

**A RESPONSE TO**  
**CHARISMATIC**  
**CHAOS**

**THE BOOK WRITTEN BY**  
**JOHN F. MACARTHUR, JR**

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**RICH NATHAN**

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**VINEYARD POSITION PAPER #5**

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**THE ASSOCIATION OF VINEYARD CHURCHES**

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**T**here is a woman in our church who was diagnosed as having heart problems about five years ago. Her doctor prescribed heart medication for her condition. Unfortunately, the woman got sicker and sicker. She began to retain water, her skin began to crack, she was frequently depressed, and there were days when she could not get out of bed. Her physician tried a variety of medications, but the woman grew steadily worse.

After four years of being treated for a heart problem, the woman went to another physician who flatly stated that she had no heart problem at all. In fact, the woman was a diabetic and needed insulin for her diabetes. After a very short time of taking insulin, the woman felt remarkably better. She was no longer depressed, she did not retain water, her skin cleared up, and she had a normal energy level again.

This story, though true, serves as a parable for John MacArthur's *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1992). MacArthur is like the first physician as he examines the charismatic movement. It's clear to him that something is wrong with the charismatic movement. He sees some of the symptoms of illness, but he completely misdiagnoses the reasons for the illness. And his prescription is, frankly, designed to kill the patient.

I personally agree with a number of points in MacArthur's book. Like many Christians, I too have grave problems with the prosperity message and the positive confession movement. Suffering, as much as faith, is an integral part of the Christian life (Phil. 1:29). I also share the general disgust that most Christians have for those television evangelists who are simply money-grubbers. Like my colleagues in the Vineyard, I oppose a view of spirituality that eliminates the maturing effect of traditional means of sanctification, such as Bible study, prayer and fellowship. And I hate the hyped testimonies of alleged "healings" that evaporate upon honest investigation.

This book, however, is particularly difficult to read for a number of reasons. MacArthur has the unfortunate weakness of exaggerating his opponents' faults. Not only is the bizarre and the quirky repeatedly emphasized, but MacArthur rarely acknowledges a mainstream view within the charismatic or Pentecostal movements that's balanced, Biblical, and mature. MacArthur, moreover, rarely admits that the Pentecostal/charismatic movement — now over 400 million strong — has borne tremendous fruit for the kingdom of God. He simply does not permit himself to acknowledge positive contributions by this enormous and varied movement.<sup>1</sup>

Excessive dogmatism is another fault of MacArthur's book. He lumps heresies, such as the view that human beings can share the deity of Christ, together with questions that should be open for discussion, such as "does the gift of tongues exist today?" Since MacArthur is dogmatic about virtually everything he says (something is either "Biblical" or "patently unbiblical" in MacArthur's book), he leaves absolutely no room for the reader to disagree and yet still be viewed as orthodox.

Indeed, in MacArthur's world, there does not seem to be any legitimate debate about almost any theological issue within Christian orthodoxy. This leads to the troubling conclusion that either MacArthur is unaware of most of the church's history and the legitimacy of differing Biblical viewpoints other than one's own, or he believes that he has received some special revelation regarding what is *the* truth about all matters. In either case, who can fault the reader for being turned off by MacArthur's excessive dogmatism?

There's another problem of lumping heresies together with matters that should be regarded as debatable by orthodox Christians: by shooting at every rabbit, MacArthur fails to ever bag the really big game. The big game involves the packaging of Christianity to suit the taste and appetites of the American consumer or

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<sup>1</sup> The Vineyard does have a family relationship with Pentecostals and charismatics via our shared belief in the contemporary miraculous work of the Holy Spirit the continuity of all biblical gifts of the Spirit and validity of signs and wonders. Unlike some "charismatics" the Vineyard teaches that the so called baptism in the Spirit occurs at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13) and does not teach tongues as a necessary evidence of the Spirit's baptism. Thus, while sharing charismatic belief in the continued existence of all the charismata, the Vineyard has much in common (at least doctrinally) with the conservative evangelical wing of the church.

the necessities of the television medium. A person in Missouri who believes a chicken was raised from the dead is hardly a national religious phenomenon. Consumer centered “Christianity” is, however, a major problem for the church in the 90s (II Tim. 4:3).

Finally, by way of introduction, MacArthur doesn't rebuke charismatics as a person would rebuke a member of one's own family. The book reads like hostile fire shot by an outsider. The tone, as will be seen by the numerous pejorative adjectives that MacArthur uses to describe charismatics, is anything but familial or irenic. It is one thing to have your child spanked by your spouse. It is quite another thing to have your child spanked by a stranger. Charismatics understandably react to being spanked by someone who intentionally positions himself as a stranger and not as a “dear friend, fellow worker... and [brother]” (Philem. 1, 2).

## I. Arguing Against Straw Men

Throughout this entire book, MacArthur has chosen to exaggerate the weaknesses of the charismatic viewpoint by selecting examples of the worst or the weakest of charismatic proponents rather than the best. Examples of this technique, fighting against the weakest of his opponents, are too numerous to exhaustively catalogue (since this flaw repeatedly runs through the entirety of *Charismatic Chaos*). However, I will, for the sake of fairness, mention just five examples to prove my point.

### A. Do Kindergarten Sunday School materials fairly represent the charismatic movement?

In his chapter titled, “Is the Gift of Tongues for Today,” MacArthur begins with a quote from charismatic Sunday school literature designed to teach kindergarten children to speak in tongues. He writes,

[This literature designed for kindergarten children] is titled “I've been filled with the Holy Spirit!!!” and is an eight page coloring book. One page has a caricature of a smiling weight-lifter with a T-shirt that says, “Spirit Man.” Under him is printed “1 Corinthians 14:4 – He that speaks in an unknown tongue builds himself up.”

Another page features a boy that looks like Howdy Doody with his hands lifted up. A dotted outline pictures where his lungs would be. (This evidently represents his spirit.) Inside the lung-shaped diagram is printed, “Bah-le odma ta lah-se ta no-mo.”<sup>2</sup>

After describing this kindergarten book for children, MacArthur summarizes his view of the matter saying, “*That expresses the typical charismatic perspective*” (emphasis added).<sup>3</sup>

It hardly needs stating that a comic book designed for children in kindergarten is not the best or most sophisticated theological thinking on a subject. Obviously, a thorough study of Sunday school literature for kindergartners in noncharismatic churches might similarly find unsophisticated explanations of a whole range of doctrines dear to most Christians. The only conceivable reason for using this kind of example is to portray charismatics as moronic. Why did he not, rather, tackle more scholarly expositions of the phenomenon of tongues by such people as Russell Spittler, Gordon Fee, Killian McDonald, or Kevin Ranaghan?<sup>4</sup> It certainly is not to MacArthur's credit to argue against Sunday school material rather than serious scholarly work.

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> See also Larry Christenson, ed., *Welcome Holy Spirit* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), chapter 43, pp. 265 ff.

## **B. Are charismatic anti-medicine?**

In his chapter on healing titled “Does God Still Heal?” MacArthur opens with the tragedy of Hobart Freeman’s “Glory Barn.” He describes Freeman’s extreme belief that submitting to a doctor’s remedy was to expose oneself to demonic influence. He then mentions that over the years, “at least ninety church members died as a result of ailments that would have been easily treatable” (p. 194). His use of Freeman as an opening example seems to imply that Freeman is somehow representative of mainstream charismatic or Pentecostal teaching about healing. MacArthur ought to know that this is absolutely untrue. Instead of beginning his chapter with Hobart Freeman, (giving the impression that this is mainstream thinking in the charismatic movement) why not, rather, open with the more thoughtful proponents of divine healing such as John Wimber, Francis MacNutt, or even 19th century proponents of divine healing such as A.J. Gordon, Andrew Murray, or A.B. Simpson? No mainstream charismatic or Pentecostal proponent of healing subscribes to the antimedicine views popularized by Hobart Freeman. Indeed, Freeman’s severest critics have come from within the charismatic camp!

## **C. Do charismatics build shrines to tortillas?**

In his chapter titled “Does God Do Miracles Today”, MacArthur begins with the bizarre story of Maria Rubio of Lake Arthur, New Mexico, who was frying tortillas in her kitchen when she noticed that one of them seemed to have the likeness of a face etched in burn marks. She concluded that it was Jesus and even built a crude shrine for the tortilla. Thousands of people visited the “Shrine of the Jesus of the Holy Tortilla” and concluded that it was, indeed, a modern day miracle. “I do not know why this happened to me,” Mrs. Rubio said, “but God has come into my life through this tortilla” (p. 107). MacArthur goes on to record another bizarre story of a man who discovered an image of Jesus on the side of a pizzeria in Deptford Township, New Jersey. In considering whether God performs miracles after the apostolic era closed, why not, rather, interact with a long line of defenders of miracles in the church’s history going back to Justin Martyr, The Shepherd of Hermas, Irenaeus, or even St. Augustine in his “Retractions?” The reader searches in vain for any meaningful interaction in this book with the best proponents of post-apostolic miracles.

## **D. Do charismatics deny the authority of Scripture?**

In his chapter titled, “Prophets, Fanatics, or Heretics?” MacArthur goes beyond portraying charismatics as fools to lumping them together with cult leaders such as Sun Myung Moon, Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, Edgar Cayce, and L. Ron Hubbard. MacArthur, again, never lets the mainstream of the Pentecostal or charismatic movement speak for itself, preferring rather to pretend that high views of Scripture’s authority are non-existent in the movement. He even asserts that “charismatic celebrities barely even give lip service to Biblical authority” (p. 17). Perhaps celebrities (I don’t know to whom he is referring) have not given lip service. The mainstream certainly has spoken volumes.

The mainstream is well represented by the Assemblies of God statement on Scripture that reads: “The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments, are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible authoritative rule of faith and conduct (2 Tim. 3:15–17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Peter 1:21).” Noteworthy is the conservative belief in Scripture’s “verbal inspiration.” Indeed, the Assemblies of God church became the largest member church of the National Association of Evangelicals shortly after the NAE’s founding in 1942. An Assemblies pastor was chosen president of the NAE in 1960. Its conservative evangelical pedigree should thus be assured to all but the most suspicious critics.

