

Roberto Perin, *The Many Rooms of This House: Diversity and Toronto's Places of Worship Since 1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 440 pp., ISBN: 978- 1487520174.

At first blush, Roberto Perin's landmark study seems irrelevant to Canadian Jewish Studies, especially with an opening chapter entitled "Establishing Protestantism." But the old adage of not judging a book by its cover – or even its table of contents – rings particularly true here. This book not only documents the pattern of synagogue building in a key area of Toronto but, even more importantly, contextualizes its findings within the wider narrative of the development of organized worship in Toronto. In the process, Perin suggests many interesting parallels between Jewish and Christian religious developments well worth consideration and further research by the various disciplines within Canadian Jewish Studies.

It is worth noting that, despite the title, Perin does not examine all of Toronto. He covers only the "West End," defined as bounded by St. Clair Avenue on the north, the Lake Ontario shoreline in the south, the Humber River on the west, and University Avenue/Avenue Road on the east. Fortuitously, this is where the overwhelming majority of Jewish settlement and institutionalization occurred between 1840 and 1950. Fortuitous though this geographic demarcation may be, it is Perin's methodology that sets this study apart. His approach is "historical in... organization and perspective, encompassing existing places of worship and those that have vanished" (5). As distinct from previous scholarship of religious institutions focused on individual buildings, their architects, and their leaders, Perin views churches and synagogues in their neighbourhood context and as far more than places of worship. He rightly sees them as yielding vital evidence on social class interactions at a sub-ethnic level and "the building blocks of community" (5). With great scholarly discipline, Perin manages to write in detail about many institutions while never losing his overarching focus on the twin themes of "time and space" – the major events driving the erection or creation of places of worship, and "the rubric of fellowship" – what brought people together to pray and how those forces changed over time (II).

This wide-ranging approach allows Perin to paint a broad and vivid canvas of the development of religious life in the West End. A large number of tables provide ready access to fascinating facts about the relative cost of building religious institutions, buildings that became home to a succession of religious tenants, and even salaries of some clergy. Scholars of Toronto Jewish history may consider the Appendix on "Places of Worship in the West End, 1840 to 2000" sufficient reason to purchase this text, given that it lists the year in which every church and synagogue was begun and the ultimate fate of the building. But Perin is not one to get buried in detail. In the process of explaining this voluminous data, Perin tracks the development and movement of West End synagogues and offers some tantalizing insights and import-

ant conclusions into some striking parallels between the congregational life cycle of churches and synagogues.

Due to the mass of data and effective analysis, two of Perin's conclusions are sufficiently important to demand our attention in this review. Perin's analysis affirms that all organized religion in Toronto struggled to make room for waves of immigrants who often found the North American variety inferior in pietism. Catholics were hard pressed to create and later control ethnic parishes for Italians and Portuguese, while Sephardim and Haredim found that Toronto Jewry in the 1950s had little room for them as well and were often poorly understood or even disparaged by their co-religionists. In both cases, these new groups, already economically disadvantaged, found themselves shunted away from the mainstream of their faith.

More importantly, Perin demonstrates that established Christians and Jews emphasized formality and decorum in worship between 1880 and 1920 to distance themselves from immigrant co-religionists. He cites the creation of larger and more formal synagogues such as Goel Tzedec and the arguments over modernizing services paralleled the Protestant and Catholic experience as well. He also supports the well-known argument that established Jews and Christians utilized formality in worship to demarcate their socio-economic turf and erected purpose-built facilities to reflect their newfound wealth and social status. Perin's research shows that the cost of the second Goel Tzedec synagogue (1905) was \$65,000, in the top 10 percent of the over 70 religious institutions built in this time period, underscoring members' belief that the opulence of their shul testified to their economic status.

Perin's suggestive final chapter entitled "Fellowship in the Time of the Shopping Centre" affirms his thesis that postwar prosperity consumerism became the "new religion" that supplanted traditional rites among Christians and Jews alike. Despite admitting that "associational life in this period did not follow a single pattern or form" (262), Perin notes a number of trends worthy of further study for researchers of contemporary Canadian Jewish religious life. First, that liturgical reform across the religious spectrum popularized fundamentalism. This led to the building of large purpose-built places of worship like Crossroads Cathedral and the Peoples Church. One wonders if the rise of Aish HaTorah and Chabad is part of a wider pattern. On the other hand, Perin points out that liturgical change frequently centred on gender, citing the "de-Orthodoxification" of the First Narayever Synagogue as a case in point. He similarly notes the important role sexual orientation has come to play in religious life; certainly, Canadian Jewish Studies researchers can discuss and debate, as Perin does, the reasons that this issue has achieved prominence while assessing if consumerism is indeed the driving force Perin claims it to be.

This book reads smoothly despite its length. Perin's methodology and time frame

keep him from mentioning where synagogues that leave the West End moved. Only a knowledgeable researcher would be able to follow up on the movement of each listed synagogue. He also does not realize, nor does the University of Toronto Press' editors, that the plural of *shtibel* is *shtiblech* and not "shtibles." But these are minor errors in an important work of scholarship. The length and the depth of the narrative does narrow the readership; only researchers who are involved in Canadian urban history, Canadian religious anthropology or sociology, or a close analysis of Jewish life in Toronto will devote themselves to reading each chapter in detail. Since Toronto was a Christian city, most of the text focuses on Christian places of worship. But the detail of the index and the construction of the tables make it relatively simple to read the sections pertaining to synagogues, some of which are pictured in the text as well. Hopefully, Perin's methodology and wealth of carefully assembled and assessed evidence will inspire scholars in the field to continue widening the context in which we view Judaism as a religion in Toronto and build new understandings of comparative religious sociology informed by the interplay of history and geography.

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