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# A Strategy To Equip Selected Members of the Gaeta Church To Build Bridges with Immigrants to Draw Them Toward the Fellowship of the Congregation

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ABSTRACT

A STRATEGY TO EQUIP SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE GAETA CHURCH  
TO BUILD BRIDGES WITH IMMIGRANTS TO DRAW  
THEM TOWARD THE FELLOWSHIP  
OF THE CONGREGATION

by

Rebecca Kessewa Gaisie

Adviser: Dr David Penno

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Professional Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A STRATEGY TO EQUIP SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE GAETA CHURCH TO BUILD BRIDGES WITH IMMIGRANTS TO DRAW THEM TOWARD THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE CONGREGATION

Name of researcher: Rebecca Kessewa Gaisie

Name and degree of faculty adviser: David Penno, PhD

Date completed: September 2024

### Problem

Due to the outbreak of a civil war in Libya in 2011, Italy has been experiencing a great influx of immigrants. Many are scattered throughout Italy, including Gaeta. A majority of the Italian members of Gaeta Church do not understand and engage in the call of God to bring all people into the fellowship of the church. This causes a lack of interest in building bridges to reach immigrants.

### Method

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategy to equip some members of the Gaeta church to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation. The basis for the development of the strategy came from the knowledge gathered from the theological and literature review chapters. The project was

intended to be implemented in two phases. The first phase was the Project Sermons and consists of 12 sermons on the following topics: (a) mission towards immigrants, (b) Jesus, the apostolic church, and the issue of immigrants, (c) ministry practice and foreigners. The second phase was the Project Seminars. This was designed to train and deploy a group of 16 selected members to build bridges with immigrants. The training focuses on five seminars regarding the issue of: (a) bias, (b) overcoming cultural enmities, (c) having knowledge and tools on cultural intelligence, (d) understanding how to interact in a multicultural group, and (e) how to become a healthy multiethnic church. During the seminars, each member would be asked to engage with a person of different ethnicity to learn more of the person's culture. The final phase of the project was to have a group interview with the 16 selected members to measure their knowledge, ability, and level of involvement in building bridges with immigrants.

### Results

All the 16 selected members that were trained and deployed to build bridges with immigrants manifested their interest in the 12 sermons that were preached and in the content of the five seminars, but at the conclusion of the project strategy only 18.75% of the participants decided to engage themselves to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation. One and a half month after the conclusion of the project one more participant started interacting and built friendship with an immigrant colleague that decided to visit the Gaeta SDA church. Therefore, at the end of the strategy project 25% of the participants were able to complete the task.

### Conclusion

Building bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation is a mission task that requires awareness of the biblical mandate, knowledge

and training about the scientific, political, and sociological implications, and faith, love, consistency, and effort in achieving the task. During the training process, the 16 selected members learned about the effect of mixophobia (the fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable dislike towards the massive presence of unknown individuals) and mixophilia (the attraction or pleasure of the natives to encounter and engage with foreigners). Five weeks were not enough to build a deep friendship, but enough to begin meaningful interaction and dialog with a foreign person. From the outcomes of the interactions with immigrant people it was evident that it requires an investment of time and persistence to build bridges with immigrants or foreign people. Therefore, training to sensitize the church members on multicultural and multiethnic mission and ministry should be periodic in order for them to get use to the idea and practice of the latter.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation work to God my heavenly father that guided me faithfully, my family, my church members, my professors and mentors, Italian Adventist Union, and my friends.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to deeply thank my adviser, Dr. David Penno, for his constant guidance.

I thank my second reader Dr. Roberto Iannò and Dr. Davide Sciarabba.

I am grateful to my Mentor Dr Jeffrey K. Couzins who encouraged me in these six years of studies.

I thank Serena Taglia La Tela, worker of Gaeta Municipal office, for providing important demographic data.

My final thanks are for Gaeta SDA church members for engaging in this doctoral project; my husband Samuel Sarpaning for being of great support, a motivator in the work of research, editing and completing the dissertation; my baby Lucia that allowed me finishing this task before delivery.

More than all my thanksgiving is to God that made all this possible through his rich provision and grace

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Description of the Ministry Context**

Since June 2022 I have ministered as a pastor in southern Italy, in the Gaeta Church. The registered members of the church are 82, but about 41 people are normally present on Sabbath mornings. There are also 9 children, three teenagers and one young adult. The average age in the church is 64-65 years. The people who attend the church are 97.5% native Italians. The remaining 2.5% is one Russian that has been living in Italy for many years.

The Gaeta city has 19,724 inhabitants, and among these 971 are foreigners, or about 5% of the population. The largest groups of immigrants are the Romanian community (302) and the Albanian community (210). The Ukrainian community is composed of 113 people, while 46 are Moldavian, 27 from Morocco and other ethnic minorities. The number of countries represented is 52 (Data received by email on November 11, 2022, from Serena Taglia La Tela, worker of Gaeta Municipal office).

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Due to the outbreak of a civil war in Libya in 2011, Italy has been experiencing a great influx of immigrants. Many are scattered throughout Italy, including Gaeta. A majority of the Italian members of Gaeta Church did not understand and engage in the call of God to bring all people into the fellowship of the church. This caused a lack of interest in building bridges to reach immigrants.

### **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategy to equip some members of the Gaeta church to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation.

### **Delimitations of the Project**

This project is delimited to the Gaeta Church in southern Italy. The project was conducted from December 2023 to March 2024.

### **Description of the Project Process**

For this project, the biblical themes, concepts, and principles that I focused on in my theological reflection clustered around multicultural and multiethnic mission and ministry. I concentrated on the following Bible passages: Genesis 18:18, Mark 13:10, Revelation 14:6-7 (mission); Mark 7:24-30, Matthew 15:21-28, John 4:1-26, Acts 11:1-18, Ephesians 2:11-22 (the church); and 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Acts 17:16-34 (ministry practice). I chose these Bible texts because in the Gaeta church they were the most helpful to present the issue of multicultural and multiethnic mission and ministry.

My literature review focused on how Italians relate to and perceive immigrants, how immigrants integrate into Italian society and culture, and how Christian churches have tried to build bridges with immigrants.

I then described the development, implementation, and evaluation of a strategy to equip some members of the Gaeta church to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation through the (a) preaching of 12 sermons, three on mission, six on Jesus, the apostolic church and the issue of immigrants, two on ministry practice and foreigners, and a conclusive interactive sermon focused on specific questions on the previous 11 sermons, (b) training and



deploying of a group of 16 selected members to build bridges with immigrants, and (c) a group interview to the 16 members to measure their knowledge, ability, and level of involvement in building bridges with immigrants.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Foreigner, Immigrant, and Non-EU Citizen**

In the past, the stranger, or he who came from other places, had a different skin color, language, religion, or culture was called a foreigner (Di Sante, 2012). Today, however, the terms most used to talk about foreigners are *immigrants* and *non-EU citizens*. *Foreigner* is a global term, which includes the last two groups, which are not synonymous with each other. Although the words *immigrant* and *non-EU citizen* allude to foreigners from poor countries, the correct use of these terms is to indicate all people that do not belong to Italy (*immigrant*) or do not come from Europe (*non-EU citizen*).

#### **Mixophilia and Mixophobia**

Other phenomena that the presence of foreigners causes are *mixophilia* and *mixophobia*. The first describes the attraction or pleasure of the natives to encounter and engage with foreigners. On the other hand, the *mixophobia* describes the fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable dislike towards the massive presence of unknown individuals (Bauman 2016, 9; Campolo and Battle 2005, 5).

#### **Assimilation, Multiculturalism, and Interculturality**

Although Western societies include a significant number of foreigners, the Western societies tend not to integrate people from different cultures. Indeed, the attitude towards immigrants is divided into assimilation and multiculturalism (D'Haenens 2006, 4).

1. *Assimilation* requires that, through the adoption of the customs and values of the host country, the following generations of immigrants merge into the local population (the French model) (D'Haenens 2006, 7).

2. *Multiculturalism* is based instead on the creation of separate communities that maintain their identity and are recognized in their specific values (the English model that today appears to be in crisis) (Benet-Martinez and Hong 2014, 129).

3. *Interculturality* should be a dialogue and an open confrontation between cultures, without the pretense of one dominating over the other. The purpose of interculturality is to find the boundary between total disconnect between cultures and full understanding between them, that is an in-depth study of reciprocal values (M. Barrett. n.d. Multiculturalism and Interculturalism - Blog - Multiculturalism Forum. Accessed 5/1/2019 <http://www.multiculturalismforum.org/blog/2014/9/1/martyn-barrett-multiculturalism-and-interculturalism.html>).

#### Cultural Intelligence (CI)

CI is a meta model that provides a structure capable of managing cross-cultural issues (Livermore 2009, 45). CI requires the study of cultures across multiple disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science and all of these in the political, educational, legal, hospital, managerial and tourist fields (Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey 2008, 3-4; Peterson 2004; Ang and Van Dyne 2008). Staller (2009) and Plum (2008) state that the concept of cultural intelligence originated in the business and economic field. According to Rah (2010), even if cultural intelligence comes from the business field it should be adopted in the Church to enable Christian communities to communicate better God's truth to all humankind.

## **Summary**

The aim of this introduction was to present the challenge of developing, implementing, and evaluating a strategy to equip some members of the Gaeta church to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation. As a procedural strategy I chose to engage at least half of the participant that were already part of the church board and in leadership position as church elders or department leaders, who could influence the church with the knowledge and experience they would acquire. Since according to the church members testimony, a specific training on multicultural and multiethnic mission and ministry was never done before for the entire church or the members in leadership position, the hope is through this project to initiate to sensitize some of the members on this important aspect of mission and ministry.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

#### **Introduction**

After introduction of chapter one, in this second chapter I am going to explore the theological basis for building bridges to reach immigrants.

I'm going to approach some key Bible passages to give to this study the theological foundation for my research. In this chapter I will have three sections.

In the first section, I will focus on Mission, by exploring the texts of Gen 18:18, Mark 13:10, Rev 14:6-7. My goal in this section is to explore the call of God to bring the Gospel world wide, with no limit and barriers toward foreigners. In the second section, I will observe the challenges that Jesus and the apostolic church faced dealing with some immigrant that wanted to become part of the salvation plan. To achieve this purpose these are the Bible texts that I will study: Mark 7:24-30, Matt 15:21-28, John 4:1-26, Acts 11:1-18, Eph 2:11-22. In the third and last section, to talk about ministry practice in reaching foreigners, I will use the examples of the apostle Paul through the texts of 1 Cor 9:19-23 and Acts 17:16-34.

Despite globalization, unprecedented ease of travel, and the common ideal that we are all "citizens of the world," welcoming foreigners without fear, discrimination and prejudice has always been one of humanity's greatest difficulties.

#### **Fear and Resistance to the Foreigner**

According to the Bible and starting from Gen 1, human beings were not sedentary. God, through the commandment of Gen 1:28, asks Adam and Eve to

populate the whole earth. As diverse populations and civilizations developed, at some point people started to move from one community to another and thus became foreigners. Also, driven by curiosity and mercantile trades, human beings traveled through multiple lands. Moreover, the boundaries of the various populations changed depending on the outcomes of wars, new conquests, and loss of territories. Historians say that because of this mobility, every people group has always included foreigners coming from families and groups belonging to different territories and regions (Gioia 1998, 15).

However, the appearance of foreigners, despite their obvious mobility, was rarely experienced in a positive way; in fact, they were considered by the natives as the primary cause of dangers and calamities such as the transmission of diseases. For this reason, foreigners were often kept away, outside the walls of cities, if not killed. Gioia (1998) writes about this: "As long as peoples did not achieve a certain degree of security and civilization, they kept themselves on guard against any threat that loomed on their horizon, denying welcome to those who showed up at the gates of their cities or in front of their tents" (16).

#### Call of God to Love Foreigners or Similar

It was not until the second millennium B.C. that trade between different nations began to be documented, normalizing the growing foreign presence in the various territories. Hospitality, understood as tolerance of people from places other than one's own territory, thus begins to be a "universal" phenomenon, especially in the places where the Bible is set, like in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Syria, and even later on in ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. (Gioia 1998, 16). After this brief introduction a few questions may rise: how is the Old Testament depicting immigrant? Are the

immigrants perceived as a threaten or as a blessing? Does the Bible have a univocal answer?

There is a constant call in the Bible to take care of the foreigner who is considered part of the most vulnerable social group together with widows and orphans. Furthermore, the appeal made to the people of Israel is to treat the foreigner well, remembering the fatigue and suffering of having found themselves foreigners in Egypt (Exod 23:9 Exod 22:20 Exod 20:10 Lev chapters 17-26 Lev 19:34 Lev 25:23 Deut 10:17,18 Deut 27:19).

Nonetheless, God says to avoid idolatry, to practices such as sacred prostitution, and to the sacrifices of children, therefore the opening towards the migrant is not without limits ( Lev 18:3; Deut 13:1-18; Exod 20:3-6; 2Kgs 17:6-18; Lev 19:29; Lev 18:21; 2Kgs 16:2-4, 17:31 2 Chr 28:3 Ezek 16:20-22).

Analyzing the biblical text, however, we realize that even before Israel was a foreign population in Egypt, the first who was made a foreigner by God was Abraham, reason why it is essential to pause and analyze this character and the way in which he interacted as a foreigner among the populations to which he emigrated. Since Abraham is a key figure of immigration in the Old Testament, in this chapter we will also look at some biblical statements in the New Testament regarding the urgency of bringing the Gospel to all nations, and we will also examine how other figures like Jesus, the apostles Peter, and Paul related to immigrants. This figures also contributed with their example to the understanding of the relationship with immigrants.

## Mission Towards Immigrant

In this section we will examine the biblical texts of Gen 18:18, Mark 13:10, Rev 14:6-7 to understand the urgency of the mission to foreigners, in bringing them the everlasting gospel, thus making them partakers of saving grace.

### A Blessing to All Nations

One of the main foreigners the Bible tells us about is Abraham. He became a blessing to all nations (Gen 18:18), by building bridges with neighbors and foreigners. According to the account in Gen 11:31, Abraham, a native of Ur, lived in his own land and community, with his family in Haran. From the biblical account, however, we know that at the beginning of chapter 12:1-3, God bursts into Abraham's daily life by making a paradoxical and radical request to him:

"The LORD said to Abraham, 'Go away from your country, from your relatives and from your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you; I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a source of blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you, and in you shall be blessed all the families of the earth.

Because all nations are blessed in Abraham, the church cannot dispense with the responsibility of bringing the good news to all peoples regardless of where they come from. The example of Abraham is relevant for Christian mission. The call of Abraham occurs before the practice of circumcision began. Abraham obeyed God's call before he became a Jew, therefore all believers have a responsibility in sharing the gospel to all nations before they identify themselves with an ethnic group.

The figure of Abraham, however, is not only important because he is a foreigner, but also because of his willingness to know, to dialogue, and to help the people around him in case of need (Gen 14:1-24), whether foreigners or locals. For

this aptitude to help his neighbor, he will be blessed by Melchizedek king of Salem who will say to him, "Blessed be Abraham by the Most High God, master of heaven and earth! Blessed be the Most High God, who has given you into the hand of your enemies!" (Gen 14:19-20).

Abraham, however, despite his status of stranger, is also hospitable and welcoming. This disposition of his to welcome and give hospitality is so important that it will be recalled in the New Testament by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb 13:2). In Genesis 18 tells us about the hospitality of Abraham who, while standing under an oak tree near his camp at Mamre, is visited by God himself who stops by, before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness. In this dialogue, God decides to make Abraham a participant in his decisions because he will be the person through whom he will bless all the nations of the earth. In fact, even in this context, although Sodom and Gomorrah did not belong to the territories in Abraham's possession, the patriarch nevertheless becomes a blessing for these foreign cities because he is the only one to pray and intercede for them to avoid their destruction. It should be noted that Abraham's concern for the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah was not for the mere fact that his kinsman Lot inhabited them, but Abraham's concern was for all citizens. This is why Abraham is a blessing for these foreign territories as well. The patriarch thus teaches that the mandate to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth consists in the interest of the common good and the welfare of one's neighbor without having a bank account (Hamilton 1995, 17-18).

The promise to Abraham to be the person through whom all nations will be blessed finds resonance in his natural predisposition to care for the good of his neighbors, beyond ethnicity and their cultural background. This predisposition of the patriarch emerges in his hospitable manner toward the three foreign men who come to



visit him, as well as in his concern about the eventual destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Arnold 2009, 181). This should be the attitude of every follower of God, to have interest in and to foster the good of one's neighbor as worship to God. For God seeks such worshippers so that they can be instruments through which he can pour out his blessings to all the families of the earth. In this, Abraham becomes, for all of us, an example of justice for and solidarity with our neighbor (O' Connor 2018, 266).

Abraham's election has a definite purpose, which is to give a testimony about the existence of the true God of love in whom to believe, and who works without limits for the good of all human beings and nations; this is in fact the significance of the Gospel, that is, the saving message and the greatest source of blessing that any individual can find (Skinner 1912, 304).

For this reason, the Bible presents many other texts that show the urgency of sharing the living Gospel with immigrant and among the different populations, one of which is Mark 13:10

### **The Urgency of the Preaching of the Gospel to all Nations**

“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations” (Mark 13:10).

