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REPORT

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

ROBERTSON AND BUSH: THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Last week I spent personal time—on different days—with both Vice President George Bush and Pat Robertson.

The Bush meeting took place in Orlando. I was on vacation at our mountain cabin in North Carolina when Doug Wead called, asking if I would be willing to meet with the vice president and about 10 other evangelical leaders for a couple of hours on a Friday afternoon. I almost didn't go. Knowing, however, I was scheduled to be with Pat Robertson the following Monday for an afternoon of personal interviewing, I decided to break my vacation, fly back to Florida and meet the VP.

It was as I expected. No surprises. He was warm, affable, open and intellectually impressive. He said all the right things.

An active Episcopalian, Bush is uncomfortable, however, talking about his personal faith. "It's not easy for me to express something this intimate and deep in public," he said candidly. "Yet I understand the American people need to know what shapes me."

"Yes, Jesus is my Lord and Savior."

"Yes, I have been born again."

"Yes, I am opposed to abortion and favor a legal ban except in cases of rape, incest and danger to the mother's life."

"I believe in the separation of church and state and believe a church should keep its tax-exempt status."

All the "right" answers, yet I kept asking myself, While Bush (and that includes Wead's assessment of Bush) talks like a man of God, is he God's man? That, it seems, is the question. Especially when you stand him up against Pat Robertson.

Political Ploys

Of course the meeting was a political ploy. Bush is just beginning to understand that there is a huge Christian sub-culture in America which controls millions of votes. He's very appealing. After the meeting one of the nation's Christian broadcasters left the room saying, "My

biggest problem is how to replace my 'Pat for President' bumper sticker with one promoting George Bush."

Others at the meeting were not so naive. They know many of America's evangelical/charismatics do not vote issues—they vote on the basis of whether a man is listening to God or not. Bush is trying hard to meet these people—and convince them he is a man of God.

Doug Wead, an Assembly of God money-maker-writer-promoter-preacher has signed on as Bush's agent. Independently wealthy from Amway, he has become something of a Washington insider by interviewing the last three presidents and writing books for or about some of them. He wrote the James Watt book and is now thick with Bush as his "national religious liaison."

It was interesting to see how the sales pitch was made. Wead said, on four occasions, the Veep did not want to play on the issue of his close personal friendship with Billy Graham. In fact, he didn't even want to bring it up. Which was, no doubt, the reason Wead needed to tell us four times. On one occasion he went into great detail to tell us that when Bush was in North Carolina he deliberately did not go to see Graham, although the evangelist had specifically invited him up to his Montreat home. However, in another we-don't-want-to-play-on-Graham's-name-statement, we were told Bush vacations each summer with Graham and they sit up late each night discussing the Bible. However, the question is not whether a man speaks evangelicalese or knows Billy Graham. The question is, Does your relationship with God influence your decisions as president?

When I asked Bush this specific question the best he could say was he prayed about personal matters. I told him I was far more concerned about whether he prayed about nuclear disarmament, tax legislation, the appointment of Supreme Court justices and federal judges, and other major decisions. I wanted to know if his relationship with God would affect the status of the United States in regard to Israel—or were

they simply a political expediency for us? Bush repeated he did not understand my question but said he prayed when he was shot down in the Korean War and when his child died a number of years ago.

Eight years in the White House as the nation's second in command cannot be discounted as a primary qualification to lead the nation. Nor do you discount his experience with the CIA, the United Nations and as a Texas congressman. Of course there are the endorsements by Jerry Falwell and, according to Wead, by Jim Bakker—a former employee of Pat Robertson.

That night when I got back to my vacation cabin my wife asked me what I gained from the meeting. I showed her my set of vice presidential cuff links worth \$379—which was the price of my airline ticket. I told her I was also convinced Bush could carry on as president.

But is that what God wants for America? Someone to carry on?

A Day With Pat Robertson

Bill Bright, a personal friend of Jack Kemp, has been reported to have said he had a vision that if Pat Robertson ran for president God would put him in the White House. My pastor, Curry Vaughan, on a personal retreat was praying about an entirely different matter when God interrupted his prayers and said exactly the same thing to him.

Last week I spent almost four hours alone with Robertson in his inner office. We were interrupted only twice—one of those was a phone call from Charles Stanley, immediate past president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Although my primary reason for being there was to interview for an "up-date" chapter to go in the soon-to-be-released re-issue of **Shout It From the Housetops**, we spent a lot of time talking about the presidential race—and Pat's involvement.

For Robertson there is only one major question: What does God want? Pat and I talked about this for more than an hour. "There is only one factor I am concerned about," he said. "Does God want me in the White House? If He does, then I am willing to lay aside everything I have except my relationship with Jesus."

That, it seems to me, is the real issue. Not whom the Republican Party wants, or even whom the American people want. Rather whom does God want to occupy the presidency in 1988? Pat Robertson is making himself available.

