

Chapter Two

Can Canada Be Discipled?

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Most Christians are familiar with the authoritative words of Jesus:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Jesus’ directive may be almost too familiar. Sometimes we may wish His words were not directed toward us.

Canada is a large, diverse and in many ways challenging collection of people groups, beginning with the aboriginal peoples, her two founding cultures and the many cultures from around the world that have joined themselves to Canada since Confederation.

Does Jesus intend us as His followers to take literally this command “to make disciples of all” and apply it to Canada? What does it mean to “disciple” the “nation” of

Canada? Can it actually be done? These vital questions stand at the heart of this book and its challenge to the whole Church of Canada.

The “Nations”

The word “nations” in the Great Commission, most scholars agree, refers—not to such modern nation-states¹ as fill the current political landscape—but to each of the smaller people groups, castes, tribes, clans and other ethnic units that make up each “country.”

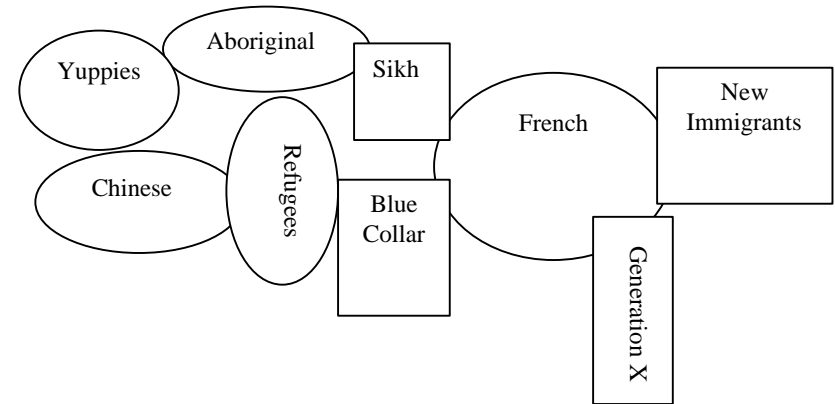
Canadian “First Nations” reflect this understanding. All share this great land but retain a clear and often proud sense of individual “nationhood.” A similar sense of cultural identity is retained by much of English Canada, Québec and immigrant peoples of various European and Asian lands.

The Canadian government has promoted and funded its policy of multi-culturalism, encouraging each culture to retain its sense of being, building cultural centers and holding festivals honoring a wide variety of Canada’s ethnic heritage.

It has been commonly noted that people from logging communities will receive the Gospel most readily from believers who already live and work within their particular sub-culture. The same is true of university students, factory workers, government bureaucrats, trades people, skateboarders and farmers. People most trust people who are viewed as being from within their own group.

“Peoples” or “people groups,” as sociologists and missiologists often term them, are those segments of society that tend to marry chiefly within their own group. Such groupings have a distinct consciousness of being unique and different from other groups in ways important to those within the given sub-culture. Usually individual members of a people group do not mix significantly with members of other people groups.

Figure 1
Examples of People Groups



Should this be so? Many, including numerous Christians, think not. Yet the sociological reality cannot be overlooked if we are to effectively disciple the peoples of Canada to the Lord Jesus. In fact, the reality of people groups should be used effectively to bring the Gospel to all peoples. No people group may be ignored or assumed to be a part of another people group.

How many of such sub-cultures and people groups exist within Canada? —Hundreds, probably thousands. The precise number is not known. Whatever the actual number, these are the “nations,” or “peoples” (*ta ethne* of Matthew 28:19) that the Lord has commanded us to disciple.

Some Christians are frustrated with the concept of people groups because untrained observers cannot readily observe such groups. Others prefer to ignore the concept, deny its validity or simply declare that all people should see themselves as one.

Yet these self-conscious “people groups” are one of the primary realities of the cultural mosaic called Canada—our

mission field. Each *must* be reached for Christ. Each *has* been reached to varying degrees. Each *can* best be reached from within. In those people groups where a church planting movement of adequate strength to disciple the group to its fringes has not yet developed, cross-cultural missionaries are needed to help strengthen and develop such a church planting movement.

What Does it Mean to “Disciple a Nation?”

What does it mean to disciple a nation? What proportion of a nation would need to be devoted followers of Jesus for a nation to be considered disciplined?

The Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Church offers definitions for four key terms relevant to this question:

- ✍ *A People*: An ethnic or racial group speaking its own language and distinguished by its self-identity with traditions of common descent, history, customs and language. This is the largest group within which communication can take place without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.
- ✍ *Unreached Peoples*: Are those within which there is no viable indigenous church movement of sufficient strength, resources, and commitment to sustain and ensure the continuous multiplication of churches. The numerical minimum for this degree of strength is frequently viewed as 5% church evangelicals.
- ✍ *Evangelized People*: A people for which the majority of its members have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ with such cultural and personal relevance that it results in sufficient understanding to accept Christ by faith as a believer (disciple) or to reject Him.
- ✍ *Christian People*: A people for which the majority of its members have made a profession of faith in Christ.

