

---

---

# DISCERNMENT NEWSLETTER

“...how is it that ye do not discern this time?” Luke 12:56

Volume 18, Number 2

March/April 2007

---

---

## The Church Growth Movement

(This article was excerpted from Anton Bosch's new book *BUILDING BLOCKS of the CHURCH with permission*).

The Church Growth Movement, on one extreme of the ecclesiastical spectrum, finds a champion in author and theologian C. Peter Wagner who has written copiously in praise of this movement. Although not an organized movement, it does represent a philosophy very prevalent among mega-churches. In *The New Apostolic Churches*<sup>1</sup> Wagner publishes papers by 18 leaders of some of the biggest and most “successful” churches throughout the world. In the introduction to the book he summarizes their commonalities as well as their reasons for success. He has since published a more detailed analysis titled *Churchquake!*<sup>2</sup>

Wagner has only one measure for the blessing of God on a church and that is numerical growth.<sup>3</sup> This thinking flows from an incorrect extrapolation of a statement made by the Rabbi Gamaliel in Acts 5:38,39: “And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God.”<sup>4</sup> Although it is true that a work of God cannot be overthrown, the converse is not necessarily true. The fact that an organization survives the ravages of time, and even prospers, does not necessarily prove God's blessing or approval.

Neither the Old nor New Testament upholds numerical strength as a sign of, or a condition for, God's blessing. On the contrary, it is often the few who carry true divine blessing rather than the many. Jesus Himself spoke of the narrow gate and the few.<sup>5</sup> After Jesus' powerfully anointed ministry on Earth, He left only 120 disciples.<sup>6</sup> Surely if numbers were a sign of God's approval He would have concluded His ministry with a large number of followers. Admittedly, a large number of people were saved on the day of Pentecost and soon after.<sup>7</sup> This kind of growth, however, only occurred at the founding of the church and on no other occasion was such rapid addition recorded. Most of the churches in the book of Acts seem to have been much smaller than that of Jerusalem. If numbers are a sign of God's approval then surely Islam and the Roman church must be the most blessed of all.

When numbers become the only measure of success, the door is opened for all sorts of evil. Doctrinal and moral purity become

secondary to “the end justifies the means.” Thus, for example, Wagner cites the growth of the African Independent Churches (AICs) as part of “...a pattern of divine blessing...”<sup>8</sup> This can never be, as much of the AICs are an evil marriage of New Testament, Old Testament, ancestor worship and witchcraft. It is syncretism at its worst and does not promote a New Testament form of Christianity.

### Nine Common Components

Based on this faulty premise, Wagner lists nine components of this new move which is shaping the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

The first of the nine is titled a **new name**.<sup>10</sup> At first Wagner seemed to favor the term “postdenominationalism.” But as a result of pressure he renamed it the “New Apostolic Reformation.”

The term “apostolic” is favored because it speaks of what is claimed to be one of the great moves of God in the latter days – the restoration of the apostolic and prophetic ministries. These modern-day apostles style themselves after men like Peter or Paul. They wield tremendous authority over their followers, such that many of their disciples view their words as equally authoritative to those of Scripture. They use this misconception to regularly claim revelation that supersedes the Bible, or even contradicts it.

Wagner explains the second part of the title as follows: “I use ‘reformation’ because... these new wineskins appear to be *at least as radical as those of the Protestant Reformation almost 500 years ago*.”<sup>11</sup> I do not believe that the use of the word “Reformation” is justified, as the reformers sought to return the church to biblical principles and to rid it of man-made tradition. This movement, however, seems to be moving away from Biblical principles and is establishing its own norms and traditions, many of which are extra-biblical.

