

## *“Jesus IS the Gospel”*

*By the Rev. Dr. Bernie Van de Walle*

*Note: This address was given in multiple regions across the AWF as part of its 2018-2019 Theological Symposia*

-the Fourfold Gospel has been the heart of The Christian and Missionary Alliance’s theology since its birth in 1887;

-consequently, it has profoundly shaped its pastoral and missionary.

-to this day, therefore, one can find emblems of this theology as center-pieces of Alliance churches around the world, even occupying the focal point of the worship space

-to educate people in regard to this theology, the founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, A. B. Simpson, and his colleagues developed a number of entrepreneurial initiatives including regular conventions of its devotees, a publishing company, and what is now the world’s oldest Bible College

-consequently, one might conclude that if Alliance people know anything at all, they know the Fourfold Gospel!

-my experience in over two decades of teaching in Alliance schools around the world, however, is that such, sadly, is simply not the case.

-furthermore, it is also my observation that misunderstanding the Fourfold Gospel is neither infrequent nor isolated

-instead, I would suggest that most people in the contemporary Alliance not only misunderstand the Fourfold Gospel, they misunderstand or completely miss out on its central emphasis

-Perhaps most regrettably, this misunderstanding of the Fourfold Gospel exists not only among parishioners, pastors, and professors; it even exists among some denominational leaders

-This misunderstanding is certainly problematic and tragic.

-yet, what is especially ironic, is that this common errant theological understanding is the very theological perspective that the Fourfold

Gospel was originally formulated to combat and that The Christian and Missionary Alliance was created to address.

## ***1. The Context of Late Nineteen-Century Evangelical Theology***

-what went by the name “evangelicalism” in the nineteenth century was little more than a loose affiliation of individuals influenced by and focussed on a number of theological emphases.

-these emphases were already well on the way to being well-established before either Simpson or the C&MA arrived on the scene.

-they included (at least) Revivalism, the Holiness Movement, the Divine Healing Movement, and Premillennialism.

### **A. Revivalism**

-The movement known as “Revivalism” provided much of the energy for religious life in North America and Great Britain in the nineteenth century.

-Various revivals, both individually and collectively, had a profound influence upon the whole of those societies.

-Among its numerous characteristics, revivalism had as its objective the preaching of the Gospel beyond the confines of the church pulpit and the church building, often finding its place in the public square, in the streets, or in open fields.

-The intent of proclaiming the Gospel in these venues was to reach the previously unchurched and the backslidden—the sinners.

-After all, they, more than any others, these were the people who needed to hear the Gospel and, for various reasons, they weren’t to be found seated in the pews in church buildings on Sunday mornings.

-This preaching, rather than appealing primarily or solely to the intellect, sought to appeal to what became known as the “religious affections.”

-That is, this style of preaching sought not merely to teach its audience; it sought to move them deeply.

-Consequently, the success of such preaching and of any revival was measured in the number of those who responded personally, physically, and, to some measure, publically to the preacher's invitation.

-More and more, this personal response was understood to be a divinely-instituted and, therefore, necessary component of salvation.

-Revivalism's primary goal, however, was not the preaching of the Gospel but the "regeneration" of the lost: the bringing to life of those previously subject to spiritual death.<sup>1</sup>

-Regeneration, of course, is what Jesus talks about when, in John 3, he says, that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are *born again*. [Italics mine.]" (John 3:3)

## ***Two Problems***

-Popularly, two problems, each of which carries both theological and practical difficulties, developed in revivalism's wake.

-First, rather than understanding regeneration as a necessary component of the larger work of salvation, many equated salvation with regeneration alone.

-Regeneration, rather than being understood as a foundational and indispensable aspect of the larger work of salvation, was popularly understood as the sum of God's saving work within in the believer (at least in the present life).

-The second problem was that, given regeneration's essential role, many believed that their salvation rested in the acquisition of something called "regeneration."

-That is, they understood salvation came from regeneration which is an object, commodity, or product that one could receive from God.

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<sup>1</sup> This is clearly seen in Moody's famous "3 R's:" Humanity as Ruined, Redeemed, and Regenerated." For\*\*\*

## **B. The Holiness Movement**

-Though there would be a variance of theological opinion among its numerous proponents, the Holiness Movement of the late-nineteenth century univocally emphasized the normative role of sanctification in the Christian life.

