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**abstract**

The history of the United States and Canada is a story of migration. While many waves of early migrants came from Christianized European countries, the past several decades have revealed many contemporary migrants coming from Asian, African, and Middle Eastern contexts where Evangelicals are small in number. While certainly there is a great influx of migrants from Latin American contexts, there are also large numbers of migrants coming to the U. S. and Canada representing some of the world's least reached peoples. In this article, I attempt to describe their numbers and offer a theological and missiological response to this present reality. Portions of this article are taken from my forthcoming book *The Strangers Next Door: Global Migration and the Great Commission Opportunity for You and Your Church* (tentative title, Paternoster).

The history of humanity is the history of migration. Ever since the exodus from the Garden (Gen 3:23–24), people have been on the move. With globalization, however, migration is now a global phenomenon occurring at a rapid rate and with massive numbers of people. In their excellent book, *The Age of Migration*, Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller note that international migration is expected to

continue.<sup>1</sup> While there are numerous sociological, anthropological, and economic theories behind such mass movements of people, as kingdom citizens, we must recognize that the hand of the Sovereign Lord is involved in the process. The migration of peoples to other nations is no serendipitous occurrence. Such is particularly true with the migration of the world's least reached people groups to areas of the world where they can freely encounter the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this article is to help you recognize that for many years the Lord has been bringing peoples across the globe to western nations where the gospel can be shared freely. I will share some of the present numerical realities regarding the migration of peoples in general and to western nations in particular, but the focus in this article will be on the United States and Canada. I want you to be aware of the countries from which the peoples are coming—lands home to many of the world's unreached peoples. I will offer a brief theological discussion of migration. From this understanding I want to set before you the need to make disciples of such peoples, equip, partner with them, and send them across the globe as church planters among their kith and kin. As a corollary matter, it is also my hope that this article will expose you to the nascent category of missiology today known as "diaspora missiology."<sup>2</sup>

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## **global statistics**

Recently, the United Nations released a global assessment on international migration with the following key findings:

- In 2005, international migrants numbered approximately 191 million, 3 percent of the world's population.
- Between 1990–2005, the world gained 36 million international migrants, with developed countries absorbing most of the increase.
- In 2005, developed countries hosted 60 percent of all international migrants (115 million), up from 53 percent in 1990.
- Between 1990–2005, the major increases in international migrants occurred in Northern America (17 million) and Europe (15 million).
- In 2005, the United States hosted the largest number of migrants (38 million), followed by the Russian Federation (12 million), and Germany (10 million).

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. revised and updated (New York: the Guilford Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>2</sup> The first time I heard the words "diaspora missiology" was in an Evangelical Missiological Society meeting with Enoch Wan speaking. I consider him the leading expert in this area of missiology today. In the *EMS Occasional Bulletin* published in the Spring 2007, Wan wrote an article titled "Diaspora Missiology" in which he defines it as "the systematic and academic study of the phenomenon of diaspora in the fulfillment of God's mission" (3).

- In 2005, countries with at least 20 million inhabitants where international migrants constituted high proportions of the population included Australia (20 percent), Canada (19 percent), France (11 percent), Germany (12 percent), Saudi Arabia (26 percent), Spain (11 percent), Ukraine (15 percent), and the United States (13 percent).<sup>3</sup>

On the following table, note the number of western nations making the list of countries with the largest numbers of migrants. The United States accounts for over 20 percent of the world's migrants, and whenever the other western locations are added, the percentage soars to over 41 percent:

20 Countries/Areas with the Highest Numbers of International Migrants, 2005<sup>4</sup>

<i>Country or Area</i>	<i>Number of Migrants (millions)</i>	<i>As Percentage of Total</i>
United States	38.4	20.2
Russian Federation	12.1	6.4
Germany	10.1	5.3
Ukraine	6.8	3.6
France	6.5	3.4
Saudi Arabia	6.4	3.3
Canada	6.1	3.2
India	5.7	3.0
United Kingdom	5.4	2.8
Spain	4.8	2.5
Australia	4.1	2.2
Pakistan	3.3	1.7
United Arab Emirates	3.2	1.7
China, Hong Kong SAR	3.0	1.6
Israel	2.7	1.4
Italy	2.5	1.3
Kazakhstan	2.5	1.3
Cote d'Ivoire	2.4	1.2
Jordan	2.2	1.2
Japan	2.0	1.1

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In 2005, 1 out of every 3 international migrants lived in Europe, and 1 out of every 4 international migrants lived in Northern America. Between 1990 and 2005, the proportion of international migrants living in Europe rose from 32 percent to 34 percent. During this same period, the proportion living in Northern America increased from 18 percent to 23 percent, the fastest growth rate of any region.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2009). International Migration Report 2006: A Global Assessment, xiv, xv [on-line] [http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2006\\_MigrationRep/part\\_one.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2006_MigrationRep/part_one.pdf); accessed 8/20/2009.

