UKRAINIAN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND THEIR JOURNEY OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

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Introduction

This study is about the personal narratives of eighteen internally displaced persons, IDPs, of Ukraine, generated by the onset of war on February 24, 2022. IDPs are:

> Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or (IDPs) obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.[1]

So, for this study, any Ukrainian who was internally displaced at least once is considered an IDP, even when they have eventually emigrated to another country. Nevertheless, their unfortunate conditions do not entirely make them mere "poor who need help" because, despite the tragic circumstances, they remain persons bearing divine grace.[2] For this reason, the experiences of Ukrainian IDPs are also possible subjects of theological studies. Thus, this paper is devoted to unpacking the displacement experiences of the eighteen

1. Francis M. Deng and UNHCR, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: United Nations Publication, 2004).

2. Salvador Agualada Jr., C.M.F., "Examining Karl Rahner's Theology of Religions, Its Meaning and Implications, in the Asian Context" [Lecture notes, Loyola School of Theology, 2021].

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participating Ukrainian IDPs as a *locus theologicus*; showing that, as bearers of the divine grace of hope, the Ukrainian IDPs are capable of imparting knowledge of God and contributing to a better understanding of the Christian faith.

To accomplish this task, Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope is foundational. A German Reformed systematic theologian, Moltmann placed the Christian hope at the center of his theological works. Thus, through the theology of hope, a positive outlook regarding the catastrophic experiences of the displaced Ukrainians is accorded. It should also be emphasized that Moltmann's theology of hope was experientially conceived. Personal events in Moltmann's life inspired his theology.[3] However, theologizing with Moltmann would not have been possible without the mimetic theory of Paul Ricoeur.[4] Utilizing Ricoeur's mimesis concept will provide this study with the means to draw out the displaced Ukrainians' understanding of their current state through their narratives.

Ricoeur defined *mimesis* as the active process of imitation or representation. Thus, imitation or representation should be understood in its dynamic sense of representation and transposition into representative works.[5] In this study's case, these representative works are the responses of the participating Ukrainian IDPs. Ricoeur believed that a hermeneutical approach to narratives deals primarily with a past that engages the present for the future and not just a mere temporal past.[6] This is why Ricoeur's notion of mimesis is the method for having a holistic understanding of the Ukrainian

3. Cf. Prelude to Refiguration.

4. A French philosopher of the twentieth century known for hermeneutics.

5. Paul Ricoeur, Temps et Récit, vol. 1 (Paris: Seuil, 1983), 58.

6. David B. Perrin, "La mimesi come terreno comune per la spiritualità e la teologia spirituale," Mysterion 12, no. 2 (2019): 192.

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IDPs' experiences. This mimetic cycle comprises three phases: *mimesis1* or prefiguration; *mimesis2* or configuration; and *mimesis3* or refiguration. Prefiguration, *mimesis1*, allows the pre-understanding of the Ukrainian IDPs' world and context. It is the part of the research that speaks about the history of the Ukrainian people as it influences their current situation. This study means understanding the IDPs through their history. For Ricoeur, human actions contain meanings that can be extracted.[7] Moreover, *mimesis1* has a diachronic character that allows the integration of new elements, coming from different points of view, to actualize existing meanings. Thus, history's temporal character contributes to and complements its significance as well. Configuration, *mimesis2*, is what Ricoeur called the world of *what-ifs*.[8] This is so because, with the narratives put into words, the search for the meaning behind the text necessitates creativity and resourcefulness to identify the *emplotment*—the process of organizing events and facts in a way that causal connections are established, which is the mediating stage of the mimetic cycle.[9] This emplotment was done by each Ukrainian IDP respondent while answering the online questions. Though the questions were the same for all, each respondent structured and communicated their story in a way unique to each other. Refiguration or *mimesis3* is "where the reader engages the world of the text."[10] "The act of reading follows the configuration process and actualizes it. It is an act of judgment and the productive imagination."[11] Refiguration

7. Ricoeur, Temps 1, 69.

8. Ricoeur, Temps 1, 101.

9. Ricoeur, Temps 1, 102.

10. Carmen Valdes, *"Candles in Babylon": The Imagination of Hope in the Religious Poetry of Denise Levertov* (Berkeley, California: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2005), 19.

11. Loretta Dornisch, "Ricoeur's Theory of Mimesis," 315.

is the stage where the reader, in this case, this study's author, understands and assimilates the meaning perceived. The mimetic cycle is not complete without refiguration because it is where the meaning of the narrative is brought back to the field of action for further interpretation. Thus, here, the reader undergoes a change in oneself because of his/her assimilation of what he/she has read and understood. The completion of this stage restarts another mimetic cycle.

