

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

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

BAPTIST TV NETWORK IN TROUBLE

The Southern Baptist television network, called American Christian Television System (ACTS), is in serious financial trouble. In fact, were it not for the good name of the Southern Baptist Convention, it would be in receivership.

On the air for a little more than a year, the Baptist Radio and Television Commission is learning something the other Christian networks learned long ago—TV sucks money like a bathtub drain sucks water. Only, in the case of the Baptists, they forgot—or refused—to turn on the spigot. They also forgot that unless you perfume the water, no one even gets into the tub.

According to John Roberts, who was chairman of the Radio and Television Commission when ACTS went on the air, the Baptists made some unwise decisions which are now coming home to roost. For one, they determined to finance the network without soliciting money on the air. Baptists, for the most part, are offended by the “crisis of the week” type fund-raising promoted by most Charismatic TV networks and programs. Therefore they decided to raise money by commercial sponsorship. However, they failed to take into account that commercial funding is not possible until the viewing audience reaches at least 15 million subscribers. In other words, “potential audiences” do not count.

The board made another crucial mistake three years ago when it decided to begin without adequate financing. The commission had asked the SBC Executive Committee for the additional \$2 million annually needed to go on the air. Turned down, they borrowed the money, believing they needed to enter the market walking as a man rather than crawling as a child. When expenses exceeded income, they borrowed more money. Now, operating at a deficit of more than \$2 million a year, the commission is getting ready to borrow another \$10 million, hoping to pay it back by conducting fund-raising banquets around the nation. This has “greatly alarmed” the SBC Executive Committee, which doubts the commission’s ability to repay the debts.

The situation is classic and needs to be thoroughly evaluated—not only by those with TV ministries but by all Christians involved in any kind of public ministry. What really went wrong?

The Baptists began with mixed motives. Although they genuinely wanted to reach America for Christ, they also saw the obvious success of the large Charismatic networks and wanted a piece of the action. In fact, they privately said they were going after Baptists who were watching—and supporting—PTL, CBN, Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart and others. It was like starting a church by stealing members from existing congregations, rather than going after the lost.

Even more important, while pulling out all the stops to have 24-hour programming, renting satellite space, building low-power TV stations and marketing the

program to cable systems, they then refused to have any programs which featured the supernatural aspects of God. In short, although they needed a miracle for financing, they refused to acknowledge that God is a God of miracles—who heals the sick and gives gifts of tongues, interpretations and prophecy. What they gave to their viewing audience was about as exciting as last year's bread with freezer burn.

As with any ministry which runs out of money, the problem is never financial—it is spiritual. When you do things God's way, God supplies.

What is God's way to reach the world? Read Acts 2-4. The world is looking for a supernatural God. As in the first century, people are genuinely attracted to a God who heals, who delivers from demons, who manifests Himself through signs and wonders. If all a group wants to do is reach their own people, there are much cheaper ways to do it than owning a TV network. But if you are going to reach the world, it must be done the same way God reached the world: by "demonstrations of power." Anything else is entertainment—and when you are competing with "Miami Vice," "Hee-Haw," and HBO, it's pretty dull entertainment at that.

WARNINGS FOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

A teacher at First Christian School in St. Cloud, Florida, has been charged with murdering 5-year-old Amanda Hersey by punishing her too often and too hard. Kevin Pheifer, 27, was indicted on a first degree murder charge. Authorities say he repeatedly punished the little girl until she died. Pheifer, who had earlier been accused by another parent for too harsh discipline, was arrested and jailed. The trial is set for December.

But it is not an open and closed case. The staff and people of the First Christian Church say Pheifer is being wrongly accused. There is a great deal of evidence that Amanda's parents may be the ones who actually abused her—rather than the teacher. In fact, two weeks prior to her death Pheifer told his pastor and a school board member he believed the child was being abused at home.

Until the trial it is wrong to draw conclusions. However, the situation presents a grave warning to all who work with children that false accusations are possible. Any parent who abuses a child is capable of blaming someone else. Any evidence of child abuse at home should be reported to authorities, not only to protect the child but to protect school and church officials.

UPDATES

National Prayer Breakfast

After several complained that their congressman said he could not get them tickets for the National Prayer Breakfast, we talked with Jerry Franz of the Fellowship House in Washington. They are expecting about 3,000 to attend the early February meeting and do not want a disproportionate number of pastors and religious leaders. However, each state governor selects one pastor and each member of congress selects two persons. If you want to attend, you should write or call your governor, senator or congressman. Don't let an aide tell you no. Some members of Congress are not interested and thus do not fill their quota. There are seats available.

