

書評

R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America*

(Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010)

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Pentecostalism is one of the fastest growing Christian groups today, not only in the United States but especially in the Southern Hemisphere. The majority of its adherents now live outside the US, although the movement had its origin in the US. R. G. Robins' *Pentecostalism in America* is a concise and well-informed introduction to the history and theology of Pentecostalism in America. Although its focus is on classical Pentecostalism, it provides a comprehensive survey of this multi-faceted spiritual renewal movements in relation to its classical origins. The book contextualizes each religious aspect or phenomenon in relation to socio-cultural and political settings in American history. This approach helps readers outside the discipline of religious studies to follow the elusive history of Pentecostalism and associated movements in a cohesive narrative line.

Chapter one, on the origins of Pentecostalism and its distinctive theological emphasis, is especially helpful in locating the movement in its historical context. Pentecostalism began as an offshoot of the Holiness movement, which itself had branched out from the Methodist movement after the Civil War. Robins demonstrates how the radical Holiness adherents paved the way for the formation of the early Pentecostal groups in the nineteenth century. The Holiness spiritual leaders, such as Timothy Merritt and Phoebe Palmer, pushed beyond the Wesleyan Methodist emphasis on the “second blessing” after one’s conversion to a perfectionist belief in “entire sanctification.”¹⁾ In this state, the true convert would attain sinless perfection even while physically living on earth. The Holiness perfectionist movement encouraged its adherents to seek for the “higher life,” both moral and spiritual, in everyday living.²⁾ The radical Holiness pursued this further and sought to identify concrete signs of spiritual perfection.

Although Robins emphasizes the American origin of classic Pentecostalism, the “higher life” movement originated in Keswick, the United Kingdom, the center of the movement. The “higher life” group gradually adopted popular eschatological premises called dispensational premillennialism, the prophetic doctrine developed by John Nelson Darby, leader of the British Plymouth Brethren Church. Thus it may be said that the Holiness movement was transatlantic and international rather than American in its beginning.

The most widely accepted version of dispensationalism divided historical economies

¹⁾ R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 5.

²⁾ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

or orders into seven “dispensations.” Following this schematic understanding of history, Holiness believers understood that they were in the sixth dispensation, the Dispensation of Grace or the Church Age, in which true believers receive the “latter rain” of the Holy Spirit’s blessings. In the premillennialist framework, the seventh dispensation, the final stage of human history, would begin with the Second Coming of Christ.³⁾

Another special belief that the classic Pentecostals emphasized and that came directly from the Holiness predecessors was “faith healing” which, Robins argues, “resonated with the mood of late-Victorian romanticism, which had a fascination for intense experience and the extraordinary.” “Faith healing” became the “centerpiece of the movement’s drive to recapitulate the power and praxis of the Apostolic Church” and became a “routine feature of Holiness meetings.”⁴⁾ To see a biblical restorationist attitude in “faith healing,” however, is only partially persuasive, for the nineteenth-century Holiness “faith healing” was slightly different from the biblical one in its theological insistence that Christ’s atonement on the cross provided physical healing just as it provided spiritual healing.⁵⁾ This was an invention rather than a restoration of Apostolic practices.

“Higher life,” dispensationalism, and “faith healing” were the three special emphases the Pentecostals inherited from their radical Holiness predecessors. By the end of the nineteenth century, “glossolalia,” or “speaking in tongues,” which was practiced in the Apostolic Church since the day of Pentecost, became normative among the Pentecostals.⁶⁾ Glossolalia was interpreted as a sign of the “Baptism of Fire” and became indispensable among Pentecostal practices. Robins considers that these Pentecostal emphases, which hark back to the early Church, reveal the Pentecostals to be “chronological primitivists” who tried to restore the faith and practices of the Apostolic Church as well as “cultural primitivists” who pursued “a superlative Christian life through Holy Ghost baptism.”⁷⁾ He sees these two modes of primitivism, both chronological and cultural, as parts of the Pentecostals’ “typically American mode of social adjustment . . . to walk backward into the future, eagerly appropriating the material artifacts of modernity while striking a cultural counterpoise that affirms traditional values as it grows more distant from them.”⁸⁾

Biblical primitivist notions can be traced back to seventeenth-century Puritanism as Theodore Dwight Bozeman demonstrated in *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (1988).⁹⁾ Radical Holiness as well as Pentecostals, however,

³⁾ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁾ Ibid., 6-7.

