

THE INTERVIEW

concerning Dispatches, 28.3.90

Philip Hunt speaks to a member of the A.J.A.

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Q. Mr Hunt, you have seen the program about World Vision on *Dispatches*?

Mr Hunt: Yes.

Q. How did you find the program?

Mr Hunt: Mysterious.

Q. Mysterious? That's not quite the answer I expected. I thought it might make you angry.

Mr Hunt: Well, it does make me angry.

Q. Why is that?

Mr Hunt: Because it presents an inaccurate and distorted picture of one of the world's most caring and effective Christian humanitarian agencies. The presentation is biased and prejudiced. It represents an injustice being done to the many hundreds of thousands of people who are part of our Christian service together as people in project communities, staff and supporters. I am angry for the way their compassion is defamed by implication, and the way their integrity is called into question. I think that is very sad and shameful.

Q. There's a lot of stuff there.

Mr Hunt: Well, you asked me if I was angry. I am.

Q. You also said you thought the program was mysterious. What did you mean by that?

Mr Hunt: Well, I don't understand why a program like this would be made.

Q. That's easy. The producers think World Vision is ripping off its supporters and the poor.

Mr Hunt: Then would you not think they would try to make that case?

Q. I thought they do. They say a lot about World Vision financial structure preventing the funds getting to the poor.

Mr Hunt: Yes, that's true. They 'say' a lot. But is it only necessary to say something for it

to be true?

Q. You don't think they prove their case.

Mr Hunt: Do you?

Q. Well, I thought the program was pretty persuasive.

Mr Hunt: I don't deny that. It is persuasive. But being persuaded is not the same as proving a case.

Q. Surely if I am persuaded by the program then they have made their case.

Mr Hunt: Are you serious? Do we now live in a society in which truth is determined merely by who can select a few facts, tell some half truths and some outright lies, and do it in such a way that viewers are 'persuaded' to believe it?

Q. You obviously think there is a better way.

Mr Hunt: I have nothing against this style of documentary as long as viewers are aware of what is being done to them.

Q. What is being done to them?

Mr Hunt: Well, the producer has begun with a conclusion and assembled material to support it.

Q. That doesn't sound like a bad thing to me.

Mr Hunt: It is not a bad thing if the conclusion is correct. If the conclusion is wrong, it **is** a bad thing.

Q. You just lost me.

Mr Hunt: Well, it is a technique bred in television news rooms. Everyone is under pressure to get the story in the shortest possible time. The actual piece of video to be used might be only a few seconds, rarely more than a minute. There's no time for in-depth analysis or reporting. So the reporter tries to understand the situation as quickly as possible. Snap judgements are made. Then the video is shot to

support that judgement.

Q: I think I follow. Can you give an example?

Mr Hunt: A reporter finds a single car on a straight bit of road, wrapped around a tree. The driver is dead at the wheel. The car reeks of alcohol. The reporter talks to the police and asks whether this driver has gone to sleep at the wheel because he was drunk. The policeman says, "Sure looks like it." She gets shots of the wreck, of the cans of beer on the back seat, of the policeman confirming her diagnosis. She started with the premise and shot a report to back it up.

Q: Doesn't seem like there's anything wrong with that.

Mr Hunt: Not for news reporting. The reporter is required to make snap judgements. A good reporter will always choose language that allows for other interpretations. Perhaps the driver had a heart attack. Maybe the smell of alcohol was only from the split beer cans. Maybe he just went to sleep without being drunk. Maybe something broke in the car. Maybe he is a soviet spy who was drugged by the CIA at a parliamentary reception. All these are possible. The reporter forms his or her premise, collects pictures and interviews that support the premise, and the audience is persuaded.

Q: So what's your point?

Mr Hunt: My point is that what is appropriate and reasonable for news reporting, is not appropriate, reasonable, fair or professional for documentary.

Q: You think *Dispatches* has made a snap judgement.

Mr Hunt: No. I think they have begun with a conclusion, and selectively chosen information, pictures and statements to support their conclusion, and excluded information, pictures and statements that would undermine their conclusion.

Q: Why would they do this?

