Landas 36:1 (2024) 73–96

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE MARIAN TITLE *SOLACE OF MIGRANTS* AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR PASTORAL ENCOUNTER WITH MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Vince Henry M. Salles

Abstract. This article surveys the Biblical bases of one of the new titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Litany of Loreto, "Solace of Migrants," nominated by Pope Francis in 2020. Two New Testament pericopes appear as obvious foundations of the new Marian title—the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem (Lk. 2:1–7) and their Flight to Egypt (Mt. 2:13–15). Mary is presented, together with her spouse and Son, as a migrant who experiences the difficulties of journeying and the instability of settling down in another land. She is in solidarity with those who escape violence from their native lands and flee to foreign countries or those forced to leave their homes while remaining within their country's borders. By creating this new title of Mary, Francis calls for the Church to intensify her care for migrants, for one of his main pastoral priorities is refugeeism and migration. The Church is invited to look to Mary as Mother and exemplar of charity. Just as Mary became a solace to Jesus and Joseph, so too is the Church called upon to *solace* migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons. The Virgin Mary and the Church can console (*consolari,* from *solacium*) migrants for God has solaced them and they themselves are migrants, too. The Church's devotion to Mary as Solace of Migrants leads her to perform concrete acts of charity and become a haven for the needy.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Keywords. Solace of Migrants; Blessed Virgin Mary; migration; refugeeism; Pope Francis

Introduction

On June 20, 2020, the Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments wrote the Presidents of the Conferences of Bishops around the world on three new invocations to be inserted in the Litany of Loreto. These are *Mater misericordiae* (Mother of Mercy), *Mater spei* (Mother of Hope), and *Solacium migrantium* (Solace of Migrants). The said letter mentioned that it was the wish of Pope Francis himself to add these invocations to the current Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This came in a meaningful way in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, explicitly pointed out by the letter: "in this present moment which is marked by feelings of uncertainty and trepidation, devout recourse to her (Mary), which is full of affection and trust, is deeply felt by the People of God."[1]

Of the three new Marian titles, *Solace of Migrants* is the most unfamiliar and novel[2] since "Mother of Mercy" and "Mother of Hope" are already invoked in the *Salve Regina*—"Hail Holy Queen, *Mother of*

[1] R. Sarah, "Letter to the Presidents of Conferences of Bishops on the Invocations 'Mater misericordiæ', 'Mater spei', and 'Solacium migrantium' to Be Inserted into the Litany of Loreto" (June 20, 2020), available at https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/06/20/200620c.html.

[2] The new Marian title *Solace of Migrants* is both similar and different to the traditional invocations "Our Lady of Consolation" and "Comforter of the Afflicted" which are both Augustinian in origin. Augustinians have long invoked Mary as "Our Lady of Consolation." Devotion to this Marian title began in the 15th century with the foundation of a confraternity of the Virgin's Cincture. According to a pious legend, Mary appeared to St. Monica to console her in her trials due to the waywardness of her son Augustine. Mary gave her a black leather belt as a sign of her maternal consolation. The abovementioned titles show Mary's maternal care for her children; however, *Solace of Migrants* specifically refers to a certain group of people who need Mary's comfort.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Mercy, our life, our sweetness, and *our hope*"—and already have their own iconographies and formularies in the Common of the Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In an interview,[3] Archbishop Arthur Roche said that many people worldwide are invoking Our Lady because they are afflicted in many ways, not only by the pandemic but also by poverty, conflict, and other reasons, and are thus forced to flee their homes. The Archbishop added that the new invocations are responsive to the world's real needs today.

In this article, this author will present the biblical foundations of the invocation *Solacium migrantium* and venture into its potential for a pastoral encounter with migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons who are part of Francis's pastoral priorities. "Migrant" will be used as an umbrella term for the subjects of this study, namely, those individuals who abandon their usual place of residence, either within their own country or overseas, permanently or temporarily, voluntarily or involuntarily, for a variety of reasons.[4] Migrants may be any of the following: refugees (persons who migrate to escape from war, violence, and persecution in their country and seek refuge in another nation), economic migrants (those who seek better opportunities abroad), or internally displaced persons or IDPs (those who do not cross international borders but only relocate from one local city to another because of natural or human-made disasters, wars, or violence). The Pope may have considered using *Solace of Migrants* so the language would be more inclusive.

