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## 1

# **Introduction: Evangelicalism, the Evangelical Alliance and the Toronto Blessing**

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### *The Toronto Blessing Then and Now*

The movement which became known as ‘The Toronto Blessing’ represented a crisis for modern-day Evangelicalism. I believe that this book bears out such an assessment, and shall here seek to explain why. I shall also seek to explain why the Blessing more particularly represented a crisis for the Evangelical Alliance, and why its theological commission, ACUTE, has now sponsored this volume of papers on that crisis.

I should stress from the outset that I am using the word ‘crisis’ in a particular way. It is a preacher’s staple that despite the largely negative connotations it now carries, the term actually ‘means’ both judgment and opportunity. This double sense attached to the Greek noun from which our English word is formed - particularly in its Septuagint and New Testament usage.<sup>1</sup> So, the logic goes, times of what we call ‘crisis’ can in fact teach salutary lessons, suggest fresh possibilities, and be turned to constructive ends. In a general sense, this is the understanding of ‘crisis’ which I would apply to the Blessing. More specifically, of course, one should beware here of what John Lyons calls the ‘etymological fallacy’.<sup>2</sup> Language changes over time, and the ‘original meaning’ of a root word from an ancient tongue may be far from reliable as a clue the meaning of its derivative. On these grounds, our current, almost wholly pejorative notion of ‘crisis’ is no less ‘real’ or ‘actual’ than its apparently more paradoxical Greek denotation. As long as we bear such provisos in mind, however, the older reference can still shed important light on issues faced by the Church today. And no doubt, the Toronto Blessing was a significant issue. As we shall see, it was significant not merely, nor even so much, for what it was *in and of itself*, but for what it revealed about the state of evangelical and charismatic Christianity at the turn of the millennium.

The background, genesis and development of the Toronto Blessing is detailed exhaustively in Part II of this book. For now it is worth noting that the phrase

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<sup>1</sup> Schneider, K., ‘Judgment: κριμα’, in Colin Brown (ed.), *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Vol. 2), Carlisle: Paternoster, 1986 [1971], pp.362-67.

<sup>2</sup> Lyons, John, *Semantics* (Vol. 1), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p.244. Cf. Barr, James, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp.76-291.

'Toronto Blessing' first appeared in the public domain courtesy of the London *Times* journalist Ruth Gledhill. In an article printed on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June 1994, Gledhill reported that it was becoming popular as a nickname for a 'religious craze' of 'mass fainting' which had 'crossed the Atlantic to cause concern in the Church of England'.<sup>3</sup> As it was, the 'craze' to which Gledhill alluded had several antecedents, involved rather more than 'mass fainting', and prompted debate and discussion well beyond the Church of England.

Gledhill's geographical reference was to the Toronto Airport Vineyard (TAV) – a church led by John and Carol Arnott, and overseen by the influential evangelist and teacher John Wimber. Wimber's Association of Vineyard Churches (AVC) had grown remarkably through the 1980s to become a major force within North American Evangelicalism. TAV had started as an independent congregation, but contact with Wimber in the late 1980s led the Arnotts to place it within the Vineyard network. During the same period a number of Vineyard churches were planted overseas, and Wimber made a significant impact on historic denominations beyond the USA and Canada - not least among Anglicans and Baptists in Great Britain.<sup>4</sup>

The distinctive approach of Wimber and the Vineyard was described by Wimber's friend and former Fuller Seminary colleague Peter Wagner as 'Third Wave' renewal. According to Wagner, it represented a development from the 'first wave' of classical Pentecostalism, which had emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through Charles Fox Parham's Topeka Bible College and the Azusa Street revival of 1906-9, and from the 'second wave' of charismatic renewal, which had assimilated Pentecostal emphases into the mainline churches while upholding the distinctive traditions and disciplines of those churches (hence its alternative designation as 'neo-Pentecostalism'). 'Third Wave' renewal borrows extensively from these two movements but, as Wagner defines it, differs from one or both of them on certain key points. In contrast to classical Pentecostalism, it disavows the notion that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace subsequent to conversion. Rather, it expects multiple fillings of the Holy Spirit consequent upon new birth, some of which may be akin to what others would call 'baptism in the Spirit'. Also in distinction from Classical Pentecostalism, 'Third Wave' understanding views the gift of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:2-40) not as 'initial evidence' of Spirit baptism, but as one of many gifts given by God to the Church, which may be granted to some and not to others. In comparison with both First and Second Wave renewal, the model of ministry developed by Wimber and the Vineyard places particular emphasis on the *power and demonstration* of the Holy Spirit's work in 'signs and wonders' such as healing and deliverance. In addition, it is more overtly committed to 'body ministry' – that is, to a corporate expression of spiritual gifts and a team ethos in ministry, as distinct from either the 'anointed man'/'faith healer' focus of much classical Pentecostalism, or the clergy-driven ecclesiology of many historic denominations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gledhill, Ruth, 'Spread of Hysteria Fad Worries Church', *The Times*, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1994, p.12.

<sup>4</sup> For a helpful account of Wimber's ministry and its impact on the UK, see Scotland, Nigel, *Charismatics and the New Millennium*, Guildford: Eagle, 2000, pp.199-250. Also McBain, Douglas, *Charismatic Christianity*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Wagner, C. Peter, 'Third Wave', in Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee & Patrick H. Alexander (eds.), *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988, pp.843-44.

As well as these defining features, Vineyard-style meetings through the 1980s exhibited other marked elements. From at least 1986, significant instances of ‘holy laughter’ were recorded, along with already-established phenomena like slumping or falling to the floor, trembling and weeping.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the growth and rising profile of the Third Wave/Vineyard movement, by the early 1990s, a number of its pastors and leaders appear to have been seeking fresh impetus and ‘anointing’. John Arnott had periodically pursued new sources of blessing and inspiration through his life and career, having previously drawn much from the healing evangelist Kathryn Kuhlman and the Israeli-born preacher Benny Hinn.<sup>7</sup> In late 1993, he and various colleagues visited key figures in the ‘Argentinean Revival’ – a significant wave of evangelical church growth centred on Buenos Aires.<sup>8</sup> While they were looking towards South America, another Vineyard leader, Randy Clark of the St Louis Vineyard in Missouri, was undergoing a radical personal transformation under the ministry of Rodney Howard-Browne.

Rodney Howard-Browne had come to the USA from his native South Africa in 1987, convinced that God was about to visit a ‘mighty revival’ on the nation. A child of devoutly Pentecostal parents, he testified to having been converted at the age of five, and to having been filled with the Holy Spirit at eight.<sup>9</sup> After an unremarkable beginning, Howard-Browne’s American ministry gained considerable momentum in 1989, when laughter and ‘slaying’ or falling down in the Spirit became more prominent in his evangelistic meetings.<sup>10</sup> While such things were hardly unknown in Vineyard circles, Randy Clark found them occurring around Howard-Browne at a level of intensity which deeply impressed him. Clark had been virtually burned-out by a demanding pastorate, and this condition appears to have prompted him to overlook doubts about Howard-Browne’s style and theological background. Very much a classic ‘front man’ Pentecostal, Howard-Browne had also trained and ministered in the ‘Rhema’ and ‘Word of Faith’ constituencies – key engines of the so-called ‘prosperity gospel’ movement. Indeed, it was in Tulsa, Oklahoma – a major Word of Faith centre – that Clark first encountered Howard-Browne in August 1993, and duly ended up on the floor laughing.<sup>11</sup>

Subsequently, as Arnott and other Vineyard leaders returned from Argentina, Clark informed them of what had happened to him, and of the effect it had begun to have on his congregation, some 95% of whom had ‘fallen under the power’ on his return from Tulsa. At this same meeting, Arnott invited Clark to visit TAV in the New Year.<sup>12</sup> Clark accepted, and on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January 1994 he led a ‘family night’ at the airport church. As he called people forward for prayer, large numbers manifested a range of

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<sup>6</sup> Robertson, Murray, ‘A Power Encounter Worth Laughing About’, in Springer, Kevin (ed.), *Power Encounters Among Christians in the Western World*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988, pp.149-57; Oropeza, W.J., *A Time to Laugh: The Holy Laughter Phenomenon Examined*, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995, p.17.

<sup>7</sup> Chevreau, Guy, *Catch the Fire*, London: Marshall Pickering, 1994, p.21.

<sup>8</sup> Chevreau, *Catch the Fire*, p.23; Oropeza, *A Time to Laugh*, p.22; Roberts, *The ‘Toronto’ Blessing*, p.31.

