

Ticket to Toronto . . . and beyond the Strawberry Fields?¹

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'You've got to get "it" out and get "it" out to the traditional churches'—so runs one tape message from the Vineyard Fellowship at Toronto Airport.² Other tapes from the Toronto Vineyard seek to demolish the defences of the hesitant—congregations are told not to try to analyse but to be open and receive.³ Hence there have been many meetings throughout Britain and the rest of the world to promote what has been called the 'Toronto Blessing'.

When the manifestations began in early 1994, the 'Toronto Blessing' was described as 'revival'.⁴ But it is clearly not a revival in the classic or historical sense of that word, since there is little evidence so far of it leading to the conversion of non-Christians. By the summer of 1994 it was being referred to as a 'time of refreshing from the Lord',⁵ referring to Acts 3:19: 'Repent therefore and be converted, so that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord'. But since, so far, neither repentance nor conversions have been major factors in the present events, this too seems a misnomer. More recently it has been called the 'Toronto Experience' (TE), or simply 'a move of God' which may be 'a period of preparation' for revival.⁶ Throughout this article I shall use the term 'Toronto Experience', for experience it certainly is. Whether it is 'blessing' is more arguable.

During the TE people speak of a sense of God's presence; there are outbursts of often uncontrollable laughter, weeping and shaking. Many are

- 1 The Strawberry Fields was a classic 60s Beatles' song: 'Let me take you down, 'cos I'm going to the Strawberry Fields; Nothing is real ... Always—no sometimes—think it's me; But you know I know when it is a dream ... It's getting hard to be someone but it all works out; It doesn't matter much to me ...'
- 2 Wes Campell *Spiritual and Physical Manifestations* audio-tape (Airport Vineyard: Toronto undated)
- 3 John Arnott *Receiving the Spirit's Power* audio-tape (Airport Vineyard: Toronto undated)
- 4 'Revival breaks out in London church' *Church of England Newspaper* 17 June 1994
- 5 Sandy Millar quoted by Frad Langan and Paul Goodman 'Faithful fall for the power of the Spirit' *Sunday Telegraph* 19 June 1994
- 6 'Toronto: Call to Keep Peace' *Christian Herald* 21 January 1995

‘slain in the Spirit’—or fall to the ground—with or without touch or prayer. Often those so affected cannot move for some time; some lose consciousness, but others are fully aware of what is happening around them. Other manifestations include animal noises such as barking, roaring like a lion, howling, yelping and screeching. It is not necessary to be ‘born again’ to receive this ‘anointing’ — secular journalists reporting the meetings have experienced it.⁷

Although the Toronto Experience is not confined to any one denomination, in the UK it was originally concentrated in the charismatic churches, 80 per cent of which, it is estimated, are associated with the Restoration Movement. This includes New Frontiers International, Pioneer, Ichthus, Jesus Army and the New Covenant Ministeries. It is also to be found in John Wimber’s Vineyard churches, many Elim and Assemblies of God churches, and Anglican churches such as Holy Trinity, Brompton.⁸ Other countries known to be affected include Hong Kong, France, Germany, New Zealand, Korea, China and Israel, as well as parts of Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

The TE is widely seen as originating at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Christian Fellowship (TVCF). Certainly this fellowship has acted as the main ‘distribution’ centre for the phenomenon, with Christians jetting into Toronto Airport from all over the globe, receiving the experience, and then taking it back to their own churches. The actual origins of the experience, however, can be traced to a South African evangelist, Rodney Howard-Browne, who in 1993 led meetings in the United States at which large numbers of people were ‘slain in the Spirit’, laughed uncontrollably or went into convulsions. The founding pastor of the St Louis, Missouri Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Randy Clark, who had been experiencing a considerable time of spiritual dryness began to seek some manifestations of God’s presence in his church. In the late summer of 1993 he went to Howard-Browne’s meetings in Tulsa where, he claims, he was powerfully touched by God. On returning to St Louis he began to see the same manifestations in his own church. (One of the hallmarks of the phenomenon is that it is passed on from person to person, and from church to church—as an official handout from the Toronto Vineyard has put it: ‘The experience is transferable; having once received it, it is best kept by giving it away’).⁹ Later, in October 1993, Randy Clark was asked to share what was happening in his church at the Regional Meeting of the Midwestern Vineyard Churches held in Wisconsin. Within a short time, all the same phenomena began to manifest in this leaders’ meeting.

