

***Engaging the Enemy*, by C. Peter Wagner.** (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), 206 pages.

—Reviewed by Morris McDonald

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C. Peter Wagner served as a missionary in Bolivia and was appointed to the Donald McGavran Chair of Church Growth at Fuller Seminary School of World Missions in 1971. His background is “that of a Scofield dispensational evangelical” who believed Pentecostal “theology seemed so shallow.”

In an earlier book, *Power Encounters*, Mr. Wagner said, “Now things have changed. Now I experience God’s power operating through healing the sick and casting out demons as a regular part of my ministry. I am no longer a dispensationalist or anti-Pentecostal” (p.47).

The premise of this book is: (a) that Satan and his demons are real; (b) that there is a spiritual warfare; (c) that Satan’s hosts include territorial spirit-demons that may be identified by name; and (d) that Christians are to engage in battle with territorial spirit-demons by name in aggressive prayer.

Consider this assertion in Chapter 16 by Vernon Sterk, a missionary of the Reformed Church in America, on the subject of territorial spirits: “I believe one of the most important roles that I must play as a missionary working with the Tzotzil Presbytery [Mexico]... is to call the indigenous church leaders back to a ministry of aggressive prayer in the battle against principalities and powers... thus the ‘command prayer’ has almost fallen into disuse except in cases of obvious personal demon possession” (p.157).

Is our ministry to go forth and “bind” Satan in spiritual warfare? Examine the ministry of some of the writers included in Wagner’s book. Larry Lea, author of Chapter 9 on “Binding the Strongman,” is pictured in a full page ad in *Charisma* magazine in combat fatigues calling 300,000 “prayer warriors” to join him in taking America for God. Lea was one of three charismatic preachers exposed by ABC’s “Primetime Live” and who has since quit his television ministry due to the damaging exposure.

Christians are never instructed in the Bible to embark on “spiritual warfare” ministries. We are not told to bind “demons of pride, of greed, of apartheid, of controversy” and on and on.

The post-resurrection commission (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8) given by our Lord assigns no instruction to go forth and bind demons or to engage in exorcism ministries.

Larry Lea insists, in the fashion of a free-will evangelist: “It is not God’s will that any should perish...it was *our* responsibility...to tear apart the spiritual darkness so that God’s light could shine with full force on the people who heard us preach and sing and testify of His greatness” (p.88, emphasis added).

Here are answers to some of the teachings of *Engaging the Enemy* that do not square with Scripture:

- 1) No New Testament Church was built on the basis of an apostle going into an area and doing spiritual battle with territorial spirits.
- 2) The assumption is that since the heathen name the spirits (“Evil mind,” “Infertility,” and so on), Christians are to discover names of demons in their territory (city, county, or country) and “bind” or “dispossess” these demon-spirits in the name of Christ. (Some of the territorial spirits identified by various authors in this book are “the spirit of religiosity-Nashville,” “the spirit of pleasure-Orlando,” “the spirit of unrighteous trade-London,” “the strongman of bondage-Annapolis,” and “the spirit of unrighteous greed-San Francisco.”)
- 3) One writer, John Dawson (of *Youth With A Mission* and author of *Taking Our Cities for God*) insists, “We must overcome the enemy *before* employing other methods of ministry among men and women” (emphasis added). Does that square with the Bible? We do not find this in the example of the Apostles. In fact, Paul appeared in the midst of the heathen philosophers at Mars Hill and immediately preached Christ. As a matter of fact, Paul said to the Corinthian believers, “I was with you in weakness....” (1 Cor. 2:3) which is opposite to the approach of today’s charismatic power evangelism.
- 4) The lines of Biblical separation are severely blurred throughout this book. Not only is charismatic Larry Lea promoted as a contributing author, but so is Paul (now David) Yonggi Cho, the Korean pastor known for his extreme charismatic compromise. Cho is the author of Chapter 12.
- 5) Finally, C. Peter Wagner offers this bit of heresy: “Pentecostal theologians have made the helpful suggestion of distinguishing the *logos* word of God from the *rhema* word of God.... The *rhema* is regarded as a more immediate word from God which we do not find in the 66 books of the Bible” (pp.15-16).

Much of what is found in this book is experience-related. Anne Gimenez, co-pastor of the Rock Church in Virginia Beach and the author of Chapter 8, begins with “I saw two angels....” Bible verses are pulled out of context and forced into a preconceived framework. If I were to pick the chapter I consider most balanced, it would be Chapter 18 by Michael Green, professor of evangelism at Regent College, Vancouver, BC. He wrote on “Principalities and Powers.”

Jack Brooks, in *Masterpiece*, explains the “signs and wonders movement”:

Power evangelism reflects a shift in American thinking whose secular parallel is the New Age Movement. What it offers in exchange for the ‘evil Western world view’ is not (as its advocates claim) a Scriptural world view, but an *Eastern world view*. The broth of mysticism, existentialism, and anti-intellectualism that’s been brewing since the 60’s has

bubbled over into a preoccupation with powerful physical experiences” (p. 9, emphasis added).

I cannot recommend this book because of its lack of faithfulness to Scripture and our Reformed Standards.