

## THE "TORONTO BLESSING"

### 1. *Introductory remarks*

The *scope* of this paper is to give a short description of the so called 'Toronto blessing', to point out some of the main issues and questions in the ongoing assessment of this, and to suggest some perspectives which may be useful in this discussion.

A large number of *written sources* are already available for those who want the story of what has been going on in Toronto since winter 1994<sup>1</sup>, in U.K. since May 1994<sup>2</sup> and by now spreading its influence in many parts of the world. The books published so far<sup>3</sup> seem

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Guy Chevreau, *Catch the Fire, The Toronto blessing - an experience of renewal and revival*, London: Marshall Pickering 1994, 12-36.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Patrick Dixon, *Signs of Revival*, Eastbourne: Kingsway 1994, 9-80.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to the books by Chevreau and Dixon the following books which are dealing mainly with the Toronto blessing has by July 1995 come to my notice; Dave Roberts, *The 'Toronto' Blessing*, Eastbourne: Kingsway 1994; Mike Fearnon, *A Breath of Fresh Air*, Guildford: Eagle 1994; Rob Warner, *Prepare for Revival*, London: Hodder and Stoughton 1995 and Mark Stibbe, *Times of Refreshing. A practical theology of revival for today*, London: Marshall Pickering 1995. The book *Charismatic Renewal. The search for a theology*, Tom Smail, Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright (eds), London: SPCK 1995, has a wider perspective than Toronto, but concludes with a chapter (11) *From 'The Toronto Blessing' to Trinitarian Renewal: A Theological Conversation*, where a number of interesting questions are raised. The pamphlet *Charismatic Crossroads. The Report of a Leadership Consultation on the Current Situation in the Charismatic Churches*, The Centre for Contemporary Ministry, Bawtry Hall, Bawtry, South Yorkshire DN10 6 JH, 1995, voices a rather strong

to be mainly favourable to this movement. Among the very large number of articles published in American, British, German and Scandinavian magazines and journals many critical viewpoints are also ventilated<sup>4</sup>. Though I have read many of these articles, my references and quotations will be mainly from the books.

As for my own personal experience with this "blessing", I had my first encounter at the Norwegian Oasis conference summer 1994. During the last year I have participated in several meetings and conferences in Norway and England<sup>5</sup> where influence from this new move has been strong. As for the effect on my own life and ministry, this has, so far, been 'significant but not dramatic'<sup>6</sup>.

The *limitations* of my presentation are obvious. It has to be rather condensed, concentrating on what I see to be the main questions. In this respect the paper reflects my own personal viewpoints, and not that of the ECC executive committee. Let me also make it clear that it is not addressing people who, at the outset, are critically inclined toward the whole charismatic dimension in the christian experience. But it does presuppose that also among people who are open to the various 'manifestations of the Spirit' (1 Cor 12,7), there is an obvious need to test the spirits and to watch out for obsession and unhealthy excesses.

---

criticism and warning against the Toronto blessing.

<sup>4</sup> From the German setting the article by Reinhard Hempelmann, *Der Segen von Toronto*, Materialdienst der Evangelischen Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (EZW), Stuttgart 2/95, represents a well informed, strongly critical, but not unfriendly contribution.

<sup>5</sup> Including *Times of Refreshing*, Holy Trinity Brompton, London 22nd-23rd May 1995.

<sup>6</sup> With the words of Patrick Dixon (1994:285)

2. *What is actually happening?*

Typical of churches or conferences where the 'Toronto blessing' is being experienced is a service with praise and worship, Bible teaching and an invocation of the Holy Spirit. In some churches the chairs or benches will be cleared away before the invocation of the Spirit and the 'ministrytime'. This is done for practical reasons, because one expects that some people will be falling down and will need space to lay on the floor while they are 'resting in the Spirit'<sup>7</sup>. It may be said that this act in itself may create an expectation for some people that they are going to experience falling.

The invitation of the Spirit to come, may be followed by a calling to a certain group of people to come forward for prayer and ministry. The ministry teams of the church will then move around and pray especially for those who have come forward, but will also be attentive toward the rest of the of the congregation who are still present in the church. During this time of prayer and ministry one or two of the leaders of the church will be positioned in the choir or at a platform in order to have an overview and a certain control of what is going on.

