

SPECTRUM

Immigrants, Foreigners and My Backyard

A Short Biblical Theology of Migration

By Andrew Buttress

1/13/2015



Introduction

Migration is a global phenomenon. International migration worldwide in 2013 was estimated at 232million people. In the year 2000 this figure was lower at 175million. In 2013, half of all international migrants lived in 10 countries, with the US hosting the largest number, 45.8 million, and the UK sixth, with 7.8million.¹

What is more, there were 16.7 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2013, around 1.2 million more than at the end of 2012. The total number of forcibly displaced people worldwide is 51.2 million.²

If Christianity is to be a relevant, contemporary faith as well as a historical one then a biblical theology is needed which shapes human attitude, response and practice.

Whereas it is recognised that listening to and working with immigrants is a vitally important part of shaping a theology of migration, the intent of this paper is to offer a biblical theology on the subject of migration from a non-practical perspective.³ Whilst this will no doubt leave the attempt incomplete, it is considered that starting and keeping with Scripture in this endeavour is a valid and reasonable exercise. Whilst possibly lacking certain interpretative insights as a result, nevertheless, the formation of this short biblical theology will still offer a coherent understanding of God and human mobility found within the Bible's pages.⁴

To achieve such a task four key theological areas will be explored very briefly: much more could be said on each one. As such this paper is an attempt at a short biblical theology and does not pretend to be comprehensive or exhaustive. These areas are:

- 1) The Image of God
- 2) The Law and Covenant of God
- 3) The Son of God
- 4) The Kingdom of God

¹ The top ten list is as follows: US (45.8million); the Russian Federation (11 million); Germany (9.8 million); Saudi Arabia (9.1 million); United Arab Emirates (7.8 million); United Kingdom (7.8 million); France (7.4 million); Canada (7.3 million); Australia (6.5 million); and Spain (6.5 million).

Trans-International Migration: the 2013 Revision, *United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: International Migration* <<http://esa.un.org/unmigration/wallchart2013.htm>>

² Facts and Figures about Refugees, *UNHCR*, <<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>>

³ All theology is done in a context and, to some degree, context shapes theology. Whether, 'there is no such thing as "theology"; there is only "contextual theology", Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Faith and Cultures* Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2011), p.3., is not discussed in this paper.

⁴ For a comprehensive theology of migration of a contextual, liberatory nature see Susanna Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012). See also Jorge E. Castillo Guerra, 'A Theology of Migration: Toward an Intercultural Methodology' in D.G Groody and G. Campese, *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame: Notre dame University Press, 2008) pp. 243-270.

1) The Image of God

A profound, central truth of the Judaeo-Christian Faith is that all humanity is made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27; 5:1–3; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas 3:9). Such knowledge defines our humanity. ‘The image of God is not so much something we possess as what we are. To be human is to be the image of God. It is not a feature added onto our species; it is definitive of what it means to be human.’⁵ Our humanity is only fully understood when it is viewed as an act of creation, created in the image of the Creator.

From this baseline our personalities, desire for relationship, spirituality, even humour stems. Good human attributes and values derive from the moral attributes of God. Whilst unable to mirror the perfection and holiness of God, falling short of His glory, humanity still reflects something of God’s intrinsic glory in these attributes.

So it is that we all share a common humanity which is grounded in God-likeness. ‘This forms the basis of the radical equality of all human beings, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or any form of social, economic or political status.’⁶ Consequently, it is for no human being to de-humanise another. We do not have that right. No one can claim some higher authority to devalue the human dignity of another. The playing field is perfectly level.

Christopher Wright quotes an ancient Akkadian proverb to show the distinctiveness of Old Testament thought. Whereas the Akkadian proverb states, “a man is the shadow of a god; and slave is the shadow of a man,” Israel was to make no such distinctions. Even though functional social structures were operative in Israel the slave was not considered less than a man, humanity was not graded and no form of ‘caste’ system existed.⁷ Slaves were treated with respect and dignity reflecting ‘Old Testament civil laws [which] are quite unparalleled in any other ancient Near Eastern Code’ (cf. Ex. 21:20-21; 21: 26-27; Deut. 23:15-16).⁸

As this basic equality applies to all people, including migrants and foreigners, our human tendency to stereotype and generalise should be checked.

If people on the move are only seen as migrants or workers, or worse, as lawbreakers, aliens or criminals, then their suffering makes no moral claims on us, and we can rest content on our side of the dividing wall because we convince ourselves they are excluded for a reason.⁹

People are more than migrants or immigrants. Such labels are in danger of carrying stigma and devaluation. People are God’s creation and each created person should seek to treat another with

⁵ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), p.119.

⁶ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Nottingham, Inter Varsity Press, 2006), p. 423.

⁷ Wright, *Mission*, p. 423.

⁸ Wright, *Ethics*, p. 292.

⁹ Daniel G. Groody, ‘Theology in the Age of Migration’, *The National Catholic Reporter* (September 2009), <<http://ncronline.org/news/global/theology-age-migration>>

value and worth. So, when we see an immigrant 'we see someone created by God, addressed by God, accountable to God, loved by God, valued and evaluated by God.'¹⁰ This godly way of seeing will prevent domination, degradation, oppression and unfairness. Being made in the image of God requires no less.