The International Organization for Migration of the United Nations estimated that there were around 281 million international

[3] "Pope adds three new invocations to the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Vatican News* (June 20, 2020), available at https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-06/pope-francis-loreto-litany-new-invocations.html.

[4] The definition comes from the International Organization for Migration of the United Nations. See "Migrant," in *International Migration Law* 34 (2019): 132–133, available at https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/iml_34_glossary.pdf.

https://publications.lst.edu/

migrants in 2020, which equates to 3.6% of the global population.[5] This latest data on migration took into account the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on human mobility—there was a noticeable drop in the number of people migrating abroad. The report acknowledged that it was not only COVID-19 that hindered the mobility of people in 2020 but also political instability, economic recession, and disasters such as typhoons. Europe had the highest number of international migrants arriving (87 million), followed by Asia (86 million), Northern America (59 million), and Africa (25 million). The United States of America is, by far, the primary go-to destination of international migrants, with over 51 million of them arriving. Germany is the second most popular destination for international migrants (16 million), followed by Saudi Arabia in third place (13 million).[6]

In the case of migrants' country of origin, India recorded the highest number (18 million), followed by Mexico in second place (11 million) and, finally, the Russian Federation (10.8 million) and China (10 million). The same organization also records migrants who perish due to various causes. They call this effort the "Missing Migrants Project," and started collecting data in 2014 after the tragic incident of a migrant boat capsizing at Lampedusa. The Mediterranean currently has the highest number of migrants who have died at 28,000, followed by Africa at 13,000, the Americas at 8,000, Asia at 5,000, Western Asia at 2,000, and Europe at 1,000.[7] Some of these people died while making clandestine crossings either by sea or through remote areas on land. The World Migration Report of 2022 also counted a total of 26.4 million refugees globally by the end of 2020. The report also included 4.1 million asylum seekers seeking international protection and awaiting their refugee status. These refugees' top countries of origin were the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar,

[5] M. McAuliffe & A. Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report 2022* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2021), 2.

[6] McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report 2022*, 24–25.

[7] Since 2014 to 2021; see Missing Migrants project data at https://missingmigrants.iom.int/data.

https://publications.lst.edu/

the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Eritrea, and Burundi.[8]

Finally, the World Migration Report also showed data on internally displaced persons (IDPs). The statistics presented two types of IDPs—those who moved because of violence and conflict and those who changed residence due to disasters. The Syrian Arab Republic had the highest number of people displaced due to conflict (6.6 million), followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5.3 million). Colombia had the third largest number (4.9 million), followed by Yemen (3.6 million) and Afghanistan (3.5 million). The number of persons displaced from disasters reached up to 7 million across 104 countries and territories.[9]

Francis has been actively advocating for the rights of migrants. Four months after he was elected Pontiff, he went to Lampedusa as an act of solidarity with migrants dying as they crossed the sea. The Pope criticized the "globalization of indifference" on this first trip outside Rome. According to him, the migrants and refugees who escaped difficult situations found death instead of greener pastures. He blamed this on the loss of the sense of responsibility for others and on people who live off of the misery of others.[10]

In his messages for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, the Pope has been comparing the situations of the refugees and migrants to the experiences of the Holy Family. They "experienced initial rejection" when Mary gave birth to Jesus "and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:7). According to the Pope, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph also became migrants themselves, for they were

[8] By the end of 2020. See McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report* 2022, 45–46.

[9] This was just in the year 2020. See McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, eds., *World Migration Report 2022*, 50–51.

[10] Francis, homily during the visit to Lampedusa (July 8, 2013), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.

https://publications.lst.edu/

forced to flee to Egypt because of "Herod's lust for power."[11] The Pope first hinted at Mary as the "Mother of migrants and refugees" in his 2016 message—he wrote that Mary and her husband Joseph "experienced the bitterness of emigration to Egypt."[12]

In 2017, Francis wrote that Mary accompanies migrants and refugees just as she accompanied her Son on the way to Calvary.[13] He first used the new title explicitly in a homily during the Mass marking the seventh anniversary of his papal visit to Lampedusa. "May the Virgin Mary, *Solacium migrantium*, 'Solace of Migrants,' help us discover the face of her Son in all our brothers and sisters forced to flee their homeland because of the many injustices that continue to afflict our world."[14]

The Flight Into Egypt

> [An] angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there

[11] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees: Towards a Better World" [message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2014)] (August 5, 2013), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html.

