

VINEYARD LEADER DIES

John Wimber, purveyor of a self-styled brand of “power evangelism,” died last Nov. 17 from a brain hemorrhage caused by an accidental fall. He was 63.

The former jazz musician-turned-pastor became a Christian in 1962 and was affiliated with Chuck Smith and the Calvary Chapel fellowships. In 1983, he joined a group of independent congregations known as the “Vineyards.” Four years later, the Association of Vineyard Churches was officially formed. Under his leadership, he helped to build the affiliation into a 150,000-member international group. Wimber’s teachings emphasized the spiritual gifts of tongues and healing and cited such signs and wonders as God’s validation of his ministry.

Robert Schuller, pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, told the *Los Angeles Times* that he felt “power when Wimber visited him” after an accident in 1991 that left him in a coma. “I’m convinced that God’s healing power entered my body through the personal touch of John Wimber,” Schuller told the newspaper after learning of Wimber’s death.

Wimber’s critics had long criticized his “power evangelism” was devoid of the cross, which according to 1 Corinthians 1:18 is the “power” of God. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Todd Hunter, National Coordinator of Vineyard Churches, as saying Wimber used to say, “Look at me, I’m just a fat man trying to get to heaven.”

Although Wimber believed that the perpetuation of the gifts of tongues and healing could eliminate “Satan, sin and sickness,” he suffered a number of ailments in his last years. Just a few weeks before his death, he underwent open heart surgery. Three years earlier, he suffered a mild stroke. In 1993, doctors discovered a malignant tumor in his nasal pharynx. The cancer and subsequent treatment reportedly caused Wimber to lose more than 100 pounds.

—MKG

CARTER SAYS MORMONS ARE CHRISTIAN

Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter has denounced leaders of his denomination for declaring that professing members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are non-Christians.

Carter told reporters, “Too many leaders now, I think, in the Southern Baptist Convention and in other conventions, are trying to act as Pharisees did, who were condemned by Christ, in trying to define who can and who cannot be considered an acceptable person in the eyes of God. In other words, they’re making judgments on behalf of God. I think that’s wrong.”

The former U.S. president also told the Mormon-owned *Deseret News* that his church’s leaders were “narrow in their definition of what is a proper Christian or certainly even a proper Baptist.” He said Baptists “are inerrantists (meaning) there cannot possibly be any error in even a translation of a Bible down through the centuries.”

The newspaper stated that Carter has misgivings about “Christians trying to convert other Christians.” The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptists, under the direction of Interfaith Witness director Phil Roberts, has made a concerted effort to equip its members to witness to Mormons. The Southern Baptists will hold their annual convention this summer in Salt Lake City.

Carter’s comments raised the ire of Southern Baptist leaders. Roberts told the Baptist Press that, “Mr. Carter must be a better politician and diplomat than a theologian. His comments show he is totally uninformed and naive about the nature and beliefs of the Mormon church.” Southern Baptist Convention president Tom Elliff said Carter “would do well to take a serious look at the Mormon faith before embracing it as part of the Christian community.”

Carter’s reservations about interfaith witnessing were not exclusive to the Mormon religion. “If you mean should we Protestants devote our time to converting Catholics to be Protestants, that’s something with which I generally disagree.”

—MKG

NEWSPAPER CHALLENGES REVIVAL’S CLAIMS

Following four months of investigative work, the *Pensacola News Journal* revealed an excess of questionable issues and practices by the leadership of the Brownsville Assembly of God church. Last November, the Florida newspaper reported its findings in a five-day series of “special reports” in nearly three dozen articles.

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