

The strategy worked. A Florida dog-track owner sent Roberts what he needed, sparing us from finding out if the threat against Roberts would be carried out. However, the City of Faith sat vacant for several years before being sold to a group of investors for commercial development. It turned out to be a monument to a false prophet.

God has now given him those 20 years. And in those two decades Roberts has, time and again, shown himself to be a false prophet. Roberts claims to speak with divine unction, but in fact states ill-conceived ideas from his own mind and attributes them to God, much as the prophets of Jeremiah's day:

"Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. ... I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied" (Jeremiah 23:16, 21, emphasis added).

Roberts repeatedly has had to retreat to silence about his failed prophecies or, when he did address them, has claimed he did not "possess all the information." This, of course, discredits Roberts' claim to speak for the Almighty, unless God is not omniscient or willfully misinformed him.

During these past 20 years, Roberts also continued an unhealthy affiliation with and indulgence of other false prophets and aberrational teachers, including Benny Hinn and Paula White. It is a sad legacy: A litany of false prophecies that kept his "partners" sowing their financial "seed-faith" to keep his dreams alive. The Apostle Peter warned of such teachers when he wrote:

"Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping" (2 Peter 2:2-3, NIV).

—MKG

NEWS UPDATES

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Ownby's schoolmate, Mitchell Hults, who gave investigators a detailed description of a white Nissan pickup truck in the area at the time of Ownby's disappearance. That clue eventually led to the discovery of the two boys.

Throughout the Hornbeck story, there were many individuals who never stopped offering the hope that Shawn would safely return home. Yet the outcome proved to be a major embarrassment for one prominent psychic, who offered no hope to Shawn's family.

Four months after Shawn's disappearance, his mother and stepfather sought the help of popular psychic Sylvia Browne. Browne appeared on the Feb. 26, 2003, broadcast of *The Montel Williams Show*. The parents were in the audience and were able to interact with the psychic. When she was asked if Shawn was still alive, Browne shook her head and said, "No." Shawn's mother wept at her answer.

Browne also gave Shawn's parents and the audience a description of the abductor, "The guy was dark-skinned. Although he wasn't black, he was more Hispanic-looking. [He] had real long dark hair and strange enough, Hispanic, he had dreadlocks." The man with whom Shawn had been living with and who has been charged in the abduction is a white male who bears no resemblance to the man Browne described.

A week following Shawn's rescue, his parents told CNN reporter Anderson Cooper that they were told if they wanted to talk further with Browne they could, "at her normal standard fee." Those who have monitored Browne's operation said she charges \$700 for a session lasting from 20 to 60 minutes.

Psychic debunker James "The Amazing" Randi, on the Jan. 26 broadcast of *Larry King Live*, said Browne's methodology was standard fare for clairvoyants. "These people, when they're wrong, they're usually dramatically wrong. When they're right, they're only right with common things that you would expect to be true," Randi told King. The probability was that Shawn had been killed and Browne echoed that expectation, Randi noted.

Browne, on her web site, countered the accusations saying, "I have **never** nor ever will charge anyone who seeks my help regarding a missing person or homicide. ... To be accused of otherwise by James Randi and others like him is a boldface lie. ... As I have stated on Montel, on my radio show, in my books and in each of my lectures, I cannot possibly be 100% correct in each and every one of my predictions. I have never claimed to be."

—MKG

TELEVANGELIST SUED BY FAMILY

The positive-confession theology of televangelist Darlene Bishop has her headed for court as a result of a lawsuit brought by the four children of her late brother. Darrell "Wayne" Perry, a country songwriter, died in May 2005 of throat cancer.

Perry's children have accused their aunt of wrongful death, clergy malpractice, and fraud. The lawsuit alleges that Bishop persuaded her brother to suspend chemotherapy treatment in favor of divine healing. In a separate lawsuit, which went before a judge on Jan. 5, Bishop was accused of probate irregularities and the

mishandling of her brother's estate, of which she had been named executrix nearly two years before his death.

Bishop issued a press release which stated that, "The allegations made by Darrell Wayne Perry's children are completely without merit." She also maintained that the allegation that she "hastened her brother's death is completely unfounded." The statement, released through her ministry, announced that, "Bishop never advised him against medical treatment; instead, she either personally took him to his medical appointments or arranged for someone to do so."

