

## AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?: THE IMAGE OF GOD IN HUMANITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF XENOPHOBIA

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### ABSTRACT

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This article discusses the issues of xenophobia and how it can be averted in future. It argues for a peaceful resolution of the problem of xenophobia by appeal to what the Bible has to say concerning the nature of humanity. In other words, by the use of a proper understanding of the nature of the *imago Dei* in humans, we can live in peace with each other regardless of our place of origins and in so doing do away with tendencies to hate the people of other nations. The article therefore analyses what it means *to talk about humans being created "in the image of God."* However, before discussing the nature of the image of God in humanity, a historical background of why people from Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and other countries trek to South Africa is highlighted. As the title indicates, the article emphasizes that we are our brothers and sisters' keepers, no matter the situation. This means that regardless of our feeling toward people of other nations, theological impetus must point us to love them, care for them and keep them.

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### Introduction

Xenophobia has a long history in the history of mankind. Forms of racism are numerous, all of them stepping from the notion of xenophobia.<sup>186</sup> The real world examples of xenophobia are: the Jewish holocaust, the murder of black families by the Ku Klux Klan in the United States; the Indian cast system which actively has hurt those in lower classes; human zoos where exhibits of human beings from Africa, the Philippines, and tribal pygmies were put on display, caged, sometimes with exotic animals in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Western countries; during the World War II, Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians were segregated from the population and lost their basic rights and liberties; the Rwandan attempted 'ethnic cleansing' in 1994 which resulted in the massacre of over eight hundred thousand Tutsis; hate crimes against Indians in Australia in 2009; Yugoslavian war where several ethnic groups of Croats, Serbs, Bosnians and Slovenes killed each other, among others.

### Historical Background of Foreign Immigrants to RSA

For many decades and perhaps centuries, South Africa has been a haven for many migrants from Asia, Europe, India and other African countries. African countries include Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and more recently, Burundi, Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Rwanda. Since the late 1960s, Malawi has been sending its citizens to work in various sectors of South Africa's economy. Officially, during apartheid the governments of Malawi and South Africa signed an agreement where Malawi would send its labour force to South Africa and in return the Government of South Africa would generously fund Malawian government alongside the personal benefits that the individual persons accrued. That agreement saw thousands of Malawians trekking to South Africa mainly to work in the mines. Out of such agreement, the so-called Temporary Employment

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<sup>186</sup>See [www. Medindia.net/patients/patientinfo/xenophobia-examples.htm](http://www.Medindia.net/patients/patientinfo/xenophobia-examples.htm) (Accessed online on 17 April, 2015).

Bureau of Africa popularly known as TEBA was bilaterally established. It was officially signed in Blantyre and Pretoria on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1967.

TEBA which was initially known as Witwatersrand Native Labor Association (WNLA) was formed in 1900 by the South African Chamber of Mines to act as labour recruiting agency, mainly in the area north of the Limpopo: Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia and Malawi. This agency had a major presence in Malawi with offices in Lilongwe, and sub-offices in Chitipa, Karonga, Mzimba, Rumphu (Northern region of Malawi) Dedza (Central region of Malawi) and Blantyre (Southern region). From Chitipa and Karonga in the north of Malawi, it also drew labor from Tanzania.<sup>187</sup>

### **Causes of Foreigners' Immigrating to South Africa**

Poverty and mere search for greener pastures are some of the major contributing factors for people's migration. One would not but conclude that the large immigrants to South Africa have, in one way or the other been due to poverty in the aforementioned countries, like Malawi. However, in the 1990s, large numbers of Malawians have been going down there on self-employment status. With the freedom of multipartism and liberation of South Africans from apartheid in the early 1990s, many more people have been going to South Africa to look for greener pastures on what is self-employment. And this has caused an influx of many nationals working for South African companies and domestic employments. With such influx, it is argued that South Africans are denied employment because most of the employers prefer foreigners to nationals. And this has been angering the nationals for a long time now. In this atmosphere where foreigners are getting employed more than the nationals, fear of foreigners has been reigning among South Africans. It this fear of foreigners that has been triggering xenophobic attacks in South Africa mainly beginning in 2008 and more recently in April 2015.

