

Migration, conflict, and displacement of tribes in Northeast India: a biblical and ethical approach

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**Migration, Conflict, and Displacement of Tribes in Northeast India:
A Biblical and Ethical Approach**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree

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Introduction

Emigration, conflict, and displacement have become a serious concern in the northeast region of India (where I come from). It is shocking and therefore, it needs a critical analysis in order to understand the reasons that drive people away from their homeland. It has become a global phenomenon. In the world as of 2013, “the number of international migrants worldwide (the global migrant stock) reached 232 million, up from 154 million in 1990 and from 76 million in 1960.”¹ The rate of migration is on rise and scholars have called this modern era *The Age of Migration*. There has been massive displacement and migration due to economic, political, social, and environmental reasons.

In this thesis I will focus on migration, conflict, and displacement in the northeastern part of India. In this part of India, migration is due to conflicts resulting from a combination of economic, political, social factors, and conflicts. These issues have led to many complexities such as trafficking, prostitution, ethnic division, unemployment, insurgency, and several conflicts between locals and Muslim migrants from Bangladesh. Though northeast India has a majority Christian population, perhaps making observers believe that it is a peaceful place, in reality peace in the region has been replaced by violence and hate. This violence is a human-rights issue: the treatment of migrants is inhumane. As the number of Muslim migrants continues to increase, so does the intolerance toward them grow. The local tribes from northeast India and migrants from Bangladesh are not rich. They are in search of a better life in northeast India but they face instead poverty,

¹ David Hollenbach, “A Future Beyond Borders: Reimagining the Nation-State and the Church,” in *Living with(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migration of People*, ed. Agnes M. Brazal and Maria T. Davila (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 223.

discrimination, and persecution. Their suffering must not be taken for granted or politicized. Politicizing the migrants' issues has brought conflict between local tribes and Muslim migrants. As a result, local Indian tribes have left their own homes and have been forced to move to other parts of India as migrants. The failure of the local church and tribal leaders has resulted in a mass exodus of the population. To bring back stability and peace in the region, the church and the local tribal leaders need to change their attitude and imbibe Gospel values for the promotion of unity and peace. Unless there is conversion in minds and hearts the migrant issue will remain the same. The whole situation needs to be reflected upon in light of Christian ethics and Catholic Social Teaching (CST). I will reflect on migrant, conflict, and displacement issues and attempt to uncover theological meaning in order to construct a path toward a harmonious society. This thesis looks at migrants, conflicts, and displacement from a Christian perspective and highlights how Christian values can promote unity, peace, and justice in a broken society. In addition, Judeo-Christian Biblical ethics gives a new understanding of our human existence with a view toward relational dignity and the revelation of radical equality that is the *imago Dei* as well as the example of experience of migration exodus of our forebears, the people of Israel.

I have highlighted my experiences with tribes. A tribal has “a unique cultural identity, ethnicity, linguistic and religious profile that is totally different from other parts of India or the world, geographically, historically and socially.”² Their attitude of simplicity, sincerity, and honesty are fading away due to unresolved issues of migrants, conflict, and displacement. A couple of questions have been raised to find out why tribes turn toward violence and intolerance. What

² S. Irudaya Rajan and Rikil Chyrmang, “Labour Migration in the North East,” in *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*, ed. Deepak K. Mishra (New Delhi: SAGA Publication India Pvt, 2016), 96.

are the reasons for migrating? My aim is to bring unity and peace despite different cultures, religions, and tribes in the northeast region.

As of the 2001 census, the total number of people living in the North Eastern Region (NER) of India was 39 million people and, of that, 1.11 million were migrants. In these eight states, the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, and Assam recorded migration of tribal people to the other parts of India and the states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Mizoram hosted mainly incoming migrants from other parts of India. The total population has significantly grown according to the 2011 census. It was 45 million and it is projected by 2020 that the population in NER will be 57 million. There is a fear among the people of overcrowding such that the “land area remaining more or less inelastic, dispersal and settlement of population would be a huge problem”³

My purpose in this thesis is to give a critical understanding through the lens of a biblical perspective of migration and conflict of the tribes of Northeast India. The majority of northeast people are Christians and hence, I would like to offer a constructive proposal from a biblical and Christian ethical perspective in order to bring unity and peace to the northeast region of India. Migration, conflict, and displacement can be resolved in northeast India by giving a constructive meaning to the issues.

To achieve greater understanding for peace and unity, I will be reflecting on CST and a biblical understanding of migration and conflicts. My aim is to propose how Christians in northeast India can transform migration, conflict, and displacement issues into opportunities for peace, unity

³ S. Irudaya Rajan and Rikil Chyrmang, “Labour Migration in the North East,” in *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*, ed. Deepak K. Mishra (New Delhi: SAGE Publication India, 2016), 98.

and stability by reflecting upon and contextualizing scriptural passages related to migration, Christian ethics, and Catholic Social Teaching. My thesis consists of three chapters.

The first chapter will give the background of the northeast tribes; its historical perspective, geographical situation, and some of the more critical ethical concerns of migration, conflict, and displacement. I will explore the following questions: Why are people migrating? Why are there so many conflicts and displacements? What different factors are involved in these issues? Some of the complex issues of migration, conflict, and displacement are highlighted based on my experience. The political instability, economic inequality, and conflicts are highlighted significantly as the main reasons for mass exodus of local tribals and fights between Muslim migrants and local tribes.

The second chapter will reflect on a biblical perspective of migration, conflict, and displacement. I will argue that through a biblical perspective we can theologically shape and form a humane approach to migrants. What is the role of God and what is God communicating to us in the examples that Scripture and theological reflection offer? The life stories of Jesus and Abraham are models for migrants. What should be our attitude toward today's migrants? What does the Bible offer us with regard to the inhumane suffering that migrants experience? This chapter will suggest how each of us is a migrant and so we should love each other. As faithful believers each one of us has a mission to show mercy, compassion, and love toward the suffering brothers and sisters.

I have highlighted specific passages from both Old Testament and New Testament to show what God wants from each faithful Christian believer. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says, "I was a stranger and you received me in your home. I was sick and you took care of me" (Mt 25:35-36). This is a clear statement that caring and receiving the stranger is an essential mission of the faithful

believers. Biblical perspective on migration will provide critical reflection to respond to the suffering of our brothers and sisters due to migration and displacement. In the Old Testament “whether under the category of ‘alien,’ ‘sojourner,’ ‘stranger,’ or ‘exile,’ migrants and displaced people emerge as subjects of clearly defined and rigorously sanctioned rights: The biblical tradition puts the migrant and exile at the very center of concern.”⁴ Thus “you shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deut 10:19). The church leaders and the local Christian tribal leaders should take these messages seriously so that there is true expression of love and mercy to migrants.

The third chapter will propose concrete steps to deal with migrants, conflict, and displacement in northeast India. In northeast India many tribes are not aware of Catholic Social Teaching and its approach to migrants. Given the Christian majority in northeast India, CST will help to create awareness among tribes. I will argue that the importance of solidarity, the common good, a preferential option for the poor, responsibility, and dialogue are the need of the hour to resolve the problem of migrants, conflicts, and displacement in northeast India. Those elements should be taken as virtues for the formation of tribals in the region. In the process it will transform each individual to become a better person in society. In conclusion, I will address two institutions, Catholic schools and churches, and the crucial role they can play for dialogue in order to promote unity, stability, and peace. These institutions can be agents for initiating dialogue. CST principles can be integrated in to many activities of schools and churches. The authorities of schools and churches have direct contacts with students, parents, and with members of church. The important

⁴Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, “Justice for the Displaced: The Challenge of a Christian Understanding,” in *Driven from Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants*, ed. David Hollenbach (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 39.

occasions such as parent-teacher meetings, seminars, and Sunday prayer services are the right platform to impart CST principles. The leaders of churches and schools should teach CST principles to students, parents, teachers, church members, and local tribal leaders. This information will help them to form compassionate human beings.

Chapter One: Migration, Conflict, and Displacement In Northeast India

Introduction

In this chapter I focus mainly on a bird's-eye view of northeast India. Sanjib Baruah argues that the “northeast India is one of South Asia’s last land frontiers and through much of the twentieth century these sparsely populated areas have attracted large-scale migration from the rest of the subcontinent.”⁵ It is easily observable that, “the northeastern tribes, mainly in the hills, are in some important respects different from their far more numerous counterparts in Middle India. They constitute local majorities within recognized territories where their distinctive cultures have long flourished in relative isolation.”⁶ What is known about the Northeast tribes and the region is that “it has been one of the greatest routes of migration of humankind. Waves of people belonging to different ethnic groups flocked into it from time immemorial, migrating in search of fertile land.”⁷ This massive displacement and migration due to economic, political, and social causes continues in the present era. Each of these issues has paralyzed the peaceful existence of tribals. Though the region has many Christian political leaders and a majority of Christians in some northeast states, nothing much has been done for the further resolution of the region. As a result, different tribal groups have chosen different paths for their survival. Many of their paths have provoked violence

⁵ Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 185.

⁶ Songram Basumatary, *Ethnicity and Tribal Theology: Problems and Prospects for Peaceful Co-existence in Northeast India* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2014), 39.

⁷ Ibid.

and hatred toward migrants in the region. “Northeast India is often viewed as a site of multiple ‘ethnic conflicts’ between that state and its alleged contenders of nonstate actors associated with the region’s many ‘tribal’ movements.”⁸ Several issues are highlighted in this chapter in order to understand migration, conflict, and displacement in northeast India. I explore economic inequality, political instability, and tension between locals and non-locals for a deeper understanding of the region. Conflict in the Northeast is not new, “tribals and ‘conflict’ have coexisted in the northeast Indian region ever since Assam became a British colony.”⁹

1.1. Geographical and Historical Background

Northeast India has eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura (See map).



⁸ Ashild Kolas, “Northeast Indian Enigmas,” in *Alternative: Global, Local, Political* 42, no. 3 (2018), 99.

⁹ *Ibid.*

The whole eight states has been term ‘Northeast’ and it was “formalized through the British colonial administration as a frontier region.”¹⁰ These states are barely connected to mainland India due to its geographic and cultural differences. Geographically, “Nine-nine percent of its boundaries are international: with Bhutan and Tibet (China) in the north and northeast; with Myanmar in the south and southeast; and with Bangladesh in the southwest.”¹¹ Most of northeast India is also a hilly region. In addition, “the whole region is connected to the rest of the country by means of a 22 Km land corridor through Siliguri in the eastern part of West Bengal.”¹²

There are 213 tribal communities and 175 languages spoken in those eight states. Tribals have “a unique cultural identity, ethnicity, linguistic and religious profile that is totally different from other parts of India or the world, geographically, historically and socially.”¹³ Most of the northeastern tribes depend for their livelihood on agriculture. The large number of Northeast Indian tribes live in rural areas. Some portions of tribes live in mountains and forests. As a result, they also lack basic facilities such as education, medical facilities, sanitation, jobs, social infrastructure, and so on. In India a census takes place every ten years. According to the 2001 census, the total number of population living in the North Eastern Region (NER) of India was 39 million people and of that 1.11 million were migrants. In these eight states, those of Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, and Assam recorded out-migration of tribals, and the other states (Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Mizoram) had mainly incoming migrants. The total population has significantly grown according to the 2011 census. It was 45 million then and by

¹⁰ Bhagat Oinam, “Preparing for a Cohesive Northeast: Problem of Discourse,” in *Beyond Counter-insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, ed. Sanjib Baruah (New Delhi: Oxford University, 2009), 171.

¹¹ Basumatary, *Ethnicity and Tribal Theology*, 38.

¹² Rajan and Chyrmang, “Labour Migration in the North East,” 96.

¹³ Ibid.

2020 the population in NER will be 57 million. There is a fear among people that with the “land area remaining more or less inelastic, dispersal and settlement of population would be a huge problem.”¹⁴

1.2. Who Are Northeast Indian Tribals?

The term ‘tribe’ is a colonial category which was used to demarcate a lack of civilization, backwardness, and primitiveness. Basically this name was given by the British. In 1757, the British East India Company conquered Bengal. The Bengal region included Assam which is a part of the northeast plain region. Eventually the control of the British extended to the hill region of Northeast and, “many of these hill areas and some zones in the plains were designated, ‘tribal,’ closed to immigration, and kept under distinct administrative regimes.”¹⁵

We can rightly call the northeastern Indian tribes “sons of the soil” and Dr. S. Irudaya Rajan writes, “India’s tribals are believed by ethnologists and classicists to be the descendants of the subcontinent’s original population – the most authentic, if you will, of the sons of the soil.”¹⁶ Ethnically, NER tribals are of Mongoloid origin. Basumatary cities Monirul Hussain, a political scientist, on this origin:

Almost all the tribals are held to be the remnants of primitive or ancient Mongolian migrants to this region. They established themselves in their present homeland in the remotest past. Needless to say, the tribals are undoubtedly the original natives of Assam [NEI]. Even in the non-tribal dominated Brahmaputra Valley today, it was the Bodo-Kachari tribals who created the first culture and civilization and in a real sense they are the first natives of the valley.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid., 98.

¹⁵ Bethany Lacina, “The Problem of Political Stability in Northeast India: Local Ethnic Autocracy and the Rule of Law,” *Asian Survey* XLIX, no. 6 (2009), 1001.

¹⁶ Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 151.

¹⁷ Basumatary, *Ethnicity and Tribal Theology*, 40.

Tribals live together but each tribe lives with the same tribe and forms its own village. My grandfather, (Mr. Baburam Brahma) who occupied a huge piece of land, would narrate to me his life and the life of other tribals. During his time most tribals preferred to move from one forest to the other because of their livelihood. They would clear the forest and remain for some years until other migrants came in. Tribals did not like to mix with other people who came from other communities, such as migrants from other parts of India. Prior to Indian independence, many tribals moved from one place to another since land was not a contested issue for them at that time. They could easily move and settle wherever they wanted, especially in northeast India.

1.3 Causes of Migration, Conflict, and Displacement

1.3.1 Economic inequality

In all the eight states of NER, today the economy varies with regard to the levels of industrialization and infrastructural development. There is also a growing rate of “have’s and have nots” in the region and “historically, the regions remained the most backward in the country due to poor infrastructure and lack of democratic governance combined with low productivity and market access, low levels of industrial activity and limited spread of a modern service sector.”¹⁸ The economic inequality and lack of development in the region occurred not because of a dearth of resources but of the people’s lack of right governance. Development aid does come in, but what happens with aid is a miserable due to corruption and lack of accountability. It is a sad thing to see the “development funds are taxed by extremists and siphoned off by local politicians, who force the ‘*gaonboras*’ [local leader] to sign. There is corruption in the Army as well as the government. There is no monitoring or inspection. The records say that we are self-sufficient in food, all roads

¹⁸ Rajan and Chyrmang, “Labour Migration in the North East,” 105.

are surfaced. The government officials blame the extremists for taking twenty per cent, but actually they take the money for themselves.”¹⁹

These northeastern states “lagged behind in terms of both the physical and social infrastructure necessary for economic development. The economic growth and development of the region has been lopsided for the last four decades ...”²⁰ The basic reason that Indians move to other states is because of this uneven development. The people from the backward states have been forced to move to other states for their livelihood. They have a right to move and “the constitution of India allows its citizens to move freely to any part of its national boundary either for seeking employment or to settle down.”²¹ As migrants are on the rise, so the local people fear for their economic opportunity. And some of the regional political parties have taken advantage of this situation and politicized the whole migrant issue to their advantage or to hold on to power.

