

THE TORONTO BLESSING:
KEY TO EVALUATING RECENT REVIVALS

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Introduction

The charismatic revivals of recent decades have sparked as much controversy as they have revival fires. Pentecostal and charismatic¹ churches generally embraced the revivals at Toronto (1994), Pensacola (1995-2000), Lakeland (2008), and Mobile (2010) as genuine works of the Holy Spirit, but non-charismatic Christians are often unsure of what to think. On the one hand, Christians do not want to be so gullible that they believe any miracle report or legitimize any manifestation as authentic. On the other hand, Christians do not want to attribute the work of the Holy Spirit to the flesh or to the devil. Evaluating any revival movement is therefore a serious undertaking, but conclusions must be drawn after close inspection. This paper will argue that the Toronto Blessing, from which the subsequent revivals were spawned, was not a genuine revival of God because of its promotion of signs and wonders (in place of repentance and salvation), its misguided emphasis upon the Holy Spirit (in place of Jesus Christ), and its counterfeit manifestations which are not from the Holy Spirit. This paper will examine the theological background, the key leaders, the revival itself, and the legacy of the Toronto Blessing before offering a critique of the movement.

The Theological Background of the Toronto Blessing

The Azusa Street Revival and the First Wave of Pentecostalism

The history of charismatic revivals begins with the Holiness movement of the 1800's. Following the doctrines of their founder, John Wesley (1703-1791), the Methodists taught that believers could attain a second blessing of grace, or state of

¹ The term *charismatic* has come to refer to churches outside of denominational Pentecostalism which practice spiritual gifts like tongues, prophecy, and healing (Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 144).

perfection, in their sanctification.² The second blessing was then equated with the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” by Asa Mahan in 1870 and was accompanied by teachings on divine healing and the imminent return of the Christ by holiness leaders such as A. B. Simpson and A. J. Gordon in the latter half of the nineteenth century.³ However, glossolalia was not prominent in the holiness tradition at this time. On New Year’s Day of 1901, it was reported that Agnes Ozman, a student at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, had spoken in tongues as the initial evidence of being baptized with the Spirit. She reportedly spoke and wrote in the Chinese language for a period of three days after Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929), the founder of the school and the “father of the Pentecostal movement”,⁴ laid hands on her and prayed for her.⁵ Other students at the college also sought the gift of tongues and were reported as speaking in foreign languages such as Russian, Spanish, Italian, and Japanese. News of the xenoglossolalia quickly spread, and many viewed the events at Bethel Bible College as the beginning of an end-times worldwide revival.⁶ Parham sent out the missionaries to various countries of the

² See R. G. Tuttle, Jr., “Wesley, John,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second edition, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1266-67; R. V. Pierard, “Holiness Movement, American,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second edition, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 564-65.

³ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 25-33.

⁴ J. R. Goff, Jr., “Parham, Charles Fox,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp., eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 955.

⁵ Parham, originally called this phenomenon “the third blessing”, but the Assemblies of God, which was founded in 1914, followed the teachings of William H. Durham who equated the initial evidence of speaking in tongues with the “second blessing” of baptism of the Spirit (V. Synan, “Pentecostalism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, second edition, ed. by Walter A. Elwell [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 901).

⁶ J. R. Goff, Jr., “Topeka Revival,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp., eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1147.

world, boasting that the students did not need to learn the native languages since they had been given the gift of tongues. However, the missionaries returned home when they were unable to communicate in the indigenous languages,⁷ and Bethel Bible College shut down later that same year.

After the college closed, Parham took his newfound Apostolic Faith Movement on the road. In 1905, he met an African-American holiness preacher, William J. Seymour in Houston, Texas. Parham taught Seymour about the baptism of the Spirit, but Seymour did not experience the baptism of the Spirit with its initial evidence of speaking in tongues until 1906 when he accepted the pastorate at a small Holiness church in Los Angeles, California. Seymour taught the congregation about the baptism of the Spirit, and on April 9, 1906, several members of the church began speaking in tongues. The meetings were eventually moved to a vacant building at 312 Azusa Street, and the Azusa Street Revival continued for a period of three years. Parham condemned the meetings when he visited in October of 1906 because of the “animalism” which included “trances, falling under the power, holy-rolling-dancing-jumping, shaking, jabbering, chattering, wind-sucking and giving vent to meaningless sounds and noises as practiced by the Negroes of the Southland.”⁸ The revival included the phenomenon of being “slain in the Spirit” or “falling under the power” as well as glossolalia.⁹ Parham tried to take over

⁷ See John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 21-24.

⁸ Quoted in C. M. Robeck, Jr., “Seymour, William Joseph,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp., eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1055-56.

⁹ C. M. Robeck, Jr., “Azusa Street Revival,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp., eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 346.

Seymour's church but was unsuccessful.¹⁰ Nevertheless, word of the revival spread, and upwards of 1,500 people at a time squeezed into the small church building over the course of three years to attend the meetings.¹¹ From 1907-1919, Seymour traveled across the country with his Pentecostal message, and three branches of Classical Pentecostalism emerged during this era: Holiness (including Church of God [Cleveland, TN], the Church of God in Christ [African-American], and the Pentecostal Holiness Church), Reformed or Finished Work (Assemblies of God), and Oneness (Unitarian).¹²

The Second and Third Waves of Pentecostalism

During the "first wave" of charismatic renewal, also known as the classical Pentecostal movement, vast numbers of missionaries were sent throughout the world with the Pentecostal teaching about baptism of the Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues.¹³ The "second wave", also known as the Neo-Pentecostal movement or the Charismatic Movement, began in 1960 when Dennis Bennett, rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, CA, was baptized in the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues.¹⁴ Bennett's Pentecostal experience became national news and was featured in

¹⁰ The rest of Parham's ministry career was marred by controversy, including accusations of being cultic, an arrest for sodomy, and endorsement of the Klu Klux Klan. See MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 24-28; Goff, "Parham, Charles Fox," 956.

¹¹ R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 27.

¹² See Robins, *Pentecostalism in America*, 42-47.

