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PLANNING FOR THE PASTORAL CARE FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

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Introduction

Migration is undoubtedly one of the most common and relevant experiences in the history of humankind since its very beginning. Fuelled by globalization processes, in the last decades human mobility has notably increased. According to the International Organisation for Migrations (IOM), in 2008 the world international migrant population was estimated around 200 million. Although the phenomenon of human mobility across national borders directly involves only three percent of the world's population, due to its impact on both the sending and receiving societies, it affects many other millions of people. If one considers also the huge numbers of domestic migrants and internally displaced people, one would fairly state that migration is a modern global phenomenon.

Modern migrations, often marked by injustices, abuses, exploitation and human trafficking, pose new challenges to the human community. Economic interests and political and cultural considerations tend to view migration solely as an economic process; in such scenario, migrants are just factors of production and not subjects of human rights and agents of dialogue among cultures and societies. "Economically forced" migration questions a model of development, which ignores inequalities and disparities that result in displacing people from their environment and heritage. According to past experiences, migration has not been that instrumental to the economic and social growth of the less developed countries. Moreover, not enough attention is given to the social costs of migration, which must be paid by the next generations. In recent times, more restrictive immigration policies reveal worrisome manifestations of xenophobia and racism, raising questions about the international community's commitment in building a "global village" capable of appreciating differences while celebrating the unity of humankind.

Modern migrations, with all their benefits and costs, pose new challenges to the Catholic Church in the third millennium. The pastoral responses to such challenges are not easily found and many times local Churches seem unprepared to deal with a phenomenon that, by definition, is ever changing. The instruction promulgated by the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People in 2004, *Erga Migrante Caritas Christi* (EMCC), aims at developing a sound theological reflection which would lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon and its challenges posed to the Catholic Church:

“[T]he Document presents a specific biblico-theological frame of reference, incorporating the migration phenomenon into the history of salvation, as a sign of the times and of the presence of God in history and in the community of peoples, directed to universal communion.” [EMCC, Introduction].

Migration, like any other relevant human phenomenon, represents a worthy subject for a serious theological reflection, a “locus theologicus” that transcends all historical and philosophical boundaries, claiming a new vision through the “eyes of faith.” Such theological exercise can be properly defined as the “theology of migration.” Enlightened by such reflection, the different pastoral responses, which constitute what I like to call “the migrant ministry,” would be more organized, focused and effective.

Catholic migrants are not ashamed to disclose their spiritual and material needs, but they sometimes feel neglected by the Church of origin and ignored by the Church of arrival. In many cases, the problem lies in defining who would be responsible for people on the move. On the one hand, geographical distance separates migrants from the Church of origin, which may feel somehow relieved of her responsibility. On

the other hand, the Church in the country of arrival may feel troubled by the new foreign faithful, who present different cultural and religious backgrounds, often speak a different language, and may sometimes seem disinterested to join the local communities. The complex dynamics generated by the multicultural setting that distinguishes many hosting societies often make the process of inclusion more difficult.

Given the specific scope on this conference, I would like to focus my presentation on the pastoral responsibilities of the host communities. For local Churches deeply challenged by the continuous arrival of thousands of foreign workers, refugees and new settlers, like the Church in Australia, the migrant ministry constitutes an essential element of the regular pastoral care. At this purpose, the instruction EMCC recites:

“There are many reasons why the specific care of migrants should be more deeply integrated into the pastoral care of particular Churches (cf. DPMC 42). The person primarily responsible for this is the diocesan/eparchial bishop who, in full respect for the migrants’ diversity and spiritual and cultural patrimony, goes beyond the limits of uniformity (cf. PaG 65 and 72), distinguishing the territorial character of the spiritual care of the faithful from that of care based on belonging to ethnic, linguistic, cultural and ritual groups. In this context each host Church is called upon to integrate the concrete reality of the persons and groups that compose it, bringing the values of each one into communion, as all are called upon to build a Church that is concretely Catholic. ‘In this way there is brought about a unity in plurality in the local Church, a unity that is not uniformity but harmony, in which every legitimate diversity plays its part in the common and unifying effort’ (CMU 19).” [EMCC 89].

