

One reason why some people voted for Brexit was because of the so-called “immigrant problem.” It is reported that 1.5 million immigrants in London, for example, voted for Brexit because “so many immigrants have come from Europe that Asian people are losing their jobs,” shopkeeper Harry Singh told *Channel 4 News*.<sup>1</sup> For Christians, however, the dilemma is in applying the Old Testament mandate: “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, the UK had 8.5 million immigrants, the fifth largest number in the world, and 13% of its population. The largest four were the US (47 million and 14% of population), Germany (12 million; 15%), Russia (12 million; 8%) and Saudi Arabia (10 million; 32%).<sup>3</sup> Canada was 7<sup>th</sup> on the list with 22% of its population as immigrants; it accepts a quarter of a million every year who are regarded as “vital for Canada’s future.”<sup>4</sup> The same might be said by some for the UK.

The UN estimated that at the end of 2013 there were 232 million international immigrants,<sup>5</sup> 3% of the world’s population, but the number will have increased to over 250 million by 2017 if present growth trends continue. In this context, “diaspora missiology” has become increasingly important, as more and more people groups are being dispersed throughout the entire globe.<sup>6</sup>

The British Social Attitudes’ Survey is an annual study based on interviews across a random sample of several thousand households. Their 2014 report included answers to questions asked about immigration.<sup>7</sup> Some people felt that immigrants took jobs away from British-born people (50% in 2013 compared to 43% in 2003) and increased the crime rate (43% to 37%), but others felt they improved British society with new ideas (40% to 33%) and were generally good for Britain’s economy (32% to 21%). Answers did not include the stimulus they give to church life in the UK!

In a YouGov survey for the 2014 Westminster Faith Debates, Anglican clergy were asked how Britain had most benefited from immigration. Their three top answers were: broader global horizons (73%), culture (69%), and greater tolerance (66%). How had Britain suffered from immigration? The top answers were: housing (29%), public services (25%) and crime (22%), but a third (30%) did not believe Britain had suffered in any way at all.<sup>8</sup>

### **Numbers of UK immigrants**

The number coming into the UK doubled during the years 1997 to 2004 from 300,000 a year to 600,000. It remained at about that level until 2011, dropped to half a million in 2012, but has risen since then, which might partly explain the Brexit vote. Emigration has been declining since 2008. Details are given in Table 14.7.2 in this volume, and Figure 14.6.6 graphs the changes.

The difference between the immigration and emigration figures gives a measure of the increase in our population other than through births and deaths.

Between 1995 and 2000 this averaged	96,000 people a year,
between 2000 and 2005 it was	175, 000 people a year,
between 2005 and 2010, it was	200,000 people a year, and
between 2010 and 2015, it was	265,000 people a year.

265,000 extra people a year is over a million people in 4 years, making a significant contribution to UK population growth.

About a third of those coming to the UK are students, who will stay for 3 or 4 years and then return. Some say their numbers should not be included under “immigrants”, but for Christians they represent a wonderful opportunity to share their faith with those who often previously had little or no contact with it. Students also explain why so many of the immigrants, 42%, are aged between 15 and 24, although not quite all of these (4%) are students. It is also important to note, however, that a further 45% of immigrants, almost half, are between 25 and 44, the age period when many become parents. A fifth, 21%, of immigrants come to a definite job, while 13% come looking for work, and a further 13% simply to join their family.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the immigrants come to London where the population has increased almost exactly by 1 million people between the Census years of 2001 (7,172,000) and 2011 (8,173,000). Of this increase three-fifths, 58%, were from non-Christian religions,<sup>10</sup> of which two-thirds, 69%, were Muslim.

### **Churches in London**

The number of churches grew in London from 3,900 in 1998 to 4,100 by 2005 and to 4,800 by 2012, a growth which is continuing but at a much slower pace (4,930 estimated total for 2017). Why did this huge growth, which was accompanied by a similar huge increase in the number of churchgoers (from 620,000 in 2005 to 720,000 in 2012), occur? One key answer was the rapid increase in the number of Black and Minority Ethnic Churches (BMECs) in this period. About a quarter, 24%, of all churches (and churchgoers) in London are in this group.