The second component is a **new authority structure**.<sup>12</sup> By this Wagner refers to the emphasis placed on leaders in the new groups. These groups are mostly headed by a single charismatic leader who often operates as a sovereign and whose authority is derived from his own dynamic personality. At times, this authority is supported by prophecy emphasizing the need for submission to (and the greatness of) the leader. Pastor Lawrence Khong of Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore (8000 members) attributes one of the main reasons for his success to the fact that his church has “one strong and anointed leader.”<sup>13</sup> Paul Daniel, founder and leader of His People Christian Ministries in South Africa, unabashedly says that the “senior pastor of each His People Church

---

<sup>1</sup> Wagner, C. Peter. *The New Apostolic Churches*. Regal Books. Ventura. 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Wagner, C. Peter. *Churchquake!* Regal Books. Ventura. 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p16.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 5:38,39.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew. 7:14.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1:20.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:41, Acts 4:4.

---

<sup>8</sup> Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* p18.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid* pp18,19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid* p18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* p19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* p221.

exercises headship in the local church.”<sup>14</sup> Wagner speaks of the move from the recognition of the *ministry* or *gift* of an apostle to the *office* of the apostle.<sup>15</sup> Thus he has included in his book a chapter by one who designates himself as “Apostle John Kelly.”<sup>16</sup>

This thinking leads to churches where: 1) believers have more of a relationship with the pastor or apostle than with the Lord Jesus Christ; 2) members can quote their leaders more than they can quote the Scriptures; and 3) leaders become so powerful that they are able to say, do and claim the most ridiculous things without being questioned. This mindless devotion to leaders is no different to that which was accorded to Jim Jones, David Koresh, *et al* by their followers.

The third component is **new leadership training**.<sup>17</sup> Under this heading Wagner highlights the fact that most leaders within these new churches have little or no theological training. Qualifications for upcoming ministry are based on personal relationships with incumbent leadership and proven skills. Some of these groups establish their own in-house Bible schools, but very few seem to send their up-coming leaders to independent, recognized seminaries. The argument that the pattern in the New Testament was not one of seminaries, but one of leaders training future leaders, is compelling and strong.<sup>18</sup> It becomes a problem, however, when the theological skills of the incumbent leaders are erroneous or almost non-existent, particularly when this becomes the foundation of the next generation. Most preachers in these groups are notorious for their lack of hermeneutical integrity when they interpret Scripture “by the leading of the Spirit” and “by revelation.” These leaders, as well as future leaders, could benefit their churches immeasurably by gaining solid biblical training.

The fourth common component is a **new ministry focus**.<sup>19</sup> By this, a distinction is drawn between those churches that are “heritage driven” and those that are “vision driven.” Most evangelical churches share a common desire to recapture the essence of the life of the church as recorded in the New Testament. The New Apostolic Churches, however, feel that the past has very little that is of benefit and that the goal lies in the future. This leads to an emphasis on the “vision” with a constant expectancy of the “new thing” that God is about to do. This focus results in instability and a tendency to run after spiritual fads, as each new “wave” holds the potential of being God’s next great move. Often solid Biblical traditions are frowned upon as “dead tradition.” Paul, however, instructs the Thessalonians: “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”<sup>20</sup> Jude emphasizes the completeness of that which has been delivered to us: “...exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once

for all delivered to the saints.”<sup>21</sup>

The fifth component is a **new worship style**.<sup>22</sup> The different style of worship is probably the most visible component to someone who comes from a more traditional church. And yet it is also the one component that has most deeply penetrated historic and traditional Pentecostal churches. A new worship style is often the aspect of a church that will attract members to a particular church. Wagner shows how the worship team replaces traditional musicians, hymnals are replaced by overhead projectors, organs are superseded by keyboards and percussive instruments, and fifteen minutes of singing is replaced by an hour of “praise and worship.”<sup>23</sup>

More significant than the changes in style and mode of worship is the philosophy behind this new worship. Biblical worship has one purpose and that is to glorify God. However, in the New Apostolic Churches worship serves many purposes, of which the adoration of God is but one. It serves as a basis of bringing God’s “presence” into the meeting, as God inhabits the praises of His people.<sup>24</sup> It also serves the purpose of creating a platform, or the right environment in which people can receive the teaching of the Word. Worship is also used to “do spiritual warfare.” One argument says that because demons are spirits and they occupy the air around us, every time the church raises its hands, demons are being “hit.” Waving arms and banners chase demons away.<sup>25</sup> It is fairly obvious to the diligent student that none of these were part of the original intent of worship. In addition, worship, which should be the product of the Christian’s entire life, simply becomes a subset of praise and something that is done as part of the meeting.

