

**Note:** This Work has been made available by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws of Canada without the written authority from the copyright owner.

Wilkinson, Michael and Bradley Truman Noel. "The Decline of Religion and the Future of Christianity in Canada," In *Pentecostal Preaching and Ministry in Multicultural and Post-Christian Canada*, edited by Steven M. Studebaker, 10-29. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019. (McMaster Ministries Studies series; v. 4)

## The Decline of Religion and the Future of Christianity in Canada

MICHAEL WILKINSON AND BRADLEY TRUMAN NOEL

### INTRODUCTION

**M**ANY THEOLOGIANS, PASTORS, AND church leaders claim Canada is no longer a Christian country. While this assumes that Canada once was a Christian country, there was never a single vision of Canada as a Christian country. Rather, competing views were shaped by the “two solitudes” of English- and French-speaking Canadians, reflecting the regionalism of the country. Protestant churches, like the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada, and evangelical churches, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), were products of the time. These reflected a particular view of Canada as a Christian country, albeit a Protestant country that did not recognize the competing view of Roman Catholics. The churches were also bolstered by a growing sense of nationalism and a post-World War II economic and demographic boom that shaped an emerging Canadian identity and coincided with a growing satisfaction with family, jobs, and public life. But signs of decline were already emerging in this prosperous period that were exacerbated with the social upheaval of the 1960s. Since the 1970s, Canadian society has experienced growing levels of secularization, a social process that

leads to the decline of religious participation, authority, privatization of faith, and the growth of “no religion” as a religious identity. Immigration is one of the most important factors for explaining religious change in Canada, with shifting numbers among Roman Catholics and Protestants from Europe to other regions of the world. Immigration also has an impact on the growth of religions like Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Hinduism. The future of religion will continue to be shaped by ongoing waves of immigration and secularization. In this chapter, we review the changing religious landscape of Canada and raise questions about the implications for Christianity.

### RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN CANADA

Religious change in Canada can be organized around four key storylines. The first is the general decline of Christianity—in Roman Catholicism, but especially among the historical or mainline Protestants like the United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada. Mainline Protestantism has faced massive decline over the past several decades with no signs of recovery. Roman Catholicism has maintained its numbers largely through immigration. Although the numbers of Roman Catholics remain about the same (approximately 12 million),<sup>1</sup> the overall population in Canada has grown and so while the numbers are not declining, the growth is slowing relative to the population.

The second storyline revolves around the general vitality among evangelical Protestants.<sup>2</sup> Evangelicals have roughly grown from about 8 per cent to 10 per cent of the Canadian population. However, the vast majority of growth is due to immigration.<sup>3</sup> Evangelicalism in Canada is undergoing a de-Europeanization process as it increasingly becomes more ethnically and culturally diverse. The growth, however, is tempered with a series of challenges for evangelical Protestants including some general dissatisfaction among clergy, especially youth pastors and assistant pastors. Evangelical pastors are also aging, with the vast majority of pastors in the PAOC, for example, now over the age of 55.<sup>4</sup> This ag-

1. Statistics Canada, *2011 National Household Survey*.
2. Reimer and Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith*.
3. See Reimer and Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith*, 68–89; Guenther, “Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada,” 365–414.
4. Unpublished figures compiled by the PAOC for Wilkinson. Also see Reimer

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

ing of the clergy also corresponds with a decline in enrolment figures at evangelical colleges and seminaries, where traditionally, clergy have been educated and prepared for congregational ministry.

The third storyline concerns the impact of immigration. We have noted that immigration is a major contributor to the changes within Christianity; however, it also accounts for the growth among non-Christian religions in Canada and the increase in religious diversity.<sup>5</sup> Immigration figures for Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, for example, for about 100 years, accounted for about 4–6 per cent of Canadians. In the past two decades, the figures have grown to roughly 6–8 per cent of Canadians identifying with a non-Christian religion. This reflects the growing numbers of immigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The fourth storyline is perhaps one of the most intriguing, for it describes the rapid growth in Canada of those who do not identify with any religion. The percentage of Canadians stating they do not identify with any religion was 4 per cent in 1971, 12 per cent in 1991, 16 per cent in 2001, and 24 per cent in 2011. Religious “nones” are not necessarily atheists or irreligious; some attend church and have religious beliefs. They are mostly young males, politically liberal, and recent immigrants. Sociologists also point out that it is increasingly more acceptable socially to identify as a religious none, and they note that numbers of those identifying as a religious none may continue to increase as individuals react negatively to the growing religious right and Christian fundamentalism.<sup>6</sup>

Often, the decline of Christianity in Canada is contrasted with the meteoric rise of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century. But what do we know about the Pentecostals when compared to other trends? What impact does immigration or secularization have on Pentecostalism? What is the future of Pentecostalism in Canada? What is the Pentecostal story in relation to the general decline of Christianity in Canada? When Ellen Hebden, leader of the East End Mission, announced that she received the gift of tongues in 1906, the Pentecostal movement in Canada found a home in Toronto.<sup>7</sup> Very quickly the news began to spread that the Spirit was baptizing Methodists looking for renewal, Holiness

and Wilkinson, *A Culture of Faith*, 134–36.

