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Twenty years ago now, I had a coffee-hour conversation one Sunday morning in the Church Parlor with a parishioner in the church I served on the North Shore of Long Island. As I remember, it was a cold day in February, with the snow outside settling in sculpted puffy piles on the revolutionary-era tombstones in the surrounding cemetery. She was an elegant lady, probably close to eighty, wearing an outfit accessorized by a pearl necklace and earrings and a full-length mink coat. She had come years earlier from Philadelphia—“on the Main Line,” she would often say proudly—and, with her husband and children, had made her home there “north of 25-A” as she pointed out equally proudly.

Highway 25-A ran in a crooked line from New York City eastward on the Island, until it played out somewhere near the East End. It was never more than a few miles below the shoreline, where the waves from Long Island Sound lapped gently the manicured lawns and large homes that overlooked the watery expanse separating Long Island from distant Connecticut. That road, for many, was every bit as important a dividing line as a national border crossing. North of it lived many people accustomed to regarding themselves as “the up and the in”—classic WASPs, many of whom attended the seventeenth-century church I served or its next-door neighbor there on the town Green, the eighteenth-century Episcopal church. To the south were the more modest three- and four-bedroom homes of post-World War II suburban neighborhoods, and my conversation partner on that Sunday morning was disturbed by how many of their residents—persons from “south of 25-A”—were finding their way to “our church,” as she described it.

She noted the growing abundance in our church directory of surnames ending in vowels—not the sturdy Scotch-Irish and English names of that community’s earliest settlers—and said to me, her eyes rolling dramatically, “Ted, why do we have so many, um, how do I say … Mediterraneans … coming to our church? Isn’t there a church they can go to south of 25-A?”

She had drawn a line between us and them, and that line was Highway 25-A. For others, that line runs along the Río Grande, just a few hours south of Austin. Or along the line that divides Western Europe from Eastern Europe, or along the line between Northern Africa and Southern Africa … and on our side of the line it’s us, and on their side of the line it’s them.

In this issue of Insights, John Ahn gives the moving perspective of people that some of us have identified as them—Asian-American immigrants living here and making this place their home, too—and informs us of the socio-cultural, historical, and, yes, biblical roots of the problems and faithful opportunities posed by their arrival. Mary Clark Moschella, Claudio Carvalhaes, and Rick Ufford-Chase explore, from different perspectives, the problems and faithful opportunities posed by crossings along the border between the United States and Mexico, and challenge us regarding what it might mean for us to live into that large word “neighbor.” Please read reverently what they each have to say. And here’s a thought-experiment: What redemptive thing might possibly be going on if some of them were finding their way to “our” church?

Theodore J. Wardlaw
President, Austin Seminary
Several years ago I had the privilege of hearing former presidential advisor David Gergen give the Castle Lecture at Yale University. His lecture series was entitled “The Leader’s Journey: Some Thoughts for the Next Generation.” One of the most salient points that Gergen made was that approximately every thirty years the baton of leadership in U.S. history is passed down from one generation to the next. He went on to suggest that the catalyst for such a generational shift in leadership is marked by a devastating hardship of monumental proportion—what he called that generation’s “crucible.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1930) and a first generation of 20th-century leaders tackled the Great Depression while battling the bitter crucible of World War II. This patriotic, selfless, and “duty-oriented generation” overcame and transformed America and
the world. John F. Kennedy (1960) marked the ensuing generation, noted Gergen. This “civic generation” had the determination to go to the moon and believed that they would win the Cold War. The third generation of leaders began with Bill Clinton (1990). Gergen fascinatingly described a routine Clinton morning—while reading several newspapers, with various briefings taking place simultaneously, he would flip through the channels of the morning news on television, eating breakfast while holding a separate conversation with his wife. Gergen went on to describe this third generation of leaders that grew up predominately in the suburbs without experiencing the economic hardships of the previous generations. But it was this third generation that had the vision to foster a more egalitarian society by reaching out to women and advocating for the rights of minorities.

As the lecture reached its climax, Gergen made another point. Emerging and forming before our very eyes is a new generation of leaders, some of them are sitting here right now, listening to this talk as the baton of leadership is being passed down. The crucible of this generation is the War on Terror, an unconventional war, a war that may last a very long time. He then slipped in the words, “Let’s never forget 9/11, the Pearl Harbor of our generation, an act of declaration of war by striking innocent civilians.” The words “Let’s never forget 9/11” immediately connected everyone in the audience as one body. For me, remembering that day was even more personal because that was the day that I was to meet my presbytery in Brooklyn. At 3:33 p.m. in Queens, on the Kosciuszko Bridge of the expressway, with traffic coming to a stand-still because all the cars on the bridge were being diverted in fear of another strike, I could still see the dark smoke billowing up from the aftermath of the collapsed towers and experienced a smell I’ll never forget.

I connected with every word that Mr. Gergen so eloquently and calmly spoke that day. As his late afternoon lecture was drawing to a close with a thunderous ovation, the moderator artfully moved the presentation from the podium to the floor for open questions. My hand was recognized as Mr. Gergen said “Yes,” and pointed toward my direction. I quickly glanced around to make sure that there wasn’t a more senior faculty member or recognizable member of the community who may have been acknowledged. Realizing that I was the only one in my area, I got up and shared the following, leading to my question: “Professor Gergen, I want to thank you for a deeply moving and profound lecture. In your last segment of age brackets that determined the ensuing generation of leaders, I actually fit into that timeframe. It’s a privilege. But I have a practical question. And this begins with my father. You see, I’m a son of an immigrant. My father came to the States in ’75 as a student from South Korea after being honorably discharged as a captain from the air force. He came with only $100 in his pocket because back then, the regime under Park Jung Il only permitted students to leave with $100. He eventually went on to complete his MRE and earned a PhD from NYU and took his learning and studies to start a church in Flushing, New York. His entire life has been about helping minorities—immigrants, to be more precise. So, what must an ensuing generation, a hyphenated-American, in my case a second-generation Korean-American, do to become a leader as you have just described? What must I do to suc-
ceed so that I can reach where you are today?"

As I was preparing to sit down, something struck me hard—really hard. All the years of climbing, striving for my parent’s sake, and now for my own children’s future was finally coming together. You see—the crosses borne by the son or daughter of an immigrant can only be known by that duty-oriented, civic, and equality-seeking generation. It isn’t just one cross that I bear, but several. And it’s an honor and a privilege. It was all coming together: every cold night, every sacrifice, every tear, and every prayer. You see—that was the very first time that I shared my family’s immigrant story in public. An immigrant’s family history is never shared outside one’s own immediate family, unless the people around feel like family or somehow are part of that extended family. As I began to reflect, it wasn’t until later that evening, ironically, as I was going up on Prospect Hill, walking home towards Canner Street, that I came to realize the import and impact of my question as several people in attendance actually came up to me and thanked me for my question.

Well, today is January 20, 2009. I just watched and listened attentively to our very first hyphenated-American president of the United States. It was inspirational. But honestly, I desperately wanted to hear something on this pressing issue, a topic so controversial that it was tabled during the presidential debates. I am fully aware of our current global economic predicament that has yet to see the bottom. Today does mark the day that Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of and even prophetically saw. But for me, today marks the day that I will begin dreaming of a nation where one day the millions of immigrants who are here illegally, those living in fear and in the shadows, will be given an opportunity—through proper channels that must be earned—to become American. So to our past-present-future leaders in our contemporary society and especially our congregational leaders, “immigration” is also our crucible and let’s never forget them—for we all came from somewhere else.

**Contemporary Immigration Theory**

Alan James talks about three types of “forced migrations” in current literature.1

(1) “Derivative Forced Migration” (DFM) or “static migration” occurs as a result of geopolitical and cartographical rearrangement. After World War I, thirteen new states were created between the territories of Finland, Greece, Germany, and the Soviet Union. New minorities resulted from this re-mapping without actual migration taking place. (2) The second type is called “Responsive Forced Migration” (RFM). RFM is a voluntary move from one place to another because of political oppressions of totalitarianism, tyranny, warfare, or domestic and natural causes such as famine. (3) The third type is called “Purposive Forced Migration” (PFM). PFM describes peoples who are forced to resettle without choice. Often, they are victims of hostile agencies or forces. These forces may be: profit driven (Uganda—1972), culture oriented (Cambodia—1975-79), race related (Turkey—1915; Germany—1920; South Africa—1948; Darfur—2005), religiously motivated (Spain—1492; Northern Ireland—1960; Greece and Turkey—1923), for the security of the dominating nation (U.S.A. against Japanese Americans—1944; Hutus in Burundi—1990s; Palestinian Arabs from Israel—
1948; Kurds—1920, 1980, 2003), for punishment (Chechens to Siberia after WWII, Crimean Tartars who collaborated with the invading Germans), and for revenge (Tutsi and Hutus of Rwanda-Burundi—1962, 1994; Sudan—Darfur 2005).  

