

## Enlarging Boundaries:

### Romans 15:7-13 and the Churches in Nagaland

—Zakali Shohe

Nagaland, one of the eight states of North East India covering a total area of 16,579 sq. km, with a population of 1,980,602 per the 2011 census of India, is comprised of at least sixteen major recognized ethnic tribes and more than twenty minor tribes, each with its own language.<sup>1</sup> It shares borders with three Indian states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur. This proximity lends itself to the movement of people both from other parts of India and outside India into Nagaland and vice versa. Nagaland has become a destination point for economic migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet and other parts of mainland India.

Civilizations have always been characterized by human migration. Such movements, which today may be understood as a process of moving either beyond international political borders or within national borders, have contributed to the structural transformation of societies and economies. As defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants, a migrant worker is a “person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.” More broadly described in the UN document, the term “migrant” “should be understood as covering all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of ‘personal convenience’ and without intervention of an external compelling factor.”<sup>2</sup> The migration of people to new places always raises difficult, if common issues, including “access to justice without fear of deportation, harsh border controls, lack of evidence-based policies on migration, xenophobia, no systemic identification or consideration of the most vulnerable groups, invisibility of migrant communities at policymaking levels, governance gaps, the need for new working structures, and more focus on migrant communities in the Universal Periodic Review.”<sup>3</sup> As with migration worldwide, Nagaland is experiencing profound society-wide questions of identity, justice, conflict, and ecology.

Firstly, Nagas in Nagaland are an ethnic group that is particular both about groups that come in from the “outside” and what they bring with them. Economic migrants, for example, bring with them their distinct identity and practices as Bangladeshi, Nepalese, Tibetan, Bihari, Bangla, Assamese and so on. This, for the Nagas, is a threat to their identity as Nagas. Their identity is connected to their land and therefore the influx of migrants raises the possibility of turning Nagas into a minority in their own land. While Nagas benefit from

1 <http://states-of-india.findthebest.in/l/19/Nagaland> (accessed on January 27, 2016).

2 “Migrant/Migration,” accessed April 22, 2016, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant>.

3 Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, “Conversations with Migrant Advocates: Do We Believe in the Resurrection of the Body?” *The Intersections of Migration, Human Rights & Development Justice, A Resource Book of Churches Witnessing with Migrants*, eds. Liberato C. Bautista and Mervin Sol H. Toquero (Quezon & New York: National Council of Churches in the Philippines & General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, 2014), 92.



the services provided by economic migrants, they are very negative and suspicious toward them and treat them as outsiders.

Secondly, Nagas in Nagaland are ninety-five percent Christian with a few in the remote villages where people still practice ancestral religion. But the influx of economic migrants who also bring with them their religious practices, faith and belief like Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and so on, is also perceived as a threat: the intermingling and intermarriages will defile their religious faith as Christians.

Thirdly, the Nagas also attribute the rise in the incidence of crime, especially of rape, to the influx of economic migrants especially from Bangladesh. Nagas point to the rape of Naga women, previously unheard of in Naga society, as being perpetrated by “outsiders” (mainly by economic migrants). Whether factually demonstrable or not, such perceptions underscore the stereotyping of “outsiders” as troublemakers and de-stabilizers of an otherwise stable society.

The churches in Nagaland have not been immune to these difficult societal issues. In fact, they have tried to address these problems. The churches in Nagaland are looking not only for answers to these problems, but also for guidance from the sources of their faith, including the Bible. As a student of the New Testament, I feel a profound obligation to assist in this search for answers to these difficult questions. The perspective may be formulated thus: Does Paul’s “acceptance motif” found in Romans 15:7-13 have anything to say to the churches in Nagaland regarding the dilemmas posed by migration?

## Jew-Gentile Context

We note here that opinions differ on the audience of Romans. Some argue for the Jewish believers as a majority,<sup>4</sup> militating against the view that Paul was addressing mainly the Gentile believers.<sup>5</sup> However, we cannot suggest with certainty a clear-cut division in terms of numbers. But, one can only suggest that both Jewish and Gentile believers are referred to in the epistle to the Romans.<sup>6</sup> In considering the edict of Claudius

4 Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine*, trans. Eduard Zeller, vol. 1 (1876, Reprint; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 321; T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909), I: 422.

5 William Sanday and Arthur Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons 1901), xxi-xxiv; C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1957), 22; W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* ed. trans. by H.C. Kee (London: SCM Press, 1966), 218-20.

