

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

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

RAMBO AND THE MINISTRY

The unprecedented success of Sylvester Stallone's latest movie, "Rambo," ought to suggest something of importance to pastors, youth ministers and others working with today's youth. The show, which is "Number One" all over the nation, features Stallone as a Green Beret who uses his special combat and survival skills to free Vietnam-era prisoners of war from the Asian jungle. Army and Marine recruiters are saying that it has triggered a huge number of young men who are swarming to recruiting offices to volunteer for the military. These would-be Rambos, stimulated by the film's "macho" image of cunning jungle warfare and non-stop blazing machine-gun fire, are eager to enlist and run the risk of death in order to achieve like the sweaty, muscular hero on the screen.

Pastors and youth workers need to see the film—not just to see the gross unreality portrayed on the screen—but to sit and watch the reaction of the kids in the theater. When the movie is over, talk to them in the lobby. Ask questions. You'll learn something. Today's youth are hungry for heroes. Rambo—even though he's an obvious fake—is fulfilling that role.

The Cry to Be Challenged

We need to tune in on the youth wavelength. Last year the big item in the stores was the Indiana Jones hat. This year the biggest selling item in the discount stores is the Rambo knife, with its hollow handle and huge, gleaming blade. Why? These items give the kids a sense of identification with their hero. Today's youth want to be challenged. That's the reason tough, no-nonsense mission organizations like Wycliffe Bible Translators are being flooded by the cream of today's college crop who want to "sign up." Wycliffe does not offer them an easy life. It prepares them to go to the jungle and die, if necessary, to complete the task of Bible translation.

On the wall, just over my word processor, is the most successful advertisement Wycliffe has ever run. It is the picture of a strong, athletic-looking man, wading across a swift-moving jungle river. His pants are rolled up. His jungle shirt is unbuttoned, exposing his bronzed, muscular chest. A canteen is hanging from his hip and he's wearing an Indiana Jones-style hat. The caption says: "Jim was voted 'most likely to succeed.' Now look at him."

The copy in the ad reaches out for the Rambo in all of us. It says: "It's too bad. Jim had it made. Personality, initiative, a college degree with honors. Success and the 'good life' were his for the asking.

"Now look at him. Backpacking across some jungle river. Giving his life to a preliterate people barely out of the Stone Age. Painstakingly creating a written

alphabet from a previously unrecorded babble of sounds. Working night and day translating the pages of the New Testament. Exposing the senselessness of superstition and ignorance. Relieving pain and introducing the possibility of health. Building a bridge of love and understanding to a neglected people.

"And to think...Jim could have been a success."

The copy continues: "If you're interested in Jim's kind of success..."

Hundreds of young people, looking for something bigger than making money or ushering in the morning service, have responded to that ad. I keep it over my desk to remind me not to sell today's youth short by offering them a sugar-coated gospel.

Big Enough to Die For

Today's kids are looking for something big enough to die for. Unfortunately, most of us don't offer them that by our own life styles—opting for comfort and pleasure rather than living the life of Rambo who risks everything to save his buddies from a living hell on earth.

The most popular speaker at the huge Urbana Missions Conference, sponsored by Inter-Varsity last Christmas and attended by more than 18,000 college students, was Jo Shetler, a Wycliffe Bible Translator. Jo is a beautiful young woman who left the comforts of home, foregoing marriage, in order to devote her life to living in a jungle village in the northern Philippines—translating the Bible. She was the only speaker to receive a standing ovation. Luis Palau, who followed her on the program, put aside his prepared message and spent most of his time commenting on the life of the woman who preceded him to the microphone. Billy Graham was so moved he insisted she come with him to Amsterdam to speak at the World Conference on Evangelism. What did Miss Shetler say? She simply told her story and asked for volunteers to join her in the jungles of the world—willing to die for Jesus.

She touched the Rambo button and called up the hero spirit which lives in today's youth.

My Call to the Ministry

The determining factor in my own life, when I answered God's call into the ministry, was a challenge from a crippled ministerial student when I was a freshman in college. I was at that time playing the macho role to the hilt: athletics, military, fraternity, campus politics. Then this skinny kid with a hump on his back came by my room one afternoon and said, "Jamie, God wants some **real men** in the ministry." That Ramboesque challenge loomed over me until the summer between my junior and senior years. I could resist no longer. At a youth retreat at Word of Life Camp at Scroon Lake, New York, I finally raised my hand to God and was sworn in.

We're missing the boat if we challenge our youth—including our own children—with anything less than dying for Jesus. But when we do—they'll respond. After all, there's a little bit of Rambo in all of us.

FOR COFFEE LOVERS

The legendary coffee roastmaster, Paul Katzeff, once said there were two kinds of people when it comes to coffee: those who wake up each morning, brush their teeth and then drink a cup of coffee, and those who wake up each morning, drink a cup of coffee, then brush their teeth.

