

# Immigration<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Immigration has played a significant role in the making of New Zealand. However, the growth in immigration from Asia since the mid-1980s onwards has significantly altered the ethnic composition of New Zealand society. This has, in turn, presented significant challenges for how New Zealanders respond to these changes, for how socially cohesive New Zealand is and could become, and for how churches in New Zealand respond to these changes as reflected in their congregations and parishes.

This paper seeks to identify and address some of these challenges as well as present implications and actions for the way forward. To begin, this paper provides a brief overview of immigrants and immigration policy in New Zealand. This is followed by a discussion of immigration and immigrants in the Bible. To conclude, we discuss the implications for Christian attitudes towards immigrants and immigration today.

## 2. Immigrants and immigration policy in New Zealand

### *New Zealand's immigrants*

Immigrants have arrived to live in New Zealand since the 1700s, from Europe, Great Britain, and Australia and, from the 1800s, small numbers from South Asia and China (the latter dominating the history of Dunedin). These immigrants joined New Zealand's indigenous Maori population, which itself migrated to New Zealand in the fourteenth century. Traditionally, New Zealand sourced immigrants from English-speaking Anglo-Celtic countries, notably Great Britain. Alongside this, there were smaller numbers of Germans, Greek, Yugoslavian, Dutch, and Dalmatians and, from the 1960s, a growing number of migrants from the Pacific Islands. In 1987, following a major immigration policy change, New Zealand diversified its source countries and an increasing number of immigrants came to New Zealand from Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Southeast Asia and later the People's Republic of China. Between March 1986 and March 2006, New Zealand's resident population that had been born in countries in Asia increased almost sevenfold, from 32,685 to 248,364. The Chinese and Indian components of the Asia-born population increased even more – by more than 800 percent during the 20 years. The population that identified with Asian ethnicities (including the New Zealand-born) increased by 550 percent in the twenty years between 1986 and 2006.

New Zealand's major metropolitan and migrant-receiving city, Auckland, saw the most substantial change, to the extent that the Asian "face" of Auckland could be seen to foreshadow the changing demographic realities of New Zealand in the 21st century. About two-thirds of all Asian immigrants settle in Auckland, and at the 2006 census one quarter of Aucklanders had been born overseas.

The reception of immigrants to New Zealand has been very mixed. Anglo-Celtic migrants have tended to be more readily accepted than immigrants from non-English speaking countries, especially Asia. There is a long history of discrimination against Asian immigrants to New Zealand. And while New Zealanders' are warming towards Asian peoples, there is a significant body of literature that demonstrates that discrimination and social exclusion against immigrants and refugees to New Zealand is wide and deep. The diversification of immigrant flows and its attendant diversification of social spaces have frequently engendered negative responses from host communities. These negative responses have been manifest in a variety of ways, from mild complaints about 'hardworking' Dutch, to criticisms of Pacific immigrants as over-stayers and contributors to urban decline to descriptions of Auckland's growing Asian populations as an "Inv-Asian".

New Zealand has a more diverse population than either Australia or Canada. The 2006 New Zealand Census revealed an increasingly diverse population in terms of ethnicity and demography. The 20 years leading up to this Census, following the introduction of the Immigration Act in 1987, saw one of the most dramatic transitions in ethnic composition that New Zealand has experienced. The most notable aspect of this change has been the growth of the populations of Asian origin, although other populations have also grown. New Zealand's diverse population also stems from diversity in the ethnicities of those who are New Zealand-born. For example, at the 2006 census, nearly 20 percent of the Chinese and Indian populations in New Zealand were born in New Zealand (these percentages were much higher in the early 1990s), reflecting their longstanding presence in New Zealand, in some cases going back to the 19th century. In fact, a fifth of all Asians in the 2006 census (70,650) had been born in New Zealand.

A combination of a number of factors, including immigration, growth in the number of New

Zealanders' who identify with more than one ethnicity (for example, children born to parents of two different ethnicities), and the age structures of New Zealand's different ethnic populations mean that New Zealand society will become even more diverse in the next 20 years. Using projections based on the 2006 census results, Statistics New Zealand estimated that, in the years between 2006 and 2026, New Zealand's Pacific population will increase by around 60 percent, the Maori population by 31 percent, the European or Other population by 7 percent and the Asian population by 95 percent. These projections will mean that by 2026 there will be almost as many people in the Asian ethnic population as there will be in the Maori population, and that between 1986 and 2026, the Asian share of New Zealand's population will have increased from 1.7 percent of New Zealand's total population in 1986 to 16 percent in 2026.

