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EVALUATING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

(Written in 1950 for the *Advocate*)

"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it . . . That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle . . . that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

At the beginning of the century, the church of Jesus Christ around the world was laboring in the throes of a soul travail which produced a child of destiny, who, from the day of its birth has grown and waxed strong and gained in favor with God and man but not without opposition.

This offspring of the mother church was the launching of mighty holiness revivals that later on produced the great Pentecostal movement which has swept over the world like a forest fire. It began to take form and assume separate ecclesiastical titles early in the twentieth century, and today there are more than a score of denominations which owe their existence to that great Pentecostal Holiness revival.

Among the groups referred to above is our own Pentecostal Holiness Church, which is classified as one of the larger Pentecostal bodies and is today experiencing the most rapid growth of its history.

The Pentecostal Holiness Church began to function as a recognized church body as early as 1895 and comprised within its official name are the two principal doctrines taught by its founders: PENTECOST and HOLINESS. Pentecost identified the church as belonging to one of the new sects and the doctrine of Holiness or Sanctification, as a second definite work of grace, identified the church among the Holiness bodies. The scriptural truth, practice and preaching of this doctrine *has not* changed through the first generation of the church's history; and there is no indication that it will ever change.

The very occasion of the birth of our church, coupled with the attitude of established religion toward the church, produced in the spirit and attitudes of the founders a dogmatic bent. The pioneers and early founders from the very first felt the sting of both local and higher criticism. The theologians and church leaders attacked them in the sanctity and privacy of their own worship service, and in many cases they were denied the protection of the law.

Every great movement that has figured to any appreciable degree in the development of human history has had its rugged pioneers who dared to charter unexplored lands and push back distant horizons. The establishing and development of the Pentecostal Holiness Church could never have become a reality had it not been for the dauntless courage, the unconquerable spirit, and the rugged individuality of the pioneer preachers who literally burned their way through all organized opposition and claimed the land upon which they trod for God and Pentecostal Holiness.

The very tone of their voice was a declaration of war upon evil and hypocrisy in religion; the

very tread of their footstep was as a soldier on the march. They asked no odds, and made no apologies for their withering blasts upon the sins of the day. Their peculiar position in the world and their relationship to the established church imposed upon them an attitude that they were not responsible for; yet this attitude was transmitted to their followers.

They were disowned by the church and opposed by the world. This gave them the feeling that they were "hated of all men," and the very tenor of their gospel revealed this attitude.

The ministers went to the pulpit with a chip on their shoulder; they preached a defensive gospel; they had taken their stand upon the great doctrines of Holiness and Pentecost, and they were being treated as heretics and fanatics by organized religion. So they fought like lions at bay to defend this new found experience.

The laxity in morals among church people and the lack of personal convictions against modern sins among Christians brought forth withering denunciation from these pioneers of Holiness against everybody from the pulpit to the gutter. It was as if another Jehu were riding down upon the Jezebels of the day, and as if another John the Baptist had arisen with a judgment against the Herods and the Pharisees in modern religion.

The Holiness groups became generally known as "Holy Rollers" and were derided, criticized, and classified as the poorest and most ignorant people on earth. In those days it was quite a sacrifice to be fully identified with the Holiness Church. Often it involved separation from friends and even loved ones. Families were broken up, husbands and wives separated, and children were driven from their homes. Small wonder then that the note

in the testimonies of the laity revealed a tinge of ostracism and persecution. Everybody was on the defensive. Many voiced this feeling in testimonies such as: "I am in this Holiness Way by choice and I am not ashamed of it."

Little by little, however, this people began to be "reckoned among the nations." Great giants of theology began to rise up among us. Under the anointing of the Holy Ghost they took their stand like pillars of truth along the horizon. They began to search the Scriptures, prepare documents, and lay the foundation for the Pentecostal Holiness Church that was destined to become one of the greatest channels for the truth of Pentecost and Holiness on this earth.

Men like Joseph Hillery King coming from the plow handles, to become the "aristocrat of the Pentecostal Holiness Church," and to stand for over forty years as the world's number one proponent of the doctrines of Holiness and Pentecost; men like N. J. Holmes and G. F. Taylor, catching a vision of the need of generations unborn, turned their efforts to establishing schools and colleges that would teach this precious truth. Thus we have Holmes Bible College and Emmanuel College. I pause here to say that Holmes Bible College, as a single factor, has contributed more toward the perpetuation of the unadulterated doctrine of Holiness as a second work of grace than any other influence on earth. May God help us as a church never to forget that.

In the East, there were other men "called to be evangelists": S. D. Page, F. M. Britton, R. B. Hayes, Watson Sorrow, H. H. Goff, E. D. Reeves, A. H. Butler, and uncounted others who feared nothing but God and hated nothing but sin. The West had great men also: Dan T. Muse, George

Byus, Lee Hargis, Harry P. Lott, A. T. Kersey, Dan York, Luther Dryden, R. B. Bell, O. C. Wilkins and others. These men literally burned their way through walls of opposition and planted the seed of Holiness and Pentecost that will be blessing this world for a thousand years to come.

