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# “Loving Your Neighbour”: A Fundamental Law of the Gospel and Christian Injunction

Zondi Magagula

## ABSTRACT

More often, Christians have not completely considered Scripture as authoritative when it comes to defining and understanding the concept of “love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31). The emphasis and implication of this great second commandment is “love your neighbour as yourself” and not “love your neighbour and yourself.” Loving yourself in the context of this second commandment does not refer to narcissism or self-glorification when it comes to relationship with God and other human beings. Narcissism has devastating effects on relationship with God and human beings. A narcissist is arrogant; conceited, egocentric and having an excessive interest in himself or herself. “Loving your neighbour” is not equated to narcissism or preoccupation or self love. However, loving God is definitely equated to loving neighbour. Hence, this article argues that loving our neighbour is the fundamental law of the gospel and it is a Christian injunction. A neighbour is not necessarily a person next door or in your suburb or country but anyone in need—especially in the context of the migrants. Thus, the Bible provides some key insights on the subject of migration and treatment of migrants that could be explored for the theological foundation in this article.

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# “Loving Your Neighbour”: A Fundamental Law of the Gospel and Christian Injunction

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## ABSTRACT

*More often, Christians have not completely considered Scripture as authoritative when it comes to defining and understanding the concept of “love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31). The emphasis and implication of this great second commandment is “love your neighbour as yourself” and not “love your neighbour and yourself.” Loving yourself in the context of this second commandment does not refer to narcissism or self-glorification when it comes to relationships with God and other human beings. Narcissism has devastating effects on relationships with God and human beings. A narcissist is arrogant; conceited, egocentric and having an excessive interest in himself or herself. “Loving your neighbour” is not equated to narcissism or preoccupation or self love. However, loving God is definitely equated to loving neighbors. Hence, this article argues that loving our neighbour is the fundamental law of the gospel and it is a Christian injunction. A neighbour is not necessarily a person next door or in your suburb or country but anyone in need—especially in the context of the migrants. Thus, the Bible provides some key insights on the subject of migration and treatment of migrants that could be explored for the theological foundation in this article. Hence, this article is developed according to the following sub-sections: Biblical terms relating to foreigners, Biblical Migration narratives, Old Testament Laws regarding foreigners, God and Migration in the New Testament, and A migrating God love migrants.*

**Keywords:** migrants, migrating, nekar, ger, xenophobia, stranger, good samaritan and god’s love.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Migration is an international phenomenon, a reality that touches every corner of the world. It is a movement of people across continents and within individual countries in order to find work and better living conditions. Pieter Emmer, in the book “Migrants and Refugees” aptly states that,

History is full of migration movements: the Jews went to Egypt, the Poles went to Germany, the Scots went to Ireland and Greeks went to Asia Minor. In addition to Europe’s internal migrations similar migrations occurred in the pre-Columbian New World, as well as in Africa and Asia. In addition to the many intra-continental migration streams the expansion of Europe after 1500 caused large inter-continental movements of people which in turn intensified the existing migration.<sup>1</sup>

The drive and desire to seek new life is inevitable. There are therefore innumerable reasons for migration. Desperate situations caused by poverty, local hardships, displacements caused by war, political upheaval or racial persecution, natural disasters, global market pressures and the stories of fame and fortune from developed countries—all of these can drive people away from their original place of abode. For some, the departure is inevitable, while others leave on their own volition. This shows that there are various unique reasons and experiences of people migrating. It is therefore imperative for the Church in South Africa and the people in general to welcome strangers or immigrants. The book of Leviticus aptly corroborates this important

<sup>1</sup> P. C. Emmer, *Migrants and Refugees* (London: Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 4:42-43.

injunction, “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 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” (Lev. 19:33-34).

## II. BIBLICAL TERMS RELATING TO FOREIGNERS

It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of migration is a major theme throughout the Bible. Just like contemporary times, there were various reasons during biblical times why people migrated.

