

A. B. Simpson: A Troubled Mystic

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Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) was a Canadian Presbyterian minister who frequently suffered from severe bouts of emotional depression, psychosis and psychosomatic illness. Out of his difficulties he created a distinctive theology, eventually left the Presbyterian Church and founded his own sect, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, which influenced many aspects of twentieth-century fundamentalism and evangelicalism: sectarianism, mystical spirituality, Pentecostalism, foreign missions emphasis, and the Bible college movement.¹ This paper examines some of the psychological and theological causes of his sectarianism.

A.B. Simpson was born at Bayview, Prince Edward Island. His father was an enterprising shipbuilder, merchant, miller and exporter, but an economic downturn caused the family to move to a farm nine miles from Chatham, Upper Canada, in 1847. The loneliness of farm life in Ontario and the death of a child left deep scars on Mrs. Simpson, who became very depressed. Some of Albert's earliest memories were of his mother weeping and wailing in her room at night, and him trying to comfort her.² These experiences made him extremely anxious.

The Simpsons were staunch Presbyterians, and Albert, a very sensitive boy, decided before he was fourteen, that he was going to enter the ministry. Even though his parents

¹ The first official history of Simpson's movement appears to have been G.P. Pardington's *Twenty-Five Wonderful Years, 1889-1914: A Popular Sketch of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing Co., 1914). The first biography of Simpson was A.E. Thompson's *A.B. Simpson: His Life and Work* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, Inc., 1920) which utilized an autobiographical manuscript written by Simpson. Another hagiography but more critical was A.W. Tozer's *Wingspread: Albert B. Simpson: A Study in Spiritual Altitude* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, Inc., 1943). Tozer had access to Simpson's diary but suppressed important information on Simpson's relationship to Pentecostalism. The centenary of the Christian and Missionary Alliance generated several other studies. See Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin and Samuel J. Stoesz, *Jesus For All: God at Work in The Christian and Missionary Alliance Over One Hundred Years* (Camp Hill, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1986) and a festschrift edited by David F. Hartzfeld and Charles Nienkirchen, *The Birth of a Vision* (Regina: Canadian Theological Seminary, 1986). These works are of varied historical worth; some of the articles in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen are of critical value. The most recent published study of Simpson's thought is Charles W. Nienkirchen, *A.B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). Two recent dissertations are also important: William Boyd Bedford, Jr., "'A Larger Christian Life': A.B. Simpson and The Early Years of the Christian and Missionary Alliance" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1992) and Darrel Robert Reid, "'Jesus Only': The Early Life and Presbyterian Ministry of Albert Benjamin Simpson, 1843-1881" (Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1994).

² Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp.41-42; Bedford dissertation, p.28; Reid dissertation, pp.54-55.

had told him that they could not afford to send him to college like his older brother, he was determined to fulfil that ambition.

While attending high school at Chatham young Simpson suffered a severe nervous breakdown that was brought on by a number of factors. Like many Presbyterians at the time he was troubled over whether he was one of the elect. His fears of eternal damnation were heightened when he almost drowned while trying to swim. Shortly afterwards, he attended a revival meeting conducted by the Rev. H. Grattan Guinness, a British evangelist known for his apocalyptic predictions. That night, while walking home through a forest after the service, Simpson became lost and came across some Indian graves which had been broken open. The experience of seeing the exposed bodies shocked him and he became further distressed. After his father found him wandering in the woods and brought him home, Albert underwent another crisis which he has described:

Then came a fearful crash in which it seemed to me the very heavens were falling. After retiring one night suddenly a star appeared to blaze before my eyes; and as I gazed, my nerves gave way. I sprang from my bed trembling and almost fainting with a sense of impending death, and then fell into a congestive chill of great violence that lasted all night and almost took my life. A physician told me that I must not look at a book for a whole year for my nervous system had collapsed, and I was in the greatest danger. There followed a period of mental and physical agony which no language can describe. I was possessed with the idea that at a certain hour I was to die; and every day as that hour drew near, I became prostrated with dreadful nervousness, watching in agonizing suspense till the hour passed, and wondering that I was still alive.³

Simpson was in that state for ten months and then turned for solace to a theological work which painted a different picture of God than the one he knew. Later he reflected, "My whole religious training had left me without any conception of the sweet and simple Gospel of Jesus Christ. The God I knew was a being of great severity...."⁴ That book explained that he only had to believe in Jesus as his Saviour and his salvation was assured. With that assurance Simpson's mental health returned to him. Thus, "Jesus as Saviour" became the first plank of his later Four-Fold Gospel.

