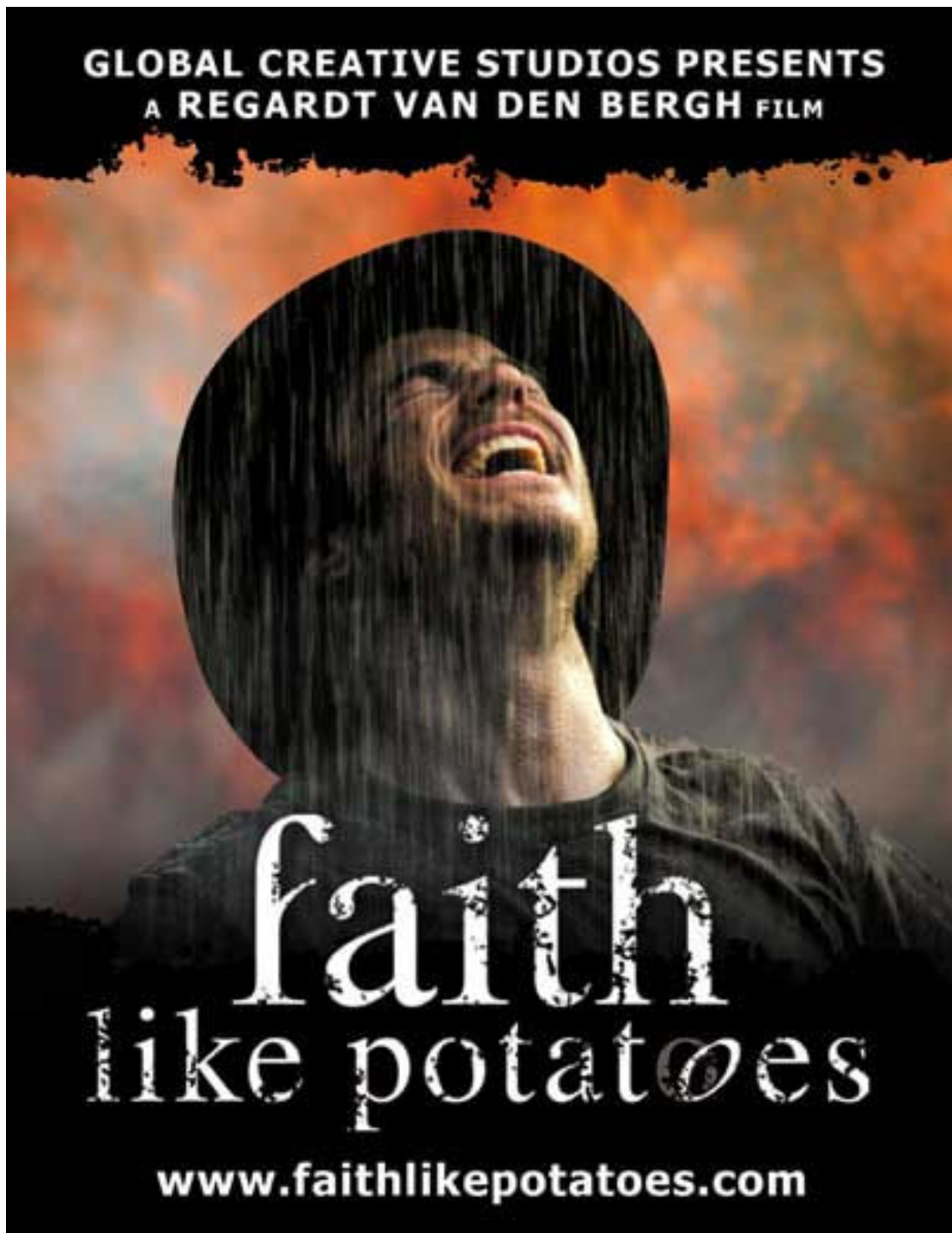


POTATOE FAITH?

An expose on "Faith like Potatoes".

by Dr Bruce Woolard



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It has been said that a good preacher will comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable. Angus Buchan is a man who “shoots from the hip” and “says it like it is”. There is certainly nothing wrong with being direct and forthright. It’s a great pity that the evangelical movement that once championed the cause of old fashion gospel preaching seems to have abandoned the need for such inspiring preaching. Along comes Buchan, a potatoe farmer, from Graytown, Kwazulu Natal shouting the odds and proclaiming a perceived message of hope. Buchan isn’t polished or a trained seminarian, neither is his theological and Biblical knowledge sound and safe, but he is effective in drawing crowds (60 000 men recently attended his rally – Mighty Men’s Conference).



Most church leaders seem to embrace a pragmatic approach in ministry (pragmatism = if it works it must be right). This stance is not reliable neither is it trustworthy. For instance taking drugs may make an addict escape reality and provide some release from his insecurity and inadequacies but in the long term the user suffers the consequences of his addiction. Taking drugs helps to ease the pressure but is it right? Of course not. Pragmatism may work and even appear to be a blessing but in the long term the results are destructive.