As this study focuses on the personal stories of eighteen displaced Ukrainians, it becomes a channel that allows the respondent to reflect, review, and reassess their experiences. As a result, they are encouraged to remain resilient and to continue hoping for the end of the war. Most importantly, their reflections help welcome cities to better accept and integrate them into their societies by pointing out injustices and calling for change. Consequently, the displaced Ukrainians can finally start contributing to improving their welcoming societies. Moreover, this study allows the respondents, through their participation, and this paper's author, through this study, to have a deeper look into the trauma experienced in forced displacement during wars. Through this process, lessons and connotations from their stories are waiting to be mined out and shared with the world, thus providing a possible new model to help churches and organizations achieve holistic ministering to them as contributors to the church's life as well. Lastly, this study will highlight the relevance and importance of having the experiences of migrants as its primary source in doing a theology of migration, thus providing a new tool for doing migration theology.

Prefiguration: Ukraine's History

The stories of Ukrainian IDPs show how eighteen people were able to act according to what they believed was necessary

to survive Russia's aggressions against their country. Delving deeper into their stories led to a discovery of diverse elements of the country's history that helped fuel the nationalism of Ukrainians. Over the course of their history, the people of Ukraine have consistently expressed a profound yearning for their national identity. The pursuit of this national identity has been recounted from various perspectives, offering numerous insights into the ongoing search for Ukraine's sense of self. This quest can be traced back to the tenth century when the Kyivan Rus' state was established: "Ukrainian history teaches that the founding of Kyivan Rus' was the beginning of the Ukrainian state and the start of Kyiv's rise to power" and that "the main avenue through this territory was the Dnipro, [...] and the capital Kyiv was in the south-center".[12]

Founding Era

The Kyivan Rus' glory was short-lived as it became entangled in political conflicts. Kyiv fell into powers that did not embody the aspirations of the Kyivan Rus'. But as the history of Kyivan Rus' transcends the Ukrainian narrative, the same is said of the River Dnipro. Neither can be exclusively claimed or owned by a single nation or state. However, Ukrainians claim that the Dnipro had been a metaphor for Ukraine's relentless quest for self-determination during centuries of foreign rule, and for the fighting spirit of Ukrainians against oppressors as represented by the Zaporozhian Cossacks, who rebelled against foreign rulers from their stronghold at Sich.[13]

12. Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation,* 4th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press) *2015, 43.*

13. Roman Adrian Cybriwsky, *Along Ukraine's River: A Social and Environmental History of the Dnipro* (Central European University Press, 2018), 16.

A cossack is "anyone who could not find his appropriate place in society and went into the steppes, where he acknowledged no authority," or armed men engaged in military service in Italian colonies on the Black Sea coast. [14] And the most prominent Cossacks were those from beyond the Dnipro rapids—the Ukrainian Cossacks.[15] They became forebearers of the Ukrainian identity, although they did not always succeed in winning their freedom, until its dissolution in the early 20th century.[16] Nevertheless, cossackdom has been deemed synonymous with the Ukrainian way of life.[17]

Along the same line, the appellation West and East of the River Dnipro came from its geographical position in terms of the River Dnipro: the right and left banks of the river, respectively. This distinction mainly emphasizes the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences more than the geographical aspect. In simple terms, Western Ukraine is more disposed to the European mindset due to its prolonged exposure to the Western mindset of the Poles, while Eastern Ukraine is more inclined towards the Russian mindset. This difference became more palpable at the onset of modern nationalism.[18] Western Ukraine's assimilation of the European mentality led it to

14. Orest Subtelny and Illia Vytanovych, "Cossacks," in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, accessed October 16, 2023, https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CC% 5CO%5C Cossacks.htm.

15. Serhii Plokhy, *The Cossack Myth: History and Nationhood in the Age of Empires,* New Studies in European History (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 32.

16. Wilson, *The Ukrainians,* 62; Orest Subtelny and Illia Vytanovych, "Cossacks," in Encyclopedia of Ukraine, accessed October 16, 2023, https://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/ display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CC%5CO%5CCossacks.htm.

17. Mykhailo Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine-Rus* Volume 7: The Cossack Age to 1625, The Cossack Age, 59-64.

18. Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson, *What Is a Nation?: Europe 1789-1914*, 2006), 20.

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adopt this, while Ukraine's eastern counterpart, ruled by the Romanovs, struggled with it. In addition, Ukrainian nationalism was defined alongside religion, specifically Christianity, be it Orthodoxy on the side of the Russian Empire or Catholicism in the western part of Ukraine. The imposition of Communism and the Russian language was regarded as an opposition to Ukrainian nationalism. Thus, subsequent attempts to establish national identity yielded an antagonism against Communism in Soviet Ukraine.[19]

Modern Ukraine

Despite all that happened in the first half of the twentieth century, Ukraine's nationalism and struggle for independence bore fruit when it attained self-proclaimed independence on August 24, 1991.[20] Nevertheless, Russia's influence over Ukraine continued to affect the latter's politics, which was geared towards European integration. Russia was against this because that would mean Ukraine would move farther away from the East, more specifically from Russia. However, in 2013, when Ukraine was approaching an agreement with the European Union (EU), its then-President, Viktor Yanukovych, suddenly stopped negotiations with the EU and made other agreements with Russia. This move led to protests in Kyiv in November 2013, dubbed the Euromaidan. [21]

Since the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula and some parts of the Donbas Region in 2014 until late 2021, tensions between Ukraine and Russia continued to escalate. Until such

19. David R. Marples, *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2007), 3-5.

20. This was confirmed on December 1, 1991, by a referendum and the election of a new president.

21. Wilson, *The Ukrainians,* 348.

a time that these tensions finally deteriorated into a full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022.[22] Naturally, most Ukrainians in the country moved away from the conflict zones. But as Ukrainians evaded the threats brought by the war, they showed a preference for moving westward, and the eighteen personal narratives will confirm this.

