Sovereignty or Spiritual Hunger?

Six Key Factors that Birthed the Toronto Blessing

Lawrence Sparks

August, 2013

History of Charismatic Renewal

TCDH 685 A

Dr. Vinson Synan

Summer 2013
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 1
  Spiritual Hunger and Revival ....................................................................................... 1

THE SIX REVIVAL FACTORS ............................................................................................ 3
  Factor 1: Desperation for Divine Intervention ......................................................... 3
  Factor 2: Uncommon Acts of Spiritual Devotion ................................................... 5
  Factor 3: Impartation from Revival Leaders .............................................................. 6
  Factor 4: The Hunger-Stirring Power of Testimony ............................................... 10
  Factor 5: Follow Revival Until Revival Follows You ............................................. 12
  Factor 6: Importing and Exporting Revival ............................................................ 13

CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 14
INTRODUCTION

When it comes to revival, renewal, or spiritual outpouring, there appears to be two main approaches that determine one’s perspective on the subject. The first approach sees revival as a sovereign act of God, purposed to rejuvenate the church—not initiated by any activity, effort, or provocation of man, but solely by God’s divine directive. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones sums up this position by writing that “Revival is always the action of God. It is not man. It is God pouring out His Spirit. It is something quite out of the ordinary, something special, unusual, exceptional.”¹

While this perspective affirms the doctrine of God’s sovereignty, the logic is slightly skewed. Why would a God Who wills, yes, even commands that His people love Him with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength,² sovereignly provide the very catalyst that ignites such spiritual zeal—revival—with the intention of sovereignly withdrawing it after a season? This question is what legitimately contributes to forming a second perspective concerning revival.

It would appear that revival is an either/or reality—either sovereignly initiated, as described by Jones, or released through man’s spiritual hunger. This body of research seeks to identify a middle ground in which the very desire to experience a renewed faith is sovereignly awakened by God, but how the flame is fanned and whether the renewal continues on or putters out is actually the stewardship of those being graced with the hunger for spiritual refreshing.

SPIRITUAL HUNGER AND REVIVAL

One of the great explanations of how man’s hunger draws on God’s renewal blessing is identified in Fred and Sharon Wright’s book, *The World’s Greatest Revivals*. The Wrights note

¹ John Peters, *The Toronto Story* (United Kingdom: Authentic Media, 2005), 117.
² Matthew 22:37
that “revival is spurred on by hungry and desperate people who are seeking answers to their needs, the Church’s needs, and society’s needs.”³ This hunger compels the spiritually famished to “pray and search the Scriptures to find answers, which they then begin to proclaim.”⁴ The “proclamation of rediscovered truth results in God’s presence being poured out upon His people and upon the message, and a profound revival takes place.”⁵ In preparing to identify and describe six factors for sparking and stewarding revival, it is worth paying attention to how historian, Wesley Duewel, evaluates the collision of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility in revival—“Revivals are the sovereign working of God, but they are always related to the obedience of God’s people.”⁶

When evaluating the Toronto Blessing, the collision of sovereignty and obedience is obvious. While many—including Toronto’s pastor, John Arnott—contend that the revival, which broke out in January of 1994, was the sovereign act of a sovereign God, the stories surrounding some of the key catalysts are worth examining.⁷ There appears to be a noticeable progression in the steps of obedience and responses to the sovereign stirrings of the Holy Spirit, that very well could be keys to unlocking and sustaining revival in the church today.

The Toronto Blessing is one of history’s great—and more recent—examples of how the spirit of revival is a sovereign stirring of God’s Holy Spirit, but the release, expression, and continuation of revival can actually be stewarded by man through several different methods.

---


⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, 28.


With Toronto, there are at least six contributing factors that both set the stage for renewal and enabled those impacted to carry the embers of the Blessing throughout the Earth.

- THE SIX REVIVAL FACTORS -

Factor One: Desperation for Divine Intervention

The Toronto Blessing was birthed out of desperation for a supernatural move of God. This hunger was evident in the lives of the key catalysts for the movement—evangelist/Pastor Randy Clark and Toronto pastors, John and Carol Arnott.

