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Pentecostalism, Secularism, and Post Christendom

Bradley Truman Noel

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PENTECOSTALISM, SECULARISM, AND POST CHRISTENDOM

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This work is dedicated to my students,
past and present,
in the Pentecostal Studies program at
Tyndale University College.

There are few rewards greater than seeing students
become friends . . .
and having the pleasure of observing these friends
contribute to the Kingdom of God
so capably and passionately.

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Introduction

MUCH LIKE THE CHURCH of the first century, the church in North America is now struggling to find its place in society. The writers of the New Testament often admonished those to whom they wrote about the importance of influencing, rather than being influenced by culture; the North American church finds itself struggling with similar issues. Unlike the early church, however, which faced a culture that never was Christian (in any sense) to begin with, the North American church of the twenty-first century must learn to find its place in a culture that, just a few decades ago, seemingly embraced the Christian worldview—but does so no longer. In recent times the church in Western Europe and her offspring elsewhere in the United States, Canada and Australia have faced an unprecedented decline in ecclesial participation and cultural influence; as I will demonstrate below, this has often happened more quickly than church leaders had previously imagined possible.¹

While all denominational groups have faced similar challenges negotiating the new religious context, attempts to mitigate the decline have varied widely. Several mainline denominations, for example, have focused on bridging the widening gap between church and culture in part by adjusting doctrine and practice to better suit prevailing attitudes in society. Others, largely from more fundamentalist or holiness backgrounds, have been tempted to retreat within the four walls of the church, as they await the Lord's return and subsequent removal of the saints from this "world of sin." As members of the latter group, Pentecostals have likewise grappled with an appropriate response to a culture that in many ways scarcely resembles

1. It is important to note that the trend towards post-Christendom does not affect all of the world's Christians, particularly those in Africa, Asia, Latin America. While Christians in the United States have long hoped in American "exceptionalism," we may observe though America may be a few decades behind in this trajectory, cracks in American Christendom are now openly visible. See Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 15.

the more “Christian” culture that existed in 1906—the year Pentecostalism exploded upon the religious world of North America.

The challenge is particularly significant at this stage in Canadian Pentecostal history, for as we shall observe, the religious scene in Canada is replete with examples of denominations that, though robust as recently as 1960, have found their membership plummeting, some by over 50 percent. Pentecostals, long known for their incredible growth, have also watched their increase slow and, in some cases, join the others in a downward slide. In the coming chapters I will argue that failure to address the considerable changes in Canadian culture in the last fifty years will spell disaster for Pentecostalism in Canada. Further, with the United States facing its own version of the post-Christendom narrative sooner rather than later, American Christians may be able to make the adjustments necessary to embrace the post-Christendom context, and do so before facing the significant numerical decline experienced by the Church in Canada and Europe. As such, the Canadian experience is presented herein as a harbinger of the wider cultural and religious shifts occurring in North America as a whole.

Post Christendom?

At issue in this study is whether Canada is in fact becoming a society that in the last century has shifted from being largely beholden to Christendom to a post-Christendom posture that is increasingly secular in orientation. We are thinking here of the shift in attitudes and practice among the Canadian populace that just a few decades ago reported high percentages of weekly church attendance and saw a large majority self-identify as Christian. As chapter 3 will demonstrate, both of these markers have demonstrated significant decline in the last half-century. With the American statistics closely following those of Canada, albeit belatedly, lessons learned from the Canadian experience may well be readily applicable to our southern neighbours. To assist with our exploration of this trend and our discussion of post-Christendom later in chapter 3, we will first pause and explore what a “Christian country” might look like in the context of Canadian society. John H. Redekop² helpfully summarizes the options:

1. *A Christian country is one in which there is an official or unofficial fusion of church and state.* This was a common situation in medieval Europe; John Calvin established just such a situation in Geneva in the 1530s.
2. Redekop, “Is Canada Becoming a Post-Christian Country?” The five definitions come from this helpful source. Redekop is a retired professor of political science, who has taught at both secular and Christian universities in Canada.

In our day, this fusion of political and religious (Muslim) institutions may be found in some Arab countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, and when considering Christianity, the United Kingdom and many European countries are examples.

2. A Christian country is one in which Christianity is the dominant faith and the government, while separated from the religious structures, ensures that the values of the dominant Christian religion are upheld, at times with coercive force. We may note examples of this in early French Canada, and most of Roman Catholic Latin America until the 1960s.
3. A Christian country is one in which Christianity is the dominant religion and its values are reflected in the laws of the land but the government does not use coercive power to assist religious organizations. Some laws, such as the prohibition against Sunday shopping, and the use of the Bible in courts, may incorporate Christian values. Government does not promote Christian values but typically grants Christian groups the freedom to do so. The tradition in Canada of the Gideons distributing New Testaments to grade five students is emblematic of this. This definition reflects the situation in Canada from about 1840 until the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted in 1982, elevating minority and individual rights, which Redekop believes significantly changed the Canadian landscape and ushered in further examples of secularism.
4. A Christian country is one in which Christianity is the dominant religion but while some government policies may still incorporate certain religious values, these are generally described by governments, the media, and educators in secular terms. The basic government stance is that no religion is to be given preferred treatment for the government itself is secular by definition. To demonstrate that they are not in any way pro-Christian, governments, media, and educators sometimes give preferred treatment to minority, non-Christian religions. Redekop believes this was the case in Canada from about 1982 until about 2000. While we may dispute the dates used to provide a timeframe, the outcomes described have been observed in Canadian political and religious life.³

3. I think for example of the recent decision by a school within the Toronto District School Board to provide prayer space for Muslim students, permitting the restrictions that girls pray behind the boys who occupy space at the front, while menstruating girls are not allowed to pray at all. Urback, "Girls should not be segregated."