One measurement of whether a country is disciplined, then, is when a majority of a country's populace professes faith in Christ. But is this the completion of the Great Commission?

A potential difficulty with this view is that “profession of faith in Christ” may permit significant nominalism. Many Canadians at the end of the millenium may profess to be Christian on the 2001 census. However they may not have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ with sufficient understanding to accept Him by faith and become a believer (disciple).

Jesus sought not professions of faith (cf. Luke 9:57ff) but “fully devoted followers of Christ,” to quote a term gaining broad acceptance that may prove better suited to the goal.

A second Biblical reality must come into play in understanding this critically important question. Profession of faith is always expressed Biblically within the community of the redeemed. “Unchurched Christian,” in New Testament terms, must be recognized to be an oxymoron. The Church may, of course, take a wide variety of forms (wineskins), but must be characterized by life and service in community.

Finally, it must be clear that the goal of a majority of those professing faith or even “fully devoted followers of Christ” must be applied equally among all people groups within a country or province. The goal may be realized in some people groups to a rate of 70%, raising the national or provincial average to 51%, while other entire people groups within that country or province could remain virtually unevangelized (e.g., under 10%).

A better answer to the question, “What does it mean to disciple a nation?” may be, “Canada will be disciplined 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.”

The goal of discipling the nation, we must remember, is not the discipling of any one of Canada's diverse mosaic of people groups. The goal is nothing less than discipling the *whole* nation.

Is it God's Will?

Donald McGavran, career missionary to India and father of the modern Church growth movement, believed this to be the central question:

The question of whether the discipling of a whole nation is God's will must be answered. For Christians it is supremely important. Unless discipling a whole nation is God's will, Christians will not begin it. If it is, they will spend life and treasure to complete it. Is discipling a whole nation God's will? That is the key consideration.²

It is not within the scope of this brief chapter to demonstrate that it is God's will that Canada and the nations be disciplined. It is our conviction, however, that what God commands is His will, and that God's will is the life-work of those who serve Him.

Further, it is clear from Scripture that God called out of the nations, a people, through Abraham, for the blessing and salvation of "*all the peoples on earth*" (Genesis 12:3).

King Solomon recognized that the ultimate purpose of the temple was that "*all the peoples of the earth may know your (Yahweh's) name and fear you, as do your own people Israel*" (1 Kings 8:43).

The Psalmist anticipated the purpose of God that "*He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.... All kings will bow down to him and all the nations will serve him*" (Psalm 72:8, 11).

God said to His servant through Isaiah: "*I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth*" (Isaiah 49:6).

In the coming of the Messiah the purpose of God is made yet more explicit. Jesus says: "*I am the light* (not only of Israel but) *of the (whole) world*" (John 8:12).

God's purpose to disciple *panta ta ethne* (all the peoples) is the basis of the command to Christ's followers in Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16 and Romans 16:25ff. "*The Lord is...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). The end result—around the throne of God, will be gathered those purchased by Christ's blood "*from every tribe and language and people and nation*" (Revelation 5:9).

The intention of God's gracious heart is clear. We can participate in no higher calling than to fulfill this purpose of God. Those who remain unconvinced will give their lives to other pursuits. Those who believe the discipling of the nations is the purpose of God, revealed and made possible in Christ, will passionately give their lives and resources to this task.

Can the Nations be Disciplined?

If it is God's will to redeem and disciple the nations of the world, then the accomplishment of His will must be possible. For we serve not a tribal god or even the chief god of an imagined pantheon, but the only eternal Creator, Redeemer and Ruler of the universe.

It must be possible for those who are His redeemed children to accomplish His will, empowered by His Spirit, for it is to us that the Great Commission has been given.

Some may believe in theory that the nations can be disciplined, but doubt whether God's purpose can be accomplished in their lifetime. It is now nearly 2,000 years since Christ issued His Great Commission, and only about

10% of the world's population are now devoted disciples. Twenty percent are nominal Christians, 30% are within cultural or geographic reach of Christ's devoted followers, and 40% remain out of reach of any explicit Christian witness.³

Yet, Christianity *has* become the world religion with the greatest number of adherents. The rate at which people have become committed, Bible-believing Christians has escalated during the 20th century, despite great persecution and a spiraling global population growth (see Table 1).

This unprecedented growth provides strong evidence that God is accomplishing His purposes and should greatly encourage those committed to making disciples of all peoples. The completion of the Great Commission in our lifetime, despite the opposition of Satan and the apathy of much of Christ's Church, is an exciting possibility.⁵

The question remains: "How can the central purpose of God, the discipling of all nations, best be accomplished?"

