CARE FOR THE MIGRANTS AND DISPLACED PERSONS: CHRIST'S INJUNCTION TO THE CHRISTIANS: MATTHEW 25:35

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Abstract

Human mobility is the sign of the present era, though not a new phenomenon. Man is ever desirous for better life and is ever on the move in search of it. Consequent to the poor governance, which has led to vicious circle of corruption, poverty, unemployment, religious and ethnic crisis, migration and displacement are on the increase. Incidentally, as human civilization becomes more complex, particularly with the development of nation states, the movement of peoples between different lands took on political and legal dimensions. Christ clearly commands Christians to care for the migrants. Matthew 25:35 captures it very well. It makes it clear that care for migrants and displaced persons is not optional but compulsory. Using this periscope, the paper intends to correct the wrong opinion about migration, and as such mates inhuman treatment on the migrants. Be it as it may, this work attempts to call the attention of the government as well as the church to sincerely care for the citizens so as to not allow a situation where people will be tempted to seek greener pasture elsewhere. The citizens are equally encouraged to make use of their God given talents and gifts to enhance their life just as those countries where they are rushing to have done.

Key words: Care, migrants, displace, injunction

Introduction

Migration is part and parcel of human history. It is an age-old phenomenon. From time immemorial, human beings have left their homes to look for greener pastures or more abundant game. At times, they fled to escape the violence of nature or others' hostility. Today, the phenomenon has acquired world-wide dimensions, especially with modern-day globalization which sometimes almost pushes people to cross the frontiers of nation-states with or without authorization. Moreover, wars, violence, persecution, the violation of human rights, terrorism underlie the flight of refugees and internally displaced people. This obviously brings with it untold suffering and pain, problems that need urgent solutions.

All nations on earth are actually faced with the eruption of this phenomenon in one aspect or another. DESA (2011) estimates **"**in 2010 there were some 214 million international migrants worldwide, this represents three per cent of the total global population. About 1 billion persons or one in seven currently live outside their place of origin." Migrants are now regular features of the contemporary societies. They migrate from rural to the growing cities, or from distant countries in search of better livelihood. This mobility affirms man's desire and aspiration for security, escape from poverty, desire for descent living, and a better future for the upcoming generations. For these reasons, people take huge risks; crossing the deserts on foot, the seas on rickety rafts, just to make it to greener pastures. On getting to the destination, residents feel naturally the need to close and police their borders in other to stem what is termed 'illegal migration.'

As migration becomes top news in the global affairs, its presentation is one sided, because it centers on the viewpoint of flow from developing to developed countries. Yet most movement in the world does not take place between developing to developed countries; it does not even take place between countries. The overwhelming majority of people who move do so inside their own country. According to Human Development Report (2000)

> There are about 740 million internal migrants- almost four times as many as those who have moved internationally. Among people who have moved across national borders, just over a third moved from a developing to a developed country - fewer than 70 million people. Most of the world's 200 million international migrants moved from one developing country to another or between developed countries.

Facts about migration are not properly portrayed by the Western world. Because they owned the media, they monopolize the reporting. Africa, where the crust of the movement is carried out does not possess basic data. Hence, the Western world floods the media with their perception of migration as movement from developing countries to developed countries.

However, the world of today is characterized by poverty; many people are impoverished and vulnerable especially from the developing world, as such, they move outside their abode in search of greener pasture for survival. Obielosi, (2018) asserts "survival trait is in the human nature. Thus, wherever he finds himself, he must work to survive". Survival therefore is the first concern for every human being. As such, migrants must be cared for. Bernard (2017) affirms

> Man is required by the most basic sense of humanity to help those fleeing for their lives as best as he can, welcoming them to stay for some time or for good. In legal terms it is a duty to rescue and not doing so constitutes a failure to render assistance to a person in danger, which constitutes a crime in many civil law jurisdictions.

As the phenomenon of migration is presently generating tensions on measures from the national to the local, and gains greater attention in global affairs, a strong theological perspective on this complex reality has much to contribute to a dialogue that is often more political, legal, and nationalistic in nature. Even more crucially, as the number of migrants and refugees driven from their homes by the effects of war, violence, poverty, and climate change swells quickly, and the suffering and danger they experience along their journey intensifies, the necessity of attending to their human rights of health, safety, shelter, and due legal process becomes more urgent. Both the structural forces and individual experiences of migration must receive due attention. Assistance and solidarity must be offered at the personal level, while fostering integration among migrants and their receiving communities requires multiple levels of political, social, and cultural change.

