



7-2014

Justice Not Benevolence: Catholic Social Thought, Migration Theory, and the Rights of Migrants

Tisha Rajendra
Loyola University Chicago, trajendra@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/theology_facpubs



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Author Manuscript

This is a pre-publication author manuscript of the final, published article.

Recommended Citation

Rajendra, Tisha. Justice Not Benevolence: Catholic Social Thought, Migration Theory, and the Rights of Migrants. *Political Theology*, 15, 4: 290-306, 2014. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1179/1462317X13Z.0000000007>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications and Other Works by Department at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 2014 Taylor & Francis.

Justice not Benevolence: Catholic Social Thought, Migration Theory, and the Rights of Migrants

Introduction

Outlining the foundations of a theology of migration, Gioacchino Campese writes, “a meaningful theology of migration must get to know the reality of migration as it is, in its complex and multifaceted totality.”¹ The same is true for any Christian ethics of migration: in order to propose appropriate norms or policies, Christian ethicists must understand migration processes in all of their complexity. Migration is not only the result of inequalities in the labor market, but the result of complex relationships between migrants and citizens, between nation-states, and between the past and the present.

Some Christian ethicists explicitly make such relationships the foundation of their ethical analyses. Kristin Heyer describes the ways in which U.S. citizens are complicit in structures that perpetuate the human rights abuses of migrants.² Christopher Steck insists that U.S. citizens must remember the complex and painful history that has led to immigration from Mexico.³ Gioacchino Campese argues that theologians must not ignore the role of U.S. foreign and economic policies that guarantee the continued “crucifixion” of migrants by institutionalized violence.⁴

¹ Gioacchino Campese, “Beyond Ethnic and National Imagination,” in *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, ed. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 180.

² Kristin E. Heyer, “Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors,” *Theological Studies* 71, (2010): 435.

³ Christopher Steck, “Solidarity, Citizenship, and Globalization: Developing a New Framework for Theological Reflections on U.S.-Mexico Immigration,” *Journal of Peace and Justice Studies* 14, no. 2 (2004): 170.

⁴ Gioacchino Campese, “¿Cuántos Más?: The Crucified Peoples At the U.S.-Mexico Border,” in *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey : Theological Perspectives on Migration*, ed. Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 291.

Many of the documents of Catholic Social Thought that concern migration, however, implicitly assume that an account of migration as the simple response of migrants to poverty and unemployment in their homelands.⁵ This account of migration, known as neoclassical migration theory, does not match the objective reality of migration, nor does it have the consensus of migration theorists.

This paper argues that Catholic social thought on migration is overly reliant on neoclassical migration theory. This theoretical foundation results in ethical claims that overemphasize benevolence and hospitality at the expense of justice. Another migration theory, migration systems theory, offers a better foundation for Christian ethics of migration, suggesting that Christian ethics must respond to the nature of relationships between migrants and citizens. In addition to this initial contribution toward a Christian ethics of migration, I draw attention to the migration theories behind the claims of Heyer, Steck, and Campese, extending their own contributions.

The term *migrant* describes those who have crossed international borders or those who have migrated within one nation-state. The category of migrants includes refugees who are fleeing religious or political persecution or economic migrants who migrate in search of better lives for themselves and their families. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on international, economic migrants. These are purely practical decisions that follow the contours of migration theory⁶ and Catholic social thought.⁷ However, my

⁵ Others have critiqued Catholic social teaching on migration, though on different grounds. See Ibid.; Victor Carmona, "Love and Conflict in U.S. Immigration Policy," paper presented at the *Society of Christian Ethics Annual Meeting*, Washington, D.C., January 4-8, 2012.

⁶ Some migration theorists take issue with this distinction between refugees and economic migrants. See for example Ronald Skeldon, *Migration and Development: A Global Perspective* (London: Addison-Wesley Longman Higher Education, 1997), 59.

⁷ Christopher Llanos, "Refugees Or Economic Migrants: Catholic Thought on the Moral Roots of the Distinction," in *Driven From Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants*, ed. David Hollenbach, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

discussion will reveal some artificial aspects of these categories.

Migration theory is a broad term that includes theories describing any aspect of human migration. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on migration theories that describe what Stephen Castles and Mark Miller term “the determinants, processes, and patterns of migration.”⁸ Why do people migrate? Why do migrants go to one country and not another? I leave aside theories of immigrant incorporation, which address how immigrants settle into their new countries.

Understanding migration theory in all of its complexity is no easy task. No one theory of migration has the consensus of all migration theorists. Empirical data does not bring consensus as the data does not conclusively support one theory over others.⁹ Empirical researchers often do not concern themselves with trying to prove one theory over another.¹⁰

Some migration theorists caution against trying to find a universal theory of migration, cautioning that any such theory risks being too vague or general to be helpful.¹¹ However, any normative claim about migration explicitly or implicitly draws upon assumptions about how migration works. Eschewing all theories of migration leaves us without the ability to make any ethical claims about migration at all. Knowing that there is little consensus in the field of migration theory, Christian ethicists must remain ever attentive to changes and developments in that field.