Many black people, that is, those who mostly come from Africa and the West Indies, have been in Britain for decades, and some families are now in their third or even fourth generation. They were immigrants initially even though now they are naturalised British citizens. However, in the late 1980s and 1990s a new wave of black immigrants, especially

from the West African countries of Nigeria and Ghana, came to the UK in what has since been called a “reverse mission” movement. Christian denominations in West Africa seeing the decline of Christianity in Britain, felt they should seek to re-evangelise their “mother country” who had brought the Gospel to them originally two centuries before, and so encouraged their members to migrate.

Some of these reverse mission denominations have been spectacularly successful in starting and growing churches, usually more from among other black immigrants than white people, though the latter are always warmly welcomed. Denominations like the Redeemed Christian Church of God have started 700 churches in the UK in the last 20 years and have a church in at least two-thirds, 64%, of the towns in Britain. Others starting in the same period include the Deeper Life Bible Church, Mountain of Fire Ministries, Potter’s House Christian Fellowship, Church of Pentecost, all Pentecostal churches which work alongside the more traditional New Testament Church of God, United Pentecostal Church of Great Britain, Assemblies of God, Elim, the Apostolic Church and the Church of God of Prophecy. Hillsong is also a newcomer to the British scene but originated in Australia, now worshipping in the Dominion Theatre in London. As a consequence of the BMEC enthusiastic church planting and church growth work, almost half of all the worshippers in Inner London were black in 2012, 48%. See Figure 13.10.2.

The Roman Catholic church saw a slight increase in its numbers in London between 2005 and 2012, against decline elsewhere, largely because of immigration from European Catholic countries, especially Poland. Polish is now the most common language spoken in Britain after English, but the Poles have dispersed throughout the country so their impact on London is relatively small. In the London Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster a spectacular number of new Catholic Chaplaincies have been formed ministering to those speaking different languages, as given in the Table below, with an estimated total Mass attendance of over 20,000 people in 2015:

Table 16.5.1: Languages and Groups of Roman Catholic Chaplaincies in London, 2012

Albanian-Kosovan	Irish prisoners	Romanian
Brazilian	Italian Church	Slovak and Czech
Caribbean	Italian Mission	Slovene
Chinese	Japanese	Spanish
Congolese	Keralan/Malayalam	Sri-Lankan (Sinhalese)
Croatian	Korean	Sri-Lankan (Tamil)
Filipino	Latin American	Traveller, Gypsy and Roma
French	Lithuanian St Casimir	Vietnamese
German	Maltese	Zambian
Ghanian	Nigerian	Zimbabwean
Goan	Polish	Others
Hungarian	Portuguese	

### Churches elsewhere in England

While London has taken the main impact of initial immigration into the UK, immigrants subsequently have been dispersed all over the country, and in other cities besides London Christian immigrants have started to attend existing churches or begun their own. The number of non-white worshippers in English churches has only been measured in 1998 and 2005, as well as in London in 2012. If the increase seen in London in these years was replicated elsewhere (due to dispersal, family additions, etc) then the number of non-white worshippers in England *outside London* would be as shown in Figure 13.10.1, and indicates that roughly London accounts for half the non-white worshippers in England. Putting it another way, there are about as many non-white churchgoers outside London in total as there are in London. In 2017 non-white churchgoers formed a quarter, 26%, of total English church attendance.

