

THE INTOXICATING SPELL OF RODNEY HOWARD-BROWNE



An Eye-Witness Report on the Canadian Escapades of the “Holy Ghost Bartender”

by Yves Brault

In this day and age as frantic spiritual manifestations attract the masses, becoming wilder as present-day religious leaders continually offer greater spiritual and physical benefits to their flock, an ever-increasing disregard for biblical principles and doctrines pervades the Church while many call these days the greatest revival we have ever known.

While the gifts of the Spirit are greatly emphasized, the fruit is rarely even mentioned. The word “anointed” has become the religious sales pitch of the nineties. There are anointed preachers, anointed singers, anointed messages, anointed praise-a-thons. Everything seems to be anointed – with a catch. True, we “have an anointing from the Holy One,” and “we have received an anointing which abides in us” (1 John 2:20, 27), but the meaning often carries a sense of “getting” it by attending some special kind of meeting and giving a certain sum of money in return.

The phenomenon of being “slain in the Spirit” has become commonplace, particularly in well-orchestrated demonstrations of laying on of hands that include a “catcher” behind the one being prayed over. Of course, that person is well aware that the catcher will gently deposit him on the floor. This sense of safety is essential. I myself, volunteered on a regular basis in those sessions. It always bothered me to see the abuse of the practice. It becomes a show where the preacher lays flat a follower as the gladiator of old would overcome a captive. Many

times you can hear an “ouch” as the individual hits somebody or the floor too hard. Or you can see those on the floor waving their hands or positioning themselves more comfortably. If they’re conscious enough to feel pain or move their body, they’re conscious enough to remain standing.

The laughing phenomenon has had a phenomenal impact since the early nineties. It is characterized by uncontrollable laughter and is often accompanied by body jerking, convulsions, spinning, or in other cases catalepsy, or even slumber. Interestingly, the Bible doesn’t mention these phenomena as being a norm for Christian living. Laughter and joy are discussed aplenty, but no ecstatic physical contortions of this nature is said to manifest an inward feeling of joy.

One may argue that such effects will not hurt, that although there might be some abuse caused by excess zeal from the part of the followers or lack of control from the part of the leaders, as a whole the Church can only benefit from this laughter revival. But ultimately any doctrine or action that has no basis in the Bible should raise concern. If it’s not found in the Bible, where does it come from? In this case, if the source is not the Holy Spirit, there are only two options left: the flesh, and darkness.

A number of believers blame the devil or demons for causing wild physical demonstrations.

While it is true in some cases, the main agents are manipulative techniques that stimulate the flesh, or carnal nature, whose works are contrary to the Spirit. Several works of the flesh are listed in Galatians 5:19-21. They are in sharp contrast with the fruit of the Spirit. Paul also tells us not to partake with those whose practices are not fitting for the saints (Ephesians 5:3-7), and admonished us “not to have any fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them” (vv. 8-11).

One has to realize that hysterical laughter, twitching, uncontrollable body spasms and the like occur in metaphysical pagan and other non-Christian groups. The manipulative technique “mesmerism” defined as the capacity to raise the emotional state of an individual or a crowd by different means, to an abnormal but controllable intensity, frequently causes faintings, convulsive movements, immoderate laughter, piercing cries, slumber, and so forth. Sometimes this technique is even used in the name of God, that is, disguised with Christian terminology. We could even say that we’re experiencing a revival of this technique. This is mainly due to an overemphasis on “signs and wonders,” an obsession with sensational experiences, and a disregard for true Christian doctrines, character and living.

I have witnessed the use of numerous manipulative and deceptive methods by popular religious leaders. This was
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Back to Basics

How many more dead people will Hinn report "visions" of? Hinn has yet spun another yarn as he has so often or is being duped by demons. God's Word leaves him no other options. Either choice ushers his followers into deep deception and may well give them leave to seek such encounters from the other side. In either case, Hinn needs to repent before God and seek the forgiveness of the body of Christ. Following that, he needs to step down and enroll in some basic doctrine courses and stop his overt approval of the occult.

Hinn, in the recent past resigned from the Assemblies of God denomination. Following his resignation he returned to being accountable and answerable to no one but himself. His new attraction and "ride" is a ride that can lead his faithful to darkness and destruction. These followers need to get off quickly and stay off. The truth is out. But will even the truth be able to convince the emotion intoxicated followers?