These forced migrations are all applicable to the 6th-century B.C.E. context. Since the Neo-Babylonians conquered Judah, a new geo-political cartographical realignment (Derivative Forced Migrations—DFM) occurred after 597. The Responsive Forced Migration (RFM) may be associated with Johanan and all the leaders that voluntarily fled to Egypt in 582. Purposive Forced Migration (PFM) and its factors (profit driven, security of the dominating nation, even revenge for revolting) indeed fit the 587 context.

For migrants being forced to leave their country of origin, push factors include lack of economic opportunity, persecution by the majority or a powerful minority, and natural disasters such as famine, earthquake, floods, or war. On the whole, these are negative push factors. But a set of positive factors include the desire to explore, start anew, seek adventure, and even forge a better life. Like immigrants in our contemporary society, these variables are mostly invisible. They only surface when critically examined or pointed out. For immigrant women and children, issues become exponentially more complicated since there are higher levels of exploitation. Pull factors, then, are almost always remuneratively or economically motivated—with the promise of newer social status, higher education, and freedom from political, cultural, and religious persecutions.  

Push and pull factors are further connected to (1) pre-existing ethnic or race relations within the host population; (2) differences in the labor markets and related institutions; (3) the impact of government policies and programs, including immigration policy, policies for immigrant integration, and policies for the regulation of social institutions; and (4) the changing nature of international boundaries, part of the globalization process. In sum, the central operative force behind push and pull factors, whether voluntary or involuntary, 21st or 6th century B.C.E., is economics.

Economics is the human engine in Development-induced Displacement and Resettlement (DIDR) projects that result in Development-induced Displaced Persons (DIDPs). In the current world of international law, DIDPs are still awaiting definition. DIDPs receive little, if any, international protection, consensus, or rights of any entitlement. Michael Barutciski argues that neither international law relating to refugees (seeking asylum in a foreign country or counties), nor humanitarian law that protects population caught in armed conflict, or the internally displaced persons (IDPs) within their own countries apply to DIDPs because governments that displace their own people have the principal obligation of compensating the resettled for damages that resulted from their displacement. To make matters worse, compensation is seldom and abuses run rampant since most of the abused are ethnic minorities.

Development-induced Displaced Persons (DIDPs) are “those who are resettled by government-sponsored programmes that use resettlement as a method of rural development and/or political control.” This definition best describes the Judeans that were displaced in 597 B.C.E. But on a deeper level, “those who have been forced out of their homes and home states may be seen as making a special claim on our concern. They
require us to reflect on issues of membership, citizenship, and democratic liberalism. They require us to ask what our responsibilities are to the stranger in distress, the stranger amongst us, on our doorstep, who is seeking a better life for himself or herself and for his or her children, and the stranger half way ‘round the world who is brought into our homes by satellite TV channels. They require us, in other words, to reconsider who we are—what is or should our moral community [be], and ultimately, what it means to be human,” writes David Turton.7 Here, I cannot help but reiterate and emphasize that we must focus on the experience and subsequent challenges that migrants face.

Official recognition to the millions of “Internally Displaced Persons” (IDPs) was given on February 11, 1998, through a document called the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. It was presented to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations by the Commission on Human Rights. Francis M. Deng, the author of the Guiding Principles, defines IDPs as: “persons or groups who have been forced or obligated to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order 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.”8

In the context of 587 B.C.E., the forces behind internal displacement of the Judeans were armed conflict, violence, and human-made disaster (famine via the two-or-three year siege). The Babylonians forced the poor or the people of the land to leave their homes and places of habitual residence. Against their will, in violation of human rights, they were forcibly relocated to Babylon, not having crossed an internationally recognized state border, since the Neo-Babylonians expanded their border to include Judah in 597 B.C.E.

In contrast to IDPs, refugees are “people who flee against their will because of fear for their lives. They are pushed from their social, cultural, and economic moorings by conditions that are or are perceived to be potentially or imminently threatening to their physical safety, security, dignity, liberty, and property … nonmaterial loss of national citizenship, social relationships through which memberships are formed, maintained and changed encompassing familial relations, kinship ties, friendships, neighborhood networks, identities, informal institutions that regulate interactions, statuses; trust; traditional authority; and organization.”9 The key difference between an IDP and refugee is that the latter has crossed a state border, i.e., the 582 group that crossed the border into Egypt or elsewhere. However, those that were displaced to Babylon in 582 continue to be identified as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) since political insurrection, violence, and the pull of Babylonian economics caused their forced migration.

**Immigration and the Experiences of Generations**

The world’s scholars and activists are working diligently to give definition and subsequently protection to peoples in plight and flight. But here in North America, especially in our guilds (AAR/SBL) and our churches, where are the scholars and pastors calling for basic human rights of our displaced and resettled? Are not our illegal
immigrants also forced migrants? Are they not pulled by our development-induced projects? Aren’t they internally displaced within our borderless borders? Are they not fleeing and seeking refuge from the tyranny of poverty? It’s difficult to bear that the world’s least fortunate have more rights and protection than our own here in the U.S.

I wholeheartedly agree that we need to overhaul our broken immigration system. I agree that we need to have tougher border control, recognizing the problems of providing general social services and education to children of illegal immigrants and incarceration for a growing number of illegal immigrants. Even the loss of lower-end jobs to illegal immigrants in the current recession is difficult to bear. But we cannot fix the problem by putting a band-aid on a deep cut, e.g. with a wall between the U.S. and Mexico border (with metal fences made in China), or the absurdity of sending everyone back (which will cost us billions). A short-term fix is not the solution. We need a long-term approach for addressing and resolving our crucible.

The first step requires that we understand the uniqueness of first-, 1.5-, second-, and third-generation immigrant experiences.

The experiences of the first generation Portuguese-American, Iranian-American, Ghanaian-Canadian, Tibetan-Swiss, Greek-American, or even the Judeo-Babylonian may be described as involving complex communal laments (Ps. 137): socio-economic struggles, adjusting to a new cultural setting, the obstacles and hurdles of their new life while mourning the past, e.g. who they were and what they had prior to resettling in the new land. Naturally, their experience is laden with laments—their work place, their home, and even their place of worship are all “by the irrigation canals of Babylon” (Ps 137.1). The waters metaphorically and even literally reflect their tears and laments.

This first generation often tries to fit in but cannot. There are genuine desires to contribute, but their contributions are often rejected, dismissed: “I’m sorry, can you repeat that again?” Many are so self-conscious of their poor English or unfamiliarity with social customs that they would rather not participate than experience mockery, ridicule, or painful derisions that they have experienced over the years from total strangers in the post office or supermarket. Emotional scars are a constant reminder of the echo that says, You don’t belong here. Deep down inside, however, the first generation says, No, I do belong here, and I have come to understand that God brought me here for a purpose.

Many first-generation immigrants smile. That smile is very genuine. But behind the smile are unbearable hurts. Many of them too are a son or daughter, a father or a mother. They are parents to little ones and need to make rent, put food on the table, and care and provide for extended family members who are often living in more distressing circumstances. It isn’t easy to smile, but they do. Those smiles are testimonies of who they are: their will, determination, persistence, and desire to make it. Occasionally, when deeply moved, they will lament outwardly and display the hardships that they have experienced. But in spite of the bitter and negative encounters with society, there is an unwavering passion and a conscious, faithful commitment to God. They have the audacity of faith to give thanks and sing hallelujahs in the midst of their laments.
What about those persons who fit neither into the first nor the second generation of immigrants? Recall Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were all teenagers when they were taken to Babylon. Technically, they are what Karl Mannheim would classify as a “1.5” or an in-between, the “forgotten generation.” The same can be said of Caleb and Joshua, in-between, transitional figures that helped the second generation Israelites reach the promised land. Again, recall that all the first generation Israelites—including Moses—died in the wilderness. Yet the Joshua and Caleb traditions record and preserve their memory, leaving an unmistakable imprint in the exilic texts of the forced migrations period. This 1.5 generation gave rise and meaning to “golah hope.” Now this golah, or exilic or immigrant, hope transforms a previous generation’s laments of hardships and struggles into something less caustic. This transformation of lament is not the result of wistful thinking, but the result of an immigrant’s negative and positive experiences. They are a transitional generation who arrives at hope through active-imperatives: “build homes, live, plant gardens, get married, have sons and daughters, and give your daughters and sons in marriage so that the next generation, too, can bear children, be fruitful and indeed multiply, increase there in Babylon, and do not diminish” (Jer 29.5-6).

The second generation’s reflection on their immigrant experience is very different than that of the two previous (first and 1.5) generations. Focus has moved away from the hardships and negativities toward a positive understanding of a “new creation” (Isa. 43). The key social theme for this generation is assimilation. With paths towards upward assimilation (straight-line up or “segmented or bumpy-line” upwards) or towards downward assimilation into the underclass, much is riding on the second generation. This second generation must learn to assimilate without foregoing received traditions, culture, and ethnicity.

Studies have found that second-generation immigrants attain higher social, educational, and economic prestige than the third and fourth generations of their non-immigrant counterparts. Scholars worry that such attained success is being curtailed because of America’s inability to eradicate racism. Nevertheless, these scholars among others see the “browning of America” and the new generation of leaders re-defining race in America, resulting in a modicum of success.

