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## Juicemanía: Interpreting Jay Kordich's Health Empire as Religion

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# Juicemania: Interpreting Jay Kordich's Health Empire as Religion

## Abstract

John "Jay" Kordich, an American "health reformer," salesman, author, and celebrity, is best known for his recipe books on diet and health and his series of television infomercials. With his charismatic presentations and playful sense of humor, he captivated audiences with his demonstrations of various models of juicers and the delicious taste of his fresh juices. Kordich is part of a long line of health reformers, fasters, and practitioners of alternative medicine that has persisted in American culture for over 200 years. These advocates of alternative medicine have not only met a need for medical treatment, but also for religion in a time of increasing secularization. This project analyzes the work of Kordich as a form of secular religion and how Kordich utilizes the language and structure of religion in his advertising as a way of communicating with an audience. I investigate a variety of primary sources produced by Kordich and then apply the theoretical frameworks of religious studies to them. Kordich's practice of juicing can be interpreted as religion due to its reliance on ritual behavior and belief. By positioning himself as an authority in a marketplace full of alternative spiritualities, Kordich opens up opportunities for himself to market his own products and promote his own life and family as the American ideal.

## Keywords

Jay Kordich, juice, juicing, secular religion

## Disciplines

Alternative and Complementary Medicine | Food Studies | Religion

## Comments

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Juicemanía: Interpreting Jay Kordich's Health Empire as Religion

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REL 400: Capstone Experience

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Grapes, pineapples, watermelons, oranges, strawberries, cucumbers, broccoli, cabbage. All of this produce makes up the cornucopia of plenty that fills the space of the counter that Jay Kordich is juicing at. He smiles off the cover of the bright green book as he inserts a bright orange carrot into his own trademarked Juiceman juicer, seemingly making a cup just for you. A large gold ring and a watch gleam, subtle reminders of the wealth Kordich has achieved as the self-proclaimed “Father of Juicing.” But wait, there’s more! A quick flip to the back cover of the book reveals a perfect family portrait. Jay’s older son John stares proudly into the camera as he inserts his own carrot into a juicer, a mirror image of his father. Jay smiles as he leans towards him. Meanwhile, Linda, Kordich’s wife, holds their younger son Jayson close to her cheek as they both grin. All of this suggests a happy family with full stomachs and good health. But who are they, and how did they receive all of this bounty?

John “Jay” Kordich, an American “health reformer,” salesman, author, and celebrity, is best known for his recipe books on diet and health and his series of television infomercials. With his charismatic presentations and playful sense of humor, he captivated audiences with his demonstrations of various models of juicers and the delicious taste of his fresh juices. Kordich is part of a long line of health reformers, fasters, and practitioners of alternative medicine that has persisted in American culture for over 200 years. These advocates of alternative medicine have not only met a need for medical treatment, but also for religion in a time of increasing secularization. Kordich’s juice can be interpreted as religion due to its reliance on ritual behavior and belief; similarly, Kordich’s methods of advertising his beliefs can be seen as sort of proselytizing. Importantly, Jay is not a singular man. He is part of a family in which juice and clean living are their center and symbol. By positioning himself as an authority in a marketplace

full of alternative spirituality, Kordich opens up opportunities for himself to market his own products and promote his own life and family as the American ideal.

## **Methodology**

For this project, I investigate a variety of primary sources produced by Kordich. These include his 1992 book *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, his 2013 book *Live Foods, Live Bodies!: Recipes for Life*, one of his infomercials, and his website Juiceman.net. Then, I take what I learned from these sources and apply the theories and ideas of religious studies to them. I utilize the approaches of a number of scholars, such as Émile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade, Wade Clark Roof, and Catherine Bell. Some of these scholars brought discriminatory and biased perspectives into their work and have been moved past from to some degree in the field. For example, Durkheim engaged with ideas of primitivism that degraded Indigenous peoples, while Eliade was known to have ties with far-right and fascist movements. However, their ideas are part of the groundwork of religious studies, and their theories have been helpful both in terms of actual analysis and in understanding how juicing is a type of secular religion. I would like to address the tense of the paper; although Jay Kordich himself passed away a number of years ago, I often refer to what he said in the present tense because I am referring to what he said in his books, not as in he is still actively saying these things. I also want to clarify that Kordich never claims to be a religious authority, nor for what he is peddling to audiences to be a religion. However, he is utilizing a language and system of thinking that is reminiscent of religion due to its potential effectiveness on an audience. Whether consumers realize that they are recognizing his message as religion or not, it's still having a positive effect on them in terms of them connecting with Kordich's messaging. This opens his ideology up for an analysis through a religious studies framework.

## The Juiceman

Jay Kordich was born on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1923 and passed away on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2017. He was extremely active in his youth, both as a star player on his college football team at the University of South Carolina and during his three years of service in the U.S. Navy.<sup>1</sup> However, Kordich admits to eating “high-fat, high-sugar” foods and neglecting his health. Kordich was diagnosed with bladder cancer in 1948 at the age of 25.<sup>2</sup> He describes this as “my body’s way of telling me that I had to shape up.”<sup>3</sup> After his diagnosis from conventional medical institutions, Kordich turned to alternative medicine as his form of treatment. He ended up seeking treatment from Dr. Max Gerson, infamous for creating the “Gerson diet.” Gerson prescribed him a treatment that was based in diet as opposed to medicine. The diet consisted mostly of raw fruits and vegetables; however, the most notable component was juice. Gerson instructed Jay to partake in “a regimen of drinking thirteen glasses of carrot-apple juice every day, beginning at 6:00AM and repeating the dosage every hour until early evening.”<sup>4</sup> Kordich claims that after three months, his tumor had disappeared.<sup>5</sup> Kordich credits Gerson’s treatment with his survival of cancer and continued this diet for the rest of his life.

Kordich explains that after his miraculous cure through the usage of juice, he made it his “mission” to share “the healing power of juice therapy” across the nation.<sup>6</sup> Kordich makes it clear that this mission was met with hardship. He describes traveling as a juicer salesman from

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<sup>1</sup> Jay Kordich and Linda Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!: Recipes for Life* (New York: Square One Publishers, 2013), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Jay Kordich, *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1992), 16.

<sup>5</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

town to town in his pickup truck and sleeping in the back of the truck in order to save money, even in freezing temperatures. Kordich often struggled to sell the juicers and would go days without a sale. Beyond his professional struggles, Kordich faced issues in his personal life, such as his inability to pursue a career in football and a divorce.<sup>7</sup> Kordich makes it a point that he had “a strong sense of working hard for [his] goals” and “never gave up the dream of teaching people about the power of juicing.”<sup>8</sup> During this time, he met and married a woman named Linda who assisted him in his professional goals; she will be returned to later in the paper.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, Kordich began to land roles on local morning shows. These appearances, combined with his in-person seminars and his personally branded juicers, soon granted him national television exposure and fame.

