

# MIGRATION THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

Migration through the eyes of faith:  
God's people, national lands, and universities

ROBERT W HEIMBURGER

*Response:* Critical questions that need to be asked  
about the migration crisis in Europe

CHAWKAT MOUCARRY

*Response:* Migration through the eyes of faith

CHRIS WRIGHT



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

## WORD & WORLD: WHAT'S IN THE NAME?

John Stott, pastor, teacher, and friend to many in IFES, recommends “double listening, listening to the word of God and listening to the voices of the modern world, its cries of anger, pain, and despair.” Inspired by this, *Word & World* has served as the title for sessions at IFES World Assembly since 2003.

The gospel attributed to another John places Word and World at its heart. This gospel draws on an Old Testament portrayal of God as one who “words”, who gives words to Israel, of the word as shining light and as sent to heal. In John, **the Word** was in the beginning, with God, and was God; this Word became flesh, the stuff of this world. Jesus Christ is this Word, and he speaks a word which when heard and believed gives never-ending life. In John, **the World** is what it is only through this Word. The World came into being through the Word, and the World is saved through the Word. The Father sent the Word into the World so that Jesus could tell the World the truth: that it lacked righteousness and justice and that it deserved judgment. The Father sent the Word into the World as an act of love, saving the World and bringing it health and wholeness. The Word’s gift to the World is life in all its fullness.

To listen to both Word and World, then, is to see the World as coming into being through the Word, as crying out in despair and alienation, and as made wholly alive through the Word. This listening is what *Word & World* seeks to enable.

*Word & World* builds on the foundations of earlier publications like the *IFES Journal* and the *IFES Review*. We aim to publish two to three issues each year, drawing in voices from around the world to address a contemporary issue. *Word & World* seeks to enable those involved in student ministry to be nourished by the gospel and attentive to the world that students inhabit.

## ISSUE 1: MIGRATION THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH

At a time when mass migration shapes nations and churches, from Colombia to Syria, from the Philippines to the United States, how might God be at work in these movements?

Tim Adams, IFES Associate General Secretary, asked me to write a theological reflection on migration. We are delighted to offer responses by Chawkat Moucarry, a Syrian Christian scholar, and Chris Wright, a British Old Testament theologian.

Included are materials for group discussion, with readings and questions. Also included is a list of further reading materials on migration. Join the conversation at [fb.com/groups/ifeswordandworld](https://fb.com/groups/ifeswordandworld).



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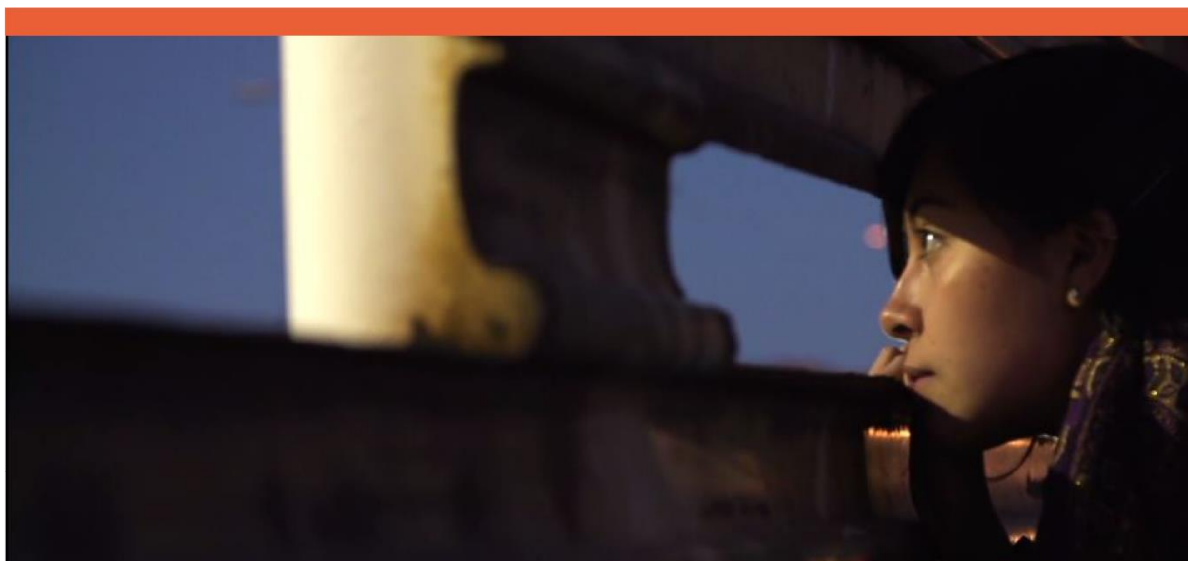
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COMPA Mexico staffworker Melissa Olachea peers through the Mexico/USA border fence on the edge of her campus.

## MIGRATION THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH: GOD'S PEOPLE, NATIONAL LANDS, AND UNIVERSITIES

Robert W Heimbürger

### SCENES OF MIGRANTS

Today, scenes involving migrants catch our attention:

- In Colombia, more than half a century of conflict between guerrillas, government forces, and paramilitary organizations has displaced a large portion of the population. Many leave behind farming communities for depressed urban areas, and they are often forced to move again when they experience violence in their new communities. The Colombian government and the main guerrilla group, FARC, are making strides toward a peace agreement, and if one is reached, the nation will face the challenge of proceeding toward peace and forgiveness.
- Opposition to Syrian President Assad has culminated in the rise of the Islamic State, or Daesh. Many have fled to refugee camps, swelling the population of neighboring countries like Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. Others have fled further north and west into Europe. In Calais, France, many live in the “Jungle,” with temporary shelter for those attempting to hide in a lorry or ferry crossing to the United Kingdom. Violent attacks in Paris, San Bernardino, and Cologne involved actors of Middle Eastern origin, and the association of those events in the mind of many Europeans and North Americans with the refugee flight from Syria has made receiving refugees a contested issue. Responses run from extraordinarily open to fiercely protective. Among politicians, German Chancellor Angela Merkel leads those offering a limited welcome, while nationalists call for migration to stop.
- The Philippines has long been a migrant-sending country, whether those migrants settle permanently or return after a time-limited contract. Filipinos have a history of service in the shipping industry, and today many Filipino migrants are women serving as domestic workers in countries like Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, and Malaysia. Some domestics leave their children behind,