¹³ See Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 57-143; Gary B. McGee, "To the Regions Beyond: The Global Expansion of Pentecostalism," in *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*, ed. Vinson Synan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 69-95; Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 161-262; Allan Heaton Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Time and *Newsweek*. Although there had been instances of glossolalia in non-Pentecostal denominations prior to 1960, “charismatic renewal” quickly spread to mainline Protestant denominations,¹⁵ major Protestant denominations (including Southern Baptists, Mennonites, and Greek Orthodox),¹⁶ and even Roman Catholicism.¹⁷ The “third wave” of charismatic renewal began in the 1980’s when evangelicalism embraced the charismatic practices of spiritual gifts and demonstrative praise. Evangelicals rejected the charismatic label and Pentecostal teaching on baptism of the Spirit, though.¹⁸ The second wave was characterized by tongues, healing, and being slain in the Spirit (e.g., Kathryn Kuhlman), but the third wave brought the restoration of prophets and apostles as well as “power evangelism” with signs and wonders.¹⁹ During the third wave, John Wimber founded the Vineyard Movement, former Dallas Theological Seminary professor Jack Deere became

¹⁴ For Bennett’s account of the story, see Vinson Synan, “Charismatic Renewal Enters the Mainline Churches,” in *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*, ed. Vinson Synan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 152.

¹⁵ Synan, “Charismatic Renewal Enters the Mainline Churches,” 153-76.

¹⁶ Vinson Synan, “The ‘Charismatics’: Renewal in Major Protestant Denominations,” in *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*, ed. Vinson Synan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 177-208.

¹⁷ Peter Hocken, “The Catholic Charismatic Renewal,” in *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*, ed. Vinson Synan (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 209-32.

¹⁸ P. D. Hocken, “Charismatic Movement,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp., eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 514.

¹⁹ John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power Evangelism: Signs and Wonders Today* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985).

a charismatic,²⁰ and the “Kansas City Prophets” made grand predictions of an end-time outpouring of the Spirit.²¹

Leaders of the Toronto Blessing

Like the revivals of church history, the Toronto Blessing did not arise unexpectedly. The theological foundation of baptisms of the Spirit, speaking in tongues, receiving prophetic revelations, accompanying signs and wonders, and the expectation of a great revival was in place by the early 1990s. All that was needed was some new manifestations of the Spirit to prove that God was doing something in these last days. This section will trace the roots of the new manifestations present at the Toronto Blessing through three key leaders: Rodney Howard-Browne, Randy Clark, and John Arnott.

Rodney Howard-Browne

Rodney Howard-Browne, is a South-African preacher and charismatic evangelist who claims to have a special anointing from God which enables him to impart the fire of God into other believers. In 1979, when he was seventeen years old, Howard-Browne prayed exhaustively for God’s power in his life. He shouted over and over again until he was hoarse, “God, I want your power!” He claims that God answered his prayers and gave him a mandate to pray for people until they became “drunk in the Spirit.” The resulting phenomenal manifestations include speaking in tongues, uncontrollable laughter, and being glued to the floor and unable to move (“Holy Ghost Glue”).²² For this

²⁰ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); cf. Richard L. Mayhue, “Who Surprised Whom? The Holy Spirit or Jack Deere?” *TMSJ* 5 no. 2 (Fall 1994): 123-140.

²¹ See Hank Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival: Looking for God in All the Wrong Places*, expanded and updated (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2001), 160-69, 175-78.

reason, Howard-Browne is known as the “Holy Ghost Bartender” and the “Holy Ghost Hitman.”²³

In 1987, Howard-Browne and his family moved to the United States because Howard-Browne believes that God told him, “Stir up the churches and tell them to get ready for the coming revival.” He travelled throughout the United States preaching his message of a coming revival. In 1989, revival broke out at his church meeting in Albany, New York, when people “fell under the power” and became drunk in the Spirit.²⁴ Then in 1990, Howard-Browne teamed up with Benny Hinn at Hinn’s church in Orlando, Florida. Pastors and church members again became drunk in the Spirit, and Hinn encouraged people to embrace this genuine work of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ The next break came for Howard-Browne in 1991 when he appeared on stage with Kenneth Copeland. At a nationally televised convention, Copeland touched Howard-Browne who fell under the power and lay on the floor. Copeland then prophesied over Howard-Browne that the stage was being set and that this was only the beginning of the outpouring of the former and latter rains. He also prayed for Howard-Browne to be released from an evil spirit that was hindering Howard-Browne’s ministry. At the service the next day, Copeland invited Howard-Browne to the front of the church to share a word from the Lord. Howard-Browne spoke in tongues and prophesied that a great outpouring of God was about to

²² For Howard-Browne’s own testimony, see “Sid Roth Interview with Rodney Howard Browne on "Its Supernatural" – Walking in the Miraculous,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDLpZe378E0>.

²³ See Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 21-23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-25; cf. Howard-Browne’s biography, “About RMI,” accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.revival.com/rodney-howard-browne.11.1.html>.

²⁵ Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 26. Hanegraaf notes that Hinn soon disapproved of Howard-Browne and refused to invite him back.

take place. What followed was a display of pastors and church members, including Copeland himself, becoming drunk in the Spirit and laughing uncontrollably. Copeland concluded the service by prophesying that God was going to fill the churches during this new time of refreshing that was about to overtake churches.²⁶

The biggest speaking engagement, which projected Howard-Browne to the center of international attention, came in April of 1993 when he was invited to speak at Carpenter's Home Church in Lakeland, Florida. The Assemblies of God pastor at the church, Karl Strader, had been struggling under the stress of his son's arrest and indictment for stealing more than three million dollars from investors²⁷ as well as a church split from a few years before.²⁸ Howard-Browne's revival preaching and Holy-Ghost laughter raised the spirits of Strader and the congregation, and it was reported that Strader himself spent six weeks on the floor of his church laughing.²⁹ Although Howard-Browne performed no miracles on camera, thousands of television viewers saw the spiritual drunkenness, uncontrollable laughter, and Holy Ghost glue that accompanied Howard-Browne's revivals. The meetings in Lakeland went on for about three months, and thousands of people from all over the world came to see Howard-Browne and this

²⁶ Ibid., 26-27. See "Rodney Howard Brown – Ministry Clips," accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjqrIJVvkYo>.

²⁷ In 1995, Daniel Strader was convicted of 238 criminal charges and was sentenced to 45 years in prison. See Jason Geary, "Daniel Strader to Stay in Prison," *The Ledger* (June 16, 2006), accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.theledger.com/article/20060616/NEWS/606160330>.

²⁸ See Karl Strader, "What Has Happened to Carpenter's Home Church?" accessed April 5, 2014, <http://karlstrader.com/chstory.aspx>; Michael Peltier, "Strife splits Carpenter's: Strader blesses new group," *Lakeland Ledger* (March 17, 1989): 2A, 12A, accessed April 5, 2014, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1346&dat=19890317&id=wbwwAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=QvwDAAAIAIBAJ&pg=1869,597472>.

