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MOBILITY ADDRESSING GLOBAL MIGRATION

World Communion of Reformed Churches

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of Reformed Churches

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Aim and Scope

Reformed World is an international journal that provides a forum for sharing and debating theological studies and prophetic witness that seek to engage and transform the realities of our time. The journal draws on, widens and deepens the treasures of Reformed sources, past and present. *Reformed World* purposefully and joyfully embodies a diversity of voices and contextual perspectives, inspired by ecclesial, academic and grassroots communities. In the understanding of *Reformed World*, theological studies are an intersectional and interdisciplinary conversation that includes biblical, historical, systematic, constructive, and practical studies, as well as reflections on visual art, music, poetry, and other expressions of the human mind and soul that aim at the transformation of the world.

In doing so, *Reformed World* is committed to the mission of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to be a global *koinonia*, covenanting for justice, and marked by discerning, confessing, witnessing, and being reformed together. The journal also strives to receive impulses from and give impulses to the wider ecumenical movement, working together with all the partners God provides.

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Introduction

by Hanns Lessing

Human mobility is one of the defining realities of the twenty-first century. Wars, ecological devastation, economic inequality, political repression, and global interconnectedness have placed millions of people on the move. Migration is no longer a marginal phenomenon but a central sign of our times, reshaping political systems, cultures, and ecclesial life while challenging theology to rethink community, belonging, mission, and home. This issue, dedicated to "Theologies of Mobility Addressing Global Migration," presents papers from the Second Ecumenical Symposium in Rome, held at the Waldensian Faculty in November 2024. The symposium explored migration from sociological, biblical, ecumenical, and ecclesiological perspectives, asking how Christian theology might respond faithfully to a world marked by displacement and fluid identities.

The essays gathered here refuse to treat migration merely as a political problem or humanitarian crisis. Instead, they approach mobility as a theological locus where the church encounters the Gospel anew. Migration, they suggest, is not external to Christian identity but deeply embedded in the biblical story and the life of the church itself. The people of God are, in a profound sense, always a people on the move.

Despite this awareness of the fundamental questions raised by migration, the symposium's location and ecumenical character shaped its geographical focus and understanding of human mobility. The witness of the Waldensian and Catholic churches centres on the Mediterranean, where several thousand people, mainly from Africa and the Middle East, drown each year. The articles thus place particular emphasis on diaconal responses to migration. Migrants' own voices and the effects of migration on the regions they leave behind receive less attention.

The editorial board of *Reformed World* values this issue's contextual focus while recognising that migration is a global phenomenon. We understand migration as a cross-cutting concern that calls for theological reflection from diverse geographical perspectives and lived experiences. We therefore intend to return to the questions raised in this issue.

The first part of this issue gathers essays that engage with migration in Europe. The second part presents articles that reflect on the theological learnings.

For the first time, this issue of the Reformed World has included an essay that is written in a language other than English. This decision is in line with our self-understanding to become a more polyphonic communion. Paolo Naso has delivered his paper in Italian. For better accessibility, we have added a 500-word abstract that summarises the article.

Daniele Garrone's essay examines migration in contemporary Europe through the experience of Italy and Italian Protestantism. Situating migration within the realities of war, poverty, authoritarianism, and climate crisis, Garrone exposes the political instrumentalisation of anti-immigrant rhetoric while highlighting how churches have become spaces of advocacy, solidarity, and integration. Through humanitarian corridors, migrant support networks, and multiethnic congregations, churches are responding creatively to mobility, which is itself reshaping their liturgical, theological, and communal life.

Paolo Naso's chapter analyses the humanitarian corridors initiative developed by Italian Protestant churches and the Community of Sant'Egidio as an innovative model for safe and legal migration. It argues that the programme successfully combines humanitarian protection, integration, and ecumenical cooperation while demonstrating the churches' commitment to "political diaconia." Although the initiative has enabled thousands of vulnerable refugees to reach Europe safely, it has remained an exception rather than becoming European policy. The essay highlights both its practical achievements and its theological significance as a public witness to justice, solidarity, and human dignity. It concludes by calling for the transformation

of this successful best practice into a sustainable European framework for refugee protection.

Monica Attias, writing from the perspective of the Community of Sant'Egidio, describes migration as both a "sign of the times" and a theological summons. Her essay highlights the role of churches in welcoming migrants, teaching languages, building coexistence, and establishing humanitarian corridors across Europe. Migrants, she argues, are not merely recipients of charity but gifts who renew and revitalise the church. Against rising nationalism and fear, Attias calls Christians to rediscover the Gospel through the face of the stranger and through practices of hospitality that embody a deeper catholicity.

Roman Fihas' essay explores how migration and diaspora have shaped the identity and mission of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC), transforming displacement into a source of ecclesial renewal. It shows how the Church survived Soviet persecution through the witness of its global diaspora and how émigré communities became vital centres of theological, pastoral, and institutional development. Following Ukraine's independence, the diaspora played a decisive role in rebuilding the Church and its educational institutions. The UGCC's experience demonstrates that migration can become a catalyst for resilience, renewal, and global ecclesial communion rather than merely a challenge to be overcome.

Christine Lienemann-Perrin's presentation reflects on migration through engagement with the First Epistle of Peter. Linking contemporary refugee experiences with biblical themes of exile and pilgrimage, she interprets Christian identity through the category of "strangeness." Christians are called to live as strangers and exiles, whose belonging to God reshapes their relationships with society, the nation, and power. Her essay challenges churches to resist fear and withdrawal while sustaining a critical and compassionate public witness.

Eric Noffce's paper argues that migration is not merely a social issue but a constitutive dimension of biblical faith and Christian identity. Reading Scripture through the experiences of exile, pilgrimage, and diaspora, it presents mobility as a theological paradigm that calls the Church to

hospitality, solidarity, and prophetic witness. Migration also challenges theology to recover its intercultural, postcolonial, and eschatological character, resisting conformity to political and cultural powers. Christian identity is thus understood as fundamentally pilgrim-like, shaped by the "migrant Logos" and the Church's vocation to live faithfully among, but not according to, the world.

Jean-Daniel Plüss extends this ecumenical conversation through the experience of the Global Christian Forum. Reflecting on the shift of Christianity toward the Global South and the emergence of migrant churches, he argues that mobility is transforming ecumenism itself. Narrative faith-sharing, intercultural encounter, and spiritual ecumenism are becoming central within an increasingly plural and mobile Christian landscape.

Finally, Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda develops a vision of a "borderless Ecclesia." Drawing on biblical narratives of exile, exodus, incarnation, and pilgrimage, he reimagines the church as a fluid and relational home. Migrants emerge not only as vulnerable persons in need of care but also as prophetic agents calling the church beyond territorial and institutional boundaries. The church becomes Ecclesia peregrinans—a pilgrim community embodying sanctuary, solidarity, and radical belonging.

Together, these essays invite readers to reconsider theology itself from the perspective of mobility. In a world marked by both unprecedented movement and growing exclusion, the church is confronted anew with the biblical call to hospitality, justice, pilgrimage, and communion. Migration challenges not only how churches respond to migrants, but also how the church understands its own identity, mission, and life together before God.

Accelerated Mobility through the Lens of Sociological and Contemporary Experiences: Effects on Church Life in Italy, Europe and globally

Daniele Garrone

In this paper I attempt to reflect on "contemporary experiences" and "effects on church life" starting from our experience, where "ours" means: of Italians within the European Union, and of Protestants in Italy.

This conversation necessarily needs us to foreground, both numerically and in terms of the weight and role it plays in the public arena, the mobility of migrants who come to us, often after the terrible crossings of the Mediterranean or on other routes, because they simply—but this is dramatic—flee hunger, war and oppression. Another aspect to keep in view is also the mobility of Italians. Today it is mostly young people and graduates who leave our country by the thousands every year. It is no longer unskilled workers who migrate as in the past. The political agenda ignores this nuanced change in the composition of Italians migrating.

The latest example of mobility that our Federation has encountered are the 56 people who arrived a few weeks ago on the last humanitarian corridor. They came from Lebanon, and until the last moment they did not know if they could leave because of the war in Lebanon. They were mostly Syrians who were fleeing for the second time in a few years: first from their homeland, then from Lebanon where they had taken refuge.

Beyond data, beyond facts, beyond any realistic consideration, these movers, these immigrants, these persons with such heart-rending stories in their backgrounds, become the focus of political propaganda. Every day someone repeats that we are being invaded; that we must repel the "illegals"; and that we must defend the nation's borders. The most radical—but they are part of the majority in government—claim that immigration is a danger to

the integrity of the people. Never mind that business organizations provide figures showing how many hundreds of thousands of new immigrants we need each year for our economy and for our welfare: from labourers for restaurants, factories, shops, families to nurses and doctors. Migrants even provide contributions to Italians to increase the birth rate...

The purpose for this discourse on immigrants is to find a consensus in the midst of the reactions to the threat that they seemingly pose. It is a vicious circle: one tries to intercept feelings present in part of the population and intensifies them with short and emotional speeches. The fight against immigration is presented as the country's main problem.

This is why we believe that the challenge is first and foremost cultural. We need to be able to bring facts, data, analysis, but also arguments, reasoning, proposals, even interests back to the centre of the discourse.

Perhaps this last word may seem inappropriate, but I will explain it like this. Think of the immigrants who have been here for years, who have not only learnt the language, but also attended schools, and very often, obtained degrees. Hundreds of thousands of signatures have been collected in order to arrive at a popular referendum to facilitate access to full citizenship for these new Italians. There are those who think that doing so is a benevolent concession, while some see it as a dangerous giving way that must be resisted. We maintain that citizenship is an interest of the Republic, if it is a constitutional democracy that does not need the subjects or outcasts it has created, but precisely citizens, who share a pact. To put in a biblical expression dear to the Reformed, a covenant—a pact that has a common interest for all—natives and newcomers: the same rights, duties and the harmonious growth of the nation.

All studies say that the kind of mobility that brings immigrants to us is not only accelerated, but will also increase in the coming decades, because the causes of mobility cannot be expected to slow down or decrease: climate crisis, authoritarian regimes, wars, and increasing global poverty. These are the problems that should be at the centre of the European agenda in foreign politics.

I exemplify this by quoting and challenging two statements by two members of the majority currently in government.

The first is the statement by the Minister of the Interior commenting on the terrible shipwreck at Cutro, February 2023: "They shouldn't have left...," as if they were irresponsible people climbing a mountain without the right shoes. One could, however, rephrase this to convey the seriousness of the matter: "They shouldn't have had to leave." They shouldn't have been forced or compelled to leave because they had no other prospect. What does "don't have (the necessity) to leave... " mean if we think of Syria, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, the women of Iran and the list could go on. What foreign policy should we start thinking about, so that people no longer have to leave.

The second phrase is "let's help them (the immigrants) at (their) home." First, those who use this phrase imply that those who have come first need to be sent back home. It implies that the rejections of those who have come will be huge, but they could succeed only in a few cases. Second implication of this interpretation of "Let's help them at home... " is: let's prevent them from coming, for example by paying someone to do the dirty work for us, as is the case with the agreement between Italy and Tunisia.

Let us think, instead, what it would mean, in a positive sense, to help at home those who are threatened by desertification, the robbery of precious raw materials, ethnic conflicts, and authoritarian and corrupt regimes—this would be a reasonable agenda for European foreign policy.

How Does All this Affect the Life and Action of Our Churches?

Advocacy. It is no coincidence that immediately after the terrible shipwreck on 3 October 2013 (at least 368 died), we set up a "migration observatory" on the island of Lampedusa. Our operators welcome and help those who arrive, and allow their dramatic personal stories to be known.

We have always been in favour of the integration of immigrants also through the recognition of citizenship, as I said above. Together with the Sant'Egidio community, we started the humanitarian corridors. Others have joined us; the support of the Waldensian Church has been joined by sister churches

and diaconal organizations abroad, but also the Buddhist Union and the Mormons, while the Waldensian Diaconal Work (Diaconia Valdese) remains a key partner.

The humanitarian corridors are a civil society initiative that shows how it is possible to counteract the activities of human traffickers who cynically profit from desperation, and instead activate safe and legal channels for those trying to escape terrible living conditions, opening up opportunities not only for reception but also for integration. From Lebanon alone the corridors have brought 3,000 people to safety in Italy since February 2016. With the humanitarian corridors, more than 7,700 refugees have arrived in Europe.

The initiative of the humanitarian corridors—an internationally recognized best practice—should not be reduced to a charitable gesture of pious souls. It can become a model for the European Union and its democracies, all of which are legally bound to defend human rights. At a time characterized by an increase in wars, the humanitarian corridors are a concrete response for vulnerable individuals and families who have a right to protection and who can be given prospects for life and hope for the future. This would be reasonable, humane and in line with what we affirm in our constitutions.

Let us try to imagine what could be done in this direction with the enormous resources used to keep out those who want to flee war, oppression and hunger—I am thinking here of certain European policies, but also of the recent agreement with Albania. In any case, as Protestant churches in Italy, we will continue to call for the expansion of legal and safe routes for people in need.

Many immigrants are employed and often exploited in seasonal agricultural (often undeclared) work. We therefore opened a social hostel in the Gioia Tauro plain that can accommodate 40 workers. We started the same work in Piedmont, in Saluzzo. Thinking about those migrants, the first concern of politics should be the huge spread of illegal, undeclared labour in Italy; instead, the problem is illegal migrants.

Mobility also involves our local churches. There has been a significant increase in the number of evangelical immigrants, especially from Ghana,

Nigeria, the Philippines, Korea and Romania. If one counts both regular and irregular immigrants, one can estimate that there are 250,000–300,000 Evangelicals.

Out of about 300 communities of member churches in our Federation, at least 200 experience the presence of members from other countries. Some Italian evangelical communities are growing thanks to the arrival of immigrant believers. The phenomenon has brought various challenges to the Italian communities in different areas: in music, liturgy, Bible reading, reflection on structures and regulations, regarding the faith education of children and young people and the training of pastors, preachers, Sunday school teachers and lay people. Some ethical issues are controversial.

In 2000 the Federation started a programme called "Being Church Together," to promote multi-ethnic encounter and fraternity within Italian Protestantism. "Being Church Together" organizes training meetings and seminars, collaborating with other Italian and European organizations in the formation of specialized ministries, and sharing good practices.

At the same time, "Being Church Together" intends to protect the religious freedom of immigrants and therefore also of the growing evangelical component. "Being Church Together" has initiated relations with some realities of Pentecostal evangelism and of the "independent" ethnic churches with a view to building collaboration networks on the issues of religious freedom, the training of pastors and lay people, multi-ethnic integration within evangelicalism in Italy, social inclusion and common witness in the country.

In the preparatory phase of this conference, I was told that I had to speak on 'migrations' in the Old Testament. Indeed, there are migrations of all kinds in the Old Testament. Some are motivated by the need for food, such as Jacob and his family, or Naomi and her husband; others are deportations, by the Assyrians and Babylonians. We could even say that in the Old Testament we already find all the phenomena that we still have today, like the trafficking of human beings: think of Joseph being sold by the merchants who take him to Egypt. We find rules that, at least for some cases of murder, establish a right of asylum. Probably behind the figure of the sojourner (*ger* in biblical

Hebrew, immigrant or emigrant, because an immigrant is always at the same time an emigrant) there is a reality very similar to that of today's migrants, i.e. fleeing from dangerous situations or seeking better living conditions. There are also regulations to protect these kinds of "foreigners." We also find opposing reactions to foreigners: positions of "universalist" openness and others of strong opposition. I mention the Old Testament instances only to say that reading the Bible accompanies, supports and inspires our "civic" engagement. The challenge, particularly serious for us Reformed, is to read the texts without falling into biblicism.

Corridoi umanitari, una buona pratica europea ed ecumenica

Paolo Naso

In questo saggio[1] ricostruiamo la storia dei corridoi umanitari, una buona pratica promossa dalle chiese evangeliche italiane e dalla Comunità di Sant'Egidio e riproposta in altri contesti europei. A distanza di dieci anni dal loro inizio, i Corridoi umanitari si confermano uno strumento efficace del migration management che, oltre ad aprire vie legali e sicure, attiva risorse della società civile, favorisce processi di integrazione e l'incontro tra domanda e offerta di lavoro. La dimensione ecumenica di questo progetto è un valore aggiunto che avvicina le chiese nel loro impegno a servizio dei migranti e dei richiedenti asilo. Questa buona pratica, però, non si è imposta a livello europeo e resta una notabile eccezione nel quadro di una politica europea "della fortezza" e della chiusura delle frontiere.

Abstract:

Paolo Naso's essay, "Humanitarian Corridors: A European and Ecumenical Best Practice," examines the development, achievements, and limitations of the humanitarian corridors (HC) initiative launched in Italy in 2015 by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI), the Waldensian Church, and the Community of Sant'Egidio. The essay argues that humanitarian corridors represent one of the most successful European responses to forced migration because they combine legal protection, civil society participation, and long-term integration while expressing a distinctive ecumenical witness. At the same time, Naso contends that this innovative model has remained an isolated best practice rather than becoming a broader European migration policy.

[1] Il testo riprende un articolo apparso sulla rivista Protestantesimo, vol. 79 : 2-3, 2024.

The origins of the project lie in the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean, particularly the 3 October 2013 shipwreck off Lampedusa, in which 368 refugees died. The tragedy prompted Protestant and Catholic leaders to seek a practical alternative to dangerous irregular migration routes. Through dialogue between the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Waldensian Church, and the FCEI, a proposal emerged that made use of Article 25 of the Schengen Visa Code, allowing states to issue humanitarian visas on limited territorial validity. This legal innovation enabled vulnerable refugees to travel safely and legally to Italy rather than relying on smugglers or risking their lives at sea.

Unlike many humanitarian initiatives, the corridors were designed not only as a means of admission but also as a comprehensive integration programme. Beneficiaries receive accommodation, language instruction, education for children, vocational training, and assistance in entering the labour market. The objective is to enable refugees to achieve independence within one to two years while preventing long-term dependency. Importantly, the entire programme has been financed by the sponsoring churches and organizations rather than by the Italian state, demonstrating an extraordinary commitment of civil society and faith communities.

The initiative also illustrates an important form of ecumenical cooperation. Protestants and Catholics worked together in an unprecedented manner, a collaboration publicly praised by Pope Francis as an example of Christians giving common witness through shared service rather than emphasizing confessional differences. Over time, Caritas and the Italian Bishops' Conference joined the initiative, broadening its ecclesial base while maintaining its practical focus on protecting vulnerable migrants.