5. Beaman and Beyer, *Religion and Diversity in Canada*; Beyer and Ranji, *Growing up Canadian*.

6. Thiessen, *The Meaning of Sunday*, 96–99.

7. Stewart, “A Canadian Azusa?” 17–37.

missionaries looking for power to evangelize the world, and many other radical evangelical Christians looking for signs of the coming kingdom of God. Hebden's Mission saw people from all around the world coming to discover what God was doing and in turn the Mission sent missionaries throughout the world, including the most prominent Canadian missionary, Charles Chawner, whose family made a lasting impact on the PAOC.<sup>8</sup>

By 1909 the Pentecostals were asking questions about organizing at a camp meeting in Markham, Ontario. The English Anglican minister, Alexander Boddy, found some interest among those in attendance, but Ellen Hebden made it very clear that she was not interested in any organization and believed it would be the end of the movement.<sup>9</sup> However, the irony of all new religious movements is that without some organization they will come to an end; organization, however, does temper the charisms that surround the emergence of these types of movements. Still, it would take another decade before the first Canadian Pentecostal denomination would officially receive a charter from the government to organize congregations, establish theological schools, and send missionaries.<sup>10</sup> In the meantime, the Hebden Mission would face a number of crises and eventually come to an end followed by Ellen Hebden's death in 1923.<sup>11</sup>

In 1914 the Assemblies of God, USA (AG) organized and Pentecostals in Western Canada were officially linked as a district. This relationship would continue until the Pentecostals in Eastern Canada received their charter in 1919 when East and West joined. However, it was not until 1925 that the official relationship with the AG ended and the Canadian Pentecostals came to exist under one constitution as the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.<sup>12</sup>

The year 1925 was also important in Canadian religious history, for it was the year in which the Methodists, Congregationalists, and about one third of the Presbyterians formed the United Church of Canada.<sup>13</sup>

---

8. Wilkinson, "Charles W. Chawner," 39–54. The son of Charles Chawner, C. Austin Chawner was a key missionary for the PAOC in Africa and gave leadership to the PAOC mission work.

9. Wakefield, *Alexander Boddy*.

10. Di Giacomo, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Canada," 22–23.

11. Sloos, "The Story of James and Ellen Hebden," 181–202.

12. Di Giacomo, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Canada," 23.

13. Schweitzer, *The United Church of Canada*; Flatt, *After Evangelicalism*; Airhart, *A Church with the Soul of a Nation*. Airhart and Flatt offer two very different

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

These two denominations are case studies in contrast that reveal two different paths Christians with Methodist roots would follow. One would be the path of evangelical Pentecostalism and the other a national vision for a Canadian church. Both, however, are products of the time when early-twentieth-century Canada was still a colony of Britain, allegiance to the Crown was taken for granted in English-speaking Canada, and anti-Catholic and anti-French sentiments were high, as the country was trying to find its identity. Canada was broadly a Christian country in belief and practice. Most Canadians attended church. Sabbath laws meant no shopping on Sunday. Prayer was public. Still, there was no unified vision of a Christian Canada.

With their view of Quebec and the Church shaped by Catholic renewal and the ultramontane movement of the nineteenth century, French Roman Catholics envisioned the country and its Christian identity much differently than the Protestants.<sup>14</sup> Catholic conservatism and its reaction to modernity was a stronghold in Quebec until the 1960s, when about 90 per cent of Québécois identified as being Roman Catholic and about the same percentage attended church on a weekly basis. While the Second Vatican Council contributed to a new openness in the Roman Catholic Church, it was most likely the Quiet Revolution with accelerated modernization and secularization that impacted the Catholics in Quebec.<sup>15</sup> There was also no single Protestant vision of Canada as a Christian country. The Methodists saw Canada as “God’s Dominion” where God would reign from sea to sea.<sup>16</sup> The Anglicans, on the other hand, saw themselves as *the* Church in the colony where the Church of England in Great Britain was the official state church that received certain benefits. The divide among

interpretations of the United Church. Platt explains the decline of the United Church in relation to its adoption of liberal theology in the 1960s. Airhart, on the other hand, offers a social and cultural analysis that explores how the United Church’s vision of Canada and the role of the Church changed with modernization, which had the effect of making the Church irrelevant in relation to the State. Airhart’s social and cultural analysis is more nuanced and convincing. For another argument about the role of conservative theology and liberal theology and its impact on the United Church, see Haskell et al., “Theology Matters,” 515–41. The argument by Haskell, Platt, and Burgoyne adopts a rational choice or market model theory that focuses on the problem of supply. Basically, the argument is that the demand for conservative religion is higher than that for liberal theology but the suppliers (i.e., the churches) are not able to meet the demand.

