



Dialogic theology of missions as a response to the global refugee phenomenon



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The legacies of colonialism on both the colonised and coloniser is one thing that our world cannot escape in contemporary times. In most of the places, colonialism came with its own form of Christianity. This colonial Christianity was based on the idea of exclusion, homogenisation and conquering the other. Thus, the combination of the ideals of colonialism and Christianity brought about a type of nationalism, which was monologic. This monologic nationalism as an ideology not only creates refugees but also generates a monological 'unity' among the people in the country of arrival against these refugees. This poses a danger to humanity as a whole. Thus, it is important for scholars of religion and theology to deconstruct ideas on the line of monologic nationalism and embrace a form of nationalism that is dialogical in nature. In this regard, this article using Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of dialogism as its framework attempts to construct a dialogic theology of missions as a response to the global refugee phenomenon. The article argues that there must be a shift from colonial missions, which are monologic in nature to a dialogic theology of missions grounded in World Christianity.

Contribution: This article attempts to point out a key legacy of colonialism and colonial Christianity: the creation of refugees, which often has not been looked at by many scholars. The problem lies not with 'Christianity' as a religion, but the type of Christianity being practised. Addressing this practice demands a shift from colonial Christianity to World Christianity, which is embedded within its solutions to the global refugee crisis that the world is currently facing.

Keywords: dialogic theology; colonial Christianity; world Christianity; colonial missions; monologic colonialism; migration; refugee.

Introduction

The current refugee crisis is a global phenomenon that is shifting the global landscape. Though the movement of people is as old as humanity itself and is not a new phenomenon to humanity, this century is witnessing what has been termed a 'large-scale migration' at an unprecedented level (Castles, De Haas & Miller 2014). Castles and Miller (1998) argue:

[W]hile movements of people across borders have shaped states and societies since time immemorial, what is distinctive in recent years is their global scope, their centrality to domestic and international politics and their enormous economic and social consequences. (p. 1)

What characterises a large part of such migration is forced migration, which has created millions of refugees. The global refugee phenomenon has emerged as a painful moral wound of our times. The suffering and death of refugees call for urgent action. The current refugee crisis is a global problem affecting all countries irrespective of continent. One may ask, how did we get here? What are some of the factors that have led to us getting here? One major event that shaped the history of the world leading to most of the problems that the world is facing in contemporary times is colonialism and its legacies. The history of colonialism not only contributes to racism and segregation but also creates the phenomenon of refugees and the crises associated with it in contemporary times. Colonialism and the type of Christianity that was birthed under this system gradually led to the emergence of monologic nationalism. The relegation of the majority of people to the lower level has given birth to global refugees, which is manifested in indifference, rejection, violence and genocide. When religion uses nationalism, the unholy marriage of the two gives birth to the global crises of refugees that have different manifestations. Human history proves that the church was born out of refugees because of its inauguration. Thus, it is possible to argue that without addressing the current refugee crises, there could be difficulties for humanity and Christianity. Therefore, this article argues that by appropriating Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of

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dialogism, one can propose possible solutions to dealing with the global refugee phenomenon. Dialogism as proposed by Bakhtin promotes inclusiveness, polycentrism and pluralism. This article considers these elements as crucial for addressing the global refugee phenomenon.

Theoretical orientation: Dialogism

Dialogism as proposed by Bakhtin (1990) was a response to the theory of monologism. Bakhtin describes monologism as the act of putting off the process of dialogue and its potential. Thus, monologism arises whenever and wherever 'universal truth' does not allow 'any other sort of truth' (Bakhtin 1986:68). Bakhtin's main argument was the plurality of consciousness, which was the direct opposite of the idea of single consciousness as posited by the monologist. For him, plurality challenges the existing monologic idea of nationalism, which is exclusive and calls to re-imagine a dialogic nation. Bakhtin's dialogism accepts the presence of multiple consciousnesses; hence there cannot be one central power that controls and orchestrates dialogue is a must (Bakhtin 1990:238). The purpose of dialogue is not to harmonise different voices into one structure or come to a conclusion but to continue the dialogue accepting the plurality of consciousness (Bakhtin 1990:238). Dialogue brings different ideas together without homogenising and paving the way for multiple consciousnesses to exist together. In the work of a monologist, the entire structure is shaped by the author's truth, making it essential for understanding the work as a whole (Bakhtin 1990:238). The author does not engage in dialogue with other truths. Readers can know only the author's truth (Bakhtin 1990:238). For Bakhtin, there is no other way to know a person except through a dialogical penetration of that personality, during which the self is revealed freely and reciprocally (Bakhtin 1990:59). All other definitions and finalising of a person only prove to be false, because it is second hand and the person has not spoken the final word.