7 Mick Brown ‘Unzipper Heaven, Lord’ *Telegraph Magazine* 3 December 1994

8 Derek Owers *The Toronto Phenomenon, a time of refreshing or a strong delusion?* audio-tape (available from 13 de Havilland House Curlew Road Mudeford Christchurch Hants BH23 4DA)

9 *Toronto Thoughts* (available from the Toronto Vineyard: Toronto) June 1994

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Following this, the Vineyard Regional Overseer shared what had been happening with John Arnott, pastor of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Toronto. Arnott invited Randy Clark to come to speak and 'minister' in the Toronto church in January 1994. Similar manifestations broke out and, as the Vineyard paper puts it, those 'two days of meetings in Toronto turned into . . . almost continuous meetings'.¹⁰

By March word of what was happening had spread to other Vineyard churches in America and around the world. Ministers began flying into Toronto in large numbers to experience the manifestations for themselves (and subsequently take them home). A key role in initially bringing the experience to Britain seems to have been played by Mrs Eleanor Mumford of the South West London Vineyard Church. She visited Toronto in May and on her return later that month she held a meeting to explain to several church leaders in London what had happened to her. One of these was the Holy Trinity, Brompton curate, Nicky Gumbel, who received the TE after being prayed for by Mrs Mumford; he, in turn, prayed that same day for an HTB leaders' meeting, several of whom were immediately 'slain in the Spirit'. Mrs Mumford was then asked to address both the morning and evening service at HTB the following Sunday, and many of the congregation were also 'slain in the Spirit' or exhibited other manifestations.¹¹ Other Anglican churches in the HTB orbit have followed suit.

Some of the house churches seem to have been initially influenced by Terry Virgo, leader of New Frontiers International, who, according to Alpha Magazine, was prayed for by Rodney Howard-Browne, who subsequently prayed with his UK leadership team.

Writers and journalists have not been slow to comment on this phenomenon. In addition to coverage in the main secular press, by the beginning of 1995 at least five books describing the growth and manifestations of TE had appeared—all of them favourable.¹² In obedience to the scriptural injunction to 'test all things' (1 Thess 5:19-22) however, this article will attempt to make a more critical assessment.

In line with Jesus' words in Matt 7:15-24 'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruits (καρπούς), neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruits . . . Thus you will know them by their fruits', the promoters of the TE encourage us to judge it by its fruit. The official Vineyard paper, *What*

10 Bill Jackson *What in the World is happening to us? A biblical perspective* (sic) on *Renewal* (Champaign Vineyard: Illinois April 1994) p 1

11 Eleanor Mumford tape 29 May 1994 (available from Holy Trinity Church Brompton London)

12 Guy Chevreau *Catch the fire* (Marshall Pickering 1994); Mike Fearon *A Breath of Fresh Air* (Eagle 1994); Dave Roberts *The Toronto Blessing* (Kingsway 1994); Patrick Dixon *Signs of Revival* (Kingsway 1994); Mona Johnian *The Fresh Anointing* (Bridge Publishing 1994)

in the world is happening to us? states, for instance, 'if the long term fruit is Gal 5:22, it's God . . . Is the fruit good? Then it's God'.¹³ But Scripture makes it plain that it is not only the fruit, but also the roots, which are vital. As Rom 11:16 states 'if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too'. Let us therefore examine the roots of this phenomenon.