²⁹ See Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 28.

new outpouring.³⁰ Two of those in attendance were Oral Roberts and his son, Richard Roberts who at the time was president of Oral Roberts University. Despite the fact that he was struggling with ORU's forty-million-dollar debt at the time, Richard Roberts received the laughter anointing from Howard-Browne, and his father, Oral Roberts, invited Howard-Browne to speak at ORU in Tulsa, Oklahoma. At a famous meeting in front of the student body in 1993, Howard-Browne intoxicated the student body with his new wine, and Oral Roberts prophesied about "a new kind of seed with a new kind of revelation" which God was going to administer through Howard-Browne.³¹ Finally, in August of 1993, Howard-Browne visited Kenneth Hagin's Rhema Bible Training Center near Tulsa.³² It was here that Howard-Browne would encounter Randy Clark.

Randy Clark

Randy Clark had fallen under the power of the Spirit a few times before, but the discouraged pastor of a small Vineyard church in St. Louis, Missouri was reluctant to go to Howard-Browne's meeting at Rhema. But after a friend encouraged him to go, Clark

³⁰ Ibid., 29. Carpenter's Home Church struggled after Daniel Strader's conviction, and the church dwindled until it eventually shut down in 2005. Out from under the rubble, Karl Strader's son, Stephen Strader, started Ignited Church in 2005. This was the church which hosted the Lakeland Revival in 2008 under the preaching of Todd Bentley (see "Our Story," accessed April 5, 2014, <http://ignitedchurch.com/our-story>).

Karl Strader's son-in-law, Shane Simmons, started Auburndale Life Church in the nearby town of Auburndale. Simmons passed away from cancer in 2013 ("Shane Allon Simmons," *The Ledger* (March 26, 2013), accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/theledger/obituary.aspx?pid=163865261>), and the church is now led by Dave Melendez under the name of Life Church ("Our Pastor," accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.lifechurchonline.org/>).

The Carpenter's Home Church building was purchased by Paula and Randy White in 2005 to be used as a satellite campus for their Tampa church, Without Walls International Church. The church was abandoned when the Whites divorced in 2007, but in 2012, Randy White sought to restore the building for use as a satellite campus for Without Walls International Church (Audrey Barrick, "Randy White Turns Electricity Back on at Once Abandoned Without Walls Church," *The Christian Post* [August 12, 2012], accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/randy-white-turns-electricity-back-on-at-once-abandoned-without-walls-church-80349/>).

³¹ See "Rodney Howard Brown – Ministry Clips."

³² Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 38-39.

drove to Tulsa ready to meet with God. During one particular meeting when Howard-Browne prayed individually for all forty-five hundred people in attendance, Clark fell under the power. He had his doubts, though, because he did not experience the shaking and feeling of electricity that he had experienced in 1984 and in 1989 when he experienced the baptism of the Spirit. He decided to hop back in line to be filled again. Nothing happened the second time or the third time either. Basil Howard-Browne, Rodney's brother, noticed Clark coming through the line a fourth time and told Clark that he looked hungry for God. Clark fell under the power this time but still did not experience the shaking, though he believed that he had been emotionally healed by God. Clark took the anointing from Tulsa back to his church in St. Louis, and the majority of his congregation fell under the power.³³ In November of 1993, the regional overseer for the Midwestern Vineyard churches reported the transformation of Clark's church at the annual board meeting of the Association of Vineyard Churches where a Vineyard pastor named John Arnott was in attendance.³⁴

John Arnott

Originally from Toronto, Canada, John Arnott was saved at a Billy Graham Crusade in 1955. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Arnott witnessed the ministry of faith healer Kathryn Kuhlman and was especially impressed with the way in which people would "go under the power" in her healing crusades. Arnott also formed a friendship with Ontario-based Benny Hinn during the 1970s. Both Kuhlman and Hinn

³³ Ibid., 41-44; cf. David Hilborn, "The Pre-history of the Blessing," in *Toronto' in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s*, ed. David Hilborn (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Acute, 2001), 145.

³⁴ Hilborn, "The Pre-history of the Blessing," 146.

had a deep influence on the future of Arnott's ministry. After a brief business/mission trip in Indonesia, John and his second wife, Carol, planted the Jubilee Christian Ministries in 1981 in Stratford, Ontario, which later became affiliated with the Vineyard Christian Fellowship. After meeting John Wimber at a church conference in 1986, the Arnotts felt called to plant another church in 1987 in Toronto that later became the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church in 1988. In September 1992, the Arnotts attended a series of Benny Hinn meetings. Carol fell under the power, but John did not feel anything. Then in June of the next year, the Arnotts attended their first meeting with Rodney Howard-Browne. Again, many people went down when Howard-Browne prayed for them, but John was left standing. In November of 1993, the Arnotts flew to Argentina for a pastor's conference led by Ed Silvoso, brother-in-law of Luis Palau. Pastor Claudio Freidzon, who himself had received an impartation of the uncontrollable laughter from both Hinn and Howard-Browne, prayed for the Arnotts, and John finally received the anointing he had been seeking. On their way back to Toronto, the John Arnott attended the Vineyard meeting where he learned about the outpouring at Randy Clark's church. Arnott quickly contacted Clark and asked him to come up to Arnott's church, the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church, in January of 1994 to tell his story.³⁵

The Toronto Blessing

The Beginning of the Toronto Blessing

On January 20, 1994, the Toronto Blessing erupted. John Arnott invited Randy Clark to preach a four-day meeting at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church. On the first

³⁵ Ibid., 131-47; Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 46-47; R. M. Riss, "Arnott, John," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp., eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 332; cf. "20th Anniversary of the Toronto Blessing Revival," accessed April 5, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcMPz77I_ZQ.

night, before a congregation of 120 people, Clark shared his testimony of his disillusionment, his skepticism, and then later the anointing he received in Tulsa the year before.³⁶ At the end of the service, he invited people forward to pray, and nearly the entire congregation responded. About 80% of the people became drunk in the Spirit and manifested behaviors of laughing, falling, lying prostrate, and staggering around like drunks – including the church leaders. Some even reported seeing visions. Other manifestations such as jerking, twitching, pogoing, bouncing, running, shouting, weeping, barking, and roaring were manifested a few months later. Prophecies were common, and prophetic words and pictures were often acted out in front of the congregation.³⁷ One famous word from the Lord was given by Stacey Campbell who violently shook her head while prophesying that opposition to the outpouring would soon arise and that people would accuse those involved as being in a cult.³⁸ Arnott was so moved by what was happening that he persuaded Clark to stay for six more weeks.

