

INTERRELIGIOUS Insight

a journal of dialogue and engagement

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Reflections on Migration

"Reflections" is an occasional section of Interreligious Insight. Pieces come from various traditions, drawing on different sources to unfold an important theme in spirituality and interreligious work. We hope that readers will make their own fruitful connections for dialogue and engagement. This issue offers three reflections on the theme of "migration", from the Christian, Baha'i, and Muslim traditions, respectively.

A Christian Insight

GONZALO ITUARTE

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. And they were amazed and wondered, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and E'lamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappado'cia, Pontus and Asia, Phryg'ia and Pamphyl'ia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyre'ne, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." (Acts of the Apostles, 2, 5-13)

In this era of globalization, the migration of peoples is an eloquent voice calling us to witness: we feel challenged by the pain of so many, but at the same time we suspect that a new future is being born. As it did at the Christian Pentecost, Holy Spirit is speaking to us in the encounters of cultures and peoples.

At first glance we are struck by the drama and conflict of migration, but with the experience of our faith we can see deeper, and we can appreciate this human—and humanizing—experience from a different perspective.

Although in many cases people leave home in search of new horizons because they are poor, marginalized, or suffering injustice, for many others interregional (within their own countries) or international migration has other, less compelling motives; but the very fact that people can decide to risk leaving behind the familiarity of their own hearth, society, and

culture to make a new home in a different environment reveals the longing for living and growing that God has sown in the human soul: a yearning so profoundly positive that it must constitute a human right.

Without discounting the nation of Israel's long familiarity with migration, we need only consider the early days of Christianity to see how, from its beginnings in the travels of Jesus and his disciples, the church grew naturally as an itinerant faith, nourished by the early Christians' encounters with those who were different.

The spiritual practice of Jesus and those who were near to him was marked by many changes of place and encounters with peoples of different cultures. We need only remember some of the places and persons mentioned in the gospels: Bethlehem, Nazareth, the desert, the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Samaria, Jerusalem, the Roman captain, the Samaritan woman, the lepers, the marginalized...

The Christian church is born in Pentecost. The fundamental sign of this happening is the diversity of languages, cultures, and origins. And this characteristic of the church's beginnings particularly increases its universality. We can even say that this manifestation of the Holy Spirit requires that the mystery of salvation be available to all of humanity and that this in turn makes clear the inherent goodness of diversity and the growth that comes from our encounters with others.

The remarkable expansion of the earliest Christian communities, the missionary travels of Paul and the other evangelists, and the spread of Christians beyond their origins in Palestine are confirmed by the richness and variety of the texts of the Christian testaments. It was the diversity of geographical, social, cultural, and even religious contexts encountered by the early Christian Diaspora that made these revelations possible.

In this way the church came to see itself as a pilgrim, always on the road. So we need to understand the significance of the migrations that characterize our times: it will reveal anew for us the true identity of the church.

Recent Catholic thought considers migration in its many and various forms as a true Sign of the Times that we must try to interpret to be able to hear God speaking to us; as a place of theological encounter that opens new ways for us to understand human beings, the church, and God.

Migration arises from our deepest instincts for personal, family, and community survival. The desire and the right to seek a life that is more fraternal and more humane, a life of dignity and worth, are manifestations of the force of the Spirit that gives us life and that moves us to grow and be transformed by our cultural, social, economic, and even our genetic interactions.

Contemporary religious and scientific reports alike speak of the migratory nature of humanity. In these movements and encounters—violent or peaceful, painful or generous—of peoples we discover the inspiration that gives us viability and cohesion and the energy to grow. The vitality and the newness that immigrants bring with them become strength and growth for the peoples that receive them and who are themselves transformed in turn.

This is also true of religions. In Christianity, which has so many diverse expressions, we see clearly that it is the encounters—the globalization—that have given birth to new and better interpretations of the faith.

As one example we can cite the theological ferment that resulted from the European encounter with the peoples of the new world in the sixteenth century. In spite of the many

casualties and injustices that occurred in those decades, and despite the persecution and rejection suffered by those who proposed new doctrines of human rights or who appealed for recognition of the rights of the original peoples of the American continent, impressive advances in church teaching gradually gained legitimacy in the life and practice of the church.

Today we are witness to migration and globalization on a much larger scale. Again it has many roots, and again it brings much injustice and suffering, but it also brings many gifts. The faces of nations, of peoples, of cultures, and of religions are changing. God is betting the future of humanity on this, making possible the transformation of the world into a multicolored and kaleidoscopic mosaic in which every person, group, people, and religion can find a place.

But God will not do our work for us. The many streams of migrants crisscrossing our world are God speaking to us today so we can see and accept our task. As at the Christian Pentecost, this is Holy Spirit coming among us, manifesting in and from our diversity, making unity and peace possible for humanity.

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