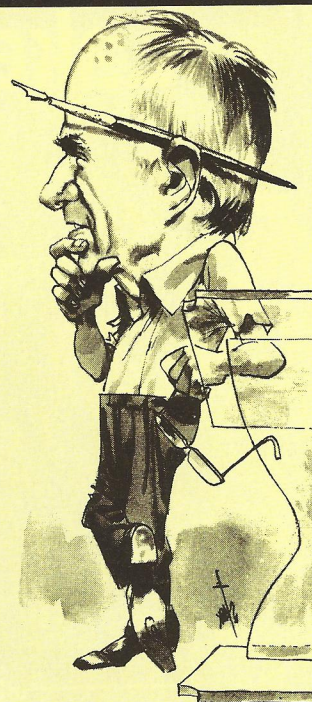


BUCKINGHAM

REPORT

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



EVALUATING THE NEW "PROPHECY MOVEMENT"

The newest controversy in the kingdom centers around the emergence of prophets—and prophetic utterances. Because of the emphasis of the charismatic move over the last 25 years, most Christians (even Christian leaders) believe God is *still* speaking and that prophets are His mouthpiece.

Biblical prophets did far more than predict the future. Most were FORTH-tellers rather than FORE-tellers. Many pulpiteers have the prophetic ministry of FORTH-telling. But recently the ministry of FORE-telling has reached a new prominence. Last year *Charisma & Christian Life* devoted an issue of the magazine to the emerging prophetic ministry. Special attention was given to the various prophets and prophecies coming out of Mike Bickle's Kansas City Fellowship. Now John Wimber has picked up the prophetic baton and is running strongly. His January Anaheim conference featured many of the prophets from the Kansas City Fellowship. It drew a reported 9,000—with 4,000 turned away.

Recently several dissenting voices—loud voices—have been raised against the extremes of the prophetic movement. Most of these objections are solid, pointing out errors that desperately need correction. My natural tendency is to write a full story covering all the charges and countercharges. God has checked me on this, however. Instead of being a reporter and analyst, I am to be a healer. He said. The most I can say about the controversy at this time is that several leaders of national stature have agreed to meet—at the request of some of the leaders of the prophecy movement—to try to bring biblical correction and balance. I have met with a number of the leaders and believe God is at work to keep this from becoming another extremist movement.

Personal Conclusions So Far

In the meantime, the movement continues to grow. From this I have drawn several conclusions:

- God is indeed speaking, and prophets are His mouthpiece.
- People are hungry to hear from God and will travel great distances in hopes of hearing Him speak, if not to them then to someone else.
- People are lazy and would rather have someone tell them what God is saying than go to Him personally—which is still the best way.
- Sensationalism draws huge crowds. As people will always come to see miracles—or a sideshow at a carnival—so they will come to hear prophecy.
- If all "prophecy" does is tell you (and others eagerly listening in) what you have in the left-hand pocket of your coat or what you did on your 13th birthday, it is worthless. Check: it may be ESP rather than a word from God.
- The prophecy movement carries with it the seeds of deception. At worst in the discipleship/shepherding movement some shepherd told you what to do. In the prophecy movement it's God(?) who tells you what to do.
- All prophecy, public and personal, should be submitted to (1) local leadership and (2) other prophets for confirmation.
- The prophecy movement desperately needs moderation and balance to keep it in the mainstream of the rest of what God is doing.
- It's easier to hear God through a "prophet" than it is through your wife.

Jamie Buckingham

Judging Prophecy

Personal prophecy—that is, when a prophet either comes to you personally or singles you out in a public meeting and delivers "a word"—is at the heart of this new movement.

The problem lies in discerning who is a prophet and who is not—and which prophecies are true and which are false.

Years ago Derek Prince told me the only way to determine if futuristic prophecy is true or false is to wait and see if it comes to pass. That's wisdom.

Also, those who receive personal prophecy must remember that it should never be used for *guidance*—only for *confirmation*. Brother Andrew once told me some real horror stories coming out of the early days of Bible smuggling in Europe. Prophets had told his Dutch smugglers that God would blind the eyes of Communist border guards when the smugglers went through the checkpoint into Eastern Europe, carrying Bibles in their car. As a result, the young missionaries did not hide the Bibles as they ordinarily would have. The border guards detained them when they saw the Bibles. The vehicle was confiscated and the young missionaries were arrested. They had used the prophecy for guidance rather than confirmation.

Many years ago a South African prophet by the name of Thomm, who was being promoted by Pat Robertson, singled me out in a meeting. He knew I was a book and magazine writer, but knew nothing else. Pointing his finger at me, he said I would write 20 books and would be asked to become editor of the Full Gospel Business Men's *Voice* magazine. "Do not accept that position," he warned. I took this as a "word" that I was to keep on writing. I've written twice that number of books, but never was even considered, to my knowledge, for editor of *Voice*. However, had I been offered the job, accepted it and later regretted the decision, I couldn't blame God.