Castles suggests that while a universal theory of migration that explains all human

⁸ Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 4th ed., Rev. & updated. ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), 20.

⁹ Joaquin Arango, “Explaining Migration: A Critical View,” *International Social Science Journal* 52, no. 3 (2000): 283-296.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹¹ See for example Alejandro Portes, “Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities,” *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 810, 17, 50, 281.

movement is unattainable, migration theorists can and should aim for “middle-range theories” that seek to explain similar kinds of migration.¹² I follow Castles, considering migration theories as explanations for labor migration from developing to developed countries. While the ethical issues surrounding transnational migration are manifold, I attend especially to the human rights of poor and vulnerable migrants. These migrants are particularly harmed by inaccurate understandings of migration theory.

Disagreements between migration theories emerge not only from disciplinary differences in methodologies and data sets; they also emerge from implicit differences in understandings of the human person and how she interacts with larger structures. Christian ethicists have the tools to bring an explicit theological anthropology to discussions of migration theory.

I argue that neoclassical migration theory is based on an anthropology of the person as an atomistic, rational actor; this anthropology is at odds with Catholic social thought’s anthropology of the person as inherently social. Christian ethicists should adopt a particular kind of migration theory: migration systems theory, because it more richly describes the objective reality of migration. In migration systems theory, migration is rooted in a geopolitics of interdependence, and is the result of relationships between sending and receiving countries. Once begun, migration is sustained by the relationships migrants have with one another and with their communities back in the sending country. The underlying anthropology of this theory assumes that the human person is both profoundly social and capable of agency.

Part I of this paper outlines various theories of migration, arguing that migration

¹² See for example, Castles, “Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformational Perspective,” *Journal of Ethic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 10 (2010), 1572.

systems theory best captures both the objective reality of migration and the relational anthropology of Catholic social teaching. Part II reviews the central principles of Catholic social teaching on migration, arguing that these principles rely on neoclassical migration theory. Part III is an ethical reflection on migration systems theory that uses the theological anthropology of Catholic social thought. I argue that Christian ethics must respond to the relationships between citizens and migrants that migration systems theory describes.

Migration Theory

The migration theorists I draw upon in this section all use slightly different categorizations and descriptions of migration theories. In summarizing this body of literature, I follow Castles and Miller in grouping the theories into economic theories—neoclassical, new economic, and segmented labor market—and structural theories—historical-structural and world systems.¹³ The last theory I describe, migration systems theory, is in some ways a hybrid of all the others.

Neo-classical migration theory

In neoclassical migration theory, migration is a rational choice. Migrants make a cost-benefit analysis and migrate only when the benefits of migration outweigh the costs.¹⁴ In particular, inequalities in wages between sending and receiving countries make migration more likely, as migrants respond to the draw of higher wages in the receiving country.¹⁵

¹³ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*.

¹⁴ George J. Borjas, *Friends Or Strangers : The Impact of Immigrants on the U.S. Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), Ch. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

Theologies and ethics of migration most frequently invoke the neoclassical model, but it does not fully account for the phenomenon of migration. This model would predict that the poorest in the world, who have the most to gain from migrating, would be the ones who migrate. But the data does not support this: The poorest countries in the world have relatively low emigration rates.¹⁶ Most migrants are from the middle class of their countries.¹⁷

In addition to these predictive shortcomings, neoclassical migration theory has philosophical shortcomings. The most glaring flaw in the neoclassical model is that it assumes that human behavior is influenced by no more than rational choice that evaluates utility in quantifiable terms. In addition, the theory does not acknowledge that individuals are more than autonomous agents motivated by self-interest. The next migration theory I will discuss, the new economics of migration, has a more social anthropology than a neoclassical one.

New Economics of Migration

The new economics of migration avoids the problematic anthropology of neoclassical migration theory by shifting the focus on the benefits and risks of migration from individuals to households and communities. Like neoclassical theories, the new economics of migration uses a rational choice model to explain migration, however, this theory shifts the locus of choice from the individual to the household or the community.¹⁸ In developing countries, communities often benefit from several members going abroad

¹⁶ This data point is virtually uncontested in the field of migration theory. See for example Skeldon, "Migration and Development," 8.

¹⁷ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 23.

¹⁸ Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 41.

to work as a kind of insurance against the vicissitudes of both nature and man-made structures.¹⁹

In the new economics of migration, individuals who migrate are presumed to be in relationship with their families and communities of origin. In addition, this theory presents a richer explanation of the push factors behind migration. The new economics of migration defines poverty as a complex of factors that include a basic insecurity and lack of insulation against misfortune, rather than simply as a lack of wealth.

Though the new economics of migration overcomes several deficiencies of the neoclassical approach, it has several shortcomings of its own. In addition, although this approach broadens its anthropology beyond the atomized individual agent, it remains within a rational choice model. The greatest shortcoming of both the neoclassical and new economic theories is that by overemphasizing push factors, they place responsibility for migration squarely on the shoulders of sending countries. In overemphasizing the supply-side of migrant labor and neglecting the demand-side, both neoclassical and new economics of migration overlook the factors in receiving countries that can drive migration. The next theory of migration is also based on economic models, but focuses on the demand side of migrant labor markets.

