

## **Pentecostal Historiography in Canada**

### *The History Behind the Histories*

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#### ***Abstract***

Because 2019 is the centenary year of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), it is both timely and appropriate to reflect on the historiography of denominational histories that have been produced for and promoted by this, the largest of Canadian Pentecostal denominations. Between 1958 and 2018 five different books were published about this denomination, with the PAOC's endorsement. The authors of these books were clear about the purposes they hoped their work would accomplish, including inspiration for current and future members of the PAOC churches. Writing denominational histories is no easy task. Bruce Guenther, a Canadian Mennonite Church historian and past president of the Canadian Society of Church History, critiques denominational histories in general, saying that many "are poorly written works of triumphalist hagiography in which well-intentioned amateur historians have copiously compiled as much detail as possible concerning the people, places and events they wish to celebrate or commemorate." Guenther concedes that while such histories are "an invaluable source of information," they usually fail to "situate a denominational story within larger social-cultural, national or theological trends." Pentecostal history books suffer those same weaknesses identified by Guenther. Yet by exploring officially endorsed histories published by the PAOC, one can trace identifiable trends in those books over time. The historiographer's task is to analyze what has been written and to explain why the presentation of the narrative changes over time. This paper analyzes each of the history books published by the PAOC to identify the messages behind the narrative and provides some context for each book to explain why particular approaches to the history were taken and what the denomination hoped those history books would accomplish.

## Keywords

Pentecostalism – Canada – History – Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

## Introduction

A Canadian church historian recounted that just before he gave a talk at a denominational event, an audience member approached him saying, “I’m very interested in hearing you tell the story because I’ll be listening for what you include, what you exclude, and the spin you put on that which you do include!”<sup>1</sup> While the challenger was likely unaware of it, as they planned to listen closely for what the presenter would accentuate, they were doing what professional historians do when we practice historiography: listening for particular emphases in the way that the history is told over time. In his 1961 classic work, *What is History?*, E.H. Carr explained that “history is a social process, in which individuals are engaged as social beings,”<sup>2</sup> and it is “the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another.”<sup>3</sup> Because of that social process, informed by the age in which a work is written, the presentation of history changes over time. The same story may be retold with different highlights, depending on what the storyteller chooses to amplify. Pentecostal historians engage in this same social process, writing history that reflects what they and their age find worthy of note, and what might be most useful in their particular context.

In 2019, the centenary year of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), it is appropriate to explore the historiography of this particular Canadian Pentecostal denomination.<sup>4</sup> How have historians of

<sup>1</sup> Bruce L. Guenther, “‘From the edge of oblivion’: Reflections on Evangelical Protestant Denominational Historiography in Canada,” *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (2008), 165.

<sup>2</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Toronto: Random House Inc., 1967), 68-69. Carr’s work was originally published in 1961.

<sup>3</sup> Burckhardt, *Judgments on History and Historians*, 158 cited in E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Toronto: Random House Inc., 1967), 69.

<sup>4</sup> While there are at least thirteen different “classical” Pentecostal denominations in Canada, and many independent Pentecostal congregations without affiliation, the PAOC is the largest of those denominations, and therefore it is the focus of more scholarship than others. In addition to books that the PAOC has created and endorsed

the PAOC portrayed the movement? Historiography focuses on why each work of history was written when it was, what each version of the history emphasizes, and how each of those historians assesses the state of Pentecostalism in Canada. Over the past sixty years, five histories of the PAOC have been published with the endorsement of the denomination. The most recent of these appeared last year (2018) when the PAOC published *Picture This! Reflecting on 100 Years of the PAOC*, in anticipation of their 2019 centennial. That volume opened with the disclaimer that it was “not an institutional history book,” but rather “a narrative that allows us to engage representative stories ... [and] invite[s] us to consider the vision, values, faith and tenacity of the persons, churches and ministries highlighted.”<sup>5</sup> That title joined a list of four previous books all published under the auspices of the PAOC:

- 1) Gloria Kulbeck’s (1958) *What God Hath Wrought: The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada*;
- 2) Gordon F. Atter’s (1962) “*The Third Force*”: *A Pentecostal Answer to the question so often asked by both our own young people and by members of other churches: “Who Are the Pentecostals?”*;
- 3) Thomas William Miller’s (1994) *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada*; and

to mark significant anniversaries, academic historians have also turned their attention to Canadian Pentecostalism generally and to the PAOC specifically. Two volumes are especially significant to mention: Michael Wilkinson’s 2009 edited collection, *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation* (McGill-Queen’s University Press) was the first academic collection to be published on this topic by an academic press. The following year, Wilkinson and Althouse published a second edited collection entitled *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement* (Brill) with twelve chapters written from a variety of disciplines, emphasizing the ways in which Canadian Pentecostals had helped to shape both American and global Pentecostalism. Those two volumes, along with the online journal *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* established in 2010 with Wilkinson and Althouse as founding editors, capture the major trends in scholarship on Pentecostalism in Canada and introduce the reader to current scholars and their works. The journal’s website is here: <https://journal.twu.ca/index.php/cjpc/index>. For informed inquiry about Pentecostal studies in Canada, these are the foundational works. However, such academic works are beyond the focus of this paper where I limit my analysis to the denominationally-sponsored works that have been produced by and about the PAOC.