A lack of economic development, along with insurgency and an influx of Bangladeshi immigrants have led to migration and displacement for the locals. The political unrest, violence, and poverty have driven people out of their homeland. Dr. Deepak K. Mishra writes, “Most of the states in the NER have unrests and tensions which include: religious, ethnic, communal clashes, tensions between local population, insurgency, tension between people and army.”²² These problems have affected the lives of the local people. These tribes of NER once had land to cultivate freely but, over the years, an increase in population and the government’s control policy on their

¹⁹ Ashild Kolas, “Framing the Tribal: Ethnic violence in Northeast India,” *Asian Ethnicity* 18, no. 1 (2017), 28.

²⁰ Rajan and Chyrmang, “Labour Migration in the North East,” 96.

²¹ S. Irudaya Rajan, Vijay Korra, and Rikil Chyrmang, “Politics of Conflict and Migration,” in *Migration, Identity and Conflict: India Migration Report 2011*, ed. S. Irudaya Rajan (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011), 96.

²² Babu P. Remesh, “Migration and Marginalization: A Study of North East Migrants in Delhi,” in *Internal Migration in Contemporary India*, ed. Deepak K. Mishra (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2016), 74.

land have brought several conflicts. Most of the development funds have gone to politicians' own pockets for personal use. Personal use of the public fund has affected the development of local tribal people. The suffering of the people due to displacement and migration has become the political agenda for politicians. As a result, these innocent people who need real help have become victims of corrupt politicians.

1.3.2 Political Instability

The entire northeastern states of India are in turmoil due to political instability, insurgency and ethnic clashes. As a result, the normal lives of people are often disrupted. Not long ago in 2010 there was a conflict between the Manipuri and the Nagas. For Manipuris to get their things, all vehicles have to pass through Nagaland state. The Nagas from Nagaland called for an economic blockage for 120 days. This 120 days blockage had "serious economic consequences such as a very high price of essential commodities since no supplies could reach the state."²³ The 2.7 million people living in Manipur state were badly affected. Apart from that, all public and private educational institutions were closed down. Such a difficult situation caused people to be displaced and also led to a mass exodus of people in search of peace and a better life in other places.

Due to political instability many insurgent groups are fighting for equal rights. There is an ongoing autonomy movement by a number of ethnic groups. The government has been trying to control the region by military force, yet "inter-communal and partisan violence remain common, and popular demands for local autonomy, boundary changes, and new states continue to proliferate, irrespective of the central state's supposed military 'successes' in the region."²⁴ The central government has been luring the local governments by giving incentives for personal gain.

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Lacina, "The Problem of Political Stability in Northeast India," 999.

As elsewhere, such tactics have promoted the local political leaders to become involved in corruption. The central government “invests in state and group leaders in the Northeast by distributing substantial financial and coercive resources and by tolerating the erosion of democracy and rule of law.”²⁵ The negotiations between the central government and insurgents do nothing but promote autocracy. In the last decades the central government came forward to have negotiations with powerful insurgents so that they can join a political stream for a proper dialogue. The political outcome might look successful for the central government but the greater concern remains for the local people. The one-sided approach of the central government remains a failure. The central government should know that, “a compromise with local militant actors will only bring about lasting change if it is followed by enforcement of democracy and rule of law in the local partners’ dealings with the public, rivals, and with minorities.”²⁶ The other concern in the region is the absence of healthy political competition. Since those powerful insurgent groups come into power after negotiations with the government so it is they who control the entire affairs of the region. There is abuse of both power and resources. What matters for the central government is that they (the insurgents) are aligned with their political agenda. The irony is that, “the center tolerates ongoing repression and corruption so long as there is an end to attacks on strategic or government targets.”²⁷ Such an attitude of the central government has a foreseeable chaotic social unrest which would drive out millions of people from the region. Bethany Lacina argues:

In the foreseeable future, the Indian central government seems likely to continue using localized autocracy to manage the Northeast. This involves massive economic transfers, a security presence to counter the greatest threats and secure the borders, and reliance on the local leaders who use violence and corruption to remain in power, curbing electoral and party competition and, by extension, ethnic mass mobilization. Much of Northeast India today is governed by these localized

²⁵ Ibid., 999.

²⁶ Ibid., 1017.

²⁷ Ibid., 1017.

autocracies, which serve the purposes of the central government by curbing violence directed at strategic installations and government security forces.²⁸

Because of violence in the northeastern states the central government imposed an Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), especially in Manipur state. This Special Act gives an extraordinary power to the hands of the armed forces. The Indian army can shoot at any person caught in some suspected illegal activity. This special power of the Army has been the source of several conflicts because of innocent people being killed in prison. For all intents and purposes, no investigation can be done of the army since they have the power to defend themselves from any allegation. The Indian army due to AFSPA the “impunity they enjoy is often held to be responsible for the alleged excesses such as extra-judicial killings, illegal arrests of innocent civilians, rapes, burning down of villages and other alleged atrocities.”²⁹ There has been public outcry to remove this power but it has been in vain. Living in such complexities has driven people away from their homeland.

1.3.3 Conflict Between Tribes and Non-locals

Conflicts between tribes and non-locals is an ongoing issue. Non-locals are those who are not part of the tribal communities. They come either from other parts of India or neighboring countries. Walter Fernandes, S.J. a sociologist, writes of NER displacement in the last three decades:

That there are conflicts in the Northeast is beyond doubt. To mention but the last three decades the 1980s witnessed the tribal-Bengali conflict in Shillong in Meghalaya that caused 25,000-35,000 internally displaced persons (IDP). The Bengali-tribal conflict in Tripura in the same decade killed some 1,700 Bengalis and tribals and caused 190,000 IDPs (Bhaumik 2005: 160-162). Over 30,000 Reang tribals displaced by conflicts in Mizoram in the 1990s continue to live in camps in

²⁸ Ibid., 1020.

²⁹ Walter Fernandes, “Conflicts and Displacement in the Northeast: Land, Identity and Immigrants,” in *India Migration Report 2017: Forced Migration*, ed. S. Irudaya Rajan (New Delhi: Routledge, 2017), 149.

Tripura (Fernandes, Datta and Visaria 2017: 53). In the 1990s Manipur witnessed the Naga-Kuki and Kuki-Paite conflicts that resulted in the burning of 10,000 houses, death of 2,000 persons and more than 50,000 IDPs (Hussain and Phanjoubam 2007: 15-16 & 28-30). In the first decade of the third millennium ethnic conflicts in the Dima Hasao and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam caused 100,000 IDPs (Mangattuthazhe 2008: 47-48). The Bodo territory of Western Assam experienced violence on three occasions in the 1990s. In the accord it signed on an Autonomous Council with the National Democratic Front of Bodoland the Assam Government refused to include around 1,000 villages in the council on the plea that they lacked a Bodo majority. Efforts to “create a majority” resulted in attacks on Bengali Muslims in 1993, Bengali Hindus in 1995 and Santhals in 1996. They caused 350,000 IDPs (Bhaumik 2005: 163-165).³⁰

Many of the “scholars have supported the view that resource competition is a cause of conflict in hill areas of Northeast India.”³¹ The above reports show clear statistics reflecting displacement due to violence. This communal and ethnic violence has caused thousands of people to be internally displaced. The conflicts which took place in the NER were turned into conflicts against migrants. The 2012 Bodo-Muslim conflict broke out with the killing of two Muslims and, as a result, there was fierce fighting between the two communities which led to 59 people dead and 400,000 pushed to refugee camps. In 2014, there was an attack on the Muslim community by the Bodo tribe. This incident led the Home Ministry of India and BJP national party to assume that there are “Illegal migrants from Bangladesh” present in the country.³² Instead of investigating the matters the political leaders scapegoated and put blame on the Muslim community.

In 1826, when the British acquired the region, they found that local tribals were not good at administration skills so the Britishers imported Bengalis to work for the administration. The second group was Muslims who were imported from East Bengal district to cultivate the

³⁰ Fernandes, “Conflicts and Displacement in the Northeast,” 147.

³¹ Kolas, “Framing the Tribal: Ethnic violence in Northeast India,” 27.

³² Fernandes, “Conflicts and Displacement in the Northeast,” 150.

Brahmaputra valley. The third group were tea-garden laborers who were imported during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.³³

As migrants grew in number the issue of land became a major concern for the tribals. For the tribals, land is an important assets for their livelihood. Many of the tribals have, rightly, a sense of attachment to their ancestral land and to their culture. Land is their livelihood. Therefore, “when the tribals’ land is disturbed their whole life is disturbed... most of the conflicts center around the alienation of their livelihood resources of land, water and biodiversity, which are the foundation of their culture, economy and identity.”³⁴

Assam, which is the largest populated state of NER and the economic center for other Northeast regions, has received migrants from the other states. As Assam expanded its economy to “tea, oil and coal industries, the demand for migrant laborers has increased.”³⁵ This increase in migrants during the 1970s and 1980s brought a conflict because of “demographic change and competition for resources... The clash occurred when the migrants became more successful than the native population in terms of occupation, business and wage earning capacity. It was then that the local people, who were at a disadvantage, became envious of the migrants.”³⁶ The migrants fought for their rights and demanded that their demands be fulfilled by the local government. However, these demands led to further escalation of tension between locals and migrants. In addition, it led to brutal killings of migrants: “the failure to solve the issue can be regarded as due

³³ Basumatary, *Ethnicity and Tribal Theology*, 122.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁵ Rajan, Korra, and Chyrmang, “Politics of Conflict and Migration,” 98.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

to lack of political will and determination both at the state level as well as at [the level of] the central Government.”³⁷

The neighboring state Meghalaya, which secured separate statehood in 1972 from Assam, witnessed several conflicts between locals and non-locals. Non-locals such as Assamese and Bengali remained in the new state. The migrants grew over the years. The Khasi Student Union (KSU), a local student’s union, began raising the issue of migrants. As inter-marriage was on the rise, the locals started to lose their land. Since Meghalaya follow a matriarchal family line, where the property went to the wife, as a result of marrying a non-local, the land became the property of the husband. Even though in the state the non-locals cannot own land, many of the outsiders took advantage through the marriage system.³⁸ The non-locals, “it is on this ground that the majority of the tribal community supports the movement against ‘non-tribals’ settler and/ or in-migrants. Even most of the political parties in the hill state join the mass movement against the non-tribals.”³⁹ Similar issues began in the other regions of the NER.

These northeastern tribes of India who are constantly disrupted by violence often live their lives in fear and distrust with the non-locals. Their constant movement to a new place gives them also new challenges to face hard realities. Since violence continues between locals and migrants from Bangladesh, in the process, there is hate and anger which shapes the tribals’ lives into inhospitable. As a result, many tribal youth move to other parts of India to avoid this suffering. The local governments also are not addressing the real issues. For the political leaders, the migration and displacement issue has become just a slogan during an election rally and, once the election is over, those elected do nothing. The trust between government and the public is

³⁷ Ibid., 99.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

disappearing with frustration and disappointment increasing toward the government, thus creating havoc.

I lived in the northeastern region of India for a decade, and during my stay there I witnessed several conflicts. The most gruesome displacement and migration took place in 2012. On July 6, 2012, there was a communal riot between Bodo tribals and Muslims. Though the riot took place in northeast India, it affected tribals in other parts of India because of fear of being attacked by Muslims. As a result, “Some 30,000 people, north-easterners, fled from Bangalore, nine of them being thrown off a moving train. Some authorities encouraged the exodus by laying on special trains: 30,000 tickets to Guwahati, Assam were sold in three days.”⁴⁰ Tribals who lived in others parts of India feared that their lives were in danger as well.

I met some of the victims who had the nightmare of leaving their work and their tribal homes. As the violence erupted, many moved to government shelter camps for protection. Some completely migrated to other places. Those who lived in government shelter camps were not ready to return to their original homes because of fear of being killed. Even those who lived in their home would go to the jungle to sleep. One man, named Ramesh, described to me how he did not sleep properly for several days. During the communal riot members from each family would need to sacrifice sleep to guard the village at night so that others would be safe. There was a Muslim family who lived closed to Ramesh’s house. They lived together for several years, but during the violence Ramesh’s younger brother was killed by his neighbor’s family in a communal riot. This incident showed how lack of trust was formed among them.

⁴⁰ Fernandes, “Conflicts and Displacement in the Northeast: Land, Identity and Immigrants,” 30.

I also see that many tribes in northeast India perceive Bangladeshi migrants as a threat to peace. Bangladeshi migrants over the years went through many difficulties. The safety and the peace of their families was a challenge. Since they pose a threat to local tribes there are suspicious and negative attitudes toward them. Peaceful coexistence between tribals and migrants is a critical concern. Tension and conflict have affected the lives of both local tribes and those migrants. The local tribes are migrating because of this tension and conflict to other parts of India. As conflict and tension breaks out, there is fear and distrust among people. The local people feel that migrants are taking away their land and jobs so locals retaliate against the migrants. This retaliation has led local people and migrants to massive displacement centers elsewhere.

1.4 Ethical Issues

Driven out of home, leaving their family members and homeland, tribals are migrating to new places in search of hope. In the capital city of India alone, there are ninety to a hundred thousand migrants from the northeast. These migrants face racial discrimination, insecurity, vulnerability, exploitation, and trafficking. Those migrating to the capital city find life hard than expected. As they migrate to a new environment, food, habits, culture, and dress need to be adjusted. Though they left their homeland because of violence, feelings of insecurity continue in a new place. By social custom the people from northeast India are different. Their skin color is somewhat similar to Chinese. Very often on the roads they are teased and addressed in derogating manner as Chinese. According to one of the Business Process Outsourcing employees settled in Delhi, “Even after wearing sari or salwar-kurta it is very easy to recognize our difference due to our fair skin and wrongly pronounced Hindi by everyone-be it auto drivers, street vendors or eve-teasers. And sooner we will fall prey to discriminatory treatment.”⁴¹ As there is a cultural

⁴¹ Remesh, “Migration and Marginalization,” 81.

difference between the people of the Northeast and the people of mainland India, the cultural gap, racism, and social labelling continue to negatively affect migrants from northeast India. They are also considered non-conforming to the norms of caste based society in the sub-continent south since northeastern tribes do not fall in the caste system. Tribal people grow up in a culture where gender equality is promoted and by nature they are friendly, but, these characteristics of tribal youth are perceived by mainland Indians as loose moral values.

Tribals from northeast India also face discrimination in daily life. Quite often mistreatment by landlords has been reported. Finding an accommodation is a difficult task for migrants from the northeast. A good number of tribals residing in Delhi felt that “a good chunk of the local landlords are not even considering North Easterners as potential clients to rent out their rooms/flat ... they have loose morals, they eat pigs and dogs, their presence will pollute our children.”⁴² Those who get rooms need to assure their landlord that they will cook only vegetarian food. They are also charged exorbitant fees by landlords for their accommodations. It has been reported that migrants from the Northeast have to pay double the normal price. In addition all house maintenance has to be done by the person who rents. The landlord will not do any maintenance of the house as long as the migrants live there, because the house owner knows that migrants have no other option than to do repairs themselves or leave the apartment. Although the lease agreement is written, many times it is not followed. In some cases migrants are asked to move out of a home and are evicted without advance notice. There have been many other complaints such as faulty electricity meters, high charges when guests are invited, and moral policing by the landlords.⁴³ These northeast migrants’

⁴² Ibid., 82.