<sup>9</sup> Howard-Browne, Rodney, *Manifesting the Holy Ghost*, Louisville, Ky., R.H.B.E.A, 1992, p.5.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts, Dave *The ‘Toronto’ Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1994, p.85.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Rumours of Revival’, *Alpha*, July 1994, p.46; Oropeza, *A Time to Laugh*, p.22, citing Riss, Richard, ‘History of the Revival, 1993-1995’, unpublished paper (7<sup>th</sup> ed., Jan. 17, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Chevreau, *Catch the Fire*, p.23-4.

dramatic physical phenomena, from falling and then ‘resting’ in the Spirit, to laughing, shaking, prostration and healing. Such was the impact of this meeting that Clark extended his time in Toronto through until mid-March, leading meetings on a regular basis. By the time of his return to St. Louis, word had spread, visitors to TAV were increasing, and some had begun to fly in from overseas to investigate.<sup>13</sup>

Back in St Louis, during April and May Rodney Howard-Browne led a series of equally spectacular meetings, some of which were attended by Terry Virgo, leader of the British-based charismatic network New Frontiers International. Along with other Britons who had attended TAV during this period, Virgo reported what had been happening to his colleagues in the UK, and various outbreaks of ‘Toronto-style’ manifestations began to occur here.<sup>14</sup> Queen’s Road Baptist Church and the Ichthus Fellowship in South London had already started to experience such manifestations when Eleanor Mumford, of the Vineyard’s own Putney congregation, met with leaders of the high-profile Anglican charismatic church Holy Trinity, Brompton, on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May.<sup>15</sup> After reporting a recent visit to TAV, Mumford saw key members of ‘HTB’s’ leadership team rendered virtually immobile as they, too, fell, shook, rested and laughed.<sup>16</sup> The next Sunday, she preached at HTB with similar effect,<sup>17</sup> and news that hundreds of largely upper middle class Knightsbridge churchgoers were rolling around as if ‘drunk’ and ‘helpless’ at services soon caught the attention of the press. Hence the interest of *The Times*, and Ruth Gledhill’s coinage of the term ‘Toronto Blessing’.

Within weeks, the ‘Blessing’ had spread to hundreds of churches across the British Isles, and by the end of 1994, estimates were suggesting that between 2000 and 4000 congregations had embraced it.<sup>18</sup> It became one of the biggest stories covered by the British Christian media in recent times, and remained so through 1995 and into early 1996. It also appeared frequently as a subject of debate and discussion in the secular press - not only in the religious pages, but in the news sections, too. The Evangelical Alliance press archive on the Blessing, on which my Chronicle in Part II of this book is partly based, is six inches thick. Between late 1994 and 1998 the Blessing prompted the publication of at least 30 books in the UK, not to mention a slew of papers, conferences, tapes, videos, web sites, radio features and TV programmes.<sup>19</sup> Major studies of it were commissioned by the Methodist Conference, the Church of Scotland, the House of Bishops of the Church of England, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and numerous smaller bodies in Britain and elsewhere (see Part III). I have read, heard and viewed most of this material, and at certain points it has been

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<sup>13</sup> Roberts, *The ‘Toronto’ Blessing*, pp.20-1.

<sup>14</sup> Virgo, Terry, *A People Prepared*, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1996, pp.13-14

<sup>15</sup> Warner, Rob, *Prepare for Revival*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, pp.2-3; Dixon, Patrick, *Signs of Revival*, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1994, pp.19-21.

<sup>16</sup> Roberts, *The ‘Toronto’ Blessing*, p.25; ‘A Day By Day Diary of What We Have Seen’, *HTB in Focus*, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1994, p.3; Fearon, Mike, *A Breath of Fresh Air*, Guildford: Eagle, pp.115-6.

<sup>17</sup> Mumford, Eleanor, ‘Spreading Like Wildfire’, in Boulton, Wallace (ed.), *The Impact of Toronto*, Crowborough: Monarch, 1995, pp.17-19. For a fuller transcript, see ‘A Mighty Wind from Toronto’, *HTB in Focus*, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1994, pp.4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Fearon, Mike, ‘Principal of Laughter’, *Church of England Newspaper*, November 11<sup>th</sup> 1994, p.8; Price, Clive, ‘Surfing the Toronto Wave’, *Alpha*, May 1995, pp.6-9; Coates, Gerald, in *Rumours of Revival* (Video), Milton Keynes: Nelson Word, 1995; <sup>18</sup> Gardner, Charles, ‘Catching a Glimpse of God’s Glory’, *Joy*, March 1995, pp.17-18.

<sup>19</sup> See Part II and Bibliography for further details.

overwhelming. As will become clear, the Toronto Blessing engaged the time, attention and pastoral capacity of the Evangelical Alliance more than any unprogrammed issue since Martyn Lloyd-Jones and John Stott famously clashed over evangelical church allegiance in 1966.<sup>20</sup>

This remarkable level of comment and interest came about not least because the Blessing was so controversial. While ‘first wave’ Pentecostalism had seemed striking and disturbing to many in the mainline churches and media, until the 1960s they were able to treat it largely as an exotic, sectarian religion with its own dedicated networks and institutions.<sup>21</sup> The ‘second wave’ of the charismatic/neo-Pentecostal renewal brought things more centre-stage, and certainly led to higher profile tensions and splits. But partly because so many of its leaders remained loyal their existing denominations, liturgies and spiritual traditions, and partly because no one episode or incident served to concentrate those tensions sufficiently to threaten really cataclysmic division, it was gradually absorbed and in some cases, actively welcomed into the mainstream as a positive force for growth.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, the Toronto Blessing seemed to many – not only liberals, traditionalists and conservatives, but also some established Charismatics – to represent a dangerously potent and fast-breeding strain of fanaticism which could seriously de-stabilise the Church. Even those who rejected this view, and who instead championed the Blessing, sometimes did so with a zeal which only provoked further polarisation.

Not surprisingly, arguments about the Blessing were most numerous and most heated among Evangelicals. More often than not, crisis is born of contention, and for better or worse, Evangelicalism is a naturally contentious movement. Once the Protestant Reformers determined to promote the authority of ‘Scripture alone’ over the magisterium of the Church, the resultant prerogative of interpretation led, almost inevitably, to divergence, tension and fissure. However much they hold the Bible itself to be supremely trustworthy, those who expound it are fallible, and are thus liable at some point to disagree. Inasmuch as Evangelicalism is rooted in the Protestant tradition, it can be seen to have reflected this tendency to an especially marked degree. Of the 25,000 or so Christian denominations in the world today, Evangelicals have contributed proportionally more to the division that figure represents than any other Christian group. Indeed, uncomfortable though it is to accept, Ken Hylson-Smith’s analysis does seem to have history on its side:

The whole ethos of Protestantism – its theological basis, the behavioural patterns it inculcates, its attitudinal emphasis and its authority structure – make it inherently liable to schism and fragmentation. It has a built-in tendency to be centrifugal rather than centripetal ... By its very nature it encourages individuality, stresses personal faith and promotes distinctive

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<sup>20</sup> The debate in question was over relationship of Evangelicals to mainline, ‘mixed’ denominations. For fuller accounts of it, see Bebbington, David, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp.267-70; Murray, Iain, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, pp.513-67.

<sup>21</sup> Bebbington, David, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, London: Routledge, 1989, p.198; Kay, William K., *Pentecostals in Britain*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000, pp.1-36.

<sup>22</sup> Hocken, Peter, *Streams of Renewal: The Origins and Early Development of the Charismatic Movement in Great Britain (Revsd. Edn.)*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997 [1986]; Bebbington, David, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp.247ff.; Scotland, Nigel, *Charismatics and the New Millennium*, Guildford: Eagle, 2000, pp.9-35.

individual or group expressions of faith and practice. Such characteristics ensure a large measure of personal and corporate creativity; but they almost guarantee divisiveness ... And what is true of Protestantism as a whole is especially so for those archetypal Protestants, the Evangelicals.<sup>23</sup>

Over the years, the majority of Pentecostals and Charismatics had readily identified with Evangelicalism's typically high view of Christ and Scripture, its commitment to conversion, its activism and its objective view of atonement. Not every Evangelical – and especially not those in more classically Reformed circles – had been happy to confirm this identity, and a good deal of familiarly heated evangelical debate arose as a result. Even so, in all but the most separatist and fundamentalist quarters, a degree of tolerance and mutual co-operation developed in the British context during the 1970s and '80s. This was particularly evident in the diverse and growing membership of the Evangelical Alliance, the common organisation of Billy Graham missions, and the resurgence of that broad-based evangelical social concern which was both epitomised and boosted by the 1974 Lausanne Covenant.<sup>24</sup> With the rise of Toronto, however, old fault-lines were once again exposed, and concerns which had either been sublimated or suppressed for the greater cause of unity, were reiterated. Many of those who welcomed the emergence of 'Toronto' (mostly charismatic Evangelicals) were confirmed in their view that those who opposed it (mostly non-charismatic conservative Evangelicals) had an insufficiently dynamic understanding of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, opponents tended to present the Blessing as evidence of a long-held conviction that despite its protestations to the contrary, the charismatic movement in fact relied too much on experience, and not enough on Scripture.

