

This Man Says He's the Divine Sweetheart of the Universe

by William C. Martin

And as far as anybody can figure, he's right

I AM UN-REAL. I AM incredible. I AM unbelievable to those who think only on the limited conscious level of mind.

I AM incredible because I am making the impossible possible. I am teaching people how to make the impossible possible by using their own indwelling God-given Mind Power.

I AM God appearing as ME. I AM the Master Mind thinking as Me. I AM the Almighty acting as Me. This is the truth even of you, and of every man. I AM the Divine Sweetheart of the Universe, loving and being loved forever.

—Dr. Frederick J. Eikerenkoetter II, better known as “Reverend Ike”

It is very important to note,” cautions Reverend Ike, “that when I speak in this way, I am referring to the Divine Presence and not to the human personality at all. Otherwise, it makes me sound like an egomaniac.” Well, yes, one could get that impression. And the gold-plated church and the Rolls-Royces and the Mercedes limousines and the clothes that would make a pimp blush do little to counteract such an impression. But it might, it just might be wrong. The evidence is mounting that Dr. Eikerenkoetter is concerned not only with bettering his own lot—an aim he freely admits—but also with assisting his million-plus, mostly black followers to better theirs and to gain a positive and healthy self-image in the bargain. Not only is he rapidly rising into the ranks of the half dozen or so most successful American evangelists of this century, he is also gaining sufficient recognition as an important practitioner of “self-image psychology” to merit a recent invitation to share his thoughts with the Department of Psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School.

Reverend Ike has come a long way, Honey. I started following his career in the mid-Sixties, when he ran the Miracle Temple in Boston's South End. At the time, I regarded him as little more than a stylish storefront rip-off artist. An aide concedes this might have been true about the Reverend in 1965, but that Ike has changed. Whatever his motives then or now, it is unquestionably true that the gospel Reverend Ike preaches today is a long way from what he was preaching in 1965, and that whether or not he is still ripping off black folk, he is doing a great deal more.

Since Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield stoked the Great Awakening in New England, popular evangelists in America have utilized a limited range of techniques: dark warnings of approaching doom

and calls to repentance (Billy Graham), sometimes mixed with detailed interpretation of Biblical prophecy (the Armstrongs of Ambassador College); hyper-nationalism (Carl McIntire and Billy James Hargis); faith healing (the early Oral Roberts, the late A. A. Allen, and the current Kathryn Kuhlman); and charismatic enthusiasm (several exponents of the Jesus Movement). In rather sharp contrast, Reverend Ike has no use for doom-saying, is essentially apolitical, directs his aides to remove those members of the audience overcome with glossolalia or the holy barks, and has even dropped faith healing from his repertoire. “I was good at it, too,” he recalls with amusement. “I’d knock people down and pray over them and grease them with oil and give them prayer cloths. I used to break up canes and yank people out of wheelchairs. I’d either heal them or kill them.”

In place of these time-tested techniques, Reverend Ike has substituted a blatantly this-worldly blend of ideas that have appeared earlier under the banners of New Thought, Christian Science, Positive Thinking, and home psychotherapy, all served up with liberal helpings of street slogans (“Stick around. Don’t be a clown. Pick up on what I’m putting down”), ingeniously applied scripture, and extravagant testimonials from satisfied users. The end product, which Dr. Eikerenkoetter calls the Science of Living, makes Thomas Harris and Norman Vincent Peale sound like depressive paranoids with a bad case of the poor mouth. It also constitutes, like the Black Muslim teachings of Elijah Muhammad, a major religious alternative to the fundamental Christianity traditionally associated with American blacks.

