

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON MIGRATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

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THE WORLD'S SEVENTH WONDER

Migration as a phenomenon occurs in nature where though individual and group boundaries exist do not however prevent crossing wide territories. In the animal world, seasonal or periodic movements take place in response to changes in climate, availability of food or to ensure reproduction. These range from microorganisms in freshwater lakes which migrate seasonally from deep to shallow water due to changes in temperature to whales, which move in autumn from the sub-polar to subtropical seas to have their young, then return in later spring to wider food-rich waters.

For some animals and birds, it may take a lifetime to complete a round-trip or return migration. Species of pacific salmon born in freshwater streams, migrate to ocean waters, and then return to the stream where they were born to breed before dying.

The Tanzania-Kenya animal migration is no different from the experiences of migrants across the world – the “river crossing”, the “do and die points” and the predators that feed on them!

The migration of large number of animals in Tanzania and Kenya have become big tourist attractions so much that it is described as a wonder of the world. How ironic? Human migration has also become a global wonder especially as one thinks of what humans do to fellows for labour, trade, profit and self-satisfaction and reenactment of the slavery stories.

River Crossing: Do and Die Points:

The most dramatic moment is the migrating wildebeest crossing Mara River. Wildebeests will amass in their thousands at banks of river Mara which is rife with the dreaded Nile crocodiles and raging currents. When the pressure from behind becomes unbearable the animals take the plunge into the river. Over a quarter of a million wildebeest die from drowning, stampede, crocodiles and the predators every year. But even this annual carnage is not enough to reduce their numbers. The wildebeest deaths during migration are replenished with almost a double number of births in a year. The deaths during migration are now considered as a natural population check, natural selection at its best.

BORDERS: CLOSED TO PEOPLE – OPENED TO THEIR RESOURCES

Migration in its various forms has been part of life from time immemorial. This will continue to be the case both within national boundaries and cross-continentially.

There is hardly any ethnic group and race, which does not have a form of migration entailed in its origins and historical experience. We are either offspring of migrants, are involved in a kind of migration or are seeking one. We may even discover that we are beneficiaries of migration events or have become victims of it. Consciously, unconsciously or both, one can be on the promoting side of migration or be opposing it for varied reasons. *In effect migration and issues surrounding it have become part of our lives, part and parcel of daily living locally and globally, from which we cannot truly dissociate ourselves, be neutral, or become unconcerned on-lookers.*

Many of the causes and consequences of migration in times past can still be seen today, some of which have taken greater scope while new trends have also emerged. The pull and push factors of migration, its lights and shadows, the life it has enhanced and the death following it, its sinful manifestations and the grace that also becomes present in the midst of it, are all shared by both communities of origin and destination.

A Travelling Experience

I recently experienced two camps of Agape Centro Ecumenico Italy: The International Political Camp on Ecology and Politics: *“Globalization and Local Experiences – How to Avoid Sawing Through the Branch We Are Sitting On”* which was immediately followed by the International Theological Camp on *“On Word, Different Voices! Let’s read the Bible Together (Genesis 1–11)”*. Delegates temporarily migrated from all continents of the world cutting across many nationalities to encounter each other as strangers, live together for a while, share experiences and search for possible alternatives and solutions to issues affecting the world in which they dwell. The world they all share in common. It ended with calls that having come together as strangers we should not return to our homes remaining strangers to one another. In other words we should be in solidarity with each other, as a newly discovered, created family. *The point to note here is that the creation of forums, platforms and exposures which makes it possible for people of different nationalities to meet and interact in some meaningful way is a relevant panacea for making them more receptive to others.*

Crossing the numerous borders to encounter each other was by no means easy for some of us. Meeting the requirements and processes for crossing the borders did not only take a lot of time – months – but was quite a struggle to organize and manage from both ends of the inviting center and the invitee. Howbeit I found the Italians I met to be very welcoming, right from the Visa Officer and his jokes, to the Prali community. A lady minister from Italy, however, pointed out that the reality on the ground was still a big challenge for the church and Italy in receiving and integrating migrants, even when they are “legal” migrants. Indicators to the struggle include separate church services for migrants and Italians within same church building or separate worship centers. While on one hand there seems to be some reservations in opening up to migrants from less developed nations, it has been in the interactions of Italy with the wider European Union Community that the standard of living of Italy on the one part has improved! This clearly shows that there are discriminatory migration preferences.