Table 1⁴
Increase in Rate of Discipling the Nations

Percentage of Bible Believing Christians	Date	Years to Disciple One Percent of the World
1%	1430 AD	1,400 years
2%	1790 AD	360 years
3%	1940 AD	150 years
4%	1960 AD	20 years
5%	1970 AD	10 years
6%	1980 AD	10 years
7%	1983 AD	3 years
8%	1986 AD	3 years
9%	1989 AD	3 years
10%	1993 AD	4 years
11%	1995 AD	2 years

The Key to Discipling Nations: the Multiplication of Cells of Believers

Jesus said, "...I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

The church of which Jesus spoke is not an institution, but simple relational networks of disciples committed to God's life-transforming redemptive purposes. Jesus intended His disciples to multiply cells of believers in every culture and geographic locale. In this way the Church would permeate and transform the world, preparing the redeemed for His return and the age to come.

The discipling of a nation takes place as networks of disciples (churches or congregations) are multiplied within each of that nation's people groups, with each of these networks of disciples in turn forming others.⁶

The case for church multiplication as the foundational missiological building block is well established.⁷ In fact, the multiplication of new "cells" or "networks" of many kinds is the heart of building the Body and discipling the nation. For example, as new disciples are touched by Christ and follow Him, new relational networks are formed, and new networks of congregations, denominations and mission agencies are birthed.

All this for one purpose—to see a gathering of devoted followers of Christ within practical and relational distance of every person in every class, kind and culture of people, so that every neighbourhood is penetrated and permeated with the saving love, care, truth and power of Jesus Christ. "*The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (Habakkuk 2:14).

Reasons for Church Planting

Roger Forster reports a startling discovery from a study of rapidly growing and declining denominations.

Congregations of the most rapidly growing denominations that have not produced new churches, or are not themselves new churches, are declining at exactly the same rate as the fastest declining denomination. He states:

*The only reason the (fastest growing) denomination is... growing is because it has churches that are producing churches, producing churches, producing churches, etc. That is where the...numerical growth is taking place. Where a denomination has stopped planting churches it will decline, and it will decline at almost a common regular rate.*⁸

The following graphs, prepared and supplied by the Church of the Nazarene in Canada, clearly illustrate the importance of church planting. Critical to the growth of the Church of the Nazarene during the 25-year period studied—whether one examines worship attendance, membership or finances—is the contribution of newly established congregations. Even in declining Sunday School attendance, the rate of decline is significantly moderated by the contribution of new churches.

Many more reasons for church planting may be advanced. Allow me to suggest several.

- 1. New churches must be multiplied to advance the Kingdom.**⁹ The population of Canada and every major nation of the world continues to grow. In 1960 Canada's population was just under 18 million. Today Canada has approximately 30 million inhabitants. During this same period the majority of established congregations lost members or held their own. Even if all Christian churches grew at the same rate as did the Canadian population, we would only be holding our own. To advance Christ's Kingdom among Canadians, new networks of believers must be planted.

