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# THE TORONTO BLESSING

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BY MARTYN PERCY



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# CATCHING THE FIRE: THE SOCIOLOGY OF EXCHANGE, POWER AND CHARISMA IN THE 'TORONTO BLESSING'

## A MONOGRAPH

### **Brief Abstract:**

This monograph is an application of Social Exchange Theory (or Rational Choice Theory) along with theories of power and charisma, to the 'Toronto Blessing' (TB), with field-work undertaken at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF). It is also partly a theological reflection on the ecclesiology of the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship and the 'Toronto Blessing,' examining the grammar of assent that partly creates the religious situations that are so particular to the movement.

## **A Responsive Foreword**

Martyn Percy's attempt to offer a sociological analysis of the Toronto Blessing is, as he states, an attempt to apply the Theory of Social Exchange along with the concepts of 'power' and 'charisma' to the 'Toronto Blessing' (TB). Based on a seven day visit to the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF) this is an incisive piece which offers a number of valuable insights into the TB and its associated social and cultural context. This said, there is also much here with which evangelical Christians, be they mainstream, charismatic or protestant will find themselves in disagreement.

The nub of the writer's argument is that the Theory of Social Exchange provides us with a way of understanding what is happening at TACF and other centres of the TB. Pilgrims come to Toronto, some of them journeying for many thousands of miles, seeking a 'return' or 'exchange' for their investment. Their part involves the total offering and surrendering of themselves to God (which includes letting go of the rational mind) in the context of worship which is 'repetitive,' 'intimate' and 'pseudo-erotic.' This call for self-surrender is reinforced by the rhetoric of the leaders who use evocative metaphors of fire, water and rain and urge the need to 'drink,' 'soak up' and 'marinate' in the Blessing. For their part in the deal the 'seekers' receive a fresh input of the power of God into their lives. It is this power which the English media dubbed the Toronto Blessing although, as Percy rightly points out, in Toronto it is only known as the 'Father's Blessing.'

Among a number of helpful insights which Percy offers to an understanding of the TB is the way he locates it in its postmodern cultural context. The loss of metanarratives, metatheories and the collapse of public forms of truth lead to competing forms of power and truth. One result of this has been the rise of new churches and new religious movements offering alternative power sources. Among obvious recent examples of this which could be cited are David Koresh and his Branch Davidian Cult in Waco, Texas and the Church of England's own 'Nine O'Clock Service' in Sheffield. Both leaders were clearly

unrestrained, power-crazed individuals.

Such leaders and movements inevitably vie and struggle with each other for ascendancy. It is in this context that Percy interprets Wimber's expulsion of the TACF from his Vineyard network of churches. Indeed, as we approach the end of the second millennium we shall inevitably witness a proliferation of competing sectarian groups each asserting that they, and they alone, have the power and the truth for this 'last hour' of history.

Wise pastors and church leaders will do well to take to heart Percy's emphasis that the TB has been reinforced by a post-millenarian eschatological chronology. Post-millenarians of the late twentieth century, like other earlier revivalists, believe that the present world order will suddenly improve as God 'pours out his Spirit in the last days.' Then the whole world order will suddenly be thrust into overdrive and be carried through into the millennium. Many advocates of the TB interpret the present move as the beginnings of this great and final end-time revival. An inherent danger in all of this can be that revivalism leads to a 'head in the clouds' mentality in which its subjects become severed from the world and the issues of daily living. Percy's critique of TACF not having any obvious relationship with its surrounding environment is worth noting. More pertinent is his underlining of the fact that the TB has not as yet issued in any significant forms of social engagement in the way that earlier revivalists grappled with slavery, factory reform and the emancipation of women.

Percy rightly points out that there is nothing new in the phenomena which accompany the TB. Jerking, barking, shaking, dancing and falling were all common features in the earlier revivalism of 18th and 19th century England and America. Indeed, much greater emotional extremes which included jumping, rolling and somersaulting were witnessed in early Methodism and groups such as the Salvation Army and the Walworth Jumpers. What marks out the TB, Percy argues, is its rhetoric of power and power for the last days.

Percy also issues a timely warning concerning the ways in which church leaders of any tradition, be they Charismatic,

Proclamation Trust or Catholic, can take on the status of 'power broker' in the process of exchange. This can happen as they dispense the power of God through invoking the Spirit (TB) or proclaiming the infallible word of God which has only one meaning (their meaning). The end result can issue in manipulation, control or religious abuse of those who place themselves under their ministries. Percy shows how this can happen in the case of the TB. Leaders in dispensing the 'power' often utilize auto-suggestion and mesmerization by informing the congregation of what is about to happen when they invoke the Holy Spirit: 'Some of you will shake, others may laugh or fall to the ground but don't worry about it. God is a Sovereign God...' Clearly such auto-suggestion can help to create the phenomena which subsequently occur. I found myself at this point in agreement with Percy in thinking that if the charismatic power broker really believes that God is moving, why not cut the rhetoric altogether and wait for a divine sovereign intervention?

Notwithstanding these and many other insightful comments on the TB and TACF, Percy's methodology and presuppositions raise serious questions in the minds of many people. Most obvious is his use of the Theory of Social Exchange. Does it really get us anywhere? Exchange is a common thread which is basic to many of the world's religions. Indeed the heart of the Christian faith is about exchange, an exchange of an old way of life for a new resurrection life. In this and all other forms of religious exchange there is some sort of self-giving or surrender in order to receive a return. In the mystical tradition, giving might be fasting or some other form of rigorous self-denial in the hope of receiving increased inner light. In the protestant evangelical churches, it might be developing a regular discipline of Bible study and prayer the return for which would be victorious christian living. Again, in Percy's own liberal Anglican tradition, it might be sacramental contemplation and attendance at early eucharists in the expectation of some kind of 'feel good' factor. In these and other forms of religious exchange it is a virtually impossible task to assess the objective reality of the power, presence, inner light or feel good factor which the subjects experience or perceive

themselves to have received. Perhaps the only possible way forward is to do some serious investigation into the lives of those who have experienced the TB. Has the quality of their marriages, home life, relationships, and social interaction improved? Has the TB made them more effective at their work stations, better communicators and people who are more concerned for the environment, suffering and disadvantaged people groups? These are matters of serious concern to most sociologists which Percy does not address.

It becomes clear in fact that Percy's position is that there is no objective power of God mediated in the TB. Power, if it is anywhere, lies in the 'structures,' 'organization' and 'non-structural interaction' of religious institutions. According to Percy, power in the Toronto Blessing is to be found only where the rhetoric of their leaders locates it, namely in worship or in the biblical text. Percy's view of the TB is encapsulated in the following lines:

What appears to be occurring is a complex form of social abreaction, which is then ascribed religious significance. Abreaction describes a therapeutic process – conscious or unconscious, group or individual – wherein repressed feelings, desires, traumas or negativity are allowed to be repressed and (perhaps) resolved.

What the individual gains through this process varies from person to person. It might be 'an altered state of consciousness,' 'social integration' or 're-integration' or 'relief from stress.' Few, I think, would deny that the TB experience for some people represents abreaction. But is it not too generalized an assumption if it is being said of the entire movement? Percy tends to see the Toronto Blessing as all of a piece, whereas in reality it is diverse. The way in which it is/was brokered at Holy Trinity Church Brompton, for example, was/is very different from expressions of it at the Sunderland Christian Centre or at the Church of Christ the King in Brighton. There is a danger here of trying to attach more to the TB than the evidence will allow, and then seeking to discredit it as one universally coherent phenomenon. Could it not be the case that the TB is something like the Church of England, good in places!

Percy does not appear to entertain the possibility that the power of God in the TB exists anywhere other than as reified projections in the minds of the Blessing's adherents. Such a view, it has to be said, represents a dogmatic unverifiable personal opinion. Historic Christianity proclaims that God's power is everywhere available. Great care needs to be exercised before we deny that God's presence and power resides in a person's life.

Percy argues that the TB marks a change in the heterogeneity of contemporary charismatic renewal since the Blessing can be transported. However the question might be interposed, is not all religious experience transportable? For example, is not this why Church of England bishops spend their weekday evenings plodding round the diocese holding confirmation services? For it is in the confirmation service that the bishop (and the bishop alone) stretches out his hands and says, 'Let your spirit come upon them.' Many students of revivalistic movements urge that the core of the Toronto experience is all of a piece with earlier revivalism, the Charismatic movement of the 1960s and Wimber's 'Third Wave.' The fact that none of the Toronto phenomena are new helps to bear this out. In addition, it needs to be recognized that there are numerous examples of people who claim to have received the 'Blessing' without ever having a link or contact with any Toronto pilgrims, or attending a meeting presided over by a TB power broker.

Few, including the leaders of the TACF, deny that the phenomena (laughing and animal noises in particular) contain at the very heart elements of individual human and group emotionalism. In fact TACF leaders repeatedly stress that the phenomena are not the Toronto 'Blessing' but simply human reactions or responses to the 'blessing' of God's power. Clearly as Percy suggests the TB does appear to have become 'routinized' in some locations where there is now a regular monthly diet of 'catch the fire' meetings. Elsewhere however, the character of the 'Blessing' has changed considerably. Where there was initially laughter and roaring there is now apparently stillness, weeping and tears of sorrow for the state of the nation.

Readers of Percy's essay will fully understand that this is a sociological account of the TB but sociologists at best are exhorted to be dispassionate. Whilst Percy feels warmly disposed to the leaders of the TACF whom he found to be 'genuine, honest and open people,' this is a one-sided piece which presents a thoroughgoing Marxist analysis of their Airport Christian Fellowship. Percy understands their 'Blessing' as 'a form of social compensation for individuals in an industrialized, secular society.' He does not appear to entertain even the remotest possibility that religion could be other than a social construct. There is no attempt to relate this conclusion to the biblical material which clearly presents a very different view of the reality of the triune God and the ways in which Christians encounter and experience God's presence in their lives.

**Nigel Scotland**

**October 1996**

## A. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

‘PHENOMENOLOGY, as generally defined in sociology, refers to the study of how the social world is constructed. We might think of how an architect blueprints a project and then oversees its realization. Phenomenology suggests that we are all, in a sense, architects of our identities, actions, communities, and social realities. Patterns of social life appear to exist independently of ourselves, but phenomenology seeks to reveal how people produce an apparently independent world in the course of their daily lives.’<sup>2</sup>

‘Magic does not dominate the spiritual life of "primitive" societies everywhere by any means; it is, on the contrary, in the more developed societies that it becomes prevalent.’<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to investigate, in a particular way, a prevalent form of religion that attracts millions of followers world-wide: contemporary charismatic renewal. There are many studies of this phenomenon operating from a variety of disciplines: sociological, phenomenological, psychological, theological and anthropological. Even a casual glance at a recent bibliographic survey reveals the wealth of primary and secondary sources.<sup>4</sup> Yet

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge the help of Christ’s College, Cambridge University, as well as the Bethune-Baker Fund and the Theological Studies Fund of the Divinity Faculty, Cambridge University, for providing me with a Travel Fellowship to visit Toronto in the Summer of 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Myron Orleans, ‘Phenomenological Sociology,’ in H. Etzkowitz & R. M. Glassman (eds.), *The Renaissance of Sociological Theory*, Itasca, Illinois, F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1991, p.169.

<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, p. xiii, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> See Watson E. Mills, *Charismatic Religion in Modern Research: A Bibliography*, National Association of Baptist Professors/Mercer University Press, 1985. This volume, though indispensable for the student of charismatic renewal, must be considered rather thin with

some of the analysis available can date very quickly, or even tends to begin by being quite piecemeal. The purpose of this essay will be to take an established sociological discipline to an aspect of charismatic renewal that has not been tried before. Social Exchange Theory will be applied to the 'Toronto Blessing,' in order to see what might be said about social and theological concepts of power and charisma that might arise from the analysis. I am, of course, aware that 'sociology' is not one subject. There are those who define it as cumulative and explanatory in its aspirations, with due respect for natural science models of quantification and comparison. Others assimilate the subject into the arts as intellectual history and theoretical interpretation. Exchange theory can be found in both these sociological 'traditions,' and although some limited field-work has been attempted for this paper, I ought to declare now that I am more inclined to the second approach.

There can be no question that charismatic renewal involves forms of exchange at many different levels. Ritual exchange is easily identified, as is the personal and cathartic. There is also a sense in which the communal enthusiasm operates as a kind of 'sacrament.' In exchange for expressing and configuring the activity of praise in excitable and passionate ways (i.e., a celebration), the group is rewarded with a sense of God – God is said to 'inhabit' the praises of his people, so if they praise, he will be present. This is a form of pseudo-mystical, mechanistic religion, where enthusiasm is eventually exchanged for presence.<sup>5</sup> The sociality of these exchanges will need to be questioned later, so more will be said about Social Exchange Theory in due course. For

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only 2100 entries. Of related interest is C. E. Jones, *A Guide to the Study of Pentecostal Movements* (2 volumes), ATLA Bibliography Series, no. 6, Metuchen, NJ, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> In other words, praise-as-charismatic-celebration has become pseudo-sacramental. As I argue later, this should in no way be regarded as a type of suburban mysticism for a postmodern culture. C.f. Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge, CUP, 1995, esp. chaps 8 & 9.

the moment, though, let us consider the justification for the focus of this essay. Following Orleans (see above), the concern with power and charisma arises quite naturally from the work of scholars such as Gerardus van der Leeuw, who saw that theological and sociological concepts of power were ordinarily quite conflated. The power of God is inseparable from things that are said to deliver the power (agents).<sup>6</sup> In a similar way, Robert Torrance notes that the charisma of the Shaman – whether in primitive or ‘modern’ society – becomes conflated with the power of God. The appeal to power partly creates the ‘magic’ that Eliade spoke of, and in the more developed societies, there is a deep hunger for the ‘things’ of God or power that can help re-form communities.<sup>7</sup> The sorts of issues that arise out of this conflation can be manifold. For example, from a socio-psychological perspective, should a phenomenon such as being ‘slain in the Spirit’ (or dramatic, mesmerizing trances) be considered as a form of therapy, or as an experience of God? Equally, should one describe the ‘Toronto Blessing’ as a matter of ‘religion’ or ‘revelation’: a search for God, or a message from beyond? It is possible that Social Exchange Theory may well be able to throw some light on these questions. Before going any further however, a brief historical explication of the Blessing is necessary.<sup>8</sup>

The ‘Toronto Blessing’ is a phenomenon that began as being particular to the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church, in January, 1994. As a church in the Vineyard tradition

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<sup>6</sup> Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1938, chaps 1-4. I have developed a more socio-theological treatment of this type of phenomenology in my *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism*, London, SPCK, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Torrance, *The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion, and Science*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> See my ‘The Rain-Maker’: A Perspective on Revivalism, in *The Richard Baxter Journal for Ministry*, October, 1996.

(fundamentalist-revivalist),<sup>9</sup> the community had experienced many of the things that would be typical for Christians in this sort of ecclesial setting: healings, an emphasis on deliverance, speaking in tongues, and a general sense of the believers being in the vanguard of the Holy Spirit's movement towards the 'end times.'<sup>10</sup> What appears to mark out the 'Toronto Blessing' (TB) for special treatment is the more unusual phenomena that occurred. There was an unusually high reportage of people being 'slain in the Spirit.' A number would laugh uncontrollably, make animal-like noises, barking, growling or groaning as the 'Spirit fell on them.' Others reported that this particular experience of God was more highly-charged than anything that had preceded it. Thus, the 'Blessing' became known by the place where it was deemed to be concentrated. In just two years, over 500,000 'pilgrims' have journeyed to Toronto to taste the Blessing for themselves.<sup>11</sup> Many of these pilgrims report dramatic healings, substantial changes in their lives, and greater empowerment for Christian ministry.<sup>12 13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Some struggle with this definition of the church, arguing that a movement that is clearly so experiential cannot be fundamentalist. However, the church, largely for pragmatic reasons, defines itself as both. Its recent statement of faith published on the internet confirms the description as apt: <http://www.grimi.org/TAV/> – 'we believe that the Bible is God's Word...speaking to us with authority and without error.'

<sup>10</sup> Some call this the Third or Fourth Wave of the Spirit. For a discussion of the Vineyard church, see my *Words, Wonders and Power: Understanding Christian Fundamentalism and Revivalism*, London, SPCK, 1996.

<sup>11</sup> These figures are based on Michael Mitton's assessment in *The Heart of Toronto*, Cambridge, Grove Spirituality Series, no. 55, 1996, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> See M. Poloma, *By Their Fruits: A Sociological Assessment of the Toronto Blessing*, published by the church. Poloma is a lecturer at the University of Akron, Ohio, and a supporter of the Toronto church, even though she remains an Episcopalian. Her account is highly sympathetic to TACF. Poloma's sociological method in this article is based on quantification of data from questionnaires, slanting the sociology towards 'science' rather than art. However, she does have a good

Yet in spite of the extraordinary success of the church, John Wimber, a founding pastor of the Vineyard network, excommunicated the Toronto fellowship for '(alleged) cult-like and manipulative practices.'<sup>14</sup> Some evangelical critics of the TB cited

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understanding of charisma, for which there is evidence in her *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville, TN, University of Tennessee Press, 1989), although this type of critique is not applied to TACF. For another sympathetic account of the Blessing, see G. Chevreau, *Catch the Fire*, London, Marshall/Collins, 1994; G. Chevreau, *Pray with Fire*, Toronto, Harper Collins, 1995; J. Arnott, *The Father's Blessing*, Orlando, FL, Creation House, 1995. For an initial critique of the Blessing, see S. Porter & P. Richter (eds.), *The Toronto Blessing*, London, DLT, 1995. Recently, the English Methodist Faith and Order Committee has published a paper on the Blessing, which is critical. There are also critiques from a conservative evangelical perspective. The best of these, by some margin, is James Beverley's, *Holy Laughter and the Toronto Blessing*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995: Beverley is arguably the best informed person on the history of the TB, and I am grateful to him for his time and insights in constructing parts of this paper. See also N. Mikhael *The Toronto Blessing: Slaying in the Spirit*, Earlwood, Australia, 1992, and published by the author, as well as the two books by Bill Randles, *Making War in the Heavens*, and *Weighed and Found Wanting*, both Cambridge, St Matthew Publications, 1994. A light-hearted introduction to the Blessing can be found in *Fortean Times*, June 1996, p. 47, by Ted Harrison.

<sup>13</sup> Many who have journeyed to Toronto speak of themselves as 'Pilgrims' coming to a Holy Place. For a discussion of this in the context of postmodernity, and related issues, see (Ed) Virgil Elizondo & Sean Freyne, *Pilgrimage: Concilium 1996:4*, London, SCM, 1996, especially Paul Post's essay, 'The Modern Pilgrim,' which identifies a new 'post-traditional' pilgrim emerging.

