My Toronto Experience

A Letter to a Dear Brother and Sister in the Lord

Elizabeth McDonald
6th June 1996

13th January 1996

Dear Liz,

Thankyou for your letter dated 8/12/95, and for the booklet about the Toronto "Bless-Up" (I can't say "blessing"). Our church … has recently "gone over" to the "Bless-Up", and after some consideration we have concluded that it's not the Lord. This, I think, is going to make life a trifle difficult, as I am one person who just cannot keep his mouth shut about what he thinks!! Anyway, time will tell, and as long as we keep our eyes on the Lord we'll be alright. …

Your bolt from the blue was one of the final things that made me convinced that I should look again at Toronto and the people around it. Thanks. …

God bless, lots of love,
----- and -------

6th June 1996

Dear ----- and -------

I am sorry to have taken so long to write to you! After I finished 'Thoughts on Alpha' *[Alpha: New Life or New Lifestyle]* I gave my brain a much needed rest for a week or so … and since then I can't believe time has flown so quickly. I actually started this letter in March! …

Quite a lot has happened since I last saw you several years ago. …

My [university] dissertation [in 1994] looked at the fight of the pre-reformers, men such as Wyclif, Hus and others, for *sola scriptura* against the unscriptural doctrines of the mediaeval Roman Catholic Church. It suddenly struck me while researching and writing that essay how *easy* it can be to gradually wander off at a tangent doctrinally just by adding a little bit to the gospel here and taking away a little bit there, until, looking around for Jesus, one realizes He is nowhere to be seen.

Then, as you know, the Toronto Blessing came to town (I agree with you that "Bless-Up" is perhaps a more accurate description of it!). We came across hints of it, though I was concentrating on revision for my finals and really had no idea of what was going on in the wider charismatic scene; we had never even heard of the Kansas City prophets or Benny Hinn or Paul Yonggi-Cho; and John Wimber, Roger Forster and others were little more than names.

In the March [1994] Ron and I went to a meeting at Icthus in South east London with a friend of ours, where one woman sitting just in front of us laughed at inappropriate moments which was rather distracting and irritating. Also at that meeting, time was set aside for a group of leaders to walk amongst the congregation 'discerning' things in each of us that needed prayer, which they would inform us of and pray for.

Well, I'm sorry but as we knew nothing about these 'prowling prophets', and Paul had warned Timothy not to be hasty on the laying on of hands, I stood in my place desperately praying that the Lord would prevent them coming to us. I found out afterwards that both Ron and our friend had been doing the same. We were probably the only three not 'ministered' to in that meeting, praise God!

Also during 1993/4 Dad was going to a fellowship in Bognor which he was getting concerned about. They sang endlessly about 'claiming the land for Jesus' but there wasn't much prayer or Bible exposition in evidence. While they kept promising that revival was around the corner, Dad kept going, not wanting to miss out on something for which he had been praying for years. But it never came, and meanwhile Dad said he was feeling more and more oppressed by something he couldn't quite define and couldn't shift no matter how much he prayed and rebuked it. I went to one function they held in June [1994] after my exams, and thought it rather strange that while the Holy Spirit was repeatedly referred to, the name of Jesus never was. I also thought it odd that they recommended coming to C.O.C. to be saved rather than to Jesus.

During that summer the friend with whom Ron and I had gone to Icthus started to talk about feeling very "dry" and "thirsty" and in need of a "time of refreshing", which he said he couldn't get in our church and so he was thinking of leaving and going to a more lively church. We still hadn't really heard of the TB as such then, but Ron felt a tremendous burden to try to prevent our friend from leaving our fellowship. He didn't know why. He just knew the burden was from the Lord and, for several weeks, as the two of them travelled up to London together on the train to work, Ron talked and nagged and cajoled and bullied and pleaded and reasoned with our friend to stay.

He didn't leave – praise God, but even now nearly two years later, though he now knows the true nature of the TB, there are still the occasional 'relapses' which necessitate speedy and urgent prayers to the Lord to hold onto him. One opponent of the TB, Richard Smith, wrote an article on the TB and 'spiritual drunkenness', and though our friend never really got the chance to get properly 'drunk' [with the TB] in the first place, as so many are, yet the odd hidden bottle pops up every now and then. Goodness, how much harder must it be for TB alcoholics to sober up and remain so.