The Church in Australia presents a long tradition of “reflection” and “action” in the migrant ministry. Millions of migrants and refugees made this Church one of the most multicultural in the world. I have been asked to contribute to the deepening of her understanding of the responsibilities concerning the pastoral care of migrants and refugees, and I would like to do so introducing some theological reflections on the basis of few selected biblical texts.

1. Martha and Mary: Activism vs. Listening

The first reflection focuses on the welcoming attitude of the host communities. Luke’s report of the visit of Jesus to the house of his friends in Bethany offers some interesting insights.

“As they continued their journey he entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.’ The Lord said to her in reply, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.’” [Lk 10:38-42].

The gospel writer Luke presents two different characters and two different attitudes: Martha is deeply concerned with all the services entailed in the good Jewish hospitality tradition; Mary just sits at Jesus’ feet and listens to him. Frequently this episode has been used to support the long debated supremacy of “contemplation” over “action;” but it may also refer to a slightly different antagonism: activism vs. listening.

With no prejudice to the “good faith” of the host, Martha’s welcoming Jesus and his disciples fell into two big mistakes. Firstly, since the Master and his companions arrived from a journey, Martha did not hesitate to serve them taking for granted what they would need: food, drink and some water to wash. She did not ask them; she just acted upon her assumptions. Secondly, being too anxious and worried about many things, Martha did not pay attention to the “persons” of Jesus and his disciples. She should have

“wasted” some time in order to make them feel comfortable in her house. Although bound to a noble purpose, Martha’s anxiety ended up indisposing her guests.

From Martha’s mistakes one realizes that Christian hospitality starts with the acknowledgment of the real needs of the guest. The main purpose of Jesus’ visit to Bethany was not to get refreshment and food, but to communicate something important to Mary and Martha. Therefore the Master was expecting both of them to pay attention to him and just listen to his words, but only Mary was able to understand the real need of the guest in that specific historical contingency. In the host communities, Church workers in charge of welcoming migrants and refugees should be trained to identify the needs of the guests. They should be provided with frequent opportunities to update and extend their knowledge of the migration phenomenon through personal study and participation in courses, seminars, conferences, fora and workshops on migration related topics. Given the complexity of human mobility, a multidisciplinary approach would be recommended. Moreover, they should be invited to deepen their comprehension of the context of reference, culture and traditions of the newcomers. This can be done through the simple exercise of listening to migrants and refugees and learning from their stories, particularly in a personal-dialogue setting. Much more can be discovered through personal reading and, given the possibility, visiting their countries of origin. Regarding this last point, I would like to acknowledge the success of some recent programs entailing temporary exchange of pastoral workers between the receiving communities and those of origin in different part of the world.

The instruction EMCC introduces the concept of an authentic ‘culture of welcome:’

“Migration therefore touches the religious dimension of man too and offers Catholic migrants a privileged though often painful opportunity to reach a sense of belonging to the universal Church which goes beyond any local particularity. To this end it is important that communities do not think that they have completed their duty to migrants simply by performing acts of fraternal assistance or even by supporting legislation aimed at giving them their due place in society while respecting their identity as foreigners. Christians must in fact promote an authentic culture of welcome (cf. EEU 101 and 103) capable of accepting the truly human values of the immigrants over and above any difficulties caused by living together with persons who are different (cf. EEU 85, 112 and PaG 65).” [EMCC, 39].

2. Moses and the Burning Bush: Removing One’s Own Sandals

The second reflection deals with the permanent tension between ‘particularity’ and ‘universality’ from the migrant ministry’s perspective. Long ago Fr Maurizio Pettenà, acting director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), gifted me an interesting interpretation of the episode of Moses and the burning bush, which I dare re-interpret at the light of the migration theology.

“Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the Lord appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, ‘I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned.’ When the Lord saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’ He answered, ‘Here I am.’ God said, ‘Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father,’ he continued, ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.’ Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” [Ex 3:1-6].

