Evangelical Missiological Society Series
no. 23

Diaspora Missiology

Reflections on Reaching the Scattered Peoples of the World



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Editors

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Published by William Carey Publishing
10 W Dry Creek Cir
Littleton, C0 80120 | www.missionbooks.org

Melissa Hicks, editor
Brad Koenig, copyeditor
Hugh Pindur, interior design
Mike Riester, cover design
Rose Lee-Norman, indexer

William Carey Publishing is a ministry of
Frontier Ventures
www.frontierventures.org

ISBNs: 978-0-87808-936-9 (epub)
978-1-64508-497-6 (paperback)

Printed Worldwide
27 26 25 24 23 2 3 4 5 6 IN

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Diaspora missiology : reflections on reaching the scattered peoples of the world / [edited by] Michael Pocock, Enoch Wan.
pages cm. -- (Evangelical Missiological Society series ; 23)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-87808-045-8 (alk. paper) -- ISBN 0-87808-045-7 (alk. paper) 1. Missions. 2. Church work with migrant labor. 3. Church work with immigrants. 4. Church work with aliens. I. Pocock, Michael, 1942-, editor.
BV2695.M5D53 2015
266'.0086'91--dc23
2015021585

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Chapter One

Global Migration: Where Do We Stand?

MICHAEL POCOCK

ABSTRACT

The pace of global scattering of peoples beyond their original countries of birth has accelerated, creating opportunities for ministry both to and by Christians in this phenomenon. People in these diasporas and their families both benefit and are threatened by separation from family, culture, and country. Christian ministries that earlier regarded immigrants, refugees, international students, and nomads as peripheral to their foci increasingly direct their attention to these people as their primary focus.

As he opened the sixteenth annual Iberian-American Summit in Montevideo in November 2006, then–UN General Secretary Kofi Annan proclaimed: "International migration is one of the greatest issues of this century … We have entered a new era of mobility."[1]

This was not an overstatement. Developments since have proved him prophetic! Two hundred and thirty-two million people lived outside of their country of birth in 2013.[2] As we shall see, "migration is as old as the Bible, but it has accelerated to an amazing and often confusing extent. This chapter will help us understand the current levels of migration, the categories of people on the move, the direction in which migration flows, and the forces that influence this phenomenon.

We shall also look at the fears of Christians and non-Christians in receiving countries, and the reasons why an old book like the Bible can give us a framework for understanding human movement and God's agenda in and through it. Understanding reduces fear. Discovering a purpose within a phenomenon like human migration prepares us to engage it rather than ignore or flee from it.

In speaking with the Greek philosophers in Athens, the Apostle Paul gave a classic explanation for why people are where they are, spread over the globe.

1 Annan, Kofi, "Opening Address" (speech, 16th Annual Ibero-American Summit, Montevideo, Uruguay, November 3, 2006), PressZoom, http://presszoom.com/story_120578.html (accessed November 28, 2006).

2 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "World Migration in Figures," October 3–4, 2013, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migration/World_Migration_Figures_UNDESA_OECD.pdf, 1.

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At the conclusion he said, "In him [God] we live and *move* and have our being" (Acts 17:28, italics mine). Paul's contention is that God is at work in human migration, and those that move, whether they know it or not, are under his providential, even salvific, care. In the same passage, Paul explains that God places people where they are to help them reach out to him and find him (Acts 17:26,27). This takes migration out of the world of mere economic, political, or environmental dynamics and puts it into a grander scheme of God's design and purpose for humanity.

Around the world, Christians are waking up to the reality that the massive movement of peoples in migration presents an unprecedented opportunity for spreading the gospel. Among the hundreds of thousands on the move to find work or a better life are highly committed Christians. Many are effectively living a life that witnesses to the presence of Christ. Others would be more effective if they had some basic preparation in cross-cultural living and how to share the gospel and lead small group Bible studies, and in fact saw themselves as instruments in the Great Commission calling of the Lord Jesus Christ. They also need pastoral care to maintain their own spiritual vitality while they are away from home.