[12] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy" [message His Holiness Pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2016] (September 12, 2015), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20150912_world-migrants-day-2016.html.

[13] Francis, "Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees" [message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018] (August 15, 2017), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html.

[14] Francis, homily on the anniversary of the visit to Lampedusa (July 8, 2020), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200708_omelia-anniversariovisita-lampedusa.html.

https://publications.lst.edu/

> until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son." (Mt. 2:13–15)

One of the Scriptural bases of the Marian title *Solacium migrantium* is the Matthean story of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. This pericope is not found in the other two Synoptics and the Gospel of John. The Gospel passage is filled with Mosaic overtones: Pharaoh tried to kill the baby Moses by slaughtering the Hebrew children; Herod wanted to take the life of the baby Jesus by killing the innocent boys of Bethlehem. Moses escapes from Pharaoh, and Jesus runs from Herod.[15] The journey of Joseph the Dreamer to Egypt parallels the journey of St. Joseph's flight to Egypt together with Jesus and Mary.[16]

Egypt was a traditional place of refuge for those escaping dangers (1 Kgs. 11:40; Jer. 26:21). "Out of Egypt, I called my son" is a quotation from Hosea 11:1, and the "son" here refers to the Israelites who were slaves in Egypt. The experience of the Israelites is like the experience of Jesus, who represents the restoration of all Israel.[17] Most Biblical scholars agree that the Holy Family's flight into Egypt is a haggadic narrative, that it is unhistorical, that it is but a story interpretation of another story in history.[18] Legends often use historical data and embellish the narration to highlight some spiritual lessons. Although the episodes are not historically impossible, and even if actual events were narrated, the concern of the evangelist is a theological reflection

---

[15] R. Brown, *Christ in the Gospels of the Liturgical Year* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), chapter 12, 133–134.

[16] M. Davies, *Matthew*, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary Series, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 35.

[17] C. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 56–57.

[18] U. Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, ed. H. Koester, trans. J. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 120.

https://publications.lst.edu/

rather than historical exactitude.[19] Because the story is brief, the narrator's interest is clearly seen: God guides the destiny of the Son and saves him through his earthly parents.[20] God is always on the side of the oppressed. The Israelites also became migrants themselves when the famine forced them to go to Egypt, yet God was with them and delivered them from their oppressive Egyptian masters. The Exodus story parallels the story of Jesus in his infancy.

God took care of God's Son Jesus through the protecting hand of Mary and Joseph. The three of them fled at night, and the angel who appeared in a dream to Joseph used three command verbs in quick succession to illustrate the situation's urgency: *Get up*, *take*, *flee*.[21] This flight was rather inconvenient and difficult because the parents were with a little baby and were asked to travel long distances. Matthew showed the true humanity of Jesus Christ. Although it was prophesied that his life mission is to be the one who will "save his people from their sins" (1:21) and that he is *Emmanuel*, "God with us" (1:23), he still needed to be saved, for he was also a human child. Jesus was too young to act, yet here he was, always acted upon.[22] Matthew wanted to illustrate Jesus's vulnerability as a migrant child. He indeed identifies himself with those who suffer because of migration.

In his work *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, Robert Myles wrote that the most significant pericope within the Infancy Narratives from the perspective of homelessness and displacement is the Flight to Egypt. According to him, Bible scholars have overlooked and

[19] D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 84.

[20] Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, 120.

[21] H. Basser & M. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-based Commentary* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2015), 63.

[22] F. Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, Vol. 1: *The Christbook, Matthew 1–12* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 150.

https://publications.lst.edu/

neglected this kind of reading.[23] Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are one with displaced persons who flee as an act of self-preservation—escaping from hostile situations and political figures. Herod's decision to kill the male infants of Bethlehem to eliminate Jesus is what drove the Holy Family to flee to a strange land seeking refuge.[24] If we analyze the journey of the Holy Family from Palestine to Egypt, which were both under the Roman Empire during the first century, the journey would not fall under refugeeism but would only be considered internal displacement, i.e., moving within the same local territory.[25]

Migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons often endure dangerous journeys and are exposed to unstable situations in a land outside their original residence. It is like they are being uprooted from their homes and replanted elsewhere. Although the Holy Family survived the wrath of Herod, they would have to start a new livelihood in Egypt and learn the province's culture, language, and mores. Large settlements of Jews were found in Egypt, a Roman province during that time.[26] Keener[27] says that perhaps one-third of Alexandria was Jewish, which accounted for an estimated population of one million. Keener adds that Egypt was one of the Roman Empire's largest cities, home to Jews schooled in Greek thought but also poor peasants. Joseph and his family would have mingled with the Israelites there.