Mr Hunt: Beats me. Maybe someone gave

them \$250,000 and said, go make a program. I don't know.

Q: Are you saying the producers have something against World Vision?

Mr Hunt: I cannot say. But let me ask you to think about this in a different way.

Q: OK. I'm game.

...wouldn't you think
there would be some
attempt at balance?

Mr Hunt: If the producer's real desire were to examine the allegation that World Vision is a rip-off wouldn't you think there would be some attempt at balance?

Q: What would constitute balance, as far as you are concerned?

Mr Hunt: They only talk about a single support office in which changes have been made to the way funds are classified. There are all the other support offices whose accounts have proven perfectly satisfactory to all comers for decades. As a matter of fact, once these classifications were subjected to independent scrutiny, and despite the independent view that there was no illegality involved, the German Board made the reclassifications that eliminated the alleged distortion.

Q: So the program is correct that World Vision in Germany was hiding the truth from its donors.

Mr Hunt: I think you made quite a leap to get to that conclusion. The program is only correct in pointing out that the classification of certain costs was changed to make the information clearer.

Q: To tell the truth.

Mr Hunt: There you go leaping again. I think, in order to sustain that line of argument you have to demonstrate an intention to hide the truth or tell lies.

Q: Surely classifying Mr Kohl's travel as "aid to the poor" is hiding the truth!

Mr Hunt: Well, you and I don't have the accounts in front of us, so we don't know how accurate that statement is. I can say that some of the travel we do is in relation to project planning or evaluation. It is part of the legitimate cost of doing project work in a country. Some of our staff go as auditors. Some go for communications purposes. It is not altogether unusual or unreasonable for this travel to appear as project costs. Most donors recognise this. AIDAB will approve certain kinds of travel costs as appropriate costs of delivering aid to the poor. So it is not uncommon to see some of these project related costs appearing in the project funding part of the accounts.

Q: But is this really aid to the poor?

The question is whether project related costs constitute "aid to the poor."

Mr Hunt: Well, here is one of the difficulties of the program. It does not make clear what does constitute good development with the poor. This is another mystery. Hancock, in his book, "Lords of Poverty" is very critical of multilateral aid agencies like the World Bank. But he also tips a bucket on any aid that does not result in real development. On that point I would agree with him, because that is what World Vision is interested in--real development.

Q: You've read "Lords of Poverty?"

Mr Hunt: Yes. I bought a copy. I have made my contribution to Mr Hancock's Holiday in Europe Fund.

Q: You're avoiding the question.

Mr Hunt: No, I was making a bad joke.

The question is whether project related costs constitute "aid to the poor".

Q: That's fine.

Mr Hunt: Well, we say they do. People development doesn't happen just by taking a dollar from a rich country and handing it to a poor person in Bangladesh.

Q: I think "Lords of Poverty" would agree with that.

Mr Hunt: Exactly. Yet this is the focus of the program. It criticises World Vision because we have a management infrastructure that guarantees that not only do the funds get to their intended destination, but also that they get spent on the right things and in the right way. We have learned that simply giving money to the poor is bad development. Often it makes them worse off in the long term because it projects them into the cash economy without any opportunity to sustain their place in that economy.

Q: So what constitutes good development?

Mr Hunt: Well, that's a big subject, but I might summarise by saying it is engaging in processes through which people overcome the limitations that cause them to be poor.

Q: For example?

Mr Hunt: In some places it might be income generation. In others, discovery of appropriate technology. I sat with people in a Philippines project in which most of the World Vision support had gone into providing for a young woman to go and live with the village for a year. She became their friend. Then she helped them to discover resources from within the village that they had overlooked. Now they have real progress, real development, through a World Vision project.

Q: You mean World Vision didn't provide much.

Mr Hunt: At the beginning, yes. In fact, I asked these people what World Vision had provided, and you know what they said?

Q: You're going to tell me anyway.

Mr Hunt: They said, "Nothing."

Q: Sounds like material for *Dispatches*.

Mr Hunt: Hmm.

Q: But did you provide anything?

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happening as the result
of their own efforts.