The Roots

As we have seen, the origins of the TE seem to lie with evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne. He has a most unusual ministry, as is shown only too clearly by the several videos of his meetings available here in Britain.¹⁴ In one, as well as the phenomena mentioned above, people can be seen to 'pogo in the Spirit' (that is, leap up and down on the spot as on a pogo stick). He is also seen laughing and talking publicly in tongues to his fellow minister, Kenneth Copeland, who – as a mischievous joke – asks Howard-Browne to go and 'zap' the music band. When he touches each of the musicians they collapse in a chaotic heap of guitars and drums, much to the amusement of the audience. He is also heard constantly shouting 'fill', 'have another drink', 'have a double'. In fact he refers to himself as a 'Holy Ghost bartender' and encourages 'laughing in the Spirit' by shouting 'ho-ho, he-he—fill—ho-ho-ho, ho-ha-ha'. Most disturbingly people are told not to use their minds or pray, but just 'yield'.

In South Africa Howard-Browne was associated with Ray Macauley's *Rhema* or 'Word of Faith' ministry. This movement has its origins in America where the most prominent leaders are Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagin.

The common doctrinal background of Rodney Howard-Browne and Benny Hinn, who has also 'ministered' to John Arnott and Randy Clarke, is 'faith' theology. Both Rodney Howard-Browne and Benny Hinn are ministers in the Word of Faith Movement and were ordained by Copeland and Hagin.

Although teachings of individual members of the faith movement vary, there is a common theological pattern. In the first place, they have an unorthodox approach to the atonement. Copeland, for instance, teaches that Christ's physical death on the cross was insufficient atonement for our sins. 'It wasn't a physical death on the cross that paid the price for sin ... anybody can do that.'¹⁵ And so, according to Copeland, Jesus had to die

13 Bill Jackson *What in the World is happening to us? A biblical perspective (sic) on Renewal* (Champaign Vineyard: Illinois April 1994) p 11

14 *Ministry in Birmingham* (available from Media Ministry International 162 Abbey Road Warley West Midlands B67 5NW); *Ministry in the US with Kenneth Copeland* (available from Video Productions 111 Eccleshall Road South Sheffield S11 9PH)

15 Kenneth Copeland *What Satan saw on the Day of Pentecost* audio-tape BCC-19

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spiritually by descending into hell and enduring torture by Satan for three days.

He [Jesus] allowed the devil to drag Him into the depths of hell ... He allowed Himself to come under Satan's control ... every demon in hell came down to annihilate Him ... They tortured Him beyond anything anybody had ever conceived. For three days he suffered everything there is to suffer.¹⁶

Secondly, they place far greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit than any other member of the Trinity. They claim that Jesus became a 'god-man' by being baptized with the Holy Spirit and so we can become gods by the same means. As Copeland has said, 'You don't have a God in you. You are one'.¹⁷ Thirdly, they see loss of dominion over the earth, not sin, as mankind's root problem. Learning to rule on earth is part of rediscovering one's 'godhood'. Through this revealed knowledge, and by extracting 'promise' verses from the Bible and declaring them repeatedly 'in faith' ('positive affirmation'), God can be manipulated and Satan defeated. Thus we can 'go forward and make this earth His kingdom'.¹⁸

In other words, as with the closely-linked Restoration/Dominion teachings, the 'Word of Faith' teachers believe that Christians can and should exercise dominion over both the natural and Satanic realms. Like occultists and New Agers, 'faith' teachers also claim extra-biblical revelations and regular out-of-body experiences and, as David (Paul) Jonggi Cho's books show, they encourage 'visualisation' techniques in order to help bring into existence those things which do not already exist.¹⁹

John Wimber's Vineyard Movement shows similarities with the 'faith' teachers. It has taught that the western church needs a major paradigm shift in world view from one that is rationalistic and 'Book' centred, to a more supernatural and experience related stance. Thus Wimber's emphasis has shifted from proclamation of the Word of God to a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's power—hence his 'power evangelism' and 'power healing'.²⁰ As far back as 1981, Wimber characterised his ministry as one of 'signs and wonders', and manifestations similar to those of the TE have been commonplace, if not in such quantity.