On the contrary, in polyphonic work, the author confronts the characters similarly and also agrees and disagrees among themselves. The polyphonic author does not monopolise the characters, but they are truly another consciousness of their own. The author creates an atmosphere where different points of view can dialogue and the author also participates in the dialogue because 'he is one of the interlocutors in the great dialogue that he himself has created' (Bakhtin 1990:239). Though the author created the characters once they come into being they have the potential to surprise the author, and the author does not know in advance what the character will do next. Polyphony consists of a plurality of voices that do not merge into one, maintaining their individuality and continuing the dialogue. Thus, a system that can control or predict can never be formed.

In classical literature and enlightenment literature, separate thoughts were introduced as thoughts that can have meaning on their own, being detached from other things around them. Bakhtin argues that in Dostoevsky's works, no thought exists

independently without a context; when detached from context a thought does not have a semantic meaning (Bakhtin 1990:95).

In polyphony, the author does not exercise monologic control. The author's stance within the work changes. 'Polyphony demands a work in which several consciousnesses meet as equals and engage in a dialogue that is in principle unfinalizable' (Bakhtin 1990:239). The characters in polyphony work are not dead puppets but characters that interact, argue and fight with the author and among themselves. The author is not the only person who has the power to mean like in the monologic work, but here the power to mean belongs to multiple voices in the work. Monologic works can be a sign that shows the direction to go beyond but the work itself cannot go beyond. The only way to go beyond is to give full semantic authority and the direct ability to convey meaning (Bakhtin 1990:239).

In the monologic design, the hero is fixed, the hero thinks and acts within the limits of his image defined as reality and there is no way for the hero to break these chains. The hero cannot transcend the boundaries of their character without contravening the author's intent. Bakhtin (1990) says:

[S]uch an image is constructed in the objective authorial world. The objective in relation to the hero's consciousness; the construction of that authorial world with its points of view and finalizing definitions presupposes a fixed external position, a fixed authorial field of vision. (p. 52)

The hero is controlled by the monologic author in order to preserve the coherence of the work and the universe depicted, but Dostoevsky grants the hero autonomy; as a result, the hero is not concluded, allowing the hero to transcend any built self. Knowing that he has the last say, the underground hero does everything in his power to avoid saying the last words that reveal his self-consciousness, 'his consciousness of self-lives by its unfinalisability, by its unclosedness and its indeterminacy' (Bakhtin 1990:53). While trying to develop an objectified portrait of the hero, Dostoevsky always gives the hero the last say and instead creates the hero's discourse about himself and his surroundings. The hero in Dostoevsky fights with all his potential against any second-hand definition.

The character realises the potential to go beyond any definition of their personality. To live means the person is not yet finalised. The person can be finalised only when he has uttered the final word that the character does not. Bakhtin (1990) states:

[O]ne of his basic ideas, which he advances in his polemic with the socialist, is precisely the idea that man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made; man is free, and can, therefore, violate any regulating norms which might be thrust upon him. (p. 59)

Dialogism calls to address the refugee issue as dialogism reflects the gospel commitments that call the church to be light and salt for nations to go beyond xenophobia. Some of the important ideas from Bakhtin's dialogism that can be

helpful to reimagine the nation are as follows: firstly, citizens of the reimagined nation do not have an idea of a completed person based on language race or culture but will know a person through dialogic penetration of the Other, so in the reimagined nation, there cannot be a finished idea of people. Secondly, the reimagined nation has to provide the space for a two-way confrontation so that there is not a controlled outcome. Also, the reimagined nation has to make sure that both parties' participation is secured when there is a dialogue. Furthermore, the people of the nation ought to know that there is no finalised person because people can be known in relation that continues. Thirdly, because thought and ideas are dialogic by nature, the reimagined nation has to be dialogic.

The nation has to be based on the future and not fixed on a glorious past. Sticking to the glorious past can become a source of exclusion and violence. For nations to be inclusive, the future needs to be emphasised and the nation cannot be fixed to the past. What has to be emphasised is that even if there has been a glorious past one can never go back to the past and any attempt to build a nation around the past can never be the same and it is a failed attempt with all potential to violently explode anytime. The futuristic thinking makes the nation fluid and not rigid. Having expatiated on the theory of dialogism by Bakhtin, the article will further proceed to look at Western colonialism and the modern context. In the coming section, we will argue that the legacies of Western colonialism have contributed immensely to the increasing refugee situation around the world but, on the other hand, become hostile to this same 'demon' that has been created by their actions.

