

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE BY AMERICA'S FOREMOST
CHRISTIAN ANALYZER OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE, &
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S SPIRIT-LED LEADERS

OPEN ATTACK ON SWAGGART

The December issue of **Forum**, the pocket-sized edition of **Playboy** magazine, featured a lengthy and graphic article by a self-confessed prostitute on how she attended a Jimmy Swaggart crusade and seduced two "workers." (Yep, I read it so you don't have to. Besides, all they want to do is entice you to buy magazines.) A full-page, color photo of Swaggart, Bible in hand, accompanies the article which is titled "Sexual Rapture at a Jimmy Swaggart Crusade." The authoress then describes how she, angered by Swaggart's attack on pornography, attended the Denver crusade determined to find someone—anyone—she could seduce. Her purpose (besides selling the article) was to prove Swaggart was a phony.

She was unsuccessful at first. The "lead musician"—whom she called a saphead—headed her off at the pass by replying to her advance: "Whenever I get lonely I just take out my Bible and read it." Later she lured a "crusade member"—who admitted he was hired off the street to help out—into her room where she seduced him. The same night she entrapped a young man working as a row captain by telling him she was lonely and needed someone to comfort her. The young man brought his Bible to her room but was unable to resist her nudity. After minimal sexual contact he fled in tears—saying he had sinned. The authoress concluded this proved Swaggart's message had no validity.

Conclusion

1. God's leaders need to be on the lookout. There are growing numbers of people angered by our message who are dedicated to entrapment. What may seem to be a very private encounter may appear in print—or pictures. I recently read of a man who had hired a beautiful young woman who had herpes to pose as a convert so she might seduce a youth leader and infect him.
2. As usual, Satan has overplayed his hand. Even those who disagree with Swaggart's methods and theology will be solidly behind him in this battle.
3. Instead of proving Jimmy to be a fraud, the article proves his inner circle (those he supervises) are untouchable. Hooray!
4. Rejoice! The enemy has been smoked out and is snapping and snarling in front of his lair. It's always easier to do battle with the seen than the unseen. This article puts to rest once and for all the intent of the **Playboy** industry. It is the enemy of God.
5. I hope, Jimmy, you'll not reply in kind—on the air or in print. Let your friends fight the battle for you. Reply with your gift of miracles. Even Satan cannot refute changed lives and healed bodies.

SORRY, SANBALLAT

As expected, my critique of Dave Hunt's **The Seduction of Christianity** (December 4, 1985) has drawn heavy response. A number of friends have written saying "Right on!" Hunt called my little review "libelous" and has demanded full retraction. Several radio and television stations have called, wanting me to debate Hunt on the air. KBRT in Los Angeles said both Hunt and his publisher, Harvest House, were eager for the debate. In other words, brew up a good controversy and it will sell books, regardless of who gets hurt or confused. Gosh—all I did was express an opinion, but it was like putting my hand in a sack full of wildcats. I am constantly amazed at the amount of anger there is out there.

The fundamentalists have accused me—in the past as well as concerning this latest controversy—of believing that errors in the church can be corrected through love and patience. Their method is to root out the error and nail it to some kind of cross—a method used (ineffectively) by religious leaders 2,000 years ago against another "false teacher." Or, in a more (or less) humane procedure, they demand public debates. Such debates, however, only bring additional confusion to the body of Christ. Several years ago when Mrs. Billy (Ruth) Graham invited me to take an hour of prime radio time on the Graham radio station, WMIT in Black Mountain, North Carolina, to refute earlier charges brought by a radio preacher who was attacking the gifts of the Spirit, I turned her down. There was no way to say what I wanted to say without attacking the other man and his theology. I did not want to do that before unbelievers and the lambs in the flock. Such debates do not build up the body of Christ. They often cause irreparable damage in relationships. I've never regretted my decision. Shortly afterward I wrote a note to myself in the front of my Bible: "Jamie, you can't defend the Holy Spirit and reveal Him at the same time."

When I wrote my critique of Hunt's book, I was writing to senior leaders in the kingdom, many of whom had asked, "What do you think?" Now it is time to move on to more important things. Like Nehemiah, we need to be firm when enticed to come down and debate with Sanballat and Tobiah. Paul warned Titus to stay clear of "foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law," saying they are "unprofitable and useless" (Titus 3:9). Let us say with Nehemiah, "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down."

NOTE: For those who are upset that I did not do a documented critique, Alan Langstaff has done an excellent and thorough critique on Hunt's book in which he deals with techniques, motives and the major issues involved. It will answer all your questions and can be given to those who are confused after reading the book. You may order it free of charge (enclose SASE) from **Kairos Ministries**, Box 27186, Golden Valley, MN 55427.

UPDATES

Jo Ann Farah Dies

She was a dear and personal friend, but it was time for her to leave and join the Church Triumphant. After battling cancer for years, the wife of Dr. Charles Farah died at the age of 51 on December 14 in Tulsa. I had spent two hours with her the week before, talking about her future life in heaven. Dr. Farah is professor of biblical theology at Oral Roberts University graduate school and co-pastor at Tulsa Christian Fellowship.

