

Guest Editorial
Mission on the Move

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People on the Move (aka diasporas, migrants, international students, refugees, transnationals, displaced, hybrids, etc.) have become a defining reality of our contemporary world. More people are living somewhere other than their birthplaces than at any other time in human history. We can all trace our ancestry to places other than where we currently make home. Human movements are currently at an all-time high due to global social unrest, economic upheavals, geopolitical conflicts, demographic shifts, ecological crises, etc. In the years ahead, more is anticipated.

This is nothing new. Migration is the throughline of the human story. Every civilization has always been reshaped by human movements in the past and will continue to be so in the future. We are all migrants or descendants of migrants. Without human displacements, it is difficult to envision the development, growth, and transformation of human societies, as well as the making of nations, economies, politics, and religions. Human beings are a migratory species. Not all need to be displaced. Emerging realities for everyone are often shaped by a select few who venture out, whether it be across the street or around the world. As it was for our ancestors, the tale of displacement is deeply woven into our very being and will continue to be so for our descendants.

While terms such as migration, refugees, displaced, or transnational do not appear in the Bible, the notion of displacement appears on every page. In humanity's planetary existence, the contemporary ideas of nation-state, border controls, passports, visas, etc., are relatively new and should not be mistaken for being absent in the Biblical narratives or extraneous to salvation history or the mission of God in the world. On the other hand, diaspora is a biblical word and a central theme in the history of redemption. It first appeared in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and was later used in the New Testament to refer to dispersed peoples.

People Movements in the Bible

Nearly all biblical writings are diasporic at their core, meaning they are written by, to, for, and about migrants and their descendants. They were originally composed, edited, preserved, read, interpreted, and distributed in the context of some form of displacement. Their original authors, readers, and carriers were migrants or their progenies who lived as minorities in foreign lands. Nearly all characters, narratives, plots, settings, and books of the Bible are shaped by diverse kinds of displacements. Geocultural movement is an overarching theme of the Bible, and one may argue that diaspora is a metanarrative of the Bible.

The need to translate the Hebrew scriptures into another language emerged in Alexandria, Egypt, among the Jewish diaspora—not in Jerusalem, the nerve center of the religious order. This need was primarily on account of the second and third generation descendants losing linguistic competency in Hebrew and becoming Greek-dominant in their Hellenistic context. All the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, the lingua franca of the Hellenized peoples, which was foreign to both Jesus and his disciples. Jewish dispersion, Hellenized culture, the Roman Empire, and human mobility played a strategic role in the spread and transformation of the Christian faith in its first few centuries.

The diasporic lens is essential to grasp the Bible and its innate missional thrust that is entwined throughout. All hermeneutical tasks require a certain distance to read and understand any given biblical text, and the diasporic contexts naturally provide such a space. The diasporic sensibility of uprooted people draws them to biblical characters and stories, while its message deeply resonates with their own contemporary wanderings. They find comfort and new hope in immigrant churches as faith provides new wind behind their sails, and their presence transforms the religious landscape in their adopted foreign lands.

God on the Move (*Motus Dei*)

Not only are people on the move, but God is on the move. In fact, people on the move see God not as static, stationary, or stagnant, but as a divine being who is moving. Static gods are idols and remain immovable, lifeless, parochial, territorial, and oppressive. The living God is a moving being, and that trait makes the God of the Bible an exceptional missionary God. Mission is not merely something that we engage in or is limited to a set of activities or accomplishments. All Christian mission is God's mission (*missio Dei*), and God accomplishes much by moving and by moving people around, much more than all our cleverly devised mission strategies and activities. God is sovereign over human dispersions and determines the place and time of our earthly dwellings (Acts 17:26).

