

Living Transformations

By Franklin Pyles



The president of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada explains their vision for transforming Canada

In the mid-1800s, a strict Presbyterian family migrated west from Cavendish, P.E.I., to a farm outside Chatham, Ont. One son was set aside for the ministry. But the younger son, Albert, also desired to enter the ministry and so his father, considering this a blessing from God, consented.

After his education at Knox College, University of Toronto, A. B. Simpson assumed the pastorate of Knox Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., at age 21. By age 30 he was the pastor of the largest Presbyterian church in Louisville, Kentucky. But God had more remarkable plans in store.

Over the next few decades, operating out of New York City, with key connections still in Canada, Simpson became one of the great missionary leaders of the 19th and early 20th centuries. He saw the birth of a missionary society called The Christian and Missionary Alliance, which is now active in more than 60 countries.

The Alliance was then a society, not a new denomination. It sought to bring in and network people from many churches and to co-operate with yet others. Only later did this missionary society face the reality that it had gradually become a denomination because of its church planting in Canada and the United States.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance deeply treasures these roots and desires to fulfil its mandate to preach Christ wherever He is not named. While there are historic connections to the holiness movements of the 19th century and the charismatic movement of the early 20th century and to various revival movements as well, the primary connection of the Alliance is with the electrifying missionary movement of the past 150 years. Two major missions, The Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM) and the Africa Inland Mission (AIM), spun out from the Alliance as have a number of smaller organizations. Many of these work in partnership with the Alliance to accomplish specific ministries.

In Canada, churches were first planted as people clustered in order to express their passion for missions. Soon this turned into an evangelistic thrust. Church planting in Canada as well as overseas is a renewed commitment today. We are trusting God that 72 new churches will be planted in Canada by the year 2012, with many of them

being among the people who are newly coming to Canada as well as among First Nations people.

How is this vision crystallized? We felt led to express our vision as a prayer:

*O God, with all our hearts we long to be:
a movement of churches
transformed by Christ,
transforming Canada and the world.*

For us, transformation does not mean Canada will become some sort of theocracy. Rather, transformation means the glory of Christ will again be seen and acknowledged by the people in this country and, in ways not totally envisioned, the culture will reflect Christ's glory. For that to happen we fully recognize our own personal need to be transformed so that each of us might be a person daily set apart for the glory of our Lord, a person living in ways that help others see Christ and not us. We long to be a people who both seek and experience the fullness of Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In returning to mission and holiness, the Alliance is also returning to humility and dependence. What was accomplished in the past had little to do with intelligence or resources; it had much to do with obedience. As we pray to be a transforming church, we recognize that other churches will also be channels of God's grace. We pray that a number of church communities will be used in even greater ways to point Canada back to God. But as a family of churches, we want to be obedient ourselves, to be used of God as He desires.

We will stand with, encourage and co-operate with all God's people as they also move forward to make Christ known where He is not known, as they let His glory shine, as they allow themselves to be transformed by Christ, transforming Canada and the world. ■

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Franklin Pyles is president of The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada. This column continues a series by affiliates of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. For a list of affiliates, see www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/affiliates.