Endnotes:

1. Benny Hinn, *This Is Your Day*, June 11, 1997, video tape on file.

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Benny Hinn, Honolulu Crusade, February 28, 1997. Transcript of Hinn's comments made by Mike Oppenheimer, Let Us Reason Ministries. Audio tape and transcript on file.
5. Ibid., emphasis added.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Phone call from M. Kurt Goedelman to Benny Hinn Media Ministries, July 25, 1997, confirmed that Hinn's organization is not making available, nor will be making available, tapes from the 1997 Honolulu Crusade.
10. See Hank Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997, pp. 168-169.
11. Benny Hinn sermon, *Double Portion Anointing*, Part #3, Orlando Christian Center, Orlando, Fla., April 7, 1991. From the series, *Holy Ghost Invasion*. TV#309, tape on file.
12. Israel Pocket Library, *Religious Life and Communities*. Jerusalem, Israel: Keter Books, 1974, pg. 154.
13. Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*. New York: Abingdon Press, no date, The Old Testament, Vol. 2, pg. 525, commentary note on 2 Kings 13:21.
14. See further *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 4, pg. 401 and *Biblical Demonology* by Merrill Unger, pp. 143-164.

15. Henry A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah*. New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1952, pp. 55-56.
16. See for example, Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10-11.
17. J.R. Dummelow, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1958, pg. 97.
18. Merrill Unger, *Biblical Demonology*. Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1952, pg. 148.
19. Ibid., pg. 152.
20. W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary Of Old And New Testament Words*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985, pp. 241-242, 1 Samuel 28:8, author's translation.
21. Ibid., pg. 242.
22. J.D. Douglas, Editor, *New 20th-Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991, pg. 782.
23. Alan Morrison, *The Serpent and the Cross*. Birmingham, England: K&M Books, 1994, pg. 142.
24. Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965, pg. 206.
25. J. Stafford Wright, *Man in the Process of Time*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956, pp. 107, 109-110, italics in original.
26. *Counterfeit Revival*, op. cit., pp. 127-128.
27. Leonard George, Ph.D., *Alternative Realities*. New York: Facts on File, 1995, pg. 55.

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unexpected and motivated me to examine, search and compare their teachings and methods with an in-depth study of the Scriptures. We're told to "test all things, holding fast what is good" (2 Thessalonians 5:21).

Jesus tells us that some will prophesy, cast out demons, and do many wonders in His name (Matthew 7:22), but in spite of that Christ will declare, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (v. 23). Several times the Lord warns the believers about great deception (Matthew 24:4, 5, 11, 24). Paul warned the church of Ephesus for three years against savage wolves who speak perverse or misleading things (Acts 20:28-31). In his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God" (2:17), and "we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling

the word of God deceitfully" (4:2). Evidently, there are some who adulterate the Word of God for their own gain and benefits.

In a meaningful passage Jesus states, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). They look Christian! But inwardly, they are hungry and greedy for something you have! And Paul exposes false apostles, deceitful workers as being individuals who transform themselves into apostles of Christ, into ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Peter and John have also found it important to write on the subject. It is therefore important today for believers to be watchful and aware of these facts.

One whose works must be tested is Rodney Howard-Browne. Howard-Browne is the prominent leader of the "laughter phenomenon." I first encountered him in the fall of 1992 when he ministered at the Orlando Christian

Center (now World Outreach Center), the church founded and pastored by faith healer Benny Hinn. The early 1990s was Howard-Browne's debut in the United States. More recently, a second opportunity to see him in action presented itself in the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. From Nov. 19 through 23, 1996, he held a series of meetings which my son, Stephen, and I decided to investigate.

Howard-Browne is a South African preacher who says he was saved at age 5, baptized in the Spirit at 8, and received a special touch from heaven many years later in 1979. But it was only in 1989, while being in New York, that he decided to put his knack into practice. His laughter ministry was born.

More than once during the crusade held in a 2,000-seat church auditorium, a member of Howard-Browne's organization warned the audience early in the service not to bring in any camera or tape recorders because "they can be

used in a bad way." We were also advised to be careful at the altar and not walk on those lying on the floor because "even if they are under the power of the Holy Ghost, they still feel pain!" After the warnings and instructions, a sales pitch for their videocassettes and books, and the essential crowd-warming songs, Rodney Howard-Browne would appear on stage and sing a few more songs.

His technique is very simple and very charismatic. The song service, lasting 60 to 90 minutes, was active and the lyrics of the songs invite you to participate. At the song, *I Walk by Faith*, the leader urged the audience to walk sideways in the pews, which had everybody marching left and right. In a case like this, you must cooperate unless you want to be stepped on by your neighbors. The favorite *Makes You Want to Dance* produced delirious dancing in the crowd, where some individuals ran up front, jumping and twisting after the very first verse.

