



STATEMENT DP-244-1

**THE COUNTERFEIT REVIVAL\* (Part One):  
RODNEY HOWARD-BROWNE AND THE "TORONTO BLESSING"**

**by Hank Hanegraaff**

**Summary**

Christianity is undergoing a paradigm shift of major proportions — a shift from faith to feelings; from fact to fantasy; and from reason to esoteric revelation. Leaders of this Counterfeit Revival, such as Rodney Howard-Browne and John Arnott, have peppered their preaching and practice with fabrications, fantasies, and frauds, seemingly unaware of the profound consequences. Many of the followers who at first flooded into Counterfeit Revival "power centers" have become disillusioned and have now slipped through the cracks into the kingdom of the cults.

John the Apostle warned, "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). This warning is particularly relevant today, as Christianity is undergoing a paradigm shift of major proportions — a shift from faith to feelings; from fact to fantasy; and from reason to esoteric revelation. This paradigm shift is what I call the Counterfeit Revival.

Prophets of the Counterfeit Revival claim that a bloody civil war is going to polarize the entire Christian community. On one side will be those who embrace new revelations. On the other will be those who obstinately cling to reason. One "prophet" went so far as to say, "God is going to renovate the entire understanding of what Christianity is in the nations of the Earth....In twenty years there will be a totally different understanding of Christianity as we know it."<sup>1</sup>

Some of the most recognizable names in the Christian community are endorsing this paradigm shift with little or no reservation. The appeal is so staggering that churches on every continent are now inviting their people to "experience" God in a brand new way. It is now estimated that seven thousand churches in England<sup>2</sup> alone have embraced the Counterfeit Revival. And with each passing day the numbers are escalating dramatically.

Sardonic laughter, spasmodic jerks, signs and wonders, super apostles and prophets, and being "slain in the spirit" are pointed to as empirical evidence of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The form and function of the church are being so radically rearranged that even the secular world has taken note.

*Time* magazine, in an article titled "Laughing for the Lord," pointed out that Anglican parishes across England today bear a greater resemblance to "rock concerts" and "rugby matches" than to Christian worship. The article says that sanctuaries throughout the world are littered with bodies as "suplicants sob, shake, roar like lions and strangest of all, laugh uncontrollably."<sup>3</sup> *Newsweek*, in an article titled "The Giggles Are for God," reported that people in churches worldwide were jerking spasmodically, dancing ecstatically, and acting like animals. The article reported that this behavior by Christians has already spread from Canada to "roughly 7,000 congregations in Hong Kong, Norway, South Africa, and Australia, plus scores of churches in the United States."<sup>4</sup>

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Newspapers from the *Orlando Sentinel* to the *Dallas Morning News* have written stories on what is termed the "fastest-growing trend within Christianity." According to *The New York Times*, this trend promotes an "experiential" Christianity that "promises an emotional encounter with God" manifested by "shaking, screaming, fainting and falling into trances."<sup>5</sup>

### **THE HOLY GHOST BARTENDER**

The scene was surreal. It looked like a bomb had exploded. Bodies were strewn haphazardly throughout the auditorium. Some lay motionless on the ground. Others twitched spasmodically. Behind me a woman shrieked, "I'm hot! I'm hot!" In front of me a girl was shaking violently. A boy standing in the aisle chopped feverishly with his hands at some imaginary object. Next to him a man whirled round and round in a circle. All the while waves of sardonic laughter cascaded eerily throughout the sanctuary.

A boy staggered drunkenly across the platform and collapsed at the feet of a man who called himself the "Holy Ghost Bartender." The "Bartender," Rodney Howard-Browne, screamed, "Git him, Jesus! Git him! Git him! Git him!" Suddenly he spun around and commanded two muscle-bound men to rise. "These men," he said, "are my 'guardian angels.'" Then, as if on cue, he moved deliberately in my direction. What happened next was best described by a charismatic pastor, who was an eyewitness: "I witnessed a stalking [by] a barroom bully."

When the Holy Ghost Bartender (who also refers to himself as the Holy Ghost Hitman) arrived at my seat, he began threatening to have me thrown out of the sanctuary. "I'm telling you right now," he hissed, "you'll drop dead if you prohibit what God is doing!"<sup>6</sup> Dramatically he gestured toward the crowd and warned them that those like me, who would dare question that what he was doing was of God, had committed the unpardonable sin and would not be forgiven in this world or the next.

The following day he crowed, "The last time I had a confrontation like that...was...with a bunch of Mormons... you could see their spirit, y'know...just a really religious, pharisaical spirit, that's what it is. Amen?...And I smelt it — y'know, I can smell them religious devils from about a hundred yards — I could smell them blindfolded, man....You could see, last night we meant business."<sup>7</sup> He labeled his critics "idiots" and warned that they were about to experience either "riot or revival."<sup>8</sup>

### **The Fire Falls**

What Rodney Howard-Browne refers to as "revival" had its genesis in July of 1979. At the age of 17, he says he gave God Almighty an ultimatum: "Either You come down here and touch me or I am going to come up there and touch You."<sup>9</sup> He began to shout over and over again, "God, I want your power!"<sup>10</sup> He shouted until he was hoarse, frightening nearly everyone present. Rodney recounts that suddenly:

