



MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES FROM A BIBLICAL AND ECCLESIAL POINT OF VIEW



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The Hebrew word *ger* (plural *gerim*) usually translated as sojourner or immigrant refers to aliens who settled in the land of Israel. *Gerim* enjoyed a very special status with profound respect and hospitality. They were under the constant protection of Yahweh (Deut. 10:18) and were often associated with the poor in Israel, the orphan and the widow (Deut. 14: 29). They were invited to participate in the national festivities (Deut. 16: 11). They were treated with the same justice as the Israelites (Deut 24: 7). Gradually they were also integrated (Deut. 23: 8). The reason behind this supporting attitude is that “Israel was

also once a sojourner in Egypt” (Deut. 5:14). The highest expression of the attitude of Israel toward the *gerim* is presented by Leviticus: “If stranger lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt” (19:33f). Similarly, Exodus 22:21 says, “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” Thus, the Old Testament teaches fair treatment of foreigners and openness to integrate them. The laws were common to both Israelites and new settlers.

From the New Testament, we learn that Jesus enriched the notion of stranger profoundly. Unconditional love for the stranger is typical form of love of neighbor. Jesus identifies himself with the stranger. He says “I was a stranger and you made me welcome” (Mt. 25:35). The Christian hospitality is exceptional. The Greek verb *sunagein* means to gather together. It indicates a communitarian gathering. The strangers are not only cared for by the existing communities, but are gathered together to be integrated to be full members of the community. Restrictions, discriminations and ethnic barriers were avoided

(Acts 2: 1f; 6: 1f). The apostle Peter proclaimed: “The truth I have now come to realize is that God does not have favorites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him” (Acts 10: 34, 35). This principle was officially proclaimed at the first council in Jerusalem (Acts Ch.15). Foreigners are no more strangers but are to be integrated into a community without discrimination.

Thus, migration was not unknown in the history of Judeo-Christian tradition. The Jewish people came into being through migration. They fled persecution, suffered in exile, and ultimately returned home. From this experience, they learn to love and empathize with refugees and immigrants (Lev 19:33). The Jesuit priest Allan Deck points out that migration is the way that God makes himself known to humans:

Can Christians ever forget that Jesus Christ himself was a refugee from the despotic terror of King Herod; or, more astonishingly, that the Trinitarian God of Christians became, as it were, a “displaced person” through the Incarnation, the central mystery of Christian faith?

In line with the scriptural traditions, the social doctrines of the church upholding the principle of solidarity defend the protection of migrants and refugees and demand wealthy nations to assist those in need. Pope Francis in his address to the Holy See’s diplomatic corps on 11 January 2016 pleading for the cause of refugees fleeing persecution and those fleeing poverty said, “Human history had been marked by great waves of migration, and humanity today must not let security fears replace the

principle of respecting the dignity of others.” He warned the nations during his return from Sweden to Rome in November 2016 that it is “inhumane to shut our doors and hearts to refugees.” He said, “If a country is able to integrate, then they should do what they can.” Welcoming, settling and integrating migrants is not a choice but a duty to be exercised in need.

The Catholic Church is thus committed to create social structures that all members of the society can flourish (the common good). It demands for right relations between community members (justice) and unity between native and immigrant communities (communion). The principle of solidarity combines all these values. Saint John Paul II thus characterized solidarity as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (Sollicitudo rei socialis, no. 38)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2241 declares, “The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin.” It goes on further to say that “political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants’ duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.”

The primary and fundamental concern of humanity is every individual person. The hallmark of human protection lies in the dignity of every human person. The dignity of the human person cannot be violated by economic reason or political power. However, it is not a single person who is the criterion of a society, Family is the basis of a society, since no human can live in isolation but is born and lives in a family. Hence, the foundation for integration of natives and aliens, inmates and migrants, citizens and refugees lies in protection and preservation of family, which is the first and the most fundamental unit of a society.

The family is the main concern to deal with migration problems. Therefore, governments must give due attention to the needs of the family: housing, the education of children. Working conditions, social security, and taxes; and that in policy decisions affecting migrants their right to live together as a family should be safeguarded (Apostolicam Actuositatem, n.2). The church, particularly episcopal conferences, should pay special attention to the very pressing problems of migrants, exiles, refugees, seafarers, airplane personnel, highway users, nomads, tourists, gypsies, pilgrims and students studying abroad (Christus Dominus, n.18).

The default position of any state or religion should be one of compassion and openness for integration rather than defensiveness and hostility. Similarly, the immigrants should not only have expectations for protections of assimilation, but must have willingness to integrate culturally and economically and to accept responsibilities and laws of the settling land.

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“MIGRATION, IF HANDLED WITH HUMANITY, IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EVERYONE TO MEET AND GROW”

A brief interview with Pope Francis and focuses on the plight of refugees and the creation of a new Vatican department to guide the church's response to this humanitarian crisis

Your Holiness, on July 8, 2013, you made this statement while visiting Lampedusa: “I had to come here to pray,” you said, “to make a gesture of closeness but also to reawaken our consciences.” On April 16, 2016, you repeated this statement in Lesbos, adding your prayers to those of Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. How can ecumenical and interreligious dialogue - not only among the three religions of the children of Abraham but also with all the others - contribute to a correct understanding of the problem of migration, with its burden of human suffering, as we look for possible solutions to welcoming those who arrive in Europe?

