
About twenty years ago, I was teaching a course in systematic theology at an interdenominational evangelical seminary in Toronto. The institution served many theological communities, including the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), a historic and Trinitarian leaning denomination. In the class, a PAOC student articulated a position that was very close to Oneness theology. The encounter suggested that the separation between Trinitarian and Oneness Pentecostalism was not as definitive a break as has been claimed. The PAOC has a historical origin different from the Assemblies of God, as David Reed ably argues. Howard Goss, a Oneness Pentecostal and cosigner of the dominion charter, remained with the PAOC even after it embraced a Trinitarian position. For eighteen years, Goss pastored the very church my forementioned student attended. Reed’s historical reconstruction helps to make sense of this curious encounter.

The book is organized around the prominent themes of race and gender. Mexican Oneness Pentecostals were a significant cluster, the focus of chapters by Daniel Ramírez, Patricia Fortuny Loret de Molan, and Daniel Chiquete. Of particular interest was Ramírez’s claim that the Assemblies of God origins narrative of Hot Springs (1914) and St. Louis (1916) needs to be relativized as a number of pre-1914 Mexicans were already practicing Jesus’ name water baptism, such as Juan Navarro, Luis Lopez (1909), Francisco Llorente (1912), and Romana Valenzeula. Daniel Segraves’ reconstruction of Andrew D. Urshan’s theology is rooted in his Persian heritage, with Syrian and Nestorian Christian influences that provide much insight to be plumbed by theologians on both sides of the debate with implications for ecumenical dialogue. And there are excellent chapters by Rosa Sailes and Dara Colby Delgado on African American Oneness developments especially among women in which resistance to cultural racism provided an important lens for understanding the differences from other Oneness Christians.

Chapters by Sailes, Andrea Johnson, Delgado, and de Molan tackle the complex issue of gender in which Oneness Pentecostal women replicate the patriarchal attitudes and structures while also arguing how these women subvert expected norms as they fulfilled their religious calling. Geneva Brazier, an African American woman with a fundamentalist theology grounded in a strict Oneness and Holiness ethos, would subvert that ethos by decorating for Christmas and enjoying baseball and marbles, behaviors that violated Pentecostal Assemblies of the World (PAW) restrictions. Moreover, she was committed to social activism, civil rights, and justice in confronting the racism of her day. In a complementary manner, Delgado explores the gender politic
in the PAW in which men adopted a passive-aggressive approach in its progressive patriarchalism. Black women were entrepreneurial, innovative, and agents of activism as they resisted patriarchal norms, even while PAW men worked to limit women’s liberty to protect male authority. Johnson examines how women held some authority and as evangelists could perform marriages, funerals, baptisms, and communion but only in emergencies. The mission field offered more advantages as women were freer from gender challenges. Again, Oneness women challenged patriarchal norms while navigating within patriarchal structures. De Molan examines the norms and rules for women associated with the Luz del Munda Church, a Mexican church that combines Pentecostal theology and norms with regional Catholic culture. Women are denied access to the upper echelons of power and can only be in charge and work at the lower rung of the church hierarchy. However, de Molan adopts a Foucauldian analysis in that the deployment of power has both formal and informal arrangements, and Luz del Mundo women predominantly operate in informal settings. De Mola’s trans-generational analysis finds a considerable range of diversity that makes gender relations and forms of power highly paradoxical.

These chapters triangulate with contemporary scholarship investigating women and power in global Pentecostal settings. With years of gaining improvements and rights for women in both the secular and religious spheres, and the purported egalitarian values brought by ecstatic rituals such as glossolalia, why are Pentecostal women not more represented in the upper echelons of leadership? The answer resides in the “gender paradox” in which Pentecostal women were willing to negotiate (intentionally or unintentionally), giving up formal authority to men who embraced holiness codes that supported the family and the well-being of the marriage. In other words, male conversion placed restrictions around alcohol consumption, smoking, gambling, and womanizing that brought men back into the family system. Pentecostal women desired these holiness regulations and in order to maintain this newfound comportment, they were willing to divest of their religious power and allow men positions of formal authority (e.g., see Elizabeth E. Brusco, The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Columbia [Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995]).

An implicit theme is the role of migration in the development of the complex tapestry of Oneness Pentecostalism. Ramírez and Reed point to migration of both sides of the US border, in which Mexicans took their newfound faith down to Mexico (either voluntarily or through forced expulsion), and Europeans across the northern border. Lloyd Barba explores migration of Okies from the midwest and southern states to California, bringing with them a more bombastic and confrontational form of Pentecostalism, thereby transforming the more conciliatory and cosmopolitan Oneness Pentecostals that already existed on the west coast. Sailes contends that the migration of
Robert and Geneva Brazier from Alabama to Chicago, in which Geneva eventually pastored Oneness churches and founded a family legacy passed on to her children and grandchildren in which community action, social justice, and civil rights were exemplified to address the plight of impoverished African Americans.

How should one theorize about these migrations within the US and across borders? Ramirez suggests that Mexican migration was socio-political as well as faithful Pentecostals following their religious calling. Barba demonstrates a south and midwest to west migration that was in part due to the droughts and economic turmoil of the mid-twentieth century. The northern border was more porous as people crossed back and forth with relative ease. What were the mechanisms that spurred migration and how did they fit in the broader global flows?

Oneness Pentecostalism is an impressive contribution to Pentecostal studies. Although Pentecostal scholarship has exploded, there has been scant research produced on Oneness Pentecostalism, as the editors rightly note. The editors and contributors are to be commended for organizing and implementing this interdisciplinary volume. An edited volume is as strong as its weakest chapter. Oneness Pentecostalism does not have any weak chapters, and this is its strength. The book exposes a sector of global Pentecostalism that has been under-researched and provides a richer picture of the complex maze of a twentieth-century religious movement.

N.B. A longer version of this review was presented in the Manchester Wesley Research Centre/ Pentecostal Theological Seminary panel at the American Academy of Religion in San Antonio, Texas, 2023.

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