14. Choquette, *Canada’s Religions*, 173–77, 322–27.

15. Beyer, “Roman Catholicism in Contemporary Quebec,” 140–44.

16. Clifford, “His Dominion: A Vision in Crisis,” 23–42.

Protestants was notable in certain ways but especially among Protestants with differing views about Protestantism's relationship to the state.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, there was no single vision of Canada as a Christian country, but at least three distinct visions among Roman Catholics, Methodists (now the United Church of Canada), and Anglicans. Pentecostals did not share in this vision either except for some sense of being English and citizens of Great Britain. The allegiance between Church and State, while not formalized in the colony, was debated, and two world wars solidified a Canadian identity that was more nationalistic than religious.

The post-World War II era of Canada was characterized by a series of "booms" including economic and demographic change. These two variables together inflated church attendance after the war. Canadians experienced peace and a sense of comfort with good jobs and salaries that allowed for mothers to stay at home and raise children. This era provided a family and work context never experienced before, and yet it was so highly influential that many assumed the nuclear family living in the growing suburbs of Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver was the norm for centuries. This economic security is the key for understanding the growing comfort among Canadians with views of progressive growth and economic certainty. As Canadians experienced this growth, which was very much a social anomaly, church attendance was already showing signs of slowing, especially in the United Church of Canada prior to the so-called liberalization of Canadian social values in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> While the 1960s may have called into question the comfort of the 1950s, it was in no way the single cause for the problems that would face the United Church. Even the Pentecostals were yet to experience their attendance boom that occurred in the 1970s. PAOC growth, however, may have had more to do with the Charismatic renewal that was occurring among Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants who began visiting Pentecostal churches on Sunday evenings to share ecumenically the experience of seeking God for divine healing and gifts of the Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

17. Westfall, *Two Worlds*.

18. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 13. Bibby notes that the attendance figures among Mainline Protestants did not suddenly decline in the 1960s but were not growing at the same rate as the rest of the population for years previous. In other words, the decline or slowing of growth was already beginning prior to the significant losses of the 1960s.

19. Butler, "The Interface of Two Canadian Renewal Movements."

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

Canada in the 1970s does start to change socially and culturally as a result of the Royal Commission to investigate the bilingual and bicultural nature of Canada.<sup>20</sup> By the time the study was completed and the fourth volume was written, the Canadian government realized that it was not just the English and the French who built the country but many “other” Canadians with European cultural histories including the Germans, Italians, Ukrainians, Scandinavians, and the Dutch. In this social context, the Canadian government brought forward a new vision for Canada: the multicultural society. However, the multicultural society was really a pan-European one. Canada was still primarily English and French with significant numbers of “other” Europeans. In the 1970s Europe was not as challenging a place to live as it was in the 1930s and 1940s and many Europeans did not want to leave. International laws and immigration were changing, with more opportunities for people to come to Canada from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It would take another twenty years for full recognition that multicultural Canada was not simply English and Anglican or United Church or French and Roman Catholic.<sup>21</sup> Any sense of Canada being a Christian country was contested among Christians and with growing numbers of Christians arriving from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, a new understanding of Christianity was emerging largely linked with the de-Europeanization of world Christianity.<sup>22</sup> If Christianity throughout the world was not European, why were Christians in Canada so surprised to discover that African, Asian, and Latin American Christians were not like them?

## POLARIZATION OR SECULARIZATION?

How do we begin to explain and understand these changes? There are two important ideas that have occupied sociologists in Canada. The most prominent voice in Canada is Reginald Bibby, who has consistently argued that religion in Canada has changed: it is characterized by fragmentation, high levels of interest in spirituality along with low levels of participation in religious institutions, and more recently with religion

20. *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1970.*

21. Bramadat and Seljak, *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada.*

22. Wilkinson, *The Spirit said Go*; Bramadat and Seljak, *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada.*

polarized between believers and non-believers.<sup>23</sup> Bibby is shaped by the theoretical views of Rodney Stark and the religious market model most prevalent among American sociologists.<sup>24</sup> The argument is that the demand for religion remains high but the providers vary. Secularization, it is argued, is characterized by the decline of religious providers who are eventually replaced by those who do a better job at meeting religious needs. Bibby argues that in Canada, we have experienced fragmentation, which accounts for the decline of churches like the United Church and the Anglican Church, and revitalization that is not measured by church attendance but in higher levels of belief, spirituality, and overall faith. The polarization view also recognizes the growing divide between believers and unbelievers with a large so-called ambivalent middle that could go either way on the continuum.<sup>25</sup> Bibby's work has been critiqued on several levels, but particularly by those who advocate for an explanation that revolves around the long-standing view of secularization.<sup>26</sup> Advocates of secularization argue that while currently it appears that society is polarized between believers and unbelievers, the trend is moving towards "no religion" with no evidence suggesting that the ambivalent middle is seriously considering a return to church.