The stories in this study reflect a Westward preference regarding displacement. After so many decades of hardships in the Soviet Union, Ukraine acknowledged that the kind of governance it seeks is somewhere else. And the only other example and experience they have is with the West. Ukraine's history shows it is more than ready to be an independent nation, eventually steering farther away from Russia.

Configuration: Eighteen Narratives

The onset of the war in 2022 produced more displacements in Ukraine. It is a tragedy to know that some have been displaced since 2014 and have not been fully integrated into the host communities. This is a tragedy since that means there are Ukrainians who are continuously suffering the effects of their forced displacement for ten years.[23]

Crisis and Trauma

In general, the common factor that is shared by IDPs of conflicts and war is fear. This was established through the narratives gathered for this paper. Those fears were undoubtedly caused by the danger and threat perceived by

22. Nigel Walker, "Conflict in Ukraine: A Timeline (2014 - Eve of 2022 Invasion)" (UK Parliament, August 22, 2023), 15-26.

23. "'Tomorrow, Tomorrow, Putin Will Come': The 2014 Ukraine Refugees Forced to Flee for a Second Time," *The Guardian,* June 6, 2022, sec. Global development, https://www. theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jun/06/tomorrow-tomorrow-putin-will-come-the-2014-ukraine-refugees-forced-to-flee-for-a-second-time.

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the respondents. When they felt the threat to their lives, they instinctively knew they had to move to a safer place. In the case of these respondents, where they are in Ukraine, whether close to the borders with Russia or far from it, it did not matter. What mattered was that they considered a place secure. This contributed to the disparate movements of the respondents. The uniqueness of each displacement experience, including their reactions and initiatives regarding their displacement, was brought about by their backgrounds and history.

Indeed, each of them struggled the best way they could in the given situations they found themselves in. They adapted because it was necessary for survival. This is explained by a statement from an article that highlights the need to investigate the spiritual and religious needs of Ukrainian refugees. Although this was concluded for refugees, it applies as well to IDPs.

In crises, people often make a deep reflection on their lives, over the sense and purpose of life, and in this way verify their current behavior, trying to juxtapose it with one's conscious immediate and further goals and the meaning of their activities and very existence. Viewed in this way, a crisis often leads to a change in thinking and undertaking decisions based on rethought values and premises.[24]

Life and Self Re-assessment

It is obvious that the participants of the online questionnaire underwent an inner transformation since life-changing decisions such as the ones they took necessitate reflection and repeated reconsideration before their concretization. Along

24. Michał Wyrostkiewicz, Wojciech Wciseł, and Anastasiia Verkhovetska, "The Need for Religious and Spiritual Counseling Among Ukraine's War Refugees," *Journal for the Study of Religion & Ideologies 21,* no. 62 (2022): 4.

the same line, their narratives reflect the presence of others in the transformation of these respondents. In other words, the respondents were able to shift their paradigm in seeing their lives because others helped them, implicitly or explicitly. Thus, their statements revealed how encountering other persons can counter negative prejudices.

Forced displacement will always be hard, and a displaced person will constantly need help. The narratives of encounters with others show that experiences involving others contribute immensely to the conduct and outlook of the respondents. For example, when the experience with others is positive, the behavior of the respondent tends to be characterized by openness to society. On the contrary, negative experiences tend to discourage them from interpersonal contact with others.

In addition, a positive experience with others fosters a feeling of being welcomed and treated as equals in terms of rights and privileges. Thus, it can be assumed that when an IDP feels welcomed, he or she will more probably consider integration into their welcoming society. Otherwise, he or she will likely think of moving on somewhere else, even if that means re-living displacement all over again.

One establishes a foothold where one feels a sense of belonging. So, if one cannot procure one's own house in a certain place, one will not have a sense of belonging there. Therefore, through the narratives, having a house has been proven to be more than a physical shelter or economic asset, but also a place that provides a sense of security and familiarity. In other words, for a displaced person, "home 'is a site in which power relations of the wider society...are played out."[25]

25. Jane R. Zavisca, Beth Mitchneck, and Theodore P. Gerber, "Housing and Integration of Internally Displaced Persons: The Case of Ukraine in 2018," *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 5 (April 5, 2023), https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2023.1086064, 2.

