

## COMMUNAL ECCLESIOLOGY: The Church Responds to the Reality of Migration in Batak Land

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to construct the church's response in facing the reality of migration in Batak land with the church's starting point as a community (communal ecclesiology). Communal ecclesiology requires an understanding of the cultural context and local wisdom of the community where the church grows. The context of the Christian community and churches in Batak land is characterized as communal life and thickened to the local wisdom. It is concluded that Christianity and churches in Batak land could adopt communal ecclesiology in response to the current migration reality. This article overviews the life of the early church in Acts. 2:41-47 as communal ecclesiology shows the Church's nature in celebrating personal faith communally within the faith community in three ways, namely daily labor, fellowship labor, and God's labor.

**Keywords:** Ecclesiology; Communal; Acts. 2:41-47; Batak church; Migration.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Migration is the reality of movement across international, local and inter-community boundaries in the same country. The issue of migration is an issue that is hotly discussed in the 21st century as a result of globalization which penetrates the boundaries of human movement in almost all sectors of life. Several reasons why people migrate include: increasing economic levels, population growth, education, marriage, natural disasters (natural factors), disease outbreaks, war, and government programs. Basically, people migrate for the sake of a better and more prosperous life. Humans will try to leave their areas of origin that provide little or no guarantee of prosperity to places that are considered to provide a better life expectancy. Globally, the reality of migration shows that migrants often experience injustice, violence, exploitation and human trafficking.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lamria Sinaga, "Teologi Migrasi Dan Diakonia Transformatif: Sebuah Tawaran Berteologi Merespons Realitas Migrasi Di Era Globalisasi," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 7 No. 2, no. April (2023): 610-26.

The international community has long recognized the important link between migration and international development. The reality of migration makes migration a silent dimension of modern globalization. The history of international migration is thought to have started with European expansion around 1500.<sup>2</sup> International migration movements became increasingly widespread in the 19th century, specifically from Europe to America. Until the end of the 20th century and entering the 21st century, migration became a global phenomenon caused by globalization to accelerate human movement in a broader context on a global scale. Deirdre Cornell believes that migration has been present in human daily life, for example culinary innovations that have been known for centuries are one small example of the fruits of migration and trade. Thus, trade and migration are not set in stone, what is new is their increasingly global intensity and influence.<sup>3</sup> Migrants are not just a matter of statistical numbers; Migration talks about humans making movements to survive and develop themselves in a foreign country.

The reality of migration is a serious theological issue for the church, considering that the church was born as the fruit of the migration process of believers.<sup>4</sup> In the Old Testament, the history of the Israelites as God's chosen nation is described, which continues to move, move and form a diaspora. The story of Abraham leaving his homeland to the promised land is an illustration of migration. The Gospel writers in the New Testament were on a journey when they wrote their letters. The Apostle Paul was a foreigner far from his homeland when he wrote his seven letters to small congregations in Asia.

Christian theologians have provided dogmatic approaches in responding to the issue of migration. Daniel G. Groody, CS.C offers a theology of migration by articulating an understanding of the relationship between God and humans with an eschatological approach. God who migrated into the person of Jesus Christ His Son and was present among humans to reconcile the broken relationship between God and His human creation is the basis for understanding Christ's mission regarding the reality of migration<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>2</sup> JD Payne, *Strangers Next Door Immigration, Migration and Mission* (Illinois: IVP Books, 2012), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Deirdre Cornell, *Jesus Was A Migrant* (New York: Orbis Book, nd).

