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LIVING THE LEGACY— PASSING THE TORCH

By Rev. Dr. Charles H. Smith



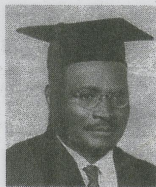
Dr. Charles H. Smith

A few years ago, Dr. Cain Hope Felder and I edited the book *The African American Jubilee Legacy - A Spiritual Odyssey* - which traces the legacy of blacks from the pages of biblical antiquity up to the twentieth century. The work includes timetables, visuals, and a history of the founding of our basic institutions - the black church and the historically black colleges. As I reflected on the progress that blacks made over the centuries, it dawned on me that my father and two of my brothers had been legends in their time, leaping across the twentieth century to make noteworthy contributions to the state of Kentucky, and may be even the world.

As I sat with family members recapitulating the lives of my father, Thomas Horace Smith, and my two brothers Gloster Maceo Smith and Horace Ray Smith, I realized that their home-going celebrations did not truly reveal the genius and the invaluable contributions of these preacher/prophet leaders. I acknowledge that the services provided an opportunity for their professional colleagues, organizational affiliates, and church family to heap accolades and recount their participation in the religious life of their expanded denominational and ecumenical communities. Yet still I felt an absence of closure—something was missing. There was a void. Not just the fact that they were no longer around, but I felt as if their real life stories were left untold.

It was a bittersweet reflection.

Preachers leave a Century Kentucky Legacy 1908 - 2010 (102 Years)



Rev. Thomas Horace Smith



Dr. Gloster Maceo Smith



Rev. Horace Ray Smith

Not in the way that people experience pangs of frustration over what they should or could have done for their loved one prior to their passing, but rather what can I do now to keep the torch they left, burning bright forever. I use this opportunity to articulate some of the rich legacies they bequeathed to me and how they contributed to the religious ethos and spiritual legacy of African Americans in Kentucky.

others who had been marked by God for service.

As he is wont to do, God affirmed, equipped, empowered, commissioned, and anointed these priestly stalwarts and sent them, with the exception of the youngest, to central Kentucky to serve as under-shepherds for nearly a century.

Rev. Thomas Horace Smith

My father, Thomas Horace Smith, believed in the value of education. He graduated from Simmons University in 1933. He admired the school so much that he named me (Charles) his youngest son after Charles Parrish, Sr., the University's president. Simmons was a part of our legacy, and each of my father's three sons was careful to continue to uphold this tradition. Gloster served on Simmons' Trustee Board while serving as President of Kentucky Baptist State Convention. Horace continued the educational legacy by serving as Treasurer and also as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. He had the distinct honor of being named Chair-

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A Call To Service

Not unlike Ezekiel's priestly family of the family of John the Baptist, God moved into the Smith family and exercised his omnipotence to declare Eminent Spiritual Domain in the heart and lives of a father and his three sons. If the truth be told, they did not invite God to take over. In fact, each of them resisted. But God, at this time, did not extend a 'whosoever will let him come' invitation, for he had previously used his divine authority to declare their lives to be his. Now, he was calling them into a life of service. They answered that call and joined the procession of saints led by John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Paul, Timothy and

man Emeritus of Simmons University Trustee Board. In 1984, while serving as an Aide to Senator John Glenn of Ohio in Washington, DC, I continued the legacy by delivering a lecture series at Simmons University on "The State of the Black Church in America."

My father was a prolific sermon writer and an intense biblical preacher. While the nineteenth century had its Charles Spurgeon known as the "Prince of Preachers," the twentieth century had T. H. Smith, known as the "Dean of Preachers." Dad's scholarly sermon preparation, distinctive exegesis, and preaching style would captivate attention as he articulated his premises with hermeneutical brilliance and crafted his arguments of apologetics with clarity and unction.

Then, as he came to the climax of his sermons, he would leave his manuscript, place his fingers in his vest pockets, and move from one end of the pulpit to the other. There, he launched his quiet but brilliant oratorical flight which would clinch the message and his rapt listeners would be transported to a heavenly sphere where they could ride the waves of divine revelation. To be sure, they got the message and joyfully responded to God's Word.