So the words “Comfort, comfort my people” in Second Isaiah, clearly uttered by a second-generation Judeo-Babylon, may in fact refer to the experiences of comforting the previous generation. The second generation, however, moves beyond and no longer attributes sin as the cause for their displacement and resettlement. They have moved beyond by reminding their generation to forget the former things (Isa. 43:18) and be a witness to the new thing that God is doing through them, i.e., the crystallization of monotheism and the rise in their socio-economic status (Isa. 43:19a).

These experiences lead to the third generation, the generation that centrally defines where home is for its current and succeeding generations. Like the Gadites and Reubenites (Num. 32) that refused to enter the promised land but requested and sought the other side of the Jordan as permanent settlement for them, their children and accumulated goods, the third-generation Judeo-Babylonians also desired to remain
on the other side of the Jordan, not wishing to return to Yehud. They made Babylon home. Going back to their motherland was not an option. This generation probably never experienced the economic hardships of their grandparents’ or even their parents’ generation. But, as an equality-seeking generation, they decided to turn to help settle and re-establish the foundation of the (second) temple and its infrastructure with all of the returnees. Then, upon such assistance, they would return home—to Babylon/Persia.

Even a cursory reading of the patriarchal narratives (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) displays the experiences of the first, second, and third generations. Recall that Abraham was a wandering Aramean, a sojourner, a first-generation immigrant. But it was none other than Jacob, a third-generation immigrant, who eventually moved to Egypt, giving credence to where home would be for Joseph, a fourth generation, and all subsequent generations.

In the ensuing biblical cycle, we read of Moses, a first-generation liberator and lawgiver. We then have Caleb and Joshua, the transitional, in-between, forgotten 1.5-generation leaders. Subsequently, we have the second-generation elders of Israel, and the third generation of judges that actually legitimized the need for civic stability making way for the period of the kings, the fourth generation. Finally, we return to our starting point, the center of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament with the exile or Judeo-Babylonians in the forced migrations period. As for our nomenclature, “forced migrations” in a theological context, I see this force as none other than God—intending each generation’s experience for good and never harm.

A PERSONAL CONCLUSION

In 1984, a Korean family was immigrating to Brazil. They sold everything they had to generate enough for four airline tickets. With the modest amount of cash they had saved to start anew, they boarded their flight that took them from Seoul to Los Angeles. From L.A., they would board a different flight to São Paulo, Brazil (where a sizable Korean-Brazilian community flourishes). However, from L.A., something happened and instead of arriving in São Paulo, they arrived at New York’s JFK International Airport. No one in the family spoke any English. The entire family remained in the airport for several hours trying to figure out what to do. They had no relatives, friends, or even acquaintances in the area.

The mother took a cab and somehow the cab driver took her to Flushing, Queens. She waited for close to half-an-hour on the corner of Main Street and Union—which is ironic because now, every second one sees at least fifty Koreans pass by—before meeting another Korean. She told her story of how her family just arrived in New York accidentally. They had no money for another flight and they knew no one here and they had two young children. That person gave the mother a local pastor’s name and a telephone number. She called and told her story to the pastor, and the pastor went to help.

That was twenty-five years ago. This is the story of one of my closest childhood friends. We grew up in the same church, learned our Presbyterian doctrine and creeds, and even competed against each other in high school and college volleyball. Today, he
Ahn has a beautiful family—his wife, two young children, a house on Long Island—and one of his greatest joys he shares is his path to becoming a legal alien and then an American citizen (through the company that hired him). However, his sister has a different story. By definition, after twenty-five years, she’s still an illegal immigrant: her application for a green card has been denied three times.

To our President of the United States of America, our governors, mayors, and church leaders, let’s never forget our immigrants. I believe the blueprint for a long-term approach in immigration reform is found in Jeremiah’s letter of golah hope: “build homes, live, plant gardens, get married, have sons and daughters, and give your daughters and sons in marriage so that the next generation too can bear children, be fruitful and indeed multiply, increase there” (Jer. 29:5-6). The cadre for our long-term socio-economically based immigration “reform” is here: collectively beginning with proper housing, learning English, paying taxes and being good citizens, acquiring suitable employment, and, on the family level, getting married, and having sons and daughters, down to the third generation. Our policy, in the end, must reach the third generation.

After dancing around looking for the right words, here’s what David Gergen said as a reply to my question: “Be an American first and then be that second-generation Korean secondarily, assimilate, and continue to serve your country for a cause like your father.”

I agree wholeheartedly.

NOTES


5. Segal, A Framework of Immigration, 12-16.


8. See Francis Deng, “Guiding Principles,” 2, emphasis added; see also, R. Cohen and F.M. Deng, Masses in Flight (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 4-6; See also, Abby Stoddard, “Every One’s and No One’s IDPs, Refugees, and the Politics of Aiding the Dis-


Your essay I think really opens our eyes to the reality of immigration that’s present throughout the Bible, not just in stories of exile, but everywhere.

It’s there in the Old Testament if you remember the conquest tradition. One of the models that we learn is the immigrant model, the peaceful infiltration into the land of Canaan. But I think what has been missing is subsequent sociological approaches to the Old Testament. There haven’t been too many substantial works done in this discipline—I can think of a handful of scholars that have actually produced anything in this area. More than anything else it’s about learning to read the text through a set of different lenses and through different training and a different sort of approach. And again I think it’s about the scholar, himself or herself, who has got a story to tell.

So how do you think the study of the Old Testament is being affected by this new lens you’re bringing to the text?

Our entire ethos in 6th-century scholarship has always been about the theological concept or the literary contents of the text. For the first time we have something to compare with in terms of real people and how to translate into different motifs and different generations, and it becomes a new way of looking at old problems. There’s five or six of us right now that specialize in the 6th century who agree that the sociological approach is the new lens toward 6th-century biblical scholarship. The 6th century can be that bridge to the real world, and it helps us to see what the real world is like so that we can connect the two together.

You recently returned to South Korea for the first time since age five. What was that like for you as a child of immigrants returning to their land of birth?

You’ve got to keep in mind that I was only four or five when I was there so it was an experience of flashbacks. As a young kid I remember living in a very small village—one of those places where there were no paved roads, one van in the whole village, one telephone as well. There was this one bully that always used to bother me, our next-door neighbor, and when we visited the childhood place, that kid still lived in the exact same house. I realized, had my parents never migrated, never left, I would probably still be here in this little town. It made me realize how fortunate I am to have this opportunity to come to the States.

I remember going from one town to the next town as a four-year-old kid with some of the older kids. As a four-year-old, how fast would you be trying to keep up with eight- and nine-year-olds? But I still did it. They ditched me and I got lost in the next town. And I remember crying and some nice lady from the town comes and says,
“What are you doing here?” And she put me in a cab and sent me back home.

I remember being in kindergarten during Christmas time, when everybody used to take pictures in front of the Christmas tree. My father had already emigrated to the States and my mom was always working to support the family. And all the kids had pictures with their mom and dad in front of the Christmas tree, and I’m the only one standing by myself, so I remember that, saying “Where are my parents?”

So memory of all that stuff was just on the back burner, and all of a sudden it came. It crystallized. I was only in Korea for three days. Mostly I spent time with my grandmother who is 94. And she has just a fantastic sort of incredible life story. It was interesting and just exciting to see Korea develop as much as it has.

I take pride in the fact that I am a child or son of immigrant parents. I consider myself second generation, even though I wasn’t born here. I really couldn’t say it was like going home, because for me I guess I would say going home would be going back to the Bronx, or to Brooklyn. That’s where my roots really are.

**Did it connect you with your parent’s story more because of that visit?**

Again it’s hard to say because we don’t ever talk about things like that. A struggling immigrant family—you never talk about how difficult it was. You experience it and you
I know the lack of stuff that you have. This office was the size of the bedroom my sister and I shared until I was 17—actually my office is much bigger than that! Other kids get allowances. You don’t. You know that as well too. You never complained. You’re grateful that you have a roof over your head. Parents provide the things that we needed.

What suggestions do you have for the church in terms of immigration issues?

I think the church has to be prophetic. Let me explain what I mean: the church has to take a stand. First of all we need to be good citizens, we need to abide by the law of the United States of America. I don’t think the church should be hiring illegal immigrants. That’s against the law. But at the same time if there’s an illegal immigrant attending worship service, or in your congregation, or seeking help, the church has to help. What if someone says, They’re here illegally. Do we send them back? What do we do? I think that’s when the church has to be that prophetic voice, going back to passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy that speak about the resident aliens.

We have vocabulary words that we should probably render differently, from resident alien to immigrant. I think I would like to push for the word “immigrant” to be in the Bible. So we have a moral and ethical and biblical responsibility toward immigrants in the United States.

I’m sure everybody in our congregations knows at least somebody who’s an illegal immigrant or has some sort of lineage as immigrants. So I think the church can cry out on behalf of the oppressed and the poor. It’s going to take a lot of faith and it’s going to take audacity on the part of the pastor to take such a position. And I think if the churches take a position, then our mayors can take a position, and our governors can take a position, and eventually our Congress will create some sort of avenue for the 15 or 20 million that are here illegally, helping them to earn their rights to become American citizens.