Margaret Poloma notes that “the story of revival and its attendant strange manifestations at Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship begins with its pastor, John Arnott, his wife, Carol, and their quest for more of the power of the Holy Spirit.”\(^8\) The key word that birthed the renewal, and went on to define its very culture and vernacular is “more.”

As John Arnott recounts, both he and his wife were struggling as leaders in full time ministry. This did not mean that their ministry was entirely unsuccessful, for the people under the Arnott’s pastoral care were experiencing measures of freedom in their lives—it was just taking a long time and demanding a tremendous amount of effort from the husband-wife ministry team. Ultimately, the Arnotts were less than satisfied with the results they were experiencing.\(^9\) Before the Toronto Blessing broke out, their primary focus was “on counseling their new parishioners, inner healing and deliverance.”\(^10\) They saw their church a hospital where they endeavored to see people healed and delivered from demonic oppression.

\(^8\) Margaret Poloma, *Main Street Mystics* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003), 60.

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid.
Arnott reflects that their “focus was on the people, their troubles, and the healings needed instead of the Lord.”¹¹ Rather than acquiring new territory by proactively advancing the Kingdom, they felt as though they were in a continuous struggle of dueling with the devil. The Holy Spirit was not their main emphasis in those years—a key factor that undeniably contributed to their feelings of burn out. Arnott sums up their problem this way: “Somehow battling the darkness had become our focus rather than dispelling it with light. Inadvertently, the devil had become too big, and God, too small.”¹² All of these elements simply reinforced the Arnott’s desperation for more of God in their lives, and ultimately, brought them to connect with some integral leaders who would fan the flame of revival that was igniting in their hearts.

Likewise, it was Randy Clark’s desperate spiritual hunger that connected him with a leader who, ordinarily, he would not have actively sought out due to the theological camps he was known to travel it. In Clark’s case, desperation drove him to press past barriers of prejudice, and vehemently pursue a powerful touch from God regardless of what it would cost him.

In his book, There is More, Clark describes his personal state of spiritual desperation prior to the Toronto Blessing. Before the renewal broke out, Clark described himself as living “in the spiritual desert” where even the “occasion showers vanished after a while.”¹³ The spiritually famished pastor reached a point on his personal spiritual journey where he felt disconnected from Scripture and assumed that God was not listening to him. This state of barrenness, however, did not drive him away from God, but pushed Clark towards Him in some surprising ways.

¹¹ Arnott, 57.


¹³ Randy Clark, There is More (Mechanicsburg: Global Awakening, 2006), 25.
Factor Two: Uncommon Acts of Spiritual Devotion

Feeling “dry spiritually”\textsuperscript{14} the Arnotts began to consecrate their entire mornings to the Lord, spending time worshiping, reading Scripture, praying and simply being with the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{15} Their desperation for divine intervention positioned them to do the extraordinary, not out of religious obligation, but out of a insatiable craving for a move of God in their lives and church. Desperation set them up for the second contributing factor of revival, which was their choice to engage uncommon acts of spiritual devotion. The routine of church was not cutting it for them, and the Arnotts recognized that, in order to experience something they had not before, they were going to have to initiate personal, spiritual habits that were a step beyond the normal.

Ministry had become business as usual for the Arnotts, and upon recognizing this, they began to engage new practices of daily devotion, prayer, and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. John recounts that “he had not signed up… so he could be the CEO of a religious organization.”\textsuperscript{16} By default, they ended up having to deal with overwhelming administrative loads which prevented them from effectively ministering to people or spending quality, intimate time with the Lord. The routine of religious business became too much for the couple, and they decided to shift gears from working for God to becoming lovers of God. It was a transition sparked by a burning desire for intimacy with Jesus—one of the central themes that would characterize the Toronto Blessing for years to come.

Randy Clark’s uncommon act of spiritual devotion brought him to attend some of South African evangelist, Rodney Howard-Browne’s meetings—notably, one at Rhema Bible Church

\textsuperscript{14} Poloma, 60

\textsuperscript{15} John Arnott, \textit{The Father’s Blessing} (Lake Mary: Charisma, 1995), 58.

