



# From the Editor: Brushing away the Cobwebs

By Darrin J. Rodgers

**“Why am I still Pentecostal?” The well-spoken young woman who asked me this question explained, “I seem unable at times to understand myself as I relate to my own past.” This sense of chronological dissonance — an apparent inability to understand why the Pentecostal testimony of previous generations should matter today — is widespread.**

“Pentecostals were ahead of their time,” I replied. “You might be surprised by how early believers struggled with the same questions that you do.” She looked skeptical and said that she has become largely immune to Pentecostal history. “I don’t know what to think of the stories about ostensibly perfect people and past greatness. I can’t relate.”

This edition of *Assemblies of God Heritage* aims to brush away some of the cobwebs that may have obscured our Pentecostal identity from younger generations. My article on the lost message of “full consecration” — which I believe is Pentecostalism’s reason for being — shows how the various themes within Pentecostal history all arose from a deep commitment to Christ and His mission. These themes — including missions, miracles, passionate worship, spiritual disciplines, racial reconciliation, an affirmation of women in ministry, and a critique of extreme nationalism and war, among others — provide fertile ground for reflection about issues of import to all generations.

Early Pentecostals were anything but bland. They were visionaries and entrepreneurs, buoyed by a mission to restore what they deemed to be authentic Christian spirituality. They professed the highest of ideals, but also were troubled by their own human

frailties and weaknesses. They published profound insights on the spiritual life, and they established churches, schools, orphanages, and rescue missions. Several of these people and ministries are showcased here.

The feature story shows how Johnnie Barnes’ burning vision to turn boys into godly, responsible men developed into Royal Rangers. This discipleship ministry has now impacted over 2.5 million boys spanning the globe.

Many readers will be surprised to learn that the founder of Earth Day was a Pentecostal. The story of John McConnell and the Pentecostal origins of Earth Day will, no doubt, raise a few eyebrows. His story is one of a complex man whose devotion to Jesus led him to question political authorities, which landed him in jail, but also to commit himself to promote peace, justice, and care of earth. McConnell provides an example from Pentecostal history that one can love Jesus and care for creation; the two are not mutually exclusive.

It is essential that Pentecostals place themselves in the context of the broader Christian tradition. They did not suddenly emerge 100 years ago and create a new religion. I asked a Pentecostal scholar and Oxford-trained medievalist to write an article on the similarities between two renewal and

reform movements: Pentecostalism and monasticism. His article helps to show how Pentecostal spirituality fits within the larger tapestry of Christian history.

Articles about educators Robert Spence and Gary McGee offer warm appraisals of men who devoted their lives to impact emerging leaders in the Assemblies of God. Ethnic diversity in the Fellowship is evidenced by pieces on Italian American Pentecostals and on Slavic Pentecostal pioneer and martyr, Ivan Voronaev. Full consecration is exemplified in the life of Voronaev, who was forced to leave Russia after refusing to fight in the Tsarist army and then was killed in a Soviet concentration camp after he returned as an Assemblies of God missionary.

Gary McGee wrote, “I hope to inspire the younger generation with a past that is theirs too, even if it’s not in their memory.”<sup>1</sup> It is my desire that the following pages further that same goal, helping tomorrow’s leaders to resonate with the people and themes in our shared Pentecostal heritage. Then, perhaps, those who are questioning their Pentecostal identity, like the young lady above, will embrace and build upon it as each generation has done in the past.✝

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<sup>1</sup>Gary McGee, *People of the Spirit: The Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2004), 13.