

Immigration and our Christian Heritage

It seems that Canada is undertaking to solve a problem that has never been successfully worked out by any people heretofore. We must not only Canadianize the new-comer, but we must check the tide of immigration until we are better prepared to deal with it. (Canadian Courier, 1914).

It doesn't matter where the immigrants come from. (Pierre Elliott Trudeau, March 15, 1979, in Vancouver.)

Canada is an immigrant nation. The only original inhabitants of Canada are the aboriginals. They were the first immigrants. The rest of its citizens are either immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Europe or elsewhere. The early immigrants came mainly from the British Isles. In 1817, nine ships arrived in Halifax in July with 1,254 immigrants and an additional nine ships were expected from Londonderry and Belfast with 2,508 more. A letter to the editor of the *Acadian Recorder* expressed the concern: "What is to become of them, how are they to obtain a subsistence?" Trans-Atlantic fares had become cheap and highly competitive. In 1830, the fare from Ireland to Quebec was usually as little as £2.10; on occasions it fell to 15 shillings. Not all newcomers stayed.

During the three decades at the end of the 19th century, emigration from Canada was greater than immigration. Most of the emigrants went to the United States. Around 1910, immigration to Canada reached a level of 300,000 to 400,000 annually, a population growth that would not be paralleled until shortly after the Second World War.

Canadian Population before the Second World War

Canada's population was polarized between those of French and British backgrounds; only twenty percent had other origins. The Canadian West attracted Americans. Mormons bought a half-million acres for a dollar an acre in what would be Alberta. At the turn of the century, farm families came to Canada. By 1900, there were 27,000 Ukrainians homesteading on the prairies. Clifton Sifton, Minister of the Interior in Sir Wilfred Laurier's (1841-1919) cabinet, called them "stalward peasants in sheepskin coats." When the British economy slumped in 1907, Canada received unemployed young men, by the thousands, many of trade-union background.

This new influx of immigrants meant moving away from unskilled work and farms. And for the first time in Canadian history, more people came to it than left. The British didn't think of themselves as immigrants as Canada was a colony within their vast empire. They expected to find a country not unlike their own. After the first World War, and during the depression years, immigration almost ceased. When the post Second World War mass immigration began, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950) felt it necessary to assure Canadians that the British still had preference. "The people of

Canada do not wish," he said, "as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population."

Our Christian Heritage

In the 18th and 19th centuries Canada developed primarily as a "Christian" society, with much of its laws, customs, and traditions based on Judeo-Christian values. The Fathers of the Canadian Confederation wanted to preserve the cultural and religious character of the two founding communities – French and British. They chose the name Dominion to describe Canada's Christian heritage. It was taken from Psalm 72:8. In 1905, Sir Wilfred Laurier said, during debates in the House of Commons on Canadian schools that:

When I observe in this country of ours, a total absence of lynching and an almost total absence of divorces and murders, I thank heaven that we are living in a country where the young children of the land are taught Christian morals and Christian dogmas.

Many years later, in 1981, the Rt. Hon. Joe Clark said:

I ask that we never forget the faith and the vision of the people who originally brought this country together, the Fathers of Confederation, who from the depths of their own profound faith took as their guide a verse from the Psalms of David, the verse that has since become the motto of our nation: "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth."

We pray that God's sovereignty over our Canada continues to bless and guide us.

Post Second World War Immigration

The years following the Second World War brought enormous changes. New people came to Canada, starting with the arrival in 1945 and 1946 of 48,000 British and Dutch women who had married Canadian servicemen, accompanied by their 22,000 children. In January 1947, the Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect. Prior to this event, citizens of this country were considered British subjects. During a citizenship ceremony in Ottawa, Prime Minister Mackenzie King received the first citizenship certificate and had the honour of being the first person ever to say, "I speak to you as a citizen of Canada." In 1947, the Canadian Chinese Act was repealed. While it had been in place since 1923, only eight Chinese immigrants had been admitted to Canada.