If it initially recalled familiar conservative-charismatic divides, however, the disputatious potential of the Blessing was most tellingly realised by a cleavage within the very ground from which it had sprung. To widespread surprise, in December 1995 John Wimber's Association of Vineyard Churches formally expelled TAV from its membership. While Wimber's own ministry had long featured most of the eye-catching manifestations associated with the Blessing, the AVC Board judged that the Toronto church's focus on them had become excessive in comparison with established Vineyard priorities of evangelism, teaching and discipleship.<sup>25</sup> Although personal hurts were later addressed, and although the Toronto church continues to this day as an independent proponent of the Blessing, this very public and somewhat messy divorce effectively put paid to it as a major international movement. If the Blessing has continued as a force within global renewal at all, it has done so inasmuch as it has transmuted into other initiatives – not least Holy Trinity Brompton's Alpha

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<sup>23</sup> Hylson-Smith, Ken, 'Roots of Pan-Evangelicalism 1735-1835', in Steve Brady & Harold Rowdon (eds.), *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*, London: Milton Keynes: Evangelical Alliance/Scripture Union, 1996, p.137.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis, Peter, 'Renewal, Recovery and Growth: 1966 Onwards', in Steve Brady & Howard Rowdon (eds.), *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*, London/Milton Keynes: Evangelical Alliance/Scripture Union, 1996, pp.178-94; Bebbington, David, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp.249-70.

<sup>25</sup> Beverley, James A., 'Vineyard Severs Ties with 'Toronto Blessing' Church', *Christianity Today*, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1996, p.66; Wright, *Strange Fire*, p.29.

Course, which appears to have been gained considerable impetus from the Toronto outpouring.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that the Toronto Blessing per se is no longer headline news should not, however, detract from its ongoing *theological* and *ecclesiological* significance. For at least a year and a half, it posed a genuine threat to Evangelical unity, even while presaging, in many Evangelicals' eyes, a full-scale, longed-for revival. With hindsight, and given the circumstances of its demise, it might be tempting now to brush the Blessing under the carpet, and to move on. This would, however, be to perpetuate the short-termism and pragmatism which, as Os Guinness and David Wells have pointed out, all too often blight the integrity of the Evangelical movement.<sup>27</sup> At its height, the Blessing was, indeed, a crisis, and crises such as this deserve to be assessed on more than a purely journalistic time scale. Crises in the life of the Church – whether the crises of true revival or the crises of heresy – are studied by historical and systematic theologians centuries after they have occurred, and can still prompt new and valuable insights. There is no reason why this book, at just seven years' distance from the rise of the Blessing, should not at least aspire to the same purpose.

Taken together, the essays and records collected here more specifically highlight three main areas of crisis which were opened up for Evangelicalism by the Toronto Blessing. In doing so, they also suggest key lessons to be learnt. As I perceive them, the three areas are: a crisis of definition, a crisis of discernment, and a crisis of unity. These all in their own way impinged on the particular role and work of the Evangelical Alliance vis-à-vis the Blessing. I shall therefore deal with each in turn while reflecting more specifically on the Alliance's position.

### *A Crisis of Definition*

As we have seen, the phrase 'Toronto Blessing' was first popularised by a London journalist. It does not appear to have been used by TAV in the six months between Randy Clark's historic visit on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1994 and The Times' circulation of it in mid-June. From an early stage, TAV in fact preferred more explicitly biblical descriptions, most notably the phrase 'times of refreshing', which was borrowed from Acts 3:19 and endorsed in a formative 'guideline' paper distributed through Vineyard network by the Illinois pastor Bill Jackson.<sup>28</sup> In due course, however, 'Toronto' became an affectionate shorthand, especially among British supporters of the movement, and appeared on the cover of several books published in the UK, including Marshall Pickering's edition of TAV pastor Guy Chevreau's early study,

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<sup>26</sup> Roberts, Dave, 'The Toronto Divide', *Alpha* February 1996, pp.4-6; Russell-Jones, Gethin, 'Whatever Happened to the Promised Revival?', *Christianity*, December 1997, pp.30; Ronson, Jon, 'Catch Me if You Can', *Guardian Weekend*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2000, pp.10-21.

<sup>27</sup> Guinness, Os, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, pp.57-61; Noll, Mark A., *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Wells, David, F., *God in the Wasteland*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, pp.68-71.

<sup>28</sup> Jackson, Bill, 'What in the World is Happening to Us?: A Biblical Perspective', in Dixon, Patrick, *Signs of Revival: Detailed Historical research Throws Light on Today's Move of God's Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway, pp.303-26.

*Catch the Fire*.<sup>29</sup> Despite all this, there remained a certain unease within the Airport church and AVC leadership about its use as a definition of what was taking place. Indeed, by February 1996, John Arnott was insisting, “It isn’t the Toronto Blessing; it’s the Father’s Blessing”, and was encouraging people to read a book he had just written under the preferred title.<sup>30</sup>

This tension between ad hoc, media-driven phraseology and more self-consciously scriptural language was indicative of a broader tension. While the ministry model emerging from Toronto was proving phenomenally popular, those most responsible for promulgating it realised that they must demonstrate its theological validity, lest they be accused of mere manipulation, superficial emotionalism and plain hype. Allowing the movement to be associated with its city of origin rather than with a New Testament text might fuel such accusations, since it could suggest something vaguely religious and spiritual, rather than anything specifically Christian or orthodox. As it was, the accusations came anyway, and despite the best efforts of Arnott and others, the ‘Toronto Blessing’ moniker not only stuck, but flourished. Today, at a distance of years, it looks to have established itself as the standard term by which the movement is known, and by which it will be referenced in textbooks on the late twentieth century Church.

In and of itself, this is not a major issue. Language has a habit of wriggling free from the attempts of those who would seek to control or ‘correct’ it,<sup>31</sup> and in any event, some of the keenest users of the phrase ‘Toronto Blessing’ were the firmest advocates of what it stood for (a marked contrast, for instance, with the word ‘Protestant’, which started out as a term of abuse used mainly by opponents, rather than supporters, of the Reformation).<sup>32</sup> More profoundly, however, the struggle between journalistic and theological discourse was symptomatic of the struggle for a frame of reference which would locate the Blessing in the context of church history – that is, within a recognisable Christian ‘tradition’. As we have hinted, the specific ‘tradition’ at stake in this case was the characteristically evangelical tradition of ‘revival’.

At various points during the rise of the Blessing, its proponents publicly cast it as a ‘sign of revival’. Patrick Dixon went so far as to adopt this very phrase as the title of his influential book on the movement.<sup>33</sup> In the early phase of the Blessing, a few journalists defined it as revival per se.<sup>34</sup> Those directly involved in it, however, tended to be somewhat more cautious. The ‘signs’ which Dixon highlighted would, he hoped,

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<sup>29</sup> Chevreau, Guy, *Catch the Fire: The Toronto Blessing – An Experience of Renewal and Revival*,

London: Marshall Pickering, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Boyd, Andrew, ‘Toronto: Calm After the Storm?’, *New Christian Herald*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1996; Arnott, John, *The Father’s Blessing*, Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1995.

<sup>31</sup> For studies of this phenomenon, see Aitchison, Jean, *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* London: Fontana, 1981; Wardhaugh, Ronald, *Sociolinguistics (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn)*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992 [1986], pp.192-216.

<sup>32</sup> McGrath, Alister, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, p.13.