<sup>4</sup> Daniel G. Groody, Peter C. Phan, and Fabbio Bagio and Agnez M. Brazal in their respective articles provide a complete explanation of why the issue of migration is a theological issue and has become *the locus of theology*.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel G. Groody, "The Church on the Move: Mission in an Age of Migration," *Mission Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013): 27–42, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341256>.

acceptance of immigrants or foreigners.<sup>6</sup> The events of God's incarnation into Jesus Christ who became human and Jesus Christ's transition from death to life are believed to be the basis for the hopes of Christians to believe that they come from God and are in the process of migrating from this world to eternity to God.<sup>7</sup>

Based on Groody's understanding, the idea proposed is that God moves in an effort to a better place or space and life. In other words, Groody's main idea shows the character of God, namely God who moves and moves and wants to move His human creation to move into His embrace. Peter C. Phan built a theology of migration by translating the doctrine of the Triune God who migrates and moves ( *God on the moves*).<sup>8</sup> In the three persons of God (God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit); Allah shows three ways of connecting Himself with humans and humans with the Three.<sup>9</sup> *First*, it describes the characteristics of God as God in motion, namely when God moved in creating the world and when God was incarnated in Jesus Christ. *Second*, Jesus is the Migrant Paradigm where during His life in the world he had the status of a migrant who received mercy from others, cared for and embraced marginalized people, and through His death and resurrection gave hope for all believers to walk towards the final destination. migration is eternal life. *Third*, the Holy Spirit guides migrants out of poverty and suffering and gives them the courage to see a better life provided by Deus Migrator. Thus, Phan's main idea lies in understanding the way God relates Himself to humans.

Fabio Baggio and Agnes M. Brazal explain the theology of migration from the perspective of humans' basic existence as strangers (aliens) in the home (world) that God has provided for them.<sup>10</sup> A similar idea is also mentioned by the World Council of Churches in its document *The 'Other' is my Neighbour*, which calls for:<sup>11</sup>

All human beings, residents with or without a migration background, are "foreigners." Our identities are constructed in and in-between: in-between paradise lost and the heavenly Jerusalem, in-between cross, resurrection and the

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Groody, *Migrants and Refugees: Christian Faith and the Globalization of Solidarity*, *International Review of Mission*, vol. 104, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12105>.

<sup>7</sup> Deirdre Cornell, *Jesus Was A Migrant* (New York: Orbis Book, 2012), 23-35.

<sup>8</sup> Peter C. Phan, "Deus Migrator - God the Migrant: Migration of Theology and Theology of Migration," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2016): 845-68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563916666825>.

<sup>9</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration Implications of World Christianity* (Lexington Book, 2020) 120-124.

<sup>10</sup> Fabio Baggio Agnes M. Brazal, *Faith on the Move - Toward a Theology of Migration in Asia* (Philippines: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> WCC Publication, *The Other Is My Neighbor*, *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*, 6(11) (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013).

second coming of Christ, in-between ethnic or gender identity and the larger body of Christ, in-between despair and hope.

Based on the opinions of Baggio and Brazal and the WCC statement above, it is concluded that the world is a temporary residence for humans on their way to their homeland. That the journey to their homeland is a migration process that produces an identity as a migrant for humans. Having an identity as a migrant will guide humans to behave in mutual respect for each other, live side by side and be friendly as a picture of eschatological life in the future (cf. Isa. 11:6-9; Heb. 13:14). Having an identity as a migrant requires everyone to have and show solidarity with others in living together in society.<sup>12</sup> Because local communities (which are the destination of migration) and new communities of immigrants; are both immigrants who meet in the context of a certain society and together travel to their homeland.

Toba Regency is currently one of the migration destinations in North Sumatra. The arrival of people from various other regions brought with them a variety of ethnic, religious, racial and class cultural riches. Another situation is the acceleration of development which directs the Toba people to adopt modernization in various sectors such as tourism, culture, economics, politics and social life.<sup>13</sup> The process of change in these sectors is intended to improve community welfare. However, the modernization process also has the potential to result in a shift in local cultural values, the loss of customs from local community culture, and give rise to an excessive bias towards worshipping new cultures and ways of life.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the state of modernization has had both negative and positive impacts on the church.<sup>15</sup>

This change must be anticipated wisely by the local community, which was previously very homogeneous, in order to absorb the broadest possible positive impacts and try to protect itself from negative impacts. The Church can play a role in helping

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<sup>12</sup> Sinaga, "Transformative Theology of Migration and Diakonia: A Theological Offer in Response to the Reality of Migration in the Era of Globalization."

