

**Multiculturalism in Canada and the United States
Immigration Patterns and
Observations for Multi-ethnic Congregations**

Daryl Busby, PhD:
ACTS Seminaries, Langley, B.C.

A. Summary:

What ministry and theological implications do current immigration patterns in Canada and the United States have for multi-ethnic churches: A study of six congregations in Vancouver, B.C.?

Current and future immigration patterns, as well as various biblical injunctions combine to strongly suggest that congregations have a pristine opportunity to overcome cultural/ethnic barriers among parishioners. As a result, these congregations will reflect kingdom values; and model to the world how the people of God overcome such barriers.

B. Rationale for the Study: Current Immigration Realities in Canada and the United States:

- **By 2030: 55% of Canadian population will have been born in Asia.**
 - 30% will be a visible cultural minority and this percentage will be over 50% in urban areas and even over 60% in Toronto...Over 6 million Canadians will identify with religions other than Christianity; and about half of these will be Muslims.
- **As of 2006, the United States accepts more legal immigrants as permanent residents than all other countries in the world combined. Since the removal of ethnic quotas in immigration in 1965, the number of first- generation immigrants living in the United States has quadrupled,¹ from 9.6 million in 1970 to about 38 million in 2007¹**
- **As of 2006 Canadian Census, 6,186,950 foreign-born in Canada, representing virtually one in five (19.8%) of the total population. This is the highest proportion in 75 years. Between 2001 and 2006, Canada's foreign-born population increased by 13.6%. This was four times higher than the Canadian-born population, which grew by 3.3% during the same period.**

1. ¹ *"Nancy Foner, George M. Fredrickson, Not Just Black and White: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States (2005) p.120.*

2. *"Immigrants in the United States and the Current Economic Crisis", Demetrios G. Papademetriou and Aaron Terrazas, Migration Policy Institute, April 2009.*

- **Foreign born: At 19.8%, Canada had a higher proportion of foreign-born than the United States of America (12.5%) and lower than Australia (22.2%).²**
 - Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver were home to 68.9% of the recent immigrants in 2006. In contrast, slightly over one-third (34.4%) of Canada's total population lived in these three census metropolitan areas.
 - There were some signs that recent immigrants are choosing to settle in smaller metropolitan areas. Individually, 5.2% of recent immigrants had settled in Calgary, 2.9% chose Edmonton and 2.2% chose Winnipeg.
- **Education of immigrants: Among Canadian immigrants, 55% have a university education (compared to 22% of Canadian citizens).**
 - Among US immigrants, 16% have university education (compared to 17.6% of US citizens)
- **Reasons for admission to country: Canada: Reasons for being admitted: 55% for economic or job prospects and employability; 28% family ties and sponsorship; 20% refugees.**
 - In the United States immigrants continue to arrive in record numbers, with primary emphasis upon "family sponsored" and less upon "employment based". The US Census of 2007 recorded 16 million (12.6% of total population) were foreign born, and an additional 38 million (22.9% of all children) had one immigrant parent.³

C. Theological implications of multi-ethnic congregations:

- **Old Testament: God used language to scatter people at Babel; and this language barrier remained in place until Pentecost. "we heard them each in our own language".But Egyptians and Gentiles were welcomed into the people of God (eg Ruth)**
- **Acts of the Apostles (chapter two in particular), Ephesians 2:11-22 and 4:4-6; and the exaltation in the book of the Revelation (5:9; 7:9) provide the rationale for multi-ethnic congregations. As one participant wrote, "the biblical basis for uniting nations in the worship of God is stronger than people realize...the church should be in the forefront of racial and cultural reconciliation." We are called to, "*Tear down that tower of Babel; to paraphrase President Reagan*"**

² <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/ethnicity/>

³ Statistics taken from Segal, Elliott and Mayadas Immigration Worldwide (Oxford Press) 2010; chapters three and seven

- However, the expression of worship at the throne in Revelation does not imply a loss of culture or even language per se; but offers an expression of worship that reflects the ethnic and cultural expressions of each group. (in other words: what language will we speak in Heaven” All of them...but with complete understanding of each other. _⁴
- Paul remained attentive to distinct cultural differences as he sought to bring the Gospel to various people groups; and yet very flexible in his actions.
 - For example: 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23 -“...to the Jew I am... to those not having the Law, I am...I do this all for the sake of the gospel”)
- Cultural tensions existed in many of the churches. Paul keep having to address these matters of food, employment, morals, pagan worship, synchronistic worship, etc)
- And yet, when people did come to Christ, he pressed for the removal of any hindrances within a culture that impeded growth. He removes his cultural sensitivity and remarks, “...we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body- whether Jew or Greek”.
 - Principle: evangelism in the church remains sensitive to cultural barriers but with the vision of bringing all into the body of Christ where such barriers are addressed
 - Principle: culture and ethnicity issues are noted within spiritual growth when they present barriers to holiness (ie weak and strong and sensitivity to both)

