

POWER

&

TRUTH

A RESPONSE TO THE CRITIQUES
OF VINEYARD TEACHING AND PRACTICE BY
D. A. CARSON, JAMES MONTGOMERY BOICE, AND
JOHN H. ARMSTRONG IN *POWER RELIGION*

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Vineyard Position Paper #4
Power & Truth, a Response to Power Religion

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A RESPONSE TO POWER RELIGION

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VINEYARD POSITION PAPER NUMBER 4

Should we expect the Holy Spirit to work in powerful, miraculous ways in connection with the preaching of the gospel today? This has been the claim of John Wimber and the Vineyard movement, and of others within what is called the "Third Wave" of renewal by the Holy Spirit.¹ But other evangelicals have differed with this claim. Most recently, strong misgivings about Wimber's teachings and practices have been expressed by John Armstrong, D. A. Carson, and James M. Boice in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?*, edited by Michael Scott Horton (Chicago: Moody, 1992).

My conclusion after reading *Power Religion* is that Armstrong, Carson and Boice have been uncharacteristically careless and surprisingly inaccurate in gathering and assessing information about the Vineyard movement. All three attribute to Wimber views he does not hold and practices he does not endorse—a fact which can be established with reference to abundant published material in the form of books, journal articles, and tapes. In addition, I think their exegesis of key Scripture passages has been uncharacteristically insensitive to context, and they have used Scripture to paint a much more negative view of miracles today than the Bible warrants. I will attempt to explain the reasons for these conclusions in the material that follows.

It is fair to mention at the outset that I know all three of these writers personally. I have met and spoken with Dr. Boice on several occasions in connection with his work for the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. I have spoken twice in Dr. Armstrong's church, at his request. I have been a faculty colleague with Dr. Carson at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for eleven years, during which time our offices have been directly across the hall from one another. In fact, we have known each other since we were together in graduate study in England in 1973-75.

I have also known John Wimber, who is the focus of much of this criticism, since December of 1988, and I have talked with him frequently and extensively about his views. I spoke at a conference for him in 1990. I have also been a member of a Vineyard church for about three years.

Among several recent published criticisms of the Vineyard movement, it seems to me that the criticisms in *Power Religion* are the most significant — first, because two of the authors (Carson and Boice) are well-known and widely-respected evangelical scholars, and the vast majority of evangelical leaders today will tend to accept their criticisms as accurate unless another viewpoint is presented; and, second, because these chapters gather together and summarize many of the concerns that others have expressed about the Vineyard in recent years, and in responding to these chapters I am in a sense responding to most of the published criticism of the Vineyard. For these two reasons, then, I have thought it important to provide an alternative perspective to the one presented in *Power Religion*.²

¹See John Wimber with Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986; revised edition, 1992); *Power Healing* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987); *Power Points* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1991); C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant, 1988); John White, *When the Spirit Comes with Power* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988).

²It is not my intention to criticize the whole of the book *Power Religion*. Several chapters of the book, written by authors such as Charles Colson, J. I. Packer, and others, contain valid corrections to some troubling currents in evangelicalism. But I do not think that the authors of the chapters on the Vineyard have treated it fairly or accurately.

I will focus most attention on Carson's chapter, since the issues in question are treated there in most detail. After that, I will comment on any additional emphases in the articles by Armstrong and Boice.

I. Analysis of D. A. Carson, "The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament"³

A. Agreements with Dr. Carson's Article

1. *Rejoicing in salvation.* I agree with his affirmation (p. 104) on Luke 10:17-20 that it is far more important to rejoice that God has written our names in the Book of Life and granted us salvation than to rejoice in power in spiritual warfare.
2. *Extensions of Jesus' ministry.* I appreciate his acknowledgement that "there is an important sense in which the first disciples' ministry, even before the cross, was an extension of Jesus's ministry and a prefiguring of the inbreaking kingdom," and that "there is nothing to suggest that it would be impossible for *any* other believers, after the resurrection, to be gifted in similar ways" (pp. 103-04).
3. *Cessationism rejected.* I agree of course with his rejection of cessationism: "There is no sufficient evidence for supposing that all genuine miracles came to an end at the close of the apostolic age," and that "Wimber and some others have been helpful in reminding some Christians of that fact" (p. 104).
4. *Avoiding automatic rejection of new movements.* I appreciate his reminder that those who assess Christian movements "need to be cautious, humble, even-handed, and patient" so as not to become "a merely reactionary movement—a movement constantly reacting *against* whatever is going on" (p. 111).
5. *Dangers regarding miracles in general.* In the course of his article he points out several dangers that accompany the occurrence of miracles in general, and these dangers need to be recognized whenever a church or denomination considers the possibility of encouraging or allowing present-day miracles in its midst (whether or not these dangers actually characterize the Vineyard movement, which he talks about extensively in his chapter).

B. Differences with Dr. Carson's Article

Before I mention areas of disagreement, I want to say that I have the highest respect for Dr. Carson as a biblical scholar. His teaching and his abundant writings have brought immeasurable benefit to the church worldwide, and much blessing to me personally. I hope and expect that his academic career will continue for many more years with ever increasing fruitfulness through the blessing of God on his work. Moreover, I am thankful that he and I share vast areas of doctrinal agreement—not only on major Christian doctrines, but also on many doctrines where other

³ Dr. Carson's article is found in *Power Religion*, edited by Michael Scott Horton (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), pp. 89-118.

evangelicals would disagree. Even in the area of gifts of the Holy Spirit, I agree almost entirely with what he has written in his book *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987). Moreover, in that book he expresses substantial agreement with my book, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*.⁴ I appreciate him as a valued faculty colleague at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. For all these reasons, I have written this response with hesitancy and sadness.

Why then have I written this response at all? Because the charges Dr. Carson makes against the Vineyard are so serious, and, I think, so incorrect, that it seemed to me that I had no choice but to make an alternative assessment available to interested people. In addition, I have included much factual information about the Vineyard's teaching and practices that was not in Dr. Carson's article.⁵

My areas of disagreement with Dr. Carson's article are as follows:

1. Do I have "a profoundly secular world view"?

Dr. Carson's story about the man who had headaches and needed glasses (pp. 114-15) was one I had told in an open faculty discussion about the Vineyard on April 3, 1991. His article says about my story,

As the couple tell the story, the woman felt impelled (a word from the Lord?) to ask if their visitor had had his eyes tested. He confessed that he hadn't. That week he followed their advice, discovered he needed spectacles, and his headaches disappeared....Because of their Vineyard connection, the couple in question felt compelled to analyze what happened as divine intervention ... a prophecy, and display it as evidence, even justification, for their theological outlook. But this represents not only the triumph of triteness, it reflects a profoundly secular world-view broken up by moments of divine intervention. That is sad; it may also be dangerous (pp. 114-15).

But that is not what happened. When we were praying with friends in the living room at my home, someone had a distinct mental picture of a pair of glasses, and mentioned it. Someone else then asked if Tom (the lawyer with headaches) had had his eyes checked. He got his eyes checked, got glasses, and his headaches cleared up. I brought up this story in faculty meeting because someone had asked if I thought God *only* healed miraculously. I said that I believed that God uses both "natural" and "supernatural" means, and I mentioned this experience as an example of the way God can use *both* unusual means (the mental picture that came to mind) and more ordinary means (getting glasses) to bring healing—both are from him.

But the article has twisted my story to make it mean exactly the opposite of what I said on both counts. The unusual mental picture is minimized as "common sense," and the eye exam, which I gave as an example of God's use of ordinary means, is taken as evidence of "a strong tendency to

⁴Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1982. My views in this book were later published in more popular form in *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988).

⁵Dr. Carson did show me a copy of his chapter before *Power Religion* was published, but it was at a time in the publication process when it was too late for any changes to be made in the manuscript. He has seen an earlier version of this response, and we have discussed it briefly.

view God as *not* operating in the 'ordinary'" (p. 114), and a conviction that "if He heals through 'natural' processes, then maybe it is not God who is doing it" (p. 114).

It is hard for me to understand how Dr. Carson can attribute what I say to a "profoundly secular world-view" that is "broken up by moments of divine intervention." I have not taught that viewpoint in any class; I have not written with that viewpoint in any article; I have not prayed with that viewpoint, nor do I think with that viewpoint. I believe that God alone is sovereign over all the affairs of the universe and "accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11). Jesus Christ "carries along the universe by his word of power" (Heb. 1:3). I believe that with all my heart, and I rejoice in it. Yes, I believe God works in miraculous ways today. But that does not mean that I think God *only* works in miraculous ways. I believe he works in non-miraculous ways as well.

Nor do I think that Carson's criticism is fair to the Vineyard. Unlike some mistaken "faith healers" in the past, John Wimber *encourages* people to use natural means and medicine for healing, as well as praying for miraculous divine intervention, and to thank God for both. In fact, I think that the Christians I have come to know in Vineyard churches are surprisingly disposed to see God's hand in *everything* that happens. The fact that Wimber encourages people to seek God for miraculous answers to prayer does *not* mean that he has to have a secular world view or that he thinks that God only answers in miraculous ways. The Vineyard teaches a "both/and" here and the article is forcing on it an "either/or" which it does not hold.

It is a rather strange turn of logic that belief in miracles is now said to reveal a "profoundly secular world-view" (Carson, p. 115). By that logic, I suppose we should conclude that people who *don't* believe in miracles have a profoundly *Christian* world view. It used to be the other way around—Christians believed in miracles and secular people didn't. As a matter of fact, I think that is a better way of looking at things: I am not persuaded when Carson says that belief in miracles is trite and sad and "profoundly secular." I think it is profoundly Christian.

2. Is the Vineyard connected with demonic healings and false religions?

If Carson had written the section on the dangers of signs and wonders (pp. 94-98) simply as a general warning of the misuse of miracles in Scripture, I would have no objection to it. The dangers he mentions (demonic miracles, miracles that draw people into false religions, miracles demanded from impure motives, and hypocritical miracles performed by unbelievers) are certainly there in Scripture.

a. Demonic healings

But in the way that section on pages 94-98 was actually written, I found it to be misleading, because it interwove mentions of and allusions to the Vineyard in such a way that it suggested that these dangers characterized the miracles found in Vineyard churches. Speaking of miracles done in false religions, the article says,

In the worst case they are *demonic*. In one of the most perceptive analyses of Wimber, Alan Cole, who has served Christ in several different cultures, writes, "None of these signs are new to me (healings, visions, tongues, exorcisms). But the trouble is that I have seen *every one of them* (yes, tongues too) in *non-Christian religions*..." (p. 95, first and third emphases mine).

Carson then immediately mentions healings among Roman Catholics, Christian Scientists, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists (p. 95).

The connection of Wimber with demonic healings is not explicit—it is by innuendo. But when the article mentions demonic healings just before and just after "one of the most perceptive analyses of Wimber," the strong suggestion is that healings in the Vineyard are demonic in origin.⁶

b. False religions and "another Jesus"

In the next section Carson mentions "wonders that have deceptive force" and quotes the passage from Deut. 13:1-5 that warns,

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "*Let us follow other gods*" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God... (p. 96).

Then he says,

The contemporary application is pretty clear. The question is not first of all whether the miracles reported by the Vineyard movement are real (though that is an important question), nor even if people are drawn to renewed love for "Jesus." There are, after all, many Jesuses around: the Mormon Jesus, the Jehovah's Witness Jesus, the Muslim Jesus, the classic liberal Jesus, and so forth. The question, rather, is whether the movement draws men and women to renewed love for the Jesus of God's great, redemptive-historical act, the Jesus of the cross and resurrection. That is an issue of extraordinary importance; I shall return to it again (pp. 96-97, emphases mine).

He does return to it again on page 116, where he only leaves us with an unanswered question about the Vineyard, "*Or is the Jesus who is praised another Jesus, one largely detached from the gospel?*"

Here again, the connection of the Vineyard with the "Jesuses" of Mormons, Muslims, and Jehovah's Witnesses is by innuendo and unanswered question, but the strong suggestion that will be picked up by readers is that the "Jesus" being worshipped in the Vineyard is not Jesus Christ the only Son of God but is a false god, a pagan deity, and that the Vineyard is therefore a false religion and not Christian at all. This is an extraordinarily serious charge. And it is simply false.

I have been in Vineyard churches for three years now and the Jesus preached and prayed to and trusted and worshipped is Jesus Christ "the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20), who "died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures," and who "was buried," and "was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Christians

⁶Perhaps Dr. Carson did not wish to imply that Vineyard healings are demonic. But in that case he should have included some very clear statements to that effect in this section of the article. As the article stands, many readers will conclude that he is accusing the Vineyard of demonic healings, whether he intended that or not.

The same thing must be said about the following section on false religions: If Dr. Carson did not wish to imply that the Vineyard was a false religion, he should have included some clear statement to that effect. As the article now stands, it is almost guaranteed that many readers will understand him to be saying the Vineyard is probably a false religion.

around the world have sung John Wimber's song, "Isn't He Beautiful?" To whom does Carson think John Wimber wrote this and dozens of other songs of praise? To whom does Carson think Christians sing this song that worships the "Prince of Peace, Son of God ... Wonderful ... Counselor, Almighty God"? Are we singing this song to a Mormon Jesus? To a Jehovah's Witnesses Jesus?

I have worshipped Jesus Christ the only Son of God, who is my Savior and Lord, more deeply and more passionately in Vineyard worship services in the last three years than at any previous time in my life. The very suggestion that I and my wife and children, and the friends in our church who love Jesus so deeply, are worshipping *some other Jesus*, troubles me deeply. I feel the emotions one feels when he hears that the deepest and most pure and precious love of his heart is being called impure and false.

c. False Christs and a warning about extraordinary deception

After this Carson adds a paragraph that suggests that ordinary readers just won't be able to tell whether the Vineyard is leading people to false gods or not. He speaks of "false Christs and false prophets who by performing signs and wonders would 'deceive the elect - if that were possible' (Mark 13:22)," and then says that these false Christs are "*extraordinarily deceptive*" and that "it will take *more than usual discernment* to see what is askew," and, "our generation of believers is not noteworthy for discernment" (p. 97, emphases mine).

The effect of this paragraph for many readers will be to think that his warnings about the Vineyard must be right, because their ordinary discernment would not be able to pick up the falsehood anyway, and they will have to trust his judgment—he, a respected scholar to whom most readers will attribute "more than usual discernment." Therefore many readers will be frightened that the Vineyard is a false religion even when they see no hard evidence that it is a false religion—even if they hear only true doctrine being taught in the Vineyard, even if Jesus is being exalted, even if they see good fruit from the Vineyard, *nothing will count for positive evidence* because this article warns that false Christs are "extraordinarily deceptive."

What will be the result of this? Many people will stay miles away from any church or group where miracles are happening today. They will reason:

False Christs work miracles.

Miracles are occurring in church A.

Therefore I will stay away from church A just to be safe (I really couldn't discern the falsehood anyway).

We should recognize at this point how harmful this kind of argument can be, against *any* religious group. Such an argument, based on the "extraordinarily deceptive" nature of any religious group, ultimately allows one to condemn a movement without any incriminating evidence: The people in the movement don't know that they are deceived (by definition of what it is to be deceived). The people outside the movement don't know they are deceived by it either (it is too deceptive). All seemingly *positive* facts then go to show how *deceptive* it is, and any *negative* facts prove how *wrong* it is. Every fact, positive or negative, therefore can be used to prove it to be a false religion. There is no defense against such an accusation except to point out that the New

Testament doesn't speak that way - it doesn't leave us without good tests whereby we *can* discern true from false religion.

d. Proper New Testament tests for false prophets

Instead of his warning about extraordinary deceptiveness, I think Carson would give a more biblical perspective if he were to say that Jesus *does* give a test for false prophets: "*You will know them by their fruits*" (Matt. 7:16). The New Testament does not say that false Christs and false prophets are so deceptive that even Christians cannot identify them. And it does *not* say that false Christs *will* lead astray the elect; it just says that is the *purpose* that they will try to accomplish: the Greek phrase is *pros to apoplanan, ei dunaton, tous eklektous*, "for the purpose of leading astray, if possible, the elect" (Mark 13:22). But Satan's purpose in this will not be accomplished: Jesus promises us, "*You will know them by their fruits*" (Matt. 7:16), and he says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Peter gives many marks of doctrinal purity and life character that distinguish false prophets from true (2 Pet. 2:1-22). John tells us that false prophets bring false doctrine about Jesus Christ, and their teaching is from the world, not the apostles. He then says, "By this *we know* the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4:1-6). This is much better counsel than Carson's bare warning that will make people think they have no way of telling false Christs from the true.

The third and fourth dangers he mentions concern the dangers of "corruption of motives" (p. 97) and "hypocrisy" (p. 98). He doesn't mention the Vineyard in these sections. But I find it strange that he discusses several Scripture passages in these sections without once mentioning that *all of these passages refer to miracles demanded or performed by unbelievers*—the hostile, unbelieving Pharisees and others who demand a sign to test Jesus in passages like Matt. 16:1-4 (cf. Matt. 12:38-45; Mark 8:11-12; Luke 11:16), and the unbelievers in Matt. 7:21-23 who prophesy and cast out demons in Jesus' name and who are told by Jesus, "I never knew you." *He mentions no passages here that warn about the dangers of miracles performed by genuine Christians.* (I discuss this matter at greater length below.)

e. The overall result of Carson's "danger" sections

What is troubling about these four "danger" sections on pages 94-98 is that in order for them to apply to the Vineyard, the miracles found in the Vineyard have to be done by demons, by advocates of false religions, or by unbelievers who are "ravenous wolves" and bad trees that bear "evil fruit" (Matt. 7:15, 17). Yet he gives no indication that he thinks the Vineyard does not fit these categories.

False religions (Mormons, JW's, Muslims, Buddhists) teach false doctrine. Pharisees (ancient and modern) oppose, and do not further, the work of the Kingdom. False prophets bear evil fruit—"nor can a bad tree bear good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). But the Vineyard does not teach false doctrine. It furthers the work of the Kingdom. It bears abundant good fruit in the lives of tens of thousands of people. These are not the marks of a false religion.

Nevertheless, many readers are going to conclude that Carson thinks the Vineyard is a false religion, or has a strong possibility of being a false religion. And because of his reputation many who have little acquaintance with the Vineyard are going to think he is right. If that is not what he

intends, then I am glad, but he certainly should have made that plain to his readers. On the other hand, if he does intend to imply that the Vineyard is a false religion, then I think his view is without substance and simply untrue.