Figure 2
Effect of Church Planting on Nazarene Worship

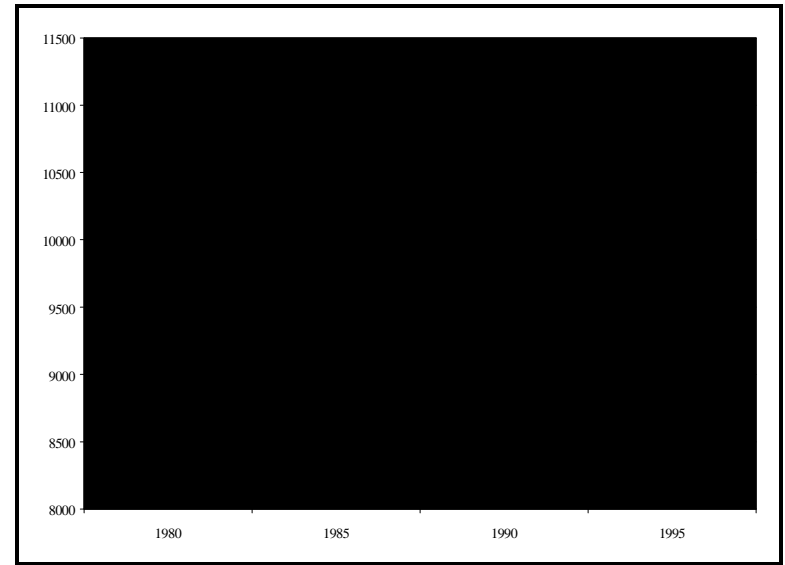


Figure 3
Effect of Church Planting on Nazarene Membership

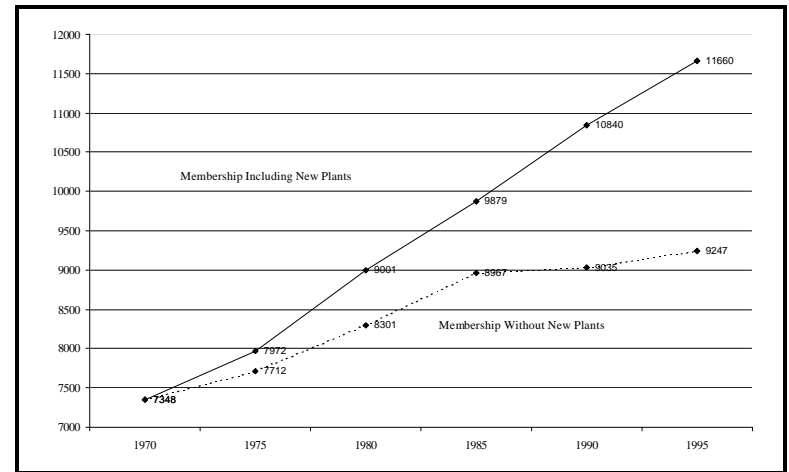


Figure 4

Effect of Church Planting on Nazarene Finances

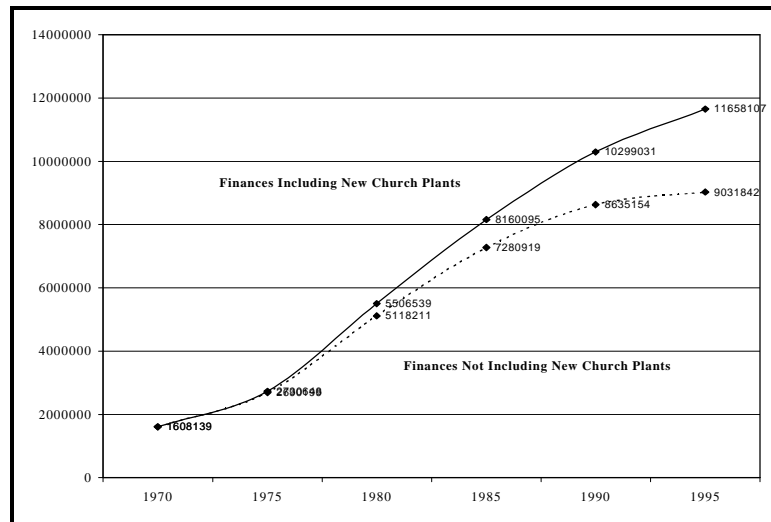
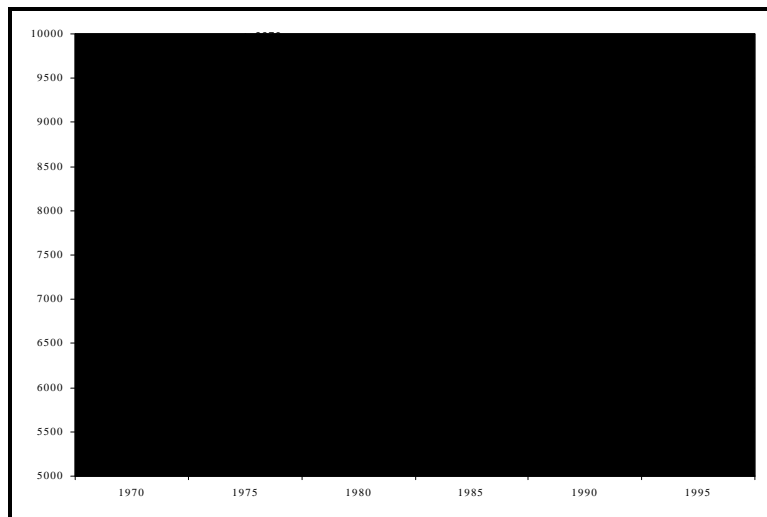


Figure 5

Effect of Church Planting on Nazarene Sunday School



Established churches alone cannot fulfill the Great Commission. If you add up the number of seats in all existing Christian meeting places, double it (assuming packed multiple worship services), and compare this figure to the population of the region, it becomes clear just how far existing churches are from being able to reach their communities. In addition, of churches 30 years or older, 83% are in decline. Half of these churches did not win a new convert to Christ in the previous year.¹⁰ New churches are therefore needed to assist older churches in fulfilling the Great Commission.

New churches are evangelistically more effective than older churches. Existing churches average four baptisms per year (per 100 members). New churches average 16 baptisms per year (per 100 members).¹¹

The individual fruit of evangelism (new believers) is best retained in new churches through discipleship in small groups. However, small groups are generally of limited duration—usually 6 to 12 weeks. Then the hope is the new believer will come to be rooted in the larger congregation. The primary difference between a small group and a new church is the intention of permanence. The small group will end and everyone in the small group knows it. The new church intends to endure, grow and reproduce, and is more effective in the discipling of new believers.

New and different kinds of churches are needed to reach different kinds of people and people groups for Christ. Canada is rapidly becoming a nation of smaller, self-aware ethnic groups. New churches will need to be formed to reach out to “new Canadians,” particularly during their more receptive first generation in Canada.

For each kind of person in a community there will need to be several congregations that understand, target and can win and assimilate that kind of person or people group. Yuppies will best be won by churches composed mostly of yuppies seeking to win yuppies. Blue-collar workers will best be won by churches composed mostly of blue-collar families seeking to win them. Canada's Generation X will best be won by churches composed mostly of people targeting that generation. No single church or kind of church is able to win all of the kinds of people within its reach.