D. Research and Summary Findings: Towards Multi-ethnic churches

With these immigration patterns and trends in mind; in late 2010, ACTS Seminaries hosted a dialogue among leaders of six diverse, multi-cultural congregations and five denominational leaders responsible for the oversight of these unique congregations. We invited churches to share their experiences with multi-ethnic ministries. We wanted to discover some self claimed “best practices of effective multi-ethnic congregations”. In other words, what challenges and victories are they experiencing? In preparation, all delegates read various books and explored selected websites and especially noted the book Building a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church, by Mark Deymaz. After hearing the stories of these congregations...we summarized our shared convictions in our Canadian setting, but offer them to a broader audience.

⁴ I remain indebted to Dr. Mark Naylor and his fine work as posted on: <http://www.nbseminary.ca/wp-content/uploads/Image/Setting-an-intercultural-agenda>.

1. **The Canadian “multiculturalism” provides a unique platform for fulfilling this vision, especially in the urban areas:**
 - a. Dr. Arnel Motz noted that, by 2031:
 - i. 55% of Canadian population will have been born in Asia.
 - ii. 30% will be a visible cultural minority and this percentage will be over 50% in urban areas and even over 60% in Toronto
 - iii. Over 6 million Canadians will identify with religions other than Christianity; and about half of these will be Muslims
 - iv. Infusions of international students at universities and colleges

2. **We concluded that, while many churches have multiple nationalities, they are not intentionally multi-cultural. We distinguished between “multi-colored congregations” and “multi-cultural” congregations: these latter ones discern the difference between “assimilation” and complete “integration”**
 - a. *Assimilation* merely integrates various ethnicities into a common “host” culture thus minimizing or ignoring distinctions (eg some Asians attend our congregation but we expect them to fit into the western way of doing church)
 - b. *Accommodating* allows for some distinctions and special interests of various groups within the church. (ie they use the same building but have different meeting times etc)
 - c. *Inclusion* brings people from various ethnicities into unrestricted and equal association as partners
 - i. Deymaz explained this as, “inclusion is more than mere tolerance.”
 - d. One church in our sample defined their mission as, “*a gathering of people from various languages and nations to worship God*”. *This microcosm reflects the fulfillment of the great commission. “...We use English as a common language, but seek to worship according to the diverse cultural expressions.”*

3. **Multi-cultural churches come in various models and sizes.**
 - a. Size of the congregation often determines the form. Some larger congregations have multiple ethnic imbedded congregations while others are single celled communities centered around an English language ministry. One church pressed “many languages, one message, one church;” with each language group attending a service. Other smaller ones still sought to included various cultures in the community but often centred around English language
 - b. One church in Winnipeg hosted immigrants (refugees) from Mynmaar, but Canadians provided the resources to enfold them into Canada

4. All such churches lived their vision in practical experiences:

a. Some practical examples included:

- i. Sharing ethnic meals
- ii. Actively celebrating ethnic events and heritages
- iii. Deeply engaging with shared struggles in all cultures
- iv. Displaying national flags and other practical evidences of our heritages. One church noted over fifty countries were represented by their flags and dress.
- v. Use of various languages in worship, preaching, bulletins and even church signage; but above all in prayer.
- vi. Presenting bi-lingual Bibles, where possible, to newcomers

b. Most of the churches had written and adopted core values that specifically noted their commitment to multi-ethnicity.

c. Some intentionally reflected their mission in the name of the church.

5. We deeply believed that pastors and Lay Leadership must embrace and live out the passion for multi-cultural congregations.

a. Leadership stayed committed to an intentional pursuit of this mission. It does not come naturally.

b. Pastoral staffing hires intentionally and prayerfully sought diversity.

c. Pastoral staff had life experiences that enabled them to develop cross cultural awareness and sensitivity. Deymaz draws specific helpful attention to this important aspect.⁵

d. Leadership remained committed to sacrificial ministry that places them in risky and vulnerable experiences.

e. Church Governance also intentionally included various cultures in the lay appointments. As one pastor wrote, "... we encourage ethnic diversity based upon biblical qualifications in all our ministries. Each leader oversees all ethnicities not just one."

