

# Growing a Truly Multicultural Australia Catholic Church

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## **“Birth pangs of a new humanity”**

Migration is part of the human DNA. It has been critical to human development. But today we are experiencing the greatest movements of persons of all time. So that the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People described us as being in the “birth pangs of a new humanity.”<sup>i</sup>

According to the International Organisation for Migration the number of people living outside their country of origin rose from 150 million in 2000 to 214 million in 2010.<sup>ii</sup> In addition the United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR] on 20 June 2014 announced that the number of forcibly displaced people in the world was now 51.2 million [17 million refugees and 33.3 million internally displaced].<sup>iii</sup> Such movement of peoples is having a dramatic effect on many nations including Australia.

## **I Migration to Australia**

2011 National Census found that 47% of all Australians are either born overseas [27%] or have a parent born overseas [20%]<sup>iv</sup> and 4 million Australians speak a language other than English at home. Australia is the most multicultural country in the western world. Until 1960 the majority of immigrants were from Europe but between 1960 and 1990 non-western migration grew from 12% to 52% of all migrants.<sup>v</sup>

Migration has changed the religious landscape of this country. “Since World War II, immigration has played a huge role in the development of religious faith in Australia. That role has been evident in the place that many of the world’s religions now have in Australia. Since 1971, the number of Australians associated with a religion other than Christianity has risen from just 0.1 million to 1.5 million. However, many millions of the immigrants have been Christian and some denominations would hardly exist today without the enormous influx of members that immigration has brought.”<sup>vi</sup>

## **Catholics & Migration**

This paper will concentrate on the effect of migration on the Australian Catholic Church because it has been a major beneficiary and graphically illustrates the pain and the possibilities of migration.

Between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses 319,564 of the 1,771,924 migrants who came to Australia were Catholic<sup>vii</sup> as well hundreds of international priests also arrived. At present 24.2% of Australian Catholics are migrants, 23.0% are the children of migrants and 53.8% are third generation Australians.<sup>viii</sup> According to the 2011 Census, four dioceses: Sydney [35.3%], Perth [34%], Parramatta [29.7%] and Melbourne [29.1%] had around one-third of their Catholics born overseas. The national average for all Dioceses is 23.6%.<sup>ix</sup> The top ten countries of birth among Catholics born overseas are: Italy, the Philippines, England, New Zealand, Ireland, India, Vietnam, Malta, Croatia and Poland in descending order.<sup>x</sup> About

three-quarters of Australian Catholics born overseas were born in non-English speaking countries.<sup>xi</sup>

At the same time hundreds of international priests were invited to take up parishes in Australian dioceses. It is difficult to find accurate statistics, Peter Wilkinson estimates that while in 2003 there were 150 overseas sourced priests working in Australian parishes, today it is between 500-550, or one in every three priests in parish ministry and the percentage is growing. Also one in every two seminarians was born or recruited overseas and the majority of ordinations between 2010 and 2013 were overseas born.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Gift & challenge of immigrant Catholics**

First generation immigrants are significantly better at attending Church. Migrants make up 40% of those under 65 attending religious services. They are more accepting of authority and more traditional in their devotions. They are attracted to devotions that Australian-born Catholics have recently given up. Consequently, “it is hard to provide religious nurture for both groups of people within the same context.”<sup>xiii</sup> So while migration has enriched the Catholic Church it brings with it some challenges.

Much the same can be said of many of the international priests now ministering in Australian parishes. They are mostly younger. They are zealous. But they are often traditional and sometimes authoritarian, finding it difficult to work with parish councils and women pastoral associates. Because of their accents many parishioners find it hard to understand their homilies. A great deal of effort and planning needs to be put into programmes to welcome, enable and support overseas priests. Some dioceses are good at this, others are not. More consultation and preparation of the local priests and parishioners is essential.

The arrival of so many migrants and international priests is a significant change in the Australian Catholic Church bringing with it pain and possibilities which we do not fully appreciate. It demands serious reflection and planning beyond the scope of this paper. I would like to limit myself to discussing not the challenges but some possibilities for all of us, migrant and “local”, to live happily and creatively in the new multicultural Church that is developing.

The paper will situate this movement within its historical context and within the theology of migration. Finally it will highlight the possible contribution of migrants and especially international priests may make in helping to build a truly multicultural church.