6 C.E.B. Cranfield points that it cannot be an overwhelming majority and a tiny minority (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary, 2 vols. [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975]). A similar view is also held by Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 13; Sanday and Headlam suggest that the community to which Paul is writing is Gentile in its general complexion, but it also comprises of a subsequent number of Jews (*Romans*, xxxiv); Joseph Fitzmyer also proposes a mixed community of both Jews and the Gentiles, but predominantly of Gentile background (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 33). Karl Paul Donfried, *The Romans Debate*. Revised and Expanded Edition (1977. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991); John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 2:172-74; Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans. Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 215. W. S. Campbell, “Why did Paul write Romans,” *Expository Times* 85, no. 9 (1973-74): 268; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. & ed. G. W. Bromiley, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: SCM, 1980), 366. Offering an alternate view that Paul is addressing a Gentile community are, A. Andrew Das, “Praise the Lord, All you Gentiles’: The Encoded Audience of Romans 15:7-13,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34/1 (2011): 101-2; Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007); Joshua D. Garro, “The Circumcision of Christ: Romans 15:7-13,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 34, no. 4 (2012): 306.

A few evidences from the epistle that point to both the Jews and the Gentiles: The formula, “to the Jews first and also the Gentiles,” is found frequently. There is also a redefinition of Jews and the reference to the Jews and the Gentiles praising God (Rom. 2-5; 15:8-12). The other instance where we find the presence of Jewish believers is in Romans 16:3-11, where Paul refers to Aquila and Priscilla, Andronicus, Junia, and Herodian. Paul also addresses the Jews (Rom. 2:3, 17) and his readers with the Mosaic Law (Rom. 6:14; 7:1, 4); refers to Abraham as our ancestor (Rom. 14:1) and to issues surrounding Jewish people (Rom. 3:19-20, 27-31; 4:12-15; 5:13-14; 6:14; 7:1-25; 8:2-4; 9:30-10:8). Similarly, there are also references to Gentile believers in the epistle. Paul refers to himself as an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 1:5-6; 15:14-21), even his



expelling the Jews from Rome in AD 49 as a possible historical background for Paul's letter to the Romans,<sup>7</sup> this edict could have significantly shaped Christian faith in Rome in the early years.<sup>8</sup> Probably one can assume that with the expulsion of the Jews and the Jewish believers in Christ, Gentile believers would have increased in number, and by the time Paul was writing to the Roman believers, Gentiles could have been in the majority even when the Jewish believers returned.

In line with the view that Paul in Romans is addressing a mixed community of Jews and Gentiles, this essay attempts to look at the acceptance motif in such a setting. In taking this stand, the essay does not intend to argue for Jew-Gentile unification as the sole purpose of Paul for writing Romans. In recent years many studies have come up on Paul's reasons for writing Romans.<sup>9</sup> The epistle itself gives evidence of the many purposes of Paul, but it is beyond the scope of this essay to go into details. Hence, keeping in mind the Jew-Gentile context of Romans, this essay will take up the acceptance motif in redefining relationships and enlarging boundaries. In accordance with this aim of looking at the pericope, I will avoid a detailed discussion of every exegetical issue arising from the text. Instead I will concentrate on how Romans 15:7-13 contributes to redefining relationships and enlarging boundaries in the context of the Jew-Gentile relationship. In relation to the acceptance motif in Romans 15:7-13 this essay will highlight two aspects: acceptance on the basis of the example of Christ and Scripture bears witness.

### *Acceptance on the Basis of the Deed of Christ*

In the Pauline epistles προσλαμβάνω (*proslambano*) occurs only in Romans and Philemon (Rom. 14:1; 15:7; Philem. 17). In Romans it appears in the context of accepting a person despite the differences in their ways of life and practices; likewise in Philemon it appears in the context of welcoming into a house. In both contexts it is a call for incorporating another member or other members into a community or fellowship.

Paul's exhortation in Romans 15:7-13 begins with a call for acceptance. The double use of προσλαμβάνω (*proslambano*) in 15:7 indicates the importance of the issue. In its first usage (Rom.15:7a), προσλαμβάνω (*proslambano*) refers to believers in Christ receiving one another while its second usage (Rom.15:7b) points to Christ's accepting the believers. In Romans 14:1, the "strong" are to accept the "weak," while in the present text with the use of ἀλλήλους (*allēlous*) Paul makes a more generic reference exhorting the Roman believers in Christ to accept one another. The Greek word ἀλλήλους (*allēlous*) is an expression used by Paul for individual members and the Christ believing communities in general (cf. Rom. 12:5, 9-16).

