

MISPLACED PEOPLE, BORDERED SUBJECTS: DISCERNING A THEOLOGY OF PLACE IN AN AGE OF DISPLACEMENT

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Abstract

“Heaven has a wall and strict immigration policies. Hell has open borders.”¹ Written on billboards and church signs from Nebraska in the Northern United States to nearer the US-Mexico border in New Mexico, this sentiment portrays a theological assumption about the nature of national borders and those seeking to cross them. Allied to the political rhetoric and policies of figures such as Donald Trump, these signs represent a transnational movement to cast immigrants and refugees as existential threats—threats to the national spirit—that demand stringent and unforgiving border policies. The exclusionary dynamic represented by these signs perpetuates the notion that sacred-like places are principally bordered, enclosed spaces.

Keywords

borders, immigration, theology, liturgy

This essay contests the exclusionary discourse that identifies bordered spaces with sacred spaces. This is accomplished by attending to points of contact between a critical analysis of modern nation-state wall and border security expansions and a liturgical theology of place which understands liturgy as a public social practice of “boundary work” that moves participants from a status of displacement into an embodied space of mutual gift and friendship.

I approach this topic in three sections: first, by examining nation-state borders and how they function as epistemological and material sites of power that shape the status and treatment of displaced people. Second, I offer some reflections on

1 Lynette Wilson, “Border Ministries Summit Brings Together Southwest, California and Mexico Dioceses,” *Episcopal News Service*, November 19, 2018, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/article/border-ministries-summit-brings-together-southwest-california-and-mexico-dioceses>; “Heaven Has Strict Immigration Laws: Church Sign Seen as Attack on Immigrants Removed,” March 16, 2022, <https://www.fox19.com/2022/03/16/heaven-has-strict-immigration-laws-church-sign-seen-attack-immigrants-removed/>

Mark 7, in particular Jesus' teaching on the purity code and how this is enacted in Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman within the border regions of Tyre. In this episode, we see the emergence of an embodied, non-competitive space of belonging being created through the rebuttal of the women and the healing Jesus brings to her daughter. Third, I draw on the work of Molly Farneth, Susanna Synder, and Bill Cavanaugh who approach liturgy and the sacraments as boundary work and social, place-making religious practices that enact the kind of subversive hope and justice through liturgical interventions that relativise the implicit power of the border structures.

Borders and Bordered Subjects

Migration and, more broadly, population displacement is a complex reality and patterns and reasons for human movement are infinitely varied. Migration as a concept can be applied to a variety of different phenomena: general geographical mobility, permanent emigration or immigration, temporary movements for migratory work, and compulsory forms of migration like flight, expulsion, displacement, and deportation, or transnational migration which is migration as a permanent lifestyle.² All these types of migration differ from each other in structural ways and have diverse consequences and impacts on the migrants as well as on the sending and receiving countries. For this essay, my concern is on the question of edges or "borderscapes,"³ specifically, the places where nation-state bordering and border security meet and restrict displaced peoples. Following the nomenclature of non-partisan organisations that track global population movements, I'll use the term displaced persons or forced migrants in reference to the men, women, and children who experience flight or displacement due to social and political pressures.⁴

What is particularly characteristic of the current global situation is the unprecedented amount of forced migration due to political, economic, and social turmoil, and the unfolding impacts of climate change. According to the latest available estimates, there were 280.6 million people moving either temporarily or permanently across an international border in 2020—representing close to 4 percent of the world's 7.8 billion people. This is the highest level ever recorded; one half of these are children.⁵ Another figure particular to this current moment is

2 Regina Polak, "Turning a Curse Into a Blessing? Theological Contributions to a Resource-Orientated Narrative on Migration in Europe," in *Religion in the European Refugee Crisis*, eds. Ulrich Schmiedel and Graeme Smith (Springer, 2018), 250.

