

**ITINERANT LIVES:**  
Notes on an inter-religious theology of migration

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# INTRODUCTION

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Immigration is one of the main challenges faced by western societies, and by Spain in particular. Among other challenges, Spain faces the issue of creating a new society in which immigrants can be made to feel as though they belong. It is not enough that immigrants should force themselves to integrate into society, or that the host country should offer a great welcome to these new citizens. Instead, a real social transformation is necessary. The result should not be a random collection of cultural elements of each ethnic group. Cultures cannot be gathered together in this way, since there are so many elements to bring together: some are juxtaposed in the new society, while others combine to take strands of different cultures, and others remain opposed and incompatible, as is the case with so many laws and regulations of social and political structures.

Migration is a challenge faced by all of society, which raises issues for the host community and for the immigrants themselves. Schools and social services are normally the first to have to adapt in order to take on this new social composition. There is also the linguistic challenge encountered in migration. On the one hand, this challenge is faced by the immigrants, who become aware that the majority of their grandchildren will lose their original language, if it is different from that of the

host country. This also becomes a challenge to the native language or languages of the immigrants, because they will undoubtedly become affected by new expressions and sounds. In relation to minority languages or dialects within a host country, they too will face the challenge of their continued survival, since the immigrants that arrive will learn the language spoken by the majority first.

Aside from the linguistic challenges, and the challenges faced by social services, while cultural relationships between the new citizens and those indigenous to the country will be on the increase, challenges will then appear in the system of moral values held by immigrants and those of the host country. Some of the values will be reinforced, while others will become problematic or face questions in relation to new ways of seeing and judging the world. And before long, religion is also affected. Before this new religious plurality, citizens would only have needed to adopt their own personal stance in regards to religion. Due to the phenomenon of globalisation, the relative calm in which people lived when their choice of religion would have been considered mainstream in their own country is abruptly altered when they have to live alongside others. Of course Europeans have already known for generations that different religions and sets of values exist,

but this fact never caused any difficulty or personal issues because it was not something learned through ‘direct experience’. In other words, people had not experienced living right alongside others belonging to different cultures and religions. The presence of other belief systems in the social panorama is therefore a real challenge for religions. Not only because other faiths instantly challenge the long-standing beliefs of another culture, but also because it is necessary to create and accept a public arena that remains ‘neutral’ in regards to religion, and at the same time does not slip into laicism or try to dismiss the social importance of different religious beliefs and traditions. Due to the existence of all these challenges, the immigrant can be perceived as a social, cultural or religious ‘threat’. And this perception can persist, even when the immigrant is welcomed economically into a country, in other words, when the flux of immigrants is regulated to suit the country’s economic needs.

My intention in this study, is to open up a new perspective on the subject, where the immigrant is not seen as a danger, or as an economic opportunity, but rather as an example of a ‘free’ or ‘liberated’ person, whose life can be understood as a search or journey of hope towards an uncertain future. These are the people who are able to leave ‘their world’ behind, to be in some ways, ‘born again’, choosing a new country, a new language and a new culture.

The perspective of this work will be as much a social one, as it will be a religious and spiritual one too, in such a way that it will be like an “inter-religious theology of

migration”. From a religious perspective, the immigrant is not simply the poor man in need of refuge, but also an example of a life that stands apart from the host country, the latter remaining anchored and static in its own reality. The host country normally views itself as an example of the ideal model, and sees the immigrant as someone who must allow themselves to be absorbed into the culture of the host country, which should become their base and stability. Yet from another point of view, the ideal model could be seen as that of the immigrant, and not the host country, because the immigrant is a symbol of someone living detached, lacking ties, while members of the host country could be seen as living in an anchored state, almost enslaved. It is this view that has caused a reversal of roles and perceptions from within the very nucleus of religions. The immigrant goes from being rejected to becoming almost a role model.

We will be looking at the Jewish, Christian and Moslem traditions separately. In each chapter we will first be looking at how each religion views the welcoming of the immigrant from a specifically *religious* point of view. We will then be looking at how each of them holds up the idea of *itinerant lives* as an example to follow, or in other words, the lives of those people who have no “ties”, who come out of themselves, and leave their land behind... guided *by* God in order to move *towards* God. Lastly, in each chapter, we will be looking at how there are not only *horizontal* pilgrimages, but also *vertical* ones, from this world towards God, and from God towards the world.

# 1. JEWISH TRADITION

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In the book of Exodus, we see that God gives the following order to His people: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Ex 22:21).

## 1. THE IMMIGRANT AS A BROTHER AND NOT AS A FOREIGNER

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Welcoming the immigrant is not something that is simply recommended to the pious Jew *if he wants to attain perfection*. It is not an issue that is left to the goodwill of the individual, but instead is actually ordered by the law. Therefore, it is not something that could be considered as being within the realm of charity, or viewed as going beyond what is dictated by the law, but instead enters the very realm of *justice*. This mandate can be found in the very important chapter 22 of the Book of Exodus within a legislative collection known as the *Book of the Covenant*. The most important aspect is that this command is not founded in an *abstract order* but rather is entrenched in the actual experience of the people of Israel: they too were once the foreigner and the emigrant.

For this reason, in appealing to the past history of the people, in Judaism, God is presenting the immigrant not as that *other* person who is coming to compete for the resources of a particular country. Neither is God portraying them as that *other* person that will create a crisis within the current system. The immigrant is not the *other* person, but rather an *equal*, because he is an immigrant just like the people of Israel were. The immigrant is not *someone else*, but rather a *brother*. He is an immigrant because he has come from afar, but he is not a *foreigner* because he is not considered a stranger. He is someone who can speak to the people of Israel about their own experience, and speak to us about ours. The command to welcome the immigrant is therefore a command of *fraternity*.

## 1.1. Migration towards slavery or towards liberation

Migration is what essentially defines the people of Israel. The Israelites were not only migrants since they left Egypt, but really since the beginning of their existence as a people, since they left Ur of Chaldea. In the Book of Deuteronomy, God Himself defines the identity of the people from the perspective of their migratory experience. This is very important because God solemnly forms this identity so that it will always remain as a point of reference for the people. In Deuteronomy, God puts these words into the mouth of Moses:

When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and have taken possession of it, and live in it (...) and you shall make response before the Lord your God: "A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a might hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey." (Dt 26:1ff).

In this text, we see how two paths exist in migration: one leads to becoming enslaved on foreign soil, and the other leads to liberation. So we are looking at two opposing experiences that immigrants can go through on our soil, that of feeling liberated, or that of feeling enslaved, and

this all depends on the conditions of welcome and acceptance offered by our society. It signifies liberation when all those people leaving their country to flee hunger, war, political persecution or a future without hope, find in our country a land of freedom and opportunities. Nevertheless, this land can become a land of slavery for many, when they are exploited with pathetic salaries, denied the papers they need to work, or not offered accommodation because they are 'foreigners'. So it depends on us as to whether immigrants experience the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, or are made to feel *at home*, in other words, as though they have reached their own *promised land*.

