
News Updates

THIS TIME HE DIDN'T COME BACK

Kenneth E. Hagin Sr., described by some as the father of the Word-Faith movement, has died. He was 86. He entered a cardiac intensive care unit after collapsing at home last Sept. 14 and died five days later. Newspaper reports said, "an exact cause of death was not immediately known."

Hagin was reared in a Southern Baptist household. He began preaching at age 17 in a church consisting primarily of Southern Baptists. His emphasis on the miraculous appealed more to Pentecostals, and he soon became an Assemblies of God minister.

In 1974, he founded Rhema Bible Training Center in Tulsa, Okla., which now operates in 14 countries and has 23,000 alumni. Rhema churches are located in more than 110 nations.

Hagin said he became a Christian at age 15 when he died and descended into hell. In his booklet, *I Went to Hell*, he wrote that his heart stopped and he "was pulled toward hell just like a magnet pulls metal unto itself." He said he "began to pray, 'O God! I come to You in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I ask You to forgive me of my sins and to cleanse me from all sin.' ... So I was born again ... and I've been saved ever since."

He claimed to have received the spiritual gifts of healing, prophecy, and discerning of spirits. He also claimed to have had personal visions of Jesus.

Hagin said his theology unfolded from a revelation. However, critics have shown that he, in part, developed and plagiarized his teachings from the writings of E.W. Kenyon, a Bible teacher and author with metaphysical leanings who died in 1948.

—MKG

EUROPEAN REVIVAL PROPHESED

Promises of the "greatest revival ever" long have been used to entice those looking for the next move of God. Toronto, Pensacola, and Smithton are just a few locations that have attracted throngs of devotees during the past decade alone. Now, two American evangelists have proclaimed that "the greatest revival of the Spirit" is coming to Germany.

During Benny Hinn's crusade held last August in Berlin, Germany, the faith healer invited to the platform Gwen Shaw, founder of the End-Time Handmaidens organization. As Hinn asked Shaw to pray for revival to come to Germany, Shaw said to him and his audience, "It will begin here, it will begin here." When Hinn inquired, "Are you prophesying now, that the revival will begin in Berlin?" Shaw responded, "I am speaking it by the Holy Spirit. ... The Lord said that the revival would begin with this crusade. ... Pastor Benny, you got no idea how important it is that you're here."

Shaw went on to declare that Hinn's Berlin meetings would spark many fires "going throughout all of Germany and all of Europe." Hinn's crusade audience cheered with loud enthusiasm at Shaw's alleged divine revelation.

However, "prophetic" words — such as Shaw's — speak only to the moment and to tantalize the naive and undiscerning. When they go unfulfilled, there is nary a cry of "false prophecy" or charge of bearing false witness against the Holy Spirit. The "prophetic word" is merely ignored, forgotten, or spiritualized. For example, in the 1990s, modern-day "prophets" in the United States said that the greatest outpouring of the Holy Ghost anywhere in the nation would occur in St. Louis and a 50-mile surrounding area. That Holy Ghost outpouring never took place and no one even thinks of holding the "prophets" accountable. Regrettably, Hinn and Shaw will meet the same reaction when the "greatest revival" fails to manifest in Europe.

Hinn's endorsement of Shaw, her ministry, and her spurious prophecy of revival continues to demonstrate his lack of spiritual discernment. Hinn has a sustained history of sanctioning questionable — and even unorthodox — women, including Kathryn Kuhlman, Aimee Semple McPherson, Maria Woodworth-Etter, and Unity School of Christianity-trained minister Johnnie Colemon.

—MKG

JUST A LOT OF SMOKE?

Finding images in the curls of smoke rising from a disaster scene long has been a staple of supermarket tabloids and some newspapers. For example, a number of papers ran photographs of both the fiery destruction of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, and the collapse of the World Trade Center buildings in New

(continues on page 20)

form of communication with the dead that is forbidden by Scripture.

A new Jesus who had to suffer in hell and be born again is welcomed. Utopia is promised and redemption of the body offered *now*, though it is never delivered. Salvation, sanctification, and glorification are mixed, matched, and mingled in incredible confusion. Doctrine is shockingly referred to as “doo doo” and there is no outrage! People are so far in the gutter that the sewer cannot be far away.

