

Abbreviated Introduction to President Phil Delsaut's 2017 EMCC Assembly Report

God bless Canada! This year, 2017, marks the 150th year of the 'birth' of the Dominion of Canada – the official term for this anniversary is the Sesquicentennial! More than 300 years before Confederation, Jacques Cartier and his intrepid band of French companions were exploring the great St. Lawrence basin, looking for an alternative way to the riches of the far East. On July 24, 1534 Jacques Cartier planted a cross on the shores of the Gaspé to claim the land for France. Cartier was the first European who documented the name 'Canada', the common Huron-Iroquois word for settlement or village, mistakenly thinking that it was the place name for the region and so he called its Iroquois inhabitants 'Canadiens.' Over time the name, Canada, grew to embrace the small French colony established on the banks of the St. Lawrence and by the middle of the 19th century, it had become the name for the British loyalist colonies along the Great Lakes and eventually for all of British North America.

In 1840 the British Parliament passed the Act of Union that formed the Province of Canada effective in the year 1841. This province was divided into two parts, Canada West (Ontario previously called Upper Canada) and Canada East (Quebec previously called Lower Canada). In both cases the territories were much smaller and confined to the lands near the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River. Subsequently talks were initiated with the colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and the first steps taken to forge a new nation. The yes side won and the British Parliament passed legislation.

The British North America Act became effective July 1, 1867 unifying the colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick with the province of Canada (Ontario and Quebec) under the name of CANADA. Other provinces and territories followed: Manitoba July 15, 1870; NWT July 15, 1870; British Columbia July 20, 1871; Prince Edward Island July 1, 1873; Yukon June 13, 1898; Alberta Sept 1, 1905; Saskatchewan Sept 1, 1905; Newfoundland-Labrador March 31, 1949; Nunavut April 1, 1999.

The Statute of Westminster in 1931 further established Canadian sovereignty but the British parliament still retained the power to amend Canada's constitution. Removal of this power and the full patriation of the constitution happened in 1982 by the passing of the Canada Act in Britain and the Constitution Act in Canada. Canada is still a nation in formation.

We must not despair knowing that the process of nation building is not done. Our hopes and dreams for a better Canada must continue to grow undiminished. The Canada of the past has benefited immeasurably from the influence of the Good News of Jesus. Every institution from our law courts, our hospitals to our schools and universities has deeply ingrained elements of a Christian worldview. Foundational ideas such the equality of people, the sanctity of life, and the worth of the individual to name a few are rooted in Christian values. Let us not despair of our place at the table of nation building. Our Saviour declared, 'You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.' (Mat 5:14, 16) Peter, in his first letter echoes this teaching, 'Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.' (1 Pet 2:12)

The beginnings of the new Canadian nation contain recognizable themes that remain important in the unfolding story of Canada. Exploration, growth, the clash of cultures, the quest for wealth, the struggle for power, confusion over the nature of the kingdom of Christ and its relationship to the worldly ambitions of rulers, plus a good measure of mutual misunderstanding. These themes are all present at the outset and they persist throughout the Canadian drama.

Many voices will be quick to remind us that the story of this land goes back to times immemorial. The 'First Nations' were here already and the *terra nova*, the new land, was new only to the newly arrived Europeans. The choice of the word, Canada, as the name, was based on a misunderstanding by the Europeans, as was the conclusion that they had found India, hence the term Indians. We all know the outlines of subsequent history and some of it is not pretty. It

would be easy to make judgements based on the attitudes of our own time or ideology, and to decide the identity of the heroes and villains, the conquerors and victims. There will be much disagreement on how to assess the past, largely because we are not conscious that we are probably NOT using a common yard.. er, metric, measuring stick. And it is too easy for any one of us to be unconsciously switching between multiple measuring systems. For we who are followers of Jesus, the task of sorting things is not easier, except for this, we have an unchanging benchmark and we are also aware of a dangerous flaw in the human condition. There is a profound biblical insight about the human condition that we ignore to our detriment. It is called 'sin'. Let's apply this to the themes of Canada's beginnings.

