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THE GLOBALIZATION OF PENTECOSTALISM: THE ROLE OF ASIAN IMMIGRANT PENTECOSTALS IN CANADA

Michael Wilkinson

Introduction

The globalization of Pentecostalism is an area of study that is relatively in its infancy. Researchers are just beginning to examine the implications of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity as a global movement. Most studies have focussed on local Pentecostal histories. To date research has attempted to establish that Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is a global movement, even if its origins are debated.[1] While it is not my concern to enter into the debate about the origins of Pentecostalism here, I do want to examine precisely how Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity is interconnected on a global scale.[2] In this paper I examine some of the transnational ties between Pentecostals in Asia and Canada. What I show is that these transnational networks between the "home" country and the "host" country are increasingly important for Asian migrants. Also, while ties between migrants have previously existed, what is new is the proliferation

[1] See Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1995); Karla Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture* (Columbia: South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

[2] For one perspective on the origins debate see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Pentecostal Origins in Global Perspective," in *All Together in One Place: Theological Papers form the Brighton Conference on World Evangelization*, eds. Harold D. Hunter and Peter D. Hocken (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 166-88.

of social ties among migrants. My findings are based on a larger research project of ethnic Pentecostal congregations in Canada.[3]

2. Asian Migration

Immigration to Canada has changed since the late 1960s when the Immigration Act introduced a new point system aligning immigration with the needs of the labor market.[4] Specifically, immigration became associated with large peaceful international movements of people looking for employment whereas in the past migration often followed periods of war, famine, or conquest by colonial forces.[5] Another major change for Canada was the increase in migration from non-European sources, especially Asia. For example, the immigrant population from the United Kingdom decreased from 25.2% of all immigrants before 1961 to 2.4% of those arriving between 1991 and 1996. Among those from Eastern Asia the percentage of immigrants increased from 1.9% before 1961 to 24.3% of all immigrants arriving in Canada between 1991 and 1996 (see the table below).[6]

Over 75% of the immigrants coming to Canada in the 1990s are members of a visible minority group.[7] Visible minorities account for 18% of the population in the Province of British Colombia and 16% in the Province of Ontario. The majority of immigrants choose the cities of Vancouver, British Columbia and Toronto, Ontario as their places of destination. The largest visible minority group are individuals who identify

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[3] Michael Wilkinson, "Global Migration and Transformation among Canadian Pentecostals" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1999).

[4] This section relies substantially on James S. Frideres, "Changing Dimensions of Ethnicity in Canada" in *Deconstructing a Nation: Immigration, Multiculturalism and Racism in '90s Canada*, ed. Vic Satzewich (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 1992), pp. 47-67.

[5] Frideres, "Changing Dimensions," pp. 50, 66-67.

[6] Statistics Canada at the following location (consulted 28/07/99): http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/Peopel/Population/demo25b.htm. Immigrant population "refers to people who are or have been immigrants in Canada. A landed immigrant is a person who has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Some immigrants have resided in Canada for number of years, while others are recent arrivals."

[7] Statistics Canada at http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/980217/d980217.htm. (July 28, 1999).

themselves as Chinese accounting for 860,000 people or 3% of Canada's population. The next largest minority group is 671,000 South Asians who comprise 2.4% of Canada's population. Approximately 1.1 million Filipinos, Southeast Asians, Latin Americans, Japanese, Koreans, Arabs and West Asians make up the remaining one-third of the visible minority population. Approximately 574,000 blacks represent 2% of the Canadian population. Canada's cultural mosaic has changed.

Place of Birth	Immig. Populat.	Before 1961	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-1996
United Kingdom	655,540	265,580 (25.2%)	168,140 (21.3%)	132,950 (13.3%)	63,445 (5.8%)	25,420 (2.4%)
Eastern Asia	589,420	20,555 (1.9%)	38,865 (4.9%)	104,940 (10.5%)	172,715 (15.8%)	252,340 (24.3%)
South-east Asia	408,985	2,485 (0.2%)	14,040 (1.8%)	111,700 (11.2%)	162,490 (14.9%)	118,265 (11.4%)
Southern Asian	353,515	4,565 (0.4%)	28,875 (1.2%)	80,755 (1.5%)	99,270 (0.9%)	140,055 (1.0%)

Immigrant Population by place of birth and period of immigration
(Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 Census)

In terms of religion, one would expect that Canada's religious mosaic would also be transforming. Reginald Bibby, however, argues that the majority of immigrants arriving to Canada are coming as Christians already.[8] As I have argued elsewhere, the greatest challenge for the Christian churches in Canada is not the evangelization of immigrants. Rather, the migration of non-European Christians to Canada has several other consequences for the denominations, including the Pentecostals.[9] According to my earlier research, the fastest changing segment of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), the largest Pentecostal denomination in Canada, is the growth of new ethnic congregations. As of January 1997 there were 120 ethnic congregations out of a total of 1,110 congregations in the PAOC. Most of this growth has occurred since the early 1990s and includes such ethnic groups as Chinese, Ethiopian, Filipino, Ghanian, Japanese, Korean, Malaysian, Spanish, Tamil and many others.

