

## REVIVAL

# They Called Jesus a Counterfeit, Too

**In his new book, *Counterfeit Revival*, Hank Hanegraaff dismisses current revival movements as nothing more than charismatic chaos. But Hanegraaff's arguments are weak, and his conclusions are outrageous.**

BY JON RUTHVEN, PH.D.

Readers of *Charisma* may be surprised to learn that John Wimber, Kathryn Kuhlman, Benny Hinn, Francis MacNutt, John Arnott, Jack Deere and most of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement represent a "counterfeit revival" or, worse, "a great apostasy" that is subverting genuine biblical faith. That's the opinion of Hank Hanegraaff, host of the *Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast, who says Christianity "is undergoing a paradigm shift of major proportions—a shift from faith to feelings, from fact to fantasy and from reason to esoteric revelation."

Hanegraaff's new book, *Counterfeit Revival* (Word), appears to echo Benjamin B. Warfield's 1918 cessationist classic, *Counterfeit Miracles*, which offered an extensive catalog of denials of spiritual gifts. Hanegraaff extends Warfield's mission by cataloging the extremes of the First and Second Great Awakenings, the Latter Rain movement, the Pentecostal movement, the charismatic renewal, the Vineyard and Third Wave movements and, in particular, the Toronto Blessing.

With one broad brush, Hanegraaff has painted warning signs on some of the most significant moments in church history. By doing so he has, in my opinion, unjustly discredited the work of God.

Admittedly, over the years, revival movements have provided critics with many examples of nonsense, hype, exaggeration, tomfoolery and even downright deception. Those of us who identify with the charismatic-Pentecostal movement know that the flesh has often tainted what the Spirit was doing among us.

But Hanegraaff infers that all charismatic renewal movements are rotten at the core and that they elevate spiritual experience over the more important biblical issues of salvation and holiness. He also claims that "multitudes" have been disillusioned and destroyed by counterfeit revivals, but he fails to document this trend with convincing research.

### Inspecting the Fruit of the Toronto Blessing

If Hanegraaff had wanted to present a balanced view, he could have talked to Margaret Poloma, a sociologist at the University of Akron who undertook a study of Christians who participated in renewal meetings at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, where the Toronto Blessing erupted in 1994.

In her study, *By Their Fruits: A Sociological Assessment of the 'Toronto Blessing'*, presented to the Society for Pentecostal Studies in 1996, Poloma analyzed 850 responses to a survey to determine if the Toronto Blessing produced genuine, positive results in the lives of believers. Her report contradicts Hanegraaff's book on several points:

- Sixty-eight percent of the respondents in Poloma's survey reported "a fresh recognition of their sinful condition." One percent made a first-time commitment to Jesus, and another 29 percent recommitted their lives to Him. And 81 percent wrote that they experienced a "fresh sense

of God's f

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of God's forgiveness" in Toronto.

• While Hanegraaff contends that those in the so-called "counterfeit revivals" seek experiences instead of recommitting themselves "to witness by the power of the Spirit" (p. 244), Poloma found that people involved in charismatic activities (including speaking in tongues, resting in the Spirit and healing) are *more* likely to be involved in evangelism than those who aren't.

• A whopping 83 percent of the survey participants said that as a result of their spiritual encounter in Toronto, "talking about Jesus to my family and friends is more important to me now than it has ever been before." And 34 percent said that since their revival experience, they had become more involved in works of mercy such as feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless.

• Most importantly, 89 percent agreed with the statement, "I am more in love with Jesus now than I have ever been in my life." Yet Hanegraaff contends that the Toronto Blessing has demonic origins.

I ask: Could a satanic or hypnotic experience lead people to love Jesus Christ? We must remember that Jesus was accused of being a counterfeit when His critics suggested that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub (see Luke 11:15). But Jesus reminded them that Satan does not work against himself.

Much of Hanegraaff's criticism of the Toronto Blessing and other charismatic revival movements is focused on controversial manifestations such as shaking, trembling, falling and laughing. In her research, Poloma found that while such manifestations are certainly visible in Toronto, as they are in the Pensacola revival and elsewhere, they were not central to the testimonies shared in the questionnaires.

On the contrary, respondents focused on how they acquired deeper spiritual passion, more zeal for Christ or greater love for their spouses. Poloma believes the emphasis on manifestations is largely due to media sensationalism.

Hanegraaff spends most of his book seeking out the bizarre aberrations, the sin and the sleaze that is part of the

human condition and, yes, sadly, part of any revival movement. But unlike Poloma's study, his book shows no sense of statistical proportion.