<sup>14</sup> Although according to TACF staff pastor, Ian Ross, it was because the 'tail was wagging the dog': TACF staff still claim to be hurt by Wimber's exclusion of them from the Vineyard network (Taped interview: 09/07/96). A fuller account of this is available in my 'City on a Beach,' in *Neo-Pentecostalism at the End of the Twentieth Century*, eds. S. Hunt, M. Hamilton & T. Walters, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997.

the influence of the Rhema or 'Health and Wealth' movement through TACF's connections with Benny Hinn and Rodney Howard-Browne, as another reason for Vineyard-led secession. In January 1996, the Toronto Vineyard became independent, forming itself into the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF). Under the leadership of its pastor, John Arnott, it continues to exercise an international ministry in the fundamentalist-revivalist tradition so beloved of its followers. It should be said that the influence of TACF is mainly international (through the revival 'circuit') and not local: so far as I can tell, few in Toronto who operate outside the revivalist circuit actually know of the 'Blessing.' As Steve Bruce notes, this is not unusual for revivalist and New Age Movements in late modernity or postmodernity, namely, the failure of a given community to be 'engaged' with its immediate environment.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the TB represents a significant, typical form of contemporary revivalism which can be legitimately identified as a focus for research. In the summer of 1996 I was fortunate to be able to spend just over a week at TACF. This may not seem much, but I should point out that I attended 16 meetings of praise, discussion and worship, and was given fairly reasonable, informal access to the leadership and to pilgrims. In all, I spent more than 50 hours at TACF events, and was able to talk to a wide variety of people from various countries who had experienced the TB for themselves.

The reasons why Social Exchange Theories (or rational choice, as it is sometimes known) might help assess the TB will become apparent as the analysis proceeds. For the moment

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<sup>15</sup> See S. Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults*, Oxford, OUP, 1996. Bruce notes that globalism produces tribalism and, eventually, 'ghetto' religion. Much New Age religion, including its Christian forms such as the Toronto Blessing, indicate a trend towards esoteric, personal religion, that is generally unrelated to social contexts or questions. Bruce cites the Findhorn community as an example, pointing out that whilst the members of the community struggle to find their inner light, the locals are engaged in a more 'real' struggle financially, namely to afford electric light.

however, we should note that the discipline has not really been systematically applied to religion, unless it has come through an anthropological sieve, which is another way of configuring Social Exchange Theory.<sup>16</sup> Yet Marx, in his sociology, was alive to religion being a system of exchange in which producers, consumers and commodities played a part.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, what is implied by religion being the ‘opium of the people’ is not just an exchange of present material paucity for future spiritual gain, but the actual provision of ‘pain relief’ in return for obedience now, this world for the next, and reality for fantasy.<sup>18</sup> This is an early exchange theory, of sorts: religion as a compensator, the wistful ‘sigh of the oppressed.’ The immediate question to ask of TACF therefore, is ‘what is on offer’?

Initially, and in terms of the rhetoric used by TACF, close scrutiny of the metaphors used to describe the Blessing is helpful. These metaphors tend to revolve around concepts of water and fire, and then bodily intimacy as a means to personal and communal empowerment. When the TB first ‘broke,’ British leaders in charismatic renewal were careful to ‘position’ the commodity in the ‘charismatic market.’ It was variously described as a ‘spiritual top-up,’ ‘in-flight re-fuelling,’ ‘refreshing, not revival,’ ‘latter rain,’ and the like.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the TB was a form of resource for a tired or flagging movement. TACF, in its own journal (*Spread the Fire*) tends to adopt the same line. For example, Roger Forster, a British

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<sup>16</sup> The most notable example of this is still Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (trans. Ian Cunnison from the French, published in 1950), London, Cohen & West, 1966.

<sup>17</sup> See *Capital*, 1867; extract in K. Marx & F. Engels, *On Religion*, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955, pp.135-6.

<sup>18</sup> See Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, 1844, in *On Religion*, 1955, pp.41-42.

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Peter Berger for the notion of this phenomenon being ‘something’ to ‘sell.’ See his ‘A Market Analysis of Ecumenicity,’ *Social Research*, 1963, vol 30, pp.75-90. The phrases used above belong to Nicky Gumbel, Curate of Holy Trinity, Brompton, a leading supporter of the Toronto Blessing. They appeared in various editions of the *Church of England Newspaper* in early 1994.

House Church leader and convert to the TB, speaks about the ‘soaking (which) refreshes vision,’ whilst others see the TB as learning to ‘turn on the faucet (tap),’ which imagines God’s blessing as a type of reservoir.<sup>20</sup> TACF has expressed the desire to see a network of pastors who will ‘be permanently wet with renewal.’

Allied to the watery metaphors, there are also analogies concerning drunkenness. Because one of the distinguishing features of TACF/TB is ‘holy’ and ‘uncontrollable’ laughter, some within the movement have inevitably linked their experience to the account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit described in Acts 2, where the apostles are accused of being drunk.<sup>21</sup> Again, the desirability of ‘non-control’ is suggested by the rhetoric: ‘don’t rationalise – just let go.’<sup>22</sup> Randy Clarke, one of the revivalist leaders closely associated with TACF, talks about dispensing the Holy Spirit like a drink: pilgrims are encouraged to ‘have a double, not a single.’ Clarke is known within the TB movement as ‘God’s bartender.’ As with the watery metaphors, we find the Holy Spirit being referred to as a resource or thing: a parcel of power which

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<sup>20</sup> See *Spread the Fire*, February 1996, Vol 2, issue 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Acts* 2: 13. The story is being read by TACF inductively, namely the tracing back of present experience into the past in order to validate contemporary praxis. However, ‘drunk’ is an insult to the apostles, not a prescription for behaviour. Furthermore, the story is almost certainly (in part) a theological ‘construction’ designed to signify the universal nature of the Spirit of Christ now available, reversing the story of the Tower of Babel in *Genesis* 11. Contrary to popular belief, *Acts* 2 does not present a paradigm for neo-Pentecostal behaviour.

<sup>22</sup> C.f. Dr. Roy Clements, ‘What Should we make of the Toronto Blessing?’, Spring Harvest, Word Alive, 1995. Cassette Tape no. 55, ICC, W. Sussex. Clements notes, as one might expect from an ultra-conservative evangelical critic, that many aspects of the New Age are mimicked by the TB. He points to the touching and anointing for blessing, and the obsession with excitement, fulfilment and ‘drunkenness with God.’

can be disposed and dispensed.<sup>23</sup>

The metaphors of fire are generally used to describe the purging and refining that charismatic movements bring, as well as the passion and excitement that revival ensures. 'Fire' is also, like water, somehow uncontrollable at first: and it is going to 'increase' in such a way that few can stand. TACF sees itself as a movement that comprehends that power, can receive it, control it (to an extent) and then direct it. Yet there is an irony for individuals who wish to access this power: they must renounce their self-control to gain power. Many of those who report being overcome by being 'slain in the Spirit' are prepared for this ritual by a careful 'grammar of possibility' being in place, and the provision of carpets and people that catch those who fall; those who succumb then often go on to describe an associated 'burning' sensation.<sup>24</sup> The intimacy (with God) is located in the rhetoric of worship, and is sometimes pseudo-erotic. Believers are to know Christ's nearness, and even to experience the 'kisses of his mouth.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The appellation of 'bartender' applied to Clarke is more usually used of Rodney Howard-Browne, a revivalist also linked to TACF. Yet we should note that Christian orthodoxy describes the Holy Spirit as a person, not a thing, that may in turn use an agent or person: the TB/TACF movement seems to have reversed this. It is the privilege of the Holy Spirit to dispense with and dispose through agents, not the task of the agent to dispense and dispose the Spirit.

<sup>24</sup> See G. Chevreau, *Catch the Fire*, London, Marshall/Collins, 1994, p.33.

<sup>25</sup> This might sound a bit tendentious, but I am not alone amongst sociologists of religion in articulating ideas like this. Max Weber suggested that Gnosticism within Christianity compensated for the lack of orgiastic indulgence that had once been prevalent amongst converts. He believed certain kinds of religion could provide 'sublimated masturbatory surrogates' for believers. Similarly, Rollo May has argued that certain contemporary religions amount to a search for Eros and the erotic, which the 'rational religion' of post-enlightenment lost. I should make it clear that I am not arguing against appropriate inculcation of Eros in worship: Christian scriptural, spiritual and mystical traditions have used erotic metaphors and imagery in the past to analogise

Thus, the task of the individual and church, which is simultaneously soaked with water, and on fire(!), as well as uncontrollably drunk, is to strive for greater intimacy, which will lead to the acquisition of power: 'seeking, even cultivating an overwhelming hunger and desperation for intimacy with the Lord ... enjoyment of the Lord ... through intimate worship ... embrace(ing) the cross ... walking in continual, childlike dependence.'<sup>26</sup> Individuals, as part of the celebrating community, are being asked to acknowledge their hunger and desperation for God, and then to become hot, wet, powerless and passionate, as a prerequisite to knowing power.<sup>27</sup> Thus, what is on offer is reified (spiritual) power in the form of personal religious experience. This could simply be charismata, but it might also be a form of primal ritual therapy, that deals with unresolved stress or profound cathartic crises.<sup>28</sup> In exchange for questing, obedience and soaring to new heights of worship, the pilgrims perceive that they gain 'power from on high' in particular forms, which, generally, address the need for refreshment, excitement, greater power, identity and security.<sup>29</sup> Fire and rain are falling from heaven: those who are

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religious experience. The issue here is clustered around concepts of control, space and freedom. See Paul Avis, *Eros and the Sacred*, London, SPCK, 1989, and *Sexuality and Spirituality in Perspective*, M. Percy (Ed), London, DLT, 1997.

<sup>26</sup> See TACF homepages on 'Partners in Harvest' and 'Prophecy': <http://www.tacf.org/etc/html>.

<sup>27</sup> See my forthcoming essay 'Sweet Rapture: Sublimated Eroticism in Contemporary Charismatic Worship' *The Body and Theology: Gender, Text and Ideology*, edited by Jan Jobling, Leominster, Gracewing/Fowler-Wright, 1997. There is some discussion of the claim made by some revivalist leaders that worship is 'making love to God,' and the claim by Paul Cain (Vineyard) that 'Jesus is turned on by our desire for him' and then rewards that with power, especially prophetic revelation.

<sup>28</sup> Clements, *Ibid.*, side 2.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of reification in revivalism, see my *Words, Wonders and Power*, 1996, pp. 49ff.

intimate (or drunk) with God can catch it for themselves, personally. Indeed, TB/TACF suggests that they can learn to ‘tap’ it when they like: revival is no longer a surprise, but is now a ready and available resource, constantly accessible.<sup>30</sup> Once this is grasped, they can spread the fire themselves if they wish, becoming God’s instrument of empowerment for others. For this reason, TACF events are often geared to attract church leaders.

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<sup>30</sup> Inevitably, one should see this as the legacy of Finney, whose *Lectures on Revivals of Religions* (1835) provided Free Churches with a handbook on how to organize a revival. Finney’s *Principles of Revival* (1836, etc) provide a marvellous example of religious exchange theory, especially his writing on conversion as both obligation and gift (Ed. L.G. Gifford Parkhurst, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Bethany House Publishers, 1987)

## B. THE TORONTO BLESSING OBSERVED

THE TACF is located less than a mile from the main international airport at Toronto. It is a large conference centre, nestling amongst hotels, restaurants, industrial estates and criss-crossing freeways; the area is completely non-residential, and all TACF members must have access to a car. The building is modern and purpose-built as a trade centre: although not aesthetically attractive, it is functional, well-lit, spacious and open. It has an impressive reception area, a small restaurant, seminar rooms, offices and a main auditorium that could seat over 5000.<sup>31</sup> There is also a bookshop on site that carries a large stock of charismatic literature: Benny Hinn, Leonard Ravenhill, John Wimber and Bill Surbritzky seem to be the most popular authors there, after TACF's own staff. You can also purchase tee-shirts, videos, CD's, audio-tapes and other products that are synonymous with charismatic culture, such as car bumper stickers, cards, pens and the like. The church advertises weekly social activities such as 'Spirit-led aerobics,' a Christian rambling club, crèches, bowling and 'work with the poor.' The atmosphere is pleasing and friendly – the church is obviously used to visitors. Adjacent to the church is a sizeable two storey office block that houses more offices for pastors, and is the main administrative site.<sup>32</sup> TACF also has its own School of Ministry, a building nearby the main church. Employees of TACF, including volunteers from the School of Ministry, exceed 80 persons. Income in 1995 exceeded \$7 million (Canadian), which is about 3.5 million pounds sterling. Much of this income comes

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<sup>31</sup> The original building for the Toronto Airport Vineyard was much smaller, but the advent of the blessing in January 1994 forced the leadership to seek larger premises. The present building is 71,000 square feet, and is owned by TACF, as are their other buildings. (Source: Ian Ross, TACF).

<sup>32</sup> There is also a Seventh Day Adventist Church opposite TACF, and a certain amount of sharing of buildings takes place, especially during busy conferences.

from visitors, although TACF points out that the budget would not be so large if it were not for the volume of pilgrims.

The weekly pattern of religious meetings is carefully regulated. There are nightly renewal meetings (except Monday) which attract many visitors. These begin at 7 p.m. or 7.30 p.m. and can run until midnight, although many have left by 10.30 p.m. There are daily workshops for pastors which run each weekday morning, covering the same themes week by week. Monday – pastoring renewal; Tuesday – the biblical basis; Wednesday – the historical basis; Thursday – worship; Friday – prayer. In the afternoons there is intercessory prayer for revival. The form of these meetings – in a more intimate, but nonetheless large seminar room – is testimony, encouragement, prayer and praise. They generally last about two hours, and seemed to me to be less controlled than other meetings: anyone who felt led to speak, pray, exhort or prophesy could do so. In addition to these meetings there is Sunday morning worship and various extra workshops and conferences running throughout the year. In a normal week in July, between 750-1000 people attended each weekday, spread across the various events.

On Sunday morning, the church meets for its regular worship. The pattern for a Sunday service can include a Eucharist or celebration of Holy Communion. The ‘elements’ are crackers and grape juice, and following some music and singing, a narrative based on the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper and Paul’s words recorded in 1 Corinthians 12 is read, with music softly playing in the background. Worshippers do not go up to receive the elements from a central altar or minister: they can go to one of several tables that are already placed around the building, and collect the juice and crackers that they need for their friends or family. On the Sunday that I was there, the juice was served in individual plastic cups, and these were arranged on each table in the pattern of a cross. In common with Free or Low Evangelical churches, even those that are charismatic, there are no sacraments as such. Babies

or children are 'dedicated' to God, and Baptism is reserved as a confessional rite of initiation.<sup>33</sup> John Arnott and TACF staff estimate that there are about 1200 members in their church, gathered from all over Toronto. In addition to the main TACF, there are six satellite meetings or church-plants, that have perhaps an additional 800 members. TACF also has 27 small groups meeting weekly in Toronto suburbs, so some TACF members I spoke to had a sense of belonging to a local Christian group, as well as the main church. The children's work includes a Sunday School, and a more radical-experimental Children's Church for 4-12 year olds, that meets each Friday from 7.30 p.m.

The first meeting I attended was an ordinary evening 'renewal meeting.' Seating is in a near semicircular arrangement in what TACF call 'the Sanctuary.' There were about 1000 chairs set out, and the meeting was filled to half that capacity, at about 500 people. Worship, teaching and ministry is led from a stage at the front. Cameras operating in the auditorium record meetings (there is a bank of 40 video recorders): they also capture the worship, focus on leaders and project the (computerized) words of songs on to two large screens, measuring eight foot square, which hang from the ceiling. At the back of the church there are further TV links with the stage, and there is also a large area that is segregated into track lanes. This is where worshippers can stand later, in their lanes, for ministry to take place. A minister stands in front of the worshipper, and a 'catcher' at the back (there were appeals for 'volunteer catchers' during the notices). When or if a worshipper falls to the ground – 'slain in the Spirit' – they are caught, and the minister moves on to the next worshipper on their track. There were seven tracks in all, measuring eight feet across and eighty feet long. I estimate that two-thirds of those attending on my first night queued up for this ministry – TACF calls this ministry 'carpet time.'

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33 TACF do not have a baptistry. However, there are plans to build one, along with a 24 hour prayer chamber. If a baptistry were built, TACF would assent to, but not encourage the practice of 're-baptism.'

Apart from Bibles, there are no books to hold, so hands and bodies are free for worship. Many seem to do their own thing in worship, and there is no pressure to conform. Unsurprisingly, the worship therefore appears to be quite individualistic at times. Before the meeting began, a few people were already shaking or being ministered to. There were also a significant number of women with 'twirling sticks' or 'flags' who were practising dancing, although there was no obvious choreography. I estimate that 90% of those attending were white, middle-class; the rest were either black or Asian. Most were young-middle-aged, although there were some young people, and a not insignificant number of small children who mostly stayed with parents or played at the back of the auditorium.<sup>34</sup> One-third of those attending indicated that this was their first time at TACF; the atmosphere seemed expectant and relaxed. When the worship began, it was instantly joyful and potent: swaying, clapping, dancing, with loud bass-dominated music. Songs covered themes such as revival, 'raining' and 'reigning,' intimacy with God ('Jesus wants a passionate bride,' or 'to be a disciple is to be a love-slave of Jesus'),<sup>35</sup> and the fire and heat of revival.<sup>36</sup> The whole event was professionally managed,

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<sup>34</sup> Margaret Poloma's own figures in *By Their Fruits* confirm my observations. The average age of attenders is 45; 71% are married. Nearly half those who attend are church leaders or pastors. Over half who attend are from America, a quarter are from Canada, and the rest are from the rest of the world (11% UK). Subscribing denominations are varied, but most will come from independent or non-denominational churches: 11% are Episcopalian. Roman Catholics, even from Quebec, seem to be almost invisible. The average profile of an attender is an American, with some college education, belonging to a non-denominational charismatic church.

<sup>35</sup> The first phrase was an interjection from Carol Arnott, introducing a song; the second a description of discipleship by Valerie Gillam, New Frontiers/TACF staff member.

<sup>36</sup> The song 'Sweet Wind,' a recent addition to the TACF repertoire, describes the sensations of gentle rain falling on the face, the fire of the Spirit and the wind of revival. The believer is to be touched by each of

without being too slick. At one point in the evening, a cameraman focused on a young girl, no older than four, who was holding her father's hand and sweetly pointing to the sky: a powerful image. Within moments the usual 'soft rock' melodies that comprise most of the worship songs were replaced by one worship leader, who had broken in to a beautiful extemporaneous violin solo that lasted two minutes. This accompanied the image on screen. From that, we moved in to soft piano music and words of 'prophetic encouragement.' This form of worship lasted uninterrupted for an hour, during which we sang no more than seven songs, although they were repeated frequently, presumably to emphasize their message and reinforce the 'atmosphere' of spiritual intimacy.

After the main worship, there were notices and testimonies. The notices largely directed to newcomers, stressed that ministry should only be accepted from the TACF staff or congregation. Then John Arnott asked for a show of hands to see which nations were represented: the emphasis on nations had a special edge that night, as it had recently been Canada Day and was about to be Independence Day in the USA. The testimonies were taken from a selection of people who had been present at earlier meetings. They had an almost ritual feel to them. Most of those who spoke were rather incoherent, since they were partially groaning, jerking, genuflecting (involuntarily) or twitching as they spoke: John Arnott explained that this was due to 'the intense power' on the speakers, causing them to buckle, struggle or stutter. Most testimonies were about the transformation of dryness or tiredness, but there were often more unusual ones. For example, one testimony, from a thirteen year old girl from New York State, expressed the belief that 'if she kept her eyes on God, he would pass on the anointing to her children' – when she eventually had them. There then followed a short reflection with older members of the group about being 'pregnant with God': one woman near me said her recent experience of God had been pseudo-psychic,

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these.

although this was not a term she used.<sup>37</sup> Many of the testimonies given expressed the view that ‘this revival was here to stay’ and that it was ‘different.’ During these testimonies, there was often background noise of groanings, animal noises, occasional screams or ejaculatory ecstatic utterances.

