Articles by Simon Holmgren

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Danger Threatens Today (Jan 1960)

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Danger Threatens Today

Simon Holmgren

Simon Holmgren came from Scandinavia to New York many years ago. In that great metropolis, he and his wife served the Lord sincerely and indefatigably.

The maturity of his experience, the mellowness of his spirit, and the devotion with which he served in the gospel at the rescue mission and at the assembly combined to produce a most fragrant testimony.

This letter, his very last message to the assemblies gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus, breathes the longings of his heart for the people of God. He had a number of copies mailed out a few days before he went to be with the Lord in November.

This message of one so mature merits prayerful consideration. —Ed.

Beloved Brethren in Christ:

In many of our assemblies there are elderly believers who look aprehensively on the trend of our assembly life today. On the other hand, there are younger ones who exult in the progress of late years. They see the splendid new meeting places, the people of the neighbourhood in many cases responding to invitations to attend the meetings. They see increased Sunday Schools, and, shall I say, a better type of ministry. (Compare Ezra 3:12, 13.).

What lingers in the mind and what do the older ones miss and why their apprehensiveness? They may not always be able to tell definitely what it is, and, therefore, it is necessary to go back to the beginning to consider what has made such deep impression on their spiritual life.

The first worship meetings of the brethren were often held in very humble places: as a craftsman's shop, a home, or a hall rented for the purpose. But entering in to such a meeting, the mind and heart were captivated by the deep consciousness of the Lord's presence. One would see tear-filled faces all around, for the High and Holy One had indeed come down to be in the midst of them who were of a broken heart and a contrite spirit (Isaiah 57:15). What rich priestly worship then flowed forth to glorify the Father and the Son!

Perhaps we, right here, may ask ourselves a most important question — What may be the mind of the Lord in regard to the old compared to the new? What may be His approval or disapproval?

We do not have to search far to find a judgment which we believe applicable in our case, for in Revelation 2:2-4, we have before us what happened to the apostolic Church. The Lord found much to commend tha Church for, but it had been done, so to speak, at the cost of that which was most precious to the heart of Christ — the first love. To use the words of the Song of Songs, "While the King sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof." The King did sit at his table, but the spikenard began to cease sending forth its sweet fragrance. In a subtle way self-sufficiency, self-satisfaction, if not self-seeking, began to kill, as it were,

that attitude of a contrite and broken heart that abased self and that glorified only in the person and work of Christ.

Do we wonder that the lamp-stand was removed and great numbers of assemblies were swept out of existence in Asia Minor, or the north coast of Africa?

Now notice that the fragrance of worship, so precious to the heart of God, does not consist in the first place of the audible singing of hymns or leading in thanksgiving and praise, but it is that which flows silently from every heart present. It is that which God sees irrespective of any audible expression, no matter how eloquent. Only in the measure we are delivered from self can true worship flow forth from God's holy priesthood. Such deliverance should be a constant and deep exercise of soul.

In the apostolic Church, under the teaching of the apostles, we have reason to believe that the early Christians understood the most gracious and glorious calling of every Christian to be one of God's holy priests, "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." But we have reason to believe that this truth was greatly set aside by an earthly, often carnal, man-ordained priesthood, presumptuously taking the place of priests (Revelation 2:15).

In the days of reformation in Germany, once again the truth of the believer's priesthood like a light from heaven shone down upon the Church. But it was mostly on the part of the godly princes and the people in general that this was true. Good reformer, Philip Melanchton, strove to be a peacemaker and reconcile as much as possible the clergy with the new movement, and therefore was not willing to go the length that such

a truth as this would require to put in practice. Neither was Luther himself thus disposed, so the truth of the believer's priesthood, at least in the practical carrying out of it, was again lost to the Church. However, the Lord had ordained that it should once again be brought back to the Church of God to have a place and practice such as it had once had in the apostolic Church. Hence, the mighty moving of the Holy Spirit brought about what we historically know as the "Brethren Movement," more rightly, the Philadelphia Church of Revelation 7:13, including the many scattered examples of believers in many places that were led into the same position. How glorious was that deep consciousness of the Lord Himself in the midst of His dear people. Each was a priest according to the New Testament, offering up spiritual sacrifices, all on an equal basis, all in deepest humility of heart, a true manifestation of what the holy priesthood of the New Testament should be according to the mind of God.

It is this that the older ones have in mind, who have tested something of the preciousness of these early experiences, when the presence of the King at His table indeed brought forth the fragrance of the spikenard from every heart present.

Now, what can be the remedy? Surely, not to censure or scold the assembly as some are prone to do; but, first of all, let those who are spiritual be much exercised about this present condition. Let the leaders of the assemblies constantly bring the worship meeting and God's portion in it before the Lord's people for prayer and exercise of heart. Let also, proper ministry be given at conferences and in assembly meetings to enlighten the Lord's people as to their calling as God's holy priests whose worship

the Father seeketh. Then again, it will be true in a fuller way: “When the King sitteth at His table my spikenard giveth forth the smell thereof,” and as it was in the house of Bethany, “the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” Thus our worship meetings will return to more simplicity, more consciousness of the Lord’s presence, and more acceptance before Him Who loved the Church and gave Himself for it. The Lord grant it so for His name’s sake.

S. Holmgren,

A brother, “who am also an elder”

(1 Pet. 5:1).