

A THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION BASED ON THE ACTIONS AND TEACHINGS OF POPE FRANCIS FOR MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

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Abstract

Migration theology is relatively a new subject, which deals with migration from a theological perspective. This paper tries to present a migration theology based on the teachings of Pope Francis. Pope Francis, who is a great friend of the migrants, refugees, and marginalized gave a new face and direction for the Church and to the theologians to deal with migration from a theological perspective. The pope proposes a theology of migration which is rooted in the bible and the traditional teachings of the Church but at the same time gives room to understand migration from the lived experience of migrants itself. In other words he suggests a "theology in migration" or "theology in move." For this purpose, he asks the theologians to encounter the migrants so that their theology will be deepened with the "flesh and blood stories of migrants.

Key Words: Migration, Refugee, Theology of Migration, Theology in Migration, Encounter, Culture of Indifference.

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Introduction

The world history is a story of large and small migration movements. These movements were not without any hardships, but at the same time we cannot ignore the developments that migration movements brought forward. Amidst the difficulties in the migration process, migration is beneficial for the migrants, their families and the host countries. Pope John Paul II says, "The phenomenon of migration has always been present in human history, but we are witnessing a great increase and significant acceleration in this situation in every country of the world."¹ As pope rightly said, the migration movement in the present decades specially, with regard to the increase of refugees along with the wars in Syria, Ukraine and the present war in Palestine has become a highly complex phenomenon, with its economic, sociopolitical, cultural, and religious impacts for the migrants themselves, their native nations, and the host societies. According to Gemma Tulud Cruz "At no other point in history has the number of people on the move been at such a large scale that the current period is being referred." Also, Cruz and many other recent migration thinkers argue that recent migration faces "considerable challenges."² In this article, my aim is to find a theological solution for the challenges in the migration movement. But the question here is; since migration is a socio-political, and economic issue, what is the role of the Church and theology in finding a solution for the migration issues of today. For this purpose, let me make use of a comparison made by Daniel Groody in a forward to the book of Tisha M. Rajendra.

Role of the Catholic Church on Migration

Daniel G. Groody, makes a comparison between two world renowned persons (Donald Trump and Pope Francis) on their response towards the Issue of Migration soon after they came to power. Groody says, in response to the issues of dying refugees in the Mediterranean Sea, Pope Francis made his maiden visit (outside the Vatican City) to Lampedusa. There he consoled the refugees and showed his closeness to them and to the persons who lost their life in their migratory movement.³ On the other hand, Donald Trump, as per

¹ John Paul II, *Address of John Paul II to Participants in the Third World Congress of The Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees Held in the Vatican on October 5 1991* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), 7.

² Gemma Tulud Cruz, *Toward a Theology of Migration: Social Justice and Religious Experience* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

³ Daniel G Groody, "Forward," in Tisha M Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration* (Michigan: Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2017), 1.

his election camp, was ordered to construct a wall between the two nations (USA and Mexico) to separate 'us' from 'them'.⁴ This is the difference between theology and politics, country and kingdom, society and church. Political leaders have the primary duty to secure the life of their people. But the Church, kingdom and theology always extend their tends for the strangers and 'others.' The Church tries to find the common factor (the dignity and sanctity of the human person) and tries to unite 'us' with 'them.' Here comes the role of a theology of migration which includes everyone, both inmates and outsiders, both hosts and guests, and both citizens and migrants. The Church or Theology of migration stands for humans and humanity whereas the country and its political leaders stand for its citizens and nation.⁵

A Theology of Migration

Even though the secular media all over the world and specially, in the western world gives importance to immigration and its related issues in the fields of economics, politics, society etc. the church was slow to realize the role of the migrants in changing the face of the Catholic Church and to respond positively to this change. That is why Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan, in their book "Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology" makes the following comment; "... the Roman Catholic Church has the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People and the World Council of Churches has its Global Ecumenical Network on Migration. However, Christian churches are still far from achieving an adequate understanding of and a comprehensive program for migration."⁶ They further argue that to theologize migration or refuge is really an ambitious and risky business in the present highly mobile and rapidly changing society. For a rapidly changing society, we need a theology which is also in migration,⁷ which needs continuous and fresh re-examination.⁸

A theology of migration must focus on the issues of justice, fairness, openness, integration, etc. Theology of migration must also address the issue of permissions granted to the multinational corporates to use and often abuse natural resources and human resources (cheap labour) to

⁴ Groody, "Forward," 3.