Segmented Labor Market Theory

Unlike the neoclassical and new economics approaches, segmented labor market theory focuses on the demand-side of labor migration: the labor markets of receiving countries. These labor markets are divided into a primary labor market that demands high-wage, high-prestige, high-skill labor, and a secondary labor market that demands

¹⁹ Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion*, 22-26.

low-wage, low-prestige, low-skill labor. The secondary labor market is for the dirty, difficult, and dangerous jobs essential to any industrialized economy. Immigrant workers are perfectly positioned for these secondary labor market jobs. Their lack of education and (in many cases) undocumented status keeps them out of the primary labor market. Unprotected by many labor laws, immigrants—particularly undocumented workers—are the ultimate disposable labor force. Thus, rather than being the outcome of poverty and unemployment in sending countries, segmented labor market theory argues that migration is driven by the very structure of industrialized economies, which demands cheap labor for unappealing jobs.

Segmented labor market theory reveals to the citizens of developed receiving countries their participation in structures that enable and cause the exploitation of immigrant workers for their own gain. In conceptualizing migration as the aggregate of individual choices to migrate, rational choice models neglect this factor. Segmented labor market theory also challenges the individualism of neoclassical migration theory by pointing out how structures larger than aggregate individual decisions impact migration patterns.

One shortcoming of segmented labor market theory is that it neglects the agency of migrants themselves.²⁰ Furthermore, it fails to account for the roles of states, policies, culture, and history in determining migration patterns.²¹ While neoclassical, new economic theories, and segmented labor market theory all provide valuable insight into the process of migration, these economic approaches to migration obscure the ways in which migration is both the result of and the cause of a complex of factors in both

²⁰ Bakewell, "Some Reflections on Structure and Agency in Migration Theory," 1693-1694.

²¹ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 25.

sending and receiving countries.²² Migration is a transnational issue, the result of transnational factors. I now turn to theories that see migration a part of global processes.

Historical-Structural Theory and World Systems Theory

While these two theories are distinct, they are often considered together because of their common intellectual roots, which lay in Marxist theory. Historical-structural theory considers migration, a legacy of colonial exploitation, and another way in which the resources of the developing world--this time the human resources--were transferred to the industrialized world.²³ World systems theory focuses on the role of multinational corporations in bringing about the conditions for migration in rural areas of the developing world.²⁴ In entering poor nations, multi-national corporations create the conditions for migration by disrupting the local economy, leading to poverty and displacement of workers.²⁵

Both historical-structural and world-systems theories pay attention to the larger geopolitical forces neglected by economic theories of migration. They attend to the fact that migration occurs in a context marked by global inequality, the legacy of colonialism and other kinds of intervention, and an increasingly globalized world economy. These theories also incorporate certain aspects of segmented labor market theory; the economic structures which drive migration operate both on a global and a local scale. Like segmented labor market theory, they avoid placing responsibility for migration solely on the shoulders of impoverished sending countries. Instead, they draw our attention to global structural forces that drive migration.

²² Ibid., 25-26.

²³ Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion*, 35-36.

²⁴ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 26.

²⁵ Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion*, 35-36.

However, while neo-classical and new economics overemphasize individual or community decision-making to the exclusion of other structural factors, historical-structural and world-systems have been criticized for neglecting the individual agency of migrants, who have their own hopes and responsibilities in migrating.²⁶ In addition, despite their promise, historical-structural and world-systems theories are too vague to account for and predict patterns of migration. These theories ignore the role of states, regional labor markets, internal conflicts in sending countries, and, of course, the hopes and desires of migrants themselves.

Migration Systems Theory

Migration systems theory is in some ways an amalgam of the various migration theories discussed so far. It attempts to place the agency of migrants described in neoclassical and the new economics of migration in the context of macro-structures such as the labor markets of receiving countries, and historical relationships between sending and receiving countries. Still, not all migration theorists consider migration systems theory a separate category of migration theory.²⁷ Skeldon defines migration systems not as a theory, but “as a series of generalizations that can help to provide an order for the analysis of the complexity of the real situation.”²⁸

Despite these concerns, I find migration systems theory to most accurately reflect a theological anthropology of the person as both possessed of agency and inherently social. Migration systems theory has much to recommend it as a mid-range theory that can explain many regional migration systems from the developing to the developed world.

²⁶ Bakewell, “Some Reflections on Structure and Agency in Migration Theory,” 1695.

²⁷ Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion*, 61.

²⁸ Skeldon, *Migration and Development*, 31.

Migration systems theories conceptualize transnational migration patterns as overlapping migration systems—“groups of countries that exchange relatively large numbers of migrants with each other.”²⁹ Each migration system is analyzed as a discreet entity in which a migration flow begins, continues, and ends. These systems consist of the overlap and interactions of macro-, meso- and micro- structures.³⁰

Migration is initiated by the macro-structures of colonialism, quasi-colonialism and organized labor recruitment. Colonial ties have often initiated migration because members of former colonies were perfectly positioned to respond to labor shortages in the former colonial power.³¹ Migration theorist Saskia Sassen includes current quasi-colonial ties as relationships that can start a migration system. For example, U.S. intervention in Latin American countries has generated a quasi-colonial link that started migration systems.³²

A migration system can also begin with governmental organized recruitment in response to labor shortages. Although the best-known example of organized labor recruitment is the German *gastarbiter* program, Belgium, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States have all had their own guestworker programs. These programs were designed to use foreign labor to respond to labor shortages without increasing permanent migration. However, migration systems, once begun, cannot be terminated at the will of the receiving country.

