

Migration: A Global Social Reality with Multiple Religious Implications

Răzvan Ionuț NEAGU

University of Bucharest, Romania, razvan.neagu@drd.unibuc.ro

ABSTRACT: Globally, migration is a social phenomenon that affects every country, either by sending migrants or receiving them. A closer look at history shows that since ancient times, this phenomenon has been closely linked to the human experience throughout its existence. At the same time, migration should not only be seen as a social phenomenon but also as the vehicle through which people, with all their values and beliefs, influence the society in which they live at any given time. This is also true for followers of the Christian religion who, either out of their own conviction or forced by the social order of the times in which they lived, came to influence people from all continents with their faith and values. Last but not least, attention will be drawn to the experience of the Son of God, who, by becoming incarnate in human nature, places himself in the position of one who is alienated from his native land.

KEYWORDS: migration, foreigner, Christianity, religion, social space

1. Introduction

In the recent history of mankind, migration has been a major concern for the world's states, which has resulted in some positions in favor of migration but also in attempts to limit it. In every corner of the world, migration is a reality, with a greater or lesser presence depending on the specifics of the country and the interests of those who can be classified as migrants. This is not surprising because "migration has been a part of human history since its inception. But today, thanks to the spread of rapid change brought about by globalization, many people are migrating more than ever before" (Groody 2009, 638; Rotaru 2014, 532-541). In this way, the explosion of migration can lead to cultural enrichment built on a foundation of diversity and pluralism but also to crises that are sometimes unmanageable. A review of the New Testament writings suggests that many Christians experienced this migration either because of persecution by the authorities (see the example of Aquila and Priscilla) or because of their desire to spread the Gospel message (Rotaru 2024, 141-151). Either of these causes has only helped this new group, Christianity, to grow in numbers and become the largest religious group in society today in terms of adherents.

In this paper the influence of migration on the development of Christianity will be analyzed, an influence which cannot be neglected and which can lead to a change of attitude towards this phenomenon in today's society. It will then be seen from the perspective of the experience that God Himself goes through when He chooses to become incarnate and an integral part of the world He came to save.

2. Migration - a favorable element for the expansion of Christianity throughout its development history

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus Christ tells His disciples, "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in

all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1), setting before them the prospect of the migration through which they had to pass in order to be able to fulfill what He had told them. From then until today many of those who wanted to go and preach the Gospel message had to go beyond the borders of their own country and adapt to the new conditions of life in the country they were going to, so that in this way they could be instrumental in the development of Christianity to the ends of the earth. As one who had gone through this experience of migration the Lord Jesus Christ had every authority to ask his disciples not to be content with the comfort offered by their own country and to go beyond interstate borders. In the introduction to the book *Christianities in Migration: The Global Perspective*, Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan make a claim that may contradict at first glance by saying that "because of migration, temporary or permanent, internal or intercontinental/international, legal or undocumented, planned or rushed, Christianity has become an indigenized religion and a global Christianity" (Padilla and Phan 2016, 3). In doing so, the author want to set before the reader a challenging horizon in which Christianity develops through the social phenomenon of migration, which will lead to a worldwide dominating movement at some point.

2.1. Migration, the working matrix of the church in spreading the Gospel message

Looking at the dimensions that Christianity has reached today, it is interesting to note what those springs have led to it. By what means the followers of the new grouping have been able to provide the necessary impetus for the development of Christianity to take place. The spiritual and theological arguments behind the multiplication of Christian groupings across geographical territories cannot be ignored, but at the same time the social readiness of Christ's followers to move into new territories cannot be overlooked, even if this sometimes happened by force. Of this, in the aforementioned book, Phan states that "migration is...not only an ongoing reality of the church, from the beginnings of its existence through the ages and especially today, but also the significance of securing its continued existence and growth through worldwide expansion. In this way migration has played a pivotal role in the emergence of Christianity as a global religion" (Padilla and Phan 2016, 10). Thus, the willingness of Christians to migrate from one territory to another has been the space for movement to grow from a number of about 120 followers to over two billion in the contemporary period. This ensured the existence of this religious grouping and its development throughout centuries of history. How was it possible for this movement, which began among Jews, to become as global as it is today?