Mr Hunt: Well, of course, we provided a person, her salary and support for a year. But the point is that the people owned the project. They saw what was happening as the result of their own efforts. Now real people development comes about only when the people can say "We did this ourselves." In such situations it is not uncommon to find the people are not aware of the amount of support they receive from World Vision.

Q: Why do you keep it a secret from them?

Mr Hunt: That's not it. It's just that they don't think about it. In February I was in a village in Guatemala. Our recently appointed executive director for World Vision of Britain was there. He asked a woman what World Vision provided and he got the kind of answer we heard in *Dispatches*. You know, a shirt, some books and a pig. Charles thought, "That's a bit rough." So he asked, "What about the World Vision worker?" When the woman thought about it she realised that World Vision was providing this support.

Q: But if you ask a literal question you are likely to get a literal answer.

Mr Hunt: And if you only want an answer that supports your conclusion then this is the answer you will use. If you were genuinely

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interested in the truth you would spend time to investigate more carefully.

Q: So you appear to be saying that far from criticising World Vision for spending money on management and support, *Dispatches* should praise you.

Mr Hunt: I don't expect praise. I just think fairness calls for common sense. Any agency that is doing effective development makes an investment in people. Sometimes it is doctors and health workers that work in a variety of projects. I saw this in Mexico where a dentist is employed by World Vision and visits dozens of projects. His costs would be in the one-third or so of project support costs that Harold spoke about in the program.

Q: But there are big offices all over the world.

Mr Hunt: There are offices. In more than 30 countries we have field directors and staff that manage fairly big programs. That's just good management. That's why, unlike the canard that is being promoted in *Dispatches*, you can really rely on World Vision to know what is happening to the donor's gifts. Personally, I don't think our offices are "big" as you say. You should visit a field office and make your own judgement. As the program rightly points out, World Vision is the largest privately supported agency in the world. So it ought to be no surprise to find that in most places where we work we have more staff and bigger offices than other aid agencies. That's because we are doing more work, with more projects, for more poor people. Nothing bad about that I would have thought. But some people just seem to think that because you are big and effective you are bad. In Australia we call it the "tall poppy syndrome." Seems like it is not isolated to Australian culture.

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bad.

Q: But what about this claim that overheads are high in World Vision? You say that all agencies have similar ratios between what gets spent here, how much goes into project support costs and how much gets spent in the project. But the program is quite specific about this. It says "there are strenuous efforts by British charities to keep their administrative costs fairly low and many manage to keep them, say, below 15%. Quite a lot manage to keep them below 10%".

Mr Hunt: Yes, I heard that. And then some character named Lutz Worch from an organisation called "International Committee on Fundraising Organisations", neither of which I have ever heard of, says "we would never give our agreement on costs higher than 35%."

Q: Well what do you say to that?

Mr Hunt: To both?

Q: Deal with Mr Worch first.

Mr Hunt: Well I agree with him.

Q: That surprises me.

Mr Hunt: Not at all. It depends what Mr Worch means by "costs". I don't think there is a World Vision office that has costs higher than 35%.

Q: But your Mr Henderson said it was something like 25% costs here, 25% costs on the way, and 50% at the project.

Mr Hunt: Sure, but was Mr Worch asked to respond specifically to that proposition or was he asked just "What is an acceptable level of overhead?"

Q: I don't know.

Mr Hunt: No, but I can guess. On the basis that is implied by the program even Red Cross would not qualify. Because most of the costs of a service organisation lie in the provision of people to provide services. If you want you call all these things "overheads" or "costs." The program pretends to draw the dividing line at the edge of the village. Most aid agencies don't do this because we see the provision of program support in a field country as a proper use of funds to enable projects to happen. These costs are an essential part of the aid we deliver.

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World Vision offices
zoom under the bar
standing up.

Q: What do you think Mr Worch means?

Mr Hunt: Well, since this is a fairly commonly asked question, I suspect he means that his organisation would find it acceptable if less than 35% were retained in the fundraising country. On that basis, most World Vision offices zoom under the bar standing up.

Q: Well, what about the claim that British charities have overheads below 15%, some as low as 10%.