## **II The Historical Context - The Great European Migration**

Andrew Walls<sup>xiv</sup> and Jehu Hanciles<sup>xv</sup> trace the massive growth in present day migration back to the great movement of Europeans from Europe into the developing world beginning in the 16th Century and lasting till mid-way through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Between 1800 and 1925 between 50 and 60 million Europeans migrated. In 1915 21% of Europeans lived outside of Europe.<sup>xvi</sup> We know this period as the time of colonisation. On this migration was built Europe’s economy and hegemony. Because of this migration we have the development of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States and less happily, Latin America, India, slavery and indentured labour.

However, since the 1960s the movement has reversed and now the movement is from “South” to “North”, from the developing countries to the developed. This applies also in Australia where the rise in non-European migration has been marked.

### **A missiological interpretation**

Although many missionaries may have been critical of colonialism most used its structures.<sup>xvii</sup> They were very successful in planting the church in Latin America, Africa and to some extent in Asia. The result being that we now have a thriving Non-Western Christianity and a predominantly “Southern” Church. Philip Jenkins claims that by 2025 approximately 60% of Catholics will live in Latin America and Africa and by 2050 80% of Catholics will live in or trace their origins to the Global South. Also by 2050 there will be 3 billion Christian of whom somewhere between 1/5 and 1/6 will be non-Hispanic whites. We already have a Pope from Latin America. The Church will be quite different to the one many of us were brought up in.

The direction of mission has also gone into reverse. Most missionaries, formal and informal, now come from the “South”. Many migrants see themselves as missionaries to a secular West in need of revitalisation in the faith. Today some of our most vibrant churches in Australia are ethnic churches. The future of the missionary movement is in the hands of these Southern missionaries.

Walls has written extensively on the serial nature of Christian history. Unlike Islam whose development has been linear, Christianity has always waxed and waned. Countries which have been “jewels in the Christian crown” are no longer. But Christianity has always moved on. This is because Christianity is essentially a religion that has to be incarnated, inculturated and translated. It must speak to the host culture or it wanes. Walls highlights 6 stages but in this paper I will concentrate on only three. The earliest “Church” was Jewish based largely in Jerusalem. But through persecution and the power of the Holy Spirit it spread and disciples from Cyprus took it to Antioch [Acts 11:19-20]. It was from there that the Church grew. The movement to Antioch came just in time because if it had not moved out of Jerusalem Christianity might have ended up as a footnote in Jewish history after the Romans destroyed the city in 70 AD. From Antioch Christianity spread throughout the Hellenist and Roman worlds but again might have disappeared with the decay of the Roman Empire except that the Holy Spirit had moved it on to the Irish Celts and the German Goths. They reconverted Europe and developed Christendom. Now, Walls claims, Christianity has moved from Europe and the North to the South and again just in time. It is in the South that the shape and future of Christianity will be worked out. Migrants and missionaries may be our major contact with this new life for Christianity.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **III The Theology of Migration**

Not only is migration part of the human DNA it is also at the heart of the Judaeo-Christian scriptures. “Migrant” or “pilgrim” is a “metaphor for the life of faith and distinctive feature in the divine plan”.<sup>xix</sup>

In the Old Testament God’s call comes frequently through migrants, foreigners and outsiders. There are the stories of “Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Ruth and Esther – not to mention major (defining) events like the Exodus or the Babylonian exile.”<sup>xx</sup>

“Abraham is celebrated as a model of faith among Christians precisely because he became a migrant.... Moses was migrant refugee when he stood before the “burning-bush”; and it was to a migrant people that the Law was given.”<sup>xxi</sup> And it was during the Exile in Babylon that Israel produced some of its most beautiful poetry and its most sensitive and universal understanding of salvation.

Just as during the Exodus Yahweh became a migratory God, walking with his people and residing in a tent, in the New Testament God reveals himself even more powerfully as a migrant. In the Incarnation, God becomes man. God empties himself and migrates to the human race. “The basic premise of a theology of migration is that God, in Jesus, so loved the world that he migrated into a far distant country of our broken human existence and laid down his life on a cross so that we could be reconciled to him and migrate back to our homeland with God and enjoy renewed fellowship at all levels of our relationships.”<sup>xxii</sup>

The New Testament is full of stories of migration. Jesus is born in Bethlehem because of a census. Joseph, Mary and Jesus flee into Egypt. Jesus spends his public ministry as an itinerant preacher who has nowhere to lay his head [Lk. 9:58]. The Acts of the Apostles portrays the early Christians as being scattered by persecution and spreading from Judea through Samaria, Antioch, and Asia Minor to Rome, so much so that they were known as people of the “way” [Acts 18:25-26; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14, 22].