Coffee is the almost sacred brew in every church office. Many pastors have

their own little coffeemaker on a table beside their desk. Secretaries come into committee meetings with cups of coffee. It is served to special visitors, drunk between multiple services on Sunday, and sipped during sermon preparation. In fact, one wonders how any pastor really got inspired before Francis Bacon wrote to his Anglican friends in 1699, "They have in Turkey a drink called COFFEE. This drink comforteth the brain and heart, and helpeth digestion."

Recently Paul Walker invited me up to Atlanta to speak at the 20th anniversary of the Mt. Paran Church of God. They had three services that Sunday morning—with 2,000 in each service. As soon as I finished speaking, an elder would usher me through the crowded halls back into Dr. Walker's third floor study. When the door closed behind me, I'd collapse into a chair, trying to get my thoughts together. The only interruption during the 20-minute break would be a timid knock at the door and then the church secretary would appear with a "God bless you, sir" and a fresh cup of coffee. I'd sit, sip, and pray until Dr. Walker would poke his head in the door and say, "Time to do it again."

I'm not sure I could have made it without the coffee.

In July, Jackie and I (and another couple from our church) spent two weeks in Alaska. Most of that time was spent in an isolated cabin on a lake halfway between Anchorage and Mt. McKinley. The owner, a pilot, flew us in his float plane and then returned, eight days later, to pick us up. We had packed in our own supplies, including coffee, of course. However, after arriving we never tasted our "standard brand" of coffee. In a cabinet in the A-frame (which had no inside plumbing but did have a delightful sauna) we discovered a fantastic new coffee. The brand was new to me: Thanksgiving Coffee Company. Since it sounded spiritual we tried it. It was decaf, which pleased the ladies, and flavored slightly with Irish Cream. Oh, good stuff. One sip was all I needed. I'll never go back to Maxwell House.

I got the address off the package (which was empty by the time we left) and when I got home I wrote—asking for a list of other flavors. I received a fascinating report from the COO, Mark Germond, which told me all about their more than 60 flavors. Germond, who could not understand why an Alaskan trapper would drink decaf, sent me several samples. Outstanding! In fact, while I'm writing this I'm sipping on an exotic cup of Ethiopian Yrgesheff. IT MAKES ME WANT TO WRITE IN CAPITALS. I CAN HARDLY WAIT TO TRY THE GERMAN CHOCOLATE MINT DECAF.

So, here's my tip to you. Why serve the regular stuff in your office when the best is available for just a few pennies more? (If you buy in bulk, it's available for less. And special gift packages of mixed blends are available for Christmas if you desire.) Write for a price list to this address: Mark Germond, Thanksgiving Coffee Company, Box 1918, Ft. Bragg, CA 95437.

THINGS TO EXPECT

Airline Luggage Requirements Changing

If you're one of those like me who never checks airline luggage (unless your wife is traveling with you and insists on taking three changes of clothes a day), look for new carry-on rules this fall. The airlines are going to strictly enforce a rule which limits you to one small case and a garment bag. Your case cannot be more than 9 x 16 x 20 inches, and it must fit under the seat or in an overhead storage bin. Most so-called "carry-on" suitcases are 22 inches long and won't quite fit under the seat. Shop around. I did and found just what I wanted. It's the size of two attache cases and takes care of nearly all my needs.

Higher Postal Rates Coming

If you are mailing on a second-class (non-profit) permit, look for a 30 percent to 40 percent increase starting October 1. This is a heavy blow to churches, publishers and others who mail regularly. Look for a hike in the third-class rate also—from 6 cents to 7.4 cents.

RECOMMENDED LEADERSHIP CONFERENCES

I'll be leading a pastors' conference (men only) October 7-9 at the Community of Living Water in Cornville, Arizona, on the subject of "Communications." Seventy dollars pays all in this beautiful setting in the desert. This will be a time of refreshing and personal ministry. Contact Bob Fetveit at (602) 634-4421 or Pastor Derald McDaniel at Trinity Church in Scottsdale at (602) 998-1222.

Jerry Cook and I will be directing a Leadership Conference with host Stephen Whyte October 22-25 in Scarborough, Ontario, outside Toronto. Theme: "The Church at Work in the World." Registration deadline: October 8. Call: (416) 752-7520 at Day-spring Christian Fellowship in Scarborough.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

MAKING THOSE INCREDIBLE HEALINGS CREDIBLE

It's time those of us who believe in divine healing start demanding credibility in the testimonials of those who claim to be healed. It needs to start with our own preaching. How easy it is to report joyfully and enthusiastically that someone has been "healed," when, in reality, nothing has changed but the symptoms.

Frankly, this kind of thing has become more than an embarrassment to the kingdom of God. It has become an abomination.

While there are those who blaspheme God by stating He no longer heals, there are others who are guilty of another form of blasphemy by proclaiming healings for those who have not been healed. Granted, the motives are different, but the fact we desire to report on a healing in order to give glory to God does not excuse sloppy research—especially when those in the world know that what we are reporting on simply isn't so. In fact, it has happened so much that worldlings (and religious legalists) now delight when they can disprove one of our glowing testimonies.

