

# *Chapter One*

## **Discipling Canada...and the Nations**

**Murray Moerman**

The concept of “discipling a nation”<sup>1</sup> (or city or community for that matter) is often beyond the expectation of Canadian Christian leaders. Some are challenged with attitudes within the church, and sometimes within themselves, viewing the purpose of the church as serving the needs of its constituents. Despite positive mission statements to the contrary, the cultural ethos of many congregations do little more than “tip the hat” to Christ’s call to serve and bless the nations with the Gospel.

Other leaders are challenged by negative attitudes in the culture towards the church or Gospel, perhaps real, or perceived through the lens of government or the media, leaving them feeling beleaguered or with little real faith in the possibility of discipling their nation, city or community.

For these reasons we recognize the title of this chapter and the volume may be viewed by some as too broad or bold. Yet our intention is to take the next step with those who seek to be obedient to the call of our Lord Jesus to disciple the peoples of our land and the nations beyond. We simply want, as did David, to serve God’s unchanging purpose in our generation (Acts 13:36).

If we were to approach the challenge of the Great Commission confident in our own ability, our response indeed would be overly bold. However, deeply aware of our weakness and dependence on Jesus, we ask only God’s strength and wisdom to follow in the calling that is higher than we.

From that position we dare seek nothing less than that Jesus calls us to—not for our own sake, but for the sake of our broad and needy land, and more—for the sake of the glory of the God who is love and redeems the lost.

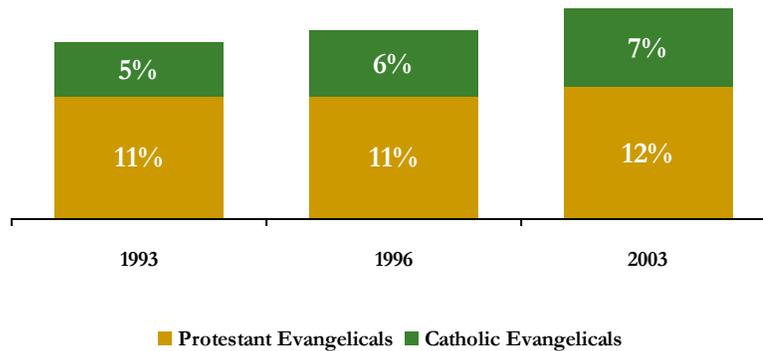
### How Evangelical is Canada?

The strength of the evangelical<sup>2</sup> movement in Canada can be measured several ways:

*Census Data:* Each 10 years the Canadian census asks citizens their “religious affiliation.” In 2001 evangelical “religious affiliation” stood at 10.9%, virtually unchanged from the 10.8% reported in 1991.<sup>3</sup>

*Polling of Beliefs:* Three scientific polls of Canadian beliefs were conducted from 1993 to 2003. Questions focused on the centrality of Christ and the cross, the Bible, conversion, behavior and values. Results from the most recent of these polls <sup>4</sup> suggest evangelical growth during the decade:

#### Growth in Percentage of Canadian Evangelicals



At the same time, it appears the gap between those tending towards Christian faith and those tending away from it is increasing:

#### Summary of Doctrinal and Behavioral Responses

	% of Canadians agree		
	1993	1996	2003
<b>Forgiveness through Christ</b>	61%	63%	66%
<b>Jesus not God</b>	16%	20%	24%
<b>God is an old superstition</b>	22%	23%	24%
<b>Committed life to Christ</b>	29%	35%	44%
<b>Attend weekly</b>	23%	21%	19%

*Church Attendance:* Actual church attendance, as might be expected, is lower than profession of belief with approximately 6%<sup>5</sup> of Canadians present as evangelicals in a worshipping congregation in a given week.

Why do we find this range of results when measuring “religious affiliation,” “polling of beliefs” and “church attendance”?

The differences result essentially from the categories under study measuring different realities; e.g., some Canadians hold to evangelical beliefs without affiliating, even mentally, with a particular denomination or tradition; some have come to adhere to the “spirituality with religion” mantra prevalent in Canada and do not feel an obligation to participate in Christian community, or to put it more bluntly, don’t like church culture; and some, lacking spiritual disciplines, may hold beliefs they do not yet, or no longer, translate to behavior and life-style choices.

