

LIFE NEWSPAPERS

THE STORY OF LIFE ON SUNDAY

'*Life on Sunday*' was a great idea that never became a reality. The original idea was for a daily newspaper that would be run by Christians to provide a biblical perspective on current news. It would handle all the usual news stories but they would be written with an emphasis upon truth and integrity and wherever possible give a Judaeo-Christian slant or emphasis. The cost of such a daily newspaper breaking into a fledgeling market was calculated to be so astronomical that it was decided to scale down the concept to a Sunday newspaper – hence 'Life on Sunday' was born in the minds of the two men where it originated – Charles Gardner and Nick Thompson.

The Team

The two men knew each other but got together for this specific purpose and were soon joined by John Hockett, Professor of Business Studies at Warwick University, unfortunately no longer with us. They began working on a full business plan which they sent to various prospective supporters including a Christian company in Clitheroe, Lancashire who liked the concept and promised the sum of £300,000 as a contribution towards launching the paper, but this was only 1/10 of the estimated £3 million needed for the launch.

That same year, 1999, Charles and Nick came to Moggerhanger Park for a meeting where they met Clifford Hill and Clifford Denton who were both involved in the publication of the bimonthly magazine *Prophecy Today* whose editorial office was based at Moggerhanger Park. Nick and Charles shared their desire for a Christian national newspaper which would present the news with truth and integrity and interpret it from a biblical perspective. This idea was appealing as its concept was not too far from the vision behind *Prophecy Today*.

Widening the Vision

Cliff had many friends among businessmen in the City of London among whom he had worked when *Prophecy Today* had its editorial office in Tower Bridge Rd and Cliff and David Forbes used to attend lunchtime meetings of Christians – many of them involved in the world of finance, in

banking or insurance. Cliff introduced Nick Thompson to Tim Green who was the head of the group developing credit cards for NatWest bank. He liked the concept, and it was quite widely discussed among businessmen in the City, although offers of actual financial support were not forthcoming, probably the risk of breaking into the newspaper world was thought to be too great.

Cliff at that time was also highly involved with the Lords and Commons Family and Child Protection Group. He had presented the report *Family Matters* to Home Secretary Jack Straw MP in the Moses Room of the House of Lords the previous year July 1998, and he was now leading a research project aiming to produce a report on the *Cost of Family Breakdown*.

Charles and Nick were also active among members of Parliament, and they had a meeting with Dr Brian Mawhinney MP in the House of Commons. They were encouraged by this meeting but nothing directly happened to support the newspaper concept.

Launching in the House

Cliff was also familiar with Christian Members of both Houses of Parliament and frequently attended meetings in both houses. He began sharing the concept of a Christian newspaper with Christian MPs and peers. There was a ready response to the whole concept which was something that could be of great advantage to those who were seeking to uphold biblical values in the life of the nation.

A number of the MPs spoke warmly of the project, and Baroness Young who was a strong campaigner for biblical values, undertook to sponsor a meeting in the House where the whole concept could be put to MPs of both Houses. The meeting, at which Nick, Charles and Cliff spoke, was held on the 18 May 2000 in the Moses Room. This was deemed to be highly appropriate for a meeting promoting biblical values and it attracted a large number of MPs and peers, together with members of the public, businessmen, church leaders and others. One of the businessmen there was Eddie Stobbart who was the head of a family nationally involved in the transport business and buses. He spoke enthusiastically about the project and hopes were high that something positive would result from this meeting.

Research and Planning

In the meantime, the Management team including Nick and Charles. had carried out serious market research with the help of a man whose name neither of them can remember. The research

The Story of Life on Sunday

showed that the paper could expect a circulation of 250,000, which gave a readership of nearly a million people which Charles pointed out was the same readership as William Wilberforce achieved with their Christian newspaper at the height of the 18th-century awakening.

Becoming a Company

So *Life Newspapers* was registered as a private limited company on 2 June 2000 and offered 10 million £1.00 shares from 1 September. It struggled to get the support it needed at that time although many attempts were made – and when he became Archbishop, even Rowan Williams liked the concept of a Christian newspaper and introduced Cliff to a leading banker at HSBC. Cliff and Nick went to see him in his office on Canary Wharf and presented the whole concept of *Life on Sunday* together with the business plan and costings that had been developed. He listened carefully and asked a number of questions, but the outcome did not lead to him recommending that his bank should support the £250,000 loan that we requested.

Moving into Action

Nick and Charles produced several dummies of *Life on Sunday* including a 64 page dummy that was presented to those attending the House of Lords meeting. But the Company eventually closed and was deregistered in 2012. Christians right across the country said that it was a great idea, but it came to nothing. It was at the time when the Internet was a rising star that was seen as a threat to the newspaper world. It was the wrong time to attempt to break into the market. Was *Life on Sunday* ahead of its time, or was it wrongfully a victim of financial fear?