

The Intersecting and Symbiotic Reality of Migration and Christianity in Contemporary

Discourse: A Theological Reflection

Michael Enyinwa Okoronkwo

Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts

National Open University of Nigeria Abuja

meokoronkwo@noun.edu.ng; meokoronkwo@hotmail.com

Abstract

The truth of migration as a global phenomenon and fact of human reality adds to the constant and radical evolving meaning of the concept. But of late scholars are gradually appreciating the role of Christian theology and religion in its quest, reminding the world of the transcendental and profound mission and goal of migration. It is on that basis that the attention of the reader is drawn to the intersecting and symbiotic reality of migration and Christian theology/religion. The paper takes an explanatory research stance with descriptive, historical and analytic methodological approaches. It criticised the subsidiary role assigned to Christian theology/religion in matters of migration. It contends that on the one hand, Christianity by its very nature is a migrant institution de facto and de jure, its God a Deus Migrator, and its founder, Jesus, a pragmatic and charismatic migrant per excellence. On the other hand, migration is fundamentally teleological, ecclesiological and eschatological. Theology, spirituality and faith are among the essential components of migration, the latent forces that push, pull and sustain migration. Neither of migration nor Christian religion could be properly comprehended or articulated without the other. Hence any discussion of one without cognisance of the other amounts to a misrepresentation and mistreatment of the reality of humanity. The study is a contribution to the ongoing discussion on the relevance of Christian theology and religion in migration discourse. It is a call for a prophetic redefinition of migration in the light of new findings.

Keywords: *Migration, Christian theology/religion, Deus Migrator, Jesus, spirituality and faith, human reality.*

Introduction

Migration is a phenomenon that is constantly and radically evolving. It continues each day to assume unprecedented meanings and expressions.¹ It is a global phenomenon that affects in either way the demographic, social, political, economic, socio-cultural, religious, moral, and spiritual landscapes of the world and human activities.² Understood as human mobility, the human persons are the principal actors. They are theologically labelled as migrants, sojourners, pilgrims, aliens and strangers.³ It involves movement or change of residence from a locale, country or region (emigration) to another (immigration). It is often characterised by multidirectional and sometimes reversible movement⁴ These movements are often exemplified by plurality and diversity of persons, languages, creeds, living habits, cultures, identities, and ethnicities. In addition to this, Christianity comes with a more profound understanding of migration as a process that ultimately leads to the ideals of divine habitation, a place filled with joy.⁴ Given this conceptual background, the reader may then appreciate the flow of the argument in this paper that Christianity as a religion and migration as human mobility are two interconnected and inseparable realities of human existence. Scholars may have no issue with the idea that migration is neither autogenic nor autopoietic. By its very nature, it cannot drive itself, and cannot be an end in itself. “[W]ar and trade, population increase, natural disasters, poverty and famine, civil disturbances, political oppression, religious persecution, and human

¹Deenabandhu Manchala, "Migration: An Opportunity for Broader and Deeper Ecumenism." In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Phan Peter C, 154-171 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 154

²Peter C. Phan, "Embracing, Protecting, and Loving the Stranger: A Roman Catholic Theology of Migration." In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C Phan, 77-110 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 83.

³Amos Yong, "The Im/migrant Spirit: De/constructing a Pentecostal." In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, 132-153 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 134.

⁴Dale T. Irvin, "Theology, Migration, and the Homecoming." In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C Phan, 7-25 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 21.

trafficking,”⁵ among others, are identified as the possible “push and pull” factors for human mobility. The worry is the subordinate role assigned to religion in matters of migration. Thus, Beckford contends: “it would be an exaggeration to claim that religion was invariably an important aspect of migration.”⁶ Even if one agrees with Beckford that [all] migration(s) is not directly a response to religious persecution or in pursuit of religious objectives, one may not discountenance the irresistible influence of religion on migration, and also the impact of migration on religion. This position is further strengthened by the findings of the Pew Research Centre, which argues that international flows of migrants are contributing to the redistribution of ‘world religions’ across the globe.⁷ This has enormous consequence for Christianity as a religion, and for other social institutions that are linked to human mobility and activities. But it must be added that in some parts of the world, religion has encouraged and will continue to encourage the shift in world demography. Nevertheless, the stress point in this very discussion is that without religion and theology, human understanding of migration will ever remain superficial. This should be a central concern for humanity.

Though the language of the study is prodigiously Christian and theologically biased, some of the conclusions in the study could be applicable to other sister religions. It is equally important to alert the reader that the study is more of explanatory research with descriptive, historical and analytic methodological approaches. Its sources are literature based.

⁵Peter C. Phan, "Christianity as an Institutional Migrant: Historical, Theological, and Ethical Perspectives." In *Christianities in Migration. The Global Perspective*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, 9-36. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian 2016) 13.

⁶James A. Beckford,. "Religions and Migrations – Old and New." *Quaderni di Sociologia* 80: (2019):15-32, accessed October 26, 2021, doi:<https://doi.org/10.4000/qds.2599>.