## 1.2. Liberation should be made available to both the poor and immigrants

In another text from Deuteronomy, we again find this rule to support the immigrant, and this same rule is applied to the Levites – a tribe from Israel that had no land of their own–, to widows, and to orphans:

When you have finished paying all the tithes of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within your towns and be filled, then you shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all thy commandment which thou hast commanded me.' (Dt 26:12-13).

The Israelite must share their resources among the poor, and among them are

mentioned immigrants. The Levites, the priestly group, are mentioned because they did not receive an inheritance of land when they reached the Promised Land (cf. Dt 14:27) and had to be supported by the other tribes. And according to the command, this sharing of resources was not to be done sparingly, but rather until they could eat *until they were full*. The duty of sharing out resources comes on the one hand, from the fact that *the land of milk and honey* was a free gift. Therefore, it is not owned by an individual based on the merits of their personal work. And on the other hand, it comes from the divine will through which all of us are given the chance to partake in this universal gift. The experience of liberation should reach *everyone*. It is therefore necessary to protect the rights of those who, through being poor, face the danger of having to sell themselves like slaves in order to survive.

The Earth belongs to *everyone*. For this reason, and because of the tendency of man's sin to want to privatise common property and leave it in the hands of fewer and fewer people, a celebration of a *jubilee* year was established to take place every fifty years, in which there was to be a liberation of slaves and a redistribution of resources. The Book of Leviticus formulates it in this way:

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property, and each of you shall return to his family. (Lv 25:10).

The slaves are liberated, and the 'enslaved' property that has been placed in the hands of a few, is returned to its owners. This command was so radical, that it is not

surprising that it was never put into practice in history. Respect for the immigrant also means that there needs to be an assurance that he will not be exploited in work, and that he will receive an earned break just the same as any other worker.

But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates. (Ex 20:10).

The obligatory day of rest once a week is a guarantee for the Jewish people that work will not be enslaving. The liberation that God offers should extend to all creation, including the land and livestock.

According to one interesting traditional Jewish interpretation of the rest on the Sabbath, the thirty-nine types of work that were not permitted on the Sabbath are those that would be necessary for the construction of a Temple. According to this view, the Jewish man could therefore work on the Temple during the week and rest on the Sabbath. In other words, the whole week is dedicated to the construction of the Temple, and paradoxically, the Sabbath is liberated from this work, in such a way that neither religion nor God Himself would become instruments of a new type of slavery. In this way, God was also liberating man from Himself.

### **1.3. Obeying commands out of gratitude**

Deuteronomy portrays liberation from slavery not as a reward for fulfilling duties, but as an argument used by God to convince His people to show loyalty. For this reason, the commands of God

are not a condition of salvation, but rather a proof and sign of it. The commands were given to those who were saved from slavery in Egypt. Therefore, God hoped that the people would fulfil these duties out of gratitude and as a sign of their salvation. It is true that Deuteronomy includes both *blessings* and *curses* towards those who do not fulfil these duties, but instead of just seeing them as punishments, these curses need to be understood as a result of the unilateral breaking of the Covenant.

In fact the structure of the Covenant agreed between God and His people and written in Deuteronomy is the same as that of agreements made between the ancient Hittite kings. The author of this fifth book of the Torah takes his inspiration from these regal treaties in order to apply them to the relationship between God and His people. The structure of these treaties was always the same: after presenting the name and titles of the kings, there was a *historical prologue* in which they would recount the story of the relationship of fidelity and mutual help between the two kings. Then, the treaty itself would be presented, in other words, the stipulations and agreements between the two kings. In order to seal the pact, the gods of each king would be invoked as witnesses to the same, and curses would be recited should either party transgress from the agreement. The treaty would then close with a blessing.

Following the same formula, the Covenant between God and His people in Deuteronomy not only lists out the commands, but is also preceded by a *prologue* in which the loyalty of God to His people is recounted, as well as His libe-

rating actions, (cf. Dt 5:6). Given the *monolatry* of Israel, the witnesses presented are not gods, but rather Heaven and Earth, (cf. Dt 30:19). And neither do the curses exclude the promised blessing, (cf. Dt27:15ff.). The regal treaties would have been written in stone, silver or gold, and two identical copies would have been made, one for each king. These would have been kept in the temple, signifying their sacredness. In the same way, Israel engraved its Covenant in stone, (cf. Dt 27:8), and kept it in the Ark, and later in the *Holy of Holies* in the Temple.

The commands need to be interpreted then as if God had said to the Israelites: “You have been freed from slavery, live as free men! Here are the commands that are a sign of your freedom”. These are proof of their liberation, and not a condition of it, given that the flight from Egypt had already taken place.

#### 1.4. Forgetting their liberation

The constant risk for the emigrant Israelite is in forgetting that they have been liberated, and that the prosperity they enjoy in a new land is a gift, and not the fruit of their own labour.

Take heed lest you forget the lord your God, (...) lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have I multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, (...) Beware lest you say in your heart: ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth’. (Dt 8:11-17).

God warns His people not to forget that they have been liberated from being emigrants. And yet this *temptation* to forget is the same for any emigrant. The Spanish people also risk forgetting that they emigrated towards Europe, and that massive migrations took place within Spain itself. It is sometimes surprising that some of these former emigrants vehemently reject the new immigrants arriving from other countries, forgetting that they too arrived in the same conditions of poverty. If they were to live in gratitude for their current wellbeing, they should be eager to see that the newly arrived immigrants achieve the same, saying: “my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth” (Dt 8:17).

We sometimes even see immigrants who after trying to integrate into a new society, reject those who have recently arrived from their own home country, out of fear that they will be confused as one of them, and lose the social acceptance of their peers that they have fought so hard to obtain.

### 1.5. God, guider of the emigrant

Psalms 23 also offers an example of the relationship of God with His emigrant people. God presents Himself as the *Good Shepherd*, who guides Israel towards good pastures, so that they can eat and rest. Just as in the Book of Exodus, God appears as a companion who guides His people on their journey. God is therefore primarily with the poor emigrants.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; / He makes me lie down in green pastures. / He leads me beside still waters; / He restores my soul. / He leads me in paths of

righteousness for his name's sake; / Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, / I fear no evil; / For thou art with me; / Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

With His staff, He guides and protects them. This Psalm is written in the context of criticism of *other* leaders that would lead the flock to their ruin, since the divine right is delegated to the king, and these often lead their people to ruin. We find these criticisms in all the prophetic books. In Ezekiel, we read the following:

Thus says the Lord God: Ho shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the crippled you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth; with none to search or seek for them.” (Ez 34:2-6).

