

God within migration processes in the contemporary global world: An intervention proposition from theological hermeneutics for integrated migrant ministry

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Abstract

Understanding and perceiving God in situations such as migration and times of pain is a challenge for theology and practical ministry. The following question is inevitable: where is God in all this? In this context, the challenge for theology is to develop a theological theory that provides a constructive perspective that leads to coping. The suffering and pain are amplified among migrants due to diverse and multifaceted needs and problems. In view of such a situation, this article explores an understanding of God within migration processes in the world, with a view to developing theological hermeneutics for an integrated migrant ministry intervention. It draws parallels between the global context of migration and the Bible as God's processes. From these parallels, a theological understanding is developed to provide insight and perspective on migration, which is then applied to develop a constructive view of migration as well as develop a migrant ministry. A migrant ministry and intervention proposition are done based on a theological hermeneutical understanding of God and migrant praxis to ensure an integrated ministry. The article first outlines the framework, which is followed by a comparative analysis of migration in the contemporary global world and the Bible. A theological development based on God's providence is formulated, then applied to developing a practical migrant intervention model (hermeneutical framework for integrated migrant ministry).

Keywords

Migrant ministry; God's providence in migration; migration in the world and Bible; God in migration; theological hermeneutics; migrant integrated ministry; theological hermeneutics of migrants; God's providence

1. Introduction and study framework

The rapid increase in migration and the associated complexities of migrants needs call for complex imaginative practical ministerial interventions. The complex challenges of migrants are systematically documented by many scholars (e.g. Magezi 2018:219–235, Chelius 2014:32–33; Gilmore 2016; Rajendra 2014:305; Ridsdel 2014:27–28; Sazonov 2015; Skeldon 2013:2). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2015:1) rightly notes that “the number of international migrants worldwide has continued to grow rapidly over the past fifteen years reaching 244 million in 2015 up from 222 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000.” Despite the rise in migration, which some theologians have termed the sign of the times (Gruber & Rettenbacher 2015:1–4; *Castles and Miller*, 2009:2–3), Heimbürger (2015:338) bemoans that there has been little theological reflection and further observes that “apart from some interest in the subject by biblical scholars, no more than a handful of academic monographs have dealt with the subject in recent decades.” An equal concern is that theological reflection has tended to be theoretical, with few practical ministry intervention models. In response to this gap, Magezi and Magezi (2018:2) suggest that:

Migration theological theory formation should entail two dimensions. On the one hand, it should develop theological categories that are theological, while on the other hand, it should be thoroughly practical to ensure that human mobility challenges are adequately addressed.

Considering the pressing challenge of migration across the globe and the quest for a relevant ministerial responsive theology, practical theology as a theology that focuses on praxis, is challenged to develop a theological theory that attempts to develop a constructive perspective that leads to effective migrant ministry. At stake within migration theological reflection are the following questions: How does God fit within migrants’ situations? How do the happenstances in migration relate to God’s actions? What is the Biblical understanding of migration and the ensuing theology of migration that should be discerned? How does such an understanding inform a migrant ministry’s theological theory? What migrant ministry can be developed in a manner that addresses their integrated needs and challenges?

Responses to the above questions should at least embrace the following four presuppositions. First, migrant challenges are complex, and an appropriate ministry should adopt a systemic approach (Louw 2014:147). Second, church migrant ministries should be informed by a theological theory that draws from a Biblical and theological understanding. This entails engagement with the Biblical text from a particular hermeneutical framework to emerge with an interpretational viewpoint where one interprets and discerns God (Ganzevoort 2009:6; Carroll 2010:2). Third, a migrant ministry should be developed from a hermeneutical framework that leads to an integrated ministry intervention that encompasses cognitive, relational, psychological (emotional) and human intervention (action) dimensions of migrants” (Louw 2014: 273; Dreyer 2005:114). Fourth, migrant ministry should take cognisance of the complexities experienced in the space of life, which Miller-McLemore (1993:368; 2018:352–354) described as a “human web.”

To contribute to migration discussion and migrant ministry, this article explores an understanding of God within migration processes in the world, with a view to develop a theological hermeneutics for an integrated migrant ministry intervention. It draws parallels between the global context of migration and the Bible as processes occurring under God’s sovereign hand. The article assumes that although God may not be the cause of the events, but he works his purposes through migration to fulfil his purposes on earth. Thus, the parallels between the Bible and the present occurring events in the world provide insight and perspective on migration, which should inform a constructive view of migration as well as a development of a migrant ministry.

