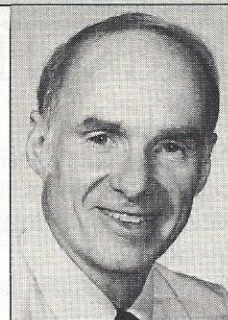


BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE &
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S CHRISTIAN LEADERS



Jamie Buckingham

THE LATEST ORAL ROBERTS CONTROVERSY

The big question on the lips of many attending the January Idea Exchange in San Diego was: "What is Oral Roberts really saying and how will it affect our ministries?"

The question is in reference to Roberts' pronouncement that if he can't raise \$4.5 million by March, God will "call him home."

In March 1986 Roberts said God had given him one year "to turn the ORU medical school into a total missionary outreach to the nations." He had a mandate from God, he said, to raise enough scholarship money to pay the tuition for all the students in the school of medicine—roughly \$45,000 each for a total of \$8 million—or God would "call him home." In turn, these students would agree to spend four years on the mission field as medical missionaries following graduation.

No one questioned him back then. By January, however, Roberts had raised only \$3.5 million—enough for about 77 scholarships. It was then he went on the air—saying to unbelievers what he had been saying to believers for almost a year.

The inevitable happened. The secular press, always looking for something unusual, grabbed the ball out of Roberts' arms and ran wildly down the field shouting, "Fumble."

But was it a fumble on Roberts' part?

Comedian satirist, Lewis Grizzard, to whom nothing is sacred except Elvis Presley, wrote a column saying, "You don't go around saying God is going to kill you if you don't come up with four-and-a-half big ones if you're not (1) totally crazy, (2) an incredible put-on, or (3) somebody who will say absolutely anything to make a sale."

If those are the only options, then Roberts did fumble the ball. But Grizzard missed one option: Did God say what Roberts says He said?

Most people, at least those who only know God as a kindly gentleman who sits behind clouds and winks at abortion, injustice and greed, shake their heads in horror and say,

"The God I know would never say a thing like that."

They see Roberts' statement as the ultimate in fund raising, that is, "If you don't give me money, God will strike me dead. Only you can save me."

Who wants to carry that kind of guilt around?

Three Questions

Here are three questions to consider.

Is God capable of saying such a thing?

Is Roberts capable of saying it simply to raise money?

Is Roberts capable of honestly believing God said it although He didn't?

In answer to number one, Roberts quotes Philippians 1:23-25 where Paul says he is "in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart...Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." You really have to stretch biblical exegesis to make that mean, "Send me money or God will call me home."

This does not erase the possibility that God said exactly what Oral says He said.

In answer to number two, despite the fact Cathy Milam of *Tulsa World* calls Roberts a "charlatan," I've found him to be a man of unflinching integrity. He has but one desire: to obey God. Without commenting on taste, at least that rules out gimmick.

As to number three, every man is capable of thinking he heard God when he didn't. That's the reason the prophet is to be subject to the prophets, the reason all utterances should be checked by other godly men.

Oral Roberts has never been conventional. In his current issue of *Abundant Life* he has a full-page picture of himself, hand extended, pleading: "Partners, I'm asking you today to come into agreement with me concerning my life being extended beyond March."

Frankly, that sounds like a 1950 tent preacher. But that doesn't make Roberts any less authentic. All it proves is that you can take the preacher out of the tent, but you'll never take the tent out of the preacher.

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

Nobody disputed Roberts a year ago when he broke this news. If the prophets felt he was deceived, they should have warned him then—not now.

Besides, I think Roberts really did hear God.

CHURCH AND POLITICS: WATCH OUT!

Pat Robertson's "announcement" that he is running for president, along with the increased interest of Christians in seeing other Christian candidates elected to office, is going to be healthy for our nation. On the other hand, unless pastors and church leaders stick to the laws governing churches and politics, it could be a disaster for some churches.

Most churches, at least those who are chartered and have received status with the Internal Revenue Service, are labeled by the IRS as "501(c)(3)" organizations. What does this mean?

It means the church itself is exempt from most taxation, including income tax on revenue, sales tax and most property taxes. It also means the church's contributors may deduct their contributions from their taxable income when filing their federal tax return.