There is no scientific evidence that suggests a diet solely comprised of fresh fruits and vegetables would be able to cure cancer. However, this project doesn't seek to investigate if any of Kordich's claims about his life or his health advice are true. This is because the veracity of the statements doesn't change their significance or impact on those who listen to them. Through the stories of his battle with cancer, his discovery of juice, and his rise to fame, Kordich builds up a mythos for himself. By presenting personal information, Kordich becomes more humanized and creates an air of intimacy with his audience. An audience can identify with his struggles and celebrate his successes along with him. More importantly, this identification with him encourages the audience to desire to be like him. Kordich paints a picture of himself, an everyman, achieving good health through work that seemingly anyone can perform. He is playing on desires that are almost universal: the desire to be healthy, to live a long life, to have a

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<sup>7</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 21.

large family, to be prosperous. Through this desire, Kordich can sell you his religion, a religion of juicing.

### **Theoretical Frameworks for Secular Religion**

Before Kordich's beliefs around juicing can be explored, a framework must be established for the idea of secular religions. Many scholars of religious studies have put forth the argument that all human beings have an essentially religious nature. Sociologist Emile Durkheim described religion as "essentially social" and equated it to society in many ways.<sup>10</sup> For example, both religion and society create a "perpetual dependence" where people look to both God and society as a form of authority.<sup>11</sup> People "yield" to society because it is "the object of a venerable respect," similar to how people would respect a god. Durkheim also argued that "society is constantly creating sacred things out of ordinary ones."<sup>12</sup> Mircea Eliade describes a similar phenomenon that he calls "homo religiosus," and says that "homo religiosus always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real." He further believes that "life has a sacred origin and that human existence realizes all of its potentialities in proportion as it is religious-that is, participates in reality."<sup>13</sup> In this way, we can think of secular religion as people finding new sacred things in our secular society. Juice is one of them. Although a seemingly innocuous substance, people have projected their own emotions onto it. These include a desire for health and a fear of illness and death. If we are to believe Durkheim and Eliade, it doesn't even matter

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<sup>10</sup> Émile Durkheim, "Religion's Origin in Society," in *Issues in Religion: A Book of Readings*, ed. Allie M. Frazier (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1975), 143.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1959), 202.



what juice is; the object that is being made sacred could have been anything. However, juice has often been selected as an important object by health food advocates and practitioners of alternative medicine. While it is often unclear why juice has been selected in particular, in Kordich's case it may be related to his sale of juicers.

The scholar Catherine Bell specialized in ritual studies and challenged its use as a category in the field. She argues that "discussions of ritual density and change inevitably imply that there is something essential and stable that undergoes variations according to time and place" and "assume there is a substantive phenomenon at stake, not simply an abstract analytical category."<sup>14</sup> Bell's argument comes from a social constructionist standpoint. Earlier scholars of religious studies set forth a variety of definitions for rituals, all of which implied that rituals were a set action and were an inherent part of every religion. However, Bell is suggesting that there isn't any such thing as a ritual. Rituals are a socially constructed category imposed on religions as a way of understanding the actions performed as part of the faith. As a result, there's no essential nature to a ritual. With this in mind, it is possible to apply the term "ritual" to Kordich's behavior even if it is not inherently religious. Although Bell is claiming that rituals aren't an inherent category, there is still use to be found in the term as a way of categorizing actions. Calling the behaviors that Kordich is promoting "rituals" is helpful because it aids us in describing some of their key features, such as the element of belief involved, its highly structured nature, and the importance of its repetition.

With the amount of individuals presenting themselves as religious authorities and creating a platform for themselves to share their message on, Americans have been experiencing

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Bell, "Ritual Reification," in *Ritual and Religious Belief: A Reader*, ed. Graham Harvey (New York: Routledge, 2005), 266.

a spiritual marketplace where they can choose their beliefs for themselves and buy into them through the purchase of whatever materials that person is selling. Sociologist Wade Clark Roof explains that:

“in recent times especially, religious messages and practices have come to be frequently restylized, made to fit a targeted social clientele, often on the basis of market analysis, and carefully monitored to determine if programmatic emphases should be adjusted to meet particular needs. An open, competitive religious economy makes possible an expanded spiritual marketplace which, like any marketplace, must be understood in terms both of ‘demand’ and ‘supply.’”<sup>15</sup>

Similar to any other consumer product, religion is being shaped to meet consumer demands as opposed to expecting followers to conform to its requirements. In more modern times, there is a plurality of religious beliefs available for people to adopt and follow. This is because of a wider exposure to varied religions and because it is easier for people with modern technology to promote and spread their own religious beliefs. In a time where a person can choose to believe in anything, belief systems must appeal to an individual in order to gain followers. Conversely, people are free to select what they want to follow and how it intersects with their other beliefs. Kordich can and must advertise his ideas due to the creation of this marketplace. He has to frame himself as someone whose form of spirituality is better and more effective than other ones. Conversely, his followers can incorporate juicing into their lives without it conflicting with their more traditional religious beliefs. Roof notes that “outside of formal religious organizations there have long been other spiritual suppliers... who were able to

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<sup>15</sup> Wade C. Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 78.

organize informal networks and develop constituencies.”<sup>16</sup> As someone with no theological background or medical training, Kordich can be thought of as an alternative supplier of belief. However, Kordich’s original “informal network” has grown and been legitimized through his increased wealth and commercialization and access to major platforms such as television.

### **Conventional and Alternative Medicine**

Kordich’s ideas about juice can be identified as a form of alternative medicine.

Alternative medicine can be understood as treatments or approaches to ailments or illnesses that are used in place of conventional medicines and are not often recognized by scientific research as effective. These kinds of treatments stand in opposition to conventional medical institutions.

However, alternative medicine is similar to conventional medicine in that conventional medicine has been recognized as a sort of secular religion. Domaradzki identifies that Western medical institutions have their own “ideology, myths, dogmas, symbols, beliefs, gestures, practices, hopes and fears.”<sup>17</sup> He argues that it is a constant force in human life, provides comfort in times of difficulty, and fulfills a wish for “‘eternal’ health, youth, and beauty” that mirrors earlier religions’ goals of community support and health.<sup>18</sup> Medicine makes a covenant with the patient to have a long life, so long as one follows the rules on how to live.<sup>19</sup> Medical institutions share a hierarchical structure with organized religions, with physicians becoming the new clergy.<sup>20</sup>

Physicians carry immense social power in that they can decide the health and ability of one’s

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<sup>16</sup> Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 87.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Domaradzki, "Extra Medicinam Nulla Salus: Medicine as a Secular Religion," *Polish Sociological Review* 181 (2013): 23, <http://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2048/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/extra-medicinam-nulla-salus-medicine-as-secular/docview/1370729321/se-2>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

body. This can be extended to a wide variety of social scenarios, including “one's employment, capability of getting married and having children; gives the right to abortion and child custody, decides who, when and how can die and if a person is fit to stand trial.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, medical institutions are a social controller and legitimizer similar to religion.