The Italian experience inspired similar projects elsewhere in Europe, including France, Belgium, Germany, San Marino, and Andorra. Nevertheless, these remained limited in scale. Despite repeated appeals by church leaders and advocacy before European institutions, humanitarian corridors have never been adopted as a comprehensive European policy. Naso attributes this failure to the persistence of restrictive migration policies associated with the idea of 'Fortress Europe', political reluctance to expand legal migration

pathways, and hesitation among some churches that considered refugee admission primarily a state responsibility.

After nearly a decade, the programme has expanded significantly. Six protocols negotiated by the FCEI and the Waldensian Church have enabled approximately 6,000 vulnerable people—primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, and other conflict regions—to enter Italy safely. Evidence gathered from the programme demonstrates that integration has generally been successful, with refugees gradually achieving economic self-sufficiency and becoming active members of Italian society. This practical success has strengthened public confidence in the model and has shown that orderly, legally managed migration can respond both to humanitarian needs and to labour shortages.

For Naso, however, the significance of humanitarian corridors extends beyond migration management. They embody what he calls "political diaconia": the integration of charitable service, public advocacy, and theological witness. The churches not only care for vulnerable people but also advocate policies that uphold human dignity, international protection, and justice. The humanitarian corridors therefore demonstrate how Christian diaconal action can move from emergency assistance to structural political engagement while remaining rooted in the Gospel. Their greatest challenge remains transforming an exceptional best practice into a permanent European commitment that combines legal pathways, shared responsibility, and solidarity with those seeking protection.

Keywords:

Migration, Ecumenism, Europe, Frontiers

Il processo di ideazione dei Corridoi umanitari (CU) avviati dal 2015 ha compiuto dieci anni[2]: un tempo che suggerisce un bilancio di questa *best*

[2] Sono numerosi i saggi di carattere scientifico che hanno descritto specifici aspetti dei CU. In inglese, sono disponibili R. Marchetti, Italian hybrid diplomacy, in *Contemporary Italian Politics,* 2/2018, 193-207; A. Palm, Leading the Way? Italy's External Migration Policies and the 2018 Elections. An Uncertain Future, *IAI Commentaries* n. 18/2018, 1° febbraio 2018, www.iai.it, (verificato il 6 febbraio 2024);

practice che, ad oggi, si configura come uno dei rari tentativi di aprire un varco nella "fortezza Europa"[3], dando una risposta al problema delle migrazioni irregolari e al dramma dei profughi che perdono la vita nel tentativo di raggiungere l'Italia percorrendo la rotta del Mediterraneo centrale. Il diretto coinvolgimento della Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche i Italia (FCEI) e della Tavola valdese nel processo di ideazione e di sviluppo della *best practice* suggerisce l'opportunità di un bilancio che non si limiti agli aspetti legali, tecnici e sociali ma affronti anche le questioni etiche e teologiche che hanno suggerito e animato questo impegno che si può considerare quello per il quale il mondo protestante italiano si è maggiorente espresso nello spazio pubblico e per i quale ha investito una quota estremamente alta delle risorse derivanti dall'Otto per mille.

Ome rilevato anche da papa Francesco[4], infine, i CU hanno costituito un momento alto della pratica ecumenica, sicuramente il terreno più visibile e rilevante sotto il profilo della testimonianza comune. Anche questa circostanza suggerisce delle riflessioni e un bilancio dell'esperienza condotta dalle chiese evangelica e, primariamente, dalla Comunità di Sant'Egidio anche se, nel corso degli sviluppi dei CU, è intervenuta anche la Caritas.

Il punto di partenza

La data, non solo simbolica, da cui si avvia concretamente la riflessione che avrebbe portato all'ideazione e alla realizzazione dei CU è certamente quella

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F. Rolando, Humanitarian corridors to Italy: an interview with professor Paolo Naso, *Harvard International Review*, 2/2018, p. 64-67.

[3] F. Krasna, La "Fortezza Europa" e il ruolo dei confini tra migrazioni forzate, migrazioni volontarie e libera circolazione dei cittadini UE, in Per una geopolitica delle migrazioni. Nuove letture dell'altrove tra noi, *XIII Rapporto della Società Geografica Italiana*, Società Geografica Italiana, Roma 2018, 18-29. L'espressione "fortezza Europa" era già stata adottata dalla FCEI *in Casa o fortezza?* l'Italia, l'Europa del 1992 e l'immigrazione: quali scelte politiche, Claudiana Torino 1989.

[4] Dopo avere citato l'impegno congiunto della FCEI, della Tavola valdese e della Comunità di Sant'Egidio, in un incontro pubblico che ha raccolto centinaia di beneficiari dei CU, il papa ha affermato: "A me piace tanto che i cristiani si uniscano per lavorare questo, insieme, come fratelli che siamo tutti e non sottolineare le differenze", *Vatican News*, Migranti, il Papa: con i corridoi umanitari vita e dignità. Grazie ai Governi che accolgono,18 marzo 2023.

del 3 ottobre del 2013 quando, al largo di Lampedusa si registra un naufragio in cui morirono 368 profughi. Non era il primo incidente di questo tipo né sarà, nella storia delle più recenti migrazioni mediterranee[5], quello in cui si registra il più alto numero di vittime. La differenza la fece la testimonianza diretta e angosciata di decine di sopravvissuti e, soprattutto per gli effetti che ebbero sull'opinione pubblica italiana, dei racconti di alcuni dei soccorritori. Poco meno di un anno dopo, dal 7 al 9 settembre del 2014, ad Antweerp (Anversa) si svolse i consueto incontro «Religioni e culture in dialogo», promosso dalla Comunità di Sant'Egidio ed al quale partecipò, come spesso è accaduto, anche il moderatore della Tavola valdese, Eugenio Bernardini.

Nelle pieghe di quell'incontro il fondatore della Comunità, Andrea Riccardi, il presidente della stessa, Marco Impagliazzo, e lo stesso Bernardini ragionarono delle necessità dell'urgenza di una proposta e di una concreta iniziativa ecumenica sul tema delle migrazioni irregolari nel Mediterraneo. Fu l'inizio di un dialogo che, in breve, coinvolse un gruppo di esperti cattolici e protestanti. La FCEI, presieduta dal past. Massimo Aquilante, espresse tempestivo sostegno all'iniziativa e mobilitò la struttura di Mediterranean Hope – Programma Rifugiati e Migrati, che allora muoveva i primi passi superando e ampliando le attività del preesistente Servizio Rifugiati e Migranti, e la cui istituzione sarebbe stata confermata nell'Assemblea del 2015[6].

Obiettivo generale era l'apertura di una "via legale" che consentisse a profughi e migranti di evitare di sottoporsi al ricatto violento e rischioso dei traffickers accedendo a vie legali e sicure di immigrazione; quello più specifico l'individuazione della base giuridica per arrivare a formulare una progetto da sottoporre all'approvazione del Governo italiano. Dopo un'accurata fase di studio, il gruppo di lavoro vide la possibilità di agganciarsi

[5] Secondo l'UNHCR i migranti morto durante la traversata mediterranea sono stati 3.231 nel 2021, 1.881 nel 2020, 1.510 nel 2019 e oltre 2.277 nel 2018. Il numero potrebbe essere ancora più elevato con morti e dispersi lungo le rotte terrestri attraverso il deserto del Sahara e zone di confine remote, Mediterraneo, aumentano i morti e le tragedie: lo rivela la rappresentazione grafica dei dati dell'UNHCR, /www.unhcr.org/it, 10 giugno 2022, online (verificato il 6 febbraio 2024).

[6] In particolare l'Assemblea votò il Documento "Accogliere chi è forestiero", *NEV* 9 dicembre 2015.

alla regolamentazione dei visti rilasciati dai paesi dell'area Schengen. In particolare, l'art. 25 del regolamento del Trattato concede agli Stati membro di rilasciare un visto "con validità territoriale limitata… quando, per motivi umanitari o di interesse nazionale o in virtù di obblighi internazionali lo Stato membro ritiene necessario derogare al principio dell'adempimento delle condizioni di ingresso" previste dalla norma. Salvo eccezioni, tale visto ha "validità territoriale limitata" al territorio dello Stato membro di rilascio[7]. A partire da questa base giuridica, il gruppo di lavoro ecumenico stese un progetto per l'apertura di "corridoi umanitari" per mille beneficiari, sottoposto ai Ministeri competenti. Al tempo, il Governo era presieduto da Matteo Renzi e ministri competenti erano Angelino Alfano all'Interno, e Paolo Gentiloni agli Esteri, che mostrarono attenzione alla proposta, delegando ai tecnici ministeriali la verifica della fattibilità della proposta. Mario Giro, tra i fondatori della Comunità di Sant'Egidio, era viceministro degli Esteri con delega alla cooperazione internazionale. La fase negoziale si concentrò sulle procedure da adottare che, trovato l'accordo, si precisarono in un protocollo sottoscritto il 15 dicembre del 2015. Perno del meccanismo era il rilascio di un visto "per motivi umanitari" da parte delle sedi consolari italiane nei paesi di partenza – il primo CU riguardò il Libano e il Marocco, in prospettiva anche l'Etiopia - a favore di soggetti che, in ragione di documentate vulnerabilità, appena entrati in Italia avrebbero potuto chiedere il riconoscimento dello status di rifugiato. Sulla base di questi criteri, i casi istruiti dagli operatori umanitari che agivano nei paesi di partenza dovevano corrispondere a un criterio compatibile con la richiesta d'asilo. Giunti in Italia, i beneficiari sarebbero entrati in un percorso di integrazione che comprendeva, oltre all'ospitalità per un congruo periodo di tempo – nei fatti tra uno e due anni -, la scolarizzazione dei minori, l'apprendimento dell'italiano l'avviamento al lavoro.

Alcuni aspetti di questo primo Protocollo meritano di essere approfonditi. In primo luogo, accoglieva una interpretazione elastica e inclusiva del diritto d'asilo. Tra i potenziali beneficiari del progetto, infatti, erano compresi non solo gli «sfollati con evidente bisogno di protezione internazionale»

[7] Regolamento (CE) n. 810/2009 del Parlamento europeo e del Consiglio del 13 luglio 2009 che istituisce un codice comunitario dei visti, *Gazzetta Ufficiale,* 15 settembre 2009.

e «persone riconosciute meritevoli dall'UNHCR, almeno *prima facie*, del riconoscimento dello status di rifugiati» in base alla Convenzione di Ginevra del 1951 e al relativo protocollo del 1967, ma anche individui che «per la loro vulnerabilità, sarebbero facili vittime del traffico o non avrebbero alcuna possibilità di raggiungere l'Europa, pur non rientrando nelle categorie previste dalla Convenzione di Ginevra quali, a titolo esemplificativo, donne sole e con bambini, vittime di tratta, anziani, persone affette da disabilità o serie patologie»[8]. Con questa definizione, il Protocollo estendeva il principio della protezione da casi essenzialmente individuali a gruppi di individui a rischio di sopravvivenza; dall'altra, includeva tra i fattori di rischio anche gravi patologie, la condizione di madri single, le vittime di abusi e di tratta. Un secondo elemento da sottolineare è che il progetto non si limitava ad aprire una via sicura e legale per l'accesso all'asilo, ma contemplava anche una serie di misure per integrare i beneficiari nel tessuto sociale e produttivo nazionale, come una rapida e buona alfabetizzazione in italiano, la partecipazione attiva dei genitori alla scolarizzazione dei figli, la frequenza di corsi di qualificazione professionale, stage e altre forme di graduale avviamento al lavoro. Si tratta di tappe di una "filiera dell'integrazione" che i soggetti promotori hanno curato attentamente per due ragioni: l'obiettivo di assicurare una graduale autonomia dei beneficiari era ritenuto qualificante e imprescindibile; era necessario contenere i tempi di assistenza dei beneficiari, i cui costi – come spiegheremo tra poco – erano sostenuti dai promotori. Tale attenzione, suggerita dalla lunga esperienza di questi ultimi in programmi di integrazione e inclusione sociale dei migranti, ha avuto una funzione molto positiva nel tenere al riparo i corridoi umanitari da campagne di discredito, che hanno colpito altre esperienze di accoglienza, ad esempio il Sistema di protezione richiedenti asilo e rifugiati (SPRAR), accusate con troppa leggerezza di mantenere persone "a non fare niente".

Infine, va evidenziato l'aspetto delle modalità di finanziamento del progetto: le spese di apertura dei corridoi, di individuazione e trasporto dei beneficiari in Italia, di accoglienza per un "congruo periodo" erano interamente a carico di Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Federazione delle Chiese evangeliche e Tavola

[8] Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted 28 July 1951, entered into force 22 April 1954, 189 UNTS 137; Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted 31 January 1967, entered into force 4 October 1967, 606 UNTS 267.

valdese. La firma del Protocollo avvenne, il 15 dicembre al Viminale, alla presenza del neopresidente della FCEI past. Luca M. Negro, del presidente della Comunità di Sant'Egidio Marco Impagliazzo, del moderatore Bernardini e dei Direttori generali dei due ministeri coinvolti.

Le reti e i primi arrivi

Conclusa la fase di impostazione, iniziava quella di realizzazione. La visita di una delegazione della FCEI in Libano mise a punto una prima rete di contatti locali e avviò un rapporto di collaborazione con l'Associazione papa Giovanni XXIII che da tempo operava in alcuni campi profughi del paese mediorientale, primo tra tutti a Tell Abbas[9]. Altri contatti furono avviati con ONG e associazioni ecumeniche locali, tra le quali, oltre all'UNHCR, *l'International Refugee Assistance Project*, MSF, il *Centre Libanais des droits de l'homme, il Forum for Development, Culture and Dialogue* presieduto dal pastore presbiteriano di origine siriana Riad Jarjour. Assai più complesso, invece, il contatto con le autorità e i partner ecumenici del Marocco. Varie missioni – la più rappresentativa, guidata dal presidente della FCEI Luca M. Negro ebbe luogo nel febbraio del 2017[10] - non sortirono gli effetti sperati, soprattutto per lo scarso interesse del governo marocchino a una collaborazione con l'Italia su un tema che riteneva di sua esclusiva competenza quale la gestione del crescente numero di profughi ammassati soprattutto a ridosso delle enclave di Ceuta e Melilla.

A conclusione delle prime istruttorie in Libano, il 4 febbraio del 2016 sbarcava all'aeroporto di Fiumicino il primo nucleo famigliare che, scappato dai bombardati sulla città siriana di Homs, si era rifugiato a Beirut, vivendo in garage fatiscente. La figlia più piccola era affetta da un grave male che, senza una delicata operazione, l'avrebbe portata alla cecità. "Oggi si scrive una pagina importante dell'Europa dell'accoglienza e della solidarietà – commentò il presidente della FCEI, past. Luca M. Negro. - Con l'arrivo in tutta sicurezza della bambina Falak, gravemente malata, e della mamma, la FCEI e Sant'Egidio, grazie al sostegno della Tavola valdese, dimostrano che

[9] La storia di questo intervento in M. Civico, *Badheea. Dalla Siria in Italia con il corridoio umanitario*, Il Margine, Trento, 2017.

[10] Nuovi corridoi umanitari dal Marocco?, *NEV*, 28 febbraio 2017, online

l'apertura di corridoi umanitari per fare fronte alla crisi migratoria di questi mesi, è uno strumento funzionale e sostenibile che speriamo possa essere utilizzato anche da parte di altri paesi dello spazio Schengen. Il risultato di oggi, infatti indica un modello di 'sponsorizzazione umanitaria' che sottrae rifugiati e profughi al traffico criminale degli scafisti e consente ingressi legali e verificati in Italia"[11].

Il successivo 4 marzo una delegazione valdese e metodista, guidata dal moderatore della Tavola, past. Eugenio Bernardini, si recava in visita da papa Francesco e gli consegnava una cassetta di legno costruita col fasciame dei barconi dei migranti contenente alcune opere del disegnatore Francesco Piobbichi, che operava per conto della FCEI a Lampedusa. I disegni a matita ritraevano immagini di emigrazione e profughi dispersi in mare o salvati [12]. Due giorni dopo il papa volle dare rilievo alla visita e all'esperienza appena avviata dei corridoi umanitari, dedicandogli un passaggio nell'Angelus del 6 marzo[13].

Non è semplice stimare il costo annuo del progetto, dato che un'ampia quota del bilancio è composta dalla valorizzazione di prestazioni volontarie, come è accaduto, soprattutto, per i beneficiari accolti dalla rete costruita dalla Comunità di Sant'Egidio e composta in buona parte da parrocchie, centri Caritas, istituti religiosi, gruppi locali. La rete delle Chiese evangeliche, disponendo di un retroterra parrocchiale assai più limitato, ha fatto ricorso soprattutto ai fondi dell'8 per mille della Chiesa valdese e, per quanto

[11] Arrivata con il primo corridoio umanitario la piccola profuga siriana Falak con tutta la famiglia, *Nev* 4 febbraio 2016, online (5 febbraio 2024).

[12] Delegazione metodista e valdese in udienza da papa Francesco. Bernardini: "Un'occasione per dare concretezza a un dialogo ecumenico che cresce visibilmente", NEV 4 marzo 2016, online (5 febbraio 2014). Alcune opere di Piobbichi sono state pubblicate dalla Claudiana.

[13] "Come segno concreto di impegno per la pace e la vita vorrei citare ed esprimere ammirazione per l'iniziativa dei corridoi umanitari per i profughi, avviata ultimamente in Italia. Questo progetto-pilota, che unisce la solidarietà e la sicurezza, consente di aiutare persone che fuggono dalla guerra e dalla violenza, come i cento profughi già trasferiti in Italia, tra cui bambini malati, persone disabili, vedove di guerra con figli e anziani. Mi rallegro anche perché questa iniziativa è ecumenica, essendo sostenuta da Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche Italiane, Chiese Valdesi e Metodiste", vatican.va, Angelus del 6 marzo 2016, online (05 febbraio 2024).

riguarda l'accoglienza, alla Diaconia valdese oppure a iniziative promosse direttamente dalla FCEI (ad esempio la Casa delle Culture di Scicli, RG) o realizzate in convenzione con gruppi e associazioni locali. Dal resoconto dei fondi dell'8 per mille gestiti dalla Chiesa valdese emerge che negli anni il contributo destinato alla gestione dei CU ammonti a circa 20 milioni di euro[14]. Il Protocollo siglato nel 2015 prevedeva mille ingressi in Italia nell'arco di due anni, un obiettivo che è stato raggiunto con un leggero anticipo.