The fire of God came on me. It started on my head and went right down to my feet. His power burned in my body and stayed like that for four days. I thought I was going to die. I thought He was going to kill me....My whole body was on fire from the top of my head to the soles of my feet and out of my belly began to flow a river of living water. I began to laugh uncontrollably and then I began to weep and then speak with other tongues....I was so intoxicated on the wine of the Holy Ghost that I was beside myself. The fire of God was coursing through my whole being and it didn't quit....Because of this encounter with the Lord, my life was radically changed from that day on.<sup>11</sup>

Although Rodney experienced a few subsequent manifestations of divine power, it was not until 1990 that this anointing returned to stay. By this time Rodney had moved from South Africa to America, and by his own admission had a ministry that was nothing to write home about. Despite that fact, when the unusual manifestations resurfaced, Rodney became indignant. Speaking to the Almighty, he said, "God, You're ruining my meetings!"<sup>12</sup> God retorted, "Son, the way your meetings are going, they're worth ruining."<sup>13</sup>

And ruin them He did! As the story goes, in Albany, New York, two people were merely walking down a church aisle when God enveloped them in a "thick fog or mist" and they "fell out under the power."<sup>14</sup> In a meeting in New Jersey people began to "jump out of wheelchairs without anyone touching them."<sup>15</sup> At times the anointing of the

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Holy Spirit would blow into buildings so powerfully that Rodney had to hold onto the podium, "because it nearly blew me flat on the floor."<sup>16</sup> One time the power of God hit a whole row of people, causing them to fall on their backs "before the ushers could catch them."<sup>17</sup>

Rodney says that even he was "amazed" at what happened when he prayed for people. At times they would be "picked up and thrown over three rows of chairs like a piece of rag."<sup>18</sup> On one occasion, while Rodney was praying for a man, the power of God allegedly came over his shoulder like a whirlwind. The man saw it coming and tried to duck, but it was too late. The whirlwind "picked him up off the ground, level with my waist," said Rodney, and "then it struck him to the ground....I was shocked. As the power hit him, the first couple of rows all went out. It was like a Holy Ghost tornado came in there."<sup>19</sup>

That was only the beginning of the unusual manifestations. In addition to becoming drunk in the Spirit, being knocked down by the Spirit, and getting enveloped in the mist of the Spirit, suddenly people were subjected to the "glue" of the Spirit.

One of Rodney's books has a section titled "Holy Ghost Glue."<sup>20</sup> In it he recounts the story of a wealthy woman who got "stuck" in the Spirit. As Rodney tells it: "She was lying there from noon until 1:30....At 1:30, she tried to get up. She wanted to get up. She couldn't. All she could do was flap her hands. So she was lying there flapping away — flap, flap, flap, flap....2:30, 3:30, 4:30....At 4:30 the woman was still saying, 'I can't get up. I'm stuck to the floor.'<sup>21</sup>

She flapped so long that, as Rodney put it, he ended up "walking out on the Holy Spirit":

I turned to the pastor and said, "Look, I haven't had either breakfast or lunch. It's 4:30. I'm not stuck and you're not stuck. These people are going to stay here with her, so let's go have a meal before the night service." The ushers told us later that at 6 o'clock the woman finally peeled herself off the carpet. Then it took her an hour to crawl from the center of the church auditorium to the side wall. She had been stuck to the floor for six hours! By 7 o'clock she couldn't talk in English anymore. She tried to talk, but only tongues came out of her mouth. She couldn't help it. She was totally filled — and totally inebriated, saturated, and drunk in the Holy Ghost! The ushers put her in the back row thinking that she wouldn't disturb anyone, but she interfered with everyone who came through the door.

I've never seen anything like it. Five women were sitting around her, were struck dumb — they couldn't talk — Their husbands were rejoicing.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Big Time**

The "big break" that would propel Rodney into international visibility happened in the spring of 1993.<sup>23</sup> *Charisma* magazine reported that Rodney's "rise to fame began...during a watershed meeting at Carpenter's Home Church in Lakeland, Florida."<sup>24</sup> Laughter in the Spirit caught on there, "jetting Howard-Browne, 33, out of obscurity, whisking him from Alaska to the Pentagon."<sup>25</sup>

Assemblies of God pastor Karl Strader invited Rodney to preach and perform at Carpenter's Home Church in its ten-thousand-seat auditorium. At the time Strader was struggling professionally through the trauma of a church split.<sup>26</sup> In addition he was struggling personally with what *Charisma* magazine reported as his son's arrest for racketeering charges "stemming from an alleged pyramid scheme involving more than \$3.7 million."<sup>27</sup> Rodney's revival rhetoric provided Strader with just the release he thought he needed. According to Strader's friends, Charles and Frances Hunter (popular charismatic leaders known as the Happy Hunters), "he had spent six weeks on the floor of his church laughing, having the most wonderful time of his life."<sup>28</sup>

While Rodney apparently provided Strader with a chance to laugh at his problems, Strader provided Rodney with the opportunity to finally capture his claims on camera. As thousands looked on, however, Rodney's claims of the miraculous did not materialize. No mighty, rushing wind blew into the auditorium, causing Rodney to hold onto the podium so that he would not be blown flat on the floor. No one was picked up and thrown over three rows of chairs like a piece of rag. People did not "jump out of wheelchairs without anyone touching them,"<sup>29</sup> and no one was raised

from the dead. Instead, Rodney was relegated to resuscitating tales of bygone miracles as well as delivering a litany of well-rehearsed jokes.