Little in Frederick Eikerenkoetter's background foreshadowed his present role as philosopher, psychologist, and pastor to the masses. At age fourteen, he followed his father into the ministry when he became Assistant Pastor of the Bible Way Church in Ridgeland, South Carolina. After graduating from high school in 1952, he attended several fundamentalist Bible colleges, spent two years in the Air Force chaplain service, then returned to South Carolina to found the United Church of Jesus Christ for All People Inc. In 1964 he moved his ministry north and established the Miracle Temple in Boston. In 1966, he transferred his operation to New York City. During these years, Reverend Ike's nickel bag of theology contained essentially the same opiates as those of other storefront street-dealers: temporary pain-killers and the promise of the Ultimate High. After a year or two in the ghetto, however, Ike decided his parishioners were suf-



fering from an overdose. The White Horse of Hope had gone lame. "I looked around and discovered people were already in hell. They no longer needed to be told they were going to hell. They needed a way out. At that point I began to develop answers to the present issues of life. I am no longer interested in what is to come later. I am interested in *now*. That's all there is."

Perhaps because he realized his growing band of followers was not equipped to kick fundamentalism cold turkey or perhaps for the more selfish reason that a nationwide evangelistic campaign and a flourishing radio ministry were bringing cascades of money from fundamentalist disciples, Reverend Ike continued to sound like a typical "healer and blesser," lacing his broadcasts and publications with stories of marvelous cures and instant riches wrought by his prayers and the little prayer cloths he sent to those who worked the Blessing Plan, the central mechanism of which was and still is a regular donation to Reverend Ike. Despite the obvious risk in quitting a winner, however, Ike was beginning to chafe. In a 1969 interview between services during a Houston appearance, he confided he was about ready to make his break with fundamentalism. "I am fed up with it. I've had it with all these ideas and this tradition and I can't preach it anymore. I have been culling out these negative ideas one by one, and when I get a few more things clear in my mind, I am going to begin to unteach some of those who have been mistaught. My presentation is going to change. Right now I sound just like another Holy Roller, but when I get my philosophy together, I will change my method of presentation."

By 1972, Reverend Ike not only had his philosophy together, but he had abandoned all pretense of being a fundamentalist. In fact, although the umbrella organization for his activities is called the United Christian Evangelistic Association, Ike acknowledges that his message can be called "Christian" or even "religious" only by stretching the terms beyond their conventional meanings. Now, on the road or at home in New York, Reverend Ike explicitly proclaims that:

"The Science of Living is not church doctrine, religious dogma, or theology. It is the teaching of how a person may live a positive, dynamic, healthy, happy, successful, prosperous life through the consciousness of the Presence of God—Infinite Good—already within everyone. . . .

"The Science of Living teaches you how to become a dynamic person. You UNLEARN sickness and know health. You UNLEARN poverty and know prosperity. You learn how to break every limitation and solve every problem YOURSELF. Sickness, age, fear, worry, tension, every human torment drops away, and a NEW YOU begins to live more abundantly."

The basic philosophical tenet of the Science of Living is that Mind is the only effective causative agent. Because this is the case, the whole duty of man is to comprehend the workings of his own mind, to apprehend its relation to other minds and to the Divine Mind present in every man, and to apply Mind Power to the affairs of everyday life.

From this starting point, Reverend Ike moves quickly to demythologize the pillars of orthodox Christian faith. God is not "someone else, somewhere else, sometime else," but the Divine Mind "within you HERE and NOW." Jesus is "the Master Mind working in you" and Christ and Lord are but synonyms for the Cosmic Law of Mind, a law that operates with the

immutability of the law of gravity. "The Cosmic Law of Mind," Reverend Ike explains, "is the universal principle which inevitably brings to pass the materialization of every subjective realization. Just like the law of gravity, it is in action everywhere. If you throw a heavy object into the air, you know it is coming down and you get out of the way. In the Science of Living, we learn to think only those thoughts that we want to see and hear in our lives, because those thoughts are going to come to pass, whether we are conscious of them or not. The scripture puts it beautifully in *Proverbs 23:7* ('As a man thinketh, so is he') and in *Galatians 6:7* ('Whatsoever a man soweth [in his subconscious mind] that shall he also reap'). When you work consciously, confidently, and correctly with the Lord—the Cosmic Law of Mind—He will give you the desires of your heart. That is why the scripture says, 'Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.'"