5. *A Christian country is one in which Christianity, although mostly in a nominal form, is still the dominant religion, and its principles and ethos still impact society. Governments, courts, media, and the schools, however, at all levels strive to remove from the public institutions of society anything that is obviously Christian, for example, Christian celebrations of Christmas and Easter. Religion, especially Christianity, is relegated to the margins as a purely private matter. This has been the situation in Canada since about 2000, though the seeds of this may be observed in Canadian culture from the 1980s; many battles are currently underway in the United States on this front. According to this criterion, a country is Christian only because most of its people identify with that faith, whether seriously or only superficially, not because Christian values and practices enjoy public support or endorsement.*

Though there are other ways of approaching this classification, I believe that Redekop's categories bring clarity to the discussion without binding us to his method of delineation. His approach assists us as we seek to understand the historical journey Canada has traversed in terms of Christianity. Though scholars may wish to challenge minor details used to describe each category, or perhaps the specific years assigned to each period, there is nearly unanimous consensus based on statistical evidence alone that Canada has experienced profound movement as a nation towards post-Christendom in the last half-century. In chapter 3 I will demonstrate that in the last fifty years Canada has transitioned in its relationship with Christianity from Definition 3, through Definition 4, to Definition 5. As such, it is incumbent upon Pentecostals to evaluate both their understanding of new cultural realities, and their efforts to evangelize successive generations of Canadians.

Purpose, Rationale, Methods, and Limitations

The goal of this work is to serve as a primer for pastors and other Pentecostal leaders as they endeavour to understand trends towards secularism and post-Christendom, and from that vantage point create new ways of engaging North American culture. I strive therefore to provide a study of both Pentecostalism and current cultural trends. From this I will offer a number of suggestions via eight themes that I believe Pentecostals must consider on a going forward basis. It is my hope that this study will become a stimulus both for discussion and action. A great deal has been written on the shift to a post-Christian culture in Western society. Many volumes have also been written on the rise of Pentecostalism from a small revival in

1906, to the worldwide movement of 600 million it is today. Little, however, has been written on the intersection of the two. This work seeks to address that lacuna, and will explore Canadian Pentecostalism's efforts to come to terms with changing cultural realities, and in so doing, provide timely commentary on the situation in the United States. We will accomplish this largely through a literature review from which we will explore the changes occurring in Canadian society as they impact religious groups, and thus situate Pentecostalism within these transitions. We will also gain a sense of who Pentecostals are, what they believe, and how their orthodoxy may be observed in their practice.

To further clarify how Pentecostals self-identify, we will avail of research completed in a smaller Pentecostal denomination, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador (PAONL). Via a survey given out to the entire membership of this classical Pentecostal denomination in Canada's most easterly province, we will observe how these classical Pentecostals view themselves, both in their efforts to evangelize and their sense of personal and corporate identity. From this, we may draw conclusions regarding classical Pentecostalism in Canada as a whole.

The limitations of this study arise first from our inability to speak as precisely as we might wish. Tracking cultural changes in a society relative to its attitudes towards religion and morality, for example, is not an exact science, despite the abundance of surveys and statistics. While we may note, for example, that far fewer Canadians or Americans attend Sunday worship regularly than did 50 years ago, or that many more individuals of both countries now approve of gay marriage than was the case in the mid-20th century, can we say with certainty that this represents the secularizing of society? Though this work will argue in the affirmative, the topic is still open for debate. Further, Pentecostalism as a whole is now variegated to the point that an all-encompassing synopsis of classical Pentecostalism is nearly impossible. While we may tease out commonalities in the worldwide movement, the geographical differences and variation of traditions alone make absolute conclusions unreliable. For this study therefore, we will focus on Pentecostalism in North America, with particular emphasis on the Canadian experience.

Additionally, as our objectives are broad, our path will necessarily traverse considerable ground. We must explore Pentecostalism, in terms of its history, theology, and global growth before turning to questions of identity. Significant attention must be given to questions of secularism, postmodernism, and post-Christendom in Canada, via both statistical and anecdotal evidence. To put "a face in the window" as it were, we will devote a chapter to understanding the struggle of one small Pentecostal denomination to

find its place within current Canadian religious culture while acknowledging its own recent decline. Finally, as there is no singular solution to the present challenges facing Pentecostalism amidst increasing secularism, we offer a series of themes, or foci, that Pentecostals must soberly visit. Though these may appear varied, and perhaps unconnected, each speaks to a facet of the ongoing struggle Pentecostals face as they endeavour to relate to culture.