*Number of Congregations:* Growth or decline in number of congregations gathering believers and equipping them for missional engagement with culture is another key measurement of evangelical growth. While it is recognized that not all congregations are missional in nature, church planting—as an expression of mission within the movement as a whole—does give a general sense of the vitality of the evangelical movement as a whole. The following table shows the growth or decline in the total number of congregations within each tradition within Canada:

**Christian Congregations in Canada  
by Tradition (1989-2003)  
as Compared with General Population Growth**

	<b>Total Congregations:</b>				<b>Average Annual Growth Rate:</b>		
	<b>1989</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>1989-1995</b>	<b>1995-2000</b>	<b>2000-2003</b>
<b>Evangelical</b>	7,854	8,848	9,449	9,879	2.0%	1.3%	1.5%
<b>Mainline</b>	9,226	8,802	8,506	8,423	-0.8%	-0.7%	-0.3%
<b>Roman Catholic</b>	6,173	5,706	5,589	5,391	-1.3%	-0.4%	-1.2%
<b>Canadian Population</b>					1.2%	0.9%	0.9%

In summary, the author believes the following conclusions are warranted:

- The evangelical impulse in Canada (as measured by “religious affiliation,” “polling of beliefs,” “church attendance” and “number of congregations”) in the last decade is holding and probably growing slightly as a percentage of population.
- Current gains are being made with increased difficulty.
- Canadians are increasingly polarized between those agreeing in principle with the Gospel and those rejecting it with consideration.

- Increasing percentages of Canadians have never personally engaged in a serious consideration of Christ or the Gospel.

### **The Goal: A Discipled Nation**

The goal of contemporary believers committed to the cause for which Christ died must encompass all Jesus envisioned as He called those who followed Him to make disciples of all the “nations” of the earth (Matthew 28:18).

It is important to understand that the word “nations” in Matthew 28:18 is in fact “*ethane*” which means not “nation” in the sense of “political entity” or “state,” but “ethnics” in the sense of “people group,” or more precisely, “web of people groups” which comprise most contemporary nation-states.

People groups are those who feel connected, and to some degree loyal, to one another by affinities related to language, ethnicity, culture, world-view, religion, shared experiences or other values. Such people groups are the “*ethane*” to which Jesus refers.

The power of such affinity groups is not to be under-estimated. The loyalty of such affinity groups often determines who will marry whom has moved nation-state boundaries and produced heroic struggles for liberty in such instances as inspired the movie *Braveheart*.

But what then is a discipled nation in the sense of Canada as a nation-state? In wrestling with this central issue in our previous volume, we suggested Canada might be considered “discipled” when “each people group within each city, town and community of each province has come to be composed of a majority of fully devoted disciples of Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

This involves two equally important tasks: the discipling of the church and the discipling of the nation.

The first task involves healing the western church from the narcissism of its cultural context. The Gospel is indeed for “me” as many contemporary worship songs celebrate; but the Gospel also transforms “me” and calls the individual to a mission outside of self, at personal cost to comfort and convenience, for the sake of the lost so loved by God.

The second task involves an alignment of the heart of the church with the compassionate self-sacrificing heart of God for His tragically broken and fatally wounded world. The resulting activities towards our discipling of the nation are necessarily multifaceted in expression.

To see Canada discipled according to the depths of the heart and purpose of God—and to accept our responsibility in discipling the nations “*ethane*” of the world—it is important that we accustom our eyes to see two realities as God sees them; that is:

1. *To see Canada as a mission field in the context of global missiology.* Many Canadian students and leaders acknowledge the reality of Canada as a mission field, at least intellectually. We must now act accordingly. Canada is predominately a post-Christian nation—this has been stated publicly and explicitly by a recent Prime

Minister—and is increasingly post-modern in orientation where spirituality is on the rise but not a biblical spirituality. We must take these steps:

- Ask God to give us fresh eyes to see those around us *just as* we might if we had for the first time stepped off the boat as missionaries to India, Morocco or Thailand—this is not easy to do given our history with our context, but critical; and
- Carefully develop missiological strategies in *Canada* by precisely the same processes as we might if we were missionaries in one of the above overseas mission settings.