This message of the Gospel is so important that in Mark 13:10 it emerges that the proclamation of the good news must reach all the world, among all nations before the time of the end comes (Marcus 2009, 883). In fact, it is no coincidence that on several occasions Mark tells us that Jesus passes through foreign territories. For instance, in chaps. 5:1-20; 7:24–8:10, Jesus interacts with people from backgrounds other than his own. It is also noteworthy that a foreigner will realize his divinity at the moment of the crucifixion (Mark 15:39). By focusing on Mark 13:10, we realize that the first priority is that the Gospel must be preached everywhere, for only then the

task that God will give to his angels (v. 27) to gather his elects at the end time will be successful (France 2002, 516-517). Even though the outcome of evangelism will be known only at the end time, this mandate that Jesus speaks of to the apostles is not prophetic, but rather a task that every disciple of any time and generation must carry out with urgency (Witherington 2001, 344). Moreover, the absolute importance of evangelism over possible persecution in the last days emerges in this text, because the end of the world is not determined by the amount of persecution, but rather by the greatest possible number of people who will be able to receive the witness of the gospel (Hooker 1991, 312). This means that as believers awaiting the return of Jesus, instead of developing an obsession with every possible persecution and every sign foretelling the end time, it is appropriate to engage seriously in the witnessing of the good news. This does not mean that everyone will accept the message of the Gospel, but those who accept Jesus into their lives will be given the opportunity to receive the freedom inherent in salvation, of which no one can be deprived even under persecution (Evans 2001, 310). The importance of witnessing the faith and salvation in God, emerges not only in the New Testament, but also in several Old Testament passages, especially in the texts of the prophet Isaiah, (42:6; 49:6,12; 52:10; 60:6) in which the role of God's children as a light to those who do not yet believe and do not know God is mentioned (Bock 2015, 324).

But if in ancient times the proclamation of the gospel was entrusted in a special way to the prophets, it is clear from Revelation that in these modern times it is important for all believers in God to be vocal carriers of the message of salvation (Rev 14:6-7). For this reason, it is relevant to look closer the text of Rev 14:6-7

## The Eternal Gospel to all Nations

Indeed, in the text of Rev 14:6-7 the importance of sharing the eternal gospel to all nations and peoples of the earth emerges. Compared with the text of Mark 13:10, this text of Revelation 14:6-7 appeals to its hearers about the awareness that God, besides being the center of the saving gospel, is also the creator of the world and the cosmos. Therefore, detached from our life-giver, as human beings, we can only die. Moreover, recognizing that God is the creator implies that every creature worships him, because as creator he will also be the judge at the end time (Ford 1984, 236-237).

The gospel spoken of in Rev 14:6-7 is thus not only about salvation by grace in Jesus, but also about salvation through praise and gratitude to God as creator. It is interesting that this appeal is also addressed to the people of Lystra by Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:15 (Mounce 1977, 273). The fact that the gospel spoken of in Revelation is qualified as eternal, it is an important element that distinguishes it from any other good news, especially in a context in which the meaning of good news is attributed to new emperors rising to reign. The term eternal thus gives to the readers the knowledge that the only true Lord is God, the one to be worshiped from creation until now and in the future to come. God is the eternal God whose gospel is also eternal. The eternity of God's sovereignty implies that from immemorial times his worship must be universal and not reserved for small ethnic groups. Moreover, the fact also that the hour of his judgment has come implies a certain urgency for conversion on the part of all those who have not yet made him their God and the center of their worship (Aune 1998, 826-827).

In an imperial context, this text emphasized the importance of worshipping the creator and sovereign God of the universe, but not the creature, as the emperor of the day (Resseguie 2009, 198). The angel thus appeals to his hearers to be aware of the

creation theology (Stevens 2014, 442) and God's absolute sovereignty. Interestingly, in Dan 4:34,37 this is the same awareness King Nebuchadnezzar acquires by healing from the state of bestiality that had been imposed on him for failing to recognize God's primacy and sovereignty (Beale 1999, 751).

After having examined the biblical texts of Gen 18:18, Mark 13:10, Rev 14:6-7 and having understood the urgency of the mission towards foreigners, in the following chapter we will analyze how the practice of these principles is not always immediate in churches and we will find out what can be the reasons for the barriers, limits and difficulties that the Bible brings out regarding the intention of welcoming the foreigner and making him a participant in the Gospel's message.

### **Jesus, the Apostolic Church and the Issue of Immigrants**

In this second section we are going to examine the synoptic texts of Mark 7 and Matt 15 to show the prejudice of the people of Israel against the foreigners; we will observe the cultural implications of Jesus encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26; we will analyzing Acts 11:1-18 the episode of Peter and Cornelius and its implications in the early church and we will conclude by analyzing the text of Eph 2:11-22 to observe how a multiethnic church can be united in Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

#### **Prejudice Against the Foreigner**

Welcoming the foreigner without fear, discrimination, and prejudice has always been one of the greatest difficulties humanity has faced. It was not easy even for the fledgling church to proclaim the gospel to all nations. It was even less easy for the disciples because, in the apostles' day foreigners were viewed with distrust and contempt by the natives. In fact, the Bible shows us that in Jesus' day the Jews held all pagans (i.e., foreigners compared to them) contemptuously as dogs. In the Gospel

episodes according to Mark 7:24-30 and Matt 15:21-28, Jesus also calls a person a dog, according to the mainstream culture.

In these texts, a pagan woman's confession of faith is illustrated to show that, contrary to the ideology of the Jews, even pagans can access salvation and God's universal grace, which is not meritorious or sectarian. Indeed, this woman's faith, as we can see from the text of Matt 15:21-28, in v. 28 is judged by Jesus himself as great (*Megas*)!

The pericope of the Syrophenician woman undoubtedly deals with Jesus' mission. This time, Jesus operates among the pagans. The miracle performed by Jesus is a symbol of the gift of salvation to the Gentiles, who manifest their faith. The mission among the Gentiles probably had to be justified in the circles of the early church. According to Marius the need for such justification resulted from the fact that Jesus was understood to be sent only to the house of Israel (cf. Mark 7:27; Matt 15:24) (Liu 2010, 254; Rosik 2004, 470).

Other scholars (Beck, Benedetti, Brambillasca, Clerici, Fausti, 1977, 234) believe that the power of the episode of the Syrophenician woman, who pleads with Jesus to have her child healed, stands out even more because of the fact that while the faith-renewing experience does not occur among the disciples and Pharisees, it takes place instead in a wonderful way among the Gentiles. Therefore, the focal point of the passage are the verses of Matt 15:24-25, where it is stated that Jesus came to carry out his mission among the lost sheep of “the house of Israel”, but the others, the Gentiles, would benefit inasmuch as that the Israelites underestimated God's gift, rejecting it. Paul writes about this in his letter to the Romans, “the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of every believer, of the Jew first of all, but also of the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

In Mark 7:24 the novelty of the meaning of this passage is also indicated by the geographical notation that Jesus leaves Galilee, where much of his ministry takes place, and goes to pagan territory. Some manuscripts omit the name of the city of Sidon (Beck et al. 1977, 234).

#### Jesus Illustrates the Mission toward Foreigners

Beck et al. (1977, 234) also attest that the Judaic writers designated the pagans by the appellation "dogs," and that the harshness of this word is muted in Mark 7:24-30 by the diminutive, by which the domestic puppies were designated, the object more of sympathy than of contempt. Moreover, from the whole account, the narrative let us perceive in Jesus himself the uneasiness he felt at not being able to extend his ministry even among the pagans; for he knew that his mission was limited to the Jews. The church would later be entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to all peoples. But it is not necessarily the case that Jesus intended to be docile in this passage. Instead, he uses this "offensive" terminology to meet the disciples cultural understanding of foreigner, and then, through the Syrophoenician's response, lift them to a higher understanding of the importance of mission toward pagans. Jesus teaches the disciples a lesson of openness and inclusion towards foreign people through the luminous faith of this pagan Syrophoenician woman, who understands the meaning of the "breadcrumbs" and encounters the power of Jesus (Beck et al. 1977, 235). So, in this way, at the same time, Jesus bridges the disciples' mission to the Syrophoenician need, eliminating the cultural barrier of the mainstream.

"God makes no preference of person, but to those who fear him and practice righteousness, to whatever people they belong, they are acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34 f.). (Beck et al. 1977, 236).

In Mark 7:28-30 the Syrophenician woman willingly accepts the humble position of "stranger," and shows how, even on that basis, she still demands healing for her daughter.

#### The Sharpness and Faith of the Pagan Woman

Here the woman not only shows intelligence and skill in being able to reuse to her own advantage an originally hostile image, but expresses an attitude that, in light of the context, reveals a profound insight into Jesus' identity and message. First of all, the title "Lord," acquires a special poignancy in a section in which, alongside the theme of the disciples' mission, that of Jesus' messianic identity is also essential. This already indicated by the two parallel groups of opinions around Jesus reported in Mark 6:14-16 and 8:27-29, at the beginning and end of the section, with the last one resulting in Peter's recognition that Jesus is the Christ. (Mazzucco 2001, 424)

#### God has Promised that All Nations Will Be Blessed

God's generosity toward his children is so abundant that even a total stranger could have a share in it. It was the great truth of the Old Testament: in Abraham, and thus in Israel, all nations would ultimately be blessed (Gen 22:18), and the woman claims it. (Cole 1998, 234; Liu 2010, 255).

What mattered most to Mark and his readers was this: that the woman's daughter was healed (v. 30). She was a Gentile, and clearly that fact was important to the mission among the Gentiles of the church of Mark's time. (Cole 1998, 235).

#### The Bread of Life

What is the "bread of the children" and who really eats of it? The episode of the Syrophenician, a pagan woman who does not belong to God's people, is highly instructive for us, who consider ourselves children of God. The disciples, as well as Mark's community, had not grasped the meaning of the "bread of the sons." The same

happens today to good Christians who perform all their religious practices but do not understand the value of the bread that is to be shared with the brethren. Their religiosity is thus reduced, as in the previous passage, to a pure outward religiosity, made up of words, which never manages to become nourishment for others. Often, agnostics are hungrier for God's true bread, like this pagan woman, who unlike those who claim to be Christians, get it. Jesus tells her that because of her "word," her daughter is saved. This "word," which saves, is precisely faith in the Christ bread, the bread of righteousness and love that frees humanity from the evil spirit. (Beck et al. 1977, 236).

### **Lordship of the God Who Saves**

The message of the pericope also fits into the theme of God's lordship found in Mark's gospel. The lordship of God, in this gospel, is closely linked to the person of Jesus. Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand (cf. Mark 1:15) is confirmed by his works: healings, exorcisms, and other miracles. His deeds clarify the power of that kingdom and are the confirmation of the proclamation. Jesus, by casting out the demon from the daughter of Syrophenician, breaks the power of Satan, who until then controlled the girl's life. The whole episode conveys the salvific message that spans the centuries, the simple and profound message whose content reveals that God is willing to offer the gift of salvation to anyone who asks humbly and in faith. (Rosik 2004, 471).

Another text that teaches us this principle is the text of John 4 in which Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman is presented. Unlike the Syrophenician woman, in this episode it is Jesus who begins the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, upsetting the customs of the time according to which a Jew would never speak with a person of the Samaritan ethnic group and female. Also, this episode, like the previous



one, will offer us pedagogical elements to learn the importance of openness and acceptance towards foreigners in sharing the Gospel of Jesus together, and will allow us to observe that people of different ethnic groups can also be converted, and they may show interest in learning how to sincerely worship God.

#### The Invitation to Worship God Has No Ethnographic Limits

In the Gospel according to John, in chap. 4, it is clear that in order to be sincere worshippers a person's ethnic origin and troubled past do not matter. Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman, a foreigner to the Jewish people. The Samaritans were culturally Hellenized and spoke Greek, which is why they were despised by the Jews. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans was well known and openly acknowledged by all. But Jesus breaks down this hostile wall in the name of the greater urgent mandate, which is to take the gospel to all nations (Keener 2005, 599).

In Jesus' days, according to the teachings given by the Jews, one should not deal with people whose morals and lifestyle were ambiguous, most likely so as not to be negatively affected by them. Jesus, however, teaches through this episode that it is important to interact with all categories of people as long as we are the ones who positively influence them. If this were not the case, the purpose of the church and believers who are supposed to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth would not make sense either (Keener 2005, 596).

Given her moral condition, the Samaritan woman was isolating herself. In fact, Jesus encounters her because she goes to fetch water at the well at an unusual time, when the sun was beating down and the other women were not there. Jesus therefore chooses to meet this woman without disrupting the schedule of her routine created to keep her life as private as possible. The text thus invites us to pay attention to people

who are isolated or often marginalized by society, and to meet them in their comfort zone without disrupting their routines (Keener 2005, 591).

Furthermore, according to the culture of the time, men did not converse openly in public with women; Jesus, however, meets the woman in broad daylight because he is not ashamed of her, unlike Nicodemus who wanted to meet Jesus at night so as not to be seen (Keener 2005, 588; 593).

In a historical context in which a woman's chastity was very important, the Samaritan woman turned out to be the object of scorn and criticism because she had had five husbands and at the time of her meeting at the well with Jesus was cohabiting (Keener 2005, 595). The episode of the Samaritan woman at the well teaches us that God's willingness to meet with people does not depend on what we consider to be more or less a right moral behavior. God does not act on the basis of appearances or on the clichés we have of other people. Keener rightly states:

"Outward markers which John's religious contemporaries would contemplate, such as her gender, religious tradition and ethnicity, and past moral activity, prove irrelevant in revealing the sort of person God seeks to worship him" (Keener 2005, 585).

This woman thus becomes one of the pillars of the nascent Christian community in her area. Through Jesus' saving action of giving living water to this "sinful" woman, she becomes his faithful disciple. This whole process of change and acceptance of the task of discipleship takes place in the woman thanks to the attitude of Jesus who speaks to her without expressing judgment and prejudice; on the contrary, Jesus' welcoming attitude brings out the Samaritan woman's missionary gifts. It would be interesting to observe what endowments might emerge from various people who are usually treated with prejudice in communities because of their

experience and appearance when not consonant with the standards of the collective imagination (Keener 2005, 586).

Looking more closely at the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, we notice in the text that Jesus says he is the fountain of living water, that is, the center and source of the saving message. The fact that Jesus himself is the source of living water indicates that Jesus is beyond religions and denominations. In all circumstances without distinction, as disciples we are called to bring this living water to those we meet. The talk about ethnic and geographical differences that the Samaritan woman instead makes, brings out a human defense mechanism, which seeks differences with the other to affirm her identity. This attitude, however, leads to removing attention from God and placing it rather on us human beings and our differences (Keener 2005, 601).

Jesus, however, shifts the woman's attention to the action and presence of the Holy Spirit, for it is the power of God manifested to be sought beyond the places of worship. It is the Holy Spirit who manifests God's presence to believers and within the church, so it was at Pentecost, during the nascent church and even in our day (Keener 2005, 615-617). Jesus teaches that truth can be conveyed through the Holy Spirit, which is why there is no true worship unless one is inspired and led by Him. In this case, the Holy Spirit not only touches the Samaritan woman's heart, but teaches that barriers of gender, ethnicity, etc., have no place among God's believers. This new truth causes a change of perspective and priorities in the Samaritan woman and generates in her a spontaneous desire to share her faith and experience. (Keener 2005, 618-621).

Thus, the Holy Spirit is the one who touches hearts and converts them without ethnic and geographical barriers, and especially beyond human expectations. After

Jesus' ascension into heaven, this reality is imparted and manifested in a special way also to the apostle Peter and his contemporaries through the conversion of Cornelius.

In this following section we will analyze the episode to understand how the Holy Spirit works without ethnic boundaries to convert people and drive them to worship God.

#### The Conversion Through the Spirit Beyond Ethnicities

The conversion of Cornelius is reported three times in Acts (chaps. 10, 11 and 15). This means that it was a major event that marked a change in the nascent church (Kurz 2013, 182).

The episode is recounted for the second time in Acts chap. 11 in response to the accusation Peter received from some circumcised believers in Jerusalem who believed that a Jew should never share the table with a pagan for his uncleanness. Their charge was that Peter entered the house of an uncircumcised man and ate with him because the Gentiles did not observe the purification laws of the Jews. The charge is probably made because until then the only mode allowed to non-Jewish new Christian converts was to also assimilate Jewish purification practices (Kurz 2013, 182; Barret 1994, 533). Peter explains that he was praying when he received a vision from God. This action leads to an understanding of the importance of the attitude of prayer to know what God wants to teach us and how he wants us to engage in reaching out to people who might be interested in knowing him (Kurz 2013, 183).

After the vision, Peter is visited by some messengers from Caesarea. These Gentiles seek out the apostle and not the opposite. This demonstrates that mission can sometimes under our eyes, without having to go far (Kurz 2013, 183). The text teaches that not to evangelize, by taking an interest in the good of the people closest to us, is an act of disobedience to God. In fact, as also emerges from the parable of the

Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 we cannot choose our neighbor. It is rather a surprise that comes from God (Kurz 2013, 184).

Once he arrives at Cornelius' house, Peter, by preaching the gospel, gives Cornelius and his family the opportunity to receive the Christian faith, salvation in Jesus, and be baptized. In this experience Peter himself is surprised that Cornelius and those in his household receive the Holy Spirit, as the apostles also received it without being able to decide anything about it, "for the Spirit blows where he wills" (John 3:8). God, through Peter's experience with Cornelius, makes it clear that the gift of faith and salvation is for everyone, including Gentiles, or whoever we might least imagine. As disciples, then, our task is to continue to be witnesses of the gospel and to be God's light to the world in which we live (Kurz 2013, 184-185; Barret 1994, 534).

As we have seen in all these previously narrated episodes of Cornelius' conversion, God's intent is to have one committed people, who despite the ethnic and cultural differences of their constituent individuals, are united in the Spirit for worship and mission to the world. In the next paragraphs through the text of Eph 2:11-22, we will analyze the intention of God to create a unite people and a new church in Christ through the work of the Spirit.

#### A New People in Christ, a New Spiritual Church for God

In both today's multicultural and multiethnic world, as in the time of the nascent Christian church, where there were Jews and Gentiles, unity among peoples could only be achieved by Christ Jesus, as it is evident from the text of Eph 2:11-22.

Hoehner (2003) writes about this,

The first thing Paul discusses about this union is that it is accomplished in Christ. Although Jews and Gentiles had nothing to do with each other before Calvary, both Jews and Gentiles who are in Christ have been united by the blood of Christ. Thus, it is not Jews and Gentiles per se that have been united but Jews and Gentiles in Christ that have been united by the work of Christ. (351-352)

The text of Eph 2:11-12 brings out the different conditions that existed before Jesus' sacrifice between the foreigners and the Jewish people so that the Gentiles are aware of the change that has taken place in their lives. In fact, believers should always be attentive in noting their own ethical transformation through their encounter with Christ. While it is true that foreigners were completely without God, at the same time even Jews had become alienated from what had been their mandate to be an example to the peoples of the earth (Lincoln 1990, 160; Hoehner 2003, 356-357; Muddiman 2001, 115). God's desire, however (v. 12) was not a privileged category, and here it is that through Jesus, the only one capable of bringing peace, (v.14) the dichotomy "we (Jews) - they (foreigners)" is broken, giving rise to a horizontal as well as a vertical reconciliation between God and the various peoples of the earth. (Lincoln 1990, 125; 160).