2) The Law and Covenant of God

As already mentioned in Exodus and Deuteronomy, the commands of God were influential in the formation of Israel's attitude and reaction to the migrant. This sensitive and compassionate attitude was to be harboured not least because the people of God were, for a time, both immigrant and migrant.

a) Israel as immigrant and migrant

It is worth noting that the first command and blessing of God to humanity, found in Genesis 1:28, is to 'be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.' This verse is an early mandate for migration. Human movement throughout the created earth was commanded by God. Aspects of this command and blessing are echoed in Genesis chapter 12:1-3. God commanded Abraham to 'go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you'. Abraham was to emigrate and move amongst foreign peoples.

In his lifetime he lived amongst the Canaanites (Gen. 12:6-8), Egyptians (Gen. 12:10), Hittites and Amorites (Gen. 14:13) and the Philistines (Gen. 21:32-34). 'In a very literal way Abraham encounters the peoples of the world as an immigrant, travelling through their land(s)...as such Abraham and his family's very status as foreigners in the land serves as one of the primary means by which God's missional purpose comes to pass.'¹¹ As an immigrant he makes 'his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country' (Hebrews 11:9). Such obedience attracts God's blessing. His descendants will multiply, be as numerous as the dust and stars and 'all peoples on earth would be blessed through [him]' (Gen.12:3).

The Promised Land seemed afar off, though, when some four hundred years later the Hebrews were still enslaved within Egypt's powerful regime. They were slaves suffering at the hands of a tyrannical oppressor and were powerless to leave. Yet God heard their cry and brought about an exodus which resulted in a mass movement of people out of Egypt into the wilds of Canaan with its sporadic cities and kingdoms.

These Israelites, however, were a mixed multitude rather a homogenous pure race. Judah and Simeon, two of Jacob's sons had already married Canaanite women (Gen. 38 and 46:10), and Joseph married the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Gen. 41:50). Over a period of four hundred years in captivity the group of seventy men and their wives (Gen. 46:27) who entered Egypt and who increased to a people of tens of thousands are likely to have had offspring who inter-bred with the

¹⁰ Wright, *Mission*, p. 423.

¹¹ Sarita D. Gallagher, 'Abraham on the Move: The Outpouring of God's Blessing through a Migrant', in *God's People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission* eds. Van Thanh Nguyen and John M. Prior (Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 3-17 (p.7).

indigenous population. Even if this was not the case, Exodus 12:38 says that during the exodus 'many other people went with them...' suggesting that people of foreign descent mixed with the Hebrews to form an eclectic mix of migrating humanity. These peoples 'were Israelites because they chose to follow God, not because they had an automatic birth-right or unifying ethnic roots.'¹² To maintain, therefore, that all these wanderers had a truly Abrahamic lineage is highly contestable.¹³

One factor in the contemporary rejection of immigrants or foreigners by a resident population rests on the presupposition that there is such a thing as a pure indigenous race. Israel could not legitimately make that claim when they eventually possessed the Promised Land; few peoples can.

b) Israel as land possessor

Just as migration is seen to be a common aspect of human living in the Mesopotamian world of the patriarchs so is settlement, boundaries, borders and national identity. Indeed one purpose of migration is to settle in a new land. These purposes are within the intention of God for from the 'days of old,' God has, set up boundaries for the peoples...' (Deut. 32:7-8).¹⁴ Division and apportioning of the land, for example, is given great store in the book of Joshua accounting for chapters 13-22.

To live as a nation is all part of God's purposes for humanity; 'the Bible does not imply that ethnic or national diversity is in itself sinful or the product of the Fall...'¹⁵ Consequently, 'national distinctives are part of the kaleidoscopic diversity of creation at the human level analogous to the wonderful prodigality of biodiversity at every other level of God's creation.'¹⁶

For Israel to now find her identity as God's called-out-people in a defined area of land was of great importance; it would be the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham. Indeed the subject of land is inextricably tied to Israel's destiny and identity.¹⁷ This identity comes first and foremost through YHWH, their God. Indeed 'the central unifying and identifying feature of this people is the covenant relationship that YHWH will form with them...'¹⁸ Second, it comes through having a land (which is allocated according to each tribe), having boundaries, and having borders. They are now a people who have much in common: a law, a language, a purpose, a place to settle and a faith in their God. Yet, they are not to become xenophobic or insular. Instead, God's ethical demands on Israel in relation to the stranger and the immigrant are now brought into focus.

¹² Guy Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', *The Jubilee Centre* (2011), <<http://www.jubilee-centre.org/christian-response-immigration-guy-brandon>> p.7.

¹³ For a fuller treatment of this subject read J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Theology of Race* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), pp. 65-68.

¹⁴ For the sake of brevity, observations regarding the origin of nations/ethnic groups and the messages which come of the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 10-12) are omitted as are broader discussions about the significance of national identity within Israel in the O.T (c.f. footnote 52).

