

Our Interview With Paul and Jan Crouch

Congratulations to Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) on its 40th anniversary. Paul and Jan Crouch are to be commended for building the world's largest worldwide broadcasting network. No matter what you may think of the Crouches or TBN, there is no denying the impact—most of it positive—they have had on modern Christianity.

You may remember I had hoped to interview the Crouches a few months ago, but at the last minute, Jan pulled out. That was after I had asked my readers what questions I should ask. If you missed that Strang Report, you can read it here along with the many comments and questions it generated.

We wanted to commemorate the anniversary because it's significant. I admire Paul and Jan and for many years have considered them friends.

So we dug out of our archives an interview we did 30 years ago for TBN's 10-year anniversary. In that interview, our writer Dennis Roberts asked them the tough questions people continue to ask, about finances and accountability and why they allow certain people on the air.

The Crouches answered his questions with surprising candor. It's reprinted below, plus the cover story we ran on TBN. It was part of a series we ran on Christian television. We did individual articles in that series on CBN (which was the biggest) and PTL, which was the fastest-growing network. In 1983—four years before the PTL scandal—TBN was considered the third Christian network, much like Chrysler is always third behind Ford and GM.

The landscape has changed significantly. ABC now owns what's left of the CBN network (although CBN and Regent University

are very much a powerful ministry). The PTL network is long gone, although a humbled Jim Bakker has started over and is doing amazing things near Branson, Mo.

Keep in mind that 1983 was a decade before the Internet disrupted all media. It was before Daystar and the Word Network and many new ministries. So, much has changed.

Back then, *Charisma* was barely eight years old. I had never personally met the Crouches, yet we covered TBN as journalists. As an organization also trying to get out the gospel via media (although in a different format), we understand the pressures and temptations that come from serving God under the scrutiny of the public eye and in a culture increasingly opposed to the gospel message.

Please take the time to read our interview and feature story. I think you'll be inspired, as I was, and will end up thanking God for what TBN has done.

JUNE 1983 ISSUE OF CHARISMA, PAGE 24

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL AND JAN CROUCH

Recently, the husband wife team that heads the Trinity Broadcasting Network talked with reporter Dennis Roberts about their ministries and philosophies

Roberts: What kind of image or flavor do you want to bring to Christian television?

Jan Crouch: I don't like the word "image" at all. What we're doing is what a pastor or an evangelist or any spiritual leader does: simply hoping that the reality of a relationship with Jesus Christ is conveyed. That's what each of us needs ... Jesus, not a religion. If we do anything other than that, then we've failed—totally failed.

I remember a statement that Kathryn Kuhlman made one day. She said, "If anyone comes here to see ministry and only goes away

remembering Kathryn Kuhlman, then I have failed. But if you go away remembering how beautiful Jesus is, then I have done what I set out to do.” That is what we try to get across to all of our guests, to see Jesus.

Roberts: If you had all the money you needed to do any kind of programming you desired, what would you do?

Paul Crouch: I’d buy 100 TV stations coast to coast to produce foreign language programs in every language and send them wherever it is possible to get programs on the air.

Roberts: A former executive of a Christian TV ministry—not yours—has voiced the following criticisms and concerns regarding Christian broadcasting. How would you respond to them? He said salvation figures are inflated and reflect not just first-time conversions, but people who may “come to the altar” numerous times. Also, prayer requests not related to salvation are sometimes counted.

Jan Crouch: I’m sure it’s true that people come to the altar many times. I have. I was born and raised under a hellfire and brimstone Pentecostal preacher. I can’t tell you how many times I went to the altar to ask Jesus to forgive me. We were trained and taught to confess our sins before the Lord and ask Him to forgive us for anything we might have done that day. So praise God if people come to the altar many times.

Roberts: A second criticism that has been made of Christian TV is that, regardless of the number who actually come to the Lord, countless numbers more are driven away by the slick, plastic and/or “Elmer Gantry” image that comes across on many Gospel shows.

Jan Crouch: My answer to that is that many were turned off by Jesus. There is scriptural proof of that. We have a tremendous variety of people on the air, from Arthur Blessitt, who walks the street as Jesus did, carrying a cross ... holes in his coat and pants ... to Jack Van Impe and Dr. Robert Schuller. I pray

to God that somewhere along the line someone will catch the sinner with the right kind of bait and reel him in. You know, some of them turn me off. I won't watch them. But some I love. So you just put all the different varieties on during the 24-hour broadcast day and try to reach everybody with somebody.