The reconciliation that Jesus brings through his sacrifice, however, is not only between God and mankind, but also between human beings. Salvation is therefore also about the unity in Christ of various ethnic groups and people (Best 1998, 235).

The unity in Jesus is not only about the fact that the previous condition of the Gentiles was that of sinners without God, but it is especially about the idea that from being strangers without God and without belonging, they become part of his people. Jesus by his sacrifice removes the sense of inadequacy that the Gentiles might have felt because of the hostile and separatist attitude of the Jews. (Best 1998, 237; 239).

The Gentiles, like the Ninevites in the book of the prophet Jonah, accept God after receiving him and no longer want to be separated from him that is why they are also willing to be with the Jews, who until then had not shared the knowledge of the covenant of promise made to Abraham (Best 1998, 241) (Muddiman 2001, 121).

In Eph 2:13 the terms *far-near* make us realize that the point of observation for measuring distance is the presence of God. So, the intent of these two spatial clues is to reflect on where the believer is in relation to God (Best 1998, 245). For the Jews, this remoteness of the Gentiles from God was also expressed through the architecture of the temple, where the Gentiles could be in the outermost and furthest part from the most holy place where God's presence was. Christ's sacrifice, on the other hand, definitely abolishes these walls and this distance for anyone who wants to approach God (Muddiman 2001, 115).

Christ's death, however, is the key to the context of Eph 2:11-22. It is only the blood of Christ that saves Christians and nothing else, not penances, knowledge, persecution, or social standing (Best 1998, 246).

In this text Christ is identified as the peace itself and not as the proponent of it. He is the peace of believers, and his peace is an indication of salvation in God. This is the reason why animated diatribes and discussions in communities where Jesus' presence is experienced should subside (Best 1998, 251-252).

The hostility that the Jews had toward the Gentiles, especially toward the Romans is reported by several historians, which is why this text speaks of the wall of separation, which only Jesus could break down through his sacrifice of love to save all nations by making them one people in God (Best 1998, 256-257).

The new being in Christ is a transformed individual through God's transcendental intervention (Best 1998, 262).

The church coming into existence as a body is possible because of Christ's sacrifice (Best 1998, 266).

Both Jews and Gentiles before Christ's sacrifice were in the same condition of sin and transgressors of God's will, and both were groups to be redeemed. The

situation of the Jews in Paul's time was no different from that of Christians in today's churches. That is, if Israel's task was to follow the way of the Lord, and to be a light to other nations, the same thing should be done by church members today toward their fellow citizens and neighbors who are unbelievers, regardless of whether they are of their own ethnicity or not, because the believer's task is to be a light through his or her testimony to those who do not yet know God. When we do not accomplish the mission of reaching to others we are as lacking as were the Jews who did not want to deal with Gentiles (Best 1998, 268).

This text from Eph 2:11-22 presents three groups of people: the Gentiles, the Jews, and the church. Bringing the parallelism back to us today, there is a danger that we are often faced with three realities: 1) the church as a sectarian group, which excludes all those who are not believers and do not think like them, thus closed to the outside world. 2) the non-believers. 3) the church open and inclusive toward the world with its various cultural and ethnic differences, i.e., the true church (Best 1998, 269).

Eph 2:11-22 brings out that in Christ all ethnic groups become one new creature (vv. 14-18), so there is a change of perspective even on the part of the Jews. There can be no more division between the two ethnic groups, and there is no more room for superiority, because now both groups have equal access to God (Lincoln 1990, 133). In v. 15 we see that of the two groups God creates only one. For God the creator is capable of continually recreating new positive realities; creation is not one-time, once-for-all, but constant. There is thus an end to the diversity of ethnicities and the beginning of one ethnicity in God, not because the individual ethnicity is eliminated, but rather because this new identity in Christ is greater and has priority over one's own personal ethnicity (see also Galatians 3:27-28) (Lincoln 1990, 134).



At a later stage after God makes of the two peoples one, he also constitutes them as the stones that build his church. Each believer can then grow as a holy temple of the Lord founded on the teaching of the apostles, the prophets, and more importantly: Christ, who is the cornerstone that maintains the whole edifice. All this should produce a deep sense of gratitude and a mindset ready to accommodate ethnic differences, as well as an anticipation of the cosmic unity that will be there at Jesus' second return (Lincoln 1990, 132; 160-161). The church then becomes the place where there is reconciliation among human beings, and where we rejoice and enjoy God's presence (Lincoln 1990, 162). The church is at the center of the divine plan in constituting all believers as his one people (Muddiman 2001, 135).

The text of Eph 2:11-22 shows us that soteriology (Eph 2:14-18) is followed by ecclesiology (Ephesians 2:19-22) and that the church is the place where people should feel at home in having a sense of belonging to God's family, as the physical place where God's presence on earth can be perceived in a collective gathering. (Lincoln 1990, 162).

Other aspects that the text of Eph 2:11-22 can impart to believers today is that the past in Christ does not matter, rather the "new present in Him who is" matters. In God we are therefore called to live in the present. Another teaching is that in Christ human beings coming from different ethnicities are united in the Spirit, and it is therefore important to recognize different cultures and ethnicities as part of their beings (Hoehner 2003, 353). A theological reason that supports what has just been said emerges in Genesis, which reminds us that circumcision is not the seal of the covenant that God makes with man and specifically with Abraham to make him and his descendants God's chosen people. The symbols of the covenant in Genesis 15 are animals sacrificed by Abraham and then consumed by God's fire. A covenant in

which God is the active party as opposed to Abraham who is the passive party, in fact he does little if anything to contribute to this covenant apart from providing the animals required by God. So even the non-Jews adhere to the covenant offered by God by accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (Hoehner 2003, 354).

One of the important issues that emerges in Eph 2:12 is that one cannot live without hope, without God who is the source of hope; therefore, the task of the church is to give through witness this hope in Christ to all regardless of ethnicity or background (Hoehner 2003, 360). But the church in turn can exist only because of Jesus who creates unity among peoples. Thus, an index of God's presence in the church and also in the harmonious and interactive coexistence of multiple ethnic groups coexisting in a brotherly way (Hoehner 2003, 362).

We can be church as a heterogeneous group, depending on how close or far we are from God (Hoehner 2003, 362).

In v. 13 we see that the blood of Christ is the real element that gives access to membership in God, unlike circumcision which is done by the hand of man. There is a substantial difference between the results caused by divine and human intervention (Hoehner 2003, 363) (Muddiman 2001, 118).

V. 14 emphasizes that only God gives peace in the context of the church, only God creates union, unity in the church, and is the sole proponent of these indispensable elements for the community of believers (Hoehner 2003, 366-367). But still in the church, should hostility between two different ethnic groups arise, it should not be experienced as taboo, but should be talked about and resolved in Christ, because the Bible speaks openly about hostility and walls erected because of ethnic differences, such as the behavior of the disciples toward the Syrophenician woman in the gospels of Mark and Matthew (Hoehner 2003, 372-373).

This enmity between peoples is defeated and annihilated by Christ's sacrifice, and when the reasons for tension and hostility are not resolved they can become the elements that destroy the church as the body of Christ (Muddiman 2001, 136).

From vv. 14 to 16, the text presents a section in which the protagonist is God, the one who resolves the issues and shortcomings of the two peoples and could be considered a hymn to be recited as a confession of faith (Muddiman 2001, 124-125).

He, indeed, is our peace; he, who of the two peoples made one and broke down the wall of separation, abolishing in his earthly body the cause of enmity, the law made of commandments in the form of precepts, to create in himself, of the two, one new man by making peace; and to reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, on which he made enmity die (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Verse 15 appeals to consciences by reminding them that being in Christ implies experiencing new realities, such as new dynamics, new openness and predisposition toward others; new positive situations never experienced before, such as the absence of hostility toward those for whom there was previously any (Hoehner 2003, 379).

Verse 19 brings out that in God one can no longer have different citizenships therefore different rights and duties; the benefits are equal and so are the responsibilities, and there is the same status for all. (Hoehner 2003, 390). One is a member of the same family there is therefore inclusion and adoption of all (Muddiman 2001,140).

Verse 20 reminds us that the church is founded on the Holy Spirit who inspired all the authors of the Bible, who bring out in their writings the importance of the inclusion of all peoples as beneficiaries of God's blessings and promises and also how important it is to engage in the work of evangelism. But more important is still

the need to be built up in Christ Jesus who is the cornerstone (Hoehner 2003, 397). (Best 1998, 271; 283;287).

Jesus is the cornerstone in the life of every believer and especially in the church, He is the foundation without which everything would collapse, and nothing would make sense. Jesus, and no other individual, is the center of the church, so acting in the church for Christ's sake builds and increases the growth of the community, acting for oneself and one's own interests brings down the building (Hoehner 2003, 404).

The metaphor of believers who are the stones with which God's temple is built up, make one think of the building of the physical object, but also of the believer within the church who must constantly grow by building himself up in Christ and thus building up other members as well. Building up is thus also a team effort, in which each one advancing in his own spiritual life is a spur to others and brings benefit. However, the temple described in Eph 2:11-22 has a definite purpose, namely, to be the place where God dwells. It is therefore God who is the real cement that holds all the stones together, all the different people, and if God were not present in the church, and if Jesus were not its cornerstone, the building could not subsist. The church is therefore the place where the various members are constantly building and growing, being God present through his Holy Spirit (Best 1998, 280; 287; 289-290).

In this second section where our focus was on the Church, we have examined the synoptic text of Mark 7 and Matt 15 to show the prejudice of the people of Israel against the foreigners; we observed the cultural implications of Jesus encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26; we will analyzed Acts 11:1-18 the episode of Peter and Cornelius and its implications in the early church and we concluded

analyzing how a Godly multiethnic church should be through the elements that emerges in the text of Eph 2:11-22.

However, since the life of the church can continue to exist only through the mission of evangelization towards those who have not yet known Christ, in the next and last section we will analyze the importance of the ministry of evangelization and some key elements to take into consideration when the Gospel is brought to people of a different culture and/or ethnicity than ours.

### **Ministry Practice and Foreigners**

As important as it is to recognize the significant of the church as a diverse, multicultural group united in Jesus, it must be acknowledged that it is not always easy to understand the most appropriate way to be welcoming and bring the gospel to people of cultures other than one's own. In this third section, through the help of the apostle Paul's writings, we will analyze some key strategies from the texts of 1 Cor 9:19-23 and Acts 17:16-34 that will help us to understand some good approaches in our intent of bringing the Gospel to many diverse people.

#### **The Value of Building Bridges to Reach All People**

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul addresses at least four groups of people toward whom he has adjusted and made himself similar in order to gain them for Christ: the Jews, those under the law, those not under the law, and the weak (Fee 1987,423). The apostle thus explains that his continual adaptation to reach those before him is intentional, for evangelizing (Fee 1987,424). Although he is a free man in fact, following the example of Christ illustrated in Phil 2:5-8, Paul chooses to be like a slave in the service of people who might in this way come to know Jesus. Paul is thus attentive to various sensibilities so that the gospel is not misunderstood, but fully comprehended (Fee 1987, 426-427).

For Paul to be under the law of Christ means that because of his love felt for Christ, the believer should therefore feel impelled to build bridges with others and be of service to them. The term “gain” that Paul uses can also be translated as winning, or conquering people for Christ as an act of love. Moreover, the fact that the apostle specifies that he becomes weak to gain the weak is a reminder that the gospel is for all categories of people, and not just for the strongest and most victorious, because its ultimate purpose is the salvation of as many as will embrace it (Fee 1987, 430-431).

Precisely because he is free in Christ, Paul can give himself to others without being a slave to his own prejudices, fears, and the judgment of others. In Christ he can give himself freely to others without anxiety and hesitancy, he can choose to enslave himself to serve people in their specific needs, and he derives gratification and benefit in passing on the gospel to others (Thiselton 2000, 700-701). Martin Luther said about this in his book *Concerning Christian Liberty*, "a Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone." (Luther cited in Thiselton 2000, 703).

According to what Paul expresses, the obligation to act on God's behalf is a direct consequence of his relationship with Jesus, and to achieve this goal the apostle chooses to preach and manifest the gospel by his daily life actions, which may differ according to the needs of the people before him (Thiselton 2000, 706, 708). Paul also addresses lawless people, which is not to be understood as only pagans but also as non-practicing Jews, and when he says that he is not under the law he does not mean without morality before God, but rather that he is under the law of Christ to which he does not renounce and for which he is in service to all (Perkins 2012, 121).

But how can one recite the gospel in contexts that are totally foreign to one's culture and where most people have never heard of God? For this eventuality, too, we are helped by the experience of the apostle Paul as narrated in Acts 17:16-34.

#### Paul and Cultural Intelligence

In the context of Acts 17:16-34, Paul is in Athens, and he begins bearing witness to Jesus in the synagogue and in the marketplace. Paul shares the gospel message with anyone, even some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, to the point of arousing curiosity in some Athenians who invite him to give more explanations of his saying at the Areopagus (Haenchen 1971, 517).

Having arrived at the Areopagus, Paul begins his speech with a *captatio benevolentiae* (complementary preamble), telling the Athenians that they are very religious, to the point of having the altar even of the unknown God of whom he is about to speak. Paul tells the Athenians that they have done well to worship the true God even though they know little or nothing about him. He explains to them that God was the only one who was able to create the cosmos and generate life. In an indirect way, he makes it clear to his hearers that polytheistic worship should be replaced with worship to the one true God, and it is interesting to note how Paul states this truth without offending and shocking the sensibilities of the Athenians (Haenchen 1971, 520-523; Barrett 1998, 826). Paul further explains that attaining the discovery and knowledge of God is not an impossible thing, but rather that human beings are facilitated in this endeavor because God is not far away (v. 27): but "in him we live and move and have our being," as in Paul's words some Athenian poets have also already said. With this discourse, the apostle reveals to the Athenians the true creator God, who until then had been unknown to them. By paraphrasing the reference of the Athenians poet Paul is also making a reference to the creator God in whom we all

have being created as brothers and sisters. Adam and Eve being the progenitors of all humanity sharers the same blood with all of us (Acts 17:26) so as humankind we all belong to one unique family, therefore we should not consider people of more or less value according to their ethnicity, culture or origin. In this knowledge what is implied is that the Athenians can now devote themselves to true worship of the creator God in view of a future time when there will be divine judgment (Haenchen 1971, 524-525).

Mentioning the Athenian poets to give more force to his saying is a strategy Paul uses to build a bridge that can connect the new creed he is trying to convey to the history of the Athenian culture. The attempt to build a bridge between the preaching of the gospel and the cultural history of the people where it is presented is a new method in missionary preaching that Paul had also adopted in Lystra (Acts 14:15-18), In these two different contexts just presented, especially Acts 17: 16-34, one can grasp the importance and urgency that Christians should feel in involving themselves in contexts completely different from the uniquely ecclesial ones, to take the gospel where it is not yet known or practiced, even in their own neighborhood or small town (Haenchen 1971, 529- 531; Barrett 1998, 824).

#### Paul Applies the Principles of Cultural Intelligence

1. In v. 16-21 Paul shows good knowledge of the culture of the Athenians.<sup>1</sup>

We see that as soon as the apostle arrives in the city, he observes it, understands its culture, and despite the discomfort he feels at the excess of idolatry he involves himself in the spaces frequented by the Athenians, speaks with different natives from different ways of thinking (Epicureans and Stoics).

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<sup>1</sup> The principle of Cultural intelligence is a well know principle of the business field and also adapted in the missionary field. This principle will be explained in chapter 3.



2. Vv. 22-23a Paul compliments the Athenians about an issue culturally dear to them, namely religion.

3. Vv. 23b-29 Paul instead of rebuking and criticizing idolatry aggressively, knowing that the Athenians have never heard of the Messiah, he is patient and explains who the center of true belief should be without mentioning the name of Jesus.

4. Vv. 30-31 Paul calls for conversion in view of the judgment of the world through the man God raised up (Jesus). (Roberts Gaventa 2003, 246; 248).

We note that since Paul is not in a predominantly Jewish context, he does not make mention as he is wont to do of the history of Israel, he does not quote the Old Testament texts, and he does not name Jesus directly even though he is speaking of him. Rather, his entire discourse is expressed in a philosophical manner to which the Athenians were accustomed. Paul, therefore, to preach effectively, speaks in the cultural language most understandable to his interlocutors (Roberts Gaventa 2003, 247).

### **Conclusions**

Summarizing what has emerged from the biblical texts presented in this chapter, it is possible to grasp the urgency manifested in the Bible about the importance of being a blessing to all nations, peoples, and tribes, spreading the Eternal Gospel and its saving message. Nevertheless, the taboo about the enmity between different peoples and the difficulty in interacting between different ethnic groups was revealed. However, it was possible to learn that this difficulty finds resolution in Christ Jesus, through whom it is possible to experience unity and peace through His sacrifice on the cross whose purpose was to reconcile humanity to God and to each other. The Church understood as the body of Christ can thus find unity in

the Spirit and be the place where people, despite their diversity, can experience the saving presence of God who has acquired all of us as one people. In addition, in order to continue to engage in missionary activity about bringing the gospel to people of different cultures from ours, in this chapter it was possible to learn through the example of the apostle Paul the importance of knowing the culture of the recipients. This is possible by finding the shared points between these cultures and the message of the Gospel, by developing the ability to build bridges, by adapting oneself to the people to whom one speaks about Jesus and by choosing the most understandable and suitable language according to their customs and needs.

Now I'm going to list the guiding principles and teachings of the Bible passages that I have analyzed in this chapter. These principles will be useful in my chapter 4 to develop the sermons and the training of the lay people of the church. The goal that I hope to achieve is to develop an outreach program that will help the church members to build bridges with foreigners based on these biblical principles.