Even before the pontificate of Francis, the Church had been giving special attention to the plight of migrants and refugees. Pope Pius XII,

---

[23] R. Myles, *The Homeless Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (University of Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 52.

[24] A. Martinez, "Jesus, the Immigrant Child: A Diasporic Reading of Matthew 2:1–23," *Apuntes: Reflexiones Teológicas desde el Contexto Hispano-Latino* 26:3 (2006): 90.

[25] B. Levick, *The Government of the Roman Empire: A Source Book*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

[26] "Matthew 2," *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, BibleHub, available at https://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/matthew/2.htm.

[27] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 56.

https://publications.lst.edu/

for example, penned an Apostolic Constitution entitled *Exsul Familia Nazarethana*,[28] giving a general overview of the Church's numerous efforts for the pastoral care of migrants and refugees worldwide. The Apostolic Constitution begins by placing the Holy Family at the center and calling them "émigré" and "archetype of every refugee family."

> Jesus, Mary and Joseph … are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and refugee of whatever kind who, whether compelled by fear of persecution or by want, is forced to leave [their] native land, [their] beloved parents and relatives, [their] close friends, and to seek a foreign soil.[29]

Just as Mary and Joseph cared for the Child Jesus, the Church is also invited to aid refugees and migrants. In his 1998 message for World Migration Day, Pope John Paul II invoked the Virgin Mary's motherly accompaniment for all those who dedicate themselves to the care of migrants and refugees and prayed that She may "dry the tears [of] and console all who have had to leave their land and loved ones."[30]

Benedict XVI ended his message for the 96th World Day of Migrants and Refugees with a supplication to the Blessed Virgin Mary: that she may watch over all people and help them understand the difficult situations faced by those far from their homeland.[31]

Mary, the Solace of Migrants, not only consoles those who are forced to leave their homes to find better opportunities within and

---

[28] Pius XII, *Exsul Familia Nazarethana* (August 1, 1952), available at http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG2011/_INDEX.HTM.

[29] Pius XII, *Exsul Familia Nazarethana,* introduction.

[30] John Paul II, message for World Migration Day (November 9, 1997), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/migration/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_09111997_world-migration-day-1998.html.

[31] Benedict XVI, message for the 96th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2010 (October 16, 2009), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/migration/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091016_world-migrants-day.html.

https://publications.lst.edu/

outside their countries and those seeking freedom from strife, but also inspires those who are tasked to minister to migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons, as well as countries and peoples who welcome them.

Lumen Gentium calls the Blessed Virgin Mary the "solace to the wandering people of God."[32] Her maternal role covers all those who are on a journey of sorts. Part of the prayer of the consecration of Ukraine and Russia to Mary's Immaculate Heart asks her to "soothe those who suffer and flee from the rain of bombs" and "comfort those forced to leave their homes and their native land."[33] This is a direct reference to the experience of people compelled to take refuge in foreign lands because of war.

The Birth of Christ

> In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Lk. 2:1–7)

Another Biblical foundation of the new Marian title *Solacium migrantium* is the Holy Family's journey and rejection in Bethlehem when

[32] Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), section V, available at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

[33] Francis, act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary (March 25, 2022), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/prayers/documents/20220325-atto-consacrazione-cuoredimaria.html.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Jesus was born. This is part of the Lukan Infancy Narrative, whereas the Biblical pericope previously cited forms part of Matthew's Infancy Narrative that directly relates to the Marian title "Solace of Migrants." Although these two infancy narratives contain differing details on the birth of the Messiah, they still provide us with rich theological implications. The evangelist Matthew, for example, wrote for a Jewish audience, so he was always citing passages from the Old Testament and connecting these with Jesus, presenting Jesus as the fulfillment of these prophecies. On the other hand, Luke wrote for a Gentile audience and presented Jesus as the Savior of all, born in poor conditions and within the reach of people of goodwill. The two infancy narratives complement each other. They each have a holy agenda.