Roberts: A third concern voiced about Christian TV is that people are given a distorted picture of Christianity. Christianity "superstars" present an image of constant victory that even they can't live up to in real life.

Jan Crouch: Well, I don't think we have a single program that doesn't have someone telling of some problem they've encountered and how they've encountered and how they've come through it. Paul and I tell of the victories and the trials. The agony and the ecstasy are both shown ... I'm thinking of Rosey Grier telling how his marriage was just over. James Robison, the week we were with him, told how he went through one of the greatest battles in his life and how God saw him through. So whoever said that has not been watching. That isn't true.

Roberts: A fourth concern: Theological fads (such as shepherding and positive confession) are easily and quickly spread by TV and become an accepted part of many people's doctrine before the difficulties and potential harm of such doctrines come to light.

Jan Crouch: That happens with or without television ministry. Anyone that knows the Word knows that there were problems minutes after Jesus left this earth. One thing I want to say about those who carry on a neglected truth of the Word is, thank God that a person gets the light on a truth such as tongues and hangs onto it unwaveringly. You know, tongues were considered a fad around the turn of the century. But there are so many truths there that anyone who studies to show himself approved needs not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word. One thing we need to make clear is that Paul is the

owner and operator of a television program. Paul falls under a totally different category in the FCC's eyes than a programmer. Paul cannot make a distinction doctrinally and say, "I don't agree with you brother, so you can't be on the air."

Roberts: final criticism about television ministries in general: True financial accounting is hard to obtain, and TV ministries—as well as many parachurch ministries in general—jealously guard their books from inspection.

Jan Crouch: This is another area where TBN is totally different from other organizations. TBN has a yearly audited financial statement done by an outside auditing firm. The financial statement is presented to our board of directors and then is opened to public inspection during working hours at TBN with our director of finance. It is open for friend or foe alike and we've had several in each category take a look. The record of donor giving is not open, but the audited financial statement is.

Roberts: Ministers in Orange County, Calif., have voiced concern about TBN giving air time and its stamp of approval to teachers and singers who have been disciplined by their churches or denominations for various infractions, specifically for immoral acts. They say these have not been isolated or infrequent incidents from the past, but in some cases are present, ongoing problems. What is your response to these concerns?

Jan Crouch: I think we need to look at it from Jesus' eyes, and see how He handled problems such as this. You remember the woman who was caught in the act of adultery. His answer to her was, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more." Many Bible scholars believe she was the woman at the tomb who was the first to tell the world that Jesus had risen.

The Samaritan woman had had five husbands and was living in

sin the moment Jesus met her. He simply told her about the living water and she was the first to run to her village and become an evangelist.

Simon Peter walked and talked with Jesus for five years and had all the light of the gospel. Yet as Jesus was dying on the cross, Peter denied Him three times. Still, as Jesus came out of the tomb, He said, "Go tell my disciples and Peter." He forgave Simon Peter for denying Him and 50 days later He allowed Peter to be the first to stand up and preach.

Who can judge sins? What is worst: denying Jesus, having five husbands, committing adultery or flaunting a proud look? Sin is transgressing against God Almighty. So how dare we Christians categorize? God said that all sin is forgiven in this life and we believe just as Jesus did that if a person has a valid ministry, such as Simon Peter, let him preach. For God does not withhold His gifts.

Paul Crouch: Just one final word on this issue. People have been critical of some Christian leaders who have been divorced. I don't know anyone who's been divorced and remarried who doesn't come under this criticism. We catch a lot of it from judgmental Christians who feel because a person has had a previous marriage or problem that has been well known to the general public that we shouldn't have them on the air anymore. What these people are probably failing to realize is that (these people) made a public apology and asked the people to forgive them for the problem. There are times in my life I want to forget about, but thank God, it's under the Blood. The critics don't hear these public confessions of some of these tremendous men of God who just like David have had gross problems in their lives. What can I say? Who's going to be the judge?

Roberts: If a person was in a situation where there was ongoing sin in his life that you were aware of, how would you handle that?

Paul Crouch: We make every effort to be sure that the person is repentant and that they have done everything they can, spiritually and physically, in that matter. If you could have seen the correspondence file on one particular individual who we worked with and tried to help through the years, you would understand a little better what we do behind the scenes.