From this *migration theology*, we can interpret this text as being a criticism of the governments of so many countries who by their harmful policies, dictatorships and corruption, cause emigration on a massive scale, as well as bringing about the situation of political refugees and displaced peoples. They take advantage of people, *they eat their fat, and clothe themselves with the wool*, and ignore their social needs, *they do not heal the sick, or*

*bind the wounds of the crippled.* This is why emigrants and refugees flee like the sheep that *were scattered and wandered all over the mountains.* This is exactly what Africans are going through, who travel up to Algeria and Morocco, intending to travel to Europe and hide themselves from the authorities. Like sheep without a shepherd, these people are also the pimps that force Romanians into prostitution without leaving them enough money to pay for their journey home, or sell tickets at exorbitant prices for the *promised land*, or promise to get immigrants falsified documents that never arrive.

### **1.6. The welcoming God**

This same Psalm 23 goes on to present another image of God, in relation to His emigrant people: that of the God who welcomes the nomad from the desert:

Thou preparest a table before me / In the presence of my enemies, / Thou anointest my head with oil, / My cup overflows.

You have to imagine the Bedouin wandering through the desert, fleeing

from his enemies, thirsty and hungry, who then finds welcome in the stall of someone who prepares him a hearty meal, with good wine, and water, and perfumes to wash with after his journey.

### **1.7. Adam, the first displaced person**

It is interesting to acknowledge that since humanity has existed, people have been displaced, and there is no other reason apart from man's sin. Genesis explains it symbolically with the story of Adam and Eve. Human egotism was at the root of the exit from the Garden of Eden, and is at the root of all displacements of people. Injustice, the quest for power, corruption and wars are all *sins* that bring about the displacement of people. Thus Adam was the first displaced person. In the same way, Cain had to live his entire life on the road after murdering his brother Abel. So the second generation of humanity in the Bible also suffers displacement due to man's sin, whether it be his own sin, or that of someone else.

## **2. BEING A PILGRIM IN LIFE**

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Up to this point we have talked about migration as being a search for a better life, and also looked at migration as being the result of injustices faced. Now we are going to change our perspective, showing how in the Bible, the sojourner

is presented as a role model for life, in contrast to the stability found in staying in one place. Undoubtedly, the real emigrant will not always live his life as a *pilgrim*, that is, from the point of view of gaining great spiritual depth and a certain

mysticism. But this will not stop him from being a symbol of a life without ties or baggage, in a permanent state of searching. This is how the Biblical tradition understands this way of life through the figures of Abraham and Moses in particular.

### **2.1. Abraham, on his way towards an uncertain future**

Abraham is an example of an emigrant who lives his life as a pilgrim. He lives for faith, promise, and hope, like so many emigrants searching for their *promised land*. However, that promise does not always come from a trustworthy source, and this is why many immigrants get a nasty shock soon after arriving in Europe. This much longed-for earthly paradise instead becomes a barren and inhospitable desert. It is like a desert because the emigrant finds himself in absolute solitude in spite of being surrounded by so many people, because he doesn't understand their language or customs. This emotional desert is only occasionally broken by meeting someone familiar or making a friend who welcomes them in the first few months of their stay, or who perhaps invited them to come in the first place, but soon the immigrant realizes that he will have to forge his own future. It is an inhospitable desert because it is not easy to make progress and there seems to be nothing but obstacles in the way of tilling this promised land and making it bear fruit. Like Abraham, the emigrant lives in hope, trusting in a promise:

Now the Lord said to Abraham: Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. (Gn 12:1-2).

Abraham is open to the future, looking ahead with loyalty and trust. In spite of difficulties, Abraham remains firm in his faith. He is lucky to have found the right *person* to put his trust in, which is the Lord. Other emigrants on the other hand, are not so lucky, and are deceived by criminal organisations, such as those that force young Romanians into prostitution.

The figure of Abraham is a model example because he is not tied down to one place or one set of customs, but lives his life in a perpetual state of movement and searching. This attitude goes against all forms of fundamentalism that make absolute their founding writings, religious traditions –or civil ones– languages and lands, etc. It is nevertheless true that this absolute type of tradition should be respected and valued, because as human beings, we can never live in a culturally *neutral* way. We always live as part of a culture or according to a personal set of various cultural elements. That culture then forms part of our very identity as an individual. This is why actively working against a culture is seen as an offence against that individual or social group. The problem arises when this tendency is brought to extremes, causing the rise of spontaneous armed movements who justify their struggle as a *legitimate defence* of their culture, language, territory or religion. There are also problems when cultural or religious elements rise to the category of being absolute and identify themselves as being the very essence of a people or nation.

## 2.2. Abraham welcomes the three visitors

The account of the hospitality offered by Abraham to three *mysterious* visitors (cf. Gn 18:2) has also been used as an example of the welcome that should be extended to emigrants. The three men beside the oaks of Mamre seem to be messengers of God. On seeing them in the distance, Abraham does not wait for them to arrive, but instead runs out to meet them, in this way, taking the initiative and attending to the men's needs before they have even asked. The father in the parable of the Prodigal Son also runs out to meet his son (cf. Lk 15:20). Abraham washes their feet, offers them a rest under a tree and bread so that they can regain their strength. This attitude represents the active attitude that our society should have when it comes to welcoming immigrants.

God speaks to Abraham through these men, as a sign that the pilgrim God of Israel is particularly close to those who journey and have not settled in one place. Thus, in a nomadic culture such as ancient Judaism, the sacredness of welcoming the journeying traveller is based in the belief of the presence of God in the pilgrim, who is considered a messenger of God.

## 2.3. The pilgrim continues

The descendants of Abraham continue living in hope of the Promised Land, travelling from one country to another. Before his death, Abraham makes his servant swear that his son Isaac should not look for a Canaanite woman to be his wife, but should return to his home country to find a wife. Here we see the attitude of many immigrants, particularly

when big cultural differences exist, who do everything in their power so that their sons will marry women from their country of origin, even using *intermediaries* to find a suitable wife for their sons. During the migration process, as there are no mixed marriages, communities continue to live side by side, yet apart from one another, without any real integration taking place.

According to the Biblical account, the journeys continue because Jacob, the son of Isaac, must spend his life on the run for fear of being murdered, until he arrives in Canaan. In spite of emigrating with all his family to Egypt because of famine, he wants to settle in Canaan, like so many emigrants from the first generation who want to remain in their home country, in spite of the high price they must pay for it.

## 2.4. God as a pilgrim

The Biblical God is a God who journeys with His pilgrim people. The nomadic lifestyle of the people works well with God. This is why only Yahweh could be the God of Israel. He is a God who travels by their side. In Genesis, we are already told that God was *walking in the garden in the cool of the day* (Gn 3:8), when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden. We are also told that *the Lord came down to see the city and the tower [of Babel] which the sons of men had built* (Gn 11:5) and in the Book of Ecclesiasticus we are told that the Wisdom of God resided with His people:

Among them all I sought where I might come to rest; in whose territory was I to settle? Then the Creator of all things laid a command on me; he who created me decreed

where I shall dwell. He said, Make your home in Jacob, enter on your heritage in Israel". (Eccl 24:7-8).

