

VINEYARD RENEWAL MOVEMENT  
RESEARCH PAPER

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## VINEYARD MOVEMENT

Steve Nicholson was sitting behind the desk in front of the class. His answers and manner were laid back and relaxed. At the end, he prayed for the class. After some moments of silence and a few words, he shared some impressions and asked if it meant anything to anybody. A few students responded, and some were in tears. Other students gathered around them and comforted them. Many others in the class were not touched by it. What was different, at least for me, was the tone and style of this prayer event. It was "normal", relaxed, "no big deal," but yet profound and deep for those to whom this prayer and those impressions spoke. Steve is the senior pastor of Vineyard Christian Church of Evanston. I visited the church one Sunday and was touched by the atmosphere of the whole service. I bought the book, "John Wimber – The Way it Was,"<sup>1</sup> written by his wife Carol, and read it the same Sunday. The Vineyard story intrigued me. This paper is structured around five questions/issues: 1. *Why did I choose the Vineyard movement for this research and what is the significance of Vineyard as a renewal movement today?* 2. *What is the history of the movement?* 3. *Who are the key figures and influences in Vineyard's story?* 4. *How does Vineyard compare with similar renewal and revival movements in the history?* 5. *I'll look at some strengths and weaknesses of the movement and connect the Vineyard story with my own context.* There is much controversy and criticism written about Vineyard, some valid and some biased and unfair. This paper does not go into the debates, and it assumes some basic knowledge of Vineyard. My experience with Vineyard is limited to several month's attendance at only one Vineyard church, in Evanston; however, there are reasons why Vineyard is significant beyond only my liking it. The significance of Vineyard as a movement can be viewed from many sides; here are some from my vantage-point:

**1. RADICAL MIDDLE:** Bill Jackson wrote a history of the Vineyard and the title of his book is, "The Quest for the Radical Middle"<sup>2</sup>. Being himself a Wheaton graduate (B.A) with a M.Div. from Gordon Conwell, Jackson had an evangelical theology but a Pentecostal experience.

I decided to try to be ordained in the Assemblies of God, but they didn't want me because I didn't believe that tongues was the necessary sign of the fullness of the Spirit. We (*his wife Betsy*) next tried to get into the Evangelical Free Church, but they didn't want me because I spoke in tongues! ... What were we to do? Where did we fit? ... That night I heard John Wimber deliver what was essentially a seminary lecture on the kingdom of God and I watched as God healed a lady of deafness in one ear. John's manner was laid back and natural, even funny, but not in an irreverent way. I had always dreamed as I read the gospels that Jesus' ministry would have been completely natural and not hyped, like some of the things I'd seen on TV. Oh, and did I mention that the music was great and nobody had to wear ties?"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Wimber, *John Wimber The Way it Was* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> Bill Jackson, *The Quest for the Radical Middle, A History of the Vineyard* (Cape Town: Vineyard International Publishing, 1999)

Jackson's experience illustrates the tension between the two worlds, the Evangelical and the Pentecostal, Word and Spirit. There are many others who experienced this tension. The Vineyard tries to join together the best of both worlds – being in the radical middle. This radical middle position is often attacked and misunderstood as the pull toward one or another pole increases: Word against Spirit, reason against experience, organization against organism. “History shows that the Word without Spirit quickly becomes dead orthodoxy, and the Spirit without Word quickly becomes cultish.”<sup>4</sup>

**2. MC 510: SIGNS, WONDERS and CHURCH GROWTH:** “Robert Meye, Dean of Fuller Seminary School of Theology, said at a joint faculty meeting, ‘I know of only two seminary courses that have become famous. One was the course on dogmatics, taught by Karl Barth, and the other is MC 510, taught by John Wimber, here at Fuller.’”<sup>5</sup> The content of Wimber’s class is written in the book, “Power Evangelism.”<sup>6</sup> The book was voted one of the most influential books in a survey titled, “The Top 50 Books That Have Shaped Evangelicals,” published by Christianity Today in 2006. It is not only about class, but the whole concept of bringing signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit to the forefront of the whole Church.