Jan Crouch: I think the scriptural basis is found in Galatians 6:1-5 "Brethren even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ ... let each examine his own work and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another."

Paul Crouch: So our approach is a little different from the particular denominational approach where you have to be chopped off from your ministry and go to the back side of the desert some period of years before you can be restored, if ever, to your ministry. If a person asks for forgiveness and the Lord has forgiven them, why we certainly do.

Roberts: In your booklet, *The Miracle Birth of Trinity Broadcasting Network*, you mention a couple of incidents where there hurtful conflicts with other Christians and Christian organizations. How do these conflicts arise between apparently well-meaning, sincere Christians? Both say God wants to do a certain thing with a specific medium—in this case, TBN—yet they are in opposition. Secondly, what advice would you offer, based on your hard-earned experience, for another Christian to avoid such conflicts?

Jan Crouch: I wish you could ask Apostle Paul and Barnabas that! Maybe we would have the answer through the ages. It arose then, it will never end until Jesus, the only perfect One, returns. Paul E. Billheimer ... whom we call Dad Billheimer at TBN ... wrote a book called *Love Covers*. He said

that God surely know the answer for everything.

He knows that there is one answer that is the perfect answer. Billheimer believes that the reason we on this earth don't all agree or know the one perfect answer to everything is so that we can work our agape love ... love each other even though we don't always agree with each other. And I think that is just the perfect answer. There isn't anyone on the face of this earth that I can't say I truly, truly love in Jesus. There are a lot of people I truly, truly don't agree with. But conflict could be an opportunity for me to show agape love when there is no other way I can show love.

Roberts: Who serves on your board of directors, and what kind of authority do they have in the operation of TBN?

Jan Crouch: Paul is the president of TBN. He has spiritual authority. A lawyer, a Spirit-filled Lutheran brother named Norm Jugeert, is secretary of the entire network. Jane Duff is vice-president of TBN. I am not a board member and choose not to be. An attorney named Jim Gammous has attended board meetings on occasion and gives us a lot of legal advice because of the fact that we do own the stations. He is a Spirit-filled man and he serves in an advisory capacity.

Roberts: To whom do you turn when you want personal spiritual counsel?

Jan Crouch: Our pastor is Jack Hayford of the Church on the Way. We have turned to him many, many times for spiritual counsel. He has come down to trinity on many occasions to pray with us personally. He has reprimanded us in love and we have taken it.

My mother is still alive and gives us beautiful spiritual counsel. Paul's brother, who was for 17 years president of Central Bible College in Springfield, and 17 years in Egypt, has given Paul much spiritual counsel. Demos Shakarian (President of Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship

International) was on our board for several years and gave Paul beautiful spiritual counsel. But our ongoing spiritual adviser is Pastor Jack Hayford.

Roberts: Jan, you have told about a vision you received during a period of deep depression and that vision brought you into a new spiritual experience. I believe this took place during the difficult formative months of TBN. Could you share this story with us?

Jan Crouch: It's such a long story it ... would be another chapter of our lives. It was a period of time that I went through deep, deep depression, and I came to the place where all I could think about was suicide. It started in 1973, when we were beginning TBN. I believe it was an attack of Satan trying to destroy me. Paul and I are so close that as I went through it, he literally went through it, too. If one or the other of us had been destroyed at the beginning, Satan knew this ministry might not have gone on. But through prayer and a miracle, God restored me to almost too much joy. Sometimes I get so excited and cry so much, and people don't understand. But ... if I giggle too much it's because my joy was once stolen from me and if I cry too much, it's because Satan once robbed me of my tears. I know what it is to be without them and I know what it is to have them.

But through a miracle of God, I saw Jesus on the Sea of Galilee. I'd never been there before, but I recognized it two or three years later when Paul and I were in Israel. I found the same shoreline where this vision had taken place.

There were boats on the water, and then I saw Jesus under a tree. Three or four of the disciples were around Him. And there I stood in all my hell, with my hair hanging over my face and ... one of the men with Jesus leaned over and said something to Him, and He kind of chuckled and laughed and they all sat down.

All of a sudden, one of them said something that I couldn't hear and Jesus began to laugh and laugh and laugh. He just began to guffaw ... He was leaning over and laughing and laughing.

Well, it was in the middle of the night and I sat straight up in bed. If you've ever seen anyone laugh, you know it makes you laugh. I started laughing and laughing and I couldn't quit laughing for a couple of hours, because Jesus had brought me a miracle of joy and peace that just restored me ...

