

Anabaptist Witness

*A Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Dialogue on
Key Issues Facing the Church in Mission*

VOLUME 6 DECEMBER 2019 ISSUE 2

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Editorial

To talk about migration is to talk about identity, both individual identity and the collective identities of communities of faith. Forced migration characterized and shaped the early Anabaptist movement—a movement created, in part, to ensure religious freedom and the ability to practice faith as separate communities.” This pattern of movement, originally meant to support a closed community, has resulted in a migration of theology, growing missions movements, and the spread of Anabaptism across the world.

In this issue of *Anabaptist Witness*, authors explore ways in which migration has shaped identity as well as how identity has shaped migration and ways of being and belief, both in the past and the present. They also offer reflections on, and understandings from different perspectives around the world of, who we are as faith communities of migrants and people on the move.

Jason Barnhart examines the theme of migration in Brethren history. He takes us through the poems of Alexander Mack, Jr., and the way Mack’s writings, which are influenced by Pietist and Anabaptist thought, capture the inward and outward pilgrimage of colonial Brethren in the new world. Bryan Rafael Falcón’s poem about visiting the US/Mexico border wall in Arizona and Sonora in 2018 provides a contemporary contrast to the themes explored in Barnhart’s paper. Falcón’s poem illuminates how the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion, of borders and crossings, of longing and disappearance, continue to shape the way we view each other and create art together.

Peter Wigginton and Robert and Anne Thiessen address the challenges of shaping our theology and acting accordingly in response to migration. Wigginton—reflecting on the ways he and his wife, Delicia, support the Mennonite Church in Quito as they receive Venezuelan migrants—shares about a needed theology of grieving in response to the situations of forced displacement. Reflection on the experience of displacement, he writes, always obliges us to pass through mourning toward hope. The Thiessens draw on their experiences in southern Mexico to expand our understanding of migration and mission. Reflecting on the failure of external missionary movements to support healthy, incarnational faith communities, they propose several new ways to think about migrants and the mission field.

Our Anabaptist communities are constantly being invited to make decisions about how to respond to current migration movements. In “Compassión con el extranjero” (Compassion for the Foreigner), Rebeca González invites us to consider responses to migration formed from her reading of the Bible as a witness of asylum seekers’ experiences and stories during her time at the hospitality ministry of Casa de Paz in Aurora, Colorado. González also invites us to consider both the root causes of migration today in parallel to historical Ana-

baptist migrations and the impact of those migrations for the early Anabaptist communities. She notes that today, as in the biblical text, migration is both voluntary and involuntary in that it is a movement toward abundance, empire, and possibilities of life. She argues that Anabaptists, pushed by political, social, economic, and religious persecution, learned to live in intentional communities where they could share, dialogue, and cooperate with each other.

How do the experiences of the people of Israel as both host and “stranger” (*ger*) inform our theology of migration today? Yamil Acevedo takes us into a dialogue among Old Testament scholars and offers suggestions on how our missional identity can be shaped and informed by the Old Testament and the experiences of the people of God. Acevedo asserts that an honest engagement with those experiences “will inevitably place us in a position that returns dignity to the other and at the same time preserves our own.” In addition, he argues that this will “incline us toward hope while we eagerly await the redemption of all things as a missionary community with a profound confrontation ethic.”

Jaime Prieto Valladares, in an article written for Mennonite World Conference’s 2027 celebrations, invites us to consider what he calls “decisive questions” for the church in this age of migration. In a Latin American rhythmical style of citing music, poetry, and historical events in Anabaptist history, Prieto walks us through our Anabaptist migration journey, with a focus in Latin America. He asks crucial questions such as, what will the church contribute to offer a better future for migrants and their children? Would it be possible to imitate Jesus in the journey with migrants? Are we capable of gathering the best of our Anabaptist tradition to recreate a utopia of solidarity? Will we allow the anointing of the Holy Spirit to inspire us to create and sing songs that will allow migrant boys and girls to dream in peace? We hope that this issue of *Anabaptist Witness* will raise these and related questions for our readers.