Can he win? I think he can. He is the best television communicator in the world. Reagan has proved this is the day for the television president. It's a matter of image. The man who

can win the television audience can win the White House. Remember, Pat's a Phi Beta Kappa and an expert on foreign and domestic affairs. It would be fun to see him in a television debate against any of the other candidates. He would devastate them. And he knows more about fund raising and organizing people at the grass roots than all the other candidates put together. When Bush had a fund-raising banquet in Michigan 100 people showed up. Forty showed up at the Kemp fund-raiser. Pat Robertson had 4,000. His September 17 teleconference via satellite will shape presidential campaigning from now on.

Other Problems

The problems I have with a Robertson candidacy touch other issues, however. I am concerned about the future of CBN. Pat may be influencing more people through CBN than he could by being president. I hate to see him "step down" to be president. At this writing it remains uncertain who would take over. The mantle could fall on Bob Slosser at CBNU, Ben Kinchlow or Pat's son Tim—all capable men but none of them even close to being a Pat Robertson.

Then there is the money question. How many people now giving to CBN would switch their giving to a Pat for President campaign?

And what would it do to Christendom? In a recent column George Will said that "animosity is the oxygen of politics." You can't just be FOR someone in politics—you have to be AGAINST his opponent.

One of the evil fallouts of a race is it not only pits good men against each other, it causes their supporters to form opposing armies as well. This is already true in the Bush-Robertson situation. Some of my best friends are already committed—backing one candidate or the other with money, influence and prayers. Can they stay friends?

Election by Miracle

The final question: What would the campaign do to Robertson himself? Herein lies the tragedy when preachers enter politics. Will Pat the Candidate no longer be our friend, our source of inspiration and accurate information, our analyzer of world affairs, our number one ministerial statesman? Will Pat the Candidate be forced to stump, working crowds, talking to labor unions, motivating precinct workers, making promises, kissing babies, eating tacos in Texas and oranges in Florida, talking to dairymen in Wisconsin, and shaking hands in the unemployment line in Buffalo? That would be sad, but in times past that's the way presidents have been elected—by promises and compromises.

On the other hand, if God is dictating this election, then we (and the Republican National Committee) might be in for some huge surprises. Is it possible to have a man elected by miracle, rather than promises and compromises? Or is that too big for God?

I asked Pat about the incident when he commanded Hurricane Diana to go out to sea rather than crash into Virginia Beach as all the forecasters said it was going to do. The press has had a ball with that, asking: "Do Americans want a president who says he has authority over hurricanes?" Pat said that night, the night of the hurricane, was his "fleece" as to whether he should run or not. He said he went to bed saying, "Lord, if I cannot take authority over a hurricane I have no business taking authority over a nation." He relinquished it into God's hands. "If You want me in the White House, honor my authority over the storm." In one hour the storm turned more than 45 degrees and went out to sea.

The question is a good question: Do you want a man to whom God has given command over hurricanes to command our nation? Or do you want another politician?

AMERICA: NATION OF GIVERS

One of the remarkable characteristics that sets this nation apart from all the other nations of the world is the spirit of giving. No nation in history has been as generous with its money as the United States.

I am not referring to foreign and domestic aid, as reflected by various government agencies. With few exceptions these programs are not giving as much as they are techniques of buying.

But when it comes to the American people—both Christian and non-Christian—there is a marvelous spirit of generosity which reflects the nature of Christ who gave expecting nothing in return. This spirit seems to be an imbedded characteristic of all Americans—part of the warp and woof of the nation.

Last year, for instance, American giving to religious causes totaled \$37.7 billion. Altogether Americans gave \$79.84 billion to philanthropic causes. These figures, released by the American Association of Fund-Raising Councils, show giving was up 8.9 percent from 1984, far outdistancing the annual 3.7 percent inflation rate.

Giving to religious causes was triple the \$11.25 billion given the second largest recipient, health and hospitals.

(One remarkable aspect of the study revealed that "weekly church attendance has held up steadily at more than 40 percent of the population for the last 20 years.")

The report notes that a recent study by the

Council on Foundations revealed that religious bodies—churches and ministries—gave away about 27 percent of what they receive. This money went to foreign missions and various human welfare projects.

While religious giving in recent years has been "substantially boosted" by contributions to TV evangelists, the report says, the "lion's share of contributions to TV evangelists goes to pay (TV) expenses connected with reaching their audiences." On the other hand, "church groups spend a considerable portion of their receipts on social service work."

The report does say that contrary to fears, giving to TV evangelists has not subtracted from church support.

Figures Grossly Inaccurate

The report concludes with the receipts from a list of the largest TV ministries:

- Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network—\$233 million
- Oral Roberts—\$120 million
- Jim Bakker's PTL Network—\$100 million
- Jerry Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour"—\$100 million
- Jimmy Swaggart (who does not report giving figures) had an estimated income of \$140 million.