Finally, limitations of space dictate that we are not able to explore all of Western Pentecostalism, let alone the global reach of the Pentecostal movement. This study will focus largely on Canadian Pentecostalism, as I believe that on the continuum of change as per post-Christendom and secularism, it finds itself midway between Western Europe (twenty years further ahead in this process) and the United States (twenty years behind.)

Definition of Terms

Before pressing further, it is wise to pause and define the terms we will use in this study. Though each will be fully unpacked in turn, a framework for understanding the core concepts contained herein is beneficial.

“*Modernity* is characterized by the triumph of Enlightenment, exaltation of rights of humans and the supremacy of reason. Modernism assumed that human reason was the only reliable way of making sense of the universe. Anything that could not be understood in scientific terms was either not true or not worth knowing.”⁴ At its essence, *Postmodernism*⁵ is a worldview consisting of anti-foundationalism⁶, disbelief in pure objectivity, and deconstruction of “certain” knowledge, primarily characterized by a reaction to the prevailing worldview of Modernism. *Relativism* is the general philosophical belief that no absolutes exist. In terms of ethics, it indicates that no criteria for ethical judgment can be claimed and that morality varies

4. Jaichandran and Madhav, “Pentecostal Spirituality in a Postmodern World,” 44-45.

5. For a sample of sources attempting to define postmodernity, see Finger, “Modernity, Postmodernity,” 353-68; Gitlin, “The Postmodern Predicament”; Percepe, “The Unbearable Lightness of Being Postmodern”; Van Gelder, “Postmodernism as an Emerging Worldview,” 412-17.

6. *Foundationalism* may be defined as “Philosophical or theological approaches affirming specific truths as bases and criteria for all other truths.” See McKim, *Westminster Dictionary*, 108. For the Christian, the belief in the God who created humanity and the universe, and who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and through his Word, is foundational.

with the culture. Closely related is *Pluralism*, which may be understood as the outworking in society of relativistic moral values.⁷

On the church front, we will explore several contemporary approaches. Though individuals involved with the *Emergent/Emerging* church are often loath to self-define, Missiologist Ed Stetzer has helpfully summarized three streams. *Relevants* describe those leaders who are trying to contextualize their worship, music, and outreach to emerging culture. They are often deeply committed to biblical preaching and other values common to conservative evangelical churches and are simply trying to communicate the message of Christ in a manner that will connect with their generation. *Reconstructionists* believe that the current form of church is increasingly irrelevant even while often holding to an orthodox view of Scripture and theology. They are not about tweaking what exists in terms of buildings, budgets or programs—all are expendable. Finally, *Revisionists* are questioning and are in many cases redefining all aspects of church life, including doctrine long held to be orthodox. In addition to sweeping changes to form, the nature of the Gospel itself is being debated.⁸

As will be explored in chapter 7, many other contemporary writers on the Christian church are heavily into the *Missional* conversation. At its core “missional” simply means an approach to evangelism and discipleship whereby one seeks to partner with God who is already at work in the community, as opposed to waiting for the lost to “come to church” and, therein, find salvation. Though largely promoted and championed by seasoned leaders, the missional approach has been welcomed eagerly by younger believers, many of whom have a more natural affinity for community involvement than do their elders.

When we speak of *post-denominationalism*, we describe a context where “it is far less important whether you are Methodist or Baptist, or even Catholic, than where you fall along the continuum of fundamentalist to evangelical to progressive (liberal) to secular or unaligned.”⁹ Finally, *post-Christian* is a term first used by Mary Daly in her 1973 book, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women’s Liberation*. In general, it may be understood as an epoch where “history has ended, there is no form of the old belief in progress or linear eschatological time, and where Christian stories have lost their strength, and the institutions continue to evaporate in crisis, not knowing how to respond . . .” A ‘post-Christian culture’ may involve not only fragmentation of a previous Christian coherence but may

7. *Ibid.*, 211, 235.

8. Stetzer, “First-Person.”

9. Thistlethwaite, “The U.S. Is Post-Denominational.”

be characterized by the presence of Christian symbols that have lost any reference to their original meaning.¹⁰ Stuart Murray Williams writes, “*Post-Christendom* is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.”¹¹

As this study focuses in particular upon Pentecostalism, a few words about this group will conclude this section. By *Global Pentecostalism*, we mean the worldwide movement of both Pentecostal and Charismatic groups. The modern Pentecostal movement is now just over 100 years old, and continues to see impressive growth worldwide. Allan Anderson counts the total number of Pentecostals/Charismatic in the year 2014 as just over 631 million, some 108 years after the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement in 1906. 800 million Pentecostal/ Charismatic believers worldwide are projected by the year 2025.¹²

