

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

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

GREETING VISITORS IN CHURCH

The greeting and welcoming of visitors can be a special time in a worship service. It gives the minister a wonderful opportunity to brag on the church, to share a personal anecdote about the friendliness of the congregation or the scope of the ministry, and to make **all** the people feel they are part of a wonderful family. Most people like to be recognized (but not put on the spot), and this is an excellent time to do it.

Here are two valuable things I've learned across the years concerning the "let's welcome our visitors" time in the church service.

1. When asking visitors to raise their hands, the pastor should raise his hand also—**and keep it raised until the ushers have served the last visitor**. The moment you lower your hand, even while ushers are passing out visitors' cards, it is a sign for the visitors to lower theirs. The ushers will invariably miss them. So, keep your hand up until the last Amalekite surrenders.

2. When distributing visitors' cards, ushers should come to the front and work back so that people can see them. I often see ushers slipping up on people from behind to give them a visitor's card. Bad! Bad! It is discourteous to the visitor, who is already confused because he has his hand in the air (or is standing) for no apparent reason, awaiting a promised packet from an unseen usher. Rather, do not ask the visitors to raise their hands (or stand) **until** the ushers have come front, turned, and are facing the congregation. Only then do you ask visitors to identify themselves.

Doing all things "in order" applies to more than speaking in tongues in church meetings. It also applies to things like announcements, altar calls and welcoming visitors in the service. Welcoming visitors should not be something shunted off to a junior grade staff member. It is best done by the pastor himself, who sees this as a marvelous opportunity to speak directly to those in the service for the first time (and indirectly to your own members). Unless it is done with sensitivity and with direction, however, the welcoming-of-visitors-time can become a fiasco, doing more harm than good.

I have been in some churches where visitors were asked to tell who they are and even "share a word of testimony." This shows gross insensitivity to the person who may be there out of heartbreak or deep conviction of sin—or who may not be a Christian. Handle this time in your service with deep love and decorum, yet with

warm acceptance and welcome. It may seem like old hat to you, but remember, it's the first time for your visitors.

I recommend you steer clear of gimmicks, too. A while back I was in a church where the visitors were asked to remain seated while all the church members stood up ("in honor of our visitors"). It was cute, but it seemed like a cheap gimmick. How would you like to remain seated while everyone else is standing—and the only person you can see is the fat fellow in front of you whose shirttail has pulled out of his belt and is hanging out from under his coat? Not only does this put the visitor on the spot, but it makes for an awkward interlude in the life of the non-Christian who attends church but has not joined. Does he stand or not?

Use the time wisely. It is your best chance to speak personally to those true seekers in your congregation.

TIMING YOUR LETTERS

According to management expert Alec Benn, you need to time your important letters to business addresses to arrive on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. This is also true of any third or fourth class letters you send from your office that you want busy people to read. Less mail arrives on these three days. Most people try to get caught up on Friday—which is the heaviest day for letters to go into the mail. This makes Monday a heavy mail day. Benn says busy people give each piece of mail less time when there's more of it. Friday is also a poor time to receive mail since the attitude is "let's get finished with this and go home," and people are less receptive to new ideas and appeals.

When mailing to homes, however, aim for Friday and Saturday.

Source: **The 27 Most Common Mistakes in Advertising** by Alec Benn, AMACOM, 135 W. 50th St., New York, NY 10020.

INTEREST DEDUCTIONS TO BE DISCONTINUED

The IRS has ruled that pastors who owned and occupied a home or had a contract to purchase a home for which they were receiving a minister's housing allowance before January 1983 will be allowed to continue deducting their mortgage interest and property taxes on their IRS return until January 1, 1987. After that, interest and taxes will no longer be deductible. Ministers who do not fulfill the above requirements will not be allowed the deductions at all.

RUNNING A CLEAN SHIP

Gene Berrey, district manager of Florida Power and Light Company in my town of Melbourne, Florida, is a management expert. Across the years he has learned that clutter on the job is usually a prime indicator of poor safety habits. Berrey says he can tell a great deal about the safety consciousness of a subcontractor, for instance, by the condition of his truck. If an electrical subcontractor who is charged with installing poles and lines uses a messy truck—a truck with jumbled equipment, scattered and rusty tools, etc.—it means the men are probably just as disordered on the job. Such men who handle high voltage electricity are dangerous to themselves and to fellow workers.

Clutter and mess in a church office is often an indicator of a disorganized staff, poor management of time and slipshod and irresponsible ministry. First-timers in a church office should not be greeted by piles of books and old magazines, stacks of nursery toys on the floor, smudged fingerprints on the glass doors, and the top of a receptionist's desk which looks like the inside of Fibber McGee's closet. All these shout loudly: "You'll get shoddy treatment here if you open yourself to ministry."

The same is true of the church vestibule, the front lawn, the parking lot, the nursery, the restrooms or any other place where people get first impressions. The message—not so subliminal—is: "Since we don't take care of the things seen, you can be sure the things unseen are worse."

