

Fasting guides Falwell's flock

If you've missed Rev. Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour the last three or four Sunday mornings, here's his Word on the Nov. 6 elections:

Fasting.

Falwell wants us to fast at least one day before making our pilgrimage to the polls. By denying our earthly bodies of sustenance, we shall gain spiritual guidance in making the Right decisions.

Now, as lawyers would say, this fasting idea is silly *prima facie*—that is, silly by virtue of just being silly.

Mona Koppelman

Falwell's flock will make the Right decisions anyway, whether they fast or not. The virtues of President Reagan and the political right have already been drummed so completely into their heads that they will not sway from their chosen path.

And further, I don't think God would require a fast to get his attention if the flock needs his approval.

Unless God has a Great Switchboard up there, full of blinking lights... yeah, and Peter wearing a set of earphones, fielding his calls:

"I've got a blinking red light, Lord."

"Who is it this time Peter?"

"People starving themselves, Lord."

"Good gravy, don't they know I've got famine in India, terrorism everywhere, and the beginning of the NBA season to worry about?"

"Lord, it's Rev. Falwell's congregation. They want you to take a look at their election picks for Tuesday."

"Oh, for crying out loud. What do they want, loaves and fishes? I've got to get to work. Got any black coffee?"

Falwell makes his argument based on biblical figures who fasted before making great decisions. John the Baptist fasted in the wilderness, Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights, David fasted to induce Yahweh to pity him and spare the life of his child.

Well, it can be convincing, I guess. Citing David, John and Jesus to Christians is like citing Ruth, Mays and Aaron to a rabid baseball fan.

But research shows that historically, there are four major reasons for fasting:

- cleansing of body, mind and soul
- sacrifice, religious request
- symbolic gesture, social or political
- health reasons

In 1923, Upton Sinclair wrote a book called "The Fasting Cure." Sinclair won fame, fortune and great respect for exposing horrendous meat packing conditions in his novel "The Jungle," and spent much of his career exposing charlatans, schemes and rotten stuff in general.

Sinclair acknowledged that fasting with a doctor's guidance could help straighten out a confused digestive system, as long as the patient drank lots of nutritive fluids—including prune juice.

However, Sinclair cast disper-

sions on claims that fasting could miraculously cure all diseases. Sinclair cited cards and letters from every corner of these United States. Folks professed fasting cures for appendicitis, severe colds, liver trouble, rheumatism, tuberculosis, cancer and syphilis with advanced ulcers in the throat.

Somehow, I don't think this is what Falwell had in mind. But Sinclair went on to attack the notion of purification of body mind and soul... a little closer to the reverend's notion of fasting for divine guidance.

"I do not advise people to fast who have nothing the matter with them," Sinclair said. "That is like a person spending his time sweeping rain water out of his house, instead of taking the trouble to repair his roof."

Sinclair admitted that many artists, himself included, went without eating for long periods of time while "creating." Thoreau, for example, lived on Walden Pond for many months on \$6 worth of food.

But if such a feat heightens the mental faculties, thousands of college students would be making straight A's without cracking a book.

Continued on Page 6

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