

Why Paul and Jan Crouch Can't Escape Accountability

I was scheduled to be at TBN in Dallas Friday for an exclusive interview with Paul and Jan Crouch about the Trinity Broadcasting Network's 40th anniversary in May. But it won't happen because Jan Crouch canceled at the last minute.

We don't usually cover ministry anniversaries, but TBN is marking the milestone with a big celebration, and they approached me about running an article in *Charisma*. I agreed only after they agreed to an exclusive interview with Paul and Jan. Their younger son, Matt, the heir apparent, would have been there. Marcus Yoars, editor of *Charisma*, and I would have tag-teamed with the questions.

I have known Paul and Jan for many years. I respect what they built, and I recognize its value to the Body of Christ. I can identify with them. We have a common Assemblies of God heritage. They began with very little—just as I did—about the same time. I know they love Jesus and are committed to spreading the gospel.

But as TBN has grown, strange things have developed, and they now are one of the most controversial Christian ministries out there. As a family friend told me about the Crouches, they built an empire but didn't build a life.

Covering them objectively as a journalist has been tough. I'm aware that they have had negative press coverage from the secular media, which looks at everything with a jaundiced eye and enjoys ridiculing Pentecostals. I know the Crouches well enough to know they are good people. So when we've written about TBN, it has generally tried to focus on the good things—like saying a glass is half full instead of half empty!

But I've also learned that people at TBN don't like to deal

with controversy—especially about TBN. I didn't know how we'd ask the questions the Christian community wants to know: about why their oldest son, Paul Jr., left the network, or the lawsuit and allegations from their granddaughter. Readers wanted to know why they allow ministers who have had nasty divorces—and in one case is accused of fathering a child by a teen in his church—on their telethons and stations. They wanted to know about how the more than \$400 million-a-year budget is spent.

I know the Crouches well enough to know they feel the last part isn't anyone's business, as long as they follow the law. They rebuff inquiries about their finances. Though they aren't answerable to us, they are answerable to the Christian public who donate the millions, just as public companies must be accountable to their shareholders.

In some ways the Crouches know this. They gush over how they love their TBN partners. They talk about the "little grandmas" who send in their love gift every month.

But what about those who feel some things on TBN make a laughing stock of all charismatics and Pentecostals? Or that with some of the questionable programming they are spreading confusion around the world at the same time they're spreading the gospel?

I decided I'd invite you to suggest the questions that Marcus Yoars and I could ask on your behalf. And we have been inundated with questions. [Click here](#) and read them. Many are vicious—which may say more about the questioners than about TBN or the Crouches.

Before we could compile our final list of questions, I learned Jan cancelled only a few hours after my newsletter went out on the Internet asking what we should ask the Crouches. Maybe she saw the questions about her pink hair or plastic surgery, or questions about why she is seen with handsome young men over

the years more than with her husband.

I would not have asked those kind of questions some would consider rude. We would have instead gone over their successes. But we also would have given them the opportunity to go on the record about some of these issues that need to be addressed.

That's because I believe TBN has a real public relations problem. In many circles, it's a laughing stock. And with Paul and Jan being as old as they are—he'll be 79 on March 30 and she turned 75 yesterday (March 14)—they need to be concerned about how they will be remembered in history after they are gone.

I went on record defending Paul Crouch several years ago when he was accused of homosexuality by a former employee who was also an ex-con. I said Paul has been a longtime Christian leader, so how could we believe the word of an ex-con over Paul's word that the allegation was absolutely a lie?

As far as I know, I was the only national leader to rally to Paul's defense by writing an editorial. I also said that if it was true, Paul should resign from TBN. Thankfully, the issue went away—it must have been false. But I did what I did based on principle. And I repeat it here to show I have no ill will and, in fact, came to their defense in the past.

I believe there are always two sides. The critics are not always right. And when you're in the public eye, there are many who will attack you—just because. (Look at how someone as respected as Billy Graham is still attacked). I'm sure there are legitimate reasons the Crouches have homes in various places and reasons the money is spent as it is. I respect the fact the network continues to grow. And Paul Crouch has more business acumen than almost anyone I know.

But this isn't about the Crouches. They don't own TBN. It is a non-profit ministry that is accountable to the public, or more

specifically, to the body of Christ. I call on the Crouches to be ready to answer their critics and not ignore them or to demonize them as they've been known to do.

If you're a TBN partner—as I've been in the past—demand some answers. And if they aren't forthcoming, then there are many other ministries you can choose to support.

I wish TBN well. I am hopeful that the new generation of leaders will be more open and accountable, and that in the future they'll be willing to sit down with respected journalists—if not us, then someone else—to answer the many questions the public has.

Do you agree with me? What do you think about the questions people sent in? Add your comments to the conversation below.

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