

MIGRATION, New Evangelization and Conversatio Morum

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Introduction

From early times people have been on the move, often from far distances and for varied reasons e.g., trade, epidemics, economic opportunities, asylum, war, persecution, natural disasters, and even adventure. When people move, they carry with them their ideas, beliefs, and religious practices. The impact and implications of such movements which Peter Stearns described as “cultures in motion” can be significant and the cultural groups involved are not left unchanged. Such movement of peoples has the capacity to foster cultural diversity and also to significantly alter demographic, economic, and social structures which makes it a potent source of social transformation.

Migration movements were an important factor in the spread of world religions as in the case of Islam and Christianity. The expansion of Islamic faith stretched from Iberia and Morocco in the west to sub-Saharan Africa in the south and as far east as Persia, northern India, and, later, Indonesia emerging as heir to the Roman and Persian empires. This was mainly due to a pattern of migration, the combined military conquest, imperial expansion, missionaries and merchants. Christianity achieved a similar global presence only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the era of colonial expansion of European powers that set in motion one of the most extraordinary migration movements in history. Between 1815 and 1915 -- roughly 50-60 million Europeans emigrated overseas. Samuel Huntington observed that, "this export of people was an important dimension of the rise of the West between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries."

Obviously, “the process (es) of globalization--in particular, the unprecedented magnitude of transregional movement of people and the speeding up of global interactions through the development of worldwide systems of transport and communication--is potentially transforming several major faiths into truly global religions, present in nearly every country, even if in culturally distinctive forms.”

An Overview of Contemporary Migration

International migration and population displacements have increased to unprecedented levels, so that some scholars say that we are living in an “age of migration.” These migrant movements are complex and varied. Credible statistics are lacking in many parts of the world, and the growing number of undocumented workers immigrants compounds the difficulty. A recent survey puts the number of migrants--defined as people who have lived outside their homeland for one year or more--at 150 million.

The various theories about the nature, origins, and processes of international migration focus on a number of issues. The economic perspective, explains international migration in terms of the supply of and demand for labor. The historical-structural approach focuses on the unequal distribution of economic and political power. Theories that emphasize social capital draw attention to the network connections. The more recent migration systems theory focuses on interactions within specific regions or between specific countries and regions.

This diversity of approaches indicates the complexity of contemporary international migration. It also manifests worldwide transformations associated with *globalization* "the upsurge in migration due to rapid processes of economic, demographic, social, political, cultural and environmental change, which rise from decolonization, modernization and uneven development."

Migration Philippine Context

A "culture of migration" has emerged in the Philippines where millions of Filipinos seek employment abroad despite the risks and vulnerabilities they have to face. Its development has been largely facilitated by the government itself when it initiated a state sponsored labor export in the 1970s. Since then the number of migrants increased rapidly. Between 4,000- 4,500 people leave the country every day to find work abroad. The Philippine labor diaspora is spread worldwide. (Diaspora here pertains to economic migrants or those who migrate to another country to find work.)

The Philippines is largely a sending country of migrant workers. Today more than 10M Filipinos or 10 % of the population live and work abroad in 193 countries. In 2011, the remittances of overseas workers amounted to \$21.3 B or 17% of the Philippine GDP.

The vast number of migrants did not leave the Philippine society and culture unaffected. Nearly every individual shares the social experience of migration, for example by having a family member abroad. The case of the Philippine culture of migration shows that migration is not only part of social change but also leads to social change, that migration transforms not only the individual migrant or the families, but the society as a whole and is embedded in local cultural meanings. (*S.Christ*)

Brief Filipino Migration History

Filipino overseas migration can be traced back to the 1906s, when the first batch of Filipino workers arrived in Hawaii to work in sugarcane and pineapple plantations. The movement of agricultural workers later expanded to California, Washington, Oregon and Alaska to work in fish canneries. Approximately 120,000 Filipino workers came to Hawaii between 1906 and 1934.

A small number of “*pensionados*”, also immigrated to the United States before the 1920s. These were scholars either sponsored by the US government or by missionary-related programs. Others were sent to study by rich families and a few came as working students. Those who returned to the country later assumed important positions in society while others remained in the United States. Between 1946 and the mid 1960s, about 10,000 to 12,000 Filipinos came to Hawaii as workers, military personnel, and war brides.

The phenomenon of Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) emerged in the 1970s when Filipinos began to leave the Philippines in droves to fill in labor shortages as construction workers, nannies, domestic workers, nurses and entertainers in industrializing countries. Filipino women took care of children and performed domestic work in booming economies in the Middle East (e.g. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait) and the Asia-Pacific (Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Malaysia) to allow women in these countries to work outside the home. Other Filipinos also settled in countries such as Germany and Japan, through marriage or work-related migration.

Under Marcos, the state-initiated Labor Export Program (LEP) was established, developed and expanded by successive governments under Corazon Aquino, Fidel Ramos, Joseph Estrada, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and currently under Benigno Aquino III.

Push and Pull factors in Filipino Migration

Widespread unemployment and underemployment as well as the much needed remittances of migrant workers have forced government to systematize the export of Filipino labor. Today, the Philippines is a major labor exporter in Asia and worldwide.