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[8] Reginald Bibby, *Unknown Gods: The Ongoing Story of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), p. 23.

[9] Wilkinson, "Global Migration and Transformation," p. 9.

3. Global Networks

As stated above, social ties among people between "home" and "host" countries is not new. As well, these transnational social ties are not unique to Pentecostals. What is new, however, is evidence of a proliferation of transnational links since the early 1990s.[10] Furthermore, the implications of these new social relationships are yet to be fully understood. The range of transnational social ties among Pentecostals include new denominational affiliations, global pastoral searches, theological training on the Internet, special events and conferences, prayer networks, Internet sites, international ministries, publications, music, television, video, and also migration. Important here is the idea that the flow between the links is two directional. The various affiliations that I discuss here consist of both sending and receiving links. These transnational relationships and practices increasingly carry religion, and specifically Pentecostalism, as a global culture.[11] There are three broad types of transnational Pentecostal networks that I have identified. They are congregational ministry flows, special event and conference links, and denominational affiliations.

The social ties between Pentecostal congregations and their members occur through the Internet, telephone, letters, videotapes, cassette tapes, mail, travel, and migration. Transnational congregational ministry links manifest themselves in pastoral searches, theological education, prayer, worship, the building of facilities, promotion, and support. Special event and conference links among Pentecostals occur in two different ways. First, there are global events and conferences that pastors and members of ethnic congregations attend with other Pentecostals from around the world. For example, the Pentecostal World Conference took place in Korea in 1998 and

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[10] Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 59.

[11] For other studies of global religion and transnational ties, see Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1994); Poewe, ed., *Charismatic Christianity*; Irving Hexam and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997); Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Faces of Catholic Transnationalism: In and Beyond France," in *Transnational Religion and Fading States*, eds. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and James Piscatori (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 104-118; Rijk A. Van Dijk, "From Camp to Encompassment: Discourses of Transsubjectivity in the Ghanian Pentecostal Diaspora," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27:2 (1997), pp. 135-159; Peggy Levitt, "Local-level Global Religion: US-Dominican Migration," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37:1 (1998), pp. 74-89.

was attended by Pentecostals from around the world. The second type of special event is more local in nature but it has a global focus that links the local congregation with other Pentecostals globally. For example, Spanish congregations in Canada annually celebrate their cultural diversity and the ties they have with their "home" countries.[12] The final type of Pentecostal network is the denominational affiliation. Again, it is not that denominational affiliations are new but that there is a proliferation of new denominational affiliations both formal and informal. These new global Pentecostal networks have organizational implications for Pentecostalism as new affiliations challenge old paradigms of "doing Pentecostalism." What follows is a brief examination of these social ties and the way they are transforming Asian and Canadian Pentecostalism.

4. Global Networks among Asian Pentecostals

The various ministry links maintained among Asian Pentecostals illustrates how Pentecostalism is changing. The types of transnational ministry networks presented here show the global nature of such things as pastoral searches and theological education. These changes relate to practical theology. The PAOC has attempted to deal with these issues in several ways. One change that has occurred in Canada revolves around the problem of a lack of pastors for Asian congregations. As a result, pastoral searches have extended beyond the borders of Canada. As one PAOC official explained, there are an insufficient number of qualified pastors for Asian congregations. For example, when new Chinese immigrant congregations began to be established in the 1990s, especially with Pentecostals from Hong Kong, the PAOC assumed a Canadian Chinese pastor, originally from Mainland China, would have no problem overseeing the congregation. It soon became apparent though that the pastor and the congregation were culturally far apart. With no Hong Kong Chinese pastor available in Canada, the search for a pastor was made in Hong Kong. The PAOC was able to find a pastor in Hong Kong who was willing to come to Canada to pastor the Chinese congregation. A Tamil speaking congregation in Toronto also made a global pastoral search when parishioners invited

[12] The anniversary celebration culminates in a "parade of nations." During the service several members representing the different countries in the Spanish congregation march in singing their national anthem while carrying the home flag. The service ends with prayer for the home countries and world evangelism. See Wilkinson, "Global Migration and transformation," pp. 216-17.

their former pastor from Sri Lanka to come to Canada to provide pastoral leadership.

Related to a lack of pastors are the requests for theological education by ethnic congregations. A group of Tamil speaking Pentecostals in Toronto have requested the PAOC to provide theological education that is distinctly Asian. Tamil students have not adjusted well to a western style of education. The PAOC has accommodated this request. Lyman Kulathungam, a Sri Lankan Tamil who teaches at Eastern Pentecostal Bible College in Peterborough, teaches courses for the Tamils. Kulathungam told me that the program has worked well for the Sri Lankan students as they are able to offer courses that are more contextual dealing with law and legal issues, and human rights, courses not traditionally offered in a Bible college curriculum. However, it is also a challenge because not all Tamil speaking Pentecostals in Canada are from Sri Lanka. Tamil speaking migrants have different histories and cultures as many have come from south India, north and east Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Africa. Thus the PAOC is changing as it endeavors to accommodate the requests of Pentecostal migrants from distinct regions of the world.