### **Contribution of a Theology of Migration**

Given migrants and refugees are such a major part of our political life it is strange that there is so little theological reflection on migration here in Australia. We have a challenging tradition to draw on. Daniel Groody argues that the social sciences and theology need each other in discussing migrants and refugees. Social sciences contribute the data and many insights but “theology offers not just more information but a new imagination. It supplies a way of thinking about migration that keeps the human issues at the center of the debate and reminds us that our own existence as a pilgrim people is migratory in nature.”<sup>xxiii</sup> The role of theology is to enable us to look at things in a new way and to give hope and energy.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The deepest experiences of Israel, Jesus and the early Church were marked by migration. To be human means to be on the way to God. We are pilgrims in search of the Kingdom of God. In the Exodus we learn that the nature of God is to be liberator and lover of the poor and that we should welcome strangers because we too were once strangers [Ex 22:21-27]. We come to realise that we, the settled, might have something to learn about God, about ourselves and our needs, vulnerability and spirituality. “The human reality of the migrant challenges the experience of those who falsely assume they have absolute control of their land and their own destiny.”<sup>xxv</sup> We learn that “sovereign rights” are not absolute. They are subject to human rights and we should not limit compassion to our family or our national borders. We lose touch with our own vulnerability and endanger our own salvation when do not welcome the stranger.

### **The Church and migration**

Church’s mission is to break down the walls that divide, alienate, exclude, discriminate and dehumanise, to be a sign of the Kingdom of God. “In fact all should find ‘their homeland’ in the Church, for the Church is the mystery of God among men, the mystery of love shown by the Only-Begotten Son, especially in His death and resurrection, so that all “may have life, and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10), so that all may find strength to overcome every division

and act in such a way that differences do not lead to rifts but communion by welcoming others in their legitimate diversity.”<sup>xxvi</sup>

But the Church is not just a “homeland” it is also an instrument of God’s mission in the world. It should model to Australia that “plurality is a treasure, and dialogue is the as yet imperfect and ever evolving realization of that final unity to which humanity aspires and is called.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

*Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* believes migrants offer something to the local church, “Migrations offer individual local Churches the opportunity to verify their catholicity, which consists not only in welcoming different ethnic groups, but above all in creating communion with them and among them. Ethnic and cultural pluralism in the Church is not just something to be tolerated because it is transitory, it is a structural dimension.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

#### IV Culture as an essential part of being human

However, we cannot fully appreciate the contribution of migrants to the local church unless we have a deeper understanding of what culture is and greater appreciation for what is involved in crossing cultural boundaries.

Culture is largely unconscious. For all of us to live a productive and relaxed life we have to take many things for granted. We could not cope with having to make original, imaginative judgements in every decision we make each day. Culture is the pattern of assumptions that limit our choices, pre-programme us and make life possible precisely because they are largely unconscious. As Edward Hill reminded us in *The Silent Language*, “Culture hides as much as it reveals and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants.”

Edgar Schein defines culture as, “the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.”<sup>xxix</sup> Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman once described the process of socialisation as one of externalisation [a group tries to make sense of or put an order on their environment], of objectification [this order then becomes part of reality, “that’s just the way things are”] and finally of internalisation [it becomes part of us and we will even teach it to others without knowing the reason why].<sup>xxx</sup> In other words a group puts an order on its environment and then proceeds to take it for granted not appreciating the power it has over their lives.

#### A parable<sup>xxxi</sup>

I once heard a parable that illustrates this process well. Many centuries ago a tribe lived in a mountainous region where there were also many lions. Often at night the lions would attack the weak and elderly on the edge of the village. The tribe met to decide how they could cope with this problem. They decided to build a fence around the village with one gate. But because no one in particular was responsible for closing the gate, it was often left open and people were still being killed. They met again and decided that the second son of each family would take it in turns to close the gate. This worked well and no more people were killed. But about a hundred years later they had killed all the lions. Two hundred years later no one in the village could remember that there had ever been lions in the area, but, second sons were

still closing the gate each evening and when they asked why, their fathers replied, “That is just the way things are”. These sons in turn taught their sons. What was an eminently sensible plan persisted long after its *raison d’être* disappeared. And after several more decades the tribe would probably have invented a spiritual reason, totally unrelated to lions, as to why they closed the gate.