3 Chiara Brambilla and Reece Jones, "Rethinking Borders, Violence, and Conflict: From Sovereign Power to Borderscapes as Sites of Struggles," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38, no. 2 (April 2020): 3.

4 Rebecca Hamlin, "'Migrants'? 'Refugees'? Terminology Is Contested, Powerful, and Evolving," migrationpolicy.org, March 18, 2022, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/terminology-migrants-refugees-illegal-undocumented-evolving>.

5 Jeanne Batalova, "Top Statistics on Global Migration and Migrants," migrationpolicy.org, July 21,

59,037, which is the estimated number of people who have died attempting to cross a national border, including the 2035 deaths of displaced people attempting to enter Australia since January 2000.⁶

These deaths are not principally the result of wars where humans become the casualties of state-to-state conflict or internal strife. Rather, they are primarily a consequence of the expansion of security and detention practices of nation-states, in particular, the increasing construction of border walls and the defensive forces deployed to monitor these structures. The increase of border walls and fences around the world, which has grown dramatically from fifteen in 1989 to almost seventy today, is part of a new geography of migration.⁷

Supporters of border security expansion argue that the border wall increase is simply the result of sovereign states utilising one of many impediments designed to limit undocumented migration. Political theorist, Brad Littlejohn, argues, for example, that, “a nation without borders is no better than a house without walls.”⁸ Commonsense, Littlejohn continues, “shows us that, like every creaturely good, hospitality (whether by household or nation) is made possible only by recognition of its limits.”⁹ Likewise, conservative commentator Isaac Riley asks what the sovereign state is for if not to “serve the interests of their native people and garner their trust.”¹⁰ Securing the borders through walls and other mechanisms, Riley contends, is a prejudice that is “wise and prudent” in that it relieves the suffering of citizens and the dissolving of the “indigenous national heritage” by the dilution of norms created when borders are opened to displaced people.¹¹

Against the line of argument taken by Riley and others,¹² Edward Casey maintains that borders and walls, whether of a household or a nation, are as human artifacts, material and symbolic, and are better understood as active agents in fostering social processes that extend beyond questions of hospitality and into matters of human

2022, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/top-statistics-global-migration-migrants>.

6 “The Australian Border Deaths Database,” ANZSOC Thematic Group on Crimmigration and Border Control, n.d., <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/border-criminologies/australian-border-deaths-database>.

7 Reece Jones et al., “Interventions on the State of Sovereignty at the Border,” *Political Geography* 59 (July 1, 2017): 2.

8 Brad Littlejohn, “Theology of Immigration,” *First Things*, June 1, 2024, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2024/06/theology-of-immigration>.

9 Littlejohn, “Theology of Immigration.”

10 Isaac Riley, “A Moral Argument against Migration,” *The European Conservative*, October 11, 2024, <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/essay/a-moral-argument-against-migration/>.

11 Riley, “Moral Argument.”

12 A notable theological voice in the debate in favour of limited migration to protect sovereignty and national identity is Nigel Biggar, *Between Kin and Cosmopolis: An Ethic of the Nation* (The Lutterworth Press, 2014).

identity and purpose.¹³ As social processes, borders do more than simply mark territorial margins. They are in the estimation of some theorists, “epistemological and material sites with the power to shape subjectivities, differentiate and produce categories of ‘citizen’ and ‘migrant,’ and trace inclusive and exclusive fields of possibilities, as well as limits.”¹⁴ Moreover, borders are continuously constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through multiple socio-spatially ambiguous processes of ordering,¹⁵ which often disrupts attempts to locate the precise line that once crossed repositions the displaced person within the border of the desired nation state. A displaced person attempting to enter Australian territory, for example, faces what the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service calls a “border continuum” of onshore and offshore spaces that transforms both domestic and foreign places into “regions” of bordering that is determined by temporary strategic agreements with adjacent countries. As these agreements shift, so does the border continuum.¹⁶