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Displaced and Homeward Bound

The interpretations of the narratives show that displacement is not only a forced movement made by a person in difficulty: it is also emotional and spiritual, in addition to being geographical. And these persons, despite their trying conditions, still manage to be grateful and hopeful for the future. This is possible because others have helped them. The respondents are homeless but never alone. For them, the best-updated definition of home includes "the affective experiences of interpersonal relationships with persons one associates with *feeling at home*." [26]

The experiences of these displaced Ukrainians revealed the spiritual and emotional sides of their journeys. They continue to desire a home despite feeling welcomed in their host communities. That is because "home is both a place and a unique source of attachments, desires, needs, and dilemmas that undergird the rest of our lives."[27] Thus, they will continue yearning for a home amidst their continuous displacement struggles.

Refiguration: Theological Interpretations of the Narratives

The personal narratives of the Ukrainian IDPs clearly describe their state of homelessness. Consequently, they yearn for a home reminiscent of the one they were forced to abandon because of the war. Deep within their minds and hearts, they foster hope for a home mirroring the one they left behind, embodying the same quality and features of their familiar way of life. Statements like "home is home. Home is better,"

26. Barbara Jo McClure, "Carrying Home: Theoretical and Theological Reflections on the Politics of Attachment and Belonging," *Pastoral Psychology* 70, no. 3 (June 2021), 242.

27. McClure, "Carrying Home", 243.

and "there is no place better than home" clearly describe the eagerness to return home.[28] While waiting for the end of the war, some find their condition precarious; having been compelled to leave their homes, they also struggle as strangers in a foreign land, though they remain within the borders of their motherland.

Strangers in Their Homeland

Such is the case of Respondent 6, who wrote, "I was surprised by the Russian language on the street, parents who continue to speak Russian to their children. Collaborators and traitors who aim shots at their neighbors." But the reality is that those speaking Russian in Kyiv are also Ukrainians. This exemplifies the tension between the host communities and the displaced. Respondent 6 left Kyiv for a safer place in western Ukraine and abroad. Upon returning to Kyiv, eastern Ukrainians who speak Russian, inhabited the capital to escape the dangers of the war. Respondent 6, therefore, became one of the locals who must welcome the displaced. Respondent 6 witnessed how Russian-speaking Ukrainians were able to assimilate the way of life in Kyiv. In this case, it is important to note how Respondent 6 passed from being displaced to being a host upon returning to Kyiv. Respondent 6 realized how much help IDPs need. So, in return, Respondent 6 has learned how to welcome even Russian-speaking people, who seemed to be strangers, as compatriots and help them be integrated into society.

Despite sharing the same citizenship with the rest of the country, these Ukrainian IDPs feel like strangers in their federal lands. Thus, the sense of being foreigners in their own country reminds us of the Christian life in the second century, when Christianity was a nascent religion: being strangers in

28. Respondents 3 and 7, respectively.

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this world because Christians belong to the kingdom of God that is to come. It is best described in the Letter to Diognetus:

> They reside in their respective countries, but only as aliens. They take part in everything as citizens and put up with everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their home, and every home a foreign land. [...] They find themselves in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh. They spend their days on earth but hold citizenship in heaven.[29]

In this sense, we can say that the experiences of the Ukrainian IDPs are a metaphor for the Christian life on earth.[30] Like a believer in Christ, Ukrainian IDPs long for a home that is not within reach or currently attainable. Thus, they continue to anticipate that home, which is not the one they are in. That home is elsewhere. They might inhabit a space in the Ukrainian land, but do not feel they entirely belong there.

Because of these diverse realities during displacement, the Catholic Church calls for the welfare of the migrants by seeing them as persons with a name and a history.[31] As a person, the forcibly displaced is also a spiritual being capable

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29. Papias Hierapolitanus, *The Didache, the Epistle of Barnabas, the Epistles and the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp, the Fragments of Papias, the Epistle to Diognetus,* ed. James Aloysius Kleist, S.J. Ancient Christian Writers 006 (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1948), 39.

30. For this purpose, metaphor is defined as the "kind of language [that] reaches out beyond the existing reality into the sphere of the possible." (Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000]). Thus, the personal experiences of the Ukrainian IDPs are taken as concrete expressions of what they are not explicitly: experiences of Christian life.

31. Papa Francesco, "Ai Partecipanti al VII Congresso Mondiale della Pastorale dei Migranti" (Ciità del Vaticano, November 21, 2014), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141121_congresso-pastorale-migranti.html.

of divine transcendence.[32] Hence, as persons recognized by the Catholic Church, the Ukrainian IDPs contribute to developing and enriching their welcoming society. As such, the Ukrainian IDPs can be channels through which God's graces pass. Thus, understanding their personal stories does not just uncover the urgency to extend help: their experiences can be a source of theological elements that can contribute to a better understanding of the Christian faith amid the suffering of war and conflicts of today's world. In considering their experiences as *locus theologicus*, they reveal the workings of God's grace in the material world. Unfortunately for them, each day represents the unknown, so every day, they must hope that this time will be better. So, when Respondent 10 wrote "believe in the best, do not lose hope, support others," it was clear that there was a realization that hope is possible because others are present, whether that presence is to be helped or to be of help. Hence, the homebound Ukrainian IDPs embody the exilic situation of Christians on earth, awaiting the time when they can finally be home, with the Creator and others of creation.