⁷Pew Research Center, “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050” (April 2, 2015), accessed December 15, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>

The study, besides rejecting the argument of Beckford on the secondary role of religion in matters of migration, underlines the intersecting and symbiotic relationship between migration and religion. It considers the two realities (migration and religion) as two faces of the same coin that reflects human reality. It draws the attention of scholars to the danger of most contemporary discourse that speaks about *the impact of migration on religion* without any attempt to counterpoise the equation by interjecting *the impact of religion on migration*. The study rather insists that migration and religion are two different but interdependent realities. Migration finds its full and ultimate meaning in the religious and theological sphere, and Christianity by its very nature is an institutional migrant, and its God is *Deus Migrator*, while Jesus the founder of the religion remains the pragmatic and charismatic migrant per excellence. Therefore, the Church follows the footsteps of its founder, hence, a migrant institution *de facto* and *de jure*.⁸ It is also important to note that migration cannot be defined as a mere human instinct to wonder and wander in search of better opportunities and new horizons for here-and-now satisfaction. That will be a misrepresentation and mistreatment of the concept of migration. Migration is fundamentally teleological, ecclesiological and eschatological. Theology, spirituality and faith⁹ are among the essential components of migration, and the latent forces that *push*, *pull* and *sustain* migration. Holding to this tenet suggests that religion is not just any other social institution that interacts with migration.

The interface between migration and Christian religion is more profound. It takes human reality to the divine sphere and opens a new vista of reality. The competing biblical and patristic concept of migration and the understanding of Christianity as a missionary religion

⁸Phan, "Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 10, 22.

⁹Jennifer B. Saunder, Susanna Snyder, and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "Introduction: Articulating Intersections at the Global Crossroads of Religion and Migration." In *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*, ed. Jennifer B Saunder, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, 1-46 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 13."

make it more engaging. The study analyses certain aspects of Christian theology, liturgy and spirituality within the context of the overarching concept of migration. It creates a platform for the reader to see the complementarity of migration and religion, and how each has supported and influenced the other. This may encourage those who are already toeing the prophetic path, calling for a new understanding of the relationship between migration and religion.¹⁰

The Three Competing Biblical and Patristic Terms of Migration

Attention is drawn to three basic competing but interrelated biblical and patristic terms associated with the concept of migration, namely, “stranger” (or alien—Hebrew *zār*, Greek *xenos*, Latin *hospes*), “foreigner” (Hebrew *nokri*, Greek *alotrios*, Latin *alienus*), and “sojourner” (Hebrew *gēr*, Greek *paroikos*, Latin *peregrinus*).¹¹ They define three different categories of persons that are pitifully today lumped together in one bag in the current English usage. This has informed the (mis)treatment of migrants both in private and public spheres. Majority of the migrants are, thus, qualified as strangers and foreigners rather than applying the biblical concept of sojourners. Therefore, they are always seen as fundamentally constituting economic, political socio-cultural and religious liability. They are wrongly and unfortunately tagged a threat to the polity.

¹⁰Cf. Jennifer B Saunder, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, (eds.) *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (eds.), *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). The two volumes form the major sources of the reflection. The paper also rely much on the thought-provoking paper by James A. Beckford (as cited above) and the insights gathered from the a symposium on “The Impact of Migration on Religion: Perspectives of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion” by the Centre of Excellence in Migration and Global Studies, National Open

¹¹University of Nigeria, Abuja on November 10, 2021. The author was given the privilege to speak from the perspective of ChristianityPhan, "Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 10, 22

Working on these terminologies, in fairness to the New Testament teachings, the reader is reminded that all human race once separated from Christ are now one. They were once excluded from the commonwealth of Israel and treated as strangers to the covenants of promise,

without God and having no hope (Eph 2:12). But now those, who were once excluded and alienated (*apēllotriōmenoi*) (Eph. 2:12) as “strangers and sojourners” (*xenoi kai paroikoi*) (Eph. 2:19) have been made “fellow citizens [*sumpolitai*] with the saints and of the household of God [*oikeioitouthou*]” (Eph. 2:19). In other words, the earlier understanding of the ‘other’ as a stranger, alien or sojourner no longer holds sway in the NT definition and understanding of the human race. This is one of the key notes that sets the tone of the discussion, which explores the characteristics of Christianity as a migrant religion and its connection to migration in the contemporary discourse.