-That is, instead of believing sanctification to be an optional appendix to Christian salvation—as was the opinion of many following the popularity of Revivalism—the Holiness Movement believed that sanctification—the believer’s growth in godliness and holiness—is God’s will for all of his people and not merely for a select few—not just the business of the clergy or the so-called saints.

-Furthermore, the Holiness Movement asserted that godliness and holiness was not only a possibility this side of heaven but that it was both the secret to and the source of the power that marked the earliest Church.

-Therefore, the Church’s lack of power, evident at various times throughout its history, was not a matter of God’s design—as the cessationists might claim.

-Instead, this lack of spiritual power was due to the Church’s neglect of its true and foundational calling, to pursue and to engage “scriptural holiness.”

## ***Two Problems***

-As with revivalism, two problems emerged from the popular effects of the Holiness Movement.

-The first was that there developed within many streams of the Holiness Movement a culture of *legalism*.

-that is, there developed a situation where people assumed that holiness and its attendant power were the consequent to doing the right things, avoiding the wrong things, and of not “quenching the Spirit.”

- This resulted in lots of “obedience” but, seemingly, in little, if any, spiritual power.
- Certainly, it resulted in far less power than its promoters and practitioners expected.
- Accompanying this lack of power was a rise in frustration and exasperation on the part of those who believed that they had been thorough and diligent in their pursuit.
- The second problem was that, given its vital role in larger work of salvation, many believed that their hope rested in the acquisition of some power or ability called holiness.
  - That is, they believed that the power that they longed for came from holiness, something that they understood to be an object, commodity, or product that one could receive from God.

### **C. The Divine Healing Movement**

- Those involved in the Divine Healing Movement asserted the essential ***goodness of the body*** against a practical and popular pseudo-Gnosticism.
  - Gnosticism is that ancient and heretical view that, effectively, views the body as nothing more than a temporary, and ultimately disposable, vehicle for the soul.
    - (Regrettably, a view of human physical existence that far too many contemporary evangelicals are prone to.)
- Consequently, the champions of the Divine Healing movement were convinced that the redemptive and restorative scope of Christ’s atoning work was not limited to the human spirit or soul.
  - The body, too, as a good creation of God, was not only worthy of redemption, physical restoration was, in fact, central to Christ’s redemptive work.
    - That is, the proponents of Divine Healing asserted that the work of Christ on the Cross—the “Atonement”—provided not only for

the regeneration of the soul but the physical restoration of the body, even in the present age!

-The Gospel of Jesus Christ, therefore, is a “whole gospel for the whole person.”

### ***Two Problems***

-First, the general interest in health in the nineteenth century provided lots of options for the beleaguered; many of them—both secular and religious—offering a “one-size-fits-all” cure, whether it be water, grains, antibiotics, prayer, or faith.

-People clamored after these various one-step “wonder-cures” hoping that each would, in some way, relieve their disease.

-In turn, the beleaguered provided lots of money for more than a few less-than-scrupulous charlatans.

-Consequently, there remained lots of sickness, lots of death, and practically, little more health.

-Second, many believed that their hope for physical relief and vitality rested in the discovery and acquisition of a power called healing.

-That is, they understood this thing that they so earnestly desired to be an object, commodity, or product that one could receive from God.

### ***D. The Rise of Premillennial Eschatology***

-Contrary to common evangelical opinion, postmillennial eschatology ruled late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century evangelicalism.

-Its optimistic outlook regarding the Church’s responsibility and ability to convert the world directly fuelled “the Great Century”<sup>2</sup> of Christian mission and its many early heroes.

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<sup>2</sup> Ken Latourette, *The Great Century, A. D. 1800-1914 in Europe and the United States of America. A History of the Expansion of the Christianity*. New York: 1941.

-Two events, however, definitively shattered postmillennialism's lock on the eschatological marketplace:

-these were the French Revolution and the American Civil War.

-Each, in its own way, convinced many Evangelicals that rather than experiencing the continual moral and social progression of the world toward heavenly perfection—that they had believed to have been the case—the world, instead, was set on a trajectory of significant and continuing decay.

-Consequently, many Evangelicals felt obliged to re-examine Scripture to discover an alternative eschatological perspective regarding the unfolding of human history.

-Premillennialism, with its pessimistic assessment concerning both the world's trajectory and the Church's responsibility and ability to bring about lasting change, rose steadily, almost meteorically, throughout the latter part of the nineteenth-century.