The sixth component is **new prayer forms**.<sup>26</sup> Here Wagner extols the greater amount of time spent in many new forms of prayer. These include praise marches, prayer walking, prayer journeys and prayer expeditions. What he does not say is that the emphasis on prayer is based on the wrong premise. It is mostly based on the modern teachings of “spiritual warfare” and “word of faith.” Under the guise of “spiritual warfare,” the church has the responsibility to defeat demons, chase them out of a particular area, bind demons and loose angels so that God’s work is not hindered. This is achieved by doing “spiritual warfare.” The “word of faith” teaching emphasizes the creative power of the spoken Word. They claim that as God spoke and the Earth and its fullness was created, so our words have power to create or to destroy. Unlike orthodox prayer, where the prayer is directed to God, in these churches the prayers are often directed at the Devil, demons, circumstances or even inanimate objects. Instead of speaking about praying to the Lord, they will speak of “praying into a situation.” None of this has any biblical foundation.

The seventh component is **new financing**.<sup>27</sup> Wagner describes money in these churches as “abundant.”<sup>28</sup> He gives three reasons

<sup>14</sup> Daniel, Paul. In Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p234 (Daniel has since been forced to resign in disgrace).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid p20.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid pp29-44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p20.

<sup>18</sup> 2Timothy 2:2.

<sup>19</sup> Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p21.

<sup>20</sup> 2Thessalonians 3:6.

<sup>21</sup> Jude 3.

<sup>22</sup> Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p22.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 22:3

<sup>25</sup> Meyer, Joyce. *Protected by God’s Presence*. Trinity Broadcast Network. 11/07/02.

<sup>26</sup> Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid p23.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

for this abundance of finance in comparison to the “traditional churches.” First, tithing and giving is not only taught without apology, but believers are made to feel that their Christianity is not up to standard if they do not give. Second, believers are taught that giving is because the church needs the money to function, and the giver will receive an abundant harvest of more money because of the seed he has sown in his giving. Third, giving is cheerful, and sometimes loud cheering and even laughter accompany the time of giving.

From a more objective view, however, much of the emphasis on giving can be seen as a very materialistic version of Christianity. Almost all of the eighteen contributors to Wagner’s book talk about money. Most cite various aspects of their budget in millions of dollars as evidence of God’s blessing. The collection (offering) takes a significant chunk out of the time allocated for their services, and it is not uncommon for this activity and the attendant mini-sermon giving to last between 20 and 30 minutes. This can often surpass the amount of time allocated to the preaching of the Word.

The televangelism extension of these churches is also marked by its emphasis on money. These preachers blatantly speak of their books, tapes and other services as “products” – drawing little distinction between what they sell and what the commercial world sells. They use the same words and systems to induce buying as the worldly telemarketers. Paul Daniel of His People Christian Ministries (South Africa) writes: “Managing our corporate identity and how we present ourselves to the community is very important in terms of our public relations.”<sup>29</sup> The church no longer follows in the footsteps of its Founder who had no place to lay His head – it has become big business in which money and corporate identity are major aspects of its operations.

This emphasis on money has an even bigger impact on these churches. It has altered the very core of the faith of its members. It has affected the preaching. Not only are some of their preachers able to preach money and prosperity from almost any verse in the Bible,<sup>30</sup> but much of the preaching is an attempt to stroke the members in order to keep them happy and to keep them giving. Some of these preachers do not hesitate to use the misfortune of their followers to milk even more money. They teach that giving will release healing, anointing and God’s provision for financial problems. These preachers will not hesitate to warn about the dangers of not giving enough and often use examples of people who were not healed, faced financial ruin, etc., because they did not give. This message has also resulted in a generation of Christians who believe that spirituality and God’s blessing can be measured in terms of money and that God’s blessings can be bought with money.

The eighth commonality is a **new outreach**.<sup>31</sup> Under this heading Wagner speaks about church planting and social outreach programs. It is the mission of these churches to be “apostolic” in vision and to be reaching out to areas where they are not represented. Many of them also run multi-million dollar social responsibility programs through shelters and feeding schemes.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid p235.