<sup>13</sup> E Natalia Sihombing and Indah Juliana Hutagalung, "Strategi Pengembangan Sektor Pariwisata Kabupaten Toba Dalam Upaya Meningkatkan Pendapatan Asli Daerah," *JISPOL : Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Politik* 1, no. 02 (2021): 150–72.

<sup>14</sup> Kementrian Pariwisata, "Garis Besar Rencana Kawasan Danau Toba," BPODT, 2020, <https://www.bpodt.id/storage/2020/04/Masterplan.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> JR Hutaeruk in his article "Batak Church: A Historical Struggle" wrote that the process of evangelization to the Land of Batak brought by missionaries brought changes to the context of religion/beliefs, customs and culture of the Toba Batak people. The HKBP Church was born as a combination of *habatahon* (Batak culture), namely the entire Batak identity (such as the concept of village- *huta*, language, clan, customs and beliefs) with the identity of the church originating from the West. This combination then brought changes in many ways to the context of the Toba Batak community.

prepare local communities for this change in openness by using the principles of Christian theology; religion adhered to by the majority of society. This problem has not yet fully occurred, but it can be anticipated because society is heading there.

Based on the explanation of migration theology that has been explained above, the question arises to what extent can migration theology be applied by the church contextually, specifically the church in Batak land? To answer this question, the author will construct the church's response in facing the reality of migration by looking at the identity of the church in Batak land as a communal faith community or communal ecclesiology. Apart from that, churches in Batak land are also famous for the strength of their customs and culture which play a role in regulating the life of their community. The communal identity of the Batak church with its rich customs and culture is a strength in facing the reality of migration that is occurring.

This research uses descriptive research methods with a literature study approach to collect theories related to the title of the article. Apart from that, reference sources such as research journals, books, official mass media reports (*websites*) from institutions working in the field of migrant assistance will be used. The collected theories will be used to find frameworks and generate new research findings.<sup>16</sup>

## DISCUSSION

### **The Reality of Migration in Batak Land: Challenges that Contain Blessings**

Toba Regency is a migration destination because it has decent sources of livelihood and promises hope of improving life for immigrants. Toba Regency's natural wealth with the presence of Lake Toba supports the development of the tourism industry, service provision, agricultural and trade sectors. The presence of a central government program through the Lake Toba Regional Acceleration Agency (BPDOT) has designated Toba Regency as one of the national tourism strategic areas so that the management, development and development of Lake Toba becomes a state priority. The Lake Toba area became increasingly in the spotlight when at the 209th session of the UNESCO Executive Board in Paris, France on 2 July 2020, the Toba Caldera was designated as a UNESCO

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<sup>16</sup> John W Creswell and Cheryl Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Fourth (SAGE, 2018), 36-37.

Global Geopark.<sup>17</sup> Then, on July 12 2019, the President of the Republic of Indonesia designated the Lake Toba area as one of five super priority tourism destinations in Indonesia. In the education sector, Toba district is experiencing rapid development with the presence of quality educational institutions up to tertiary level. Apart from that, there are large companies such as PT. Toba Pulp Lestari and PT. Inalum made Toba district a migration destination. Toba Regency can be accessed easily through the presence of two international airports, Silangit and Sibisa, several ferry ports that connect districts around the Lake Toba area and smooth land transportation.

Based on population census data, it can be seen that in the last 10 years there was a recorded population increase of 33,070 in Toba Regency.<sup>18</sup> As per data released by the Toba Regency Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in 2000 the population was 174,382, in 2010 the population was 173,129, and in 2020 the population was 206,199. In more detail, the population (people) in the last four years (2017-2020) was recorded as follows: in 2017 there were 44,516 residents; in 2018 there were 182,673 residents; In 2019 there were 183,712 residents, and in 2020 there were 206,199 residents. Based on this data, it can be seen that in one year (2019-2020) there was an increase in population of 22,487 people.

