

Billionaire Pentecostal Making International News With Bible-Based Soap Operas

Billionaire Pentecostal Eric Macedo's latest projects reshaped the way his country consumed television, according to international reports.

The controversial Universal Church of the Kingdom of God founder and the megachurch's TV broadcasting network continue to attract audiences with Bible-based soap operas.

Thus far, Macedo and the network aired *Ten Commandments* last year, followed by the on-air *Promised Land* and *The Rich Man and Lazarus*, which is currently filming.

"In the 27 years I've been in this business, I've never seen a set like this. It's a very bold project, and it will be a wonderful story," *Lazarus* director Edgard Miranda told *Agence France-Presse*. "The Bible is a fantastic script."

In 2015, *Ten Commandments* competed against one of the nation's leading networks, the Globo, and its show *Babilonia*. *The Guardian* reports *Ten Commandments* saw success because it offered wholesome entertainment for Brazil's conservatives.

Assemblies of God Pastor Silas Malafaia blasted the *Ten Commandments*' competition as "moral rot."

"Whether you like it or not, the public is still very traditional," said Anderson Souza, who oversees soaps at the network. "Families want to be able to peacefully sit down in the living room and not worry about ... being embarrassed."

But according to *Bloomberg*, the network's content isn't always clean, and neither is its history.

The financial news site reports that in addition to the Bible-based telenovellas, the network also airs sex-infused reality shows and journalistic reports on grisly crimes.

Macedo purchased Record, then just a debt-ridden TV network, in 1989 for \$45 million. The transaction led to an investigation by Brazil's tax agency, which found that he'd used interest-free loans from the Universal Church to fund it and fined him for failing to declare the loans as income. In his defense, Macedo said he'd bought Record on behalf of the church to create the country's first evangelical TV network. The argument failed to convince tax inspectors and led prosecutors to file suit in 1997, seeking to strip Record's broadcasting license on the grounds that Brazil's constitution forbids religious institutions from owning radio or TV stations. In testimony for that case, Macedo acknowledged the loans, while changing tack to say that he had acquired Record for himself. The case dragged on for more than a decade until a federal judge, Leonel Ferreira, ruled in Macedo's favor in 2011. In his decision, Ferreira wrote that the church's transfer of cash to Macedo could imply that, far from being front men for the church, he and his deputies "control the church absolutely and use it for their own benefit." But, he said, such speculation fell outside the limits of the case at hand.

Macedo and the network, though, now thrive on the Bible soaps.

"In my opinion, there should only be soaps like this one—to teach about the Bible, about family and values," hairdresser Cristiana da Silva told *The Guardian*. "This is the best soap."

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