

Who exactly is the 'Kiwi' in Kiwi-made?

Andrew Butcher

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If I were to travel back in time, to say the goldfields of Central Otago in the 1880s, and asked those I came across 'who exactly is the 'Kiwi' in Kiwi-made?' they would, most likely, look at me askance and answer, with a firm colonial accent: "British".

That's not to say, of course, that there weren't others on the same goldfield or its environs that were not British.

We know there were Chinese and Indians as well as New Zealand's indigenous population, Maori. Of the former, there was an expectation they would go back whence they came. On the latter, there was a view that they would simply die away.

So this question is ultimately driven by its context.

So, to what extent does *context* drive *content*?

Let's move to the present-day. If I asked someone in Gisborne 'who is a Kiwi' I would get a different response from someone who was in Timaru or Manukau or Eketahuna or Dunedin.

If I were to go to Asia, where I've just spent the last five weeks, and attend churches there, which I did, what might I see? Well, based on my reasonably limited exposure to churches in Singapore I would see:

- A largely ethnically homogenous church, dominated by ex-pats, which, as one of those ex-pats put it to me "is just like church back home";
- A large charismatic 'mega-church', modelled heavily on the US mega-churches, with stage-lighting, a professional band and a personality cult around its senior pastor; parallel services in different languages
- An Anglican cathedral, with parallel services in different languages, the Book of Common Prayer and vestments worn by the clergy;

- Some sermons that encouraged and suggested that God rewarded meritocratic behaviour; but bear in mind that Singapore is a strongly meritocratic society;
- A leadership structure where the senior pastor was a European but all associate pastors were Asian;
- A strong focus on the importance of personal piety and what we might call the *practice* of Christianity; in other words, on what we should do in order to be a good Christian.

So, to what extent does *place* define the *person*?

Let's move further in. If I were to go around to different congregations in the country, what would those in the Anglican Cathedral tell me? What would those in the local Baptist church tell me? What would those in the large youth-oriented city church tell me? What would those in the small house-church tell me? What would those in the Catholic Church tell me?

If I were to walk down an Auckland street, what might I see? Peter Lineham helpfully did that, and describes it thus:

Flatbush has suddenly sprung up in the last five years as an overflow from the huge growth of new housing in the Howick area, primarily accommodating Asian people. The little chapel [that gave Chapel Road its name] still stands, now a joint Anglican-Methodist church half way down the road that takes its name from it, but at the other end is the exotic Botany Downs shopping centre, a Truman-Show like phenomenon, looking like it has dropped as a unit from the sky, a whole plastic town centre modeled on traditional towns. The central focus of Chapel Road is the enormous, almost completed Buddhist Temple. On the other side of the road is a new co-educational Catholic School, reflecting a huge boom in Catholic education and in baptisms into the Catholic Church by Asians concerned at the violent tone of New Zealand. Other sites down the road have been purchased by Baptist churches, and doubtless the fine facilities of the new secular high school are rented out to a Pentecostal Church group on Sundays. It is boom time in Flat Bush and religion is booming there as well, but not in the little chapel. There is a plan for Anglicans and Methodists to build a big new church, but they are struggling to find the money. Meanwhile the Presbyterians have made a separate move. Their old Pakuranga congregation, famous for its evangelical and conservative tradition, has rebuilt just around the corner from

Chapel Road and have attracted a large congregation including many Asian people with a formula that has something of the Pentecostal flavour mixed in.¹

This picture will resonate with many of us. It will resonate for some because this is what we see increasingly in New Zealand. It will resonate for others because this is what we see when we travel overseas. In many countries, temples, mosques and churches exist cheek-by-jowl. A plurality of faiths is more likely in many countries than a preponderance of those with no faith at all. A bus campaign about atheism would make no sense in Malaysia even if it created attention and caused controversy in New Zealand.

So, if I come from a country in which there are numerous dominant faiths, or even just one dominant faith that is not my own, how is that going to inform how I interact with those of all faiths and none?

Or, if I come from a country, like this one, which is keenly secular, how will that inform my views of those of all faiths and none?

From and in each context what assumptions might I make? If I were to assume that religion is a private matter between a man and his God, how then might I cope in a context in which faith is very public, very present, and very influential in decisions made by and about me?

If I were to assume that religion is very public, how might I engage with those who have a strong religious faith but give no sign of it in what they say, what they wear, or what they do?

To what extent am I, as a person, defined by the place I am from and the place I am in?

To what extent do our *denominations* create their *congregations*?

We know that the Catholic Church in New Zealand has an increasing number of Filipinos in it, as the Catholic Church in the United Kingdom has an increasing number of Poles. That both these nationalities migrated in large numbers to these countries, and that the countries from which they migrated are predominantly Catholic, is not incidental.