Un progetto europeo

Grazie alla positiva esperienza italiana, l'azione di advocacy delle Chiese evangeliche e della Comunità di Sant'Egidio per estendere il modello dei corridoi umanitari in altri Paesi europei ha avuto un relativo successo in Francia (500 unità) e in Belgio (300); piccoli esperimenti sono stati realizzati a San Marino e ad Andorra, mentre nell'autunno del 2019 in alcuni Länder tedeschi, con capofila la Chie- se evangelica della Vestfalia, è partito il progetto NeST, che si ispira al modello italiano dei corridoi umanitari anche se l'individuazione dei beneficiari è sostanzialmente delegata all'UNHCR [15].

Data la peculiarità del modello laico francese – imperniato su un principio di rigorosa distinzione tra le competenze dello Stato e quelle delle comunità di fede – la cooperazione sussidiaria tra le istituzioni repubblicane e varie associazioni religiose (la Conferenza episcopale francese, la Federazione protestante di Francia, la struttura diaconale protestante FEP, la Comunità di Sant'Egidio e la Caritas) appare di particolare importanza, come del resto è stato rilevato dal presidente Hollande nella cerimonia di firma del Protocollo svoltasi all'Eliseo il 14 marzo 2017: «Questo Protocollo conferma che in una Repubblica laica delle collaborazioni fruttuose con le Chiese sono possibili ed anzi auspicate […] La Repubblica laica significa agire con tutti coloro che con le loro convinzioni vogliono impegnarsi per l'interesse generale»[16].

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[14] Il dato ci è stato gentilmente indicato dall'Ufficio Otto per mille delle chiese valdesi e metodiste.

[15] NeST (Neustart in Team), www.infomigrants.net/en/post/16727/new-german-resettlement-program-enlists-members-of-civil-society-as-mentors-to-help-refugees-integrate-better>.

[16] La France met en place des "couloirs humanitaires" pour accueillir des réfugiés vulnérables, www.santegidio.ch/2017/03/france-met-place-couloirs-humanitaires-

Di lì a poco altri corridoi furono aperti anche in Italia per iniziativa della Conferenza episcopale italiana, della Caritas, della Fondazione Migrantes e della Comunità di Sant'Egidio. Queste associazioni cattoliche il 12 gennaio del 2017 firmarono un Protocollo per 500 beneficiari, del tutto analogo a quello "ecumenico" del 2015, fuorché per il luogo di partenza che fu l'Etiopia, a beneficio di profughi di origine somala, sudanese ed eritrea.

L'esordio del Governo Conte I (1° giugno 2018), con un ministro dell'Interno come Matteo Salvini dichiaratamente ostile ad ogni misura di accoglienza degli immigrati, pur minando consolidate politiche di integrazione e limitando i criteri per l'ammissione alla protezione dei richiedenti asilo, non ha bloccato il programma dei corridoi umanitari; ha però reso più difficili e incerte le prospettive di integrazione. Nel la "guerra" contro le ONG che operavano in azioni di salvataggio nel Mediterraneo, i corridoi umanitari sono anzi diventati lo "strumento buono" da proporre contro il soccorso in mare, al punto da velocizza- re alcuni programmi di reinsediamento (resettlements) definiti impropriamente "corridoi umanitari"[17]: un primo contingente di 51 profughi dalla Libia è stato accolto il 14 novembre del 2018 da Salvini in persona; altri due gruppi sono giunti il 18 dicembre 2018 (103 profughi) e il 19 aprile del 2019 (147 profughi) sempre dalla Libia.

Pur accogliendo con favore questa ulteriore forma di corridoi umanitari, le chiese evangeliche non hanno mai lesinato critiche alla politica di chiusura nei confronti dei migranti e richiedenti asilo, opponendosi ai Decreti sicurezza[18] ed esprimendo pieno sostegno alle attività delle ONG[19] fino

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accueillir-refugies-vulnerables; IFRI, Hébergement citoyen des personnes refugiés. Témoignage des collectifs d'accueil et des personnes accueillies dans le cadre du projet Couloirs Humanitaires, 2019, online, (verificati il 7 febbraio 2024).

[17] A. Cari, «Migranti, che cosa sono i corridoi umanitari proposti da Salvini», *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 9 gennaio 2019.

[18] A. Riccardi, Il decreto sicurezza frena l'integrazione. L'emergenza non c'è, *La Stampa*, 8 gennaio 2019; Decreto Salvini. Il no delle Chiese evangeliche, *Riforma.it*, 10 settembre 2018, online (verificato il 5 febbraio 2024).

[19] AGENSIR, Migranti: gli evangelici scrivono a Conte e Salvini, "pronti ad accogliere i profughi di Open Arms, 8 agosto 2019, online (verificato il 5 febbraio 2024). La lettera, indirizzata al premier Giuseppe Conte e al ministro dell'Interno Matteo Salvini fu firmata dal presidente della FCEI Luca M. Negro, e dal moderatore della Tavola valdese, Eugenio Bernardini: "Questo gesto – spiegano i due esponenti protestanti

al punto da dichiararsi disponibili a farsi carico dell'accoglienza dei 147 profughi che nell'agosto del 2019 furono costretti a rimanere a bordo per 19 giorni perché il Viminale si rifiutava di concedere un porto di sbarco. La vicenda è attualmente oggetto di un processo penale presso il tribunale di Palermo.

Corridoi umanitari "europei"

Forti di inattesi riconoscimenti tra i quali il Premio Nansen[20], soprattutto i vertici delle chiese evangeliche si impegnarono in un'azione ecumenica internazionale sia perché altri paesi adottassero la policy dei CU o aumentassero le quote dei beneficiari, che perché le istituzioni europee stesse aprissero un corridoio "comunitario". All'inizio del 2016, il presidente della FCEI, Luca M. Negro, spingeva in questa direzione inviando una lettera alla ministra dell'Interno Luciana Lamorgese, e alla viceministra degli Affari Esteri, Emanuela Del Re, in cui ribadiva la necessità di aprire nuovi "corridoi umanitari europei come strumento strategico di gestione sostenibile degli arrivi di soggetti vulnerabili"[21]. Negli anni successivi, la richiesta di un'europeizzazione dei CU fu una costante dell'azione della FCEI, per altro sostenuta dalla Commissione delle Chiese per i Migranti in Europa (CCME)[22]. Nel 2019, in occasione della Settimana di preghiera per l'unità dei cristiani, FCEI, CEI, Tavola valdese, Comunità di Sant'Egidio giunsero a pubblicare un appello comune in cui si affermava: "Abbiamo sentito la necessità di unire le nostre voci – scrivono ancora protestanti e cattolici italiani - così come insieme abbiamo lavorato in tante occasioni nel campo dell'immigrazione, permettendo la realizzazione dei primi corridoi

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– ha per noi un significato eminentemente umanitario e risponde, oltre che alla vocazione evangelica, all'accoglienza e all'amore cristiano, all'esigenza urgente di portare in salvo persone già provate e colpevoli di nient'altro che sfuggire da guerre e persecuzioni", *NEV*, Open Arms. Gli evangelici scrivono a Conte e Salvini, 8 agosto 2019.

[20] Il progressivo riconoscimento è attestato anche dai premi conferiti al progetto: la Colomba d'oro per la pace da parte di Archivio Disarmo nel 2016, il premio giornalistico Lucchetta nel 2017 e il prestigioso premio Nansen dell'UNHCR nel 2019.

[21] Migranti, corridoi umanitari europei, FCEI: "Il tempo è ora", *NEV* 29 febbraio 2016

[22] CCME, Recommendations for the development of safe and legal paths to protection in the European union, 19 novembre 2014, online (verificato il 7 febbraio 2024).

umanitari, avviati da Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia, Tavola Valdese, Cei e Caritas italiana". Nel momento in cui "celebriamo il dono dell'unità e della fraternità fra i cristiani, desideriamo spiegare a tutti che per noi aiutare chi ha bisogno non è un gesto buonista, di ingenuo altruismo o, peggio ancora, di convenienza: è l'essenza stessa della nostra fede"[23]. Picco di questa campagna europea fu il convegno che la FCEI, la Tavola valdese e la Comunità di Sant'Egidio, in collaborazione con la Church Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), organizzarono al Parlamento europeo nella giornata internazionale "per i diritti umani". In quella occasione – erano presenti il vicepresidente del Parlamento europeo Massimo Cataldo, esponenti dell'UNHCR e di tutte le principali aree politiche rappresentate a Bruxelles – la FCEI ribadì i punti qualificanti della sua proposta: l'apertura di corridoi umanitari europei nel quadro di un patto tra tra le istituzioni e la società civile dei vari Paesi membri; l'orientamento per i beneficiari prima della partenza; la complementarietà del progetto rispetto agli impegni già assunti dagli Stati[24]. L'esito di quell'incontro fu incerto. Da un lato, infatti, esponenti di diverso orientamento politico, anche conservatore, espressero un giudizio positivo sulla proposta; dall'altra, alcune grandi chiese europee – prima tra tutte la EKD – mantennero le loro riserve sul progetto dei CU, ritendendo che iniziative di questo genere dovessero restare di stretta competenza dello Stato[25]. Soltanto una chiesa regionale tedesca, quella della Vestfalia, aveva da tempo espresso il suo convinto appoggio alla proposta. Oltre a sostenere anche finanziariamente il progetto dei CU, infatti,

[23] Cattolici ed evangelici: salvare i migranti in mare e ampliare i corridoi umanitari, *Vatican News*, 22 gennaio 2019, online.

[24] Corridoi umanitari europei, l'impegno del governo e delle istituzioni comunitarie, *NEV* 11 dicembre 2019.

[25] Le motivazioni dell'EKD furono espresse da Angsar Gilster, consigliere e segretario del Presidente Heinrich Bedford Strohm, in una lettera del 15 ottobre 2018, in cui si faceva riferimento ai costi estremamente alti del progetto e alla diversità della base giuridica del progetto che si sarebbe realizzato in Germania. Del resto di lì a poco la EKD si sarebbe impegnata in un oneroso sostegno alle attività di search and rescue nel Mediterraneo, finanziando la ONG Sea Watch, Kirchliches Rettungsschiff heißt "Sea-Watch 4", EKD News, 20 febbraio 2020, online (verificato il 6 febbraio 2024).

nel maggio del 2019 aveva avviato il progetto NEST (Nuovo inizio in team) che, nelle sue linee generali, si ispirava all'esperienza realizzata in Italia[26].

Dalla buona pratica alla policy

In sintesi, dal 2015 ad oggi la Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche e la Tavola valdese hanno firmato sei protocolli[27] - 3 dal Libano, 2 dalla Libia e uno dell'Afghanistan - per un totale di 6.000 beneficiari che sono andati in accoglienza in strutture della FCEI, della Diaconia valdese, della Comunità di Sant'Egidio e di enti e associazioni partner. Oltre al Libano, i paesi da cui sono stati attivati sono la Libia e il Pakistan. I beneficiari provengono soprattutto da Siria e Afghanistan; a seguire, con numero inferiori, Sudan, Palestina, Libano, Iraq e via via altri paesi del Medio oriente e dell'Africa subsahariana. L'apertura di CU da altri paesi oltre al Libano segna un passaggio politicamente rilevante perché segna l'ampliamento della prospettiva dal caso specifico dei profughi siriani a quello, assai più controverso nel dibattito pubblico, dei migranti subsahariani.

Come spesso è stato sottolineato, uno dei tratti caratteristici dei CU è che non si tratta soltanto una via legale e sicura di accesso al diritto d'asilo evitando le traversate ma che, sin dalla loro origine, delineano un percorso di integrazione che si realizza grazie al contributo di vari attori della società civile, a iniziare dalle agenzie diaconali evangeliche, locali e nazionale. I dati raccolti dagli uffici di MH su un campione di circa 1500 beneficiari offrono utili elementi di riflessione. Sono ben 16 le regioni coinvolte in progetti

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[26] NesT – Neustart im Team, MedienInfo 34/2019, 8 maggio 2019. L'articolo riporta l'intervento di presentazione pronunciato dalla Präses (presidente) della Chiesa, la teologa Annette Kurschus, e dall' Oberkirchenrat Ulrich Möller.

[27] Il primo protocollo è stato firmato i 15 dicembre del 2015, per mille beneficiari provenienti dal Libano. A seguire altri protocolli sono stati firmati nelle seguenti date: 7 novembre 2017 (1000 beneficiari dal Libano); 20 aprile 2021 (300 beneficiari dalla Libia); 30 luglio 2021 (1000 beneficiari dal Libano); 4 novembre 2021 (1200 beneficiari provenienti dall'Afghanistan); 20 dicembre 2023 (1500 beneficiari provenienti dalla Libia). A questi, a partire dal 2017, si sono aggiunti altri corridoi attivati dalla Caritas e della Comunità di Sant'Egidio. Il 3 maggio del 2019 gli stessi soggetti hanno rinnovato il Protocollo per 600 beneficiari, estendendo i punti di partenza, oltre che all'Etiopia, anche al Niger e alla Giordania.

di accoglienza, a conferma del fatto che si tratta di un un'azione diffusa e partecipata. Il dato di quasi 200 accoglienze in Sicilia e di oltre cento in Calabria smentisce l'idea di un Mezzogiorno in cui solidarietà e processi di integrazione sono meno sostenibili che altrove[28].

Come si diceva, il meccanismo dei CU non riguarda solo i meccanismi di ingresso in Italia ma delinea un preciso percorso di integrazione che mira al pieno inserimento dei migranti nella società italiana in un regime di dignità e autonomia. In questo senso è interessante analizzare come i beneficiari accolti dalle strutture evangeliche siano usciti dai progetti di accoglienza. Sempre su un campione di circa 1500 individui, emerge la seguente dinamica. La durata media dell'accoglienza è stata di un anno e, a seguire, il progetto ha erogato somme variabili a sostegno del reddito degli individui o delle famiglie che si rendevano autonome, per un periodo massimo di tre anni. La velocità dei processi di autonomizzazione risente di numerose variabili: le capacità professionali, la velocità di apprendimento della lingua, il territorio di residenza e la salute fisica e mentale. Non sono rari, infatti, i casi di beneficiari arrivati in condizioni di non immediata idoneità al lavoro.

Un dato che merita una riflessione è quello degli abbandoni volontari dei progetti di accoglienza: si tratta di beneficiari che, talora ancor prima di avere avuto il riconoscimento dello status di rifugiato, hanno scelto di muoversi in autonomia e, quasi sempre, di ricollocarsi all'estero. Ricordiamo che il visto di ingresso per motivi umanitari ha valore sono per il paese che lo concede e quindi non ammette trasferimenti in altri paesi, sia pure della UE. Caso diverso è quello dei beneficiari che sono già riconosciuti come rifugiati i quali, in linea di principio, sono liberi di spostarsi all'estero. Abbandoni improvvisi e non negoziati con l'ente di accoglienze, tuttavia, sono traumatici e rischiosi perché interrompono un percorso delineato e consolidato. Va però considerato che, con l'eccezione dei beneficiari provenienti dall'Afghanistan che evidentemente hanno solide reti di supporto, il fenomeno è in netta regressione per quelli provenienti dal Libano e dall'Africa subsahariana.

[28] I dati a seguire sono stati gentilmente forniti dall'Ufficio di Mediterranean Hope – Programma rifugiati e migranti della FCEI.

Conclusioni

In quasi dieci anni, l'esperienza dei CU si è imposta come un modello sostenibile di gestione dei flussi migratori nel rispetto dei diritti umani e nella prospettiva del sostegno all'integrazione e all'inclusione sociale dei beneficiari. Questa "buona pratica" ha attraversato fasi politiche diverse e ha fatto breccia in partiti e settori dell'opinione pubblica generalmente contrari a misure che, in qualche modo, risultano favorire l'immigrazione. Nel caso dei CU, l'autorevolezza morale degli enti proponenti, il loro diretto impegno finanziario a sostenere il progetto, l'efficacia delle misure di integrazione adottate hanno aperto una breccia e determinato un giudizio generalmente favorevole su questo modello di "buona immigrazione", per altro pienamente funzionale rispetto alle esigenze del mercato del lavoro italiano.

Se sono chiari i punti di forza di questa esperienza, lo sono anche le criticità che, a nostro avviso, sono sostanzialmente due: a quasi dieci anni dal varo di questo progetto, il persistente disimpegno delle istituzioni dello Stato a finanziare i CU, lasciando che siano esclusivamente gli Enti promotori a farsene carico. Il rischio è di "una rosa che non fa primavera" o, nel linguaggio più sofisticato della scienza politica, una best practice che non si fa policy.

La seconda criticità sta nella debolezza del sostegno europeo, per quanto più volte annunciato e ribadito. La proposta di CU "europei", più volte avanzata dalla FCEI in sede pubblica[29], ad oggi non ha trovato concreti riscontri.

Sul piano etico e teologico, attualmente la proposta e la realizzazione dei CU costituisce il caso più evidente di una "diaconia politica" delle chiese evangeliche nella quale una comunità di fede intreccia il suo impegno a favore di soggetti estremamente deboli e discriminati a un'azione di denuncia e di proposta politica per affermare il diritto umanitario e fondamentali principi di giustizia. Così si legge nella Carta della diaconia delle chiese valdesi e metodiste: "progetti temporanei di 'surroga' all'intervento, che dovrebbe essere di competenza delle varie articolazioni di

[29] Migranti: FCEI, "E' tempo di avviare i corridoi umanitari europei", *Agensir* 31 luglio 2020.

uno stato solidale, possono essere attuati anche dalla diaconia evangelica. E soprattutto bisogna accompagnare ogni azione diaconale con una parallela azione di 'diaconia politica', promuovendo e sostenendo politiche pubbliche coerenti che rispondano ai bisogni effettivi della popolazione"[30].

L'intreccio tra impegno esterno e predicazione conferma e sostanzia questa strategia. Va in questa direzione, ad esempio, la pubblicazione a cura della FCEI di un "manifesto dell'accoglienza" che richiamava i fondamenti biblici e teologici dell'impegno diaconale a sostegno dei migranti[31].

Infine, ci pare importante sottolineare che alla luce dell'art. 118 della Costituzione Stato, i CU promossi anche dalle chiese evangeliche danno concreta a quel principio per il quale "Regioni, Città metropolitane, Province e Comuni favoriscono l'autonoma iniziativa dei cittadini, singoli e associati, per lo svolgimento di attività di interesse generale, sulla base del principio di sussidiarietà". Ed ecco la sfida che sta di fronte alla diaconia delle chiese evangeliche: trovare la propria posizione di fronte al principio costituzionale di sussidiarietà che, alla luce delle scelte di questi anni, si può interpretare in termini assai diversi e persino conflittuali. In coerenza alla critica alla "surroga" delle funzioni statali nella gestione dei servizi e del welfare, più volte espressa dal mondo evangelico, non deve esprimersi come sottrazione del ruolo e delle risorse del soggetto pubblico ma come interazione sinergica e aggiuntiva a sostegno dei soggetti più deboli e, nel caso specifico, dei migranti e dei richiedenti asilo.