Traditionally, religion has been a site for healing for many communities. Nuns in the Christian faith have often taken up positions as nurses, and many cultures looked to shaman-like figures for healing.<sup>22</sup> Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) relies on techniques that balance the ch'i, or vital energy and breath of a person, in order to maintain good health. Followers of TCM will utilize techniques meant to balance ch'i and place the body more in alignment with the cosmos when they experience illness.<sup>23</sup> Indian practices of Ayurveda have a similar goal in that they recognize the human body that needs to be balanced in order to be healthy.<sup>24</sup>

Medicine is also similar to religion in that people will question it, and when unsatisfied with their protests, will turn to other sources of knowledge. The scholar Domaradzki states that “there is nor can be any alternative to medicine” that is grounded in science.<sup>25</sup> Despite this, there are many examples of alternative medicine that have become prevalent in the modern era, such as “the anti-vaccination movement, AIDS and cancer denialists, [and] the critical psychiatry.”<sup>26</sup> Religious institutions such as the Church have a “rule of infallibility: any attempt at questioning

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<sup>21</sup> Domaradzki, "Extra Medicinam Nulla Salus," 26.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>23</sup> Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, 2020. “Sustaining the Body: Breath, Harmony, Health, and Healing.” In *The Body in Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2020), 103-104.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>25</sup> Domaradzki, "Extra Medicinam Nulla Salus," 28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

these dogmas meets with an anathema and excommunication.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, religious institutions usually punish or expel members who deny their authority. However, that has not stopped groups from criticizing religious institutions. The same applies to medicine. If medicine as a secular religion is an alternative to historical religions, juicing is an alternative religion to medicine.

### **The Juice**

In the context of Jay Kordich’s system of belief, juice refers to any sort of fruit, vegetables, or combination of the two that has been processed through a blender in order to remove the pulp, leaving behind only juice. According to Kordich, juice as a form of alternative medicine can treat a variety of ailments. These include a healthier body, a more attractive appearance such as better skin and hair, losing weight, a longer life, and a cure for various ailments ranging from colds to serious illnesses.<sup>28</sup> Kordich also states that “once you start to consume greens on a daily basis, your body will begin to detoxify itself” as a result of the “purifying diet.”<sup>29</sup> The explanation that Kordich provides for how fruits and vegetables heal is that they are “living foods” that contain a “life force.” This concept is purposefully kept nebulous, but refers to the idea that these foods have some sort of magical property to them due to their nature as photosynthesizers. This makes them “incredibly nutritious and even regenerative to the human body.”<sup>30</sup> Fruits and vegetables must be consumed raw because cooking risks killing the “life force” of the produce.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Domaradzki, "Extra Medicinam Nulla Salus," 28.

<sup>28</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 12, 25, 223, 252.

<sup>29</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

The idea that one substance can treat all of these issues for all people makes juice a form of “magic bullet” treatment. Scholars Chrzan and Cargill define a magic bullet cure in their book *Anxious Eaters* as something that says that:

“an adherent needs to do only one simple act, such as take a pill, avoid a certain food, or practice a behavior, and the results are guaranteed to solve the problem, however defined. Most importantly, there is rarely any mention of possible negative outcomes or even outcomes that don’t work at all.”<sup>32</sup>

Although there is a promise that juice will cure, that offer only stands if certain requirements are met. One can think of Kordich’s particular regiment of 13 glasses of apple-carrot juice for cancer. He provides some more general advice in his book, such as that “fresh juice made at home should be consumed within an hour to retain the precious enzymes that are vital for energy and superior digestion” and that juice must be “organic and not pasteurized, as pasteurization destroys enzymes and other nutrients.”<sup>33</sup> What is notable about these rules is the almost impossible nature of them. Most people are not able to purchase fresh juice or enough produce to make juice in large enough quantities or have the time to constantly be making juice. This difficulty serves two purposes. The first is that it takes the pressure off the juice to cure by putting the blame on the consumer for not juicing properly. Instead of the juice being at fault, it is the person for not perfectly following these strict standards. The second is that the difficulty in itself makes it more attractive. Scholars Veissière and Gibbs-Bravo argue that part of the appeal of religious groups such as cults is that they provide “hardship.” They explain that:

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<sup>32</sup> Kima Cargill and Janet Chrzan, *Anxious Eaters: Why We Fall for Fad Diets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 8.

<sup>33</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 13.

“humans... do not simply desire safety, freedom from want, and the satisfaction of basic physiological and social needs: they also thrive on a sense of purpose and sacrifice. They like to work hard for rare, hard-to-reach, highly arousing, often esoteric experiences—experiences that will give a select few the full satisfaction of having entered higher realms of truth, entitlement, prestige, and solidarity.”<sup>34</sup>

People engage in a purposeful hardship like juicing because they want to achieve what they believe juice advocates like Kordich have. The fact that juicing is a difficult process also may be part of what reinforces the idea of its efficacy. People who juice have to work at it. They must purchase enough produce at regular intervals so that there is enough to eat but not enough to spoil and then prepare it in a highly specialized way at specific times. The amount of time and effort that is put into juicing may make it seem as though it has to work as a technique.

Jay insisted that “the juice always comes first when I am planning what I will eat.”<sup>35</sup> However, he also had strict regulations when it came to what solid foods he ate. Along with a juice diet, Jay also followed a raw vegan diet. He defines this as someone who “consumes only nuts, legumes, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and herbs, all in uncooked form.”<sup>36</sup> With this limited set of foods that are “good” to eat, there are also a number of unacceptable foods to eat. Jay lists these as alcohol, soda, anything with artificial sweeteners, coffee, dairy, and meat products.<sup>37</sup> Despite the strict boundaries that Jay attempts to enforce with his lists of approved and non-

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<sup>34</sup> Samuel Veissière and Liona Gibbs-Bravo, “Juicing,” In *Food Cults: How Fads, Dogma, and Doctrine Influence Diet*, ed. Kima Cargill (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 65, [https://gettysburg.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01GETTYSBURG\\_INST/rol5uk/alma991004779942405231](https://gettysburg.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01GETTYSBURG_INST/rol5uk/alma991004779942405231)

<sup>35</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing*, 25-26.

<sup>36</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-70.

approved foods, there are still items that fall through the gaps. There are a limited amount of “suitable cooked foods,” which are “lightly steamed vegetables, cooked soups, tofu, legumes, and cooked grains.”<sup>38</sup> These sorts of gaps illuminate the previous point about the impossibility of the diet. There are some “living foods” that cannot be consumed raw without great difficulty, such as grains. The idea that someone can never consume a food that has been cooked is excessively restrictive. Kordich must provide some leeway to his followers, if only so the foods that he is recommending are actually edible.

The juice diet must be placed in the context of a larger fad diet industry in order to understand its structure and its goals. Scholars Chrzan and Cargill present a definition of fad diets with criteria such as “ask[ing] the user to eliminate one or several food groups,” “us[ing] only certain or special foods,” and “us[ing] personal testimonies as proof of effectiveness.”<sup>39</sup> A juice diet presents juice as a special food with unique and powerful properties. It also pushes the user to not consume other foods. In the case of Kordich, many of his infomercials and his website use customer testimonials to justify and praise the use of the product. In addition to the broader idea of fad diets, Chrzan and Cargill lay out four distinct categories of fad diets, with some overlap between them. Using their criteria, Jay’s diet is a combination of food removal diets and Clean Eating diets. Food removal diets are defined as diets that “generally limit one macronutrient believed to cause excess weight and obesity” and can include anticarb and antisugar diets.<sup>40</sup> Clean eating is “a dietary practice designed to decrease the intake of substances added to food that are considered to be dangerous and increase the intake of foods

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<sup>38</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 51.

