

Preface

Much of the material in this book first appeared in the conference notebook distributed to the 279 registrants at the *Canadian Church Planting Congress '97* held in Bramalea, Ontario, October 27-30, 1997. The conference theme was “Pray, Plan, Plant”—themes also reflected in the sections of these eleven chapters.

This revision has the benefit of recently released components of the 1996 Canadian census, an overview of the first *Canadian Church Planting Congress*, a new chapter by Dr. Gary Walsh and further reflection by the authors after interaction with congress delegates.

Church Planting Canada, sponsor of the congress, is a broadly based ad hoc association of denominations and ministries. Our desire is to work cooperatively to disciple the whole nation and all its people groups through evangelistic church planting, saturating our mission field with the Gospel. *Church Planting Canada* in this way serves as the Canadian church planting track of *Vision Canada* and the international *AD2000 and Beyond* movement and *DAWN Ministries*.

Vision Canada is the result of an affiliation agreement between the *Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's Vision 2000* and several Canadian tracks of the *AD2000 and Beyond* movement. Dr. Arnell Motz served as *Vision Canada's* first coordinator. Administrative support for *Church Planting Canada* is provided by *Outreach Canada*.

The research team, seeking to supply current information on the harvest force and harvest field in Canada, recognizes the need for consistency when measuring either reality. This is particularly important over time, as those committed to working toward the discipling of our nation wish to evaluate progress in the task. We also recognize the valuable discussion that inevitably accompanies any such definition.

For these reasons we believe it important to share the rationale for definitions used in this study. There are two primary issues to be addressed:

1. Definition of the *harvest force*.

In the first half of the century, those who held to Biblical basics such as the deity of Christ, authority of Scripture and unique sufficiency of the cross were termed “fundamentalists.” During the second half of the century, the term “evangelicals” came to be preferred by those who held these same truths but emphasized equally the implications of these truths in ministries of compassion in their communities and the world. The development of the *Evangelical Fellowship of Canada* and its relief and development partner, *World Relief Canada*, testifies to the strength of this movement in Canada.

Dr. George Rawlyk emphasized the presence and work of evangelicals within mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic congregations, suggesting approximately one-seventh of those worshipping within these traditions hold to evangelical beliefs.

Many within these historic movements of Christendom are quite comfortable with the term “evangelical,” identifying wholly with the “evangel” proclaimed classically by the apostle Peter in Acts 10:34-43. Some in these movements, wishing to distance themselves from the political views of other evangelicals, prefer the term “Biblically orthodox.” Others prefer various other terms or none at all.

Recognizing the history of the discussion, the research team compiling the work underlying several of the following chapters continue to use the term “evangelical” (as expressing the Gospel message summarized in Acts 10:34-43) until a broad consensus regarding language use develops otherwise.

2. What should be measured to evaluate progress in the discipling of our nation?

It is broadly recognized that the reason definitions of evangelical strength in Canada vary to the degree they do is that different things are measured.

Current definitions of evangelical strength, depending on criterion chosen, include:

- ✍ *Religious affiliation*—currently 10.8% in response to a question asked at the beginning of each decade by Census Canada,
- ✍ *Church membership*—9.5% according to evangelical denominational records and Rawlyk’s findings of one seventh of evangelicals within historic traditions,
- ✍ *Church attendance*—5.2% by the records of the evangelical denominations and Rawlyk’s findings of one-seventh of evangelicals worshipping in historic traditions, or
- ✍ *Christian beliefs*—16% or higher depending on which beliefs are measured in a given poll.

In 1990 Dr. Arnell Motz, editor of *Reclaiming a Nation*, used a combination of evangelical worship attendance, adherents and evangelicals in mainline churches to come to the conclusion that Canada was 7.6% evangelical in 1989. By this criteria the evangelical movement grew slightly to between 8 and 10% in 1997.

The higher percentages found by polls of individual beliefs are legitimately used to lobby Ottawa for legislation reflecting Biblical values. However, our concern is ultimately for Biblical discipleship in this life and preparation, in Biblical terms, for the day of accountability and the life to come (most evangelicals recognize polled beliefs in an undefined god to be of comparatively little help in understanding the degree to which Canadians have become devoted followers of Jesus Christ).

Furthermore, how are we to respond to those who claim to be born again but hold non-Biblical views on theology (e.g., reincarnation) and/or morality? It is difficult to count such persons as members of the harvest force.

The research and editorial team has chosen to measure the strength of the evangelical movement and its progress in discipling the nation in relatively simple terms: Canadians holding to the evangel (Acts 10:34-43) in the context of redemptive worshipping communities giving priority to evangelizing the world. Our figures are based on a ratio of congregations in which this evangel is proclaimed, to the number of persons yet unconnected to this redemptive community.

Biblical theology does not permit the separation of an individual's theoretical belief system from participation in the nurturing life of the local church. "Unchurched Christians" are a New Testament oxymoron (which we may measure but not define as accomplishing the goal). The same is true of those who believe the Gospel to be true "for them," but who

are embarrassed by the absolute claims of the Gospel on the allegiance of those yet uncommitted to Christ.

We recognize some readers will hold other views. However, we believe the most honest gift we can offer is that which makes its working assumptions clear at the beginning of the research study.

May the Lord of the harvest use this book to bring greater prayer and purposeful focus to His Church and His glory as we join hearts and focus our resources in *transforming our nation*.

Murray Moerman

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