

Challenging Leaders

I am not alone in my desire to see the church return to biblical standards.

Jack Hayford called it a “watershed moment.” The occasion was a meeting of 50 to 60 key charismatic leaders who came together in Orlando in January to discuss tough integrity issues facing the church (see the report on page 20). In an age when it seems nearly anything goes—even in the church—and when confrontations about conduct, doctrine and morality are often greeted with charges of “judgmentalism” or “legalism,” the symposium convened to determine what can be done to set a standard.

Hayford and I both had felt for a while that we had to do something. We saw that too many leaders who are endeavoring to walk in integrity are hurt by extremists—those who, by their erroneous teaching or extravagant lifestyles, create negative stereotypes for all charismatics. So last fall Hayford wrote an article in *Ministries Today* magazine calling for accountability.

Then we decided to host an invitation-only meeting of ministers who are concerned about the same integrity issues that concern us. The group included charismatic leaders from several major denominations as well as various independent “streams.” Our common denominator was a commitment to God’s Word in the power of the Spirit.

Hayford set the tone for the meeting by declaring that charismatics must shed the image that our convictions regarding basic, Christ-like values are foggy. “By reason of an absence of a collective voice to address this,” he said,

“the silence seems to be approval, or, at the very least, an indifference to righteous standards.”

A longer analysis of the meeting by Hayford appears in the March/April issue of Ministries Today, along with a copy of a statement, dubbed the “Orlando Statement,” that was drafted by the group. “I was impressed how quickly common acknowledgment was made that a reasonably practical, solidly biblical statement be set forth,” Hayford wrote in Ministries Today. “All expressed concern that a tidal drift from the stream of the Spirit’s purity and from leadership accountability be stemmed.”

I was encouraged by the strong affirmations made by other leaders. As a Christian journalist for the last 28 years, I have seen ministries rise and fall and some increasingly disturbing trends develop. A decade ago, leaders of a widely known charismatic church were accused by more than two dozen women of gross sexual wrongdoing by the leadership. When we appealed to leaders to investigate the charges, the response was to sweep the issue under the rug. Recent experience has shown that a similar attitude on the part of Roman Catholic leaders created one of the greatest crises that denomination has faced in 50 years.

Unquestionably, there are wonderful things happening. But it seems that not a month goes by that another scandal doesn’t develop. This month Lee Grady reports in his column that in at least one city charismatics are saying churches should condone homosexuality.

The leadership symposium was an encouragement to me that, like the prophet Elijah who believed he was the only one serving God but found out there were 7,000 other prophets that had not

bent their knee to Baal, I am not alone in my desire to see the church return to biblical standards of life and ministry.

The symposium and its resulting statement was Step No. 1 in a process that must continue. I hope the statement will be widely accepted, and I'm urging all ministry leaders to affirm it.

Please read it on our Web site, [www.charismamagazine.com](#), and then post your comments. I believe a tidal wave of response will make a statement not only to the church but also to the world. It will show that we are committed to focusing on the church's greatest calling, emphasized at the symposium by evangelist Reinhard Bonnke: winning souls.

Our hope, as Rod Parsley so aptly expressed it, is that "a paradigm shift can take place in the leadership and the body of Christ at large, where souls, once again, truly become our focus."

Stephen Strang, founder of Charisma, hosted the symposium in Orlando in January. Go to [www.charismamagazine.com](#) to access the Orlando Statement.