16 Kenneth Copeland 'The Price of it All' *Believers' Voice of Victory* September 1991

17 Kenneth Copeland *The Force of Love* audio-tape BCC 1956

18 Agnes Sanford *Creation Waits* (Logos International) p 4. For more details of Word of Faith teachings see D R McConnell *A different Gospel* (Hendricksen 1988).

19 Paul Yonggi Cho *The Fourth Dimension: the key to putting your faith to work for a successful life* (Logos Books 1979)

20 John Wimber *Power Evangelism* (Hodder and Stoughton 1985); *Power Healing* (Hodder and Stoughton 1986)

Thus it can be argued that Wimber's visits to Britain since the early 1980s have helped prepare British charismatic churches for the TE. Ordinary believers were encouraged to expect 'signs and wonders' as they prayed for each other. Moreover, although Wimber's inner-healing techniques may have genuinely helped many, its methodology – which tends to stress the building-up of self esteem rather than repentance and a dying to self – has helped nudge the Church towards man-centred theologies.

The Vineyard Movement's approach and judgment is further called into question by its promotion of the 'Kansas City prophets', like Paul Cain. The exposure of immorality and an occultic understanding and practice of prophecy by some of the Kansas City prophets has not seemingly diminished their acceptance by the Toronto Vineyard.²¹ Nor has the false prophecy of imminent revival by Paul Cain in 1990 been rejected. At first the TE was hailed as its fulfilment.

Marc Dupont, of the Toronto Vineyard, has himself claimed to have received a prophecy both in 1992 and 1993 of a mighty wave starting in Toronto and flowing powerfully out eastwards across Canada leading to world revival in the early years of the twenty-first century. He has stated, 'this move of the Spirit in 1994 (the TE) is NOT just a charismatic and pentecostal experience, concerning power or gifting. It is one thing to be clothed with power; it is another to be indwelt with the Person of God'.²² In saying this, Dupont may consciously or unconsciously be drawing on 'Latter Rain' and 'Manifest Sons of God' teaching (both of which have been strong influences upon the Kansas City prophets). These have many elements of 'faith' teaching but, in addition, claim that before the return of Christ there will be a Second Pentecost outpouring which will empower an elite group of Christians ('Manifest Sons of God') to become gods by incarnating Christ within them. This 'Second Pentecost' was prophesied to begin in Canada and spread throughout the world.²²

It should be clear, then, that the roots of the Toronto Experience are dubious.

21 Wes Campbell *Spiritual and Physical manifestations* audio-tape (available from Airport Vineyard: Toronto undated)

22 Reports in *Mantle of Praise* newsletter and *Alpha* magazine September 1994
For more details of 'Latter Rain', 'Manifest Sons' and Restorationist teachings see: Al Dager *Vengeance is Ours* (Sword Publishers 1990); Pauline Greigo-MacPherson *Can the Elect be Deceived?* (Bold Truth Press 1986); K Adler *The Kingdom Now' Message: Analysis of Manifest Sons* (Holbrook 1990 3rd edition); Richard M Riss *Latter Rain: The Latter Rain Movement of 1948 and the Mid-twentieth Century Evangelical Awakening* (1987 available from Honeycomb Visual Productions Mississauga Ontario Canada).

For a book promoting the current Restorationist approach to prophecy, see Bill Harmon, *The Eternal Church* (Christian International Publishers 1981).

The Phenomena

Let us look now at some of the phenomena associated with the experience.