Buchan’s book and movie “Faith like Potatoes” is pragmatic and to the undiscerning reader and viewer “God inspired”. Decades ago Buchan and his then young family moved from Zambia and embarked on the unenviable task of farming in South Africa. The rough and ready farmer of Scottish descent faced many challenges and hardships. His faithful and somewhat naive wife backed her man to the hilt.



Stress and strain started taking its toll and Buchan's mental health was threatened. The signs of burnout syndrome and serotonin depletion caused by protracted stress left Buchan vulnerable and emotionally bankrupt.

Binge drinking and anti-depressants compounded his problem. Buchan faced ruination. His status and egotistical makeup made him a walking time bomb. Buchan at the end of his tether then takes his young family to church in town. He arrives after the service had started and is forced to take seats at the front of the church. The sermon triggers off a series of soul searching questions. Buchan sets up an appointment with the pastor who hands him a Bible and a prayer of support.

Buchan's conversion opens a whole new perspective and he is convinced that planting potatoes would reap a great harvest. Against all odds and advice to the contrary, Buchan stubbornly persists in his quest to grow potatoes. During a dry summer and debilitating drought, Buchan believes God has shown him to hire the Kingsmead Rugby Stadium to stage a prayer rally for rain. A couple of hundred farmers and friends attend the rally and Buchan urges the crowd to repent and to trust in God.

PURPORTED MIRACLES

His optimism and enthusiasm leaves many people impressed. One day an out of control bush fire threatens to destroy his crops and estate. Buchan prays for Divine intervention. Dark clouds gather and a thunderstorm cracks the heavens and a cloud burst stops the fire from spreading. Dramatically the movie suggests that a miracle saves Buchan's farm. A lightning strike, during the thunderstorm, leaves a labourer's wife "dead". Buchan is called by the victims family. After he prays for her she resuscitates. The movie again suggests "a great miracle". While we don't doubt that God is a miracle working God and He is able to intervene in human affairs, the movie and book purports that Buchan's faith activates God's power (as a former Pentecostal and Charismatic pastor, I'm suspicious of such claims because with a little dramatisation and tweaking of the facts a purported miracle appears convincing and excites the gullible).



The Bible warns us that the anti-Christ will rise to power and influence through his ability to perform lying signs and wonders. As a matter of fact the whole world is predisposed to such an event. The excitement and expectation being generated by Buchan's visit to various cities in the country is not

surprising. Church people are so desperate to witness a miracle or to feel God's presence that they forget the Bible's warning of deception and apostasy. By no means am I inferring that Buchan is an evil deceiver or conman, although there are many charlatans and false prophets and "super" apostles leading people astray. What I am saying is that Buchan is sadly buying into an erroneous belief system that outwardly appears to be authentic and relevant but will undermine the faith of believers in Biblical Truth.

Far too many Christians determine Truth by their subjective feelings. Experiences with God seem to be the quest of modern believers. Buchan's ministry perpetuates this experiential spirit and promotes a brand of Christianity that will ultimately destroy the Faith of its followers.

Buchan is a lightweight and novice in terms of understanding the Scriptures. Much of what he says is not new or original. He is simply regurgitating what he has read or been exposed to in his circle of ministry.

I found the movie offensive and vulgar. The Church is expected to raise the standard of decency. The movie uses abusive strong and suggestive language. What is more alarming is that the movie is made by so called Christians who appeal to pastors to encourage their flock to view the movie. Despite my written objections to the producers the courtesy of a response is yet to be received.



Buchan, however, has certainly fired up the emotions of believers. I see this as a blight not a blessing. The hype in church circles is an indictment on the shallowness and fickleness of modern day believers. The issue that really concerns me is that Buchan has become somewhat of an authority. What he says is embraced as “Gospel Truth”. We need to assess and discern Buchan’s ministry in light of sound Bible principles. An objective not a subjective approach is necessary.

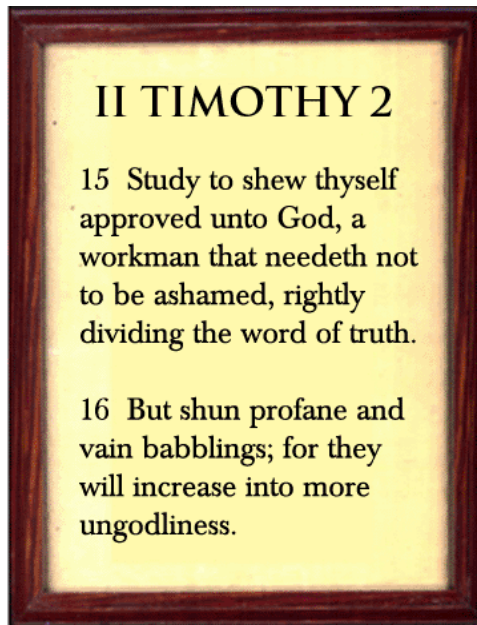
May the following points be prayerfully considered:

Like many modern day evangelists Buchan draws information from the Old Testament and the Gospels and contextualises its meaning which sounds convincing and plausible to the undiscerning listener. An example of this is 2 Chronicles 7:14 “*If my people who are called by my Name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.*” This verse is often used to promote mass rallies to pray for rain and to suggest that God will heal the nation. While we do recognise that the Bible has many parallel truths and therefore all Scripture is God inspired, we fall into the trap of using passages of Scripture that directly relate to Israel’s nationalism and purpose as if it belongs to the nation in which we reside. This is not scholarly and will

People are experimenting with subjective, relativistic ideas of Truth and labelling them “Christian.” This trend signals a significant departure from Biblical and historic Christianity.

lead to confusion. In the movie and book Buchan makes reference to this verse and appeals to people to claim the promise. This is simply erroneous. God is not working with national entities. Today God’s modus operandi is the Body of Christ, the Christian church, which is non-ethnic and detached from nationalism. This may be difficult for people to understand but the consequences of adamantly relating a text to our situation and claiming a promise that was meant for national Israel, will lead to heresy and deception. Buchan continues to misapply passages of Scripture and unwittingly promotes an unbiblical agenda in society. Fanaticism of any kind needs to be discarded of. I am concerned that the

people I have counselled who have been greatly inspired by Buchan's philosophy have launched into projects and visions that they feel is of God because if it worked for Buchan it will work for them.



The consequences of failing to see their dream achieved is too ghastly to contemplate. Many believers have been left shipwrecked in terms of their faith because they have built their belief around a passage of Scripture that does not relate to the programme of a Christian Church. We are told in Scripture to rightly divide and understand the Bible – 2 Timothy 2:15. The fact that the writer says we should “rightly divide the word” strongly implies that we stand vulnerable to wrongly dividing the Word of God. The latter is true in terms of Buchan's

claims. Those who follow this trend are at risk because they too misapply the Scriptures.

Controversy and conflict in the church are never to be relished or engaged in without sufficient cause. But in every generation, the battle for the truth has proved ultimately unavoidable, because the enemies of truth are relentless. Trust is *always* under assault. It is actually a sin *not* to fight when vital truths are under attack.

This is true even though fighting sometimes results in conflict within the invisible community of professing Christians. In fact, whenever the enemies of the Gospel Truth succeed in infiltrating the church, faithful believers are obliged to take the battle to them. This is certainly the case today, as it has been since apostolic times.

HOW FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS MUST RESPOND.

As the Holy Spirit drew the New Testament revelation to its completion, the importance of fighting for the truth emerged as one of the dominant themes. Tucked into the end of the New Testament, in the shadow of Revelation (which describes the final battle and ultimate triumph of truth), we find three short epistles whose common theme is devotion to the truth in the midst of conflict. The apostle John wrote two of them. 2

John contains the word *truth* five times in the first four verses alone. It ends with this sobering message (vv7-11):

Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward. Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrines of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house not greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

3 John likewise has truth as a major theme. The word *truth* appears six times in the epistle's fourteen verses. The apostle John was writing to defend the truth against Diotrephes, who loved having pre-eminence in the church more than he loved the truth. By contrast, he commends Demetrius, saying he "has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself (v.12).



Jude wrote the third of the trio of "postcard" epistles. His whole point in writing was to remind believers of their duty to fight for the truth. It wasn't what he intended to write about. When he took up his pen to write, his plan was "to write concerning our common salvation." But he was compelled by the Holy Spirit instead to exhort us with all passion "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Jude was talking specifically about battling the influence of false teachers who had secretly infiltrated the Christian community. These men were apparently turning Christian pulpits into platforms from which they broadcast lies that undermined the heart of Christian doctrine: "For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ." (v.4).

This may be a harsh assessment of Buchan's ministry, but on examining the content of his speeches, the evidence of error is overwhelming. Buchan believes that we should wait on God just as the apostles did at Pentecost to receive power and to hear from God. (God has already

spoken through His Word. We don't need a new revelation). Buchan employs terms such as "the fire of God literally started to descend." (Remember Jim Jones and David Kuresh). Emotional scenes of men crying and embracing each other are emphasised as if such gestures prove God's presence and blessing. (I have seen huge men cry and hug strangers when the Boks won the rugby world cup. Is this behaviour evidence of God's presence?)

It is most irresponsible to accredit to God's Holy Spirit any outbursts of human emotion. The "higher the expectation" the "desperation" of these men to hear from God makes them vulnerable and is a recipe for disaster. Mass gatherings have a dynamic atmosphere that is euphoric.

Mature Christians should pray for Buchan's awakening to the truth of Scripture and the dangers of making men believe that they are "Messiahs" and "anointed" to fulfil a vision they wrongly think is from God.

Angus Buchan is on the wrong track. Don't follow him. Wrong expectations will lead to confusion and our God is certainly not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33).

*God is not a God of
disorder but of peace.*



St Marks Church – 041-3606060

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