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[30] Carta della diaconia, Sinodo delle chiese valdesi e metodiste del 2014, online, www.chiesavaldese.org, (verificato il 7 febbraio 2024).

[31] Il testo del Manifesto per l'accoglienza al sito https://www.fcei.it/2018/08/13/manifesto-per-laccoglienza/ (verificato il 7 febbraio 2024).

Human Mobility and Migration: A Sign of Our Times

Monica Attias

Human mobility and migration are hallmarks of our era, and the signs of the times are also signs of God.

According to the 2024 International Organization for Migration (IOM) data, there are 281 million migrants worldwide, in addition to 117 million people on the move due to conflicts, violence, and disasters. The number of "forced" migrants is the highest ever recorded in modern times—not a new phenomenon, but one that defines our age more than ever before.

In 2015, Italian statisticians Allievi and Dalla Zuanna predicted that if wealthy countries were to completely seal their borders, by 2035, they would lose 4.5 million working-age inhabitants, while in poorer countries, the same age group would increase by 42 million per year—an unsustainable imbalance. Perhaps this powerful sign of the times is meant to show the world the inevitability of human fraternity at a time of renewed nationalism. Faced with the fear that migrants might distort local cultures, the same two authors provocatively speak of the need for a "fusion" between migrants and natives.

The Role of Churches in Welcoming and Integrating Migrants

It is undeniable that churches in Europe and the western world have made significant efforts in providing initial reception and social integration for migrants. Many of the initiatives undertaken by western associations to support migrants and refugees have Christian roots. The humanitarian corridors established by the Federation of Evangelical Churches, the Waldensian Table, and the Community of Sant'Egidio, as discussed later, are a clear example.

In Italy, the presence of associations, parishes, and community groups in the poor areas has helped prevent the excessive social tensions between

Italians and migrants that we have seen in France, Germany, or Belgium. Issues such as second-generation migrants and radicalization—for instance, ISIS recruitment—have been significantly less prevalent in Italy. The country has followed a family integration model, akin to an adoption process, where families employing caregivers or small rural communities have successfully integrated migrants into their social fabric.

The Impact of Free Italian Language Schools

An essential aspect of integration is language education, often provided by free Italian language schools run by religious communities. Consider the Sant'Egidio Community's school network across Europe, which has educated generations of migrants and refugees—not only teaching them the host country's language but also empowering them through communication. Founded in 1982, today these Schools of Language and Culture welcome tens of thousands of students and serve as a gateway to social and relational life in their new country.

Alongside language instruction, the Peace People movement, comprising people of all nationalities, creates a protective network for migrants. The classrooms are increasingly full, and for many migrants—especially women working as caregivers—these schools become their primary social outlet. Here, friendships are formed among people from different backgrounds—Russians and Ukrainians, Muslims and Christians—who might otherwise never have met. This makes these schools a true laboratory of peaceful coexistence.

Hospitality and the Churches' Response to the Migration Crisis

The Churches have also played a key role in hosting migrants. During the height of the migration influx to Europe following the Arab Spring and the Syrian war, Pope Francis, in September 2015, called on every European parish to welcome refugees. While the response was not as widespread as hoped, the appeal conveyed a powerful vision: those who opened their doors saw their own lives and church communities transformed. However, even among Christians, many no longer seek to understand migration issues

through a Gospel lens, and instead absorb dominant political narratives without reflection.

We also witness a rewriting of history, as seen in the United States—a nation founded by migrants—which now seeks to redefine itself by pushing people back across the Rio Grande. As noted in Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, denying history is a symptom of cultural crisis. Many in the West fail to see that today's migrants mirror the biblical figure of Lazarus—the poor man at the rich man's gate, surviving on crumbs from the table. Jesus' vision is stark: the rich man's future is one of eternal solitude. In this analogy, Europe is the rich man, building walls without realizing that its real danger lies within its own gates—a wealth of values and rights wasted because they are not shared.

Yet, churches can also become trapped by institutional constraints and national policies, unless they recognize the signs of the times as a prophetic call. Andrea Riccardi, founder of Sant'Egidio, once asked if the time had come for a pan-European Christian synod to address the great issue of refugees. Pope Francis' visit to Lesbos on 16 April 2016, alongside the Archbishop of Athens and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, was a landmark ecumenical gesture.

Humanitarian Corridors: A Model for Europe

Humanitarian corridors have united Christian communities in envisioning a more humane way to welcome refugees. In a period when Europe abandoned sea rescues and criminalized solidarity, Sant'Egidio and Protestant churches developed a resettlement model for those fleeing war and persecution.

The idea was first discussed in 2014 in Antwerp, Belgium, at a conference with sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, Sant'Egidio president Marco Impagliazzo, and Waldensian moderator Eugenio Bernardini. Later, with contributions from the Federation of Evangelical Churches (FCEI) and the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI), the initiative took shape.

Since their inception, humanitarian corridors have brought over 8,000 refugees safely to Europe—including Syrians, Afghans, and Africans—via legal visas, with all costs covered by civil society. Originally an Italian initiative, this model has been exported to France (2017), Belgium (2018), and other European countries, maintaining its ecumenical character.

The Transformative Power of Welcoming Migrants

Welcoming migrants is not just a duty but also a gift to Europe. Beyond the economic need for workers, migrants revitalize European churches. The Church Father Gregory the Great once fused Roman and barbarian cultures, allowing invaders to integrate into Roman religious and social traditions—an opportunity Europe faces again today.

In Italy, while the Catholic Church has made great strides in social integration, migrant "ecclesial citizenship" remains undeveloped. Many Catholic immigrants worship separately, rather than integrating into local parishes. Pope John Paul II, in 1987, warned that ethnic and cultural pluralism is not a transitory issue but a structural dimension of the church.

Conclusion

Pope Francis, addressing an Italian Catholic Missions conference, summarized it best:

"Migrants are a blessing for our churches in Europe. If integrated, they bring a breath of diversity that regenerates unity, enriches the church's Catholicity, and gives birth to new stories of holiness."

Migration is not merely a challenge—it is an opportunity to rediscover the Gospel message in a deeper way.

Migration and Diaspora as Forces That Challenge and Develop a Church: The Example of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church's Recent History

Roman Fihas

The Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC) Between East and West

The UGCC is an Eastern Catholic Church that lives according to the Ukrainian-Byzantine Christian theological, liturgical, canonical, and spiritual tradition, while maintaining full and visible communion with the Bishop of Rome. Rooted in the baptism of Kyivan Rus' in 988 under Prince Volodymyr and the establishment of the Kyivan Metropolia in communion with Constantinople, the UGCC historically embodies a synthesis of Eastern Christianity and Catholic ecclesial unity.

Its identity is twofold: on the one hand, it remains deeply connected to the Eastern Christian world through its liturgy, spirituality, and canonical structures; on the other, it participates in the universal communion of the Catholic Church. This dual identity places the UGCC in a unique position—geographically, theologically, and historically—between East and West.

Persecution and Witness: The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century was a time of severe trial for the UGCC. Following World War II, the Soviet authorities systematically suppressed the church. In 1945, the UGCC head Josyf Slipyj, along with all UGCC bishops, many clergy, and laypeople, was arrested. Thousands were imprisoned, exiled to Siberian labour camps, or executed for their faith, accused of being "agents of the Vatican." The UGCC was declared illegal and forced underground, becoming the largest clandestine religious organization in the world. Despite these

efforts to erase its existence, the church endured through a powerful witness of faith, martyrdom, and resistance to totalitarianism.

Migration and Diaspora as Contexts of Growth

Even prior to the Soviet persecutions, Ukrainian migration played a key role in shaping the UGCC. The first major wave of labour migration (1870–1907) saw Ukrainians settling in North and South America, Australia, and even Siberia. Later, socio-economic and political crises led to further waves of migration in the interwar period (1920s–1930s) and post-World War II era (1940–1954), with the latter driven primarily by political motives and a strong national consciousness.

The UGCC followed its people into the diaspora, though initially without a coordinated ecclesiastical structure. Parishes and communities were often integrated into Roman Catholic dioceses. A turning point came with the release of Patriarch Josyf Slipyj from Soviet imprisonment in 1963, thanks in part to the intervention of Pope John XXIII and U.S. President John F. Kennedy. At 71, Slipyj arrived in Rome and began a tireless mission to rebuild the church globally.

From his base in Rome, he spearheaded the spiritual and intellectual revival of the UGCC in the diaspora. He constructed the Sobor of Saint Sophia in Rome, established the Ukrainian Catholic University (the precursor to today's UCU), published theological and liturgical works, and visited Ukrainian communities across continents. He envisioned the UGCC not as a scattered remnant, but as a global church united in mission and identity. Though he did not live to see the fall of the Soviet Union—he died in 1986—his vision helped lay the groundwork for the revival of the church in Ukraine after 1989.

Rebirth and Renewal After 1991

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the legalization of religious life in Ukraine, the UGCC experienced rapid regeneration. However, decades of persecution had left deep scars: from over 3,000 priests before the Stalinist crackdown, only about 300 remained active by the early 1990s.

Infrastructure, seminaries, and educational institutions had to be rebuilt from scratch.

It was precisely here that the diaspora, especially those formed under the leadership of Slipyj, played a critical role. Figures such as Fr. Mykhailo Dymyd and Bishop Borys Gudziak, trained abroad and inspired by the diaspora's theological formation, returned to Ukraine to rebuild church structures and educate a new generation of clergy and lay leaders. Texts published in the diaspora—Bibles, catechisms, liturgical books—became foundational resources in the revitalization process.

The reestablishment of seminaries and the development of theological institutions such as the Ukrainian Catholic University enabled the UGCC to reengage with the global Christian community, participating in ecumenical dialogues and international theological forums. This renewal was not only institutional but deeply spiritual: the suffering church had emerged with a purified and renewed sense of mission.

Conclusion

The recent history of the UGCC demonstrates how migration and diaspora, while challenging, can profoundly enrich and transform a church. Far from merely preserving traditions, the Ukrainian diaspora became a crucible for theological renewal, pastoral innovation, and strategic leadership. The survival of the UGCC during decades of persecution, and its astonishing rebirth after 1991, would not have been possible without the commitment and vision of its dispersed members.

Ecumenical Approaches in the Changing Landscape of People on the Move

Christine Lienemann-Perrin

Preliminary Remarks

The phrase "people on the move" conjures various associations, ranging from Willie Nelson's iconic *On the Road Again*, to the nomadic lifestyles of itinerant communities, to harrowing experiences of forced displacement due to persecution, resettlement, hunger, or environmental disaster. The following discussion centres on a specific segment of this broad spectrum: those who, facing perilous conditions at home, choose to emigrate from Africa or the Middle East to Europe in search of a better life. I begin by examining the stages of the journey across the Mediterranean Sea. I then explore accounts of flight and foreignness in the New Testament—particularly in the First Epistle of Peter. In the third section, I turn to humanitarian responses to refugees in Europe, acknowledging the importance of the commitments made to date, while also raising critical questions. These reflections are framed within a dialogue with the First Epistle of Peter, offering a foundation for ecumenical approaches in the ever-changing landscape of "people on the move." Finally, I consider the concept of "people on the move" as a hallmark of the church (*nota ecclesiae*).

1. From Africa Across the Mediterranean Sea: A Changing Landscape

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 117 million people were forced to leave their homes worldwide in 2023, a figure that includes 37.6 million registered refugees, 6.9 million asylum seekers, and 68.3 million internally displaced persons. Between January and September 2023, 184'614 irregular crossings of the Mediterranean took place—almost twice as many as in the previous year. In the same period, 2'418 drownings or missing

persons were reported along the three primary sea routes, an increase of approximately one-third compared to the total recorded in the previous year.

With the aim of shedding light on the plight of refugees, Swiss director Markus Imhoof joined the rescue ship *Mare Nostrum* ("Our Sea") to produce the documentary *Eldorado* (*Golden Land*, 2018). The film brings the experiences of refugees into focus as they journey through Italy to Switzerland, while also exposing the complex legal, political, and economic dimensions of migration—challenges that are unparalleled in recent history. Indeed, this landscape has evolved significantly in recent years and is still shifting. Using this documentary as a point of departure, I would like to highlight some of the situations that refugees face on their journey from the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

The film vividly captures the initial encounters between refugees and Europeans aboard the rescue ship *Mare Nostrum*. These interactions are swift, professional, and largely silent. From early morning until late at night, the rescue team works tirelessly, pushing themselves to their limits. The refugees are fingerprinted, creating a traceable record that will be repeatedly checked and cross-referenced after disembarkation. All identification data are forwarded to Eurodac, the central database for comparing asylum seekers' fingerprints, accessible to all EU countries and Switzerland for the purpose of verifying the identities of new arrivals.

Upon arriving in Italy, the rescued are guided to a "red carpet" to disinfect their shoes. Unbeknownst to many, this first step onto Italian soil carries far-reaching legal consequences. In principle, asylum seekers are distributed among the countries of the EU. In practice, however, the first EU country that asylum seekers enter, for example Italy, is assumed responsible for processing the asylum application. Should asylum be granted in Italy, it will most of the time also become their designated country of residence. The problem is that principle and facts do not always correspond. If these people leave Italy on their own initiative to travel to Switzerland, France, Austria or Germany, they risk being returned to Italy at the first border control.

The refugees are subsequently taken to a collective centre—a fenced-in camp that will serve as their temporary home while they await a decision on their

asylum application. This process can take weeks, months, or even years. There, they undergo another round of questioning—this time in much greater detail—for the purpose of identifying them more precisely. Withholding information during this interrogation can negatively impact the outcome of their application. For the refugees, the situation is fraught with risk: they often lack the knowledge required to understand the legal implications of their statements and are unaware of the specific criteria that could lead to a rejection of their claim. Few people comprehend the precise legal meaning of the terms "refugee" and "asylum." Most simply express that they are seeking a better life—an imagined "Eldorado" or the hope of reuniting with relatives in Europe. In the eyes of many officials, however, such statements are evidence of their "illegal migrant" status and significantly reduce their chances of securing asylum. In the end, the specific desires expressed by asylum seekers hold little sway; what ultimately matters are the stipulations enshrined in EU agreements and the asylum laws of individual European countries.

Those who receive a negative decision on their asylum application often disappear and seek illegal work in Italy. One of the characters in the documentary, Imhoof, visits a tomato plantation controlled by the Mafia, where refugees toil under exploitative conditions. Housed in makeshift sheds without sanitation, they work gruelling hours under the scorching sun for a daily wage of €30, half of which is taken by their supervisors. The little that remains is used to support their families in Africa, who must repay debts incurred to send them to Europe. The film starkly illustrates the exploitation structures of the globalized economy. In a bitter irony, cheap canned tomatoes produced under these conditions are exported from Italy to Africa, where they are bought by locals with the money sent back by refugees: a cycle that ultimately undermines African agriculture. The refugees regularly communicate with their families in Africa via mobile phones. Out of shame, however, they conceal the harshness of their living conditions, perpetuating the illusion of Europe as a promised Eldorado and inspiring more young people to undertake the perilous journey.

After this overview of the challenges surrounding the European asylum system I now explore and compare a set of biblical narratives that trace

similar experiences of alienation and strangeness as a result of various forms of mobility and migration.

2. Movement and Mobility in the New Testament: 1 Peter

Various passages in both the Old and the New Testament bear witness to the experiences of refugees and migrants. Using the theme of mobility as a focal point, the author of the First Epistle of Peter addresses his letter to congregations whose members' thoughts and actions have been shaped by experiences of mobility. Rather than foregrounding the concepts of flight, refugees, or migration, however, the letter centres on the concepts of strangeness and otherness. Peter therefore addresses refugees who have settled "in the dispersion" but have never fully integrated into the local society. Describing conditions at the end of the first century, Peter tells of conflicts between members of Christian congregations and Gentiles—whether in their neighbourhoods, workplaces, or marriages. These conflicts were especially acute for slaves under Gentile rule and the wives of Gentile husbands. Because the Christian faith compelled them to abstain from various religious, familial, and social obligations, they were often brought before the court and made to defend themselves against false accusations and slander. In addition, Christian communities disrupted the fabric of Gentile society by creating their own social systems and fostering a network of loyalty that spanned the *oikoumene* (the known world). The ethical distinctiveness of this emerging faith was perceived by the broader society as a brand of misanthropy. External hostility transformed these congregations into strangers within their own homes, a condition that was further reinforced by their responses to such antagonism. Strangeness emerges as a pervasive issue in Peter's epistle, serving as a backdrop against which the longing for a homeland (*politeuma*) and the desire for social acceptance become poignantly visible. (In the German-speaking Bibles *Heimat* is the common term used to translate *politeuma*).

Peter is the only New Testament author to address Christians as "strangers" (*paroikous kai parepidemous*). Drawing boldly on the ancient tradition of Israel's experience of estrangement, Peter reinterprets the negative connotations of foreignness and non-identity as a defining feature of Christian identity. In the ancient Greek-speaking world, the terms *paroikos*

and *parepidemos* would have conveyed a sense of homelessness and disadvantage. A *parepidemos* was a foreigner living in a host country without a permanent right of residence, uncertain of how long he would be tolerated. A *paroikos* was a permanent resident in a foreign land, one who remained in a perpetual state of legal, political, social, and religious subordination. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, the term *paroikia* is often used to signify exile, banishment, and foreignness. Today, *parepidemos* most closely corresponds to the terms *refugee* and *asylum seeker*, conveying the notion of one at constant risk of deportation.

Peter's message to these congregations is as follows: You are exiles because of your election; being a stranger is your calling. He frames their experience of strangeness within the context of God's election and belonging to the people of God (1 Pet. 1:1f; 2:10). Note that being a stranger is not framed as opposition to society but rather as alignment with God and belonging to his people. A decisive change of perspective takes place here: Peter seeks to free the churches from their fixation on their opponents by orienting them in a new direction. If congregations can embrace this perspective, their relationship with the world will also shift: they will come to see their distance from society as rooted in their relationship with God and will learn to accept their strangeness, enabling them to deal freely with those who are hostile towards them. The church communities will become messengers of the living hope (1 Pet. 1:3-13), even for those who distrust, slander, and harm them. Here, by explicitly addressing Christians as exiles, Peter imparts an ecclesiological dimension to exile.

