

'I don't have to be nice to the spirit of the Antichrist'

Right-wing TV evangelist and former Presidential candidate Pat Robertson is the man Bank of Scotland has chosen to spearhead its US subsidiary. Why?

Gregory Palast Inside corporate America



IT'S TIME someone told you the truth. There is an Invisible Cord that can be traced from the European bankers who ordered the assassination of President Lincoln, to Karl Marx, to the British bankers who funded the Soviet KGB. They are members of the 'tightly knit cabal' whose goal is nothing less than a new order for the human race under the domination of Lucifer.

If you don't know about the Invisible Cord, then you have not read *New World Order* by Dr Marion 'Pat' Robertson. This is the same Pat Robertson that the Bank of Scotland recently named chairman of its new American consumer-bank holding company. Interestingly, the Scottish bank's biography of Robertson failed to mention *New World Order*, the 1991 bestseller that the *Wall Street Journal*, in a mean-

spirited review, described as written by 'a paranoid pinhead with a deep distrust of democracy'.

There is so much the Bank of Scotland forgot to include in its profile of Robertson that it is left to this newspaper to describe this man of wealth and taste. The bank, for example, failed to note that he is best known to Americans as leader of the 1.2 million-strong ultra-right political front, Christian Coalition.

It may seem a bit odd for the Bank of Scotland to choose as its spokesman a man who has been compared to Ian Paisley. But bank officials say they are not concerned with Robertson's religious beliefs. Nor, apparently, is Robertson concerned with theirs.

He said: 'You're supposed to be nice to Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Methodists ... Nonsense. I don't have to be

nice to the spirit of the Antichrist.'

Why would the Bank of Scotland want to join up with a figure whose unpalatable views on women, gays, Democrats and others led one unkind civil liberties organisation to describe him as 'the most dangerous man in America'?

Someone more cynical than me might suspect that the Bank of Scotland covets Robertson's fiercely loyal following, the 2 million conspiracy wonks and charismatic evangelicals who, a former business partner says, 'would give him their life savings'. 'These people believe he has a hot-line to God.'

In an exclusive interview with *The Observer*, Robertson swears he will keep bank commerce, Christianity and the Coalition completely separate. But our look into the Robertson empire, including interviews with his former and current business associates, reveals a history of mixing God, gain and Republican campaign.

The combination of ministry and Mammon has provided Robertson with a net worth estimated at between \$200m and \$1 billion. He himself would not confirm his wealth, except to tell me that his share of the reported \$50m start-up capital for the bank is 'just a small investment for me'.

Neil Volder, president of Robertson Financial and director of the new bank venture, emphasises that Robertson selflessly donated between 65 and 75 per cent of his salary as head of International Family Entertainment. But that amounted to only a few hundred thousand dollars a year — pocket change for a man of Robertson's means.

There was also, says Volder, the \$7m he gave to 'Operation Blessing' to alleviate the woes of refugees fleeing genocide in Rwanda. Robertson's press operation puts the sum at only \$1.2m. More interesting is the way the Operation Blessing funds were used in Africa. Through an emotional fund-raising drive on his TV station, Robertson raised several million dollars for the tax-free charitable trust. Operation Blessing bought planes to shuttle medical supplies in and out of the refugee camp in Goma, Congo (then Zaire).

But investigative reporter Bill Sizemore of the *Virginian Pilot* discovered that over a six-month period — except for one medical flight — the planes were used to haul equipment for something called African Development Corporation, a diamond mining operation a long way from Goma. African Development is owned by Pat Robertson.

Did Robertson know about

the diversion of the relief planes? According to pilots' records, he actually flew on one plane ferrying equipment to his mines.

One of Robertson's former business partners recalled that, although he often travelled in the minister's jet, he never saw Robertson crack open a Bible. 'Everywhere we were flying he had the *Wall Street Journal* and *Investors' Daily*'.

Volder counters that by diverting the planes for diamond mining, Robertson was actually carrying out God's work. The planes proved unfit for hauling medicine, so Robertson salvaged them for the diamond hunt which, if successful, would have freed the people of the Congo from lives of starvation and poverty'. The Virginia State Attorney General is conducting an investigation into Operation Blessing that is looking into the use of the charity's equipment.