There's one thing that I want people to understand about us and that is that Paul and I honestly don't want any publicity. We don't want people to see us, but to see Jesus. When you think of the great men and women of God, the truly great ones, you know that people didn't see them, but the Jesus in them. We have turned down interviews ... Paul just turned down the Saturday Evening Post ... because we don't want to attract attention to ourselves, what we have done. It's what Jesus has done, and that is all that is important ... Him and His beauty and His grace. That is our goal and desire for TBN.

We would see Jesus.

Following that heartfelt interview, Dennis wrote this cover story on TBN for the same June 1983 issue of Charisma:

THE DREAM ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN

Through triumphs, nightmares and blistering criticism, Paul and Jan Crouch have kept their eyes on a dream of 24-hour Christian television

Dennis Roberts

Somewhere in Bruce, S.D, there is a church member who deserves a special footnote in the history of Christian television. He belonged to an eight-member church that was considering hiring a young minister named Paul Crouch. No one in the congregation

knew that Crouch and his wife, Jan, had agreed that the call would have to be unanimous or they would not accept.

When the vote came back, the Crouches won by a landslide—seven to one. Close, but not enough, sighed the husband and wife as they packed their bags and went off to accept an associate pastorate with Mrs. Crouch's brother in Rapid City.

There, Crouch, who had been fascinated with radio since childhood, had to take a job with a radio station to supplement the family income. When a new TV station opened in town, he got in on the ground floor. Within three months, he was program director, a lofty position which he admits came not because of his qualifications, but because of his attrition—all those ahead of him had left for better jobs.

To say that the station operated on a shoestring is, perhaps, painting too bright a picture. Crouch often found himself manning the entire operation. Those were the days when people thought videotape was what you used to patch a picture tube. Crouch would often have to shut off whatever movie was showing, turn on the station's lone camera, step in front of the lens to pitch a sponsor's product, then shuffle off-camera and roll the movie again.

It was grueling, but priceless, training. Crouch went on to manage a film studio in Burbank for the Assemblies of God and then to a Christian TV station, KHOF, in Southern California.

This year, Trinity Broadcasting Network celebrates its 10th anniversary. It has grown from a single station to a seven-station conglomerate whose satellite signal is carried to nearly 400 cable systems in 37 states. According to Crouch, TBN is available for viewing to more than half of the population of the U.S. and the network is actually viewed by about 5.5 million people. TBN's "flagship" program, "Praise the Lord," is syndicated in eight languages using nationals who host the show in their native tongues (as opposed to a

“lip-dub” version of Paul and Jan’s program).

Although not as large nor as well-known as CBN or PTL, TBN is carving out its own distinctive niche in Christian television.

So it’s understandable that Crouch harbors absolutely no bitterness against the lone holdout in South Dakota who voted against him.

“I’ve often thought that when I get to heaven, I want to look up that one person who voted no and thank him!” he laughs.

But just in case you’re thinking of running out and starting your own Christian TV network, there are a few things you ought to know.

First, the Crouches have had to survive a series of personal and business crises that qualify them for an addendum to the Book of Job. Second, even though the Crouches maintain a relatively low profile, the very nature of TV ministry leaves them open to criticism ranging from the type of programming carried by TBN to Jan’s styles of dress. Finally, 24-hour-a-day TBN occupies just that many hours per day for the Crouches. They seem to be totally absorbed by the network’s demands. Asked how they compare TBN to the other Christian networks, the Crouches insist they haven’t had time to monitor what anyone else is doing.

TBN was born in 1973 just a few days after Crouch resigned as manager of KHOF. According to the Crouches, they were kneeling in prayer following an evening church service when both were slain in the Spirit. Their pastor at the time, Syvelle Phillips, gave a word of prophecy that “a new television ministry is coming to birth.” The word was confirmed several times over the next few days by similar prophecies. One, however, contained a provision that the ministry would be sustained “only through daily intercessory prayer and by love.”

Now the question was, where would the Crouches find a TV

station for sale and how could they possibly buy it? In prayer one day, God prompted Paul to call the owner of a station that had signed on the air several months earlier. It turned out that the station had flopped and was up for sale. Within a few days, God worked a miracle. Some Christian businessmen offered to let the new ministry move into an industrial complex that was perfectly suited to a TV studio and they offered the facilities rent-free for the first three months. Furthermore, they allowed Crouch to sign a \$250,000 lease agreement with no collateral up front.