When the intrigued Moses decided to get closer to the burning bush in order to analyse the remarkable sight, the Lord stopped him and asked him to remove his sandals before entering a holy ground. Entering bare foot a sacred place is clearly a sign of respect, a common practise in many religions. Sandals and

shoes are normally 'dusty' and they can 'contaminate' the holy place. Moreover sandals and shoes can prevent the faithful from entering in physical contact with the sacred ground, jeopardizing the integrity of the encounter with the divinity. According to Jesus' teaching in Mt 25:35, every encounter with a migrant, a foreigner, a refugee is an encounter with Him, the son of God. Like Moses, all Christians are invited to 'remove the sandals from their feet' in order to make such meeting real and meaningful. Removing the sandals means setting aside preconceived notions and past experiences that might jeopardize the integrity and newness of each encounter with 'Jesus the foreigner.' Removing the sandals means going beyond one's own cultural traditions and expressions, accepting the challenges of multiculturalism and interculturalism. While recognizing the valuable efforts produced by the Australian society - and by the Catholic Church in Australia - to establish a peaceful and respectful multicultural setting, enhancing the pathways for social inclusion of extremely heterogeneous elements, it seems that the call for the migrant ministry today is to move beyond multiculturalism. The new model can be the interculturalism, which envisions a permanent and constructive dialogue among different co-existing cultures for the continuous reformulation of a common identity. Such identity cannot be defined beforehand by experts or policy makers. Neither can such identity be codified as absolute at a certain point of time. It is an identity *in fieri*, meaning in a continuous becoming fed by the inexhaustible richness of the different peoples and cultures.

Interculturalism may sound a concession to relativism. However, from a Christian perspective, it exemplifies instead the ancient quest for 'common grounds,' which constitutes a basic element in the identity-building process of the Catholic Church, both *ad intra* (inculturation of the Gospel) and *ad extra* (interconfessional and interreligious dialogue). God revealed himself to Moses with a clear reference to a preceding tradition, which should have sounded familiar to his interlocutor: "I am the God of your father ... the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Progressively through the centuries and lastly in Jesus Christ, the Lord revealed the human being to him/herself and such revelation constitutes the archetype of human identity, which will be achieved by humankind only in the *parousia*. While walking in exodus toward the completion of time, human beings struggle to make their being more and more similar to the archetype, looking at the model and committed in deepening the understanding of the divine revelation from diverse cultural perspectives. With the Vatican II Council (*Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes*) we learned that 'seeds' of such revelation are present in different culture and beliefs. Therefore the intercultural and interfaith dialogue, oftentimes spontaneously promoted in the contest of international migration and refuge, would aid the understanding of God's revelation. Focusing on common elements rather than differences is not only the main rule of the dialogue, but it is also the easiest way to get us nearer and nearer to the real identity of human beings.

The reflection on the common Christian tradition, well rooted on the biblical codification and apostolic transmission of the divine revelation, will help to lessen the frequent tensions which often burden the local Catholic communities challenged by multicultural settings. A sincere and shared discernment of the unchanging and unchangeable Gospel values will lead both hosts and guests to avoid the absolutisation of contingent expressions of incultured faith, rediscovering the Catholic dimension of the Church, which is 'communion in diversity,' exactly like her model, the Holy Trinity.

The holy ground of Horeb, the mounting of God, is the place of the encounter with the Lord, the encounter with the mystery of the 'totally Other,' who remains such even after his revelation. The encounter with Christ the foreigner re-presents the experience of Horeb, an intimate exposure to the mystery of God dwelling in the heart of migrants and refugees. One will never understand other's human heart in fullness. Psychology and other human sciences may help. A basic knowledge of such disciplines may be quite useful in the migrant ministry. However absolute certainties and infallible interpretation of other's heart are beyond human reach. Before the mystery of the totally Other dwelling in the others one should first remove the sandals and kneel down in a contemplative attitude.

The instruction EMMC clearly states the importance of cross-cultural dialogue in order to reach unity treasuring plurality:

“Cultural plurality thus invites contemporary man to practise dialogue and also face basic questions such as the meaning of life and history, suffering and poverty, hunger, sickness and death. Openness to different cultural identities does not, however, mean accepting them all indiscriminately, but rather respecting them – because they are inherent in people – and, if possible, appreciating them in their diversity. The “relativity” of cultures was also stressed by the Second Vatican Council (cf. GS 54, 55, 56, 58). Plurality is a treasure, and dialogue is the as yet imperfect and ever evolving realization of that final unity to which humanity aspires and is called.” [EMCC, 30].