In this great process of planting and laying the foundation, many mistakes and errors were made, but that was to be expected. However, through the first generation our church has come, and she stands today in the midst of the holy sabbatic year with her chin up, and with a consciousness of her mission in this world; feeling equal by God's grace and help to face any situation, claiming her "place in the sun" as confidently and serenely as some of the oldest denominations on earth.

This year, this holy year, this fiftieth year, this Jubilee year, has a very special significance for the Pentecostal Holiness Church. It marks the passing of the first generation of her history; it also marks the passing of the defensive note in her ministry, and the underdog attitude in her laity.

Most of the founders of the Pentecostal Holiness Church are dead. To mention a few: E. D. Reeves, G. F. Taylor, and S. D. Page were among the first to go. And then the news went around the world that J. H. King had gone to Heaven. We were all shocked. We were "like an orphan child crying in the night." We bowed our heads and wept. There were hundreds of us in all parts of the world who could still remember those solemn words of charge as he ordained us to the ministry; we could still feel the weight of his hand upon our heads as he blessed us there.

The passing of J. H. King seemed to be the signal for others to follow and they were not long in going. Bishop Dan T. Muse took the office that

our Brother King had held so long and he filled it like a prince for a while; but he did the work of three men, finished his course quickly, and followed Bishop King to the other side. A. E. Robinson and J. A. Culbreth, possibly the two most outstanding laymen of our church, also went to their reward the same year. Brother S. E. Stark from the West left us, and Rev. H. H. Goff, though not a member of our church, yet a friend and brother in it and a preacher of Holiness for over fifty years, was the next to go.

I mention only a few of those outstanding men because they represent the spirit and character of the Pentecostal Holiness Church in their generation, and their passing symbolizes the change from the first generation to the second. Without doubt the responsibility for perpetuating the torch of truth is changing hands, and the Pentecostal Holiness Church is facing the future without the steadying influence of her pioneer leaders but with an enthusiasm and spirit of aggression that the church has never had before. We feel safe under the present guidance of our God-given leaders. The doctrines of the church have remained intact through the years, but there have been radical changes in her attitude and scale of values.

The thought pattern of the Pentecostal Holiness people has been revamped in a shifting of points of emphasis. No longer does the church go forth with a hit or miss, roughshod policy; but she marches forth with program, plan and purpose. The method of those early, rugged, self-styled evangelists was to fast and pray and preach until people were saved and then often leave their converts to be devoured by wolves or carried off into some other church.

Some pastors in those early days would not

receive a new convert into the church until he had proven to the church that he was going to live right. More was said about back door revivals than about taking new members into the church. The church was set forth more as a disciplinary institution than a training ground for young Christians. Many people were actually afraid to join a Pentecostal Holiness Church.

These former attitudes had their virtues and may have seemed necessary in the period of our church's adolescence. But whether unconsciously or deliberately; whether humanly planned or divinely inspired, the church has revised its pattern of thought along this line. Our ministers now preach with a positive note; no longer do they try to defend the doctrine against the critics, but rather, they preach the doctrine of Pentecost and Holiness with a pardonable pride. It is no longer a defensive, but an aggressive ministry. We are no longer at bay fighting a defensive war; we are on the march with a message that this world is dying for.

We now realize that we have "come to the kingdom for such a time as this." We are burdened with the responsibility that God has made us custodians of the great message of Pentecost and Holiness.

Our church has proven its virtues and has fully justified its right to claim a place among the old established denominations of earth. No longer do you hear the testimonies that we are Holiness and not ashamed of it; but with our heads uplifted and our hearts thrilling with the joy of it, we say: "We are Pentecostal Holiness people and are proud of it." This attitude gives us a feeling of security and a sense of belonging, and is one of the contributing factors in the spectacular

growth of our church today. However, may God grant that we shall always remain humble and walk softly before Him.

If we can maintain this attitude without losing the rugged individuality, uncompromising stand, and the sacrificial, unselfish spirit of the pioneer preachers who laid the foundation of this our Great Church, we can and will march on to push back new horizons and interpret grace and truth for a world that has become disappointed in formal religion. But if we become soft, and lose the spirit of sacrifice, we too will lose our power with God and our influence over men.

Finally, this fiftieth year of Jubilee is a signal point on the time table of the Pentecostal Holiness Church. From this point we begin a new generation, another stage of development, another period of growth.

God grant that we, as men and women who must pick up the torch of Pentecostal Holiness truth from the faltering hands of those whose "eyelids have been touched with the fingers of death," will never let this spirit perish from the earth, but with the battle cry they gave us, go out into a perishing world, out into the gathering gloom of the end time to herald the mighty truth of Pentecost and Holiness to the ends of the earth.

Let us faint not nor falter as long as there is a human soul out of Christ, or until that blessed hour when the call shall come from beyond the stars to the marriage of the Lamb.

(General Conference Sermon, 1957)