The population around the Lake Toba area is the Toba Batak tribe and the majority are Protestant Christians. The Toba Batak tribe is one of five Batak tribes (Karo Batak, Pakpak Batak, Angkola Batak, Simalungun Batak, Toba Batak). The Toba Batak tribe has a nomadic nature. Even though they have migrated to other countries, Batak people will still carry their ethnic identity.<sup>19</sup> This can be seen through the establishment of Batak community associations overseas and the establishment of tribal churches, such as the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant (HKBP). If viewed from daily life practices, the Toba Batak people are a society that has a high attitude of solidarity towards each other in their

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<sup>17</sup> Kementerian Luar Negeri, "Kaldera Toba Ditetapkan Sebagai UNESCO Global Geopark," KBRI Paris, 2020, <https://kemlu.go.id/portal/id/read/1457/berita/kaldera-toba-di-tetapkan-sebagai-unesco-global-geopark>.

<sup>18</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Toba, "Kabupaten Toba Dalam Angka Tahun 2021," Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupate Toba (Balige, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Bungaran Antonius Simanjuntak, *My Concept for Building Bangso Batak* (Jakarta: Indonesian Obor Pustaka Foundation, 2012); BA Simanjuntak, *Thoughts About Batak* (Medan: HKBP Nommensen University, 1986); Fuad Habibi Siregar and Rilus A. Kinseng, "Sociocultural Changes and the Level of Welfare of Batak Migrants in the Informal Sector in Bogor City," *Sodality: Journal of Rural Sociology* 3, no. 1 (2015): 10-23, <https://doi.org/10.22500/sodality.v3i1.9428>.

community.<sup>20</sup> Even the Toba Batak people have customary rules and laws to act in solidarity with other people outside their tribe who live together in one community.<sup>21</sup> The solidarity attitude towards other people is the result of the Toba Batak people's view that all humans are royal, the *daliha na tolu kinship system* which regulates kinship and communication patterns in society, the existence of cultural practices to welcome foreigners into their traditional community (clan patching, *aleale*, *sihal-sihal* and *horas greetings*), all of which become a bridge in building an open and universal brotherhood.<sup>22</sup>

Basically, there are three big challenges that need to be anticipated by the Batak Christian congregation in Toba Regency in facing the reality of migration. *First*, the erosion of local cultural riches. As a migration destination area, Toba Regency will become an area where there are new communities with various cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The new communities will certainly express themselves according to their respective identities and this situation will have a considerable influence on the form of culture that local communities have lived in so far. The meeting between local culture and immigrant culture will result in the loss of the value of cultural originality and local wisdom due to the presence of a new culture which demands a process of uniformity or unification of cultural practices. The choice for cultural unification and uniformity is seen as an effort for the good of living together.

*The second challenge* is the emergence of a rejection or resistance bias from local communities towards the presence of a new community with its cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. This challenge will lead to the vulnerability of conflict within society due to the local community's desire to maintain their cultural values and reject the presence of immigrants or new communities. Local communities see superiority in their own ethnicity, religion and culture and reject and close themselves to encountering diversity. This attitude is also called the attitude of absolutism, namely absolutists who view only their religion, ethnicity and culture as absolutely correct.<sup>23</sup> *The third challenge* is the birth of new cultural practices and religious sects or beliefs which are considered

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<sup>20</sup> Jubil Raplan Hutauruk, *Lahir, Berakar Dan Bertumbuh Di Dalam Kristus* (Pearaja Tarutung: Kantor Pusat HKBP, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Vergouwen, *Masyarakat Dan Hukum Adat Batak Toba* (Yogyakarta: LkiS Pelangi Aksara, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Yakobus Ndonga, "Kemanusiaan Dalam Falsafah Hidup Masyarakat Batak Toba," *Jurnal Citizenship: Media Publikasi Pendidikan Pancasila Dan Kewarganegaraan* 1, no. 1 (2018): 15, <https://doi.org/10.12928/citizenship.v1i1.10441>.