Saulo Padilla (Mennonite Central Committee U.S.) and
Anna Vogt (Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Ottawa Office),
guest editors

Brethren to America: Alexander Mack, Jr. (1712–1802) and the Poetic Imagination of a Pilgrim People

JASON BARNHART

In 1784, Alexander Mack, Jr., known as “Sander,” penned a poem in response to the death of his friend Christopher Sauer II (1721–1784). Entitled “Nun bricht der Hütten Haus entzwei” (“Now Breaks the Cottage House in Half”), the poem details the final stages of a person’s transition into eternity:

Now breaks this house of earth in twain,
now the body can decay;
the pilgrimage is now over;
now will my spirit recover;
the soul has now won the fight;
my Jesus has overcome the enemy.
To Him alone be the honor.

Now I will enter into Jesus who died for me.
He has won through pain and death a refuge for my soul.
He has prepared for me a better house in Heaven
that I may praise Him in it forever and ever.¹

Christopher Sauer II—Mack’s beloved friend, confidant, and brother in Christ—had finished his pilgrimage on earth, and the conclusion of that journey was not mere death but the sweet embrace of Christ Jesus. In German, the description is all the more personal as the phrase *Pilger Reise*, translated “pilgrimage,” literally means “pilgrim’s travel.”

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¹ Samuel Heckman, ed., *The Religious Poetry of Alexander Mack, Jr.* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Publishing House, 1912), 43, 45.

Even in moments of profound grief, Mack's poetry alludes to a "spiritual vision [of a] true homeland beyond the horizon of this world."²

Poetic reflections like this capture an inward and outward pilgrimage that marked the lives of colonial Brethren in the new world. Through mediums of poetry and hymns, Mack captured and communicated the Brethren immigration narrative as a transitional self-awareness marked by the meta-theme of pilgrimage. Brethren in colonial Pennsylvania were interacting with religious "others" in a new context.

All German Brethren churches trace their lineage back to the fusion of Radical Pietist and Anabaptist themes present at the beginning of the Brethren movement in Schwarzenau, Germany, in 1708. Sander Mack's father, Alexander Mack, Sr. (1679–1735), is the progenitor of the Brethren family. Whereas Mack Sr. devoted his energies to doctrinal and didactic writing, his son, Sander Mack (1712–1803), chose to do a significant amount of writing through poetry and song. His works fittingly capture the devotional understanding of truth and theology that marks the Brethren witness. Far from being a systematic people, Brethren maintain the importance of a lived theology at their center rather than depending on a propositional scholastic creed or statement of faith. Poetry and hymns became Sander Mack's way to mark this new people in a different world. The early Brethren were first and foremost to be a pilgrim people of worship.

The depth and discernment in Sander Mack's poetry reveal a simple (though not simplistic) faith rooted in his Brethren beliefs, shaped by streams of Anabaptism and Radical Pietism. Mack's writings reveal a deep sensitivity to Scripture, an awareness of the larger narrative arc of the Bible, and a high view of the gathered church. These three subthemes find their poetic meaning in the pilgrimage imagery of his poetry and hymnody. Anabaptists and Radical Pietists understood the church as distinct from the world. They were familiar with persecution from those whose faith had become wed with political power. The role of the people of God in Radical Pietist, Anabaptist, and, subsequently, Brethren literature is one of travelers bearing witness to their God not by coercion or power but through a pilgrimage marked by patience, suffering, hope, and worship.

The journey from Europe to America was a moment born out of necessity for the Brethren as they sought freedom for their religious expression, in reaction to the reformation landscape of continental Europe. The emigration to America granted the Brethren freedom to worship—a freedom that had not been afforded them in continental Europe. Religious pressure and economic

² Dale Stoffer, "Alexander Mack Jr.: The Pilgrim of Love and Light," *Brethren Life & Thought* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 16.

necessities had combined to make migration to North America essential. Two large groups left—in 1719 and 1729, respectively.

In 1729, Mack Sr. himself led about 120 Brethren to America.³ His leadership, alongside that of his son, Sander, enabled the evangelistic zeal of the Brethren to spread quickly in America; by 1770, congregations had been founded in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas.⁴ The worship services of these congregations included lively preaching and singing as Brethren sought to live a devout and Christ-like life by maintaining their principles of nonconformity, nonresistance, and nonswearing.

The Brethren immigration narrative, however, would be both productive and haunting as they settled in colonial Pennsylvania. While the new world provided a welcome respite from persecution for them, it also labeled them as outsiders. This outsider status was marked by their use of the German language amid an anglophone world. They also refused to take up arms in a world of violence and war, and they settled close to each other and to neighboring German sects in a world of English politics and customs.

