

Unholy Alliances

The time has come for many national church leaders to reappraise their positions regarding various alliances made in the last ten years. Their position has been made untenable by the unfolding of history and repentance is long overdue. Recent events now make reconsideration vital. We should explain these.

From the mid 1980's, many churches began to follow the emphasis given by John Wimber¹ on *Signs and Wonders*. Indeed, who could fail to be captivated by the humility, affability and sincerity of the man who described himself as: '*just a little fat man on his way to heaven*'. Again, who can deny the attraction of simply following Jesus and '*doing the stuff*'. By this Wimber means that the church is called to move in the miraculous to testify to the power of God. To achieve this we must, apparently, remove the hindrance of over intellectualism and tradition.

We will ignore the arguments surrounding cessationism and the Signs and Wonders apologetic. The main concern of this paper is the alliances that began to emerge following John Wimber's involvement in the English church scene. Wimber's presentation became incredibly popular. Not only did his teaching catch on, but his method of conference organisation, his method of flowing worship, his active merchandising, his close connection to key Christian leaders, his proliferation of Vineyard churches and a magazine distribution all followed in train. His influence was incalculable. Indeed, it came at a time when the Charismatic Movement, the Restoration Movement, the New Churches and the Renewal Movement in Institutional churches were all running out of steam. These were all grateful for the Vineyard's shot in the arm. Wimber was the first man to successfully straddle relationships with the New Churches and the Institutional churches. Leaders started sharing Wimber's platforms who had previously alienated or ignored each other. This gave him an incredibly powerful influence. What Wimber endorsed soon ran through most of British Evangelicalism without question.

In my view, the main problem was (and still is) not just John Wimber in all this but the Pandora's box which he opened and could not control.

Wimber appears to always have been somewhat ecumenical in attitude. Perhaps this arises from his Quaker background rather than a thoroughly Evangelical one. There seems to have always been a slightly mystical and open attitude to other influences. This seems to have risen to the fore after the degeneration of his health in the late 80's and the death of his friend, David Watson; who died despite his prayers, ministry and confidence that he would be healed. He became more gullible and dependent on others. In 1987 Wimber admits that he was in a spiritual wilderness. He hadn't 'heard from God' for two years² and scandals and immorality beset his church leaders. It was in the year following all this, a difficult year of struggle for him, that he met Paul Cain.

¹ Since this paper was written John Wimber has passed into the presence of God.

² Pytches, *Some Said It Thundered*, Hodders, London(1990), p52.

False Prophets

After the Signs and Wonders movement established ground in England in the mid to late 80's, the next wave of error began to be exported into the UK by John Wimber. It was avidly taken up by churches, national leaders and many average church-goers. This was the Kansas City Prophets (KCP) phenomenon.

John Wimber became taken with Paul Cain in 1988 (who had worked with the Pentecostal heretic William Branham in the 1940's³). Cain's triumphal *Latter Rain* teaching, and seeming closeness to God, revitalised Wimber's gloom, and through him Wimber developed a relationship with Mike Bickle, leader of the Kansas City Fellowship. In August 1989 Wimber invited the KCP to minister to the Vineyard pastors and lay hands on them. This church then became formally affiliated into the Vineyard system, after a series of scandals and opposition from other Christian pastors, and was renamed the Metro Vineyard Fellowship. The whole Vineyard movement became saturated with a prophetic emphasis as a result of this influence. Major and minor decisions now rested upon words of knowledge and prophetic utterance. People even began keeping written books of prophecies with them, which they referred to rather like divination, instead of searching God's word. Staff appointments, leadership decisions, church direction and strategic operations all became dependent upon the prophets. Needless to say it all ended in tears, but this would take years to surface.⁴

Of course, English leaders readily accepted Wimber's endorsement and took the Kansas City Prophets to their heart in 1990. Not only so, but a new wave of, so called, prophetic activity began to develop as English church leaders later would consider themselves to be prophets not just apostles. What is so staggering is that they could all swallow the utterly ludicrous *Manifest Sons of God* teaching that went with it. In this, as exemplified by Paul Cain's teaching about Joel's Army, we see Postmillennial Triumphalism gone mad: the end times will see God raise up a super army of apostles (out of the Vineyard of course). These people will be able to fly, be invulnerable to bullets and be able to walk through walls.⁵ This rubbish was then promoted by Wimber in several conferences identified as the *dreaded army, dread champions* or *super breed* of warriors God is preparing for the end.⁶ Jack Deere, Wimber's then token theologian, sought to give a Biblical foundation for such nonsense.⁷ This was necessary because Cain's own ministry denigrated the Bible. In 1989 he even said, *'the word will do you no good'*.⁸ By this he means that the Bible alone is insufficient, it has to be implemented by people with power.

³ Cain called Branham, *'The greatest prophet who ever lived'*. Yet Branham was formally denounced as a heretic even by Pentecostal groups. He did not believe in the trinity which he said was of the Devil; for him the word of God consisted of the Egyptian pyramids and the zodiac as well as the Bible; and Eve had had sexual relations with the Devil producing the 'serpent's seed' (sinners from the line of Cain). His ministry was clearly occultic, being based on revelations given to him by an 'angel' (demon) present when he ministered. Eventually, Branham believed he was the angel of Rev 3:14 and 10:7 and baptised people into his own name!

⁴ See the foreword to Hank Hanegraaff's, *Counterfeit Revival*.

⁵ If you think that I am crazy, simply listen to Paul Cain's taped messages on Joel 2 available from various sources as he preached it so often.

⁶ *'God has given us a vision to see the body of Christ move from being an ineffective audience to a Spirit-filled army.'* John Wimber, Leaflet advertising the Oct 1990 conference.

⁷ David Forbes, *Blessing the Church*, Ed. Clifford Hill, Eagle, Guildford (1995) p92.

⁸ Cain, speaking at the *School of Prophecy*, Anaheim, Nov 1989 session 7.

Despite the clear occultic practices of men like Bob Jones, the leading KCF prophet,⁹ and despite the ensuing scandals that arose, despite the unbiblical teaching, no one questioned that this was all of God. Bishop David Pytches even wrote a Book (*Some Said It Thundered*) popularising the KCF phenomenon. Of course the UK Evangelicals put it immediately in the best selling list, despite the fact that Wimber told Pytches not to publish it, not least because stories of fulfilled prophecy included in it were fake.