After a while some people may start shaking, some laughing or sobbing, and some falling on the floor. Quite many will just be standing in a rather quiet and restfull atmosphere, while some may start shouting and making strange noises. Some people seem to lose control of their feet, which start 'to run on their own' or cause them to jump around. Some of those who are falling on the floor may be laying there for up till two hours (perhaps even longer), not being able to move. Not all of these things may happen in the same service, but they are some of the manifestations which have been associated with the 'Toronto blessing'.

For an uninformed or unprepared spectator these things may well be seen as confusing or even scaring. This is the reason why some close up TV reports has created so much agitation against this movement in some countries (including Norway).

But also journalists who have interviewed people who have experienced some of these physical manifestations have been moved by the testimonies of what they experienced at an inner and spiritual level. New and stronger encounters with God and his love than ever before, a deep sorrow for their own sinfulness and the state of the world, healings of various kinds, a new love and excitement for Jesus .

How are we then to interpret this movement? Is it God at work, or is it something else?

---

<sup>7</sup> Some people are here using the classical pentecostal expression of people being 'slain in the Spirit', but the phrase 'resting in the Spirit' seems to be preferred of this experience which is claimed to bring much peace, rest and refreshment into many peoples lifes, Chevreau (1994:15).

### 3. *Models of interpretation*

#### a) Testing of theology?

The traditional way of testing new movements within a (especially a Protestant) Christian context has been to look at the teaching and implicit theology and compare this with the biblical witness. Concerning the 'Toronto blessing' the case seems to be that the teaching that goes on in the churches which have been touched by it in most cases is rather traditional evangelical and biblical. The 'untraditional' things<sup>8</sup> start to happen when the Holy Spirit is called upon, and the ministrytime begins. There may well be examples of cases where the 'preaching' primarily has consisted of anecdotes of what has happened in other churches, as to create an atmosphere of expectation for the same things to happen here, but this does not seem to be typical. In many cases it seems to be the solid biblical teaching which cause people, who come with a critical mind to a service, to open themselves for personal ministry and prayer.

However, if a certain theology is growing out of some special interpretation of the physical phenomena occurring, this must be subject to testing.

In our discussion we shall therefore now move on to the question of the interpretation of the phenomena following this movement.

#### b) 'Fluch oder Segen'<sup>9</sup> - the either/or model

In some theological traditions there seems to be a tendency to operate with a too narrow understanding of reality, tracing all human problems directly back to the conflict between God and Satan, between the divine and the demonic. Without going into this huge and complicated area in detail, I would like to indicate that there often seems to be a lack of Creation theology which has a place for the 'humanity' of man or the 'natural'<sup>10</sup>. Even if we all are influenced by the Fall and by our sinful nature, this does not mean that our 'humanity', our 'psyche' or our bodies are demonized. We are weak, we are emotionally and physically hurt through our upbringing and encounters with the sinful reality of life

---

<sup>8</sup> It has correctly been pointed out that very few of the specific phenomena occurring in these meetings are new to people who are acquainted with John Wimber and the Vineyard movement. The new and surprising thing is the intensity and the number of the manifestations.

<sup>9</sup> 'Curse or Blessing?' This was the theme of the German magazin *Gemeindewachstum* 60, Heft 1/95 on Toronto.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also Wright, *Charismatic Renewal* (1995:84 and 163).

in this world. But this does not mean that all unbelievers, or even believers to some extent, are possessed.

It is therefore very unsatisfactory on the one hand to reject the whole movement as seductive or 'schwärmerisch' or even of demonic origin, or on the other hand to defend everything which happens in a 'Toronto meeting' as genuine spiritual. If the defenders of this movement should resist all testing and open discussion of what is going on because this will offend the Spirit, there is certainly a danger that it may end up in sectarianism.