- The Philippines has long been a migrant-sending country, whether those migrants settle permanently or return after a time-limited contract. Filipinos have a history of service in the shipping industry, and today many Filipino migrants are women serving as domestic workers in countries like Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, and Malaysia. Some domestics leave their children behind, supporting them with remittances while they raise other people's children. Domestic workers often lack freedom and are subject to mistreatment and abuse.
- Today many migrants reside in the United States of America without legal status. Many of them have come from Mexico and Central America to work and to join family members, perhaps to flee poverty or violence, facing further threats on their journeys. The shadowed existence of those without authorization to reside in the USA involves fear and caution. Often there is no way out of the predicament for parents whose children have been born in the USA and gained citizenship by birthright. At work, at church, in neighborhoods, the disparity between those with legal residence and those without complicates ordinary ways of relating. Unauthorized immigration is a dividing point for elected politicians, and the Congress has failed to reform laws since the 1990's.<sup>1</sup>
- Eritrea's authoritarian regime regularly forces its members into military and national service without any foreseen end. Christians outside of registered churches face imprisonment. These are among the factors that have pushed many to flee to nearby Ethiopia and Sudan or to Israel. Faced with life in refugee camps in Ethiopia, mistreatment by organized criminals in Sudan, and lack of legal recognition in Israel, Eritreans are traveling through Libya to reach Europe. This country in the Horn of Africa ranks second to Syria among sending countries of migrants crossing into Europe.<sup>2</sup>

These are just a few scenes of migration in our world today. In these cases, some Christians are among the ones migrating. Others are at the forefront of welcoming migrants. Still others are calling for order and opposing migration. What response does Christian worship invite? What response does hearing the Word of God bring to these troubled scenes of migration?

In what follows, a Christian account of migration will arise from a reading of Deuteronomy 10, circling around a God who migrates with God's people, a God who loves them and calls them to love migrants. In addition, two other questions will be dealt with: Is the confidence of nations in governing migration legitimate, and do national lands have a place in the history of salvation? Also, might Christians perceive unique opportunities in the university as a community of migrants? Each section will focus on one biblical passage or moment of history, providing one angle on the question rather than a comprehensive account. Other questions about the attitudes of migrant-receiving societies or the responsibilities of migrants will not be dealt with here.

## A MIGRANT GOD, A MIGRANT PEOPLE, AND A LOVE FOR MIGRANTS

When we ask questions about migration, many of us start with our nations or economies as the basic realities at work: but when the Holy Scriptures deal with migration, they don't start with stories about our nations or economies. The main stream of passages about migration start with a story about God and God's love for a people. Take one example: Deuteronomy 10:12-22. This passage is interested in resituating and reorienting its hearers before God as the people God loves, in the words of Moses:

<sup>12</sup> And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? <sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. <sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. <sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin

of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. <sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. <sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. <sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup> You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. <sup>21</sup> He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. <sup>22</sup> Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven (ESV, here and throughout except where noted).

## A MIGRANT GOD WHO LOVES MIGRANTS

In the Book of Deuteronomy, as God's people reach the River Jordan in sight of the land God is giving them after wandering in the wilderness for years, Moses reminds them of what's been happening since the Lord brought their mothers and fathers up from Egypt. In his first speech, he tells them that on their journey to the land that the Lord their God is giving them, "...you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place" (1:31). Even though they did not trust in God, Moses says, "the LORD your God...went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go" (1:32-33). This God migrated with the people, carrying them along the way and going ahead of them to show them the way.

In Moses' second speech in Deuteronomy, God's people hear some astounding claims about God, about how God loves and how God wants God's people to love: "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day" (10:14-15). They hear that to God belongs everything, all the heaven and earth, everything that God has created. And yet for all that God owns, God has a particular affection and desire for them. Out of all the people on earth, God chose Israel.<sup>3</sup> Christians readers will hear a message directed at them: God chose you, the church in Ethiopia, the church in the Philippines, lavishing love on you.

God's people hear more:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing (10:17-18).

God, Yahweh, stands above all other powers and authorities. From Pharaoh to Queen Elizabeth, from Og King of Bashan to Vladimir Putin, God rules over all of them. God is the great judge, deciding what is right and what is wrong. The lords of the earth are accountable to the Lord God.

When this translation says, "he executes justice for the fatherless and the widow," a more exact translation of the Hebrew would be, "he judges the fatherless and the widow." It may surprise us to hear that God judges the fatherless and the widow, but a different sense of judging is implied here, the gift of a fair and appropriate judgement that protects the vulnerable from the oppression of the powerful. The Lord God has an impartial, bribe-free way of giving justice, taking the time to give judgment where judgment is due.

What God does with all this power as judge is to provide justice for the orphan, the widow, and... the sojourner? No, the passage goes further. God does not only seek justice for the sojourner; God loves the sojourner, in Hebrew, the *gēr*. God befriends the *gēr*.

Who is the *gēr*? This is someone who comes from outside to live with a community. In the ancient Middle East, life depended on being part of a household. Those outside that household, without a father or a

husband or without family connections, would be in danger of dying. They wouldn't have a way to get food and clothing. The *gēr* is the vulnerable outsider, whether from outside of Israel or from some other tribe or family within Israel.<sup>4</sup> English translations of the Bible translate *gēr* in a number of ways, as "stranger," "sojourner," "alien," and "foreigner."<sup>5</sup> "Refugee" might also fit, but the meaning of *gēr* is broader. Setting aside words that are archaic or that imply suspicion, the best word is "migrant."

Today, who among us is like the *gēr*? Perhaps it's you the reader who has migrated. Perhaps it's the teenager who has left home to find new opportunities. Perhaps it's the family fleeing conflict or famine. Perhaps it's the lonely and disoriented international student at the university. In Deuteronomy, the all-powerful one, the greatest ruler of the world has a particular concern for vulnerable outsiders.

## A MIGRANT PEOPLE WHO LOVE MIGRANTS

Is there some connection between God's love for Israel and God's love for the migrant? Yes, says Moses: "You all were migrants in the land of Egypt" (10:19, translation by the author). God's people were refugees, going there when there was no food in Canaan. That move left later generations enslaved, caught with no possibility of escaping. But this is just the kind of people that God has shown love to, bringing them up out of Egypt, away from Pharaoh and his chariots, into the desert, and now into a good land.

