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Noel, Bradley Truman. "Review of *The New Canadian Pentecostals*, by Adam Stewart." *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* 8, no. 1 (2017): 89-91.

Adam Stewart, *The New Canadian Pentecostals* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015). xii + 195 pp. \$29.99 paper.

Adam Stewart, like other Pentecostal adherents and observers, has watched with interest as Canadian census data recently reported for the first time a marked decline in Pentecostal affiliation. Stewart's objective in this work is to explain how, "in just ten years, Pentecostalism has transitioned from one of Canada's fastest-growing Christian denominations to one of the fastest declining." After dismissing a variety of possible explanations, he takes issue with the assumption itself, challenging the notion that the census data does in fact demonstrate a decline in Pentecostalism affiliation.

In brief, Stewart's thesis states:

The decrease in Canadian Pentecostal affiliation recorded by Statistics Canada does not provide adequate evidence to claim that Pentecostal adherents have abandoned their churches at a rate of more than 15 percent in the decade between 1991 and 2001. Instead, my hypothesis is that this decrease in affiliation can be explained by the fact that Canadian Pentecostals are experiencing a significant transformation of religious identity and experience from traditionally Pentecostal to generically evangelical categories. In other words, I propose that a significant portion of those individuals who attend Canadian Pentecostal churches are simply no longer identifying, believing, or behaving as they did just a few decades ago and that this transformation accounts for the dramatic, if misleading, census results.

To accomplish these goals, Stewart employs ethnographic fieldwork in three churches belonging to Canada's largest Pentecostal denomination, The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC). A series of interviews with parishioners and their pastors were used to measure the aforementioned shifts in Pentecostal identity.

Having suitably set the stage for the study with this introduction, chapter two then moves to a description of Pentecostalism in Canada and the United States, focusing particularly on a functional definition of

Pentecostalism achieved through outlining the origins of the movement and the development of ideal types of traditional Canadian Pentecostal identity, belief, and practice. The reader will find the first half of this chapter a helpful and succinct summary of Pentecostal history and the latter half an engaging discussion of Pentecostal identity in the Canadian context.

Chapter three helps the reader engage the voices of the study's participants, when (with a nod perhaps to Pentecostalism's penchant for narrative and oral testimony) Stewart presents brief vignettes of the three congregations and background information on the lead pastors of each assembly. Chapters four to six form the backbone of this study, providing and interpreting the core data supporting the hypothesis. "Generic evangelicalism" is explored and defined, and its tendency "towards homogenization and alignment with the culture of therapeutic individualism" is discussed. With this understanding in place, Stewart is prepared to elucidate the fact that 86 percent of respondents used a generically evangelical or Christian descriptor rather than the term "Pentecostal" to describe their religious affiliation and preference. The remainder of this section explores traditional Pentecostal doctrine and practice in the areas of Spirit baptism (including glossolalia), and experiences of divine healing, angels, demons, and exorcism. In most cases, while participants expressed an affinity to some aspect of these traditional Pentecostal experiences, most do so not out of any loyalty to Pentecostalism, Stewart contends, but rather via their acceptance of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism that is already predominant among these generically evangelical congregations.

There is much to be commended in this study. First, for shedding yet further light on the situation of Pentecostals in Canada; Pentecostalism south of the border tends to receive the lion's share of attention in studies such as this, and for his Canadian focus here he is to be applauded. Further, Stewart's grasp of the religious scene in Canada—both evangelical and Pentecostal—and the sociological factors at play, is impressive. His willingness to challenge what would appear to be clear-cut data from Statistics Canada, investigate further, and hypothesize a different conclusion, serves the reader very well and assists in the education of a public that all too often accepts the standard interpretation of reported statistics at face value. Finally, his methodology resonates with the Pentecostal reader, who often has a

natural affinity for data that may be mined not so much from the surveys themselves, but from the stories of actual congregations and their particular narratives.

This, however, leads to the chief concern with the book as a whole, one that Stewart readily acknowledges: the entire hypothesis hangs on the data collected from just three congregations, all within a 100 km radius, from the Waterloo region of one Canadian province (Ontario), represented by just one PAOC district out of eight nationally. Would the same conclusions be readily applicable to the rural areas of Saskatchewan or Nova Scotia, or, for that matter, the urban areas of Quebec or British Columbia? Stewart clearly believes that data collected from three congregations in southern Ontario may then be used to challenge statistics provided from across Canada. Given the fluid nature of Pentecostal identity, however, and the challenges associated with finding common ground among differing religious presuppositions across a widely diverse Canadian federation, the reader may hesitate to endorse this assessment of the Canadian Pentecostal situation in Canada as a whole. Stewart recognizes this situation by suggesting that if his study is able to convince the reader that Pentecostal identity in his localized area of study has significantly shifted from that of a generation prior then his work will have accomplished its intended goal. On this I believe Stewart has succeeded.

Stewart's book is a highly readable, thorough, and thoughtful rejoinder to those who would automatically interpret Canadian census results as describing several recent decades of Pentecostal decline. His work would serve educators well as a study in classical Pentecostal identity.

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