To preserve conformity with this Statement of Faith and historic orthodoxy, the Assemblies of God set up a Commission on Doctrinal Purity to review possibly deviant teachings of individual ministries. In examining the movement as a whole, Russell Spittler, a New Testament professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and a recognized scholar regarding Pentecostal spirituality, calls belief in the Bible’s ultimate authority one of the most significant traits of Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality.

J. Rodman Williams in the introduction of volume one of his *Renewal Theology* affirms the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the objective rule of Christian truth. As a professor of theology at

Regent University (a charismatic institution) Dr. Williams is a credible voice for the charismatic point of view regarding the authority of the Scripture. He writes,

To be sure, the Holy Spirit guides into all truth, and the Christian community profoundly knows the things of God through the indwelling Spirit; however, there is the continuing need for the authority of Holy Scripture. Without such, because of human fallibility, truth soon becomes compounded with error. “What does the Scripture say?” is the critical question that must undergird all theological work.

It should be immediately added that there can be no basic difference between the truth the Christian community knows through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and what is set forth in Scripture. Since all Scripture is “God-breathed” (which means “God Spirited”) or Spirit given, it is the same Holy Spirit at work in both Scripture and community. However, in terms of that which is authoritative and therefore normative, what is written in Scripture always has the primacy. It tests and judges every affirmation of faith and doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

In the book titled, *Pentecostal Preaching*, by R.H. Hughes, Hughes sets forth several of the basics of Pentecostal preaching. Hughes' first major point is that true Pentecostal preaching centers on the Word of God. He states:

Pentecostals have been so identified by an emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit that some observers overlook the fact that a cardinal principle of Pentecostalism has always been strict adherence, first and foremost, to the Bible. For one properly to understand the role of Pentecostal preaching, this basic first principle — the centrality of the Word of God — will have to be kept in mind... For Pentecostals today the Word is central in all life practices as well as to all doctrine. It is both the manual by which to operate and the standard by which to judge. To think otherwise, or to try to understand Pentecostalism from any other perspective, is erroneous.<sup>6</sup>

Hughes goes on to state that Pentecostal preaching must always exalt Jesus Christ. He states that preaching that extols anything “other than the grace manifested in the person and work of Jesus Christ is not Pentecostal preaching no matter how it is labeled.”<sup>7</sup>

#### **E. Do charismatics believe “zapping” results in instant sanctification?**

In his chapter “What is True Spirituality?” MacArthur states:

For the typical charismatic, the gateway to spirituality is through an experience, usually speaking in tongues. The term actually used by some charismatics is “zapped.” It accurately describes the way most charismatics view sanctification. People in my congregation tell me when they have talked with charismatics about spirituality and have admitted that they have never had an ecstatic experience, the charismatic person would say, “Well, may Jesus zap you!”<sup>8</sup>

I have been around thousands of charismatics and Pentecostals in my life and I have never met anyone who has ever said, “May Jesus zap you!” Why did MacArthur choose to use such ludicrous language in arguing against a subsequent experience of the Holy Spirit? Why not, rather, deal with the best proponents of post-salvation experiences of the Holy Spirit such as Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, D.L. Moody, John Wesley, or R.A. Torrey? Indeed, one can search long and hard in MacArthur's book and never discover that many (presumably non-tongue speakers) have believed in subsequent experiences of the Holy Spirit that they labeled the “Baptism with the Holy Spirit.” And sadly, this demonstrates MacArthur's repeated tendency to deal with the weakest rather than the strongest of his opponents and their arguments.

MacArthur further shows a profound ignorance of charismatic and Pentecostal doctrine when he suggests that “the charismatic movement has flourished primarily because it promises a shortcut to spiritual maturity.... Is there really a short-cut to sanctification?.... Many charismatics insist that once you get the

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<sup>5</sup> J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: God, the World & Redemption. Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective Vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> R.H. Hughes, *Pentecostal Preaching*, (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 249.

baptism of the Spirit, spirituality is yours.”<sup>9</sup> MacArthur clearly does not understand what the vast majority of charismatics and Pentecostals teach regarding the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. While the holiness variety of Pentecostalism does teach a second definite work — a post-conversion cleansing experience that enhances personal holiness — these holiness churches do not call that the “Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” Even among Pentecostal holiness churches, the Baptism in the Holy Spirit is provided not for personal holiness, but for empowerment for Christian service such as missionary evangelism or pastoral leadership. But apart from the holiness churches, the main body of charismatics and Pentecostals view sanctification along Reformed lines, progressing from conversion to death via traditional means of sanctification such as prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and service.

If MacArthur studied the matter, he could read numerous documents suggesting a Reformed viewpoint regarding sanctification from the International Church of the Four Square Gospel, The Assemblies of God churches, and The Open Bible Standard churches. This Reformed emphasis is also found in Vineyard churches.

In sum, MacArthur is really fighting a paper tiger when he suggests that Pentecostals or charismatics believe the “Baptism in the Spirit” or speaking in tongues provides instant spirituality. Mainstream Pentecostals and charismatics teach no such thing. Even in popular books of Pentecostal teaching, there is a clearly noted distinction between spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit. Yet MacArthur is content to leave a false and misleading impression among those not familiar with Pentecostal and charismatic teaching.

## **F. Why should MacArthur stop fighting straw men?**

Because *Charismatic Chaos* is so severely marred by the technique of arguing against straw men, perhaps it would be helpful to suggest three reasons why MacArthur ought to abandon this argumentative style (which unfortunately characterizes nearly all his writings).

1. The same technique can be applied to modern fundamentalism of which MacArthur is a representative and to Christianity in general. One would not have to search too hard to find fundamentalists who believe in an especially inspired King James Version, a dictation theory of inspiration, or who have written fantastic books of prophetic schemes regarding the Middle East, which have proven to be absolutely false. Likewise, false and foolish statements from sincere nonfundamentalist Christians abound. Yet, it would be totally unfair to charge the best proponents of fundamentalism or Christianity with holding the views of their less sophisticated or educated brethren.

2. By arguing with the weakest of your opponents, one proves absolutely nothing. One may appear to win, but the victory is false and hollow. The already convinced will applaud MacArthur and thank him for his thoughtful analysis (p. 13), but more objective observers watching the battle can rightly conclude that MacArthur either did not understand his opponents' better arguments or did not have the ammunition to defeat them.

3. Perhaps most serious of all, arguing against straw men is unbecoming of a mature Christian. Micah 6:8 says, “He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Pinning a position to a Christian brother that he does not hold just to make him look foolish (or to win a cheap victory) is not just, merciful, nor does it display humility before God. After reading MacArthur's book it could be asked: What price such a Pyrrhic victory?

## **II. The Tendency To Use Negative Labels**

Perhaps the worst flaw in MacArthur's argumentative style is his tendency to label his opponents with excessively negative and pejorative adjectives. MacArthur wonders in his introduction why he has received

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.249–252.

such strident opposition to his books from charismatics. He suggests, “The Biblical challenge is not to avoid truth that is controversial, but to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). I have endeavored to do that.” Is this, indeed, true? Has MacArthur endeavored, throughout his book, to “speak the truth in love?” He goes on to say that “most charismatics fall back on the all too easy defense that virtually every critique of their movement is unfair and unkind. Non-charismatics, intimidated by that accusation, are effectively silenced.”<sup>10</sup> Perhaps MacArthur would understand why charismatics find it difficult to receive his message if he would go through his book, page by page, and simply note the disparaging labels he used and the accusations he made of his opponents' motivations, intelligence, and orthodoxy.

In his chapter on the Third Wave, MacArthur accuses the Third Wave of “rolling like a destructive tsunami, leaving chaos and confusion in its wake” (p.131); toning down his [Wimber's] claims because he was being observed by objective observers (p. 133); badly corrupting the message of the gospel (p. 136); pragmatism (p. 141); being un-Biblical (p. 142); not believing in the deity of Christ (p. 143); being syncretistic (p. 148); and, engaged in a carefully crafted image that is the result of a skillful marketing campaign, attempting to sell the movement to noncharismatic evangelicals (p. 148).

In other places in *Charismatic Chaos*, he accuses charismatics and Pentecostals of being immoral (p. 21); “keen but clueless” (p. 40); anti-intellectual (p. 40); not far removed from existentialism, humanism, paganism (p.41); and, being “perilously close to neo-baalism” (p.43). It is difficult to dialogue with somebody who is as abusive and caustic as MacArthur is in his attacks on charismatics. He expresses surprise that charismatics become defensive when he simply “speaks the truth in love” to them. Perhaps if MacArthur stopped labeling and vilifying charismatics, they might find it easier to listen to him. (Later on I will devote an entire section to MacArthur's charges against John Wimber).

Moreover, MacArthur uses terms such as “neo-orthodox” and “Roman Catholic” in describing some of the tendencies of the charismatic movement. Unfortunately, MacArthur displays no real appreciation of just what neo-orthodoxy or Roman Catholicism is about. His understanding of neo-orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism is superficial and entirely negative. While he may have read a book by Karl Barth or Emil Brunner, no one would believe that after reading his remarks on neo-orthodoxy. Likewise, he displays no current understanding of Roman Catholicism as treated by men like Hans Kung. For MacArthur, neo-orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are simply negative labels to be pinned to the chests of charismatics.

### III. Fallacies Of Causation

It is commonplace in philosophy to distinguish between causation and correlation. Because A and B happen near each other, does not mean that A caused B. Thus if the stock market goes up the same day the Yankees win, it does not mean the Yankees' victory caused the stock market rise.

#### A. Does charismatic belief cause immoral behavior?

Throughout MacArthur's book, he regularly charges charismatics and Pentecostals with every type of sin imaginable. Thus, in MacArthur's first chapter, he mentions the appalling sex scandals that have occurred among ostensibly Spirit-filled charismatic leaders. In an especially hysterical paragraph MacArthur states:

...such scandals are the legacy of a movement that touts spectacular signs and wonders as the only irrefutable verification of true spirituality. To authenticate their claims, some charismatic leaders resort to fraudulent or simulated 'miracles.' Spirituality is viewed as an external issue; godly character is nonessential to those who believe supernatural phenomena validate their claims to speak for God. Such a system breeds duplicity, trickery, charlatanism, and fraud.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

While MacArthur goes on to say he is not attempting to charge all charismatics with the broad brush of immorality or charlatanism, clearly he believes there is a causal connection between charismatic beliefs and sexual immorality, and fraud.