This is the story of the church too: migrants are just the sort of people that God shows love to. Nowhere in the New Testament is this clearer than in the First Letter of Peter. Peter writes to the "elect strangers of the Diaspora" (1:1), and Peter urges his readers to conduct themselves with reverence during the time of their temporary residence, their "residence as aliens" (1:17).<sup>6</sup> Again, his directions for holy living address those newly called "Christians" (4:16) as "visiting strangers and alien residents" (2:11).<sup>7</sup> Here, Peter takes on the exact phrase used of Abraham in Genesis and David in the Psalms and applies it to the churches.<sup>8</sup>

What is the case for Israel in Deuteronomy also becomes the case for the churches<sup>9</sup>: God's people are migrant communities. Those "born again...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1:30), Peter calls alien residents or settled migrants (*paroikoi*) as well as visiting foreigners (*parepidēmoi*).<sup>10</sup> Perhaps many in the churches of Peter's time already had this status as people who were from somewhere else, but Peter suggests more. Those called Christians begin to live like migrants. As men and women are born again, they are made holy by the Spirit (1:2, 3), and they are set apart as a unique people, forming a parallel community alongside the settled communities of Asia Minor.<sup>11</sup> Though it is possible to interpret the church's migration in 1 Peter as primarily a spiritual migration, commentator John Elliott demonstrates that this distorts the message of 1 Peter. The church actually lives out a migrant existence, worshipping a different God, living in a different way, and suffering suspicion, fear, and discrimination from the surrounding community.<sup>12</sup> They are a people that participates in Christ's suffering (4:13).

And yet in 1 Peter, these migrants and aliens become a "household of God" (4:17) and a "household of the Spirit" (2:5). Here the letter includes a play on words: the migrants, the *paroikoi*, those alongside the national household, become a household, an *oikos*; those outside the family become a family.<sup>13</sup> Peter declares that this house of God, this migrant community, shares in the promises made to Israel:

But you are a chosen race, a royal residence, a priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (2:9-10).<sup>14</sup>

This remains the story of the church, a new community, often composed of migrants, that in its distinct behavior looks like a migrant community. God chooses and possesses these people, they become God's palace and priesthood, and they are God's ethnic group, tribe, or nation. This claim is strong: Those who trust in Jesus have the church as their nation.

Here, 1 Peter carries over to the church what is said of the people of God in Deuteronomy 10. This is the strange people who show reverence to the LORD (10:12), who praise the Lord and stake their reputation and their identity on the LORD (10:21). God commands them: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" (Deut. 10:16). God wants the people's hearts, the core of their being, to be set aside for God, as a pure and holy thing.<sup>15</sup> God demands their complete allegiance:<sup>16</sup>

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? (10:12-13)

To do this is made possible by the God who "brought [Israel] out of the land of Egypt" (Deut. 5:6), through the "power of God" who "has caused [the church] to be born again...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3, 5).

So, who are the people of God? They are the people who learn to love like God. Whom does the Lord love? The Lord loves the migrant, the one from afar who comes to stay. The Lord befriends the migrant. God's people are told to love the migrant, and in the Hebrew, a command is the same as a promise. Deuteronomy 10:19 means, "You all must love the migrant," and it also means, "You all will love the migrant." Remember that here, God might be expected to speak of justice for the stranger, but instead God goes farther to commend love for the migrant. The Book of the Covenant in Exodus 20-23 forbids mistreating and oppressing the migrant (22:21; 23:9), but this passage goes farther, commanding and promising love.<sup>17</sup> When one translation uses "befriend" instead of "love," it specifies the love for migrants in a way that is easier to imagine: Go and befriend the migrant; I promise, you all will be enabled to befriend the migrant.<sup>18</sup>

The Lord wants a people who love like the Lord does: loving those who come from outside, who lack home or family. These are the very people that God cares for, both in a physical and in a spiritual sense. Thanks to the mercy of Jesus Christ, members of every people in the world can join in being a new people, God's people. 1 Peter makes clear that for those of us who are in Christ, the church is our nation (2:9). Those who are part of God's nation hear a very different story about migrants: God has loved them immensely to the point of migrating with them, and in response they are to love the migrant.

Now, this linking of Deuteronomy 10 with 1 Peter is only one set of passages from Scripture that could result in a story about God and migrants. Different stories could be told: about the conquest of Canaan and a destruction of idolatrous foreigners, about Nehemiah and Ezra doing away with foreign wives and children. As theologian Susanna Snyder is right to point out, it is possible to draw different theologies of migration from Scripture, and Christians are often complicit with scapegoating or hating foreigners.<sup>19</sup> Still, the account developed here stands in line with the trajectory of God's covenant that is confirmed in Jesus Christ. That trajectory moves from Israel blessed to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3), to the prophecy that foreigners will join themselves to the Lord so that God's house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Isaiah 56:6-7), to unity for Jews and Greeks baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27-29). Recounting Deuteronomy's telling of a migrant God loving a migrant people and calling that people into the same love, and actualizing that story for the church by way of 1 Peter, is in line with this trajectory toward a nation of migrants united in Christ.

Likewise, this sort of account is not new: many other writers have put forward related accounts of welcome, hospitality, and the migrant church. Many of these are mentioned under *Further Reading*. Still, given all that is happening in the world today, the main stream of material in the Scriptures demands a hearing. What would it mean to start with the big story of who God is and who God's nation is instead of starting with stories of the country where we live? What would it look like for God's people to let this story form them as settled people and migrants in the UK or Sudan, Argentina or South Korea?



## MIGRANTS AND NATIONAL LANDS

It would be possible to agree with the preceding account and still remain confident that those who migrate illegally should be removed from a country. Someone might hear the message from Deuteronomy and 1 Peter and say that it is right to say that the church is a migrant people, and it might be right for the nations of this age to show justice and love to refugees who come through legal means. But those who break laws to enter a country shouldn't be treated with the same degree of care, someone might think: nations are important, and their lands should be protected.

So, is this view right? Does God care about national lands, and ought they be protected against those who enter them unlawfully? Or, does the story of the God revealed in Jesus Christ limit the governance of immigration? Here, a focus on one passage will provide an initial and tentative answer.

Those who pray the Psalms perceive an aspect of the human condition:

Hear my prayer, O LORD,  
and give ear to my cry;  
hold not your peace at my tears!  
For I am a sojourner with you,  
a guest, like all my fathers (Ps. 39:12).

Human beings are first human beings before God, creatures who can claim no rights against God. Yet out of love, God listens to those who address God and enables them to enter God's presence. They are newcomers, invited in to speak to God.<sup>20</sup>

Praying the Psalms, it becomes clear that human beings are guests in a world that is already God's: "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Ps. 24:1, NIV). On a narrower scale, the experience of Israel is not one of owning land. It is one of receiving land as a gift. In the Book of Deuteronomy, the land that Israel is more than just land. Again and again, it is "the land that the LORD your God is giving you" (1:25, 2:29, 3:20, 4:1, 4:21, etc.). Elsewhere in the Pentateuch, limitations on the sale of land include this declaration: "...The land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Leviticus 25:23b). Land first belongs to God, Israel receives land as a gift from a divine landlord, and she remains a tenant on that land.