<sup>33</sup> Dixon, Patrick, *Signs of Revival: Detailed Historical Research Throws New Light on Today’s Move of God’s Spirit*, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1994.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., Lindsay, James, ‘Revival Breaks Out in London Churches’, *Church of England Newspaper*, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1994, p.1; Langan, Fred & Goodman, Paul, ‘Faithful Fall for Power of the Spirit’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1994, p.5.



point the way to a much fuller inbreaking of God's power, but did not confirm that revival itself had yet arrived. Others wrote in similar terms of the Blessing bearing the 'hallmarks' of revival,<sup>35</sup> and of being a 'preparation' for, or 'initiation' of, revival.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, in a key pronouncement on the Blessing, the 'Euston Statement' of December 1994 (reproduced here in Part III, 7), an Evangelical Alliance-sponsored consultation concluded:

We do not believe that the Church in the United Kingdom is presently experiencing revival. However, many have testified to an increased sense of the manifest presence of God in recent months, and to empowered preaching and conversions. This enrichment has been observed in some measure across the evangelical spectrum. This encourages us to hope that we may be in a period of preparation for revival.

Now 'revival' is a disputed term among church historians. Most especially, there is considerable debate about its relation to what is often called 'awakening'.<sup>37</sup> Some see the two terms as synonymous, while others reserve the former to the revitalisation and expansion of the Church, and the latter to wider social transformation. Beyond these nuances, however, most define 'revival' in relation to the archetypal Evangelical movements of the 1730s and '40s led by the Britons John Wesley and George Whitefield, and by the American Jonathan Edwards.<sup>38</sup> It is then typically applied to such resurgences of spiritual life as occurred in Ulster in 1859, South Wales in 1904 and the Outer Hebrides in 1949.<sup>39</sup> As Earle Cairns describes it, revival may be summarised in this respect as 'the work of the Holy Spirit in restoring the people of God to a more vital spiritual life, witness, and work by prayer and the Word after repentance in crisis for their spiritual decline.'<sup>40</sup> While acknowledging that such elements might distinguish relatively small gatherings and movements, Timothy Beougher follows the majority of commentators in relating revival more specifically to outpourings whose effect is felt on significant numbers of people and churches beyond a single congregation, village or town.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kendall, R.T., Address to London Leaders' Meeting, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1994, cit. Warner, Rob, *Prepare for Revival*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, pp.17-18.

<sup>36</sup> Roberts, Dave, 'From the Editor: When the Holy Spirit Comes', *Alpha*, August 1994, pp.10-11; Wimber, John, quoted by Goodman, Paul, 'The Evangelist Who Is Refreshing Religion', *Sunday Telegraph*, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1994, p.22; Warner, Rob, *Prepare for Revival*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> For a helpful analysis of these terms and their application see Beougher, Timothy, K, 'Revival, Revivals' in Scott Moreau, Harold Netland & Charles van Engen (eds.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, pp.830-33.

<sup>38</sup> Beougher, Timothy, K, 'Revival, Revivals' in Scott Moreau, Harold Netland & Charles van Engen (eds.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, pp.830-33.

<sup>39</sup> For a historical overview of these and other such revivals around the world, see Duewel, Wesley, *Revival Fire*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

<sup>40</sup> Cairns, E.E., *An Endless Line of Splendor: Revivals and their Leaders from the Great Awakening to the Present*, 1986, p.22.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Beougher, Timothy, K, 'Revival, Revivals' in Scott Moreau, Harold Netland & Charles van Engen (eds.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, pp.831-33; Brown, Stewart J., 'Revivals (British Isles)', in Donald K. McKim & David F. Wright (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1992, pp.325-27; Murray, Iain H., *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that so many advocates of ‘Toronto’ were keen to *associate* the movement with revival, even while recognising that it had some way to progress before it could actually bear comparison with the established ‘canon’ of revivals. On reflection, however, it must be said that this ‘anticipatory’ use of the term probably did more harm than good.

In a world of rapid communications, instant analysis and ‘spin’, sincerely-expressed hopes that the Blessing might become full-blown revival sometimes risked appearing to ‘talk it up’ *into* revival. In this sense, the criticism of Tim Thornborough, Gethin Russell-Jones and Andrew Walker, that it at times came closer to revivalism than true revival, must be taken seriously.<sup>42</sup> As defined by Beougher and Iain Murray, the distinction between revival and revivalism in this sense is the distinction between an unambiguously sovereign work of God and a more questionable application of what the nineteenth century American evangelist Charles Finney called ‘new measures’ – that is, ‘man made’ techniques of persuasion and emotional direction designed to stir up response to the gospel.<sup>43</sup> The following comments about the Blessing, for instance, though couched as aspirations rather than *faits accompli*, would surely have heightened expectations, as well as simply reflecting them:

... We are on the edge of what could be the greatest thing to hit our nation this century.<sup>44</sup>

What if, as I believe, we are on the brink of a great revival this century – and God sovereignly chose [Rodney Howard Browne’s] ministry as the embryonic phase of it?<sup>45</sup>

It *has* to go to revival. [We are] daring to believe that this could be the last move of God before revival.<sup>46</sup>

We praise God for the times of refreshing we have been enjoying, but our plea must be that they are no more than a prelude. We long to see the glory and power of the living God sweeping across the face of the earth as never before. A global revival to prepare the world for the return of Christ. Send revival, Lord, and send it in our day!<sup>47</sup>

By ‘raising the stakes’ like this, proponents of the Blessing were always liable to incur greater disappointment if and when the movement lost momentum. Indeed, Rob Warner, who authored the last of the above comments, has recently articulated this disappointment in strikingly blunt terms:

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<sup>42</sup> Thornborough, Tim, ‘An Evening at the Airport’, *Evangelicals Now*, February 1995, pp.6-7; Russell-Jones, Gethin, ‘Whatever Happened to the Promised Revival?’, *Christianity*, December 1997, pp.30. Walker is cited in Russell-Jones’ article.

<sup>43</sup> Murray, Iain, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994; Beougher, Timothy K., ‘Revival, Revivals’, in A. Scott Moreau, Harold Netland & Charles van Engen (eds.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, Grand Rapids: Baker books, 2000, pp.830-33.

<sup>44</sup> Coates, Gerald, ‘A Mighty Convulsion’, *Christian Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1994, p.9

<sup>45</sup> Kendall, R.T., ‘R.T. Responds’, *Evangelicals Now*, January 1996, p.24.

<sup>46</sup> Gott, Ken, interview for *Rumours of Revival*, Nelson Word Video, 1995.

<sup>47</sup> Warner, Rob, *Prepare for Revival*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, p.175.

Toronto came in with a bang but, frankly, seems to have ended with a whimper. For me, it was a time of deep spiritual enrichment and rekindled hope for revival. Yet it was also a time of being turned off by the threefold ministries of unreality – exaggeration, manipulation and hysteria ... Perhaps Toronto is best seen as a parable of the mixed brew that is renewal.<sup>48</sup>

No doubt some will argue that it is better to aim high and miss than not to aim at all – that, as John Wimber himself was fond of saying, faith implies risk, and that there will consequently be failures and embarrassments along the way. Even so, it is noticeable that with hindsight, Warner prefers to confine Toronto within the more modest parameters of ‘renewal’. This in fact echoes the line taken at the time by many those who were seeking to steer a ‘middle way’ through debate on the Blessing. Not least, it reflects the guidance of the Evangelical Alliance’s Director General, Clive Calver, given at a conference organised by Holy Trinity, Brompton in early August 1994:

...Just after this move of God started I was in a set of churches and they said, “Is this an awakening?” And I said, “No. An awakening is what God does in the world when he turns society around as he did in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.” They said, “Is this revival?” I said, “I don’t think so. Revival is what God does when he brings the world into the church.” They said, “Is this renewal?” I said, “Yes, definitely. It’s as important as this: you have never had an awakening in history that hasn’t started in renewal and revival.” Now I want to see an awakening. I want to see God touch our nation and to see God turn our society upside down and inside out. But he won’t start in society. He’ll start with the people of God.<sup>49</sup>

In the model proposed by Calver here, ‘renewal’ constitutes an internal reinvigoration of existing believers, and indeed, even sharp critics of Toronto, like Steven Sizer in his essay for this volume, have tended to accept that Toronto prompted some into a deepened relationship with God. Most, in fact, would now accept Rob Warner’s conclusion – which itself reflects that put forward by another of our contributors, David Pawson – that Toronto was a ‘mixed blessing’. Some, however, have rejected even this description, and have maintained that the movement was an overwhelmingly harmful, and even demonic, distraction from the true purpose of the Church. Among those who propounded this view at the time were Christian Research Ministries, Tricia Tillin, and Steve and Cheryl Thompson.<sup>50</sup> It was also prominent in the many severe attacks on the Blessing made by the Derbyshire Baptist minister Alan Morrison, whose Diakrisis organisation launched a range of broadsides against the Blessing from July 1994 onwards:

...when any phenomena occurred in the revivals of earlier eras – such as the Evangelical Awakenings in the UK and the US in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – they always took place as a result of powerful preaching

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<sup>48</sup> Warner, Rob, ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Renewal: Only Just Begun’, *Renewal*, January 2001, p.54.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in *HTB in Focus*, 14<sup>th</sup> August 1994, p.10.