The Defining Character of Christianity as a Migrant Religion

The diversities in Christianity are serious matters. Any attempt of harmonisation often ends up in a web of ‘reductionism’. The question sometimes is: what form or denomination of Christianity? The question may appear simple but a second look would expose the complexity of the issue and may end up approaching the matter with some level of scepticism.¹² Without counting much on the variegated and multifaceted forms of Christianity, they still share some commonality and dynamism of unity-in-diversity. It sets the religion apart from other religions, and persists in the evolution of its theology,

¹²Kondothra M. George, "Theology of Migration in the Orthodox Tradition." In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, 63-76 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 64-65.

ecclesiological doctrines and polity. It justifies the stance of speaking of Christianity as a religion. Good instances of the agreements are the Christian trinitarian confession of God, the salvific role of Jesus in human history, the centrality of the bible.¹³

Historically, the inception of the Vat II in the mid-1960s would make earlier moves for renewal in the Church (both from the Catholic and Protestant quarters) become a prominent reawakening call to the true nature of the Church. Christianity becomes more conscious of its nature as a Church “needing continual renewal,” hence *ecclesia semper reformanda est*—the church is always being reformed.¹⁴ One of the implications of the emphasis is the return to the apostolic and post apostolic traditional understanding of the Church as a “*community of migrants*,” which in the early times influenced all aspects of its theology and modulated the dynamics of the religion. According to Phan, the migratory character is a permanent and a fifth character of the Church as a migrant institution *de facto* and *de jure*, which transforms it to a worldwide religion.¹⁵ Thus, migration (wondering) becomes a trope for salvation, which is connected with various traditions and practices in the sacramental and liturgical life of the church, devotional readings, retreat, recollection, pilgrimage, etc. It is a form of scattering and gathering, missionary journeys and returns, forceful or voluntary migrations of going and homecoming, etc.¹⁶ It may not be surprising, therefore, to hear that migration saturates the church with an *eschatological* orientation. It reminds Christianity of its essential goal. It energises the Church on the road to its final fulfilment in the reign of God. The same thinking invokes an underlying claim that makes migration the centre and heart of the theological bias

¹³Nancy Bedford, "Protestantism in Migration: Ecclesia Semper Migranda." In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, edited by Elaine Padilla and Phan Peter C, 111-131 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 120..

¹⁴Bedford, "Protestantism in Migration," 113.

¹⁵Phan, "Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 10, 22..

¹⁶Irvin, "Theology" 9.

of World Christianity. Without migration, Christianity is a polished antiquated product of the museum, which has lost its essence and mission in the world. This would be demonstrated by examining some of the theological aspects of the Church's life.

Migration and the Church's Missionary Character

A point has been made that migration is one of the key factors that has contributed immensely to the geographical expansion and internal diversity of Christianity across the globe. Migration as a part of the life of the religion is retraceable to Abram's journey from Haran to Canaan.

The journey is interpreted as an obedience to divine command (Gen 12). Suffice to mention that all the OT stories of migration and the interpretations given to them in the NT revolve around the Babylonian exilic experience of the Jews.¹⁷ It provides the context within which other stories of migration in the Judeo-Christian literature were formulated and became complexly intertwined with the experience of Jews living in diaspora.¹⁸

In the NT, the migratory act of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem marks the pivotal moment in the history of Christianity. For the Christians, he is the pragmatic and charismatic migrant per excellence. He is the initiator and champion of Christian migration, which consistently replays in the life of the Church. Ontologically, the migration of Jesus takes its root in the

¹⁷Saunders, Snyder, and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "Introduction: Articulating" 19. See also Erin K. Wilson, and Luca Mavelli. 2016. "Taking Responsibility: Sociodicy, Solidarity, and Religious-Sensitive Policymaking in the Global Politics of Migration." In *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*, edited by Jennifer B Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 261-284, accessed December 15, 2021, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-58629-2_11; also Damaris S. Parsitau, "The Role of Faith and Faith- Based Organizations among Internally Displaced Persons in Kenya," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011): 473-492

¹⁸Susanna Snyder, Zayn Kassam, Anna Rowlands, and Narzanin Massoumi, "Theologies and Ethics of Migration: Muslim and Christian Perspectives." In *Rescripting Religion in the City: Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis*, edited by Jane Garnett and Alana Harris, 17-36 (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2013) 22.

incarnation, which makes him to stand between divinity and humanity and embraced both. Historically, he remained a migrant per excellence.¹⁹

His apostles and disciples, following the instruction of their master Jesus (cf. Lk 9:2; 10: 1-6; Matt 28:19; Acts 1:8), championed the movement of the gospel beyond Jerusalem and Palestine to the ends of the earth (Rome). The dominant opinion is that the persecution of the apostles and disciples necessitated the movement of Christianity from Jerusalem to other parts of the world. Thus, migration propels the expansion of the frontiers of Christianity. A reading beyond the surface shows that it is the gospel that occasioned the persecution. The persecution is only a secondary cause of the early Christian movement. It is religion, the faith of the people, their teachings about Jesus Christ (Christology) that brought the persecution, which in turn led to the dispersion of the disciples. Overtly or otherwise, “religion and religious freedom—or lack of it—have exerted a powerful “push” and “pull” in the dynamics of migration, whether internal or international/intercontinental, free or forced, temporary or permanent, documented or undocumented, planned or unforeseen.”²⁰

These migratory stories have today formed a “paradigmatic responses of faith and obedience to the divine command”²¹ to carry the gospel to all parts of the world. They set the tone and contour of Christian migration history as mobility of the gospel. This is championed by the Holy Spirit through human agency. In other words, it is the missionary drive of *going out*

¹⁹Phan (“Christianity as an Institutional Migrant,” 25) gives an impressive portrait of the person and life Jesus as a migrant.