<sup>39</sup> Chrzan and Cargill, *Anxious Eaters*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



that are whole, natural, organic, and minimally processed.”<sup>41</sup> Kordich’s diet meets the criteria for both of these diets through its strict removal of certain food groups in favor of organic food that is considered purifying for the body. Chrzan and Cargill note that “prior to 1994, most published works that used the term ‘Clean Eating’ and its variants were books on the laws of kosher, halal, and other religion-based systems of eating” and that the term was then adopted by bodybuilders.<sup>42</sup> The term has seemingly been coopted by the diet industry from religion.

### **Purity and Pollution**

A theoretical approach to understanding the roles that cleanliness, pollution, and order play in Kordich's ideology is Mary Douglas' theory of purity and pollution. Douglas puts forth the idea that cultures have binary systems of what is “pure” and what is “polluting” to promote order and to create cohesion in a larger social body. Douglas argues that “dirt is essentially disorder” and that “there is no such thing as absolute dirt.”<sup>43</sup> Douglas is deeming dirt a social construction as opposed to an inherent category. She also counters a common belief that cleaning serves a functional purpose, such as preventing disease. Instead, cleaning dirt is due to the more symbolic reason that “dirt offends against order,” making cleaning “a positive effort to organise the environment.”<sup>44</sup> These ideas of purity and pollution are serving critical social purposes. They control human behavior through a fear of danger, the idea of the body being contaminated in some way. This can be through immoral acts or social transgressions.<sup>45</sup> Greenberg simplifies these ideas by saying that “purity is related to wholeness, holiness, and normality” and

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<sup>41</sup> Chrzan and Cargill, *Anxious Eaters*, 147.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Milton Park: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002), 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

“pollution... disturbs equilibrium, destroys or confuses desirable boundaries, and engenders destructive natural forces or conditions.”<sup>46</sup> Douglas’ binary can help clarify Kordich’s ideas around juice by illuminating how juice serves as a way of ordering the body. As established before, Kordich defines juice as a purifying substance that can clear out toxins. The fear that people have over their bodies being contaminated can be assuaged through juice, which promises to clear out whatever has been left behind by previous polluting foods. The term “toxin” isn’t explained by Kordich; he never states what these toxins are or provides concrete ways in which they are hurting the body. This vagueness causes additional fear and allows a person to assume a toxin to be whatever they think it should be.

Additionally, Kordich sets up his own binary system with the idea of “live foods.” One of Kordich’s main sayings is that “live foods build live bodies;” the phrase became so closely associated with him that one of his books was titled *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*<sup>47</sup> The other side of this binary that Kordich presents is “cooked,” as in “cooked foods.” Kordich claims that heating fruits and vegetables in any way, such as through cooking, baking, or processing them, “stri[ps them] of a vital portion of their nutritive value.”<sup>48</sup> If one were to cook produce before juicing it, it “would lose its healing properties.”<sup>49</sup> Kordich also calls cooked foods “sterile,” which calls to mind both the sterility and lifelessness of something perfectly clean and in a reproductive context in regards to living things.<sup>50</sup> Although Kordich is utilizing the term “cooked,” in our common

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<sup>46</sup> Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, “Purity and Pollution” in *The Body in Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2020), 127, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474205320>

<sup>47</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Downpat Music, “Power Grind Pro Infomercial,” YouTube Video, 4:53, uploaded November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, <https://youtu.be/DEYUCXcldBU>.

discourses, the opposite of “alive” is “dead.” Kordich usually avoids the term “dead” in this context, but will occasionally reference it. He states that “live foods feed live bodies” while “dead foods do not.”<sup>51</sup> Kordich is playing on both a general social fear of death and his own specific promise to audiences that his diet will grant them a longer, healthier life. Although most of the food people eat is dead, such as slaughtered meat, it is not usually socially framed this way. Whether or not produce is even “alive” is somewhat debatable, seeing as it has been separated from its plant and will not grow anymore. However, a social aversion to death will make people conform to Kordich’s idea of foods that are “alive.” Kordich functions in the space of many binary systems: purity/pollution, alive/cooked, healthy/unhealthy. By breaking down diet into binaries, Kordich is simplifying the complicated choices that people have to make about food every day.

### **A History of Health Reformers**

Kordich is not a standalone figure in his beliefs. Instead, he comes from a long line of health reformers who suggested a wide variety of treatments focused on the body, food, and physical exercise. These terms “health reform” and “health reformer” may seem confusing at first. The idea of health reform today is often applied to ideas such as improving conventional American medical institutions, cutting health care costs, or creating governmental policies to improve healthcare. However, in the context of U.S. history, a health reformer is someone who sought to build and improve the U.S. health system and develop new forms of treatment for better living, regardless of whether or not they had any medical training.

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<sup>51</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 26.

The United States has had several periods which scholars call “clean living movements,” where there is a larger social push for healthier living. This often includes better diets, medicine, and exercise. The first “clean living movement” began in the Jacksonian era, the mid-1800s, while the second began during the Progressive Era, or the late 1800s to the early 1900s. Many of the major actors during this period are now referred to as “health reformers.” Many of their ideas are now widely accepted, such as the negative effects of drugs and alcohol, the regulation of food and medicine, and a need for sanitation.<sup>52</sup> For example, Upton Sinclair’s 1906 book *The Jungle* concerned itself with the sanitation of the meat industry and its effects on both the bodies of individual Americans and the social body of America as a whole.<sup>53</sup> However, some of their more unconventional ideas have remained on the fringes of acceptable medical practices, such as fasting and abstinence as a form of self-improvement for the body.<sup>54</sup> Sylvester Graham promoted an “avoidance of undue dietary stimulation” and advocated for a diet of vegetarianism, preferably raw. Additionally, he cut out meat, condiments, sugar, and drugs.<sup>55</sup>

Many health reformers presented “fads” that seem quirky and strange to modern-day audiences. For example, health reformer Horace Fletcher is most known for his ideas around chewing. Fletcher argued that most people do not chew their food thoroughly enough, which puts pressure on the digestive system. Improper chewing would lead to food not properly digesting and sitting in the stomach, which would then lead to it “putrefying” and causing gastrointestinal

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<sup>52</sup> J. Michael Duvall, “Processes of Elimination: Progressive-Era Hygienic Ideology, Waste, and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” *American Studies* 43, no. 3 (2002), 32, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40643381>.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>54</sup> R. Marie Griffith, “Apostles of Abstinence: Fasting and Masculinity during the Progressive Era,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2000): 599, 604, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30042198>.

<sup>55</sup> Alice Ross, “Health and Diet in 19th-Century America: A Food Historian’s Point of View,” *Historical Archaeology* 27, no. 2 (1993): 44, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25616238>.

issues. He suggested that a person should chew for a longer period of time until the food is practically liquid in your mouth, which then should be swallowed. Any leftover material in the mouth should be spat out. This technique for eating came to be known as “fletcherizing.”<sup>56</sup>

Benarr McFadden was obsessed with bodybuilding and advocated for American men to become more fit and strong. Fasting was a solution he proposed for losing weight and combatting disease. He would emphasize his own muscular physique through photography and would fast so his muscles were more pronounced, and he would even produce before and after photographs of this effect.<sup>57</sup>

There was an undeniably religious bent to the work of many health reformers. For example, John Harvey Kellogg, best known for his invention of various cereals as health foods, was a Seventh-Day Adventist, a branch of Protestant Christianity known for its emphasis on diet and health.<sup>58</sup> Edward Hooker Dewey’s book *The True Science of Living*, published in 1895, is subtitled “The New Gospel of Health.”<sup>59</sup> Dewey proposes that restraint in eating, such as by cutting out breakfast and only eating two meals a day, can lead one to be a “great deal better Christian.”<sup>60</sup> This alignment with religion is fitting because many religious traditions involve some sort of dietary laws or restrictions. Christianity has a long history of fasting as a practice, whether to purify the body or to curb desires. Similarly, Christianity has historically placed value on abstinence and the resistance of sexual urges.<sup>61</sup> Many religions have dietary laws that restrict the consumption of certain foods. For example, Jewish dietary laws for keeping kosher often

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<sup>56</sup> Duvall, “Processes of Elimination,” 33.