The issue of diet in a community gathering consisting of both the "weak" and the "strong" appears in the preceding verses (Rom.14: 2-3, 6b, 14, 20-21). The idea of glorifying God (Rom. 15:7, 8-11) also reflects a

---

arguments about God's plan for Jews in Romans 11:1-24 is directed to Gentiles in 11:13 and his exhortations on dietary laws and observance of special days are directed to both the Jews and the Gentiles (Rom. 14-15). This indicates that Paul was aware of the different groups among the believers in Rome and his teachings were directed to both groups within the epistle. The vulnerability of the returning Jews makes Paul warn his Gentile audience against the attitude of superiority (Rom. 11:17-21). In his exhortation on the "weak" and the "strong" in Romans 14:1-15:6, Paul also encourages the strong to accept the "weak", most of whom were returnees from the expulsion.

7 Those who take this stand are Das, *Solving the Romans Debate*, 149-202; Cranfield, *Romans*, I: 17-18; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, xlix-liv; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 31-32; Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, 98-108; Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 4-5. On the contrary, Sanday William and Arthur C. Headlam suggest that there was no expulsion under Claudius and that Dio's report stands valid against Suetonius or Acts (*Romans*, xxl).

8 Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome," 92; Cranfield, *Romans*, I: 16.

9 See L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988); Lo Lung-Kwong, *Paul's Purpose in Writing Romans: The Upbuilding of a Jewish and Gentile Christian Community in Rome* (Hongkong: Alliance Biblical Seminary, 1998); Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 80-91.



liturgical setting. Paul is reminding the Roman believers in Christ of the need to accept one another in the context of community gatherings. Nevertheless, for both groups to accept one another and partake together in common worship and meals, they need to compromise based on strong theological grounding. On the one hand, the Gentiles are not to disregard Jewish dietary habits but be sensitive to them and accommodate their dietary habits accordingly (Rom. 14:13-23). On the other hand, the Jews are not to consider adherence to the tradition as a primary necessity for Christian faith.

The basis for Paul's exhortation on acceptance is the service of Christ to the Jews and to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:7). This pattern of presenting his exhortation is consistent with Romans 15:1-3a, where Paul's exhortation is based on an appeal to what Christ has accomplished. In these verses, the deed of Christ remains the center of Paul's exhortation. It provides a basis for an important motif in Roman 15:7-13 or even in Romans 14-15, i.e., "accept one another."

In referring to the pattern of Christ, Paul uses ὁ Χριστός (*ho Christos*) in Romans 15:7. In the Pauline epistles Χριστός (*Christos*) and ὁ Χριστός (*ho Christos*) occur without much distinction. But it is highly likely that in this pericope the use of ὁ Χριστός (*ho Christos*) and Χριστός (*Christos*) alternatively in verses 7 and 8 suggest an important differentiation. In Romans 14 and 15 the use of the definite article with Χριστός is constantly maintained (Rom. 14:18; 15:3, 7).<sup>10</sup> As in Romans 15:3, the definite article in 15:7 indicates that the emphasis of the text is to highlight the significance of *Christos*, the Messiah. Thus, the presence of the definite article ὁ also indicates that Χριστός (*Christos*) needs to be regarded as a title of Jesus, i.e., the Messiah whose deeds benefit both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Unlike in Romans 15:7, Christ in 15:8 appears without the definite article ὁ, suggesting that it is a proper name. As James Dunn surmises, "The purpose is to focus on the person rather than on the people as the one in and through whom fulfillment of covenant promise and gentile incoming have been made possible."<sup>11</sup> Hence, the article ὁ (*ho*) with Χριστός (*Christos*) in Romans 15:7 is significant. After this, Paul reinforces his appeal by referring to the purpose of Christ's acceptance of the believers, i.e., to the glory of God.

### Scripture Bears Witness

In order to demonstrate that Christ has accepted both the Jews and the Gentiles, Paul further appeals to the Jewish scriptures in Romans 15:9b-12. Noteworthy is Paul's strategy of bringing texts from the Law, Prophets and Writings in a closely knitted structure in order to indicate that the acceptance of the Gentiles is found within the key cluster of Scriptures. This powerfully provides an avenue for both the Jews and the Gentiles to glorify God together.

Most interpreters<sup>12</sup> refer to the "Gentiles" as the link word suturing the citations, but a few<sup>13</sup> include also the praise language. It is true that the common element in all the citations is the catchword "Gentiles." However, the way the citations are presented may indicate another crucial theme. Noteworthy is Paul's appeal to three

<sup>10</sup> Χριστός preceded with an article in Romans is found in 7:4; 8:35; 9:3,5; 14:18; 15:3, 7, 19; 16:16.

