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Tides of Opportunity: Missiological Experiences and Engagement in Global Migration

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Chapter 1

Global Gateway Cities in Canada as Diaspora Epicenter

Christopher Carr

The Bible is full of stories, starting with Genesis, that show the sovereignty of God at work as he moves the chess pieces of human history to position individuals, families, clans, and sometimes entire people groups in new geographic locations to expose them to the good news of his kingdom and invite them into it. The Old and New Testaments abound with examples of people group migrations resulting in diasporas, both willing and forced. These migrations and displacements have led directly to urbanization and a phenomenon that we in Canada call *global gateway cities*.

The gateway phenomenon is not a historic anomaly, but rather a recovered understanding of Scripture, church history, and the contemporary *motus Dei*. Those of us serving with Global Gates Network of Canada (GGNC) want to share an overview of both the broad and specific elements of the missiological reality known as gateways and its strategic mission importance. This chapter focuses on the phenomenon, missiological definition, and meaning of global gateway cities in Canada and around the globe.

A New Era

Due to the increasing presence of diaspora least-reached people groups (LPGs) in urban gateways, we face quite a different mission landscape in the coming quarter of the twenty-first century than the one we knew as we ended the twentieth century. Modern immigrants symbolize a new era in pioneer missions—one in which today's migration, transnationalism, globalization, glocalization, ethnoburbs, and urbanization present unprecedented opportunities for Christians to take the gospel to the ends of the earth via gateways.

The global gateway city concept is far more expansive and far-reaching missionally than the previous global city paradigm and has wider and deeper missiological implications. Further, whereas the megacity concept came to us from economic, social, and political scientists, *gateway* is GGNC's best term missiologically and linguistically in our current globalizing and glocalizing hybrid world paradigm.

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Today, according to the Joshua Project,[1] at least 41.6 percent of the world's peoples remain unreached by the gospel. Nowhere is there a greater concentration of unreached (and least-reached) peoples than in Canadian gateway cities. GGNC is focusing on the unengaged and least-reached in these cities who have been neglected or written off as too difficult to reach. We seek to make disciples and start churches among peoples without a witness. When the church is established, we want to help them multiply a movement of disciples building more churches that will transform their community with the gospel here in Canada and to the ends of the earth.

Global Gateway Cities

Global gateway cities derive their definition and value from their relationship to "reaching the ends of the earth." They are a means and not an end.

"The ends of the earth" is a theological term that comes from Acts 1:8, "you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Here, "the ends of the earth" refers not so much to geographical designation as to those peoples who had not yet received the gospel, and to whom Christ was sending his disciples.

As Matthew Barrett states:

> One of the essential aspects of God's nature is that he doesn't need anything to support his existence (Acts 17:24–25). If a perfectly self-sufficient, satisfied, wise, and good God has chosen to create, then he must have a purpose for doing so. In this way, divine creation presupposes divine mission. As Scripture reveals, the mission of God involves sharing and increasing the knowledge of himself within his creation. This knowledge of God is most fully revealed in the sending of the Son in the incarnation (John 1:1–18). God's self-revelation then continues in the sending of the Holy Spirit to fill the church (John 14:15–26). Furthermore, Jesus describes the relationship between the sending mission of God and the sending of his disciples when he says, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). God's trinitarian nature, then, grounds our concept of mission as he calls us into his own purpose: to share the knowledge of the triune God to the ends of the earth.[2]

Translated into the twenty-first century then, "the ends of the earth" refers to the world's least-reached people groups, particularly those language communities and populations who have yet to receive the good

1 Joshua Project, "Global Summary."

2 Barrett, "Is the Trinity Optional?"

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news of Christ's salvation. It is for the sake of reaching these least-reached, unevangelized populations that GGNC is on mission. Therefore, it is in relation to reaching these least-reached ethnolinguistic people groups that the term *global gateway cities* must be understood.

With the object of global gateway cities clearly defined as "the ends of the earth," we now turn our attention to these three words: *global*, *gateway*, and *city/cities*.

Global

Global is not merely about size but also composition. For this reason, we limit our list of global gateway cities to those that contain a substantial population of least-reached peoples. Typically our metric is a city/metro area containing at least one million people. However, tier two Canadian gateways (metros such as Winnipeg, Hamilton, Quebec City, Halifax, London, and the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge-Guelph corridor) have populations of less than a million.

Gateway

There are two key aspects to the term *gateway*. First, being a gateway is about having access and ability to move about freely and openly. A city may have a large number of "ends-of-the-earth" people groups within it, but if that city is itself closed or highly restricted from gospel witness, then it is hardly a gateway. Second, "gateway" conveys the relationship back to the people groups' communities of origin. These relationships are nurtured by individuals traveling back to their homes to visit family and friends, vacation, conduct business, or represent some branch of the government for trade, commerce, or diplomacy. Such relationships are also nurtured and empowered in real-time via social media, messaging, and video calling. Increasing numbers of diaspora immigrants and refugees are using Canadian channels for inviting and sponsoring family members into open, accessible gateways. However, diaspora ethnic groups that are generations away from their places of origin with no ongoing relationship back to their places of origin are not very effective gateway communities.

