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LOCAL CHURCH IS MODEL OF INTEGRATION

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(Published February, 1996, in The Record, 150 River St., Hackensack, NJ, 07601)

Reconciliation comes to terms with the past in the light of the present for the sake of the future. True reconciliation is God's lasting antidote for racism. The best way to administer God's antidote is through integrated fellowship. I am privileged to pastor an integrated church. The demographics of Englewood Assembly of God are 45% Anglo Saxon, 30% African American, 22% Latino, and 3% Asian American. Through God's love, our church is a working model of integration in Englewood.

In 1995 the Assemblies of God, the world's largest Pentecostal group, reconciled a racist past that caused it to abandon a multi-ethnic revival in Los Angeles. The "city of angels" is too often a city of racist demons. However, 90 years ago Los Angeles was a center for ethnic reconciliation.

A revival began when an African-American minister named W. J. Seymour started preaching in Los Angeles. Seymour's first sermon was from Acts 2 -- "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." On April 9, 1906, Jesus poured out His Spirit upon the saints meeting with Seymour. They began to speak in other tongues. They began to magnify the Lord so fervently that a crowd gathered outside. Soon all Los Angeles heard that God was pouring out His Spirit. White people joined black saints in a great revival.

An old two-story building was rented in the city's industrial section. The house at 312 Azuza Street became God's epicenter for ethnic reconciliation and world evangelization. From there was launched a Pentecostal movement that to date has swept over 100 million souls into God's Kingdom.

The Azuza Revival went on daily for over 3 years. An eyewitness had this to say - "The news spread far and wide that Los Angeles was being visited with a rushing mighty wind, from heaven..., Pentecost has come to hundreds of hearts. As soon as it is announced that the altar is open for seekers for pardon, sanctification, the baptism in the Holy Ghost, and healing for the body, people rise and flock to the altar..., It is noticeably free from all nationalistic feeling..., No instrument that God can use is rejected on account of color or dress or lack of education. That is why God has so built up the work." Azuza Street represents God's ideal for His Church.

Sadly, the multi-ethnic unity of the Azusa Revival ceased after a few years. The white believers moved out and established white Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God. But through several reconciliatory meetings held in 1995, Evangelical groups, such as the Southern Baptists, have cast off their racist pasts and have taken up the mantle of ethnic reconciliation. Also the General Council of the Assemblies of God (A/G) passed a resolution promoting racial reconciliation. I was a co-author.

The A/G resolution noted that in the Azusa Revival “leadership and people joined together without regard to ethnicity, providing a divine rebuke against the Jim Crow laws and racial discrimination of this worldly age and throwing a shining light of God’s intention for His church where the blood of Christ washes out the color line.” However, it also noted that because “of the deep stain and sin of racism following the Azusa Revival, predominately black and white Pentecostal denominations went their separate ways for a season.” This racism caused our testimony to suffer and deprived our fellowship of many blessings.

But now we in the A/G have resolved to “repent of racism and ask our black brothers and sisters for forgiveness for failing to keep and treasure the 20th century Azusa Revival.” In addition, we have resolved to remove “every last vestige of racism from our midst, restoring to the work of the Lord the blessing of an integrated fellowship.”

God’s Word teaches that humanity is one race. The Bible says, "He has made from one blood every nation of men." Scripture says Jesus “is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.” Through faith in Christ God reconciles us to Himself and to one another.

I remember when President Ronald Reagan stood in front of the Berlin Wall dividing Germany and challenged Gorbachev, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear this wall down.” The wall came tumbling down! God’s Spirit now challenges us to tear down the walls of division and tear down the bitter wall of racism.

If we Christians are going to reach a divided world, then we need to present a united front. It is wonderful to see the reunification of ethnic groups in God’s Church. It is beginning. It is the most exciting news of our generation. The love of God is smashing down walls of partition that have separated the Body of Christ. There is a healing revival happening in America.

The best antidote for racism is reconciliation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Church has God’s antidote for racism in America. His Church is a multi-ethnic fellowship. God’s Word reveals that is not His will for 11:00 o’clock Sunday morning to be the most segregated hour in America.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." However it is done in Heaven is how God wills for it to be done on earth. How do they do it in Heaven? Ethnic groups intermingle in glory. The Bible records a song Christians in Heaven sing to Jesus, "They sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Heaven is fully integrated. An integrated local church is the Lord's model of Heaven on earth. May Heaven come down and fill our churches with souls from all nations. Let's pray to our Heavenly Father, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

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