The visit to Lesbos and the prayers with Archbishop Ieronymos and Patriarch Bartholomew are a sharing of brotherhood, of closeness to the cries of the many innocents who ask only for a chance to save their own lives. Migration, if handled with humanity, is an opportunity for everyone to meet and grow. We cannot lose our sense of fraternal responsibility. The defense of

human beings knows no barriers:

We are all united in wanting to ensure a dignified life for every man, woman and child who is forced to abandon his or her own land. There is no difference of creed that can outweigh this wish—in fact, quite the contrary.

In Europe and around the world we are living through a critical moment in the management of migration policies. Those in power must be both far-sighted and coherent in watchful respect for fundamental human rights, as well as trying to end to the causes of forced migration which oblige civilians to flee.

The directives of your Motu Proprio (Aug. 17, 2016) for the creation of a new social Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development within the Catholic Church came into effect on January 1. For the social teaching of the church, the dicastery - which takes over the remit of various pastoral councils - is the new organizational destination of a long historical journey. What mission have you entrusted to the new dicastery, with

regard to migrants and refugees?

Yes, I set up the Migrants & Refugees Section of the new Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development with a start date of Jan 1, 2017. The multitude of migrants, refugees, displaced people and victims of human trafficking requires particular care. This is why I decided to take care of them personally, at least for a while, and why the section reports to me directly. I am thinking of all those who flee from conflicts, persecutions or humanitarian emergencies, whether natural or caused by human intervention.

I am thinking about victims of human trafficking, about undocumented migrants, about migrant workers in exploitative situations and about women, young people and children migrating in situations of vulnerability. As for the Christian community, the peaceful integration of people from different cultures is, in some way, a reflection of its Catholicism.

Courtesy to the Italian journal Libertàcivili, April 07, 2017



1 Cross demolition upsets Catholics Mumbai

The demolition of a Cross in Bandra (West) by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) irked the Catholic community. The Cross is said to be there for many years. The tearing down of the crosses and shrines are increasing day by day throughout the country. Even though the proof of the legality of the Cross was shown to the Municipal Corporation, they went on bulldozing the Cross. The locals reacted to this kind of brutal act by conducting a prayer service and putting up a temporary Cross at the place, and a number of them went to the Bandra police station protesting the demolition. The Supreme Court had ordered all illegal structures in public places to be demolished. "They have confused it with the illegal ones," said Godfrey Pimenta of the Bombay Catholic Sabha, adding that "this Cross didn't feature in the list of illegal ones."

2 Farmers' migration Delhi

India is facing mass migration from its poor villages to the major cities looking for jobs in domestic aids or in the construction, textile, transportation and agriculture industries. This phenomena of internal migration have challenged the Caritas India to start the Agrarian Prosperity Program (APP) and to provide villagers with alternative sources of income. "Caritas introduced farmers to new techniques such as organic farming, a system to preserve indigenous seeds besides intensifying activities to save water such as renovation and construction of check dams, ponds, tanks and wells. They formed self-help groups and farmer clubs to empower women and build the capacity of farmers to create better livelihood opportunities." Thus Caritas India is able to engage the villagers in cultivating multiple crops year-round and increase their annual income.

3 Fr. Tom Uzhunnallil Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday said he will take up with Prime Minister Narendra Modi the issue of kidnapped Kerala Catholic priest Tom Uzhunnallil, who is at an undisclosed location in Yemen. In March 2016 militants barged into a care home for the elderly set up by Mother Teresa in Yemen's Aden and shot dead many people, including four nuns of the Missionaries of Charity, one of whom was from India. After the shooting, the militants abducted Uzhunnallil. Since then, besides a few videos, there has been no news of his whereabouts.

4 Kerala nun writer-director Thalasserry

Sister Jiya, a member of the Medical Sisters of St Joseph (MSJ) order in Kerala, has become the first nun in India to direct a feature film. She is now the writer-director of a full-length Malayalam feature film 'Ente Vellithooval'. The two-and-a-half hour long film is all set to hit the screens, and it stands proof of Sr Jiya's immense dedication and relentless hard work for over a year. 'Ente Vellithooval' is all about the love for children. The film was made on a budget around 4 million rupees. Sr Jiya raised the money with the help of family and friends, while the church also chipped in with a significant contribution towards the end to help her finish the project. Sister, who hails from Palakkad, is the in-charge of the lab at St Sebastian's Hospital in Cherupuzha, Kannur.

5 Sr Rani Maria Mumbai

The beatification of Sr Rani Maria, a Malayali missionary nun who was stabbed to death in Indore, Madhya Pradesh, 22 years ago, will be held in Indore on November 4. Vatican has intimated the confirmed date of beatification to the Superior General Franciscan Clarist Congregation (FCC), Sr Rani's order. In March, the Vatican had cleared her beatification approving the report of the 'Congregation for the Causes of Saints' to promulgate the decree of Sr Rani's martyrdom. The decision of Pope Francis to beatify Sr Rani Maria brings joy to all Catholics in India," said Mar George Cardinal Alencherry, head of the Syro-Malabar Church. Sr Rani Maria is a native of Pulluvazhi at Perumbavoor in Ernakulam district.