One thing Rodney did produce, however, was an epidemic of "spiritual drunkenness." In response to his cries of "Fill, fill, fill! More, more, more!" or "Git 'em, Jesus, git 'em, git 'em, git 'em!" a growing number of people began to manifest signs of intoxication. Some fell to the floor in uncontrollable laughter while others got stuck in "Holy Ghost Glue." As Rodney commanded God to give people double and triple doses of His "New Wine," some even went "dumb in the Spirit." Most notable among them was Pastor Strader himself, who struggled pathetically to speak but could emit only unintelligible grunts.

News of the laughter that erupted in Lakeland "spread quickly on the charismatic grapevine,"<sup>30</sup> drawing thousands of spiritually starved saints to the church sanctuary. What was originally scheduled to be a week's worth of meetings eventually stretched into three months.<sup>31</sup>

Lakeland had suddenly become the spiritual destination of choice. Christian leaders from America, Africa, Australia, Argentina, and elsewhere began to make pilgrimages to Florida to witness the "bizarre emotional displays"<sup>32</sup> firsthand. Among them was Richard Roberts, the President of Oral Roberts University (ORU), who was struggling under the weight of a 40 million dollar debt inherited from his father, Oral. After his introduction to Lakeland's laughter, "Roberts says he ended up on the floor laughing at every Howard-Browne meeting as have members of his family."<sup>33</sup>

Oral Roberts, who also attended the Lakeland meetings, was so enamored with Rodney Howard-Browne that he proclaimed that Rodney's ministry signaled the arrival of "another level in the Holy Spirit."<sup>34</sup> Oral said that Rodney was "raised up from a new kind of seed, with a new kind of revelation...yet a fresh wave."<sup>35</sup>

After seeing Rodney perform in Lakeland, Richard and Oral invited him to come to Tulsa for a series of meetings at Oral Roberts University. The response was so overwhelming that classes had to be canceled as students fell to the floor and laughed.

Karl Strader was so enthusiastic over the dramatic changes in the lives of these Christian superstars that he called the Happy Hunters and encouraged them "to come down and participate in this."<sup>36</sup> After doing so, the Hunters were impressed enough to label "Holy" Laughter an "End-Time Revival."<sup>37</sup> They concluded that in this revival "the Spirit of God is swiftly moving in breathtaking and sometimes startling new ways, and people of every tongue and every nation are letting out what is on the inside of them. People of all races and denominations are radically falling in love with Jesus in a brand new way! They are running at a fast pace to 'Joel's Bar' where the drinks are free and there is no hangover."<sup>38</sup>

### **The Vatican of the Faith Movement**

After their visit in Lakeland the Happy Hunters went on to spread "Holy" Laughter throughout Europe. Back home in America, "Holy" Laughter was to get a powerful shot in the arm as well. Events that ultimately would lead to a worldwide laughing revival were precipitated when Howard-Browne, himself a former associate pastor of a Word of Faith church in South Africa, was summoned to speak at the "Vatican" of Faith theology — Kenneth Hagin's Rhema Bible Training Center (located near Tulsa, Oklahoma).

Rodney Howard-Browne was tailor-made for Rhema. The parallels between his preaching and practice and those of Rhema's founder, Kenneth Hagin, are striking. Like Rodney, Hagin is quick to pronounce divine judgment on those who dare to question his prophetic ministry. Hagin has gone so far as to predict the untimely death of a pastor who doubted his false doctrine. According to Hagin, "The pastor fell dead in the pulpit...because he didn't accept the message that God gave me to give him from the Holy Spirit."<sup>39</sup>

Years before Rodney began popularizing "Holy" Laughter, Hagin preached and practiced "Holy" Laughter at Rhema. Thus, when Rodney Howard-Browne came to this "Mecca" of faith theology in August 1993, most of the people were well prepared for what he brought. One person, however, was not.

### **THE VINEYARD CONNECTION**

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Randy Clark had traveled to Rhema discouraged, disillusioned, and close to a complete breakdown. He was a burned-out pastor from the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Saint Louis who, over the 24 years of his ministry, had gradually lost the fervency of his faith. The Bible no longer spoke to him; he no longer wanted to pray; and he did not like going to church. He was at Rhema for Rodney's appearances only because of the persistent urging of a friend "who moved in power" and in "the gift of discernment."<sup>40</sup>

Reluctantly, Randy Clark gave in and decided to attend Rodney's next appearance. He was dismayed when he found out it was to be at Rhema. Clark was passionately opposed to the Faith movement and agreeing to go to Rhema was like Daniel's asking to be thrown into the lion's den.

Randy now says that in the midst of his spiritual disillusionment, God rebuked him, saying, "You have a...denominational spirit if you think you can only drink of the well of your own...group."<sup>41</sup> God then asked Randy a very pertinent question: "How badly do you want me?"<sup>42</sup> Thus chastened by the Almighty, Randy made his pilgrimage to Rhema.

