

Pentecostal Predominance in French Evangelicalism in Quebec, 1921-1963

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During the period of the 1920s through to the early 1960s there was a marked change regarding which denominations were predominant in French evangelicalism in Quebec. New groups such as the Pentecostals, Christian Brethren, and Fellowship Baptists became predominant in terms of measures like numbers of churches due to the decline of all the major pre-existing French evangelical groups and to the continuous if limited growth of these new groups.

The experience of the Pentecostals illustrates well the factors involved in the change among French Protestant groups in Quebec regarding which groups were predominant.¹ In the context of the decline of the older groups, Pentecostals experienced a continuous if very limited growth. This growth was rooted in a theological anti-Catholicism, a conviction that many French Catholics in Quebec were in need of salvation. This theological conviction motivated a strong commitment to evangelism and church planting, and the establishment of a French Bible school to facilitate such work, all of which provided the motor of Pentecostal growth. This theological anti-Catholicism motivating church planting was also shared by the Brethren and Fellowship Baptists and similarly led to continuous if limited growth. Together these three groups established over fifty new French churches in fifteen of the seventeen present administrative regions of Quebec in the period 1921-63, with each having roughly the same number of churches. This period was the beginning of the trend of the predominance of the Pentecostals and these

other two groups in French evangelicalism in Quebec, which became more pronounced after the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s.

The growth of the Pentecostals is best studied in the larger Canadian church context, which proved significant at several key points in the history of this growth, such as the birth of the first French Pentecostal church and the establishment of a French Bible school. The local Quebec context of Catholic anti-Protestantism is also important in understanding the limited nature of Pentecostal growth. Catholic social control in Quebec and the resulting pressure on French converts to Protestantism in such areas as education, limited the growth of the Pentecostals and of the other new groups and had contributed to the decline of the older groups through emigration of members.² Whereas Protestant theological anti-Catholicism fuelled Protestant growth, Catholic anti-Protestantism helped limit this same growth.

A final important point about the Pentecostals was their leadership among the new groups in different aspects of growth. They were the most successful in this period in developing indigenous leadership, establishing the first French Bible school, and they had the largest churches and by far the largest overall attendance. In addition, until the early 1950s, they had the most churches. Their growth was assisted by an emphasis on healing as part of their evangelistic method. Pentecostalism thus played an important role in French evangelicalism in Quebec in the twentieth century prior to (and after) the Quiet Revolution. Yet it is relatively neglected in the historical literature.

A document issued by the Missions Department of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) in 1947 clearly articulates an official Pentecostal position that many French Catholics were in need of salvation. It describes Catholic Quebec as a "Mission Field at our door" and states that the "evangelization of the lost is the primary objective of the Church."³ The author describes a "darkness" caused by the Catholic religious system that is contrasted with the "light of glorious Salvation." Clearly, then, the Catholic religion may not lead to salvation, and many Catholics are lost, which is why they are a mission field. According to the Missions Department, the Catholic sacramental system exacted a price "before any hope of absolution or pardon could be enjoyed."⁴ Thus French Catholics were seen by Pentecostals generally to be in need of salvation because their system undermined the gospel of salvation through the free grace of God. Another document from the PAOC Missions Department from around the late 1950s maintains that a Quebec missionary's joy over

the conversion of a French Canadian is just as great as his African counterpart's joy over heathens in Africa converting from idol worship and witchcraft since the "transition from darkness to light is just as great," as is the opposition.⁵

This Pentecostal theological anti-Catholicism motivated the strong commitment to evangelism and church planting that led to Pentecostal growth, which contributed in turn to Pentecostal predominance in French evangelicalism. The Pentecostals established their first French church, La Première Église de Pentecôte Française, in 1921 in Montreal. This was the first instance of Pentecostal leadership among the new groups in that they were the first to establish a French church in Quebec. La Première Église initially consisted of French Canadians converted in a three-week evangelistic and healing crusade conducted by Aimee Semple McPherson in Montreal in 1920. It also consisted of members of a group of Francophones who had attended a service for Francophone members of Evangelical Pentecostal church in Montreal. Charles Baker, a Pentecostal minister from Ottawa, founded this English church in 1916.⁶ It was Baker who invited McPherson to Montreal.