In Germantown, Pennsylvania, the Brethren met their first American neighbors—German Mennonites and English Quakers. The German Mennonites shared the Brethren's ethnic background but not always their piety or evangelistic zeal. The English Quakers shared the Brethren's peace interests but not their ethnic identity that was anchored in the alternative witness of the church.

In this tumultuous new world, the Brethren's very act of clinging to one another only solidified their identification as a religious other. It was into this world that Mack Jr., henceforth referred to simply as "Mack," would have reminded colonial Brethren of their pilgrim identity and called them to a witness of worship and obedience amid a world plagued by difficulty and strife.

3 Few Brethren remained in Europe. Those that did joined other Pietistic groups or the Mennonites. The Brethren had been fully transplanted to America by 1750.

4 Sauer II and his father, Christopher Sauer I (1695–1758), were known for their printing establishment that served the German-speaking settlers in America. Sauer Press published the three editions of the Sauer Bible—the first European language Bible printed in America—along with almanacs, books, magazines, and newspapers. The Sauers used a specific typeface that was easier for German readers to read. Christopher Sauer II would suffer severely during the American Revolution when his press was confiscated and he was tortured for his unwillingness to support the revolutionary cause. Brethren of the period, by and large, did not support the revolutionary cause, believing they were to submit to the Crown according to the commands of Romans 13:1–7.

The Beginning of a Brethren-American Identity in Prose

Mack's poetry communicates pilgrimage themes of separation from the world and of hope. As an alien in a foreign land that was often hostile, Mack remained steadfast in his hope, using Pietist understandings of Christ as the "Lamb of God," "the Bridegroom," and the "Good and Faithful Shepherd" whose teachings are "sweet as sugar" and "sweeter than honey."

Mack's writings reveal the creative synthesis of Anabaptism and Radical Pietism as colonial Brethren engaged their new religious neighbors—German- and English-speaking alike. This literary synthesis in meter became a sort of "poetics of Brethrenism." Whereas Anabaptism grounded faith in one's obedience to the example of Jesus, Pietism and its "Radical" variant emphasized the inward journey of the heart. Coupled together, the two describe a transformative pilgrimage in which followers of Christ are transformed from the inside out as they often live counterculturally to the currents of the world. To describe this journey, Brethren theologian Scott Holland notes that Mack's writings are "touched by mystery, metaphor, wonder, love and transcendence in the romance of faith."⁵ Therefore, he concludes, Mack writes "very confessionally" all while presenting deep theological themes "emotionally and poetically."⁶

Two of Mack's poems in a 1795 edition of *Der kleine oder kurze Sprüche und Gebätlein, Aus dem meistens unbekanntten Werklein des Thomae a Kempis, German-taun, 1795* (*The Little Kempis, or Short Sayings and Brief Prayers from the, for the most part unknown, Minor Work of Thomas à Kempis, Germantown, 1795*) provide an example of his poetics of Brethrenism. The first and second stanzas of one of them captures the emotional and poetic detailing of the pilgrimage of faith:

A soul which loves God
Finds anguish in this world.
What it loves outside Jesus
Is beset by terror and distress.
Therefore, Jesus calls to it
"Come, in me is joy and peace."

"I have overcome the world,"
Says Jesus Christ consolingly.
"I have bound its strongest man
Through the splendor of my light."
Therefore, He calls ever and ever
"O dear souls come to me."⁷

5 Scott Holland, "Sander Mack and the Poetics of Pietism," *Brethren Life & Thought* 58, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 108.

6 Holland, "Sander Mack and the Poetics of Pietism," 108.

7 Heckman, *Religious Poetry*, 37.

Love juxtaposed with anguish. Terror and distress contrasted with joy and peace. These emotionally vivid descriptions kept the hope of Christ from being mere pie-in-the-sky theology. They served as both a narrative and poetic foundation to the pilgrim identity of colonial Brethren.

Mack's poetry would have assisted colonial Brethren in the exploration of their identity in the new world. It was a calling back to their Radical Pietist and Anabaptist heritage—a balance of individual and community, internal and external witness, head and heart, and, most importantly, the ongoing maintenance of the Word-Spirit organic relationship at the heart of their witness. In a diary entry dated “The fifteenth of July, 1786,” Mack penned a poem reminding himself of the Apostle Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 13:13 to love. This was the mission of the soul's pilgrimage—to love like Jesus.

Faith, love, hope,
Reach the goal
Through quiet modesty.
What God hates, avoid.
To bow down, to suffer, to endure,
Bring us happiness.