¹⁵ Wright, *Mission*, p. 455.

¹⁶ Wright, *Mission*, p. 456.

¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* 2nd Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) charts the 'story of land gift, land possession and consequently land loss,' (p.xvii), from the nomadic patriarchs through to monarchy and onto exile.

¹⁸ J. Daniel Hays, *Race*, p. 66.

i) God's appeal is experiential

In Exodus 23:9, we read, 'Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.' God's appeal here is experiential. On the basis of Israel's own experience they, of all people, should understand from a humanitarian perspective the importance of treating the foreigner fairly.

Such 'foreigners' in this text are known as *gerim*. As Guy Brandon points out, '*gerim* were part of normal Israelite society, integrating culturally and economically and hence were protected by, but also expected to live by, Israelite standards.'¹⁹ Nevertheless they were still 'resident aliens' in Israel, 'who remained different and [were], as a result likely to be vulnerable.'²⁰ They did not have their own land, property or law but abided by the law of their host country. They were at the very least sympathetic with the worship of YHWH, Israel's God.

In contrast, Brandon also draws attention to the *nokrim* or *zarim* 'often translated as 'foreigners', who lived outside of Israel and had no real link with the land, its people or their God. They might typically have been mercenaries or merchants.'²¹ They were not under Israel's law and did not benefit from it. They did not integrate into society and were often viewed with more suspicion. Consequently, they were not strictly immigrants or refugees as we think of these terms but people who were transitory migrants. They were also economically independent.

Determining who the *gerim* are and who the *nokrim* are today, is not a straight forward exercise. Brandon suggests that the *gerim* 'can most closely be identified with today's asylum seeker or refugee.'²² He interestingly includes the 'multinational companies which operate in the UK but are domiciled elsewhere or have arrangements in place to avoid paying tax here,'²³ as examples of *nokrim*.

Whether this is a good dynamic equivalent of Old Testament terminology is open to debate. To attempt to find parallels between ancient Israel's situation and contemporary immigration contexts is fraught with difficulty. What is less debatable, however, is Brandon's conclusion that 'ethnicity was not the factor that decided how the Israelites treated foreigners. In this respect, there was no difference between *ger* and *nokri*. The distinction is instead one of intention and self-identification.'²⁴

¹⁹ Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', p.8.

²⁰ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 165-6. Here Snyder gives a more detailed etymology of *gerim* as well as other relevant Hebrew categories of foreigner.

²¹ Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', p.7.

²² Guy Brandon, *Votewise, 2015: Making a Difference at the Ballot Box and Beyond* (London: SPCK, 2014), p. 56.

²³ Brandon, *Votewise*, 2015, p. 56.

²⁴ Brandon, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', p. 8.

ii) God's appeal is covenantal

God's appeal to Israel with respect to the foreigner is also covenantal. It is based on an understanding that 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it,' (Ps. 24:1) for he is and remains the landlord in any covenant or treaty. 'Israel could not treat the gift of land as a license to abuse it, because *the land was still YHWH's land*. He retained the ultimate title of ownership and therefore also the ultimate right of moral authority over how it was used.'²⁵ With the Year of Jubilee in mind, Leviticus 25:23 also asserts unequivocally, 'the land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers.'

Thus the relationship between God and Israel is one of landlord and tenant. Israel possesses the land, God owns the land. Israel must be good stewards of the land. Israel has no right to treat the immigrant poorly. They are to treat them as people who need protection, special consideration and compassionate justice, just as Israel receives protection, special consideration and compassionate justice from God. This is all part of God's covenantal agreement and serves to maintain the value and dignity of the immigrant in a vulnerable context. Such action is indeed commended in the book of Ruth as Boaz treats Ruth, the Moabite, with protection, special consideration and compassion.

c) Israel in exile and beyond

As settlers, land possessors and owners of a national identity, Israel's breaking of the covenant through disobedience to God was a catastrophe (Jer. 44). For many, deportation, forced migration and exile into a foreign Babylonian land was the result. Once again, as in Egypt long before, they were not to care for the *gerim*, they were the *gerim*, the 'resident aliens' in a strange land without land, temple and cultic ritual. This corporate experience of captivity necessitated a theological restructuring and a rebuilding of identity as the people of God.²⁶ The book of Daniel and Lamentations gives just a glimpse of the tensions, agonising and soul-searching which this involved.

Their return to the wastelands of Judah which happened in truncated fashion over a lengthy period (538 – 432BC), saw a re-establishment of the Law and a rebuilding of the temple and walls. Ezra and Nehemiah sought to provide 'continuity with historic Israel whose name and inheritance were carried on by this remnant (c.f., Ezra 2:2b), and... separation from the taints of heathenism.'²⁷ It is this separatist and exclusivist theology which presents a contemporary theology of migration with one of its biggest difficulties. For example, Ezra the Priest who, on learning that 'the people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, had not kept themselves separate from the neighbouring peoples with their detestable practices like those of the Canaanites, Hittites ...' (Ezra 9:1), instigates an enforced expulsion of foreign wives, back to their countries of origin (Ezra 9-10).