²⁹ Mary M. Kritz and Hania. Zlotnik, “Global Interactions: Migration Systems, Processes, and Policies,” in *International Migration Systems : A Global Approach*, ed. Mary M. Kritz et al., (Oxford New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1992), 4.

³⁰ Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*.

³¹ Castles and Miller, *The Age of Migration*, 102-106.

³² Saskia. Sassen, *Losing Control? : Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 85.

Like segmented labor market theory, migration systems theory shows how the appetites of industrial economies for cheap labor fuels migration. Unlike segmented labor market theory, migration systems theory shows how migration systems have been initiated by the specific actions of states, but continue after these actions end. In many cases, once governmental recruitment ended (most guestworker programs ended in the 1960s) labor recruitment continued through private agencies.³³

The macro-structures of contact between sending and receiving countries initiate migration systems; the meso-structures of migration, or the social networks and connections that migrants both create and draw upon to migrate and adapt in their new countries, perpetuate them.³⁴ These networks include family relationships, small economic infrastructures, and informal networks both within ethnic enclaves in the receiving countries and across borders to communities still in the sending country.

While neoclassical theory and the new economics of migration would predict that migration would ebb and flow with the unemployment rate of receiving countries, migration systems theory predicts that migration is somewhat autonomous from these variations. Once a migration system is initiated by the receiving country, it is sustained for a time by the meso-structures of informal migrant networks. Migration flows, however, do not necessarily continue indefinitely. Because they are highly conditioned on social, political, and economic factors, they ebb and flow in relation to these factors. Migration flows can also end if these factors change.³⁵

Migration systems theory is distinct from economic theories of migration and

³³ Portes and Böröcz, "Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives on Its Determinants and Modes of Incorporation," 611.

³⁴ Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, Ch. 4.

³⁵ Sassen, *Guests and Aliens*, xv.

structural theories of migration in that it accounts both for the macro-structures of history, policy, and institutions along with the meso-structures of social networks and familial ties. Unlike purely economic theories of migration, it can account for why migrants from some countries go to some receiving countries and not others. Unlike structural theories of migration, it can account for why some people in a sending country migrate and others do not. It incorporates features of the new economics of migration by accounting for the fact that migrants do have agency in their decisions about migration, but it places these decisions in both a macro-structure of geopolitics and a meso-structure of social networks. It incorporates features of segmented labor market theory by placing the demand for cheap, disposable labor in industrialized countries in the context of the globalized economy.

Unlike the economic theories of migration, migration systems theory takes into account the role of states in the migration process. States can initiate migration systems through foreign and economic policy. They can extend or deny rights to migrants through immigration and border control policy. However, migration systems theory is careful not to overemphasize the role of the state in migration processes. The state is a “powerful player” in migration systems, but not the only player.³⁶ Its power and effectiveness in controlling migration is often offset by the strength of the migration flow itself. Thus, states border control policies often work at cross-purposes with economic policies, with undocumented migrants caught in between.

Migration systems theory can intertwine with a theological anthropology that sees the person as inherently social, born into both micro-structures and meso-structures of

³⁶ Skeldon, *Migration and Development: A Global Perspective*, 46.

family, community, culture, local economy, states and macro-structures of history, globalization, and transnational labor markets. The lives of individual migrants are not wholly determined by these macro-structures. On the other hand, the micro-decisions of migrants are not disconnected from the globalized, interdependent geopolitical context in which they make their decisions.

Migration systems theory should not be regarded as the final word on migration theory. As in every other field, new data and theories emerge in time. Christian ethicists who write about migration should be ever aware of new trends in the field and continue to evaluate both the migration theories and the resultant ethics of migration in light of the Gospel.³⁷

Migration Theory and Catholic Social Thought on Migration

As we have seen, migration is not simply a problem of poverty in sending countries. In the words of migration systems theorist Saskia Sassen,

If immigration is thought of as the result of the aggregation of individuals in search of a better life, immigration is, from the perspective of the receiving country, an exogenous process, one formed and shaped by conditions outside the receiving country. The receiving country is then saddled with the task of accommodating this population...The receiving country's experience is understood to be that of a passive bystander to processes outside its domain and control, and hence with few options but tight closing of frontiers if it is to avoid an "invasion."³⁸

In other words, if we understand migration as solely the result of poverty in sending

³⁷ Second Vatican Council, "Gaudium Et Spes," in *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), no. 4.