On the other hand, Paul was warned by Agabus not to return to Jerusalem. If he did, the prophet said, he would be bound in chains (Acts 21:10-11). Paul felt his call overrode the prophecy, went to Jerusalem, was bound in chains and never was free from arrest from that time until his death. Should he have obeyed the prophet? The debate will continue forever.

I believe this new move of prophecy is of God; yet it brings with it what all new moves bring: extremes and extremists. As we evaluate what is happening, we need to understand there is a difference between false prophecy and a false prophet. One way to determine a true prophet is his willingness (eagerness) to confess and ask forgiveness for any false prophecy he may have uttered.

Dick Mills of San Jacinto, California, is such a man. Dick entered the prophetic ministry long before most of the modern prophets were born. Recently he sent a letter to pastor Tom Peters of

Trinity Assembly of God in Lake Worth, Florida, dealing with two prophecies he gave while speaking in Tom's church. Neither came to pass.

In his cover letter to me, Dick wrote: "My reason for mailing a copy of this letter to you is because of a strong desire I have to cope with the problem areas that are surfacing in the current focus concerning the prophetic ministries. I feel that all mobile prophetic ministries need to establish accountability as well as credibility. It's my hope this letter can counteract some of the irresponsible things that have happened recently in the body of Christ."

Dick's letter is so valuable I am publishing it just as it was written.

"Dear Pastor Peters and Congregation:

"I feel the Lord wants me to write to you all there at Trinity Assembly of God regarding my visit with you in March 1988. At that time I strongly felt a major earthquake was going to happen in the summer months of 1988. I proclaimed it as a prophetic word and now face the fact it did not happen.

"In addition to the 'Big Bang' word, I also prophesied that Pastor and Mrs. Peters would be out of their house and into another location within 18 months. I even proclaimed an evaluation on the new residence. The 18 months expired and the new house had not materialized. It is obvious that I missed it on both messages: the earthquake and the new home for the pastors.

"What are the biblical steps to be taken when traveling ministries visit a congregation and deliver words that do not come to pass? Deuteronomy 18:22 gives us a good, sound answer: 'If the thing follows not or doesn't come to pass the prophet has spoken it presumptuously (or out of his own spirit).'

"I'd love to be 100 percent accurate, but in this situation it has to be a case of human error. One reason I'm writing this letter is because of a desire to be accountable to the Lord, to the church leadership and to the people.

"I answer to three ministers and go to them for corrective words, discipline and reproof. One of these ministers is Jack Hayford, pastor of Church on the Way. Pastor Hayford made some practical suggestions: Instead of date-setting he recommended I preface my remarks by these words, 'In my spirit I feel this could happen, and then name the time-frame. This would avoid any statement sounding like an oracle of God or a prophetic word.

"Pastor Hayford also suggested that I

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squarely face the fact that I missed it and not try to come up with anything elusive or evasive. He also felt it was good for the cause of Christ for me to contact you and acknowledge that my own human spirit got in the way of the Holy Spirit.

"Not only do I have feet of clay but the clay extends to the top of my head. This is a fact according to 2 Corinthians 4:7 where we have divine treasure in earthen vessels.

"I want to apologize for any harm done or any expectations raised that led to disappointment or frustration. I pray you won't give up on prophetic ministry. First Thessalonians 5:20-21 says, 'Despise not prophecies.' We're also told to prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. Those very verses let us know that prophecy is valid but needs to be verified. It also implies that we can discriminate between what is to be discarded and what is to be retained.

"All of life is a learning process, and I pray we'll all be enriched by this incident and not become embittered."

RELEASING PUBLIC GIFTS

As you consider the use of prophecy gifts, study these suggestions made by Roy Hicks, Jr., who offers valuable suggestions on releasing the "gifts of the Spirit" into ministry.

1. Teach. Don't teach in principal gatherings. Do a series during a midweek gathering. Gifts do not just happen; they are modeled and explained.

2. Enlist some contenders. Build the conviction among some of the small group enclaves of your church that you want manifestations of the Spirit. Show up at one of those meetings. Let them hear you pray in earnest.

3. Staff meetings. Never have a meeting with your principal leaders without waiting before the Lord for some expression of the gifts. If you'll be faithful to do this with them, a pattern will naturally transfer into the larger meetings you lead and into the meetings they lead.

4. Identify giftedness. Take time to explain the operation of gifts when they occur. Identify the operation of gifts when they are not readily identifiable—maybe something said in the context of prayer that you recognized as prophetic, or a word of wisdom that was shared in the

context of leading in worship. Calmly identify them for the saints without the use of drum rolls and spotlights. We want gifts to become a natural part of our supernatural life.