Wendy Brown argues that the proliferation of nation-state walling and border security processes contributes to a political-theatrical response to eroding nation-state sovereignty. Contemporary walling and border continuums, whether between US and Mexico or around Australian territory, function as symbolic responses to crises produced by a fear of eroding sovereign state capacities to secure territory, citizens, and economics against growing transnational flows of power, people, capital, ideas, and terror.¹⁷ In the US and elsewhere, the wall or their socio-spatial equivalent have become screens onto which citizens project their most irrational fears. Sold to a fearful population as an assurance towards greater security and prosperity, the walls have, notes Brown, inadvertently produced a collective ethos that is defensive, parochial, nationalistic, and militarised. As a result, we have seen the emergence of what Greg Eghigian has called the bordered subject, for whom real and symbolic defensive structures serve as potent organisers of the human psychic landscape that generates cultural and political identities.¹⁸ In other words, borders are not simply created by peoples—they create peoples.¹⁹

13 Edward S. Casey, “Moving Over the Edge: Borders, Boundaries, and Bodies,” in *Borders and Debordering: Topologies, Praxes, Hospitableness*, eds. Tomaž Grušovnik et al. (Lexington Books, 2018), 20.

14 O. Belcher et al., “Border Struggles: Epistemologies, Ontologies, Politics,” *Darkmatter Journal: In the Ruins of Empire* 12, no. 1 (December 31, 2015): 10.

15 Brambilla and Jones, “Rethinking Borders,” 7.

16 Josh Watkins, “Bordering Borderscapes: Australia’s Use of Humanitarian Aid and Border Security Support to Immobilise Asylum Seekers,” *Geopolitics*, October 2, 2017, 2.

17 Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Zone Books, 2010), 40.

18 Brown, *Walled States*, 74.

19 Justin P. Ashworth, “Who Are Our People? Toward a Christian Witness against Borders,” *Modern Theology* 34, no. 4 (2018): 9.

The conditions of enclosed nation-states and bordered subjects contribute to the conceptualisation of migrant populations as *misplaced* peoples, that is, as individuals lost to a world of places. As walled territory is considered sacred and therefore necessary to maintaining the nation's myth of managed might and majesty, so populations outside of places that matter become the highest threat to a "normative nationalism," a privileging of certain nationals (e.g., heartland America) who alone represent what it means, for example, to "Make America Safe Again."²⁰ Through discursive and coercive techniques of disciplining misplaced people by increased border security and surveillance, the settled and dominant population ontologise migrants not simply as "outsiders" but as "outside of the bounds" of ordinary human space: aliens indeed.²¹

Relativising Borders in Mark 7

The confluence of walled states, bordered subjects, and misplaced people contribute to displaced peoples existing with a loss of specificity in "non-places" as "non-people" devoid of established shared meaning and identity. Countering these conditions and its corrupting imaginary requires relativising border mechanisms and reorienting the subjectivity of both citizen and displaced person. It requires, in short, an alternative vision where, in the words of Avtar Brah, there is an entanglement of identity through embodying a shared geographic and imaginative space.²² Such a vision has a precedent in Jesus's transgression of social and ethnic boundaries in Mark 7.

The debate about purity laws and, in particular, food purity in Mark 7:14–23 sets the scene for Jesus at the border regions of Tyre in the encounter with the Syrophoenician woman. The issue at hand in these episodes, Ched Myers notes, is the inevitable anxiety that the dominant "in group" experiences when contemplating the interaction and potential inclusion of those outside the group's boundaries. Jesus addresses this anxiety first through a parable then follows with an illustrative object lesson on relativising territorial and social boundaries.²³

What begins in the opening verses of Mark 7 with the Pharisee's challenging the disciples' practice of sharing table fellowship with "unclean" persons becomes, by

20 Kristin E. Heyer, "Internalized Borders: Immigration Ethics in the Age of Trump," *Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (March 1, 2018): 151.

