



THEOLOGY OF
HUMAN MOBILITY
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Today migrations represent a major political, social and human concern for the global agenda as they affect governments, the Catholic Church as well as other faith-based communities, local communities, and countless individuals. In recent years individual scholars have studied the significant impact and transforming power of human mobility as portrayed in the Bible, in the experience of major religious figures, in the social teaching of the Church and in specific religious traditions. In order to responsibly address the challenges posed by migration, local Churches in sending, transit and receiving countries around the world are called to promote theological reflections and studies on the phenomenon, as well as to enable and encourage concrete pastoral actions. A biblical, theological and pastoral reflection on today's migrants and refugees is therefore very timely and useful. To such extent, the Scalabrini International Migration Institute (SIMI), the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), and the Union of Superiors General (USG) organized and held an online international conference on the Theology of Human Mobility in the 21st Century on 20-22 September 2021. This book presents the proceedings of the conference, aiming at providing valuable information and insights for both biblical and theological research, as well as for the pastoral planning and the formation and training of pastoral workers.

MIGRANTS AND PILGRIMS AS OUR ANCESTORS (1 Chr 29:15)
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Elizangela Chaves Dias, Aldo Skoda, Veronica De Sanctis

‘MIGRANTS AND PILGRIMS AS OUR ANCESTORS’

(1 Chr 29:15)

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MOBILITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Editors

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INTRODUCTION

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Migrations are more than purely movements from a place to another; they are related to cultural, social, and political transformations and to the continuous reshaping of social, political and personal boundaries. In different ways, migrants raise very basic questions simply being there since they have the capacity to transform established identities, to affect the demographic structure of the receiving society, to impact political life. Therefore, they represent a major political, social and human concern today. They raise social and economic questions of greatest relevance for the global agenda, as they affect governments, the Catholic Church as well as other faith-based communities, local communities, and countless individuals. Media and political debate all over the globe offer immediate evidence almost on a daily basis. Demographers and social analysts have called ours the “era of migration”. In fact, more than 280 million people live and work in a country different than that of their birth. Some 60 million of them are forcibly expelled from their home by violence and many more by violation of human rights, extreme poverty and the search of a better life. Among these there are about 700 million of internal migrants (IDPs).

A reflection on today’s migrants and refugees is therefore very timely and useful. The social sciences have written much and encouraged research on this major social phenomenon. Religions

have not ignored the significant impact and transforming power of human mobility nor the problems that being uprooted and inserted in a new environment entail. Among these, the catholic tradition has been given a great deal of attention to people on the move. Biblical and theological studies on the topic have been catching up in recent years adding a specific and original angle of analysis that highlights solidarity, ethical responsibility, and God's plan. In fact, in recent years individual scholars have studied these aspects of human mobility as portrayed in the Bible, in the experience of major religious figures, in the social teaching of the Church and in specific religious traditions. In order to responsibly address the challenges posed by migration, local Churches in sending, transit and receiving countries around the world are called to promote theological reflections and studies on the phenomenon, as well as to enable and encourage concrete pastoral actions. Indeed, special groups of religious women and men belonging to different Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life are specifically dedicated to the care of people on the move.

This volume contains the Proceedings of the International Conference, 'Migrants and Pilgrims as our Ancestors' (1 Chr 29:15). Theology of Human Mobility in the 21st Century, held from 20 to 22 of September 2021. Born as an intercongregational initiative promoted by the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), the Union of Superiors General (USG), and the Scalabrini International Migration Institute (SIMI) aimed at focusing on the biblical, theological, and pastoral reflection as well as on the concrete actions through which the Church in general, and Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in particular, accompany and support migrants, refugees, IDPs and seafarers. The Conference convened a group of international biblical scholars, theologians, and pastoral agents to present and

debate about the status of their research, and respond to the reality of current migration movements. By inviting to participate the persons working in the pastoral and social care of migrants, the daily practical problems emerging from the encounter of the newcomers with the host society were presented for a collective evaluation and search for solutions; thus, making the 3 days International Conference not purely academic, but representing an important occasion for a reflection open to action.

The conference was opened by H.E. Card. Braz de Aviz who, after reciting the prayer for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, recalled how «combining biblical, theological and pastoral reflection with the action of consecrated persons in favor of migrants» is «a concrete testimony that indicates a style to follow». Not only is it a style to follow, but caring for our sisters and brothers forced to flee «is an unavoidable responsibility. Since we are all migrants and the earth belongs to God», remembered H. E. Cardinal Silvano Maria Tomasi. Among the authorities who opened the proceedings were Fr. Fabio Baggio, a Scalabrinian and Undersecretary of the Migrants and Refugees Section of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, and Fr. Leonir Chiarello, Superior General of the Scalabrinian Missionaries. «To do pastoral theology today, one must know how to pitch a tent among the people of God. In particular, as Pope Francis reminds us, we need to know how to pitch our tent among the inhabitants of the existential peripheries; this allows us to listen to the people of God, read together the signs of the times and above all to learn the meaning of the faith of the faithful» – said Fr. Baggio. This path must be accompanied by a «systematic study» given «the complexity and rapidity of the changes as well as the breadth of the actors that the migration phenomenon involves, who are migrants, refugees, displaced persons, sea-

farers, and all those who in one way or another experience a form of uprooting», stressed Fr. Chiarello.