⁵ Joby Kunnath, *A Theology of Migration in acts of Mercy* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2023), 6.

⁶ Elaine Padilla, Peter C Phan, eds. *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

⁷ Peter C. Phan, "Deus Migrator, God the Migrant," 885.

⁸ Elaine Padilla, Peter C Phan, eds. *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, 4.

multiply their profit, disregarding the value of human dignity, justice, and fairness. The catholic theology of migration unlike a sociological, political, economic or demographical study on migration, sees the “problem of migration from the view of point of migrants and refugees themselves, their expectations and hopes, their joys and sorrows, their anxieties and worries, and the wellbeing of the refugees and migrants and their families.”⁹

As it is seen, a theology of migration is a migrating theology in accordance with the changing conditions of migrants and refugees. But the task of the theologians is to establish a strong theological foundation for this changing scenario. That is why, Susanna Snyder, in her edited book *Church in an age of Global migration* asks the question; “How are churches changing in terms of theology, identity and practice in the face of global migration?”¹⁰ Here, Gioacchino Campese also raises some existential questions in his article on immigration; “Are the churches willing to hear the voice of the Spirit that speaks through the too often broken voices and experience of immigrants? ... Or are we afraid to be transformed by them?”¹¹ And what I am suggesting here is; we need a theology which is rooted in the scriptures and the teachings of the Church, basing on the “flesh and blood stories” of the people who are in move. Catholic theologians like Daniel Groody, Peter C. Phan, Susanna Snyder, Gemma Tulud Cruz etc. have taken up the challenge of having a theology of migration that upholds the Catholic principles along with their own experiences as migrants and their experiences with the migrants.¹²

Pope Francis and a Theology of Migration

Pope Francis, the son of migrant parents, has from the very beginning of his Papacy become a living theologian of migration through his words and deeds and has given a new face to the Church. His visits to Lampedusa, Lesbos, Mexico, Myanmar, etc. and his challenging messages and actions there gave a new face and new direction to the Catholic Church. His responses and interventions in

⁹ Kunnath, A Theology of Migration, in Acts of Mercy, 6.

¹⁰ Susanna Snyder, “Introduction Moving Body,” in *Church in an Age of Global Migration: A Moving Body*, eds. Susanna Snyder, Joshua Ralston, and Agnes M. Brazal (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 2.

¹¹ Gioacchino Campese, “‘But I See That Somebody is Missing’: Ecclesiology and exclusions in the Context of Immigration,” in *Ecclesiology and Exclusion: Boundaries of Being and Belonging in Post Modern Times*, eds. Dennis M Doyle, Timothy J. Furry, and Pascal D Bazzell (New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 81.

¹² Kunnath, Theology of Migration in Acts of Mercy, 8.

the recent wars in Ukraine and Palestine also should be seen as his genuine quest for peace in the world and his keen interest in the refugee. Migration theology must start with the encounter – encounter with the migrants and refugees. A real encounter can only be possible if you are with them. All his trips to migration hit areas and the way he meets the people must be seen against this background. Susanne Snyder is of the opinion that an encounter with migrants and refugees is the only way to remove the “ecology of fear” from migrants and inmates.¹³ This encounter also changes the “culture of indifference”¹⁴ in the modern world and brings forth a “culture of solidarity.” Pope Francis proposes a theology of migration which perceives migrants and refugees with an eye of mercy and not strictly by the norms and rules of migration. Proposing such a theology was one of the main aims of this article.

Pope Francis a Man of Living Theology

Even though Pope Francis did not write any encyclicals on migration and refuge, his life itself is an encyclical on migration, and he loses no chance to speak for the needs of migrants and refugees. The leadership of popes in migration issues was not new to the Catholic Church, but Pope Francis did it with more enthusiasm than his predecessors.¹⁵ Pope Francis plans his actions for migrants and refugees, in such a way that, he can take the issue of migration and refugee in the heart of the Church and into the minds of the people. Guzik opines in his article that “The way he is doing it, not only makes headlines but reshapes migration communication on a global level.”¹⁶

Most of the writings on Pope Francis explain with uttermost care, the first Journey of Pope Francis outside Rome to Lampedusa, the “Island of tears.”¹⁷ Pope Francis through his Lampedusa trip, made the less important Island of Lampedusa a world known place. By showing the miseries faced by the migrant community there, the pope could open the eyes of the authorities and the faithful. According to Guzik more than 30 international media covered this story.¹⁸ One of the main

¹³ Snyder Susanne, *Asylum Seeking, Migration and Church* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 42.