²⁰Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, “Introduction: Migration in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.” In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C Phan, 1-5 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 1.

²¹Padilla and Phan, “Introduction: Migration,” 2

and *bearing witness* to the gospel,²² obeying and carrying out the divine command that gives rise to the formation of Christian communities in different parts of the world. There is equally in the scriptures the theological undertone of “*scattering*” and “*gathering*” of the disciples of Jesus as missionaries of the gospel. The disciples scattered from Jerusalem (Acts 7) carrying the gospel to different parts of world, and would once in a while “gather” again in Jerusalem (Act 15; cf. Isa 43: 5-9; 49:5-10; 56:3-8; Jer 31:8-10). One also reads the motif of *to-ing* and *fro-ing*, back-and-forth of the movement of the gospel with the people,²³ a kind of homecoming for one reason or another, find themselves coming back from their various missionary posts to Jerusalem and Palestine, and setting off again.²⁴

Contemporary scholars²⁵ have even gone further to conceptualise the migration of the gospel in the spiritual and mystical sense. Thus, the motif of scattering and gathering continues with pilgrimage to the Holy City and the monastic vow. Those who took monastic vows see some relationship between wandering and holiness.²⁶ In a mystical presentation of the concept, it is the mystical journey of the *self* with God as the Mystery. The migration starts from divine love, is accompanied by God’s self-disclosure in and through various visible signs, and after many waystations, arrives at the “Station of No Station.”²⁷ During this mystical migration, the self is never alone but travels in the company not only of the divine but also of other human migrants. Furthermore, because the divine self-disclosure occurs in material signs, the migrating self develops a deep care for creation, and thus migratory spirituality flows into

²²Manchala, "Migration: An Opportunity," 13

²³ The Book of Acts can simply be described as the Book of Missionary Movements. One can see here how human mobility can accelerate the spread of the gospel.

²⁴Irvin, "Theology," 14.

²⁵Jennifer B. Saunder, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, eds. *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Padilla, Elaine and Peter C Phan, eds. *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014

²⁶Irvin, "Theology," 14.

²⁷Padilla and Phan, "Introduction: Migration" 4.

eco-ethics and spirituality. It becomes in another sense the transformation of the inner cosmos of the self with the outer universe that renews the self in evolutionary manner.²⁸

Ursache adds another, probably economic, perspective to the contemporary understanding of mission and migration, He draws attention to the Church's mission to evangelise, and argues that the presence of the migrants in their destination country(s) calls for a shift in the paradigm of mission. It is a big resource-saving opportunity for a Church that has "invested enormously to send out missionaries to those countries that are closed to the gospel and now are at their door steps in Europe. It benefits as well the countries whose faith seems to be obsolete due to secularism, now being challenged and revitalized by the flood of migrants.

Simply put, the presence of the migrants challenges the Church to be conscious of its nature and mission.²⁹

Migration, Ecclesiology and the Christian Eschatology

One of the interesting aspects of the missionary character of the Church is not simply that the gospel moves. The horizon of the early movement would exert enormous influence on the eschatological and soteriological belief that Jesus himself would come back soon, and that the *scattered* would be *gathered* together with him (Matt 25:31-46) in Jerusalem (Lk 24:49-53; Acts 1:10-12).³⁰ In other words, the Church is the Church of the scattered migrants, who are on their way to gather by gathering. It echoes the early claim that migration is a permanent feature of the Church, and not a mere historical phenomenon. As an institutional migrant on

²⁸Elaine Padilla, "Signs of Wonder: Journeying Plurally into the Divine Disclosure." In *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, 209-237 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian, 2014) 209

²⁹Liviu Ursache, "The Impact of Migration on Church Mission." *Proceedings of Harvard Square Symposium, The Phenomenon of Migration, August 22-23, 2016* (Örebro, Sweden: Örebro University School of Business, 2016) 393-400 [398-399], eText, accessed December 26, 2021, doi:10.5281/zenodo.999640.

³⁰Irvin, "Theology," 13.

the way to realising the kingdom of God, it takes care of all the migrants in this common journey in faith, hope, and love.³¹

The Christian eschatological insight, as George observes, becomes the driving force for human commitment in history. It defines and determines the Christian ethics in its interaction with the world. It reminds Christians as migrants that the ultimate goal in life is not for immediate gains but a future that is both normative and eternal. It gives meaning to the present existence and inspires the believer on the journey to the eternal home.³² It is this understanding that explains the Christian life as a dedicated journey with the purpose of realizing the kingdom of God.³³ Christians are simply wayfarers on a pilgrimage here on earth. The implication is that the ethical and social involvement of the church and its historical configuration are shaped by this ultimate goal. Therefore, material possessions and comfort, worldly power and authority are values that are hierarchically subdued to the dominance of the kingdom of God. The reign or kingdom of God becomes the ultimate fulfilment of the Christian aspiration for love, justice, and salvation. It is beyond here and now. It can be experienced here and now but an imperfect glimpse of the eternal reality where every creation is geared towards. Hence all Christian ethics arise from this vision of the kingdom of God, and God is God in all and of all.³⁴

Fernandez' interjection of the existential reality of Christian experience is remarkable in the Christian eschatological journey as a being in the world. He observes that there are moments of emptiness and sorrows in life that human logic cannot ignore. But the hope in the living

³¹Phan, "Embracing," 105.