Humans or Their Resources

On another front, Nigerian crude petroleum for example, is explored, drilled and exported across borders easily into Europe and North America to service the insatiable developmental quest and affluent lifestyle. This is courtesy of multinational oil companies from Europe and America such as Royal Dutch Shell (British Dutch), Chevron (American), Exxon-Mobil (American), Agip (Italian) and Total (French) oil companies. 40% Nigerian crude exports go to United States of America accounting for 10% of its oil imports and ranks as the fifth largest source of its imported oil. Crude oil production by these multinational companies is carried out at a very high cost of environmental degradation and pollution resulting from oil spillage and bunkering in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

Meanwhile, thousands of Nigerians queue up daily for visas at the American, British and Italian Embassies in Lagos Nigeria, where most are turned away after gruesome, tedious, long, complicated, costly, and very detailed procedures. The shadow of these failed migration attempts are the human trafficking of Nigerian women and girls to European (particularly Italy), American and some Asian destinations. The same can be said for many other nationalities.

WALLS AND TOWERS

Human migration, the movement of individuals and groups of people from one place to another, is **inherent in the creation narrative**. God blessed the male and female, He created to be fruitful, multiply, and replenish the whole earth (Genesis 1:27 – 28). God intended people to migrate in order to fill the earth. Following the flood, the families of the sons of Noah after their generations became nations. The major event, which led up to the tower of Babel project, was a mass movement of people of one language in search of a suitable dwelling place. They found a plain and decided to dwell there (Genesis 11). The insecurities, unsettledness, vulnerabilities and uncertainties of a migrant life informed the idea to build a city, have a tower and make a name for themselves. The city would be walled which not only defined its boundaries but also immediately secured those within it while at the same time kept away those outside of it. The tower would stand as a symbol of their power, enterprise and ingenuity. The city would be named, well known, intimidating and domineering, a pointer to its sovereignty. The driving motive for all this was that *“lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth”* (Genesis 11:4). The Babel enterprise was contrary to the purpose of God. It was anti-migration and also an anti-migrants solution, a self-protection and exclusion wall.

It seems, therefore, that we have situations where the forces, motives, and reasons which cause people to migrate or give in to migration are same factors which make others to seek to prevent, limit or exploit migration.

Since *“lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth”* (Genesis 11:4) was at variance with *“Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...”* (Genesis 1:28a) God *“babelled”* them to keep them open to migration its consequences notwithstanding.

It is possible then that migration could both be desirous and at the same time feared, acceptable and rejected depending on what situation is prevailing or purpose it serves.

CONFRONTING ATTITUDES: ESTABLISHING COMMON GROUNDS

This, therefore, could form a point for our reflection - to look at where we are on the issues surrounding migration, our own understanding. What will we consider desirous and what fears do we have about migration... the stranger in us which we seek to protect and the stranger we see in others we try to prevent? What stranger are we ready to become? What stranger do we fear to be? What makes us welcome or reject someone from another race? The basic question then will be how are our own basic desires and fears about migration different from that of the other? What common grounds do both of us share?

Our Christian understanding leads us to know that *“All people are born in the image of God”* (Genesis 1:26) whether they have a skin that is pigmented white, black, brown or without any pigmentation. **We all are fellow-creatures of God** as Malachi 2:10 reminds us. *“Have we not all one father? (Luke 13:34 pictures God as a mother also) hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother...?”* Leviticus 25:35 gives an even wider scope of who a brother or sister is, *“And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him yea though he be a stranger, or a sojourner, that he may live with thee”*.

The creation itself is one whole collective. The responsibility for sustenance of the earth rests on every part of it and therefore everyone. What happens in one area of the globe affects the other. In a sense therefore we all have a common ownership of the earth. We all should then have common right to not only have access to it but also dwell in any part of it. This common individual or group right does not necessarily work against the right of sovereignty of nations. The Psalmist declares that the whole world and all in it, the beasts, forest and mountains belong to God (Psalm 50:10), who bequeathed it to all.