Unfortunately, MacArthur never demonstrates biblically how belief in tongues or the “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” makes one more susceptible to immorality or chicanery. No empirical evidence is cited that charismatic and Pentecostal pastors or leaders are more susceptible to immorality than non-charismatic leaders and pastors. Televangelists' well publicized sins do not necessarily translate down to the man or woman in the pews or the shepherd caring for those men and women. In fact, sexual immorality is among the most abhorrent sins in the culturally conservative Pentecostal movement.

Immorality is, tragically, a phenomenon that seems to know no denominational boundaries. Indeed, several very prominent dispensational and fundamentalist leaders have had to step down from radio ministries, para-church leadership, and pastorates because of sexual immorality. One might more realistically point to the sex-drenched culture of the modern western world, the cult of sexual self-expression, and the absence of the practice of spiritual disciplines as more likely explanations for the fall of charismatic pastors than their experience of speaking in tongues.

## **B. Does belief in all the Biblical gifts of the Spirit cause sloppy exegesis?**

MacArthur devotes the better part of a chapter to describing exegetical weaknesses in charismatic literature, and suggests that there is a causal connection between belief in charismatic experiences and sloppy exegesis. Yet, in his chapter, he never tells us why someone who believes in the present day existence of all the gifts of the Spirit, including tongues, would be any more likely to exegete his or her Bible more sloppily than someone who doesn't believe in the present existence of these gifts. Indeed, Gordon Fee, the well-known Pentecostal Bible scholar, wrote (with Douglas Stuart) one of the best popular books on Bible interpretation, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*.<sup>12</sup> Again, there is no empirical evidence cited for more sloppiness in exegesis among charismatics than among non-charismatics. A casual survey of Christian bookstores would yield shelves of books produced by non-charismatics on topics like eschatology, counseling, and men's and women's roles based on extremely questionable exegetical methods. D.A. Carson, a noncharismatic, wrote an entire book titled *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), in which he cites example after example of fallacious arguments made in popular Christian books. Most of the examples that Carson cites are from non-charismatic sources.

MacArthur himself falls prey to many of the errors that he claims are the special purview of charismatics. While MacArthur yielded to the temptation to tar the charismatic movement with poor interpretive methods, sloppy exegesis — like sexual immorality — knows no denominational bounds. It cannot be laid at the feet of any period in church history (it is found in all periods), nor can it be laid at the feet of any particular denomination (all the denominations fall short of perfectly interpreting the scriptures).

## **C. Do charismatic churches produce spiritual casualties?**

MacArthur states:

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<sup>12</sup> In addition to this popular treatment, Dr. Fee has written *New Testament Exegesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), a more scholarly handling of the subject. Dr. Fee, professor of New Testament at Regent College, Vancouver B.C. has recently been named to replace F.F. Bruce as editor of the prestigious evangelical *New International Commentary* series on the New Testament.

Charismatic chaos is usually not physically fatal, but the movement is littered with *spiritual* casualties. I received a letter from a Christian man whose wife became entangled with a fanatic charismatic assembly. He wrote me for counsel, brokenhearted, “She got involved with a group of charismatic women and they convinced her I was not saved since I didn’t speak in tongues, etc. as they taught her to do... finally, she left and filed for divorce two months ago. It will soon be final.”<sup>13</sup>

Again, no empirical evidence is cited to show either that people who are charismatics are more likely (than non-charismatics) to divorce. Nor is there any evidence that the charismatic movement is “more littered with spiritual casualties” than non-charismatics. Indeed, if the findings of books such as *Toxic Faith Understanding and Overcoming Religious Addiction* (Nashville: Oliver–Nelson, 1991) are taken as accurate, fundamentalist churches often produce at least as many spiritual casualties as charismatic churches. Sadly, there are dozens of Fundamentalist Anonymous groups nationwide and the Christian Research Institute has received many reports of “casualties” from non-charismatic churches. In any case, there does not appear to be any causal connection between mainstream charismatic beliefs and becoming a spiritual casualty.

#### IV. False Models and False Questions

In chapter 9, titled “Does God Still Heal?” MacArthur lays out a six pronged test, supposedly derived from the Bible to evaluate whether someone possesses a true gift of healing. The model includes the following:

1. Jesus (and the Apostles) healed with a word or a touch.
2. Jesus (and the Apostles) healed instantly.
3. Jesus (and the Apostles) healed totally.
4. Jesus (and the Apostles) healed everyone.
5. Jesus (and the Apostles) healed organic diseases.
6. Jesus (and the Apostles) raised the dead.

To this list, MacArthur added a seventh point Jesus (and the Apostles) could use their miraculous gifts at will.<sup>14</sup>

As MacArthur applies his supposedly biblically derived model he finds (not surprisingly) that modern healers do not meet the Biblical tests as outlined above. Many modern healings are delayed or are partial. Beyond that, no one heals everyone and there are few verified reports of raisings from the dead. Therefore, MacArthur concludes, whatever the source of the so called modern gift of healing, it cannot be of God. MacArthur's use of a self-constructed model to prove his case may indicate the contrived nature of this form of argumentation. Beyond this, model construction is a game that anyone can play. There is no necessary (or Biblical) requirement to use the criteria for healing that MacArthur supposedly distilled from the scriptures. Indeed, one could quite reasonably construct a “Biblical” model that would embrace, or would validate the current claim of healing gifts. For example, the criteria for evaluating a healing gift might be:

1. Jesus (and the Apostles) gave glory to God whenever a person was healed.
2. Jesus (and the Apostles) general healed people not to prove anything about themselves, but from a motive of compassion.

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<sup>13</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 159.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 210–215.

3. In every healing faith is required either in the person being healed or in the person praying for the healing, or a third party (e.g., the paralytic's friends; Jairus's daughter).
4. Jesus (and the Apostles) were selective in their choice of whom to heal.

Each of my criteria can easily be derived from scripture.<sup>15</sup>

A decade has passed since the silliness of model making was pressed home to me while carrying on a discussion with a Muslim. A Muslim, whom I was attempting to evangelize, tried to prove to me that Mohammed, and not Jesus, was the Prophet spoken of in Deuteronomy 18. In Deuteronomy 18, verse 15, Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet *like me* from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” The Muslim man said, “Mohammed is like Moses and is, therefore, the Prophet. But Jesus is not like Moses.” I asked, “On what basis do you make this assertion?” He answered, “Well, first, Moses was a political leader and Mohammed was a political leader. But Jesus was not a political leader. Secondly, Moses fought military campaigns, Mohammed fought military campaigns, but Jesus did not fight military campaigns. Third, Moses was a shepherd. Mohammed was a shepherd, but Jesus was not a shepherd. Fourth, Moses spent many years in the desert. Mohammed spent many years in the desert, but Jesus spent almost no time in the desert.” To this list he added several other criteria that he felt proved his case almost completed.

My response to his self-constructed model was to point out that his criteria were not necessarily the only criteria to evaluate “the Prophet's” likeness to Moses. I gave him my own “off-the-cuff” criteria. First, Moses was a Jew. Jesus was a Jew, but Mohammed was not a Jew. Second, Moses had a beard. Jesus had a beard, but Mohammed did not have a beard. Third, Moses was nearly killed at birth by an evil king. Jesus was nearly killed at birth by an evil king, but Mohammed was not threatened at birth by an evil king. I could go on, but I think the point of the foolishness of these kinds of arguments is made!

More importantly, MacArthur fails to see that the Biblical evidence doesn't even fit his own self-constructed model. For example, under criterion number 4, MacArthur states that the Apostles were able to heal anyone. Yet, Paul, who had a Biblical gift of healing, states in 2 Timothy 4:20, “...I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.” Why didn't Paul heal Trophimus rather than leave him, presumably to recuperate, if, as MacArthur states, the Apostles were able to heal anyone? Paul himself claims that the reason he ended up in Galatia was because of a personal illness (that he apparently he could not heal himself). In Galatians 4:13–14, Paul writes, “As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn.”

Finally, MacArthur seems to poke fun at John Wimber for claiming to have the gift of healing<sup>16</sup> while having to acknowledge his own personal heart condition. The same embarrassment can apparently be laid at the feet of Paul.

## **V. Do Charismatic Media Personalities Fairly Represent the Mainstream Movement?**

A person does not have to read MacArthur's book too long before coming to the conclusion that MacArthur's understanding of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements is an outsider's viewpoint that has been chiefly informed by over-exposure to charismatic media. In short, MacArthur displays the characteristics of a man who understands American culture only through the lens of Hollywood media. Just as Hollywood is not representative of America, charismatic media stars, The Trinity Broadcasting

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<sup>15</sup> For example, in John, Chapter 5 Jesus chose to heal only one man at the pool of Bethesda. There is no evidence that despite the presence of many, many sick people at Bethesda, Jesus healed more than the one man.

<sup>16</sup> John Wimber doesn't claim to possess “a special healing gift.” Wimber simply believes that all Christians should pray for the sick. If they do, many sick people will be healed.

Network, and *Charisma* magazine do not represent the 400 million Pentecostals and charismatic Christian believers worldwide.

Reading MacArthur's examples of charismatic foolishness (taken chiefly from television and magazine sources) reminds me of a conversation I had with a high school student in England in 1986. The high school student remarked to me, "You Americans are so cool. You get to race around in sports cars and the women in America are gorgeous. I want to go to America when I get out of high school!" I asked him why he thought that all Americans raced around in sport cars and that all American women were gorgeous. He said he watched "Miami Vice" on television all the time! As a result of watching "Miami Vice" this high school student thought he understood America!

