

**A factual analysis of
the
“Reading Outpouring”**

February 3, 2017

“Christ is proclaimed in every way... in
that I rejoice.” – Phil 1:18

“Abraham... faced the fact” – Rom 4:18-19

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Introduction

I have been in Christian ministry for over 30 years. I have been involved in many evangelistic campaigns and regularly announce the gospel as part of my ministry as a prison chaplain. I endeavour to stand with the apostle Paul in asserting that wherever the Gospel is preached, I rejoice (Philippians 1:18).

At the same time, together with Paul I believe it is important to seek the utmost integrity in the preaching and reporting of our gospel preaching, and it is with this in mind that I wish to examine the “Reading Outpouring”.

Much can and indeed has been said about the mechanistic nature of the evangelistic script initially used, the “decisionist” theology that underpins it, and the unusual combination of this theology with the charismatic practice and conference-based operations of Bethel Ministries.

However, for the sake of brevity and avoiding too much theological debate, this short paper focuses predominantly on the claims made and how they have been reported.

Indeed, it is my contention that while many people have undoubtedly been trained in some form of evangelism in Reading, and that many Christians have been encouraged to share the Gospel on the streets, the events are not as popularly reported, there is no particular sign of revival, and the communication surrounding events has been at best uncritical and at worst dishonest: ultimately, this will not help the cause of the Gospel.

1. Media coverage of the “outpouring”

In June 2016, the Christian media picked up on events in Reading focusing on The Gate Church.

On June 17, Premier Radio published an article on its website headlined “Unprecedented” openness to the gospel reported in Reading as 1,200 make commitments to Christ”¹

Website Christian Today ran a piece on June 24 entitled “Revival in Reading: 1,200 people turn to Christ in just 3 weeks”² with a photo captioned “Worshippers at The Gate Reading, where thousands are converting to Christianity”.

Under the headline “Evangelistic outpouring in Reading” the Baptist Times reported, slightly more cautiously, that “In just over three weeks of mission more than 1,000 people have prayed to give or rededicate their lives to Christ”³

The Premier Radio article goes on to report that the pastor of The Gate, Yinka Oyekan, “said over 720 people had “prayed in the streets” during the first 10 days of mission. Today the

¹ <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Unprecedented-openness-to-the-gospel-reported-in-Reading-as-1-200-make-commitments-to-Christ>

² <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/revival.in.reading.1200.people.turn.to.christ.in.just.3.weeks/89070.htm>

³ http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/469870/Evangelistic_outpouring_in.aspx

number is said to stand at around 1200 and Mr Oyekan estimates that 80% of this figure represent prayers for “salvation or rededications”⁴.

2. The “Learning Review”

On October 13, 2016, Yinka Oyekan published a “Learning Review”⁴ on his Facebook page.

To Oyekan’s credit, this provides detailed figures and other information about the evangelistic campaign conducted in Reading and some of his analysis. However, it also reveals a fundamental disconnect between the claims made and the reality on the ground.

2.1. No difference between commitments and rededications

Oyekan reports (p4) a total of 1850 “people prayed for” said to include “many first time commitments and rededications to Christ”. Nowhere in any information I have found are these two categories separated. By failing to distinguish a “first-time” conversion from a “rededication”, the statistics about what has happened are effectively rendered meaningless.

However, as can be seen from the above quotes, the media have consistently reported the headline figure as if it referred to conversions (the Baptist Times is noteworthy for being somewhat more reserved).

2.2. Barely a quarter could be followed up at all

Of these, Oyekan reports (p19) that an initial follow-up meeting for tea/coffee was secured for 26% of a sample of 101 respondents who left details and describes (p20) the other 74% [of those “first time commitments and rededications to Christ”] as having “brushed them off and not wished to continue the dialogue”.

Simply put, the huge headline number of 1850 “people prayed for” is divided by four when it comes to arranging a follow-up tea or coffee, let alone getting people into church life.

This reality is buried in a 26-page document, in stark contrast to the loudly trumpeted claims, which, by the time they have crossed the Channel, are being reported by the *Fédération Baptiste* as “over 2,500 people turning to Christ”⁵.

2.3. More number problems

As of July 23, Oyekan reported (p5) that 810 people had been trained in street evangelism for a four-week mission which he elsewhere reports as having seen 1850 people receive prayer (op. cit).

That amounts to 2.3 contacts per trained person, or each person praying with one contact every 12 days, which while it may be seen as encouraging is hardly very extraordinary, especially

⁴ https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10154644691847460&id=230550737459

⁵ <http://www.eglises-baptistes.fr/The-Turning-Lille.html#.WIoF31yEU50> (“le pasteur baptiste Yinka Oyekan a vu plus de 2’500 personnes se tourner vers Christ en 4 mois”)

bearing in mind that according to Oyekan's own figures, only about one quarter of those prayed for were successfully contacted afresh.

Similarly, the report resorts to the following over-optimistic back-of-an-envelope calculations (p22-23):

“If just five churches with an average attendance (60 members each) are all witnessing, praying for or leading someone to Christ just once a week for just one and a half hours, then between 300 and 600 people will either come to faith or rededicate their lives to Christ a week. (...) Scaling up these numbers over 52 weeks gives you a staggering figure of 31200 people prayed for.”