Every human being shares the same basic needs for existence - food, shelter, clothing, safety, and human dignity. Every person will take every necessary possible step to meet these necessities, which at times entails having to migrate to other lands. Though generally a person will not ordinarily want to leave his or her country for another if most of the essential needs are met, but other reasons do arise which could make one to migrate.

The Bible describes all human beings as pilgrims on earth. We are strangers on transit in the world. We are all temporary dwellers. No one had a choice in being born an African, American, European or Asian.

We see how **divine acts can be manifested in migration**. The call of God required that Abraham and his household be migrants for most of his later life. In other words this instance of migration was an action initiated by God, an act of God Himself. As Christian students today, are there acts of God, which we can see in migration today? How can the divine and divine presence in migration affect the destinies of a people and of a world?

“Even in the harsh stories of migration, God is present, revealing himself. Abraham stepped out in faith to respond to God’s call (Genesis 12:1). He and Sarah extended bounteous hospitality to three strangers who were actually a manifestation of the Lord, and this became a paradigm for response to strangers of Abraham’s descendants. The grace of God even broke through situations of sin in the forced migration of the children of Jacob, Joseph, sold into slavery, eventually became the savior of his family (Genesis 37:45)- a type of Jesus, who, betrayed by a friend for thirty pieces of silver, saves the human family”. The salvation from famine, which came through Joseph, went beyond his immediate family to save the Egyptian nation and those around it. The presence of the stranger impacted the whole nation. We can think of how the migrants have challenged and hanged the way people think, act and live.

The history of the chosen people in experiencing enslavement and subsequent liberation by God gave rise to laws regarding strangers (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33). The people of Israel were not only to imitate God in the conduct to a stranger but were to draw from their experience in loving the neighbor as ones self. *“For the Lord, your God, is the ...Lord of lords, the greater God, mighty and awesome, who has no favorite, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and befriends the aliens, feeding and clothing him. So you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt”* (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). These commandments went beyond personal exhortations to being instituted within the laws for gleaning and tithing. (Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 14:28-29)

In reaping the harvest of the land, which is a type of the wealth of the nation provision was to be made for the poor and the stranger. They were not to use up everything for themselves but actually allow the stranger to dine with them to satisfaction.

The Lord Jesus Christ said the judgment of his followers would be based on the manner they responded and treated those in need, including, strangers (Mathew 25:11)

The Lord Jesus said, *“...whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me”* (Mathew 25:40). In the incarnation the Saviour came to his own but they knew him not. He was a stranger to them. Just like an alien Jesus left all that made him God to come to the world, to be sacrificed.

The church today and as Christians we need to relive the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-23). The risen Lord presented Himself as a stranger to his disciples. It was after they received Him as a stranger that their eyes were opened to His resurrection, which became their own resurrection, a newness of life and hope.

The Roman Catholic Church in the United States and Mexico recognized the following rights:

1. Persons have the right to find economic, political and social opportunities in their homeland to live in dignity and achieve full life through the use of their God-given gifts with a just and living wage.

2. Persons have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families. All the goods of the earth belong to all people. It becomes necessary for sovereign nations to provide ways to accommodate this right.
3. Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders. This however should not merely be for the purpose of accumulation of more wealth. More powerful economies have stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows, those who flee wars and persecution.
4. Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection by the global community without incarceration.
5. Regardless of their legal status, migrants, like all persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected without punitive laws and hard treatment by enforcement agents.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children, defines “Trafficking in persons” as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs”.

“Trafficking in person – in which men, women, and children from all over the globe are transported to other countries for the purpose of forced prostitution or labour inherently rejects the dignity of the human person and exploits conditions of global poverty” (– Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope).

Trafficking in human beings is a modern-day form of slavery. The United States “Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000” describes severe forms of human trafficking as “Sex Trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age or the recruitment, harbouring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labour or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.”

