

Anne Alexander. *The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today*. (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1997). Pp. 247.

During the 1920s Catholic priests of St. Francis Xavier University appropriated the increasingly popular label "adult education" for their efforts to revitalize rural areas near Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Townsfolk, farmers, and fishermen learned how to organize and operate credit unions and co-operatives through mass meetings and study groups. The visible success of this project made the "Antigonish Movement" a model in the history of Canadian education.

Anne Alexander's book aims to link historical understanding to current adult education practice. She begins with an historical overview of the Movement, provides an analysis of the ideas of central figure Moses Coady, and concludes with a discussion of the Movement's relevance to contemporary problems. Despite these grand objectives, the book suffers from various weaknesses which, alas, turn out to be disabling.

The first section proves the most valuable. Alexander provides a useful service to education historians by surveying a broad range of social antecedents to a complex activity, summarizing relevant secondary research, and providing a solid bibliography. But she never states her own view of just what the Antigonish Movement might have meant. We do not learn what a "movement" is, nor exactly what constitutes the famed economic "middle way" of cooperativism. We never know why St. Francis Xavier University established a Department of Extension (although we learn that it was in response to a threat by the Scottish Catholic Society to raise funds and "do it themselves"). In short, Alexander presents excerpts from other research but introduces little historical evidence or perspective. Despite normative exhortations, her own voice is weak.

Alexander's attempt at a popular and accessible writing style is all too frequently careless and imprecise. We find, for example, several "mirrors," plenty of "context" and "milieu," "emerging" events, social movement "thrusts," vague "needs," "holistic" views, and, of course, we meet "the people" of "the community," the "oppressed" and the "oppressors." I counted some twenty-two occasions of the word "reflect" (or variations). Three are in the same paragraph, each with a different meaning: Coady "reflected the optimism and many ideas of other progressives;" "while his ideas represented the ideal... they reflect the base from which Coady and his colleagues informed and motivated themselves;" "these ideas that underpinned this social reform movement give us... a base for critical reflection" (176). Presumably the first means "shared," the second "were a consequence of," and the third "thinking about" (in some unspecified way). But it is not the reader's job to define terms.

Charitable readers who dismiss such language as mere sloppiness and overlook vague terms and passive voice to seek the author's deeper meaning and understanding will not find rewards. Alexander's work is conceptually weak, avoiding many essential questions. The second section of the book, which promises to be intellectual history and conceptual analysis, is particularly unfulfilling. Why, in discussing the Catholic "social gospel," is it important to note Aquinas as a philosophical realist; and is "realist" meant in its mediaeval or modern sense? Pierre Bourdieu's name appears on page 133, but in an inadequate discussion of the relevance of his views to the study at hand. Alexander hints at the conflict between charismatic authority and what Weber called legal-rational authority, but never delves into the topic. Accepting Coady's "philosophy" at face value as declared in speeches and credos, she appears more an apologist than critical analyst. To read that "to Coady, democracy meant 'rule by the people' and not 'rule by the elite'" (166) tells us virtually nothing.

Catholic intellectual history should be a central aspect of this study, but again appears in a weak and shallow form. Alexander rightly ties Coady's philosophical and social views to the papal edicts of Leo XIII, but only hints at their relevance to the social role of the Catholic Church in an increasingly secular and scientific age. We are told that Coady believed in "scientific thinking," but nowhere do we find what science meant to Catholic clerics. Was social science conceived in positivistic terms, leaving moral and social judgements to the church? We learn that Coady equated scientific thinking with "straight thinking" and "real thinking." Alexander explains that scientific thinking means "reducing a complex topic to simplest components and developing an understanding about it" (135). To put it mildly, this is not conceptually informative.

There are puzzling inconsistencies. How can Alexander characterize the Antigonish Movement as non-professional if she recognizes the professional status of priests in the 1920s (32, 182)? If Coady preached that adult education leaders ought to break alliances with "vested interests," one would expect the author to consider seriously the tremendous influence of Carnegie Corporation money (acknowledged by Alexander) in evaluating Coady and his "philosophy." Such consideration is missing.

Alexander wishes to show that Coady's normative beliefs about adult education contributed to the Antigonish Movement, and that similar beliefs might contribute to similar programs today. Although portrayed in heroic terms, Coady is shown to be an actor surrounded by other social forces that contributed to the Movement; a critical reader might see in Alexander's account someone less charismatic and more domineering. From the evidence of this book, Coady was pushy and brusque, with high self-regard, and used simple-minded rustic metaphors to illustrate a folksy (and probably in-

consistent) philosophy. Alexander's thin conceptual analysis makes him appear more political opportunist than visionary educator. Although the humanitarian accomplishments of the Movement are hard to ignore, one must wonder if Coady is the proper figure for adulation.

The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today is a useful introduction to the topic, especially as a casual read at the undergraduate level, but its considerable shortcomings make it of limited use to historians or educators. As history, it simply does not bring new insights or evidence to bear on a fascinating topic. As education, it promotes political bravado over careful philosophical consideration. At a time when many decry the lack of "vision" among adult educators, we must resist a vision of empty rhetoric fuelling mindless activism.

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Doug Owrain, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, [10] 392.

Doug Owrain has produced the first book-length study of the English-Canadian middle class baby boom generation of the 1950s and 1960s. Historians usually shy away from the experiences of a generation. Owrain chose them since, in his view, boomers are one of the rare groups in history to think of themselves explicitly "in terms of generational identity." Owrain sees generations as historic rather than demographic phenomena, and convincingly identifies his subject as those born between the "late war and about 1955 or 1956" (as opposed to the more extended and common 1946–1962 benchmarks). He thus excludes generation Xers.

He is writing the history of the first twenty-five years of this generation, the period when baby boomers had the most influence and power. The author explicitly identifies his topic as white, English Canadian, middle class boomers: "[T]he very poor, the very remote, certain ethnic communities had a very different experience and ... did not fully participate in the generational sense of self..." This legitimate distinction raises thought-provoking questions others must try to answer: How did the working class and other ethnic groups of the baby boom differ from their middle class colleagues in terms of attitudes and behaviour documented in this study, and, more generally, How did they perceive themselves if not "generationally"?

Owrain peppers his study with comparative American data and developments. Although he does not try to account fully for differences between English Canadian middle class boomers and their American counterparts, he