### **Randy, Rodney, and Rhema**

To his own amazement, at Rhema he "fell under the power" as Rodney prayed for him. At first he doubted that the experience was real because he was not "shaking" and "hurting from electricity"<sup>43</sup> as he had during a similar experience at a Vineyard in 1989. However, the accompanying phenomena convinced Randy that this was a genuine encounter with the Holy Spirit. While he was "pinned to the floor," says Randy, "two bodies down from me there was somebody oinking!"<sup>44</sup> Randy immediately began laughing in the spirit and then got drunk in the spirit. In time, Randy got so drunk that he was actually afraid the police would arrest him on his way home.<sup>45</sup>

Randy's associate pastor, Bill Mares, who had accompanied him and received the blessing as well, couldn't wait to bring the Rhema experience back home. Randy, however, did not want to bring the manifestations into his church until he had spent six months preparing his people. When Bill said, "I can't wait that long," Randy pulled rank and countered, "I'm the senior pastor." God allegedly intervened then by impressing Randy with the words, "I'm God and I'll do it when I want."<sup>46</sup>

### **We All Fall Down**

And do it He did. Their first Sunday back, while his congregation was worshiping God, a woman on the worship team fell, knocked over a guitar stand, and began to laugh uncontrollably. As Randy points out, "She just didn't fall and lie still, she's laying there, doing this — Laughing! — Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! All the way through forty-five minutes of worship, just continues to do this."<sup>47</sup> Although none of his people had ever fallen in church before, by the end of the service virtually everyone enthusiastically rushed forward to be touched by Randy, who recounted later, "WHOOOMP! Wall to wall people.... BOOOM! Boy, this is fun! BOOOM! BOOOM! BOOOM!"<sup>48</sup> As Rodney had touched Randy, Randy now touched his people, and they all fell down.

The initial impact of Randy's visit to Rhema was merely a harbinger of things to come. A woman, who had been touched in Randy's church, received a vision in which she saw Toronto, Canada. In her vision Toronto was "on fire and little blades of fire [were] going three hundred-sixty degrees all over Canada."<sup>49</sup> Sure enough, not long after this vision, Randy received a call from a Vineyard pastor named John Arnott, whose church was located in Toronto, Canada.<sup>50</sup>

Arnott had heard about Randy's participation in a regional meeting of Vineyard churches in which every pastor, as well as all of their wives (except one) were touched by "drunkenness and partying."<sup>51</sup> Arnott wanted Randy to export these experiences to Canada.

### **A Wing and a Prayer**

Pastor Randy, however, was afraid to step out as a guest leader because, as he put it, he had only "a testimony and maybe one other sermon." Once again God intervened. This time, instead of speaking directly to Randy, God sent

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him a prophetic pronouncement through a Baptist friend named Richard Holcomb, whose record of prophetic accuracy in the past was allegedly one hundred percent.

Repeating himself three times, presumably for emphasis, God said (through Holcomb), "Test me now. Test me now. Test me now. Do not be afraid. I will back you up. I want your eyes to be opened to see my spiritual resources in the heavenlies for you just as Elijah prayed that Gehazi's eyes would be opened. And do not become anxious because when you become anxious you can't hear me."<sup>52</sup>

Randy later pronounced "that prophetic word" to be the very thing that "changed my life." Randy is now convinced that without this prophecy, he would not have made the transition from being an emotionally disturbed pastor to becoming the conduit through which the new wine of the Spirit would be dispensed to people who until now had never even conceived of Holy Ghost Glue or divine drunkenness. Within hours of the prophecy, Randy was in a van, headed to the airport. It was a mission that would forever change not only his life, but also the lives of multiplied millions of other people later touched by what has come to be known as the "Toronto Blessing."

### **The Toronto Blessing**

Long before Randy Clark's January 1994 trip to Canada, Toronto Airport Vineyard pastor John Arnott was being conditioned for what was to follow. As his wife, Carol Arnott, explains, "God also spoke to John and said, 'I want you to hang around people that have an anointing.'"<sup>53</sup>

According to Carol, God directed them back to an old friend named Benny Hinn.<sup>54</sup> When Benny would get through ministering to them backstage, Carol would be so drunk that John would have to carry her home.<sup>55</sup> John, however, did not "feel anything."<sup>56</sup>

In June of 1993 Rodney Howard-Browne prayed for John Arnott, but the results were the same. In November of that year he embarked on an expedition to Argentina, where he was prayed over by a Pentecostal pastor named Claudio Freidzon, who himself had undertaken a spiritual pilgrimage through which he received "an impartation of spiritual anointing from both Benny Hinn and Rodney Howard-Browne."<sup>57</sup> Freidzon's ministry was now characterized by manifestations of "uncontrollable laughter."<sup>58</sup>

Claudio Freidzon asked Arnott "if he wanted this new empowerment, and if so to take it." While Carol, as John puts it, "went flying,"<sup>59</sup> John didn't know whether "to stand, fall, roll or forget it."<sup>60</sup> John fell down, but he suspected that he was just "going along with it" as he had many times before. When John got up from the floor, Claudio walked over to him and said, "Do you want it?"<sup>61</sup> Claudio then slapped John on both of his hands and immediately Arnott felt God prompt him with the message, "For goodness sake will you take this? It's yours."<sup>62</sup> With those words Arnott finally gave in and received the breakthrough he had been seeking so desperately.