With his health restored Simpson went on to complete his high school diploma and obtained with it a licence to teach school. At sixteen he began teaching in order to raise money for his college education. Then, in October 1861, he appeared before the Presbytery in London to be examined as a prospective theological student and from there he went on to Knox College in Toronto where he was given advanced placement in the Arts program.

Simpson did well at Knox College and won a number of awards. Upon graduation in 1865 he was offered positions in Dundas and Hamilton. He chose the latter and in September 1865 became the minister of Knox Presbyterian Church, then the second largest Presbyterian church in Canada.⁵

³ Cited in Thompson, p.15. See also A.B. Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Christian Publications, Inc., 1915), p.155.

⁴ Thompson, pp. 15-16.

⁵ *Hamilton Spectator*, 13 Sept. 1865, p. 2.

Under Simpson's ministry Knox Presbyterian Church grew quickly. He worked hard in his parish and during his time there 750 new members were added.⁶ But he had worked so hard that he over-extended himself. His health broke in 1869 and again in 1871. He had a terrible fear of heights and often became very anxious in the pulpit or at the side of an open grave, fearing that he was going to fall.⁷ In 1871 he was forced to take a four-month extended vacation to Europe to restore his health. Upon his return he ministered in Hamilton until November 1873 when he received a call to the Chestnut Street Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

Shortly after arriving in Louisville Simpson underwent another emotional crisis. He longed for a deeper spiritual life and sought sanctification, the mystical experience of being made holy. In his search he was highly influenced by a book by W.E. Boardman, one of the founders of the Keswick movement,⁸ and another book given to him by a friend, a woman in his church who became a "kindred spirit" in pursuing holiness. He described the latter book as an "old medieval message."⁹ Subsequent research has shown it to have been a collection of writings by seventeenth century Quietists such as Madame Guyon, Archbishop Fénelon, and Miguel de Molinos, edited by two Quakers.¹⁰ The central theme of the book was "that God was waiting in the depths of my being to talk to me if I would only get still enough to hear His voice."¹¹

Simpson was drawn to this means of divine illumination which had been taught by Madame Guyon. About ten years later he reflected on his quest:

I thought this would be a very easy matter, and so I began to get still. But I had no sooner commenced than a perfect pandemonium of voices reached my ears, until I could hear nothing but their noise and din. Some of them were my own voice, some of them were my own questions, some of them were my own cares, and some of them were my own prayers. Others were suggestions of the tempter and voices from the world's turmoil. Never before did there seem so many things to be done, to be said, to be thought; and in every direction I was pushed, and pulled, and greeted with noisy acclamations and unspeakable unrest. It seemed necessary for me to listen to some of them, and to answer some of them, but God said, "Be still, and know that I am God." Then came the conflict of thoughts for the morrow, and its duties and cares, but God said, "Be still." And as I listened and slowly learned to obey and shut my ears to every sound, I found after awhile that the other voices ceased, or I ceased to hear them, there was a still, small voice in the depths of my being that began to speak 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

⁶ Thompson, pp. 50-51.

⁷ Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, pp. 156-157.

⁸ Niklaus *et al.*, pp. 7 and 277.

⁹ A.B. Simpson, *The Holy Spirit or Power From On High* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, Inc., 1895), pp.160-162.

¹⁰ See Dwayne Ratzlaff, "An Old Medieval Message: A Turning Point in the Life of A.B. Simpson," in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., pp.165-172. The book has since been identified as *A Guide to True Peace or The Excellency of Inward and Spiritual Prayer*. See Charles W. Nienkirchen, A.B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement, pp.10-11.

¹¹ Simpson, *The Holy Spirit*, Vol. 1, p. 161.

knowledge, and all prayer, and all blessing; for it was the living God Himself as my Life and my All.¹²

Simpson began to promote the works of Guyon and Fénelon.¹³ From their books and his experiences Simpson came to believe that sanctification was a gift of God, not self-perfectionism. It came about by a consecration or a deliberate separation from sin, “death to self,” and a dedication to God.¹⁴ Christ became the sanctifier, not man himself, because Christ was now actually living within the body of the Christian.¹⁵ Thus the second plank — Christ the Sanctifier — of his Four-Fold Gospel was formed.