⁵⁾ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.

⁶⁾ R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America*, 22-24.

⁷⁾ Ibid., 9.

⁸⁾ Ibid., 8-9.

⁹⁾ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 11, 15-18.

sought to restore particular practices such as “faith healing” and “glossolalia” as special signs of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostals’ primitivist notion was different from that of Puritanism since it did not care much about the theological or doctrinal framework of these signs and practices. Pentecostals were rather inventive than primitive in developing their modern religious practices, disregarding the theological context of the Apostolic teachings.

Robins astutely points to “syncretism” as the “genius and the essence” of the Holiness as well as the Pentecostal movement. This was inevitable since its adherents came from diverse social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and from scores of Protestant denominations. In addition to such ecumenicity, it was a “genuinely international movement” which drove the adherents to travel for international “conferences in places like Keswick, England, and Gnadau, Germany.” Missionaries were sent abroad for the movement’s formative year, to Asia and Africa. Just like the Lutheran Pietist movement in the eighteenth century, the Pentecostal movement became an “inclusive force capable of uniting broad coalitions of Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, Reformed, and other believers in the pursuit of higher common ground,” crossing the denominational borders.¹⁰⁾

At the turn of the nineteenth century, radical Holiness provided two factors to the early Pentecostal movement in addition to the emphases discussed so far. Firstly, “growing numbers of plainfolk saints, those with rural and working-class sensibilities” attested intense expressions of Holiness experiences and became the focal members to form early Pentecostalism. Secondly, “comeouters,” those who came from other denominations, pursued the way toward independence from any other existing denominations. Both working-class “plainfolk saints” and independent-minded “comeouters” tended to uphold egalitarian values and shared “their dual alienation from mainline denominations and mainstream Holiness” particularly “in their dispute with main stream Holiness gentility.”¹¹⁾ The deep-seated class and cultural antagonisms among them created another important feature of radical Holiness, namely “religious ecstasy,” which they termed “shouting.” Bodily activities and expressions such as “falling, screaming, shouting, running, jumping, laughing” were considered “manifestations of the Holy Ghost” and valued more than sedate religious exercises.¹²⁾

Religious ecstasy and its theology of the poor extended the boundaries of the movement and attracted the socially and culturally oppressed: African Americans and women. However, African Americans in the radical Holiness wings shaped their own movement separately from the whites.¹³⁾ With its marginal status, the movement also provided women a greater social freedom and involved them in active ministry.

¹⁰⁾ R. G. Robins, *Pentecostalism in America*, 8.

¹¹⁾ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹²⁾ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹³⁾ *Ibid.*

In Chapter two, the outburst of glossolalia at Azusa Street in 1906 is discussed as the event marking the Pentecostals' separation from radical Holiness. Since this revival, glossolalia became a crucial experience to be interpreted as the sign of baptism with the Holy Spirit. In this phase, Pentecostalism made sharp inroads into the African American community under the leadership of Lucy Farrow and William Seymore. The Azusa Street revival began under Farrow's assistance to Seymore's congregation with one worshiper's experience of Holy Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. The influential revivalist eruption was marked by ecstatic frenzies, outbursts of glossolalia, and racial mingling.¹⁴⁾ In a typical Pentecostal worship service, glossolalic rituals were incorporated into the charismatic performance of drama, music, and song without losing order, with "enraptured saints" and "the free flow of worship" as "proof of God's sovereign and validating presence."¹⁵⁾ Otherwise an ambiguous doctrine of Holy Spirit baptism in the radical Holiness framework was clarified by making glossolalia the obvious marker of the Spirit baptism.