3. Carson's inaccurate information about the Vineyard movement in general

a. Lack of necessary sources for information

The article has several significant criticisms of the Vineyard movement—its wrongful emphases, its mistaken central focus, its arrogance, its defective view of spirituality, its lack of calling people to self-denial, its skewed reporting of healings, etc. *But Carson nowhere quotes John Wimber to support these charges, nor does he quote anyone else in the Vineyard movement (except his inaccurate recounting of my story of the man with headaches), nor does he give any evidence of ever having visited a Vineyard church or talked with any Vineyard pastor or any other responsible leader within the Vineyard movement.*⁷

Is Carson's picture of the Vineyard accurate? I have spent hundreds of hours in Vineyard churches and talking with Vineyard pastors and other leaders. *I do not recognize the great majority of his characterizations as accurate or truthful. I doubt that anyone within the Vineyard movement will think that Carson is describing it at all fairly* (regardless of whether he agrees with it theologically). I hope that fact alone would give Carson some pause—for when we differ with other Christians (or, if he does not think Vineyard people are Christians, then when we differ with unbelievers as well), we should at least try to represent their position in a way that they would recognize as accurate. Some examples follow:

b. Is there an overemphasis on miracles within the Vineyard?

At several points I think he characterizes the Vineyard inaccurately regarding its emphasis on miracles, making it sound as though that were the primary emphasis of Vineyard churches and ministries. For example:

p. 113: "The Vineyard movement seems to have focused on the relatively peripheral (namely, the kinds of phenomena found in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and some other passages), called them 'signs and wonders,' and elevated them to a place of central importance....to elevate them to what is central is to lose the central, or at least to send it into eclipse."

But how does he know that miraculous gifts are "central" to the Vineyard? Has he attended any Vineyard services? Has he asked Vineyard pastors what is central to their preaching? Has he seen what has been emphasized in the Vineyard's journal (*Equipping the Saints*) over the last few years? Wouldn't it be appropriate to do some or perhaps all of these things before saying what is central?

⁷When I asked Dr. Carson if he had ever visited any Vineyard churches, he assured me that he had, but he declined to name any of them and only said that none were within the United States. He also assured me that he had talked with some Vineyard pastors and leaders about what the Vineyard teaches and practices, but declined to name any specific persons he had talked to. It is disappointing to me that a careful scholar can write such a critical evaluation of something about which he gives so little evidence of accurate knowledge. The article is filled with unsupported generalizations. And when someone asks for supporting evidence but none is provided, it does not increase our confidence in the accuracy of those generalizations.

(1) *Equipping the Saints*: For example, what is emphasized in the Vineyard's journal *Equipping the Saints*? Each issue has a theme about which most or all of the articles are written. Here is a summary of the themes covered in the last 6 years of *Equipping the Saints* (1987 - 1992):

Equipping The Saints
(the journal of Vineyard Ministries International):
List of the Major Theme of Each Issue, 1987-1992

1987

- Jan-Feb** **Worship**
Major articles by: Robert Webber, Peter Jennings, John Wimber
- Mar-Apr** **Fellowship: Strength in Troubled Times (small group ministries)**
Major articles by: John White, John Wimber, Ken Wilson
- May-June** **Ministry: God's Love in Action** (reaching out to the poor in ministry)
Major articles by: Mother Theresa, Jackie Pullinger (Hong Kong missionary), John Wimber
- July-Aug** **Training: A Key to Strong Character in Ministry** (on character development in ministry)
Major articles by: Peter Davids, Laurie White, John Wimber
- Sept-Oct** **Sent into the Harvest Field** (on evangelism)
Major articles by: Michael Green (on personal evangelism), Charles Kraft, Kevin Springer (on the opportunity of evangelizing internationals in US)
- Nov-Dec** **Prayer: Intimacy with God**
Major articles by: Kathryn Lindskoog, Joyce Huggett, Richard Foster, George Mallone

1988

- winter** **Why Christians Suffer**
Major articles by: John Wimber, Peter Kreeft (7 lessons on suffering from the saints in past generations of the church) Jonathan Hunter (interview): on AIDS Resource Center, a Vineyard ministry to dying AIDS patients in West LA
- spring** **The Cross**
Major articles by: Harold O. J. Brown, John Wimber, C. Peter Wagner; sidebar column from Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- summer** **Fallen Leaders** (on sin in the pastorate)
Major articles by: David Neff, Don Basham, Ken Blue, John Blattner
- fall** **Confronting the New Age**
Major articles by: Douglas Groothuis, Brooks Alexander and Robert Burrows (of Spiritual Counterfeits Project), Charles Strohmer (testimony of conversion from New Age to Christianity), John Wimber

1990

- winter** **The Bible**
Major articles by: Gordon Fee, Clark Pinnock [Kevin Springer "regrets" asking Pinnock for this article, was expecting something more solidly conservative based on Pinnock's earlier writings]
- spring** **The Lamb's War** (on social justice)
Major articles by: Richard Foster, Ron Sider, Ted Engstrom, James Skillen
- summer** **Facing the 90's** (arts on humility, fearing God, pure hearts, suffering)
Major articles by: Jack Deere, James Ryle, John Wimber
- fall** **Introducing Prophetic Ministry**
Major articles by: Wayne Grudem, John Wimber, John Blattner

1990

- winter** **Holiness**
Major articles by: Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Ed Murphy, John White, Jack Deere; short article by Jerry Bridges (VP, Navigators)
- spring** **Intercession**
Major articles by: C. Peter Wagner, Cindy Jacobs
- summer** **Building Strong Families**
Major articles by: John Blattner, Paul Vitz
- fall** **Prophecy Today** (dealing with controversy over Kansas City prophets)
Major articles by: John Wimber, Paul Cain (interview), John Blattner, Sandy Miller (from Holy Trinity Church, Brompton (London))

1991

- winter** **Revival**
Major articles by: Michael Green, John White, John Wimber, John Blattner
- spring** **Raising Children**
Major articles by: Suzanne Springer, Bruce Narramore
- summer** **World Missions**
Major articles by: Lyle Dorsett (Billy Graham Center, Wheaton), J. Dudley Woodberry (Fuller): on Muslim evangelization, Chris Woehr
- fall** *issue skipped (move to new facilities)*

1992

- winter** **Money**
Major articles by: John Piper, John Wimber
- spring** **Evangelism & Church Planting**
Major articles by: J I Packer, C. Peter Wagner, John Blattner, John Wimber
- summer** **Youth Ministry**
Major articles by: John Wimber, Jim Burns, Mark Senter III
- fall** **Healing for Broken Lives**
Major articles about the damaged lives in society today (John Wimber), the link between promiscuity and violence (John White), and healing for people who are suffering from the results of sexual sin (Andy Comiskey), abortion (Jack & Paulette Clark), and abusive fathers (David Stoop)

Summary: Equipping the Saints:

Themes of 25 issues over the last 6 years

Church life	6	(worship, fellowship, training leaders, fallen leaders, revival, youth ministry)
Sanctification	5	(prayer, holiness, facing 90's [humility, purity of heart, holiness, fearing God, suffering], intercession, money)
Doctrine	4	(suffering, the cross, the Bible, the New Age)
Missions/evangelism	3	
Social justice, care	2	

for the poor		
Family life	2	
Miraculous gifts	2	(both on gift of prophecy)
Healing	1	(for personal brokenness)
<hr/>		
TOTAL	25	

This is not elevating the peripheral to what is central.

(2) *Sermons*: Another test of what is central would be to look at sermons preached over the last few years. I can't do this for every Vineyard, obviously, but I obtained from the Anaheim Vineyard a list of John Wimber's Sunday morning and evening sermons for the past 2 1/2 years: The sermons cover the whole range of Christian doctrine and life, and often move consecutively through Bible texts a week at a time. (See section h. below for a partial list.) Once again, this does not show a pattern of elevating the peripheral to what is central, as he claims.

I do not see the factual basis on which the article can claim that there is excessive emphasis on healing or on spiritual gifts in the Vineyard: People may *assume* that because John Wimber has written and taught on healing. But within Vineyard churches themselves I think there is a healthy, positive emphasis on healing, and one which I think corrects the imbalance in the other direction in much mainstream evangelicalism. In the overall scope of Vineyard ministries, however, this is just thought of as part of the ordinary life of the church.

(3) *Books and conferences*: In response to what I have just said about what is emphasized in Vineyard *churches*, Carson might say that Wimber has written two books on miraculous gifts in evangelism and church ministry, *Power Evangelism* and *Power Healing*, and he has held many conferences dealing with these things, and therefore that is all Wimber is concerned about. But the fact that someone writes books on one specialized subject or another, or has conferences on one particular subject or another, does not mean that that is the overall emphasis of his church's or his denomination's ministry. (In fact, Wimber's third book, *Power Points*, was written because he wanted to publish something about the importance of the broad sweep of Christian doctrine in the church.) Personally, I think that Wimber has valuable things to say to the rest of the evangelical church about miraculous gifts generally and healing in particular, and I am glad that he has published those first two books.

For the same reason, I am glad for the emphasis of James Dobson on family issues, or of Larry Burkett on finances, or of Charles Colson on prison reform, or of the Christian Action Council on opposing abortion, or of Philip Johnson on evolution, or of Neal Anderson and Tim Warner on spiritual warfare, or of Joni Earickson Tada on ministry to the handicapped, or of Bill McCartney on Christian manhood, or of Bill Bright on evangelism, etc., etc. *The fact that someone has a specialized emphasis in writing and in large public conferences does not mean that the overall ministry of his own church or his own denomination is imbalanced.* I think Carson may have

wrongly confused these two things, writing about "what is central" in the Vineyard before he had enough information to make an informed judgment.⁸

c. Is the cross of Christ neglected?

In the same vein, Carson says, "In scores of their public meetings, where checks have been made as to the place given to the cross in hymns, songs, prayers, and preaching, this element, so foundational to New Testament Christianity, scarcely registers on the scale of what is important" (p. 113).

But what is his evidence for this? He gives none. When he says "scores" I expect he means something like 60 or 80 or more meetings. I am unaware of any tabulation like this, and I have seen most of the studies that people have made about the Vineyard. I wonder where and when such a count was made concerning scores of public meetings—or if this statement was simply made without adequate factual support.

Regarding the Vineyard "hymns" and "songs" that Carson mentions, his statement is simply incorrect. In the main Vineyard songbook, *Worship Songs of the Vineyard* (1989), there are at least eight songs (out of 125) dealing with Christ's death for us. For example:

It's your blood that cleanses me
It's your blood that gives me life
It's your blood that took my place
In redeeming sacrifice
Washes me whiter than the snow
My Jesus, God's precious sacrifice (#61)

You are the worthy one
Lamb that was slain
You bought us with your blood
And with You we'll reign (#111; see also 41, 42, 64, 84, 94, 119).

Now the Vineyard publishes about four supplemental songbooks per year, along with new worship tapes and CD's. For instance, a songbook put out in 1990, *King of Saints*, has a new arrangement of "Crown Him with Many Crowns," with these words:

Crown Him the Lord of love! Behold His hands and side
Rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified
All hail Redeemer, hail! For Thou hast died for me

⁸Dr. Carson might respond that his main concern in the article was not Vineyard churches but the large public conferences held by the Vineyard. However, if that was his intention it was not communicated in the article: There is no indication to the reader that his criticisms were mainly directed to large public conferences. Looking through the article I find 23 references to "*the Vineyard movement*," or "the movement" and only two references to public conferences (both in subordinate points on pp. 113 and 116). The heading for the last major section of the article is "*Assessing the Vineyard Movement*" (p. 110). He talks about excellent times of praise in "some Vineyard churches" (p. 112). He talks about testimonies of people's "connection with the Vineyard" (p. 112). He reports a story of an incident in my home (p. 114). So the article as written does talk about the Vineyard movement in general, and readers will take it that way.

On the other hand, if his intention was to talk primarily about large public conferences, then many of his criticisms regarding overemphasis on one doctrine or another are not valid, for specialized conferences and ministries are appropriate on many different subjects.

Thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity (pp. 34-35).

The *We Behold You* songbook (1990) includes this Graham Kendrick song:

Come and see, come and see
Come and see the King of love
See the purple robe and crown of thorns he wears
Soldiers mock, rulers sneer as he lifts the cruel cross
Lone and friendless now he climbs towards the hill
We worship at your feet where wrath and mercy meet
And a guilty world is washed by love's pure stream
For us he was made sin, oh, help me take it in
Deep wounds of love cry out "Father, forgive"
I worship, I worship the Lamb who was slain
Come and weep, come and mourn
For your sin that pierced him here
So much deeper than the wounds of thorn and nail
All our pride, all our greed
All our fallenness and shame
And the Lord has laid the punishment on him (p. 47).

I do not understand how Carson can say that the cross "scarcely registers on the scale of what is important." How can anyone sing these songs and fail to believe in and love the redeeming work of Christ on the cross? We sing songs like this regularly in church, and so do the other Vineyards I have visited.

Moreover, the Vineyard I attend, and a number of other Vineyards, also partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday, with an explanation of the meaning of the elements as representing Christ's death for us. In addition to that, the Vineyard has an internationally distributed series of worship tapes (now about 26 in number). Many of the songs on these are praise to Jesus Christ for his work of redemption. To say that Christ's atoning work "scarcely registers on the scale of what is important" is simply false.

Carson also mentions counting the subjects of prayers and preaching in public meetings. I have never heard of anyone counting people's prayers and I don't know how I could have access to such information—or even if I would want to sit counting the subjects a pastor prayed about whenever he prayed in public!

As to preaching, once again we must distinguish specialized conferences as something different from the overall emphasis of a church: When Carson speaks of "scores of their public meetings," if he is referring to large conferences on specialized topics (such as healing or worship or spiritual gifts today), then to count "the place given to the cross" in main messages would of course result in a relatively low number. But the same is true of other specialized conferences: in James Dobson's radio broadcasts, or Larry Burkett's seminars on finances, etc., we will find very little overt emphasis on the cross of Christ. The same is true of Carson's own class on advanced Greek grammar—or even the book of James in the New Testament, which never once mentions Christ's death for us! The fact that we believe something deeply and that it is foundational to our whole Christian life does not mean that we emphasize it in every public meeting.

But does the Vineyard neglect the cross *in its preaching generally*? The *1990 Spring Catalog* of the Vineyard Ministries International (Anaheim, CA) carries a 13-tape series of sermons by John Wimber on "The Cross." The catalog description says,

This series offers a fresh look at the person of Christ and what his life, death and resurrection really means to us. John looks at the Father's, the Son's and the Spirit's particular roles in our redemption, as well as the effect of the cross on Satan and his power. As a result of Christ's death on the cross we have available to us justification, adoption and sanctification by God. This set is meant to enrich your relationship with Christ by enabling you to discover the love and power he has given you through his sacrifice (p. 21).

It is not true to say that the cross "scarcely registers on the scale of what is important" with respect to Vineyard preaching generally.

Carson says, "It is virtually impossible to imagine a Vineyard pastor saying, with Paul, 'I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2)" (p. 113). But this is not impossible at all, if the pastor is referring to an initial church planting situation like the one Paul is speaking of in the context of 1 Corinthians 2. *Certainly this does not mean that Paul taught only on the cross of Christ*, for he teaches many other things in 1 Corinthians, including an extensive section on spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14. He no doubt taught "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) when he was at Corinth for two years, just as he did in Ephesus. In the context of 1 Cor. 2:2, however, the contrast is not, "I preached Christ instead of working miracles" (which Carson seems to suggest), but rather a contrast between worldly wisdom and eloquence, and preaching in the power of God: "And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, *but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*" (1 Cor. 2:4).

Nor does this verse mean that Paul excluded miraculous demonstrations of God's power from his initial Gospel presentations, for he says that his ministry *at Corinth* included "signs and wonders and mighty works" (2 Cor. 12:12), and he writes *from Corinth* to describe his entire ministry in words a Vineyard church planter would also want to say with Paul,

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, *by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit*, so that from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum *I have fully preached the gospel of Christ...* (Rom. 15:18-19).

I think it is fair to conclude that the cross of Christ is not neglected in Vineyard churches, and it does indeed register strongly on the scale of what is important.

d. Is the central emphasis of the Vineyard wrong?

Carson says,

The real distinction of the Vineyard movement does not lie in its prayers for the sick, but in its insistence that signs and wonders *must* be a part of normal Christianity. That means frequent claims of healing must be present, or the movement loses its *raison d'être*. In my observation, that has badly skewed the objectivity of the reporting (p. 111).

There is some element of truth in this statement, because John Wimber's teaching that we should expect God to do miracles ("signs and wonders") today is one clear emphasis of the Vineyard movement. But if people within the Vineyard could be allowed to describe what they see as distinctive, I think they would speak much more broadly than this. The Vineyard's reason for being a movement distinct from other denominations is multi-faceted, for there are several unique emphases: (i) "equipping the saints" with respect to spiritual gifts; (ii) a strong emphasis on extended times of contemporary worship; (iii) a church style that is "non-churchy" in atmosphere, aimed at a younger generation; (iv) a prayer model in personal ministry that includes physical healing but also includes far more than physical healings; and (v) ministry to the poor. Of course, other groups do these things to some extent as well. But these things all receive, I think, relatively more emphasis in Vineyard churches.

The important point is that all of these go on whether or not physical healings are common. I agree that there is an expectation that healing will *ordinarily* occur. But I would differ with saying that these "*must* be a part of normal Christianity"—an expression that would just make people try to force them to happen.

He says that "the vision of spirituality in the Vineyard movement might be dubbed a spirituality of power," and he advocates instead a "spirituality of the Word" (p. 113). But this again is forcing a false alternative on the Vineyard. Why not include in spirituality *both* power *and* the Word—as well as love for God and others, and faith, etc? I do think genuine power from the Holy Spirit is one aspect of spirituality—even as evident in the ministry of Billy Graham, for example, and the remarkable work of the Holy Spirit through him. But spiritual power of any kind *without* personal holiness of life, *without* faithfulness to the Word, *without* love for God and one's neighbor, will not be blessed and is not to be pursued or commended. Wimber has taught on this many times. He sees an overemphasis on a "spirituality of power" as a great danger to be avoided, and disavows it and warns against it.

Carson also says, "At the purely linguistic level, 'signs and wonders' is not a particularly apt way to designate the Vineyard movement" (p. 91). But he fails to note that the Vineyard has not called itself a "signs and wonders movement"—that is a label others have put on it. The name it has chosen is "The Vineyard." (And I have heard Wimber say that he thinks the "names" that God has given the Vineyard—in the sense of designating what is most characteristic of it—are "Worship" and "Compassion.")

If I were asked to name a central emphasis of the Vineyard, instead of Carson's claim that the Vineyard focuses on healing and miracles, it would seem to me more accurate to say that the Vineyard focuses on worshipping God and caring for people—bringing them to know Christ, and bringing them to grow to maturity and effective ministry in Him. Spiritual gifts, healing, etc., are just means to that end.

With regard to prayer for healing, another clarification is important: On page 111, Carson represents the Vineyard as claiming, "At least the movement prays for the sick, whereas mainstream evangelicalism fails to do so." He differs with this, saying that many evangelicals pray for the sick.