They are really universal themes. These themes were current in the world of the First Nations before the Europeans darkened the shores of North America. And these universal themes, dressed in the fashions of one's own time and place, are still at work today. Having said this, it is not a matter for despair. It is good to be realistic about the human condition. We are beautiful, powerful creatures made in the image of God, but since the disobedience of our first parents, we have also had a fatal flaw. When we live our lives unyielded to Our Creator and refuse to receive His work as Our Redeemer, inevitably the good we do becomes corrupt. This truth in the history of the human race is writ so large that it boggles that we do not see it. The apostle Paul said it well in Romans 7:19 *For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing.*

C. S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, has put it succinctly and well: *What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could 'be like gods'—could set up on their own as if they had created themselves—be their own masters—invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery—the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.*

As we anticipate the future and consider the past, we can and should admit that there are bad things about Canada's past but by several measures there is even more to celebrate and even more to hope for. Thank God for the land of Canada, a home where many have already found refuge, and a nation whose destiny is yet to be revealed. God give us the faith and courage to see it unfold in ways that will make the planting of the cross in 1534, a symbol of the hope and justice found in the Prince of Peace rather than the expedient tool of King Francis I, who among others things ushered in a wave of persecution in France against Protestants resulting in thousands of dead and tens of thousands more homeless, motivated by his urge for power and control. (It is worth noting that one of the great leading lights of the Reformation, John Calvin, was among those who in 1533 fled for his life, leaving Paris for safer precincts.)

We are living in a time when social justice activism is in fashion. Good, but let's be careful to keep our bearings. We cross the dunes of Sahara by keeping our eye on the fixed stars above, not on the shifting mountains of sand. How can we assess right and wrong when we measure by the changing standard of our time. We want to redress the perceived wrongs of the past and in doing so often are blind to the new injustices that we are creating. For example, in our day, we have seen our government leaders approve assisted suicide out of compassion for those who are experiencing unmeasured pain. However, we are seeing these same government leaders struggling with protecting the rights of health professionals who cannot in good conscience participate in assisted suicide. How can these same people show so little understanding about the anguish that these good people face? If there is no legislative protection for these 'prisoners of conscience', we consign them to untold anguish for them as well as horrendous social and financial loss. And how do we redress the wrongs of the past? How do we find reconciliation? We do no one a favour by wallowing in the mire of the past. My maternal grandfather, an Italian cavalry officer, for words overheard in a public place had to flee the clutches of Mussolini's murderous intentions. Having fled to southern France, less than 15 years later he and his family, including my mother as a young child, were now living under the rapacious regime of another monster. My father was a refugee from northern France living under an assumed name to

escape the sweep of all young abled bodied men to feed Hitler's war machine. And there were millions who suffered. How will anyone redress these wrongs multiplied many times over? Shall we permit past evil done to us cripple us? Shall we perpetuate the injuries done to us by hanging on to the past? Shall we sit on the dunghill of our sorrows feeling sorry for ourselves, blaming others, and bleating that YOU (not ME) must fix it! Or, shall we find hope and liberation in the Way of the Master, Who said, *But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27, 28)* Al Gore is famous for his environmental propaganda called an inconvenient truth. The Jesus idea that we are to bless those who curse us, and do good to those who hate us, is dismissed as unrealistic. But it is at worst an inconvenient truth, that is, a truth that we do not want to face. There is only one way forward for any of us. There are many testimonies of those who have embraced it and found healing for themselves and who then by turn, bring healing to others. There is no way forward for any of us unless we let go of hate and take hold of good. And there is no one who can renew us in doing this impossible thing like Jesus. Let's bring our best to Canada and recall that those who founded the new nation got some things right.

Our Assembly theme this year is based on the Canadian motto, 'A Mari Usque Ad Mare,' ('from sea to sea') which is found affixed to the Canadian Coat of Arms. This motto was drawn from Psalm 72:8, 'He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.' (KJV). Those who applied this motto to Canada at the time thought it fitting for a nation that they could envision would one day stretch from sea to sea. What were the prayers and hopes and dreams of those in 1867 with deeper understanding of the ways of God? We will not know until the day we stand before the One Who reigns. But we know the mind of the One Who gave us these words through the life of the Psalmist, 3000 years ago. In the words of Scripture, we have an insight into the mind and purposes of God.