To look for the goodness of our neighbors (Genesis 18:18):

1. It is important to have the good of one's neighbor as an interest, and to be instruments through which God can pour out his blessings on all the families of the Earth. God himself, being a loving God continually act for the goodness of all humanity. As Christians we are called to do the same within our sphere of influence.

To focus on evangelization rather than possible persecutions (Mark 13:10):

2. Thinking of evangelization is of absolute importance, and far more important than the preoccupation of the various possible persecutions of the end of times, because the end of the world is not determined by the amount of persecution, but rather by the greatest possible number of people who will be able to receive the testimony of the Gospel.

To preach the gospel to all nations, language and ethnicities without borders (Revelation 14:6-7):

3. The eternity of God's sovereignty implies that his adoration must always be universal and not reserved for small ethnic groups. The fact that the hour of his judgment has come implies a certain urgency for conversion on the part of all those who have not yet made him their God and center of worship.

The importance of sharing the gift of salvation with pagan foreigners (Mark 7:24-30, Matthew 15:21-28):

4. The gift of salvation is also for pagans who manifest their faith. Paul writes about it in the letter to the Romans: «(the gospel) "is the power of God for the salvation of every believer, the Jew in the first place, but also the Greek" (Rom 1:16). God is willing to offer the gift of salvation to anyone who asks for it humbly and with faith. Performing all religious practices, without understanding the value of the bread of life, which is Christ, which is to be shared it is a failure, because God's interest is to be shared by as many people as possible.

God seeks true worshippers beyond borders (John 4:1-26):

5. God seeks true worshippers, who worship him in spirit and truth, and makes it clear that to be sincere worshipers, a person's ethnic origin and troubled past do not count. It is important to interact with all categories of people as long as we influence them positively. Attention must be paid to people who isolate themselves or who are often marginalized by society, and it is important to meet them in their comfort zone, without disrupting their routine. The process of change and acceptance of discipleship takes place because of the attitude of Jesus who speaks without expressing judgment and prejudice.

6. When there are arguments about ethnic and geographical differences as the Samaritan woman does, a defense mechanism emerges among human beings, who seek differences with each other to affirm their own identity. However, when this happens in church, this attitude leads to removing attention from God, to place it rather on human beings and their diversity, so it is wise to avoid a such attitude.

Taking care of our neighbors needs to receive the gospel (Acts 11:1-18):

7. The fact that Peter was praying when he received a vision from God makes us understand the importance of a prayerful life to know how God wants to engage us in reaching people who might be interested in knowing him (Kurz 2013, 183). Sometimes mission possibilities are under our eyes, without having to go far. God, through Peter's experience with Cornelius, makes us understand that the gift of faith and salvation is for everyone, including those we could least imagine.

One ethnicity in God (Ephesians 2:11-22):

8. Unity among peoples could only be generated by Christ Jesus. The reconciliation that Jesus brings through his sacrifice is therefore not only between God and men, but also between human beings. Therefore, salvation also concerns unity in Christ of the various ethnic groups and people. There is thus an end to the diversity of ethnicities and the beginning of one ethnicity in God, not because the individual ethnicity is eliminated, but rather because this new identity in Christ is greater and has priority over one's own personal ethnicity.

9. The text of Eph 2:11-22 shows us that soteriology (Eph 2:14-18) is followed by ecclesiology (Ephesians 2:19-22) and that the church is the place where people should feel at home in having a sense of belonging to God's family.

Building bridges for Christ purpose (1Corinthians 9:19-23):

10. Paul explains that his constant adaptation to people is intentional to bring the gospel, therefore he is attentive to various sensibilities so that the gospel is not misunderstood, but fully comprehended. Precisely because he is free in Christ, Paul can give himself to others without being a slave to his own prejudices, fears, and judgment of others. Because of their love for Christ, believers should feel impelled to build bridges with others and be of service to them.

Preaching with cultural intelligence (Acts 17:16-34):

11. It is necessary to affirm biblical truths without offending and hurting the sensibilities of those who have not yet known God. In Acts 17:16-34 Paul applies the principles of cultural intelligence. Since Paul is not in a predominantly Jewish context, he does not make mention as he is wont to do of the history of Israel, he does not quote the Old Testament texts, and he does not name Jesus directly even though he is speaking of him. Rather, his entire discourse is expressed in a philosophical manner to which the Athenians were accustomed. Paul, therefore, to preach effectively, speaks in the cultural language most understandable to his interlocutors. This is what believers should learn to apply when there are chances to preach the gospel in foreign contexts.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Due to the many immigrants in Italy, the church needs to build bridges with them to draw them to fellowship. I will review the history of immigration in Italy, the responses to that immigration, and how the church should respond to it. I am limiting my review to Italy because that is the context of my project.

Most of my literature review has been selected from a selection of academic articles and books on the topic of migration and its impact on the Italian society. In addition, some of the sources come from the official web sites of the Italian government regarding the specific data on immigration.

In this chapter, we will review academic literature in the following areas: (a) Basic Concepts on Immigration, (b) Italians' Perceptions of Immigrants, (c) Immigrants Integration into Italian Society, (d) Christian Efforts to Build Bridges with Immigrants in Italy, and (e) Equipping Italian Church Members to Build Bridges with Immigrants.

#### **Basic Concepts on Immigration**

##### Defining Terms

In the past, the stranger was perceived as the one who came from other places, with a different skin color, language, religion, or culture, and was called a foreigner (Di Sante 2012). Today, however, the terms most used to talk about foreigners are *immigrants* and *non-EU citizens* (Chiurco 2021). *Foreigner* is a global term,

which includes the last two groups, which are not synonymous with each other, so it is good to see their definitions.

According to the definition established by the UN, the term *immigrant* is a person who has moved to a country other than that of habitual residence, and who has lived in that country for more than a year (United Nations 2018). According to this definition, the immigrant is characterized by his/her spatial mobility, by his displacement of the national border towards another country and by his prolonged stay in this new country for at least a year. In this way the government knows that he is not a tourist, that he is not a commercial operator who travels for a short time to meet clients, and that he is not even a lecturer at a congress for a few days.

This term does not reveal the place of birth, nor the citizenship of the foreigner, nor does it even talk about the children of immigrants, who do not cross any borders, because they were born in the state of residence (Ambrosini 2017, 11-12). According to this definition anyone who does not have citizenship of the place where he has been living for a long time is an immigrant.

The word *immigrant*, however, for many Italians has a negative connotation, and is therefore not generally used to define people from economically strong states that do not belong to the third world. For example, in Italy, this term is not used to refer to French, Spanish, or Germans, but many use it referring to, for example Romanians, as second-class EU citizens.

The same applies to the definition of *non-EU citizens*, people who do not belong to the European Union, but has become a synonym of immigrants in the broad sense, of citizens not belonging to the northern part of the world.

Therefore, both *immigrants* and *non-EU citizens* have to come to mean foreigners from countries considered poor and not from developed countries (Ambrosini 2017, 12).

Another distinction made about the displacement of foreigners is that of the definition of migration and mobility. The first term concerns the movement of people from poor countries to the European Union, or the countries of the northern hemisphere, for urgent economic needs. Mobility, instead, indicates the people of the most affluent countries in the world who travel by free choice (Ambrosini 2017, 14-15). Thus, says Ambrosini (2017):

We can therefore affirm that the use of the concept of immigrant alludes to the perception of a double alterity: a foreign nationality and a condition of poverty. Generally, when an individual or a group manages to get rid of one of these two stigmas, he ceases to be considered an immigrant. Sometimes it happens that he believes he has freed himself, but someone else brings him back to his old and uncomfortable condition. (15)

An example of what Ambrosini is stating can be observed through the ways some Italians express racist attitudes toward black footballers, especially Mario Balotelli, born of Ghanaian parent and adopted since childhood by an Italian family.

Although the words *immigrant* and *non-EU citizen* allude to foreigners from poor countries, the correct use of these terms is to indicate all people that do not belong to Italy (*immigrant*) or do not come from Europe (*non-EU citizen*).

#### The Four Different Migration Flows

According to the French sociologist Wihtol de Wenden (2017), 240 million people are international migrants and 740 million are "informal" migrants. There are four main types of migration flows: from the north to the north of the world, where "migrants" have the same rights they enjoy in the countries of origin (international mobility). A second stream is the one from the south to the south of the world, where the movements are simpler but there are few rights (for example, for family



reunification). The third flow is from the south to the north of the world, usually those that are meant when talking about immigrants. The increase in the number of women is noteworthy about this migration. Furthermore, due to the restrictions for crossing borders, irregular forms of migration are often used. The fourth flow is from the north to the south of the world. In this case the term *immigration* is little used; it is rather spoken of Western people who choose to spend their pension in the warmer and cheaper places in the world, or of expatriate professionals to start new businesses (Wihlto de Wenden 2017). Ambrosini (2017) says about the Western people of the fourth flow:

All of them rarely encounter problems at entry, by virtue of their strong passports, retain the social and political rights they enjoyed in their countries of origin, can move easily across borders without fear of being labeled and persecuted as irregular migrants, but can be excluded from certain rights, such as that of property in the countries in which they settle. (16)

The four migration flows generate different and specific categories of immigrants, which are subdivided into: economic migrants, or those who move for job hunting; skilled immigrants, i.e. entrepreneurs, ambassadors, those working in the medical field and students; second generation migrants, or young people of immigrant origin; asylum seekers and refugees, i.e. people migrated by force and not voluntarily, and returning immigrants, that is, people who return to their country of origin after a long period of time spent abroad (Ambrosini 2017, 17-18).

### Mass Migration

It is necessary to focus on the refugees, because they are often part of the so-called mass migrations, which are not a new phenomenon in the modern era. Today, however, mass migration is knocking on Europe's door with a large number of refugees and asylum seekers (Caritas and Migrantes 2017, 5). This increase in foreigners at the doors of Europe is due to the increase of countries without a stable

government, and with continuous tribal wars (Bauman 2016, 4, 6). About all this, says Bauman (2016),

It is to a large extent the collateral damage caused by the ill-calculated, unfortunate and disastrous military expeditions in Afghanistan and Iraq, which have replaced the previous dictatorial regimes with a scenario of endless chaos and an orgy of violence backed and fomented by a global market of weapons, devoid of any control and fueled by a war-trimmed industry of profits. (6-7)

The large number of refugees is therefore made up of people who flee the massacres due to wars in their own countries, but it is also made up of a large flow of economic migrants, moving from a parched area and impoverished places with no possibility of growth, escaping from their land to seek an opportunity to live with dignity (Bauman 2016, 7).

According to Collier (2016), what drives economic migrants to leave their homeland is the extreme difference in income between rich and poor countries that "the process of global growth will maintain for decades" (45). Unfortunately, this migration will not solve the problem of the economic gap. Indeed, with the increase in diasporas, the income of the third world will remain low and therefore will continue to increase the migratory thrust, and in the future a point of equilibrium will not be reached (45).

### **Italians' Perceptions of Immigrants**

#### **The Effect of Immigration on the Indigenous Italians**

There are two main reactions that this large number of refugees causes in European host countries, including Italy: (a) in economically advanced countries, the business world "welcomes the arrival of cheap labor"; (b) for the majority of the native population, which fights against the increasingly widespread precariousness, foreigners become competitors on the labor market, bringing more uncertainties and less confidence in the government which is then required to quell the fears of citizens.

Foreigners also tend to cause anxiety precisely because they are "strange", and frightening in their unpredictability (Bauman 2016, 5, 8). Licata and Molfetta (2017, 10) point out that the fear of an invasion of foreigners in Italy is not borne out by the facts. Asylum applications in Italy are 1.37 per thousand inhabitants, and in Europe they are 2.75 per thousand inhabitants (Licata and Molfetta 2017, 287). Considering the numbers, we can therefore conclude that the fear of invasion is a perception that is not realistic.

For millennia, the soldiers have maintained law and order within a country's borders, and this did not require a large military presence, even though foreigners were not thought of as being human but demonic creatures. This idea is caught by Zamagni (2009) who wrote that society:

is thus ideally divided into two spheres: those who deserve and those who do not deserve trust. The set of the former includes all those who belong to the Church—*sacerdotium et fidelis*—the latter, instead, includes uncivilness, infamies, infidels, in other words, the different, the strangers, the dissidents, the bearers of a creed different from the Christian one, first of all the Jews. (54)

In relation to today's attitude towards foreigners, Buber (as cited in Milan 1994, 35) coined the term *non-meeting* (or "seeing without looking"); to live with foreigners one must learn the art of non-meeting, which relegates the other to the background, to the margin (Levinas, as cited in Ronchi 2006, 74)

Tani (2015, 79) explains that there are two opposite and too simplified perceptions of foreigners in Europe: the first one sees them as a social and cultural problem, simplified by the equation Immigrants = Islam = Terrorism. The second one sees them as a humanitarian problem, poor people who need to be helped.

Today, the situation of the foreigner raises new questions: "In a society in crisis, which fails to solve its economic and identity problems, the foreigner becomes an enemy and an ideal scapegoat" (Todd, as cited in Gambaro 2007, 43).

Touraine confirms:

We live in a society where we often feel threatened ... We feel we can no longer cope with threats that are often undefined and unpredictable. We feel defenceless and unable to act, so we are afraid. An indistinct fear that we transfer to others, especially to foreigners ... The characteristics of the other are only a pretext to project our anxieties on it ... it is the dynamics of the scapegoat. (Touraine as cited in Bauman 2014, 65)

In reality, immigrants support the welfare of the host states. For example, in Italy it is estimated that with the contributions of these foreigners they pay about 600,000 pensions of Italian citizens (ISTAT 'Notizie Sulla Presenza Straniera in Italia' 2019; Ambrosini 2017, 47).

Other phenomena that the presence of foreigners causes are *mixophilia* and *mixophobia*. The first describes the attraction or pleasure of the natives to encounter and engage with foreigners. On the other hand, mixophobia describes the fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable dislike towards the massive presence of unknown individuals (Bauman 2016, 9; Campolo and Battle 2005, 5). In reality 86% of asylum seekers find shelter in third world countries, or in other safer regions within their own country, or in countries bordering their crisis areas, and less than 10% arrive in Europe (Nicolosi 2018, 13; Ambrosini 2017, 19).

The organization of urban space tends to isolate classes, ethnic groups, and generations based on a sort of implicit general agreement (Manconi and Resta 2017, 23). This impacts ethical interactions, and Levinas (1989) wrote a significant ethical reflection on the status of a foreigner:

The Stranger is precisely that one, who appears before us with his face of another color, with his smells, with his smears, with his costumes and its strange language, which sometimes sounds unpleasant to us, and which asks us to be loved in its irreducible difference. (7)

The arrival of migrants causes a sense of superiority in the poorest category of the natives since these foreigners are more disadvantaged than them. In this way,

instead of self-denigrating, the citizen saves his self-esteem by recovering a place in the society in which he is no longer hierarchically the last (Sarli in ISMU 2019; Bauman 2016, 13).

Another effect that is found with the increase of foreigners is the neglect of moral obligations and the responsibilities that the natives should have towards those who arrive, even though non-profit organizations try to raise awareness and interest through the media. When appeals are made for distressed situations in Africa, Italian natives tend to donate generously, but when desperate migrants arrive in Italy, those same natives feel no moral obligation to help. This attitude is justified almost as if there were two worlds divided between "us" and "them". This lack of interest is reinforced by the fact that these migrants are often given such connotations (terrorist, offenders, rapists) as to make them, in the eyes of society, unworthy of any kind of welcome and right, thus justifying the neglect, fear, and indifference towards the foreigner (Bauman 2016, 67; 70; Ambrosini 2017, 12-13, 114-116).

#### The Importance of Cooperation

However, the first key of success for Europe is being aware of the heavy problem of its aging population and understanding how welcoming the immigrants would be a great opportunity to solve this problem (Tani 2015, 94).

In 2015 the Forum of Civil Ethics (Tani 2015, 108) identified four areas in which Europe and all its components, churches included, have to work. These are: (a) understanding the politics involved in helping different cultures cohabiting, helping them to find legal status, and participating in society; (b) encouraging people to think in terms of economic equality and environmental; (c) promoting interreligious meetings as examples of dialogue, pluralism, peace and hospitality; (d) striving to

communicate and educate young people, using medias and social medias about those new values and perspectives.

If on the one hand natives have some challenges in welcoming some immigrant, on the other hand, immigrants, for various reasons, including linguistic and cultural barriers, are not able to communicate with natives and generate relationships, which is why some scholars have thought that perhaps multiculturalism could be an answer to the problem of civil coexistence among different cultures, since it allows every culture and ethnicity to freely express itself in the private space (P. Donati 2008). But before explaining in what multiculturalism consist, I will describe Italian border politics, which will help to understand if multiculturalism can be the key to solve the problem.

#### Border Politics

In Italy, the policy favored by the majority of citizens regarding immigrants is that of border closure. However, this policy is impractical for several reasons, the first of which concerns the tension between politics and the labor market. Southern European countries, including Italy, from the 1980s to the 2008 crisis had a great need for labor in the sectors of agriculture, construction, the hotel industry, and home care, which could not be covered only with the labor of local citizens, so they used the labor of immigrants (Ambrosini 2017, 53-54).

Even today, despite the citizens' expectation that the government will implement the policies of expulsion of foreigners, thought abstractly as dangerous and threatening figures, the Italians themselves hire these immigrants for jobs like caregiving, because the cost per foreign laborer is low. All this, without considering any problems of residence permits or that documents are in order, because the use of these workers in the black market is convenient. Indeed, the ideal candidates are

precisely those most in need of a place where they can stay, willing to do anything to work and without any kind of family bond that could affect the hours of work performed (Zuanna and Allievi 2016, 37).

Even large industries favor the use of this kind of worker because they reduce costs and allow companies to be increasingly competitive in the trade (A. Donati 2012, 27). If the state tried to block the flow of irregular immigration, the first to be against it would be the business organizations that would lose cheap labor. Undeclared work in fact has very low costs, because it is devoid of social security and insurance coverage, it is not protected by labor contracts and indeed it is characterized by the evasion of taxes and contributions (Ambrosini 2017, 54, 83).