<sup>50</sup> Christian Research Ministries report, cit. Dube, Steve, ‘Holy Spirit ‘Blessing’ Dismissed as Demonic’, *Western Mail*, September 5<sup>th</sup> 1994; Tillin, Tricia, *Looking Beyond Toronto: The Source and Goal of Pentecost*, Banner Ministries, 1994; Steve and Cheryl Thompson quoted in Beverley, James A., ‘Toronto’s Mixed Blessing’, *Christianity Today*, September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1995, pp.23-26.

of the cross from the Bible, an overwhelming sense of one's foulness in the face of an infinitely holy God, the shocking realisation of the impending reality of eternal punishment in hell, and a desperate desire to be free from the scorching blaze of God's wrath. In genuine revivals, any 'falling down' which occurred was the result of a sense of horror at one's sin and grief at the offence caused to an omnipotent God – certainly not an experience one would want to be repeated. In complete contrast to this, the current phenomena that we are seeing in churches today are completely unconnected to any of these contexts and are, at best, the outworkings of a childish and hysterical mimicry; at worst, they are the result of something far more sinister.<sup>51</sup>

Once giants like Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards had been eagerly invoked by the Blessing's apologists, it must be said that detractors like Morrison were handed an easy chance to draw odious, rather than flattering, comparisons. The result was a sometimes helpful, but often frustrating debate – a debate which centred most intensely on the legacy of Edwards. It says much about the character of Evangelical rhetoric that spokespeople on both sides claimed Edwards for their own position. To opponents of the Blessing he was the model Calvinistic cessationist unmoved by physical manifestations, who would have been horrified at the lack of genuine gospel preaching, true repentance and sound conversion in the Toronto movement.<sup>52</sup> To supporters, he was the anointed evangelist who took exotic emotional responses to the Spirit in his stride, and would have seen considerable affinity between what happened in his own Northampton revivals of 1735 and 1740-42, and what was emerging from Toronto.<sup>53</sup> Both versions caught aspects of the truth. Yet ultimately, they offered partial assessments which were unduly skewed by the presuppositions with which their advocates had started, and by the conclusions which they had all too obviously determined to draw. The charges of institutional demonization cited above, for example, conveniently underplayed the many and varied reasons given in *Distinguishing Marks* for discounting any such accusation in respect of a spiritual movement<sup>54</sup> – not to mention the plain warning of Jesus about blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:29; Matt: 12:32). By the same token, those who rushed most enthusiastically to declare 'this is that' in respect of Toronto and Edwards often failed adequately to take account of the deeper pneumatological differences between Vineyard-style teaching and that of the Northampton Congregationalist.

By contrast with all this, Roy Clements, in one of the best-informed and most fairly balanced articles published at the height of the Blessing, managed simultaneously to pinpoint the true relevance of Edwards for what was taking place, and to shift the debate about him onto more fertile ground:

Jonathan Edwards remains the classic source of Christian reflection on the kinds of phenomena associated with religious revival. His three works,

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<sup>51</sup> Morrison, Alan, *We All Fall Down*, Crich: Diakrisis, 1994.

<sup>52</sup> For the quintessential expression of this view, and kindred references, see Wright, Eric E., *Strange Fire? Assessing the Vineyard Movement and the Toronto Blessing*, Darlington: Evangelical Press, pp.121ff.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Chevreau, Guy, *Catch the Fire: The Toronto Blessing – An Experience of Renewal and Revival*, London: Marshall Pickering, pp. 70-144.

<sup>54</sup> Edwards, Jonathan, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edinburg: Banner of Truth, 1984 [1741], pp.112ff.

*Distinguishing Marks, Thoughts on Revival* and *A Treatise on the Religious Affections*, are absolutely essential reading for anyone who wants to make sense of the Toronto blessing (or indeed, of the modern charismatic movement in general). Guy Chevreau, whose chronicle of the Toronto experience, *Catch the Fire*, has been widely influential in promoting the movement, makes use of Edwards' work in his fourth chapter, drawing many sympathetic comparisons with the Great Awakening. It is perhaps worth noting that Chevreau draws almost exclusively from *Distinguishing Marks*, which is only the earliest of Edwards' books. In many respects, his *Treatise on the Religious Affections*, published a couple of years later, represents his maturer reflection on these matters, following the excesses associated with less-cautious revival preachers like James Davenport. In particular, it is important to note how Edwards distinguishes 'religious affections' from mere 'passions'. Affections are not just emotions, but include the delight of the mind and engagement of the will. Edwards is scathing about mere emotional froth. Nevertheless, Edwards refused to denounce the emotional and physical manifestations which accompanied the revival. He insisted that they proved nothing either positive or negative regarding the authenticity of the experience. The only reliable test of the Spirit's work is the behavioural changes in a person's life which attend it.<sup>55</sup>

Clements' implication here is that both positive and negative assessments of the Blessing were prone to the same error so carefully avoided by Edwards - namely a fixation on physical phenomena. Indeed, it is ironic that the very outrage voiced by some at the others' indulgence in the manifestations ensured that those manifestations remained in the foreground of the debate, when more attention ought to have been given to the impact of the Blessing on people's lives and churches. No doubt such analysis did occur, but hindsight raises serious questions as to how it was conducted and presented. This leads us to the second crisis we have identified in respect of Toronto: the crisis of discernment

### ***A Crisis of Discernment***

The New Testament word translated 'discernment' is itself bound up with the notion of 'crisis' which we have outlined. The compound *diakrisis* can convey both negative denunciation and constructive assessment. Hence while in Romans 14:1 it denotes a quarrel, in 1 Corinthians 12:10, it suggests a positive facility for distinguishing the spiritually good from the spiritually evil (cf. 1Cor. 2:14; 11:29; Heb. 4:12).<sup>56</sup> As Ernest Larkin defines it, the object of discernment as understood in this more positive biblical context is 'to identify the presence or absence of God in given human activity'. As such, it is concerned with 'affective movements within the person', which are to be 'evaluated in their orientation or direction according to the gospel principle, 'You shall know them by their fruits' (Matt: 7:16)'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Clements, Roy, 'Toronto: A Personal Appraisal', *Evangelicals Now*, June 1995, p.16.

<sup>56</sup> Arndt, Walter and Gingrich, F. Wilbur, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edn), Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1979, p.185.

<sup>57</sup> Larkin, Ernest E., 'Discernment of Spirits', in Gordon S. Wakefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, London: SCM, 1983, p.115.

As we shall see, this emphasis on fruits was widely observed in relation to the Blessing, even if the specific application of it was often hotly disputed. Before we examine the discernment of such fruits, however, it should be noted that some commentators on the Toronto movement were at least as much concerned with its *roots* – that is, with its historical provenance. This focus on the aetiology of the Blessing – on its origination and causation – featured especially in the work of those who were minded to discern it as a force for harm. Hence both Alan Morrison and Eric Wright made much of John Arnott’s avowed debt to Kathryn Kuhlman and Benny Hinn, both of whom had attracted high-profile repudiations of their doctrine and methods, while W.J. Oropeza painstakingly traced the connection which led from the much-maligned Latter Rain movement and the sectarian ‘oneness’ Pentecostalism of William Branham, through Branham’s protégé Paul Cain, to the subsequently scandalised ‘Kansas City Prophets’, and on into the Vineyard network and the Blessing itself.<sup>58</sup> In these instances, there is little doubt that links existed – links which we ourselves have examined and detailed in Part II of this book. Yet it must be emphasised that merely establishing some sort of connection between two people or groups does not mean that the one is necessarily or exclusively in thrall to the influence of the other. The deleterious effects of a dubious mentor can be offset by more orthodox role models; a follower may imbibe teaching of questionable source and content, but may later manage to filter it under more benign guidance. Besides, even those who work closely together under the same banner (like Cain and Branham or, indeed, Wimber and Arnott) may in due course develop markedly divergent views. No doubt, the process of discernment can usefully take account of such historical investigation, but in biblical terms, it must also recognise the dangers of guilt by association. It was the Pharisees, after all, who carped in relation to Jesus’ own background, “Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?” (John 1:46).