Homing with Others

At the same time, the respondents could identify how important others are, be it their family, loved ones, friends, or strangers willing to help. Respondent 3 stated the importance of being close to family and encouraging people during hard times: "We surround ourselves with positive people. Our grandmother and relatives live in Sumy, so now we are closer to them and have more contact." "I have a duty to my country and my people, and I am motivated by the idea of justice and the fact that evil is always punished. My family and friends are

32. Michał Wyrostkiewicz, Wojciech Wciseł, and Anastasiia Verkhovetska, "The Need for Religious and Spiritual Counseling Among Ukraine's War Refugees," *Journal for the Study of Religion & Ideologies* 21, no. 62 (2022): 3–19.

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with me," Respondent 11 shared how helping others became a job motivation. For some, it was through others that made they realize how important faith is.

These Ukrainian IDPs lost their homes, and yet were welcomed by others into their homes and communities. They are uprooted when forced to leave and "temporarily" settle in another place. Therefore, the settlement place must make space for them by letting their own space shrink, whether in terms of private space in welcoming the displaced in their homes or any property, or public space in giving them jobs and livelihood opportunities. Consequently, an uprooting of the host communities is necessary as well. Since welcoming IDPs requires making space, it can be assumed that the uprooted IDPs unknowingly uproot host communities. Therefore, a careful examination of the experiences of the IDPs revealed that the ongoing war is uprooting the whole nation of Ukraine since those who were able to stay in the safe regions needed to share their spaces with those fleeing the dangers and threats. Though they did not leave their homes, they had to make space for the displaced. As a result of their uprootedness and being displaced, they are also homebound, though in a different manner compared to the IDPs.

That is why, because of the encounter of the otherness between the Ukrainian IDPs and those welcoming them, both sides have also perceived how different and yet similar they are. Displacement caused by war is atrocious, and yet it also brings recompense: it simultaneously reveals Ukraine's culturally and linguistically diverse regions and yet hopes and desires for the same independence from Russia. And as a nation, it experienced what Moltmann describes when he speaks about the crisis.

> When the whole existing situation is in a state of crisis, it becomes obvious that the future can no longer arise automatically out of the past, that it can no longer be the natural repetition and continuation of the past, but that something new must be found in it.[33]

With all it endured as a nation, Ukraine must take on a new beginning, not completely unfamiliar, so that Ukraine would be unrecognizable. Instead, the new beginning, which lies in the hands of the people of Ukraine, "must arise from the dream of the future"[34] —meaning a free and safe place that fosters belongingness and security within its territories that will help the Ukrainian people grow roots again.

Waiting to be Rooted and Home Again

Based on their expressed hopes, it is certain that waiting is necessary. Then, as waiting becomes part of their hope for freedom, it becomes part of their history. As Ukrainian history depicts how its people fought for centuries and finally gained their unstable independence in 1991, it presently shows that contemporary Ukraine will not yield easily to invaders who want to invalidate that independence. And since by its history, Ukraine has shown how capable it is to fight for its sovereignty, its citizens, IDPs, and local hosts alike, one can count on its ability to ward off its enemy. Accordingly, a history marked with hope in the fulfillment of the promise is, according to Moltmann, exactly where God unendingly reveals Himself faithfully through his promises and their fulfillment.[35]

The hopes mentioned above reflect a non-egotistic attitude from the one hoping. The object for which hope is directed is

33. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology,* 1st Fortress Press ed. (Fortress Press, 1993), 233.

34. Moltmann, *Hope,* 233.

35 Moltmann, *Hope,* 108.

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not oneself but another. The hope coming from the difficult situations of the respondents shows that they seek to see beyond the current hardships and sufferings. Thus, in hoping for the promises to be fulfilled, hope is not only unceasingly looking forward, but also, for those ravaged by war, is not self-centered. So, from the personal experiences of the Ukrainian IDPs, hope entails unselfish waiting and looking forward. But as they hope, they also go about their daily life fueled by that same hope. As Respondent 8 said, "It is my duty to continue to live consciously, not to fall into depression, to do my best and achieve something in life, to return to Ukraine and make it better. For the sake of all those who gave their lives for this."

These experiences show that the present condition of Respondent 8 was transformed by what was hoped for. Thus, the unselfish hope is a hope that points to a superior being capable of changing the current mindsets of Respondent 8. Accordingly, this is where Moltmann's assertion that transformation of the present is brought about by hope that comes from the Christian God.[36] Also, The element of otherness that encounters us in the hope of the Old and New Testaments — the thing we cannot already think out and picture for ourselves based on the given world and of the experiences we already have of that world — confronts us with a promise of something new and with the hope of a future given by God.[37] Thus, the hopes of the displaced Ukrainians above are certainly Christian.

