

## THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION

- Convener: Linh Hoang, Siena College  
Moderator: Kathryn Cox, College of St. Benedict and St. John's University  
Presenters: Gemma Tulud Cruz, Australian Catholic University  
Brett Hoover, Loyola University Chicago  
Sophia Park, Holy Names University

In the second year of the theology of migration interest group, the image of “the world on the move” stated by Gemma Cruz captured the three presenters’ papers. The world continues to change and people are constantly negotiating the new places and situations they encounter. A theology of migration reflects on that movement and the implication of God’s presence in that activity. Each presenter explored the broader themes of migration: journeying, pilgrimage, and postcolonial identities that enrich the reflection of a theology of migration.

The first presenter, Gemma Cruz entitled her paper “Journeying (together) in Faith: Popular Religion in the Context of Migration” and provided one symbol important in any journey, i.e., carrying baggage. There are visible baggage and invisible baggage; it is the invisible baggage of language, cuisine, music, and faith that are crucial to the migration experience. The invisible baggage of religion/faith has a special but also a complex role in the migration process. Religion acts as both comfort and challenge. As comfort, religion provides the migrant with consolation before, during, and after the journey. It is the foundation by which the migrant is able to translate into a new culture and also the icon that the migrant carries into the new culture. Religion as a challenge is threefold: status of the religion practiced, class differences between those practicing the religion, and theology. The theological aspect challenges the church also in a threefold manner. First as a church of the stranger where we are asked to see our brokenness and how we are enriched by others; how do we break bread together? Second, in light of religious freedom and pluralism how do we practice interreligious reciprocity and talk about common language that has different meanings? For example what do we mean when we use the term God? Third, we need to see the church’s mission as an incarnational imagination. That is, witness as “witness” whereby the migrants functions as protagonist to help the church see where outreach and presence is needed.

Brett Hoover “The Rhythm of the Saints: Migration in a Pilgrim Church” utilized his ministry experience and first-hand interviews with undocumented migrants to describe the process of pilgrimage for a theology of migration. The process of migration is a disorienting but also a spiritual journey. Hoover laid out some of perceptions of a theology of migration which are viewed predominantly from the lens of rights and multiculturalism. He offers another perspective from the point of view of a pilgrimage narrative starting with scripture. It is not the popular description of Abraham as migrant but rather as Hoover explains the story of Tobit who was forced to abandon his home and relocate that illuminates the migrant experience. Hoover argued that Abraham’s story is insufficient because Abraham was wealthy. Rather, it is Tobit’s account of the jarring migration that shows the messier and complicated

experience of migration which speaks to the contemporary context. Tobit and Anna had a continued forced migration with reversals of fortune, along with disorientation and seeking to be in control. The two accounts, however, undergird the varied experiences of migration from early salvation history to the present day context. Using Thomas Merton, Hoover examined the idea of pilgrimage not as atonement, but rather radical dependence on God, where there is a radical surrender of control on the journey. This surrender is both internal and external for the migrant. He argued that the quest is for work and everything else results from this quest. In this notion of pilgrimage accompaniment becomes key, both divine and human. This raises questions of how humans provide accompaniment to the migrant pilgrim in the form of a social network, language, and a church (worshipping community). As a remedy to the weakness of the pilgrimage model which can privilege interiority, for thinking about migration, Hoover turned to the Second Vatican Council drawing upon the notion of the people of God en route to God and discussed the idea of a communal pilgrimage, and the need to judge the present order with the Reign of God as the standard.

Sophia Park's "A Reading of Cha's *Dictee* from a Postcolonial Diasporic Perspective" appropriated the autobiographical novel *Dictee* by Teresa Cha to provide a postcolonial perspective on the theology of migration. The personal experiences of the author outside and inside the novel are necessary to hear in order to understand the fragmented identities of immigrants. The two overarching images that she uses are language and food. These are tools for survival but also they emphasize the sense of dislocation. For the immigrant writers, personal stories are always embedded in the writing process. Learning the language of the host country gives the sense of the absence of the self and dislocation. In a manner similar to eating, learning the language of the host country is a matter of survival. Park articulated that the narrative describes both the bitterness and discomfort with this process. And the pain associated with learning the language of the host country reminds one of the sensory experiences of indigestion after eating. In a more descriptive way, the process of biting and swallowing food can be applied to language where each new word spoken is physically swallowed by the immigrant. It is "eating transposed to the speaking, the pain is dislocated to the new culture." In the swallowing, one takes into one's embodied self part of the new culture, changing forever, whereby they are no longer part of their original culture and not part of the new. Park discussed the need to attend to the construction of identity because if one is able to return to their homeland they realize they have learned another language and no longer speak the mother tongue. How does a fragmented/hybrid identity function when one is losing a sense of belonging and when uprooted?

A fruitful and engaging discussion between the presenters and those in attendance provided other examples of metaphors, themes and theories to explore in a theology of migration.

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