“Peter Wagner coined the phrase, ‘Third Wave’ to describe the phenomenon. Wagner’s thesis was that there had been two historic waves of the Spirit in the twentieth century. The first, at the turn of the century, birthed Pentecostalism; the second, begun in the late 1950s, birthed the Charismatic movement. Wagner saw the present move of the Spirit as distinct from the other two – thus the term ‘Third Wave.’ David Barrett, the pre-eminent demographer of the Christian world, agrees with Wagner and defines the Third Wave: *These are Evangelicals and other Christians who unrelated to Pentecostalism or the Charismatic movement, have recently become filled (or empowered, energized) with the Spirit and are 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 non Pentecostal denominations and who do not identify as either Pentecostals or Charismatic’s*”<sup>7</sup>

“The Vineyard brought back in the forefront the gifts of the Spirit balanced with Evangelical theology”<sup>8</sup>. “To pray ‘thy kingdom come,’ and then to actually wait to see how the kingdom is coming – this is what John Wimber reclaimed for the church.”<sup>9</sup> Another significance of the Vineyard is the role of every believer in using the gifts and not only the spiritual “superstars.”

During the ministry time at the end of the service a teenage girl in blue jeans had a word of knowledge for someone with a bronchial condition. No one responded, but afterwards, David

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>6</sup> John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism* (Ventura: Regal, 2009)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>8</sup> John Wimber was particularly influenced by the writing of George Ladd on the kingdom theology

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 126.

Watson leaned over to Wimber and said, "I have this condition. What am I supposed to do?" Wimber promptly called over the girls and some other youth to pray for him. Through their prayer David received profound improvement in his condition. If it had been Wimber or the church elders doing the ministry, it would have been different, but what was this – a teenage girl in blue jeans (and chewing gum for that matter!)?<sup>10</sup>

"Church Growth" mentioned in the title of this course developed into the church planting movement. For some time, international church planting was under a "moratorium" because John Wimber made a commitment that Vineyard will not plant churches in the United Kingdom, but equip existing churches to do the work. "While John was in Australia, in 1993, the Lord told him that the commitment to avoid church planting was 'illegal.' ... Furthermore, John's renewal ministry, which was supposed to equip the existing churches to win the lost and multiply local congregations, was not resulting in evangelism. ... the Vineyard was now going to begin to plant churches at the leading of the Lord."<sup>11</sup> Today there are more than 1500 Vineyard churches in the world<sup>12</sup>.

**3. WORSHIP:** Contemporary worship is today a given, but in the previous years, it was a big battle ground in the church between the older and younger generation. Especially having in mind the "wild 60's" and rock-and-roll generation. Wimber, a former professional jazz musician, and the Vineyard as a movement, were together with Calvary Chapel's *Marantha! Music* pioneers of the contemporary (gospel rock 'n roll) worship music in the church. Not only that, but the direction, focus, role of worship was significantly impacted. Worship was not treated as a prelude, as an introduction to the preaching, but was regarded as a time for God, a time in which we give to God our worship. It is a significant paradigm shift. "The most significant discovery was that worship wasn't for them at all, but a gift they gave to God. They learned that it didn't matter what they felt like. God was worthy and inhabited the praise of his people. When they gave him this gift, not as the warm-up for the teaching, but as an end in itself, an interesting thing happened. God brought his presence and ministered to them. What an awesome time it was!"<sup>13</sup>

**4. CHANGE AGENT:** Even some controversial periods of Vineyard, like the '*Kansas City Prophets*' and the '*Toronto Blessing*' (more about those two Vineyard periods later), show a learning movement not afraid to step into the uncharted waters, a movement staying open for whatever God might want to give to the Church and not excluding something before trying and testing it. Giving it a chance was/is Vineyard's strength.

"In describing this philosophy he (*Wimber*) used the analogy of growing a bush. It is a temptation

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>12</sup> Different sources are mentioning this approximate number.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, 59.

to trim a bush back too soon before the gardener knows what he has. This means letting the thing go for awhile, thus having to endure a period when the bush looks messy and untrimmed. Then, when the course the branches are taking is clear, that which is unwanted is trimmed back. This allows more growth in the rest of the plant. In this way, the boundaries of our centered set were being defined."<sup>14</sup>

Reflecting on it, I am wondering was it the personality of John Wimber and the improvisational gift of a jazz musician that gave the tone to it, and does Vineyard today still have this trait that marked and marred them in their short history.