Thanksgiving Coffee

Mark Germond of the Thanksgiving Coffee Company reports that he's received 120 inquiries from 29 states as a result of my endorsement for their delicious coffee. I hope you are as pleased as I am. They sent me a price list and I have ordered several

gift packages which we intend to give as Christmas presents. If you missed my first article, the address is Box 176, Ft. Bragg, CA 95437. Ask for a price list and a sample. Yummm, good!

DRY HOLES IN ISRAEL

The search for oil in Israel continues, despite the dry holes being drilled all over the nation by Charismatic Christians from America.

The Israeli government spent more than \$150 million drilling dozens of dry wells over the past decade, then gave up. Now American Christians have taken over (with the blessing of the Israeli government) and continue to pour hundreds of millions into the ground in hopes of (1) blessing Israel and (2) making a personal fortune. In fact, Israel has offered to put up 44 cents for each \$1 invested by American Christians and is selling drilling licenses cheaply in return for 12½ percent royalties.

Who is behind all this? The big name is Andy SoRelle from Houston, whose last well got stuck at 21,428 feet and was abandoned two years ago. SoRelle drilled not on seismographic studies but on an interpretation of Deuteronomy 33:24—that Asher's brothers would favor him and he would "bathe his feet in oil." On the basis of this, SoRelle has spent \$13 million on his Asher-Alit No. 1, drilled 12 miles north of Shunor-Libnath on the Mediterranean in the land once allocated to the tribe of Asher.

Another oilman, Wesley Hancock of San Francisco, says the correct spot is clearly six miles north of Alit at the base of Mt. Carmel where he drilled two dry holes 25 years ago.

Still another oilman-turned-Bible-scholar, Clifford Ford, believes SoRelle and Hancock have drilled in the wrong location. He bases his drilling on an interpretation of Deuteronomy 33:19, which states that Zebulon and Issachar will "feast on the abundance of the seas, on treasures hidden in the sand."

Yet another preacher/oilman, Harold "Hayseed" Stephens, says the Bible plainly states that the world's largest oil deposit is on the site of old Sodom and Gomorrah. He bases this on an interpretation of Genesis 19:24-25.

In August the **Wall Street Journal** ran a front page article on this huge expenditure of Christian money in Israel. SoRelle replied saying, "There is oil in Israel—it is just very deep. The Lord made it this way, because if the oil had been discovered in Israel at the same time it was discovered in Saudi Arabia, the British never would have released Israel."

Much of what is happening in Israel is based on Jim Spillman's book, **The Great Treasure Hunt**. The result is many Israel-loving Christians pouring money—by the hundreds of thousands of dollars—into these various projects. Some of this is coming from widows and others who honestly want to "bless Israel." They are being told they will be blessed in return. Other money is coming from various Christian businessmen around the nation who see their investment as (1) a tax write-off, (2) a chance to make some money, (3) a chance to bless Israel. Some of the drillers are convinced that an oil strike will usher in the Second Coming of Jesus. A Valdosta, Georgia, dentist, for instance, who has invested \$30,000, told the **Wall Street Journal**, "When the oil comes in, Jesus will return and the Jews will turn back to God in fulfillment of prophecy."

In several "Love Israel" rallies around the nation—held in prominent Pentecostal churches—Christians have been urged to buy shares in a Utah penny-stock company called Ford Oil and Development Inc. In good faith the owners of the stock have given shares to various ministries around the nation as a "seed offering." The oilmen

put up \$200,000 for exploration and are trying to raise another \$20 million for development. In over-the-counter trading, the stock climbed to a high of 62 cents but has since dropped to less than 10 cents a share. The stock is currently under investigation by securities regulators in Massachusetts and California, and sale has been banned in these states.

My conclusion: There may be oil in Israel. I hope so. However, it is highly speculative and I have problems believing that the "oil" in Deuteronomy refers to drilled crude and that the prophecy "thy shoes shall be iron and brass" refers to the metals used in drilling rigs. I have no choice but to strongly advise that all investors use extreme caution in these projects. Pastors, especially, should be careful about endorsing schemes which produce, primarily, material blessings.

Christians who are pouring millions of dollars into these dry holes need to consider if this is the best expenditure of God's money. For instance, had the money that has already been dumped into the ground in Israel been used in Bible translation, almost everyone in the world would have had the Bible in their own language by the end of the century. Which is more precious to God's heart: putting the Bible into the hands of all or striving to make prophecy come to pass in our time and in our strength?

Be especially cautious about purchasing shares in Ford Oil stock. If you do invest in this—or other Israeli oil projects—you should do so knowing there is a good possibility you will lose your entire investment. Then, if oil does come in, it will indeed be a supernatural blessing and not a return on your money.