On policy formulation level in Malawi, we know that Malawians trek to South Africa for several reasons. These, of course, include both push and pull factors. Push factors are those that force people to leave such as poverty and unemployment; while pull factors are those such as jobs and pursuit of good opportunities. To be sure, before 1994 some people left Malawi to escape from the MCP regime's oppressive rule. However, there was great expectation that life would change for the better after 1994. Despite that change in governance a vast majority of Malawians has been disappointed with the performance of each government since 1994. This is because there has been steady decline in the standards of living of the people courtesy of economic mismanagement—and one would add, the adoption of harmful economic policies sponsored by the IMF and the World Bank under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS) of the 1990s. These complex problems have resulted into xenophobia in the long run.

The purpose of this article is to articulate the implications of the nature of the image of God in humans, thereby pointing out that xenophobic activities must be ruled out in our midst based on the fact that we are all equal regardless of our cultural heritage, country of origin, and social and eco

### **Methodology, Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

This article argues for a peaceful resolution of the problem of xenophobia. Deep-seated causes of

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<sup>187</sup>See [www.books.google.mw/books/Temporary+employment+bureau+of+africa+with+Malawi](http://www.books.google.mw/books/Temporary+employment+bureau+of+africa+with+Malawi) (Accessed online, July, 21, 2015).

xenophobia seem to lie more on the political elites of African states. For instances, national leaders in the affected countries must sit down and think and devise ways and means of ending dire poverty which has been causing young men and women to trek down to South Africa in search of jobs.

The article seeks to offer solutions based on the proper understanding of the nature of the *imago Dei* and what it means to be human. It is a paper that aims at looking at issues from the *ubuntu* point of view so that whatever problems or predicaments we encounter, we should be ready to sort them out with the principles of conflict resolutions which are portrayed in the Scriptures. As Aurelius observes, –the Bible is relevant today because it is talking about the listener, everytime.¶<sup>188</sup> Agreeing with Aurelius, Einat Ramon strongly believes that –the Bible is vital to human life in all areas because it is a book which deals with ethical values which give us directions. The Bible provides moral paradigm for our right living.¶<sup>189</sup>

The article is informed by various sources: newspapers, news broadcasts, telecasts, and online sources. It is also informed by various readings and people’s discussions on the subject. Also to be noted is desk readings on the nature of the *imago Dei*.¶<sup>190</sup>

The paper begins with theological constructs of the nature of the image of God—briefly discussing the three notable theological views, where in some instances it will be employing exegetical analysis of some biblical passages on the *imago Dei*. Thereafter, the paper proceeds to elucidate its implications on the xenophobic attacks in South Africa and then the conclusion. To some extent, the paper constitutes personal reflections and reminiscences on the issue of xenophobia and its implications on the Southern African nations.

Conceptually, xenophobia can be defined as –the attitudes, prejudices, and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders, or foreigners to the community, society or national identity.¶<sup>191</sup> It can also be defined as –an attitudinal orientation of hostility against non-natives in a given population.¶<sup>192</sup> Xenophobia comes from two Greek words: *xeno* and *phobos*, meaning \_alien, or stranger, and fear, respectively.¶<sup>193</sup> Most dictionaries agree on a definition of xenophobia as hatred or fear of foreigners, combining the Greek *xeno* meaning foreign with *phobos* meaning fear.¶<sup>194</sup> Literally, xenophobia means fear of the foreigners or strangers or aliens. The Oxford English Dictionary lists a very strongly worded definition of xenophobia: –deep-rooted, irrational hatred towards foreigners.¶

In short, xenophobia is when an entire group is not considered part of the society. This can result, most often, from a mass immigration by one group into a country, though xenophobia can be present in relation to groups in the society who joined the community quite some time ago. This type

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<sup>188</sup> Erik Aurelius, –What has the Bible to do with us,¶ in *The Biblical Text in the Context of Occupation: Towards a New Hermeneutics of Liberation* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2012), 314.

<sup>189</sup> Einat Ramon, class lecture, –Feminism in Jewish Culture¶ (delivered on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2014).

<sup>190</sup> During the second wave of xenophobic attacks, I was in the midst of teaching Old Testament theology to fourth year students. Among some of the notable themes in biblical theology, is the *imago Dei* as indicated in Genesis. It was this backdrop that prompted me to look at solutions to xenophobia from the point of view of what the image of God in humanity implies.

<sup>191</sup> –Declaration on Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance against Migration and Trafficked Persons.¶ Asia-Pacific NGO Meeting for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Teheran: Iran, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2001).

<sup>192</sup> Boehnke, Klaude in –NGO Working Group on Migration and Xenophobia for the World Conference¶ in *International Migration, Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia* (Jointly published ILO, IOM, OHCHR in Consultation with UNHCR, 2001), 2.