2. *To see Canadian people-groups as microcosm of the world.* The fact is that our Dominion of Canada is a nation of nations, beginning with thousands of First Nations bands. Canada is unique among the nations in that it officially espouses multiculturalism, seeks increasing numbers of immigrants, and has seen Toronto designated by a UN agency as the most multicultural city on the planet. This means not only that we have one of the most complex missionary training and ministry contexts in the world, but also that the Canadian church, if she accepts her calling, is uniquely poised to go and minister to all the nations of the world.

Scientists point out that our eyes can play tricks on us when we become used to interpreting data around us in familiar ways. The result in fact may be that we become barely able to see the many and diverse people groups around us.

One of the best means of training our “eyes” is to take the “Perspectives on the World Christian Movement” course. This university-level adult education course with a proven track record of over 25 years is helping train people to see the world as God sees it. Perspectives is offered in many centers across North America. In fact, you may find a way to offer the course through your own congregation!<sup>7</sup>

### **How Will We Approach our Task?**

Since the first Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization in 1974<sup>8</sup>, a global recognition has emerged in the mission community of the need for church planting movements to be established in every people group in the world.

The application of this recognition was first implemented in a broad interdenominational way in the Philippines, initially coached and coordinated by James Montgomery. The story is now well known and continues to provide encouragement to many. In brief, the Philippines, with 5,000 known evangelical congregations in 1974, adopted a 25-year goal of planting an additional 45,000 evangelizing congregations by 2000. In a remarkable season of focused cooperation in a context of God’s grace, the church in the Philippines grew to 50,000 congregations by 2000, saw significant political and social changes, and has subsequently set additional goals to challenge the national church to greater heights in the future.

Numerous additional nations have taken steps to develop church planting movements in subsequent years. To support these efforts James Montgomery also established, in the 1980s, a “Discipling a Whole Nation” (DAWN) network emphasizing a basic three-pronged approach:

- **Research** – both into the “harvest field”<sup>9</sup> (to bring into sharp relief unreached peoples in greatest need of compassionate ministry from the Body of Christ) and into the “harvest force”<sup>10</sup> (to clarify where congregations exist, their comparative strength and growth and adequacy for the task).

The following chapter addresses some of these questions in the “macro” but followers of Jesus Christ are challenged to engage in such research in their own communities, developing a prophetic message to the church appropriate to its context and engaging the church broadly in at least the following two processes.

- **Prayer** – for receptivity of Canada’s “harvest field” to the Gospel and for unity and empowerment of “harvest force” in obedience to the Great Commission.
- **Planting** – to reach and disciple unreached people groups to the Lord Jesus Christ beginning with goal setting, where:
  - Each denomination, mission and association is invited to set public, dated, faith-and-reality-based church planting goals
  - Each local church is challenged to plant at least two daughter churches: first to replace itself and second to extend the Kingdom.

(Congregations already “on the beachhead” and those joining them as newly planted churches to aid in the struggle towards community transformation<sup>11</sup> will focus strongly on *leadership training* and other resourcing for the task.)

### **Basic Framework**

This basic framework is often termed “classic” DAWN,<sup>12</sup> while variations including leadership and resource development have been added and additional saturation church planting (SCP) networks, such as the Alliance for Saturation Church Planting<sup>13</sup> focusing on developing SCP movements in post-communist Eurasia, have also emerged.

In nations where evangelical believers do not yet comprise 10% of the population, in the opinion of the author, the “classic” DAWN approach should gather and focus the priority resources of the emerging church.