This Psalm is a prayer of aspiration for the new King Solomon and what he yearns to be toward God and for his people. What Solomon, the author of the psalm, could pray for aspirationally, and achieve in part, could be prayed descriptively in anticipation of the yet Greater Son, Who would bring to pass even the most extravagant statements in this Psalm. Could there be a King whose reign would extend to the ends of the earth? A King who would bless all the nations? Isaac Watts in 1719 penned a great hymn based on this psalm. The age of modern missions had not begun and Watts could not know how soon the day when:

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

In our day, it is true that His kingdom (His power, presence and blessing) does stretch from sea to sea and to the ends of the earth. There is a flood of reports from every corner as to what Jesus is at work doing. In India, for example, where many authorities are standing in vocal and open opposition to the Gospel, there is a massive turning to Jesus. In the face of great hostility there are many hungry for the life-giving good news of Jesus.

In refugee camps across the middle East thousands are embracing Jesus, placing themselves at risk, because they have seen in God's people in Christ and then in Jesus Himself, what James Montgomery renders poetically based on Psalm 72:

*He comes in succour speedy to those who suffer wrong;
To help the poor and needy, and bid the weak be strong;
To give them songs for sighing, their darkness turn to light,
Whose souls, condemned and dying, were precious in His sight.*

Our Canadian impulse toward 'humanitarianism' and 'justice' finds its foundations in the One Who comes to break oppression and to set the captive free. And let it be known that the followers of Jesus in Canada, though we still fall short of our Master, are amongst the best

practitioners of these two touchstones of Canadian society. Statistically we are the most likely to volunteer and the most generous in charitable donations. Many of our congregations are known as centres where the Good News is demonstrated as much as proclaimed. This is good. Let's keep growing to be like Our King Who 'will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy.'

There are so many stories of what our own EMCC tribe has done and is doing in Gospel demonstration and proclamation. It is not one or the other. Ours is an integrated vision. It is the life of Jesus flowing through us. The apostle John wrote, *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 John 3:17)*. Or, again, James, the Lord's half-brother: *If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:16)*

Of the messianic King, the psalmist (72:17) could proclaim, *'All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.'* It is happening in our day.

But we are living in the time of the King's reign that is 'now and not yet.' During WWII, the turning point of the war in Europe happened on D-day, the day of the Normandy invasion, June 6, 1944, but it was not the end of the war! There were bloody days ahead. VE-Day (Victory in Europe) when the German troops laid down their arms was nearly a year later, May 8, 1945. And the Lord Jesus told us that this would be the way that His reign would unfold. With His First coming, we experienced D-Day and at His Second Coming we will have the Final Victory. To explain this he told the parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Matt 13:24-30 and 36-43). In this parable, Jesus explains that the kingdom of heaven, that is, the power and the presence of God, is like a field sown with wheat. But the enemy sneaks into the field to sow weeds in the midst of the wheat. The master says, *Let both [the wheat and the weeds] grow together until the harvest (v. 30)*.

As the Lord explains later, *The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (Matt 13:39-41)*

This is our experience in this in-between time. We do see the way in which the wheat and the weeds are growing up together. The Lord explains that *The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one (v. 38)*. How are we to live in the present? We, who are the sons, that is, the heirs of the kingdom are said to be the good seed. We are to be planted in the field and we are to bring forth a harvest of good and of blessing. We, who are heirs, who have the power and know the presence of God are to be fruitful and to multiply ourselves. And here is the welcome surprise. The weeds, that is, those who are like their father, the evil one, are those who become wheat! This is why the weeds are not pulled until the end of the age. It is like the children's game of Tag, where each one who is 'tagged' by 'It' becomes an agent of 'It' until finally everyone has been tagged. In order for this to happen we must be planted in the field, and 'the field is the world'! How do we live in the world? By blessing! All the nations of the earth will be blessed through the King, says Ps 72. And how will that kingdom blessing come? Through us, who have been called heirs of the kingdom. Let this be a byword amongst us: *'I am being sent by Jesus to bless others and to invite them to follow Him.* (Way of Jesus, Marker 2).

Your servant in Jesus,

Phil Delsaut