⁴³ Ibid., 83.

inability to speak Hindi makes them additionally vulnerable as they are unable to fight for their rights because of the language barrier.

The northeast migrants face other vulnerabilities such as exploitation and verbal abuse. The NE migrants who run small businesses are not given licenses by local authorities. As a result, migrants end up paying higher amounts of rent as well as bribes to government officials. Since northeast India has violence, its migrants are labeled as terrorists or anti-national people in order to ban them from entering the northeast by a false notion. Verbal abuse is quite common. Due to a fair complexion, the NE migrants are called Chinese or Nepalese. Some tribals have other non-tribal names but people from mainland India find this strange. When they tell their names the common response is, “how come you have our name?”⁴⁴

Every year there are many girls who go missing in northeast India. Many of these missing girls are trafficked, and some who migrate to other states for jobs are often caught up by traffickers. Traffickers lure young girls with money and jobs. These girls innocently believe the job promises, but in reality they are trafficked to other states by illegally. This human trafficking is operated by multiple groups. The first type of group is a mafia-type which acts as a job placement agency. This type of agency looks for young women who are economically poor and looking for a job. The agents go to villages to befriend them in order to lure young women with job offers. A second type of trafficker is either relatives or friends. Since they are known to each other, it is easy to fool them with false promises of jobs. The third kind of traffickers are those who are already maidservants in cities and, when they return to their village during holidays, they take one or two back with them to work in cities. As they are handed over to others such as an agency or families, some are even

⁴⁴ Ibid., 87.

sold to brothels.⁴⁵ These innocent women who are trafficked because of job promises undergo inhumane experiences. Their human dignity, respect, and justice are often violated. Even young women who return to their homes face segregation because of suspicion of having sexually transmitted diseases, which makes it difficult for them to marry.⁴⁶ These ethical issues faced by tribals and Muslim migrants in northeast India cannot be ignored or silenced. They have to be addressed with full responsibility to give human dignity, respect, and justice to migrants. The tribal Christian leaders should remember that promoting human dignity, respect, and justice is their main evangelization. The local tribals' ethical issues can be reduced when they receive proper care in their own place. In addition, good formation in faith will make tribals open toward their suffering Muslim brothers and sisters.

1.4.1 Attitude of Indifference

As I recall my experiences in northeast India, I feel I have seen enough Christian “bystanders.” Christians are supposed to speak up against any social evil that dehumanizes human beings, because remaining silent to social evils encourage perpetrators. It is scandalizingly true, “as long as human beings can sit and watch with hands folded while their fellow-men are tortured and butchered so long will civilization be a hollow mockery.”⁴⁷

Allowing people to suffer in migration, conflict, and displacement, however, raises many questions for today. The tendency of people who think, “It is none of my business” will not solve

⁴⁵ Prem Xalxo, “Migration for Livelihood: Hope amid Untold Miseries of Tribal Girls,” in *Living with (OUT) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples*, eds. Agnes M. Brazal and Maria Teresa Davila (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2016), 192.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴⁷ Petruska Clarkson, *The Bystander: An End to Innocence in Human Relationships?* (London: Athenaeum Press, 1996), 58.

these problems.⁴⁸ As Jon Sobrino rightly observes, “people do not want to acknowledge or face up to the reality of a crucified world, and even less do we want to ask ourselves what is our share of responsibility for such a world.”⁴⁹

What surprises me are religious leaders who often decline to speak up on behalf of the marginalized people. How do they claim themselves as religious leaders when they do not address the concerns of humanity seriously? Are they not responsible for bringing change in the lives of their people? Keeping silent is an act of irresponsibility. In Proverbs we are instructed to, “Speak up for those who cannot speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

My experiences with tribal people give me a sense of the lack of responsibility from Church leaders among others. Many tribal Church leaders come under the category of “bystanders.” This issue demands bystanders to take responsibility and respond with concrete action. H. Richard Niebuhr’s concept of responsibility—response, interpretation, accountability and solidarity—give insights for understanding this responsibility in a clear way.⁵⁰ When response, interpretation, accountability, and solidarity do not take place while addressing the issue of racial discrimination, the whole notion of responsibility loses its meaning. Privileged bystanders should know that “response-ability refers to the ability to respond – to react in some way to the events, invitations and provocations of our world.”⁵¹

Migration, conflict, and displacement need to be addressed by every Indian regardless of their tribe, race, culture, or religion. Hiding from this reality further enhances violence in society.

⁴⁸ Clarkson, *The Bystander*, 36.

⁴⁹ Elisabeth T. Vasko. *Beyond Apathy: A Theology for Bystanders* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 6.

⁵⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1963), 63-64.

⁵¹ Clarkson, *The Bystander*, 12.

As Elizabeth Vasko notes in the context of Western valuation of “individualism.” The individualism can lead to escapism from violence and eventually leading to hide in violence. She argues that “in contexts marked by violence, hiding can be risky business, encouraging passivity and escapism, and sapping the world of the vital and creative energy needed for transformation.”⁵² In hiding, it is not possible to care for someone genuinely. Similarly, the northeast Indian tribal leaders should not hid or escape themselves from caring migrants who often suffer from violence. But it is important to remember that “compassion only becomes possible when we come out of the shadows and come face to face with vulnerability – human and divine.”⁵³

Migrants’ inhuman suffering is often ignored by the privileged bystanders: “We do have the ability to resist harm done to others and to stand in solidarity with those who are suffering, but fall prey to apathy and indifference, convincing ourselves that ‘it is not my problem,’ ‘it’s really not that bad,’ or ‘the person got what he or she deserved.’”⁵⁴ This is what I see among the bystanders in northeast India. Violence has been increasing over the years but it is due as much as to the perpetrators as it is to the silence of the privileged bystanders.

Jesuit James T. Bretzke writes, “Every human person obviously has both ‘experience’ and ‘experiences’ and these can serve as an important moral source and resource.”⁵⁵ In a diverse society like northeast India it is important to “attend to the incorporating as many people’s experiences as possible into our moral analysis.”⁵⁶ Not considering migrants experience of suffering for moral analysis is injustice. In addition, marginalized people also need to be heard and accepted: “To truly

⁵² Vasko, *Beyond Apathy: A theology for Bystanders*, 33.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁵⁵ James T. Bretzke, *A Morally Complex World: Engaging Contemporary Moral Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

listen to the other means staying in the conversation, hearing the person out, and taking responsibility for our action and inaction.”⁵⁷

Migrants are crying to be respected in India. Do privileged Christian bystanders hear their cry? It seems unlikely, since migration, conflict, and displacement continue a “God will take care of it, so what can I do? Or, more commonly, “God has a reason for everything so why get involved?”⁵⁸ This kind of unethical passivity is a serious concern in need of challenge, otherwise it continues as a threat to humanity.

“Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn 12:24). This passage could be used to help privileged Catholic bystanders examine their lives. I still remember a nun who was killed in India on February 25, 1995. She worked in a very hostile place where preaching the Gospel was very difficult. Her name was Rani Maria, she was beatified on November 4, 2017. She was stabbed to death by a man who resented her work among landless poor people. Many landlords were not happy with her because she was fighting against unlawful treatment of the poor and marginalized people. Sr. Rani was “widely known in India, [and] had encouraged the laborers to demand fair wages and the right to a dignified life, showing them ways to avoid predatory interest rates on loans.”⁵⁹ Because of that she was killed, yet today she continues to inspire many people. Even her killer later on repented and he now visits Sr. Rani’s parents every year. Mr. Singh, the killer, said in *Asiannews* in 2010, “I was overcome with grief and remorse for killing an innocent nun, who only selflessly worked

⁵⁷ Vasko, *Beyond Apathy*, 150.

⁵⁸ Vasko, *Beyond Apathy*, 148.

⁵⁹ Blessed Rani Maria. <http://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/ministry/blessed-rani-maria-seen-beacon-hope-indian-christians-50206> accessed Nov 8, 2017.

to uplift the poor people and make our nation progress.”⁶⁰ Sr. Rani Maria is a perfect example of for Catholic privileged bystanders.

With the example of Sr. Rani I draw attention to the Catholic community of northeast India. I feel it is not quantity but quality which is significant in changing society. In the midst of 1.3 billion Indians, even the tiny 2.5 percent of Catholic Indians can bring change in the life of people by their genuine commitment to them. The case of Rani Maria is a perfect example to imitate. Catholics in northeast India should remember that “Christianity was founded upon the ethic of care of the vulnerable; which included the poor, imprisoned and oppressed.”⁶¹ Claiming to be Christian, yet not following Christ’s words and actions, places one into the category of bystander. Bystanders are a threat to a peaceful and harmonious society. Without the conversion of these bystanders there will be further violence. The biblical text also clearly indicates, “The duty of a person to act on behalf of another because of the covenantal relationship that God has with humans which structures human-to-human interaction in important ways.”⁶²

St. James in his letter asks, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2: 14-18). I feel that Christian bystanders should always look at scripture as their ethical source. This would help them to reflect their own words and actions, and they will come to know what it means be a Christian in word and deed. One of the problems I see among Catholic privileged bystanders is their vertical relationship

⁶⁰ Crux. <https://cruxnow.com/global-church/2017/11/04/murdered-nun-beatified-india-sister-rani-maria-martyr-social-justice/> accessed Nov 4, 2017.

⁶¹ John C. Lentz Jr, “The Bystander in the Bible,” *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017), 691.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 703.

with God, common in Hinduism too. Here, it's "me and God" that matters. This is the reason why the holy river Ganges is considered the dirtiest river in India. Thousands of people go there to dip themselves in the river and purify themselves from sin. In the name of God, all the ritual things used for worship are drowned in the river. As a result, the Ganges is highly polluted. This is the problem of verticalizing one's relationship with God. In verticalizing, one forgets the horizontal relations which are an important aspect of relating with God. Christian faith calls for both vertical and horizontal relationship with God and to our fellow brothers and sisters. We are instructed to love God and to our brothers and sister in our daily lives. This is explicitly clear "whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (I John 4:20).

In Christianity, "Jesus draws a parallel between our relationship with God and our relationship to the poor, disenfranchised, and oppressed. To love God is to love one's neighbor and vice versa."⁶³ Jesus teaches his followers to be compassionate to their neighbors in relating with Him and God the Father. Jesus invites us to look at our own actions toward family members and neighbors and our whole outer reality. Imagine withholding love, kindness, and charity for others and coming to the Eucharistic table. How can we call ourselves Christians if we are not kind and loving to one another? It is by loving each other that we will know God, as St. John writes: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). Passive bystanders go against the spirit of Christ's disciples. As Vasko argues, "Passive bystanding signifies a loss of relationality that extends far beyond issues of personal self-esteem. It marks our collective failure to engage in compassion, to suffer with those who are marginalized, dehumanized, and humiliated by interpersonal and systemic forms of

⁶³ Vasko, *Beyond Apathy*, 125.

violence.”⁶⁴ The Scripture makes it very clear that to be a disciple of Christ is to engage in action on behalf of others. In Christianity there can be no neutrality toward structural violence.

Conclusion

The migrants, conflict, and displacement issue in northeast India can be tackled in a right way by engaging the fundamental values of Christians. Although Christians are a minority in the northeast, change is possible through responsibility. Niebuhr argues that “responsibility lies in the agent who stays with his action, who accepts the consequences in the form of reactions and looks forward in a present deed to the continued interaction.”⁶⁵ Whereas in relational discipleship we are all part of God’s family. Each one has a responsibility to help each other. But by being a bystander one rejects both responsibility and interpersonal relationship with God and fellow brothers and sisters. In the struggles of people due to migration, conflict, and displacement, all Christian leaders need to join together to bring peace and unity. As privileged bystanders they “have the responsibility to find ways to respectfully join others in solidarity on this journey.”⁶⁶ It is true that as Christians we cannot be passive bystanders. Christ who sacrificed his life for us invites each Christian to take an active role in dealing with structural violence. As St. Paul teaches us, “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (Corinthians 12:26-27). We may not be perfect but what is important as Christians is to reach out to vulnerable people. “May we find courage to take risks, to make mistakes and to take responsibility”⁶⁷ to help us live Christian ethical values in our day to day life.

⁶⁴ Vasko, *Beyond Apathy*, 66.

⁶⁵ Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 64.

⁶⁶ Vasko, *Beyond Apathy*, 245.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Chapter Two: A Biblical Perspective on Migration and Displacement

Introduction

People are on the move and every person has the history of migration. Thus, “migration has been part of human history since its origins.”⁶⁸ Due to massive movement of the people in the last 2 centuries and unto today, this age has been called “*the Age of Migration.*” Tomy Thomas Kattampally argues that People leave their birthplace for many reasons. Global estimates project that a person is displaced every five seconds in the world; which means in “any given day, thousands of people are being forced to leave their homes.”⁶⁹ Migrants express that “if there is one thing that all people on the move will agree on, it is the fact that migrating is never easy. It takes courage to migrate. It is a long, complicated, and difficult process that never truly and fully ends even after people have successfully moved from one place to another.”⁷⁰ In recent times there have been millions of migrants and displaced people due to war, natural disasters, political instability, and economic inequality. Sometimes with poor understanding, migrants are often disparaged by the labels attached to them as “illegal aliens, strangers, asylum-seekers, displaced persons, economic migrants, lawful permanent residents, refugees, temporary workers.”⁷¹ Labeling them can easily bring separation between citizens and migrants. Labeling is harmful to migrants “although labeling may be an inescapable part of policy-making and its language, the difficulty

⁶⁸ Daniel G. Groody, “Crossing the Divide: Foundations of a Theology of Migration and Refugees,” in *And You Welcomed Me: Migration and Catholic Social Teaching*, eds. Donald Kerwin and Jill Marie Gerschutz (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 1.

⁶⁹ Tomy Thomas Kattampally, “Biblical Perspective on Migration,” *Jeevadhara* XLVII, No. 282 (2017), 40.

⁷⁰ Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward A Theology Of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 128.

⁷¹ Gasper Lo Biondo and Richar Ryscavage, “Introduction” in *And You Welcomed Me*, eds. Donald Kerwin and Jill Marie Gerschutz (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), ix.

arises when migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers are identified principally and primarily in terms of their political status rather than their human identity.”⁷² We need to look at them beyond their labelled status and to their identity as our sisters and brothers. We faithful especially should know that the “Church does not ask first whether a person is legal or illegal but rather looks at the migrant as a human person in a human family.”⁷³ Secondly, we need to understand that “The faith that guides our view of migration has deep biblical roots beginning with God’s call to Abraham, our father in faith, to abandon his homeland and migrate.”⁷⁴ The biblical roots of migration can lead the faithful to see migration and displacement in a responsible way. Tisha Rajendra asks the necessary fundamental questions: “What responsibilities do citizens have toward migrants and potential migrants? What is the basis of such responsibilities?”⁷⁵ In Scripture a definitive answer can be found. Nevertheless scripture gives an explicit command to treat migrants with hospitality. “Any responsible use of the Bible must acknowledge that it comes from a culture completely different from that of modern western society ... Further, it must be acknowledged that the Bible says nothing about many modern problems ... This does not mean that the Bible cannot be used to address modern issues. It does mean that ... Against all the odds, the Bible can bring light and hope into a world still darkened by so much ignorance and inhumanity.”⁷⁶

In this chapter I reflect on a biblical perspective of migration, conflicts, and displacement. I will argue that through a biblical perspective we can theologically shape and form a humane

⁷² Groody, “Crossing the Divide,” 3.