2. Methodological approach

The article adopts a systemic-hermeneutical approach. A systemic approach is about networking and considering the diverse dimensions affecting an individual as a whole. Louw (2014:147) usefully advises that systems thinking attempts to understand and interpret things in terms of their connectedness. Considering migration from a research and academic disciplines perspective, various disciplines including Theology, International Relations, Economics and Development are all integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and inform holistic

ministry interventions. Theology, particularly practical theology (and missiology), which are our areas of interest in this paper, are arguably on the forefront of informing the design of a practical ministerial response model.

Practical theology focuses on developing theories of praxis. The leading Practical Theologians, Hermans and Schweitzer (2014:88) state that “In practical theology we build theological theories about praxis.” In linking practical theology to missiology, Hendriks (2007:1002) usefully suggests a missional and practical ecclesiology by stating that a “missional paradigm pursues a missional and practical ecclesiology: it develops a methodological strategy on how to be a contextually relevant church.” Thus, practical theology and missiology are twins on the frontline of ministry, where one interfaces with people in their existential situations, which Magezi (2016:5) describes as a ministry space where the “rubber meets the rod in people’s lives.” Thus, within migration theology and ministry, theology should engage the practical challenges and experiences of migrants. This task, however, is non-linear and complex. It calls for systemic and zigzag approaches to thinking and ministry design. Therefore, a practical missional approach is a hermeneutical process. Ganzevoort (2009:4) rightly describes “practical theology as the hermeneutics of lived religion.” There are two approaches to hermeneutics in practical theology:

The first is the classical focus on the relation between text and reader, leading to the identification of rules of interpretation or to a study of the interaction of tradition and experience. The second is the broader approach that stresses the process of human interpretation, thereby placing existential themes at the centre of investigation. In the first, practical theology moves closer to the religious tradition, church, and biblical or systematic theology. In the second it may align more with social sciences and the broad realm of worldviews and religions. In practical theology, we study the field of lived religion in a hermeneutical mode that is, attending to the most fundamental processes of interpreting life through endless conversations in which we construct meaning. These conversations not only include exchanges with our fellow humans, but also with the traditions that model our life. This exchange with tradition, with all its interpretive power and normative claims,

eventually aims at a more profound and more adequate spiritual life (Ganzevoort 2009:5–6).

Therefore, in this article, a hermeneutical approach will be applied to understand complex migrant systemic issues.

3. Discerning parallels – overview of contemporary global context of migration and that of the Bible

Two broad drivers of migration can be identified. They fall under natural disasters and human causes, particularly political instability and associated factors. However, the question is: How do these migrant situations compare to those of biblical times? What parallels could be drawn between contemporary times and biblical times? The highlighted biblical parallels are not exhaustive but illustratory.

3.1 Natural disasters in contemporary global migration context and parallels with that of the Bible

Many scholars maintain that contemporary international migration is characterised by people who are forced to migrate from their countries of origin due to natural disasters such as avalanches, landslides, earthquakes, sinkholes, volcanic eruptions, famines, tsunamis and blizzards. These scholars rightly argue that there is a link between natural disasters and migration as people will be forced to move to other places (Afonso 2011; Kolmannskog and Trebbi 2010; Watch 2004; Shamsuddoha *et al* 2012; Drabo and Mbaye 2011; Mbaye 2017; Ferris 2008). Traylor-Smith (2017:12) added that there are environmental and climatic factors that include floods, storms, landslides, and forest and bush fires, as well as “gradual changes such as rising sea levels, drought, severe heat, and soil degradation.”¹ In recent years, the natural disasters have increased due to climate change and other harsh weather triggers². Traylor-Smith (2017:19–24) indicated that although natural disasters can take place in any country, it is important to note that Small Island states in the Pacific are affected by the rise of

1 While it may be necessary to extensively discuss the various natural disasters and their effect, this discussion is not the focus of the article.

2 See Bengtsson and Holme (2012), Ferris (2008), Afonso (2011) and Shamsuddoha *et al* (2012) discussion on climate change and the displacement of people.

the sea level, Bangladesh is affected by floods and high temperatures, the United States of America is affected by climate change, rising sea levels, and population movements on the East Coast and Africa are caused by climate change. In Hakimi's (2016:6) view, international migration in North Africa and the Middle East, due to climate change, will continue in Africa, as some experts predict that some "parts of the Middle East and North Africa will be uninhabitable because of temperature increases by the end of century." This clearly indicates that natural disasters are most likely to increase in the next few years and this will continue to fuel the movement of people to other nations as refugees or asylum seekers. Therefore, Mbaye (2011:1) observed that is a way for people to cope with the adverse effects of climatic shocks and other natural disasters.