¹⁴ Pope Francis accused the world in his Lampedusa Message for its “culture of indifference” and he asked his listeners to develop a “Culture of Solidarity.”

¹⁵ Kunnath, *A Theology of Migration in Acts of Mercy*, 188.

¹⁶ Guzik, “Communicating Migration,”114.

¹⁷ Massaro Thomas, *Mercy in Action*, London: Rawman and Littlefield, 2018,132.

¹⁸ Guzik, “Communicating Migration,”116.

themes Pope wanted to convey to the world during this visit was the “Globalization of indifference” which leads to a “culture of comfort.”

The second instance where pope Francis challenged the world was his trip to Mexico in 2016 where he celebrated the mass at Ciudad Juarez, the US-Mexico border under a wooden cross. The place selected for the mass was so important for the migrants, because it is the gate way between Mexico and US, or more symbolically, the gate way between suffering and joy, desperation and hope, starvation and salvation. Massaro writes, “On this solemn occasion (Visit of Pope Francis) the cross served as a powerful symbol of both suffering and hope for deliverance.”¹⁹ In the homily, Pope Francis stressed the suffering of the migrants who wanted to cross the Mexican- US border and the injustices they had to face from the authorities and middleman.²⁰

The third important trip of Pope Francis related to refugees and migrants was his trip to the Greek Island of Lesbos. It was widely covered by the world media because of the very action of the pope receiving 12 Muslim migrants in his flight as he returned to Rome. His visits of Roman prisons, dining with the refugees, his enthusiasm to be with the people, etc. are good examples of which the people taken to their hearts. Another occasion on which he attracted the attention of the world media was his trip to Myanmar and Bangladesh in the year 2017, where he addressed the issue of Rohingya Muslim Refugees, who were minority-community, suffering in Myanmar. Through all his actions he indirectly speaks a theology of migration, a theology that encounters the migrants.

Teachings of Pope Francis on Migration

Even though Pope Francis did not produce any Apostolic Exhortation directly on the issue of migration, from the beginning of his papacy he gave ample weight to the issue of migration in his writings. From the very beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis, who experienced difficulties with the poor and migrants, had a desire to have “a poor Church for the poor.”²¹ This desire to have a poor Church

¹⁹ Massaro, *Mercy in Action*, 133.

²⁰ Pope Francis, Homily at Ciudad Juárez Fair Grounds, February 17, 2016, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160217_omelia-messico-ciudad-juarez.html.

²¹ Centre for Migration Studies, “Pope Francis and Migrants: Honouring Human Dignity, Building Solidarity and Creating a Culture of Encounter,”

for the poor led him to speak for the cause of migrants, refugees throughout his talks and writings. His intense desire for the migrants is reflected in his writings, *Laudato Si*,²² *Evangelii Gaudium*,²³ *Misericordiae Vultus*,²⁴ *Amoris Laetitia*,²⁵ *Gaudete et Exsultate*,²⁶ and *Fratelli Tutti*.²⁷ Apart from his official writings, his teachings on migration can be also seen in many of his messages. He uses many theological/migration jargons to attract people. These jargons are very important to understand the theology proposed by Pope Francis on migration. So now let us see some of the usages coined by Pope Francis to attract people on the issue of migration.

Ethical Principles on Migration Coined by Pope Francis

Sociological, economic, demographic, or political studies on migration always give emphasis to the number of migrants, or refugees. The media and political leaders are also interested in the number of migrants they have received or rejected. In this background Pope Francis uses the dictum, “**Humans, not Numbers**” in order to denote the refugees. Through this statement Pope Francis, accentuates the human dignity of the refugees who are crossing borders. In Lesbos, Pope Francis asserts that the migrants and refugees are not numbers, but people with a history of their own.²⁸

Globalization of Indifference is another phrase the pope often uses in his speeches. He says, “We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – suffering with others: The Globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep.”²⁹

<https://cmsny.org/pope-francis-and-migrants-honoring-human-dignity-building-solidarity-and-creating-a-culture-of-encounter/> accessed on 11 August 2020.

²² Pope Francis, Encyclical on Care for our Common Home: *Laudato Si* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), § 2, 25,26.

²³ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World: *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), § 210, § 87.

²⁴ Pope Francis, Bull of Induction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), § 13,14.

²⁵ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family: *Amoris Laetitia* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016), § 30, 46,47.