The Spread of the Toronto Blessing

News of the Toronto Blessing spread quickly. In February of that year, the Arnotts took the Toronto impartation – the laughing phenomenon – to a healing conference and to the nation of Hungary. During March and April, attendance at the meetings began to exceed one thousand, and people from other countries begin to flock to

³⁶ See the video footage of Clark’s message from 31:16 onward in “The Toronto Blessing- A Plague in the Land (Alan Morrison, 1995),” accessed April 5, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83fg4eBLUfM>.

³⁷ David Hilborn, “1994: The Rise of the Blessing,” in *‘Toronto’ in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s*, ed. David Hilborn (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Acute, 2001), 152-53.

³⁸ See the section from 1:12:20 onward of “The Toronto Blessing- A Plague in the Land (Alan Morrison, 1995).”

Toronto so witness the outpouring.³⁹ The Toronto Blessing also gained momentum through the media attention it received.⁴⁰ It is estimated that in the first year of the revival, over 600,000 people visited the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church, including 20,000 church leaders from all over the world.⁴¹ Over 900 first-time conversions were also reported that year.⁴² By the end of the second year, it is estimated that 800,000 people had been to Toronto to witness the revival.⁴³ The church eventually moved to a bigger building that could accommodate the thousands attending the meetings. In 1996, Arnott started a network of churches called Partners in Harvest. By 1999, more than 2 million visitors had been to Toronto for the revival meetings, and Arnott had founded a school of ministry and aired a television program called “Catch the Fire.”⁴⁴ In 2004, it was estimated that 4-5 million people from sixty nations had visited the Toronto church.⁴⁵

³⁹ Hilborn, “The Rise of the Blessing,” 153-ff.

⁴⁰ E.g., Joe Maxwell, “Is Laughing for the Lord Holy?” *Christianity Today* 38, no. 12 (Oct 24, 1994): 78-79, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1994/october24/4tc078.html>; “Laughter Ignites Toronto Blessing,” *Anglican Journal* 120, no. 9 (1994): 1, 7, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/196723187?accountid=12085>.

⁴¹ This information comes from the interview with the Arnotts in 2014, “20th Anniversary of the Toronto Blessing Revival.”

⁴² This number comes from Vinson Synan’s book, *The Holiness Pentecostal Tradition*, quoted in Larry Sparks, “3 Keys to Sustaining Revival 20 Years After the Toronto Blessing,” *Charisma News*, January 20, 2014, accessed April 6, 2014, <http://www.charismanews.com/opinion/42478-3-keys-to-sustaining-revival-20-years-after-the-toronto-blessing>.

⁴³ Gordon Legge, “‘Toronto Blessing’ Packs ‘Em in.” *Calgary Herald* (April 20, 1996): E.12, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/244484942?accountid=12085>.

⁴⁴ John Arnott, “The Toronto Blessing: What is it?” *Revival Magazine*, December 31, 1999, accessed April 6, 2014, <http://revivalmag.com/article/toronto-blessing-what-it>.

⁴⁵ Ron Csillag, “Toronto Blessing Marks Decade.” *Leader Post* (Jan 17, 2004): G6, accessed April 6, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/349727829?accountid=12085>.

The Decline of the Toronto Blessing

Although people continued to flock to Toronto to witness the outpouring, the revival itself was controversial from the beginning.⁴⁶ Pentecostals and charismatics generally endorsed the Toronto Blessing as a genuine movement of God because they had seen precursors to Toronto in the ministries of Benny Hinn and Rodney Howard-Browne. Cessationists condemned the movement as a counterfeit revival.⁴⁷ Others were caught in the middle. For example, R. T. Kendall, successor to D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel in London was skeptical of the revival at first, but he later recognized it as a genuine work of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ On the other hand, John Wimber, the leader of the Association of Vineyard Churches, endorsed the outpouring in September of 1994 but urged Arnott and the other leaders toward restraint in the promotion of the manifestations.⁴⁹ In July of 1995, Wimber stated that the Toronto Blessing was yet to be described as a genuine revival because the focus seemed to be on the phenomena instead of on the Great Commission to evangelize and plant churches.⁵⁰ Wimber was also critical of the “come and get it” approach which might detract from the gospel message and the degrees of anointing claimed at Toronto.⁵¹ Towards the end of 1996, other Pentecostal

⁴⁶ See David Hilborn, “1995: The Spread and Critique of the Blessing,” in *Toronto in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s*, ed. David Hilborn (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Acute, 2001), 211-86.

⁴⁷ E.g., John MacArthur, *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses its Will to Discern* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994).

⁴⁸ See R. T. Kendall, *When God Shows Up: How to Recognize the Unexpected Appearances of God in Your Life* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2008), 1-7; “RT Kendall Sermon – Why I Endorse the Toronto Blessing,” accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRTqzvPO5yQ>.

⁴⁹ Hilborn, “The Rise of the Blessing,” 184.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 248-52.

leaders, including David Yonggi Cho of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, began to feel uneasy about what was happening in Toronto.⁵² Finally, in December of 1995, John Wimber and the board members for the Association of Vineyard Churches met with John Arnott to inform him that the Vineyard Association could no longer endorse his ministry.⁵³ One of the major concerns for Wimber was the manifestation of animal noises (e.g., roaring) that was attributed to the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ In January of 1996, Arnott changed the name of the church to Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship. Although the ministry continued at the church, the split from the Association of Vineyard Churches marked the decline of the Toronto Blessing.⁵⁵

The Legacy of the Toronto Blessing

The ministry of John and Carol Arnott continues through the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, which was renamed “Catch the Fire Toronto” in 2010,⁵⁶ and the revival fires from Toronto have sparked other significant revivals of the past twenty years. The Brownsville Revival, or Pensacola Outpouring, which lasted from 1995-2000, has ties to Toronto. John Kilpatrick, the pastor of Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida, had witnessed the Toronto Blessing and wanted to bring the party back to his own church. On Father’s Day of 1995, evangelist Steve Hill preached a

⁵¹ Ibid., 260.

⁵² Ibid., 260-ff.

⁵³ Ibid., 268-ff.

⁵⁴ See “John Wimber Responds to the Phenomena,” in *‘Toronto’ in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s*, ed. David Hilborn (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Acute, 2001), 343-45.