For several months, I have been attending the Vineyard Church in Evanston, being an observant participant. "I have a dream," to use the most famous line from another sermon and another time, a time that in significant ways influenced this story, but my dream takes me back to my country, Croatia. As I write this, forty years after Martin Luther King spoke those words, I am amazed that a few weeks ago I attended a breakfast with the first African American President of the USA, Barack Obama, (to put the story in the right context and for the sake of some future historians who will read this paper, I must add with 4000 other people who were present at the National Prayer Breakfast in DC). I walked in King's dream and even had a real breakfast in it. My dream is to see a similar church in Croatia, to see people experiencing the power of worship and feel, even before the music starts, the presence of the Spirit, to have different worship teams and different styles of music, to see people coming together to be prayed for after each service, to see liturgical elements and creeds creatively interwoven in the service, to see a multicultural, multigenerational and multiethnic community working together, caring for the poor, loving and struggling together like the Vineyard Evanston does, and last but not least, to have good coffee and bagels (I am still debating if bagels should be part of my dream, but this is for another paper). The Croatian religious context is predominantly Roman Catholic (86,75%); Evangelical churches are small and divided into different denominations (two largest denominations are Baptist and Pentecostal) – I see a space for the "Radical Middle" in the midst of this religious landscape of Croatia.

## SHORT HISTORY OF VINEYARD MOVEMENT

The history of the Vineyard can be followed looking at two directions, Jackson calls them, "two streams:" one is John and Carol Wimber, representing the Evangelicals, and the other is Ken Gulliksen and Calvary Chapel, representing Pentecostals.

John Wimber was born on February 25, 1934, in Kirksville, Missouri. Raised as an only child after his father left the family. He described himself as a third generation pagan. Carol Wimber produced a more comprehensive family history in her book. John became an accomplished musician playing over 20 different musical instruments. John and Carol were married in Riverside, California on 23 December

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 245.

1955.<sup>15</sup> A few years later marriage problems brought them close to divorce. Those times of trouble prepared and opened them for God. Two old friends Dick and Lynn Heying, new believers themselves, invited them to their church.

“I was converted to Christ in 1963 through the ministry of Gunner Payne, a man whose zeal for Jesus compelled him to share the gospel with anything that breathed. `.. for the first year of my Christian life, I followed Gunner around, learning to do everything he did.’ By the end of the year, I was also teaching evangelistic Bible studies. Between 1963 and 1970, Carol and I led hundreds of people to Christ, and by 1970 I was leading several Bible studies a week, with more than 500 people involved. I was appointed to the Yorba Linda Friends Church as staff in 1970 because we had personally brought so many new Christians into the church. They were truly our sheep. I served as pastor until 1974. `... In 1974, I left the pastorate to become the founding director of the Department of Church Growth at what became the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth.”<sup>16</sup>

He stayed at Fuller until 1978. “During these years, John worked with 27 denominations (none of them Pentecostal or Charismatic), nine parachurch organizations, and hundreds of local churches. He met with some 40 000 pastors.”<sup>17</sup> Wimber's experience in church growth was very helpful and strategic for later Vineyard church planting, and he helped many pastors with advice and suggestions for church planting, as said in an interview with Steve Nicholson<sup>18</sup>, today's Vineyard's church planting director. This is a short overview of John's life from 1963-1978 and the things that influenced him on his life ministry line.

A small group from the Yorba Linda Friends Church started to meet in someone's house. This group was hungry for God. “Before long the group was accused of speaking in tongues, a thought which had never occurred to them. Then it was said that they were casting out demons and falling on the floor. God was blessing them, so they made no attempt to defend themselves. ... The group had grown to about 100 by April (1977), and John had now become their leader. At this point, the elders of the Friends Church had asked John and Carol to leave. They consented on condition that the leadership write a letter of release and give the young church their blessing. `... Pastor Don McClure suggested that they affiliate with Calvary.’ Calvary Chapel of Yorba Linda had its inauspicious beginning on Mother's Day, May 8, 1977. There were 150 in attendance.”<sup>19</sup>

Another Mother's Day, in 1980, is a significant turning point in Vineyard's history. This Sunday Wimber invited Lonnie Frisbee (more will be said about Lonnie later) to give his testimony at Yorba Linda. Lonnie invited young people under 25 to come forward and prayed for them. Carol Wimber offers her

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<sup>15</sup> Carol Wimber, 44.

<sup>16</sup> John Wimber, 82.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson, 53.

