

Why We Think the Way We Think about Morality and Ethics National Borders, Sovereignty, and Immigration

“The Church, ‘sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among people,’ feels herself to be closely involved in the evolution of civilization, in which mobility is a striking feature”

Catholic Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, “The Church and Peoples on the Move” (1978)

Beginning at the Beginning: Issues

This has been a difficult paper to write for a range of reasons. The first is the sheer breadth of the theme. Second, immigrants are often telescoped in the public mind with asylum seekers and refugees. This conflation is confusing, since current Australian Federal government policy, distinguishes and administers them separately. Immigration involves the selection of candidates on the basis of occupational skills offered and family considerations. Refugee policy, is carried out on the basis of need alone, as people seek safety “owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (UN Refugee Convention, 1951).¹ This paper examines the issue of immigration *not* asylum seekers and refugees. Third, the issue of immigration in the Australian mind, is almost always associated with multiculturalism. Favourable attitudes to multiculturalism tend to imply favourable attitudes to immigration, while the opposite – unfavourable attitudes – holds as well. That said, evidence suggests a greater willingness on the part of the Australian population to embrace multiculturalism more than immigration. Finally, Christian ethical teaching with regard to immigration and immigrants, nearly always ‘lumps’ refugees into the picture, failing to distinguish them. This makes thinking through the issue of immigration, from a theological and ethical perspective, a bit more difficult than it otherwise would be.

As a way forward, I want to do two things. The first to evaluate the broad perceptions of Australians about immigrants and immigration, referring to the most significant work of the last 20 years; that of Robert Holton, *Immigration, Social Cohesion and National Identity* (Research Paper No 91, 1997-1998 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/version/46682035>), in the Parliamentary Library in Canberra. I also shall refer to a recent piece by the Australian, Melbourne based journalist, George Megalogenis, “The Changing Face of Australia”, published in the inaugural issue of the new triannual publication, *Australian Foreign Affairs*. Second, I want to briefly raise some theological points that may stimulate discussion.

Contemporary Australian Attitudes to Immigrants and Immigration

Here, I shall examine three aspects of Australian immigration policy: first, immigration and social cohesion; second, immigration and globalization; and third Australian attitudes to immigration and multiculturalism.

Immigration and Social Cohesion: As immigration has broadened over the last 40 years to include a greater range of peoples from Asia, the question has been raised as to its social impact, its effect upon social cohesion. This question is based less upon the actual statistics, and more upon the sensed visible difference between Asians and others, and the construed beliefs about Asian social behaviour in Australia. Much of this pertains to the perception of Asian concentration in ‘ghettoes’ and the idea that Asians are socially exclusive and culturally alien. In his work, Holton makes three points germane to this issue. First, the evidence about Asian social exclusivity, points to differences between national/cultural groups. The Vietnamese communities have been the most concentrated, but the Indian, Sri Lankan and Filipino groups are much more scattered. The Chinese, contrary to first appearances, are widely spread as are the Koreans, while the Muslims are more broadly spread than the Jews. Second, where there are concentrations of national groups of people, the evidence suggests that the reasons have much to do with the realities of dealing with life in a new environment. Crucial issues include home prices that are often cheaper in some areas, and availability of jobs in some areas rather than others. Third, statistical evidence regarding Australian citizenship and marriage are useful in order to gain an objective view about immigrants and social cohesion. Regarding citizenship, Vietnamese (78%) and Chinese (75%) have the highest take-up rates along with those of the Greeks (81%). Concerning marriage, based on the 1991 census figures, Asians as a

¹ This clear distinction between immigrants and refugees was not really made until 1975, at the ALP’s Terrigal Conference, where the Labor government was now required by the Conference to allow for “sympathetic consideration of people who for political and other reasons would face danger to life and liberty upon return to their country of origin”.

whole “marry-in” no more frequently than non-Asians. That said, some specific groups do “marry-in” more frequently than immigrants of British origin (18.9% for men and 18.2% for women). Chinese figures are 28.4% for men and 21.9% for women, but for Indians, the figure is very low at 5.4% and 5.2%. So, while the specific figures for specific groups vary, the evidence tells us that there is no Asian pattern of separatism, compared with other groups.

