

# Revivals, schisms and always something new

Evangelicalism appeared very strong as Canada entered the 20th century. On the 1901 census, 60 percent of Canadians identified themselves as Protestants and most of those would have identified themselves as "evangelical."

Still, some cracks were appearing. For example, Methodism had lost much of its revivalistic fervor, its growth rate was slowing down, and it was not "winning the west" in the same way that it had swept much of the Ontario frontier between 1800 and 1850.

Widespread acceptance by Protestants of the theory of evolution, adopted as a concept of development in all areas of human life, encouraged great optimism about the inevitability of human progress. In fact, it downplayed belief in a sinful mankind who needed salvation, or in a God who was active in human affairs.

Also by 1900, the spreading acceptance of higher critical methods of studying the Bible in some educational institutions was raising questions regarding the unique authority of Scripture.

## WINNIPEG'S ELIM CHAPEL, 1910

In the summer of 1910 several families from Winnipeg's Westminster Presbyterian Church opened the Ellice Avenue Mission as a non-denominational community outreach. Best known among the early group were Sidney T. Smith and John Bellingham, who provided long-term leadership both within and beyond the church. Soon known as Elim Chapel, it developed as an independent church that became a focal point of an evangelical network that radiated across Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Several of Elim's members were influential in the early years of Winnipeg Bible Institute. That school was instrumental in the formation of the Canadian Sunday School Mission (CSSM), which initiated rural Sunday schools, churches and summer camps. One convert from a CSSM camp, Henry Hildebrand, studied at Winnipeg Bible Institute, attended Elim Chapel and became a CSSM "circuit-riding preacher." In 1935 he accepted the call to pastor a non-denominational chapel in Moose Jaw, Sask. and to establish a Bible school. The school, Briercrest Bible Institute, eventually became Canada's largest Bible college.

Elim Chapel remains a significant church near Winnipeg's downtown core. Winnipeg Bible Institute is now known as Providence College and Seminary. (Photos: Elim Chapel & Briercrest Bible Institute)

## JOHN MCNICOL OF TORONTO BIBLE COLLEGE, 1906-1946

John McNicol (1869-1956) led and shaped Canada's first Bible college, Toronto Bible College (TBC) for 40 years. He was appointed as interim principal in 1906, then was principal from 1908 to 1946. Under his leadership the school (later known as Ontario Bible College, now Tyndale College & Seminary) became a major force in evangelicalism in southern Ontario. Enrolment during the McNicol era peaked at 380. By McNicol's retirement, well over 500 of its graduates had entered foreign missions and several hundred had entered the pastorate.

TBC shared many characteristics typical of the early Bible school movement in North America. It focused on the study of the Bible and the training of lay people, did not require high school graduation, and welcomed female students long before

The clear line of demarcation between liberal and conservative Protestants developed in the first decades of the century. Mainline denominations that once were committed to evangelical beliefs and priorities gradually shifted. Increasingly, evangelicals who promoted traditional views and principles were identified as conservatives.

It is tempting to focus on the decline of evangelicalism among mainline Protestant denominations. However, another theme throughout the century is the considerable vitality and growth among evangelicalism in other quarters. Revivals, immigration, schisms and a host of new institutions all played a role in 20th century church history. It is this second theme that concerns us here. It is in this vitality and growth – including schisms and new institutions – and the proclamation of historic Christian faith during the century – that we discern our shared heritage.

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HENRY HILDEBRAND  
ELIM CHAPEL,  
PRE-1941 (L)



JOHN  
MCNICOL

seminaries did.

At the same time, TBC was very different from most Bible schools. Perhaps best known was McNicol's refusal to allow the school to adopt dispensationalism. Also unusual was that much of its support and many students came from evangelicals in mainline denominations. Although churches often sought TBC graduates as pastors, McNicol did not develop a pastoral program, believing that pastors ought to be trained in liberal arts and in seminary.

In response to disillusionment with the influence of liberalism on many denominational seminaries, TBC introduced a pastoral program in the mid-1950s. It merged with London College of the Bible and Missions in 1968 to become Ontario Bible College (OBC). Seminary training was introduced in 1976 with the founding of Ontario Theological Seminary, which, along with Regent College in Vancouver, is now one of the two largest seminaries in Canada.

