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### **Comparison of the Beginnings of the Assemblies to its Present State**

The history of the Assemblies of God denomination is well documented in the book *Restoring the Faith* by Edith Blumhofer, copyrighted in 1993. From its beginnings in 1914, the Assemblies of God has grown to be the largest Pentecostal denomination, both in the United States and in the world. With Blumhofer's book as a basis, comparisons can be derived from the early beginnings of the Assemblies of God to its present state as described at the end of the text.

The Assemblies of God began in 1914 as a part of a brief and intense end-times restoration movement that desired to return to the models, messages, and power of the New Testament era that would soon usher in the prophesied return of Christ. They had no plan of forming a long-lasting denomination with its own traditions, especially since many at that time viewed organized religion (or bureaucratic institutions) as a hindrance to the advancement of the gospel and to the flow of the Holy Spirit. They formed a loosely knit fellowship of ministers whose churches would be autonomous. Over time, the loose knit fellowship has become more of a denomination. Organization has been necessary to preserve spiritual revival and to curb self-destructing spiritual excesses, yet it can hamper authentic spiritual experiences with rules and bureaucracy that are not flexible to exceptions that God's Spirit may be authorizing. Believing time was short before Christ's return, the early Assemblies maintained a relentless pace to "redeem the time" and engaged in activities of soul winning and pursuing deeper spirituality.

Like the Holiness Movement before it, the Assemblies stressed holiness by living a simple lifestyle and by separating from the world. This included a long list of sinful practices to avoid such as wearing jewelry, drinking coffee or cola, bowling, attending theaters, dances, circuses, ball games, swimming at public pools and beaches, owning television sets, dressing fashionably, painting fingernails, plucking eyebrows, using tobacco or alcohol. The simple life of the Assemblies set them apart and generated disdain from the world and other Christian groups, enhancing their spiritual strength as they reflected on their special calling within God's plan.

Over time, the Assemblies adapted to many of the styles of American popular culture, which enabled it to relate more to society and to gain more adherents, yet it also weakened its distinctiveness with the world. Most of the earlier taboos are no longer considered sinful to the Assemblies, and adherents have become more like middle-class Americans having improved their social and economical standing from their poorer beginnings. Biblically, no burden should be placed on believers that are not supported by Scripture, for that is legalism. On the other hand, the early Assemblies had an intense desire to please God and wanted to forsake anything that was remotely associated with evil or did not promote spiritually, including most forms of amusement and pursuit of material things. Each generation needs to define practical holiness and separation from the world. The rules birthed by the Spirit in one generation may be considered legalism in the next. God may speak to a "spiritually hungry" person or a group to adhere to a different form of devotion than what is explicitly stated in the Bible, but this does not mean that God is authorizing it for every individual or every group. God does have universal standards, but He also knows what is best for each individual or group to promote spiritual growth.

Although the Assemblies have accommodated to society in some ways and to non-

Pentecostal Evangelicals in deemphasizing some of their Pentecostal distinctive, they continue to be out-of-step with a society that does not believe in an interactive God and out-of-step with a rational and secular Christianity that does not accept the supernatural as normative—as Assemblies do. This view of a God who can be experienced in paranormal ways by all believers has drawn many adherents to the Assemblies.

In the beginning, the Assemblies were skeptical about higher education and felt they had no time for long-term training for ministry since there was much work to do and little time to do it in. As the Assemblies progressed, educational institutions were built to help train the next generation in the truths held by the Assemblies and to equip them for ministry. Professional scholars who are geared toward intellectual teaching may have some difficulty imparting spiritual experiences to their students; and yet the Assemblies were birthed from spiritual experiences. This writer has been pleased with the spiritual dynamism of Assemblies professors with whom he has interacted.

Without compromising a focus on the Word and believing rightly, the Assemblies have contributed greatly to Christianity by emphasizing personal religious experiences and expecting paranormal religious experiences. While many churches allow the Spirit to flow freely and encourage such experiences, some churches within the Assemblies need to renew their stress on the miraculous. A Biblical church is one that is grounded in the Word and flows with the Spirit. Of all the church denominations, this writer feels that the Assemblies have the best balance between Word and Spirit.