This is not the place to outline all the false prophecy and scandalous behaviour that has arisen from this group, there is not room for the myriad stories that could be told. We must focus on incontrovertible testimony from public history and John Wimber. If leaders became involved with these aberrations because of him, it is vital that we establish his current position on these issues. He is the man in the know.

1990

Wimber must be held accountable for bringing Bob Jones to England and allowing him to minister with him, albeit not on the platform. Wimber was aware of the very serious accusations against his ministry from a number of leaders in the USA and the UK. He was aware of a demonic influence in his life, and yet he allowed him to 'prophecy' over English leaders in July 1990. David Pytches and Sandy Millar (Holy Trinity Brompton) sponsored a tour presenting Bob Jones as a prophet of extraordinary power. At the end of the Holy Trinity KCF leadership conference, led by Wimber, a statement was issued by a number of national leaders fully endorsing the Kansas City prophets. They stated that they had examined them and their ministry and were satisfied that it was of God. This was despite the fact that one month earlier the KCF had confessed to 15 areas of error in their teaching and practice. This endorsement was signed by: Gerald Coates (Pioneer), Graham Cray (St Michael-le-Belfrey), Roger Forster (Ichthus), Lynn Green (YWAM), David McInnes (St. Aldates, Oxford), Sandy Millar, John Mumford (Vineyard, London), David Pytches, Brian Skinner, Teddy Saunders, Barry Kissel (St. Andrew's Chorleywood), Terry Virgo (NFI), Ann Watson (widow of David Watson) Rick Williams (Vineyard, Teddington) and others. All these people have received 'ministry' from Kansas City prophets. Many Christians consider that this period is a watershed in the establishment of deception in the British churches.

The first clear incontrovertible warning was a prophecy made by Paul Cain, the 'best' of the new prophets. Paul Cain prophesied that revival would come to Britain in October 1990. In the usual fashion, the KCF prophets supported it with further prophecies by Bob Jones and John Paul Jackson.¹⁰ Cain explicitly stated that this revival would begin in London. Wimber arranged a large conference in Docklands as a result. He even brought his whole family over to witness this historic event. It never happened. Wimber

⁹ That Bob Jones could ever be allowed to serve in a church, let alone in Wimber's international ministry is incredible. His paranormal experiences began in a mental asylum to which he had been incarcerated after extended alcoholism, violence, immorality and drug abuse. He even states that he is visited by demons and converses with them. His ministry involves an 'angelic' (demonic) messenger. Clifford Hill visited him in 1989 and immediately discerned a demonic presence in him. (See *Blessing the Church* p 194). In 1991 Wimber was forced to dismiss him for 'gross sexual sin'- using his 'prophetic' gift to manipulate women sexually and other offences. This is the man of whom Mike Bickle (leader of the Kansas City Fellowship) said, '*There is nobody ... that had a more integral role in establishing our foundations*'. (Quoted from, *What's the problem*, by Ernest Gruen.)

¹⁰ John Paul Jackson was subsequently seconded to Wimber's ministry team in Anaheim.

subsequently distanced himself from Cain, who took up with R.T. Kendall as a result in England and is still actively involved with the Metro Vineyard Fellowship.¹¹

Instead of being warned by this obvious false prophecy, instead of taking disciplinary action in the way that Deuteronomy 13 and 18 teaches, English church leaders began to unleash even more prophecies themselves in the years to come. I do not know of one major prophecy from these sources which has come to pass. In fact some of them have seriously led astray individuals and caused disrepute to churches and even dishonoured Christ nationally throughout a nation.¹² As a result of the KCP influence, several national figures are now referred to as prophets instead of their earlier favoured term, apostles.

Despite Paul Cain's incredible false teaching, despite his public false prophecy, he was still courted by many national leaders and given public platforms. For instance he spoke at Westminster Chapel, co-authored a book with R.T.. Kendall, shared ministry with Gerald Coates, Terry Virgo and others. What happened to discernment?

Again, part of the problem was the powerful endorsement of John Wimber. Although slightly distanced from Cain, Wimber did not condemn the false prophecy, but rather excused it and tried sophistry: 'the revival had indeed begun', we were told, 'but only as a spark, not a forest fire for the moment'. Later years have shown this to be wrong also as the social and religious situation steadily declined. This is partly the reason why these same people quickly jumped on the Toronto bandwagon in 1994. They were desperate for a fulfilment of all the prophecies of power, prosperity, rivers of blessing and revival.

Despite the UK's continued fascination with these prophets, Wimber was very unhappy. In August 1996 the Metro Vineyard Church resigned from the Association of Vineyard Churches due to irreconcilable differences. Mike Bickle's vision, undergirded by Paul Cain's influence, was totally opposed to that of the Vineyard. In the AVC's letter of acceptance, Rick Olmstead states that the executive council does 'not believe or agree that you have the "word of the Lord"'. Bickle's church was then renamed as the Metro Christian Fellowship.

What we now know is that Wimber was actually troubled about these prophets from the start. It is a shame that Wimber did not share this fully with the public until 14 July 1997; although he had earlier, in the summer of 1995, stated that he had been deceived by the KCP regarding prophecies. In an interview with Christianity Today he explained that for six years, i.e. 1991 onwards, the Vineyard team had been advising the KCP to leave the Vineyard ministry, but they refused. Why did Wimber not simply insist that they left? Why did Wimber and the Vineyard leaders continue in this period to endorse and encourage KCP prophetic practices in their churches to bad effect?¹³ Wimber accepted responsibility for introducing the KCP to the Christian world (i.e. he accepts that this was wrong) and

¹¹ Note at 2007 - In October 2004 it was announced that Paul Cain was subsequently disciplined for very serious sinful behaviour including alcoholism and homosexuality. Those of us who warned churches about this man in 1990 were castigated at the time.

¹² On 20 April 1995 Gerald Coates prophesied a specifically timed revival in Westminster which did not happen. He also prophesied an earthquake in New Zealand in 1991 which prompted emergency measures by many Christians, including warning the nation in the media. When it did not occur, the cause of God was ridiculed nationally and Coates was asked to leave the country. Unfortunately he is not alone; consider all the leaders who told us that Toronto would usher in the greatest revival ever known. Did we blink and miss it?