The Arnotts traveled back from Argentina with great expectations. When they heard that, like them, Randy Clark had been touched, they invited him to speak. On January 20, 1994, he gave his testimony before 120 attendees at the Toronto Airport Vineyard. In short order "almost 80 percent of the people were on the floor."<sup>63</sup> As John tells the story, "It was like an explosion. We saw people literally being knocked off their feet by the Spirit of God...Others shook and jerked. Some danced, some laughed. Some lay on the floor as if dead for hours. People cried and shouted."<sup>64</sup>

Like the congregation, the staff of the Toronto Airport Vineyard was dramatically impacted. Arnott reported that the sound man got "drunk, drunk, drunk."<sup>65</sup> The church receptionist could not speak for three days and after that, "could only speak in tongues."<sup>66</sup> Delighted, Arnott described how "our staff loves to get me on the floor, you know, they all run over, 'Hey he's down,' you know. They come 'More, Lord!' [and] they try to get me to shake or jerk or something. It just makes their day."<sup>67</sup>

### **Party Now, Check the Fruit Later**

As news of the strange goings on in Toronto spread, spiritually starved seekers from across North America and abroad began flocking to Toronto. Many have brought the experience back with them to their churches (e.g., Holy

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Trinity Brompton, an Anglican church in London), causing the "laughing revival" to become a truly global phenomenon.

Not everyone who has come seeking the Spirit in Toronto has been filled, however. John believes many frustrated seekers simply would not let go of their emotions. The reason John himself had such a hard time getting drunk and falling in the Spirit was, as Carol clarified, "You control your emotions. You control your responses."<sup>68</sup>

Controlling emotions is not only harmful to an individual, but doing so can also have a significant impact on others. John explains, "Many times Carol and I will be praying for people, we're soakin' 'em, soakin' 'em, soakin' 'em, feel the anointing going in. Next thing you know the guy that's supposed to be catching goes flying back 'cause it just kind of, it's got to go somewhere. If the person doesn't take it, it goes to the catcher, or it rebounds back on the person praying, or something where they can't take it." This dilemma can be solved, John says, if he and the other leaders "break those controls off of people and boom, they'll take it just like that."<sup>69</sup>

Another reason for failing to receive is people's fear of deception. The antidote, says Arnott, is not to become a good discerner, but instead, when one comes "asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit, I don't want you to even entertain the thought that you might get a counterfeit."<sup>70</sup> John notes that, in the past, Vineyard leaders made mistakes regarding the supernatural: "We used to think when people shook, shouted, flopped, rolled, etc., that it was a demonic thing manifesting and we needed to take them out of the room. That was our grid, that's what our experience had taught us, that demons could be powerful."<sup>71</sup> Now John thinks these kinds of situations should be handled simply by enjoying the experiences and checking the "fruit" later. He explains, "Why would we focus, then, on 'Yeah, but I don't like the way he fell and shook and got stuck to the floor and everything!' Listen! Who cares whether he did or he didn't? Who cares? If he thinks it's God and he likes it, let him enjoy it! Because you can test the fruit later."<sup>72</sup> Caution would be a big mistake: "If you play it safe with this thing, the Holy Spirit, you know what? You're never going to get anywhere."<sup>73</sup>

Arnott is quick to admit that in the beginning he had no "theological framework for parties."<sup>74</sup> He adds, "I had no desire for Christians to fall down, roll around and laugh." Instead he says he wanted God to "save the lost, heal the sick, and expand the kingdom."<sup>75</sup> Today, however, he proudly promotes parties during which Christians get "thoroughly blasted" while "Jesus picks up the tab."<sup>76</sup>

While he is happy to "marinate"<sup>77</sup> Christians in the Holy Spirit, he complained when God began bringing "animal sounds" and "strange prophecy"<sup>78</sup> to the party. When the Almighty allegedly asked, "Would you like Me to take it away?" Arnott quickly acquiesced.<sup>79</sup>

Arnott's assumption that God was more interested in evangelism than experiences led to another unexpected revelation as well. As he preached salvation messages, he began to sense a "quenching of the Spirit." He went to the Lord in prayer and asked, "Well, why, why is this hard, like I would have thought you would have liked it if I'd have preached on that." To his astonishment, the Lord replied, "It's because you're pushing Me." And then God said, "Is it all right with you if I just love up on My church for a while?"<sup>80</sup>

John not only discussed this issue with God but he also discussed it with Randy Clark. Randy, like John, came to the conviction that, rather than giving people "the heavy message of holiness to start with,"<sup>81</sup> it was wise for God to throw "a party first."<sup>82</sup> Randy later elaborated: if God had not first thrown a party, "the church couldn't even have responded" because "most of the people in church already feel so icky about themselves."<sup>83</sup>

### **No Laughing Matter**

As attractive as they believe the "party" is, Laughing Revival leaders seem convinced that the day is coming when critics will polarize in opposition to those who know how to enjoy the party. Vineyard prophets Wes and Stacey Campbell point out that after people "throughout the entire Christian community of the world" find out about the party, "there will come a polarization."<sup>84</sup> The Campbells warn that this is "no laughing matter."<sup>85</sup> A horrendous "time of bloodshed" is coming in which "there won't be a house that escapes weeping."<sup>86</sup> God Himself (using Stacey Campbell as His mouthpiece) called upon those gathered at the Toronto Airport Vineyard:

Grab all you can while you can get it. Take what you can while you can have it. For the days are coming, says the Lord, when a great division will begin in the church, and a man's enemies will be

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those of his own household. And your parents will criticize you, and speak evil of you and say they have lost you to a cult. And your sons and daughters will say, "My parents have gone crazy." And there will be mourning in the house of God.