The existence of the church as an institution involves not only a spiritual component but also a social component (Rotaru 2017, 57-76), because the church is made up of people who interact with each other and move according to the interests they have at any given time. In this way the transition of people from one territory to another leads to reciprocal influences which affect the customs and beliefs of those who come into contact with each other. This was and is the experience that those of the Christian faith have gone through and are going through, and it is one through which the influence of Christianity has transcended the barriers of time and space.

At the beginning of its existence, the church was seen as another sect of Judaism, a proclaimed monotheistic religion trying to carve its own way through and increase its influence through those who adhered to its values and principles. To the rulers of the time, Christianity seemed to be a strange grouping, to say the least, one that, at first, they could not separate from its Jewish affiliation. They carried this label of ethnic belonging and were seen as "Jews who shared a common set of scriptures and a sense of belonging as God's chosen ones with an ethic of mutual aid and a purity of conscience contrasted with that of the Gentile societies that surrounded them" (Chadwick 2001, 5) and although this was the

perception of the people in society at the time about the church (Rotaru 2012, 5), it manages to transcend the boundaries of its own country and culture and make its message universal.

The universality of the message and its applicability was something that was intended not by the followers of Christ, but by their Teacher himself. This is confirmed by Luke in Acts 1:8. The Apostle Paul is also one who is fighting for the message he preached, which he says was entrusted to him by Christ Himself, to be accepted by the other Gentiles and not just the Jews. In Romans 9-11 he shows that this movement of salvation from the Jews to the Gentiles is God's intention and not some human claim. Speaking of this, Henry Chadwick says that "Paul...interprets the movement among the people as a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy and as a parenthesis in the divine plan for human history, intended to challenge the Jews to realize the truth of Jesus' message and the authenticity of messiahship as it wins more and more converts around the world" (Chadwick 2001, 10). Analyzing the subsequent course of events it seems that Paul's mission was more successful among the Gentiles than among his Jewish people. It is interesting to note that in order to do this, Paul behaved like a migrant going from city to city, from territory to territory and from country to country depriving himself of the comforts of his home country and becoming an outcast and a prisoner, accused of disrupting the normal social order (this is what happens in the cities of Lystra, Philippi and Ephesus, but also in Jerusalem where Paul is caught, imprisoned and finally sent to the dungeon in Rome).

This being the case, the expansion of Christianity initially takes place within Jewish communities outside the borders of Israel. Under these circumstances, "the first Christian migration, on the path of Christianity's radical transformation from a Jewish sect into a global migratory institution, takes place within the Jewish diaspora" (Padilla, Phan 2016, 13). This statement is true when viewed only through a sociological lens, so to the human observer this movement is of Jews who had left their homelands. However, when the situation is analyzed from a biblical point of view (Acts 8) it can be seen that this migration of Christian-oriented Jews takes place against the backdrop of persecution directed against them by their fellow countrymen who did not agree with their message, and from the point of view of migration, these Jews who leave their homeland can be classified as refugees. Another observation based on the above quote is that these refugees interacted with Diaspora Jews who, in the collective mind, had this expectation, of the Anointed One of God who is to come and establish the Kingdom of God, so their message is initially received by an audience who is not unaware of this situation.

This period is followed by another in which Roman troops, under the Roman general Titus, enter Judea to put down the revolt of the Jewish insurgents. The Roman troops make no distinction between the inhabitants of the country so that even the Christian Jews are threatened by this invasion and, to save their lives, migrate to other territories. About what happened in this period, Padilla and Phan (2016, 14) state that "the departure of Christians from Palestine coincided with the evangelistic activity of the church...it seems that the Christian community, which at that time was on the order of thousands, emigrates en masse from Jerusalem and Palestine as a whole, either forcibly or voluntarily, to various parts of the world," a movement whereby, thanks to God's providence, the message conveyed by the church reaches an increasing number of people. For his part, the Roman historian Tacitus (2014, 379), presents the moment of the conquest of Jerusalem as one in which, in addition to the Roman troops, a large number of Arabs who hated their neighbors and wanted to oppress them joined them. This confirms the tensions that were in the region and which often resulted in armed conflicts that resulted in many personal and national tragedies.