⁵⁵ See David Hilborn, “1996-2000: The Decline and Transmutation of the Blessing,” in *‘Toronto’ in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s*, ed. David Hilborn (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Acute, 2001), 287-330.

⁵⁶ See “About,” accessed April 6, 2014, <https://catchthefire.com/about>.

message at Kilpatrick's church, and the Pensacola Outpouring began. Like Randy Clark in Toronto, Hill recounted his experience of receiving the impartation of the Spirit from Sandy Millar of Holy Trinity Brompton in England (Millar had received the impartation from Rodney Howard-Browne). Hill then challenged the people to experience more of God like he had.⁵⁷ It is no surprise that the same phenomena of being drunk in the Spirit, spasmodic jerking, and uncontrollable laughter accompanied the revival in Brownsville.⁵⁸ The Brownsville Revival also emphasized physical healing and prophecy.⁵⁹

The Lakeland Revival of 2008 also has ties to the Toronto Blessing.⁶⁰ Todd Bentley, the leader of that revival, had received the anointing from prophetess Patricia King who had received the impartation at Toronto.⁶¹ In April of 2008, Stephen Strader invited Bentley to speak at a five-day conference on signs and wonders at Ignited Church in Lakeland, Florida. Ignited Church was an offshoot of Carpenter's Home Church where Rodney Howard-Browne had led a revival back in 1993.⁶² The Lakeland Revival lasted for 188 days (six months) with crowds exceeding 10,000 people each day. It is estimated that over 350,000 different people from over 200 countries attended the meetings, and over 40 million viewers watched the meetings online and on satellite television.⁶³ In the

⁵⁷ See the full video, "The Father's Day Outpouring 18th June 1995 – Pensacola Brownsville Revival," accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G8ME4SiPHc>.

⁵⁸ Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 57-65.

⁵⁹ For an examination of the miracle reports, see *ibid.*, 72-78.

⁶⁰ See "Lakeland Revival & Toronto Blessing," accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRMZ8JJQ3cU>.

⁶¹ See "Tracing the 20 year old Trail of Transferable Impartation," accessed April 6, 2014, <http://sheepyweepy.wordpress.com/2008/06/11/tracing-the-20-year-old-trail-of-transferable-impartation/>.

⁶² See note 30.

middle of the revival, and in spite of his violent methods of faith-healing,⁶⁴ Todd Bentley was endorsed by and prayed for by Kansas City Prophet Bob Jones⁶⁵ as well as John Arnott, New Apostolic Reformation apostle Peter Wagner, MorningStar Ministries founder Rick Joyner, Bethel Church pastor Bill Johnson, and Toronto Blessing leaders Wes and Stacey Campbell.⁶⁶ The prophecies about Bentley and the coming world revival came crashing down two months later when Bentley filed for divorce because he had been carrying on an adulterous affair with his ministry intern, Jessa (now his wife), during the Lakeland Revival.⁶⁷

The two most recent incarnations of the Toronto Blessing include the Bay Revival of 2010-2011 and the events at Bethel Church in Redding, California. The Bay Revival

⁶³ See “Pastor Stephen Strader,” accessed April 6, 2014, <http://ignitedchurch.com/pastor-stephen-strader->.

⁶⁴ See “Todd Friel & Justin Peters On Todd Bentley’s Revival Part 1,” accessed April 2, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErH4kF_AYE4&list=PLfi5YNEtKak46KRHHiXgj.

⁶⁵ See “Bob Jones Prays over Todd Bentley,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7hZzkczUI>.

⁶⁶ See “Todd Bentley’s Apostolic and Prophetic Commissioning 1/4,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nVdY9ufJmz8>; “Todd Bentley’s Apostolic and Prophetic Commissioning 2/4,” accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-A05WQYi7aQ>; “Todd Bentley’s Apostolic Prophetic Commissioning 3/4,” accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-A05WQYi7aQ>; “Todd Bentley’s Apostolic and Prophetic Commissioning 4/4,” accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAnNSiZfgvI>.

⁶⁷ Bentley underwent a short restoration process under Rick Joyner’s care, and he is back in ministry leading revivals (See “About,” accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.god.tv/fresh-fire-ministries/about>). He continues to be a controversial figure, though, because of the quick restoration to ministry and because of the investigations which turned up fake healings. See “Todd Bentley’s Restoration with Rick Joyner,” accessed April 2, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdh51_d2g50; J. Lee Grady, “The Tragic Scandal of Greasy Grace,” *Charisma Magazine*, March 11, 2009, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.charismamag.com/blogs/fire-in-my-bones/3975-the-tragic-scandal-of-greasy-grace%20on%2023%20March%202013>; “Our America with Lisa Ling – Web Exclusive: Todd Bentley Interview – Oprah Winfrey Network,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgeS-YFF4Y4>; “Our America with Lisa Ling – Faith Healers: Will Steve Walk? – Oprah Winfrey Network,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dshuBQ5hEG0>; “Todd Bentley: Lakeland Liar,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kMAVPXPx6H8>; Warren Cole Smith, “Heal or Heel?” *World Magazine*, May 23, 2009, accessed April 2, 2014, http://www.worldmag.com/2009/05/heal_or_heel.

occurred in Mobile, Alabama and was lead by pastor John Kilpatrick,⁶⁸ former pastor of Brownsville Assembly of God where the Pensacola Outpouring took place, and British evangelist and faith-healer Nathan Morris,⁶⁹ whose preaching and showmanship resembles Benny Hinn. Although there was a greater emphasis on healing and miracles than at Toronto, the manifestations of being drunk (or slain) in the Spirit were present in Mobile.⁷⁰ The Bay Revival lasted less than one year and is reported to have resulted in hundreds giving their lives to Christ and others experiencing miraculous healings.⁷¹ Bill Johnson, pastor of Bethel Church in Redding, is a ministry partner of John and Carol Arnott.⁷² In addition to the manifestations present at Toronto, Bethel Church has a “fire tunnel”, where people line up in a long tunnel and pray over people who pass through,⁷³ and even claims that the glory cloud of the Lord appeared in one of their services.⁷⁴ What is happening at Bethel is an amplification of the manifestations at Toronto, and Bill

⁶⁸ See “About John,” accessed April 6, 2014, <http://churchofhispresence.org/new/staff/bio/john-kilpatrick/>.

⁶⁹ See “About Nathan Morris,” accessed April 2, 2014, <http://shakethenations.com/about/nathan-morris/>.