The hope for the fulfillment of the promise of freedom mentioned above is not only related to an unselfish future but also to *homing*, or homeward bound. Thus, the displaced are always homing and, because of the hope of returning home,

36. Moltmann, *Hope,* 33-34.

37. Moltmann, *Hope,* 16.

they endure their present suffering. This transformation is what makes their hope "Christian" despite their religious belief and belonging.

Hoping and Homing Towards the Kingdom of God

Even non-Christian and atheist hopes can be accepted as possessors of a christic hope. As such, statements expressing hope like "living in a free country so that a child can live in a democratic state" and "the only hope is for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, for the victory"[38] are recognized as bearing christic characteristics in Moltmann's theology of hope. Because hope is grounded in history, non-explicit christic experiences can be compared to Christian experiences. So, the non-denominational experiences of hope recounted by the Ukrainian IDPs can be likened to the experiences of the early Christians who were living their earthly life when they were citizens of heaven.[39] As the Ukrainian IDPs were homebound and waiting for the fulfillment of the promised freedom from invaders, Christians are likewise homebound for the promised kingdom of God.

According to Scriptures, the first Christians were practically all religious Jews, waiting for the Messiah to come. And in coming across Jesus of Nazareth, they were able to recognize the signs pointing to him as the promised Messiah.[40] As a result, they began to believe in Him and His teachings, which were not always agreed upon by the Jewish authorities. This triggered a crisis within the Jewish community they belong. More importantly, this crisis reached its climax when Jesus, the promised Messiah, died on the cross and rose again from the dead, according to the Scriptures. Thus, the faith of the

38. Respondent 1 and 2, respectively.

39. Hierapolitanus, *The Didache,* ed. James Aloysius Kleist, S.J.

40. Giorgio Jossa, *Il Cristianesimo Antico Dalle Origini al Concilio Di Nicea,* Quality Paperbacks (Rome: Carocci, 2006), 32-33.

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early Christians in Jesus Christ led them into a state of religious and spiritual uprootedness from their religious community and beliefs. This uprootedness brought about persecution and tragic events in the lives of the first Christians. Their faith in the promise of Jesus Christ caused their separation from the Jewish traditions, which caused suffering, but the same faith made them look to the future, to the coming again of the Son of God.[41] It was in their uprootedness that their faith in the promise of the kingdom of God uttered by Jesus Christ became salient, since it was a promise of salvation. But this freedom was different from what the first Christians believed it to be in the beginning. They were waiting for a Messiah who would free them from bondage from a foreign authority in their lands. But what Jesus Christ offered them was freedom from the slavery of sin and through Him have everlasting life (John 3:15). In the uprootedness of the Christians, they continue to journey in this world, hoping to be finally rooted and at home in God's kingdom.[42] Christians believe that they belong to this kingdom. This belongingness to the kingdom remains a mystery of faith, but it does not mean it is incomprehensible. And it can be explained through the experiences of uprootedness and homing of the Ukrainian IDPs.

Based on the narratives, belonging somewhere is being with others. These stories tell that they were able to recognize a feeling that they belonged because they felt welcomed, even though the sentiment of being foreigners still lingered. They felt they belonged, and so they felt at home, and vice versa. They perceived a subtle sense of belonging because of the hope of returning home.

41. Mark 13:26-27 and Matthew 26:64.

42. Dale T. Irvin, "Theology, Migration, and the Homecoming," in *Theology of Migration in the Abrahamic Religions,* ed. E. Padilla and P. Phan, Christianities of the World (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014), 18.

Belonging to the Kingdom of God in Diversity

The journey of hope toward God's kingdom transpires in history, belonging implies taking part in "the completion of history and creation, its perfecting into the kingdom of glory in which God himself 'indwells' his creation."[43] This applies to Ukraine's story of journeying to a promised free and independent nation because it mimics the journey of Christians toward the promised kingdom of God. The respondents will only feel sure at home when Ukraine wins the war and keeps its sovereignty, because that is also when they can geographically regain their homes. Respondents 6 and 11 have explicitly named Russia the enemy and resolutely decided to avoid it. This is subtly saying that they do not want to be under the Russians because that is not where they truly belong. In other words, they desire to be where they feel at home. Just like how Christians will only truly feel at home once the lordship of God over His kingdom is found both in heaven and on earth.[44] However, in the irruption of Jesus Christ in the history of humankind, God has fulfilled His promise of the Messiah—that in His death and resurrection, God showed Himself faithful to His promise and offered salvation to all, without exception. As Moltmann said,

> God's promises must be understood historically, not merely because they were uttered in history, and must ever and again be interpreted afresh in history, but also because they throw open a particular history. [...] The opening up of history in the possibilities of the promising God means the opening up of the history of the creative God for whom creation out of nothing and new creation from the dead is possible. Faith in the promise does not just count on the objective and subjective possibilities

43. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Fortress Press, 2004), 280.