⁷³ Biondo, and Ryscavage, “Introduction” x.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Tisha M. Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 6.

⁷⁶ Fleur S. Houston, *You Shall Love the Stranger as Yourself: The Bible, Refugees, and Asylum* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

approach to receiving migrants. I ask, what is the role of God and what is God communicating to us in the examples of people on the move that Scripture and theological reflection offer? The life stories of Jesus and Abraham are one of the models for migrants. What should be tribal Christian's attitude toward today's migrants? What does the Bible offer us with regard to the inhumane suffering as opposed to welcome that migrants experience? This chapter will suggest how all of us are migrants and so we should love one another as sisters and brothers.

To have a virtuous attitude toward migrants it is critically important to look at biblical texts. In the biblical texts there are more than several passages alluding to migration: "there are allusions to migration in the creation history, in the call of Abraham, in the exodus event, in the exile, in the wisdom literature and prophetic literature."⁷⁷ The confusion among the faithful toward migrants can be enlightened through the narratives of salvation history.

2.1 Theological vision of migration

As faithful we need to move beyond our social divisions and social differences. In "the *visio Dei* challenges people to move beyond an identity based on a narrow sense of national, racial, or psychological territoriality. It holds out instead the possibility of defining life on much more expansive spiritual terrain consistent with the kingdom of God."⁷⁸ There is a lot that we can learn from the Old Testament's key theological vision on migration as the joint Mexico/US bishops' conference reflect:

The key events in the history of the Chosen People of enslavement by the Egyptians and of liberation by God led to commandments regarding strangers (Ex 23:9; Lv 19:33). Israel's conduct with the stranger is both an imitation of God and the primary, specific Old Testament manifestation of the great commandment to love one's neighbor: "For the Lord, your God, is the . . . Lord of lords, the great God,

⁷⁷ Kattampally, "Biblical Perspective on Migration," 41.

⁷⁸ Groody, "Crossing the Divide," 17.

mighty and awesome, who has no favorites, accepts no bribes, who executes justice for the orphan and widow, and befriends the alien, feeding and clothing him. So you, too, must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt" (Dt 10:17-19). For the Israelites, these injunctions were not only personal exhortations: the welcome and care of the alien were structured into their gleaning and tithing laws (Lv 19:9-10; Dt 14:28-29).⁷⁹

Biblical ethics calls for concrete action to respond to the suffering of our brothers and sisters due to migration and displacement. In the Old Testament, whether under the category of "alien," "sojourner," "stranger," or "exile," migrants and displaced people emerge as subjects with clearly defined and rigorously sanctioned rights: "the biblical tradition puts the migrant and exile at the very center of concern."⁸⁰ Scripture offers the utmost care and concern for migrants and displaced people. Therefore, the faithful today ought to reflect that this care and concern mentioned in Scripture is not just a matter of the past, rather, it is a call for the faithful to respond with the same spirit of care and concern for migrants at the present moment. With that response there will be greater human flourishing. Christians are called to be aware of our mission toward our suffering brothers and sisters. I find that biblical narratives will play a significant role in imparting moral values. Looking at migration and displacement through the lens of biblical ethics provides a critical understanding of reality. Having viewed migration from a Christian perspective brings a new theological theme of Christian cosmopolitanism, "all persons are brothers and sisters in a single

⁷⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope." (Accessed January 22, 2003)

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm>

⁸⁰ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, "Justice for the Displaced," in *Driven from Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants*, ed. David Hollenbach (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 39.

human family no matter what their nationality or ethnicity. Every person has been created in the image and likeness of God.”⁸¹

2.2 You shall not oppress a resident alien (Exod 23:9)

In the Old Testament, Yahweh told the people of Israel to treat strangers with love and dignity. What does this mean for the faithful? “You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exod 23:9). Why does God ask us to remember our own roots of coming? Peter Phan rightly reminds us, “Always remember where you come from.”⁸² In the passage of time it can be easy to forget one’s own narratives of migration. To highlight what Phan has said, “for descendants of white immigrants who are not aware of their roots due to the passage of time...remember one’s past is an urgent ethical imperative lest forgetfulness of where they came from blunts their sense of solidarity with new immigrants.”⁸³ In the Old Testament the faithful are explicitly told, “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:33-34).

Why is it so important for migrants to remember the past? Migrants who left their home of origin may not find it a pleasant experience to recall. Whether they left voluntarily in search of a better life or were forced to leave their country of origin due to war or were internally displaced, such experiences are not pleasant things to recall. I would argue more importantly from the

⁸¹ David Hollenbach, “Migration as a Challenge for Theological Ethics,” *Political Theology* 12, no 6 (2011), 808.

⁸² Peter C. Phan, “Always Remember Where You Came From: An Ethics of Migrant Memory,” in *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migration of Peoples*, ed. Agnes M. Brazal and Maria Teresa Davila (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 173.

⁸³ Phan, “Always Remember Where You came From,” 174.

perspective of past narratives that, in the journey of migrants, though they might have gone through significant loss of family, friends, and culture, they must remember their suffering of the past in their new “host” country, and they must not forget the command of the Lord. There is a constant reminder to “not oppress a resident alien; ... for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exod 23.9). One’s experience of suffering can connect one to other people.

2.3 You shall also love the stranger (Deut 10:18)

What does it mean to love a stranger? Who is a stranger in Scripture? In Greek the word for stranger is *Xenos* which also means ‘alien’ or sojourner.’ In the New Testament it is used to describe the identity of a Christian as a stranger to the world.⁸⁴ There is a moral obligation to serve strangers with love and kindness. “For the Lord your God ... loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Dt 10:19). Sadly, migrants are often treated so badly that in the local leaders experience migrants life has no value. Migrants are in search of hope to live a dignified life, but their journey has often been perilous. If this modern age is called, “*The Age of Migration*,”⁸⁵ then we need to be aware of the signs of the times that instigate migration and the structures that oppress.

God has blessed people with an abundance of natural resources, yet today due to structural sin, these resources have been distributed unjustly among people. Structural greed and its lack of sharing the common good has divided people into “have’s” and “have not’s.” It has also forced people to migrate from one place to another. In addition, lack of jobs, violence, and poor infrastructure development have added to people’s migration. There is unjust treatment of people

⁸⁴ Kattampally, “Biblical Perspective on Migration,” 46.

⁸⁵ David Hollenbach, “A Future Beyond Borders: Reimagining the Nation-State and the Church,” in *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migration of People*, ed. Agnes M. Brazal and Maria T. Davila (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 223.

based on their race, social status, and geographic cultural origin. For many, structural sin is invisible. Through migration God directly speaks to us in Deuteronomy 1:16: “Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien.” On the journey of hope God invites us to love one another. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus says, “I was a stranger and you received me in your home. I was sick and you took care of me” (Mt 25:35-36). This identification with the vulnerable is a clear statement that caring and receiving the stranger is an essential mission of the faithful believers. We need to be aware of false narratives surrounding migrants. As migrants are often portrayed as dangerous, this portrayal becomes a part of the structure of narrative surrounding them. Rajendra argues that a false narrative of migration is a social sin and it lessens citizens’ responsibility toward migrants. Therefore, accurate narratives are critical to resisting social sin.⁸⁶

Given the current problems of conflict, displacement, and migration, the Old Testament and the New Testament give us a perfect message for offering hospitality and protection to our migrant brothers and sisters. Both testaments tell us to love and protect migrants, to bring peace and harmony. The crises of migration and displacement are taking place in the world partially because of a lack of awareness of these emphases within biblical ethics. It is important to contextualize the Old Testament narratives so that people know that God cares for everybody. Christians’s sense of biblical ethics should derive from the love of God. This love will give the people a different perspective on migrants, that is, from the perspective of God: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and

⁸⁶ Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens*, 56.

takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing” (Deut 10:17 -18).

In the New Testament the image of the Holy Family offers a beautiful example to see the presence of God in suffering people. Pope Pius XII in *Exsul Familia*, Apostolic Constitution, August 1, 1952, a document on migration, made a link between present migration issues and the exile of the Holy Family:

The Émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, living in exile in Egypt to escape the fury of an evil king, are all times and all places, the models and proctors of every migrant, alien, and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil.⁸⁷

In the Gospels of Luke and Matthew the image of Jesus’ birth and the life of Mary and Joseph are similar to the current-day tragedy of displacement. Christ’s migration experience not only takes place during his infancy but is extended to his later life. Throughout his life journey and till death, “Jesus begins his earthly journey as a migrant and a displaced person.”⁸⁸ In the present context, Christ’s migration event continues to shape our theological understanding of the present day forced migration and displaced people. The present day theological understanding of migration and displacement can be linked to the biblical foundation by analyzing the life of Christ. First, by the “itinerant nature of his public ministry,” Jesus journeyed from one place to the other and He experienced all kinds of hardships. Second, by “Jesus’ special concern for vulnerable women and men who have been displaced to the unstable margins of society, religion, and politics.” To them

⁸⁷ *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*: Apostolic Constitution, (accessed Feb 20, 2017) <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius12/p12exsul.htm>

⁸⁸ Agbonkhianmeghe, “Justice for the Displaced,” 41.

Jesus constantly showed love and mercy. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan (LK 10:29) Jesus was asked by a lawyer, “who is my neighbor?” Jesus offered a new definition of the neighbors as the one who treats the “stranger” in need. Third, by incarnation, Jesus is actively present with those migrants and displaced people. It is God who has “pitched a tent with the refugees. God weeps when they weep, feels pain when they feel pain. God is with them.”⁸⁹ These concerns of Jesus and his life give a New Testament biblical foundation to a theological understanding of migration and displacement. As displacement and migration connect with biblical foundations, there should be concrete actions to respond to the plight of displaced and migrant people. Jesuit Fr. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator writes, “from a theological perspective, today’s crisis of refugees and displaced people cannot be taken simply as a historical continuation of earlier biblical occurrences unmodified except in intensity.”⁹⁰ Migration and displacement today is complex and needs the urgent attention of the Church. The Church in its pilgrim nature as a community can help people to see oneness in the Lord. It is important to note that “the approach of the Church to migration has increasingly emphasized its ecclesiological basis: migrants are viewed as icons of the Church, which is the people of God and the community of disciples at the service of the Kingdom.”⁹¹ The migrants and displaced people are part of salvation history. Their suffering cannot be excluded because Christ came to liberate those who are marginalized and suffering.

2.4 I was a stranger and you welcomed Me (Mt 25:35)

In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus says, “I was a stranger and you received me in your home. I was sick and you took care of me” (Mt 25:35-36). Again, Jesus offers a clear statement that caring

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁹¹ Ibid., 43.

and receiving the stranger is an essential mission of the faithful believers. Christ is present in such situations.

Christians should understand migrants from the Catholic traditional perspective, where “migrants occupy a place of almost unique reverence. They evoke our Judeo-Christian heritage, image our God, serve as a metaphor for the human condition, allow the Church to realize its mission on earth and provide a means for conversion and a measure by which our lives will be judged.”⁹² Christians in the world should note that the “Catholic Church identifies with migrants in its own history and experience.”⁹³ The journey of Abraham to the Promised Land is a clear example of God who is directing the journey. God told Abraham, “go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you” (Gn 12:1). His journey to the Promised Land wasn’t easy yet he moved on until he reached the final destination. In addition, the Israelites, the chosen people, went through hardships such as defeat, slavery, and persecution, and from “this experience they gained empathy for migrants.” Thus, they and we are reminded, “You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exod 23:9) As people migrate to different places, the image of the Holy Family and their flight from King Herod’s designs gives a powerful image to protecting migrants. At “all times and places [the Holy Family are] the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear or persecution or by want, is forced to leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil.”⁹⁴ The image of the Holy Family should not be forgotten in the midst of migration and displacement. It

⁹² Donald Kerwin, “Catholic Social Teaching on Migration on the 40th Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 1, no. 1 (2004), 129.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*: Apostolic Constitution. Pope Pius XII.

is clear that the Church looks at migrants from a faith perspective. Further “the Church considers the problem of illegal migrants from the standpoint of Christ, who died to gather together the dispersed children of God, to rehabilitate the marginalized and to bring close those who are distant, in order to integrate all within a communion that is not based on ethnic, cultural or social membership.”⁹⁵

Migrants need to be treated with dignity and respect. St. Paul says, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12). Christians should understand that the Church is the body of Christ and each of us is part of the Church. It is important to remember too that, as the body of Christ, the Church identifies itself with the marginalized, poor and suffering migrants. Any exclusion of suffering migrants from being part of the Church is sinful and goes against the part of Christ’s body. It is suffering people with whom Christ identified, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35). This is a strong point for Christian’s to remember: being disciples of Christ means to identify and love the needy as well as to welcome with a generous heart those who are suffering and looking for shelter. As migration continues to increase over the years, there should be serious consideration given to making migration an opportunity to build a better human family. It is a call for the members of the Church to recognize Jesus in those who suffer exclusion on account of their status as migrants.

2.5 Jesus as a migrant

⁹⁵ Ibid., 131.

We know that while the “history of Israel is rooted in migration, as noted above, a similar case can be made for Jesus and the early Christian community.”⁹⁶ Jesus’ origin in both Matthew’s and Luke’s gospels is shown as a displaced person. Jesus as a displaced person gives us insight to reflect on how our faith binds us to him. Our relationship with Jesus should help us to ponder our relationship with our suffering brothers and sisters. “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20). In the Gospel of Luke the birth of Jesus took place “when his parents must return to their ancestral home for a census ... Jesus was born on the road and in Matthew’s Gospel the origins of Jesus are even more radically affected by the experience of migration.”⁹⁷ His migration narrative can be seen again after his birth. Joseph is warned in a dream to take Mary and the child to Egypt in order to avoid the violence intended by Herod in Bethlehem. (Matthew 2: 13- 23) This is the same Jesus “who began his earthly journey as a migrant and displaced ... Who identified himself with the “least” and gave hospitality to the stranger”⁹⁸ (Matthew 25:35). Through his own migration experience Jesus advises us to be compassionate toward migrants. Through the Gospels we know that Jesus is an “itinerant preacher” and we hear Jesus saying “the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Luke 9:58); he leaves behind his “family, land and possessions” (Mk 10:28-31).⁹⁹ On the other hand, “Mary and Joseph are presented by Saint Luke as vulnerable migrants in need of shelter and hospitality. Our Lord is born far from home, on a journey.”¹⁰⁰ Migrant and itinerant Lord, does He teach and

⁹⁶ Donald Senior, “Beloved Aliens and Exiles: New Testament Perspectives on Migration,” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration*, eds. Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 22.