<sup>30</sup> Creflo Dollar is but one example. Listening to any of his sermons as broadcast by Trinity Broadcasting Network will confirm this assessment.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p24.

The philanthropic work of these groups is difficult to judge, as the motives behind these works of charity cannot be gauged with accuracy. In a number of cases, however, the churches will speak of their multimillion-dollar food distribution program, when, in fact, the cost to the church is a fraction of the total budget. They will not hesitate to solicit money, expired foodstuffs, transportation, etc., from secular organizations – even from unbelievers. While their zeal for the needy is to be commended, the taking of money from unbelievers and governmental organizations cannot be reconciled with the *modus operandi* of the Lord Jesus Christ. By advertising their achievements in these areas they also violate the principle of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing.<sup>32</sup>

The planting of new churches is also difficult to measure in the absence of objective statistics. Judging by observations in KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa), however, many of the so-called church plants are simply take-overs of existing churches. Traditional Pentecostal churches have lost significant numbers of their congregations and properties to New Apostolic Churches. Other evangelical and traditional churches have not been spared. The second source of new churches is splits and divisions within established churches. Only the third, and by far the smallest, source of new church plants is true missionary activity where a worker or team will work in an unreached area and, by evangelism and making disciples, begin to establish a new church.<sup>33</sup>

The last of the common traits of New Apostolic Churches is entitled: **New power orientation**.<sup>34</sup> This describes the emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the supernatural. The Holy Spirit is actively invited into the meetings and worship and prayer is directed to the Holy Spirit. These churches not only believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are still operative today, but that there are many more manifestations that are not mentioned in the Scriptures. This is all justified and encouraged under the cover of “...the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 6:3.

<sup>33</sup> This assessment is based on the author’s close observations of these movements over the past 30 years. (Marjorie Froise writes about the difficulty of quantifying these New Apostolic Churches since they do not fit into traditional denominational categories. [Froise, Marjorie. *2000 South African Christian Handbook*, M Froise {Ed}. Christian Info. Welkom. 1999, p. 36.]) This trend is confirmed also to be true in the United States by Sarah Leslie, a respected researcher of modern trends in Christianity. This trend is changing, however, as “the G12 structure and the purpose-driven structure are cutting new ground and making new ‘converts’ out of the masses, using ‘accelerated conversion rates’ – i.e., methods of psycho-social marketing and manipulation to make people believe they are ‘Christian’ because they come into the cell group structure.” (E-mail 26/09/2005, conscien@nacs.net).

<sup>34</sup> Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p25.

he will do, because I go to My Father.”<sup>35</sup> Wagner offers the following (partial) list of manifestations of the Spirit: “...healing, demonic deliverance, spiritual warfare, prophecy, falling in the Spirit, spiritual mapping, prophetic acts, fervent intercession and travail, and so on....”<sup>36</sup> To this can be added holy laughter, animal sounds, dancing in the spirit, being drunk in the spirit, etc. These manifestations are often used as part of the total strategy to grow the churches. Believers are taught to expect, and even to demand, the supernatural in every meeting. Some of these churches and ministries are built almost exclusively on such manifestations. Names such as Benny Hinn, Reinhard Bonnke and TB Joshua spring to mind as men who have built their ministry and following on the supernatural.

Although it is not within the scope of this chapter of the book to examine whether or not the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament continue today, serious questions have to be raised as to whether the modern versions of such gifts accurately reflect the manifestations of those gifts in the New Testament, and whether the Holy Spirit will manifest His power in ways not taught in the New Testament.