Many new churches, with personalities and styles of ministry designed to reach specific groups of people, need therefore to be planted in every community to effectively re-evangelize our great nation.

2. **New churches must be planted because church planting is spiritually healthy.** The laity is spiritually matured and mobilized as new leadership is raised up both for a daughter church and to replace departing leadership in the mother church. In most cases departing leadership and finances in the mother church are replaced within two years, and the mother church can begin planning her next birth.

Church planting refocuses the mother church on her reason for being. Both the mother and daughter congregations become more evangelistic and "purpose driven."¹²

No existing church may allow itself to remain a "dead-end link" in what Christ intended to be an ongoing, reproductive chain. God's intention is that churches plant churches just as normally as young married couples might be expected to have children.

Some churches may find themselves unable to parent a new church due to age, a lack of physical strength,

spiritual vitality or leadership resources. In such cases, a local church may need to direct its church planting resources indirectly through parachurch or denominational mission agencies. Sole reliance for church planting on other mission agencies, however, should be used only in extreme cases.

New churches must be planted to replace older churches that die. Churches have natural life cycles just as people do. As congregations age, neighbourhoods change and younger families relocate in large numbers and some older churches die a natural death. A very small percentage of Canadian churches continue to grow for more than a human lifetime.

Statistics indicate that approximately 1% of churches close their doors in a given year. This is not necessarily "bad" or something we should feel guilty about in many cases. The reality is it happens with predictability in the life cycle of many congregations. For this reason, every Canadian denomination or association of churches must plant 1% of its total number of churches each year to hold even, and 2 to 3% or more of its total number of churches annually to move ahead even slowly. Without exception, growing denominations actively plant churches, while static or declining denominations plant very few, if any.

Churches must also be planted to replace the lost capacity of mergers. When two churches merge, the sociological arithmetic is characteristically $1 + 1 = 1.4$. The merging of congregations, denominations or organizations always spells net loss. New churches must be planted elsewhere to replace the loss of each merged church.

3. **All of society benefits when more churches produce more devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.**¹³

The best way to invigorate an entire community with the presence of our Risen Lord is to birth new churches.

4. **We must plant new churches to find God's lost sheep and introduce them to the Savior.** This was Jesus' prime purpose. You may wish to review Luke 15. We must remember, "...*the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Luke 19:10). Without Christ people face a frightful destiny, one we prefer not to contemplate, but must because Jesus did. Jesus made this reality clear both in parables (e.g., Matthew 13:24-30, 25, Luke 16:19-31) and direct speech (e.g., Luke 13:1-5, 17:26-35).

We must therefore plant new churches, not with a primary motivation to provide spiritual support for existing Christians, but rather to reach out to those who have not yet become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. A fundamental shift in thinking is necessary for Canadian congregations to move from a "come to our church" mentality, to a "go and win the unchurched" mentality. Rick Warren points out that a church's health is not measured by its *seating* capacity, but its *sending* capacity.¹⁴ That is to say the onus lies not with the unchurched but with us.

The "Discipling a Whole Nation" (DAWN) Vision

If church multiplication is key to discipling every people group of the nations of the world, including Canada—and we are convinced it is—the question must then be answered, "How can we best multiply congregations to saturate and reach our nation for the Lord Jesus Christ?" The answer lies in the Biblical vision of the unity of the Church expressed in cooperative obedience to the Great Commission.

The whole Church in the nation can reach the whole nation as it prioritizes and sets faith projections for evangelistic church planting—both as individual denominations and as the whole Church in the nation! The Church in Canada, composed of distinct denominations is, like Israel, composed of many tribes and yet essentially one. We must view the task as *our* task and calling *together*.

Either one is a part of the harvest *field*, needing to become a devoted disciple of Jesus Christ, or one is a part of the harvest *force*, needing to engage in the task Jesus has set before us.

One denomination may be able to plant two new congregations a year, another 30 or 50. But as each gives of its *best* to plant as many new cells of witnessing believers¹⁵ as it can—block by block, apartment building by apartment building—the nation is evangelized.

The whole Church sharing in a common commitment to disciple the whole nation through church planting has become known as a DAWN movement. As stated previously in the Preface, Jim Montgomery defines the aim of such a movement as:

*Mobilizing the whole Body of Christ in the whole country in a determined effort to complete the Great Commission by working toward the goal of providing an evangelical congregation for every village and neighbourhood of every class, kind and condition of people in the whole country. It is concerned that Jesus Christ become incarnate in all His beauty, compassion, power and message in the midst of every small group of people—400 or so to 1,000 in number—in the whole country including all its people groups.*¹⁶

Roger Greenway puts it this way: "The Church's evangelistic task...demands that every barrio, apartment

building and neighbourhood have a church faithful to God's word established in it."¹⁷

The concept is simple, strategic, Biblical and fundamentally effective.

✍ DAWN is the best strategy yet developed for world evangelization," says C. Peter Wagner of the *Fuller School of World Mission*.