⁹⁷ Senior, “Beloved Aliens and Exiles,” 23.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Deirdre Cornell, *Jesus Was a Migrant* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 24.

provide us something? There is no doubt about the strength and consolation that we have received in our life journey from Christ. Therefore, our faith and love for Christ needs to be expressed through our actions and relationships with migrants. Pope Francis rightly mentions in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* that “an authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it... The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters.”¹⁰¹ The words of the Pope are grounded in the God of Exodus, who hears the cry of the poor and of Jesus Christ. God and Jesus are united through the Spirit and it is the same God who is sensitive to the suffering people. It is an important reminder that those who love and believe this liberator God ought to realize that each one has a mission to love our brothers and sisters who are prevented from living with freedom, dignity, and peace.¹⁰² It is important to reflect on an authentic faith that calls us to see reality through the lens of Christ. When reflecting on such questions, we should not forget the faith and relationship with Christ. Christ who is the center of our lives, invites us to have compassion and love for the marginalized people.

2.6 Image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27)

One of the problems that exists with regard to the immigration debate is an issue of language. As migrants are labeled “refugee, migrant, forced migrant, immigrant, undocumented, internally displaced person and alien,”¹⁰³ the terminology creates a great division between them and “those who belong.” Such labeling harms their human identity. Labeling is a political and social construction which does not clarify human identity, but rather, as Roger Zetter argues, “Far

¹⁰¹ Pope Francis, *Apostolic exhortation: Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 183.

¹⁰² Alexandre Andrade Martins, “Immigration and Vulnerable Bodies: Migrants and Health Risks in Brazil,” in *Living With(out) Borders: Catholic theological Ethics on the Migration of Peoples*, ed. Agnes M. Brazal and Maria T. Davila (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 95.

¹⁰³ Groody, “Crossing the Divide,” 3.

from clarifying an identity, the label conveys, instead, an extremely complex set of values, and judgments which are more than just definitional.”¹⁰⁴ The problem with labeling is that it creates a harmful relationship. It leaves migrants and immigrants to control, manipulation, and exploitation. To avoid control, manipulation, and exploitation, I would argue that human beings can go beyond this labeling. Our very connection with others can be found in Genesis 1:27, “God created humans in His own image, in the image of God he created them.” When human beings are defined based on image of God, this gives a new understanding. “*Imago Dei* names the personal and relational nature of human existence and the mystery that human life cannot be understood apart from the mystery of God.”¹⁰⁵ *Imago Dei* gives a basic foundation to see other humans from a dignified perspective. Lisa Sowle Cahill points out that the image of God is “the primary Christian category of symbols of interpretation of personal value.”¹⁰⁶ Each human being is valuable and calling migrants “aliens” dehumanizes them and sins against the image of God. Looking at the human person from the roots of *Imago Dei* offers a new understanding which cannot be found in a socially and politically defined human person.

Groody argues that “the image bearers of God” must be taken into account when dealing with migrants. In agreement with Zetter, Groody recognizes that the political label on migrants invites discrimination by host communities. Groody responds to the language problem which causes discrimination. Groody “brings the doctrine of creation” to tackle the issue. “He claims that human beings are created in the image of God”¹⁰⁷ (Gn 1:26-27).

¹⁰⁴ Roger Zetter, “Labeling Refugees: The Forming and Transforming of a Bureaucratic Identity,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 4 (1991), 40.

¹⁰⁵ Groody, “Crossing the Divide,” 4.

¹⁰⁶ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Toward a Christian Theory of Human Rights,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 8 (1980), full pg#s at 279.

¹⁰⁷ Groody, “Crossing the Deivide,” 4. Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi, “Migration crisis and Christian Response: From Daniel De Groody’s Image of God Theological Prism in Migration Theology

Groody proposes that any and every host country should look at migrants from an *imago Dei* perspective. When migrants are recognized as created in the image of God, the image counteracts and challenges being labeled or categorized by their political status. As Groody states, “the perception of migrants as primarily ‘lawbreakers, aliens or criminals’ is dangerous because it will make the suffering of migrants have no claim to the hosting nations or local communities.”¹⁰⁸ The realization of such a perception is important to see how migrants have been suffering from denigrating categorization and labeling. Host nations and local communities must recognize that migrants are created in the image of God. Their God-given identity needs to be protected by the local communities and the host nations. Groody’s idea of reinforcing the doctrine of *imago Dei* is crucial to change the attitude of local communities toward migrants. In addition, “the use of *imago Dei* as the primary principle in perceiving migrants is crucial in making the native communities of hosting nations to cease exploitation and racial discrimination.”¹⁰⁹ This principle will help local communities to perceive migrants with equal status having the same dignity given by God. As Miguel De La Torre argues, “God has created human beings with the ability to enter into relationship with one another and to love one another... Human beings were fashioned to portray the character or attributes of God who has love as the essence of his being in the ontological trinity.”¹¹⁰ De La Torre’s moral, spiritual, and rational aspects of the image of God brings explicit understanding of our relationship to God and others:

Unlike the rest of creation, these humans exist in relationship to God, to creation and to one another. It is these reciprocal relations that define humans, as such

to a Migration Practical Theology Ministerial Approach and Operative Ecclesiology,” in *HTS Teologiese Studies* 74, no.1 (2018), 3.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi, “Migration crisis and Christian Response: From Daniel De Groody’s Image of God Theological Prism in Migration Theology to a Migration Practical Theology Ministerial Approach and Operative Ecclesiology,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 74, no.1 (2018), 3.

¹¹⁰ Miguel De La Torre, *Genesis: Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 24.

relationships provide opportunities for self-realization. To be in right relationship is to be in right relationship with creation and other people. To be human in image of God is to be also for others. If God is love, whose very essence expresses concern for others, then to be created in the image of God means that humans are products of love expressed as being for others... Being for others becomes possible as we become conscious of others. But when we cut ourselves off from the vast majority of humanity, which happens to be marginalized and disenfranchised, refusing to hear their cry or see their condition, we cease being for others.¹¹¹

2.7 Love one another (John 13:34)

What responsibility does each one have as a faithful believer? The problems of displacement, violence, and migration are issues that need to be understood critically in order to bring harmony and peace to the community. What is God asking of us? Without love for each other there will not be any peaceful solution. We know that “the theology of Christian love developed by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas affirms a Christian duty to love all humans as our neighbors.”¹¹² In scripture we read, "Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (Isaiah 58:7). Isaiah brings up the act of kindness for genuine worshipers. It also shows what it means to be a disciple. To be a disciple is to practice kindness toward those who are hungry, homeless, and poor.

In today’s world, finding Christ among our suffering brothers and sisters is a challenge. As Pope Francis in his homily at Lampedusa put in:

the culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of the other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are unsubstantial they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Hollenbach, “Migration as a Challenge for Theological Ethics,” 810.

used to the suffering of others: it doesn't affect me; it doesn't concern me; it is none of my business!¹¹³

This “globalization of indifference” is taking place throughout the world. There is violence because of a failure to listen to each other. As a result, migration and displacement continue to rise. Unless people welcome others with love and dignity, there will be no change to the present reality. It is through love and mercy that the “globalization of indifference” can be counteracted. The lack of peaceful coexistence results because Christians fail to follow Christ authentically in the mission of the Church.

The Matthew's first discourse of Jesus begins with the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-12) and, his last discourse with the final judgment (Mt 25:34-46). In the final judgment, as we know from Jesus as corporal and spiritual works of mercy, “a generous gift which one offers to the other and is beneficial to other ... Jesus was emphasizing the need of having such attitudes in the life of his followers.”¹¹⁴ Migrants need help and, as followers of Christ, it is help with love that makes one a true disciple. “Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17-17). We should respond to migrants with this reality in mind.

As chapter one illustrates, there is a lack of love and mercy toward migrants and displaced people. Mercy heals the wounds of the broken relationships with migrants. In other words, “mercy is a key Christian virtue that, among other things, recognizes the value of allowing one's heart to

¹¹³ Francis, “Visit to Lampedusa: Homily of Holy Father Francis,” (accessed July 3, 2013) http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html

¹¹⁴ Kattampally, “Biblical Perspective on Migration,” 47.

be touched by the plight of the vulnerable, the poor, and the suffering.”¹¹⁵ That mercy embodies love was the main message of Jesus, too. As the world is wounded by migration, there is need of mercy. Those who practice mercy will be rewarded in the final judgment. As they take care of marginalized people they will inherit the kingdom of God for their mercy.¹¹⁶ (Mt 25:34)

I wonder how many are encouraged to practice mercy today. Are people aware that they would be rewarded for the practice of mercy from God? Given the complexity of the situation and filled with conflicts, we need mercy to heal broken relationships. Let us be aware that “the God who was faithful in his promise to the Israelites will be faithful in fulfilling the promise given to all those who practice acts of mercy to strangers.”¹¹⁷ Given today’s migration situation, now is the right time to practice the virtue of mercy in order to inherit the Kingdom of God. Mercy would lead to hospitality and finally to responsibility in our actions. As noted above, it is clear that when an expert in the law asked Jesus, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25-28). Jesus affirms the great commandment and tells us to do likewise to live.

Pope Francis appeals for “a culture of mercy” to uplift people who have been through difficult times due to migration. He rightly calls us to open our hearts to our suffering brothers and sisters. He calls us to do something substantial in order to lift up migrants.¹¹⁸ His call to “weep for these migrants is a powerful call to include migrants in the responsibilities that bind people together in society.”¹¹⁹ What is God reminding us in the midst of conflicts, displacement, and migration? Humans are relational beings. The Christian vision shows that “There is no longer Jew

¹¹⁵ Thomas Massaro, *Mercy in Action: The Social Teachings of Pope Francis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 119.

¹¹⁶ Kattampally, “Biblical Perspective on Migration,” 48.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹⁸ Massaro, *Mercy in Action*, 120.

¹¹⁹ Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens*, 25.

or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female... all are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). We are all one before God. God is against any “racial superiority, national and cultural boundaries.”¹²⁰ How do we give love, respect, and dignity to our suffering brothers and sisters? It is time to bring justice to migrants. Very often their basic rights have been denied. Their inhuman suffering needs to be heard to bring healing in the world in a crisis of migration.

Justice in the Hebrew Bible provides insights to reflect a deeper introspection on our relationship with each other. Rajendra points out that in the Hebrew Bible, “Justice is defined not in terms of abstract norms but in relational categories.”¹²¹ The Hebrew Bible offers us the relational meaning of justice as the key factor to tackle the cause of migration. Looking at justice from a relational perspective would foster equality and oneness before God: “Love one another, as I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). Loving one another can take place when there is relationship. The biblical justice centered on relationship is crucial at this time of widespread migration. Thus, viewing justice from a relational perspective helps to realize that justice is not a “set of abstract norms,” but is fidelity to the demands of relationships.

I would argue that to realize justice through relationships we need to be aware of the past narratives of migrants. For example, in the narrative of the guest-worker programs which took place in Germany, “guest-workers were considered “a disposable commodity without social reproduction and education costs.”¹²² To commodify migrants with the perspective of only their instrumental purpose goes against their dignity as human being *imago Dei*. Failure to acknowledge their contributions to the economy is unjust and sinful. Further, colonial migration systems which

¹²⁰ Senior, “Beloved Aliens and Exiles,” 32.

¹²¹ Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens*, 93.

¹²² Christian Joppke, *Immigration and the Nation-State: The United States, Germany, and Great Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 65.

took place in the past need to be seen as “structural injustice” to respond justly to the past.¹²³ What is important in migrants’ narratives is to analyze them critically for a thorough understanding. Knowing the past narrative of migrants will help us to understand their experiences and, in the process, will help us to avoid a false “outsiders” narrative. The false narrative can condition our views of them. As Rajendra notes, “relationship of the past can have an impact on the relationship of the present, circumscribing our choices.”¹²⁴ Rajendra argues that “injustice in relationships is a result of not having a better narrative that includes the ambiguities and tragedies of this history.”¹²⁵ Unless false narratives such as “migrants are dangerous” are corrected in host countries’ perceptions, the challenge to love migrants genuinely will continue.

In the Bible migration is an important theme which addresses the plight of strangers. But more importantly God invites us to love one another. Loving the neighbor implies that we love “those most distant to one’s world, those foreign to it ... those closest to it. In biblical terms being and loving neighbor simply means to make friends.”¹²⁶ In the Gospel Jesus rightly states, “I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my father,”¹²⁷ (John 15:15).

Conclusion

Can Christians provide a new understanding of migration and displacement inspired by the insights from the Old Testament and New Testament? The biblical perspective on migration and

¹²³ Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens*, 59.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹²⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, “Poverty Migration, and the Option for the Poor,” in *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspective on Migration*, eds. Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 83.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

displacement would help Christians to better understand the suffering and needs of migrants. Many Christians are unaware of the scriptural interpretation of migration and so migrants are perceived as outsiders and aliens. I argue that “migrants should be met with a hospitable and welcoming attitude, which can encourage them to become part of the Church's life, always with due regard for their freedom and their specific cultural identity.”¹²⁸ Migrants in northeast India and elsewhere need to be served with love and care and their rights to freedom of movement should be respected. The local tribal and church leaders should take the spirit of service in order to bring harmony and peace in the region. Migration, conflict, and displacement in northeast can be brought to solution by allowing the gospel values to shape the minds and hearts of people. The right interpretation of migration will help the faithful to see migrants from the perspective of Christian faith. In the process, “the Kingdom of God will be built” through peace and harmony in the world. Viewing migrants from the faith perspective will also shape a right attitude and encourage right relationship. Christians should know that “loving one’s neighbor also implies not just a change in behavior, but a change in attitude, as well. To love someone is to respect and to trust them, to care and feel compassion for them, and to open oneself up to them.”¹²⁹ Jesus says, “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you” (Jn 15:12). Imagine withholding love, kindness, charity for others and claiming to be followers of Christ. How will the faithful call themselves Christians if they are not kind and loving to one another? When there is trust, love, and openness among people then there will be unity, peace, and harmony. This unity, peace, and harmony would promote strong stability in the world. As Christians let our service to our suffering brothers and sisters not be only

¹²⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope.”

¹²⁹ Moses L. Pava, “Loving the Stranger and the Moral Myopia at Agriprocessors,” in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration*, eds. Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 133.

a “material solidarity.” As Anthony Rogers, argues, “It has to flow from our inner spiritual renewal and our self-identity as Christians who want to find concrete expression for our personal and collective love of our neighbors with our whole minds, heart, will, and strength.”¹³⁰ Let us not forget the words “You shall love the stranger as yourself” as we serve our suffering brothers and sisters in the world. Phan encourages us, “When we welcome, protect, and love the foreigners, the strangers, and migrants among us, we not only welcome, protect, and love them as we embrace, protect, and love ourselves, but also welcome, protect, and love ourselves in and through them.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Anthony Rogers, “Globalizing Solidarity Through Faith Encounters in Asia,” in *Faith on The Move: Toward a Theology of Migration in Asia*, eds. Fabio Baggio and Agnes M. Brazal (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2008), 206.

¹³¹ Peter C. Phan, “*Deus Migrator* – God the Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration,” In *Theological studies* 77, no. 4 (2016), 866.