The antithesis of the foreignness characteristic of Christianity on earth has often been interpreted through the lens of an otherworldly realm, yet to the careful reader of Peter's epistle the congregations are not described as inhabiting an otherworldly place; rather, the epistle directs them to their trials and tribulations in this world. Explicitly rejecting the impulse to escape the challenges of earthly life, Peter critiques three forms of escapism in particular: an escape inwards, an escape outwards, and an escape forward.

An Escape Inwards

The consolation of the afterlife (*Jenseitsvertröstung*) emerged as a means of coping with crises as early as the time of ancient Christianity. By declaring earthly life non-essential and irrelevant, one could avoid disappointment and failure. The non-reality of all that is earthly could be derived from one's own alienation. Peter writes that being a stranger must prove itself precisely in the adversities of earthly life: "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles (*paroikous and parepidemous*)…" (1 Pet. 2:11). This self-designation as exiles enabled Christians to establish an open relationship with communities in the "world" (1 Pet. 5).

An Escape Outwards

Another form of escape takes the form of an exodus from society—a withdrawal from a world that is perceived as unjust and impure—and the creation of a just counter-society in an untouched no-man's-land. In early Judaism, the Essenes sought this solution when they withdrew to a desert area near the Dead Sea in order to constitute themselves as the Qumran community. They were eager to lead the life of the true people of God, in unconditional loyalty to the Torah. The model of the Qumran community was based on a self-chosen alien existence, one that marked a sharp break from both mainstream Judaism and the Gentiles (*goyim*, *ethne*). Some local church groups turned themselves into a counter-society of sorts, regarding all outsiders as enemies. Peter rejects this option as well; instead, he meets those who are "outside" with an astonishing openness, as exemplified in the words: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you … But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings … If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory … is resting on you" (1 Pet. 4:12-14). Christians are called to account for the hope within them with gentleness and reverence, as emphasized in 1 Peter 3:16. The model here is one of a gentle mission—perhaps even one carried out without words (1 Pet. 3:1)—rather than a verbal attack directed at adversaries. The advice is: act below the radar of oppressive powers.

An Escape Forward

By integrating themselves into society, the Christian congregations would be able to free themselves from the pressures that weighed on them. However, the paraenetic (exhortative) sections of the epistle reveal that Peter distinguishes carefully between necessary openness and contestable adaptation. This distinction must be maintained, even if it perplexes outsiders. "You have already spent enough time in doing what the Gentiles like to do … They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme" (1 Pet. 4:3f).

This concludes my main discussion of the First Epistle of Peter. I will return to it when exploring the relevance of Peter's exhortations for contemporary society in an era of accelerated mobility and migration.

3. Humanitarian Action for (and with) People on the Move

In this section, I am primarily concerned with our contemporary context, in which civil society— and church-based actors in particular—have committed to supporting refugees. In what follows, I will take my own observations and experiences in Switzerland as a starting point. Joint action for and with refugees is and remains asymmetrical in many respects: Switzerland's Foreign Nationals and Integration Act (*Ausländer- und Integrationsgesetz*) reinforces the divide between those with and without Swiss citizenship, with and without an earned income, with and without knowledge of national languages and cultures, and with and without freedom of establishment and freedom of movement. Article 116 of this act makes anyone who promotes the unlawful entry and exit of foreign nationals and their unlawful stay in Switzerland, liable to prosecution. This is punishable by a fine or imprisonment of up to one year.

Humanitarian commitment to refugees is a deeply polarizing issue dividing civil society and religious groups. Uncertainty about what counts as right and wrong, good and bad, in the face of refugee mobility has sparked controversial debates. Five years ago, for instance, German ship captain Carola Rackete was praised for her refugee rescue operation in the Mediterranean Sea, while Matteo Salvini, then the Italian Minister of

the Interior, denounced her as “public enemy number one.” Viewed in isolation, humanitarian actions are often regarded as ethically responsible and morally commendable. Under certain circumstances, however, they may appear ambivalent, if not irresponsible. Crucially, the broader effects of humanitarian actions on other stakeholders in the refugee and migration field are often overlooked; those who rescue refugees at sea and bring them ashore typically do not consider who will bear responsibility for the rescued or shoulder the financial and logistical follow-up costs for years to come. They rarely question whether the host society will respond to the influx of refugees with rejection and polemics, nor do they consider the signals such rescue operations may send to smuggling networks or others in Africa contemplating the perilous journey to Europe.

Humanitarian commitment is ruthlessly exploited by traffickers. When private rescue ships began to sail to the border of Libyan waters, traffickers immediately switched to using unseaworthy inflatable rubber dinghies without navigation equipment—vessels that could only reach the edge of international waters. In some cases, refugees themselves are reported to have provoked rescue operations by deliberately jumping into the sea. This distorts the longstanding humanitarian tradition of sea rescue. In short, the unintended consequences of humanitarian actions—undertaken, presumably, with the best of intentions—necessitate a critical examination of such actions from both an ethical and a legal perspective.

A few years ago, the American journalist Ben Traub documented the route taken by young women and girls from Benin City in Nigeria to Italy. He exposed how internationally organized trafficking networks exploit young women seeking decent work in Europe to support their families. In 2016, of 11,000 girls and young women rescued in the Mediterranean Sea, an estimated 8,800 were subjected to sexual exploitation while crossing the Sahara and Libya. Upon reaching Italy, they fell directly into the hands of traffickers, who distributed and sold them to pimps (so-called “Madams”) across Europe. This effectively excluded them from the asylum system, rendering them “people in hiding.”

The member states of the European Union have struggled to reach consensus on common rules for the admission of refugees. Rather than coordinated

measures, crises have been responded to with ad hoc decisions. Meanwhile, many African states have shown little interest in preventing emigration, whether to other African countries or to Europe. On the contrary, they often view emigration as beneficial, as it alleviates the pressures of a rapidly growing youth population and staggering unemployment rates. In recent years, remittances from migrants to their families back home have exceeded the total amount of development aid allocated to these countries. According to World Bank data, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa sent a total of US-$38 billion in remittances to their home countries in 2017, far surpassing the US-$25 billion allocated to the region as development aid during the same period.

In Switzerland, the legal framework for asylum seekers is extremely complex and has prompted heated public debate. Human rights organizations and church groups have repeatedly been the targets of verbal attacks—incidents that have tempted some to retreat from their commitments rather than standing firm. This mirrors behaviours addressed by Peter in his epistle: the temptation to withdraw from social and political responsibilities (an escape inwards); the temptation to retreat from the harsh realities of a xenophobic society into protected spaces where humanitarian actions of a counter-society go unchallenged (an escape outwards); and the temptation to expect refugees to simply accept the current asylum laws and abandon all hope of a better life (an escape forward).

The exhortations in the First Epistle of Peter exhibit a paradoxical structure, balancing an ethos of consensus with an ethos of distinctiveness, between which tension is maintained. Basic consensus differs from conformity; it is an agreement in principle that can unite people even when they hold opposing viewpoints on specific issues. In the spirit of this ethos of consent, Peter urges the churches to do what is perceived as right and good (1 Pet. 1:15; 18; 2:12; 3:1; 2:16). Believers are called on, not to reject societal norms outright but to align with those aspects of social consensus that are consistent with their faith. Thus, church-based humanitarian activists need not reinvent moral behaviour from scratch, nor must they fundamentally renounce cooperation with those who hold different worldviews. In early Christianity, some church members appear to have misinterpreted their challenges, using the “offense of the cross” (1 Cor. 1:23) as a pretext to explain why they were criticized by those of other faiths. They confused their own misconduct with

the “stumbling stone” (1 Pet. 2:8), believing it absolved them from justified criticism (1 Pet. 4:15f). Peter’s maxim is clear: pursue as little conflict as necessary, and as much consensus as possible.

What I mean by an ethos of distinctiveness is made clear when Peter writes: “What glory is it if you persevere and suffer punishment for wrongdoing? But if you persevere and endure suffering for good deeds, this is grace from God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you a legacy so that you may follow in his footsteps” (1 Pet. 2:20f). Here we encounter election, which is part of being a stranger and leads to difference. Suffering for the sake of righteousness distinguishes believers from the Gentiles (*ethne*) without separating them from the latter, for suffering injustice is not to be confused with condoning injustice. On the contrary: suffering injustice is a silent cry of protest against injustice and the hope for a right that applies to all.

By maintaining the tension between the ethos of consensus and the ethos of distinctiveness, Peter protects the witness of Christian faith from three dangers: resignation due to self-pity, a fixation on opponents that leads humanitarian commitment to a dead end, and the expectation that refugees will simply accept the asylum and migration policies as it stands and thereby abandon all hope for change.

4. God’s People on the Move

4.1 From Non-identity to Identity

“You are those who once were not a people, but now are the people of God” (1 Pet. 2:10a). In his address, Peter reminds the congregations of God’s election, through which those without identity are given a new identity as a community of faith. As such, they are called to align their thoughts, behaviour, and actions accordingly, as Peter writes in the paraenetic section of his letter. Through their transformation, hope is inscribed in them as people of faith (1 Pet. 3:15).

In other New Testament letters, this hope is grounded in the belief that Christians hold their “citizenship in heaven,” a status that comes with distinct

rights and duties. In Paul's Letter to the Philippians (3:19b-20), for instance, we read: "We … are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come, the Lord Jesus Christ." The legal term *politeuma* refers to the rights and duties associated with citizenship in the polis, granted under specific conditions to those who reside there as citizens. This privilege carries the obligation to behave as a citizen in accordance with the law—a standard that must nonetheless constantly be examined and, if necessary, corrected. This is what is meant by accountability (*apologia*): "Always be ready to give an answer if anyone asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15b). Heavenly citizenship must demonstrate its worth here on earth, as earthly citizenship is a reflection of heavenly citizenship. These two forms of citizenship are interconnected, rendering Christians "dual citizens." They are called to align their lived earthly citizenship with their heavenly one, particularly when faced with unjust accusations and slander.

What are the implications of this dual citizenship in the context of the devastating consequences of flight and migration? At present, these consequences are one of the greatest challenges facing states, societies, and churches in Europe. The designation of Christians as strangers in the diaspora (*paroikous* and *parepidemous*, 1 Pet. 2:11) was originally addressed to churches in Asia Minor in the first century. However, it also serves as a timely framework for reflection on flight and migration affecting Europe today. Indeed, this perspective invites a nuanced understanding of responsibility toward different segments of the population: on the one hand, those with a painful history of flight; on the other, those who, despite not sharing this experience, align themselves with refugees through practical solidarity. Such solidarity can manifest itself in various ways, including providing refugees with access to legal aid, helping them to find decent accommodation, supporting refugees facing forced repatriation, and assisting them in establishing sustainable livelihoods in their countries of origin. Finally, citizens of democratic European states can leverage their political participation to advocate for policies that support refugees and uphold their rights.

4.2 Being on the Move and Living in Dispersion

The theme of the symposium on accelerated mobility has been chosen as a timely diagnosis of contemporary challenges. Churches and local

congregations are increasingly unsettled by the effects of accelerated mobility, particularly as it disrupts established modes of communication and undermines their coherence as communities of faith. This issue was highlighted by the Synod of Catholic Bishops during its XVI. Ordinary General Assembly in Rome in October 2024. The document *Instrumentarium Laboris,* a working tool for the members of the Second Session of the General Assembly, identifies a growing heterogeneity; local churches are becoming increasingly fragmented as new members with different cultural backgrounds and limited denominational knowledge join their ranks. Nevertheless, the *Instrumentarium Laboris* also recognizes the growing interconnection brought about by accelerated mobility as an opportunity to develop innovative, creative approaches to space and togetherness across monocultural faith communities. Through this process, new forms of ecumenism may emerge.

In this context, it is illuminating to consider how the Gospels and epistles of the New Testament depict Jesus, his disciples, and the early Christians following the resurrection. The theme of being on the move emerges as an implicit *Leitmotif* in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Taking Matthew as an example, we observe Jesus constantly travelling across the Holy Land. He leads Peter, James, and John to a high mountain—traditionally identified as Mount Tabor—where the disciples witness his transfiguration (Mt. 17: 1-18). Although they wish to remain there, Jesus guides them back from the mountain into the lowlands of earthly life, where he heals an epileptic boy and continues travelling through the region, ministering to and healing the sick until his final journey to Jerusalem (Mt. 21: 1-11). After Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, the disciples return to Galilee, where they encounter the risen Christ. There, they receive his missionary commission to go to all nations, accompanied by his promise to remain with them always, until the end of the world (Mt. 27 and 28).

According to the Gospel of Luke, the story of mobility continues after the resurrection (Lk. 24: 13-33). Two disciples, distressed by what they experienced in Jerusalem, set out for Emmaus. On the road, they are joined by a stranger, to whom they recount what they witnessed in Jerusalem. During the meal in Emmaus, "their eyes are opened," and they recognize the stranger as the resurrected Jesus. They then immediately leave for

Jerusalem, where fellowship with other disciples is formed through the Spirit of God, marking the birth of the church.

During this accelerated journey, the disciples experience highs and lows—moments of unbridled joy alongside deep despair, instances of faith suddenly interrupted by relapses into denial (as exemplified by the disciple Peter). Time and again, just as they begin to settle in one place, Jesus calls them to set out anew. They are never meant to grow comfortable or to fall into established habits. This perpetual state of movement is no coincidence; it embodies what is often referred to as "costly discipleship" (*Nachfolge*). The church, at its core, is a community of followers on the move.

4.3 Called to Live as Strangers in a City with Open Borders

In closing, I would like to draw a connection between 1 Peter and the book of Zechariah in the Old Testament. Zechariah recounts the return of the people of Israel from Babylonian exile to Jerusalem. On the way, the prophet dreams of Jerusalem as an open city protected by God's presence. According to God's plan, the city is to be expanded and redesigned to accommodate the returnees and the many people from other nations who have joined them as Zecharaiah (8:23) reports: "This is what the Lord of armies has said: In those days, ten men from all the languages of the nations will put out their hands and take a grip of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for it has come to our ears that God is with you'." Land surveyors, architects, and master builders make preparations to allow for harmonious co-existence within the city. Zechariah envisions a model drawn from eternity yet intricately connected to the earthly realm. From the interaction of these two realities, something new will emerge: a community that, despite its spatial and temporal limitations, reflects the boundless openness of the heavenly Jerusalem. In his vision, Zechariah imagines a world where everyone flourishes—a society that cherishes children, honours the elderly, welcomes foreigners, promotes gender equality, and extends generosity to those of other faiths. It is my hope that today's churches can draw inspiration from this vision, orienting themselves toward its ideals in their lives together with strangers and as strangers.

Mobility of God's People through Theological Lenses: Towards Theologies of Mobility

Eric Noffke

The title of the discussion is "Mobility of God's People through Theological Lenses." But I would also like to reverse the title: "Theological thinking through the lenses of the mobility of God's people." There is a mutual connection between theology and mobility of God's people. The purpose of this talk is to explain why this approach convinces me more and more.

Migration and Theology

Human society moves rapidly and millions and millions of people traverse the globe migrating from one place to another. But the idea of human mobility is something that concerns a minority of people, namely those who have to flee from terrible situations or who travel in search of fortune. Most human beings in this world have in some way moved from their place of origin to another. I myself, in my history, am the result of the migration of many people: my ancestors come from Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, and from many different places in Italy. I was born in Pisa, grew up in Pramollo, an alpine village in Piedmont, and have lived in Rome for 20 years, passing through more or less long stays in Livorno, Basel, and Princeton... Mobility is a key concept for understanding the human experience on this planet.

Yet migration has always basically been perceived as a serious problem rather than a fact and an opportunity. It should also be noted that although the vast majority of migrants move within the global South,[1] today in the

[1] According to European Parliament, "Asylum and Migration in the EU: Facts and Figures," June 30, 2017, 71 percent of the refugees globally find refuge in low- and medium-income countries (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/it/article/20170629STO78630/statistiche-su-asilo-e-immigrazione#i-rifugiati-nel-mondo-10).

West the problem is strongly felt and instrumentalized by a good part of the ruling class, in order to foster war among the poor. As a result, the problems already inherent in migration itself are knowingly amplified by certain politics, in order to create fear and a sense of precariousness, through which to blackmail the population. There are too many interests at play in the status quo to think that those in power will resolve to solve the problems inherent in migration.

Thus, theology has a social duty to confront the issue of migration. This, will prove to be a fruitful gesture, enabling theology to return to its original biblical nature and rediscover itself anew.

The Duty of Hospitality and Welcome

If we turn to the Bible, numerous episodes and passages related to the experience of migration and estrangement immediately leap to mind. Israel's history is indelibly marked by numerous voluntary and forced relocations and the experience of diaspora, starting from the time of Abraham, progenitor of God's people. We are familiar with his story and that of the people born of him: the way the patriarchs moved to Egypt, the events related to the call of Moses and the Exodus, the conquest of the Promised Land, and then the exile of the northern tribes, the destruction of Jerusalem, the Babylonian captivity and the return... The whole history of Israel was made up of people in constant movement. The idea is so ingrained in Jewish tradition that it becomes part of the confession of faith, at least according to Deuteronomy, in a powerful passage where history really becomes *magistra vitae.* The offerer who brings to the temple the first fruits of the land given to him by God is asked to utter this formula:

> "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD,

> have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house (Deut. 26: 5-11).[2]

This teaching through history emphasizes the offerer's identity as part of a migrant people, accompanied by God in his/her many displacements, while also declaring that the fruit of God's blessing will be shared with the stranger who now dwells in the land where he/she has been placed by the LORD. Thus, from the story of migration should immediately flow a sense of solidarity with the resident stranger, he/she being also the subject of a homeland transfer like the offerer's ancestors.

In the New Testament Jesus himself is depicted as a migrant, a traveller, uprooted and homeless.... Think of the gospels: Mark portrays him as an itinerant prophet, a characteristic that Luke accentuates by giving ample space to the narrative element of the journey to Jerusalem, which occupies chapters 9:51 to 19:27. Just as Jesus travelled, leaving everything behind to follow his calling, so his disciples are invited to do the same, and in this context arise the numerous sayings (*logia*) on mission, collected mainly in the sending discourse of Luke 10:1-12 (parallel in Mt. 9:37-38 and 10:9-16). Those who choose to follow Jesus leave behind all they have, opting for a life of uncertainty and entrusted to the hands of those who will generously welcome them. Although a free choice is given here, the disciple's life recalls that of the refugee who finds himself without anything and faces his/her destitution day after day. The evangelist Matthew sees Jesus as a refugee child, seeking a shelter in Egypt, like the people of Israel in his time, only to return to his land, which, however, will eventually reject him.