<sup>4</sup> Taken from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2009). International Migration Report 2006: A Global Assessment, xvi.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

## canada

The data collected from the 2006 Canadian Census revealed that migration is alive and well in this northern-most North American country. The portion of the country's population born outside of Canada reached its highest level in 75 years with 6,186,950 people. This amounted to 19.8% of the total population, the highest proportion since 1931.<sup>6</sup>

Between 2001 and 2006, 14% of those migrating to the country came from the People's Republic of China. Migrants from India were next in line with 11.6% of the total migrants. The Philippines accounted for 7%, Pakistan accounted for 5.2%, South Korea accounted for 3.2%, and Iran accounted for 2.5%. In 2006, almost 150 languages were reported as a mother tongue among the international migrants. The largest portion reported Chinese (18.6%) as their heart language, followed by Italian (6.6%), Punjabi (5.9%), Spanish (5.8%), German (5.4%), Tagalog (4.8%), and Arabic (4.7%).<sup>7</sup>

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Contemporary migrants are predominantly urbanites, even being more likely to live in a metropolitan area than Canadian-born citizens. In 2006, 94.9% of the foreign-born population and 97.2% of the recent immigrants lived in either a census metropolitan area or a census agglomeration (i.e., urban community), as compared with 77.5% of the Canadian-born citizens. Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver received 68.9% (765,000) migrants between 2001 and 2006, while only 2.8% decided to live in rural areas.<sup>8</sup>

In the Atlantic Provinces, Halifax, Nova Scotia, boasted of the largest foreign-born population, receiving over 5,000 immigrants, with just over half (51.4%), being born in Asia and the Middle East. In Quebec, Montreal was declared home to the third-largest foreign-born population. Of the 740,400 foreign-born population, 31% of the newcomers came from Asia and the Middle East. Six of the ten leading birthplaces were naturally from countries where French was spoken: Algeria (8.7%), Morocco (7.6%), Romania (7.2), France (6.3%), Haiti (5.2%), and Lebanon (3.2%). Toronto is the country's largest migrant receiving area, with the 2006 census noting 2,320,200 foreign-born people. The foreign-born population is now at 45.7% of the Census Metropolitan Area's total population of 5,072,100, with India and the People's Republic of China as the two major source countries for recent immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, "Census Snapshot—Immigration in Canada: A Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population, 2006 Census," (catalogue number 11-008-X), pg. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 50, 51.

In Hamilton, almost twenty-five percent of the population is foreign-born. Between 2001 and 2006, the foreign-born population grew by 7.7%, with the total population of the Hamilton Census Metropolitan Area increasing by 4.3%. For Winnipeg, the Philippines is the number one source for recent immigrants. In Calgary, the foreign-born population is growing faster than the Canadian-born population. Vancouver is the major point of entry for immigrants to the western part of the country. Between 2001 and 2006, the foreign-born population of Vancouver grew five times faster than the Canadian-born population, with most of the new migrants born in Asian and the Middle East. The foreign-born population in the city now accounts for 45.6% of the total population, almost equivalent to that of Toronto.<sup>10</sup>

It is predicted that by 2017 about 20% of Canada's population will be visible minorities, anywhere from 6.3 million to 8.5 million people. Half of this growth is expected to come from South Asian or Chinese peoples, with the highest growth rates coming from West Asian, Korean, and Arab groups.<sup>11</sup>

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## **united states**

Though the Native Americans had been living in what is now the United States, the last 500 years of America's history has been a history of migration, with the earlier waves of immigrants coming primarily from European nations and the latter waves from Asia and Latin America. Of all the countries throughout the world receiving migrants, the United States by far leads the way for the largest numbers and percentage received. By 2005, the U.S. foreign-born population reached an all time high of 38 million, representing approximately 12.9% of the total population.<sup>12</sup>

Large numbers of Asians migrated to America after the 1965 Immigration Act, with one-third of all U.S. immigrants now coming from this continent. Their numbers increased dramatically across the twentieth century, from 17,000 in 1965 to more than 250,000 annually in the 1980s and over 300,000 per year in the early 1990s.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 51, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada, "Ethnic Diversity and Immigration," [on-line]; [www41.statcan.ca/2007/30000/ceb30000\\_000\\_e.htm](http://www41.statcan.ca/2007/30000/ceb30000_000_e.htm); accessed 6/2/09.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/09s1289.pdf>; accessed 8/19/2009.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., revised and updated (New York; London: The Guilford Press, 2009), 129.