"We could have lived forever on the spiritual mountaintop experiences of those days," Crouch recalls. But even then, all was not total euphoria. At one crucial point, the Crouches thought all their financial problems were about to be solved by a man from Chicago who claimed to be a millionaire. When it turned out their "benefactor" was a phony, it was almost too much disappointment to bear. For a short time, the fledgling ministry was in complete disarray. Crouch believes the incident happened because they took the situation at its face value, failing to pray for God's direction and discernment.

Not long after the station recovered from this setback, another major crisis developed. When it was time to test the picture transmission from the studio to the station transmitter atop Mt. Wilson, the engineers were dismayed to discover their signal wasn't getting through. After testing and re-testing the equipment, Crouch called the telephone company to see if their microwave engineers had an answer. They did.

"It's impossible!" they insisted. "We've tried microwave from Mt. Wilson to the Anaheim Stadium near you and it won't work. We think the Whittier Hills are in the way." The FCC had given the network until Monday—two days away—to go on their air or lose its license. While the weary crew went home, Crouch went onto the station roof to pray.

“Father,” Paul Crouch implored, “You said that if we would have faith even as a grain of mustard seed, we could say to that mountain, ‘Be thou removed and be cast into the sea.’ Father I have a mountain that needs to be moved.”

The discouraged crew returned the next day to try once more to get the picture through. In the studio, Crouch waited anxiously by the telephone, waiting for word from the engineer at Mt. Wilson. Suddenly, there was an ear-splitting whoop on the other end of the line.

“We’ve got it!” the engineer yelled. “We’ve got a picture and it’s as beautiful as NBC!”

The crew was speechless. One man who’d kept everyone else coughing and squinting from his endless chain-smoking stared in disbelief as the studio TV screen, then dropped his cigarette on the floor and crushed it out. He never smoked in the TBN studio again. “We all felt we were on holy ground,” Paul remembers.

On Monday, May 28, 1973, just three months after God first gave Crouch the vision for a station with 100 percent Christian programming, TBN was on the air. Hundreds of calls came in that first night expressing support for the new ministry. Since the station signal was relatively weak, many people got nothing but voices and a snowstorm on their sets, but they stayed tuned anyway.

However, not all those calls interpreted into expressions of financial support. By the third day of broadcasting, TBN was out of money, Pastor Phillips went on the “Praise the Lord” program that night to tell viewers of the critical need. Meantime, God impressed Crouch to give his life savings of \$20,000—which he and his wife had already loaned to TBN. Pledges and gifts in excess of \$50,000 came in that night.

Many people actually drove to the studio to give their money since the need was so urgent.

About this time, Jim and Tammy Bakker moved to Southern California to help get TBN established. After a time of working together harmoniously, Bakker and Crouch began to disagree on the concept and goals of TBN. Outside pressures worked against them, too, as numerous churches and Christian organizations insisted on having a voice in the network's operations. One pastor dressed them down by exclaiming, "You are doing this all wrong. You're heading this ministry into a gutter!"

Added to all these problems, Crouch was forced to deal with a severe personal crisis. His wife was withdrawing into a shell of extreme mental depression.

"Paul and I are so close that as I went through it, he literally went through it, too," Mrs. Crouch explains. "If one or the other of us had been destroyed at the beginning, Satan knew this ministry might not have gone on."

In one of her darkest moments, God sent a miraculous deliverance that brought Mrs. Crouch out of her manic-depressive state. Still, that didn't clear up the problems between Crouch and Bakker. Understandable, Crouch is reluctant to talk about those days.

"Regardless of any rumors," he says today, "Jim Bakker and I had no problems at all." Others, however, believe there was intense conflict between the two, and Crouch himself indicates that in a short booklet, *The Miracle Birth of Trinity Broadcasting Network*.

"Jim and I, who had worked together beautifully in the early formative days of the ministry, began to grow farther apart in the concept and goals of the ministry. As a result of the confusion and dissension which followed, God began to lift His blessing and we began to suffer serious financial needs." Paul wrote.

"We learned another important spiritual lesson. Where there is

contention and strife, the Holy Spirit is grieved, and God cannot bless and prosper in this condition. As a result of all this, Jim and I both lost our spiritual direction for a time."

Whatever the hurts inflicted and received in those days, Crouch is philosophical about it all today.