¹³ For hard examples of this see foreword to Hank Hanegraaff's *Counterfeit Revival*.

explains that this was an aberration on his part because: '*I turned my brain off for a couple of years*'. !!!! These were the very years that Wimber drew all the aforementioned British leaders into direct contact with men who had false, dangerous, even demonic ministry. These leaders accepted Wimber's endorsement because of his reputation, trusted a man instead of God and accepted evil ministry, thrusting upon their people 'doctrines of demons' warned by Paul (1 Tim 4:1).

Is it not worrying that a man who admits to not hearing from God for two years up to 1987, also shut off his brain for two years up to 1991. And this man was the main influence in British Evangelicalism in this same period! At least Wimber has now, belatedly, admitted his mistake. It is time for British leaders to do the same. They cannot but admit to being deceived and repent and seek to help their people recover. The alliance was publicly made, it must be publicly undone.

Toronto

There is not the space to pursue a long examination of this aberration. Many books are now available which identify the erroneous ideas and practices.¹⁴ The critical thing for this study is that it arose out of the Signs and Wonders Movement, particularly flowing from the influence of the KCP, and was originally closely identified with John Wimber.

The KCP phenomenon had managed to soften up the British churchgoer so that he was ready to receive the next wave of deception uncritically. I doubt if people would have fallen for it so easily in the early 80's rather than the early 90's. Without realising it, many British Christians had taken on board *Latter rain* and *Manifest Sons of God* heresies because their trusted leaders had taught them, often unwittingly. Wimber had introduced wide numbers to the concept of being slain in the spirit for the first time, even though it had been around for decades, especially after the influence of Kathryn Kuhlman. Christians outside of the Pentecostal orbit were now open to the idea. What was very new to most was the other phenomena like barking, crowing, shaking, pogoing, roaring and so on. Fortunately only a few groups went even further into the areas of simulated sex, orgasms and birthpangs.

What is very frightening is the ready acceptance of, what is now universally and clearly identified, as hypnotic control of audiences made passive by emotional worship and suggestion from trusted leaders. Even non-Christian authorities on the subject have evaluated Toronto style meetings as evidencing clear stages of hypnotic suggestion and manipulation. The ordinary reader can see this for himself if he cares to read up the facts and witness a typical meeting.¹⁵

I will avoid the temptation to delve into this nightmarish pit any further and stick to my main point. Though representatives of the Word Faith movement are involved like Rodney Howard Browne, Benny Hinn and Kenneth Copeland, the main influence in the world-wide spread of this move was, of course, the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church led by John Arnott. As such, Arnott was a colleague of Wimber's. It was another Vineyard pastor, Bill Jackson of the Vineyard Champaign church, Illinois, who tried to develop an apologetic in

¹⁴ For example: Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*; Bill Randles, *Weighed and Found Wanting*; Eric Wright, *Strange Fire*; Clifford Hill (Ed.), *Blessing the Church?*

¹⁵ A good Christian starting point is: *Slaying in the Spirit* by Nadir Mikhael, available from St Matthew Pub. 24 Geldart St, Cambridge, CB1 2LX.

a widely distributed paper in May 1994 called, *What in the world is happening to us?* However, within a year Wimber reacted against the strange phenomenon. Wimber decided to dismiss the Toronto Airport Vineyard church from the Association of Vineyard churches. In a letter to Vineyard pastors posted on the Internet (18/12/95) he rejected the Toronto extremes saying, *'there is no biblical or theological framework for such phenomena ... I cannot endorse or even encourage this experience in our movement and ministry.'* The AVC board had requested John Arnott to discourage *'exotic and extra-biblical manifestations'*. Arnott refused. Arnott's refusal to test the spirits was said to be contrary to the commands of 1 Cor 14:29, 1 Thess 5:19-20 and 1 Jn 4:1-3. They even accepted that the Toronto leadership had manipulated the crowds by suggestion and emotionalism.

Did Wimber's rejection of the Toronto excesses lead to a repentance from the British leaders closely connected with its extravagances? No. In fact they continued to promote Toronto style meetings in the mistaken idea that it would increase the size of their churches. John Arnott was brought over to minister in Terry Virgo's New Frontiers churches even in late 1996.

Again we see a deplorable lack of being able to admit mistakes on behalf of English Charismatic leaders. Despite the overwhelming evidence presented to show the error of the Toronto experience; despite the fact that the self styled 'father' of the Toronto experiences¹⁶ eventually rejected it, our own leaders could not bring themselves to say they got it wrong, let alone repent for deluding their people. Yet another unholy alliance has been left to fester in the British church.

Roman Catholic Influence

Having already been open to draw from Roman Catholic sources¹⁷ there was a growing openness to sharing platforms with hard line Catholics. On one occasion Wimber even publicly apologised to the Roman Catholic Church on behalf of all Protestants. His confusion about the foundations of the Gospel was revealed when he stated that the Pope is a born again evangelical who preaches the Gospel as clear as anyone preaching it in the world!¹⁸ This was said of the man who believes, and is bound by his office to teach, that everyone who believes in justification by grace in faith alone is eternally lost.

One fruit of his influence was the Brighton 91 Conference. Though not sponsored by Vineyard directly, it flowed from its precedent and via its supporters. Wimber was on the programme to speak but was not able to come. The conference was organised locally by Terry Virgo's New Frontiers International who also organised several of Wimber's UK conferences. It was sponsored by the International Charismatic Consultation on World

¹⁶ Wimber stated this in his rejection paper on the internet claiming that his churches had experienced such things for 15 years.

¹⁷ E.g. Francis MacNutt, Michael Scanlan. He even accepts Catholic miracles, like those at Lourdes attributed to Mary, for instance etc. He was also re-married in a Catholic church as a believer after a period of separation from his wife. He has written for Roman Catholic magazines, one article was called *'Why I Love Mary'*, (New Covenant Mag. June 1988). It's hard to believe but Wimber also accepts the use of Catholic relics (human remains and other objects) to bring healing (Wimber, *Church Planting Seminar*, Tapes 1,2,3,4,5. March 1981).