A talk by John Arnott then followed. His theme was ‘intimacy with God,’ and as with most TACF sermons I observed, a selection of scripture passages was used rather than focusing on one in particular. Teaching is essentially thematic, with plenty of analogy and illustration combined with contemporary reflection. Much of Arnott’s message centred on how God’s power was received through and in love, and how emotionalism and experientialism, often mistrusted by the church, were nonetheless agents for profound transformation. There was an appeal to accept the message now, and not to procrastinate: there was an urgency about the ‘last days’ in which we were living.<sup>38</sup> Arnott then explained why there was so much emphasis on continuously receiving the Blessing at these meetings, likening the process to being soaked or ‘marinated’ in God’s Spirit. The analogy of marination in this context is especially illuminating. It encourages passivity in the worshipper, and implies that without this sort of soaking the believer is somehow not as imbued with the presence of God as he or she might be. Furthermore, marinating is not just a seasoning process – it is also a softening one in which the tough becomes tenderized. Arnott described ‘carpet time’ as God’s marination of believers, suggesting that if one was ‘slain in the Spirit’ it was better to rest in this rather than resist it.<sup>39</sup> This rhetoric is to an extent assisted by the worship songs that stress concepts such as ‘softness,’ ‘the gentle touch’ of God and the

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<sup>37</sup> i.e., a phantom pregnancy, in which some of the sensations of pregnancy are experienced.

<sup>38</sup> A show of hands in a subsequent meeting revealed that about half those attending thought these were ‘the last days’ before the Parousia.

<sup>39</sup> For further discussion see Ed Piorek, ‘Marinated in God’ in *Spread the Fire*, vol. 2., issue 3, June 1996.

desirability of acquiescence in the believer.<sup>40</sup> The song ‘Eternity’ perhaps captures this best, sung many times over to a soft melody:

I will be yours, you will be mine.  
Together in eternity  
Our hearts of love will be entwined.  
Together in eternity,  
Forever in eternity.  
No more tears of pain in our eyes;  
No more fear or shame.  
For we will be with you,  
Yes, we will be with you,  
We will worship,  
We will worship you forever.<sup>41</sup>

Following his message, Arnott led an evangelistic call, appealing for those who were either not Christians or for others who wished to ‘recommit’ themselves to come forward.<sup>42</sup> So far as I could tell, there were no non-Christians in the building, but there was a modest response to the call to rededicate lives to Jesus – eight went forward and were counselled. Following this, Arnott then announced the ‘carpet time’ or ‘soaking’ ministry, which was to begin at the back of the auditorium. About two-thirds of the gathering responded to this call, and they lined up in rows along the tracks measured out. Ministers worked their way along the rows, and the ‘catchers’ did their job as people fell. It was difficult to say precisely what people were receiving at this point. Some

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<sup>40</sup> See *Catch the Fire Again: Songbook Volumes 1 & 2 (TACF)*, Brampton, Ontario, Rejoice Publishing, 1996, and *Isn't He/Eternity: Intimate Songs of Praise and Worship*, Anaheim, Calif., Vineyard Publishing, 1995.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Eternity’ by Brain Doerksen, 1994, Vineyard/Mercy Publishing.

<sup>42</sup> John Arnott and all TACF pastors I heard give evangelistic talks, adhered to a standard doctrine of penal substitution or substitutionary atonement. In contrast, John Wimber’s Vineyard churches tend to stress the Pentecostal emphasis on the cross, namely that it brings victory over Satan and healing for believers.

movements, noises and behaviour suggested what many revivalists would regard as deliverance. For others, there was clearly some cathartic relief. However, people mostly seemed happy to be prayed for, fall over, and then 'rest in the Spirit': there was some ('holy') laughter, but just as many tears and groanings, and many were simply silent. The meeting was mostly finished by 11.30 p.m., and the other renewal meetings largely followed this pattern in the week I was there. Themes for the evening talks were varied, but they tended to connect with the issues that were outlined in the most recent issue of *Spread the Fire*.<sup>43</sup>

The teaching at the workshops in the morning was not preceded by worship: about 100-150 people attended on average. The workshop is a straight and 'chatty' two hour 'pep' talk from a TACF pastor on a subject related to renewal. All workshop material relates to revival or renewal: there is no TACF line on any issue of global significance such as racism, sexism, poverty or war and violence. Indeed, for all the discussion of nations, including TACF's strong interest in Israel,<sup>44</sup> there was no mention of 'local' issues such as Quebec and the threat of secession, or any other Canadian social or political issues. Generally, the talks at workshops followed a pattern familiar to revivalist gatherings. The leader spoke in a way that sounded dialogical; but in fact, most of the questions were actually rhetorical. There was a subtle blend of wit, wisdom, biblical insight and reflection, applied to a theme, although the overall standard of preaching was rather poor.

The first workshop I observed was led by Jeremy Sinnott,

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<sup>43</sup> Thus, we had talks on or references to 'prayer that gets results,' 'possessing the gates of the enemy,' 'prophet sharing,' 'praying God's heart,' 'perseverance,' etc. There is continual reference to 'the nations,' and strong interest in the 'end times' and the conversion of Israel or Messianic/Jewish Christians.

<sup>44</sup> Although again, there is no knowledge or discernment shown about Zionism, the present state of Israeli politics in relation to Palestine, and the like. The interest in Israel largely lies in the expectation of its conversion, and the fact that God 'has not forgotten it.'

worship leader at TACF. Sinnott explicitly affirmed the structure of TACF worship as ‘moving from celebration to intimacy’ – it was the deliberate strategy of those who led the praise. In some ways, this must account for the behavioural and experiential individualism that is present in TACF meetings. As I reflected on this, it seemed obvious that if the desideratum of worship is a gradual convergence from communal celebration to individual intimacy with God, then individualistic phenomena will undoubtedly surface in meetings. Sinnott expressed the TACF line perfectly: ‘worship is a personal and intimate meeting with God.’<sup>45</sup> Here the activity of revivalist worship seems to have largely replaced sacraments (it has become one), such as bread, wine, confession, creeds and other traditions of praise.<sup>46</sup> Yet this new meeting with God takes place in a community that is profoundly dislocated: there are no obvious obligations to neighbours or the immediate locality,<sup>47</sup> nothing ‘ordinary’ is made extraordinary. Personal renewal dominates the horizons of possibility.

In spite of my theological reservations, Sinnott’s message, like most of the others I heard, was humorous and well delivered. The typical jokes or quips were all centred around the re-ordering of power relations: ‘I didn’t learn that at seminary,’ was often paired with a remark such as ‘I didn’t think God ran the Church – I thought that was our job,’ and the like.<sup>48</sup> The function of these

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<sup>45</sup> J. Sinnott, ‘Worship,’ 04/07/96: unpublished paper.

<sup>46</sup> For a different description of worship, see D. Hardy & D. Ford, *Jubilate*, London, DLT, 1984, pp.37ff, etc.

<sup>47</sup> My Anglican instincts got the better of me when I was at TACF. Seeing the church surrounded by many industrial units and different companies, I enquired of several if they had connections with the church, say in the form of ‘industrial chaplaincy.’ They did not, and TACF staff were happy to confirm their non-involvement. The local hotels and restaurants have financial or discount arrangements with TACF – the church benefits local businesses, some of whom reward TACF – but that was the extent of their involvement.

<sup>48</sup> Or, ‘I was always taught that I was God’s hands, feet and eyes, until God

ironic remarks is to assert that God does not always work through people, but sometimes goes direct to the person he wants to touch. In other words, TACF teaching is that you can have direct access to God without going through a 'middle man' or an agent such as a sacrament. Thus, the prayer or invocation used prior to ministry – 'Come, Holy Spirit' – is a prayer for the importing of direct divine activity. As we shall see later, the irony of this approach is that it concentrates enormous power in the hands of revivalist leaders, who invariably become primary agents of God's power, or power brokers.

The motto of TACF is 'That we may walk in God's love and give it away.' Sinnott and other TACF leaders largely translate this 'walking' as 'receiving the revivalist experience' (which is 'love') and then passing it on. How does this work out in practice? The following example may help. In the workshop I observed on worship, Sinnott teased his congregation with a rhetorical question: 'How much grace do you want? I want all I can get, and just a little more.' This form of 'commodification' of God's activity takes an attribute like grace and turns it into a quantifiable resource. Clearly, the pragmatism of revivalist churches such as TACF orientates them towards treating God, as we have already noted, like a parcel of power. An attribute like grace becomes something that can be hoarded and stored by an individual, then given away.<sup>49</sup> This is an important observation, since it may account for why some pilgrims to Toronto describe themselves as 'hungry,' 'desperate' or even 'greedy' for God, and therefore why TACF is so strategic in the revivalist world: it has become a primary place of feeding and refreshing, where pastors who serve can be served instead, 'refuel,' and then return to work. These sentiments are explicitly expressed in TACF literature describing their 'Rest and Renewal Programme' for pastors, which assumes a central role

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reminded me that he had his own, and encouraged me to just get out of the way.'

<sup>49</sup> In other words, not something that is worked at and struggled for through piety, abstinence or devotion.

for the TB working through the church.

The workshops ended rather like the other meetings. An invocation of the Holy Spirit's power, which was then followed by 'pseudo-pneumasomatic' or pneumasomatic behaviour. On one occasion, I observed a group of Danish believers, seven in all, alternately buckling their knees, clutching stomachs, genuflecting and groaning. They gathered in a circle and then seemed to be bowing to each other. I saw others caress and stroke friends or partners in ways that would be normally considered inappropriate in church, although I must add that TACF staff are very cautious about inappropriate touching and actually teach all manner of safeguards. Others still seemed to bounce, jump, fall or writhe – there was always plenty going on. The first intercessory prayer meeting I attended included one incident that appeared to be a type of deliverance, with many people sighing, shaking and falling. Yet I should stress, as TACF does, that many who attend do not experience any of these things; Jeremy Sinnott said, somewhat regretfully, that nothing like this had ever happened to him – and sometimes he was envious.

The intercessory prayer meetings that ran each afternoon, but not Sundays, were in many ways the most intense and passionate events. Different approved staff lead them, and they can easily last beyond two hours. One session I attended was particularly noteworthy for exhibiting many prominent TACF themes. Many of the visitors gave 'words' for or about the church: bride, mighty rivers, rain, Jesus as a lion, the arms of the Father, the desire of the Spirit, and the end times.<sup>50</sup> Each word was frequently greeted by deep groans, sighs, a little joyful weeping, and occasional shouts of ecstasy. Some people sitting in their seats seemed to be collapsing under a weight above them. Two young women squatted over their seats, moved up and down over them rhythmically, groaning deeply all the time, and breathing fast, and

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<sup>50</sup> The image of the Lion (of Judah) to describe Jesus was frequently used, and is a code for the dangerous and unpredictable strength of the TB.

then appeared to ‘ride’ them, with their backs arched and their heads up, in a manner that I can only describe as sexual. None of this distracted those attending: they were focused on the words being given and their own sensation of God’s presence. The underlying theme of this particular afternoon could be described as intimate patriarchy. There was constant talk of love and submission. One man came forward to give a word, but suddenly appeared to be ‘struck dumb’ for over 15 minutes. When he did finally speak, he said that God had told him to speak right at the end of the meeting, but because he had been afraid of missing his opportunity, he had come forward early. His revelation was that, although he had disobeyed God, ‘instead of Daddy (i.e. God) smacking me, he filled me with joy, so I could not speak.’ God, the loving Father who disciplines lovingly, is a feature of TACF worship, and supports the notion of God as the intimate, but dominating parent.<sup>51</sup>

Having observed many other renewal and revival meetings within the Christian tradition, I was naturally curious as to what made the TB different from other revivals that had gone before it. The TACF answer to this is that it is just ‘an increase’ of God’s power towards the last days – it is ‘end time ministry.’ Hence, and unusually for revivalist gatherings, there was a nightly altar call, with quite a bit of stress placed on the reality of hell for those who were unconverted.<sup>52</sup> As a former Vineyard, TACF seems even more relaxed than its parent church. Also, unlike the Vineyards, TACF and the TB do not revolve around John Arnott, who has a fairly low

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<sup>51</sup> For example, Bill Doerksen’s song, ‘Light the Fire Again’ says: ‘You know my heart, my deeds...I need your discipline, I’m calling out, light the fire again....’ The fathering metaphors featured prominently, particularly when describing ideal forms of leadership in relation to God.

<sup>52</sup> The strict evangelicalism of TACF leads them to believe the homosexuals who are unrepentant will go to hell. In TACF thinking, they need healing, converting, and possibly deliverance: Ian Ross, TACF – interview.

profile.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the Vineyard, TACF also sees itself as primarily a prophetic body, although it has few people it would identify as prophets: they see the TB movement as prophetically gifting. TACF is also capable of novel innovation. There really is no escaping the metaphors of water and soaking, and on one evening, the congregation were all encouraged to queue up and pass through a 'spiritual car wash': individuals walked through a team of ministers who lined up in a 'guard of honour' style, their hands hovering over all who passed through. Pilgrims were 'sprayed and brushed' with the anointing power of God. The passageway became blocked by falling bodies several times, and catchers cleared away those who had fallen, whilst the band played on.

The key differences appear to lie in the phenomenology and the religious rhetoric. On one evening when Carol Arnott spoke, she was barely able to deliver her message at times, because she was 'doubled-up under the Spirit's anointing': she would stop mid-sentence, groan and clutch her stomach, sometimes stretching out her hands as she bent down, as though oppressed by some weight. The congregation responded to these manifestations in a positive way, clearly regarding them as a sign that God's hand was on Carol: they groaned with her.<sup>54</sup> When Carol delivered 'prophetic revelation,' this sort of manifestation tended to be at its peak. For example, Carol once described a vision she had been given whilst in Europe. Jesus had 'flown' her over countries like Holland, where she had seen windmills on fire for God, a sign that revival was coming, and that the TACF had, in some sense, a mastery of this outpouring. As she spoke, some in the congregation spread their

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<sup>53</sup> Arnott cannot match Wimber for rhetorical skills, or his ability as a raconteur. But Vineyard identity has become synonymous with Wimber, whereas the TB is 'a nameless, homeless move of God' (Paul Cain). Part of the reason for the success of the TB in Britain is probably to do with its non-attachment to a personality cult.

<sup>54</sup> John Arnott expresses it like this: 'The Holy Spirit is a powerful person. So when the Spirit touches you, its a wonder that you live – so falling down or feeling crushed is nothing!'

arms like wings.

There are other theological distinctives peculiar to TACF. Deliverance ministry is very much scaled-down for a church in the revivalist tradition, setting TACF apart from its original Vineyard roots. TACF believes (presently) that specific prayer ministry for deliverance is unnecessary, simply because of the power of the current – the TB – in which they move. It graciously but insistently sweeps everything before it. The analogy used to describe this is the image of a ‘hedgehog,’<sup>55</sup> a large mechanical device that is sometimes used to loosen mud, rocks, silt and blockages from river beds, allowing those materials to be carried away downstream. TACF teaches that the force of the TB, and the mighty flow of the Spirit, is all that is necessary to free people from blockages that may have a demonic origin. One workshop I attended suggested that demonic influences could simply be ‘loved’ out, or simply squeezed out by the presence of the Holy Spirit: in all my time at TACF, Satan, evil spirits or demons were hardly mentioned.<sup>56</sup> In some ways, I suspect that the lack of emphasis on demons and Satan is yet another example of ‘conflict’ being minimized in TACF, so that all believers need to do is turn to God and ‘let go’: there is little sense of struggle with anything, other than one’s inhibitions. Most people who have been ‘blessed’ by the TB describe it as a form of ‘deep emotional healing’ rather than deliverance. In a sense, the appeal of TACF may partly lie in its subtle theological distinctiveness here. It is independent of the Vineyard Fellowship network now, and certainly has been quick to shed the dualism that is more easily located in the teaching of John Wimber.<sup>57</sup> TACF is also quite tactile compared to the Vineyard:

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<sup>55</sup> Often used in road building to break up ground or old roads.

<sup>56</sup> According to some evangelical critics, this is just a pragmatic move. In the early 1990’s, Arnott was more inclined to deliverance than Wimber ever was. The TACF bookshop had many books on inner healing, but few on deliverance ministry. Jack Sanford is the most cited authority on healing in TACF sermons.

<sup>57</sup> For further discussion, see my *Words, Wonders and Power*, 1996,

appropriate touching and holding is encouraged, although it is very carefully ordered. TACF seems to be a more organized, more avowedly therapeutic community than other churches in revivalism.<sup>58</sup> (Yet illnesses like depression are still descriptively over-simplified, and then set against the equally simple cures on offer: ‘hope,’ ‘the nearness of God,’ or prayer.)<sup>59</sup> Also, the very fact of TACF’s independence may, ironically, enhance its reputation: it stands as a sign that any church can be at the sharp end of revivalism, without necessarily belonging to a network of affiliated churches.

The rhetoric centres on concepts of ‘love’ and ‘power,’ and there is a clear relationship between the rhetoric and the phenomenology of TACF/TB meetings. One talk by Carol Arnott suggested the following. First, that the purpose of intimacy with Jesus was marriage – this was the main message.<sup>60</sup> Carol’s descriptions of intimacy with Jesus are worth noting: they are

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pp.90-94.

<sup>58</sup> Authorised lay ministers wear pink badges: only they are allowed to lead prayer ministry at TACF. In turn, these ministers are supervised by leaders who wear ‘blue spot’ badges: these people may pray with people of the opposite sex, and are permitted to decide on the more difficult prayer or ministry cases. For a discussion of Christian therapeutic communities in North America, see Meredith McGuire, *Ritual Healing in Suburban America*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1988.

<sup>59</sup> On two occasions, ‘victims of incest’ were asked to stand, and then made to join in a prayer of forgiveness for their fathers. No counselling was given, and any anger they might have felt was seen as a block to their own healing: ‘Give your Dad a gift he doesn’t deserve – forgive him and let God touch him.’

