

**Enrichment, Spring 1999**

**All For Jesus: The Revival Legacy of A. B. Simpson**

BY GARY B. MCGEE

"Gold-for-iron for Jesus!" In the mid-1890s, a call went out to members of the Christian and Missionary Alliance to donate their gold watches, rings, and other gold possessions for foreign missions. In turn, a gold ring would be replaced by an iron ring, a gold watchcase for one of gunmetal. The burden of evangelism weighed so intensely on the hearts of the faithful that thousands of dollars were raised in this fashion. Who and what could inspire people to surrender such precious items to win lost souls for Christ?

In the study of Christianity, scholars attempt to identify key leaders whose commanding presence shaped new movements. Lutherans look back to Martin Luther, Reformed to John Calvin, Methodists to John Wesley, and the Salvation Army to William and Catherine Booth. In the late 19th century, among those who promoted divine healing and missionary evangelism, few rivaled A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Alliance.

Pastor, missions executive and strategist, prolific author, editor, hymnwriter, teacher, and spiritual master, A.B. Simpson wore many hats. He challenged his followers to seek for the "higher life" in Christ and climb over their denominational walls to join other Christians in evangelizing the world in the last days.

**A DREAMER, A FOOL**

Born into a devout Presbyterian home on Prince Edward Island, Canada, in 1843, Albert Benjamin Simpson was converted as a teenager in 1858. Sometime afterward, he felt called to the ministry and enrolled at Knox College in Toronto. Graduating in 1865, he was ordained and became pastor of Knox Church in Hamilton, Ontario, the second largest Presbyterian congregation in Canada, where he served until 1873.

After he entered his second pastorate at the prestigious Chestnut Street Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, Simpson gained inspiration from the ministries of the popular evangelists Dwight L. Moody, Major D. W. Whittle, and Philip P. Bliss. He also received news about conferences in England on "the higher Christian life," later known as the Keswick movement. Longing for a closer relationship with Christ, he read William E. Boardman's *Higher Christian Life* (1858). Boardman's classic introduced Simpson to the Reformed wing of the holiness movement that taught

an instantaneous experience of sanctification following conversion. This experience empowered believers for evangelism. Seeking and receiving this "baptism in the Holy Spirit" led to his spiritual transformation. "Never," wrote Simpson, "has my heart known...such a thrill of joy."

Although Simpson had refused to support a citywide evangelistic campaign in Hamilton, his attitude changed and he helped organize a similar effort in Louisville. Impressed by its success, he planned other such endeavors. Simpson became so enthusiastic about evangelism that the restraints of pastoring a socially affluent church troubled him. In his estimation, one had to move beyond parish confines to those waiting to hear the gospel for the first time. In the second verse of his famous missionary hymn, "The Regions Beyond," he penned:

To the hardest of places He calls me to go,  
Not thinking of comfort or ease;  
The world may pronounce me a dreamer, a fool,  
Enough if the Master I please.

Simpson's struggle grew after the Chestnut Street congregation decided to construct a new building. Simpson proposed a plain and functional building that could serve as an evangelistic center. The church board, however, saw things differently and forged ahead with erecting an elaborate structure, one that also left the church with a \$50,000 debt. Believing the money had been misspent, Simpson refused to dedicate it until the debt was paid in full.

When Simpson resigned in 1879, the church was still in debt and remained undedicated. He would not compromise the proper use of the Lord's money for social and ecclesiastical aggrandizement. With his wife Margaret and their children, he left for the more promising harvest field of New York City and the Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church. His vision for reaching the masses soon proved greater than that of his congregation.

Simpson's spiritual search reached a climax in 1881 that dramatically changed the direction of his life: Having suffered from frail health for many years, he testified to the healing of a serious heart ailment at the Old Orchard Beach campground in Maine. He also asked to be baptized by immersion in a Baptist church, resigned his pastorate and the Presbyterian ministry, and began evangelizing the poor and unchurched in New York City. He then founded an independent congregation later known as the Gospel Tabernacle.