Another reason why the border closure policy cannot be implemented is that it would be against the interest of the country itself. In Italy, in fact, international tourism contributes 10% of Gross domestic product (GDPC), so it is in the interest of the state to facilitate access to visas or abolish them altogether. In reality, however, entrance for tourism generates more irregular immigration, because individuals remain in the country beyond the permitted period and stay as overstayers. Another channel that generates irregular immigrants is the student channel. In fact, universities are encouraged to attract foreign students, but once students arrive many of them work more than the 20 hours a week granted by law and others leave their studies. In Italy there is also another category that generates irregular immigration, that of religious Roman Catholic pilgrimages to the Vatican state or Rome, who, once they have arrived in the country, do not necessarily return to their own (Ambrosini 2017, 56).

Another reason why the policy of border closure cannot work depends on international migration and political policies. In Italy a low percentage of regular

migrants from the Balkan countries such as Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia etc. obtain visas to enter Italy for three months, at the end of which they have to return to their country. This results in the majority from these visitors becoming illegal immigrants because many remain in Italy even after the visa expires. Therefore, in 2010, to reduce illegal migration from the Balkan countries, the visa requirement for stays of less than three months was repealed. But it is not guaranteed that people will return home after three months. This repealing of visa laws also applied to Brazilian citizens (Ambrosini 2017, 57).

Even if irregular immigrants can be identified, they are protected by the “liberal constraint, which prevents the hosting states from carrying out drastic deportation measures, recourse to arms for those who illegally cross the borders, mass expulsions without legal guarantees, raids on private homes in search of immigrants irregular and other similar measures” (Ambrosini 2017, 60; Mazza 2013, 156). In Italy, as in the rest of Europe, there are centers for the identification and expulsion of irregular migrants, where they are held for repatriation. But they only work for 10% of immigrants because if the state were to repatriate all the irregular immigrants, it could not bear the costs at all.

In fact, according to the ISMU Foundation (multicultural initiatives and studies) in 2016, there were 435,000 illegal immigrants in Italy, each of these costing around 55 euros per day for identification and expulsion centers, which would imply a daily expenditure of 23,925,000 euros (‘Immigrazione in Europa: i dati sulle migrazioni in Europa - Fond. ISMU’ n.d.; Ambrosini 2017, 63, 65). Since this solution is very burdensome, the state generally carries out regularization operations, which allow irregular immigrants to enter a residence and a legitimate job. These amnesties are conveyed through employers, who have the possibility to make foreign



employees legal, in order to hire them directly from abroad (Ambrosini 2017, 66-67). Therefore, following this brief but important description of border policy, we can understand that despite the political promises of the current governors, Italy cannot carry out a policy of blocking the borders (Ambrosini 2017, 70).

### **Immigrants' Integration into Italian Society**

#### Multicultural Mindset

Although Western societies are inhabited by a significant number of foreigners, the Western societies tend not to integrate people from different cultures. Indeed, the attitude towards immigrants is divided into assimilation and multiculturalism (D'Haenens 2006, 4).

1. Assimilation requires that, through the adoption of the customs and values of the host country, the following generations of immigrants merge into the local population –it is the French model– (D'Haenens 2006, 7)

2. Multiculturalism is based instead on the creation of separate communities that maintain their identity and are recognized in their specific values –it is the English model that today appears to be in crisis– (Benet-Martinez and Hong 2014, 129).

In Italy, as Camozzi (2019) states

The Italian state does not formally have a reference model of integration and that, although since 1986 it has promulgated various laws aimed at regulating the migratory phenomenon - including the Bossi-Fini law currently in force (No. 189/2002) -, it does not seem to be mature yet compared with the successful transformation of Italian society in multicultural terms. (46)

Nevertheless, Italian politics seems to be closer to the model of multiculturalism because, as Tatarella (2010) states

The model of integration according to which, through a progressive acculturation, immigrants progressively lose the cultural traits of the country of origin, seems to have entered into crisis [...] the ethnic traits of the culture of origin seem not to

disappear, but rather to regenerate in new forms, giving rise to new ways of integration. (149)

Tatarella (2010, 152) also claims that many children of migrants increasingly maintain their cultural identity of the country of origin, thus generating a multicultural social reality.

To understand better this Italian scenario, I will describe multiculturalism and its limits.

#### Definition

Multiculturalism is a political approach with the intention of fostering respect and tolerance of different cultures, and therefore emphasizes the peculiar differences they have between them. The first time this term was used was in Switzerland, in 1957, and then in Canada, in 1971, where it was adopted as a political program (P. Donati 2008, 3). Multiculturalism has nothing to do with assimilation, hybridization, melting pot and interculturality. It is rather a collective imaginary that mythologizes cultural diversity as irreconcilable with other cultures without common values, so it implies the fact that the other is different from the native, that all are different from all, and that secularity is in the state to neutralize the difference in favor of greater individualism (P. Donati 2008, 4; 6; Fish 1997, 378-381).

The theory of multiculturalism is therefore a public policy that has positive and negative aspects and consists of a corporate order that recognizes equality with all and an equal public policy. In this case multiculturalism is understood as non-discrimination, and indeed differences are important for the public sphere (ISTAT n.d.). Multiculturalism is subdivided into a pluralist one, that is, which gives rights to minorities, and a communist, that is to say that all diversity must be honorable, thus generating a cultural relativism (P. Donati 2008, 9-13).

What characterizes multiculturalism is tolerance understood as indifference, and relativism of the so-called "live and let live". This tolerance and relativism, however, generates the crisis of Western civilization that has been too rational, functional and dehumanizing in social issues (Blau 1995, 57).

### The Limits of Multiculturalism

The problem with multiculturalism in the Italian context is that it generates more and more divisions and tribalization, weakening social relations. Furthermore, ethical and cultural relativism provokes and nurtures dehumanization. The idea according to which I know and feel good only in my culture makes the general moral judgment disappear, because every individual seeks morality exclusively in his own culture and therefore there is not mutual learning with cultures but only what is functional and opportunistic. And pluralism is understood just as an amoral situation in which everyone does what he wants (Campani as cited in Nesti 2006, 90-106).

There are many challenges with multiculturalism because, although people involved in multicultural societies try to recognize identities, they are not able because they do not have the interest of knowing the cause of relativism. Wilkens (2011) states about ethical and cultural relativism

Ethical relativism, the belief that there is no moral truth that applies to all people at all times, has been around for a long time [...] Cultural relativism says that it is not each person but each person's culture that is the standard by which actions are to be measured. (29)

For this definition above multiculturalism has to deal with conflict between different ethical codes of conduct. An extreme case of this is that everything becomes legitimate according to the different cultures of belonging, including pedophilia, and adult males marrying girls beneath the age of legal consent in Italy. An extreme case of these ethical codes that differ according to the culture of origin is pedophilia. In fact, in some countries other than Italy, marrying minors is normal. Some parents,

when their daughter has the first menstrual cycle, consider her mature enough for marriage. Usually, this teenager is married to an older man. This practice is certainly illegal in Italy, but if politicians were to fully apply the multicultural concept of ethical and cultural relativism, it should allow such practices. However, since marrying a minor in Italy remains a crime, we realize that the concept of multiculturalism is weak and vacillates confronted with the Italian social reality and the laws that the state requires to protection of citizens (Crowder 2013, 21-25).

According to Brie and Horga (2014) and Kukathas (1993), multiculturalism also presents a political limit, because rather than generating tolerance, it further nourishes intolerance for the absence of shared ethics. Therefore, multiculturalism has political limits and weaknesses, because even if from a theoretical point of view, it has the intention of generating greater tolerance between different cultures, from a practical point of view it is not capable of it. Indeed, it creates a greater sense of intolerance because citizens from different cultural backgrounds do not share a univocal understanding of the ethics to be applied in the social sphere in which they find themselves. It is also incapable of generating active participation and citizenship responsibility in citizens (Brie and Horga 2014, 91-92; Kukathas 1993, 15). In my experience as both immigrant and citizen I can testify that the dynamics that Brie and Horga talk about are real.

Multiculturalism, being unable to generate equal dignity and dialogue between cultures, fails to promote unity in diversity, and is therefore a reductive theory of recognition, whereby recognition we mean identity, acceptance and gratitude. Multiculturalism stops at the recognition of identity, but as P. Donati (2008) maintains, recognition is a relational activity. It is therefore necessary through reflective reasoning to recognize the rich variation within each culture that can be a

gift to other cultures. To engage effectively and cross-culturally in this way, one must be willing to engage in relationships with persons of other backgrounds and at the same time open an understanding of one's own culture to the other. This, Donati argues, is the process for the progress of society (33-49).

One of the reasons why multiculturalism does not work could be due to the secular nature of the state, understood as a clear separation between faith and reason. But as Macey (2009) states, "Though religion and ethnicity are conceptually separable, they are often considerably less so in reality, to the point that in some cases it is reasonable to talk of ethno-religious communities" (35). Relating faith and reason may help avoid falling into the neutrality of secularism in multiculturalism. If there were greater collaboration between the state and religious institutions such as churches or mosques, multiculturalism could reduce the possibility of falling into the neutrality of secularism. According to P. Donati (2008) it is also appropriate to think of the three types of semantics that characterize secularism (79-82):

1. dialectical semantics, which highlights the boundaries as if they were a meeting-conflict place, for which tolerance is mandatory;
2. Binary semantics, in which there is a clear separation between individuals that avoids dialogue;
3. Relational semantics, where the relationship with the other allows you to create a relationship in which you agree on certain issues, without losing awareness of what distinguishes and unites people.

This latter semantics is the only one that avoids a view of homologation in the way of seeing and thinking about people. Homologation is a cultural process by which a thing or person is losing its peculiar characteristics and behaviors, conforming to the dominant tendencies, and if adopted, the secular state becomes capable of recognizing

the original freedom to have its faith and diversity, even allowing public debates on the diversity of religions to be followed through relational arguments (Gouldner 1960, 161-178).

#### Impact on the Italian Christian Churches

In Italy the federation of evangelical churches in Italy (FCEI) in collaboration with some expressions of Pentecostal evangelism and some independent ethnic churches in the face of the phenomenon of the great migratory flow have implemented the meetings of ECI Being Church Together, a program born in the year 2000 to promote fraternity and multi-ethnic encounter in evangelical churches. ECI in collaboration with the Commission of Churches for Migrants in Europe (CCME), and through the Models of Integration through Religion, Activation, Cultural Learning and Exchange (MIRACLE) program organizes seminars to promote the leadership and participation of migrants in Italian churches; moreover, it creates training courses on multi-ethnic integration and evangelization strategies in Italy for pastors and lay people (Naso, Passarelli and Pispisa 2014, 55-60).

In the Catholic sphere through what can be deduced from the speeches of some popes such as John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and the current Pope Francis, and according to what was declared in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in point 2241, there is the propensity to encourage governments to welcome migrants, while promoting integration programs, to ensure mutual respect between those who welcome and the people who are welcomed, who in turn have a commitment to respect the laws and the culture of the host country. To promote and support reception programs, the Catholic Church provides first reception centers, organizes Italian language courses and vocational career guidance schools. (Valente 2017; D'Ugo 2018).

## Impact on Adventist Churches in Italy

In Italy, the Adventist immigration generated both mixed churches and ethnic churches, following schemes of local adaptation rather than a general strategy of inclusion, which is still missing from the Italian Adventist Union plans. In any case, in the mixed churches the integration process is very slow and hindered by the natural trend to join and live in small homogeneous groups, with few relationships with other ethnic groups (Naso, Passarelli and Pispisa 2014, 85). This may happen because, as DeYmaz (2007) states,

In light of this, old models of church that focus on reaching a single racial group are not going to be as effective as they have been in the past [...] So if the Body of Christ is to adjust to our new racial future, we will have to make bold, biblical steps toward the development of churches situated to meet the needs of people of different races and cultures. (13)

Ethical issues are a challenge in the multicultural church because, as Sheffield (2005) observes, multicultural and multiethnic communities have to consider values and practices from multiple cultures, so as he continues to say, “the issue before us is how the Christian faith community will respond to this?” (39).

As Earley and Ang (2003) state, cultural differences produce conflict and difficulties. Foreign parents sometimes fear that the friendship of their children with native boys or girls could take them away from religious traditions and biblical values, as they understand them. And this is an obstacle for interactions, inclusion, and sharing between the two groups (Feitosa 2016, 60). Anderson (2007) would define this as a lack of “gracism”, the capacity to extend favor on other humans of different color, class, and culture (21). But Boyd (2008) rather states: “For the Church to ignore the demographic changes in the Western world would be sin at worst and total ignorance at best. For a church not to actively pursue multicultural diversity in a diverse community would be dishonoring to scripture and dishonouring to God.” (11)

Ao and Penley (2006) continue by saying: “The church must respond to this multicultural society with multicultural churches or face becoming irrelevant” (25).

In Italy, there are Pathfinders, Ambassadors and Youth departments, with programs concerning Adventist youth up to the age of 35 years. But the foreign young Adventists (Ghanaians, Romanians, Filipinos, etc.) prefer to organize their own Pathfinders and youth activities within their own ethnic church or group (Naso and Passarelli 2018, 88). According to some scholars, a multicultural church is formed by ethnic diverse believers in relation with each other, united in their faith in Christ, and able to incorporate the gifts of its heterogeneous membership in various ways to increase the Church growth (Anderson and Cabellon 2010; Parker and Girgis 2010; Woo 2009). In the Italian Adventist churches, it is difficult to admit that this is the usual scenario among multicultural churches.

There are apparently two reasons why foreign young Adventists (Ghanaians, Romanians, Philippians, etc.) prefer to organize their own Pathfinders and youth activities within their own ethnic church or group: prejudice and economic factors. In my experience the foreign parent I spoke with expressed that the Italian programs for youth are too light, because they include too many fun activities; the foreigners prefer program with much more spiritual activities. Furthermore, often foreign families don't have enough money to pay for meetings and camps for their children (Feitosa 2016, 90).

The ethnic church has also several other advantages: (a) it comforts the immigrants offering them a piece of their lost land and their roots; (b) it permits a selective acculturation with the country, by which the immigrants learn things from the natives that they consider positive; and (c) it has a function of resiliency to face the traumas and difficulties of the integration process (Naso and Passarelli 2018, 28).



For many Adventist young people in Italy, the ethnic church remains a safe place in which to cultivate their own roots but, at the same time, looking for opportunities for exchanges with Italian and other ethnic churches (Naso and Passarelli 2018, 103; Jagessar 2015). As Pispisa (2014, 152) writes, an ethnic church is often a first step to facilitate the integration of the immigrant in the hosting context. But, in the future, this can move to become multiethnic (DeYmaz 2007, 149).

It is important that people feel good in church, because in that case they will come back, and they may bring other people with them. But what makes people feel good? People feel comfortable in church when they feel the pleasure of finding themselves in a place where the believer finds the answer to his/her spiritual needs conditioned by cultural experience.

And as it is impossible to give satisfaction to all different tastes, church leaders tend to join members in homogeneous groups of affinities, creating mono-ethnic and mono-cultural groups, contributing to the racialization of society and putting obstacles (unconsciously) to integration among different groups and cultures. The same members search for churches and groups in which there is affinity of tastes, social status, ethnicity, etc.: they are very aware about the equality of all human beings, but they strongly fight (not intentionally) against integration because they prefer living in a continuous state of liminality (Blount and Tisdale 2001, 100) and it has been proved that this makes ethnic churches grow faster than multiethnic ones (Hall 2010).

### Multicultural Churches

Multicultural churches have to recognize that there are often dominant cultures. Therefore, to maintain a healthy environment, it is important to consider, recognize, and value secondary cultures within the church (Brouwer 2017, 86).

Romano (Commissione “Etica cristiana e società” 2019, 5) argues that the multiethnic and multicultural church is surely a blessing, but also a source of several problems. The presence in the same church of different ways to understand and live Adventism often leads to walls and strong identities, groups, and parties in the church which are opposite each other. Often, even during the “agape feasts” (common meal in the church), every group isolates themselves. For these reasons, it is necessary that the Adventist church in Italy find a proper hermeneutic to understand how multiethnic and multicultural issues are treated in the Word of God, permitting then to identify acceptable mediations on theological and ethical issues. For, as Lingenfelter and Mayers (2003) suggest, Jesus’ ministry gives evidence of multicultural ministry. A new trust should be built between church members of different cultures, while remaining different.

Somasundram (2014) states that “unhealthy cross-cultural conflict arises where there is an absence of strong, resilient relationships and teamwork” (79). Therefore, the unity of the church needs to be redefined on the basis of multiculturalism and plurality of ideas and sensibility, not by generic calls to unity, but seeing courageously inside the differences (Commissione “Etica cristiana e società” 2019, 6). Iannò (Commissione “Etica cristiana e società” 2019, 44) affirms that an intercultural Church is aware of its many cultures and knows how to be at ease with the many "Adventisms" that live within it (45).

Feitosa (2016, 37) enumerates three principles for transitioning from a culture-blind church to a multicultural one: (a) studying the community, its geography, history, culture, habits, values, etc.; (b) clear intentionality and willingness to transform all church life in a multicultural perspective; and (c) diverse leaders, aware about the key principles of multicultural ministry. Another important factor is

inclusiveness, “Cultural elements of the different ethnic groups in the church should permeate every program and activity, especially the worship service” (Feitosa 2016, 42).

Hibbert and Hibbert (2014, 10) point out that integration is not a simple process. It requires time, energy, and steps: forming (the honeymoon stage), storming (conflict), norming (acceptance), and performing (positive results).

At the first encounter between cultures, the honeymoon stage starts. It is accompanied by positive feelings and experiences, because there is an exchange of external differences like food, clothing, musical instrument, languages, etc. Passing time together, much more deep differences come out, differences of values and visions of the world, and the following stage, storming, begins (Hibbert and Hibbert 2014, 27). It is important to persevere in this process and not give up during the storming phase. The conflict step is necessary (10), as it is an opportunity to grow (88).