<sup>193</sup> See Smelser, N.J and Baltes, P. B. (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of the Behavioural Sciences* (Elsevier: Oxford Science Ltd, 2001).

<sup>194</sup> See <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2013-05-28-analysis-the-ugly-truth-behind-sas-xenophobic-violence>. (Accessed online 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2015).

of xenophobia can result in hostility and violence on a lower level up to greater persecution of the group through genocide.

## Exegetical Analysis of Genesis Creation Accounts and Chapter 4

### Nature of the Image of God

The biblical foundation of human beings created in God's image is firstly depicted in Genesis 1:26-27 which reads:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the livestock and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'

In the history of the church, examining the nature of the image of God has been a big inquest. It is necessary to understand the nature of the *imago Dei* because it has a bearing on our discussion. The three notable views of the nature of the *imago Dei* briefly are.<sup>195</sup>

#### 1. The Substantive View

Erickson Millard notes:

The common element in the several varieties of this view is that the image of God in humans is identified as some definite characteristic of quality within the makeup of the human. Some have considered the image of God to be an aspect of our physical or bodily makeup. The more common substantive views of the image of God isolate it in terms of some psychological or spiritual quality in human nature.<sup>196</sup>

This view emphasises reason as a unique feature because reason distinguishes man from other creatures. Millard says, 'Indeed man is classified biologically as *Homo sapiens*, i.e., the thinking being.'<sup>197</sup> The *imago Dei* is a quality resident in man's nature, notably his ability to reason.

#### 2. Relational View

Some modern theologians do not conceive the image as something resident within man's nature. Millard says that some theologians perceive the image as 'the experiencing of a relationship.' Man is said to be [in] the image of God when he stands in a particular relationship. According to this view, 'the relationship is the image.'<sup>198</sup> Raymond H Dunning describes the image of God in humanity as man's relationship to God; man's relationship to others; man's relationship to the earth; and finally, man's relationship to self.<sup>199</sup> In sum, from this perspective, standing in right relationship with God and fellows is what constitutes the *imago Dei*.

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<sup>195</sup> See Erickson Millard, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 498. Due to limited space, I briefly explain the basic meaning of each of the views. I am heavily indebted to Millard's formulation on this issue. However, see also Tikv Frymer-Kensky, 'Image of God: The Image: Religious Anthropology in Judaism and Christianity' in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Westview Press, 2000), 320-356.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, see also David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 58-69.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 502.

<sup>199</sup> H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

### 3. Functional View

This view has had quite a long history and has recently enjoyed an increase in popularity.<sup>200</sup> Erickson Millard rightly notes that

This is the idea that the image is not something present in the makeup of man, nor is it the experiencing of relationship with God or with fellow man. Rather, the image consists in something man does... In the functional view, little attention is given to the content of the image of God.<sup>201</sup>

Norman Snaith says, –Biblically speaking, the phrase ‘image of God’ has nothing to do with morals or any sort of ideals... but everything concerning the function of man.¶<sup>202</sup> For his part, John Oswalt says, –Humans are understood to be the very highest order of God’s creation. They are made to be lords and ladies of creation, functioning in obedient partnership with God. Humans have real freedom to make genuine choices, and they are held accountable for effects of their choices.¶<sup>203</sup> Genesis 4:1-10

1 Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, –With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.¶ 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, –Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.¶ 8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, –Let’s go out to the field.¶ And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, –Where is your brother Abel?¶ –I don’t know,¶ he replied. –Am I my brother’s keeper?¶ 10 The Lord said, –What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.¶<sup>204</sup>

This passage is very foundational to human relationships, interactions and attitudes towards each other as well as how sin manifests itself. Of great import are verses 9 and 10 which depict a conversation between God and Cain—and verse 9 is what informs part of the title of this study. You do not see one person working hard, and the other person a never-do-well living off welfare. The only difference is one seems to be a farmer and one seems to be a rancher, from what we can tell. One is raising animals. The other one is a farmer. Of course both are farmers: one animal husbandry and the other crop husbandry.

An analysis of the passage shows that they are both offering up to God. They are both doing God’s will. They are both seeking God. But then, what is the problem? All we are told is God blessed and showed favor to Abel, which certainly means he prospered him and made him successful and he did not favor Cain. Why? It is subtle. It is supposed to be subtle. It is supposed to be a matter of the heart. That is how the narrative gets you to start to investigate. Here are some clues to the

<sup>200</sup>See Millard, 508.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., see also G.C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 70.