<sup>60</sup> Perceptively, she noted that the Bible begins and ends with a marriage: Adam and Eve in *Genesis*, through to the marriage feast of the lamb described in *Revelation*. Strictly speaking however, this is incorrect – there is no description of the marriage of Adam and Eve, and it would be more appropriate to say that the Bible begins and ends with different accounts of creation or re-creation.

nearly all articulated through ‘visions’ she has had. One was of her head on Jesus’ lap, another of him ‘putting her to bed’ and caring for her when she was particularly stressed. She described the story of Cinderella as ‘the Gospel story’ – ‘we are all looking for a Prince Charming who will save us and protect us.’ Second, Jesus is looking for a ‘passionate and willing bride’: another vision of Carol’s was Jesus at his own marriage feast, asking Carol (one of the many brides present) for the first dance.<sup>61</sup> Other TACF staff used these images in their teaching. What is noteworthy about them is that they are used in an individualistic way. The bride is an individual apart from Christ – Christ is consistently presented as wanting to ‘come’ to his body (the church): in TACF thinking he is not one with it yet, although luring him with praise and devotion appears to bring him closer. Thus, Jesus is the groom who is not yet one with the bride. Theologically speaking, it should be pointed out that Carol Arnott, or any other individual for that matter, is not Jesus’ bride: the analogy borrowed from the range of New and Old Testament sources is about the whole church. Furthermore, the analogies were probably not intended to be read as though they would be literally fulfilled, therefore constructing present and future religious experience. The images are intended to suggest, in linguistic terms, what union with God might be like, not be the starting point for fantasy role-play.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Intimacy with Jesus,’ 05/07/96. Carol also described the other brides as the outcasts, the poor and those shamed by society, who the church had neglected. Personally, I found this to be quite a moving image. Normally, most of her points were greeted by gentle ripples of applause, but curiously this one was not.

<sup>62</sup> In another of Carol Arnott’s presentations, I was rather intrigued by her rendering of the story of the wise and foolish virgins from *Matthew* 25. Usually, the story is interpreted along eschatological lines, stressing the need for readiness in the event of the Parousia. However, with accompanying deep groans and sighs, and the focus shifting to the expectation of the virgins, the story starts to take on the hint of a theme of sexual union. The wise virgins keep their reserves of oil, not because the bridegroom might be late, but in case they are called upon to be up

Third, whilst images of intimacy and marriage signifying unity with God clearly do have some scriptural warrant, the underlying definitions of love in TACF – present only in analogical form – are disturbing. ‘Ideal’ love is described in over-romantic, even immature terms.<sup>63</sup> Both John and Carol Arnott, Jeremy Sinnott and others on the TACF staff frequently refer to ‘teenager in love’ scenarios to describe the ideal form of relationship with God. Thus, ‘wearing a stupid grin,’ ‘not being able to think about anything else,’ ‘unable to speak properly,’ ‘ecstatic feelings or elation,’ ‘starry or sparkling eyes,’ ‘laughter’ or ‘a rosy glow’ are all normal. Jesus, we are told, is the greatest lover you will ever have. The TB is (allegedly) just recovering for the church and individuals the sense of what it is like to be ‘in love for the first time.’<sup>64</sup> Without being too critical here, the shortcomings of these analogies are obvious. Valued behaviour is no longer ‘adult,’ but instead the sort of pre-critical teenage obsessionism that is often mistaken for love.<sup>65</sup> Distance from ‘reality’ is justified on the basis that being in love ‘like this’ makes you oblivious to your environment, which of course, it often does. Furthermore, an additional focus on necessary ‘childlike’<sup>66</sup> dependence adds to the process that obviates a concept like ‘maturity.’<sup>67</sup> In short, the

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all night with the bridegroom, and presumably with the lights burning as well.

<sup>63</sup> For a fuller discussion of the romantic genre in charismatic ideology, see J. Hopewell, *Congregation*, London, SCM, 1987.

<sup>64</sup> When rhetoric like this occurs, some in the congregation giggle in a ‘soppy’ kind of way; others are clearly touched differently, and shake excitedly.

<sup>65</sup> Of course, I am not saying that teenagers don’t love, or can’t. They can love with great maturity, but very often that is done in long-standing relationships such as with parents or siblings. A mature, sexual love with a partner however, for a young person, especially if it is the first relationship of its kind, would be unusual.

<sup>66</sup> See J. Arnott, ‘Receiving as a Child,’ *Spread the Fire*, Vol. 1, issue 6, December 1995.

<sup>67</sup> It also places passion above love, in my view. There seems to be no

‘system of grammar’ (worship, analogy and testimony) operating here creates an ideology of romanticism, in which Jesus sweeps you off your feet and carries you away to new heights of passion and power. The Godhead is either an indulgent father,<sup>68</sup> or, the perfect lover anyone would willingly submit to.

Last, the path of intimacy in the TACF is the path to empowerment. Only when the worshipper is ‘soaked,’ ‘marinated’ and besotted with Jesus to the exclusion of all else, can God visit with his power. The TB is the provision of both. Thus, passion leads to power, since intimacy leads to marriage, which in turn leads to reigning with Jesus. At many of the meetings I observed, people spoke about Jesus being ‘put first in everything’ in future, or of believers needing to ‘do business with God.’ The configuration of marriage or of contractual relations here, of course, is not a union of equals: the bride is subservient to the demands of the husband, who is the head, as is the ‘customer’ who needs to get sorted out – their life repaired, healed or made whole. Naturally, there are social and ecclesial implications for this in the governance of family life and the TACF community.<sup>69</sup> For example,

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scope for a deeply loving relationship in which passion knows its place, and can sometimes lead, but does not dominate all other senses.

<sup>68</sup> Arnott would prefer to describe the Toronto Blessing as the ‘Father’s Blessing’ (*Spread the Fire*, Vol. 1, no.6., p.33). References to God as the ideal father who blesses his children with gifts were fairly frequent. However, we were warned not to get absorbed with the ‘wrapping’ around the gifts, by which Arnott means the outward manifestations. However, I have yet to meet a child who is absorbed by the wrapping paper and not the gift inside it. Equally, it can hardly be surprising if people do become absorbed by what might be the ‘outward’ manifestation of an inward gift – there is nothing else, immediately at least, to see. Worshipers were also often offered healing for any poor fathering they may have received, which, it was suggested, was being projected on to God and ‘blocking’ their capacity to receive, be renewed and restored.

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of the sociality of love, see Niklas Luhmann, *Love as Passion: The Codification of Intimacy*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1986,

there were several talks on experiencing God as the ideal father, which it was said, in turn, would help personal, family and ecclesial relationships: no one suggested that ‘fatherhood’ was a metaphor. Consequently, leaders often assume the persona of the ideal type, becoming relational or commodity brokers, with the effect of themselves simply being different forms of reified power.

Whilst it is not possible to record all that has been observed at TACF, it does seem that the TB is distinguishable from other forms of revivalism (at present) by its distinctive and relentless appeal to specified concepts of love and power, and its rejection of God-Satanic dualisms. There is, I think, a clear relationship between the rhetoric deployed and the subsequent phenomenology. Believers sing about the power and intimacy of God, hear testimonies of it, listen to it preached, and then finally get to experience it for themselves. In effect, they reap what they sow.<sup>70</sup> Believers who attend TACF clearly imagine that ‘the power of (dead or dry) religion’ is being broken, and that they are being given direct access to the awesome power of God. The screaming, shaking, and almost banshee wailing are comprehensible only when one listens to the grammar of possibility that prepares the ground of actuality. In a more modest way, this is sometimes described as refreshment, renewal and revival. Yet there is also a sense in which this behaviour is already developing into a form of routinized religion. As with other charismatic groups in history, the Arnotts cannot resist the lure of denominational association to ‘spread their fire.’ In spite of claiming, as British Restorationists once did, that they were not a denomination, but rather a restoration of God’s kingdom, TACF announced a new umbrella of churches whilst I was there called ‘Partners in Harvest,’ which

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pp.3ff: ‘The dominant semantics of a given period becomes plausible only by virtue of its compatibility with social structure...’

<sup>70</sup> A difficult thesis to prove, but one that merits testing. If meetings began with different hymns, the testimonies had a different focus, and the sermons covered other themes, it would be no surprise if the pneumasomatic phenomena suddenly underwent a marked decrease.

would cater for and safeguard this particular brand of revivalism.<sup>71</sup> In some ways, I think this marks the beginning of the end for the TB, namely its routinization, in the full Weberian sense. TACF will only survive if it can continue to market the Blessing, or improve upon it for existing and new consumers who are hungry for this kind of God.<sup>72</sup> As Margaret Poloma candidly admits, '[this] Renewal is about satisfying the desire of the human heart.'<sup>73</sup> Precisely. If it fails to do that, its peripatetic clientele will take their business elsewhere. That last remark is the cue for the next section of this paper.

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<sup>71</sup> A conference for 'like-minded' pastors to augment the new federation is planned for October 1996.

<sup>72</sup> See Peter Berger, 'A Market Model Analysis for Ecumenicity' in *Social Research*, vol. 30., 1963.

<sup>73</sup> M. Poloma, *By Their Fruits*, p.21.

## C. SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY, AND THE IDEA OF BLESSING

EXCHANGE theories view social order as the unplanned outcome of acts of exchange between members of a given group. Given that it is so difficult to ‘read’ or get a ‘handle’ on what is taking place in the TB/TACF, and that participants appear to think the outcome of the TB is unplanned (at least by its leaders), Social Exchange Theory may offer a way forward here. There are two major variants of the theory to note. First, Rational-Choice Theory locates the source of order in the personal advantage individuals gain through co-operative exchange. Second, Anthropological-Exchange Theory claims that both order and the pursuit of individual advantage are effects of the underlying ritual and symbolic nature of the thing that is exchanged. Both strands of Social Exchange Theory have something to say about religion as an exchange process, although we should note that the second tradition, especially through the work of Mauss, is the more dominant. Mauss, in his observation of what he called ‘primitive or archaic types of society’ understood that if God was ‘blessed’ in certain ways, God would ‘bless’ in return. For Mauss, the notion of ‘gift’ was central: in return for worship, the gifts of the spirit are given. In return for the gifts being exercised, more gifts are added. Charisma, charismata, power and empowerment are all inextricably linked.<sup>74</sup>

These two traditions of Social Exchange Theory offer different perspectives on what is exchanged in religion, and to what end. Rationalists such as Peter Blau stress the structural nature of society as being guided by exchange: the basis of belief lies in its ability to deliver on desires. Individuals, in this configuration of the theory, weigh extrinsic benefits within a system of reciprocal

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<sup>74</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (trans Ian Cunnison), London, Cohen & West, London, 1966, pp.v-x, 1-4, etc.

exchange.<sup>75</sup> Anthropologists such as Mauss take a different line, arguing that orderly collective life is a pre-condition, not a consequence, of self-interested choice. A key to this configuration of the theory is the role of obligation, and the rules and commands that must be followed in order to belong to society, as well as benefit individually. Both theories, critically for this paper, share interests in power and collective behaviour. They provide an account of what individuals and groups give and gain by belonging, perhaps suggesting that the ‘mystique’ of the TB may actually involve some quite rational or embedded assumptions on the part of individuals and groups, which are sociologically accountable.<sup>76</sup> What we shall be mainly attempting to show in this section is that both the rationalist and anthropological approaches to Exchange Theory are right in different ways when it comes to the TB. Some pilgrims definitely come seeking a specific blessing: a ‘return’ for their investment. Others come in a more enquiring mode, but nonetheless find themselves surprised or blessed by the apparently unplanned outcome of the obligations and gifts that configure the movement.

Two additional distinctions in Exchange Theory also need noting before proceeding further. Peter Ekeh, in his work, describes the traditions as being ‘collectivist’ and ‘individualist,’ which are derived from Talcott Parsons’ categorization of British and French orientations in sociology.<sup>77</sup> For Ekeh, the correlation is

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1964.

<sup>76</sup> See for example Gustave Le Bon’s *The Crowd*, New York, Viking, 1895/1960: Le Bon argues that people surrender their individuality in crowds, and find their rational-moral powers suspended by the hypnotic effect of leaders and the consequent mass behaviour. However, writers on collective behaviour since Le Bon have shown that crowds are much more mindful, rational and socially organized than Le Bon first thought: see R. H. Turner & L. Killian, *Collective Behaviour*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall, 1987.

<sup>77</sup> P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions*, London, Heinemann, 1974; Talcott Parsons, *Theories of Society*, New York, The

individualistic-Protestant and collectivist-Catholic, and modern sociological theory is a 'marriage' between these strands. From the point of view of this paper, this is significant, since the TB movement is undoubtedly Protestant in one sense, namely its origin from a neo-Pentecostal and fundamentalist background. Yet there is also a Catholicity about this movement too: it is less textual and more symbolic than conventional Protestantism.<sup>78</sup> Also, it has a place for the nouveau-sacramental, namely the identification of charismata and certain types of celebratory worship as pivotal points of instrumentality through which God is encountered and blessed. Thus, in Blau's definition of Exchange Theory, there is a place for collective, organic emotionalism (Catholic) alongside individualistic, atomistic rationalism (Protestant), and the possibility of movements as well as theories that have managed to merge the two in late modernity.<sup>79</sup> With this in mind, we shall now look at three areas of Exchange Theory in relation to the TB/TACF movements: the structure of group relations, power and exchange, and finally, the nature of gifts. This will indicate some suggestions about individuals and the community formed around the 'Blessing.'

In terms of the structure of group relations, Exchange

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Free Press, 1961, pp. 85-97.

<sup>78</sup> Although a different perspective can be found in R. Spittler, 'Are Pentecostals and Charismatics Fundamentalists? A Review of American Uses of these Categories' in Karla Poewe (ed.), *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, Columbia, Columbia UP, 1994, pp. 103-16. Spittler argues that the roots of fundamentalism are different to those of revivalism (pacifist, Quaker, Shaker, etc). Whilst I agree that Pentecostalism has a richer history than fundamentalism, I do not really see pressing historical or phenomenological reasons for driving a wedge between the two movements *now*. They share interests in power and certainty, are ecclesologically similar, and are both, at present, like-minded in their pluriform responses to modernity and postmodernity. Without being fully fundamentalist, they may be *fundamentalistic*.

<sup>79</sup> Ekeh *Ibid.*, 1974, pp. 5-17.

Theory has shown that group size is important.<sup>80</sup> Of particular note is Blau and Schwartz's observation that 'as group size increases, the probable rate of outgroup relations decreases.' A number of considerations arise from this. First, the sheer scale of TACF and the TB movement offers pilgrims the possibility of exchanging their present world for a new world configured in charismatic terms. There is sufficient 'culture' in the TB movement – clothes, books, conferences, media, etc. – to offer a sustainable alternative world to those who opt in. The size of the operation is a crucial factor here: believers must see that they are opting into a 'world' (or world-wide network), not just a micro-group such as a cult or sect. Second, the decrease in outgroup relations needs careful handling. TACF is profoundly unrelated to its immediate environs: members drive in and drive away, just as pilgrims fly in and fly away. Yet the absence of outgroup relations is masked by the popularity and size of TACF. Third, the sizeist aspirations of TACF are deeply embedded in its cultural roots through the American led 'Church Growth Movement' (CGM) founded by Donald McGavran and developed by Peter Wagner. In CGM thinking, there are three sizes of groups that perform different tasks. The cell is for intimate, in-depth personal work. The congregation is a collection of local cells – a small church, perhaps. And finally, there is the 'celebration,' a collection of congregations that is intentionally sizeable in order to impress upon believers and attract new followers. Whilst the congregation is to be somehow 'earthed' locally, the celebration simply exists anywhere, for the sake of its size and what that connotes about God and the community of believers. Its purpose is to demonstrate God's power in a concentrated form to a sizeable group.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> See P. Blau & J. Schwartz, *Crosscutting Social Circles: Testing a Macrostructural Theory of Intergroup Relations*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.28ff. See also my discussion of the Church Growth Movement in 'How to Win Congregations and Influence Them', *Contours of Christian Education*, Eds. J. Astley & D. Day, Great Wakering,

However, TACF has gained its size through slightly different means: social association and the mobility of pilgrims are primary factors in promoting a permanent resident community of celebration. The TB movement marks a change in the heterogeneity of contemporary charismatic renewal. For the first time in its history, there is now a 'place' which hundreds of thousands are visiting as a source of blessing, rather in the way that pilgrims in other religious traditions visit shrines or sites. Mobility is a key to understanding the success of the TB, since it has enabled the 'Blessing' to be carried, transported as it were, back home to the places from whence the pilgrims came. The sense of size is enhanced by the ever-expanding network of followers who are linked by common bonds of faith, but have also tasted the Blessing for themselves at source.<sup>82</sup> Put crudely, some see the mobility around the TB as a legitimate exchange for getting God to act: 'when God moves, the people move.'<sup>83</sup>

Naturally, this movement or mobility has implications for structures and group relations within contemporary charismatic renewal. Effectively, it creates classes or subdivisions, between those who have been willing or able to go to Toronto or one of its satellite 'filling/refreshing' meetings, and those who have not. An obvious arena to highlight is the equation between financial means and sacrifice. Going to Toronto, or to one of its key satellite conferences, is a costly business. Those who do go are looking for value, or are charged by a supportive sending group with bringing back the Blessing. So far, this means the movement has not moved much beyond the European, American and Australasian middle-classes.<sup>84</sup> In short, inequality and differentiation have crept in at

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McCrimmon, 1992, pp.174ff.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp.55ff. See also Michael Mitton, 'Pilgrimage to Toronto,' *Anglicans for Renewal*, Winter 1995, and P. Richter & S.Porter, *The Toronto Blessing*, London, DLT, 1995.

<sup>83</sup> David Pytches, 'The Toronto Blessing,' Chorleywood, Kingdom Power Trust (Video), 1995.

<sup>84</sup> This is not an unusual feature of contemporary revivalism. See M.

many levels.<sup>85</sup> Structurally, there are now distinctions to be made between pro-TB and anti-TB revivalists, between Wimberites and Toronto followers, and so forth: typically, these groups have quickly developed their own cultures, complete with requisite merchandise. And, as we remarked earlier, size is a factor here. The larger the size of a community, the greater the increase in the rate of overt conflict between competing groups. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that Wimber's excommunication of TACF was more to do with its growing in size than its doctrine. However, both groups have yet to address the 'consolidated (or consecrated?) inequalities' that are present in their respective groups through hegemonic structures and authoritarian leadership, although the split between the two groups has something to do with this.<sup>86</sup>

Ultimately, what is governing structure and group relations in the TB movement is the realm of cultural symbols and meanings centred around power, coupled with the rhetoric of choice. This gives rise to the configuration of 'overlapping circles' of interest and belief in contemporary revivalism which encourages mobility, heterogeneity and consolidation. So, structurally and relationally, there is both harmony and difference in revivalism,

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McGuire, *Ritual Healing in Suburban America*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1988, for a treatment of middle class American healing groups. See also Anthony Archer, *The Two Catholic Churches: A Study in Oppression*, London, SCM, 1986, p.220: 'Typically, then, a Catholic who came to take part in the charismatic renewal movement was ostensibly successful, economically and otherwise, but conscious, if only vaguely, of being deprived of other sorts of satisfaction.' Archer describes renewal as 'charismatic chicanery' – the enthusiasts' response to modernity, which reflects middle-class values and success, whilst alienating the working class and poor.

