1-1-2010

# Justice for the Displaced: The Challenge of Christian Understanding

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Published version. "Justice for the Displaced: the Challenge of Christian Understanding," in *Driven from Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants.* Ed. David Hollenbach. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010: 37-53. Publisher link. 

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# Justice for the Displaced

## The Challenge of a Christian Understanding

*Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator*

> While the disastrous war was waged, there converged on Rome almost hourly a vast mass of people, children, women, the sick, and the aged, to seek from the common father of all a place of safety and refuge. They came from the towns and villages laid waste by the invading enemies, particularly from devastated areas of Italy. This caused us to enlarge, yet further, the scope of our charity, for the cries of so many exiles and refugees touched our heart, and, moved by that same pity, we felt the need to repeat those words of Our Lord: "I have compassion on the multitude."
>
> —Pius XII, *Exsul familia* (Apostolic Constitution), August 1, 1952

As we look at the complex reality of migration, we see the various voices that compete for a hearing. One of the most neglected voices is the theological perspective.[1] The complex saga of refugees and displaced people in many parts of the world depicts the dire conditions of millions of men, women, and children.[2] Considered as a whole, and seen in its multiple forms, the crisis of forced displacement poses a challenge to governmental and nongovernmental institutions and demarcates a difficult terrain for theological and ethical analysis.

The overall perspective of this chapter is twofold. First, it examines the biblical and theological foundations of Christian approaches to the tragedy of refugees and displaced people and how these approaches provide resources for responding to the crisis of displacement as a systemic and structural problem. Second, the essay pays close attention to the combination of structural causes of displacement and the structural responses generated by a Christian understanding of this phenomenon.

We begin with a general consideration of the relationship between theology, religion, and refugees in its wider historical context. Getting the dynamics of this relationship right is critical to a correct analysis and a valid interpretation of the Christian and theological grounding of responses to the twin issues of refugees and displacement of people. The pertinence of this analysis emerges more clearly and acutely in light of the worsening conditions of forcibly displaced people. A conflagration of violence in conflict and war zones continues to drive hundreds of

thousands of people from their land and home into refugee and internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps. No continent suffers the tragic consequences of this catastrophe more than Africa. Recent events in Chad, Sudan's Darfur region, Kenya, the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, and Zimbabwe have thrust Africa into the eye of the raging refugee storm. As Archbishop Silvano Tomasi points out elsewhere in this volume, the global profile of migration and displacement presents an alarming picture, with nearly 200 million people seeking livelihood and refuge away from the land of their birth.[3] The magnitude of this crisis underscores the necessity of a fresh and critical reappraisal of the conditions of refugees and displaced people.

## Theology, Religion, and Refugees

A quick survey of situations of displacement such as refugee camps and detention centers reveals the active presence of various cadres of religious actors engaged in advocacy, protection, accompaniment, and/or the provision of humanitarian relief assistance, alongside other established governmental and nongovernment institutions.[4] Yet in the often-contested public sphere of migration and displacement, religious or faith-based organizations face the task of an ongoing clarification of the theological rationale for their roles and strategies.[5]

Tracing the contours of a Christian understanding of displacement and its theological foundations reveals two salient points. First, on the issue of migration and forced displacement, Christianity does not stand alone; nor did it invent the theology of displacement and migration. The literature of migration and displacement indicates an awareness of and sensitivity to the problems of migrants and refugees in most religious traditions.[6] Beyond some of these long-established religious traditions, there is a clear evidence of a religious and ethical concern for migrants and refugees in antiquity.[7]

The link between religion and displacement throws up an interesting irony. Religion does not function simply as a benevolent and innocuous player in the drama of displacement. One sobering fact stands out clearly, namely, that religion has been used as an instrument of displacement. Stephanie J. Nawyn notes correctly that "Religion is often a factor in the root causes of refugee migrations."[8] For example, without discounting the significance of other cofactors of displacement, the still not fully resolved crisis in southern Sudan pits the predominantly Arab Muslims of the north against the predominantly black indigenous religionist and Christian populations of southern Sudan. The religious dimension of the north–south conflict in Sudan incontrovertibly confirms Nawyn's observation that, directly or indirectly, "religion has long been implicated in why people must seek refuge elsewhere."[9] This critical awareness of the negative potential of religion invites a sober and measured consideration of the theological foundations of Christian understanding of displacement.

The volume of religious literature on various forms of migration and instances of displacement of people also serves as a pointer to the link between theology and displacement. One example of this is the plethora of ecclesiastical pronouncements

on the problem of migration and displacement of people. Whether issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the World Council of Churches, the French Episcopal Committee on Migration, the All Africa Conference of Churches, or the Zambian Episcopal Conference, each document lays claim to a theological basis. Yet, as Daniel Groody has hinted, theological claims and perspectives need to be the subject of an explicit analysis before they are made the basis of credible and effective responses to the plight of refugees and displaced people.

In the next three sections I will examine three overlapping elements of a theological framework for how Christians should respond to the human suffering facing both refugees and internally displaced people: the perspective of biblical ethics, the contribution of a theology of the Church, and the standpoint of Catholic social teaching. Thus, this chapter aims to show that migration and displacement of people define a theological and an ethical subject.