¹⁸ Wimber, *Church Planting Seminar* (1981) tape no. 2. Cited by John Goodwin (an ex-Vineyard pastor and former associate of Wimber) in Media Spotlight, *Testing the Fruit of the Vineyard*, (1990).

Evangelism and was titled *That the World may Believe*. It was attended by Roman Catholic (the largest group), Anglican, Pentecostal, Charismatic and Non Denominational delegates. Senior Papal ministers were present sharing platforms/responsibility alongside Archbishop George Carey, Graham Kendrick, Terry Virgo, Michael Green, Michael Harper, Larry Christenson, Vinson Synan, Jack Hayford and Kriengsak Chareonwongsak. Peripheral meetings included celebration of mass by monks and other Catholic propaganda. A remarkable fact is that a Christian observer and reporter noted that at only one meeting he attended were the scriptures read.

Interviews with key leaders present make it clear that they considered the Roman Catholic Gospel to be identical with Evangelical teaching: *'The Catholics have been converting millions of people in Africa ... I'd rather them be Catholic Christians than Muslims ... I'm convinced after meeting tens of thousands of Catholic Charismatics that most of those people are as much born again'.¹⁹ 'the spirit here, in Brighton, is a spirit of co-operation ... our chief concern is to find the best place for a convert to develop, and I think that it could be that for a person, the Roman Catholic Church could be in actual fact the best place. Equally it could be a house church ... I am a Catholic, Evangelical Charismatic.'*²⁰

Unity with Catholics is clearly on the level of similar experiences, mainly Baptism in the Spirit, healing or miracles: *'the reason why I ... related to the Roman Catholics was because I saw that they had the same experience that I had, of the baptism of the Spirit ... the basis of fellowship is not primarily doctrine, it is those who God has drawn into his fellowship.'*²¹ *'The Reformation was a mistake.'*²² *'I was in this room because I wanted to observe a modern Charismatic Catholic Mass and it was the most reverent thing I have seen in the whole Conference. Quite astonishing.'*²³ *'When you've got a Roman Catholic (who is) really accepting Jesus Christ as his saviour ... I want to put my arm round my brother and say look we are regiments in the same army.'*²⁴

There is no question that the Roman church has not changed its views on its anti - Reformation distinctives. In fact, recent church formulations undergird those of the Council of Trent. It is also unquestionable that Romanism is gaining ground and getting stronger everyday. Defections of Evangelicals to the Roman church seem to be gathering apace. A key reason for this is the common ground afforded by Charismatic experiences. While refusing to change its doctrinal position, the Roman church openly warms to Charismatics and uses Charismatic experiences to make its meetings more palatable and enticing. Some church leaders even consider that it is the Catholic church that is at the cutting edge of Charismatic innovation.

We need to remember that our forefathers preferred to yield up their lives rather than have any affiliation with the errors of Romanism; and Catholics were quite happy to torture and kill Evangelical believers in their thousands, men women and children. Paul made it clear that we cannot have fellowship with the works of darkness, we must not share in a different Gospel. Romanism is such a different Gospel which teaches that our meritorious works are part of our salvation, Mary is a co-redemptrix and is to be worshipped, purgatory is where we can continue to save ourselves after death, the elements of the Lord's

¹⁹ Vinson Synan, *The Brighton 91 Interviews*, WPU (Inc), Peacehaven (1991), p4.

²⁰ Michael Harper, *ibid* p16.

²¹ Michael Harper, *ibid* p15.

²² David Watson, *ibid* p15.

²³ Michael Green, *ibid* p19.

²⁴ Michael Green, *ibid* p21.

Supper are transformed into Christ's very body, the Pope is infallible and is a mediator under Christ etc. It is one thing to love those in this false church who may ignorantly seek to honour the Lord within it, but it is quite another to have any formal involvement with the church itself. The Charismatic Movement, and especially the Signs and Wonders Movement have opened the door for many gullible believers to walk straight into unbiblical relationships with the Catholic church. Charismatic leaders involved need to repent. Unholy alliances continue to develop as a result of British leaders paving the way. The blood of our fathers in the faith cries in the ground.

Conclusion

In the face of hard historical evidence, let alone clear Biblical teaching, British leaders who have shared in Wimber's sin must repent. It is a sin to delude the church, it is not a sincere weakness that can be ignored. These people were trusted by sheep following a shepherd, and were led into very dangerous pits. They are guilty, at least by collusion, of error which Jesus warns us is a very serious matter. This cannot be covered up and ignored like so many other matters in the Charismatic church. Some are named in the KCP document, they, at least, must own up in the light of Wimber's recent position.

Even if they were to repent, could men who have led the church into such serious errors ever be trusted again? Even if they were unsure as to the unholy roots of these things, should they not have admitted their mistakes when their trusted colleague, John Wimber, publicly owned up? If they can make such serious mistakes about big issues, how trustworthy is their strategy on smaller ones? Many of these same leaders also led the church into other unscriptural paths before these major issues developed: authoritarianism, unscriptural church government and structure, focus upon personalities, destruction of local relationships and koinonia, focus upon money, intrigue and cover ups, and so on. These have been ignored by deceived congregations; but now, at least these three errors are plain for all to see.

Church leaders have taken the church into unholy alliances and the people are being despoiled. The situation can only get worse if these leaders do not repent and lead their people away from these serious errors. There are other aberrations already taking hold in Evangelicalism apart from those we have highlighted here, such as a focus on a fleshly Celtic spirituality, completely opposed to the real faith of our Celtic forebears, and the new age Promise Keepers movement whose roots are too appalling to discuss.

As always, the battle is for the Bible as the absolute and final word of God. It is the truth which makes us free and it is the truth which must provide the weapons to destroy modern strongholds of error. If church leaders cannot lead Biblically, they must be opposed Biblically.

Appendix

The Problem of John Wimber

John Wimber is a truly nice guy. Those that have met him, seen him speak, corresponded with him or worked with him all say so. His attitude is a breath of fresh air compared to many speakers and leaders. He is humble, prepared to admit his mistakes and open to

counsel, even from unknown sources (he once accepted counsel from myself). His demeanour on a platform draws one to him as a result of his relaxed style. At one of his early conferences he spoke with his hands in his pockets, suddenly he found an old boiled sweet, stopping his talk he commented on his luck and popped it into his mouth to appreciative laughter. Such disarming behaviour endeared him to many. He was the opposite of the pompous, self-promoting healers one sees in the Pentecostal and Word Faith movements.

