



Of course, the process is a lot more complex than this theory represents. In some cases, people experience all of the four possible ways of adapting. In families, children might assimilate to the new culture while their parents unconsciously separate from it. Different combinations of integration, separation and assimilation can happen in just one person as well. A migrant might assimilate to the new culture at work by learning the social code and not keeping the code from her or his old culture. At the same time, they might integrate with the language, meaning that the migrants know the language and it's conventions in the new country, but may also use their own first language. It is also possible that they separate when getting married; they may only think of marrying

from within their own ethnic group. They then keep their marital life apart from the new culture.

However, the most important thing is that the migrant finds a way to live a good life in the new culture. This usually happens in different stages, as they find their identities again in a new home country. Integration seems to give the best psychological basis for migrants to do so.

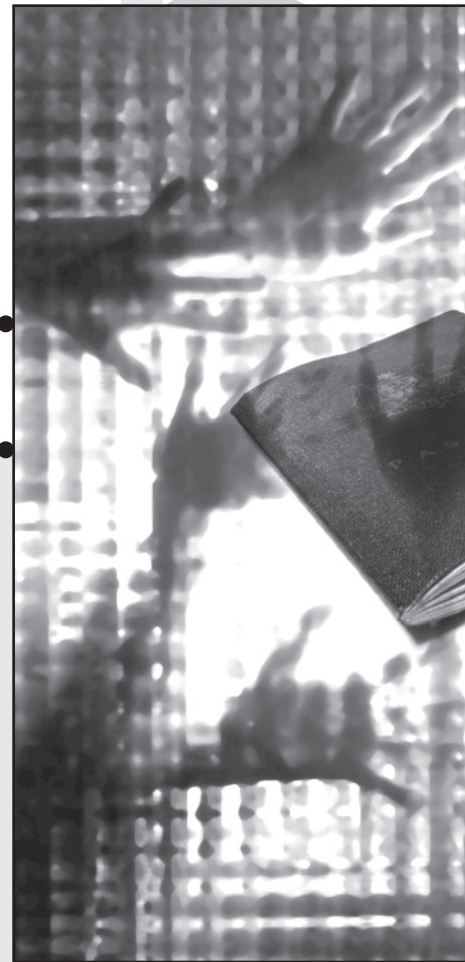
*Torbjørn Askevold*

## “We are all sons and daughters of a wandering Aramean”

Reflections on WSCF's solidarity theme for 2007:  
Migration

Now that I am home in Norway, the obvious question I would like to ask is how do we deal with this issue in our local SCM's? How should we analyse migration as a phenomenon, and how can we reflect theologically about it?

A recurring point that was often mentioned at the conference in Mexico was how we are all “sons and daughters of a wandering Aramean”. The Bible-studies were led by theologians and scholars who understood the Bible as a collection of stories about people who have lived their lives as migrants. We learned how Abraham was living in an Aramean tribe that led a nomadic life in the Middle-Eastern region. The Exodus from Egypt is a central story to this theme, and we looked at other Biblical passages about characters facing migration. The story of the Holy Family's flight from Palestine to Egypt is a well known, showing us how Christ himself had to flee from persecution.



If we use these Biblical accounts as normative descriptions of the human condition, we are forced to revise our idea of what is normal in regards to migration and being settled. Is being settled the “normal” way of life for most people? How did we end up where we now live? How many of us, as students and members of a student movement, have migrated at a certain point in our lives? Both our own history and the central Biblical figures show us how ‘settledness’ is not a given part of the human condition.

Considering the normality of this fact, how do we then deal with this from a theological point of view? Christian theology speaks of the value and dignity of every man and woman as something innate and given, based on the idea that we are all created in the image of God. The Gospels tells us that what we do towards the stranger, the homeless and the poor, is being done to Christ. In this way, we can say that every migrant carries the Face of Christ, and this compels us to act in a way that protects this innate dignity.

What does this imperative mean to us as Europeans, living inside the mighty fortress of the Schengen agreement? How should we deal with migrants so that their dignity is cared for? It’s impossible to look at migration as an isolated phenomenon, if we are to take the tools of historical analysis from the tradition of liberation theology seriously. Why are people migrating? What are the causes for migration? The unequal distribution of wealth, the climate crisis, war and conflict are all causes that force people to flee. If we are to address migration, we have to address the causes of it.