We now go back to the passage at hand. The Holy Family set off from Nazareth to Bethlehem in obedience to the decree of Caesar Augustus. The emperor was entirely unaware of the arduous journey that ordinary people made on his account.[34] The poignant verse from Luke—"there was no place for them in the inn" (2:7)—illustrates the inhospitality shown to the Holy Family and the lowly conditions of Christ's nativity. Benedict XVI pointed out the correlation of Luke 2:7 with a passage from John—"He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (1:11)—and a passage from Matthew—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (8:20).[35]

Annan creatively explains the Son of God's incarnation as a kind of immigration—the Savior crossed the "borders of divinity and time and space, to walk among humanity."[36] Jesus's mystical migration is his act of communion with humanity. Indeed, throughout the earthly

[34] Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, trans. P. Whitmore (New York: Image, 2012), 58.

[35] Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, 66.

[36] K. Annan, *You Welcomed Me: Loving Refugees and Immigrants Because God First Loved Us* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 116.

https://publications.lst.edu/

life of Jesus Christ, he was constantly migrating because he was an itinerant preacher.

In four homilies during the Masses of Christmas Midnight across different years, Francis reflected on the similitude between the plight of the Holy Family and the difficulties faced by migrants who are rejected and set aside. The Pope said that Christmas contains both the mysteries of hope and sadness: sadness because "love is not accepted and life [is] discarded" and hope because God's light continues to shine amidst the darkness.[37] He drew a contrast between the Child Jesus in the manger and children in "squalid mangers that devour dignity" who suffer because of bombardment and war, abandonment, and migration.[38]

In his 2017 Christmas midnight homily, Francis reflected on the uncomfortable journey undertaken by Mary and Joseph to be registered in the census. He said that uncertainties and dangers weighed down the steps of this young couple, similar to migrants who have to leave their homes behind. The Pope continued that even after the couple's difficult journey, they struggled with the pain of rejection in Bethlehem. Parallel to the footsteps of Mary and Joseph are the footsteps of families who unwillingly leave their homeland to hope and to survive. Jesus, who had no place to be born in, is revealed to those with no place in society—the shepherds who represent those who live in the margins. The birth of the Lord challenges Christians to proclaim Him to the discarded, to the unwelcome visitors, to foreigners, pagans, and sinners.[39] Christians are called to be watchmen for many who despair

[37] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2016), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161224_omelia-natale.html.

[38] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2016).

[39] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2017), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171224_omelia-natale.html.

https://publications.lst.edu/

because of many encounters with closed doors. The Child Jesus makes us agents of hospitality for all and awakens in us the sensitivity to recognize God in those who arrive in our lives, cities, and histories.[40]

In his 2020 Christmas midnight homily, Francis asked, "Why was he born at night, without decent accommodation, in poverty and rejection, when he deserved to be born as the greatest of kings in the finest of palaces?" It was to manifest fully his love for our human condition and touch our poverty. Jesus became an outcast to tell every outcast person that they are a child of God.[41] The Pope emphasized that Jesus was born close to people who were forgotten and in the peripheries. He ennobles the excluded and comes to reveal himself to them.[42]

Migrant Mary

The Virgin Mary was always with Jesus during his birth, infancy, and childhood (with some appearances during his public ministry[43] and later on during his crucifixion and death). The various exegeses and reflections on the Nativity of the Messiah and his eventual Flight into Egypt focus on Jesus. Christ's Mother played only a supporting role, although it was admittedly a significant one. Jesus became a young migrant and depended on his Mother for protection. Mary became "solace" first and foremost to her Migrant-Son. Although not in the

[40] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2017).

[41] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2020), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201224_omelia-natale.html.

[42] Francis, homily for the Midnight Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord (December 24, 2021), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/20211224-omelia-natale.html.

