

Editorial

MIGRATION: BUILDING THE FUTURE WITH MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, rightly said, “As a global community, we face a choice. Do we want migration to be a source of prosperity and international solidarity, or a byword for inhumanity and social friction?”¹ Human history has been marked by migration ever since its inception. The phenomenon of human mobility today often entails suffering due to the inevitable uprooting from one’s own country. In contrast, more people are migrating than ever before as a result of globalisation, war, persecution, violence, natural disasters, and other extreme circumstances that endanger their lives. Others leave their homeland because they can no longer afford to live with dignity, while others seek better life opportunities abroad – Labour Migration. However, the number is almost double what it was twenty-five years ago.

Migration is a powerful driver of sustainable development, for migrants and their communities. It brings significant benefits in the form of skills, strengthening the labour force, investment, and cultural diversity, and contributes to improving the lives of communities in their countries of origin through the transfer of skills and financial resources.² International migration has become a pressing issue for source and recipient countries, particularly in light of the ongoing refugee crises in the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, etc. Refugees should cultivate an open and positive attitude towards their receiving society and be willing to accept offers to

¹ António Guterres, “Towards a new global compact migration,” 11 January 2018, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/articles/2018-01-11/towards-new-global-compact-migration#:~:text=Migration%20should%20not%20mean%20suffering,migration%20truly%20work%20for%20all> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

² <https://www.iom.int/migration-sustainable-development-and-2030-agenda> (accessed on 15 January 2024).

build together an integrated community that would be a “common household” for all. Many developed countries need more migrant workers to care for their ageing populations. Can migrants and refugees build a new future in every country? In today’s world, migration has changed and is destined to increase in future decades. In the past, it was much easier to distinguish between voluntary and forced migration, between those who moved away looking for a better job or education and those whose lives were threatened by persecution. But over the years, the situation has become more complex, and consequently, the protection awarded to refugees has been extended to other groups, such as people fleeing for varied reasons.

Migration issues are so complex and far-reaching that understanding them demands a broad range of interdisciplinary research. Economics, politics, geography, demography, sociology, psychology, law, history, anthropology, and environmental studies are foremost among the disciplines that shape the emerging field of migration studies and migration theory.³

Every year, International Migrants’ Day is observed on December 18. International Migrants Day is seen as an opportunity to recognize the contributions made by millions of migrants to the economies of their host and home countries and promote respect for their basic human rights. Pope Francis reflected on the theme “Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees” to emphasise the collective effort required to build a future that embraces God’s plan to leave no one behind. The Church accompanies these vulnerable people on the move, who are among the most forgotten and neglected of our times.

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said: “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him” (Mt 2:13). Like many of the migrations that shaped the history of the Israelites, the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt did not come from a free choice. The decision to migrate should always be free, yet in many cases, even in our day, it is not. Millions of people are being forced to leave their home countries due to conflicts, natural disasters, or, more simply, the inability to live a dignified and prosperous life there. “For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked, and you gave me clothing, I

³ For further details of Global Migration and Refugees see Philip Marfleet, *Refugees in a Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

was sick, and you took care of me, I was in prison, and you visited me" (Mt 25:35-36). These words are a constant admonition to see in the migrant not simply a brother or sister in difficulty, but Christ himself, who knocks at our door. Consequently, even as we work to ensure that in every case, migration is the fruit of a free decision, we are called to show maximum respect for the dignity of each migrant; this entails accompanying and managing waves of migration as best we can, constructing bridges and not walls, and expanding channels for a safe and regular migration. In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important thing is that there will always be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote, and integrate everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone.

In response to the challenges of the contemporary world, theology has undergone numerous revisions since the Second Vatican Council. These challenges have been posed by aesthetics, feminism, religious pluralism, postmodernism, cultural diversity, and liberation movements. The ongoing phenomenon of global migration, which is currently experiencing an acceleration, offers an additional chance to situate theological analysis within a particular social context that arises from the "joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties" of numerous marginalised individuals in the present day (G S 1).

Our comprehension of migration and God can mutually influence and enhance one another, bridging the gap between theology and migration studies, tradition, and one of the most perplexing contemporary social concerns. My objective is to not only draw attention to the ethical obligations associated with displaced populations, but also to investigate novel approaches to scrutinising the theological domain of migration and potentially contest certain theological and biblical understandings that underpin the discourse surrounding migrants and refugees. For the purpose of this discussion, I will be focusing on migration through the lens of two concepts: *Imago Dei* and *Verbum Dei*.

1. *Imago Dei*

In the book of Genesis, we are introduced to the central truth that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). This is not just another label, but a way of speaking profoundly about human nature. Defining all human beings in terms of *imago Dei* provides a very different starting point for the discourse on migration and creates a very different trajectory for the discussion. *Imago Dei* names the personal and relational nature of human existence and the mystery that human life cannot be understood apart from the mystery

of God. Although *imago Dei* is foundational to Christian theology, it has been interpreted in various ways throughout history. Most debates about the term's meaning revolve around the condition of human nature after the Fall, as well as issues related to attributes (such as reason, will, emotions, and creativity), ethical qualities, social characteristics, and divine filiation. Irenaeus distinguished between "image" and "likeness," noting that "image" indicates ontological participation and "likeness" a moral transformation (*Adversus Haereses* 5.6.1; 5.8.1; 5.16.2). Tertullian believed that the image could never be destroyed, but it could be lost by sin (*De Baptismo* 5, 6.7).