During McPherson's crusade, Mrs. Dutaud, the wife of Grande Ligne Baptist pastor Louis Roussy Dutaud, was healed of tuberculosis, a cancerous rib, and infection in her limbs. Her father was healed of a crippled arm as McPherson preached. A reporter from the *Montreal Gazette* observed and reported a great number of healings.⁷ After the crusade, the Dutauds joined the fledgling Pentecostal movement. It was pastor Dutaud who led out the French group in Baker's church to start the first French Pentecostal church in Quebec.⁸

The influence of the Canadian church context was crucial in this birthing of the French Pentecostal movement in Quebec. The nucleus of La Première Église was formed in an Anglophone church founded by a leader sent from Ontario and grew due to the invitation Baker gave to McPherson to come to Montreal. The role of healing in the birth of this church is also important to note. McPherson preached the "fourfold gospel" – Jesus as Saviour, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and soon coming King. This "full gospel," as John Christopher Thomas argues, is the theological heart of Pentecostalism.⁹ Charles Baker preached this fourfold gospel, and early Pentecostal sources in Quebec, both French and English, frequently mention people being saved, healed, and baptized in the Spirit.¹⁰ According to Candy Gunther Brown, healing "is the single most important category – more significant than glossolalia or prosperity – for understand-

ing the global expansion of Pentecostal Christianity.”¹¹

La Première Église continued to be the only French Pentecostal church in Quebec into the 1930s. The primary focus in this first phase of Pentecostalism in French Quebec was the development of one large urban church that would provide a solid base for future expansion throughout the province. The focal points for the Canadian Pentecostal movement in general were cities.¹² The key factor in the growth of the church was the conversion of French Roman Catholics. Pentecostal theological anti-Catholicism drove evangelism and led to many conversions. For example, Pastor Dutaud wrote of a revival in 1931 in which about thirty people abjured or formally renounced the Catholic Church, of which twenty-two were admitted to the church and baptized.¹³ In 1935 the French Protestant newspaper *L'Aurore* recorded fifty-five abjurations of the Catholic Church by people who then joined La Première Église. According to Ron Rust, by 1940 the church had an attendance of over 300 people.¹⁴ Even if inflated, this figure is significant, for no church planted by the Brethren or Fellowship Baptists in this period exceeded 100 people. Thus a second aspect of Pentecostal leadership in this period was that they developed the largest French churches among the new groups. Many of the families that would affect French Pentecostalism in Quebec attended this first church.¹⁵

La Première Église started a church in St. Hyacinthe in the Montérégie region in 1939 through one of its key workers, Arthur Samson, a converted French-Canadian.¹⁶ This second Pentecostal church began with the conversion of twelve members of the Desmarais family. The mother, a devout Catholic, initially expelled one of her children from the house when he converted, so as to remove his influence on his siblings. After Samson visited her home, the priest convinced her that her family should have no further contact with him.¹⁷ According to Samson, about 150 people converted from 1939 to 1963. In the late 1960s, attendance at the church was over 100.¹⁸ The St. Hyacinthe church is significant in part in that it started the Pentecostal pattern of church multiplication through indigenous workers – Dutaud was French Canadian but was a seasoned worker initially from another group.

After the establishment of the Montreal and St. Hyacinthe churches by 1940, the French Pentecostal movement entered a second phase beginning in 1941, one in which it expanded into many new regions of the province through the work of indigenous church planters trained at a French Bible school in Quebec. This second phase was due to the establishment that year of a second Pentecostal church in Montreal, Église

de Pentecôte Centrale, and of a Pentecostal Bible school, Institut Biblique de Bérée (IBB), both headed by Walter Bouchard. Bouchard was of French-Canadian origin, but he lived in Providence, Rhode Island.¹⁹ He moved to Montreal in 1941 and started the new church and the Bible school. The latter began with fourteen resident students and a staff of five, including Bouchard as Principal.²⁰ IBB represents another example of French Pentecostal leadership in Quebec, since the Pentecostals were the first among the predominant three new groups to form a French Bible school. Église de Pentecôte Centrale drew away many members from La Première Église and soon had an attendance of 250 to 300.²¹ Others joined after experiencing conversion. The church was aggressively involved in evangelism and recorded fifty-eight baptisms by the end of 1942.²²

Many of the initial students at IBB came from Centrale. In this way one large church in Montreal provided the indigenous workers for a church-planting movement in Quebec after 1941.²³ These two institutions working together partly explain why the French Pentecostal movement in Quebec indigenized more thoroughly than did the Brethren or Fellowship Baptist movements. They had a larger pool of potential indigenous leaders to work with, and they trained them. The French Conference was formed in 1949 and elected its own leadership, the first one being Bouchard.²⁴ The greater level of indigenization with respect to workers was a fourth and central aspect of Pentecostal leadership in this period.