For a number of years I worked with the late Kathryn Kuhlman, reporting on healings which had taken place in her miracle services. During this time I researched a total of 46 medically-authenticated miracle healings. I compiled these into 10 books. There was Nanci Forrester, a 15-month-old baby girl from Milpitas, California, who was dying of leukemia. There was Arlene Strackbein, the wife of a businessman from Little Rock, Arkansas, who had multiple sclerosis. (Her husband is now in the ministry.) John LeVrier, a police captain in Houston, was dying of cancer. Fred Burdick, who at the time of his healing was an unbeliever in the contracting business, was permanently disabled from a back injury. I researched the cases of several medical doctors who were healed, including a former Southern Baptist medical missionary, Dr. Clifton Harris. His hip had been fused as a result of an automobile accident, forcing him to practice medicine from a wheelchair. Each one of these was a genuine miracle person whose healings withstood the bright light of medical investigation.

Sloppy Research and Dishonest Testimony

Those years of research spoiled me, I guess. Today when I hear some of the gushy testimonies, or read stories of people who have been healed of vague symptoms, I shudder—and long for honesty in reporting and testifying.

The irony of it all is that God is healing sick bodies. Miracles are taking place. But, like it or not, these are not nearly as prevalent as we wish they were—and many of those we proclaim healed are only better. Some die shortly afterwards of the same disease they once declared was no longer there.

I don't care if your theology does say you need to confess it in order to possess it—if it's not true you should not say it is true.

Protestant Charismatics and classical Pentecostals need to take a lesson from the Roman Catholics, who have been checking out healings for a long time. In fact, during my research years with Miss Kuhlman, I followed, as a guide, the Roman Catholic standard used to determine cures at the shrine of St. Bernadette at Lourdes, France. Only if they passed that same test did I put them in printed form.

Testing a Miracle

Since the time on February 11, 1858, when a teenage shepherd girl, Bernadette Soubirous, saw an apparition of the Virgin Mary in a small cave (now called the grotto of Massabielle) near Lourdes, France, more than 5,000 people have reported miraculous cures following a visit to the shrine. Of these the Catholic church has confirmed only about 70 as certified miracles. They use a tedious—but scientifically honest—procedure.

Once a miraculous cure is reported to some official at Lourdes, it is passed on to the Medical Bureau—a group of physicians with headquarters near the shrine. This Medical Bureau, composed of a number of cooperating physicians, is looking for particular characteristics without which they say no miracle has taken place: (1) No outside treatment or drugs made the healing possible. (2) It was instantaneous and did not require convalescence. (3) All natural functions which had been arrested by the condition were immediately restored.

The Medical Bureau asks four key questions of the one who claims to be healed—and of his attending physician.

1. Did the patient's illness described by the medical record exist at the moment of the patient's pilgrimage to Lourdes?
2. Was the malady suddenly stopped in its course at the time when there was no tendency toward improvement—and did all the symptoms disappear at this time?
3. Is there a cure—can you prove it with certainty—and did the cure take place without medical treatment?
4. Is there any possible medical explanation of this cure? In the present state of science, can any natural or scientific explanation be given?

A final medical examination—after some time has passed—is required to verify the healing. This exam is made by the Medical Bureau and involves a physician who is a known expert in the area of the patient's malady.

Once the Medical Bureau is satisfied, it passes the dossier on to an International Committee. This committee is made up of about 30 members—physicians from different nations—all appointed by the Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes. The

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International Committee meets for one day each year. They discuss each case sent them by the Medical Bureau and vote. It takes a two-thirds majority in order for the case to be certified. The results are then returned to the Medical Bureau at Lourdes.

Following the approval of the International Committee, the Medical Bureau then sends its recommendation on to the bishop of the patient's diocese. He appoints a Canonical Commission of five to study the findings and evaluate them.

Pope Benedict XIV set down the criteria for each Canonical Commission to apply when trying to determine if a cure at Lourdes is miraculous or not. To decide that a cure is supernatural, the Canonical Commission must be satisfied beyond any doubt that these points have all been satisfied.

1. The malady was a grave one and impossible, or at least difficult, to cure.
2. The cured malady was not in a state of decline to such an extent that it could have declined soon after (that is, it had not gone into medical remission).
3. No medication had been used, or if there had been, its inefficacy was certain.
4. The cure was sudden—instantaneous.
5. The cure was perfect.
6. There had not been beforehand a crisis produced by some cause so that one could say the miracle was wholly or in part natural and not miraculous.
7. Finally, after the cure there had been no recurrence of the illness for a reasonable period of time.

If it is satisfied on all points, the Canonical Commission sends its recommendation to the archbishop, who alone is qualified to state that the cure is definite, durable, and puts an end to an extremely serious pathological state.

Riding the Wings of Veracity

I'm not saying each testimony should undergo such rigorous investigation before a person testifies to a healing. I am saying, however, we need to be far more careful in what we say and write when it comes to healings. Especially is this true of enthusiastic people who go on public television or testify in meetings where skeptical but discerning unbelievers are present. I'm tired of hearing doctors, scientists, and other intelligent people sneer (or snicker) at us after hearing or reading our well-meaning but cornball testimonies.

It is the truth—not wishful thinking—which makes us free.



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