



STATEMENT DP-244-3

THE COUNTERFEIT REVIVAL (Part 3): Separating Fact from Fabrication on the Pensacola Outpouring

by Hank Hanegraaff

Summary

While promoters of the Pensacola Outpouring allege nearly two million participants to date, an examination of the revival reveals its serious distortions of biblical Christianity, concluding the movement is simply the latest outbreak in a long history of Counterfeit Revival. Characterized by an overemphasis on subjective experience in opposition to objective tests for truth, nonbiblical spiritual practices, Scripture twisting, and false and exaggerated claims, the Pensacola Outpouring threatens countless believers and depicts to the world a tainted stripe of Christianity. In post-Christian times as these, evangelicals more than ever need to return to the basic teachings and practices of the historic, biblical Christian faith.

What is today touted as the Pensacola Outpouring had its genesis on Father's Day in 1995. In recalling the events of that day, John Kilpatrick, pastor of the Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida, said he suddenly heard what he first thought was a mighty wind but later discovered was a river of the Holy Ghost. The force of the river was so pronounced that Kilpatrick claimed, "My ankles flipped over." After being pulled up to the platform by his pantlegs, Kilpatrick shouted, "Folks, this is it! Get in! Revival's come!" He goes on to exclaim:

And man, when I said that it was like dynamite exploding [explosion sound]. And it looked like somebody had taken a machine gun and mowed people down. Even out in their pews. Even out in their pews [*sic*]. I mean, they were falling out of the pews, they were falling down between the seats, they were falling out up here without anybody even touching them. A little like [machine gun fire sound], you know, somebody just cut 'em down.

Man, I hit this floor up here. And evangelist [Steve Hill] saw me up here by the pulpit, and I was looking about half drunk, you know. And he just waved his hand like that and said, "More, Lord." And I said, "Whap!" And I hit the floor and I stayed there from 12:30 to 4 o'clock....I was laying there thinking, you know. It felt like I weighed 10,000 pounds. It didn't feel like you was pinned to the floor or nothing like that, but you're just so heavy. Just felt so heavy. It felt wonderful.

I thought, "Dear God, whatever this is, don't take it off of me."

But one of our worship team ladies that fell in my arms—long after revival broke out a lady came up to me during the revival and she said, "Brother Kilpatrick, your wife is so sweet. She sings so good in that worship team."

And I thought, "Worship team?"

She said, "You know, the blackheaded one that was laying in your arms up there on the platform."

I said, "That's not my wife."

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She said, "It's not?"

She just fell out under the fire too and just happened to land in my arms. And so I said, "Lord, this don't smell like Brenda here."¹

The trance state John Kilpatrick experienced on that Father's Day in 1995 was merely a harbinger of things to come. As the next two years rolled on, his followers would experience manifestations ranging from sardonic laughter to spasmodic jerks.

One man in particular experienced such unusual convulsions on the platform in Pensacola that he became the center of attention. When Steve Hill (the evangelist credited by Kilpatrick as a primary catalyst for the Pensacola Outpouring) realized that he was losing his audience, he turned to the man and said:

Now some of you are watching this young man up here. I want to tell you exactly what he is doing, and then I want you to turn your eyes from him. He's interceding for your soul. Some of you are on the verge — it's like we've got you with a thread and you're hanging over hell. It's intercession in the deepest form right here. It's moanings and groanings, words that can't be uttered. God's put it on him. You can't tell me God doesn't love you, friend. You can't tell me God doesn't love you when He will stricken[sic] another young man who loves God with all his heart, cause him to fall to the ground and experience the moanings and groanings and the birth pains. He's giving birth to you, friend. He's giving spiritual birth to you. He's dying for you right now. He's dying that you might have life.²

Pensacola promoters claim that "in less than two years Evangelist Steve Hill has won hundreds of thousands to Christ."³ Hill identifies two out of the "hundreds of thousands" as alleged drug dealers. As reported on the Brownsville web site, "Police officers had arrested three men in the Brownsville area for suspected drug dealing. For some reason, the police officers brought these men to one of our revival services instead of jail. Two of the three men responded to the altar call and were saved."⁴

Not only does Hill assert that police officers have brought suspected drug dealers to the revival instead of to jail, but also he claims that congressmen are weeping under the power of God in Pensacola. Hill states,

We're having politicians come in here now. Congressmen. I'm talking about Washington DCers are coming into this place now. It's getting serious. Would you say that with me? It's getting serious. When it gets to Washington, it's getting serious. One of the congressmen that was with us from up north, his statement was this — I believe he made it to Charlie, or somebody — He said, "I'm bringing back 12." So we proclaim that in a very short while our congress, our senate is ablaze with the power of the gospel, that they're on fire! That they're on fire with the power of the gospel, that their lives are changed and transformed. Those of you that have that kind of doubt, would you open your eyes and watch what's happening? You still can't see it. We're telling you, we've already had them here. The Congressmen are here. They're weeping under the power of God. They're already here. We're not dreaming. They've already been here.⁵

In addition, Pensacola promoters proclaim that they are having an impact on crime in Pensacola. They point out that "crime in the city of Pensacola had dropped off significantly," and that "the driving force behind the declining crime rate" is "the revival."⁶

Pensacola spin doctors use salvation statistics, converted congressmen, and crime conditions to draw a distinction between the "Toronto Blessing" and the "Pensacola Outpouring." Michael Brown, an apologist for Pensacola, has gone so far as to deny any relationship between the two: "The bottom line is that there is no formal or informal relationship between Toronto and Pensacola, and the spirit and thrust of the meetings are very different."⁷

One of the most disturbing deceptions of all is that Counterfeit Revival leaders like Brown have co-opted Jonathan Edwards and dishonestly claimed him for their own. Brown demeans my book *Counterfeit Revival* for a lack of serious scholarship regarding Edwards and cites unnamed "Edwards scholars" assisting on Yale University's project, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, to lend academic credibility to his criticisms.