While the general conclusions of the association are certainly valid, the giving figures attributed to the various TV ministries are so wrong they make you wonder if any of the figures can be trusted. For instance, CBN's income is listed at \$233 million for 1985. The actual figure is much closer to \$150 million. The discrepancy: the report lumps earned income—such as money paid to CBN for cable and satellite hook-ups—along with contributions. In Oral Roberts' case "contributions" are lumped with income generated by Oral Roberts University. Contributions to PTL are confused with money brought in by the hotel and amusement part—and even those figures do not reflect the actual figures released to me by PTL's financial manager.

TV Evangelists and Foreign Missions

Another area of discrepancy in the report is that most of the money given to TV evangelists goes to pay TV expenses. While this is true with some TV ministries, it is certainly not true of all.

Jimmy Swaggart has perhaps the largest foreign mission outreach of any ministry in history.

Last year CBN, through their Operation Blessing alone, helped 8,791,233 people receive food and clothing. Their capital outlay of \$11 million generated total giving of \$52,747,399 all

of which went to feed and clothe the hungry. They are working with 13,565 churches who are providing matching funds to Operation Blessing. In addition, CBN is broadcasting in 71 nations—\$6 million alone to broadcast in the Middle East. All comes from U.S. contributions. The report does not consider this money as spent on “foreign missions” but lumps it with “TV expenses.” That’s unfair.

Thus, although the report cannot be counted as accurate when it comes to figures or the interpretation of those figures, it does point out one thing:

Christians in America remain the most generous people on earth. And that spirit of generosity is increasing each year.

THREE CONFERENCES TO ATTEND

North American Conference on the Holy Spirit and World Evangelization in New Orleans, October 8-11. Registrations for this leadership conference are pouring in. Hotel rooms in some hotels are already sold out. Rooms are left in many major hotels within walking distance of the Superdome, but they are going fast. Charles Green and I are sponsoring the non-denominational sessions (Network of Christian Ministries and National Leadership Conference). We will have morning sessions with an outstanding array of speakers including men like Charles Simpson, Dick Iverson, John Gimenez and Ken Copeland.

If you live east of the Mississippi discount airline fares (up to 50 percent off) have been arranged through Eastern Airlines from 24 key cities. Call toll free 1-800-468-7022 (from Florida call 1-800-282-0244). Tell the Eastern agent you want the lowest fares from your city of departure to New Orleans as provided by Access Number EZ 10 AP 30. For registration and housing applications write: Charismatic Renewal Services, 237 N. Michigan Street, South Bend, IN 46601, or call 1-800-348-2227.

Conference on Seniors in the Church sponsored by Christian Believers United (CBU) in Montreat, North Carolina, September 22-24. Speakers include senior citizen **Don Basham**, psychotherapist **Harvey Hester**, tax and financial expert **Jim Bauman**, and myself—plus a rich assortment of doctors, attorneys and experts on aging. Not just for those working with seniors—but for any “over 60s” who are interested in the dynamics of aging. Registration will be limited to 400, which will allow for plenty of questions and answers. Contact Jim Jackson, Box 1000, Montreat, NC 28757, for room rates at Montreat.

Church on the Way Pastors’ Conference sponsored by Jack Hayford and the Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, November

10-13. Theme: Perspective 2001. Speakers include Jack Hayford, Billy Joe Daugherty, Bill Hybels, Glandion Carney, Jim Hayford and Robert Schuller. They expect about 1,500 and group rates have been arranged in area hotels. Registration fee is \$100 for principal registrants, \$50 for wives, \$75 for associates. Write: Pastors’ Conference, Church on the Way, 14300 Sherman Way, Van Nuys, CA 91406-2449.

PERSONAL

Last year I wrote, recommending you check out a new little coffee company in California that was producing some first-rate coffee. I took some flack on that. Some of you didn’t think I should use space to recommend coffee. On the other hand, Mark Germond, of Thanksgiving Coffee, reported he had inquiries from 42 states and Scotland as a result of my recommendation. I guess some of you take your coffee-drinking pretty seriously.

A couple of weeks ago I got a letter from Roger Holloway in Indianapolis. Roger was one of those who wrote Thanksgiving Coffee for samples. He says, “After your coffee report, I contacted Mark Germond by letter and consequently by phone. We developed a relationship from there.” He then enclosed a copy of a letter from Germond.

Germond writes: “I wanted to drop you this brief note to tell you about a change in my life which occurred shortly before Easter. There I was, my five-year-old son at my side, watching a movie about the apparent demise and consequential crucifixion of Jesus.

“I was overcome with a tremendous weight of sadness, for the first time in my life really understanding the magnitude of the burden which He took upon Himself, dying for our sins on Calvary. At that moment I decided to pursue the path of the Lord and straighten my walk.

“I thought of you, and the relationship we have established that centered around coffee. A close friend, with whom I now attend church regularly, said you were probably praying for me to find this path. Bless you, Roger. My unlimited thanks and praise for your thoughts and prayers about my salvation.

“I leave this area in two weeks, for a new job in Manhattan and then Boston....”

From coffee to Christ. Don’t knock it.