<sup>5</sup> PAOC, *Picture This! Reflecting on 100 Years of the PAOC* (Mississauga, ON: PAOC, 2018), 6.

- 4) Douglas Rudd's (2002) *When the Spirit Came Upon Them: Highlights from the Early Years of the Pentecostal Movement in Canada*.<sup>6</sup>

While the quality of the historical research varies among these volumes, each one was promoted with enthusiasm by the PAOC national office at the time of publication. The authors of these books were clear about the purposes they hoped their work would accomplish, including guidance for current and future members of the PAOC churches.

Writing denominational histories is no easy task. Bruce Guenther, a Canadian Mennonite Church historian and a past president of the Canadian Society of Church History, critiques denominational histories in general, saying that many “are poorly written works of triumphalistic hagiography in which well-intentioned amateur historians have copiously compiled as much detail as possible concerning the people, places and events they wish to celebrate or commemorate.”<sup>7</sup> Guenther concedes that while such histories are “an invaluable source of information,” they usually fail to “situate a denominational story within larger social-cultural, national or theological trends.”<sup>8</sup> Guenther sounds an important note with that critical insight, and yet looking beneath the celebratory tone of these volumes is an important exercise because of what it can reveal about the writers’ mindsets and their shared assumptions about the purpose of doing history.

Pentecostalism poses its own particular challenges for historians and it is also appropriate to note that in the historiography of American Pentecostalism, there are several observable historiographic trends which provide useful tools for exploring denominational histories within the broader Pentecostal movement. A summative overview of

<sup>6</sup> Gloria Kulbeck, *What God Hath Wrought: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Toronto: Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 1958); Gordon F. Atter, *The Third Force* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Caledonia, ON: Acts Books, 1970) [Originally published 1962]; Thomas William Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Mississauga, ON: Full Gospel Publishing House, 1994); and Douglas Rudd, *When the Spirit Came Upon Them: Highlights from the Early Years of the Pentecostal Movement in Canada* (Mississauga, ON: The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Guenther, 161.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

these trends in presented in an entry entitled “Bibliography and Historiography of Pentecostalism in North America,” in the *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, where A. Cerillo Jr. and Grant Wacker identify four contemporary interpretive approaches which they categorize as providential, genetic, multicultural, and functional.<sup>9</sup> While the authors concede that each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, they maintain that “taken together [these approaches] promise a way toward a more comprehensive and historically satisfying synthesis of the story of the emergence of the American Pentecostal religious tradition.”<sup>10</sup> Echoes of some of those approaches can be heard in the Canadian historiography too, as we shall see.

The historiographer’s task is to analyze what has been written and to explain why the presentation of the narrative changes over time. As the largest Pentecostal denomination in Canada celebrates 100 years of organizational history, it is just as the critic whose concerns opened this paper said: we need to pay attention to what is included; what is excluded; and what spin (if any) is put on that which is included.

### **History as Celebration**

In 1958, Canada hosted the fifth triennial conference of the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the first time the group had met outside of Europe. In the same year, Gloria Kulbeck’s book, entitled *What God Hath Wrought: The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada*, was published. More than fifty years after Ellen Hebden’s experience of speaking in tongues in Toronto and approaching the fortieth anniversary of the creation of the PAOC’s historic charter in 1919, gathering the movement’s history into a book was timely. Kulbeck worked on the book under the direction of PAOC General Superintendent W.E. McAlister, who initiated the project by asking for submissions from long-serving Pentecostal leaders across the country. As the title suggests, *What God Hath Wrought* was a celebration of the unbelievable growth and progress that the PAOC had enjoyed. From the humble beginnings in 1911, when the Canadian

<sup>9</sup> A. Cerillo Jr. and G. Wacker, “Bibliography and Historiography of Pentecostalism in North America,” in Stanley Burgess, ed., *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 2002), 397-405.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

census counted just over 500 people who declared themselves to be Pentecostals, that number had ballooned to over 95,000 in 1951 and three years after Kulbeck's book, would approach 150,000 in 1961.<sup>11</sup> The rate of growth, particularly for those who remembered the humble beginnings and the struggle for recognition in Canadian society, seemed miraculous indeed. Therefore it is not surprising that Kulbeck's text reflects the "providential" approach identified by Cerillo and Wacker, where divine intervention in human history is offered as the most plausible explanation of events.