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

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Let's take a closer look at a small sampling of Pensacola fabrications masquerading as facts.

Fabrication: "Police officers had arrested three men in the Brownsville area for suspected drug dealing. For some reason, the police officers brought these men to one of our revival services instead of jail. Two of the three men responded to the altar call and were saved."

Fact: While salvation statistics vary wildly from source to source,⁸ the men referred to above are two of the "hundreds of thousands" who were supposedly saved as a result of the "Pensacola Outpouring."⁹ However, the Pensacola Sheriff's Department has stated unequivocally that this did not happen and, moreover, that it could not happen.¹⁰ When Pensacola promoters were confronted with this fabrication, they promised to remove it from their web site.¹¹ Sadly, however, they continue to circulate this fabrication as a testimony to the authenticity of the "Pensacola Outpouring."¹²

Fabrication: "We're having politicians come in here now. Congressmen....So we proclaim that in a very short while our congress, our senate is ablaze with the power of the gospel...that their lives are changed and transformed....We've already had them here....They're weeping under the power of God."

Fact: Despite Steve Hill's dogmatic declaration that congressmen are in Pensacola "weeping under the power of God," he has not provided a shred of evidence to support his claim. His proclamation that congressmen will be changed and the Senate ablaze with the power of the gospel is at best an unrealized fantasy.¹³

Fabrication: "Crime in the city of Pensacola had dropped off significantly....The driving force behind the declining crime rate [is] the revival."

Fact: According to the Pensacola Police Department, this widely circulated story has no basis in reality. As the police pointed out, total crimes have, in fact, risen from 83,849 in 1995 to 85,581 in 1996 (a total increase of 1,732 crimes). "Forcible sex" was up from 52 to 69; "assault" was up from 623 to 656; "drug possession" was up from 647 to 660.¹⁴ As Assistant Chief Jerry Potts reported, "Contrary to a widely circulating rumor, crime rates in Pensacola have not decreased dramatically."¹⁵ By way of contrast, as reported in the *Orange County Register*, 13 March 1997, the crime rate in Orange County, California (home of the Christian Research Institute) has dropped at least 23 percent.¹⁶

Fabrication: "There is no formal or informal relationship between Toronto and Pensacola, and the spirit and thrust of the meetings are very different."

Fact: First, in sharp contrast to this denial by Pensacola's Michael Brown, evangelist Steve Hill confessed, "We've received a lot from the Toronto church on how to pray with people and care for folks...we model a lot of what is going on here from them."¹⁷

Furthermore, Pastor Maul Ely, speaking from the pulpit of the Brownsville Assembly of God, declared to raucous applause that no less an authority than God Himself had specifically revealed to him a direct connection between the "Toronto Blessing" and the "Pensacola Outpouring":

The Lord said, "Son, draw the tabernacle on a piece of paper." So I just opened up my notebook and I drew the tabernacle. Nice rectangular lines.

And the Lord said, "Now, put there at the western side of the tabernacle," He said, "write down Azusa."

I said, "Okay." How many know you need to do what He tells you to do, whether you understand it or not?

He said, "Now, go all the way across to the eastern part of the tabernacle, the entrance," and He said, "write Cleveland, Tennessee." So I wrote Cleveland, Tennessee.

He said, "Now, go to the northern side and write Toronto." Oh, oh! I feel it.

He said, "Now, go to the southern side of the tabernacle and write down Brownsville." You ain't heard nothin' yet!

He said, "Now, draw a line from Azusa to Cleveland, Tennessee"—how many know that the first wave of the Holy Spirit came to America started on the western coast and went across to the eastern coast? — He said, "Now draw a line from the northern side at Toronto to Brownsville"....He said, "The lines that you have drawn have made a cross across the tabernacle." And He said, "Now look at America. I have made a spiritual cross across America." And He said, "I want My people to realize that it's in your weakness of burying your cross that the church becomes powerful."¹⁸

Finally, it is significant to note that prior to Father's Day 1995, Brenda Kilpatrick and staff members of the Brownsville Assembly of God had made pilgrimages to Toronto and received "an impartation." In addition, Pensacola revivalists, such as Steve Hill, have candidly acknowledged that they have been prayed for by John Arnott in Toronto and that Arnott and members of the Toronto staff have been to Pensacola.¹⁹

Fabrication: Hanegraaff misused Edwards's material to suit his own purposes. Brown, conversely, has consulted scholars working on the Yale University project, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, who have lent their academic credibility to his critique of *Counterfeit Revival*.