Notably, natural disasters are not only limited to the contemporary global context of international migration but are also an issue in Scripture. The Bible presents many people who moved from one country to another due to natural disasters such as famine. These victims of famine migrated to other countries for survival. For instance, in Genesis 12:10–20, Abraham is forced to migrate to Egypt when famine strikes the land of Canaan. When famine strikes the land where Isaac was living, he migrates to Gerar in order to save himself (cf. Gen 26:1). At the point when famine severely hit the land of Canaan, Jacob heard that there is corn in Egypt and he sent his children there twice to buy food (cf. Gen 42 and 43). Eventually, Jacob and his whole family migrated to Egypt to escape famine (Gen 45). Furthermore, when there was famine in the land of Judah, Elimelech of Bethlehem in Judah (with his wife Naomi and two sons namely Mahlon and Chilion) migrates to Moab and settles there (Ruth 1:1–2). In this way, just like the contemporary global context of migration, Scripture seems to present migration as a response to climatic and environmental changes as people move from their countries of origin to other nations for survival. Understandably, this parallel can be simplistic but it suffices to illustrate our point that the natural events that occurred in Biblical times and are happening in our contemporary times present a similarity. People migrate from one place to the other to survive.

3.2 Political instability as a recent global context of international migration – drawing parallels from the Bible

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2015:2), as a global leader on issues pertaining to international refugees, reviewed the issue of internal and international refugees at the end of 2015. It noted that many people embark on internal and international migration due to political instabilities such as wars, conflicts, persecutions and various violations of human rights (UNHCR, 2015:2ff, cf. IOM, 2015:2).³ Political instabilities such as wars, persecution and violations of human rights, as the major drivers of internal and international migration, is part and parcel of the current context of the state of migration in South Africa. UNHCR (2015:14) notes that in 2015, the Sub-Saharan Africa region hosted 3.5 million refugees who came from five countries, namely: Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and the Central African Republic (*ibid*). South Africa has been a home of safety for many people escaping from war, persecution and violations of human rights in their countries (Wentzel & Tlabera 2006:80–82). In our view, the above approximate figures of people embarking on both internal and international migration due to the afore-stated political instabilities indicate that “a significant proportion of migrants are refugees who seek protection abroad because of insecurity and fear of persecution in their home country” (Hakimi 2016:6). Hakimi (2016:6) reported that “there are currently around 40 active conflicts in the world with varying degrees of severity.”

In drawing parallels with the Bible, it is important to note that although we cannot establish the number of people who migrated because of political instability such as persecution, war, violation of human rights and persecution, we argue that political instability also caused migrations in biblical times. For example, some people were forced to migrate because of persecution in their countries of origin. Acts 8:1ff describes persecution of the church in Jerusalem, which scattered disciples such as Peter, Phillip, etc. to regions of Samaria and Judea (Stenschke 2016:136). According to Hultgren (1976:97), there are many reasons for the persecution of the followers of Jesus Christ in Acts 8:1–3 (cf. also the persecutions in Acts 9:1–

3 For a detailed discussion on migration caused by political instability see UNHCR 2015.

2, 22:4–5; 26:9–11). In Hultgren (1976:97) and Bultmann's (1960:113–114) view, the first persecution of the Christians was in Jerusalem, perpetrated by the zealous Pharisees, such as Saul, who felt that the Christian Hellenists were teaching a way of salvation apart from the law, as recorded in Acts 8:1. There are other records of migration due to political instability and persecutions (e.g. in the book Peter). This indicates that both Scripture and the contemporary global context of migration attest to situations whereby people moved from one place to another within the same country or from one country to another due to political instabilities.

Having noted the parallels between contemporary and Biblical times, the question that emerges is: how should migration phenomenon be understood within God's outworking in history?

4. Beyond similarities to theological conception of migration in the Bible⁴

The various individual and corporate factors for migration in Scripture, such as famine, should be viewed as events that happens in God's world and contributing to God's purposes. We argue that while the events that results in migration may not be caused by God, he providentially uses them to fulfil his redemptive promises for humankind (Magezi 2018:146). For instance, the biblical characters such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Naomi and many others who migrated from their countries of origin to other nations due to famine are used by God to advance his salvific purposes for Adam and his descendants (ibid). In locating this discussion in the backdrop of sin and redemption, in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sin against God (Arnold, 2009:65–66) and as a result death came into world. In Genesis 12:1–3, God called Abraham and his descendants as his instruments for accomplishing great redemption that was first announced to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 after the fall. This Abrahamic call and covenant are particular and universal in nature (Gen 12:1–2; 15) (Torrance 2008:51–58). Even though God promised some specific blessings to Abraham and his physical descendants (Gen 12:1–2), it is apparent that God designed the Abrahamic covenant to save all nations (Gen 12:3) (Torrance, 2008:51–58), which

4 As indicated above, the theology is not intended to be exhaustive but illustratory.

indicates the universal nature of Abraham's call and covenant with God. When famine broke out in the land of Palestine and Canaan, Abraham and his descendants migrated to foreign nations for survival. Hence, migration became a physical preservation of Abrahamic promise. Because God rescues Abraham and Sarah in their complex situation in Egypt, the story is perceived as God's faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham even in a foreign land (Motyer 1986:36–39; Kidner 1967:113; Kass 2003:257; De La Torre 2011:150; Cotter 2003:92; Calvin 1965:362–365; Arnold 2009:138).