²⁶ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Call to Holiness in Today’s World: *Gaudete Et Exsultate* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2018), § 1,103.

²⁷ Pope Francis, Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship: *Fratelli Tutti* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020) § 1,3.

²⁸ “Pope Francis in Lesbos: Migrants are not Numbers, They are People,” *Youtube*, April 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Me5TcJUtWwI>.

²⁹ Pope Francis, “Homily of Holy Father Francis, Arena Sport Camp, Lampedusa,” July 8, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampe_dusa.html.

Over this globalization of indifference he lamented, “So many of us, even including myself are disoriented, we are no longer attentive to the world in which we live, we don’t care, we don’t protect that which God has created for all, and we are unable to care for one another.”³⁰

Various terrorist-attacks by Islamic fanatic groups spread fear among the natives of Europe and western countries towards the refugees. This led to hostility towards the foreigners, or islamophobia, among the natives of Europe. Against this background Pope Francis reiterates that the **Immigrant is an Opportunity, Not a Threat**. The pope in his speech at the World Meeting of Popular Movement in February 2017 strongly affirms that, “No people are criminal, and no religion promotes terrorism. Christian terrorism does not exist, Jewish terrorism does not exist, and Muslim terrorism does not exist. ...There are fundamentalist and violent individuals in all people and religions.”³¹ Pope Francis, all through his speeches dealing with migration repeated the idea that migrants should not be seen in terms of juridical persons such as legal or illegal but should be perceived as persons with dignity and contributors to a welcoming society.³²

After having registered more than 220,000 asylum-seekers in the year 2015 Hungary wanted to construct a 4-meter high and 175 kms long razor-wire wall on its border with Serbia. USA also wanted to construct a wall between Mexico and USA. In this connection Pope makes the historic Statement; **Fences not the Solution but Building Bridges as the Solution for Migration**. Pope Francis in a press conference on board on 17 February 2016 made the following historical statement; “Person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be and not building bridges is not a Christian.”³³

Welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants and refugees was the main theme of the message of Pope Francis on the day of World Migrants’ Day 2018.³⁴ We may summarise the entire theology of migration by Pope Francis in these four words. For him,

³⁰ Pope Francis, “Homily of Holy Father Francis, Arena Sport Camp.”

³¹ Pope Francis, “Message of his Holiness Pope Francis on the Occasion of the World Meeting of Popular Movements in Modesto.”

³² Pope Francis, “Child Migrants: The Vulnerable and the Voiceless.”

³³ “In-flight Press Conference of his Holiness Pope Francis,” February 17 2016, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco_20160217_messico-conferenza-stampa.html.

³⁴ Pope Francis, “Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees,” *Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the 104th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018*, Vatican, January 14, 2018.

‘welcome’ is not merely a social gesture or not merely a biblically founded theological virtue, but for Pope Francis, ‘to welcome’ is: “...above all, offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally.”³⁵ For Pope Francis, the verb ‘protect’ has two dimensions. One, “recognise and defend the inviolable dignity of the of those who flee real dangers in search of asylum and security.” Secondly, “to prevent exploitation, especially of women and children.”³⁶

The word “Promoting” means ensuring a good climate for the growth of migrants and refugees. “Promoting essentially means a determined effort to ensure that all migrants and refugees – as well as the communities which welcome them – are empowered to achieve their potential as human beings, in all the dimensions which constitute the humanity intended by the Creator.” Pope Francis, in his message emphasises the need for migrant integration. “Supporting integration implies providing opportunities for intercultural encounter and active citizenship.” According to Pope Francis, integration “concerns the opportunities for intercultural enrichment brought about by the presence of migrants and refugees.”³⁷

Theology of Migration by Pope Francis

According to Peter C. Phan, a theological effort to interpret migration in the light of Gospel is called Migration Theology.³⁸ Unlike other sciences, theology of migration sees migration through the eyes of God. In that connection, theology of migration takes a different level of interpretation of migration without disregarding its’ sociological, economical, and political influences.³⁹ Based on all these socio-political and cultural factors, the theology of migration gave a biblical and theological interpretation to the experiences of migrants and the reality of migration. Phan again says that this theology of migration should be rooted in the “flesh-and-blood stories of migrants themselves as human beings whose dignity and rights have often been trampled

³⁵ Pope Francis, “Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees.”

³⁶ Guzik, “Communicating Migration,” 125.

³⁷ Pope Francis, “Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees.”

³⁸ Phan, “*Deus Migrator*, God the Migrant,” 855.