Imago Dei is a two-edged sword that, on the one hand, serves as a positive affirmation of each person's value and worth, and on the other, evaluates and challenges any tendencies to dominate or oppress the poor and needy, or degrade them through various manifestations of racism, nativism, and xenophobia.⁴ The expulsion from Eden of Adam and Eve, the prototype of the *image and likeness of God*, and their border-crossing into the land beyond name the human propensity to move toward a state of sin and disorder (Gen 3:1–13). Sin disfigures the *imago Dei*, resulting in a fallen world that creates discord in relationships. The territory into which the Prodigal Son migrates and squanders all his worldly wealth (Lk 15:11–32) symbolizes this barren terrain; it is a place that moves people away from the original creative design into a place of estrangement from God, others, and themselves.⁵ However, the notion of *imago Dei* put forth in the Old Testament is realized in the New Testament through *imago Christi*. Christ is the perfect embodiment of *imago Dei* and the one who helps people migrate back to God by restoring in them what was lost by sin. Consequently, migration is not only a social reality with profound implications but also a way of thinking about God and what it means to be human in the world, which can become an important impetus in the ministry of reconciliation and a compelling force in understanding and responding to migrants and refugees.

2. *Verbum Dei*

By means of the *Verbum Dei*, which consists of the kenosis and crucifixion of Jesus, God surmounts the obstacles brought about by sin, re-establishes the boundaries established by those who have secluded

⁴ Migrants and refugees often bear the burden of a humanity living in tension between the land of likeness to God, which fosters the dignity of every person, and the land of unlikeness to God

⁵ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, Jane Marie Todd (trans.) (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 45.

themselves from Him, and penetrates the most isolated and desolate regions of the human condition. No aspect of a theology of migration is more fundamental, nor more challenging in its implications, than the incarnation. Through Jesus, God enters the broken and sinful territory of the human condition in order to help men and women, lost in their earthly sojourn, find their way back home to God. As noted in the Gospel of John, migration shapes Jesus' own self-understanding: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end... Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into his hands, that he had come from God, and that he was going back to God" (Jn 13:1, 3). The *Verbum Dei* from this perspective is the great migration of human history: God's movement in love to humanity makes possible humanity's movement to God. Hans Urs von Balthasar adds, "If the Prodigal Son had not already believed in his father's love, he would never have set out on his homeward journey."⁶

The sojourn of the *Verbum Dei* into this world is riddled with political and religious controversies, many of which are connected to narratives about migration. Luke's Gospel describes the nativity of Jesus within a documentation-related drama (Lk 2:1-5). In Matthew's account, Jesus and his family must flee a threat that endangers their lives, making them political refugees (Mt 2:13-17, a parallel to a foundational migration in biblical history, Exodus 1). In John's Gospel, many have trouble believing in Jesus precisely because of the place from which he emigrates (Jn 7:41-43, 52). In a fallen world, human beings find many compelling political, legal, social, and religious reasons to exclude—and reject—the migrant Son of God. Jesus was rejected by many in his day, including Herod, who feared losing his power (Mt 2:1-13); Jesus' family, who thought he was out of his mind (Mk 3:20-21); his neighbours who failed to understand his origins (Mt 13:54-57; Mk 6:1-4; Lk 4:13-30); and the rich young man, who had great wealth but did not want to share it (Mt 19:16-22). In migrating to the human race God enters into a place of "otherness," the very migration that human beings fear and find so difficult to make. This movement of divinity to humanity is predicated not on laws, institutions, or any form of human merit but, above all, on God's gratuity. In crossing borders of every kind for the good of others, the *Verbum Dei* reveals the mystery of God's a priori, self-giving love.

Joby Kunnathu's paper provides a migration theology grounded in the teachings of Pope Francis. A "theology in migration" or "theology in move" is what the pope suggests. Theologians ought to engage in personal

⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone: The Way of Revelation*, 5th edition (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 84.

encounters with migrants in order to get insight into their “blood and flesh experiences,” which would ultimately enhance their theology. The paper of Colman Okechukwu Nwokoro promotes the radical teachings of Pope Francis on migrants, who called on host communities and countries to recognise migrants and refugees’ immense potential to aid society. This paper highlights the teaching of Pope Francis that host communities and countries should use them to strengthen their economies and societies because everybody can promote human flourishing, societal change, and economic prosperity. Thus, host communities should respect migrants and refugees and allow them to develop as human beings. No one was tabulated by God. Deogratias M. Rwezaura reflects on displaced people and a moral challenge to the African Renaissance. In his article, “Protracted Internal Displacement as a Moral Challenge to African Renaissance,” he argues that despite climate-induced displacements, recurrent internal displacements across the continent due to the revival of armed conflict and coup d’états offer a moral challenge to the stated goals of a new Africa. Guns must be hushed, and broken communities and relationships must be repaired to allow forcibly displaced people to return home securely. These problems require an interdisciplinary strategy based on socio-pastoral and ethical humanitarian expertise.

Luz Elena Arozqueta Villeda recommends in her paper that instead of separating ethics and AI, we should prioritise human-centered policies and methods. She suggests that technological developments could benefit humanity if they foster a greater sense of awareness and respect for human dignity. This is particularly true if the algorithmic system design makes it possible for us to interact with the realities of marginalised groups like migrants and look at and listen to them without bias. The paper by Shyson Poruthoor Simon examines God’s Call in the book of Jonah. This Biblical exegesis concentrates on Jonah’s call for God’s universal love, despite the fact that several studies have been conducted on the prophet Jonah’s life and song. This study examines God’s benevolence to Gentiles with the belief that everyone can be saved. This study by Justin Devassy Puthenpurackal examines Hebrews 12:2 readings that suggest “Jesus as the model and the focus of believers’ faith.” The study proposes reading the text without the personal pronoun “our” in order to accurately translate it and highlight the ideas of Christin faith – the faith life of Jesus and the faith life of believers.

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