

Shifting from Multicultural Church to  
Intercultural Ecclesiology

# Being Intercultural People of God



# The Multicultural Church Debate

Big Idea: The future of the Christian church in North America will lie with multicultural churches (Mark DeYmaz, Soong-Chan Rah)

## Reasons:

- Changing demographic diversity
- Changing views of mission activity from the “West to the Rest” to “Missions at our doorstep”
- Increased migration provides an opportunity to reflect Revelation 7:9 as a kingdom reality in our time




# The Multicultural Church Debate

“Over the past century [the twentieth century] ... the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward to Africa, Asia, and Latin America... Christianity should enjoy a worldwide boom in the new century, but the vast majority of believers will be neither white nor European, nor Euro-American.” – *Phil Jenkins, The Next Christendom*

# The Multicultural Church Debate

“While applauding this vision, supporting the effort, and sympathizing with the intercultural struggles that inevitably arise, I would like to take issue with those who promote this form of local church as more in conformity with the New Testament ideal than other less ethnically diverse churches.” – *Dr. Mark Naylor, Coordinator of the Centre for Intercultural Leadership Development at Northwest Baptist Seminary*

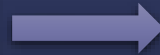


To summarize his contention, Naylor’s primary issue lies with upholding multicultural congregations as the *true* church over and against monocultural congregations; promoting an “either/or” approach instead of the Body of Christ as *both* universal church *and* local congregation which allows for a “multicultural” expression of the Christian faith.

# The Multicultural Church Debate

## Obedience to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)

- The growing diversity of Canada makes “making disciples of all nations” within reach to all Canadian Christians, especially to nations which are closed to Christian missionaries



*“Why aren’t there more multicultural churches per capita in Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal, where most immigrants settle?”*

# The Multicultural Church Debate

- Multiculturalism as an ontological reality and social policy has been incorporated into mainstream evangelical Canadian Christian churches which promotes the preservation of said congregation's ethno-cultural and denominational heritage.
- This is because Canadian multiculturalism acknowledges that people of many cultures have shaped the development of Canada and continue to have a role in its evolution as a nation, and each culture is worth protecting.
- Thus, Canada's multicultural policy which promotes tolerance and accommodation creates a false solidarity amongst Christians in Canada, promoting instead *Christian ethnocentrism coupled with a historical legacy of ethnic marginalization*.

# The Multicultural Church Debate

“Curiously, the churches in the host society have always been the initiators of spiritual movements in societies in other parts of the world. But when people from those other countries come to the host country, the church in the host society frequently become afraid. It is unable or unwilling to cross the barriers in its own multicultural society.” – *Ronald Kowano, The Global City*

## Definitions of Multiculturalism (Konieczny and Wan):

- (Descriptive) Multiculturalism is the recognition that a variety of cultures co-exist in a given context
- (Ideology) Multiculturalism is the procedural and substantive principles ordering a multi-cultural society
- (Ideology w/ Power) Multiculturalism is “primarily a movement for change” that involves theoretical analysis and the development of a conceptual framework to challenge the “cultural hegemony of the dominant ethnic group”

## Canada's Journey Towards Multiculturalism

# Canada's Journey Towards Multiculturalism

What is Canadian Multiculturalism?