In Exodus, God assures Moses that '*My presence will go with you and I will give you rest*' (Ex 33:14). This journey of God with His people is distinctive of Yahweh.

Moses says:

For how shall it be known that I have found favour in thy sight, I and thy people? Is it not in thy going with us, so that we are distinct, I and thy people, from all other people that are on the face of the earth? (Ex 33:16).

The journey of God remains symbolized in the *Ark of the Covenant* which always accompanies the people. The image of the carrying of the Ark through the land is like the image of the four angels who carry the Throne of God in Heaven. This image is as much a Jewish symbol as it is a Christian one, and even a Moslem one.

In the Ark, the four tablets of the Law are kept, that is, the *words* of the Covenant made between God and His people. These *words* of God were His Word and are representative of His Presence. The people carried the Ark and occasionally even brought it into battle with them for protection. Each time the people stopped in a particular place, they would set up a *Tent of Meeting* in which they would place the Ark. A cloud covered it that protected God's transcendence, acting as a veil for His presence. God communicated to Moses through a cloud, which was also present on Mount Tabor when Jesus was transfigured. The cloud, acting like a veil, hides and reveals at the

same time. It protects God by hiding Him, but *reveals* Him at the same time, since like sunlight, God can only be seen through a veil. The veil and the cloud allow us to distinguish the shape of the sun, but hide it at the same time.

## 2.5. The temptation to settle down

Once people have become settled in their promised land, they will also try to settle their God there. This is why David wanted to construct a Temple and God was opposed to the idea:

Thus says the Lord: 'Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' (II Sam 7:5-7).

So in spite of there being many writings that legitimise the construction of Solomon's Temple, in other extracts it is presented as a potential temptation for the idolatry of God. The same occurs with the institution of the monarchy: the people of Israel ask to be governed by a king like their neighbouring countries, which God only accepts reluctantly since the king is a symbol of a sedentary people.

For this reason, the subject of the Temple continued to be very controversial in the time of Jesus, rejected by the Essenes and criticized by the Pharisees for the non-legality of its representatives. Even Jesus threw out the market holders from the Temple, and prophesied its des-

truction and reconstruction in three days. Today, Jews believe they do not have the right to build it again. This will be the task of the Messiah when He comes in the final days.

This God not only warns Israel that they should continue to be a pilgrim people in spite of them having settled in the Promised Land, but He also forbids them

from fixing boundaries or setting an area in terms of shape and size. In terms of size, because the presence of God is not limited to the bounds of the Temple, and in terms of shape because there is no fixed area that can contain Him. This journeying God forbids His representation because that would mean setting it down and limiting Him within a specific *form*.

### 3. HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL PILGRIMAGES

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Up to now all the movements we have spoken about have been “horizontal”: from Ur of Chaldea to Canaan, from Canaan to Egypt and from Egypt to Israel. These journeys were made through God and with God. Through God because He originally gave the commands at the start of the journey to travel to another land, and with God because God accompanies His people on the way. But there are other journeys: vertical journeys that are made towards God, in order to enter into His presence. We are referring to other types of migrations that are more essentially interior pilgrimages expressed through images of the ascension of body and soul.

The Bible tells that some prophets were assumed into Heaven, such as Enoch and Elijah, for example. And on Jacob’s Ladder, we see the angels rising and descending. This movement of the ascension of man is only possible because God first descends in order to raise us to Him. This is why Isaiah states:

For as the rain and snow come down from the heaven, / And return not thither but water the earth, / Making it bring forth and sprout (...) / So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; / It shall not return to me empty.” (Is 55:10ff).

This same experience is underlined even more in Christianity. In his ascension, Jesus does not return empty handed, but instead holds us by the hand, like in the images of those icons where Jesus is seen taking Adam and Eve out of hell by the hand.

So God is a pilgrim with His people, in both a horizontal direction and a vertical one. One of the most emblematic passages of this ascension to meet God is that of the revelation at Mount Sinai. Here, as in many other accounts, man ascends so he can meet God alone, yet this account does not signify some form of individual mysticism. These encounters always bring with them a mission. God communicates with man and gives him an as-

signment. Moses did not stay on the mountain but instead returned in order to guide the people. These ascensions towards God allow people to journey through the world, through God and with God. The exodus from Egypt towards the

Promised Land has its roots in the ascension of Moses on Mount Horeb, where he is drawn to a burning bush. God tells him at that moment that He has witnessed the oppression of the people and has chosen him to talk to the Pharaoh.

## 2. CHRISTIAN TRADITION

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The Christian religion takes on the whole of the Jewish tradition that preceded it, thus meaning that everything that has been discussed so far also applies to Christianity. For this reason, this second part will be shorter than the previous section. For example, Easter is a festival essential to Christian faith, and the Jewish Old Testament is seen as its inspired precursor. This is brought about by *Christianising* the Jewish heritage, or in other words, from now on, the God that walks with and among mankind, the Wisdom that sets up its tent in Israel (Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-13) and the Word that comes from the mouth of God and does not return empty (Is 55:11), has a name: Christ Jesus. God is God-with-us in Christ. The Ark of the Covenant, and the Temple in which it is kept are *destroyed* and rebuilt in three days through Christ. This is why the pilgrim God of Israel, who walked with His people by being carried in the Ark, now walks among them in *human* form, through Galilee, from one place to another announcing the kingdom of God, and calling for a new way of life for humanity in their relationship with each other and God.

### 1. JESUS LIBERATOR OF THE OPPRESSED

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Jesus views his mission as being to liberate all classes of oppressed people: the poor, slaves, blind and sick... In the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus applies the words of Isaiah to himself:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of

sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." (Lk 4:18).

The miracles of Jesus, more than being manifestations of the power of God so that the people believe in him, are signs that a new society is being created, one in which the poor, oppressed, immigrants and sick people will have pride of place. Even though Christianity is a religion

without a specific political angle, and in this way differs from Islam for example, going by the classical interpretation of those words “give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”, it does not mean that Christianity is spiritualism alone. Christianity denounces all types of oppression and discrimination. The separation of God and Caesar, particularly in the ancient world, clearly implies that no earthly power should ever be idolised. This is why Christians would go as far as martyrdom in order to avoid proclaiming that “Caesar is Lord”.

When Jesus presents himself as the liberator, he is taking on a divine role, that of God liberating His people from Egypt. This is why Jesus was considered a blasphemer, and had to leave the synagogue.