<sup>202</sup>Norman Snaith, *The Image*, 24.

<sup>203</sup>See John Oswalt, *Called to Be Holy: A Biblical Perspective* (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 1999), 10-16.

<sup>204</sup>Genesis 4:1-10. Bolded lines mine.

answer. The first clue is this. It says, –Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering ... But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.¶ Here is what is interesting. And God says to Cain, –I see you are downcast.¶ Scholars interpret this saying that literally, God says, –Your face has fallen,¶ which is actually a Hebrew idiomatic expression for depression. God seems to say, –Look, Cain, it’s not Abel’s fault you are depressed, and it is not my fault. It is your own actions and your own attitudes.¶ Yet he says, –But sin is going to master you. I do not want it to master you.¶ He is coming after Cain. He does not want to see him perish. So there we see the grace of God. There we see the love of God, but at the very same time, in verse 10, we see something. God tells Cain, –Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.¶ What does that mean?

Throughout the Bible, there are places where God says, –The innocent shed blood is crying to me from the ground.¶ What does that mean? God is a God of justice. It means when injustice is done, it cries to God, as it were. There is an outcry.<sup>205</sup> However, before verses 7 and 8 are a background to verses 9 and 10. In verse 7, God, in speaking to Cain, uses a remarkable image. He says, –But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.¶ It is a remarkable image. It is the image of a leopard or a tiger, a predatory animal, crouching in the shadows, coiled and ready to spring and kill. God says that is sin. Sin is predatory. Sin has a deadly life of its own. First of all, when God uses this image, it is telling us that sin has an abiding, growing presence in your life. If you commit sin, sin is not over. Sin is not simply an action. It is a force. It is a power.

### **Implications of the Image of God in Humanity in the Face of Xenophobia**

The Bible, through many passages tells us what God desires. For instance, Micah 6:8 reads, –He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.¶<sup>206</sup>

What Micah<sup>207</sup> says is clearly a reference to the many laws that have to do with Israel’s relationship with others—inwardly as a community, and outwardly as a nation, to welcome and dwell with the strangers or neighbors in peace and love. There are specific commands on how Israel was/is to relate to its neighbors \_for the land is mine.<sup>208</sup> In the land, Israel is to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before God. The New Testament is replete with such admonitions. In fact, the New Testament goes further by urging us to \_love even our enemies and those who persecute us’ (Matthew 5: 43-44, 48) because love is the fulfilment of the law (Romans 13:10).

Jesus urges all people to love even their enemies saying that such attitude is tantamount to \_being perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Matthew 5:48). Jesus’ teaching is what constitutes the unconditional love, which despite what has happened to the South Africans over four centuries, this paper urges them to love even their enemies—and in this case the foreign immigrants: Malawians, Zambians, Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, and others. This can be implied as a radical call on South Africans to ethical responsibility. Despite what has happened to foreign immigrants in May

<sup>205</sup>See Timothy Keller on <http://www.monergism.com-history-world-nutshell-genesis-41-10> (Accessed online May 25, 2015).

<sup>206</sup>I have chosen Micah as representative of prophetic voices. Micah’s verse fulfils both relational and functional views of the Imago Dei. Humans are to love kindness toward others, and walk humbly before God and thus effectively doing duo relationship.

<sup>207</sup>See also Isaiah 58: 5-11 which depict what it means to care for others, including strangers.

<sup>208</sup>See Leviticus 25:23; Exodus 19:5. This is the paramount reason why South Africa has to do this—the land is God’s.

2008 and April 2015, countries whose citizens suffered violence in South Africa due to xenophobia are urged to love.

Looking at the passage in Genesis 4, there are socio-theological issues we can encapsulate. Verse 8 says, Cain spoke to his brother—likely as a friend, to deceive him, and lure him into the field to kill him. Satan is a great deceiver. God knows our hearts (Jeremiah 17:9-10). He knew Abel was killed. The Lord offered Cain an opportunity to repent, but Cain denied knowing where Abel was, as if he could fool God. –Am I my brother’s keeper?‖ We are all responsible for each other. What have you done? God’s words awaken the conscience, spoken by our Father in heaven. The voice of your *brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground*. He hears the cries of all his children.

