

Scandals stagger U.S. fundamentalism

by Ira Liebowitz

In what one evangelical spokesman, Dr. Lowell Streiker of San Francisco, characterized as “a Chappaquidick for Evangelical Christianity,” a mud-slinging war has broken out among some of the country’s most prominent and wealthy TV evangelists. The war has featured Elmer Gantry-style scandals involving charges of sexual misconduct, drug use, blackmail, and shady financing by top-level TV preachers (televangelists).

EIR has initiated its own investigation of the source of the scandals, and will report findings on an ongoing basis. The reason: Far from being of esoteric concern to the fundamentalist community, these scandals have potentially significant strategic implications:

- First, many of the affected fundamentalist sects are tied into equally fanatical networks in Israel, “Jewish fundamentalists” of a sort, who are engaged in a plot to destroy a very holy site of Islam, allegedly to rebuild “Solomon’s Temple” atop Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The Middle East could be consumed in the flames of “holy war” as a result. In this regard, the scandals intersect the “rethinking of the U.S. alliance with Israel,” set into motion by the recent conviction of Israeli spy Jonathan Jay Pollard.

- Many of the affected Protestant fundamentalist sects have been sent into Ibero-America as pagan battering rams on behalf of usury, against the present power of the Catholic Church and the efforts of Pope John Paul II to preserve Ibero-American economies and republican institutions against the genocidal demands of foreign creditors. Proselytizing by evangelists such as Jimmy Swaggart in Central and South America has run point for a State Department-linked campaign of “democratization” (destabilization) which has long identified the Catholic Church as its chief enemy.

According to San Francisco’s Dr. Streiker, the scandals will probably escalate, as other sexual or financial indiscretions come to light among some of the lavishly wealthy (and often financially overextended) televangelists. Others believe that disillusionment among the ranks of the 30 to 50 million-member fundamentalist community, will cause a drift back, toward mainline churches, provided that they begin to assert traditional moral values for the disillusioned.

Georgetown professor Michael Berenbaum, an expert at Rabbi David Sapperstein’s Union of American Hebrew Con-

gregations (Sapperstein is also a leader of “People for the American Way”), suggests there might be a 25% drop in contributions to the televangelists.

Most agree on two immediate results:

First, Pat Robertson of the 700 Club has been fatally undercut in his bid for the Republican Party presidential nomination. He is perceived as the man who insinuated politics into the religious domain.

Second, both the Christian fundamentalists and the Israeli and American Jews involved in the cited “Temple Mount Project” are weakened. According to Berenbaum, both partners need to “reassess strategy.”

Jim and Tammie

EIR readers cannot be surprised at the “Elmer Gantry” character of the current scandals. This brand of “Christianity” is a thin cover for forms of pagan Gnosticism that involve occult practices.

Involved in scandal to date have been Assemblies of God (AG) Rev. Jimmy Bakker, of “PTL Ministries” (an offshoot of Pat Robertson’s 700 Club), AG ministers Jimmy Swaggart and Marvin Dorman of Louisiana, and Rev. Oral Roberts of Florida. As the scandals unfolded, however, fundamentalists from the Coalition for Traditional Values, including Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and others were drawn into the maelstrom, in efforts to stabilize their shaken ministries.

The scandals began on March 18, when Jim Bakker and his wife, Tammie, tearfully appeared on Pat Robertson’s TV show to announce his resignation from the \$129 million per year “PTL (Praise The Lord) Ministries” in North Carolina, after confessing to a sexual encounter with a 20-year-old, whom he had then paid “hush money.” Bakker announced that a board headed by Jerry Falwell and Bakker’s former assistant, Richard Dortch (who reportedly was the hush-money bag man), would take over PTL. This scandal followed earlier damaging revelations about Tammie’s addiction to prescription drugs.

The story of Bakker’s indiscretions was leaked from the *Charlotte Observer* to Tennessee Evangelist John Ankerberg, to Jimmy Swaggart, who alerted the Assemblies’ leadership. Bakker charged that Swaggart (working for Satan) had attempted to use the affair to seize control of PTL. Then, New Orleans evangelist Martin Gorman announced a \$90 million suit against Swaggart for attempting to bankrupt him by spreading tales of sexual misconduct.

Next, Oral Roberts’s completed his bizarre fund-raising campaign—God would kill him if he failed to raise \$8 million—when a Florida race track owner stepped forward with a \$1 million donation, and said he thinks that Roberts needs a psychiatrist.

One outstanding question now is, who leaked the *Charlotte Observer* story to Swaggart? That set in motion a not-unhealthy process, where many will now be seeking traditional-value-oriented religion—this time, with their TVs turned off.