But John Wimber or the Vineyard have never taught what he says here. Of course mainstream evangelicals pray for the sick. The difference is rather that the Vineyard has a new and healthy emphasis on *how* to pray for the sick—a reexamination of the New Testament teachings on the Kingdom of God and the ministry of Jesus and the early church as they relate to healing, a consequent encouragement to Christians' faith in this regard, a challenge to secularism in our world view, and a model of more extended prayer coupled with waiting on God. These factors are combined with knowledge (from long experience) of how to integrate prayer and counsel from the Word in ministering to more complex situations in people's lives. This whole area of teaching and modelling prayer in personal ministry—as represented in Wimber's *Power Healing*—has proven to be very effective, and I think is something that evangelicalism as a whole can benefit from. But it is not correct to say that the Vineyard claims that mainstream evangelicalism fails to pray for the sick.

e. Is the gospel without miracles defective?

On p. 90 Carson says that, according to Wimber, "In the sweep of our evangelism signs and wonders *must* find a place or the gospel we present is defective, robbed of its power." But Wimber does not say the *gospel* is defective without miracles—only that our overall *method of presenting it* is defective.

Wimber says,

Scripture is effective in bringing people to a personal relationship with Christ. *The word of God generates eternal life.* Peter says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). *Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the word of God also creates saving faith.* It overcomes unbelief and promotes salvation (Rom. 10:17) (*Power Points*, p. 42).

f. Are the Vineyard's reports of healings "badly skewed"?

Carson presents no evidence to support his allegation that Vineyard reports of healings are "badly skewed" (p. 111). John Wimber and others try hard to be extremely accurate and objective in reporting what has happened when they've prayed for people. The book *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy, or Fact* by David Lewis (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989) has a large amount of carefully tabulated data analyzed by a professional social anthropologist. The Anaheim Vineyard keeps detailed records of people who have received extended times of prayer, and what has happened. There is a genuine attempt to maintain objectivity and complete honesty. I fail to understand Carson's charge of inaccuracy—essentially dishonesty—at this point. Does he have enough evidence on which to base a charge of "badly skewed" reports?

g. Is the Vineyard arrogant, elitist, and divisive?

He says that "the Vineyard...fosters an inner ring syndrome that caters (however unwittingly) to spiritual arrogance and tends toward divisiveness" (p. 112), and he complains that there are "endless testimonies" of the "before-I-entered-the-Vineyard-and-after-I-entered-the-Vineyard" variety (p. 112).

I see nothing wrong with people being excited about a church where they see God at work, and where they have experienced God's blessing in their own lives. That does not in itself create an

"inner ring" syndrome. The question should rather be whether there is a barrier to fellowship with others or a broad permeability and openness to interaction and fellowship with others. For so young a movement, I think there have been numerous gracious attempts at fellowship and interaction at all levels.

But since Dr. Carson has raised the question of divisiveness, there is a question that the Vineyard could ask not only of Carson but also of several others who have written quite critically of the Vineyard: Before criticizing the Vineyard in print, have you made genuine attempts to interact with people in leadership in the Vineyard? This is important to any progress in understanding on both sides, because the act of publishing severe criticism of a movement, without first attempting to hear how its leaders would address your concerns, might possibly give the appearance of arrogance and divisiveness not on the part of the Vineyard but on the part of the critic.

h. Does the Vineyard neglect the value of suffering and self-denial?

He says, "There is so little perception that God's power is perfected in weakness, that we triumph as we endure—and frequently that we conquer as we suffer" (p. 113). But why does he not mention that Wimber published a lead article in *Equipping the Saints* (Winter, 1988) called "Why Must Christians Suffer?" The theme of that whole issue of the journal is suffering. And Wimber has published a 42-page booklet called *Kingdom Suffering* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1988).

In his *Equipping the Saints* article Wimber writes,

God uses our suffering to fulfill his purposes and bring maturity to our lives (p. 2),

and,

God allows hard times in the lives of Christians for the purpose of bringing forward a new quality of life, for conforming us more closely to his nature Regardless of the immediate reasons for the suffering, the ultimate reason is for our growth, that we might become like Jesus (p. 3).

How can Carson rightly say that there is little perception of this process when Wimber has written explicitly on it?

Carson also says, "There is so little call to self-denial, to the way of the cross" (p. 113). Again, I wonder how he can say that without giving some evidence of what is preached and taught and practiced in Vineyard churches. Does he know about the ministry to the poor, to the homeless, to AIDS victims, to prisons? Does he know about the large emphasis on "servant evangelism" to our cities? We can look over the list of Wimber's sermons for 1990-92 and see what there is on self-denial and the way of the cross:

1-7-90	PRAYER AND GOOD DEEDS
1-28-90	THE DEVOTED LIFE OF LOVE
2-4-90	THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOLINESS & LEGALISM
2-25-90	BE NOT WEARY IN WELL-DOING
4-8-90	SUFFERING IN CHRIST (PSALM 34:19)
5-13-90	PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER (ROM 15)
5-20-90	GROWTH IN THE DESERT (PSALM 63)

6-3-90	REJOICING IN PERSECUTION (LUKE 6:22)
6-3-90	THE COMPASSION OF THE LORD (PSALM 86:15)
8-26-90	GOD'S HEART FOR THE POOR (PSALM 12:5)
9-16-90	HUMILITY: THE ABSENCE OF SELF-CONCERN (ROM 12:1-2)
9-23-90	DIE TO SELF: LIVE TO GOD (ROM 12)
3-17-91	LIVE YOUR WHOLE LIFE FOR CHRIST (ECCL 12)
3-31-91	WEAKNESS IN THE LORD (2 COR 12:9)
4-7-91	HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (JER 13:1-11)
4-21-91	THE SIN OF JAMES AND JOHN (MARK 10:35-45)
5-12-91	PERSEVERANCE IN OUR JOURNEY (2 TIM 4:6-8)
6-2-91	PEACE & MERCY THROUGH THE CROSS (GAL 6:16)
6-16-91	REJECTION (ISAIAH 53:1-6)
6-16-91	THE LORD OF THE POOR
9-8-91	ALMSGIVING: GENEROSITY OF HEART (2 COR 9:6-15)
10-20-91	OUR WEAKNESS/ HIS STRENGTH (MATT 14:22-33)
12-8-91	THE CROSS: THE WAY TO HEALING OF SEXUAL SIN (ROM 6:5-6)
1-26-92	SERVANT EVANGELISM (1 COR 2:5 & 3:6)
3-1-92	SERVANT LEADERSHIP (LUKE 22:14-30)
3-1-92	A SERVANT'S HEART (PHIL 2:1-30)
3-15-92	SERVANT STEWARDSHIP (MATT 25:14-30)
3-22-92	SERVANT DISCIPLESHIP (MATT 28:18-20)
3-29-92	DISCIPLESHIP: A SIMPLE LIFE STYLE (MATT 6:19-24)
4-12-92	OUR PRISON MINISTRIES (MATT 25:31-46)

Can anyone honestly look at this list and say, "There is so little call to self-denial, to the way of the cross"? What is the factual basis on which Carson makes this accusation?

4. Differences with Carson's interpretations of Scripture

In Carson's survey of biblical material, it does not seem to me that he strikes the kind of balance regarding miracles that is found in the New Testament, because his article frequently minimizes the role of miracles in evangelism and the life of the church, and because he focuses so much on warnings about miracles that the positive New Testament emphasis on the value of miracles is lost. This can be seen at a number of specific points.

a. A failure to distinguish believers from unbelievers when treating warnings and rebukes regarding miracles

As I mentioned above, in the entire section in which he treats the dangers connected with signs and wonders (pp. 94-98), a serious deficiency is Carson's failure to recognize that the passages he quotes *all* speak of dangers from unbelievers who work miracles to lead people astray, etc. Though his chapter and this entire section of the book are very clearly written with a view toward assessing the Vineyard Movement, and especially the place of miracles within the Vineyard, nowhere does he indicate that *these warning verses, taken in their original contexts, apply to unbelievers*, and that therefore to use them to apply to genuine Christians is an illegitimate application. *He gives no passages that warn against the use of miracles by genuine Christians.*

This failure to distinguish believers from unbelievers is especially relevant when he talks about the passages where Jesus condemns people who seek signs as "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matt. 16:4). In the context of Matthew 16, it is the *Pharisees and Sadducees* who came, "and to

test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven" (Matt. 16:1). Similarly, it was the *hostile scribes and Pharisees* who came in Matthew 12:38-45, the *Pharisees* who began to argue with him "to test him" in Mark 8:11-12, and skeptics who came "to test him" and sought a sign from heaven in Luke 11:16. (The only passage that doesn't specify that the comment was directed against hostile unbelievers is Luke 11:29, but the parallel passage in Matthew 12:38-42 does specify that it was specifically the scribes and Pharisees against whom this word was directed.)

So in every instance the rebuke for seeking signs is addressed to hostile unbelievers. Jesus is rebuking Jewish leaders with hard hearts who were simply seeking a pretext for criticizing him. *In no case are such rebukes addressed to genuine followers of Jesus* who sought a miracle for physical healing or deliverance for themselves or others, either out of compassion for others or out of a desire to advance the gospel and see God's name glorified.

It seems to me that the New Testament encourages us to believe God and seek answers to prayer in many ways, including miraculous answers to prayer (see Acts 4:30; 1 Cor. 14:1; Gal. 3:5 (implicitly), see also the entire pattern of gospel proclamation plus miraculous demonstration in the evangelism carried on in Acts; compare Hebrews 2:4 also).

Perhaps Dr. Carson and I have a difference on whether Christians ought to *seek* miraculous answers to prayer today. But even if we do, it would seem that he needs some Scripture passages saying that believers should not seek them today before he gives such a negative overview of their use in Scripture. Whether he intends it or not, *I think the overall force of his article will discourage Christians from seeking miraculous answers to prayer today—it will not increase their faith.*

b. An inappropriate restriction for the phrase "signs and wonders"

Carson says, "At the purely *linguistic* level, 'signs and wonders' cannot easily be made to align with the kinds of phenomena that interest Wimber" (p. 92). This is because he says the phrase "signs and wonders" is primarily used in reference to the major acts of redemptive history, such as the Exodus in the Old Testament or the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament.

In response, three points can be made:

(i) *A failure to consider "signs and wonders" after the ministry of Jesus:* It would have been more accurate to note in this section that the phrase "signs and wonders" is *also* used in some key summary texts that describe the evangelistic activity of the church which comes *after* the life and ministry of Jesus. Paul says that his entire evangelistic ministry was brought about "by word and deed, *by the power of signs and wonders*, by the power of the Holy Spirit..." (Rom. 15:18-19). He says that his ministry at Corinth (where he stayed for two years) was accompanied by "*signs and wonders and mighty works*" (2 Cor. 12:12). And the author of Hebrews says that when the gospel was preached "God also bore witness *by signs and wonders and various miracles* and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will" (Heb. 2:4). These verses do not talk about one or two isolated miracles but rather about large segments of the ministry of the early church.

In fact, signs and wonders—even at a "purely linguistic level" are said to accompany the evangelistic preaching of the church from its inception: "*many wonders and signs* were done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43). The church together prayed for "*signs and wonders*" to be

performed by the Lord as they boldly preached the gospel (Acts 4:30). Shortly after that, "many *signs and wonders* were done among the people by the hands of the apostles" (Acts 5:12).

These signs and wonders were not limited to the apostles, because "Steven, full of grace and power, did great *wonders and signs* among the people" (Acts 6:8). A similar phrase is used of Philip in Samaria where "*signs and great miracles*" (*dunameis*) were performed (Acts 8:13). In Iconium, the Lord granted "*signs and wonders*" to be done by the hands of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:3).

These texts give no indication of limiting signs and wonders primarily to events like the Exodus and the ministry of Jesus.

(ii) *A failure to include texts which use the word "miracles"*: Moreover, when Carson speaks of signs and wonders "at a purely linguistic level" (in the sections on pp. 91-94, and again on pp. 101-03), he artificially restricts the range of words used for his investigation. In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts, miracles are much more frequently called *dunameis*, "miracles, works of power." Carson would have given a more balanced presentation of the New Testament teaching if he had included the verses that use the word "miracles" as well. After these sections, on pages 94-101 and 103-110, he does broaden his scope to include all kinds of miraculous phenomena, but before he turns to this larger group of verses he uses his artificially restricted selection of verses to lodge several criticisms against the Vineyard (pp. 92-93, where he disparages belief in present miracles, and p. 101-103, where he argues that the Vineyard wrongly applies to Christians today many texts that speak of signs and wonders done by the apostles). His artificial restriction of texts means that for part of his essay he evaluates Wimber on a group of texts far smaller than Wimber himself would refer to for understanding his ministry, and far smaller than is appropriate for discovering a balanced New Testament emphasis on the role of miracles in evangelism and ministry. By contrast, Wimber himself doesn't restrict his description of what he thinks the church should be experiencing to the phrase "signs and wonders," but will often use Scripture texts which use the word "miracles" as well.

(iii) *A failure to note the value of believing present miracles*: What about the difference between believing *past miracles* as opposed to believing *present miracles*? Carson places such emphasis on believing past miracles that he calls into question the value of present miracles to encourage faith. He says that one of the major purposes of signs and wonders in Scripture is "to call the people of God back to those foundation events, to encourage them to remember God's saving acts in history" (p. 92). With regard to Old Testament signs and wonders, he says that "unbelief in Israel is nothing other than the reprehensible forgetting of all the wonders God performed at the Exodus." And in the gospel of John, "John's readers are called to reflect on the signs that he reports...especially Jesus' resurrection, and thereby believe. The mandate to believe here rests on John's reports of God's past, redemptive-historical signs, not on testimonies of present on-going ones" (p. 93).

But he has only told half the story. He says that belief based on reports of signs and wonders that God did in the past (such as the Exodus and the resurrection) is to be a belief that God did signs and wonders in the past. But this is just a tautology: belief that God has acted in the past is belief that God has acted in the past. What he fails to note in this section is what happens in the New Testament church: the apostles not only say that Jesus in his earthly ministry was "attested to

you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst" (Acts 2:22), but they *also* perform *present signs and wonders* when proclaiming the gospel. Scriptural faith surely is not to be restricted to a belief that God has acted in the past. It must also include a belief that God will act presently in our lives.

So I fail to see the force of this argument if it is intended to discourage the use of signs and wonders today. He is just saying that biblical reports of the past are to be believed as reports of the past. But any implication that we should discourage *present* signs and wonders is setting up a false alternative. When he says that in John, "The mandate to believe here rests on John's reports of God's past, redemptive-historical signs, not on testimonies of present on-going ones" (p. 93), this is because John is writing *a gospel*—a story of what happened in Jesus' life. Of course he doesn't present any people who come to faith *after* Jesus returned to heaven, because his gospel ends at that point. To find people who come to believe because of miracles that occur *after* the life of Jesus, I wouldn't suppose we should search the Gospel of John. For that situation we need to look to Acts and the Epistles—and they do show *present, ongoing miracles* in connection with the proclamation of the gospel.

c. A one-sided evaluation of "signs" in John's gospel

His analysis of the role of "signs" in John seems to me one-sided. His negative evaluation comes from the following passages:

(1) *Did Jesus rebuke the official at Capernaum for seeking his son's healing?* In John 4:48, where Jesus says, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe,"⁹ Carson calls this a "firm reproach" (p. 101; his commentary calls it a "sweeping rebuke").¹⁰

But there is certainly room to doubt whether this is any kind of reproach at all—there is no explicit indication of reproach in the context. In fact, verse 53 shows that this "sign" (miracle) led to faith for the official: "he himself believed, and all his household." John continues his theme of emphasizing the value of miracles (which he calls "signs") in the next sentence: "This was now the second *sign* that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee" (John 4:54).¹¹

⁹Although Jesus is speaking specifically to the official ("Jesus therefore said *to him*..."), the Greek text shows that he uses a plural verb to speak of the Galileans generally ("Unless you (plural) see signs and wonders you (plural) will not believe").

¹⁰D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: InterVarsity, and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 238.

¹¹In order to support the idea that "the welcome the Galileans accorded Jesus was fundamentally flawed, based as it was on too great a focus on miraculous signs" Dr. Carson's commentary (*The Gospel According to John*, p. 238) mentions verse 45 ("So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast, for they too had gone to the feast"). But this verse talks only about the welcome of the Galileans, and does not mention faith, whether strong or spurious. A more likely interpretation is that many who saw Jesus' miracles were pondering the miracles and gradually growing in their positive assessment of him, and that day after day more were coming to believe in him. Their welcome was simply a welcome, as the text says, and no generalization about the nature of their faith at that point should be drawn from it.

His commentary (p. 238) also mentions John 2:23-25, but I doubt that "inadequate faith" is indicated here: it simply says that when people saw the signs which he did "many *believed in his name*" – the same expression used in 3:18 to refer to saving faith. The fact that Jesus "did not trust himself to them" (2:24) simply refers to the fact that he didn't yet fully disclose his Messiahship and deity to them, not that their faith was inadequate. I doubt that the fact that people "believed in his name" can be made to say that people did not believe in his name. If John had wanted his readers to be warned by these stories of people coming to faith because of miracles, he would not have portrayed the results so positively.

(2) *Did Jesus' miracles lead to inferior faith?* In John 10:37-38, Jesus says, "If I am not doing the works of the Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father."¹² He says that Jesus sees faith that is based on miracles "as of inferior quality, but certainly better than unbelief" (p. 101).

But this is a misleading way to express it: Jesus does not see this "faith" as saving faith at all, for it is the kind of belief possessed by those who will not believe in him ("even though *you do not believe me*"; Greek *kan emoi m_ pisteu_te*). Rather, he is asking that they at least have some *intellectual acknowledgment* that God is working through Jesus: "that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:38). This *knowledge that* a fact is true is certainly not saving faith. Therefore Carson's conclusion here that genuine faith occasioned by miracles is of inferior quality is not a correct one—this text does not talk about saving faith at all.

(3) *Did Jesus' miracles lead to spurious faith?* Carson says that "not all faith triggered by Jesus' signs proves valid: some of it is spurious (2:23-25; cf. 8:30-31)" (p. 101).

But the verses he cites do not prove that the faith of some people who believed was "spurious." John 2:23 simply says that "many *believed in his name* when they saw the signs which he did" - the verse says nothing about "spurious" faith. Similarly, John 8:30 says, "As he spoke thus, *many believed in him.*" It says nothing about signs and wonders in that passage, nor does it say anything about people having spurious faith as a result of signs and wonders. I fail to understand how Carson can use two passages, neither of which says that anyone had spurious faith, and both of which report that many believed in Christ, and say that some people have spurious faith triggered by signs and wonders. The passages do not prove that.