By 2008, the largest numbers of legal permanent residents of the U.S. came from the following countries:

2008 Legal Permanent U. S. Residents' Countries of Birth and Sizes<sup>14</sup>

Mexico	189,989	El Salvador	19,659
China, People's Republic	80,217	Jamaica	18,477
India	63,352	Guatemala	16,182
Philippines	54,030	Peru	15,184
Cuba	49,500	Canada	15,109
Dominican Republic	31,879	United Kingdom	14,384
Vietnam	31,497	Iran	13,852
Columbia	30,213	Ethiopia	12,917
Korea (North and South)	26,666	Nigeria	12,475
Haiti	26,007	All other countries	365,800
Pakistan	19,719		

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Each year, large numbers of refugees enter into the United States. During the 1990s, refugee arrivals averaged over 100,000 each year, with a decline in the early twenty-first century. There was a 25 percent increase in the numbers of such peoples admitted from 2007 (48,218) to 2008 (60,108).<sup>15</sup> The following table displays the numbers of refugee arrivals by country of nationality in 2008.

2008 Refugee Arrivals to the U.S. by Country of Nationality<sup>16</sup>

Burma	18,139	Somalia	2,523
Iraq	13,823	Vietnam	1,112
Bhutan	5,320	Ukraine	1,022
Iran	5,270	Liberia	992
Cuba	4,177	Other	4,841
Burundi	2,889		

Students are another source of adding to the multi-ethnic composition of the United States. In 2007–2008, students from the top five countries of India (15.2%), China (13%), South Korea (11.1%), Japan (5.4%), and Canada (4.7%), comprised 49% of all international students in the United States. Several countries showed

<sup>14</sup> Taken from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Computer Linked Applicant Information Management System (CLAIMS), Legal Immigrant Data, Fiscal Years 2006 to 2008 as referenced in Randall Monger and Nancy Rytina, "U.S. Legal Permanent Residents: 2008," *Annual Flow Report* (March 2009), 4.

<sup>15</sup> Randall Monger and Nancy Rytina, "U.S. Legal Permanent Residents: 2008," *Annual Flow Report* (March 2009), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Taken from U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) as referenced in Daniel C. Martin and Michael Hoefer, "Refugees and Asylees: 2008," *Annual Flow Report* (June 2009), 3.

large increases in the number of students as compared to the previous year: India (12.8%), China (19.8%), South Korea (10.8%), Saudi Arabia (25.2%), Nepal (15.2%), and Vietnam (45.3%). The following table shows the top twenty leading places of origin of international students to the United States.

Top Twenty Places of Origin of International Students to the United States<sup>17</sup>

Rank	Place of Origin	2006/07	2007/08	2007/08 % of Total	% Change
	<i>WORLD TOTAL</i>	582,984	623,805	100.0	7.0
1.	India	83,833	94,563	15.2	12.8
2.	China	67,723	81,127	13.0	19.8
3.	South Korea	62,392	69,124	11.1	10.8
4.	Japan	35,282	33,974	5.4	-3.7
5.	Canada	28,280	29,051	4.7	2.7
6.	Taiwan	29,094	29,001	4.6	-0.3
7.	Mexico	13,826	14,837	2.4	7.3
8.	Turkey	11,506	12,030	1.9	4.6
9.	Saudi Arabia	7,886	9,873	1.6	25.2
10.	Thailand	8,886	9,004	1.4	1.3
11.	Nepal	7,754	8,936	1.4	15.2
12.	Germany	8,656	8,907	1.4	2.9
13.	Vietnam	6,036	8,769	1.4	45.3
14.	United Kingdom	8,438	8,367	1.3	-0.8
15.	Hong Kong	7,722	8,286	1.3	7.3
16.	Indonesia	7,338	7,692	1.2	4.8
17.	Brazil	7,126	7,578	1.2	6.3
18.	France	6,704	7,050	1.1	5.2
19.	Colombia	6,750	6,662	1.1	-1.3
20.	Nigeria	5,943	6,222	1.0	4.7

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### what in the world is god doing anyway?

