

These stones cry out:
Migration of Peoples within the Web of Planetary Relations
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The migration of peoples is a complex global phenomenon of the Twenty-first century. Everyone and every nation is affected by the consequences of people on the move.¹ These consequences are the result of human decision making and activity which impact not only the quality of human life, but also every life form and natural element on the earth. As a human species we are connected to the web of planetary life. Migration in its present form alerts us to a rip in the web of relationships and it demands a response.

The Situation

If we contemplate the spider's web, we begin to sense a beauty and wisdom around its subtle complexity of form. Touch one part of the web with your finger and the entire web moves at once. Break one part of its network will send the web into the air, loosing its vitality and purpose. The reality of people who are forced from their lands of birth indicate the web of relations with all that exists and that gives life is in peril. For this reason, we need to take a close look at this social phenomenon.

Migration is a complex process and there are many reasons why people choose to migrate: poverty, armed conflict, social strife, political turmoil, and economic hardships.² Much of the poverty and economic situations are caused by a change in global weather patterns, such as drought, flooding, and rise in temperatures. Added to climate change are economic decisions like NAFTA and CAFTA made by corporations and heads of State that have driven populations further into poverty. NAFTA had forced 1.3 million Mexican farmers out of business because US agribusinesses, with tax dollars, sold corn in Mexico at lower prices. The ripple effect in the "web" was the rush of undocumented immigration from Mexico into the US, a 60% increase after the passage of NAFTA.³

War is another cause of migration. Ever since the end of the cold war we saw a shift from inter-state conflicts to intra-state conflicts and genocide. The weapons trade, encouraged by developing

¹ Nearly 232 million people, or 3.2 % of the world's population, were international migrants in 2013. In 2000 - 175 million; in 1990 - 154 million. Source: UN global migration statistic. Press release, Sept. 11, 2013.

² www.weareoneamerica.org. See "An Age of Migration: globalization and the Root Causes of Migration."

³ Ibid. "An Age of Migration."

countries, has attributed and prolonged the bloody conflicts. More recently, the US war on Iraq has created well over two million refugees who have no home.⁴

A Christian Response

Many religious voices have already drawn attention to the plight of migrants, refugees and displaced persons. In 1980, the Jesuit Superior General Pedro Arrupe founded the *Jesuit Refugee Service* to respond pastorally to the reality of migration, of which many are women and children. The Jesuit response is "to accompany, to serve, and to act."⁵ The model of authentic pastoral service is to welcome the "widow, orphan and the stranger." "To accompany refugees is to affirm that God is present in human history."

In his 1996 World Migration Day message, John Paul II reflected on the plight of migrants and especially the undocumented migrants. He says that the reality of illegal immigration and the exploitation of the undocumented by criminal activities is a challenge to the human race's sense of responsibility.⁶ He goes further and says we have to "listen to them" and hear their concerns, and walk with them in solidarity, which means bearing responsibility for the situation (no. 5). The obligation for this responsibility has biblical roots: "What have you done to your brother?" (cf. Gn. 4:9; no. 5). The Church's task is to show hospitality and solidarity with the migrant: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (Mt. 25:35).

The Cosmic Dimension of an Augustinian Response of Communion and Lament

Global migration is one of the great signs of the times of the present era. As a sign it requires interpretation. The traditional, religious response continues to be one of hospitality and solidarity. The danger with this response is to ignore the deeper causes behind the phenomenon and to resort to a charity that eases the burden of a collective conscience or to view the issue as a "problem over there" and separate from my self. Is there something else that escapes our awareness?

⁴ The term "refugee" is used to describe people who are persecuted on account of their race, religion, ethnic group or political conviction. "Displaced persons" are not fleeing from individual persecution but from escalating violence threatening large parts of the population in a certain region or country. These people are accommodated in refugee camps. A "migrant" denotes a person living outside his or her native country. Many leave because of environmental catastrophes. Today two-thirds of the world's population live in economically poor countries. Source: Confederation Suisse. Federal Office for Migration. "Internally displaced people" (IDP) are forcibly uprooted people and are displaced within their own country. The latest figures show that 28.8 million IDPs around the world in 2012. Source: UNHCR 2001-2013.