Baptist Controversy Flares Again

Two Southern Baptist laymen, saying they were "irreparably harmed" by a ruling at the last meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas, have filed suit against the SBC in a federal court. Robert S. Crowder and Henry C. Cooper want the 52 people elected to the SBC committee on boards barred from serving. They claim Dr. Charles Stanley, president of the convention, violated the bylaws and used excessive authority. The plaintiffs say they were present and tried to object from the floor but were not recognized by the chair. In other words, be careful who you ignore—they may demand recognition in court.

Christian Schoolteacher Found Innocent of Murder

In November I reported that Kevin Pheifer, teacher at the First Christian School in St. Cloud, Florida, had been arrested and charged with murdering a 5-year-old girl whose body indicated she had been beaten. In late December a jury found Pheifer innocent. Prosecutors are now looking at the child's parents, who brought the earlier charge, saying there is evidence they may have been the ones who severely abused little Amanda Hersey—and then blamed the teacher.

Laying It On the Line

Chew on this: "It's getting harder and harder to tell the difference between what you hear in Pentecostal or charismatic circles from the old evangelical-fundamentalism which does not believe God still heals or works miracles....Why is this? I think we've worked too hard to reassure other Christians that we 'charismatics' are safe and sane...." Dennis Bennett, in his latest newsletter, **The Morning Watch**, takes a hard but scholarly look at creeping compromise. It's a solid word, and I recommend it to each of you. Write: Christian Renewal Association, P.O. Box 576, Edmonds, WA 98020-0576.

National Leadership Conference—May 19-22

Rooms at Ridgecrest Conference Grounds in Western North Carolina are being snapped up as word has gotten out that Oral Roberts, Ern Baxter and Morris Sheats will be the principle speakers at the May leadership conference. Thirty seminar leaders will cover topics such as leadership, healing, church government and specialized ministries. You'll worship under one of the nation's top worship teachers, Barry Griffing. This will be the one conference you and your wife should not miss. Last year's attendance was over 2,000. Write Jim Jackson, Box 1000, Montreat, NC 28757 for registration information.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

THE BRITISH HOUSE CHURCH MOVEMENT

After three days of intense meetings with certain apostles, prophets and pastors in England, I woke one morning with a nagging feeling I had seen this kind of movement someplace else. As I sat on the side of the bed in the home in Essex where we were staying, it came to me. What I had observed over the last few days was almost identical to the methods and spirit used by the church in the early chapters of Acts.

I had been invited to England by John Noble, who fills the apostolic position in Team Spirit, one of the house church "streams"—as they call themselves—

spreading throughout the country. Noble is part of an apostolic team and is recognized as the leader among the 10 men and women who currently make up the leadership group for Team Spirit. They work together with their differing abilities to give oversight to a number of smaller house churches—not only in the London area but throughout Great Britain and into Scandinavia. Each of these churches is self-governing and self-supporting, yet related because of their rather loose submission to the Team Spirit leadership in London.

Significant among those cooperating with Team Spirit is the community in Romford, Essex, a suburb of London. More than 200 families have moved into this neighborhood and formed two Christian communities. It is not exclusively a Team Spirit neighborhood, for others live in the subdivision also. But it is heavily saturated by families who are spiritually related. They have two schools functioning at the present and a number of other ministries—both to their own people and to the community.

These English house churches are more than what Americans might call home groups. Many of them number in the hundreds in membership. However, instead of putting their money and energies into building and maintaining expensive church buildings, they rent secular meeting halls for their corporate services and concentrate their energies on ministry to people—rather than on inanimate objects.

Streams in the Desert

Team Spirit is but one of several “streams” of house churches flowing in England. Growth over the last few years has been astronomical. Since the movement is in its infancy—and is quite unorganized—it is hard to estimate how many churches are actually involved. Conservative estimates are that at least 150,000 people are actively involved in England alone. Many of these churches are independent and not associated with any of the major streams of house churches.

David Matthews, an Irish minister now living in London and part of the Team Spirit leadership team, gave me a copy of his soon to be published book **Man's Inhumanity to God** (Kingsway), in which he outlines the history of the house church movement in England.

In the early days the movement grew by “transference”—that is, Christians in traditional churches, desiring more than a dead liturgy, **transferred** their loyalties to a house church. Some of the English clergy called this “sheep stealing.” But house church leaders, like Matthews, replied, “We did not steal sheep; we simply grew grass.”

Over the last four or five years the “transference” process has virtually stopped. For one, many of the evangelical churches—especially the Anglican Church—are now open to the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. However (and this is causing far more of an impact), those now joining the house churches are people off the street who have never heard the gospel before. Most of the pastors are in their late 20s or early 30s and virtually none have a theological education, nor have they been preconditioned by church institutionalism.