In the 1970s, when large-scale labor migration from the Philippines started, among the "push" factors were the inability of economic growth to keep up with population growth. This was worsened by the oil crisis in 1973. The country could not provide jobs and decent wages and had severe balance of payment problems.

On the other hand, there was need for workers in oil-rich Gulf countries' infrastructure projects. With push and pull factors converging, the Philippines was ripe for large-scale labor migration, an opportunity the Marcos government recognized, the framework for what became the government's overseas employment program. After the downfall of the Marcos regime, the Philippine economy did not take off as expected. The Philippines continued to reel from the terrible legacy left by the dictator: massive institutionalized corruption, crony capitalism, bad or weak leadership and a host of other problems — preventing an industry based economic takeoff.

The continuing demand for workers in the Gulf countries and the opening of new labor markets in other regions fueled further migration. On the supply side, the push factors

continued. The absence of sustained economic development, political instability, a growing population, double-digit unemployment levels, and low wages continued to compel people to look abroad.

The Philippines is a country rich in natural resources and has an educated labor force, unfortunately the government cannot provide jobs. This is not surprising since the Philippine economy is backward, primarily agrarian, and without basic industries. With landlessness and poverty in the countryside, and without basic industries to generate jobs, the Philippines has become a source of cheap raw materials and labor for multinational companies.

Feminization of Migration

The hardest hit by the economic crisis are principally the women, forcing them to leave the country, home and family in search of a viable alternative livelihood overseas.

On one hand, a growing section of the population in the host country now had the earning capacity to employ cheap migrant labor for domestic work. On the other hand, the high cost of living also necessitated that a majority of women had to work in order to augment the family's income. Likewise, a growing feminist consciousness had led to a growing recognition of women as wage earners and encouraged their greater participation in the economy.

Women are very visible in international migration from the Philippines and are as prominent as men in labor migration. In fact, since 1992, female migrants outnumbered men among the newly hired land-based workers who are legally deployed every year.

Female OFWs dominate domestic work and entertainment in 10 top destinations: Hong Kong, Kuwait, Singapore, Italy, United Arab Emirates, Japan, and Taiwan. Female OFWs can also be found in factory work, sales, and nursing. In Hong Kong, for example, more than 90 percent of OFWs are women. Since these are unprotected sectors, female migration has raised many concerns about the safety and well-being of women migrants. Many Filipinos continue to experience abuse and exploitation ranging from contract violations, termination without cause, rape, sexual harassment, prostitution, violence and even death.

Issues that confront Migrant Workers

The irregular operations of recruitment agencies in the Philippines and their counterparts in the countries of destination are one of the sources of vulnerabilities for migrant workers. Excessive placement fees, contract substitution, nonpayment or delayed wages, and difficult working and living conditions are common problems encountered by migrant workers, including legal ones.

Migrant women face particular vulnerabilities. Aside from the usual problems that plague migrants, their jobs in domestic work and entertainment usually mean long working hours, surveillance and control by employers, and abusive conditions, including violence and sexual harassment. Given the "private" context in which they work, the problems encountered by migrant women in these sectors go unnoticed.

The cases of Maricris Sioson, Flor Contemplacion and Sarah Balabagan opened the eyes of the Filipino community to the plight of migrant Filipinos. In Canada, high-profile cases such as Leticia Cables and Melca Salvador have mobilized the community to fight against the unjust treatment of migrant workers. Add to these the executed drug mules Sally Ordinario-Villanueva, 32, Elizabeth Batain, 38, and Ramon Credo, 42, and the 576 overseas Filipino workers currently facing the death penalty. The anguish and ordeal of migrant Filipinos continue.

Looking Ahead

While we acknowledge that our country's economy, the migrants and their families have benefited from labor of migration mostly because of remittances, economic and development migration impacts have not been clearly felt. The Philippines has become a very successful labor exporter but it has failed to develop and strengthen development processes. The target to send more workers every year is a telling indicator that labor migration from the Philippines will continue to persist.

We cannot stop people from leaving. And it is even doubtful whether the Philippines can ever do without foreign remittances. But in the face of present global instability and intensifying economic competition, the future of Philippine development and security lies in a strong domestic economy that provides professional employment within the country for all of its citizens. Government has to start to lure back migrants to the country and retain workers who desire better possibilities. Also, our country will need to explore and learn much from international discussions and reflections taking place in other countries on how migration can be an instrument for development.

Changing decades of migration and dependence on income abroad is an enormous challenge. However, if brought together under the right conditions and incentives, our people can build a country that is economically competitive and self-sufficient, with opportunities for Filipinos to raise families without the risks and costs of migration. Just imagine the wealth of knowledge and experience from around the world converging in the Philippines and transforming the country into a "global nation" should our OFWs return. (*Manansala*)

Filipino Migration and the New Evangelization

Pope Benedict XVI has chosen the theme "Migrations and New Evangelisation" for his January 15, 2012 Message for the World Day of Migrants. He declares,

"Proclaiming Jesus Christ the one Saviour of the world 'constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent'. Indeed, today we feel the urgent need to give a fresh impetus and new approaches to the work of evangelisation in a world in which the breaking down of frontiers and the new processes of globalisation are bringing individuals and peoples even closer. This is both because of the development of the means of social communication and because of the frequency and ease with which individuals and groups can move about today."