His emphasis in teaching was, originally, very refreshing. He majored upon the Lord Jesus Christ. His original apologetic for ministering in power was the total sovereignty of God and listening carefully to Jesus. He repeatedly emphasised Jesus' ministry in John's Gospel - only doing what the Father was doing and only saying what the Father said. He categorically denounced the idea that healing was automatic or that all diseases could be dealt with by a word from a Christian. All this sane teaching was a sea change from what many of us had heard before. We were impressed. Furthermore, he stated that he was called by God to devote himself to prayer rather than leading meetings, and in the second conference I saw him, he gave the platform to delegates in the afternoon so that he could pray for four hours. We were even more impressed.

So what's the problem?

The first problem is that Wimber's ministry keeps changing rather dramatically. The focus, seen in the UK, gradually began to be on demonstration rather than hearing God. On doing rather than being. On outward works rather than inner communion resulting in various expressions, which may include power. On spectacle rather than testimony. As he became influenced by false prophets and teachers, matters degenerated further. Pursuance of the 'dread warrior' concept being an obvious example. Today, from a distance he seems to be like a puppet being pulled by whoever has the strings; first this one then that one. First he is influenced by a prophet, then there is failure followed by a period of dejection, then someone else like John Arnott comes along with a new experience so Wimber gets caught up in that also.

His original emphasis, in this country, was healing, worship and church development. Later it became power evangelism, growing big churches and spiritual warfare. Then it focused on the prophetic move. Then the 'new breed' followed by Toronto. What next? Throughout these changes there has been a growing superficiality of teaching. A failure to emphasise the atonement, the purpose and attributes of God and other critical doctrines. People have not been taught to discern for themselves through understanding God's word better, rather they have been led to accept, uncritically, whatever is offered by the leadership at the time.

In addition, information has now surfaced which shows that he is not quite the man we all thought he was. Various writers have proved conclusively that Wimber has frequently been confused about the truth, or has misrepresented situations. Writings and sermons often give contradictory information about historical events, such as his conversion, early Christian development and the growth of his church.²⁵ Some of his statements are very worrying, such as that he led 2000 people to Christ, in one to one situations, while being 'dead inside', without the power of the Holy Spirit, and completely unable to pray for himself because he thought that God didn't like him.²⁶ Another is that

²⁵See for example: *The Toronto Blessing: A Renewal from God?* Mchale & Haykin, Canadian Christian Publications (1995) p224ff.

²⁶ *ibid*, p225.

'our rational mind is dead -set against the works of God'.²⁷

An example of contradictory statements regards his first manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Usually he says that he was a conservative pastor who suddenly experienced gifts of the Spirit. In his books one is led to believe that these were unsought. Wimber's colleague, John White, says that they were not only unsought but were abrupt, unexpected and unpleasant.²⁸ Yet even in *Power Evangelism's* first page he explains that he attended his first meeting expecting: dramatic healings, exorcism and spiritual warfare as a result of studying Acts. A taped message given in 1980²⁹ contradicts this again where he states that he was baptised in the Spirit and spoke in tongues before he had read Acts or 1 Corinthians, he had only read three chapters of John's Gospel. In a TV interview with Peter Jennings (March 1995) Wimber admits that he expected miracles from the first time he went to church, in fact as a young Christian he complained to the church staff asking when they would *'do the stuff'*, i.e. work miracles.

Perhaps one could forgive a person mixing up old memories, but such examples are quite common and many deal with more important matters. Whether it is deliberate or accidental, as one reads contradiction after contradiction one is forced to wonder whether anyone can trust anything he says, or even wonder if he is mentally incapacitated in some way.

Another example is that he has repeatedly stated that God told him not to defend himself or listen to the voice of critics of his movement: *'I'll never, ever answer another spectator's questions the rest of my life. I'm not interested in their ... criticisms.'*³⁰ [This in itself is very suspicious, God expects us to be open to criticism and fellowship through our development of strategy, 'in the presence of many counsellors there is wisdom'.] However, if one looks up the Vineyard Internet sites (Oct 1997) we see advertised a number of defensive papers reacting to the criticism of worthy men like John MacArthur, Don Carson and John Armstrong.

Information from ex-Vineyard staff members is now coming to light that accuse Wimber of outright lies. One example is that Dave Hunt repeatedly telephoned Wimber's office before his book *Seduction of Christianity* was published. Wimber refused to talk to him; yet that very evening, at a Vineyard service in Anaheim, he said how hurt he was that Hunt, and others, had criticised him without bothering to approach him with their concerns first.³¹

Wimber has aberrant beliefs.

It comes as a shock, to many who had esteemed him highly, to learn of his many aberrant ideas, such as: believing that there is a range of powerful supernatural forces in the earth (as well as God, angels and demons) which includes: ghosts, ancestors, earthly gods and goddesses who live within trees and rivers, maya, planetary influences, evil eyes etc.³² We

²⁷ *ibid*, p235.

²⁸ John White, *When the Spirit comes with Power*, IVP (1988), p158.

²⁹ Called: *History and Vision of Vineyard Christian Fellowship*.

³⁰ Dager, *Vengeance is Ours*, Sword Pub. Redmond, Washington (1990), p158. This comment has been repeated on very many occasions.

³¹ The source for this is John Goodwin, *Testing the fruit of the Vineyard*, Media Spotlight, 1996, p29. John Goodwin was a Vineyard pastor for eight years and travelled extensively with John Wimber for four years. Since speaking out against Vineyard, negative rumours have circulated about his character. Al Dager checked these out and found them to be untrue.

³² Wimber: *Signs Wonders and Church Growth*, section 3, 'Today's tension with the miraculous:

should also worry that Lonnie Frisbee, whose ministry led to the first manifestations in Wimber's original congregation, admitted that: *'even before he became a Christian he could make such things happen'*.³³ Presumably Wimber has no problem with this since he has stated that some people are *'natural healers'*.³⁴ This is unabashed shamanism.