Mr Hunt: Well, first of all let's set the record straight as far as World Vision in Britain is concerned.

Q: OK.

Mr Hunt: According to the independently audited and publicly available accounts of World Vision of Britain for the year ending September 1989, they raised £9,206,837. Their total Admin and Fundraising costs were £2,015,847.

Q: That's about 20% right?

Mr Hunt: 21.9%.

Q: A lot worse than 10 or 15% though.

Mr Hunt: Sure. But the question to ask is whether you are comparing apples with apples.

Q: You know we are not?

Mr Hunt: No. I don't know. But I suspect from my experience in Australia that there are enough variables between agencies to make a simple comparison like this unfair.

Q: What sort of variables?

Mr Hunt: Well, two mainly. First, the way agencies are structured and raise their funds. Second, the way they report in their financial statements.

Q: You'll need to explain that.

Mr Hunt: First of all, World Vision raises most of its money from the general public. We do receive some funds from the government in Australia, Britain, Canada and the US. But most of our income comes from individual people through the child sponsorship program or the 40 Hour Famine and its equivalents, 24 in Britain.

Q: They like their food better in Britain?

Mr Hunt: Can't imagine why.

Q: Don't all agencies raise their funds in this way?

Mr Hunt: No. Some agencies get most of their income from a single donor. Usually the government.

Q: What's this got to do with overhead percentages?

Mr Hunt: Everything. Per dollar raised, government money is much cheaper to raise. It comes in big lumps and requires less administrative support than, say, a regular monthly gift of \$27 a month for a sponsorship project. Look at the effect on overhead if we

add a major donor to the revenue mix. The only difference between these two agencies is that the one on the right spent an extra \$2 million to raise an extra \$50 million from the government. The result is a reduction in the reported overhead from about 27% to 22%.

Q: Isn't that better?

Mr Hunt: For public relations, sure. But nothing else is different. The second agency is not more efficient. It does not spend less of the ordinary supporter's money on overhead. It's exactly the same. It just looks better.

Q: Well, why doesn't World Vision do it then?

Mr Hunt: Because we are not an arm of the government. We want to be an organisation that makes connections between ordinary people in Australia, Britain and so on and the poor in the Third World. We are a people to people organisation. Other organisations may not have this as their objective. To compare us with such public service contractors as if we are the same kind of organisation is simply silly.

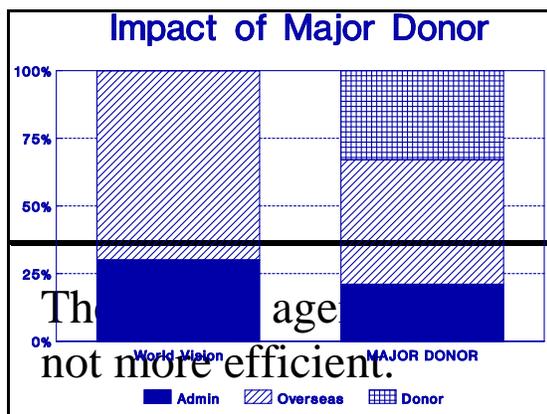
Q: So you are saying that all other charities raise more funds than World Vision from the government and therefore report lower overheads.

Mr Hunt: Not at all. I am saying that agencies are different from one another. Before you say A is better than B, you have to eliminate or account for the differences. Government money is only one of the differences.

We are a people to
people organisation.

Q: There are others?

Mr Hunt: Sure. The next most common is the difference between operational and grant-



making organisations.

Q: What does that mean?

Mr Hunt: An operational agency is one like World Vision that does all or most of its own projects. When you give a dollar to World Vision, you know it stays with World Vision all the way to the project. A grant-making agency takes your gift and gives it to a second agency which does the project.

Q: Doesn't World Vision of Australia pass your gift on to World Vision International?

Mr Hunt: Yes, it does. But World Vision International is still World Vision. It is not a separate organisation in the way that Austcare and Freedom From Hunger are. World Vision of Australia is one of the owners of World Vision International. I am a Vice President of World Vision International.

Q: How does being a grant making organisation make a difference?