When we talk of *Pentecostals*, we are referring specifically to *Classical Pentecostals*. Classical Pentecostals are those that trace their roots to the turn of the century, and the Azusa Street revival. “Classical” was added in about 1970 to distinguish Classical Pentecostals from *Charismatics*. Essentially, Pentecostals believe that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the 120 at Pentecost as is recorded in Acts 2 should be normative for all Christians. As those in the Upper Room were already believers, according to Pentecostals, Spirit Baptism thus occurred as a second act of grace, following salvation; this is the Pentecostal doctrine of *Subsequence*. Further, most Pentecostals strongly hold to belief in *Initial Evidence*; the key proof associated with this Spirit-baptism is *glossolalia*, as it was in Acts.¹³ For the purposes of this study, *Charismatics* are those who have received the Pentecostal experience of Spirit-baptism, usually with *glossolalia*, but have typically remained in one of the mainline Protestant denominations, or Roman Catholicism.¹⁴ *Charismatic* refers to “. . . all manifestations of Pentecostal-type Christianity that in some way differ from classical Pentecostalism in affiliation and/or doctrine.”¹⁵ Not all of the charismatics remained in traditional denomi-

10. “Post Christian Society: What Is Meant by the Term “Post-Christian?”

11. Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 19.

12. Anderson, “Transformation of World Christianity.”

13. For more on the history and impact of the Azusa Street revival and the subsequent Pentecostal movement see Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*; Hunter and Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*; Owens, *The Azusa Street Revival*; Hyatt, *Fire on the Earth*; Valdez, *Fire on Azusa Street*; Dayton, *Roots of Pentecostalism*.

14. Hocken, “Charismatic Movement,” 477–519.

15. *Ibid.*, 477.

nations; many of the largest charismatic churches in North America, for example, are affiliated only with loose networks of other “independent” charismatic churches.

Canadian Pentecostalism refers to the variety of Pentecostal groups in Canada that arose out of the Azusa Street revival, the largest of which is the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.¹⁶ Discussion of *Pentecostalism in Newfoundland and Labrador* will be limited to just one denomination for the purposes of examining a specific Pentecostal denomination in light of the concerns arising from this study. As such, this project will focus upon the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador, a sister organization to the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, but one that was founded decades before Canada’s tenth province joined the Canadian confederation in 1949.¹⁷

As one can imagine, the naming and dating of the various generations alive today is not a precise science. Scholars are typically agreed only on the dating of the Boomer generation that immediately follows World War II in 1945; apart from the Boomers, even the names of each generation vary widely from author to author. For the purposes of this paper, we will use the following dates and monikers: *Seniors* (born before 1925); *Builders* (born between 1925 and 1944); *Boomers* (born between 1945 and 1964); *Generation X* (born between 1965 and 1983); *Millennials* (born between 1984 and 2001); and *the newest (and unnamed)* generation, born since 2001. Based on this dating, the median age of each generation in 2015 is: Senior—100, Builder—80, Boomer—61, GenX—42, Millennial—24, with the newest generation comprised of children, the oldest of whom is just 14 years of age.¹⁸

Christians and Cultural Engagement

As will be observed, Western Christians are not in agreement on biblical teaching regarding cultural engagement. Though I understand the interaction between the church and the society in which it is placed to be axiomatic, a brief discussion to clarify our understanding of what is meant by “cultural engagement” and how a rationale for this effort can be found in Scripture, may be prudent.

16. See www.paoc.org, and Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals*.

17. See www.paonl.ca, and Janes, *History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland*.

18. As we will observe in chapter five, there are a variety of approaches to naming and dating the generations.

Definitions

A discussion on the merits of Christians engaging culture cannot be entertained with much productivity unless we first establish what we mean by both *culture* and *engagement*. Definitions are important, because we may observe that definitions themselves are culturally bound attempts to understand something, to the extent that even by defining we may add weight to a particular argument. What then is *cultural engagement*? To be sure, culture exists in the entire realm of human activity. Whether we are riding the bus, reading the newspaper or latest online article, enjoying a game of golf for leisure, interacting with friends on a social networking site, investing in the stock market, watching the many advertisements on television, or simply raising our children to be good citizens, we are engaging the culture around us. All of human activity involves cultural engagement on this level; everything we do may be seen to support cultural norms or repudiate the same. There is no neutral position. Cultural engagement must therefore refer to more than simply living and performing human activities in the world around us. Rather, we wish to discuss cultural engagement as the “. . . deliberate, thought-out, philosophically-consistent activity of vocational and societal living that is proactively designed to reflect a biblical perspective on the world.”¹⁹

Derek Brown asks the correct question:

Does the Bible speak with clarity on the matter of how to live in 21st century society, and is it right for Christians today to spend significant time and sustained energy on deliberately seeking to shape how they and other people live and relate together and use the environment in response to this supposed biblical mandate, as a legitimate witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Or is such an activity a dangerous diversion from the true biblical position of doing what is necessary to sustain life whilst focusing on the only truly worthwhile purpose of helping individuals to become Christians and so in some future day after death, to enter into the wonderful promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord?²⁰

There are a variety of responses to this question, as we will discuss more thoroughly in chapter 8. As this point, it will suffice to highlight two different approaches. First, Christians are called only to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified, for the forgiveness of sins and eternal

19. Brown, “Is Cultural Engagement Biblical?”

20. Ibid.

life to those who will accept this message. As the Bible rarely comments on secular culture, and fails to give contemporary believers instruction for cultural engagement, Christians are to stick with the task given us by Christ—winning souls. Any attempt to engage the culture with the Gospel eventually ends with the culture having transformed the message of the Gospel, and is a dangerous distraction from the primary and important goal of the Christian life.