Most importantly, he has clearly stated, as has his one time theologian Jack Deere, that he does not believe in the sufficiency of scripture.³⁵ In fact, he has said that he can get accurate information from a demon as well as God's word, he frequently gives total credence to things demons say, not realising that the Devil is a liar and the father of lies.³⁶ It is common for Wimber to state that, *'God is greater than his word'*. This is understood to mean that there is spiritual truth in sources outside of the Bible and also that weird manifestations do not need to be backed up by doctrine. Quotes showing his low view of the sufficiency of scripture are suffused throughout his seminar notes and tapes. For example: *'not all truth is in the Bible. We integrate all truth, both Biblical and other into our experience of living'*.³⁷ 'Spiritual' experiences, not the Bible, form the foundation, therefore, of many Vineyard practices. This is how Wimber can justify the use of relics, or psychic auras in healing for instance.

Wimber opposes the 'western', intellectual approach to the Bible, demanding a *paradigm shift*, a new world view. He thinks that Third World countries are more open to God's power because they have such a different world view, an intuitive openness. He seems oblivious to the fact that this could also be a sensuousness, founded on a tradition of mysticism, occult religions and gullibility. It is also an insult to educated Third World Christians who have risen to become famous scholars in the western world. In fact, his approach is actually following the world's drift. Since the 60's, western culture has grown progressively anti-rationalistic so that we have now entered *Post Modernism*. Even scientists and philosophers seem pre-occupied with blending science, mysticism and magic today and many commentators are actively anti-rationalistic. Wimber should take note that the rise of cessationism actually began in the East, not the West, with the church Fathers. Their cultural background did not prevent them condemning spurious charisma.

The reason for this emphasis is Wimber's reliance upon pragmatism. 'If it works, it must be of God.' Experiences become more important in this atmosphere than Biblical teaching. He actually says that a practice does not have to be supported by scripture to be of God. Wimber does not seem to realise that powerful experiences can be false and that Jesus and the apostles continually warned about the danger of following signs uncritically. The Third World is full of 'signs and wonders' that emanate from occult experiences; and these include all the manifestations seen at the average Vineyard conference: slaying in the 'spirit', tongues, healing, demonic manifestation, screaming, laughing, vibrant noisy

world view'.

³³ *Meeting John Wimber*, John Gunstone Ed. p55. Lonnie Frisbee was also a practising homosexual at this time and continued as such until his death of aids. This man was the origin of all the Vineyard manifestations.

³⁴ Healing Seminar Syllabus, Section 2, *Healing in the NT* (1983), also Ministry Training Seminar, Part 2, Vineyard Christian Fellowship (1982), p1.

³⁵ *John Wimber, friend or foe?* St Matthias Press, p9-10. See also Media Spotlight: *The Vineyard*, p4, column 2.

³⁶ Media Spotlight, Special Report: *The Vineyard*, p23.

³⁷ Wimber, *Vineyard '83*, Leadership Conference, 'The 5 year plan', Tool 6; quoted in Media Spotlight, *The Vineyard*, p20.

worship, quiet passive contemplation and so on. We should also note that many of the features seen in Vineyard meetings (shaking, falling, jumping on the spot etc.) were not seen in apostolic Christianity but *were seen* in cults outside of the church and were condemned (e.g. Gnosticism, paganism, Bacchanalian rites etc.)

The apologetic for power evangelism is usually focused upon the need to use signs to aid conversions. This is spurious. Conversion is totally to do with the power of God expressed in the **word** of the Gospel (Rm 1:16). To the experience hungry Corinthian church Paul said that the Gospel was the **word** of the cross. He denigrated the search for signs and centred upon preaching (using words) Christ (1 Cor 1:18-25). Jesus even said that it is better to believe without seeing (Jn 20:29). I suspect that the real reason behind everyone wanting to experience power, is that everyone wants to experience power. The root is self centred. Wimber's own explanation of his desires for powerful experiences clearly suggest this.

Furthermore, the Vineyard's experiences of healing do not tally with those seen in scripture anyway. We do not see instant healing, resurrection from the dead, the blind receiving their sight, the deaf hearing, the lame walking. Instead we observe psychosomatic relief of pain due to emotional exuberance or induced passivity. Wimber has actually said that relief of pain is a key objective to aim for.

Closely connected with this is the emphasis upon psychic healing using visualisation and inner healing techniques as described by Agnes Sanford. Wimber's friend and colleague, Peter Wagner, even describes the occult use of observing auras as a guide to discerning a person's problem.³⁸ Wimber refers to the same thing as '*radiance on the face*' or '*warmth flowing out of hands*'.³⁹ These methods (e.g. used in healing of memories) are identical to the practices of psychic healers and have no foundation in scripture at all. They arise, at best, from subjective mental impressions; at worst they are demonic pretensions. Sanford even taught that people's minds are connected, and can travel back and forward through time touching other minds in history as well as angelic and demonic minds!⁴⁰ Other methods, like receiving a tingling feeling in a part of one's body identifying that God will heal an organ in that area, are completely occultic in nature. Never in scripture did the apostles work this way. It is, however, a feature of eastern occultic religions and sects which Wimber has opened himself up to with his 'paradigm shift'.

Apart from all this, where is the recognition that it is the sovereign God who allows problems, suffering and sickness to overtake us. Even if we are unfamiliar with specific texts stating this clearly (like Isa 45:7, Exod 4:11, Lam 3:1, 32-33), surely everyone knows the story of Job? Satan's afflictions required God's permission. Now it is always right to pray for relief of suffering, and we should bear one another's burdens. The problem is the Vineyard's identification of disease with demonic activity; as such it can be commanded, rebuked and combated. But what if the disease was a chastisement from God? One is therefore waging war against God. There is very little said about God's sovereignty in current Vineyard practice. One cannot employ a rigorous healing methodology to every

³⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *How To Have A Healing Ministry Without Making Your Church Sick!* Regal, Ventura Calif. (1989), p228.

³⁹ These sorts of manifestations are called '*Cosmic reality*' by Wimber. See *Healing Seminar Syllabus: 2 Observations, A Spiritual Phenomena*, p74-75.