[43] See Jn. 2:1–12; Mt. 12:46–47; Mk. 3:31–32; Lk. 8:19–20; Lk. 11:27–28.

https://publications.lst.edu/

Sacred Scriptures, we can imagine that the Virgin Mother, during the journey to Egypt, had to breastfeed her Son, sing him lullabies to sleep, embrace him in the cold night of the desert, and play games with him while they were perhaps taking a break. The aforementioned form part of the pious imagination of Christians, but looking fair and square at the Sacred Scriptures, we can see that Mary is both a subject and object of God's redemptive, liberating power.[44] God redeemed her and liberated her. In turn, she "redeemed" and "liberated" her son from the claws of Herod, the oppressor. In her *Magnificat*, Mary "embodies and personifies"[45] the oppressed who are being liberated: the hungry who are fed, the lowly who are lifted, the helpless who are helped; we can add the migrants who are shown hospitality. Gray calls the *Magnificat* Mary's protest and struggle against injustice.[46] She speaks for the little people and gives voice to the pain of those who cannot articulate.[47] Mary, the poor woman, is juxtaposed with the proud, the mighty, and the rich—Caesar Augustus and Herod—in the two infancy narratives discussed earlier. Fiorenza noted that the infancy narratives tell us about "women, slaves, shepherds, the hungry, the homeless who experience the good tidings of salvation" and are not "fairy tales of rich and glamorous people."[48]

Mary has always joined in her Son's migration since the start of his earthly life. She journeys to physical places, as in the case of the

[44] E. Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 189.

[45] Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 189.

[46] M. Gray, "Reclaiming Mary: A Task for Feminist Theology," *The Way* 29:4 (1989): 339.

[47] Gray, "Reclaiming Mary," 339–340.

[48] Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 203–204.

https://publications.lst.edu/

itineraries Nazareth-Bethlehem,[49] Bethlehem-Egypt,[50] Egypt-Israel,[51] Israel-Nazareth,[52] their pilgrimages to the temple of Jerusalem when she presented the infant Jesus 40 days after his birth,[53] and when they lost and found him when he was 12 years old.[54] Mary also travels abstract distances, such as from the pedestal of honor with the Angel Gabriel's salutation "Hail full of grace!"[55] to the humble domestic service to Elizabeth.[56]

In the second place, Mary was "solace" to her spouse Joseph. She was a woman of "strength, independence, of integrity."[57] In paintings[58] depicting the Flight into Egypt, Joseph is the one pulling the beast of burden on which his wife and child are riding. He must have felt exhausted, but the tiredness seemed to wear off when he looked at his wife. This author imagines the Virgin Mary offering her husband words of encouragement and gestures of concern like giving him water or asking that they pull off for a short time to let him (and the animal) rest. Joseph, in turn, consoled his wife by his heroic outlook and strength of character.

However, deeper reflection directs our focus to Jesus Christ, the Solace of all those who give solace. Mary and Joseph were both

[49] Lk. 2:4.

[50] Mt. 2:13.

[51] Mt. 2:19–20.

[52] Mt. 2:22–23.

[53] Lk. 2:22.

[54] Lk. 2:41–42.

[55] Lk. 1:26.

[56] Lk. 1:39.

[57] Gray, "Reclaiming Mary," 337.

[58] From masters like Gentile da Fabriano (1423), Vittore Carpaccio (1515), El Greco (1570), and Bartolome Esteban Murillo (1647–1650), among others.

consoled by the tender face of their Son, God-made-man. Jesus is the source of rest for people who are weary and carrying heavy burdens.[59] Mary is able to give consolation to migrants for two reasons: one, she has been solaced by God her Savior; two, she was a migrant herself so she knows and feels what it is like to be one.

Mary, Model of the Church

The journeys of Mary were occasions of receiving divine solace and giving it away to others. Just as Mary journeyed as a migrant and was divinely solaced, so too is the Church journeying as a "migrant," so to speak, in this world and receiving consolation from the Lord. Not only Mary but also the Church should be the "solace of migrants."

Every time the Church invokes Mary as the *Solacium migrantium*, she is called upon and challenged to aid migrants, refugees, and internally displaced individuals following the evangelical command of charity. The Parable of the Sheep and Goats[60] is brought to mind concerning these persons. One of the "least" of Christ's brethren are the "strangers," and those who hope to inherit his kingdom should be hospitable to these people. The Lord identifies himself with them: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least [brothers and sisters] of mine, you did for me."[61] The various efforts of the Church toward migrants and refugees are a powerful missionary witnessing of the charity of Christ, which is all-encompassing.

As a worldwide institution, the Catholic Church intervenes in upholding the rights of migrants and refugees through public discourses of the Pope and ecclesiastical leaders, as well as papal journeys in which the destination itself is a message and a witness of life. Francis wanted a personalist approach to ministering to refugees,

[59] Cf. Mt. 11:28.

[60] Cf. Mt. 25:31–46.