For example, is what passes for prophecy today the same as that of the New Testament? I would suggest not. Modern prophecy is more akin to fortune telling than the inspired utterances found in the Scriptures. Although we have some instances of foretelling in the New Testament, this does not seem to have been the main intention of prophecy. Paul clearly states that prophecy was to be “...to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.”<sup>37</sup> Modern churches also accept a very high rate of error from their prophets. One such prophet, Bob Jones, says that the general level of accuracy of prophets is 65%, but in some instances it is as low as 10%.<sup>38</sup> Examples of patently misleading and wrong predictions, even from their most experienced prophets, abound.<sup>39</sup> Scripture, however, demands 100% accuracy.<sup>40</sup>

Prophecy that is contrary to the plain teaching of the Scriptures, or that supersedes Scripture, also cannot be attributed to the Holy Spirit. Yet, modern prophets will often speak extra-biblically, or speak contrary to the Scriptures and claim that the Holy Spirit has revealed to them more than was previously revealed to the New Testament apostles and prophets. Each of the modern manifestations of biblical gifts must be measured against biblical criteria. On this basis much of what passes for gifts of the Spirit has to be rejected.

Extra-biblical manifestations, those of “Toronto Blessing”<sup>41</sup> and the “Pensacola Revival,”<sup>42</sup> must be rejected out of hand because not only are these manifestations not in the Bible, they often go against biblical principles. Thus the emphasis on hilarity and laughter is contrary to at least fifteen injunctions to sobriety in

<sup>35</sup> John 14:12.

<sup>36</sup> Wagner. *The New Apostolic Churches*. p25.

<sup>37</sup> 1Corinthians 14:3.

<sup>38</sup> Randles, Bill. *The New Prophets*. Plumline Publishing. Pietermaritzburg, 1994. p65.

<sup>39</sup> Randles. *The New Prophets*. pp23-54.

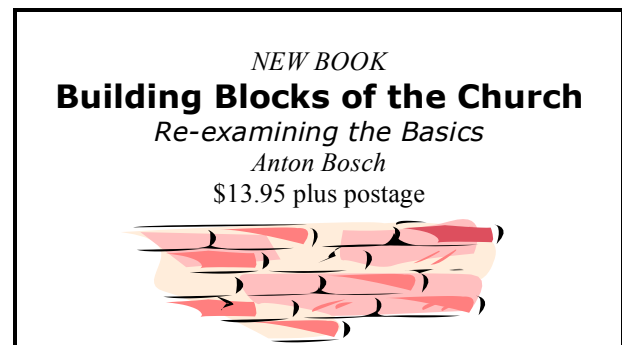
<sup>40</sup> Deuteronomy 13:1-3, 18:22.

<sup>41</sup> As emanating from Toronto Airport Vineyard.

<sup>42</sup> As promoted by the Brownsville Assembly of God, Pensacola, Florida.

the New Testament. These manifestations can also be measured by their lack of fulfilment of promises. Both Toronto and Pensacola promised sweeping worldwide revival. Neither was able to deliver. If these were genuine works of the Holy Spirit – comparable to or exceeding the day of Pentecost – surely the world would have been impacted visibly.

**The Church Growth Movement may certainly build big congregations, control large fortunes, and have increasing influence on politics and society. However, whether it complies with the Lord Jesus’ intentions for His Church is open to debate. I do not deny that individual lives may be positively affected. But I suspect that much harm has been done to individuals, as well as to small churches.**



## From Which Well Are You Drinking?

*Exposing the Dangers in the Emerging Church Movement*

J. David Winscott

Chuck Smith, Senior Pastor Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA warns:



### BEFORE YOU DRINK

“The serious issues arising from the “Emerging Church” movement are troubling to our pastors and churches. David Winscott, who is active in our church, has helped us to grasp these urgent concerns by writing, *From Which Well Are you Drinking?* Pastors, teachers and serious students of the Bible will want to read this so that they can understand the inherent dangers of this movement that undermines the sufficiency of the Word of God and the sufficiency of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in proclaiming the Gospel of the Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

This booklet is a “must read” for every Christian. It is an excellent resource on the subject of the Emergent/Emerging Church. The book begins with the simple premise: from which wells have these teachers been drinking?

“If a Christian teaching is seriously troubling and appears unbiblical, we must examine the various wells from which the teacher draws and constructs his belief systems, his paradigm, his rules of reality, his philosophy.”

“Let’s briefly look at the wells of influence that our Lord speaks about in His earthly ministry. We will look at the wells of the Emerging Church movement writers; and then we will examine some of the wells of influence from which they have drawn their

waters of discourse to develop their belief systems.”

