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Is God reviving Europe through refugees?

Middle East is facing a meltdown! Countries are under tremendous Political, socio-economic, military pressure. %60 of Syrians (over 13 million people) are displaced! Over %50 of which are under 18. There are over 3.2 million refugees in Turkey, mostly from Syria. (See PDF here)

And over 3 million (mainly Afghans, one million documented and two million undocumented) live in Iran. All the refugees are looking for an opportunity to move to the West.

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His article on impact of refugees on churches in the West is thought and hopefully prayer provoking.

The current refugee crisis in the world is widely considered to be the greatest humanitarian crisis of our times. According to the United Nations, there are over 65 million forcibly displaced people in the world today. The magnitude of human displacement on account of wars and political and societal instability is unprecedented. The arrival of millions of migrants in Europe has not only received much media attention, but it is also shaking the foundations of secular post-Christian Western civilization.

The contemporary refugee crisis has stirred our collective consciousness and catapulted immigration to a prominent place in national debates. It has come to the forefront of security discussions and electoral politics in many countries. It has also redefined the development and economic agenda in relation to other parts of the world. These disruptions have already reshaped our worlds in significant ways and will reshape our futures, far beyond our current imaginings.

The epicenter of the refugee crisis is the continuation of wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, producing nearly half of all refugees in the world. About 60% of Syrians have been displaced from their homes, and roughly half of them are children below the age of 18. This is unprecedented for a single nation in recent history. When neighborhoods are bombed, livelihoods gone, family members killed, and their own lives endangered, people are left with no option but to flee.

Refugees in Europe turning to Christ

God is doing is something new and exciting in the midst of this great crisis. In December 2016, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand what God is doing among and through the refugees in Europe. I travelled through ten cities in five countries over three weeks visiting many refugee camps, as well as churches and missions agencies working with them. A month before, I visited three cities in three other countries. Over this period, I interviewed many refugee ministry leaders in Europe in order to assess and study the desperate situation and the response of God's people to it.
It was amazing for me to be present at meetings where hundreds of refugees turned to Christ. I visited several fellowships and churches that have baptized hundreds of refugees. One church in Germany had baptized over a thousand Syrian and Kurdish people over the previous six months. At our own meetings each night in different cities in Greece and Germany, we saw almost all of the refugees present responding to the gospel. There are over 100 Arabic-speaking churches across Europe, some predating the crisis and others started in response to it. They are not only very engaged with the issue, but also highly effective on account of their linguistic and cultural proximity to the refugees.

**Churches transformed**

Only God could have turned such a desperate situation into such a mission opportunity, and what is happening lies beyond the strategic planning of any church or mission agency:

One refugee ministry leader admitted, ‘God brought me here to Germany a few years ago and prepared me for this ministry to refugees. I never saw this coming!’

One pastor in Northern Germany confessed, ‘Starting an outreach to the refugees was the best thing that happened in this church over the last 50 years and is the most exciting part of our church life right now’.

Yet another pastor in Greece informed me that three quarters of his church now comprise refugees, all of whom have joined within the previous six months.

Pastors and mission leaders showed me videos of their recent baptisms and introduced me to several new refugee believers from other religious backgrounds.

From **Syrian Refugees Face an Uncertain Future**? (World Bank Photo Collection) by Mohamed Azakir (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0).

**Refugees' stories**

I met refugees from Syria, Kurdistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Morocco, Sudan, Somalia, and Iran. Most were men in their 20s and 30s, maybe some in their 40s. I met some refugee women with small children in family camps, while other camps held teenage boys who were separated from their families. Most camps in Germany provided shelter in modified shipping containers and family members were kept together as far as possible. The living conditions of refugees in Greece were bleak. Some refugees were eager to meet us and share the stories of their escape, their wanderings, and homelands, while others exhibited clear signs of extreme trauma or disillusionment as a result of what they had endured along the journey.