David Ford (2007) in his comments on “The Theological Legacy of the Slave Trade” touched on the root cause of this modern-day slave trade when he wrote: “It is a harrowing realization to appreciate that the fundamental building blocks of the transatlantic slave trade remain virtually untouched by modern notions of equality and social justice. The drive for growth, cultural imperialism and control of the world’s resources and wealth continue to be the primary motives in the economic and political policies of the world’s leading, and (in terms of where power resides) white, industrialized nations. Slavery, such as bonded labour and human trafficking, continues to exist today...”

not simply (as) evidence of humanity's continuing capacity for sin... (*rather*) the dominant political and economic ideas that underpin 21st century society in the west are precisely those - albeit in a more benign form - that create the conditions in which these practices and structures can exist. Not only is equality not a reality, but also the value of some people and people is deliberately emphasized (and exploited) over that of other. The continuing distance between the reality of exclusion and invitation to equality in the sight of God is self-evident”.

Trafficking in human persons is a global phenomenon, which affects men, but especially women and children. Every year 700,000 to 2 million women and children are trafficked across national and international boundaries. A significant factor in human trafficking is the economic gain. It is observed that trafficking of adult and young women reaps greater economic gain than drugs! It is the third largest source of profit for international organized crime, after drugs and arms, amounting to billions of dollars annually.

Cultural influences also play a role in the trade of human beings. Cultural perceptions of women and discriminatory views of prostitution involving men as against women might affect one's disposition or concern for women who are involved in prostitution who became victims of trafficking. Another contributory factor to human trafficking is the manner in which the media, commercialism and marketing projects manipulate the image and role of women. “We live in a culture, which thrives on a high level of consumption and convenience, often without awareness of or concern for how that level is achieved or maintained. We don't often stop to consider the migrant field labor or sweatshop factory labor at huge department stores or shopping centers”. (S. Jeanne Wingcenter, SSND).

The questions then to consider will be how our participation in a consumer culture relates to the exploitation of workers and the use of people as commodities for our enjoyment or convenience.

In addition to the economic status and states of poverty, low status of women, which underline human trafficking, other factors are the strong international criminal networks. The trafficking of both girls and boys, almost always involves to some extent deception, or agreement between adults, including at times parents and relations! Girls between the age of 13 and 18 constitute the largest group (with estimates of 500,000 girls below 18) within the sex industry. Virtually every country in the world is affected, whether economically developing or developed from the north or south. The majority of those trafficked are women under the age of 25. The fear of contracting HIV/AIDS by sex clients and the erroneous thought that young girls are not infected have led traffickers to recruit younger victims, even as young as under 10. It is estimated that about 1 million women and girls of various nationalities are trafficked into Thailand, with 20,000 to 30,000 women and girls from Myanmar (Burma) trafficked into brothels in Thailand while 5000 - 7000 Nepal girls get trafficked into India every year.

We yet recall how the dreams of Joseph became a source jealousy, fear and hatred by his brothers. They sold him in a foreign land to “see what would become of his dreams”. His dreams made him vulnerable. Potiphar's wife harassed him sexually and falsely accused

him. He did not get a fair trial and was thrown into prison. In prison Pharaoh's chief butler forgot him after making use of his gift. We can see a parallel in the actions of Joseph's brothers, the Ishmaelite traders, and Portiphar's wife in what happens in human trafficking today. One also notes the abuse of power in handling the case of a domestic servant.

However, Joseph's faith and knowledge of God, his moral values and sense of self-dignity in labor together with the gift of interpreting dreams became a tool with which God intervened to effect liberation. We also note how most people in the story used Joseph for their own ends – his brothers, the merchants, Portiphar and his wife, the prison guard and Pharaoh's officers, including Pharaoh himself. No one was thinking of protecting Joseph's dreams and interests. Joseph however knew that God had not forsaken him. He felt the presence of God. The recognition of Joseph's industry and gift only brought him more work but which also brought elevations to higher positions of responsibility.

We also read about the Pharaoh and his generations, which did not know Joseph and how they began to put the people of Israel into forced labour. This is similar to many who benefit from the sweats, deprivation, exploitation and sufferings of forced migrants and forced labour, and turn against them still.

