

The Brownsville Revival

Do not underestimate the power of Pentecostalism in our time. Although out of the headlines most of the time, it is capturing millions of followers, and is a force yet to be reckoned with—when, at the time of the National Sunday Law, a powerful movement of “the spirit” sweeps through Protestantism, and coerces the U.S. Congress into enacting certain of its requests.

In this present study we will be primarily concerned with the Brownsville Revival. It provides us with an excellent view of the current fever—and the controversy surrounding it.

— PART ONE —

THE BROWNSVILLE REVIVAL

Four nights a week, week after week, the five-hour meetings continue. They have continued for the last 33 months. Every night dozens of people are baptized, while in the audience people shout, shake, dance, go limp in chairs, clap, scream, fall to the floor, cry, bounce, pray, or convulse.

It is business as usual at Brownsville, with 2,000 packing the auditorium at 7 p.m. starting time. The people come from all over the world, every continent. They are here to find the spirit and be filled by it. They want the spirit to change their lives, and they generally get what they have come for.

Nearly 2 million visitors have attended the evening services at the Brownsville Assembly of God Church in Pensacola, Florida, since the spirit first arrived there in mighty power in June 1995.

A Pentecostal church in Toronto, Canada, which in 1995 had the wildest action, has now been surpassed by Brownsville. The Brownsville Assembly of God Church is on the outskirts of Pensacola, Florida.

What is happening there is sometimes referred to as the “Pensacola Revival,” but more often as the “Brownsville Revival.”

Each night in the large parking lot can be seen cars, trucks, and campers from 30 or more states. As mentioned earlier, some have journeyed here from overseas countries—Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and South America.

According to how they tell it, for Father’s Day in 1995, Pastor John Kilpatrick had invited the revivalist, Steve Hill, to take the service. Hill had hardly begun when a sound of a rushing, mighty wind was heard. Kilpatrick was flattened by “the force”. His legs stopped working and he lay there three hours. He said he had been “totally slain by the spirit.”

Since that night, it has happened to hundreds every night since then. Hill has become a permanent fixture at the evening meetings.

After a lengthy sermon, Hill calls for the people to come forward to receive the spirit. Immediately several hundred rush forward, followed by others.

Slowly, Hill and several fellow ministers work their way through the immense crowds which are standing, quietly waiting for their own empowerment to occur. Night after night Hill touches people with his thumb on their forehead and most fall over backward, while some only stagger back.

Each meeting begins amid an air of highest expectation. The people come, expecting to be filled with a spirit, and they receive what they want.

Upstairs, interpreters are standing by with headphones. In the choir room, up to 150 people are praying for the spirit to fall on those out in the main assembly. No, it is not the usual kind of praying. Everyone is babbling in mysterious sounds, all at the same time.

In the basement, a dozen converts at a time wade

into a baptismal pool and are baptized into this new spirit.

In the main auditorium, the service begins as some curl up on the ground, a few sit in a trance, and most rise, shake off their shoes (because they are on “holy ground”), and begin twisting and dancing in the aisles. Some hop around. It all has the appearance of the heathenism which gripped the Hebrews (Exodus 32), while they danced and worshiped the golden calf. They sing songs (often several different ones at the same time), with titles such as “*Satan is under my feet*” (if they only knew) and “*The Spirit of the Lord is in me.*”

Then they begin going through their practice noises so the spirit can take control of their minds more fully. Each one repeats a meaningless vowel, or a consonant and vowel—over and over again. The place has become a Babylon (in the original meaning of the word, *babel*)—and the spirit descends. Speaking in “tongues” erupts everywhere.

Eventually, from the podium John Kilpatrick calls them to quietness, and the vast audience of 2,000 is seated. Then Kilpatrick turns the meeting over to Steve Hill, and the excitement begins in earnest.

Recently, I saw an eyewitness video of a meeting at Brownsville. Some of the people begin shaking uncontrollably, as if they had advanced Parkinson’s. This experience, which is repeated for certain individuals each time they henceforth attend any Pentecostal meeting anywhere, must surely be damaging to their nervous system.

Others go into a faint, and fall rather slowly to the floor in a downward heap,—but always slowly enough that they are not injured. It is, by no means, a normal fall.

The ones which fall backwards (whether or not Hill has touched them), fall with their bodies totally straight. Behind them are “catchers.” These are volunteers waiting to catch and lay them down on the floor. This stiffened drop is always directly backward, never forward or sideward. If several are standing together, they all fall backward together in perfect timing, with none falling into the other falling ones. It all has a very orderly, but supernatural, appearance.

In my earlier study, *The Holy Laughter Apostasy—Part 1-2 [WM-707-708]*, the fast-spreading growth of this strange form of Pentecostalism was discussed in some detail.

The *Newsweek* article, quoted elsewhere in this report, also provides a brief glimpse of another Pentecostal pattern: rabbit hopping:

“At the Community Church in tiny Smithton, Mo., where a showing of the spirit has been going on for two years, the typical experience is hopping up and down. I’ve shrieked because of the [spirit’s]

After initially touching one and then another person, which falls backward, Hill faces towards entire clusters of three to six people which have come forward to “receive the spirit,”—and they all fall backward as he begins to step toward them. Then he turns in a different direction, and another group falls backward in perfect group coordination. Only part of the time do they fall on others behind them. As one group falls backward, Hill steps over them and walks a little farther back, and still more fall.