And I tell you there are those even among you now who are here simply to spread discord among the brethren. . . . And for the one who comes to bring division, to divide the Church of Christ, to cut off His arms and His legs, and the toes from His feet, the Lord says it would be better for Sodom and Gommorah than it will be for that one on that day. But I tell you, nonetheless, that division will come, and it is even now brewing like a leaven in the church.

For the Lord calls you right now, this day, seeing what you are seeing, hearing of the miracles you are hearing of, seeing the fruit of God that you are seeing, to call it God, endure to the end and be saved, or to follow after human wisdom and reasoning that kills the word of faith and brings division and justifies in self-righteousness the dividing of the church.

The Lord wants you to purpose in your heart this night, is it God or isn't it, and to stand by your commitment as you are called to stand by your confession of faith.<sup>87</sup>

God Almighty then summed up his sentiments in just three words — "Choose! Choose! Choose!"<sup>88</sup>

John Arnott likens the choice God is calling for to that which faced the Israelites while they were wandering in the desert three thousand years ago. Says Arnott, "God came along with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." However, "due to fear and unbelief," the Israelites failed "to possess the kingdom of God."<sup>89</sup> According to Arnott, God is once again giving us an opportunity to "enter the promised land." The question is, will we be "radical enough to go for it"?<sup>90</sup>

## **THE FATAL FRUIT**

The promised land described by John Arnott, Rodney Howard-Browne, and other proponents of this Counterfeit Revival is a utopia in which Christians will be "the head and not the tail," "the lender, not the borrower." They will dominate the sociopolitical systems of the day, and their leaders will be the greatest in the history of humanity.

Leaders of the Counterfeit Revival claim Christianity is in the embryonic stages of a new Pentecost more potent and powerful than the New Testament Pentecost. Arnott says, "We are currently in a time similar to the ministry of John the Baptist, which is preparing the way for a soon-coming time resembling the ministry of Jesus where powerful signs, wonders and miracles will take place."<sup>91</sup>

### **"The Best One So Far"**

Of all the miracles claimed by the Counterfeit Revival, Arnott calls the healing of Sarah Lilliman "the best one so far." Arnott not only tells his unsuspecting audience that the healing was "documented," but also he makes a point to chide those who may not have had the kind of faith it took to facilitate the miracle.<sup>92</sup>

Sarah, says Arnott, was "like a vegetable...totally incapacitated, paralyzed, and blind." Her friend, "out under the power [at the Toronto Airport Vineyard] has a vision: Jesus said, 'Go pray for Sarah, your friend, I'm going to heal her.'" To enthusiastic applause, Arnott continues, "That girl, totally incapacitated, paralyzed and blind, after two and a half hours of soaking prayer, got up seeing."

Sadly, however, Arnott's story plays fast and loose with the truth. An examination of the facts shows just how wildly Arnott has embellished his story:

- Sarah was *not* totally incapacitated, paralyzed, and blind; Sarah's doctors had diagnosed significant psychosomatic emotional problems underlying her physical problems.
- Jesus did *not* heal Sarah as He supposedly promised her friend He would.

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- When Arnott's associate (who allegedly documented the case) was interviewed, he confessed that he had not done any investigation.

Two months later, during a visit to the Toronto Airport Vineyard, Sarah's friend claimed that God once again had a word for her. This time the Almighty told Sarah (through her friend) that if she "would go to the front of the church and testify, He would heal her eyes."<sup>93</sup> An Arnott associate then promised Sarah that God was not only going to heal her eyes, but would heal her emotions as well.

Today, despite the broad circulation of this story by Arnott and his associates as evidence of God's power in the Toronto Blessing, *Sarah is still, as before, legally blind*. Unfortunately, just as before, she and her family are continuing to struggle with her physical and psychosomatic disorders.

As will become painfully clear in Parts Two and Three of this series, this fabrication on the part of John Arnott is not unique. Fellow Counterfeit Revivalists pepper their appearances with fabrications, fantasies, and frauds, seemingly unaware of the disastrous consequences. Followers who at first crowded through the front doors of their churches often become disillusioned and fall out the back doors, some even into the kingdom of the cults. They no longer know what to believe and secretly fear that the untrustworthiness of those who claim to be God's representatives may indicate the untrustworthiness of God Himself.