Second, Pentecostalism is changing through special event and conference links which also serve to construct and maintain cultural identity. Many ethnic congregations participate in conferences in North America, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. For example, Joo, pastor of World Pentecostal Mission Church in Toronto, participates in an annual pastors conference at Yonggi Cho's Full Gospel Church in Korea. The conference connects Joo with other Korean pastors around the world where ideas for ministry are exchanged, prayer support is provided, and cultural continuity is maintained. Joo's congregation in Canada then benefits from the conference through the establishment of an important link between Canada and Korea. Joo is able to network with other Koreans who are coming to Canada. The World Pentecostal Mission Church provides services in both English and Korean which establishes a connection for worshippers from Korea.

Third, there are organizational implications for Pentecostalism that center around organizational and denominational issues. For example, one of the changes for the PAOC revolves around the sharing of facilities by more than one congregation. Most ethnic congregations cannot afford to build their own facilities. As a result most of them meet in the buildings of older established English-speaking congregations. The Agincourt Pentecostal Church in Toronto has four language groups sharing the facility including a Tamil congregation and a Chinese congregation. The English-speaking congregation, which built and paid for the facility, felt the other

congregations had little respect for the building. The ensuing conflict led to the development by the PAOC of a shared facilities agreement with guidelines for peaceful cooperation in the building. Again, the PAOC is endeavoring to deal appropriately with organizational issues and ethnic congregations.

One effort is to have a yearly seminar for the leaders of ethnic congregations to deal with relevant concerns, especially organizational ones. In 1995, PAOC official, Stewart Hunter said that the PAOC is still learning to be flexible with its new diversity. At that time they were reluctant to allow a PAOC Korean congregation to also hold affiliation status with Yonggi Cho's Full Gospel World Mission. The Korean congregation then decided to withdraw its membership with the PAOC in favor of the Korean affiliation. In 1997 the PAOC changed. Korean congregations can now have dual denominational affiliation. They can maintain their ties with the "home" country and the "host" country. Korean pastors in Canada contend that holding dual affiliation with the Full Gospel World Mission in North America and globally allows them to not only use the name Full Gospel but also maintains a sense of Korean Pentecostalism in Canada. An official partnership was also established between Korean and Canadian Pentecostals in 1998 when Eastern Pentecostal Bible College founded an official relationship with Korea's Hansei University. The two institutions signed an agreement for student and faculty exchanges.[13]

The idea of partnership between the PAOC, ethnic congregations, and other Pentecostal denominations globally, is largely a response to contemporary circumstances. New partnerships, according to Ken Birch and Eusebio Perez, assumes a spiritual unity between equals.[14] They argue that non-ethnic congregations need to also make adjustments by partnering, in several ways, with ethnic congregations. First, the local congregation can partner with ethnic congregations through sharing facilities. Second, Pentecostal denominations can partner with ethnic congregations by providing finances to support new ministries. Finally, Pentecostal denominations can partner with ethnic congregations by encouraging leadership development. The PAOC is attempting to adjust to the new

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[13] See "Building Bridges," *On Track* (Peterborough: Eastern Pentecostal Bible College, Summer 1998).

[14] Kenneth B. Birch and Eusebio Perez, "Ethnic and Anglo Churches in Partnership," in *Missions within Reach: Intercultural Ministries in Canada*, ed. Enoch Wan (Hong Kong: China Alliance Press, 1995), pp. 59-72.

migration. It is also recognizing the importance of global networks among Pentecostals in Asia and Canada.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Pentecostalism, and specifically the PAOC, is adapting to the realities of global migration and the various transnational social ties maintained between Pentecostals in Asia and Canada. Global networks, such as congregational ministry ties, special event and conference links, and organizational and denominational affiliations, have several implications for Pentecostals. First, there is a greater diversity within the PAOC not experienced before. Along with the new diversity is the desire and ability for Asian Pentecostals to maintain close ties with their "home" countries. The consequences of these social ties are still yet to be determined not only in the "host" country but also in the "home" country. An area that still needs to be examined is the degree to which Pentecostal congregations in Asia are changing as they establish ties with other Pentecostals, especially in North America. For example, how are Pentecostals in Asia responding to new denominational ties? What kinds of adjustments are made through increased contact with other Pentecostals? How do global networks lead to new conceptions of Pentecostal identity? What contributions are Asian Pentecostals making to the development of a global Pentecostal culture? The global story of Pentecostalism can only be enhanced through a better understanding of transnational networks among Pentecostals.