To evangelize North America and overseas, Simpson founded several

institutions, among them the Evangelical Missionary Alliance and the Christian Alliance. In 1897, these merged to become the Christian and Missionary Alliance. In its early years, it served as a parachurch association of members from various denominations. He also established the Missionary Training Institute (present-day Nyack College)—the first Bible institute of its kind in America. Students called it "Simpson's matchbox," indicating his passion for their being set on fire for the Lord's work.

### **THE FOURFOLD GOSPEL**

Simpson longed for the restoration of the purity and vitality of the New Testament church to energize the church of his day. Beginning with the Protestant Reformation and Luther's discovery of justification by faith, he pointed to Wesley's teaching on the sanctified life, the rediscovery of divine healing by faith, and at the end of human history the widespread anticipation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Just as first-century Christians had received the "early rain," so 19 centuries later the "latter rain" (Joel 2:23,28) would bring the power and gifts of the Spirit.

To highlight the key elements of his theology, Simpson coined the expression "Fourfold Gospel." Its four "folds" speak of Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King. But whether one uses the terms "full gospel," "whole gospel," or the later "foursquare gospel," they all teach that following conversion, there are other gospel truths that should be integral to living the deeper/higher life in Christ.

#### *Jesus as Savior*

Christ's redemptive work for the salvation of humankind inspired Simpson's all-consuming burden to preach the gospel to unreached peoples. Without hearing and accepting the good news, they faced an eternity separated from the light of God's presence. This theme appears in his hymn, "A Missionary Cry," which pulsates with the rhythm of a ticking clock:

A hundred thousand souls a day,  
Are passing one by one away,  
In Christless guilt and gloom.  
Without one ray of hope or light,  
With future dark as endless night,  
They're passing to their doom,  
They're passing to their doom.

### *Jesus as Sanctifier*

In regard to holiness, Simpson believed that sanctification was an experience of full consecration separate from conversion. It meant "the putting off, the laying aside of evil," an experience that "set [the believer's] affections on things above" (Colossians 3:2). Proof of this came in part from the pattern of Spirit baptisms found in Acts 2,8,10, and 19.

To him, the Spirit-filled life in Christ sparks the missionary impetus: "No soul can receive this deep, divine overflowing life and remain henceforth unto himself." "The baptism of the Holy Ghost," he added, "is not worth anything if it does not fire your soul with a love like [that of Christ], a love that forgets your own spiritual need in pouring out your life like Him for others."

### *Jesus as Healer*

Due to his own physical healing and study of the Scriptures, Simpson identified with the late 19th-century evangelical healing movement. The doctrine of instantaneous sanctification fit well with the concept of immediate healing by faith. Christ is both the "sin-bearer" and "sickness-bearer" (Isaiah 53:4,5). His atoning work at Calvary makes possible spiritual reconciliation between God and humankind; through faith it can then reverse the physical impairments caused by the fall (Genesis 3).

Simpson dismissed the notion of praying "if it be His will." Since the "Lord Jesus has purchased [healing] for us in His redemption, it must be God's will for us to have it, for Christ's whole redeeming work was simply the executing of the Father's will." Once believers had been sanctified and entered the "higher life," they could, through the exercise of faith, promptly receive healing from every disease (Exodus 15:26).

### *Jesus as Coming King*

Like other evangelicals at the time, Simpson was influenced by dispensational premillennialism that taught believers were living in the "last days" (Acts 2:17). This deeply impacted his concept of missionary evangelism. In view of Matthew 24:14 ("this gospel...shall be preached in all the world...then shall the end come"), he announced: "We are preaching the gospel not for the conversion of the world, but for a witness unto all nations, and when we shall have accomplished this, [Christ] will come." Thus, the message had to get out regardless of the number converted. In 1892, then, he sent missionaries to China hoping they could enter

Tibet—considered by many to be the “uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8)—with the gospel.

Simpson argued that the Great Commission had to be completed before Christ could return. He based this on the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14 and Peter’s admonition in 2 Peter 3:11,12.

