

LECTURE FOUR: THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ALLIANCE AND THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

Introduction

More than any other single institution, the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination profoundly impacted the shaping of the Assemblies of God. For our purposes in this lecture series, it is important to note that the Christian and Missionary Alliance was strongly allied to the “higher life” movement previously discussed. A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Alliance, advocated a theology of sanctification that fits into the Keswick pattern rather than the classical Wesleyan Holiness theology. That the Assemblies of God adopted many of the values of the Alliance is important for understanding the complexity of Pentecostal origins.

To be sure, virtually all of the earliest Pentecostal pioneers came directly from the nineteenth century Wesleyan Holiness movement. One can readily understand why scholars are inclined to say that the modern Pentecostal movement is a direct descendent of the Holiness movement.¹ Until 1910, the modern Pentecostal movement was distinctly a Holiness-Pentecostal phenomenon. However, if one broadens the scope of inquiry to include the next several years of Pentecostal history, the story becomes markedly different. It is useful to inquire into why virtually all Pentecostal bodies that came into existence after 1911 adopted non-Wesleyan views about sanctification.

In this pursuit, the Assemblies of God is a useful focus of inquiry. Certainly, the Assemblies of God is but one of many Pentecostal denominations. However, the Assemblies of God has occupied a unique role of influence in the Pentecostal world. It has been deemed to be a legitimate microcosm of patterns generally observable throughout the Pentecostal world.² It is the assumption of the author, therefore, that what happened in the formative years of the Assemblies of God will be helpful in understanding what happened in the Pentecostal movement at large, causing it to divide along the lines of sanctification theology.

We have previously sketched the story of William Durham and his “finished work” theology and how this impacted the Assemblies of God. And, we have pointed out that the Fundamentalist movement also had an important formative influence on groups like the Assemblies of God. Fundamentalism, of course, was a movement contemporary to the Holiness movement but quite distinct from it. It flowered at the time of the birth of the Pentecostal movement and although it decisively rejected Pentecostalism, Pentecostals readily identified with the major themes of Fundamentalism. Then, too, we examined the development of the Keswick movement and attempted to show how this “higher life” movement influenced the values of the Pentecostals. The lecture at hand takes a look at one specific component of the “higher life” movement, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, with a view to examining the fascinating link between this group and the Assemblies of God. Much of the theology, as well as the polity, of the Assemblies of God was borrowed directly from the Christian and Missionary Alliance. No single denomination had as important an influence on the formation of the contours of the Assemblies of God as did the Christian and Missionary Alliance. It is significant for our thesis that this body, having such great influence on the Assemblies of God is properly classified as a “higher life” movement, rather than being identified with the classical Wesleyan Holiness movement.

A. B. Simpson and the Formation of the Christian and Missionary Alliance

The story of Albert B. Simpson (1843-1919), a Canadian-born into a Scottish Covenanter Presbyterian home, is instructive in the attempt to understand the struggle earnest Christian believers experienced in coming to terms with the Pentecostal revival. Simpson was the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and its chief spokesperson for many years. Throughout the formative years of the Pentecostal revival, Simpson, more than any other, expressed the prevailing views within the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

¹ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), p. x.

² William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), p. 10.

Simpson, following preparation for the Christian ministry at Knox College, Toronto, pastored the Presbyterian Knox Church in Hamilton, Ontario, with good success from 1865-1873. Simpson had attracted considerable attention as an outstanding preacher. At the end of 1873, Simpson was invited to consider the pastorate of the Chestnut Street Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. He and his family moved to Louisville, where Simpson served with outstanding success in that church from 1874 to 1879. During his time in Louisville, Simpson developed great interest in urban evangelism, leading him to encourage interdenominational ministry among his colleagues in Louisville. In 1879, Simpson was extended a unanimous invitation to pastor the Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church of New York City.

