

A Call to Full Consecration: Rediscovering Pentecostalism's Reason for Being

By Darrin J. Rodgers

I sometimes wonder whether God is much interested in big movements. I know He is intensely interested in individual souls who are wholly consecrated to Him, and wholly devoted to His cause.¹

— Stanley Frodsham, editor of the *Pentecostal Evangel*

Early Pentecostal literature is overflowing with calls to full consecration — the insistence that Christians fully devote themselves to Christ and His mission. This call to full consecration — an essential part of the worldview of early Pentecostals — is now a faint echo in some quarters of the movement. Early Pentecostals offered profound insights concerning the need for a deeper spiritual life. A rediscovery of these insights — which focus on discipleship and mission — could reinvigorate the church by challenging believers to question the Western church's accommodation of the materialism and selfishness of the surrounding culture.

Full Consecration

What is “full consecration?” The term may be unfamiliar to many readers. Stanley Horton noted, in a 1980 *Pentecostal Evangel* article, “In the early days of this Pentecostal movement we heard a great deal about consecration.” Horton went on to explain that the Hebrew word, *kadash*, which means consecration, was later replaced in popular piety by similar words, such as dedication and commitment. He noted that *kadash* signified a “separation to the service of God,” calling for not merely a partial dedication, but for “a total consecration and a life-style different from the [surrounding] world.”²

Pentecostalism emerged about 100 years ago among radical Holiness and evangelical Christians who aimed for full consecration. They were very uncomfortable with the gap between Scripture and what they saw in their own lives; between *ought*-ness and *is*-ness. They wanted to practice an authentic spirituality; a genuine Christianity, not just in confession, but in practice. Yearning for a deeper life in Christ, they were spiritually hungry and desired to be more committed Christ-followers. These ardent seekers saw in Scripture that Spirit baptism provided empowerment to live above

normal human existence; this experience with God brought believers in closer communion with God and empowered them for witness.

According to Pentecostal theologian Jackie Johns, early Pentecostals embraced a worldview that, at its heart, is a “transforming experience with God.”³ According to this understanding, the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit enables believers to consecrate themselves to God.

Results of the Consecrated Life

Various themes arose from this worldview that emphasized full consecration:

- **Mission** — Pentecostals have demonstrated a gritty determination to share Christ, in word and deed, no matter the cost. They had a vision to turn the world upside down, one person at a time. Delegates to the second general council of the Assemblies of God, held in November 1914, committed themselves to “the greatest evangelism that the world has ever seen.”⁴
- **Priesthood of all believers** — Pentecostals have put into practice a radical application of this Protestant ideal, affirming that God can call anybody into the ministry — regardless of race, gender, educational or social status, age, ability, and so on.
- **Spiritual disciplines** — Believers prayed, read their Bibles, fasted, avoided worldly entanglements that would dilute their testimony, and called for a lifestyle of self-denial for the sake of lifting Christ up to the world.
- **Expectation of the miraculous** — Believers practiced biblical spiritual gifts, experienced miracles, and viewed

life's struggles as spiritual warfare.

■ **Racial reconciliation** — Early Pentecostals at Azusa Street and elsewhere, realizing that full devotion to Christ precluded racial favoritism, committed themselves to overcoming the sin of racism.

■ **A conviction that heavenly citizenship should far outweigh earthly citizenship** — Most early Pentecostals critiqued extreme nationalism and war.

These themes (the above list is not exhaustive) all made sense within the worldview that called for full devotion to Jesus, no compromise with evil, and no distractions from the Christian's highest calling. Pentecostals, subject to human frailty and the confusion of surrounding cultures, have not always lived up to these ideals. Still, Pentecostal identity should not be defined by the shortcomings of individual members, but by the vision for authentic Christianity that captures the imagination of its adherents.

Early Pentecostals viewed tongues-speech as the evidence, but not the purpose, of Spirit baptism. The purpose of this experience with God was full consecration — to draw believers closer to God and to empower them to be witnesses. Spirit baptism helped enable believers to live with purity and power.

Early Pentecostals recognized that the consecrated life came at great cost, but yielded great spiritual riches. Daniel W. Kerr, the primary author of the AG's Statement of Fundamental Truths, warned against “the fading glory” on some Christians' faces, and instead called for a “deeper conversion” that is marked by desire for holiness.⁵ Quoting Hebrews 12:14, Kerr stated that holiness, “without



Artist's depiction of early Pentecostals being tared and feathered.

which no man shall see the Lord,” is both a “product of grace” and “a life of self-denying and suffering.”⁶ Early Pentecostals insisted that the consecrated life is not inward-focused. Kerr averred that holiness “is a life of love for others, manifested in words and work.”⁷

Early Pentecostals were ahead of their time. It should be noted that they were not buying into modern political or social ideologies; their commitments arose from their devotional life. Some of their commitments — such as women in ministry, racial reconciliation, or pacifism — brought persecution 100 years ago, but the culture has shifted so that these stands are now considered respectable by many. This newfound respectability presents a challenge — it is possible to look like a Pentecostal by embracing historic Pentecostal themes that are now considered “cool,” without also seeking to be fully consecrated.

Pentecostalism without Consecration?