³⁹ Phan, “*Deus Migrator*, God the Migrant,” 855.

upon."⁴⁰ This theology can bring about a 'culture of solidarity' instead of the 'global indifference'⁴¹ to the problem of migrants.

Perspectival Shifts of Migration Theology

Theology of migration is a new stream in theological discourses, but it has its roots in scriptures and traditions. But one could notice a great shift in the Catholic teachings of migration in the awake of the modern migration issues, and specially with the papacy of Pope Francis. Normative guidance by the popes was replaced by a moving theology of migration in the very person of Pope Francis. The first shift in this theology is a shift from a **Theology of Migration to Theology in Migration**. The dynamics of the migration theology depend on the fact that this theology which is strongly rooted in the bible, the teachings of the Church and its tradition, takes care of the background of the migrants, and interprets it according to the particular stories of particular migrants and refugees. This theology is well lived and preached by Pope Francis. Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi find four elements in this theology of migration. They are: 1. A sound theology that constructively engages with real life challenges; 2. The subject of migration should be considered a practical/actual phenomenon rather than a theoretical abstraction; 3. Migration reflection should be informed by the notion of living life in between, that is *homo viator* people on the move; and 4. These theological categories entail fluidity.⁴² Through adding these factors to migration theology they are giving life to migration theology or they are presenting a 'theology in migration, or a 'theology in move' rather than a static migration theology.

Theory to Praxis is another characteristic of the theology of Pope Francis. His historical visits and his symbolic actions spoke much louder than all the theories that we have. The Apostolic Exhortation on the migrants *Exsul Familia* which is considered as the Magna Charta for migrants proposes so many theories on migration, but these theories must lead us to certain praxis. It is the most challenging part of any theory. This theory has taken flesh in the visits and activities of

⁴⁰ Phan, "Deus Migrator, God the Migrant," 855.

⁴¹ Both these words 'culture of solidarity' and 'global indifference' are repeated in the migration related speeches of Pope Francis, which is seen in the third chapter.

⁴² Vhumani Magezi and Christopher Magezi, "Migration Crisis and Christian Response: From Daniel De Groody's Image of God Theological Prism in Migration Theology to a Migration Practical Theology Ministerial Approach and Operative Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (2018): 2, 4876. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4876>.

Pope Francis. With regard to this praxis of theory, Peter C. Phan writes, theory (orthodoxy) should lead us to good practice (orthopraxis) and this good praxis deepens our theological understanding.⁴³ We may say that the theology of migration by Pope Francis was a theology of practical experience with the migrants.

Even though Pope Francis gave clear cut norms of action for migration, he gave preference to examples rather than norms. A shift from **Norms to Examples** was at the core of the theology of Pope Francis. He gave an example to the world before he proposed some norms. The documents, exhortations, and messages on migration gave certain guidelines for the missionaries involved in the ministry of migrants and the authorities of the area to maintain healthy cooperation among them. But a theology of migration should give room for putting these norms into praxis through life examples. Jesus showed it through his life example of helping the people in their needs and finally submitting his own life for the salvation of humanity.

Another important shift that has taken place in the teaching of migration by Pope Francis is the conversion of the concept of **Witness as with-ness**. Pope Francis always finds time to be with the migrants and marginalized. This “with-ness” leaves a room for “encounter with the marginalized”, another favorite usage for Pope Francis. Susanne Snyder in her book, makes use of two terms to denote migration theology: “Theology-in-Action” or “performative theology.” According to her “theology in action” is closely related to Liberation Theology and the two important characteristics of a theology in action are ‘experience’ and ‘practice’. In order to have this experience we should experience the “with-ness” with the migrants and refugees. She further argues that ‘doing the truth’ or ‘orthopraxy’ should be given precedence over theologizing,⁴⁴ in other words she suggests that encountering the migrants and supporting them is the first step and theologizing is only the second step.⁴⁵ “A theology starts with the experience of the poor⁴⁶ and a theology proceeds to the actions of mercy (Theology-in-Action)⁴⁷, and a theology of migration – theology of mercy – reflected in the actions and words of Pope Francis is the

⁴³ Phan, “*Deus Migrator, God the Migrant*,” 856.

⁴⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. C. Ina and J. Eagleson (London: Orbis Books, 1974), 10.

⁴⁵ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church*, 16.

⁴⁶ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 11.

