CHAPTER TEN

WYNN T. STAIRS: ATLANTIC CANADIAN FULL
GOSPEL PENTECOSTAL LEADER

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*I was serving the devil then but now I am serving the Lord.*

[Introduction]

Dramatic life transformation was the result for many who joined the early Full Gospel-Pentecostal community in New Brunswick, Canada. This reorientation not only affected the intellect and the emotions of the individual but also significantly changed his or her actions as well. The opening statement noted above was penned by Wynn Stairs within a few months of his own conversion to Christ in a revival meeting. It is a summary statement of personal conversion which underscored the change in spiritual allegiance shared by many early Full Gospel-Pentecostal Christians. Conviction of sin changed the way people lived and it revolutionized their relationships with others.

The life and ministry of Wynn Stairs serves as a case study of an early Full Gospel-Pentecostal leader in Atlantic Canada. Stairs is an example of the indigenization and development of a Full Gospel-Pentecostal identity in the Atlantic Northeast. This broader geographic area includes the Maritime Provinces of Canada especially New Brunswick and Nova Scotia but also includes the state of Maine. His ministry legacy impacted the Atlantic Northeast in Canada and the United States, Quebec, the American mid-west and internationally on several different mission fields.

During his ministry career he belonged to several different, and in some cases, overlapping organizations and ministerial fellowships. Originally receiving ministerial credentials with the Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada (ACOP), Stairs would later hold credentials,

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1 Stairs, letter written to the CPR, 2 February 2 1921.
with several other Pentecostal organizations. He established several pioneer churches, pastored or gave oversight to a local church in St. Stephen, New Brunswick for several decades, was asked to be missions secretary by three different organizations, was active in the Full Gospel Ministerial Fellowship, established the Full Gospel Pentecostal Church denomination in New Brunswick, and participated in the merger of the New Brunswick based denomination with the American based United Pentecostal Church. His conversion and ministry career in this region is representative of the character displayed by many early converts to the Pentecostal tradition and how their influence shaped its later development.

Early Years

Wynn Theodore Stairs (1901–1982) was born on the family farm in Temperance Vale, New Brunswick. He was the son of Theodore and Annie Stairs. He grew up in this area and his family attended the United Baptist Church located in Temperance Vale. He did not profess any faith commitment while growing up. His mother and aunt were active lay leaders organizing a large Baptist Sunday school. In time, his mother was nicknamed “Annie Be Saved” and her sister-in-law Liz Sharp was called “Lizzie Divine”. The Stairs family was exposed to the Pentecostal movement by Wynn’s uncle, a Primitive Baptist minister, who had attended a convention at Mars Hill, Maine. Upon returning home he related his experience and observations to the Stairs family. At the time, Wynn Stairs was not interested in religion or his uncle’s stories, however. Occasionally he felt compelled to listen at a distance.

Beginning with the original tent revival meeting conducted in 1917 by Aimee Semple McPherson, several Pentecostal mission centres were established in Caribou, Ashland, Presque Isle, Monticello, Mars Hill, Easton, and Summerville, Maine. Edgar Grant, who was baptized in the Spirit in the McPherson meeting, established Pentecostal missions in Summerville (commonly called the “Tin Church”), Clearview, and River du Chute, New Brunswick. During the winter of

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3 Type written manuscript of Stairs interview with Anne Stairs, “Growth and Dates,” c. May 1982.
4 Stairs, “How and When the Oneness message came to N.B.”