<sup>23</sup> Einar M. Sitompul, "Pengalaman Berteologi Dalam Konteks Kemajemukan," in *Menggagas Masa Depan: HKBP Pasca-100 Tahun Dr. I.L. Nommensen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2018), 128–35.

to provide more comfort and prosperity. Even new cultural practices and religious sects have a tendency to reduce religious truth. The emergence of this novelty can originate from existing cultural values or be the fruit of a mixing process of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. On the other hand, opportunities for religious sects or beliefs that have been banned by the government can grow further with the Indonesian government's guarantee for people to express themselves through their religion, culture and beliefs freely. This freedom also provides an opportunity for people to return to embracing original beliefs in Indonesia that were previously prohibited. For example, in the Toba area, there is an original Batak belief, namely Parmalim. This situation is certainly a serious challenge for the church which must be responded to immediately.

The challenges facing Christianity in the Toba Regency area do not originate from the impact of modernization but rather that its services are no longer relevant in responding to the needs of the congregation and society. Darwin Lumbantobing wrote two things that the church must anticipate in the postmodern era in a pluralistic context, namely *ecclesiocentrism* (enlarging the church institutionally) and *churchless Christianity* (Christianity without a church).<sup>24</sup> The search for an approach that can respond to the challenges mentioned above is an obligation that the church needs to provide. The church is called to create and build a service that is appropriate for the needs of the congregation and society.

### **Communal Ecclesiology: The Church Responds to the Reality of Migration in Batak Land**

Salvation from God is addressed to the world as a community. If initially God created humans as individuals (Adam's personality) then they became small groups (Adam and Eve) to a large group (communities) until humans increased in number and filled the earth. Community is a small picture of society where the connection between people in daily life practices occurs. Living in community is very important because obedience to Allah will be shown through living in harmony in the community. Community not only helps everyone to grow but is an illustration of the existence of a living community of faith in the world. Even Andrew Shepherd wrote: *"The self finds its*

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<sup>24</sup> Darwin Lumbantobing, *Bertumbuh Lokal Berbuah Universal* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2018), 175.



true identity in community, and the idea of community is only in communion with Christ with others. Thus community is a place where people can be human beings."<sup>25</sup> Moving on from his opinion, Shepherd then offers *ecclesial hospitality* as the basis for the church to accept other people in the community with the various goodness and challenges they bring.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Alawode said, "*the task of humanizing relationships between indigenous Christians and other migrants, and that this can be done through a well-developed program of human development in which both migrants and indigenous Christians should participate*".<sup>27</sup>

In essence, the life of the Church is the fruit of personal faith who lives out their faith seriously so that they are integrated into a communal community of faith. The church views itself as a small community, where each member has the spirit to share faith, sit together, share materials and a common desire to support each other in a broader context.<sup>28</sup> The church places itself with society so that it deals directly with the reality and context of society. The church in society is required to create space, join in solidarity with society and bring about real change. <sup>29</sup>That is why, the Church rejects the dominant social narrative of self-interest but strives to create a neutral and equal social space for everyone. <sup>30</sup>Because all believers are endowed with various gifts and all existing gifts work together to build the body. Awareness of God's love for all people will lead every Christian to see and interpret the relationships they have beyond those limited to family, close friends, faith fellowship. <sup>31</sup>Thus, believing personally and communally are two sides of Christianity that must be practiced and aligned together.

Referring to the origin of the word *ekklesia*, it was originally not a religious expression, but was used in terms of state government which has a communal meaning:

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew Shepherd, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality*, 2014. 208.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 219.