6. Despite our best efforts, there still exist tensions between "ownership" and "landlord" in the governance and mission of the church.

a. Successful churches promote ownership of the mission among the various cultures;

b. However, there will often be a "host culture" that provides the platform and building. Canadian citizens seemed adept at this welcoming stance.

⁵ Deymaz p. 103-106

- c. We are all ethnic, not just “those other people”. We all have ethnic assumptions; and we possess the tendency to be paternalistic with “other cultures.”
 - d. We all have some evidences of ethno-centrism. It is a part of our fallenness and limited life experiences.
 - e. Keep communicating and trusting each other.
 - f. The Kingdom of God pushes against this tendency to be mono-ethnic and even divisive
- 7. Embodying this experience has practical and rewarding implications. These included components such as:**
- a. Experiencing ethnic meals and learning about other cultures
 - b. Deeper engagement with shared struggles in all cultures
 - c. Deeper spiritual maturity that rises about culture and personal opinions
 - d. “foretaste of heaven”.
 - e. Overcoming intentional and unintentional theological and cultural biases.
- 8. We acknowledge the longstanding sociological principle of homogeneity that attracts people of similar background; and, the theological vision for a multi-cultural diversity that encourages each one to reach beyond their own culture. *“Come because you feel comfortable; but, reach out because you are called.”***
- a. We still acknowledge that some ethnic cultures are more adept at multi-cultural movements than others.
 - b. We also acknowledged that the goal of blended ethnic congregations may not attract not-yet-followers, especially recent immigrants, because they look for something familiar.
- 9. Preaching must be culturally sensitive in use of illustrations; and also, tactful yet truthful in talking about other religions.**
- 10. Certain cultural assumptions influence the churches. These include:**
- a. **Authority distance” is a challenge when bringing such cultures together**
 - b. Conflict avoidance is a cultural variable in making decisions. Some cultures are more confrontational while others are more “shame based.”
 - c. Some cultures tend to be more “conservative” than our Canadian churches and hold stronger convictions on selected doctrines.
 - d. How decisions get made varies between cultures
 - e. Various assumptions about the power and role of the pastor

- f. Mark Naylor added, *“when people from different cultural backgrounds congregate for discussion or decision making, the overall context can be so familiar that each cultural group believes that their assumed “rules” of interaction will be followed as the norm. When the cultural groups have contrasting low power distance (LPD) versus high power distance (HPD) orientations, the result can be frustrating with the participants misattributing² the motives of others according to their cultural perspective of what is normative behavior.”*⁶
- a. Mark Naylor... *“A Canadian pastor and a Hispanic pastor were discussing the possibility of a joint worship service for young people. It became obvious that there are cultural issues that cannot be ignored. The young people in the Canadian congregation often address their pastor by his first name, whereas the Hispanic pastor could not recall one person in his congregation who would not address him with the title “pastor.”*

11. However, multicultural congregations cannot preserve a pure expression for each cultural identity; but rather involves deliberate “transformation,” “our new way of doing things,” the “influence of others” and the use of “intercultural dialogue forms” that shape those involved in the process, hopefully towards a more Christlike expression of faith. In order to create a multicultural local church give-and-take remain necessary.⁷

12. Multi-cultural ministry includes sociological and economic issues:

- a. Many are immigrants needing employment, housing and day to day practical needs.
- b. Child raising techniques and nurturing vary.
- c. ‘Doctrinal issues are shaped by culture and experience
- d. Some come from caste systems and have limited experience with other cultures or social strata issues
- e. Self image is challenged as they come from a status of influence to a place of servitude and lower paying jobs
- f. Family violence and cultural mores may be underneath, some of which are unbiblical and even illegal in Canada
- g. “Bible tries to shape culture and not the reverse”. Biblical authority is the common ground for such matters.
- h. Even the early church experienced practical and financial stress based upon race.

⁶ <http://www.nbseminary.ca/archives/resolving-intercultural-tensions-4-laws-mutual-invitation>: accessed on October 09, 2011. His articles are well written and provide further gold mines for such congregations

⁷ Sheffield Dan (2005) *The Multicultural Leader: Developing a Catholic Personality* (Toronto: Clements)

References:

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US	Before 1990	2008	CAN	1971	2006	
<i>Europe</i>	16%	13 %	Europe	61.1%	16.2%	
Latin Am	50.7%	53.9%	Latin Am	8.9%	10.8%	
Asia and ME	27%	27%	Asia and ME	12.1%	58.3%	
North Amer.	2.0%	1.6%	N Amer.	4.0 %	3.5%	
Africa	2.3%	4.1%	Africa	8.3%	10.6%	