<sup>57</sup> Griffith, “Apostles of Abstinence,” 607-610.

<sup>58</sup> Ross, “Health and Diet in 19th-Century America,” 44.

<sup>59</sup> Griffith, “Apostles of Abstinence,” 603.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 603-604.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 600.

exclude the consumption of pork. Islam, Baha'ism, Jainism, Sikhism, Mormonism, and Seventh-day Adventism all prohibit the drinking of alcohol. Vegetarianism is promoted as the ideal way of eating for many Hindus and Jainists.<sup>62</sup>

Many of the beliefs of early health reformers are shared by Kordich. Kordich is a raw vegan, an eating practice similar to the beliefs of a reformer like Graham. He also engages in juice fasts, claiming that they “cleans[e his] body and refres[h his] soul.”<sup>63</sup> This is reminiscent of McFadden's fasting practices. Additionally, the focus on Kordich's athleticism in his infomercials is similar to McFadden's obsession with muscular, fit bodies. Kordich himself is actually a proponent of fletcherizing. Although he doesn't directly call it that, he describes how “slow, thorough chewing” allows the body to absorb nutrients better and for the digestive system to work less.<sup>64</sup> Tracing these ideas show that Kordich's ideas did not develop in a vacuum and that he is drawing from a variety of source materials. The fact that Kordich can also repackage these ideas and sell them alongside his own beliefs shows that these types of beliefs are appealing to people. They are meeting some desire to control one's body into being healthy.

### **The Juicer**

In order for a believer to engage with Kordich's spirituality of juicing, diet, and health, he needs to sell you ritual tools. Although juice may seem like Kordich's core product, with overflowing cups of bright, fresh liquid ever present in his books and infomercials, this is a bit of a misdirect. In a way, it is a product of his through his various recipes for making it. However,

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<sup>62</sup> Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, “Food: Laws and Practices,” in *The Body in Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2020), 81, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781474205320>.

<sup>63</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 250.

<sup>64</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 44.

selling juice would go directly against Kordich's philosophy as someone who believes that juice should be drunk fresh. What he's selling you is the techniques to *make* juice. These techniques are needed for a user to engage with his spiritual beliefs. The actual core product needed for a believer to practice Kordich's religion is the juicer. Kordich's juicer is the main piece of technology needed to engage in his rituals; without it, a practitioner is unable to engage with his ideas. In order to follow a juice diet, one must literally "buy into" it. Kordich's fixation on the juicer is unique in that it leads to an equation between the ritual technology and the human body. The juicer is both an extension of one's body that "pre-digests" the food, while also being in competition with the body as a more efficient form of consumption.

Similar to how there is no unanimous answer as to what the best kind of juice is, there is also much dispute about the best kind of juicers for making juice. The general consensus is that juice must be produced with a juicer and not a blender. Kordich distinguishes juicers from blenders by claiming that "the blender purées or mashes fruit," while "the juicer releases the life-giving, body building juice from the fruit or vegetable and discards the indigestible fiber." Jay explains that this is a positive thing in that the lack of fiber causes the juice to be absorbed into the body more quickly.<sup>65</sup> Jay is notable in that he markets his own juicers, calling them the best equipment for making juice. Alongside the juicer, Jay recommends a variety of other tools for preparing a juice diet. These include a blender, a cutting board, a food processor, a glass measuring cup, a kitchen scale, knives, and strainers, along with a few other tools.<sup>66</sup> These tools have their own particular specifications as well. For example, Jay discourages the use of aluminum or nonstick pots and pans due to the idea that aluminum may leach into the food as it

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<sup>65</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 39.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-43.

is being prepared.<sup>67</sup> These particulars again highlight the importance of rules and regulations in Kordich's ideology.

A common metaphor for the body is the body as machine. The body "works" through different processes such as respiration, circulation, and digestion. As with any machine, there is a focus on efficacy and efficiency. There is a fixation on how well the body performs an action, and how efficiently it can then do that action. The body should be productive, quick, and successful. Any fault of the body is therefore an embarrassment or a sign of weakness. To resolve this issue, there is a constant urging to remedy any sort of issues with the body to make it a more productive machine. Kordich seeks to meet this need through his marketing of his juicers. In his infomercials, Kordich compares the human body to his juicers as a method of advertisement. His claim is that the juicer can do what the human body does when it comes to digestion, except it can do it even better. Kordich explains that the body can only get a "fractional or minimal amount of food value out" of produce through normal digestion, while the juicer is more efficient at getting the full food value out of the juicer. He describes this as a sort of "pre-digestion" that allows the body to work less while digesting food.<sup>68</sup> Juicing vegetables is framed as a matter of efficient eating. Kordich points out that it is difficult for the average person to consume large quantities of fruits and vegetables in one sitting, stating that he can't eat "seven or eight carrots" in one sitting.<sup>69</sup> However, since a juicer condenses produce down into a liquid form, it is much easier for a person to drink more of it, and by extension eat more of it. While you may be inefficient, the juicer isn't.

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<sup>67</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 41.

<sup>68</sup> Downpat Music, "Power Grind Pro Infomercial," 3:18.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:24-5:46.



Throughout Kordich's advertisements, there is an emphasis on the human body as a failure. He claims that "Anytime you have a juicer, you're doing to the food what the body tries to do, but is very inept."<sup>70</sup> He also goes so far as to call the human mouth "dumb" for eating whatever is put up to it.<sup>71</sup> One of Kordich's many routines involves him picking up a carrot and squeezing it with his hands. When there is no effect, he observes that "not a drop of juice comes out." However, when the carrot is run through the juicer, the juicer is able to produce juice.<sup>72</sup> He also makes it a point that what a juicer does is almost impossible to do by hand. The juicer is necessary to make the product. Despite this, there is also an equation between the body and the juicer. Kordich explains how when the human body consumes a raw vegan diet, it "becomes the ultimate juicer, extracting what it needs from the food and converting it into liquid."<sup>73</sup> He elaborates on this by saying that during digestion, "our bodies extract as liquid what they need from the fiber, which passes on to the lower digestive tract. For all intents and purposes, the extracted liquid is juice, containing the same elements as the juice you make in your kitchen with the juicer."<sup>74</sup> In Kordich's world, there is no framework for understanding digestion, or even the human body to an extent, that is without the juicer. The juicer is both *better* than you and *is* you. It is worth noting that Kordich's original line of juicers was called the "Juiceman" juicers. His name is necessary to sell the juicers, and the juicers are necessary for him to build up his commercial empire. He is synonymous with his own juicers.