Fact: On the one hand, since Brown does not name these Yale scholars it is impossible to evaluate this claim. On the other hand, Dr. Michael Bowman, the coordinator of another program concerning Edwards's works, STEP: *The Edwards Project* (which is releasing the complete works of Edwards on CD-ROM), was concerned enough about Michael Brown's lack of scholarship and fabrications to release the following statement:

Having just finished Hanegraaff's *Counterfeit Revival*, I do not see any inaccuracy in his review of Edwards' *Distinguishing Marks*²⁰ treatise. Overall, I felt that Hanegraaff's analysis was right on. Edwards did not condone excesses, but felt that they could be present in true revival. Edwards realized that the remorse that the repentant individuals feel, when they realize what they have been saved from, can occasionally lead to emotional outbursts. The bizarre and "drunken" behavior in the "counterfeit revival" movement has nothing to do with repentance. What concerns me the most about this issue is that mainstream Christianity does not seem to seriously and forcefully condemn this movement!²¹

Under the guise of academic credibility Brown not only grossly misrepresents Jonathan Edwards but he also grossly misrepresents me. While space and time do not permit a complete accounting of his deceptions, let's take a moment to look at how he misleads unsuspecting readers in a new book²² in which he confronts the critics of the Pensacola Outpouring and impugns the research and reasoning of my book, *Counterfeit Revival*.

Brown accuses me of committing the logical fallacy of guilt by association, suggesting that I implicate John Arnott as being a prosperity teacher by virtue of his association with Benny Hinn.²³ The reality is in *Counterfeit Revival* I never indict Arnott on those grounds at all, let alone through guilt by association with Hinn. What I actually write is that Hinn "has had a profound impact on such Counterfeit Revival leaders as John Arnott,"²⁴ which is true since Hinn had been increasingly asked to pray over the Arnotts after John was allegedly told by God to "hang around people that have an anointing."²⁵ I do, however, expose Hinn's health and wealth teaching proclivities, offering substantive quotes by Hinn as evidence.²⁶ Curiously, Brown then accuses me of indicting Hinn based on an out-of-date quote reflecting a view that Hinn allegedly repented of long ago. Brown fails to acknowledge that I provided a 1996 quote of Hinn in addition to an older quote to substantiate that Hinn has taught and continues to teach a health and wealth message.²⁷ Moreover, Brown ignores the fact that Hinn continues to market books that promote a prosperity gospel.

Brown also accuses me of exhibiting a "lack of serious scholarship." The following is what he refers to as a "representative" example. Brown states, "On page 269, n. 66, Hanegraaff writes that: 'The ruling sect of Jews in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were empty, unprincipled religionists,' a sweeping statement that is almost unthinkable in Christian scholarship at the end of the twentieth century."²⁸ Brown fails to acknowledge Jesus' own sweeping statements about Pharisees (e.g., Matt. 23:1-7, 13-36; cf. Luke 7:30). Moreover, Brown quotes only the portion of my footnote that would support his contention, cutting off my statement mid-sentence and thus mid-thought. The remainder of the sentence reads, "who, *for the most part*, rejected Christ and attributed Christ's works to Beelzebub, or Satan" (emphasis added). Brown therefore accuses me of making a sweeping statement only by omitting the qualification for the statement.²⁹

While much more could be said, unmasking all of the fabrications of Pensacola spin doctors would be an endless project. As they continue to seduce unsuspecting subjects through fabrications, fantasies and frauds, Blaise Pascal's poignant words (in *Pensees*) ring down through the ages: "Truth is so obscure in these times and falsehood so established, that unless we love the truth, we cannot know it."

MANIFESTATIONS VERSUS MESSAGE

As Pensacola promoters endeavor to spread their movement worldwide, they dogmatically declare that bizarre manifestations are not the focus of this revival. The facts say otherwise.

One of the videos used by Pensacola promoters is entitled "Honey, Where Are We From?" It features the testimony of a pastor and his wife who become so spiritually inebriated that they can't remember where they are from. First, the wife becomes incoherent, and her husband intervenes to explain what she is attempting to say. Then he, too, becomes disoriented and is unable to think or speak rationally.³⁰

The sensational physical manifestations of Alison and Elizabeth Ward are also strategically utilized to arouse people's expectations for similar experiences. The sisters have been brought up before the entire congregation to describe and display their mysterious experiences, thus giving the people a sense that they are having a close encounter with the divine. Peer pressure is brought to bear as Elizabeth tells prospects, "After standing there so long watching those people being touched by God, I guess my spirit got hungry." When she finally threw caution to the wind, she said, "The shaking went on for about three days....I couldn't eat and I was shaking in my sleep. My family had to feed me through a straw. My whole body was convulsing for three days."³¹ Her sister, Alison, says she shakes in the sanctuary because "it feels good."³²

Baptisms at Brownsville are used as yet another promotional gimmick. In a widely used promotional video some of the baptized jerk so violently that baptizers can no longer control their behavior. In one clip the subject shakes so severely that someone is actually kicked in the face.³³ Physical danger is part and parcel of the process. Pensacola leaders point out that "the power of God falls during the Friday night water baptisms, and sometimes even the workers are overcome by the Spirit and have to be carried out of the water."³⁴ Ironically, a word of caution has come from the Brownsville pulpit about not sitting too close to other people during the time of ministry out of concern that someone under the influence of a manifestation might injure nearby worshippers.³⁵

Thousands who have viewed the videos and subsequently experienced the manifestations testify to radically changed lives. Nevertheless, my 11-year-old son David and I recently attended a Christian convention during which the manifestations of Pensacola were promoted. He rode on an elevator with a couple of ladies who were still glowing from their spiritually intoxicating experience. They were delirious over the life-transforming work that the manifestations had produced in them. Suddenly, one of the ladies noticed my son's name tag. Instantly she began shrieking, "I know who you are. You're the son of the Bible Answer Man. You are a cursed child."