#### *New Zealand's immigration policy*

New Zealand's immigration policy has traditionally responded to two factors: changes in the labour market and nation-building. Regarding the labour market, various policies around the required number of points to enter New Zealand (which include points for qualifications, work experience, wealth, English-language abilities) were tailored to meet skills shortages in New Zealand's workforce. In simple terms, migrants who were trained in particular professions would jump to the head of the queue. However, the skilled migrant category is only one avenue for entry into New Zealand. Migrants can also enter under categories in business migration, various family categories, a particular stream for Pacific migrants, or come as refugees. In recent years, an increasing number of refugees to New Zealand have come from Africa and West Asia, or what we know of as the Middle East, although earlier refugees came from war-torn countries in Southeast Asia and have become established communities in New Zealand.

Immigrants also arrive in New Zealand as part of a nation-building process. New Zealand's history is built on the interaction between its *tangata whenua* (the Maori population), and its *tauiwi* (foreigners or immigrants). New Zealand is unique amongst other settler societies (such as Australia and Canada) in this respect, in that New Zealand has an active and dominant indigenous population and thus the ethnic diversification of New Zealand's population takes place within the context of biculturalism. The intersection between New Zealand's immigrant communities and New

Zealand's Maori population is a significant point of contact, especially as New Zealand's Asian and Maori populations are set to increase.

In 2006, a New Zealand Immigration Policy Framework was developed as part of a substantive Immigration Change Programme. This programme identified skills, security and settlement as three key areas of focus if New Zealand were to successfully meet what the then-government saw as the challenges of increasing global mobility, increasing global competition for skilled migrants, heightened security issues, and the on-going need to meet the challenges of a diverse society.

What this demonstrates, amongst other things, is that New Zealand's immigration policy is complex and multi-layered. It is more than just the movement of people and it impacts upon government policy in a range of areas. Immigrants are also diverse. Some may arrive in New Zealand speaking only English, some may arrive speaking many languages including English (we know that immigrants are generally more multi-lingual than New Zealanders), and some, such as refugees, may arrive in New Zealand with no or minimal English. Some immigrants arrive with families and employment while others arrive with qualifications that are not recognised in New Zealand, with families left behind in another country. We also know that contemporary migration is circular rather than what it has traditionally been – linear. In other words, immigrants may arrive in New Zealand, stay for a few years, and then move onto another country or return to their home country. A migrant's journey is not just one-way. And in a globalised world, we know that the movement of people from one country to another will continue unabated.

### **3. Immigration and immigrants in the Bible**

The movement of people and peoples runs like a thread through the Bible. A call to emigrate features early in the story of the people of God: *Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."* (Gen 12:1). Jacob and his family migrate to Egypt because of economic pressures and experience life as "aliens in the land" (Gen 47:1-6); the people of Israel are rescued by God after suffering oppression and an attempted ethnic cleansing (Exod 1:8-22); for a generation they are a people in transit (Deut 29:1-6); then, having been established in their own land for centuries, they suffer the upheaval of military conquest and forced relocation to a new existence

as vulnerable outsiders in other countries (2 Kings 17:5-6; 25:1-21). For some there is, later, the mixed experience of a return to the land of their or their parents' memories (Ezra, Nehemiah).

A recurring theme in the Old Testament's instructions for the life of the people of God is just and generous treatment of immigrants who have come to live among them. Their own experience of having once been aliens should give them empathy for others in that situation (Exod 23:9; Lev 19:34). They must not misuse their power to oppress a vulnerable immigrant (Exod 22:21; Lev 19:33). On the contrary, they should show generosity towards them, recognising their needs (Lev 19:10; 23:22). Immigrants are to have the same rights to justice as native residents (Deut 1:16; 24:17; 27:19). They are to enjoy a break from work on the sabbath (Exod 23:12; Deut 5:14) and share in times of celebration and feasting with the rest of the community (Deut 26:11). Should they wish to participate in the worship of God, immigrants may do so on the same basis as Israelites (Num 15:14-16). The obverse is that those behaviours that are forbidden to members of the community of Israel are also to be refrained from by immigrants who have come to share in the life of that community (Lev 18:26). Ultimately, the attitude of Israel to immigrants is to be a reflection of the character of the God whom they worship: *The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.* (Lev 19:34).

To the people of God in their own experience as aliens, through the forced migration of the exile, there comes a remarkable set of instructions through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 29:4-9). They are to recognise the purpose of God in being where they now are, enter into normal economic and social life there, and seek the good of their new location and its people. Nehemiah and Daniel are prominent examples of migrants making significant contributions to their host communities.