### **The power of culture**

The power of culture is that it is unconsciously absorbed and rarely questioned. It makes society and life possible by limiting our choices. But culture is a partial view of the environment and only *a* way of being human, not *the* way of being human. It is not the best and only way of doing things. Unfortunately most people don’t become aware of this until they have to live among people of another culture.

Our culture influences how we feel about God and when, where and how often we relate to God. It influences what we think is holy, what is sin, what is good ritual? And how we think of and feel about family, community, authority, celebration, recreation, body, sexuality, spirit, suffering and death. Culture determines what is important and relevant, what is thinkable or unthinkable. It shapes our questions and determines how satisfactory answers will be.

Culture is the framework within which we will inevitably situate everything we come to know. There is a Latin saying which illustrates this. *Quid quid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*. [Whatever is received will be received according to the mode of the receiver.] People can only hear, remember and apply what makes sense to them. Unfortunately in our Western and more individual-centred society our emphasis in communication is mostly on the speaker conveying his or her message. But in many group-oriented cultures the emphasis is more on the listener and what they can hear.

We could learn much from this listener-centred approach if we want to speak to the hopes and fears of our people, because unless the Gospel is understood, it cannot be meaningful and appeal to conversion.

### **The pain and gain in crossing cultural boundaries – another parable<sup>xxxii</sup>**

Imagine again a tribe living in a valley in the mountains. This tribe has a rule, which if you break, you are banished from the village. Fred has been banished for a month, but after a week he becomes bored and he does something no one in his tribe has ever done before. He climbs over the mountains where he meets a previously unknown tribe. They welcome him into their village. At first Fred finds it difficult there. The people are good to him but they have strange and even “immoral” customs. Slowly he comes to like them and he stays about six months. Nevertheless it is not home so eventually he returns back over the mountain to his own people. Now the trouble begins. After an initial welcome the tribespeople and elders become angry with him for all his questions. But worse still his experiences and especially his questions have isolated him. He wants to be there, but he feels cut off by his intellectual awakening. He no longer shares the same taken-for-granted. He has questions that no one appreciates. He wants to talk about the other village and no one wants to listen. Fred becomes lonelier and angrier because no one seems to understand in his home village and it is no use returning to the other village because will be the same there.

This, of course, is part of reverse culture shock. The only successful resolution is when Fred comes to the realisation that he, his tribe and the other tribe all have limitations, and that



while his tribe might not be perfect it does have a valid human way of living and real achievements, issues and needs. If he can successfully manage crossing cultural boundaries he will end up with greater insight and tolerance, increased sensitivities and an expanded humanity. He will be a resource for his tribe.

## **V Birth pangs of a new Australia and new Australian Church**

Given the historically unprecedented movement of migrants and the evidence of several Australian Censuses, we are clearly at the beginning of multi-ethnic if not multicultural future [one where there will be unity and a positive acceptance of difference]. You only have to catch a capital city train or visit a university campus to realise that our future is going to be vastly different to what it used to be. Most can see this but unfortunately there has been little systematic reflection on how to plan for a happy and satisfying future for the Church.

### **We all have a vital role to play**

We all, Australian and overseas born, have a vital role to play in building a truly multicultural church. We need each other's energies and more importantly visions to correct, enlarge and focus our own and help build a unified community with positive respect for our different cultures and contributions. We all need to change and grow because we can only become fully human together.

### **International priests as a resource**

Much can be said about the pros and cons of inviting international priests to work in Australia but instead of entering that debate, I would like to propose a vision that might help us to see these programmes in a new and more enabling light. I believe we can make a breakthrough if we learn to look at these priests in a new way. Normally we regard them as priests to fill gaps in diocesan sacramental programmes. This is important but sells them and their possible contribution short. If they can successfully negotiate crossing into Australian culture they will have sensitivities and insights for building a truly multicultural church that no local person can have unless they too cross similar boundaries. We should value them for their difference and not make them just like us. That would be impossible, unethical and a wasted resource.<sup>xxxiii</sup> "Since culture, although a human product, is so essential to our very humanity, to take away a person's culture is to damage a person grievously. It is a denial of an important aspect of who we are."<sup>xxxiv</sup> Our goal should be to help them live happily and minister creatively in Australia without losing their integrity. That is a more valuable missionary role than filling pastoral gaps.