Conceptual Framework
Migration and Displacement
Different scholars have tried to define the concept of migration distinctly because of their different approaches. Geographers emphasize on the time and space significance of mobility, sociologists laid stress on social consequences of mobility whereas importance to economic aspect of migration is given by the economists. Literal meaning of "Migration" is "shifting of people or an individual or group of individuals from one cultural area to another, which may be permanent or temporary". Webster's dictionary (2018 edition), defines it as "the act or an instance of moving from one country, region to settle in another". It is equally defined as "an act of moving from one area to another in search of work". According to many individuals, the simplest meaning of the word migration can be simple shift in the physical space. But it would be interesting to note that meaning of migration is changing simultaneously with the passage of time. Contemporary, both the scope and definition of migration have become more complicated i.e. only mobility in physical state cannot define the concept of migration.

Smith (1960) bases his concept of migration on change in physical space. The definition suggested by Lee (1969) poses some problems when different types of migration is considers that is the movement of people from village to urban

areas for the duration of their active life, their visit back to the home town for a few days or a month could not be included unless these are for last time at retirement and so on. According to Caplow (1954)

> Migration is strictly speaking, a change of residence and need not necessarily involve any change of occupation, but it is closely associated with occupational shifts of one kind or another. The principal directions of migration are illustrated by more or less continuous movements from rural areas towards the city, from areas of stable population towards centers of industrial or commercial opportunity, from densely settled countries to less densely settled countries and from the centers of the cities to their suburbs.

Eisenstaedt (1953) looks at migration as "the physical transition of an individual or a group from one society to another. This transition usually involved abandoning one social setting and entering another and permanent one." But this definition failed to explain the psychology of individual or groups who are shifting from one geographical location to another.

In comparing the above mentioned definitions of migration, definition suggested by Weinberg (1961) appears relatively flexible because he considers human migration as the change of place permanently or temporarily for a particular duration of times in case of seasonal workers. If people maintain multiple residences in city, town and village, then his frequency of movement will help in deciding his status as a migrant. Though many social scientists came forward to discuss and define the concept of migration but some of them have complicated its definition. Hagerstrand (1957) has studied the Swedish migration fields and he has defined migration in terms of change in the center of gravity.

Migration and displace are same coin of different sides as both experience loss of contact with relatives, friends and usual location. Both leave their homes for a wide variety of often overlapping reasons. Whether they are fleeing from conflicts or disasters, or are simply seeking a better future for their family, whether they cross borders or are displaced within their own country, these people often face the same hardships and encounter the same pitfalls along the way. Maurer (2017) describes the difficulties and experience in the following terms:

> Once on their journey, migrants and IDPs face multiple risks and high degrees of vulnerability. When they reach their destination they often face difficulties in accessing health care, housing, education or

employment. They may become easy targets for abuse, extortion and exploitation due to a lack of a protective family network, a lack of information or missing documents. Many suffer accidents or illness and cannot benefit from medical care. Some lose contact with their families. Thousands die or disappear along the way every year. Many are held in prolonged detention for having entered or stayed irregularly in a foreign country, in disregard of the fact that detention should always be an exceptional measure of last resort and limited in time.

Why People Migrate

Several factors induce the intention and desire to migrate. As such, migration phenomenon can be perceived from different perspectives. The causes have been categorized into 'push and pull' factors. The push factors are the negative conditions at home that impel the decision to migrate. These conditions which vary in magnitude from one place to another include, unemployment, loss of jobs, famine, pestilence, lack of professional opportunities to prevalent high mortality levels. The pull factors are the strong positive attributes perceived to be existing at their destinations. They include availability of jobs, professional opportunities, comparatively better socio-economic environment, and access to medical facilities. These movements have been facilitated by good telecommunication and transportation systems which have made communication possible between those in diaspora and their home countries. The ease of transportation and communication has also encouraged migrants to endure long distances in search of better socio-economic prospects.

Many studies on international migration have confirmed that economic factors play a very dominant role in people's decision to migrate across borders (ILO, 2010). Before the colonial era (pre-colonial times) in Nigeria, cross-border migration was mainly involuntary as many people were forced out of the country due to the slave trade. During that period, many developing countries' citizens were forced to migrate to the western world especially to the Americas or the 'New World' to work in the plantations. Nowadays, globalization has made this movement inevitable. Lack of employment opportunities in the developing countries especially Nigeria is another strong push factor for cross-border migration.

According to ILO (2004) migration has absorbed a considerable number of young people entering labour markets of the advanced countries, while also generating remittances to the sending countries border migration has partially

reduced the pressure on the labour market in this country. Presently, there is a significant number of unemployed young graduates in Nigeria, and the situation is not getting better, which is likely to push them to emigrate. Nigerian emigrants are not willing to return home, arguably, the prevailing conditions at home is not favourable for them to return. Brain drain can be referred to as the large migration of individuals with technical skills from one country to the other with the purpose of finding better quality of life and jobs. Many Nigerians who studied abroad refuse to return home after completing their studies partly because the possibility of getting better job and higher living standards as are experiencing abroad are low. Other reasons for international migration especially from developing countries include humanitarian crisis such as forced displacement as a result of civil wars, natural disasters and ethnic conflicts. Some of the people also emigrate due to political persecution by their home governments. General unattractiveness of farming, lack of basic amenities (roads, electricity, water, and health care facilities) which prevent industrial ventures has made international migration inevitable.