Armed with this new understanding, Simpson was instrumental in arranging in 1875 a revival campaign conducted by D.L. Moody’s associates: Major Daniel Whittle and the singer and song-writer Phillip Bliss, who was known for his sentimental gospel songs filled with personal pronouns. Also associated with the revival was Robert Pearsall Smith, who would soon launch the Keswick movement.¹⁶

During the revival Simpson added the third plank to his distinctive theology. He became a convinced premillennialist following the historicist interpretations of H. Grattan Guinness and A.J. Gordon, who viewed the papacy as the Antichrist and Islam as the False Prophet. Like Guinness he also attempted to set dates for the return of Christ, which he felt was imminent. Simpson also mixed in some aspects of dispensationalism, such as the pre-tribulation Rapture, but then he added another twist. He taught a partial Rapture based on the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25: 1-13). Only those Christians who had experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit (another term he used for sanctification), would be spirited out of the world. The rest of the Christian community would have to experience the Tribulation, a period of time which he did not restrict to seven years.¹⁷

The revival meetings of Whittle, Bliss and Smith in Louisville had brought a high degree of religious unity to the city, but it was short-lived. While the revival was going on, most of the churches had co-operated by cancelling their Sunday evening services and joining together in the theologically neutral Public Library Hall. After the revival was officially over, Simpson tried to extend its impact by having the Sunday evening union services continue at the Public Library. When the ministerial association refused to go along with the plan, Simpson cancelled his own evening services at Chestnut Street Presbyterian Church and held them at the Public Library Hall. This created much opposition from the other clergy. Later, when he could no longer rent the Public Library Hall, he moved his services to a theatre. As Simpson continued with his revival meetings his theology and sense of worship became less and less Presbyterian; in place of hymns he stressed the gospel songs of Bliss, Sankey and himself. Because of the great crowds he was drawing, Simpson wanted to build a new utilitarian building. That decision

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162.

¹³ Nienkirchen, *A.B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement*, p. 10.

¹⁴ A. B. Simpson, *The Four-Fold Gospel* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, Inc., 1887), pp. 27-46.

¹⁵ Thompson, pp. 66-71.

¹⁶ Samuel J. Stoesz, “The Doctrine of Sanctification in the Thought of A.B. Simpson,” in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., p.112; Reid dissertation, p.434.

¹⁷ Simpson, *The Holy Spirit*, Vol. 2, pp.29-36. For a further discussion of Simpson’s eschatology, see Franklin Arthur Pyles, “The Missionary Eschatology of A.B. Simpson,” in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., pp.29-47.

caused a schism in his church and the dissenters left. In spite of the conflict the project continued.

The pace at which Simpson drove himself, the church conflicts which he generated, and his own marital conflicts took their toll. In 1877 he had a complete physical and nervous breakdown. This had followed a suspicious hunting accident. He spent almost half a year at the mental sanatorium at Clifton Springs, N.Y. where Robert Pearsall Smith had also been treated.¹⁸ Simpson offered his resignation to the church but it was not accepted.

While Simpson was away from Louisville the building plans took on a more elaborate form than Simpson wanted. Eventually the new building, which was called Broadway Tabernacle, cost \$105,000 and was heavily mortgaged. Simpson demanded that the congregation pay off the debt immediately. When they would not, or could not, he refused to dedicate the building and accept his salary.

In 1878, through the influence of another Presbyterian minister A.T. Pierson, Simpson became involved with the Plymouth Brethren oriented Believers' Meeting for Bible Study.¹⁹ Soon he began talking about going to China as a missionary. His obsessions caused further conflicts with his wife who regarded him as a lunatic; she refused to go to China.²⁰

As Simpson began to change the order of worship to a more Plymouth Brethren form, the conflict between himself and the Session apparently resulted in his resignation in November 1879. His wife was furious with his actions. The marital turmoil became so intense that she reported that "a glint of murder was in his eyes."²¹

Simpson left Kentucky for New York City where he accepted the pulpit of Thirteenth Street Presbyterian Church. Christian and Missionary Alliance historiography suggests that he had chosen that city because there he could become more easily involved in foreign mission work. Soon after arriving he launched what appears to have been the first illustrated foreign missions magazine.²²

In spite of the success of that magazine and the impact he was having in his evangelistic activities, Simpson continued to have difficulties within his own home as well as disputes with the Session. His wife Margaret had opposed his move to New York City and his visionary activities, such as the missions magazine, which often used up the family budget.²³ Their relationship became increasingly strained and in his diary Simpson referred to her hatred of him. Simpson saw the hand of Satan in his marriage difficulties.²⁴

Simpson withdrew more and more from his family and sought solace in his mysticism. He recorded, in a fashion reminiscent of the Nova Scotia mystic Henry Alline,

¹⁸ Reid dissertation, p. 331.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 351; Bedford dissertation, p. 56.

²¹ Reid, pp. 358-360.