God saved Abraham in a foreign land and the redemptive promises were renewed to his descendants Isaac (Gen 26:3–5) and Jacob (Gen 32:9–12; 35:12) who were also migrants in foreign countries due to famines in their land of origin (*ibid*) (Magezi 2018:34). At the point when famine severely hits the land of Canaan, Jacob hears that there is corn in Egypt and sends his children there twice to buy food (cf. Gen 42; 43). Eventually, Jacob and his whole family migrate to Egypt to escape from famine (Gen 45). This understanding also applies to the migration of Elimelech of Bethlehem in Judah (with his wife Naomi and two sons namely Mahlon and Chilion) to Moab, where they settle, after famine afflicts the land of Judah (Ruth 1:1–2). Elimelech and his two sons die in Moab (after both sons had married Moabite wives). However, ten years later, by then a widow and bereft of both sons, Naomi moves back to Bethlehem with Ruth, her daughter-in-law. Ruth, in this new setting, is the immigrant. She goes to the fields to glean alongside the harvesters of Boaz and earns everyone's admiration (Ruth 1–2) (Carroll 2010:7). Ruth conceives and gives birth to Obed, the father of Jesse, who sires David (Ruth 4:17). David becomes the king of Israel and enters into an eternal covenant with God about his (David's) throne, which God declares would endure forever (2 Sam 7ff).

The genealogy in Matthew also amplifies David's genealogy in Ruth 4:18–22 by making a significant link between Jesus Christ (the saviour of all people) and David, as it denotes Jesus as the Davidic son (Mt 1:1–25). Given this, Cohen (n.d.: 168–169) and Magezi (2018:58–64) argue that it is in the migration of Ruth and Naomi to Judah in Ruth 1:19ff that God, in his grace and divine providence, allows Boaz to marry Ruth in order to affect his redemptive purposes and plans for humankind. Likewise, after examining the narrative of Ruth in view of God's redemption, Bush (1996:55) concurs with Magezi and Cohen in advancing that the theme of the book of Ruth is

to display that God effects “his purposes in the world through the ordinary motivations and events of his people – ordinary people like Ruth and Boaz” (Bush 1996:55). Given the discussion, we advance that God is in the shadow of Abraham’s migration to Egypt, Isaac’s migration to Gerar, Jacob and his whole family’s migration to Egypt, Elimelech’s migration, with his wife and children, to Moab and Naomi and Ruth’s migration to Judah, so as to bring his redemptive promises to fulfilment by preserving them from dying in Canaan.

Even the various migrations in the book of Acts, as a result of the persecution of the Church, should not be understood as outside of God’s hand. This is because the Christians that are forced to move out of Jerusalem because of persecution, proclaim the redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went (Acts 8:4). Stenschke (2016:129) argues that “according to Acts, many early Christian missionaries served in places that were not their places of origin, voluntarily or by force: the disciples ended up in Jerusalem and eventually at the ends of the earth”. For instance, Phillip escapes the persecution by migrating to the city of Samaria where he proclaims the redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ in words and deeds. When the Samaritans hear Phillip preaching the gospel that is accompanied by the healing of the sick and exorcism of the evil spirits, they pay special attention to his (Phillip’s) message about the salvation for humanity accomplished by Jesus Christ (Acts 8:4–8). Here, Phillip preaches the gospel that accomplishes its redemptive purpose, since there is evidence of a great conversion and baptism of the Samaritans (Simon the magician is also converted) after hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12ff).