<sup>11</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 846.

<sup>12</sup> Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 206; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 705; Keck, "Christology, Soteriology, and the Praise of God (Romans 15:7-13)," 91; Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 272.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas Moo makes a passing reference that the praise language does connect the citations but he does not explicate how it binds the citations or even links the citations to the entire pericope (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 878).



parts of the Scripture, viz., the Law, the Prophets and the Writings along with the use of diverse praise vocabularies. The praise language is elucidated with parallel terms as given in the chart below.

Praise language		
Romans 15:7	εἰς <b>δόξαν</b> τοῦ θεοῦ ( <i>eis doxan tou theou</i> ) (note that this verse is not a citation, added for reference to show the praise language that dominates in this text)	Glory
Romans 15:9b	τὰ δὲ ἔθνη ὑπὲρ ἐλέους <b>δοξάσαι</b> τὸν θεόν ( <i>ta de ethnē hyper eleous doxasai ton theon</i> )	To glorify
Parallel terms		
Romans 15:9b	διὰ τοῦτο <b>ἐξομολογήσομαι</b> σοι ἐν ἔθνεσιν ( <i>dia touto exomologēsomai soi en ethnesin</i> )	Praise Sing
Romans 15:10	καὶ τῷ ὀνόματί σου <b>ψαλῶ</b> ( <i>kai tō onomati sou psalō</i> )	
Romans 15:11	<b>εὐφράνθητε</b> , ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ καὶ <b>ἐπαινεσάτωσαν</b> αὐτὸν πάντες οἱ λαοὶ ( <i>euphranthēte ethnē meta tou laou autou kai epainesatōsan auton pantes hoi laoi</i> )	Rejoice Give praise

The first citation (Ps. 17:49 LXX) bears a note of confession in which the psalmist praises God among the Gentiles. Here, David exalts the name of God for delivering him from the hands of his enemies. The second citation (Deut. 32:43) is an invitation for the Gentiles to rejoice with Israel. The third citation (Ps. 116:1) emphasizes the universality of praise. The fourth citation (Isa. 11:10) speaks of the cause of the inclusion of the Gentiles and the reason for the Jews and the Gentiles praising God. The reference to the Davidic lineage and kingship in Psalm 17:49 LXX and Isaiah 11:10 in the first and the last citation of Romans 15:9b-12 provides the basis for the call to praise from Deuteronomy 32:43 and Psalm 116:1 LXX. Paul's reading of Scripture in Romans 15 can be taken eschatologically where the risen Christ stands in the place of David.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the resurrected Christ exalts the name of God among the nations. As a response to this exaltation, the Gentiles join the Jews in praising God, as indicated in the second citation from Deuteronomy 32:43. The inclusion of the Gentiles results in a common praise of the Jews and the Gentiles in the citation from Psalm 116:1 LXX. As indicated οἱ λαοὶ (the peoples) can be generalized as neither Jew nor Gentile. The psalm emphasizes the universal glorification of God. The cause for this universal praise is the Messiah from the "shoot of Jesse" who will restore Israel and in whom the Gentiles will hope. The scriptural citations from the Writings, the Law, and the Prophets demonstrate that Scripture bears witness to God's faithfulness and mercy to the Jews and the Gentiles, resulting in a universal praise. The coming together of the Jews and the Gentiles in common worship, glorifying God together, redefines boundaries.

<sup>14</sup> See also, Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/ Nottingham: Apollos, 2007), 689.



## Redefining Boundaries

The notion of an inclusive community of both Jews and Gentiles is especially indicated in Paul's call for acceptance in Romans 15:7-13. In this call for acceptance, Paul urges the Jews and the Gentiles to be open to one another. Consequently, the exclusive claim of the Jews as the only race chosen by God is relativized. Moreover, the meaning of Israel in its strict sense as referring to an ancestor, land, or a descent from the tribe of the patriarch is also enlarged upon (Acts 2:36; 7:41; Rom. 9:27; 2Cor. 3:7; Phil. 3:5; Heb. 8:8; Jth 6:2).<sup>15</sup> Such redefinition arises from the act of God in Christ. A brief analysis of Paul's exhortation in relation to the identity of the believers would give us a clearer picture.