This booklet is a remarkable snapshot of the history of various philosophies over the past 100+ years and how the ideas were transmitted down to our current Emergent era. The booklet examines Brian McLaren, Dan Kimball, David Jacobus Bosch and many more important Emergent leaders. The historical philosophers who came up with new ideas about man and God are included in this concise overview.

*From Which Well Are You Digging?* Summarizes “18 Dangerous Issues Arising Out of the Emerging Church,” which includes excellent material describing modernism, post modernism, and inconsistencies and heresies in doctrine and practice.

If you have had trouble sorting out all of this Emergent “stuff,” this handy little booklet is the ticket to biblical sanity. You’ll “get it” after reading this book. It isn’t written too intellectually, but it is also not too simplistic. You’ll become educated about Emergent/Emerging in a way that will help you to articulate the problems to others – particularly so that you can sound a clear warning of the dangers.

This is the perfect kind of short booklet that you can stock up on and give away to pastors, friends, young people, Bible studies, etc. It is professionally done with a beautiful full-color cover and easy-to-read print.

The author attends the Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa, California and the booklet is a project of the Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship.

Scripture warns of those who “have forsaken the right way and are gone astray” – “These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.” (2 Peter 2:15a, 17)

-----  
 --  
***The testimony below has been on our website – but not all of our readers go on-line – so we are reprinting it for all to read. We received many e-mails from people with similar testimonies after this was published.***

#### **The Toronto Deception**

It has taken me nine years to actually come to the place where I would write this story. Part of the reason was because I was not fully convinced that it is appropriate to speak out against weaknesses in the body of Christ publicly. Another reason is because it has taken years of soul searching to become convinced that what happened in the Toronto Airport Church was actually all bad or at least more bad than good!

For the past number of years I have called it a **mixed blessing**. I think James A. Beverly called it

this in his book *Holy Laughter and the Toronto Blessing 1994*. Today I would call it a mixed curse concluding that any individual good that came from this experience is far outweighed by much harm and satanic deception. I suppose that therein has been my dilemma. I have tried to live my life in the fear of the Lord and Jesus told us that the unforgivable sin was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Attributing to Satan what was in fact a work of God. If pressed as to whether or not the Toronto blessing is all God or all Devil I will still be hedgy, but I am convinced that Satan has used this experience to blind people to the historical doctrines of God, to produce fruit in keeping with repentance, to failing to test and discern the spirits and failing to test prophecy.

After three years of being in the thick of the Toronto blessing our Vineyard assembly in Scarborough (East Toronto) just about self destructed. We devoured one another, with gossip, backstabbing, division, sects criticism etc. After three years of ‘soaking,’ praying for people, shaking, rolling, laughing, roaring, ministering at TACF on their prayer team, leading worship at TACF, preaching at TACF, basically living at TACF we were the most carnal, immature and deceived Christians that I know. I remember saying to my friend and senior pastor at Scarborough Vineyard Church in 1997 that ever since the Toronto Blessing came we have just about fallen to bits! He agreed! My experience has been that the manifestation of spiritual gifts mentioned in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12 was much more common in our assembly, before January 1994 (when the Toronto blessing started) than during this period of “supposed” Holy Spirit visitation.

During 1992-1993 when praying for people we would experience what I believe was genuine prophecy, deliverance and much grace and favour from the Lord. After the Toronto Blessing started, all ministry time changed, the only prayers were ‘More Lord MORE’, the shouting of ‘Fire’ the jerky shaking of the body with the ‘ooh ooh OOH WOOOAAH’ prayer. (I kid you not!)

On January 20<sup>th</sup> 1994 about 15 people from our church traveled over to Toronto Airport Vineyard in order to listen to Randy Clark, a Vineyard pastor from the USA. John Arnott had called our senior pastor to invite us. He communicated that Randy had been to the Rodney Howard Browne meetings and that the *stuff* had broke out in his church in the following weeks. John was hoping that something might break out with us too. We were only too happy to travel over. We were a church plant out of the Toronto Airport and we started in 1992. In those days there

were three Vineyard Churches in Toronto. One Down-Town church, Scarborough Vineyard Church to the east and the Airport Church. We were one big happy family. Because we were small in number we did special meetings, conferences etc, together.