The mixture of immigrants began to change. In the early 1950s Canada needed low-skilled construction workers and found them in Portugal and Italy. Until the end of the 1950s Canada's immigration policy tried to control the flow of non-traditional immigrants to maintain an ethnic balance. On December 5, 1960, 16 year old Anette Toft from Denmark became the two millionth postwar immigrant. In 1962, Canada welcomed immigrants from the entire world, formalizing this change by the revised Immigration Act

of 1967. Immigrants from Britain, the United States and Europe accounted for 80 percent of all immigration between 1962 and 1967; they accounted for 56 per cent during 1968-76 and even became a minority of total immigration during the years when there was a heavy influx from such countries as India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Guyana, Jamaica, and Uganda. By 1983, New Delhi, India, had become Canada's largest immigration post. The 1986 Census listed seventy-six distinct ethnic groups in the Canadian population. European immigration had waned as more European countries began to surpass Canada in economic development.

Most third world immigrants settled in a few cities. An Immigration and Citizenship study showed that far from populating areas that may need growth, immigration seems to add people to places already densely populated; consequently, the Canadian population shifted from rural to urban. Richard Gwyn notes that Toronto's non-white population was higher than Los Angeles' at 38 percent to 33 per cent, and Vancouver's over New York and San Francisco by 30 per cent compared to 26 and 21 per cent respectively. These new comers changed the fabric of their cities. So-called "Asian malls", which catered to members of a particular ethnic group, became prominent features of urban landscapes.

In 1978, the government provided for reuniting close family members, usually a spouse or dependent children. Parents and grandparents were also included in this category. The government believed that the family unit must be strengthened in order to help newcomers adjust to Canada. The "reuniting families" policy attracted many newcomers. Since the Asians and Third World immigrants have a large sense of family, they brought in relatives by the score, and each in turn, brought more. On December 30, 1987, the *Globe and Mail* reported that Harbhajan Singh Pandori, who had come to Canada in 1970, had managed – in a time period of 17 years – to reunite with him 60 to 70 family members. Richard Gwyn aptly remarks: These families only became disunited because one member chose, voluntarily and invariably to their considerable personal advantage, to emigrate.

Impact of Immigration

Immigrants have shaped Canada. It is obvious that the new wave of immigrants has a greater effect on our national character than any other social policy executed since the Second World War. Immigration became a powerful agent of social change fostered by the Liberal Party as it depends on the ethnic vote to stay in power. Within a few decades Canada became a multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual nation. The ethnic and cultural diversity of Canada was given the highest legal recognition in the 1987 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, whose Article 27 requires that: "This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multi-cultural heritage of Canadians." Multiculturalism led to abandonment of Canada's Christian heritage. When the Ontario Court of Appeal prohibited the Lord's Prayer in Ontario schools, it stated bluntly: "It can no longer be assumed that Christian practices are acceptable to the whole community."

Opposition to Immigration

Until recently there has been little argument about immigration and its consequences. Although the Canadian public has become suspicious that the government has lost control over its immigration program, it is still waiting for the beginning of a serious discussion on this pressing topic as the Canadian economy is weak and the unemployment rate intolerably high. From 1990 on, more Canadians were out of work since the Depression, while at the same time more newcomers than ever before were brought into the country to compete for jobs.

In 1993, business journalist Daniel Stoffman recommended to the C.D. Howe Institute, an economic research group, the cutting of annual immigration from the present levels of around 250,000 to 150,000 as, in his opinion, the current immigration levels are more than Canada's social infrastructure can bear.

Official multiculturalism has also raised questions. Although questioning, it leads to charges of bigotry, intolerance and racism. The latter attitude stifles any possibility of reasonable debate. The new immigration policies have led to a great diversity in population. The multitude of diverse cultures may be in many ways enriching; it also makes it more difficult to keep the traditional culture or promote a unified common purpose. Neil Bissoondath, a Montrealer and an immigrant from the Caribbean, argues in his book, *Selling Illusions*, that promoting multiculturalism is a mistake. He wrote that immigrants should come here prepared to become Canadians not Jamaican-Canadians, or any other kind of hyphenated Canadian. In his fascinating book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of world order*, Samuel P. Huntington warns that Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies. He observes that one such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere and propagate the values and cultures of their home societies. And he points to the Muslims in Europe as an example.