<sup>85</sup> Blau & Schwartz, *Ibid.*, pp.161ff.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.177. The discussion between TACF and John Wimber on the internet prior to the excommunication supports this thesis. TACF argued that Wimber's jealousy of the TB was analogous to Saul's envy of David, recorded in *I Samuel* 16ff

although the same ‘story’ about God’s power is basically being told everywhere. The believers have obligations to the power, namely to receive it and reify it in appropriate forms. In some cases, they may choose how this is done. But in others, the underlying revivalist culture might determine the mode of receiving, as for example in being ‘slain’ in the Spirit. Either way, size emerges as proof of power, and enables the group concerned to adopt their collective representations of power as organizing principles of social structure.<sup>87</sup>

Power is already beginning to emerge as a pre-eminent feature of Exchange Theory. Theorists such as Emerson, Homans, Thibaut and Kelly have all noted that power-relations lie at the basis of exchange.<sup>88</sup> The simple, yet elegant proposition is this: One person’s power resides in the dependency of another. If two persons are unequally dependent, the less dependent person acquires a power advantage over the other, and an imbalance of exchange arises, with the more dependent person giving or losing more than they receive.<sup>89</sup> We shall turn to the implications of this for the TB in a moment, but two characteristics of the power theorem need to be noted initially. First, the determinants of power are structural characteristics of the relation between persons rather than (just) individual characteristics. Second, power and power use are conceptually distinct: Power is a function of the structural position, whereas power use refers to the actual method of control that might determine behaviour. How does this affect the TB?

The dependency in power-relations for the TB is linked to

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<sup>87</sup> For a fuller discussion, see P. Blau & R. Merton, *Continuities in Structural Inquiry*, London, Sage, 1981.

<sup>88</sup> See R.M. Emerson, ‘Power-dependence Relations,’ *American Sociological Review*, 1962, vol 27.: 31-42; G.C. Homans, *Social Behaviour*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974; H. Kelly & J. Thibaut, *Interpersonal Relations: A Theory of Interdependence*, New York, John Wiley, 1978.

<sup>89</sup> See Linda Molm, ‘Linking Power Structure and Power Use’ in (Ed) Karon Cook, *Social Exchange Theory*, London, Sage, 1987, pp. 101ff.

the focus of divine power being located (or poured out) in one place: Toronto. This delivers power into the hands of the leadership, who naturally become power brokers, or the main agents/interpreters of the manifestations. In spite of the insistence of some of the believers that TACF does not 'hype-up' the TB, and is not that charismatic (in the Weberian sense), its structural position in the power equation automatically creates a hegemony. The fact that the type of power the TB/TACF offers is novel and particular further stresses the imbalance of power. Thus, pilgrims wishing to receive must 'let go of themselves' in a TB context in a way that would not be required of them were they to step in to say, an average Episcopalian or Anglican service of Matins. In short, to receive anything, mostly everything in the cognitive-rational sphere has to be given up, including critical faculties: we have already noted the accompanying rhetoric – 'don't rationalise – just let go.' So, independent of the charisma of the leader, the power-relation context requires obedience to the prophets, leaders or bringers of the Blessing.<sup>90</sup> Second, and linked to this, it should be obvious that power only becomes something when it is used. A belief in an inerrant Bible is useless unless there is an interpreter: it is not the Bible-as-power that rules in ecclesial settings, but the one who controls its use.<sup>91</sup> It is in the use of power that the behaviour of another is determined. Thus, the carefully prepared grammar of assent that surrounds TB meetings is actually quite significant. In appealing to certain revivalist phenomena of the past, a selection of testimonies from the present, as well as suggesting what is about to happen in the immediate future, once the Holy Spirit has been 'invited to visit' ('some of you may fall over, others weep or

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<sup>90</sup> For example, Paul Cain, a prophet of the Vineyard Church and one of the 'Kansas Six' had little in the way of endearing charismatic qualities. Yet his position as a prophet ensured a whole series of power-dependent relations. Once outside the Vineyard, his charisma and any personal power he might have largely failed to give him the public platform he once enjoyed in revivalism.

<sup>91</sup> See K. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*, London, SCM, 1990.

laugh...,’ etc.), adherents are actually being controlled. This is partially, but not wholly with their consent, since the inequality of the power-relations in the first instance renders complete freedom of choice impossible for those who want this Blessing.

Exchange Theory, at this point, cannot know how structural advantage is actually translated into behavioural control. However, in terms of power-relations, we have the first indication that a power structure is also a power process.<sup>92</sup> Another way of expressing this would be to say that the suggestion of, determination, interpretation and conversion of power-outcomes, ultimately leads to behaviour control. Thus, the responsiveness of someone to power is a key. Those who wish to receive will most likely become high users of power; those who are more passive may well give and gain less. Variations and reinforcements in the power process may reconfigure individuals, but the essential point to grasp is that those who want power are part of a process that will, to some extent, deliver it. Foucault, in a slightly different way, was alive to this when he noted that power only existed in reciprocal relations, and then again in the intentions and gaps that form the structures and processes of power.<sup>93</sup>

Given that networks, processes and structures are important for describing power and its use, it is now necessary to turn to the issue of heterogeneity. Any consideration of heterogeneity needs some comprehension of how membership boundaries are determined. Peter Blau makes a distinction between nominal and graduated types of discrimination for

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<sup>92</sup> K. Cook, *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>93</sup> See M. Foucault, ‘Space, Knowledge and Power’ in *The Foucault Reader*, (Ed) Paul Rabinow, New York, Pantheon Press, 1984, p.247. However, I wish to add that I do not entirely share Foucault’s belief that there is nothing to power apart from space and relationships: this would amount to a capitulation to non-realist views of divine power, based on projectionist theories of religion (Feuerbach). Whilst I agree that power is mainly known in agencies, I would wish to affirm the reality of a spiritual power that is both beyond and in the agent.

groups.<sup>94</sup> The nominal forms of discrimination may be age, sex, race or religion. In the case of TACF, and, in fact, many churches on the revivalist circuit, there is little serious nominal discrimination. Whilst it is true that there are few women in senior pastorship positions, this is probably an artefact of evangelical or fundamentalist views on the role of women in Christian leadership and ministry, that has survived in revivalist churches. The graduated form of discrimination takes into account such characteristics as charisma, power, education, rhetorical ability, lucidity and the like. Here, a clear power 'shape' begins to develop in revivalist churches; salience is acquired here for a group like TACF. How though, does the separation of nominal and graduated affect power-relations? There are a number of issues to consider.

First, the division of labour in any given religious group will be shaped by perceptions about who has most or least charisma, giftedness, charismata or other desired qualities. In short, the division of labour is configured in terms of ideals or ideology. This takes us into the heart of Weber's notion of ideal types:

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sided corporate viewpoints into a unified analytical construct. In its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be empirically anywhere in reality...it is a utopia.<sup>95</sup>

Whilst Weber might have understood ideal-types to be abstract, they are becoming reified in the idealized or idolized revivalist community. So, although groups like TACF are heterogeneous, it should be seen as a converging community in

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<sup>94</sup> P. Blau, *Inequality and Heterogeneity: A Primitive Theory of Social Structure*, New York, The Free Press, 1977, pp.7ff.

<sup>95</sup> See M. Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, Ed E. Shils & H. Finch, New York, Free Press, 1948, p.89.

which horizons of desire and possibility are gradually being shaped, moulded, narrowed, focused and concentrated into a form of idealism.<sup>96</sup> Blau confirms this ‘shape’ to power, when he notes that inequality of power goes hand in hand with heterogeneity, since there is always, somewhere, a concentration of power.<sup>97</sup> In the case of TACF, and its special access to the TB, it is obvious what is going on. Those outside the community are deemed to be impoverished; starved of power, as it were. TACF however, knows and owns the power in a concrete, concentrated form, so is ‘wealthy.’ An exchange or redistribution of wealth depends on being willing to ‘reduce diversity’ in order to gain equality.<sup>98</sup>

Second, Blau suggests that the ‘shape’ of power is pyramidal. From the top, there is absolute power; this is supported by proportionate power which immediately relates to the absolute; lastly, there is relative power, which although experiencing inequality can nonetheless relate to the absolute, albeit solely through the proportionate. This ‘shape’ is the shape of social-power-relations in Exchange Theory. It assumes a hegemony that actually provides a heterogeneity, albeit one that is converging to its absolute point or focus. This shape has space for collective action to be undertaken, conflict to be allowed, an elite to emerge, and time for interpersonal relations. In other words, the model for power turns out to be a paradigm for exchange. The group history that knows one or two people are especially anointed, and are the harbingers of a unique Blessing, provides a social account of the relationship between TACF and the TB, between leaders and pilgrims, and between the absolute authority – the interpreter and chief imparter of the Blessing – and his followers. This requires a little more clarification here. The leadership structure at TACF is rather ‘flat’ when the TB is benign: there appears to be no one obviously in sole charge. However, when the TB is exported to

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<sup>96</sup> As I have noted in my *Words, Wonders and Power* (SPCK, 1996), the ideology expressed in worship is a crucial factor here.

<sup>97</sup> Blau, *Ibid.*, 1977, p.13.

<sup>98</sup> Blau, *Ibid.*, p.73.

other churches, it is the chief importer who acquires ‘prophetic’ charisma over others within their own context. This immediately creates a pyramidal shape. Increasingly, as TACF stresses the prophetic more and more, the routinized charisma of its leaders emerges (offering ‘checks,’ ‘controls,’ ‘balance’ and the like), culminating in the creation of hegemonic Apostolic Authority for a few over the many. Wimber’s relationship to the Vineyard movement offers a near identical historical paradigm.

Third, and given these remarks, it is also worth pressing the question of why religious power is able to operate like this in an essentially pluralistic society. How does a group like TACF hold the attention of its followers? How does it avoid routinization or adverse bureaucracy? To some extent, the answer lies in seeing the TB as offering a competing commodity within a spiritual market, rather than setting up an alternative spiritual bureaucracy: ‘power accrues to those having the tools with which to maximize efficiency outcomes.’<sup>99</sup> Coupled with this, Weber’s notion of bureaucratic transition is now in reverse flux: there is declining attachment to organization, and an expectation of ‘products’ being tested by the vicissitudes of market forces. This elevates a characteristic like charisma, and novel derivatives of it, in a way that was not possible when modernist organizations and meta-theories were in the ascendancy. But the new postmodern celebration of difference only works provided it is understood that the language of power is now the language of efficiency.<sup>100</sup> TACF, for all its explicit power

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<sup>99</sup> See M. Meyer, ‘The Weberian Tradition in Organisational Research,’ in *Structures of Power and Constraint: Essays in Honour of Peter Blau*, Eds. M. Meyer & W. Scott, Cambridge, CUP, 1990, p.211.

<sup>100</sup> See Stewart Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, London, Sage, 1989, for a discussion about the ‘forgetting of power’ as a subject, in spite of the fact that it persists in a postmodern context. Peter Morriss, from a more purely philosophical perspective, makes the same point in *Power: A Philosophical Investigation*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 1987, part one, where he suggests that we should see power in dispositional terms – something that we create conceptually, in order to comprehend the episodic. For a discussion of episodic and dispositional forms of power,

language, is, in common with other revivalist groups, rather shy of that. What is preferred is talk of ‘what God has done’ or is doing, and testimonies that demonstrate the reification of power in return for (perceived) legitimate exchange.

Finally in this section, there needs to be some consideration about the nature of gifts or commodities, and the individual and community that is formed around the ‘Blessing.’ I have been suggesting that power and charisma are gifted and exchanged in a dynamic relational structure that is gradually converging towards an absolute point of reference. The grammar of assent – metaphors of water, fire, intimacy, force (the Spirit falling) and drunkenness – are all descriptions of the social control that is engendered by the leadership. In other words, to distort Peter Berger, the ‘theological construction of reality’ has direct ecclesial consequences.<sup>101</sup> The valued behaviour becomes intimate-enthusiastic, which is offered in return for a deeper experience of what this is said to deliver.<sup>102</sup> TACF leadership remains in the power structure, but as leaders, they acquire the status of brokers or interpreters: they are themselves partly sacramental – God’s pivotal point of instrumentality which directs and disposes of blessing. The hegemonic structure of TACF is necessarily so, since access to power must always be controlled, especially when it is deemed to be in such a concentrated form. Correspondingly, leaders emerge who are variously described as ‘God’s bartender’ or ‘God’s instrument of laughter/wind/blessing.’

As I have suggested, the levels and types of exchange that are taking place here are highly complex, and this has something to do with the rich but largely hidden conceptuality of ‘blessing’ and its power. Blessings may be given and received; they are also gifts

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see Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, London, Macmillan/British Sociological Association, 1974.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Berger (with Thomas Luckmann), *The Social Construction of Reality*, Garden City, Doubleday, 1966.

<sup>102</sup> R. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1950.

of grace, and a sign of approval. At a more systematic level, the activity of blessing can also be seen as something that emerges out of the dynamic of praise. In many ways, TACF and the TB seem to have understood and inculcated this, at least initially. Yet closer attention to the structural and exchange configuration of TACF shows this is not quite so. Although a form of joyfulness is a hallmark of TACF, it often appears to be superficial and socially un-engaged. Similarly, one may take, for example, the presence of 'holy laughter' as a symptom of having the Blessing. If humanity is the 'rational species who laughs,' then the laughter accompanying the TB may be a sign of God's super-abundance: not disorder, but non-order, leading to new possibilities and horizons. Yet TACF does not have a sufficiently broad-based ecclesiology to allow the laughter to be truly expansive and freeing. What could be a liberating symptom of blessing is transformed into a sign of exchange, and controlled within a fairly tight economy. Further evidence for this can be located in the spheres that are deemed not to bring blessing: suffering is one. Mary Craig was able to call her book about the experience of being mother to two severely handicapped children Blessings, because she saw that God's super-abundance was not delimited in one place or experience, but, by definition, a free and gracious gift.<sup>103</sup> There is also a failure to see that blessing is often an investment with no apparent return. Jesus' life is, on one level, a history of the economy of expanding blessing, with its ultimate test at the cross, and vindication at the resurrection. Typically, those who are the beneficiaries of this form of blessing are the marginalized and excluded. In contrast, although there is much heterogeneity in TACF, one cannot escape the homogeneity and hegemony of the movement, and the types of people the TB touches.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> M. Craig, *Blessings*, London, Collins, 1980. A similar point could be made by reference to Margaret Spufford's *Celebration*, London, Collins-Fount, 1989.

<sup>104</sup> See D. Hardy & D. Ford, *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*, London, DLT, 1984, for a discussion of blessing.

Thus, rather than describing the Toronto phenomenon as a 'blessing,' the application of Exchange Theory seems to point in a slightly different direction, at least for the individuals who appear to gain from being involved in the TB movement. What appears to be occurring is a complex form of social abreaction, which is then ascribed religious significance. Abreaction describes a therapeutic process – conscious or unconscious, group or individual – wherein repressed feelings, desires, traumas or negativity are allowed to be expressed and (perhaps) resolved.<sup>105</sup> Typically, the process involves a high disposal of emotional discharge; when the feelings are expressed, psychological, social or spiritual 'insights' in to conditions may be gained, and behaviour modified. For many, this is a religious interpretation of a 'natural event,' a sense of being 'healed,' or of being 'touched by God.' Hypnosis,<sup>106</sup> primal therapy, psychodrama and enthusiastic religion can all play a part in any abreactive process, which is gained through catharsis.<sup>107</sup> What is clear from the ecstatic religious experiences that characterize the TB/TACF movement is that there are constituent gains in 'releasing' rationality, control, emotions and the like. What the believer gains by yielding to the powers can vary: an altered state of consciousness, social integration or re-integration, increase in conviction or relief from stress are all possibilities.<sup>108</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>105</sup> See D. Benner, *Encyclopaedia of Psychology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker House, 1985, p.9; I. Cotton, *The Hallelujah Revolution: The Rise of the New Christians*, London, Little, Brown & Co., 1995, pp.114ff.

<sup>106</sup> My observation of hypnotists like Geno Washington suggests that phenomena like speaking in tongues and religious experience can be induced through any medium that delivers an altered state of consciousness.

<sup>107</sup> See M. P. Nichols & M. Zax, *Catharsis in Psychotherapy*, New York, Gardner Press, 1977.

<sup>108</sup> See W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Garden City, New York, Image Books, 1978: 'Incursions from the transmarginal have a peculiar power to increase convictions' (p. 372). See also E. Bourguignon, *Possession*, San Francisco, Chandler & Sharp, 1978; A. Aylland, 'Possession in a Revivalistic Negro Church,' *Journal for the*

TB/TACF movement operates as a system of exchange. In order to benefit, it is necessary to 'learn' the cathartic processes before abreaction can be reached.<sup>109</sup> This makes the movement profoundly individualistic, which is of course, exactly what it is. In spite of the numbers involved, the sizes of groups and the shared perceptions, everybody is gaining something that is mainly of a personal nature, and will remain so.

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*Scientific Study of Religion*, 1962, 1, pp.204-13.

<sup>109</sup> See W. Samarin, 'Glossolalia as Learned Behaviour,' *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 1969, 15, pp. 60ff.

## D. FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON POWER AND CHARISMA

IF charisma and power are essential to the operation of a given religious group as an exchange mechanism, further consideration needs to be given to their action. We noted at the beginning of this essay how phenomenology seeks to discern patterns, in order to articulate, at least in part, how the social world is constructed. Clearly, one way forward here is to attempt a type of 'deconstruction' on types of power in the TB/TACF movement. This approach to religion is by no means novel. For example, Gerardus van der Leeuw's work can be described as a phenomenology of power: he cannot prove there is such a thing, but he does seek to draw our attention to 'it' – the things of power. His thesis is that sensitivity to power has been largely forgotten in 'modern' society, but in primitive society, power developed into religious monism, which reached its climax in monotheism. In contemporary society, power is not encountered in nature or personality, but in the dispersed forms of social organization.<sup>110</sup> However, the essence of religion is power, driven towards monism, which has a tendency to conflate the psychological with the cosmological, the sociological with the theological: religion is a description of concepts of power and their use. More recently, and from an anthropological viewpoint, I.M. Lewis has also argued that although religious power assumes many different forms (which may appear to be unrelated or mutually exclusive), it is an appropriate 'theme' through which to approach religion holistically.<sup>111</sup> For Lewis, religious power is best understood as a negative force which opposes malign spiritual powers. Thus, the shaman assumes the charismatic role par excellence – being able to

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<sup>110</sup> See G. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J.E. Turner, London, Allen & Unwin, 1938; see also J. Bettis (ed.), *The Phenomenology of Religion*, London, SCM, 1969, pp.56ff.

<sup>111</sup> I.M. Lewis, *Religion in Context: Cults and Charisma*, Cambridge, CUP, 1996 (2nd edition).

exorcise the evil and prepare the way for blessing. In effect, the shaman stands between negative and positive power as a broker, a fixed point of passage and determinacy that both creates and obviates power. Like van der Leeuw, Lewis cannot 'see' power, except in the way that it is related to, and in the social and ritual structures that are based on its assumption.

Sociologically, the conceptions of power can be divided into two very broad categories. On the one hand, there are those which are asymmetrical, stressing conflict, will, resistance and the like: social relations are assumed to be competitive, conflictual and dialectical. On the other hand, there are conceptions that imply that all may make some gain through power. Here, power is a collective capacity or achievement, born not out of conflict, but communal welfare.<sup>112</sup> Although it is helpful to be mindful of these two broad categories, it should be noted that they are somewhat inadequate for the assessment of the TB and TACF. To an extent, those religious movements have elements of both categories within them. This must be because the religious-social system itself is one of exchange alongside being one of power, which therefore allows for conflictual and communal action together. Beyond this however, there is no account of subliminal power, which is so important in understanding religious behaviour. Power is not just attached to structures and positional personality, but also to non-structural interaction and roles.<sup>113</sup> Yet we must agree with Talcott Parsons in eschewing 'canonically correct' definitions of power: it actually covers more than it can define.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Steven Lukes, 'Power and Authority' in T. Bottomore & R. Nisbet (eds.) *A History of Sociological Analysis*, New York, Basic Books, 1978, p.636.