BENT PRIDE

George Fletcher, who has flown single-engine airplanes over the most inaccessible jungles on earth, recently wrote an article to his fellow missionary pilots about the destructive results of reaction to damaged egos. In his article he detailed the damage caused by overreaction when pilots bruised their egos by bad landings on jungle strips. His warnings have direct applications to those of us in Christian leadership who often try to compensate for our damaged egos—and cause even worse problems.

Story #1: A pilot lands a taildragger (a plane with a tail wheel) on a grass strip. One of the main wheels falls into a deep hole and the plane gently tips over on its nose. No damage done so far. The pilot and passengers pour out to examine the situation. Although the plane is OK, the pilot's ego is badly bent. It embarrasses him to see his plane standing on its nose with the tail high in the breeze. Chagrined, he gets a passenger to help him pull down on the tail. He forgets how heavy an airplane is. The tail comes down with a huge bang, breaking the entire tail wheel assembly. His bent ego manifests itself in bent metal.

Story #2: A pilot lands his twin-engine plane on a small airstrip. The nose gear and the left gear are in good shape. The right gear, however, collapses. The plane is over on one wing. Not much damage except to the pilot's ego. He climbs out of the plane, rounds up some spectators, and has them lift up the right wing so he can manually lower the landing gear. But he forgets the hydraulic system operation. As he pulls down the right main gear and locks it in place, the other two landing gears collapse, badly damaging the plane and almost trapping the pilot underneath.

Fletcher's advice to his fellow pilots: Relax, Charlie! Wounded pride often goads men into immediate action which many times makes things worse. When things go wrong, you can't afford to go blasting ahead to defend your shattered vanity. Wise men know they will make mistakes. When that happens they remain calm, analyzing the situation before taking corrective action. Some situations do not need to be resolved immediately. Those two airplanes could have sat in their ridiculous positions for a long time. But bent egos caused additional damage. It's better to take a little ribbing, even some criticism, than to compound the problem with radical action.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

STRESS VULNERABILITY

Insurance and medical experts rate pastors and heads of ministries in the "critical" category when it comes to stress. Factors such as eating and sleeping habits, exercise and daily schedule affect our vulnerability to stress. Here's a reliable questionnaire, adapted from the one developed by Boston University Medical Center, to help you discover your vulnerability quotient and to pinpoint trouble spots. Rate each item from 1 (always) to 5 (never), according to how much of the time the statement is true of you. Be sure to mark each item even if it seems not to apply to you. For example, if you don't drink coffee, circle #1 next to item 19.

Circle answer: 1 = always; 5 = never.

- | | | |
|-----------|------|--|
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (1) | I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day in a relaxed atmosphere. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (2) | I get at least seven hours sleep a night at least four nights a week. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (3) | I give and receive affection regularly. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (4) | I am part of a small group which meets regularly and helps me carry my personal burdens. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (5) | I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (6) | I have a quiet time each day for Bible study and prayer—not related to sermon preparation. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (7) | I consciously limit my intake of salt, sugar, and junk foods to minimums. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (8) | I am the appropriate weight for my height. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (9) | I have an income adequate to meet basic expenses. |
| 1 2 3 4 5 | (10) | I consciously turn to God and depend on Him to solve my problems. |

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

- 1 2 3 4 5 (11) I readily confess my sins and errors in judgment to my peers and ask for ministry and direction.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (12) I have a network of close friends outside my local church that I regularly communicate with.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (13) I do not **feel** pressured by people on my staff or in my church.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (14) I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth).
- 1 2 3 4 5 (15) I am able to speak openly to my congregation and staff about my feelings when angry, worried or afraid.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (16) I have regular conversations with the people I live with (wife, children, etc.) about domestic problems—for example, chores, money, frustrations.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (17) I do something “non church related” for fun each week—for example, movies, picnic, tennis, fishing.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (18) I am able to organize my time and schedule effectively.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (19) I severely limit my intake of caffeine—that is, coffee, chocolate, soft drinks—to less than three cups of coffee a day or one caffeine soda pop.
- 1 2 3 4 5 (20) I take regular vacations with my loved ones which are not related to my ministry.

To get your score, add up the figures and subtract 20. A score below 10 indicates excellent resistance to stress. A score over 30 indicates vulnerability to stress. You are in trouble if your score is over 50.

What to do? Review each item you scored three or higher and determine to make changes. Notice that nearly all items describe situations and behaviors over which you have a great deal of control. Concentrate first on those things easiest to change before tackling those which will take more time—such as being part of a small group or opening yourself to ministry at the hands of peers.



6
BUCKINGHAM
REPORT

The *Buckingham Report* is published twice monthly (24 times a year) by Strang Communications Company, 190 N. Westmonte Drive, Altamonte Springs, FL 32714, (305) 869-5005. Subscription rates in the U.S. and its possessions \$99 per year. All other countries \$150 per year. All copies sent first-class mail. Copyright © 1985 by Strang Communications Company.