Do the other nations also receive land from God, or is Israel's experience unique? Around the edges of the Deuteronomy account of Israel's journey, as Israel encounters Edom, Moab, and Ammon in chapters 2 and 3, there are clues. In his first speech, Moses tells Israel what God (Yhwh) has to tell them as they met another nation:

<sup>4</sup> You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of Esau, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. <sup>5</sup> Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession (2:4b-5).

Moses goes on to name the peoples that preceded Esau or Edom in its territories: Edom dispossessed the Horites (2:12), and Yhwh destroyed the Horites before Esau (2:22). After Israel encountered the Edomites, the same pattern is repeated twice as they pass Moab (2:8b-16) and then Ammon (2:16-25). The pattern changes in the next encounters with two more nations, Heshbon and Bashan (2:24—3:7), as God gives these lands to Israel.

The remarkable degree of attention this passage gives to the lands of nations other than Israel reveals a few things. The excerpt begins, "You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers and sisters."

As the people of God travel toward the land that God is giving them, they pass through the “territories” or by the “borders” of Edom and other peoples. River gorges, a sea, a mountain, and cities mark the edges of territories in the passage from Deuteronomy (2:13-14, 24, 36, 37; 3:8, 9, 10, 16, 17). In a parallel telling of Israel’s encounter with Edom in the Book of Numbers, Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, asking permission to pass through his territory (Num. 20:16-17, 21). In both tellings, it is clear that nations other than Israel have territories and exercise control over passage through their borders.<sup>21</sup>

In the passage, another of God’s statements stands out: “Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession” (2:5). God says the same about the lands of Moab (2:9) and Ammon (2:19): Israel must not fight them, because God has given them land as a possession. The key term here is “possession,” and the Hebrew verb indicates both possession and dispossession. This passage in Deuteronomy tells of one people possessing land and dispossessing another people, having been granted the land by God. Treading on the land and walking around it constitutes possessing it.

In a surprising way, the pattern of the gift of land that applies to Israel throughout Deuteronomy here applies to three other nations. For Israel, God gives the land and everything in it, and God requires that Israel give in return. In this treaty or covenant, Israel receives the land as a possession so that it might flourish and be satiated.<sup>22</sup> But the land serves as a temptation to forget the giver. Instead, Israel must give tribute back to God in three ways: it must not make images of other gods, it must carry on Sabbath practices of freeing slaves and letting the land rest, and it must maintain justice for those who lack standing in the community.<sup>23</sup>

How much of this pattern applies to other nations? It is plain that God gives the lands for possession, and that God enables the dispossession of these lands. Is this linked to some requirement of right worship, Sabbath keeping, and doing justice? In another passage in Deuteronomy, Moses stresses to Israel that the Lord is not giving them the land because of their righteousness, not because of their justice, but because of the wickedness of the nations the Lord is driving out (9:4-5). It seems that God does make requirements of nations other than Israel, both blessing them with the possession of land if they practice justice and righteousness and cursing them with dispossession if they do not.

There is reason to recoil from the hasty dispossessions in the narrative, where whole peoples die in a setting where God is the prime actor.<sup>24</sup> But if there is any relief from the troubling, quick destruction of people, it comes from a couple of sources. First, the people of Israel as God’s instrument also experience judgment when they fail to trust God, and the older generation dies in the wilderness (2:14-15). And second, as noted before, Moses makes clear that Israel does not possess land because of its blameless behavior but because the nations that preceded Israel carried out injustice and unrighteousness (9:4-5). What becomes clear is that God does not allow injustice to go on forever in the lands that Yhwh gives. Indeed, at the heart of the justice that God requires in Deuteronomy is a love for the *gēr* that goes beyond justice, a love for the migrant that mirrors God’s love for God’s people as migrants, as explained above.

Around the edges of the big story of God’s people, Deuteronomy 2 gives a clue to questions about national integrity: National lands do play a role in divine purposes, though in a carefully limited way. The God revealed to Israel, the God of all the earth, grants lands to peoples so that they might enjoy their fruits. These are lands to walk about on and possess, lands with borders. Still, God expects a gift in return, and in Israel’s case this means right worship, Sabbath keeping, and justice for the vulnerable. Otherwise they will be dispossessed of their lands. The passage does not say, but perhaps something similar extends to Edom, Moab, and Ammon, or even to the examples above of Colombia, Germany, the Philippines, the United States, or Eritrea: God gives lands to nations, but if they do not follow God and carry out God’s justice, God will allow another nation to take that land. At the center of God’s justice, a love for the migrant is revealed, and perhaps this too is required of the nations of this age. If a nation neglects God’s justice, a justice that

involves protecting the vulnerable and the migrant, that nation risks losing its lands. Yet this is the same God who listens to Moses' plea that God not punish Israel for its rebellion (Deut. 10:10-11, following from 9:6—10:6).

The people of God have a role to play here. As a migrant community, they know what those who don't worship God don't know. As they come humbly before God to receive abundant gifts in worship, they signal that human beings ultimately have nothing to claim against God, no right to do what they want with land, no right to govern as they wish. The people of God have the task of reminding civil authorities that all land belongs to God, that it is God's to give and to take away. As they pray for leaders and all those in authority, as Paul urges Timothy to do (1 Tim. 2:1-2), they make plain that leaders serve a greater leader, that presidents and parliaments are accountable to Jesus Christ as judge.<sup>25</sup>

Ought nations to have such confidence in opposing unlawful migration? This passage suggests that governing immigration is a legitimate, God-given activity for this age, but the very holding of land happens as a gift from God. If justice is not upheld, if abundant gifts are not shared, and perhaps if justice and gifts are not extended to the migrant, then God may dispossess that unjust or ungenerous nation. Confidence in governing immigration is wrongly held when an authority fails to respond to its divine landlord.

## MIGRANTS AND THE UNIVERSITY

Having dealt with nations and their lands, what about the university? As men and women migrate from far and wide to study, how should believing students and academics perceive the university? As this piece is written for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), it is worth considering how university life might be shaped in relation to the worship of the God who gives refuge to a migrant people.

