

## THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION

- Topic: A Theology of Migration  
Convener: Linh Hoang, Siena College  
Moderator: Kathryn Cox, College of St. Benedict and St. John's University  
Presenters: van Thanh Nguyen, Catholic Theological Union  
Linh Hoang, Siena College

The session began with an announcement that "A Theology of Migration" interest group was beginning the first year of a three year term. People were asked to provide email addresses or speak to Linh Hoang if they had ideas for next year. The current theme of the convention provided an opportunity to address the important issue of being immigrants and refugees within the history of Christianity both theologically and biblically. The session was moderated by Kathy Cox who announced that there was a change in the speakers from the printed program. She introduced the two speakers Linh Hoang and van Thanh Nguyen. The papers examined the need for a theological reflection on the current movement of peoples and also reading scripture through the eyes of being an immigrant.

Linh Hoang who convened the session presented a theoretical approach to studying migration today. The title of his paper was "Crossing and Dwelling: Hospitality in a Theology of Migration." The theme of crossing and dwelling is developed by Thomas A. Tweed in a theory of religion. This theory was used to study the immigrant communities and their religious practices. In adapting this theory of religion, Hoang suggested the theme crossing and dwelling is appropriate and necessary to reflect on a theology of migration. The constant movement of immigrants and refugees makes it necessary to understand their struggles.

Hoang made a point that climate refugees are not included in the migration/immigration debate and that this will pose a serious problem for helping people on the move. The theme of crossing and dwelling can help understand how immigrants negotiate multivalent borders—geographical, invisible, political, and others. A way to negotiate is the practice of hospitality. To take hospitality seriously one needs to include the idea of vulnerability because in this practice being host and being hostile are both a part of hospitality. We need to be careful of not simply institutionalizing care into an agenda—feed, clothe, and house the poor. The Christian is called to be hospitable not only because of the biblical directive but also because of the connection with all of creation.

Van Thanh Nguyen shared his reflection entitled "Jesus as Sojourner: An Immigrant Reading of Matthew 2:13-15." International migration is said to be at an all-time high—over 200 million people—which is a staggering fact and a sad reality for many. Why are there so many people on the move, and more importantly, what does the Bible say about immigration? Reading the story of the Flight into Egypt in Matthew 2:13-15 from the perspective of an immigrant and a refugee will provide a fresh understanding of what the author is trying to teach his immigrant community and our current situation today. The text will demonstrate

that although being the Son of God, Jesus, who was constantly on the move and one whose survival depended upon people's hospitality, knows what it is really like to be an immigrant and a stranger. Seeing Jesus as a sojourner not only provides a message of comfort and hope for those who are displaced but an invitation for all believers to care for the stranger in their midst.

Following the presentations there was a lively question and answer session which included some conversation between the audience members. The questions ranged from the implications of the presentations for understanding the new immigration law in Arizona, how hospitality is reciprocal in Asian countries—how the biblical idea of hospitality extends to the stranger—giving without strings breakdown the patronage system. Questions were raised about how race and ethnicity are selectively attended to in the migration debate. It was noted that in Irish or other European systems illegal immigrants are more tolerated; there is a greater hospitality to them. The ethics of these variations was raised. Other questions raised: what counts as hospitality and what is being acknowledged? It begins with listening to peoples' stories, as well as the need to envision a different story. The distinction between just laws, unjust laws, and divine law were also discussed. The need to recognize why people are migrating and understand the causes of migration is essential. There was a discussion about how the biblical presentation shed helpful light on the migration topic and kept us focused on our responsibility to all human beings as followers of Jesus Christ. The interest group concluded with a several voicing interest for next years' presentations and discussion.

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