Brouwer (2017) suggests ten steps: (a) making the church a place where each culture can feel home; (b) naming the church in an intercultural perspective, for example adding the word “international”; (c) intercultural leadership, awareness about the different expectations that cultures have about leaders, and relationships considered as important as effective results; (d) theological generosity, that means open and unrestricted theological thought: the fixed points must be few and clear; (e) understanding, in which everyone practices the listening of the other but also the ability to communicate in a way understandable to all; (f) learning the language of people of the different groups attending the church, some key-words of their life and way to define and live their religion; (g) moving beyond cultural stereotypes, caring of others as they understand caring and want to be cared for; (h) avoiding flags of the

nation in the church; flags are patriotic symbols that for other cultures could mean colonialism; at least having many flags of different countries is better than just one flag; (i) the most important success key in the intercultural church is not the music or the worship style, but (j) sharing the meal.

#### Christian Efforts to Build Bridges with Immigrants in Italy

In Italy there are three main Christians organizations that engage in building bridges with immigrants: the Federation of Protestant Churches FCEI, the Community of Sant'Egidio, and the Waldensian Diaconia (Frasca 2017; Jackson and Passarelli 2016).

The FCEI includes seven churches: Waldensian Church, the Italian Evangelic Lutheran Church, Methodist Church, Salvation Army international, Apostolic Church, St. Andrew's Church of Scotland in Rome, and Christian Evangelical Baptist Union (FCEI n.d.; Frasca 2017).

The FCEI in 2014, through the finances of the 8X1000 funds of the Methodist and Waldensian churches and through private donations, organized a humanitarian and social project called Mediterranean Hope. The aim of this project is to receive and protect the asylum seekers that arrives in Italy. Mediterranean Hope provides for a first reception of migrant accommodation in Sicily, guidance and training activities for about 40 vulnerable migrants (young mothers, pregnant women, unaccompanied children); raising awareness to the citizens on migration issues in the Mediterranean; hosting and coordinating training for volunteers, promoting a “culture of integration” with social, intercultural and integration programs addressed to the local population; guidance and training with a variety of service such as Italian language classes, psychological support, healthcare assistance; and network of solidarity to support

integration through Italian and European churches interested in the project (Mediterranean Hope n.d.; Frasca 2017).

The Community of Sant'Egidio is a Catholic Non-Governmental Organization present in more than 70 countries; it was founded in Rome in 1968. In Italy the Sant'Egidio Community, in the effort of helping immigrant, provides for welcome centers, distribution of food, distribution of clothes, showers, laundry, hairdresser, medical clinics, language schools and Humanitarian Corridors (Sant'Egidio n.d.; Frasca 2017).

The Waldensian Diaconia is a non-profit organization within the Waldensian context. The main activities are providing accommodation and assistance to the disadvantaged children and migrants, the elderly, and people with disabilities (Diaconia Valdese 2024; Frasca 2017).

In 2015, the Federation of Protestant Churches FCEI, the Community of Sant'Egidio, and the Waldensian Diaconia designed a project called Humanitarian Corridors that was approved by the Italian government. Their commitment was to create receptions and integration programs for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy; and also to get interest in the countries of transit during the asylum seekers' journey to Europe. In this project, the resources of the Waldensian Church are the main financial source. (Politica estera e Cooperazione allo sviluppo n.d.; Mallardo 2017; Morozzo della Rocca 2017).

### **Equipping Italian Church Members**

#### **Interculturality as a Possible Solution**

Interculturality should be a dialogue and an open confrontation between cultures, without the pretense of one dominating over the other. The purpose of interculturality is to find the boundary between total disconnect between cultures and

full understanding between them, that is an in-depth study of reciprocal values ('Martyn Barrett: Multiculturalism and Interculturalism - Blog - Multiculturalism Forum' n.d.) . The factors that can facilitate this process are tolerance (that is not allowing any interference to be an element of disturbance), respect (believing the other worthy of honor and deserving), and, sharing, or a common heritage integrated by both cultures (Baldassarri 2017, 101-115; P. Donati 2008, 55; 57). Interculturality therefore deals with dialogue from the particular to arrive at the universal and implies a reflective capacity in cultures and individuals.

#### Adopting Interculturality

Above all it is the state that must have this reflective capacity to promote it among the citizens and make valuable choices. We therefore speak of sociological reflexivity without which interculturality is not possible, but this is a complex process that is not always achieved (P. Donati 2008, 59-66). One needs a multicultural or intercultural mind, a versatile mind able to understand different cultures with its values codes to make connections between the different understandings and worldviews (Anolli 2011). Elmer (2006) defines worldview as a set of beliefs, values, knowledge, opinions, attitudes through which a social group interprets the world.

To allow a favorable interculturality, it is essential to understand that cultures are different because they have different worldviews and relational reasons. This relational reason is important because it takes into consideration the dignity of people, human relationships will in fact be positive or not, depending on the degree of reflexivity of individuals. The relational reason has the task of valuing the differences and cultural mediation becomes possible through the reflexivity of the values of cultures, thus giving dignity to all people beyond their origin (P. Donati 2008, 110-111). The relational reason therefore provokes so-called "social capital" because it is

the rationality of dignity that can lead to constitutional socialism, in which the freedom and responsibility of the native reflect the social good, taking into consideration the complexity of diversity and reasoning in relation to for the common good (P. Donati 2008, 125-126; 134-135).

Ravasi (2006) says that according to the believe of the philosopher Bauman “The only way to increase security is not to build other walls, but to create open spaces in which everyone can dialogue and feel part of the same world” (123). Therefore, according to what we have observed until now we can agree with Hiebert (2008) and Koliman (2011) who argue that nineteenth and twentieth centuries measures (change in behavior or belief) that missionaries used to consider conversion are insufficient, because the challenge of globalization forces us to think church mission in new ways. For this reason, as Roberts (2007) states through the concept of *Glocalization*, a connection is needed between the local and global way of thinking.

#### Cultural Intelligence

When we talk about dialogue or intercultural communication, we mean the communication between different cultures. During communication between people of different cultures, such as the Chinese and the Americans, one can notice some reactions that dialogue produces, but to do this it is important to have studied both Chinese and American culture first, to understand what arouses the reactions of the two groups (Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey 2008, 1-2). As Black (2000) states “Culture conditions everything from the way we make formal plans to the way we respond to various nonverbal behaviors. All cultures are rich and complex” (63).

Understanding the dynamics of intercultural communications requires the study of cultures across multiple disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science and all of these in the political, educational, legal,

hospital, managerial and tourist fields (Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey 2008, 3-4; Peterson 2004; Ang and Van Dyne 2008). All this is contained in the concept of "cultural intelligence" a meta model that provides a structure capable of managing cross-cultural issues (Livermore 2009, 45). Authors like Staller (2009) and Plum (2008) states that the concept of cultural intelligence comes from the business and economic field. According to Thomas and Inkson (2009), CQ (Cultural Intelligence) can be seen as an easy concept, but it takes time and effort to develop its high levels. According to Rah (2010), even if cultural intelligence comes from the business field it should be adopted in the Church to enable Christian communities to communicate better God's truth to all humankind.

According to Livermore (2009), Christian love is the engine of CQ, and cultural intelligence consists of four main factors:

- “1 CQ Knowledge: Understanding cross-cultural issues and differences;
2. Interpretive CQ: The degree to which we are mindful and aware when we; interact cross-culturally
3. Perseverance CQ: Our level of interest, drive, and motivation to adapt; cross-culturally
4. Behavioural QC: The extent to which we appropriately change our verbal and nonverbal actions when we interact cross-culturally” (47-48).

When we talk about cultural intelligence, we cannot neglect the question of the different meanings that the language assumes according to the cultures. In fact, a language spoken in several places, such as English, can contain words or ways of saying that in England are offensive but not in Australia or the USA. According to Sapir-Whorl, the language spoken by native people has an influence on their ways of thinking. Not all scholars fully agree with this theory, but it is clear that languages are



not always translatable literally because they contain within them meanings that are lost in translation, which is an aspect not to be overlooked because words also take on a different value depending on the culture (as cited in Livermore 2009, 113-114).

When we talk about cultural intelligence, we must also take into account that, with regard to cultural values, there can be opposites between them depending on the culture. For example, individualism vs collectivity, hierarchy within relationships, the sense of risk, the concept of time, direct or indirect ways of communicating, the importance of being vs. the importance of doing. People from different cultures may have great difficulty understanding and interacting with each other due to these differences in value (Livermore 2009, 121-139). But having a sensitivity to cultural intelligence can help individuals take steps towards interaction thanks to a relational reason.

Pastors that trained themselves and their church members to develop major cultural intelligence testify that the church has grown in awareness and sensitivity towards people of different cultures, and that their church members have increased of number (Somasundram 2014; Brouwer 2017, Black 2000).

Benedict XVI (2010) said that peace: “starts, in fact, with a respectful look that recognizes a person in the face of the other, whatever the color of his skin, whatever his nationality, language or religion.”

### **Summary**

In this chapter speaking about foreigners and migration in Italy, I saw the different meaning between *immigrant* and *non-EU citizen* and the appropriate way to use these terms. Through Wihtol de Wenden I acknowledged the reality of migrant flows. Then Bauman, Campolo and Battle showed the effect of mixophilia and mixophobia that mass migration generates on the natives.

Facing the issue of border politics through Ambrosini I understood the different reasons that generates irregular immigrant. After I observed how some of the Christian Churches are involve in helping the asylum seekers and the refugees. Since multiculturalism is the strategy adopted in the Italian society to answer the problem of civil coexistence among different cultures, Donati and other authors helped to understand its meaning, its process, and its limit. After I observed how migration sociological issues were impacting Adventist churches in Italy and through the reflections of the “Commissione etica e società” of the Adventist Church, I understood integration challenges among Italian and foreigners church members. Observing Brouwer’s suggestions of how becoming a multicultural church it seemed that interculturality, a dialogue and an open confrontation between cultures could be the only solution to solve conflict among people of different cultures, because cross-cultural understanding helps people to become more mindful and aware of other ways of thinking and interpretation of reality. Therefore, I concluded that all this couldn’t be addressed without cultural intelligence, so through Livermore we saw it four main factors of which awareness should help church members of different culture to build a better understanding, respect and willing of integration.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Introduction**

Due to the outbreak of a civil war in Libya in 2011, Italy has been experiencing a great influx of immigrants. Many are scattered throughout Italy, including Gaeta where I have served as pastor since June 2022.

The city of Gaeta has 19,724 inhabitants and 971 are foreigners, or about 5% of the population. The largest communities of immigrants are the Romanian community composed of 302 people, and the Albanian community, made of 210 people. Other groups include the Ukrainian (113), Moldavian (46), and Moroccan (27). The number of countries where all the foreign people come from are 52 (email communication from Gaeta community officer Maria Serena Taglialatela, November 10, 2022). A few kilometers from Gaeta, there are also large communities of immigrants from Ghana, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

The people who attend the Gaeta church are 97.5% native Italians. The remaining 2.5% is one Russian married to an Italian that has lived in Italy for many years.

A majority of the Italian members of Gaeta Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church do not understand and engage in the call of God to bring all people into the fellowship of the church. This causes a lack of interest in building bridges to reach immigrants. For this reason, the task of my project is to develop, implement, and

evaluate a strategy to equip some members of the Gaeta church to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation.

### **Project Design Section**

This chapter presents a strategy designed to sensitize the Gaeta church and to train some of the members to build bridges with immigrant. The basis for the development of the strategy came from the knowledge gathered from the theological and literature review chapters. The project was intended to be implemented in two phases.

The first phase is the Project Sermons and consists of 12 sermons divided as follows: three on mission towards immigrants, six on Jesus, the apostolic church, and the issue of immigrants, two on ministry practice and foreigners, and a conclusive interactive sermon that summarized the previous 11 sermons to review the main theological points that the members understood on the importance of mission and building bridges toward foreigners.

The second phase is the Project Seminars. Was designed to train and deploy a group of 16 selected members to build bridges with immigrants. The training focuses on six encounters: five seminars regarding the issue of (a) bias, (b) overcoming cultural enmities, (c) having knowledge and tools on cultural intelligence, (d) understanding how to interact in a multicultural group, and (e) how to become a healthy multiethnic church. During the seminars, each member would be asked to engage with a person of different ethnicity to learn more of the person's culture. The 6<sup>th</sup> encounter was projected to have a dinner with the people of different ethnicities that the members got involved with, and to share with the entire group the benefits and the challenges they found in the various interactions. The final phase of the

project was to have a group interview with the 16 selected members to measure their knowledge, ability, and level of involvement in building bridges with immigrants.

### **Project Sermons**

As part of the project implementation, a strategy was designed to deliver 12 sermons to the congregation, to teach and sensitize the members and the visitors about what the Gospel says on the importance of building bridges to share the good news with individuals from all nations so that the church may become a house of prayer for all people (Isa 56:7). The sermons were planned to be preach from December 2023 to January 2024.

#### **Three Sermons on Mission**

The first three sermons on mission towards immigrants had the following focus:

1. To look for the goodness of our neighbors (Gen 18:18):

I sought to describe why it is important to have the good of one's neighbor as an interest, and to be instruments through which God can pour out his blessings on all the families of the Earth. God himself, being a loving God continually act for the goodness of all humanity. As Christians we are called to do the same within our sphere of influence.

2. To focus on evangelization rather than possible persecutions (Mark 13:10):

In this sermon I intend to share that thinking of evangelization is of absolute importance, and far more important than the preoccupation of the various possible persecutions of the end of times, because the end of the world is not determined by the amount of persecution, but rather by the greatest possible number of people who will be able to receive the testimony of the Gospel.

3. To preach the gospel to all nations, language, and ethnicities without borders (Rev 14:6-7):

I endeavor to share that the eternity of God's sovereignty implies that his adoration must always be universal and not reserved for small ethnic groups. The fact that the hour of his judgment has come implies a certain urgency for conversion on the part of all those who have not yet made him their God and center of worship.

#### Six Sermons on Jesus and the Apostolic Church

The 6 sermons on Jesus, the apostolic church and the issue of immigrants had the following focus:

1. The importance of sharing the gift of salvation with pagan foreigners (Mark 7:24-30, Matt 15:21-28):

The gift of salvation is also for pagans who manifest their faith. Paul writes about it in the letter to the Romans: (the gospel) "is the power of God for the salvation of every believer, the Jew in the first place, but also the Greek" (Rom 1:16). God is willing to offer the gift of salvation to anyone who asks for it humbly and with faith. Performing all religious practices, without understanding the value of the bread of life, which is Christ, which is to be shared it is a failure, because God's interest is to be shared by as many people as possible.

2. & 3. God seeks true worshippers beyond borders (John 4:1-26):

God seeks true worshippers, who worship him in spirit and truth, and makes it clear that to be sincere worshipers, a person's ethnic origin and troubled past do not count. It is important to interact with all categories of people as long as we influence them positively. Attention must be paid to people who isolate themselves or who are often marginalized by society, and it is important to meet them in their comfort zone, without disrupting their routine. The process of change and acceptance of discipleship

takes place because of the attitude of Jesus who speaks without expressing judgment and prejudice.

When talking about worship there are arguments about ethnic and geographical differences (as the Samaritan woman does), a defense mechanism emerges among human beings, who seek differences with each other to affirm their own identity. However, when this happens in church, this attitude removes the attention from God, to place it rather on human beings and their diversity. So, it is wise to avoid a such attitude because the church is to be a house of prayer for all people of all nations.

4. Taking care of our neighbors needs to receive the gospel (Acts 11:1-18):

The fact that Peter was praying when he received a vision from God makes us understand the importance of a prayerful life to know how God wants to engage us in reaching people who might be interested in knowing him (Kurz 2013, 183). Sometimes mission possibilities are under our eyes, without having to go far. God, through Peter's experience with Cornelius, makes us understand that the gift of faith and salvation is for everyone, including those we could least imagine.

5. & 6. One ethnicity in God (Eph 2:11-22):

Unity among peoples could only be generated by Christ Jesus. The reconciliation that Jesus brings through his sacrifice is therefore not only between God and men, but also between human beings. Therefore, salvation also concerns unity in Christ of the various ethnic groups and people. There is thus an end to the diversity of ethnicities and the beginning of one ethnicity in God, not because the individual ethnicity is eliminated, but rather because this new identity in Christ is greater and has priority over one's own personal ethnicity.

The text of Eph 2:11-22 shows us that soteriology (Eph 2:14-18) is followed by ecclesiology (Eph 2:19-22) and that the church is the place where people should feel at home in having a sense of belonging to God's family.

#### Two Sermons on Paul and His Outreach Method

The two sermons on ministry practice and foreigners had the following focus:

##### 1. Building bridges for Christ purpose (1 Cor 9:19-23):

Paul explains that his constant adaptation to people is intentional to bring the gospel, therefore he is attentive to various sensibilities so that the gospel is not misunderstood, but fully comprehended. Precisely because he is free in Christ, Paul can give himself to others without being a slave to his own prejudices, fears, and judgment of others. Because of their love for Christ, believers should feel impelled to build bridges with others and be of service to them.

##### 2. Preaching with cultural intelligence (Acts 17:16-34):

It is necessary to affirm biblical truths without offending and hurting the sensibilities of those who have not yet known God. In Acts 17:16-34 Paul applies the principles of cultural intelligence. Since Paul is not in a predominantly Jewish context, he does not make mention as he is wont to do of the history of Israel, he does not quote the Old Testament texts, and he does not name Jesus directly even though he is speaking of him. Rather, his entire discourse is expressed in a philosophical manner to which the Athenians were accustomed. Paul, therefore, to preach effectively, speaks in the cultural language most understandable to his interlocutors. This is what believers should learn to apply when there are chances to preach the gospel in foreign contexts.

#### Conclusive Interactive Sermon

The conclusive interactive sermon focused on the following questions:



1. What have you learned about Bible teachings on mission and ministry towards foreigners?
2. What is your role in being God's blessings to foreigners, and which should be our attitude?
3. How are you engaging to bring the gospel to people of a different culture than yours and which are the challenges you see?
4. What can we learn from the Bible about how to build bridges with foreigners in order to draw them into the fellowship of the church?
5. Which are the blessings of becoming an open multiethnic and multicultural church?