²² Tozer, p. 94.

²³ Nicklaus *et al.*, pp. 33-38, 278-279.

²⁴ Reid, pp. 435-436.

that "Jesus has been to me a husband today and yesterday and has often ravished my soul with his love."²⁵

The disputes in the church occurred when he tried to impose his own vision of holiness and evangelism upon the congregation. The first involved his attempt to stop dances at young people's functions. The next occurred when he attempted to extend the church's ministry to the poor and the immigrants. He won many converts, but the Session was not prepared to welcome the lower classes into its membership. Under such stresses at home and at work he suffered another complete physical and nervous breakdown. He feared he was on the verge of death.²⁶

In order to get help Simpson again went to the sanatorium at Clifton Springs.²⁷ Next he visited a health spa at Saratoga Springs, but continued to be very depressed. However, there he happened upon a Negro revival meeting and his spirits were lifted by the songs. In August 1881, while visiting a vacation spot at Old Orchard, Maine, Simpson attended faith healing meetings being conducted by Dr. Charles Cullis, who had been involved in establishing the Keswick holiness movement. Simpson came to believe that healing was part of the atonement of Christ. Christ had died not only for human's sin, but also for their sickness. After praying, Simpson claimed he was miraculously healed of heart disease. To prove his healing to himself he went out and climbed a mountain.²⁸ Thus, divine healing became the fourth plank in his distinctive theology. His Four-Fold Gospel was: Jesus as Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King.²⁹

When Simpson returned to New York City divine healing became the new emphasis in his preaching. There was a strong dualism in Simpson's thinking for he believed that most sickness occurred as a result of the Devil's activity.³⁰ Since sickness was a spiritual matter, it could be cured by prayer; medicines were unnecessary for Christians who could trust God for their healing. Eye glasses were also dispensed with.

When his daughter was critically ill with diphtheria Simpson dismissed the doctor and resorted only to prayer. This created more family tensions.³¹ He claimed she was cured by this method. However, when one of his associates did the same with his child, the child died. Later Simpson stated that when children were sick, regular medical means should be used as well, in order to avoid problems with the legal authorities.³² Still holding to his views on divine healing, he stated that those who could not trust their healing to God should rely on all that science had to offer them. He remarked that "we

²⁵ Cited in Brereton, p. 45.

²⁶ Thompson, p. 74.

²⁷ Bedford, p. 73.

²⁸ Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, pp. 161-169.

²⁹ Simpson, *The Four-Fold Gospel*, pp.47-67. For Simpson's belief that healing was in the atonement see his *How to Receive Divine Healing* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, Inc., c.1885), pp.2-3.

³⁰ Simpson, *The Gospel of Healing*, pp. 30-31, 87, 100-101.

³¹ Bedford, p. 80.

³² Thompson, pp.140-141 and John V. Dahms, "The Social Interest and Concern of A.B. Simpson," in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen. eds., p.55.

should not set ourselves against health laws for the protection of the community, nor make ourselves obnoxious to society because we know a better way.”³³

Simpson added another aspect to his theology in the fall of 1881. He came to reject infant baptism, and in October 1881 he was himself immersed by a Baptist minister.³⁴ Because he now refused to perform any more infant baptisms and because of his views on divine healing, the Presbytery would not allow him to conduct any more worship and communion services.³⁵ Simpson resigned from the church in November 1881 and from the Presbyterian denomination altogether. Friends thought he was crazy giving up his position.³⁶ His wife was again very distressed at his actions and his older brother advised her to divorce him.³⁷

That same month Simpson established an independent ministry called the Gospel Tabernacle where he could present his Four-Fold Gospel to all classes of society. He started with seven people and they met in halls, tents, and theatres. Refusing to take a salary he and his family, which included four children, lived off the generosity of his friends. It was not long before his new congregation had an actual membership of 217, with about 700 attending his Sunday evening services.³⁸ Membership was open to all Christians, but Simpson would only baptize adult believers.

Another of Simpson’s innovations was the acceptance of women as elders.³⁹ Women played a great role in his enterprises and within his theology there was the possibility for the ordination of women.⁴⁰ Simpson supported women’s suffrage and worked with Frances Willard, the noted feminist and founder of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Many of his supporters were involved in rescue mission work, established orphanages, and created homes for the reform of prostitutes.