If we have not understood it before, an examination of the 'Toronto blessing' should help us realize that the tendency to think in 'either/or' categories of spiritual phenomena very often represents an oversimplification. Always when the Spirit of God is at work among men, human thoughts, feelings, reactions and relationships will be involved and in varying degrees influence the way the impulses and promptings of the Spirit are reacted out among us.

c) The 'basic impulse - different reactions or manifestations' model<sup>11</sup>

This distinction between a basic impulse - different manifestations or reactions seem to be very helpful. It makes it possible to think of different kinds of impulses into the mind of a human being:

1. From the Holy Spirit
2. From the human nature or psyche
3. From demonic influence

It also makes it possible to distinguish between different ways this impulse is received or reacted upon. One way of seeing it is to presuppose that people may react differently upon the same impulse by the Holy Spirit because we represent different personalities with different emotional and physical needs.

Imagine a small forest with five or six different kinds of trees, some pinetrees, birches etc. Suddenly the wind starts to blow into the forest, and the different trees are reacting in very different ways. Some are swaying with their leaves shivering, some are 'shooshing' and some are almost not moving at all. They are standing on the same piece of land, reacting to the same wind, but very differently according to their 'nature'.

---

<sup>11</sup> This model seems to me to be indicated in the statement 'Help in Relating to the "Toronto Blessing" Phenomena. Position statement of the Coordinating Group in the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church in Germany and it's Theological Commission' pt.5. This statement is published in the magazine of the German Catholic Charismatic Renewal, *CE-Infodienst* (June 1995, p.11) by the Coordinating Group in the Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church in Germany.

'It is important to distinguish the root cause or impulse of such an event from its further results. For instance, an originally sound and good impulse can be understood in a improper way or responded to inappropriately. But it can also be the case that a root cause or impulse - even though it occurs in a pious context, can be of a merely psychological nature. Such a psychologically-based impulse can, for instance, come into being due to expectations, suggestion (contagion), or other processes of group or mass psychology. In evaluating these matters, all the laws of human nature should be taken into consideration'.

On the other hand, one may be thinking of impulses of the Spirit with different intentions; emotional or physical healing, endowment with spiritual gifts, an outpouring of divine love etc., and these impulses may be manifesting themselves in different ways at a physical level.

The possibility that some may react in a wrong way to something which was a genuine impulse by the Spirit, should not be ruled out. This may especially be the case with a psychically vulnerable person.

The story of King Saul and his men coming into prophetic ecstasy (1 Sam 19,18-24) has been quoted from rather different perspectives in this debate. By the defenders of the 'Toronto blessing' as an example of 1) a collective manifestation of the Spirit of God upon a group of people who came to a certain place, followed 2) by some strange reactions; tearing of their clothes and falling naked to the ground. By a critic as an example of the (wrong?) reaction of a psychically vulnerable person, King Saul, and also as an example of 'a corporate dimension to the experience, subconsciously communicable within or from a group'<sup>12</sup>

Concerning an impulse from 'the flesh', or from the human psyche at an unconcious level, this may be caused by a strong expectation or wish to experience a new encounter with God, or to be regarded as one who has received 'the blessing'. There should be no need to deny the complexity of mechanisms operating in and through a human psyche also in a Christian setting.

It seems to be quite evident that some of the manifestations accompanying the 'Toronto blessing' in some cultures, some African and others, would be regarded as symptoms of demonic possession or influence. This may also be the case in some instances here. But it would be, according to my understanding, totally unreasonable to consider this whole present move as something inspired by demonic forces. Is it reasonable to believe that so many experienced, evangelical and charismatic pastors and leaders could be totally lead astray by the devil?

If one tries to interpret our present movement on the basis of this model, one would have to say that the physical manifestations in themselves are no clear evidence of a work of the Holy Spirit. In many cases it may certainly be the Spirit who is at work, but we have to bear in mind that some of the same manifestations also occur in sensitivitytraining, psychotherapeutic groups and in other contexts.

d) The 'Altered state of conciousness' (ASC) model

This model has been introduced into the present debate by the medical scientist Patrick Dixon<sup>13</sup>, and can only be touched upon quite briefly here.