## From the Memory of Displacement to a Place of Hospitality and Protection: The Perspective of Biblical Ethics

Judeo-Christian biblical ethics regulates the social construction and treatment of migrants and displaced people. Whether under the category of "alien," "sojourner," "stranger," or "exile," migrants and displaced people emerge as subjects of clearly defined and religiously sanctioned rights: "the biblical tradition puts the migrant and exile at the very center of concern."[10] Irrespective of the mythico-historical events at its origin, the biblical prescription for the ethical treatment of migrants and displaced people carries the force of divine law. Yahweh's command to the people of Israel regarding the treatment of socially deprived people, including migrants and refugees, is unambiguous:

> You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deut. 10:19, NRSV).
>
> 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).
>
> 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).

Translated into our contemporary context, these ethical injunctions of the Old Testament affirm the right to expect and the obligation to offer hospitality and protection. Associated with these are the right to settle; the right to citizenship; and, as well, the guarantee of work and economic sustenance.

The biblical traditions, attitudes, and dispositions that condition the moral category and status of migrants and refugees are derived from "a genuine historical memory" and "a bona fide recollection of the past."[11] This ethical framework harks back, first, to the nomadic experience of biblical patriarchs out of which "comes a

deep appreciation for the plight of the migrant."[12] If nomadism appeared normal in the socioeconomic and geopolitical context of the pastoralist ancient Near East, other historical factors of migration and displacement were anything but congenial. Throughout the biblical saga, the twin realities of migration and displacement are provoked commonly by natural, religious, socioeconomic, and political upheavals—famine, escape from oppression, search for a better and dignified life, mass deportation, and forced exile. Deuteronomistic authors weave the experiences of migration, displacement, oppression, and deliverance of the ancestors of Israel into a "profession of faith" in the power of Yahweh:

> A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Deut. 26:5–9)

Donald Senior notes by way of commentary that so profound was the trauma of the searing experiences of displacement that they "became embedded in the consciousness of the people of Israel and helped define their character as a people and the nature of their relationship to God."[13] Precisely, this character and this relationship also shaped Israel's attitude and treatment of migrants and displaced people. As the texts quoted earlier from the Old Testament show, having themselves been victims uprooted and forcibly displaced, the people of Israel instituted legal provisions that protected the rights and guaranteed the well-being of people in similar conditions. Yet ultimately, the timeless and universal character of the concomitant biblical ethics derives not just from the recollection of a fading, painful past but from the experience of the abiding love, justice, and compassion of Yahweh who offers deliverance to migrants, exiles, and displaced people: "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and 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).

When we shift our attention to the New Testament, another interesting experience of displacement emerges, albeit not altogether dissimilar to the modern experience of forced migration and displacement. In the seminal document on migration, *Exsul familia*, Pius XII links the contemporary experience of migration and forced displacement to the flight into 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, for all times and all places, the models and protectors 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."[14] Against the backdrop of this archetypal event, Jesus emerges as the "Proto-Refugee."[15] The divergent Lucan and Matthean accounts of Jesus's birth

contain unmistakable echoes of the modern-day tragedy of displacement. In Luke it involves a perilous journey for a poor tradesman and a pregnant teenager (Luke 2:1–7). Matthew's account is more dramatic: the flight into Egypt is provoked by the murderous wrath of a despotic king and the fear of an impending large-scale infanticide (Matt. 2:13–23). Under these circumstances of "a well-founded fear of persecution," contemporary refugee protocols would have granted Mary, Joseph, and Jesus the status of prima facie refugees instantly. The two New Testament accounts lead to the poignant remark that "Jesus begins his earthly journey as a migrant and a displaced person."[16] The enduring memory of this event continues to shape the theological understanding of forced migration and displacement in the present-day context.

It needs to be said that the Gospels do not limit the refugee experience of Jesus exclusively to the circumstances of his birth and infancy. Three aspects of his life are particularly pertinent to our attempt to identify the biblical foundations of a Christian theological understanding of displacement. The first concerns the itinerant nature of his public ministry, summed up by the Lucan Jesus in a somewhat paradigmatic declamation: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). The second aspect pertains to Jesus's special concern for vulnerable women and men who have been displaced to the unstable margins of society, religion, and politics. This category included outcasts, foreigners, the terminally ill, people with disability, the poor, and the weak. Furthermore, this population of "displaced people" would become the subject of his most memorable teachings and parables, of which the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) and the Judgment of the Nations (Matthew 25:31–46) retain enduring significance in the debate about migrants, refugees, and displaced people. The third aspect relates to the wider theological notion of incarnation.

In the context of displacement, "incarnation is the principal theological hermeneutical key in this situation. God has pitched a tent with the refugees. God weeps when they weep, feels pain when they feel pain. God is with them."[17] The significance of this declaration connects with the deepest meaning of the theological reality described in the Johannine Prologue, according to which the Word of God became flesh and made a dwelling among us (John 1:14). The experience that underpins this reality is one of movement, displacement, and migration. God migrates and God moves out of a distant or remote existence of divinity toward human history, not in an abstract manner, but in a concrete, palpable experience of establishing a dwelling in time and space. The theological rapprochement suggested in this imagery of a displaced, mobile, or migrant God reinforces the ethical imperatives of hospitality, refuge, finding home and protection for the displaced and migrant peoples.