In similar fashion, the devil is dismissed as nothing more than ignorance, being "born again" gives way to being "magnetized into the universal subconscious," and salvation is conceived as victory over the only sin worth talking about, negative thinking. Reverend Ike also tosses Heaven onto the heap of discarded theological baggage. "We are not interested in Pie in the Sky bye and bye. We want our pie now, with ice cream on it, and a cherry on top."

The pie of which Reverend Ike speaks is a money pie. Nothing about his ministry stands out more boldly than his unabashed love of money. Undoubtedly, it is also a major factor in his popularity. According to Ike, it is not the *love*, but the *lack* of money that is the root of all evil. A special "Green Power" edition of his *Action!* magazine pictures two fist-sized rolls of twenty-dollar bills and asks, "What's wrong with money, success, and prosperity?" Inside this and other publications, one finds more rolls and stacks of bills and even a vase filled with flowers made of folded money. Several 1972 issues featured a piece called *The Money Rake!* and offered tips on how to rake money in with the right attitude:

DON'T BE A HYPOCRITE ABOUT MONEY

Admit openly and inwardly that you like money. Say "I like money. I need money. I want money. I love money in its RIGHT PLACE. Money is not sinful. Money is GOOD. . . ."

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU THINK OR SAY ABOUT MONEY

As long as you think and say things such as "Money is hard to get" and "I can't get hold of any money," that is just the way it will be.

STOP COMPLAINING ABOUT HIGH PRICES

Say, instead, "I give thanks for money to pay whatever price for whatever I need."

STOP LOOKING FOR "SOMETHING FOR NOTHING"

A person with a hope to get something for nothing is open to be cheated and swindled by others who have the same thing in mind but are "slicker" than he is.

Reverend Ike readily acknowledges that the basic principles of Mind Science are not unique to him, although he claims to have arrived at them independently before discovering similar notions in the writings of professional optimists from Mary Baker Eddy's mentor, Phineas Quimby, to Dr. Peale and Maxwell Maltz. In any case, it is relatively unusual fare to be dishing out to folk reared on fundamentalism, as most of his followers have been. How does he accomplish the task of communicating what must be regarded as heresy to his rapidly ex- (Continued on page 140)

THIS MAN SAYS HE'S THE DIVINE SWEETHEART OF THE UNIVERSE

(Continued from page 78) panding flock? Impressively, that's how.

"You will note"—he smiles—"that I quote the Bible a great deal. As you know, fundamentalist people accept the authority of the scriptures. They are programmed to believe anything a scripture is quoted in front of. So I take the scriptures and I reinterpret them in the light of the Science of Living, and that helps a lot of them make the transition more easily." In addition to scripture, Reverend Ike also draws on other images from the familiar tradition, as when a lesson from a Science of Living study guide asserts that the words of the spiritual, "Deep River, my home is over Jordan," express "a deep-seated realization on the part of man as to his proper place in Divine Mind. . . . Once this is established in our thought pattern, through our crossing over Jordan in consciousness to its positive side, we shall find that we have reached the Promised Land [Divine Consciousness]."

But Ike is not simply trying to see how far the old wineskins will stretch. With the same caution—admirable or otherwise—that led him to hold back from declaring his true convictions until several years after he had formed them, he has limited the amount of pure, uncut Mind Science dispensed to his mass audience until first testing the tolerance level of the folks in the home church in New York. He tells them, "You understand, of course, that when I am speaking to the Babylonians, I have to communicate in a language they understand, but when I talk to you, I can speak in another tongue." In the last two years, the message at home and abroad has become progressively uniform, to the point that anyone who believes Reverend Ike is just another pulpit-pounding soul saver simply hasn't been paying attention. Today, using calculated profanity, sharp perception of soft spots in what he repeatedly calls "the old religion," and a heavy dose of what Phineas Quimby used to call Animal Magnetism, Ike often launches into what amounts to a frontal assault on beliefs his hearers have held since childhood: "Coming up in Sunday School and in organized Protestant religion, we always thought of the Lord as some old grey-haired man sitting up in the sky in a great big chair. And with one hand he was writing all the bad deeds that were being done and in the other hand he had a great big stick with which he was going to beat the hell out of the bad people. And we used to pray to this Lord and say, 'Please, Lord, do this and do that.' I'm sorry to have to tell you this, Saints, but that is a false idea. There is nobody up in the sky who is going to do a damn thing for you. And yet religious people pray and fast and punish themselves, trying to impress some God-in-the-sky, and the preachers take the Bible and beat them down with it, and you will go back to this kind of preaching, like a damn fool, week after week, trying to get some man-in-the-sky to