Where roots are concerned, there is another strategy which is more problematic even than condemning people by the company they might once have kept. This is indulgence in what rhetoricians call the ‘fallacy of the undistributed middle’.<sup>59</sup> Essentially, it involves undue ascription of the terms of a major premise to a minor inference. Where the discernment of Toronto has been concerned, this has most clearly manifested itself as a confusion of *resemblances* with *causes*. Hence, certain opponents of the Blessing have sought to ‘prove’ its erroneousness by drawing parallels between various practices associated with it, and apparently similar practices associated with mesmerism, the occult and eastern polytheistic religion.<sup>60</sup> The difficulty here is that while, say, charismatic ‘laying on of hands’ and repetitive chorus-singing, or Toronto-style trembling and ‘resting in the Spirit’ may look like phenomena which occurred in the meetings of the occultist Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), they are not *therefore*, ipso facto, ‘mesmeric’. Those who make this leap of logic are effectively suggesting that such practices must *always* and *everywhere* be

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<sup>58</sup> Morrison, *A Different Gospel: The Origin and Purpose of the Toronto Blessing* (Video), Crich: Diakrisis, 1994; Wright, Eric E., *Strange Fire*, p.202-216; Oropeza, W.J., *A Time to Laugh: The Holy Laughter Phenomenon Examined*, Peabody, Mass., 1995, pp.15-81.

<sup>59</sup> Cockroft, Robert & Cockroft, Susan M., *Persuading People: An Introduction to Rhetoric*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992, p.92.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Morrison, Alan, *We All Fall Down*, Crich: Diakrisis, 1994; Haville, Mark, ‘An Illusion of Power’, in Peter Glover (ed.), *The Signs and Wonders Movement: Exposed*, Epsom: Day One, pp.34-37 cf. Dixon, *Signs of Revival*, pp.227-32; Middlemiss, David, *Interpreting Charismatic Experience*, London: SCM, 1996, pp.242-52; Clements, Roy, ‘Toronto: A Personal Appraisal’, *Evangelicals Now*, June 1995, pp.16-17.

occultic and heretical, since they occur in some recognisable form in mesmerism, and mesmerism is occultic and heretical. But this is a falsely absolutist presupposition – a defective syllogism. Repetitive song-singing may be a feature of both mesmerist meetings and Toronto-style worship - but it can also be witnessed on innocent display in folk clubs and nursery schools. The laying on of hands may feature in the Hindu shakti-pat, but it is involved in a good deal else besides - not least biblical, apostolic ministry (Mark 16:18; Acts 6:6, 13:3, 19:6; 28:8; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). A similar methodological point is made with respect to so-called ‘altered states of consciousness’ in the papers contributed here by Patrick Dixon and Mark Cartledge: while such states *may* be induced by dubious acts of suggestion, manipulation or drug-taking, this does not in itself mean that they cannot or should not be considered as a legitimate part of Christian spiritual experience. From a Christian perspective, the errors of mesmerism or eastern polytheism lie more crucially in their philosophical and theological assumptions, than in the physical techniques which they might deploy, or the external manifestations by which they might be identified.

All this confirms that while responsible study of the background and development of new movements within the Church can aid discernment, it cannot in itself determine such discernment. For this, we must indeed turn to the question of fruits.

Scrutiny of fruits was, as we have already noted, the chief means by which Jonathan Edwards sought to identify the work of the Holy Spirit. In *Distinguishing Marks*, he famously advances five ‘tests’ to determine whether a spiritual experience is genuine and godly. All are related to the longer-term effects of that experience in terms of devotion and discipleship. First, he writes, it must ‘raise the esteem’ of Christ in the life and witness of the believer. Secondly, it must work ‘against the interests of Satan’s kingdom, which lies in encouraging and establishing sin, and cherishing men’s worldly lusts’. Thirdly, it must cause ‘a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures’ and should establish people more deeply in ‘truth’ and ‘divinity’. Fourthly, it should lead *others* into truth, as it overflows into evangelism. Fifthly, it should issue in love of both God and fellow human beings.<sup>61</sup>

These tests were widely cited by commentators on the Blessing, and were strongly commended in the Alliance’s own Euston Statement.<sup>62</sup> The problem, however, is that they are not entirely self-evident, and must be interpreted and applied in each situation. And not surprisingly, they were applied quite differently, and with quite different results, by different ‘camps’. While it was harder to deny personal claims to enhanced devotion, Bible-study and relationships, plenty of more sceptical observers moved to condemn the lack of scriptural and doctrinal substance in Toronto-style meetings, the dearth of that corporate contrition and repentance which Edwards had viewed as so characteristic of revival, and the relatively low number of new converts made through the movement. In response, the pro-Toronto lobby presented accounts of impassioned crucicentric preaching, radically enhanced communal discipleship, and influxes of new Christians. The problem in each case was that the evidence given

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<sup>61</sup> Edwards, Jonathan, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984 [1741], pp.109-20.

<sup>62</sup> Roberts, Dave, ‘The Finger of God’, *Alpha*, August 1994, pp.32-4; Davies, Ron, ‘Physical Manifestations in Revival’, *Renewal*, January 1995, pp.28-30; Atkinson, David, ‘Why my Middle Name is Certainly Not Gamaliel’, *Church of England Newspaper*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1995, p.17; Sargent, Tony, ‘Physical Phenomena and Revival’, *Evangelism Today*, March 1995.

was so often parochial or anecdotal, and sometimes, decidedly ‘second-hand’. As such, it could have only limited value for an objective, thoroughgoing discernment of the fruit being produced by the Blessing as a whole. So typically, just as critics like Alan Morrison, Chris Hand and the Centre for Christian Ministry would make broad-brush accusations about pro-Toronto churches lacking in repentance, evangelistic impact and holiness,<sup>63</sup> Sandy Millar would counter-claim that Holy Trinity, Brompton had seen the Blessing bring “many hundreds of people to renewed faith in Jesus Christ, a greater depth of repentance, and a fresh desire to pray and read the Bible”<sup>64</sup>, or Ken Gott would describe Sunderland Christian Centre as an exemplar of reverent lamentation and conversion-growth.<sup>65</sup> For every ‘scare story’ about casualties of the Blessing published by arch anti-Torontoites like Mark Haville<sup>66</sup>, Gerald Coates or Terry Virgo would be ready with edifying stories of how the new movement had transformed lives for the better.<sup>67</sup> For all the ‘hard-soft’ stereotypes of conservative v. charismatic, Toronto showed that where these exchanges were concerned, each party could give as good as it got. So for the prosecution, Chris Hand could generalise from personal experience at Queen’s Road Baptist Church, Wimbledon to tar the Blessing with homiletic neglect, church decline, doctrinal error and hype,<sup>68</sup> while Rob Warner, who joined the same congregation shortly after Hand left it, could address those who levelled such accusations in the following terms:

Such is not the blessing I preach and encounter week after week. A movement of God cannot be properly evaluated by caricature. A work of God cannot be undone by such caricature. Smears, distortion and guilt by association are not devices of good evangelical theology. Are you opposed to emotionalism and manipulation? So am I. Are you equally opposed to what Paul described as ‘holding to the form of religion while denying its power? So am I.’<sup>69</sup>

Nowhere was such fevered argumentation more potently illustrated, however, than in the matter of ‘animal noises’. Interestingly, these are not listed as a distinctive manifestation of the Blessing in Bill Jackson’s early, landmark Vineyard paper ‘What in the World is Happening to Us?’, and do not seem to have featured significantly in debate about the movement until Clifford Hill reported in the magazine *Prophecy Today* that an anonymous Pentecostal pastor had told him that they had occurred at ‘a

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<sup>63</sup> Morrison, Alan, *Falling for the Lie*, Crich: Diakrisis, 1994, *We All Fall Down*, Crich: Diakrisis, 1994; Hand, Chris, ‘Tasting the Fruit of the Toronto Blessing’, in Glover, Peter (ed.), *The Signs and Wonders Movement – Exposed*, Epsom: Day One, 1997, pp.38-60; Centre for Christian Ministry, *Charismatic Crossroads: The Report of a Leadership Consultation on the Current Situation in the Charismatic Churches*, Bawtry: PWM Team Ministries, 1995.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Brown, Andrew, ‘Church at Odds Over ‘Waves of Faith’’, *Independent*, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1995, p.2.

<sup>65</sup> Gott, Ken and Lois, *The Sunderland Refreshing: How the Holy Spirit Invaded One British Town*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995.

<sup>66</sup> Haville, Mark, ‘Giving Their Lives for ‘The Faith’’, *Evangelicals Now*, June 1997, p.10.