³²George, "Theology of Migration," 68-69.

³³Pope Paul VI. November 21, 1964. "Lumen Gentium." In *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Daniel J. Castellano, 61-148 (Vatican City: The Vatican Publishing House), accessed December 23, 2021. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/

³⁴George, "Theology of Migration," 68.

God does help migrants to imagine and live out new possibilities which is future oriented.³⁵ It is important to note the distinction between the classical tradition of a “better-past” from the Christian linearity and forward-looking of Christian eschatology. Even where and when the earthly pilgrimage points towards a return to the homeland, it is more than a return to the original homeland. It is not a return to the glorious past (lost garden) but forward-looking to a better “city” promised by God (Heb 11:16; 13:14). The eschatological homecoming is about God, who is the new and ultimate desirable homeland. Therefore, the Christian understanding of migration, whether in the physical, spiritual or symbolic sense, leads ultimately to the ideals of divine habitation, a place filled with joy,³⁶ where every eye would like to see and the tongue speak about (I Jn 3:2; I Cor 2:9).

The migrants themselves are the constructors of a new city in the shrinking world of multiple experiences. They are on a journey in God and to God, and simultaneously at home and on the way.³⁷ Therefore, migration is not simply an accident of history in the development of Christianity. This thinking invariably impacts on the ecclesiology of the Church. Migration is at the service of the Church. It is a catalyst for the realization of the eschatological and ecclesiological realities of the Church.³⁸

Migration, Theology and the Christian Liturgy

The first obvious theological and liturgical shifts and the rise of plurality of theology is thanks to early migration that saw the political movement of the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople. The unprecedented shift creates awareness and opportunity for local churches. It induces the churches to developing their own liturgical and theological

³⁵Carmen Nanko. Fernández, "Creation: A Cosmo-politan Perspective." In *In Our Own Voices. Latino/a Renditions of Theology*, ed. Benjamín Valentín, 41-63. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010) 41-63.

³⁶Irvin, "Theology," 21.

³⁷Bedford, "Protestantism in Migration," 125

³⁸Phan ("Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 10

traditions. A kind of local piety gives vent to monasticisms, spiritualities, and many forms of ecclesiastical organizations. It sets the paradigms for contemporary regional and denominational theologies. Its pull and push forces would play a decisive role in the expansion, formation, and indigenisation of Christianity.³⁹

Within the inner world of the Church, Christians as pilgrims celebrate and worship the *Deus Migrator*, the One who leads, saves and is ever present on the journey (cf. Ex 6:6-8). The same God is finally and fully revealed in Jesus Christ (Jn1:1, 14; 1 Jn 1:2b; Heb 1:3). For the same reason, the Church worships the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, imitates and follows the steps of the Son, the Paradigmatic Migrant. The Son promised his Church the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49; Jn 14:21-31; Acts 1:8), who becomes the “push” and “pull” of the migrants.⁴⁰ Thus, the meeting of the natives and migrants in the ecclesial life of the Church, and their full participation in liturgical worship expands the work of the unity that Jesus the founder of Christianity had prayed for (Jn 17:11b, 21-22).

The Church’s understanding of the spirituality of its liturgy is couched in the portrait of migratory act. It is couched as a transcendental worship that unites the earthly and heavenly liturgy. It transforms Christians and leads them into the transcendental sphere. It frees them from shackles of social limitations and expands the basis of their moral, political and socio-cultural communities.⁴¹ The liturgy disposes Christians, whether as natives or immigrants, as co-migrants in this world and on the way to their eternal homeland. It affords them the reason to appreciate spiritually the moral (ir)relevance of borders by encouraging one another to sacrifice self-interest to build an intimate global community, where border-based crises no

³⁹Phan ("Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 20, 31.

⁴⁰Phan, "Embracing," 105

⁴¹Charles Taylor, "What Was the Axial Revolution?" in *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, ed. Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, 30-46 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012) 30-46.

longer have a place. They strive sacrificially and universally to transcend the earthly borders and migrate to the heavenly realm. They recognise their unity and help each other to offer a more meaningful and ultimately humane response to the experiences of different forms of migration.⁴²

In the liturgy, Christians also participate individually and collectively in the life of communion in the spirit and in the Holy Trinity. Their celebration is a sacrifice offered in the liturgical doxology to God Almighty Father, through Christ the Saviour of the world, and with Him the Eternal Priest and in Him the Son, and in the unity of Holy Spirit, all honour and glory revert to the Holy Trinity. They see themselves as dynamic parts of the totality of that community bound by the Trinitarian unity.