✍ Ralph Winter of the Center for World Mission asserts, "DAWN is the most basic strategy of all strategies. There are other things that need to be done besides DAWN, but that is the starting place for the completing of the Great Commission."

This "whole nation" concept has been endorsed as the primary evangelistic strategy for national churches by the *Lausanne Committee, World Evangelical Fellowship* and the *AD2000 and Beyond* movement.

How is it Possible to Rally the Whole Church Around Discipling the Nation While Avoiding the Pitfalls?

Some may object that previous efforts to rally the whole Church in a common cause have fallen prey to theological liberalism, structural ecumenism or questionable political causes. How is discipling the whole nation different?

The "discipling a whole nation" vision avoids these pitfalls by maintaining several clear priorities:

1. The DAWN movement is rooted in the comprehensive purpose and plan of God to turn the hearts of nations and peoples to Him. DAWN is prayer-empowered, Christ-centered and focused squarely on the Great Commission rather than any worthy or questionable political derivative of Biblical understanding.
2. The DAWN movement respects denominational autonomy and distinctives. Rather than interfere with any

denominational task or structure, it focuses on encouraging all in the use of evangelistic church planting to disciple every segment of society and grow Christ's Church. At the same time, the Church works as a whole, setting goals together, growing in faith, raising up leadership—pursuing the heart and purpose of God.

3. DAWN is focused not only on pursuing the Great Commission, but *completing* it in segment after segment of our country. This is our common task. To this end, clear, pertinent information on the current status of the harvest force (growth of the Church) and harvest field (unreached people groups and neighbourhoods) is gathered and updated so that clear understanding of progress may be shared by all.
4. DAWN helps us function as a body. Every part of the body—local churches, denominations, parachurch organizations, missions, individuals—reinforce one another as each plays a role in seeing churches multiplied.
5. DAWN is not a program. Programs hold the interest of participants for a season and new interests are pursued. DAWN, rather, is a long-term vision for cooperatively discipling the nation through saturation church planting without any attempt to centralize or program the process.
6. DAWN is goal oriented as the whole Church, unified in a common goal that leads most directly to the discipling of the nation, evaluates honestly its own progress and contribution to the common task. Each local church, district, denomination and mission agency is invited to seek God's direction reflected in faith projections of what may be accomplished by prayer, faith, obedience and the power of God.
7. In many nations around the world the DAWN vision has unified, mobilized and made the Church more effective in its task.¹⁸

The Practical Process**How does the DAWN vision work practically?**

Details vary in the implementation of DAWN in countries around the world. Common elements, however, suggest the value of the following:

- ✍ A person or group of persons earnest for the reaching of their country, as was the reformer, John Knox of Scotland, who cried out to God, “Give me Scotland or I die!”
- ✍ A national representative working committee, that shares the vision and is willing to give of personal and organizational resources to guide this relatively simple process.
- ✍ The gathering and updating of relevant information regarding the current harvest force and harvest field in the country. From this can be gleaned a “prophetic message”, how God sees His Church in the nation and what He is saying to His people.
- ✍ Periodic national and regional gatherings of the leadership of the Church to consider what God may be saying and how each denomination may best respond for God’s purposes to be accomplished. These gatherings are frequently called “congresses,” to emphasize the decision-making element of response. Goals will be set and reviewed, progress celebrated, prayer for revival renewed and fresh commitments made.
- ✍ The commitment to continue the process until Jesus returns: mobilizing prayer, monitoring of harvest force and harvest field progress, dissemination of information in publications and congresses and sharing church planting models and resources.

International Case Studies

The Christian Church has experienced measurable results in a wide variety of countries around the world:

- ✍ In 1992 **England** held its first congress, attended by 750 leaders from 32 denominations, who committed to plant 20,000 new churches. All major denominations now have church planting goals. By 1995 a national decline in the ratio of population-to-churches had been overcome with the planting of 1,600 new churches.
- ✍ In **Ukraine**, a national goal for 50,000 new churches has been set: 303 church planters are being trained in 16 sites, and over 100,000 unchurched people are now attending over 3,800 evangelistic groups that double as embryonic new churches.
- ✍ **Japan** has been a culture traditionally resistant to the Gospel since harsh persecution all but wiped out a newly developing Church some centuries ago. During the 30 years from 1960 to 1990, the Church had been growing at a sluggish 1.7% annual average growth rate (AAGR). Between 1990 and 1993, however, 64 denominations together doubled that rate to 3.6%, and 14 of these denominations averaged an amazing 10.3% growth rate.¹⁹
- ✍ **Peru** set a goal of 50,000 new churches by the year 2003 in 1993 (an average of six new churches a day) and has been planting new churches at an incredible 15% during the three years since that DAWN goal was set.
- ✍ **Egypt** is the first nation in the Middle East to hold a national church planting congress. In 1996 leaders agreed in a common vision for 10,000 new congregations in this majority Muslim nation.
- ✍ In 1992 leaders in **Zimbabwe** set a goal for 10,000 new congregations, and have since seen 3,400 new

congregations established with 1.6 million new members. The nation is being discipled.