Because of this, churches are strictly regulated by the IRS. For instance, churches and other 501(c)(3) organizations are permitted by tax laws to engage in a small amount of lobbying on issues. But the tax laws specifically and clearly prevent 501(c)(3) organizations from being involved in any campaigning for or against particular candidates.

Note: Profit organizations (as opposed to nonprofit organizations) are not hindered by these laws. Thus Strang Communications, which publishes this magazine as a for-profit venture, is free to endorse or oppose a political candidate without violating the law.

IRS regulations state that an organization is not qualified to have a 501(c)(3) status "if it participates or intervenes, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office." The penalty for violating this law can be the loss of the church's tax-exempt status. That's fair. If we take advantage of the law which allows us to be tax exempt, we should submit to the restricting laws of the IRS.

This law does not prevent Christian individuals from being involved in partisan politics. But it is important that pastors, other church staff members and lay leaders make clear that their involvement is personal and

individual and that it in no way suggests or implies the support or involvement of the church.

The Robertson Question

Does this mean churches can endorse Pat Robertson up until the time he makes an official announcement? When I asked this question of Herb Ellingwood, an attorney on staff for Americans for Robertson, he hedged. One of Robertson's campaign managers assured me, however, that churches would be allowed to solicit signatures and gifts without violating restrictions by the IRS until the time Robertson made an official announcement. I reported that in my November-December 1986 *Buckingham Report*.

I am grateful to Nancy LeSourd, an attorney with Gammon & Grange in Washington, D.C., a law firm that specializes in nonprofit tax and communications law, for setting me straight. Mrs. LeSourd points out that while the federal election campaign laws might allow this, the IRS has a much more expansive definition "which would sweep persons such as Robertson under the rubric of political candidacy." She quotes from the Exempt Organizations Handbook which is the guide given to the IRS agents who monitor churches. It defines a "candidate for public office" as:

"An individual who offers himself, or is proposed by others, as a contestant, for an elective public office, whether such office be national, state or local. Regs. 1. 501(c)(3)-1 (3) (i) (ii). It does not matter if the candidate is not endorsed by a political party or if the office is not contested by any political party."

Mrs. LeSourd has researched this matter and says the exempt organizations branch of the IRS has informed her law firm that on an informal basis they consider Robertson to have held himself out as a political candidate. They are advising all churches and nonprofit organizations to strictly avoid any political activity such as soliciting signatures or contributions for Pat Robertson.

VIOLATIONS

Last June *The Biblical Recorder* published a list of eight activities which could be construed as violations of the law and would jeopardize a church's 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. These must all be applied even to "non-candidate" Robertson, as well as any other announced or "non-announced" candidates for public office.

- A church resolution endorsing or opposing candidates.
- A political rally held in a church, unless it is clearly educational and is open to all candidates.

- Apparent endorsements of or oppositions to candidates placed in church bulletins, newsletters, etc.

- Use of church stationery in endorsing or opposing candidates.

- Statements of support or opposition when included as part of church services, whether made by the pastor or by someone else.

- Use of church bulletin boards to support or oppose candidates, especially if the space is not made available to all candidates.

- Use of church facilities or grounds for events which either support or oppose candidates.

- Placement of posters supporting a candidate on property owned by the church.

Does this mean a candidate, who is a member of—or friend of—the church, should not be allowed to speak in that church? No. But it does mean that he should not use his platform to campaign personally. He may speak about issues or non-political subjects. Most certainly it means the person who introduces him should not encourage people to vote for him. It is permissible, of course, to encourage people to vote without endorsing a particular candidate. It is also permissible to ask people to pray for the candidate.

RUNNING A TIGHT SHIP

The pastor of a large, independent church told me he had almost waited too late to tighten up his leadership structure. He had long believed in a loose, almost structureless organization. Had the church remained small, he could have continued to fly "by the seat of his pants." But the church grew. When he finally realized he could no longer fly without sophisticated instruments, it was almost too late.

One staff member, hired to oversee a portion of the rapidly growing ministry, described the church structure as "organized chaos." After losing a number of qualified men who could not function without a degree of structure (the church did not have job descriptions, for instance), the pastor began to tighten a few screws. When he did, a lot of people began to squirm. Some screamed in pain.

Structureless churches presumably foster creativity and individuality. They also allow the leader almost limitless freedom to come and go as he likes. But such churches can be frustrating to work in if you are a staff member or ministry head. Why?