The reader observes the resonance of migration in the celebration of the Eucharist as *anamnesis* (recollection or remembrance). The liturgical tradition of anamnesis takes the Christian back to the core history of salvation. It reflects the whole human history in its totality and catholicity. It is “memory” or “remembrance” in its total sense, not simply confined to the historical past. It points to the future homecoming of Jesus to take his own to the eternal homeland – God, who is the centre of all worship. Thus, celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as anamnesis enkindles the expectation for the future which includes all created reality.⁴³ In this sense, the Christian migrants remember the past cast into the future. It is a kind of homecoming event, going back to the past for better future. The eschatological orientation draws the attention of the Christian to conceptualise the past as anamnesis. It is not the celebration of the past for the sake of the past. It is a way of meeting

⁴²Benjamin Schewel, "The Moral Relevance of Borders: Transcendence and the Ethics of Migration." In *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*, ed. Jennifer B Saunder, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, 241-257 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian, 2016) 242, accessed December 16, 2021, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-58629-2_10.

⁴³George, "Theology of Migration," 68-69.

the future,⁴⁴ which is rooted in the heavenly liturgy. So, whatever activities that may be going on in the Church's liturgy, it is a foretaste for the perfect celebration in the heavenly kingdom.

A Theological Redefinition of Migration

Phan could have been correct to observe that adequate attention is yet to be given to the significant role migrants play in transforming the culture and churches of the countries of destination. In their ethnic communal life, they formed their own ethnic Christian communities; worshiped according to their own liturgical traditions, in their own languages, under the leadership of their own clergy, and in their own churches. While preserving some of their distinguishing forms of Christianity in their new country, they made immense contributions to the belief system of the host communities. Their presence could give rise to a new form or hybrid Christianity that is essentially a medley of their ethnic Christianities.⁴⁵ In this sense, the migrants are not simply marginal or peripheral or supporting club members in the transformation of the society. They are *de facto* agents of change both within and outside the Church. This is not because they are ontologically or intrinsically different from the rest of humankind.⁴⁶ But they have the privilege of three worlds: the in-behind (the original homeland), the in-between (the current home) and in-beyond (the future and anticipated homeland). The pull and push of the anticipated or dreamed homeland propels them to act beyond and outside the normal. This is seen in their capacity to produce contextual and local ecclesial forms while maintaining a transnational imaginary and strong ties to communities outside the host community.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Cf. John Meyendorff, "Does Christian Tradition have a Future." *St. Valdimir's Theological Quarterly* 26 (1982): 139-54.

⁴⁵ Phan "Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 21.

⁴⁶ Bedford, "Protestantism in Migration," 117; cf. Phan, "Embracing."

⁴⁷ Bedford, "Protestantism in Migration," 117.

There is a cautionary prompt that migration is not a mere sociological factor. It is a fundamental theological issue with enormous eschatological and spiritual demands. Migrants ought to be pictured as “the pilgrim people of God on the march toward the kingdom of God.” Their social and political status as migrants and sojourners, without a permanent residence and citizenship, and “the persecutions they suffer, lend depth and poignancy to their theological reflections on their social condition.”⁴⁸ This is Phan’s crucial argument in the celebrated anonymous *Letter to Diognetus* cited in the *Letter of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians*. The migrants, in spite of sharing the same social environment with the rest of human, demonstrate in their fate of the citizenship of heaven. They are the people of God in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:14-16). While in the world, they are aliens and strangers to the world. Being encouraged to contribute to the business and wellbeing of the world, still they see themselves in the spatial and spiritual sense as “wayfarers” on the march to an eternal homeland *beyond* the homeland *behind*. Therefore, their marginal life of “in-between” their homeland and their new land; belonging to neither and living “in-both” governs their ethical principles about the world. They are beings in two cultures but not of any culture because their true homeland is beyond the earthly home. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and every fatherland is a foreign land to them.⁴⁹

Their life is a life of *in-beyond*; a life of margin. It is not defined primarily by the centre, but by the point at which negative and positive experiences of interculturality connect. The lesson, according to Bedford is that the true life of the Christian [or the Church] is a hyphenated life of “in-between” and “in-beyond.” It is a life that is *here* and *not-here*. It is a

⁴⁸Phan "Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 23.

⁴⁹Phan, "Embracing," 105

life of being in the world but at the same time being out of the world. It is a life of double vision; a life that engenders positive change within a given context.⁵⁰

Phan tells his audience that all are migrants. All, irrespective of where and when, are living “out of place,” in “exile” “in-between worlds”. They are fellow wayfarers heading towards a common destination. Therefore, they are destined as co-migrants to welcome, protect and love the other: the foreigners, the strangers and the migrants among them. In doing this, we not only welcome, protect, and love them as we embrace, protect, and love ourselves, but also welcome, protect, and love ourselves in and through them. Together, as natives and migrants—the distinction has now become otiose—we are all pilgrims, not back to where we came from (the countries of origin) nor to the foreign lands (the countries of destination) because neither is our true home.⁵¹

Therefore, to welcome, protect and love the migrants demand appropriate ethical behaviour of *philoxenia* (love of strangers). It includes taking care of the material and spiritual needs of the migrants without border. It takes the form of generous hospitality, working together with the migrants to affirm and defend their rights, and live in compassionate solidarity with them. Loving the migrant is not a service to the migrant but the reaffirmation of the person in *me*, “the person in and through whom I can discover my true identity, that is, who I am: a migrant, or better still, a *co-migrant* with Jesus. the Paradigmatic Migrant, and other fellow

⁵⁰ Bedford, "Protestantism in Migration," 117. The idea is originally from Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 2, 59ff and Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York, NY: Routledge.