Drunkness

One of the features of the TE are the symptoms of drunkness—swaying about, slurred speech, movements which are difficult to control etc. There have been instances where people receiving the TE have been unable to drive their car after meetings, or even attend work the next day. The ‘drunken’ condition is taken as testimony of a deep work of the Holy Spirit. Dr Patrick Dixon, for example, who was initially sceptical about the TE stated in *Joy* magazine, March 1995, that ‘I gradually changed my mind after measuring what was happening against Scripture, particularly noting that “drunken behaviour” is a consequence of the Holy Spirit’.

Dixon and others using such an argument are referring to Acts 2 where, at the first Pentecost, the disciples were accused of being drunk. But it was only some onlookers who said this and it was clearly meant as mockery, not as an accurate description of the situation. The Acts account gives no reasoning for believing that the disciples were reeling around with slurred speech; on the contrary, it is clear that they preached a coherent gospel message—if one in many different languages. Indeed Gal 6:23 quite specifically tells us that one of the fruits of the Spirit is ‘self-control’—quite the opposite of symptoms of drunkness.

Laughter

As we have already seen, the TE is frequently marked by uproarious laughter. This is referred to as ‘the work of the Lord’ and equated to the biblical notion of ‘joy’. The Bible however seems to be ambivalent about the desirability of laughter. Out of forty or so references, more than twenty refer to ‘scornful’ laughter; the three New Testament references all warn against laughter. Moreover, ‘laughter’ (γέλως in Greek) is found in the Bible in social settings and is not to be confused with ‘joy’ (χαρά). The angels did not say ‘I bring you good tidings of great laughter’! Joy is a delight with the Lord and all he has done which we can experience inwardly even in tribulation and suffering.²³

Some observers have noted that the laughter connected with the TE is often inappropriate. In one report it was stated that a preacher had just begun by saying ‘the story of Solomon is one of the most tragic figures in the whole Bible’ when several people in the meeting immediately broke out into hilarious laughter. Rodney Howard-Browne has himself related how, when he preached to a group of students on hell, the same uncontrollable laughter resulted.²⁴

23 See Warren Smith *The Spiritual Counterfeit Project Newsletter* (Fall 1994) for a study on biblical laughter. (Available from PO Box 4308 Berkeley CA 94704-9881 USA)

24 Ray Borlase *Toronto—Blessing or Blight?* (Intercessors for Britain 1995)

genuine work of the Holy Spirit. But something is quite clearly going on. The difficult question to answer is: what?

It could be some sort of simple crowd manipulation. TE meetings tend to be marked, night by night, by testimonies of how people have been blessed. All this can be extremely hard to resist; particularly if your minister is telling you 'not to analyse, but just receive' or 'to become a babe in Christ' and be prepared to act like one. Churches these days have such an emphasis on 'being part of the body' that it can be very difficult not to follow the herd.

This is not the first time that such phenomena have been seen in the Church. A number of manifestations like those of the TE sometimes happened in revivals during the time of Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, George Whitefield and others. But many of the Christian leaders at that time did *not* encourage them, and attributed them to soulish enthusiasm or the demonic. Jonathan Edwards wrote: 'People should endeavour to refrain from such outward manifestations ... to their utmost'. Whitefield took a similar line when he saw people thrown into convulsions during his meetings in Pennsylvania: 'Satan now begins to throw many into fits', he wrote. David Bennidict said: 'These jerking exercises were rather a curse than a blessing. None were benefited by them. They left sinners without reformation and Christians without advantage'. Edwards considered the principal cause of the decline of the revival was 'the unwatchfulness of friends ... who allowed genuine and pure religion to become so mixed with "wildfire", and carnal "enthusiasm", that the Spirit of God was grieved and advantage given to Satan'.³⁸

Another explanation several have put forward is that some sort of mass hypnosis may be going on. One reporter has described a visit to Holy Trinity Brompton in these words:

And then, little by little, all over the church, it started. People with hands upraised began moving them rapidly, in a curiously jerky seemingly uncontrolled way (I tried unobtrusively to copy the movement they were making, just so that I could remember it, and found it was unusually hypnotic—once I'd started it was hard to stop).³⁹