My son David is not the only child who has tasted the fruit of Pensacola. Several children from a youth group traveled to Pensacola and experienced such severe twitching that when they returned to their classrooms, they were unable to do their schoolwork. After these children were dismissed from school, their pastor encouraged them to view their expulsion as persecution for the sake of Christ.³⁶

BIBLICAL PRETEXTS

More bizarre than the manifestations themselves are the biblical pretexts that are used to validate them. As a case in point, *Charisma* magazine recently ran a series of articles designed to undermine my credibility and integrity.³⁷ One article was a critical review of my book, *Counterfeit Revival* titled "They Called Jesus a Counterfeit, Too." Even more telling than the overt deceptions contained in the article were the texts author Jon Ruthven used to legitimize the manifestations of counterfeit revival hotspots, such as Pensacola. Ruthven, an Assemblies of God minister and associate professor of systematic theology at Regent University, Virginia Beach, Virginia, writes,

Hanegraaff demands proof for the biblical grounds of charismatic revivalism. Yet he seems to ignore that many times in Scripture people who were influenced by the Holy Spirit acted in unusual ways.

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When the Spirit "rushed" upon Saul in 1 Sam. 19:20-24, he stripped off his clothes, prophesied before Samuel and "lay down naked all that day and all that night" (v. 24, NKJV). Ezekiel displayed even more bizarre behavior after God told him to lie on his side, put "the iniquity of the house of Israel" on himself for 390 days, burn his hair and cook his food over human excrement! (Ezek. 4:4-5, 12; 5:1-2, 4). Isaiah was told by God to walk naked through Jerusalem for three years proclaiming judgment on the city (Is. 20:2-3)...We can only imagine how Hanegraaff would react to these types of behavior if they were to appear today. He seems to assume that Christian orthodoxy is a rationalistic, sterilized Calvinism that functions entirely on an intellectual level — devoid of the subjective spiritual dimension.³⁸

Before examining Ruthven's abuse of Scripture, it should be noted in passing that his stereotyping of me in this review as an anticharismatic Calvinist and an antispiritual rationalist is disingenuous at best and, at worst, dishonest. A closer look at my background or a careful reading of my books would forever dispel this myth.

As for his use of the Bible, while at first blush his arguments from 1 Samuel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah may appear compelling, a careful examination will expose their absurdity:

1 Samuel 19:20-24. The fact that Saul stripped off his clothes, prophesied before Samuel, and laid down naked all day and night (v. 24) provides no validation for the peculiar manifestations in places like Pensacola.

First, as should be obvious, Ruthven's interpretation of Saul's nakedness cannot be used as normative behavior for Christians today. If it were, we would be compelled to endorse counterfeit revivalists who decided to parade around naked as a sign of spiritual enlightenment!

Furthermore, as a professor of systematic theology, one would presume that Ruthven is aware of the basic hermeneutical principle that narrative passages must always be interpreted in light of didactic or teaching passages (e.g., Scripture *records* Judas hanging himself, but it *teaches* that suicide is wrong).

Finally, this passage clearly reveals God's judgment against Saul, not his blessing. In context, Saul is seeking to destroy David but instead is humiliated by the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit had once come upon Saul to minister through him, on this occasion the Spirit came upon Saul to resist his evil intentions.

Ezekiel 4–5. Professor Ruthven claims that Ezekiel displayed even more bizarre behavior than Saul. By this reasoning, the precedent is in place for today's revivalists to push the envelope beyond even nakedness.

First, the very fact that Ezekiel was engaged in an unusual process is precisely why it should *not* be considered normative for us today. If, indeed, it were the norm, it would not be much of a sign.

Furthermore, what Ruthven labels "bizarre behavior" is in reality extraordinarily meaningful. One need only take the time to read this passage in context to grasp God's explanation for the symbolism of Ezekiel's behavior. While unusual, it is neither random nor bizarre.

Finally, as with Saul, Ezekiel's actions represent God's judgment, not His blessing.

Isaiah 20. In yet another vain attempt to justify the radical behavior of today's counterfeit revivalists, Ruthven uses the fact that God told Isaiah to walk naked through Jerusalem for three years.

First, as should be obvious to Professor Ruthven, the wording in Isaiah does not necessitate the notion that the prophet was stark naked. Complete nakedness would have been considered religiously, as well as socially, unacceptable — particularly in light of Middle Eastern culture.

Furthermore, as Hebrew scholars Keil and Delitzsch point out, "With the great importance attached to the clothing in the East, where the feelings upon this point are peculiarly sensitive and modest, a person was looked upon as stripped and naked if he had only taken off his upper garment. What Isaiah was directed to do, therefore, was simply opposed to common custom, and not to moral decency."³⁹

Finally, as previously noted with regard to Saul, if God had instructed Isaiah to walk around stark naked and if that is justification for Pensacola proclivities today, then if they really do start stripping, God can be blamed for setting the precedent for their bizarre behavior.

Tragically, Ruthven's reasoning process is the norm rather than the exception for counterfeit revivalists. One need only scan books by Pensacola leaders, such as John Kilpatrick, Steve Hill, and Michael Brown, to find even more outrageous examples of texts taken out of context and used as pretexts for Pensacola extravagances.

Aping the Practices of Pagan Spirituality

Out of all the bizarre manifestations I have witnessed in today's Counterfeit Revival, one scene has been indelibly etched into my consciousness. One Sunday morning I sat in the sanctuary of the Brownsville Assembly of God and watched in horror as a woman in the choir began to jerk her head violently from side to side. An hour went by, then another. All the while the violent shaking continued unabated as intermittently she bent spasmodically at the waist.