<sup>113</sup> Kingsley Davis, 'A Conceptual Analysis of Stratification,' *American Sociological Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1942, pp.315-16.

<sup>114</sup> See Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Society*, Glencoe, Illinois, Free Press, pp. 220-1; this is a critique of C. Wright Mills, especially his *The Power Elite*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1956 and 'The Structure of Power in American Society,' *British Journal of Sociology*, vol 9, no. 1, March 1958, pp. 29-41, and reprinted in *Power*,

The only viable way forward, in my view, especially given the multifarious nature of ‘power’ in the TB/TACF movement, is to focus on the agents or ‘nodal points’ of power, as Stewart Clegg calls them. His theory of circuits of power does not attempt to marry the ‘non-realist’ tendencies of Foucault with the ‘identification’ trends of someone like C. Wright Mills.<sup>115</sup> Instead, he chooses to describe power in terms of circuits, which are organized through agencies. However, he is careful to note that the agencies cannot be seen as ‘effortlessly rational or powerful,’ since their ‘carrying capacity is itself opened up for scrutiny in power terms.’<sup>116</sup> This view of power is altogether more contingent than monolithic. For example, it has space for dispositional, facilitative and episodic power within the same or overlapping frameworks. Dispositional power, as its description suggests, is the tendency or habit of an individual or group: in the TB/TACF movement, this is reflected in the ‘grammar of power as a concept’ that helps form the ecclesial community. Facilitative power describes the points of access through which power can be reached, reified and exchanged. Episodic power can be used to describe the ‘surges’ or ‘events’ of power that may alter the shape, perceptions or behaviour of individuals and groups. Central to these three ‘circuits’ is organization, and the TB/TACF movement is able to demonstrate systematic configuration in each field. The ideology of worship is dispositional; the charismatic leaders are facilitative; the ‘invocation’ of the Holy Spirit a ‘cue’ for episodic manifestations of power to be unleashed.

As I hinted above, the ‘agents’ – which could be a guru or

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*Politics and People*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1963.

<sup>115</sup> For a fuller discussion, see my *Words, Wonders and Power*, SPCK, 1996, and ‘Power and Fundamentalism,’ *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol 10, no. 3 1995. See also J. Beckford, ‘The Restoration of Power and the Sociology of Religion,’ in T. Robbins & R. Robertson (eds.), *Church-State Relations*, New Brunswick, Transaction Books, 1987

<sup>116</sup> S. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, London, Sage, 1989, p. 239.

leader, or a desired personal experience that is valued by the group, – belong to a circuit: they usually control the distribution of power and direct its flow, but they can also be bypassed by power. Ecclesial communities, especially those that are revivalist and postmodern, frequently change their shape and direction in response to cultural trends. Their pragmatism can also lead them to question power sources that are inefficient, and remove them from the equation if necessary. One consequence of this is the necessary conflation of divine and human agency as a means of survival within the framework. Leaders cannot just be ‘good’ at what they do; they must be ‘gifted’ to last, supernaturally endowed with qualities which make them indispensable. In terms of exchange, this ‘fixes’ them as obligatory passages through which the best ‘blessings’ flow. The very existence of TACF and the prefixing of ‘Toronto’ to ‘Blessing’ demonstrates this, even though there is nothing (comparatively) special about revivalism wrought through the TB. We can go further here, and say that there is an equation between the power a leader ascribes to a miracle or text, and then the power (he) has, which in turn relates to the perceived benefits of belonging to the group offering the Blessing. This in turn has implications for the size of a group.

Yet the TB/TACF is distinctive in one way, since it invites the exchange of rationality and organization for an ecclesial community that appears to be characterized by flux and change. However, it is clear that the TB is organized – indeed, highly organized – so there must be some interrogation of how this is so. Clegg suggests that there are ‘modes’ of rationality that come into operation in a given power circuit, especially in a community in a postmodern context. The mode of rationality is effectively an account of disorder, that stresses that there is no such thing as a total explanation for an occurrence of power. Thus, modes of rationality focus on efficiency – ‘How do you feel after that prayer?’ – rather than on ultimate cause and effect relationships. Naturally, this posits power in the hands of the leaders, since modes of rationality are ultimately determined by them: apparent innovation

is, ironically, the path to domination.<sup>117</sup> To gain one form of empowerment is to be relatively dis-empowered in another way. What I am suggesting here is that the charismatic leader, as part of a system of flux, must avoid severe routinization or pure bureaucratic efficiency. Such a position would mean power could revolve around the leader instead of through (him); it might imply that the community was dynamic, and the leadership static. Thus, movement and changes in modes of rationality are key; in my own observation of TACF, it was not unusual to hear leaders state that we used to do this or think that, but ‘now we have moved on.’ Depending on your point of view, this is either an orthodox notion of developing doctrine, or sheer pragmatism in the face of theological rootlessness. Even so, it remains the case that the movement is still mostly driven by the charismatic personality. Here we have an irony. The modernist state has tended to routinize, even obviate charisma. The conditions of post-modernity however, have offered a new lease of life to the charismatic agent, who can adapt to religious and cultural flux, mastering it and perhaps even ‘surfing’ the waves of renewal.

Perhaps the best way of understanding the place of agency in circuits as a place of exchange, is to evaluate the nature and function of charisma at this point. According to Weber,

‘Charisma’ shall be understood to refer to an extraordinary quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed. ‘Charismatic authority,’ hence, shall refer to a rule over men, whether predominantly internal, to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific person.<sup>118</sup>

Although ‘quality’ is at issue here, Weber’s definition works just as well for efficiency or outcomes, or any other net

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<sup>117</sup> S. Clegg, *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>118</sup> Max Weber, ‘The Social Psychology of the World Religions,’ in H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1946, p.295.

result gained through exchange. Indeed, Weber knew only too well that charismatic authority was quite capable of competing with rational or traditional patterns of power: charisma derives its authority through the devotion it inspires and the benefits it brings to believers.<sup>119</sup>

For Weber, the oldest of all ‘vocations’ was the shaman or diviner, who is permanently endowed with charisma and is able to experience and pass on ‘ecstatic states.’ Whilst Weber may have thought that this ‘vocation’ was lost, or routinized in offices (such as priest or pastor) in the modernist-rational world, it is very much alive again in the postmodern world. An account for the resurrection of the charismatic religious leader in postmodernity lies, in part, in Weber’s own writings. Weber differentiated between ‘religion’ and ‘magic’ in the way that he differentiated between ancient and modern. Religion was rational, organized and functional. Magic was primitive, a legitimate form of domination, and placed power outside ordinary temporal spheres.<sup>120</sup> Within magic, there were prophets, magicians and shamans. Weber saw the prophet as the most significant bearer of charisma, since their claims were based on personal revelations that ultimately developed a personal following.<sup>121</sup> Yet he knew these distinctions to be fluid: priests and prophets practised magic, and there was routinization in the prophetic as much as in the religious.<sup>122</sup> The key to understanding the durability of charisma today lies in seeing Weber’s vision of charisma as being too in debt to modernist notions of social and economic organization, which all too easily assume its routinization. The advent of postmodernity, ironically, creates a set of conditions under which the magicians, shamans

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<sup>119</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, (volume 1), New York, Bedminster Press, 1968, pp. 24-25.

<sup>120</sup> Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation*, New York, Free Press, 1947, pp.358ff.

<sup>121</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, London, Methuen, 1965, p.46.

<sup>122</sup> For a good discussion of Weber’s sociology of religion, see Brian Morris, *Anthropological Studies of Religion*, Cambridge, CUP, 1987.

and prophets can thrive. The absence of certainty, history devoid of teleology, progress questioned and a return to pre-critical 'classicism' or romanticism, puts competing powers and alternative world-views back into the centre of 'public' space.<sup>123</sup> What I am suggesting here is that some elements in an over-developed, postmodern culture are looking beyond 'religion' and back to 'magic'; Eliade says as much in his *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (1958). This is still no guarantee against domination, but it does at least ensure diversity. And to the believers, it at least appears to offer a place for ritual and symbolic exchange that routinized religion may not be offering.

Some final remarks on the function of charisma as an agent or nodal point within a distributive power circuit should be made. First, it is clear from Weber that charismatic leadership is a form of domination and a method of exchange. Charismatic leaders have the potential to challenge existing order, are typically disruptive and innovative: something new is being offered in place of the old. Yet their weakness lies in having to constantly prove their powers, which are inevitably, personal. This means that any delegated succession of leadership is open to the charismatic situation, not subject to it. The meek do not inherit the earth here, and neither, necessarily, does the chosen successor: the leader of the charismatic group will always need to be, definitively, the one with the most anointing – the most charismatic, even if that power is hidden.<sup>124</sup> Charismatic situations are notoriously susceptible to coups. Second, the form of domination in charismatic leadership is consensual. Disciples and believers enter into covenants with charismatic leaders because they wish to lose some things and gain others. Weber believed that charismatic domination emerges (or was demanded?) in times of crisis. When established paths are seen not to be delivering, the charismatic leader emerges to

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<sup>123</sup> See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990, p. 46.

<sup>124</sup> See J. Hughes, P. Martin & W. Shorrock, *Understanding Classical Sociology: Marx, Weber, Durkheim*, London, Sage, 1995, p. 115.

renounce aspects of the past, embrace others, and lead forwards. The true prophet is not a seer, but 'reveals' and reads the present.<sup>125</sup> Third, charismatic domination stresses the ideal over the real, the spiritual over the material.<sup>126</sup> The consequence of this is that it is never easy to test the results of exchange for the believer. In the dissonant community, the charismatic leader is able to dominate by naming the goals of belief and realizing them. If they are not achieved, the goal-posts can be moved, or results reinterpreted. The pyramidal structure of the exchange process, which mirrors the convergence of belief and the gradual restriction of critical horizons, is carefully controlled by the organizational agency of the charismatic leader. It is under these conditions that power flows: the circuits, although in a state of flux, are always carefully delimited by the ultimate power brokers. Only the death of a leader or a competing power circuit can alter this. Thus, charisma is a dominating nodal point in a circuit of power, which is also a place of limited exchange for believers. They must be willing to shed material or ideological baggage and suspend belief above reality, but in return for this they will receive power themselves, and be blessed. The more you give, the more you get.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> See Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1956, p. 105.

<sup>126</sup> For an excellent discussion of domination and charismatic authority, see Ken Morrison, *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*, London, Sage, 1995, pp. 284ff.

<sup>127</sup> See Percy, *Ibid.*, 1996, p. 121.

## E. SOME RELATED THEOLOGICAL ISSUES, AND FURTHER SOCIOLOGICAL COMMENT

ANYONE who was raised in an evangelical church may well have a vivid recollection of William Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* (1853, Keble College Chapel, Oxford). The picture was frequently used as an apologetic device in evangelism. Painted in a Pre-Raphaelite style, it shows the Son of God knocking at a barred wooden door, so firmly shut against intruders that it is covered with weeds and vines. The door, as John Ruskin explained, is the entrance to the human soul. There is no handle on the outside of the door for Christ to turn; the door may only be opened from the inside. Meanwhile, outside, the disconsolate face under the crown of thorns, illuminated by the lantern, waits and hopes.<sup>128</sup> The invitation is clear: only the individual can let Christ in – he cannot get in himself. This form of apologetics places great emphasis on the need for a decision. In contrast, modern revivalist apologetics, almost entirely conducted in terms of power, replaces the rhetoric of decision with that of destiny: Christ can break the door down, and does. The power of God is unstoppable: Jesus does not knock – he just comes in. Prayers like 'Come Holy Spirit' are an invitation to be 'blown away' or to be 'slain'; personal space for decisions, and the 'polite' Jesus of Victorian England have given way to a form of brute force that is made attractive through notions of intimacy and passion.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> See Thomas, D., *The Face of Christ*, London, Hamlyn, 1979, pp.147ff.

<sup>129</sup> The shift is actually quite profound, and no doubt reflects the original fundamentalist-authoritarian roots of contemporary revivalism. Similar artistic-literary portrayals of the relationship between the persistence of God and the 'space' God then gives for response can be located in Francis Thompson's (1859-1907) 'The Hound of Heaven,' Vincent Donovan's *Christianity Rediscovered*, London, SCM, 1978, especially pages 62-64, or then perhaps Robert Browning's poem 'A Death in the

How is it though, that a movement that claims to be and is experienced as liberating, should in fact be described as one that induces domination? To an extent, the answer lies, as we have hinted above, in the legitimization of violence. In the TB movement, the violent, brute force of the Holy Spirit is seen as 'redemptive': freedom is removed in the interests of the believer's fulfilment and salvation. Gently administered, corrective force is expected. Typically, this is manifested in the individual's religious experience, closely followed by its socio-ecclesial out-working. Thus, dynamic, forceful religious experiences are deemed to be necessary to break bonds of emotional, secular or even demonic oppression, but are then exchanged for equally oppressive 'redemptive' conditions which allegedly guarantee new spiritual rewards. The world of revivalist 'myth' created by Frank Peretti illustrates this well: demons and angels waging war, with both sides eroding human freedom in the process.<sup>130</sup> Yet as Walter Wink notes, the coerciveness of the vision Peretti offers just plays into the hands of the individualistic, privatized world, inhabited by so many revivalists:

We have here a case of the total projection of evil out on others. The view of evil is scary but finally trivial; his demons are simply imaginary bad people with wings, and the really mammoth evils of our day – racism, sexism, political oppression, ecological degradation, militarism, patriarchy, homelessness, economic greed – are not even mentioned. It is simply Pentecostal political naiveté writ large on the universe.<sup>131</sup>

Equally, the history of hegemonic structures in revivalism

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Desert,' *Poetical Works*, Oxford, 1897, p.489, where Browning suggest that the more compelling miracles are, the less morally authentic they become.

<sup>130</sup> See F. Peretti, *This Present Darkness* (1986) and *Piercing the Darkness* (1989), Westchester, Ill, Crossway Books. Peretti's books have sold in their millions to revivalists all over the world.

<sup>131</sup> W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*, Augsburg, Fortress Press, 1992, p. 9.

such as ‘Shepherding’ bear ample testimony to the domination that can take place inside the ecclesial community, once the believer is properly protected from malign powers and under the influence of ‘godly’ power. Andrew Walker’s perceptive sociological critique remains a seminal work.<sup>132</sup>

However, there are a number of theological critiques that are alive to these dynamics. For example, Walter Wink’s trilogy on power plots a middle course between passivity and aggression towards power, and argues for a sensitive and discerning form of praxis that names, unmasks and engages with corruptions of power that abuse and dominate in social and ecclesial communities. He recognizes, however, that the present dominating systems are, to an extent, inevitable in the church, although he reminds his readers of the eschatological dimension. In terms of power, this hopes to replace ‘power-over’ with partnership, exclusiveness with inclusivity, and indoctrination with enabling.<sup>133</sup> The ultimate goal is God’s ‘domination-free’ order, a clear echo of the ‘non-order’ conceptualized more richly in David Ford and Daniel Hardy’s *Jubilate*.<sup>134</sup> Yet as Hollenweger notes, the problem in the TB/TACF movement with power, to some extent, might be traceable to the order or hierarchy of salvation or blessing that is present in much Pentecostal and fundamentalist doctrine. Although talk of ‘doctrine’ is problematic with these groups – they are mainly about religious experience, not formulas – there is a definite ‘grading’ of blessing taught. Typically, in revivalist churches, there are notions of post-conversion second blessings: tongues, fillings and anointings. But beyond this, there is scope for

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<sup>132</sup> For a discussion of submission doctrines within the Shepherding Movement, see A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1988 (2nd edition), pp.88-93, 147-53, etc.

<sup>133</sup> W. Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 1992, p. 46. See also *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament*, 1984 and *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence*, 1986, both Philadelphia, Fortress Press.

<sup>134</sup> London, DLT, 1984.

having more or less power than other Christians: the more you know the power of God, the more you can rule and reign over others.<sup>135</sup> David Nicholls' study of recent images of God in terms of their socio-ecclesial capacities for power is aware of how complex systems of social exchange are funded through theological conceptions.<sup>136</sup> For example, Nicholls makes the point that monotheism, as a theological belief, has lent a significant hand in our developing understanding of monarchy. The links between Arianism and imperialism, and between Trinitarianism and pluralism or liberal democracy are more than mere coincidence.<sup>137</sup> The God you believe in is the church you get: the God of revivalism is, de facto, a body of power.

In the light of Wink, Hollenweger and Nicholls (although Sallie McFague and Brian Wren could be added for support),<sup>138</sup> I wish to suggest that the 'power' attested to in the TB/TACF movement, both individually and ecclesially, is a form of Kyriarchy. The appeal to God as 'Lord' in revivalism has been noted as being unusually frequent;<sup>139</sup> typically, this leads to a profound conflation between the leader of a given movement and the 'God' that is appealed to, that rules the rest of the ecclesial

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<sup>135</sup> W. Hollenweger, 'From Azusa Street to the Toronto Phenomenon,' in J. Moltmann & K. J. Kuschel (eds.), *Pentecostal Movements as an Ecumenical Challenge*, London, Concilium/SCM, 1996, no. 3, pp. 3-14.

<sup>136</sup> D. Nicholls, *Deity and Domination: Images of God and the State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, London, Routledge, 1989.

<sup>137</sup> Nicholls, *Ibid.*, 1989, pp.234ff. I point out that the hegemonic structures in Wimber's churches are partly derivative of the absence of a Trinitarian doctrine: Percy, *Ibid.*, 1996, p.182, note 11.

<sup>138</sup> See Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982 and Brian Wren, cited in Nicholls, *Ibid.*, 1989, p. 243.

<sup>139</sup> See Percy, *Ibid.*, 1996, pp.73ff. We should also note that the preferred Bible version amongst revivalists and many evangelicals is the New International Version, which uniformly substitutes 'Lord' for the names of God used in the Old Testament (p. viii, Preface, 1978: London, Hodder & Stoughton).

community. In feudal terminology, a Lord is in total charge, and requires obedience and subjugation. A Lord can also appoint an elite to carry out instructions and to rule in (his) place. A Lord may also be benevolent, bestowing favours on the faithful. The celebration of Lordship at the heart of many revivalist communities, including the TACF/TB movement, is the magnification of a certain kind of governance: freedom is necessarily restricted, force (or spiritual violence) justified, and conformity required. The power of the Lord is given first to the leaders, whose power and its interpretation become inextricably linked to and conflated with the power of God. In the present post-modern context, the implications of this are more serious than they might at first appear. The loss of metanarratives, metatheories and the collapse of the 'public' forms of truth lead to competing forms of power and truth, spearheaded by tribal or feudal-like interests. It is almost impossible to keep up with 'policing' the emerging developments. One consequence of this is a significant rise in new churches, new religious movements and the like, all configured around concepts of 'alternative' power sources, yet with a correlative rise in the manifest abuse of power within these movements. Typically, this will be domination in the name of the deity. Or, just another local kyriarchy, conflating charisma, power and order with a selection of notions about God, for the sake of socio-ecclesial order.