Divine punishment as a result of Israel’s prolonged idolatry caused them to be deported (Amos 5:25-27; Acts 7:43). Challenging socio-economic circumstances have always caused Israel to migrate. The Old Testament pages contain rich theological reflection that describes life in a foreign place. What some people in the Bible experienced is similar to what foreigners today go through, and can teach us valuable lessons about migration. The Bible reveals how serious and complex the topic of migration is. Therefore, it is important to start by examining the terms the Bible uses to refer to foreigners. In the context of this study two Hebrew words, *nekar* and *ger*, will be considered. In some English translations these words seem to be the same in meaning. According to Strong’s Lexicon, *nekar* (*nay-kawr*) is an alien, foreigner, and stranger. Whereas *ger* (*gare*) as alien, foreigners, immigrants, sojourner, stranger.<sup>2</sup>

However, there seems to be a distinction between the two words. According to Allen in his article, “Stranger in the Old Testament”, *ger* refers to a person of the same race who resides permanently in a country of which he is not a citizen. Sometimes, it may refer to a fellow national who is in another country. A *ger* has certain privileges in Israel. He has a right of gleaning just like the poor, widow, and orphans (Lev 19:10, 23:22). Gers are subject to the same civil laws and justice and privileges of a citizen (Lev 19:33, 34; 24:22,

Num 15:15, 16, 29; 35:15; Deut 1; 16; 24:14, 17; Judge 20:9). They are also subject to the same religious prohibitions (Lev 20:2) and Sabbath requirements (Deut 5:14). Their children are to become citizens (Ezek 47:22, 23). If circumcised a *ger* may partake in the Passover (Exod 12: 48). And may therefore enter into the covenant with God (Deut 29:11) and be part of Israel (Josh 8:35). However, a *nekar*, *nokri*, *noker*, and *zar* are people of races other than the race of the Israelites. A *nekar* is not allowed to partake in the Passover (Exod 12: 43).

Citizens are not allowed to socialize with them (Deut 31:16). Marriage with a *nekar* is prohibited (Neh 9:2, 13:30, Mal 2:11). A *nekar* was not permitted to enter God’s Sanctuary (Ezek 44:7, 9). *Nekars*, according to the Israelites, are not only people who are foreign but people who worship strange pagan gods in the society of Israel. Such foreigners were also considered a threat to the Israelites—(1Kgs 11:1-8, Neh 13:23-27, Ps 144:7, Deut 32:16, and Prov 22:14).<sup>3</sup> Their stay in Israel was short. They would come and go just like mercenaries. Interestingly, *gers* were more readily accepted in Israel than *nekars* although they were both foreigners. Thus in the OT, one could conclude that the social-economic and religious opportunities of certain classes of migrants were restricted.

In the New Testament three Greek words used for foreigners are *xenos*, *paroikos*, and *parepidemos* (Heb 11:13; Lk 24:18; and 1Pet 1:1). Also *allogenes* (*allos*, “another,” *genos*, “a race”) occurs in Luke 17:18, of a Samaritan. These words refer to people who are not indigenous and have no status in society. For instance, in Acts 17:20, *xenos* from its root *xenizo* could refer to something or someone alien and not welcomed. *Xenos* is also related to the English word “*xenophobia*,” which means dislike or fear of someone alien or foreign. However, *paroikos* and *parepidemos* refer to the status of life before one becomes a follower of God (Eph 2:19). In 1Peter 2:11 *paroikos* and *parepidemos* appear together. Interestingly some

<sup>2</sup>J. Strong, *Strong Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 1890.

<sup>3</sup><https://tcallenco.blogspot.com/2009/06/stranger-in-old-testament.html>

of these terms carry negative connotations like *nekar* in the OT, and others do not like *ger*.

### III. BIBLICAL MIGRATION NARRATIVES

The Bible offers some migration narratives. For instance, the account of the Fall of man in the book of Genesis closes with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from God's presence (Gen 3:23). Adam and Eve are banished from the presence of God because of their disobedience. Groody explicitly corroborates this painful experience when he states that,

The expulsion from Eden of Adam and Eve, the original *imago Dei*, and their border-crossing into the land beyond, names the human propensity toward a state of sin and disorder (Gen 3:1-13). Sin disfigures the *imago Dei*, resulting in a fallen world that creates discord in relationships. The territory into which the Prodigal Son migrates and squanders all his worldly wealth (Lk 15:11-32) symbolizes this barren terrain; it is a place that moves people away from the original creative design into a place of estrangement from God, others, and themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Groody re-emphasizes the fact that the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God led them out of the garden of Eden, their original abode. Consequently, the relationships between God and man, and man and man were broken. Cain after murdering his brother Abel, is condemned to wander as a result of God's displeasure (Gen 4:10-14). Perhaps, the most significant migration narrative could be identified as the divine action in the dispersal of humanity following the futile effort of the Tower of Babel. Here, God "scattered them abroad from there over the face of the earth; and they stopped building the city" (Gen 11:8). Subsequently, Terah the father of Abram together with his family migrated from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan (Gen 11:31-12:5).