A church member noting the look of concern on my face quickly attempted to assure me that this woman was merely under the influence of the "Holy Ghost." When I asked if she was certain it was the Holy Ghost, she seemed incredulous. "What else could it be?" she snapped. "We're in church, aren't we?" She went on to report that this woman had been shaking violently in the sanctuary for more than a year and a half.

Several months later on CNN's *Larry King Live*, King asked me if there was a substantial difference between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults. In response I pointed out that Christianity was historic and evidential — not a blind leap into a dark chasm, but faith founded on objective fact. I went on to say that in sharp distinction, cult leaders attempt to subjugate their followers' critical thinking faculties because the mind is seen to be the obstacle to enlightenment.

A striking parallel from paganism can be found in the ashram of Poona, India, where devotees of the late guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh engage in repetitive physical motions in order to work themselves into an altered state of consciousness. Their frenzied behavior produces a mind-altering form of hyperventilation, which empties the mind of coherent thought. In the end, they personify Rajneesh's rendition of the mindless man.⁴⁰

Sadly I had to acknowledge that what was once relegated to the ashrams of cults is now being replicated at the altars of churches, as Christians are beginning to ape the practices of pagan spirituality. Dr. Elizabeth Hillstrom concurs: "Having largely set aside their ability to think rationally and critically or to exercise their will, they have become hypersuggestible, which means that they are likely to accept any 'spiritual truth' that enters their minds. Even more remarkably, they seem to be primed for mystical experiences and may attach great spiritual significance to virtually any event or thought no matter how mundane or outlandish."⁴¹

What heightens the danger of this kind of activity in churches is that Christians do not expect a counterfeit. While virtually the same methods employed in cultic communes can now be experienced in Christian churches, there is a significant difference. In the ashrams of Poona there is no pretense. Despite such dangers as spirit possession or insanity, Hindu gurus openly encourage trance states through which devotees tap into psychic realms and discover their "higher selves." At the altars of Pensacola, however, these practices are cloaked in Christian terminology and attributed to the Holy Ghost rather than the pantheon of Hindu deities.

Whether in the ashrams of cults or at the altars of churches, the result of achieving an altered state of consciousness is always the same. It dulls the critical thinking process because the mind is seen to be the obstacle to enlightenment. As the worship leader of the Brownsville Assembly of God, Lindell Cooley, has prophesied, "The Lord is saying, 'I'm bypassing your mind and going straight to your heart.' ...The heart is what matters to the Lord."⁴² Though counterfeit revival leaders repeatedly express this concept, it is in reality a false dichotomy or a fictional antagonism. Not only are the mind and intellect of tremendous importance to the Lord in living the Christian life, but from the perspective of Scripture the heart is more a matter of understanding than of sentiment.

John Wesley correctly stated, "It is a fundamental principle that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand in hand; all irrational religion is false religion."⁴³ While he recognized physical manifestations as a natural response to an encounter with the gospel, he also attributed enthusiasms such as falling, laughing, and jumping to the "simplicity" of people and to the ploys of Satan. Wesley recounted the story of a meeting that took place in 1773. A hymn was sung over and over some 30 or 40 times, resulting in bodily agitations on the part of some of the people present. In response to this phenomenon, he wrote, "Satan serves himself of their simplicity, in order...to bring a discredit on the work of God."⁴⁴

Years earlier, in 1740, an epidemic of laughter had broken out during a gathering in Bristol. Wesley said, "I was surprised at some, who were buffeted of Satan in an unusual manner, by such a spirit of laughter as they could in no wise resist."⁴⁵ A short time later the "spirit of laughter" returned. One lady present was "so violently and variously torn of the evil one" that "she laughed till almost strangled; then broke out into cussing and blaspheming; then stamped and struggled with incredible strength, so that four or five could scarcely hold her."⁴⁶

Pensacola practices, such as jerking spasmodically, laughing uncontrollably, and falling backward into trance states, are conspicuous by their absence in the ministry of Jesus Christ and the apostles. Conversely, they are commonplace in the world of the occult. Peter warned believers to be wary of just such pagan practices. He admonished believers to "be clear-minded and self-controlled" (1 Pet. 4:7).

It should also be noted that these practices are harmful and characteristic of neurological diseases such as palsy. Dr. Oliver Wilder-Smith warns, "[For] somebody who's shaking their head violently for a long period of time, the potential for physical damage is massive because your cervical spine, which is a very delicate organ, is just not built for that sort of activity. I'm sure she'll be having degenerative changes of all of the joints in her cervical spine very rapidly....The purely physical consequences of shaking your head for hours on end are very, very damaging from a purely medical point of view."⁴⁷

The spiritual consequences can be even more damaging. My concern for this woman and scores of others like her prompted me to plead with Pensacola pastor John Kilpatrick to consider the physical and spiritual consequences. While acknowledging that the woman I identified in his church "shakes like she has palsy," he defiantly paraded her across his platform as a trophy of the "Pensacola Outpouring." Ominously he shouted, "If you don't want your head to start shaking — you make fun of someone in the choir shaking — come here a minute, girl. Come down here a minute. Hurry up. Hurry up, if you don't want your head to do like this, you better lay your mouth off of her."

