

The Gospel According to “God’s Cartoonist”

Jack T. Chick is a rarity—a pop-culture icon known for gospel tracts

He’s known as “God’s Cartoonist”—a writer, artist and pop-culture icon whose gospel tracts are either hailed or derided, yet so universally recognized that they are curios in a collection at the Smithsonian. He’s the world’s most published living author, but few people are aware of this incredible fact about him—if they even know who he is. It’s all part of the controversy and mystery of Jack T. Chick.

As his Chick Publications approaches its 50th anniversary in July, the company’s founder told *Charisma* in an exclusive interview he’d like the broader Christian community to re-evaluate the effectiveness of gospel tracts—an evangelistic tool that has fallen out of favor in recent years in the U.S.

“The big shots in the theological world look down on [tracts] as beneath them,” the notoriously reclusive 85-year-old Chick said in one of only a few interviews he’s given in his life. “But that didn’t stop Moody, Billy Sunday, the Wesleys and Charles Spurgeon from using them. Tracts saved England from collapse when the French Revolution was under way.”

In the last five decades, Chick has shipped nearly 800 million of his controversial tracts, comics and books. That puts him third on the list of the world’s best-selling fiction authors—just behind William Shakespeare and Agatha Christie.

“The amazing thing is how few people outside Christian circles know who Jack Chick is,” says Kurt Kuersteiner, author of the book *The Art of Jack Chick* and director of the documentary *God’s Cartoonist*. “Neither [Shakespeare nor Christie] were the most published authors in their lifetimes, and here is Chick

who has done it while he's still alive. He's done it right under the nose of the mainstream media, and nobody is talking about it."

Chick is most famous for his eye-popping artwork and storylines about the occult, the Illuminati and Catholic Jesuits. His work became especially controversial in the late 1970s and early 1980s after his comics criticized the Vatican, Mormonism and Freemasonry.

Larry Eskridge, the associate director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals at Wheaton College, says: "Given the era of underground newspapers and ... the Jesus People movement, the ... cartoon-in-your-face that characterized Chick tracts were kind of culturally appropriate."

The tempest of protest began after Chick published a six-part, full-size comic series based on information provided by ex-Jesuit priest Alberto R. Rivera. In the series, Rivera made allegations about the Jesuits, claiming the powerful group "advised kings and toppled governments" and undermined Protestant churches.

Amid the protest, many Christian bookstores stopped carrying Chick tracts. Some continued selling them but kept them "under the counter," says Chick Publications Vice President George A. Collins, who estimates a billion people have read the tracts.

Available in up to 100 languages, the tracts have played important roles in the explosive growth of Christianity in Asia, Africa and South America, experts say.