Chapter Three: An Ethical Perspective

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present Catholic Social Teaching and virtues in light of migration, conflict, and displacement and in the process to help NER tribals become more grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and virtues, so they can analyse and understand their situation critically. Such understanding will provide a peaceful atmosphere for new development. The complex issues of migration, conflict, and displacement in NER present challenges, such as ethical issues, political instability, economic inequality, health threats, and lack of education. As a result, a large number of people are either displaced or have migrated. The question arises: what approach should we take in addressing these issues which place many migrants in vulnerable situations? How do we restore the moral values of tribals? “Tribal people are in general simple, sincere, truthful, happy, jovial, hardworking ... hospitable, generous, independent and carefree, social, egalitarian, men of few words, and peace loving.”¹³² In existing issues in NER the moral values of tribals need to be formed and promoted once again to resolve migration, conflict, and displacement challenges. It is important to recognize that “nobody should be cut off from benefitting from our common inheritance of nature, which includes the very land we inhabit and which provides an abundance of essential food for everyone.”¹³³ There is a challenge of belongingness and mercy. This chapter addresses CST, the responsible self, interreligious dialogue, the common good, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor. These elements would certainly shape the minds and hearts of the people. In addition, Catholic educational

¹³² Songram Basumatary, *Ethnicity and Tribal Theology: Problems and Prospects for Peaceful Co-existence in Northeast India* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2014), 243.

¹³³ Thomas Massaro, *Mercy in Action: The Social Teaching of Pope Francis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 37.

institutions and local churches can play an active role in promoting peace and unity by putting CST principles into action.

3.1 Catholic Social Thought

In NER the violence done to migrants can be reconstructed by following Catholic Social Teaching. Catholic Social Teaching can shape the minds and hearts of people. It can restore the lost values of tribals. George M. Soares Prabhu argues that “their culture, which can broadly be described as ‘tribal,’ includes extraordinary values of solidarity with nature, egalitarianism, a non-competitive collaboration with one another, and a filial (not mercantile) relationship with the land, which offer a valuable alternative to the rampant individualism, unchecked greed, aggressive competitiveness, and growing alienation from nature which is leading the post-modern world to nuclear and ecological disaster.”¹³⁴

From the Catholic traditional perspective, “migrants occupy a place of almost unique reverence. They evoke our Judeo-Christian heritage, image our God, serve as a metaphor for the human condition, allow the Church to realize its mission on earth and provide a means for conversion and a measure by which our lives will be judged.”¹³⁵ To be disciples of Christ means to love the needy as well as to welcome with a generous heart those who are suffering and looking for shelter. As migrations continue to increase over the years, there should be serious consideration of making migration an opportunity to build a better human family. It is a call for the members of the Church to recognize Jesus in suffering people. It is clear that “the Church considers the problem of illegal migrants from the standpoint of Christ, who died to gather together the dispersed children

¹³⁴ As cited in Basumatary, *Ethnicity and Tribal Theology*, 243.

¹³⁵ Donald Kerwin, “Catholic Social Teaching on Migration on the 40th Anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 1, no. 1 (2004), 129.

of God, to rehabilitate the marginalized and to bring close those who are distant, in order to integrate all within a communion that is not based on ethnic, cultural or social membership.”¹³⁶

Catholic Social Teaching looks at human beings beyond borders. Regardless of race, country, and culture, it welcomes everyone as brothers and sisters. It promotes mercy as a key element. In Christian faith “mercy is a key Christian virtue that, among other things, recognizes the value of allowing one’s heart to be touched by the plight of the vulnerable, the poor, and the suffering.”¹³⁷

Given the violence and conflict in northeast India, driven by local tribes and migrants, Catholic Social Teaching could play an important role in bringing peace and harmony. Migrants who come from Bangladesh are not rich. They are in search of a better life and have been facing poverty, discrimination, and persecution. Their suffering must not be taken for granted or politicized. Politicizing the migrants’ issues has brought lots of conflict among local tribes and Muslim migrants. As a result, local tribes have left their own homes and been forced to move to other parts of India, adding to the numbers of and the reasons to migrate.

The northeast tribe members who migrate to big Indian cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore often face discrimination in jobs, racism, and culture. Similarly, those Bangladeshi migrants also go through all kind of discrimination. Both NER and Bangladeshi migrants are identified as economic migrants, forced migrants, refugees, displaced people, and homeless people. When they are identified principally with those names rather than as fellow human beings there is violation of their individual human dignity. Human dignity is a critically important element of personhood. Thus, “migrants are humans made in the image of God. Regardless of their

¹³⁶ Ibid., 131.

¹³⁷ Massaro, *Mercy in Action*, 119.

citizenship, their legal status, or their ethnicity, every person is a child of God who bears the image of Christ.”¹³⁸ The most painful experience for migrants is when they are treated not as human beings but like animals. Therefore, recognizing every person as made in *Imago Dei*, one cannot overlook their human dignity. Each person is created in the image and likeness of God and this image and likeness “gives them an inherent and un-deconstructable human dignity.”¹³⁹ It is therefore a sinful act to not recognize migrants’ human dignity. Catholic Social Teaching makes people aware to have concern for migrants.

Today, globalization has made it possible for things to move easily from one border to the other. It is easy to supply goods to other places, but when it comes to human beings there is a restriction and exclusion of movement from crossing borders. I myself have witnessed how at the border of India and Bangladesh, goods can be easily sent across countries, but human beings are banned from fleeing to a safe place. We have increased the building of physical walls and we have also built walls in our hearts to keep people away. Building walls in our hearts to keep people away is a painful reality. In the process, human interrelatedness is lost, “we have lost a sense of our own human dignity and our interconnected nature as human beings, and as *Imago Dei*.”¹⁴⁰ The spirit of solidarity, which Catholic Social Teaching promotes, offers an important role in forming the lives of the people. In reality “Most migrants who cross a border without proper documentation are not simply breaking civil laws but are obeying the laws of human nature, such as the need to find work in order to feed their families and attain more dignified lives.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, the Bangladeshi

¹³⁸ Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens*, 13.

¹³⁹ Jennifer B. Saunders, *Intersections of Religion and Migration: Issues at the Global Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 230.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 233.

migrants who came to northeast India are to be accommodated well because they have fled their homeland for safety and dignity.

Pope Francis has been very vocal about economic injustice, labor problems, environmental issues, good family life, migrants, and peacemaking. Thomas Massaro argues that Pope Francis has made a significant contribution to Catholic Social Teaching by giving special attention to “people suffering the effects of inequality, poverty, unemployment, and low wages in the global economic system.”¹⁴² We know that Pope Francis is serious and has deep concern about the suffering of the people due to economic injustice. He is “challenging economic leaders to be more honest about the distributive consequences of how markets function.”¹⁴³ Pope Francis’s statement is a challenge to the leaders of every nation. His vision is a fine example of helping each one to “benefit from our common inheritance of nature, which includes the very land we inhabit and which provides an abundance of essential food for everyone.”¹⁴⁴

The problem of labor injustice has been a serious issue in many parts of the world. Many are exploited and as a result there is violation of human dignity. Pope Francis calls for the mission of giving dignity to people. Without work there is no dignity but Pope Francis is concerned that work places are “devoid of ethics” and “money is in command.”¹⁴⁵ Massaro explicitly argues that Pope Francis is clear that to be human and Christian is to treat people with equality and dignity. Pope Francis hopes that “they (youths and world leaders alike) also reject inhuman economic models which create new forms of poverty and marginalize workers.”¹⁴⁶ Inhuman treatment of

¹⁴² Massaro, *Mercy in Action*, 23.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

workers cannot be justified and Pope Francis's steps to eliminate labor injustice are inspiring. Most migrants are denied proper work. And migrant families go through many challenges. Family is an important institution for growth to be better human beings and, in fact, "it is in the context of family life that we encounter God, experience the loving offer of salvation, and respond to human and divine love in a life of committed discipleship."¹⁴⁷

In northeast India violence due to migrants can be reconstructed by Catholic Social Teaching, which can offer virtues to the local tribal community for discernment on migration, conflict, and displacement. The people of northeast India face a violation of human rights and justice as they move and settle in new places. The Tribal Christian leaders should oppose "all forms of violation of the fundamental rights and dignity of the human person."¹⁴⁸ This opposition to indignity is a concrete step toward the restoration of reforming unjust social structures. In the process it will restore communitarianism. Songram Basumatary argues that "It is believed that traditionally tribals are born in community, live in community, work in community and die for community. The tribal life and their religions are rooted in such community-centeredness."¹⁴⁹ But today, such a wonderful tradition has been lost in many of the tribal communities.

Catholic Social Teaching offers new insights for working toward a solution for displaced people by rethinking the issues of displacement and migration due to violence. Catholic Social Teaching goes beyond care and concern of displaced people in general and "emphasizes the necessity of a global ethical framework that prioritizes solidarity and justice" to address the issue of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 99.

¹⁴⁸ Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, "Justice for the Displaced," in *Driven from Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants*, ed. David Hollenbach (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 44.

¹⁴⁹ Basumatary, *Ethnicity and Tribal Theology*, 239.

displacement and migration.¹⁵⁰ The tribals should see the Muslim migrants as connected members of one human family. Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, a Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, rightly says, “In our interconnected world, we are linked with all the displaced people by our common humanity and by the realization that the globalization of justice and solidarity is the best guarantee for peace and a common future.”¹⁵¹ It is true, when such ethical imperatives are not taken into consideration then there is a danger to the fundamental rights of Tribals and Muslim migrants in northeast India.

Catholic Social Teaching argues “that rights to emigrate and migrate are fundamental to human persons.”¹⁵² The pastoral letter issued by the bishops of the United States and Mexico presents a clear message of Catholic Social Teaching on migrants. Though the Church does not deny the right of a sovereign state to control its borders, it does emphasize the right of human persons to migrate. Migrants in northeast India or other parts of the world should not have their right to migrate curtailed. From what is seen today, “in the current condition of the world, in which global poverty and persecution are rampant, the presumption is that persons must migrate in order to support and protect themselves.”¹⁵³ For reasons of the presumption, all nations need to receive migrants with generosity.

Catholic Social Teaching deals with very important aspects of human beings. First of all, it brings awareness of the dignity of human persons. It understands human persons as created in the image and likeness of God. From a Christian perspective humans are considered sacred and

¹⁵⁰ Orobator, “Justice for Displaced,” 44.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Vincent D. Rougeau, “Catholic Social Teaching and Global Migration: Bridging the Paradox of Universal Human Rights and Territorial Self-Determination,” *University Law Review* 32, no. 2 (Seattle: 2009), <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/sulr/vol32/iss2/6/>.

¹⁵³ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Pastoral letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States* (January 22, 2003), <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/immigration/strangers-no-longer-together-on-the-journey-of-hope.cfm>.

need community as part of their existence. In addition, CST gives importance to community where each individual is supported in the different aspects of life. On the other hand, it also promotes the common good to bring social justice in the community. The principles of Catholic Social Teaching such as human dignity, importance of community, and promotion of the common good all lead one step further to focus on the poor: needy and marginalized migrants. The preferential option for the poor comes into play when taking into account all the principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Therefore, when Tribal Christian leaders consider human dignity, life in community, and the common good, they must be particularly aware of the needs of the least powerful among displaced tribals and Muslim migrants in northeast India.

3.2 The Responsible Self

Catholic Social Teaching raises the conscience of people's sense of responsibility. India has a population of 1.3 billion people as well as "the 330 million gods Hinduism believes in."¹⁵⁴ What I have experienced living in India is that many Indians worship gods without being compassionate toward fellow human beings. One day I was travelling to the airport in Delhi. I called a taxi early in the morning and the driver played Hindu devotional songs on his radio, which is quite common among many Indians. In the traffic several beggars approached him for money, and I was surprised to see his rude behavior to them. This whole incident left me with a deep impression of a hypocritical way of worshiping God. How is it possible to love God and do injustice to one's fellow humans? I found myself becoming a bystander at that moment. I neither gave them anything nor said anything to the driver. I certainly knew that my silence was not right.

¹⁵⁴ Felix Wilfred, *Asian Public Theology: Critical Concerns in Challenging Times* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 294.

Keeping silent was an act of irresponsibility. In Proverbs it says, “Speak up for those who cannot speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”¹⁵⁵

My experiences with tribal people give me a sense of the lack of responsibility from Church and other political leaders. Many tribal leaders come under the category of “bystanders.” As a result, injustice continues in the region, especially against the migrants, and the unwillingness to address these issues remains a big challenge. As a result, there is conflict among the tribals. Most of the leaders refuse to serve the suffering people. This issue demands responsibility from bystanders to respond with a concrete action. H. Richard Niebuhr’s concept of responsibility - response, interpretation, accountability, and solidarity - gives insight into understanding responsibility in a clear way.¹⁵⁶ When response, interpretation, accountability, and solidarity do not take place while addressing the issue of racial discrimination, the whole notion of responsibility loses its meaning. Privileged bystanders should know that “response-ability refers to the ability to respond – to react in some way to the events, invitations and provocations of our world.”¹⁵⁷

We have been dealing with complex issues. India’s northeast region is faced with challenges such as political instability, economic inequality, and conflict. In such situations responsibility is needed to respond to those issues. We have lost the sense of belonging and togetherness. Given the complex problems in the NER we need to be responsible in order to address these existing problems. These kinds of problems emerge when there is lack of responsibility for oneself. Niebuhr defines responsibility “as the idea of an agent’s action as response to an action upon him in accordance with his interpretation of the latter action and with

¹⁵⁵ Proverbs 31:8-9.

¹⁵⁶ Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 63.

¹⁵⁷ Petruska Clarkson, *The Bystander: An End to Innocence in Human Relationships?* (London: Whurr Publisher, 1996), 12.

its expectation of response to his response; and all of this is in a continuing community of agents.”¹⁵⁸

Niebuhr presents the image of man as one who is to the answer because man enters into dialogue and acts and responds to others. Niebuhr goes beyond the image of man as maker and citizen.¹⁵⁹ Through the image of man as an answerer, I find there is some chance to respond to the problems of the NER. Though it may not be a complete answer, certainly from the perspective of responsibility we can address the problems to a certain degree. I would say that what makes good Christians is not just observing law or desiring to achieve the highest good but acquiring responsibility through following the example of Jesus or other responsible persons and living out a life genuinely with responsibility. Niebuhr’s concept of responsibility includes four aspects, namely responsibility, interpretation, accountability, and solidarity.¹⁶⁰ Applying these four aspects of responsibility to various problems would definitely help us to understand each situation and to engage it in a more concrete way. Niebuhr argues that to be a responsible person one needs to answer to reality: responsibility is not applied to abstract ideals but it is for our human relationality to respond to each other’s actions. Secondly, every action needs to be interpreted within its context. When action is reflected and interpreted properly, it helps us to understand ourselves and the reality around us better. Here Niebuhr stresses that the interpretation of action should be done with reference to God. Further, our actions have consequences and that is where accountability is discerned. The consequence of our actions is not just for the individual moral agent but for the larger context since we are relational beings and relationality calls for social solidarity. Analyzing

¹⁵⁸ Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 65.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

the concept of responsibility in this way gives us a sense of hope and a practical approach to deal with existing problems.

Niebuhr argues, “responsibility proceeds in every moment of decision and choice to ask: ‘what shall I do?’ by raising as the prior question: ‘What is going on?’ or ‘What is being done to me,”¹⁶¹ From this questioning, we can always find some fitting response to address the various issues. I am sure through a responsibility hermeneutic in our actions, we can move toward a proper understanding of the nature of human beings as created in *Imago Dei* and in relational.