Later on, under divine direction, Acts 8:26ff presents us with the migration of Phillip, with the gospel, to Gaza where he (Phillip) meets an Ethiopian Eunuch (an important official, joins him) in the chariot and interprets to him the verses of the prophet of Isaiah 53:7–8 that he is reading without proper understanding. Phillip tells the Eunuch that the prophet Isaiah is referring to Jesus Christ and the message he preached (Acts 8:36–39). This encounter results in the salvation of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:36–39). In other words, the Eunuch believes the gospel, is baptised and receives the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:36–39). Phillip continues to move with the gospel to Azotus and other towns until he reaches Caesarea (Acts 8:40). Given this, just like in the Old Testament, the migration of God’s people seems

to be intertwined with God's grace to save others so that they can become part of his people (Stenschke 2016:136). This seems that God, in his grace and providence, uses the forced migration (i.e. persecution) of the early Christians to spread the gospel to all nations or people: the gospel that God first announces for Adam and his descendants in Genesis 3:15 and then continues to commit himself to accomplish through Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:3) in the context of their narratives of migration in the redemptive history. This means that:

The history of the expansion of the Christian Church – past, present and future – cannot be explained apart from the historical reality of God's sovereignty, his ruling over the nations, and the moving of his people everywhere (Medeiros 2013:176).

As a result of persecution, Acts 9:32–10:48 reveals that Peter ministers in places beyond Jerusalem, namely: Lydia, Joppa, Caesarea, etc. After ministering extensively in Jerusalem, Peter migrates to places outside Jerusalem and ministers there, as a new mode of his ministry. Peter migrates to places such as Lydia and Joppa, where he heals a paralytic man (Aeneas) who had been bedridden for eight years (Acts 9:33–34). In bringing this miracle to bear in the advancement of God's kingdom, it is apparent that all those who see this miracle being performed by Peter believe in Jesus Christ (Acts 9:35). In this way, there is a numerical extension of God's kingdom beyond Jerusalem, through Peter's forced migration as a result of persecution, as we witness the conversion in Acts 9:35. Soon after this, in his grace and sovereignty to use miracles to lead some into faith, God migrates Peter to Joppa, where he raises Tabitha, who had been known for looking after the needy (Acts 9:36–43). This miracle also results in many people believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Moreover, Peter also migrates to Caesarea where he gets in contact with Cornelius, a Gentile man. This is a very dramatic story in which God reveals himself to Cornelius first and then to Peter. In God's revelation to Cornelius (a God-fearing centurion of the Italian Cohort in Caesarea, who was generous to the poor and prayed regularly, as Acts 10:2 attests), God tells him to send messengers to Joppa to bring Peter, who was staying with Simon the tanner, whose house was by the sea (Acts 10:3–6). Here, we perceive Cornelius's obedience to God since he explains his dreams to

two of his servants whom, afterwards, he sends to go and take Peter from Joppa. As these two servants of Cornelius are journeying to Joppa, God reveals himself to Peter while he was praying on the roof of Simon the tanner's house. It is from this vision that God directs Peter what to do. Peter migrates to Caesarea, where he preaches a sermon that results in the conversion of Cornelius and many people who were at Cornelius' house (Stenschke 2016:140). Stated differently, God migrates Peter to Caesarea so that he could preach the redemptive gospel of Jesus Christ so that his remnant people among the Gentile nations could be saved, as we perceive the conversion of Cornelius and many other Gentiles in his room (Acts 10:34–48).

Given the above discussion, we therefore argue that, notwithstanding the natural disasters (i.e. famine, volcano eruptions, avalanches, landslides, earthquakes, sinkholes, famines, tsunamis and blizzards) and political instabilities (i.e. persecution, wars, human rights violation, etc.), the unfortunate circumstances, albeit not caused by God, should be understood as intrinsically related to redemptive history, which is sovereignly planned and executed by God to advance his redemption for humankind. As we have argued before, this indicates that the *individual* and *corporate* factors for migration in the Bible may, in this case, also receive a more than human aspect in God's providential control of everything that has to do with human beings as he works out his plan to fulfil his promises.

The above understanding of migration in redemptive history that arises from the Old and New Testaments is embedded within the doctrine of God's providence. McClintock (1968: 8,707, cf. Kleinhans 2018:120–125; Harold 2018:6–17) states that even though the word *providence* is not in the Bible, it is usually used to signify the biblical notion of “the wisdom and power which God continually exercises in the preservation and government of the world, for the ends which he proposed to accomplish.” Likewise, Sproul (2000:4) defines the doctrine of the providence of God as the doctrine that denotes the aspect of “God's involvement in the world and in the daily affairs of our lives.” The aforesaid definitions of God's providence are brought together to configure the doctrine of God's providence as “God's support, care and supervision of all creation, from the moment of the first creation to all the future into eternity” (Tenney 1975:4). However, the proposed doctrine has some challenges, especially when one

considers some disconnected, purposeless and chaotic events that human beings encounter in the world (Sproul 2000:3). Tavard (2003:707–718) concurs with Sproul (2000) when he argues that the doctrine of providence can be challenged when one poses the following question: “How can an infinitely good Creator allow the kind of evil that puts the divine goodness in doubt?” In our view, this is an interesting question, however, it is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, the focus of our discussion is to argue for human migration as working towards accomplishment of God’s purposes and plans for the world.