Besides evangelism and social service, Simpson’s practice of divine healing attracted many people. He was faced by a steady stream of those seeking healing. He had gained a reputation as a faith healer, although he preferred the term divine healing, since he believed that the healing did not depend upon the faith of the seeker, but rather that it was a product of sanctification. He wrote, “We are healed by the life of Christ in our body. It is a tender union with Him; nearer than the bond of connubial oneness; so near that the very life of His veins is transfused into ours. That is divine healing.”⁴¹

In 1883, to facilitate the many demands for prayer and anointing with oil, Simpson converted his own home into a clinic for Faith and Physical Healing, much to the

³³ Simpson, *Four-Fold Gospel*, pp.47-48. See also A.B. Simpson, *The Old Faith and the New Gospels* (New York: Alliance Press Company, 1911), p.103.

³⁴ Thompson, pp. 85-86; Niklaus *et al.*, pp. 43-44.

³⁵ Niklaus *et al.*, p. 45.

³⁶ Brereton, p. 47.

³⁷ Bedford, p. 318.

³⁸ Thompson, p. 93.

³⁹ Tozer, p. 91.

⁴⁰ See William H. Howland, “Women Preaching: A Sign of the Last Days,” *Faithful Witness*, 14 June 1890, reproduced in Lindsay Reynolds, *Footprints: The Beginnings of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada* (Toronto: Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada, 1981), pp.543-550. See also Leslie A. Andrews, “Restricted Freedom: A.B. Simpson’s View of Women,” in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., pp.219-240.

⁴¹ Simpson, *The Four-Fold Gospel*, p. 61.

consternation of his long-suffering wife.⁴² Additional healing homes were opened by some of his disciples.

Another aspect of Simpson's Gospel Tabernacle was its interest in foreign missions. This was related to Simpson's eschatology because he believed that the return of Christ would be hastened if the peoples of the world were evangelized.⁴³ Simpson's rejection of the established denominations and their efforts was further demonstrated in 1882 when he started another illustrated foreign missions magazine to promote the independent "faith" missions. In 1883 he organized the Missionary Union for the Evangelization of the World and several months later he opened a Missionary Training College in New York City to train missionaries for home and foreign missions. It was modelled after similar institutions which H. Grattan Guinness had established in London, England and a short-lived one which Dr. Cullis had started in Boston several years earlier.⁴⁴ Simpson's college school became the mother and/or model for many of the Bible Colleges and Bible Institutes that soon dotted the landscape of North America.

At first the course of study at Simpson's missionary college was a short-term affair lasting between six months and a year. The focus was not to provide an education or to teach theology, but rather to inculcate Simpson's brand of spirituality into the students.⁴⁵ Later the program was extended to three years and became more academically oriented.

Simpson also reached out to the black community. Ever since the revival meetings in Louisville he had tried to attract Negroes to his meetings. Believing that blacks could best evangelize the African tribes, he established several mission colleges for blacks. However, racial prejudice in North America, and the refusal of colonial governments to allow black missionaries to enter their countries because they might disturb the social order, militated against the plan. There were, however, some very successful black Alliance congregations in North America.⁴⁶

As Simpson's fame spread he began to address holiness and healing conferences in Britain, Canada, and across the eastern and mid-western United States. By 1886 he was holding his own conferences at Old Orchard, Maine. Those who spoke at his meetings represented the core of the Keswick faith mission and premillennial leadership, many of whom shaped twentieth-century evangelicalism and fundamentalism: Andrew Murray, H. Grattan Guinness, F.B. Meyer, J. Hudson Taylor, A.J. Gordon, A.T. Pierson, R.A. Torrey, George F. Pentecost, D.L. Moody, Major Whittle, James A. Brookes, W.E. Blackstone, C.I. Scofield, Nathaniel West, James M. Gray, Charles A. Blanchard, J. Wilbur Chapman, A.C. Dixon, William Bell Riley, Charles G. Trumbull and Frances E. Willard.⁴⁷

⁴² Tozer, p. 107.

⁴³ Simpson, *The Four-Fold Gospel*, pp. 92-93; Thompson, p. 111.

⁴⁴ See W.H. Daniels, ed. *Dr. Cullis and His Work: Twenty Years of Blessing in Answer to Prayer* (Boston: Willard Tract Depository, 1885), p.359.

⁴⁵ Jacob P. Klassen, "A.B. Simpson and the Tensions in the Preparation of Missionaries," in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., pp.241-242.

⁴⁶ For the role of blacks in the Simpson's movement see Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), pp.121-123 and Niklaus et al., pp.167-171.

⁴⁷ Thompson, p. 110.

In 1887 Simpson founded two organizations at the Old Orchard conference grounds. The Christian Alliance was dedicated to teaching the Four-Fold Gospel. He claimed that it was not intended as a new denomination but rather as a fellowship of those Christians who held to those beliefs.⁴⁸ The other organization, the Evangelical Missionary Alliance, was to send out foreign missionaries and it was supported by the Christian Alliance.