Volder asserts that Robertson was 'not trying to earn a profit, but to help people'. As it turned out, he did little of either. The diamond safari went bust, as did Robertson's ventures in vitamin sales and multi-level marketing. These disastrous investments added to his losses in oil refining, the Founders Inn Hotel and a jet-leasing fiasco. One cannot

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term a demi-billionaire a poor businessman — but, outside of the media, Robertson could not cite for me any commercial success.

It is too early to tell whether his board membership of Laura Ashley will improve the company's fortunes. But, undeniably, Robertson is a master salesman. To this I can attest after joining the live audience in Virginia Beach for *700 Club*, his daily television broadcast to raise money for the Christian Broadcast Network.

That week, he was selling miracles. Following a mildly bizarre 'news' segment (reporting, for example, that the Kosovo Liberation Army sells heroin), Robertson shut his eyes and went into a deep trance.

After praying for divine assistance for his visions, he announced: 'There is somebody who has cancer of the intestines ... God is healing that right now and you will live! ... Somebody named

Michael has a deep chest cough ... God is healing you right now!'

It is not clear why the Lord needs the intervention of an expensive cable TV operation to communicate to Michael. But more intriguing theological issues are raised by the programme hosts' linking of Robertson's organization.

In a taped segment, a woman's facial scars healed after her sister joined the *700 Club* (for a donation of \$20 a month). A voice intoned: 'She didn't realize how close to home her contribution would hit.' It ended: 'Carol was so grateful God healed her sister, she increased her pledge.'

The miracles add up. In 1997, Christian Broadcast Network, Robertson's 'ministry', took in \$164m in donations plus an additional \$34m in other income. The tidal wave of tax-deductible cash generated by this daily dose of holiness paid for the cable channel — which was sold in 1997 to Rupert Murdoch, along with the old sitcoms that filled the remaining broadcast hours, for \$1.82bn.

But seven years prior to the sale of this media bonanza, the tax-exempt group 'spun it off' to a for-profit corporation, in which Robertson held a controlling interest.

Robertson donated hundreds of millions of dollars from the Murdoch deal to both CBN and CBN University (now Regent University). That still left Robertson burdened with a heavy load of cash to carry through the eye of the needle.

In his younger days, Robertson gave up worldly wealth to work in the ghettos of New York. But, says a former Coalition executive, 'Pat's changed'. She noted that he gave up his ordination as a Baptist minister in 1988. (He is still, incorrectly, called 'Reverend Pat' by the media.) His change in 1988 was accelerated when, according to his former television co-host Danuta Soderman Pfeiffer, 'he was ensnared by the idea that God called him to run for President of the United States'.

The 1988 run for the Oval Office, which began with Robertson announcing his endorsement by Highest Authority, was not some quixotic adventure. The race generated a mailing list of 3 million sullen Americans of the heartland, whose rage against the establishment was given voice by Robertson forming, out of defeat, the Christian Coalition.

Volder offers that it may in fact have been the Lord's stratagem to create a mailing list of good Christians. Such mailing lists, like the CBN lists, are worth their weight in gold. Robertson swears they shall not be used for the bank-

ing business. But abuse of these lists lies at the heart of charges by government and former partners. These are, of course, denied by CBN and the Christian Coalition.

Two former top executives in the for-profit operations, who have never previously spoken to the media, state that the tax-exempt religious group's lists and the Christian Coalition lists were used to build what became Kalo-Vita, the pyramid sales enterprise that sold vitamins and other products. The company collapsed in 1992.

A former officer of the company alleges some operations were funded, without compensation, including offices, phones and secretarial help, by the ministry. When questions arose about using donations for a commercial enterprise, Robertson produced minutes of board meetings that characterised as 'loans' the start-up capital obtained from CBN.

Not all board members were made aware of these meetings until months after they were held. Robertson's spokesman responds that they are unfamiliar with the facts of the allegation.

The US Federal Election Commission has charged Robertson's groups with misusing lists.

Federal courts are reviewing internal documents, including a 15 September 1992 memo from the Coalition's then president, Ralph Reed, to the co-ordinator of President George Bush's re-election campaign that says Pat Robertson 'is prepared to assist ... [by] the distribution of 40 million voter guides ... This is a virtually unprecedented level of cooperation and assistance ... from Christian leaders.'