5. From theology to ministry design – towards a theological hermeneutics and integrated practical migrant ministry

Emerging from the previous discussion are the questions: how do we proceed from current migrant observations as well as biblical and theological understanding to developing a responsive migrant ministry? What ministry model can be developed? In practical theology and ministry designs, a model is critical. A model “helps to widen one’s perspective and demonstrates the complexity of the migration crisis. It also helps one to see the big picture, which raises awareness on the complexities of the situation, and shows that an ‘either-or’ approach is inappropriate” (Magezi 2017:243). A model presented in the form of a picture helps one to see a bigger picture. Magezi (2017:241), citing Louw (2016) notes that:

Seeing the bigger picture brings about a kind of soberness and realism and opens up options that create a sense of ‘hope’. A diagnostic chart helps one to see the bigger picture, the networking dynamics of life as an existential and qualitative category. Within this framework, life is a web where the dynamics and structural interplay between various situations, experiences and relationships should be understood as part of a reality within the global village. Complexity is the norm.

A hermeneutical model for migrant ministry intervention (figure 1) below is proposed as an intervention approach.

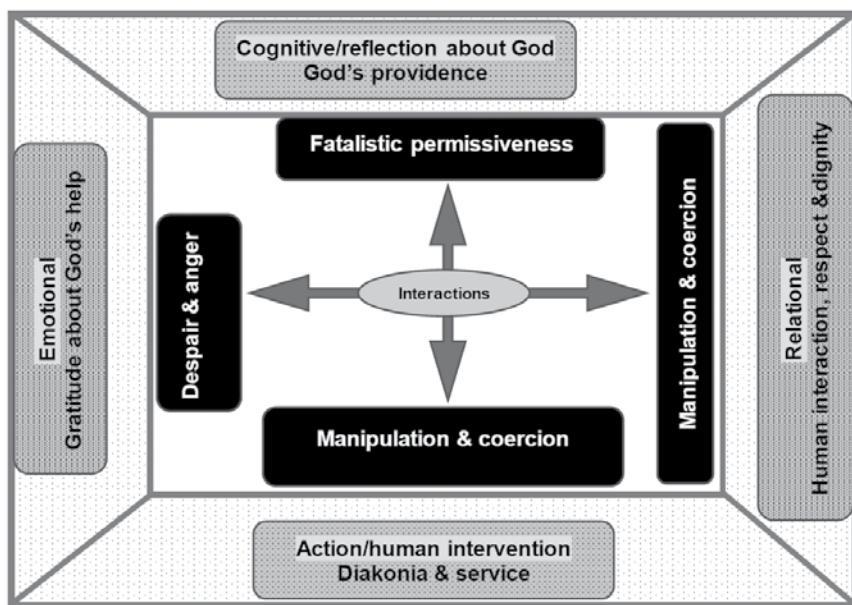


Figure 1: Hermeneutical framework for integrated migrant ministry intervention

The model comprises four dimensions represented by quadrants that interact with each other to inform and guide migrant ministry. The four dimensions are (1) cognitive, (2) relational, (3) psychological (emotional), and (4) human intervention (diakonia or service). The *cognitive* process entails the need to think and reflect about God. It aims to assist an individual to have a constructive understanding of God's providence, amidst the pain and challenges being experienced by migrants. The *relational* dimension seeks to reflect and inculcate the importance of proximity and being relational as a centrepiece of cultivating a sense of respect, treatment and consideration of one another between migrants and host people. Relationality and interaction foster respect and upholding of the dignity of one another as fellow human beings. The *emotional* dimension aims to challenge and instil an appropriate emotional attitude and disposition to God, individual self and others. Uncontrolled and uninformed emotions could easily degenerate into fatalistic anger, despair and desperation. Appropriate thinking of God in migration situation (God's providence), relating to other human

beings and positive emotions of gratitude, interact to influence responsible human action and service (diakonia). Miller and Jackson (1995:76) in *Pastoral Psychology for Pastors* clearly describe the interrelationship and interactions of these dimensions. They rightly argue that during diagnosis or assessment, one has to understand that cognition (thinking), affective (feelings and emotions) and behaviour (actions) dimensions are intricately linked. That is, cognition (thinking and reflection), affective (feelings and emotions) and behaviour (actions) are not separate, as they can be made to be when human beings are dichotomised. Hence, Miller and Jackson (1995:76) usefully maintain that each aspect (dimension) influences the other. For instance, in our case, negative feelings and emotions due to the pain and suffering experienced by migrants feed negative thinking about God, which, in turn, influence negative actions.