1. Without official rules (some kind of SOP) staff members and ministry heads will make up their own. They may not find out they were right or wrong until too late.

One church operated with a very loose

concept of receiving offerings. The head usher was one of the founding members of the church. In the early days, long before there was strict fiscal accountability, the pastor authorized the usher to give to the poor from the offering plate sometimes. If a single mother came in and needed shoes for her baby, the compassionate usher could give her \$10 straight out of the offering basket. This allowed the usher the freedom to function as the early deacons in Acts 6. The church grew, however, and one day a stranger saw the usher taking money out of the plate. A scandal followed. Rules, as binding as they are, might have prevented this heartache.

2. Sometimes a charismatic leader holds the church together single-handedly. But his inimitable style doesn't provide staff members or ministry heads with a realistic role model.

3. People will resent control when it finally becomes necessary.

Nothing kills a growing, progressive church any quicker than a group of people who begin to moan about "the good old days." By the good old days they mean days when they were in control. But when an organization grows and structure is finally imposed, things like reports, working hours, enforced vacations and days off all become mandatory.

One person in our church constantly gripes because the music in our morning services is now controlled from the platform. He remembers the "good old days" when someone out in the congregation might spontaneously strike up a song and everyone would join in. I loved those days also. But when 1,000 people are jammed into a building, starting a song from the back row is seldom effective.

Loosely organized churches often have trouble perpetuating themselves. Loose management styles usually don't include training successors. Young people are not encouraged to go to school and prepare for the ministry or the mission field. If there is no program to train leaders there will always be a period of confusion when someone leaves and no one is ready to take his place.

Some churches and ministries are so loose they lose their creativity because sustained creativity requires enough structure to follow through on ideas. The writer who says, "I write as the Spirit leads," might get a few things on paper, but he will never keep putting them on paper. Every writer knows his greatest friend is the deadline, that unyielding rule which forces him to submit a finished product by a certain time—or not get paid. Sustained creativity—be it with writing, art, music, sermon preparation or

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

planning an Easter program—requires enough structure to follow through on ideas. Use this structure to coordinate different research groups, offer creative people appropriate advancement, and march your army on to its next objective.

CONFRONTING STAFF HOSTILITY

Routine hostile reactions to directives are not only annoying, they get in the way of relationships. One senior pastor told me that, although his minister of music was a great musician, he was going to replace him. "Every time I ask him to do something new, he scowls."

For instance, when the pastor said he wanted to lead a few choruses at the morning service, the worship leader agreed; but his face showed his unhappiness. The pastor was invading his turf.

"It's been this way for five years," the pastor said sadly. "I'm tired of battling his hostility. I'd rather have a second-rate musician who's cooperative than a top man whose quills are always extended."

Sometimes a subordinate's objections to certain assignments, directions or criticisms seem to be ritual. One elder told me of their frustration with their pastor who reacted defensively to almost every suggestion of change. While the pastor was on vacation recently, the elders decided to confront him about his method of serving communion. They felt his approach to the Eucharist was irreverent and wanted him to treat it with more respect.

When the pastor returned, the men voiced their concern. Before they could discuss their feelings, however, he exploded. He accused the elders of meddling in his areas of expertise, said they were conniving behind his back, and shouted that he was "the boss" of the church. The angry reaction to all suggestions of change was typical. Since then the elders have backed off, which is tragic, for the pastor needs modifiers to help him mature.

Hostile reactions to directions (or even suggestions) may be triggered by unconscious echoes of some past problem the person has had with authority. One youth director, raised by an alcoholic mother, invariably reacted with an "Oh, I can't do that. I'm not qualified" every time the pastor suggested a major project. Minimal counseling revealed his mother had constantly badgered him as a child saying, "You'll never amount to anything.

You're a loser."

An associate pastor, raised as an army brat by a domineering father and even more strict mother, understandably reacted with anger to all authority.

When a pastor criticized the church secretary for her sloppiness and asked her to clean off the top of her desk in the reception area, she burst into tears. Her late husband always accused her of being messy. Any mention, therefore, of lack of neatness triggered an emotional display of guilt.

These reactions on the part of your staff—and we all experience them—echo battles with parents, previous bosses or authority figures, even bygone battles with you.

