

# BUCKINGHAM REPORT

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

## CHARITABLE IMMUNITY DAYS ARE OVER

It is now legal, at least in the state of South Carolina, for a church member who is injured on church property to sue his church for damages. Up until three years ago churches in South Carolina were protected by a doctrine called "charitable immunity." Now that has changed. Lawyers are predicting other states will soon follow suit.

Charitable immunity was never a law in South Carolina. It was a tradition which said a church or other organization which existed only for the common good could not be held responsible for the harm suffered by a member or by the public in general.

Recent court cases have blown that tradition out of the water. Fortunately, the South Carolina House set the maximum of recoverable damage at \$200,000.

The question remains: How would your church fare if someone stumbled, fell, broke a bone, and sued for \$200,000? What can you do?

For one, you need to make sure danger places in your building are as safe as possible. When an acquaintance of mine, a church organist, fell down a flight of unlighted stairs in a Washington, D.C. church last year and injured her back, she sued the church for a huge amount of money. The courts said the church was to blame for not having the steps well-lighted, even though the accident took place after hours in an unused section of the building. So check for loose carpet, loose handrails, slick tile, icy walks, etc. Such precautions ought to be taken anyway.

Second, check your state law and find out what the maximum liability is for charitable organizations. Some are not as conservative as South Carolina.

Finally, check your insurance and make sure you're covered. You may not want to believe it, but a lot of "good church members" get nasty (and greedy) when they are injured.

And remember, unless you are legally incorporated under the laws of your state, you, pastor, could be held liable--along with your board of directors.

## LITTLE INDICATORS OF BIG PROBLEMS

Remember the flap last spring over Gary Hart's "little lie"? Hart told reporters he was born in 1937. But his birth certificate showed he was really born in 1936.

So, why make an issue of it? After all, Hart explained that his family never paid much attention to details like birthdates. He shrugged it off as no "big deal" and the American public did the same.



Daniel Seligman, writing in Fortune, pointed out the pathological nature of the "pointless lie." He was talking about the lie that was too small to serve any purpose yet was certain to be discovered somewhere down the road and cause problems to the liar.

The phenomenon of the pointless lie is like a tiny blade of crabgrass sticking through the earth. It may not look like much, but underneath is an entire network of root system. Pastor, you need to be on the lookout for things like this among your key personnel. They are an early warning of big problems in the subconscious--which may come roaring to the surface at some unsuspected time.

Anytime you spot behavior which is both unethical or anti-social--and without purpose--such as little lies which aren't necessary, petty thefts from the cash drawer, kitchen or equipment closet, or odd behavior such as crude sexual slips or outbursts of unnecessary anger--watch out. There are unconscious motivations at work as big as the rumblings of Mount Saint Helens.

Recently a pastor told me his minister of music, on three occasions in a month's period of time, had slammed the phone down on friends--one of them the pastor's wife--who dared question him about his anti-social behavior. I advised the pastor to insist his staff member get immediate professional help.

At times such behavior is caused by repressed anger. Then the person arranges small ways to be found "bad," asking for punishment. Keep your eyes open for these little indicators. They could spell big trouble later on. If you're not prepared to make a change in your staff then professional help is in order. The best way to approach it is through direct confrontation--coming as a friend who wants to help. But be prepared, you may have a phone-slammer on your hands.

### PROPHETIC PREACHING

Foy Valentine, executive director of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, has long been on the point when it comes to applying the gospel to today's society. In a recent issue of Light, Dr. Valentine gives some pointed insight on how prophetic preaching differs from the normal pate we often hear (and sometimes preach).

"Wherever the church is vibrantly alive," Valentine says, "it is alive in the presence of powerful preaching."

He goes ahead to say prophetic preaching condemns sin, convicts sinners and cultivates a change of mind, heart, and will about sin. It challenges the status quo, prods people to progress, and pleads with them not to plant pleasant vineyards. It perceives that the world is messed up but that God is at work to fix it, that He is out to get back what belongs to Him. The summum bonum, he says, must not be owning the parsonage, or moving to a bigger church with stained glass in the rest rooms, or retiring.

All that rates a four-star "Amen" from most of us. But the catch is that such preaching--if it is really prophetic--always results in the stoning of the prophet. Any prophetic voice from the pulpit, agitating for action and pressing for change, is likely to be challenged. We need to recognize that people, even Spirit-baptized people, like to remain comfortable. They will do all they can--in a civilized way, of course--to silence the prophetic voice and replace it with a priestly voice which does not force them to change.