In the Gospels, Jesus is born after a journey demanded by an occupying power (Luke 2:1-7), and his early life is that of a refugee fleeing political violence, seeking asylum in a foreign country (Matt 2:13-15). Those who come to believe in him respond to a call to follow (Matt 4:18-22) and a command to go (Matt 28:19-20). To the disquiet of religious leaders and even his own followers, Jesus' ministry extends beyond ethnic and cultural boundaries to Samaritans

(John 4:1-42) and gentiles (Mark 7:24-30; 8:5-10; John 12:20-22). As the Good News of salvation through the risen Christ is unleashed on the world, the miracle of Pentecost ensures that it is heard by migrants, people of the Jewish diaspora who have made their homes all over the Mediterranean world (Acts 2:5-11). People who had come to Jerusalem as visitors leave with an experience of transformation and news to share (Acts 8:26-3). Issues arise out of the coming together of people from different social, cultural, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, and are dealt with by receiving members of the “outsider” community into the leadership group (Acts 6:1-6). When the Gospel reaches beyond the Jewish world, the church resolves not to make ethnicity an obstacle to membership of the community of faith, but, like Israel in the Old Testament, requests some accommodation on the part of the incomers to enable shared life to be realised within one community (Acts 15:19-20, 28-29). Soon, the believers in Jesus are themselves a diaspora, scattered by religious persecution (Acts 8:1-3; 11:19-20), living as “aliens and exiles” (1 Pet 1:1-2; 2:11). But in their scattering they are sustained by the vision of the gathering in of people from every ethnicity, tribe, people group and language, worshipping God and sharing together in the gift of salvation through Christ (Rev 7:9-12; Rom 15:6). The reality of life on the move is reflected in the New Testament requirement to show hospitality, including to strangers (e.g. Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9). Christians are to *Welcome one another . . . just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God* (Rom 15:7).

#### **4. Conclusions and implications for Christian attitudes to immigration and immigrants today**

From this brief survey of the place of migration in the Biblical story, a number of observations may be made about how God wants his people to behave towards immigrants. We cannot assume that instructions given by God to Israel for their life as his people should translate directly into law for Aotearoa New Zealand. We do, however, find in those instructions indications of attitudes and behaviours that express God’s values and should therefore be characteristic of the Christian community that seeks to live authentically as God’s people in our context. By extension, as salt and light in our wider communities, local, national and international, Christians will want to work for conditions shaped by those values that we have learned from God. In addition, there is specific

guidance for churches as local expressions of Christian community in relation to sharing life with other believers in Christ who arrive as immigrants.

The following observations are offered with implications to be considered for Christian attitudes and action:

- *God’s purpose:* Migrations of people and peoples play a significant part in the Biblical story of salvation. In what ways may we see the saving purpose of God in the mobility of people today in permanent, short-term and cyclical migration? How may the church in New Zealand partner with God in what he is doing?
- *Mission:* The Gospel is for all nations. How may the church in New Zealand make use of the special possibilities for reaching peoples and nations presented by immigration to New Zealand and circular or onward migration? How may churches in New Zealand draw upon its bicultural history and relationships to engage multi-culturally?
- *God’s care:* Those who today undergo migration, whether drawn by hope or aspiration or driven by need or oppression, can find their own experiences reflected in the Bible. God understands! How may the people of God communicate God’s care for immigrants?
- *Justice:* Justice matters to God. Immigrants, without the knowledge, facility with language, and the networks of support that many in the host community enjoy, are particularly vulnerable to injustice. How may Christians work at national, local and personal levels to ensure justice for migrants?
- *Generosity:* God cares for the needy and requires his people to live generously. What may Christians do so that immigrants may experience the generosity of God?
- *Inclusion:* God directed his people to give opportunities for immigrants to participate fully as members of the community. How may Christians facilitate the inclusion of immigrants into New Zealand communities?
- *Family of Christ:* Believers in Christ are one family with all other believers, and we are instructed to welcome each other on that basis. How may the churches in New Zealand welcome other members of Christ’s family who arrive as immigrants?
- *Victims of persecution:* For some

believers in Christ, now as in New Testament times, migration has been forced by religious persecution. How may their Christian family receive them with hospitality, encouragement and help?

- *Seeking the welfare of the city*: Both exiled Israel in the Old Testament and the persecuted church in the New Testament were told to live responsibly in the communities among whom they went and to seek their good. How may New Zealand Christians assist Christian immigrants to enter into the life of and contribute to the good of this country?

## 5. Call to Action

The ethnic reality of 21st century New Zealand is marked by diversity. The ethnically homogenous churches that characterised much of the 20th century for much of New Zealand will not continue. Christian leaders, their ministries and congregations need to respond both appropriately and effectively to New Zealand's changing demography. To that end, one high-level task could be to set up a working group of Christian leaders

at the national level, drawing on established and new communities, to meet and work together on the relational, ecclesial and missiological aspects of this multi-ethnic reality.

In order for the above task to be more than just a 'talk-shop', for progress in this area there is an urgent need for the cultivation of intercultural competence at every level (national, Christian leaders, pastors, church members). This should have a place in ministry training programmes and in the resourcing of local churches.

New Zealand is an immigrant nation. How churches respond to the ongoing diversification of New Zealand's population may serve as a positive example to society generally. And how churches respond should not just be marked by "us" caring for "them", as important as undertaking a welfare role might be; rather, the churches should encourage incorporation, where members of the body of Christ arriving from elsewhere in the world are welcome into leadership and ministry for New Zealand churches and national Christian bodies.

## Footnotes

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