The God of the Bible is a missionary God because God is always on the move. God is on the move because God is a living being. God cannot be confined in space or time yet is sovereign over spatial and chronological domains. The divine attributes of aseity, immutability, and impassibility should not lead us in the direction of viewing God as rigid, static, immovable, or sedentary. After closely examining the history of Israel sketched in the sermon of the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:2-53), John Stott concluded that "God of the Old Testament was the living God, a God on the move and on the march, who was always calling his people out to fresh adventures, and always accompanying and directing them as they went" (Stott 1994, 131).

Human beings are created to move. I move, therefore I am (*moveo ergo sum*). We are created in the image of a moving God. Christians are more likely to travel beyond the places of their birth since they are not bound to any locale, and their peripatetic encounter with foreign cultures and languages leads to new endeavors in translating the tenets of their faith and practices into new contexts. Contrarily, Hinduism is considered a geographically imprisoned religion with its scriptural prohibition to traverse large expanses of water (*Kala Pani*) and thus remains largely bound within a particular land and culture. Hindus are expected to live and die in places close to where they were born, and most remain largely bound within specific lands and cultures. The only way they can escape Karmic fatalism is by migrating out of the territorial boundaries of such provincial gods and changing their allegiance to a more benevolent and universal God. Likewise, Islam is also a rooted religion on account of its pilgrimages, prayers uttered while facing a particular place, and untranslatable scriptures which have primarily spread through conquests, reproduction, religious imposition, and violence. Islam maintains an immovable geographical and linguistic center. Jesus, in contrast, came as a universal Savior, and the first Christian Pentecost abandoned the notion of divine territoriality (Acts 2:1-11).

Changing World of World Missions

The shifting of the center of gravity of Christianity from the global West and North to the Global South and East is fundamentally changing the world of Christian mission as well. Many peoples

of Africa, Asia, and Latin America that were mission fields in the past have now emerged as strong mission sending forces, while former mission sending nations have become mission fields. This reversal of center and margin is far beyond who goes where, but the very means, perception, and nature of the missionary engagements are undergoing dramatic transformations.

Christian mission is no longer an exclusive prerogative of a select few of the Western churches and well-resourced agencies. Mission is not solely from “the West to the Rest” but from anywhere to everywhere. Since we live in some extraordinary times in the entire history of the Christian faith, with Christians in every country of the world and many of whom have read or heard the mission challenge to go to the ends of the earth, anyone could be involved in missions to and with anyone anywhere in the world. Christians are bolder to venture out, knowing that there is in all likelihood a church no matter where they end up. Not only is every nation a potential mission sending nation, but everywhere is a mission field as well, requiring Christians from other parts of the world. Christians need not be surprised that others from across the globe are coming near to them on missions. Some may argue that the West is in desperate need of Christians from the East and South, more than the other way around. There is no ‘reverse’ mission or need to call what Westerners do as mission and what non-Westerners do as reverse mission. All mission is a ‘forward’ mission, from God to the world through God’s people wherever they may be found.

Christian migrants are a larger force for God’s work in the world than all the organized efforts of missions, as they have always been in history. Just as all missionaries are cross-cultural migrants, one may consider all Christian migrants as cross-cultural missionaries, even though they are not officially sent by a mission agency or engage in mission activities regularly. With over two-thirds of migrants globally being Christians—who are quick to establish fellowships and churches in their host nations, with their distinctive cultural and linguistic expressions—they may be God’s largest missionary force in the world. The migrant Christians embody a spirit of missionhood, just as the Protestant Reformers talked about the priesthood of all believers.

Overview of this Issue

Since its very inception as a journal in 2003, *Global Missiology* has been a leading prophetic voice to cry out in the wilderness about the changing world of mission. Being an open-access and widely read scholarly journal, many quarterly issues focused on diaspora communities have played a critical role in disseminating the concept of diaspora missions globally. I have drawn much inspiration from the journal’s past issues that have introduced many ideas and scholars in mission studies globally. I am honored to be invited to write this editorial, and I sincerely acknowledge the pioneering spirit of the *Global Missiology* founders, editorial team, and contributors over the last two decades.