As Hill makes his way through the standing crowd below the podium, more and more fall. All the while the seated audience beyond cheer and clap wildly at each new exhibition of the spirit’s moving.

When Hill reaches the end of the frontal area, he steps over the seats and falls more with a touch or glance, as they sit or stand at their seats in the audience.

Prior to stepping down from the podium on the stage-wide carpeted stairs, so the spirit can “slay the people,” Hill interviews several individuals from the audience. Each one speaks for a few minutes of his past experience in being “slain by the spirit,” and then begins shaking, or growing dizzy, and finally collapsing. At these exhibitions the audience laughs, and wildly applauds.

At some point in the performance, amid more screeches and applause Hill touches Kilpatrick and he falls, or Kilpatrick touches Hill and he falls into a groggy, immobile sitting position.

Then the one, still standing, causes more of the audience to fall.

Other helpers, called “prayer warriors,” fan out through the congregation touching still more, and they fall to the ground.

Soon the vast hall appears like a bedlam (The name fits well, since the original *Bedlam* was an insane asylum outside of London).

A recent issue of *Newsweek* touched on the Brownsville experience:

“As on cue, the hoppers and twisters drop to

power, and it’s sent me to the floor,’ says Joe Cole, 33, owner of a moving and storage company who has visited the Smithton church from Ramsey, Minn. ‘I’ve been overcome with peace and it blankets me, and nothing else matters in the world . . .’

“At the Smithton church, the five-hour service begins with an hourlong jam session featuring three guitars, three keyboards, a full set of drums and two vocalists to deliver original music over a high-tech sound system.”—*Ibid* [as in all quoted passages, “spirit” was initial-capitalized in the original].

their knees. A man from France curls up in a fetal position, burying his face in the carpet. A woman from Arkansas remains erect, but can't stop bowing. Here and there someone begins speaking in tongues. 'Get used to it,' the music minister urges the crowd, carressing the keys of his Yamaha organ. 'This is what heaven will be like.' —*Newsweek*, April 13, 1998.

"One man lies flat, his arms raised stiff in the air. Another takes a smothering blow to the face when a woman topples onto him; he doesn't flinch. Hill moves down an aisle, stepping over the fallen, then climbs over the backs of pews to spread the spirit power. At a flick of his hand, a whole row of the faithful fall like dominoes."—*Ibid.*

— PART TWO —

THE BROWNSVILLE SCHOOL AND RALLIES

Kilpatrick and Hill are doing what they can to help their spirit convert the world.

A Year ago, the *Brownsville Revival School of Ministry* opened with 120 full-time students. Half were new Brownsville converts. Michael L. Brown is the school's dean. By fall 1997, the school, which offers a two-year theology degree, had 511 students from 46 states. These are sent out to extend the work still further.

Kilpatrick and Hill are now regularly sending out associate pastors to bring in new converts at two-night rallies in Memphis, Birmingham, Dallas, Saint Louis, Toledo, Anaheim, and elsewhere. "Our goal is to bring this revival to key cities in the U.S."

— PART THREE —

PROBLEMS AT BROWNSVILLE

The greater Pensacola community have not known what to do with the Brownsville phenomenon. Finally the *Pensacola News Journal* decided to do some careful investigating.

After previously publishing dozens of mostly positive articles about the revival, on November 16 through 20, 1997, the *News Journal* ran a series about their findings. They discovered that leaders at the Brownsville Church were growing wealthy from millions of dollars spent by revivalgoers on books, manuals, audiotapes, videotapes, and other products. The newspaper reported that only Brown, the dean of their school, had paid sales tax on his books and cassettes sold at tables inside the church.

About 30 different stories appeared in the *News Journal* during those five days. The general title of the series was "*Brownsville Revival: The Money and the Myths.*" The *Journal* said that the revival-related

businesses was "a multimillion-dollar retail industry conducted within the walls of the church."

The series accused Kilpatrick of orchestrating the revival and causing trouble to dissenters, and charged that Hill invented parts of his dramatic testimony. Nearly every aspect of the the revival and operation of the church was questioned.

The *News Journal* said that hundreds of thousands of dollars had been spent on houses and vehicles owned by the leaders, as well as on offices and other expenses. The paper said that during its investigation, Hill, now 43, submitted incomplete financial reports, and Kilpatrick refused to give any financial data for either the church or his private *Feast of Fire Ministries*. There may also be financial problems connected with Hill's private ministry.

Here is a brief summary from the five-day *News Journal* series:

Sunday, November 16, 1997:

The church budget is \$6.6 million, and it is intensifying its pleas for money. Leaders urge that the people give at least \$100 per person per evening. It appears that through the sale of merchandise, revival is for sale. The three top ministers at Brownsville do not pay state sales tax.

Monday, November 17, 1997:

John Kilpatrick rules over the church, and his new lifestyle includes a \$310,000 coach. He has expensive homes, and vigorously opposes dissenters. In the pulpit, he utters "prophecies" warning of disaster to critics. Sadness and fear fill the hearts of members who have left Brownsville.