Prior to Romans 9, Paul frequently refers to "Jew and Gentile," but from Romans 9-11 there is a shift in the terminology to "Israel" (Rom. 9:6b). James Dunn argues that Paul is not trying to merge two distinct identities, "Jew and Gentile" but through the shift in terminology to "Israel" Paul opens up a "different possibility." The term "Jew" or "Jews" represents an ethnic identifier or has a geographical connotation. It refers to Jewish people in order to distinguish them from the other nations. The term "Israel," on the other hand, connotes an "insider" perspective, connected with the covenant. Dunn's conclusion is that "Jew" is understood in relation to the land, whereas "Israel" is understood within the sphere of a believer's relation to God. However, it is possible to include "Gentiles" within "Israel" and this is what Paul is attempting to do in Romans 9-11 with the shift in terminology.<sup>16</sup> In the new identity, Israel is not defined in relation to physical descent but in relation to the divine call. *Καλεῶ* (*kaleō* Rom. 9:6-29) is the key word for determining Israel's identity.<sup>17</sup> Such a definition is also taken up in Romans 11:28-29. The children of God are therefore the children of promise and not children of the flesh. Neither is election determined by works, but by God's calling (*καλοῦντος* Rom. 10-13 esp. v. 12).

Clearly, the boundary of historical Israel is redefined and this arises from God's salvific act in Christ. In defining the identity of Israel through the call of God, Paul does not deny the election of historic Israel, but redefines it,<sup>18</sup> not by physical descent (Rom. 9:7-12), but through life in Christ. Life in Christ is not a label of identity but it is a description of belonging for Israel and the other nations. Thus, the coming together of the Jews and the Gentiles remains an important dimension in Paul's emphasis on the theme "in Christ." Paul even states that the example of Christ in accepting all actualizes a universal praise (Rom. 15:7-12). For Paul, the promises of God to the fathers are confirmed and actualized in Christ (Rom. 15:7-8). The act of faithfulness actualized in Christ opens up belonging to the Gentiles, who through mercy praise God along with the Jews (Rom. 15:9-12). They too become worshippers of the God of Israel through the act of Christ. However, the actualization of the promises through Christ does not make them "Israel," in terms of an ethnic group. It rather provides them a new status as children of God.

Paul proceeds to show how in this redefinition the promises of God to the fathers are not nullified. For him, the covenant promises with Israel remain valid and he has frequently emphasized the priority of the Jews in Romans (Rom. 1:16; 2:9, 10; 3:9, 29; 9:24; 15:7). This priority remains because of God's promises to their ancestors (Rom. 11:28-29). The inclusion of the Gentiles does not nullify God's promises to Israel. For, if God's promises were nullified, then the salvation to the Gentiles would have no guarantee. Thus, Paul in Romans 15:8-9a shows that God in Christ remains faithful to the promises to the fathers but at the same time extends

15 H. Kuhli, "Ἰσραήλ," *EDNT*, vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 202-4.

16 Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 506-514.

17 So also, Johann D. Kim, *God, Israel, and the Gentiles. Rhetoric and Situation in Romans 9-11*, SBL Dissertation Series 176 (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 126.

18 As also, Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 510, 514.



his mercy to the Gentiles, who look up to the Jewish Messiah as a banner (Rom. 15:12). In this sense, the divine act of God in Christ to the Jews and the Gentiles in accepting all, redefines the boundary of Israel. This relationship becomes evident and is expressed in a community comprised of believers who wanted to adhere to the Jewish way of life and those who wanted freedom from it.

In redefining the identity of the people of God as being linked to the life in Christ, Paul does not demand of both Jews and Gentiles the renunciation of their identities as Jews and Gentiles. In fact, the identity as people of God adds to the believer's multiple identities and roles. To be sure, Paul does not directly use words like "multiple identities" and "roles" in relation to the believers in Christ. However, the idea that as followers of Christ, believers continue to belong to the world and participate in the public and private spheres is conspicuous in the Epistle to the Romans. In Romans 12-13 Paul highlights the four spheres of the Christian life: the individual sphere (12:1-2), the Christian community (12:3-13), the social sphere (12:14-21; 13:8-10), and the political sphere (13:1-3). A believer in Christ continues to belong to the world for he/she is neither removed from the world nor set back into it.<sup>19</sup> The notion of embracing multiple identities and roles is also emphasized in Paul's call for acceptance in Romans 14-15. He asks neither party to renounce its practices, nor to judge the other. Instead, he calls for acceptance (Rom. 15:7). He exhorts the "strong" to accept the "weak in faith" (Rom. 14:1) and not to despise them (Rom. 1:3). Conversely, the "weak" are not to judge the "strong" (Rom. 14:10).