Kulbeck's book included profiles of significant players in the founding of the PAOC, along with portraits of the "founding fathers", the men (and only a few women) who helped the movement spread and created the denominational institutional structures that helped to encourage and manage the growth. Indeed, the book's hagiographic tone is evident in the dedication:

To the memory of the faithful, consecrated and self-denying Canadian Pentecostal pioneers whose names are recorded in this book, and to their loyal co-workers and helpers, all of whose names are recorded in the Lamb's book of life, we dedicate this history of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Based on personal recollections from aging participants along with limited print sources, Kulbeck's book was far from perfect, and later writers would critique it saying, that while it was "a commendable first effort at recounting the history of the PAOC," there was room for improvement because the story it told was "chiefly anecdotal and [did] not attempt to offer a serious analysis or interpretation of trends."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the accuracy of Kulbeck's work has been called into question since according to one source, "PAOC leaders [have pointed out] that there are some errors in dates, events, and processes related to PAOC

<sup>11</sup> The 1961 census would report 143,877 Canadian Pentecostals. Those census numbers include all Pentecostals, not just the PAOC, but as the largest Canadian denomination by far, the growth was undeniable. See Michael Wilkinson, *Canadian Pentecostals*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Gloria Kulbeck, *What God Hath Wrought: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Toronto: Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, 1958), ii.

<sup>13</sup> Miller, 413.

development.”<sup>14</sup> In fairness to Kulbeck, who was limited by her sources, it is not surprising that the attempt to compile anecdotes from various people lead to some conflicting memories and inaccurate details. Moreover, Kulbeck was not a trained historian and she did not purport to write a definitive history. Instead, she wrote as she had been instructed to do, to capture the stories of the early years from the participants before it was too late for those founders to speak, and to celebrate the remarkable development of the PAOC through the eyes of its founding fathers. It was clear, both by the title and by the tone of the work, that a chief objective in writing the book was to give glory to God for what He had wrought. But it was also to highlight the male leadership and to celebrate their accomplishments.

In the foreword to the work, A.G. Ward pointed to the providential nature of Canadian Pentecostal history when he recalled its humble beginnings: “Then we met to worship in the most humble mission halls. We were few in number, under great reproach. Money was scarce – there was no organization – and almost everyone believed that at any moment the Lord would come.”<sup>15</sup> He contrasted those early days with the mid-century material assets and sustained popularity of the movement to offer evidence of God’s blessing on the movement:

Today there are beautiful church buildings from coast to coast – tens of thousands of eager worshippers filling them from week to week – still worshipping God in Pentecostal fashion – a well-balanced and wisely-ordered organization with plenty of funds to carry on a world program which is having a telling impact upon all the peoples of the world. What God hath wrought!<sup>16</sup>

The providential approach to Pentecostal history, along with hagiographic tributes to the founders, were clearly in evidence.

In 1962, just four years after Kulbeck’s book came out, a second volume of Canadian Pentecostal history appeared when Gordon Atter published *The Third Force*. Atter was clear in his criticism of Kulbeck’s book, asserting that she had missed a significant part of the Canadian

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 413-16.

<sup>15</sup> A.G. Ward, “Foreword,” in Kulbeck, *What God Hath Wrought*, v.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

story when her book failed to emphasize the international scope of Pentecostalism and the important role that Canadians had played in missionary work. Atter was well-placed to correct that oversight, as one author observed, being “the son of early Pentecostal missionary parents, [he] was an eyewitness of many events in the early years of the movement. He grew up surrounded by Pentecostals and writes with a great deal of authenticity about people and events.”<sup>17</sup> As a bible college instructor, Atter clearly had potential readers in mind when he wrote because his book was subtitled “A Pentecostal answer to the question so often asked by both our own young people and by members of other churches: Who are the Pentecostals?” *The Third Force* would become the standard textbook adopted by PAOC bible colleges as they taught their denominational history to future pastors, missionaries and laypeople.

Atter explained in a preface to the third edition of his book that the term “the Third Force” had been coined by a religion writer for *Life* magazine who pointed to so-called “fringe groups” and “sects” including Pentecostals, who seemed to be enjoying remarkable growth as they emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit. Atter explained that by 1970, the term “third force” was widely known as a reference to Pentecostalism, and he noted with a celebratory tone “as this third edition goes to press, the Pentecostal Revival rolls on to ever greater victory.”<sup>18</sup> Optimistically, Atter asserted that “the Revival still bears the characteristics of its early fervor,” and it was clear that his book was intended to celebrate the continuing work of God. In answer to the idea that “no revival can continue beyond the second generation,”<sup>19</sup> Atter offered evidence of the continued growth of Pentecostalism and summarized his argument saying “Its growth has been phenomenal, its leadership remarkable. Its doctrines are thoroughly scriptural. Its impact on the religious world of today is continually increasing.”<sup>20</sup>

Given the wide reach of his book, *The Third Force* went to into a third edition by 1970 and was a standard textbook for PAOC bible colleges; his contribution to the historiography is quite significant.

<sup>17</sup> Rudd, *When the Spirit Came Upon Them*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon F. Atter, “Author’s Preface,” *The Third Force* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Caledonia, ON: Acts Books, 1970), v.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.