³⁸ Sassen, *Guests and Aliens*, 136.

countries, migration seems as if it is something happening “over there,” caused by forces far away that have no relationship with receiving countries. Catholic social thought on migration adopts the view that migration is an exogenous process, and misrepresents migration as a tragedy of sending countries rather than a process in which receiving countries participate. This leads Catholic social thought on migration to emphasize benevolence rather than justice as a foundation for an ethics of migration. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on *Strangers no Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, the 2003 joint declaration by the U.S. and Mexican bishops on migration and on John Paul II’s 1996 address for World Migration Day on Undocumented Migration.

Strangers No Longer builds its reflection on migration on two rights: The “right of persons to migrate to support themselves and their families” and the right of “sovereign nations to control their borders.”³⁹ The first two rights of the person are linked to the right to life. The human person has the right not only to life, but also to the goods that support and sustain life: food, water, employment, health care, etc. When access to these goods is threatened, the person has the right to migrate in order to be able to provide these things for herself and her family. This right of the person to migrate is in tension with the right of the sovereign state to control its borders, which stems from the duty of the state to protect the common good by creating and maintaining stable conditions.⁴⁰

Although these two rights would seem to come into conflict in the current era of border control, the Bishops insist that these two rights “complement” one another.⁴¹

³⁹ *Strangers No Longer*, no. 39.

⁴⁰ Drew Christiansen, “Movement, Asylum, Borders: Christian Perspectives,” *International Migration Review* (Spring 1996): 16.

⁴¹ *Strangers No Longer*, no. 39.

When the right of the state to control its borders and the right of the person to migrate do come into conflict, the Bishops are quite clear that, under the prevailing conditions of global inequality, “the presumption is that persons must migrate in order to support and protect themselves and that nations who are able to receive them should do so whenever possible.”⁴² Although states can close their borders if the local common good demands it, wealthier, more powerful nations have “the stronger obligation to accommodate migration flows.”⁴³ Thus, while the Church affirms both the right of the person to migrate and the right of the state to control its borders, in the context of contemporary economic migration, the right of the person most often takes precedence over the right of the state.

Catholic social thought on migration is actually quite radical in its assertion that immigrants have human rights; public policy discussions on immigration rarely invoke the human rights of migrants.⁴⁴ The insistence that in today’s context, some persons have a right—and perhaps even a duty—to migrate actualizes the option for the poor by taking the side of the needy migrant over the right of a wealthy state. But while I agree that this uncompromising commitment to the human rights of migrants is a necessary component of any Christian ethics of migration, these two principles falter in their over-reliance on neoclassical and new economic theories of migration.

The complementarity of the twin rights is founded in an assumption that migration is caused exclusively by poverty and under-development. The U.S. and Mexican bishops state this explicitly when they identify the “root causes of migration” as

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., no. 36.

⁴⁴ Andrew Yuengert and Gloria L. Zúñiga, *Inhabiting the Land : The Case for the Right to Migrate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Acton Institute, 2003), 5.

economic inequalities, poverty, and unemployment in sending countries.⁴⁵ Similarly, John Paul II writes that the cause of undocumented migration is “the present economic and social imbalance” which can be addressed through development.⁴⁶

The implication of this focus on poverty and inequality implies that people migrate only because they cannot find economic opportunities in their homeland. While it is certainly true that there are some migrants who cannot survive in their home countries, the same critiques of neoclassical migration theory described above apply to the tradition’s take on the twin rights of the migrant. While poverty and unemployment in sending countries are certainly *a* factor driving migration, the emphasis on push factors of migration obscures the fact that most migrants are in fact neither the poorest people in the world, nor the poorest people in their countries.

This theoretical weakness in Catholic social teaching on migration leads to dubious policy recommendations. Catholic social thought on migration repeatedly advocates development aid. For example, the U.S. and Mexican Bishops propose “develop[ing] the economies of sending nations” and “adjust[ing] economic inequalities between the United States and Mexico.”⁴⁷ In his 1996 World Migration Day address, John Paul II proposes a similar supply-side cure for undocumented migration.⁴⁸

With the exception of pure neoclassical migration theory, most theories of migration suggest that development will not reduce migration pressures. In fact, the

⁴⁵ *Strangers No Longer*, nos. 50-nos. 61.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, “Undocumented Migrants: Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996,” http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/migration/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_25071995_undocumented_migrants_en.html (accessed June 27, 2011), no. 2.

⁴⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, “Strangers No Longer,” no. 59-no. 60.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, “Undocumented Migrants,” no. 2.

theoretical models of the new economics of migration,⁴⁹ historical-structural/world-systems theory,⁵⁰ and migration systems theory all suggest that development may actually enable more migration, at least in its initial stages. In fact, only the neoclassical model would predict that development would ease migration pressures.

The empirical evidence on relationship between migration and development does not point to clear correlation between development practices and reduced migration.⁵¹ Many theorize that development can actually spur emigration.⁵² Some literature suggests that the effect of development on migration depends on the specific strategies of development. Export-oriented manufacturing, for example, may actually increase migration pressures.⁵³ On the other hand, Margaret Regan's account of an independent coffee-cooperative suggests that just labor practices have encouraged coffee farmers to remain in Chiapas rather than emigrate to the United States without documentation.⁵⁴ The fact that there is no straightforward answer to the question of how and whether development affects migration suggests that Catholic social teaching on migration should refrain from confidently recommending development as a remedy for migration.