The violent shaking that Kilpatrick deemed to be a mark of revival would for me become the mark of God's wrath. Kilpatrick went on to prophesy judgment upon me: "I want to say something this morning to Hank Hanegraaff...if you want to keep any kind of a semblance of a ministry, you better back off from this revival and what God is doing. You better back off, because I am going to prophesy to you that if you don't, and you continue to put your tongue in your mouth on this move of God, within 90 days the Holy Ghost will bring you down. I said within 90 days the Holy Ghost will bring you down."⁴⁸

While the "prophet" Kilpatrick said his words were a direct revelation from the Lord, the prophet Moses said that we need not fear those who utter false revelations: "You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him" (Deut. 18:21-22).

BACK TO BASICS

A tragedy in modern-day Christianity is that people are looking for experience of God in all the wrong places. The real experience is found in getting back to basics.

Prayer

The body of Christ must rediscover the joy of genuine worship by developing a passion for authentic prayer. The Tuesday evening prayer meetings at Brownsville involve a practice known as "sweeping the sanctuary," in which groups of people in militaristic fashion join hands and walk throughout the sanctuary and campus to bind hindering spirits that would threaten the revival.⁴⁹ But genuine prayer is not about binding Satan or other sensationalistic ventures.

It is crucial that we become so focused on the real purpose, power, and provision of prayer that once again genuine prayer becomes our priority. While prayer involves supplication of our Lord, it is much more than that. Ultimately, prayer is the submission of our wills to God. That is precisely why R. A. Torrey said that "to pray the prayer of faith we must, first of all, study the Word of God, especially the promises of God, and find out what the will of God is."⁵⁰

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Through prayer we have the privilege of expressing adoration and thanksgiving to the One who saved us, sanctifies us, and one day will glorify us. Through prayer we also confess our sins with the sure knowledge that "He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). And through prayer we indeed petition the Lord to send forth His people to boldly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ (Matt. 9:38; Col. 4:3), asking that He would open the hearts of the unbelieving so they might believe and be saved (e.g., Rom. 10:1).

F. B. Meyer has well observed that "the great tragedy of life is not unanswered prayer, but unoffered prayer."⁵¹

Scripture

The Scriptures not only form the foundation of an effective prayer life, but they are also foundational to every other aspect of Christian living. While prayer is our primary way of communication with God, the Scriptures are God's primary way of communicating with us. Nothing should take precedence over getting into the Scriptures and getting the Scriptures into us.

One of the most important means of getting the Scriptures into us involves the faithful pulpit ministry of the local church. Unlike Pensacola's propensity for severe holiness preaching based on emotional anecdotes, a genuine pulpit ministry must maintain substantive Bible-centered instruction week in and week out. More than exposure to intensely emotional sermons is needed in order to sustain a healthy Christian life.

If we fail to eat well-balanced meals on a regular basis, we will eventually suffer physical consequences. What is true of the outer person is also true of the inner person. If we do not regularly feed on the Word of God, we will suffer spiritual consequences. Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

Fellowship

As we rediscover the power of prayer and renew a passion for Scripture, we also need to rededicate ourselves to experiencing fellowship as a community of faith. We ought not think that we can find quick-fix solutions to our often distant and troubled relationships. Running off to Pensacola for an impartation to bring back to our home church is not the biblical prescription for healthy fellowship.⁵² Neither is the real experience found in focusing *in* on ourselves. Rather, the genuine biblical experience is found through focusing *out* on others. The question we should be asking is not, "What can an esoteric experience in church do for me?" but, "How can I use my experiences for the edification of others?" A sad commentary on modern Christianity is that when members of the body hurt, too often we relegate them to finding resources outside the walls of the church. That is precisely why the apostle Paul exhorts us, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Rom. 12:10-13).

While counterfeit revival leaders clamor for unity without regard for truth, genuine fellowship can be experienced only in concert with the enduring truths of our Christian confession. In the words of J. I. Packer, "We are not entitled to infer from the fact that a group of people are drawing nearer to each other that any of them is drawing nearer to the truth."⁵³ We must never forget that it was for precisely these biblical truths that the martyrs spilled their blood. Hugh Latimer, who was burned at the stake for his confession of faith, cried out, "Unity must be ordered according to God's Holy Word, or else it were better war than peace."⁵⁴

Witness

If more than 1.8 million⁵⁵ people have experienced the Pensacola Outpouring in some way, one would never know it from examining the immediate vicinity of Brownsville. When I was in Pensacola, I personally interviewed a number of people on the street within a block from the Brownsville Assembly of God church.⁵⁶ None of them had been positively impacted in the least by the so-called revival. Others who say they have canvassed the Brownsville neighborhood report similarly.⁵⁷

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Do you want a real spiritual experience? Equip yourself to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

If the early Christian church had one distinguishing characteristic, it was a passion to communicate the love, joy, and peace that only Christ can bring to the human heart. As we find ourselves entrenched in an era of esotericism, it is essential that Christians rediscover the ultimate experience of being used as a tool in the hands of almighty God in the process of transforming lives. Too many today believe that the task of apologetics is the exclusive domain of scholars and theologians. Not so! The defense of the faith is not optional. It should be part of basic training for every Christian.

AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Nowhere is there a more clear-cut contrast between genuine and counterfeit revival than when it comes to an eternal versus an earthly perspective. While the preaching of the Great Awakening was focused on eternal verities, the promises of counterfeit revivalists are often focused on earthly vanities. The more we listen to their messages, the more crystal clear their common refrain becomes. Leaders of the counterfeit revival demand the kingdom now! — in this life, with all its attendant material wealth, physical health, and public accolades.⁵⁸ Jesus, however, said, "My kingdom is not of this world....My kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). As evidence of this, John's gospel relates how quickly the shout, "Hosanna!... Blessed is the King of Israel!" (12:13) gave way to the cry, "Crucify him!...We have no king but Caesar" (19:15).