### **Project Seminars**

#### Recruitment Strategy

To recruit 10-15 volunteers from the Gaeta church members to form the training group, the criteria for selection were that the participant had to be over the age of 18, and that at least half of the participant should be part of the church board and in leadership position as church elders or department leaders, who can influence the church with the knowledge and experience they have acquired. Another criterion was that, if possible, the participants would be people that have experience interacting in languages other than Italian and with people of different ethnicities. The seminars are planned to be taught by Rebecca Kessewa Gaisie in the Gaeta church, and the duration for each seminar is 90 minutes. The seminars were scheduled once a week with 45 minutes of lecture and 45 minutes of group discussion, in February and March of 2023.

## First Five Encounters: The Training Seminars

The headline title for the seminars is “Building bridges with immigrant to obey the gospel mandate.”

### **Seminar One**

The first title is “The awareness of bias and its implications in the way immigrant are perceived”. This seminar focuses on:

1. Definition of terms about the words: foreigners, immigrants, non-EU citizens.
2. The four main types of migration flows and how because of bias we define these four categories of immigrant.
3. Mass migration and border politics impact on the natives.
4. “mixophilia” and “mixophobia” as result of multiculturalism.

### **Seminar Two**

The second title is “The importance of overcoming cultural enmities”. This seminar focuses on:

1. The urgent need to break the vicious cycle of victims and perpetrators.
2. The advantages of intercultural interactions.
3. Definition of values and system of beliefs.
4. The richness of creating a “third culture”.

### **Seminar Three**

The third title is “Knowledge and tools on cultural intelligence”. This seminar focuses on:

1. “CQ Knowledge: Understanding cross-cultural issues and differences.
2. Interpretive CQ: The degree to which we are mindful and aware when we interact cross-culturally.

3. Perseverance CQ: Our level of interest, drive, and motivation to adapt cross-culturally.
4. Behavioural QC: The extent to which we appropriately change our verbal and nonverbal actions when we interact cross-culturally” (Livermore 2009, 47-48).
5. The question of the different meanings that the language assumes according to the cultures.

#### **Seminar Four**

The fourth title is “Healthy interactions in a multicultural group”. This seminar focuses on:

1. How to avoid misunderstandings in interactions with people other than our culture.
2. How to understand some behaviors different than ours.
3. Being aware of different cultural needs.
4. The importance of detecting different cultural manners that can enrich our church culture.

#### **Seminar Five**

The fifth and last title is “How to become a healthy multiethnic church”. This seminar focuses on:

1. The reading of 1 Corinthians 13 in the light of interacting with immigrant or people of different culture than ours.
2. The role of God’s love in us in the way we interact in multicultural context and situations, what we can embrace and what is not possible to tolerate according to the Christian principles.

3. Some challenges that a multiethnic and multicultural church can encounter.
4. Some teachings from Mark DeYmaz and George Yancey's book *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*, for the good of a multicultural community.
5. The blessings of being a multiethnic and multicultural church.

The following books were intended to serve as a helping support for each seminar: (a) seminar one, Eberhardt (2019), (b) seminar two Yancey (2006); Volf (2019), (c) seminar three, Livermore (2009), (d) seminar four, Hibbert, Evelyn and Richard (2014), (d) seminar five, DeYmaz and Yancey (2007); Black (2000).

#### **Last Encounter: Multicultural and Multiethnic Dinner**

For the sixth encounter the intention was not to offer a seminar, but to organize a multicultural and multiethnic dinner with the group participants. This meeting is planned to be held in the church dining hall and the members of the implementation group will invite the people of different ethnicities that they have interacted with. In this meeting each participant will bring its food typical of their country of origin, but since for religious reasons and also food allergy reasons some people may not eat some specific things, we will print a list of the food to avoid that includes avoided foods for both religious and allergy reasons. During this encounter each participant will share some of their core cultural values and teach some words or sentences in their own language to the other participant.

#### **Final Phase**

At the end of the project seminars, was planned a group interview with the 16 participants. These interviews should be useful to collect data about the participant

knowledge, ability, and level of involvement in building bridges with immigrants. The guiding questions for the interview are as follows:

1. How did you experience the 12 sermons and the seminars? What did you enjoy more and less and what do you think could have been done differently?

2. Were the 5 seminars clear and understandable? What are the new notions that you learned?

3. How the twelve sermons contributed in your spiritual growth and your understanding of mission?

4. Do you think the 12 sermons and the 5 seminars were useful to give you tools to achieve the gospel mandate to: (a) proclaim the good news to all people especially immigrants, (b) be a blessing for many families, and (c) make the church a house of prayer for all people of all nations before Christ second coming? What did you learn about building bridges with immigrant?

5. During the five weeks of seminars did you get enriched by also interacting with the friend of different culture and ethnicity that you finally invited for the sixth encounter dinner? What feedback did you receive from him/her about the intercultural and multicultural dinner we had in church? Would he/she like to visit our church again?

6. What changes in your behavior has this training produced in your way of interacting with immigrant? What are you doing now to build bridges with immigrants?

Would you recommend this program to equip members of other churches to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation?

## **Conclusion**

I chose as a strategy to implement this project starting from the delivery of 12 sermons, to be able to sensitize the entire congregation on the importance of multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry. Then as part of the strategy I decided to recruit a smaller group of people to teach the seminars in order to have more time for the interactions, and also to have at least have half of the participant in leadership position as church elders or department leaders, who can influence the church with the knowledge and experience they have acquired. Then I decided to have the sixth encounter dinner as a strategy to open our church doors to people that in a normal condition will not attend the congregation for their detachment from the Seventh Day Adventist Church. And finally, I chose to have the group interview to have a feedback of the 16 selected church members that experienced the entire project strategy, to know if it the project was effective to achieve the task of build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation.

In the next chapter I will describe the implementation of the project to see in percentage the effect of the project strategy on the 16 selected members.

## CHAPTER 5

### NARRATIVE OF INITIATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this research project was to implement a strategy designed to equip selected members of the Gaeta church to build bridges with immigrant to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation. The basis for the development of the strategy came from the knowledge gathered from the theological and literature review chapters. The project was intended to be implemented in two phases: from December 1, 2023 to January 27, 2024 and from February 10, 2024 to March 9, 2024. The first phase, the “Project Sermons” consisted of 12 sermons divided as follows: three on mission towards immigrants, six on Jesus, the apostolic church, and the issue of immigrants, two on ministry practice and foreigners, and a concluding interactive sermon that summarized the previous 11 sermons and reviewed the main theological concepts concerning the importance of mission and building bridges toward foreigners.

The second phase, the “Project Seminars” was designed to train and deploy a group of 16 selected members to build bridges with immigrants. The training focused on six encounters: five seminars regarding the issue of (a) bias, (b) overcoming cultural enmities, (c) having knowledge and tools on cultural intelligence, (d) understanding how to interact in a multicultural group, and (e) how to become a healthy multiethnic church. During the seminars, each member was asked to engage with a person of different ethnicity to learn more of the person’s culture. The 6<sup>th</sup>

encounter was to have been a dinner with the people of different ethnicities that the members got involved with, and to share with the entire group the benefits and the challenges they found in the various interactions. The final phase of the project consisted in a group interview to the 16 selected members to measure their knowledge, ability, and level of involvement in building bridges with immigrants.

This chapter describes what happened during the implementation of the project.

### **Project Sermons**

As part of the project implementation 12 sermons were delivered to the congregation, to teach and sensitize the members and the visitors about what the Gospel says on the importance of building bridges to share the good news with individuals from all nations so that the church may become a house of prayer for all people (Isa 56:7). The themes were Mission, Church, and Ministry Practice.

#### **Three Sermons on Mission**

Date: 12/01/2023 (evening service). Title: To Look for the Goodness of our Neighbors (Gen 18:18). I sought to describe why it is important to have the good of one's neighbor as an interest, and to be instruments through which God can pour out his blessings on all the families of the Earth. God himself, being a loving God continually act for the goodness of all humanity. As Christians we are called to do the same within our sphere of influence.

Date: 12/09/2023 (morning service). Title: To Focus on Evangelism Rather than Possible Persecution (Mark 13:10). In this sermon I intended to share that thinking of evangelization is of absolute importance, and far more important than the preoccupation of the various possible persecutions of the end of times, because the end of the world is not determined by the amount of persecution, but rather by the



greatest possible number of people who will be able to receive the testimony of the Gospel.

Date: 12/09/2023 (afternoon service). Title: To Preach the Gospel to All Nations, Language Groups, and Ethnicities without Borders (Rev 14:6-7). I endeavored to share that the eternity of God's sovereignty implies that his adoration must always be universal and not reserved for small ethnic groups. The fact that the hour of his judgment has come implies a certain urgency for conversion on the part of all those who have not yet made him their God and center of worship.

#### Six Sermons on Jesus and the Apostolic Church

Date: 12/16/2023 (morning service). Title: The Importance of Sharing the Gift of Salvation with Pagan Foreigners (Mark 7:24-30, Matt 15:21-28). The gift of salvation is also for pagans who manifest faith. Paul writes in the letter to the Romans: (the gospel) "is the power of God for the salvation of every believer, the Jew in the first place, but also the Greek" (Rom 1:16). God offers the gift of salvation to anyone who asks for it humbly and with faith. A Christian that performs all religious practices without understanding the importance of sharing Christ and his good news to others, has failed in his comprehension of Christ's mandate to spread the gospel. In fact, God does not desire that believers only worship him, but also that they testify about him to those that have not known him yet.

Date: 12/16/2023 (afternoon service). Title: God Seeks True Worshippers beyond Borders: Part One (John 4:1-26). God seeks true worshippers, who worship him in spirit and truth, and makes it clear that to be sincere worshipers, a person's ethnic origin and troubled past do not count. It is important to interact with all categories of people as long as we influence them positively. Attention must be paid to people who isolate themselves or who are often marginalized by society, and it is

important to meet them in their comfort zone, without disrupting their routine. The process of change and acceptance of discipleship takes place because of the attitude of Jesus who speaks without expressing judgment and prejudice.

Date: 01/05/2024 (evening service). Title: God Seeks True Worshippers beyond Borders: Part Two (John 4:1-26). When talking about worship, arguments about ethnic and geographical differences can emerge (as in the story of the Samaritan woman), and a defense mechanism emerges that focuses on differences to affirm one's own identity. However, when this happens in church, this attitude removes the attention from God, and places it rather on human beings and their diversity. So, it is wise to avoid such an attitude because the church is to be a house of prayer for all people of all nations.

Date: 01/06/2024 (morning service). Title: Taking care of our neighbors' needs to receive the gospel (Acts 11:1-18). The fact that Peter was praying when he received a vision from God makes us understand the importance of a prayerful life to know how God wants to engage us in reaching people who might be interested in knowing him (Kurz 2013, 183). Sometimes mission possibilities are right under our nose, without having to go far. God, through Peter's experience with Cornelius, makes us understand that the gift of faith and salvation is for everyone, including those we could least imagine.

Date: 01/13/2024 (morning service). Title: One Ethnicity in God: Part One (Eph 2:11-22). Unity among peoples could only be generated by Christ Jesus. The reconciliation that Jesus brings through his sacrifice is therefore not only between God and men, but also between human beings. Therefore, salvation also concerns unity in Christ of the various ethnic groups and people. There is thus an end to the diversity of ethnicities and the beginning of one ethnicity in God, not because the

individual ethnicity is eliminated, but rather because this new identity in Christ is greater and has priority over one's own personal ethnicity.

Date: 01/13/2024 (afternoon service). Title: One Ethnicity in God: Part Two (Eph 2:11-22). The text of Eph 2:11-22 shows us that soteriology (Eph 2:14-18) is followed by ecclesiology (Eph 2:19-22) and that the church is the place where people should feel at home in having a sense of belonging to God's family.

#### Two Sermons on Paul and His Outreach Method

Date: 01/20/2024 (evening service). Title: Building Bridges for Christ Purpose (1 Cor 9:19-23). Paul explains that his constant adaptation to people is intentional to bring the gospel, therefore he is attentive to various sensibilities so that the gospel is not misunderstood, but fully comprehended. Precisely because he is free in Christ, Paul can give himself to others without being a slave to his own prejudices, fears, and judgment of others. Because of their love for Christ, believers should feel impelled to build bridges with others and be of service to them.

Date: 01/27/2024 (morning service). Title: Preaching with Cultural Intelligence (Acts 17:16-34). It is necessary to affirm biblical truths without offending and hurting the sensibilities of those who have not yet known God. In Acts 17:16-34 Paul applies the principles of cultural intelligence. Since Paul is not in a predominantly Jewish context, he does not make mention as he is wont to do of the history of Israel, he does not quote the Old Testament texts, and he does not name Jesus directly even though he is speaking of him. Rather, his entire discourse is expressed in a philosophical manner to which the Athenians were accustomed. Paul, therefore, to preach effectively, speaks in the cultural language most understandable to his interlocutors. This is what believers should learn to apply when there are chances to preach the gospel in foreign contexts.

## Concluding Interactive Sermon

Date: 01/27/2024 (afternoon service). Title: Concluding Interactive Sermon

Focused on the Following Questions:

1. What have you learned about Bible teachings on mission and ministry towards foreigners?
2. What is your role in being God's blessings to foreigners, and which should be our attitude?
3. How are you engaging to bring the gospel to people of a different culture than yours and which are the challenges you see?
4. What can we learn from the Bible about how to build bridges with foreigners in order to draw them into the fellowship of the church?
5. Which are the blessings of becoming an open multiethnic and multicultural church?

### **The Impact of the Project Sermons**

These sermons had an impact on some visitors from India (non-Adventist), Brazil (Adventist), Venezuela (non-Adventist) who felt welcome in the church, to the point of deciding to stay for the church afternoon program that involved a group discussion of the message of the sermon, to focus on the key ideas and clarify those that were unclear.

During the afternoon group discussion these visitors shared how the Bible passages of the sermons fed their souls and made them feel that the Gospel had a relevant message also for their realities.

Some of the native Italian church members said that the sermons helped them to understand the importance of mission and ministry towards foreign people. Others declared that it became clear to them that interacting with foreign people is

challenging because of the language barriers, different cultural approaches, or just because in their lives they never interacted or had friendships with people from a different country. Some others church members were defensive, declaring that they did not have any need to approach to foreign people, because in the past when they opened themselves to foreigners they had bad experiences like cheating in various forms.

### **Project Seminars**

The number of the people recruited for the seminars were 16, but only 9 attended all the encounters. Other 4 people missed one appointment, and three persons missed 2 appointments. I personally taught the seminars every Sabbath afternoon at the church from the 10<sup>th</sup> of February to the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, but since on Sabbath 2<sup>nd</sup> of March we had a funeral of a church member, we moved the 4<sup>th</sup> seminar on the same date of the 5<sup>th</sup> seminar on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March, with a 15-minute break between. Each seminar lasted 90 minutes, and all participants were actively involved in the interaction time, by asking questions or sharing personal experiences.

The first seminar, “The Awareness of Bias and its Implications in the Way Immigrant are Perceived,” focused on:

1. Definition of the terms: foreigners, immigrants, and non-EU citizens.
2. The four main types of migration flows and how because of bias we define these four categories of immigrant.
3. Mass migration and border politics impact on the natives.
4. *Mixophilia* and *mixophobia* as result of multiculturalism.

During this seminar, the majority of people confirmed that they did not use properly the nouns *immigrant* and *non-EU citizen*. Regarding the issues of *mixophilia* and *mixophobia*, some participant shared their personal experience regarding

foreigner friends that experienced discrimination, or personal experiences of discrimination when they were abroad, outside of Italy. Some other participants spoke about their mixophilia experiences among people of different ethnicities.

At the end of the seminar the participants were showing enthusiasm in having had the possibility to learn more about all the various subjects addressed during the seminar.

The second seminar, “The Importance of Overcoming Cultural Enmities,” focused on:

1. The urgent need to break the vicious cycle of victims and perpetrators.
2. The advantages of intercultural interactions.
3. Definition of values and system of beliefs.
4. The richness of creating a “third culture”.

During this seminar some of the participants did not seem convinced of any advantage in intercultural interactions. They rather showed their concern on the possibility of opening too much to the foreign cultures, saying that their fear was being overcome by other cultural ways of doing things, instead of the foreign people adapting to the Italian culture. Some of the participant declared that they considered the assimilation model to be the right one for foreigners; but other participants understood the issue of values and system of beliefs, and considered the creation of the third culture an important step in order to respond to the Gospel model of *ecclesia*.

The third seminar, “Knowledge and Tools on Cultural Intelligence”, focused on the content from David A. Livermore’s book *Cultural Intelligence*. The subjects I spoke about in the seminar were:

1. “CQ Knowledge: Understanding cross-cultural issues and differences.

2. Interpretive CQ: The degree to which we are mindful and aware when we interact cross-culturally.
3. Perseverance CQ: Our level of interest, drive, and motivation to adapt cross-culturally.
4. Behavioural QC: The extent to which we appropriately change our verbal and nonverbal actions when we interact cross-culturally” (Livermore 2009, 47-48).
5. The question of the different meanings that the language carries in various cultures.

This seminar started with a game, where the participants were divided in two groups. Each group had to invent a name of the planet they were coming from, the main food of that planet, and its population characteristics. The requirement of the game was for the two groups to discover this information. The two groups could dialog to get this information, but they did not know that they had different ways to interact with each other. The rules of the game required the members of the first group to be people that did not want to be touched, to the point of running from people, and that they speak with a very loud voice; on the contrary the members of the second group had to speak only when they touch the person they are interacting with and only by whispering in a very lower voice tone. The goal of the game was to demonstrate the importance of suspending a little of a person’s self-characteristics in order to be able to interact and dialog with a person of a different provenance, to understand the differences, and why they behave the way they do.

At the end of the seminar some participants shared about some interactions they had with foreign people during the week.

The fourth seminar, “Healthy Interactions in a Multicultural Group,” focused on:

1. How to avoid misunderstandings in interactions with people other than our culture.
2. How to understand some behaviors different than ours.
3. Being aware of different cultural needs.
4. The importance of detecting different cultural manners that can enrich our church culture.

There is a Ghanaian ethnic church close to the Gaeta church that is in the same district with the Gaeta church. These two congregations already have many interactions due to joint district programs together. And since I am originally Ghanaian (I was born in Ghana and my parent are Ghanaians), the participants of the groups agreed to use the Ghanaian culture for practical examples regarding the content of the seminar.