Tuesday, November 18, 1997:

Steve Hill's professed biography are fraught with fallacies. His frequent boasts exaggerate the facts. He asks for money for projects which are not carried out. His criminal record is not what he says it is. He has purchased a 40-acre estate in southern Alabama.

Wednesday, November 19, 1997:

Bible scholars, theologians, and Pentecostal church members voice various criticisms of the Brownsville revivals, its theological basis, and the tactics it uses. The pastor orchestrated the first revival. The Brownsville revival is similar in its devious methods to the one in Toronto.

Thursday, November 20, 1997:

How true are the Brownsville revival claims regarding healing, charity, crime reduction and addiction reduction? The sheriff of Escambia County disputes their claims of crime reduction. The neighborhood sees no benefit from the revival. There is no medical proof of 'miraculous healings.' Experts declare that addicts may be building false hopes. It is the other churches in the area which are reaching out to those in need, not Brownsville Pentecostal Church. Area pastors and spiritual leaders recommend that, if you want answers, go to the Bible; that

is where you will find them.

— PART FOUR —
ORIGINS AND OUTCOME

The Pentecostal churches trace their origins to revivals of tongue-speaking that occurred at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901, and at the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles in 1906. Similar revivals took place in Great Britain and in Europe, Asia, and Latin America during the early 1900s. Since the 1930s, the Pentecostal movement has grown rapidly. By the early 1970s, there were about 7 million members in the various Pentecostal churches. *Newsweek* says that, at the present time (1998), there are 20 million members in the U.S. and 225 million worldwide. The largest tongues denomination (Assemblies of God) now has 2.4 million members.

Pentecostal leaders claim their people constitute a “third force” in Christianity, alongside Roman Catholics and non-tongues Protestants.

At the present time, that “force” has invaded traditional Protestant and Catholic churches, so the total number cannot be estimated accurately. David Barrett, a religion demographer at Regent University, believes the total number of “spirit-filled” worshipers is close to 460 million Christians in various parts of the world.

The latest promotion of spirit-seeking comes from a newly-released motion picture, *The Apostle*. Written, directed, and starring Robert Duvall, I am told it strongly urges the viewer to go find a Pentecostal church and receive the spirit.

As if to dramatize the situation even further, Pope John Paul II has proclaimed 1998 as the “*Year of the Holy Spirit*.” However, the Vatican is actually very worried about the Pentecostals,—for they have captured so many faithful Catholics in Central and South America.

For their part, the mainline Pentecostal church headquarters are concerned about all the little spirit-filled start-ups here and there. People are being filled with the spirit—but not under their auspices or control. All it takes is to “get the spirit”—and then go out, rent a hall, and begin putting the spirit in those who come.

But the power of these spirits is also surging at local mainline Pentecostal churches also. Thomas Trask, general superintendent of the largest of these bodies, the Assemblies of God (based in Springfield, Missouri), has said that church leaders are pleased with the new power displayed at these local churches.

The impact of Toronto and Brownsville has had a ripple effect throughout the world.

Regarding the excitement at Brownsville, Pentecostal historian Vinson Synan comments, “This is probably the most important revival to come out of a local church since Azusa Street.” According to Synan, the unleashing of spirit forces occurring in our time, exceeds that of any earlier time in our century. That is a significant comment.

It appears that the great masses of humanity no longer want doctrine or standards; they want an emotional experience. They want to be taken over by a force outside of themselves!

“In the evolution of Pentecostal Christianity, ‘membership in the movement is proven by whether you’ve experienced the Holy Spirit getting inside your body and taking physical control,’ observes Wellesley’s Marini.”—*Ibid.*

This is the reason for the success of Celebration Churches in our own ranks. Rather than worship God in the beauty of holiness, people would rather worship the excitement of feeling. They stand and clap, sing semi-rock songs to drums and band music, and want a man to put his hand on their heads—so they will be more sanctified.

What is the next step after Celebrationism? It is full-scale Pentecostal exhibitions: dancing, rolling, shouting, tongues-speaking, and all the rest.

However, there is a step beyond that. It is discussed in the first booklet (*The Counterfeit Revival and Threefold Union*; \$3.95 plus p&h) in the present writer’s 18-part *End-Time Series*, which is the most complete collection of Spirit of Prophecy statements on last-day events, from just before the National Sunday Law on down to the final destruction of the wicked, and views of heaven beyond.

It will be a strange and overmastering “excitement in the churches” which will initiate the final crisis! *Beware! Study God’s Word! Know what the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy have to say about such matters. There is not much time left. We are surely nearing the end.*

Study God’s Word, In Christ’s strength obey God’s Word, and do what you can to be a help to those around you.

“Rather than yield the liberty so agreeable to the carnal heart and renounce the sins which they love, multitudes close their eyes to the light and walk straight on, regardless of warnings, while Satan weaves his snares about them and they become his prey.”—*Great Controversy*, 559.

“Marvelous beyond expression is the blindness of the people of this generation.”—*Great Controversy*, 561.