### **Televangelism and the Prosperity Gospel**

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<sup>70</sup> Downpat Music, "Power Grind Pro Infomercial," 5:30-5:34.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:30.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:16-1:24.

<sup>73</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 207.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

A helpful comparison when thinking about Jay Kordich's tactics and goals is the televangelist. As technology and new forms of media have emerged, some religious leaders have met them with enthusiasm and adopted them as methods of communication. This has led to the creation of the "televangelist," someone who primarily performs their ministry through methods such as radio and television. The term primarily refers to people who are Christian, whether they are part of a specific denomination or non-denominational, although the term has been applied to people of other faiths. Much of the success of televangelists is based on their own personal appeal and charisma. They are usually highly personable and are able to present to and connect with large crowds. Every form of media is capitalized on as a possible method of reaching a potential consumer, such as television, social media, and livestreaming. An emphasis is placed on their physicality, such as being good-looking or athletic. A performance-like quality and an element of showmanship can be found in their style of preaching. Commercialism factors into the businesses of televangelists. Many televangelists sell products related to their ministries, such as books, CDs, DVDs, or other media containing their messages. In many ways, televangelists themselves are what is being consumed through the purchase of a customer's access to them through tickets to live shows, broadcasting, or products.

Christian televangelists broach a wide variety of topics in their ministry, such as faith, healing, and social issues; however, one concept that many televangelists refer to is the prosperity gospel. Bowler defines the prosperity gospel as "a wildly popular Christian message of spiritual, physical, and financial mastery."<sup>75</sup> Some of the ideas it espouses are that "God increases the riches of those who give," "God wants people to prosper," "the faithful receive

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<sup>75</sup> Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

health and wealth,” and that “God will grant financial success and good health to all believers who have enough faith.”<sup>76</sup> The prosperity gospel may seem to run counter to much of what Jesus Christ preached and how he lived. Jesus did not live a life of luxury or splendor and endured a significant amount of suffering. He also often favored the poor, the ill, and the socially outcast as those who would achieve salvation. The prosperity gospel is also problematic in what its inverse implies. If the gospel is true, then those who are suffering from poverty, ill health, or any other misfortune are experiencing these issues due to a lack of faith. This places the blame for these issues solely on the individual, rather than considering larger issues like systemic inequalities, discrimination, or an inadequate healthcare system. It also suggests that the solution must come from the individual in the form of increased faith in God, as opposed to any sort of outside help.

The idea that some sort of effort or belief will grant a person benefits such as health and wealth is pervasive in American culture. One can think of best-selling self-help books such as *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne. The book alleges that there is a “secret,” the power of positive thought, that is so powerful that it can drastically alter and improve one’s life. Byrne takes this beyond positive thinking simply improving one’s attitude and goes so far as to suggest that someone’s positive internal thoughts can affect external scenarios and cure one’s illnesses. The idea of the United States being a meritocracy, or that anyone can succeed in American society through hard work and dedication, is one of the foundations of American life and culture. The prosperity gospel and the idea of meritocracy work together in that both try to justify why some people are wealthier and healthier than others without looking at causes such as privilege and inequality.

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<sup>76</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 6.

Kordich can be thought of as a televangelist from an alternative spiritual background, bringing his gospel of juice to American homes through television and print. Kordich experienced a spiritual revelation when he was cured through the juice diet prescribed to him by Dr. Gerson. As a result, Kordich “made a personal commitment to dedicat[ing his] life to spreading the word about the power of juicing.”<sup>77</sup> Similar to a preacher, he found a calling and dedicated himself to his vocation. The framing of the knowledge of juicing as “the word” compares it to the Bible or another form of holy scripture. What Kordich has discovered is a “secret” that he is willing to share with you. At least, he is willing to sell it to you. Kordich’s career started with him doing in-person demonstrations of juicers at health food stores, home shows, department stores, and country fairs in the hopes of selling them.<sup>78</sup> Kordich frames this less as an effort to make a profit and as a more benevolent affair, stating that “regardless of whether [he] made a sale or not, [he] was repeatedly gratified and excited by the response to that first sip of carrot juice.”<sup>79</sup> This can be thought of as a form of proselytization. Kordich had hopes to impart that moment of conversion that he first experienced with Dr. Gerson.

Kordich turned to television as his primary form of communication after seeing the impact that his television appearances had on the sales of his juicers.<sup>80</sup> He also notes how tiring in-person demonstrations could be, especially due to his older age; television appearances and a team of employees who could travel in his place were able to reduce his time traveling.<sup>81</sup> As someone whose career was at its height in the 1990s, Kordich primarily relied on television as his form of digital media to spread his message; however, he also had his own website.

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<sup>77</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing*, 16.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

Televangelism has grown to embrace the Internet as its one of its primary forms of communication.

Kordich's life seemingly fulfills many aspects of the prosperity gospel. His central belief system, the power of living foods and juice, served as the cure for his cancerous tumor. Additionally, he claimed that this diet was what kept him fit and healthy for the rest of his life. Many of the people featured alongside Kordich on television note how "good he looks" and how active he is for his age. Efforts are made to make Kordich appear athletic in his media appearances; he often wears a sports tracksuit, and clips of him performing activities such as playing football on the beach are shown. On a more superficial level, Kordich claims that juicing can help one achieve a more attractive physical appearance, such as clearer skin and healthier hair.<sup>82</sup> In terms of work ethic and belief in regards to health, Kordich frames his own cancer as a failing of his body when he says it was a sign he needed to "shape up."<sup>83</sup> It was through this "shaping up" and commitment to healing his body that he was able to cure himself; it involved body work.

Kordich chooses to emphasize physical health over wealth. For example, he states that "Linda and I have been blessed with good health and vitality, without which money and success mean nothing."<sup>84</sup> The idea that Kordich and Linda are blessed would imply that it is the juice that is blessing them. Regardless of this claim, it is clear that Kordich has become very successful from his juicing endeavors. Kordich starts his book *Live Foods, Live Bodies!* by commenting that readers "may remember [him] as the author of *The Power of Juicing*, which reached #1 on The

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<sup>82</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 2.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

New York Times Best Seller list in 1992” or know him from his juicing infomercials.<sup>85</sup> A viewer could imagine how much money that Kordich has made from the sales of his juicers, books, and other products. All of this profit can be directly tied back to the juice and the faith that Kordich holds in it. Kordich acknowledges that he experienced financial hardships early on his career. These were solved over time as he became successful through his hard work and persistent belief in his mission. The hard work he shows to have put in can be related to the idea of meritocracy or a “bootstrap” mentality. A subtler blessing that Kordich and Linda have is each other and their happy, healthy family. The concept of the nuclear family is still presented as an ideal in American society.