According to Matthews, the movement was an outgrowth of the charismatic movement which began in the United States and quickly spread to England. Since the historical church was not favorable to the renewal movement in those early days (things have changed radically over the last several years), Spirit-baptized Christians were forced to meet in each other's houses. As these newly energized Christians began studying the Bible, they discovered the early church was basically a “house church” movement. Whereas most modern Christian activity took people out of the home and into some kind of church building, these British Christians wanted to reverse the direction.

Problems With Divisions

The result, according to Noble, was "sanctified introspection." This was a call to reassess not only methods but theologies as well. While their vision was to restore the church to its rightful place in society, in practice the house church movement seemed isolationist and separatist. This led to divisions among the house church leaders themselves for a time, although many relationships are now being restored.

My time in England was spent primarily with those pastors who are part of Team Spirit. My knowledge of other streams, therefore, is both limited and mainly secondhand. I did spend one exciting evening with the pastors and apostles making up two other parts of this same stream. Gerald Coates heads a group called **Pioneer** and Dave Tomlinson oversees **Team Work**. Altogether these three groups represent about 150 individual churches. I was particularly impressed with the place of women in the ministry and the freedom of worship, which included a great deal of expressive dancing.

On Sunday I met with the Team Spirit group in a rented community center. This is a weekly gathering of the home groups primarily in the Romford area who function under various apostles. Monday night I met with the combined pastors from the three groups. I was deeply impressed with the solidarity and the commitment toward unity. Noble, for instance, has found favor among the evangelicals and has been actively involved with the annual Spring Harvest festival which brings many evangelical Christians together. One of the primary pastors cooperating with Noble was instrumental in bringing Billy Graham to Sheffield last year.

Other Streams Flowing

There are other streams in England just as vital. To the far right is the group headed by Bryn Jones called Harvest Time, which publishes the magazine **Restoration**. There are about 100 churches submitted to Jones' apostolic leadership. Harvest Time is characterized by those I talked to as a heavy discipleship movement. Jones is looked upon as the final (almost papal) authority. The weekend I was in England I discovered several controversies brewing in that stream. One concern had to do with head covering. Word had come down from the top that all women were to cover their heads in the worship services (i.e., wear hats, shawls, etc.). There seemed to be a feeling among those I talked to that the problem was not with Jones' decree as much as with the heavy-handed methods used by some of his disciples to enforce it. It was similar to the problems which caused so much commotion in the discipleship movement in the United States several years ago. Jones has the power to remove pastors, relocate them and place new men in leadership.

A friend who visited the Keighly group connected with Harvest Time commented on the degree of self-consciousness among the worshippers. She said it reminded her of "the early days of the Full Gospel Businessmen's meetings when everyone was looking around to be sure they were doing all the right things—lifted hands, closed eyes, broad smiles, bouncing and clapping....They are obviously new in the experience and still very self-conscious." This is quite different from the impression I received when meeting with Team Spirit where, if anything, the group was totally uninhibited.

Many Americans know Jones from the outstanding work he did in salvaging New Covenant Fellowship in St. Louis, Missouri, after the pastor was involved in an adultery scandal a few years ago. He still has oversight in St. Louis as well as a few groups in other areas of the United States.

Another, and smaller, stream is represented by Barney Coombs, a disciple of Bob Mumford. This group of churches is directly related to the discipleship movement

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in the United States and looks to Mumford as their apostle and final spiritual authority. While this stream is much more isolationist, the relationship between Coombs and other leaders has remained warm and friendly.

A fourth stream is found in the denominational churches—primarily among the Anglicans but also in Catholic, Methodist and Brethren circles. Here such men as Canon Michael Harper, director of the Anglican SOMA organization, is still recognized as a major spokesman. This, however, is a stream with many components. Harper speaks only for Anglicans—and then only as an advisor, not in a functional apostolic role. None in this stream are linked except in their own denominations.

The Quest for Unity

As Matthews points out, there is a thin line between “sanctified introspection” and insularity. Many of the house churches felt they were model building—that this alone would bring unity. In other words: Get your internal structures right and God will bring unity. Matthews is right when he says that will not happen. Correct doctrine, correct church structure, correct behavior—none of these will bring unity, for they are all relative. Unity comes only when diversified people worship the living Christ.

The Team Spirit stream, and those associated with it, do not seem to be as interested in changing society as in changing lives. Church structure—that is, the relationship of the home groups to apostolic authority—is important, but not primary. Noble and those functioning with him seem to be far more concerned with establishing the saints in their individual walk with God than with lumping them together in institutional unity. This has led to a healthy diversification, not only among the churches but among the leaders.

Evidence of the diversification, even in the house church movement, has been the publication of magazines and other materials promoting the doctrines of that particular “stream.” Yet, at the same time, there is a growing desire among many of the apostles in the house church movement to “flow together.” Apparently Matthews is right: There is a new awareness that God is not on the side of any particular group. Instead, all the leaders are being called to a new subservience to God. Given this new alignment, unity may come after all.