Most of the early missionaries whom Simpson sent out died from disease en route or shortly after their arrival.⁴⁹ This seems to have been due to poor training, poor planning, or the prevalent attitude among Alliance members who dismissed medicines.⁵⁰ For this he received harsh criticism from the evangelical community.⁵¹

As well as sending out missionaries, Simpson was organizing branches of the Christian Alliance across the United States. The first organizational meeting in Canada was held in Hamilton in 1889, but Toronto became the headquarters. He found support among marginal Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Salvationists, and Plymouth Brethren.⁵² The leaders of the Canadian Alliance were the Rev. John Salmon and Toronto's mayor William H. Howland.

Both Salmon and Howland became vice-presidents of Simpson's international organization in New York City. Other prominent Canadians involved in the Alliance were William Christie, the biscuit king of Canada; Charles Wilson, ginger ale manufacturer; Manton Treadgold, the mayor of Brampton; and Dr. Jenny K. Trout, the first licensed female medical doctor in Canada and leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Association for the Advancement of Women.⁵³

Although the leadership of the Alliance in Canada was middle-class, its appeal was directed at the lower classes. Its branches held their meetings in homes, halls, storefronts, and abandoned churches. The movement was strongest in Ontario. Simpson made repeated trips to Canada to visit the Alliance branches and to speak at anniversary services of his former church, Knox Presbyterian, in Hamilton. He also held meetings and founded Alliance missions in Vancouver and Winnipeg.

In 1897 Simpson amalgamated the Christian Alliance and the Evangelical Missionary Alliance into the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Later that year Simpson moved his Missionary Training College and healing centre to Nyack, New York, where there was more space and solitude. There he built a new home. He also acquired a good deal of property in the hopes of creating a Christian community for members of his Alliance movement, but the project failed financially and Simpson himself absorbed the loss.⁵⁴

The new Christian and Missionary Alliance, of which Simpson was president, soon took on the characteristics of a denomination. The former Alliance branches organized into churches, ordained clergy, baptized members, and administered communion. The organizational structure tended to be presbyterian, with major decisions being made by

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129.

⁴⁹ Bedford, pp. 323-331.

⁵⁰ Roland V. Bingham, "The Bible and the Body," *The Evangelical Christian and Missionary Witness*, May 1920, p.140.

⁵¹ Klassen, p. 254.

⁵² See Reynolds, pp. 106ff.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

⁵⁴ Tozer, p. 108.

the assembled delegates at the annual conventions. This move alienated the Plymouth Brethren members and led to their defection.

Another schism occurred after Pentecostalism made its appearance. Charles F. Parham who created the Pentecostal movement at Topeka, Kansas had been influenced by Simpson.⁵⁵ Quite a number of Alliance members were favourable to the pentecostal practice of “speaking in tongues,” including vice-president of the Alliance, John Salmon, who experienced it.⁵⁶ In his 1907 diary entries Simpson himself struggled with the issue:

While preaching on Daniel, it came to me, like to him, to set apart a time for prayer and fasting that God would specially bless the work entrusted to me and give me a special anointing of the Holy Ghost. I was the more led to do this in view of the approaching Council, May 29, and the special movement of the Holy Spirit abroad today, that God would show His will about it, and give to me all He has for me — and also for the work.

After one week of waiting on God I could not stop, but continued two, three [days], and up to the Council, and indeed with slight interruptions ever since.

I noted first a quiet but real quickening in my own soul, and great blessing in the Council. God kept us united, and at the close manifested Himself in some of the meetings in a very unusual way. There were several cases of the Gift of Tongues and other extraordinary manifestations, some of which were certainly genuine, while others appeared to partake somewhat of the individual peculiarities and eccentricities of the subjects; so that I saw not only the working of the Spirit, but also a very distinct human element, not always edifying or profitable.... At the same time I could not question the reality of the gifts, and I was led to pray much about it, and for God’s highest will and glory in connection with it.⁵⁷

In Simpson’s definition “speaking in tongues” elevated “the soul above the ordinary modes and expressions of reason and utterance.”⁵⁸ As Simpson definitely sought to “speak in tongues” he recorded a number of mystical experiences in his diary.