It is nothing new that universities attract students from around a country and from abroad. From the start, the university has been a place of gathering, a destination for migration. At the oldest university in the English-speaking world, the University of Oxford, today more than sixty percent of over ten thousand graduate students come from other countries, but this merely repeats a long-established pattern.<sup>26</sup> From around the late eleventh century, students travelled to Oxford to gather around masters, leaving their homes to move to a new place. Groups of students living together from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are recorded in 1238, and before that, in 1190, the first student from the European continent is recorded: Emo, who came from Friesland to study law.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, it was problems that migrants to Oxford faced that brought about the formal establishment of the University of Oxford. In 1209, a student killed his mistress and fled. The town authorities hanged two men who lived with him as accomplices to the crime. The masters or teachers objected, not because they celebrated this killing but because they wanted to protect the independence of the university from outside authorities. In a settlement reached in 1214, not only was independence guaranteed through the appointment of a stronger leader of the university, a chancellor under the Bishop of Lincoln, but other guarantees were put in place to ensure the welfare of students. These migrant scholars rented property from local landlords, but the landlords were setting artificially high prices, and in response, the settlement cut rents in half for ten years. The town was also required to provide a fund for students with financial needs.<sup>28</sup>

Thus a gathering of schools became what in Latin was called a *universitas*. This did not mean what it is taken to mean now, an institution where a wide range of subjects is studied. Instead, *universitas* meant a society or a corporation. It was a special kind of society set up to protect academics who tended to rent lodgings in

a city where they had migrated. The founding of a university enabled people to leave their villages and towns, to leave their cities and countries, and to make the journey to Oxford, where they would study Roman and church law, theology, medicine, and the arts.<sup>29</sup>

Medieval Oxford was no paradise for the learner: it was dangerous to go outside at night, murder was a real threat, and now and again there were open fights. The University was divided into “nations,” with those from northern England together and those from southern England and Ireland together. These nations sometimes fought, and so did the townspeople and the scholars on occasion: the original town and gown conflict.<sup>30</sup> Thievery, prostitution, and drunkenness were common.<sup>31</sup>

A peaceful multicultural society this was not: but it had promise, and it continued to draw scholars from far and wide. By 1429, the University’s coat of arms declared where its trust lay: *Dominus illuminatio mea*, “The Lord is my light,” from Psalm 27:1.<sup>32</sup> This motto, still in use today, recognizes the Lord God as the one who illumines the student, who shines light into darkness and brings truth to light.

Universities today remain the destinations for those on a journey. At the very least, men and women leave their neighborhood to go to the city center or another part of the city, studying alongside people from other parts of the city. Frequently, students leave their cities, regions, and countries to learn and be trained.

One of the great merits of the university is closely tied to its nature as a society of migrants: that is the opportunity it provides to listen to others. At first glance, the arts and humanities seem the least useful subjects in the university, but they do something special. Theologian Nigel Biggar writes that they “introduce us to foreign worlds.” The humanities give scholars an ability to distance themselves from their current setting so that they can critique it. Students encounter other ways of doing things, and these encounters provide students with “resources vital for social and cultural and moral renewal,” Biggar says.

They do more, according to Biggar:

The arts and humanities not only introduce us to foreign worlds, they teach us to treat them well. They teach us to read strange and intractable texts with patience and care; to meet alien ideas and practices with humility, docility, and charity; to draw alongside foreign worlds before we set about — as we must — judging them. They train us in the practice of honest dialogue, which respects the “Other” as a potential prophet, one who might yet speak a new word about what’s true and good and beautiful.<sup>33</sup>

In the university, an encounter with foreign worlds grows certain virtues, Biggar says: a humility before the truth, patience, and charity. Perhaps just as important as the encounter with foreign worlds that he mentions is the encounter with foreigners themselves. Universities shape their members through the people they encounter there. As students and faculty get to know people from other parts of the country and from other countries, they have the opportunity to learn to listen and to be ready to receive wisdom from someone else. They also have the opportunity to respect and love others.

What happens in the university has a parallel in Christian worship. Those who worship learn to listen to the word of God, to accept the word of another as true and life-giving. Worshippers learn to treat texts and persons as bearing a message from God. Both study and worship have in common an attitude to listening to the outsider and being changed by the outsider. And in both study and worship, participants are migrants of a sort, migrating to a place of study, migrating through the imagination to other worlds, or migrating as a holy people.



God's story thus brings about a renewed response to the migrant. The migrant experience is not foreign to God and God's people: instead, in Scripture, worshippers hear of a God who migrates and gathers a people of migrants. God's love for migrants stands at the pinnacle of God's justice and goes beyond it, and God both *commands* God's people that they will love migrants and *promises* them that they will love migrants. Around this story, insights into other questions arise. When it comes to those who immigrate without permission, the Deuteronomy narrative suggests that nations are given land to protect, but that land remains God's and must be kept with generosity and justice, even justice for migrants. When it comes to the university, these are gatherings of migrants who come to study, who have the opportunity to encounter the foreign and to be changed by it.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 2012); Jeffrey S. Passel and D'Vera Cohn, "Unauthorized Immigrant Totals Rise in 7 States, Fall in 14" (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, November 18, 2014), <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/11/18/unauthorized-immigrant-totals-rise-in-7-states-fall-in-14/>.

<sup>2</sup> Mogos O. Brhane, "Understanding Why Eritreans Go to Europe," *Forced Migration Review*, no. 51 (January 2016): 34–35.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 125; J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 5 (Leicester, England: Apollos; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 199–200.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Anthony Spina argues that the Hebrew term *gēr* combines sojourning with experiences of strife and fear. He thinks that term captures someone who comes from afar, escaping conflict and settling in a place where that person might still be afraid. He translates the term as "immigrant," but since he thinks it includes people from both inside and outside the nation of Israel who have left their place of origin, "migrant" seems a more appropriate term, "Israelites as *Gērîm*, 'Sojourners,' in Social and Historical Context," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and Michael Patrick O'Connor (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 323, 325–27. Mark A. Awabdy is in agreement with Spina, *Immigrants and Innovative Law: Deuteronomy's Theological and Social Vision for the Gēr* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 1–5. Christoph Bultmann views the *gēr* as a member of a class of Israelites without land or family, *Der Fremde im antiken Juda: eine Untersuchung zum sozialen Typenbegriff gēr und seinem Bedeutungswandel in der alttestamentlichen Gesetzgebung*

(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992). José E. Ramírez Kidd sees the *gēr* as someone fleeing the northern kingdom of Israel after the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C., *Alterity and Identity in Israel: The gēr in the Old Testament* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), 5–6. Christiana van Houten sees the *gēr* as a non-Israelite in Deuteronomy and as a convert in the Priestly Laws that she sees as arising after Israel's exile, *The Alien in Israelite Law* (Sheffield: J.S.O.T. Press, 1991), 106–108, 155–157. Spina argues convincingly that accounts of patriarchs as sojourners in and around Canaan and Israel and then of Israel as sojourners in Egypt cannot have arisen during the exile, since only one passage refers to the exile as a sojourning: Ezra 1:4. Nor would there be reason for a story of sojourning to arise during Israel's settlement in Canaan, says Spina. Instead, the regular testimony to the patriarchs and then to Israel as sojourners and migrants reflects Israel's memory of an experience as migrants from before the settlement, Spina demonstrates convincingly, "Israelites as *Gērīm*," 321–22, 329.