These shameless charlatans are the devil’s instrument to weaken the Church, even though Paul says it is the pillar and ground of truth. Their television broadcasts, along with their book deals, allow them maximum exposure to perpetuate massive heresies as they cavalierly undermine Scripture, raze honesty in ministry, belittle the local church, and disregard sound doctrine. “If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?”

For over three decades, Christians have been encouraged to write the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in protest of a fictitious petition. The petition (known as “Petition #2493”) is purported to be an effort by infamous atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair to remove all religious programming from the television airwaves. The petition is pure fiction, but attempts to stifle it continue to circulate within Christian circles. As a result, letters of protest from Christians steadily pour into the FCC’s office. (The fact that O’Hair was murdered in September 1995 has done little to deter the crusade against the spurious campaign attributed to her.)

In one very real sense, we could say, “Oh, that the O’Hair petition were true.” The Church would be better served if Christians signed their name, not on letters of protest, but on just such a petition to remove religious broadcasting. Pulling the plug on “Christian television” with its destruction of the four pillars noted above, would be a tremendous advantage for the local church. The local church is God’s arrangement for worship, teaching, fellowship, encouragement, ministry, evangelism, and so forth. It is not, and never will be, “Christian television,” despite Paul Crouch’s repeated exclamation, “We’re gonna have church tonight!”

It is safe to say that the outlawing of religious broadcasting by the FCC will never take place. So what should Christians do? We can start by turning off religious television and reading our Bibles, becoming active in a local church (investing time, talents, and finances), supporting good apologetics ministries, and writing letters of protest to the false prophets, calling them on their lies and lunacy. There needs to be an outcry, and it needs to start now. We need to speak out to the managers of so-called Christian bookstores that are promoting poison by the boatload. That is what the righteous can do. *Act now while there is still time.*

—GRF

NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

York City, pointing out what appears to be a face in the ascending smoke. The apparitions are more readily visible in a still photograph and probably would not have been recognized at the scene by an unaided eye. Newspapers that publish these photos usually define the apparition but leave any further interpretation to readers.

Not so for Arnold Murray, televangelist and pastor of the Shepherd’s Chapel in Gravett, Ark. Recently, Murray called attention to a facial image found in the gigantic clouds of ash rising at the eruption of Mount St. Helens, adding to it his commentary that works the United States’ most famous and greatest natural disaster into end times prophecy.

On Sunday, May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens, a volcano in southern Washington state, erupted with the energy of 27,000 atomic bombs. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ran a dramatic aerial photograph of the volcano’s primary eruption which spewed rock and ash 16 miles above the mountain. On the left side of the rising cloud is said to be the “face” in Mount St. Helens. As with a stone that Murray says contains the 10-million-year-old footprint of an angel, the Mount St. Helens photograph is a favorite “show and tell” resource for Murray.

Murray fuses this twentieth-century cataclysmic event with biblical prophecy through the unorthodox use of the phrase “vapor of smoke” found in Joel 2:30. He connects the dots of Joel 2 (eighth century B.C.) with Acts 2 (first century A.D.) and then leaps right off the biblical pages to the contemporary Pacific Northwest. “What smoke and vapor came up from the earth on Pentecost day to show maybe that we could be in the latter days?” he asked his viewers during his broadcast on July 10, 2003. Murray outlines, in great detail, the facial features he says appear in the cloud rising from Mount St. Helens.

“God allowed the picture ... fire, smoke, and brimstone to lock in a benchmark of time in the final generation ... He gives enough signs that you cannot help but believe His Word,” he told his audience. The point not to be missed for Murray’s followers is that on Pentecost Sunday 1980, God bolstered His Word with the effects of a volcanic eruption. Other than claiming it to be a “sign” of the “final generation,” Murray did not say why it was a “face” — and not some other object — that appeared in the smoke.

Murray’s prophetic observation is flawed on key issues. First, seeing images and patterns in clouds of smoke are the products of one’s imagination. When Jesus told His followers to understand the times, He did not instruct them to employ pareidolia — that is, the art of seeing His face in a rusty road sign or the Virgin Mary on the side of a weather-worn barn. Christians are never to engage in such a frivolous, abstract, and subjective practice as cloud watching. The signs which Christ said

would be on the horizon would be real, concrete, and objective events (Matthew 24).