The main proponents of secularization in Canada include sociologists like Kurt Bowen who argued that Canada is increasingly a secular and modern society.<sup>27</sup> The implications, according to Bowen, are as follows: (a) secularization as differentiation whereby the public role of religion loses authority; (b) disengagement among Canadians from congregations and more specifically, the decline of Church-based religion; (c) decline in faith with growing numbers of people claiming to be spiritual but not religious; and (d) the privatization of faith whereby religious

23. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods; Unknown Gods; Restless Gods; Beyond the Gods and Back*. In *Fragmented Gods*, Bibby makes his best case for understanding secularizing trends but also his views about the need for churches to connect with Canadians through the offering of specialized services. In *Unknown Gods*, Bibby continues his analysis of the decline in religion but one-third of the book focuses on the churches and their problems of marketing and messaging among other issues. *Restless Gods* focuses on high levels of spirituality in the Canadian marketplace.

24. There are numerous journal articles and books, but see especially Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, for details about the theory.

25. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 34–61.

26. Thiessen and Dawson, "Is there a Renaissance of Religion in Canada?" 389–415; Wilkins-Lallamme, "Toward Religious Polarization?" 284–308.

27. Bowen, *Christians in a Secular World*.

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

commitment is increasingly insignificant. Bowen evaluated numerous studies and trends and argued that the decline of Christianity in Canada would result in the weakening of civic life precisely because Christianity played an important role in many areas, including volunteering and charitable work, education, and social services.

Joel Thiessen has also considered the question about secularization and specifically whether or not Canadians had any interest in churches.<sup>28</sup> In his study Thiessen interviewed people from three groups to ascertain just how much interest or demand for religion existed. The groups included (a) active affiliates, or those who regularly participate in church; (b) marginal affiliates, those who attend only on special occasions like Christmas and Easter; and (c) religious nones, those who do not attend or identify with any particular religion. Thiessen discovered that active affiliates are generally content with their involvement and the congregations they attend. Marginal affiliates, while enjoying the special times of the year that they attend, are not interested in higher levels of participation.<sup>29</sup> Religious nones clearly indicated that they have no interest in participating. Overall, the high demand for religion argument, according to Thiessen is weak in Canada, which is a cultural issue and not necessarily a congregational problem. There was no indication that Canadians saw the problem being primarily churches, but clearly, they did not see much need or relevance for increased levels of participation.<sup>30</sup>

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FAITH IN A POST CHRISTIAN CANADA

Having presented the background to the collapse of Christendom in Canada, in all of its various forms, we may now discuss the many issues arising out of changing societal values around faith and religion, focusing in particular on the tremendous challenge to Pentecostalism that secularization is proving to be in a post-Christendom age. We wish to offer a way forward that includes the possibilities and opportunities inherent within an increasingly secular and post-Christendom context.

28. Thiessen, *The Meaning of Sunday*.

29. Also see Thiessen, "Marginal Religious Affiliates in Canada," 69–90.

30. This conclusion challenges the view of Bibby (e.g., *Unknown Gods*), that one of the primary problems is with the churches, and not culture, and if they would attend to issues like marketing and managing (i.e., be more relevant) then Canadians would return.

CHRIST AND CULTURE: NIEBUHR'S FIVE TYPES

The classic book around which discussion on religion and culture revolves is *Christ and Culture*, published in 1951 by H. Richard Niebuhr.<sup>31</sup> Written more than 60 years ago, Niebuhr offered five perspectives on Christian responses to contemporary culture in the middle of the last century. Beginning with definitions of Christ (acknowledging that our descriptions will always be incomplete) and culture ("the total process of human activity")<sup>32</sup> Niebuhr sought to summarize the possible relationships between Christianity and modern Western culture.

The first, termed *Christ Against Culture*, emphasized the opposition between Christ and culture. "Whatever may be the customs of the society in which the Christian lives, and whatever the human achievement it conserves, Christ is seen as opposed to them, so that he confronts men with the challenge of an 'either-or' decision."<sup>33</sup> This view uncompromisingly affirmed the Lordship of Christ and his authority over the Christian, and rejected absolutely any claims of loyalty by contemporary culture. For one to be completely loyal to Christ, one draws a clear line of separation from the world. On the opposite end of the spectrum, with option two, *The Christ of Culture*, proponents sought to ". . . hail Jesus as the Messiah of their society, the fulfiller of its hopes and aspirations, the perfecter of its true faith, the source of its holiest spirit."<sup>34</sup> There is no inherent tension between the Church and contemporary culture, the social laws and the gospel, or the workings of divine grace and human effort. Culture is interpreted through an understanding of Christ, and his teachings and actions which were believed to mirror the broader civilization.

Third, Niebuhr noted that the vast majority of Christianity refused to side with the "anti-cultural radicals" or the "accommodators," but sought a different approach, termed *Christ Above Culture*. In this view, the tension is not between Christ and culture, but between God and humanity. As God stands above culture, it is neither inherently good nor evil, but as a human sphere may exhibit both extremes. As humanity functioned in the social realm it also did so in the cultural realm, and thus culture

31. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*. For a helpful summary, see Kumar, "Christ and Culture' by Richard Niebuhr: Book Summary." Also, Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 9–65.

32. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32.

33. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 40.

34. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 83.