Anyway, as the weeks progressed, I began to read bits here and there about the TB, and recognised in what I was reading some of the same words and phrases that our friend had been using. All the reports looked and sounded positive, yet this 'new move of God' just didn't feel *right*.

One evening at our church house group we watched a recorded news report and listened to an audio tape by Ellie Mumford telling of her experience of the TB, which made me feel even more uneasy, though I still wasn't quite sure why. I was concerned though that in all the excitement to be heard on the tape, neither Ellie Mumford nor the leaders of the meeting at which she speaking, warned the assembled audience that after such a spiritual high the enemy is always waiting to take it away. No need to, I suppose, if the 'high' came from the enemy in the first place. But I didn't know that then.

In September or October 1994, Ron, our friend, and I went to hear John Arnott preach at Icthus (I knew by then that John Arnott was something to do with the TB but didn't realise that it had effectively been 'birthed', as John Wimber likes to describe it, in his church). I prayed before the meeting for the Lord's protection over the three of us, and I'm glad I did, as after John Arnott finished preaching and all those on the platform had been 'slain', the chairs were cleared away and we were all to be prayed for in like manner.

Well, our friend went down before anyone reached him – I believe the Lord got to him first. Ron thankfully refused the eager ministrations of one chap who came up from behind him wanting to pray for his back, and I may as well have been invisible for all the attention I received from the ministry team! Thank God for His protection.

It took a further visit to a very developed TB style meeting at a local church with another friend a week or so later for me to finally grasp that the TB was definitely not what its leaders claimed it was. In this meeting there was no Scripture reading or sermon, but there were four testimonies of trips to Toronto. They were incoherent and punctuated by irritating jerks, spasms, and laughter, which everyone in the congregation seemed to find highly amusing. Then followed the now-familiar 'ministry time', during which a woman - who was obviously in need of deliverance from what seemed to be a demon of some kind of false religion – was allowed to remain on the floor shrieking in a hideous manner. Ron and I left the meeting convinced by now that the Toronto 'Blessing' was nothing of the kind.

Shortly after that, I read an article in the *Christian Herald* by Tricia Tillin of Banner Ministries in which she briefly outlined the main unbiblical manifestations characterizing the TB and the equally unbiblical eschatological doctrines on which it is based; and I knew I was reading, finally, the truth about the TB. Since then I have collected masses of information (both pro- and anti-TB) as well as information on Latter-Rain teachings, the Kansas City prophets, Word-of-Faith movement, Paul Yonggi-Cho's Fourth Dimension teachings, Territorial spirits, John Wimber's Power Religion and Vineyard church, Romanism/Ecumenism, the New Age movement, etc, etc., and I enclose a few bits you may or may not find useful. …

My work at the moment [is to] do as much reading, studying, and research as I can on all the strange movements coming into the church today. The Alpha Course, for instance, looks very good – part of it is – and it certainly seems to 'work', but if churches rely on the videos to run Alpha, then they will find

themselves preaching the gospels of the TB and Ecumenism. Neither am I very happy about the John Wimber/Vineyard influence on Nicky Gumbel and the Alpha Course. I am beginning to find that in most of these movements the Vineyard crops up sooner or later in one way or another.

The latest thing to watch out for and avoid like the plague is Promise Keepers; a parachurch men's movement started by Bill McCartney of the Colorado Vineyard, and now hoping to come to Britain. Also Christian Channel Europe – though not easily accessible at the moment – is not as good as it seems. It was started on the strength of a false prophecy; and is funded and dominated by Word-of-Faith teachers (Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Rodney Howard-Browne, etc).

Also, sadly, ecumenism is rampant amongst Protestant Charismatic leaders, who appear to have little understanding of the reasons for the Protestant Reformation. And beware the current buzz-word 'Unity' – sound doctrine is being abandoned to obtain it.

Anyway, this letter is extremely long; and I'm sorry it is several months later than promised … I shall say bye for now, otherwise you will *never* get this letter!

With lots of love,
From Liz