International priests also see themselves primarily as parish priests. So the challenge to them is to also be missionaries in the fullest sense of that word. As we have seen, we are all enculturated beings. We believe that our way of doing things is *the human*, moral and best way of doing things. We tend to carry our church of origin, with its assumptions, ways of doing things, roles and traditions around with us. We will see, hear and judge our new church from that framework. Being human we "can do no other", until we learn the limitations of our way of doing things and the strengths of the local culture. As missionaries, we are guests and should learn to live on our hosts' terms. We must learn to respond to local needs. We must be conscious that although we may be perfectly logical in making judgements according to our terms we may be wrong because we just don't fully understand what is going on. Sensitive missionaries are slow to judgement and recognise their need for a local mentor. We should be learners constantly searching for meaning in the local's terms.<sup>xxxv</sup>

### **Acculturation for all**

Undoubtedly there will be successes and misunderstandings for the local church in being a good host. It is not always easy to be welcoming, supportive and understanding especially of people who may be suffering from culture shock, are not suitable for overseas mission or who have come here unwillingly.

One of the weaknesses in our present programmes for welcoming and enabling international priests is that they are frequently run for the international priests alone. This only makes for resentment among the international priests, who question why they alone need education, and ignores the fact that local priests, parishioners and especially parish staff are also challenged by their arrival. Programmes should be organised to include local clergy and laity so that they can understand culture and what is involved in welcoming international priests. Such programmes should include the basics of cross-cultural communication and encourage structures for friendship, support and dialogue.

### **Fuller life for us, the hosts**

The tendency in migration is for the hosts to think they have little to learn and don't have to change. However, exposure to other cultures can be an opportunity for profound personal learning, for a deeper insight into us, for learning greater tolerance and for developing increased freedom and ability to love. Engagement with our migrant brothers and sisters will help us develop the ability to listen to minorities, cultural awareness and the cultural competence we need for mission in Australia today. It will also provide us with a link and exposure to the Third World church where the Holy Spirit is clearly saying something.

Personally, it will expand our humanity and offer us the opportunity for a happy, creative and full Christian life. We must accept Pope Francis' challenge to become pilgrims, to go out onto the streets. We have a worthy and exciting mission to welcome migrants and model for Australia unity in diversity. It will put us in touch with the poor. We may end up "bruised, hurting and dirty" but we will be happily alive.

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<sup>i</sup> Pastoral Care for Migrants Itinerant People, *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi*. Vatican City: 2004 #12

<sup>ii</sup> Tulus Cruz, Gemma. *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 1 [Quoting the International Organisation for Migrations' World Migration Report]

<sup>iii</sup> UNHCR statement <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-6-20/number-of-forcibly-displaced-people-hits-51...>

<sup>iv</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Cultural Diversity - Reflecting a Nation: Stories from the 2011 Census*. 2013

<sup>v</sup> Hanciles, Jehu J.. "Migration and Mission: The Religious Significance of the North-South Divide" in *Mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission*. eds. Walls, Andrew & Ross, Cathy. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008) 124

<sup>vi</sup> Hughes, Philip. "The Impact of Recent Immigration on Religious Groups in Australia," *Pointers* Vol. 22 No. 4 2012 1

<sup>vii</sup> Hughes 2012. 3

<sup>viii</sup> Figures prepared by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference [ACBC] Pastoral Research Office from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Censuses of Population and Housing. [www.pro.catholic.org.au](http://www.pro.catholic.org.au)

<sup>ix</sup> Figures prepared by the ACBC Pastoral Research Office from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census data.

<sup>x</sup> Hughes, Philip, Fraser, Margaret & Reid Stephen (2012 a). *Australia's Religious Communities: Facts and Figures from the 2011 Australian Census and other sources*. (Nunawading Vic: Christian Research Association, 2012) 35

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- xxxv Cf. Gittins, Anthony. *Ministry at the Margins: Strategy and Spirituality for Mission* especially Chapter 3, "Sense and Nonsense: Understanding Other People" (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).