Catholic social teaching's reliance on neoclassical migration theory leads not only to flawed policy recommendations, but also to an inadequate analysis of the ethics of migration. Ideally, Christian ethics should be able to bring its own methodological tools

⁴⁹ Massey et al., *Worlds in Motion*, 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵¹ Skeldon, *Migration and Development*, 6; Stephen Castles, "Development and Migration--Migration and Development: Which Comes First?," *Migration and Development: Future Directions for Research and Policy* 2, (2008): 14.

⁵² See for example Lin Lean Lim, "International Labor Movements: A Perspective on Economic Exchanges and Flows," in *International Migration Systems*, ed. Mary M. Kritz et al., (Oxford New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1992), 138; Skeldon, *Migration and Development*, 8.

⁵³ Lim, "International Labor Movements," 138.

⁵⁴ Margaret Regan, *The Death of Josseline : Immigration Stories From the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), Ch. 2.

to migration theories in order to help us understand reality in all of its complexity. If we employ flawed theories, then the tools of Christian ethics can only give us a distorted picture of reality.

Catholic Social Thought on Undocumented Migration

Both John Paul II and the U.S. and Mexican bishops root their analyses of undocumented migration in neoclassical migration theory as well. John Paul II insists that the Christian community must help undocumented migrants, listening to their stories, providing them with fundamental needs, and helping them, when possible, to legalize their status.⁵⁵ However, when there is no way for the undocumented migrants to become legal, Christians and their institutions should help them “seek acceptance in their other countries, or return to their own country.”⁵⁶ John Paul II thus assumes that undocumented migration is driven by unfortunate conditions in the sending countries. The receiving country has limited responsibility to legalize undocumented migrants. In advising Christians to help undocumented migrants, John Paul II urges Christians to work within the laws of the nation-state, never challenging the international political and economic systems which, according to migration systems theory, drive both legal and undocumented migration.

The U.S. and Mexican bishops have a slightly more complex analysis of undocumented migration, though it also falls prey to some of the same shortcomings as John Paul II’s. The bishops acknowledge that certain policies in receiving countries, for example per-country limits on family reunification visas, actively encourage

⁵⁵ John Paul II, “Undocumented Migrants,” no. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 4.

undocumented migration.⁵⁷ They advocate for a “broad legalization program” to better protect the rights of migrants.⁵⁸ While the Bishops are correct to criticize the current state of affairs, in which millions of undocumented immigrants live in constant fear without the protection of law, the Bishops are still using the conceptual tool of benevolence in arguing for legalization.

Benevolence and hospitality are cornerstones of both Christian ethics and common sense morality. However, they are not adequate solutions to the problem of migration. In the same way that charity is often presented as the solution for poverty, missing the role of justice in righting the wrongs that have led to extreme inequality, Catholic social thought on migration misses the participation of the receiving country in the processes that lead to migration.

An Ethical Analysis of Migration Systems Theory

Although John Paul II and the U.S. and Mexican bishops do not adequately analyze the ethical issues presented by migration, a social ethics of migration can draw on the resources of Catholic social thought in order to respond to a more complex account of migration than neoclassical migration theory can provide. While I do not intend to present a comprehensive social ethics of migration here, I suggest that the theological anthropology of Catholic social thought, with its attention to relationships, can contribute to a Christian social ethics of migration.

A theological anthropology that sees the human person as interdependent can help

⁵⁷ *Strangers No Longer*, nos 65-nos 66.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 69.

us understand migration so that we can see what theological resources might be required to address transnational migration. Catholic social thought understands the person as inherently social, embedded in a network of relationships. The idea that persons, societies, and political communities are interdependent with one another is a core assumption of Catholic social thought. In migration systems theory, migration is the natural outcome of interdependence rather than the result of tragedies in sending countries.

This interdependence includes both the migrants themselves and their larger political communities. Migrants are in relationship with one another, establishing informal structures to protect one another from economic or political misfortune. Small businesses in ethnic enclaves help migrants to employ one another. Informal informational networks protect undocumented migrants against detection by the authorities and help them to cope with life on the margins of society. Migrants are also in relationship with their families and communities back in the sending country. Remittances enable migrants to care for their families back home. Similarly, migrants care for their families by sharing knowledge about how to migrate, thus aiding family reunification. Migrants embark on migration journeys not only because they are rational actors, but because they are also social beings “who seek to achieve better outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities by actively shaping the migration process.”⁵⁹

Catholic social teaching on migration accords with this aspect of migration systems theory, affirming that migrants are social beings who must act out of

⁵⁹ Castles, “The Factors and Make and Unmake Migration Policy,” 37.

responsibility to their own relationships. So far, this is not so different from *Strangers no Longer*, which sees migrants as part of larger families and communities. The U.S. and Mexican bishops strenuously advocate family-based immigration policies so that the families of migrants can stay together.⁶⁰

While Catholic social thought on migration is attentive to the meso- and micro-structures of migration systems, it ignores the macro-structures. Like the economic migration theories upon which it is based, Catholic social thought on migration attends to the micro- and meso-structures of migration, but ignores the macro-structures of transnational relationships that are often marked by inequality and exploitation. Although Catholic social thought on migration does not address the relational macro-structures, there are resources within Catholic social thought that can help ground an ethics of migration.