In John's Gospel, this form of existential nomadism is projected on a cosmic level: God's Logos has come to dwell among us; indeed, remaining faithful to the original Greek text, in John 1:14 it is said that the Logos has "pitched his tent" among us. The image is precisely that of the encampment, a gypsy settling at the edge of a city, with the consciousness of a precarious life. The Logos-gypsy has come among us and set up his tent in this world, but

[2] All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version.

conscious that it will be a precarious sojourn including the rejection by his own that he will have to suffer.

If nomadism is a feature of Jesus' life, the same is true of his disciples, who travel with him and, after his death and resurrection, are mostly scattered to the four corners of the ancient world. Early Christianity itself was mainly tied to people moving throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, as in their own way the apocryphal stories of the apostles also show.

Contemporary migration, then, puts the church before its own history, its own identity, and asks it to enter into a constructive relationship with the migrant, to recognize him as a brother or a sister, and to listen to his/her cry for help. Whatever one thinks about one's own country's immigration policies, the Christian has first and foremost the specific duty to welcome the neighbour in the name of our common identity as children of God. It is clear that migration poses problems for receiving societies, for a thousand concrete reasons that challenge local administrations and politics. Within this framework, Christian churches are only one of many actors involved in a broad debate. Whatever choices are supported, however, one point must remain firm, namely, the recognition of the full humanity of the migrant. Attitudes of certain politicians, such as the case of the minister in Italy who wrote of a migrant, killed by the policeman he attacked, that he would not be missed, are unacceptable. A sentence like this, especially when it is said by a high representative of the state, tells us that a boundary has been crossed towards the dehumanization the immigrant, whose death becomes almost a cause of relief. In the face of the de-humanization of the other, churches must be firm in their condemnation.

In this debate, our first role must therefore be that which Jesus took on. He welcomed all the outcasts he met on his path and spoke words of salvation to them: he healed the sick and freed them from the influence of demons. His action is described as that of one who cares for the last, for people who dwell in the margins of society. Note that his intervention is generally referred to by the verb *therapeuo*, meaning "to care." In the gospels Jesus is first and foremost *diakonos*, the one who takes care of someone, the one who serves, and his service is intended for the least, to the point that in the famous

scene of the Last Judgement precisely the service to the least becomes the criterion of salvation or damnation:

> 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 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 at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are 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 something to 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.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Matthew 25:31-46).

Welcoming Jesus' disciples means to welcome Jesus: that is the slogan of the Kingdom!

To his communities, Paul, referred to as "the traveling apostle" in an interesting essay,[3] makes a compelling appeal to welcome one another among people of different backgrounds, following the example of Christ, who also here is represented like a servant (once again, *diakonos*!):

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[3] Thimothy Luckritz Marquis, *Transient Apostle. Paul, Travel and the Rhetoric of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, 6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name". (Rom. 15:5-9)

When Paul says, do not conform to this world, he is saying that we must always be careful that if we are too entrenched in a tradition, in a history, in an identity that is not directly related to the one we receive in Jesus Christ, then we are betraying our calling. An example of this non-conformism can be seen in Paul's attitude toward the "forced migrants" par excellence, that is, slaves, toward whom he has words of full acceptance within the *ekklesia* (Gal. 3:28), because in Christ the differences between human beings fall away. In the name, then, of our common identity as children of God, believers are called to welcome first and foremost those who are weak and marginalized, and the resident alien as part of this group.

As Reformed people, we have a tradition of theological reflection on the role of the Christian in society, and our faith cannot be disconnected from our context. It is also true that our *polis* today has taken on a more complex and multifaceted character, which, as we say now, is more "fluid" and must find ways to constructively welcome into local history and culture the new identities that seek refuge and future within our borders. Can we hope that this is a possible future, rather than a difficult and unpleasant present? Given the biblical premises I have summarily recalled, how can we, Reformed churches, make our contribution? Our tradition is strongly tied to specific territories and distinct social classes. Our Scriptures express a history of a relationship between God and a people in perpetual movement. Within this evident tension between tradition and Scriptures how do we make our contribution?

The Battle for Truth

As the passage from Matthew 25:31-46 implies, in the Bible a word of welcome is addressed primarily to the marginalized and to the poor —a category to which migrants as a rule belong to even today. For this reason, too, the preaching of welcome has a political as well as a social value: affirming that "blessed are the poor" indicates a precise stand (Lk. 6:20-26) because it implies a condemnation of wealth, declared illegitimate by practically the entire biblical tradition, especially when it arises from exploitation, creating poverty and marginalization. Reflection on communion in the New Testament, especially in the preaching of Jesus, is not divorced from an indictment of the powers that create poverty and injustice, and marginalization. Rightly, migration theology is linked to liberation (in all its forms) and postcolonial theologies.

In this sense, the World Communion of Reformed Churches had clearly expressed its position on this issue with the Accra Confession (2004), one of the most important statements by Reformed churches.[4] In our case, it is important because it clearly blames neoliberal ideology for the human and environmental exploitation that also causes migration and poverty in this world. Paragraph 26 states, "We believe that God calls us to stand up for those who are victims of injustice": if the church is to be open to the others and especially concerned about the poor, about the least of the earth, then it has a duty to speak out loud the truth and the names of those who are the cause of this unjust situation.

Of course, we can only speak out after studying very carefully what is happening, but I think that is also a privilege we have or should have, because as churches we have national and international governing bodies that help us go beyond local issues and perspectives, having independent access to the facts, and this makes churches even more inexcusable if they do not fulfil their duty to provide counter-information. The question of truth today for denominational and ecumenical institutions must be central, as it is a problem for everyone today because of the very bad information we receive, filtered by those in control of power and too often instrumentalized

[4] Full text in: https://wcrc.eu/about/accra-confession/

for their purposes. When we fail to perform this struggle for the truth, we have failed. For instance, I think we have failed in Ukraine, to cite only the most recent and most serious example. I identify our failure in the fact that we were not capable (or did not want?) of seeing what has been going on for years, how the war was being prepared. As European Christians we had the tools to have access to independent channels of information, but we did not use them. And so members of our churches fell prey to war propaganda and we failed to do anything to prevent the war, or at least to denounce its imminent arrival. Examples like this could be multiplied: for example, in Europe the voice of international ecumenical bodies against European rearmament does not reach the communities: why? Do we not have alternative information to offer? The world needs truth and the churches must offer it.

Christian Identity as a Moving Identity

If mobility, read in the light of the Bible, obliges the churches to solidarity, to denounce the destructive forces that create precariousness and poverty, often becoming themselves the cause of migration, and to the constant search for the truth behind human actions, it also calls theology to return to its origins and to rethink itself in the light of the very concept of mobility with all that it brings. Returning to the nomadic origins of God's people, of Jesus, of the earliest forms of discipleship compels theologians not to be lulled into the comfort of sedentariness. Over time the stabilization of Christianity has led it to become integrated into society, rooted in theological faculties and parish preaching. All this, in the Reformed tradition, is certainly not viewed negatively, but the risk of the transformation of theology into what South Africa's Kairos document[5] calls "Church theology" that is not opposed to the status quo, is undeniable. In the case of the war in Ukraine, just cited, this is exactly what happened.

Reading theology in light of the Logos-gypsy and migrant church, on the other hand, would help us preserve the "prophetic" calling that lies at the

[5] The Kairos Theologians, *The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa*, rev. 2nd ed. (Braamfontein: Skotaville Publishers, 2017).

heart of evangelical preaching, again to use the categories of the Kairos South Africa document. It is the very understanding of the believer's identity that must be read in light of migration, domestic instability, and the sense of estrangement from the *kosmos*.

Living here and now, and gradually losing the eschatological tension that pervades the New Testament, the church has learned, especially since the Constantinian turn and throughout the Middle Ages, to find its place in the world, thus responding to a calling, certainly, but not always sufficiently aware of the risks of conformity. Already Paul was warning Roman Christians "Do not conform to this world" (Rom. 12:2). The same risk applies to Protestant theology, born within the framework of a stable church, tied to its social context in a double knot, usually supported (and controlled) by the political authorities of the time. Coming from this history, the instances raised by migration are understandable to us only up to a certain point, I would say too often only up to the first point we have highlighted earlier (solidarity), and this makes it necessary to rethink deeply our theology in order to return to the migratory spirit of the Bible. It becomes necessary to ask ourselves what it means to read the fundamental concepts of Protestant theology in the light of the reality of migration.

The First Letter of Peter addresses its addressees thus, "Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect who live as strangers scattered in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia..." (1 Pet. 1:1). The terms used here give a sense of strong territorial dispersion. Later he identifies them as "strangers and pilgrims" (1 Pet. 2:11), deepening the sense of foreignness and precariousness in relation to their surroundings. Since this letter is generally dated toward the end of the first century, when the strong eschatological tension of the origins was fading, we must infer from it the persistence of the understanding of the Christian gospel as a migratory phenomenon, as it had manifested itself since the preaching of Jesus and his disciples, opening the doors of the kingdom to people of all classes and nations. Peter engages his readers, people in exile, on the move, displaced, while living in the *kosmos*.

New Testament theology, then, was born and remains strongly oriented to the end time, to the prospect of the coming kingdom, but redefining our identity already in the present. The apostle Paul declares in Philippians

that our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and The Letter to the Ephesians deepens the argument thus:

> But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2: 4-7).
>
> [..] So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Phil. 2:11-13).

Those who were far away and strangers have been gathered into his people, broadening the horizons of ancient Israel and thus creating a new citizenship, the fruit of migration from idolatry, because Israel, in which all peoples now find their citizenship, is equated with the kingdom and is no longer an earthly political reality: it is "in Christ" that we find our common identity, and certainly not in the values of the idolatrous world we have abandoned.

We encounter the same thought in the Letter to the Hebrews, where it is stated, within the long list of people throughout Israel's history who were true examples of faith, that:

> All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them. By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom he had been told, "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you" (Heb. 11: 13-18)

The true homeland is the heavenly one, and not this earthly one. These words recall another decidedly well-known passage, John 17, where Jesus states that believers are *in* the world but not *of the* world. This, however, does not lead to forms of asceticism: the world remains the place where one works and strives for the good of one's neighbour and not only for his/her evangelization. We, then, belong to the kingdom of God already today, and in light of this we must understand the meaning of our being in the place where we live and whose life and destiny we share, for whose sake we are called to act. In a word, we can say that the encounter with the migrant reminds the settled church, integrated into the fabric of its society, often also complicit with the status quo, what its true identity is, the one indelibly marked by migration. Theology, then, cannot but be a migrant, intercultural, postcolonial theology.

Just as migration tends to achieve a stability and negotiate a space in the host country, similarly, theology tends to find its own comfort zone. The risk, however, is that while migration can interact with its new home to form a new culture, theology must still respond to the alternative Jesus poses in John 17: one must be in the world without being from the world. And while the fourth gospel accentuates a dualistic worldview, it is still true that the reality of the gospel cannot compromise with this idolatrous world and its values. Consequently, one of the duties of theology is to develop the antibodies that will defend it from adaptation to the present century: idolatry evolves, becomes more and more insidious, and gradually absorbs into its world even the church, making it an instrument of control of the masses[6]. Thanks to liberation, gender, feminist, postcolonial theology these mechanisms of domestication are exposed and denounced.

Only by preserving a migrant perspective, then, can Christianity remain faithful to its origins, precisely because the Bible expresses a migrant theology. It may therefore be helpful to close with the words of the Letter to Diognetus, an early Christian apologetic text from the second century CE:

> Christians, neither by region, nor by voice, nor by custom are to be distinguished from other men. For they do not inhabit cities of their own, nor do they use a jargon that differs, nor do they lead a special kind of life.

[6] See, again, the *Accra Confession*.

> Their doctrine is not in the discovery of the thought of multifarious men, nor do they adhere to a human philosophical current, as others do. Living in Greek and barbaric cities, as each has happened to each, and adapting to the customs of the place in dress, food and the rest, they testify to an admirable and undoubtedly paradoxical method of social life. They live in their homeland, but as strangers; they participate in everything as citizens and are detached from everything as foreigners. Every foreign homeland is their homeland, just as every homeland is foreign. They marry like everyone else and beget children, but they do not throw out newborns. They share the table, but not the bed. They are in the flesh, but do not live according to the flesh. They dwell in the earth, but have their citizenship in heaven. They obey the established laws, and by their lives they overcome the laws. They love all, and by all they are persecuted... (5:1-11).[7]

The active confrontation with migration thus obliges us to rethink theology from a postcolonial and intercultural perspective, to reflect further on our idea of human identity and thus society. To achieve these goals, we need to have a church that is truly independent and autonomous from the oppressive powers of this world, not least to avoid making ourselves complicit with the warlords. If we close the page of the colonization of the church, we can open that of a theology, and therefore of a church, nomadic, migrant, faithful daughter of the Logos-gypsy. A church that really starts from the margins, because in the end Christianity still remains the religion of the last ones and not the first ones.

[7] *Letter to Diognetus* 5.1–11.

An Ecumenical Response to Christine Lienemann from the Perspective of the Global Christian Forum

Jean-Daniel Plüss

Introductory Remarks

Professor Lienemann's presentation[1] has struck me in a number of ways. First, the refugees have a story to tell. This goes way further than giving information about their identity. Second, there is a narrative dimension to people's faith. Third, Christine Lienemann hints at new forms of engaging in ecumenism.

These points give me a practical entry in explaining a theology on the move from the point of view of the Global Christian Forum.[2]

For those of you who might not be acquainted with the Global Christian Forum (GCF), let me just say that the idea was born by the desire of Konrad Raiser who was General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the 1990s. He was aware that the WCC did not really represent global Christianity because a large segment of evangelicals and Pentecostals were not interested in joining the WCC for a variety of reasons. Besides, the Roman Catholic Church is not a member either. So, the question arose, could there be a way to enter into a conversation with these churches?

Eventually the idea was born to create an open platform on which all Christian churches could participate. It would be a space with no strings attached and focus on Jesus Christ, in whom we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

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[1] Christine Lienemann-Perrin, "Ecumenical Approaches in the Changing Landscape of People on the Move," paper presented at the 2nd Reformed Ecumenical Symposium, Rome (November 22–23 2024).

[2] Global Christian Forum, https://globalchristianforum.org/

Within the last 22 years various Global Christian Forums have taken place on global and regional levels. To make it more appealing to the "new kids on the block" evangelicals and Pentecostals would represent 50 percent of the participants. This would include younger churches like migrant churches, neo-charismatic communities and non-denominational groups. WCC member churches and Roman Catholics would represent the other 50 percent. Furthermore, as a basic methodology it was decided that sharing faith stories would be the basic approach for creating trust and rapprochement between the participants of every forum. This narrative form of sharing one's faith has become a hall mark of the Global Christian Forum.

Having said that, let me respond regarding a theology on the move from a GCF Point of view.

Three Dimensions of Theology on the Move

The Shift of the Global Church to the South.

Although one hundred years ago most churches had their missions across the world, the heart of Christianity was to be found in the North, especially in Europe, the Americas and in Russia. Now, we have witnessed that the centre of Christianity has moved to the Global South, especially to Africa and Asia. This move represents also a shift in the language of faith. A shift from the analytical and conceptual to the narrative and organic communication of faith. One of the major benefits of the GCF is that it brings the North and the South into conversation by focusing on the narrative sharing of faith.[3]

The Inclusion of Migrant Churches and Their Stories

It is easy to be governed by institutional thinking. Those institutions whose presence is easily noted are best heard. But the GCF is constantly asking "Who is missing at the table?" Therefore, there is always an effort to include representatives from migrant and minority churches into the conversation.

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[3] Casely B. Essamuah and Jean-Daniel Plüss, "Christianity Moving South – Walter Hollenweger's Propositions Revisited: A Conversation" in *The Holy Spirit, Spirituality and Leadership*: *Essays in Honor of Younghoon Lee*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (Oxford: Regnum Books, Oxford, 2024), 225–233.

The churches on the move need to be heard. They have stories to tell about justice and peace, but also about reconciliation and renewal.

We Are All Part of an Ecumenical Journey

Faith stories are fundamental accounts about how we experience vocation, maturation and change in our lives as followers of Christ. These narratives often give way to very intimate situations of our personal journeys. Voyeurism is not the aim, but an honest assessment of broken paths and new avenues of hope. As Professor Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda formulated it, there are borders being crossed. There is fluidity in transformation.

This has also been a major reason why there are changes in the ecclesial landscape. There are for instance "cradle Lutherans" who have journeyed to other churches because their religious needs have been better met elsewhere. There are people who grew up Pentecostal who now visit Reformed congregations because they found answers to questions their previous minister did not address. In short, denominational loyalty has diminished because we live in a pluralist society.

The GCF offers here a new kind of ecumenical conversation. Instead of a dogmatic emphasis that is often displayed in bilateral dialogues, the GCF offers an alternative approach, namely one of spiritual ecumenism.

In conclusion, Professor Lienemann and Professor Sadananda have both emphasized that we, as believers in Christ, are, or should be, people on the move. Crossing borders is not a prerogative to migrants and refugees alone. It is also an ecclesial reality. May we receive the gift of listening to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

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The Church as Home: Rethinking Ecclesia in the Light of Migration and Mobility

Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda

Introduction: Reimagining Ecclesia as Home in a World on the Move

In a world increasingly defined by migration, displacement, and mobility—whether caused by war, ecological crisis, economic instability, or systemic violence—the concept of "home" stands both as a site of longing and contestation. The church, called to embody radical love and revolutionary justice, must rise as a force of liberation for refugees and migrants. It has offered shelter to the uprooted, turned sanctuaries into homes, and amplified silenced voices. Yet, while it strives to dismantle systems of exclusion and proclaims every migrant's dignity as *Imago Dei*, the church often falls short of embracing the prophetic challenge migrants embody.

Migrants are not mere recipients of hospitality, but prophets of disruption, calling the church to reimagine itself. Their movement unveils the Gospel's demand to transcend walls, reject complacent structures, and confront imperial systems. Though churches extend a ministry of hospitality, they have been hesitant to fully engage with the transformative Gospel proclaimed through the struggles and resilience of migrants.

For millions of migrants, home is not a place of permanence, but a journey, a process of resilience, memory, and reinvention. What does it mean, then, to speak of the church as "home" in such a world? What theological, biblical, and ecclesiological resources can help us rethink ecclesia as a sanctuary for those constantly on the move?

This essay explores the possibility of reimagining the church as a "fluidic," "borderless," and "transformative home"—one that is not tied to territory or tradition, but constituted in movement, hospitality, and relational belonging.