Western colonialism and refugee

The Western colonial powers contributed to dividing communities and drawing strategic lines geographically forming nations. Western colonial powers have not taken responsibility for centralising power and destroying plurality. On the other hand, western nations have been blaming refugees as an economic burden. For example, the ongoing war on terrorism has cost thousands of lives and millions have become refugees.

Contrary to the fluid concept of borders of traditional communities, colonialism drew strong lines of division among communities, and nationalism justified those divisions. Thus, the global refugee phenomenon could be described as a colonial legacy. Destabilising regimes by the United States of America and taking away resources by Western nations force people to migrate to a safe place to find wealth. Communities that were living side by side for centuries all of a sudden were brought under one colonial rule. Before colonialism, each community had its own way of governance, but after colonisation, one central power of governance was created. After the colonial powers left, different communities fought to take over the government power created by colonial masters. Colonialism thrived on a divide-and-rule policy in which people were divided and excluded. As a result, some nations formed by colonial powers

contained seeds of division, exclusion and violence sown by the colonial powers.

The colonial influence in creating refugees can be seen among the Burmese people and the Indian Hindu and Muslim divide in Pakistan and India, just to name a few. The injustice perpetuated by the colonisers to the South Asian people is still having violent consequences. Firstly, different groups of people were brought together under one central government but were not harmoniously united. Secondly, their differences, ethnic, religious and communal identity were used for the divide and rule policy of the British that later resulted in violent conflicts and created a massive refugee crisis (Tarzi 1991).

There are many other factors that contribute to refugee creation. Marfleet (2006) lists the factors in a helpful manner. He posits that:

Refugees are produced by a complex of factors: economic, political, social, cultural and environmental. Their lives are shaped by formal political and legal structures, and by both official and popular ideas of nation and nationalism, citizen and alien, 'race' and ethnicity. (p. 7)

This article suggests that the primary cause of forced migration is the phenomenon of monologism, which is shaping different forms of muscular nationalism across the globe. Such forms of nationalism, which are accompanied by ordering, serialisation, monitoring and homogenisation, which are efforts of control by the nation state, have not only contributed towards the creation of refugees but also towards the rejection of these refugees.

The formation of the modern nation is intrinsically related to the refugee phenomenon (Gatrell 2013:148–177). This is not to say that there were no refugees before the formation of the nation state, but that the nexus between the nation state and refugees cannot be denied. The purpose of constructing homogenous nations by making all citizens belong to one religion (Christendom) and ethnic group is to avoid internal conflict. The idea that the modern state should be ethnically and religiously homogenous becomes a reason to separate ethnic groups to prevent conflicts (Arendt 1958:267–294). For example, the formation of the state of Israel resulted in Palestinian Arabs becoming refugees (Chatty & Farah 2005:465–471). Israel is an example of one refugee group that became a nation state and made the people of the land refugees in order to homogenise the nation state. The formation of America resulted in the genocide of native people, and around 60 000 people were expelled (Maya 2012:357). When the British Empire left India and was replaced by India and Pakistan, millions became refugees overnight (Gatrell 2013:148–177). As the modern state replaced the old empires, the new states made an environment that favoured the persecution of minorities, which became the breeding ground of oppression and marginalisation (Gatrell 2013:148–177).

The formation of the modern state with the control of borders has made the situation of refugees worse. Before the

nation-state system came into existence, borders were fluid and there were no strict border controls. As lines were only on maps, refugees were able to take shelter somewhere, but when the lines on the map became physical lines, refugees had nowhere to go. In this century, the scene of millions of people becoming refugees shows that the rise of the modern state that replaced empires is not able to hold all people groups together. The reason why the nation is not able to hold different groups together is that unity of culture and politics (oneness) is the foundation of the nation where differences do not have space (Dunaway 2003). Castles and Miller (1998) explain why nations are against multi-ethnic society and immigration. They say:

The nation-state, as it has developed since eighteenth century, is premised on the idea of cultural as well as political unity. In many countries, ethnic homogeneity, defined in terms of common language, culture, traditions and history has been the basis on nation -state. This unity has often been fictitious construction of the ruling elite but it has provided powerful national myths. Immigration and ethnic diversity threaten such ideas of nation ... (p. 15)

The French Huguenots, who were first called refugees, were, in fact, the victims of the union between religion and nationalism that was done to form a homogenous group (Shaw 2019:3). This is a good example that Christendom was based on the idea of conquest and eliminating differences. The attempt was to form one homogenised community that failed in the long run but created division and exclusion. Though this might seem natural and historical, a nation state is a construct. Anderson (1983) calls it an 'imagined community' because it is not a real community where people know each other personally. The common consciousness is a construct of the elite and the powerful, which uses it to control the masses (Fanon 1967:179).