run your life for you. It breaks my heart to tell you good religious people this, but the only one who runs your life is you. And if you don't take conscious control of your life and operate your own mind, your life will just be a total mess! The Lord is not going to do a damn thing. You are the only one who can tell you what you can or can't have. When you pray, you are talking to yourself. So stop this kneeling down for your prayers, or somebody will catch you humped over and you'll get kicked in the behind. If you are going to pray, just stand right up, put your hand on your hip, let your backbone slip, and say, real sassy-like, 'Can't noooooobody tell me what I can't have.'"

Excursions such as this move Reverend Ike's audiences to titter with scandalized laughter and to look around nervously as if half expecting a bolt of lightning to come crashing through the roof, but there is clearly an exhilaration present as they shake their hips not only in obedience to Ike's direction but also in bold defiance of their religious past. He is onto something, and he knows it. "Frankly, I've been rather surprised," he admits, "at how fundamentalists and even semiliterate people from the backwoods have come to this and have accepted it. So many have said to me, 'You know, Reverend Ike, I have felt this for a long time, but I never had the occasion to hear anybody say it. When you told me God is in Me, this sort of confirmed what I have been feeling.'"

Along with scripture, familiar symbols, and out-front Positive Thinking, Reverend Ike also gets his points across by means of a technique long favored by mass evangelists—unremitting bombardment. Listeners to his daily broadcasts hear of case after case of those who have profited from Reverend Ike's teaching and receive constant encouragement to "get out of the ghetto and into the get-mo'." The bimonthly *Action!* magazine, sent free to anyone who requests it, is also jammed with testimonials, sermons, expositions on Mind Science, and instructions on how to hear and see even more. A letter a month, preferably with a contribution, brings a special Success Idea, which is yet another formulation of the basic theme: "How to use Mind Power to get more Green Power." If requested, each Success Idea comes with a prayer cloth, a tiny scarlet remnant of Reverend Ike's days as a healer and blessing.

In each publication and broadcast, Reverend Ike urges his followers to write him regularly. Undoubtedly, he hopes and expects most will enclose money, but he makes a great deal of the letter-writing process itself, claiming that even though he does not read every letter personally, he knows what they say by means of "subconscious correlation" and "vibratory affinity" and that the very process of writing to him will start things happening. In support of this, he produces letter after letter from correspondents who tell of

the good fortune that befell them within minutes after they dropped their letters into the mailbox. When I asked him how he accounted for these occurrences, he pondered the question a moment, then allowed it was a demonstration of something called *graphotherapeutics*. "To write," he explained, "you must focus your attention rather definitely and positively. Once the mind is directed in a certain way and certain ideas are clarified in the mind, other ideas which help to bring about the realization of the first idea begin to happen." Is it possible that people might confuse graphotherapeutics with magic? "Yes, there is that possibility. I have found that belief works, whether a person understands the mental mechanics of it or not." But, to be fair, Reverend Ike is not really trying to have it both ways. A subsequent edition of *Action!* addressed this issue squarely: "Some call it A MIRACLE! Others call it MAGIC! But I have stripped away all of the religious and superstitious NON-SENSE, and I have revealed *IT* to be MIND POWER!"