⁵¹Phan, "Embracing," 105

migrants, in the journey back to *Deus Migrator*.”⁵² This understanding introduces the intersecting realities of migration and Christianity.

The Intersecting Realities of Migration and Christianity

This paper has consistently argued that migration has contributed immensely to the growth of Christianity and its self-understanding. In some cases, migration provides opportunities for new religious and identity formation resulting to complex integration of migrants and indigenes. The argument may tilt to underscore some positive qualities of migration in the expansion of Christianity and drawing attention to the nature and mission of Christianity. There are still some underlying challenges and controversies posed by migration to the religion. Beckford stresses the dynamism in the religious experiences of the migrants that could result to tensions and divisions within previously unified religious ‘collectivities’.⁵³ Added to these are the various awkward predicament and experiences of the migrants, which impact on their religions and on their environments. The situation is succinctly articulated by Bedford as she writes: “Migrants live immersed in the ambiguities and difficulties of the present age, and are forced to navigate them as best they can.”⁵⁴

But migrants are never lone wayfarers. They travel with fellow migrants, and above all, with the Migrant God, who leads. This flow affects the demography of religion across the globe.

⁵⁵ It heightens controversies and conflicts which can be acute among the migrants, and between migrants and the indigenes. It can persist even long after settlement in their new

⁵²Phan, "Embracing," 106

⁵³Beckford, "Religions and migrations" #10

⁵⁴Bedford, "Protestantism in Migration," 118

⁵⁵ Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions"

locations.⁵⁶ The fear and threat vary with complex factors relating to economy, politics, social, culture and religion. The native and the migrant religionists feel threatened since some of their members would abandon their early faith to embrace other's.⁵⁷ Even religious buildings and monuments by migrants, serving as symbols of their presence, providing support and resources for them and fellow migrants, and shaping public opinions, influencing policy-makers and legislators in relation to some potentially contentious issues,⁵⁸ may turn out to lie on the borders of conflict.

In their journey to their destination country(s), which is sometimes undefined, the migrants intentionally or otherwise, carry with them their baggage of faiths.⁵⁹ From their varied cultures they bring diversity and plurality to life. Their shared patrimony becomes religion (and theology), which, to their own advantage, opens a multifaceted platform of social and spiritual realities. It creates a bond of solidarity for the migrants, who now discover certain commonalities in their common and respective experiences. They understand themselves as a people of common destiny.

As they travel, they continue to transform the religious landscapes of their new and host communities and countries. Their religion and faith shape them into cohesive communities, providing them with effective means for physical survival, economic upward mobility, social stability, civil integration, cultural preservation, and of course, spiritual progress in the host countries.⁶⁰ They slowly but progressively reconstruct and reshape a new home better than and unlike their imaginations.⁶¹ Religion (and theology) would afford them the strength and courage to cross boundaries and in a profound manner reach out to the local communities of

⁵⁶Beckford,. "Religions and migrations" #9

⁵⁷Ursache, "The Impact of Migration," 397.

⁵⁸Beckford,. "Religions and migrations" #12

⁵⁹Beckford,. "Religions and migrations"

⁶⁰Douglas E Cowan, "Religion on the Internet." In *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. James A Beckford and N. J. Demerath III, 357-376 (London, England: Sage, 2007) 357-376.

⁶¹Padilla, "Signs of Wonder," 209-210

the host countries, especially in public worship and ritual celebrations.⁶² Their willingness to engage, accelerated by the power of social media, in practical inter-faith and ecumenical activities, is a solid proof that religions of all kinds break iron borders and positively contribute to “the vitality of civil society.”⁶³

The back-and-forth drives in human mobility can also have some ideological and religious impact on the society. Granted that the movement “can become embodied, retaking physical and material form,” the interest at the moment is on how religion becomes one of many socio-cultural and spiritual remittances that immigrants send – influencing religious changes in their homelands. As earlier indicated, there are many reasons that could induce migration, and migrants often go beyond borders to find a sense of self, and to transform the self to social and spiritual assets. It signals a notice and a challenge to the Church for the urgency to go beyond the earthly borders to rediscover its true home.⁶⁴

Situating the study of migration within the scope of Christian theology would then give an alternative, probably a different and resounding, outlook of the entire story. The realities of life have proved that theology and religion are inseparable from migration discourse.⁶⁵ They are not only valuable sources of support to migrants before, during and after their journeys,⁶⁶ they teach what it means to live and be in the world as migrants. Thus, Groody writes:

⁶²Kim Knott, "Living Religious Practices." In *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*, edited by Jennifer B Saunder, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, 71-90 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian, 2016), 71-90, accessed December 16, 2021. doi:10.1057/978-1-137-58629-2_3

⁶³Beckford, "Religions and migrations" #14

⁶⁴Stephen M. Cherry. "Exploring the Contours of Transnational Religious Spaces and Networks." In *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*, ed. Jennifer B Saunder, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, 195-224 (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2016) 211, accessed December 16, 2021, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-58629-2_8.

