

JAMES RYLE'S VINEYARD THEOLOGY

By Debra Bouey

(From the February 1996 issue of *The Christian Conscience* magazine Vol. 2 No. 2. Reprinted with permission.)

Questions continue to arise about Promise Keepers and how closely linked the organization is with the doctrinal stance of the Vineyard movement. These issues are of concern particularly in light of the following comments by Promise Keepers' Board Member and Vineyard Pastor James Ryle, who is also Bill McCartney's pastor, during an interview with *GQ* writer Scott Raab (Jan. 1996, p.129):

"Nothing in the world," he said, chuckling, "could have ever possibly happened worse, in the whole world, than for Promise Keepers — this incredible, significant, undeniably noble movement — to be spawned out of the Vineyard."

Here, Pastor Ryle is telling us, indisputably, Vineyard "spawned" Promise Keepers. It is very difficult to believe that Promise Keepers was propagated by Vineyard and yet remains unaffected by Vineyard's doctrinal views, some of which are quite questionable theologically.

For instance, Pastor Ryle believes his dreams and visions are prophetic revelations directly from God. In a sermon entitled "Sons of Thunder" he preached at his church, Boulder Valley Vineyard in Longmont, Colorado, July 1, 1990, he alleges that God is about to anoint Christian musicians with the same "anointing" that was originally given to the Beatles. He says God told him in a dream:

"I called those four lads from Liverpool to myself. There was a call from God on their life; they were gifted by my hand; and it was I who anointed them, for I had a purpose, and the purpose was to usher in the charismatic renewal with musical revival around the world."

Obviously, the Beatles were anything but an instrument of God during the years they recorded and performed music together, as the lyrics to their songs attest. So, how does Ryle account for this? In the same sermon he says God told him:

"The four lads from Liverpool went AWOL and did not serve in my army. They served their own purposes and gave the gift to the other side."

Ryle goes on to say that God told him he lifted the Beatles anointing in 1970 and has held it in His hand since but that He is about to release it again in the church.

Then, there is the book Pastor Ryle wrote entitled *Hippo in the Garden* (Creation House 1993), which stems from yet another dream he had. He claims he heard the Lord tell him:

"I am about to do a strange, new thing in My church. It will be like a man bringing a hippopotamus into his garden. Think about that." (p.259)

Apparently, Pastor Ryle did give a great deal of thought to it and reached the conclusion God was telling him He was going to return "the power of His prophetic word by His Holy Spirit into churches that no longer have any place for it" (p. 261). Pastor Ryle continues: "Not only is the hippo in the garden the unusual thing God will do prophetically within His church, but it also heralds His release of a prophetic voice into the world through His church, bringing in a great last-days harvest" (p. 262). Ryle then quotes Acts 2:17-21 and says: "A vast prophetic

JAMES RYLE'S VINEYARD THEOLOGY

movement inspired by the Holy Spirit within the church in the midst of the world resulting in an evangelistic ingathering — that is the 'hippo in the garden'" (p. 262).

A hippo happens to be a member of the same biological family as the pig. Given the situation with the Gadarene demons being cast into a herd of swine (Matthew 8:28-32), it seems highly unlikely God would liken Himself to a member of the pig family, does it not?

Last year, yet another book recounting hearing God through dreams and visions was released by Ryle, entitled *A Dream Come True: A Biblical Look at How God Speaks Through Dreams and Visions* (Creation House, 1995). Obviously, the "word of God" is considerably far more spacious than Scripture. Rather, Ryle adds to it his own subjective personal revelations, visions, words of prophecy and dreams. Both of his books are replete with isolated Scripture passages wrested out of context and applied peculiarly. Ryle proclaims: "The Bible is not an end in itself, rather, it is the God-given means to an end" (*Hippo in the Garden*, p. 74).

What Ryle and others in the Vineyard organization are teaching is that God's written Word should be viewed through the lens of one's personal, spiritual experiences, dreams and visions as opposed to rightly asserting that one's personal, spiritual experiences, dreams and visions ought to be viewed through the lens of God's written Word. In so doing, he and the others have denigrated and relegated God's written Word, that *more sure word of prophecy* (2 Pet. 1:19) to the back seat while "fresh prophetic words" overtake the driver's seat and thus dictate the direction one ought to take in the practice of one's faith.

This serves to deny that *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.* (2 Tim. 3:16-17) If God's written word is sufficient to equip the man of good for **every** good work, what need is there to rely heavily upon subjective impressions? To do so clearly denies that God's written Word **is** sufficient.

Is There Carry-Over?

What, perhaps you are wondering, does all of this have to do with Promise Keepers? Since, as Ryle has told us, the Vineyard organization "spawned" the Promise Keepers movement and Ryle himself, until very recently, was a board member, is it not reasonable to assert that the movement itself is managed by men holding doctrinal views congruent with Ryle's? Bill McCartney has been pastored by Ryle throughout Promise Keepers' formative years and still is today.

If, as Ryle tells us, Vineyard did indeed "spawn" Promise Keepers, then the movement is likely to be equally as inundated with the same doctrinal convictions. This is an issue which is not likely to go away and some hard questions need to be asked and answered... and the Promise Keepers movement will be plagued by these issues until they are viably dealt with.