(4) *Did the raising of Lazarus lead to rejection and anger?* In John 11-12, with regard to the raising of Lazarus from the dead, he notes that some religious leaders become angry as a result of this miracle: "The religious leaders are convinced that Jesus is actually performing miracles whose reality they cannot deny, but that does not foster faith: rather it fuels their rejection and anger" (p. 101).

At this point I agree with Carson, but I differ with any suggestion that John is warning us against miracles in the story of Lazarus. It is true that the religious leaders become more hostile, but that simply makes their *unbelief* more culpable - in the very context of John 11, John is showing that because of Jesus' miracles many people "believed in him" (John 11:45). The miracles *should have* led to faith for the Pharisees as well, but instead they became more hostile in their hardness of heart. John does not use this fact to show the harmful effect of miracles (!) but rather the amazingly hard hearts of the Pharisees.

The contemporary application should be clear: Miracles will always engender faith in some and hostile opposition in others - especially religious leaders who are jealous because of their loss

¹² Here the word "sign" (*s_meion*) is not used and "work" (*ergos*) is found instead, but I agree the reference is primarily to Jesus' miracles.

of power and influence when genuine miracles are occurring and people are coming to faith outside of their influence.

(5) *Did Jesus give a negative evaluation to Thomas's faith because Thomas saw Jesus after his resurrection?* Finally, he mentions the time when Thomas saw Jesus after his resurrection and then believed in Him. His conclusion (p. 101) is that "the same relatively negative evaluation is given" to the value of seeing the miracle of the resurrection, showing the superiority of faith that does not rest on miracles. He says: "Better than the kind of faith that insists on seeing Jesus' signs first hand is the faith that rests on the reports of the unique signs of Jesus (20:29-31)" (p. 101).

But I do not think he has reasoned correctly from the redemptive-historical context of the verse. The contrast in the passage is not between seeing miracles and not seeing miracles. Rather, the contrast is between seeing Jesus in the flesh and not seeing Jesus in the flesh. Jesus does not say, "Have you believed because you have seen *a miracle*? Blessed are those who have not seen a miracle and yet believed." Rather, Jesus says, "Have you believed because you have seen *me*? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (Jn. 20:29). There is a redemptive-historical reason for this: Jesus is ascending to heaven, and will no longer be on earth to be seen. The passage does not at all imply that *miracles* will cease, but that *Jesus will be absent*.

Any other conclusion than this not only is contrary to the words in the verse itself, but also to the larger context of the lives of the apostles in the early church. If those who saw Jesus with their own eyes had inferior faith, then the apostles and all other eyewitnesses of the resurrection would have inferior faith! Surely this is incorrect. Moreover, it would mean all those who believed as a result of the signs and wonders done frequently by the apostles, and especially by Paul throughout his ministry, would have inferior faith—almost the entire first century church would have inferior faith! That is hardly the point of any passage in Acts, nor is there any hint of that kind of reasoning in either the four gospels or Acts.

When the article speaks of "the same relatively negative evaluation" (p. 101) given to the role of miracles in encouraging faith, it contradicts the fact that it is *God himself* who does these miracles: "while *God also bore witness* by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will" (Heb. 2:4). Should it not give us pause to place a "negative evaluation" on what God himself does to bear witness to the truth of his Word?

(6) *Important verses in John not mentioned by Carson.* Finally, there are several more positive verses about miracles in John which Carson does not mention. At the bottom of page 100 he has one brief sentence indicating that "Jesus' signs display his glory, at least to his disciples" (John 2:11), and in the middle of page 101 he has a concessive sentence in which he admits that "some do believe because they see Jesus' works (e.g. 11:45)." But these two sentences are tossed off in passing, while his overall picture is that John views signs in a negative way.

Why does he entirely omit consideration of many other passages which view signs very positively in John's gospel? This theme runs through the whole gospel, beginning at John 2:11 when Jesus has changed the water to wine: "This, the first of his *signs*, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples *believed* in him." This theme continues to the end of the gospel where John says that "Jesus did *many other signs in the presence of the disciples*" which he did not record, but that he did record these in order that people might *believe*: "But *these are*

written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that in believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). From beginning to end this gospel shows people coming to faith because of the signs they see Jesus do.

Why does Carson not mention the verses in which John shows time and again how the miraculous *signs* that Jesus did brought about faith in those who saw these signs? For example, "When he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs which he did" (John 2:23, a verse which Carson uses to speak of spurious faith). In the next chapter, Nicodemus comes and says, "We know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him" (John 3:2). The reader could hardly miss the point that John is trying to make: John wants his readers to draw the same conclusions from these signs that Nicodemus has drawn.

When Jesus healed the official's son, "He himself believed, and all his household. This was now the second sign that Jesus did..." (John 4:53-54).

Later, John says, "a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased" (John 6:2). John's point is certainly that he wants his readers likewise to follow Jesus. Similarly, "When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!'" (Jn. 6:14). John wants his readers to draw the same conclusion.

Similarly, at the feast of Tabernacles, "many of the people believed in him; they said, 'When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?'" (Jn. 7:31). John even reports a division among the Pharisees, when some of them begin to say, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" (Jn. 9:16).

The Pharisees are troubled, because they are forced to admit, "This man performs many signs," and they realize that if he continues to do miracles in this way, soon everyone will follow Jesus: "If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him" (Jn. 11:48). Once again, John is showing the extremely positive role that Jesus' miracles (or signs) had in engendering faith in those who saw him.

When Jesus raised Lazarus, many came to faith: "On account of him, many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus," (Jn. 12:11). At the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, "The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign" (Jn. 12:18), but the Pharisees were dismayed, saying to one another, "You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him" (Jn. 12:19).

It would be hard for John to be any more explicit in showing that the amazing signs that Jesus did brought great multitudes of people to follow him and believe in him. Nonetheless, John continues to remind us that the Pharisees remain hostile in their unbelief, and are all the more culpable for that unbelief because they had seen these very miracles: "Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him" (Jn. 12:37).

Finally, after the entire gospel has shown how Jesus' miracles brought about faith in him, John tells us that he recorded these "signs" for a specific purpose: "that you may believe that Jesus is the

Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31). The overwhelming evaluation of the role of signs in regard to faith in John's gospel is a positive one, not a negative one, and I am surprised that Carson's evaluation on page 101 does not represent it that way, but ignores so much of the data that is there.

d. Carson's attempt to restrict signs and wonders to the apostles

His section on "miracles after Christ's resurrection" argues that "'Signs and wonders' (or some minor variation) as a *linguistic category* is almost exclusively restricted to the apostles" (p. 101). He notes the frequent connection of signs and wonders with the apostles in Acts, and then he says, "In Acts, the only other individuals who are said to perform 'signs and wonders' are Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip (Acts 8:13), who at least are closely associated with the apostles" (p. 102). But this is just the old cessationist¹³ argument dusted off and presented under the guise of a linguistic examination of the phrase "signs and wonders."

In response, three points can be made:

(1) Acts and the Epistles *focus* on the activities of the apostles. Therefore it is not surprising that the "signs and wonders" that are reported are mainly done by the apostles.

(2) However, Acts 6:8 and 8:13 show that signs and wonders are *not* restricted to the apostles, for Stephen and Philip also do them. He can say they are closely connected with the apostles, but this does not prove anything, because *everything* done in Acts is closely connected with the apostles. The weakness of the argument used here is seen by applying it to something else in Acts, such as church planting: one might argue as follows: church planting in Acts is restricted to the apostles and those who are closely associated with them. Therefore we should not plant churches today.

Of course that argument does not make sense. The restriction to the apostles and their companions is simply due to the fact that they are the people most frequently in Acts. (And it might be argued that the church planting activity of the apostles and their companions should serve as an example for us to imitate and not one for us to avoid.)

(3) Carson understands Hebrews 2:3-4 to say that "the 'signs, wonders and various miracles' by which God testified to the gospel were performed by those who first heard the word (i.e., the apostles) and who then passed the message on" (p. 102). But I don't see any hint in the context of Hebrews 2 that there is a restriction to the apostles. It says that our salvation "was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us *by those who heard him*, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will" (Heb. 2:3-4). Now the phrase "those who heard him" certainly must include more people than the apostles, for hundreds of people heard Jesus. Carson speaks of "those who *first* heard the word" (p. 102), but Hebrews 2:3 makes no such restriction, and simply speaks of "those who heard him."

¹³Cessationism is the view that certain spiritual gifts (such as miracles, prophecy, healing, and tongues) *ceased* in the church after the time of the apostles and their close associates – usually said to be around 100 - 150 A.D. Dr. Carson disagrees with this position on p. 104, and also in his book *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), but here he adopts an argument very similar to that view.

Moreover, it wasn't just "signs and wonders" that bore witness to this proclamation of the gospel, but also "gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His own will" (Heb. 2:4). Certainly we would not want to say that the distribution of spiritual gifts was restricted to the proclamation by the apostles. So how can we restrict the other terms in the same phrase to the apostles?

e. Should churches be concerned if there are no miracles?

He says, "In no passage are readers berated because they have been insufficiently concerned with gifts of healing and exorcisms" (p. 105). But we might respond that the New Testament authors assume that the churches *are* sufficiently concerned with miracles and that miracles were a regular occurrence. Galatians 3:5 and 1 Corinthians 12-14, together with James 5:13-16, seem to imply that miracles were occurring in a large number of churches. So these situations may be quite different from ours today where miracles are uncommon. Perhaps it is appropriate for us to ask whether there is some reason why we are unlike the New Testament church in this regard.

f. Did Paul avoid connecting "power" with evangelism and miracles?

He says, "When we examine the notion of power in Paul, we find it centrally tied neither to evangelism nor healing, but to perseverance, faith, hope, love, spiritual stamina, endurance under trial, and growing conformity to Jesus Christ." (p. 105). But this is a false alternative and one which in fact overlooks a fairly strong emphasis in Paul on "power" as it relates to evangelism and to miracles.

Examining just the Greek word *dunamis*, the term which Paul most frequently uses for "power," we find a number of passages that speak of miracles. He says that his entire ministry has been characterized by the "*power* of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit ..." (Romans 15:19). This is an important verse since it gives a description of his entire gospel ministry up to that point. In 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about "the working of *miracles*" (12:10), and says that God has put in the church "workers of *miracles*" (12:28), in both cases using *dunamis*. He uses the same term to speak of the "signs and wonders and *mighty works*" (1 Cor. 12:12), which he did at Corinth. And he similarly uses *dunamis* "power" to speak of the fact that God "works *miracles*" among the Galatian churches (Gal. 3:5). These passages are all examples of Paul tying together the idea of power with evangelism and miracles. Of course, there are other passages where "power" is connected with the things he mentioned, but to say that one emphasis is central and the other is not is certainly not obviously true, if it could even be demonstrated at all.

With regard to the Pauline discussion of the Holy Spirit, Carson says, "The burden of the associations with the Spirit in Paul is not on miracles, but on sanctification, ethics, revelation, transformation of character, the mediation of all that God provides for His people under the new covenant" (p. 108).

I certainly agree with this, but once again, it is not an either/or matter, but a both/and matter. We must not forget the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit mentioned by Paul in Romans 15:19, nor the miraculous gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Moreover, where a church has neglected miracles and some spiritual gifts, a greater emphasis is probably called for.

In practical terms today, it is very hard to separate the miraculous things that God does from personal sanctification anyway. In thousands of cases, the miracles contribute to personal edification. To take the case of the Vineyard for example, the Vineyard's model of expectant interactive prayer for individuals has very frequent application to personal sanctification. Miraculous healing often occurs in the process of such prayer. Power for miracles should not be opposed to power for sanctification, for they are both God's power, and they work together for the same end.

5. Some concluding comments

(1) *Is it better to preach the gospel without miracles?* A common theme of this essay is that faith which occurs when people see a miracle is *inferior* to faith that occurs when people only *hear* the gospel preached. But the New Testament does not teach that perspective. The New Testament *pattern* is preaching of the Word *plus* performing of miracles. There are no New Testament examples of Christians performing miracles without proclamation of the Word (and the Vineyard would not teach or approve that.) But, similarly, there are no examples of significant missionary activity that is not accompanied by the working of miracles. I think the Vineyard is correct that both should go hand and hand.

(2) *Does Dr. Carson think there is any "balanced" church in the US today?* Whereas he says that he is not a Warfield cessationist, when he ends up criticizing the Vineyard so strongly, it leaves a question of whether he thinks that any denomination or movement in the United States comes anywhere near what he thinks to be a biblical pattern in its use of spiritual gifts. Presumably, he would have even more objections to the Pentecostal and charismatic movements because of what he said in the opening paragraphs about their views of baptism in the Holy Spirit, the necessity of speaking in tongues, the "name it, claim it" and "health and wealth" abuses that are sometimes present, etc.

But what then is the upshot of his criticism of the Vineyard in this chapter? Does it not imply that nobody in the United States today comes near to the biblical balance which he would hope to see in practice? Is it even possible for any denomination to believe in miracles and all the New Testament gifts today and still avoid all the criticisms Carson thinks must be levelled against the Vineyard? What would such a church look like with respect to miracles today?

(3) *No matter what a church does, some criticism is possible.* As I read Dr. Carson's article, I began to feel more and more that many of his criticisms put the Vineyard in an impossible position. If people in the Vineyard are excited about the movement, he says it is proud and has an inner circle syndrome. But if they were not excited someone could say that they don't really believe in their own ideas and they are ungrateful for what God is doing. If people in the Vineyard take care to compile and report what God is doing among them, he says that they are exaggerating and distorting what is happening. But if they didn't report what is happening, then someone would quickly criticize them for giving no evidence and showing no results for their views. If they minister to people and encourage them to seek God for help for healing and pray with them for healing, then he says they don't emphasize suffering enough. But if they didn't encourage people to seek God for healing, then someone could easily say that they are insensitive to people's needs and don't even follow their own teachings about healing. If people in the Vineyard respond to their critics, he says that they are argumentative and incapable of self-correction. But when Wimber for a

time did not respond to his critics, then people said that he would not dialogue and would not listen to others. If people in the Vineyard believe and teach that God's power is active in the world today, then he says that they are power hungry. But if they didn't believe and teach this, someone could easily say that they thought God was distant and removed from the world today. If people in the Vineyard talk about how God supernaturally answers prayer, then he says they are mistakenly missing God in the ordinary and they have a profoundly secular world view, broken up by moments of divine intervention. But if they did not talk about how God supernaturally answers prayer, then someone would probably also say that they have a secular world view because they don't see God in the supernatural.

What it boils down is this: If a biblical scholar *wants to criticize* a movement, no matter how biblical or sound that movement is, he can criticize it for any number of things. If they teach on A, a scholar can criticize them for not teaching on B. If they have conferences on C, a scholar can criticize them for not having conferences on D. Or if they do E, a scholar can criticize them for not doing F. And in all of this, it is easy to throw in criticisms concerning emphases and motives, criticisms which are very hard to defend against because they concern things which are difficult to quantify. Finally, if a respected scholar does not take the time to find out what the facts are, but simply speaks in broad generalizations that make all sorts of accusations without support from any evidence, the criticism can be very damaging whether it is grounded in fact or not.

II. Analysis of James Montgomery Boice, "A Better Way: The Power of Word and Spirit"¹⁴

A. Agreements with Dr. Boice's Article

1. *Belief in the possibility of miracles today.* I agree with Dr. Boice when he says, "We can be open to the claim that God can and does perform miracles" (p. 124). I agree with him when he affirms with B.B. Warfield that "God answers prayer and sometimes heals and does other humanly inexplicable things in answer to prayer" (p. 124). Further, he says on page 128, "Let me reiterate that I believe in miracles."

2. *Freedom for Christians to differ about spiritual gifts.* I agree with him when he says, "We ought to be very careful to maintain a certain liberty of conviction in the matter of spiritual gifts" (p. 124).

3. *People are saved by hearing the Word of God.* I agree that "the word of the gospel is the means by which God reaches and saves sinners today" (p. 126). Similarly, I agree with him on page 132 when he says, "Since God uses the Word to incite faith, its use in evangelistic efforts is absolutely imperative."

4. *The church is weak in knowing and trusting Scripture.* Finally, I agree with Dr. Boice when he says, "the weaknesses of today's church...can be traced precisely to its failure to trust and, consequently, its failure also to preach and teach the Scriptures" (p. 134). I would only add "and obey" to that last sentence.

B. Differences With Dr. Boice's Article

I differ with Dr. Boice only with much hesitation. I have the highest respect for him and I am thankful for the worldwide impact of his speaking and writing ministry. Under his leadership, the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was used by God to halt a dangerous trend toward unbelief in the church. Moreover, I wholeheartedly endorse his current efforts to present Reformed theology, which I think is truly Biblical theology, to the wider evangelical world. I hope that his fruitful ministry at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia will continue with much blessing from the Lord.

Yet I do not think that his article has accurately portrayed the Vineyard movement, for the following reasons:

¹⁴Dr. Boice's chapter is found on pp. 119-136 of *Power Religion*.

I am grateful to Dr. Boice for a very gracious personal letter of March 13, 1993, in which he responded to an earlier draft of this booklet and pointed out information that enabled me to make some corrections in my representation of his article.

1. Incorrect facts about the Vineyard.

Boice's brief overview of the Vineyard movement contains several incorrect statements. He says,

The most visible manifestations of this ["signs and wonders"] movement in our day are the Vineyard churches associated with the name of John Wimber, founder and pastor of the original Vineyard Christian Fellowship of *Pasadena, California*. This church started in his home in 1977 but has now grown to more than two hundred congregations scattered throughout the English-speaking world.

For a short time Wimber taught as an adjunct professor at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary, which he *refers to often to establish credibility*. The course was called MC:510, "The Miraculous and Church Growth." From the material of this course he produced a book, *actually written by Kevin Springer*, called *Power Evangelism*. That was followed by another, called *Power Healing*. (p. 122, italics mine to indicate incorrect statements)

In fact, the following is true:

(1) The church that started in Wimber's home in 1977 was in Yorba Linda, California. It relocated to Anaheim in 1983, where it remains today.¹⁵ Wimber has never been pastor of a church in Pasadena.

(2) Wimber taught in various capacities as an adjunct professor at Fuller Seminary from 1975 to 1992. He worked full time in the Fuller Evangelistic Association from 1975-77. He taught the course MC510 from 1982-85. The course was taught again from 1987-91 with C. Peter Wagner as the professor, but Wimber continued to lecture in part of the course. Up to 1992 he taught 2 or 3 day-long sessions per year as an adjunct professor in the Doctor of Ministry program.¹⁶ 1975-1992 is 17 years, longer than "a short time."