Tracing the origins of the Pentecostal movement in Canada, he first pointed to R.E. McAlister's experience at the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, firmly establishing the tie between Canadian and American Pentecostals, and pointing to McAlister as the first of many male players behind the PAOC's success. Atter also wrote about the Toronto Hebden Mission, emphasizing that although theirs was an independent work, it had a significant role in promoting missionary activity. This point could hardly be omitted from Atter's account due to the fact that his own parents left for their missionary work in China from the place where Ellen Hebden, the first Canadian (and the first woman) who had reported her experience of spirit baptism that predated McAlister's. Moreover, Atter emphasized that while those initial North American experiences of Pentecost were occurring, there was a simultaneous outpouring of the Holy Spirit in various places worldwide, and thus he complicates the "genetic approach" to Pentecostalism, especially the monogenetic origin that privileges Azusa Street as the single origin point, by saying "Revivals broke out in many other lands. In some cases these were entirely independent of, and unknown to the North American brethren, coming as a direct visitation from heaven without any American contacts."<sup>21</sup> At the same time Atter concedes that some other sites of global revival were sparked by "the influence of the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles,"<sup>22</sup> and the implication is, that because of McAlister, Canada was one of those places. Like Kulbeck, Atter's book takes up a celebratory tone and borders on the providential approach, as he recounts with amazement the sacrifices that early leaders made and the remarkable progress that the movement enjoyed worldwide.

### **History as Exhortation**

With Kulbeck's and Atter's books in wide circulation, it seems the need for publishing Canadian Pentecostal history was satisfied for the time being, but as the seventy-fifth anniversary of PAOC approached in 1994, and the denomination continued to enjoy uninterrupted growth, the need for an update and a retelling of the story emerged. Pentecostalism had been gaining acceptance on the religious landscape in Canada, and by the 1991 census, 436,435 Canadians

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

identified themselves as Pentecostal. A boost to those numbers had come as the PAOC gained members from the charismatic movement of the late 1960s-1980s. The PAOC had taken its place among other Protestant evangelicals in the second half of the twentieth century, maturing as a denomination, and participating in public affairs through their membership in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Yet with that maturity, some expressed fears about the spiritual vitality of the movement and raised questions about whether societal acceptance for Pentecostalism had come at the cost of spiritual compromise. From that place of reflection, two more volumes of denominational history were published: Thomas Miller's *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* published in 1994, and Douglas Rudd's *When the Spirit Came Upon Them: Highlights from the Early Years of the Pentecostal Movement in Canada* published in 2002. Both of these books took a turn away from the triumphalist providential model to inject some concern about how the movement was trending and what the future might hold if no course correction was taken. Because this tone is not reflected in the approaches that Cerillo and Wacker outlined, I suggest an additional category of analysis: history as exhortation.

Thomas Miller had impressive academic credentials, and in marketing his book, the PAOC was pleased to demonstrate that their official historian held multiple degrees including a diploma from Central Pentecostal College in Saskatoon, a BA from the University of London, an MA in History and a PhD in Education from the University of Saskatchewan, as well as a MST degree in Theology from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon.<sup>23</sup> While Kulbeck and Atter wrote on the strength of their familiarity with the movement's founders and the authenticity that such associations spawned, Miller was celebrated for his academic achievements. The PAOC had come of age in having their very own professional historian to tell the story. Miller set out to correct the weaknesses he identified in the previous books, including Kulbeck's errors of fact and Atter's overemphasis on the international story, which in Miller's opinion, gave too much attention to other Pentecostal organizations around the globe at the expense of telling the denominational story of the PAOC. And of course, with a significant anniversary approaching, a retelling of the

<sup>23</sup> "About the Author," Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals*, 4.

PAOC story was due. Moreover, when Miller published his book, more than thirty years since Atter's textbook had first appeared, it provided an updated textbook option for PAOC bible college students that accounted in part for the growth stimulated by the charismatic movement as new members had left their traditional denominations to take up membership with the Pentecostals.

However, Miller was clearly motivated by more than just an urge to celebrate growth, to set the record straight, or to write another textbook supporting the undying triumphalism implicit in the providential approach of previous chroniclers. True to his academic training, Miller justified the need for his book with reference to scholarship in the sociology of religion. Referencing the scholarship of sociologist David O. Moberg, from Marquette University, that defined five phases of development common among revivalist movements, Miller sounded an alarm to the PAOC and its adherents.<sup>24</sup> Moberg had argued that "revivalist associations rarely have retained their primary religious emphases past the third or fourth generation,"<sup>25</sup> and Miller was convinced that the PAOC was on the verge of decline if action was not taken to restore the movement and recapture the deep spirituality of its founders. As Miller explained,

the PAOC has enjoyed eight decades of uninterrupted growth. ...But the extraordinary accomplishments of the past 80 years have, in themselves, led some thoughtful observers to ask penetrating questions about the future. It remains to be seen whether the PAOC will follow the historical pattern from the origin to decline observed by Moberg, or be an exception.<sup>26</sup>

Miller was quick to say that he hoped the latter would be true and he saw "hopeful indications" in the fact that some members of the PAOC leadership who understood "the critical stages of development" and who were expressing "their determination to maintain the distinctive

<sup>24</sup> While Miller did not provide the reference for Moberg's work that he had in mind, it is likely that he was referring to Moberg's *The Church as a Social Institution* (1962) which appeared in a revised edition in 1984. In that book, Moberg discussed theories about church life-cycle. David O. Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984).