Unprecedented and illegal, says the FEC, which is taking legal action against the Christian Coalition, technically a tax-exempt educational corporation, for channelling campaign support worth tens of millions of dollars to Republican candidates.

The action is extraordinary because it was brought by unanimous vote of the bipartisan commission. It cited, among other things, the Coalition supplying Colonel Ollie North with copies of its lists for North's failed run for the US Senate, which followed his famed appearance at the congressional hearings on the Iran-Contra scandal.

The Coalition is defending the action. Records subpoenaed from the Christian Coalition contain a carefully scripted set of questions and answers by the Coalition and the Republican Party for a 1992 'interview' with Bush by Robertson broadcast on *700 Club*.

Pat Robertson, above, with Senator Strom Thurmond, below, at the 1996 Republican Convention in San Diego. Photographs by Brian Smith/Katz and AP

This caught my eye: first because it appears to constitute a prohibited campaign commercial; and second because Robertson had months earlier claimed in *New World Order* that Bush was 'unwittingly carrying out the mission of Lucifer'. With Bush running behind Bill Clinton, Robertson must have decided to stick with the devil he knew.

But the government will never see all of the documents. Judy Liebert, formerly chief financial officer for the Christian Coalition, told me that she was present when Coalition president Reed personally destroyed crucial documents.

When Liebert complained to Robertson about 'financial shenanigans' at the Coalition, 'Pat told me I was "unsophisticated"'. Well, that is a strange thing for a Christian person to say to me.

The Coalition has attacked Liebert as a disgruntled ex-employee whom it fired. She responds that she was sacked only after she went to government authorities — and after she refused an \$80,000 severance fee that would have required her to remain silent about the Coalition and Robertson.

Liebert also claimed that her evidence about the Coalition's illegal printing of

— although he said Robertson may object.

This is just the type of mixing that has so upset the election commission and the Internal Revenue Service, and last March Christian Broadcasting Network agreed to be stripped of its tax-exempt status for 1986 and 1987.

Furthermore, despite grumbling and grunts from Volder, Robertson told me he could imagine tying his Chinese Internet firm ('The Yahoo of China', he calls it) into the banking operation. Picking up Volder's body shakes, Robertson added: 'Though I'm not supposed to talk about Internet banking.'

And he wasn't supposed to mention China. His fellow evangelists are none too happy about his contacts with Zhu Rongji, the communist dictator who gleefully jails Christian ministers. Volder defends Robertson's meetings with Zhu — and his association with deposed Congo strongman Sese Seko Mobutu — on the grounds that 'Pat would meet with the Devil if that is the only way to help suffering people'. The fact that the connections assisted in obtaining diamond and Internet concessions is secondary.

Let us return to the point on which we began: the Bank of Scotland's US consumer-bank holding company, which Robertson will head. When the bank gets going, it will launch through Robertson's accustomed routes: phone and mail solicitations.

This deal could make Pat Robertson the biggest financial spider on the World Wide Web. The *Wall Street Journal* believes the bank will be worth \$3bn.

Yet Robertson's choice of the Bank of Scotland as partner is surprising because, until this year, he boasted of his *English*, not Scottish, heritage.

Moreover, in *New World Order*, he singled out as the apotheosis of Satan's plan for world domination the British-chartered central banks conceived by Scottish banker William Paterson.

In the book Robertson explains that Rothschild interests carried on the Paterson plan, financing diamond mines in Africa which, in turn, funded the 'satanic' secret English Round Table directed by Lord Milner, 'one-time editor' of *The Observer*. (Ah-ha!)

Furthermore, the Scottish banker's charter became the pattern for the US Federal Reserve Board, a 'diabolic' agency created and nurtured by the US Senate Finance Committee, whose chairman was the 'Money Trust's' dependable friend, Senator A. Willis Robertson — Pat Robertson's father.

Are you following this? That's right. Pat is the scion of the *New World Order*, who gave up its boundless privileges to denounce it.

Or did he? As I drove away from the chapel/TV studio/university/ministry/banking complex, I realised I, too, had a vision of an Invisible Cord that went from Scottish bankers to African diamonds to the Senate Finance Committee to Christian conservatives to the communist dictators to the World Wide Web...

