

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

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



Jamie Buckingham

PROPHECIES AND TRENDS FOR THE '90S

PROPHECIES

A number of Christian leaders are predicting the church will experience radical change over the next 10 years.

Hal Sacks, of El Shaddai Ministries in Phoenix, says, "Those leaders who are not flexible and willing to change will be left on the sidelines."

Sacks outlines five areas where he feels the church will change:

1. **Prayer.** God is requiring that we substantially increase our time in personal prayer, in intercession and in the Word of God. He is requiring us to come into a deeper intimacy with Him. He is telling His spokesmen that they must first be His listeners. The Lord is desiring to speak to us those things that are in His heart that we might speak them forth in His authority.

2. **Priorities.** The Lord is entreating us to become unencumbered. We are to separate the important activities from the urgent, the holy from the profane. God is requiring a higher level of stewardship and integrity. He is saying if you're in debt, get out of debt, and if you're free of debt, stay unencumbered.

3. **Preparation.** Prepare for battle. The devil is coming in great wrath and the world is thrashing the waters like a drowning man. Satan is seeking whom he can pull down into his own filth. We must be spiritually alert and vigilant. We must be strong, ready and able to go into the enemy's strongholds, bring salvation to the lost and free them from their destruction. Effective world evangelization must be our goal and foremost desire.

4. **Positive positioning.** 1989 was a year for positioning. Now is the time for God's people to enter into the place of intimate relationship with the Father and meaningful relationship within the body of Christ, and into their essential place of ministry in the building up of the body. The

fivefold minister must become the equipper, encourager, enabler and commissioner. The body of Christ must become "the ministry."

5. **Strengthening relationships.** We must strengthen relationships in our church and family, with fellow ministers and with the church universal. Great stress and pressure is coming to the body of Christ and only through trusting, loving and valued relationships will we be able together to stand victorious in this battle. Satan's first line of attack is against relationships.

ECONOMICS

Roy Hicks Jr., director of missions for the Foursquare Church, reminds pastors that "the activity of the Holy Spirit does not require money. The environment necessary for His activity involves attitudes, needs, faith and character. The ambience created by plush carpets and sophisticated speaker systems is nice, but they are not necessities. And, unfortunately, the moving of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee a flow of funds." (Remember that word as you read what George Barna has to say about money later in this report.)

While saying he believes in the prosperity message, Hicks points out: "The biblical prosperity message is not one of how to get money. The prosperity given by the Spirit is designed to bless the believer in relationship to his environment and to make possible the meeting of his needs and the needs of those around him.

"I am convinced that money will be an issue in the coming decade...The American economic system will traverse enormous changes...Whatever changes take place, the

church that ministers the message of prosperity, while not allowing financial resources to become the proof of spirituality, is positioned to have a dramatic impact."

Hicks concludes: "Whenever our financial condition determines whether or not we can participate in kingdom life, our life-style is probably in conflict with that of the kingdom and needs changing. At the congregational level, whenever the absence of funds keeps us from fulfilling our assigned mission, we've either misunderstood our mission or we need to discover how He plans to fund the assignment."

SEASONS IN THE CHURCH

Hicks also offers personal encouragement to discouraged leaders.

"Almost everywhere I travel, I hear leaders asking hard questions:

" 'What season are we in?'

" 'Is the charismatic revival over?'

"Be encouraged," Hicks writes, "revivals come and go. His Spirit has many seasons in the life of the church. He alone is responsible for the coming and going of each season. We are responsible for making the most of what He is offering.

"Lead the church you pastor to respond to the season you find yourselves in, instead of petitioning for a new season! Each season has rich potential. Regardless of the task the season brings—reaping during harvest, plowing during planting, preparing during winter—every seasonal task has its own blessing.

"Our tendency is to wish for spring during winter, fall during summer, etc. Lead the saints you shepherd toward Holy Ghost responsiveness. As you successfully do this, you and your congregation will discover that you are being uniquely prepared for the coming seasons while getting the most out of the present season."

LOOKING INTO THE '90S—A SPECIAL REPORT

In a special edition of the *National and International Religion Report*, respected pollster George Barna analyzes the "Seven Trends Facing the Church in 1990 and Beyond." I have digested it here for your benefit.