Both evangelicals and Catholics can clearly see this point. There are, for example, 10.5 million Filipinos serving as contract workers outside the Philippines who send home $21 billion a year to their families.[3] Lorajoy Dimangondayao says of the Filipino diaspora workers:

> With Filipinos found in almost every industry, at every level of management, and in every strata of society, Christian Filipinos are positioned to be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ wherever they are situated. Christian Filipinos recognize God's providence in placing them in all corners of the globe to serve people of all sorts. They become like the Apostle Paul who became all things to all people … for the sake of the gospel.[4]

A Catholic symposium entitled "Faith on the Move: Towards a Theology of Migration in Asia," was held in Quezon City, Philippines, in July 2006. Participants called for pastoral care for the thousands of Filipinos working abroad, but also showed we can get insight into how God works, and in fact how Jesus worked when we reflect on the situation of people on the move.[5] This same conference examined victimization of migrants and family disintegration caused by migration.

3 National Statistics Office of the Philippines, http://www.census.gov.ph/ (accessed May 18, 2014).

4 Lorajoy Dimangondayao, "To All People: Samples of Diaspora Filipinos Making a Kingdom Impact," in *Scattered: The Filipino Global Presence*, ed. Luis Pantoja, Sadiri Joy Tira, and Enoch Wan (Manila: LifeChange, 2004), 291.

5 Scalabrini Migration Center, "Faith on the Move," http://www.smc.org.ph/symposium.htm (accessed August 8, 2006; page discontinued).

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These are the kinds of problems, among many, needing reflection and action by Christian laypeople and missionaries today.

Global migration in the United States and around the world presents awesome possibilities and perplexing challenges. This chapter attempts to show how we can build on the opportunities while resolving the difficulties of global migration. The first order of business is to grasp the size and shape of this phenomenon. *National Geographic*, which focused an entire issue on migration, emphasizes the dramatic reality of migration:

> Migration is big, dangerous, compelling. It's Exodus, Ulysses, the Battle of Agincourt, Viking ships on the high seas bound for Iceland, slave ships and civil war, the secret movement of Jewish refugees through occupied lands during World War II. It is 60 million Europeans leaving home from the 16th to the 20th centuries. It is some 15 million Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims swept up in a tumultuous shuffle of citizens between India and Pakistan after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947… But it is much more than that. It is, as it has always been, the great adventure of human life. Migration … drove us to conquer the planet, shaped our societies, and promises to reshape them again.[6]

Migration to the United States

There were 40 million foreign-born people in the United States in 2010. The largest percentage, 53.3 percent, were from Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by 28 percent from Asia, 12 percent from Europe, and 7 percent from other regions of the world.[7] Of these, approximately 12 million are unauthorized migrants. They include those who entered without valid documents and those who entered legally but overstayed the expiration date of their visas.[8]

The United States has been in an accelerated period of migration since 1965 when a new US Immigration Act was passed removing the national quota system that had been in place up to that time. From 1965, immigration, which had been predominantly European, changed. Significantly more Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans began moving to the United States. The foreign-born population now constitutes 13 percent of the population. Although the actual numbers are significantly greater than at other periods, foreign-born people have historically constituted greater percentages of the total population in 1890

6 Michael Parfit, "Human Migration," *National Geographic*, October 1998, 11.

7 American Community Survey, "The Foreign-born Population of the United States: 2010," United States Census Bureau, http://www.census.gov/prod/2010pubs/acs_19.pdf.

8 Dimangondayao, "To All People."

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(15 percent) and 1910 (14.7 percent).[9] Immigrants increased by 57.4 percent between 1990 and 2000 alone.[10]

The arrival in the United States of approximately 1 million legal and 1.5 million unauthorized immigrants each year is a great concern to many and to the US government. The pressure is on to enforce existing measures against illegal migrants and to enact more effective legislation. This is happening at the national and local level. The US Congress in 2006, while failing to pass comprehensive reform legislation, did pass a measure to build a wall seven hundred miles along parts of the southern border with Mexico. Six hundred and fifty miles had been built by 2013. Volunteer "Minutemen" began patrolling certain border ranch lands.[11] Communities like Farmers Branch, Texas, passed laws forbidding landlords to rent housing to undocumented persons and have authorized police to routinely check the documents of any person they believe may be undocumented. Arizona passed and began implementation of similar laws. Most recently Texas governor Perry authorized one thousand National Guardsmen to help control the Texas border area. 85,131 unaccompanied minors have arrived on the Southwest U.S. border between October 2014 and June 2015.[12]