## From Dispersed People to Pilgrim Community: Contribution of a Theology of the Church

The literature of the Church's theology contains numerous attempts to correlate the experience of migration and displacement with the nature and identity of the

Church. As in the case of biblical ethics, this ecclesiological approach to displacement is far from being an invention of modern-day theologians. Its roots go back to the biblical milieu. At least two historical moments can be distinguished clearly for the purposes of this chapter.

In the first instance, the early Christians lived a precarious existence. Gospel and historical anecdotes portray them as the target of religious violence and politically orchestrated persecutions leading to displacement. Even when such state-sponsored violence and persecutions did not specifically target the nascent Christian communities, they were not insulated against the predicament of the general population. Not infrequently, violent persecutions triggered displacement and migration into distant, unfamiliar territories (see Acts 8:1 ff, 11:19 ff ).[18] A useful resource for the persecuted Christians flowed from the identification of their situation with the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Such a connection with the Paschal Mystery offered hope of resurrection (see Acts 5:40–41). New Testament writers characteristically imbued their accounts of forced displacement and migration with a theology of divine providence. Yet the fact remains that the events involved an involuntary movement of people across political boundaries occasioned by what refugee protocols centuries later would categorize as "a well-founded fear of persecution." As Senior has noted, "In the highly mobile and interconnected Mediterranean world of the first century A.D., the early Christians were not strangers to the experience of dislocation caused by violence and persecution. There is little doubt that they reflected on this same experience in the light of Jesus' own life and that of the history of God's people."[19]

Senior's observation is important, because it underlines how the early Christian communities set about consciously integrating their experience of displacement into a theological self-understanding. From this theological process emerged a unique definition of the meaning, nature, and identity of the community called church. For example, Acts makes a point of designating the early Christian communities as communities of "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 18:25–26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).[20] Although the early Christian communities "praised God" for the phenomenal spread of the good news "to the Gentiles" (Acts 11:18), the trajectory of their evangelical peregrinations bore marks of persecution, expulsion, and forced displacement.

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. As I will point out in the third section, the factors of displacement have become more complex and the agents more sophisticated and diverse. This analysis, however, should allow us to recognize that a theological interpretation of the historical events and circumstances of displacement belongs to the core of Catholic life.

Vatican Council II's "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" emphasizes the pilgrim nature and identity of the community called church in striking terms: "While on earth she [the Church] journeys in a foreign land away from the Lord . . . the Church sees herself as an exile" (no. 6). It continues: "On earth, still as a pilgrim in a strange land, following in trial and in oppression the paths he [Jesus Christ] trod, we are associated with his sufferings as the body with its head, suffering with him, that with him we may be glorified" (no. 7). This theological affirmation is linked

closely with the historical experience of persecution, migration, and displacement. In reality, the ecclesiology of Vatican II adopts the chaos and trauma of forced migration and displacement as a sacramental prism through which it understands the Christian community and defines its mission in the public and social arena. "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."[21]

Within the ethical space circumscribed by this theology of the Church, various categories of migrants, refugees, and displaced people become the beneficiaries of special concern and compassionate care.[22] Thus, the theological concern for the plight of refugees and displaced people does not function as an accidental or convenient theological characterization. Rather, it cements the link between a radical option for people who are forced to move and the nature, identity, and mission of the community called church.[23]

Vatican II also affirms the identity of the community called church as a witness to the values of the kingdom of God.[24] The manifestation and anticipation of this kingdom make ethical demands on the church as an exile community. Bearing witness to the reality of this kingdom implies living out its values of love, inclusivity, mutuality, justice, and peace as they relate to forced displacement and migration of people.

Yet evidence from myriad situations of refugees suggests a certain "ecclesial marginalization"—besides economic and political marginalization—whereby refugees are considered passive beneficiaries of the Church's charitable services, at best, or excluded as a burden to an already impoverished ecclesial community, at worst.[25] The call that the community church see itself through the prism of refugees, however, further requires that refugees make ethical claims on the Church not as beneficiaries, but as sources of theological transformation. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach frames this point in the following words: "Despite being kept in the shadow of injustice and evil, refugees are a witness to survival in the face of adversity. This directs us towards the light of the Lord. . . . 'God is calling us through these helpless people. We should consider the chance of being able to assist them a privilege that will, in turn, bring great blessings to ourselves and our Society.'"[26]

## From a Refugee to a Sacrament of Christ's Presence: The Contribution of Catholic Social Teaching

The tradition of biblical ethics, tied directly to the ecclesiology of migration and displacement, also relates closely to Catholic social teaching. When Catholic theology wades into the debate about the structural causes and possible responses to the suffering of refugees and displaced people, it grounds its argument on the resources and traditions of Catholic social teaching.

The vast body of analytical and practical resources commonly classified under the rubric of Catholic social teaching also addresses the crisis of refugees and displaced people. As Jacqueline Hagan has phrased it, "The links between theology

and matters of migrant well-being are firmly carved into Catholic social theology."[27] The component documents of Catholic social teaching have a number of characteristics and foci that serve to expand our understanding of the pastoral care of migrants, refugees, and displaced people, and diverse ethical issues relating to their conditions.[28]

Broadly considered, Catholic social teaching offers some principles for discernment and priorities and indicators for action in the context of displacement, both individually and corporately, that is, as a faith community.[29] In particular, it carves out a secure ground for the treatment of refugees where human rights and justice serve as the primary conceptual markers. Within this ethical locus a refugee or a displaced person is, like every other human being, without exception, a bearer of rights. Three implications may be suggested here. First, the occurrence of displacement does not remove refugees and displaced people from the ethical ground or locus defined by human rights and the demands of justice. Second, it is incumbent on theology to question and oppose all forms of violation of the fundamental rights and dignity of the human person, no matter the agents and circumstances of such violation. Third, therefore, securing the rights of refugees and displaced people establishes the imperative of transforming unjust structures of socioeconomic and political organizations.