The message being sent to those who view, read, or otherwise consume Kordich’s preaching is that through belief and commitment to juicing, they can receive the same blessings that Kordich has. Kordich even goes so far as to promise the reader that they “will learn the secrets to vital health that have sustained [him] for all of these years” in *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*.<sup>86</sup> Part of the attractiveness about ideas such as the prosperity gospel or Kordich’s and Byrne’s “secrets” is the idea that one can learn a singular thing or technique that will grant them the success they want, almost magically or instantly. If such a secret were true, it would obviously make life simpler. There is also the appeal of knowing something that someone else does not. If something is a secret, then that is because someone else doesn’t know about it, and someone else may not even *want* you to know about it. Many conspiracy theories and alternative ways of thinking promote themselves as something “they” don’t want you to know about; there’s this idea that there’s some sort of mystical, hidden knowledge being held by authorities that the

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<sup>85</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

average person cannot obtain. In this case, juice is a magical healer and a possible pathway to success. Despite its healing capabilities, it is not something that formal medical institutions recognize as medicine. However, Kordich is willing to give his audience that secret, so long as they are willing to pay for it.

### **Denial of Responsibility**

An important element to Kordich's sales tactics that cannot be overlooked is his hypocrisy. Kordich's books start with disclaimers that they are not giving health advice, that they cannot diagnose anyone with a health problem, and that the recipes inside are not medicine. These warnings may seem well-meaning, but they are usually more for legal protection so that an author like Kordich cannot face legal measures if the information their book provides causes harm or death. Beyond just a simple legal disclaimer, Kordich also insists in the text of his book that "juices are not medicine."<sup>87</sup> However, the ways in which Kordich presents his ideology makes it difficult to *not* interpret juices and juicing as a form of medical treatment. Kordich's descriptions of a body being filled with toxins before a juice diet and the ways it becomes healthier and stronger after a juice diet read like medical advice. The juice recipes found in *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing* often describe the "properties" of the juice, such as giving the drinker "iron-rich blood" or easing their "aches and pains."<sup>88</sup> A glossary-like section at the end of the book similarly describes what different fruits and vegetables can do to the human body due to what substances they contain, such as being able to strengthen the immune system or lessen anxiety. It is simple to draw a connection between the way that Kordich is describing these foods and how modern medicines could be described by doctors as treating certain

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<sup>87</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 13.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 99.

ailments. Kordich positions himself as someone highly knowledgeable about these products and familiar with their effects as if he were a doctor. Kordich's cohort of alternative medicine advocates and health reformers echo his sentiments; on one of Kordich's infomercials, a guest speaker, Shelly Redford Young, describes the juicer as a "medicine cabinet."<sup>89</sup> Scholars Chrzan and Cargill note that what "many... so-called wellness experts are doing is presenting themselves as specialists yet disavowing any responsibility for their recommendations or the consequences of following them."<sup>90</sup> Through his disclaimers, Kordich can absolve himself of any responsibility for his actions and for any negative consequences that may arise from following a juice diet.

Ironically, Kordich assures his readers that he "[is] not trying to sell a fad diet. [He is] not going to tell you precisely what to eat and when to eat it."<sup>91</sup> Kordich's entire brand is telling people exactly what to eat and how to eat it, down to every last detail. His books are filled with rules and regulations regarding diet. Kordich's diet plan closely matches definitions of fad diets as put forth by scholars. Most importantly, if a reader has the book in their hands, it means that they have either already bought it, acquired it from someone who bought it, or are considering buying it as they riffle through it in a store. Kordich has packaged this way of living in a product meant for purchase. It is true that there is nothing in the books forcing a reader to conform to Kordich's standards. However, the combination of Kordich's positioning of himself as an authority, social pressures to conform to a certain body and set of food practices, and general anxieties about health and death will lead people to look to him for answers.

### **The Juicewoman**

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<sup>89</sup> Downpat Music, "Power Grind Pro Infomercial," 9:00.

<sup>90</sup> Chrzan and Cargill, *Anxious Eaters*, 152.

<sup>91</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*, 240.



Throughout his career and even throughout this paper, Kordich is mostly framed as a solo figure. Through his stories of his own hard work to heal his body and find success and his framing as a “Juiceman” as opposed to someone who is part of a team, he may seem as though he found fame and fortune entirely on his own. However, many of his achievements were won through the hidden support of his wife, Linda Kordich. Linda is introduced in the biography section of *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing* as a key supporter of Kordich during the early days of his career and instrumental in getting him a spot on *The Rita Davenport Show*.<sup>92</sup> Although it is easy to see Linda as a side character in her husband’s story, Linda has been an important part of Kordich’s empire. Linda was a vegetarian and a juicer long before she met Kordich, having started in early childhood when her mother decided to start the family on a vegetarian and juice diet. Linda’s mother met Kordich first at a seminar at a health food store. Linda met him soon after. While the two were originally interested in working together as business partners, their relationship soon blossomed into romance.<sup>93</sup>

Kordich periodically mentions Linda throughout *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing*, whether directly or indirectly. Linda is the first person he thanks in the acknowledgements section. Linda is credited with helping with many of the recipes found in the book.<sup>94</sup> She is often referenced in the context of family and home life, such as the two of them taking care of their children and serving guests food. The inclusion of these details allows Kordich to display another part of his identity, which is being a father. Kordich can center his own nuclear family, an American ideal, as another desire of his consumers that he can meet. It also opens up a consumer audience in the form of other families that want to pursuing dieting. The use of the

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<sup>92</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 49.

<sup>94</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing*, 12.

pronouns “we” and “our” in the book implies Linda’s important role in her and Jay’s shared life. The introduction of *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing* includes a small section on Linda and Jay’s marriage. Importantly, Linda is credited as part of the reason why Jay was successful in obtaining a spot on a television show.<sup>95</sup> Linda is also shown to have made many of the same sacrifices that Jay made early on in their career, such as sleeping in the back of Jay’s camper while pregnant with their first son.<sup>96</sup> By including her in the introduction, Linda is framed as an integral part of Jay’s success story. Although Linda is a constant underlying presence in the book, she is entirely a passive actor; she never once is actually heard from. The only perspective the reader is able to get is Jay’s. Because of this, it is often easy to forget about her role in his career. As someone constantly supporting him and raising their two children, Linda has put in a lot of unseen labor into Jay’s career. One could imagine her developing these recipes while making food for the family.

In *Live Foods, Live Bodies!: Recipes for Life*, Linda moves into a much more prominent role. She is credited as a co-author along with Kordich. In the introduction, Jay states that his successful career is “actually due to the expertise of Linda, who is the strength behind all that I do.”<sup>97</sup> There is also some clarification as to how Linda became involved in the juicing lifestyle. Jay explains that Linda’s family is vegetarian, and Linda has been a vegetarian since she was 10 years old and consuming juice since she was 12 years old. She is also defined as having her own career as “a teacher of vegetarianism and veganism, as well as a living foods advocate.”<sup>98</sup> She is deemed “a known expert in her own right.”<sup>99</sup> In *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, it is not clearly

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<sup>95</sup> Kordich, *The Juiceman’s Power of Juicing*, 21.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

defined what sections have been written by Jay and which have been written by Linda. Each chapter doesn't explicitly state who wrote it, and the pronoun "I" is used in each section. Context can be used to surmise who is speaking in each section, such as a reference to their other spouse. Based on this, the first three chapters seem to have been written by Jay, while the next three chapters have been written by Linda. The opening to the third section has also been written by Linda. The third section is mostly comprised of recipes, which Linda likely contributed to based on the previous acknowledgment that Linda wrote many of the recipes for *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*. Linda has moved up in significance to Jay's message.