To apply the above model to our migration discussion, the following critical aspects of the model need to be understood. Magezi (2019:114), in his article ‘Pastoral Care to Migrants as Care at the “In-Between”’ applies Louw’s (2016) model that reflects “possible danger zones in a systemic understanding of migrants.” The caution on the model that should be noted is that “one has to be vigilant and be cognizant of the risks and pathologies that may arise and exist” (Magezi 2019:114). There are possible dangers linked with each of the positions adopted in the hermeneutical model. The caution is that good and positive intentions on the model are inevitably linked to negative positions in a bipolar or tension way. Each position is in the shadow of the other. For instance, constructive (good) understanding (reflection) of God’s providence could easily be negatively flipped to be a fatalistic permissive position, which triggers anger towards God by migrants. Hence, Harold (2018:6) usefully argues that the theology of providence continues to be of great importance to faith. It underlies not only what we say in times of joy, when we overflow with gratitude, but also in times of bereavement or disaster, when we cry out in sorrow or despair. A theology that dismisses providence would render God “absent and inactive”. At the same time, positive views and emotions about God would result in gratitude and doxology and yet one could easily experience despair, desperation and deep anger with God due to pressing challenges. For instance, among migrants, this could be exemplified by gratitude that at least one has survived from a life-threatening situation while, at the same

time, experiencing emotional turmoil and anger due to loss of loved ones. At a relational level, it should be noted that due to a sense of peace and security that some individuals enjoy, they may have no interaction with migrants. High walls obscure the reality of migrants' suffering, resulting in indifference. Thus, on the one hand, one could interact and connect, while efforts to challenge and encourage others to do the same could degenerate into insensitive coercion. Similarly, a positive sense of human duty and responsibility that leads one to intervene and help could easily turn coercive if people are insensitively pushed to help.

The question that arises then is: how does one proceed? Thinking about God in times of suffering, notably migration, is central to many people. Adogame (2013:494ff) who studies migrants, particularly from Africa, observes that God and spirituality fulfil a very important part of the coping strategies of people in the diaspora. God and religion are bedrocks for people's survival. However, the following questions, which cannot be answered simplistically, remain central in people's minds: Why God? Where is God in this situation? God's providence dogma could easily become a theological zombie category. Louw (2011:6) citing Reader (2008:1) explains that zombie categories are theological frameworks that are familiar to theologians, but they are no longer relevant or adequate in current times. God's providence, as a zombie category, causes one to be helpless and despair as God is conceived as sitting in a chair with folded arms, allowing things to go whichever way they please. However, the other extreme is for one to develop a 'human made' theology and 'a god' through the rationalisation of trickery through the notion of Trickster theology. For instance, Beck (n.d.) argues that trickery was rewarded in the Bible (e.g. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Rahab).

Thus, to avert a zombie thinking approach, migrants engage in trickery, whereupon they call God to bless it. Within this confusing situation, the question is: what should one do? How should one think of God? The hermeneutical model proposed does not provide an *either-or* situation, but a systemic, imaginative and zigzag process of thinking. Cahalan & Mikoski (2014:3) advise that practical theology is about imagination. The model shows us that the principles of the co-existence and bipolarity are norms. The tension should be creatively understood. For instance, migration should be understood as a natural order of God, with the

devastating effects of displacement that should be mitigated to ease the pain and suffering through humanitarian efforts. Therefore, this calls for service (*diakonia*). However, migration should sometimes be equally viewed as human induced, especially in cases of political and economic migrants. Accordingly, interventions should include confronting the root causes. Thus, the appropriate providential view of God in migration situations entails embracing a sensitive understanding of God that is informed by prevailing situations and dynamics. Surely, displacement and migration caused by a volcanic eruption cannot be viewed in the same light as a global business conglomerate displacing people for profits or a dictator president causing suffering, resulting in citizens seeking refuge elsewhere. The hermeneutical model challenges one to interpret the situation and discern the meanings generated by people, based on their situations. God has to be understood contextually and relevantly. Ganzevoort (2009:5), writing in the context of practical theology, rightly advises that practical theology and God should be understood within the context of people's existential realities. Practical theology, as lived religion, should describe the "actions and meanings operant in the ways humans live, interact and relate to the divine" (Ganzevoort 2009:5). God and his providence should be understood in a continuous hermeneutical fluid manner rather than be locked in a cause and effect mode.

