

Benny Hinn Refutes Dateline Charges

But the healing evangelist noted that criticism by the NBC program would increase his anointing

NBC may have their doubts about healing evangelist Benny Hinn's ministry, but at least one viewer came away with a different opinion after seeing the network's skeptical hidden-camera report on the popular TV preacher.

The man phoned Hinn's ministry to say that God had freed him from a severe back problem while he was watching the hour-long Dateline program, which raised questions about the legitimacy of healings claimed at Hinn's crusades, and where the millions of dollars raised during the events are spent.

"God used NBC!" Hinn exclaimed as the testimony was shared by ministry worker Jon Wilson on a Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) Praise the Lord appearance two days after the NBC broadcast. "The devil today is sorry he ever touched me," Hinn commented. "He is sorry he ever bothered."

Benny Hinn Ministries (BHM) spokesman Don Price told Charisma that although many NBC remarks had been "either wholly false or grossly misleading," there were no plans for any legal action.

"We believe our partners will discern truth from fiction and do not believe they would want the ministry to use donated funds to commence a legal battle against NBC for airing a story that was substantially incorrect and clearly biased," he said.

"We believe that this kind of unprovoked attack by the mainstream, secular media is an attack on every believer's faith, regardless of his or her denominational or theological persuasions," he added. "The body of Christ has been nationally ridiculed for believing in God's power to heal, and by extension every Christian should be alarmed that a national television network would display its bias against people of faith in God in such an overt manner."

Hinn devoted two hours of the Dec. 29 Praise the Lord program to answering questions raised by the Dateline report, inviting ministry staff and others to respond to different charges. He said he did not want to attack NBC, but "simply tell the truth because the Scripture says speak the truth in love."

More than two years in the making, the Dateline program featured hidden camera footage from Hinn crusades, shot after the network was told it could film only the first hour of the evangelist's meetings. It showed people falling as they were prayed for, describing them as "being strewn across the floor like bowling pins."

Ole Anthony, founder of the Dallas-based Trinity Foundation, a watchdog group that monitors TV evangelists and has provided material for previous secular-media exposés, said: "It's a circus. It's like professional wrestling."

Dateline said Hinn's ministry declined to confirm any of 56 healings reported at one crusade. The ministry did provide details of five "irrefutable and medically proven miracles," the report added, but only one of the people involved could provide her medical records, and her doctor suspected that the woman never had the Lou Gehrig's disease she claimed to have been healed of.

Dateline interviewed Belva Ventura, who with her son had received prayer from Hinn at a crusade for the cancers they were battling. She said she never received any follow-up calls from the ministry. Both she and her son later died of cancer.

The report also questioned the ministry's financial integrity, referring to an estimated annual ministry income of more than \$100 million, and a \$3.5 million home being built for Hinn in Southern California.

One former worker told the network that Hinn had bragged after one service of taking an elderly woman's last \$5 in a collection. Dateline also said construction on an orphanage in Mexico had not begun, despite ministry claims to the contrary.

Speaking on TBN, Hinn said he had declined to be interviewed by Dateline because God had told him not to speak to the network other than in a live interview. He wanted to answer the various charges on TBN, he said, because he didn't want to see "one believer weakened in the faith."

Pastor J. Don George, a former longtime BHM board member, said he personally had seen the impact of the ministry at crusades and through overseas ministries to the poor and needy.

"It's understandable to me that when an individual or an entity seeks to validate its existence by the discrediting of someone else, they are obligated to not tell the whole story," he told the TBN audience, "but I have come today from Dallas, Texas, to set the record straight and say Benny Hinn is a man of God in whom I believe."

Hinn interviewed Raymond Scott, who told how he had been healed of cancer at a BHM crusade in 1994 after doctors told him his condition was incurable. Hinn also introduced Oscar Alarcan, a businessman from Mexico who said he had donated the land on which the orphanage was being built and had acquired the building permits NBC had alleged had not been granted.

Nancy Nagelhout, who oversees BHM's follow-up work, said the ministry had contacted and spoken with Ventura on several occasions. Wilson said Hinn's comment about the elderly women's donation had been "twisted" by NBC, as Hinn had been commenting on her faith in giving the last money she had.

Price said Hinn had been "overwhelmed by the outpouring of support from his fellow ministers of the gospel" since the NBC report. Many had spoken "words of support and encouragement both personally and publicly," he said.

As Hinn observed in his TBN response, the Dateline report was not the first time he has faced negative media. In 1997 he made policy and personnel changes in his ministry after a CNN report criticized him for lavish spending practices. Ten years ago he announced plans to introduce other changes in the way he ran the ministry after a critical Inside Edition report on CBS.

Hinn told the TBN audience in December he welcomed the latest criticism because God had told him that the more he was attacked, the more God would increase the anointing on him.

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