<sup>5</sup> "Stranger" appears in the King James Version, the New Revised Standard Version, the New Jerusalem Bible, and the Tanakh translation. "Sojourner" appears in the Revised Standard Version and the English Standard Version. "Alien" appears in the New International Version (1984) and the New American Standard (1995). "Foreigner" or "foreigner residing among you" appears in the New International Version (2011) and the New Living Translation (2013).

<sup>6</sup> Following the translation of John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 47; *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 307, 354. Critical scholarship questions the apostle Peter's authorship of the letter, but there is a good case to be made for him as author.

<sup>7</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 47; *1 Peter*, 101, 312.

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 23:4 and Psalm 39:12 in the Septuagint use the same phrase, Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 174.

<sup>9</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 48–49.

<sup>10</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Black, 1969), 103; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 312, 458–461.

<sup>11</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 459, 461.

<sup>13</sup> Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless*, 25, 194–204.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Peter 2:9–10 from the ESV, with one modification: the "royal priesthood" in the ESV translation is taken to be composed of two nouns, denoting both "royal house" and "priesthood," following Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, 82, 97; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 408.

Kelly (82, 97) and Elliott (2000, 408).

<sup>15</sup> Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 126; McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 200.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 125; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 66; Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (London: S.C.M., 1966), 83.

<sup>17</sup> Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 289.

<sup>18</sup> Deut. 10:19 in the Tanakh translation reads, "You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt," Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael A. Fishbane, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Susanna Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration, and Church* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 136–7. The approach here keeps Snyder's point in mind, but it runs counter to the opinion of biblical scholar Jean-Pierre Ruiz who argues that there is no one theology of migration but just little stories of migration, *Readings from the Edges: The Bible and People on the Move* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2011), 5. The approach taken here assumes that among the many little stories of migration, some have enduring value as the story of God's beloved people, while others served only for a time or were a distraction from the vocation of the covenant community.

<sup>20</sup> Chawkat Moucarray deals with this theme, "The Alien According to the Torah," trans. Joye Smith, *Themelios* 14 (1988): 18, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Magnus Ottosson, "גֵרִים וְגֵרִים; גֵרִים וְגֵרִים," in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. J. T. Willis, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1975), 361–66; McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 77, 79, 83, 84. James K. Hoffmeier is a rare theological writer on migration who highlights territories and borders, concluding that "nations could and did control their borders and determined who could pass through their land," *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and*

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*the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2009), 33. He is right to bring attention to this phenomenon, but he makes little room for criticism of the way that political communities govern their borders.

<sup>22</sup> On land as gift given in a covenant, see J. G. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 33 (Sheffield: J.S.O.T., 1984), 11–13; Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 44; Norbert Lohfink, “יָרָשׁ yāraš; יִרְשָׁה yēruššā; מוֹרָשׁ mōrāš; מוֹרָשָׁה mōrāšā,” in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990), 385; Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2002), 46, 50; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 537; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 72.

<sup>23</sup> This summary is drawn from Brueggemann, *The Land*, 58–61.

<sup>24</sup> For more on this question, see Christian Hofreiter, “Genocide in Deuteronomy and Christian Interpretation,” in *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David G. Firth and Philip S. Johnston (Nottingham: Apollos, 2012), 240–62; “Reading Herem as Christian Scripture” (D.Phil. Thesis, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Oxford, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> On the church’s task of reminding, calling to mind, or drawing attention to the kingdom of God, see the Confessing Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany, “Barmen Declaration,” May 1934, para. 5, [http://www.ekd.de/english/barmen\\_theological\\_declaration.html](http://www.ekd.de/english/barmen_theological_declaration.html).

<sup>26</sup> “University of Oxford Facts and Figures - Full Version,” accessed March 17, 2016, <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/full-version-facts-and-figures?wssl=1>.

<sup>27</sup> J. I. Catto, “Citizens, Scholars, and Masters,” in *The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. J. I. Catto, vol. 1, The History of the University of Oxford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 175; R. W. Southern, “From Schools to University,” in *The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. J. I. Catto, vol. 1, The History of the University of Oxford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 17–19.

<sup>28</sup> Southern, “From Schools to University,” 26, 30.

<sup>29</sup> M. B. Hackett, “The University as a Corporate Body,” in *The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. J. I. Catto, vol. 1, The History of the University of Oxford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 38, 40, 50; David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, ed. C. N. L. Brooke and D. E. Luscombe, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1988), 139–40; C. H. Lawrence, “The University in State and Church,” in *The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. J. I. Catto, vol. 1, The History of the University of Oxford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 133.

<sup>30</sup> Hackett, “The University as a Corporate Body,” 65.

<sup>31</sup> Catto, “Citizens, Scholars, and Masters,” 162, 185.

<sup>32</sup> So says Hackett, “The University as a Corporate Body,” 94. Geoffrey Briggs records the book in the coat of arms as reading differently later, in 1574: *In principio erat verbum et verbum erat apud Deum*, from John 1:1, *Civic & Corporate Heraldry: A Dictionary of Impersonal Arms of England, Wales, & N. Ireland* (London: Heraldry Today, 1971), 294–295. Whatever was the case, the reference to John 1:1 looks to Christ as word in a university dedicated to words, and the motto *Deus illuminatio mea* is the current motto, with medieval attestation.

<sup>33</sup> Nigel Biggar, “What Are Universities For?,” *Standpoint*, August 2010, <http://www.standpointmag.co.uk/node/3156/full>.



Syrian refugee families rest at a camp where STEP Croatia students helped distribute supplies.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS THAT NEED TO BE ASKED ABOUT THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN EUROPE

Chawkat Moucarry

The issue of migration has turned into an intractable crisis that threatens the European Union's very existence. It has already seriously undermined the Schengen Treaty as several EU countries resumed border controls. People in Europe (including Christians) are divided over this 'hot-potato'. Some show welcome and support for migrants while others are deeply hostile to this covert Islamic 'invasion'.