<sup>27</sup> Akinyemi O. Alawode, "Mission Original Research Migration and Human Development: A New Approach," *In Die Skriflig* 1, no. 49 (2015): 1–7.

<sup>28</sup> John Zupez, "Small Christian Communities – Rejuvenating the Church," *The Way* 3, no. 59 (2020): 97–109.

<sup>29</sup> Joas Adiprasetya, "The Good Yet Missing Innkeeper and the Possibility of Open Ecclesiology," *Ecclesiology* 14, no. 2 (2018): 185–202, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455316-01402006>.

<sup>30</sup> Danny Hunter, *Radical ecclesiology: The Church as an arena for reconciliation through cultivating alternative communities*, *Missiology: An International Review* 2020, Vol. 48(1) 75–82.

<sup>31</sup> Amos Yong also gives the same idea that the Holy Spirit is poured out on everyone and has a universal vision. See "AP (new) Matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World" in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIII, Nr. 2 (April 2005) 176–177.

a gathering of people, an association of independent citizens in a city, who are called together to decide on matters that affect their own welfare. From the meaning of its roots, ecclesiology comes from the Portuguese word *igreja* which comes from the Greek *ekklesia* which means being called out to enter into a fellowship or community. Thus, the main character of the church is community. The church as a community must be contextual, that is, the church pays attention to the problems and needs that exist in the context of the community where the church is located and takes a stance to respond to these situations.

Currently, there are still many churches that adhere to traditional ecclesiology which is based on a dogmatic understanding of existence only. How the church re-examines its ecclesiological formulation in response to the reality of migration requires an understanding of the identity of the church.<sup>32</sup> The church is again realizing its identity, that the true church is the church that exists for other people. Thus, church services are not focused only on people inside the church but also on other people outside the church. Therefore, differences and diversity that exist outside the church, namely religion, ethnicity and culture are no longer understood as threats to church life, but rather as wealth.

The church as *ekklesia*, believers come out of the world and fellowship and are then assigned to serve and witness in the midst of the world. The fruit of communion with God must be manifested in communion with fellow human beings. On the contrary, fellowship between human beings is the fruit of communion with God. Koinonia, based on its meaning in Greek and Latin, contains the basic essence of a community where each member participates in other members of the community. The meaning and meaning of Coinonia always emphasizes action rather than appreciation of meaning where its members first receive from each other and then give to members outside other communities.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the coinonia terminology originates from the context of social life, namely the relationships between individuals in society. The church community created by God in Christ is not actually formed by its members but is built by God in which its members are invited to participate.<sup>34</sup> Community is a blessing that contains an element

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<sup>32</sup> Adiprasetya, "The Good Yet Missing Innkeeper and the Possibility of Open Ecclesiology."

<sup>33</sup> Lumbantobing, *Bertumbuh Lokal Berbuah Universal*, 433-436.

<sup>34</sup> Bonhoeffer Dietrich, *Life Together* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1949).

of solidarity between people and everyone is called to enter the community, even when someone dies, someone remains in the community in Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup>