On the closing Saturday of the Nyack Convention I received, as I waited in the after meeting, a distinct touch of the mighty power of the Holy Spirit — a kind of breaking through, accompanied by a sense of awe and a lighting up of my senses. It was as if a wedge of light and power were being driven through my inmost being and I was all broken open. I welcomed it and felt disappointed when the meeting was abruptly closed by the leader, for I was conscious of a peculiar power resting upon us all and continuing to fill me. I carried it home with me, and for several days the deep sense remained as a sort of “weight of love,” in addition to the ordinary and quiet sense of God I have felt so long.⁵⁹

About two weeks later he noted in his diary:

At the same time I pressed upon Him a new claim for a Mighty Baptism of the Holy Ghost in His complete Pentecostal fullness embracing all the gifts and graces of the Spirit for my special need at this time and for the new conditions and needs of my life and work.

⁵⁵ See Charles Nienkirchen, “A.B. Simpson: Forerunner and Critic of the Pentecostal Movement,” in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., p.126, and his book, *A.B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement*, pp.26-33.

⁵⁶ Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.78.

⁵⁷ Simpson’s diary, May 1907, copy obtained from Canadian Theological Seminary Archives, Regina.

⁵⁸ Nienkirchen, “A.B. Simpson: Forerunner and Critic of the Pentecostal Movement,” p.142.

⁵⁹ Simpson’s diary, 28 July 1907.

He met me as I lay upon my face before Him with a distinct illumination, and then as the Presence began to fade and I cried out for Him to stay, He bade me believe and take it all by simple faith as I had taken my healing 26 years before. I did so, and was enabled definitely to believe and claim it all and rest in Him.⁶⁰

In September 1907, while in Hamilton celebrating the anniversary of his ordination there forty-two years before, he made a curious entry in his diary: "Asked God to accept my offering and ordain me anew. The Spirit came with a baptism of holy laughter for an hour or more and I am waiting for all He had yet to give and manifest."⁶¹ [Could we call this the "Hamilton blessing"?] Five years later Simpson was still seeking to "speak in tongues" but it had not happened.

No extraordinary manifestation of the Spirit in tongues or similar gifts has come. Many of my friends have received such manifestations, but mine has still been a life of fellowship and service. At all times my spirit has been open to God for anything He might be pleased to reveal or bestow.⁶²

Because Simpson was open to the Pentecostals' definition of "speaking in tongues" it quickly spread throughout his movement. A number of churches in his association were called Full Gospel Churches.⁶³ However, Simpson was opposed to the attitude within Pentecostalism, which claimed "speaking in tongues" as a must for all Spirit-filled Christians.⁶⁴ As a result, a number of ministers and congregations of the Alliance withdrew and joined the Assemblies of God or other pentecostal groups. The Christian and Missionary Alliance therefore further tightened its denominational control in 1912. Branch churches and organizations were persuaded to incorporate a clause into their constitutions which said that if they ever departed from the Alliance creed their property would revert to the Alliance headquarters in New York City.⁶⁵

Although Simpson died before the major battles of the modernist/fundamentalist controversy occurred, early in the century he was showing the militancy and separatism which later characterized fundamentalism. In his 1911 book *The Old Faith and the New Gospels*, he spoke out strongly against the theory of evolution,⁶⁶ Social Darwinism, biblical criticism, and theological liberalism. He denounced the existing schools, colleges, and seminaries and suggested the creation of new educational institutions.⁶⁷

Simpson also attacked modernism and religious syncretism among the denominational foreign missionaries and called for the diversion of funds to the independent missionary societies.

The New Thought and Higher Criticism of our time have invaded our Boards of Missions and perverted many of the missionaries themselves. Liberal thought on the Mission fields has at length begun to trifle with the old faith and to join hands with that which is good, so called, in the religions of the East, an unholy alliance which God forbids just as much as the alliances of Israel with the Canaan world. The spread of this leaven has

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9 August 1907.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12 September 1907.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 6 October 1912.

⁶³ Pardington, pp. 93, 118.

⁶⁴ Reynolds, p.567 quoting *The Christian and Missionary Alliance*, April 1910, p.78.

⁶⁵ Niklaus *et al.*, pp. 116-117.

⁶⁶ Simpson, *The Old Faith and the New Gospels*, pp.12-14. Simpson accepted Darwin's view of natural selection as being operative in nature, but maintained the special creation of humans.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

been so rapid that God is visiting it with a serious financial blight in the missionary resources of the great Missionary Societies.