### 1.1. Jesus and foreigners

Jesus has a special understanding of foreigners, in relation to their plight of being rejected. Jesus was the first to realise that his mission was not just about the *scattered sheep of Israel*, but also involved the call to convert pagans. Jesus was often surprised at the great faith of pagans, and offered their behaviour as an example to the Jews. Jesus praised the faith of someone on only two occasions in the New Testament, and both times they were pagans; on the other hand, he often reproached the lack of faith found in “his people”. An example of one of these incidents is that of the Canaanite woman, (Mt 15:22ff), in which she asks him to cure her daughter by pleading to be able *to eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table*. The master’s table refers to the Jewish people, so the woman is asking if she can

participate in their same destiny of salvation. Jesus also admires the faith of the centurion who asks him to cure his servant, but also recognises with great humility and faith: “Lord I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word” (Mt 8:8). In the Gospel of Mark, we see another foreigner and centurion being the first to confess at the foot of the cross that “truly this man was the Son of God” (Mk 15:39).

Another emotive and significant passage is that of the Samaritan woman, (Jn 4:1-42). The Samaritans, without being fully pagan, were not considered fully Jewish either due to their denial of the Temple in Jerusalem. In the account, the Samaritan woman is seen asking for water (symbolic of Baptism) (Jn 4:8ff) after being so favourably treated by Jesus.

Jesus not only preaches in Israel but also crosses Lake Tiberius and travels east. The other shore is pagan territory and Jesus carries out miracles here as a sign that the faith is also offered to them. The Gospel of Mark presents two accounts of the multiplication of bread, one carried out on the Jewish shore, (Mk 6:30-44), and the other on the pagan shore, (Mk 8:1-9). In the first account, there are twelve baskets of bread left over, that represent the twelve apostles, and in the other account, there are seven, representing the seven deacons that were dedicated to attending to the early Greek-speaking community of Israel.

So Christianity broadens the concept of *people* to include the entire community of believers, from every race and nation. This universalism and radical equality encompassing all races is also present in Islam. In spite of some de-

plorable acts in history related to both Christianity and Islam, these religions are essentially anti-racist, even though by their own theology they can someti-

mes fall –and have fallen– into a temptation that is absent from Judaism, which is that of disrespectful proselytism.

## 2. THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS

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### 2.1. Jesus as the model pilgrim

Jesus lived his life on a constant journey through Israel. He travelled to meet all the peoples, announcing the Good News of the Kingdom. He never remained in one place longer than was necessary. He moved through people that rejected him, such as when they wanted to stone him after preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth, (Lk 4:28-30), and later disappeared when he heard people wanted to make him king. Following the multiplication of the bread, according to St. John's Gospel, Jesus rejects being crowned king and continues his life of travelling with his disciples. People were pursuing him to crown him because he fed them. Later, he went around Lake Tiberius, wondering where he would be able to disembark. There, Jesus began his discourse on the bread of life, (cf. Jn 6:26-58), so that the multiplication of the bread was only a prologue that would act as a backdrop to his speech. Soon, the people understood that the meaning of the bread of life is the gift of Jesus' life. To eat this bread commits man to give his life just like Jesus did. This is why the

crowds began to abandon him and leave him alone with his disciples.

In the Gospels, Jesus appears surrounded by people during the day and then retires to pray in solitude at the close of the day and at dawn, (Mk 1:35, Mt 14:23). The image of Jesus given in the Moslem mystical tradition is that of a journeying figure living in total poverty and isolation. The monks and hermits of the desert, with their austere life of spirituality, strengthened the vision that the Moslem tradition created of Jesus. The central pivot of the Gospels is the account of the forty days spent by Jesus in the desert, (Mt 1-11). One can also note a decisive influence of texts that criticise the rich in these accounts. The famous Sufi Hasân al-Basrî (VIII century) says the following:

Jesus wore a habit made of coarse wool, fed himself with fruit from the trees and slept wherever night would find him.

The image of Jesus' constant journeying is supported by the development of the phrase of Jesus "The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk

9:58). Al-Ghazālī (XII century), recounts the following about Jesus:

Jesus took a rock in order to use it as a pillow on which to sleep. The devil came to him and said: Did you not renounce this world in favour of the next? Jesus replied: Yes! What do you mean? The devil said: If you take this rock as your pillow you are enjoying the fruits of the world. Why not put your head on the ground? Jesus threw the rock far away and rested his head on the ground.

Some Sufi authors see this trait of Jesus as being of such great importance to his character that they have even linked his identity with the word *Messiah* –which is from an undeniable Hebrew source– with the Arab verb *masaha*, which means, according to some interpretations –“being able to measure the earth with your hands”. The idea behind this is that having journeyed so much, Jesus would know the very dimensions of the land he was travelling across. Even more significant is to have linked the word Messiah with that of *sāha*, which means ‘to travel’, ‘to journey’... From this perspective, Jesus is *masīh* because he is the *sā’ih*, the true sojourner.

## 2.2. Jesus as an emigrant

This image of Jesus as a traveller is supported by various pieces of evidence in the Canonical Gospels. One of these is the flight of Joseph, Mary and Jesus to Egypt when they were fleeing Herod, (Mt 2: 13-21). Popular Egyptian tradition has “extended” this journey more and more towards the south, believing that clues of their presence can be found much further south of Cairo. Whatever the case, the Gospels offer no details of this journey

and neither does the historicity of the account interest them –instead they are interested in the theological meaning. It only interests them to highlight the fact that Jesus followed the same route as the people of Israel. Jesus the Saviour remains intrinsically linked with the liberation of Israel from Egypt. In the Easter Liturgy, it is proclaimed that: “Jesus is our Passover”, in other words, the Lord Saviour has *passed* through Jesus, just as it *passed over* when it was saving the people from the hands of the Pharaoh.

Returning from Egypt, Jesus enters into the Promised Land like an emigrant. Once there, from the start of his public life, he passes through towns and villages announcing the Good News, hardly stopping for a rest with his disciples. Furthermore, the Synoptic Evangelists present his public life as being a journey towards Jerusalem, a journey in which little by little, the entire world abandons him, in spite of his initial apostolic success. So it is a journey towards solitude and towards the *night* of the cross. In St. Mark’s Gospel, Jesus is completely alone on the cross, and even shouts: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34). Here again we find the similarity with the experiences of many emigrants who make their journey in solitude, and who can even reach the point where they begin to wonder if God has abandoned them too. They start their journey confident in the help and support of a friend or someone they know, but on many occasions, these people fail them, or perhaps the emigrant realises that they cannot depend on them indefinitely and must launch themselves into making their own life for themselves.

### 2.3. Sending out the disciples

Jesus sends out the disciples two by two, in poverty, without money, a staff or even tunics.

Take no gold, nor silver nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the labourer deserves his food (Mt 10:9-10).

These instructions to the disciples are not simply told as an anecdote, but instead present the way of life that all true Christians should follow: that is, to live as a messenger, on the move, totally detached, losing all sense of security other than the firm rock of one's faith.