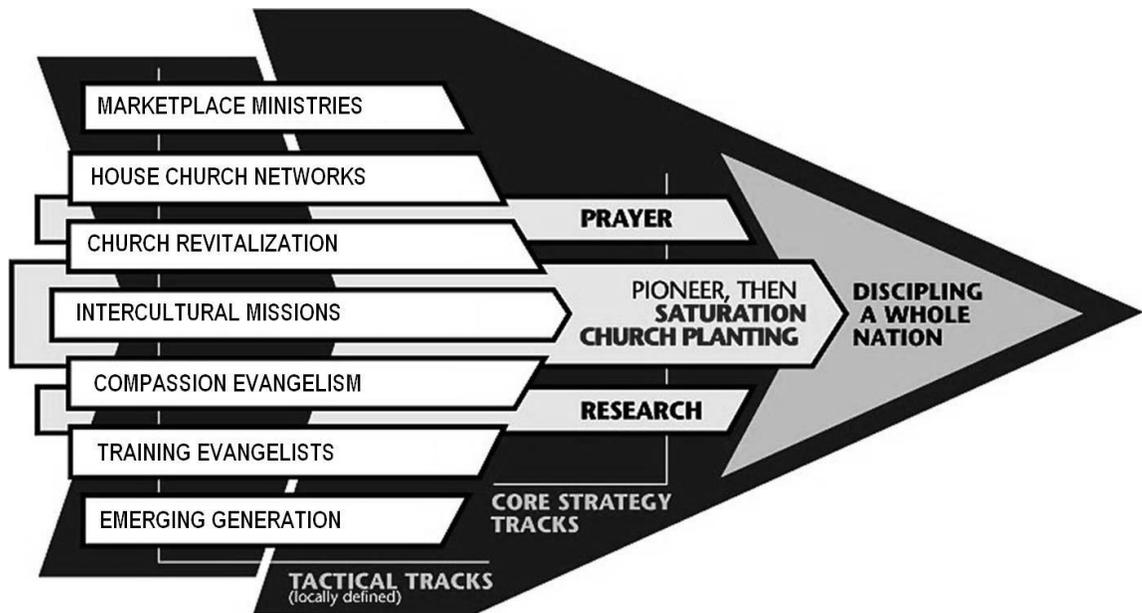
In those comparatively few countries where evangelical population exceeds 10%, the coordinated movement to disciple the nation, without lessening energies focused on church planting, may be effectively augmented by additional national partnerships aimed at discipling the church and nation.

### **A Multi-Track Approach**

In Canada, a DAWN-type church planting initiative was proposed in the late 1980s and formed in 1996 as an expression of the “AD 2000” movement with an initial “National Church Planting Congress” held in Bramalea, Ontario in 1997. The gathering affirmed a long-range missional goal focusing on doubling the number of evangelical congregations in Canada.

During this time Arnel Motz, then president of SIM, proposed to the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada<sup>14</sup> a joining of “AD 2000” and EFC efforts towards the re-evangelization of Canada through “one organizational structure under the title: “Vision 2000 & Beyond Canada” with the subtitle: “a national strategy of AD 2000 AND BEYOND”<sup>15</sup>

In the context of this initiative additional “tracks” have developed which continue to pursue the vision of discipling Canada<sup>16</sup> along the following conceptual lines<sup>17</sup>:



Each track gathers like-minded leaders sharing a heart for the nation for the purpose of developing a variety of national partnerships, frequently with regional expressions, focused on equipping the church to disciple the nation. The tracks may also clarify best practices, organize conferences, and produce books, websites and other resources. Each track engages in leadership support and development.

Track leaders for at least two days, twice a year, for mutual accountability and encouragement. Each meets in turn with partnership participants in their area of specialized contribution.

Tracks vary in strength but each makes a significant contribution. Other partnerships will doubtlessly be added. Some may also lose vitality and require reconfiguration. The process is dynamic.

Together we embrace a common mission: “To Empower the Whole Church to Bring the Whole Gospel to the Whole Nation” and we invite disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere to engage in the DAWN task and vision with us.

The current volume is produced in this “Discipling a Whole Nation” (DAWN) context with several of the contributors serving track partnership facilitators.

Our labours are incomplete, and stronger, more helpful approaches may well yet be developed. In the meantime we press forward with the energy and grace given us

(Colossians 1:29) with the prayer that the Lord of the Harvest would use us to His glory for the advancement of His Kingdom in our generation!

**Questions for Reflection and Action:**

1. Do you interpret the table titled “Summary of Doctrinal and Behavioral Responses” as suggesting a polarizing of Canadian beliefs between those who are essentially evangelical in worldview and those moving a way from the gospel, or are the figures showing decline in church participation more of a rejection of the church than a rejection of the gospel?
2. If people reject the church over a period of years, are they likely to remain clear on the heart of the gospel?
3. What do you see as the best way to approach the mandate of discipling our nation?

**Bibliography / Suggested Reading:**

Allen, Roland. The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962.