Strenuous service in his pastoral duties in New York were too much for Simpson's frail health. On an extended vacation in Maine, along the seashore, in the summer of 1881, Simpson had a remarkable encounter with the Lord. Charles Cullis, a Boston physician who had come to believe in divine healing, was the speaker at Old Orchard, a Christian retreat center in Maine. Through his influence, Simpson put his trust in Christ for his healing. He had a great sense of the presence of the Lord as he sat on the beach one day. He believed that God had healed him. That weekend, he went to speak in a Congregational church in the mountains of New Hampshire, not far from their Maine summer residence. The day following his speaking engagement, he was invited to climb 3000-foot Mt. Kearsarge. This, for Simpson, was a true test of his healing. As he climbed, he sensed another Presence helping him. In his words, "When I reached the mountain top, I seemed to be at the gate of heaven, and the world of weakness and fear was lying at my feet."³ It is said that Simpson, who previously had suffered from a bad heart that severely limited his ability to sustain strenuous activity, now was able to do the work of three men.⁴ Considering the range and magnitude of his activities until his death nearly forty years later, it certainly appears that he indeed did experience a remarkable divine healing. This personal experience reinforced for him the reality and the importance of the teaching of divine healing, a teaching which became a cornerstone of his subsequent ministry.

By the seashore in Maine, that summer in 1881, not only did Simpson receive a remarkable healing, but he reckoned that moment as the point where he experienced a mighty encounter with Christ, an event he would term a crisis experience, a filling with the Holy Spirit, or sanctification, what he later describes as "the personal indwelling of Christ."⁵ He described his experience as a crisis of sanctification, yet he so qualified what he meant by this that it is clear he wanted to distinguish his understanding of this crisis experience from the teaching of Wesleyan Holiness advocates.

Simpson was moving rapidly away from his Presbyterian roots. Not long after his remarkable healing, Simpson began to find new ways of reaching the lost, both in New York City among the downtrodden and disenfranchised, and in exploring ways to mobilize people for overseas mission endeavor. His evangelistic work among immigrants led to a strain with the local presbytery of his church. It was evident that his congregation did not share his enthusiasm for reaching those whose life styles were quite different from their own. About this time, as well, Simpson felt constrained, from a diligent searching of the Scriptures, that he should be rebaptized by immersion. This, of course, was a serious breach of ministerial behavior within the Presbyterian Church. To avoid controversy, and quite aware that his interests had diverged from the current prevailing views in his church, Simpson startled the church session by his decision to resign, not only from the church, but from the presbytery.⁶ Suddenly, from having a comfortable salary and a secure position, Simpson was thrust out into a life of faith with no tangible source of support, other than trusting the Lord.

Dramatic events followed Simpson's launching out in faith. Two weeks after his resignation from the Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church, in November 1881, he conducted a meeting designed to promote evangelistic work in the city of New York. Only seven people showed up on that first occasion. From a humble beginning, this little group developed an aggressive, ambitious program of ministry, ministry that included not only evangelistic endeavors, but systematic training of converts for Christian service. Simpson

³ Robert Niklaus, John Sawin, and Samuel Stoesz, *All for Jesus* (New York: Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1986), p. 41.

⁴ A. W. Tozer, *Wingspread* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1943), p. 81.

⁵ A. B. Simpson, *The Four-fold Gospel* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing House, 1925), pp. 38, 39.

⁶ Niklaus, Sawin, Stoesz, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

was able to enlist the aid of capable leaders who shared with him in the work. God blessed his labors with rapid growth. This work became known as the Gospel Tabernacle.⁷

In the years that followed, Simpson launched a veritable cascade of ministries from the Gospel Tabernacle base in New York City. In 1884, he initiated the opening of a faith home for providing a supportive environment for those seeking divine healing. This facility, called “Berachah Home,” sheltered more than 700 guests in the course of the next year and half, until the home was moved elsewhere.⁸

To promote the cause of world missions, Simpson launched in 1883 “The Missionary Union for the Evangelization of the World,” an organization formed within his Gospel Tabernacle. Simpson was a prolific writer. He launched a periodical, *The Word, the Work and the World*, as an instrument for giving visibility to the cause of world missions. Yet another momentous achievement that came into being in that year was the opening of a Missionary Training School for Christian Evangelists. Simpson enlisted the help of some of the ablest Evangelical scholars of the day to teach the classes in his new school. Some of these were A. T. Pierson, George F. Pentecost, A. J. Gordon, and James Brooks.⁹ Eventually the school required more spacious accommodation and moved up the Hudson River from New York City to Nyack.

