

CONTENT AND CONTEXT IN THEOLOGICAL ETHICS



Gemma Tulud Cruz

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION

**Social Justice and
Religious Experience**



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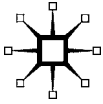
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*To my husband,
Edmund Kee Fook Chia*

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FOREWORD

One of the most striking signs of contemporary globalization is worldwide migration. Proponents of globalization describe it as the free flow of capital, goods, and knowledge. They typically mention the flow of people as well, but often do not note that this flow is not like the others. The flow of people in migration—now estimated to be 1 out of every 35 people on the planet—faces all kinds of restrictions. Migrants do not enter other countries freely. Once in the new country, their rights are often not acknowledged or protected. Only a small number of sending countries engage in any kind of advocacy for their citizens who are migrants.

A great deal is being written about migration. An important segment of the literature grapples with national and international policy regarding migrants, regarding their status and treatment in host countries, the impact of remittances migrants make back to their families in their home countries, and judging the economic and social impact of their labor on national economies. Another segment has been concerned with the migration of elite professional and academic personnel, and the need to provide easy movement of these people for the sake of utilizing their specialized knowledge in areas of science and of research and development. A smaller portion of the literature addresses the plight of the unskilled or semi-skilled migrant in the midst of the larger macro-forces of globalization.

This book by Gemma Tulud Cruz is an important contribution to understanding this latter group, who constitute the majority of today's migrants. She addresses the experience of these migrants as they leave their home countries, struggle to make a living in their home countries, and find themselves caught between two lands. Within that experience she focuses upon their religious experience. Religion is a component of migrant experience that is often overlooked in migration studies, due to secular bias in the academic settings of the investigators. Such a bias views religion as a private matter that should not impinge upon public discourse. If religion does so, it becomes a nuisance or a genuine problem. But it is the religious sensibilities of

migrants that often sustain them in their travails as migrants. Common religious practices also form an important social glue that helps migrants build a sense of community and belonging in the midst of an environment too often hostile to them.

Findings from the Pew Research Center indicate that the majority of today's migrants are Christian and women. Religion is often not taken into consideration in the literature; the gender question often also gets passed over. Cruz does us a double favor by focusing on the religious experience of Christian migrants and on the experience of women. Her religious focus is on Christians in general, and Roman Catholics (who make up slightly more than half of all Christians) in particular. And her focus on the female face of migration is perhaps the very first book to do so from a global perspective.

At another level, this book combines insights into the personal experience of migrants and questions of religion and gender into what is the first book on the theological significance of worldwide migration. Studies have been done on specific groups or areas of the world, but this book reaches beyond those confines. In doing so, Cruz not only explores the lives of individual migrants, and the role that religion plays in sustaining them in the arduous life of a migrant, but also questions what these experiences mean for a worldwide institution such as the Roman Catholic Church. What does the experience of such massive migration mean for this Church's understanding of itself and its mission in the world? This has been an understudied area in the extensive body of Catholic Social Teaching, and Cruz's book makes a significant contribution to the necessary next steps that need to be taken to include this important matter into the teaching and ministry of the Church. A more comprehensive vision of the phenomenon of migration with these insights will aid developing and enforcing clearer policies on the rights of immigrants and the responsibilities of both the host and sending countries. It will also provide elements of the groundwork for a more adequate understanding of a multicultural society.

Although there is a certain ebb and flow in migration that matches expansion and contraction of economic cycles, migration on a significant scale will continue to be a phenomenon with which we must grapple in the coming decades. So long as there is poverty and income inequality, so long as some countries cannot provide adequate and secure standards of living for their citizens, and so long as demographic patterns shift and reshuffle in different parts of the world, migration will be with us. The relative ease of travel not present in earlier times ensures the continuing movement of peoples. Added to all

the economic push-and-all factors currently experienced in migration, the looming consequences of climate change are also already being felt in migratory patterns. Extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels will likely ignite stronger waves of migration than we have seen to this point. Gemma Tulud Cruz's important book will stand as a landmark in an important region of this map of human movement and dislocation: it probes the deeply spiritual dimensions of the migration experience, and especially that of women, who make up a majority of the world's migrants. These two dimensions will be important for understanding the needs and aspirations of migrants today, and also the challenges of those institutions who try to support them in their quest for a more humane standard of living for themselves and their families.

Robert Schreiter
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

INTRODUCTION: MIGRATION AS A LOCUS FOR THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Mobility is as old as the human species. In fact, it is regarded as an engine of human history. Borders have been redrawn; people's stories have been rewritten; and identities and subjectivities have been transformed because individuals, groups, or masses of people took the risk to cross borders by either land, sea, or air. But mobility, particularly in its contemporary phases and faces, comes with considerable challenges. There is, for instance, the matter of density. At no other point in history has the number of people on the move been at such a large scale that the current period is being referred to as the age of migration.¹ To be sure, this claim is not without merit. The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) World Migration Report, for instance, says that the number of people living outside their country of origin dramatically increased from 150 million in 2000—when IOM published its first World Migration Report—to more than 214 million in 2010. That's an increase of 64 million in a matter of ten years. Moreover, the IOM reports that the figure could rise to as much as 405 million by 2050.² Today, about 3 percent of the world's population comprises of migrants. While the percentage may seem miniscule, it actually represents a lot of people. In fact, if all migrants in the world were to come together to constitute a country, theirs would be the world's fifth most populous.