Mr Hunt: It shouldn't make much difference to the amount of money spent locally, but it does mean that some agencies can make it look like everything that is passed onto the second agency is used in projects.

Q: And that's not always the case?

Mr Hunt: Right. The second agency often treats the grant as overhead-free income. They report it as donated money. It then has the effect of increasing their reported revenue...

Q: ...and reducing their overhead percentage.

Mr Hunt: You're getting the hang of this.

Q: I begin to see that this is rather complicated.

The one reporting the lower overhead is not telling the whole truth.

Mr Hunt: That's my point. Yet we have

this looney statement that an agency with 10% reported overhead is better than one with 25%. Such statements tell you nothing about either agency. Indeed they might tell you that the one reporting the lower overhead is not telling the whole truth.

Q: I guess there are other differences.

Mr Hunt: Lots. Some agencies don't send your money right away. In fact World Vision often does this. We have reserves depending on the need in the field. If we raise funds for long term projects it's often better to invest the money carefully here than have it sitting and earning money for a bank in Singapore or Bangladesh. Usually, World Vision reserves are only equal to a couple of months spending, but some agencies have huge amounts in reserve.

Q: How much?

They spent every cent of the dollar donated on the needy.

Mr Hunt: Well, I remember one agency in Hong Kong when I worked there that did not spend a cent of the money raised this year until next year. That meant that at year end they had a whole year's fundraising sitting in the bank earning free interest for them. They allowed it to get so huge that after a few years they were able to say they spent every cent of the dollar donated on the needy.

Q: How could they say that?

Mr Hunt: Because the amount earned in interest was set off against their running expenses. They said the interest paid their expenses.

Q: Sounds clever. Why doesn't World Vision do that?

Mr Hunt: Well, to a small extent we do. Our finance people earn more than \$1,000,000

a year by making sure that spare cash is working properly. That's out of \$50 million total revenue. So it represents about 10% of our local costs. It has the effect of increasing the amount of each donor's dollar that goes overseas.

Q: I still don't see why you don't make that 100%, like this charity you mentioned in Hong Kong.

Mr Hunt: Two reasons. One, we work often in urgent situations. The money we raise for starving Ethiopians can hardly be allowed to sit in a bank for a couple of years. The people will die.

Q: That's fair.

Mr Hunt: Two, I think the public don't expect us to sit on huge reserves. If I felt confident that the majority of supporters were prepared to see half or more of their gifts going into endowment funds, I would consider it. My conversations with donors do not lead me to think this is what they want.

Q: OK. There are differences.

some costs ... are shared
with the church.

Mr Hunt: And there are lots more. It would take hours. There are church agencies who don't report some costs because they are shared with the church. Sometimes even staff salaries are paid by the church. And there are minor variations like agencies which are committed to spending a much larger percentage of their income on local community education rather than sending it overseas. These differences in emphasis need to be looked at before jumping to conclusions.

Q: But in the end, doesn't 15% mean something better than 25%?

Mr Hunt: I see I have not satisfied you. I would only say that all others things being

equal 15% is better than 25%.

Q: The lower the better.

Mr Hunt: Not at all. Too little can be just as incompetent as too much.

Q: Surely the lowest overhead is desirable.

Mr Hunt: Only if it is consistent with good management and control. Frankly, provided an organisation is doing work similar to World Vision and provided it reports all of its costs in the same way, I would say that an organisation that spent less than 15% on administration was probably badly administered.

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Q: So all of this material in the *Dispatches* program constitutes what you think are half-truths, right?

Mr Hunt: Yes. I think some of this material is factually true. It just presents an untrue picture because it is so much less than the whole truth. It is not good enough for the journalist or documentary maker to claim his material is true. He or she must be able to say that the impression it leaves with the reader or viewer is a true impression.

Q: Some of this seems pretty technical to me.

Mr Hunt: Well, let me give you a simple example from right at the beginning of the program. You know how it starts with the statement "sometimes as little as 10 or 20% of money raised reaches the people in need." This is in fact a true statement. But it is not the truth.

Q: Pardon?

Mr Hunt: Well, I can take you to projects of any agency in which right now only 10 cents in the dollar is getting through.