Migration to the Toba area changed the condition of the local community, which was previously a homogeneous society into a heterogeneous society. In the midst of a heterogeneous society, for the Batak people, custom still coexists with religion. Religion alone is not enough, it must be strengthened by custom.<sup>36</sup> The existence of customs in a pluralistic society is considered to enrich the meaning of religious teachings. A church that is strong with its traditions then positions itself as part of a pluralistic society, demanding proactiveness in getting to know other people, learning to live together, and helping to build dynamic relationships to create harmony.<sup>37</sup> This situation makes doing theology in a pluralistic society not an option but a necessity. Joas Adiprasetya offers *open ecclesiology* (an open Church) amidst global society's anxiety to meet other people in diversity.<sup>38</sup> An open church re-examines the classic characteristics of the church as one, holy and Catholic and in an apostolic light with new characteristics, namely, diverse, fragile, concrete and friendly. Furthermore, *open ecclesiology* offers the concept of an open church with three main requirements, namely: it must be rooted in the center of the Christian tradition, namely the Triune God, understood by society in its cultural context, awakening Christianity to move out of passive Christianity which is only focused on its community towards a deeper context. wide. In line with Adiprasetya's opinion, Danny Hunter stated the importance of understanding culture in responding to the reality of migration. Hunter further stated that the church is called to show radical solidarity by incarnating in a cultural form that migrants can understand.<sup>39</sup> Adiprasetya and Hunter's opinion, which emphasizes being an open and friendly church through understanding the cultural context to reach a wider community, supports the author's idea of developing a church approach in Batak land to respond to the reality of migration. Thus, understanding the local cultural context and church identity becomes the starting point in constructing the author's migration theology.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Sitompul, "Pengalaman Berteologi Dalam Konteks Kemajemukan."

<sup>37</sup> Sitompul.

<sup>38</sup> Adiprasetya, "The Good Yet Missing Innkeeper and the Possibility of Open Ecclesiology."

<sup>39</sup> Danny Hunter, "Radical Ecclesiology: The Church as an Arena for Reconciliation through Cultivating Alternative Communities," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 1 (2020): 75–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829619887391>.

Referring to the HKBP church, it is the oldest church in the Lake Toba area and is the church that was the forerunner to the birth and development of Christianity in Batak Land. HKBP Church has a vision as an inclusive, dialogical and open church.<sup>40</sup> An inclusive attitude is defined as openness and willingness to hear and be heard by other religions, willing to give meaning to other people and conversely willing to accept meaning from adherents of other religions. With this attitude, the church tries to open itself to coexistence and collaborate with other religions and believers without having to ignore Christian truths and the wealth of local wisdom that has been lived out in the church so far. For example, the local wisdom of the Toba Batak community is *dalihan na tolu*. If the local wisdom of Dalihan Natolu is linked and constructed as a strength in framing sustainable development in the Lake Toba area in the economic, environmental and socio-cultural fields,<sup>41</sup> then local wisdom also has the potential to be understood as a theological response to the social realities that occur in society.

### **The Early Church in Acts. 2:41-47 as a Model of Communal Ecclesiology**

The Toba Batak community is very strong in its concept of communal life. Communal life is characterized by the role of custom which is almost inseparable from the religion one adheres to, one of which is the *dalihan natolu* custom. *Dalihan natolu* literally means "three-legged stove", to describe the system of kinship relations that bind and regulate the Toba Batak community. The presence of the term *sihal-sihal* in the *natolu dalihan* can be interpreted as an attitude to welcome the presence of other people outside the Toba Batak community into the community.<sup>42</sup> Thus, communal life is inseparable from religious or spiritual life where the presence of God or the divine is determined by the harmony of a community.

Characteristics of the early church in Acts. 2:41-47 shows the nature of the Church which celebrates personal faith communally within the community of faith. In Acts. 2:41-47 the apostles set the right example for living by gathering, breaking bread and praying.

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<sup>40</sup> Kantor Pusat HKBP, *Tata Dasar Dan Tata Laksana HKBP Tahun 2002* (Pematang Siantar: Percetakan HKBP, 2015), 9.

<sup>41</sup> Defri Elias Simatupang, "Dalihan Natolu, a Local Wisdom as Framing of Three Pillars for Sustainability Development at Toba Lake Area," *Journal of Culture* 12, no. 2 (2017): 95-96.

<sup>42</sup> In practice, when cooking on a stove, sometimes there are imbalances because the shape of the stone or pot is not balanced. To align it, another object is used to support it. In Batak language, this object is called *sihal-sihal*. When it is positioned correctly, it is ready to cook.