44. Moltmann, *Hope*, 100.

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> of history; it reckons with the presence of the one who makes the impossible.[45]

Thus, belonging to the kingdom of God is the journey of hope towards the reconciliation of differences, which is possible only to the Creator alone. This hope is Christian because it is centered on Jesus Christ as the sole Savior, the only One capable of uniting believers of all races and denominations in Him. Through God's event in history, the animosity the Ukrainian IDPs have toward the Russians will one day cease to exist. The criterion of a divine promise is that it creates a new beginning. This calls for faith in the promise because the One who uttered it will always be true to His word. Christian hope then goes along with faith and is focused on another, who is "the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it."[46]

Interculturality and Ecumenism

The difference in cultures among Ukrainians evokes interculturality and shows that one is not alone in their journey. Second, their hope for freedom established the importance of otherness in the transformative power of hope that is innately Christian, and that this hope is future-oriented. In other words, the hopes of the Ukrainian IDPs regarded through the lens of Moltmann's theology of hope have revealed an ecumenical dimension as well.

The personal narratives of the respondents made intercultural encounters perceivable. Even though their stories are unfortunate, they exhibit enriching capacities because others in them are willing to help and are animated by the same hope of freedom from the invaders. In this sense, interculturality among Ukrainians at war leads to a rediscovery

45. Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 99.

46. Moltmann, *Hope*, 16.

of their identity as a nation, belonging to the same people, despite cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences. Hoping for the same goal is mobilizing Ukrainians into being one people. Like how Christians of all denominations are being moved by the same Spirit into being one with the Father as Jesus prayed for: "That they may all be one" (John 17:21).

How was it possible that victims of war were able to lead a theological study based on Christian hope to ecumenism as a promotion of cooperation and unity among Christians? The Church, and not just individual Christians, in their journey back to the Father, shall progressively take the only path leading to the Father. Thus, this "constricting" movement towards the unique path is considered an ecumenical movement. In ecumenism, there needs to be a compromise to avoid breaking the existing tension created by differences and, in the case of this study, by the war. In the stories of the Ukrainian IDPs, efforts of integration and welcoming are perceived. This recognition plays a significant role in unifying the Ukrainian people because they have the same goal: making it through and winning the war. Consequently, their presents conform to the future hoped for, just as Moltmann defined what Christian hope is. In this case, Christian hope is not only for the victory of Ukraine but also for the unity of the Ukrainian people. Thus, as a metaphor for the Christian life, this paper posits that the same stories implicitly describe the hope for Christian unity as an aspiration that seeks the fulfillment of the Saviour's prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21), it also implies zeal and constant effort on the part of all Christians, but also the hope that the work will be accomplished at a point in time known only to God.[47]

47. Cristian-Sebastian Sonea, "Ecumenism as Hope: The Prophetic Role and the Eschatological Function of the Church: Religions," *Religions* 14, no. 10 (October 2023): 1.

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The personal experiences of the respondents have opened the doors towards an awareness that they bear the capacity to (1) provide examples that will lead to a better understanding of what ecumenism is, and (2) mobilize the nation to work for unity.

Since working for unity does not disregard the real conflicts between the churches in Ukraine, unity between them should remain a challenge and a motivation for ecumenical encounters and dialogues. Therefore, even though the Euromaidan crisis of 2014 was not recognized or organized as an ecumenical protest, through this study, it can be considered as one because Christians of diverse denominations gathered there to send and communicate the same message regarding Ukraine's politics.[48] The protests during the Euromaidan crisis have shown an example of how an ecumenical movement can be concretized and formalized in this world. At the same time, it is worth underlining that although Moltmann does not explicitly treat ecumenism in his theology of hope, this can implicitly lead to open discussions about ecumenism.

As the journey of each Ukrainian IDP moves forward, it unveils lessons and messages of hope because the experiences involved in this journey are marked and motivated by the Christian hope that transforms the present according to what it hopes for. What is hoped for—independence of and an end to war in Ukraine and the kingdom of God—emphasized the need to be rooted and to belong. As a result, this need to belong and be rooted at home led to the intercultural and ecumenical aspects of the Christian life as observed in the personal narratives of this research. These two criteria—interculturality and ecumenism—naturally point toward migration theology.

48. For more details, see Nadia Diuk, "EUROMAIDAN: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution," *World Affairs* 176, no. 6 (2014): 9–16.

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Contribution to Migration Theology

The interculturality drawn from the narratives of individuals and from their country's history reflects that Ukrainian history and the Ukrainian participants of this study's personal stories raised awareness as to how to better understand the cultural context of the eighteen victims of war. Intercultural study is important in a theology of migration because migrants bring with them (often without being conscious of doing so) their culture, language, and beliefs to where they settle, temporarily or permanently. Being displaced within their country's borders highlighted their differences from the locals of the host communities they are in. This created a crisis that led most of them to reassess how they see and define themselves. The same goes with the locals who welcomed them. The intercultural aspect of their displacement appeals to a theology that not only focuses on migration as a spatial movement but also one that pays attention to the human, social, and spiritual dimensions of the migrants in movement. Moreover, the interpretation of personal narratives of the displaced in Ukraine exposed the urgent need for a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to doing a theology of migration to provide a better appreciation of the implicit and explicit Christian messages the displaced offer the Church and the world. As they are affirmed to be bearers of Christian messages, they can be considered as those who are also paving the way for an ecumenical encounter and dialogue that opens doors for the unity of Christians.