For Paul "the one who observes the day does it for the Lord. The one who eats, eats for the Lord because he gives thanks to God, and the one who abstains from eating abstains for the Lord, and he gives thanks to God" (Rom. 14:6). He further adds to his exhortation by stating that the kingdom of God is not only food and drink, but also "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). These kingdom values can be visible only if the members of the believing communities live in harmony despite their diverse practices and ethos. In accepting each other, they will be able to strengthen one another and grow together as a community of faith (Rom. 14:19; 15:2, 5, 7). This leads inexorably to the redefining of their relationship, not based on strict Jewish practices, but through the act of Christ.

Thus far, this essay has attempted to bring out the acceptance motif in Romans 15:7-13. As mentioned, the call for acceptance is on the basis of the example of Christ who accepted both the Jews and the Gentiles to the glory of God, and to this, Scripture also bears witness. From the above analysis of Romans 15:7-13 it can be said that the call for acceptance describes a new kind of relationship, one expressed in openness, an openness to accept the "other." In accepting one another relationships are redefined and people move from narrow boundaries to a much larger "sense of the whole"—to the glory of God in Christ.

### **Challenges for the Churches in Nagaland**

I return now to the question posed earlier in this essay: Does Romans 15:7-13, Paul's "acceptance motif" have anything to say to the churches in Nagaland regarding the dilemmas posed by migration?

#### *Attitude towards the Migrants*

First, there is a stereotyping of the migrants. Many Nagas say that they are not against the migrants from Nepal, Tibet, and Mainland India, who have done exceedingly well in business sectors in Dimapur and Kohima.

---

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Francis Watson for the insight on the four spheres of the Christian life, from his public lecture at Trinity Theological College, Singapore, on October 2, 2014.

The Nagas generally assume that the migrants from these places do not indulge in crimes.<sup>20</sup> However, the Naga society adheres to a myth that regards the non-locals to be responsible for bringing into the land rape and also other crimes. The migrant from Bangladesh becomes the main target as they can disappear easily; they have no proper identity proof or a permanent place of residence in Nagaland. This understanding unfortunately proved accurate when four migrant workers who had no papers to prove their Indian citizenship raped a Naga woman in February 2011.<sup>21</sup> In such a context where stereotyping is common, Paul's exhortation on the example of Christ has implications for the churches in Nagaland. For a Jew, one born a Jew was considered part of a chosen race, the people of God, and the Gentiles were considered outside the people of God. This stereotyping of Jews as the insiders and the Gentiles as the outsiders within the boundary of the people of God is broken down by Christ Jesus whose deeds benefit both the Jews and the Gentiles as seen in Roman 15:7-13. Christ accepted everyone and so Jews who are considered as the chosen race and the Gentiles who are considered as outsiders are to accept one another on the basis of Christ's acceptance. The churches in Nagaland can learn from Paul to enlarge their boundaries and accept people "outside" their faith and their own ethnic communities.

### *Question of Identity*

Second, in the context of the influx of migrants the question of identity becomes a challenging issue in Nagaland. The history and identity of Nagas and their identity are connected to land and now with the influx of the migrants, the Nagas feel insecure that their land will be taken from them. Nagas in Nagaland fear that the day will come when the Bangladeshi "infiltrators" will reduce them to a minority in their own native land. Jakato Sumi, convener of Survival Nagaland, remarks "Bangladeshis will reduce us to a minority if we do not stand united. We are also talking about dignity of labor. If our young people do all kinds of work then the Bangladeshis will have to anyway go."<sup>22</sup> There is thus the growing sense of insecurity among many Nagas that people from outside the state (both national and international) are tapping into economic opportunities more effectively than they do. There is vast unemployment in this group. It is a common notion that Naga people look out for business that reaps big returns. As a result, street-side businesses, retail, wholesale, and poultry in the region are owned mostly by non-Nagas. All this has brought about concern with regard to Naga identity and its survival in the new world of entangled economics and politics.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, for many, the inter-mingling, adoption, and intermarriages pose a threat to the identity of being a Naga by "blood." With many mixed marriages between Nagas and Bangladeshis, they are insecure that the identity and heritage of the Nagas is at stake. As Christians the Nagas also think that they should not mingle with the migrants especially those coming from Bangladesh, as most of them are Muslims. They have the attitude that Nagaland is a Christian state and so intermarriages between Christians and Muslims defile Christian faith and constitute an invasion of their space that must be avoided.

The fear of losing their identity and land that accompanies this so-called "invasion" gives rise to exclusivism where there is no openness to accept the political, cultural, and religious dimensions of the "other." In this case the understanding of building relationships is narrowly confined and tied to immediate family or to

20 "Illegal Immigrant Issue a Threat to Future Survival," <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2012/04/16/illegal-immigrant-issue-threat-future-survival> (accessed on 23 January 2016).