Susanna Snyder (*Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church*, 2012) does not disregard these texts altogether but instead adopts a suspicious reading of them on the understanding that 'the story told in Ezra-Nehemiah is one-sided and oppressive.'²⁸ She holds the human authors accountable for

²⁵ Wright, *Ethics*, p.93 (his italics).

²⁶ D.L. Smith-Christopher, *Biblical Theology in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

²⁷ Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: IVP, 1979).

²⁸ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 143.

vindictive policies driven by an 'ecology of fear'. Ezra-Nehemiah's fear of their strange situation, in particular the 'people of the land' (Ez. 9:1-4, 10-12) including foreign women, leads to a suppression of submerged voices and excluded strangers, distorting the ways of God. Rather than adopting similar attitudes today, she says, we should acknowledge the role of these texts in highlighting the 'complicity of the wider Judaeo-Christian tradition in fostering hostile attitudes towards foreigners.'²⁹ By admitting such texts to be understandably xenophobic and exclusivist, given Ezra-Nehemiah's context, we can move on to determine how God would want to include and welcome the immigrant and foreigner in our midst today.

Snyder should be applauded for not side-stepping this difficult issue and tackling the interpretative tensions head on. In suggesting the Ezra-Nehemiah texts are written within an 'ecology of fear' she provides useful insights into the psychological motives which influence the drastic decisions to ostracise the foreign wives. This said it is difficult to agree with Snyder that 'being "foreign" in Ezra-Nehemiah is intimately linked with being female,'³⁰ and the expulsion of the foreign wives was because 'Ezra-Nehemiah were looking for someone or something to blame for its loss and for the exile.'³¹ [The loss referred to here is the loss of Israel's standing and past].

This short paper does not allow a full explanation of Snyder's arguments or a full response to them but, suffice to say, in examination of the text, it does not seem to suggest that the foreign wives were expelled because they were foreign, neither were the foreign wives expelled because they were wives. To postulate that they were victims of a strategy which levied unfair, disproportionate blame on a weak and defenceless sector of society (women and foreigners) does seem to read back into the text insights gained from contemporary studies in social psychology. It also does not seem to take into the account the strength of the holiness tradition in Israel's history.

It must be remembered the pervading idea that Israel went into exile because of their idolatry was not the creation of Ezra-Nehemiah. It was the theme of the prophets before them. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah are clear: Jerusalem and Judah lie in ruins because the Jews gave themselves to 'worshipping other gods' (Jer. 44:3, Ezek. 14:7-8, Is. 44:9-23). This idolatry, at a regular frequency, had come through embracing the household gods of the foreign wife and the nation-gods of her peoples. It had previously been forbidden (Ex. 34:15-16; Deut. 7:3-4). So when Ezra reiterates the offense which has come through inter-marriage (9:2; 10:2, 6, 10) he is reinforcing the word of God relayed by the prophets of God. The 'ecology of fear' which exists in Ezra-Nehemiah is a fear which is not mythical but actual and it is a fear which is based in the fear of the Lord. If God exiled his people in the past because of this transgression he will not bless his people in the present if they are no better. This fear is focused on the foreign wives, not out of xenophobia (note that foreigners who had separated themselves from evil Gentile practices were allowed to participate in the Passover – Ezra 6:21 – the idea of including the *gerim* remains) or misogyny, but out of a religious purity and identity.

Whilst Snyder recognises this, in part, she sees the expulsion of the foreign wives as an unjustified and cruel act. Is it unjustified? Ezra does not think so for the foreign wives are perpetrating idolatry

²⁹ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 142.

³⁰ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 151-2.

³¹ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking*, p. 150.

not because they are either foreign or women but because they are people who are breaking the holiness code which enshrines Israel's law. To some, though, Ezra's actions will still seem unjustified and cruel regardless of Ezra's motive.

This is quite understandable as we sit and judge, today, outside of the original historical context. In the light of our sensibilities concerning human rights within the twenty-first century West, to expel married women and children from a land because of the shape and name of their god does not seem right. Yet we are living in a very different context, a very different world. We should not be too quick to judge.

For our purposes, it must be emphasised that naïve attempts to overlay contemporary immigration contexts with those found in post-exilic Judah are to be discouraged. The peoples of the UK are not under foreign domination, they are not returning from exile and it is not 450BC! Our theology of migration based on the Old Testament must be unspecific.

We can, however, confidently assert that all men and women have equal worth and value because of their being made in God's own image. We can equally assert that migrating and settling are both embraced as being part of the economy of God. Migrants who are vulnerable particularly due to poverty and persecution are not to be discarded. Conversely, migrants who seek to exploit and destabilise are to be treated with caution. Beyond this we must surely be tentative in our theological assertions.

3) The Son of God

'The very fact that God became truly human underlines the value of human life. The Creator did not become a lion (apologies to C.S. Lewis) or a dolphin or a parrot. He became one of us.'³² It should not go unnoticed that one of the remarkable facets of Jesus 'becoming one of us' is that he became a migrant.