A similar claim is made (p23) for their evangelism training:

“We have in the space of just seven weeks trained up 810 people in how to share the gospel with the lost. I estimate with the number of cities asking us to bring this grace to their town (18 at last count) that we will train between 50,000 – 100,000 people in how to share the gospel in the streets of the UK in the next 18 month.”

This is the logic of chain letters, Tupperware parties, and pyramid schemes. Numbers in evangelistic training simply cannot be scaled in this manner, not least because on a practical level, one quickly runs out of new people to enter the scheme.

3. Bridging the gulf between decisionism and prayer on the streets

Oyekan originally invited evangelist Tommie Zito to Reading. It is clear from the script Zito imposed and from the outrageous figures on the latter's website⁶ that he is an outright decisionist. Oyekan reports (p19) that “The visiting evangelist would happily rest at the idea that making converts is what God is doing in this season, a concept I do not share”⁷.

This difference of opinion as to what constitutes conversion is at the heart of the confusion here, and it is not resolved.

The best Oyekan can manage is to express the theologically questionable hope that over time the “quality of conversion will improve” (p5). The issue of how one defines the quality of a conversion is left unexplored.

Maintaining the confusion between “people prayed for” and “conversions” despite Oyekan's avowed disagreement with Zito's decisionist theology perpetrates unrealistic reports and unrealistic expectations. The truth becomes an inconvenience, and people will end up being disappointed or disillusioned as a result of it being obscured.

⁶ <http://tommiezito.com/crusades/>

⁷ Despite featuring heavily in Oyekan's original plans for exporting the anointing, Zito appears to have been quietly dropped from the programme.

In this respect the “Reading Outpouring” stands in a long line of over-hyped “revival”-style events. In an article in THEMELIOS magazine from the mid-1990s, Nigel Wright reflects on the events surrounding Paul Cain’s visit to London in 1990. He reports that Cain made a

*“prediction that the United Kingdom would experience revival in October 1990. This claim was published in connection with the conferences to be held in the UK in that month. The suggestion was clear. John Wimber was reported to have brought all his family across to be part of the events. I was present at the Docklands Arena on the final night of the conference which, if anything, was less eventful than most such meetings I have been to. The discussion since that time, true to the psychology of cognitive dissonance, has been around what is meant by ‘revival’ (...) and whether throughout the country as a whole there are signs of increased spiritual effectiveness hingeing around October 1990. **Creative redefinition is under way. An alternative interpretation might be that at this point Cain stepped beyond the area of his gifts and made a misleading statement**”⁸.*

It can be fairly asserted that exactly the same is true in the present case: in view of the cognitive dissonance surrounding the events in Reading, creative redefinition is under way, instead of any admission that misleading statements have been made.

4. Self-fulfilling prophecy?

On June 12, 2016, Baptist Union General Secretary Lynn Green visited The Gate Church and shared her testimony in respect of the outpouring⁹.

“Two weeks ago a year ago (...) I had this amazing vision of fire, and I saw that God was lighting beacons of fire all across our nation, starting here in Reading and spreading out across the nation (...) I wrote it all down in my journal (...) Because I felt that it would start in Reading, I rang Yinka [Oyekan] and said “I’ve had this vision, and I just want to share it with you and test it with you.” So we met together a couple of days later, didn’t we? And what I didn’t know is, when I shared it was going to start in Reading and spread out, he thought it was going to start in Plymouth (...) I am a friend of Yinka on Facebook, and when his name just keeps popping up again and again (...) I am of course praising God. But thinking “okay, God is doing something”. And of course then that make me think about the thing that I had originally thought, that it started in Reading, but I’d screened it out, so I went back Friday morning, I went back to my journal and checked in it, and it says there, “it will start in Reading and go out from here”.

While Lynn seems to have taken this experience as confirmation that her vision had come true, what also emerges from this testimony is that the best part of a year before the “outpouring”, Yinka Oyekan was aware of Lynn’s expectation of “beacons of fire” that would “start in Reading”. Consciously or otherwise, this may have affected his decision to invite Tommie Zito (it is not known on what date this invitation was extended).

⁸ http://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/17.1_Wright.pdf

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t58iKmzFyM4>

5. Open to criticism?

To her credit, in the same testimony Lynn Green also says “We need to be open to critique, we need to be open to what God is saying to us.”

This short paper sets out a critique of these events. It is my view that Christian leaders and media need to grasp the nettle, clearly state actual figures and what they relate to, admit the possibility of false expectations being maintained, wilfully or otherwise, and repent of deceptive reporting. Invoking the danger of quashing others’ faith or being a “bad witness” in doing so is self-deception.

Dispelling sensational rumours¹⁰ and being scrupulously truthful are vital components in preserving the integrity of the Gospel – and indeed of ourselves: “We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God’s word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2). The ball is now in the court of those with responsibility in this matter.

¹⁰ John 21:21-23