The next year, 1884, Simpson launched a great missions convention at the Gospel Tabernacle. It was so successful that he joined forces with other key leaders and conducted similar conventions in various cities, including Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Boston, Pittsburgh, Buffalo, and as far away as Detroit and Chicago. Over the next several years, a series of associations of local churches to promote the cause of missions evolved, under the leadership of A. B. Simpson. Actually two associations evolved, one centering in mobilization for missions, the other an association of local churches. Eventually, the Christian Alliance and the Missionary Alliance merged to form the present-day denomination, the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The denomination evolved, as well, resulting in a permanent constitution which was adopted in 1912, in Boone, Iowa, outlining the character and the form of the denomination. By this time, there were already 250 missionaries serving overseas under the banner of the Alliance.¹⁰ It is of interest to note that only two years later, with the formation of the Assemblies of God, much of the character, form, and theology of the younger group would be borrowed wholesale from the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance: Key Concepts

A. B. Simpson certainly diverged from his Calvinistic roots. The theological concepts he articulated that gave shape to the belief structure of the Alliance were thoroughly Evangelical and strongly supportive of classical orthodox theology, but were clearly marked by American revivalist emphases. High priority is given to individual choice rather than divine election.¹¹ Simpson was primarily a preacher, not a careful theologian. Hence, his writings have a devotional style, and some of his teachings are a bit blurred, especially as he addresses the subject of sanctification. One has to filter through his language to capture the essence of his thought.

Simpson popularized with great effectiveness an organizing principle borrowed from A. J. Gordon, the “four-fold gospel.” This device enabled his followers to express their beliefs in clear and simple form. For Simpson, the center is Jesus Christ, from whom all blessings flow. He is our Savior, our Sanctifier, our Healer and our Coming King. When the Assemblies of God came into being, the “four-fold gospel” was readily adopted, with a slight Pentecostal revision. For the Assemblies of God, the “four cardinal doctrines” became Jesus Christ as Savior, Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, Healer, and Coming King.

⁷ It should be noted that a favorite name for Assemblies of God churches for many years was borrowed from the Christian and Missionary Alliance, who from its beginning, favored that name for local churches.

⁸ Niklaus, Sawin, Stoesz, op.cit., p. 57.

⁹ Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

¹¹ A.B. Simpson, *The Four-fold Gospel* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing Co., 1925), pp. 22, 23.

1. Jesus Christ Our Savior

Simpson anchored his teaching on salvation on the substitutionary atonement of Christ.¹² The outline of steps for receiving Christ as Savior are familiar to Evangelicals. Simpson placed a strong emphasis on “whosoever will,” making it abundantly clear that salvation, offered freely by Christ, is effective only when one chooses to exercise his free will.

2. Jesus Christ Our Sanctifier

Simpson’s teaching on sanctification is instructive. He said, “You cannot sanctify yourselves. The only thing to do is to give yourself wholly to God, a voluntary sacrifice. This is intensely important. It is but a light thing to do for Him. But He must do the work of cleansing and filling.”¹³ Simpson made it clear that there is an active role for the believer in the process of sanctification. Consecration, dedication, surrender—these are terms that lace his writing. In effect, he is saying that there is a divine-human cooperation required; the human side of the equation is commitment and submission, but this is merely establishing the condition required for Christ, the Sanctifier, to do His work. It is Christ Who sanctifies. The language of emptying conveys the idea that one is preparing himself for Christ’s sanctifying work. The result of one earnestly seeking God, consciously pressing in for His sanctifying work, is experiencing “love, supreme love to God and all mankind.”¹⁴ For Simpson, sanctification is not only emptying, but also filling.¹⁵ In May, 1906, the Alliance called a special pre-conference meeting that met just prior to the annual Council, at which time a statement was prepared to spell out agreed-upon Alliance teaching on sanctification. Sanctification was described as:

- a. A definite second blessing, *distinct in nature*, though not necessarily far removed in time, from the experience of conversion;
- b. The baptism of the Holy Ghost *as a distinct experience*, not merely for power for service, but for power for personal holiness and victory over the world and sin;
- c. The indwelling of Christ in the heart of the consecrated believer *as a distinct experience*;
- d. Sanctification by faith *as a distinct gift* of God’s grace to every open and surrendered soul; and
- e. Growth in grace and the deeper filling of the Holy Spirit *as distinct from* and the result of the definite experience of sanctification.¹⁶

What is evident here is that the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer came to be understood in the Alliance in a two-fold way: by a definite act of consecration one could expect to enter upon a tenuous condition of “entire sanctification,” a condition subject to development, and in no way was understood to be sinless perfection. The Alliance view was certainly interchangeable with Keswick teaching. Further, the believer was expected to be “filled with the Holy Spirit,” or to use the language that was current by the turn of the century, to be “baptized in the Spirit.” Examining the definition of this experience, one discovers that this baptism in the Spirit is primarily an endowment of power for service, but is not entirely bereft of a heightening in one’s personal holiness of life.

3. Christ Our Healer

Flowing from his own remarkable experience in 1881, Simpson built into his theology a solid place for the doctrine of divine healing. He courageously held to this conviction, even though this cost him support from many who did not accept this controversial teaching. Divine healing became one of the four pillars in

¹² Ibid., p. 17.

¹³ Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁴ Simpson, *The Four-fold Gospel*, p. 36.

¹⁵ Simpson, *Wholly Sanctified*, (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1925), p. 21.

¹⁶ Extracted from “Conference for Prayer and Counsel, Respecting Uniformity in the Testimony and Teaching of the Alliance, May 25-28, 1906,” quoted by John Sawin in “The Response and Attitude of Dr. A. B. Simpson and the Christian and Missionary Alliance to the Tongues Movement of 1906-1920,” in *Papers of the Sixteenth Annual Meeting, Society for Pentecostal Studies, November 13-15, 1986, Costa Mesa, CA*, p. 51.

his theology. He expressed eloquently the importance of centering this message in the work of Christ. Healing, for Simpson, was not to be confused with mental gymnastics; it was a gift to be received by those believers who would reach out in faith to receive the birthright. Important to note, as well, is the teaching of Simpson about the place of the ministry of healing for the missionary outreach of the church and the significance of the recovery of this biblical message for understanding our place in history. “Divine healing is one of the signs of the age. It is the forerunner of Christ’s coming. It is God’s answer to the infidelity of to-day. Many may try to reason it down with the force of his intellect. God meets it with this unanswerable proof of His power.”¹⁷

4. Christ Our Coming King

Simpson taught that Jesus Christ would return to earth in a sudden, pre-millennial rapture, to be followed by His earthly reign for a millennium. This teaching, clearly in harmony with Scofieldian dispensationalism, was held by a wide range of Evangelicals by the end of the nineteenth century. There is nothing particularly unusual about Simpson’s eschatology. What this emphasis, making the Second Coming one of his four major theological anchors, is that it gave a sense of urgency and significance to the cause of world evangelization.¹⁸

One can see in the Four-fold Gospel how closely these views were followed in the formation of the Assemblies of God. Even the language about sanctification and baptism in the Holy Spirit is pretty well in line with what Assemblies of God people came to believe. To be sure, the Alliance emphasis on a crisis experience of sanctification can be seen as a different nuance. But, when one examines the qualifications that refine what is meant by sanctification, it appears that the differences are largely semantic, rather than substantive. The only thing of great significance that was truly different was the matter of speaking in other tongues as the biblical accompanying sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Let us look in on the story of the Alliance response to the Pentecostal revival.