So the position would be of advocating hospitality and welcoming to immigrants while providing pathways to citizenship.

I think that’s exactly what it is. So how do you do that without cutting the corners? Of course we have illegal immigrants who cause problems and drug trafficking and all that as well, and we want to curb that, of course. But I’m talking about those who are good, ordinary people, trying to make ends meet and trying to find God in the process of their struggles and their hardships, too.

Well turning more broadly to the national scene, your essay also mentions immigration policy to a certain extent. What’s the U.S. doing well and what’s the U.S. doing poorly in terms of immigration policy?

I think the one time that the U.S. has done well was in 1965 where they dropped racial quotas and allowed anyone of any ethnic or minority descent to turn to the United States. I don’t think we’ve had any major immigration reforms since ’65. There have been tiny things that they have tweaked here and there. Since 9/11 immigration has gotten more to do with homeland security than anything else. The one good thing that Bush tried to do was to pass that law to create some venue for citizenship. He had it right because he’s been here in Texas for such a long time that he really knows the problem. He really understands the complexity of that sort of issue.
A very powerful part of your essay is when you pointed to the fact that refugees have more rights in other contexts than in our own American context. What is our responsibility here?

Well let’s say that an illegal immigrant is here in the United States, they need basic human needs, human rights. And we are one of the most egalitarian and forward-thinking nations in the world. It makes me think, What are my obligations as a day-to-day Christian? Am I really living out the Gospel? So let’s go back to Jesus. You look at all the borders that Jesus has crossed, all the boundaries that he has crossed, and I think that’s what we’re forgetting. I think that’s where faith kicks in. You really have to have that audacity of faith. To follow Christ and to do what Jesus did means for us to pick up that cross and to go where others don’t want to go.

I’ll be very frank with you. I couldn’t take a position on this before writing this piece. As a scholar you’re trained to write in a certain style and a certain voice. At the end you want to talk about the larger picture. I didn’t want to take a personal position on this—until January 20. I just thought, Yeah, it’s a problem we have.

And as I sat down to write the piece that’s when it hit me. I have to speak out. And I’m very grateful for the opportunity to do this piece because I have a position, too.

Your essay concludes with the remark that we’re always American first and immigrant or children of immigrants secondarily. Can you say more about what that means?

Initially I disagreed with that assessment. After that encounter with David Gergen I went home and a lot of things sort of came together and I really thought about what it meant to be an American first. My father had always been saying to me "John, don’t just be stratified by the Korean or the Korean community. That’s not what America’s about. You have to learn to break through all of the barriers and the obstacles and you need to get there, wherever there is." So I think it finally hit home and I understood what he was talking about.

The melting pot theory, I think there is some truth in that. I think we have this whole notion of being a mosaic, as well, but the whole notion of having that melting pot and making America better, I think there’s an absolute truth to that. At the end of the day it’s about realizing we are all Americans. Let’s say there’s a soccer match between South Korean team and the American team. I’d root for the United States of America—and it drives my friends nuts. Right? And I’m like, "That’s who I am. I’m not going to apologize for it—that’s who I am." This is the greatest country in the world. I have tremendous pride in the fact that I carry American citizenship and that I am an American. And secondarily I am a Korean American. Now others—they may never see it that way. They’ll always ask me where am I from and I say, From the Bronx. [Laughter] And then they’ll as me again, Where are you really from? Are you asking where my parents are from and what my ethnicity is?

You never forget where you come from, especially because my skin color is different. I’m not afraid of that. But I do realize that it is important for us to assimilate and also to be one more than anything else. It’s that body of Christ image for me. I’m a Christian beyond anything else. But at the same time you do highlight what you bring to the table and your personal life experiences and your stories, your friends’ stories. It just makes us better and it brings us that much closer that we can learn from one another and appreciate the different cultures that are out there.
So it’s kind of like Pentecost then? Out of many people, one body.
That’s right. I think you put it perfectly. Pentecost really is about that and it’s about bringing the Gentile and the Jew together at the table. We look back on our American history and oftentimes the immigrant history is forgotten. But just look at New York City—all the history, all that the Irish immigrants did, the Polish immigrants, the Jewish immigrants, the Korean immigrants, the Chinese immigrants. There is so much history behind that, and together they all constitute this place called New York City, and it is just beautifully run. It just works.

You know there’s a sense of community within that diversity. It’s just a fantastic place to be, and the church should be like, too.
The United States boasts a long and fascinating history of the immigration of people from diverse nations. In the past, the edges or shores of the land served as the main points of entry. From New York’s Ellis Island to San Francisco’s Bay, to Miami’s coast, to the Tijuana River, watery thresholds have marked the tenuous beginnings of many an immigrant’s story. While more recently many immigrants have arrived via air to inland as well as coastal destinations, the journey into these borders is nonetheless consequential. Historians’ older metaphors from “uprooted” to “transplanted” still capture some immigrants’ experiences, the impact of which reverberates in families and communities for several generations. Here I reflect on a more recent metaphor—that of border crossing—in order to promote mutual engagement between and among immigrants, settled citizens, and other strangers in the land.¹

Immigrants cross boundaries that are religious, emotional, and cultural, as well as geographic, economic, and political.

This comprehensive kind of relocation requires crossing over spatial and cultural boundaries into a life with new landscapes, often a new language, and always, new social arrangements. Much is at stake in these transitions, especially for those whose wealth and class status are low. Economic necessity still drives much immigration, pushing people to accept enormous losses and contingencies in order to cross over into life inside these borders.

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¹The author’s use of “border crossing” as a metaphor reflects the idea that immigration is not just about crossing physical borders but also about navigating cultural, emotional, and social landscapes.
Contemporary Americans’ encounters with immigrants provoke all manner of projection of psychological fear onto the newcomers. This is nothing new. Fear of the racialized other, fear of scarcity of resources, and fear of the stranger have long haunted Americans’ attitudes and actions toward immigrants, as the nativist movements in our history demonstrate. The desire to keep someone or something out, to build a fence or a wall, is understandable. It is a protective and a defensive impulse.

Pastoral responses to immigrants in this country have a long and complicated history as well. Attempts to care for immigrants, however altruistically conceived, often exacted costs in exchange for benefits provided. The efforts of Protestants to convert and assimilate the “Catholic hordes” in the late 19th century, while providing much-needed material support, had manipulative and patronizing dimensions. Even with well-meaning attempts to welcome the stranger, there is a common desire to change the other, to make him or her more acceptable, more familiar, and thus, less frightening.

Recognizing that altruism is never pure, is there a more life-giving way of thinking about strangers in the land? All people cross borders of some kind: growing up involves moving through developmental stages and across a series of boundaries from childhood to young adulthood to old age; all of these borders may seem fraught with peril at the time of their crossings. Many persons cross over the boundaries of cultural conventions and norms in order to grow and thrive; some relocate geographically out of curiosity or necessity or in the pursuit of happiness. Many Americans’ family histories of immigration once involved hardship, struggle, and pain. Some have banished such historical memories for this very reason.

Yet the re-collection of national and family histories is a salutary practice. In remembering ourselves as strangers, we may gain empathy for newcomers.

Historian Thomas Tweed makes much of the distinction between immigrants and exiles. Exiles, on one end of a continuum, have no choice but to leave their natal lands—they are forced out or they are political refugees. Immigrants, on the other end of the continuum, choose to leave their countries, usually for economic gain. United States law has historically been more hospitable to exiles than to immigrants, though these designations are often blurry and politically motivated. In many lives, the distinction between political and economic refuge is blurry: if you can’t feed your family, what are your options?

A news report in 2000 on National Public Radio described two would-be illegal immigrants from Guatemala to the U.S. They had just been apprehended by local authorities, while attempting to walk through a forest in Nicaragua en route to the U.S. border. When interviewed, the men explained that they were attempting to cross the border into the U.S. in order to be able to earn money and send it back to support their families. The men had been hiking and hiding there in the woods for two weeks, with all of two tortillas between them for food.

The desperate desire to feed kin and prosper may not make one an exile, but this desire is the main force propelling people across these borders. Americans who have ever felt that they had to move, to relocate for a job even within this country, can appreciate the stress involved. Even a move that is beneficial and freely chosen involves loss and vulnerability along the way. These experiences are magnified for immigrants who
arrive as strangers to the language, culture, and exigencies of life in this new place.

Yet immigrants’ border crossing is not, and has never been, unidirectional. Immigrants and “settled” citizens have always changed each other, for better and for worse. Encountering strangers, individuals and groups on both sides negotiate goods, services, relationships, and identities. Border crossing involves going forward, letting go, moving into the unknown, knowing that one can never completely return, or at least, return the same. The broader American immigration story is one that includes resistance and rejection, as well as interchange, connection, and cultural mixing.