Rooted in the lived experiences of migrants, theologies from the margins, and biblical narratives of exodus, exile, and incarnation, this essay asks:

- How can the church embody God's movement toward the displaced and uprooted?
- What biblical visions of home challenge static, institutionalized models of ecclesia?
- How does the Holy Spirit create a new kind of communion that transcends borders?
- Can the Trinitarian life of God guide us toward a theology of radical belonging?

These questions are approached through a theological hermeneutic of migration, bringing together voices from biblical texts, liberationist and post-colonial theology, and Spirit-led praxis. The essay does not treat migration as an external challenge to the church, but as a theological lens through which the very identity and mission of the church are reimagined.

Through five theological trajectories—rooted in biblical patriarchs and matriarchs, the exodus movement, Jesus' incarnational ministry, the work of the Spirit, and the dynamic relationality of the Trinity—this work proposes that the church is most faithful when it becomes a sanctuary in transit: a community of justice, inclusion, and shared vulnerability. Here, "home" is not a structure to be defended, but a sanctuary to be shared, not a possession to be guarded, but a gift to become, together. The revolutionary nature of home lies in its multi-scalar and processual essence. It exists across geographies and identities, shaped by the temporal weaving of past, present, and future. It is a dynamic process, a lived and felt experience that is embodied in rituals, memories, and everyday acts of survival. Home is sensorial, rooted in the smell of familiar food, the sound of a shared language, or the warmth of human connection. Home is that place, which is not a space, but a feeling, a knowing, a being.

The church, then, is called to become *Ecclesia peregrinans*—a church on the move, making home wherever people seek justice, breathe peace, and enact communion. This vision is not only theological, but deeply political and pastoral, challenging the church to reject fortress mentalities and embrace

its vocation as a "borderless home." To reclaim home is to dismantle the politics of borders and exclusivity, embracing its radical potential as a space of belonging and liberation. It is a sanctuary for those on the move, an insurgent force that resists oppression and creates new possibilities for collective flourishing. Home, in its essence, is a borderless revolution.

1. A Borderless, Fluidic Home: Revolutionary Lessons from the Patriarchs and Matriarchs

The call and election narratives of the Old Testament—rooted in the lives of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel—proclaim a radical vision of home as a dynamic, liberative movement. These stories defy oppressive stasis, revealing home, not as a fixed structure, but as a transformative, borderless community on the move. In their struggles, failures, and faith, these ancestors demonstrate that a true home resists the empire, embraces fluidity, and becomes a sanctuary for the marginalized and excluded.

1.1 Abraham and Sarah: Blessing in Movement

Abraham's journey is the blueprint for a home on the move. Called out of the familiar, Abraham and Sarah step into uncertainty, carrying nothing but God's promise. Their story dismantles the idea that blessing is tied to fixed locations or institutions. Instead, blessing flows through trust, movement, and radical faith. The land is not a possession to be held onto, but a venue for the ongoing drama of obedience. In this drama, home becomes a theological journey, rather than a geographical endpoint.[1]

Through struggles with Lot and Hagar, Abraham and Sarah learn that God is partial to the excluded. Hagar, abandoned and wandering, encounters God's liberating care, revealing that a home built on justice must centre the marginalized. This theophany disrupts patriarchal norms and embeds the sacred within the story of an Egyptian slave woman—a migrant and a

[1] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), especially see chapter 1 'Land as promise and as problem,' 1–14, section,– 'Israel as God's Homeless People', 7–9.

mother. The wilderness becomes the location of divine encounter, not the palace or the Promised Land.[2]

In welcoming three strangers, Abraham and Sarah extend their borders, embodying a living sanctuary of love and compassion, and are then awestruck to realize that the strangers bring blessings beyond imagination. Their intercultural and interreligious encounters—like those with Pharaoh in Egypt, King Abimelech, and Melchizedek—challenge rigid socio-political and religious boundaries, pushes them toward a nomadic force of justice that thrives in interreligious and intercultural solidarity. Home, for them, is a tent with open borders, sustained by the revolutionary hospitality of radical love.

1.2 Isaac: Renewal Amid Conflict

Isaac's prophetic act of re-digging abandoned wells amidst hostility is a quiet yet radical testament to perseverance, peacebuilding, and nonviolent resistance. In a land riddled with conflict over resources, Isaac does not retaliate; he labours to restore life-sustaining water for both kin and strangers. His actions model a vision of home that labours for liberation—patiently, persistently, and peacefully. It is pertinent to note that the well is a symbol of generativity in a world of scarcity, and Isaac's refusal to be consumed by cycles of enmity allows space for reconciliation to emerge.[3]

Journeying from *Esek* (quarrel) to *Sitnah* (enmity), and finally to *Rehoboth* (broad space), Isaac embodies a theological geography of resilience and renewal (Gen. 26:19–22). Each name marks a spiritual and communal struggle, culminating in the expansive vision of *Rehoboth*—where space is made for flourishing without domination. These stories "invite us to reimagine prosperity not as conquest, but as cohabitation." Isaac's wells become more than water sources—they become symbols of a home that resists exclusion, restores brokenness, and makes room for shared hope.

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[2] Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), see chapter 1.

[3] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 224f.

1.3 Jacob: Wrestling for Identity and Justice

Jacob's journey reveals that home is not inherited but struggled into being. His life charts a trajectory where exile, conflict, and divine encounter converge into a transformative vision of identity. At Bethel, Jacob discovers that the holiness can erupt in desolate, unchosen places (Gen. 28:10–16). Brueggemann observes that *Bethel* is a moment when the fugitive becomes the recipient of promise, where despair is transfigured into hope.[4] Later, at the river Jabbok, Jacob engages in a night-long struggle that leaves him wounded, yet blessed, renamed, yet limping (Gen. 32:22–30). He calls the place *Peniel*—the face of God—where vulnerability becomes a site of divine intimacy.

This wrestling is not only with God, but with his past, his guilt, his fractured family, and an unjust world. Phyllis Trible aptly names it a "sacred wound,"[5] one that marks him as both survivor and prophet. Even in exile, Jacob nurtures a people, modelling how home can be constructed in the wilderness, not despite struggle, but through it. His story calls us to engage oppression head-on, to wrestle with systems and selves, and to emerge—scarred and renamed—as bearers of liberative hope.

2. A Borderless Ecclesia: Exodus as Revolutionary Blueprint for Fluidic Home

The exodus narrative is far more than an ancient story of escape; it is a revolutionary blueprint for a fluidic, borderless ecclesia—a community in perpetual movement, shaped by struggle, sustained by promise, and committed to the liberation of the oppressed. As Israel journeys from Egypt through the wilderness, they are transformed from enslaved subjects into a covenantal people. Their story invites the church today to resist institutional rigidity, embrace sacred mobility, and embody justice in unpredictable terrains.

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[4] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 247.

[5] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 4–5

2.1 Liberation from Oppression: Breaking Chains of Stability

Exodus begins with divine disruption: God hears the cries of the oppressed (Exod. 2:23–25) and initiates a rupture from Egypt's false security. The empire offers stability, but at the cost of exploitation and control. Walter Brueggemann reminds us that "the empire is seductive because it offers order—but it is an order sustained by injustice."[6] Israel's liberation shatters the illusion that control equals freedom. In rejecting Pharaoh's economy of endless labour and accumulation, the people are reoriented toward a covenantal identity shaped by trust, vulnerability, and divine solidarity.

A fluidic ecclesia follows this trajectory. It cannot root its identity in land, tradition, or institutional permanence, but in a covenant with the liberating God who dwells among the displaced. Such a church is a mobile and disruptive force, a sanctuary of resistance, where "home" is not fixed by geography, but marked by acts of justice and the refusal to comply with the empire's demands.

2.2 Wilderness: Radical Dependence and Sacred Mobility

The wilderness is not a divine punishment, but a sacred school of unlearning the empire. Israel's reliance on manna (Exod. 16) becomes a theological protest against the ideology of scarcity and self-sufficiency. Brueggemann notes that manna is a daily teaching that God—not Pharaoh—gives life.[7] The people are instructed to gather only what is needed for the day. This practice enshrines an ethic of "enoughness," where accumulation is not only impractical, but a betrayal of trust in divine provision.[8] In this daily dependence, the community learns to embody solidarity, equity, and humility.

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[6] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th anniversary edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), 40.

[7] Walter Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, updated ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 14–19

[8] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 60

The Tabernacle (*mishkan)*,—a sanctuary in motion—makes divine presence portable (Exod. 25–40). Unlike a temple rooted in imperial power, the Tabernacle sanctifies liminal space, becoming a symbol of a God who travels with the vulnerable. It breaks down binaries between sacred and secular, holy and profane. Brueggemann calls this "holiness on the move," reminding the church that sacredness is not confined to buildings or traditions, but is enacted wherever justice, love, and liberation flourish. [9]

For today's ecclesia, the exodus vision demands a reorientation: to live humbly, travel faithfully, and act justly. It is a call to become a sanctuary without walls—inhabiting city streets, migrant journeys, rural margins, and digital frontiers with the presence of a God who still liberates.

2.3 Shared and Adaptive Leadership: Centring Marginalized Voices

The exodus journey is not led by a solitary hero, but by a shared and adaptive leadership that evolves in response to the needs and burdens of a migrating people. While Moses remains central, his leadership becomes distributed—God commands him to appoint elders (Num. 11:16–17), and women like Miriam rise as prophetic voices of resistance and praise (Exod. 15:20–21). This model decentralizes power and reflects a leadership grounded in relational discernment, mutual trust, and communal agency.

Brueggemann observes that the wilderness community is "a counterculture in which old patterns of domination are unlearned."[10] A fluidic ecclesia must echo this ethic: centring the voices of those long excluded—women, children, people with different orientations, indigenous peoples, the disabled, and the undocumented. Leadership is not defined by credentials, but by proximity to pain and the ability to midwife liberation from the margins. It listens, adapts, and reconfigures itself in response to the Spirit's movement through the oppressed.

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[9] Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 86–88

[10] Walter Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, updated edition, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 25–28

2.4 Embracing Failure: Liberation as Imperfect Progress

The wilderness is also a place of divine patience and human failure. Israel's journey is riddled with missteps—idolatry (Exod. 32), rebellion (Num. 14), and complaints (Exod. 16–17)—yet each failure becomes a space where God reaffirms covenant and reimagines relationship. Ellen Davis calls this the "economy of wilderness,"[11] where grace is taught not by perfection, but by perseverance.

A fluidic home recognizes that liberation involves experimentation, risk, and humility. The community learns by doing—and undoing—and finds in failure no shame, but renewal. Just as God continues to journey with Israel despite betrayal, the ecclesia must embrace its own wounds, confess its complicity, and turn again to the liberating path of justice.

2.5 Mission Without Arrival: The Promised Land as Horizon

Even when Israel enters the Promised Land, the story does not end. The exodus ethic—of justice, mobility, and divine solidarity—persists as a horizon rather than a destination. The "Promised Land" becomes not a fixed place, but a symbol of God's ongoing call to transformation. The land is never simply owned—it is always held in trust, and always under the shadow of covenantal demand.[12]

A fluidic ecclesia, therefore, resists settling into institutional complacency. It remains on the move—reshaping itself to serve the oppressed, dismantle exploitative systems, and become a living sanctuary of hope. It is a people with hearts set not on arrival, but on pilgrimage as purpose—forever creating, restoring, and imagining home in solidarity with all who are displaced.

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[11] Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009),66–79

[12] See Jon D. Levenson, *The Love of God: Divine Gift, Human Gratitude, and Mutual Faithfulness in Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 101–103

3.Home as a Fluidic, Transformative Ecclesia: Jesus' Radical, Boundary-crossing Vision

Reimagining home as a fluidic, transformative ecclesia challenges the fixed notions of stability, exclusivity, and control. Drawing from the Synoptic Gospels, John's Gospel, and the Acts, this vision frames home as an ever-shifting, inclusive, and liberative space where boundaries are dismantled, and transformation unfolds. It is a theological and post-colonial reimagining of belongingness, rooted in Jesus' ministry of radical inclusion, hospitality, and resistance to oppressive structures.

3.1 Incarnation as Divine Migration: A Revolutionary Solidarity from the Margins

The incarnation is not simply the theological claim that God became human; it is an act of divine migration—a radical crossing of borders, a disruptive solidarity from the underside of the empire. As John's Gospel declares, the Word became flesh and pitched tent among us (Jn. 1:14, Gk. *eskēnōsen*), invoking the image of a wandering God who dwells vulnerably and migratorily, not in imperial palaces, but in the wilderness of human fragility.[13] This is not a stable embodiment, but a fluidic presence—transitory, relational, and intentionally embedded among the marginalized.

Jesus' life, especially in the Johannine narrative, is framed as a journey: coming from the Father and returning to the Father (Jn. 13:3; 16:28). His incarnation is an ongoing movement, not a static event, a constant journey—crossing borders and adapting to new worlds—Jew and Gentile, clean and unclean, male and female, insider and outsider. As such, in and through incarnation, God speaks from within the flesh of a colonized people, through a life lived in the structures of the empire. The incarnation becomes an anti-imperial act, not of dominion, but of divine displacement and radical nearness. [14]

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[13] Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God*, (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2004), 197.

[14] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (Yale University Press, 2010), 112, 155–161.

In this light, the incarnation revolutionizes the very meaning of "home": not a private possession, but a communal, borderless dwelling where love is enacted, power is inverted, and vulnerability becomes sacred. The incarnation is God's declaration that oppressed bodies matter—bodies violated by the empire, gendered by patriarchy, and marked by migration.[15]

To follow the incarnate Christ is to join this divine migration—to become a people in movement, dismantling the walls that exclude, and building relational sanctuaries of justice in every wilderness of exclusion. Thus, incarnation obliterates boundaries of exclusion, and revolutionises the understanding of belonging, and reimagines "home" as a borderless community of justice and love.Top of FormBottom of Form

3.2 Redefining Home: A Transformative Space

In the Synoptic Gospels, home is not simply a dwelling, but a transformative space—a site where healing, justice, and a new community emerge. Jesus, born into imperial occupation and displacement, was denied room in the inn (Lk. 2:7), foreshadowing his lifelong identification with the homeless, the uprooted, and the excluded. His family's forced migration to Egypt (Mt. 2:13–15) situates the incarnate God among refugees fleeing political violence, aligning the divine narrative with those whose lives are marked by statelessness and fear.[16]

This migrant identity destabilizes the prevailing theological and cultural norms that associate "home" with ownership, purity, and boundary. When Jesus declares, "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk. 9:58), it is not just personal dislocation, but a public critique of hospitality systems corrupted by the empire.[17] Jesus "enacts a counter-world" where God's

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[15] Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Cascade Books, 2018),58, 70–93.

[16] Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 66–67

[17] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Fortress Press, 2002), 188–189.

reign interrupts the spatial monopolies of the elite and reframes home as relational, rather than territorial.[18]

Rather than claiming space through power, Jesus transforms the spaces he enters. The home of Simon Peter becomes a site of embodied healing (Mk. 1:30–31); the crowded house in Capernaum, a site of forgiveness and social reintegration (Mk. 2:1–12); Zacchaeus' home, long complicit in systemic greed, becomes a locus of repentance and jubilee economics (Lk. 19:1–10). These events redefine home, not as an architectural enclosure, but as a relational sanctuary—space created through inclusion, forgiveness, and justice.

This fluidic theology of home emphasizes permeability and openness to transformation. Jesus reframes domestic and public boundaries to prioritize liberative presence. He does not conform to patriarchal or nationalistic models of household but elevates household as co-creators of sacred space. A home is no longer where tradition or purity are preserved—it is where bodies are healed, sins forgiven, and identities reclaimed.[19]

In this sense, "home" is a sanctuary always on the move—carried in relationships of justice, compassion, and resistance to the empire. It is constructed by migrants, healed by the wounded, and opened by the excluded. The fluidic ecclesia today must follow this vision: resisting institutional fixity and constructing sanctuaries in shifting and contested spaces.

3.3 Crossing Boundaries: Home at the Margins

Jesus' ministry is marked by intentional boundary-crossing—cultural, theological, spatial, and gendered. He traverses the invisible lines drawn

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[18] Warren Carter, *John and Empire: Initial Explorations* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 14, With its rhetoric of distance and differentiation, the Gospel seeks to disturb cozy interactions and ready participation in Romes world by emphasizing Jesus' challenge to and conflict with the Roman world, by delineating an either/or dualistic worldview, and by emphasizing the alternative world created by God's life-giving purposes manifested in Jesus.

[19] Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back* (Cascade Books, 2018), 87–93

by purity codes, patriarchy, classism, and imperial religion. In doing so, he reimagines home as that which is created in the crossing, not the possessing. Wright affirms that Jesus redraws the boundaries of belonging around his own actions of healing, welcome, and restoration.[20]

Jesus meets people in their own contexts: synagogues, boats, streets, dinner tables, and even tombs. He transforms exclusionary gatherings into liberative encounters, as seen in the story of the unnamed woman anointing him in the house of Simon the leper (Mk. 14:3–9). This space—meant to be private and exclusive—is ruptured by an act of radical hospitality, turning shame into honour and exclusion into prophetic witness.

Jesus' encounters with tax collectors, Samaritans, the bleeding woman, and Gentiles reveal a home defined by grace, not gatekeeping. His fluid, mobile presence builds a home wherever dignity is restored. The ecclesia, in his image, is called to resist the logic of walls—be they theological, national, or patriarchal—and instead cross into discomfort with the hospitality of justice.

A borderless ecclesia must practice this same radical presence: inhabiting the margins, entering wounds, and building homes in transit. To redefine home today is to refuse exclusivity and instead co-create sanctuary with the very people systems seek to erase.

3.4 Disruptive Agency from the Margins: Homemaking Through Resistance

While much of Jesus' ministry models radical hospitality and boundary-crossing inclusion, the Gospel of Matthew offers a striking moment in which Jesus himself is the one challenged by a voice from the margins. In Matthew 15:21–28, Jesus encounters the Syrophoenician (or Canaanite) woman, a double outsider by ethnicity and gender.

This encounter reveals that theological transformation does not only flow from the centre outward, but is co-constructed at the edges, where the marginalized claim their space in God's story. The Syrophoenician woman exercises an agency that disrupts exclusionary paradigms and insists on a

[20] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Fortress Press, 1996),308–310, 316–319.

reorientation of divine compassion toward Gentile bodies.[21] The woman's rhetorical boldness is a form of "talk back theology" that refuses passive receptivity and articulates a counter-narrative from a position of marginal power.[22] Home, in this moment, is made not by being invited in but by demanding space at the table. The woman does not accept crumbs as a resignation to inferiority, but as a subversive means to redefine the feast itself. In doing so, she exposes the porousness of theological boundaries and asserts her role as a midwife of ecclesial reimagination.