Further to the need for a constructive and imaginative theological reflection, migrant ministry entails practical intervention. Migrants experience physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Accordingly, migrant ministry should focus on practical interventions. The question is: What does theological reflection got to do with a migrant without shelter and food? This suggests that it is imperative to intervene practically. However, imperative for action can easily degenerate into coercion. Action is about acting freely, compelled by grace and the Spirit. Action is an ethical act that should not be cranked through manipulation or coercion. Migrant practical intervention should be voluntary. Voluntary action and freedom, rather than coercion, are important for Christians. The ethicist, Rowan Williams rightly maintains that Christians should be characterised by freedom in their actions (Williams, 2001:5). Williams (2001:5) argues that while Christians may not be sometimes subjectively eager to perform certain acts, due to their faithfulness to their call to human responsibility,

they are constrained to act freely (own paraphrase). Christians act “not from knowing a catalogue of recommended or prescribed actions, but from that knowledge of who or what they are” (Williams, 2001:5). Our hermeneutical framework recognises the existence of tension between freedom to act and coercion. That is, the action driven by proper understanding (freedom) of Christian responsibility (i.e. among Christians) or natural duty to fellow human beings (i.e. among general humanity) and coercion are in the shadows of the other. Importantly, therefore, encouragement to action can subtly make people feel cornered to embrace and help migrants. This may result in push backs by those with limited capacity to practically help.

At a psychic level, migration responses may evoke all sorts of emotions. Manipulation to action can take the form of psychic guilt piling on an individual. This makes an individual to feel helpless and perceive him/herself as having limited capacity to practically help. For instance, people who have resource constraints, but with a desire to help, experience undue guilt for not being able to assist. In some instances, the migrants themselves manipulate host people to act. The manipulation sometimes takes the form of amplifying needs or telling outright lies in order to obtain donations. It should be noted that as much as the skills and needs of professional economic migrants differ from those of children and women who are displaced by war and natural disasters, the interventions (actions) should equally vary in type and urgency. This means that within the context of immense need and competing migrant needs, a migrant ministry should be informed by proper needs analysis, thus resulting in clear discernment of appropriate responsive actions. Hendriks (2007:1005) rightly advises that theology entails knowing God and discerning his will and guidance. The demand on Christian leaders to intervene spiritually and practically suggests that ministry leaders should develop social intervention skills to conduct needs assessments, in addition to their theological competences.

However, this raises the question: should pastors or church ministry leaders be superhuman beings possessing different skills and trained in different fields in order to be able to perform their ministries? Greider (2008) ponders on the ever-expanding scope of pastoral care and suggests that pastoral caregivers should make strategic decisions about where to focus, depending on their social contexts and demands. She adds that pastoral care providers should be articulate about their limits and how

they triage (Greider 2008:54). Thus, in the context of complexity, global disorders and disruptions that result in the influx of migrants, a pastor or any religious leader has to develop multiple skills and clarity on what they intend to intervene in. Failure to be critical and working within the parameters of one's capacity may result in causing harm and violating laws, despite good intentions and motives. A good example of good intentions and desire to address the practical needs of migrants that engender negative consequences is that of Reverend Paul Verryn, then pastoring at Johannesburg Central Methodist Church. Parker (2010), in his essay, "Paul Verryn: What went wrong?" reports that Rev Paul Verryn ended up being disciplined by his church for housing refugees at the church.

At a relationship level, it should be noted that on the one hand, there are individuals who interact with migrants, resulting in increased awareness, attitude change and intervention (action). On the other hand, there are also people who are unexposed, therefore remain unaware of the plight of migrants. The hermeneutical model recognises that migrant ministry should be accompanied by exposure and intentional efforts to interact with migrants. This interaction is not easy as it challenges one to move out of one's comfort zone. While cultivating a relationality and interaction with migrants, the potential danger of the encouragement to relate and interact becoming coercion should be noted and guarded against. At the same time, migrants' situations and experiences that trigger emotions of despair should be noted, as some migrants are prone to becoming angry with God and fellow human beings. In such situations, positive emotions should be cultivated to encourage feelings of gratitude. Positive emotions entail embracing God's providence with gratitude in spite of how desperate the situation may be. Thus, the hermeneutical model indicates the coexistence of gratitude and despair. Despair is in the shadow of gratitude and doxology.

The above discussion indicates that, far from being rigid, the hermeneutical framework for integrated migrant ministry intervention is a fluid way of thinking on complex challenging issues. While God remains unchanging (immutability of God), our human understanding and interpretation of Him (God's providence in challenging times) are influenced by context and prevailing circumstances. As Miller and Jackson (1995:76) importantly postulate, our thoughts about God (cognition), our feeling (affect) and our actions in prevailing situations interact in a manner that either influences

a constructive (positive) perspective and coping or, alternatively result in negative perceptions that obscure our imaginations and options, resulting in perpetuating pain, suffering, apathy and inaction.

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