The experience of Tamar, king David's daughter, is an example of the way young girls are forced unto sex, through deception, collusion, force and indifference. Amnon, David's first son lusted after his cousin a virgin Tamar. With the collaboration of subtle Jonadab, Tamar was lured and deceived into believing that she was going to care for a sick brother. The unexpected was the case. Amnon being stronger than her forced her and raped her, in spite of her pleas. Amnon throws Tamar out who goes on the street wailing. The father of Tamar, the king gets angry but does nothing to punish Amnon, or about Tamar's situation. "*So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house*". (2 Samuel 13:20b). After two years of concealing his hatred, Absalom, kills Amnon in revenge yet Tamar is left ostracized and her condition unchanged.

Those whom Tamar felt safe with and trusted the most gave in to her forced defilement. Jonadab exploited the innocence of Tamar to satisfy the selfish desire of Amnon. When Tamar is defiled nobody cared about giving her justice or rehabilitation. The societal stigma left her desolate for life.

We see ***the providential acts of God to prevent the destruction of forced migrants***, as with Queen Esther and her people in Shusan and also Daniel, his colleagues and the worship of the god of the land.

Migration is in a sense a demand for equity. Migrants represent a physical presence asking for a piece of the cake belonging to all. The presence of migrants often reveals the level of human selfishness and self-centeredness.

God would allow migration to reorder and reposition the world. It becomes the correct interpretation of the dreams of kings of the nations, just like that of Pharaoh, which differs from the advice of the astrologers representing today's experts on safeguarding the national well-being.

What challenges does migration and human trafficking hold for a Christian student group?

The challenge of building a community of young people and students from all nations:

- When conferences and assemblies occur - creating actual interaction and building relationships and friendships which would reduce the bias toward strangers.
- Creating other platforms of interaction and communication like internet discussion groups which cuts across human and territorial boundaries.
- Group exchange programmes beyond continental spheres.

The challenge of discovering and examining where we are in relating to strangers and people looked down upon then take deliberate actions to get closer to a "stranger". We are actually brought up not to talk to the stranger!

The challenge of creating awareness and education among students and family circles on issues of trafficking, forced prostitution, and sexual exploitation.

The challenge of seeking out trafficked persons and becoming "dog sniffers" within our neighbourhood.

Personal and Group Reflection Points

a) Jesus makes a whip of cords and drives out those who exhibited lack of respect for the temple. Though the situation was overwhelming, Jesus found a way to respond (John 2:13-22).

What are our feelings towards the lack of respect shown to women trafficked around the world, together with young men under servitude? What responses will be appropriate?

b) On the Sabbath, Jesus calls over a woman crippled by a spirit for eighteen years; touching her, He said "*women, you are set free from your ailment*" (Luke 13:10-13)

What "spirits" or forces contribute to crippling women and men who are trafficked today? What "spirits" cripple us? What would help free those trafficked? What would help free us to respond? How can we suffer with them, bear their shame, exploitation and fear? How can we *touch* them?

c) Can SCM offices become distress call centers? How can we support groups and networks focusing specially on migration and human trafficking?

How can we even symbolically, support, stand by or accompany a victim of human-trafficking or stranded “legal”/“illegal” migrant? How can we engage in a programme of recovery, repatriation, and integration at the student level?

References and Bibliography

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[http:// www.unodc.org/unodc/en/trafficking-human-beings.htm](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/trafficking-human-beings.htm)
- 2. Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope**
<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml>
- 3. The Theological Legacy of the Slave Trade** by David Ford 15 May 2007
- 4. Trafficking in Persons: Report in Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act 2000.**Trafficking in persons Report 2007.
5. Kenya Wildebeest Migration Safaris/Tanzania Serengeti Animal Migration Safari

Attachments:

- 1. “Theological Reflection-What Others Say”** Divining School, Vanderbilt University, Nashville.
- 2. The Forms and Impact of Human Trafficking (Trafficking in Persons Report)**
Labour Trafficking (Bonded Labor, involuntary servitude, Deb Bondage and Involuntary servitude, Among Guest Workers Involuntary Domestic Servitude, Forced Child Labor, Child Soldiers), Children Exploited for Commercial Sex, Child Sex Tourism, Servitude on the High Seas, Trafficking through Brokered Marriages, Technology of pornography in Child Sex Tourism, Products made with Slave Labor etc.