3.3 Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Virtue Ethics

What is virtue? How does one know that he or she has virtue? How does one acquire it in life? According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of herself and himself” (CCC, no. 1803). Virtue does not come by itself from birth; it has to be practiced. According to Nicomachean ethics, moral virtue is formed by habit: “None of the moral virtues is implanted in us by nature, for nothing which exists by nature can be changed by habit.”¹⁶² Humans can change and transform themselves. They can always examine their actions based on moral conscience. Moral virtues can be acquired through performing just actions. Our repeated just actions promote virtues. The Nicomachean ethics suggest important points to keep in mind in just action, first of all, the moral agent “must know what he or she is doing; secondly, he/she must choose to act the way he/she does, and he/she must choose it for its own sake; and in the third place, the act must spring from a firm and unchangeable character”¹⁶³ (30). Through these points

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁶² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book Two, trans. Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 33.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 39.

certainly there is a way that moral values can be formed and practiced in our daily life. Thus, I find “virtue ethics is concerned with individual formation or what Christians might describe as the process of ongoing conversion.”¹⁶⁴ Similarly “Virtue ethics is teleological, developing a rich description of what constitutes a good human life... virtue ethics is concerned not merely with the shape of the *telos* itself, but equally with the questions of how a person’s dispositions, practices, and ways of life must be formed in order to lead to that goal.”¹⁶⁵ Since virtue ethics is teleological, it orients an individual person to move toward being. Through virtue ethics we discover what it means to be human in the course of a person’s lifetime. What makes virtuous and good Christians is not just observing principles but acquiring good habits through following the example of Jesus or other virtuous persons and living out a life genuinely. Given a complex NER virtues are needed to live a life that is morally fruitful.

3.3.1 Principle of Solidarity and Virtue

Solidarity is an important aspect for connecting people together. Solidarity leads to “commitment to the common good and participation by all.”¹⁶⁶ In India the disparity between rich and poor is high. The economically disadvantaged section of people needs the help of the socially and economically advantaged. Without solidarity these poor people will not advance. It is an essential element to bring people into unity. “Solidarity requires both a radical commitment to the dignity of each human person and the dignity of the one human family.”¹⁶⁷ Solidarity calls for a total commitment. Pope John Paul II said, “Solidarity is not a vague compassion but rather it is a

¹⁶⁴ Christopher P. Vogt, “Fostering A Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 68 (2007), 400.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁶⁶ Clarke E. Cochran, “The Common Good and Healthcare Policy,” *Health Progress* 80, no. 3 (1999): 41.

¹⁶⁷ Meghan J. Clark, “Anatomy of a Social Virtue: Solidarity and Corresponding Vices,” *Political Theology* 15, no. 1 (2014): 26 - 39.

firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of each and every individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”¹⁶⁸ An awareness of solidarity is needed in tribal society. The principle of solidarity not only applies to some wealthy people but it applies to all. Lisa Cahill argues that people living in developed nations have a responsibility to take care of people living in poor nations.¹⁶⁹ We are relational beings and we need each other for human flourishing. Solidarity as a virtue calls for the attentiveness and prompt response to those who are in need. Further, “solidarity has to do with understanding the interconnections that exist between oppression and privilege, between the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressors.”¹⁷⁰ Besides this awareness of the sinful state of the world, solidarity as a virtue demands the structural change to replace violence with the new loving society. In addition, “solidary demands that the restructure of society be reformed in such a way that this situation of interdependence is transformed into a morally positive relationship that respects the human dignity of all.”¹⁷¹

In today’s world, oppression is everywhere, both in developed and underdeveloped places. My experience in northeast India shows that exploitation such as oppression, discrimination, injustice, violation of human rights, and inequalities is happening frequently among the poor people and especially among those who are migrants, victims of conflict and displacement. The poor and marginalized people’s voice often goes unheard. For instance, in India the caste system is an inherent part of Indian culture. And very often people in the lower castes go through an

¹⁶⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html

¹⁶⁹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, “Global Health and Catholic Social Commitment,” *Health Progress* 88, no. 3 (2007): 55.

¹⁷⁰ Vogt, “Fostering a Catholic Commitment to the Common Good,” 402.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 403.

inhuman experience such as extreme poverty, malnutrition, lack of healthcare, education, and housing. It is truly horrifying to see them going through inhuman suffering for no reason. For example, women, because of the dowry system, face a good deal of social pressure from the patriarchal society. There are countless ethical issues. My concern is that the leaders of church and society view those problems as normal. Their faith and action are something to be reflected upon. I would argue that faith without action is morally wrong.

A liberationist perspective argues that

Solidarity as an activity engaged alongside the oppressed is inseparable from the idea of solidarity as a process of knowing. One does not first come to know the truth of solidarity and then act upon it, but rather one comes to know the true meaning of solidarity only by first acting. This liberationist insight is important for our understanding of solidarity as a virtue. It explains why we cannot understand solidarity to be exclusively intellectual; the process of coming to know how human beings should be interdependent cannot stand independently of acting alongside the vulnerable and developing feelings of concern for them.¹⁷²

The demands of solidarity may look unspecified in action and practices for many people but its social character is clear. Hollenbach argues “Solidarity is not only a virtue to be enacted by individual persons one at a time. It must be expressed in the economic, cultural, political and religious institutions that shape society. Solidarity is a virtue of communities as well as individuals.”¹⁷³ The problem in NER cannot be solved without solidarity. The Christians leaders need to be aware that overall development can take place through solidarity. Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio* states, “There can be no progress toward complete development of individuals without development of all humanity in the spirit of

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 404.

¹⁷³ David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 405.

solidarity.”¹⁷⁴ Pope John Paul II expressed a similar idea, “true development must be achieved within the framework of solidarity and freedom.”¹⁷⁵ I find this a very important insight for human flourishing of the tribals of NER.

3.3.2 Principle of the Common Good and Virtue

Cardinal Bernardin argues “The promotion of the common good does call for a change of focus, a change of emphasis, a change of direction, a change of attitudes and, most of all, a change of heart.”¹⁷⁶ In NER, migration, conflict, and displacement are major critical issues. If the government does not take serious consideration of these issues, then there can be serious consequences on the Indian economy due to a failure to resolve them. Such existing problems can be brought to solution through an exploration and application of the common good. For instance, people who are suffering due to migration, conflict, and displacement often face health issues. Health care facilities in India needs to be critically re-evaluated in light of the common good. Issues such as expensive health care, inequity, legal status undermine the health of poor people. Everyone has a right to live a dignified life. The right to health care is everyone’s right. We cannot tolerate disparities in access to health because of money. Concerning health everyone has the responsibility to look after each other. Regardless of religions, countries, origin, and race, we all suffer when there is disease. So no sort of institutional divisions, such as religion, race, or status, should block our human interconnectedness. We should find a way in which we all can promote good health care for everybody. Catholic bioethics argues that “Respect for the dignity of the human person is emphasized, especially in the face of contemporary threats to human life and

¹⁷⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 43, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html

¹⁷⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 26, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Bernardin, “Why Virtues Are Basic to the Common Goods,” *Origins* 23, no. 19 (1993), 339.

health even in healthcare situations. Nothing can lessen the intrinsic goodness and inviolability of human life; no personal or social benefit can justify its destruction or abandonment.”¹⁷⁷ Human life is important and everyone will agree that dignity of life matters for human flourishing. It is morally and ethically wrong not to help those who are suffering.

The common good runs against individualistic ethical thought. Paul VI and later the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) defines the common good is, “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”¹⁷⁸ We are interconnected and as relational beings it is the responsibility of everyone to promote equality and to ensure that everyone has access to the common good. In the absence of inequality everyone benefits, since individuals will contribute more to society in the absence of violence. Respect for the common good calls for mutual respect and dignity of life. Further, as we live together, education and health care have to be seen from the viewpoint of the common good. Without an approach to a share in the Common Good, our lives are in danger.

As elsewhere, in India, with its high poverty rate, health care and education should be considered as common goods. Due to the commercialization of education and health care in India, many poor people who suffer from the injustice that is a lack of access to education or to health are unable to flourish. India has the second largest population in the world and a large number of people are not able to get a good education or visit health care facilities. For instance, “India has the highest number of TB cases in the world. Out of 9.2 million cases of TB that occur in the world

¹⁷⁷ USCCB, “Catholic Social Teaching and the Allocation of Healthcare,” in *On Moral Medicine: Theological Perspectives In Medical Ethics* Lysaught and Kotva, ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 131.

¹⁷⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium Et Spes*, 74, CCC# 1906.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

every year, nearly 1.9 million occur in India which accounts for one-fifth of the global TB cases. ... 2.5 million persons have HIV, 1.5 million are affected by malaria every year, 300 million of acute diarrhea, and 35 million carry hepatitis B virus.”¹⁷⁹ How are we to treat these people? We cannot say that they are suffering and then say it is not our concern to take care of them. The Indian government cannot just move on to economic gain without further considering the health of the common people. It is frightening to see so many Indians suffering from TB, HIV, and hepatitis B. Until and unless the government makes healthcare a common good, there will be an increase in those diseases and everyone will be in danger. The tribal leaders in NER need to be aware of healthcare as a human right as well as a common good for their fellow tribals. Ethical formation needs to be prioritized to create a sense of belongingness so that each one takes the responsibility to promote human flourishing of the other. When more and more people are aware that healthcare is a common good, then each one will commit to build a better community. Vatican II made the undeniable statement, “Everyone should look upon their neighbor as another self, bearing in mind above all the neighbor’s life and the means necessary for living it in a dignified way.”¹⁸⁰ This is a challenge to communicate across the nations because of secularization. In a world where education and healthcare are commercialized, should we not consider taking a step to come together to help each other? We need to be aware of our “moral sense which enables us to discern by reason the good and the evil, the truth and lie.”¹⁸¹ The common good should be promoted in order to share the gift of life that each one receives from the Creator.

¹⁷⁹ L. Chauhan, “Public health in India: issues and challenges,” *Indian Journal of Public Health* 55, no. 2 (2011), 89.

¹⁸⁰ *Catechism of Catholic Church*, 1931.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 130-139.

3.3.3 Principle of the Preferential Option for the Poor and Virtue

People in the modern world are divided economically, socially, politically, culturally, and religiously. These divisions have caused individualism and broken the spirit of solidarity. When society is affected in such a way there is destruction, misery, isolation, and injustice among people. In any country where there is political instability there is suffering and structural violence. Today, societies polarization between with haves and have-nots have brought a negative impact on people. Economically disadvantaged people are not able to access needed public facilities. In such a situation the preferential option for the poor should be kept in mind in reaching out to the needy. “From the birth of the Messiah we can see God’s option for the poor.”¹⁸² In the Bible God’s preference for the poor is strong, “the option for the poor is not one of a multitude of virtues, in which case it could be optional, but a biblical principle... The option for the poor should be seen as an aspect of God’s mercy, since it is God’s merciful love that moves God to opt for the most needy of history.”¹⁸³ We need to understand critically this “preferential option for the poor.” What does it mean? And what is its implication for people? Perhaps this “preferential” can be best understood in the writings of Leonardo Boff:

Preferential is not a synonym for “more” or “special,” let alone “exclusive” or “divisive.” The meaning here is more radical and is apparent when one analyzes the causes that generate social poverty. The poor person does not stand alone: he or she stands in relation to the rich person who is the exploiter, and with allies from the other classes who offer support in the struggle. Therefore, to opt preferentially for the poor means: to love the poor first, as Jesus did, then starting from the poor to love all others, inviting them to liberate themselves from the mechanism of the production of riches on the one hand and poverty on the other... the Church loves the poor inasmuch as it combats, not rich persons, but the socio-economic mechanisms which make them rich at the expense of the poor.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Elsa Tamez, “Poverty, the Poor, and the Option for the Poor: A Biblical Perspective,” *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology*, ed. Daniel G. Groody (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 44.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Do Lugar do Pobre* (Petropolis, Brazil: Editores Vozes, 1984), 37.

From this perspective it is a mission to serve the poor and marginalized people.

It is sad that “half the people in the world – nearly three billion -- live on less than \$2 a day.”¹⁸⁵ With that amount very few can survive though they live in third world countries generally lower income levels. When basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter are not met, then how can poor people get health care which is expensive and beyond any affordable price? One of the serious concerns for migrants is the health problem. Conversely, economically well-off people and nations spend massively on unnecessary things. Cahill argues against in light of expenditure of rich nations, like the United States and European countries. Money spent in these nations, especially on ice-cream, cosmetics, and pet food, is much higher than the money needed to provide water, sanitation, basic health care, and nutrition in developing countries.¹⁸⁶ As social beings, are we not responsible for each other? Can rich nations reach out to economically poor nations where access to health is a huge concern so that there is human flourishing? Liberation theology gives us a method to focus on those who really need help.

Addressing the health issue of migrants is quite complex: every nation has its own policies and norms regarding its health care system. Some nations might need greater attention because of their lack of medical facilities or due to structural violence. In such complexities, liberation theology does provide us with a moral compass to focus on the really needy. Unless we make a choice for the “preferential option for the poor” in global health as a priority, then there will be little progress meeting the health care needs in poor countries. In NER many religious worked to provide healthcare to the people. Their choice to follow this preferential option for the poor has

¹⁸⁵ Lisa, “Global Health and Catholic Social Commitment,” *Health Progress* (May – June 2007) 55 – 57. (Accessed June, 2007) <https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/health-progress/thinking-globally---global-health-and-catholic-social-commitment-pdf.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

driven them to take care of their marginalized peoples. They have given them care to maintain or restore their dignity and worked for the common good. As we are all created in the image and likeness of God as humans, we are all interconnected and each of us has the responsibility to care for the other. Diseases have no boundaries and can spread to anywhere and to any person, but, the most vulnerable to contracting these diseases are the poor. As they suffer from structural violence and poverty, it is hard for them to get basic medical care and, as a result, their right to health is violated. What should be our response to these issues? I truly believe that through Catholic social teaching “centering on human dignity and the common good” along with Leonardo Boff’s and Paul Farmer’s use of liberation theology to make the “preferential option for the poor” we can address the concrete health realities developing nations, particularly in NER.

Catholic social teaching also calls the international community to take responsibility to protect the common good. John Paul II stressed the importance of solidarity among people to empower us to meet the needs of vulnerable and marginalized peoples. Solidarity, he maintains, is not a vague compassion but rather a resolve to be fully committed to the common good. Solidarity calls us to respond to issues in a concrete manner.

To create human flourishing and caregiving I suggest that the international community should commit to this pragmatic solidarity with the poor nations. The global health organization members should also learn from religious traditions, regardless of specific creeds, which teach compassion and service in the world. If the international community commits to making the preferential option for the poor a priority, then the disadvantaged peoples will benefit from health care, and their right to health can be maximized. Therefore, to address global health concretely, the members of the global health organization, rich nations, and wealthy people should have a

spirit of solidarity, and commit to the preferential option for the poor so as to help the disadvantaged peoples and nations of the world.