"The present time, in fact, calls upon the Church to embark on a new evangelisation also in the vast and complex phenomenon of human mobility. This calls for an intensification of her missionary activity both in the regions where the Gospel is proclaimed for the first time and in countries with a Christian tradition".

"Internal or international migration, in fact, as an opening in search of better living conditions or to flee from the threat of persecution, war, violence, hunger or natural disasters, has led to an unprecedented mingling of individuals and peoples, with new problems not only from the human standpoint but also from ethnical, religious and spiritual ones. The current and obvious consequences of secularisation, the emergence of new sectarian movements, widespread insensitivity to the Christian faith and a marked tendency to fragmentation are obstacles to focusing on a unifying reference that would encourage the formation of 'one family of brothers and sisters in societies that are becoming ever more multiethnic and intercultural, where also people of various religions are urged to take part in dialogue, so that a serene and fruitful coexistence with respect for legitimate differences may be found'. Our time is marked by endeavours to efface God and the Church's teaching from the horizon of life, while doubt, scepticism and indifference are creeping in, seeking to eliminate all the social and symbolic visibility of the Christian faith".

"The phenomenon of migration today is also a providential opportunity for the proclamation of the Gospel in the contemporary world. Men and women from various regions of the earth who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ or know Him only partially, ask to be received in countries with an ancient Christian tradition. It is necessary to find adequate ways for them to meet and to become acquainted with Jesus Christ and to experience the invaluable gift of salvation which, for everyone, is a source of 'life in abundance'".

Instrument of Christian Expansion

Christianity is a migratory religion, and migration movements have been a functional element in its expansion. The thousand years from A.D. 500 to 1500, which saw the entrenchment of Christianity as the faith of western Europe, were marked, "by vast movements of peoples". The end of that period witnessed the beginning of the momentous expansion of Europeans from the heartlands of Christianity to other parts of the world.

A major reversal (and diffusion) of missionary initiative is underway, one significantly tied to the fact that the direction of global migratory flow is now primarily south to north and east to west, where it was once primarily north to south. Missionary initiatives from the old heartlands of Europe and North America are diminishing. Before 1925, 85 percent of all international migrants originated from Europe; since 1960 Europe has contributed an increasingly small fraction of emigrants to world emigration flows as emigrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America have increased dramatically. Once again, the possibilities for Christian expansion and migratory movement are forcibly and intimately intertwined.

But how will these post-Western Christianities affect a post-Christian West? If, the Christian faith has depended on cross-cultural diffusion for its survival, then we could say that the future of Christianity is intricately bound up with the emerging non-Western missionary movement. To the extent that it is predominantly non-Western, the new face of global Christianity is one of relative poverty and powerlessness, as for the first time in over a millennium, the global church displays the most explosive growth and increasing missionary vitality precisely in those areas that are most marginalized and impoverished.

A Changed Understanding

The growing non-Western missionary movement boasts neither the economic and technological advantages of the Western missionary movement nor the protection of strong economic and military powers that the Western missionary movement enjoyed. In acute contrast it comes not from the centers of political power and economic wealth but from the periphery. It emanates from contexts of religious plurality where Christianity has historically been a minority faith, a persecuted religion, or simply one among others. These factors have serious implications for the effectiveness of its "missionaries." They are likely to be free from the arrogance and triumphalism associated with a Christendom mentality and will have much to offer the church in the West as it grapples with issues of identity and relevance in the face of emerging religious plurality.

The Challenge

In a situation of poverty and alienation, mission needs to be done with the primary consideration of the context and with a view of empowerment. Pastoral approaches in the sense that we give stop-gap solutions no longer suffice. We have to seek the root causes of the problem. As *Justice in the World* document says: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of preaching the Gospel, that is, of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.” So, mission to be rooted in the biblical tradition entails social justice.

Today, poverty worsened by economic globalization and migration are redefining and challenging our very understanding and approach to mission. The call therefore, especially in the context of Filipino migration, is to engage in a mission that brings about contextual borderless liberation – one that is in dialogue with other cultures and religions. Mission in the face of globalization should be a mission beyond inculturation but a mission of interculturalism – one that respects or embraces differences, especially in cultures and religions, and enables people to live in harmony with diversity. It is only when mission is both contextually liberational and dialogically translocal that mission can truly respond to the cry of the Filipino in general and the Filipina in particular. (Cruz)

Reflections

1. How do you speak about God in a situation where one’s faith is put to extreme test with the host country’s religious repression, e.g. Saudi Arabia, and migrant marginalization?
2. How do you minister to a people whose faith is challenged by exposure and immersion not only to secularization and urbanization but also religious and cultural pluralism?
3. How do we recognize and deal with *Pilipino* religiosity which is manifesting itself in and across international borders?
4. Beyond political boundaries, how can we as Benedictines share humility, hospitality and hope in our global (-izing) world?

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