City

Finally, the word *city* is important, not only because GGNC is primarily an urban mission organization, but also because cities are where we have the highest concentrations of the least-reached, "ends of the earth" people groups that we are seeking to reach. In our current Acts 17:26–27 "*kairos*" season, it is the size of the least-reached populations, rather than mere categories of

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ethnolinguistic composition existing within a given gateway setting, or mere existence of people groups, that takes precedence. A handful of diaspora individuals in a suburb or small town lack the gravity (according to GGNC's vision) to warrant a full-time GGNC missionary engagement. Though we can't give serious organizational attention in such contexts, we rejoice that the Lord calls many local churches and sister mission organizations to focus some of their efforts and resources to such settings.

People Movements to Cities

Globally, over 272 million people currently live away from their home country,[3] but the numbers are even larger when you add the children of immigrants, those who lived abroad and then returned home, and those who have internally migrated within their own countries. GGNC is focusing on a newly recovered era of mission (in reality, an ancient one) aimed at reaching a world already connected through global diaspora relationships, by ministering initially in our tier one gateways of Metro Vancouver (comprised of twenty-one municipalities, one electoral area, and one Treaty First Nation), Calgary, Edmonton, Greater Toronto Area, Ottawa, and Montreal.

Luke's record of Paul's visit to Athens in Acts 17 is crucial for GGNC and its understanding of diaspora dynamics especially in relation to Canadian gateways. Of first importance is Paul's mention of how God has created us all (people groups, nations, Gentiles) from one blood (v. 26) and has defined where and for what seasons of time we would "live and move" (v. 28) on the entire planet. God decides when a people group, through what we might typically view as political, social, economic, meteorological, religious, and other reasons, will live in certain locales and when events will result in their migration to a new place. In looking at the entirety of the Bible and its plethora of people group migration evidence, it is clear to us that God himself is orchestrating such dynamics for his kingdom mission purpose. Yes, individuals, married couples, nuclear families, and extended families immigrate to new geographic locations (in our context, Canadian gateways) because of political repression, religious persecution, a failing economy, better opportunities for their kids and grandkids, etc. But could it be that God is bringing such individuals and people groups into Canadian gateway cities for more than just a "better life"? It seems to us that God is intentionally orchestrating such people group migration movements so that people seek him, though they may be quite unconscious as to the ultimate goal of their

3 United Nations, "World Urbanization Prospects."

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searching out a new geographic space in which to bring stability and new opportunities to their families.

When they do move, these people are often moving to the city. Unfortunately, while the world goes urban, mission endeavors have largely remained rural in much of the world. Missionaries often live in cities but focus their efforts in rural areas which they perceive to be more open to the gospel. However, over 4.4 billion people as of early 2021 are already living in cities. That number makes up 56.2 percent of the world population (as of November 2020 per the World Economic Forum) and is estimated to surpass 68 percent by 2050. The urban population of the world has grown rapidly from only 751 million in 1950.[4] GGNC is focusing on what the world is becoming—an urban world!

People Movement to Canada

In the context of urbanization, Canada is on track to welcome record numbers of new immigrants between 2022 and 2024. Despite the pandemic, Canada recorded its highest-ever immigration numbers in 2021 with over 405,000 people becoming permanent residents. For 2022, Canada released a revised target of over 432,000 immigrants and even higher numbers in 2023 and 2024. These numbers may seem highly specific, but each target is based on the Canadian government's Immigration Levels Plan 2022–2024.[5]

GGNC has identified six tier one Canadian gateway cities: Vancouver/Abbotsford lower mainland, Calgary, Edmonton, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA; includes the cities of Brampton, Richmond Hill, Mississauga, Newmarket, Markham, Vaughan, Milton, Oakville, Burlington, Scarborough, Etobicoke, York, North York, East York), Ottawa-Gatineau, and Montreal.

Each qualifying Canadian gateway city must meet the following requirements: (1) have five or more qualifying unreached people groups that each have a population greater than five thousand in that gateway city; and (2) have an overall population close to or greater than one million.[6]

A Kairos Moment

As a primary destination for global immigration, Canada has become the global epicenter for diaspora people group migration into our gateway cities. God is dropping a kingdom mission gift into our laps; will we recognize it and seize the day? Will we move in obedience to mobilize and train more Jesus-

4 United Nations, "World Urbanization Prospects."

5 Robitaille, "How Many Immigrants?"

6 Global Gates Canada, "Canadian Gateway Cities."

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