

BOOK REVIEW AND NOTE

The Holy Spirit and the Eagle Feather: The Struggle for Indigenous Pentecostalism in Canada. By Aaron A. M. Ross. *Advancing Studies in Religion*, 16. Montreal, Canada: McGill Queen's University Press, 2023. xi + 365 pp. \$140 cloth; \$36.99 paper.

In 1953, Assemblies of God missiologist Melvin Hodges declared: "The successful missionary is one who has done his work so well that he is no longer needed in that area. He can leave that work to his converts" (18). Aaron Ross might respond, "Easier said than done." Ross traces the complicated missionary efforts of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) to Indigenous peoples in Canada (he uses the term "Indigenous" for aboriginal groups in geographic Canada including those in Indigenous nations who assert sovereignty and those who chose to identify as Canadian).

Ross identifies as a settler Canadian and serves as an ordained anglophone minister in the PAOC, the largest Pentecostal denomination in Canada. With this first book-length treatment of the history of Pentecostalism among Indigenous people in Canada, he produces an important and foundational volume. Although he carefully avoids writing on behalf of Indigenous Pentecostals, he adopts a reflective posture; he tells an all-too-common missionary story that mixes failure and success and requires a spirit of lament and hope. Ross notes several leading statistics: nearly eight percent of Indigenous peoples in Canada identify as Pentecostal; the growth rate of Pentecostals among Indigenous people currently outpaces the growth rate of the overall Indigenous population; and the PAOC boasts the largest rate of Indigenous adherence. The growth of Indigenous Pentecostals in the PAOC coupled with Ross's position as a PAOC insider provides the necessary motivation and limits for his study.

Ross charts a steady course. Following a brief rehearsal of early Euro-Canadian evangelism of Indigenous people, he turns quickly to the evolution of the PAOC Northland Mission (NLM) founded in 1943 by Pentecostal evangelist – and pioneering missionary pilot – John Spillenaar. The NLM emerged as an air-based mission targeting communities primarily adjacent to James Bay and Hudson Bay in Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Northwest Territories. Although Spillenaar led successful meetings and established local congregations, he and PAOC leaders struggled to administer their upstart churches. Unfortunately, according to Ross, PAOC leaders compounded colonialism; they employed governmental structures that failed to deliver the satisfactory transfer of the mission to Indigenous control. The NLM Bible College founded in 1955 trained indigenous pastors; however, the PAOC hierarchy overlooked these same pastors for leadership positions and offered them minimal influence on decisions and policymaking. In a striking rebuke, Ross argues that the NLM and PAOC "fulfillment" of indigenous autonomy happened primarily because of waning resources. Moreover, when the PAOC terminated NLM in 1996 and subsequently turned decision-making matters to Indigenous leaders, PAOC leadership blamed the delay on Indigenous "dependency" rather than acknowledging Euro-Canadian failure to stand back as promised. Upon

the dissolution of the NLM, the core of Indigenous ministers launched a new Native Leadership Committee, and in 1996, they formed the PAOC Aboriginal Pentecostal Ministries (APM). Over the next three decades, both parties continued their efforts to reach Indigenous peoples amid volatile days on the Canadian religious and political front.

Within the larger institutional history, Ross slows his narrative to focus on significant contributors and events. He highlights the particular influence of Matthew Coon Come (Eeyou; Mistissini, Quebec), former Grand Chief of the Northern Quebec Cree (1987–1999; 2009–2017), National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (2000–2003) – the highest office among First Nations, and a devout Pentecostal! Coon Come, a survivor of the La Tuque Indian Residential School in Mistissini, marks the emergence of Indigenous Pentecostal leaders in Canadian politics. Ross also considers implications of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2007–2015), specifically, Pentecostal responses to the cultural genocide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian – and Pentecostal – institutions and churches revisited their complicities with the revelation of unmarked graves at several former Canadian residential schools.

Ross trumpets a call for honest reflection and action. First, although Euro-Canadian leaders of the PAOC – and other denominational leaders – perceive themselves as proponents of indigenous autonomy, they too often fail to recognize or deny their colonial impulses. Will missionaries and their agencies begin to assess their own cultural and religious impact on indigenous communities? Will they honor their promise to entrust Indigenous communities the right and privilege of autonomous leadership?

Second, according to Ross, Indigenous Pentecostals provide an outstanding model of the indigenous principle boasted by Euro-Canadian Pentecostals. In 2018 the PAOC church in Mistissini Cree Nation (Eeyou) was sending teams and resources to Liberia. Ross imagines further possibilities for Indigenous Pentecostal theological and missiological contributions to the current global Pentecostal movement. Will Canadian-based theological and missiological architects finally welcome indigenous Pentecostals and rethink local and global mission? Ross argues that Indigenous Pentecostal attention to dreams and visions as well as practices such as oral liturgy and narrative theology resonate well with global Pentecostalism. Indigenous Pentecostals also recognize first-hand the economic legacy of colonialism; they understand impositions against their notions of sacred land and time. As the Spirit-driven message of Pentecostals advances through the Global South, Euro-American Pentecostals must reimagine aboriginal cosmologies and spiritualities already at work.

Some 30 years after the dissolution of the NLM and the formation of the Indigenous-led APM, both communities remain committed to ongoing partnership. Ross demonstrates yet again that historians do not simply recount past events, but they implore readers to participate in a story already at work and to strive for a better future. Every PAOC student and pastor should consider this book required reading. Students and scholars should consult this work alongside the ever-complex histories of Pentecostalism and Christianity in Canada. Pentecostal students and scholars outside of Canada will welcome this volume to the repertoire of scholarship on the global expansion of twentieth-first century Pentecostalism. After 70 years, Hodges's clarion call still sounds. In 2018, PAOC educator Van Johnson echoes the struggle: "Herein lies the dilemma: we may have unconsciously anointed a way of life that is more culturally formed than biblically shaped. Our context may have contextualized us. We may be preaching a 'Christianized' version of Western individualism and materialism rather

than the great narrative of God's saving work in the world" (Ross, 181). Pentecostals must fuse their passion for missions with a renewed vision for prophetic hospitality.

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