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis considers it a given that countries are interdependent with one another, however, interdependence may be exploitative.⁶¹ The macro-relationships that drive migration are largely exploitative. In the case of colonial, quasi-colonial, and guestworker source relationships, the relationship has been “separated from its ethical requirements” of solidarity and justice.⁶² Although there is not the space here to critically examine the history of colonialism, it should suffice to say that colonialism, though cast as a civilizing project of European countries, was primarily a quest to exploit the resources and peoples of the newfound worlds. Similarly, the quasi-colonial relationships between the U.S. and countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua

⁶⁰ *Strangers No Longer*, nos. 64-67.

⁶¹ John Paul II, “*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*,” in *Catholic Social Thought : The Documentary Heritage*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), no. 17.

⁶² *Ibid.*

overturned the will of peoples, and armed dictators to act against their own peoples at the behest of the U.S. Government. Such colonial and quasi-colonial relationships were unjust in and of themselves; they also initiated migration systems back to the colonial power.

While organized guestworker recruitments cannot be compared to colonialism or quasi-colonialism, such recruitments are also a type of interdependence based on exploitation. In this case, Western governments wanted a temporary workforce: one that could do jobs that native workers would not do. Guestworker programs were established to use sending countries as a source of labor without allowing the laborers to participate in the benefits of citizenship. Michael Walzer terms this exercise of power of citizens over non-citizens tyranny.⁶³

The relationships that generate migration flows—colonial, quasi-colonial, and labor recruitment—are often exploitative relationships that are based in inequality. According to John Paul II, interdependence means that the nations of the world either prosper together or suffer together. When interdependence becomes exploitative, although it seems to benefit the stronger nations at the expense of the weak, the effects of this exploitation appear even in the stronger nation.⁶⁴ In most cases, this is not immediately obvious.

The costs of exploitative interdependence are borne by the most vulnerable members of the global society—the poor, the disabled, women, and immigrants. Many forms of transnational exploitation are hidden. With migration, however, the

⁶³ Michael. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice : A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 62.

⁶⁴ John Paul II, “Sollicitudo Rei Socialis,” no. 17.

consequences of present and past exploitation come home to the receiving nation. The exploitation of both past and present are physically embodied in the migrant. Migrants are the concrete, embodied manifestations of a past and present that would rather be forgotten. “They are here because we were there.”⁶⁵

The narrative of neoclassical and new economic theories of migration—that migration is solely a problem of poverty in the sending country—enables the citizens of receiving countries to close their eyes to the sinful structures that drive migration.⁶⁶ One of the tasks of a theology of migration must therefore be to illuminate these structures as a first step in addressing the social sin that hides them.

In other words, a Christian ethics of migration that attends to the realities of migration would need to directly address the histories of exploitation that have shaped the relationship between citizens and migrants. In addition, a Christian ethics of migration must be clear that these relationships lead to responsibilities that go beyond benevolence. The protection of the human rights of migrants is a matter of justice.

Many Christian ethicists do address the relationships between migrants and citizens. Kristin Heyer makes social sin a central part of her analysis of migration. Implicitly drawing on segmented labor market theory, Heyer describes the ways in which U.S. citizens are complicit in the structures that perpetuate the human rights abuses of migrants.⁶⁷ For Heyer, solidarity is not just a general call to respect migrants and defend their human rights; solidarity is a set of practices that can counteract social sin.

Christopher Steck draws on migration systems theory to point out that Mexican

⁶⁵ Attributed to Stewart Hall

⁶⁶ For an account of how social sin as a form of blindness that leads to anti-immigrant policies in the United States, see Heyer, “Social Sin and Immigration.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 435.

migration to the United States today takes place in a context of a history of economic relations between the United States and Mexico. For Steck, “Solidarity means to accept that history and our responsibility for it.”⁶⁸ This is a substantially thicker account of responsibility to migrants than that provided by John Paul II and the Bishops. In Steck’s account, solidarity concerns particular relationships and particular histories.

Gioacchino Campese draws on migration systems theory to point out that in the context of the U.S.-Mexican border, with its extreme weather, human smugglers, and increasingly militarized border, ignoring the role of U.S. foreign and economic policy in U.S. migration guarantees the continued “crucifixion” of the migrants by institutionalized violence.⁶⁹

Such Christian ethicists are drawing attention to the structural forces that drive migration, as well as the role of the citizens of Western democracies in participating in such structures. They also call attention to the need for the theological and methodological resources of Christian ethics to attend to a more accurate and complex account of migration than the one drawn upon by institutional Catholic social thought.

Conclusion

According to migration systems theorists, migration will not come to an end any time soon. Although many migration systems began in the past, migrant networks sustain migration flows. Migration flows can end; however, new interventions—both military and economic—have the potential to generate new migration flows.