Consider the story of Biju, a protagonist in Kiran Desai’s moving novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. Biju, the son of an impoverished cook in Kalimpong, India, desperately scraped his way onto a plane to New York, using forged travel documents and lying to the embassy about how long he planned to stay. In New York, Biju took a string of jobs working in restaurant kitchens for illegally low wages and no medical insurance. One day after years of lonely striving, Biju called his father and became convinced that he should return to India. Biju gave up his chances in New York in order to see his father, the elderly cook, again. Upon his arrival in Calcutta, Biju was robbed and beaten as he tried to make his way home, losing all of the money he had saved and the possessions he had purchased for his father. The cook’s own meager life in the eastern Himalayan foothills had been all but washed away by the combined forces of political upheaval, his unscrupulous employer, and the driving rains of monsoon season. Biju limped miles to reach the tender climax of the novel, the moment of reunion and filial embrace. Desai’s novel depicts the stark choices and slim chances that immigrants may encounter as a result of colonialism and its legacies on both sides of the globe.

Even when immigrants do find economic relief here, there are those who choose to go home—to reject the overwhelming losses of landscapes and loved ones. A hunger for home calls them back, yet this choice, too, is complex. Return immigrants have spoken of feeling ambivalent, or torn, especially when their children choose to remain here. Immigration pushes and pulls at conventional notions of identity, love, and connection.

In order to cross the U.S. borders, people take enormous chances, accept dramatic changes, endure painful losses, and sometimes choose (and are allowed) to stay. There is no guarantee of love, acceptance, or prosperity, and no money back for trying. Those who cross into these borders can only hope that the walls they meet will give way, that human encounters will be gentle and not harsh, and that as strangers in this land, they will not be wronged or oppressed.

**NOTE**


Theology starts where it hurts. From there we build on theology’s possibilities. How then do we who call ourselves Christians hear all the cries of the world? Should we? As I write this article, Israel is attacking Gaza, an attack that has killed more than 800 people so far. The genocide in Darfur still goes on. The situation of the million refugees in Africa is near hopeless. The destruction of small farmers by big corporations everywhere is rampant. Climate change is increasingly destroying our world. And most people throughout the world are getting poorer. Living our Christian faith with the crying world, how can we confess the things we confess, sing the songs we sing, and believe in a God that intervenes in our history?

Many tears are shed daily across the borders between Mexico and United States. For many persons, life throughout that area is a disaster. Last August, when I visited the borders between Arizona and Sonora, I experienced a devastating situation with many facets: the militarized work of the U.S. Border Patrol that is now associating typical immigrants such as mothers, singers, construction and farm workers with terrorism; the lack of legal help to immigrants in the prison system across the borders; parents and children lost in the desert; the presence of smugglers (coyotes); the robbing and raping that occurs in transit; and the ecological destruction produced by the presence of the walls. As a former pastor to non-documented immigrants, a Christian theologian, and an immigrant myself, I see it all and cry. In my recent visit to the borders, I witnessed...
what some of the members of my former church went through and how these stories continue to play out every day. If theology starts where it hurts, with the poor and the least of them, then the borders are a privileged site for theological reflection.

The wall between the U.S. and Mexico attests to much larger issues. These include the world migration crisis, weak international relations, weakened notions of national sovereignty, disintegrated economies across the globe, flawed trade policies, and others. In the United States, the wall attests to the politics of criminalization of immigrants. Typically viewed as “criminals,” immigrants frequently and inaccurately get associated with gun trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, and terrorist organizations. What follows is a growing hatred of immigrants that permits their brutal and illegal treatment. Furthermore, the media usually do not take on the deeper issues that shape the immigration problem and, in too many cases, actually fuel this hatred and create a distorted vision about the presence of non-documented immigrants in the U.S. This distorted vision creates numerous myths that go unchecked and perpetuate the problem.

Here are four of these myths:

Immigrants take our jobs. Actually, they create jobs because they perform many tasks that employers require and this allows for businesses to grow.

Immigrants drain our economy. In fact, they revive local economies and the country’s economy gains $22 billion dollars per year from immigrant workers, which makes Latino/a immigrants more of a benefit than a problem.

Immigrants threaten American culture and don’t learn English. In most cases, immigrants bring a wealth of wisdom that enriches American culture instead of destroying it. And by the third generation, almost every person speaks English.

Immigrants bring disease. Recently, Minnesota Representative Michele Bachmann’s claimed that immigrants “are bringing in disease and violence and every sort of difficulty. We need to protect ourselves against that.” In fact, many immigrants are healthier than U.S. citizens, and since they are so afraid of being caught by the police, most live hidden lives.

When we think in these “mythic” ways, the simplest solution seems to be to enforce the borders and get rid of immigrants at any cost. But this approach fails to recognize that immigration is the result of global economic structures that push people to other places. People come to the U.S. because it possesses most of the world’s economic resources and opportunities. The “problem” of immigration, therefore, should be placed not on individuals but on an unfair economic system that does not include the poor and that accumulates money in the hands of comparatively few across the globe.

Beginning again ...

Christians cannot be silent about the horrific, sinful, and obscene realities signified by walls between U.S. and Mexico, nor about what they create in the fabric of the conscience of this country. If we accept the walls, and stop screaming “NO WALLS
between U.S. and Mexico,” the walls will lose their sinful and obscene status and might fall into a seemingly “natural” space and assume the status of a proper moral symbol.

It is not by building a wall that the U.S. will prevent people from needing to come to this country. The presence of walls between countries, like gated communities in towns, is the construction of a new Babel tower against God, against the poor, against the human condition. Christians have a lot to do! Our main challenge, perhaps, is to deal with immigration issues foremost as economic and political matters, as a human rights concern that calls for action and expanded perspectives. Yes, there is a need to control the rates of immigration, but there is much more than this at stake. Immigrants are not criminals! There are 200 million human beings moving around the world searching for ways to live, feed themselves and their families, and survive.

The churches of Christ must take a stand and help them.

How do we Christians read the Bible under the shadows of this wall? How do we gather at our Eucharistic tables when the injustices committed against non-document-ed immigrants are closely tied to the harvest of the bread and wine we consume? How do we offer hospitality in our churches when we endorse the existence of a wall that divides and separates people? How do we care for the stranger? How do we pray when people are dying in the desert daily? As we walk through the muros, we are to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When I was in the midst of a walk in the desert, I couldn’t hold my tears and I could barely breathe. Then, a whisper in the desert brought to my heart this Mexican song:

Ay, ay, ay, ay,
Canta y no llores,
Porque cantando se alegran,
Cielito lindo, los corazones.
Ay, ay, ay, ay,
sing and don’t cry,
for hearts are happy, pretty one,
when singing.

Even though I could not and cannot stop crying, I learned that I have to sing—sing a new song as the Psalmist says, in spite of everything I see, witness, or stumble upon that relates to this or other walls around the world. Walking in the desert of Arizona and Sonora and visiting the borders convinced me that, at least in these days, theology cannot be done without tears.

For further reflection:

“Canta y no llores” is part of the lyrics of a famous Mexican song called “Cielito Lindo,” written in 1882 by Quirino Mendoza y Cortés.

Please watch the movie “Romantico”; www.meteorfilms.org/

According to some data, an immigrant dies every day trying to cross the borders. In Morre um Imigrante por dia na fronteira entre México e Estados Unidos. EFE, 03.11.2008, http://ultimo segundo.ig.com.br/mundo/2007/11/03/.

http://www.immigrationforum.org/documents/TheJourney/MythsandFacts.pdf Search for
“myths about immigration” on the web and you will find plenty of material.


“You shall not oppress a stranger/foreigner; you know the heart of an stranger/foreigner, for you were strangers/foreigners in the land of Egypt.” Exod. 23:9

Visit /www.borderlinks.org/ to know how to experience the borders and help their ministry.

“You, with weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back...” Jeremiah 31:9; “Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.” Psalm 126: 6; “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” Luke 6:21.
In 2008, after twenty years of living on the U.S./Mexico border and being immersed almost every day in work with migrants and refugees, my wife and I moved our family to New York in order to become the co-directors of Stony Point Center, a conference facility of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Though I felt a clear sense of call to Stony Point Center, I imagined that it would offer little of what I had grown to love about the border region. The regular contact with migrants who are making life and death choices every day has been what has grounded me in my faith for a long time. How would I manage in a place where those opportunities would be less available?

Shortly after I arrived here in Rockland County, I began to notice a few things that made me think that my initial guesses about life in New York had missed the mark. As I drove down a three-mile stretch of strip malls along Route 59, I saw large groups of men, many of them Hispanic, hanging out in parking lots hoping for a day of work. Saturday nights during the fall our family sought out the little family-run Dominican, Salvadoran, and Mexican restaurants in downtown Haverstraw, just three miles south of Stony Point. It felt as though we might have been in Nogales or South Tucson. Like most places I’ve been in the U.S., the immigrant population is here, but hidden; a little harder to see for the newcomer or the person who doesn’t know where to go looking.