21 "As Nagaland Frets about Loss of Identity, Women's Choices Have Come under Scrutiny," <http://scroll.in/article/712469/as-nagaland-frets-about-loss-of-identity-womens-choices-have-come-under-scrutiny> (accessed on January 25, 2016).

22 "Nagaland: Movement against 'Immigrants' Brewing for a While," <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/nagaland-movement-against-immigrants-brewing-for-a-while/> (accessed on January 23, 2016).

23 "State's Duty to check Illegal Migrants-MHA," <https://nagalandnews.wordpress.com/category/illegal-immigration-in-nagaland/> (accessed on 25 January 2016).



those residing within the structured political boundary. Nagaland, as a Christian state and a Christian community, needs to rethink and critically evaluate its understanding of building relationships by redefining it, especially in the context of migrants from Bangladesh, Tibet, Nepal, and mainland India. In this regard Paul's call for acceptance to the Jews and the Gentiles in Romans becomes a challenge, particularly for the Christians and the churches in Nagaland.

Paul's exhortation on redefining relationships between the Jews and the Gentiles that move beyond the traditional boundaries of peoples can serve as a normative basis for creating space for openness to accept one another in a faith community. In their acceptance and openness to one another the believers abound in hope that strengthens and nurtures their relationship in a constructive and meaningful direction. The Churches can create awareness among the people that opening up and accepting the other does not reduce anyone to a minority nor it does not take away another's identity, but it helps to build a community of diverse peoples where we learn, share, and grow together.

### *The Question about Life*

Part of the issue of migration has to do with legal questions. The question of legal and illegal becomes a priority in the attitude of the Nagas towards the economic migrants. But beyond the issue of legal and illegal is the question about "life", for whether it is legal or illegal, both concern life. Every life is precious and every single individual should be allowed to experience life and live it out to the fullest. In Romans we have seen that Christ Jesus accepted both the Jews and the Gentiles. The condition of acceptance was not the Jews as the chosen race, but salvation in Christ was extended to both the Jews and the Gentiles. The Gentiles, who were considered as outside the covenant community, are also accepted by Christ and along with the Jews they experience life in the family of God. They also give praise to God along with the Jews for extending his mercy, which makes possible their inclusion into the community of believers. The notion of the Jews and the Gentiles growing together and strengthening one another in their common faith can also be interpreted in the context of our experience in Nagaland: accepting the other in our community and learning to strengthen one another and build a community of sharing, and nurturing one another and learning from one another. It is thus important for the churches in Nagaland to be agents in creating awareness that the migrants are also our neighbors and so we need to help them live life to the fullest and not deprive them of it.

### *Hospitality*

By nature Nagas in Nagaland are known to be very hospitable not only among themselves but even with those coming from the outside. This is one positive feedback that Nagas receive from those coming to visit Nagaland as tourists from other parts of the country and the world. However, towards the economic migrants the hospitable nature of the Nagas seems lacking. As mentioned, the Nagas in Nagaland have stereotyped the migrants, especially those from Bangladesh as the ones committing crime and rape in Nagaland. This stereotyping prevents the Nagas from extending hospitality toward the migrants and it also stimulates suspicion of them. As a Christian community the Nagas in Nagaland fail to practice the teaching of Paul on the acceptance of one another. Paul exhorts the "strong" and the "weak" to be mindful of the other and not to judge the other. But many Christians in Nagaland tend to be judgmental about the "outsiders." Thus the churches in Nagaland have the task of preaching and creating awareness on the need to be hospitable towards the migrants as co-creatures sojourning together in this world. In a different but not unrelated context, Lester Edwin Ruiz, has rightly pointed out that, "the event of Diaspora announces the existence of the racialized and gendered Other who invites a religio-moral response, namely, hospitality." Ruiz goes on to explain that "the experience of the



stranger or of Otherness” lays before us “the problems, prospects and the possibilities of fundamentally new and better forms of knowledge and being.” Strangeness or Otherness represents the “*constitutive outside*” and in this case the “*constitutive inside*” is hospitality which for Ruiz is “the inclusion of the stranger into a community not originally his or her own.” In the context of a racialized and gendered diaspora that gives rise to or creates the stranger and the other, Ruiz raises two important questions, “the who” and “the how.” “*Who* the stranger is, is the socio-analytical question occasioned by the stranger’s existence; *how* we treat the stranger in our midst [hospitality] is the ethical demand which is not caused by the Stranger, only motivated by the encounter.”<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

Paul’s call for acceptance in a Jew and Gentile context is an invitation for the churches in Nagaland to engage in this conversation by being open to the migrants. This will give an opportunity for the churches in Nagaland to enlarge their boundaries and to build bridges and provide opportunities to critique the walls built in the past and create space for openness; to be a witnessing community to the transformative power of God in the world.