Data available from National Bureau of Statistics (2012) shows the level of education among Nigerian emigrants in 2000, in all OECD countries indicated that, about 34.5% of the migrants had tertiary education Similarly, about 83% of the Nigerian emigrants in the United States and 46% in Europe were highly skilled workers (Docquier & Marfouk, 2004). Estimated data on Nigeria health professionals abroad in 2000 showed that more than 4,856 or 13.6% Nigerian physicians were working abroad and out of this 90% of them lived and worked in the USA and the UK. Over 12,579 or 11.7% professional nurses, who were born and trained in Nigeria, lived and worked abroad (Clemens and Peterson, 2008).

Facts of Migration: Nigeria Libya Experience

Millions of West African young men and women who really want to travel abroad gamble with death in an attempts to cross over to Europe and other parts of the world. This is as a result to escaping poverty, hunger, unemployment and insecurity among others. This situation has caused a major segment of Nigeria's population to seek alternatives for better livelihood elsewhere. Irregular migration is seen as the best alternatives, given difficulty and resources involved in migrating through regular and legitimate routes. Most occasions, very few of the original number who set out on these dangerous journeys live to tell their stories. Many are drown in the Mediterranean Sea, many die in the deserts, and others are sold as slaves in a

modern slave market. Most of the victims of this trade are from West Africa. According to Hamood (2006)

> In recent years, Libya has increasingly come to serve as a key transit country, particularly for North and sub-Saharan Africans heading for Europe. In Libya, refugees and asylum-seekers are not afforded adequate protection due to unclear policies regulating their stay in the country and to a lack of recognition of the specific legal status of refugees. The experiences of refugees and migrants alike are characterized by a lack of state protection regardless of their legal status in the country. They risk detention and, once detained, ill-treatment. Sub-Saharan Africans face the additional difficulty of racism from state officials as well as from Libyan society at large (p.6).

Libya, by comparison, has been predominantly a destination and transit country for regular and irregular migrants alike. According to Sheen (2012) "Libya was a major destination country in the 1990s, encouraging skilled and unskilled workers from sub-Saharan Africa to fill its need for manpower, it increasingly became a transit country in the 2000s. at the same time, large-scale deportations of irregular migrants were carried out throughout the 2000s, resulting in the removal of possibly hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants (CARIM, 2010).

Libya, by comparison, has been predominately a destination and transit country for regular and irregular migrants alike. While it was a major destination country in the 1990s, encouraging low-skilled and unskilled workers from sub-Saharan Africa to fill its need for manpower, it increasingly became a transit country in the 2000s. At the same time, large-scale deportations of irregular migrants were carried out throughout the 2000s, resulting in the removal of possibly hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants (CARIM, 2010). According to UNDESA (2009), the number of migrants in Libya in 2010 totaled 682,482, which amounts to 10.4 per cent of Libya's total resident population. In addition to these figures, Human Rights Watch (2006) estimates that there were between 1 million and 1.2 million irregular migrants in Libya in 2006, with the majority coming from West Africa and the Horn of Africa.

As a response to the United Nations Security Council air and arms embargo on Libya between 1992 and 2000, and the perceived lack of support among Arab countries, Gaddafi shifted his foreign policy towards Africa. Part of this policy entailed opening Libya's doors to migrant workers from sub-Saharan

Africa to work in Libya, causing increased arrivals of Western and Eastern Africans (de Haas, 2006). This increase, however, also led to the further segmentation of the Libyan labour market, as Libyans were unwilling to fill unskilled positions in areas such as construction and agriculture (despite calls to nationalize the workforce) (ibid). In 2000, in response to a backlash against migrant workers (which involved anti-migrant clashes and rising xenophobic attitudes towards migrant workers), the Libyan Government put in place more restrictive migration regulations and carried out the forced removal of about 1,450,000 irregular migrants between 2003 and 2005 (ibid).

In 2004, the EU lifted its arms embargo and economic sanctions on Libya, which had been in place since 1992 (Sheen 2012). The beginning of dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Libya resulted in Libya becoming one of the EU's main partners in its fight against irregular migration – a partnership that focused on securing the EU's southern Mediterranean border. Libya's relationship had been particularly strong with Italy, with whom it signed a 2008 Treaty of Friendship, stipulating that Libya increase its efforts to stop irregular migration to Europe, in exchange for EUR 5 billion provided by Italy to assist Libya in this endeavour. As part of this agreement, Libya coordinated land and sea efforts with the Italian Navy and Coast Guard, in order to intercept migrants before they reached the European Union (Araujo, 2011; Donadio, 2011).