Americans are conflicted over what to do about migration, and, more particularly, unauthorized workers and their families. Columnist Steve Blow has likened our attitudes over immigration to the game "Red Rover," where children form a chain, hand to hand, and challenge anyone on an opposing team to break through the chain. If they can, they become part of the chain.[13] In similar fashion, Americans seem united in opposition to the *entry* of illegal migrants, but expect them to become part of society and that government and communities will provide many services to them once they *are* here. He and others have pointed out the plain fact that the United States needs the labor and benefits from the spending power of migrants, legal and illegal. The combined

9 Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States," http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states (accessed June 23, 2015).

10 Ibid.

11 "Thirty Days to Change a Mind," editorial, *Dallas Morning News*, July 29, 2006, 24A. The U.S. Border Patrol stated that 56,547 unaccompanied and undocumented minors entered the U.S. southern border during the year up to June 30, 2014. U.S. Customs and Border Protection, http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unccompanied-children (page discontinued). The border fence mandated in 2006 has never been finished, primarily due to high costs and failure of Congress to fund the project completely. *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Secure Fence Act of 2006," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secure_Fence_Act_of_2006 (accessed May 2014).

12 "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children," U.S. Customs and Border Protection, http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children (accessed June 23, 2015).

13 Steve Blow, "Migrant Policy Is a Puzzler," *Dallas Morning News*, July 16, 2005.

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spending power of US Hispanics alone surpassed 1 trillion dollars in 2010 and is projected to be 1.5 trillion in 2015.[14]

Attitudes among Christian church people reflect national patterns. Some see undocumented migrants as a threat and as criminals who have broken the law to enter the country. At the same time, many other Christians believe that the history of God's people in Scripture and its teaching about the treatment of aliens and the reality of America as a nation of immigrants compels us to deal graciously with those who so desperately want and need to be here.

The Global Picture of Migration

Americans often feel their country is the special object and attraction of the world's immigrants, but migration is actually occurring at high levels to Canada, Europe, the Middle East Gulf states, and the more prosperous cities of Asia. The movement of the world's peoples has been likened to weather patterns swirling constantly and forming changing patterns all over the planet.[15] Movement is a constant feature of human life. Societies come into possession of particular areas and come to think of themselves as permanently in place. This may continue for lengthy periods, but eventually migratory forces will bring others into their territory or take themselves to other regions. We have dealt with the historical picture of migration patterns in other sources.[16] Here we are looking at a snapshot of the situation today.

International migrants worldwide amounted to 232 million persons in 2013. About a third of these have moved from one developing country to another, and a third have moved from a developing country to a more developed country.[17] Thirty-four percent of all migrants have moved to Europe, 23 percent to North America, 28 percent to Asia, 9 percent to Africa, 3 percent to Latin America, and 3 percent to Oceania.[18]

These figures reflect only *international* migration. *Internal* migration, generally from rural to urban areas, is also a major consideration. Urban centers everywhere in the developing world are surrounded by millions of such internal migrants.

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14 "Hispanic Buying Power," *The Shelby Report*, http://www.theshelbyreport.com/2011/07/01/hispanic-buying-power/#.U_5EaWMic0k (accessed May 2014).

15 Pocock and Henriques, *Cultural Change*, 59–60.

16 Ibid., 59–77. See also Pocock, Van Rheenen, and McConnell, *Changing Face*: Pocock, ch. 1, "Globalization," 21–44; and McConnell, ch. 2, "Changing Demographics," 45–78.

17 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "World Migration in Figures," October 3–4, 2013, http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migration/World_Migration_Figures_UNDESA_OECD.pdf (accessed May 20, 2014).

18 "United Nations Report Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2013 Revision"; *Wikipedia*, s.v. "List of Countries by Foreign-born Population," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_foreign-born_population (accessed May 2014).

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