Sri Lanka can be a good example of the British colonial legacy manifesting in the monologic idea of nationalism, which is destructive and creates refugees. Sri Lanka was colonised by the British who brought a centralised governing system. Before the arrival of the British, different communities lived with their own leaders and there was no centralised system of governance. When Sri Lanka gained independence, the British government had to be replaced with one local government, and this put the minorities in a disadvantaged position. Ethnicity, nationalism and religion formed their nexus only to struggle for a homogenous nation leaving the minorities in fear. Like Sri Lanka, Myanmar was also colonised by the British, which brought different ethnic groups under one government and after independence the struggle for power and control gave rise to the exclusion of minorities.

It is obvious that in such a context, Christendom was colonial by its nature and became a manifestation of the monologic idea of conquest. Therefore, it excluded the 'other'. The global refugee phenomenon is a product of exclusion. The church cannot exist for itself, but the church must exist for and by a mission that embraces the other. The ultimate goal

of the mission is not a church, but the goal of the church has to be a mission, and this is because the church is a product of the mission and not vice versa. When the church becomes an end in itself, it becomes narcissistic and it works against the reign of God.

The monologic ideology and its challenges

Colonialism and Christendom have a monologic ideology that does not have the ability to dialogue because monologism does not recognise plurality and differences. The assumption that everything needs to be and can be forced to be harmonised, results in serialisation, ordering and exclusion. Though there are various factors like economic, social, political and cultural that might give rise to refugees, monologism is one of the main causes.

Monologic nationalism was seen as a positive force mainly by independence freedom fighters to unite different ethnic and religious communities to fight against the common enemy, the coloniser. However, this same nationalism has another dimension of excluding people as it is based on the idea of an enemy. After independence, the nation state that is formed following the European ideology of nation state tends to establish a central government replacing the coloniser, for which homogenisation of language, culture and religion is essential, which only turns out to be a violent process. Because the nation state created by colonisers is not a harmonised group, there is always a struggle for power and control over the other groups in the nation. As a result, nationalism and nation state not only contributes towards generating refugees, but it has also united the country of asylum against refugees. We see clear evidence of nationalism generating refugees in Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Tanupradja 2019).

Globalisation and refugee

In the 21st century, the movement of people has increased along with globalisation. In globalisation, while on the one hand, the movement of capital is free flowing, and on the other hand, the movement of people is highly restricted. Despite restrictions through border patrol and visa control, people have not stopped attempting dangerous journeys. This has resulted in an alarming increase in the deaths of refugees attempting to flee conflict-prone zones to a safer context. The borders of the modern nation states have precipitated the suffering of refugees. For example, the United States of America has threatened Mexico with an economic backlash and forced Mexico to prevent refugees on the migrant caravan from Central America push back and hold the migrants from getting near the American border. This has led to dangerous measures that have resulted in the loss of life. The 'barbarian' and life-negating aspect of the 'modern nation-state system,' which is a product of enlightenment rationality, can be seen falling apart revealing its inability to protect and include all people, thus affirming its exclusivity.

The seriousness of the Global refugee phenomenon is evident from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' statistics. UNHCR's data on June 2024 says 122.6 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, and this is an increase of 5.3 million people compared to the end of 2023. As of June 2024, the global refugee population is 43.7 million, which includes 32 million refugees and 5.8 million people in need of international protection under UNHCR's mandate, as well as 6 million Palestine refugees (UNHCR 2024).

The figure of displaced people shows the magnitude of the refugee phenomenon. There is a constant rise in the number of refugees every year. The figures show that border control is not the answer to refugee, crises as border control has not stopped people from attempting to cross borders or taking dangerous journeys. What is also alarming today is the reluctance of several affluent countries to receive refugees. Eighty-five per cent of the world's displaced people are hosted not by European countries but by developing nations such as Turkey, Uganda, Pakistan, Lebanon and Iran, which are the top hosting countries. The developing nations in spite of their economic struggles have been hosting refugees without turning their backs on them.