Reverend Ike's approach has firmly established him as the poor man's Peale and he has, as they say, done well by doing good. His daily radio program is heard on approximately 270 stations and he confidently predicts that the weekly *Joy of Living* telecast will be seen nationwide within a few months. His personal appearances regularly draw crowds of five to ten thousand, and a memorable service at Madison Square Garden in 1972 drew over twenty thousand. A mailing list generated primarily by letters containing contributions is rapidly climbing toward two million and raising huge sums of money in the process. Figures on the total income from the Blessing Plan and other revenue-gathering activities are unavailable, but Reverend Ike concedes that "the church is very rich." Much of the money, of course, goes to pay for broadcasts, printing, postage, professional staff, and the standard operational expenses for such an organization. But Reverend Ike comes in for his share. His personal salary is said to be a relatively modest \$40,000, but this is augmented by an almost unlimited expense account that enables him to purchase jewelry and clothes that, by his own reckoning, cost \$1,000 a week, and to enjoy the use of Association-owned homes and luxurious automobiles.

The crown jewel of Reverend Ike's organization is the United Palace and Science of Living Institute, a former Loew's theatre that occupies a city block on Broadway and One Hundred Seventy-fifth and serves as a mother of a church. Besides providing formal instruction in the Science of Living and granting honorary doctorates to its President and Founder (Ike holds the D.Sc.L. and Ph.D. Sc.L. degrees), the Institute offers courses in secretarial training, money management, yoga, speech, drama, and fine arts. A book-

stall in the space where the candy counter used to be displays *I'm OK, You're OK, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, Working With the Law, Open Your Mind to Prosperity, Try Giving Yourself Away, and Move Ahead With Positive Thinking*. The church also provides academic and family counseling, college scholarships, drug-abuse and prison programs, and sponsors free plays and concerts.

A staff of associates operates the church in Reverend Ike's absence, but he conducts classes and services on an average of two weekends a month. Sunday meetings are scheduled in the afternoon, to avoid conflicts with churches of the old religion. The official starting time is usually three o'clock, but the action begins at least an hour earlier, as scattered clumps of ten or fifteen people gather to hear church leaders discuss the Science of Living. About two-thirty, Reverend Ike appears onstage without fanfare, and announces that he wants to exchange smiles and hugs with the assembly. "You know, you are not blessed unless you put on a smile, even if your wig cost a hundred dollars." As a spotlight follows him up and down the aisles, he pauses every few rows, flashes his teeth, and wraps his arms around himself in an enormous autoerotic bear hug. The folks in each section mirror the gesture and say with him, "MMMMMMMMMMMM, there is healing and blessing even in a smile."

As soon as Reverend Ike has made the circuit, a mammoth stage bearing a fifty-voice chorus rises into view. The chorus is good, but Ike notes he would like to see some improvement before an upcoming telecast. "We have some good singers who haven't joined the choir yet, and some of you who have joined it need to volunteer for the usher board. I'm going to be damn blunt with you. Television is expensive. If you have a voice like a sour lemon, get the hell out of my choir. Anything that doesn't look, act, sound, and smell like the Christ, the Son of the Living God, won't go on my TV show, because I'm mean and clean and everybody on the screen is going to have to look like they are kin to me."

When the chorus has finished, it drops out of sight and the gold curtain opens to reveal an opulent set curtained and carpeted in deep red and featuring a Louis XV desk flanked by two throne-like wing chairs covered in red velvet, each sporting an embossed golden crown that lies just above Reverend Ike's head when he sits down. The chairs strike an outsider as a bit immoderate until the Reverend explains the symbolism: "The crowns represent the Divine Royalty of the individual. I put two out there for a purpose—so that people will not get the idea that this is a chair where only Reverend Ike sits. We do not believe in the exclusive divinity of any man. Anybody can sit in those chairs. When I call people to testify, regardless of who they are, they sit in those chairs."