Like modern-day counterfeit revivalists, the sights of many would-be disciples of Jesus were focused on earth, not eternity. In sharp contrast, the leader of the first Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards, was utterly convinced that in genuine revival the Spirit of God is at work "to lessen men's esteem of the pleasures, profits, and honors of the world, and to take off their hearts from an eager pursuit after these things; and to engage them in a deep concern about a future state and eternal happiness which the gospel reveals—and puts them upon earnestly seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness."⁵⁹

Like Edwards, C. S. Lewis understood the utter folly of aiming at earth. As he so concisely put it, "Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither."⁶⁰

NOTES

¹John Kilpatrick, *In Times Like These* (Pensacola, FL: Brownsville Assembly of God, 30 May 1996); videotape.

²Steve Hill, Brownsville Assembly of God, 30 May 1996; videotape.

³Michael Brown, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1996), back page promotion.

⁴Brownsville Revival Testimonies web page at www.brownsville-revival.org/html/testimon.htm.

⁵Steve Hill, Brownsville Assembly of God, 6 April 1997; videotape.

⁶Dr. Carl Sightler, "Results from the Revival," Brownsville Revival web site (see note 4).

⁷Dr. Michael L. Brown, "Pensacola: God or Not?" *Destiny Image Digest*, Winter 1997, 39.

⁸The Brownsville Assembly of God reports as of 10 August 1997, over 115,000 have responded to the altar calls since the revival began 18 June 1995 (www.brownsville-revival.org). Dale Schlafer, *Becoming an Agent of Revival: Revival Primer* (Denver: Promise Keepers, 1997), 21, reports 102,000 converts. A publisher's blurb on the last page of Dr. Michael Brown's book, *From Holy Laughter to Holy Fire: America on the Edge of Revival* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1996), says, "In less than two years, Evangelist Steve Hill has won hundreds of thousands to Christ...." A widely distributed promotional flyer for Awake America at Anaheim CA 28-29 September 1997 with Pastor John Kilpatrick and Evangelist Steve Hill states: "In Pensacola hundreds of thousands of people have come to Jesus." In an Internet Reapernet Chat session, 6 May 1997 (chat.reapernet.com), Dr. Michael Brown wrote: "As for the question of why we are now speaking about numbers of people responding to the altar calls as opposed to numbers of people being 'saved,' the reasoning is simple. In point of fact, all of us HATE exaggeration and hype, and from the start, conservative figures were being used. Actually, between 250,000-300,000 people have responded to the altar calls, not the 103,000 figure you may see. But we know that not all of these people were actually being

saved or coming back to the Lord, therefore we used a very low number for people 'saved.' However, since we cannot follow-up on every individual, and since we don't want to exaggerate anything in the slightest, we speak now of those coming to the Lord or responding to the altars calls, also avoiding unnecessary controversy. Of course — and this is the good news! — we can point to multiplied thousands of radical converts, and really, hundreds of thousands around the country through the revival." In *Good News* (July-August 1996 np), Steve Hill is quoted as saying: "We're seeing a thousand people saved a week, but we are very conservative with the figures."

⁹To the extent that true conversions have taken place as a result of the Pensacola Outpouring, I rejoice (Phil. 1:18). Of course, what I am concerned about is the *kind* of Christianity these converts are being led into and the *kind* of Christianity this movement is depicting to the world. Conversions do not relieve teachers of responsibility and accountability for their unbiblical teachings and practices.

¹⁰My office contacted the Pensacola Sheriff's Department on March 20, 1997 (Sheriff Loman and Sergeant Spears — Brownsville is in their district). Not only were we told that this did not happen, but also that the only possible reason for suspected drug dealers to be taken to a revival would be if it were part of a parole stipulation ordered by a parole judge.

¹¹See *Bible Answer Man* program interview with Michael Brown, 20 March 1997.

¹²As of 25 July 1997 this fabrication remains on the Brownsville AOG web site.

¹³As Christians we must not make public claims without verifiable evidence to back up those claims (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Cor. 13:1; Heb. 10:28).

¹⁴Statistics available through the Pensacola Police Department.

¹⁵Steve Rabey, "Pensacola Outpouring Keeps Gushing," *Christianity Today*, 3 March 1997, 57.

¹⁶*Orange County Register*, 13 March 1997, Metro 1. Of course, CRI does not claim responsibility for the drop in Orange County's crime rate.

¹⁷Steve Hill, "Heart to Heart, with Evangelist Steve Hill," *Destiny Image Digest*, Winter 1997, 14.

¹⁸Maul Ely, Brownsville Assembly of God, 16 March 1997; audiotape.

¹⁹Hill, "Heart to Heart," 14.

²⁰Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival* (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1997), 83-101.

²¹Michael Bowman, e-mail message to Debra Bouey (forwarded to CRI 29 July 1997, CRI files).

²²Michael L. Brown, *Let No One Deceive You: Confronting the Critics of Revival* (Shippensburg, PA: Revival Press, 1997).

²³*Ibid.*, 242-43.

²⁴Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*, 106.¹⁹

²⁵As quoted in *ibid.*, 47.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 106.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸Brown, *Let No One Deceive You*, 244.