According to Dixon ASC is something in between our waking state and our sleeping state. It could be described as 'trance, hypnosis, dream or ecstasy, depending on the situation and our worldview'. Biblical examples may be found in many of the texts about

---

<sup>12</sup> Wright, *Charismatic Renewal* (1995:83).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. his book *Signs of Revival* (1994:258-279) or the tapes of his talks in the *Times of Refreshing* Conference, Holy Trinity Brompton, London 22nd-23rd May 1995. For a theologian the whole chapter 5 of his book, *Medical Perspectives on Manifestations*, (233-279), opens up several new and interesting perspectives.

visions, such as Jes 6; Mt 17; Acts 10 and 2 Cor 12. ASC is a state of mind which makes a person more open and receptive to a spiritual dimension. Dixon mentions the following characteristics of ASC: 1.Alterations in thinking 2.Altered sense of time 3.Loss of control 4.Changes in emotional expression 5.Body image changes 6.Perceptual changes 7.Changes of meaning or significance 8.Sense of the ineffable (that which cannot be communicated through words) 9Feelings of rejuvenation and 10.Hypersuggestibility. The following may trigger ASCs: 1.Lack of food (fasting) 2.Reduction of sensory stimulation 3.Increased sensory stimulation 4.Increased alertness or concentration 5.Decreased alertness or relaxation of critical faculties 6.Body chemistry alterations and 7.Speaking in tongues (because the languagecenter in the brain is being cut out).

Dixon claims that the accusation of drunkenness on the day of Pentecost most likely is to be explained from an ASC perspective on the behaviour of the disciples, brought about by the sudden outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The ASC in itself can not convey an encounter with the living God, but it may open up for such an encounter for a person who is seeking God through faith in Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that Dixons approach is very interesting. It can, perhaps, also help many christians to feel less threatened by a psychological approach to spiritual phenomena, and also to be less frightened by bodily reactions in a Christian setting.

e) Judging by roots or fruit?

Some of the critics of the `Toronto blessing' stress the viewpoint that its roots goes back to preachers like Benny Hinn, Claudio Freidson and especially the South-African pentecostal evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne<sup>14</sup>, implying that this, in itself, makes it rather suspicious.

1. Tracing roots

Even if one certainly will agree that it may be interesting and important to trace the origin of a spiritual movement, it must be admitted that this is often very difficult. It may be possible to trace the roots of a special teaching or theology, or of a specific model of ministry, but concerning the present movement there seems to be such a *complexity* both in its origin and in the way it is *reshaped* and *adapted* into new contexts that the question of roots, in a human perspective, becomes quite complicated.

If one, *methodologically*, is tied up with a purely immanent way of thinking, there are no other option than to seek the roots in a human history of traditions. From a theological point of view there ought to be an openness to the possibility that there may be some divine roots behind this movement with its complexity of manifestations. A theologian would, hopefully, interpret the roots of the `Jerusalem blessing' in a somewhat different way from a secular historian or sociologist.

One should also bear in mind that very few of the significant revival or renewal movements in the history of the church can be traced back to established and well reputed church leaders, as if the Lord wants to show us that 1 Cor 1,27 (cf. Jes 40,13f and Joh 3,8) has a clear relevance within the church.

2. Fruit

---

<sup>14</sup> For a presentation of Rodney Howard-Brown, see the article in *Charisma* magazine August 1994, 21-28.

Many of the adherents of the 'Toronto blessing' argue, however, that the Bible tells us to look for fruit, and not for roots; 'By their fruit you will recognize them.'(Mt 7,16).<sup>15</sup> Even if one will agree that the question of roots has some interest concerning the 'Toronto blessing', it seems to be the question of fruit which is more decisive.

f) The 'Toronto blessing' as a postmodern, 'emotionalistic' phenomenon

---

<sup>15</sup> A support for this principle is by many sought in the writings of Jonathan Edwards where he is reflecting on his experiences from *The Great Awakening*, esp. *Distinguishing marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741). Some of the most important treatises by J. Edwards have been reprinted in the volume *On Revival*, London: Banner 1965.