Rather than watch so many charismatic celebrities on television, MacArthur might have put his time to better use reading Russell Spittler's helpful history of the Pentecostal movement. Spittler writes: "When the total figures are combined for classical Pentecostals along with charismatics from Anglican, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and mainline Protestant sectors, the sum exceeds the size of [non-charismatic] Protestantism as a whole."<sup>17</sup> If for no other reason than statistical dominance, MacArthur ought to have more carefully analyzed the movement as a whole. Again, Spittler writes:

If some varieties of Christians are geographically uniform and predictable, Pentecostals are neither. Certain features nearly always occur, yet the variety is astonishing. Who are the Pentecostals, the charismatics? How do the two differ? Some distinctions are in order. Pentecostals and charismatics of every variety are distinguished by their emphasis on the Holy Spirit and their beliefs in the contemporary relevance of the gifts of the Spirit. As a whole, they all reflect a conservative Christian orthodoxy. They value personal religious renewal. They value a restorationist impulse, a bent to an often idealized "church of the New Testament." But there the similarities end. For example, while Pentecostals generally insist on speaking in tongues as "the initial physical evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit", not all Pentecostals around the world do, nor in their origins did teach, that speaking in tongues is the necessary physical evidence of the baptism. In fact, the vast majority of contemporary charismatics do not affirm the necessity of tongues; indeed, that is an incidence among charismatics as one of the principle features that distinguishes them from Pentecostals.<sup>18</sup>

MacArthur seems to be totally unaware of the difference between Pentecostals and charismatics and lumps the two together as a monolithic whole. Spittler summarizes the distinctions between the Pentecostal and charismatic movement this way:

Pentecostalism arose in the first half of this century, charismatics in the second half. Pentecostals formed the classical Pentecostal denomination; charismatics remained in their own churches, the mainstream ones. Most (though not all) Pentecostals insist on tongues as initial evidence; charismatics generally speak in tongues, but do not make it a matter of necessity. Pentecostals teach a strict subsequence of vital Christian experience; two, in the case of baptistic Pentecostals; and, three, in Wesleyan Pentecostalism. Charismatics, on the other hand, find ways to fit charismatic experience and renewal into their existing ecclesiastical and theological traditions.<sup>19</sup>

MacArthur also does not take account of cultural differences in the charismatic movement. For example, over 50 million charismatics and Pentecostals live in Africa. Over 60 million live in East Asia. There are approximately 80 million in Latin America and only 80 million in North America.<sup>20</sup> The charismatic and Pentecostal movements are not North American media phenomena, although one would have the impression by reading MacArthur's book that they are a narrow, exclusively white, North American phenomena.

Contrary to MacArthur's assertion about rampant sexual immorality, Pentecostals, at least the North American varieties, are likely to reflect the strict mores rising from their holiness and fundamentalist

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<sup>17</sup> Russell Spittler, "The Pentecostal View," chapter in *Christian Spirituality, Five Views of Sanctification*, Donald Alexander, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), p. 134.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>20</sup> David Barrett, "Statistics," in *Directory of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess and Gary McGee, eds., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 816–817.

origins. In short, MacArthur's entire book is devoid of even the more general distinctions that any knowledgeable observer of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements would know as a matter of course. Indeed, Pentecostal or charismatic insiders will not be able to recognize themselves in MacArthur's media-based view of the movement.

## VI. Is There Any Fruit From the Charismatic Movement?

Implicit in MacArthur's wholesale attack on the charismatic movement is that it is not derived from the Holy Spirit and therefore, has borne only bad fruit. He suggests that the fruit of the charismatic movement is entirely negative and, among other things, has “created divisions” (p. 293), “encourages mysticism” (p. 292), “denigrates reason” (p. 292), “leads to spiritual casualties” etc. Is there any fruit in the charismatic movement? “Surely, if the movement is of God,” MacArthur asks, “we ought to find abundant fruit.” Yet, MacArthur looks about him and sees no fruit at all. Perhaps the lens that he looks at the charismatics through is less than clear. A Christian approaching the charismatic movement without a clouded lens, might see the following.

### A. The Fruit of Remarkable Growth Worldwide.

According to David Barrett<sup>21</sup> Pentecostals numbered approximately 1.2 million in the year 1900. By 1990, that number had grown to over 400 million. As a percentage of worldwide Christianity, the Pentecostal and charismatic movements represented something less than .5% in 1900. That number has grown to almost 25% in 1990. The number of Pentecostal churches has grown from 15,000 in 1900 to 1.5 million in 1990. Giving among charismatics and Pentecostals to Christian causes has grown from 3 million dollars in 1900 to 37 billion dollars in 1990. Charismatic church organizations have grown from 120 in 1900 to 13,800 in 1990. The majority of the fifty or so mega-churches the world's largest single congregations, each with over 50,000 members — are Pentecostal/charismatic.

Particularly impressive is the church growth rate among Third World believers. The growth of Christianity in China, particularly since 1976, has been a phenomenon unmatched in Christian history. When Western missionaries were driven out of China in 1949–1950, they left about one million Protestant believers. Since the Communist takeover in 1949, Christians multiplied. By the mid-1980s, the number was conservatively estimated at over 50 million, with some suggesting twice that number. Two expert China-watchers suggest that 85% of Chinese believers would be “phenomenological Pentecostal-charismatics.”<sup>22</sup> Such amazing growth can be observed in much of the rest of the Third World. As Patrick Johnstone put it:

The harvest of people into the Kingdom of God in recent years has been unprecedented. Never in history has such a high percentage of the world's population been exposed to the Gospel, nor the increase of evangelical Christians been so encouraging. Although there are many factors that have combined to produce this growth, among the most significant according to most observers has been the explosive increase of Pentecostal and charismatic movements.<sup>23</sup>

### B. The Fruit of Evangelism.

Evangelism has been a priority among Pentecostals throughout their history. The historical self-image of the major Pentecostal church bodies is that they were raised up to be an instrument of evangelism in the world. Traditionally, therefore, it has been felt that to be a Pentecostal is to be an evangelistic witness. Pentecostals see aggressive evangelism in the pages of the New Testament and due to their high regard for

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.812.

<sup>22</sup> C. Peter Wagner, “Church Growth” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 182–183.

<sup>23</sup> Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World: A Day-to-Day Guide to Praying for the World* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1987), p. 35.

their Bible and their literal interpretation of Scripture, they interpret the Pentecostal experience as a mandate for evangelism in its various forms and methods.<sup>24</sup>

Pentecostals believe that redemption is the central purpose of God in Scripture and evangelism as the comprehensive method for fulfilling that purpose. Pentecostals' Biblical literalism has caused them to be aggressively obedient to the Great Commission passages in the gospel. Pentecostal understanding of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit connects it with the evangelistic task and suggests that evangelism is the primary result of the Holy Spirit's baptism (Acts 1:8). Contrary to MacArthur's contention that tongues is central to the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, *evangelism occupies the central place in thinking among Pentecostals regarding the Spirit's baptism*.<sup>25</sup> In his classic book *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, first published in 1949, Donald Gee contends that evangelism was a natural expression of the spiritual gifts of 1 Corinthians 12.<sup>26</sup>

The evangelism of Pentecostals centers on the gospel or Good News. Pentecostals believe that evangelism is the act of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit with the intention that men and women will come to put their trust in Christ for salvation and serve him in the fellowship of his church.<sup>27</sup> Pentecostals suggest that the telling in Pentecostal evangelism can involve more than verbal proclamation but is never a substitute for verbal proclamation. Pentecostals and charismatics understand that divine healing can be an evangelistic door opener, but is in no way a substitute for the gospel message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I am unaware of any responsible Pentecostals who suggest that the Good News is replaced by, or made subservient to, supernatural signs and wonders. Rather, supernatural signs and wonders are claimed only to open the door for or accompany the gospel message. The Pentecostal and charismatic movement has borne the fruit of evangelism.

### **C. The Fruit of World Missions.**

Pentecostals from the beginning have been known as “doers.” Pentecostal mission theology has tended to be a theology on the move. Eschatological urgency is at the heart of understanding the missionary fervor of Pentecostalism. “Eschatology,” says Danboriena, “belongs to the essence of Pentecostalism.”<sup>28</sup> Pentecostals from the outset have been involved in a variety of strategies that have contributed to the astonishing world mission growth.

These strategies include:

1. Indigenous churches. Pentecostal missions have sought from their inception to develop indigenous churches. Indeed, Pentecostal missionary Melvin Hodges' book, *The Indigenous Church* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), has become a standard on the subject in evangelical circles. His numerous other books have further earned him respect in missiological circles.

2. Church planting. Pentecostals stress the importance of planting responsible reproducing congregations as the abiding fruit of world evangelization and generally measure their progress by the number of new congregations put in order.

3. Urban strategy. Pentecostal growth and urbanization have developed side by side.

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<sup>24</sup> L.G. McClurg, Jr., “Evangelism,” *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 284.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>26</sup> Donald Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1979).

<sup>27</sup> “Evangelism,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 285.

<sup>28</sup> P. Danboriena, *Tongues As of Fire: Pentecostalism in Contemporary Christianity*, p. 82.

4. Literature distribution. John Thomas Nichol in his book, *Pentecostalism* (Plainfield, J.J.: Logos International, 1971), lists among some fifteen causes for the initial success of Pentecostalism the strong emphasis given to tabloid size newspapers and other early publications. Publishing ministries are a high priority in all major Pentecostal groups.

5. Mission stewardship. Pentecostals have given generously to the cause of world missions since the early days of the movement. In the pioneering years, whole families sold their possessions and started for the field or supported others who went. In the classic Pentecostal denominations, mission budgets continue to receive the largest share of donations. Mission stewardship has received number one priority from the outset.<sup>29</sup>

#### **D. The Practice of the Priesthood of Every Believer.**

While the priesthood of every believer was doctrinally recovered during the Reformation, Pentecostalism especially put the believer's priesthood into practice in the modern world. Sociological and historical studies have reflected on the humble social origin of the Pentecostals and the development of preachers from the common people of the poorer classes. Since they have not had a long history of formal theological training for professional clergy, the Pentecostals have emphasized that *all in the body of Christ are ministers and everyone is a preacher*. C. Peter Wagner's study of Latin American Pentecostalism found aggressive layministry as a key factor in Pentecostal growth.<sup>30</sup> Further, a large part of the dynamic world wide growth of the Pentecostal movement has been due to the higher percentage of women ministers and missionaries in Pentecostal groups per capita than in their evangelical counterparts.<sup>31</sup> While maintaining a conservative view of male leadership, Paul Yonggi Cho has espoused the leadership and involvement of women as a key ingredient in the successful growth of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea.<sup>32</sup>

In John Wimber's teaching on spiritual gifts, in general, and healing in particular, equipping all the saints for the work of ministry is the predominant theme. Indeed, the magazine of John Wimber's vineyard ministry is titled *Equipping the Saints*. (Ephesians 4:11–13 is one of the most frequently commented upon verses in popular charismatic and Pentecostal books.) No movement in Christianity today, affirms the role and ministry of the individual non-clergy as does the charismatic movement.