'In the Incarnation, God migrates to the human race, making his way into the far country of human discord and disorder, a place of division and dissension, a territory marked by death and the demeaning treatment of human beings.'³³ In this sense Jesus emigrated from heaven and immigrated to earth. Yet he was not an immigrant who distanced himself from the indigenous people and paid little heed to culture. He fully immersed himself in human flesh, human culture, and human life. In this respect Jesus took on human citizenship and became one of us.

The incarnation shows us a God who moves towards humanity. Leaving behind the comforts and securities of heaven, Jesus came here. Jesus identified with all of humanity by becoming human and, in particular, identified with the migrant by becoming a migrant. It is poignant, then, that one of Jesus' first human journeys is a migration. In literal, concrete terms, Jesus and his family knew what refugee status felt like being taken into Egypt for fear of the murderous Herod (Matt 2:13-15).

³² Graham A. Cole, *The God who became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation* (Nottingham: Apollos, IVP, 2013), p.150.

³³ Groody, 'Age of Migration'.

Fleeing persecution, known to many asylum seekers and refugees the world over, was known to Jesus' family at such an early stage.

Jesus, although known as a resident of Nazareth and familiar with the region of Galilee, lived, at least for parts of his ministry, as an internal migrant. At times he seemed to be a man of no fixed address. 'Foxes have holes,' he said, 'and birds have their nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (Luke 9:58). The hospitality of others as facilitating and enabling the ministry of Jesus should not be overlooked.³⁴ This basic, itinerant lifestyle is concordant with Jesus' identification with the poor and vulnerable. His dependency on others for life-giving sustenance means Jesus has much in common with the needy in society.

Jesus assumed the human condition of the most vulnerable among us, undergoing hunger, thirst, rejection and injustice, walking the way of the cross, overcoming the forces of death that threaten human life. He enters into the broken territory of human experience and offers his own wounds in solidarity with those who are in pain. The Jesus story opens up for many migrants a reason to hope, especially in what often seems like a hopeless predicament.³⁵

What is more the work of Christ has a migratory tone. His work focuses on helping humanity migrate from a place of hopelessness and alienation before God to a place of belonging and reconciliation.

No aspect of a theology of migration is more fundamental, nor more challenging in its implications, than the incarnation. Through Jesus, God enters into the broken and sinful territory of the human condition in order to help men and women, lost in their earthly sojourn, find their way back home to God.³⁶

This migratory work is found in the cross, resurrection and ascension. At the cross, Christ offers atonement, a way home to the Father through the shedding of blood and the forgiveness of sins. 'Once you were alienated,' Paul says, 'now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death' (Col. 1:21-22). In the resurrection, Christ migrates from death to life. The grave which is the final dead end or terminus now becomes a departure lounge for the follower of Christ who will also rise as Christ has risen.³⁷ A truly positive migratory hope exists for every believer. And the ascension, the return of Christ in heaven is anticipatory of our migration to heaven. Jesus says, 'I am going there to prepare a place for you' (John 14:2).

³⁴ Luke 10:38-42 is one example. Martha and Mary gave Jesus hospitality on more than one occasion.

³⁵ Groody, 'Age of Migration'.

³⁶ Daniel G. Groody, 'Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees' *Theological Studies* 70 (2009), pp.638-667 (p.649).

³⁷ Again, for the sake of brevity I will not mention or discuss the words found in the Athanasian Creed, 'he descended into hell'. These words would, however, add to the migratory tone if they were included in this section.

4) The Kingdom of God

It is widely understood that Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth.³⁸ This kingdom is not a physical kingdom with borders and boundaries. It 'is based not on geography or politics but on divine initiative and openness of heart, leading to a different kind of vision of the current world order, where many of the first are last and the last first (Matt. 19:30; 20:16; Mark. 10:31; Luke. 13:29–30).'³⁹

This kingdom, founded on the rule and reign of God, is 'now' as well as 'not yet'. The kingdom has come in the present just as the kingdom is yet to come in the future. The present day aspect of the kingdom causes the follower of Christ to realise that the kingdom makes contemporary claims on his/her life. It challenges and confronts. It makes an existential impact. It means that issues such as migration and immigration need consideration from a kingdom perspective.

A good starting point in this pursuit is Jesus' teaching about the kingdom. He makes it clear that at the kingdom's epicentre are two commandments which are actually enshrined at the heart of Israel's law. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Luke 10:27//Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18). These verses beg the question who is my neighbour? And, if our answer includes the immigrant, what does it mean to love the immigrant as oneself?

a) Hospitality and the foreigner

Israel was to welcome the foreigner because they had once been strangers in a foreign land. The disciple of Jesus is to welcome and care for the needy (which may well include the immigrant foreigner and asylum seeker) because such acts of kindness are ultimately done to Jesus himself.

In the parable of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46), the sheep are depicted as those who inherit eternal life because they have provided hospitality for the stranger, clothed the needy, cared for the sick and visited the prisoner. Incredulously, they ask of the Christ-King, 'when did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you.' And the King replies, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me' (verses 38-40).