<sup>25</sup> Miller, 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

spiritual emphases.”<sup>27</sup> What sets Miller’s approach apart from the earlier volumes is that although he shared an admiration for the early leaders of the movement, he urged the PAOC not to rest on its laurels (or on God’s providential moves) but to move from celebration of the past to sober thought about the future. PAOC’s General Secretary William Griffin, who helped edit the work, explained that the book used “unique terminology which was so meaningful for the pioneers of Pentecostalism in this century” and that it did so because “our children need to hear about the ‘waves of glory’ and ‘being slain under the power of God.’”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the General Superintendent James McKnight reiterated the importance of Miller’s emphasis on spirit baptism and evangelism and expressed his hopes about the impact the book might have saying “It is my fervent prayer that this volume will become a dynamic instrument to ignite another Pentecost.”<sup>29</sup> Miller’s academic concern with the demise of revivalist movements was useful rhetoric for PAOC leadership concerned about how the movement would fare in the coming decades. The historian and the denominational leadership could agree that it was important to admonish PAOC members who were drifting into complacency and exhort them to return to Pentecostalism’s distinctive foundations.

Douglas Rudd echoed that same message with his 2002 book entitled *When the Spirit Came Upon Them: Highlights from the Early Years of the Pentecostal Movement in Canada*. Emphasizing the vital spirituality of the movement’s founders, Rudd cautioned “Surveillance is vital.”<sup>30</sup> Adopting the same tone of exhortation that characterized Miller’s work, Rudd asked “Have roots been forgotten? Are newly discovered facts included? Have mistakes inadvertently crept into the account? It is essential that records be updated with the most accurate and verifiable facts available. All these reasons justify another review of Pentecostal history in Canada.”<sup>31</sup> Rudd had served for twelve years as archivist for the PAOC yet he admitted that he was not attempting to write an objective, academic account. Confessing that he was deeply invested with the PAOC, both professionally and personally, he revealed “these pages give a view from the inside, not passing

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>28</sup> William Griffin, “Editor’s Preface” in Ibid., 11.

<sup>29</sup> James McKnight, in Ibid., 11.

<sup>30</sup> Rudd, 13.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

comments from a distant, objective, and sometimes hostile viewpoint. In so doing, I have tried to adhere strictly to known facts. Admittedly, I confess to being biased in favor of the Pentecostal way because of close association.”<sup>32</sup> Justifying his “insider” approach, Rudd explained that history should be written with a purpose. To prove his point, he invoked an academic authority figure:

In case that stance might be thought unacceptable, may I share an enlightening statement from Dr. Craig Bloomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary and former research fellow at Tyndale House, Cambridge University: “In the ancient world the idea of writing dispassionate, objective history merely to chronicle events, with no ideological purpose, was unheard of. Nobody wrote history if there wasn’t a reason to learn from it.”<sup>33</sup>

What Rudd hoped his readers would learn was that Pentecostals shared distinctive practices that unlocked the source of spiritual power. As his title suggests, Rudd did not try to redo what Miller had done with his narrative account of the PAOC over the decades. Rudd limited his focus to the events that had unfolded by 1925, and explained that “the content is largely anecdotal, presenting biographies of more than eighty pioneer pastors and missionaries, stories of sixty early churches, and about eighty relevant photos throughout the text.”<sup>34</sup> Rudd revealed that while he was doing research for the book he was “deeply moved by the great price paid by those early Pentecostal believers and their pastors.”<sup>35</sup> Building on the way the pioneer stories had moved him personally, Rudd hoped that readers would be similarly moved and that the book would “inspire them today to exercise faith in the promises enjoyed by the pioneers, but most of all to re-ignite the passion for God and power He provides for evangelism at home and around the world.”<sup>36</sup>

Rudd was overt about the fact that lessons should be learned from history. “Do people ever learn from the past?” he asked

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

rhetorically. Clearly, he hoped that they would, when he exhorted readers,

It is easy to count numbers, sit back, and rest on laurels; and that is just what some may do. God has uniquely blessed the movement in bringing it to this critical juncture in time. Previous generations have paid a great price. The pioneers were often ostracized by the world and maligned by other Christians. The sons and daughters of the movement must complete the mission.<sup>37</sup>

Echoing Miller's concerns that the third and fourth generations of a movement typically move away from the fervor and fundamental practices of the founders, Rudd called out the integrity of some PAOC congregational records when they measured growth in terms of members who transferred from other evangelical congregations. He also warned about the dangers of smug satisfaction that accompanied success when it was measured in worldly terms. Rudd warned PAOC members that they must not fall into the sin of pride "over numbers or material assets" because such measures were "Satan's most subtle snare."<sup>38</sup> Whereas material assets like property and healthy budgets had previously been regarded as a sign of providential blessing by Kulbeck and Atter, Rudd warned they could also be a trap.