Q: So it is a true statement.

Mr Hunt: Yes. But I can also take you to projects where, right now, we are spending \$2 in the dollar! Projects start slow, build up, then slow down again as the people themselves take over. At the beginning and end we spend less. In the middle we spend more, sometimes more than the donors are giving at that particular time.

Q: The impression one gets from the program is that a lot of the projects only get a little of the money.

Mr Hunt: And that's an untrue impression that is created by only emphasising half of the truth, and failing to accept the journalistic responsibility for balance.

Q: You said the program told half-truths and lies. You have given some examples of what you think are half-truths. What are the lies?

Mr Hunt: Well, in comparison most of the lies are trivial.

Q: For instance?

Mr Hunt: The statement is made that "World Vision came to Britain from California".

Q: I thought World Vision is an American organisation.

Mr Hunt: Well, it isn't. It began in America as an American's idea, but it can hardly be called an American organisation any more than the Red Cross can be called a Swiss organisation just because it started in Switzerland.

Q: There are a lot of Swiss still running Red Cross.

Mr Hunt: Yes, but it has become an international organisation.

Q: And World Vision has too?

Mr Hunt: Yes, In fact, you mentioned staff. I would say that World Vision might have fewer Americans working for us per capita than Red Cross has Swiss. World Vision

is an international organisation.

Q: When it began in Britain where did it come from?

Mr Hunt: I'm not sure how you want me to answer that.

Q: Where did the staff come from?

Mr Hunt: Britain and Australia.

Q: Where did the start up funds come from?

Mr Hunt: From everywhere. All the World Visions put in a share for a year or two until it was on its own feet and able to pay its own way.

Q: What about the Board? Was it all American?

Mr Hunt: No, it was all British save for the President of World Vision International. He is on every World Vision board, including mine. At that time the President was an American. Later our President was a Scot. Now it is an Australian.

Q: This is a trivial point you are making isn't it?

A statement like that
exploits people's inbuilt
dislike...

Mr Hunt: Yes and no. I agree that by itself it does not seem important. But there is a degree of america-phobia in Britain. A statement like this exploits people's in-built dislike of things from America. Add this statement to the many similar ones throughout the program and people's emotions are manipulated to dislike World Vision.

Q: Can you cite other statements like this that trade on people's negative attitudes?

Mr Hunt: Sure. The statement that "World Vision has made poverty its business" implies we are exploiting the poor for business (that is, commercial) interests. And he describes us as "a global bureaucracy". Most people don't like

bureaucracy, and nor do I.

Q: Are there other wrong statements in the program?

Mr Hunt: Little things. It says we aim our "fundraising at a broad, Christian constituency." As a generalisation this is untrue. We have a mass market approach in most countries that is attractive to Christians and non-Christians alike. The reason we aim at Christians in the USA is that they are the majority of the population. We are a Christian organisation. Our motivation for our work is a Christian motivation--we want to follow Christ's example in caring for the poor. But we want everyone to hear what we have to say and to participate in our work.

Q: Let me go back to the question of how the money is disbursed.

Mr Hunt: You are persistent, I'll give you that.

Q: I can see that it is reasonable that there is money spent here, money spent in the field on management and systems and money spent in the project. What are the proportions?

Mr Hunt: Well, I think Harold has it right in general terms. He said 25-33% in the fundraising country. Then 25-33% on project support overseas. Then the balance, between 33 and 50% right in the project community. But, as Harold points out, usually none of it gets to the child in actual cash. That's not the way we work, nor do we ever tell our supporters that it is normal to give cash to sponsored children. We always say that the cash is converted into services or goods.

Q: The program says that at best what benefits your sponsored child is \$6.60 out of \$10.

Mr Hunt: Well, that's funny maths. And it's a bad use of the word "benefits."

Q: Tell me about the funny maths first.

Mr Hunt: OK. If we spend 25% in this country, I would argue that the balance of \$7.50 is the amount that "benefits the child" in *Dispatch's* terms.

Q: But you don't agree with this way of describing benefits?

