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RECALIBRATING THE CANADIAN CHURCH FOR MISSIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The currents of global Christianity no longer flow as robustly through Canada and other Western nations as they once did. Leslie Newbigin observed that the modern missionary movement once rose during a period when the tide of political power and economic and cultural expansion was flowing out from

Western Europe and North America into the other parts of the world. That flow steadily diminished throughout the latter half of the twentieth century as the church in the majority world established itself as a genuine global faith. Faith now flows out of its centers. As Canadians recalibrate for missions in the twenty-first

century, we must learn to navigate amid a significant number of new realities.

Emergence of a Younger, Global Church

The southern global expansion of Christianity has led to the emergence of a younger, larger, indigenous church that

Footnotes: 1 Changing immigration patterns has resulted in an increase in immigrants to Canada from Muslim regions of the world. At the current pace it is projected that the Muslims population in Canada will double every ten years. 2 The Global Mission Roundtable of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is launching a Church-to-Church Code of Best Practices in October of 2009. 3 Approximately 22.2 million Canadians fifteen (15) years of age or over gifted an estimated \$8.9 billion in charitably allocated financial donations. During that same period, 11.8 million Canadians (from the same demographic) volunteered their time, contributing an average of 168 hours per person to charity (M. Hall, D. Lasby, G. Gumulka and C. Tryon, "Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating," Statistics Canada, Catalogue no 71-542-XIE, Ottawa, ON: Ministry of Industry, 13).

has grown faster than the church in the West during the last quarter century. Missionaries from the resource-rich Canadian Church must learn to navigate in a more interconnected world, in concert with our global church family. The "missionized" are now partners, as together we intentionally engage in the global outreach of the church. Three decades of exploding global migration has spawned many new creative initiatives from the majority world. Increasingly, Christians from the Global South are intentionally seeking to become evangelists to Christendom. Missions today is from "everywhere to everyone."

Interaction with Non-Christian Faith Perspectives

Non-Christian faiths are also on the move, carried to Canada by the currents of technological advances and the immigration policies of the late twentieth century. Once in Canada, new Canadian immigrants move quickly to assert their influence in a nation that celebrates multiculturalism and accepts pluralism. The continual flow of new Canadians, with cultural diversity and varied religious perspectives,¹ is forcing Canadian Christians to develop a deeper understanding of their own faith. Many have renewed their commitment to an authentic life in Christ and have learned to meaningfully articulate the claims of Christ to their culturally and religiously diverse neighbors.

Economic and Ethnic Global Tensions

Another complexity to ministry in the new global reality is the need to respond appropriately to the growing gap between the rich and poor and the increased internal and violent ethnic conflicts flaring up in many regions. These

issues, combined with the resulting polarization of power around the planet, are causing many Canadian Christians to examine their theology of engagement in the world. The fact is that many Western values which have shaped our Canadian evangelical approach to "others" have, in some measure, contributed to global poverty and ethnic unrest. Instead of benefiting from the systems that contribute to poverty, we need to reflect on how our consumer oriented Canadian values have shaped our Christian worldview. The Canadian propensity to simply throw money at global problems does not appear to be the full solution.

Theology Driven Mission

Canadian Christians need to become more intentional about developing a theology of mission that recognizes, on one hand, the plight of the poor, hungry and marginalized while at the same time, proclaiming Christ. The poor often have no appetite to hear the words of life because of the looming necessities of their lives ("empty bellies have no ears"); a reality that certainly must be held in dynamic tension with the words of Christ: "... people do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mat. 4:4). This theology must reverberate in the heart of the person in the pew and thereby give substance to our good intentions.

Decrease in the Mediating Role of Mission Structures

Increased international contact at the local church level has led to a minimizing of the mediating role of mission structures that heretofore have been a significant part of the conversation between local churches and the mis-

sion field. Spawned by the popularity of short-term missions, many churches have opted to engage directly in church-to-church² mission partnerships. We celebrate the Canadian local churches' reengagement in mission. This renewed willingness to engage in grassroots mission has led to new conversations regarding the relationship between the church, the agency, and the academy. The model of the church as the sending structure, the agency as the coordinating entity, and the academy as the training center is undergoing substantial change and will continue to require appropriate new and innovative alliances.

Pressure from the Short-term Missions Movement

The increased popularity of the short-term missions movement has challenged Canadian congregations to develop even more inventive approaches for connecting the person in the pew with the global work of God. Canadians, by in large, are a generous people who support a myriad of charitable and nonprofit organizations; and more than one-third of them serve as volunteers in these organizations.³

As a result, Canadian mission agencies and partnering churches are pressed to provide opportunities for lay people.

Most Canadians want to be part of the transformation process and are no longer content with simply cutting checks.⁴ Canadian baby boomers, in particular, appear to understand philanthropy differently than their parents' generation, so charities and mission agencies have to find more intriguing ways of enlisting their support.

Footnotes: 4 An Ipsos Reid survey conducted for BMO Harris found that 72% of British Columbian baby boomers want to know where their funds are going before they are willing to part with their cash (P. Wilson, "Boomer Phenom Even Hits Charities," Vancouver Sun, Thursday, December 21, 2006). 5 Paddy, "Canadian Churches Rethink Their Global Mission," Faith Today, (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, March/April 2009), p.27. 6 Patricia Paddy, 27, 28.

Signs of Hope

Canada has a rich heritage of global engagement. In the midst of our present global realities, we must not succumb to the temptation to retrench and pull back our resources. Signs of hope abound.

Tenth Avenue Alliance church in Vancouver has made a ten year commitment to Cambodia by partnering with Cambodian ministries to advance initiatives that "... promote unity and build capacity within churches, to support the

plight of people at risk and to encourage marketplace believers."⁵ On the other side of Canada, The Meeting House in Oakville, Ontario is exploring ways in which to partner with organizations to address the AIDS crisis in Southern Africa.⁶ They are working with Mennonite Central Committee, who has both the expertise and infrastructure to assist them in extending their global reach.

A new generation of Canadian young

adults appears eager to engage in the global mission of God. Canadian churches are partnering with the church in the majority world and are sending out personnel in significant numbers. New ways of training people for global service are being developed. My prayer is that the Canadian church would stay true to their historic global orientation and catch a renewed vision of what God is up to and join with Him in building His Kingdom, as we move intentionally into the twenty-first century ●