Moreover, in using personal narratives of the Ukrainian IDPs still displaced since the war is still ravaging their country, this paper has demonstrated that human stories can produce unusual and yet fertile outcomes. Through the experience of the Ukrainian people in the context of war, combined with the mimetic theory of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Moltmann's theology

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of hope, individual migrant stories can speak of God because they have divine grace in them. Harvesting their theological implications is thus a matter of employing the best method of theologically studying them. While one should be careful in doing a theology of migration using the personal narratives of migrants, the process of doing so is quite enriching.

Moltmann gave history a new perspective by putting the death and resurrection of Jesus at its foundation and, therefore, calling for a constant "hermeneutical" approach to occurring events in the temporal world. In Moltmann's theology, the displacement of Ukrainians during the war is an event that merits attention because Christian hope is undoubtedly there. Even though the Ukrainian IDPs are still in displacement, they can implicitly or explicitly testify to living a Christ-like life. Through them, hope was perceived as it operates as encouragement for the present, in bearing the afflictions of displacement, and as a promise that opens their tormented present to a future unlike the present. What transpires is not without relevance to the promise that hope is aspiring for.

As a result, being homeward bound alongside others towards a possible future that transforms the quality of the present is characteristic of Christian hoping. So, whether hope is explicitly described as Christian or is denied, that hope can point towards God and, therefore, give a renewed knowledge of Him. Moltmann writes,

> Knowledge of God is then an anticipatory knowledge of the future of God, a knowledge of the faithfulness of God which is upheld by the hopes that are called to life by his promises. Knowledge of God is then a knowledge that draws us onwards, not upwards, into situations that are not yet finalized but still outstanding.[49]

49. Moltmann, *Hope*, 118.

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Conclusion

The respondents to the online questionnaire of this study have made it clear that they are also engaged in this war, believing in the eventual victory of Ukraine and the establishment of peace in their lands. Their narratives, viewed using Paul Ricoeur's mimetic theory, serve as testimonies of hope that Jürgen Moltmann's theology would categorize as Christian.

Their stories produced insightful and positive connotations on their displacements, thanks to a careful consideration of their context, without which interpreting the narratives would have been superficial. Also, the displacement experiences of each respondent have been proven to undergo a spiritual journey, which can be described as terrible and yet fruitful. This is so because their horrendous experiences were expressed almost always with expressions of hope and the importance of others. The central message pulled out from their stories was that of hope for a better-than-present future.

This is why the personal experiences of the respondents are viewed as metaphors for Christian life on earth. Their displacement stories are seen as stories of uprootedness and the need to belong, which in turn, lead to the desire and yearning to return home and establish connections with others who make them feel welcomed. Moltmann's theology of hope recognizes these narratives as mirroring the experiences of Christians, as citizens of the kingdom of God, as they navigate their worldly lives.

The theological interpretations and reflections on the narratives channeled the path toward intercultural and ecumenical dimensions lying beneath the already palpable and significant messages of the narratives: that narratives brought about by crises such as displacement caused by war can authentically relay theological understanding of the

direct connection between theology (particularly migration theology), interculturality, and ecumenism. In return, these aspects can be attributed and considered as contributions to Moltmann's theology of hope.

By using a proper methodology and approach in analyzing and interpreting personal narratives, the stories communicated, through their testimonies of hope of peace and victory amidst suffering and pain, what Christians would define as faith and hope in the promised salvation through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection to all who believe in Him and the One and only faithful God of promises.

These findings clearly express the significance of highlighting hope as a beacon that sheds light on the present but points to the horizon. Because of this, this study also affirms that any experience that testifies to a hope that nurtures the faith in a better world to come is indeed Christian because only the Christian God died and rose from the dead, in Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, a study like this naturally calls for further research. I recognize that this study has only paved the way for further research, especially regarding the interconnection of interculturality, ecumenism, and migration theology on a larger scale and different migrant groups. In so doing, this study recommends further studies and research that will demonstrate how being a migrant or being in displacement can be a new form of being a missionary in a globalized world through the combined efforts of theology and intersectionality.

Therefore, this study of the narratives of the eighteen respondents was able to show how, in their suffering, these Ukrainian IDPs could express hope, which is innately Christian according to Moltmann's theology. This, I hope, will motivate the Church to pay a different outlook on IDPs as human beings in need of help but are also contributors not only

to the well-being of the welcoming society but to both local and universal ecclesial lives that are simultaneously moving toward the fulfillment of Jesus Christ's promise of the coming kingdom.