As a fundamental resource, Catholic social teaching seeks solutions by rethinking the problem of forced displacement within a far-reaching, global framework. Several instances can illustrate this point. For example, beyond the duty of care and protection owed to each refugee and displaced person, Catholic social teaching emphasizes the necessity of a global ethical framework that prioritizes solidarity and justice for refugees and forcibly displaced people. As the Holy See's permanent observer at the United Nations in Geneva, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, recently affirmed, "In our interconnected world, we are linked with all 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."[30] The absence or neglect of these ethical imperatives and the lack of an effective global refugee framework to guarantee them imperil the fundamental human rights of all refugees and displaced people. Drew Christiansen further elaborates the need for a global framework as an effective response to the crisis of displacement in clear terms: "From the point of view of Catholic social teaching the paramount ethical problem in the movement of peoples today is precisely the lack of a global authority with the competence and capacity to address the needs of victimized populations in timely fashion. . . . When it comes to fundamental human rights, the basic requirement is to establish institutions which prevent their deprivation and, in the event of failure, to have in place the institutions which will undertake special efforts to protect them."[31]

On account of its global vision of the problem, Catholic social teaching has been effective in identifying and assessing some of the deeper causes of displacement. The factors include war, religious persecution, poverty, and socioeconomic and political crises, stemming from deliberate actions on the part of individuals and political institutions operating at local, state, and global levels.[32] According to Archbishop Tomasi, "displacement is not a phenomenon isolated from other social realities. It

is the result of political decisions, of neglect and lack of preventive action, and also of unforeseen natural events."[33] In other words, the phenomenon of refugees and displaced people is symptomatic of systemic dislocations in society, economics, and politics. As Clement Majawa argues, "What displaced populations reveal to us all are profound shifts and stresses underlying our social economic systems. The major weakness in our system is poverty; refugee movements are like earthquakes signaling movements between the earth's tectonic plates. They are warning signs of the deep tensions within our global community."[34] Thus, as was the case even in biblical times, social, political, and economic crises generate refugees and displace people.[35] The reality of refugees and displaced people points to deeper problems of socioeconomic and political dislocations and imbalances in contemporary global dispensations.

What needs to be stressed, therefore, is that for Catholic social teaching, forced migration, whatever form it takes, represents an ethical issue. "The refugee phenomenon on the African continent, as elsewhere, is not a product of fate or stroke of misfortune but is a result of choices and decisions made individually and collectively. . . . By the very fact of having left their homes or homelands, displaced people are generally disadvantaged and are in no position to vindicate their human rights."[36] In the chaos of refugee and IDP camps, where the primary need is humanitarian relief and assistance, Catholic social teaching reminds us of the underlying variety of complex global ethical challenges.

As a consequence, Catholic social teaching affirms the complementarity of humanitarian and structural responses to the crisis of refugees and displaced people. Both are important, but neither by itself completely satisfies the need of refugees and displaced people for both charity and justice.[37] This inclusive approach enables us to characterize the task of the community called church as both a pastoral and a prophetic ministry. Not only do Christian communities and faith-based organizations offer assistance to and accompany refugees and displaced people in various locations; they also draw on a vast network of resources as "supranational religious institutions" and advocate changes at national and global levels: "The church itself is seen as an important actor in confronting the injustices that lead to forced migration, in helping to bring together warring factions and working towards peace and reconciliation."[38]

## A Theological Triptych: Structural Implications of Ethical Norms

The foregoing considerations lead to a renewed affirmation of the centrality of the present-day crisis of refugees and displaced people in Christian theology and ethics. Christian responses to the needs of refugees and displaced people would appear deficient if they neglected the three theological elements just sketched and thereby risked becoming simply a form of social activism devoid of religious purpose. The following discussion summarizes the structural implications of these three theological elements.

Biblical ethics formulates a teaching that grounds a Christian understanding of

displacement. In this understanding, refugees and other victims of displacement are subjects of divinely sanctioned rights, because Christianity lays claim to a total experience of life that originates from a covenantal relationship with God. "According to the Judeo-Christian Scriptures," Daniel Groody writes, "immigration is not simply a sociological fact but also a theological event."[39] The injunction to welcome and protect migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people comes as God's command. This assertion is not immune to criticism, especially because it appears gratuitous, imposing no obligation on people who do not subscribe to the underlying religious tenets. This objection notwithstanding, it bears repeating that the Christian ethical discourse on migration, refugees, and displacement appeals to a transcendent source that neither tolerates indifference nor condones injustice.

