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## Artman's "The Miracle lady: Kathryn Kuhlman and the transformation of charismatic Christianity" (book review)

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# Book Reviews

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Artman, A. C. (2019). *The Miracle lady: Kathryn Kuhlman and the transformation of charismatic Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 248 pp. \$28.00. ISBN 9780802876706

As someone who grew up in charismatic circles, the very existence of this biography feels like something of a personal rebuke. I had never heard of Kathryn Kuhlman, and yet Amy Collier Artman makes the claim that Kuhlman played a vital role in the “gentrification” of charismatic Christianity in America. Artman tells a story in which Kuhlman’s early evangelistic preaching, her televised healing ministry, and her religious daytime talk show all played a part in the transition of charismatic Christianity from a marginalized eccentricity to a mainstream expression of evangelical faith. Kuhlman did this primarily through a shrewd use of radio and television that combined the themes and messages of the revival tent with a carefully orchestrated TV image.

Artman deals with Kuhlman primarily as a media figure. The book starts with a fascinating description of her appearance on Johnny Carson’s *Tonight Show* in 1974, emphasizing the celebrity status that the now forgotten Kuhlman once held. The main sources for the book come from the VHS tapes of Kuhlman’s two TV shows, archived in the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. While few of Kuhlman’s personal letters or papers are extant, these videos serve as rich sources for reading Kuhlman’s carefully crafted image as a preacher and healer. Artman situates Kuhlman among other media figures like Barbara Walters, Dinah Shore, and Johnny Carson, demonstrating how Kuhlman utilized the developing format of the TV talk show to normalize a brand of Christianity that was viewed as an oddity. Artman carefully describes and analyses scenes from both of Kuhlman’s shows to demonstrate that Kuhlman controlled not only her own professional image but also the guided narratives of healing and charismatic experiences told by her guests in conversation. By featuring their testimonies of charismatic phenomena in a digestible talk show format, Kuhlman made these experiences more palatable to a TV audience. Artman offers keen insight to how Kuhlman used the media to her advantage and helped set the stage for many of the prominent televangelists that followed her.

In addition to media studies, the book is a fascinating exploration of gender issues. This includes the precarious place that Kuhlman occupied as a female religious figure in an environment where women in ministry found little support. Artman shows how Kuhlman benefited from the advancement of women's status that came with second-wave feminism even as she failed to support the cause of women seeking similar opportunities for leadership. Artman could be critiqued for bringing an overly cynical view of some of Kuhlman's motives and actions, but there is no doubt that she maintains a basic sympathy for her subject. Artman persuasively advocates for the important place that Kuhlman should hold in the charismatic tradition, and she expertly demonstrates the role that new forms of media played in the development of American Christianity in the twentieth century. This excellent installment in Eerdmans' Library of Religious Biography series raises the profile of an important figure in American religious history.

### **Reviewer**

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