Looking at the European context, we are facing obvious challenges on the field of migration. The issue of integration is a hot topic in most countries, and it’s perhaps the most widely debated subject in this field. In Norway, the debate has taken a more hostile turn, and the earlier focus on hospitality and compassion for refugees has turned into a debate of suspicion and prejudice. Samuels P. Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations* has entered our own neighbourhoods, and the polemic is sharper than ever before. Conservative parties are claiming that our “Christian heritage” is threatened and that we have to protect our “Christian values”. This so called conflict of values is seen in close connection to Huntington’s ideas. Earlier we could speak of immigrants as important promoters of family values and social responsibility. Today the immigrants are treated with the opposite approach; their values pose a threat until they can prove the opposite.

What are these Christian values that we are supposed to protect? What does the Bible tell us about migration and the tradition of hospitality and every man and woman’s dignity? In my opinion, the right-wing understanding of these values is seriously distorted and has



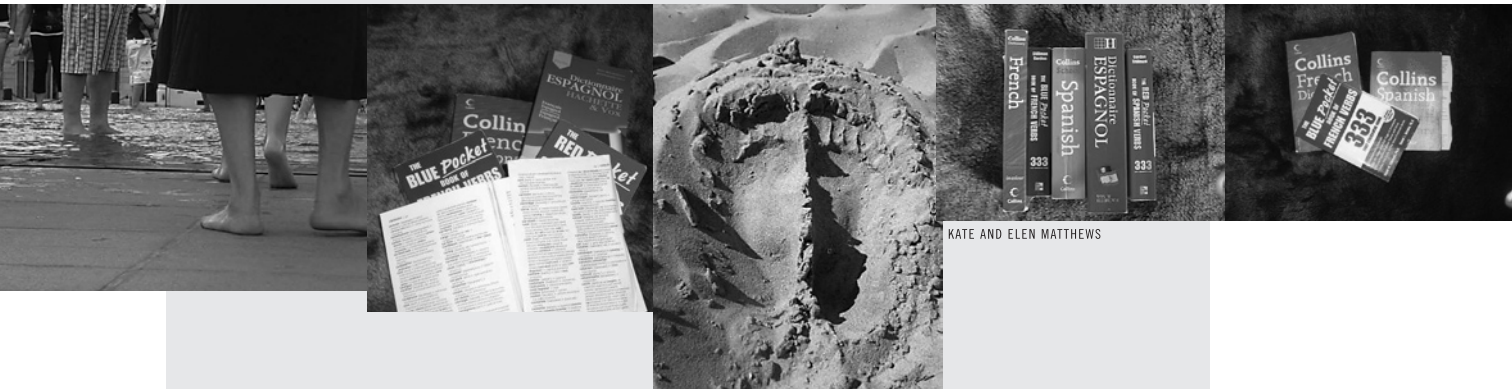
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to be claimed back by the Churches and the Christian movements. We cannot let Christianity be used in the political game of fear-mongering and identity-politics. Christianity does not imply being irresponsible towards migrants, but it compels us to show deep and honest hospitality towards newcomers to our countries. We should all work for and promote the Kingdom of God - a Kingdom of social and economic justice; in the mean time, we have to care for those who are seeking the chance of a better life.

As of today, European countries have a stricter policy on migration than ever before. A good example to mention is the case of Denmark and the UK, countries which participated in the American-led invasion of Iraq but refused 97% and 88% of the applications from Iraqi refugees for asylum in 2006 according to UNHCR statistics.

The issue of migration is complex and cannot be analyzed without looking at the causes for it. Even though migration seems to be an unavoidable reality to all of us, we should not approve of the economical and political systems that force people to migrate. The WSCF Migration Statement and Solidarity Plan that was written at the conference in Mexico states “that each person has a right to move in safety and with their dignity respected”. We still need to recognize that “in looking at migration we have to critique the global economic system, international financial institutions and unjust economic structures as the major causes and to look for just alternatives.”

These are just a few of the things that were debated at the inter-regional meeting. The Solidarity plan is an excellent summary of the conference and is a good starting point for looking deeper into this issue. The plan both summarizes the theological and political analyzes and suggests concrete forms of action for the different levels of WSCF and our local SCM 's.



KATE AND ELEN MATTHEWS

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