-In particular, the newly-minted and fantastic "Dispensationalism" variety of premillennialism appealed to those who were becoming convinced that the world was hurtling towards utter decay and the only thing that could stop it (and save them) would be the decisive in-breaking of Jesus Christ.

-In particular, the Rapture—that secret coming of Jesus to rescue his people from the coming Tribulation—was particularly attractive to these folk.

### *Two Problems*

-In practice, the focus on premillennial eschatology led many to abandon any concern for or activity in regard to the present state.

-it fostered within its people an ultimately (and sometimes absolutely) world-denying attitude which, practically, stunted Christian responsibility and ministry in regard to the present state of affairs.



-Second, many understood that the promise of premillennialism to be objects, commodities, or products that one would one day receive from God.

## 2. *Simpson and Late Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism*

-Like everyone, A. B. Simpson was a product of his era.

-He was immersed in, related to, and influenced by the various events and movements of his day.

-He was not only aware of the theological trends of his day, he was influenced by many.

-Simpson's own doctrines of salvation, sanctification, divine healing, and premillennialism were based, at least in part on the theologies of others.

-In particular, Simpson's dependence upon William Boardman in the area of sanctification and the early Divine Healing teachers in regard to divine healing is seemingly beyond academic dispute.<sup>3</sup>

-Therefore, when one looks for the contribution of A. B. Simpson, it should not be that of theological innovation.

-He did not invent the theological positions that form the key tenets of the Fourfold Gospel; he certainly did not discover a "new" gospel.

-Even in those places where he diverged from the mainstream position on any of these four central aspects, his position was not unique.

-Others held the same position would advocate and, in most cases, held them before Simpson did.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On more than one occasion, Simpson arranged for Otto Stockmayer of Männedorf to speak both to the C&MA and to the students of the Missionary Training Institute.

<sup>4</sup> For example, even Simpson's seeming novel doctrine of a partial-rapture of the Church is neither original nor exclusive to him. Robert Govett (1813-1901) expounded such in his magnum opus, *The Apocalypse*, which was written from 1861-1865. Cf. Bernie A. Van De Walle, *The Heart of the Gospel: A. B. Simpson, the Fourfold Gospel, and Late Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism*. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 188-189.



-Yet, Simpson's cooperative nature and his participation in these circles of influence did not mean that he accepted all their assertions and practices uncritically.

-For example, while a key promoter of the Holiness Movement, he identified what he thought were the theological and practical shortcomings of both the Wesleyan and Keswick perspectives and distinguished the Alliance view from both of them.<sup>5</sup>

-While a key promoter of the Divine Healing Movement, he was sure to correct the theological and practical shortcomings of many of those who were associated with it, both religious and secular.

-While Simpson's critiques of these various theological trends may be found in a number of areas, his single greatest contribution to the theology of late nineteenth-century evangelicalism comes in one particular area.

-As I noted earlier, there was a tendency among the popular interpretations and practices of the four movements delineated above (Revivalism, the Holiness Movement, the Divine Healing Movement, and Premillennialism) to commodity, objectify, or reify the grace of God.

-That is, there existed within each of these movements a tendency among its adherents to seek to gain, in some way or another, something from God.

-In Revivalism, the desire was for *regeneration*.

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<sup>5</sup> At one point, Simpson wrote, "A correspondent recently inquired regarding the standpoint of Alliance teaching with respect to sanctification whether we held the Wesleyan view, or what is commonly known as Keswick teaching. We believe that the Alliance teaching on the subject is neither Wesleyan nor, strictly speaking, an echo of even the excellent teaching given at the meetings annually held at Keswick. While speaking in greatest appreciation of other teachers and of all who endeavor to hold up the true Scriptural standard of life, yet we believe that the point of view from which the subject of personal holiness is regarded by the teachers and workers in the Christian Alliance is what we might term the "Christ Life," rather than even the sanctified life. There is always a little danger of seeing our experience more than the source of that experience, the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, we have ever been led to rise above all our experiences and recognize our new and resurrection life wholly in Him. At the same time we believe and teach that this will lead to the very highest kind of Christian life; higher than our best experiences, higher than Adamic perfection, for it is the life of Jesus, the second Adam, the Son of God, "manifested in our mortal flesh." "Christ-Centered," *Christian and Missionary Alliance*, 23:1, (June 3, 1899), 8.