21 Susanna Snyder, "Displacing Theology: God-Talk in an 'Age of Migration,'" in *Home and Away: Contextual Theology and Local Practice*, eds. Stephen Burns and Clive Pearson (Wipf and Stock, 2013), 58.

22 Jaisy A. Joseph, "The Decentered Vision of Diaspora Space: Theological Ethnography, Migration, and the Pilgrim Church," *Practical Matters Journal* 11, Spring (2018): 2.

23 Ched Myers, "'Nothing from Outside Can Defile You': Jesus' Embrace of the 'Other' in Mark 4–8," in *Our God Is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice*, eds. Matthew Colwell and Ched Myers (Orbis Books, 2012), 129–30.

verse 14, a teaching from Jesus on how the regulations of maintaining group identity have the effect of creating conditions of social and economic exclusion, especially of the poor whose movements and location are restricted by the purity codes. This is something which Jesus repudiates in his parable: “there is nothing which goes into a person that can defile; only that which comes out of a person defiles” (7:15).

In his teaching around this parable, Jesus is concerned with the broader issues of boundaries. Rather than being simply a teaching about food purity, Jesus, in verse 17 characterises the physical body as a metaphor of the body politic. As Myers notes, Jesus contends that the social boundaries constructed by the purity code are powerless to protect the integrity of the community. “Contamination” can only arise from within the community.²⁴ The exclusive boundary represented in food purity, therefore, is an obstacle to building community, and as in St. Paul and St. Luke’s writings, the community in question includes those outside the social location of Israel, namely, the gentiles.

The parable represents for Jesus and the disciples a redrawing of the lines of group identity. The ethnocentricity of the purity code is replaced by the rigor of collective ethical self-scrutiny that shifts the anxiety of community identity away from the location and movements of the “unclean” to the desires and actions of the community itself.²⁵ Life with God ceases to be principally a matter of maintaining boundaries but is also a relativising of the real and symbolic power of social borders in order to participate in the kind of boundary work where human and divine belonging is enacted.

Relativising borders and boundaries, however, requires a reorientation, a moving over the edge as it were. As the scene in Mark moves to the border regions of Tyre, the full import of Jesus’ teaching on the purity code is brought into contact with an outsider in the person of a Syrophoenician woman, who is under social, religious, and gender designations. It is, in short, a scandal of an encounter. Jesus’ initial racialised retort to the request of the woman is a reminder of how deep the social protocols run, even in Jesus. Her bold and surprising response turns Jesus’ words back upon him, turning the tables in service to access them. In this border scene, Jesus’ privileged status is severely affronted by a gentile woman for the sake of inclusivity, which enacts Jesus’ earlier declaration about food being clean becoming the basis for healing and welcoming all to the table.²⁶

This reorientation, first by Jesus on the purity laws and then through the words and actions of the Syrophoenician woman, constitutes a defining and redefining of borderscapes where through an unexpected intertwining of argument and

24 Ched Myers, “Lessons in Inclusivity (Mark 7:1–37),” in *“Say to This Mountain”: Mark’s Story of Discipleship*, eds. Ched Myers et al. (Orbis Books, 1996), 81.

25 Myers, “Lessons,” 81.

26 Myers, “Lessons,” 83.

encounter, space is made for the *re-membling* of those who have been *dis-membered* by imperial design. Through such acts, Mark's account of Jesus at the border speaks directly to the need for Christian communities to respond to the presence of dismissed and misplaced peoples and their experiences in navigating the borders of modern nation-states.