3. Paul in the Areopagus: Speaking the Audience’s Language

The third reflection moves from the disappointing experience of St. Paul at the Athens’ Areopagus as it is reported in the Acts of the Apostle.

“Then Paul stood up at the Areopagus and said: ‘You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious. For as I walked around looking carefully at your shrines, I even discovered an altar inscribed, ‘To an Unknown God.’ What therefore you unknowingly worship, I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all that is in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands because he needs anything. Rather it is he who gives to everyone life and breath and everything. He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being,’ as even some of your poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ Since therefore we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the divinity is like an image fashioned from gold, silver, or stone by human art and imagination. God has overlooked the times of ignorance, but now he demands that all people everywhere repent because he has established a day on which he will ‘judge the world with justice’ through a man he has appointed, and he has provided confirmation for all by raising him from the dead.’ When they heard about resurrection of the dead, some began to scoff, but others said, ‘We should like to hear you on this some other time.’ And so Paul left them. But some did join him, and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the Court of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” [Acts 17:22-34].

Before starting his preaching in Athens, the capital of philosophy, Paul spent some time to properly prepare for such a demanding task. Like a sociologist *ante literam*, he walked around looking carefully at the local shrines in order to better understand the local religious culture. The discovery of an altar dedicated to the Unknown God gave him the chance to introduce the God revealed by Jesus Christ. When ministering to foreigners, migrants and refugees, the correct understanding of their signs and symbols is critical. Pastoral agents should allocate sufficient time to learn about them from empirical observation and through the mediation of qualified ‘interpreters.’ Based on the text of the Acts of the Apostles, in addressing the audience Paul was very concerned about its composition and sensitivities. Given the complexity of the cross-cultural dialogue and the high risk of misunderstanding, when dealing with foreigners, migrants and refugees pastoral agents in the migrant ministry should pay special attention to attitudes, speed, tone and volume of voice, and gestures. The goodness of the contents of the message may be jeopardized by a wrong conveying methodology.

In Athens, Paul meticulously chose the place for his preaching. The Areopagus was the most convenient place for the encounter. It was not necessarily the most comfortable place for Paul, but it was indeed a suitable place for the audience. Due to their dispersion in the territory, their limited time, their shyness and, sometimes, their experiences of rejection and discrimination, waiting eagerly for migrants and refugees inside the parish structures is not sufficient. Pastoral agents in the migrant ministry should be

able to generate the encounter, reaching out the ‘lost foreign flock’ in faraway places. Workplaces, hospitals, schools, prisons, clubs and ethnic restaurants are all suitable places for the encounter. The choice would fall in the place that would make the guest feel more comfortable and secure.

Paul’s experience at the Areopagus was not really successful. After listening to his preaching, some Athenians began to scoff, some others dismissed him in a more polite way. Many times, despite remarkable efforts, the pastoral agents in the migrant ministry face the indifference of the people they want to assist. The migrant ministry is not an easy task because the migrants and refugees have generally other urgent concerns that are distracting them from taking care of their spiritual life. Sometimes they are deeply wounded by bad experiences in dealing with the Catholic Church in the past. Sometimes personal dramas and tragedies have shaken their faith and they need time for healing. Despite being rejected by the Athenians in the Areopagus, Paul was still able to get some disciples. The pastoral agent in the migrant ministry - more than in other ministries - should learn the farmer’s patience, knowing that between sowing and harvesting there may be a long wait.

The instruction EMCC invites to see the mysterious growth of the new creation forged in Jesus Christ beyond the failures of human projects:

“God thus entrusts the Church, itself a pilgrim on earth, with the task of forging a new creation in Christ Jesus, recapitulating in Him (cf. Eph 1:9-10) all the rich treasures of human diversity that sin has transformed into division and conflict. To the extent that the mysterious presence of this new creation is genuinely witnessed to in its life, the Church is a sign of hope for a world that ardently desires justice, freedom, truth and solidarity, that is peace and harmony. And notwithstanding the repeated failures of human projects, noble as they may have been, Christians, roused by the phenomenon of mobility, become aware of their call to be always and repeatedly a sign of fraternity and communion in the world, by respecting differences and practising solidarity, in their ethics of meeting others.” [EMCC, 102].

