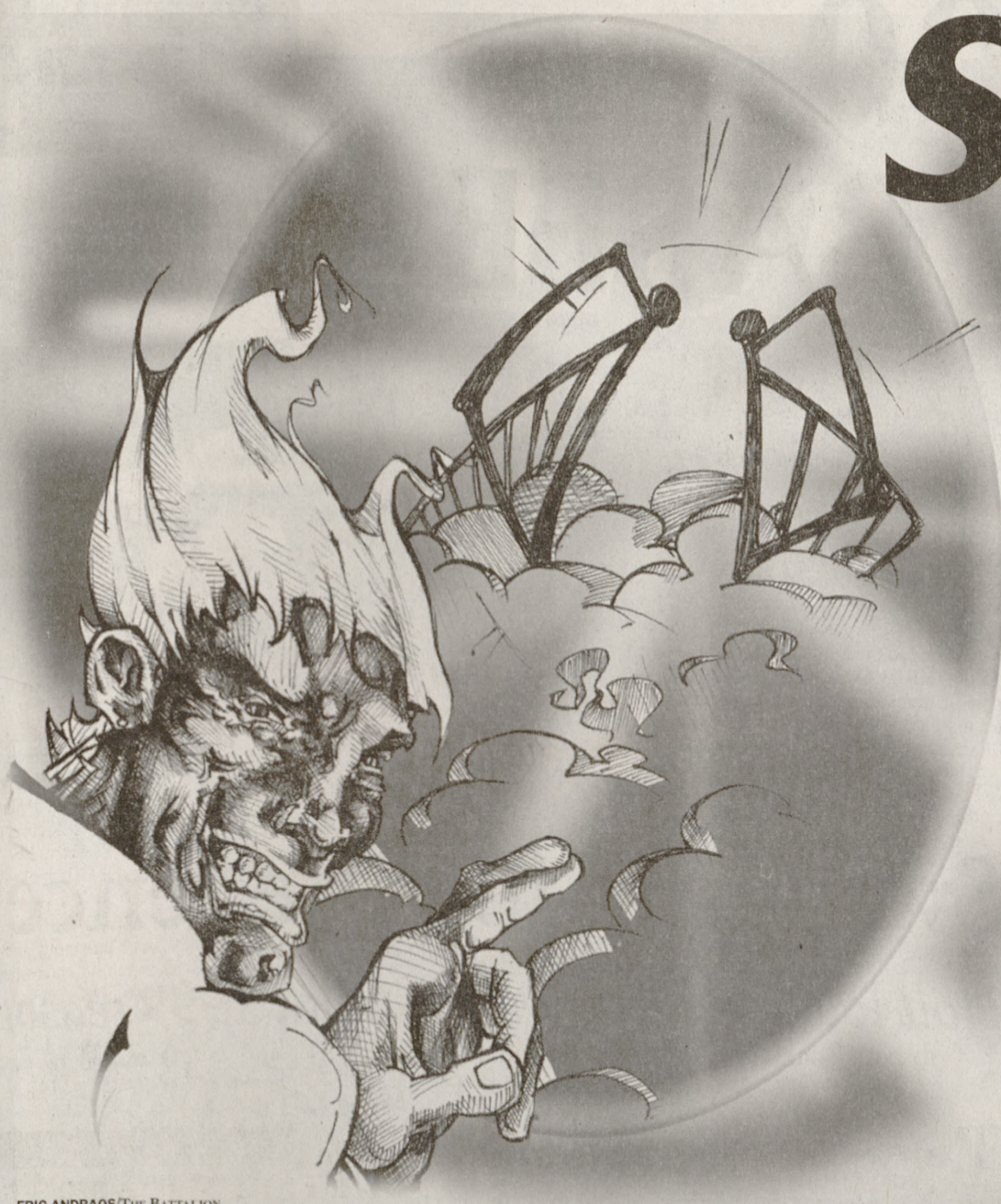


SIN & redemption?

Jim Bakker makes a returns to evangelism



ERIC ANDRAOS/THE BATTALION

To the chagrin of televangelist-weary Christians, Jim Bakker is back in the pulpit.