- ✍ **India** represents about 15% of the world's population and 30% of the world's unreached peoples. Is a DAWN project possible in India? Already seven of the states in India have saturation church planting projects underway as part of the national goal of seeing 1,000,000 evangelizing churches reaching the unreached.
- ✍ In 1990 there were no indigenous **Malay** churches. There are now 55 known congregations in the country toward a national goal of 4,000 new churches.
- ✍ The **Philippines** is home to the first DAWN project. A goal of 50,000 churches by the year 2000 was set in 1975, when only 5,000 evangelical congregations were known in the nation. As of February 1998 close to 40,000 new churches have been established. National leaders are convinced they can reach their goal of 50,000 by the end of 2000.
- ✍ **Brazil**, with an evangelical population of 16.5%, growing at an AAGR of 8.3%, set a goal of establishing 150,000 new congregations by 2010.
- ✍ **Norway** set goals for 500 new churches in 1996, as the Archbishop of Canterbury offered the keynote congress address. This is significant not for the size of the goal but because the goal was set by a tax-supported "state" church that historically has not seen the need to grow.
- ✍ **Finland** in 1994 had 85 leaders from five denominations commit to planting 2,000 new congregations by the year 2000.
- ✍ In the **United States**, with approximately one-third of its population evangelical, saturation church planting is being implemented in three networks: by denomination,

ethnic group and city-by-city under the auspices of "Mission America," but no national goal has yet been set.

A Strong Step Forward for Canada

In October 1997, leaders representing 39 denominations, 13 mission agencies and four seminaries gathered in Bramalea, Ontario, to pray, consider needs and develop strategy for a cooperative "whole nation" approach. This was the first time such a national church planting congress was convened. Two hundred and seventy-nine delegates participated.

During a closing communion service, delegates affirmed a Congress declaration in which they committed themselves to incarnating Christ through a geographically accessible and culturally relevant evangelical church for every Canadian. A numerical goal of planting 10,000 new congregations by the year 2015 was affirmed.

Denominational leaders also met in their respective denominational families for prayer and planning and to set denominational goals and strategies to contribute toward the national goal. Leaders also met inter-denominationally in regional groupings, representing each of six Canadian regions, to plan how they could cooperatively develop practical strategies and networks to maximize effectiveness.

The **Canadian Church Planting Congress '97** was hosted by *Church Planting Canada*, a track of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's *Vision Canada* initiative and the *AD2000 and Beyond* movement. The Church Planting Canada servant-leadership team is composed of seventeen leaders of twelve denominations and two mission agencies. A broader steering committee in which all Canadian denominations and mission agencies are invited to participate gives further guidance.

In order to plant 10,000 new churches by the year 2015, 1,078 new congregations will be needed by December 31, 2000. Before the end of the Congress, 21 denominations indicated their intention to plant 541 new congregations toward this total. Others will indicate their commitment upon consultation with colleagues. Non-attending agencies are invited to inquire or indicate their church planting contributions to this “whole nation” effort by contacting the author at Outreach Canada.²⁰

At the time of this writing²¹ area gatherings of denominational leaders have been convened in each of Canada’s major regions for the purpose of cooperative resourcing. For details on current regional undertakings please consult www.outreach.ca/cpc.htm²² if you have internet access or see Church Planting Canada’s quarterly newsletter.

Can the Great Commission be Accomplished in Canada?

What about Canada? Can Canada be discipled? Some may say, “the setting of national church planting goals is a good step, but can it be done?”

We believe the Lord of the harvest in fact calls each of us from “armchair quarterbacking” to the field. The discipling of the nations is God’s will. The clear intention of the Lord Jesus is that the Great Commission not only be pursued but also completed by His disciples before His return.

Saturation church planting is the best means under heaven given for doing so. We believe the whole Church has the resources to establish the presence of the Lord Jesus in every people group and neighbourhood of the whole nation. We have God’s promised power and the means of receiving all He has for us to accomplish His glorious purpose.

So we return to the question: “Can Canada be discipled?” Any of us as *individual* churches, denominations or mission agencies would have to say, “No, we are not able to do so.” But *together* we **can**, we **must** and we **will**, by God’s grace, disciple the peoples within Canada to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe the discipling of the nation, by the grace of God and the empowered obedience of his people, can be accomplished to the glory of God.

Is this arrogance? No, rather unified obedience to the long-standing command of Christ motivated by the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40).

Jesus called His followers to disciple all the nations of the world (Matthew 28:18-20) at which time He will return in glory (Matthew 24:14). This task is the heart of the mission of the Church. The Biblical river of redemption flows in the Old Testament from Abraham’s call to be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth (Genesis 12:2-3) to the New Testament vision of the consummation of history as peoples of “...*nation, tribe, people and language...*” gather to worship our glorious Redeemer (Revelation 7:9).