<sup>67</sup> Coates, Gerald, ‘A Mighty Convulsion’, *Christian Herald*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 1994, p.9; Coates, Gerald, ‘On the Crest of the Spirit’s Wave’, *Renewal*, February 1995, pp.18-20; Virgo, *A People Prepared*, Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1996.

<sup>68</sup> Hand, Chris, ‘Tasting the Fruit of the Toronto Blessing’, in Glover, Peter (ed.), *The Signs and Wonders Movement – Exposed*, Epsom: Day One, 1997, pp.38-60.

<sup>69</sup> Warner, Rob, Address to third Evangelical Alliance Consultation on the Toronto Blessing. For more details see entry for 21<sup>st</sup> December 1995 in the Chronicle in Part II/3 of this book.



meeting in Brighton'.<sup>70</sup> A few days later, the *Observer* journalist Martin Wroe wrote of Christians 'barking, crowing like cockerels, mooing like cows, pawing the ground like bulls and, more commonly, roaring like lions' – although he notably admitted that such things had not been on display at the actual meeting on which his piece was based.<sup>71</sup> The gap between what Hill and Wroe heard from others and what they saw for themselves is significant. Certainly, animal noises did play some part in the Blessing. It remains unclear, however, exactly how prominent they were. It is known that Bishop David Pytches did 'roar like a lion' on a visit to TAV in the summer of 1994. It is also well documented that he then publicly expounded this experience in relation to Hosea 11:10-11.<sup>72</sup> Beyond this, however, the true picture becomes warped by the same sort of rhetorical heat-haze we have observed with regard to other aspects of the Blessing. So as debate develops, we see Tony Higton, Stanley Porter, John Stott and Brian Edwards and others expressing grave reservations about such noises on the basis that they lack biblical backing and debase the image of God in humanity,<sup>73</sup> while John Arnott, Gerald Coates, Rob Warner and John Noble defend them as legitimate 'acted signs' of a kingdom which Scripture often symbolically depicts in terms of lions, lambs, doves and other fauna.<sup>74</sup>

Although this exegetical and theological debate was no doubt intriguing, it often appeared to take on a life of its own quite apart from any consideration of whether the actual incidence of such noises was in any way sufficient to warrant the energy and time spent deconstructing them. Indeed, it seemed at times that the sceptics in particular were more concerned with the idea of animal noises, and with their with negative emblematic potential in respect of Toronto, than with such animal noises as were in fact being made 'in the field'. By the same token, Toronto apologists seem to have defended animal behaviour on principle – out of allegiance to an assumed 'right' of freedom in worship – whilst at the same time seeking to play down its actual importance for the Blessing per se. At the end of all this, however, the neutral or non-aligned observer is still left relatively unclear about the *de facto* role of animal noises in the Toronto movement, even if they can be seen to have served incidentally as a catalyst for more general evangelical arguments about epistemology, cultural assimilation and hermeneutics. These arguments are obviously vital, and are considered more thoroughly in Martin Davie's and David Pawson's papers for this volume. However, it is doubtful that the debate on animal noises proved either appropriate or particularly illuminating as a 'way in' to such issues.

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<sup>70</sup> Hill, Clifford, 'Toronto Blessing – True or False?', *Prophecy Today* Vol. 10 No. 5 (September-October 1994), p.10-11.

<sup>71</sup> Wroe, Martin, 'A Drop of the Holy Spirit Has Them Rolling in the Aisles', *The Observer*, 4<sup>th</sup> September 1994.

<sup>72</sup> Nodding, Peter, 'The Holy Spirit in Our Midst', in Boulton, Wallace (ed.), *The Impact of Toronto*, Crowborough: Monarch, 1995, p.32; Fearon, *A Breath of Fresh Air*, pp.98-9.

<sup>73</sup> Higton, quoted in Price, Clive, 'Surfing the Toronto Wave', *Alpha*, May 1995, pp.6-9.

Porter, Stanley E., 'Shaking the Biblical Foundations?: The Biblical Basis for the Toronto Blessing', in Stanley E. Porter & Philip J. Richter (eds), *The Toronto Blessing – Or Is It?* London: Darton, Longman & Todd, pp.58-60; McCloughry, Roy, 'High Profile: Interview with John Stott', *Third Way*, October 1995, pp.21-23; Edwards, Brian, Address to Third Evangelical Alliance Consultation on the Toronto Blessing, see entry for 21<sup>st</sup> December 1995 in Part II/3 of this book.

<sup>74</sup> Price, Clive, 'Taste for the Exotic', *Alpha*, p.29; Warner, Rob, 'The Stott Debate: Truth and Toronto', *Alpha*, October 1996, pp.4-7; Noble, John, 'A Very English Blessing?', *Renewal*, November 2000, pp.34-5.

If nothing else, the animal noises dispute pointed up the need for more sober, distanced, empirical evaluation of the Blessing. The febrile tone of the immediate, media-fuelled controversy hardly facilitated this, but over time, a more scientific evaluation of the ‘fruit’ of the movement has begun to emerge. The work of Margaret Poloma has been highly significant in this regard, and the paper she has contributed here stands as a welcome antidote to the more impressionistic approach which characterised so many earlier assessments of the movement. Beyond her sociological, case-study based analysis of how the Blessing has ‘transmuted’ into various other modes of renewal, however, it is also worth noting the statistical findings of the Christian Research Association, whose most recent English Church Census (1998) offers a helpful tool for discernment of Toronto’s fruit - albeit within England alone.

In his account of the census, CRE Director Peter Brierley highlights the fact that between 1989 and 1998 – that is, the period which included the rise and fall of the Toronto Blessing – regular church attendance in England dropped from 10% to 7.5%.<sup>75</sup> In blunt terms, this would appear to confirm that the Blessing cannot now seriously be defined as a revival, let alone an awakening. For all the great claims and hopes attached to it at its inception, its medium to long term impact on both church and wider society in England appears to have been negligible. Some might even say that it contributed to the decline charted by the census, although any direct causation here would be hard to demonstrate.

Viewed against these stark figures, the so-called ‘Gamaliel Principle’, which was invoked by a number of commentators in defence of the Blessing,<sup>76</sup> would seem now to have found it wanting (cf. Acts 5:34-9). If the main test of a movement’s godliness and fruitfulness is its ability to ‘thrive’, then Toronto would appear to have withered on the vine, if not the Vineyard. Having said this, Tom Smail and John Lyons are surely right to question whether longevity alone should be the decisive criterion in discernment.<sup>77</sup> As Smail points out, such a test would, after all, work very well for Buddhism. And even full-blown revivals have rarely lasted more than three years. There is, as we have recognised, a case for arguing that Toronto lives on in other more obviously durable and successful initiatives – and it is a case that Margaret Poloma makes skilfully in this volume. Yet the problem with the Toronto Blessing lies not so much in how long it lasted, or in what other renewal paradigms it might have spawned, but in its effect on relationships within the Church, and most particularly, within the evangelical wing of the Church.

Brierley himself makes an intriguing observation about the possible effect of Toronto on evangelical identity and self-understanding. Despite stressing that Evangelicals as a whole have declined less rapidly than other streams within the English Church, Brierley points out that the proportion who would now define themselves as ‘charismatic’ has seen a comparatively dramatic, 16% fall since 1989. In particular,

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<sup>75</sup> Brierley, Peter, *The Tide is Running Out: What the English Church Census Reveals*, Eltham: Christian Research, p.27.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Evangelical Alliance (UK) ‘Preliminary Statement on the Toronto Blessing’, reprinted here at Part III.2; Showers are ‘Strong Meat’, *Salvationist*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1994; Bateman, Alan, ‘Whatever Happened to the Toronto Blessing?’, *Salvationist*, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1998, pp.12-13.