At a second level, in the midst of the refugee crisis and forced migration, a theological account of the Christian community defines the Church essentially in terms of displacement and mobility. Devoid of this understanding of the Church, our ecclesiology appears incomplete. It is true that victims of forced migration and displacement naturally turn to the Church, seeking aid and protection.[40] As an institution with a global network of centers, the Church possesses the resources to serve as a focal point for vulnerable people, particularly refugees and displaced people. Of course, one could argue with good reason that in reality not all of the Church's interventions are entirely altruistic. For example, a visit to refugee camps in eastern Africa or the Great Lakes Region would confirm that large populations of refugees and displaced people are professing members of Christian denominations on which they depend for wide-ranging religious services in addition to relief assistance.[41] This has the potential of heightening the imperative to provide humanitarian assistance and protection by churches and religious institutions. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, what grounds a Christian understanding of displacement pertains more to biblical ethics and to the theological constitution of the Church as a migrant reality endowed with an exilic vocation than to its activity as a charitable institution serving its own people:

> Welcoming the stranger, a characteristic of the early Church, thus remains a permanent feature of the Church of God. It is practically marked by the vocation to be in exile, in diaspora, dispersed among cultures and ethnic groups without ever identifying itself completely with any of these. Otherwise it would cease to be the first-fruit and sign, the leaven and prophecy of the universal Kingdom and community that welcomes every human being without preference for persons or peoples. Welcoming the stranger is thus intrinsic to the nature of the Church itself and bears witness to its fidelity to the gospel.[42]

Finally, the long history of Catholic attentiveness to and involvement in the public sphere has produced a social teaching, doctrine, and tradition that ground a theological understanding of the crisis of refugees and displaced people in the domain of fundamental rights and the dignity of the human person, as well as the imperative of justice. As Archbishop Tomasi states, "the continued effort to safeguard the human rights of all forcibly displaced people is in line with a consistent ethic of life."[43] It is important to note that, just as in the case of the ecclesiology of migration

and displacement, biblical ethics serves as an important source for Catholic social teaching.[44] Rather than considering this crisis as "a nonreligious functional domain," devoid of theological warrants or rationale for action, Catholic social teaching provides alternative resources and responses within the public sphere that prioritize justice, conversion, communion, and solidarity.[45] In its clearest manifestation this teaching, tradition, or doctrine enables Christian theology to analyze the crisis of displacement, formulate an in-depth appraisal, and indicate effective responses to the structural causes of this tragedy. Stated differently, in the context of forced displacement, Catholic social teaching offers principles for reflection, criteria for judgment, and guidelines for action.[46]

The objective of establishing foundations of a Christian understanding of forced displacement and refugees will fall short if it does not attempt to distill ethical norms that generate structural responses for transforming refugee-causing factors on a global scale. It is beyond dispute that outside of natural disasters, displacements of refugees are not natural phenomena. Refugees are *caused* to flee: "Refugees are *refugeed* people."[47] Yet the question of causality is a complex one. As J. Bryan Hehir points out in this volume, although in some instances refugees can be considered "a cause of war," in most instances "refugees and IDPs . . . [are] consequences of wars." Wars and conflicts remain the most common causes, albeit not the only structural causes.[48] Thus, we bear a responsibility to seek systemic responses to the deeper causes of forced displacement. At least three such ethical prescriptions can be proposed based on the foregoing considerations.

First, in light of the central tenets of Catholic social teaching, justice and human rights, or the lack thereof, constitute vital conceptual ingredients in understanding the challenge of forced displacement. Securing justice appears paramount prior to the occurrence of displacement, which, as I have argued above, is a consequence of violations of fundamental human rights. It could be argued that concomitant structural implications exist at the political level. Ethical norms of justice and human rights necessitate international refugee protocols and conventions that are not simply reactive but essentially proactive. One way of achieving this would be to redefine more closely and strengthen the links between international agencies, instruments, and protocols that protect human rights in general and those that offer protection specifically to refugees.[49] If adequate protection is a right, it should not only be accessible as a consequence of displacement (in a refugee camp), but also as a prerequisite mechanism for safeguarding the rights of vulnerable people threatened with displacement. This argument resonates with the point made by Christiansen that "what is needed is essentially a new refugee regime, one which would include necessary revisions in international law but which also would devise the institutions that would protect and assist refugees, and *one which would, more importantly, be empowered to address effectively the political and social problems that result in refugee flows.*"[50] Thus, an effective systemic response would seek to address complex problems of poverty, conflict, human rights violations, poor governance, or lack of employment as deeper causes of forced migration.[51] With regard to the kind of ethically generated systemic response to the deeper causes of refugees and forced displacement proposed here, Tomasi makes a valid point in this volume that "the

creation of a social environment where human rights are upheld and this [human] dignity is respected would be the best strategy to prevent forced displacement" (see chapter 3).

Second, hospitality represents the linchpin of a Christian approach to forced displacement. However we choose to define it, hospitality transcends a mere theoretical analysis. Practically, hospitality demands sacrifice. In various parts of the globe, concrete evidence exists of how a massive and sudden influx of refugees provokes a radical reconfiguration of the political, economic, and social landscape of host communities. There is a widespread consensus that in "many Third World countries . . . refugees represent an unacceptable strain on their limited resources."[2] Understandably, examples of lack of hospitality can be found not only in biblical and Christian traditions, but also in contemporary societies placed under enormous demographic pressures by populations of displaced people. The disproportionate burden borne by poorer nations offering hospitality to refugees translates into an ethical obligation on the part of richer nations to take more responsibility for meeting the needs of displaced people. In other words, considering the strain imposed on an already impoverished economy by unregulated refugee flows, the notion of burden-sharing assumes critical importance as a structural implication grounded on the theme of hospitality and protection of forcibly displaced people and refugees. Thus, devising an equitable mechanism of burden-sharing constitutes one of the systemic responses to the challenge of forced displacement. Arash Abizadeh makes an analogous argument for the ethical responsibility of prosperous states to keep their borders considerably more open to foreigners. The imperative of the international community to assist economically fragile and politically unstable countries—as in sub-Saharan Africa—in assuming the burden of hospitality represents an explicit structural implication of the ethical norms of a Christian understanding of forced displacement and refugees.