### Lighten Up, Hank!

We can't deny the fact that the Pentecostal-charismatic tradition, as any other Christian tradition, has much in its history to be ashamed of. In some sense we must give Hanegraaff's criticisms their due. We must ask, "Lord, what are You saying through this?" We certainly must not circle the wagons and retaliate.

It is true that some sincere evangelists have allowed themselves to come under pressure to perform—to swing recklessly for the spiritual "home run"—and that the pressure has led them at times to stretch the truth, emphasize the spectacular and even manipulate emotions. Such men often insulate themselves from proper accountability—and this has created serious problems in the church.

And when high-profile Christian leaders fail, the media pounce on the stories. There's big money in digging up dirt on those whose message confronts sinfulness and alienation from God: It's the sinners' sweet revenge.

*Counterfeit Revival* has certainly made us aware of these sins. As a movement we need to take Hanegraaff's criticisms seriously and repent diligently. But Hanegraaff seems to have no sympathy for the problem. He makes his case without compassion.

Unlike most critics, Hanegraaff describes none of the revival movement's redeeming features. Instead, what the movement attributes to the Holy Spirit, Hanegraaff would call demonic. In a chilling statement that shapes the very title of his book, he says: "Wimber would do better to attribute the manifestations in his sensational stories to Satan, [whose work] is displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing" (p. 193).

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

When the Spirit "rushed" upon Saul in 1 Sam. 19:20-24, he stripped off his clothes, prophesied before Samuel and "lay down naked all that day and all that night" (v. 24, NKJV). Ezekiel displayed even more bizarre behavior after God told him to lie on his side, put "the iniquity of the house of Israel" on himself for 390 days, burn his hair and cook his food over human excrement! (Ezek. 4:4-5,12; 5:1-2,4). Isaiah was told by God to walk naked through Jerusalem for three years proclaiming judgment on the city (Is. 20:2-3).

The Bible also gives us plenty of basis for displays of emotion in worship. Ezra 3:12-13 and Nehemiah 12:43 both describe a revival of weeping and shouting that could be heard perhaps

miles away. Moreover, shouting for joy in worship is actually commanded or expected (see Ps. 32:11; 35:27; 47:1,5; 60:8; 81:1; 132:9,16; 1 Chron. 15:28; 2 Chron. 15:14; Zeph. 3:14; Luke 19:37). Jesus Himself prayed with "vehement cries and tears" (Heb. 5:7; see also Mark 15:34,37).

The case can also be made for trembling and being filled with or "slain in" the Spirit (see Jer. 5:22; 23:9;

Dan. 8:17-18; 10:9-11; John 18:6; Acts 2:4,13; 26:14; Rev. 1:17). We can only imagine how Hanegraaff would react to these types of behavior if they were to appear today. He seems to assume that Christian orthodoxy is a rationalistic, sterilized Calvinism that functions entirely on an intellectual level—devoid of the subjective spiritual dimension.

Scholars today who accept the authority and inerrancy of Scripture are challenging the view that miracles and gifts of the Spirit ceased after the apostles died. Recently, several theologians have published works that provide a solid

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grounding for charismatic experience. These include *The Kingdom and the Power* by Gary Greig and Kevin Springer (Gospel Light); *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* and *Surprised by the Voice of God* by Jack Deere (Zondervan); *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in Paul* by Gordon Fee (Hendrickson); *Renewal Theology* by J. Rodman Williams (Zondervan); and *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem (Zondervan).

Pentecostals and charismatics do not advocate the present move of God because of experience alone, but because it flows within the letter and spirit of the New Testament. Hanegraaff, on the other hand, believes reason is altogether superior to spiritual experience.

This position was championed during the Enlightenment (circa 1650-1790), when revelation, enthusiasm or religious experience was denied in favor of the rational processes of scientific method. Rational "certainty" replaced faith as the way to truth. The rational approach influenced Christian theologians, and intellectual understanding of doctrine eventually became their goal—not the biblical "knowing" of God by the revelation of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 2:14).

Hanegraaff's disdain for charismatic gifts, experiences and manifestations flows from this perspective. By criticizing charismatics, he ridicules the Father's lavish gifts of joy and playfulness.

I think Hanegraaff needs to lighten up. Being in the Father's presence should be a healing, cleansing and liberating experience—freeing us to do His will and His work. A true encounter with God does not produce a sour rationalism, but life-changing fellowship with God and an exuberant desire to spread His love to others.

It is unfortunate that some of those who read *Counterfeit Revival* will conclude that a life-giving encounter with God is not meant for them. □

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