Chapter three moves to the period between the great wars and notes the changes in the Pentecostal movement's religious culture and the rising strength and organization skills of its major institutions. In the period after World War I, one of the crucial issues was the fundamentalist and modernist controversy. This chapter traces how the Pentecostals have started to become the prominent actors on the fundamentalist side and eventually took the central position among the evangelicals. In the early part of the controversy, Robins maintains, Pentecostals positioned themselves neither with Protestant modernists nor with fundamentalists but "followed a third way."¹⁶⁾ Although Pentecostals held to the "fundamentals" of Christianity as strongly as any other fundamentalists, "they remained relatively untroubled by theological modernism," for they did not take theology or theory as seriously as theological conservatives in the major denominations such as Presbyterians and Baptists. Pentecostals' primary concern rested on religious experience. Soon, however, they gravitated toward fundamentalism, since both shared similar theological commitments and moral values. For a brief while, however, Pentecostalism "held a middle ground, where its individualistic, experiential assumptions and progressive spirit resembled Protestant modernists while its doctrinal commitments, biblical literalism, and class affiliations echoed the grass roots—if not the institutional elites [such as Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen]—of fundamentalism."¹⁷⁾

Adaptation of modernity was also seen in their quick reception of the latest popular culture, especially in the fields of music and media. While holding a conservative doctrinal line, Pentecostals quickly adapted contemporary popular music and instrumentation into

¹⁴⁾ Ibid., 24-25.

¹⁵⁾ Ibid., 29.

¹⁶⁾ Ibid., 58.

¹⁷⁾ Ibid., 59.

their worship. Furthermore, they met in taverns or theaters for worship without any hesitation. Such innovations in worship services increased their outreach and attracted new adherents to the movement. In spite of a steady decline among mainline Protestant Churches throughout the 1920s and 1930s, American Pentecostalism attained numerical growth. Fundamentalist groups and the Pentecostals rose in numbers and expanded their influence without recognition by mainstream media for quite a while after the Scopes Trial in 1925.¹⁸⁾

In the 1920s, Pentecostal denominations faced internal changes in their formulations and facilitated infrastructural strength by adopting “constitutionalism” and “rule by committee.” To regulate the disputes and overcome differences in opinion among the institutions within Pentecostal bodies, the adoption of constitutions was necessary. In their structural formation of institutions, the Pentecostals were steadfast realists.

Pentecostals attained the height of their growth in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1962, *Time* magazine recognized Pentecostalism as the “fastest growing religious movement in the hemisphere.”¹⁹⁾ Chapters four and five trace its expansion and its religious, socio-cultural, and political influence. Aimee Semple McPherson’s pioneering accomplishment as a media celebrity was maintained in the Pentecostal tradition by TV evangelists in the latter half of the twentieth century. Pentecostals’ prominence in TV evangelism surpassed that of any other religious groups. Their growth was amazingly rapid even though they earned relative social respectability only since the post-war period. They quickly moved from the periphery to the center of evangelicals, pushing aside such traditional evangelical denominations as Presbyterians and Baptists.

In spite of its decidedly anti-modern attitudes, Robins observes, Pentecostalism’s message, social instincts, and organizational structures proved well suited to the modern realities of the postwar United States.²⁰⁾ It took its first steps toward rapprochement with the wider evangelical world in the 1940s, when several predominantly white, Trinitarian bodies joined the NAE (National Association of Evangelicals). These denominations quickly moved toward full evangelicalization. In the National Religious Broadcasters for TV evangelism and in para-church agencies such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Pentecostal leaders built a close alliance with the evangelicals, pursuing common interests in political lobbying and inter-denominational evangelism.²¹⁾

Although the post-war Pentecostals acquired institutional strength by skillfully organizing their bodies, they still sought spiritual renewal as a revitalization against gentrification. The revival movement erupted in mid-twentieth century under charismatic leaders of “deliverance evangelism,” among whom Oral Roberts was the most successful. Having started as a preacher affiliated with the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Roberts won

18) Ibid., 63.

19) Ibid., 78.

20) Ibid., 73-74.