Liturgical Boundary Work

Understandably, as Susanna Synder notes, the primary focus of Christian responses to the growth in militarised borders and displaced peoples has been largely deontological in tone. Many have focused on commands to care for the alien and to show hospitality to the stranger—notably in the Pentateuch (e.g., Lev 19:34) and Matthew 25—while others propose a Christian cosmopolitanism grounded in the idea that the reign of God transcends earthly borders and that all are migrants are deserving of equal concern in the eyes of God.²⁷ Still others, Synder notes, argue that duties can be discerned scripturally and theologically to prioritise family, community, and culture over outsiders or that those who cross international borders without legal paperwork have committed a sin.²⁸

In the face of these complex and fraught debates, for Snyder the reception of migrants and the increase of border security cannot be limited to ethical commands. To draw on an earlier point, since borders foster exclusionary social processes that both exclude and create displaced people, acts of hospitality, important as they are, are not sufficient in addressing the material and symbolic power of the border. Following the position of Rowan Williams, Aden Cotterill argues that the key theological task in an age of displacement comes in the form of a deceptively simple question: How can we inhabit a place where God and humanity can belong together?²⁹

Inhabiting places where God and humanity belong together is, I believe, one of the core purposes and functions of ritual and liturgy in the Christian context. Liturgical speech and actions make specific claims about the location of God's activity, and as Molly Farneth argues, the location is often in relation to the question of where a community begins and ends. Rituals such as Christian baptism are liturgical enactments that form part of the boundary work marking the movement in and out of communities. What the ritual is doing is moving you from a person who doesn't have those rights and responsibilities to having them. It distributes

27 See, for example, Luke Bretherton, "The Duty of Care to Refugees, Christian Cosmopolitanism, and the Hallowing of Bare Life," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19, no. 1 (April 2006): 39–61.

28 Susanna Snyder, "Walking, Wounds and Washing Feet: Pedetic Textures of a Theo-Ethical Response to Migration," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2019): 4.

29 Aden Cotterill, "The Dialectics of Place and Pastoral Practice," *Ecclesiology* 19, no. 2 (June 21, 2023): 192.

or marks the distribution of goods in an important way. So, rituals are implicated in the distribution of goods, particularly intangible goods like authority or power and status of different kinds, and they mark these moments of transition in part by giving people access to goods that they didn't have.³⁰

Farneth is quick to note how rituals can and do operate to exclude those outside of the bounds of a community. Rituals can powerfully enforce the status quo as much as creating space for expressions of more just and inclusive relations. Rituals associated, for example, with nationalism, militarism, and capitalism can become the pretext for violence against those outside the community. Moreover, religious rituals such as baptism and Eucharist are often the means of restricting access to the goods of a community such as status and authority. Yet, as Farneth notes, rituals can and do play an important role in countering such limits and restrictions even in the use of the same ritual actions—for example, the Eucharist—as a means of incorporating and including rather than limiting and excluding. In other words, though rituals are used as part of an exclusionary process by state and religious actors, they can be wrapped up in concerns about justice, that is, the distribution of what is needed to those in need as a benefit to the community as a whole.³¹

When people enact the kinds of rituals associated with a more just vision of community, they engage in shared activities that create and distribute goods around a community and at its boundaries. Importantly, Farneth explains, rituals do more than merely demonstrate a community's practices and beliefs; they often operate as “performatives,” as activities that can bring about changes in the social world.³² In a similar vein, Cláudio Carvalhaes talks about how rituals such as liturgies don't simply *mean* something, they *do* something. Liturgies shaped by concerns for justice create space within the “political-country-nation-state form of organization community” where it becomes possible to “honor God and each other, offering restitution to those who have been robbed, giving possession to the dispossessed, bringing life to death, and justice and peace to situations of inequality and despair.”³³ These rituals, Carvalhaes argues, reorient us in a world of many maps and competing powers towards new forms of existence and a new social landscape where the displaced are

30 Molly Farneth, *The Politics of Ritual* (Princeton University Press, 2023), 22–23.

31 Farneth, *Politics of Ritual*, 37. For his part, Vincent Lloyd believes that the language of ritual has lost credibility due to the association with reinforcing social norms in political and religious contexts. For Lloyd, it is the work of liturgy, not ritual, that opens up new social possibilities and broadens the political imagination. A set of actions can be liturgical but not a ritual if instead of reinforcing what we already know and believe, our lives and the lives of those around us are open to a foretaste of things to come that are not governed by the social norms. See chapter 5 in Vincent Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace: Reconfiguring Political Theology* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