What God commands to believe
This no one shall take from me
In spite of all the lack of faith.
What God's word bids us love,
That I will daily practice
Through my pilgrim's time.

When my time has passed,
Then I find my hopes;
In blessed eternity
Where all things stand in view
Are faith and love and trust,
My peace and blessedness.⁸

The Apostle Paul argues that, of faith, hope, and love, “the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13 NIV). In a poetic circle, Mack returns to the source of love and places his trust in Christ, his source of “peace and blessedness.” Reflections like this offered prayers of lament and hope within a world that was foreign and sometimes hostile toward colonial Brethren.

Patrick Erben writes of two “iconic instances” for German groups such as the Brethren.⁹ The first was the publishing of *Martyrs Mirror* by the Ephrata

8 Heckman, *Religious Poetry*, 71.

9 Patrick M. Erben, *A Harmony of the Spirits: Translation and the Language of Community in Early Pennsylvania* (Williamsburg, VA: The University of North Carolina

community, an offshoot of the colonial Brethren. Published in the 1740s and 1750s, its detailed stories of martyrdom were translated by groups like the Brethren onto their current political context, “of a province rife with fears of war and mandatory armament.”¹⁰ Mack was involved in this translation; the book’s reflections on the martyrdoms of early Christian witnesses would have buttressed the pilgrimage motif evident in his writing. Brethren were called to be faithful to Jesus; though this world might take their physical lives, Jesus held their eternal lives.

Secondly, Erben lists German sectarian participation in the “Friendly Association for Regaining and Preserving Peace with the Indians” during the Seven Years’ War as revitalizing a common spiritual foundation among German groups, noting that it stressed their common history of persecution and suffering.¹¹ The Brethren, having experienced the isolation of being the “other,” collected funds to reimburse native peoples for land taken by the English. They rallied to care for native peoples and offered them asylum when backlash from skirmishes on the Pennsylvania frontier devolved into rogue violence by eastern colonialists toward Native Americans. Brethren chose peace and hospitality over violence and retribution. Such a posture was fitting for a pilgrim people.

These “iconic instances” marked Mack’s life and the pilgrimage of colonial Brethren. The threat of violence and division was always palpable in his world, yet his writings never communicate anxiety. This pilgrimage imagery is pronounced nowhere more strongly than in the annual poems Mack wrote on his birthday—a day that caused him to pause and reflect. In a 1779 birthday poem he writes, “Once again a year is gone/O thou rock, eternity!//All my ardent longing goes far beyond this life/towards this true fatherland/for I’m a stranger here below.”¹² The longing for the true fatherland, which is hauntingly evident in the poem, speaks to the eschatological hope of the colonial Brethren that likely assisted their weathering of the many challenges and setbacks they experienced.

The following year, Mack journals: “I can no more consider what happens in this world/For on these pilgrims’ roads there shines for me a different light. . . . What brings me pain but helps me on, what brings me joy but holds

Press, 2012), 245, Kindle Edition. While German Mennonites would have utilized Ephrata for publication of *Martyrs’ Mirror*, they probably did so pragmatically—for financial reasons—as they would not identify with Philadelphia ideals. German Mennonites had the resources for such a printing, and Ephrata accepted the task for economic reasons.

10 Erben, *A Harmony of the Spirits*, 245.

11 Erben, 245.

12 Heckman, *Religious Poetry*, 152.

me back/My true rest I find up yonder when my brief pilgrimage is done.”¹³ Amid the obstacles of colonial Pennsylvania, Mack and the colonial Brethren found peace in their eschatology as they interpreted their current situation alongside Scripture. Their reading of the Bible also reinforced their recognition of, involvement with, and care of other outsiders experiencing persecution.¹⁴ It’s quite telling that in his final birthday entry (1803), at the age of ninety, Mack refers to himself as “the poor pilgrim whom the mercy of God has sustained until he is ninety years old.”¹⁵ Pilgrimage, with its many hills and valleys, was always near to Mack’s heart. It was a frame of reference for how colonial Brethren understood themselves in the new republic.