The testimony of Edward Milton Jr. is typical of those who sit on the

Throne of Man: "Reverend Ike, I was working on two or three jobs making money but I couldn't seem to see where it was going. I was shacking up with a woman and was all hung up. So, after I heard you on the radio, I decided to write you. That was in July. I started working with the Blessing Plan and using your Success Ideas. By November I was blessed with a brand-new Buick Electra 225! And January twenty-first I married a nice young lady. And by August, 1972, I was blessed with an eighteen-thousand-dollar home. We have it furnished beautifully." Reverend Ike is delighted: "You couldn't keep any money. You couldn't accumulate anything. Doing nothing but shacking and backtracking, huh? You women had better say 'Amen.' I tell all the ladies in my congregation, 'Don't fool around with those men who don't have anything, never did have anything, and don't look like they're going to get anything.' These little girls come up to me and say, 'Reverend Ike, I want to get married!' I say, 'Your boyfriend have any money?' They say, 'No, but we have love.' I say, 'You try paying the rent with that! See how many groceries that will buy.'"

The sermon for the day is typical: "Are You on Your Side?" Under each of the main headings—(1) "Be Your Own Cheerleader and Others Will Join in the Cheering," (2) "Be the President of Your Own Fan Club," and (3) "Play the Game of Life in Your Favor"—Reverend Ike tells stories of the Wright brothers, whose daddy was a bishop and told them it was blasphemy to think that man could fly, but who looked up in the sky and saw birds fly and said in their hearts, "If birds fly over the rainbow, why then O why can't I?" and of Thomas Edison whose schoolmaster said he could not learn but who had a light in his heart and lit up the world.

To punctuate the proclamation, Reverend Ike pauses every three or four minutes to ask the congregation to shake at least three hands and say, "Come on. You can make it. I see you making it big," or to repeat an affirmation such as, "I'm a FUN person . . . God in me is full of fun . . . The blues do not interest me . . . I light up the atmosphere with my happiness . . . I fizz like a bottle of French champagne . . . I move from glory to glory. . . . So it is. It cannot be otherwise. . . . Thank you God-in-Me, Thank you Lord, Thank you Cosmic Law of Mind."

To close the service Reverend Ike leads his parishioners in a Visualization Prayer Treatment. The mental mechanics of the V.P.T. are evidently similar to those of graphotherapy. By concentrating on the good they desire, those undergoing the Treatment automatically set up subconscious vibrations that will "enable their imaginations to build a bridge of incident over which they can pass to the condition they have consistently imagined." Like a magnificent tawny lion, Reverend Ike lounges in one of the crown chairs and directs his flock to "lean back, stretch your legs, close your two outer eyes, open the inner eye of faith, and follow

me into the Theatre of the Mind." Then, at his direction, they repeat his every phrase, giving each the same sensual caress he does: "As I look on the stage of my imagination, I see who I am in God and who God is in me. My divine self is healthy, strong, and bubbling over with the joy of the Lord. Prosperous ideas constantly unfold in my mind, leading and guiding me into ways of success. It feels so good to have money. I am going to pick out a car. MMMMMMMMMM, doesn't this leather smell wonderful! Now I am going to rub my hand around the steering wheel and feel the notches on the underside of the wheel. Oh, this is wonderful. Now I see myself on a Caribbean cruise. I can smell the flowers around me, I can taste the tangy tropical drinks. I can hear my friends telling me how good I look when I come back from my vacation. And all that I see, I can have because the Lord, the Law of Mind gives it to me. Thank you Father."

Back from St. Thomas-in-the-Mind, Reverend Ike brings the service to a close with a matter-of-fact announcement: "Now, I want you to give me some money. Give whatever you want to, but remember one thing. If there is a sin in this church, it is making noise during the offering. Please do not give change. Change makes me nervous in the service." The crowd laughs at the line they have heard before and Reverend Ike says, "Bless your hearts. I'm just teasing you because I love you. And you know that." As uniformed and white-gloved sisters collect the offering in plastic buckets—"The Scripture says, 'My cup runneth over,' so we use buckets"—Reverend Ike commends them for their generosity. "We have never had a financial problem in this church and we never shall. I am not personally a millionaire, but I have made this church a multimillionaire. Besides being a minister, I am a pretty sharp businessman. You have to admit, a fool couldn't do all this. Look around you and see how I am spending your money. That is liquid gold we are putting on the walls and the ceiling, and if you look carefully you will find a few drops of it on the rug. The complete renovation will take another year and about another one and a half million. But it's worth it. Anything I am connected with, I glorify."