1. Church Membership will Grow

Barna believes churches will grow in size for a number of reasons. Primary will be an

increase in brilliant marketing strategies, superior preaching and teaching capabilities, and an improved sensitivity to the existing needs of the population. They will also grow because of an increasing emphasis on ministry to the family unit.

The "Graying of America" means more older people in our churches—a real boon since the elderly represent the most loyal churchgoers in the nation and the foundation upon which the church membership can be built.

There will be an influx of ethnic members, primarily Hispanics and Asians. (Asian families are growing at 14 times the rate of our native population.)

The most significant reason for church growth, however, is the aging of the baby-boomers. To many people in the 30-50 age bracket, church membership is a symbol of belonging, a way of becoming an accepted and ingrained part of the community. As these older baby-boomers have children, they are being forced to seek a spiritual community.

An obstacle to be overcome is the growing concern that the average church is not relevant to the contemporary American household. Large churches do not supply satisfying relationships. Small churches are often narrow in concept. And in most cases denominational affiliation is of little consequence.

Barna believes, as I do, that our nation is heading into tough times, bordering on despair. "Historically," he writes, "times of economic despair have been eras in which the church has seen hordes of confused and frightened people turn to religion for solace. It seems apparent that the next decade will bring such a period to pass. The church in the next decade will most likely find many individuals who have never had much interest in religion suddenly demonstrating an interest in any institution that promises a respite from the financial uncertainty that besets the nation."

2. Increasing Emphasis on Family

During the next decade, the importance of ministry that addresses the issues faced by families—from child raising to marital problems—will escalate. Parents are interested in organizations and resources that can help them in their struggle to master parenthood. Most women today work, dramatically altering their ability to cope with the pressures of nurturing their young. Drugs, alcohol, rampant sex and violence are forcing families to regroup. In short, churches need to major on family concerns.

A number of factors are helping shape

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

family priorities. Christian schools will continue to grow—while home schooling has tapered off.

The Christian music industry is beginning to recognize it has to place a greater emphasis on ministry than entertainment.

Parents will be seeking a church that will provide their children (especially those in the 12-18 age bracket) with teaching, programs and activities that are contemporary and meaningful.

3. The Quest for Lasting Relationships

People are lonely. Our nation has lost its ability to communicate with each other. Meaningful relationships are hard to find. Things like television, VCRs, longer work weeks, working women, fast-food restaurants—all deter interpersonal encounters. Divorces, single-parent families, and the increased number of husbands and wives "on the road" have magnified the problem.

Now people are starting to recognize their gnawing emptiness.

Tomorrow's church must meet this need. Many churches are doing this by using small group fellowships as the basic building block of the congregation. The focus of these groups is not just Bible study, although that may be the central aspect of the group. But the focus is on bringing together people of like interests and having interaction in a non-threatening environment.

Likewise, churches that offer counseling services will help satisfy this growing need. Counseling has become widely accepted, but since most people refuse to pay the huge fees charged by professional counselors, they will be turning more and more to the church for help with their emotional problems.

4. The Decline of Mass-Media Ministries

Studies conducted by the Barna Research Group indicate that money donated to the media ministries is money that would have otherwise been donated to the local church. With the decline of the electronic church, much of that money will now be coming back to the churches.

Barna points out four unfavorable situations that have helped destroy nationwide confidence in the electronic church:

- Jim and Tammy Bakker's eccentric, high-living standard.
- Pat Robertson's abdication from ministry to run for president.

- Oral Roberts' highly sensational fundraising techniques.

- Peter Popoff's use of electronic communications to receive "words of knowledge."

He also cites the public failures of Joyce Landorf and Rex Humbard as contributing factors to the loss of public confidence. (Interestingly, he omitted any reference to Jimmy Swaggart.)

The vast majority of the media ministries have been unsuccessful in their attempts to expand their donor base. With network and independent television providing less and less time for religious broadcasting, and airtime costs soaring (some have gone up as much as 100 percent over the last two years), the electronic church is in for a serious decline. Add to this the imminent retirement or passing of Billy Graham as the one representative of religious broadcasting with impeccable credibility and the decline may happen even faster.

