

Gelien Matthews. Review of *The Lost Gospel Christianity and Blacks in North America* by Jerome Teelucksingh, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. ISBN (10):1-4438-1635-3, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1635-9. (Cloth) xix+ 162 pp.

The Lost Gospel is a welcome addition to historical monographs on North America since it is unique in bringing together the past religious and the secular experiences of Black migrants to Canada during the tumultuous nineteenth century when the anti-slavery campaign in the USA was in full swing. The book is not interdisciplinary in the strictest meaning of the word. However, it fuses several variants of history such as social, religious and migration history. While the narrative of the text is heavy with regard to examples and anecdotes, its most compelling feature is the complex analysis it undertakes to evaluate the nature of the reception that African-descended migrants from the USA experienced in Canada. Teelucksingh labours painstakingly to demonstrate that clergy and laymen alike in Protestant white churches in Canada, especially the Baptists and the Methodists, were half-hearted and even hypocritical in their attitude to Blacks seeking refuge from slavery and the inhumane plantation system in operation in the southern United States. Yet Teelucksingh is not at all completely dismissive of the white Canadian Protestant congregations. Despite their shortcomings Teelucksingh declares, "For Canada's role in harbouring these Blacks, the country deserves international recognition and respect for its humanitarian efforts during the anti-slavery struggle" (122).

The thematic methodology through which Teelucksingh structures his discourse sets up a dialectic between the good and the bad, the humane and the inhumane, the philanthropic and the misanthropic, as well as between the sacred and the profane. On the one hand Teelucksingh, in culling through a wide cross-section of primary and secondary sources, provides more than sufficient and convincing evidence to support his conclusion that members of the white Canadian Protestant churches were a stabilising force, protectors, friends, educators and guides (121) to Blacks from the USA who fled to Canada through the Underground Railroad, during the War of 1812, and even during the eighteenth century War for American Independence and before. It was the white churches, Teelucksingh underscores, who welcomed the newly arrived migrants to their country and dipped into their resources to satisfy the immediate need for food, shelter and clothing (97). Members of the white

churches also gave generously to secure and establish African American migrant settlements in Upper Canada such as Amerherstburg, Windsor, Puce, Chatham and Colchester (92, 103). White flocks, with the assistance of their white philanthropic secular colleagues, also funded the establishment of schools, churches and other institutions for Blacks (90). From their pulpits, white ministers openly opposed slave holding (26). Teelucksingh is convinced that, with regard to rescuing Blacks from slavery in neighbouring USA and providing for their material well-being, the nineteenth century white Canadian Protestant churches were blameless.

The less attractive end of the white and black relationship in Canada's nineteenth century Protestant churches, Teelucksingh insists, cannot be ignored. He is perturbed by the fact that the same white churches who voluntarily extended acts of Christian charity to waves of black migrants were as intolerant of sharing spaces with blacks as the wider Canadian community and the slaveholders of the southern United States. Teelucksingh posits that Blacks from the USA in Canada in the nineteenth century faced racism, the rejection of integration and isolation. The Common School Act of 1850, Teelucksingh highlights, institutionalized educational segregation in the country (40). In chapter four, entitled "Training of Disciples: Development of Black Leadership," Teelucksingh carefully analyses the manner in which racial prejudice tainted white/black interactions within the church. Many white theologians adopted the attitude of superiority which spelt out that, although they were Christians, Black converts aspiring to be religious leaders needed to be weaned from "their crude and wild notions about Christianity" (55). In the few Protestant churches in Upper Canada which remained integrated from the 1820s to the 1860s, Blacks were often relegated to "Nigger Heaven" which physically separated the two major races especially with regard to the pews, galleries and balconies they occupied and the burial plots allocated to each (101-103). Thus, Teelucksingh reinforces Malcolm Wallace's assessment that "although there was unlimited Canadian enthusiasm for providing a refuge for the colored man, he was, as a rule, segregated in church, school and social relationships" (111). In the long run, the white churches sabotaged the assimilation of Blacks into Canadian life which, ironically, had been facilitated by their generosity.

In accordance with the title of the text, *The Lost Gospel*, Teelucksingh traces the decline of Black membership, not only in white Protestant congregations in Canada,

but also in all black churches in particular and in Canada in general by 1863 following the Emancipation Proclamation in the USA. Teelucksingh explains that the Proclamation “was a crucial blow to the assimilation efforts undertaken by the white and black churches in Canada West” (99). He also argues that the passage of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments to the Constitution of the USA and of the first and second Reconstruction Acts triggered optimistic hopes among Blacks from America in Canada that return migration might empower them with citizenship and voting rights (99). Perhaps Teelucksingh could have taken this analysis a bit further by deducing that, in the immediate postbellum years, Blacks in Canada contemplating return migration to the USA calculated that life in Canada was just the same as in the old south and could even be better now that slavery was abolished.

In general, Teelucksingh gives more agency to the white clergy and their congregations than to the Black Christians in Canada. This approach leads him to make the unfortunate and unfair conclusion that “Black leaders and their congregations had a resilient, yet passive and tolerant attitude which facilitated their emotional growth and social interaction” (121). There was nothing passive, however, as Teelucksingh himself reasons (104), about Blacks deliberately and consciously negotiating segregation as an instrument of social solidarity and survival in the face of racial hostility. This notwithstanding, in the final analysis, *The Lost Gospel* ought to be compulsory reading for everyone interested in grappling with the contradictions which shaped the history of the interaction between Blacks from the USA seeking refuge and white Protestant churches in Upper Canada in the decades from the 1820s to the 1860s.