

Editor decries Pentecostal shrugs over moral failures: J. Lee Grady of Charisma

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Four years ago, after Ted Haggard confessed to involvement in a gay sex and drug scandal, he lost his Colorado Springs pulpit and his job as head of the National Association of Evangelicals and underwent a period of counseling and discipline. Haggard has led some prayer services in Colorado Springs lately, but denies he has imminent plans to lead a congregation.

Other fallen charismatic/Pentecostal superstars, however, have rapidly re emerged into the spotlight with a new wife, a new church, a new TV ministry or a new “message from God” that seems to dismiss the gravity of their sins.

J. Lee Grady has seen it all, and he’s had enough. Grady, a longtime editor of the widely read *Charisma* magazine, says the miraculous and transforming power of the Holy Spirit that he and other charismatic/Pentecostal have experienced is under assault by the “epidemic of moral failure among our leaders.”

“We can have the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation without this circus sideshow going on,” Grady said in an interview. “I’m waving my hands in the air because this is a huge problem, and we are going to experience even more serious problems in our churches if we don’t know how to apply godly discipline to our wayward leaders.”

It’s a message he’s preaching in his new book, *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale*, and one that’s roiling the waters in one of the fastest-growing segments of evangelical Christianity.

Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians—who embrace speaking in tongues, healing and other signs and wonders—have been raising people’s eyebrows ever since the Holy Spirit first descended on Pentecost. At the time, skeptical observers figured

they were drunk.

Things haven't changed much since. Aimee Semple McPherson, a pioneer of the Pentecostal movement that grew out of Los Angeles in the early 20th century, was known for her fervor, her pioneering use of radio and her mysterious disappearance in 1926. The 1980s were rocked by the sexual and financial shenanigans of Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swaggart and others.

Grady was a member of a Southern Baptist church when, in 1976, he was filled with the Holy Spirit—"when I became a really radical Christian," he says now. From 1992 until earlier this year he was editor at *Charisma*, and he still writes a column for the magazine called "Fire in My Bones."

Grady says the movement remains as controversial at the dawn of its second century as it was in its first. The movement's embrace of technology—especially television—carries added risks, he said.

His book explores the fall of leaders like Bishop Earl Paulk of Atlanta's Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, who confessed to decades of sexual misconduct before his death last year; divorced evangelists Randy and Paula White, whose lavish lifestyle at Tampa's Without Walls International Church piqued the interest of congressional investigators; abuse charges leveled against Bishop Thomas Wesley Weeks III and his ex-wife Juanita Bynum; and an affair that toppled evangelist Todd Bentley of the Lakeland Revival in Florida.

As if to prove Grady's point, soon after his book was published the wife of famed faith healer Benny Hinn filed for divorce. Hinn defended his sexual purity and said the divorce filing caught him off guard.

Grady said there's nothing unusual about leaders falling—they're sinners just like anyone else, and charismatic/Pentecostal leaders are no guiltier than others. It's just that their failures are more publicized. "Our movement has a lot of television personalities," he said.

What does concern him, however, is fallen leaders who try to emerge from scandal without publicly acknowledging their sin, repenting, submitting to discipline or undergoing counseling. In other words, it's not the fall but the response that matters. "Instead of giving in to our celebrity culture and allowing fallen leaders to reappear in a new pulpit the next week, we need to preserve a sense of purity with

standards of righteousness and systems of accountability,” he said.

Historian Vinson Synan, who has spent decades researching the charismatic and Pentecostal movements, shares many of Grady’s concerns. “Lee’s book is accurate and fair,” said Synan, dean emeritus at Regent University, the Virginia school founded by charismatic broadcaster Pat Robertson. “And I share many of the same concerns Lee has about the lack of discipline and order in our movements.”

Grady said he will continue his vigilant crusade to do whatever he can to keep modern-day Elmer Ganttrys from “hijacking our whole movement.” He went on to say: “I’m unapologetically part of this movement. That’s who I am and there’s no changing that. But just as the apostle Paul was outspoken about false prophets, bad doctrine and bad methodology, I’m going to continue offering words of correction and brotherly rebuke.” *-Steve Rabey, Religion News Service*