Third, this chapter has implicated religion as a factor of displacement. Without attempting to denigrate the commendable intervention of faith-based nongovernmental organizations, the fact remains that on several contemporary refugee issues, religion continues to play an important albeit oftentimes negative role, resulting from religious intolerance and opposing sectarian ideologies. Refugee studies tend to pay marginal attention to the connection between religion, forced migration, and displacement. In the context of defining ethical norms based on a Christian understanding, it is possible, even necessary, to identify a systemic response that draws upon the contribution of religion more positively construed. Allowing for the possibility, as Tomasi argues, that "faith insights are not a precise roadmap for normative reforms, but they do set a framework within which to move," the emphasis here is on the need to create an environment conducive to the promotion of peace, reconciliation, and dialogue among religious traditions (see chapter 3). Whether in Somalia, Sudan's Darfur region, Iraq, or Afghanistan, the breakdown in the relationship among religious traditions and allegiances counts as a deep cause of displacement and refugees. Consequently, harnessing the positive potential of religious traditions that maintain an active presence in the public sphere for a global solidarity against factors of displacement represents an important ethical,

systemic response that needs to be on the agenda of refugee-serving international agencies.

## Conclusion: An Enduring Challenge, an Unfinished Business

Christianity responds in diverse ways to the challenges posed by "the variegated universe of migrants—students far from home, immigrants, refugees, displaced people, evacuees—including, for example, the victims of modern forms of slavery, and of human trafficking."[53] In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the thesis that a Christian understanding of and responses to the phenomena of refugees and displacement are not bereft of theological resources and foundations, some of which date back to the origin of Christianity and, beyond that, to the Old Testament theology of hospitality and protection for migrants and refugees. Yet there are conceptual and practical gaps both in biblical accounts and in Christian history. This chapter has also recognized the negative role of religion as a factor in the displacement of people. The avowal of theological principles of hospitality, protection, and justice for displaced people has not always generated the required ethical behavior and practices. The legacy of lack of openness and the failure to show hospitality in Christian communities intensify the overall challenge of a theological understanding of justice for the displaced.

This investigation has identified a triptych composed of biblical ethics, the ecclesiology of migration, and Catholic social teaching. Taken together, they provide a normative Christian understanding that shapes Christian responses to the crisis of refugees and displaced people. The selection of these three items is guided by the historical affinity between religion and migratory experiences, especially those provoked by harmful socioeconomic and political factors.

I have deliberately circumscribed the scope of this chapter to explore the subject of refugees and displaced people from the perspective of Roman Catholic theology. Thus, it does not pretend to speak for all Christian traditions and denominations. Within the constitutive norms and values of this theological framework, Christian understanding recognizes, affirms, and promotes the rights of the refugee. These rights impose on church and society the obligation to welcome the stranger, protect the weak, and respect the dignity of the human person.

To be a refugee or a displaced person defines not simply a liminal sociological condition; more importantly, it embodies a theological and ethical condition. The experience of forced migration and displacement—along with their concomitant moral claims—appears to be so fundamental and constitutive of Christian discipleship that to deny or ignore it would inevitably undermine the credibility of Christian witness and weaken the identity, nature, and meaning of the community called church.

However, one reminder is important: Christianity does not enjoy a monopoly of theological responses to the crisis of refugees and displaced people. The crisis involves a multiplicity of factors. Many other religious traditions and secular organizations formulate their own partial strategies of response. This points up the

necessity of cross-disciplinary approaches and dialogue among religious communities both at the level of understanding and at the level of concrete responses.

In the context of forced migration and displacement of people, the hallmark of a Christian understanding finds paradigmatic expression in the claim that at all times and in all places, the refugee or the displaced person is a bearer of inviolable rights endowed with a transcendent dignity. This claim is based neither on mere speculation nor on mere whim: it constitutes the primary tenet of Christian theological anthropology, according to which human beings embody and reflect the *imago dei*. The denial of, or resistance to, this fundamental truth underpins several refugee-causing factors. By its affirmation of the dignity and humanity of refugees and migrants as people created in the image and likeness of God, the totality of biblical and Christian understanding challenges the global conscience with regard to the evil of forced migration and displacement of people and establishes incontrovertible ethical demands of justice for the displaced.

**Notes**

1. Daniel G. Groody, "Fruit of the Vine and Work of Human Hands: Immigration and the Eucharist," in *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration,* ed. Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 311–12.

2. Susan Martin's analysis of the various categories of forced migrants is helpful, but it does not obscure the fact that "human mobility today is blurring the traditional distinctions between refugees, internally displaced people, and international immigrants." António Guterres, "Millions Uprooted: Saving Refugees and the Displaced," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 5 (September–October 2008): 90.