Moerman, Murray, ed., Transforming Our Nation. Richmond, BC: Church Leadership Library (1998). (also available at [www.outreach.ca/ton](http://www.outreach.ca/ton))

McGavran, Donald A., and Jim Montgomery. The Discipling of a Nation. Milpitas, CA: Global Church Growth, 1980.

**About the Author:** Murray Moerman serves with Outreach Canada as it’s Church Planting department head, is founder of Church Planting Canada, and chair of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada’s “National Evangelism Partnerships”.

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**Chapter Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Discipling a nation to Jesus Christ does not envision all citizens and institutions in the nation turning to Christ. But it does envision a real and meaningful opportunity for the majority of its citizens and institutions to hear, see and understand the Gospel resulting in a significant proportion of the nation becoming devoted followers of Jesus Christ. These in turn will further impact the tenor, laws and institutions of the nation in a Christward direction. Progress towards discipling a nation towards Christ may be expected to be evidenced in a growing number of healthy missional churches, an increase in the percentages of devoted followers of Jesus Christ in the nation, and an increasingly positive attitude towards the Gospel in the culture as a whole. These are, in the view of the author, reasonable expectations of Christians in the nation and goals in line with our scriptural mandates worthy of our highest efforts.

<sup>2</sup> Some will question the focus on “evangelical” in this volume, perhaps charging us with a depreciation of parallel Christian traditions. Not so. The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

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regularly reaches out to Christian friends and leaders in mainline and Roman Catholic traditions, particularly in matters of shared conviction in matters of faith and practice. We value God's work in each tradition and, understandably we trust, seek to strengthen our responsiveness to God's work also within and through the evangelical church.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 2 for further details.

<sup>4</sup> Complete results of the Ipsos-Reid poll, commissioned by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada through its *National Evangelism Partnerships* Research Track in cooperation with partner organizations, is available in PowerPoint form for presentations from [www.outreach.ca/research](http://www.outreach.ca/research) (click: "the church")

<sup>5</sup> As calculated for the National Church Planting Congress held in Montreal, November 2001. The figure is not based on polls—which tend to significantly higher figures (due both to respondents' possible tendency to report intentions rather than behavior, and to pollsters' inclusion of the religious practices of adherents of non-Christian religions)—but on counts of actual average worship attendance.

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller treatment of the question of the nature of a disciplined nation, we commend the second chapter of *Transforming Our Nation*, "Can Canada be Disciplined?" out-of-print but available from [www.outreach.ca/ton](http://www.outreach.ca/ton).

<sup>7</sup> Two websites may be useful in the Canadian context: [www.PerspectivesCanada.org](http://www.PerspectivesCanada.org) and [www.outreach.ca/perspectives](http://www.outreach.ca/perspectives); for international links see [www.perspectives.org](http://www.perspectives.org).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.gospelcom.net/lcwe/archives/lau1docs/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> "Harvest Field" is a general term drawn from Jesus' words in John 4:34-38. More specifically, "harvest field" research explores sub-cultures the church has not yet effectively engaged with the Gospel, means of engagement which have shown promise and the degree of receptivity to the Gospel currently apparent in those people groups.

<sup>10</sup> "Harvest Force" refers to Christians or organizations available to engage a given geographic location or people group with the Gospel. Harvest force research explores the health, readiness and willnessness of the church to be obedient to the Great Commission and Great Commandment.

<sup>11</sup> "Transformation" is understood here as a definite and noticeable improvement rather than a notion of perfection.

<sup>12</sup> Further details at [www.dawnministries.org](http://www.dawnministries.org) or [www.outreach.ca/ton](http://www.outreach.ca/ton) (click "forward")

<sup>13</sup> [www.alliancescp.org](http://www.alliancescp.org)

<sup>14</sup> [www.evangelicalfellowship.ca](http://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca)

<sup>15</sup> From an unpublished document titled *A Proposed Merger of AD 2000 and Vision 2000 Canada*.

<sup>16</sup> Such a conceptual approach could also be applied to the context of a city, county or other geographic designation.

<sup>17</sup> Prayer, research and the establishment of church planting movements in each people group may be viewed as a missiological step chronologically prior to other tactical strategies, though all tracks and strategies supplement and support one another, as together—along with additionally partnership strategies yet to be developed—each makes it's vital contribution to the discipling of a nation. The diagram depicts one conception of the relationships of these cooperative efforts.