If the TE *is* some sort of hypnosis, then it would be aided by the form of worship now dominant in charismatic churches where choruses are repeated over and over again almost so as to produce an altered state of consciousness. Hypnosis is, of course, very dangerous. Whilst it is happening subjects enter into a trance, the mind becomes passive and unable to resist someone else gaining access into parts of the human personality

38 'Are we falling for a lie?' *Christians for Truth Newsletter* January/February 1995 (Available from Private Bag 250 Kranskop 3550 South Africa)

39 *Aware Magazine* October 1994

which cannot normally be reached; they become open to exploitation by others, or even by demonic spirits, and may gradually lose their ability to differentiate between reality and non-reality.⁴⁰ After this, special words or music can act as a trigger to induce the subject to act in some way against their will or out of character. If the TE were to be some sort of mass hypnosis then the ramifications are really deeply alarming.

And the Future?

When asked what would be the sign of Jesus' Second Coming and the 'end of the age', the first warning Jesus gave was 'take heed that no one deceives you' (Matt 24:4). Paul adds that the lawless one will come with 'unrighteous deception' – there will be all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders and all sorts of evil which will deceive those who are perishing, because they refuse to **love the truth**. 'And for that reason God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe **the lie**' (2 Thess 2:9–12). He warns too that 'in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons' (1 Tim 4:1).

These are stern warnings that the Church would obviously do well to heed. If, as this article is suggesting, the Toronto Experience is a 'strong delusion', we need to ask why it has been so widely accepted and the lessons for the Church in the future.

The beginning of the British charismatic movement in the late 1960s, was experienced as a wonderful release from the then often arid evangelical biblicism. But it may have been a release that went too far. The swing away from a Bible-centred faith to one which increasingly came to over-value experience has created an apparently insatiable hunger for a 'new touch' from God, forgetting the biblical evidence that 'signs and wonders' may equally be evidence of occult activity.

Many too seem to have forgotten that deception has the appearance of truth – otherwise it would deceive no one. In order to see through deception and contend for the truth, a thorough grounding in Scripture is vital, for it is this which gives us understanding of the character and ways of God. The last ten to fifteen years, however, have seen many churches so concentrating upon experience-based activities and shallow teaching, that many of today's Christians lack biblical criteria by which to assess the Toronto Experience. Writing from her experience of the 1904 Welsh Revival, Jessie Penn-Lewis said:

It is because believers seek for their share of 'Pentecost' without the deep bedrock work of the cross and the resurrection first being

40 M Taylor *Hypnotism: are there Side Effects?* 1984 (available from Christian Literature Crusade)

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wrought in them, that the devil as an angel of light has broken in upon believers with his counterfeits. If the cross had been preached and known in all its aspects, the devil would not have been able to deceive, as he is doing, so many children of God.⁴¹

Church leaders must also accept blame for allowing the norms of our present inclusivist culture to influence church thinking and activity. There is a strange unwillingness to subject new trends to biblical examination, and a reluctance to exercise church discipline over those who teach or practise unbiblical doctrines. Error is ignored and allowed to pass without correction; no one and nothing is to be criticised publicly. Related to this is the widespread cult of 'leader worship' in some churches. The leaders are treated almost like New Age gurus, above criticism or contradiction. The apostle Paul did not see things like this. To him error and compromise were anathema; real unity, he asserted in word and deed, existed only on a basis of truth (2 Tim 4:2-5, 4-15; 1 Tim 1:18-20). As a consequence of these trends, there is little agreed basis in the Church for weighing the Toronto Experience. It is possible, as this article has attempted to do, to demonstrate valid reasons for doubting its authenticity as a genuine move of the Holy Spirit, but such arguments will leave most of the adherents totally unmoved. Their response will be along the lines of 'Pastor X thinks it's OK, therefore it must be OK'; or 'it feels good to me, therefore it must be good'. In other words, the opinion of a leader, or personal feelings, are taken as sufficient to validate the experience. Indeed, as we have already seen, inherent to the TE is that you should not try to analyse it, just receive it. Thus there is no agreed objective benchmark common to both those who have received the TE, and those who have not, for discussing and assessing it.