It is the Home counties which have absorbed many of the London immigrants (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent and Surrey, along with Bedfordshire), and had between them taken in 67,000 immigrants or 13% of the churchgoing immigrants in 2005 (London was 43% of the total). Other major cities like Birmingham (with 6% of churchgoing immigrants in 2005), Manchester (4%), Nottingham (2%) and the West Yorkshire towns of Leeds and Wakefield (3%), all had five-figure numbers. Smaller towns/counties like Bristol, Cambridge, Hampshire, Lancashire, Leicester, Sheffield, Staffordshire (including Stoke) and Tyneside collectively took another 10%, leaving the remaining 19% to be scattered across the rest of England, no county without any, although there were very few in Herefordshire or the Isle of Wight.<sup>11</sup> Details are given in the Table on Page 13.11. A study of internal migration within Britain concluded that the key characteristic of migrants was demographic not geographical.<sup>12</sup>

### Is “Reverse Mission” working?

Not all of the BMEC churchgoers have acclimatised to British culture, nor do they always understand it, and see fewer successful attempts at evangelism as a consequence. Many immigrant children, for example, spend time in their own communities, apart from going to school, and lacking Western cultural knowledge will find effective communication of the Gospel difficult. There is also the prejudice of the average non-Christian white person who will resent being “evangelised” by a black person, regarding it as presumptuous (“we already have our own white churches and services if we want them” and “why should black people think they can teach us anything when we gave them Christianity in the first place?”).

At the same time, it is important that the traditional churches embrace the immigrant Christians, and at least catch their enthusiasm for sharing the faith. In the 1998 and 2005 English Church Censuses churches were asked what percentage of their congregation was non-white. The result, with an estimated projection to 2015, is given in Table 13.10.2, also including Scotland.

The declining percentage in the “0%” column suggests that more congregations are seeing a greater mix of nationalities among them, although the rate of change is slow, and almost half the churches in the country are still entirely white British. Perhaps more non-white Christians should be included among the leadership of the various denominations. We talk of gender-equality; should the church move more to ethnic-equality?<sup>13</sup> Looking at the other side of the coin, in view of the enormous cultural differences, should co-operation and partnership rather than integration be the initial step in black/white interchurch relationships?

### ***Immigrant Churches in Scotland***

The broad pattern seen in England is to a large extent replicated in Scotland, as shown by the Scottish Church Census of 2016. While the number of churchgoers has declined slightly more rapidly than in England (-2.7% per annum against -2.5% for England), growth is taking place in three groups of churches: Messy Churches (part of “Fresh Expressions”), Pentecostal Churches (which includes many Protestant immigrant churches), and Catholic immigrant churches, especially among the Polish.

Roman Catholic church numbers decreased as did other denominations between 2002 and 2016, but they grew 9% in Aberdeenshire, because of Polish immigrants. There are 27 Polish churches in Scotland, all but a few new since 2002. Where are they located? There is one in Dundee, one in Edinburgh, but 25 in Aberdeen (11) or in the Aberdeenshire countryside (14) among the postcodes immediately to the west of Aberdeen, because many Polish labourers are working in the oil industry of north-east Scotland. There are also Polish language Masses for congregations in Glasgow.<sup>14</sup>

The Protestant Pentecostal churches have seen considerable growth, tripling in number from nearly 6,000 in 1984 to almost 19,000 by 2016, when they were 5% of all churchgoers (only 1% in 1984). Pentecostals are predominantly Evangelical (95%) and two-fifths would describe themselves as Charismatic. Why do they grow, and so fast (a rate of +4% per annum)? This question was not asked in the Census but Dionne Gravesande, one-time Chair of the (now closed) Afro-Caribbean Evangelical Alliance, speaking to the Global Connections Council, gave the following answers to the question:<sup>15</sup>

- “Mission is more important than justice,” she said, acknowledging that some black people are discriminated against by the local government, but put evangelism before getting their rights. This *primacy of mission* has been key in spurring the huge increase in London’s Pentecostalism.
- Black Majority Churches are very *relational*, and very *generous* in their giving. They react to poverty issues, especially on the global scene and readily give money to help. Many travel overseas and see impoverishment first hand, and their whole attitude becomes changed.
- They expect to be given *practical as well as theological teaching* in their church on life style, what the gospel is, how to witness, family life, transmission of the faith to the next generation, the importance of their community, being distinctively different at work, giving stories of changed lives, black history, and so on. They expect much from their pastors and generally pay them well (more than white ministers!).
- They make a huge investment in IT, often *using the latest communications* methods and technological resources. (I once visited Kingsway International’s 10,000 seater Christian Centre; wherever you sat you could see a screen and hear everything that was being said on the platform).