Heimburger's paper 'Migration through the eyes of faith: God's people, national lands, and universities' has the merit of addressing this issue from a biblical perspective. It looks at two key texts the author rightfully puts in parallel; that is, Deuteronomy 10 (vv. 12-22) and 1 Peter (1:1, 17; 2:4-5, 9-11). Just as God's Old Testament people are depicted as a migrant people, so are God's New Testament people (i.e. the Church). To the extent that God has promised to be with them during their exodus from Egypt to Canaan (Deut. 1:31-33), God himself is described also as 'a migrant God'. The divine presence with immigrants finds its fulfilment in Jesus who identifies with them to the point of saying: 'I was a stranger and you invited me in' (Mat. 25:35).

The people of Israel were called to love the non-Jews living among them for three main reasons: theological – God loves the immigrants; historic – the Israelites were themselves immigrants in Egypt; and moral – strangers are among the most vulnerable inhabitants of the land. All this is wonderfully captured in Deuteronomy 10: 'He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt' (vv. 18-19). The Israelites are expected to love the strangers in practical ways for it is through them that God provides them with 'food and clothing'. Loving migrants also means, among other things, respecting their rights, applying the same laws to them as to the Israelites, and inviting them to share in their religious festivals.<sup>1</sup> God's requirements to care for the strangers and to treat them justly are such that his judgment against the Israelites is motivated by their exploitation of the weakest members of society. He will himself testify 'against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice' (Mal. 3:5).



members of society. He will himself testify 'against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice' (Mal. 3:5).

The paper does not go as far as to suggest that God accompanies today's migrants, most of whom are Muslims. But just as God's love for the migrants has nothing to do with their ethnic or religious identity, it is safe to believe that God loves nowadays migrants to the point of being present with them on their often life-threatening journey. Israel's exodus from Egypt, though unique in its character, did not mean God let down other peoples: 'Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?' declares the LORD. 'Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?' (Amos 9:7).

We need to ask the question about what God might have on his agenda through this unprecedented wave of Muslim peaceful migration to largely secular and historically Christian-rooted Europe. Does he intend to shake European traditions, cultures and politics? Has he started a spiritual revolution in 'the House of Islam'? Is he challenging the Church to implement the command about loving our neighbour as ourselves, wonderfully illustrated by Jesus in his parable about the Good Samaritan? Rather than avoiding the religious question behind today's migration, it is critical that Europeans in general and Christians in particular address this issue head-on and take a fresh (and biblical) approach to Islam and Muslims. This is likely going to be a strenuous endeavour as Islam is often associated with terrorism in the mind of many ignorant and often prejudiced people. This misperception of Islam is understandable, as it reflects the media legitimate focus on exceptional and dramatic events such as the violent actions of the so-called Islamic State and other terrorist groups. However, this distorted image of the world's second largest religion does not take on board its mainstream teaching or the vast majority of its followers.

The migration crisis raises other controversial and sensitive issues. Should illegal migrants be returned to their home countries unless they are genuine refugees? And what about economic migrants: should they be deported even if they come from the world's poorest countries? Is it fair for host countries to define their migration policy on the basis of their selfish needs for skilful workers and successful businessmen, or worse on the ground of people's ethnic and religious background? Do Europe and the US have any responsibility in this crisis due to their foolish foreign policy in the Middle East and beyond (especially in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel and Syria)? Should they be held accountable because of their predominant role in the unjust world economic order that cripples the poorest countries in the majority world?

University students have many opportunities to engage with and befriend fellow students from all over the world. Students are assumed to be less suspicious of foreigners, less fearful of the unknown and more open to critical thinking. Will Christian students, because they follow Christ and his teaching, take the lead in turning the migration crisis (with all its implications) into new opportunities for reaching out to international students who live at their doorstep? Will they demonstrate that God's love is for everyone, including foreigners, 'for God does not show favouritism' (Rom. 2:11)?

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Dr Chawkat Moucarray is a Christian Arab from Syria. He lives in the UK and works for World Vision (a Christian development and relief organisation) as an interfaith specialist. From 1980-1992 he worked for IFES in France among international students. He authored several books and articles including *The Search for Forgiveness. Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity* (IVP, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> See "Love the Immigrant as Yourself." In *Faith to Faith: Christianity & Islam in Dialogue*, 283–89. Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2001.



European immigrants to the United States aboard the S.S. Imperator arriving in New York City on June 19, 1913.

## MIGRATION THROUGH THE EYES OF FAITH: A RESPONSE

Chris Wright

Robert Heimburger shows good biblical instincts in linking together his two main texts, from Deuteronomy 10 and 1 Peter. Between them they do encapsulate a theme within the Bible that is sadly much neglected (God's practical concern for foreigners, migrants, refugees), or else over-spiritualized (the Christian life as a spiritual pilgrimage through alien territory until we all reach some other place: "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through..."). So we see ourselves as strangers in the world and neglect the actual strangers that God has placed among us and called on us to care for.

As Heimburger points out, these two texts are only a fraction of the biblical evidence. Israel never forgot their own origins as a nation of fleeing slaves, their vulnerability in the wilderness, and indeed, the migrant status of their earliest ancestors. "A wandering Aramean was my father..." begins the liturgy of their annual harvest festival (Deut. 26:5). So the strong ethical demand in their law to exercise compassion and justice towards foreigners and immigrants rested on a robust historical and theological foundation. They were to behave to such people as God had behaved to them in the same circumstances – a principle that runs through the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament at many levels.

The strength of this principle can be seen in the form of the love commandment in the Pentateuch. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the law, he specified two, to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength (drawn from Deuteronomy 6:5), and to love our neighbour as ourselves (drawn from Leviticus 19:18). These constitute two out of the only four occurrences of the precise verbal form, *wə'āhabtā*, "and you are to love / and you shall love / and you must love..." in the Old Testament. The object in these two cases are God and the neighbour respectively. But Deuteronomy and Leviticus each use that verb form once more, and in both cases it is "and you shall love the foreigner" (Deut. 10:19, which Heimburger quotes; and Lev. 19:34). Indeed, Leviticus 19 makes an undoubtedly deliberate parallel between verse 18 ("and you shall love your neighbour as yourself"), and verse 34 ("and you shall love him [the *gēr*] as yourself"). Putting all this together, our love for the stranger/migrant/foreigner is put

on the same footing as our love for our neighbour, and both are seen (by Jesus as well as the Old Testament law), as an essential implication and requirement of our claimed love for God.