The Pentecostal Revival and the Christian and Missionary Alliance

Simpson was faced with the issue of speaking in tongues long before the advent of the Pentecostal revival. In 1883, upon Simpson’s advocacy of divine healing, critics complained that if he allowed for a restoration of divine healing in the church, he would also have to accept other manifestations of the Spirit, including speaking in other tongues. To this he responded,

We cheerfully accept the severe logic. We cannot afford to give up one of the promises—We believe the gift of tongues was only withdrawn from the early Church as it was abused for vain display or as it became unnecessary for practical use. It will be repeated as soon as the Church will humbly claim it for the universal diffusin of the Gospel.¹⁹

Nine years later, in 1892, when returning missionaries from China inquired into Simpson’s insights respecting seeking the gift of tongues to be able to communicate the gospel in other cultures, Simpson cautioned the missionaries that he doubted that Scripture warranted as a rule the availability of tongues for this purpose, but he was reluctant to discourage the faith of earnest people.²⁰ In 1898, in a sermon he preached, Simpson said he understood tongues as,

... a Divine influence which elevated the soul to a state of ecstasy and found expression in utterances of an elevated character, impressing the hearer with the manifest presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the subject of this influence.²¹

¹⁷ Simpson, *The Four-fold Gospel*, p. 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 93.

¹⁹ Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (1888 edition), pp. 83, 84, quoted in Sawin, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

²⁰ Sawin, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

²¹ Sawin, *op.cit.*, pp. 5, 6.

In February, 1906, in response to a call for a conference to discuss uniformity of doctrine within the Alliance, Simpson wrote,

The greatest thought that God is projecting upon the hearts of Christians these days of increasing revival is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is a matter of deep thankfulness that the attention of Christians is being directed so forcibly to the person and work of the Holy Spirit.”²²

In response to news that a great revival was taking place in Los Angeles in 1905, even before the Azusa Street outpouring, Simpson evaluated what God was doing in an editorial. He stated, “We do not believe that these special enduements are really essential to the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We may have that without any of the supernatural gifts.... Have we received and are we using all that the Holy Spirit has for us today for the ministry of Christ in the crisis time in which we live?”²³

When Simpson learned of the great outpouring at Azusa Street in Los Angeles, he acknowledged that this was “a remarkable manifestation of spiritual power among earnest Christians in the West; that these manifestations have taken the form chiefly of the gift of tongues.” To this he added a cautionary note to avoid extremes and fanaticism, but said, “...guard against the extreme of refusing to recognize any added blessing the Holy Spirit is bringing to His people in these last days.”²⁴

Within weeks of the blossoming of the Azusa Street revival, Alliance people in many parts of the country began to seek God earnestly for the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Frank Bartleman, an early leader in the Los Angeles revival, received a number of invitations to minister in Alliance fellowships, including several engagements at Nyack, New York.²⁵ By 1907, the Pentecostal revival had spread widely. In Indianapolis, there was a remarkable outpouring in the Christian and Missionary Alliance Gospel Tabernacle in January of that year. The pastor, G. N. Eldridge, at first opposed the revival, but later received the Pentecostal experience. The Reynolds family were charter members of the Alliance Gospel Tabernacle. On Easter Sunday, 1907, the youngest daughter in that family received the baptism in the Spirit. Alice Reynolds later married a young law student, J. Roswell Flower, who himself received the baptism in 1911 in Indianapolis.²⁶