In New Zealand, Alan Jamieson has shown that the churches from which most people are *leaving* are the charismatic, evangelical and Pentecostal churches.² Contrast that to Singapore, where the churches

¹ Peter Lineham, "Among the believers", Massey News (April 2005).
http://masseynews.massey.ac.nz/magazine/2005_Apr/stories/thoughts-1.html [Accessed 1 November, 2009].

where there are most conversions happening are charismatic, evangelical and Pentecostal churches.³ Indeed, similarly to New Zealand, it is these large evangelical and Pentecostal churches that are growing in Singapore while the traditional churches, with the exception, in New Zealand, of the Catholics and the Baptists, are declining.

So, is it any wonder that many Asian students to New Zealand are attracted to the large mega-churches in our university cities?

While, at the same time, is it any wonder that European New Zealanders, and others, scarred by experiences of the church gravitate to 'post-church' settings; or leave church at all?

To what extent is the notion of 'post-Christian' applicable across the breadth of New Zealand churches?

To what extent are the Pentecostal and evangelical churches recreating themselves to account for the diversification of their congregations?

And, to what extent do *congregations* reflect their *catchment*?

Some years ago, when I attended Auckland Baptist Tabernacle, I was part of a research group that was asked to find out information about the immediate catchment area of the Tab, which, for those of you who know Auckland, is situated toward the top end of Queen Street, and buttressed by inner-city apartments. Due to the security and privacy of these apartments, it was virtually impossible for us to find out who lived in these apartments, what they did and if they had any church association.

The church I was raised in, and currently attend, is Tawa Baptist. That church grew up with the suburb. While it didn't begin its life on the site it is now, it did begin it at a time when few people had cars and so those who attended the church lived within walking distance of it. Many suburban churches would have the same kind of history, even if the walking-distance of a church is no longer a factor in whether most people attend it or not.

It is still true, however, that the vast majority of people who attend Tawa Baptist church live in Tawa.

² Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*

³ Daniel Goh, 'State and Social Christianity in post-colonial Singapore', *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 25, 1 (2010): 54-89, pp.54-55

But if I were to go to The Street City Church, in Wellington, and look through their telephone directory, I would find that their catchment is as wide and broad as a car can travel.

In 2008 the Asia New Zealand Foundation, where I am the research director, commissioned a series of reports about the Asian populations in New Zealand's cities. The reports, which are excellent, using Census data, both described and mapped out the spread of Asian communities in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin. There was much that the reports told us, not least that not all Asians live in one-place. To be sure, there are Chinese in Howick, but not all Chinese in Auckland live in its Eastern suburbs. The largest population of Koreans in New Zealand is on Auckland's North Shore, but not *all* Koreans live there.

And, in any case, as we've seen, it doesn't necessarily follow that people attend church in the suburb in which they live, in the same way that we don't necessarily go to work in the suburb in which we live.

To what extent does a pastor's *self-identity* influence how they see the identity of *others*?

Let's move from the group to the individual. If I were to survey pastors and church leaders, what would they answer to 'what exactly is the 'Kiwi' in Kiwi-made? Would they look at their congregations and give me an answer based on what they see out there? Or would they look in a mirror and give me an answer based on what they see in the mirror?

Pastors and their congregations don't always see the world in the same way. So if I went to the person sitting in the fourth pew, as they had done for the last several decades, and asked them the same question I'd asked the others, how would they respond? Would they draw on what they *remember*? Or would they respond based on what they *see*? Or would they answer according to what they *wish* for?

It might surprise you, but my family heritage is Asian. You wouldn't know it by looking at me. My DNA is made up of three-parts Scottish to one-part English, with a smattering of French. But my grandparents served as missionaries in China in the 1940s, so Chinese food, awareness of Asia, and how to use chopsticks aren't as foreign to me as they might be to someone else.

To what extent does our upbringing inform our awareness of other people, of difference, of what we'd consider 'foreign'?

As a pastor and preacher, to what extent does *nurture* – not just our upbringing, but also what we read, where we travel, where we live, what we listen to – intersect with *nature* – our ethnicity, our prejudices, our way of doing things?

Someone once said to me that you can tell a lot about people by the books they read, if they read any at all.

To what extent are our preachers and pastors informed, and are informing themselves, about the changing New Zealand identity? How much theology do pastors and preachers read that is written from the two-thirds world? And how can we get that scholarship into their hands, heads and libraries?

Prejudices, of course, extend beyond the pulpit.

So, to what extent does a church member's past, present and prejudices drive on how they see people?

Are we informing our congregation about how Christianity is lived and experienced in other parts of New Zealand and other parts of the world?

I love it when I go to a church in New Zealand and I hear a preacher who is neither male nor white. It is not because they are necessarily better preachers, but because their perspective is *different* to what I usually hear.