5. Make room. Don't rush. Learn to tarry at the appropriate moment. A pause doesn't require that a prophecy break forth. It is valuable even as silence. You need to give opportunity for gifts to be shared.

6. Response. Never allow a gift to be shared without leading the congregation in some kind of response—either a short prayer or ask everyone to repeat quietly what they heard the Lord say to them. Don't simply go on as though nothing happened. That will produce shallowness and an unspoken cynicism about the value of gifts.

7. Restating. Ask the person who has shared to repeat what he said, or ask someone else to say what they heard in the gift. This is especially useful when the style has hindered the content of the gift.

8. Refer to gifts. Look for opportunities to use gifts as illustrations in messages or when leading worship. This increases the value of the gift in the congregation's estimation and affirms the one giving the gift.

9. Use gifts as landmarks. Jack Hayford will work into a sermon or congregational letter a gift of prophecy that had a shaping impact on the life of the church family or on his own life, even if the prophecy happened years ago.

10. Link strategies and programs. Don't be afraid to begin a new church emphasis based on something the Lord said through one of the saints. Look for phrases in prophecies that confirm a direction the church is taking, and point them out to the church.

CHRISTIANS IN ISRAEL

On my last trip to Israel I took 19 men from our church, including most of my pastors and several key leaders. We deliberately planned a Saturday in Jerusalem so we could attend the Narkis Street Baptist Church. (Their services are on Saturday morning—*Shabbat*—rather than the traditional Sunday morning.) Although sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention, the Narkis Street Church recognizes the charismatic experience, and it comprises the largest body of believers in Jerusalem. For eight years, since their building was burned by Jewish extremists, the church has been meeting in a huge tent as the new building (it's incredibly expensive to build in Jerusalem) goes up next door.

Most in our group said the highlight of the trip was the visit with the believers in Jerusalem. Sadly, tour groups seldom visit. If you are planning a trip to Israel, insist on visiting the Narkis Street Church—hopefully on Shabbat morning. Frankly, what Jesus is *doing* is as exciting as what He did.

CONFERENCES YOU NEED TO CONSIDER

Many have written or called asking about my speaking schedule at various leadership conferences. We had more than 550 pastors show up for the Northwest Pastors Conference sponsored by Eastside Foursquare Church in Kirkland, Washington, in February. Both Doug Murren, the host pastor, and I felt it was one of the finest pastors conferences held in the Pacific Northwest.

Here's a list of other leadership events I'll be leading in 1990:

National Leadership Conference is a conference for pastors, church leaders and their wives held annually at the Baptist retreat center at Ridgecrest, North Carolina. For several years I have served as president. The attendance runs between 1200 and 1500, and is geared mostly toward leaders in smaller churches. Speakers this year are committed to help leaders "understand the times." They include two outstanding black leaders, *Luther Blackwell* and *Robert Whittaker*, plus a great balance between young and seasoned leaders. These include Karl Strader, Larry Tomczak, Moses Vegh, Phil Derstine and Bible study leader Don Finto from Nashville. Don Crossland, former "fallen" pastor now being used in a national ministry of restoration, will give inside insight on how to help fallen pastors. The times are too critical not to attend. The dates are May 21-23—so the deadline is close. Phone (704) 669-6900 for full information.

North American Renewal Services Congress (NARSC), Indianapolis. More than 45,000 are expected in the Hoosier Dome August 14-18. Jim Jackson, Charles Green, Bob Weiner and I are in charge of the non-denominational "track." The emphasis is world evangelization. Charles, Bob and I are speaking, plus Loren Cunningham of YWAM and a host of others. One entire morning will be given as a forum to understand what is happening in the new wave of prophetic ministries in the nation. Sharing at that session will be Mike Bickle of Kansas City Fellowship, Paul Cain and

John Wimber. It will be an exciting event. Write NARSC, 237 N. Michigan St., South Bend, IN 46601.

Southwest Pastors Conference. Each year I lead a small but intense 24-hour retreat for pastors. Date: October 1-2. This year we'll discuss prophets in the church as well as have personal ministry. Held at a beautiful retreat center in the high desert near Cornville, Arizona (two hours north of Phoenix), pastors come from all over the United States. Accommodations and meals are free. They can house 120 men on a first-sign-up basis. You're responsible for your own transportation. Stick around for a few days of vacation in a beautiful area. Write: Kathy Fetveit, Community of Living Water, P.O. Box 443, Cornville, AZ 86325.

Christian Writers Conference. David Manuel, one of the nation's top editor/writers, joins me for a four-day Christian Writers Conference also held at Community of Living Water, following the pastors conference. Dates: October 2-6. This is an intense time of lectures and workshops for serious writers. Registration is \$295 and is limited to 60. Prior manuscript submissions are required. We'll cover fiction, non-fiction, magazines, books and poetry. For registration information, write to the same address as above.