### **The Story of Kristy**

I will close this installment with the story of one such disillusioned follower, who called me on the *Bible Answer Man* broadcast May 1, 1996. Just before signing off that day, I squeezed in one last phone call. The female voice on the other end of the line was obviously shaken and scared. She told me that her pastor had traveled to the Toronto Airport Vineyard and had "brought this thing back with him." While he had gone a skeptic, he returned a believer, persuaded that the power he had personally encountered was real. He convinced his parishioners to let him pray over them and they, too, began to experience what he had experienced. Kristy, however, did not experience anything but frustration.

If this was from God as her pastor claimed, she desperately needed His touch. "Why, God?" she pleaded, "Why are you leaving me out?" She sat down on the floor and began to cry bitterly as people all around her continued to laugh, shake, and be slain in the spirit. Suddenly, she realized she was flat on the floor, unable to move. Instantly her frustration turned to fear.

Although she recounted this to me more than a year later, I could still hear the fear in her voice. I was convinced she needed to understand exactly what had happened to her. I began by explaining why the experience she had been subjected to was unbiblical and dangerous. I described some of the common consequences of such behavior: wild swings of emotion, depression, anxiety, anger, irrational outbursts, prolonged trances, feelings of alienation, and confusion. As I spoke, she began to weep.

"That's what happened to me!" she said between sobs. As she struggled to regain her composure, Kristy confessed that she was still reeling from the effects of her experience. She said that after she had finally gotten up off the ground, she felt as though she had "just run a one hundred mile marathon." In fact, the physical effects of her depression became so severe that her physician had to place her on antidepressant medication.

The spiritual consequences were equally severe. She began to question Christianity altogether. The happiness she had sought so desperately through an esoteric experience had turned into a living hell:

My relationship with the Lord is totally turned upside down. I am afraid to pray. I am afraid to find out what that experience really was, because I know it wasn't of the Lord. I'm afraid to go to church, afraid of God. I've seen things that go against every good thing I learned in the Bible as a new Christian. It terrifies me. It's so scary to me. I'm afraid this has done something to my husband and me forever.

It has taken both of us so long to get back into the discipline of Bible study and prayer. It's almost like we don't understand salvation anymore. I remember days when it was so clear, and now it seems so confusing. I'm still scared. We read and we pray, but still the relationship we had just doesn't seem to be what it used to be. I don't call this a "blessing!" It was a nightmare that is just

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now beginning to lift from me, my husband, and our marriage. It makes me so angry to see how much this has hurt our family and messed up our relationships.

I can't believe where I'm at now spiritually. I have no desire for the Lord. I am now so critical and so skeptical that I don't know who to trust.

I know there are so many believers like me who don't know. It was so gradual. When the leadership you've trusted, the leadership that seemed to be so grounded in the Word endorses this stuff, you feel guilty going against it.

As I continued to talk with Kristy, she began to understand how she, like her pastor, had succumbed to the sociopsychological manipulation tactics that will be described in Part Three of this series. She also began to comprehend that these manipulation techniques provided the fertile soil in which satanic and spiritual deception grow.

Understanding brought closure, and suddenly she began to see the silver lining in this ominous cloud. "My story has to help others," she said, "otherwise it is a waste. I can speak from both sides now. I experienced the numbness in my body, but now I know it wasn't from God. If I can help someone, then it will be worth all the pain. I know the experience was real; now I also know how it was produced. Now more than ever, I know it wasn't from God."

*\*This article is adapted from Hank Hanegraaff's book, Counterfeit Revival, published by Word Publishing, April 1997.*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Mike Bickle, *Overview of Corporate Long Term Vision* (n.p.), 5 January 1986; audiotape.

<sup>2</sup>Figures given by both news sources and leaders of the Counterfeit Revival are not always consistent.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Ostling, "Laughing for the Lord" in *Time*, 15 August 1994, 38.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth L. Woodward, Jeanne Gordon, Carol Hall, and Barry Brown, "The Giggles Are for God," *Newsweek*, 20 February 1995, 54.

<sup>5</sup>Walter Goodman, "About Churches, Souls, and Show-Biz Methods," *The New York Times*, 16 March 1995, B4.

<sup>6</sup>Rodney Howard-Browne, 17 January 1995, meeting at Melodyland Christian Center, Anaheim, CA.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Rodney Howard-Browne, 16 and 17 January 1995, meeting at Melodyland Christian Center, Anaheim, CA.

<sup>9</sup>Rodney Howard-Browne, *Fresh Oil from Heaven* (Louisville, KY: RHBEA Publications, 1992), 28; see also his *The Touch of God* (Louisville, KY: RHBEA Publications, 1992), 73; *Manifesting the Holy Ghost* (Louisville, KY: RHBEA Publications, 1992), 14; and related in *Charisma* magazine, August 1994, 22-23.

<sup>10</sup>Rodney Howard-Browne, *Flowing in the Holy Ghost* (Louisville, KY: RHBEA Publications, 1991), 15. In other booklets such as *Manifesting the Holy Ghost* (14), Howard-Browne says he shouted, "God, I want your fire! Let the fire fall here tonight like it did at Pentecost!"

<sup>11</sup>Howard-Browne, *Fresh Oil from Heaven*, 27-28. In some renditions of this story, Howard-Browne says the fire burned in his body for three rather than for four days (such as in his *The Touch of God*, 74).