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

was a tool in the hand of God. D. A. Carson noted, “Synthesists seek a ‘both-and’ solution. They maintain the gap between Christ and culture that the cultural Christian never takes seriously and that the radical does not even try to breach—yet they insist that Christ is as sovereign over the culture as over the church.”<sup>35</sup>

Similar to this is the *Christ and Culture in Paradox* type, which sought to clarify that viewing Christ as above culture may be desirable, but is ultimately very challenging due to the sin within culture. Like the “Christ Against Culture” position, these dualists see a clear distinction between Christ and sinful humanity, but in contrast place themselves fully in the sinful category with the rest of humanity who do not follow Christ. Finally, Niebuhr posited the *Christ as the Transformer of Culture* position. Those who hold this position “hold fast to the radical distinction between God’s work in Christ and man’s work on culture” but reject the road of isolationism from culture that has plagued exclusivist Christianity. While not seeking to modify Christ’s judgment of sin as found in culture, they also believed that “culture is under God’s sovereign rule, and that the Christian must carry on cultural work in obedience to the Lord.” We may distinguish the approach of the “conversionists” from their “dualist” compatriots by their more “positive and helpful attitude toward culture.”<sup>36</sup> Although Niebuhr did not embrace either of his five types explicitly, only the last option of the five received no negative criticism whatsoever; many scholars have interpreted this as his tacit approval.<sup>37</sup>

Classical Pentecostalism’s emphasis on “separation” from the world as evidence of commitment to Christ, clearly places it in Niebuhr’s first category, *Christ Against Culture*. Culture and its institutions were inherently evil, as a part of a fallen, sinful world. The Christian task was to introduce humanity to Christ, so others might also enjoy similar separation from the culture and its negative influence. This understanding, of course, does not fit well with Christ’s description of believers as “*in*, but not *of*, the world” (a phrase adapted from John 17:14–15). Further, this separation from culture, at least on the surface, was far easier in a society structured by Christendom. Pentecostals could assume a posture of antagonism vis-à-vis culture, and feel secure in their “withdrawal” from the world, because Christendom supported all of the major societal

35. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 21.

36. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 191.

37. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 29.

structures around them. Pentecostalism could afford the luxury of posturing against “worldly endeavours” because many of these were, in the broad strokes at least, supported by the Canadian Christendom narrative.

Further, and less pejoratively, Pentecostals were loath to embrace any task that detracted them from their core focus of winning souls before the soon return of Christ. Kent Duncan notes that J. Roswell Flower, first General Secretary of the Assemblies of God (USA), declared in 1920 that institutional ventures (such as orphanages and schools) were “clearly out of bounds for Pentecostal missionaries serving in ‘the last days.’” Pentecostal missionaries, he wrote, “cannot follow the methods laid down by those who have gone before them, neither can they bend their energies in building up charitable institutions, hospitals and schools as do the denominational societies. The Pentecostal commission is to witness, *witness*, WITNESS. . . . It is so easy to be turned aside to do work which is very good in itself, but which is short of the Pentecostal standard. Our missionaries are in danger of this.”<sup>38</sup> Though this view did not prevail over the course of the decades that followed, it still appeared from time to time as Pentecostals grappled with the balance between the proclamation of the gospel and the desire to meet the real needs of hunger, housing, and medicine.

With the support of Christendom, early Pentecostals were therefore able to more easily maintain a cultural stance of separation. But as we have observed, culture and society have changed, raising an important question about the relationship between Pentecostalism and culture in Canada. Niebuhr’s work is instructive even with its limitations. We recognize that Niebuhr’s ideas reflect a Christendom assumption, and its perspective of transformation. Niebuhr did not imagine the end of Christendom as we now understand it. As Craig Carter notes, “. . . once one rejects the Christendom assumptions behind Niebuhr’s book, the whole typology becomes suspect. . . . It is taken for granted by Niebuhr that, since Western culture is Christian, Christians therefore have a responsibility for culture . . . Christendom is presupposed, and the problem is how to relate Christ to it.”<sup>39</sup> If this understanding is accurate, what is the value in Niebuhr’s typology for a Canadian post-Christendom context?

38. Flower, “Pentecostal Commission,” 12. Quoted in Duncan, “Emerging Engagement.”

39. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture*, 15, 17. Carter endeavours to engage Niebuhr’s work via a post-Christendom perspective, and offers a new typology of understanding Christ and culture.

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

Without entangling ourselves in substantial debate relative to the details of Niebuhr's work, such as his particular understanding of "culture" or the placing of certain historical figures into specific categories of his five types, we may nonetheless observe value in his observations. Though the concerns raised by Carter and others have merit, the five types suggested by Niebuhr serve our purposes well as they raise important questions for how Pentecostals may consider engaging culture, even if culture is defined differently than Niebuhr suggested. We recognize that Christ did not come to establish a Canadian Christendom, but rather the kingdom of God. In this sense, we do not speak of "culture" as in any way suggesting "Christian culture." Rather, when speaking of culture we wish to consider simply how Christians can engage Canadians with the Good News of Christ through the everyday interactions of social life. The goal of the Incarnation was never to establish Christian governments or an official Christian society, but to establish God's kingdom in the lives of individuals called into community with one another. With that perspective, we may applaud the end of Christendom in the sense that it was never God's intention. Further we may recognize that the fight to preserve it has in many senses distracted Christians from the task originally given—announcing the good news of the kingdom of God—and not preserving the vestiges of a "Christian era" now past. As Stuart Murray observes, "The end of Christendom means, in the long run, *imposing Christianity does not work*; only if we celebrate this and move beyond dismissing Christendom to a more repentant response will we be truly free to develop a different strategy."<sup>40</sup>