### **MISSION STRATEGIST**

The interest among contemporary Pentecostals, charismatics, and “third wavers” in “power evangelism” can be traced back to Simpson, the Alliance, and other radical evangelicals a century ago. Simpson recognized that prayer for the sick would gain the attention of nonbelievers by allowing them to see the power of God. It represents an integral part of apostolic ministry in “signs and wonders” (Acts 5:12): “The plan of the Lord [is] to pour out His Spirit not only in the ordinary, but also in the extraordinary gifts and operations of His power...as His people press forward to claim the evangelization of the entire world.”

Nevertheless, the actual application of what I have called the “radical strategy”—the expectation of miracles in mission—brought mixed results. For example, John Condit, one of the first Alliance missionaries to the Belgian Congo (present-day Republic of Congo), died from a fever in 1885 shortly after his arrival. Yet Grace Agar, an Alliance (and later Assemblies of God) missionary to China, rejoiced that the Lord had kept her in strength and health for 38 years and “protected [her] from all harm, from accidents on ice, slippery roads, from robbers, wild beasts, and from epidemics so common in China.”

But the urgent priority of gospel proclamation faced a formidable obstacle: Formal language study might take from 1 to 4 years for a missionary to gain the needed proficiency to preach. Hence, the delay prevented zealous “end-times” missionaries from immediately evangelizing once they arrived on their fields.

Even though he struggled to understand how tongues on the Day of Pentecost related to Paul’s instructions about the gifts of tongues and interpretation in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, Simpson considered it possible that the Spirit might confer known human languages (i.e., speaking in tongues). After all, Jesus had promised in Mark 16:17, “And these signs shall follow them that believe...they shall speak with new tongues.” This could potentially eliminate the nuisance of language school and expedite preaching to every tribe and nation. He noted that “instances are not wanting now of its apparent restoration in missionary labors both

in India and Africa."

Expectant faith could achieve the seemingly impossible. Thus, in 1892, Alliance missionaries William W. Simpson and William Christie arrived in China intent on evangelizing Tibet. They anticipated that God would miraculously bestow on them the Mandarin and Tibetan languages in fulfillment of Mark 16:17. Before long, however, they engaged in formal language study.

In response to a flurry of interest in "missionary tongues" (c.1889-92), and wishing to avoid the "danger of Irvingism" (controversial teachings of early-19th-century Scottish preacher Edward Irving on the gifts of the Spirit), the Alliance convention in October 1892 issued an urgent call: Delegates asked the faithful to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit in connection with the acquiring of foreign languages and to enable missionaries to withstand the climates in Africa, India, and China. Interest in "missionary tongues" continued into the 20th century and contributed to the rise of the Pentecostal movement.

Simpson also knew the dangers inherent to the quest for spiritual power. Too easily the desire for power can move ahead of the higher priority of seeking Christlike character. Words of caution appear in another of his songs, "Himself":

Once it was the blessing, Now it is the Lord;  
Once it was the feeling, Now it is His Word;  
Once His gift I wanted, Now, the Giver own;  
Once I sought for healing, Now himself alone.

Once it was my working, His it hence shall be;  
Once I tried to use Him, Now He uses me;  
Once the pow'r I wanted, Now the Mighty One;  
Once for self I labored, Now for Him alone.

To promote world evangelism, Simpson began conducting missions conventions in 1884 and soon crisscrossed the country speaking at such conferences in local "branches" of the Alliance. The popularity of these conventions attracted the attention of other mission leaders and did much to raise the missions consciousness of believers. The Christian and Missionary Alliance eventually became a denomination and developed one of the foremost evangelical mission enterprises.

#### **THE SEEKER**

To conclude that the source of Simpson's revivalist legacy lies in the institutions he founded or the activities he sponsored would

misjudge him. Always longing to "know [Christ], and the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10), his sermons and publications reveal the richness of his prayer life and profound theological reflection.