4. Jesus and the Paralytic: The Holistic Pastoral Approach

The episode of the paralytic in the report of the gospel writer Mark constitutes the basis for the forth reflection.

“When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached the word to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Child, your sins are forgiven.’ Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, ‘Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?’ Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, “Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, pick up your mat and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth’ - he said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.’ He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, ‘We have never seen anything like this.’” [Mk 2:1-12].

The four men carrying the paralytic worked hard in order to get the sick near to Jesus. They knew how the prophet from Nazareth had cured the man with the unclean spirit in the synagogue, Peter’s mother in law and many other people who were sick with various diseases or possessed. They believed that Jesus could heal their friend lying on the mat. Actually, it is just because of their faith that Jesus decided to perform the miracle, but the healing is different from what was expected. The saving action of the Master went

beyond what was “obvious” at human eyes, meaning the restoration of mobility to the paralytic. Though not explicitly indicated in Mark’s text, one can assume that Jesus’ healing addressed the real “sickness” of the man on the mat. It is just a manifestation of the Master’s divine ability to “read the heart” of human beings and understand the labyrinth of their feeling and the complexity of their needs. The silence of the paralytic seems to confirm Jesus’ assessment: more than physical cure, it was spiritual healing what was needed. And the words the Master chose to perform the miracle, “Child, your sins are forgiven,” resound the loving concern of the merciful Father of the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32).

Not everybody in the crowd seems to understand Jesus’ miracle. The scribes started murmuring against the prophet of Nazareth, questioning his authority and accusing him of blasphemy. Knowing their evil thoughts, Jesus performed the second miracle (“... rise, pick up your mat, and go home”) to state that he was invested of the divine power that is equally necessary to heal the body and the soul. In doing so, the Master revealed also the holistic dimension of the salvation offered in him. The double miracle disclosed God’s will to redeem human beings in their wholeness. The Messiah came into the world to announce glad tidings to the poor and liberty to captives, but also to give back the sight to the blind and free the oppressed (Lk 4:18). The episode of the paralytic reveals that Jesus’ salvation cannot be trapped into any dualistic understanding (body vs. soul) of the human being. It also unveils the futility of the missiological discussion on what should come first between giving the bread or teaching the gospel.

The pastoral care of migrants, like any other pastoral care, aims at catering to the needs of the whole human being, in all his/her dimensions. Migrants are often silent victims of human tragedies, bodily and spiritually wounded. Sometimes they knock the main door, other times they fall from the roof. Like Jesus Christ, pastoral agents in the migrant ministry are called to restore their dignity, heal their wounds, revive their hope and bring them to salvation. Particularly in the case of charitable services offered to migrants of different religions and beliefs, one should recall that human promotion is in itself evangelization, since it realizes the one of the main missionary goals: to make all human being more similar to the archetype, Jesus Christ.

According to the instruction EMCC, the person’s integral advance and promotion of human dignity are essential elements of the migrant ministry:

“Keeping our eyes on the gospel thus means attention to people too, to their dignity and freedom. Helping them advance integrally requires a commitment to fraternity, solidarity, service and justice. The love of God, while it gives humankind the truth and shows everyone his highest vocation, also promotes his dignity and gives birth to community, based on the gospel proclamation being welcomed, interiorised, celebrated and lived.” [ECMM, 36].

5. Paul Praises the Church in Macedonia: Solidarity between Communities

The fifth reflection is inspired by the laud of the apostle Paul to the Christian communities in Macedonia with the occasion of their show of generosity to the poor brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

“We want you to know, brothers, of the grace of God that has been given to the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their profound poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For according to their means, I can testify, and beyond their means, spontaneously, they begged us insistently for the favor of taking part in the service to the holy ones, and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and to us through the will of God, so that we urged Titus that, as he had already begun, he should also complete for you this gracious act also.” [2Cor 8:1-6].

Paul’s words were intended as a challenge to his addressees in order to promote their generosity in response of the appeal of the needy in Jerusalem. Out of their profound poverty the Christians from Macedonia had contributed more than the wealthier Corinthians, who were used to excel in other virtues.

