of the program, with the chalkboard serving as the platform for expressing the scholarly ten-dollar words after the exchange rate calculations that reduced those words to two-dollar ones.

When the program concluded, I scoffed at those who say there is nothing good on television. They just don't know where or when to look. Out of time and low on 'mad' money, I eventually went to bed.