This disruptive agency finds resonance in other Gospel stories of women whose marginalized status becomes the site of transformative encounter. The haemorrhaging woman (Mk. 5:25–34) crosses social and purity boundaries to touch Jesus, enacting a theology of risk that results in both healing and public affirmation of her faith. These stories are not merely illustrative; they are constitutive of a fluidic ecclesiology that is re-scripted by those without a bordered home. Such narratives reflect a "kyriarchal reversal," in which women and the socially excluded become theological protagonists.[23] These voices do not wait for permission—they interrupt, reframe, and reconstruct the household of God. Thus, a borderless ecclesia must not only welcome the displaced, but be ready to be reshaped by their prophetic imagination.

3.5 Abiding in Fluidity: John's Vision of Relational Home

In the Gospel of John, "home" is no longer tethered to physicality or possession—it is a relational dwelling in divine love. When Jesus declares, "Abide in me, and I in you" (Jn. 15:4), He invites his followers into an intersubjective communion where divine presence reshapes the concept of home from static place to dynamic intimacy. This radical redefinition

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[21] Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 127–155.

[22] Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 28–45

[23] Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, "Towards a Borderless Church*"* in *Rethinking Ecclesia: Being and Becoming Christ Communities, Towards a Borderless Church,* ed. Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda and Solomon Paul*,* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2021), xix

of home critiques exclusive religious geographies and instead offers an expansive, "kin-dom" belonging that transcends ethnicity, gender, and class.

To abide (*menō*) is not to settle, but to remain in divine movement—a rhythm of love, service, and mutual indwelling. The Johannine concept of abiding reveals "a relationship that exists in continuity and reciprocity rather than in a fixed space." [24] Home, in this context, is formed and sustained by love enacted, not by territory defended.

This vision is powerfully embodied in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn. 4:1-42). Here, Jesus reclaims a contested, public, gendered space and transforms it into a sanctuary of theological revelation and empowerment. Jesus transforms the well—a space of both history and shame—into a site of rebirth, showing that any marginal space can become a fluidic sanctuary. The woman—ethnically marginalized and socially stigmatized—is not only welcomed, but entrusted with the message of living water and becomes the first evangelist in John's Gospel. This subversion of boundaries models a fluidic home: mobile, relational, and centred on the agency of the marginalized. [25]

Further, Jesus' assurance in John 14:2—"In my Father's house are many dwelling places"—reframes divine home not as a mansion of the elect, but as a capacious "kin-dom," a spatial metaphor of inclusivity, open to the many who are diverse, wounded, and seeking. This "house" (*oikia*) is not limited to heaven, but also reimagines ecclesia as radically hospitable, flexible, and non-hierarchical. John's "many rooms" reflect God's expansive hospitality, not as assimilation, but as honouring difference and creating space for every identity.

This relational ecclesia, then, is not a gated theological estate, but a network of liberated relationships, where abiding becomes the organizing principle

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[24] Gregory Thomas Basker, "Imag(e)ining ekklesia with John: Call of the Fourth Gospel to Being and Becoming Christ Communities - towards a Borderless Church" in*, Rethinking Ecclesia: Being and Becoming Christ Communities, Towards a Borderless Church,* vol.1 (2021),127-–143.

[25] Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel,* (Collegeville: MN: Liturgical Press*,* 2001), 85–114

of community and mission. Belonging is not earned or ascribed but offered freely as divine gift and mutual responsibility.

3.6 Empowerment and Distributed Leadership

John's Gospel, often misread as hierarchical or spiritualized, contains a revolutionary model of distributed leadership. Jesus' consistent empowerment of "ordinary" individuals—women, the uneducated, outsiders—as bearers of divine witness (Jn. 4, 9, 20) reflects a decentring of power. Leadership in John is marked, not by institutional control, but by radical entrusting.

When Jesus breathes on his disciples (Jn. 20:22), he commissions a dispersed ecclesia, animated by the Spirit, not confined to temple or synagogue. "This breathing creates a people who carry the Spirit into fractured spaces to build homes of justice."[26] The act is intimate, personal, and communal—infusing every believer with the authority to embody God's liberative mission.

This vision aligns with the Synoptic witness, where Jesus sends his followers in pairs (Lk. 10:1)—a model of shared, adaptive leadership that refuses domination. Leadership in the fluidic ecclesia is a collaborative vocation, shaped by proximity to pain, attentiveness to the Spirit, and commitment to justice. It is context-sensitive, relationally grounded, and mobilized from below, affirming that every member is called, capable, and commissioned.

A fluidic, transformative home, then, is built not through hierarchy, but through the multiplication of agency—an ecclesia led by the wounded, energized by grace, and propelled into the world as a sanctuary on the move.

4. The Holy Spirit as Creator of a Fluidic, Transformative Ecclesia

The Holy Spirit emerges as the divine architect of a fluidic, transformative ecclesia—a community unbounded by walls or institutions, defined instead by compassionate movement, cross-cultural solidarity, and prophetic justice.

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[26] James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B Eerdmans, 2003) 850, 850n105

Across Scripture, the Spirit disrupts order, empowers the vulnerable, and creates a borderless belonging rooted in God's redemptive presence.

4.1 The Spirit as Migrant and Guide

From Genesis to Pentecost, the Spirit is always found on the move—hovering over chaotic waters (Gen. 1:2), guiding Israel through the wilderness as pillars (Exod. 13:21), inspiring prophets (Isa. 61; Mic. 3), empowering Jesus at baptism (Lk. 3:22; 4:18), and commissioning the early church (Acts 2). In each instance, the Spirit crosses cultural, geographic, and ideological boundaries.

The Spirit's migratory presence "constitutes God's solidarity with the uprooted and voiceless," breaking the illusion that divine blessing is tied to place or privilege.[27] Thus, divine guidance is not settled or static—it is a calling to wander with the displaced, building a home wherever justice is sought.

4.2 Empowerment for CrossCultural Solidarity

Pentecost (Acts 2) exemplifies divine reversal: from the empire's drive for uniformity, the Spirit births a multiverse of tongues and peoples hearing the Gospel in their own languages. This affirms that unity comes not through conformity, but through Spirit-woven diversity.

Acts 10 further disrupts exclusivist religion, relocating divine belonging to a Gentile home. Peter's statement—"God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean" (Acts 10:28)—seals this inclusivity in Spirit logic.[28]

Even more, the communal practices of Acts 2:42–47—common table, shared resources and mutual care—stand in explicit contrast to Greco-Roman household economies and Roman insularity. The Spirit's outpouring dismantles hierarchy by reordering household norms around mutual caring

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[27] Edward Wimberley, *Contemporary Pneumatology and the Migrant Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 45.

[28] Joseph Samuel, "*The Paradigmatic Challenge of Visions of Cornelius and Peter in Acts of the Apostles for a Borderless Ecclesia"* in *Rethinking Ecclesia,* (Delhi: ISPK/CSI, 2021), 119–120

and shared abundance. Here, home is radically relational, constructed through acts of solidarity rather than territorial claims.

4.3 Breath and Becoming: The Johannine Paraclete as Advocate of Home

In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit—named the Paraclete—emerges as both breath and becoming, a divine presence who redefines home as relational, adaptive, and justice-centred. The Paraclete is not a static doctrine, but a living movement within and among the community, embodying both God's radical intimacy and eschatological promise.

When Jesus promises his disciples, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete, to be with you forever" (Jn. 14:16), He reconfigures divine presence not as a distant mystery or institutional possession, but as a dwelling-with, a presence in and among the vulnerable. The Spirit is given, not to secure the boundaries of orthodoxy, but to journey with disciples, offering counsel, comfort, advocacy, and prophetic memory (Jn. 14:26; 16:13).

In Johannine Paraclete passages, the Spirit's identity is relational and kenotic—mirroring Jesus' own self-emptying by refusing domination and working from the margins. The Paraclete becomes the voice of the voiceless, not by imposing, but by empowering the wounded to speak.[29] In this way, the Spirit redefines home not as a return to certainty, but as a space where questions, vulnerability, and mutual indwelling become sacred.

This is made most vivid in John 20:22, where Jesus breathes the Spirit into his disciples. This moment recalls Genesis 2:7 - signalling that the new community, the *Ecclesia pneumatica*, is re-created by breath, not by law, land, or lineage. This breath is more than animation; it is intimate commissioning, calling disciples to be peacemakers, forgivers, and boundary-crossers in a fragmented world (Jn. 20:21–23). This Johannine breathing constitutes the new humanity, formed by shared life in the Spirit,

[29] Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God,* 255–272.

not ethnic or institutional cohesion.[30] The Paraclete "abides" (*menō*) in believers (Jn. 15:4–7), making home not a location, but a network of abiding relationships. The Spirit, as divine homemaker, thus builds not temples, but living connections—between exiled bodies, fractured communities, and wounded memory.

In a world that exiles the poor, the migrants, and the religiously marginalized, the Paraclete advocates for a home where justice is not delayed but enfleshed in shared breath and becoming. The Spirit calls the church to a pneumatological hospitality—where homes are opened, wounds are healed, and dignity is restored through relationship, memory, and courage. Thus, to be accompanied by the Paraclete is to become breathers of peace, co-creators of boundary-breaking homes wherever domination threatens, the ecclesia shapes homes of grace, resistance, and liberation.

4.4 Pauline Trajectories: Groaning Toward Home

In Paul's theology, the Spirit is both the guarantee (*arrabōn*, Eph. 1:13–14) and the groaning companion (Rom. 8:22–27) of a creation in travail, labouring toward new birth. This dual role reflects an "apocalyptic interruption" that breaks into oppressive present realities with future hope.[31] The Spirit does not erase suffering, but dwells in it - testifying to a promised home not yet seen, but deeply awaited. For Paul, the Spirit disrupts imperial logic by valorising the weak, the exiled, and the enslaved - declaring that they, not the powerful, will inherit the kin-dom (1 Cor 1:26–28). Pauline eschatological vision is one of cosmic homecoming where "nothing is untouched" by grace.[32] The Spirit's presence in the body—fragile, suffering, yearning—prefigures a boundary-breaking liberation. In this view, home is a radical becoming, where the dislocated find kinship, and estrangement is metabolized into communion. Paul's Gospel is thus a pneumatological

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[30] Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, vol. 3, (London: Burns &Oates, 1992), 325.

[31] J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 98–101.

[32] Philip Esler, *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary,* (London: T&T Clerk 2022), 155–160

redefinition of home: a place in the making, where marginalized lives are no longer guests at the table, but hosts of God's indwelling future.

4.5 Revelation: Home as Restored Communion in the Midst of Empire

The Book of Revelation, often misunderstood as escapist or catastrophic, casts a profoundly political and embodied vision of homecoming. In Revelation 21:3—"Behold, the dwelling (*skēnē*) of God is among mortals"—the New Jerusalem descends, not to evacuate the faithful, but to make home among the wounded. As Schüssler Fiorenza argues, this is "not a flight from history, but its transformation,"[33] where the Spirit's work dismantles the imperial architecture of exclusion (Rev. 18) and replaces it with a city of shared flourishing. Here, there is no temple (Rev. 21:22), no border, no night—only intimate divine presence. The Spirit's invitation, "Let the one who is thirsty come" (Rev. 22:17), echoes John's living water (Jn. 4), revealing that the eschatological home is shaped by radical hospitality, not religious purity. Bauckham notes that Revelation's telos is not annihilation, but re-creation—a restored cosmos where God and creation dwell in nonviolent communion.[34] The ecclesia is thus called to prefigure this future now: building sanctuaries of resistance, presence, and belonging in the ruins of empire. The Spirit does not wait till the end of time, but moves now, urging the church to become a borderless home, where exiled bodies are welcomed, embraced, listened to and healed.

5. The Trinity as Dynamic of Mobility: Revolutionizing Home and Belonging

The doctrine of the Trinity, when understood not as abstract speculation, but as a living communion of love, radically reshapes how we imagine home, belonging, and ecclesial identity. The Triune God is not a static monad, but a dynamic community of mutual indwelling and movement—a God who is ever in relation, ever in motion, and ever toward creation. This understanding

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[33] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 34–35

[34] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 132–136.

deconstructs colonial, hierarchical, and exclusionary models of community and opens a liberative vision of church as fluidic sanctuary and borderless home.

5.1 Perichoresis: The Dance of Divine Relationality

At the heart of Trinitarian theology is *perichoresis*, a term rooted in patristic thought that names the mutual indwelling and self-giving love of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. "The doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a teaching about God's life with us and our life with each other"—a call to relationality, not merely a statement of ontology.[35] Trinity is a social model of God, where the persons are coequal, co-inherent, and open to the world in love, resisting authoritarianism and embodying divine justice.[36]

This divine relationality—eternal, mutual, non-hierarchical—challenges human systems built on domination. It calls the church to reimagine itself as a space where relationality, not rigidity, structures life. *Perichoresis* is not just a divine reality, but an invitation into divine life—a movement that unites difference without erasure.

5.2 Theosis and Fluid Belonging

The doctrine of *theosis*, particularly in Orthodox theology, offers a vision of salvation as participation in the dynamic life of God. "Being is communion," describes personhood as realized only in relational, ecclesial life.[37] *Theosis*, then, is not an individualistic ascent to divinity, but a communal migration into divine relationality, where inclusion, openness, and justice are constitutive of salvation.

In this view, the church becomes not a fortress of dogma, but a movement of becoming—a space of shared vulnerability, mutual love, and transformation.

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[35] Joy Ann McDougall *Pilgrimage of Love, Moltmann on The Trinity and Christian Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[36] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1981), 174–178

[37] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

Relational belonging replaces static membership. This ecclesia welcomes the exiled, centres the marginalized, and reflects God's own dynamic of kenotic hospitality.

5.3 The Trinity as Radical Hospitality

Liberation and queer theologies have powerfully reimagined the Trinity as a model of divine disruption and hospitality. Critiquing the heteronormative closures in traditional doctrine calls for a theology "undone by the scandal of excluded bodies." Thus, the Trinity is "radical love"—a communion where multiplicity and unity co-exist, offering a model for queer inclusion, fluid identities, and radical belonging.[38]

These theologies call the church to resist theologies of conformity, purity, and control. Instead, the church must model the Trinitarian embrace: a love that gathers the wounded, the diverse, the displaced into a shared space of celebration and healing. This is a home not built on sameness, but sustained in love across difference.

5.4 Ecclesia as Trinitarian Migration

To be an ecclesia, believing in the Trinity is to be a community always on the move—toward the margins, toward the other, toward new ways of being. If God is eternally mobile, then ecclesial identity is not institutional fixity, but mission in motion. A fluidic ecclesia mirrors the Trinitarian pattern: it moves outward, crossing boundaries to meet people in their lived realities.

Such a church rejects imperial architecture, theological gatekeeping, and clerical control. Instead, it embodies God's movement of love into every corner of creation—urban margins, migrant shelters, queer communities, digital spaces. It is both refuge and launchpad; sanctuary and springboard.

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[38] Patrick Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), chap. 3

6. Conclusion: Becoming Ecclesia in a World on the Move

In an age where millions traverse borders—some by choice, most by necessity—the question of "home" cannot be answered by geography, nationalism, or ecclesial edifices. It must be reimagined through the prism of theological fluidity, embodied justice, and radical relationality. The ecclesia, shaped by the Triune God whose life is eternal motion and embrace, is called to become a sanctuary in transit: a home not of bricks, but of breath, memory, resistance, and solidarity.

The biblical narrative, from Abraham's migration to Jesus' itinerancy and the Spirit's descent at Pentecost, unravels a revolutionary redefinition of home as a space created through divine encounter and human solidarity. The church is called to remember that God's dwelling is not first in temples, but in tents (Exod. 25–26), not behind borders, but in the desert, not in static institutions, but among moving peoples. This fluidic identity was recapitulated in Jesus' life as divine migrant (Jn. 1:14) and is extended through the Spirit as breath and movement, not doctrine and dominance (Jn. 20:22).

Each theological section of this work converges toward a vision of ecclesia, not as fortress or homeland, but as diasporic communion—a people on the move who make home by practicing justice and mutual care. The patriarchs and matriarchs teach that home is discovered through journey and struggle. The exodus reveals that holiness is found in the wilderness. Jesus reconfigures home through radical inclusion, healing, and presence at the margins. The Holy Spirit breathes new life into scattered bodies, transforming homes into places of resistance and hope. The Trinity, as the eternal dance of love and openness, summons us to build communities that reflect this relational dynamism—non-hierarchical, boundary-crossing, and kenotic.

In a world fractured by nationalism, displacement, and the empire's spatial politics, the church must resist the temptation to settle for the familiar. It must unlearn practices of gatekeeping, purity, and ecclesial control, and instead inhabit the liminal zones where exiles gather, and where the Spirit breathes. The church as home is not a location—it is a practice of radical

welcome, a politics of incarnation, and a liturgy of presence that transforms grief into solidarity and exclusion into community.

Five trajectories toward becoming a borderless ecclesia:

- Mobility as faithfulness: Like the God who journeys with the displaced, the ecclesia must embody movement—physical, theological, and institutional—toward the margins. It cannot equate faithfulness with permanence but must perceive pilgrimage as vocation.
- Radical hospitality as resistance: Hospitality is not sentimental welcome, but fierce protest against the systems that exclude. It centres the wounded not as guests, but as hosts, co-authors of new homes of dignity, reciprocity, and justice.
- Shared and decentralized leadership: In a borderless Ecclesia, power flows from the margins. Leadership must be communal, wounded, and attuned to the Spirit's whisper in silenced voices—from women, children, migrants, the historically marginalized, the disabled, and persons with different orientations.
- Sanctuaries of fluid belonging: Belonging is not earned through doctrine or heritage, but received as gift and enacted in shared breath, mutual care, and liberative struggle. Every home, tent, meal, and well can become sanctuary when justice dwells there.
- Becoming new creation now: The eschatological vision of Revelation—of God dwelling among mortals (Rev. 21:3)—is not an afterlife fantasy, but a call to live the "kin-dom" now. Ecclesia is called to build glimpses of this future in fractured present realities—on street corners, digital spaces, refugee camps, and borderlands.

In the end, borderless ecclesia is not a new architecture, but a new anthropology and doxology. It is a people learning to breathe together in Spirit-led communion, weaving networks of love and liberation in the face of the empire and proclaiming with every act of shared bread and broken boundary: this too is home.