In the wintertime, the staff and volunteers at Stony Point Center participate in a program called “Helping Hands,” offering shelter in local churches to homeless folks on the nights when temperatures drop below freezing in the lower Hudson Valley. One night in mid-November, it was my turn to pick up the men huddling together for warmth in the dark shadows off the end of the parking lot of the International Foods store on Route 59. As they scrambled to get in, I realized that all but one of them were Spanish speakers.

Rick *Ufford-Chase* is the co-director of Stony Point Center in New York and the executive director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. He has worked on the U.S./Mexico border for twenty years where he founded and directed BorderLinks and worked in a variety of efforts to support migrants and refugees in the borderlands. Ufford-Chase served as the Moderator of the 216th General Assembly of the PC(USA).
“Qué tal, como estan?” I asked them. “What’s going on? How ya doin’?”

“Gracias a Dios, bien,” several of them answered. “Thanks be to God, I’m doing all right.”

One man, whom I’ll call Rolando, was from Jalapa, a city in Guatemala I’ve visited many times. He told me that in April of 2008, unable to find work to support his family, he borrowed the equivalent of nearly three thousand U.S. dollars. A few days later, he paid all of it to a coyote—a smuggler—well known in Jalapa for his ability to get folks safely to Los Angeles.

Together with a group of more than a dozen other men, Rolando traveled north by bus across Mexico, arriving four days later in a small town called “Altar.” Located about 150 miles southwest of Tucson, Arizona, and about sixty miles south of the western Arizona border, Altar has been a nexus for hundreds of thousands of travelers each year as they head north toward the promise of a job that pays well.

From there, Rolando described a journey that I know well. Sixty miles up a dirt road at breakneck speed in a beat up old van; and then, at dusk on a mid-May evening, Rolando and his group began hiking north. They crossed the border almost immediately, but their journey was far from over. In all, they walked through the unforgiving Sonoran Desert for seven nights. Each day they found mesquite bushes in dry washes where they could rest. “Within a couple of days,” Rolando told me, “everyone had run out of water.” They replenished their one-gallon water jugs from cattle tanks and—at least once—from one of the Humane Borders water stations maintained by church volunteers from Tucson and Phoenix in an effort to keep migrants from dying in the desert.

Rolando was one of the lucky ones. Temperatures didn’t go sky high during his hike and no one fell ill or fell behind. They made it more than 100 miles to a spot near Casa Grande, just south of Phoenix, without any encounters with the Border Patrol. “Still,” he told me, “It was the hardest thing I ever did.”

After a few nights in a “safe house” in Phoenix, Rolando’s group was moved west by van to Los Angeles. A few days later, he was crowded with more than twenty others into a cargo van for a nonstop trip cross-country to New York, where he had a sister waiting for him. Two days after he arrived here in Rockland County, he had false papers and a job on a construction crew working (I love this part) for the State of New York. This fall, the bad economy spelled layoffs for Rolando, and he’s spent several months stringing together day jobs and trying to save as much money as possible to send home to his parents.

Rolando’s story makes it clear that we live with a global economy designed to pit workers from different countries against one another, a failed immigration policy, and a border enforcement strategy that has been ill-conceived from its inception. Often as I’ve traveled and spoken across the church, folks have asked me how to solve these seemingly intractable problems. My answer is simple, “Christians must live what we say we believe.”

The Bible tells story after story of hospitality offered to people who have been shunned and rejected, hated and feared. Judaic law that has guided the people of Israel for thousands of years is built on the
premise that we must welcome the stranger and care for the most disadvantaged among us.

The prophets insisted that God delights not in lavish displays of wealth and power, nor even in pious expressions of faithfulness or worship. Instead, God’s favor is bestowed upon those who do justice and who stand with the oppressed.

Jesus carried the teaching to its logical, if dangerous, conclusion: Our God doesn’t care a whit about rigorous adherence to the law, but honors a radical commitment to the widow, the poor, the blind, and the lame—the most disenfranchised among us.

As Christians, we are called to stand against the xenophobia, fear mongering, and racism that characterize far too many of our communities, and even our churches, across the United States today. Doing so will often be unpopular, and will likely get us in trouble even with our own members. I rarely preach or speak on this difficult topic without someone standing up and walking out.

But the biblical notion of justice is clear: we need a global economy that will allow folks like Rolando to make a dignified wage and offer them a reasonable choice to stay with their families in their communities of origin. The biblical understanding of hospitality is unequivocal: we need an immigration policy designed to welcome those like Rolando who will work hard and become productive members of our society. The New Testament allows little wiggle-room on whether and how to respond to people without documents in our communities: “I was hungry,” Matthew’s Jesus proclaims, “and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me something to drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, in prison and you came to me, sick and you visited me” (Matt. 25:35-36).

My church friends in Latin America talk a lot about “El Jesus Migrante”—“Jesus the migrant.” The face of that Jesus looks much the same, whether one is in Jalapa, the southwestern deserts of the U.S., or the International Foods parking lot on Route 59 in Rockland County. Perhaps we should all be looking for Jesus in such places.
What do you hear parishioners saying about the issue of immigration?

Sung-In Park, Pastor, Yerang Korean Church, Austin, Texas

Mostly I hear about the difficulties involved in acquiring a job and a Green Card. Many say that after 9/11, the process for the Green Card became more difficult than ever before. International students used to get a job easily in the U.S. after acquiring a U.S. degree and then could acquire a Green Card through a hiring company or an institution. After 9/11, however, many companies and institutions ask for a Green Card first as a requirement to apply. As a result, many who want to stay in the U.S. feel stuck in between.

Jesús Juan (Jesse) González, Pastor, Comunidad Presbiteriana Hispana, Springdale, Arkansas

Sixty percent of our NCD congregation in northwest Arkansas have entered the U.S. without formal immigration inspection from various Latin American and Caribbean Spanish-speaking countries. In most cases they have come looking for jobs that will improve their own living standards in the U.S. and those of relatives in their home country. Social destitution is enough reason for them to endure the risky trip and entry as well as the marginality of living without proper identification or assuming someone else’s identity. Their main cry is, Why are we seeing and considered criminals or potential terrorists if we just came looking for a job?

My parishioners have become more fearful of local/state efforts to enforce immigration regulations than federal efforts. Voting citizens have became desperate in the face of what they perceive as a lack of federal enforcement and often elect any city/county/state candidate with a “tough immigration agenda.” So, undocumented immigrants are avoiding cities, counties, or states that have passed anti-immigration laws/ordinances.

In helping parishioners grapple with immigration, what biblical and theological resources do you draw on?

Jesse González

When confronting undocumented persons in trouble, church members struggling with the idea of harboring law breakers, or public elected officials with an anti-immigrant agenda, I always refer to Paul’s law and grace discussion in Romans chapters 2-14. The word “amnesty” is anathema for politicians or some church members but this is precisely what Paul argues in Romans: without the amnesty (grace) given by God in Jesus Christ no one can be saved under the law (by which everybody is guilty as charged); everyone is a sinner (a crime against God’s will), and unless Jesus Christ reforms the Torah with another graceful law, no one can make it to heaven. To me this is the case.
for immigration reform, that unless there is amnesty, no one who has entered the country without proper documentation under the present law could ever regularize his/her immigration status.

Sung-In Park
Since the majority of my congregation does not have permanent status in the U.S., I sometimes refer to Philippians 3: 20a (for our citizenship is in heaven) to elicit the issue of immigration and comfort them. I also sometimes preach on Joseph or Daniel to present them biblical examples of successful immigrants. The doctrine of the image of God provides a good basis for human equality and justice. God loves and protects the weak and the sojourners who were created in the image of God. Thus I preach that we need to help and embrace both legal and illegal immigrants. However, at the same time, justice must roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5: 24). Thus we pray for lawmakers and encourage immigrants to respect immigration laws.

What role should local congregations play in the issues surrounding immigration?
Sung-In Park
In most cases, financial ability becomes the crucial issue for both legal and illegal immigrants. They need a good attorney and food and shelter to sustain them. Thus they need money. A local congregation can provide financial aid for an immigrant to proceed with his or her case legally. A congregation can hold an event such as a special concert or garage sale to draw some funds. In addition to raising funds, a congregation also can host a seminar to inform immigrants of recent changes in immigration laws. Above all, I think, a local congregation should be a place for legal and illegal immigrants to worship the LORD in peace and pray for their future.

Jesse González
The basic and elemental need in many congregations is to educate their members in the biblical/theological concept of immigration and also to be better informed about the present federal immigration laws and bureaucratic procedures that citizens of other countries have to endure when applying for any kind of visa.

The main question to local congregations is, To whom are they listening or reading to shape their stand about the immigration issue? The worst scenario could be that local congregations would not be listening to our own denominational governing bodies' public and theological stances on immigration.

What effects of immigration stand out in Guatemala?
Karla Ann Koll, PC(USA) mission co-worker, professor of history, mission and religions for the Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America (Guatemala) and the Latin American Biblical University (Costa Rica)
Every day, immigration affects the people among whom I serve in mission here in Guatemala. One of my students, whose husband has been in the United States for more than ten years, called to say that he hasn’t sent her any money since July. Has he lost his construction job? Or has he decided to abandon completely his family in Guatemala? She doesn’t know, but without the money he was sending their son won’t be able to continue in high school.
A young man I know has frequent nightmares. When he was walking across the Arizona desert, his group came upon a mother and child dying of thirst. “Keep walking,” the coyote told them. “If you stop to help, you will die, too.”