But material temptations were only one of the troubling side effects of growth: if Pentecostal churches were expanding because of an influx of evangelical believers who did not share their convictions about spirit baptism, or enthusiastic charismatics who had no sense of PAOC heritage, then the growth was not progress. "It would be a fatal blow to the movement if the new believers who have swollen the ranks should compromise the distinctive truths and experiences which have been at the core. Failure is never further away than one negligent generation."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, if new converts joined the PAOC but were not immersed in the distinctive doctrines of Pentecostalism, then the growth was actually a setback and a liability. Rudd's warnings were precursors to the kinds of concerns raised by the recent scholarship of Adam Stewart about the

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 355.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

effects of evangelicalism diluting Pentecostal distinctives.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Andrew Gabriel and Adam Stewart's study about PAOC clergy views on key doctrines shows that changing views about so-called "essential truths" are common among credential holders of the PAOC, alarmingly not simply the new converts or transferring members within the congregations.<sup>41</sup>

Rudd ended his volume on a sobering note: "There is no easy route. The price of revival is still repentance, consecration, prayer, fasting, hard work, and faith in God. Our leadership is calling for renewal. Pastors and people must respond with one accord – that unity of faith and mission was present for the first church on the Day of Pentecost *when the Spirit came upon them.*"<sup>42</sup> Rudd's work is a clear example of what "one ages finds worthy of note in another" and he hoped that his readers would "pay the price," return to their roots, and experience a new visitation of the Spirit. For Rudd, history was a tool for the PAOC to call believers back to the fundamentals.

### **History as Strategy**

In 2018 the PAOC published a book to mark its upcoming centennial. The book, entitled *Picture This!*, guides readers to consider the values, vision, faith and tenacity of the pioneers. But it does so with a softer tone than that of Miller or Rudd. When the 2018 book was designed, it was deliberately not a comprehensive book nor a full-fledged institutional history like Miller's. Rather, it was a compilation, a series of "snapshots" that were intended to illustrate and be inspirational. This volume is organized around the various departments of the national office, based on the programs that PAOC operates. The book does not have a chronological format but history is used to illustrate how the existing structures came about and to inspire a sense of legacy for current participants in those programs and departments. Stacey McKenzie, PAOC publications manager, explained that the idea behind the 2019 book was to present vignettes so that "Anyone can see

<sup>40</sup> Adam Stewart, *The New Canadian Pentecostals* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> Andrew K. Gabriel, Adam Stewart, and Kevin Shanahan, "Changing Conceptions of Speaking in Tongues and Spirit Baptism Among Canadian Pentecostal Clergy," *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* 7 (2016), 1-24.

<sup>42</sup> Rudd, 357.

themselves in the picture mosaic and be inspired to find their part in the beautiful story that is the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.”<sup>43</sup>

The General Superintendent, in his introduction to the book, gives a historic message to the flock, to reinforce the idea that a “re-set” for the PAOC was necessary. Unlike previous volumes, the PAOC could no longer claim that theirs was a story of uninterrupted growth. The statistical reality in the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seemed to reinforce that Miller’s and Rudd’s fears about decline were actually coming to pass. According to the census, the number of Pentecostals in Canada peaked in 1991 with 436,435 and had declined ten years later to 369,475.<sup>44</sup> Statistics from PAOC’s own sources reveal that the number of their congregations also decreased from 1103 in 1991 to 1060 by 2017.<sup>45</sup>

To counter that new reality, in 2013 the PAOC had developed an ambitious strategy for growth with a plan known as “The 2020 Initiative.” The stated goals of that initiative were that “by 2020, [there will be] 1 per cent of Canadians (350,000) serving Christ within 1,500 Pentecostal disciple-making communities.”<sup>46</sup> The ambitious plan sprang from the fact that between 2008 and 2012, the PAOC “had 81 churches close, merge or disaffiliate. In that same time period, we have had 104 new church plants, satellites and other missional initiatives. Overall, this leaves us with a slight decline in affiliated assemblies but an incremental increase in our churches, satellites, campuses and missional initiatives.”<sup>47</sup> As part of the reset it was undertaking, the PAOC was planning to measure its success differently. As traditional congregations were in decline, the strategy was to put effort and resources into other forms of growth including work on post-secondary campuses, urban ministries, and other entities beyond congregations. On the website that communicates the 2020 Initiative, PAOC leadership explained their response to the statistical decline was not a passive one,

<sup>43</sup> *Picture This*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Wilkinson, table compiled from Canadian Census.

<sup>45</sup> Table compiled by Michael Wilkinson from PAOC Archives; PAOC Vital Statistics.

<sup>46</sup> The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, PAOC Family, “What is the 2020 Initiative?” <https://paoc.org/family/2020> (Accessed January 10, 2019).

<sup>47</sup> PAOC, “What is the 2020 Initiative?”