The principle applied by Paul is the principle of “equality,” that is the surplus of one Christian community should supply the needs of a less fortunate community (2Cor 8:14). Such principle is based on the idea that everything one possesses is a gift from the Lord to be administered for the advantage of all within and beyond one’s community, according to the dogma of the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ. Therefore sharing resources is not an act of generosity, but an act of justice, since the poor are entitled to receive from the rich ones. As a phenomenon generally linking “poor” and “rich” communities, international migration reminds the Church of the universal extent of the principle of equality. Sharing resources with migrants within one community is an act of justice. Sharing resources with their communities of origin is an act of justice as well.

The Christians in Macedonia “begged ... insistently for the favor of taking part in the service to the holy ones.” The sharing of resources is understood as a privilege, an opportunity to concretely show their concern for the less fortunate brothers and sisters. They gave not only “... according to their means” but also “... beyond their means.” They did not use their surplus; they sacrifice their own share. This generous attitude was figuratively codified by Mother Therese of Calcutta in her famous invitation “Give till it hurts.” Communities in the receiving countries generally enjoy better economic situation. They should feel like a privilege the possibility to extend financial support to the communities of origin, particularly in the development of service programs for migrants and their families.

The sharing of resources between communities of origin and host communities should go beyond the financial dimension. Sharing human resources is equally important and in this “trade” the roles of donor and recipient is likely to be inverted. In fact, the Church in the countries of origin is normally “rich” in human resources and may be able to provide the Church in the host country valuable pastoral workers for the migrant ministry. The exchange of pastoral workers may help the home and host communities to deal better with problems of inculturation and adaptation, which often mark the migration experience.

In the resource sharing exercise migrant communities should take a proactive role. They know the needs and wealth of the Church in their countries of origin as well as the needs and wealth of the Church in the host country. They can promote different kinds of cross-national sharing through their good example and sensitization initiatives aiming at engaging all the brothers and sisters in faith at home and abroad. Their generosity, which is generally overwhelming in case of disaster relief in their home countries, should be equally extended to cater to the needs of the host community.

International migration urges the Church to rediscover her Catholicity and the universal dimension of the pastoral care. In the history of the Church the temptation to focus only on the needs of one’s community has been quite frequent. Like the Corinthians, many local Churches had to be reminded about the “commandment” of solidarity. Such commandment is grounded in the principles of co-responsibility and subsidiarity. The Church of Jesus Christ is one and the geographical divisions are to foster not to jeopardize the chase for the common good. The migrant ministry highlights the transnational dimensions of the pastoral care, by which every initiative taken in favor of “foreigners” is actually for the advantage of the one Catholic Church. The migrant ministry is a concrete expression of the globalization of solidarity. Moreover, in the long term, the aid provided by the host communities to the communities of origin may become a fruitful “pastoral investment.” To this extent, such aid should always entail the promotion of transnational pastoral programs with special attention to the training and formation of pastoral agents.

According to the instruction EMCC, one of the theological foundations of the migrant ministry is the ecclesiology of communion:

“To ensure that the pastoral care of migrants may be one of communion (that is, born from an ecclesiology of communion and serving a spirituality of communion), it is essential that the Churches of departure and arrival establish an intense collaboration with one another. This begins first in the reciprocal exchange of information on matters of common pastoral interest. It is

unthinkable that these Churches should fail to dialogue with one another and systematically discuss, even in periodic meetings, problems concerning thousands of migrants.” (EMCC, 70).

6. David and the Temple: Light Structures for a Pilgrim People

The sixth reflection focuses on the divine revelation to the prophet Nathan in response to David’s intention to build a house for God.

“After David had taken up residence in his house, he said to Nathan the prophet, "See, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord dwells under tentcloth." Nathan replied to David, "Do, therefore, whatever you desire, for God is with you." But that same night the word of God came to Nathan: "Go and tell my servant David, Thus says the Lord: It is not you who are to build a house for me to dwell in. For I have never dwelt in a house, from the time when I led Israel onward, even to this day, but I have been lodging in tent or pavilion as long as I have wandered about with all of Israel.” [1Chr 17:1-6a].