Most pastors are able to tolerate these rituals and work around them. But they are disruptive; they get on people's nerves, hamper efficiency and prevent genuine relationships.

What to do? First, take a look at yourself. Are you guilty of the very things you notice in others? If so, ask a friend to speak truth to you. (Better, go to your elders and ask them to help you.)

Then, once the beam is out of your own eye, confront your problem head on. First keep a log of the ritual reactions—dates, things asked, and an accurate description of the person's reaction. Make certain of the pattern. Then call the person in—not at the point of another reaction but in a calm moment—and go over the log. Ask the subordinate if any of your requests resemble an earlier, unhappy experience in his/her life. Be sure to point out your gratitude that the person does the required work. You just want to get to the bottom of the low-level hostility—and put an end to it.

The person may be grateful to discover you appreciate him and are not out to get him. Ministry may be necessary at this point, either inner healing from past sins or some form of deliverance if you sense an evil spirit is involved. Then see if you can convince the person the battle is over and he no longer has to walk around peering through the slit in a shield or brandishing a sword. Besides, once home from the war, shields are unnecessary, swords are heavy, and both get in the way of peace-time activity.

STARTLING STATISTICS

Recently released statistics on abortion in America show that 35.9 percent of all babies conceived were aborted. Seventy percent of abortions were obtained by white females; 35 percent of abortions were obtained by women who had previously had abortions; and 28 percent of all abortions were performed in two

states: California and New York. (These figures were for 1981, the latest year data is available. All figures have significantly increased since then.) Total U.S. babies aborted since *Roe vs. Wade*: 21 million.

The statistics on the babies that were not murdered through abortion are equally startling. According to American demographics of the 63 million U.S. children under 18, 27 percent of white children and 63 percent of black children do not live in households with both of their natural parents. Of these only 3.1 percent live with their natural father. Some 31.2 percent never see their natural father and another 22.8 percent see him less than once a month.

Ladies Home Journal reports that more than 50 percent of American girls have had sexual intercourse by age 16; more than 50 percent of American boys by age 15. More than one million teenagers will become pregnant this year. That works out to 3,000 teenage pregnancies a day costing \$16.7 billion in state and federal welfare payments.

U.S. Surgeon General Everett Koop reports that 1.5 million Americans have AIDS—and the number is doubling every 10 months. Originally a disease for homosexual men, now 45 percent of those with AIDS are females. Koop estimates 70,000 will die of AIDS in 1991 and the health care costs for those patients will be \$16 billion that year.

In addition, the nation's homeless population grew 25 percent this year. New York City has 80,000 homeless people—compared to St. Louis which has 15,000. Some 28 percent of homeless people in cities, who live in their cars or on the streets, are families.

Conclusion: despite Reagan's insistence that "America is back," the moral condition of this nation has never been worse. The question: what will it take to save America?

USE YOUR TELEPHONE

The Dartnell Institute says the cost of sending one business letter from your office has now risen to \$9. That figures in dictation to a secretary, typing, stationery and postage. Word-processed or machine-dictated letters run \$6.50 a letter. The result is going to be more and more churches and businesses will be using the phone—rather than the mail.

Despite the confusion as to which company offers the best deals and can handle your needs, you can save a lot of money if you'll check around. For instance, our church subscribes to Transcall America which saves us about 35 percent off regular long distance rates. We have 12 different code numbers, one

assigned to each department or to key members of the pastoral staff. I have two of those numbers. I use one for my personal calls and the other for ministry-related calls. Each month our financial secretary gives me a read-out of all my calls for the previous month. Last month my record showed I made 66 long distance calls. I spoke a total of 298 minutes—an average of 4.5 minutes a call. Cost was \$83.91. That's an average of \$.28 a minute or \$1.28 a call. That's considerably less than \$9 a letter.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

TRY FOOTWASHING FOR A CHANGE OF PACE

Last year, the Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida, decided to hold a church-wide footwashing service on Easter Sunday night. It was one of the most moving spiritual experiences of my life.

I have participated in footwashing on a number of occasions, but always in small groups. The idea of calling the entire church into a footwashing service was a far more radical procedure.

On the three Sundays prior to Easter we announced that the Easter night service would be a church-wide footwashing service coupled with communion. On those Sunday nights I preached on the principles of John 13. I asked the people to pray and ask the Lord if they were to attend. I made it plain that anyone who could not agree theologically, or who felt they would be embarrassed by participating, would be excused from that service. Any who wanted to come to observe, but not participate, would be welcome as long as they did not bring a hostile spirit.