Recently, I stood beside a mother and father as they buried their twenty-year-old son, his dreams of a better life ended by a hit-and-run driver in Los Angeles.

More than once, a promising student has started theology classes, only to disappear a few months later. They can make so much more even in a menial jobs in the United States than they can pastoring a church here.

Over a million Guatemalans live in the United States. The remittances they send back to their families keep the Guatemalan economy afloat to the tune of more than four billion dollars a year. This money puts food on tables, builds homes, pays for children’s education, and provides start-up capital for small businesses. In my experience, it’s not the poorest who take the risk to emigrate, but the most prepared and the most ambitious. Guatemala and its churches are losing many of the brightest young people. They see no possibility of earning a decent living for themselves in this, the economy with the most unequal distribution of wealth in the Americas. Now detentions and deportations are putting an end to many dreams. Every time I accompany a group from the United States to visit the Emmaus Presbyterian Church in San Mateo, immigration comes up almost immediately. Why are people who only want to work being treated as criminals? the Guatemalans ask. What are you and your churches doing to help our relatives in the United States? Are they not your brothers and sisters in Christ?
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Each of these reference books is an admirable tool for researching topics in Christian spirituality. Taken together, they represent something of a consensus, and possibly even a convergence, in the contemporary study of spirituality.

The intent of the New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality is to provide a resource of spirituality “in the light of the reform and renewal that the Second Vatican Council set in motion” (viii). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the articles contained in this dictionary were being written, what that reform and renewal really brought about was not clear—and it is not clear yet. But two factors were apparent: the desire of the church to acknowledge the “modern world,” as one of Vatican II’s key documents put it; and the church’s willingness to be in conversation with points of view other than its own.

Consequently, this dictionary, while written almost entirely by Roman Catholic scholars, includes accounts of spiritualities other than Roman Catholic, and aspects of the contemporary world as they affect the issues of spirituality. One can find articles on Protestant Spiritualities, Eastern Christian Spirituality (i.e. Orthodoxy), Eastern (Asian) Spirituality, Feminist Spirituality, and Liberation Theology, which are accurate and sympathetic. The articles vary from several paragraphs to several pages. There are articles on spiritual movements and schools, but not on individuals: Thus, there is an article on “Franciscan Spirituality,” but not on “St. Francis of Assisi.” Each article is followed by a brief bibliography.

The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality is not tied to any denominational tradition. Its contributors include scholars from throughout the English-speaking world. It limits itself to Christian spirituality, but necessarily—because the boundary between “Christian” spiritualities and other spiritualities is so porous—gives attention to other spiritualities which have helped to shape or influence Christian spirituality. Hence, one finds articles entitled “Buddhism and Christianity,” “Islam and Christianity,” and “Global Spirituality.” The New Westminster Dictionary also focuses on issues of the relationship between spirituality and contemporary culture through articles such as, “Cyberspace and Spirituality,” “Secularization,” and “Technology and Spirituality.” One also finds, of course, exactly what one would expect to find in a spirituality dictionary: articles on prayer, various devotions, spiritual formation, and spiritual traditions within Christianity.

Most of the articles are at least a page long, and often are several pages. In addition, The New Westminster Dictionary includes thirteen longer essays by noted scholars. Among these are “Mysticism,” by Bernard McGinn; “Spirituality and the Dialogue of Religions,” by Michael Burns; and “Spirituality and Science,” by Robert John Russell. Taken together, these essays constitute a comprehensive introduction to the study of spirituality in our time. They make the New Westminster Dictionary an exception to the general maxim that reference books are to be consulted rather than read sequentially. The book-within-a-book that the essays provide...
deserves to be both read attentively and consulted often.

Taken together, these two works demonstrate the ecumenical thrust, and even the eclecticism, of Christian spirituality in our time. They indicate the presence of conversations on almost every hand about the ways that Christian spirituality engages the contemporary world. In one sense, spirituality is religion-as-lived, and will always be eclectic, because life itself is eclectic. However, both dictionaries also demonstrate that in Christianity there can be no divorce between religion-as-lived and religion-as-thought (theology). Whatever might be the case in other religions, in Christianity if religion-as-lived becomes separated from religion-as-thought, both Christian theology and Christian spirituality lose their identity.

A couple of dictionaries is not going to resolve the gulf that is often felt (and often bewailed without effect) between Christian spirituality and Christian theology. But these two dictionaries, each in its own way, help to mark out the territory, and this indicates where and how bridges might be built. Both are worth owning, and both do a far more comprehensive job than the term “dictionary” might suggest.

**THinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian, Elements of Preaching Series, by Ronald J. Allen.**
Reviewed by Jennifer Lord, associate professor of homiletics and dean of the chapel.

Many discussions about preaching consider it to be a practical rather than a theoretical discipline. Because it is under this purview, it does come as a surprise to some that preachers are interested in the “theoretical disciplines” of systematic and constructive theology, exegesis, and hermeneutics. In fact, they are preaching's partners in play, for week in and week out preachers work with texts. There are texts, there is critical work, there is interpretation, and there is operative theology. From the preacher’s vantage point there is no division: preaching has always been integrative. Preaching is a theological action of many parts.

Ron Allen’s recent book puts these topics together. In *Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian*, Allen explores how a theological stance shapes a sermon from start to proclamatory finish (or, to proclamatory penultimate finish as the sermon lives on through hearers’ lives). Allen describes the connection between different theological identities and their accompanying views about the nature and purpose of preaching and interpretation of texts. Texts, homiletical aim, hermeneutics, and theology are brought together. In order to accomplish this Allen does one of the best things that he does for the discipline of homiletics: he categorizes.

Allen introduces readers to the ways that theology shapes preaching in Part One. After defining theology he shows how it functions even informally in communities. He then diagrams what he calls “A Circular Relationship: Preacher, Text, Theological Perspectives, Sermon” (6). Allen recognizes and names other factors that influence the preacher’s approach to the sermon (i.e. educational level, ethnicity, and gender orientation) but then claims his theological focus and moves to show how particular theological movements still shape preaching.

To do this he presents ten theological families and their general emphases on preaching. Allen includes the following traditions: Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Episcopalian, Lutheran, Reformed, Wesleyan, Anabaptist, Society of Friends, and Pentecostal. Allen concludes Part One with a brief description of premodern and Enlightenment worldviews, highlighting hermeneutical positions that are important in the history of interpretive methods and theological tasks for preaching.

Part Two introduces readers to theological movements in relation to homiletics. In this section, which Allen calls
“Theological Movements in the Enlightenment Tradition” (23), he describes liberal theology, theology as mutual critical correlation, and process or relational theology. He organizes each category the same way: 1) a broad outline of the theology; 2) a description of that movement’s purpose/s of preaching; 3) an interpretation of Luke 7:11-17 according to that particular theological position; 4) questions for the theological position. Each section concludes with a list of representative readings for that theological perspective.

Part Three is titled “Theological Movements that React Against the Enlightenment” (43). These chapters cover evangelical theology, neoorthodoxy, postliberalism, and then confessionalism, radical orthodoxy, and theologies of otherness. The theological positions in this section are organized according to the same four-part arrangement as above. Part Four is titled “Theological Movements Arising from Contextual Concerns” (69) and attends to liberation theologies and ethnic theologies. The book’s end includes two tables: one that compares key theological motifs of the different perspectives and the other that provides a way to correlate historic and contemporary movements.

This book is a part of the Elements of Preaching series by Fortress Press. The series is designed for the introductory preaching course and for preachers who want to revisit the different topics of preaching. Allen’s volume accompanies volumes on sermon context, sermonic claim, interpretation of texts, form, delivery, language, and the sermon in the context of worship. The books are intended to be short introductions to the particular homiletical topic, to promote classroom discussion, and to provide a reintroduction of the homiletical topic for pastors.

Among current homiletical writings there are other books that offer more detailed argumentation between confessional and postliberal preaching or neoorthodox and postmodern homiletical implications. There are other authors who are more interested in taking one question about the purpose of preaching, and writing to elucidate that one question. But Allen once again does the discipline a service with a concise overview; in this case it is an overview of the relationship between preaching and theology. He lays out a template, arranges the positions, asks questions, and so creates a grid for conversation.

Pastors will benefit from this book in several ways. It is another tool for identifying where our theological feet stand. It is also a tool for identifying operative theological movements within one congregation. The book is arranged in such a way as to be useful for adult educational study; in particular the different theological interpretations of the passage from Luke are a sure conversation starter for Bible study groups. In the end readers may find that their stance straddles theological categories, which may help us all negotiate a world of differences.
Beloved, I exhort you, as aliens and sojourners, to abstain from fleshly desires, which fight against the soul, by keeping your behavior among the Gentiles beautiful, so that when they slander you as evildoers, as a result of seeing your beautiful works, they might glorify God on the day of visitation. (1 Pet 2:11-12)

To be a Christian, according to 1 Peter, is to send yourself into exile, to name yourself as outsider, to enforce a distance, an estrangement, between yourself and your neighbor. This sending, this sojourning, occurs of course without physically leaving home or house or city.