They cannot even count on their own words:

When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." (Mt 10:19-20).

### 2.4. Christians as migrants

There are several texts that show how early Christians lived their lives like emigrants. In the letter to the Hebrews, they describe themselves as migrants: "For here we have no lasting city but we seek the city which is to come" (Heb 13:14). The first great crisis of Christianity appears when it begins to move out of the Jewish environment (towards the pagans), in the same way that Judaism began with the exit of Abraham from his country and kindred. But more than this, before calling themselves "Christians", when they still felt as though they were part of the Jewish world, the early Christians called themselves "belonging to the Way", (Acts 9:2), and Christianity called itself "the Way", (Acts 18:25,26; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). This nomadic existence is also expressed in the *Letter to Diognetus*, one of the most ancient Christian texts. It says: "Every foreign land is to them as their native country and every native land as a foreign country".

## 3. ASCENT AND DESCENT

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### 3.1. Ascent becomes descent

In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus is not only a traveller through Palestine –going through Jerusalem three times– but as the Son of God, he comes from God, and returns to Him. Here we see then how Jesus

was moving in two directions, as we earlier pointed out in relation to the Jewish tradition: a horizontal direction and an upward direction. Christ, being the Son of God, begins by *descending*. In this way, the *descent*, the *kenosis*, his concern for the most needy and those who usually oc-

cupy the last place, fulfils the criteria of those that talk about his need to *come from God*. This is the proof of his claim of being in contact with God.

During Jesus' life, we see him *ascending* on various occasions. Jesus ascends the mountain to pronounce his speech on the Beatitudes, (Mt 5:1-12, Lk 6:20-26), giving this speech the character of a *Christian law*, just as when Moses received the law on Mount Sinai and later passed it on to the people. Jesus also went up to Mount Tabor where he revealed his divine reality. At the end of his life, he went up to the Mount of Olives to pray, and finally to Golgotha, where he was crucified. Jerusalem itself is a raised area in relation to the rest of Israel, and this is why Jesus said he was going up to Jerusalem. His life understood as an ascent towards Jerusalem is paradoxically also a descent towards the depths of pain and rejection. The Christian tradition has presented it like a descent into hell. The Christian message is clear, there can be no ascent without a descent. Sin consists in trying to ascend without stooping to the depths of poverty, suffering and human pain. This sin is as much an attempt to ascend the social scale, as the early heresies that developed were when they placed too much emphasis on the glory of Christ while ignoring his descent into humanity.

Christ's life ended with his ascent to the Father, and yet this was with the marks of the cross, and therefore also represented a descent. These ascensions permit Jesus to move in a horizontal direction on Earth through God and towards God. In the Christian mystical tradition, the two wooden beams of the cross have been interpreted in the light of the two dimen-

sions of Christ, the horizontal and vertical.

Christian mysticism has often used the image of ascension towards God in order to describe the path of the mystic. Saint John of the Cross and his *Ascent of Mount Carmel* is one good example of this. The most important aspect is that the ascension of the mystic is at the same time a descent, since it deals with getting rid of one's inner self to be filled with God, rather than being a process of *self-glorification*, or some sort of accumulation of earthly merits, glories and dignities. It is a process of putting *oneself and I aside*, so is in some ways like a *Copernican revolution*, where at the centre, the 'I' is moved aside and God is moved to the centre. In order to avoid thinking that this process of ascension and divinisation of the human being reaches glorious fruition, Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Life of Moses*, presents a form of eternal ascension, in such a way that not even *Heaven* is the final destination point, but instead one is constantly moving in a pilgrimage of ascension towards God, since God always manifests Himself in new ways: He is always beyond any human conception, and is *always astounding*.

### **3.2. Emmanuel, God is with us as emigrants**

Christianity bases the need to welcome the immigrant on the very presence of God being within the emigrant. The incarnation of God in Jesus, is a life marked by rejection, from the stable in Bethlehem to the hill of Golgotha. Jesus' commitment to all those who have been rejected in the world is not simply in one

individual and unique event, but is instead a revealing event with a universal aspect: the presence of God is in all people who have been rejected and marginalized. *Emmanuel*, God-with-us, is particularly there for the poor and emigrants. The parable of Matthew 25 according to which justice will be carried out based on our attitude towards the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned, confirms the mystery of the encountering of Jesus through service to the poor:

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see

thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' (Mt 25:37-40).

Paying attention to the needs of the stranger is as much an indisputable moral precept as it is a mystical way of living every event in life as if it were an encounter with Jesus. On the same point is the *mysticism of welcome*, according to the rule of Saint Benedict –patron saint and re-builder of Europe– when he states: “*hospes venit, Christus venit*”, in other words, when a guest arrives, it is Christ himself who arrives. Also the famous Jesuit doorman, Saint Alphonsus Rodriguez, while in Majorca, said each time he heard a knock at the door: “I’m coming Lord!”.

### 3. ISLAMIC TRADITION

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We now arrive at the third monotheistic tradition, Islam. We will also see the two dimensions of man's journey here, both horizontal and vertical, and examine the attitude of Islam towards strangers and slaves.

#### 1. ACCOUNTS OF HOSPITALITY IN EARLY ISLAM

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##### 1.1. Hospitality in the desert

The welcome of the stranger in Islam is based *on three* fundamental experiences. The first is the necessary solidarity that was imperative in the desert in order to survive. The harshness of the desert not only obliges solidarity within the same tribe, but also encouraged the development of welcoming the stranger as a fundamental principal ethic. This is why it was elevated to the category of a rule of conduct, meaning that for three days, there was an obligation to welcome any-

one travelling through at that time and offer them hospitality. This conduct was so important that it was particularly imposed on Christians who lived under Moslem rule, according to various capitulation treaties relating to Christian lands in the face of Moslem assaults.

##### 1.2. Hospitality in Abyssinia

A second fundamental experience of Islam, which has remained in the memory of all Moslems, is the welcome offered by the King of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), to a

group of Moslems that were fleeing from Mecca. In the time of the prophet Mohammed, Abyssinia was an important Christian Monophysite kingdom. A few decades earlier, it had managed to obtain the area we currently know as Yemen under its power too. Aware of the fairness of the King, Mohammed sent a group of his first followers to the court of King Negus, saying:

What would you think of emigrating to the land of Ethiopia, because there is a kindly king there and Ethiopia is a friendly land, until God liberates you from your torment?" (Ibn Ishâq, *Sirat alnabawwiyya*).