<sup>18</sup> Steve Nicholson, interview by author, 22 January 2010, Vineyard Christian Church of Evanston, Chicago IL, digital voice recording

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, 62-63.

recollection of the event: "The Holy Spirit came with great power on those young people. Suddenly kids were shaking and speaking in tongues. (While the church had been open to the movement of God and had seen a few people tremble and fall, they had never emphasized tongues). ...The place looked like a battlefield. Bodies were everywhere, falling, shaking, weeping, wailing, speaking in tongues."<sup>20</sup>

A second Vineyard stream was initiated by Ken Gulliksen. Ken and his wife Joanie were part of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA in the early 1970's. Out of small Bible study groups, he and a few friends started a Vineyard church in 1975 that birthed a few more Vineyard churches. Keith Green, a talented musician, came to Christ through Ken and was part of the Vineyard church. "While the Vineyard attracted other celebrities such as Bob Dylan, Debby Boone and Hal Lindsey, it was not its people that made it distinctive. According to Bill Dwyer, who was involved at this time, ... the Vineyard 'offered an expression of Christ that was magnetic in its simplicity and intimacy.'<sup>21</sup>

The two streams merged.

"In April of 1982, Chuck Smith invited pastors (Mike MacIntosh, Greg Laurie, Jeff Johnson, Raul Ries, John Wimber and Ken Gulliksen) from the larger Calvary Chapels to Lake Arrowhead, California, for a time of fellowship and prayer. ... During that meeting it became apparent that some were upset with John's emphasis on the Holy Spirit...As a solution, it was suggested that Wimber's church align with the Vineyard churches that had formed under Gulliksen's leadership. ... Wimber and Gulliksen joined in alignment together and Wimber's church became the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Anaheim with Chuck's blessing in May 1982. ... It is important to note that from Gulliksen's perspective, it had never occurred to Chuck Smith that the Vineyard would become a separate movement from Calvary."<sup>22</sup>

Soon some 30 Calvary Chapels joined Vineyard what created a rift between two movements. Vineyard became a church planting movement.

Two significant events, briefly mentioned earlier in this paper, shaped the identity of Vineyard. From 1989 - 1991, Vineyard had an encounter with "prophets" and this phase is called the "Prophetic Phase." January 20th, 1994 will be remembered as the start of the "Toronto Blessing," and Vineyard's "Toronto Phase" existed from 1994 to 1995. Much is written about both of these periods, and it would take too much space to go into the details. From the "Prophetic Phase," in addition to confusion, tension, criticism and disagreement, the Vineyard learned a lot about prophetic gifts. After reading Jackson's account about the Toronto Phase, and talking with Steve Nicholson, I would disagree with his tone and interpretation of some of the events, particularly the ending. In order to get the full picture, it would be helpful to go back a little bit in time, when John Wimber accepted the Toronto Airport Church into the Vineyard Movement. According to Nicholson,<sup>23</sup> their values and theology were more Pentecostal than Vineyard's. That

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>23</sup> Steve Nicholson, interview by author

observation might explain the different approach of the 'Toronto Blessing', and it might add an additional piece of information to the development of the whole Toronto story. Fervently phoning people to come and visit, self promotion, tapes and catchers in front of the church predisposing people to fall, and giving the platform to 'strange' manifestations of the Spirit, were some of the strategies used by the Toronto Airport Vineyard (TAV) church that were not Vineyard style or values. Wimber's unexpected announcement to the TAV that they had been withdrawn from the Vineyard could be explained in part by his impulsiveness and in part by the fact that he was seriously ill with cancer at this time. It might shed a different light on his rejection of Ted Haggard's reconciliation effort? I personally agree with Haggard's attempt and challenge to Vineyard as recorded in Bill Jackson's book: "He challenged the Vineyard to create a model which would be a first step toward reversing the historical trend to break fellowship with portions of the church that are experiencing a supernatural outpouring of God's Spirit."<sup>24</sup> Haggard did not have the whole story. As I write this, I recall my visit to Haggard's 5,000-member church in Colorado, a few years ago, and hearing a remarkable story of church growth starting from his living room. As I view the DVD about Lonnie Frisbee's life, Ted Haggard's sad moral failure comes to mind.

In Wimber's "bush analogy," maybe this time the gardener let the bush grow too much before cutting it, or perhaps he cut it too early. Those two phases played an important part in shaping Vineyard's identity.

After the "Prophetic Phase," in 1991, John Wimber gave a list of things for which he was looking in the Vineyard churches' core values, that centered the movement:

1. The Bible taught as the Word of God
2. Ministry to the poor, orphans, widows, etc
3. Evangelism tied to social concerns, if possible
4. Healing the sick and casting out demons
5. Commitment to small groups
6. Equipping the saints in things such as serving, giving, doctrine, family, finances, etc.
7. Interaction with other pastors and churches
8. Worship that reflects the values God had given us such as intimacy, being natural, etc.
9. The exercise of spiritual gifts
10. Commitment to mission<sup>25</sup>

On November 16, 1997, John Wimber died of a massive brain hemorrhage.