Jay and Linda Kordich's Juiceman website serves as both a storefront and an archive of their activities. The site is very simple in design, with a plain white background. The main page is a seemingly endless scrolling list of all the products they sell, such as a juicing masterclass, books, an audio library, CDs, and DVDs. Interspersed between the products, there are customer testimonials praising the efficacy and impact of the products. The website is outdated in many sections. For example, a "Christmas Special" sale was still up on the page in mid-March.<sup>100</sup> Interestingly, what is missing is any sort of acknowledgment of Jay's death. There is no memorial or obituary listed; Linda is referred to only once as "Jay's widow." Jay at one point is referred to as being 89 years old. While this may be a reference to how old he was when a particular book was released, it is left unclear in a way that suggests that he is still alive.<sup>101</sup> However, the website has certainly been updated since Jay's passing in 2017 since the site references the COVID-19 pandemic. If one is wondering who is still running the website after Jay's passing, an email may provide that hint. A personal email seemingly belonging to Linda

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<sup>100</sup> Juiceman, "Home," accessed February 11, 2023, <https://juiceman.net/>.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

Kordich is listed as a point of contact to request more information.<sup>102</sup> By preserving and periodically updating the page, Linda is preserving and extending the life of Jay. She also has a platform to keep sharing her message that has the veneer of authority given by Jay's name and persona. In the absence of Jay, she has become his successor. She is maintaining his empire and making it seem as though he is still alive.

Linda's role in Kordich's career is indicative of the role of the family in his career. Religion is often founded in ideas of the couple or the family. Juicing has always been rooted in family for Linda. Besides the family she started with Kordich, she was introduced to juicing by her own mother as a child. When comparing the tactics of Jay Kordich to evangelical preachers, it is notable that many evangelical preachers function as husband and wife teams.<sup>103</sup> The language that Jay uses to describe himself as "the Father of Juicing" positions him as a patriarchal and authoritative figure. It is also reminiscent of the idea of "God the Father" in Christianity. He, Linda, and their children form a "holy family" of juicing. It is worth noting that despite Linda's amount of labor in her and Jay's career, she has not historically received the same amount of credit. This may be reflective of the ways in which American society is patriarchal. Jay's children are also silent actors in both books and infomercials; their perspectives can be implied to not be as valuable as a result. While the nuclear family is present in Kordich's messaging as a way to capitalize on a viewer's desire for their own, it is an incredibly idealized version that lacks any of the voices of the actual members of it.

### **The Juicefamily**

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<sup>102</sup> Juicemania, "Home," accessed February 11, 2023, <https://juicemania.net/>.

<sup>103</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, 106.

Linda states that due to her and Jay's background as vegetarians and juicers, "it was only natural for living foods to become the center of [their] universe."<sup>104</sup> This idea of a central object to a family, an organizing symbol, can be best thought of through the lens of the totem.

Durkheim states that:

"the totem expresses and symbolizes two different kinds of things. From one point of view, it is the outward and visible form of what I have called the totemic principle or god; and from another, it is also the symbol of a particular society that is called the clan. It is the flag of the clan, the sign by which each clan is distinguished from the others, the visible mark of its distinctiveness, and a mark that is borne by everything that in any way belongs to the clan: men, animals, and things."<sup>105</sup>

Living foods have become the symbol of the Kordich family. Books and other forms of media involving the Kordichs often involve pictures of massive amounts of fruits and vegetables. The image of the carrot is the most iconic, with Jay juicing one on the cover of *The Juiceman's Power of Juicing*. They distinguish themselves and their family from others through their extreme lifestyle of raw food. Besides just representing their family, living foods represent what they believe in. On the surface, it may just seem that their beliefs are just in eating healthy foods and living a healthy life. However, there is a deeper religious meaning to this belief. Living foods represent a life of purity, both in eating pure foods and the pure foods filtering out toxins built up from other impure foods. They represent a mystical life force that will bring health and wellness. They are also the source of prosperity for the Kordich family.

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<sup>104</sup> Kordich, *Live Foods, Live Bodies!*, 49.

<sup>105</sup> Durkheim, "Religion's Origin in Society," 28.

This idea of living foods can also be related to Eliade's idea of the axis mundi, or cosmic axis, "for it is around the sacred pole that territory becomes habitable, hence is transformed into a world."<sup>106</sup> The worldview that the Kordichs have socially constructed for themselves is reliant on living foods. They have organized their entire lives around it. Without it, their way of life would collapse. This clan that they have built allows them to protect each other and their way of life. Any sort of extreme diet, including the raw veganism and juicing that the Kordich family partakes in, is extremely difficult to maintain. As established earlier, eating is as much of a social and cultural act as it is a biological imperative. People sharing food and eating together is a social bonding tool.<sup>107</sup> Engaging in an extreme diet can be difficult in that it can alienate people from eating meals with others. However, since the whole family is consuming a raw vegan diet, the Kordichs can rely on each other to maintain the diet. Their house and housework can be fully devoted to eating raw foods, and meals of raw food can be shared with and consumed with each other; the clan protects itself.

## **Conclusion**

Jay Kordich's expert marketing and evangelical messaging allowed him to build an empire where he could sell both physical products and his own beliefs. Although secular at its roots, Kordich's sale of juicers and promotion of juice take on a religious appearance through Kordich's adoption of religious language and proselytization in order to gain profit. Beyond just a cloak of religiosity, Kordich's beliefs can be thought of as meeting the criteria for secular religion as put forth by Durkheim and Bell. The idea that religion can be bought or sold does not delegitimize it as a system of belief, as evidenced by Roof's idea of a "spiritual marketplace."

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<sup>106</sup> Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 33.

<sup>107</sup> Chrzan and Cargill, *Anxious Eaters*, 12.

Spirituality and consumerism work in a cyclical relationship where Kordich's spiritual beliefs about a healing life force in produce can be used to sell juicers, and Kordich's sale of the juicers allows a consumer to engage with a certain kind of spirituality. Kordich did not and could not do this work on his own; instead, he needed a "holy family" to help him advertise to audiences and do the household labor necessary to maintain the diet.

Kordich's religion of juicing and other forms of alternative medicine are important to study because of the idea that people will always look to some object to project religion onto. As evidenced by the long history of health reformers and promoters of alternative medicine in the U.S., people will routinely look to juicing and other similar practices as sources of guidance, healing, and comfort. This should be a concern because it focuses on one of the most intimate parts of ourselves, our physical bodies and the food that we put into them. Kordich's ideas about juicing frame the body in a way that can be degrading, such as implying the failure of the body in comparison to the juicer. His ideas can cause genuine harm; besides how taxing a juice diet can be on the body, the concept that conventional medicine should be rejected in favor of juice for ailments such as cancer could cause someone's death. Kordich also places value on attributes such as having a healthy, thin, and beautiful body and implies that a body lacking these things is subpar. Not all of these traits are accessible to all people. Overall, juicing is something that is based in exclusion; it is only available to those who have the money, time, and labor to put into it, and it will most likely not work for most people like it did for Kordich. These negative aspects of juicing and the diet industry as a whole must be critiqued in a constructive way for the good of the whole social body. Applying theories of religion to Kordich's ideology provides us a framework to understand these beliefs, even in a secular context, and to investigate how and why his ideas appeal to us.

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