In the second approach, a proper understanding of creation reveals that all of society is God's and that we must differentiate the concept of culture as part of God's original design, from the practice of culture defined as it is by the stain of sin upon all human endeavours, and its need of the light of the Gospel. Engaging the culture need not be synonymous with conforming to the culture. Rather, the Christian recognizes that a properly biblical worldview entails that as the believer embraces life, every activity, thought and plan, is subjected to the Lordship of Christ. In so doing, Christians automatically speak into the culture around them, shining light in dark places, doing a small part to re-align culture with God's design, every day in every way. In this sense, all of life and human activity engages culture, and is part of a rounded understanding of worship. With this understanding, for example, the Christian in business seeks not only to pray for her fellow workers and share with them the good news of Christ, but she also seeks to apply the biblical principles of justice and mercy in the workplace, and to consider matters such as stewardship and generosity.²¹ In this approach, Christians seek to influence both the individuals in their lives, and also the societal structures of which they are a part.

My understanding of cultural engagement aligns with viewpoint two, above. I believe that Christians are called to live out the Lordship of Christ in all areas of work, play, and mission, and in so doing, engage the culture around them with the light of the Gospel. We may influence both individual and societal structure, bringing the principles of biblical living to bear upon each as we view all of life as worship. By way of caveat, however, I believe it is important to retain the priority of the mission to the individual over and above structures, policies, or governance. I share the discomfort of those who suggest that Christians in some circles have reversed the proper focus, and now spend more time and energy bringing a Christian worldview to bear upon governments and laws than on ensuring their neighbour has heard about Christ. While we may surely have a voice within culture, and may speak to themes of love, compassion, and justice clearly, we must also

21. Ibid.

remember that Christ's kingdom is first in the hearts of believers, which then influences the structures of which they are a part.

Pentecostal Theology of Social (Non) Engagement

As will be observed, Pentecostals have not had a cohesive theology of social engagement. In fact, it can be argued that the only theology relative to engaging culture Pentecostals have recognized is one that posits a basic position of separation from "the world" and an isolationist outlook. In *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda*, Wolfgang Vondey argues that early Pentecostals saw themselves primarily as a "missionary movement" led by the Holy Spirit. The absence of support structures and organizational plans for these missionary endeavours eventually severely hampered the growth and effectiveness of this new movement. Pentecostals therefore moved towards the organization and structures associated with an understanding of being a "church" only reluctantly, and primarily to facilitate their missionary efforts. If Pentecostalism remained simply a movement as many hoped, some wondered whether it was valuable to discuss ecclesiology at all. Vondey notes,

In this debate, classical Pentecostalism avoided the crucial question of culture in defining its own ecclesiality and thereby, sidestepped the debate on the impact of modernism, modernity, and cultural formation, supporting the separation of the religious realm from the arena of politics, economics, and the secular, and strengthening the autonomy of culture. As a result of the underdeveloped account of the theological identity and ecclesiological role of culture, the organic ecclesiality of Pentecostalism as a movement, its pneumatological basis, and its eschatological orientation have remained largely underdeveloped.²²

For example, David Milley studied the doctrine of "Separation" in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador, the denomination that we will focus upon in chapter 4. He observed that the core message of the foundress of the denomination, Alice B. Garrigus, was one of separation. Milley notes,

There was such a strong stand taken to separate the church from the world that anything that appeared to be of the world was condemned . . . The Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland stressed separation even to the point of isolation. Association

22. Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, 158.

with the world, and the organizations of the world were considered to be contrary to standards of separation, and therefore isolation was the preferred choice of action.²³

A few examples will suffice. The issue of modesty in dress, particularly for women, was deemed sufficiently important to be a topic of discussion and subsequent motions in the General Conferences of 1931, 1932, 1933, 1939 and 1941—five times in ten years. Concern for modesty was such that changes to the building code of individual assemblies were recommended to protect the modesty of altar workers. The 1929 and 1934 General Conferences discussed burial of the dead, clarifying that Pentecostal workers were not to participate in funerals held in churches of other denominations, or bury in sacred burial ground those known as members of “secret societies.”²⁴ By 1936 leaders were apprehensive that drift from strict standards of separation was already occurring in the young denomination. That year the wife of the General Superintendent, Mrs. Eugene Vaters, in an article entitled “Hold Fast . . . Repent,” wrote, “God does not want us to let go of the old lines of separation we took in him. He does not want us to take unto ourselves again that which once we put away from us.”²⁵

In 1936, the PAONL General Conference also ruled against participation in, “. . . any outings or occasions whether indoors or out of doors in which games, rings, races, plays, selling or sport or revelling of any kind are permitted.” It declared, “. . . we discourage the participation on the part of our people, young or old, in promiscuous gatherings in which such things are done, or in such gatherings of any other church or society.” Any Pastor who became “lax in vigilance” and permitted such things among his people, “shall be held responsible.” The following year pastors voted to establish one day a year for the congregations to share a common meal, but one that would specifically exclude those outside the church. The meal was to be, “. . . away from the general public; . . . without revelry, excessive feasting, or evidence of the holiday or picnic spirit.” Milley notes, “In retrospect it would appear as though they were permitted to have a meal, but not to have fun.”²⁶