The Canadian influence on IBB is shown by the facts that the curriculum was modelled after that used by the English Canadian Pentecostal Bible schools and that program material was initially obtained by translating material from English.²⁵ In addition, in 1942, three graduates from Ontario Bible schools joined IBB to serve as teachers.²⁶ That Bouchard, the teachers from Ontario, and another French-speaking American worker, Emile Lassègues,²⁷ were all products of the North American Bible school movement highlights the fact that IBB was an extension of a North American phenomenon.

IBB graduates had a very large impact on this second phase of Pentecostal church growth, reflecting the similar major influence of Bible schools in the growth of Canadian evangelicalism.²⁸ Of the fourteen new Pentecostal churches planted between 1942 and 1963 (one was a previously existing, but new, work), at least eleven of them were started with the help of, or pastored at some point by, IBB graduates.²⁹ With the three churches already mentioned, this brought the total number of Pentecostal churches to seventeen. In 1959, Ethel Logan, one of the teachers at IBB

from Ontario, wrote that IBB had “graduated 54 students, of whom 56% are in full time Christian work. Most of the fourteen French Pentecostal churches were pioneered and are being pastored by graduates of this school.”³⁰ The new churches were in Senneterre (Abitibi region), Valleyfield (Montérégie), Longueuil (Montérégie), Chomedey (Laval), Rouyn (Abitibi), St. Raymond (Quebec City region), Granby (Estrie), Sherbrooke (Estrie), St. Calixte (Lanaudière), Gaspé (Gaspé), Val d’Or (Abitibi), Quebec City, Pointe St. Charles in Montreal (a pre-existing, but new, church that joined the Pentecostals), and St. Jean (Montérégie).³¹ Thus, by 1963, the Pentecostals had expanded greatly beyond Montreal and were present in about half of the administrative regions of Quebec (eight of the current seventeen regions).

Attendance figures were found in different sources for eleven of these seventeen churches, which provide the basis of an estimate of 800 to 870 French Pentecostals in Quebec in the early 1960s.³² Ron Rust and Michael di Giacomo estimate that there were about 1000 French Pentecostals in Quebec in the 1960s.³³ Even the lower estimate of 870 is about double the attendance in the early 1960s of the next largest of the new groups, the Brethren.³⁴ The Pentecostals, then, had both the largest churches and the greatest overall attendance of the three groups.

Thus the Pentecostals experienced continuous growth in attendance and numbers of churches from 1921 to 1963. Yet this growth was obviously very limited. This was due in part to Catholic anti-Protestantism, which proved effective in limiting the growth of all three new evangelical groups. The previously mentioned document, “Miracles of Grace,” noted the “very real difficulties in the way of evangelization” due to the power the Catholic Church exercised in Quebec society. Because of this “one after another sincere groups have commenced the establishing of Gospel work among the needy French, only to find themselves checkmated and stalemated until progress seemed impossible.”³⁵ These comments by a contemporary Pentecostal observer make a clear link between the social and political dominance of the Catholic Church in Quebec and a perceived lack of progress in “Gospel work” by evangelicals. Pentecostal pastor Bernard Sigouin made the same connection in a public response in the 1970s to accusations of a lack of productivity among French Pentecostals prior to the full onset of the Quiet Revolution. According to Sigouin, Pentecostals then had worked “under a leaden sky.” One could not “submit articles freely to newspapers” or rent “a hall on a street corner” since owners would not rent for “fear of the parish priest.”

Some Pentecostals moved out of Quebec after being “treated as low persons” and “called Communists and agitators.”³⁶ An aggressive Catholic anti-Protestantism that made full use of its social dominance in French Quebec was an important cause, according to Sigouin, of the modest scale of French Pentecostal growth during our period. At least some French evangelicals were still leaving the province due to this opposition.

Other Pentecostal testimonies from the period highlight both the social and economic pressure on French converts as elements of Catholic anti-Protestantism. Arthur Samson, the pastor of the St. Hyacinthe church, wrote that “the priests tried to stop those who were newly saved. They even went to the factory where they worked, and tried to have them dismissed from their jobs.” When the church rented a hall, “again the priests tried to step in and close the hall.”³⁷

French Pentecostals in other towns experienced similar pressure from Catholic priests. In Valleyfield “several young ladies lost jobs because the priest forbade the people to have them in their home.” In 1950, according to the same source, a church radio broadcast in Montreal was “abruptly cut off with no other explanation than that it was objectionable to the Roman hierarchy.”³⁸ Radio broadcasting was an important plank in the evangelistic strategy of the new French evangelical groups, so the successful opposition of the Catholic Church in this case certainly impeded evangelism. Catholic opposition also curtailed the broadcasting of the other new French evangelical groups.