Afterwards, poverty caused; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their households to migrate from Canaan to Egypt (Gen 12:10-20; 42-46); to Negev

<sup>4</sup> D. G. Groody, *Crossing the divide: foundation of a theology of migration and refugees* (Theological Studies, 2009), p. 648.

(Gen 20); and Philistia (Gen. 26). Thus, Abram and his descendents lived a semi-nomadic and migratory life (Gen 23:4; Deut 26:5). Jacob and his family left their homeland voluntarily but also to escape the economic hardships experienced in their home country at that time (Gen 46:6). His youngest son, Joseph, was the first to leave for Egypt, a victim of human trafficking resulting in migration. Jacob's family grew into a nation in a foreign land, Egypt. Although the earlier years after their arrival were relatively favourable for them, this did not last for too long.

Their host country became hostile to them as migrants/foreigners—they were treated as slaves. After four hundred years of slavery in Egypt, Israel left and migrated out of Egypt, spending forty years in transit in the wilderness before returning to the country promised to their forefathers (Numbers 33-35). While in transit, they often experienced hostilities from other nations on their travel route. In the list of Israel's enemies along the way, Edom ranked number one as recorded in Psalm 83. The Edomite's anger, brutality and aggression against Israel can be seen throughout Scripture. In Genesis 27:41 Esau already revealed his personal hatred and murderous vow against Jacob. Also the sneaky attacks of the Amalekites against the Israelite's stragglers in the wilderness (Exod 17:8-16; Deut 25:17-19), Amalek's alliances with other nations against Israel (Judges 3:12-14; 6:1-6), and Haman's attempt to exterminate the Jews in Persia (Esther 3:1, 8-11, 13). Beyond these, the Bible provides more scriptural evidence of Edom's incessant hostility against Israel and Judah and against God.

Further, there are other Old Testament Patriarchs that are forced to migrate. Jacob because of his deception flees Esau and lives with his uncle Laban in Aram (Gen 27-31). As alluded above, Joseph, because of his betrayal by his brothers is sold to Ishmaelites and finally landed in Egypt as a slave (Gen 37). Moses after killing an Egyptian escapes to Midian to avoid being prosecuted (Exod 2). Elimelech and Naomi and their two sons sought refuge in Moab due to the famine in Israel (Ruth 1:1-2). The economic hardships forced them to look for better opportunities for survival. After

the death of her husband Ruth clings to her mother-in-law Naomi and migrates to Israel and finally gets married to Boaz (Ruth 1:3f). Eventually Ruth is counted among the ancestors of David and Jesus (Matt 1:5). Migration narratives are not common in the New Testament. Yet, a few examples may be gleaned from NT narratives. One may refer to the flight of Jesus' parents to Egypt at the threat of His life by Herod. They remained there until the death of Herod (Matt 2:13-15).

In this instance, migration could be attributed to political issues since Herod perceived Jesus as a threat to his throne. However, the description of the composition of the people in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5-7) hints at an extensive migration in that era. This passage indicates that at Pentecost, there were in Jerusalem Jewish immigrants from many nations who had returned to participate in the festival. While this passage does not provide the reasons for migration, it may not be far from economic issues. The church's Spirit-empowered witness to the risen Jesus was heard by immigrants "men from every nation under heaven." These Jews were in Jerusalem during Pentecost. Their considerable diversity included both Jews and people from outside Jewish community. It could be concluded that the migration narratives in the Bible reveal that migration could be the result of divine judgment, economic challenges or political instability as in the case of Jesus. Further, it is also obvious that migrants could be both followers and non-believers in God.

#### IV. OLD TESTAMENT LAWS REGARDING FOREIGNERS

The Old Testament contains certain laws that regulate relationships with foreigners. However, it would be helpful to briefly give a background and the essence of the moral law (Ten Commandments) in the OT before I address the law regarding foreigners. There is a distorted view that was maintained by the Jews concerning the role of the Ten Commandments. In this vein, Carroll states, "the Jews believed that they had to obey the law in order to earn the right to be the people of God. Christians are freed from the

unforgiving demands of the law and therefore can proclaim that salvation is by God's grace through faith alone."<sup>5</sup> However, it is significant to note that the law was not intended for the nation of Israel to gain redemption through the observance of the Ten Commandments. Israel was spared and saved from the Egyptian bondage not because they had kept the law. God out of his abundant grace saved his children from the cruel hand of Pharaoh.