Howard-Browne plays a very active human role in the laughter. The man acts like a stand-up comedian. He repeatedly told jokes like, "I'll read from *The Amplified Bible*, so if it comes out loud, it's because it's amplified." Howard-Browne, himself a Caucasian, born and raised in Africa, now living in America, has come to the conclusion, "That makes me an African-American." The crowd just loved it. Or when comes the time of the offering he suggests, besides cash and check giving, "You can use your credit card: Mastercard, Visa, American Distress." Well, he repeatedly used this one too.

Adonica, Howard-Browne's wife, also made an appearance on stage. At the first meeting she was asked by Rodney to greet the audience. Estimating that the crowd's response lacked enthusiasm, she said, "Are you just shy Canadians, or what? Are you just as the Americans?" Not such a tactful remark! The attendees did not seem to appreciate, nor do I think Americans would either.

Howard-Browne seems to believe that he needs to instruct people on how to laugh and behave. He even defies those who do not respond according to his desires. It comes close to threatening when he accuses the more conservative type of person of not acting wild

in response to his jokes or commands, "We'll cast the religious devil out of you." There's actually not much liberty in his meetings. One feels intimidated and compelled to obey, or comply lest you be labeled according to Howard-Browne's own offensive categories.

In each and every meeting we attended, he did not miss an opportunity to put his critics down, those who question his method of operating. He said, "Some people have got more faith in believing the devil can come into this place tonight to touch people. How dumb can you get and still breathe!" And referring to North American theologians, which he names dead heads, "Bunch of whitewash, full of dead bones, like a constipated mule." The Americans and Canadians, in particular, don't weigh much in his eyes. "Jesus is alive. It's only North Americans that don't believe that."

Howard-Browne also played the game of faith healing. And he played it well. The first night he prayed for a man suffering from cancer. The next day he laid hands on a woman with the same disease. He even gave an example of a successful healing that occurred in one of his crusades, though he provided no documentation. And of course, Howard-Browne talked about the anointing, saying that God gives it to individuals and confirms it with signs, wonders, and miracles.

As he was uttering these words, he was standing just a few feet from a man whose task was to translate by sign language the preaching to a small group of deaf attendees. Curiously, Howard-Browne did not pray nor lay hands on them, nor did he pray for the man in a wheelchair whose legs were clearly atrophied. A young lady whose gait and talk revealed a severe physical disorder, probably cerebral palsy, was never addressed. How many in the crowd discerned the scheme?

Howard-Browne, like faith healers, is clever, selective and deceptive. Implying that he has an anointing from God, he threatened once again his critics or would-be critics, "If you can't produce the real of that which you criticize you'd better shut your mouth. Just shut your mouth. Amen." People must realize that the criticism is not about laughter, though, but about the wild

physical manifestations occurring in the meetings.

One of the scariest moments came on the last day, the day Howard-Browne would lay hands on everybody in the house. He preached his regular 25 or so minutes on the subject of offerings, then told the crowd he wanted them to listen to a compact disc of one of his crusades. The soundman played it very loudly. All we heard were applause and cries, but the crowd did not react, not really knowing what to do. So the song leader got to the sound booth and raised the volume much higher. Howard-Browne started clapping and screaming, "Jesus, Jesus." Then the crowd started imitating him, clapping and screaming repetitively. A scary moment indeed. The fruit of gross manipulation and imitation. Men and women were dancing like under a spell. Howard-Browne had them where he wanted. They were under his mesmeric spell.

I find no edification in such meetings. Music is used as a tool to bring individuals into a hyper-suggestible emotional state, fanciful and exaggerated stories are told to gain the people's trust and confidence, and the Scriptures are misused or distorted to support their unbiblical teachings and practices. Rodney Howard-Browne not only orchestrated the show by instructing people on how to behave, but he clearly showed his arrogant nature through his statements and attitude. Where is the fear of God today?

What shall we say about his ministry? It is the result of a deceptive scheme of manipulation and crowd control, not the genuine work of God. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." Remember: Power, signs and wonders are insufficient to determine someone's true nature. Israel was misled and deceived in their days, and numerous Christians are misled and deceived today. Just look deeper than what meets the eyes.

Editor's Note: Yves Brault, a native of Montreal, Quebec, is the author of *Behind The Scenes*, an autobiographical volume which surveys and challenges the false anointing of Benny Hinn and other popular faith healers. He currently resides in Vancouver, B.C., with his wife Nicole.