\textsuperscript{16} Arnott, 58.
in Tulsa, OK. In the context of contributing factor number two, it is important to note that, more than the process of Clark pursuing an impartation from Browne, it was his ravenous hunger for God that caused him to press pass barriers that would have otherwise restrained him from receiving the touch available through these meetings. Clark had strong adverse feelings towards Word of Faith theology, and when he discovered that Browne would be speaking at the Rhema Church in Tulsa, OK—the major hub for the Word of Faith movement—his unusual act of spiritual devotion involved him pressing through prejudice to receive what God had for him. Clark was “seeking for a new level of spiritual power in his life,” and as a result of his visit to Browne’s meetings, he “was profoundly impacted by what he saw and by what he experienced.”

It was not long after Clark attended one of Browne’s meetings in Lakeland, FL that he was invited to speak at the Toronto Airport Church and on January 20, 1994, the historic renewal broke out.

Factor Three: Impartation from Revival Leaders

Revival historian, Diana Chapman, explains “Impartation” as the “intentional journeys to places where the Spirit of God is moving, chance meetings, being in the company of those fresh from heavenly encounters… all bring us in contract with the breath of heaven. When that happens, we can’t remain the same.”

Author R.E. Davies contributes to the explanation of impartation in noting that “revivals often spread through contact, almost like contagion.

---


Individuals or groups who have experienced God’s power are the means of bringing it to others.”19 This was undeniably the case for both the Arnotts and Randy Clark.

Impartation is such a significant contributing factor to birthing and sustaining revival that Randy Clark devoted his book, There is More, to exploring this very theme, and teaching believers how to catch the fire of God from another person or environment where the Spirit is moving. To illustrate the teaching on impartation, Clark references his personal testimony—primarily his interaction with evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne—when describing the momentum that gave birth to the Toronto Blessing.

As previously noted, Clark persevered through his prejudices and theological differences with the Word of Faith movement to attend a meeting with evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne. He was truly desperate for a fresh touch from God. Clark notes that “Revival always follows the desperation that God gives.”20 He heard about what was going on in Browne’s meetings and became desperate to experience this special touch from God for himself. Naturally speaking, Clark did not want to attend the meetings where Browne was ministering, mainly due to his disdain towards the Word of Faith camp. Nevertheless, desperation compelled him onward and he sought out a man who was being used by God in an unusual, supernatural manner. This brought Clark to stand in line with 4500 other spiritually hungry people and pursue an impartation of supernatural grace and blessing from Browne. Though the evangelist prayed for Clark on multiple occasions, nothing overly significant took place. Others were being touched in physically profound ways, where they would fall to the ground, shake, tremble, or laugh uproariously. Even though Clark was not experiencing the same measure of dramatic experience,

20 Clark, 28.
he did not discount what was happening. Instead, he drew on the advice that mentor, John Wimber had given him: “You've got to learn to see what the Father’s doing.”

In response, Clark began following Browne around, carefully watching what he was doing. Browne’s brother and bodyguard, Basil, became curious about Clark’s activity, and was provoked to ask him if he wanted to receive prayer. Though Clark noted that he had already been prayed for four times, Basil prayed again, commenting that Randy “looked thirsty.” Upon returning to his church in St. Louis, Clark recollects that it was “like a bomb went off,” as God being to release supernatural outpouring in their church services and even during the regional Vineyard pastors meeting. It was testimony about these meetings that draw John Arnott to Randy Clark, as Arnott “heard about these meetings and invited Randy to come speak at his church.” The rest would soon become history.