(3) I have heard Wimber speak many times and I have never heard him refer to his teaching at Fuller to "establish credibility." In fact, he has a genuine humility which would prevent him from doing this. One place we might expect this teaching at Fuller to be mentioned is in the biographical note on the dust jacket of his three published books, but Fuller is not mentioned on any of them.¹⁷ I do not understand the basis on which Boice can say that this is something that Wimber "refers to often to establish credibility." When and where has he done this?

(4) The book *Power Evangelism* was put into prose form by Kevin Springer (who is named as co-author on the book cover), but Springer based it on extensive lecture notes and tapes from Wimber's seminars and especially from the course Wimber taught at Fuller Seminary. In writing the book Wimber and Springer worked closely together on a daily basis, revising each chapter in

¹⁵This information is correctly given in the chapter by John Armstrong in the same book, *Power Religion*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁶This information came from a personal phone conversation with Ruthmary Mangan, John Wimber's secretary, on February 12, 1993. She had obtained the information from Doris Wagner, administrative assistant to C. Peter Wagner, Professor of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary.

¹⁷See the dust jackets for *Power Evangelism*, *Power Healing*, and *Power Points*.

detail.¹⁸ Boice's statement is in one sense technically true, but when he says, "From the material of this course [Wimber] produced a book, actually written by Kevin Springer," the contrast of the two clauses implies that Boice is correcting the first clause and telling us what "actually" happened in the second clause: Kevin Springer actually wrote the book that bears Wimber's name. The suggestion many readers will pick up is that the material in the book was really Springer's material, not Wimber's. This suggestion is incorrect.

Now someone might respond that these are minor details, surely of no great importance. But if Boice has not taken the time to get even these historical facts straight, then what confidence should we have that he has accurately portrayed the doctrinal teachings or the practices of the Vineyard?

2. Incorrect statements about Vineyard doctrine

Boice has a surprisingly inaccurate understanding of what the Vineyard actually teaches as far as doctrinal matters are concerned.

a. Evangelism by miracles instead of the Word?

Boice says,

the Signs and Wonders Movement is trying to do evangelism, *not* by the power of the Spirit of God working through the Word of God, *but* by miraculous displays designed to attract the attention of unbelievers..." (p. 122, emphasis mine)

This claim that the Vineyard teaches that we should do evangelism *not* by preaching the Word *but* by working miracles comes up again and again in Boice's essay. He says, in criticism of the Vineyard,

one wrong way of doing religion is by proclaiming signs and wonders rather than the *message* through which, as Paul states, faith comes to us (pp. 119-120).

Other statements of Boice simply repeat or reinforce this report of Wimber's teaching and practice. Boice frequently refers to the Vineyard's teaching not as the gospel of Jesus Christ but as "a gospel of miracles" (p. 124) or "a religion of signs" (p. 121, also p. 130).

Boice gives no documentation for these claims, and in fact he could not do so, because John Wimber has never taught that we should work miracles rather than preaching the gospel message. Wimber always argues that Jesus' own ministry *combined* proclamation of the Word with demonstration of God's present power in life. It is proclamation of the Word *plus* demonstration of God's power, not one or the other, that Wimber is arguing for. Wimber says,

the explanation of the gospel comes *with* a demonstration of God's power through signs and wonders" (*Power Evangelism*, p. 35, emphasis mine).

¹⁸Information from personal phone conversation with Kevin Springer February 11, 1993.

To say that Wimber thinks that miracles instead of the Word will convert people is directly contrary to what he himself says he believes:

Scripture is effective in bringing people to a personal relationship with Christ. *The Word of God generates eternal life*. Peter says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). *Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God also creates saving faith*. It overcomes unbelief and promotes salvation. (Rom. 10:17) (John Wimber, *Power Points*, p. 42).

Wimber has never taught we should proclaim "signs and wonders rather than the message."

Wimber writes:

Christ uniquely takes our place (he is our substitute, John 11:50; 1 Tim. 2:6), enduring God's wrath for us. Jesus...represents us on the cross (2 Cor. 5:14), so that as we identify with him, the benefits of his death are applied to us....

Propitiation means that at the cross the wrath of God is turned away from human beings, due to the substitutionary offering of Christ....The blood of Christ appeases God's wrath. Romans 3:25...says, "God hath set forth [Jesus] to be a *propitiation* through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past..."

Forgiveness through Christ's atoning sacrifice must be received by faith....When we put our faith in Christ (see Acts 10:43) we become so closely identified with him that his righteousness is credited to us, and we are declared righteous (John Wimber, *Power Points* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 107, 108, 109, 111, 114).

Not only does John Wimber believe this, it is also required of all Vineyard pastors. The Association of Vineyard Churches' Statement of Faith (paragraphs 2 and 5) says,

We believe in the full humanity and deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in his virgin birth, in his sinless life, in his substitutionary atonement, in his bodily resurrection...

We believe that all men and women are sinners and can only be justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:1-10).

This is not a "gospel of miracles" (Boice, p. 124), or teaching that we should work miracles rather than preach the Word. This is a fundamental error in Boice's representation of Vineyard teaching.

b. Is conversion possible without hearing the gospel?

A particularly disturbing assertion by Boice is his claim that the Vineyard teaches "that it is possible to become converted without hearing the gospel at all" (p. 129). I need to quote the following material from Boice at length in order to show his process of reasoning:

"Wait a minute," I hear someone saying. "Now you are really jumping to conclusions. Who among the Vineyard leaders would say that it's possible to be converted without hearing the gospel at all?" John Wimber: "One day a group of our young people approached a stranger in a parking lot. Soon they were praying over him and he fell to the ground. By the time he got up, *the stranger was converted*. He is now a member of our church." (*Power Evangelism*, p. 26). (Boice, p. 129)

Boice takes this incident from *Power Evangelism* as proof that Wimber thinks people can be converted without hearing the gospel at all. But the story proves no such thing. It does not say that the young man had no knowledge of the gospel beforehand. It does not say that they did not read Scripture and share the gospel with him while they were praying with him. It does not say that he became converted without hearing the gospel, or anything like that.¹⁹ Boice has put words in Wimber's mouth and made him say something that Wimber himself would never say.

If Boice had looked elsewhere in *Power Evangelism* for indications of what Wimber thinks people need to know in order to be converted, he would have found some very clear statements about that subject. Wimber says, for example, "Power evangelism employs the heart of programmatic evangelism, *a simple presentation of the gospel*" (p. 47, emphasis mine).

More explicitly, Wimber says in this very book,

Power evangelism is not antirational. If people are going to be converted, they need to know the essentials of the gospel, that they are sinners in need of God's grace and that grace is experienced through faith in Christ (*Power Evangelism*, p. 57).²⁰

In fact, Wimber has a long discussion of the changes in thinking that have to occur before someone is converted. He discusses what is called the "Engel Scale," a way of explaining in detail the process that people go through in coming to faith in Christ. Wimber explains that this process involves several steps, such as moving from initial awareness of Christianity to interest in Christianity, to *awareness of basic facts of the Gospel*, to *a grasp of the implications of the gospel*, to *a positive attitude to the gospel*, to awareness of personal need, to challenge and decision to act, to *repentance and faith* (p. 54-57). This is not teaching that people can be converted without hearing the gospel. When Boice writes that Wimber thinks this, he is speaking incorrectly about what Wimber has repeatedly taught and written.

Michael Horton, the editor of *Power Religion*, also accuses John Wimber of teaching that people can be saved without hearing the gospel. He says:

The signs and wonders movement runs the risk of proclaiming salvation by an experience of naked power, such as the event reported by the Vineyard's John Wimber, where a man was "saved" simply

¹⁹Note that even the book of Acts can give compressed reports of evangelism in which no preaching is mentioned: see the story of the conversion of "all the residents of Lydda and Sharon" when Peter healed Aeneas: the miracle is reported but nothing is said of preaching the gospel (Acts 9:32-35). The same thing is true of the story of the raising of Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36-43): we are told that in Joppa when this miracle was known "many believed in the Lord" (vs. 42), but no preaching is mentioned. Certainly Peter did preach to them, but Luke did not make that explicit in every narrative, because it was clear enough from what he says elsewhere in Acts. We should not conclude from the stories of Aeneas and Tabitha that Luke thinks people can be converted without hearing the gospel – but that is exactly how Boice has treated Wimber's brief narrative, without taking into account explicit statements elsewhere in Wimber's book.

²⁰John Wimber regrets that there was not a basic explanation of the gospel message in the first edition of *Power Evangelism* (a fact which Boice criticizes on p. 129). That was simply an oversight: he assumed that his readers were Christians and knew the content of the gospel. There is of course much in *Power Evangelism* about the fact that people need to *know* the content of the gospel (see discussion above). Moreover, the oversight has been corrected in the revised edition of *Power Evangelism* (1992): see pages 36-38, with an explanation of the atonement, justification, and saving faith; also pages 78-79.

The problem with Boice's criticism is that it took a true fact [there was no explicit statement of the facts of the gospel in the book] and assumed an untrue conclusion [that Wimber either doesn't preach or doesn't believe in a biblical gospel]. The correct explanation is that the book (wrongly) assumed that was something its readers (Christians who were interested in doing evangelism) would already know well.

by passing the evangelist on the street and being struck by the power of the Spirit that was upon him. Wimber even emphasizes that there was no presentation of the gospel that accounted for the "power encounter" (*Power Religion*, p. 344).

In order to support this claim, Horton's footnote 15 cites John Wimber's book, *Power Healing*, p 26. But there is no such story on page 26 of *Power Healing*. That page recounts the story of John Wimber praying "for over forty minutes" with an older student in a Bible College whose heart had been resistant to God. Wimber says that the student's prayer was "one of the most eloquent prayers of faith that I have ever heard" (p. 26). It is simply not true when Horton says that on this page Wimber "even emphasizes that there was no presentation of the gospel that accounted for the 'power encounter'" (p. 344).

Perhaps the citation in Horton's footnote is an error, and perhaps he meant to refer to *Power Evangelism*, p. 26, where the following paragraph occurs:

Our young people went out into the community, looking for people to evangelize and pray over. An event that I heard about is a good illustration of what often happened. One day, a group of our young people approached a stranger in a parking lot. Soon they were praying over him, and he fell to the ground. By the time the stranger got up, the stranger was converted. He is now a member of our church (p. 26).

As I mentioned above, this brief narrative does not say that the person was converted without knowledge of the gospel. It does not say that he had no previous knowledge of the gospel. It does not say that they did not share the gospel with him during the time that were with him. It does say that "they went out looking for people to evangelize and pray over."

In any case, whichever book and whichever page Horton is referring to, when he talks about "the event reported by the Vineyard's John Wimber, where a man was 'saved' simply by passing the evangelist on the street and being struck by the power of the Spirit that was upon him" (p. 344), this is simply untrue. Wimber has never reported any such event. And when he adds, "Wimber even emphasizes that there was no presentation of the gospel that accounted for the 'power encounter,'" this statement also is simply false. John Wimber said no such thing.

c. Does the Vineyard deny the value of suffering?

Boice writes,

The signs and wonders movement also *cheapens suffering*. Suffering has various causes, some arising within ourselves. But there is suffering that is given to Christians by God that is intended for their growth and His own glory. Such were Job's trials, the suffering of the man who had been born blind, the thorn in Paul's flesh, and the various hurts, disappointments, and forms of physical anguish endured by countless numbers of God's people today—anguish that the Bible assures "produces character" (Romans 5). Miracle seeking ... undermines character-seeking by eliminating the mundane hassles and frustrations of the normal Christian life. *The religion of signs reduces all those to unnecessary affliction and further burdens us with lacking faith if the demon of suffering cannot be quickly cast out. That is a cruel burden to lay on God's people.* (p. 130, italics mine)

But this is certainly an inadequate view of the Vineyard's teaching. John Wimber has written and taught that God can use suffering for our benefit and to strengthen our Christian character: As I asked in the discussion of Dr. Carson's article above (pp. 20-21), I must ask here as well, why does

Boice not tell readers that Wimber published a lead article in the Vineyard journal *Equipping the Saints* (Winter, 1988) called "Why Must Christians Suffer?" This would not have been hard to find by simply phoning the Vineyard office in Anaheim, because the theme of that whole issue of the journal was suffering. Moreover, Wimber has published a 42-page booklet called *Kingdom Suffering* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1988).

In his *Equipping the Saints* article Wimber writes,

God uses our suffering to fulfill his purposes and bring maturity to our lives (p. 2),

and,

God allows hard times in the lives of Christians for the purpose of bringing forward a new quality of life, for conforming us more closely to his nature Regardless of the immediate reasons for the suffering, the ultimate reason is for our growth, that we might become like Jesus (p. 3).

But this is exactly what Boice teaches, and what Boice criticizes Wimber for not teaching. Granted that there are some extreme charismatic groups that teach that all sickness is due to our lack of faith, but Boice should not *assume* that Wimber also teaches that view unless he can document it explicitly in Wimber's writings. Nor is it appropriate to publicly accuse someone of teaching wrong doctrine when one gives no evidence that the person has taught that doctrine.

Wimber also has a section called "What About Suffering?" in *Power Healing*, pp. 13-20, in which he says the following:

God uses pain and sickness to break us of our rebellious self (p. 13)

Suffering in sickness plays a part in spiritual growth. In any evil circumstances God blesses us when we trust and rely on him. Divine healing and the discipline of suffering are not mutually exclusive; we are not forced to choose one or the other (p. 15)

But the fact remains that some type of suffering is a mark of the Christian life (p. 16)

My point is quite simple: just because we recognize God works through evils does not mean we react passively to them (p. 17).

When Boice says the Vineyard reduces all suffering to "unnecessary affliction," he is not speaking accurately about what the Vineyard believes and teaches.

d. Is sickness always due to our lack of faith?

At the end of the paragraph quoted above, Boice says that the Vineyard movement "burdens us with lacking faith if the demon of suffering cannot be quickly cast out. That is a cruel burden to lay on God's people" (p. 130).

But the Vineyard does not teach that we always continue to suffer due to our lack of faith. Wimber teaches that there are multiple causes for sickness and suffering, and he does not adopt the "faith formula" method of some Pentecostal groups. I wonder if Boice has read the first paragraph of Wimber's book *Power Healing*:

In October 1985 I was in England for three weeks, teaching at conferences in London, Brighton, and Sheffield. Many people were healed. One was not—me. (*Power Healing*, p. xv)

He explains, "I had a damaged heart, possibly seriously damaged" (p. xv). Later, prayer for healing, plus attention to diet, exercise, and adequate rest, resulted in some improvement, but not a total cure: He says [1987], "I wish I could write that at this time I am completely healed, that I no longer have physical problems. But if I did, it would not be true" (p. xviii).

Especially helpful here is John Wimber's chapter, "Not Everyone is Healed," in *Power Healing*, pages 147-166. Wimber recognizes that we live between the "already and the not yet" (p. 157). He tells in detail the story of praying extensively for his friend David Watson, who was not healed of cancer (pp. 147-49). He says, "There are instances in which the Lord says, 'The appointed time to die has come.' For these people, offering a false hope for healing brings unnecessary pain and deflects their attention from trusting God for eternal life...telling the truth in the face of death is one of the most helpful things we can do for a terminally ill person. That way he or she can talk about it and work through his or her relationship with God." (p. 163).

At this point we should note the seriousness of these assertions by Boice. If the Vineyard did indeed teach a gospel of miracles instead of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I would have nothing to do with it. If the Vineyard did teach that people can be converted without hearing the gospel, I would have nothing to do with it. If the Vineyard did teach the cruel doctrine that suffering and sickness are always due to our lack of faith, I would have nothing to do with it. These are serious heresies. They are false, unbiblical doctrines of major consequence.

In making these charges, especially the first two which have to do with the heart of the gospel, Boice is essentially accusing the Vineyard of being a false religion. Indeed, Paul says, "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8). For this reason, it is all the more tragic that these are accusations without basis in fact, and that thousands of people reading and believing this Moody Press book will conclude that the Vineyard is a false religion and that they and other evangelicals should stay far from it.

3. Disagreement with Boice over the role of miracles in the New Testament

In addition to disagreeing with Boice over incorrect facts about the Vineyard, and incorrect statements about Vineyard teachings, I wish to express some differences concerning the New Testament's teaching about miracles. At several points in the article, Boice discourages Christians from seeking miracles today, or thinking that God will work miracles today as part of the process of evangelism. This theme is expressed in several ways:

a. Is a desire for miracles "sinful and unbelieving"?

Boice quotes with approval the following statement of John Woodhouse:

Faith involves remembering the signs and wonders by which God redeemed His people...unbelief is precisely a failure to remember those wonders...a consequence of this is the fact that *a desire for further signs and wonders is sinful and unbelieving* (pp. 125-126, emphasis mine).

I have responded to this objection at some length in the discussion of Dr. Carson's article above, where Carson also fails to note the New Testament teaching on the value of believing present miracles (see p. 24). I need only say briefly here that I think Woodhouse and Boice are also inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament in this claim.

If it is sinful and unbelieving to have "a desire for further signs and wonders" after the death and resurrection of Christ, then it is hard to explain the activity of the early church. (1) The Christians in Jerusalem prayed that God would give them the ability to speak the Word with all boldness and that while they spoke, God would stretch out His hand "to heal," and that "signs and wonders" would be performed "through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:30). They certainly demonstrated an eager desire for further signs and wonders. Was their desire for "further signs and wonders" after the resurrection "sinful and unbelieving"? (2) Similarly, the ministry of Peter and Paul in the New Testament was characterized by miraculous deeds. Shall we say that Peter and Paul were "sinful and unbelieving" in their prayers for further miracles after the resurrection? (3) In addition, people in the church of Corinth and in other churches who had gifts of miracles and healing and prophecy (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 28-30; 14:1-40; Gal. 3:5; 1 Thes. 5:20; Heb. 2:4) certainly were right to *desire* that those gifts be operative in the life of the church.

Boice and Woodhouse have adopted an incorrect line of reasoning: The fact that we are to remember God's great redemptive deeds in the past should not *discourage* us from praying for miraculous events to occur today, but rather should *encourage* us to pray that God would still work in miraculous ways today. This is exactly the point of James 5:16-18: He says that "Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves" and then *encourages us* to pray with the *same kind of faith that Elijah had*, reminding us that "the prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." This is specifically set in a context of prayer for healing (Jas. 5:14-16).

b. Does the New Testament ever warn believers against seeking miracles?

Boice quotes some New Testament passages that rebuke people for seeking miracles, such as, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign" (Matt. 12:39, quoted on pg. 126), or the warning that Boice repeats on page 133, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" (Matt. 7:22). But Boice, like Carson, *fails to recognize that all of these warnings about miracles are addressed to hostile unbelievers* (see further discussion above with respect to Dr. Carson's chapter, p. 21-22). The New Testament never warns *believers* against seeking miracles at the present time, nor does it ever rebuke believers for praying that God would perform miracles.