The global refugee crisis also poses challenges for Christianity, which can no longer shut itself from the implications of the refugee crises. A majority of Christians are from the Global South, and most of the refugees are also from the Global South; thus Christianity is inevitable from being affected by the global refugee phenomenon. When migrants come to places where Christians live, the church can become active in serving them. When Christians migrate, they form new faith communities in the place where they migrate. The attempt to address the refugee crises can help Christianity to liberate itself from the destructiveness of Christendom mentality. Thus, how does the church respond to the issues of the global refugee crisis as created by colonialism and colonial Christianity? The article proposes a dialogic theology of missions as its response to this phenomenon.

Dialogical theology of missions as a response to the global refugee crisis

The theme of the recent Lausanne conference 'Let the church declare and display Christ together!' sends a clear message: the church proclaims Christ through both words and actions. The concern for foreigners is emphasised from the time of the Pentateuch. Deuteronomy 14:28 states that the tithe offered should be used for the Levites, foreigners orphans and widows so that God may bless the community when the basic needs of the vulnerable are met. In other words, for God to bless the community, the vulnerable must be cared for and satisfied. Foreigners should be loved as oneself (Leviticus 19:34) and treated without discrimination, receiving equal treatment as natives. 'The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God'.

Addressing the refugee crises is theologically very significant because it is very much related to one's salvation. On the day of judgement, the king looks at the people on his right side and says:

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (Mt 25:35)

The king identifies himself with those in need. Addressing the refugee crisis is not an option because it is related to one's salvation. In the parable of the good Samaritan, we read of becoming a neighbour to the one in need and today the refugees are in need and the church is called to become a neighbour of the refugees.

'Together towards life, Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes' is a meaningful document on mission in the 21st century though it does not make reference to refugees in particular and addresses migrants. Refugee is a bigger issue looking at the scale of refugee movements. Addressing migration is not enough in the 21st century because the case of refugees is the context of the mission. The World Council of Churches document 'Together towards life' is helpful in the direction of doing dialogical theology of mission. The document says (WCC 2013):

Starting with God's mission leads to an ecclesiological approach 'from below'. In this perspective it is not the church that has a mission but rather the mission that has a church. Mission is not a project of expanding churches but of the church embodying God's salvation in this world. Out of this follows a dynamic understanding of the apostolicity of the church: apostolicity is not only safeguarding the faith of the church through the ages but also participating in the apostolate. Thus, the churches mainly and foremost need to be missionary churches. (p. 22)

The Lausanne conference, 2024, went a step further and directly addressed the refugee issue in their reports. The article 'reaching refugee youth with the love of Christ' by Job Naibei is clear evidence that the mission movement has been involved with the refugees. The author begins by saying in a world where displacement is still a crisis, Christ is needed more than ever. Displacement in the middle east is not taken as an opportunity to convert but the youth leaders in the church are trained ready to address the refugee community going beyond religious differences. The positive development of the mission is that 'they started seeing the refugees through the eyes of Christ who died on the cross for the local and the foreigner alike'. Church has opened its doors to refugees and these churches that opened the doors to refugees have seen a revival. The success of the church mentioned in the article depended on how they handled the refugees. Churches that did not open the door to refugees are dying. Refugees when they become the subject of mission, churches are revived. Refugees have strengthened the church's mission in new areas by addressing the refugee crises (Naibei 2024). God has sent the church to embrace refugees and through the refugee's church has found its mission.

Dialogical theology of mission is counter to monologism because the former is a theology of active listening not to the powerful but to the centre. It is a theology of mission from the margin shaped by the perspective of those who resist marginalisation even in the course of suffering and stigmatisation. Instead of being the recipients of mission, refugees are mission agents who have a prophetic role in reaffirming life for all of humanity (eds. Kinnamon & Cope 1996). Refugees are important partners in the mission of God. Because of their marginalisation, oppression and suffering, refugees possess the ability to discern between news that is beneficial to them and news that is detrimental (eds. Kinnamon & Cope 1996; WCC 2013:39). For the mission to be life giving and life affirming, the voices of the refugees is very crucial. The mission should work for the transformation of the refugee reality and in the process; the mission will continue the process of being transformed. Refugees are not the objects of mission but they are subjects of mission in the present century (Kim 2012). Refugee is the context in which God calls to do a mission in dialogue with them. Theology and mission cannot be based on mere conceptual frameworks, but their directions ought to come from the struggle of refugees for a mission to be life affirming to all. Theology of mission in the 21st century cannot be ontological but ought to be renewed by the dialogue with the margins. The dialogue is never ending. This dialogue cannot be systematised but continues with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dialogue and cooperation are important for mission and evangelism (WCC 2013:40). The Mission of God respects every culture, language and Tribe. Plurality is not seen as a threat, and there is no assumption that there can be a homogenous Christian Group. Mission affirms that people are different and difference is not a threat but a gift that can be shared and celebrated together. Mission not only transforms the one who listens to the message, but because it is dialogue the one who listens actively contributes to enriching and transforming the mission for the future. The richness of the elements of the outside is very important for the mission.

