

Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884-1914 By Eric R. Crouse

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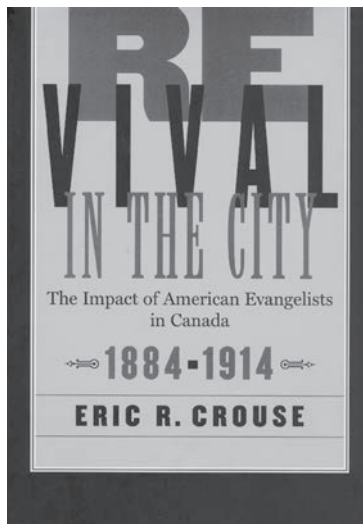
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Revival in the City: The Impact of American Evangelists in Canada, 1884-1914

By Eric R. Crouse. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005. xv + 230 pp. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-7735-2898-9.

This volume is a part of the growing and valuable 'Studies in the History of Religion' series being published by McGill-Queen's University Press, begun by George Rawlyk but now edited by Donald H. Akenson. *Revival in the City* is an examination of how Canadian Protestants reacted to, and were influenced by, prominent American evangelists who travelled throughout Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The main sources for the extensive and detailed research by Professor Eric Crouse are the reports and analyses of the revivals in secular publications like the *Hamilton Daily Spectator* or the *Montreal Daily Star*, and in church publications such as the *Methodist Christian Guardian* or the *Anglican Canadian Churchman*. The specific American evangelists that he focuses on are

Dwight L. Moody, Sam Jones, Sam Small, Reuben Archer Torrey, Charles Alexander and J. Wilbur Chapman. While there were other evangelists who came up from the United States to Canada, these men were the ones with the most significant impact and audiences. Crouse examines each man's revivalist campaign in Canada, and shows how support for such campaigns waxed and waned under each, ultimately waning by the time of Chapman. The description of the popular reaction to these revivals is fascinating, and Crouse's adept handling of the contemporary reports of the revivals provides the reader with a clear sense of the religious and social impact of these larger-than-life men. For instance, Crouse's description of people breaking a window to avoid asphyxiation in an over-packed auditorium in Toronto in 1886, only to have a hundred or so people try to get in through the window, provides a sense of the religious zeal of those who longed to hear these men preach.

From the 1880s through to the early 1900s these prominent evangelists travelled throughout Canada, speaking in most of the major cities and many smaller ones such as Ottawa, Hamilton, Kingston and Brantford. It was a time of serious social ills such as poverty and overcrowding

in rapidly growing urban centers, rising labor problems, and mounting theological tensions over modern critical approaches to the Bible and the meaning of Darwinian evolution. These preachers benefited from the support of the majority of Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and evangelical Anglican leaders. (Non-evangelical Anglicans were the largest exception to this trend; almost from the first visits they did not appreciate the revivalists.)

One of the strengths of Crouse's research is that he avoids simply repeating the events of the revivalist's itinerary and the contents of the evangelistic message, but rather, he analyzes the theological and social concerns. For many Protestant leaders, Crouse explains, these revivalists were a solution to the woes of the Christian church, especially evident in Canada's urban centers. Their masculine and muscular image and message helped to counter a perceived feminization of the church, making the message more appealing to men. The revivalists' theological conservatism resonated with those alarmed by the rising tide of theological liberalism, and their modern methods were an adaptation to culture that allowed for reaching people outside of the church's normal membership. However, not all of these evangelists were treated the same, as Crouse notes. For instance, Moody's emphasis was on reaching the lost through personal conversions; he did not really speak to pressing social ills or criticize capitalism. On the other hand, Small's attacks on the press and labor led to particular daily papers roundly criticizing him. Crouse also notes the importance of the press in the making (or breaking) of "popular images," and this loss of important newspaper support meant that Small's work suffered. Some revivalists (such as Small) were criticized for getting wealthy through revival meetings, whereas others (such as Moody) were not seen to be

in it for the money.

Crouse finds that by 1911 widespread support for American revivalism among Canadian Protestant clergy had waned, even collapsed. The reasons? A main argument is that into the early 1900s a "significant number of Canadian Protestants continued to show considerable interest in a populist and conservative kind of evangelicalism until secular and other forces lessened theological and financial support for American revivalism." (p. 13) More specifically, a growing number of Protestant leaders began to question the conservative theology of the revivalists and the effectiveness of their methods among the working class in cities such as Toronto or Hamilton. Crouse places himself within the camp of those who argue that a process of secularization occurred at the turn of the last century, and that there was a movement away from orthodoxy (Crouse equates revivalism and orthodoxy) among many social gospel proponents, especially within the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. The subsequent loss of support among many Protestant leaders for the revivals also meant that the workers who had supported the revivalists were alienated from the very churches that had previously sought their participation.

Revival in the City is an important contribution not only to the ongoing study of religion in Canada and the continuing debate regarding secularization here early in the twentieth century, but also to our understanding of the Americanization of Canadian religion and culture long before the appearance of media such as radio, television and Hollywood.

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