Loving neighbour and brother is exemplified in the New Testament's use of hospitality. Building upon a strong Middle Eastern tradition of hospitality Jesus himself extends hospitality to those who were marginalised racially, economically, religiously and morally. What other Rabbi would be seen dead eating with tax-collectors and sinners? It has been said that Jesus 'got himself crucified by the way he ate.'⁴⁰ Hospitality is highly relational and inclusive. It means not simply "to do something for"

³⁸ Many New Testament books on theology will expound and discuss this theme. Two classics are A.M. Hunter, *Introducing New Testament Theology* (Bungay: SCM Press, 1957) and George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel and the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (London: Paternoster Press, 1959).

³⁹ Groody, 'Crossing the Divide', p. 661.

⁴⁰ Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian* (New York: Paulist, 1985), p.47 cited by Groody, *Crossing the Divide*, p. 658.

or "to give something to" somebody, but "being with" somebody.⁴¹ In doing this Jesus crossed borders and broke down barriers. He was willing to step over a line that others had drawn.

Hospitality is risky both individually and nationally. Will our guests appreciate us or abuse our friendship? What will others think? Will there be enough food and drink? Is there enough space? Hospitality is willing to go beyond these risks trusting in the providence of God. This is a challenge to the Christian, to the church and to any nation that would dare to call itself Christian.

b) Adopting the pilgrim principle

Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God was often scandalous and, in many ways, counter-cultural. The beatitude 'blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5), for example, was diametrically opposed to both Roman tyranny and Pharasiacal pride. Today such verses and the values they promote are unlikely to be found at the heart of many political manifestos. Such teaching almost seems overly extreme.

Jesus' demand on the rich young ruler to sell all his wealth also seemed extreme. If it was difficult, then, for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:16-30), how much more now in a Western world which promotes a 'lifestyle of luxury and self-indulgence. Its whole aim and ethos is this-worldly comfort.'⁴²

Yet, Jesus' counter-cultural teaching was embraced by many. In doing so, the Early Church adopted a migratory worldview, fashioned by a pilgrim principle.⁴³ They saw that such worldly comfort could lead to myopia causing people to lose sight of the transience of this world and the ultimate meaninglessness of material ownership. Paradoxically, it was by virtue of them being 'no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow-citizens with God's people' (Eph. 2: 19), that they were also 'aliens and strangers in the world' (1 Peter 2:11).

As aliens (*parepidemos*, meaning transient visitors) and strangers (*paroikos*, meaning foreigners), the Christians were people who held an inbetween status. 'They saw themselves as dislocated on this earth and being en route to a heavenly home, an attitude that may have stemmed from the extensive travels of their leaders and their own experiences of social marginalisation.'⁴⁴ Their citizenship was in heaven (Phil: 3:20), their temporary home, on earth. Such thought is migratory. It does not entertain the idea of earthly permanence but of being resident aliens, sojourners ready to move on. Thus Giovacchino Campese's comments are not too extreme when he says 'the true Christian is the person who acknowledges in every moment the fact of being on a journey, of being a

⁴¹ Giocchino Campese, C.S., 'The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21st Century' *The Free Library Theological Studies*, (2012).

<<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+irruption+of+migrants%3a+theology+of+migration+in+the+21st+century.-a0280855775>>

⁴² Dewi Hughes and Matthew Bennett, *God of the Poor: A Biblical Vision of God's Present Rule* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1998), p. 64.

⁴³ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009), pp.3-15.

⁴⁴ Snyder, 'Asylum-Seeking', p. 133.

pilgrim of the reign of God, for this is the final goal of those who believe in the God revealed by Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ This is the pilgrim principle.

On this basis it can be said, that, metaphorically, we are all migrants. The Christian, above all, should live as if

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through,
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.⁴⁶

As pilgrims and migrants, then, how might this affect our attitude to immigration and the foreigner? The Israelites were reminded under the Old Testament covenant that the land ultimately belonged to God even though they possessed it. They were temporary residents of it. As temporary residents of this world, how should followers of Christ, under a new covenant, respond? How tightly should we hold to that which we call our own? How much should we be concerned about 'our own backyard'? How much should we see the care of the asylum seeker, refugee and immigrant as investing towards 'treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy' (Matt. 6:20)?

c) Beyond national identity

For Israel in the Old Testament their primary identity was as the people of God. In addition to, and related to this, their identity was found in their tribe, their land and, latterly, a corporate sense of national identity under a king. Such identity enabled a sense of security and well-being vital for human flourishing and development (1 Ki. 4:20-21). God's intention for humanity was, and is, to live in a place of security and safety.

For the follower of Jesus, having entered the kingdom of God and having become a citizen of heaven, their primary identity is also in being the people of God.

Despite this, the Christian's identity is also likely to be related to their country, their political affiliation and a sense of national identity. These facets of personal identity colours how one responds to immigration with its associated concerns relating to social cohesion, demographic imbalance, strains on public services, housing and employment. It is important that a Christian's spiritual identity as a follower of Christ is not separated or divorced from their personal and public identity as a member of a party, people and place. Identity in Christ should be interwoven with identity in the real world.