Let's clean up our offices—and our desks—so folks will know we've cleaned up our act.

TRANSITIONS

DIED: BILL BRITTON of Springfield, Missouri, on July 16. Britton, born May 23, 1918, was best known as the primary promoter of a doctrine known loosely as "Manifested Sons." Based in part on Romans 8:19-23, the eschatological doctrine is interpreted by some that instead of a "rapture" it is the intention of God that Christians become the "manifested Christ" at some point in time. Although Britton did not espouse this to the extremes which his followers represented, his radical concepts of the kingdom of God kept him from being considered as part of the "mainstream" of the modern Charismatic movement. He was a voluminous writer and speaker. His books and tapes are cherished by Christians all over the world. He was deeply respected by a large number of Christian leaders as a humble, gentle "Watchman Nee of the Ozarks." In tribute, Arthur Katz called him "unassuming and unpretentious" and spoke of his "gracious, thoroughly American, gentlemanly manner that hid from casual view the prolific thinker-prophet-writer within."

REPLACED: THOMAS ZIMMERMAN, for 26 years general superintendent of the Assemblies of God, at an election on August 9 at the annual convention of the AOG in Springfield, Missouri. Zimmerman, now in his mid-70s, had always been elected on the first ballot. This time it was reported he had said if he was not elected on the first ballot he would take that as a sign he should retire. Although he was far ahead of the other nominated candidates, he dropped out of the race after failing to receive sufficient votes on the first ballot. He was replaced by G. Raymond Carlson, who has been assistant general superintendent for a number of years.

REPLACED: VINSON SYNAN, assistant general superintendent and director of evangelism of the Pentecostal Holiness Church, in a surprise political squeeze at the annual convention in Richmond, Virginia, on August 2. In a move to break up power structures on the lower conference levels, the convention, earlier in the day, adopted a resolution putting an eight-year limitation on office holders. Voters did not seem to realize the resolution would affect Synan, one of the most popular leaders in the history of the Pentecostal Holiness movement. Under his leadership the Department of Evangelism had planted 154 new churches in the last four years. However, when it came time for the election Friday night, Synan, along with a number of other leaders at various levels, was caught in the squeeze. In fact, only two of the nine members of the executive board were returned to office in what one man called a "Pentecostal fruit basket turnover." Last year Synan, a noted historian, scholar and writer, replaced

Kevin Ranaghan as president of the Charismatic Concerns Committee, an inter-denominational group sponsoring the forthcoming National Leadership and World Charismatic Conferences. With three children in college and no regular income, Synan has not yet determined which way the Lord wants him to go.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

RUMBLINGS AT FULLER SEMINARY

When it comes to that "Signs and Wonders" course John Wimber teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, all is not well on the western front. The course, known as MC-510, is presently offered at night and is part of the School of World Mission. This is a separate school from the main School of Theology, although it operates under the same administration.

Of the 83 theological seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, Fuller ranks second in enrollment with 2,938 students enrolled in its three schools: theology, psychology, and world mission. The nation's largest seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas, has more than 5,000 students enrolled this year. Number three is Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, with 2,335 full-time students.

(The nation's other prominent seminaries have much smaller enrollments. For instance: Asbury—746, Chandler—802, Gordon-Conwell—861, Harvard—463, Nazarene—463, Notre Dame—119, Oral Roberts—275, Perkins—524, University of Chicago—246, Union (Virginia)—273. Those running over 1,000 besides the three mentioned are: New Orleans Baptist—1,708, Southeastern Baptist—1,093, San Francisco—1,049, and Trinity Evangelical—1,016.)

John Wimber: Burr Under the Theological Saddle

Several years ago the administration in the School of World Mission invited Wimber, a former rock music promoter and later a Quaker pastor, to teach a class as an adjunct professor. An adjunct professor is one who has another life occupation and teaches from a field of expertise on a part-time basis. This puts him at the bottom of the academic totem pole, ranked beneath the assistant professor, the associate professor, and the full professor. Wimber's class meets, usually evenings, two hours a week, 10 weeks a year. It is followed by an optional "lab" where Wimber demonstrates what he has taught in the area of healing, deliverance, baptism in the Holy Spirit and/or miracles. The course, listed in the catalog as MC-510, became—from the start—the most popular course in the Fuller curriculum.

Shortly after Wimber began teaching his class, **Christian Life** magazine published an issue on signs and wonders featuring, primarily, Wimber's MC-510 class at Fuller. That issue was the magazine's all-time most popular issue, with calls coming for thousands of reprints as evangelicals learned what was being allowed at Fuller. Up until then very few Charismatics had heard of Fuller and virtually no one knew of Wimber or his course.