"We've talked about this a lot in the ensuing years," he says. "I believe the Lord brought us together for a brief period of time so that we could learn certain things from each other." He says they are on good terms today.

A fire at the TBN transmitter knocked the network off the air for several days in August 1973. Financial support dropped, and it looked as though TBN was finished. The station owner, tired of waiting for Crouch to come up with a down payment, began negotiating with another buyer.

Once again, Crouch felt prompted to make a phone call, this time to the owner of Channel 40. That day, the owner had decided to sell his station and TBN signed a purchase agreement. As a bonus, Channel 40 had four times the broadcast power and double the population coverage.

The Bakkers, of course, moved east and began the PTL Network. TBN began to come into its own. Phone calls increased as people called in to say they'd received salvation, healing, and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit while watching Channel 40.

Finances continued to be a problem, though, and TBN signed an agreement with another Christian organization (which Crouch won't name) that was supposed to help matters. Unfortunately, the organization began to take over control of the network, imposing ideas that were completely at odds with Crouch's original vision.

"What followed is a valley so deep and a nightmare so dark, it would serve no useful purpose to unfold," Crouch says in *The Miracle Birth of Trinity Broadcasting Network*. "Jan and I

found ourselves in another struggle for our very survival as blow after blow and attack after attack was hurled at this new fledgling ministry which we knew God had called us to. God taught me the bitterest lesson of all in this school of hard knocks. In our hour of great financial need, I had depended upon man rather than God—and now I was paying the price!”

TBN board member and attorney Norm Juggert found sections of the agreement that were illegal, and TBN was free again. Free, that is, to go bankrupt. Without the financial support of its main benefactor, the station would probably fold.

On the day TBN had to have \$100,000 in escrow to complete the down payment on the station, they were still \$35,000 short. Moments before the banks closed, though, a man named Scotty Scotvold came into the studio offices with a check for \$35,000.

“I was planning to buy a yacht,” he explained, “but God told me to bring the money to you instead.”

Other crises came and went, any of which could have sunk the new endeavor for good. Lease payoffs totaling \$137,000 came due, and the station was told its FCC license application would be denied if it couldn’t produce the money. TBN staged another telethon and it looked as though the money had been raised. Then it was discovered that \$40,000 of the pledges were phoned in by pranksters. When Crouch and his wife explained the situation to supporters, though, \$40,000 in real pledges came in, and the leases were paid off.

On August 2, 1974, the FCC granted TBN’s broadcast license. The Crouches had been through some of the worst whitewater imaginable to put and keep TBN on the air. They had been able to share many desperate situations with the viewing audience, which helped them bear up under the load. But for the last five years, they have been embroiled in a crisis that was perhaps the most serious of all, and which for a long time

they could reveal to no one outside a small circle of advisers.

It seems that when TBN moved its studio location five years ago, a group of businessmen took advantage of an obscure FCC rule that allowed them to apply to TBN's license. The network spent five years and more than \$1 million to save the license.

On January 25, an administrative law judge ruled in TBN's favor, but Crouch was still unable to say anything over the air because of a 50-day waiting period stipulated by the court. On March 15, TBN breathed a corporate sigh of relief and Crouch was able to tell viewers about the network's latest, and undoubtedly longest, crisis.

But along with the problems have come tremendous successes. In May 1977, TBN became the first full-time, 24-hour per day Christian television station. Not long afterward, TBN began purchasing stations in other major metropolitan areas with an eye toward bringing in 24-hour Christian programming. This year the network goes on the air in Seattle, Wash., via Channel 20, bringing to seven the number of stations owned and operated by TBN, the maximum number allowed by the FCC.

Other areas serviced by TBN are Phoenix, Ariz. (KPAZ-TV, Ch. 21); Miami, Fla. (WHFT-TV, Ch. 45); Oklahoma City, Okla. (KTYBO-TV, Ch. 124); Richmond/Cincinnati/Dayton, Ohio (WKOI-TV, Ch. 43); Poughkeepsie, N.Y. (WFTI-TV,); and, of course, Southern California (KTBN-TV, Ch. 40).

In addition, the network feeds programming to several independent translator stations and several hundred cable systems throughout the United States. All of this is made possible by a miracle no one considered possible 15 years ago: satellite. Crouch explains that he entered television's space race as a result of "one of the most awesome experiences of my life."