In 1998, the American Vineyard Church (AVC) had 449 churches in the USA and 370 International

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<sup>24</sup> Jackson, 332.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 246.

churches, in 52 countries<sup>26</sup>. In 2010, the AVC had around 600 churches in the USA,<sup>27</sup> and around 1000 churches internationally.

## KEY INFLUENCES ON THE VINEYARD STORY

### Key sociological factors (by Donald E. Miller, University of Southern California)

I believe we are witnessing a second reformation that is transforming the way Christianity will be experienced in the new millennium. The style of Christianity dominated by eighteenth-century hymns, routinized liturgy, and bureaucratized layers of social organization is gradually dying. In its place are emerging hundreds of new paradigm churches, which are appropriating stylistic and organizational elements from our postmodern culture. This reformation, unlike the one led by Martin Luther, is challenging not doctrine, but the medium through which the message of Christianity is articulated. But what makes this reformation radical has largely been abandoned. Instead, the leaders of these new paradigm churches are starting new movements, unbounded by denominational bureaucracy and the restraint of tradition – except the model of first-century Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

The 1960's launched a cultural revolution whose implication we are still seeking to understand. Much of the rhetoric surrounding "countercultural" values is currently pejorative and politically condemnatory. Nevertheless, however tired and frayed some of the concepts may be, they are still important reference points in understanding the cultural restructuring being done by new paradigm churches. In particular, new paradigm churches and their members have responded to the *therapeutic*, *individualistic*, and *antiestablishment* themes of the counterculture. In each instance they have incorporated an element of these values into their religious life, while rejecting other implications of these stances.<sup>29</sup>

**Other factors:** Baby-boomers (born between 1946-1964); John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Bobby Kennedy killed; Vietnam war; Beatles; Drugs, sex and rock'n roll; Hippie movement; Jesus People Movement; Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Church, ...

**Authors that influenced some of the theological thinking:** Chuck Kraft, Russell Spitter, James Engel, Donald Gee, Morton Kelsey, George Ladd, Paul Hiebert, Peter Wagner, ...

**Key figures in the beginning of Vineyard:** Dick and Lynn Heying, Gunner Payne, John and Carol Wimber, Peter Wagner, Chuck Smith, John McClure, Bob and Penny Fulton, Carl Tuttle, Lonnie Frisbee, Tom Stipe, Ken and Joanie Gulliksen, Brent Rue, Jack Little, Bill Dwyer, Craig Mechler, Todd and Debbie Hunter, ...

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 340.

<sup>27</sup> The survey of pastors in 1996 done by Dr. Donald E. Miller from the University of Southern California done in 1996, showed that the median Vineyard Fellowship had 150 members. At this time Vineyard USA had 411 churches in USA what is 61 650 members. In 1996 there were 192 churches internationally (source: Jackson, 340). In 2004 Vineyard USA had around 600 churches with 140 000 members (source Wikipedia). Today there are around 650 churches in USA and close to 1000 churches internationally (those numbers are approximate numbers and serve only as illustration).

<sup>28</sup> Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 11.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 20.

Those are some of the contextual factors and key influences that significantly impacted the time and culture and people that shaped Vineyard at its beginning. I will concentrate on one particular contradictory person that played a significant role in some of the key moments in Vineyard's, as well Calvary Chapel's, history. His name is Lonnie Frisbee.

### Lonnie Frisbee (1950-1993)

I mentioned Lonnie before in reference to John Wimber's inviting him to give his testimony at Jorba Linda on Mothers Day in May of 1980. Lonnie's story is fascinating to me, and I will quote a few episodes from his life that touch not only the Vineyard story but illustrate attitudes at the time in which he lived. The conclusion of the essay by David Di Sabatino, leading historian of the Jesus People movement, raises some challenging questions and thoughts:

#### LONNIE'S CONVERSION STORY

"I was nudist-vegetarian-hippie when the Lord called me. I was going into the desert, taking off my clothes and I'm saying, 'God, if you're really real, reveal yourself to me.' One afternoon, the whole atmosphere of this canyon started to tingle and change. The Lord identified himself to me and said, 'I'm Jesus. I build nations and I tear them down. It is better for a nation to have never known me than to have known me and turned their back from me.' I thought all roads lead to Rome, but He explained to me that He was the only way to know God. I accepted him and he said, 'I am going to send you to the people.' Then he gave me a vision of thousands of people, and they were wandering around in a maze of darkness with no direction or purpose for their lives. He showed me that there was a light on me that he was placing on my life ... and that it was Jesus Christ, and I was going to bear the Word of the Lord."<sup>30</sup>