⁶⁵Knott, "Living Religious Practices," 74.

⁶⁶Holly Straut Eppsteiner and Hagan Jacqueline, "Religion as Psychological, Spiritual, and Social Support in the Migration Undertaking." in *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*, ed. Jennifer

... it [theology] names all of human existence in terms of migration, it offers an alternative identity that is not only more dynamic but also more suited to the right ordering of relationships and the building of a more peaceful and just society.⁶⁷

Saunders, Snyder and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, commenting on the insight of Eppsteiner and Hagan,⁶⁸ draws attention to the intersecting reality of migration and religion. They see in them a kind of symbiotic relationship. For them, these include, “the ways in which the sacred, ritual, belief, identity and community shape and are shaped by immigration.” The support religion and spirituality offers to the migrants gives vitality to migration. Otherwise, migration would cease to subsist. This is added to the intricate intersecting relationship between the equations of religion and migration. The lived experiences of migration and religion is a practical demonstration of how both can as well intersect with diverse identity markers and power structures. To mention is the “camp experience” of migrants. By designing special camps and locations for migrants, they understand themselves as persons of one definition and one destiny. In many instances, it leads to a build-up of a new dedicated ethno-religious solidarity. It solidifies religion and migration and makes them inseparable from each other. This may have positive and negative returns. Positively, many religions, championed predominantly by the Christian religion, are now appreciating the basic commonality of humanity that transcends all religious divides and opens the door for interfaith dialogue. This could be seen in the leading role of Christianity in interreligious dialogue. In some cases, religious contentions would erupt. This can in very few occasions incubate not only religiously motivated radicals and violent extremists but also hostile reactions against them.

⁶⁷B Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, 49-70 (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). doi:10.1057/978-1-137-58629-2_2.

Daniel G. Groody, "Migration: A Theological Vision." In *Intersections of Religion and Migration. Issues at the Global Crossroads*, ed. Jennifer B Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Susanna Snyder, 225-240, (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 227, accessed December 16, 2021, doi:10.1057/978-1-137-58629-2_9.

⁶⁸Eppsteiner and Jacqueline, "Religion as Psychological," 49-70

Nigeria's experience in camps designated to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) is a point of reference.

It is pertinent to mention the dominant hermeneutic role of the sacred texts and stories of Christian religion. They provide an indispensable platform to articulate, narrate and re-live the life experiences of migration. This is well attested in the reading and interpretation of migrant stories in the Christian scriptures. They become reference points for leap of faith. But something noteworthy of note is that the migrants are not just receptor or hearer of the words from the sacred texts. They are active agents who interpret not only their own predicaments and experiences. By reading the text through the lens of migration and appropriating them to their life experiences, they bring to the world of religion and migration a profound understanding of the intersecting relationship between the two. Their presence becomes a 'sacred' living presence that shades new light on old texts, leading to them (the texts) being understood in new ways precisely consequent upon their migration experiences.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Few issues have been raised in the forgone discussion, which would anticipate more robust exploration by scholars. However, the stress point here is on the symbiotic relationship between the realities of migration and the Christian life. Their complementarity and indispensability become obvious. One may not conceive Christianity in its true nature without migration, and the concept of migration remains incomplete, empty and devoid of substance without religion and theology. Christian religion defines the ultimate goal of migration, and the later keeps alive the communal sense of the essentially eschatological

⁶⁹Saunders, Snyder, and Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, "Introduction: Articulating," 20.

nature of the Church. Thus, in Christian faith, migration is a trope for salvation. This is connected with various Christian traditions and theology. It is the thread that braids and sets the contour of the spiritual, sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. It creates the “arena par excellence where one of the characteristic Christian virtues, namely, hospitality toward the stranger, can be practiced.”⁷⁰Without migration, Christianity could have been driven to another edge.

Interesting also is that the concept of migration goes beyond the Christian metaphorical usage of wondering and returning. It includes many other theological and spiritual realities such as pilgrimage, missionary journey, retreat and recollection, scattering and gathering, migration and homecoming, going out and coming back. All these transcend the physical and lead to the ultimate and eternal home. Hence, Christians understand their life here on earth as migrants who are on the way to the eternal happy homeland, where nothing ever conceived in human mind is found. It is the meeting place where all long to be.

⁷⁰Phan "Christianity as an Institutional Migrant," 31.

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