The year before most of our leadership teams joined and had headed to Nicaragua for a short term missions trip. We had genuine love and fellowship with each other. Since leaving the Vineyard churches I have read a fair bit of analysis from the critics. Some make out that the Toronto Blessing was one huge conspiracy to lead the body of Christ into heresy. Heresy and apostasy I suspect may well be the result, but none of these destinations were intentional. I am honestly convinced that the leaders in the Vineyard churches are genuine born-again Christians who love the Lord, but have fallen into deception. They have not loved the Lord enough to keep His commandments. They have failed to obey the scriptures and have been led astray by our longing for something bigger and brighter and more exciting and dynamic. I am guilty of this sin also. I have preached renewal in Korea, the United Kingdom, the USA and here in Canada. I am genuinely repentant and in writing this story I would ask you the bride and body of Christ to forgive me. Especially the Pentecostal / Charismatic Christians among you, for you are my immediate family theologically. I am an evangelical Christian, I always have been but I do not believe in the cessation of the spiritual gifts at the end of the apostolic era. I believe that it was my evangelical roots (my family are Baptists and I was born again in the Presbyterian Church) that started to open my eyes to problems with this so-called renewal. In hind sight I look back and think how could I have been so blind? I laughed at people acting like dogs and pretending to urinate on the columns of the TACF building. I watched people pretend to be animals, bark, roar, cluck, pretend to fly as if they had wings, perpetually act drunk and sing silly songs. How I thought that any of this was from the Holy Spirit of God amazes me today. It was loud, irreverent and blasphemous to the Holy God of the Bible. I suppose in my mind I reasoned that as long as they did not teach any thing in direct violation to scripture then it was what we called the exotic. This is a buzz word for manifestations that could not be justified from a biblical perspective. I was taught from the pulpit that we had two options. The order of the nursery full of life and messy or the order of the graveyard, very orderly but dead! As a young immature pastor I wanted life with mess. I failed to remember that God wants us to become mature and grow up in Him. I

became disconcerted by the prophetic words that came forth especially one by Carol Arnott in which she had her bride experience where she was taken into the very presence of Jesus and said that the love that she experienced was even better than sex! I was shocked in my spirit and thought how can one compare the love of God with sex? When we suspected that demons were running riot in our services John Arnott would teach that we should ask are they coming or going. If they are leaving then that is ok! John would defend the chaos by saying that we ought not be afraid of being deceived, if we have asked the Holy Spirit to come and fill us then how could Satan come and deceive us? This would make Satan very strong and God very weak! He said that we needed to have more faith in a Big God to protect us than in a Big Devil to deceive us. This sounded very convincing but was totally contrary to scripture for Jesus and Paul and Peter and John all warn us about the power of deceiving spirits and especially so in the last days. Again we did not love God enough to obey His Word and the result was that we opened ourselves up to lying spirits. May God have mercy upon us!

Finally the penny dropped for me as I was rolling around one night 'drunk in the Spirit' as we would say. I started singing and as I rolled around the floor the Nursery Rhyme 'Mary had a little lamb its fleece was white as snow.' came to mind. I sang this in a mocking spirit and instantly my heart told me this was a demon. Instantly I repented and was in total shock. How could a demon get into me? Did I not love God? Was I not zealous for the things of God? Was I not nuts about Jesus? I knew that an unclean spirit had just manifested through me and I was guilty of great sin. After this experience I stayed away from TACF. I did not go back there any more. I did not possess the conviction to denounce the whole experience but thought that we were failing to pastor the "Blessing" well enough.