Murray demonstrates a disregard for truth and accuracy and takes advantage of the ignorance and gullibility of his television flock. He has based his interpretation of Bible prophecy on an erroneous date. Murray says the Mount St. Helens' eruption occurred on Pentecost Sunday in 1980. It did not. The volcano's primary eruptions began May 18, a week before Pentecost, which was celebrated on May 25, 1980. But Murray doesn't let historical fact stand in the way of his interpretation. This sort of implausible hermeneutic may titillate an audience, but does nothing to honor God by rightly dividing the word of truth.

Murray repeatedly calls those who challenge his Bible interpretations "Bible-thumpers," "numbskulls," and "yo-yos." However, it is Murray who would be more rightly regarded with such scorn. Despite his efforts to establish himself as an extraordinary Bible teacher, careful examination of his ideas shows him a confused teacher to be avoided.

—MKG

JESUS SAVES, YES JESUS SAVES

Christians have long sung of the saving power of Jesus. As they sing, they express the power of Christ to save one from spiritual death. Recently, however, Dallas Cowboy's cornerback turned CBS sports analyst Deion Sanders gave new meaning to the popular hymn. Apparently Jesus is now saving from more than just the consequences of sin. He saved Sanders \$2,765 off a \$4,265 auto repair bill.

In 2001, Sanders had work done on his 1961 Lincoln Continental convertible. Since that time, auto repair shop owner Phil Compton, along with his attorney, Ed Edson, have been trying to collect on the bill for the repair work. According to an *Associated Press* report, "The owner of the repair shop said Sanders wanted to pay only \$1,500 of the \$4,265.57 bill, saying that Jesus had informed him that was all he needed to pay."

Compton serviced the vintage automobile and returned it to Sanders' home in Plano, Texas, in November 2001. Pilar Sanders, former wife of the sportscaster, took the keys and repair bill from Compton and retreated into the locked house while bodyguards and housekeepers moved other vehicles around the automobile to prevent it from being returned to the repair shop. "When Sanders drove up, he refused to pay the invoice amount, handing Compton a \$1,500 check and saying, 'Praise Jesus ... I follow what in my heart I'm told to pay,'" the *AP* reported.

Compton filed suit in March 2002 in an attempt to collect the outstanding balance. During the July 14, 2003, trial, held in Texas State District court, Judge Joe Cox ruled in favor of Sanders. Testimony was given during the trial which stated that Compton had been told that there was a \$1,500 ceiling on the cost of repairs.

Sanders told the *AP* that "I'm not hurting for money. And let's be honest. A \$4,000 bill, I could have written a check a long time ago. But it's the principle. I'm tired of getting ripped off."

—MKG

LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND SHAMELESS

Two local business-related publications last summer disclosed the successes of their respective hometown televangelists. The *St. Louis Business Journal* examined the "evangelism empire" of Joyce Meyer, while the *San Antonio Express-News* revealed the spectacular income of John Hagee. Each report revealed an opulent kingdom that is amassing millions of dollars through donations and the sale of books, tapes, and other materials.

The St. Louis publication sought, but was refused, an interview with either Meyer or her husband, Dave. The newspaper also noted that an "exact revenue figure for the ministry wasn't available." Joyce Meyer Ministries is not a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, an organization that oversees and sanctions the financial activities of evangelical ministries. The ECFA regularly receives inquiries concerning Meyer and her ministry.

Despite these obstacles, the June 20-26, 2003, issue of the *St. Louis Business Journal* divulged prominent items in the inventory of Joyce Meyer Ministries, including an annual income estimated at \$57 million, a \$19-million headquarters, Meyer's personal silver Lexus SC 430 sports car, and an eight-bedroom, seven-bath, 7,000-square-foot home valued at more than \$500,000.

The *Business Journal* also said that within her office complex, the "hallway leading to the television studio features larger-than-life murals of Meyer in various speaking poses." Critics of Meyer long have noted her unabashed vanity. The *Orlando Sentinel* has stated that Meyer has had "plastic surgery," which the newspaper reported "Meyer readily admits." She wears tailored suits and lavish jewelry. Likewise, photographs of Meyer fill her Web site and magazine publications. As one approaches the guardhouse at the front entrance to her ministry's headquarters, a large portrait of the Meyers looms behind the guard.

While the *St. Louis Business Journal* reported on Meyer, the June 20 edition of the *San Antonio Express-News* revealed John Hagee's exorbitant income. The newspaper revealed that for the year 2001, "Hagee's total compensa-