In 2008, official negotiations to establish a framework agreement between the EU and Libya also began. In 2010, these parties, together with the EC, agreed on a Migration Cooperation Agenda, which included border management, anti-human-trafficking measures, mobility and dialogue on international protection and refugees (Araujo, 2011). While Libya is party to the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention, it is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Libya also ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families in 2004. Cooperation between the EU and Libya has focused mainly on security measures and has been criticized for lacking a human rights dimension (ibid). The onset of the crisis in Libya therefore caused tension among European governments who were unsure of the impact the ongoing conflict would have on migration flows towards Europe and on the upholding of previously concluded agreements.

Nigeria and the Migration Crisis

Historically, Nigeria's migration crisis and the quest to leave the country in search of better prospects began with the economic policies of the 1980's, which caused much hardship for people. The structural adjustment programme (SAP) that was meant to heal the country of its debt-induced development crisis ended up complicating the county's economic woes, leading to unimaginable hardships with associated unemployment, poverty and corruption. This resulted in large numbers of young men and women seeking better livelihoods abroad. Alemika (2013) contends that in in the 1980's and 1090's, the SAP destroys the economy and any social progress made in the country after independence from colonial rule. Alemika (2013) goes further to affirm that "Many of the SAP policies led to government downsizing or a withdrawal of social services, thereby creating a huge population of deprived and excluded citizens." Consequently, Egbuta (2018) asserts "many of these deprived and excluded citizens, whose conditions became more complicated, took to crime, while others began to migrate out of the country by any means: a situation that has continued even in the face of a government crackdown."

However, this cassis could be perceived in two forms. According to Egbuta (2019) "Irregular migrants fall into two categories: those who enter destination countries legally and overstay their visas, and those who leave Nigeria without proper travel documentation and/or enter destination countries illegally." Migrant who enter through unofficial routes fall under the definition of irregular immigrants. Irregular migration occurs both out of and into Nigeria. Citizens within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) overstay their 90 days of grace without regularizing their stay. Hence, the major expulsion exercises of January- March 1985 and May –June 1987 (Afolayan 1988, pp. 4-27).

Care as a Solution to Migration Crisis Using Matthew 25:35

The phenomenon of migration stirs a complicated host of questions, emotions, issues, and responses. The voices of migrants are often neglected or drowned out in the increasingly boisterous debates about policy, economics, and social and cultural identity as receiving countries wrestle over how to respond to thousands of migrants reaching and crossing their borders. The Catholic Church's engagement with migration has taken on various forms, from Pope Francis's repeated calls for mercy and hospitality as a response to migrants' plight, to the involvement of religious communities and laypersons in developing, staffing, and sustaining the array of shelters along the Mexican Migration Corridor.

Some bishops have been particularly outspoken in support of migrant's rights and a comprehensive reform of immigration policy in the United States; one Catholic and several Protestant bishops serving in southern Arizona have written a set of personal and spiritual reflections on their pastoral involvement– and that of their congregations– in the immigration issue. They affirm, in both word and deed, that "Christians have always been sent, like Jesus, to serve those who are poor and marginalized. Our presence on the border of our country is where we believe Jesus directs us to be" (Smith, 2013). "The Church's inner unity moves it to be a sign and instrument of unity in the world; its catholicity calls it to be a sign and instrument of diversity in unity for all to see," (Bavens and Schroeder 2004, p.299), expressing the Church's nature as a community of disciples charged by Christ to imitate his loving service and presence among the poor and the marginalized.

In Matthew 25:35, Jesus identifies himself as a stranger to be welcomed. He categorizes himself in the form of the most vulnerable and the marginalized, inviting all men to care for the frailest and to recognize his suffering countenance, especially in the victims of new forms of poverty and slavery associated with migration. Jesus says: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-36). The mission of the Church, herself a pilgrim in the world and the Mother of all, is thus to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are certainly migrants and refugees, who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Life is the most precious gift of God to man. Every man on earth heartily desires the fullness of this life. When there seem to be interruption to this, man instantly seeks protection. The world of today is characterized by cruelty. Developing countries like Nigeria is progressively going down the valley every day. There is no hope for its development. Young boy and girls are migrating out of the country in search of better life. Those who cannot afford the cost to travel either are trapped in the country while some hard core ones take dangerous route: Libya through the Sahara desert and Mediterranean Sea. Because of this situation, the Gospel pericope: Matthew 25:35 is calling for care and concern for migrants. Life and words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel is a long foundation for hospitality.

However, leaders of these underdeveloped countries are called to look inward and see what could be done to better the lives of their citizens so as to minimize this desire to migrate. In the migrating, let it be for site adventure. On the other hand, the countries the migrants are pulled to be enjoyed to monitor their border with human heart for all are created by the same God.

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