3. See Global Commission for International Migration, "Migration in an Interconnected World: New Directions for Action (Report of the Global Commission for International Migration)" (Geneva: Global Commission on International Migration, 2005).

4. I have examined some faith-based organizations and their programs in refugee camps in East Africa in *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV/AIDS, Refugees and Poverty* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines, 2005), 148–63. A good example of this is Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), an arm of the religious order of the Society of Jesus, also known as Je- suits, with special focus on advocacy, service, and accompaniment of refugees and displaced people. See also Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, "Key Ethical Issues in the Practices and Poli- cies of Refugee-Serving NGOs and Churches," in *Refugee Rights: Ethics, Advocacy, and Africa,* ed. David Hollenbach (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 225–44; Joint Commission for Refugees of the Burundi and Tanzania Episcopal Conferences, "The Presence of the Burundian Refugees in Western Tanzania: Ethical Responsibilities as a Framework for Advocacy," in Hollenbach, *Refugee Rights*, 53–75.

5. With regard to the issue of immigration, Tricia C. Bruce has argued that churches and church-based nongovernment organizations undertake a process of "discursive adaptation" in which religious desires and motivations are (re)formulated in more general secular terms for strategic purposes, including the need for funding. "Contested Accommodation on the Meso Level: Discursive Adaptation within Catholic Charities' Immigration and Refugee Services," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 11 (July 2006): 1489–508.

6. For example, the theme of migration and displacement is present in Judaism, Islam, and

Confucianism. See W. Gunther Plaut, "Jewish Ethics and International Migrations," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 27–36; Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, "The Islamic Conception of Migration," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 37–57; Weiming Tu, "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality: A Confucian Perspective on Ethics, Migration, and Global Stewardship," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 58-68.

7. W. G. Plaut, *Asylum: A Moral Dilemma* (Toronto: York Lanes Press; Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 28.

8. Stephanie J. Nawyn, "Faith, Ethnicity, and Culture in Refugee Resettlement," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 11 (July 2006): 1510.

9. Ibid. Maryanne Loughry's chapter in this book offers further examples of how "the refashioning of many parts of Iraq along confessional lines" emerges as a key factor of displacement of refugees in Iraq and Syria.

10. Mark Franken, "The Theology of Migration" (paper presented to the board of directors of the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, Baltimore, MD, October 28, 2004). For a detailed exegesis and philological analysis of the concept and meaning of various ethical categories of migrants and displaced persons, see Frank Anthony Spina, "Israelites as *gērîm*, 'Sojourners,' in Social and Historical Context," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Carol L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 321–35; Peter Muema, "Special Attention to the Tragedy of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons within Africa in Light of the Bible," in *A Theological Response to the Tragedy of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa,* ed. Sewe-K'Ahenda (Nairobi, Kenya: CUEA Publications, 2007), 8–12.

11. Spina, "Israelites as *gērîm*," 322.

12. Office of Migration and Refugee Services of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Welcoming the Stranger among Us: Unity in Diversity" (November 15, 2000), 8.

13. Donald Senior, "'Beloved Aliens and Exiles': New Testament Perspectives on Migration," in *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey*, ed. Groody and Campese, 22. See also Robert Schreiter, "Theology's Contribution to (Im)migration," in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization,* ed. Gioacchino Campese and Pietro Ciallella (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2003), 170–74; Santime Matungulu, "*L'Afrique et l'immigration*," *Telema* 2–3, nos. 129–30 (April–September 2007): 66–71.

14. Pius XII, *Exsul familia*.

15. Clement Majawa, "The African Refugee-Shepherding Ecclesiology," in *A Theological Response*, ed. Sewe-K'Ahenda, 46. See also Drew Christiansen, "Movement, Asylum, Borders: Christian Perspectives," *International Migration Review* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 1.

16. Senior, "Beloved Aliens and Exiles," 23; cf. Schreiter, "Theology's Contribution to (Im) migration," 174–75.

17. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 239.

18. The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's "Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees" (January 18, 2009) is "*St Paul Migrant, 'Apostle of the Peoples*.'" This document refers to Paul as "a migrant by vocation" and a "missionary to migrants" whose experience serves as "an important reference point for those who find themselves involved in the migratory movement today." It can be found at the website of The Holy See, http://212.77.1.245/news_services/bulletin/news/22721.php?index=22721&po_date=08.10.2008&lang=en#TRADUZIONE%20IN%20LINGUA%20INGLESE (accessed October 9, 2008).

19. Senior, "Beloved Aliens and Exiles," 26.

20. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 228–29; Senior, "Beloved Aliens and Exiles," 24–25.

21. Graziano Battistella, "The Human Rights of Migrants: A Pastoral Challenge," in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 93–94.

22. USCCB, "Welcoming the Stranger among Us," identifies the concrete manifestations of this concern as conversion, communion, and solidarity. See also Michael A. Blume, "Towards an Ecclesiology of Migration," *People on the Move*, no. 90 (December 2002), 4; Majawa, "African Refugee-Shepherding Ecclesiology," 53 ff.

23. There are interesting attempts to develop theological models of the Church based on the experiences of refugees and internally displaced people. Clement Majawa, for example, advocates a new kind of ecclesiology christened "shepherding ecclesiology," on the basis of which he argues that "the Church in Africa cannot neglect its role of speaking and acting on behalf of the oppressed, refugees, immigrants, and those in various forms of captivity." "African Refugee-Shepherding Ecclesiology," 71; see also 72–85. I also develop the idea of a "nomadic church" or "mobile church" in the context of refugees and internally displaced people. *From Crisis to Kairos*, 163 ff.