Reading Megalogenis, however, who writes in reference to the period 2001 to today – that is after the period covered by Holton – some changes in appreciation need to be made. Megalogenis points to a number of new factors in Australian society in the light of modifications to immigration policy. First, that since 2001 immigration intakes have increased substantially, in fact, more than doubling, from 80,000 annually at the turn of the 21st century, to 190,000 annually today. But this is not the only difference. There is also– and this is my second point – a fundamental change in terms of philosophy. Up till the turn of the century, much of the immigrant intake had to do with family reunion with about two thirds of the quota unskilled and a third skilled. With the change in direction by John Howard, the face of the immigrant changed from unskilled, to the majority, in fact two thirds, skilled. Howard did this, while at the time cutting back the immigration intake as a whole. However, with the mineral boom, and the overall stimulus to the economy, industry required and demanded more skilled labour, looking overseas for it, promoting immigration growth at a rate never seen before. Finally, the explosion in immigration in this country coincided with the development explosion in China and India. This correlation, led to a significant proportion of skilled immigrants coming from both those countries. Moreover, the explosion of the education industry in Australia, has also fed immigration, with half of all migrants who are granted permanent residency, sourced onshore: already here on student or work visas.

Such dramatic changes in pace and direction of immigration policy leaves a blaring question for our concerns about integration and social cohesion. Whereas, for the whole of the period from 1945, most migrants were unskilled or semi-skilled, and it took at least two generations for adaptation and assimilation; we now face a new situation. In the light of this, Megalogenis suggests that we will need a new approach. “In the past” he writes, “it took two generations to count the success of a migration wave. The new arrival started at the bottom. It was the second generation, their Australian-born children, who rose to positions of authority in parliament, the public service, media and business. We cannot afford to wait a generation with the Chinese, or, indeed the Indians. Their success on arrival has to be reflected more quickly in our institutions. I am not suggesting”, he continues, “that we hand over political or corporate power to the skilled migrant, but that we learn to share it. The alternative is a withdrawn migrant elite who lives in comfortable separation from the rest of the population.”²

Immigration and Globalization: On the face of the evidence, Holton argues that the most significant reason for caution about immigration among Australians, and the fear of the break-down of social cohesion, is the prior concern about globalization³. In short, resistance to immigration, appears to have as much to do with concern about the new world order of permeable boundaries, and feared economic insecurity, than any specific rejection of immigration *per se*. Behind this, stands an anxiety about the viability of the nation-state and its capacity to defend the interests of its citizens. While there exist a number of ‘takes’ or interpretations of the relationship between the nation-state and the new global order, the most alarmist of these – that the nation-state is to all intents and purposes, dead – only feeds the fear of immigration further, as it is seen as a clear result of a nation’s powerlessness in the face of global corporate ascendancy, which shifts labour according to commercial need (Stephen Castles). The reality of course is more complex: the nation-state and the globalized world, are in fact inter-dependent, even though this inter-dependence is not without its tensions. No nation can meet all its needs from its immediate environment. This applies to economic, technological and scientific needs, as much as cultural practices and resources. What we are finding today, is a recasting of what it means to be Australian, under the impact of world pressures, immigration and increased cultural diversity.

There is then a tension, a double tension which burdens us. The first, marked by fear of what globalization may lead to; and the second, marked by what globalization demands of societies, communities and

² George Megalogenis, “The Changing Face of Australia”, in *Australian Foreign Affairs*, Issue 1, October 2017 (Schwartz Publishing, Carlton, Vic, Australia), pp. 83-84.

³ For our purposes, we define globalization as ‘the intensification of economic, political, social, and cultural relations across borders.’