Christian Bunner identifies eight themes central to the Pietist poetry and hymnody of Mack’s period:

... the communication of religious assurance through individual experience of God; renewal and transformation of life through the Holy Spirit; the critique of dead, conformist church spirituality; the awakening of hope in an imminent eschatological kingdom of God; the transformation of believers by the divine Being; the formation of fellowship; the encouragement of active expressions of love; and the sharing of one’s faith.¹⁶

These same eight themes appear in Mack’s poetry. One finds an ongoing travelogue of experiences with God coupled with the ongoing transformation of both person and perspective by the activity of the Holy Spirit. Consider the following poetic rendering of Matthew 25:31–46 in which Mack, in the seventh stanza, picks up the pilgrim motif for the Brethren in the new world:

I was a stranger in the world and you entertained me so that I placed my easy burden upon you. I was sick and I was in prison and you visited me, and you took care of me in accordance with the custom.¹⁷

One wonders if Mack reflected on this after his closest friend, Sauer II, had his printing press confiscated and was incarcerated by revolutionaries for refusing to support the revolutionary cause.

The Brethren’s theme of pilgrimage is continually animated by an eschatological hope forming the witness of the church and calling them to a generous spirituality with others. As an encouragement to Brethren on their pilgrimage,

13 Heckman, 152.

14 Colonial Brethren would be staunch opponents of slavery and frontline responders to the plight of Native Americans.

15 Heckman, *Religious Poetry*, 152.

16 Christian Bunner, ed., *Lieder des Pietismus aus dem 17. and 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2003), 235–36.

17 Heckman, *Religious Poetry*, 93.

the first stanza of Mack's poem "Ein in Hoffnung gesungenes Liedlein vor eine schwach-glabige Seele" (A little song sung in hope for a soul weak in faith), declares:

Every soul that loves God
 Will finally succeed!
 God can yet defeat the enemy
 That brings temptation to weak hearts
 In distress—even in death
 God grants His Bread of Heaven.¹⁸

A synthesis of heart/emotion (Radical Pietism) and discipleship/obedience (Anabaptism) enlivens this call to hope.

As the Pietist witness called Brethren to a new life in Christ, the Anabaptist witness anchored that conversion in a life of discipleship and community. To encourage this pilgrim community of colonial Brethren, Mack would often translate biblical events into poetry mixed with contemporary application. In one journal entry, he describes the passion of Christ, detailing Good Friday in poetic prose:

Eight o'clock.
 Dressed in white, Thou comest now
 To Pilate once again,
 For nothing 'gainst Thee can be found
 Save only my guilt of sins.

Nine o'clock.
 Wicked men are scourging Thee,
 But the guilt I must confess
 And in justice I should suffer
 What the mad heathen do to Thee.

Ten o'clock.
 The crown of thorns Jesus must wear,
 The purple robe, the jeers and scorn,
 All for me unworthy sinner,
 And in addition He is beaten . . .
 Three o'clock in the afternoon.
 Now that all should be fulfilled
 Which the Scriptures have foretold,
 And that they might quench His thirst,
 They have a sponge filled with vinegar.

And the precious Lamb of God

18 Heckman, 113.

Drinks it on the cross's beam,
 Bows His head and suffers death
 So that mercy I can receive.¹⁹

In light of Christ's great poverty on our behalf, Mack would note in a later poem entitled "Die Reiche Armuth" (Wealthy poverty) that worldly riches are not the same as spiritual riches, alluding to the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3–12) as the way of Jesus. He challenged colonial Brethren to not view economic poverty as a sign of spiritual maturity, as some were prone to do. Instead, he noted that the pilgrimage of faith is judged not by economic standing but by a sacrifice on behalf of the world—a sacrifice motivated solely by the love of God.

Blessed are they that are poor in spirit,
 Riches do not endure,
 Poverty nourishes not,
 The poor man deceives himself
 Unless he seeks God.
 The half-way kind of man
 Finds nowhere any peace
 Until lowliness and elevation
 Serve him equally!
 For Heaven is hers! (That is, the poor's.)²⁰

Though in this world the Brethren would experience hardship, strife, and persecution, Mack called them to take heart in the God they worshiped. He assured them that the kingdom of heaven was not for those with great economic prowess but rather for those who remained faithful to Christ Jesus and identified their posture toward the world with his humble life of service.

The Anabaptist-Radical Pietist Synthesis of Mack's Poetry of Brethren Pilgrimage

Mack masterfully weaves together the themes of Brethren identity into a seamless whole; nowhere does he identify certain themes or concepts as either Pietist or Anabaptist. Instead, in a poetic narrative, he invites colonial Brethren to worshipfully consider their distinct identity in a foreign land.

For contemporary readers, however, it is helpful to understand the themes that Mack employs and to categorize them appropriately. This fosters a deeper appreciation of the complexity of themes that emanate from his simple prose.