People suffering from disease are particularly vulnerable. For instance, HIV patients are often ostracized. Poor people are more likely to suffer from HIV because they have less means to protect themselves. Paul Farmer argues that there is unequal treatment for the poor so there is a need for “preferential treatment of the poor.”¹⁸⁷ It is a horrendous experience to be discriminated against because of disease. Hinduism in India believes that suffering from disease is punishment from God due to past sins and thus makes the situation worse by labeling the seriously ill as sinners. In this situation, a Catholic ethic for global health can play a major role in opening up the mind of people to understand how disease can affect everyone and anyone in the community. In addition, it should “mobilize Catholics at every level to act for the global common good by affirming health care as a Christian duty and a human right and by adopting the option for the poor as the first step toward global health justice.”¹⁸⁸ Along with the common good, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor, I would also propose what Maura A. Ryan suggests, “Education has important implications on health.”¹⁸⁹ Giving people good education will help decrease disease. As was my experience in rural India, people lack hygienic knowledge and as result, infectious diseases spread quickly. Good education would improve health.

Without the support of each other it is impossible to eradicate global diseases. The approaches suggested in thesis or chapter such as the common good, solidarity, and the preferential option for the poor are not a conclusive answer to healthcare issues but they give us insights to

¹⁸⁷ Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley: University of California, 2005), 227.

¹⁸⁸ Cahill, “Global Health and Catholic Social Commitment,” 57.

¹⁸⁹ Maura A. Ryan, “Health and Human Rights,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008), 154.

reflect critically on the ethical issues that people in India face. They give us a way to see how we need to respond to the needs of migrants and their health care.

3.4 Interreligious Dialogue

I lived in the northeastern region of India for a decade. During my stay there I witnessed several conflicts. Some people accept conflict passively by considering it as fate or punishment by God for their past sins. The most gruesome conflict took place in 2012. On July 6, 2012, two Muslims were gunned down by four unidentified men and that led to a communal riot between the Bodo tribal community and Muslims. In that conflict 80 innocent people lost their lives.¹⁹⁰ The fight between the Bodo and the Muslims did not stop. It continued and later more violence took place. Thousands of people became homeless; some lost all their family members and others became physically disabled due to injury. In the midst of such adversity some of the local Hindus called it punishment by God. I wonder if there is any logic where or fathom that God kills innocent people for the sins of someone. When conflicts or natural calamities occur many innocent people suffer. It is a sad reality that the local people, instead of examining the problems that instigate violence, rather make conclusions by bringing in God's role as the cause. It is similar to Job's life in the Old Testament, his friends saw his suffering, loss, and illness as related to his sins.

My experiences tell me that many Indians consider their fate as a result of past sins. Unfortunately, a passive acceptance of suffering influences the moral life. I find Job's story quite impressive. Job, after going through all the sufferings, did not remain quiet. He questioned God and also continued to remain faithful to God and that changed his life. In the present context what I argue is, "if the religious traditions do not revise critically the metaphysical foundations of their

¹⁹⁰ "A Neglected Crisis: India's North-East," *The Economist (US)*, 404, no. 8799 (2012), 30.

narrations of God, they could intervene in society and in the political realm in a way that threatens peace and harmony.”¹⁹¹ In India, the metaphysical foundation of narrations of God is static and, as a result, there is disharmony, exploitation, and division. In addition, neither oppressors nor oppressed lament because suffering is bestowed by God.

To encounter the religious mindset of Indians, interreligious dialogue plays a significant role in critically understanding God. It helps to see God and lament from different perspectives. Felix Wilfred argues that interreligious dialogue, provokes “us to seek with others, new and different paths, and discover the presence and action of God even beyond the boundaries of religion.”¹⁹² Christianity calls lament for a concrete action to respond to suffering. In the midst of suffering, lament as trust in God brings change in one’s life.

In the Indian context I would encourage interreligious dialogue to fight against the privileged bystanders of the Hindus and Christians. I am aware that each religion has its own approach to marginalized people, but justifying suffering or discrimination in the name of God shows an utter misconception of human beings. Therefore, interreligious dialogue can help one to “grow in his own faith because truth is often better studied, deepened, appreciated, understood and lived when confronted with other views.”¹⁹³ The suffering of others cannot be taken for granted. India is a pluralistic country, and so it is important for each religion to engage in dialogue. Organizing more interreligious dialogue would shed light on privileged bystanders. It will also help to “promote cooperation among citizens so that in mutual respect, justice, peace and fraternal

¹⁹¹ Wilfred, “Asian Public Theology: Critical Concerns in Challenging Times,” 302.

¹⁹² Ibid., 296.

¹⁹³ James H. Kroeger, *Interreligious Dialogue Catholic Perspective* (Davao, Philippines: Mission Studies Institute, 1990), 22.

collaboration, they can build up their country.”¹⁹⁴ And overall it will help to see suffering of migrants in more humanistic way.

I have seen in India in every incident privileged bystanders trying to justify their action or inaction in the name of God. Therefore, Catholics should take a bold step by naming the pain and suffering of humanity. Elizabeth Vasko rightly points out, “The naming of pain is a dynamic process pointing toward transformation.”¹⁹⁵ I feel that this naming is a good beginning in challenging privileged bystanders in India, many of whom believe that suffering is a Karmic part of previous sins. In fact, a person is encouraged to go through suffering in order to attain “*moksa*” liberation. Interreligious dialogue offers insights to Hindus, Christians, and members of other religions to analyze situations critically.

In NER, though the majority of tribes are Christians, there is a lack of tolerance toward other religions. The migrants who are crossing the border from Bangladesh to India are mostly Muslim. As they come from a different culture and community it is a challenge for them to adjust. Besides cultural challenges they also face exclusion from basic rights such as the rights to worship, health, education, and shelter from and within the local tribal community. In such situations interreligious dialogue will help to understand migrants in better ways. Dialogue will also encourage “friendly relations between believers in different religions. It helps ... at least to reduce, prejudices, exclusiveness and intolerance.”¹⁹⁶ “Dialogue among different religions must not, however, be understood as just looking for points in common so as to build peace together but above all as an occasion to rediscover convictions shared in each community.”¹⁹⁷ In NER placing

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Vasko, *Beyond Apathy*, 116.

¹⁹⁶ Kroeger, *Interreligious Dialogue Catholic Perspective*, 30.

¹⁹⁷ Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* 2004,

interreligious dialogue as one of the priorities will reduce violence. The Christian tribal and Muslim conflict continues in the northeast of India because of a lack of dialogue. Lack of dialogue leads to misunderstanding and misjudgment of migrants. As migration increases with differing religions, the local tribals should open their minds and hearts to welcome them. Due to this reason, “Local Churches should receive solid formation and information on other religions so as to overcome prejudices, prevail over religious relativism and avoid unjustified suspicions and fears that hamper dialogue and erect barriers, even provoking violence or misunderstanding.”¹⁹⁸ On the other hand, as Pope Francis said in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*:

An attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, in spite of various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Indeed, situations in the world where coexistence is difficult are not lacking: often political or economic motives overlap with cultural and religious differences, which also play upon misunderstandings and mistakes of the past: this is all likely to generate suspicion and fear. There is only one road for conquering this fear and it is dialogue and encounter marked by friendship and respect. When we take this path it is a human one.¹⁹⁹

Cardinal Tauran, the president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, rightly says to accept the other is to be aware of the unity of the one human family. Thus, interreligious dialogue could bring peace, unity, and harmony in the northeast region of India. The church leaders should often take note of interreligious dialogue: “Our Churches are to be encouraged to come together as often as possible with other religions to share life experiences and to promote and to defend human and spiritual values, such as solidarity with the poor, justice, and peace... to develop a

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 69.

¹⁹⁹ Pope Francis, *Address to Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, (Accessed Nov 28, 2013)

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/november/documents/papa-francesco_20131128_pc-dialogo-interreligioso.html.

sense of coresponsibility to participate actively with all men and women of good will in responding to the socio-cultural and political needs of our people.”²⁰⁰

3.5 Conclusion: Strengthen the Role of Local Church

The Indian Church needs to be more holistic. As we have seen the Church in India has a precarious approach toward the poor. Its negative treatment hurts these vulnerable people. There should be pragmatic solidarity with them. Paul Farmer argues that pragmatic solidarity “is linked to the broader goals of equality and justice for the poor.”²⁰¹ Leaders of the Church there should show compassion and solidarity with the tribals and migrants. They should reach out in times of struggle. When this spirit of compassion and solidarity is not present, then their following of Christ loses its meaning. Helping the tribals and migrants requires greater sensitivity. As poor people they need some concrete help such as education, pastoral care, and economic support. But, the church seems not to be addressing these issues. The Church needs to look at its mission critically so that we are not failing in the call to serve the poor and needy. Often times their needs are not addressed properly. The Church should deal not only with spiritual matters but also with the real need of the hour. In some cases, unless material help is given to migrants there will not be any change in their status. They suffer due to lack of education and sustainable economic conditions. In such situation “the Church can play an important role in the social transformation of India and the liberation of the oppressed by forging relationships with people of other faiths and working together with them.”²⁰² It should welcome and support them in their struggles.

²⁰⁰ Kroeger, *Interreligious Dialogue Catholic Perspective*, 85.

²⁰¹ Paul Farmer, *Pathologies of Power*, 223.

²⁰² Elze Sietzema-Ricmar, *Christian Dalits*, (accessed April, 2019)
<http://www.indianet.nl/pdf/christiandalits.pdf>

The role of the international Church is crucial and its importance has been expressed in different meetings. Awareness and solidarity are the two key elements that can bring unity in suffering. Through it people outside will come to know the real problems of the tribals and migrants. They should follow the incarnational model of Jesus who came for the poor and hungry. Without further delay “it is time now, perhaps long past time, for the world outside India to get involved. Casteism is the apartheid of today and it needs the same commitment and some of the same tactics and strategies from the world community to challenge it and root it out... The World Church must challenge the Indian Church as – eventually – it challenged the South African Churches in the ‘60s and ‘70s.”²⁰³ They also need to tell the Indian government to look into the migration issue more seriously. When the government is shamed by the international community only then will there be some sort of fire lit to work for such social issues. Further, Indian churches need to be closely monitored in financial matters. There are many Church organizations which collect money in the name of charity to poor people but the money is hardly used for them. Church members state “We know there are many donations coming into India to help poor Christians. What I want to know is where it all is going. What I see is that priests who used to travel on cycles now have cars and fancy homes to live. But they don’t have Rs. 900 (12 dollars) to help for a boy’s education.”²⁰⁴ There is a need of close financial monitoring so that there is no misuse of money. It is advisable that international Church members work closely with the recipient country. In this way mutual collaboration between church and donors can reciprocate in a fruitful way.

3.5.1 The Role of Catholic Educational Institutions

Catholic educational institutions in India can uplift tribals and other migrants through education. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Article 26, “Education is

²⁰³ Ibid., 24.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

recognized as a basic human right and is focused on helping humans achieve their full potential to contribute to society and to learn to live a moral life and live with others in mutual respect, harmony and peace.”²⁰⁵ Similarly, “Catholic education shares the ideals of the UN Declaration and focuses on the key issues of what is to be human, the realization of human potential, the nature of interpersonal relationship and the nature of a good society.”²⁰⁶

There are many Catholic institutions in India, sadly many of these institutions are for middle class and rich people who come to study. The poor people are left out and very few can access education. Specifically Catholic institutions should open up more to educate those weaker sections of the society, especially migrants. It is not enough to run reputable institutions without including the poor and neglected. I have experienced myself how poor tribals are not able to continue their education due to high school fees and many end up dropping out from the schools. Tribals are talented people, but because of a lack of resources they are not able to advance. It is a shame that they are neglected by some Church leaders too. How do these leaders justify themselves as servants of Christ when they are not serving these least ones? It is horrifying to see the silence of Church leaders not doing enough to uplift tribals and migrants concretely. Neglect of women is all the more prevalent. Many of them in the family are left out and, besides that, they must face many difficulties outside their families. Anne E. Patrick argues that the patriarchal church does a lot of injustice to women and as a result they leave the church.²⁰⁷ The Church in India contributes to this injustice to women. As poor tribal and migrant women, many are not able to leave the community because they have nowhere to go due to poverty and illiteracy; as a result

²⁰⁵ United Nations, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Articles, 26, (Accessed 30 March 2019) <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

²⁰⁶ Stephen J. Mckinney and John Sullivan, *Education in a Catholic Perspective* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2013), 17.

²⁰⁷ Anne E. Patrick, *Conscience and Calling: Ethical Reflections on Catholic Women's Church Vocations* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 171.

they are continuously trapped in injustice. Martha Nussbaum's the central human capabilities approach applied to Indian society would offer the possibility of human flourishing.²⁰⁸ Her capabilities need to be implemented through education. The tribals and migrants can live in freedom and have a dignified life provided the privileged people help. The very fact they are not able to flourish is because they are not given the opportunity and freedom to advance. The Basic Human Capabilities approach proposed by Nussbaum give us insights for reflection on human dignity. The capabilities approach offers corrective vision which can solve many of the issues, as it gives every individual the chance to grow in freedom. Through education, the capabilities approach is possible to achieve. It promotes each individual to grow according to a person's own ability. In Nussbaum's words, "the capabilities approach is fully universal: the capabilities in question are held to be important for each and every citizen, in each and every nation, and each person is to be treated as an end."²⁰⁹

In India tribal and religious leaders should commit to a mission of eradicating tribals' and migrants' issues. It is a collective responsibility to provide education for marginalized people. I have experienced that Catholic schools, colleges, and universities in India perhaps cater to the needs of rich and middle class people. I argue that these institutions should welcome more underprivileged students. It is not enough to spiritualize social issues, there should be concrete actions to deal with the problems. Our work for salvation makes sense only through uprooting social evil. Salvation should be here and now. As Nancy Pineda-Madrid argues "We can understand salvation only through our communion with one another, with God, and with creation.

²⁰⁸ Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 76.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

Without a love for community, without an active drive to make more visible and vital the many ways we are interrelated, salvation is impossible.”²¹⁰

The suffering of the tribals and migrants, and their struggle for liberation from oppression can be eradicated through Catholic educational institutions. Education plays an important role in the overall development of a person’s life. Catholic educational institutions in India should make assisting poor tribals and migrants a top priority. Their sufferings should not be ignored by Church leaders. Christ Jesus who came for the poor and suffering should be our role model and each leader of the church should follow his example while serving the universal Church. We should not lose our faith in God. God’s coming on earth should be prepared by us through bringing justice, peace, hope, and love among the people divided between “have’s” and “have nots.” As Patrick argues, “it takes an active religious imagination to trust that God is coming to us from the future, and with our help is bringing the divine values of justice, truth, and love to greater realization in history.”²¹¹ It is possible to transform tribals’ and migrants’ social status through education and access to the common goods of health, work, social systems, worship, and recreation. The Catholic educational institutions should be established in rural areas so that more marginalized people may be served. Having established schools in these areas will help morally and ethically to tackle social discrimination. Christian organizations should also collaborate with other organizations that work for the same mission of uplifting our suffering brothers and sisters. In this way we can change and bring justice, peace, equality, and development to society. Pope Paul VI argues, “There can be no progress toward complete development of man without the development of all humanity in the

²¹⁰ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 152.

²¹¹ Patrick, *Conscience and Calling*, 171.

spirit of solidarity.”²¹² Solidarity is linked to human dignity. Remember Christ came for the poor and needy. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind and to set the oppressed free” (Lk 4:18). Educational institutions and Church are the two important institutions to form people to grow in virtues. Much of the solidarity, common good, preferential option for the poor, and interreligious dialogue can be taught and shared in those two institutions for the benefit of all.

²¹² Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, no. 43, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html

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