21) Ibid., 78.

recognition in his denomination at an early age. By the 1950s, he was applying his skills to ecumenical ends, and successfully cultivated ties with mainline Protestants and lay Catholics. The career steps he took from an itinerant preacher to a university president enabled him to become one of the most successful evangelists of his generation. Further success was brought by TV evangelism and Roberts became the chief executive officer of a multimedia empire by the mid-1970s.²²⁾

Postwar Pentecostal revitalization movements further expanded to include mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church through the Charismatic Renewal movements.²³⁾ Furthermore, Pentecostal influence reached the advocates of counter culture spiritual pursuits such as the Jesus People Movement in the 1960s. Although this movement was complex and could not be credited to a single course, Robins asserts, in “its frank supernaturalism, its primitivist urge to restore apostolic Christianity, its millenarian expectation, and its Spirit-centered openness to tongues, healing, and other charismatic gifts, the Jesus People movement bore the telltale imprint of Pentecostalism.”²⁴⁾

Chapter five deals with Pentecostalism’s continued assimilation and pays in-depth attention to the politicization of the movement from the 1970s to the present. White Pentecostals responded “ambiguously” to civil rights activism, while black Pentecostals, who had been segregated by the 1930s, actively took the same direction as the Black Church. During this period, Pentecostalism flourished more fully abroad than in the United States. By this time the non-American and non-Western membership of the movement exceeded that of white Americans.²⁵⁾

In responding to the post-civil rights cultural wars, Robins argues, Pentecostals fervently joined their culturally conservative comrades among fundamentalists and evangelicals to defend America’s Judeo-Christian heritage. Calling their opponents “secular humanists,” conservatives were united to confront America’s social and cultural challenges. Since the Equal Rights Amendment (1972), the Supreme Court legalization of abortion on demand (1973), feminism and the gay rights movement were associated in the public mind with the Democratic Party, the politicized white fundamentalists and evangelicals started to take a major role in the Republican Party after the 1964 election. Pentecostals, as well as other conservative Christian groups, made a political turn which eventually led to the Republican victory seen in the presidential election of 1980.²⁶⁾

The ideal of limited government, adopted by the Republican Party, suited well the apolitical instincts of Pentecostals and other sectarians, who had always looked to churches, private charity, and personal initiative for solutions to social problems. Pentecostals and

22) *Ibid.*, 86-90.

23) *Ibid.*, 91-93.

24) *Ibid.*, 99.

25) *Ibid.*, 105-122.

26) *Ibid.*, 112.

other religious conservatives soon gathered around a political consensus that was pro-family, pro-religion, pro-business, pro-defense, anti-communist, and anti-big government.²⁷⁾ The leading Pentecostal televangelists such as Pat Robertson, Paul Crouch, and Jim Bakker helped to promote the conservative political agenda with their pervasive reference to family and home.²⁸⁾

Pentecostals' continual influence on American politics was phenomenal. In the 2008 presidential race, Sarah Palin, a Pentecostal from the Assembly of God background, became a media sensation as John McCain's running mate on the Republican ticket. Although her influence had faded by the time of the 2012 presidential race, frenzied media still followed her until around October 2011 to find out whether she would run in the primaries as a Republican presidential candidate. Palin was not the first Pentecostal media celebrity in US history. Robin's work clarifies that there is a certain continuity from Aimee Semple McPherson in the 1920's and 30's to Palin in 2012. On the Democratic side, Barack Obama chose the Pentecostal minister Joshua DuBois to head his White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in order to close the "God gap."²⁹⁾ The historical analysis presented in this study leads us to understand the religious scene behind the politics, revealing how crucial a role Pentecostals have played in recent American politics.

As Robins suggests in the conclusion of the book, the ratio of foreign to US Pentecostal adherents is now ten to one.³⁰⁾ Pentecostal identity has become increasingly global, multi-racial and multi-ethnic. The political tendency especially among the white Pentecostals, however, is still traditional and the dispensationalist framework of seeing the signs of times sustains its ideological influence. The elusiveness of the spiritual movement has given Pentecostalism its energy and strength. How Pentecostals shape their social and political views in future may continue to influence America's destiny as it has done since the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Robins' work reminds us that in the United States religion has never been totally separated from this world but pervades everyday life—sacred and secular, private and public—in a peculiarly American way. Pentecostals may be biblical primitivists as Robins insists but, at the same time, they are powerful inventors of modern religion.

27) Ibid., 113-114.

28) Ibid., 114-115.

29) Ibid., 117.

30) Ibid., 143.