The potential consequences of the media ministry demise for the local church are mind-boggling. The local church will have new populations for which it will be responsible—those who have been depending on the television as their church. The image of the church will be based on the activities and behavior of the local body rather than media leaders. Finally, the coming generation will be less "personality-conscious" when evaluating the ministry and the church.

5. A Change in the Support Base of the Church

The church cannot hope to expand its ministry and reach great numbers of people if it cannot raise the capital to do its work. Yet the church could be entering a period of tighter finances.

Barna believes the expected national economic downturn will generally reduce people's giving. As the church grows in numbers, it will be reaching many people (Hispanics and Asians in particular) who are not known to give liberally.

Estate planning and trust giving will foster a new breed of consultants who will emerge to help raise money through memorial gifts. Much of this will come from the elderly who will be flocking to the church in the years ahead.

6. The Polarization of the Evangelical and Ecumenical Movements

The winsomeness of Pope John Paul II and his emphasis on a theology of grace rather than works has caused many Americans to feel more friendly toward the Catholic Church. In America, Catholic churches have been

growing while mainline Protestant churches have been declining in membership. While Catholics have maintained an absolute theology, Protestants have loosened their stand on the importance of remaining doctrinally implacable.

Protestant seminaries have become increasingly liberal. Debates that used to rage over such things as female ordination, the acceptance of homosexual behavior and the right to communion have all assumed a place of lesser importance in most mainline seminaries.

This has caused other churches to dig in, set boundaries and declare their doctrinal stands. More and more churches are having to defend their views to a skeptical world. This works against the ecumenical movement, which is based on the loosening of doctrinal boundaries. At the same time, it has given great meaning to evangelism as the church reaches out to those in cults and the New Age movement and to others who don't believe anything with value or meaning—but are searching for truth.

7. Government Will Become More Involved in Church Affairs

The next decade will bring with it an increased involvement of government in religious affairs. Much of this will be brought on by the church's increasing involvement in political and social issues.

The attempts by men such as Pat Robertson and Jesse Jackson to gain political power and leverage by seeking election has only strengthened the resolve of some politicians to exert pressure upon churches.

Norman Lear's People for the American Way has had growing influence with liberal leaders in Congress over the past two years, providing those elected officials with an alternative perspective to that provided by church-led groups.

The courts are growing increasingly unfriendly toward the church. Today there are nearly 2,000 lawsuits pending in state courts against clergymen and religious organizations. These suits drain huge amounts of money from the Lord's work. Over the last 18 months, courts have awarded more than \$100 million in damages to plaintiffs who have sued for clergy malpractice.

The Internal Revenue Service has stepped up its investigations into church and para-church ministries. Based on votes in Congress, some political analysts have warned that the prospect of a Democratic president being elected in the future would virtually assure us of increased government

regulation over churches.

What's Ahead?

George Barna believes that as the nation heads into a traumatic economic period, the accepted philosophies of materialism and self-gratification will be rejected as people look for something more secure, more absolute.

I agree. This means the church must change its image from that of the world to that of the kingdom of God. In most of today's churches the overriding spirit is not the Holy Spirit, but the "spirit of this world" that Paul talks about in 1 Corinthians 2:12. And while Barna seems to major on methods the church must use, none of these will be of any lasting effect unless the church changes its spirit.

The church of the '80s tried to compete with the flashy TV evangelists. Our music and our ministry were geared to entertain people—not bring glory to God or lasting ministry to people with needs. Pastors spent more money on TV airtime than they did on meeting real needs. One church I know of, which is typical of hundreds of others, spent half a million dollars a year on its radio and TV ministry—not understanding that had that money been spent on providing salaries for personal evangelists and "helper ministries" the church would have grown 50 times faster.

To Barna's seven trends I add five more:

1. A growing emphasis on raising up, training and releasing into ministry youthful leaders in the church.
2. The necessity of providing for and ministering to the fastest-growing group in our population—the elderly.
3. New and innovative types of education curriculum, especially for children's ministries.
4. A swelling emphasis on evangelism.
5. A return to the basic reason the church has to exist—to train people to be like Jesus. As the Holy Spirit moves at a deep level in tomorrow's church, pastors will challenge themselves and their people to ask the one question which will not only change their lives, but change society: What would Jesus do?