In the same vein, it is important that theology engages dialogically with issues relating to migration so that personal action and public policy reflects the heart of God. The role of theology is to determine how God would want people who identify themselves with Christ and with their nation to consider immigration and treat the immigrant.

⁴⁵ Campese, 'Irruption'

⁴⁶ 'This World is not my Home' is a negro-spiritual song made popular by Jim Reeves.

For our purposes, a particular question of interest here is what role does national identity and patriotism have in this theological debate?

Stephen Backhouse (*Red, White, Blue...and Brown: Citizens, Patriots and the Prime Minister, 2007*), drawing upon the parable of the Good Samaritan, suggests that citizenship and a sense of belonging comes through neighbourliness more than patriotism. He says that 'we need to recognise the importance of the narrative of national identity, and to go beyond it.'⁴⁷ A society is built on the citizen who does not cross to other side of the street when there is someone in need on our side - even if they are racially different. 'Ultimately, it is a sense of "neighbour" rather than "nation" that will best contribute to citizenship in modern Britain.'⁴⁸ Racial and national identity is not undermined in the New Testament, indeed Paul remains identifiable as an 'Israelite... a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin' (Rom. 11:1), but loving thy neighbour, as the epicentre of the kingdom of God, takes on a transcendent quality.

Notwithstanding, it still remains a biblical enterprise for a country to assert its core values to which it adheres and to encourage immigrants to adopt them. The welcomed place of the *gerim* in Israelite society functioned on the existence of known laws, known principles and known values being part of the socio-political framework of Israel. A national identity based on shared moral and ethical values for its citizens must be of value. A national identity threatened by a lack of moral and ethical shared values of its citizens and migrant population is a concern. As with the *gerim*, the 'recognition that citizenship should not demand wholesale integration,'⁴⁹ is reasonable. Yet, as with the *gerim* a certain level of adherence to law and societal value is to be expected.

How this works out in practice is open to discussion. Heightening a sense of national identity may sound beneficial but may be limited in its achievements for whilst 'nationhood contributes to the context in which individuals live and work, supplying a number of the essential ingredients of modern society...it does not supply the content of that society...'⁵⁰ How should honourable values such as justice, fairness and freedom in a country become the content not just the context? Or as Backhouse puts it how can such values move from being the rules of the game to being enacted in the outworking of the game? The answer may lie less in patriotic flag waving and more in concrete acts of kindness exemplified by the supposedly racially-inferior Samaritan. If loving thy neighbour could be the practice not just the theory how much more powerful would that be than imposed forms of patriotism in a nation?

In considering national identity and patriotism, the parable of the Good Samaritan contributes to a biblical theology which challenges stereotypes, generalisations and even prejudice. As residents of a particular nation is it at all possible that we could harbour such godless attitudes as that of the priest and Levite? Do we have such ingrained attitudes that we would ignore the needy, poor and persecuted person who seeks to settle in our country and who wants refuge in our own backyard?

⁴⁷ Stephen Backhouse, 'Red, White, Blue...and Brown: Citizens, Patriots and the Prime Minister,' *Theos*, 2007, <<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2007/08/15/red-white-blue-and-brown>> p.10.

⁴⁸ Stephen Backhouse, 'Citizens', p.10.

⁴⁹ Nick Spencer, *Votewise: Helping Christians Engage with the Issues* (London: SPCK, 2004), p.38.

⁵⁰ Stephen Backhouse, 'Citizens', p. 58.

d) From every people and nation

In a world of racial division, class division and gender division the words of Paul, 'there is no Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28), offers a radical vision of a redeemed human race under the Lordship of Christ. These people do not degrade or dehumanise others for all equally belong. This kingdom has no prejudice or discrimination because all belong equally.

In Revelation 7:9, John sees these people of this kingdom as 'wearing white robes', worshipping God; people characterised by diversity not uniformity despite their attire! 'The inhabitants of the new creation are not portrayed as a homogenised mass or a single global culture. Rather they display the continuing glorious diversity of the human race through history.'⁵¹ These people are an eclectic mix from 'every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb'. Indeed, in the new heaven and new earth 'the glory and honour of the nations will be brought in to it' (Rev. 21:26). In Christ, nations will come together as united nations.⁵² All this 'is a picture of the reality which will exist in the climactic kingdom of Christ, and as such, provides a model for us to strive toward. John sees the kingdom of Christ as a multi-ethnic congregation.'⁵³

The culmination of the Christian's migratory existence on earth is, therefore, revealed. The Christian has arrived at 'a better country – a heavenly one... God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them' (Heb. 11:16). With this end in view, with such an eschatological vision of the holy, universal church glimpsed, how then might the people of God live now to resemble this multi-national multitude? If the church is truly catholic and migratory how can it offer in our present age a foretaste of this multi-national assembly?

In truth, such diversity is not possible without migration. With migration a church can glimpse this future. Without migration the church in each nation remains mono-cultured; a painting of but one colour and medium, lacking a global perspective. With migration, many nationalities join together as many different parts, reflecting the variety and extravagance of God in common worship through different cultural forms. A national church can only reflect its international God-ordained purposes when it opens its doors to migrants who are (or who will become) worshippers of Christ as well.