#### **E. The Role of Women.**

Women have had extremely important leadership roles in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, as has happened in most awakenings and spiritually vital movements throughout Christian history. Many Pentecostal pioneers were women including Florence L. Crawford, founder of the Apostolic Faith movement in the Pacific Northwest; Marie Burges Brown, who founded Glad Tidings Tabernacle in New York City, and Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the International Church of the Four Square Gospel.

Other major figures in the Pentecostal movement in North America include the following: Carrie Judd Montgomery, a woman who was miraculously healed in 1879. She became a healing evangelist of considerable promise and her book, *The Prayer of Faith*, 1880, gained widespread circulation. Carrie Judd Montgomery became a founding member of A.B. Simpson's Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. Maria Woodworth-Etter was a woman involved in the holiness movement before she rose to prominence as an early Pentecostal leader. In 1885 she began to receive widespread attention for her teaching ministry and began preaching about divine healing. In the next four years she was “responsible for starting about a dozen churches, adding a thousand members, erecting six churches, and starting several Sunday schools. In

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<sup>29</sup> L.G. McClung, Jr., “Missiology” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 607–608.

<sup>30</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Spiritual Power in Church Growth* (Alta Monte Springs, FL: Strang Communications Co., 1986, p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> *Women In Ministry*, 1985, p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups*, (South Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1981).

addition twelve preachers were licensed as a result of her ministry.”<sup>33</sup> Woodworth– Etter was a regular speaker in the early Pentecostal movements and reportedly saw many converts during her evangelistic revival meetings.

Many women who were pioneers of the Pentecostal movement served as itinerant evangelists and missionaries. Others worked as speakers, authors and evangelists, including Rita Bennett, Ann Gimenez, and Corrie ten Boom. As in other periods of revival, women have historically enjoyed greater freedom in Pentecostal circles, as opposed to non-charismatic circles. A revival atmosphere usually includes an emphasis on evangelism, missions and a sense of the urgency of the times. Because the times are urgent, all available personnel are mobilized whether men or women, laity or clergy, within biblically appropriate role designations (see e.g., 1 Cor. 11:2–16).<sup>34</sup>

## VII. John Wimber

MacArthur directs some of his most derisive and virulent attacks against John Wimber whom he arbitrarily lumps into the Third Wave. Not only is MacArthur's tone unquestionably pejorative and unloving, but his chapter on the Third Wave is filled with factual and Biblical errors.

David Barrett the preeminent demographer of worldwide Christianity, used this definition of “third-waver” for his statistical analysis:

These are Evangelicals and other Christians who, unrelated to Pentecostalism or the charismatic Movement, have recently become filled with the Spirit, or empowered or energized by the Spirit and experiencing the Spirit's supernatural and miraculous ministry (though usually without recognizing a baptism in the Spirit separate from conversion), who exercise gifts of the Spirit (with much less emphasis on tongues, as optional or even absent or unnecessary), and emphasize signs and wonders supernatural miracles and power encounters, but who remain within their mainline nonpentecostal denominations and who do not identify themselves as either Pentecostals or charismatics.<sup>35</sup>

It is the fastest growing sector of what Barrett terms “the 20th century Pentecostal/charismatic renewal in the Holy Spirit.” Barrett estimated Third Wave Christians as amounting to 33 million in the year 1990.<sup>36</sup>

### A. Does the Vineyard have a Statement of Faith?

On page 147 MacArthur writes,

Listening to the claims of Third Wave leaders, one might conclude their movement is essentially composed of conservative evangelicals who remain strongly committed to traditional Biblical theology. The facts do not bear this out. Much of the Third Wave is difficult to classify doctrinally. Statements of Faiths and Creeds simply are not an earmark of the Third Wave. Wimber's Vineyard is typical. Another disturbing aspect of the Vineyard ministry is their lack of any written Statement of Faith. Because Vineyard members come from a variety of denominational backgrounds, the leadership has avoided setting strong doctrinal standards. This deemphasis of doctrine is also consistent with the leadership of John Wimber and Bob Fulton, (pastor of the Vineyard in Yorba Linda, California) whose backgrounds theologically include associations with Quakers, who typically express the inner experience of God and minimize the need for doctrinal expressions of one's understanding of God.

MacArthur is correct in the first sentence. The Third Wave movement is essentially composed of conservative evangelicals who remain strongly committed to traditional Biblical theology. The only accurate statement in the rest of the quote is that John Wimber had twenty years ago pastored a large conservative evangelical Quaker church. Had MacArthur simply called the Association of Vineyard

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<sup>33</sup> R.M. Riss, “Women, Role of”, in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 896.

<sup>34</sup> For further reading see John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, p. 820.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 813.

Churches and asked for the Association's doctrinal statement, or spoken to John Wimber personally, he would have been given this statement, (adopted in 1986 and currently under revision) that reads in part:

### **I. Our Convictions**

- A. WE BELIEVE that there is ONE LIVING AND TRUE GOD, eternally existing in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory that this triune God created all, upholds all, and governs all. (Matt. 28:19, Isa. 40:12–26, Isa. 46:8–11)
- B. WE BELIEVE that the SCRIPTURES of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, fully inspired, and the infallible rule of faith and practice; and that they are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through them in living power. (2 Tim. 3:14–17, Rom. 15:4, James 1:22)
- C. WE BELIEVE in GOD THE FATHER, an infinite, personal Spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, and love; that He concerns Himself merciful in the affairs of men; that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death and all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. (Matt. 6:9, Isa. 6:3, Rom. 11:33–39, Psalms 138:5–6, Matt. 7:11, Isa. 55:6–7)
- D. WE BELIEVE in JESUS CHRIST, God's only begotten Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles and teachings, His substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for His people and personal, visible return to earth. We believe that in His first coming Jesus inaugurated the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. (John 1:14–18, Luke 1:18–20, Heb. 4:15, Rom. 5:8, 1 Cor. 15:1–8, Eph. 1:20, 1 Thess. 4:16, Mark 1:14–15)
- E. WE BELIEVE in the HOLY SPIRIT, who came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify and empower for ministry all who believe in Christ; we believe the Holy spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and that He is an abiding helper, Teacher, and Guide. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit and in the exercise of all the biblical gifts of the Spirit. (John 15:26, 16:8, Titus 3:5, Acts 1:8, Rom. 8:9, Eph. 1:13, John 14:16, 1 Cor. 12:4–11)
- F. WE BELIEVE that all MEN are sinners by nature and choice and are therefore under condemnation, that God regenerates and baptizes by the Holy Spirit those who repent of their sins and confess Jesus Christ as Lord. (Eph. 2:1–10, Acts 2:38, Ezek. 36:26, John 1:12–13, John 20:9)
- G. WE BELIEVE in the universal CHURCH, the living spiritual body, of which Christ is the Head and all regenerated persons are members. (1 Cor. 12:12–13, Eph 2:19–22, 1 Peter 2:4–5)
- H. WE BELIEVE that the Lord Jesus Christ committed two ORDINANCES to the church: baptism; and the Lord's Supper. We believe in water baptism and communion open to all believers. (Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 11:23–30, Luke 3:3)
- I. WE BELIEVE also in the LAYING ON OF HANDS for empowering of the Holy Spirit, for receiving of gifts of the Spirit, for healing, and for recognition and empowering of those whom God has ordained to lead and serve the church. (Acts 13:3, Mark 6:5, 1 Tim. 4:14, 2 Tim. 1:6)
- J. WE BELIEVE in the personal, visible APPEARING OF CHRIST to earth and the consummation of His Kingdom; in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment and eternal blessing of the righteous and the eternal punishment of the wicked. (Acts 1:11, Matt. 25:31, 1 Cor. 15:20–24, Rev. 20:11, 21:8)
- K. WE BELIEVE in what is termed “THE APOSTLES' CREED” as embodying fundamental facts of Christian faith, and endorse the historic orthodox creeds of the church.

This Statement of Faith is the standard to which church plants and adoptions into the Vineyard movement must subscribe. Every Vineyard pastor subscribes to the Association's Statement of Faith. John Wimber's *Power Points: Seven Steps to Christian Growth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), also lays out his doctrinal convictions in a more extended way. No one but the most suspicious critic of Vineyard, who reads Vineyard's Statement of Faith or John Wimber's book, would conclude that Vineyard is a movement without a set of doctrinal formulations.

## **B. Does the Third Wave underemphasize traditional means of spiritual growth?**

On page 130 MacArthur writes,

Like Pentecostals and charismatics, common Third Wave adherents aggressively pursue ecstatic experiences, mystical phenomena, miraculous powers, and supernatural wonders — *while tending to under-emphasize the traditional means of spiritual growth: prayer, Bible study, the teaching of the Word, persevering in obedience and fellowship of other believers* (emphasis added).

Again, had MacArthur taken time to examine the Association Vineyard Churches Statement of Priorities or had he spoken to John Wimber personally, he would have discovered that fundamental Vineyard priorities include:

1. Worship
2. The teaching of the Bible
3. Prayer
4. Fellowship
5. Ministry
6. Training
7. Evangelism and World Missions

Our first leadership requirement is “a sincere love and pursuit of Jesus Christ demonstrated in regular personal worship, meditation on God's Word, and prayer.” Even a casual visit to a Vineyard church will disclose a significant emphasis on fellowship as demonstrated by the numerous small groups in the church, an emphasis on intercessory prayer, an emphasis on the teaching of the Bible, and an emphasis on obedience to God's word.

As a Vineyard pastor whose church numbers approximated 1200 on Sunday mornings, our Vineyard church has about 65 small groups that are designed specifically for fellowship, prayer, worship, and Bible study. (John Wimber's Anaheim Vineyard has over 100 small groups designed for similar purposes.) On Sunday morning at our church we take about 40 minutes for Biblical exposition. Our Tuesday evening Training Center for adults in the Vineyard regularly has several classes on basic Christian doctrine, Old and New Testaments surveys, and various books of the Bible. Our particular church also has numerous intercessory prayer meetings. My experience of the Vineyard movement as a whole indicates that prayer and fellowship are certainly strongly emphasized.