As a result of these wars, Christians spread to new territories, but this does not happen under the auspices of a friendly welcome in these other territories. In Pliny the Younger's reply to the Emperor Trajan it may be seen how those who were accused before him of being Christians were received and treated. The Roman governor in letter 96 of book X writes the

following: 'In the case of those who were brought before me under the name of Christians, the procedure was as follows. I asked them whether they were Christians or not. In the case of those who confessed that they were, I asked the question a second and third time. Those who persisted, I ordered to be executed. For, indeed, I have no doubt, whatever may be the reason of their confession, that their obstinacy, at whatever level, and their inflexible obstinacy, ought to be punished' (Pliny Secundus 2014, 481). Reading this, one can see that the attitude towards Christians was a hostile one, and the charge for which they received condemnation was the name they bore, namely that of Christians. From the above account it is clear that simply belonging to that group attracted the death sentence for the woman who 'stubbornly' kept her testimony. Under these auspices, groups of migrant Christians from that region try to make their own way and survive the hostile living conditions and it is amazing that despite all the threats, both from the Jews and the Romans, they succeed.

Geographically, the migration of Christians in this period is towards five major regions, namely Mesopotamia and the Roman province of Syria, Greece and Asia Minor, the Western Mediterranean (Italy, France, Spain and North Africa), Egypt and East Asia (Padilla and Phan 2016, 14-16). In each of these regions persecution of Christians was present to a greater or lesser degree, but "they built a number of lively and mission-oriented communities" (Padilla and Phan 2016, 14), some of them willing to pay with their lives for their beliefs, and others abdicating those beliefs in order not to have their lives endangered.

2.2. Migration, a global phenomenon in which the principle of "love your neighbor" can be tested

As history has progressed, Christians have found themselves in a double position. The first was as migrants, a role that will probably not end until human history. The second is as receivers of migrants. In the second, Christian principles can lead to a solid basis of relationships in which love for neighbour, as demonstrated by Jesus Christ, can help to facilitate integration both for those who are forced to leave their own underdeveloped countries and choose destinations in Christian, more economically developed territories, and for those who are forced by conflicts in their own countries to leave their native lands and seek refuge in more peaceful places.

What has happened in recent decades has led to a generalisation of migration. Phan (2016, 845) states that "a seismic phenomenon in our contemporary world is undoubtedly migration. After the Second World War, migration has become a global phenomenon of unimaginable magnitude and complexity. There is virtually no nation on earth that has not been seriously affected by migration, either as a country of origin or as a country of destination." There is no doubt that the phenomenon of migration presents itself on such a global scale. It is enough to watch TV news bulletins or browse through a newspaper to encounter at least one reference to this phenomenon, many of them generating a lot of emotions through the people who are involved and going through real dramas them on a personal level. Sometimes it is even the case that people in refugee camps are used as manipulative elements in relations between states.

In the unfolding of this phenomenon, it is interesting to observe what the reaction of countries with cultures influenced by Christian principles is and whether these countries take into account the principle of "love of neighbour" when dealing with migrants. In the continuation of his article, Phan (2016, 847) writes: "In response to the migration crisis, political organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union have engaged agencies to study the migration issue from different perspectives as well as to provide emergency aid. Religious authorities, especially Pope Francis, have awakened our sense of solidarity with these victims and advised churches and religious communities to welcome them into their midst." These efforts and statements are commendable and they seem to