In this issue, we feature another set of exceptional articles on diaspora missions from a select set of seminary students, academicians, practitioners, and pastors from many different regions of the world. The articles deal with Ghanaian, Kenyan, Korean, Ugandan, Chinese, Indian, and other diasporas in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North American contexts. Together, these accounts continue to enrich the story of God’s work in the world today through some unlikely migrant missionaries, whose contribution to the spread of the faith is likely to accelerate, as it has been throughout the history of Christianity.

In the first article, **Ebenezer Obeng** and **Hansung Kim** explore how Ghanaian immigrant pastors in the United States adapt to the needs of the Americanized second generation using case

studies of three pastors of the Church of Pentecost. The study brings out challenges of cross-cultural and generational gaps in ministry in this growing community. In the next article, **Peter Brassington**, a SIL missionary in the UK, deals with the issue of language in relation to new migrants in neighborhoods and the practice of linguistic hospitality to celebrate linguistic diversity in multiethnic contexts by offering Bible resources.

The third article, written by **David Hirome**, investigates the hybrid missional identities of Kenyan Anglican clergy in the United States, including cases of both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of North America. Hirome examines lived realities in inhospitable settings, vocational flexibility, and transnational ecclesial negotiation that immigrant clergies engage in to present diaspora, not as a marginal state but as a site for theological and missiological creativity and reimagination. Subsequently, **Esther Okiror**, a Ugandan Presbyterian youth pastor in Korea, examines the use of social media by Ugandan Christian students in South Korea, not only to communicate and stay in touch, but also how social media—TikTok in particular—has emerged as a vital space of negotiation in regard to migrant identity, culture, and faith. Okiror's study deals with the growing interest in transnational digital diasporas, digital mission, and virtual belongings.

The fifth article, by **D. Chadwick Parker**, analyzes diasporic identities in relation to multiethnic churches in the wake of growing diversity in many parts of the world, dynamics that could result in either inter-ethnic social cohesion or fracture. Parker deliberates briefly on issues such as racial abuse and power dynamics (and could have included economic injustices and former colonial oppression from where immigrants are coming from) to introduce his recent doctoral thesis on embodied cohesion in a local church context (Parker 2024). The next article is written by **Tianji Ma**, who is a lecturer at Lutheran Seminary in Taiwan and a researcher at the Institute for Evangelical Missiology in Giessen, Germany. Ma's research presents findings of her fieldwork on language, worship style, family dynamics, belonging, etc., using a lens of bicultural hybrid identity of second-generation Chinese German Christians.

Benjamin Isola Akano, a missionary with a Nigerian mission agency and board of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, besides lecturing at a seminary in Ogbomoso, explores the issues of internal migration within his country and shares missiological implications by studying Hausa-speaking migrants from Muslim-majority northern regions living in the southern parts of Nigeria. Akano employs the mission concepts of centrifugal and centripetal flows for voluntary and involuntary migrants to advocate for intentional engagements with northerners wherever they are by viewing mission as philoxenia instead of xenophobia. Finally, **Jose Philip**, an Asbury doctoral student of an Indian background with ministry experiences in Singapore and the Middle East, takes up methodological issues related to studying diaspora mission and Christianity, and proposes a reflexive and integrated approach that includes both social sciences and theology. Philip advocates for the embodied, communal, and public nature of Christian truth, which, when combined with humility and contextual awareness, produces lasting missional impact of the growing diasporas locally and globally.

All in all, what a rich collection of essays on the diaspora mission from diverse contexts and vantage points! What is evident from this plethora of reflections and insights is that God is behind human movements, and the kingdom of God is advancing powerfully through and among today's migrants. It is time for churches and agencies to reimagine Christian mission entirely by developing a wider canvas and including new players who may not fit into existing mission categories or models. God is at work in calling people everywhere to himself and charging them

to go from where they are to everywhere else in the world. The migration of Christians has always expanded and transformed Christianity throughout its history and will continue to do so. May the new breed of diaspora missionaries multiply and flourish everywhere.

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