This is evident when Israel celebrated the Passover, in which their first born had been spared from the divine judgement by the blood of the lamb they sprinkled on the doorposts of their homes (Exod 12:12, 13). The second unprecedented episode is when they miraculously crossed the Red Sea and witnessed the defeat of the Pharaoh's army by the tempestuous sea. In other words, "the law is given to the Israelites through Moses not to *achieve redemption*; but its purpose was to show them *how to live as redeemed people*."<sup>6</sup> Arguably, the prelude to the Ten Commandments underscores the fact of their redemption: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of poverty" (Exod 20:2). God wanted the Israelites to understand the true essence of the law. He wanted them to understand that the law was a divine blessing to regulate their lives. Adherence to the statutes of God was designed to showcase His greatness among the foreign nations.

Wright further explicates that these laws "constituted a concrete model, a practical, culturally specific, experimental exemplar of the beliefs and values they embodied."<sup>7</sup> The law of God initiates in the lives of His people, unprejudiced governance that is pleasing to Him. God wanted His children to be an epitome of His righteousness. Christ underscores this principle when He says "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16). Therefore, the Israelites' unbiased relationship to God will be

<sup>5</sup> M. Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), 96.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 97.

<sup>7</sup> C. J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 68.

reflected in their treatment of a stranger. Hence, Carroll states, "Israel's stance toward the foreigner was part of the larger fabric of its ethical life. It was part of the ethos of what it meant to be the people of God."<sup>8</sup> Now having addressed the backdrop and the purpose of the law, I will specifically address the law in the context of dealing with a foreigner. Foreigners in Israel lived under precarious conditions. Carroll graphically states these austere conditions as follows:

The economy of Israel was agrarian. Life in rural areas could be difficult. The support of kinship groups was indispensable in times of drought, crop failures, disease and death. Foreigners were also excluded from the land tenure system. Foreigners therefore, could be particularly vulnerable to the unexpected and sometimes harsh vicissitudes of life. Employment was difficult, only few could be employed to do hard labour in the building of the temple (1Chron 22:2; 2 Chron. 2:17-18)<sup>9</sup>.

These conditions made it difficult for foreigners to live a normal enjoyable life. Under these unfriendly conditions, God gave certain laws that would support the welfare of migrants amongst Israel. Such laws included mandating harvesters should leave the edges of the field untouched for the sake of the needy foreigners (Lev 19:10; 23:22). God also stipulated that foreigners must be given fair judgement in court cases (Deut 1:16, 17), and receive a portion of the special tithe (Deut 14:28-29). Further, foreigners must be paid on time (24:15). Thus, God through Prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 22:7, 29) rebuked those that were treating the foreigners with contempt, robbing, and oppressing the needy. They had forgotten that they were once slaves in Egypt.

When God was giving His law, He wanted Israel to understand a very important principle in life, the principle of Israel's fairness and love towards other humans (Deut 10:17-19) since they could learn from their experience in Egypt and therefore must not repeat the same mistake because God

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 99.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 103.

does not approve of such. Israel was not to forget the experience of slavery they suffered in Egypt, and its people were not to repeat the heinous deeds of oppression by their slave masters in Egypt because God will give them the same measure. Further in His desire to affirm His commandment for the welfare of foreigners, God says, "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner (Deut 10:18-19). Infact, even while they are free in Canaan, God calls Israel "Aliens and my tenants" (Lev 25:23). The lands in which they have built their houses still remain His. He is the Owner of Heaven and the earth.

However, when Israel was comfortable, resourceful and blessed by God, they turned against this great principle. Thus, God used the Babylonians to punish them and take them captive (Psalm 137). In line with what God had always intended for Israel, Carroll further explicates, as follows:

In reminding Israel of its history and the obligations that stemmed from it, the Lord explains that the redemption from their horrific experience as immigrants also revealed something very important about his own person: He loves the helpless, among whom he lists foreigners. Israel, too, is to love foreigners, because God does (Deut. 10:17-19; Ps. 146:6-9). That is why God calls ignoring the cry of these people a sin" (Deut. 24:14-15).<sup>10</sup>

## V. GOD AND MIGRATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament also provides divine command in dealing with strangers. One of such passages perhaps illustrating the divine command and attitude towards migrants and its eschatological dimension is Mathew 25:31-40. The passage reads:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Carroll, *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 105.

gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep in his right hand and the goats in the left. Then the king will say to those at the right hand, "Come, you that blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me'" (Matt. 25:31-40).