Recently my pastor, Curry Vaughan--in the midst of an otherwise "keep-'em-smiling-Sunday-morning message"--lashed out at Christians



who refuse to renounce their allegiance to certain secular fraternal groups. I could sense the congregation around me immediately tighten up. As long as Curry was condemning adultery, theft and gossip--socially acceptable condemnations--he was on safe grounds. But suddenly he shifted from preachin' to meddlin'. Things got uneasy in Zion that morning, and afterwards some of the usual glad-handers were out front trying to find others who agreed with "their side."

But prophetic preaching always afflicts the comfortable. Valentine is right. It perceives that God's basic concern is not religion but life, and Christianity and life are to be everlastingly correlated. There can be no turning back from responsible involvement to change the world for God's glory and humanity's good. That cannot be done by merely proclaiming what is right. Preachers also need to renounce wrong. Just be prepared for the stones when you do.

### TRAVEL TIPS

El Al Israel Airline has lowered its fare from New York to Tel Aviv. You may now fly round trip from New York, non-stop on a 747, for \$609. This is not a charter fare, but a regular commercial flight. Reservations must be made in advance, however. Once you reach Israel you may, for \$111 extra, fly from Tel Aviv to Eilat. This fare, which is good only through March 15, is available Monday through Thursdays and includes three nights at the fabulous Laromme Hotel along with two of those sumptuous buffet breakfasts.

El Al is also offering--until Feb. 28--the best bargain I've run across. For \$669 you get round trip airfare from New York, five nights in a first class hotel, bed and breakfast and a Hertz Rent-A-Car for five days. You can also add extra days. For an extra \$100 you can stay at the deluxe Laromme Jerusalem Hotel, the Tel Aviv or Jerusalem Hiltons. My rental car alone cost me \$300 per week last year, and the Hilton was \$150 per night. It's called their "Sun-sation" package. Call your travel agent for advance reservations.

### POLICY FOR OUTSIDE SPEAKERS

Charles Green, pastor at Word of Faith in New Orleans, has--after some interesting experiences--worked up a written policy which he gives to all outside speakers in his church. It is a simple, one-page document that begins "Welcome to Word of Faith."

The second paragraph says: "Almost daily, we receive requests from speakers and music ministries to come and minister here. About 90% of the time we cannot accommodate them. But we have sought to have your ministry here because we feel it will be compatible with our vision and will bring strength to the Body. Please allow us to help you make your visit a memorable one. You will love the Word of Faith people. Flow out to them, and they will respond."

He then lists 5 requests:

"Based on our years of experience we make the following requests of our guest ministers:

-- 1. "The pastor will be in full control of the service. At the conclusion of the ministry, the guest will turn the service back to the pastor for final announcements and the closing of the service.



-- 2. "Since the Word of Faith is a complete service, each service will include a time of praise and worship. It's our desire for the guest minister to be present, on the platform, from the beginning of the service. (Our people will not respect dramatic entrances just before the ministry.)

-- 3. "The pastor is the only person authorized to receive offerings. The guest minister will not take any offering. This must be strictly adhered to. Word of Faith is a generous church and we will bless you.

-- 4. "For years it has been popular not to be disciplined concerning time limitations. This is not our belief. We are considerate of our people, the hour, and the large crowd of babies in the nursery. The pastor and the guest minister can discuss these things and work together on them.

-- 5. "We feel it is the wisdom of the Holy Spirit as well as the years of practical experience that has helped us develop these guidelines. We thank you for working together with us to have a great meeting." End of quote.

#### USEFUL TRIVIA

Last year when a friend's house burned he went through a two month hassle with the insurance adjustors on his contents claim. It was difficult to prove, for instance, that the sofa was good quality and his Ethan Allen dining room set was not junk. When he finished his new house he borrowed a friend's video camera and went from room to room, video taping all the contents--including close-ups of model and serial numbers. The tape is now in his safety deposit box. That's good stewardship.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING. . .

#### EXCESSES IN FAITH HEALING FORCES NEW LAWS

One of the purposes of government is to protect citizens from those who would harm us. However, for years, the government has considered certain areas sacrosanct. At the top of the list of untouchable areas was faith healing. Now, because of the growing number of religious fanatics and outright quacks, not to mention the opportunists and shysters who operate under the cloak of immunity cast over the area of faith healing, the government has been forced to step in and pass laws to protect innocent children from both charlatans and sincere but ignorant parents and religious leaders.

