

TBN Responds to Steve Strang

In mid-March, TBN staff members asked me to do a story on Trinity Broadcasting Network's 40th anniversary. We don't normally "cover" anniversaries, but because founders Paul and Jan Crouch agreed to an exclusive interview, it was set up for March 15.

To help me utilize the time, I asked my readers of The Strang Report to give me suggestions on what questions to ask, knowing we'd use only a few. It was similar to when people gave suggestions for questions for the presidential debates. It loosed a flood of questions, showing deep feelings—mostly negative—about TBN.

When Jan Crouch then canceled the interview, I felt it wasn't worth the trip to interview Paul Crouch and his son Matt. I also felt I needed to tell my readers that the interview didn't take place. TBN staff responded with a "letter to the editor." Even though we don't do "letters to the editor" for an Internet newsletter, I felt it was important to let you read what they said.

As we continue to cover this ongoing story and seek answers to the many questions that surround TBN, I'll respond to some of the charges they made about me, with which I don't agree, including portions of private text messages in which we negotiated the terms of the agreement, which they have divulged in order to make me look bad.

They apparently don't understand the journalistic give-and-take in arranging such interviews. If anything, TBN should know, since they seem to carefully vet all the guests on their *Praise the Lord* program, including whether those guests have ever been critical of TBN or the Crouches.

As a journalist I want to tell "both sides," so I am devoting this issue of The Strang Report to their response. Here is the

link to my original column.

TBN's 'Letter to the Editor'

It was a disappointment for many to read Steve Strang's recent commentary addressing his inability to orchestrate the interview he had hoped with Trinity Broadcasting Network founders Paul and Jan Crouch. While a meeting had, indeed, been arranged for an interview with Dr. and Mrs. Crouch, along with TBN Vice President Matthew Crouch, about the network's upcoming 40th anniversary, Mrs. Crouch's schedule forced her to bow out at the last minute.

That left both Dr. Crouch and Matthew Crouch at Mr. Strang's disposal to move ahead with the planned substance of the interview: to reminisce about the miraculous launch and growth of TBN under Dr. Crouch's 40 years of leadership, and to discuss the vision and direction for the network moving ahead under the leadership of Matthew Crouch.

An earlier series of discussions between Mr. Strang and a TBN representative had led to the impression that Mr. Strang was genuinely open to covering the occasion of TBN's 40th anniversary with an exclusive interview and article in Charisma magazine. Knowing Mr. Strang's business reputation in the world of ministry, the representative even arranged for the partnership to include a financial incentive for Mr. Strang's magazine through planned advertising.

However, what Mr. Strang conveniently left out of the extended discussion was his plan to use the opportunity provided by the Crouches to apparently focus on questions about the mistaken belief that TBN lacked accountability, civil and spiritual. When Mr. Strang discovered that he would not be able to target Mrs. Crouch as he wished, he quickly sent a terse, two-word text to the TBN official who had set up the interview: "Deal's off."

Forgoing what he called the "exclusive" piece that he was

planning to make a "big deal" in his publication, Mr. Strang reversed course and instead offered "a one pager interview we can [do] by phone." Added a disgruntled Mr Strang: "I'm not going to spend two days in my life and a couple thousand bucks for a routine story. I'll assign someone to do it. But I won't. Sorry."

That private venting segued into a more public, muted diatribe against the Crouches, in which Mr. Strang portrayed himself as a serious journalist seeking accountability. Apparently, however, Mr. Strang's search for accountability extended no further than an intense interest in questioning Jan Crouch, and her absence made an exclusive sit-down interview with TBN's esteemed founder and Vice President nothing more than "routine."

That is unfortunate, because such an interview would have allowed him the opportunity to ask any question he wished, including those he solicited from his online blog. It would also have allowed him to set the record straight on the issue of TBN's accountability, pointing out, among other salient facts, that:

- TBN voluntarily files annual "Returns by Tax Exempt Organizations" with the IRS (IRS Form 990), even though as a church it is exempt from doing so.
- TBN is subject to dual annual audits conducted by two separate CPA firms covering tax, financial, and regulatory compliance matters.
- TBN submits annual charitable solicitation filings and registrations with more than 30 states (all that require it).
- TBN files ownership and quarterly and annual compliance reports with the Federal Communications Commission regarding its operations, programming, and public service.
- While TBN is one of the largest non-profit television network entities in the nation, the salaries of its

officer are among the most modest (if not the lowest) in the industry.

- Paul and Jan Crouch have turned over nearly all of their assets and estate to TBN.
- TBN has garnered one of the most respected ratings from GuideStar, a leading group that monitors non-profits and ministries like TBN.

Along the way, an objective Mr. Strang might have told the relatively little-known story of TBN's miraculous growth from one small station in California to over two dozen international networks and affiliates broadcasting the good news of Jesus Christ to every inhabited continent 24 hours a day—billions of souls.

Mr. Strang might have focused in particular on TBN's six affiliate networks in Russia, its two full-time networks broadcasting the gospel to Muslims around the world, or the 24-hour network established a couple of years ago in Jerusalem that broadcasts the good news to the millions of Russian Jews who have made Israel their home.

Mr. Strang might also have pointed out the state-of-the-art studios TBN is now building in London and Jerusalem for the production of life-changing programming in all of TBN's international networks and affiliates.

Most importantly, Mr. Strang would have had the opportunity to highlight the more than 36 million decisions for Christ logged by TBN's prayer partners over the past forty years, the multiplied millions of prayers answered and lives changes, and the commitment Matt Crouch and the next generation of TBN leadership has for continuing to pursue Paul and Jan Crouch's undeterred vision of using television to reach the world for Christ.

Over the many years that Mr. Strang's Charisma has been published, TBN and its founders have been the subject of a

number of informative cover stories, and TBN's friends and partners—as well as those unfamiliar with the ministry—would have benefited from a well-deserved update.

Regardless of Mr. Strang's unfortunate response to the circumstances surrounding their planned meeting, the Crouches continue to count Mr. Strang as a friend and fellow-laborer for the work of the Kingdom. They also pray for God's continued blessing over Mr. Strang's life and endeavors.

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