By 1941, General Conference banned the wearing of flowers or feathers as adornment, and sought to move towards uniformity, “. . . in sister worker hats, and other platform and out-door apparel.” In 1947, a dress code for the annual camp meetings was established, and by 1951, an actual uniform consisting of a “plain navy dress” and “plain navy hat and dark stockings”

23. Milley, *Message of Separation*, 11.

24. *Ibid.*, 14.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 16.

was adopted for female workers. While the reader may wonder about the relationship between social engagement and the colour of women's stockings, we emphasize that all of this was intended to create a further separation between the church and the world. As Garrigus complained in a 1946 letter to the General Superintendent, "What a shame that one cannot hardly tell a baptized one from the world—bobbed dresses and bobbed hair have proved to be too great a temptation to withstand . . ."27

These examples serve to demonstrate the commitment of one Pentecostal denomination to separation from the world, in matters as seemingly minor as the uniformity of women's hats, to participation in social events sponsored by community clubs or other church groups. In fact, the leadership explicitly believed and taught that the blessing of the Lord in terms of revival of numbers and individuals was directly tied to the quality of separation practiced by church members. While the focus in recent decades within the PAONL has shifted from an isolationist approach²⁸ to one that focuses more upon internal criteria for being "set apart," the message of separation from the first half of the denomination's history still has a lingering effect, particularly within older generations. From my conversations with members of other classical Pentecostal denominations, it appears that neither the stories of isolationism and legalism, nor the continuing effects into the present day, are unique; similarities abound throughout North American Pentecostalism.

Biblical Mandate

Before leaving this section, we will first pause and consider the Scriptural support for a proper cultural engagement. As others have penned comprehensive treatments of this position,²⁹ we will simply outline in broad strokes the biblical rationale for engaging culture. Genesis 1:28 is often viewed as providing the original mandate for interaction with creation: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" Though much has been written on the notion of "subduing the earth" in the recent focus on ecological concerns, we may note foundationally that humanity was encouraged to go

27. *Ibid.*, 18.

28. Kent Duncan demonstrates a similar transition in the American Assemblies of God. See Duncan, "Emerging Engagement."

29. See for example, Wright, *The Mission of God*; Brueggemann, *The Word That Redescribes the World*.

into the earth and interact with its inhabitants. In this first command given by God, his intention is clear: we shape culture as an exercise of faithful obedience to our creator. Brown notes,

Read again the extract from Genesis 1 above, and the meaning is clear: cultural shaping or engagement (ruling over the animals, engaging in farming etc.) is not a secular exercise, to be done in some God-ignoring manner. As we are reminded in Psalms 8, cultural shaping or engagement for the Christian means obeying God's pattern for life in how we live day by day in everything. It means denying the false claims of dualism which have restricted Christian activity to the spiritual realm, and it means celebrating the purpose and meaning of the Good News of the gospel in all that we do. Not only is cultural engagement inescapable; the calling for the Christian to engage and shape the culture in a biblically faithful manner also is inescapable.³⁰

Jeremiah 29 provides more specific instructions for God's people who live in a context that is not immediately welcoming or shares an affinity in beliefs. With his people in Babylonian exile, God directed:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.

In this passage we observe God's direct command for his people to settle into the foreign culture, accomplishing everything normally associated with human living, all the while seeking the prosperity and peace of the culture in which they found themselves. We see in this letter to the exiles something of Jesus' later description of God's people as those who are *in*, but not *of*, the world.³¹ Although the exiles are to go about their lives, and seek the peace and prosperity of their adopted culture, they are not to be

30. Brown, "Is Cultural Engagement Biblical?"

31. John 17: 14-15

swayed by the lies of those who suggest that God is acting immediately to remove them from this foreign culture. J. A. Thompson writes, "Jeremiah by these words cast the people completely adrift from all those things on which they depended and which they regarded as essential to their own well-being: a nation-state, kingship, an army, national borders, the temple. Without all these Yahweh could give the nation new perspectives and a new understanding of their calling."³² The parallels to the collapse of Christendom in the West are striking; God will provide both a new perspective and a new understanding of the Christian calling once our reliance upon the structures of Christendom ceases.

From Jesus' teaching, I believe we have a clear mandate to engage culture. In Matthew 5, following the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes believers as both the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." In Jesus' mind, it is inconceivable that salt can be non-salt, or that light would be hidden or would fail to shine. Implicit in Jesus' command to "let your light shine before others" is the challenge to engage the darkness, wherever it may be found. Donald Hagner observes, "The disciples . . . are thus of vital importance for the accomplishment of God's purpose in the world. They constitute the salt and light without which the world cannot survive and remains in darkness. Their mission is accomplished, however, not only in word . . . but in the deeds of their daily existence."³³ Douglas Hare, in observing the common use of the phrase "salt of the earth" today, notes that it is difficult for us to now grasp the power of the original use of this phrase. "We can perhaps catch its force better by substituting another seasoning: 'You are red hot pepper for the whole earth!' In this way we are reminded that the statement refers not to *status*, as if it said 'You are the world's ethical elite,' but to *function*: 'You must add zest to the life of the whole world.'³⁴ In a warning to those who would contextualize to the point of assimilation, Hare states, "Any church that adapts itself so completely to the secular world around it that its distinctive calling is forgotten has rendered itself useless. Its vaunted salt has become tasteless and uninteresting."³⁵ Further, and contrary to popular thought, the key point of the Great Commission³⁶

32. Thompson, "The Book of Jeremiah," 546.

33. Hagner, "Matt 1-13," 102.

34. Hare, "Matthew," 44.

35. *Ibid.*, 45.