Perhaps the element of the social dominance of the Catholic Church in Quebec that most concerned the new French evangelicals was Catholic control of education, the result of which was an educational system split between English-speaking Protestants and French-speaking Catholics. The French-speaking Protestant was thus driven toward the English school system, which led to Anglicization and the consequent weakening of the French church. Anglicization had been a major factor in the decline of the older denominations.

René Robert, principal of the Pentecostal school for children, l'Académie Chrétienne de Montréal, discussed the issue of education under the title “Our Movement and the Problem of Education” in an article written in 1955. He noted that “(there) are no French public schools in Quebec. With practically no exception, government subsidized instruction in French is only to be found in schools under the Roman Catholic School Commission.” This situation created great difficulty for Francophone evangelicals parents, who, according to Robert, found it necessary to

withdraw their children from school. It was through pressure exerted by these parents that l'Académie was founded in 1943 so that their children could receive an education in French that also taught Christian principles.³⁹ The relationship between the two elements in Robert's title was stated in stark terms: no education in French for the children, no future for the French Pentecostal movement in Quebec. Sending French children to English Protestant schools in the past had led to the children joining English churches, thus depriving French churches of much-needed workers⁴⁰ and always making them vulnerable to being first generation churches. Claude de Mestral, a United Church pastor, commenting in 1947 on the educational system in Quebec and its implications for Francophone converts to Protestantism, wrote that Quebec "is the only place in the world where converts are more or less forced to turn their backs on their mother tongue and culture."⁴¹

In conclusion, the experience of the Pentecostals illustrates well the argument that the new French evangelical groups became predominant in Quebec because of a theological anti-Catholicism that motivated a strong commitment to evangelism and church planting among French Catholics. Pentecostal growth occurred in the context of the decline of the older French evangelical groups, which also facilitated the change with regard to which groups were predominant among the Protestants. It also occurred in the context of significant help at key junctures from the Canadian church and in a local Quebec context marked by a powerful Catholic anti-Protestantism. The former aided Pentecostal church growth; the latter restrained it. Finally, the Pentecostals exercised leadership with regard to growth in a number of ways among the new groups, such that they were an important denomination in French evangelicalism in this period.

Endnotes

1. The historical literature on French evangelicalism in Quebec often refers to French Protestantism because of Quebec's Catholic context. Though evangelicalism is a later development within Protestantism, the two terms are used interchangeably here.
2. For the effect of the Catholic anti-Protestantism on the older groups, see Dominique Vogt-Raguy, "Les Communautés Protestantes Francophones au Québec, 1834-1925" (Ph.D diss., Université Michel-de-Montaigne, Bordeaux III, 1996), Tome IV, 926-27.

3. "Miracles of Grace in French Canada," 1947, Missions Department, 11, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada Archives, Mississauga, ON (hereafter PAOCA).
4. "Miracles of Grace," 3, PAOCA.
5. E.L. Lassegues and Salome Cressman, "Pentecost in Quebec," n.d., PAOCA. Other examples of the Pentecostal view of Quebec as a mission field are cited in Michael di Giacomo, "Les Pentecôtistes Québécois, 1966-1995: Histoire d'un Réveil" (Ph.D diss., Laval University, 1999), 48-49.
6. Michael Di Giacomo, "Aimee Semple McPherson: 'Shot in the Arm' for French-Canadian Protestantism," in *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement*, ed. Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse (Leiden: Brill 2010), 158-59, 163; Ronald Rust, "Les Premières Églises Pentecôtistes Françaises à Montréal," (Unpublished paper, Faculté de Théologie Évangélique, 1998), 11-13.
7. Di Giacomo, "Aimee Semple McPherson," 162, 160; Florence Dutaud, "Des pentecôtistes à Montréal!" in *Chroniques des Oeuvres du Saint-Esprit au Québec*, ed. Claude Tremblay (Magog: Les Éditions Jaspe, 2010), 27.
8. Di Giacomo, "Aimee Semple McPherson," 163.
9. John Christopher Thomas, "Health and Healing: A Pentecostal Contribution," *Ex Auditu* 21 (2005): 88. Another variant, mentioned by Thomas, is the fivefold gospel that includes Jesus as Sanctifier.
10. For example, Mary Nahern, "Evangel Memories," 14 November 1986, 2, PAOCA; Dutaud, "Des pentecôtistes à Montréal," 31.
11. Candy Gunther Brown, "Introduction: Pentecostalism and the Globalization of Illness and Healing," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.
12. Bruce L. Guenther, "Pentecostal Theological Education: A Case Study of Western Bible College, 1925-50," in *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation*, ed. Michael Wilkinson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 101, 118n8.
13. L.R. Dutaud, "Église Pentecôte Française," *L'Aurore*, 16 Janvier 1931, 6, cited in Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 14; Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 12n45, 16.
14. Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 16n62, 15. The attendance figures are based on an interview between Rust and a later pastor of the church, Marcel Vachon, in 1998. For attendance, see also Di Giacomo, "Aimee Semple McPherson,"