#### LONNIE&CALVARY CHAPEL

"The Rev. Edward E. Plowman, editor of *Christianity Today*, documented Frisbee's influence on Calvary Chapel by stating that the "population explosion" at the church following the couple's (*Lonnie and his wife*) arrival had 'skyrocketed from 150 into the thousands within two years'<sup>31</sup>

#### LONNIE&VINEYARD

John Wimber invited Lonnie to preach at the Mother's Day evening meeting in 1980. „At the close of the service Frisbee invited 'all those under the age of 25' to come to the front altar. Wimber later recounted that upon Frisbee's prayer, 'people fell to the floor. Others, who did not believe in tongues, loudly spoke in tongues. The speaker roamed among the crowd, praying for people, who then immediately fell over with the Holy Spirit resting on them.'" Wimber notes that the event served as a powerful 'watershed moment' in the life of the church and the initiation of what would eventually become a separate church denomination."<sup>32</sup>

#### DEATH OF A HIIPPIE PREACHER

"His death on March 12, 1993, as a result of AIDS, offers a puzzling end to a rather spectacular, albeit brief, evangelistic career. How does one reconcile the extremes that resonate throughout his biography? Lonnie Frisbee remains as enigmatic in death as he was in life. ... As embarrassing as Lonnie Frisbee's story may be to many of those who were influenced by him, the

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<sup>30</sup> Jackson, 395.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 401.

fact remains that God called him while he was an LSD-ingesting hypnotist who was experimenting with alternative sexuality just as God called Paul as he was a murderer. To miss the underlying premise of Frisbee's biography – that God would risk His reputation by aligning Himself to such a frail character – is to ignore the potential that lies resonant with each of us. That God 'chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things' (1 Cor. 1:28) should cause us to rejoice with humility. Ultimately, we need ask ourselves when we point to someone like Frisbee with an accusatory finger: Is the line between saint and sinner that clearly defined for any of us? <sup>33</sup>

I choose Lonnie Frisbee's story because it illustrates how God uses unlikely people to do great things through them. Was not David an unlikely young man in front of Goliath? Would we choose the same disciples as Jesus did? Would we choose Paul, the persecutor of the church and murderer, to bring the Gospel to the pagans? Would we use William Seymour, a black man, blind to one eye to start the Azusa Street Revival in the time when racial divide was huge in US, making him the founder of modern Pentecostalism ... and the list can go on and on. It is encouraging to see those examples. It illustrates as well Lonnie's almost child-like faith in God and the power of the Holy Spirit that touched so many. It illustrates the power of love that frees someone from the bondage and that compels a young hippie to share the good news with his fellow hippies about Jesus. John Wimber asked Lonnie to speak to Vineyard on the Mother's Day of 1980 and it has been talked about this service for years in private conversations, written about in books and retold in conferences. Wimber couldn't sleep this night, he was "agonizing over his flock", crying out "Lord, if this is you please tell me!" as Bill Jackson writes. "They weren't prepared for what happened over the next few months. A revival broke out among the teenagers who had gotten "blasted" in the meeting, and they began to rove around in packs looking for other kids who needed to get saved. They witnessed and prayed for the sick on the streets and saw hundreds converted and healed."<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, it also illustrates the seriousness of the spiritual warfare and the many dangers on the way and the need for close loving fellowship of friends, who will help us on this journey full of temptation. The spiritual battle is raging fiercely in our time, maybe even more intense than ever; it is sad to hear about casualties on the way, and it is a constant reminder of how much more we should be around each other fighting the battle together. It is easy to point an 'accusatory finger' to someone who lost the battle without being around when it was needed most. May Lonnie's story be an encouragement and warning to all of us.

### VINEYARD IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER RENEWAL AND REVIVAL MOVEMENTS

I will briefly compare the Vineyard story with the Moravian Movement (*Moravians*) from the 18th century, and with the *24-7 Prayer Movement* and Wheaton Revival of 1995. If we look at some writings about

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 405.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 76.

*Moravians*, what happened on August 13, 1727 in Berthelsdorf has some similarities with the above Vineyard accounts. The presence of the Holy Spirit was felt and people were deeply touched, crying, and overcome with passionate emotion.