⁵ See "The Charter of Jesuit Refugee Service" on the Internet.

⁶ "Undocumented Migrants," Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996, no. 2," accessed at www.vatican.va.

I would like to suggest a different approach and link the phenomenon of migration and its causes to a spiritual dimension of the earth's ecosystems and the Augustinian theme of *communion*. We already referred to the earth's web of relationships that sustains life in all its forms on the planet. The Pauline notion of the "body of Christ" echoes the reality of a web of relations: all things are connected, and if one part suffers, the entire body suffers (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26). Augustine speaks about the body of Christ as the *totus Christus*, or the *whole Christ*, which is that layer of humanity stretched over the surface of the planet (Mt 25:31-46; Acts 9:5). One might ask, "What is the state of health of this human, planetary body?" The migration of people, uprooted by violence, represent a flowing of human blood, a kind of metaphorical hemorrhage. Violence is an act of dismemberment of the body of Christ or a strike against the web of life. The whole body is weakened by the violence and it is a matter of time before the whole body dies.

If migration is a planetary hemorrhage, then is it possible that the body-earth is reacting to such violence? Is this notion nuanced in Jesus' statement that *if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!* (Lk 19:40)? The earth is wounded when there is collective silence, no justice and right relations. Jesus then laments over the situation because the people *did not recognize the time of your visitation* (19:41-44). Perhaps the Augustinian response is to lament and take responsibility for being silent about injustice and the consequences of the missed *visitation*.

What is the missed *visitation*? The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) highlighted the need to read the "signs of the times," those historical moments of God breaking into history or the barriers erected against any form of communion. One might say that the *visitation* is a moment in time in which human energy can be channeled toward building a better world, the ultimate focus of the Council. Today we have the means to travel, share information, ideas, technology and resources on a global scale. We have the capacity to create an alternative reality based on collaboration rather than fierce competition. The *visitation* might be the Internet, a structure for global consciousness that will promote unity or fragmentation and suspicion based on power structures like the weapons trade and maximization of profit on the world market.⁷ The *visitation* is a moment of decision on how human energy will be used.

If the *visitation* is an energy that calls humanity to live in harmony with one another and the material world, we might find healing balm in John Paul II's 1996 Message on the Church's role and the people on the move. *In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters* (no. 5). When the Church is a *sign of unity* it becomes a *binding force for the whole human race*. The

⁷ See Diarmuid O'Murchu, *God in the Midst of Change: Wisdom for Confusing Times*. Orbis, 2012.

notion of “unity” or “communion” takes on a spiritual quality or energy, a life source and “blood,” for all of humanity. Communion is the opposite of a hemorrhage. The energy is one of justice and the attitude of “brother and sister” is practiced.

To describe more fully the relationship between migration and the body-world-Christ web of relationships, we need a new language. In Augustine’s *Rule of Life*, he describes community as a group that is *one mind and heart on the way to God*. Can we reinterpret this insight to say we are all called to be *one mind and heart with others and with the earth*? The circle of communion is widened to include the matter of the earth and not just human beings. If we look closer with Chardinian eyes we can also affirm that the matter of the earth has a spirit/consciousness as well. Thus, if human beings have *restless hearts that only rest in God*, then the earth has a restless global heart that *cries out* for justice. Is migration a manifestation of that global restlessness of pain, anxiety, agitation, uprootedness, fear, and lack of connection? To put the question in another way: Is there migration of peoples in the land of the Kingdom of God, or is there rest, stillness, joy, gratitude, unity with all that is and with the Source?

People are migrating to unknown lands and cultures because the ground under their feet suffers with a pain inflicted by human violence and greed. The *stones do cry out* and the whole body of Christ, the entire planetary web of relations, is a communion of broken bones. The Augustinian response is to *lament*. We need to forge a new language and liturgy of a reconciliation that jettisons all dualisms and escapes to a future homeland. We are not just pilgrims on a journey, we are blood and tissue in an earth-body we call “Mother,” “Woman,” the Web of Life.

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