Mr Hunt: No. I think it all benefits the child. I think that it is of benefit to the child to have a community education program in this country. I think it benefits the child to ensure that we have a computer system here that ensures funds are quickly and accurately receipted and sponsors followed up. I think it benefits the child to have me here answering your questions.

Q: But on that basis you might not spend anything on the child.

Mr Hunt: Well, I am not suggesting that, of course. All I am saying is that money spent in this country is not wasted money. We are engaged in a ministry of connecting people who have resources with those in need. Anything that empowers transformation through that relationship is a good thing to do. The world will not be changed only by a transfer of resources from here to there. I would have thought the program's producers would agree with that. We need to do more than just shift money. We need to educate. We need to empower people here with information and interpretation. We need to lobby our governments. We need to put the issues of world need on the public agenda so that people here have an awareness of the world and our place in it, and our responsibilities for creating and sustaining poverty in the Third World.

Q: What about this strange arrangement of shipping all the money to Singapore?

Mr Hunt: This is one of the most amazingly naive things said in the program and shows how little the producers seem to understand about international finance.

Q: How come?

Mr Hunt: Well, they say Singapore is "renowned for its impenetrable secrecy". That surprised me. I'd like to know how they justify such a statement. Singapore, as a financial centre is more renowned for its excellent communications and low government

interference. That makes it an efficient and cheap place to do money transfers. That's why many international companies do exactly what World Vision does, use it as a centre for money transfers. The bank we use is actually a Swiss bank, one of the most reputable and experienced in the world.

Q: But why not send the money direct?

Mr Hunt: Well, we could do this, but we have found it is more efficient for each field office to do a single draw down of funds from a central bank once a month than to have 15 times 30 transactions.

Q: Couldn't you just post a cheque from Australia?

Mr Hunt: You obviously haven't tried to send money to a relative in Ethiopia recently.

Q: Not recently.

I hope no aid agency
works like this.

Mr Hunt: We could do this. The result would be that it would take a week to 10 days to arrive by air mail. Then it would have to be presented at the bank in Ethiopia. Then the bank would present it for collection. Then the funds would be transferred. The banks are notoriously slow in completing such international transactions. They sit on the funds and use them to earn income for themselves often for weeks at a time. Such a process would be hopelessly inefficient and result in a huge increase in administration costs. I hope no aid agency works like this.

Q: How long does it take to transfer funds from Singapore?

Mr Hunt: It is instantaneous. We use electronic funds transfers. We send it at the last moment and when the field director in Ethiopia rings up his local bank, the money is there waiting for him. In the meantime, until he needed it, it has been generating income for

World Vision which is used to fund extra projects and help additional needy people.

Q: *Dispatches* suggested that the money comes straight back to Britain from Singapore.

Mr Hunt: Well, this is a distortion of a temporary situation when Britain was set up. Before there were many supporters in Britain, the whole world-wide partnership contributed funds for a couple of years to subsidise the running expenses of the new office. We paid this subsidy by making a transfer from our account in Singapore.

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this arrangement
particularly unusual.

Q: So funds did go to Singapore and back to Britain.

Mr Hunt: No. I think that is wrong. Funds came from all over the world, and a tiny part of them went to Britain. This is the way we always start new offices. I accepted a subsidy from the partnership for a year in Hong Kong in 1983. After that we paid our own way and contributed to the establishment of Singapore and later Japan. It is a fairly unremarkable arrangement. I would have thought anyone motivated by goodwill would not find this arrangement particularly unusual.

Q: The program implies that World Vision International under-reports its activities. That it is secretive. They talked with the Deputy Attorney General in California.

Mr Hunt: The Deputy Attorney General of the California Charitable Trusts Division, not of all California.

Q: I wasn't aware of the difference.

Mr Hunt: And nor would most viewers.

Q: But he wanted World Vision International to supply more information.

Mr Hunt: Well, this is interesting to me. It is important to note that World Vision already provides every piece of information that is required by law. We are not in breach of any legal requirement. In many places we exceed the requirement, but no government agency wants a copy of every report ever printed. If this public servant wanted extra information he has as much right as any citizen to ask for it. Anyone who calls my office and asks for a copy of the accounts of World Vision of Australia or World Vision International will be offered a complete audited set of accounts. There is no secret here or anywhere.