He learned the blessings of "stillness" in prayer. As he first sought to hear the "still, small voice of God," "a pandemonium of voices reached my ears, a thousand clamoring notes from without and within, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din. Some of them were my own voice, some of them were my own questions, and some of them were my own cares, and some of them were my very prayers." But God had said, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

In shutting out "noisy acclamations" and "unspeakable unrest," he began to hear deep within his consciousness a small voice that spoke with "an inexpressible tenderness, power and comfort. As I listened, it became to me the voice of prayer, and the voice of wisdom, and the voice of duty. I did not need to think so hard, or pray so hard, or trust so hard, but that 'still, small voice' of the Holy Spirit in my heart was God's prayer in my secret soul, was God's answer to all my questions, was God's life and strength for soul and body, and became the substance of all knowledge, and all prayer, and all blessing; for it was the living God himself as my Life and my All."

Activity could never substitute for prayer: "We cannot go through life strong and fresh on express trains, with 10 minutes for lunch. We must have quiet hours, secret places of the Most High, times of waiting upon the Lord, when we renew our strength and learn to mount up on wings as eagles, and then come back, to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint... The best thing about this stillness is that it gives God a chance to work."

Simpson's poem, "All for Jesus," reflects the depth of his personal devotion:

How can my heart the world refuse,  
Content my earthly all to lose,  
That I the better part may choose?  
I do it all for Jesus.

How can I meekly suffer wrong,  
With patience sweet, and courage strong,  
Repeating still my happy song?  
I do it all for Jesus.

How can I seek and save the lost,  
The souls forlorn and tempest-tossed,  
Regarding not the hardest cost?  
I do it all for Jesus.

#### **PENTECOSTAL FORERUNNER**

In 1906-07, nearly 20 years after members of the Alliance first raised the possibility of speaking in tongues for missionary preaching, the Pentecostal movement swept through the ranks. As the "branches" sent in reports describing revivals with some marked by tongues, Simpson faced an old issue once again. Before long, a sizable number of the faithful became Pentecostals, with many later joining the General Council of the Assemblies of God which organized in 1914.

While Simpson did not become a Pentecostal himself, his modeling of the "higher life" in Christ, burden for missions, prayer for the sick, and anticipation of "signs and wonders" in ministry blazed the way for many who became Pentecostals. With other former Alliance members, Daniel W. Kerr, J. Roswell and Alice Reynolds Flower, Carrie Judd Montgomery, Noel Perkin, John W. Welch, Frank M. Boyd, and W. I. Evans profoundly affected the early course of the Council. Not surprisingly, the "Fourfold Gospel" and other Alliance doctrines reappear in the Assemblies' "Statement of Fundamental Truths" with some modifications.

Simpson's Missionary Training Institute served as the model for Assemblies of God schools such as Glad Tidings Bible Institute (Bethany College), Central Bible Institute (Central Bible College), and Southern California Bible School (Southern California College). Among the earliest Council missionaries who attended Bible institutes, the largest number were trained at Simpson's Institute in Nyack, New York.

Waiting for the moment when the fulfillment of Bible prophecies would begin, Simpson suffered a paralyzing stroke in 1918 after hearing that General Edmund Allenby, British commander in Palestine, had captured Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks. Having "lived his life in the light of eternity," he died a year later, mourned alike by evangelicals and Pentecostals.

#### **ALL FOR JESUS—WHAT DOES IT COST?**

Decades after his death, the ministry of A. B. Simpson still inspires believers to experience the truths of the fourfold gospel and sacrificially devote their time and treasures to God. With the

overwhelming number of unreached peoples in the world today and the ever-lengthening shadow of evil in human cultures, proclaiming the good news in word and compassion remains at the heart of the Church's mission.

Yet, because Christians have frequently absorbed the materialism of the prevailing culture—the endless quest for prosperity and comfort—how firmly will they commit themselves to the biblical demands of discipleship? In the second verse of "A Missionary Cry," Simpson passionately prays that God will inspire them to examine their priorities in light of the gospel:

O Holy Ghost, Thy people move,  
Baptize their hearts with faith and love,  
And consecrate their gold.  
At Jesus' feet their millions pour,  
And all their ranks unite once more...

"Gold-for-iron for Jesus"? What are we laying at the Master's feet?

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