Thus, with healthy dissatisfaction yet with appreciation for our evident missional impulse, the national leadership was firm in their desire to see a renewed season of church revitalization and multiplication. Think of it—What does that require of us? In our discussion, we recognized that spiritual and theological vitality are essential in order to be effective missionally, whether here in Canada or globally. This involves leaders and congregational members who are intimate with God through prayer and Scripture engagement, and who, empowered by the Spirit, lead generous and just lives where Jesus is shared daily in word and deed.<sup>48</sup>

PAOC General Superintendent David Wells insisted that while the 2020 Initiative was more than a “pipe dream,” he conceded that in and of itself, it was not the answer. He boldly declared that human strategy was not the answer for the denomination’s future. “We are presently growing weary of all our well-intentioned strategies and efforts falling short of changing lives, and of churches where there is not a dynamic move of the Spirit.”<sup>49</sup> Wells was not suggesting however, that the PAOC should abandon strategic thinking, but rather that they call themselves back to “what Jesus said: apart from Him we can do nothing. We need His strategic wisdom, His empowering presence, and His loving activity in our lives.”<sup>50</sup> As he introduced the PAOC centenary book Wells hoped that the historic record would spark reflection because,

The invitation presented by those who have compiled these narratives is for us to read and ponder these pictures of faith and fruitfulness. May we, as a Pentecostal family, continue to personally live and minister with similar vision, values, faith, and tenacity. We are also invited to leave a legacy for those who follow us that provides a clear picture of the faithfulness of God and of the life found in the gospel of His kingdom.<sup>51</sup>

The centennial year’s idea of leaving a legacy is interesting to note. Wells explained the legacy by making it very personal for readers, urging them that this call for renewal was “for the sake of our children,

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Picture This*, 212.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 212-13.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 6.

and grandchildren and next generations of Canadians.”<sup>52</sup> Early in the movement Pentecostals gave little thought to legacy as they sought the gifts and baptism of the Holy Spirit with urgency in order to accomplish the work of the kingdom and thus speed the return of Christ. However, one hundred years later, that eschatological urgency is not a strong emphasis. “Leaving that out” (or at least de-emphasizing it) may be because of continuing discussion within the PAOC about eschatology as part of the “refreshing” of the PAOC Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths that is currently under review. Was this a deliberate attempt to avoid the controversies that are currently swirling among PAOC credential holders, where some “fundamental” elements are being debated, including doctrines about end times (i.e., is it “essential” to hold a pre-millennial view?) and is it fundamental and essential to hold the view that speaking in tongues is THE initial evidence of spirit baptism? Recent clergy surveys reveal that views on these questions are evolving, and that there is generational division among credential holders.<sup>53</sup> As a result, it seems more than coincidental that the PAOC’s commemorative book does not attempt to establish or reinforce doctrinal distinctives as Miller and Rudd had done. Indeed, Wells insisted that revisiting and refreshing the PAOC’s Statement of Fundamental and Essential Truths “has never been a token exercise in denominational self-preservation,” but rather “a passionate cry for God’s Word, theology, and truth to be on the front burners of our lives. Pentecostal distinctives, and how we communicate them, matter. But the highest priority is our personal and corporate mission to be like Jesus and to help others to become disciplined followers of Him as well.”<sup>54</sup>

The goal according to *Picture This!* was to take inspiration from the history, in order to “live and minister with similar vision, values, faith and tenacity” as the PAOC figures from the past who are presented as snapshots throughout the book. Using recent scholarship on Canadian Pentecostalism and their own archival sources, contributors to the centenary book echoed earlier works by PAOC’s official historians, as they “celebrated what the Lord has done” but without such strong triumphalism. At the same time, the 2019 book continues in the tradition

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>53</sup> See Andrew K. Gabriel, Adam Stewart, and Kevin Shanahan, “Changing Conceptions of Speaking in Tongues and Spirit Baptism Among Canadian Pentecostal Clergy,” *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* 7 (2016), 1-24.

<sup>54</sup> *Picture This*, 215.

of the “exhort and admonish” model, but with a softer tone. This new book does not scold readers, but it invites them to dream about how the earlier histories of growth and expansion might inspire and ignite another new period of revival. David Wells made clear that the challenge “for a Fellowship of churches approaching 100 years of age is to maintain vitality ... by keeping the main thing the main thing.”<sup>55</sup> Wells was clear that the main thing was a call for “leaders to be models of prayerful, worshipful intimacy with God who teach and demonstrate a naturally supernatural spirit-empowered life marked by grace and truth.”<sup>56</sup> In effect, *Picture This!* takes the tone of a strategic planning document, with PAOC leaders expecting renewal and growth to emerge from a concerted effort of collective reflection.

Yet exactly what that “renewal” might mean, beyond the call for individual leaders to consecrate themselves anew and make efforts to initiate growth as the national leadership undertook a “refresh” of their doctrinal statement, is unclear. Wells was not suggesting new growth should be measured by material assets nor that doctrinal distinctives should be used to reinforce distinctives as previous historians had done. On the contrary, as PAOC General Superintendent Wells also held leading roles in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the World Pentecostal Fellowship, two groups that deemphasize differences and look for common ground. By the numbers (both attendance and finances) the PAOC is currently one of the most successful denominations in Canada, surpassing the United Church of Canada, even as more Canadians than ever declare their religious affiliation as “none.” With an established level of influence among Canadian evangelicals, the church that Wells currently leads would be unrecognizable to Canada’s earliest Pentecostals like Ellen Hebden and even to its own founding figures like R.E. McAlister.