When the service ended a few minutes later, Reverend Ike repaired to a private suite in the Palace to shower and change clothes. As he sipped a thick revivifying blend of milk, raw egg, and banana, I asked him to respond to the criticism of black militants who claim he is draining the ghetto of money that should go for shoes, milk, and rent, and spending it instead on cars, clothes, and gold-leaf paint. One senses he has answered the question before. "If I could say that tomorrow morning I am going to lead five thousand people up to city hall to demand more welfare, they would say, 'Oh, gee, Reverend Ike is great.' But the black ministers and the black militants and the white liberals who teach

people to demand handouts are doing minorities a disfavor, by breaking down their sense of self-sufficiency. We say to the poor, 'Look, the white people are not responsible to deliver you. As long as you have to depend on the President, or the Governor, or the Mayor, you're not free. You're a slave. You can't eat until they feed you. You can't eat until you line up and get those damn stamps. Don't look for handouts. Welfare has its place, but don't make it a resting place.'"

Reverend Ike does not shrink from the anti-sociological implications of his brand of classic individualism—"You could take all the people from the ghetto and move them downtown into Fifth Avenue mansions and ten minutes later they will have brought the ghetto with them. That's because the environment you live in is the environment that lives in you." But on other occasions, his pronouncements sound like moderately respectable social psychology: "I take issue with the dogooders in the federal government and some of the so-called liberals who are good at giving people negative labels for themselves. In Washington, D.C., they have certain rubber stamps. One says, 'Poor People,' and they select a group of people and categorize them as Poor People. If people don't fit in that category they have another stamp that says, 'Culturally Deprived,' and another that says, 'Underprivileged.' This is negative self-image psychology. That is just another psych job. Don't you let this world put any labels on you. This is what the Bible means when it says, 'Be not conformed to this world.' Don't you take anything from this world. Any kind of sob story you've got, I can match it. Don't tell me, 'Reverend Ike, I'm black. Nobody likes me.' I'm medium black myself!!! I came from a broken home. I walked four miles to school every day and four miles back. You don't need any more sympathy and welfare; you need a kick where your brains are. I could still be down in South Carolina sitting on a log in the woods talking about 'poor black me.' Instead, when I was a little barefoot boy working in an auto mechanic shop, the head mechanic would look at me and say, 'Boy, do you think you will ever amount to anything?' I would straighten up, hold my shoulders back, tilt my chin and answer, 'Yes, Sir!'"

Like most super-individualists, Reverend Ike fails to recognize that others may not be quite so well equipped for the Game of Life as he, and that social, political, and economic structures do, in fact, make a difference. Still, it is no doubt true that a positive self-image gives a person a leg up on the ladder of success, whatever the odds. And Reverend Ike's people are nothing if not positive. I talked to as many as I could before and after services and found them unequivocally excited about possession of a new sense of self-confidence and reporting improvement in all areas of their lives—school, jobs, marriages, and bank accounts. They understand what Reverend Ike is saying, recognize it is a radical departure from

"the old church down South," and are pleased with the difference. Clearly, they agree with the Reverend's motto: "You can't lose with the stuff I use."

An Epilogical Testimony

After my last visit with Reverend Ike, I spent the night on Long Island with old friends who assured me we would have no difficulty making an eight-twenty flight from La Guardia the next morning. The time they allowed for the trip would have been comfortable in the middle of the night, but at seven-fifteen a.m. we discovered that others had also made plans to drive into the city via the Long Island Expressway. After forty minutes and four accident bottlenecks, the map showed we had averaged an inch every ten minutes and still had six inches to go. Obviously, it was time for a Visualization Prayer Treatment. I heard myself telling the stewardess that no, I did not want a cocktail at eight-thirty in the morning. I struggled vainly with the button that was supposed to make my seat recline. I put on the stereo earphones and discovered the right channel was dead and all I could get was a left ear full of percussion. I tried to breathe through the cigar smoke exhaled by a seatmate who insisted no one was going to tell him he had to sit in the back of the plane to smoke. I heard the captain say we were experiencing a loss of cabin pressure and realized it had been so long since I had paid attention to the stewardesses' instructions about the oxygen equipment that I had forgotten what to do and would undoubtedly explode or implode

momentarily. But, in the Theatre of my Mind, I was on that plane!