In a time of significant cultural change, and a widespread longing for experiences and emotional uplifting together with an upsurge of various kinds of non-Christian spirituality, there is certainly a valid warning here from some critics.<sup>16</sup>

If the ministry of the 'blessing' is not closely tied up with basic biblical teaching, grounding the christian life not in experience and emotions, but in the Word, the sacraments and in faith, a lot of people may come into a very unbalanced way of thinking about the Christian life.

On the other hand there is a whole dimension of experience of the life in the Spirit, described in the Scripture, which is unknown in so many established churches<sup>17</sup> today. What about this unbalance? Can the one be discussed without the other?

g) The 'Toronto blessing' as *Times of Refreshing* for the Church

This phrase 'Times of Refreshing' (Acts 3,19-20 *καιροὶ ἠναψβξεωζ*) seems to have become central to many as a model for an interpretation of the present movement.<sup>18</sup> The greek terminology may indicate a sovereignly ordained season as 'a breathing space' for the church. A time of relief and relaxation. A time where the Lord is tending to and healing his church in a rather special way. A possible preparation for a great harvest for the Kingdom, or even for the return of Christ?

#### 4. *Basic criteria for the testing of the 'Toronto blessing'*

Three basic areas seem to come into focus in a special way in the assesment of this movement:

a) church history, b) the Bible and c) fruit. We shall try to discuss, briefly, each of these areas.

a) Testimonies from church history, eg. history of revival and renewal

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Hempelmann (1995:38f).

<sup>17</sup> I do realize that the term 'established churches' which is used several places in this paper is rather ambiguous. From my point of view it primarely includes the protestant 'Volkskirchen', 'Nationwide churches' of Northen-Europe and Brittain, but also some of the older protestant Free churches. My knowledge of the Roman catholic and Ortodox churches is so limited that I would not want to include these in this term.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Stibbe (1995:171f).

This present movement seems to have triggered off a new interest for earlier movements and periods, with similar manifestations, in the life of the church.

In the literature which we are consulting it is primarily the anglo-saxon tradition, with names as Charles and John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards<sup>19</sup> and several revival and renewal periods in the 1800 and 1900 centuries<sup>20</sup> which have been brought into focus.

From this century the Welsh revival in 1904, the 312 Asuza Street revival in 1906 and the following early Pentecostal movements<sup>21</sup> are also mentioned by many.

It seems quite obvious that there are a lot more to find in the mystical tradition of the church<sup>22</sup>, and it must only be a question of time before a much broader documentation is presented.

From the material which has been brought to attention from the books and articles mentioned here, three things could be said: 1) It seems to be evident that most of the manifestations connected with the 'Toronto blessing' have occurred in earlier times, 2) They have always been controversial and 3) The 'movements' within which they have occurred seem almost always to have had a revitalizing effect on the church in general.

---

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Edwards and The Great Awakening is especially discussed by Chevreau (1994:70-144) and Warner (1995:37-80).

<sup>20</sup> Dixon has in his chs 3 and 4 (1995:113-232) collected a large number of interesting sources and quotations which may shed much light on the present discussion.

<sup>21</sup> Hempelmann (1995:38) claims that *die Berliner Erklärung* from 1909 not primarily was prompted by the more traditional charismatic phenomena (speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing), but by 'die ekstatischen und unkontrollierten Ergriffenheitserfahrungen, die Anstoss erregten und Trennungen hervorriefen.' (the ecstatic and uncontrolled experiences of being seized (?), which caused offence and created division).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Oskar Föllner, *Charisma und Unterscheidung. Systematische und pastorale Aspekte der Einordnung und Beurteilung enthusiastisch-charismatischer Frömmigkeit im katholischen und evangelischen Bereich*, Wupperthal und Zürich:R. Brockhaus 1994, 10ff.

Who today would deny the remarkable positive effect of the Pentecostal movement on World mission?

b) The Bible

1) The distinction between *unscriptural or antiscritptural* and *not mentioned in Scripture*

The fight in America about use of *organs* in church is very popular with defenders of Toronto. Is the use of organs scriptural or not? This distinction is certainly valid to a certain extent, but it has, of course, to be balanced with other criteria.