ultimately the state. The North American economist, Joseph Stiglitz, has written on these themes for some years now. In a recent article in *The Guardian*, 'Globalization: time to look at historic mistakes to plot the future' (December 6th, 2017), he notes the broad sense of disaffection and anger across both the developing and developed world with globalization: both sides feel they have "been done". Stiglitz, acknowledges that this should be no surprise, given that the overwhelming majority of international trade agreements have intentionally pursued cheap labour and job reduction: "one of the objectives of globalisation was to weaken workers' bargaining power. What corporations wanted was cheaper labour, however they could get it". The difficulty in all of this, is that in the face of the fact of increased insecurity, people push back at what they consider the cause, or at least partial cause: immigration which increases competition in the labour market and drives wages further down. Stiglitz discounts any possibility of sustaining the current mode of globalization - the so called "Las Vegas" strategy, of doing the same as we have done, only with more aggression. He also, rejects the Trumpian line of reversing the situation, pointing out that protectionism can't work. There may be, under such policy, a return of manufacturing, but because of rapid technological innovation, "the jobs won't come back". He concludes that the path forward is one that protects citizens without protectionism. Here, the practice is one, led by the Nordic countries, that understand that remaining open to trade is crucial to generation of wealth, but that in the same breath, puts workers and their jobs at risk. Part and parcel of remaining open, includes the maintenance of skilled immigration, as needed, but also the building of a "social contract", through which, workers are helped to move from old jobs to new and financially supported through the process.

In short then, Stiglitz, can see no way back to the past arrangements. The new order is with us, including immigration. Nevertheless, the secret of a successful arrangement includes the maintenance of a framework that ensures justice and fairness, where no-one is left behind. Without constructive social policy that accompanies economic reality, the future looks bleak.

Immigration and Multiculturalism: And so, to the question of culture, of multi-culturalism. According to Holton the broad sense is that attitudes to multi-culturalism are more positive than to immigration despite the connection between the two. That said, the stand-out problem is this: while it is obvious that multiculturalism refers to many cultures, it is much harder to discern what multiculturalism has to say about relationships *between* many cultures. Does it mean cultural separatism, through policies that magnify social division, or does it mean inter-cultural tolerance and engagement within sets of general rights and obligations that apply to all groups? Two points in particular are worth noting here. First, that social cohesion requires the same standards of fairness and equity for all. However, because people come from different beginning points, educationally, socially and economically, there must be different responses to the different groups within society to actually build such fairness and equity, including services for some, not extended to all. This latter point is seldom understood among the broad public, and raises the perception of unfairness between cultural groups. Second, while true that globalized markets are one of the main drivers of multiculturalism, it is also true that markets cannot guarantee social cohesion and equity between groups. This is necessarily the function of government and what are referred to as mediating groups or institutions, such as community groups, including Christian churches. It is these mediating groups, that build relationships across cultural divides, serving the common good, the good of all, in the process.

Christian Theology and Philosophy Engaged

I make three points: the first concerning modern reason; the second concerning Christian theology, and the third concerning Christian ethics.

Modern Reason: Today, there is a broad sense that events run ahead of us, that we are increasingly not in control. The idea that enlightened humanity could bring the conditions of social existence under the control of human reason is being lost. This perception is not new. The Christian sociologist, Ernst Troeltsch, said as much decades ago in his *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (1912). The sense that we all have - Christian and others - is that the best we can do is to cope. Our increased knowledge, has led to a sort of confused relativism. In matters of globalization and the knock-on effects of global immigration and multiculturalism, the social good seems far away.

Christian Theology: In a world marked by this sense of foreboding relativism where we know so much, but appear paralysed to address reality, Christian theology speaks of a theology of the cross - a gift of the apostle Paul. Central to this theology is the idea of the *Compassionate One* as the mystery at the heart of the

world. The cross reveals divine solidarity. God's prime attribute is mercy (*miser cordia* over *miserum*). Buried in our relativism, this insight helps us to step outside of ourselves, beyond ourselves, to garner the energy to re-engage a reality exhausted in its greyness. This idea of God as the Compassionate One, who helps us step outside of ourselves, beyond ourselves, is compellingly reflected in Thomas Aquinas through his insight about friendship, his view of God as Friend.

Christian Ethics: This idea of God as Friend, has deep meaning for our understanding of the way we see each other, our society and world. It is the basis for a Christian humanism that sees each other in terms of friendship, rather than as people who live in cultural, and should we use the word, race-based silos. The often- ignored fact that the Christian Church itself is a transnational community, a border-transcending community, puts us in a strong position, to build, precisely, such friendship.

Resources

Robert Holton, "Immigration, Social Cohesion and National Identity" (Research Paper No 91, 1997-1998 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/version/46682035>), Parliamentary Library, Canberra

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George Megalogenis, "The Changing Face of Australia", *Australian Foreign Affairs*, Issue 1, October 2017 (Schwartz Publishing, Carlton, Vic, Australia)

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