## THE CHALLENGE OF CHRIST AND CANADIAN CULTURE

Once the Church is able to embrace the demise of the Christendom narrative and structure, sober thought will be required to discern how it might shift its view of mission. Further, the Church must recognize the changes in the Canadian cultural milieu occurring as the demise of Christendom and its modern assumptions. As noted elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> a post-Christendom Canadian culture also exhibits signs of postmodernity. Shane Simms notes:

40. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 208.

41. Noel, *Pentecostalism, Secularism, and Post-Christendom*, 68–82. Italics in the original.

WILKINSON AND NOEL *The Decline of Religion*

Penetrating a pagan or saturated culture that thinks in terms of post-modernity is one of the biggest challenges the church has ever faced in its history. Even though the postmodern milieu is potentially open to the narrative of God's Kingdom, it does not largely accept the role of the church in that narrative. The church needs to discover ways to be about the work of the Kingdom of God, not to proclaim itself as superintending the work of the Kingdom of God. *This change in ecclesiastical mindset may pose a more significant challenge than actually reaching a postmodern generation with the message of Christ.*<sup>42</sup>

Lesslie Newbigin argues that a Christian response to secularization must involve more than simply affirming the way of salvation for the individual. Rather, the central call and life of the Church must be to call all people into discipleship. Acknowledging Christ's sovereignty over the personal and domestic issues of life, and the life of the Church, also implies acknowledging the Lordship of Christ over the public life of society. Believers cannot simply seek to follow Christ in their personal lives without also challenging the assumptions that govern the worlds of economics, politics, education, government, and culture. He observes:

The Church can never settle down to being a voluntary society concerned merely with private and domestic affairs. It is bound to challenge in the name of the one Lord all the powers, ideologies, myths, assumptions, and worldviews which do not acknowledge him as Lord. If that involves conflict, trouble, and rejection, then we have the example of Jesus before us and his reminder that a servant is not greater than his master.<sup>43</sup>

REMAIN ORTHODOX: RESIST ASSIMILATION  
AND ISOLATIONISM

In the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, neither the conservative nor the liberal responses to the Enlightenment helped the cause of Christianity. "Conservatives, rejecting scientific explanations and trying to maintain a stranglehold on debate, weakened its appeal by associating Christianity with obscurantism and blinkered traditionalism. Liberals, attempting to reconfigure Christianity to fit comfortably into the culture

42. Simms, "Moving Forward in Mission," 54-55. Emphasis added.

43. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 220-21.

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

of scientific rationalism, produced an anemic religion that attracted little commitment and decreasing numbers.”<sup>44</sup> Some groups in the twentieth century sought to fortify their position in Christendom by withdrawing into the church walls, avoiding contact with culture. In a culture that has moved beyond bounded set thinking, and desires to *belong* before it will *believe*, this approach simply will not work.

Other Christian groups sought to navigate the changes in culture by seeking to eradicate any position or doctrine offensive to Enlightenment thinking and its modern assumptions. Belief in the Scriptures as authoritative, the divinity of Christ, and any talk of Christ’s atoning blood shed for “sinners,” were among the first casualties. While these attempts to placate the supposed demands of a secular culture and bridge the gap between the message of Christ and the notions acceptable to the modern, educated person, seemed prudent, in reality the strategy had the opposite effect.

The correct approach is to take the middle of these two extremes: neither *Christ Against Culture* nor the *Christ of Culture* approaches will serve the church well in a post-Christendom society. Rather, churches would do well to hold to orthodoxy while engaging culture. Maintaining congregational vitality in a sea of secularizing trends is a challenge. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark note, “People tend to value religion according to how much it costs . . . because ‘reasonable’ and ‘sociable’ religion costs little, it is not valued greatly.”<sup>45</sup> Bibby agrees, stating “In short, the more mainline a denomination becomes, the lower the value of belonging to it, resulting eventually in widespread defection.”<sup>46</sup>

Newbigin observes,

The facts are well known. The strongly conservative and evangelical elements in the Protestant church have undergone a remarkable renaissance, while the churches which have tried to adjust their beliefs and practices to the temper of modernity are in decline . . . It would seem to be proved beyond doubt that human beings cannot live in the rarefied atmosphere of pure rationality as the post-Enlightenment world has understood rationality. There are needs of the human spirit which simply must be met. It seems that those religious bodies which have tried to accommodate as much as possible of the rationalism of

44. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 181.

45. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 238–50.