36. Matt 28:18-20 "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

is not commanding believers to “Go” but to “make disciples.” Literally, we may understand Jesus saying, “*Going* into all the world,” or “Having gone therefore, into all the world,” that is, since you are going anyway, “make disciples”—the command.³⁷

The narrative of Paul on Mars Hill provides another excellent example of the biblical injunction to engage culture. In Acts 17:22–31 we read of Paul’s discussion with “the men of Athens” concerning their worship of “the Unknown God.” We may quickly observe that Paul was interacting with these individuals in the public square, an open area surrounded by government buildings, businesses and temples, where citizenry could gather to discuss political matters. Paul did not wait for the curious to seek out proper teaching at the Christian place of worship, but sought an audience with the Athenians on their own turf. Well-trained in the rhetorical styles of his day, and familiar with their Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, he was able to engage these seekers of Athens on their own terms, in a manner readily accessible. Paul’s explanation of the Gospel was replete with references to their own poets and philosophers, and is a model of how we may translate Christ’s message to those holding a decidedly non-Christian worldview. William Larkin notes, “Paul’s preaching at Athens shows us how God’s messenger made inroads into the very center of a culture’s religious and intellectual life. A fearless proclamation of Jesus and the Resurrection within the framework of God’s work as transcendent Creator, immanent sustainer, and righteous savior may have brought mockery, but it also yielded adherents.”³⁸

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul describes his efforts to contextualize the Good News of Christ:

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all

37. Some scholars note that as a circumstantial participle that depends on the imperative, “going” gains imperatival force of its own. We may conclude that though Jesus assumes the disciples are going, and commands them to make disciples, the force of his statement suggests that refusing to go is not an option. See Kurtzhan, “Exegesis of Matt 28:18–20.”

38. Trites and Larkin, “The Gospel of Luke Acts,” 549.

possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

We may not translate Paul's efforts at contextualization into a perception that he was willing to transform the message itself into whatever was most palatable to his listeners. Ben Witherington observes, "Furthermore, his accommodating behavior has clear limits. He does not say that he became an idolater to idolaters or an adulterer to adulterers. But in matters that he did not see as ethically or theologically essential or implied by the gospel, Paul believed in flexibility."³⁹ He insisted that his message was simply one of "Jesus Christ and him crucified"⁴⁰ and encouraged Timothy to "Watch your life and doctrine closely,"⁴¹ for the time will come when people will not put up with "sound doctrine" and will listen only to that which tickles their fancy.⁴² Indeed, Paul learned how to present the Gospel in a manner accessible to a variety of cultural settings, without negating the core of Jesus' message, or softening the call to repentance, sacrifice, and death to self. We would do well to model the same, recalling the admonition from the writer of Jude: "Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to *contend for the faith* that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people."

Summary of Project

With a clear biblical command to share the Good News, and mindful of Paul's efforts at contextualization while holding firm to the faith so long ago entrusted, this study seeks to assist Pentecostalism as it endeavours to navigate an increasingly post-Christian culture—contending for the faith, as it were, in a context both similar and dissimilar to the first century. I trust this project will serve as both a primer on current realities and a stimulus for discussion and action going forward. To accomplish this, chapter 1 has first explored briefly the religious changes in Canadian culture in the last one hundred years, via a consideration of the various options for understanding in what sense a country might be considered "Christian." Essential terms have been defined and a foundational background for the topics to be covered has been laid. Chapter 2 will commence the contextual focus of Part One. It will first move to examine Pentecostalism both in a historic

39. Witherington, "Conflict and Community in Corinth," 213.

40. 1 Cor 2:2

41. 1 Tim 4:16

42. 1 Tim 4:3

and theological sense. We will trace the growth of global Pentecostal from the Azusa Street revival of 1906, to the movement that today numbers more than 600 million souls. The peculiarities of Pentecostal doctrine will be considered, as will praxis that has developed over the decades in a very real Pentecostal subculture.

Chapter 3 will explore the current societal context in Canada that Pentecostals must learn to engage properly. To begin, we will continue our discussion of post-Christendom begun in chapter 1, via a comprehensive survey of the state of religious faith in Canada. Through this we will seek to discern whether Pentecostals in Canada are indeed facing a secularist culture moving towards post-Christendom, as many are proclaiming. We will then move to an examination of postmodernism, and its role in the rapidly changing face of North American religious culture. Pentecostals may in fact be in an excellent position to engage a culture steeped in the tenets of postmodernism, but only if they recognize postmodern thought for what it is, and respond appropriately.