The program entailed three full working days of three sessions each divided into different themes. The first day was dedicated to the Biblical reflection and to experiences in North & South America with a specific focus on the borders and the protection of human rights. The second day to the Theological reflection and the experiences of forced migration and human trafficking in Africa and Europe. The topic of the third day was the Pastoral reflection on migration with a focus on education and health promotion best practices for improving integration in Asia and Oceania. Many shared with the audience good practices at the local level that have deepened the reality of the migratory path, and the commitment to the healing process, both physical, psychological, and spiritual. This publication of the proceedings reflects such sections and brings together the interventions presented by invited speakers. The volume is multilingual: English, French, Italian, and Spanish in order to offer the contributors the choice of writing in their own language which gives the possibility to important works to emerge in other languages rather than only in English.

The book is therefore divided into three parts, each dedicated to a day of the Conference. The biblical session of this volume offers a *status quaestionis* on the study of the Bible from a migratory perspective. The text identifies several frequent themes, on the basis of which the biblical text has been studied in the last ten years: the migrant and migration in the OT, welcome, hospitality and theoxenia, walking as a metaphor for life, loving the migrant, cities of refuge, exile and return, exemplary characters, the migrant Jesus, migration and mission and the literary genre of the journey. In addition, the last topic briefly presents a series of specifically biblical publications, in which there are indica-

tions of books and journals of significant topicality and academic and pastoral relevance on the study of motives related to forced or spontaneous migration.

The sequence includes the article “Las migraciones en el Antiguo Testamento”, the author Dra. Nuria Calduch-Benages leads the reader to understand the identity of God’s people from their migratory movements. According to the author, the Israelites were forced to emigrate several times. Driven by hunger, political oppression or the desire to improve their living conditions, they will leave the country and settle in foreign lands such as Egypt, Moab, Persia and Babylon. Now, being a foreigner and emigrant is no obstacle to receiving God’s favor and protection. Proof of this is the Roman centurion who lived in Capernaum at the time of Jesus (Mt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10; Jn 4:46-53). Even Jesus, from an early age, experienced what it means to be an immigrant and the uprooting that this situation entails (Mt 2:13-23). Starting, therefore, from a general overview, the article gives special attention to the migrations of Abraham and Sarah.

The second biblical article is entitled “The Global Migration Crisis and the Church’s Response: A Biblical Perspective”. Dr. vãnTHANH NGUYỄN, svd, faced with the migration crisis, starts with the question: How should Christians react to this troubling sign of the times? Does the Bible have anything to say about today’s global migration crisis? The author proposes that much of the Bible was written by, for and about foreigners, migrants and refugees, so its teachings remain valid for today’s realities. In the first part of the essay, the author invites the reader to see the reality of the time by examining the three main factors of contemporary migration, namely, wars and conflicts, human trafficking and environmental disasters. In the second part, he invites the reader to judge from Scripture by reflecting on three stories of migration, namely that of Joseph, Moses and Jesus. The

final section invites the reader to act by cultivating justice, peace and hospitality towards strangers.

The session on good practice reports two models of pastoral response to the reality of migrants in North and South America. In his talk Pat Murphy, cs, founder of the Migrant House in Tijuana-Mexico, summarizes the current challenge of walking with migrant brothers and sisters on their journey in search of a better life. In the short term, more emergency responses follow, offering food for the journey, space for rest and clothing against the elements. However, on another level, one is called upon to speak up for migrants and, when necessary, to defend their basic human rights. It is not a matter of choosing to work on one level or the other, because as followers of Jesus Christ, Christians must work on both levels in accompaniment and radical hospitality to the needy in Mexico, fueled only by the dream of crossing the border to the United States.

Sr. Rosita, mscs, founder of the Migration and Human Rights Institute (IMDH) in Brasilia-Brazil, says that geographical boundaries are not the only borders that migrants and refugees must face on their journey to find food, safety and protection. IMDH's pastoral practice over two decades of work has given her insight into the realities and challenges that migrants face in their daily lives. The history of migrants and refugees welcomed by IMDH is marked by anguish and suffering in the face of borders, be they geographical, legal, political, social or cultural. Invisible walls, successive or simultaneous, each with its own barriers to overcome. IMDH's mission is to act in several axes to contribute to the defense of human rights, so that immigrants and refugees are welcomed, protected and integrated, with dignity. Therefore, the report presented in this volume is dedicated to referring to the projects and activities carried out by IMDH.

