Guest Editorial

Migrants and migration have impacted the cause of God from the early millennia of human history. Early biblical history records the separation of the human race through language and ultimately through distance and the evolution of culture. Genesis chapter eleven records the words of God during the building of the Tower of Babel, who said, “Let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” From this point people began to separate. However, it is the coming together again that too often causes friction, tension, and misunderstanding.

Even though biblical records clearly show that an act of God caused the separation of peoples, it also clearly shows that an act of God also causes the unification of peoples. When God called Abram he told him to leave his country, his people, and his father’s household and go to a land that was foreign to him (Gen 12:1). God further extended his cause by causing Abraham’s grandson, Jacob and his family to leave their new-found home and settle in the land of Egypt for 430 years where they found temporary acceptance with food and accommodation provided for them. Their eventual return to Canaan was a migration phenomenon that astounded the world and has shaped the course of history. This newly formed nation occupied a land that was foreign to them; the Israelites lived among people that were different from them, and they practiced a religion that was antagonistic to the existing culture. But God still intended for them to become a blessing to all nations around them.

The phenomenal impact of immigration is also demonstrated in the New Testament in the spreading of the gospel to the then known world. After the stoning of Stephen, Acts chapter seven records that a great persecution broke out against the Christian believers in Jerusalem and, as a result, they were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). Some “travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews” (Acts 11:19). As one looks at Christian history one will notice the trends and the impact that immigration has had on the spread of the gospel. From the persecution of the Waldensians and the Huguenots in France to the flight of the Pilgrim Fathers on the Mayflower to the east coast of North America, it is demonstrated that people have travelled and have brought their culture and religion with them.
Soon after the Second World War former colonial empire nations faced the brunt of having to deal with the impact of immigration on their nations and economies. Britain, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal faced the challenge of having to receive an influx of immigrants from their former colonies who were given rights to settle in the “mother lands.” These immigrants came from the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and South America, some by invitation from host nations to boost their post-war economies and others purely as a means of finding a more comfortable life for themselves and their families.

Over the past fifteen to twenty years the membership of the European Union (EU) has allowed citizens of the twenty-seven member countries the right to travel, work, and settle freely in any country of their choosing within the EU. This freedom has created in some of the post-colonial countries a new wave of immigration which has superseded the trends caused by post-colonial immigration. The number of immigrants from countries within the EU has exceeded the expectation of many European governments and measures are being taken to restrict the flow, purely for economic reasons and to satisfy the outcry of many activists. As well as stemming the flow of immigrants into their countries governments are also concerned about the integration of these immigrants into their respective societies for the sake of unity and social harmony.

The work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe has been impacted by the immigration phenomenon. The articles in this issue of the Journal of Adventist Mission Studies on the impact of immigration on evangelism will demonstrate that this impact is viewed by some as being quite positive and by others as being very negative. The articles in this issue raise important questions as to how the church should address the challenges faced and also how the church can take advantage of this apparently uncontrollable phenomenon and channel its energies for the furtherance of the cause of God. As the writers have intimated, the answers are not clear-cut. Immigration often presents challenges which the church is not prepared to receive. Governments have set up think tanks and advisory committees in order to address the present and anticipated challenges caused by immigration but the church seems to be somewhat blasé and ends up being reactive rather than pro-active. Immigration is not a new phenomenon; it has been with us for millennia. What can we learn from its history? How can we manage its impact on society for the good of the gospel?

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