

circulated before the faith healer even set foot on Indian turf.

Tension before Hinn's meetings also escalated when, on Jan. 18, police arrested a team of missionaries from Kanyakumari whom they identified as "Benny Hinn agents." Police cited the group for creating a riot and assaulting local youths in efforts to proselytize. A judge remanded them to judicial custody until Feb. 2, according to a *Star of Mysore* news report. Kanyakumari is located at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, about 300 miles directly south of Bangalore.

The day before the meetings began, Hinn and his entourage arrived at the Bangalore Airport in his private jet. Two full floors in the Leela Palace hotel where Hinn stayed were kept vacant for security reasons. Additionally, the city deployed 10,000 police during the days of the meetings.

As the "prayer meetings" were set to begin, violent protests broke out in the city. An article in *The Times of India* reported "widespread arson and stone-pelting across the city which left several persons injured." The report also stated that "angry mobs forcibly shut down shops and blocked traffic" and that over 110 buses and many private vehicles were damaged. One city bus was stopped by a mob, its passengers forced to get off, and the vehicle was then set on fire. Other buses parked in the terminal were also set on fire. At least 100 people were arrested in the fracas.

Despite the event's name change, on stage it was the same old Benny Hinn show. The musical prelude, the divine messages, and the bogus claims of healing were all part of the program. According to the *Star of Mysore*, "Benny Hinn is reported to start his show while the people in the large gathering were made to experience increased heart-beats due to loud music blaring through the speakers. He makes dramatic declaration saying, 'Christ has come. He is entering your body. You now have acquired a rare kind of strength.'"

When Karnataka Chief Minister Dharam Singh appeared at the meeting, Hinn singled him out and summoned him onto the platform. Once on stage, Hinn embraced the Chief Minister saying, "In your presence, I too feel that I am an Indian." Hinn then proceeded to prophesy over Singh, claiming that he is going to "experience a big change shortly." According to the *Mysore* newspaper, as Hinn spotlighted the official, "Dharam Singh seemed slightly taken aback as he reluctantly climbed on to the dais [raised platform]."

When it came time for the miraculous, there were many "who publicly announced that their illnesses were cured by the grace of Christ in the prayer meeting." However, an investigation by a fact-finding committee revealed that the only ones making professions were

Hinn's volunteers. "The volunteers who had mingled with the people in the large gathering to take part in the prayer meeting rushed to the raised dais soon after Benny Hinn's show started and also openly declared that they were suffering from specific illnesses which were cured by him, the Committee revealed," according to a further report in the *Star of Mysore*.

The report also emphasized, "The Committee members also found out that the volunteers, who could be seen everywhere among the large audience, were none other than the volunteers of the evangelist keeping company with him after dusk."

Other news sources in India questioned Hinn's claim of divine healing powers. The *Deccan Sunday Herald* reminded readers of a 2001 HBO special:

"One of Benny Hinn's miracles is worth recalling, as it involves an Indian family. The Prakash family converted to Christianity so that Benny Hinn could heal their son who was dying of a brain tumor. ... Benny prayed and assured the family of a miracle. Prakash felt that God was speaking to him during the service, and immediately pledged \$2,000 to the miracle man. The boy was dead seven weeks later."

The secular media appear to exercise a greater level of discernment regarding Hinn and a better biblical understanding than do many who claim Christianity. One Indian news report, drawing attention to Hinn and his meetings in Bangalore, warned, "Therefore, discernment is of utmost importance. Present day healing mass melas do not resemble healing as recorded in the Bible. While in the Old Testament there were only a few episodes of healing, in the New Testament, the miracles of Jesus were to the whole man. It was not just a physical healing, but a moral renewal and a call for total commitment of faith. Many times Jesus said, 'Tell no one,' because he knew people would follow him with wrong motives."

—MKG

BROOKLYN WATCHTOWER EXPANSION PLANNED

Brooklyn residents found themselves in what appears to be another losing battle with the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. Late last year, a Brooklyn City Council's zoning subcommittee approved the religious organization's plan to develop a three-acre waterfront parcel into a virtual residential nucleus. Two weeks later, the City Council approved zoning changes thereby allowing the Watchtower to clear its last major hurdle to begin the project.