Even a cursory reading of the Scriptures reveals that God is in control of His creation. He is working through the blessings and curses this world offers. While the Lord does not cause evil, He does work through the wickedness of others to accomplish this plan, such as the scattering of Israel among the nations (Deut 30:1) or the scattering of the Jerusalem church at the hand of persecution (Acts 11:19–20). From the migration out of Eden (Gen 2:23–24), the Lord has been

<sup>17</sup> Institute of International Education, *Open Doors 2008 – Fast Facts* [on-line] [http://www.opendoors.iienetwork.org/file\\_depot/0-1000000/0-10000/3390/folder/68485/Open+Doors+Fast+Facts+2008.pdf](http://www.opendoors.iienetwork.org/file_depot/0-1000000/0-10000/3390/folder/68485/Open+Doors+Fast+Facts+2008.pdf); accessed 8/25/2009.

working out His salvation history as people have multiplied and spread across the planet (Gen 9:1, 7; 35:11). He is at work through the mass movements of peoples from the rural communities to the cities, from fleeing persecution, war, and starvation, to lands of security and prosperity, and from departing areas where educational and economic lift are rare, to locations where such matters are assumed to be the norm.

In his Mars Hill address, Paul made a fascinating statement regarding the Sovereign hand of God across history and people. Luke records,

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26–27, ESV).

28 While there are portions of these verses that pose some exegetical challenges to New Testament scholars, the point made is that the peoples of the world share a common ancestry and a common Creator, who is Lord over history and the places of residences so that people may come to Him.

It is important to note here that the rise and fall of nations and the movements of peoples across the globe are a part of the outworking of the Lord's plan leading to the day when His kingdom will come (Matt 6:10) and all the nations will bow and worship Him (Ps 86:9; Isa 2:2; Phil 2:9–11). He is the God who rules over the nations (Daniel; 2 Chr 20:6; Ps 22:28) and is presently working through His church to preach the Good News to the peoples of this world before the end comes (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10).

### **a strategy for consideration**

While this article has focused on the United States and Canada, I could share similar stories with you related to other western nations. When we begin to move outside of western contexts, the stories of global migration continue to multiply. The reality is that the Lord has been bringing many of the world's least reached peoples to the United States and Canada. We are foolish to miss out on this Great Commission opportunity in our backyards.

While there have been evangelistic ministries going on among migrants for many years, few churches and organizations have understood the truly global potential for kingdom advancement that is before us. The typical paradigm of reaching migrants results in assimilating them into our established churches or



maybe planting a church with them. While both of these methods are good, they generally fall short in maximizing the Great Commission potential.

While the following strategy likely has several variations, its essence is as follows: A team of church planters works among a particular people group doing evangelism. As people come to faith, the group of new believers is baptized and becomes a new church. As the church planters continue to teach them all that Christ commanded, they are also helping the people get a vision for reaching their people group across the globe. Throughout the teaching process, the church planters are modeling a very simple, yet New Testament, expression of what it means to be a local church, a model they can take with them to restricted-access countries and to model before others. From the very beginning, the church planters are challenging the people and praying for them to send a church planting team “back home.” The end result is the planting of a church among a least-reached people in North America *and* the sending of such peoples across the world to plant churches in their homelands.

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## **conclusion**

For most evangelicals living in the United States and Canada, particularly among the Anglo majority, the migrants living and working in our neighborhoods are simply strangers next door. Recently, I presented a paper at a meeting of the Evangelical Missiological Society titled, “In Through the Back Door: Reaching the Majority World from North America,” that was later published in the book *Missions from the Majority World: Progress, Challenges, and Case Studies*, edited by Enoch Wan and Michael Pocock.<sup>18</sup> What I discovered at the time was evangelicals in North America do not have a good understanding of what people groups are living in our neighborhoods and the percentage of evangelicals (if any) among those groups. I also discovered, as was noted in this article, there are peoples living on this continent representing some of the world’s unreached people groups.

Return to the tables listed in this article. Did you see the countries listed that have peoples migrating to the United States and Canada? Are you aware of the numbers of the world’s unreached peoples living in many of these countries, living

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<sup>18</sup> Enoch Wan and Michael Pocock, eds., *Missions from the Majority World: Progress, Challenges, and Case Studies* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009). The original paper can be found here: <http://www.northamericanmissions.org/?q=node/410>.

in your neighborhoods? We continue to suffer from what Donald McGavran called “people blindness” and lack the E2 and E3 missional labors that Ralph Winter described in 1974. How long will we wait before reaching the strangers next door, equipping them, partnering with them, and sending them to their peoples?

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