confirm the application of the aforementioned principle, but these initiatives have also met with opposition from other organizations and individuals, so that "anti-immigration rhetoric and policies, especially against Muslims, are on the rise lately, even in countries that have traditionally been hospitable to migrants" (Phan 2016, 847). These anti-immigrant discourses greatly influenced what happened in the UK when the referendum to leave the European Union was held and generated feelings of rejection towards all immigrants in some people. At the same time there were other organizations that continued to provide assistance to migrants, but most attention was paid to social aspects and less to relational or spiritual ones, and this was because "scholars have generally explained the phenomenon of migration only in social and economic terms, mostly reflecting on those kinds of questions designed by sociologists to understand the experience of migration" (Eppsteiner and Hagan 2016, 49), which is not surprising when one tries to explain the origin of life only in terms of matter and does not take into account the complexity of the human being. Undoubtedly, the phenomenon of migration goes beyond the boundaries of the social sciences and it can be observed that "not once does it make clear that historically migration has been a major catalyst for the realization of Christianity's eschatological dimension, so that migration is not simply an accident of history in the development of Christianity but constitutes the church's very nature as an eschatological community-that migrantness is an essential mark of the true church" (Phan 2016, 849). Phan sees migration as more than a social phenomenon of people moving between different geographical territories, or an accident of history, considering that for the church, the attitude of not being bound to a territory is a defining indicator of an eschatological community.

3. In the Christian vision - without Migration there would be no salvation

This statement might seem bold at first glance and could even create confusion. This is why the word Migration was capitalized, because it does not refer to the common experience of people going from one country to another on this earth, but to the transfer of the Son of God to the world on earth by incarnation. In this way He was able to assume the role of representative of men in condemnation and bring salvation.

In Phan's view, such an approach to theology also involves a slightly different way of doing theology than the classical one, according to which "in order to distinguish the signs of the right time, the most productive approach to building a theology of migration will be a multidisciplinary one. This means that alongside appropriate theological disciplines such as biblical study, church history, systematic and practical theology, migration theology must draw its data from secular disciplines such as sociology, geography, demography, anthropology, psychology, history, politics and migration law. As a result, the theologian will develop a "multi- and cross-cultural" epistemology of seeing reality from the margins and from below" (Phan 2016, 855). This proposal of Phan's is bold and it remains to be seen whether it is an appropriate and correct way of doing theology but, at the same time, it brings a perspective that should not be overlooked, namely that humans are not mere actors in salvation history.

Looking at the life of Jesus Christ through the lens of Migration, two directions can be indicated. The first is that in order to save his life until his "hour" comes (as mentioned several times in the gospels), Jesus Christ goes through the phenomenon of migration, so that "the gospel writers leave no doubt that Jesus' life experience includes the travail of a refugee, the pain of uprooting, the hostility with which an unwanted stranger is met, and the isolation of the homeless" (Padilla and Phan 2016, 40). In this way, Jesus also goes through this human experience of the one who must leave the familiar homelands and accept the life of a fugitive so that, in the end, God's plan for his life can be fulfilled with precision. The second is the experience of the incarnation through which Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of

God, migrates from heavenly glory to the earth under the curse of sin to bring about the liberation of the human race and creation from that curse and from the condemnation that came as a result of Adam's sin. Phan (2016, 861) believes that "the incarnation of God's Word in Jesus of Nazareth can be seen as a migratory movement of God" even though, in a sense, this is not a purely migratory movement of God because it all belongs to God, but only a picture of such a movement from a human perspective. Therefore, the salvation of man from a religious perspective was only possible when through the incarnation, the Son of God descended to the earth under the condemnation of sin and taking sin upon Himself brings salvation to man from his condemned state.

4. Conclusions

A careful analysis of the phenomenon of migration can lead to some conclusions that can be of great use to members of churches today. First of all, it should not be forgotten that in its development, Christianity has made full use of migration, going from a community seen as a sect of Judaism to the most widespread land religion of today. No doubt many Christians were forced to migrate, but this did not prevent them from influencing the countries they reached, even if for some of them the price paid was their own lives. The history of the persecution they have had to endure should generate a much friendlier attitude towards those who today bear the name of migrants.

The church is portrayed in the Bible as being on a journey to the heavenly homeland, which means that the place it now occupies is in a country that does not belong to it and to which it is migrating. In this place, Christians can show by concrete actions the materialization of the principle of "love your neighbor" so that those who visit it feel welcome. Last but not least, the attitude towards migration should take into account how God chose to come down to earth, to be an immigrant, to accept all the injustices from people, and in this way, to bring salvation to many people. It should not be forgotten that without Migration there is no salvation. Without Christ leaving His heavenly glory and coming to earth, man could not have paid for his salvation.

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