"I was really seeking the will of the Lord one Saturday

afternoon in the den of my home. We only had the one channel (Channel 40) at that time ... and I didn't know if we should get more stations or what.

"All of a sudden ... the best way I can describe it ... the lights went out, and it was as though I was several thousand miles in outer space, looking down on the earth. I could see the outline of the United States. Then, a great light came into being right over the center of the United States, and I could see beams of light going out and hitting the major metropolitan areas of America. Then, as those secondary lights lit up, I could see little pencil threads of light emanating from them, and forming little dots of light until the whole country became like a blaze, a network of light all over. I was fascinated, enthralled, enraptured by it!

"I asked the Lord, 'What is it?' And I heard one word: 'SATELLITE.' Those were the days when we had only dreamed about having Christian programming on satellite. So my next questions was, 'But Lord, how? When?' And I only heard one other word: 'SOON.'"

Crouch was mystified by the vision, but says it was "no time at all" before RCA was knocking on his door wanting to know if TBN might like to buy space on their new communications satellite. They weren't getting many takers in those days, even at the "bargain" rate (by today's standards) of \$34,000 per month. With fear and trembling, Crouch took the step into satellite TV ministry, something he says he never would have had the courage to do if it hadn't been for the vision he received. Today, of course, the satellite is used to feed programs to the exploding cable TV industry, and transponder space on communications satellites is at a premium.

TBN brought another innovation to satellite TV with the purchase of a mobile satellite transmitter lovingly dubbed "The Holy Beamer." TBN was the "guinea pig" for a firm that hoped to produce dozens of these mobile units housed in 18-

wheel semi trucks. TBN got theirs for \$600,000, but the same unit today cost about \$1 million. TBN has wheeled the "Holy Beamer" to several different sites around the nation, covering Christian events such as a Billy Graham crusade in Reno, Nev., a full Gospel Business Men's Convention in Anaheim, Calif., a Southern Baptist Convention, a Kenneth Copeland camp meeting, and others. The rolling transmitter has also been loaned out occasionally to secular networks, but TBN plans to keep the beamer on the road pretty steadily from now on, providing live coverage from each of its affiliated stations and points in between.

Crouch's willingness to give the "Holy Beamer" a try reflects a characteristic bent for the unconventional. His silver hair, conservative style of dress and general easy-going manner mask a TV veteran who is a shrewd businessman and a calculated gambler. Part of the reason for TBN's success is that Crouch has been willing to put it all on the line, assuring either astounding success or resounding failure. He would insist, though, that he's not gambling at all, since God initiated and still controls TBN.

Crouch has been involved in ministry literally all his life. His parents were the first Assemblies of God missionaries to Egypt. He spent much of his childhood in the Middle East and still has a special desire to reach those nations with the Gospel. One of his dreams is to establish a Christian TV station in the Holy Land that will beam the Gospel into Egypt and Israel.

Jan is also a preacher's kid, daughter of renowned Assemblies of God evangelist Edgar Bethany. In fact, she and Crouch met at one of her father's camp meetings while Crouch was a student at Central Bible College in Springfield, Mo. Married for more than 25 years, they are a study in the axiom that opposites attract.

In contrast to Crouch's warm but conservative style, Mrs.

Crouch exudes a kind of southern belle charm that would seem more at home in Nashville than in Southern California. She is prone to giggle or cry at the drop of a prayer card. But people close to her insist that's the real Jan and that she's the same off-camera as on. If you're not used to old-fashioned Bible Belt gushiness, you may not know quite how to take Jan the first time you see her on "Praise the Lord." But if you talk to her—or her husband, for that matter—for any length of time, you can't help but like them. Differences of style and taste dissipate as you realize that these are two sincere, sold-out Christians who are pouring their total lives into God's vision for them.

That vision is reflected in the type of programming TBN carries. About nine hours of the broadcast day are filled with live telecasts and re-runs of the "Praise the Lord" program, a combination talk and variety show featuring the Crouches and/or various co-hosts such as evangelist Dwight Thompson, singer LaVern Tripp and others. The rest of the day and night, however, contain a huge variety of Christian programs such as:

- "Calling Dr. Whitaker," a half-hour program featuring a Christian physician who discusses health and healing from a scientific perspective and relates it to Christian living.
- "Treasures Out of Darkness," hosted by former drug addict Sonny Arguinizoni (author of *Once a Junkie*). The program highlights testimonies of men and women who have been saved through Sonny's inner-city ministries.
- "Night Light," a kind of subdued "Saturday Night Live" with a Christian perspective, featuring Todd and Donna Fisher and guests such as funnyman Stan Freeburg.
- "The Bible Bowl," a quiz game for Scripture experts.
- "Get in Shape," a morning exercise program featuring Pamela Cole. (Don't worry, no scanty leotards here. Well, she does wear leotards, but with a long-sleeved blouse underneath and a

conservative skirt to cover her legs.