What shall we say then about 1 Corinthians 1:22-24, where Paul says, "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God"? Does Paul mean that he did no miracles ("signs") at Corinth, or perhaps in his evangelistic work generally?

Here Paul cannot be denying that he performed miracles in connection with the proclamation of the gospel. In fact, in Romans 15:18-19, a passage he wrote while in Corinth, he said,

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me *to win obedience from the Gentiles*, by *word and deed*, by *the power of signs and wonders*, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

And 2 Corinthians 12:12 affirms clearly that Paul did work "signs and wonders and mighty works" among them.

So 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 cannot mean that Paul was denying the validity of *wisdom* or the validity of *signs*, for through Christ he worked signs and he taught wisdom. Rather, here he is saying that *signs and wisdom do not themselves save people*, but *the gospel saves people*. Signs and the wisdom which Jews and Greeks were seeking were not the signs and wisdom of Christ, but simply *signs to entertain* or to fuel their hostility and skepticism, and wisdom which was the *wisdom of the world* rather than the wisdom of God.

c. Do miracles detract from faith?

Boice writes,

...the working of miracles detracts from faith because it focuses attention, not on Christ, but on the miracle worker... (p. 134)

If Boice is correct, then the working of miracles must have detracted from faith when Peter preached the gospel as well, and when Paul preached. Miracles must have detracted from faith when Stephen and Philip preached (Acts 6:8; 8:6-8), and when Christians at Corinth and in the churches of Galatia worked miracles (1 Cor. 12:28; Gal. 3:5). Did miracles detract from faith in almost the whole of the preaching of the early church, and still the church used them? Surely this is an incorrect conclusion about miracles.

But if Boice is wrong here, and if miracles did not detract from faith in the repeated patterns we see in the New Testament, and if in fact the working of miracles was given by God in all those cases, then this objection is not valid, and we are right to seek God for the working of miracles along with evangelism today as well. In fact, the New Testament pattern is that present miracles *encourage* faith, they do not weaken it.²¹

d. Does the New Testament ever say that miracles are a means God uses for converting unbelievers?

Boice says,

My point is that miracles alone prove nothing. They may be false and deceptive as well as true and instructive, and we are never told that they are God's means for converting unbelievers or that we should seek to perform them (p. 127).

...the New Testament does not teach that evangelism is to be done by cultivating miracles (p. 128).

²¹See the discussion of Dr. Carson's similar argument above, pp. 21-26.

I can agree with the beginning of the first statement: miracles alone prove nothing, and they may be false and deceptive as well as true and instructive. But I cannot agree with Boice's conclusion: that therefore miracles are never said to be God's means for converting unbelievers. For that to be true, we would first have to assume that people can never distinguish true from false miracles. Then the bare *fact* of a miracle would have no value for evangelism, because any given miracle could be either evil or good, and we could never tell the difference. (This is what Boice seems to assume in order for his argument to work.)

In fact, the New Testament picture is different. People see Jesus's miracles and they *know* that he comes from God, and they believe in him (John 2:11, 23; 3:2; 20:30-31; etc.). They decide correctly that his miracles are "true and instructive," not "false and deceptive." And so it is with the later evangelistic ministry of the early church, as we see in Acts and the epistles.

So I fail to understand how Boice would explain the evangelistic activity of Jesus himself. Or the evangelistic activity of Peter and Paul. Or the evangelistic activity of Stephen. Would he say regarding miracles in the ministry of these people that "we are never told that they are God's means for converting unbelievers"?

Certainly the Apostle Paul would not agree with this. He says,

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has worked through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, *by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit*, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ (Rom. 15:18-19).

These verses describe the whole of Paul's evangelistic ministry. He says that the "power of signs and wonders" is one of the means that God himself used for converting unbelievers. Paul says that he did evangelism with miracles. It is hard for me to understand how Boice can say that "we are never told that they [miracles] are God's means for converting unbelievers" (p. 127).

Perhaps at this point Boice would modify his statement and say that it was only Jesus and the apostles who worked miracles along with their evangelism. But that would not seem to help his argument, because if miracles were a means God used to bring about faith when Jesus and the apostles preached, then why could God not use miracles to bring about faith when we preach today? Is our preaching today more powerful than that of Jesus and the apostles? Did they need miracles to accompany their preaching but we do not, because our preaching is so much more powerful? Certainly that is an incorrect argument.

In addition, miracles did not only accompany the preaching of Jesus and the apostles. For example, there is the example of Stephen, who was not an apostle, but who "did *great wonders and signs* among the people" (Acts 6:8). And there is the example of Philip, who was not an apostle, who went to Samaria, "and the multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the *signs* which he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city" (Acts 8:6-8).

Perhaps Boice would say that Philip and Stephen were "closely associated with the apostles." But that is simply the old cessationist argument, which does not seem to be very convincing:

everything in the Book of Acts was "closely associated with the apostles," and if we say that we are to imitate none of it, then the Book of Acts ceases to be a model for us in any way today.

Moreover, there is the example of the church at Corinth. Certainly prophecy is a miraculous gift (both in Boice's understanding and in mine). But Paul says that prophecy may well be the means of converting an unbeliever:

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

It is hard for me to understand how Boice can say that we are never told that miracles are God's means for converting unbelievers. Here the miracle of prophecy is explicitly said to be the means of converting an unbeliever.

Should we seek to perform miracles today? It depends on how we view the New Testament pattern of evangelism. If the New Testament pattern of preaching the gospel *and* working miracles is seen as a unique historical record but *not* as an example of how we should do evangelism, then Boice is correct and we should not seek miracles today in connection with gospel proclamation. But if we see the New Testament pattern as an example of how we *should* do evangelism, then it provides encouragement for us to imitate the disciples in Acts 4:30 and ask God to work miracles to give confirmation to our gospel proclamation today as well.

e. Should we give glory to the Holy Spirit?

In one final matter regarding miracles today, Boice touches on the question of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here it is surprising to read that Boice denies that we should give glory to the Holy Spirit. He says,

Whenever glory is being given to anyone or anything else, to a miracle worker *or even to the Holy Spirit Himself*, we can be sure that there the Holy Spirit is not working and that another spirit is involved (p. 133).

I can certainly agree with Boice that glory should be given to Christ rather than to human beings. But to say that the Holy Spirit should not be glorified is indeed puzzling. The Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is fully God. As such, he is worthy of praise, along with the Father and the Son. I wonder if Dr. Boice ever sings the doxology in his church:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost!

I also wonder if Dr. Boice would agree with the statement in the Nicene Creed, which has been used in the Christian church continually since 381 AD:

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son]; *who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified*; who spake by the prophets.

It has been the conclusion of the church throughout history that the Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is worthy of our worship. It does not seem correct to say that where the Holy Spirit is glorified, "we can be sure that there the Holy Spirit is not working and that another spirit is involved" (p. 133).

Sometimes it has been said that the work of the Holy Spirit is not to call attention to himself but rather to give glory to Jesus and to God the Father. But this seems to be a false dichotomy, not supported by Scripture. Of course the Holy Spirit *does* glorify Jesus (John 16:14) and bear witness to Jesus (John 15:26; Acts 5:32; 1 John 2:3; 1 John 4:2). But this does not mean that he does not make his own actions and words known! The Bible has *hundreds* of verses talking about the work of the Holy Spirit, making his work known, and the Bible is itself spoken or inspired by the Holy Spirit!

Moreover, the Holy Spirit frequently made himself known by some phenomenon or event that indicated his activity, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. This was true when the Holy Spirit came upon the 70 elders with Moses and they prophesied (Num. 11:25-26), or when the Holy Spirit came upon the judges to enable them to do great works of power (Judges 14:6, 19; 15:14, etc.): people could *see* the effect of the Holy Spirit coming on someone in these cases. This was also true when the Holy Spirit came mightily upon Saul and he prophesied with a band of prophets (1 Sam. 10:6, 10), and it was frequently true when he empowered the Old Testament prophets to give public prophecies.

The Holy Spirit also made himself known or evident in a visible way when he descended as a dove on Jesus (John 1:32), or came as a sound of a rushing wind and with visible tongues of fire on the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:2-3). In addition, when people had the Holy Spirit poured out on them and began to speak in tongues or praise God in a remarkable and spontaneous way (see Acts 2:4; 10:44-46; 19:6), the Holy Spirit certainly made his presence known as well. And Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit within us would be so powerful he would be like a river of living water flowing out from our inmost beings (see John 7:39): certainly that simile suggests a kind of presence that people would be aware of, a presence that would somehow be perceptible.

In the lives of individual believers, the Holy Spirit does not entirely conceal his work, but makes himself known in various ways. He bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and cries, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). He provides a guarantee or a down payment of our future fellowship with him in heaven (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5), and reveals his desires to us so that we can be led by those desires and follow them (Rom. 8:4-16; Gal. 5:16-25). He gives gifts that manifest his presence (1 Cor. 12:7-11). And from time to time the New Testament indicates that he works miraculous signs and wonders and miracles that strongly attest to the presence of God in the preaching of the gospel (Heb. 2:4; compare 1 Cor. 2:4; Rom. 15:19).

It seems more accurate, therefore, to say that although the Holy Spirit *does* glorify Jesus, he also frequently calls attention to his work and gives recognizable evidences that make his presence known. Indeed, it seems that one of his primary purposes in the new covenant age is to *manifest* the presence of God, to give indications that make the presence of God known. And when the Holy Spirit works in various ways that can be perceived by believers and unbelievers, this encourages people's faith that God is near and that he is working to fulfill his purposes in the church and to bring blessing to his people.

4. Disagreement with Boice over forcing an either/or choice when the Vineyard would teach both/and

My final major difference with Boice's article concerns his method of argument. Several times he assumes that we must choose A or B as a means of evangelism or Christian growth. Then he argues that because the Vineyard teaches B, it cannot teach A. The error of this kind of argument is seen in several cases when the better answer is "both A and B," an option which Boice does not consider.

a. "Not miracles, but Scripture"

For example, in discussing spiritual warfare, Boice says,

The Spirit's weapon, therefore, is *not* additional revelation, *nor* "power encounters," *but* the written text of Holy Scripture. We are constantly reminded that the way to defend ourselves against Satan's onslaught is *not* by miracles *but* by the effective proclamation and teaching of Scripture (p. 123, emphasizes mine).

But why can the Holy Spirit not use *both* Scripture *and* give gifts of prophecy and the authority to cast out demons? Certainly at the time of the New Testament the Holy Spirit used Scripture *and* gave gifts of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:29-33) and authority over demonic forces (Luke 10:17-20; Acts 16:18; Jas. 4:7).²² How then can Boice interpret a passage like Ephesians 6:17 (which he makes the basis of his argument on p. 123) so that it becomes an argument against the gift of prophecy and against authority over demons? Certainly Paul did not understand Ephesians 6:17 to mean Christians should use Scripture but not use spiritual gifts. And if Paul did not understand it that way, Boice will need to give a very convincing argument indeed before we are persuaded that we should understand it that way.

b. "Not healings, but Christ's redeeming work and the new birth"

Boice writes,

Again, the signs and wonders movement shifts from the sublime to the ridiculous. It cheapens and overshadows the gospel. It cheapens it because it reduces its promises to shrinking goiters, straightening backs, and lengthening legs, all of which are described at length in *Power Healing*. Those alleged wonders are next to nothing in comparison to the message of God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ or the true miracle of the new birth (p. 129).

Now I agree that God's greatest miracles are the incarnation and the atonement and the new birth that he gives to us in Christ. But that doesn't mean that healing for a crooked back is "ridiculous." It is certainly not ridiculous for the person who has suffered from back pain for years without relief. Yes, new life in Christ is most important. But physical healing is important too, and something we should thank God for. The Vineyard does not say, "Heal people but don't preach the gospel." It says, "Heal people *and* preach the gospel." Boice is trying to force an either/or choice, when the New Testament pattern is both/and.

²²Note how Jesus combines the command to preach with the command to heal the sick and cast out demons: "And *preach* as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' *Heal* the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, *cast out demons* (Matt. 10:7-8).

When Boice says the Vineyard "cheapens ... the gospel" because it "reduces its promises to shrinking goiters, straightening backs, and lengthening legs," he is simply speaking untruthfully about the Vineyard. It has never reduced the promises of the gospel to physical healing.²³

c. *"If something is essential, it is sufficient"*

The procedure of forcing false alternatives is especially evident when Boice quotes an Australian writer, John Woodhouse, who says the message of the Vineyard is:

A version of Christianity in which the gospel is not sufficiently powerful to produce *mature Christian faith*, the Scriptures are not sufficiently revealing for the *life of faithful obedience to God*, the finished work of Christ is not sufficiently relevant for *effective evangelism*, and the hope of Christ's coming is not sufficiently *comforting for those who are suffering* (p. 130, emphases mine).

Woodhouse mentions four desirable results in this statement:

- (1) mature Christian faith
- (2) a life of faithful obedience to God
- (3) effective evangelism
- (4) comfort for the suffering

Now Woodhouse's criticism of the Vineyard initially sounds convincing because when we read it we recognize that in each case the author has mentioned something absolutely essential which contributes to these results:

- (1) *the gospel* is essential to mature Christian faith
- (2) *the Scripture* is essential to faithful obedience to God
- (3) *the finished work of Christ* is essential to effective evangelism
- (4) *the hope of Christ's coming* is essential to comfort the suffering

But then Woodhouse makes a fatal mistake in his logic: He assumes that if something is essential to a result, then nothing else can contribute to that result. In terms of logic, that would be like arguing,

Gasoline is essential for driving a car to St. Louis.

Therefore nothing else can contribute to driving the car to St. Louis.

Of course that is wrong, because the car is greatly helped by oil in the engine, air in the tires, brake fluid, the battery, etc.

²³See above, pp. 12-15, 32-35 on the nature of the gospel that is preached by John Wimber and the Vineyard.

In a similar way, regarding the four items above, we must simply recognize that *there are many other things that contribute to all four of these desired results*. In fact, it is surprising that Boice or Woodhouse would imply anything else.

For example, regarding (1), mature Christian faith, we recognize that our faith is built up by many things, including Bible reading, Christian fellowship, prayer, life experiences of trusting in God and seeing Him answer prayer (including prayers for healing and other miracles if they occur!), worship, perseverance in suffering, etc. The fact that these things *contribute* to growth in faith does not argue against the power of the gospel; it simply says that God has given us *many means* to encourage our faith. I find it surprising that any Christian would think otherwise.

Regarding (2), a life of faithful obedience, God has likewise given us many other means in addition to the Scriptures to help our faithful obedience to God: prayer, Christian fellowship, the example of others, advice and counsel from friends, worship, God's discipline, etc.

Regarding (3), effective evangelism, God has given us many aids to effective evangelism which do not challenge the completed work of Christ as the basis for our justification: evangelism is helped by deeds of kindness and mercy, prayer, the example of our lives, personal testimony of God's work in us, etc. For example, we read Peter's words to wives:

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the Word, *may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives*, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior (1 Pet. 3:1-2).

Is it not true that the witness of our life *contributes* in a very helpful way to the task of evangelism? In fact, I think most of us would say that deeds of kindness in general will frequently open the door for the gospel message. I imagine that both Boice and Woodhouse have taught that many times in their own churches, and practice it in their own lives.

But if we say that deeds of kindness contribute to the effectiveness of our gospel testimony, then why should we not say that God's intervention in miraculous ways in a person's life can also contribute to the effectiveness of the gospel proclamation? In neither case would we say that these things challenge the power of the gospel message itself. We would just say that these are means that God has ordained in order to increase the effectiveness of our evangelism.

Regarding (4) comfort for the suffering, it is true that the hope of Christ's coming is one primary means of comfort in suffering, but God has also given us many other means of comfort such as the present ministry of the Holy Spirit who is our comforter, the reading of Scripture, the encouragement of Christian friends and fellowship, the awareness of the presence of God himself with us in our suffering, and certainly prayer for God to alleviate the suffering! With respect to suffering, I am quite sure that neither Boice nor Woodhouse would fail to pray to ask God to alleviate the suffering of someone who was ill in their own church. To fail to do so would be to adopt the view that we should never ask God to remove suffering from us—but that would be an insensitive and uncaring stoicism, and not the compassionate faith of New Testament Christianity exemplified in the life of Christ.

Therefore in all four of these objections both Boice and Woodhouse are setting up false alternatives which they themselves would not impose on the life of their own churches. But if they admit other means in all of these cases, then it is hard to see how they can object when John Wimber teaches that the miraculous intervention of God in our lives is also a means which will help in these various aspects of the Christian life.

A final example of forcing false alternatives is seen when Boice summarizes Wimber's teaching as follows: "In short, the best and most effective evangelism, growth in the Christian life, and lasting assurance of salvation are attained by miracles, according to Wimber and his associates" (p. 124).

As this statement reads, it is an inaccurate summary of Wimber's teaching. Wimber would certainly say that the most essential element for evangelism, growth, and assurance, is reading and believing the teaching of the Bible. It is the Word of God that gives us new life, teaches us so that we may grow, and gives us assurance (see the entire section on Scripture in *Power Points*, pp. 1-56, especially 26-56). Wimber believes that miracles in the Christian life do contribute to evangelism, growth, and assurance, but that is far different from saying that these are the source of the best and most effective evangelism, growth, and assurance.

C. Conclusion

In the last two major sections (B.3, on the role of miracles in the New Testament, and B.4., on forcing either/or choices regarding New Testament teachings), I have interpreted the New Testament differently from James Boice, and I have given reasons for my interpretation. These are areas where Christians may have legitimate differences, and some readers may be persuaded by Boice's arguments, some by mine. Regarding this kind of difference I have no objections: I think such theological discussions are healthy for the church as a whole, and appropriate for Christian publications.

But in the second section of this paper (B.2, incorrect statements about Vineyard doctrine), I think something more serious is involved. Scripture tells us, "Never admit any charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses" (1 Tim. 5:19). Paul wrote this because he wanted to protect those in positions of church leadership from accusations that were merely based on rumor or supposition and not based in fact. John Wimber has a highly visible position of leadership in a significant segment of the church today, but Dr. Boice has brought several very serious charges of false teaching against him, in some cases with no "witnesses" at all—no quotations of Wimber showing that he teaches the false doctrines Boice has charged him with. In each of these cases, the public record of books, pamphlets, and journal articles shows that Wimber has explicitly taught against the things he is accused of.

I think that in the final analysis Dr. Boice would have some real differences with John Wimber over the emphasis that should be placed on miracles today, and the level of expectation of miracles that we should encourage people to have, and the value of miracles in evangelism, and the nature and use of some spiritual gifts today. These are important questions and I do not wish to minimize them. In fact, I think further discussion could profitably be focussed on these areas.

