

THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION

- Topic: Crossing the Divide: A Theology of Migration
Convener: Linh Hoang, Siena College
Moderator: Kathryn Lilla Cox, College of St. Benedict and St. John's University
Presenters: Kristin Heyer, Santa Clara University
Linh Hoang, Siena College
Daniel Groody, University of Notre Dame

The theme of the 2009 convention provided an opportunity to address the important issue of immigrants and refugees. This session examined the need for a theological reflection on the current movement of peoples both immigrants and refugees. Kathryn Cox called the session to order and introduced each of the panelists.

Kristin Heyer opened her presentation by articulating that a theology of migration, as suggested by Gioacchino Campese starts from an epistemologically privileged perspective of undocumented migrants, theology must read the reality of migration and uncover the presence of God within that reality. Her presentation considered the sinful practices that both characterize the realities of migration and at the same time conceal the face of God as they impede our grasp of authentic values. In particular, she proposed that social sin serves as a conceptual key to revealing the socioeconomic, legal, and political structures that contribute to undocumented immigration, as well as to understanding the ideological blinders that foster resistance to an ethic of hospitality and to immigrants themselves. She continued by examining the development of the category of social sin, particularly its articulations by John Paul II and Latin American liberation theologians, to arrive at a dialectical conception of social sin that illuminates the relationship between pervasive ideologies regarding undocumented persons and unjust structures impacting their vulnerability. She concluded with brief reflections on conversion beyond this "impasse."

Linh Hoang examined the refugee plight and resettlement both stressing the past and present situation of refugees around the world. He discussed the complicated issue of identifying refugees from the larger group of migrants. Yes, refugees are migrants but their reasons for leaving are more pressing or dangerous than those of immigrants. The focus on how the United States responded to the refugees in the early twentieth century and also its consideration of refugees now was highlighted. In stressing the refugee plight and resettlement for a theology of migration relies on two particular perspectives that of hospitality, solidarity of others. Christian hospitality is being able to welcome not only the invited guests but also those unexpected guests. This hospitality coupled with the solidarity of others places no privilege on any one but rather each group is related to and dependent upon each other. Refugees stress the realization and development of these two perspectives for a theology of migration.

The last presenter, Daniel Groody stated that in light of the contemporary challenges that emerge with nearly 200 million displaced people around the world,

his work seeks to examine a theological reflection in an age of migration. He explored ways in which the concept of migration shapes our understanding of God and the ways that this same concept of God can shape our understanding of migration. He focused on four foundations of a theology of migration and refugees: 1) the *imago Dei*: Crossing the Problem-Person Divide, 2) the *Verbum Dei*: Crossing the Divine-Human Divide, 3) the *missio Dei*: Crossing the Human-Human Divide, and 4) the *visio Dei*: Crossing the Country-Kingdom divide. Each offers a way of thinking about theology and migration as a call to cross borders and overcome barriers. His presentation focused on not only on how migration is a way of thinking about God and what it means to be human in the world, which has many implications for how we understand and respond to those who are migrants and refugees.

Kathryn Lilla Cox facilitated a lively conversation between the panelists and with the audience in attendance.

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