(Photo: Tyndale College and Seminary)



T. T.  
SHIELDS

## AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON, "Canada's Gift to the Sawdust Trail"

In the fall of 1907 at a Pentecostal meeting in Ingersoll, Ont.,

## IMMIGRATION OF RUSSIAN MENNONITES IN THE 1920s

Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, more than 20,000 Mennonites left Russia for Canada between 1923 and 1930. Earlier waves of Mennonites had come, and two waves have followed since World War II. The wave in the 1920s was the largest.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance to evangelicalism of this wave of Mennonites. Mennonites form one of the largest evangelical groups in the nation in the late 20th century. The 1991 census noted that approximately 208,000 Canadians called themselves Mennonites. Thousands of people in other denominations have Mennonite roots. The strong Mennonite influence has helped the Christian "peace witness" gain a significant voice, and has contributed to the humanitarian, musical and educational dimensions of Canadian evangelicalism. (Photos: Conf. of Mennonites in Canada; Conf. of Mennonite Brethren Churches)

## CHARLES PRICE CAMPAIGN IN VICTORIA, 1923

The 7,000 people who packed the Willows Arena in Victoria, B.C. on April 23, 1923 cheered and waved a sea of white handkerchiefs as teenager Ruby Dimmick ran around the platform. They cheered again as her father, Rev. J. F. Dimmick, stated that a thorough medical examination had confirmed that his daughter had been completely healed of curvature of the spine, a shortened leg and bent ankle resulting from infantile paralysis.

The Ruby Dimmick story, which became internationally known through *Reader's Digest*, was just one of many coming out of the Charles S. Price evangelistic and healing meetings held that spring in Victoria. Endorsed unanimously by the city's ministerial association, the meetings drew crowds so large that up to 4,000 people were unable to gain entrance.

Price helped Pentecostalism move beyond its modest origins in Canada. A respectable, British-born Congregationalist minister in California, Price had been converted from his



CHARLES  
PRICE

skeptical, liberal views of the Bible at meetings of Aimee Semple McPherson. He began an itinerant evangelistic and healing ministry. After Victoria, he held even larger meetings that rocked the city of Vancouver with both enthusiasm and controversy. Conservative evangelicals, especially fundamentalist Baptists who were in controversy with liberal Baptists, welcomed Price and his emphasis on evangelism and the supernatural origins of the Bible. Liberal Protestants, however, expressed suspicion and eventually issued a report condemning the campaign.

Most fundamentalist Baptists repudiated Price the following year, not so much because of the healings but because of his claims that "speaking in tongues" was the evidence of the filling of the Spirit. That did not prevent several thousand people in Vancouver, many of them Baptists, from flocking to the city's burgeoning Pentecostal movement.

Without evangelists such as Price, it is unlikely that it would have grown to become one of the largest active evangelical groups in Canada, with 436,000 Canadians identifying themselves as Pentecostal in the 1991 census. (Photo: Courtesy of PAOC)

## UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA, 1925

More than 15,000 people crowded into Toronto's new Maple Leaf Gardens in June 1925 to celebrate the formation of the United Church of Canada. This union of the Methodist Church in Canada, the Congregationalist Church and the Presbyterian Church in Canada was the world's first major union of different denominational traditions. As such it was enthusiastically regarded by many as the "wave of the future" and as Canada's greatest contribution to worldwide Christendom.

Evangelicals viewed the development in different ways. Some supported it as the logical outcome of the interdenominational cooperation that had existed among evangelicals since the latter part of the 19th century. Cooperation included city-wide revivals, institutions such as the YMCA, foreign missions and social reform movements. To many, these cooperative efforts demonstrated the secondary nature of issues that divided denominations. Evangelical supporters also hoped that one large denomination would end wasteful competition.

Many evangelicals, however, especially Presbyterians, opposed the union, fearing that it would create a centralized institution that would crush the unique and valued features of the individual denominations. Conservative evangelicals also worried that the union movement was largely "liberal" in doctrinal orientation. The conservatives could not argue that the "Basis of Union" of the new church contained radical new doctrines, but they did believe that many unionists placed new meanings on the old words.

The United Church succeeded in becoming the nation's largest Protestant denomination. However, the 1925 union did not lead to additional major unions as its proponents had hoped.

## DEFEAT OF PROHIBITION IN ONTARIO, 1926

By 1918 every province had become officially "dry." Despite statistics indicating that prohibition reduced crime and alcohol-related problems, the success of prohibition was short-lived: within 10 years regulations fell in Quebec, B.C. and the Prairies.

Although the Maritime Provinces remained dry for several years longer, the Ontario re-election of Premier Howard Ferguson in 1926, on a platform to bring in

the end of the Prohibition era in Canada.

In working for Prohibition, many women and their supporters came to believe that votes for women were necessary to bring in social righteousness. Evangelicals tended to be staunch supporters of Prohibition and in this regard, at least, worked with "social gossellers." The defeat of Prohibition helped weaken evangelical support for attempts to reform society through social and political



LADIES FELLOWSHIP  
NORTH END MENNONITE  
BRETHREN CHURCH,  
WINNIPEG, C.1930

RUSSIAN MENNONITES LEAVING RUSSIA 1926



BANNERS OF THE  
WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN  
TEMPERANCE UNION