The Extremes of Overenthusiasm

But this presented a major problem. Following the **Christian Life** article, some overenthusiastic Charismatics and Pentecostals, along with certain "I-told-you-so" fundamentalists, began categorizing Fuller Seminary as "Charismatic." It's not, even

though about 30 percent of Fuller students come from Pentecostal or Charismatic churches. There are no self-described "Charismatics" on the faculties of the three schools, though several professors hail from classic Pentecostal churches. Wimber's is one of a gently rising number of courses offered at Fuller which address Charismatic issues and values. The School of Psychology offers an integration course on healing, team-taught along with one of the theologians. Related courses include a softly Charismatic course on church renewal taught by another adjunct, an Anglican active in British church renewal. More recently, the School of Theology has offered a course on demonology and mental illness. A course on the history of the Pentecostal movement has been a regular feature.

What is true is this: Fuller Seminary is "open" to the Charismatic dimension. Unlike a number of fundamentalist schools, there is open acceptance of those with Charismatic or Pentecostal persuasion. These are welcomed along with Seventh Day Adventists and other "minorities"—although the single largest group of students is Presbyterian.

Fuller's "Broader Duties"

In an extensively-published statement on their "Mission Beyond the Mission" as a theological seminary, the Fuller trustees and faculty agreed that "we must take the risks necessary to break fresh ground in the ministry and broach new ideas in scholarship." One of these risks, it now seems, is the risk of being classified as Charismatic simply because the seminary is not anti-Charismatic. Perhaps this is part of the breaking of new ground—plowing under the labels which in the past have divided us into "either-you-are-one-of-us-or-you-are-against-us" categories.

Despite its stated commitment to "risks" and "new ideas," however, tradition—and the determination to maintain an image—continue to plague Fuller. As a result of the **Christian Life** article, recent publicity about Wimber, and the fact that Wimber often describes himself, imprecisely, as a member of the Fuller faculty (when in the eyes of many of the elitist theology professors he is only a guest lecturer) there are now rumblings being heard down in the volcanic mountain of the School of Theology.

Faculty Up in Arms

I recently talked with Dr. Russell Spittler, associate dean at Fuller who is relinquishing that post to become the director of the newly inaugurated David J. du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality. Dr. Spittler, an ordained minister of the Assemblies of God, confirmed that a number of men on the faculty in the School of Theology are up in arms. They fear the school is gaining a reputation as a "Charismatic" seminary—when it is, in fact, merely open to all forms of legitimate Christian expression. According to Spittler, several of those who vocally oppose Wimber have never attended his class or spoken directly to him themselves. To this degree they have violated the scriptural concept of primary confrontation. Much of their criticism is based on reports from students who have commented on Wimber's methods, or from images of the school reflected around the nation. They accuse Wimber of teaching "magic" and twist his words to say trees have demons. The fact these accusations come from Christian academicians who teach that knowledge should be attained by the empirical process makes their rumblings whimsical, if not preposterous.

Although Wimber is the primary focus of controversy, Spittler believes there is a deeper agitation against Professor C. Peter Wagner, who sponsors Wimber. Wagner holds status in the School of World Mission as a full professor and cannot be touched.

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A Congregationalist who is best known for his work in the area of church growth, Wagner set out a dozen years ago to explore the reasons why Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Third World nations are growing so rapidly—while mainline evangelicals are barely holding their own. His study led him to write a book, **Look Out, The Pentecostals Are Coming**. As often happens, Wagner absorbed what he opposed and is perceived by some, in Spittler's words, as "something of a raving Charismatic." However, as a full professor with tenure, his job is secure at Fuller. Therefore the critics are attacking his protege, John Wimber, and his "Signs and Wonders" class.

What can these academic critics do? Not much, unless Fuller President David A. Hubbard buckles under to their pressure and fires Wimber—which probably won't happen since Dr. Hubbard believes in academic freedom and since Wimber is accepted and approved by the faculty of the School of World Mission.

They can discourage theology students from enrolling in Wimber's class, but this invariably has the same effect as Brer Rabbit saying to Brer Fox, "Skin me, Brer Fox, snatch out my eyeballs, but do please, Brer Fox, don't fling me in that briar-patch."

Or, they can keep Wimber's class from being certified for degree credit. Even so, Spittler believes, since a study of the Bible always leads to a God of the supernatural, classes such as Wimber's will always draw those who are spiritually hungry and academically honest—even if credit is denied. In fact, Spittler views his mission in the newly created Du Plessis Center as an opportunity to add theological substance to Charismatic enthusiasm—thus restoring the balance of heart and head needed anew in every generation of the church.

I predict the theology faculty at Fuller—which is committed to academic honesty and scriptural integrity—will eventually recognize Wimber as a man whom God has singled out to be one of the leading voices in the now-rising tide of genuine spiritual interest which is sweeping the world. Another of the seminary's "broader duties"—as stated in their "Mission Beyond the Mission"—will insure this. It states: "We must put our biblical convictions into practice even when the price is high."

The price at Fuller may be that of being numbered among the Charismatics and Pentecostals—whether the theology faculty likes it or not.