Migration systems theory might lead some to say that migration is a tragedy, born out of a history of unjust interventions and exploitation. I think that viewing migration as

⁶⁸ Steck, “Solidarity, Citizenship, and Globalization,” 170.

⁶⁹ Campese, “¿Cuántos Más?” 291.

a tragedy is a mistake. Migration systems theory also points to the innovation, ingenuity, and creativity of migrants themselves, as they work to improve opportunities for themselves and their families. In addition, regardless of the often-painful histories that bring migrants to their new homes, they can and do make positive economic, social, and cultural contributions in receiving countries. Regardless of the histories that initiated a migration flow, both migrants and citizens have the opportunity to transcend an unjust history by seeing their present actions in light of that past.

Rather than focus on ending migration flows, citizens of developed countries must advocate for more just foreign, economic, and immigration policies. Certain policy proposals of the Bishops, such as a broad legalization program, have merit, but they must be rooted in duties of citizens towards migrants. While it is not the purpose of this paper to outline the specifics of a legalization program, I will say that migrants are not strangers to citizens; they have claims on citizens that could certainly entail legalization in certain circumstances.

Migration systems theory suggests that the relationship between migrants and potential migrants is stronger than an encounter between strangers, thus responsibilities to migrants would be stronger than benevolence. Migrants are neither complete strangers, nor are they full citizens. Christian ethics of migration should reflect on the nature of the relationship between migrants and citizens in order to propose policies that respond to these relationships.

Acknowledgements

I thank Hille Haker, the Loyola University Ethics Colloquium, and the peer-reviewers for this journal for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Sandra Sullivan Dunbar

provided insight to numerous drafts of this paper.

Selected Bibliography

- Arango, Joaquin. "Explaining Migration: A Critical View." *International Social Science Journal* 52, no. 3 (2000): 283-296.
- Bakewell, Oliver. "Some Reflections on Structure and Agency in Migration Theory." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 10 (2010): 1537-1563
- Borjas, George J. *Friends Or Strangers : The Impact of Immigrants on the U.S. Economy*. New York: Basic Books, 1990.
- Campese, Gioacchino. "Beyond Ethnic and National Imagination." In *Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants*, ed. Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, 175-190. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.
- _____. "¿Cuántos Más?: The Crucified Peoples At the U.S.-Mexico Border." In *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey : Theological Perspectives on Migration*, ed. Daniel G. Groody, and Gioacchino Campese, 271-298. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008.
- Castles, Stephen. "The Factors and Make and Unmake Migration Policy." In *Rethinking Migration : New Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives*, ed. Alejandro Portes, and Josh DeWind, 31-63. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007.
- _____. "Understanding Global Migration: A Social Transformational Perspective." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, no. 10 (2010): 1565-1586.
- _____. "Development and Migration--Migration and Development: Which Comes First?" *Migration and Development: Future Directions for Research and Policy* 2, (2008):
- Castles, Stephen, and Mark J. Miller. *The Age of Migration : International Population Movements in the Modern World*. 4th ed., Rev. & updated. ed. New York: Guilford Press, 2009.
- Faist, Thomas. *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.
- Heyer, Kristin E. "Social Sin and Immigration: Good Fences Make Bad Neighbors." *Theological Studies* 71, (2010): 410-436.

- John Paul II. "Undocumented Migrants: Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day, 1996." (1996):
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/migration/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_25071995_undocumented_migrants_en.html (accessed June 27, 2011).
- Kritz, Mary M., and Hania. Zlotnik. "Global Interactions: Migration Systems, Processes, and Policies." In *International Migration Systems : A Global Approach*, ed. Mary M. Kritz, Lin Lean. Lim, and Hania. Zlotnik, 1-34. Oxford New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Lim, Lin Lean. "International Labor Movements: A Perspective on Economic Exchanges and Flows." In *International Migration Systems : A Global Approach*, ed. Mary M. Kritz, Lin Lean. Lim, and Hania. Zlotnik, 133-149. Oxford New York: Clarendon Press Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Massey, Douglas S., Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Adela Pellegrino, and J. Edward Taylor. *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration At the End of the Millennium*. Vol. International studies in demography. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Portes, Alejandro. "Immigration Theory for a New Century: Some Problems and Opportunities." *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (1997): 799-825.
- Portes, Alejandro, and József Böröcz. "Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives on Its Determinants and Modes of Incorporation." *International Migration Review* 23, no. 3 (1989): 606-630.
- Sassen, Saskia. *The Mobility of Labor and Capital : A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow*. Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- _____. *Losing Control? : Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization*. Vol. University seminars/Leonard Hastings Schoff memorial lectures. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- _____. *Guests and Aliens*. New York: New Press : Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1999.
- Skeldon, Ronald. *Migration and Development: A Global Perspective*. London: Addison-Wesley Longman Higher Education, 1997.
- Steck, Christopher. "Solidarity, Citizenship, and Globalization: Developing a New Framework for Theological Reflections on U.S.-Mexico Immigration." *Journal of Peace and Justice Studies* 14, no. 2 (2004): 153-178.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Conferencia del Episcopado
Mexicano. "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope." (2003):
<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml> (accessed July 1, 2011).