Part Two examines the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland and Labrador (PAONL) specifically as an example denomination for the project. Desiring to observe the trends discussed above in a particular Pentecostal denomination, significant attention will be given to exploring the impact of post-Christian thought on the Pentecostals of Newfoundland and Labrador. Further, we will seek to observe the reaction (or lack thereof) to changing cultural tides by this classical Pentecostal body.

Having provided sufficient background for our discussion, and having observed the situation of the PAONL, we will then move to eight themes that I believe must be considered as Pentecostals move forward. We will give concrete examples of ways Pentecostals can engage Western culture, while remaining confident that we remain *in*, but not *of*, the world around us. Part Three and its focus on practical application and solutions begins with chapter 5, which examines the various generations that currently compose Pentecostalism in the West. At present, up to six generations currently worship together at a typical Christian gathering: children, Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers, Builders, and Seniors. The contribution and significance of generational traits will be examined for each of the generations, with particular attention paid to the impact of each on Canadian Pentecostalism. This chapter therefore engages our first theme—Generational Issues.

We then move to chapter 6 for a look back at an early Pentecostal pioneer who was a master at engaging culture—Aimee Semple McPherson. The founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel—a classical Pentecostal denomination—McPherson packed a 5300 seat auditorium three times daily in 1920s Los Angeles. Despite being located next to what

many considered the sin and entertainment capital of the United States—Hollywood—McPherson was able to combine cutting edge media presentations of the timeless gospel with a willingness to share the good news with many of the “untouchables” of the day. She is an exceptional example of the importance of a correct approach to our second theme—creativity and risk. Her attitudes and approach are worth examining, for she was incredibly successful in the same arenas that much of contemporary Pentecostalism today languishes.

Chapter 7 will then shift focus to the present, and inquire about the promise of the recent Missional conversation for classical Pentecostalism in this hour. Arguing that the contemporary church has become far too inward focused, Missional authors insist that believers must re-envision the purpose of the Church, and cast a new vision of community involvement and outreach. “Come out from among them and be ye separate”⁴³ has been replaced, as it were, with the simple command to “Go ye into all the world . . .”⁴⁴ Given Pentecostalism’s penchant for withdrawal from all things “worldly” in their pursuit of holiness, theme #3, the Missional conversation, will bring a significant and timely message to Canadian Pentecostalism.

On the religious front, chapter 7 will continue by examining the cultural significance of the Emerging/Emergent⁴⁵ Church movement. Though not quickly visible, or even accepted throughout much of Canadian evangelicalism, the Emergent Church nonetheless has a significant voice and is influential in the younger generations of Canadian Pentecostals. This chapter will serve to explore theme #4—Pentecostals as Influencers of Culture.

Chapter 8 will seek to address themes #5 (reclaiming our supernatural heritage) and #6 (embracing post-Christendom). We begin by coming back to the groundwork on postmodernism began in chapter 3, but now with an eye towards a proper Pentecostal engagement of a culture influenced by postmodern thought. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the importance of engaging culture where we find it. We will examine the increasing need for Western Pentecostalism to seize the opportunities afforded the church through the decline of Christendom and growth of secularism. Though many Christians and churches are quite aware of the changes in culture recently, some seem confused or afraid of the loss of a Christian dominance in culture that has provided comfort throughout their lifetime.

43. 2 Cor 6:17

44. Matt 16:15

45. The term *Emerging church* is used generically to reference those churches actively seeking to reach communities influenced by postmodern thought. *Emergent churches* were specifically connected to the Emergent Village organization. See Carlson, “Emerging Vs. Emergent Churches.”

Fewer have recognized the tremendous possibilities that accompany the death of Christendom, and we will seek to assist in that regard.

Concluding our efforts to explore practical steps Pentecostalism can take to once again engage and impact for Christ the culture around it, chapter 9 will address our final two themes. Few doctrines are as important to Pentecostals as that of Spirit Baptism. On the doctrinal front, Pentecostalism must therefore closely examine its “distinctive doctrines”—subsequence and initial evidence. While some classical Pentecostals have held to these understandings of Spirit-baptism with a dogmatism one would think reserved for only the most foundational pillars of the gospel, others have expressed considerable reservations about the traditional expressions of the practice, if not dogma, that have arguably made Pentecostalism into the worldwide force it currently is. I will argue that neither the retreat into increasingly dogmatic positions nor the abandoning of that which has been most highly cherished by Pentecostalism, will benefit the movement well into the future. Pentecostals must consider the importance of theme #7, and reflect on the difference in the *essence of Pentecostalism, versus doctrinal distinctives*.

How will Pentecostals bring change to such a key doctrine for identity? I believe they would do well to consider our final theme—the difference in *belief* and *values*. While beliefs as such are important, only those things we actually value impact our behaviours. It is possible that on a number of core doctrines, Pentecostals are simply giving mental assent to that which they traditionally valued quite highly. The results are problematic and telling.

Part Four will conclude with a final chapter on conclusions from our study. A summary of lessons learned will be given, and we will explore the various limitations of this study. Finally, areas of research will be suggested for those who wish to pursue these topics with further study.