As they entered the door of the church at Berthelsdorf, the hairs on the backs of people's necks started to rise. The atmosphere was electric. Everyone knew that something was about to happen, but no one was quite sure what it was. As they sung the opening hymn, they admitted their sin, called for God to break its power in their lives and were overcome with such passionate emotion that they wept loudly as they sang. The singing was followed by a powerful prayer by the Brethren, a public confession on behalf of the congregation by Zinzendorf, and finally Pastor John Suss pronounced the absolution over them. Finally, as they took communion together, they were "baptized into one spirit". They felt the overwhelming love and joy of the Lord. As one participant wrote, "we learned to love."<sup>35</sup>

The renewal among *Moravians* released the love for other people in need, the new missionary zeal inspired people to go to the nations.

While in Copenhagen in 1731, Zinzendorf met Anthony Ulrich, a slave from the Danish West Indies, and invited him to Herrnhut. Ulrich visited Herrnhut and spoke of the need for the gospel among his fellow slaves. The *Moravians* picked up the burden and within one year, the first missionaries were sent out to the Danish West Indies.<sup>36</sup>

*Moravians* are considered to be the first Protestant missionary movement in history. The Vineyard movement reached out to other nations as well. Not only has Vineyard impacted and brought renewal to other denominations around the world (for example, the Anglican Church in United Kingdom, South Africa and others), but today, the Vineyard Movement has more 1500 Vineyard churches planted in many countries of the world.

*Moravians* emphasis on ongoing prayer (24-7-365) lasted for more than 125 years. Vineyard might not have such a strong focus on prayer. The Vineyard Prophetic Phase, as mentioned above, was shaky for Vineyard. The initial "merger" with *prophetic and intercessory* brought some confusion and influenced Vineyard's prayer focus.<sup>37</sup> One of the core values of Vineyard during the „Prophetic Phase“ was prayer, but after the parting from the „prophets“ this value was not anymore the core value. In this regard *Moravians*, inspired the *24-7 Prayer Movement* of today.

It would be hard to prove a relationship between the Toronto Blessing and Wheaton revival in 1995 although they happened at the same time. In my opinion, reading about the spread of the Toronto Blessing, and excluding some of the strange manifestation that received criticism and eventually led to the

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<sup>35</sup> Power point presentation by dr. Rick Richardson, December 2009, Wheaton College

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Jackson compares the core values in 1990 and 1991 with a comment that „there has been,, by this time, an open move away from the themes introduced by Metro Vineyard Fellowship in Kansas City. This leaves the question was the baby (prayer) thrown with the water? Jackson, 250.

exclusion of the Toronto Airport Vineyard from the Vineyard movement, there is a connection. At this time there was a movement of the Spirit felt in many places around US and the World. "At the North American Conference for Itinerant Evangelists in July 1994, Billy Graham noted that 'America is at the center of a great revival ... I'm praying for a new touch of the Holy Spirit."<sup>38</sup> Another similarity is the focus on the renewal of students at Wheaton College with confessions, repentance, new commitment, refreshments of the faith etc., and the renewal in many Vineyard churches at the same time (some say 2/3 of Vineyard churches experienced some form of renewal during this time). The Vineyard movement, in its short history, was the catalyst for much renewal in the Church regardless of the denominational differences.

An interesting similarity between Vineyard and similar renewal and revival movements in history, is the fact that almost all of the noted moves and manifestations of the Spirit were attacked and resisted, mostly from other churches, or individual believers who did not share the same theology. We can see it in the case of persecuted *Moravians* and criticism from established churches of the *24-7 Prayer Movement's* unconventional worship and prayer style (boiler prayer rooms, club gatherings, dress code etc.). Vineyard, throughout its history has received a lot of criticism, and even in Wheaton's Renewal in 1995, some professors and leaders were outspokenly distressed over what was transpiring, calling it a display of extreme emotionalism.

## EVALUATION OF VINEYARD'S STORY

### Vineyards Strengths:

Many strengths are already mentioned in this paper:

- Radical Middle – balancing Word and Spirit,
- Worship – bringing contemporary music to the church, connecting the generation of the wild 60s with new creativity and sound, inspiring the worship leaders of today
- Sign and Wonders – bringing the gifts of the Spirit back to the forefront of the church but without the hype and emotionalism as seen in some other charismatic circles;
- Being a church planting movement with a strong focus on evangelism
- Colorful history rich with learning experiences
- Mature leadership today
- More and more urban Vineyard churches, many of which are multicultural and multiethnic

### Vineyard's Room for Improvement:

-John Wimber's leadership style was at the same time strength and weakness. He had the personality of a

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 301.

jazz musician, prone to experiment and improvise; his dissonance sometimes created problems for others in the leadership team, as did his impulsiveness.