The definitive settlement of the people of Israel in the Promised Land was marked by the construction of a residence for their king David. The royal palace was a sign of an epochal change, the beginning of a new kingdom founded on the ultimate possession of the land which was promised to their father Abraham. David’s house of cedar represented also an adjustment to the “political standards” of that time, when a ruler’s power was stated by the luxury of his/her residence. However, David realized the paradox between the palace of the deputed king and the tentcloth of the eternal Lord of Israel. The words revealed to the prophet Nathan are meant to clarify two important matters to David: a) no human being can build a house for the Lord to dwell in since he is the owner of the universe, and b) the Lord of Israel doesn’t want to dwell in a house since he wants to wonder about with his people. While the first clarification deals with the “immanent” dimension of God, the second one refers to his “economic” dimension. In his relationship with his people, the Lord is the “Pilgrim God,” dwelling in tent or pavilion in order to stay in the midst of his beloved sons and daughters. Journeying with his people, the Lord can listen to their pleas and cater to their needs. Such loving presence is ultimately revealed in the “Homeless Jesus” (Mt 8:20), who through his itinerant ministry was able to make himself neighbour to the poor, the oppressed and the afflicted of his time (Lk 19:36-37). The mission of revealing the loving concern of God to humankind is now entrusted to the Church, which is also called to be pilgrim and homeless. Sometimes heavy structures and comfortable stability have delayed the pace of the mission. Due to its nature, international migration reminds the Church of its itinerant dimension, through which she can journey with the people entrusted to her care.

In the ordinary pastoral care the establishment of solid structures (churches, parishes, oratories, pastoral centers, schools, etc.) grants some sense of security and durability of the ministry. However, in the case of the migrant ministry - especially when the beneficiaries are temporary migrants – solid structures may not be very suitable. Frequently migration flows suffer sudden changes and pastoral needs may vary accordingly, so that precious pastoral responses may result outdated and pastoral structures obsolete. In this case it is better to rely on “tents” rather than on “temple;” light, multipurpose and convertible structures would probably respond better to the challenges of contemporary migration. The same appreciation is valid for “juridical” structures (national parishes, chaplaincies, *missiones cum cura animarum*, offices, associations, NGOs, etc.) and pastoral programs. The pastoral coordinators of the migrant ministry should always plan them wisely, bearing in mind that in the migration scenario situations and needs are likely to change rather quickly.

At the end, a fair balance between stability and flexibility would be probably the best pastoral response to the challenges posed by contemporary migration. To this extent, the instruction EMCC states:

“In other words, new structures need to be thought out that, on the one hand, will be more “stable”, with a more consequent juridical form in the particular Churches, and, on the other, will

still be flexible and open to mobile or temporary immigration. It is no easy matter, but this already seems to be the challenge for the future.” [EMCC, 90].

Conclusion

The reflections proposed by the author are far to be exhaustive. There an evident need to deep the theological comprehension of international migration in order to better understand the meaning of this important “sign of the times.” At the end of the XIX century, blessed John Baptist Scalabrini, bishop of Piacenza (Italy), was able to discern God’s plan in human mobility:

“Seeds migrate on the wings of the wind. Plants migrate from continent to continent on the waves of the seas and rivers. Birds and other animals move from place to place. But even more do human beings migrate, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone, and, in so doing, are always the free instruments of Divine Providence, which presides over human destiny, leading all people, even through great calamities, to their final goal: the perfection of man on earth and the glory of God in heaven.” [J. B. Scalabrini, *L’Italia all’estero*, Torino 1899, pp.7-8].

People on the move challenge the Church to journey with them, reminding her that her missionary work is not concluded yet. The Church struggles to achieve her Catholicity, whose realization will be obtained only when every woman and men would believe in the salvation offered in Jesus Christ. Therefore the Church is called to continually adapt her pastoral care to the needs of the whole humankind and to be as inclusive as possible in her approach. This is what the instruction EMCC underlines with regard to the migrant ministry:

“Today the problem of helping migrants find their place in the Church is mainly on two planes: one is canonical and structural, and the other theological and pastoral. Human mobility today is on a world-wide scale. In the long run this certainly means going beyond pastoral care that is generally mono-ethnic, as both chaplaincies/missions for foreigners and the territorial parishes of host countries have been up to now, this in view of a pastoral approach based on dialogue and constant mutual collaboration.” [EMCC, 90].