



Kemp Pendleton Burpeau. *God's Showman: A Historical Study of John G. Lake and South African/American Pentecostalism.* Oslo: Refleks Publishing, 2004. Illustrations. xi + 268 pp. \$25.00, paper, ISBN 978-82-996599-2-5.

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Commissioned by Gene Mills (Florida State University)

This is an excellent book on the life of John G. Lake, a controversial figure known for his healing ministry in South Africa and the United States. Lake, born in Canada in 1870, was raised in a small town in southern Ontario. While his family identified with Presbyterianism, Lake was influenced by the Methodists and especially the holiness movement. His involvement with the church as a teenager already demonstrated his enthusiastic commitment to holiness teachings. When he was about sixteen his family moved to northern Michigan where he continued to be active in the Methodist Church. Kemp Pendleton Burpeau notes some inconsistencies in Lake's story about his early involvement as a lay minister with the church and some of his associations, which raise important critical questions about a number of areas especially for the study of early Pentecostals. These inconsistencies and perhaps even inaccuracies (or at best the inability to substantiate claims made by Lake) contribute to the enigma of Lake. The author, however, effectively employs a vast array of primary and secondary sources to evaluate Lake's life and ministry.

One of the problems with studying early Pentecostals like Lake revolves around the sources researchers must rely on, such as personal notes, sermons, and other writings. While these are of

ten excellent primary sources for understanding the early Pentecostals, the sources for Lake also reveal claims that are difficult to substantiate. This is where Pendleton Burpeau demonstrates excellent historical analysis by identifying the problems with some of the sources; cross-referencing with other documents; and providing a larger historical context that gives the story, even with its problems, a critical and yet sympathetic account.

Another issue raised surrounds Lake's ministry in Africa. I found it odd, in some ways, to see so much of the book focused on Africa when Lake only spent five years of his ministry in South Africa, especially when compared to another Canadian Pentecostal missionary, Charles Chawner, who went to South Africa in 1908 and stayed until his death in 1949. However, it is not difficult to see why Africa was so important in Lake's ministry even though the vast majority of his work was in the United States. The five years in South Africa were formative for Lake and continued to shape his ministry in North America. Lake's experiences in South Africa shaped his ministry in several ways, including an influence of African worship, reformed charismatic Christianity, and healing. However, other events continued to follow Lake as well, such as the death of his wife while in

Africa, his falling out with local leaders, questions about financial impropriety, and tensions over black/white relations. All of these issues played out over and over for Lake when he established churches in Spokane, Washington, and Portland, Oregon; when he encountered legal battles with former parishioners; when he was scrutinized for questionable investing; and when he remarried.

The influences on Lake are also important and demonstrate how his life and ministry currently influence those with independent Pentecostal ministries or the charismatic movement. Lake became very involved with John Dowie in Chicago and was shaped by Dowie's theology, organizational patterns, preaching style, and church practices. While Lake eventually left Dowie's organization, in some ways he never left Dowie. Likewise, Charles Parham and William Seymour had a profound impact on Lake, whether through Parham's theology of speaking in tongues or Seymour's view of racial integration.

Lake was an independent Pentecostal for most of his life and expressed some tension with the formation of the Assemblies of God. He saw the organization of Pentecostals into denominations as problematic, as did many early Pentecostals. His strategy was to plant a church in a city like Spokane as the "church" of Spokane, illustrating his apostolic views as well as his ideas of the Kingdom of God. It was Lake's independence though that also got him into trouble with authorities, preachers, and parishioners. Strangely, near the end of his life, Lake joined the Pentecostal Church of God and served as a district superintendent. Finally, in 1935 after suffering a stroke, Lake died at the age of sixty-five having lived a full and controversial life.

This book ought to be required reading for courses in early Pentecostal history. It is an excellent example of biography that relies on substantial research of primary sources. It places Lake in the context of North American and South African history, which offers an important interpretive

framework. Finally, it shows clear lines of influence on Lake and the early Pentecostals from a variety of sources, including Parham, Seymour, Dowie, the holiness movement, and reformed Christians with healing emphases in their ministries.

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