<sup>12</sup>Howard-Browne, *Manifesting the Holy Ghost*, 29.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Howard-Browne, *The Touch of God*, 100.

<sup>15</sup>Howard-Browne, *Manifesting the Holy Ghost*, 22.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>Howard-Browne, *The Touch of God*, 133-34.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>20</sup>Howard-Browne, *Manifesting the Holy Ghost*, 25.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>Julia Duin, "Praise the Lord and Pass the New Wine," *Charisma*, August 1994, 23.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

- <sup>26</sup>Dave Roberts, *The "Toronto" Blessing* (Eastbourne, England: Kingsway Publications, 1994), 87.
- <sup>27</sup>"News Briefs," *Charisma*, August 1994, 62.
- <sup>28</sup>Charles and Frances Hunter, *Holy Laughter* (Kingwood, TX: Hunter Books, 1994), 35.
- <sup>29</sup>Howard-Browne, *Manifesting the Holy Ghost*, 22, 25; Howard-Browne, *The Touch of God*, 134.
- <sup>30</sup>Duin, 24.
- <sup>31</sup>Richard M. Riss, in *A History of the Worldwide Awakening of 1992-1995*, 11th ed. (self-published, 15 October 1995), 10, says it was 13 weeks.
- <sup>32</sup>J. Lee Grady, "Laughter in Lakeland," *Charisma*, August 1995, 61-62.
- <sup>33</sup>Duin, 24.
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup>Riss, 12.
- <sup>36</sup>Hunters, 35.
- <sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, front cover copy.
- <sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>39</sup>Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 336.
- <sup>40</sup>Randy Clark, *Catch the Fire '94, Test Me Now...I Will Back You Up*. Toronto Airport Vineyard, 13 October 1994; audiotape.
- <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup>Riss, 22.
- <sup>45</sup>Clark.
- <sup>46</sup>Riss, 22; and Clark.
- <sup>47</sup>Riss, 22; and Clark.
- <sup>48</sup>Clark. Although this is the consistent story found in most of Randy's messages and recounted in Riss as well (22), Guy Chevreau tells a different story, perhaps about a subsequent event, or perhaps he is confused about when the revival began in Randy's church. Chevreau says, "Five months later, at a Browne meeting Randy attended in Lakeland, Florida, Rodney discerned a powerful anointing being released in Randy's life — he came over to him and said, 'This is the fire of God in your hands; go home and pray for everyone in your church.' The first Sunday of Randy's return, he did as instructed, and saw a similar outbreak of the Spirit as he ministered" (Guy Chevreau, *Catch the Fire: The Toronto Blessing — An Experience of Renewal and Revival* [London: Marshall Pickering, 1994], 24-25).
- <sup>49</sup>Clark.
- <sup>50</sup>At the beginning of 1996 the Toronto Airport Vineyard changed its name to the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship after the church was no longer accepted as a member of the Association of Vineyard Churches. Since in this article most of the comments quoted from Toronto leaders were said before the name change, in most instances I have retained the name Toronto Airport Vineyard.
- <sup>51</sup>Clark.
- <sup>52</sup>Clark. There is a slightly different version of this message recounted by Chevreau in *Catch the Fire*, 25.
- <sup>53</sup>Riss, 23.
- <sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>55</sup>John Arnott and Guy Chevreau, Pastor's Conference, Toronto Airport Vineyard, 19 October 1994; audiotape transcript.
- <sup>56</sup>John Arnott, Discovery Church, Orlando, Florida, 29 January 1995; audiotape transcript.
- <sup>57</sup>Roberts, 64.
- <sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>59</sup>Chevreau, 23.
- <sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.
- <sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup>John Arnott, *The Father's Blessing* (Orlando: Creation House Publishers, 1995), 20.
- <sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 71-72.
- <sup>65</sup>Quoted in Riss, 26.
- <sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>67</sup>John Arnott, Discovery Church.
- <sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>70</sup>John Arnott, Toronto Airport Vineyard, 16 December 1994; audiotape transcript.

- <sup>71</sup>John Arnott, *Dynamics of Receiving Spiritual Experiences*, Toronto Airport Vineyard, 18 November 1994; audiotape transcript.
- <sup>72</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup>John Arnott, Toronto Airport Vineyard, 16 December 1994.
- <sup>74</sup>John Arnott, *The Father's Blessing*, 210.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid., 206.
- <sup>76</sup>Ibid., 224 and 209-10.
- <sup>77</sup>Ibid., 167.
- <sup>78</sup>Ibid., 183.
- <sup>79</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>80</sup>Arnott and Chevreau.
- <sup>81</sup>Clark.
- <sup>82</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>84</sup>Wes Campbell, Toronto Airport Vineyard, 14 October 1994; audiotape transcript.
- <sup>85</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>88</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>89</sup>John Arnott, *The Father's Blessing*, 204.
- <sup>90</sup>Ibid., 205.
- <sup>91</sup>*Spread the Fire*, May/June 1995, vol. 1, no. 3, 2.
- <sup>92</sup>John Arnott, "Valuing the Anointing," Toronto Airport Vineyard, 15 October 1994; audiotape.
- <sup>93</sup>Chevreau, 148; see also, James A. Beverley, *Holy Laughter and the Toronto Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 115-20.