Earlier this month, Bakker reentered the public spotlight with an appearance at the First Assembly of God Church in Fort Myers, Fla. The warm reception he received from the 2,700 worshippers in attendance shows how selective the public's memory can be. It is remarkable that a seedy sex-embezzlement scandal can be forgotten so easily.

Hopefully, no one will take Bakker's reappearance as a minister too seriously. His criminal past and the questionable tactics he continues to use today cast a shadow of doubt on his attempt at obtaining redemption. Reservations people may have about Bakker should not be forgotten, lest they be doomed to repeat the past.

Bakker and his former wife, Tammy, were the "first couple" of televised religious programming in the mid-1980s. Their juggernaut PLT Ministries enjoyed unparalleled success, raking in millions of dollars in donations from viewers. "The PLT Club" and "The Jim Bakker Show" were mainstays on major market television stations around the world. Thanks to the PLT empire, Bakker was regarded as one of the foremost authorities on morality and decency. This regard and stature makes his



DAVID LEE

fall from grace all the more hilarious. On March 19, 1987, Bakker was forced to resign his position in the ministry due to revelations of infidelity in his past. A former secretary, Jessica Hahn, revealed their Dec. 6, 1980 sexual encounter.

The resulting media frenzy uncovered more wrongdoing in Bakker's past. Questions about his business dealings quickly surfaced. Soon after, a grand jury found evidence that Bakker had defrauded his followers of \$158 million during his tenure at PLT Ministries. He was tried and convicted of conspiracy and fraud in 1989 and was sentenced to 45 years in prison, a sentence that was eventually commuted.

The images of Bakker being marched off to the big house were absolutely cringe-inducing. Videotape of a slumped and sobbing Bakker literally being dragged from his home in shackles were splashed all over the news. How could this bastion of morality have sunk so low?

To be able to forgive Bakker is one thing — forgiveness is completely reasonable at this point. The man deserves the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and redeem himself. But to allow this master manipulator the opportunity to regain his past levels of influence and power would be very naive and shortsighted.

Not surprisingly, Bakker's skill at manipulation reappeared in his sermon at the First Assembly of God Church. "Some of you hate me, I can tell,"

Bakker told the congregation. "How many of you want to go to heaven?"

As the members of the congregation slowly raised their arms high in the air, Bakker pulled the ultimate of underhanded moves — he pointed into the crowd and declared, "You've got to love me!"

Since when was Jim Bakker anointed the sole gatekeeper to heaven? Who does he think he is — Saint Peter? Bakker has a lot of nerve questioning the faith of Christians simply because they do not support him. To draw a parallel between a person's devotion to God and their trust in Bakker is blasphemous. It perverts the purpose of Christianity beyond recognition.

Granted, any sensible person would laugh off Bakker's rationalization as garbage.

But one has to keep in mind that there are many impressionable people out there who will gobble it up, the type of people Bakker preyed on before his imprisonment. All of this eerily foreshadows the possibility of Bakker returning to his shady methods of the past.

Clearly, it would be foolish to accept the new Jim Bakker with no reservations. It must always be kept in mind that this man is a convicted felon who turned his back on his so-called virtues and easily manipulated the masses.

David Lee is a junior economics and journalism major.

Colorado Supreme Court should uphold anti-protester law

Three anti-abortion activists, part of a group of protesters referring to themselves as "sidewalk counselors," recently appealed a Colorado Supreme Court ruling upholding the 1993 law that set up a 100 foot zone around the entrance of any health care facility. Inside the zone, people may not "knowingly approach another person within eight feet" for the purpose of handing out literature or engaging in "oral protest, education or counseling" without consent. The sidewalk counselors appealed the case to the United States Supreme Court on the grounds that their free speech was being violated. The case is currently before the court.

Jay Sekulow, the lawyer representing the three demonstrators, argued the speech in question was "speech in a public forum." However, there are few conversations that cannot be carried on from a distance of eight feet, provided both parties want to participate. In the words of Chief Justice Rehnquist, "Speech in a public forum typically refers to a soapbox where people gather around, not to face to face conversation from an eighth of an inch."