My father's special calling was his ability and willingness to share his education and experiences with those whom others deemed "unlettered preachers" - men who served smaller rural churches. He served as Moderator of the Howard's Creek Missionary Baptist Association for several years. At the time, those associations of churches and pastors formed the basic fabric and infrastructure of black religious life and culture. My father refused to have his church, Shiloh Baptist Church, join the Consolidated Association, which was comprised of larger urban churches, for fear of losing touch with his local congregants. My two brothers, Gloster and Horace, remained loyal to this tradition and continued to provide servant-mentoring to bi-vocational preachers and rural churches.

Gloster Maceo Smith

My brother 'GM' was the custodian of Baptist core beliefs and doctrines for over sixty years. During his tenure, the church was witnessing the erosion of moral standards, the crossing of the line between secular and sacred music, and the dilution of Baptist doctrines as more and more preachers tried to appeal to crowds looking for "feel good" motivational messages. Despite this, GM remained loyal to the doctrines of the Baptist faith tradition. He refused to allow elements of other faith traditions to penetrate the Baptist Beliefs to accommodate crowds by neutralizing the teachings of the New Testament. He refused to be captivated by music emotionalism in worship services and demanded that music reflect the discipline of four-part harmony and not be substituted by a Hammond 3 Organ.

Gloster was the consummate American Martin Luther of the twenty-first century. He may not have placed 95 theses on the door of a Catholic church and declared salvation is not earned by deeds, but received only as a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus as redeemer from sin. But he was resolute in his stand against watering down theological dogma to accommodate the winds of popular cultural practices.

While he and I never disagreed on biblical doctrine, we often differed over tradition. Yet, he mentored and guided me and many other young ministers to understand that the Baptist Church is the New Testament Church and that individual liberty and competency of the soul is ultimate. Most of all, GM assumed the role of my dad and adopted me as his ministerial son. He encouraged my innovative approaches to ministry while I preached in West Virginia and invited me back often to his pulpit. I will always treasure the moments after I preached at his last pastoral anniversary. He said, "Charlie, that's the best sermon I have ever heard you preach."

Horace Ray Smith

Horace was a gifted African-American ecclesiastical griot. (Griot - an African storyteller). He could paint pictures with words on the canvases of human minds that would remain engrained and treasured forever. He was Kentucky's twenty-first-century biblical poet laureate. His poetic sermons were homiletically crafted yet hermeneutically substantive, and should be examined by seminary students for literary style. Just as Pope Julius II commissioned Raphael, the Italian painter, to paint *The Freeing of St. Peter for the Vatican*, God called Horace to paint, in words, the scenes from the 23rd Psalm, *'The Lord is My Shepherd—A Psalm of David.'* With master strokes of words and phrases that lingered in the minds of his listeners, one could all but smell the lushness of the grass in that panoramic scene.

Horace along with GM took the torch of leadership of Howard's Creek District Association of Churches from Dad. When larger churches abandoned this Association which consisted primarily of small rural churches, my brothers refused to let the 'big church fad' lead them to desert the small church and its leaders who needed their wisdom and guidance in education and church polity. They continued the legacy of support to clergy and lay members by providing Christian education and genuine fellowship.

Horace recalled that it was this lower economic neighborhood that gave birth to the church and his opportunity to serve. He brought the higher-educated, economically stable residents back into the neighborhood to build it up. During his church expansion program, nearly an entire block was purchased to serve the local community. Under his leadership, in the new church design, he constructed 'God's Pantry,' a distribution center for the neighborhood poor. For the extended community, he instituted a tutoring service, prescription drug assistance program, scholar-

ship programs for higher education and lastly, an adult education program for the blind.

In addition to pastoring Pilgrim Baptist Church in Lexington, Horace traveled, for 50 years, to a small country church in Watkinsville to minister to the people two Sundays a month. This church closed and held its last service on Sunday, December 5th 2010. The church was then donated to the Howard's Creek District Association.

Like his dad and brother before him, Horace Ray Smith was summoned to come up to the front office. He had been a member of God's Labor Party for over sixty years. Horace's guaranteed labor contract had been negotiated and settled on Calvary. On Labor Day, September 6, 2010, God called him home to receive all the benefits prescribed in his retirement package... eternal life.

A Living Legacy

God hallowed these spiritual giants as he anointed and guided their pilgrimage by the aid of the Holy Spirit. In turn, they allowed God to stir up the gifts he had so graciously bequeathed them. Their lives and legacy demonstrate the synergy of the pulpit, the pew, and the academy. To God Be The Glory, Amen.

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