The same Moslems were welcomed by the Christian king and recognised that: "when we went down to Ethiopia, [to the land] of Negus, [he] protected us well; we were in no danger because of our religion; we loved God Most High without being persecuted and without people hating us". The tribe of the Quraysh of Mecca, who had persecuted these Moslems, sent a delegation to Ethiopia in order to convince the King and his Christian generals to hand over these refugees. They tried to buy him presents, the likes of which he would never have seen before. Yet Negus wanted to hear the testimony of the Moslem refugees that said. "Oh King, we were an uncivilised people, who worshipped idols, we ate carcasses, committed abominations, we broke family bonds, mistreated guests and the strongest would tread on the weakest. [Mohammed] has commanded us to tell the truth, to be faithful to our commitments, to honour relationships, to assure good neighbourly relations, to avoid crime and the spilling of blood". Then the King asked them

what they thought of Jesus, to which they replied: "Jesus is the servant and messenger of God, the spirit and word of God, whom God entrusted to the Virgin Mary". Then the King picked up a twig and said: "I swear, the difference between what we believe about Jesus, and what you have said, is not greater than the width of this twig." At that moment, the Christian King solemnly proclaimed he would protect the Moslem refugees: "You, emigrants, will be safe in my country. Anyone who insults you will be fined. I do not want to harm any of you not even in exchange for a mountain of gold".

This is the first account of an encounter between Christians and Moslems, and it occurred while Moslem refugees were in a Christian country. It is interesting to see how through time, when King Negus was threatened by another claimant to the throne, all the refugees asked God to let the Christian King triumph, and that is exactly what happened. According to one tradition even, when this King died, the prophet Mohammed prayed for him, so that he would obtain pardon from God. In a modern context, this entire story could be interpreted as a successful example of welcoming the immigrant, and his subsequent feeling of belonging in his new country. This incident always underlined the perception that Islam had of Christianity as being its nearest and most respectful religion. The Koran says of this welcome offered in Ethiopia:

Certainly you will find (...) the nearest friendship to those who believe (to be) those who say: "we are Christians; this is because there are priests and monks among them

and because they do not behave proudly". (Q.5: 82).

### 1.3. The hospitality of the inhabitants of Medina

Another fundamental experience of this welcome was that of the brotherhood that existed between the inhabitants of the city of Medina and the Moslems that fled towards the North of Mecca. According to tradition, every inhabitant of Medina took a Moslem as his *brother*, welcomed him and gave him refuge. This fraternity between a member of the host town and an immigrant still remains alive today, in one of the religious rituals of the *Alevi*, a Turkish Moslem group of more than fifteen million believers made up of Shi'ite and Sufi roots. In this ritual, each Alevi Moslem pairs with another, thus recalling the fraternity of the people from Medina with Moslem immigrants. The tradition of Ibn Ishâq offers us a list of those pairings, starting with the prophet himself. Mohammed said:

Be brothers in Christ, two by two. Afterwards, he took the hand of 'Alî Ibn Abî Tâlib and said: "This is my brother".

In the pact signed by Mohammed, the emigrants from Mecca, the inhabitants of Medina and the Jews, a special protection for foreigners is accorded, determining their rights and duties: "Yathrib (Medina) will be a safe haven (*haram*) for the people [signing] this document. The foreigner will be welcomed under its protection, it will be like his protector: it will not harm him, and nor should he commit any crime," (Ibn Ishâq, *Sirat al-nabawiyya*).

These three experiences of hospitality are at the heart of a Moslem's need to

show an attitude of respect and welcome towards foreigners, whether they be Zoroastrians, Jews or Christians, according to Moslem theology. This religious justification adds itself to the inherent Arab value of welcoming the guest.

Moslems, like Jews, were also *emigrants* in Abyssinia and Medina, and an attitude of gratitude persists in them. Historically of course, in Islam there was also a tendency to forget their previous status as *emigrants and travellers* once they arrived in their *promised land*, which was the ancient political and religious dominion of Arabia. The third Caliph, Omar Ibn Khattâb, expelled many Christians living in the city of Najrân out of Arabia. A list of directives relating to Jews and Christians living in Islamic lands is also attributed to him, all of them humiliating and segregationist. These directives were most likely falsely attributed to him, similar to an alleged quotation from the Prophet in which he said that there should be no Christians or Jews in Hijâz, (North-eastern Arabia). In spite of the probable apocryphal nature of these orders, it has still been used as an inspiration for many fundamentalist attitudes.

The warning of Yahweh to the Jewish people before entering the *Promised Land* to not forget their emigrant roots while settling in the country, can therefore be taken as a universal warning, which all people and all religions should listen to. It is not a coincidence that the Arab phrase that translates as *unfaithful*, "kuffâr", finds its origin in the sense of *being ungrateful* or of *hiding and covering the truth*, and therefore *forgetting* the gift given by God.

## 2. THE MOSLEM AS A WANDERER

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It is not only Jews and Christians that live their lives as a journey. There are also dynamic elements in the Islamic tradition, in spite of the stability found in their desire to set up an Islamic State centred on the first Prophet and later Caliphs, and therefore *it seems that their Kingdom does appear to be of this world.*

These elements nearly always revolve around the idea of a “way” which, surprisingly, appears in several basic theological terms in Islam. All these combine to make the Moslem a sojourner too.

### 2.1. Islamic law as the way

Islam has highlighted the fact that the Arabic term used to designate Islamic law, *shari’a*, etymologically means *way*. The possibilities that exist for a *mystical and spiritual* understanding of this phrase are endless, given that it means that the law is primarily the way or guide that leads man towards God. The Moslem should therefore live his life as though he were on a journey.

### 2.2. The “straight path” (sirât almustaqîm) that must be travelled

In the *fâtiha* prayer that *opens* the Koran and that is recited five times daily, we also find the idea of the way, *al-sirât almustaqîm*. The person praying asks God that they may be guided along the straight path and not on the way of those that have upset God, or the path of those that have lost

their way. This *sirât al-mustaqîm* is also the path that must be taken on the day of justice, and the path that leads directly to paradise. It is like a bridge suspended above hell.

### 2.3. The Arabic language and the idea of displacement

Moreover, the language in which the Koran is written, Arabic, derives its name from the idea of displacement. The origin of the term ‘*araba*’ means to cross, or to go from one place to another. This is where the term ‘to express oneself’ originated from. In Arabic, ‘to express oneself’ has an etymological meaning of crossing, because when we talk, our senses *cross*, and we progress (in our way of thinking and being) towards comprehension. Therefore speaking Arabic is a way of crossing to another side.

### 2.4. The Sufi fraternity is also the way

Furthermore, the word that Moslem mystics use for *brotherhood* in relation to the Sufi group that meets to pray, is that of *tarîqa*, which can also mean *way*. The Sufi live in a permanent state of journeying through the mystic way of life, moving from one stage or station (*maqâm*) to the next. Sufism has also created a link between the words “heart” (*qalb*) and the verb “to transform oneself” (to turn around), *inqalaba*. The heart, being the seat of the presence of God in man, is

constantly transforming given that God always reveals Himself in a new way. For this reason, the spiritual state (*hâl*) is in a constant state of flux.