Consideration of other theological issues is also necessary, however. Alongside the question of power and domination, we must note the radical 'experientialism' of the TACF and followers of the TB. Harvey Cox, in his recent *Fire From Heaven*,<sup>140</sup> notes how late modernity or postmodernity has seen the well-worn debates between conservatives and liberals finally become exhausted. He suggests that the pursuit of 'cognitive stances' on religion are giving way to a new experientialism that is based on

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<sup>140</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: Pentecostalism, Spirituality, and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, New York, Addison-Wesley, 1995.

Pentecostalism. The key to the success of religious experientialism as a basis for ecclesial polity and personal formation lies in interpretation and choice. In a postmodern setting, TACF offers an attractive composition. Firstly, a degree of cognitive certainty through fundamentalist doctrine and fundamentalist-style leadership (i.e., hegemonic, authoritarian, etc.). Second, transformative personal experiences that feed on and supplement the former.<sup>141</sup> Yet as Cox notes, experience is a ‘slippery concept,’<sup>142</sup> and is liable to produce schism as much as it guarantees certainty: TACF already knows this, following its excommunication from the Vineyard network. Yet it is unlikely to be the last falling-out the TACF will witness.

Because many in charismatic renewal apparently have personal, dramatic experiences of God which they cannot locate in a cognitive framework, some have been tempted to regard the TB

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<sup>141</sup> I find Cox’s positivism puzzling here. Fire From Heaven apologizes for over-stating the secularization thesis so prevalent in his earlier works [The Secular *City* and *Religion in the City*]. Yet much of his evidence for the resurgence of revivalist religion in this volume is impressionistic and over-appreciative, glossing over the wide variations in the nature of global Pentecostalism. More subtle is David Martin [*Tongues of Fire*], amongst others, who suggests that Pentecostalism’s attraction to individuals in the Third World partly lies in its ability to provide a persona that is well-suited to the new world of urban capitalism, as well as a warm, supportive community that obviates the worst effects of anomie. Amongst white, middle-class people, it seems to provide something different; cathartic and emotional expression in a worshipful context that is doctrine-light and experience-heavy. Once beyond the worship, however, and the disagreements begin: factions, schism and ‘heresy’ expose the ‘content-free’ religion. If neo-Pentecostalism does represent the shape of religion in the next century, it will be precisely because of the reasons that formed the heart of the secularization thesis: because it represents religion in its most radically individualistic phase. For a fuller discussion, see my essay, ‘City on a Beach,’ in *Neo-Pentecostalism at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997.

<sup>142</sup> Cox, *Ibid.*, 1995, pp.313ff.

as ‘mystical.’ It is perhaps necessary to qualify what is meant by this. Clearly, authors like Cox are comfortable with some experiences in revivalism as being (at least) like mysticism, albeit in the suburban context of a postmodern culture. Yet recent work on Christian mysticism suggests that caution should be expressed in embracing phenomenon like the TB as modernist mysticism. For example, Grace Jantzen perceptively points out that much of what we regard as ‘mysticism’ is in fact, an exclusive category of religious experience that has been ‘privatized and intellectualized’ by men. Thus, the predominant male tradition of mysticism has valued disembodied forms of religious experience, and then tended to ‘de-sacralise’ women’s more embodied mysticism by placing it in categories such as emotionalism, misplaced sexuality, or even witchcraft. Paradoxically, the TB’s sublimated eroticism – often located in its worship and sentiments expressed about desire for Jesus – seems to be quite an embodied spirituality. Yet it is actually very far from that. The sexual imagery – shaking, shuddering, desire and consummation – is largely for personal and private pleasure. Furthermore, the mystic-prophets of TACF and Wimber’s Vineyard network are always male. The language about God remains rooted in maleness, as does, predictably, the leadership (conflation again), with profound suspicion being expressed towards feminism. In terms of historic expressions of mysticism, there is also an absence of the TB experience being grounded in social or redemptive concepts for the oppressed.<sup>143</sup> ‘Traditional’ mysticism was also pursued through the known Catholic roots such as prayer, fasting, abstinence and scholarship. Invariably, the mystical experiences were related to Christ’s passion, to heaven or hell, or to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Although metaphors centred on water, fire and passion were present, it is more usual to find blood, bread and eucharistic themes, which had personal and social-ecclesial implications. It hardly needs saying that the ‘mystique-al’ experiences of contemporary revivalism bear

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<sup>143</sup> Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge, CUP, 1995.

little relation to the usual category of ‘mysticism.’<sup>144</sup> Whilst some of the religious experiences are undoubtedly exotic, they cannot be placed in a category named ‘mysticism’ simply because they are unusual.<sup>145</sup>

Steve Bruce, although primarily a sociologist, takes the argument a stage further in some of his more recent works. He suggests that the worship of God is quite routinized in Christian and Jewish traditions, due to the hypothesis that God is beyond the cosmos as well as in it, and that the consequence of this is the development of controlled ritual, morality or behaviour that will reify the presence of God in the midst of the faithful.<sup>146</sup> The social implications are clear: tribalism, well-configured identity and a

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<sup>144</sup> See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London, Longmans Green, 1903. James helpfully classifies mystical states of mind into four types: (1) Ineffable – unable to express meaning in words (2) Noetic – discovering a new truth, (3) Transiency – temporary socio-psychological dislocation, and (4) Passivity – feeling controlled by external forces. James sees the states as functional methods of bringing order out of chaos, or peace from disturbance, resulting in a new ‘firmness, stability and equilibrium succeeding a period of storm and stress and incompleteness.’ (p.176).

<sup>145</sup> We should note that Knox (Enthusiasm, Oxford, Clarendon, 1950, pp. 578ff) distinguishes between ‘mystical’ and ‘evangelical’ enthusiasm. The mystical tradition is centred on the incarnation, and duly focuses on the God within. The evangelical tradition focuses on the atonement, and concentrates on redemption. TACF/TB is really neither of these, its focus being on the power of the Holy Spirit first, not Jesus. As we have already noted, the appeal to the Spirit in the movement is not actually an appeal to a person, but to a ‘parcel of power,’ leading to a fulfilment-centred religion that can *then* acquire an evangelical or mystical gloss. Those inspired by the movement remain irrefutable: ‘[one] may consult the light within...and mistake some psychological urge for divine guidance...the very courageousness of conduct...is, in a sense, the guarantee of supernatural inspiration.’

<sup>146</sup> S. Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World*, Oxford, OUP, 1996, p.10. However, in configuring this thesis in monotheistic terms, Bruce has clearly not understood the subtle dynamics of Trinitarian relationality.

sense of belonging that transcends human otherness. This sociological account of a theological cosmos has implications for Bruce's later comments on the New Age, since he is bound to see phenomena like the TB as a product of social relations rather than something that is from beyond it. Bruce sees the New Age as a form of social compensation for individuals in an industrialized, secular society. It has no cohesion other than fulfilment, and lacks the rigours of a sect: 'for all its talk of community...[it] is the embodiment of individualism.'<sup>147</sup> If pushed too far this could be seen as mere Marxist analysis but used sensitively it surely cannot be unfair to see the TB in similar terms. For all the discussion of the TB's impact on 'the nations' in journals such as *Spread the Fire*, there is no mistaking the tribalism of TACF's treatment of others. It does seem that this form of religion is a reaction to globalism or pluralism, and, ultimately, radically individualistic in its promotion of experience.

Further evidence for this thesis can be traced in Mark Noll's provocative theological critique of contemporary evangelicalism: he prosecutes the 'escapist' thesis with even more vigour than Bruce, even though he is evangelical himself.<sup>148</sup> Noll suggests that modernity and postmodernity have produced a crisis of intellectual faith amongst Evangelicals, such that they no longer wish to engage with the world and its culture. For Noll, the evidence is not just in the paucity of evangelical scholarship, which he claims has retreated into its own ghetto, but also in evangelical worship. Noting that pre-industrial revivalism was most concerned about social issues, Noll cites a George Croly song, penned in about 1860 – 'Spirit of God Descend upon My Heart':

I ask no dream, no prophetic ecstasies,  
No sudden rending of the veil of clay,  
No angel visitant, no opening skies;  
But take the dimness of my soul away.

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.217-225.

<sup>148</sup> M. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Leicester, IVP, 1994.

It is a typical expression of evangelical and revivalist piety from the period, describing what would happen if one were to experience a deeper walk with the Spirit. In contrast, a Helen Lemmel song, although written only a few generations later (1922), has been popularized by, and to an extent can characterize the present revivalist outlook:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in his wonderful face,  
And the things of the earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.

Whilst it is true that the pietistic directionality of this song is clear, it does illustrate that there has been a profound shift in revivalist attitudes to the world. In older revivals, such as those presided over by Wesley or Edwards, the world and its needs came into sharp focus through spiritual experience: revival led to deeper social and cultural engagement. But in late modernist and postmodern revivalism, the world grows 'dim' due to the personal nature of religious experience. It is the believer who becomes bathed in light; the world is left in darkness, unless it too follows the pattern of abandonment.<sup>149</sup> Again, looking at the brochure for the 'Rest and Renewal' programme from TACF, it would appear that Noll has struck a chord here.

Some within revivalism, whilst not disagreeing with the thrust of this thesis so far, would nonetheless point to the allegedly authentic religious experiences of many individuals and groups. As we have seen already, there are myriad ways of accounting for the perceived 'depth' of encounter. Some social-psychology can be of

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<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144. Noll develops some interesting arguments in this volume, and it repays close scrutiny. In Chapter 3, dealing specifically with revival, Noll develops a line of thinking that resonates with Harvey Cox's thesis about revivalism being anti-rational: 'revivals...call people to Christ as a way of escaping tradition' (p.63). Noll suggests that charisma and personal religious experience fill the void vacated by critical thinking.

further assistance here. Serge Moscovici's work on crowds shows how subliminal messages and 'mesmerisation,' including the use of animal noises or behaviour, can influence the outcome of individual and collective unconscious.<sup>150</sup> Leon Festinger notes that because the function of religion is to 'bind' believers, adherents will 'knowingly process lack of agreement in such a way as to make it harmonise.'<sup>151</sup> Typically, this is done when prophecies 'fail' or are wrong, in such a way as to imply that they have come to pass. Charismatic groups are past masters at this. In terms of exchange, consecrated denial is the price of belonging.

However, denial (and affirmation) need not form the socio-theological basis of a religious group. Given TACF interest in substitutionary atonement (our place of punishment exchanged for Christ's blood), a recent and relevant book by Timothy Gorringer explores the relationship between crime, punishment and atonement theories, and suggests that theological language has helped construct and underpin social reality in the past: 'theological rhetoric may be the mother of [social] change.'<sup>152</sup> Gorringer is critical of this relationship on this issue (crime and punishment), but recognizes the benefits in other areas in terms of exchange. He goes on to explore how atonement theories that stressed a just punishment for the sinner (but with Christ as substitute) lent credence to social notions of 'appropriate' penal codes. In TACF ideology, the temporary abrogation of Jesus' power justifies its present force. Equally, his observations on the contemporary social situation are also relevant to our discussion of revivalism. In a postmodern world, he suggests, community has given way to 'neo-tribalism': with the demise of metanarratives, smaller groups (such as TACF) 'persevere thanks only to their

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<sup>150</sup> S. Moscovici, *The Age of the Crowd: A Treatise on Mass Psychology*, Cambridge, CUP, 1985.

<sup>151</sup> See L. Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails*, New York, Harper & Row, 1956 and *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 1957

<sup>152</sup> T. Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1996, p. 81

continuing seductive capacity.<sup>153</sup> Thus, resonating with Noll's work, we are seeing some religious communities, especially postmodern revivalism or New Age groups, no longer forming society or being formed by it, but, rather, simply attempting to escape it in a manner that is attractive to a constituent membership.<sup>154</sup> Rodney Stark goes further, and suggests that the economy of commitment is now governed not by 'truth,' but by the limits placed on 'strictness' and the freedom that is available for the individual.<sup>155</sup> Thus, the theological issue at stake here is how micro-communities (or new 'tribes') relate to sociality. Gorringer and Stark are both suggesting that the links are necessarily tenuous, in order to keep privatized ideology intact.

Clearly, the range of theological issues that TACF/TB raises are manifold. However, in terms of the focus on Social Exchange Theory as a reasonable explanation for this revivalist phenomenon, some concluding remarks should be made. First, TB/TACF offers a place of exchange that is attractive to believers. The key to the attractiveness lies in the adventurous motifs offered within an ecclesial framework that can be characterized as 'romantic' and 'mechanistic.' The romantic genres present in revivalism value personal manifestations, blessings, charisma and immanence; God is Spirit, Lord, Presence and Power, against the forces of Demons and the Devil.<sup>156</sup> The mechanistic ecclesiology is also prey to power, and is typically concerned with size, order, dynamics and the like: it is rational and pragmatic, if necessary animating 'the social will to

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p.261

<sup>154</sup> As I argue in my *Farmington Paper/Manchester College, Oxford* (Is There a Modern Charismatic Theology? February, 1997), contemporary revivalism does not really have a theology as such, but is more of an ideology with a theological *gloss*.

<sup>155</sup> See R. Stark, 'Why Religious Movements Succeed or Fail: A Revised General Model,' in *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, vol. 11, no.2., May 1996, pp.133ff.

<sup>156</sup> James Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures*, London, SCM, 1987, p.70.

achieve results,' with which it is chiefly concerned.<sup>157</sup> The combination of romantic and mechanistic themes is powerfully seductive – believers are virtually guaranteed an effective outcome from their investment in passionate worship.

Second, and following on from the identification of TB/TACF ecclesiology as 'mechanistic-romantic,' there is a 'dissonant' relationship with the world which actually enables 'mass proselytising.' As Festinger notes, if beliefs are held securely in a way that appears to relate to the world, yet in themselves require a distance being created between the church and world, then a number of things may take place. Disconfirmation of beliefs becomes difficult, since the world is deemed to be unable to 'address' all the evidence for belief. Dissonance is thus introduced between belief and contrary information, which becomes the habitation and place of exchange of most believers.<sup>158</sup> Finally, social support is obtained in attempting to reduce dissonance, on the condition it is done without diluting belief.<sup>159</sup> One does not have to look very far in the TB/TACF movement to encounter forms of 'cognitive dissonance': prophecies regularly 'fail,' and it is obvious that many of the hoped-for healings can never be measured, or do not last, if indeed, they take place at all. In terms of exchange, what TACF and the TB are offering is constant movement, enthusiasm and adventure to believers, which prevents many 'real' issues being addressed. Horizons of critical reflection are necessarily reduced, and those that remain are placed in the service of dissonance reduction.<sup>160</sup> An appropriate analogy would be a series of bank

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<sup>157</sup> Hopewell, *Ibid.*, pp.23ff.

<sup>158</sup> See B. Bettelheim, 'Individual and Mass Behaviour in Extreme Situations,' *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1953, vol.38, pp.417-52.

<sup>159</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*, London, Tavistock, 1959, pp.249ff.

<sup>160</sup> Knox, in his *Enthusiasm*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1950, p. 585, notes this in his concluding chapter, 'The Philosophy of Enthusiasm': 'More generally characteristic of the ultrasupernaturalist is a distrust of human

accounts that move assorted amounts of money between them at great speed, creating the sense of business being generated and new income, in order to attract further funds from investors. However, when the process is arrested and the assets counted, it transpires that, for all the exchange taking place, there has actually been very little to bank in the first place.

Thirdly and finally, it should be re-stated that the form of theological domination offered through TACF/TB – the Spirit as force, God as power, Jesus as deliverer, Lord and conqueror – even though grace and gentleness is emphasized, is a form of exchange mechanism. Believers opt for the kyriarchy because they perceive themselves to be already dominated by earthly powers which are oppressive, robbing them of their freedom. TACF offers a restoration of theocracy: a new set of ‘conditions’ under which to live, that will transform and liberate. In one sense then, we can read the uncontrollable laughter, ‘slaying,’ shaking and animal noises as a sign that the believer has stepped in to the dissonant habitat. This behaviour represents individuals shaking off anything oppressive that might hold them back from being dominated in a different way: as we have noted, rationality is the chief casualty. But the behaviour also shows that power is being profoundly ‘forgotten’ in the postmodern climate, subsumed into the paranormal and the enthusiastic. The oppression, whether it is there or not, is being swapped for the charismatic, provided the believer first submits to the awesome power that the TB claims to be. Once that is done, the initiated believer enters a realm in which real power is forgotten, and quasi-spiritual power is the new reality.<sup>161</sup>

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thought processes. In matters of abstract theology, the discipline of the intellect is replaced by a blind act of faith. In matters of practical deliberation, some sentiment of inner conviction, or some external ‘sign’ indicative of the Divine will, claims priority over all considerations of common prudence.’

<sup>161</sup> See S. Clegg, *Frameworks of Power*, London, Sage, 1989, pp.273ff.

## F. SUMMARY

THE history of revivals in North America is well documented.<sup>162</sup> However, there is no agreement amongst historians as to the sociological roots of revivalism, or of the long-term sociological effects. They may have affected and bolstered family life on the frontiers; moral and political agendas have certainly grown out of revivals in the past. Prohibition and the emancipation of slaves are both partially in debt to revivals. In contemporary American fundamentalism, the 'New Religious Right' does take an active interest in social and political affairs, especially issues connected to sexuality.<sup>163</sup> But what of revivalism in the present – can there be similar expectations for social renewal arising out of enthusiastic religion? One way forward in addressing this question is to look for continuity in revival tradition. If there are sufficient similarities between revivals of the past and present, it is possible that the impact today will be as significant.

The phenomena of jerking, barking, shaking, dancing and falling are not new,<sup>164</sup> although there are some phenomenological differences between the kinds of manifestation occurring in the late twentieth century compared to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>165</sup> What can be said with some clarity is that there are

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<sup>162</sup> See for example R. Cawardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1978; B. Reisberg, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America*, New York, Little, Brown, 1958; W. McCloughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change*, Chicago, Chicago UP, 1978.

<sup>163</sup> C.f. Martin Marty, 'Fundamentalism Reborn' in *Religion and Republic*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1987.

<sup>164</sup> See the account of Barton Stone's 1847 autobiography in *Christian History*, Vol. XIV, No.1, 1995, p.15.

<sup>165</sup> Nowadays, the attribute of God focused on is power, with people tending to fall down after preaching, during ministry, and resting on their backs. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the attribute of

behavioural traditions in revivals, which arise out of certain social conditions. For example, the turbulence and displacement of frontier life in the early nineteenth century appears to have encouraged community camp meetings that indulged in religious fervour and enthusiasm in response to preaching: 'religion,' in the original sense of the word, was a force for binding the disparate. The new religiosity was both a compensator for social displacement, as well as a reflection of the newly emerging optimism of modernity. Like the present revivalist conferences, these meetings lasted for days at a time, with the organisers knowing that, within reason, the more believers had to travel and sacrifice of themselves, the more rewarding the meeting was.<sup>166</sup> Believers reaped what they sowed. There were often accusations in the popular press at the time: allegations of emotionalism, exploitation of vulnerable people, and crude manipulation were all common. As a result of the Kentucky Revivals, including that at Cane Ridge, which was manifestly an explosion of popular enthusiastic piety, some countered that these revivals were nothing but a money-making venture for some – an excuse to sell tracts, devotional material and anything that might help someone on the road to salvation.<sup>167</sup> Similar accusations are sometimes levelled today.