Bishop's positive-confession theology is borne out in her book, *Your Life Follows Your Words*. The advertisement for this volume boasts, "You will not be able to put this book down as Darlene Bishop uncovers the truths of how your life follows your words. By the time you finish this book, your faith will be so strong, that you will be able to believe God for anything." The publication claims "her brother [was] healed from throat cancer." She also writes in the book that "God healed her of breast cancer."

According to an Associated Press report, "in a deposition taken for the case in probate, Bishop says she believed she had cancer, but a physician did not diagnose it." Bishop also contends that the omission of disclosing her brother's death in the book was that it was published while he was in remission. However, in spite of her brother's death, Bishop continues to advertise and sell, without qualification, the book with its claims of divine healings.

Perry wrote a No. 1 hit for country singing star Tim McGraw in 1994. He also wrote songs for Lorrie Morgan, Toby Keith, and the Backstreet Boys.

Bishop is co-pastor, along with her husband Lawrence, of the 4,000-member Solid Rock Church, north of Cincinnati. She hosts *Sisters*, a weekly 30-minute television program. She is also a popular conference speaker in Charismatic venues. In March she appeared at Paula White's "Life by Design Conference" with White and T.D. Jakes.

—MKG

RESUSCITATING ARMSTRONG

From the time of its inception, the Worldwide Church of God, the sect founded by the late Herbert W. Armstrong, was considered unorthodox in its doctrine and practice. Armstrong considered himself Christ's sole true apostle on the earth who announced the "true original Gospel." He went to great lengths to try to show the Trinity was a pagan-derived doctrine, presented a defective Christology, denied the bodily

resurrection of Christ, and adhered to a strict legalism and sabbatarianism.

Following Armstrong's death in 1985, several of the church's key leaders appeared to agree, renouncing many of its founder's heretical teachings. This transformation was hailed by many evangelicals as a move from a "cultic sect" to a "Christian church." With the theological mutations came a diminishing of Armstrong's heretofore unquestioned authority. Yet not all of those within the WCG hierarchy endorsed the "conversion" to orthodoxy, and schisms followed.

A new book, *Raising the Ruins*, written by Stephen Flurry, contends that the church's deviations were not the result of a spiritual awakening, as church leaders maintain. Flurry argues the group was taken over by corrupted visionaries with an agenda.

An editorial review from his book promotes it as "the shocking, gripping untold story of the doctrinal hijacking and spiritual destruction of the Worldwide Church of God after the death of its founder." The review also alleges to be "the story of a cabal of leaders who destroyed Mr. Armstrong's work, sold the church's assets and hoarded the money."

Flurry maintains that some of the doctrinal alterations were occurring under Armstrong's nose before he died. The two men most villainized by Flurry are Joseph Tkach Sr., who succeeded Armstrong as pastor general of the church (and who died in 1995), and his son, Joseph Tkach Jr. Tkach Jr. told his version of the WCG's revisions in his 1997 book, *Transformed by Truth*. (See, Peter Ditzel, "Transforming the Truth - The Worldwide Church of God Continues to 'Make' History," *The Quarterly Journal*, July-September 1998, pp. 5-12.)

Flurry is a member of the Philadelphia Church of God, executive editor of its news magazine, *Philadelphia Trumpet*, and president of Herbert W. Armstrong College in Edmond, Okla.

Flurry's book, published in October 2006, is an ambitious attempt to recover what Armstrong loyalists see as the religious leader's severely maligned legacy. Flurry identifies Armstrong as one of the foremost religious leaders of the 20th century, the world's leading televangelist, and a Bible-based humanitarian.

Apart from the book, the Philadelphia Church of God is also resuscitating the late cult leader by way of the printing and free distribution of seven of Armstrong's principal books. The Philadelphia Church of God, following a fierce legal battle with the Pasadena-based mother church, gained copyright for the publications.

After *Raising the Ruins* enjoyed brisk sales of its initial printing of nearly 15,000 copies, Flurry and his church rushed to a second printing of 50,000 copies in late December.

—MKG