In addition, there are teaching programs with Hal Lindsey, Lester Sumrall, the LaHayes, Marilyn Hickey, Father Joseph P. Manning, and others. TBN won four "Angel Awards" from the Los Angeles-based Religion in Media Association this year for "Night Light," "Treasures Out of Darkness," and "One Way Game" (a fast-paced quiz program that tests the Bible knowledge of Christian high school students), and 30-second promotional spot featuring an airline pilot.

TBN's programming is also unique in its production and funding. Most programs are produced at the network's Santa Ana studios at little or no cost to the people on the program. These are, in fact, exclusive TBN shows selected by the Crouches and Program Director Terry Hickey. While people may present video-tape auditions for consideration, Hickey emphasizes that TBN's purpose is not to give exposure to fledgling ministries, but to present programming by seasoned, proven ministers.

Some shows are carried as paid clients—for example Jimmy Swaggart, Jack Van Impe, Lloyd Ogilvie and others—but according to TBN even these are charged only minimal costs to cover electricity used. So how does the network pay its way?

The main method of fund-raising is a twice-yearly telethon during which most of TBN's approximately \$12 million budget is covered by pledges. Although the Crouches discourage on-air direct appeals the rest of the year, there are of course the "special gift offers" and subtle references to ongoing costs and special projects. In fairness, though, it must be said that TBN's approach to raising funds is relatively low-key compared to some other Christian TV ministries.

Just how effective is TBN in its declared area of priority: winning souls to Jesus Christ? A sign in Channel 40's main studio, where the "Praise the Lord" program is produced and

where about 100 prayer counselors assemble each evening to field telephone calls, a sign proclaims that approximately 1.5 million people have called in to accept Christ. One of the most famous, of course, is actor Efrem Zimbalist Jr., who accepted the Lord after watching several programs on TBN.

There's no question that the prayer counseling service offered by TBN during broadcasts of "Praise the Lord" has helped countless people through difficult times. Pam Bourquin, a former bank vice president who served as a prayer counselor at TBN several years ago, said the intensity of that ministry was an experience she'll never forget.

"Once I got a call from a young girl whose brother had just been killed by a rival gang member. She was a Christian, and she was agonizing over the fact that she didn't know if her brother would go to heaven and she loved him so much."

Another lady phoned in a praised report about her 15-year-old daughter who had just died of leukemia. She said her daughter had faced death with such victory and hope that she just had to share it with someone. As often happened, both Pam and the caller were in tears at the end of the conversation.

Not all the prayer requests were so heavy, though. One lady called in to ask prayer for her damaged garbage disposal.

Pam estimates that about one in 10 calls she received were for salvation. Most people called in for catharsis more than counseling, often, Pam guessed, because they had no one else to share their needs with. Many callers, she felt, either were not attending church anywhere or went to large churches where personal counseling was hard to get.

Pam also felt that most callers were sincere, not pranksters (although she did get an occasional obscene or crank call), and that very few were actually repeat callers. So even though there's no accurate way of measuring effectiveness of this type of ministry, it would seem that just having the phone

counseling available is a major “plus” for TBN’s ministry.

The Crouches also have received thousands of letters from people who have been saved, healed, and baptized in the Holy Spirit while watching their program. All the letters are still on file, they say, for anyone who wants to take time to read them.

Of course, TBN has had its share of criticism. The Crouches don’t take the criticism lightly, but they apparently don’t intend to let it sway them. Most of all, they don’t want to allow criticism—or praise—to draw people’s eyes away from Jesus.

A lot of people think the Crouches are succeeding at that goal. But with more cable stations being added weekly to TBN, it’s going to be harder and harder for them to keep a low profile. After all, they’re already in Miami, Phoenix, and Los Angeles. Before you know it, they might even make it back to Bruce, S.D.

Steve Strang *is the founder and publisher of Charisma. Follow him on Twitter at @sstrang or Facebook (stephenestrang).*