

Mike Murdock Dismisses Newspaper Investigation as “Falsehood”

The three-part examination questioned the “lavish” lifestyle of the television evangelist and his fund-raising practices

A charismatic televangelist has dismissed a Texas newspaper investigation that called into question his lavish lifestyle, biblical claims for prosperity and use of supporters' donations.

In a major three-part series it called “an examination,” The Fort Worth Star-Telegram stopped just short of accusing Mike Murdock of wrongdoing in operating his Denton-based ministry. Murdock is known for his teaching on biblical wisdom and “seed sowing.”

The man who “says his mission is to rescue people from poverty is living lavishly, while the ministry he founded spends most of its money on overhead,” the newspaper said, noting that Murdock, 57, drives fancy sports cars, owns Rolex watches and recently purchased a jet. “Murdock makes few distinctions between his resources and those of the ministry he founded. Some critics question whether his actions are proper.”

The Star-Telegram's 13,500-plus-word story, published March 2-4, was the result of a six-month inquiry. Three reporters and a research librarian investigated Murdock, whose weekly TV program, Wisdom Keys, is broadcast nationwide.

The newspaper pieced together details of Murdock's lifestyle and ministry from documents obtained by the Trinity

Foundation, a televangelist watchdog group in Dallas; local property-appraisal records; a report of a burglary at his home; interviews; and excerpts from his broadcasts and books.

The newspaper said Murdock would not agree to an interview with its reporters unless everything he said was printed verbatim.

Murdock told Charisma that the first story in the series—featuring his photograph—ran on the front page next to an article on the arrest of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

“There was only one column devoted to the capture of the mastermind of the 9/11 attack, and the rest of the front page focused on our ministry,” Murdock said. “That told me that this wasn’t just a regular story. I don’t know if it was intentional, but it added to the negative tone of the story.”

Murdock added that he was saddened by the attack “targeting” his ministry. “Every minister of the gospel always finds hatred, anger and false accusation from nonbelievers to be painful, devastating and soul-searching,” he said.

“Our attorneys will address the 36 discrepancies and false statements in the first article alone,” he added. “I have a 14-page response that will be presented to our partners shortly.”

The Star-Telegram examined three aspects of Murdock’s ministry: how donors’ money is spent, how the line between his interests and those of the tax-exempt ministry is blurred, and his biblical claims for prosperity.

Experts on nonprofit organizations told the newspaper that Murdock's solicitation of personal gifts—for his birthday and ministry anniversaries— were "questionable," but none charged that he was raising funds illegally. Ministry accountant John Walker of Tennessee-based Chitwood & Chitwood said whether the funds were marked as love gifts, blessings or birthday gifts, they were simply income, the Star-Telegram reported.

Murdock's main critic in the series was Ole Anthony, the founder and president of the Trinity Foundation, who claims Murdock is living a double standard.

"He tells his employees they should sacrifice, but he doesn't," Anthony told the newspaper. "He tells the viewers to buy his books and give to him, but he doesn't give. He's just another cog in the wheel [of televangelism], maximizing self-interest."

The newspaper also spent a day examining Murdock's alleged use of "love bonding"—a psychology term used by University of California, Santa Cruz, social-psychology professor Anthony Pratkanis.

"On his television program, he often pauses to gaze intensely into the camera," the Star-Telegram said. "He singles out viewers as if he knows who is watching and what they are thinking."

The newspaper quoted Murdock newsletters, in which he told donors: "I wonder if you realize just how much you are appreciated ... how many times I talk to the Father about your needs, your pain, your miracles!"

At least eight women moved to the Denton area, some believing Murdock intended to marry them. The newspaper said one woman lives on the side of the road near the ministry's headquarters.

On a ministry tape, Murdock said he did not know the woman living near his property, but tried to help her by giving her some money to return home, the newspaper reported. He told the Star-Telegram that God did not send her to marry him because she "brought divisiveness."

Murdock told Charisma several "wisdom keys dominate my heart" concerning the Star-Telegram investigation, which he said had been going on for several years.

"False accusation is the last step before supernatural promotion," he said. "Adversity is always the golden link to divine relationships, time reveals truth, and those who attack you fear your potential. The flood of phone calls, mail, e-mails and flowers from all of my pastor-friends and partners has meant the world to me."

Murdock added that the articles were "disappointing in motive, goal and falsehood."

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