Men of wealth who still believe the Bible refuse to contribute to societies that dishonour Christ and compromise the truth. We cannot blame them. But this makes the necessity all the greater for those who do believe the Bible to give a true Gospel to the heathen world. Those societies who do stand for the Scriptures in their integrity, the deity, death and resurrection of our blessed Lord, and the supernatural in personal religion, are summoned as never before to strengthen their stakes and lengthen their cords and give to the heathen world the first principles of the Gospel of Christ, the only true foundation of faith and hope.⁶⁸

Premillennial pessimism came to dominate Simpson's thought, and he moved away from his earlier interest in Christian social work. In 1897 he wrote:

Philanthropic schemes and social reforms are absorbing the interest and enthusiasm of thousands of redeemed men and women who ought to be giving their strength and wealth to do the best things and not the second best. We admit there is something good in these enterprises. They have a place and a value, but let the world take care of them.... There... are plenty of people to run social reform and temperance societies; plenty of people to fight the political battle. God wants you to give the gospel to the world, to rise to the higher calling, to do the best things.⁶⁹

Of those evangelical social workers studied by Norris Magnuson,⁷⁰ Simpson became the most reactionary and exemplified the "great reversal" in evangelical social attitudes. While some in the Salvation Army saw socialism as an answer to the plight of the poor and worked towards international peace, Simpson attacked socialism and linked it with modernist theology.⁷¹

Contemporary critics of Simpson's healing theology noted that his theories did not work out in his own life. In 1917 Simpson suffered a stroke or a heart attack. It appeared linked to his excitement at learning that General Allenby had captured Jerusalem; it seemed to Simpson that biblical prophecy was about to unfold.⁷² During his final years he had to resort to eyeglasses, which he had earlier cast off as being unnecessary for a person of "the spirit". He was again afflicted by a deep depression and gradually had to relinquish his control over the Alliance organization. During the final years of his life he was hospitalized again at the Clifton Springs Sanatorium.⁷³ He died there in 1919.

A.B. Simpson left behind him a legacy of 101 published books — consisting of biographies, collections of sermons, commentaries, and hymn books — which the Christian and Missionary Alliance continues to reprint.⁷⁴ He composed about 181 hymns of varied quality. Even A.W. Tozer, his biographer, found some of them to be

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

⁶⁹ Simpson quoted by John W. Dahms, "The Social Interest and Concern of A.B. Simpson," p.49. Overall, Dahms's article is not very convincing for most of his examples of Simpson's social concern occurred before the above quotation.

⁷⁰ Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums*.

⁷¹ Simpson, *The Old Faith and the New Gospels*, pp.63-65, 119-132.

⁷² Nienkirchen, *A.B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement*, p.56.

⁷³ Roland V. Bingham, "A Great Leader Taken," *The Evangelical Christian and Missionary Witness*, Dec. 1919, p.367; "The Bible and the Body," *ibid.*, May 1920, p.139; "The Subject of Healing," *ibid.*, June 1920, p.172.

⁷⁴ See John Savin, "Publications of Albert B. Simpson," in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., pp.279-303.

unsingable;⁷⁵ others intended to soothe were set to marching tunes. Yet, Simpson's hymns played a great role in the worship services of the sect. Most of their themes dealt with his belief in sanctification, foreign missions, and the Second Coming.⁷⁶ One of the better known songs is "Jesus Loves the Little Children."

While Simpson created his own distinctive theology, he was not doctrinaire about it within his international organizations. Quite a bit of latitude on eschatology, divine healing, and "speaking in tongues" was allowed. Moreover, his doctrine of divine union with Christ, or "habitarianism," laid some of the theoretical groundwork for the anti-Trinitarian "Jesus Only" or "Oneness" theology which became popular in some Pentecostal circles.⁷⁷ While his theological distinctives would have alienated him from some fundamentalists, his views did have a great impact upon pentecostalism,⁷⁸ faith missions, and a number of Canadian and American fundamentalists including Aimee Semple McPherson, Roland V. Bingham, L.E. Maxwell and Oswald J. Smith.

A.B. Simpson's pilgrimage from Presbyterian minister to sectarian appears to have been very tied to his emotional difficulties. He sought solace in mysticism, but the very individualistic nature of mysticism which seeks direct union with God, unencumbered by outside influences of church, session, presbytery or even the Bible, led him into highly questionable theology, domestic troubles, and ultimately schism.

⁷⁵ Tozer, pp. 117-118.

⁷⁶ Eugene Rivard, "Rediscovering the Music of A.B. Simpson," in Hartzfeld and Nienkirchen, eds., pp.75-105.

⁷⁷ Nienkirchen, *A.B. Simpson and the Pentecostal Movement*, pp.46-50. See also D.A. Reed, "Oneness Pentecostalism," in Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee and Patrick H. Alexander, eds., *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), pp.644-651.

⁷⁸ See Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*.