From Pietism and Radical Pietism, Mack calls colonial Brethren to a variant of Christ mysticism that is evident in earlier Pietist writings. He uses the bride and bridegroom from Song of Solomon to communicate the love of

19 Heckman, 102–103.

20 Heckman, 119.

Christ for his church. The theme of love occurs throughout his writings, and he references the kiss of peace or love as an expression of fraternal love to be shared by the Brethren.

Evident also in Mack's poetry and hymn writing is a creative spirit. According to Brethren theologian Dale Stoffer, this "creativity had disappeared for the most part among the Mennonites by this time."²¹ Mack's creative spirit always held closely to Pietist, hermeneutical emphases of reading the part in light of the whole and comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Brethren took from Anabaptism a high view of the visible church, understood as the gathered community of regenerate disciples of Christ. Out of this theology, Mack picks up Anabaptist themes of obedience and the commitment to discipline. Accountability and fidelity to the gospel were paramount for the witness of the church. Likewise, Mack's theology of baptism is in line with the Anabaptist view of immersion baptism as a public modeling of the inner to outer transformation of the believer, a transformation that serves as a strong theme in Mack's poetry.

Mack's distinctiveness, however, comes in elements of his poetry that are derived from both Pietism/Radical Pietism and Anabaptism. He calls Brethren to nonresistance in a hostile world; he stresses that a new life must be conformed to Christ in a world that is often antagonistic to the Brethren's radical obedience; and he holds in creative tension the outward call of discipleship alongside the vital role of the Holy Spirit in all aspects of the Christian life.

This inner and outer synthesis forms a pilgrim people who are humbly yielded toward God and one another and who possess an extraordinary hospitality to the "least of these" (Mt 25:40). Mack's poetics of pilgrimage become synonymous with his poetics of Brethrenism. Both anchor themselves in a hope that transcends the hardships of life. Both point colonial Brethren toward Jesus. And both remind these early Brethren of his call to go and do likewise—a benediction given to his disciples with the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37 NIV).

Most importantly, Mack's Christocentric hope is a fusion of both his Radical Pietist and Anabaptist moorings. Poetry became a vehicle to detail his spiritual reading of Scripture, a means to capture the Word-Spirit nature of Brethren theology. He calls colonial Brethren to utilize "spiritual eyes" in their exegesis of Scripture and society. Furthermore, the Spirit's influence will be marked by love: "[Above] all preserve love, for thus one preserves light. The good God, who is the pure impartial love, can and will supply gradually where insight is lacking here or there."²²

21 Stoffer, "Alexander Mack Jr.," 18.

22 Stoffer, 444-45.

Hope, unity, and love serve as the indicators of the true church. Whether in times of celebration or crisis, these outward signs communicated the inner commitments to both Word and Spirit for the Brethren. In an expansive poem for Christopher Sauer II's *Geistliches Magazien* (*Religious Magazine*), Mack pens a poem under the pseudonym "Theophilus," literally translated "lover of God." Stanzas three, five, nine, and the concluding stanza, number seventy-eight, capture his countercultural call to pilgrimage. The stanzas in between are a retelling of all of human history. The essence of the poem is that those called to true love of God have always been the true, faithful, pilgrim people of God. Mack reminds his readers that, within their context,

Agriculture is widely practiced
 By good and evil as well.
 Hardly has one time to love one's neighbor
 Unless one is willing to be very industrious.
 Famine greets us from afar, exhorting
 That we do our best here below.

Commerce has long flourished
 And is very lucrative today,
 Even though many go bankrupt
 And forfeit their lives and souls.
 Yet few meditate thereon thoroughly,
 Most of them preferring a pleasant day.

But avarice rules
 And pretends to [hold great] honesty.
 Feigned wealth has led astray
 Thousands with its fine appearance.
 Poverty even is infected
 With that which stains both body and soul.²³

Then, alluding to Genesis 19, reminding his readers of Lot's wife, who looked back on her creaturely comforts instead of being steadfast in her forward commitment to God, Mack challenges colonial Brethren with the following:

If doubt seeks to seduce us,
 Let us be mindful of Lot's wife.
 God's mercy alone be with us,
 And let us hope that none will stay behind;

For disobedience has the effect
 Of making the heart as hard as stone.

