

## BOOK REVIEW

WILKINSON, Michael, *The Spirit Said Go. Pentecostal Immigrants to Canada*. American University Studies: Series 7, Theology and Religion, 247. New York: Peter Lang, 2006. 129pp. Hbk ISBN: 978-0-8204-6394-0. \$57.95.

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This book is a case study of non-European Pentecostal immigrant congregations and their affiliation within the largest Canadian Pentecostal denomination, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), based on data collected between 1995 and 1998. The study links up with theoretical debates concerning religion, globalization and culture, and more particularly discusses the question of whether *global* relationships as a characteristic of globalization have implications for *local* religious life. As Wilkinson points out in the first chapter, the construction of contemporary global Pentecostalism – as it has reshaped Christianity worldwide and is interconnected with ethnicity, migration and transnationalism – is the background for this case study.

Chapter two gives an overview of a number of key aspects of the globalization of culture that are significant for the construction of contemporary Pentecostalism, primarily drawing on the cultural perspective of Roland Robertson who discerns three features of globalization that contribute to the complexity of global religious change: global-local dynamics, poly-ethnicity and multiculturalism, and the role of identity formation. Pentecostalism as a global culture continually challenges and changes conceptions of Pentecostal identity, such as debates about origins and about renewal movements. New sources of migration principally raise questions about Pentecostal identity and authenticity. Referring to the latter, Wilkinson concludes that the construction and transformation of Pentecostalism continues as identity is negotiated and debated, in this case through the migration of (non-European) Pentecostals to Canada.

Chapter three reviews the state of research on immigrants and religion. Wilkinson states that most theories of migration still tend to polarize towards assimilationist and pluralist models, habitually limited to an analysis within the nation state. Recent American studies focus on the adaptations that immigrant congregations make while settling in the USA. In Canada important changes in immigration policy, due to a shift in sources of immigrants from Europe to the “Third World,” had implications for ethnic theorizing, but also for theorizing

on religion and immigration, equally focused on issues of assimilation and pluralism. This approach lacks the exploration of the global characteristic of ethnic and religious identities and the interactive relationship with a “dominant host culture.” Wilkinson pays much attention to ethnicity as “a global strategy” in identity construction within immigrant groups, which goes beyond the nation-state. He points to the intertwined dynamics between a shared religious identity and different ethnic identities within the Pentecostal congregations in Canada that both, but differently, refer to the wider context of global migration. This chapter ends with a depiction of the response of the PAOC towards the shift of sources of immigration from European towards non-European. Although most of these new immigrants arrived in Canada as Christians, the main idea among Canadian Pentecostals was that the PAOC should focus on evangelizing the new pagans, not being aware of the fact that in the meantime, the PAOC had incorporated 120 non-European ethnic congregations, holding over 69,000 members. According to Wilkinson the local and particular theological, cultural and organizational changes, associated with the emergence of these congregations, can only be understood in a global context.

Chapter four provides a description and analysis of the PAOC and six immigrant congregations as a background for a detailed analysis in chapter five of the effects of global migration for the PAOC. Wilkinson states that these effects have more to do with new relationship networks and new practices that have implications for the PAOC, rather than with immigrant adaptation issues. Wilkinson depicts PAOC as an established denomination, operating pragmatically with regard to changes and moral issues. Referring to issues that caused national debate in the PAOC, such as divorce and remarriage, organizational restructure and the increased immigration to Canada, Wilkinson states that they also reflect the transformation of Pentecostalism as a global movement. In his description of the debates, however, this statement is not convincingly substantiated. It does not become clear what exactly the connection with the global movement is, and what the transforming element is in these debates and their outcome. Even the adaptability of the PAOC that these issues should illustrate is debatable, especially concerning its ongoing lack of understanding of the religious implications of current immigration, as Wilkinson repeatedly concludes. The six immigrant congregations are systematically described within a framework of categories like age, gender, income, education, language, ethnic origin and religious background, accompanied by a characterization of the church’s history, its leader(s), its building and its church meetings, reflecting the local nature of a global Pentecostal culture, as Wilkinson puts it.

Chapter five starts with a theoretical explanation of the concept of “social networks,” which points to the structure of relations, and which gives tools for understanding individual behavior at the macro level. A network approach to an organization has the potential to analyse relationships and practices that surpass organizational and national borders and simultaneously affect its operations. Pentecostal networks for instance are involved in the construction of a global Pentecostal culture and the religious socialization of the individual, through the concrete interactions of Pentecostals with global Pentecostal networks. An

examination of some social networks that the PAOC immigrant congregations participate in, mediating the simultaneity of the local and the global, such as “congregational ministry flows,” “international conferences” and “denominational affiliation,” reveals that they have theological, cultural and organizational implications. According to Wilkinson, the latter appearing to be the most profound, especially concerning different ideas about church organization and sharing church facilities. The PAOC changed its policies slightly towards dual affiliation of local immigrant congregations, allowing local difference in church leadership, and at the national level, cooperation with other large denominations in the homeland, for the benefit of immigrant believers in Canada. This transformation of the PAOC, as Wilkinson calls it, is “largely related to global migration and the various social relationships and practices maintained by immigrant congregations” (p. 94). As in the previous chapter, Wilkinson’s argument for calling the changes in PAOC a “transformation” is not persuasive. It is not made clear how problems that arise from the internationalization of pastor recruitment and of theological education cause *theological* reflection within PAOC. The only plausible example of theological reflection is the discussion on the nature of mission in PAOC, raised by the international ministries of immigrant pastors, supported by their immigrant congregations in Canada. The examples of cultural implications show rather a divide between the international networks of immigrant congregations and the PAOC, instead of mutual involvement, let alone “change” in PAOC. Based on his material he could have made a much stronger point for a critique of “transformation theories” as being too idealistic.

Wilkinson is right in his concluding plea in chapter six for going beyond the concept of “adaptations” in the study of migration and religion and for a focus on transnational social networks as social realities that construct “translocal identities.” Reflecting on his approach he admits that he has used his research data in a quite broad and global manner as a strategy to “demonstrate that the story of immigrant congregations is global and local as well as particular and universal” (p. 98), and that the book leaves several questions for future research. However, a slightly more detailed level of case analysis would have made his theoretical claim more convincing. Furthermore, an update of the material in order to reveal the complex lines along which changes occur would have enriched the study.