This is proof that their faith in Christ is manifested and celebrated communally in fellowship. Adiprasetya stated that the context of Acts. 2:41-47 describes two models of church at that time, namely the gathered church and the scattered church.<sup>43</sup> The sincerity of faith is visible in the life of the early Church, which always showed its characteristics as a community. They are present as someone who believes in Christ personally without ignoring the communal aspects of their life of faith.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, in Acts. 2:41-47 describes thousands of people believing and being baptized as followers of Christ. Those newly baptized come from various tribes, regions, religions and beliefs, most of whom were originally immigrants on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After believing and being baptized, some of the immigrants and pilgrims chose to stay and form small communities that lived in the midst of society at that time. The author's assumption is that these small communities are then referred to as scattered churches as mentioned by Adiprasetya in his writing.<sup>45</sup> The communities that existed at that time then became images of the first Christian communities that showed a way of living and expressing faith.

By using the text Acts. 2:41-47, the author offers three efforts that the church must undertake to demonstrate the quality of its faith in society. *First*, daily work (*daily labor*) is carried out by sharing the goods needed by everyone in the community. *Second*, community or communal work (*fellowship labor*), namely a community that is not just about gathering and telling stories, but a community that contains the meaning of *koinonia*, namely a reciprocal relationship between one person and another, who want to serve each other, build, encourage, improve and entertain beyond the boundaries of the community to reach those outside the community. Robert Setio uses the term living ecclesiology, namely a church that must capture the complexity of a multi-relationship network.<sup>46</sup> *Third*, the work of God (*God's labor*), namely breaking bread and praying as a holy communion ritual which is carried out as a reminder of the congregation's faith in Christ.

In the context of the reality of migration in Batak land, local communities in Toba district, specifically Christian congregations with Toba Batak culture, are called to

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<sup>43</sup> Joas Adiprasetya, "Gathered and Scattered: Considering Two Models of Ecclesiology," *DIEGESIS: Journal of Theology*, Volume 8, no. 2(nd): 124–44.

<sup>44</sup> Kristin Colberg, "Ecclesiology Today and Its Potential to Serve a Missionary Church," *Missiology: An International Review* 1, no. 46 (2018): 23–26.

<sup>45</sup> Adiprasetya, "Gathered and Scattered: Considering Two Ecclesiological Models."

<sup>46</sup> Robert Setio, "Mencari Eklesiologi Yang Hidup," *DUNAMIS: Jurnal Teologi Dan Pendidikan Kristiani* 7, no. 1 (n.d.): 1–19.

welcome the diversity brought by immigrants by being guided by communal ecclesiology (the church as a community of faith). The church as a communal ecclesiology sees immigrants not only as objects receiving compassion by the church. The church interacts openly with people outside their community and together to do *daily labor* and *fellowship labor* while always remembering *God's labor*. In other words, there is a meaning of reciprocal relations and mutual need in it. Through *Daily Labor*, *Fellowship Labor* and *God's Labor*, the church understands its identity and status as *a communal ecclesiology*, namely a community of faith that is open and welcoming to everyone with the strength of the role of local cultural context while adhering firmly to Christian principles.

## CONCLUSION

Referring to the explanation above, to respond to the reality of migration in Batak land, the church remembers its identity as *communal ecclesiology*, which has three principles. *First*, as a faith community, the church is open to inviting and welcoming other people (immigrants) into its community through cultural understanding and local wisdom that newcomers can understand. *Second*, the openness of churches in Batak land to the diversity brought by migrants is based on their identity as communal churches or communal ecclesiology. *Third*, churches in Batak land adhere to Christian principles without losing the rich values of local culture. As God migrated in His Son Jesus Christ and became equal to man; is an act of love that goes beyond the limits of human thought, so the church as a communal community of faith is called to express solidarity in responding to the reality of migration. Radical solidarity can only be demonstrated if the church understands its identity correctly in the context in which the church is located and lives its *daily labor*, *fellowship labor* and *God's labor*.

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