23 Heckman, *Religious Poetry*, 167–99.

Be mindful of Lot's wife!²⁴

Though the journey could be brutal for colonial Brethren, in their pilgrimage they were never to shrug off the costly call of Jesus for a fleeting call to comfort. In no uncertain words, Mack was reminding the Brethren not to pilfer away their precious hours and days when eternity belonged to them in Christ.

Such commitments sustained the Brethren as they took root in their new contexts. Mack's use of worship, hymnody, and poetry, inspired by his Anabaptist and Radical Pietist heritage, exhorted the colonial Brethren in their pilgrimage of faith. It is only fitting that in a later poem titled "Reim-Gedicht vor die liebe Jugend. Von der Weissheit" (Poem for our dear young people on wisdom), Mack implores youth, the next generation of Brethren, to discern the wisdom of Jesus. As his last stanza reminds them (and us), "The worldly wisdom of this earth does not recognize this wisdom [of Jesus]; it [worldly wisdom] must become mere foolishness when this noble light shines forth."

The poetics of pilgrimage within Brethrenism is a reminder not only of the Brethren's mission in the world but also their belonging. The peculiar witness of the Brethren, revealed by Mack's poetry, was as a pilgrim people who belonged to Jesus Christ. Poetry and hymnody called them to worship. This marked the life of the colonial Brethren; to know them was to sing with them, and to sing with them was to know their theology. Their theology was deeply impacted by the poetic retelling of their immigration narrative that brought them from the Palatinate of Germany to the burgeoning colonial city of Philadelphia.

The reminder from Mack's poem (at the beginning of this article) after the death of his friend holds even richer meaning in light of this pilgrimage identity. When Mack breathed his last breath, did he revisit these lines that he had penned earlier?

Now I will enter into Jesus who died for me.
 He has won through pain and death a refuge for my soul.
 He has prepared for me a better house in Heaven
 that I may praise Him in it forever and ever.²⁵

For a persecuted, pilgrim people, then and now, these words capture the deepest longings of the human heart. They tell an immigration narrative through story and song. Like the call to the Israelites to continually remember their exodus story out of Egypt, Mack's poetry called colonial Brethren to remember their story, to remember Jesus, and to remember one another.

For modern audiences, Brethren and otherwise, Mack's poetry and hymnody offer us the opportunity to pause and reflect on a little-known people

24 Heckman, 199.

25 Heckman, 45.

group of the early American republic. His reflections allow us to appreciate the hardships that immigrants and refugees have undertaken to find freedom in the new world (then and now). At the heart of his poetry is the recognition that followers of Jesus are all refugees as we pilgrimage from the kingdom of the world into the kingdom of God—from a world of many kingdoms and boundary lines toward a larger hope that transcends the many ways we carve up the world. With our eyes toward the sun, we pilgrimage toward our “better house in Heaven,” all while living Heaven here and now.

The Three Thousand

BRYAN RAFAEL FALCÓN

The Sonoran Desert has a secret. Not very many people know about the three thousand casualties here, two thousand people missing.

—Alvaro Enciso, borderlands artist and activist (interview)

When it rains you forget
the fierceness of the sun.
You stand among the desert hills,
smell the creosote, myrrh
of the savage wastes.

When you get tired of walking,
you lay your head on the rocky ground.

In the quivering stillness, the sun
washes out even the brightest city lights.

Days from now, no one will know you were here.

Far from this wasteland, you took your first step.
A tiny hand slipped from yours.
You didn't turn around.

Those you left behind stood expectantly
each time the phone rang.

That last tinny call
from the distant edge of the world—
Agua Prieta, the dark waters.

“Tomorrow I cross over,
no te preocupes, mi amor.”

But that was years ago.

The monsoons come
and the blossoms follow.
They cannot wash away the waiting,
the dread of unknowing.

Those you left behind still listen,
wait for rain.

Brueggemann's Prophetic Imagination and Venezuela's New Song

PETER WIGGINTON

Here at our home congregation of *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Quito* in Ecuador, my wife, Delicia, and I, in our work with Mennonite Mission Network, regularly support various ministries: Delicia helps with Sunday school and, together with Colombian refugees, also organizes a project sewing cloth diapers for refugee babies and cloth menstrual pads for refugee women. I help with the church worship group—most of whom are Colombian refugees—and also assist with teaching a discipleship class. We recently baptized six people who went through the discipleship class, all of whom were Colombian refugees. In the children's Sunday school, it's not unusual for only one or two Ecuadorian children to be present among the predominately Colombian and Venezuelan refugees. This diversity reflects the makeup of the congregation; if we include ourselves (I was born in the United States, and Delicia is from Bolivia), there are about five or six nationalities attending our church on an average Sunday.

