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REVIEW ESSAY

Michael Wilkinson, ed., *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009).

Reviewed by Sam Reimer
Crandall University

From its humble beginnings with James and Ellen Hebden in Toronto until the first academic volume on Canadian Pentecostalism, it has been one hundred years. There is no doubt that this volume was needed. It is important partly because it brings together the little we know about Canadian Pentecostalism, which has been scattered and somewhat hidden in various collections, but it also adds significantly to it. It is also important because it fills an important gap in the literature, and in our understanding of Canadian religion. Canadian religion is often lost in the shadow of its much bigger, bolder American counterpart. This is particularly true of Canadian conservative Protestantism, which is assumed to be identical to American conservative Protestantism writ small. Finally, it is important because of the phenomenal worldwide growth of Pentecostalism, or the “Pentecostalization” of “contemporary Christendom” (Mittlestadt, 123). This growth draws attention to this movement, and requires scholars to clarify how Canadian Pentecostalism is situated vis-à-vis other Pentecostalisms worldwide.

The chapters in this volume show solid scholarship. There are several chapters that include primary research, and some with strong analysis. There are some chapters where the analysis is not as strong. Even chapters with less analysis, however, are valuable because they synthesize the secondary literature. I think the volume also does a good job of covering the range of areas that are Canadian Pentecostalism: classical Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement in mainline denominations, women in Pentecostalism, Aboriginal Pentecostals, immigrant Pentecostals, Pentecostal institutions, and oneness Pentecostalism. In this sense, I think the volume does a better job of covering diverse topics than maintaining a central focus (alas, such is the nature of edited volumes). Nonetheless, in the introduction, Wilkinson does a very good job of bringing the parts of the volume together. He sets up three main foci, which I think can be summarized as follows: the nature and impact of Pentecostalism in Canada, the uniqueness of Pentecostalism in Canada, and the institutionalization and globalization of Pentecostalism. These themes are important. I already alluded to the importance of situating Canadian Pentecostalism within worldwide Pentecostalism. The tension between the spontaneity and unpredictability of the Spirit and the rigidity of institutionalism has captured the attention of scholars for many years, and one can hardly study the Canadian religious scene without attention to globalizing forces.

Chapters one to four lay out the origins and development of Canadian Pentecostalism. Di Giacomo's chapter

is excellent in this regard, with special attention on Quebec Pentecostalism. This is the kind of chapter you point your students to when they want an overview of Canadian Pentecostalism. Althouse's paper is similar. I think Althouse's argument that the founding fathers of North American Pentecostalism promoted anti-capitalist views and racial integration would surprise many modern observers. Robinson's work on Oneness Pentecostalism is an important addition, a movement that is still strong in New Brunswick. Holm's piece on Pentecostal spirituality uses the metaphor of walking to show Canadian Pentecostals always have one foot on the ground, even if their walk is sometimes meandering and sometimes redirected toward the latest Spirit manifestation. American Pentecostals, by comparison, often run, with greater enthusiasm but sometimes without being grounded. This piece, and several others, suggests comparisons between the U.S. and occasionally British Pentecostalism, but by the end of the book, I was still unclear exactly what those differences were. No doubt, Canadian Pentecostalism shows some distinctive elements which are more than just a combination of British and American brands, but what exactly are those characteristics and where do they come from? Canadian Pentecostalism is probably less exuberant, less schismatic, maybe more middle class than its American counterpart, but can we find evidence for this and can it be clearly traced to historical, geographical, or theological differences? I wonder if some of the leading early Pentecostal congregations, possibly like Calvary Temple in Winnipeg, partly explain the differences, or

what Guenther called the “less sectarian” version of Pentecostalism propagated by Western Bible College. I hope that future research will build on the important foundations of this book and help clarify those differences.

The second section focuses on more specific topics with more primary research. Guenther’s piece shows solid scholarship and does a good job of pointing out the larger significance of theological training in his case study of a Pentecostal Bible college. I found Burkinshaw’s explanations of the appeal and then decline of the PAOC among Canadian Aboriginals convincing. He suggests that the affinities between native spirituality and Pentecostalism helps explain the higher percentages of Pentecostals among B.C. Aboriginal peoples, going beyond the typical class based explanations. Mittlestadt’s chapter argues for the hermeneutical continuity with other Judeo-Christian traditions, but also notes how Pentecostalism has hermeneutical distinctives as well. Holmes chapter on women is an important piece because it focuses on the role of women in Pentecostalism and the effects of institutionalization on those roles.

In the third section, we see scholarly treatment of charismatic movements, immigrants and globalization. Reed and Swenson look at the charismatic movement with Canadian Anglicanism and Catholicism respectively. Both chapters examine the beginnings and eventual decline of these movements. Reed points to an aging charismatic demographic that is actively serving within Anglican churches. Swenson shows how Catholic Charismatic

groups declined because of inability to market their faith, a lack of innovation, and a weakening separation/distinctiveness as per Finke and Wittberg's model. Hunt's piece on the Toronto Blessing, one of the most important renewal movements in Canada, shows its influence on Canadian Catholic and Protestant churches, and churches worldwide. He connects his work to globalization theory, as does Wilkinson on Pentecostal immigrants. Wilkinson points to the tensions that exist when Pentecostals from other parts of the world are squeezed into Canadian institutional molds. Beyer's conclusion is impressive in its breadth, placing Pentecostalism within the larger events of history. His work invites us to speculate on the future of Pentecostalism in Canada, in light of its slowed growth and possible decline. Has the movement reached its growth potential in Canada?

Overall, the volume has a good mix of chapters that synthesize considerable secondary scholarship, bringing together previously published material, and new, primary research. Several other themes come out in its chapters. Pentecostalism has not found the North American ground as fertile as other parts of the world, partly because of Western rationalism. Second, Pentecostalism is, at its center, a renewal movement that seeks to restore the distinctives of the early church as depicted in the second chapter of the book of Acts. The early church was accompanied by "signs and wonders", and the baptism of the Spirit accompanied by speaking in tongues. Restoration movements need regular restoring themselves, since the forces of routinization work against the freedom of the Spirit.

This book provides an important historical, theological and sociological foundation for future work. Many chapters trace a part of Pentecostalism historically, and many point to theological uniqueness. Others rightly note that global Pentecostalism will be important to the future of Canadian Pentecostalism. What is missing still is a contemporary portrait of Pentecostals in Canada. This volume lacks the necessary data to help us understand the transitions and transformations of Canadian Pentecostalism in the last twenty years or so. For example, census data shows Pentecostal declines in recent decades. Is this an aberration created by wording or coding changes in Stats Canada's religion questions, or is Canadian Pentecostalism actually declining? It would be great to update the charismatic movement in Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, and a chapter on the charismatic movement within mainstream conservative Protestant churches would be an important addition to this book. Are the majority of these charismatic congregations now immigrant churches? Pentecostal and charismatic Canadians and their institutions need to be topics of both qualitative and quantitative study, particularly in comparative perspective. There is much to do, but this is a very good start.