## **C. What is Power Evangelism?**

John MacArthur claims: “The underlying assumption that drives the whole Third Wave movement is wrong. Miracles, signs and wonders are impotent to produce either faith or genuine revival.”<sup>37</sup> To justify

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<sup>37</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 135.

this, MacArthur claims that nowhere in the book of Acts do we see power evangelism practiced. And, he claims that Jesus, himself, did not practice “power evangelism.”<sup>38</sup>

What is “power evangelism?” Let's be clear about what John Wimber means (and explicitly wrote) about his coined expression “power evangelism.” In his book titled, *Power Evangelism*, Wimber writes:

By power evangelism I mean a presentation of the gospel that is rational, but that also transcends the rational (though it is in no way 'irrational' or anti-rational). The explanation of the gospel — the clear proclamation of the finished work of Christ on the cross — comes with a demonstration of God's power through signs and wonders. Power evangelism is a spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, empowered presentation of the gospel. Power evangelism is preceded and undergirded by demonstrations of God's presence, and frequently results in groups of people being saved. Signs and wonders do not save; only Jesus and substitutionary work on the cross saves. Through these supernatural encounters people experience the presence and power of God. Usually this takes the norm of words of knowledge...healing, prophecy, and deliverance from evil spirits.<sup>39</sup>

Nowhere does this definition diminish the gospel message of the good news of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection preached with the intention that men and women will come to put their trust in Christ for salvation and serve Him in the fellowship of His church. John Wimber believes that the gospel message presented without signs and wonders can save:

Before exploring power evangelism further, however, a healthy word of clarification and caution is needed. The Bible does not teach that evangelism apart from signs and wonders is invalid, or that the addition of signs and wonders somehow changes the gospel message. *The heart and soul of evangelism is proclamation of the gospel.*<sup>40</sup>

Healings and “words of knowledge” are simply a “door opener” for the preached message. Wimber's entire purpose in presenting “power evangelism” is to suggest to modern conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists, such as John MacArthur, that eliminating signs and wonders as a “door opener” is “patently unbiblical” (to use MacArthur's phrase in *Charismatic Chaos*).

MacArthur claims that biblically “miracles do not produce a real faith in an unbelieving heart,<sup>41</sup> “Miracles, signs and wonders are impotent to produce either faith or genuine revival.”<sup>42</sup> To bolster this claim MacArthur cites the story of the healing of the lame man in Acts 4. He says the Jewish religious leaders did not deny that a miracle occurred (Acts 4:16). But the response was far from saving faith.<sup>43</sup>

There is truth in the assertion that miracles do not “produce” saving faith. But nowhere does John Wimber assert that they do. Indeed only the Holy Spirit can “produce” saving faith, that comes as a gift. Rather, signs and wonders accredit the message and messenger of salvation. They provoke the unbeliever to consider the truth claims presented by the messenger. Put another way, they help to open the door and remove roadblocks to faith and so function as an apologetic for the message. Signs, wonders, miracles, and spiritual gifts illustrate the reality of the presence and power of God to save.

It is unnecessarily narrow to restrict the mode of the gospel presentation to just preaching. God speaks through books, magazines, film, and miracles.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>39</sup> John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism: Revised and Expanded with Study Questions* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), p. 78.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> John MacArthur *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 134.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 136.

Why did MacArthur stop with Acts 4? Reading ahead five chapters to Acts 9, we find an undeniable connection between the demonstration of powerful signs and wonders and the rapid expansion of the church. For example, in Acts 9:32–35, Luke writes:

As Peter traveled about the country, he went to visit the saints in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. 'Aeneas,' Peter said to him, 'Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat.' Immediately Aeneas got up. *All those who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.*

What is it that provoked the response of faith and the turning to the Lord by the residents of Lydda and Sharon? MacArthur asserts that miracles cannot biblically produce faith in observers nor by implication can they serve as a “door opener” to the gospel. The residents of Lydda and Sharon who are now “at home with the Lord” would likely be puzzled by MacArthur's anti-supernatural assertions.

The next incident recorded in Acts 9 further demonstrates power evangelism at work. Luke goes on to write about a woman named Dorcas who had died. Luke writes: Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. *This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord*” (Acts 9:40–43). Again, what was it that removed barriers to belief in the Lord other than the raising of Tabitha from the dead? This is power evangelism in its most explicit form.

The Apostle Paul also practiced power evangelism. In Acts 13 Paul met a Jewish sorcerer and false prophet named Bar-Jesus, whom the scripture recorded:

...was an attendant of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. The proconsul, an intelligent man, sent for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 'You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.' Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord (Acts 13:7–12).

What is it that opened the proconsul's heart to trusting in the saving message of the gospel? The scripture is quite explicit. He saw the miracle wrought by the hands of the Apostle Paul, and was amazed at the authority of the teaching. Again, MacArthur selectively ignored this clear teaching of power evangelism in the book of Acts. Paul's methodology of evangelism generally included a coupling of the gospel message with “a demonstration of the Spirit's power” (1 Cor. 2:4). It would have been a surprise to people in the early church to uncouple signs and wonders from preaching for they generally prayed like Peter “Now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your Word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly” (Acts 4:29–31). Why did Peter pray for signs and wonders if, as MacArthur asserts, “they are impotent to produce faith or genuine revival?”

Do miracles produce faith? No. God does. But in the case of the citizens of Joppa, Sharon, and Lydda, miracles clearly provoke unbelievers by removing barriers to faith and illustrating the truth and power of the message. In the case of the Pharisees, it is recorded “even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (John 12:37). The difference obviously depends on the *responsiveness of the human heart, not any deficiency in miracles to provoke faith*. MacArthur may wish to reread Old Testament passages such as Exodus 4:1–6 regarding the ability God to work through miracles to produce faith. That text reads:

Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you?' Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. "This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has appeared to you."

Pharaoh refused to believe, not because the miracles could not lead to faith — they could — but because *his heart was hard*. In contrast when Aaron performed signs before the people, "they believed" (Exod. 4:31).

Indeed, Jesus invited his disciples to believe based on his miracles. In John 14:11, Jesus said, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; *or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves*." He condemned the Pharisees because they did not believe that he and the Father were one, *based on his miracles*. (John 10:38) Far from emphasizing the ineffectiveness of miracles to provoke belief, (as MacArthur asserts), Jesus' point in John 10:38 is that some Jews willfully disbelieved even when faced with the overwhelming evidence of miracles. As Jesus said later in John 15, "If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their law 'They hated me without reason.'"

MacArthur is wrong! The Pharisees were condemned because they had reason to believe Jesus and rejected the obvious evidence staring them in the face: the miraculous power of the Son of God!<sup>44</sup> When the messengers of John the Baptist asked Jesus if he was the one to come, (i.e., the Messiah) or should they expect someone else, Luke records Jesus' answer as, "go back and report back to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." (Luke 7:18–23) Jesus does not simply point to the preaching of the Word of God as the reason to believe. He points, chiefly, to his miracles.

MacArthur is so strident in his opposition to the miraculous element in Jesus' ministry that he goes so far as to say, "For Jesus, preaching the Word was more important than performing signs and wonders. The emphasis of Jesus' ministry was not miracles, but preaching. He often preached without doing signs and wonders."<sup>45</sup> To bolster his claim, MacArthur refers to Mark 1:38, "Let us go somewhere else, to the nearby villages, so I can *preach* there also. That is why I have come." However, he fails to add the next verse, which reads, "So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and *driving out demons*" (Mark 1:39, emphasis added). Why does MacArthur kick so hard against the goads? No responsible interpreter of scripture can fail to note the general coupling of the proclamation of the gospel with the demonstration of signs and wonders. Matthew 4:23–24 is one of many summary statements of Jesus' ministry in the gospel of Matthew. Matthew records:

Jesus went through Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

A similar summary statement of Jesus' ministry is found in Matthew 9:35 which reads, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness."

In the first post-Pentecost sermon, Peter addresses the crowd who have witnessed the receipt of the Holy Spirit saying, "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by

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<sup>44</sup> Matthew 12:22–37 (see also Mt. 9:34; Lk. 11:15–36) indicates that the Pharisees (and others) believed that Jesus performed miracles but that he did so by the power of Beelzebub, not by the power of God. Jesus replies, "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 9:28).

<sup>45</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 139.

miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him” (Acts 2:22). In a later sermon, again at a pivotal moment in the expansion of the gospel, Peter speaks to the gentile household of Cornelius saying, “You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached — how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:37,38).

Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews explicitly states that the salvation message announced by the Lord was first announced by the Lord, “was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will” (Heb. 2:3b–4). Clearly God confirmed the life and message of Jesus through miracles.

There is no opposition in the gospels or the book of Acts between the demonstration of power through healings and the proclamation of the evangel. Nor does the Bible support MacArthur's diminution of signs and wonders as an evangelistic “door opener.” Proclamation *and* demonstration were the normal way that the gospel proceeded in Jesus' ministry and in the ministry of the New Testament church as recorded in the book of Acts. That is John Wimber's simple, but profound, point in his book *Power Evangelism*.

#### **D. Does John Wimber believe in the deity of Jesus Christ?**

MacArthur writes on page 143,

Wimber's teaching regarding the person of Jesus Christ is careless at best, blasphemous at worst, but in any case, clearly contradictory to scripture. In his taped healing seminar, Wimber says 'Haven't you been taught that Jesus knows all things? There are many times in the gospel where Jesus doesn't know and he has to ask questions.' (MacArthur concludes): That statement denies the omniscience of Christ.

Several points can be raised regarding MacArthur's use of the unpublished tape as evidence of John Wimber's disbelief in the deity of Christ. A minor, but troubling, point is why MacArthur would use a tape of some oral remarks made by Wimber during a conference, rather than his more substantial written statements in books such as *Power Points*? It is hardly lame reasoning to suggest that many oral statements, particularly those made during preaching, or in fielding a question, may not be as well stated or articulate as one would make in written communication. Beyond the obvious point that one may say things orally that do not represent a full or complete disclosure of all of a person's thoughts on a matter, there seems to be a vindictive motive in MacArthur's publishing of old oral material. Why did he not quote Wimber's well stated and orthodox view of the deity of Christ from Wimber's own *Power Points*?

One reason MacArthur may have neglected a lengthy quotation from *Power Points*, is to leave readers (who would be unacquainted with Wimber's writings) with the absolutely misleading impression that Wimber doesn't believe in the deity of Christ. Again, MacArthur unjustly and unlovingly pins a position to an opponent, that his opponent does not believe. Quoting this oral material, without at least mentioning Wimber's written statements, is an obvious attempt to portray Wimber as a heretic.