Cain’s rhetorical question –Am I my brother’s keeper?‖ signifies his defiance of God and his disregard for humanity—the very cradle of God’s good creation. Implicitly, in this rhetorical question is the foreknowledge of Cain that as brothers we are indeed responsible for the welfare of each other. What we see lacking in Cain’s life is his remorse. This story implies that if we wish to avoid the way of Cain, we must subdue angry feelings, love our neighbors, confess our sins to God instead of trying to conceal them or defend them; and ask God for pardon, instead of trying to flee from His face.

–My brother’s keeper‖ implies that God holds us responsible for the safety and welfare of our fellow men. This welfare includes their temporal welfare, for their moral condition and for their religious well-being as well. As brothers, we keep each by attending to their bodily condition. Hospitals, almshouses, refuges, etc., i.e., by caring for their souls.

In Cain’s response to God’s rhetorical questions is the falsehood of it—I know not.‖ We feel astonished that a man can dare to lie in the presence of his Maker. Another issue at stake here is the insolence (impertinence, rude) of it—Am I my brother’s keeper?‖ This shows that indeed Cain had no fear of God before his eyes. And where the fear of God is wanting, regard to man will be wanting also. Probably, this could be true of some South Africans. Even natural affection will be swallowed up in selfishness. And this is what happened to immigrants in South Africa in May 2008 where over 60 foreigners were killed and in April 2015. It can be argued that some South Africans behaved in a manner that showed they have no fear for God hence, no regard for fellow humans.

The doctrine of the *imago Dei* implies that both men and women are created equal by God. The Genesis creation account should be the basis for all that people do when it comes to how they live as both the Old and New Testament attest. The views elucidated in this article help us see the relationship and function as central to the essence of the image. However, the relationship and function come because humans are thinking beings. Humans are endowed with capacity to reason, relate, and function properly. Humans represent what God would do for his people regardless of creed, race, sex, economic and social status. This should be urged to the South African povo as well as the national leadership, including traditional chiefs. The South African immigration and socio-economic policies must be critically viewed and reviewed for the betterment of the nationals and immigrants. This call also has to go to the leaders of other nations as they formulate economic policies of their countries.

Taking the teaching on the image of God at face value implies a radical call and plea on South African government leaders and the nationals to ethical responsibility. Concerning love for everyone regardless of race, creed, country of origins, Patricia Tull says:

To love one’s enemy means neither to cover up the conflict nor to downplay its seriousness, but rather to endure the tension inherent in that conflict without succumbing

to hatred... Loving one's enemy without resisting would be a cheap, abstract, and treasonable attitude. But to resist without loving one's enemy can be inhuman, brutal, and violence... If we can endure the tension, both love and resistance offer the only way out for us Christians [South Africans and immigrants together with their countries of origin].<sup>209</sup>

On this, Tull says –we must all call ourselves and one another to ever true humanity and in this as St Augustine said, we pray as though everything depended on God, but work as though everything depended on us.<sup>210</sup> This is what the threefold understanding of the *imago Dei* implies in humanity. Borrowing from its calling on the Jewish, Muslim and Palestinian leaders, based on the humans created in God's image, the Kairos Palestine strongly urges:

... with whom we share the same vision that every human being is created by God and has been given equal dignity. Hence the obligation for each of us to defend the oppressed and the dignity God has bestowed on them... This is a call to see the face of God in each one of God's creatures and overcome the barriers of fear or race in order to establish a constructive dialogue and not remain within the cycle of never-ending manoeuvres that aim to keep the situation as it is. Our appeal is to reach a common vision, built on equality and sharing, not on superiority, negation of the other or aggression, using the pretext of fear and security.<sup>211</sup>

Seeing the face of God in each one of us is a call to recognize that each person is the *imago Dei*, hence need not be dehumanized in any way. The story of Jacob's facing his brother Esau in Genesis 32 and 33 is very interesting. Scholars interpret the passage as a story of reconciliation.

After this night alone, Jacob rejoins those who crossed the river ahead of him: –Jacob walks bravely in front of his family, bowing himself to the ground seven times until he came near his brother. Jacob has learned to humble himself to those he has wronged instead of running away. The story continues with the reconciliation of the estranged brothers: –Esau ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept (Gen 33:3-4). Jacob responds, –Truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor (Gen 33:10). Another version says: Jacob says, –... For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God and you have accepted me.<sup>212</sup>

Seeing the *xenos*, i.e., strangers, or aliens, or immigrants and even our perceived enemies as seeing the face of God is the radical teaching of this intriguing story. We are admonished to see our fellows as ‘imaging’ God. The face of the –other is the face of God in our midst and we must care for them and not abuse them—that means no harassing, burning and looting their property, or even killing them.