Two weeks before the service I went through the details with the staff. Through a local linen service we rented 150 towels. We purchased 30 inexpensive, plastic basins, choosing the rectangular size rather than the shallow, round type which would splash water. We made certain the basins were big enough to accommodate the largest foot in the congregation.

The Sunday before Easter I asked the people to prepare themselves for the service. I kidded with them, saying it would be easier if the ladies did not wear panty hose and the men at least trimmed their toenails. I then explained that what would happen to the heart was more important than what would happen to the feet—that blessings would come to those who washed, and to those who were washed.

During this time I heard from a number of

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

people in the body who cherished the memories of earlier footwashing services.

Easter Sunday morning a final announcement was made from the pulpit—building expectation. That evening I met early with the elders, the pastoral staff and our ministry teams which always meet before the Sunday night services to pray. I explained the procedure we would use and handed out assignments. We prayed together and went into the service expecting God to meet us in a special way. We were not disappointed.

Order of Service

We had about 600 people present. Here is the order of service we used.

We had earlier removed the pulpit and replaced it with two rows of 10 chairs facing each other about 10 feet apart. In the middle of the row were 10 basins already filled with warm water (no soap). We opened the service with 10 minutes of praise and worship, received the offering, then I taught for about 20 minutes on the subject of inner cleansing, dealing specifically with footwashing and communion. I closed by giving instructions to the congregation concerning the procedure we would use for the ministry to follow. I told of my own reservations—nearly all dealing with false pride and an unwillingness to expose my ugly feet. Then, very deliberately, I removed my shoes and socks, and rolled my trousers up to my calves. Until then I had sensed tension and unrest in the congregation. However, the moment I took off my own shoes to lead the way, I felt the tension ease. The people settled in—ready for what was to follow.

As the musicians led the congregation in another song, our senior pastor, Curry Vaughan and his wife, Nancy, came to the platform. They sat opposite each other in the first set of chairs. Jackie knelt in front of Nancy, and I in front of Curry, and washed their feet—drying them with the towel. We then exchanged seats and they washed our feet.

When this was over the 10 elders and wives came to the platform and occupied the two rows of chairs, each elder facing his wife. Each elder washed his wife's feet and dried them. The wives then washed their husband's feet. While this was happening the ministry teams and the church staff were doing the same thing on the front row—washing the feet of their spouses and then reversing the situation.

When the elders finished, they left the platform, taking the basins with them. Leaving

the basins on each side of the platform, they went directly to assigned stations around the auditorium where ushers brought them the communion trays. I then invited the people to leave their seats, going to the nearest communion station or to come forward to have their feet washed by the staff or the ministry teams. We tried, as much as possible, to have men wash the feet of men and women with women. This didn't always work out and we did not try to enforce any set law.

The basins on the side of the platform were for those who wanted to wash the feet of their family members, aside from that which was taking place on the front row with the staff and ministry teams. In addition some home church groups came, pulled chairs into small circles and washed each other's feet. I encouraged those who wanted to come and kneel at the altar for laying on of hands or anointing with oil for healing. Curry and I and our wives conducted that ministry.

Divine Order

To any one peeking through a window it must have looked like mass confusion. But there was a certain divine order which was taking place as each person sought God where he should go for communion, ministry and footwashing. We did not change the water in the basins but did replace it when the level dropped low.

The people never did settle back in their seats. Instead, I noticed a great deal of intermingling as people went to each other expressing love, asking forgiveness and encouraging one another. Some people were giving money to others. Some were hugging. Some had gathered in small groups and were praying for each other. I stayed on the platform as overseer and did little but encourage now and then.

When the footwashing and communion were over, our musicians began, spontaneously, to play and sing celebration songs—mostly with a Hebrew flavor. All across the auditorium people began to dance. It was as in the time of David when the Tabernacle of David on Mt. Zion was thrown open for all the people. Suddenly the platform was filled with barefoot people, singing, dancing and praising God. That continued for another 30 minutes until the people, happy and exhausted, finally drifted home.

Radical? Not really. It seemed like normal New Testament Christianity to me. Why not try it? You'll like it.