#### **E. What does John Wimber believe about the deity of Christ?**

Since MacArthur chose not to quote Wimber's own written statements on the matter, we will, for the sake of simple fairness and justice, redress this omission. In *Power Points*, Wimber devotes an entire chapter to the deity of Jesus Christ. Chapter 17 of *Power Points* is titled, “Fully God.” It begins this way:

What does God's Word say about who Jesus is? First and foremost it says that Jesus is fully God. This is clearly stated in many passages. John says, “in the beginning was the Word” (John 1:1) — later, in verse 14, John identifies the “Word” as Jesus “and the Word was God, and *the Word was God.*” Paul says Christ, “is God overall” (Rom. 9:5) and tells us to look forward to the “glorious appearing of our *great God and Savior*, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). He says that in Christ, “*all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form*” (Col. 2:9).

Wimber goes on to write: “Jesus not only claimed to be God, he acted like God....When he received Thomas' worship, he implicitly claimed deity.”<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, Wimber is careful to explicitly deny the *kenosis* theory of the person of Christ when he writes:

‘...[the phrase in Philippians 2:7] made himself nothing’ can also be translated ‘emptied himself.’ The Greek word from which ‘emptied’ is translated is *kenosis*. Its precise meaning is unclear. Some theologians interpret *kenosis* as meaning Christ completely emptied himself of deity while on earth, so he was limited to the knowledge and abilities of an ordinary man. This interpretation comes dangerously close to denying Christ's deity. Others interpret *kenosis* as meaning Jesus retained his divine nature but *emptied himself of his divine prerogatives* — the high position and glory of his deity. *This interpretation is probably closer to the truth.* Jesus did not give up his deity, but he *did* lay aside his glory (John 17:5) and submit to the humiliation of becoming a man (2 Corinthians 8:9). The idea behind *kenosis* is not that Jesus took on humanity and took off deity as though they were coats that could be changed; it is that he took on humanity while remaining fully God.<sup>47</sup>

We read here nothing that is outside a fully orthodox view of the person and deity of Christ. Later, Wimber explicitly affirms his own personal faith in the Chalcedonian definition (which he actually quotes) and states Jesus was “at once complete in God-hood and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man...coming together to form one person in subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God, the Word, Lord Jesus Christ.” What is it that MacArthur detects in Wimber's explicit statements that leads him to believe that Wimber is anything other than an orthodox Christian? Indeed, Wimber's oral statement regarding the omniscience of Christ can easily be read as touching on Jesus' human nature. The Bible itself says in Mark 13:32: “But of that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Similarly, Luke 2:52 tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom.”

Reading Wimber's oral statements without a heresy-hunting perspective, might lead to the conclusion that Wimber was simply referring to Jesus' human nature without denying the omniscience that he possessed in his divine nature. In any case, Wimber does not hold the heretical view that MacArthur is so desperately attempting to pin on him with a brief oral statement from a 1981 tape.

## F. How shall we assess John Wimber's ecumenism?

As has been historically common among fundamentalists, MacArthur views an ecumenical spirit in an almost entirely negative fashion. He uses a Wimber quote about the Pope as an example of Wimber's dangerous drift away from Biblical orthodox. The quote that MacArthur used (again, from an unpublished tape) is as follows:

The Pope...by the way is very responsive to the charismatic movement and is, himself a born-again evangelical. If you have read any of his text concerning salvation, you'd know he was preaching the gospel as clear as anybody is preaching it in the world today.<sup>48</sup>

Whether Wimber would reassert this off-hand oral statement twelve years later is impossible to say. But, a more positive reading of the statement would suggest that Wimber was personally glad that the Pope was making a call to all Roman Catholics to personally assert their faith in Christ. Indeed, the Pope has on numerous occasions called for a personal choice of faith in Christ. The Pope has also called for a massive evangelistic campaign beginning *with the Roman Catholic Church* in the decade of the nineties. Celebrating the Pope's statements hardly makes Wimber guild of heresy.

The broader question, however, concerns MacArthur's uniformly negative views of ecumenism. He sums up his entire book by suggesting that “charismatic ecumenism is steadily eroding any claim the

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<sup>46</sup> John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Points: Seven Steps to Christian Growth* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

<sup>48</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 148.

charismatic movement ever had to Biblical orthodoxy.”<sup>49</sup> In sounding the alarm against ecumenism, MacArthur is echoing a theme that has characterized fundamentalism in this country for the past seventy-five years.

Billy Graham's ministry, likewise, has repeatedly been assailed from the fundamentalist right. As early as 1957 the publication, “The Sword of the Lord,” contained numerous articles detailing Graham's supposed misguided inclusion of liberals in his meetings. Fundamentalist rage increased during Graham's New York crusade. One critic charged that of the 140 people on the general crusade committee at least 120 were “reputed to be modernists, liberals, infidels, or something other than fundamental.” John R. Rice intoned that “Dr. Graham is one of the spokesmen, and perhaps, the principle sparkplug of a great drift away from strict Bible fundamentalism and strict defense of the faith.”<sup>50</sup>

In a later section, I will more pointedly draw a connection between MacArthur's writings and the fundamentalist fighting spirit that so thoroughly characterizes *Charismatic Chaos*. For now I will simply make a few comments about ecumenism.

### **G. Ecumenical cooperation and John Wimber's perspectives regarding cooperation.**

John Wimber has never accepted an invitation in which he was required to water down his conservative evangelical beliefs. Nor has he ever toned down his ministry to accommodate himself to a church organization that invited him to minister. Much like Billy Graham, Wimber has been willing to speak and minister in a variety of church settings including the Roman Catholic church, the Anglican church, the Lutheran church, etc., that Wimber may personally differ with on a variety of doctrinal points. Wimber doesn't accept invitations to speak and minister in such places because he agrees on all points with Roman Catholic, or Anglican, or Lutheran doctrine. Nor is it because he thinks that differences are irrelevant. Nor is it because he is an utter pragmatist, as MacArthur asserts, and cares nothing for truth. It is, rather, because Wimber sees a huge need for the message and ministry that God has given him and is willing to declare that message wherever and whenever God gives him an opportunity so long as he can do so without conditions or compromise.

MacArthur would do well to read Robert Ferm's book called *Cooperative Evangelism* (Zondervan, 1958) in which Ferm defended Billy Graham's ministry from precisely the same attack that MacArthur levels against Wimber. In a fascinating summary of ecumenical cooperation in history, Ferm cites the examples of Wesley, Whitefield, Finney, Moody, and Billy Sunday. Regarding Jonathan Edwards, Ferm quotes from Jonathan Edwards's well-known *Thoughts on Revival*:

'Spiritual pride disposes people to affect separation, to stand at a distance from others, as better than they, and loves the show and appearance of distinction...but on the contrary, every humble Christian...delights in the appearance of union with his fellow creatures, and will maintain it as much as he possibly can, without giving open countenance to iniquity, or wounding his own soul, and herein he follows the example of his meek and blessed redeemer, who did not keep such separation and distance as the Pharisees, but freely ate with publicans and sinners that he might win them.' Indeed, Edwards insisted that his decision to work with those of differing opinions was deliberate and considered. He made it a point never to judge the spirituality or even the total orthodoxy of another minister. At one other time he wrote: 'I am glad that God has not committed such a difficult affair to me; I can joyfully leave it wholly in his hands who is definitely fit for it without meddling at all with it myself. I know of no necessity we are under to determine whether it be possible for those who are guilty of it (heresy and opposition) to be in a state of grace or not.'<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, Whitefield was criticized because of his non-separation for associating with certain groups, considered in his day to be unorthodox. His response was simple and to the point: he said he rejects the views of those who consider that there are “no others among the Lord's people but themselves. [If they are

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 293–294.

<sup>50</sup> William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: Morrow, 1991), p. 122.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Ferm, “Cooperative Evangelism: Why Not?” in *Christianity Today*, 2:14 (April 14, 1958), pp. 16–17.

right] and if others are the devil's people, then [these others] have more need to be preached to. For me, all places are alike.”<sup>52</sup>

Moody's view of Roman Catholics is interesting to note. After reporting on Moody's crusade in Dublin, Ireland, an editorial read: “There is not an evening that Roman Catholics, as well as Protestants, have not found their way to the inquiry room. Probably one reason is that there is no denunciation of Roman Catholicism. Men are not addressed by their particular church, but as sinners. Roman Catholics are not mentioned by name at the evangelistic service; and feeling no hurt, and not having opposition forced upon them, those who go once are pretty sure to return.”<sup>53</sup>

Ferm writes that Moody had a great affection for Roman Catholics even though he did not agree with the official teachings of their church. Certainly the same could be said about Wimber. Indeed, Moody went beyond John Wimber by contributing money to the Roman Catholic church in an incident reported by Heng Drummond:

With everything in his special career, in his habitual environment, and in the traditions of his special work, to make him intolerant, Mr. Moody's sympathies have only broadened with time. Some years ago the Roman Catholics of Northfield determined to build a church. They went around the township collecting subscriptions, and by-and-by approached Moody's door. How did he receive them? The narrower evangelical would have shut the door in their faces, or opened it only to give them a lecture on the blasphemies of the Pope, or the iniquities of the Scarlet Woman. Mr. Moody gave them one of the handsomest subscriptions on their list. Not content with that, when their little chapel was finished, he presented them with an organ. 'Why,' he exclaimed, 'if they are Roman Catholics, it is better that they should be good Roman Catholics than bad. It is surely better to have a Catholic church than none; and as for the organ, if they are to have music in their church, it is better to have good music.' 'Besides,' he added, 'these are my own townspeople.'<sup>54</sup>

Example after example of warm-hearted tolerance and love of others with whom orthodox Christians may differ, can be piled on from Ferm's book. The point is that evangelical luminaries from the past, display none of the bitter, invective, separatist, fighting spirit that MacArthur believes stamps someone as “biblical.” Wimber is closer to the irenic spirit of Moody, Edwards, and Whitefield and indeed, to Jesus, himself, than are his fundamentalist critics. If seen in the above light Wimber likely takes it as more of a compliment than a criticism to be tarred with the label “ecumenist.” And he is not alone. Chuck Colson, a conservative Southern Baptist seems to have irenic attitudes to the whole Body of Christ in all its expressions.