Among those who received tangible acts of love and hospitality in this text are strangers who could be migrants. As already mentioned earlier, the Greek word *xenos*, which denotes someone who is an outsider, who has no rights and privileges, is used in Matthew 25:35. Christ's comparison of Himself to the migrants and other less-privileged in this passage, illustrates the degree Jesus identifies himself with strangers. In essence, this means that anyone who welcomes a stranger/alien welcomes Jesus himself. Here Jesus links a correct attitude towards migrants with eschatological reward for the righteous. Consequently, a significant principle here is that one's attitude towards this class of people may reveal that person's relationship with God. Further, in the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-26), Jesus redefined relationships between strangers. The setting of this parable suggests that the victim's ordeal took place in the Jewish territory, and the Samaritan, a stranger, treated the victim compassionately and with dignity.

It is important for this study to give a definition and background of Samaritans and who they are. The Samaritans and Jews were long-standing rivals.<sup>11</sup> There were several violent clashes between the two communities during the New Testament times. Jews regarded Samaritans as strangers (Luke 17:18). The Greek word used here for the Samaritan is *allogenes*. They were so-despised-because they intermarried with the Assyrians when the Northern Kingdom was taken captive by Assyrians. While in captivity they worshipped foreign pagan gods and practiced idolatry. Thus, the Jews continue to distance themselves from the unclean idolatrous Samaritans. This led to strong historical feelings of hostility and enmity between the two rivals. Therefore, to illustrate how God's people should love migrants/foreigners Jesus gave a parable of a Good Samaritan. Jesus in this passage, in his response to the lawyer affirms that love to God and to love a stranger is the fulfilment of the law.

This summary of Jesus regarding the law contains two parts: "love God" and "love your neighbour" come from the Old Testament. The commandment to "love your neighbour" occurs in Leviticus 19:18, while the injunction to "love God" appears in Deuteronomy 6:5. Usually such biblical quotations follow the canonical order. However, Jesus placed "love God" before the commandment to "love your neighbour." Bailey elucidates: "experience dictates that it is very hard to love the unlovely neighbour until the disciples' heart is filled with the love of God, which provides the energy and motivation necessary for the arduous task of loving the neighbour."<sup>12</sup> This parable depicts how the power of costly love would climax at the cross when Jesus lay down his life for an undeserving sinner. And then Jesus asks the lawyer, "Which of these three proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" Bailey succinctly interprets the lawyer as follows:

<sup>11</sup> I. Glaser, *The Bible and other Faiths: What does the Lord require of us?* (InterVarsity Press, England, 2005), 161-162.

<sup>12</sup> K. E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2008), 287.



The lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbour?" is not answered. Instead, Jesus reflects on the larger question, "To whom must I become a neighbour?" The parable replies, "Your neighbour is anyone in need, regardless of language, religion or ethnicity." Here compassion for the outsider has its finest expression in all scripture. The ethical demands of this vision are limitless.<sup>13</sup> Because of the power of costly love demonstrated by a Samaritan in saving the man who fell among the robbers, the lawyer was bound to answer correctly "The one who showed mercy." Although he could not openly praise the Samaritan or mention his name, his admittance shows how deeply he was convinced in his conscience. Jesus as the master teacher demonstrated to the lawyer that compassion reaches beyond what the law requires. Christ finally says to the lawyer, "Go and do likewise." The lawyer is challenged to do what the right thing to do is, "to love God" with all his mind, soul, and strength and to "love his neighbour as he loves himself."

To those who put this injunction into practice will inherit eternal life! This noble ethical model demands that God's people must love and treat migrants the same way God did and still do. Consequently, Christianity is not about me but about others—about the community. This is truly demonstrated in the concept of Ubuntu in Africa. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that emphasises that people exist in community and not in isolation. Ubuntu is compassionate and cares for human dignity and collective unity. Unlike the Western philosophy which emphasizes the principle of individuality, Ubuntu emphasizes the ethic of community and corporate solidarity. Barbara Nussbaum aptly describes and defines Ubuntu concept as follows:

Ubuntu is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community. Ubuntu calls on us to believe and feel that: Your pain is my pain; my wealth is your wealth, and your salvation is my salvation. In essence, Ubuntu,

an Nguni word from South Africa, addresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and the responsibility to each other that flows from our connection. The eclipse of Ubuntu has darkened the spirit of modern-day African political systems. However, imagine the potential of Ubuntu's sunlight, were it to be embraced as a vital part of the African renaissance or even Africa's contribution to help a divided, fragmented world.<sup>14</sup>

## VI. A MIGRATING GOD LOVES MIGRANTS

In dealing with the biblical and theological foundation of immigration and God's attitude towards migrants, it would be needful to briefly consider the nature of incarnational love of God towards fallen humanity. The nature of God is wrapped up in a paradoxical dimension which is enigmatic as far as incarnation is concerned. When the world speaks of upward mobility, greater achievement, and human dignity; divine migration condescends toward a downward mobility that is willing to reach the contexts of the poor, estranged, and alienated. God could not remain in heaven while humanity was stripped of its divine dignity and caused to suffer untold human atrocities and indignities. In Jeremiah 31:3 He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." Because of this incomprehensible and inexplicable love, He migrated to planet earth to save that which was lost (John 3:16; cf. Gal 4:4). God's incarnational love overcomes the barriers caused by sin and re-establishes the broken relationships between God and man, man and man, man and nature. God's love knows no barriers, no human borders. With God there are no borders that can obstruct Him. Hence, Barth aptly states, "The mystery reveals to us that for God it is just as natural as to be lowly as it is to be high, to be near as it is to be far, to be little as it is to be great, to be abroad as it is to be at home."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> B. Nussbaum, 'Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on our common humanity, in reflections', *Society for Organizational Learning and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology* 4(4), 2003, p. 21-26.

<sup>15</sup> K. Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation: Church Dogmatics* (trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrence, New York: Continuum, 2004), 184.

<sup>13</sup> Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, 297.

Even though human beings continue to erect and fortify borders, God continues to assure and reassure humanity that he will not wall them off from divine embrace. John's statement, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:7, 8), is one of the most important descriptions of the nature of God in scripture. The apostle made that statement in the context of Christ's sacrificial death. According to him, the work of Christ reveals the very essence of God: "He is love." This love is self-giving and absolutely unselfish (Jn 3:16). There is nothing outside God that could move or force Him to love. In fact, there is no need for any external motivation because it is God's very nature to love. It was this understanding of God's love that led Paul to say, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). The statement God is love, means that every one of His actions originates and is motivated by love. According to Nygren (1958:77), "The revelation of God's love reaches its deepest dimension of meaning in the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus."<sup>16</sup>

His love for sinners is not motivated by the misery of their sinful condition, but by the fact that God is love and it is this great fact that moves Him to love sinners in spite of their sin. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The redemption brought by God through Jesus does not only liberate humanity but also His natural world which was also affected by sin. This is the essence and purpose of *missio Dei*, to reconcile His created order to Himself. God's love is not reserved for Himself, our neighbours, or strangers only, but also our enemies. His love is incomprehensible.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This article has provided key insights on the subject of migration and the treatment of migrants. It has also highlighted and underscored the fact that migration is a major theme throughout the Bible. Hence, biblical migratory narratives were extensively cited in this article.

<sup>16</sup> A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958), 77.

Further, it reflected the importance of the law regarding Israel's behaviour towards immigrants. God wanted Israel to understand that the adherence to His statutes was designed to showcase His greatness among foreign nations—and that Israel's unbiased relationship to God and his divine mandate will be reflected in their treatment of a stranger. Consequently, the biblical narrative for migration does not only take place or occur in the OT but in the NT as well. Matthew 25 and Luke 10 for an example are among the narratives that illustrated the divine command or mandate and attitude towards migrants in the New Testament. Matthew 25 demonstrates that those who received tangible acts of love of hospitality are strangers who could be migrants. Luke 10 demonstrates that to "love God" and to "love your neighbour" does not only fulfil the law but is eternal life! Finally, this chapter has demonstrated that God is not static but is God who migrates to His creation that is flawed and warped. God cares about human suffering in history.

His nature is characterised by love (*agape*). Love is not self-seeking; love is touched by human frailties. Hence, John explicitly states, "No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man" (John 3:13 NASB). He identifies Himself as Immanuel, "God with us" (Isa 7:14; cf. Matt 1:23). God is not only transcendent but also immanent. His immanence does not however deny his transcendence.

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