Wonderfully, the traffic began to move more swiftly. Then, in cruel rebuke to the Scientific Life, the car threw a fan belt and we pulled into a service station. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, I dashed into the street. Two blocks away, a yellow cab was stopped in front of a school. I flagged him to my position and asked if he could make it to La Guardia in ten minutes. "No. Get in." Inside, he told me, "Mister, you don't know how lucky you are to find a cab out here. I just happened to be bringing my daughter to school." He knew a shortcut, but cautioned against optimism. "When we get back on the freeway, we'll really hit the heavy traffic. I don't think we can make it." Moments later, we pulled onto a virtually empty freeway. "Mister, I can't explain it. I come by here at this time every morning, and this is the first time I have seen the traffic this light in ten years. It's a miracle." At eight-seventeen we stopped at the Eastern terminal. A porter asked, "Where you going?" I told him Houston, and he said "Gate thirty-five. Run!"

A few minutes later, as we taxied down the runway, I pondered the events of the morning. Most of my skepticism returned when I noted that the seat reclined properly and no one was blowing smoke in my face. Still, just to be safe, I paid careful attention to the oxygen routine. And I thought, "I AM incredible, because I have made the impossible possible. I AM on this plane. So it is. It cannot be otherwise. Thank you Cosmic Law of Mind." #

THE INCREDIBLE REVENGE OF EDWARD GOREY

(Continued from page 111) "works me up terribly.") The pursuit of that subject, we agree, seems classically profitless. And religion?

And religion. "I don't believe in God in the Christian sense," he points out. "I'm not terribly religious." God never says a word in the cosmology of Gorey; fathers, uncles, and severe guardians—His dexterous mouthpieces—do. Gorey's father, who in Chicago was active in journalism and public relations, was a Roman Catholic, but the inexorability of that persuasion ended for Gorey in the second grade, he explains, when, packed off to church, he claims he used to "throw up"—and, at about that time, when he was seven years old, he caught measles, which became for him (gainsaying, this, the hagiographical commonplace which often links early illness to conversion) a memorable icon for the end of his Catholic period. Gorey still reads Thomas Merton. And he is seriously attracted to Taoism, and shows himself more than well acquainted with Chinese translator Arthur Waley's *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* and the extracts of Chuang Tzu.

Gorey has never married. "I've never been emotionally involved," he frankly avers and points out how for more than ten years he has just about managed to

shuttle fretfully in his Volkswagen bug between his apartment in the Murray Hill section of New York and quiet, occasionally bleak Barnstable on Cape Cod, always accompanied by his five pulviplume cats: Agrippina, Kanzuke, Kokiden, Murasaki, and Fujitsubo—the last four after names from Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*, possibly Gorey's favorite book. Gorey dedicated the drawings he did for Lear's *The Dong with a Luminous Nose* to three of his cats, and for his own drawings of cats—antic, be-jerseyed, grinning—he is famous: they humorously tumble over Gorey's personal postcards and, most notably, jack-flip all over the cover of *Amphigorey*, a lovely recent collection of fifteen of his otherwise difficult-to-find books. (There are plans for *Amphigorey Too*.) The cats who possessively roam his house are fat, fussy, and damned important to him.

Edward Gorey is tall, sports a grey beard, and has a glittering eye, always the wee trace of a smilelet there, but his face is gaunt, a bit saturnine, and often studiously uncertain, his mien suggesting the somewhat endungeoned, rather like a saint who lives on pulses, lentil soups, and alarming news. He is very informal and has a long-standing reputation for wearing heavy fur coats, tennis shoes, and lots of jewelry.

THIS MAN SAYS HE'S THE DIVINE SWEETHEART OF THE UNIVERSE

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