



"Where's 'Know Your Faith?'... 'In the Centerfold.'"

The Death Of the Saturday Evening Post

By FR. JOHN S. KENNEDY

The sad and frantic final years of the Saturday Evening Post are re-created in Otto Friedrich's "Decline and Fall" (Harper and Row, \$10.) Friedrich was one of the Post's editors from 1962 to 1969, when the long-lived magazine was done in.

There were several reasons for the Post's demise. One was its ruinously large circulation. Does that sound crazy? It isn't. A gigantic circulation was achieved by cut rate subscriptions, bringing in far less than it cost to produce the magazine. But profits would be realized from advertising. And the bigger the circulation, the greater the appeal to advertisers. That was the theory, but it was not the fact.

Advertisers didn't want the kind of clientele which the Post could offer. People who bought the magazine so cheaply were not likely to buy the products which prospective quality advertisers were selling. Such advertisers withdrew from, or avoided, the Post, and the magazine wallowed hopelessly in the red.

But the principal reason for the Post's troubles was that the business management did not see the difference there is between publishing and printing. "Publishing is based on ideas," Friedrich says. "Printing, by contrast, is a manufacturing industry, and it is based not on ideas but on physical objects—printing presses, factory buildings, paper mills, tons of wood pulp, vats of ink, fleets of delivery trucks." The corporation was loaded down with such impedimenta, and the Post was supposed to pay for them. This was its sole purpose and value in the eyes of management.

The editors sought to reverse the situation, and to gain control of the publishing company, so as to produce a magazine of integrity and strong appeal. Their struggle and their defeat are the substance of the story which Friedrich has to tell.

It is a story both comic and tragic, and fantastic in both (Continued on Page 9B)

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