<sup>77</sup> Smail, Tom, ‘Why my Middle Name is Certainly Not Gamaliel’, *Church of England Newspaper*, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1995, p.8; Lyons, John, ‘The Gamaliel Principle’, in Pietersen, Lloyd (ed.), *Mark of the Spirit?* Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998, pp. 92-121.

he notes that this fall owes much to the fact that around a quarter of mainly white-majority Pentecostal congregations switched from describing themselves as 'charismatic evangelical' to 'mainstream evangelical'. As Brierley presumes it, this change has occurred because such churches 'wish to disassociate themselves from the churches who have experienced the Toronto Blessing, probably all of whom would describe themselves as charismatic'.<sup>78</sup>

While somewhat speculative, the inference drawn by Brierley here suggests that at least on one level, the Blessing has left a legacy of embarrassment and retrenchment among those who might have been among its most obvious allies. Neither, it seems, is this mood confined to classical Pentecostals. We have already cited Rob Warner's disappointment with the fruit produced by Toronto, but the recent reflections of HTB's own Nicky Gumbel are also salient: "I don't talk about it now", he told *The Guardian* in October 2000, "It divides people. It splits churches. It is very controversial."<sup>79</sup>

This retrospective assessment by a sometime leading proponent of the Blessing suggests that whatever else might have accrued from it (and Gumbel went on to describe it otherwise as 'a wonderful, wonderful thing'), the movement generated a major crisis of evangelical unity. This indeed, was the crisis which most immediately drew the Evangelical Alliance into the Toronto debate, and it merits some re-examination in the context of this book.

### *A Crisis of Unity*

The December 1995 split between the Toronto Airport Vineyard and the Association of Vineyard Churches was symptomatic of the growing divisions which the Blessing had provoked within the evangelical world as a whole. As Part II of this book confirms, almost from the moment of its arrival in Britain, the movement seemed to draw out tensions which had existed under the surface of Evangelicalism for some time. In particular, as we have noted, it re-catalysed long-standing mutual suspicions between conservative and charismatic Evangelicals. Also, however, as Peter Brierley's findings suggest, it prompted significant debate between those who were generally at ease with the presence of supernatural charismata, emotional responses and physical phenomena, but who differed on the relative profile which should be accorded to these things in worship and mission, and who questioned their specific status vis-à-vis Scripture, preaching, evangelism and personal holiness. Hence, while the Blessing predictably incurred the scorn of many traditional Reformed Evangelicals, it was also vigorously challenged by the self-professed Charismatics of the Centre for Christian Ministry, and of the Sheffield University group which produced the stinging 1998 critique *Mark of the Spirit?* In addition, it was viewed with concern rather than enthusiasm at the 17<sup>th</sup> World Pentecostal Conference which met in Jerusalem in October 1995.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Brierley, Peter, *The Tide is Running Out: What the English Church Census Reveals*, Eltham: Christian Research, pp.147. See also p.54.

<sup>79</sup> Ronson, Jon, 'Catch Me if You Can', *Guardian Weekend*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2000, p.19.

<sup>80</sup> Centre for Contemporary Ministry, *Charismatic Crossroads*, Bawtry: PWM Tem Ministries, 1995; Pietersen, Lloyd (ed.) *Mark of the Spirit? A Charismatic Critique of the Toronto Blessing*, Carlisle:

Against this rather fraught backdrop, the role and work of the Evangelical Alliance became crucial. No doubt the Blessing spurred many conferences, consultations, studies and statements, but the truth is that these tended to reflect the views of one 'side' or another in the debate, and thus tended to reinforce, rather than ameliorate, existing differences. Of course, some of those who took it upon themselves to attack the movement saw themselves in a 'prophetic' role – warning the Church against a perilous deception. As such, any attempt at dialogue or co-operation with proponents of Toronto was presented by them as a compromise to be avoided.<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, there were those in the forefront of the movement who, when it was at its height, saw little point in having to justify something so self-evidently 'of God' to those whose theological presuppositions ensured that they would always be set against it. As the largest pan-Evangelical body in the UK, the Alliance was probably the only organisation which could seriously hope to work through and beyond these polarities, and thereby reiterate a unity which could be neither cheap nor monolithic, but which would be grounded in genuine biblical collegiality.

To this end, the Alliance organised three major forums on the Blessing in 1994-95, which could together claim to have gathered the most widely representative body of evangelical leadership and opinion at the time.<sup>82</sup> Contrary to the jibes of some on the separatist hard right,<sup>83</sup> these forums were not fronts for an Alliance overrun by Charismatics, but significantly engaged leaders from that 42% of our membership which does *not* define itself as Charismatic.<sup>84</sup> The 'Euston Statement' issued by the first of these forums, and signed by the overwhelming majority those present, may have been less sharp-edged and detailed than many other statements produced from more partisan quarters, but it remains one of the few documents published on the Blessing which can claim a genuinely 'conciliar' and 'ecumenical' evangelical authority.<sup>85</sup> It is often forgotten by Evangelicals that the early church worked out its theology in characteristically *ecclesial* fashion – whether through the biblical Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), or in later meetings such as those at held at Nicea and Constantinople. As the record shows, the discussions which took place in such settings were hardly superficial or uniform; indeed, they were very often highly charged.<sup>86</sup> Yet by God's grace, positions were defined, and texts produced, which could realistically claim to articulate the mind of the Church. Granted, they might have looked like 'compromise' to some, and granted, in the case of post-apostolic

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Paternoster, 1998; Grady, J. Lee, 'Classical Pentecostals Wary of the 'Toronto Blessing'', *Charisma*, November 1995, pp.41-42.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Morrison, Alan, 'No Great Surprise', *Evangelical Times* (Letters), September 1995, p.18.

<sup>82</sup> For summaries of these Consultations, see entries for 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> December 1994, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1995 and 21<sup>st</sup> December 1995 in Part II of this book.

<sup>83</sup> Morrison, Alan, 'No Great Surprise', *Evangelical Times* (Letters), September 1995, p.18; 'Comment', *Evangelical Times*, September 1995, p.2.

<sup>84</sup> This figure is derived from a 1998 survey of 848 Alliance member churches, the results of which were published in the Spring 1999 edition of *Ear*, p.1.

<sup>85</sup> I realise that the term 'ecumenical' has negative connotations for some Evangelicals, but I am using it here in its general, biblical sense of Christian co-operation, rather than in any necessary relation to the so-called 'Ecumenical Movement' characterised by the World Council of Churches. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was deeply suspicious of this Movement nonetheless regularly spoke of 'evangelical ecumenicity', and this comes close to what I am implying here.

<sup>86</sup> For an accessible evangelical account of these councils, see Bray, Gerald, *Creeds, Councils and Christ*, Leicester: IVP, 1984.

councils like Chalcedon, they often marked out boundaries rather than presenting exact definitions on every point. But it is doubtful that anything better, or more representative, could have been produced at the time. While it only claims to act for one stream of the wider Church, and while it clearly does not carry the authority of such ancient councils, the Alliance does seek to operate on the same basic, ecclesial model when it engages in theology and lends guidance on movements such as Toronto. This approach is embodied in its theological commission, ACUTE, which was in fact formed as a constructive response to the debate on the Blessing, and which has since produced major reports on the equally controversial questions of homosexuality and hell.<sup>87</sup>

This book operates very much on the model I have just outlined. It gathers together diverse essays and sources on the Blessing, the better to inform understanding of what the Toronto movement meant for Evangelicals when it emerged, and what it means now. It also seeks, in Part II, to offer the fullest documentary record yet published in the UK of the events, personalities, texts and discussions which together constituted ‘The Toronto Blessing’. In Part III, it offers a unique compendium of statements on the Blessing from churches and Christian organisations around the world. Unlike ACUTE’s studies on homosexuality and hell, it does not purport to speak ‘with one voice’ on behalf of the Alliance as a whole. This is partly due to the prior existence of the Euston Statement, which does come with such a pedigree. It is also due, however, to the recognition that discernment on this matter is still going on, and that a presentation of different perspectives therefore probably still offers the most helpful way ahead. What I myself have written here obviously reflects my own view from within the heart of the Alliance, and benefits from access to the Alliance’s archive and resources. Even so, it should not be treated as ‘the official version’. Rather, the format adopted for this book might be more closely compared to that of the IVP series, *When Christians Disagree*, which so many found helpful when it was published during the 1980s, and which is still widely consulted today.

Admittedly, some have questioned why it has taken so long to issue this volume, and as Part II confirms, the Alliance did commit itself to publishing more detailed material within a year of the Euston text. I myself did not join the Theology Department of the Alliance until 1997, but on its behalf, I should apologise for the fact that the wait has been so extended. Having said this, I am sure that the delay has afforded certain benefits – not least the benefits of hindsight and enhanced perspective.

It may be seven years since the birth of the Blessing; it may well take another seven years, or longer, before its full implications are realised. As things stand, it is to be hoped that in addition to offering judgements on Toronto, this book provides opportunities for the further reflection, study and response which is still needed.

**[Click here to read part II “A Chronicle of the ‘Toronto Blessing’”](#)**

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<sup>87</sup> ACUTE, *Faith, Hope and Homosexuality*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998; ACUTE, *The Nature of Hell*, Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000.