The Colorado law in no way inhibits the activists' right to freedom of speech. It simply saves potential medical clients from being forcibly bombarded with a "product" they do not wish to be sold.

In the past, there have been two separate court injunctions because of repeated incidents of violence outside clinics. In

an environment as emotionally charged as an abortion clinic, the likelihood for violence is simply too great to allow unwanted contact between clients and protesters.

Sidewalk counselors often use any means necessary to get their message across. In doing so, they often make dangerous and incorrect assumptions about human nature, then act on the assumptions to harass clients.

According to an instruction manual for sidewalk counselors from webcom.com, "A mother who is crying does not want the abortion. You must redouble your efforts ... Do not let up on her no matter how tired you are." The instructions fail to recognize that the woman could be crying for many reasons — for example, family opposition or opposition from a significant other. It is doubtful that even a psychiatrist would be so presumptuous as to make such drastic assumptions about the psyche of someone he or she has never met.

The manual also instructs counselors to "Stand directly in her path, ... If she walks past you, follow alongside her." By following this course of action, the counselors assume that persistence will always prevail. But they fail to consider that forcing their unwanted presence on someone who has already expressed disinterest is a better way to cause a disruption than to get their point across.

The instructions further direct, "It is far better to be too aggressive in approaching these mothers than to be timid." Apparently, the protesters do not comprehend that it is seldom better to use a blow torch when a match will suffice.

If the above methods do not work, sidewalk counselors are advised to take more severe measures. The manual states:

"From time to time you will run across a situation in which a woman is prevented from leaving the abortion mill by the staff..."

The counselors are advised to go inside and ask to see the mother. The manual then instructs, "When they give you some excuse why you cannot see her do not take no for an answer."



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

Walk boldly through the entire abortion mill shouting her name, opening doors, and looking for her. ... Get physical with the staff if they try to block you. ... Stop at nothing to get the mother out of there."

The sidewalk counselors have apparently failed to realize that "abortion mills" are professional medical centers which can legally refuse visitation.

The Colorado law was not passed because pro-choice advocates want to suppress the opinions of the protesters, but because of reckless actions such as the ones described above. Debbie McCall, Director of Community Services for Planned Parenthood of Houston and Southeast Texas, stated: "I do not have a problem with the protesters. I have a problem only when they start judging and harassing the clients."

McCall expressed concern that the protesters could occasionally be dangerous to the welfare of themselves and others. She described how the protesters have often tried to keep cars from entering the Planned Parenthood parking lot, once nearly causing a wreck.

Thoughtless speech that is detrimental to the immediate welfare of others is illegal in any form. Freedom of speech is not absolute — hence the classic example of yelling "fire" in a crowded theater. If setting an eight foot boundary will reduce the risk of bodily harm to both parties involved, it should be enacted and enforced without further delay.

The Colorado law does not silence protesters — the activists are still allowed to demonstrate, as well as to invite clients to speak with them about options other than abortion. The law simply gives the clients a right to decide for themselves whether they want to speak with the counselors — the same freedom of choice the United States is reputed to provide everyone.

Jessica Crutcher is a sophomore journalism major.

School vouchers prove to be beneficial

It has been well-documented that the United States public school system has many problems. The system needs a major policy change, preferably one that does not cost more than the present system. The only educational options open to parents at this time are moving to a better school district or sending their children to private schools. However, low-income parents do not have either of these options.

The idea of school vouchers, grants given to parents of underprivileged students that attend poorly-run public schools, is a good one. These vouchers would help offset the cost of private education, and information from the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) proves that the voucher programs already implemented in several school districts have been beneficial. Vouchers are cost-effective, improve students' academic performance and aid public schools.

The first issue when considering a voucher program is the cost. Private schools traditionally have exorbitant price tags, but public schools now spend an average of \$7,000 per student, twice the average cost of private schools. The NCPA documents the average per-pupil spending by the 300 largest inner-city public school districts as very close to the national average of per-pupil spending. The problem with deteriorating school facilities in these areas is more often a sign of mismanagement than a lack of funds.