A few refugees I met had been forcefully drafted into radical groups. Some told me about horrendous incidents while fleeing their homeland?how everything known to them vanished overnight. Siblings or parents were killed before their eyes; homes, workplaces, and businesses were destroyed; and many showed me gunshot wounds on their bodies or exhibited clear evidence of psychological scars, which they will carry to their graves.

However, they wanted to leave their old way of life behind and were keen to embrace new things in a foreign land. Like all migrants, they were questioning some underlying assumptions and worldviews that had defined their lives and culture, while showing great openness to explore new ideas. They asked deep questions about life, meaning, purpose, truth, God, etc. Truly, migratory displacement is a theologizing experience.

I was surprised to learn about many of their supernatural encounters with ‘Isa’. They told me about their dreams or visions of Jesus and several cases of miraculous encounters while fleeing from conflict zones. Their stories of escape, loss, survival, and determination were breathtaking. They were deeply grateful to have survived the ordeal, and I found them sincerely desiring to rebuild their lives. Their eagerness to seek God and the fervor of their worship and prayers were soul-stirring. Their dramatic life transformation and new hopeful outlook are a testimony to the power of the gospel, and there is no reason to doubt the genuineness
of their conversions. Their willingness to take up any work and their motivation to succeed are extraordinary.

Turning crisis into opportunity: reviving the church

I believe that one of the ways in which God is reviving Christianity in Europe is through refugees. They may be the least likely agents, and what is happening is a highly unexpected means for a major move of God. However, that is surely what the Christmas story is all about: a teenage girl, a carpenter, a manger, shepherds, Persian astrologers, Bethlehem, and the like. God breaks into our world where we least expect it. Refugees are God-bearers (theotokos) reviving the stagnant churches in Europe, used by God in the same way that he has always operated through people who are willing to risk all to bring him into our worlds.

After all, practicing hospitality to strangers is not just about offering something to the newcomers, but also experiencing how strangers bless host nations in unexpected ways. Opening our hearts and neighborhoods to people who are familiar with hospitality as part of their culture and who are unlike ourselves brings divine favor upon the land and its people. Surely that is what mission is all about. It is not that we are changing the world, but that God wants to change us by letting us see what he is doing in the world in the least expected places and through the least likely agents.

According to Andrew Walls, Christianity's center is always on the move, as reflected in the current shift in the demographic center of gravity of Christianity; and margins revitalize the center.[4] Mission theology is a continual work in progress, moving toward greater inclusivity. Mission in the margins always emerges in new and unclear forms, but it is characterized by clear signs of advancement of the gospel, empowerment by the Holy Spirit, and (as a result) changes to the very nature of Christian faith and our conceptions of it. Thus, mission is a boundary-breaking phenomenon, diffusing across cultures and geographies.

In the year of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, God is once again reviving the church in Europe, this time through refugees from the Middle East. Who could ever have foreseen something like this? The churches and ministries involved with refugees are experiencing renewal while those who are skeptical are missing out on a move of the Spirit. God is indeed doing new things in the world. What a privilege it is to see him at work where one least expects it!

An African Diaspora scholar has described Europe as a 'prodigal continent' in the course of discussing 'reverse mission' and chronicling the impact of African Christians on Europe at the beginning of the 21st century. Now that role is also being taken up by new Christians of Middle Eastern descent and Asians who are bringing a new lease of life to a moribund and plateaued European Christianity. Once the Great European Migration took the Christian faith to the far corners of the world; now Christians from those same margins are returning the favor in bringing a fresh revival in European churches.

In today's world, people are on the move everywhere. God is also on the move among people on the move, as is evident from the fact that many refugees are turning to Christ and becoming a means to revive churches in Europe. The diasporas arising out of displacement, including the flight of refugees from the Middle East to Europe, are fertile ground for new activity of the Spirit of God and with it the advancement and indeed transformation of Christianity.

Source: The Lausanne Movement