⁷⁰ See “Bay Revival Highlights,” accessed April 2, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9UmqXfj6Rnk.

⁷¹ See “About,” accessed April 2, 2014, <http://bayrevival.org/about.php>. The most famous “miracle” occurred when paraplegic Delia Knox got out of her wheelchair and began to walk a little bit (see “Nightline from ABC News: Turning to Revivals for Healing,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uSV-LpH-es>).

⁷² See “Our Friends,” accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.catchthefire.com/about/our-friends>.

⁷³ See “Wretched: A Fire Tunnel Party,” accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dxp3Bz9HQAs>.

⁷⁴ See “Glory Cloud @ Bethel,” accessed April 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvJMPccZR2Y>; “Response to Glory Cloud at Bethel,” accessed April 4, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcPkOR4Lwj0>. See the critical remarks about this supposed glory cloud at “Strange Fire Panel Question and Answer, Session 1,” accessed April 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhG2CBVQy3w>; “Real Discernment Glory Clouds IHOP The Call Wretched Bill Johnson Bethel,” accessed April 6, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Pv1W49FYBk>.

Johnson is spreading his teachings and “anointing” through the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry and through the music of Jesus Culture.

Conclusion: Evaluating the Toronto Blessing

The Toronto Blessing may be as controversial as it is strange, but it has enjoyed a widespread influence upon churches across the world from various denominations. Similarly, the Toronto Blessing influenced the leaders of the Pensacola Outpouring, the Lakeland Revival, and the Bay Revival. Through the efforts of Bill Johnson and Bethel Church in Redding, there may be another revival like Toronto, Pensacola, Lakeland, and Mobile in the near future. For this reason, it is imperative that one evaluates the Toronto Blessing in light of Scripture and in light of the history of revivals. Whatever conclusions one draws about Toronto will likely apply to the other charismatic revivals of the past and in the future.

Was the Toronto Blessing a genuine revival? This author believes that the Toronto Blessing was a counterfeit revival for several reasons. 1) Historically speaking, the message of repentance from sin has always been at the heart of true revivals and awakenings.⁷⁵ However, it seems that people were drawn to Toronto because they wanted a spiritual experience. Although there are reports of people being converted, the Toronto Blessing is known for the barking, jerking, rolling, laughing, etc; it is *not* known for the number of lost who were saved. In fact, one of the former pastors of a sister Vineyard church in Toronto who lived through the Toronto Blessing confessed that repentance was

⁷⁵ E.g., J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame: Dynamic of Student Religious Revolution* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1971), 231; Henry & Richard Blackaby and Claude King, *Fresh Encounter: God's Pattern for Spiritual Awakening*, rev. and exp. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 15.

very rarely preached.⁷⁶ The primary message from Toronto was “come and be baptized/drunk/slain in the Spirit,” not “come to Jesus to have your sins forgiven.” Likewise, the primary reason why people went to Lakeland and Mobile was to get their miracle, not to have their sins forgiven and their lives changed (even with no miracle). Without biblical preaching on sin, there can be no repentance; without repentance, there is no revival. Revival occurs when people change their hearts and ways and submit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. J. Lee Grady, editor of *Charisma Magazine*, criticized the Lakeland Revival on this very point:

The word “revival” is thrown around loosely these days. If a few people fall on the floor, get goose bumps or see gold dust, we are ready to christen it a revival and put it on television as soon as possible. After all, if large crowds gather, it must be God! I’m tired of imitations. History shows that genuine revival is more than a bunch of blessed bodies in a pile. We need more than angel feathers, emotional euphoria and limp pep talks about getting high on Jesus. We need the strong Word of God that convicts hearts, demands repentance, slays sin and has the power to produce converts who will withstand temptation.⁷⁷

2) The Toronto Blessing is marked by a misplaced emphasis on the Holy Spirit. Any revival which is obsessed with the Holy Spirit is not from the Holy Spirit. Jesus taught, “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me” (John 15:26). According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit will not be the focal point of any revival. Rather, when the Holy Spirit is truly at work, Jesus will be exalted. People will speak the name of Jesus more than they will speak of the Holy Spirit. As John MacArthur states, “Thus, a true work of

⁷⁶ See appendix.

⁷⁷ J. Lee Grady, “What I Hope We Learned from the Lakeland Revival,” accessed April 4, 2014, http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/churchandministry/Grady_Lakeland_Lessons.aspx.

the Spirit directs people first and foremost to exalt Christ as Lord of all and give their attention and affection to Him. The Spirit is most glorified when we honor the Son.”⁷⁸

The misguided focus on the Holy Spirit and signs and wonders is an indication that the Toronto Blessing was a counterfeit revival.

3) The manifestations at the Toronto Blessing were not from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps they were self-induced. For example, until he visited Argentina, John Arnott admitted to “falling under the power” many times even though he knew that he was faking it.⁷⁹ This may explain the behavior of people who act drunk in the Spirit. Or, perhaps the crowd was duped. The psychological tricks of hypnotists and others have been well documented, and the power of suggestion may be behind the holy laughter and other manifestations.⁸⁰ It is also apparent that demonic forces were at work. The very language of “impartation” alludes to this fact. The testimony of the former Vineyard pastor is that demonism was present,⁸¹ and there are many striking resemblances between the manifestations at Toronto and those from the Kundalini cult of Hinduism.⁸² The typical response is that phenomena such as shaking, jerking, falling, dancing, and barking happened during the Second Great Awakening and at the Cane Ridge Revival.⁸³ But

⁷⁸ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 43.

⁷⁹ See “20th Anniversary of the Toronto Blessing Revival.”

⁸⁰ See Patrick Dixon, “An Altered Christian Consciousness,” in *Toronto in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s*, ed. David Hilborn (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Acute, 2001), 88-98; Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 225-ff.

⁸¹ See appendix.

⁸² See “Kundalini in Action & Toronto Blessing,” accessed April 10, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7Hidj1OGcE>; “The Kundalini Spirit has Invaded The Church Masquerading as The Holy Spirit !!! BE VIGILANT!” accessed April 10, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbVYalAE5-8>.

those episodes are not commendable either. In the New Testament, the filling of the Holy Spirit never results in such behavior.⁸⁴ The fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control, not frenzy (Gal 5:22).

Many other theological criticisms could be leveled at the Toronto Blessing, but the bottom line is that all that glimmers is not gold. If anyone was truly saved at Toronto or at the subsequent revivals, then the Holy Spirit was working, for no one is ever saved apart from the Holy Spirit's activity. But the unbiblical teachings and manifestations which comprise nearly the entire movement were *not* from the Holy Spirit. Attributing the works of the flesh or the works of demons to the Holy Spirit is very dangerous.