During this seminar the participant learned many behavior differences, misunderstandings, cultural needs of the Ghanaian community, and the participants of the seminar also recognized how the Ghanaian cultural manners enriched their worship experience when the two churches are together.

The fifth and last seminar, “How to Become a Healthy Multiethnic Church,” focused on:

1. The reading of 1 Corinthians 13 in the light of interacting with immigrants or people of cultures different than ours.
2. The role of God’s love in us in the way we interact in multicultural context and situations, what we can embrace and what is not possible to tolerate according to the Christian principles.



3. Some challenges that a multiethnic and multicultural church can encounter.
4. Some teachings from Mark DeYmaz and George Yancey's book *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*, for the good of a multicultural community.
5. The blessings of being a multiethnic and multicultural church.

During this seminar some participants declared that for them it was too difficult to become a multicultural church. But others realized that being a multicultural church is something that could happen in any moment. Some participants recognized that it was a blessing to have some training on all the subject of the 5 seminars so that they could be better equipped in cross-cultural interactions and in case of the reality of becoming a multicultural church.

For the sixth and last encounter, at the beginning of the 5 seminars, each member was asked to engage with a person of different ethnicity to learn more of the person's culture. The 6<sup>th</sup> encounter was projected to be a dinner with the people of different ethnicities that the members got involved with, and to share with the entire group the benefits and the challenges they found in the various interactions, but only three people were able to have constant interactions with foreigners during the duration of the seminars. The rest of the group members were not able to purposely interact with foreigners, in order to build friendships to invite them in church. But some of them still wanted to try in this effort even after the seminars. For this reason, the group members decided to postpone the intercultural dinner, with the intent to open this possibility to all the congregation.

### **The Outcome of the Group Interview**

At the end of the six meetings, a 45-minute group interview was planned with the 16 participants to collect data through specific verbal question about their

knowledge, ability, and level of involvement in building bridges with immigrants. The questions for the interview and the main responses were as follows:

1. How did you experience the 12 sermons and the seminars? What did you enjoy more and less and what do you think could have been done differently?

To this question the majority of participant (13 people) said that they got benefit both from the sermons and seminars, because they had the possibility to reflect in a more practical way what it means to be open to bring the Gospel to all people foreigners included. They also realized that was not easy for them because they were not used to that reality. The duration of the seminars was not too long to get them tired, and they enjoyed the clarity of the presentations. What they would have preferred differently were the sermons to be spread in a larger time frame. Three participants did not respond to the question.

2. Were the 5 seminars clear and understandable? What are the new notions that you learned?

To this question the people that were interviewed said that the seminars were clear and understandable, and many people said that they knew something of the notions were shared but not so much into details, like for example the scientific implications of bias. They learned new words and their meanings. They learned about the complexity of the intercultural interactions and its importance for Mission and Ministry, and they realized that before they were not equipped to understand the reasons of diversity that emerges in cross-cultural interactions.

3. How did the twelve sermons contribute to your spiritual growth and your understanding of mission?

To this question, the members of the group said that the sermons helped them to reflect on the importance and urgency to proclaim the good news to foreigners, but

they also realized that they were not doing much to reach the Gaeta native citizens. Some of the participants declared that maybe it would have been easier to share the gospel with immigrants than the natives, because the natives have deep Catholic roots that define their identity within the social and family context. Through the sermons some participant also understood that as Christians they were not exempt from having prejudice toward foreigners, and others realized that the constant personal interaction was more effective than the big evangelistic campaigns to bring the gospel to others.

4. Do you think the 12 sermons and the 5 seminars were useful to give you tools to achieve the gospel mandate to: (a) proclaim the good news to all people especially immigrants, (b) be a blessing for many families, and (c) make the church a house of prayer for all people of all nations before Christ second coming? What did you learn about building bridges with immigrant?

For the first part of the question all participants responded positively. For the second part of the question three participants said that they acknowledged that building bridges with immigrant was something that could not happen quickly because of its complex implications. So they needed training like the 12 sermons and 5 seminars to enable them to at least try doing it. Regarding building bridges with immigrant, other four participants said that they understood the importance of learning more of the culture of the person they wanted to engage with. Other two participants said that building bridges with immigrant required love, time, and being intentional.

5. During the five weeks of seminars did you get enriched by also interacting with the friend of different culture and ethnicity that you finally invited for the sixth encounter dinner? What feedback did you receive from him/her about the

intercultural and multicultural dinner we had in church? Would he/she like to come in our church again?

To this question only three people were able to respond partially, because the other 13 people were not able to interact with a person of different culture and ethnicity, and none of the participant were able to receive feedback about the intercultural and multicultural dinner, because the entire members of the group decided to postpone it.

The three people that were able to interact with a person of different culture and ethnicity said that they got enriched by interacting with these new friends. One got involved with a 42-year-old Indian man who started attending church and who decided to start Bible studies. This Indian man shared part of his culture with the program participant he was engaging with, and this participant was able to explain the difference between aspects of the Indian man's culture and the Gospel culture. For example, God does not divide people into higher and lower classes.

Another participant got involved with a 30-year-old Russian woman that was about to die from cancer. This participant got involved also with the parent of this woman and they shared differences between the Russian and Italian culture, and the differences between the Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. When the young lady was dying the program participant shared with her and her parent about the resurrection hope that the Bible speaks about, and the lady fell asleep in the hope of Jesus second coming. The parent of the lady received encouragement by knowing that one day at Jesus' Second Coming they will meet their beloved daughter again.

The other participant got involved with a 33-year-old Brazilian man that intended to be in Italy just for few months in order to work on his Italian citizen document since his great grandfather was an Italian. But then this Brazilian man

decided to stay in Italy for at least one year. Since the Brazilian man was alone, the program participant invited the Brazilian man several times to his house in order to spend some time with his family and to make him feel less lonely. The program participant came to know that the Brazilian man was a Christian missionary who served in China for 2 years doing evangelistic work. The program participant invited the Brazilian man to share his mission testimony with the church youth, and the youth appreciated it a lot. The Brazilian man visited the Gaeta church a number of Sabbaths, then he left to live in the north of Italy.

6. What changes in your behavior has this training produced in your way of interacting with immigrants? What are you doing now to build bridges with immigrants?

To the first part of the question five participants said that the training helped them to be less defensive in their interactions with immigrants. Others four that now they ask more questions to understand the worldview of the immigrants they interact with. Five participants developed more curiosity in knowing people of other cultures. Others four said that they do not take for granted that the immigrant they are interacting with understands the Italian culture.

To the second part of the question, seven of the participants' answer was that they will be more open to intercultural interactions with immigrant. Other four said that they are not doing much to build bridges with immigrant, but that they will pray God to equip them to know how to behave if they happen to be in intercultural settings and interactions.

7. Would you recommend this program to equip members of other churches to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation?

To this question all participants said yes, because of the mandate of the gospel to bring the good news to all people, because of the possibility to become a multicultural church at any time, and because of the lack of knowledge and awareness that many church members have in multicultural and interethnic mission and ministry.

### **Summary**

During the project sermons discussions, the project seminars, and group interview, in some of the 16 selected members, it emerged the effect of mixophobia (the fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable dislike towards the massive presence of unknown individuals) and mixophilia (the attraction or pleasure of the natives to encounter and engage with foreigners) in some of the participant. It also emerged that training to sensitize the church members on multicultural and multiethnic mission and ministry should be periodical in order for them to get use to the idea and practice of the later. In this process for my personal experience, and from the testimonies of the project participants, I learned that to build bridges with immigrants or foreign people it takes time and constancy, but most of all it requires willingness to be intentional.

## CHAPTER 6

### EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I gave a narrative of the implementation of the project to equip some members of the Gaeta SDA Church to build bridges with immigrants, to draw them toward fellowship with the congregation. The project consisted in (a) preaching 12 sermons, divided as follows: three on mission towards immigrants; six on Jesus, the apostolic church, and the issue of immigrants; two on ministry practice and foreigners; and a conclusive interactive sermon that summarized the previous 11 sermons and reviewed the main theological points on the importance of mission and building bridges with foreigners; (b) training and deploying a group of 16 selected members to build bridges with immigrants; and (c) a group interview with the 16 members to evaluate their knowledge, ability, and level of involvement in building bridges with immigrants. In this chapter I will give my evaluation and learning about the project.

#### **Method, Evaluation, and Analysis of Results**

##### Method of Evaluating the Project

My method of evaluation of this project was through a group interview with the 16 selected members of the Gaeta church. The questions used in this interview are found in chapter 5. Not all the 16 participants responded to all the interview questions.

## Results and Analysis of Evaluation

Even if all the 16 selected members that were trained and deployed to build bridges with immigrants manifested their interest in the 12 sermons that were preached and in the content of the five seminars, only three of them decided to engage themselves to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation. The others did not achieve this task. But one and a half month after the conclusion of the project one more participant started interacting with a Ghanaian colleague of his job place. This interaction led the project participant to know more about the life of this Ghanaian colleague. They became friends, and the project participant came to know about some personal needs of this colleague, and he tried to be of help. And even if the Ghanaian colleague of this project participant is of Muslim beliefs, he accepted the invitation of the project participant to come to visit the church. We can therefore say that four out of the 16 project participants were able to achieve the task of the project. It may be that after some time other participant will be able to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation. But at the moment, the result and analysis of the evaluation demonstrate that the majority of the participant did not engage themselves with immigrant.

## Learnings

During the training project with the 16 selected members, I learned through the comments of some participants the effect of mixophobia (the fear of the unknown and the uncontrollable dislike towards the massive presence of unknown individuals) and mixophilia (the attraction or pleasure of the natives to encounter and engage with foreigners). In fact, some participants were worried about the possibility of having persons from foreign ethnic groups attending the church and wanting to introduce new cultural styles of worship, diverse from the Italian ways. On the contrary, other group



participants shared their love of participating in diverse ethnic Adventist churches, the pleasure of interacting with people of other cultures, and engage in diverse worship experiences with diverse music and ways of preaching.

I also learned that training to sensitize the church members on multicultural and multiethnic mission and ministry should be periodical in order for them to get use to the idea and practice of the later.

I recognized that five weeks were not enough to build a deep friendship, but enough to begin meaningful interaction and dialog with a foreign person. In this process for my personal experience, and from the testimonies of the project participants, I realized that it requires a willingness to be intentional to build bridges with immigrants or foreign people. It also takes time and constancy. Building bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation is a mission task that requires awareness of the biblical mandate, knowledge and training about the scientific, political, and sociological implications, and faith, love, consistency, and effort in achieving the task.

### **Conclusions**

In addition to the conclusions drawn from the narrative of initiative implementation (Chapter 5), brief summaries of the theological, theoretical and implementation conclusions of chapters 2, 3, and 4 are provided.

#### **Theological Conclusions—Chapter 2**

From the biblical texts presented in this chapter, it was possible to grasp the urgency manifested in the Bible about the importance of being a blessing to all nations, peoples, and tribes, spreading the Eternal Gospel and its saving message. Nevertheless, it was also revealed the taboo about the enmity between different peoples and the difficulty in interacting between different ethnic groups. However,

this difficulty finds resolution in Jesus Christ. In fact, the Church understood as the body of Christ can thus find unity in the Spirit and be the place where people, despite their diversity, can experience the saving presence of God who has acquired all of us as one people. Then it was possible to learn through the example of the apostle Paul the importance of developing the ability to build bridges, by adapting oneself to the people to whom one speaks about Jesus and by choosing the most understandable and suitable language according to their customs and needs.

### Theoretical Conclusions–Chapter 3

In this chapter speaking about foreigners and migration in Italy, I explained the different meaning between *immigrant* and *non-EU citizen* and the appropriate way to use these terms. Through Wihtol de Wenden I acknowledged the reality of migrant flows. Then Bauman, Campolo and Battle showed the effect of mixophilia and mixophobia that mass migration generates on the natives.

Facing the issue of border politics through Ambrosini I understood the different reasons that generates irregular immigrant. After I observed how some of the Christian Churches are involve in helping the asylum seekers and the refugees, and I observed how migration sociological issues were impacting Adventist churches in Italy. Through the reflections of the “Commissione etica e società” of the Adventist Church, I understood integration challenges among Italian and foreigners church members. Then since from the literature review it emerged that interculturality (a dialogue and an open confrontation between cultures) could be the only solution to solve conflict among people of different cultures, because cross-cultural understanding helps people to become more mindful and aware of other ways of thinking and interpretation of reality, I concluded that all this couldn't be addressed without cultural intelligence.

## Implementation Conclusions–Chapter 4

I chose as a strategy to implement this project starting from the delivery of 12 sermons, to be able to sensitize the entire congregation on the importance of multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry. Then I decided to recruit and to teach specific seminars on the latter to a smaller group of people, having at least half of the participant in leadership position, who can influence the church with the knowledge and experience they have acquired. I planned to have as sixth encounter a dinner as a strategy to open our church doors to people that in a normal condition will not attend the congregation for their detachment from the SDA Church. I finally chose to have a group interview to have feedback of the 16 selected church members that experienced the entire project strategy, to know if the project was effective to achieve the task of build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation.

### **My Transformation as a Ministry Professional**

I started my Doctor of Ministry (DMin) in Multiethnic and Multicultural Mission and Ministry in May 2018. These years of studies have been a blessing for my life. I learned a lot about mission, ministry, myself, and God. The greatest transformation I had was in my personal relationship with God. In 2019, some month after attending the second-year intensive that focused on deepening our personal spiritual growth in God, I faced a divorce after a year of marriage. One night my now ex-husband woke up and told me that he did not love me, and he never did, and that he got married to me only to meet the expectations of others. I found myself in a very dark place. But the spiritual growth practices that I learned through the DMin classes, and the prayers of my church members enabled me to see God by my side in all that painful process.

Sometimes, I thought I did not have the strength to continue in my studies, but my professors, my mentor, and some colleagues always encouraged me to move on and not to quit. It has not been an easy task, but I thank God that by his grace, and through all the people he sent to motivate me, I was finally able to finish my studies.

During this journey, in 2021, God gave me the grace to have a foster child whose mother was an asylum seeker who gave birth three days after arriving in Italy by boat. Unfortunately, she was paralyzed soon after giving birth and was in hospital for 5 months before she started recovering some mobility in the legs. Meanwhile, since the newborn baby could not stay in the hospital without a caregiver, as a pastor they called me and ask if I could take care of him in my house, until the mother recovered. By God's grace, after five months, the mother of the baby was released from the hospital, and I hosted her for almost two months in my house to give her refuge and to teach her how to care for her baby.

Since this woman is from Ivory Coast, while she was with me, I learned some French to communicate with her, and she taught me about her culture; she made me taste some Ivory Coast traditional foods and I also did the same regarding Italian food and culture. I tried teaching her some of the Italian language but was not an easy task for her. Although she is Muslim and I am a Christian, we were able to pray together, praising and thanking God for all the blessings he had provided in our lives through our encounter. I still have contact and friendship with this woman, and my studies in multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry helped me a lot to interact in a better way with her.

Because of the DMin studies, I was able to sensitize the churches I was in charge of to have church boards that reflected the diversity of the members. Before

the church boards were composed of Italian members, even though there were many members from South America, East Europe, and Africa.

In 2022 I was moved to a new district that includes the Gaeta Church where I finally implemented my project. Meanwhile, in October 2023, I got married to my husband Samuel, and since he is also a pastor, we had the joy to be in ministry together. In November 2023, the Italian Union asked me to deliver some seminars on multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry during the National Evangelization Forum, and I had the opportunity to share the knowledge I got through my studies with many church members of the Italian Seventh-day Adventist churches.

Since I have friends from Europe, Africa, South and North America, but not Asia, in February 2024, during the five weeks that I was teaching the five seminars to the 16 church members for the project to build bridges with immigrants to draw them toward the fellowship of the congregation, I connected with a young lady of Chinese origins. The first interactions were not easy, but finally we agreed to have tea together in our next appointment. My hope is in time to deepening my relationship with this lady, to know her better and to learn about her culture, religion and core beliefs, and God willing becoming friends, to also share our life experiences and walk with the entity we believe in.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further studies on multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry should be conducted in the various Italian Adventist Union territories to have a better perspective on the reality of the subject matter within the entire union. Other studies should be conducted to understand the reason why even after receiving the training the majority of the church members did not engage themselves in reaching out to immigrant within the Gaeta context. And specific studies should be done to

understand the appropriate time frame required to enable church members to engage in meaningful outreach towards foreigners.

### **A Final Word**

I have been blessed in learning, leading, and experiencing multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry, and since I am from Ghana, and I have lived in Italy since I was a child, I will always experience multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry because of the diverse cultures that are a part of me, and because of globalization that makes our world more multiethnic and multicultural.

My dream would be having the opportunity to work 100% in a department focused on training pastors, churches and Unions or Federations in multiethnic and multicultural mission and ministry. I in fact believe that, before Jesus second coming, this is one of the ministries that the global church should be engage in, to reach two important goals: (a) to win souls for the kingdom of heaven, and (b) to generate love and brotherhood spirit among human beings; because as Jesus declared: “they will know that we are his disciples if we have love one for the other” beyond ethnic and cultural differences.

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## VITA

- Name:** Rebecca Kessewa Gaisie
- Background:** I was born on April 18, 1989, in Sekondi Ghana, but raised in Torino, Italy. I have two sisters one older and one younger. I was raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church by my parents. I was baptized into the body of Christ and became a Seventh-day Adventist at a young age (2005).
- Family:** I am married to Samuel Sarpaning, and we are about to have our first child in some days.
- Education:
- 2018-2024 Doctor of Ministry in Multiethnic and Multicultural Mission and Ministry, Andrews University, MI
- 2010-2016 Bachelor and Masters Studies in Theology and Pastoral Care from Villa Aurora Adventist University, Florence, (I)
- 2004-2010 High school diploma from Lagrange Scientist High School, Rivoli, (I)
- Experience:
- 2022- present Pastor, Italian Union (I)
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- 2014-2017 Ministry in Villa Aurora Adventist University serving as girls dean and campus life organizer.