24. See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)*, no. 5, and *Gaudium et spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), no. 45.

25. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 168 ff.

26. Letter of November 14, 2005 to the Whole Society of Jesus.

27. Jacqueline Hagan, "Making Theological Sense of the Migration Journey from Latin America: Catholic, Protestant, and Interfaith Perspectives," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 11 (July 2006): 1560.

28. Examples of Catholic social teaching documents relating to migrants, refugees, and displaced people include John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (1963); Vatican Council II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (1965); Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (1967); and Pope John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (1981) and *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987). To these documents we should add Zambia Episcopal Conference, "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" (Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Zambia, June 20, 2001); Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People, *Cor Unum*, *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity* (1992); Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (The love of Christ towards migrants), 2004.

29. In "Theology of Migration," 4–5, Franken summarizes five principles of Catholic social teaching of particular relevance to migrants and refugees: (1) the right not to emigrate, (2) the right to emigrate, (3) the greater obligation of powerful nations to accommodate migration, (4) the right and claim of refugees and asylum seekers to protection; and (5) the affirmation of the inalienable dignity of all migrants and refugees.

30. Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, "Globalization of Justice and Solidarity Is the Best Guarantee for Peace" (statement delivered to the UN refugee agency's annual Executive Committee meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, October 2008), Zenit News Agency, www.zenit.org/article-23906?l=english (accessed October 13, 2008).

31. Christiansen, "Movements, Asylum, Borders," 4. Cf. Kristin Heyer, "Welcoming the Stranger: What Christian Faith Can Bring to the Immigration Debate," *America*, www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11117 (accessed October 5, 2008); and J. Bryan Hehir, "Catholic Social Teaching & Migration," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Migration & Refugee Services, www.usccb.org/mrs/hehir.shtml (accessed October 9, 2008).

32. Recent church documents mention development projects, climate change, and natural disasters as factors of displacement. As Maryanne Loughry points out in her chapter in this volume, not only are there multiple causes of migration and displacement, but the various causes are also interlinked.

33. Archbishop Tomasi, "Globalization of Justice."

34. Majawa, "African Refugee-Shepherding Ecclesiology," 36.

35. Spina, "Israelites as *gērîm*," 331; Hehir, "Catholic Social Teaching & Migration." See also Donald E. Gowan, "Wealth and Poverty in the Old Testament: The Case of the Widow, the Orphan, and the Sojourner," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 343–44, 347.

36. Peter Kanyandago, "Who Is My Neighbour? A Christian Response to Refugees and the Displaced in Africa," in *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity: Exploratory Essays in Moral Theology*, ed. J. N. K. Mugambi and A. Nasimiyu-Wasike (Nairobi, Kenya: Initiatives Publishers, 1992), 173. Cf. Michael A. Blume, "Migration and the Social Doctrine of the Church," in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 62.

37. Orobator, "Key Ethical Issues," 240.

38. Paul Flamm, "Refugee Ministry: Towards Healing and Reconciliation," *Mission Studies* 15, no. 1 (1998): 116. On the related issue of immigration, Margarita Mooney notes: "Although bishops do not set public policy, they can influence public policy through their lobbying of political officials and by shaping the conscience of citizens. . . . The bishops can also influence the public sphere by directly providing social services." "The Catholic Bishops Conferences of the United States and France: Engaging Immigration as a Public Issue," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 11 (July 2006): 1468.

39. Daniel Groody, "A Theology of Immigration," *Notre Dame Magazine*, www.nd.edu/~ndmag/au□□□□/groody.html (accessed September 15, 2008).

40. Michael A. Blume, "Refugees and Mission: A Primer," *Mission Studies* 16, nos. 1–2 (2000): 164. Cf. USCCB, "Welcoming the Stranger," 4.

41. See Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 148–63; Flamm, "Refugee Ministry," 99–125; Ce- cilia Menjívar, "Public Religion and Immigration across National Contexts," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49, no. 11 (July 2006): 1448–49; and Jacqueline Hagan, "Faith for the Journey: Religion as a Resource for Migrants," in *Migration, Religious Experience, and Globalization*, 13–14.

42. Pontifical Council, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, no. 22.

43. Archbishop Tomasi, "Globalization of Justice."

44. Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891–Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 2–3.

45. See Bruce, "Contested Accommodation," 1500.

46. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima adveniens* (1971), no. 4; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, *Libertatis Conscientia* (March 22, 1986), no. 72; Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1998), no. 41.

47. Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, 56.

48. Ibid.

49. The argument here not only concerns transnational actors, like UNHCR and the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as Maryanne Loughry indicates in her chapter here, but in the overall context of this chapter, it should allow space for the participation and contribution of faith-based, refugee-serving, nongovernmental organizations.

50. Christiansen, "Movements, Asylum, Borders," 4 (emphasis added).

51. Global Commission, *Migration in an Interconnected World*, 4.

52. Ebenezer Q. Blavo, *The Problems of Refugees in Africa: Boundaries and Borders* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1990), 70.

53. Pope Benedict XVI, "Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees" (January 18, 2009).