⁴⁰ Agnes Sanford, *The Healing Gifts of the Spirit*, Revell, (1983), p152. This rubbish is truly frightening and completely occultic, yet it forms the basis of inner healing practised by Wimber and others.

case irrespective of its cause.

On key doctrinal issues Wimber is very wobbly. He describes himself as evangelical in doctrine but not evangelical in practice. This is in itself a contradiction of terms and shows his misunderstanding of the purpose of doctrine. Biblical doctrine, properly understood and thoroughly believed will always take root in practical experiences. If not, the teaching is not of God for it has no power to transform a life.

In practice Wimber's doctrine of man seems to be devoid of any understanding of total depravity, and he even speaks of his ministry as '*restoring the Edenic state*'!⁴¹ His Arminian view of God's sovereignty is woefully inadequate as noticed by Jim Packer: '*My God is not frustrated by any failure on man's part (as Wimber suggests) ... He is a sovereign God; He does whatever he pleases ... God works out all things according to His own will (Eph 1:11) ... And if you are going to lose sight of that ... your doctrine of God is out of shape.*'⁴²

Finally the message of the Gospel given at conferences and seminars is hopelessly flawed. But this follows on from Wimber's idea that the demonstration of power is equal to the word of God. Sound words are, therefore, not necessary. Vineyard leaders have stated many times that people are healed, slain in the Spirit and converted without any knowledge of the Gospel or the work of Christ. This is not the Gospel and we should fear for converts to it.

His writings are very suspect. His early books, which were so influential, have been severely criticised by Wimber himself. He disclaims that he wrote some of them, and agrees that they contain erroneous material; yet they have not been withdrawn.⁴³ Regarding *Power Evangelism*, Wimber states that he did not read the manuscript before publication and has not even read the whole book. This is extremely irresponsible of someone with such a great influence, whose books sell hundreds of thousands of copies. His books contain much erroneous and unbiblical material. Generalisations are made about power healing in history and the Bible which are simply not true. Several writers have documented these and other doctrinal errors.⁴⁴

Thirdly, he keeps very dubious company and has from the beginning. Some of his influences are downright disturbing. We have already noted the considerable Roman Catholic influence in his life, to this we should add dubious writers like Morton Kelsey,⁴⁵ Agnes Sanford,⁴⁶ Ruth Carter Stapleton,⁴⁷ Denis and Rita Bennett,⁴⁸ John and Paula

⁴¹ Donald Lewis quoted in *Power Religion*, Moody Press (1992), p81.

⁴² J.I. Packer, *Power Religion*, p82.

⁴³ *John Wimber: Friend or Foe?* p13.

⁴⁴ E.g. Al Dager, Gary Mchale & Michael Haykin, John MacArthur, Bill Randles.

⁴⁵ Kelsey is an Episcopalian priest and Jungian psychologist who equates Jesus with a witch doctor having 'extra-sensory perception' as any shaman. He receives guidance from the dead, equates the Holy Spirit with 'the self' and commends false religions and divination. Wimber dedicated a seminar series to this man.

⁴⁶ Agnes Sanford is a popular Christian writer whose ideas are almost New Age and Pantheistic. Her ideas are Jungian, combined with Shamanistic occult techniques. She started the inner healing epidemic. See Hunt, *Seduction of Christianity*, chapter 9, for a concise summary of her zany and dangerous beliefs.

⁴⁷ Stapleton is a disciple of Sanford and promoter of inner healing. She has said that people can be 'born again' by listening to great music or staring at great works of art.

Sandford⁴⁹ and Kenneth Hagin⁵⁰.

Wimber has adopted practices that lack integrity. The growth of Wimber's vineyard churches has often been through specific sheep stealing methods. The plan was to hold a Signs and Wonders conference or seminar in a town with the aid of local churches. Out of the resulting interest from believers, a new Vineyard church was then established from existing church members. Sometimes churches were specifically targeted and listed in this process as likely to provide Vineyard fodder.⁵¹ Pastors obviously felt betrayed and hurt when the interdenominational seminars seemed only a ploy to start a new denomination. This explains the growth of Vineyard churches in the UK where there are no linked Restorationist churches locally.

Similar practices occurred at the very beginning. The early days of Wimber's church were chaotic and confused. The meetings started as an unofficial gathering of some members of the Yorba Linda Friend's Church in 1975. This grew dramatically under Richard Wickwire's unofficial leadership, and Wimber visited it occasionally. In March 1977, Wimber responded to 'words of knowledge' and gathered some of these people together in his cabin at Lake Arrowhead. Here he announced that the group was now a church, it must leave the Friend's Church and he was the pastor. Some were so startled and upset that they went to pray together in the bedroom. Wimber was felt by many to be unqualified as a pastor and was not even baptised. For some reason, they followed him!

Their first meeting began in a Masonic lodge with Wimber and Bob Fulton (a founder member and Wimber's brother-in-law) sitting on the thrones above a pentagram. To gain credibility, Wimber joined the church to Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel denomination. Apparently, Wimber's ministry was confused, technical, academic and based on methodology. Later, he brought in a psychologist, Sam Thompson, as an assistant pastor. It was Thompson who developed the Vineyard's ministry method, combining psychological theory with charismatic practices. Here they 'experimented' with power encounters and saw many strange things, often focused on commanding demonic manifestation in order to heal. It has been testified, by more than one witness, that at this time almost all the original members of the group felt resentful about what had transpired.⁵²

After a while, Wimber offered to lead Smith's pastoral training school. In doing this, Wimber actively sought to unite these pastors under his direction. He also focused the training on Signs & Wonders and Power Evangelism rather than the subjects Smith requested. All without Chuck Smith's knowledge. Eventually matters came to a head and Smith suggested that Wimber align himself with Kenn Gulliksen's Vineyard Fellowship in the San Fernando Valley, since Gulliksen had defended Wimber's stance. Smith asked the pastors to either remain with Calvary chapel, and stress the teaching of scripture, or follow Wimber and convert their churches to Vineyards. Many chose the latter. After a while Gulliksen was moved to a position below Wimber and then sent out on church planting missions, one after another.

Wimber's behaviour throughout this affair was not good; needless to say he also ignores

⁴⁸ Popular pioneers of the Charismatic movement and disciples of Sanford.