- 163, who cites Rust.
15. Thomas Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals: A History of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada* (Mississauga: Full Gospel Publishing House, 1994), 164.
 16. Gerald Samson, "Le prix de victoire," in *Chroniques des Oeuvres du Saint-Esprit au Québec*, 135; "Quebec Echoes, 1962-63," Home Missions Department, 8, PAOCA.
 17. Miller, *Canadian Pentecostals*, 164; Tabitha Lemaire, "Ultime génération," in *Chroniques des Oeuvres du Saint-Esprit au Québec*, 243-45.
 18. "Quebec Echoes," 8; PAOCA; Salome Cressman, "Le Mouvement de Pentecote au Quebec," n.d., 12, PAOCA. This latter document is based on Salome Cressman, "A Half Century of Pentecost in Quebec," *The Pentecostal Testimony* (September 1964), so most of the material dates from 1964. It was updated and translated by Gilles Gagnon; Cressman, "Mouvement de Pentecote," 1, PAOCA.
 19. "Miracles of Grace," 4, PAOCA.
 20. "Miracles of Grace," 4, PAOCA; W.L. Bouchard, "The Founding of Berea French Bible Institute," *The Pentecostal Testimony* 26, no. 13 (July 1 1945): 4. "Miracles of Grace" states that there were sixteen students the first year. Perhaps there were two non-resident students. "Miracles of Grace," 4, PAOCA.
 21. Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 20-21. These figures are again based on the interview with Pastor Marcel Vachon, who had been a member of La Première Église from 1930 to 1941 and who joined Centrale in 1941.
 22. Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 21.
 23. Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 26. Guenther notes the similarly important role of Calvary Temple in Winnipeg for another Canadian Pentecostal Bible school, Western Bible College: Guenther, "Pentecostal Theological Education," 101-2.
 24. Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 28.
 25. Bouchard, "Founding of Berea," 4, PAOCA; Guenther, "Pentecostal Theological Education," 117.
 26. Rust, "Les Premières Églises," 24-25.
 27. "Rev. E.L. Lassegues Finishes His Course," *The Pentecostal Testimony* (February 1970): 9.

28. Bruce L. Guenther, "The Origin of the Bible School Movement in Western Canada: Towards an Ethnic Interpretation," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1993), 135.
29. Jerry Thomas, "The Predominance of Pentecostals, Brethren, and Fellowship Baptists in French Evangelicalism in Quebec, 1921-1963" (Master's thesis, Briarcrest Seminary, 2015), 62-65.
30. *Le Béréen* XII (1958-1959): 13, PAOCA.
31. Thomas, "French Evangelicalism in Quebec," 62-65.
32. Thomas, "French Evangelicalism in Quebec," 66.
33. Ron Rust and Michael Di Giacomo, "Quebec: Mission Not Impossible," 2000, 4, POACA.
34. Thomas, "French Evangelicalism in Quebec," 89-90.
35. "Miracles of Grace," 2-3, PAOCA.
36. Cited in Michael Di Giacomo, "FLITE: Religious Entrepreneurship in Quebec in the 1970s and 1980s," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 46 (2004): 77-78. The Padlock Law passed in Quebec in 1937 gave the provincial government "wide powers with reference to any group or meetings suspected of communism." The French Baptist Grande Ligne mission noted that year how Catholic priests on many of its mission fields were describing French Protestants as Communists in public statements. W. Nelson Thomson, "Witness in French Canada," in *Baptists in Canada: Search for Identity Amidst Diversity*, ed. Jarold Zeman (Burlington: G.R. Welch Company, 1980), 56.
37. "Quebec Echoes," 8, PAOCA. The efforts in both cases were ultimately unsuccessful.
38. "Pentecost in Quebec," PAOCA.
39. René Robert, "Our Movement and the Problem of Education," *Le Béréen* 10 (1955): 18-19, PAOCA.
40. Robert, "Problem of Education," 18-19.
41. Claude de Mestral, "Protestantism in Quebec," *The Christian Century*, 23 April 1947, 524.