MacArthur's summary here is fitting:

The incredible irony is that those who talk the most about the Holy Spirit generally deny His true work. They attribute all kinds of human silliness to Him while ignoring the genuine purpose and power of His ministry.... To promulgate a corrupted notion of the Holy Spirit and His work is nothing less than blasphemy, because the Holy Spirit is God. He is to be exalted, honored, and adored. Along with the Father and the Son, He is to be glorified at all times for all He is and all He does. He is to be loved and thanked by those whom He indwells. But for that to occur, He must be worshipped in truth.⁸⁵

The Toronto Blessing may have been led by Christians and attended by Christians, but the aberrant teachings and practices of Jezebel (Rev 2:20-25) are the legacy of the Toronto Blessing. Christians must be very careful that they are not deceived by everything that claims to be revival. The deviation from the true work of the Holy Spirit

⁸³ See Julia Duin, "An Evening with Rodney Howard Browne," *Christian Research Journal*, 17 no. 3 (1995), accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.equip.org/articles/an-evening-with-rodney-howard-browne/>.

⁸⁴ See John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 313-21; Stephen Sizer, "A Sub-Christian Movement," in *'Toronto' in Perspective: Papers on the New Charismatic Wave of the Mid 1990s*, ed. David Hilborn (Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Acute, 2001), 45-63; Hanegraaf, *Counterfeit Revival*, 193-211.

⁸⁵ MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, xvi-xvii.

and the spiritual damage done to believers contrast with the biblical and historical revivals. The revival we need in our country is not one of drunkenness. We have enough of that already. We need a sober awakening to righteous living for the glory of God!

Appendix: A Toronto Pastor Repents

by former Toronto Vineyard pastor Paul Gowdy⁸⁶

It has taken me nine years to actually come to the place where I would write this story. Part of the reason was because I was not fully convinced that it is appropriate to speak out against weaknesses in the body of Christ publicly. Another reason is because it has taken years of soul searching to become convinced that what happened in the Toronto Airport Church was actually all bad or at least more bad than good!

For the past number of years I have called it a mixed blessing. I think James A. Beverly called it this in his book *Holy Laughter and the Toronto Blessing 1994*. Today I would call it a mixed curse concluding that any individual good that came from this experience is far outweighed by much harm and satanic deception. I suppose that therein has been my dilemma. I have tried to live my life in the fear of the Lord and Jesus told us that the unforgivable sin was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Attributing to Satan what was in fact a work of God. If pressed as to whether or not the Toronto blessing is all God or all Devil I will still be hedgy, but I am convinced that Satan has used this experience to blind people to the historical doctrines of God, to produce fruit in keeping with repentance, to failing to test and discern the spirits and failing to test prophecy.

After three years of being in the thick of the Toronto blessing our Vineyard assembly in Scarborough (East Toronto) just about self destructed. We devoured one another, with gossip, backstabbing, division, sects criticism etc. After three years of 'soaking,' praying for people, shaking, rolling, laughing, roaring, ministering at TACF on their prayer team, leading worship at TACF, preaching at TACF, basically living at TACF we were the most carnal, immature and deceived Christians that I know. I remember saying to my friend and senior pastor at Scarborough Vineyard Church in 1997 that ever since the Toronto Blessing came we have just about fallen to bits! He agreed!

My experience has been that the manifestation of spiritual gifts mentioned in 1st Corinthians 12 was much more common in our assembly before January 1994 (when the Toronto blessing started) than during this period of supposed Holy Spirit visitation.

During 1992-1993 when praying for people we would experience what I believe was genuine prophesy, deliverance and much grace and favour from the Lord. After the Toronto Blessing started, all ministry time changed, the only prayers were 'More Lord MORE', the shouting of 'Fire' the jerky shaking of the body with the 'ooh ooh OOH WOOOAAH' prayer. (I kid you not!)

On January 20th 1994 about 15 people from our church traveled over to Toronto Airport Vineyard in order to listen to Randy Clark, a Vineyard pastor from the USA. John Arnott had called our senior pastor to invite us. He communicated that Randy had been to the

⁸⁶ See "A Toronto Pastor Repents," accessed April 6, 2014, http://truthforfree.com/html/article_torontopastorrepents.html. For the response from Catch the Fire Toronto, see Naomi Ierullo, "Regarding Paul Gowdy's Letters," June 18, 2007, accessed April 6, 2014, <http://revivalmag.com/article/regarding-paul-gowdys-letters>.

Rodney Howard Browne meetings and that the stuff had broke out in his church in the following weeks. John was hoping that something might break out with us too. We were only too happy to travel over. We were a church plant out of the Toronto Airport and we started in 1992. In those days there were three Vineyard Churches in Toronto. One Down Town church, Scarborough vineyard church to the east and the Airport Church. We were one big happy family. Because we were small in number we did special meetings, conferences etc, together.

The year before most of our leadership teams joined and had headed to Nicaragua for a short term missions trip. We had genuine love and fellowship with each other. Since leaving the Vineyard churches I have read a fair bit of analysis from the critics. Some make out that the Toronto Blessing was one huge conspiracy to lead the body of Christ into heresy. Heresy and apostasy I suspect may well be the result, but none of these destinations were intentional. I am honestly convinced that the leaders in the Vineyard churches are genuine born-again Christians who love the Lord, but have fallen into deception. They have not loved the Lord enough to keep His commandments. They have failed to obey the scriptures and have been led astray by our longing for something bigger and brighter and more exciting and dynamic. I am guilty of this sin also. I have preached renewal in Korea, the United Kingdom, the USA and here in Canada. I am genuinely repentant and in writing this story I would ask you the bride and body of Christ to forgive me. Especially the Pentecostal/ Charismatic Christians among you, for you are my immediate family theologically. I am an evangelical Christian, I always have been but I do not believe in the cessation of the spiritual gifts at the end of the apostolic era. I believe that it was my evangelical roots (my family are Baptists and I was born again in the Presbyterian Church.) that started to open my eyes to problems with this so called renewal. In hind sight I look back and think how could I have been so blind? I laughed at people acting like dogs and pretending to urinate on the columns of the TACF building. I watched people pretend to be animals, bark, roar, cluck, pretend to fly as if they had wings, perpetually act drunk and sing silly songs. How I thought that any of this was from the Holy Spirit of God amazes me today. It was loud irreverent and blasphemous to the Holy God of the Bible. I suppose in my mind I reasoned that as long as they did not teach any thing in direct violation to scripture then it was what we called the exotic. This is a buzz word for manifestations that could not be justified from a biblical perspective. I was taught from the pulpit that we had two options. The order of the nursery full of life and messy or the order of the graveyard, very orderly but dead! As a young immature pastor I wanted life with mess. I failed to remember that God wants us to become mature and grow up in him. I became disconcerted by the prophetic words that came forth especially one by Carol Arnott in which she had her bride experience where she was taken into the very presence of Jesus and said that the love that she experienced was even better than sex! I was shocked in my spirit and thought how can one compare the love of God with sex? When we suspected that demons were running riot in our services John Arnott would teach that we should ask are they coming or going. If they are leaving then that is ok! John would defend the chaos by saying that we ought not be afraid of being deceived, if we have asked the Holy Spirit to come and fill us then how could Satan come and deceive us? This would make Satan very strong and God very weak! He said that we needed to have more faith in a Big God to protect us than in a Big Devil to deceive us.