For John and Carol, “they saw other ministries who they believed were powerfully anointed for ministry, and they prayed earnestly that they might be similarly empowered.” This was the case for them with evangelist Benny Hinn, as they had attended one of Hinn’s crusades in Toronto and were profoundly impacted. In the aftermath of the Hinn event, they were compelled to spend their mornings in prayer and pursuing greater intimacy with the Lord. This ultimately led the Arnotts to attend revival services in South America, “seeking a fresh touch

21 Clark, 29.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 29-30.
24 Ibid., 30.
25 Poloma, 60.
from the Lord.”

27 Pastor Claudio Freidzon, the leader who was presiding over the powerful move of the Holy Spirit in Argentina, had himself received impartation from Hinn—both by reading the book *Good Morning, Holy Spirit* and through personally connecting with him during a visit to the United States. 28 Freidzon’s ministry was hallmarked by mass healings, deliverances, and transformed lives 29 and it was Freidzon who singled John out of a crowd, asking him: “Do you want the anointing?” 30 This was a key moment in shaping the events to come, as “a significant feature of Freidzon’s ministry had been that people have received an unusual anointing when he laid hands on them and prayed for them. Their own ministries, in turn, became more effective in evangelism, healings, and imparting anointings of the Spirit to others around the world.”

Through Freidzon, John received impartation to take the anointing for revival back to Toronto. In fact, Arnott recalls that what he received was nothing short of an “impartation of faith for more of God and for miracles.” 32 The Arnotts returned from Argentina with a “great expectation that God would do something new in their church.”

---


29 Ibid, 319.

30 Poloma, 60.

31 Waugh, 216.

32 Arnott, 10.

33 John Arnott, *The Father’s Blessing* (Lake Mary: Charisma, 1995), 58.
Factor Four: The Hunger-Stirring Power of Testimony

What compelled John and Carol Arnott to connect with Claudio Freidzon in Argentina was the fact that they “heard about the revival in Argentina.” This is the power of testimony in action, as what the Arnotts heard ultimately compelled them to travel all the way down to South America in November of 1993 in hopes that they would experience God’s anointing in some transferable measure.

Randy Clark’s role in the Toronto story began with testimony as well. During his spiritually dry season, he reached a point of such intense desperation that he watched video tapes of a visitation of God’s power that took place in his previous church—nine years prior. Connecting with what God had done in the past, by exposing himself to testimony, Clark came to a place of fresh desperation and faith in the present. He cried out, “God I am so desperate. I want You. I want the power of the Holy Spirit to flow through my life again.” It was one week after this desperate cry that God connected Clark with a current testimony of renewal and power. Clark’s friend, Jeff shared testimony with him about the spiritual refreshing he experienced under Rodney Howard-Browne’s ministry.

Testimony had already been circulating about Browne, as the South African evangelist “had been in the USA since 1987 and had a reputation for meetings where ‘holy laughter’ broke

---

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Clark, 26.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
out as early as 1992.” In fact, “his revival meetings soon became known as the ‘Laughing Revival.’” The testimony of what was taking place in Browne’s meetings stirred Clark so deeply that he attended “one of Browne’s meetings in Kenneth Hagin’s Rhema Bible Church in Tulsa in 1993… and experienced the phenomenon personally.”

One of the key sparkplugs for the Toronto renewal was testimony. John Arnott had heard testimony of how God was moving in Clark’s meetings and how his “St. Louis Vineyard… had experienced a season of refreshing.” This was after Clark received prayer from Rodney Howard-Browne, and brought the fire of revival back to his St. Louis congregation. As a result of this testimony, Arnott invited Clark to come speak in Toronto and conduct “a series of renewal services.”

On January 20, 1994, as Randy Clark was ministering at the Toronto Airport Vineyard, he simply “gave his testimony and the ministry time began.” Nothing sensational or spectacular. Randy simply shared about what God had supernaturally done in his life, and during the ministry time afterwards, “people fell all over the floor under the power of the Holy Spirit, laughing and crying.” Clark’s testimony released supernatural possibility to those listening and in turn, stirred faith in the Toronto congregation to pursue the same dynamic experience with God for themselves. Again, while the implanted desire for God is a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, the

40 Poloma, 61.
41 Anderson, 163.
43 Ibid.
44 Arnott, 59.
atmosphere at Toronto was well prepared for what transpired on that historic January evening.