²⁹These points, in addition to numerous others, concerning Brown's indictment of *Counterfeit Revival* were brought to my attention through a very thoughtful analysis written by Shawn Paul Suave. Many who have undertaken the arduous effort of analyzing Brown's arguments have highlighted similar issues.

³⁰"Honey, Where Are We From?" *In Times Like These* (Pensacola, FL: Brownsville Assembly of God, 8 June 1996); videotape.

³¹Larry Walker, "Sisters in the Fire: Alison and Elisabeth Ward," *Destiny Image Digest*, Winter 1997, 27.

³²Amy Elizabeth Ward, 'Mercy Seat,' Alison Ward," *In Times Like These* (Pensacola, FL: Brownsville Assembly of God, n.d.); videotape.

³³"The Voice of Many Waters," *In Times Like These* (Pensacola, FL: , Brownsville Assembly of God, n.d.) (testimonies from baptismal services); videotape.

³⁴Michael Brown, "Revival in Brownsville?" *Destiny Image Digest*, Winter 1997, 36.

³⁵E.g., Brownsville Assembly of God, Sunday evening service, 16 March 1997, personal eyewitness testimony of Hank Hanegraaff.

³⁶CRI's research included interviews with eyewitnesses to this case.

³⁷See *Charisma*, July 1997, 36-41, 60-62.

³⁸Jon Ruthven, "They Called Jesus a Counterfeit, Too," *Charisma*, July 1997, 61.

³⁹Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, Volume VII in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 372.

⁴⁰Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, quoted in *Fear Is the Master* (Hemet, CA: Jeremiah Films, 1986); video.

⁴¹Elizabeth L. Hillstrom, *Testing the Spirits* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 79.

⁴²Lindell Cooley, "1997 Conference on the Ministry," Grand Rapids, 7 January 1997, as cited in G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman, "The Murky River of Brownsville: The Strange Doctrine and Practice of the Pensacola Revival," *The Quarterly Journal*, April-June 1997, 17.

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⁴³Quoted in Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 32

⁴⁴John Wesley, as quoted in Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994 edition), 533.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶John Wesley, as quoted in Nick Needham's appendix, "Holy Laughter — The Experience of John Wesley," *Was Jonathan Edwards the Founding Father of the Toronto Blessing?* (Welling, Kent, England: self-published, 1995), 39.

⁴⁷Dr. Oliver Wilder-Smith, *Bible Answer Man* radio program, 15 May 1997.

⁴⁸John Kilpatrick, "God's Ears," Brownsville Assembly of God Revival Service, 6 April 1997; videotape.

⁴⁹For frank and unashamed accounts of these prayer meetings, see the Brownsville Assembly of God official web site (www.brownsville-revival.org).

⁵⁰R.A. Torrey, *The Power of Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 123-24.

⁵¹John Blanchard, *Gathered Gold* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1984), 231.

⁵²Another significant problem with the Brownsville revival is the lack of accountability offered for new converts. The Brownsville AOG acknowledges that they do not know whether the vast majority of the thousands upon thousands of recorded conversions have been baptized, enrolled in a discipleship program, or regularly attend church. (Fax response from Rose Compton of the Brownsville Assembly of God, Pensacola, FL, 13 December 1996.)

⁵³Blanchard, *Gathered Gold*, 37.

⁵⁴Ibid., 39. Hugh Latimer (1485–16 October 1555) was an English reformer who was burned at the stake under the authority of Catholic Queen Mary Tudor.

⁵⁵Figure as of 7 September 1997 (www.brownsville-revival.org).

⁵⁶2-4 May 1997.

⁵⁷E.g., Joseph R. Chambers, "False Brags and Real Facts," *The End Times and Victorious Living*, March–April 1997, 7. See also the report offered during the 10 June 1997 Internet Reapernet Chat session (chat.reapernet.com).

⁵⁸While this particular criticism applies more to counterfeit revivalists in general (see *Counterfeit Revival*, 67-162, especially 105-9) than specifically to the Pensacola revivalists, the latter have exhibited such tendencies. For example, John Kilpatrick says, "When God blesses somebody or God promotes somebody, I want to warn you now, expect self-promoters to become jealous. What did Jesus say? He knew what He was talking about. He said I will bless you with houses and land and mothers and fathers. He said no man has ever given up anything in my Kingdom. I will bless you with houses and land. Mark 10:29-30....He said if you give it up and you sacrifice, I will see it and I will bless you and I will promote you but when I promote you, you won't get rid of any of those things and suffer and sacrifice any of those things but what I will bless you and repay you. He said I will give you those things in this life but you are going to have them with persecution....God has got His hand on you...and [is] going to bless you even more as this thing continues to go along...and He is going to bless you even more because it is a law of God, a principle of God." (John Kilpatrick, "Moving on Up," Brownsville Assembly of God, 12 January 1997, tape no. 509, part 2. Transcript provided from official Brownsville AOG web site, (www.brownsville-revival.org.) Stephen Hill is quoted as saying: "Yes, I love the anointing. But I believe *there is more*. You see, my shadow isn't healing the sick yet. I want my shadow to heal the sick. I want the dead to be raised. I want people to call me when their son or daughter dies, asking me to come to the funeral parlor. I want to see the dead raised. *So there is more*" (emphasis in original). (Steve Hill, "Heart to Heart, with Evangelist Steve Hill," *Destiny Image Digest*, Winter 1997, 18.)

⁵⁹Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 267.

⁶⁰Edythe Draper, *Edythe Draper's Book of Quotations* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 305.