#### **H. Are John Wimber's healings unverifiable?**

In MacArthur's chapter on the Third Wave, MacArthur states that “all those [medical healings] are utterly preposterous. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that they are either utter fabrications or yarns that have grown with the telling. In each case, the people to whom the miracles have supposedly occurred remained anonymous. In the two cases reported by Wimber, he maintains that medical doctors witnessed the events. Yet he offers no documentation.” MacArthur goes on to suggest that the only “so-called” miracles that ever occur in the signs and wonders movement are psychosomatic and involve hard to prove cases involving “back pain, inner healings, migraine relief, emotional deliverance, ringing in the ears, and so on. The only detailed anecdotes involving known people actually describe the occasions when the healing doesn't come.”

Interestingly MacArthur never mentioned the book length academic investigation of 1,890 people who attended one of Wimber's conference in Harrogate, England in 1986. The book is titled *Healing: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), by David C. Lewis. The author is a social anthropologist with degrees from Cambridge and Manchester. Dr. Lewis prepared a detailed questionnaire

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Ferm, *Cooperative Evangelism: Is Billy Graham Right or Wrong?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), p. 55.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 73.

that people filled out during the conference, and then followed-up with some randomly selected cases several months later. Of 862 cases of prayer for physical healing, 32% (279) reported a great deal of healing or total healing. Another 26% (222) reported a fair amount of healing. All the physical problems prayed for are listed in a detailed appendix. The physical problems are distinguished from prayer for spiritual problems such as emotional healing and deliverance that are separately tabulated by Dr. Lewis. Many case studies were reported in detail, and several incidents *with medical reports* are quoted at length. MacArthur suggests that no medical verification is ever given. Why not respond to Lewis's book rather than resort to *ad hominem* attack?

On a personal level, I would invite MacArthur to examine a case in our own church involving a young man who had epilepsy from the time he was five years old. For over twenty years, this young man suffered grand mal seizures. Before he received prayer from John Wimber, he experienced at least three grand mal seizures a week. We attended a conference where John Wimber was present and John agreed to pray for this man. In describing the experience of prayer, the man reported the feeling of a wind rushing through his body. While he was prayed for for almost an hour, he said he was entirely unconscious of time passing, but felt surges of power through his body. Whatever his subjective claims, one startling objective fact remains. After being prayed for by John Wimber, he has had no grand mal seizures in the past three years.

Now MacArthur may attempt to explain away this story (I don't know what motive he would have for doing so). The fact is, that there is one man who can now work, who can live a functional life, who may, very shortly, obtain a driver's license and who has been spared a radical brain operation simply because he was physically and verifiably healed through the prayers of John Wimber. I would be happy to speak with John MacArthur about this case personally and other physical healings that I have had the pleasure of both observing and participating in.

### **I. Is the Third Wave simply a slick marketing technique?**

John Wimber has never labeled himself as a leader of the Third Wave. Dr. Peter Wagner coined the phrase and Dr. David Barrett has used it to describe conservative evangelicals who hold both a Reformed evangelical view of the baptism of the Holy Spirit *and* believe the full range of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and miracles are available today. MacArthur forces Wimber to defend a label that he himself is uncomfortable with and only gingerly holds himself. Wimber has remarked in public that "I am a conservative evangelical who speaks in tongues." He does not see himself as leading a new splinter group within evangelicalism. However the Third Wave is a descriptive label.

MacArthur repeatedly asserts that the Third Wave is nothing other than a marketing technique. For example, MacArthur states: "The effort to market the Third Wave as noncharismatic fits as a pattern of shrewd promotion and semantic smoke screens that permeates Third Wave teaching."<sup>55</sup> Later in the chapter, MacArthur states: "The truth is the evangelical veneer of the Third Wave is a carefully crafted image, another crucial element of the skillful marketing campaign that is attempting to sell the movement to non-charismatic evangelicals."<sup>56</sup> To say this, MacArthur by definition, is departing from confronting objective observations regarding the Third Wave and is involved in judging the heart motivations of John Wimber and other Third Wave leaders. There is no way for MacArthur to know whether something is sincerely believed or is, instead, "a skillful marketing campaign."

While he may legitimately object to what the Third Wave teaches, it is wholly inappropriate for MacArthur to suggest that Wimber is "slick," or "shrewd," or involved in a "marketing campaign designed to mislead." Again, these kinds of charges fan into the same unfortunate pattern that characterizes *Charismatic Chaos* as a whole. But, once a charge has been made and is read by thousands of Christian friends, it demands to be answered. No, Vineyard's views are not designed as a marketing campaign! One of the observations that has been repeatedly made about John Wimber by friends and foes alike, is his

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<sup>55</sup> John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 131.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

unfailing willingness to confess mistakes, to display weakness, to admit to failures, and to be, in general, ruthlessly honest, especially about himself.

While he is known as advocating a healing ministry for the church today, John Wimber has repeatedly emphasized his own failures in healing. This is not, as MacArthur takes it, clear evidence that a healing ministry is an impossibility in the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> Rather, it fits squarely within Wimber's kingdom theology of the “already and the not yet” of the present age. Wimber never promises healings (or any other blessing). Anyone who has listened to him for more than five minutes will see a major difference between his teachings and beliefs and the beliefs of the positive confession movement. Wimber emphasizes suffering as a major means of spiritual growth in the Christian life. He is not shy about talking about his own suffering and the suffering of close friends. Nor is he bashful about his promotion of Biblical preaching, sound exegesis, and the need for pure doctrine in the movement that he leads. Finally, Wimber promotes ecumenical cooperation, not out of pragmatism, but as a matter of Biblical conviction regarding the spiritual unity of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

On a more personal note, I have spoken with, and heard John Wimber teach on more than one hundred occasions now. His public image is no different from the private person that I have come to know and respect. He firmly holds to conservative evangelical beliefs regarding the trinity, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, Christ's physical resurrection, the inerrancy of the scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, and the personal, visible return of our Lord Jesus Christ. His theology has been heavily influenced by the conservative evangelical theologian, George Eldon Ladd. He is unabashed in his indebtedness to Ladd. Anyone who reads any of John's conference notes, listens to him speak, or reads any of his books will see John's debt to George Ladd.

Wimber is not a man who is shy or secretive about his own views or his own theology. He went so far as to write an article in *Charisma* magazine, declaring that he personally rejects the view that healing is “in the atonement.” His article was a clear line of demarcation, distinguishing his understanding from traditional Pentecostal teaching regarding healing. John has also, both privately and publicly, affirmed his own belief that the so-called “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” is not a post-conversion experience, but occurs as part of the initial conversion experience. John has also denied the Doctrine of subsequent evidence” taught by some Pentecostals.

To sum up, MacArthur's charge of marketing deception, and intentional semantic diversion, especially when applied to Wimber, is quite unfair and inappropriate. It is a personal attack. It is an attack on Wimber's motivations and personal integrity. John MacArthur, frankly, owes John Wimber a personal and public apology regarding these statements.

Shakespeare, in *Othello*, describes the wrongfulness of injuring another's reputation, when he says,

Good name in man and woman...is the immediate [most valuable] jewel of their souls. Who steals my purse steals trash — 'tis something, nothing, 'twas mine, 'tis his, and has been the slave to thousands — But he that filches from me my good name Robs me of that which not enriches him And makes me poor indeed.

## Conclusion

In 1957 Carl Henry, the Editor of *Christianity Today* magazine wrote a critique of fundamentalism that accurately summarizes my own critique of the central problem with John MacArthur's *Charismatic Chaos*. Henry wrote:

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

The real bankruptcy of fundamentalism has resulted not so much from a reactionary spirit — lamentable as this was — as from a harsh temperament, a spirit of lovelessness and strife contributed by much of its leadership in the recent past. One of the ironies of contemporary church history is that the more fundamentalists stress separation from apostasy as a theme in their churches, the more a spirit of lovelessness seems to prevail. The theological conflict with liberalism deteriorated into an attack upon organizations and personalities. This condemnation, in turn, grew to include conservative churchmen and churches not ready to align with separatist movements. It widens still further, to abusive evangelicals unhappy with the spirit of independency in such groups as the American Council of Churches and the International Council of Christian Churches. Then came internal debate and division among separatist fundamentalism within the American Council. More recently, the evangelistic ministry of Billy Graham and [the] efforts of other evangelical leaders, whose disapproval of liberalism and advocacy of conservative Christianity are beyond dispute, have become the target of bitter volubility. This character of fundamentalism as *a temperament* and not primarily fundamentalism as a theology, has brought the movement into contemporary discredit... Historically, fundamentalism was a theological position; only gradually did the movement come to signify a mood and disposition as well. In its early [years] leadership reflected ballast, and less of bombast and battle... If modernism stands discredited as a perversion of the scriptural theology, certainly fundamentalism in this contemporary expression stands discredited as a perversion of the Biblical spirit.<sup>58</sup>

Ultimately it is MacArthur's rancorous, bombastic style that undermines his objectivity and any value this book may have had as a necessary corrective to excesses or errors in the charismatic, Pentecostal and Third Wave movements. Rabid anti-charismatics will love this book. It provides wonderful sermon illustrations for the already convinced. For those not so zealously anti-charismatic, this book serves only as a painful reminder of the lovelessness that characterizes too much of contemporary Christianity.

On a personal note, I have enjoyed John MacArthur's radio ministry on the occasions that I have been able to listen to it. *Charismatic Chaos*, I am afraid, is unworthy of the teaching gift that God has given to John MacArthur and to the grace that has been so richly displayed in his church's life.

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<sup>58</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, "Dare We Renew the Controversy?" *Christianity Today*, (June 24, 1957), p. 26. In Martin Marty's *Fundamentalism Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), "fighting" is described as a "key feature that separates fundamentalism from evangelicalism or traditional Christian expression. Fundamentalists fight when they perceive a challenge or threat to their core identity. They fight for their particular world view. They fight with a chosen set of weapons. They fight against others, especially those who are perceived as more moderate than themselves, and they fight under the supposed banner of God."

## **About the Author**

Richard Nathan is senior pastor of Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Columbus, Ohio. After being converted in 1974 at age 18, Rich joined InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. He became the chapter president and later served as the InterVarsity faculty advisor for five years at Ohio State University. Rich graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Case Western Reserve University with a BA in Religion and History in 1977. He holds a Juris Doctorate with honors from the Ohio State University School of Law. After teaching at Ohio State University for five years, Rich began pastoring at the Columbus Vineyard.