Even after I stopped going over to TACF, I had to pastor the fruit of it. One example was when some of our people returned from a meeting there asking us if we had all received the golden sword of the Lord? I asked them what they were talking about thinking that it was some prophetic reference to the Holy Scriptures but they said, 'no, its not the Bible, it's an invisible golden sword that only the really pure can receive. If taken in an unrighteous fashion then the Lord would kill you. But if you are holy enough to receive it then you can wield this sword and it will heal aids, Cancer etc. and bring salvation. How one wielded this sword was by pretending to have this invisible sword in your hand and motioning to strike

people with it when in prayer! I thought while even in deception at this time that the TACF had become Looney bins! This was purportedly first received by Carol Arnott and then given to the ones holy enough to receive it! Another thing was the golden fillings in the teeth. We had people in our assembly peeping down one another's throats looking for the gold fillings that God had placed there to show how much he loved them! In all my time there I only heard one message on repentance given by a visiting speaker from Hong Kong named Jackie Pullinger. It went over like a lead balloon. We were not there to repent, we were there to party in the Lord! After one year into the blessing I spoke out at a pastors meeting and said 'guys we have shaken, rattled, rolled, laughed cried and bought the tee-shirt. But we have no revival, no salvation, no fruit and no increased evangelism so what's the deal?' I was soundly rebuked - who was I to expect to see fruit when the Lord was healing his broken people? We had been legalistic long enough and God was spending this time restoring his wounded and freeing us from legalism. I was told not to push the Lord and the harvest would come in His time.'

I knew this was wrong because the Lord had commanded us to go into all the earth and make disciples! Not, that everyone should take a sabbatical for who knows how long, while God does some strange new thing! Ultimately I left over something as controversial as the ordination of women. Personally I believe from scripture that women should not be pastors/elders in a local assembly. I could be wrong on this and there is much debate in the Church today but that is my conviction and in the Vineyard churches they were ordaining all the pastors wives to co pastor with them. I am certainly for women in ministry but believe that the Elder/pastor role in a local assembly has been reserved for men. I did not write scripture but God willing I will have the grace from now on to obey it.

So there is my story. I could go on and document much excess, folly, sin and latter rain teaching that manifest from the prophetic end of this Blessing but others have already done that. We sang about Joel's army and the billion soul revival as if it were one of the Ten Commandments, and as always it was just around the corner. Next month, next year etc. Jesus said that when the Son of Man returns will He find faith upon the earth? This is a far cry from the dominionism that is being taught all through the Vineyard / Prophetic/ Spiritual Warfare movement. I honestly think that they think they are going to take over the whole world! While in the Vineyard I embraced a life verse from the Apostle Paul the

phrase do not go beyond what is written!

To finish I just want to say sorry for the damage that I have personally done by teaching things that are not correct biblically. I repent before men as I already have before God. I will not excuse my falling into deception. I did not bother to test things when the scriptures commanded us to do so. Everyone who was there when this thing started knows that what I write is true, they would just come to different conclusions especially if they are still promoting the 'river!'

To those in the river I would say swim out, there are things living in the water that will bite you real good! I love the people of TACF and the Vineyard movement but I think that we have much to answer for and may the Lord open your eyes sooner rather than later. I suspect that when this letter goes online I will get bombarded by emails from both camps, some damning me for still believing in the ministry of the Holy Spirit and still walking in deception and some old friends damning me for exposing dirt or being negative about the Lords anointed! Well, the Lord knows my heart and by his grace he will guide me into all truth as I seek to know Christ and Him crucified! If you believe that I walk in sin and error please pray for me that the Lord would forgive me and open my eyes. I will study the word to show myself a workman approved! I would call on all who read this to pray that the Lord would open the eyes of all who have been involved in this deception. Whether leader or follower, we are loved and the Lord is a forgiving God. He says if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. I believe we are like the church in Laodicea, we think that we are rich, have prospered and need nothing, we do not realise that we are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. We must take the Counsel of Jesus and buy gold refined in the fire (which is his suffering, not a false spirit), white garments to clothe our shameful nakedness and salve for our eyes that we might see again. Jesus is calling us to repentance and thank the Lord that He is, for it will lead us to true restoration with our Father! If God has forgiven me and opened my eyes then He can do it for all those caught in deception too. I will finish with a warning from Paul, he says if you think you are standing firm be careful lest you fall.

Sincerely, Paul Gowdy