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# PENTECOSTALISM AS LIVED RELIGION

MICHAEL WILKINSON  
PETER ALTHOUSE

The scholarly study of religion appears to be a fairly straightforward process. Researchers identify those who practice a particular religion, ask them what they believe, how they practice their religion, and make some general conclusions about the influence of their religion in society. However, as soon as graduate students and even some seasoned researchers venture into the study of a religious group or the practices of individuals who may or may not identify with a religious group, the study takes on numerous layers and becomes multifaceted. This is troublesome for those who want “straightforward” answers, like journalists, denominational leaders, and politicians.

What makes religion so interesting is the diversity of beliefs, practices, viewpoints, and assumptions, even within a single family like Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity. Furthermore, religions change over time, which requires scholars to consider the relationship between religions and social contexts, whether they are local as in a neighbourhood or particular community, or national, regional, global or any combination of various contexts. Religions also respond to social change and in some cases a religious

group will embrace or endorse change and in other cases will reject it. This, however, is not always easy to understand because while some denominations, for example, may embrace cultural shifts, other individuals and subgroups do not. We have not even begun to discuss the popular notion of religion among Canadians as “spiritual but not religious” that has led some to refer to Canada as “a nation of believers not believers.”

The idea of “lived religion” comes from a number of scholars working through these issues.<sup>1</sup> For example, Meredith McGuire understands through years of research that religion is multifaceted and it undergoes change just as society changes. Lived religion is an attempt to get at the “unofficial” ways in which people practice their religion. It is also an attempt to make sense of the ways in which “official” religion responds to the “unofficial.” Lived religion investigates the spectrum of spirituality, experience, religiosity, individuals, and identities. It does not preclude institutions like denominations and congregations. Rather, the approach gives attention to the ways institutional religion interacts with the practices of participants including those often at the margins such as immigrants or women, or those issues often deemed too controversial such as human sexuality and science.

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<sup>1</sup> See Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford, 2008).

In this issue, the essays address a number of ways in which Pentecostalism is a “lived religion.” In the first article Peter Neumann examines how Pentecostals have understood their “experience” of God and furthermore, how that understanding is changing. Neumann gives attention to the ways in which “experience” is mediated through theological constructs.

Another way that Pentecostalism is mediated is through congregations. Pentecostals, especially classical Pentecostals who make up denominations such as the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, value congregations and expend much energy and resources supporting them. Throughout the twentieth century the PAOC has established over 1,000 congregations, invested major resources into their operation, and believes they are central to religious practice. However, as Sam Reimer demonstrates, the growth of PAOC congregations is plateauing and a number of questions are now being asked about their future including its identity, vitality and the role of women.

Linda Ambrose writes about her research on women in Canadian Pentecostal history and raises questions about the scholarly study of women. Her article focuses on the issues of gender, history, and Pentecostalism. Ambrose raises questions that are perplexing for scholars especially when the theology of Pentecostalism claims liberation but also places limits on women. Her work also explores methodological issues and archival resources that often celebrate men and women, but she asks how trustworthy these offi-

cial reports are for understanding the lived experience of Pentecostal women. She probes the tricky relationship that researchers who want to place history in theoretical frameworks have with archivists who are denominational gatekeepers and have a vested interest in maintaining the official denominational histories.

Finally, we include in this issue review articles on the work of Amos Yong and his approach to Pentecostalism and science. The articles were initially presented as papers at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley, California November 2011. Yong offers a creative response that illustrates how Pentecostalism is attempting to wrestle with some of the key questions from the field of science.

These essays are interdisciplinary in the areas of theology, sociology and gendered history. They offer different approaches to the scholarly study of Pentecostalism as a “lived religion.”