My primary concern with Dr. Boice's analysis of John Wimber and the Vineyard, however, is not in these areas. My primary concern is fairness and accuracy in reporting the teachings of those with whom we disagree. In this area, I wonder if Dr. Boice would want his treatment of John Wimber to be used as a model for Christians to follow when they speak and write about those with whom they disagree.

III. Analysis of John H. Armstrong, "In Search of Spiritual Power"²⁴

A. Agreements with Dr. Armstrong's Article

I am thankful for the positive elements of Vineyard teaching and practice which Dr. Armstrong notes in his chapter:

- (1) He appreciates that the Vineyard reminds us that we should expect remarkable and even unusual and unexpected phenomena when the Holy Spirit is at work (p. 83).
- (2) He appreciates that we must remember that "we worship the Holy Spirit as well as the Father and the Son" (p. 84).
- (3) He appreciates the fact that the Vineyard shows an intense desire "to worship God in a meaningful and positive way" (p. 84).
- (4) He appreciates the praise music that has come from the Vineyard (P. 84).
- (5) He appreciates the positive stress on genuine fellowship, zeal for the lost, and emphasis on "the presence of the kingdom of God" that he sees in the Vineyard (p. 84).

B. Differences with Dr. Armstrong's Article

I am sorry to have to take issue with Dr. Armstrong over what he has written about the Vineyard. I have considered him a friend for several years, and we share mutual convictions in many areas of doctrine. I have been thankful for his faithful preaching of the Word in the Baptist church in Wheaton in which he was pastor. I regret that in our analysis about the Vineyard we have not been able to agree, and that his publication of this and previous material about the Vineyard has made it necessary for me to differ with him in this public way.

My disagreements with Dr. Armstrong's article are as follows:

1. Quoting non-Vineyard people and implying that they speak for the Vineyard

My primary objection against Armstrong's article is that he quotes numerous non-Vineyard people in the course of criticizing the Vineyard, and in doing so he gives the impression that the Vineyard endorses a number of strange doctrines and practices. I cannot understand why Armstrong has included these quotations if he wants to give an accurate impression of the Vineyard.

a. William Branham

²⁴John Armstrong's chapter is found on pp. 61-88 of *Power Religion*.

Although Dr. Armstrong and I have corresponded and talked by phone about our different evaluations of the Vineyard in the past, he chose not to respond to a draft that I sent him of this booklet.

For example, he mentions the anti-trinitarian doctrine of William Branham (1909-1965) and says that Paul Cain (who has spoken often at Vineyard conferences) "was also an associate of the healer-evangelist William Branham" (p. 66). But Armstrong does not mention that Paul Cain (who is now 63) disassociated from Branham in the 1950s, nearly 40 years ago, *before* Branham began teaching his false doctrines.²⁵

b. C. Peter Wagner

Armstrong quotes Peter Wagner as saying that he anoints people with oil for healing, but that some people use holy water and some people use consecrated salt (p. 74). But Armstrong fails to mention that Wagner is not a member of the Vineyard but is a member of Lake Avenue Congregational Church in Pasadena, California. The Vineyard does not teach people to anoint others with holy water or consecrated salt!

Armstrong criticizes Peter Wagner for "run-away pragmatism" (p. 75), but again he fails to note that Wagner is not a part of the Vineyard. Wagner is John Wimber's friend, and they have many points of agreement concerning the work of evangelism today, but they also have points of disagreement, and it is hardly fair for Armstrong to hold Wimber or the Vineyard responsible for everything that Peter Wagner writes or teaches.

c. Bob Jones (pre-Vineyard)

Armstrong also quotes Bob Jones, a member of the Kansas City Fellowship Church, to the effect that Christians may some day have such a strong anointing of the Holy Spirit that they will even be able to walk through walls (pp. 74-75). But two objections must be raised at this point:

(1) The footnote says that this came from a 1989 tape of Bob Jones. In 1989 the Kansas City fellowship was still an independent church. It did not join the Vineyard or come under the Vineyard's disciplinary authority until 1990 as Armstrong himself notes (p. 65).

(2) Although John Wimber at first gave a public platform to Bob Jones because of his strong prophetic gifts, Armstrong fails to note that after a short time Wimber decided that Bob Jones should not do any more public teaching, and declined to give him a public platform in the Vineyard. So it is inaccurate to take Bob Jones' statements as representative of what the Vineyard teaches. In fact, his statements are representative of some things that the Vineyard has disavowed and disciplined. It is hardly fair or truthful to quote this material and imply to readers that this is something which the Vineyard endorses.

d. Donald Lewis

Armstrong quotes church historian Donald Lewis as saying that Wimber endorses "radical Arminianism" (p. 81). Lewis goes on to say that "Wimber insists that God often does not get His way in this world; that God's will is regularly thwarted. Here we may question his doctrine of God" (p. 82, quoting Donald Lewis).

²⁵See the interview with Paul Cain in *Equipping the Saints*, Fall, 1990, p. 9.

In this section Armstrong has not quoted a friend but a critic of the Vineyard. In the original material from which this quotation was taken²⁶, Lewis gives no documentation to support his assertion about what Wimber teaches.

As a matter of fact, Wimber is probably closer to the Reformed or Calvinist than the Arminian side of the debate over God's will and sovereignty. But both Armstrong and Lewis should realize that a simple statement that God's will is not always done does not make one an Arminian: anyone who follows Jesus in prayer, "Thy kingdom come, *thy will be done* on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10), must admit that *in some sense* of God's will, His will is not always done on earth today, because we still must pray for it to be done! (This is often called God's will of precept or His revealed will.) My objection is simply that the citation by itself is without documentation and is inaccurate. Certainly Wimber does not deny God's sovereignty over the world today, but rather affirms it regularly.

e. The Montanists (about 150-230 A.D.)

One more example of quoting non-Vineyard people to criticize the Vineyard is seen when Armstrong says,

the Montanists, whom some Third Wave advocates claim as precursors, caused a great disturbance....the ancient church condemned Montanism (p. 71).

Then, in order to support the idea that "some Third Wave advocates claim" the Montanists "as precursors," Armstrong's footnote 39 quotes the book *Power Evangelism*, pages 157-174.

However, this section of *Power Evangelism* does not claim Montanists as precursors to the Vineyard or the Third Wave at all. The closest it comes to this is when it mentions the church father Tertullian (ca. 160 - 220 A.D.) in a list of 24 examples of people who believed in miracles throughout the history of the church, and it mentions in passing that Tertullian later in his life became a Montanist. These are simply historical facts, and imply no endorsement of Montanism.

Therefore when Armstrong mentions the Montanists as precursors of the Vineyard and then says that they were condemned as heretical,²⁷ without mentioning the many differences in doctrine and practice between Montanism and the Vineyard, he again is being unfair in his criticism. Instead of criticizing things that the Vineyard *actually* believes and teaches, Armstrong has brought in an entire range of things the Vineyard does *not* believe and teach, and then has criticized the Vineyard for these things that it does not believe or teach. This is hardly fair analysis or truthful reporting.

f. Obscure quotations from an inaccessible, pre-Vineyard John Wimber tape

In addition to all these quotations from non-Vineyard people, Armstrong adds several quotations from Wimber himself which sound very unusual: quotations about the healings that

²⁶*Wonders and the Word*, edited by James R. Coggins and Paul Hiebert (Hillsboro, KS: Kindred, 1989), p. 58.

²⁷Armstrong also fails to note that some recent reevaluations of the Montanists have not been entirely critical of them: see, for example, Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 66-68.

come when Catholics touch the relics of the saints (pp. 76-77), about "apologizing" to the Catholic church on behalf of Protestants (p. 80), and a statement to the effect that the Pope is preaching the gospel as clear as anybody is preaching it today (p. 80).

But where did all these quotations come from? If we check the footnotes we see that they all came from an article by John Goodwin, "Testing the Fruit of the Vineyard," in a little-known publication called *Media Spotlight* (1990). Armstrong identifies Goodwin only as "a former associate of Wimber's" (p. 87, note 43), and adds, "Goodwin was a ministerial associate of Wimber's for eight years" (p. 87, note 58).

I question the accuracy of these statements as representative of John Wimber's teaching, however, for the following reasons:

(1) None of these alleged quotations of Wimber are taken from publicly accessible material, so most people have no easy way to check the accuracy of them. All of these strange quotations are taken from what Goodwin cites as audio tapes of a "healing seminar series" and a "church planting seminar," both in 1981. But it must be remembered that John Wimber's church did not even become a Vineyard until 1982. And it was on Mother's Day of 1981 (as Armstrong himself notes, pp. 63-64), that the Holy Spirit came in a powerful and unusual revival at Wimber's church, and the events which led to the current Vineyard began.

Is this an accurate way to represent what a major church leader believes and teaches today? To take a tape from 1981, when Wimber was an unknown pastor in a church of perhaps 700 people, and when he was himself developing his understanding of spiritual gifts and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is hardly an accurate way to understand what John Wimber teaches today.

When I asked Wimber (in a telephone conversation) about these tapes, he said he doubts if they even have kept tapes that go as far back as 1981, so it would be difficult to find the material and understand in context what was being said. Moreover, at that time he had not even the faintest idea that he would be as widely known as he is today (any more than any pastor of a church of 700 would think that), and he had no idea that every sentence that he had said in the past would be scrutinized for any hint of doctrinal error by his critics. Without actually hearing the tapes, of course it would be difficult for him to remember just what he had said in a seminar 12 years ago.

(2) When Armstrong says that John Goodwin was "a ministerial associate of Wimber's for eight years," this is not true. Goodwin was never on the staff of John Wimber's church, the Anaheim Vineyard. When I asked John Wimber about Goodwin, he said the extent of Goodwin's association with him, as far as he can remember, is that Goodwin was a drummer in the band that accompanied Wimber on perhaps two to four ministry trips several years ago.

According to Bob Craine, the Vineyard's Regional Pastoral Coordinator for Central and Northern California, Goodwin planted a Vineyard church in San Jose, California, in 1983, but San Jose is 450 miles from Anaheim—this hardly the proximity implied by Armstrong's statement, "a ministerial associate of Wimber's for eight years." Sometime after that, Goodwin's wife sought help for their marriage from leaders within the church and from Bob Craine, the Goodwins' former pastor. In 1987 church discipline procedures were begun against Goodwin regarding allegations of marital misconduct. Goodwin did not cooperate with his local church leaders or with the Vineyard's

area and regional coordinators in the disciplinary process, but subsequently divorced his wife, left the Vineyard movement, and has since married the woman who was the worship leader at his church.²⁸ It is perhaps not hard to understand why Goodwin would write critically about the Vineyard, but it is hard to understand why he would be frequently quoted as an authority on the beliefs of John Wimber or the practices of the Vineyard, or as "a ministerial associate of Wimber's for eight years."

(3) At any rate, these unusual statements do not represent what the Vineyard believes and teaches today, and, as such, are really inappropriate for John Goodwin to cite or for John Armstrong to cite as representative of the present day Vineyard. (It is interesting that a significant part of Armstrong's criticism of Wimber depends on Goodwin's article: note that he quotes John Goodwin in notes 43, 58, 59, 66, 68, and 69).²⁹

2. Stating inaccurate information about the Vineyard

In addition to the fact that Armstrong frequently quotes non-Vineyard people in order to imply that the Vineyard teaches false doctrine, he also makes some inaccurate assertions about the doctrinal teachings of the Vineyard. Some examples follow:

a. Does the Vineyard advocate an Eastern world view?

Armstrong says, "The Vineyard movement urges a major paradigm shift from rationalism to a more Eastern world view" (p. 70). He speaks of "the paradigm shift from a Western to an Eastern world view advocated by leaders of the Third Wave" (p. 72). He speaks at the end of the article of "the call for a shift from a Western to an Eastern world view" (p.85).

In none of these cases does he ever quote Wimber as saying we should shift to an Eastern world view. That is because he cannot: Wimber has never taught this. Wimber teaches that we should shift from a Western *materialistic, rationalistic* world view to a *Biblical* world view that includes the supernatural and the spiritual reality of creation. But he has never taught that we should shift to an Eastern world view with its "religious mysticism," its "anti-rationalism," and its "syncretism," as Armstrong implies (p. 72).

b. Should training in prayer be called superstition and magic?

In another section, Armstrong claims that the Vineyard's belief that people can be trained to pray for healing is a belief that degenerates into "superstition and magic" (p. 76). Armstrong objects to courses in prayer for healing: "Advanced courses in healing are offered, as though it were training in the magical arts" (p. 76).

It is hard for me to understand how Armstrong can equate training in ministry skills with magic. Our seminaries regularly offer training courses in preaching, in evangelism, and in

²⁸Information from personal telephone conversations with Bob Craine, Pastor of Vineyard Christian Fellowship of San Luis Obispo, California, on February 19, 1993, and with John Wimber.

²⁹Goodwin is also quoted by John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 148, 292.

counseling. Now we agree that it is only the power of the Holy Spirit that can make evangelism effective, or that can produce any real change in the lives of people whom we seek to help through preaching and counseling. But the fact that we must depend on the Holy Spirit to do the work does not prevent us from realizing that *we can train people in effective ways to do evangelism or counseling or preaching*. Such training in ministry skills includes both principles that are derived from *Scripture* and the wisdom that has come from years of *experience* in effective means of doing these ministries.

Therefore it should not seem strange that we could have seminars to train people to pray more effectively in various ways—not only in prayer for healing but in prayer for other kinds of things as well. In fact, I myself preached and taught Sunday School classes on "Effective Prayer" long before there was any Vineyard in existence. Armstrong calls training in prayer "superstition" and "magic," but this is just a kind of criticism by name calling, not a criticism that is accurate in its substance.

c. Is it wrong to train people in evangelism?

Regarding training in evangelism, Armstrong says, "Evangelism in the New Testament does not appear to be a skill to be learned, but a message to be known and proclaimed clearly, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through weak human vessels (1 Cor. 1:18 - 2:5)" (p. 76). But here Armstrong forces a false alternative: Our goal should not be, "The message but no skill," but rather, "The message *and* skill in presenting it." Jesus certainly taught the disciples how to do evangelism in the three years he was with them, and our seminaries and our churches are right in having courses and seminars to train people to do evangelism more effectively.

d. Did Jack Deere say the sufficiency of Scripture was a demonic doctrine?

One of the most objectionable misrepresentations of Vineyard teaching comes when Armstrong claims to be quoting Jack Deere, a former Dallas Seminary professor who was John Wimber's associate on the staff at the Anaheim Vineyard for several years and who spoke at many conferences under Wimber's auspices. Armstrong quotes Deere as saying,

Ultimately this doctrine (the sufficiency of Scripture) is demonic even though Christian theologians have been used to perfect it (p. 77).

What Armstrong does not tell the reader is that the words "(the sufficiency of Scripture)," which Armstrong puts in parenthesis as if they were Deere's own words, *are not in Deere's statement at all*. Those are *Armstrong's own words* inserted into the text to make Deere say something that he does not believe.

If we go back to the source of Armstrong's quotation, we see that he has omitted the previous sentence which explained the thing Deere was referring to by the phrase "this doctrine."

Satan understands the strategic importance of Christians hearing God's voice so he has launched various attacks against us in this area. *One of his most successful attacks has been to develop a doctrine that teaches God no longer speaks to us except through the written word*. Ultimately, this

doctrine is demonic even [though] Christian theologians have been used to perfect it.³⁰ [italics mine, showing the sentence omitted by Armstrong]

As the larger context shows, Deere was talking about the anti-charismatic doctrine that God does not reveal anything to us today and that the gift of prophecy does not exist today. He was denying this, saying that God still does speak to us today, although in a form that does not carry the authority of the written Scriptures. I too would argue that God speaks to us today through the gift of prophecy, and I have written about that at some length.³¹

But both Jack Deere and I believe in the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture in the sense that no prophecies today can add to the doctrinal or moral standards which are found in Scripture and which all Christians are required to believe and obey. Jack Deere did not say that the sufficiency of Scripture is a demonic doctrine. The Vineyard would not teach that the sufficiency of Scripture is a demonic doctrine. But Armstrong has added words to the quotation and made readers (very few of whom will have access to an obscure Australian journal) think that Deere has said this is a demonic doctrine. He has put words in Deere's mouth in a way that is both unfair and untrue.

Now Armstrong may *think* that if someone believes in the gift of prophecy today he or she therefore denies the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. But it should be made very clear that *that is Armstrong's own inference from the other person's teaching, it is not the other person's teaching*. And I do not think that it is a correct inference either, since I have taught and written at length in defence of both the gift of prophecy today and the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture for doctrinal and moral guidance for Christians.

If Armstrong wishes to differ with the idea of the continuation of the gift of prophecy today, he is certainly free to do so, but then he should be honest with the reader and tell the reader that that is what he is differing with. He should not subsume that argument under another doctrine (the sufficiency of Scripture) and say that his opponents don't believe that doctrine.

e. Does the Vineyard teach that people can be converted without hearing the gospel?

Armstrong here makes an inaccurate claim that is similar to that made by Boice and Horton:

Vineyard leaders and writers go to great lengths to make the point that non-Christians often are healed, slain in the Spirit and *converted without any knowledge of the gospel*. Anecdotes abound in which *unbelievers came to faith without any communication of the Person and work of Christ* (p. 82).

As I explained above in connection with Boice's article, John Wimber simply does not believe that people can come to faith in Christ without any knowledge of the gospel. He has not taught that or written that. Armstrong, Boice, and Horton (the editor of the book) have all three made this claim, but it is simply untrue, no matter how many times they repeat it. Armstrong may say,

³⁰This quotation is found in an Australian journal, *The Briefing* (Sydney, Australia: St. Matthias Press, April 24th, 1990 (issue 45/46)), p. 11. [It is wrongly cited as from page 18 in Armstrong's chapter, p. 87, note 60].

³¹See my book, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Crossway: 1988).

"Anecdotes abound in which unbelievers came to faith without any communication of the Person and work of Christ," but where are such anecdotes that "abound"? He gives no specific examples, and indeed he could not, for there are none in the published writings of John Wimber and the Vineyard.

f. Does the Vineyard replace "trust" with power encounters?

Armstrong says that the classical evangelical position has said that saving faith included "knowledge, assent, and *trust*," but that Wimber has redefined saving faith so it includes "knowledge, assent, and *power encounters*" (p. 83). Armstrong accuses Wimber of "replacing that third element of trust with power encounters" (p. 83).

But Wimber teaches no such thing. If we look at *Power Evangelism*, pages 54-57, Wimber talks about the way people move along a scale of increasing understanding of the gospel until they come to a place of personal repentance and faith (p. 56). He says, "Power evangelism is not anti-rational. If people are going to be converted, they need to know the essentials of the gospel, that they are sinners in need of God's grace and that grace is experienced through faith in Christ" (p. 57). Wimber sees the demonstration of God's miraculous power as a help in moving people along the scale of progress toward genuine faith, and also a help in deepening and increasing their faith, but he has never taught or said that power encounters replace genuine trust. Armstrong is simply misrepresenting Wimber here, and in a serious way.