2) What about 1 Cor 14,23 and 32

Many are reacting against the 'Toronto blessing' manifestations because they are felt to be out of control and may cause outsiders to say 'that you are out of your mind' (NIV) or 'that ye are mad' (KJV), (*ἵνα μὴ ἰσθῆτε*)<sup>23</sup>.

---

<sup>23</sup> The greek verb here may give associations to ecstatic hellenistic cults where certain forms of uncontrolled and ecstatic utterances may have been regarded as a token of divine inspiration.

What Paul is dealing with in this context is uncontrolled speaking in tongues. Over against this he recommends prophecy, emphasizing that those who prophecy are in control of what they say. One may disagree about the bearing of this text on the manifestations we are discussing, but there seems to be a general warning in this chapter: do not let certain phenomena or manifestations take over the control of that which is happening in a church. Some kind of control is necessary for the peace of God to be present<sup>24</sup>.

### 3) A scriptural basis for the specific phenomena

A number of articles have been produced where people are trying to justify all kinds of manifestations from biblical texts. Quite much of this is not very convincing as many texts often are read out of context. There are, of course, relevant biblical parallels to a number of the Toronto manifestations, especially tears, joy and laughter<sup>25</sup>. It is also, from a biblical point of view, possible to make sense of falling and shaking<sup>26</sup>.

Concerning the more bizarre manifestations it seems to be more honest to say with John Wimber, 'There's nothing in Scripture that supports these kinds of phenomena that I can see, and I can't think of anything throughout the church age that would, - So I feel no obligation to try to explain it. It's just phenomena. It's just people responding to God'<sup>27</sup>. So even if they are not supported in Scripture, they do not need to be in opposition to Scripture - granted they do not violate the principle of 1 Cor 14?

### 4) Acts 2 - making sense of the accusation of 'drunkenness' (v13)

---

<sup>24</sup> For some interesting reflections on control and decent behaviour in church, cf. Warner (1995:124f). 'Where Christianity has been reduced from a living faith to a social custom, nothing is more shocking than an outbreak of holy fire' (122).

<sup>25</sup> For balanced discussions of this, cf. Warner (1995:81-96) and Stibbe (1995:103-138). In a mental-health perspective on laughter Dixon (1994:234-241) stresses the positive function of laughter in releasing of stress, and postulates that 'laughter is almost always a positive and beneficial thing' (236).

<sup>26</sup> Warner (1995:97-116).

<sup>27</sup> Quoted from *Charisma* magazine, February 1995, 26.

Many people claim to have a very strange experience of 'drunkenness' in the Spirit. I have myself observed very 'sober' Norwegian vicars 'swaying' around. Some have not been able to drive their cars. It is claimed that this may have a certain parallel in the behaviour of the disciples on the day of Pentecost.

What may have caused the accusation in Acts 2? 'Speaking in foreign languages may have been a mark of genius, rather than of intoxication' (Patrick Dixon), so it is likely that this accusation may have its background more in their behaviour than in what they said<sup>28</sup>.

The idea that a person who is filled with the Spirit (Eph 5,18) could behave in a way that has any similarity to alcoholic intoxication, seems to be rather appalling to northern-European mentality, where 'sobriety' is a distinct mark of civilized behaviour<sup>29</sup>. One may ask, however, if not the concept of the strictly selfcontrolled and reason-dominated personality is more of a Greek than a Hebrew ideal?

'My hearth is broken within me; all my bones tremble.  
I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine,  
because of the Lord and his holy words' (Jer 23,9)<sup>30</sup>

##### 5) Collective manifestations of the Spirit?

For some critics it is suspicious that the Holy Spirit is claimed to come upon a whole group of persons at the same time. There are certainly some biblical background for such events, cf. the story of the Spirit coming upon the 70 elders (Num 11,24-30), upon King

---

<sup>28</sup> In my opinion this interpretation is better than that which is offered in many standard commentaries; that the accusation was caused by their speaking in tongues. The context presupposes that what was said represented intelligible languages (vv8 and 11), cf. also Stibbe (1995:82ff).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Charismatic Renewal* (1995:159). I do, of course, realize that the NT is talking about 'being sober' Rom 12,13 (NIV); 1 Tim 3,2 and Tit 1,8 (KJV), rendering the greek *sâfroneâ/sâfrân* (being wise, balanced etc). My point is that in a Northern-European culture this is often read as; not showing emotions.