The estrangement is of another order, anchored in the new realities and demands

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of the Christian life. These realities appear, in the above passage at least, to be primarily moral. To be an alien, to be a Christian, is to abstain from desire, to engage in a moral and ethical battle, and to do beautiful (kalos) works. An enormous insult is thereby put in place wherein Gentile (Roman) culture is defined as a dwelling in the realm of fleshly desire.

This is an insult most Gentiles or Romans would recognize and find appropriately offensive. Resisting the terrors of the passions is, of course, standard in Greco-Roman ethics. Socrates’ speech to Cebes in the Phaedo is typical (Plato, Phaedo 82D-83B). Socrates argues that when philosophy “takes possession of the soul” it enters a body that is imprisoned by the passions. Philosophy then tries to free the soul from the powers of these passions. In fact, this battle over the soul between philosophy and the passions is the central dynamic of the philosophic life.

Thus, this rhetorical connection by 1 Peter between the passions and the Gentile life reads like an internal family insult. Only someone at home in Roman culture could insult that culture so effectively. First Peter asserts to its Roman neighbors that they have failed at their core aspiration. Romans may wish for and work for the ethical life, but they cannot achieve it. Christians, however, using non-Roman powers, can.

Of course, this insult is addressed not directly to Romans but to the Roman Christians themselves.

The letter is mapping the divided personal geography of the Christian readers. This suggests that Roman Christians are composed of Roman narratives and Christian narratives. Christians are in conflict with themselves. The conflict is rhetorically severe. The Christian life is a new birth (1:3); they are suckling babes (2:2); they are a new people (2:10); they are aliens in their own homes (1:1; 2:11). First Peter, then, is an exhortation to intensify this internal conflict by becoming more and more Christian. This involves both a “yes” and “no” to the Roman narratives within and without. First Peter is a call to cultural conflict.

Having created a rhetoric of a complex cultural geography composed of rejection and acceptance, of affirmation and denial, of congruence and estrangement, it is not clear from 1 Peter what exactly has changed. The language of rejecting the passions (1:14; 2:11) could mean almost anything, as could the call to holiness (1:16). However, the brief reminder to no longer live as Gentiles do in 4:3 includes a rather curious list of vices: licentiousness, desires, drunkenness, inebriating feasts, drinking parties, and lawless idolatries. Readers have never quite figured out how to read this list. These vices may function simply as a classic vice list which names common vices that almost any reader would recognize as vices. First Peter would be simply repeating the admonition to reject the power of the passions. However, certain terms in the list and perhaps even the sequence of the list recall the Roman collegia, which were voluntary societies formed around a variety of social, economic, and religious interests. The context of social abuse assumed by 1 Peter cannot be explained simply by the rhetoric of passions or holiness. However, rejection of collegia might be sufficient cause for conflict with Roman neighbors who valued these communities. Nevertheless, this is still an internal Roman discussion in which one Roman value is pitted against another. Collegia were, for instance, quite unpopular with the emperor and with most officials. Chris-
tians are taking sides in an internal Roman debate. These sojourning Christians sound, in fact, much like the Roman elite in their morality and their support of household hierarchies (2:18-3:7) and like members of the imperial house in their politics (2:13-17). These are stances not all Romans and all Christians would applaud.

Thus, none of this quite explains the initial call to become aliens and sojourners or the language of new birth or the imagery of being a new people and a holy priesthood. This sense of estrangement from Roman culture must reside in something besides this rather modest ethical sorting. While it is always possible that 1 Peter leaves the real reasons unstated, within the explicit syntax of 1 Peter, Christology is the key. The dynamics of the Jesus story provide the engines of estrangement and conflict. Jesus himself started the cultural wars. In the imagery of 1 Peter, Jesus Christ, although he committed no sin, suffered on the cross. Yet, “when he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten” (3:23). In doing this, he left Christians “an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (3:22). The terrors of the story of Jesus inaugurates similar terrors in the life of every Christian. Jesus was killed by a certain set of Roman values.

To follow Jesus is to invite this same violence. To be a Christian requires cultural warfare.

The story of the cross eliminates any possibility of peace between Christianity and culture.

Of course, even the story of the cross and to the unjust suffering of Jesus finds analogies in the story of Socrates. In fact, it is hard to find any single moment in the Christian narratives or any single Christian value that cannot find parallel somewhere in the Roman world. Nonetheless, the engines of christology demand estrangement, demand alienation. Yet it seems that this estrangement with the Roman world can only be accomplished by sorting the values of the Roman world. To be a Christian means to be a certain kind of Roman. This sorting of Roman values means that some Romans will see the good in these Christians and some will not. In the end, perhaps a Roman Christian is a Roman who can take a certain set of Roman values to the Christian cross.

This fluid dynamic of belonging and not-belonging is most famously expressed in the Epistle to Diognetus.

The unknown author notes that the difference between Christians and other people is not in country or language or customs (ethos) (Diogn. 5.1). In fact, Christians follow the customs of their native cities in clothing and food and even “in the rest of life” (Diogn. 5.4). Nonetheless, there is a difference. The letter asserts that these same Christians may live in their own cities, but they do so as “sojourners.” They may share all the duties of citizens, but do so as “strangers” (Diogn. 5.5). In a rather clever summary, “Every foreign country is their fatherland (patris), and every fatherland is a foreign country” (Diogn. 5.5). Nonetheless, Christians are good citizens. In fact, they surpass the laws in their obedience. For this, they are hated. When hated, they respond with grace. Quoting 1 Peter, “They are abused, and they bless” (Diogn. 5.10-15). All of this leads to the famous image of the soul and the body. “To put it simply, what the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world” (Diogn. 6.1). This means several things.
Christians live in the world but are not “of” the world. The world hates Christians, but Christians love the world. Finally, Christians may be imprisoned in the world, but their presence keeps the world alive.

You may hate us, you Romans, but without us you cannot survive.

While not all early apologists would admit to Christians loving the Roman world, Diognetus in a brief space articulates beautifully the complex geography of early Christianity and Roman culture. Everyone is Roman, even the Christians. Yet somehow, in some sense, in some way, these Roman Christians turn out to be something other than Romans. They are aliens and outsiders. But they are more dangerous than the usual misspoken foreigner, for they live in the house with you and they have all the legal documents.

One final example is that of 2 Peter. Here, the cultural wars invade the Christian house.

The enemy is not the Roman but the incorrect or immoral Christian. According to 2 Peter, Christians who choose the wrong values are false teachers, irrational animals, blots, accursed children, waterless springs, and dogs who return to their own vomit (2 Pet. 2:1, 12, 13, 14, 17, 22). The vitriolic of the attack against Christians in 2 Peter, which is taken largely from Jude, is unyielding and overwhelming. Nonetheless, we cannot reconstruct from 2 Peter exactly what the immorality or heresy might be. These people may have bad theology about the second coming or a different understanding of the ethical character of the Christian life or both. In any case, there is nothing peculiarly Christian versus Roman in this attack.

From a cultural perspective, 2 Peter reads as though Romans with different sets of Roman values wandered into the church bringing their Roman differences with them.

These Roman cultural differences become Christian theological differences. The Roman cultural wars take over the church. In this way, 2 Peter anticipates the confused cultural dynamics of early Christian theological and ecclesial conflicts.

What is the point of these brief (very brief) sketches? Let me suggest, somewhat immoderately, several readings.

1. To follow Jesus is to pursue estrangement both from the larger culture and the people in it.
2. Christian culture is a species of the larger culture, albeit often a rather peculiar species.
3. Christian alienation is accomplished by choosing, for often rather peculiar reasons, among the competing values of the larger culture.
4. Cultural wars do not stop at the doors of the church.
5. It is the nature of Christianity and of individual Christians to be in cultural conflict both with themselves and with others.
6. Christians can be good citizens, although some non-Christians and other Christians will contest their understanding of good citizenship.

The doors between the church and the world are swinging open and closed. They were in the NT times, and they are now. And no one, neither then nor now, can agree which doors should be open and which closed. Thus, I have a final suggestion, perhaps
no. 7, echoing the christological anchors of 1 Peter.

The eternal Christian cultural battle, within and without, should be fought not only in ecclesial and public arenas but also within the syntax of the Jesus story. The story and stories of Jesus, what he said and did, and what neighbors and enemies did for him and to him, ought to have some kind of canonical power. All readings of the Christian life should be readings of the story of Jesus. I do not think, of course, that gospel syntaxes can silence disagreement or end cultural conflict. In fact, close readings of the stories of Jesus increase conflict as often as they reduce it. Texts are places of conflict, both within themselves and among their readers. Nevertheless, to take our contests to the syntactical field of the story of Jesus will, I think, change something about our debates for the better.
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