Muslim communities whether Turkish in Germany or Algerian in France have not been integrated into their host cultures and, to the concern of the Europeans, show few signs of becoming so.

Steven Emerson, a terrorism analyst, specializing in Middle East terrorist groups, said in a speech, why the media doesn't warn about the threat, lies and hatred of Islamic terrorists, that people in the West have a hard time accepting the fact that Muslim terrorist groups who come to this continent still harbour the same ideological beliefs and adherence to the same radical, violent agenda they held in the Middle East. Emerson points to the leading international radical publication, the *Crescent*, as an example. This Ontario based magazine publishes racist and violent ideological tracts against the United States, Christians, Jews and pro-Western Muslims. It repeatedly invokes the need to wage a holy war against infidels and praises acts of terrorism against innocent civilians as a religious good deed and obligation of all Muslims. Should immigrants be allowed into Canada when their belief system conflicts with this country's traditional tolerance?

Fear has been expressed about losing Canada's Anglo-Saxon cultural traditions and Christian heritage. This fear is not unwarranted. For example, the House of Commons replaced its 120-year-old-daily prayer with an interfaith version from which all references of Christianity were exorcized. How should we deal with cultural diversity? What should the government do with laws that assume monogamy, when a religion permits polygamy? Should the government protect all religious customs? It hasn't always. In 1953, protective legislation was used to remove children from Doukhobor families. These children were placed either in juvenile training schools or in a special institution in New Denver, B.C. This institution remained in use until August 1959. Over these years, about 170 children were placed there.

Political Solutions

During the last federal election, a large number of Canadians voted for the Reform Party, which criticized multiculturalism and mass immigration. It had resolved that the Reform Party supports [that] immigration levels be established at a maximum of 150,000 per year in any year where the unemployment rate exceeds 10%, with increases in immigration as the unemployment rate falls below 10%.

It had also resolved that it supports amending the Immigration Act so that to qualify for Social Services or Healthcare, a sponsored immigrant must become a Canadian Citizen. The party's performance in Ontario showed that immigrants in the urban areas were not supportive of its proposals.

The Christian Heritage Party advocates that as immigrants and refugees enter Canada, they must be taught that the nation is founded upon Christian principles and that they must abide by the Common Law code which embodies Christian moral values and principles. Former party leader, Ed Vanwoudenberg, argues that Canada will benefit from continual immigration. He believes that Canadians can and must extend "the hand of compassion to genuine refugees." He also thinks that careful consideration should be given to maintain an ethnic balance. CHP's official policy booklet states that:

Immigrants have an obligation to become self-sufficient in the shortest time possible and to respect Canada's law and heritage. Deportation should be employed for all major non-capital offences committed by landed immigrants.

An opportunity and challenge for the church

Immigration encourages the church to its mission task. The world has come to our doorstep. Our neighbours may be practicing Buddhists or Muslims. Sizable Vietnamese and Chinese communities are found in Vancouver and Toronto. In general, compared to Africa or South America, Asia has been resistant to Christianity. Asians in Canada are receptive to the Gospel. The Chinese churches in Toronto are growing. Asian university students have formed Christian fellowships. Since our move to London, my wife and I have been involved with the Asian Christian Fellowship, which meets on the campus of the University of Western Ontario. The majority of our group of about 30 students are

Chinese, one is from Laos, a few come from Vietnam and Korea. Most of these students are from non-Christian homes and became Christians in Canada. They meet for Bible study, prayer, and mutual support. We have hosted some students in our home for a meal and interaction. A rewarding experience!

Someone said that immigration "represents missionary movement in reverse." I pray that the church will see immigration as an opportunity to fulfill our Lord's Great Commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19f.). The nations are now in our neighbourhoods ready to be reached with the Gospel. What a challenge for the church!