32 Farneth, *Politics of Ritual*, 42.

33 Cláudio Carvalhaes, “Worship, Liturgy and Public Witness,” in *A Companion to Public Theology*, eds. Sebastian Kim and Katie Day (Brill, 2017), 482.

never lost or forgotten.³⁴

As a kind of boundary work, the performative and transformative character of liturgical enactments contribute to defining and redefining borderscapes, including the places where displaced people encounter the imposed limits of borders. In the act of liturgical place making, the ritual words and bodily actions of the participants assume not only that God is present in some general way, but in the words of Peter Phan, that God is the Primordial Migrant, the *Deus Migrator*, who “chooses, freely and out of love, to migrate from safety of God’s eternal home to the strange and risky land of the human family.”³⁵ Like a migrant, Phan notes, God in the incarnation, “enters a new country, that is, the world, and its inhabitants may not, indeed, as it turned out, not only did not offer him welcome and hospitality but also put him to death.”³⁶

Responding to the various ways borders are symbolised and secured, liturgies materialise, “the migration of God to us and our migration (in)to God.”³⁷ In relativising the real and symbolic power of the border, the space for human and divine belonging is enacted, and this space of solidarity and mutual gift exists as an alternative—a counter space—to the enclosure and violence signified in the materiality of borders and border security. Tending to our liturgies as public social practices is an act of solidarity; they are, in Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz’s words, the process through which Christians approach and enact in concrete human history God’s gratuitous gift of “kin-dom.”³⁸

Liturgical enactments in the face of the proliferation of border walls and fences and the broader expansion of what Josh Watkins refers to as bilateral and multilateral “transnational borderwork”³⁹ are becoming more necessary and more common as Christian communities seek to practice the boundary work of the kin-dom of God. One such liturgical intervention is the practice of celebrating the Eucharist at the site where the border structures separate families and communities. Another example is the practice of foot washing in migrant camps.

Each week, members of the El Faro Border Church, a binational ecclesial

34 Carvalhaes, “Worship,” 484.

35 Peter C. Phan, “Deus Migrator—God the Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration,” *Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (December 2016): 861, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020717916678x4>.

36 Peter C. Phan, “God, the Beginning and the End of Migration: A Theology of God from the Experience and Perspective of Migrants,” in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration: Implications for World Christianity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 123.

37 Kristine Suna-Koro, “Liturgy and the Age of Migration,” in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration: Implications for World Christianity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Fortress Academic, 2020), 251.

38 Ada María Isasi-Díaz, “Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 21st Century,” in *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Orbis Books, 1996), 89.

39 Watkins, “Bordering Borderscapes,” 4.

community, gather early Sunday afternoon for worship, fellowship, and outreach in the open-air plaza of Friendship Park, a half-acre area situated on the US-Mexico border between San Diego, California, and Tijuana, Mexico, immediately adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. This community exists as one worshipping community cut through by the militarised border fence: one group on the US side, and another on the Mexican side, with clergy on both sides acting as co-presiders and preachers.⁴⁰

The border Eucharist works at and around the border structures, occupying ground where the threats of state sovereignty are at their most visible. When the communion wafer and wine are distributed between the slats of a fence that physically divides the faithful, something that is always true of the Eucharist is made explicit: namely, that the sacrament enacts a community that is radically local and particular to the place where the sacrament is shared, all the while relativising and transcending the borders and boundaries that separate.