Last year a Tennessee judge ordered doctors to give chemotherapy and radiation treatment to 12-year-old Pamela Hamilton of La Follette, despite pleas from the child and her parents to let them rely solely on the power of prayer for healing her rare form of bone cancer. The judge, after hearing the doctors say the child would die without the treatment, ordered chemotherapy. Not to have done so, he said, would be the worst kind of child abuse. Seven months later the doctors



announced there was no longer evidence of the disease. Pamela's father, a minister of the Church of God of the Union Assembly, said, "The medicine didn't do it. It came through God."

Without commenting on how the healing came about, I need to point out the frightening and dangerous precedents which these fanatic excesses in faith healing are forcing in courts all over the land. This is causing conflict even in the judiciary. Time magazine comments that "the American legal system is at odds with the Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom" as state courts routinely intervene against the anti-medicine doctrines of those who choose to believe that faith in God rules out the use of medical treatment.

Not only are states now passing laws giving courts authority to order medical treatment, but they are bringing charges of neglect or abuse against parents who invoke their doctrines on their children. In a growing number of instances courts are actually taking children away from their parents if the parents violate a court order for medical treatment. This has been accented, in part, by the public outcry caused by the heavy media coverage of "child abuse."

Judges are not comfortable with these rulings. All those I have interviewed believe the U.S. Constitution grants parents the rights to raise their children as they see fit. However, when a parent's doctrine "endangers" the life of a child the courts feel obligated to step in.

### Monkey Pus

These decisions would not be necessary were it not for the growing number of excesses by people like Herbert W. Armstrong, leader of the Worldwide Church of God, who calls vaccines "monkey pus" and likens the use of physicians to worship of pagan gods. Jehovah's Witnesses, who refuse blood transfusions, are in constant court battles.

Now the federal courts are getting involved. Since 1974 a federal child protection program has required participating states to exempt from prosecution parents who refuse medical treatment for their children on religious grounds. Recently the Federal Department of Health and Human Services dropped the 1974 religious exemption demands and issued a new regulation to states, requiring that all cases of "child neglect"--including cases where parents relied on prayer rather than medicine--be reported for possible prosecution. (An amendment is before Congress which could restore that exemption.)

### Hobart Freeman

A rash of excesses was exposed last year by The (Fort Wayne) News-Sentinel when it did a series of expose articles on Hobart Freeman's Faith Assembly. Freeman, 64, one of the early Charismatic writers and speakers, taught that the use of medicine, doctors, and drugs of any kind is a sign of faithlessness. The News-Sentinel researched at least 88 followers of Freeman in eight states who have died since 1976 because they would not accept medical treatment. Of these, 43 were children. In a particularly shocking incident two years ago, 1-year-old Evie Swanson of Attica, Indiana, received second-and third-degree burns when scalding tea spilled over her. Infection set in, was left untreated, and Evie died two days later.



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## Anti-Faith Healing Laws Being Passed

One of the results of this kind of excess is a new law in Indiana. As of June, 1984, parents (or guardians) are no longer allowed to cite religious beliefs as a defense for failure to report a case of "child abuse" or neglect.

The first convictions of this tragic excess force came in the fall of last year when Noble County, Indiana, Judge Roger Cosbey sentenced David Bergmann, 28, and his wife, Kathleen, 27, to 10 years in prison for allowing their 9-month-old daughter, Allyson, to die of untreated meningitis. Commenting on the case Judge Cosbey said: "The preventable death of a child will not be tolerated by the law, even when cloaked in the garments of religion." In short: if the church doesn't police its fanatics--we will.

## Victim of His Own Teaching

In an interesting twist of events, Freeman died on December 8, 1984, after being sick for a month and refusing medical help. He had been indicted by a grand jury on October 17 on three felony charges in connection with the death of a 15-year-old Warsaw girl who died of untreated kidney disease. The grand jury charged Freeman with inducing reckless homicide, criminal recklessness and neglect of a dependent. A fellow minister, John Davis, said Freeman had "reached the point in his life where his beliefs are non-negotiable. He has drawn the circle so small only he can stand in it."

(For an excellent theological approach to the entire matter I recommend From the Pinnacle of the Temple by Dr. Charles Farah, Jr., graduate professor of Biblical Theology at Oral Roberts University.)

## Nose of the Camel

The intervention of government into this sacred area is frightening. It is the nose of the camel which has been allowed into the tent of the righteous. How soon will it be before the tent is so full of camel there is not room for balanced teaching on divine healing? Is it possible that in the near future humanistic courts could possibly move into areas which are not excessive? Remember, though, before condemning the courts, that it is the antics of abrasive and arrogant fanatics which are forcing judges and lawmakers to these terrifying decisions.



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