Will the Pentecostal movement follow “the path of gradual surrender to carnal forces” like most Christian renewal movements before it? This question, posed in 1953 by former General Superintendent W. T. Gaston, remains strikingly relevant.

According to Gaston, history’s “tragic lesson” is that a church’s solid foundation does not prevent corruption from “fleshly elements within.” He offered this warning at a time when certain media-savvy Pentecostal healing evangelists had been exposed for their ungodly lifestyles, but who continued to promote themselves and their unbiblical message that God guarantees financial prosperity to believers.

Gaston suggested, “If we are to have a future that is better or even comparable and worthy of our past, we will need to learn over again some of the lessons of yesterday.” One of the important lessons to rediscover, he wrote, was the importance of promoting “pure, undefiled” religion.

He recalled the “utter disregard for poverty or wealth or station in life” that he witnessed in the early Pentecostal movement: “Completely satisfied without the world’s glittering tinsel, and content to be the objects of its scornful hatred, those rugged pioneers had something that made them attractive and convincing.”

While Gaston’s writing concerned those who promoted a “prosperity gospel,” his observations have a broader application. Throughout history, churches have demonstrated a tendency to spiritually stray. There has always been a need for voices to prophetically call believers to be faithful.

Another such voice was British Assemblies of God leader Donald Gee. In 1942, he asked this question: “Is our modern revival deep enough?”

Like Gaston, Gee was concerned for the future of the Pentecostal church. He wrote, “Everywhere I go I find indications of shallowness. The modern revival is very bright and happy, but I fear it is also very shallow, and I am deeply concerned about that because I do not believe that which satisfies the heart of God is shallow.”

While Gee praised the positive aspects of the Pentecostal movement of his day, he also challenged readers to not be satisfied with a superficial faith. Instead, he admonished believers to seek a “revival of repentance” — which includes a sense of brokenness over sin and a full commitment to Christ and His mission.

Today’s Pentecostals would do well to do some soul-searching and to ask questions like those posed by Gaston and Gee.

Spiritual vigilance — recognizing all of life as a great spiritual battle — is woven throughout the fabric of our Pentecostal heritage. As you read the sacred stories of Assemblies of God pioneers on the following pages, I hope you will be inspired by their faithfulness. They sacrificed greatly, accomplishing so much with so little.

I pray that our Pentecostal priority remains on the spiritual life — which is lived out in both purity of heart and power for witness. If younger Pentecostals heed this lesson from older Pentecostals, the future of the church will be in good hands.

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