This sounded very convincing but was totally contrary to scripture for Jesus and Paul and Peter and John all warn us about the power of deceiving spirits and especially so in the last days. Again we did not love God enough to obey His Word and the result was that we opened ourselves up to lying spirits. May God have mercy upon us!

Finally the penny dropped for me as I was rolling around one night 'drunk in the Spirit' as we would say. I started singing and as I rolled around the floor the Nursery Rhyme 'Mary had a little lamb its fleece was white as snow.' came to mind. I sang this in a mocking spirit and instantly my heart told me this was a demon. Instantly I repented and was in total shock. How could a demon get into me? Did I not love God? Was I not zealous for the things of God? Was I not nuts about Jesus? I knew that an unclean spirit had just manifested through me and I was guilty of great sin. After this experience I stayed away from TACF. I did not go back there any more. I did not possess the conviction to denounce the whole experience but thought that we were failing to pastor the Blessing well enough.

Even after I stopped going over to TACF, I had to pastor the fruit of it. One example was when some of our people returned from a meeting there asking us if we had all received the golden sword of the Lord? I asked them what they were talking about thinking that it was some prophetic reference to the Holy Scriptures but they said, 'no, it's not the Bible, it's an invisible golden sword that only the really pure can receive. If taken in an unrighteous fashion then the Lord would kill you. But if you are holy enough to receive it then you can wield this sword and it will heal AIDS, Cancer etc. and bring salvation. How one wielded this sword was by pretending to have this invisible sword in your hand and motioning to strike people with it when in prayer! I thought while even in deception at this time that the TACF had become Looney bins! This was purportedly first received by Carol Arnott and then given to the ones holy enough to receive it! Another thing was the golden fillings in the teeth. We had people in our assembly peeping down one another's throats looking for the gold fillings that God had placed there to show how much he loved them! In all my time there I only heard one message on repentance given by a visiting speaker from Hong Kong named Jackie Pullinger. It went over like a lead balloon. We were not there to repent, we were there to party in the Lord! After one year into the blessing I spoke out at a pastors meeting and said 'guys we have shaken, rattled, rolled, laughed cried and bought the tee-shirt. But we have no revival, no salvation, no fruit and no increased evangelism so what's the deal?' I was soundly rebuked - who was I to expect to see fruit when the Lord was healing his broken people? We had been legalistic long enough and God was spending this time restoring his wounded and freeing us from legalism I was told not to push the Lord and the harvest would come in his time.'

I knew this was wrong because the Lord had commanded us to go into all the earth and make disciples! Not that everyone should take a sabbatical for who knows how long, while God does some strange new thing! Ultimately I left over something as controversial as the ordination of women. Personally I believe from scripture that women should not be pastors/elders in a local assembly. I could be wrong on this and there is much debate in the Church today but that is my conviction and in the Vineyard churches they were ordaining all the pastors' wives to co pastor with them. I am certainly for

women in ministry but believe that the Elder/pastor role in a local assembly has been reserved for men. I did not write scripture but God willing I will have the grace from now on to obey it.

So there is my story. I could go on and document much excess, folly, sin and latter day reign teaching that manifest from the prophetic end of this Blessing but others have already done that. We sang about Joel's army and the billion soul revival as if it were one of the Ten Commandments, and as always it was just around the corner. Next month, next year etc. Jesus said that when the son of man returns will he find faith upon the earth? And if he does not return when he does no flesh would be saved but for the sake of the elect he comes. This is a far cry from the dominionism that is being taught all through the vineyard/prophetic/ spiritual warfare movement. I honestly think that they think they are going to take over the whole world! While in the Vineyard I embraced a life verse from the Apostle Paul the phrase do not go beyond what is written!

To finish I just want to say sorry for the damage, that I have personally done by teaching things that are not correct biblically. I repent before men as I already have before God. I will not excuse my falling into deception. I did not bother to test things when the scriptures commanded us to do so. Everyone who was there when this thing started knows that what I write is true, they would just come to different conclusions especially if they are still promoting the 'river!'

To those in the river I would say swim out, there are things living in the water that will bite you real good! I love the people of TACF and the Vineyard movement but I think that we have much to answer for and may the Lord open your eyes sooner rather than later. I suspect that when this letter goes online I will get bombarded by emails from both camps, some damning me for still believing in the ministry of the Holy Spirit and still walking in deception and some old friends damning me for exposing dirt or being negative about the Lords anointed! Well, the Lord knows my heart and by his grace he will guide me into all truth as I seek to know Christ and him crucified! If you believe that I walk in sin and error please pray for me that the Lord would forgive me and open my eyes. I will study the word to show my self a work man approved! I would call on all who read this to pray that the Lord would open the eyes of all who have been involved in this deception. Whether leader or follower, we are loved and the Lord is a forgiving God. He says if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. I believe we are like the church in Laodicea, we think that we are rich, have prospered and need nothing, we do not realise that we are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. We must take the Counsel of Jesus and buy gold refined in the fire (which is his suffering, not a false spirit!), white garments to clothe our shameful nakedness and salve for our eyes that we might see again. Jesus is calling us to repentance and thank the Lord that he is, for it will lead us to true restoration with our Father! If God has forgiven me and opened my eyes then he can do it for all those caught in deception too. I will finish with a warning from Paul, he says if you think you are standing firm be careful lest you fall.

Sincerely Paul Gowdy

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