Another important element drawn from this nifty story of Jacob is what we read from that passage: –The sun rose upon Jacob as he passed –Penu-EL limping because of his hip (Gen 32:31). Jacob leaves the fords of Jabbok wounded and prepares to face his brother Esau. But, in the

<sup>209</sup>Patricia Tull, –I am A Presbyterian Christian: Toward a Dialogical Contextual Hermeneutics, in *Biblical Text in Context of Occupation: Towards a New Hermeneutics of Liberation* edited by Matri Raheb, 310. Parenthesis mine.

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*,

<sup>211</sup>–Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth, (Jerusalem: December 15, 2009), italics mine.

<sup>212</sup>This reading came through my discussion with Professor Jesper Svartvik, March 6, 2014. See also Carl Cregg, –A God who will Wrestle with you until Daybreak (July, 27, 2011). Accessed online, March 6, 2014. <http://www.textweek.com/pentateuch/gen32.htm>

words of Henri Nouwen, –the hope is that Jacob, having wrestled with God, leaves Jabbok as a –wounded healer, not as a wounded wounder. The hope is that he has learned from his injury and will use his experience to heal others, not to wound them out of his woundedness.<sup>213</sup>

What an interesting and intriguing expose by Nouwen! South Africans might be coming from a painful long history of suffering in the hands of the white settlers for over four hundred years. Having been wounded by the dehumanizing apartheid system, South Africans would have been the first to recognise the pain inflicted on others through racism, acknowledging the fact that xenophobia is also a form of racism. Hence, South African nationals were to be in a better position to heal foreigners—especially the blacks who come to their country seeking greener pastures.

Humans were endowed with capacity to reason, relate, and function properly as they are the only beings to fully represent what God would do for his people regardless of creed, race, sex, and status. This admonition should be strongly urged to the South African government, its policies and among South Africans today. All this implies that humanity exists to represent God in all matters patterning life (responsible to responsibly care for each other).<sup>214</sup> In this case, whatever humans do must be in conformity to what God requires for harmonious living. And this must hold true to the modern and new republican state of South Africa and its treatment of foreigners.

The combined threefold nature of the imago Dei in humanity necessitates humans to be perpetrators of either good or bad in the world. Unfortunately, the latter has dominated the scene instead of the former—a clear affront to God’s will when he created humans in his image and likeness. If South Africans and their socio-political leaders understood this concept, may be things would have headed for a different direction especially after the establishment of freedom for all in the early 1990s.

Various religious groups have an ethic of loving others that could help our brothers and sisters in South Africa to live together with immigrants in harmony. These truths are in most cases ingrained in African situations we could tap in. Some of the quotable ethical expressions from various traditions showing the importance of love for the neighbor are:<sup>215</sup>

1. –Do not do to others what you do not want done to you—African Traditional Religions.
2. –Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone things you would not desire for yourself—Bahauulla—Bahai Faith.
3. –Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find harmful—Udana-Varga, Buddhism.
4. –In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you, for this is the law and the prophets—Jesus, Christianity/Judaism.
5. –Do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you—Mahabharata, Hinduism.
6. –Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself—Prophet Muhammad, Hadith.
7. –One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated—Mahavira, Jainism.
8. –What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor, this is the whole torah—Hillel, Judaism.
9. –Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself—Shayast, Zoroastrianism.

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<sup>213</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>214</sup>When Abel was killed by his brother, God asked Cain, “where is your brother Abel?” (Genesis 4:9-10).

<sup>215</sup>Courtesy of World Religions: Love and Peace, The Golden Rule (Norwegian Church Aid, Dar es Salaam: Commission for Interreligious Dialogue).

10. –Regard your neighbor’s gain as your own gain, and your neighbor’s loss as your own loss!—Tai Shang Kan Ying Pien, Taoism.

## Conclusion

The consequences of xenophobia can be very serious as we have seen in the context of South Africa. It is important to do everything possible to overcome xenophobia on a societal level in order to avoid problems that can stem from fear, hatred and prejudice. The substantive, relational and functional views of the imago Dei should impel all of us as concerned people, especially South Africans and the affected citizens from other countries, to come and live together as one people (Africans) with a spirit of reconciliation and love on both sides.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>216</sup>My emphasis on South Africa does not elude the immigrants’ countries of origin from taking seriously these dictums. Rather, it recognizes that South Africa seems to have an upper hand in these issues in ending xenophobia by formulating right socio-economic, as well as immigration and employment policies.

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