The second part of this volume collects the contributions of the conference session dedicated to the Theological Reflection. Daniel Groody in his essay “Migration and the Eucharist: A Sacramental Vision of Migration” looks at migrants and migration in light of the narratives of the Scriptures, the Eucharist, and the Pope’s visit to Lampedusa on July 13, 2013. It offers a new, «theologically infused imagination that seeks to challenge some of the dehumanizing narratives operative around migration today» and it does it by exploring the «integral connection» and «inseparable relationship» between the bodies of refugees and the body of Christ.

The session on good practice focuses with particular emphasis on the organizations in which religious participate with a specific focus on the African continent. The roots of migration in general, and forced migration in particular as well as human trafficking are the center of the contribution of David Holdcroft, SJ and Yvonne Clémence Bambara, rgs. In describing the broad context involving the current state of migration, Fr. Holdcroft, in his essay “Forced migration: Sources of hope”, points out the universal nature of forced migration and at the same time the ways in which the burden of response falls unevenly on the Global South, particularly on countries adjacent to the source of the refugee flight. The article then analyses briefly some of the main causes and trends in current forced displacement, highlighting three key trends: the size of the population of forced migrants worldwide, the disappearance of resettlement to a third state as a significant, so-called «durable solution», and the length of time many people are forced to remain in the refugee state. It follows the story of Nadine, a refugee caught in such a situation and the way she is vulnerable to traffickers, for no other reason than her long period residing in a refugee camp. This introduces to the responses to these challenges in the form of projects that draw on

both humanitarian and development modes of thought offering a brief recent history of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and its process of internal reform.

In his talk “Migration Forcee et Traite des Etres Humains”, Yvonne Clémence Bambara focuses on the issues that migrant women encounter during their migration journey. They are confronted with situations of exploitation and abuse of all kinds, that sometimes put their lives in danger. Secular but also religious structures exist to help them get out of their situation of slavery. Sister Bambara focuses on the mission of Talitha kum, created in 2009 by the Union of Superiors General of Women’s Congregations and supported by Pope Francis. This structure fights against all forms of human trafficking. Spread throughout the world and working in 89 countries, Talitha kum brings comfort, support and accompaniment to the victims of trafficking, including migrants through the various continental networks.

The third part of this book is related to the session on Pastoral Experiences. As pointed out in many previous contributions migratory phenomenon is well documented in the Scriptures and indicates the ethical responses of believers and their communities. In his essay, “Migrants and Pilgrims as Our Ancestors”, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ underlines that besides the ethical imperatives of hospitality and protection, in particular, migration and displacement offer the church an opportunity to embrace its identity and fulfil its mission as the people of God in exile, on the move and on pilgrimage. Orobator remarks how this phenomenon is «an ecclesial matter» and from a pastoral perspective, the responsibility of accompaniment, care and ministry to migrants and people on the move hinges on the fundamental truth of an incarnational theology. Moreover, the experience and the context of mobility, migration, displacement, or exile generally, exemplify and intensify the ecclesial identity of migrants as

«a living faith community in exile». To be church in this context presumes therefore a commitment «to create community with uprooted people». Orbator outlines specific pastoral options and practices, that originates from these convictions, incumbent on the church and religious congregations in countries of origin, transit and arrival.

The session on good practice is dedicated to a regional focus on Asia and Europe with topics related to health and integration. In particular, Suresh Sundram with his essay “The health and moral landscape seeking asylum: An Australian perspective” present an overview of the refugee and asylum seeker context in Australia, focusing on the current scale of the issue within a global perspective and the policy context with a focus on offshore regional processing. In describing physical and mental impacts of migration, Sundram puts particular emphasis on the mental health impacts of immigration detention.

The convene – which included working group sessions at the end of each day for the registered participants to attend, and share their experiences and reflect on new perspective ignited by the discussion – proved to be an intense and highly stimulating gathering of academics, experts, and more than 250 registered participants (religious women and men) belonging to about 70 congregations and working around the world.

During these days of reflection and dialogue four paths of action emerged. Today, more than ever before, migration is a phenomenon that challenges society and the church. And it is appropriate to keep in mind, in addition to numbers and statistics, the human face of those who, children, men and women, have left everything behind them. An important reference certainly remains the action and magisterium of Pope Francis in that the challenge is not only what pastoral action for migrants we want to achieve, but also what face of society and church we want to

build together, that ever-growing ‘we’ that is also the message of the World Migrant and Refugee Day.

This has been a collective venture and as always in such cases there are many to whom we must express our deepest gratitude. A special thanks go to the Global Solidarity Fund for its support of the whole project. Furthermore, SIMI expresses its gratitude to the Conference’s participants for their excellent contributions, especially the moderators and experts who participated in the panel discussions. SIMI is also particularly thankful to UISG and USG for co-organizing the Conference.