-Looking at the present US leadership profile of Vineyard, there is very little diversity; Vineyard leadership is comprised of predominantly white males in their 60's, which is not the best combination in today's multicultural, diverse world.

"We believe that the New Testament church was governed by plurality of elders. We also see the gift of leadership operating in the early church, so we affirm the need of one among the elders to take the lead in showing the way and making directional decisions. John Wimber believed that women are to be affirmed in every aspect of the ministry except the governance of the church. ... Some in Vineyard define "governance" as excluding the women from eldership while others ordain women as elders but retain a man as the senior pastor."<sup>39</sup>

-The role of women in the church, especially when it comes to leadership, has been debated throughout church history and is very important for the church today. More and more women today are occupying senior leadership positions in business, government and society. One of the questions is: "Can a women with a gift of leadership be a senior pastor?" Today Vineyard is taking the more egalitarian position concerning this question and allows every church to make their own decision concerning the leadership role of women. In 2006, the National Board of Vineyard of USA said this: "In response to the message of the Kingdom, the leadership of the Vineyard USA will encourage, train and empower women in all levels of leadership both local and translocal. The movement as a whole welcomes the participation of women in leadership in all areas of ministry."<sup>40</sup> Some theologians, favorable to Vineyard, think that the present egalitarian Vineyard leadership position differs from Wimber's (and New Testament) position about women in leadership and call it Vineyard's weakness.

The gift of leadership is not the only qualifying factor for church leadership, but the question of church governance was, and continues to be, an important area for the Vineyard church planting movement.

-Taking the same leadership issue on the global level and looking at Vineyard internationally, the picture is not always clear. Vineyard decided that each country should have indigenous leadership, which is a great decision, but sometimes internal leadership problems escalate into bigger and bigger problems without wise counsel from the whole "Vineyard body." The mission field is another area where this dissonance becomes more serious with cultural differences between Vineyard US and Vineyard from other countries. This is an area for improvement.

-Vineyard was in some areas a pioneer, cutting edge, change agent movement for the renewal of the Church, especially seen in: healing, bringing gifts of the Spirit in the forefront, introducing new contemporary worship, and giving a platform to the "prophetic." The questions can be asked: what is the

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<sup>39</sup> Jackson, 108.

<sup>40</sup> Vineyard USA. Available from [www.vineyardusa.org/site/blogs/vineyard-women](http://www.vineyardusa.org/site/blogs/vineyard-women).

cutting edge today, and does Vineyard remain open to being a pioneer, or was it only Wimber's calling? "John had told me that while praying one morning, he asked the Lord just exactly what was his 'call' and the Lord had said very clearly that he was called to be a 'change agent'. From that point on he never wavered in his understanding of what he was about."<sup>41</sup> This point resonates with Dallas Willard's comment to Todd Hunter, "Todd, my concern for you guys is that in the history of ideas, followers rarely understand pioneering leaders." Willard said, "Todd, you must ensure that Vineyard churches maintain the visible signs of the Holy Spirit and the Kingdom of God, or else Vineyard churches will never maintain the faith for discipleship or evangelism or anything else."<sup>42</sup>

Talking with Steve Nicholson about the visibility of signs of the Spirit so characteristic for Vineyard in the past, Steve used healing as an example, "We have today even more healings in Vineyard than before, but it is not anymore the novelty as it was then, and we don't talk about it the way we talked in the past because we were learning then; now it became the fabric of our DNA."<sup>43</sup> The danger can be when something that was so "direct, spontaneous, and immediate in the first generation of the movement became formalized, ritualized, and in time bureaucratized." Weber labeled this process the "routinization of charisma."<sup>44</sup> Let's pray and hope that Vineyard will not routinize its charisma, especially for the sake of all the new members that are joining the movement.

The question remains: is Vineyard listening and learning new things from God for *today* as it did *yesterday*, in order not to lose its radicalness in the middle for *tomorrow*? Thank you Vineyard; you inspired one more person and gave him hope that church can be different and relevant and passionate and a worshipping community and creative and caring and loving and missional and ... I have a dream that one day in Croatia...

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<sup>41</sup> Carol Wimber, 166.

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, 380.

<sup>43</sup> Steve Nicholson, interview by author

<sup>44</sup> Miller, 26.

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