Worse, since the TE is judged by its adherents to be a work of the Holy Spirit, those who, for whatever reason, refuse to accept it, are implicitly or explicitly made to feel guilty of rebellion against God. For instance, a paper by Marc Dupont of the Toronto Vineyard, entitled *1994: The Year of the Lion* is in part summarized by Stephen Sizer as follows:

Dupont refers to, or quotes from, an amazing array of passages to silence criticism. These include 1 Kings 13:4 (the unbelieving king got a withered arm); Judges 1:2; Judges 20:18; Proverbs 6; Isaiah 58; 2 Cor 3:6; Malachi 3:16; 2 Kings 5:26 (Gehazi's disobedience led to leprosy); 1 Kings 13:26 (the disobedient prophet was killed by a lion); Ephesians 4:30; James 4:5; John 15:2 (the branch cut off); Jeremiah 6:14; 8:14; Isaiah 42:13,16. In fact the entire paper seems to be designed to do just that.⁴²

41 Jessie Penn-Lewis *The Centrality of the Cross* (Christian Literature Crusade revised edition 1993)

42 Marc Dupont *1994 The Year of the Lion* (Mantle of Praise Ministries Incorporated 6915 Dixie Road Unit No 1 Mississauga Ontario Canada). A short in-depth analysis of his paper is available from the Rev Stephen Sizer Stoke Rectory 2 Josephs Road Guildford GU1 1DW.

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All this bodes ill for the Church in the future as divisions widen between adherents and non-adherents of the Toronto Experience (and possibly post-Toronto experiences). But it also indicates urgent priorities for church leaders seeking to ensure their flock walk in the truth: there needs not only to be a solid, general grounding in Scripture but, in addition, individual Christians need to be taught how to discern between good and evil and how to weigh all things according to biblical injunctions. As Hosea 4:6 makes clear, destruction of God's people can come about from a lack of knowledge. The first epistle of John warns that: 'Many false prophets have gone out into the world', so urges believers to 'test the spirits to see whether they are of God' (1 John 4:1). Again Christians are urged to 'test everything' (1 Thess 5:21). As part of this process, difficult as it may be, responsible church leaders need to encourage their flock quite specifically constantly to test and assess what they have to say. It is only in this way that they will develop a flock of mature believers, able to stand against any form of deception.

Another alarming factor which needs addressing swiftly is the ignorance of the average British Christian regarding the differences between the impulses of the flesh, the activity of the demonic, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Most of the present TE phenomena merely parallel New Age and occultic activity and thought, though disguised by the use of 'Christian' terminology. Christians need to be taught that apparently 'Christian' language is not enough to ensure something is genuinely Christian.

Moreover, as contrary as it may be to the Spirit of the Age, Christians need to be retaught that division is not always the work of Satan, but that truth itself may be divisive. As Jesus said, he did not come to bring peace on earth, but rather division (Luke 12:51). Division amongst Christians is clearly undesirable, but unity must be maintained on a basis of truth – not peace brought about at the cost of error or deception.

During the 1930s a pastor named Wong Ming-Dao kept an account of the revival in China. He noted its excesses which included hysterical laughter and other similarities to the TE. He saw them as a threat to true revival. I close by quoting his considered intentions for the situation:

Our purpose on the one hand is to help believers who have fallen into these errors to come to their senses and to break away from them. On the other hand, our purpose is to alert those who have not yet fallen into these errors so that they do not follow blindly those who have gone astray.⁴³

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43 'Are we falling for a lie?' *Christians for Truth Newsletter* January/February 1995

Bible quotations are taken from The New King James Version.