-In the Holiness Movement, the desire was for *power*.

-For the Divine Healing Movement, it was *healing, health, or vitality*.

-For the Premillennialists, the object of longing was the *Rapture, Heaven*, or the like.

-In his teaching of the Fourfold Gospel, Simpson reminded his audience that none of these things (regeneration, sanctification, divine healing, or the blessed events of the eschaton) existed in and of themselves.

-That is to say, for Simpson regeneration, sanctification, vitality, and the coming age had no independent existence; they had no *ontology*.

-Instead, each of the blessings that the Evangelicalism of his day was seeking for, and in which it was investing itself, were nothing other and nothing more than the consequences or the manifestations of the primary blessing of God's saving work in our lives:

-that is, the indwelling of the all-sufficient Christ Himself—our union with Christ; being found “in Christ.”

-For Simpson, not only is Christ our Savior, more basically, Christ is our Salvation.

-Regeneration is nothing other and nothing more than the life and vitality of the indwelling and resurrected Christ, Himself, overflowing to the believer.

-It is not that Christ brings along with him some thing called “vitality” that he applies to us; He, Himself, is that vitality.

-The same hold true for the other aspects of the Fourfold Gospel.

-None of these “blessings” exists other than as a consequence or a manifestation of the presence of Christ, Himself, within the believer.

-This point is not merely implied within the construction of the Fourfold Gospel, it is explicit in Simpson's writings.

-This is true from the earliest days of Simpson's independent and interdenominational ministry.

-Most notably, it is found in one of his earliest writings, "Himself."

-originally, an *impromptu* sermon delivered in 1885 in Bethshan, England at the "International Convention on Divine Healing and True Holiness."

-two full years before the birth of the C&MA

-According to Simpson, it is an idolatrous and, therefore, a rather un-Christian thing to seek regeneration, sanctification, healing, or the millennial kingdom.

-In a somewhat prophetic tone,—prophetic to the Evangelicalism of which he was part—the Fourfold Gospel proclaims that:

- it is that it is the indwelling Christ Himself, alone, who regenerates;
- it is the indwelling Christ Himself, alone, who sanctifies;
- it is the indwelling Christ Himself, alone, who is life;
- it is the indwelling Christ, alone, for whom we should long.

-Therefore, Simpson's major contribution to the Evangelicalism of his era is his reminder to these various movements that their proper focus is never to be on commodities or things that one imagines may be received from God.

-Instead, Simpson reminded late-nineteenth century Evangelicalism that the proper subject of its longing and the sole provision for the Christian life is nothing other and nothing less than Christ Himself.

-It is Christ Himself, not Christ and regeneration.

-It is Christ Himself, not Christ and holiness.

-It is Christ Himself, not Christ and healing.

-It is Christ Himself, not Christ and a kingdom of shalom.

-Jesus not only delivers the blessings of the atonement, Jesus Christ, Himself, is the blessing of the atonement!

-Christ is not only the “instrument” of our salvation—it is not just that he brings us something other than Himself that saves us—he is, Himself, the “content” of our salvation.

-To use Simpson’s poetic language, Christ, and Christ alone is, at one and the same time, both the *Giver* and the *Gift* of salvation.

-While nineteenth-century evangelicalism was sure to remember the first, it was prone to forget the second.

-For Simpson, the only gift—the only salvation—that exists is that of the Giver Himself.

-The world has seen momentous change in the past 130 years—since the founding of The Christian and Missionary Alliance.

-The world that you and I inhabit is a world that would be alien to our grandparents and our great-parents.

-So very much has happened; so very much has changed.

-Yet, it is said, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

-After 130 years, in spite of all of the change, people are still people.

-That has not changed.

-After 130 years, people—even sincere believers within the Church, even people within the Alliance—are still prone to idolatry, to chasing after objects, commodities, or products.

-That is, even the sincerest of people are liable to misdirect their longings, their desires, and, consequently, their worship.

-Today, as was common 130 years ago, people—even Alliance people—continue seek after commodities, after stuff, after things.

-Therefore, should someone ask, “After 130 years, is the message of the Fourfold Gospel still relevant?”

-My answer would be, as the Fourfold Gospel is rightly understood and centred in indwelling person Jesus Christ, Himself, “Absolutely, yes! Amen, Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20)