C. Conclusion

It is disappointing to see that Armstrong can have so much acquaintance with literature about the Vineyard³² and still not be able to represent its teachings fairly and accurately. He frequently quotes non-Vineyard people in an attempt to show that the Vineyard teaches false doctrine. He misquotes Jack Deere by putting in his mouth words that Deere never said. He attributes to Wimber ideas that Wimber does not teach, such as the idea that sinners can be converted without knowledge of the gospel, or that power encounters can replace trust, or that Wimber is radically Arminian in his doctrine, or that Wimber advocates shifting to an Eastern world view that is characterized by religious mysticism, anti-rationalism, and syncretism.

If Armstrong or the general Christian public wish to know what Wimber believes, the evidence is easy to find, is stated in plain, straightforward language, and is a matter of public record. John Wimber has published three major books (*Power Evangelism* (1986), *Power Healing* (1987), and *Power Points* (1991)). The Vineyard publishes an official journal, *Equipping the Saints*, where a pattern of sound Bible doctrine has been advocated and established over several years.

Another question is whether Armstrong shows evidence of striving for fairness and accuracy in representing the position of someone with whom he disagrees: Even if Wimber had said some unguarded or incorrect things when he first came into a new experience of the Holy Spirit's power in 1981, the important question for us today should be this: does he believe and teach these things

³²He has extensive footnotes on pp. 85-88.

now? The answer to that is clearly no. Therefore it is hard for me to understand why Armstrong persists with such zeal in attempting to pin false doctrine on John Wimber. What is the point of all this? After reading this chapter, it seemed to me that Armstrong was just going to elaborate lengths in the hope that somewhere he could find some false statement to attribute to Wimber in order to show that he teaches false doctrine.

But is this the kind of zeal that should characterize a fair and honest evaluation of the teaching of any Christian leader or any Christian movement?

It should be noted that John Armstrong has written about the Vineyard before. In the publication of the Baptist General Conference denomination, *The Standard* (Arlington Heights, Illinois), John Armstrong wrote a series of ten articles (October 1990 - July 1991) in which he spent 34 pages analyzing the Vineyard. Almost all of that series was highly critical. I then wrote a response to those articles, which has been distributed by the Association of Vineyard Churches.³³

Regarding the current book under discussion, *Power Religion*, when Armstrong first submitted a chapter for it, someone sent me a pre-publication copy of his chapter. I found that it contained most of the inaccurate accusations that had been published in his earlier articles in *The Standard*. I then wrote to the editor at Moody Press sending a copy of my critique of Armstrong's articles.

After reading this chapter in *Power Religion*, I am surprised to find that almost all of those earlier charges by John Armstrong have been omitted from his current chapter. I suppose this may indicate that he realized that those earlier charges were based on inaccurate information about the Vineyard, and that they therefore should not be repeated. Now, having read his current chapter, I find that he has come up with a series of new charges and new quotations in which he attempts to show that the Vineyard is guilty of other doctrinal errors. But I find that these charges are also without basis in fact, and do not accurately represent what the Vineyard teaches. So I have written here in response to these charges.

It only remains to say that it puzzles me that Armstrong has continued in such an apparent crusade to prove that the Vineyard teaches things that it does not teach. Such a procedure does not seem to me to be wise or edifying for the church as a whole.

³³*The Standard* refused to allow any article giving another evaluation of the Vineyard to be published. I submitted my 10-page response to the editor of *The Standard*, but he declined to publish it (even though he had previously published articles by me, and even though that denomination, the Baptist General Conference, was the one in which I had been ordained). He then asked me instead to write a 1-page "letter to the editor" responding to the Armstrong articles, which I did, but he then declined to publish that. Finally, in December, 1992, *The Standard* published (on p. 33) the following 2-sentence statement in response to the 34 pages of criticism which they had published about the Vineyard:

THE STANDARD regrets any factual errors in the articles on the Vineyard published October 1990-July 1991. Readers interested in pursuing the matter further can write to Dr. Wayne Grudem or Dr. John Armstrong.

It has now been three months since that statement was published. I have received exactly one inquiry.

(My response is available from The Association of Vineyard Churches, PO Box 17580, Anaheim, CA, 92817-7580, for \$1 per copy.)

IV. Conclusion

A. Do These Criticisms of the Vineyard Really Matter?

Some people may wonder why I have taken the time to respond in such detail to the criticisms of the Vineyard in *Power Religion*. Does it make any difference what is said in this book? I think it does, because (1) truth is important, and it has been obscured by this book; (2) the ministry and reputation of the Vineyard and John Wimber are important, and they have been damaged by this book; (3) fellowship and trust between Christians are important, and they have been damaged by this book.

This becomes more clear when we look at a list of the untruthful statements about the Vineyard that have been made in *Power Religion*, and which I have responded to in the preceding discussion. If all the things claimed or strongly suggested about the Vineyard in *Power Religion* were true, it would:

- (1) have a profoundly secular world-view
- (2) be connected with demonic healings
- (3) worship another Jesus
- (4) be extraordinarily deceptive, so that only those with unusual discernment will see what is askew
- (5) elevate miracles to central importance in the life of the church
- (6) neglect the cross of Christ
- (7) say that the gospel is defective unless miracles are performed
- (8) distort its reports of healings so that they are badly skewed
- (9) be arrogant, elitist, and divisive
- (10) neglect the value of suffering and self-denial, and fail to teach on suffering
- (11) use miracles to lead people to inferior faith
- (12) be headquartered in an original Vineyard in Pasadena, California
- (13) publish books claiming to be by John Wimber that were actually written by Kevin Springer
- (14) proclaim miracles rather than the gospel of Christ or the Word of God
- (15) tell abundant anecdotes about people who were converted without hearing the gospel

- (16) teach that people can be converted by miracles without hearing the gospel
- (17) say that sickness is always due to the sick person's lack of faith
- (18) teach people to use holy water and consecrated salt, or touch Roman Catholic relics of the saints, when praying for healing
- (19) say that Christians will one day have such anointing that they will be able to walk through walls
- (20) endorse radical Arminianism
- (21) endorse Montanism
- (22) teach that the Pope is preaching the gospel as well as anybody today
- (23) advocate an Eastern world view that includes mysticism, anti-rationalism, and syncretism
- (24) teach a method of healing that includes superstition and magic
- (25) teach that the sufficiency of Scripture is a demonic doctrine
- (26) teach that it is better for people to have power encounters than personal trust in Christ when they come to saving faith

If these things were true, I would have nothing to do with the Vineyard, and I am sure that John Wimber would have nothing to do with the Vineyard either. For all if these things were true, the Vineyard would be a false religion, not a Christian church. Yet thousands of people have already read this widely-advertised book, and those who trust Carson, Boice, and Armstrong have already come to believe many or perhaps all of these things about the Vineyard.³⁴

Now this is only the list of accusations from the book *Power Religion*. If we add the material earlier published by John Armstrong in the journal called *The Standard*, we find more alleged characteristics of the Vineyard.³⁵ If these were true, the Vineyard would also:

- (27) fail to preach the cross of Christ
- (28) not know what the gospel is but think it has something to do with casting out demons and healing

³⁴I am not saying that every one of these points constitutes a major heresy -- for example, having a headquarters in Pasadena or teaching Arminianism I would not call heresy. I have simply listed here all the false statements about the Vineyard found in this book, whether important or not. But most of the charges concern serious errors in doctrine.

³⁵For details on these charges, and a response, see Wayne Grudem, "The Vineyard's Response to The Standard: A Response to the Critique of John Armstrong in *The Standard*, a Publication of the Baptist General Conference." Anaheim, Cal.: The Association of Vineyard Churches, 1992.

- (29) listen only to people who minister in signs and wonders, not any other Christians
- (30) exalt experience over sound doctrine
- (31) repeatedly ridicule the written Scriptures as the sole and final authority for faith and practice
- (32) repeatedly belittle rational revelation
- (33) tolerate anti-Trinitarian doctrine
- (34) use New Age language in its teaching
- (35) encourage non-rational, disorderly experiences as part of a regular liturgical form
- (36) undermine the authority of Scripture
- (37) have a basically ineffective healing ministry
- (38) define everything undesirable as demonic

Perhaps this list demonstrates why I felt it necessary to respond, and to say that such allegations are not true, and to give evidence for this. I think this kind of criticism is very harmful, not only for the Vineyard, but, because of the example it sets, for the evangelical world generally.

B. Will the Vineyard Just Go Away?

In addition to the foregoing analysis of the articles by Carson, Boice, and Armstrong, there is a larger question to be considered, one that goes beyond these articles or the book *Power Religion*. The question is this: *What is behind all the criticism that people have written against the Vineyard?*—not just these articles, but a number of other publications as well?

I really don't know the answer to that question. Perhaps—and this is only a guess—perhaps behind much of it is a desire that the Vineyard would "just be quiet and go away"—that it would stop teaching and writing that we can expect God to heal today, and that we can expect God to work miracles today, and that the proclamation of the gospel to unbelievers should frequently be accompanied by the demonstration of God's miraculous power at work. Moreover, the Vineyard should stop actually doing these things, and stop talking about the way God is answering prayer again and again in wonderful and miraculous ways.

If that happened, if the Vineyard just stopped teaching and doing these things, then no one would say that it is proud or that it distorts stories of miracles, or that it doesn't emphasize suffering enough, or that it is argumentative or power hungry, or that it preaches miracles instead of the gospel, or any of the other things that have been said, because then it would simply be like the rest of evangelicalism, not only in doctrine, but also in practice. Then it would not be different, and there would be no cause for alarm.

Will this happen? No, I do not think the Vineyard is going to stop teaching or doing what it has been doing. I do not think it is going to be quiet and go away. I think it is here to stay as a significant segment of the evangelical world. Because this is so, I simply ask the rest of evangelicalism to consider carefully how it is going to respond to the Vineyard in the next 10 or 20 years.

Has the Vineyard made any positive contributions to the larger evangelical world? In the last few years, several members of Vineyard churches have published books widely read by Christians generally: Psychiatrist John White, a member of a Vineyard church, has published several books on the Christian life, including *Parents in Pain*, *Eros Defiled*, *The Fight*, *The Tower of Geburah* (a popular children's book) and (with Ken Blue) *Church Discipline that Heals*. Richard Foster has published the widely-used book, *Celebration of Discipline*. In the area of spiritual gifts, George Mallone has published *Those Controversial Gifts* and *Arming for Spiritual Warfare* (both IVP), and Don Williams has published *Signs, Wonders, and the Kingdom of God* (Servant). Bill McCartney (head football coach at the University of Colorado) has edited the book *What Makes a Man?*, and has founded the Christian men's organization called Promise Keepers. In the academic world, Dr. Walter Bodine chairs the Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew unit for the Society of Biblical Literature and has published a technical book on the Greek text of Judges. Dr. Peter Davids has published major commentaries on James and 1 Peter. I myself am actively teaching and writing in the fields of systematic theology and ethics. In the realm of music, John Wimber's songs ("Isn't He?," "O Let the Son of God Enfold You," "Son of God, This Is Our Praise Song"), and many other songs in the Vineyard worship series have been used by churches worldwide. The songs, "O Lord, You're Beautiful" and "There is a Redeemer" were written by Keith Green (who belonged to a Vineyard church before his untimely death). Other songs from Vineyard song leaders Eddie Espinosa ("Change My Heart, O God" and "You Are the Mighty King"), Carl Tuttle ("Hosanna, Hosanna"), and Danny Daniels ("Glory, Glory in the Highest") have been widely used.

Now these things come nowhere near the contributions to the church made by Christians in other, older denominations, but I think they are of some value to the cause of Christ. Is it right to publish unsubstantiated generalizations about these Christians—and thousands like them who haven't published any books or music but who go on quietly ministering in Jesus' name to others day by day—as if they deserved to be banished to the realm of heretics who worship another Jesus and preach another gospel?

I hope there will soon be some genuine efforts to increase understanding and fellowship between the Vineyard and other evangelical groups, and to avoid harsh and unfounded criticisms, which can only increase misunderstanding and alienation. And I hope that people who write about John Wimber and the Vineyard in the future will be able to be more accurate in representing what the Vineyard actually believes and teaches.³⁶

³⁶One forthcoming analysis of the Vineyard is very even-handed and accurate: see the chapter on the Vineyard in the revised edition of Charles Hummel, *Fire in the Fireplace* (IVP, second edition, due to be published later in 1993).

C. Weaknesses of the Vineyard Movement

I have defended the Vineyard movement in this response to *Power Religion*, but I realize it is not perfect. It is a young movement, and many people in it, including many leaders, have made mistakes. It still has significant needs and weaknesses in several areas, some of which are areas of strength in other denominations: I think the Vineyard needs more strong, mature Bible teachers. I think in many churches it needs to do a better job of warning Christians against the excesses of subjective guidance. I think it needs more thorough understanding and teaching on sanctification. I think it needs, in many churches, to establish a better system of accountability for pastors and other leaders. I think it needs to appreciate more fully the value of older evangelical churches and traditions. I think it needs to work harder at building good relationships with other denominations, and at avoiding even the appearance of divisiveness or competition when new Vineyard churches are founded.

But I also realize that many of these weaknesses can best be overcome in extensive interaction with the larger evangelical world. The Vineyard needs, for example, the kind of Bible teaching that Don Carson and James Montgomery Boice do so well. This might have been possible—I know that John Wimber has spoken appreciatively of Don Carson's writings several times in the past. Yet after Vineyard leaders have read the kind of harsh and misinformed criticisms found in *Power Religion*, what chance is there that they would ever want to invite Dr. Carson or Dr. Boice to do a series of Bible teachings, or even be able to hear any valid criticisms that they might have to offer? The magnification of alienation that has been accomplished by *Power Religion* is what saddens me.

I must be very clear at this point. I am *not* saying that all criticism of the Vineyard is wrong. There is room for very valid criticism. And I am *not* saying that it is always wrong for people to differ with the Vineyard, or that I think the Vineyard is just like the rest of evangelical Christianity. There are a number of differences—in the emphasis on contemporary worship, in the expectation that miracles will often accompany the proclamation of the gospel, in the emphasis on training people how to pray for physical and emotional healing, in the teaching that the Holy Spirit often gives physical or mental or emotional manifestations of his present work, in the belief that spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing, tongues, interpretation, and working of miracles are valid to use in the church today, and in the belief that there is a subjective component to the Holy Spirit's guidance today.³⁷

In several of these areas, the Vineyard *is different in teaching or emphasis* from many (not all) other evangelical groups. In several of these areas, the Vineyard has adopted innovations which other Christian groups may or may not find valid. These are areas where there is room for healthy, open discussion and debate about what the Bible really teaches and what is wise practice. I think both the Vineyard and other evangelicals would profit from further investigation and perhaps mutual correction regarding these areas. But before this kind of profitable interaction can be done, the kind of misrepresentation found in *Power Religion* has to come to an end.

³⁷See John Wimber's books *Power Evangelism* and *Power Healing* for further discussion of these topics.

D. Will These Articles Set a Pattern for Future Theological Discussion?

There have been earlier times in the history of the church when harshness and misrepresentation characterized theological debates. I had hoped those times were past. But in *Power Religion* and other recent criticisms of the Vineyard the undercurrent of animosity, the intemperate nature of the accusations, and the rash of incautious allegations against another Christian leader have risen to a level not usually seen in evangelical scholars of this generation.

Will these articles set the tone for future evangelical discussion of these and other issues? Do Carson, Armstrong, Boice, and editor Michael Horton wish their articles about John Wimber to be used as models for the way in which evangelical scholars should research and write about those with whom they disagree? And does Moody Press think that these articles should be models of the way in which theological discussion should be carried on among Christians? I can only hope not, or else we are headed for a time of much greater misunderstanding, alienation, and animosity among believers, rather than a time of increased unity around a common faith in Jesus as our Lord.

E. The Impact of These Articles on the Faith and Unity of the Church

With respect to individual Christians, I think the primary result of these articles will be to discourage people from seeking or expecting God to work in miraculous ways today. I think the effect will be to decrease people's faith in God's present working in answer to prayer. I cannot imagine anyone coming away from reading these three articles with increased faith to pray for God's present intervention in miraculous ways in people's lives today. Perhaps the writers think this is a good result, but I do not.

With respect to the Vineyard as an organization, the primary effect will be to place greater distance and alienation between evangelicals who believe this article and the Vineyard movement. In other words, I think the articles will be divisive in their effects, whereas, to my mind, the thing that needs to happen is that the Vineyard and the rest of evangelicalism need to move closer together, need to have more frequent interaction and cooperation with one another, and need to benefit from one another. I cannot see how articles such as these will help to bring that about.

These articles simply have not given a truthful view of Vineyard teaching or practice. Primarily because they were written without adequate information, I think they have seriously misrepresented a growing movement through which God has brought much blessing to tens of thousands of people around the world. And I think they have portrayed the biblical teaching on the role of miracles in evangelism and in the Christian life in a much more negative light than Scripture itself teaches.

The articles speak very critically of what I am convinced is a genuine and powerful work of the Holy Spirit in the world today. John Wimber began with 50 people in a new church in 1977, and the Vineyard now numbers over 500 churches and around 100,000 members—remarkable growth in 16 years. The Anaheim Vineyard, where John Wimber is pastor, now numbers around 5,000. But far more significant than that are the countless people in over 50 countries who have been touched by John Wimber's conferences and books. There have been thousands of new Christians brought into the kingdom, and hundreds of non-Vineyard churches have experienced a

reawakening of evangelism, a new expectation of seeing God work in miraculous ways to confirm the proclamation of the gospel, a renewed Christ-centeredness and genuineness in worship, a strengthened ministry of prayer for healing, and an "every member" emphasis on the use of spiritual gifts. And this is to say nothing of the thousands of people—including my wife and myself, and almost every family who has been in our church for more than a few weeks—to whom God has given significant degrees of physical and emotional healing, and increased closeness to Jesus, through Vineyard ministry. This can only be a work of the Holy Spirit exalting Jesus as risen Lord and Savior. To speak so critically against a work that is doctrinally sound and is bearing such good fruit seems to me to be very unwise.

About the Author

Wayne Grudem is Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, USA, where he has taught since 1981. Prior to that he was Associate Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota (1977-81). He received a B.A. from Harvard University, an M.Div. from Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, and a Ph.D. (in New Testament) from the University of Cambridge, England. He was ordained as a minister in the Baptist General Conference in 1974. He has published four books, including *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), and *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (co-edited with John Piper). He is a member of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Evanston, Illinois. He and his wife Margaret have three sons.