<sup>30</sup> One commentator explains 'With broken heart and shivering members he stands "before the face of Jahve" like a drunk person who can no longer control his mind and thoughts', A. Weiser, *Das Buch Jeremia*, (ATD), Göttingen 1969<sup>6</sup>, 201f (my translation), cf. 1 Sam 1,12-17.

Saul and his men (1 Sam 19,18-24), upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and upon the participants in the prayermeeting recorded in Acts 4,23-31.

But even if some of the attempts to explain the manifestations in a 'Toronto meeting' according to some alleged psychological models: collective hysteria, brainwashing, corporate subconscious communication, hypnotism etc., in most instances does not seem to be very helpful<sup>31</sup>, one should not try to deny that laughter and exposure of strong emotions may have a natural infectious effect.

6) A biblical, wholistic view of man

---

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Dixon (1994:241-258).

In addition to specific references to biblical passages, one may point to a more general biblical view of man. Without going into the scholarly debate on biblical anthropology, I would like to bring to attention a very important work by the Swedish scholar and pastoral theologian Fredrik Brosché (*The wholistic view rediscovered. The wholistic view of man in christian creation theology and the awareness of many different kinds of healing*)<sup>32</sup>.

What Brosché is doing in this book is to bring together the modern insight in biblical anthropology with recent psychological research, showing a remarkable correspondance between these<sup>33</sup>. In both traditions there is a strong consciousness about the interaction between soul, spirit and body, considering man as a functional unity. This implies that impulses on a spiritual or psychological level always will have some influence on the body, and vice versa. Some quotations (my translation) from his book, which unfortunately only has been published in Swedish, may show the relevance of his work for the present debate.

'(this means that according to biblical thinking) even the bones of the skeleton may express the emotions, thought and will of a person (Ps 6,3; 35,10; 51,10; Job 4,14; Jes 38,13 and Hab 3,16)' - 'When we consider the close connection between the psychic activity of the brain, the autonomic nerve system, and the skeleton muscles, it is no wonder that a powerfull psychic experience may result in some physical mobilization of strength' (p148).

The same way of thinking is formulated by the medically trained preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones, 'Let us be very careful that we do not do violence to man's very nature and constitution. Man reacts as a whole. And it is just folly to expect that he can react in the realm of the spiritual without anything happening to the rest of him, to the soul, and to the body'<sup>34</sup>.

If we are familiar with this biblical way of thinking, we may not be so surprised if a powerful spiritual, or emotional, experience manifests itself in rather vigorous physical reactions.

### c) Fruit

All defenders, and many of the critics, of the 'Toronto blessing' are pointing to the question of fruit as a main test of this movement.

Fruit, however, is a long time 'project' and an assesment from this perspective may still seem to be premature.

Nevertheless, it seems to be possible to describe some fruit at an individual level. An early documentation is given by Chevreau (1994:145-204) including a number of testimonies of physical and emotional healing, personal transformation, a new awareness

---

<sup>32</sup> *Helhetssynen återupptäckt. Den kristna skapelsetrons helhetssyn på människan och bejakelse av många slags helande*, Klippan:EFS förlaget 1985, 280pp.

<sup>33</sup> This correspondance is well known in many circles, but it has been worked out in a particularly interesting way by Brosché.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Warner (1995:116) from Lloyd-Jones book *Revival* (1986).

and confession of sin, endowment with spiritual gifts, a greater joy in the Lord, a greater hunger for God and his Word, and a new love for Jesus.

Many of the leaders within this movement say the real *acid test* will be if it promotes *a new desire to reach the lost, and a new concern for the poor and needy*.