Whatever the similarities between the eighteenth, nineteenth and late twentieth century revivals, there are many more differences to be noted. First, the popular piety of previous centuries resulted in mass conversions; the present culture of revivalism, at least in Europe and North America, largely services an internal market – people who are already believers.<sup>168</sup> Second,

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God that was mostly focused on was holiness, with falling occurring during preaching, with believers resting face down.

<sup>166</sup> *Christian History*, Vol. XIV, p.2.

<sup>167</sup> See P. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost*, Wisconsin, University Press, 1990, and Mark Galli, 'Revival at Cane Ridge,' *Christian History*, Vol. XIV, pp.8ff.

<sup>168</sup> This is a difficult point to prove, and some understanding of the

the present charismatic culture is a self-sustaining entity. It may well feed off some social turbulence at times, or millennial or 'end time' perceptions, but it is not necessary to its survival. Indeed, contemporary revivalist preachers seldom address relevant social issues with any precision; in contrast, their forebears frequently commented on social or political evils of the time, such as slavery. Revivalists exist in sufficient numbers to maintain and advance their own belief systems through books, television, seminaries and the like, which is a primarily spiritualized and privatized cosmos.<sup>169</sup> Third, revivalist preachers in previous centuries frequently had to endure violence, assault and physical hardship. Few were wealthy, secure or comfortable. Unlike today's itinerant charismatic ministers, these people took their message to the streets, and were often ridiculed.<sup>170</sup> Lastly, the revivalist strategy appears to be consistent insofar as mass rallies have taken place beyond many of

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subtleties of North American 'Conversion-Culture' are needed. Empirical research shows that many who respond to altar calls in revival meetings are not doing so for the first time, but seeking a fresh 'born again' experience, new compensators and revised positive affect. See W. Johnson, 'The Religious Crusade: Revival or Ritual?,' *American Journal of Sociology*, 1971, Vol. 76, pp. 873-90. John Arnott, in a sermon on 07/07/96, suggested that as many as 10,000 may have been converted through TACF since the outbreak of the TB. However, those who responded to the evangelistic calls that I heard seemed to already have a knowledge of Christianity, or to have responded at TACF before. This does not rule them out going forward to 'be born again,' or to arrest their 'backslidden' state, which does mean that TACF can claim that thousands have dedicated or re-dedicated their lives through their ministry. Evangelistic sermons frequently deployed the metaphor of 'harvesting,' and believers were repeatedly urged to join in the reaping of new converts, for 'the end is near...God is rampaging over the earth, saving souls.'

<sup>169</sup> A recent NBC Network/USA (June 1996) survey estimated the charismatic market in the USA – retreats, conferences, books, tapes and videos – at being worth at least \$500 million per year.

<sup>170</sup> See for example W. P. Strickland (Ed.), *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher*, New York, Carlton & Porter, 1857.

the attendees immediate localities. Yet the phenomenology of revivalism in the late twentieth century indicates that the social re-integration of believers after the revival is rare. Enthusiastic religion, even though it may occasionally enjoy a public profile, is a largely private affair. Believers, for all their talk of saving the nations or setting them on fire for God, transforming society, or walking in God's love and giving it away, basically soak up the present revival and then go home or back to their churches, and wait until the next one.<sup>171</sup>

In spite of my comments about the historical continuity and discontinuities between today's revivalist leaders and those of previous generations, I must stress that this should not be taken to imply that the Arnott's or other TACF staff are in any way manipulative. It may be the case that today's revivals are but a pale shadow of those that preceded them, but this cannot be any one individual's responsibility. TACF staff are clearly aware of how some meetings and phenomena can be manipulated, but are wise and generous enough to admit that whilst they have this knowledge, they do not wish to use it.<sup>172</sup> What they claim to be

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<sup>171</sup> The book cover of Michael Mitton's *The Heart of Toronto* (1995) pictures the maple leaf on the Canadian flag being turned into a flame, implying that this is somehow happening or about to happen to Canada. Yet once again I must point out that few in Toronto seem to be aware of TACF, and the TACF's engagement with their local and national situation is at best, thin. In terms of the world-wide church, many revivalists see the TB as 'ecumenical,' but the movement does not seem to have brokered any lasting unity in denominations or between them. On the contrary, it is rather divisive. True, it does bring like-minded people together, but there is no serious ecumenism in the movement – it lacks a dialogical dynamic.

<sup>172</sup> A workshop led by TACF staff member Valerie Gillam demonstrated just how aware of manipulation TACF are: they seem to take great care in not 'giving God a hand.' However, I should point out that even this presentation, with all its honesty, was riddled with ironies. For example, 'catchers' were told not to pull people backwards, but were also instructed to apply a small amount of pressure to the small of the back

seeking is ‘God’s heart,’ ‘the things of the Spirit’ and ‘the manifest presence of Jesus’ in the midst of the congregation and for the lives of individuals. This is an important observation, since it should be noted that the overall flavour of the ‘Toronto Blessing’ is one of joyful exuberance, abundantly shared, with analogies and concepts of passion and power playing a key role in configuring images of God and the Christian life. In meeting John Arnott and other TACF staff, I found them to be genuine, honest and open people, not given to guile, or even overtly ambitious.

In spite of this, and following Stark and Bainbridge, it does seem, at least sociologically, that the TB is a profound example of ‘gaining rewards or avoiding costs and is lodged in exchange relationships.’ The power that is present in the TB/TACF movement controls the exchange ratio, with ‘the consequence that the more powerful, the more favourable the exchange ratio.’<sup>173</sup> The exchange ratio is the net rewards or ultimate compensators over costs in an exchange; power is simply the degree of control over the exchange ratio. Stark and Bainbridge are suggesting that religious sects or schisms are evidence of demand for religious rewards or compensators, that will combat the alienating affects of modernity. Indeed, secularization actually stimulates the growth of sect movements through the pressure it brings to bear on religious belief.<sup>174</sup> They further suggest that a new religious group, schism or sect that can offer a low-tension environment (i.e., a relatively easy relationship with the world, that is non-separatist), alongside high rewards (healing, wealth, social cohesion, elevated spiritual insight,

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for the person receiving prayer, so that they knew someone would catch them if they fell. It is hard to know whether this just provides assurance for those who might fall, or actually helps induce it.

<sup>173</sup> R. Stark & W. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, New York, Peter Lang/Toronto Studies in Religion, 1987, pp. 33ff. This work is a significant exposition of religion as an exchange mechanism, and I am grateful to Prof. Donald Wiebe of Trinity College, Toronto, for drawing my attention to it.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

family values, etc.), will be avoiding the fate of cults and the failures of mainstream churches.<sup>175</sup> TACF is a good example of the 'ideal' they have in mind: an undemanding body, configured via power-relations, in which rewards or compensators are gained through the exchange of inhibitions, rationality or other forms of personal power. Thus, this 'revival' is mainly about personal renewal: it is an expansive survival reflex, and emerges as 'the staging of episodes of increased religious affect to sustain compensators.'<sup>176</sup> The more believers invest in the blessing, the higher the rate of return: it is a virtuous circle. In reality, TACF is not so much a 'church' as a centre of pilgrimage. It has developed into an evangelical shrine at which God's power is deemed to be specially manifest. As a place where God works, there is less stress on charismatic leadership, and more on exchange relations. To receive the TB, congregations pay-up to send an emissary. In turn, this person gives by investing in TACF worship and its grammar of assent: the emissary is then blessed, and returns home to give the blessing back to investors.

In this paper, we have been attempting to assess the complex phenomenology of the TB and TACF through theories of exchange, power and charisma. What is clear is that the grammar of assent that is peculiar to the TACF, conceived through notions and analogies of passion, power and passivity, not only describes the TB but actually helps create the situations that configure it. However, it must be emphasized that sociological method and theological reflection cannot provide a completely comprehensive account of religious experience. Equally, those closer to the TB and

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122ff. A high tension/low-reward sect would have a poor relationship with the world, low recruitment, and also offer few compensators for belonging. A church, according to Stark and Bainbridge, is low-tension and low-reward – schisms that are variants of mainstream religion therefore often present the most attractive formula for some. Some high-tension religious groups offer high rewards, but these tend to be communitarian or cultic.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p.273.

who are sympathetic to it can also struggle to make sense of its complexity. For example, Michael Mitton's recent *The Heart of Toronto*, as the title suggests, tries to get to the 'centre' of the movement, but the analysis and reflection is fraught with the difficulties and contradictions that bedevil many theological assessments of this kind.

Mitton claims that the TB has a 'creation spirituality' and is not 'escapist or pietistic': he suggests that this is so because the movement is positive about humanity, not suspicious of it as other revivals (allegedly) were. Whilst it is true that many report personal or emotional inner healing, there is still no real evidence to suggest that the TB has any real interest in creation or non-religious social life. The stress on intimacy consistently implies that God is calling his people away from the earth, not to a renewed love for it.<sup>177</sup> Mitton also tends to collapse into the familiar rhetorical genres that describe renewal experiences. There is spiritual 'dryness,' but dread of 'new improved renewal,' followed by the shock of 'dignified clergy in Brompton collapsing to the ground and giggling like hyenas!'<sup>178</sup> There then follows the predictable false dichotomies (of exchange) that encourage waverers to choose, exchanging the present for the future. Mitton assumes (theologically) that there is a distance between God and humanity, and that the specious eccentricity of the manifestations is God's way of getting our attention. Thus, we read that 'the manifestations must either be a response to the work of God,' or human 'engineering,' and a form of 'ritual' performance that is not of God. So, Mitton leaves his readers to choose between 'dishonest' and 'authentic,' 'control' and 'letting go' to admit God, 'death' and 'resurrection.'<sup>179</sup> This reasoning is set against a background of basic

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<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. It is extraordinary to hear Mitton expressing surprise at the behaviour of clergy at Holy Trinity, Brompton, when they are known for being well-disposed to John Wimber's revivalism, which already included phenomena such as jerking, laughter, falling and the like.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.5-7. Somewhat risibly, the resurrection is presented as a sort of

accounts of revival being ‘clear, factual and unbiased,’ so you can trust them.<sup>180</sup> The subtleties of historical and phenomenological interpretation seem to be lost on Mitton: it is an either/or situation, and the possibility of the TB being neither/both does not seem to have occurred to him. The TB may well just turn out to be representative of the contemporary resurgence of enthusiastic religion – ‘Church is supposed to be exciting, fun...and dangerous!’ – in which some ‘form’ of revelation may be present.<sup>181</sup> It represents Charismatic Renewal in its most positivistic, postmodern, non-dualist phase, in which nothing seriously oppresses the believer: all you need to do is let go, and let God.

Characteristically, the hopes of the TACF community for the TB are principally embedded in their worship. This is the fire that is to burn, that will break chains, release passions and consume.<sup>182</sup> The TB is an answer to a prayer: rain, sweet rain has been falling, and God has caused the mighty river to flow once more.<sup>183</sup> The revivalist church stands in the midst of the end times, and it believes Jesus will be coming soon.<sup>184</sup> It sees itself as Jesus’ bride, and it awaits him, panting in expectation. For those who move in this stream or wave of renewal, one thing is guaranteed: more blessings will come to those who invest now.<sup>185</sup> The harvest is ready; the harvesters are coming. And so, I suspect, will another

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‘pick-me-up.’

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p.II.

<sup>181</sup> See my discussion of Rahner’s position in ‘City on a Beach,’ *Neo-Pentecostalism at the End of the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1997.

<sup>182</sup> ‘Let it Burn,’ David Ruis, Anaheim, Calif., Mercy/Vineyard Publishing, 1995.

<sup>183</sup> ‘Light the Fire Again,’ Brian Doerksen, Anaheim, Calif., Mercy/Vineyard Publishing, 1982; ‘Let the River Flow,’ David Ruis, Anaheim, Calif., Mercy/Vineyard Publishing, 1995.

<sup>184</sup> c.f. *Revelation*, Chap. 22.

<sup>185</sup> ‘More Love, More Power,’ Jude Del Hierro, Anaheim, Calif., Mercy/Vineyard Publishing, 1982.

revival – soon. It will need to. Numbers attending TACF are down on 1995, and only another innovative outpouring can help sustain this extraordinary charismatic community.

## Afterword:

‘That we construct “religion” and “science” is not the main problem: that we forget we have constructed them in our own image – that is a problem.’<sup>186</sup>

There is no agreed method or process amongst social scientists or theologians on how to assess and evaluate religious experience. Given the variety and weight of different accounts for the ‘Toronto Blessing,’ it must at times be tempting to flee academic insight, and simply trust the testimony of those who claim to be affected, as though it were the only reliable barometer. For good or ill, I do not think this is an option that is open to most Evangelicals. Any statistics, testimonies or data gathered that point to the benefits of the ‘Toronto Blessing’ must be open to a whole series of relative and counter-claims. Are not many people happy to be Moonies, or to be part of non-Christian revivals? Is it not so that tens of thousands are helped through their involvement with New Age therapies? The temptation to deduce that anything that feels good must be of God – or at worst, harmless – is naive, and possibly dangerous. No-one is suggesting that the ‘Toronto Blessing’ has not made some within revivalism feel happier, blessed and strengthened. But good feelings or transformed lives do not necessarily implicate God. It may well be that some are led to ‘weep for the nation’ as a result of the ‘Toronto Blessing,’ but one must still ask : ‘And what next...?’ Jesus wept over Jerusalem, but it made no difference to its fate, or to his. The inability of the movement to penetrate beyond its immediate sphere of influence and immerse itself in genuine sociality suggests that this is not a sign of world-wide revival, let alone anything of national or local significance. Rather, it is ‘an attempt to close the gap between expectation and

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<sup>186</sup> See Damian Thompson, *The End of Time: Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium*, London, Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996, pp.165ff. Thompson points out that the market for charismatic-evangelicalism in Britain is probably ‘saturated.’

reality,' borne out of the frustrations in the charismatic world that have had to cope with the non-appearance of promised revival, and the creeping suspicion that the movement has reached the likely extent of its growth.<sup>187</sup>

To tackle a phenomenon like the 'Toronto Blessing' through a mainly sociological lens can only ever be an intermediate method in the hunt for authenticity and wisdom in matters of religion. Sociology, following its founding fathers such as Durkheim, Weber, or Sohm, makes fundamental methodological presumptions about the nature of religion that not all religious believers will want to buy in to. It assumes that religion is a human enterprise that can be described in humanistic terms, with reference to notions such as structure, ideology and sociality. That religion is a 'created' cosmos that brings stability, order, meaning and moral cement to a given community: the very word 'religion' means 'to bind,' from the Latin. As such, considerable caution needs to be exercised by theologians who place sociology in the service of religious understanding. Especially since some sociologists, such as Steve Bruce or Bryan Wilson, sometimes seem to be setting themselves up as gurus, and their theories as secular alternatives or remedies to religion. Believing themselves to be 'neutral' (in the rather passé, modernist sense), it is almost as though they are preaching at times: 'Come to me, all ye who are religious, and I will explain.'

Responses to this type of modernist metanarrative range from the crude to the sophisticated. Clearly, one such crude response is to engage in literalism or fundamentalistic interpretation of experience, and distrust any serious analysis. More sophisticated though, is the work of scholars like John Milbank, who trump the modernist metanarratives with a taste of their own medicine: his critique of the social sciences is a carefully constructed philosophy of suspicion turned back on to

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<sup>187</sup> J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990.

philosophies of suspicion. Others take a middle way. Scholars such as Kieran Flanagan, are more selective in their adoption of sociological method, and clearly appreciate its capacity to illuminate religious studies, although they do not think it is the light, per se.<sup>188</sup>

In using Exchange Theory to elucidate the ‘Toronto Blessing,’ I have been attempting to demonstrate that the claim to experience the power of God directly, immediately and authoritatively requires a little more critical reflection. The rhetoric and religion of what I would dub ‘unmediated zapping’ is mesmerizing and magical; but it also results in rational abrogation. The human sciences can help us to see that claims on religious experience cannot be made and accepted in a simple, literalistic fashion. (Neither, of course, can they be rejected out of hand). All religious experience is mediated through some agency or other, such as language, ideology, social or ecclesial structure. It is therefore open to some enquiry through social science. God is both present in and beyond sociality, so sociology and theology need each other here, if wisdom is being sought, not simply interpretation. In using the sociology of religion carefully, one is not engaged in the task of ultimate humanist reduction, whereby the power of God is always deemed to be a human projection. Rather, the enterprise is geared towards showing that any powers of God that might be known are often subtle, ambiguous and open to a variety of explications.

For example, accounts of ‘miracles’ are invariably interpretations of events, not simple, pure descriptions that require blind acceptance or naked rejection. ‘Miracles’ do happen, I am sure, just as God’s power is real. But psychological, sociological, anthropological and phenomenological accounts of the same can compliment, critique and illuminate the eyes of faith that may have seen the hand of God. Those who are for the ‘Toronto Blessing’ are

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<sup>188</sup> K. Flanagan, *The Enchantment of Sociology: A Study of Theology and Culture*, London, Macmillan, 1996.

actually engaged in the exercise of descriptive-interpretation, as much as any sociologist of religion. The real issue is over the quality and form of rational-faith basis that constructs the explanation. Literalistic interpretations are typically still, framed, black and white portraits: social science can give colour, sound and movement to the same image, helping to convey the complexity of what is taking place. Neither ultimately monopolizes the truth to the exclusion of the other, although one should acknowledge the paucity of literalism as an intellectual stance, and perhaps be better disposed to the suspicions of rational-social enquiry.

Accordingly, some theological reflection on the directionality of the sociological insight is most likely to assist the task of illumination: there is nothing more practical than a good theory. In using Exchange Theory in the way that I have, and then building on it theologically, I am inviting readers to ponder the claims made over God's power in relation to Christian traditions. In short, does the 'Toronto Blessing' correlate with historically-validated forms of revelation, or does it look more like a postmodern praxis, configured through a discourse and ideology of contemporary power interests? Put more sharply, does the 'Toronto Blessing' movement represent a type of revelation, or more likely a 'religious construct' in which God is deemed to be moving (and of course is free to do so).

It would be wrong to suggest, however, that all reductive accounts are damaging to faith. On the contrary, such accounts provide helpful skeletons – an anatomy if you will – that might suggest anything from a pathology to a cure. Theologians who are interested in studying religious movements cannot afford to ignore these insights. Whilst it is true that autopsies give no insight into the condition of the soul, they nonetheless tell us something about how a body lived and moved – and what eventually killed it. With respect to the employment of Exchange Theory, it is true that it runs the risk of flirting with a Marxist Non-Realist (theological) account. Yet it can also be used in the service of simple Social Realism, which is surely a worthy theological goal. So far as the use of this theory goes, I am not suggesting that it provides a comprehensive account of the 'Toronto Blessing.' Rather, it is a

complimentary account, which has the effect of challenging the claims made for the 'Blessing.' In my view, this is a necessary component in the task of discernment, and in the pursuit of wisdom.

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**Harvest, 1996.**

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