Living out and conveying authentic Christian spirituality from one generation to the next has often proven a difficult task. Carl Brumback, in his 1961 history of the Assemblies of God, expressed concern over the decline of the spiritual life within the Pentecostal movement. He wrote:

It must be admitted that there is a general lessening of fervor and

discipline in the Assemblies of God in America. This frank admission is not a wholly new sentiment, for down through the years in the pages of the *Pentecostal Evangel* and other periodicals correspondents have asked, “Is Pentecost the revival it was in the beginning?” As early as five years after Azusa, they were longing for “the good old days”! Nevertheless, it is vital to any revival movement to reassess not too infrequently the state of its spiritual life.⁸

Likewise, *Charisma* magazine editor Lee Grady recently lamented “the lost message” of consecration. He wrote, “Today's shallow, ‘evangelical lite’ culture focuses on self, self and more self. Christian books today are mostly about self-improvement, not self-sacrifice. We teach people to claim their ‘best life now’ — and to claim it on their terms.”⁹

Is it possible to be Pentecostal without full consecration? D. W. Kerr, in answering this question, propounded that “when we cease to [esteem others better than ourselves] we cease to live the Christ-life. We may still have the outward form, but the power is gone.”¹⁰ Those who identify with the Pentecostal tradition but who defend sinful or unwise activities are being inconsistent with the early Pentecostal worldview.

Need for Renewal

Self-centered spirituality seems to be the default setting for humanity. Pentecostalism arose as a renewal and reform movement within Christianity — and now the movement may itself be in need of renewal and reform.

How can Pentecostals rekindle a wholehearted passion for Christ and His mission? Stanley Frodsham suggested that Christians need to form a daily habit of reconsecration.¹¹ Rediscovering classic Pentecostal and Holiness devotional writings and hymns would be a good place to start. The popular Australian Assemblies of God worship band Hillsong United has done just that with its recent release, “Arms Open Wide,” which no doubt is patterned after the Holiness hymn, “Take My Life and Let it Be.”

“Take My Life and Let It Be” (lyrics below) is a prayer for full consecration. Read it, sing it, meditate upon it, and let God transform you. In doing so, you will rediscover Pentecostalism’s reason for being.

Take My Life and Let It Be

*Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to Thee.*

*Take my moments and my days; let
them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands, and let them move at
the impulse of Thy love.*

*Take my feet, and let them be swift
and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King.*

*Take my lips, and let them be filled
with messages from Thee.*

*Take my silver and my gold; not a
mite would I withhold.*

*Take my intellect, and use every
power as Thou shalt choose.*

*Take my will, and make it Thine; it
shall be no longer mine.*

*Take my heart, it is Thine own; it
shall be Thy royal throne.*

*Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy
feet its treasure store.*

*Take myself, and I will be ever, only,
all for Thee. ✠*

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NOTES

¹Stanley Frodsham, *Wholly for God: A Call to Complete Consecration, Illustrated by the Story of Paul Bettex, a Truly Consecrated Soul* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, [1934]), 20. Frodsham served as general secretary of the Assemblies of God (1916), missionary treasurer (1917-1919), and as editor of all Assemblies of God publications (1921-1928; 1929-1949).

²Stanley Horton, “Consecration, Commitment, Submission,” *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 10, 1980, 20.

³Jackie David Johns, “Yielding to the Spirit: The Dynamics of a Pentecostal Model of Praxis,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Carlisle, CA: Regnum Books, 1999), 74.

⁴*General Council Minutes*, April-November 1914 [combined], 12.

⁵D. W. Kerr, *Waters in the Desert* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, [1925]), 77.

⁶*Ibid.*, 34.

⁷*Ibid.*, 33.

⁸Carl Brumback, *Suddenly from Heaven: A History of the Assemblies of God* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1961), 349-350.

⁹J. Lee Grady, “The Lost Message of Consecration,” *Fire in My Bones*, September 8, 2009. Online newsletter archived at: <http://www.charismamag.com>

¹⁰Kerr, 130.

¹¹Frodsham, 61.

¹²*Ibid.*, 27.

¹³John G. Lake, “The Power of Consecration to Principle,” unpublished manuscript edited by Wilford H. Reidt. FPHC.

¹⁴Stanley H. Frodsham, “Our Heavenly Citizenship,” *Weekly Evangel*, September 11, 1915, 3.

Paul Bettex, a Pentecostal missionary who was martyred in China in 1916, proclaimed:

Full consecration is my battle-axe and watchword. You will find it in the tenth chapter of Matthew, and indeed from beginning to end of the New Testament... We have been forgetting that the Lord Himself, even before Paul taught that great doctrine of faith, heralded and proclaimed with no uncertain voice the conditions of true discipleship. These conditions are: *a full, absolute, unlimited consecration.*¹²

Early Pentecostal John G. Lake pointed to Christ as the Christian’s example for “absolute consecration,” even to the point of death. He wrote:

The real purpose of becoming a Christian is not to save yourself from hell, or be saved to go to heaven. It is to become a child of God, with the character of Jesus Christ....¹³

Stanley Frodsham, in a 1915 article, called upon Christians to be true to their heavenly citizenship:

When one comes into that higher kingdom and becomes a citizen of that ‘holy nation’ (1 Peter 2:9), the things that pertain to earth should forever lose their hold, even that natural love for the nation where one happened to be born, and loyalty to the new King should swallow up all other loyalties.... National pride [extreme nationalism], like every other form of pride, is abomination in the sight of God. And pride of race [racism] must be one of the all things that pass away when one becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus....¹⁴