Q: But the program says the donors' money "ends in a financial black hole."

Mr Hunt: All holes look black to a man with his eyes shut.

Q: You are saying that the producers did not ask for all the information that is available.

Mr Hunt: I don't know whether they asked for it or not. I do know that this information is available. I do know that I and my colleagues write many letters setting out financial and other information as people request it. I do know that if someone wants to come into our offices and browse our information centre, they are welcomed.

Q: The Deputy Attorney General ...

Mr Hunt: Of the Charitable Trusts Division...

Q: Yes. He says a "multinational charity has opportunities to work outside the framework". Is that what World Vision does?

Mr Hunt: I don't follow his argument. He implies that World Vision International is unlike World Vision USA. As far as he is concerned they should look the same. They are both registered in California, and fully comply with all legal requirements. From the point of view of the public servant, both organisations would be considered as national organisations. I'm only talking about their legal status, but

then that is what is in question here.

Q: The German Task Force report was pretty damning, didn't you think?

~~We took it very seriously indeed. All holes look black to a man with his eyes shut.~~

Mr Hunt: Yes. We took it very seriously indeed. A government appointed auditor came in and went through everything. He found that, apart from the things we talked about before, there was nothing to support the allegations.

Q: Are you saying there were other allegations?

Why don't we hear what the auditors said?

Mr Hunt: Oh yes. All sorts of stuff. Allegations that the executive director and the board were getting personal advantage from donors' funds. The program hints at it when it mentions an account under the executive director's "personal disposal". All this was investigated by outsiders and found to be unsubstantiated. I mean, I am amazed at the stupefying gall of this program to ignore the way the Task Force Report was demolished by the outside auditors. Why don't we hear what the auditors said? Instead we have a reaction from the original accuser. The program does not mention that two of the original seven have since publicly dissociated themselves from the report. They weren't interviewed.

Q: Do you think mistakes were made in Germany?

Mr Hunt: I think we make mistakes

everywhere. Anyone involved in the high risk business of people development is going to make mistakes. The question is not whether we make mistakes. The question is what we do about mistakes.

Q: What do you do about mistakes?

Mr Hunt: I'm glad you asked. We try to learn from them. We fix them. The way the accounts were structured and the relationship between the marketing company and World Vision in Germany were not shown to be dishonest in any regard. But they were open to misinterpretation. They might have caused problems. So we changed them. We fixed them. That's how we work, whether it is in Germany or the Philippines. We work hard to learn from what we do and we change as an organisation to do our work better.

Q: What about MARC? What's this got to do with Third World aid?

Mr Hunt: Well, it all looked very sinister on the program.

Q: I agree.

Mr Hunt: It's very simple really. World Vision is a Christian organisation. That should not be a surprise to anyone. We don't hide that. We have a number of small programs which are designed to assist the church in its mission. These are small parts of our total program and they are separately funded. We don't take money off the projects of sponsored children to pay for these things. The major work of MARC is in Britain, where it concentrates very profitably on publishing, and in the US where it concentrates on research and information collection. We also run conferences for clergy. These are usually self-funding and are coordinated by a full-time Vice President.

Q: If someone only knew about World Vision through what *Dispatches* says they would have a pretty negative view of you.

It simply does not
present a true picture of
World Vision at all.

Mr Hunt: That's the tragic dishonesty of this program. It simply does not present a true picture of World Vision at all. If people want to know about us they will have to look a lot wider than this program. Ask the dozens of reporters who have investigated World Vision in this country and elsewhere. Ask Hinch, 60 Minutes, A Current Affair, TEN news. These have all reported on World Vision. Ask the Premiers of the States and the Prime Minister of the nation who are Patrons of our 40 Hour Famine. They're not going to endorse an organisation that is really like what *Dispatches* wants you to believe. Look at what we do and judge for yourself. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the almost dead are raised up, and the poor hear good news. And blessed are those who take no offence at us.

Q: Sounds like something Jesus might have said.

Mr Hunt: Really?