46. Bibby, *Beyond the Gods and Back*, 39.

the Enlightenment are those which are in decline, and that those which have maintained a strong emphasis on the supernatural dimensions of religions have flourished.<sup>47</sup>

The reality is, those who value Christianity in Canada are surrounded by those who do not. Post-Christendom churches must focus on practicing and living the culture of the kingdom of God rather than defining and patrolling the boundaries of Canadian culture. Congregations must be places where those exploring faith and searching for authentic relationships are welcomed; cultures of faith that refrain from quick judgment, where doubts, questions, criticism, and fears are embraced. “They will also need to embody core values that are attractive, clear, demanding, and deeply owned. The term ‘centred set’ (rather than ‘bounded set’) is now popular to describe communities that welcome people to ‘belong before they believe’ but it is not always clear that the ‘centred set’ has a centre!”<sup>48</sup> We can hold strong to Christ as the centre while still ensuring that the margins are flexible and open.

Stuart Murray makes the excellent point that it is the surviving interest in the person of Jesus, exhibited in contemporary culture by individuals who have long given up on the church—and even in the Jesus portrayed by Christendom—that offers the greatest asset to the post-Christendom church. “In a society that is heartily and understandably sick of institutional Christianity, Jesus still commands interest and respect. However garbled his teaching may have become, and however little his story is known, many people suspect Jesus is good news, despite the shortcomings they see in our churches and the distaste for which they regard our evangelistic activities.”<sup>49</sup> We must rediscover how to tell the story of Jesus, recognizing that many previous attempts by a Canadian church immersed in Christendom have fallen short. We cannot reduce Jesus to simple statements of dogmatism, a feel-good message to assuage guilt, or a safe “establishment Jesus” who came to make believers feel comfortable and secure. Rather, “we must present Jesus as (among much else) friend of sinners, good news to the poor, defender of the powerless, reconciler of communities, pioneer of a new age, freedom fighter, breaker

47. Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 212–13. This is the key point of Reeves, *The Empty Church*.

48. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 310. Paul Hiebert first used these terms in “Conversion, Culture and Cognitive Categories,” 24–29. Also see Hiebert, “Sets and Structure,” 217–27.

49. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 316.

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

of chains, liberator and peacemaker, the one who unmask systems of oppression, identifies with the vulnerable and brings hope.”<sup>50</sup>

### CONCLUSION: POST CHRISTENDOM NEED NOT MEAN POST CHRISTIAN

Some may fear that celebrating or even accepting the demise of Christendom automatically entails a tacit acknowledgment that we must *de facto* enter a post-Christian era also. In fact, the opposite may well be the case. The end of Christendom will in reality place the church in a context where the gospel—without the trappings of institutional Christianity—may once again be clearly heard. John Webster Grant, in *The Church in the Canadian Era*, wrote, “The end of Christendom does not imply the end of Christianity or necessarily even any diminution of the influence of the church on its members or on society . . . A period of exile to the periphery of power might well release Christian energies that have been smothered for centuries.”<sup>51</sup>

We might argue that while the Church relied on the position and influence afforded by the overarching narrative of Christendom, she was less creative than might otherwise have been the case. Why seek earnestly for the creative empowerment of the Holy Spirit to engage culture, when one could count on Government to enact the laws needed to preserve the semblance of a Christian nation? With the structure of Christendom collapsing, the Church will be forced to once again rely upon the Spirit’s guidance and power.

Stuart Murray declares:

But post-Christendom need not mean post-Christian. The near future will be difficult for Christians in a society that has rejected institutional Christianity and is familiar enough with the Christian story not to want to hear it again. Inherited assumptions and Christendom models will not help us respond creatively to the challenges ahead. But perhaps—if we have the courage to face into this future rather than hankering after a fading past, if we resist short-term strategies and pre-packaged answers, if we learn to be cross-cultural missionaries in our own society, and if we can negotiate the next forty years—whatever culture emerges from the ruins of Christendom might offer

50. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 316–17.

51. Grant, *The Church in the Canadian Era*, 216–17.

tremendous opportunities for telling and living out the Christian story in a society where this is largely unknown. Whether post-Christendom is post-Christian will depend on whether we can re-imagine Christianity in a world we no longer control. Christendom is dying, but a new and dynamic Christianity could rise from its ashes.<sup>52</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Airhart, Phyllis D. *A Church with the Soul of a Nation: Making and Remaking the United Church of Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014.
- Beaman, Lori, and Peter Beyer, eds. *Religion and Diversity in Canada*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Beyer, Peter. "Roman Catholicism in Contemporary Quebec: The Ghosts of Religion Past?" In *The Sociology of Religion: A Canadian Focus*, edited by W. E. Hewitt, 133–56. Toronto: Butterworths, 1993.
- Beyer, Peter, and Rubina Ramji, eds. *Growing up Canadian: Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists*. McGill-Queen's Studies in Ethnic History Series 2.32. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.
- Bibby, Reginald W. *Beyond the Gods and Back: Religion's Demise and Rise and Why It Matters*. Lethbridge, AB: Project Canada, 2011.
- . *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada*. Toronto: Irwin, 1987.
- . *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1993.
- . *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion*. Toronto: Stoddart, 2002.
- Bowen, Kurt. *Christians in a Secular World: The Canadian Experience*. McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion Series 2.27. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.
- Bramadat, Paul, and David Seljak, eds. *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*. Toronto: Pearson, 2005.
- . *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
- Butler, Ewen H. "The Interface of Two Canadian Renewal Movements: Classical Pentecostalism in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada and the Charismatic Movement, 1960–1985." PhD diss., Regent University, 2015.
- Carson, D. A. *Christ and Culture Revisited*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.
- Choquette, Robert. *Canada's Religions*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004.
- Clifford, N. Keith. "His Dominion: A Vision in Crisis." In *Religion and Culture in Canada*, edited by Peter Slater, 23–42. Waterloo: CCSR, 1977.
- Di Giacomo, Michael. "Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in Canada: Its Origins, Development, and Distinct Culture." In *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation*, edited by Michael Wilkinson, 15–38. McGill-Queen's Studies in

52. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 8.

## PENTECOSTAL PREACHING AND MINISTRY

- the History of Religion Series 2.49. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.
- Duncan, Kent. "Emerging Engagement: The Growing Social Conscience of Pentecostalism." *Enrichment Journal* [n.d.], [http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201\\_EJO\\_Emerg\\_Engag.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.ag.org/201201/201201_EJO_Emerg_Engag.cfm).
- Flatt, Kevin. *After Evangelicalism: The Sixties and the United Church of Canada*. McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion Series 2.64. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.
- Grant, John Webster. *The Church in the Canadian Era*. 3rd ed. Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998.
- Guenther, Bruce L. "Ethnicity and Evangelical Protestants in Canada." In *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada*, edited by Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, 365-414. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
- Haskell, D. M., et al. "Theology Matters: Comparing the Traits of Growing and Declining Mainline Protestant Church Attendees and Clergy." *Review of Religious Research* 58 (2016) 515-41.
- Hiebert, Paul. "Conversion, Culture and Cognitive Categories." *Gospel in Context* 1.4 (1978) 24-29.
- . "Sets and Structures: A Study in Church Patterns." In *New Horizons in World Missions: Evangelicals and the Christian Mission in the 1980s*, edited by David Hesselgrave, 217-27. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979.
- Kumar, Nigel Ajay. "Christ and Culture' by Richard Niebuhr: Book Summary." *Regeneration: A Tryst with (Indian) Theology*, January 17, 2008, <https://regenerationayk.wordpress.com/2008/01/17/christ-and-culture-by-richard-niebuhr-book-summary/>.
- Leng, Felicity. *Consecrated Spirits*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2011.
- Murray, Stuart. *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper, 1951.
- Noel, Bradley Truman. *Pentecostalism, Secularism, and Post-Christendom*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015.
- Reeves, Thomas C. *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity*. New York: The Free Press, 1996.
- Reimer, Sam, and Michael Wilkinson. *A Culture of Faith: Evangelical Congregations in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.
- Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Book IV: The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups*. Ottawa: Minister of Supplies and Services, 1970.
- Schweitzer, Don, ed. *The United Church of Canada: A History*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011.
- Simms, Shane A. "Moving Forward in Mission: Introducing Missional Life to a Rural Newfoundland and Labrador Pentecostal Church through Shared Narratives and Missional Experiments." DMin diss., Tyndale Seminary, 2011.
- Sloos, William. "The Story of James and Ellen Hebden: The First Family of Pentecost in Canada." *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 32 (2010) 181-202.

WILKINSON AND NOEL *The Decline of Religion*

- Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.
- Statistics Canada. *2011 National Household Survey*. Catalogue 99-004-XWE. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2011.
- Stewart, Adam. "A Canadian Azusa? The Implications of the Hebden Mission for Pentecostal Historiography." In *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement*, edited by Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, 17-37. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Thiessen, Joel. "Marginal Religious Affiliates in Canada: Little Reason to Expect Increased Church Involvement." *Canadian Review of Sociology* 49 (2012) 69-90.
- . *The Meaning of Sunday: The Practice of Belief in a Secular Age*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.
- Thiessen, Joel, and Lorne L. Dawson. "Is there a Renaissance of Religion in Canada? A Critical Look at Bibby and Beyond." *Studies in Religion* 37 (2008) 389-415.
- Wakefield, Gavin. *Alexander Body: Pentecostal Anglican Pioneer*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007.
- Westfall, William. *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario*. McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion Series 1.02. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988.
- Wilkins-Laflamme, Sarah. "Toward Religious Polarization? Time Effects on Religious Commitment in US, UK, and Canadian Religions." *Sociology of Religion* 75 (2014) 284-308.
- Wilkinson, Michael. *The Spirit said Go: Pentecostal Immigrants in Canada*. New York: Peter Lang, 2006.
- . "Charles W. Chawner and the Missionary Impulse of the Hebden Mission." In *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement*, edited by Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, 39-54. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
- Wilkinson, Michael, ed. *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation*. McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion Series 2.49. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.