### **Conclusion**

When historiography considers the “spin” that each of these PAOC books reflects and explores the idea of a particular “angle” in each work, it is not a negative exercise. Sometimes we consider “spin” to be a way of making something false. The idea behind historiographic inquiry is

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 213.

to pay attention to the tone and stated objectives of the works of history to tease out the social process that was at work and the emphases that each author found worthy of note in the history they retold. In other words, why was the book put together when it was and what did the author(s) hope to accomplish by publishing it? From there, I reflected on and analyzed the books' stated purposes to explore why that particular emphasis seemed important to the authors at that time, and in their context.

This paper has identified three different presentations of history that the PAOC has used over time in its official history publications. First, in the Kulbeck and Atter books (1958 and 1962), there was an eagerness to tell the story from the point of view of the pioneers and those who knew those founding figures, and to celebrate what they had accomplished, or rather what God had accomplished through them. While Kulbeck compiled her book from the materials submitted by those founding fathers, Atter added his own material from the firsthand encounters he remembered with PAOC founders, albeit his "correction" to Kulbeck was to add a more global and international perspective because of the missionary emphasis that his family held. The tone of these early works is triumphalist, echoing Cerillo and Wacker's "providential approach," as the books encouraged readers to celebrate the founders and to marvel at "what God hath wrought."

The second pair of books Miller (1994) and Rudd (2002) built on the tone of celebration but added a more sobering element. When Miller's book appeared, in time for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PAOC Charter, the denomination had matured and expanded to the point where telling its story called for a more comprehensive and academic treatment. Miller, who held academic credentials, did not disappoint in the level of detail and the chronological approach he took to the history. Rudd concentrated his book on the first twenty-five years of the movement, recapturing the language and the spirit of the early movement by emphasizing how the earliest Canadian Pentecostals were deeply impacted by their encounters with the Spirit, and consequently made life-changing sacrifices for the cause. In both Miller and Rudd, there is a message of exhortation and admonition. Both authors subscribed to the idea that the danger with the maturing movement was that it might lose its potency as second and third generation believers forgot the fervor that typified their founders. Readers were exhorted to

celebrate the past, but at the same time, admonished that they were guilty of spiritual compromise as they embraced a level of societal acceptance and respectability that their forefathers would have disparaged.

As the PAOC leadership spends its centennial year celebrating its roots, reframing its fundamental and essential truths, and facing the reality of negative trends in growth, the challenges are profound. Moreover, those numbers belie the fact that as Canada becomes an increasingly irreligious society, Pentecostal churches in general (and the PAOC in particular) are doing better than most Canadian churches if success is measured by participation rates and budgets. Inviting their leaders and members to dream, envision, and picture the future growth they hope for, the PAOC leadership is using history as a tool in that strategic planning process. Rather than scold themselves for relying on material assets and membership transfers as marker of success, the PAOC is hoping to find measurable growth in campus ministries, urban projects, and other “missional activities.” The General Superintendent urged readers to recognize that future “missional vitality” required the PAOC to “recapture what it means to be vital, fruitful, and multiplying leaders and churches.”<sup>57</sup> In the most recent history book, there is a clear call for personal and corporate intimacy with God that will lead PAOC people to make disciples and to do so “within the context and relationships that the Lord has given [them].”

Critical thinkers in PAOC pews, and certainly those in the academy, will echo the words that opened this paper: “I’m very interested in hearing you tell the story because I’ll be listening for what you include, what you exclude, and the spin you put on that which you do include!” The “spin” that some sociologists of religion take is more about looking to the future than the past. As one scholar friend recently predicted, “Denominations, in the sense that they exist in national contexts like Canada, are not likely to survive another thirty years.”<sup>58</sup> As shocking as that prediction seems, this colleague insists, “The long and short of it is that sociologists of religion are increasingly reporting changes that are so massively disruptive that the conversations that denominational leaders are having (mostly to do with comfortably

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Stewart, personal email correspondence with the author, March 4, 2019.

managing demographic decline) do not even interest most of us because we realize that they will, most likely, not be the conversations that we will even be having in ten, let alone, thirty years.”<sup>59</sup> While denominationalism ran its course throughout the twentieth century and up to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PAOC, the future of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement in Canada may resemble more what some of the earliest Pentecostals were actually calling for: the throwing off of cumbersome denominational forms that seemed to hamper what they heard the Spirit saying to the churches. If the “death of denominations” thesis that my sociology friend predicts actually transpires, then ironically, Ellen Hebden and her fellow “anti-organization” peers will be vindicated. But of course, as historians, we will have to wait and see. We will be better placed to measure the validity of the sociologist’s predictions by the year 2049.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.