[61] Mt. 25:40.

https://publications.lst.edu/

seeing them as human beings and not as statistics; they should be considered a part of society that brings opportunities, not threats.[62]

The Holy Father is concerned about *making headlines* so that there will be public awareness of the plight of refugees and migrants—with the ultimate goal of charting a just and stable solution for them worldwide.[63] Some of the Pope's efforts toward migrants and refugees that made it to the news were his first papal trip in Lampedusa to express his closeness to the people, his trip to Lesbos where he let a Muslim family ride a papal plane to the Vatican, his apostolic journey to Myanmar to communicate his concern over the Rohingya who are a minority group in the country, his creating a special Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development with a particular emphasis on migrants and refugees, his inserting of the new Marian title *Solace of Migrants* into the litany, and his condemnation of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia, pointing to the suffering of families forced to flee.

It may be noticed that the Pope conflates the terms "refugee" and "migrant." For him, those who look for jobs abroad and those who escape war do so out of a desire for a better life; they want to leave behind hopelessness because they cannot build their future due to political unrest in their home society or lack of employment opportunities therein.[64] Both the refugees and the migrants are poor because some suffer from inequality, discrimination, and marginalization from their host nations/cities. Indeed, human mobility is one of the Pope's main priorities and the most fundamental features of his pontificate. He

[62] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace" [message for the celebration of the 51st World Day of Peace - January 1, 2018] (November 13, 2017), available at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20171113_messaggio-51giornatamondiale-pace2018.html.

[63] P. Guzik, "Communicating Migration – Pope Francis' Strategy of Reframing Refugee Issues," *Church, Communication and Culture* 3:2 (2018): 131.

[64] Francis, "Migrants and Refugees: Men and Women in Search of Peace."

https://publications.lst.edu/

calls Christians to respond with generosity, promptness, wisdom, and foresight to the plight of these people.[65]

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church dedicates a specific section to immigration. It teaches that "immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it."[66] It also made special mention of the material and pastoral solicitude that the Church must extend to refugees who are war victims and her defense of their human dignity.[67]

In 2004, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People published the instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (On the Love of Christ towards Migrants).[68] This instruction renews the charitable commitment of the Church toward migrants from previous documents such as *Exsul Familia*, *De pastorali migratorum cura*, and *Gaudium et Spes*. The presentation portion of the aforementioned pastoral Instruction penned by Stephen Fumio Cardinal Hamao intends to transform the migrants' migration experience into "an opportunity to grow in Christian life" and "an occasion of new evangelization and mission."[69] The Church wants the migrants to be not just recipients of pastoral solicitude but also active agents and participants in the Church's

[65] Francis, "Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees."

[66] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 297, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

[67] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 505.

[68] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* (Vatican City, 2004), available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html.

[69] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, presentation part.

https://publications.lst.edu/

mission. In the Instruction, focus is placed on the centrality of the person of the migrant and his/her rights, the contribution of ordained and lay faithful, the importance of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, and some specificities on the pastoral care of migrants to foster a culture of welcome and solidarity. The Instruction upholds Christ as the Archetypal Stranger and Mary as the living symbol of the emigrant. The two Gospel stories mentioned earlier (Journey to Bethlehem and Flight to Egypt) are also discussed in this Instruction as the basis for showing Jesus and Mary as migrants. Other particular instructions from *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* are as follows: entrust migrants to a chaplain who speaks the same language as them or at least close to their linguistic and cultural point of view; oppose baseless suspicions and prejudices against foreigners; promote an authentic culture of welcome; engage in long-term projects for migrants and truly integrate them into the host society; celebrate liturgies that are culturally, historically, and anthropologically sensitive to migrants; and encourage popular piety and devotion among migrants. Moreover, the local Church of the migrant from his/her home country must collaborate intensely with the host Church, Catholic universities must study various aspects of migration for the concrete pastoral service of migrants, seminaries should take into account the phenomenon of migration in the formation of young seminarians, and religious men and women should assist in the various pastoral ministries for migrants. There are also instructions to celebrate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees; establish a personal, intercultural/interethnic, or inter-ritual parish; and, finally, consider today's migrations as a call from God to the Kingdom of God and an instrument of Divine Providence to further peace and the unity of the human family.[70]

In 1992, the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" released a document entitled "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity."[71] Here they emphasized

[70] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, nos. 2, 7, 15, 21, 23–24, 26–27, 33, 38–50, 53–56, 58, 69–72, 75–85, 86–89, and 99.