In several of the books and articles mentioned in this paper lists are being made of testing criteria and fruit which is desirable in a renewal or revival movement<sup>35</sup>. Here are some points from the respected evangelical scholar Jim Packer, which he considers to be constant factors recognizable in all biblical and post-biblical revivals and renewals of faith and life<sup>36</sup>:

1. Awareness of God's presence
2. Responsiveness to God's word
3. Sensitiveness to sin
4. Liveliness in community
5. Fruitfulness in testimony

#### 5. *Beware of pitfalls!*

Many of the same warnings about dangers and pitfalls are coming from people both involved in and critical to this movement.

Some of these are as follows:

##### a) Do not focus on the manifestations

There is an almost unanimous warning against too much focus on the manifestations. And, obviously, there is a strong need today to emphasize that it is a holy life, and not the experience of some physical manifestation, which is the sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life<sup>37</sup>.

But even if it is said in a service that a person may have a strong and genuine encounter with God without any of the specific manifestations, there often seems to be a kind of double communication here. It is very often persons who are showing some physical symptoms who are getting the attention of the ministry teams, indicating that the Spirit is doing a more significant work in them than in a person who is standing totally relaxed. In some churches, also within the Vineyard movement, where there is a strong emphasis on evangelism, there seem to be an awareness of the danger that some of the manifestations may keep out many of the people they want to reach out to.

##### b) Beware of manipulation

There is a special danger that physically vulnerable persons may be manipulated.

---

<sup>35</sup> Good examples are Warner (1995:145-164) and Stibbe (1995:30-69).

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Dixon (1994:212f) from Packer's book *God in Our Midst* (1987).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Mark Stibbe who is warning against *Manifestations 1. - without mission, 2. - without transformation, 3. - without adoration, and 4. - without proclamation*, *Renewal* magazine, June 1995, 32-34.

c) Do not believe that the Holy Spirit can be `mastered' or `controlled' within any special model of ministry

d) Do not let any of the manifestations get the status of an act of initiation

Those who have been laughing or falling `have had it', or `are in'. This is certainly going to cause division.

e) Beware of speculative interpretations of this movement in an eschatological perspective

`This is the beginning of the Great Harvest' or `this is the Fourth Stream out of the Temple' according to Ezek 47<sup>38</sup>. Let time show the significance of this movement.

f) A continuous seeking after experience may cause *exhaustion* rather than *refreshment*

In a time with a movement like this there is certainly a strong need for pastoral care and for people being integrated into a christian community. Even if it may be good to seek prayer continuously, people should be cautioned against seeking out every possible meeting and worship service simply for the purpose of experiencing certain manifestations.

g) Do not give up leadership and responsibility

The need for wise and sensitive leadership can not be too strongly emphasized. Leaders who are not willing to exercise some control, and allows `anything and everything' to happen, are not fulfilling their responsibility.

## 6. *Some concluding remarks*

It is obvious that this movement called the `Toronto blessing' has been received somewhat differently in the various European countries. In some countries, especially England, it seems to have brought much blessing and new life into many churches across almost all denominations. But also in England there are divisions in some churches, and some strong theological critique.

---

<sup>38</sup> Mark Stibbe is modifying this perspective somewhat when he says that `we may be witnessing the first signs' of this (1995:29).

In other countries the critique and opposition is very strong. Also the 'charismatic community', if such a thing exists, seems to be divided.

This whole situation calls for humility and much prayer, but also for open and frank discussion. The either/or model should be avoided, but at the same time a willingness on both sides to look critically at ones own position is necessary.

Maybe the time has come for those of us who belong to the established churches to ask some unpleasant questions:

Has the decline of our churches now gone so far that the Lord is acting in new and radical ways among us. Is it possible that many of this phenomena may tell us that God now is 'shaking' and rebuking his church today, because of all the rationalism and this-worldliness which is dominating us. And worst of all, he is sending it from America.

---

Rev. Ove Conrad Hanssen, teol. dr., senior lecturer New Testament exegesis, Stavanger School of Mission and Theology, Misjonsvn. 34, 4024 Stavanger, Norway.  
Temporary adr. from 21.09.95, Wycliffe Hall, 54 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PW, U.K.