**Zakali Shohe** is an Associate Professor of New Testament and the Academic Dean at Trinity Theological College [Affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College (University)] in Dimapur, Nagaland, India. She has contributed chapters in several monographs and is the co-editor of *Theology-In Context* (2010). Her upcoming monograph is *Acceptance Motif in Paul: Revisiting Romans 15:7-13*.

## Works Cited

Achtemeier, Paul J. *Romans*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1985.

“As Nagaland Frets about Loss of Identity, Women’s Choices Have Come under Scrutiny.” <http://scroll.in/article/712469/as-nagaland-frets-about-loss-of-identity-womens-choices-have-come-under-scrutiny>.

Barrett, C. K. *The Epistle to the Romans*. London: Adam and Charles Black, 1957.

Baur, Ferdinand Christian. *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine*. Translated by Eduard Zeller, vol. 1. 1876. Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003.

Campbell, W. S. “Why did Paul write Romans?” *Expository Times* 85/9 (1974): 264-269.

Cranfield, C. E. B. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. ICC, 2 vols. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, 1979.

<sup>24</sup> Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, “Recovering the Body: When Race and Power Migrate,” *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives-Ecumenical Trends-Regional Surveys*, ed. Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang and Joshua Raja (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 96. Cf., Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).



- Das, A. Andrew. *Solving the Romans Debate*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- Donfried, Karl Paul. *The Romans Debate*. Rev. ed. 1977. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
- Garroway, Joshua D. "The Circumcision of Christ: Romans 15:7-13," *JSNT* 34, no. 4 (June 2012): 303-22.
- "Illegal Immigrant Issue a Threat to Future Survival." <http://www.asiantribune.com/news/2012/04/16/illegal-immigrant-issue-threat-future-survival>.
- Jervis, L. Ann. *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991.
- Jewett, Robert. *Romans: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress press, 2007.
- Käsemann, Ernst. *Commentary on Romans*. Translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 4 ed. London: SCM, 1980.
- Das, A. Andrew. "Praise the Lord, All you Gentiles': The Encoded Audience of Romans 15.7-13." *JSNT*, 34, no. 1 (Sept 2011): 90-110.
- Kim, Johann D. *God, Israel, and the Gentiles. Rhetoric and Situation in Romans 9-11*. SBL Dissertation Series 176. Atlanta: SBL, 2000.
- Kuhli, H. "Ἰσραήλ." *EDNT*, ed. Horst Balz & Gerhard Schneider. vol. 2. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991, 202-204.
- Kümmel, Werner George. *Introduction to the New Testament*. Translated and edited by H. C. Kee. London: SCM Press, 1966.
- Lo, Lung-Kwong. *Paul's Purpose in Writing Romans. The Upbuilding of Jewish and Gentile Christian Community in Rome*. JDDS 6. Hon Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1998.
- "Migrant/Migration." <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/migrant>.
- Moo, Douglas. *The Epistle to the Romans*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996.
- Murray, John. *The Epistle to the Romans*. NICNT, 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965.
- "Nagaland: Movement against 'Immigrants' Brewing for a While." <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/nagaland-movement-against-immigrants-brewing-for-a-while/>.
- "Nagaland." <http://states-of-india.findthebest.in/l/19/Nagaland>.
- Ruiz, Lester Edwin J. "Conversations with Migrant Advocates: Do We Believe in the Resurrection of the Body?." In *The Intersections of Migration, Human Rights & Development Justice, A Resource Book of Churches*



*Witnessing with Migrants*, edited by Liberato C. Bautista and Mervin Sol H. Toquero. Quezon & New York: National Council of Churches in the Philippines & General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, 2014.

\_\_\_\_\_. “Recovering the Body: When Race and Power Migrate.” In *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives-Ecumenical Trends-Regional Surveys*, edited by Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, and Joshua Raja. Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010.

Sanday, William and Arthur Headlam. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. ICC. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons 1901.

Seifrid, Mark A. “Romans,” In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, 607-94, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/ Nottingham: Apollos, 2007.

“State’s Duty to check Illegal Migrants-MHA.” <https://nagalandnews.wordpress.com/category/illegal-immigration-in-nagaland/>.

Wedderburn, A.J.M. *The Reasons for Romans*. Edinburgh: T& T Clark, 1988.

Zahn, T. *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 1 Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909.