### 2.5. The world in a constant state of movement

Some mystical thinkers in Islam, such as Ibn Arabi, also view the world as being in a constant state of movement. Based on a medieval theory of creation, this Murcian author understood God as a living breathing being. Each exhalation of God represented a recreation of the world, and in each inhalation, the world returned to its original form. In the following breath, the world went back to look like it did before, thus giving the illusion of continuity. We will not be debating this scientific medieval theory here, but instead we can see how this theory could be interpret-

ed mystically: things are in an eternal state of movement and progress. They come from God and return to Him interminably.

### 2.6. Blessed are the foreigners

Finally, there is a saying of the Prophet that is little known among Moslems, and that can act as much as a basis for welcoming strangers as it can for looking at the experience of life as a form of *migration*: “Islam began as being foreign (*gharîb*) and will return to how it began. Blessed (*tûba*) are the foreigners” (Muslim, *Imân*, 232 ff). The Prophet was referring to the rejection experienced by Islam in its early days. This is why being the foreigner (*gharîb*), that is, he who has been considered as a stranger and is rejected, can also be considered as receiving a blessing in *Christian* terms: “blessed are the persecuted”, (cf. Mt 5:10).

## 3. THE CELESTIAL ASCENSION OF THE PROPHET

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Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, has also developed a mystical pilgrimage with two dimensions, vertical and horizontal, as we have mentioned earlier.

In its vertical dimension, the example is of the nocturnal ascension of the Prophet Mohammed. His account, which can only be found in the Koran, has been extensively developed and extended through tradition, in particular by the

mystical side of Islam, Sufism. According to tradition, Mohammed displaced himself *physically* from Mecca to Jerusalem, where he met the great prophets of the Biblical tradition, and Jesus. After praying in the esplanade of the ancient Temple in Israel, he moved up through the seven Heavens –according to Ptolemaic cosmology– until he reached the presence of God. There he received the command to

pray fifty times a day. On descending, Mohammed met Moses and talked with him a while. Moses, aware of the fragile faith of desert people, encouraged Mohammed to return to the presence of God and ask for a reduction in the number of obligatory prayers: "Prayer is a heavy duty and your people are weak", he told Moses. The Prophet received various *dispensations* until he arrived at the five current compulsory prayers, with the promise however that their value would be the same as that of fifty.

The traditional account places the great prophet in each one of the seven heavens, or seven *planets* of ancient cosmology where the Earth was considered to be at the centre.

In the first, that is the Moon's orbit, dwelt the prophet Adam; in the second, Mercury, dwelt Jesus and John the Baptist; in the third, Venus, dwelt Joseph; in the fourth, the orbit of the Sun was Idris (Enoch); in the fifth, that of Mars, was Aaron; in the sixth, the Heaven of Jupiter, was Moses; and finally, in the seventh, that of Saturn, was Abraham.

The importance of this account is that in its Sufi mystical interpretation, it has become a model in spiritual development for anyone that wants to live their life in deep faith. Man must follow the steps of Mohammed in his ascension towards God and also meet the prophets in order to receive their wisdom. According to Islam, this ascension, confirms the Seal of the prophets to Mohammed, in other words, bringing together all previous revelations. The mystic also ascends spiritually as he gathers the wisdom of each one of the prophets. In this way, the

mystic *makes a pilgrimage* of revelation in revelation, of wisdom in wisdom, without tying himself down or limiting himself to any one particular level. His love for God makes him search for God anywhere he can find trace of Him. This is how the famous Murcian mystic, Ibn Arabi (XIII century), understood life when he said that Jesus had been his first master and at the end that he had received the legacy of Mohammed, after Mohammed inherited his knowledge from the prophets. It is interesting to note that Mohammed did not remain in the presence of God or in the seven heavens, but instead descended again to Earth in order to pass on his experience and guide mankind, just like the Bodhisattvas that do not allow themselves to be assumed into Nirvana, so they can continue to guide other people towards *illumination*.

We have already mentioned how in Islam, Jesus is one of the images of a travelling prophet. He also ascends to Heaven –without having died according to Moslem doctrine– and waits there until he can return again before the end of the world. However, he is not the only prophet who lives body and soul in the Heavens. It is also affirmed in Islam that Idris (Enoch) and Elijah share this privilege.

Finally, in Shi'ite tradition, we find the Messianic figure of *Mahdi*, the Imam whose arrival is expected at the end of time, and who is seen as an eternal wanderer until his final appearance. This was the last of the great Shi'ite imams who mysteriously disappeared without a trace. So he lives hidden, without ageing, waiting for the end of time.

## CONCLUSION

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This study hopes to provide an outline of the *theology of migration*. We have seen how religions have elements that make the welcome of immigrants imperative to the believers' faith. It also means that the host society must be moved aside: this society, who may have believed themselves to be the cultural ideal in relation to the immigrants' background, finds itself in a position of *stability*, having lost that *migrant* aspect of life. Instead, the central focus now moves from the society towards the person that has left his land and home behind. The immigrant does not necessarily live his migration as a journey or experience it in its full spiritual depth, such as if he were undertaking a vertical ascension towards God. This ascension can incorporate both the sense of travelling northwards and the sense of a horizontal journey, such as the ascension of Horeb by Moses, which was upwards, yet also held the significance of the horizontal exodus from Egypt.

In any case, the immigrant will always be a symbol of someone who lives in a state of searching and movement.

This wisdom on life is not exclusive to the three monotheistic religions we have looked at here either. It is equally present in the journeys of man through his various reincarnations, a belief held in oriental religions. In Hinduism, there is something even more beautiful: the pilgrimage of man who, through many theophanies, *searches for God in all things*. The Oriental believer lives everything as a *theophany*, or manifestation of God. So the mystical experience consists in journeying from one life to the next in order to ascend towards knowledge of God and to allow everything to become an occasion for an encounter with the divine.

I will finish with a beautiful Spanish poem that portrays Jesus as an emigrant drifting in a boat. The poem could be read as a song of lament for all those who have been forced to flee their countries.

To the tones of a soft lullaby  
fall asleep angel  
so little is the boat,  
so big the dreams...  
Like Jesus and Mary  
also left,  
fleeing abroad from Herod  
fleeing from a Herod  
eternal God,  
we flee out of hunger  
He fled out of fear,  
We leave in the boat  
He left on a donkey...  
Your father is rowing  
and I am watching over you  
the Herods and hunger  
are far away now...  
sleep my child,  
and so he sleeps.  
May the moon

and stars cradle you  
may the waves break  
and the wind drop...  
When we get there, child,  
when we get there,  
you will eat finest bread  
and lamb,  
it is Christmas, my sweet,  
and the God above  
only wants one thing:  
for us to love each other...  
Jesus and Mary  
also left,  
fleeing abroad from Herod  
to the tones of a soft lullaby  
fall asleep, angel.

Alfonso Valverde  
*Lullabies of the little boat.*