Bill Cavanaugh contends that the Eucharistic liturgy in particular can be understood as a spatial story that performs certain operations on places—in this case by God, with human cooperation—and that produces an alternative space and social imaginary to that symbolised by the nation-state and its borders. As an act of resistance to the growing defensive, parochial, nationalistic, and militarised ethos of countries like the United States and Australia, the Eucharist organises space such that those who are displaced due to poverty and violence are incorporated into the body and community of Christ in whom the solidarity of God is embodied and embedded. Just as eating and drinking together does not merely symbolise a family, Cavanaugh says, but helps to constitute a family, so eating and drinking together at the table transforms the partakers into a body with a public, theopolitical dimension.⁴¹ As such, the Eucharist refracts space in such a way that the whole body of Christ is present in the visible, local assembly.⁴² Through the sacred words and actions of the Eucharist, the reality of God as *Deus Migrator* transgresses the bordered subjectivity of migrants and citizen, and makes of them a kin-dom.

Eucharistic practices, such as those performed by the El Faro Border Church community, subvert what the walls and borders strive to perpetuate as tactical infrastructure by challenging the power of the boundary and energising an alternative community toward enacting a new future. In sharing in the body, which is Christ's broken and resurrected body, the Eucharist renders visible the place of

40 Susanne Johnson, "Decoloniality and Liberating Hope at the Border," *International Academy of Practical Theology: Conference Series 2* (April 7, 2021): 105–6. Other sites of similar border Eucharists include El Paso, Texas, Las Cruces in New Mexico, and Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. See Nathaniel Grimes, "Church at the Wall: A Political and Liturgical Analysis of Border Masses," *Toronto Journal of Theology*, January 16, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.3138/tjt.2019-0090>.

41 William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Christian Practices of Space and Time* (T&T Clark, 2002), 93.

42 Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination*, 115.

human and divine belonging while revealing the borders for what they stand for: sites of violence and oppression.

Foot washing practices are another liturgical intervention where borders and displaced people meet. In one notable enactment of this liturgy on Maundy Thursday 2016, Pope Francis travelled to a refugee centre near Rome to wash the feet of several of the centre's inhabitants. The pope knelt before three Eritrean Coptic Christians, four Catholics from Nigeria, three Muslims from Mali, Syria, and Pakistan, and a Hindu from India. He poured holy water on their feet, wiped, and then kissed them. During the Mass that followed, the pope spoke of the two categories of actions surrounding the gospel reading for Maundy Thursday: first, "Jesus, who serves, who washes the feet. He, who was the head, washes the feet of . . . the smallest," and second, the betrayal by Judas who spurns peace in the name of money. In washing his disciples' feet, the pope concluded, Jesus showed that peace through acts of service and care is the way of God and all who seek God.⁴³

For Susanna Snyder, recognising the humanity and subjectivity of displaced people begins with recognising their feet. "Migrants' humanity is . . . glimpsed in the wounds, blisters and callouses on their feet—bodily marks that tell stories moulded by encounters with death."⁴⁴ She continues: "worn and wounded feet encapsulate the toll that journeys in leaking rubber dinghies, lack of sufficient drinking water and food, camps with limited if any sanitation, and sexual and other violence en route can take."⁴⁵ To engage the sole of a migrant is to engage with a renewed vision of humanity that seeks healing and justice for displaced people from the ground up.

Embedded within the simple act of foot washing lies a radical upending of power, and this represents another aspect of the spatial story of migration. Foot washing is a practice that attends to power and seeks to challenge power imbalance and misuse. Jesus sets aside his status—literally taking off his clothes that were a symbol of social standing—and confers honour on his disciples by performing the actions of a servant. At the place where wounded and tired feet are confronted with border structures and security, foot washing inverts the roles and rank of the powerful and powerless and acknowledges the violence of the journey through a liturgy of subversive hope.⁴⁶

In the estimation of Kristine Suna-Koro, liturgical interventions such as border Eucharists and foot washing are "part of a migratory action that uniquely characterises the work of God that is by nature always a vicarious action toward the

43 "Pope Francis Washes Feet of Migrants and Refugees on Holy Thursday," *National Catholic Register*, March 24, 2016, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/pope-francis-washes-feet-of-migrants-and-refugees-on-holy-thursday>.