⁴⁷ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church*, 16.

theology that can counter the present hardships of migrants/refugees.”⁴⁸

Theology of Migration as a Theology of Encounter and Solidarity

One of the most important problems faced by migrants and natives in connection with migration and refuge is xenophobia, or the fear of others. This problem of fear leads to a fear complex. In order to overcome this fear, Daniel Groody, Susanne Snyder, Pope Francis, etc. propose the word “Encounter.” It is only through a genuine encounter, we can overcome an “ecology of fear” and to have an ecology of “mutual trust.” In migration this encounter is not merely to create an atmosphere for social contact or to create a peaceful atmosphere but for Cruz this encounter is a mission - a mission for the liberation of migrants and refugees. Encounters in grassroot service, according to Snyder, is about developing the person-to-person relation and to win the mutual trust.⁴⁹ Pope Francis summarized this mission of the Church in four words “Welcome”, Protect, “Promote” and “Integrate”⁵⁰ “By winning the mutual trust, the church gets an entry into the migrant’s world and there by getting closer to the migrant as well as migrants in general.”⁵¹

Another important factor of this encounter personalized by Pope Francis is the accompaniment/with-ness with the migrants and refugees. In all his visits to migrants and refugee filled areas, he spent enough time with the migrants and refugees. Another important aspect of this encounter is “solidarity with the migrants and refugees.” Stefan Gärtner puts it in this way. “The perspective of sympathy or compassion unites a theologian with the migrants and refugees who practises what he researches. The empathy and sympathy of the theologian can intensify the scientific insights and can have more precise definition on the issues of the suffering.”⁵² Through showing solidarity with the migrants, the Catholic Church can teach its subjects to show solidarity to the migrants and strangers who come to the Catholic world.

⁴⁸ Kunnath, *A Theology of migration in Acts of Mercy*, 245.

⁴⁹ Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church*, 36.

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, “Welcoming, Protecting, Promoting and Integrating Migrants and Refugees.”

⁵¹ Kunnath, *A Theology of Migration in Acts of Mercy*, 260.

⁵² Stefan Gaertner, “Borders and Migration in Practical Theology: The Example of Post-World War II German Refugees and the Inter-generational Transfer of their Experiences,” in *Practical Theology* 11, no. 2 (2018): 145.

According to Daniel Groody, a theology of migration or a theology of encounter can break through the three walls formed in migration or in refuge. Groody conceives of three divisions in the migration movement. They are, "Person-Person" divide (othering or fearing others), "Nation- Nation" divide (based on citizenship) and "God-God" divide (on the basis of belief). Groody finds that only a theology of migration can bridge these divisions. A clear vision of "Imago Dei," which is common to every human being, leads us to respect every human being with dignity and cross the boundary of person-person division. An eschatological understanding of "kingdom" (*visio Dei*) helps the people move forward from nation to kingdom (Kingdom of God) where everyone enjoys equal rights, and everyone gets universal citizenship as the children of God. And finally, to solve the problem of God-God divide. Daniel Groody argues that there is no border that cannot be crossed by God since God is beyond all borders. He argues further that even when human beings make borders and structures in their day-to-day life, "God walls off no one from the divine embrace."⁵³ And we see in the bible that Jesus Christ who crossed all the boundaries; social, political, and religious boundaries in his lifetime. Finally, through his death and resurrection, he opened for everyone the boundary between heaven and earth.

Conclusion

From its beginning onwards, the Catholic Church was aware of its migratory nature and was very close to the needs of migrants and refugees. But at the same time, it has not been given much importance to have a theology of migration. Catholic Social teachings on Migration or a theology of migration is based on the scripture, tradition, and authentic teachings of the Church. Moreover, the present migration theology takes care of the desperate conditions of the migrants and refugees and urges theologians to encounter the migrants and refugees to deepen their theological understanding. Different streams of science make various studies on migration but with limited perspective. In this connection there arises the importance of a theology of migration which sees migration from a wholistic viewpoint and specially from the viewpoint of the migrants themselves and their experiences.

Of course, migration is an age-old, complex, and challenging phenomenon. It is a subject of never-ending debate. As said earlier, there is room for different views on migration and migratory

⁵³ Groody, "Crossing the Divide," 8.

movement. But as Christians who follow Jesus Christ, should ask the question, what can we do to improve the life of migrants and refugees? How a theology of migration can solve the problem of hurdles between human beings on the basis of nation, religion etc.? And it is my strong conviction that a theology of migration based on the real blood and life story of migrants which is based on the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, can find some amicable solutions to the issues related to migration.