⁵¹ Wright, *Mission*, p. 456.

⁵² For a biblical understanding of 'nation' in the Old Testament (from which Revelation draws), see Daniel. I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁵³ J. Daniel Hays, *Race*, p. 205.

Conclusion

Based on the assertion that all humanity is made in the image of God and therefore shares equal value and worth, a theology of migration explores God's relationship with Israel, Jesus as a migrant Son and the kingdom of God as a radical expression of redeemed humanity.

In each area attitudes and values of the people of God are called into question in relation to the migrant whether immigrant, asylum seeker or refugee. Throughout, the human capacity for self-interest and self-preservation is challenged and confronted.

Once settled, God commands Israel to show compassion to the migrant on humanitarian and covenantal grounds. Unless migrants threatened Israel's security or stability they were to be treated well. This was particularly true for those who were in need.

Such generosity was based on the understanding that the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord. As tenants of the land Israel were to possess not own it. This was to shape their attitude to others.

The coming to earth of God's Son is a migration. With Israel's religious leaders unable to fulfil the Law and the covenant, Jesus' migration to earth and his work on earth, serves to move those alienated from God toward and into His kingdom. It is fitting that Jesus experiences migration and identifies with the migrant's suffering and vulnerability in doing this.

To be part of God's kingdom people need to follow Jesus. This following is a call to be a migrant, a pilgrim, a traveller who adopts values and attitudes often counter-cultural to society. These values include hospitality to the stranger and foreigner who is vulnerable, persecuted, or in poverty when others close the doors. They include a holding on lightly (not tightly) to land and material possessions. As a migrant, life is for rent. On earth life is a temporary existence not to be devalued or dismissed but seen for what it is – a place to invest in what will not fade rather to be consumed by what will.

Nationalistic or patriotic tendencies may not be wrong in themselves but may not achieve what is hoped for. They are not the whole answer. Whilst safety, security and stability rightly inform national policies on immigration, such measures can easily pander to self-centred and self-preservationist tendencies. What is in my own interest rather than the interest of others can be the outcome. That outcome does not love your neighbour as yourself but loves your neighbour less than yourself.

We are all migrants. One day we are here the next we are gone. Our theology of migration may be of more significance than we think.

Bibliography

Backhouse, Stephen, 'Red, White, Blue...and Brown: Citizens, Patriots and the Prime Minister,' *Theos*, 2007, <<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/publications/2007/08/15/red-white-blue-and-brown>>

Block, Daniel, I., *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001)

Brandon, Guy, 'A Christian Response to Immigration', *The Jubilee Centre*, 2011, <<http://www.jubilee-centre.org/christian-response-immigration-guy-brandon>>

Brandon, Guy, *Votewise, 2015: Making a Difference at the Ballot Box and Beyond* (London: SPCK, 2014)

Brueggemann, Walter, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* 2nd Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002)

Campese, Gioacchino, 'The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21st Century' *The Free Library Theological Studies*, (2012)
<<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+irruption+of+migrants%3a+theology+of+migration+in+the+21+st+century.-a0280855775>>

Castillo Guerra, Jorge E., 'A Theology of Migration: Toward an Intercultural Methodology' in Daniel G Groody and Gioacchino Campese, *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame: Notre dame University Press, 2008), 243-270

Cole, Graham A., *The God who became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation* (Nottingham: Apollos, Inter Varsity Press, 2013)

Gallagher, Sarita, D., 'Abraham on the Move: The Outpouring of God's Blessing through a Migrant', in *God's People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission* eds. Van Thanh Nguyen and John M. Prior (Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 3-17

Groody, Daniel G., and Gioacchino Campese, *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame: Notre dame University Press, 2008)

Groody, Daniel G., 'Theology in the Age of Migration', *The National Catholic Reporter*, September 2009, <<http://ncronline.org/news/global/theology-age-migration>>

Groody, Daniel G., 'Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees' *Theological Studies* 70 (2009) 638-667

Hays, J. Daniel, *From Every People and Nation: A Theology of Race* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2003)

Hughes, Dewi, and Matthew Bennett, *God of the Poor: A Biblical Vision of God's Present Rule* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1998)

Kidner, Derek, *Ezra and Nehemiah: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1979)

Nguyen van Thanh and John M. Prior eds. *God's People on the Move: Biblical and Global Perspectives on Migration and Mission* (Eugene, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014)

Smith-Christopher, D.L., *Biblical Theology in Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002)

Snyder, Susanna, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012)

Spencer, Nick, *Votewise: Helping Christians Engage with the Issues* (London: SPCK, 2004)

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: International Migration <<http://esa.un.org/unmigration/wallchart2013.htm>>

UNHCR, <<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>>

Walls Andrew, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009), pp.3-15

Wright, Christopher J.H., *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2004)

Wright, Christopher J.H., *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham, Inter Varsity Press, 2006)