For years, residents in what is known as the DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) neighborhood have fought in vain to stifle the incursion of the Watchtower's high-rise structures which, they say, de-

stroys the character of their neighborhood. The village, nestled between the Manhattan and Brooklyn Bridges, features cobblestone streets framed by two of the most famous bridges in the United States. The local community was united and relentless in its opposition. Residents sent city council members 1,500 signed postcards, 400 signed petitions, and thousands of e-mail messages.

The Watchtower's current plan calls for a complex consisting of four towers, the tallest of which will be 20 stories high. Another will rise 18 stories. The two other towers will be nine stories high. Originally, the Watchtower proposed all four towers to be 14 stories or higher. The new complex will be a residence for another 1,600 Jehovah's Witnesses who move to Brooklyn to work at the sect's international headquarters. According to one report, the organization currently has about 3,500 members living and working in DUMBO. The buildings will also contain a welcome center, a dining hall, a 1,100-car underground garage, and a three-story auditorium or Kingdom Hall.

According to the Watchtower's proposal, the city will benefit from the development. The sect says it will renovate two neighborhood parks adjacent to the new campus and will install security cameras at a nearby subway station. The zoning subcommittee voted 15-1 in favor of the Watchtower's plan. Charles Barron, the dissenting committee member, cited his opposition to all developments that disregard community concerns. Likewise, residents say the development will make traffic more dangerous and its new residents won't support or add to the local economy. The 51-member City Council's vote weighed in with three dissenting votes: Barron and two council members whose districts overlap the Watchtower's project.

Construction could begin as early as this year.

—MKG

BAD, BAD CLINT BROWN

The pastor who inherited the Orlando Christian Center, the Florida-based church founded and built by faith healer Benny Hinn, has had his "lavish lifestyle" exposed by a local television news report. Citing financial records stemming from their divorce transcripts, WFTV Channel 9-TV revealed that the Rev. Clint Brown and his wife Angie utilized large amounts of church money to finance their extravagant lifestyle.

According to the news report, the \$1.4 million home in which Brown and his estranged wife lived carries a \$7,000 a month mortgage paid by the church. Utilities, lawn care, and pool maintenance are also underwritten by Faith World. The home is in Alaqua, the same gated community where Hinn lived. Angie is said to drive a \$95,000 Mercedes-Benz paid for with church funds. In addition, the couple reportedly spent hundreds of

thousands of dollars of church donations during exorbitant shopping sprees at Neiman Marcus and other exclusive stores.

Atop of all the "fringe benefits," Brown is reported to have received a salary of more than \$500,000 last year from the church.

And it's not just the Browns who profit from the generosity of Faith World members. According to the divorce records, Brown purchased more than \$70,000 of merchandise from women's clothing stores during a twelve-month period and it was paid for by the church. Brown's attorney told WFTV news that the money was spent by Brown on gifts for women ministers at various churches where he appears as a guest.

Brown moved to Central Florida in 1993, after being a music minister for Rod Parsley in Columbus, Ohio. He started and was pastor of Faith World, a church first located in a strip mall. In 1999, Hinn pulled up his Florida roots to move his ministry to Texas, following his personal move to California. Brown and his Faith World congregation merged with Hinn's church, then known as World Outreach Church. Brown and Faith World received Hinn's WOC facilities on 30 acres of property and assumed a near \$6 million debt. Some contend that Brown "bought" the congregation and property from Hinn, but both say they "loathe" the suggestion that Hinn "sold" his congregation to Brown.

—MKG

ATHEIST FLEW ADMITS A CREATOR

Antony Flew, the British author of *Atheistic Humanism*, *Darwinian Evolution*, and *A Rational Animal*, and an avowed atheist for over 50 years, has acknowledged he has reconsidered his former philosophy and has moved toward a theistic belief. Flew is a former professor at Oxford, Aberdeen, Keele, and Reading universities in England. The 82-year-old professor now says that scientific evidence has led him to a belief in God.

For many years, Flew had ongoing public debates with Christian apologist Gary Habermas on topics such as the existence of God and the validity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their 1985 debate on the resurrection was published in book form, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?* Habermas is currently the chairman of the department of philosophy and theology at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va.

Habermas, who has remained friends with Flew throughout the years, told the Baptist Press that Flew told him he was "really rethinking theism" and considering arguments from the "intelligent design" movement. "He was going back and forth as to whether he should