Factor Five: Follow Revival Until It Starts Following You

Pastor Bill Johnson is often quoted as saying “Follow signs and wonders until they begin following you.” John and Carol Arnott, along with Randy Clark, fit this mold—albeit, reluctantly at times. For Randy, it demanded a significant paradigm shift, embracing environments that were both uncomfortable and outside of his theological comfort-zone. For the Arnotts, it took them across the planet, from Toronto to South America. In both cases, it is evident that, in order to experience increased zeal and expectancy for renewal, there had to be an active pursuit of what God was doing in other places across the globe.

In 1992, when the Arnotts attended Benny Hinn’s crusade in Toronto, they realized “in a fresh new way that was the power of the Holy Spirit that was missing in our lives and ministries.” Most likely, they would have not come to this overwhelming conclusion had they not positioned themselves in an environment where the Holy Spirit was moving so powerfully. They made a decision to expose themselves to God’s renewal activity—in this case, by attending Hinn’s crusade—and by doing so, became intent on pursuing the same power and presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives and ministry. After attending Hinn’s meeting, the Arnotts launched into intentionally seeking out individuals, ministries and specific geographies where God was powerfully moving, and connecting with the leaders who were responsible for stewarding these regions of renewal. More than anything, the Arnotts were stepping out to follow those whose lives were dedicated to following the move of the Holy Spirit. This became characteristic for the ministry couple. However, they were not merely following people; they were pursuing the

dynamic power of the Holy Spirit that these individuals were experiencing as normative in their meetings and lives.

Factor Six: Importing and Exporting Revival

When it comes to the continuation and sustainment of the Toronto Blessing, the key term is exportation. Even though the number of actual weekly church services has reduced over the years at the Toronto headquarters, the impact of the revival has become global and spreading like wildfire. Because of the Toronto Blessing, there are pastors and leaders spanning the globe who are building centers of revival in their respective cities and churches. Importing and exporting the move of God has been a key characteristic since the revival broke out in 1994.

For example, John and Carol Arnott invited Randy Clark to their church. At the time, he was no more than a casual friend and pastor of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in St. Louis, MO. The Arnotts were not pursuing a personality, but rather, they sought to import the move of God that Clark was experiencing in his life and church to their church in Toronto.46

Some would even argue that “the revival in Toronto was initiated by South African preacher, Rodney Howard-Browne and Randy Clark,” citing both men as catalysts for the renewal.47 This is particularly noteworthy since Clark was the minister who was physically present during the meetings in Toronto. Browne receives credit indirectly, as he imparted a spirit of revival to Clark. Because of what Browne’s ministry exported into his life, Clark, in turn, became a vehicle through which revival was imported into Toronto.

46 John Arnott, The Father’s Blessing (Lake Mary: Charisma, 1995), 59.
47 Anderson, 163.
This process of exporting the move of God taking place at Toronto was so impacting that
the very term *Toronto Blessing* was somewhat of a “misnomer… as it was coined by the British
media after the unusual, revival-like manifestations experienced at the Toronto church were
apparently carried by a visitor from Canada to the Anglican Parish Church of Holy Trinity
Brompton in central London.” Even though momentum at the Canada hub slowed down over
the years, “the phenomena spread to other places in the western world, especially as ministers
who had visited Toronto went back with the ‘refreshing’ to their own churches.”

**CONCLUSION**

Though there are undeniably more than six factors that contributed to the Toronto Blessing, these highlighted catalysts are worth studying and applying today if renewal is to
remain a consistent hallmark of the Christian tradition. Throughout the centuries, a series of
awakenings and revivals have infused new vibrancy into the landscape of faith. It is key for both
contemporary church leaders and believers to study the processes of previous revivals in order to
discover how to take the step beyond repeating seasonal refreshing, and actually start witnessing
the manifestations and energy of renewal become the normative Christian experience rather than
the unusual and sporadic exception.

---


49 Anderson, 163.
REFERENCES

BOOKS


Poloma, Margaret M. *Main Street Mystics*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2003.


ARTICLES