[71] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity" (Vatican City, 1992), no. 26, available

https://publications.lst.edu/

that care for refugees depends on the local Church. The document enumerated some of the ways that the local Church can aid refugees, such as through personal contact, defense of their rights, denunciation of injustices, action for the adoption of laws that will guarantee their effective protection, education against xenophobia, the creation of groups of volunteers and emergency funds, and pastoral care, among others. The document adds that parishes have to welcome refugees and integrate them effectively into the community while avoiding fear and suspicion. Those who live in refugee camps, however, also benefit from the Church's pastoral, moral, and spiritual care. Volunteers who work among refugees have to be encouraged by the Church, and cooperation among local Churches must be fostered so assistance to refugees might be more effective. Others, like episcopal conferences, educational institutions, religious institutes, and Catholic organizations, have their role to play in assisting refugees and migrants. Indeed, one undertaking common among the Catholic Church, other Christians, and even non-Christians is to aid refugees. Doing so fosters unity within and among the members of the human family.[72]

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article has laid down two Biblical foundations for the new Marian title *Solacium migrantium*: Jesus's Nativity and the Holy Family's Flight into Egypt. The first Scriptural pericope demonstrates the migration experience of Mary (with Jesus and Joseph) and her encountering difficulties during the sojourn, with the eventual rejection at her destination. The Flight into Egypt narrates the Holy Family's forced journey to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath. These Biblical stories ground Mary's title of *Solace of Migrants* by presenting her as a model and intercessor of migrants and those who care for them. Migrants

---

at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/corunum/documents/rc_pc_corunum_doc_25061992_refugees_en.html.

[72] Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, "Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity," 27–34.

https://publications.lst.edu/

and refugees are close to Francis's heart and are obviously one of his top pastoral priorities. His words and actions show this strongly. Thus, he has entrusted them to the maternal intercession of Mary and pointed to her as their Solace. Mary typifies the Church. Whatever or whoever Mary is, the Church is. Therefore, in calling Mary the Solace of Migrants, the Church also becomes a Solace of Migrants. In her charitable actions for migrants, she fulfills Christ's commandment of love for everyone. The Church can be a convincing witness through love and attract people to Christ's fold. Migrants having a hard time and on the verge of giving up their faith may be inflamed once again. Following the example of Mary, the Church can be a haven of peace and hospitality for them.

To inculcate devotion to Mary under her new title *Solace of Migrants*, the Church of Rome may institute a feast for her. The old liturgical calendar has a feast dedicated to the Flight into Egypt, explicitly mentioning the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Collect of this old feast goes like this:

> O God, protector of those who put their trust in thee, by whose will thy only-begotten Son, our Redeemer, escaped the sword of Herod by his flight into Egypt, grant that we, thy servants, through the prayers of his blessed and ever-virgin mother Mary, may be delivered from all dangers to soul and body, and be counted worthy to reach our heavenly fatherland.[73]

The old feast was suppressed due perhaps to the historical doubts cast on this Biblical narrative. Instead of the Flight into Egypt, a new feast in honor of Our Lady Solace of Migrants may be created, and the presidential prayers may revolve around the Church's solicitude to migrants and refugees. The Church may also commission artists to conceptualize an appropriate iconography for the Marian title. She can also be proclaimed as the patron of migrants and refugees.

[73] J. O'Connell & H. Finberg, eds., *The Missal in Latin and English*, trans. R. Knox (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1952), 878.

https://publications.lst.edu/

About the Author. **Vince Henry M. Salles** is a licensed professional senior high school teacher at the Pontifical and Royal University of Santo Tomas (UST) in Manila, Philippines and has been teaching Fundamentals of Faith subjects since 2017. He is the Coordinator of the Student Welfare and Development Committee of UST Senior High School. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Development Communication, major in Community Broadcasting, from the University of the Philippines-Los Baños and a Master's Degree in Theology, major in Social/Pastoral Communication, from the Graduate School of UST. He is currently finishing his doctoral theological studies also in UST. He regularly writes articles for newsletters and local and international journals and presents in academic conferences and seminars. Before entering UST, he worked with the Corporate Communications Office of Mapúa University as a copywriter and social media manager and with the Office of the Secretary Joint Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines as a speechwriter and research analyst. His research interests include pastoral theology and Biblical studies.