But who are these people who are on the move across borders? Where do they come from? What are their motivations, what are their reasons? What forces compel them to leave their homeland and move to foreign lands? Perhaps it would be best to begin with some kind of definition or description of different types of international migrants to have a kind of framework to stand on.

The United Nations (UN) defines *migrants*—the term generally used in this book³—as persons residing outside their country of origin.⁴ Migrants are generally classified in two ways. First, they

are categorized as either *sojourners/ temporary migrants*, those who move briefly to visit, study, or work in another country, for example, international students, scholars, and contract workers,⁵ or *emigrants/ immigrants* or *permanent migrants*,⁶ those who leave one's country or region permanently to relocate or settle in another. Second, they are labeled as either *forced migrants*, those who have been driven from home by wars, persecutions, and natural calamities, or *voluntary migrants*, those who move independently or on their own accord, for example, migrant workers and brides or family members of immigrants. It must be noted here, however, that the terms "forced" and "voluntary" reflect more of a continuum in motivations rather than clear distinctions.

Moreover, there are specific types of migrants under the forced and voluntary migrants category. Under forced migrants, for instance, are the *refugees*. Refugees are defined by the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as persons who have had to flee across an international border because of well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. This definition was then expanded in the convention's 1967 Protocol to include persons who had fled war or other violence in their home country. Refugees are also often called *displaced persons*.⁷ Until a request for refuge has been accepted, displaced persons who move across international borders are referred to as *asylum seekers*. It is only after the recognition of their need for protection that they are officially referred to as refugees and enjoy refugee status, which carries certain rights and obligations according to the laws of the receiving country.⁸ In recent times due to severe environmental problems and hardships brought in large part by global warming, a new group of refugees, *environmental refugees*, has also emerged in the global migration landscape. New Zealand, for example, is now home to a number of people who have fled their homes in the small island country of Kiribati, which is slowly being swallowed by rising sea levels attributed to global warming. The UN even warns that rising sea levels, desertification, and shrinking freshwater supplies will create up to 50 million environmental refugees by the end of the decade.⁹ Then there are the 800,000 to 2 million people who are victims of human trafficking each year, a phenomenon that activists consider as the most pernicious human rights scourge created by globalization.¹⁰ *Trafficked persons* could also be seen as forced migrants, particularly those who fall prey to or become victims in the illegal human trade that coerces people into commercial sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, forced

marriage, domestic work, and other forms of forced labor,¹¹ making this contemporary illegal trade in human beings a modern-day form of slavery.

The majority of modern-day migrants, however, fall under the voluntary migrants category. Moreover, these people who move on their own under less problematic conditions are either *cultural migrants*, for example, international students or scholars on cultural exchange; *family (re)unification migrants*, for example, spouses and family members petitioned by their loved ones; or *economic migrants*, who constitute the vast majority of migrants globally. Understandably, migrant workers are the most dominant face of economic migrants. In migration history, particularly in the West, there have been various types of migrant workers. There is the *guest worker*, who comes under a temporary permit system aimed at the importation of temporary contract laborers. France and Germany ran such programs in the 1960s and 1970s importing laborers largely from Algeria and Turkey, respectively.¹² The *bracero* program, which ran in the 1940s–1960s and involved Mexican workers, is the American equivalent of the guest worker system. Visas were renewable, but the workers were not given permanent residence rights.¹³ In the United States the guest worker has made a comeback, albeit mostly in agricultural work and on a shorter visa, through the H2A visa or the agricultural worker visa. This visa allows American employers to hire foreign workers for temporary or seasonal jobs, specifically for no longer than one year. Technically, these guest workers fall under the category of unskilled workers together with the army of domestic workers, construction workers, factory workers, hospitality workers, and workers in the garment, agriculture, and fishing industry who make up the bulk of unskilled migrant workers today. Then there are the *skilled workers* or *STEP OUT migrants*, as Michelle R. Pistone and John J. Hoeffner prefer to call them in *Stepping Out of the Brain Drain: Applying Catholic Social Teaching in a New Era of Migration*.¹⁴ These are highly educated professionals, for example, nurses, doctors, engineers, scientists, and communication technology experts who are highly sought for their expertise (and, in certain cases, for their willingness to take a lower pay compared to their local counterparts) and are usually given permanent residence rights as well as possibilities for citizenship and family reunification. Last but not the least are the businesswo/men or rich *entrepreneurs* whose considerable financial resources make it much easier and quicker for them to get not just a visa but also permanent residency and, eventually, citizenship.