Most voucher proponents suggest giving each parent around \$3,000 per student, which is enough for enrollment at most private elementary schools. That payout brings a savings of \$4,000 per student per year for the public school system. The public school students and teachers would benefit further

since their schools would have fewer students, amounting to smaller, more manageable classes.

There are some locations where the voucher system has been tried, and it worked. Milwaukee and Cleveland are two large cities in the United States that have dismal records of success in their public schools. The NCPA states that less than half of Milwaukee freshmen graduate, and only 4 percent of eighth-graders in Cleveland pass algebra. Both have started offering vouchers to over 3,000 low-income students.

Alternative forms of education must be compared to the presently disproportionate system

Studies done on voucher programs in Milwaukee showed that after three years in the program, students receiving vouchers started showing increases in test scores which compounded each subsequent year. A Stanford study of the Cleveland voucher program found the average student gained 5.5 percentage points in reading and 15 percentage points in math between the fall of 1996 and the spring of 1997. Plans to expand these programs have been approved by both the Ohio and Wisconsin legislatures.

There has been some concern that vouchers, by increasing the number of private school students would create a system of haves and have-nots. While there may be an inequality in the wealth of private school students versus public school students, the present system does not give students equality in the caliber of their education. To solve this, alternative forms of education must be compared to the presently disproportionate system.

Vouchers would reduce the educational gap that exists between the rich and poor, since they would only be given out only to less-fortunate children. James Coleman of Equality and Achievement in Education, found that the level of integration in schools is higher in private than public schools. The level of voluntary integration in school cafeterias was higher in private schools as well, according to a study done by Jay Greene and Nicole Mellow. Vouchers offer more students access to the range of benefits that social integration provides.

While not every student will be able to attend his or her first choice school, the voucher system would vastly increase the number of appropriate educational environment choices for each student.

In Japan, the value of expanding a student's choices has been realized. Japan's thriving educational market makes schools expand their operations, just as businesses in other industries do. As successful schools begin to have more applicants, the schools expand their facilities. In America, money available from vouchers could be used to add new classrooms and teachers in order to improve both private and public schools.

Do not be surprised to hear more about this program as the clock ticks toward Nov. 2. Gov. Jeb Bush made Florida the first in the nation to implement a statewide voucher program last June. His brother, Gov. George W. Bush, discussed a similar plan for Texas involving stripping federal funds from underperforming schools and giving that money to parents in September — smart man, considering that 79 percent of Americans are looking for improvements to schools as a platform of the candidates in the 2000 presidential race, according to WorldNetDaily's David Limbaugh.

The public school system has not always been as it is today, and Americans need to change the failing system. Vouchers may prove to be a viable way to shape up America's education system.

Jill Riley is a senior journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Faith alone not worthy of election

In response to Heather Corbell's Jan. 28 column.

Few can deny that character is, and should be, an important consideration when considering a candidate for public office.

But it is not the only consideration. It is foolish to assume that because Gov. Bush appears to be a good and decent man that he is, for that reason alone, "fit to lead a nation."

The mere fact of professing himself a sincere Christian is no guarantee that Bush possesses any of the traits necessary to be a successful President.

His Christian faith may mean that if elected President, his constituents need not expect any "Clintonesque" scandals — but it does not necessarily mean that the policies he advocates will prove effective, appropriate or even intelligent. Character is, of course, an important consideration — but not all well meaning men and women of impeccable character are fit to be the next President.

I suspect that character is not the real issue with Corbell, however, so much as the fact that the governor is Christian.

I cannot help but wonder if Corbell would be so glowing in her

praise if Gov. Bush happened to be a sincere and devout Jew for whom Moses was the favorite political philosopher "because he changed [the governor's] heart".

Or if Bush happened to be a Muslim, a Hindu, or a Buddhist. Or a man of integrity and character who happened to be an agnostic.

Above all, in spite of the sincerity of his professions of Christian faith, the showcasing of sectarian religious beliefs in the very public manner of the governor only serves to alienate Americans who are either not religious or not Christian — and betrays the governor's lack of sensitivity toward the significant religious minorities of our nation.

Nathaniel Rich
Class of '01

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