To what extent do our congregations hear a range of voices from the pulpit?

Someone once said to me that the Asian migrants to New Zealand were threatening the Christian heritage of this country. In fact I disagreed with that assumption so much that I persuaded George Wieland to write a book with me in response, which we are doing, and which will come out in 2013.⁴

And on what criteria would people make these judgments and observations?

⁴ Andrew Butcher & George Wieland, *Asian Christianities in New Zealand*, Singapore: ARI & Springer.

On age?

So, if the young people of today are the church of tomorrow, how do we deal with the reality that our congregations are getting older and that those over 65 are going to form a significant part of our church?

On colour of skin?

So how do we deal with the reality that our present and past Governors-General don't look much like the early British settlers to New Zealand, but with one Indian and the other Maori, what colour should we pick and does it really matter?

On accent?

How do we reconcile the broad vowels of comedian Lyn of Tawa with the radio voice of Geoff Robinson? Or how do we hold together the Scottish brogue of Nigel Pollock and George Wield with the American influence on Paul Windsor and Brian Krum?

On ethnicity?

Are Kiwis ethnically European? And if they are, what does that mean for Maori, Pacific and Asian peoples, who are all projected to grow as proportions of New Zealand's population?

On language?

Must Kiwi-made be synonymous with speaking only English? And if so what do we make of the most commonly taught languages in our secondary schools, French and Latin? Or that the majority of students who learn Mandarin are of Chinese ethnicity?

On gender?

How much of our Kiwi-made image is based on a bloke drinking beer and playing rugby? And how much is it based on the suffragette efforts of Kate Shepherd or that New Zealand had two female Prime Ministers before Australia even had one?

On appearance?

Does what you wear determine who you are? Must you be an Indian to wear a sari? And is a woman who wears a head covering as much of a Kiwi as one who wears a mini-skirt?

On diet?

Must you like and eat the national dish of fish and chips to be considered a Kiwi? Or can you be a Kiwi and cook and eat curry? Or rice? Or vegetarian food? Or a roast every Sunday? Or a barbeque at Christmas?

And why does this matter anyway? Why, in this forum on preaching should we care about who exactly is Kiwi in Kiwi-made?

Surely our exegesis is not driven by those whom we encounter with the Word?

And, as preachers, does the way we speak, the way we shape the vowel, move quickly past a word, tell a story, matter all that much?

As readers, does it matter what we read and who wrote it? Does it inform our preaching if we draw not just on the old dead white men of classical theology but on the very much alive men and women of the two-thirds world who write material that will shake our world view and confront our prejudices?

As listeners, does it matter whether we listen to those whose experience of faith will be qualitatively different to our own?

As story-tellers, does it matter whether we tell stories that are sprinkled with pop-culture references, or we draw from a wider and deeper pool of resources that might connect in different, maybe better, ways with those who don't watch the same programmes, have the same history, or share the same identity that we do?

As those who stand in front of people, does it matter what we wear? Does it matter if those whom we address are used to those they hear wearing a suit and tie, a lava-lava, a Hawaiian shirt or jeans?

As expositors, does it matter how we read the stories of Scripture? Does it matter if we only locate the Exodus story as a story of history, rather than the metaphor of liberation that our listeners might instead connect to?

As people connected to the spiritual as well as the material, does it matter how we perceive of and preach about the supernatural and the spiritual world? Is it something we should treat as seriously as those who see it as important to them as the air that they breathe? Or is it something we should discard and ignore because for a particular kind of Kiwi culture it would be very out-of-place?

As teachers, does it matter how we teach? Does it matter if we 'stand and deliver' or should we instead sit down and discuss? How much of that is our personal preference and how much of that should we be cognisant of our congregation's backgrounds and needs?

As pastors, does it matter how we pray with people and whether we visit them alone or with others? Does it matter if we prayed with holy oil or the laying on of hands? Or is it okay to send someone in our place?

And how do we decide what *matters* anyway? In any case, what *matters* to me might not matter all that much to you.

And even if we can come to one or several answers to our key question about who exactly is Kiwi in Kiwi-made, what does that matter to us?

Well, I would suggest, it matters to us because who and what we thought of as 'Kiwi' might not be accurate anymore, if it ever was.

These questions *matter*, not so that we might agree on how we answer them – because there will be no agreement. Context will drive content, prejudices will play a role, place will define a person, denominations will create their congregations: all to a degree.

But they matter because we need to ask them. The future of our congregations will look quite different to the way they looked in the past. Therefore, the assumptions that we made might need to be changed. The stories that we told might need to be translated. The methods we used might need to be adapted. The training we gave might need to be amended. And the questions we asked might need to give way to new questions, such as 'who exactly is the Kiwi in Kiwi-made?'