44 Snyder, "Walking, Wounds and Washing Feet," 8.

45 Snyder, 8.

46 Snyder, 12.

creative and salvific wholeness of God's creation."⁴⁷ For liturgical actions to be faithful, meaningful, and genuine, they must, like Jesus in Mark 7, operate as enactments of an encounter with the mystery of God, who as *Deus Migrator* "exceeds the human—often all too human—frontiers of ecclesial symbolism, cultural context, and ritual conventions."⁴⁸

Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to provide a counter-narrative to that represented in the signs that read: "Heaven has a wall and strict immigration policies. Hell has open borders." It is the contention of this paper that borders and boundaries are created and maintained in and through people's social practices. They are enacted when people name them, mark them, police them, and create, follow, and enforce rules for traversing them. As Christians, those who bear the name of Christ, we are not without our own social practices that call into question the real and symbolic power of borders as part of the kin-dom making that defines Jesus' own ministry.

In contrast to the sacred-like identity of national borders, the heaven discerned in the Eucharist and foot washing is the place of divine and human belonging together for eternity. And heaven is foreshadowed in the practices of liturgy as ritual boundary work, place-making acts at the sites where borders and displaced peoples meet. Such liturgical interventions are acts of *re-membering* what has been *dis-membered* by imperial designs.

Inhabiting a place where God and humanity can belong together invites the kinds of embedded liturgical enactments that we saw in the way the practice of the Eucharist and foot washing transgresses the symbolic and material power represented at the sites of borders and border security. These are practices of an embedded discipleship; words, gestures, and items that physically and morally create an entanglement of the identity of migrant and citizen through the embodiment of a shared, mutual geographic and imaginative space of human solidarity.

As border structures and security extend beyond the boundaries of the nation-state through similar arrangements as Australia's "border continuums," the actual sites of engagement with displaced peoples and their experience as misplaced subjects invites a regular evaluation of how and where Christian communities can respond. The ritual boundary work becomes more vital and will become more varied as the migrant landscape evolves and expands. As such, the enactment of liturgies that perform human and divine belonging, such as border Eucharists and foot washings, may become a regular part of Christian communities, regardless of their location to national borders.

47 Kristine Suna-Koro, "Liturgy and the Age of Migration," 250.

48 Suna-Koro, "Liturgy," 249.

In the absence of these liturgical enactments, or perhaps in anticipation of them, there is another liturgical action suggested by Kristine Suna-Koro, namely, lament. Lament, Suna-Koro argues, is a profoundly counter-hegemonic liturgical practice that can empower Christians within the majority culture to, “name and subvert the polarising imaginaries of dehumanisation, resentment, and hostility into which the uprooted victims of forced migration are increasingly inscribed.”⁴⁹ In the context of a congregation struggling to identify a just and compassionate way to be in solidarity with displaced peoples, a liturgy of lament is a gateway to honesty and realism, and has the potential to move people from apathy or anxiety closer to the borderscapes where the wounded feet and body of Christ are encountered in each person and story of flight and displacement.

As boundaries become fluid, crossing them in the name of justice and love follows the example of Jesus who continues to transgress borders as our *Deus Migrator*. Where to begin this journey might be through the liturgy of lament. In introducing this practice at the end of the essay, I am offering it as a first or next step, an invitation that can open a Christian community to deeper patterns of involvement and engagement with displaced peoples. In being open to such work, there is hope that the various material and internal borders we erect against vulnerable people can be breached by the transgressive God who journeyed into the far country of human existence to bring healing and redemption to all.

49 Kristine Suna-Koro, “Liturgy and Lament: Postcolonial Reflections from the Midst of a Global Refugee Crisis,” *Liturgy* 34, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 34.