But, it was at Nyack that the most significant events transpired. In May, 1907, at the annual Council of the Alliance that met in Nyack, New York, a remarkable Pentecostal awakening swept through the student body of the Missionary Training Institute as well as the ministers and delegates who had come to the conference. Even before this event, a number of prominent Alliance pastors had received the Pentecostal experience. During the summer months, at least two Alliance camp meetings were scenes of Pentecostal blessing. It seemed that the Alliance was well on its way to accepting the new experience. But, then it was learned that the Pentecostals were teaching that tongues always accompanies a full biblical baptism in the Spirit. Controversy followed. Simpson appointed Henry Wilson to visit churches in the Ohio district where there were known to be strong Pentecostal groups functioning. He was delegated to study the meetings and to bring back a report to New York with his findings. A. W. Tozer, prominent pastor and editor, later stated that the report Wilson brought was adopted by Simpson and by the entire Alliance family as their official position. He reported that “there is something of God in it,” but felt that the Alliance should encourage a posture of “seek not, forbid not.”²⁷ John Sawin, noted Alliance scholar, in a conversation with the author, disclosed that A. W. Tozer, who had written Simpson’s official biography, just before his death, admitted to Sawin that the “seek not, forbid not” view of Wilson, the view that was widely adopted in Alliance circles, was not, in fact, held by Simpson. As a matter of fact, Simpson, Sawin stated, sought the Pentecostal experience until his death, although he never did speak in tongues, and never acknowledged that tongues is the necessary accompanying biblical sign of Spirit baptism.²⁸ Regardless of the personal feelings of Simpson, who seems to have been more favorable to the Pentecostal revival than the official

²² Sawin, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

²³ A. B. Simpson, “Christian Alliance,” Dec., 1905, p. 817, quoted in Sawin, *op.cit.*, pp. 8, 9.

²⁴ A. B. Simpson, “Christian Alliance,” Sep., 1906, p. 177, quoted in Sawin, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁵ Bartleman, *op.cit.*, p. 84.

²⁶ William W. Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1971), p. 66.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁸ Interview with John Sawin, Nov. 14, 1986, Costa Mesa, CA.

Alliance position, this was the parting of the ways. When the dust had settled, a number of able leaders had abandoned the Alliance and joined the Pentecostal movement. Nearly all of those who defected identified with the Assemblies of God upon its formation in 1914. Among these early leaders were some of the important architects of the Assemblies of God, principally D. W. Kerr of Cleveland, Ohio, Frank M. Boyd, William I. Evans, D. W. Myland, Noel Perkin, Louis Turnbull, A. G. Ward, and J. W. Welch.²⁹

Conclusion

Observing the structure of the Assemblies of God as it evolved in its early formative years, one sees overwhelming evidence of wholesale borrowing from the Christian and Missionary Alliance. From the beginning of the Assemblies of God, the very strong emphasis on missions certainly is a further reflection of the character of the Alliance. The architects of the Bible schools that the Assemblies of God developed from early years were in large measure the product of Alliance teaching and influence.

Even more importantly, the doctrines adopted by the Assemblies of God, drafted in 1916 to meet the crisis of the Oneness phenomenon, disclose the hand of D. W. Kerr, former Alliance pastor from Ohio. With the exception of the clear statement regarding the important connection of speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of the baptism in the Spirit, the entire “Statement of Fundamental Truths” could fit easily within the framework of the Christian and Missionary Alliance.

The Pentecostal movement, and especially the Assemblies of God, owes a great debt to our Evangelical colleagues, our Alliance friends, from whom we have gained so very much. More than any other institution, the Christian and Missionary Alliance shaped the values and the form of the Assemblies of God.

I would like to add a final note to this lecture series. We began with the observation that there is a current wave of revival sweeping through the Pentecostal movement. Although it is too soon to make a thorough evaluation of the present era, the story unfolding in Pensacola, Florida, a major revival center, indicates that the focus of the revival lies in a renewal of concern for rediscovering the theme of holiness—the holiness of God and the appropriate response of a people who yearn to be holy. In an era that has featured the wonderful blessings that a gracious God dispenses, perhaps the attraction of blessing has outweighed the more subtle and quiet call of God for a people willing to examine themselves, a people who will lay aside the weights and hindrances that corrode the spiritual life. After all, the gifts and blessings of God are all a matter of grace—they are not evidences of a superior quality of Christian character. If, indeed, God is speaking to us about revisiting the theme of sanctification, let us each propose that we shall give the Holy Spirit fresh opportunity to work in our lives.

²⁹ Menzies, *op. cit.*, p. 72.