

Washing of the Feet: A Proposed Missiological Paradigm in Doing Mission with the Exiled Myanmar Migrants in Ranong, Thailand

Nino P. Memorial, SM

Abstract

This paper provides an understanding of the experience of the Myanmar migrants in diaspora. The military takeover of Myanmar in the 1960s set off massive migration that continues to this day. Dirty politics and corruption have led to forced migration to neighboring countries, most notably to Thailand where there is today the biggest population of documented migrants. The border town of Ranong in the southern part of Thailand, in particular, has been steadily receiving Myanmar migrants for decades now because of its less strict regulations on employment opportunities on the fishing, agricultural, and manufacturing industries. Work conditions, however, exposed the migrant labourers, including the minors among them, to the serious risks of physical abuse, labor exploitation, and drugs. Using the “See-Judge-Act” approach, the paper attempts to the needs of the Myanmar migrants in Ranong? How does this mission relate the notion of the exilic Myanmar in the light of the Jewish diaspora? What missiological model can help the Marists and the local church of Ranong effectively bring about their mission to the Myanmar migrants?

Introduction

The military takeover of Myanmar in the 1960s set off massive migration that continues to this day. Favoured army officials emerged as the new ruling class, sending out their forces to crush any kind of rebellion. The iron-fisted clampdown silenced the press, expelled foreigners, and shut down borders. All industries were put under state control, with multinational corporations supportive of the military regime being granted the right to exploit Myanmar’s natural resources. Under the military regime, the country soon slid into dire social conditions of rampant malnutrition, underemployment and lack of access to education and health facilities for the local populace.

Dirty politics and corruption have led to forced migration to neighboring countries, most notably to Thailand where there is today the biggest population of documented Myanmar migrants. The border town of Ranong in the southern part of Thailand, in particular, has been steadily receiving Myanmar migrants for decades now because of its less strict regulations on

employment opportunities in the fishing agricultural, and manufacturing industries. Work conditions, however, reportedly exposed the migrant labourers, including the minors among them, to the serious risks of physical abuse, labor exploitation, and drugs.