Now when we connect such biblical language to the issue confronting us today, we are immediately faced with the contrast of scale. There is surely a difference between “the stranger within your gates” - i.e. a relatively small number of resident aliens in the midst of Israel’s society, for a variety of reasons - and the millions of refugees and migrants in our world today. More refugees have fled from the devastation of Syria than probably the whole population of biblical Israel. The question is, does this eliminate our responsibility, or simply magnify it, since the principle and command is presumably unchanged?

Even if we take the latter view (that we still have responsibility to love the foreigner), the means by which we can do so are very different from biblical Israel, and beset with a whole range of political, economic, legal and religious complications. If countries have the right to protect themselves from military invasion, or cultural and economic imperialism, do they also have the right to control their borders from waves of refugees? But what rights do the refugees have, if all lands and countries and indeed the whole earth belongs to the Lord who calls us to care for one another in need, regardless of borders? The issue is complex and needs careful thought, but we cannot easily dismiss the biblical teaching just because the problem has got much larger. And such mass movements of refugees fleeing from war were not unknown in biblical times. The small and neglected book of Obadiah is a searing condemnation of the people of Edom because of their heartless and inhuman response to the refugees of Judah fleeing from the starvation, brutality and destruction wreaked upon their city by the Babylonians. It is hard to read that book (or preach from it, as I had to do at the peak of the refugee crisis in Europe in the summer of 2015), without thinking of the appalling treatment of some of those refugees in some parts of so-called “Christian” Europe.

What strikes me most uncomfortably when the issue of migrants and refugees is hotly debated in some western countries is the blatant hypocrisy of the rhetoric. Almost all western nations have experienced centuries of immigration. Some, like the USA and Australia, are what they are today almost entirely as the result of immigration – some of it soaked in blood and oppression. Whole areas of the national economy in the UK could not function were it not for imported labour at all levels. Yet somehow, some political voices in these countries and their policies want to pull up the drawbridge and keep others out. There is also hypocrisy in the language used. Why, for example, are Britishers who have gone overseas, many in search of better economic opportunities, referred to as “expatriates”, or “expats”, while all those who come to our country seeking the same, are vilified as “migrants?”

And there is the hypocrisy embedded in the lack of any historical perspective. Five hundred years ago, Europeans decided to migrate. En masse they exported themselves all over the world, sometimes conquering, sometimes colonizing, often both. They asked no permission and needed no visas. They just went and took and stayed – for centuries. And now the world bounces back. Not all, but a tragically large amount of the crises in war torn regions of the world can be traced to the gross historical injustices of European expansionism, colonialism, the slave trade, the carve up of Africa and then the Middle East after the First World War, and other evils perpetrated on the world. Such reflections do not help much, it has to be said, in seeking solutions to the dire problems of millions of refugees pouring into Europe from Islam’s civil war in the Middle East, but it should at least generate some humility and less moral superiority in the way we try to talk about the issue, and pray into it.

The university ought to be the place where such historical and ethical perspectives can be shared and brought to bear. Christian university students, therefore, surely have a strategic role in influencing the rhetoric and the debate, striving to prevent it descending to the level of gutter racism and xenophobia that seems to have infected not just unthinking popular attitudes but even political discourse that claims to be taken seriously.

My final thought asks what a missional perspective on this issue might throw up? The Bible teaches us that God is sovereign over the movements of peoples all over the globe. The geographical notes in Deuteronomy 2 show that (as Heimburger points out). And it seems that when people move around, God is particularly active among them, and among the people and places where they go. So the question we need

to ask is: how and where do we discern the sovereign reign of God - the kingdom of God – in the midst of this crisis of migration and refugees across the world? It is a fact that astonishing numbers of Muslim people, hitherto unreached and virtually unreachable by any Christian witness to the gospel, are becoming followers of Jesus the Messiah through the loving actions and words of Christian individuals, families and churches in the countries to which they have fled. I know this to be true from several Christian friends in Lebanon, for example.

I need to say immediately that the causes of forced migration are evil in themselves - whether war, religious persecution, abject and unsustainable poverty, or climatic devastation such as drought, famine, floods, or rising sea-levels. To say that God can be at work among people suffering such evils, and use their circumstances as a means of bringing ultimate blessing through the gospel, is NOT to say, either that God caused such things for that purpose, or that the circumstances themselves are somehow “good”. No, evil is evil and suffering is suffering, and can never be justified or excused just because something good emerges in the midst of them. Nor are we excused from the task of advocating for justice and peace and seeking to love the foreigner. But the words of Joseph to his brothers seem to embody a very profound theology of the sovereign providence of God over all that is evil, and the power of God to bring good ends out of evil intentions and actions. “You intended it for evil; but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen. 50:20 - significantly and ironically said to his brothers when they had become famine refugees in the country into which they had sold Joseph into slavery). The power of God to overcome evil by his sovereign love and grace – and indeed to use evil to its own ultimate destruction, is supremely modelled at the cross, which must remain at the heart of how we respond to this, or any other, issue. So I would argue that a missional perspective on this crisis calls us not only to action on behalf of the victims and to prayer for those who work for peace and justice, but also to prayerful discernment of the hand of God and readiness to take up the opportunities for gospel witness that he puts in our way through the operation of his hidden and mysterious global governance.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## GOD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 10:12-22; 1 Peter 1:1-2, 2:4-12

1. Do you consider yourself a migrant? Are you descended from migrants?
2. Do you know migrants personally?
3. How do people around you talk about migrants?
4. How does worshipping a God who loves a migrant people influence your perspective on migration?
5. What does it mean to seek justice for migrants?
6. What does it mean to love migrants?
7. Does your local church include migrants or relate to migrants in any way? Are there are opportunities for your church to seek justice for migrants and to love migrants?

## MIGRANTS AND NATIONAL LANDS

**Reading:** Deuteronomy 2:1-25

8. Do you think that before God, nations are right to govern immigration?
9. How can those in authority show that they are under Christ as king as they govern immigration?

## MIGRANTS AND THE UNIVERSITY

**Readings:** A brief history of your university or statistics on the origins of its students; Nigel Biggar, "What Are Universities For?," *Standpoint*, August 2010

10. Where do people come from to study and work at your university? Do they come from other parts of the city, region, or country, or from other countries?
11. What opportunities do you have as you encounter people from different places in the university?
12. Does your Christian student movement include people from other places and countries? How might your movement love those of you who are migrants and seek justice for them?

# FURTHER READING

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