CHAPTER TWELVE

THE LATTER RAIN MOVEMENT AND THE PHENOMENON OF GLOBAL RETURN

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INTRODUCTION

History, as David Martin has noted, is volatile. Just when the world seems to be irrevocably secular, religion pushed off the world stage by the events of the 1960s, its comes bounding back again through another door. As some scholars were watching France for a lead in the way that modernization treated religion, the Middle East brought religion back to everybody else's attention. The flashpoints of the world seemed to be increasingly aligned along the frontiers of religious and cultural difference. This has led to a renewed concentration on the movement of ideas and cultural influences on a global scale. For both scholars of religion and for sociologists interested in global emergence, Pentecostalism has thus been a particularly important subject. The fact that Pentecostalism has proven to be inveterately fissiparous, mobile and adaptive raises the possibility that for the first time there is a form of Christianity which cannot be studied solely in the local, regional, and/or national frames. Indeed, the effect of the new scholarship is to suggest that perhaps Christianity was always part of a universalist project, and that it needs to be studied as part of a process of worldwide reticulation, feedback and reinforcement. It is this latter which, in this chapter, will be called the phenomenon of 'global return.'

Origins of the Latter Rain Movement

This is nowhere more visible than in the remarkable case of the Latter Rain revival which emerged in Canada in 1948. The local course of this

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1 This is a standing argument of Martin's, present in almost all his works since his contributions to the secularization debates in the 1960s – for his most substantial recent piece on this, see On secularization.

revival has been traced elsewhere and does not need repeating here except in the barest details. Emerging from institutional confrontation within the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada centred on the Sharon Orphanage and Schools in North Battleford, Saskatchewan, this tiny sectarian revivalist movement quickly realized its internal ideology of ‘global missions’ by following the lines of post-war reconstructionism around the world. Building on widespread dissatisfaction amongst Pentecostals about institutionalization of their tradition among the major denominations, the effect of the revival quickly reached out to Vancouver, Detroit, and New York, finding champions in Elim Bible Institute, Bethesda Missionary Temple and a wide network of independent revivalist churches.

Highly typological, the movement drew upon Old Testament prophetic fulfillment (particularly with regard to the Feast of Tabernacles) and ‘the foundational truths’ of Hebrews 6: 1–2 to shape its particular appropriation of early Pentecostal practices such as laying on of hands, singing in the Spirit, prostrations, etc. The ‘foundational truths,’ in particular, gave a sense of dispensational certainty and inevitability to the restorationism which had been basic to Pentecostalism right from its origins. Indeed, one might typify it as the realization of restoration – so much of its teachings and practice related to visible manifestation that, in its particular appropriation of the language of the Spirit, it held within it the potential to become the ideological basis for some of North America’s more materialist exports. The ‘manifest sons of God,’ the emphasis on restoration now, on evidences, signs and wonders, its mobile convention form (a variation on nineteenth-century brush arbours, ‘tabernacles in the wilderness’ which appropriated to themselves the sense of the wandering people of Israel), and particularly physical healing, all made this the natural interpretive framework for a renewed Pentecostalism emerging as a missiological program in the context of post-war, global consumerism.

The Latter Rain movement rapidly fused with the North American healing revival and its global extensions, influencing and being influenced by the work of William Marion Branham, Oral Roberts, and T.L. Osborne (among others). While not originally identified with Word

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3 See, for example the following by Riss: A Survey of 20th-century Revival Movements in North America; Latter Rain; and “The Latter Rain Movement of 1948.”
4 For these roots, see Blumhofer, Restoring the Faith.
5 See Harrell, Oral Roberts and All Things are Possible. Also, Weaver, The Healer-prophet, William Marrion Branham.