Not all the Pentecostal churches are made up of immigrants, and some immigrant churches are not Pentecostal. The latter were grouped together as “Overseas National Churches,” although these excluded the Roman Catholic and Orthodox, the latter very small in Scotland but almost exclusively immigrant. These Overseas National churchgoers grew by 10% from 3,700 in 1984 to 4,100 in 2016, when they were just over 1% of all churchgoers. How many of the above reasons for the growth of BMEC churches given above apply to them is not known. Details of some of the many changes in numbers of overseas nationals are given in Table 11.4.3.

### ***So what does all this say?***

Immigration is a worldwide occurrence, unlikely to change significantly in the foreseeable future. On the whole in the UK, the general population is fairly favourably disposed towards immigrants, though there are pockets of strong resistance and even antagonism. From a spiritual viewpoint, perhaps two-fifths of immigrants would claim to be Christian, and some of that translates itself into attending church. Some immigrant churches help foster fellowship among people of a common language while others become welcoming communities open to all.

The Director of the National Church Life Survey in Australia said that, as in the UK, their non-Western churches are generally growing, illustrating “reverse mission.” “Cross-culture” work thus takes on different meanings from “West → East”. Old and young present quite different cultural models, both for immigrants and national churches. Churches

are using the following strategies in their witness:

- They help make positive contacts between the different groups
- They engage in intentional cross-cultural church planting
- They release younger people into mission
- They support mono-cultural church communities while they transition

Part of that reaching out is sharing their church property with other groups; 21% of Australian churches do this, exactly the same percentage as London's churches which let another congregation use their premises.<sup>16</sup>

London has seen a very large number of immigrant churches started in the last decade, but other cities across the country, and in parts of Scotland, have also seen like growth if on a smaller scale. In some places such churches form a secure base for evangelism to other immigrants (especially Muslims in countries like Germany), though thus far few immigrant churches have been successful in winning white non-churchgoing British people.

## Notes

1) *Sunday Express*, 21<sup>st</sup> August 2016.

2) Leviticus chapter 19 verse 34.

3) Article "Global Trends in the North American Church in Mission" in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*, OMSC, Vol 40, Issue 4, Oct 2016, Page 331.

4) Article "Christian Churches and Immigrant Support in Canada" in *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 58, No 4, December 2016, Page 497.

5) *Population Facts*, No 2013/2, Sept 2013, United Nations, Dept of Economic and Social Affairs, latest report in Feb 2017.

6) Article "A Diaspora Mission Strategy for Local Churches," Global Diaspora Network, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Vol 53 No 1, 2016, Billy Graham Center for Evangelism.

7) *British Social Attitudes* No 31, NatCen, 2014 edition.

8) University of Lancaster and Westminster Faith debates, YouGov, August 2014.

9) Percentages from Office for National Statistics Migration Statistics.

10) Actual total was 584,912 people, of whom 405,740 were Muslim.

11) Percentages based on figures in *Religious Trends* No 6, 2006/2007, Christian Research, London, 2006, Section 12.

12) Understanding Internal Migration in Britain at the Start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Adam Dennett, PhD Thesis for the University of Leeds, School of Geography, 2010.

13) Article in *FutureFirst*, No 41, October 2015.

14) The Fourth Scottish Church Census, The Results Unveiled, Brierley Consultancy, Feb 2017, Table A3.16.

15) Talk "Understanding and interpreting missions in the Black Christian community" on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2006.

16) Extract from talk by Prof Ruth Powell at the Lausanne International Researchers' Conference, Kuala Lumpur, May 2015.