

2.6.2 Aimee Semple McPherson (1890-1944) and the Foursquare Gospel

Blumhofer details, “Aimee Semple McPherson was born Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy on a family farm west of the southern Ontario village of Salford on 9 October 1890. The daughter of a Methodist farmer, James Kennedy, and his second wife, Minnie Pearce Kennedy, a Salvationist . . . she was raised on . . . Canadian Pentecostalism . . . and the Canadian Salvation Army” (Blumhofer 1997:388). And, “In the fall of 1907” she experienced “speaking in tongues” and “falling under the power” during prayer meetings and storefront mission services in Ingersoll, Ontario, under the ministry of Irish evangelist Robert Semple, whom she married in August 1908 (Blumhofer 1997:394).

Over the next couple of years, the Semples ministered within the Toronto Pentecostal network, starting in John Alexander Dowie’s Zion Mission on Concord Avenue (established from the 1906 Pentecostal revival of Charles Parham in Zion, Illinois) (Blumhofer 1997:396).

Blumhofer continues:

This, then, was the Semples’ world, defined by straightforward premises *rooted in persuasions about the end-times*, restorationism, spiritual gifts, and religious experience. Driven by the certainty of the imminent end of time, the faithful bent every effort to “know God in his fullness” . . . Aimee and Robert Semple moved in this mobile and fluid world, with its transient workers, its global consciousness, its supernaturalism, and its intricate and overlapping networks and international connections. Its piety blended themes from Keswick, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, holiness movements, and Dowie’s Zion. Its devotional classics came from the pens of Brother Lawrence, Madame Guyon, and John Wesley. It valued physical healing, faith living, Christ-centered devotion, religious experience, spiritual gifts, congregational polity, Quaker-like spontaneity, spiritual disciplines like fasting, and silent “waiting on God” [emphasis added] (Blumhofer 1997:399-400).

The Semples left in February, 1910, on a mission trip to China, where Robert Semple died and was buried in a “Hong Kong cemetery known as Happy Valley. Aimee returned, only to discover that the leaders and congregations that had moulded her had either vanished or relocated. . . .

What continuities that remained did not effectively replicate the early phase of Toronto Pentecostalism” (Blumhofer 1997:401).

From this point, Aimee Semple returned to New York City with her new baby Roberta Star Semple and made trips to Chicago and even back home to Ontario to try and rekindle the old fires of revival. However, nothing worked, and for the sake of the baby, she married again in 1912 to Harold Stewart McPherson (an accountant), with the condition that if the Lord called her back into the ministry, she would go (McPherson 1951:78-9, 81). This call came after the birth of her son Rolf Potter Kennedy McPherson, while on her “deathbed” from various illnesses in 1913. So after she was “healed,” she took the two babies and began her itinerant ministry, consisting of mostly revivals in tent meetings (McPherson 1951:82, 86-7). Aimee Semple McPherson (divorced from her husband in 1921) settled in Los Angeles, California, and began her ministry, which became the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, at the newly built Angelus Temple on January 1, 1923. This ministry was a result of a “revelation” (of the Foursquare Gospel) she received from God while preaching on “Ezekiel’s Vision: Ezek 1:4-10” during the Oakland Campaign in the summer of 1922 (McPherson 1951:151, 178-80, 193-4; The Foursquare Church – About Us). In 1924, she started the radio station KFSG (Kall Four Square Gospel), and in 1926, she started the Lighthouse of International Foursquare Evangelism (L.I.F.E.) Bible College (McPherson 1951:197-8). After her death in 1944, her son Rolf became the president and leader of the ministry for the next forty-four years. In 2004, Pastor Jack Hayford, founder of The Church on the Way in Van Nuys, California, Living Way Ministries and The King’s College and Seminary, became the president of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

The Foursquare Gospel consists of Jesus Christ as the Savior, Baptizer with the Holy Ghost, Great Physician, and Coming King. According to McPherson, the Foursquare Gospel was conceived in the mind of God “before the foundation of the World” (Rev 13:8); received by inspiration of the Holy Ghost from the “four faces” in the vision of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-28), providing a “perfect Gospel complete for the body, soul, spirit, and eternity”; based on ten references to the word “foursquare” and four phases of the Gospel (Savior—Rom 6:23; Baptizer—Acts 1:5; Great Physician—Matt 8:17; Coming King—1 Thess 4:16-18); proclaimed by Jesus Himself (John 3:16; Acts 1:4-5; Matt 4:23; 24:30-31); affirmed by the apostles Peter, James, John, and Paul; and symbolized by the Foursquare Emblem and four colors of the Foursquare Flag (McPherson 1946:13, 19, 21-2, 28-31, 36-41, 44, 63). In the conclusion to her book *THE FOURSQUARE GOSPEL* (published in 1946), Aimee Semple McPherson reprints a copy of her famous sermon preached all over the world, “FOURSQUARE NOT ROUND.” Excerpts from it follow:

The world is hungry for a revival!
They are asking a complete Gospel—not one with corners off.
“FOURSQUARE SHALT THOU MAKE IT AND NOT ROUND”
The message still rings forth. Foursquaredom has the answer: *The Foursquare Gospel*.
The Foursquare Organization is growing, advancing, spreading out to cover the world with the most glorious, straightforward, reassuring message since the days of the Apostles—THE FOURSQUARE GOSPEL!
Our aim is to reach with the Foursquare Gospel every nation, kindred, tongue and people of the children of men, and thus hasten the day of the coming of our King of Kings, our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ—for he said:
“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matt. 24:14 [emphasis added] (1946:198-9).

From the birth of the Fourfold Gospel of A. B. Simpson and the Foursquare Gospel of Aimee Semple McPherson have come most of the American Pentecostal denominations. From C. I. Scofield’s (1843-1921) dispensationalism, and bolstered by both his Reference Bible and the founding of Dallas Theological Seminary by Lewis Sperry Chafer in 1924, have come the

Dispensational Baptists. Then, from the fires of revival, sparked from both these branches of the Eschatological Gospel, came Billy Graham and Oral Roberts.