The church has to journey along with the refugees so that the mission is always on the way, and there is no territorialisation of Christianity. Journeying together with the marginalised enriches the church with a vision for the future. The journeying with the refugees will affirm not only the life of the refugees but in the process, it will also transform itself in the ongoing journey from the clutches of structuralism.

The mission is the witness and proclaiming Jesus is Kurios. Jesus who emptied himself and stood with the oppressed and the marginalised to the point of death is the one to whom we pledge our loyalty above all loyalties. Proclaiming Jesus is lord is to say that any ideology or institution including the state that tends to be monologic needs to be countered by acting the Gospel. The unjust market economy, liberal capitalism, oppressive states and democratic institutions that have transferred the wealth of masses into the hands of handful of people need to be countered. To stand against unjust powerful institutions is not an option for the church,

but a must for which the church needs to be in fellowship with people who are outside the church whom Jesus called 'other sheep.' To do this, the church itself needs to undergo the spiritual experience of kenosis. The reason for the church to stand against any ideology of homogenisation including nationalism is that any force that divides people is against the values of the reign of God. We do obey the institutions here on earth remembering that we are sojourners and our primary mission is to proclaim and witness that Jesus is Lord who dialogues. We obey any institution as long as it is not against the values of the gospel.

An incarnation is an act of dialogue. God, who was above, unseen and powerful, became human to engage in conversation on equal terms without the advantage of power. The mission, then, is to become powerless like Jesus in Philippians chapter two, identifying with those at the bottom of the social hierarchy and reversing the existing social order – not to oppress again, but to celebrate life in its fullness. Proclaiming Jesus as Lord through our actions means striving for justice in solidarity with those who are denied dignity, oppressed and marginalised, such as refugees.

The church has a call to serve in mission beyond, ethnic and cultural boundaries, denominationalism and nationalism. One of the ways in which the church can do mission along with refugees is to advocate justice for refugees in policies, affirming that every person is made in God's image irrespective of religion and nationality (WCC 2018). During Sunday worship, the word is proclaimed in the church, and in the larger society, the word can be proclaimed in action by serving the refugees and migrants. The mission in the context of refugees is to foretaste the reign of God where people from different tribes and nations live together. Serving the refugees is faith in action.

The mission in the context of refugees is to foretaste the reign of God where people from different tribes and nations live together. Mission in the context of refugees is a counter mission against the idea that mission belongs to the powerful. The marginalised refugees are prophetic agents of God who can see the life-negation realities of the oppressive system that denies them the right to live. This lens from the margins can never be found in the centre.

In 2018, the World Council of Churches organised a conference on Xenophobia during which WCC felt the need to address the refugee crises:

While recognizing the right of refugees to return to their country of origin and live there in dignity and security, we affirm and uphold the institution of asylum for those fleeing from armed conflicts, persecution or natural disaster. We also invoke respect for the rights of all people on the move, regardless of their status. (WCC 2018)

Now that the need to address the refugee crises is felt strongly and the church has to work to practically addressing the refugee phenomenon. The work of theology is to work for a place where there is no discrimination, violence and totalisation, for which self-emptying is

important. In the context of refugees, the work of the church is to work for an inclusive world. In order to do this the church needs to cross all barriers that are divisive. The church needs to cross its own borders to reach out to the refugees to renew the commitment of the church to the Gospel.

Conclusion

Dialogue is driven by the future and not by the past, even if there was a glorious past. Because of struggles and refugee experience, refugees have the aspiration for peace and equality for all humanity and not only for themselves. Refugees play a redemptive role as they have the longing to reimagine the world in a different way for all. The refugee problem will continue as a global phenomenon; it requires serious theological reflection and the church is obligated to support the refugees in solidarity. Theology should be dialogic and understanding of theology must be dialogic. Anything that is monologic has to be challenged by theology and the church. Even civil society has to challenge anything that is monologic for the betterment of humanity. Epistemology creates violence, knowing is the root of all violence and the way out of it is dialogue.

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