⁴⁹ Yet more disciples of Sanford with Pantheistic tendencies.

⁵⁰ Leading proponent ('father') of Word Faith errors, disciple of the heretic E. W. Kenyon.

⁵¹ Al Dager gives an example of this in British Columbia in *Vengeance is Ours*, Sword Pub. Redmond (1990), p154.

⁵² Media Spotlight, *The Vineyard*, p2-4.

all this history in his own descriptions of Vineyard's origins. He also feels free to publicly criticise Smith's church: '*Calvaryites (those who attend Calvary Chapel) are ... very Pharaisaical in their allegiance to the Bible. They have very little life, and growth and spontaneity in their innards. Sometimes they're very rigid and can't receive much of the things of the Lord.*'⁵³ In fact, Smith's view is sound: '*One of the greatest weaknesses of the charismatic movement is its lack of sound Bible teaching. There seems to be an undue preoccupation with experience, which is often placed above the Word. As a consequence, charismatics have become fertile field for strange and unscriptural doctrines.*'⁵⁴

Another example is that the claims made by Vineyard for successful healings, like other movements, do not hold water. Several times conferences were subjected to statistical analysis (e.g. the Australian campaign reported in *The Briefing*). The figures for improvement were lower than if the sick people had gone to the doctor. Why were so many of these conferences held internationally when they seemed to have little new to offer? The answer given by ex-Vineyard staff member, John Goodwin, in a forthcoming book, is that they could make hundreds of thousands of pounds profit!

His healing methodology is suspect in that it arises from a mixture of Jungian psychology and Agnes Sanford's inner healing techniques. In the Wimber model we see practices like *visualisation, healing of memories* (inner healing), imagining the very localised presence of God ('I can see the power of God on your chest'), being slain in the Spirit and so on. Many Roman Catholic / psychological ideas are incorporated from Francis MacNutt, Jesuits Father Dennis and Matthew Linn and others. Practices that are established by others are pragmatically accepted and taught without any reference to scripture. The rejection of sane Biblical reference observed in Toronto meetings (evasion of preaching, 'don't question, don't think, just drink') seems to have some root in Wimber's anti-intellectualism: '*When are we going to see a generation [which] doesn't try to understand this book but just believes it?*'⁵⁵

Wimber's churches (like other Restoration churches) has left a trail of damaged, disaffected believers. In the foreword to *Counterfeit Religion*, ex-Vineyard leader, Tom Stipe, gives a personal example of the sort of broken lives emerging from unbiblical strategy and teaching. This was considered so relevant that the Christian monthly *Evangelicals Now* reproduced the whole section as an article in October 1997.

Apart from unrighteous manipulation of people by Vineyard leaders, the commissioning of any Tom, Dick or Harry, despite their spiritual immaturity, to pray over needy people after a short period of technique absorption can obviously lead to chaos. I can give an example of this sort of danger from a Brighton church⁵⁶ associated with Wimber, with leaders/stewards 'trained' by Vineyard people, to show what I mean. In a healing service (an unbiblical meeting), an old lady with her leg in plaster went forward for prayer. An excited youth launched into prayer for the leg expecting her to rip the plaster off and leap about. When this did not happen, he berated the old lady, telling her that she had no faith,

⁵³ Wimber, *Church Planting Seminar*, Tapes 1,2,3,4,5, unedited March 28, 1981. Quoted from Media Spotlight: The Vineyard, p20.

⁵⁴ Chuck Smith, *Charisma vs Charismania*, Harvest House Pub. Eugene, (1983), p127. Quoted from Media Spotlight: The Vineyard, p20.

⁵⁵ Dager, op. cit. p155

⁵⁶ Terry Virgo's Clarendon Church, Hove (NFI), now Church of Christ the King, Brighton. This story was recounted to me by one of the leaders at the time. The 'pray-er' was a respected member of the youth leadership team praying on the platform.

and promptly walked away. The lady was reduced to tears and hobbled off the platform. Such stories are legion. Some people never recover from the emotional scars caused by would be healers.

We should also be concerned about the level of public sin that has emerged in Vineyard leaders. Many have needed to be disciplined or expelled for: adultery, manipulation of individuals, pride, immorality, lying, drunkenness, revelry and licentiousness. Where people allow themselves to be under the ministry of men with so called power or prophetic ability, the situation is ripe for abuse.

Wimber must accept some responsibility for all this, and indeed has done. Yet it must be remembered that he encouraged all his people to submit to counselling and prayer by Kansas City Prophets, despite being concerned. In the year that he now admits his brain was shut off, he said this at a Denver conference (in August 1989): *'I think you'll find that the prophets are pretty nice people, by and large. ...it's my hope that every one of you, if you've not today had the occasion of sitting down with one or two of them and having them minister to you ... you'll go home with your pockets full and your heart singing.'*⁵⁷ Is the not irresponsible to say the least? What is the emotional and spiritual result of a situation like the following, all too common: *'Personal prophecy was used a lot and often did not come to pass. When a prophecy was not fulfilled, the recipient was blamed (you didn't pray it into being, etc.) The 'victims' were often the most vulnerable people in the church - single women, the sick ... One woman (going through a divorce) was prophesied to, that the Lord would not allow her divorce to become final and that she would not lose custody of her daughter. Her divorce became final and she did lose custody of her daughter. ... The accuracy rates of the prophecies were very low and there was no accountability for these false ... prophecies.'*⁵⁸ Wimber knew of this tragedy, and many other stories like this before he made the statement above.

It is hard, at first, to accept that such a humble man could be involved in so much that is so wrong. Nevertheless, although Wimber is complex and confused, often changing his stance, we must condemn what are clear and outright errors. I have, by no means, mentioned all the wrong teachings and bad practices that are known to be in the Vineyard. Wimber's repentance and admission of mistakes is to be praised, but for every apology, there is a mountain of other problems waiting to surface. If the root is wrong, no matter how pleasant the blossom may appear for a while, the fruit will be bad.

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⁵⁷ Quoted in Dager, op. cit. p159, emphasis mine.

⁵⁸ *Documentation of the Aberrant Practices and Teachings of Kansas City Fellowship*, p206