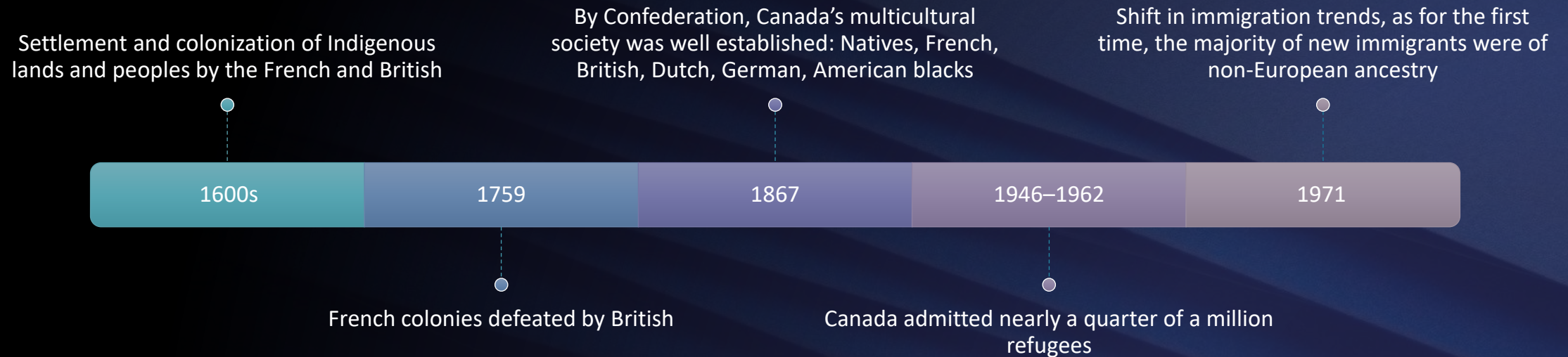
- i) it is a social policy solution to diversity in Canada
- ii) multiculturalism draws out the best of its residents
- iii) these strengths will benefit everyone

Bill C-93 passed on July 21, 1988 recognizes the cultural diversity of Canada, states that Canadians are free to *preserve and share their cultural heritage* [italics mine], and affirm that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of Canadian identity.

“Whereas the Constitution of Canada provides that every individual is **equal** before and under the law and has the **right** to the **equal** protection and benefit of the law without discrimination and that everyone has the **freedom** of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association and guarantees those **rights** and **freedoms** equally to male and female persons.”- *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*

## Canada's Journey Towards Multiculturalism

# Canada's Journey Towards Multiculturalism



# Forging an Intercultural Ecclesiology

## Problem with Multiculturalism:

- Stating a multicultural policy does not mean that every person is multicultural
- Multiculturalism undermines the cohesion and shared identity that a society needs (assimilation vs. acculturation/"melting pot" vs. "Salad bowl")
- Multiculturalist provisions privilege to some communities at the expense of others, and depart from the liberal-democratic ideal of equal treatment for all individuals

# Forging an Intercultural Ecclesiology

Problems with immigrants (which includes global Christians) expressed as:

- choose to speak their own ethnic languages or wear traditional dresses in public
- ignorant of Canadian cultural practices
- unwilling to “act like Canadians”

Conclusion:

- theology of multiculturalism is eschatological in nature (Revelation 5:9; 7:9)

Contention:

Should the Apostle John's vision of "unity in diversity" only to be experienced in the eschaton where racism, ethnocentrism and prejudice no longer exist; then what is the point for the Apostle Paul to call for sanctification and transformation of the mind, forming a new humanity, and addressing gender, socio-economic and ethnic prejudice?

## Forging an Intercultural Ecclesiology

# Forging an Intercultural Ecclesiology

“Although multiculturalism is a great step towards accepting cultural and linguistic difference, the concern is that people will end up forming islands within the same community while avoiding deep engagement with one another.” – *Safwar Marzouk, Intercultural Church*

“An intercultural church is a church that fosters a just diversity, integrates different cultural articulations of faith and worship, and embodies in the world an alternative to the politics of assimilation and segregation.” – *Safwar Marzouk, Intercultural Church*

## Conclusion:

In an age of increasing xenophobia, discrimination and racism, the *ecclesia* or the ones called out by God, must present a different answer to the problem of diversity (not that diversity is a problem)... The disciples as *ecclesia*, were called out from Jerusalem to be witnesses of the Good News, crossing ethnic, social and religious barriers in order to establish an intercultural relationship with God.

Genesis 11:1-9, Ruth 1:16-18, Isaiah 55:5; 56:4-8, Matthew 28:19-21, Acts 2:1-13, Acts 10:34, Galatians 3:26-29, Ephesians 2:11-22, Ephesians 4:4-6, Colossians 3:11, Revelation 5:9, Revelation 7:9

# Forging an Intercultural Ecclesiology

# Forging an Intercultural Ecclesiology

## Conclusion:

The Body of Christ was not called to be tolerant or accommodating, and least of all to co-exist with one another... Rather, the Body as God's New humanity is a diverse community, called out from our ethnocentrism as witnesses to the power of God to redeem and restore broken relationships with Him and one another in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith reality.