Since it is the theme of Scripture, God’s will, the purpose of Christ’s coming, death and resurrection, and signal of His return, I believe the discipling of the nations, and Canada in particular, is eminently possible. We are called to disciple the nation, and by God’s grace and power we can do it. As Christ is made incarnate through cells of His Body in every segment of society, “...*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*” (Habakkuk 2:14).

Action Points

☞ Do a study of the last 20 years of your denomination, district or movement. Where would your group be in terms of baptisms, worship attendance, finances and membership without the new churches planted during this period?

☞ Some have suggested Christian unity is best expressed in practical action for the sake of the Great Commission. How could your organization experience mutual benefit from working with another denomination in church planter assessment, support groups for church planters or training events for churches planting churches?

☞ As you observe what God has done in other countries in which the Church has worked together in a DAWN-type project, what needs to be done in Canada to mobilize the whole Church to disciple the whole nation? What action may the Lord be calling you to take to bring about this needed step?

Chapter Notes

¹ 221 such “countries” currently make up the world political map.

² James H. Montgomery and Donald A. MacGavran. *The Discipling of a Nation*. Milpitas, CA: *Global Church Growth Bulletin*, 1980. p.17.

³ Whether responsibility for the slowness with which the fulfillment of the Great Commission has progressed over the centuries belongs primarily to the Church or to God is at least in part a theological question we cannot explore in depth, but will recognize in this footnote. Our conviction, based on God’s response to Israel’s failure to be a light to the Gentiles and upon New Testament texts (e.g., Matthew 24:14) is that the responsibility of the Church cannot be set aside lightly.

⁴ Ralph Winter. *Mission Frontiers*, (*Bulletin of the U.S. Center for World Missions*) Jan.-Feb. 1996. Vol. 18, No. 1-2. p.5.

⁵ Not all will acknowledge Jesus as Lord and become devoted followers before He returns. Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matthew 13) and the book of *Revelation* make this clear. But all the nations will have heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ with such personal relevance as results in sufficient understanding to accept Christ as Lord or to reject Him.

⁶ The essential multiplication of cells for the building of each component of the human body is a helpful analogy.

⁷ “Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic method under heaven.” For its rationale cf. C. Peter Wagner. *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*. Regal Books: Ventura, CA, 1990.

⁸ Roger T. Forster. *Models of Church Planting*. Ichthus Media Services, 107 Stanstead Road, Forest Hill, London, England SE23 1HH. p.6.

⁹ “Every new church robs Satan of turf. Every new fellowship of believers takes away his power.” Elijah Khoza, former witch doctor, Zululand, South Africa.

¹⁰ *Leadership* magazine, 1996. A similar figure (85%) is suggested by Dr. Daniel Allen, *A Church of God*, Cleveland TN., church planting coach.

Chapter Notes

- ¹¹ C. Peter Wagner, pp.32-33.
- ¹² Rick Warren. *The Purpose Driven Church*. Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995.
- ¹³ “Through His redeemed (God) causes justice to roll down in families, neighbourhoods, cities and states....Soundly Christian men and women...are powerful instruments of social advance. Evangelization is the best friend of all reformers who desire the reconstruction of the social order along righteous lines....social engineering exercised on pagan societies yields only a trickle of lasting progress. Exercised on nominal Christians it yields a slightly larger trickle. But exercised on committed, illumined Christians it yields a mighty stream of abundant life, righteousness and justice. Do we desire the uplift and transformation of any nation? *Disciple it*. Do we want an end to oppression and exploitation in any segment of society? *In it multiply Christians and churches*. Are we patriots working to bring progress, plenty and peace to our beloved country? *Create in it tens of thousands of cells of shalom, units of mercy and peace.*” James H. Montgomery and Donald A. MacGavran, p.22-23.
- ¹⁴ Rick Warren, p.32.
- ¹⁵ The phrase “cells of witnessing believers” refers, not first of all to the “cell church” model originally popularized by Asian believers, but to the Biblical image of the “Body of Christ” being composed of parts—congregations, small groups and individuals—which together make up the whole.
- ¹⁶ James H. Montgomery. *DAWN 2000: 7 Million Churches to Go*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, p.12.
- ¹⁷ Roger Greenway. “Content and Context: The Whole Christ for the Whole City,” in *Discipling the City*, ed. Greenway. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979, p.104.
- ¹⁸ See the section titled: “International Case Studies.” James H. Montgomery, when asked about the failure rate of the application of the DAWN vision, replied: “There have been no failures to date.” (Conference in Colorado Springs, June 1997, on the application of DAWN principles to reaching cities.)

Chapter Notes

- ¹⁹ James H. Montgomery. *Then the End Will Come: Great News About the Great Commission*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997, p.6.
- ²⁰ Outreach Canada, #16 - 12240 Horseshoe Way, Richmond, BC V7A 4X9, Phone: (604) 272-0732, Fax: 272-2744, or Email: mmoerman@outreach.ca
- ²¹ The six months since the Congress.
- ²² Scroll down to “Regional Networks and Activities” and click on your region of interest.