Ecuador has been a place of human mobility; for more than fifty years, the country has received Colombian refugees because of the violence and war in Colombia. Over the years, Ecuador has also turned into a popular destination for retirees from North America and Europe. In my conversations with migrants from many different places (not just Colombia and Venezuela), I have generally heard people speak favorably of Ecuador and about Ecuadorians as being great hosts and helpful people.

Over the past two years, however, with the mass movement of Venezuelans entering the country, these sentiments have changed radically; unfortunately, many of the people with whom I have shared more recently do not have positive feelings about Ecuadorians. Many appreciate Ecuador, and also Quito as a city, but feel that *Quiteños* are rude or even hostile. It is unfortunate that so many people feel this way.

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In a recent *New York Times* article, Jose Maria Leon Cabrera describes how xenophobia has been increasing dramatically in Ecuador and in the Andean region, spurred on unfortunately by social media and, in several cases, by the government.¹ Fighting xenophobia becomes much more difficult when people such as government leaders, who are supposed to have some level of moral authority, are increasing the levels of xenophobia instead of lessening it.

A Colombian refugee shared with us recently about the reality of being a migrant. She explained that she had come to Ecuador with her family because her husband's family had been threatened. "I don't know when I will see my mother and sisters and brothers again," she lamented. Her young son, with tears in his eyes, added, "Please pray for my aunt who is in Colombia."

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are currently 70.8 million people forcibly displaced in the world. This figure includes refugees and internally displaced persons. At the end of 2018, according to UNHCR, there were 7.8 million internally displaced people in Colombia. Until the end of 2018, there were also 101,564 refugees in Ecuador, most of them being Colombians.² Although peace agreements are ratified and moving forward in Colombia, the violence there has not abated, so Colombian refugees continue entering Ecuador—about one thousand each month according to some estimates.³

The reality in Venezuela is also sobering; the high incidence of crime⁴ is only one of the problems facing the oil-rich nation; the country also suffers from hyperinflation (estimated to have reached 1,000,000 percent by the end of 2018), power outages, very little food and medicine,⁵ and a public transportation system that has nearly collapsed.⁶ Political polarization has also been

1 J. M. Leon Cabrero, "La xenofobia en Ecuador empuja a migrantes venezolanos a salir del país," *New York Times*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/01/28/ecuador-ibarra-venezolanos/>.

2 UNCHR Statistics, The UN Refugee Agency, 2019, http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview#_ga=2.228567390.298240806.1542129677-558422399.1542129677.

3 "Ecuador acoge más refugiados que toda América Latina en su conjunto," EFE/El Comercio, June 19, 2018, <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/ecuador-refugiados-americalatina-colombia-cancilleria.html>.

4 Ciara Nugent, "How Hunger Fuels Crime and Violence in Venezuela," *TIME*, October 23, 2018, <http://time.com/longform/hunger-crime-violence-venezuela/>.

5 "Venezuela Crisis: How the Political Situation Escalated," BBC, August 8, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-36319877>.

6 Vivian Sequera and Mayela Armas, "Weary Venezuelans Rely on 'Dog Cart' Transports as Buses Succumb to Crisis," Reuters, July 17, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-transportation/weary-venezuelans-rely-on-dog-cart-transport-as-buses-succumb-to-crisis-idUSKBN1K72BJ>.

extreme in Venezuela, as in much of Latin America, perhaps reflecting a world trend.

Dr. Alan MacLeod from the London School of Economics and Political Science *Latin America and Caribbean Centre Blog* writes that there are four main factors contributing toward the polarization in Venezuela: 1) A history of class hatred and conflict encouraged by (former) President Hugo Chávez; 2) the stymied opposition that has tried many times to push out the governing party, not always using the most legal means; 3) US support of the coup in 2002 in addition to several other activities against the government; and 4) the highly partisan local media.⁷ The people most affected by this extreme polarization—average Venezuelans—have now been pushed to flee the country because of the economic violence or, less frequently, because of a threat against their lives for intentionally or unintentionally becoming involved with the political opposition.

Currently, the United Nations estimates that more than four million of the thirty-two million inhabitants of Venezuela have left the South American country,⁸ with over three hundred thousand of these emigrating to Ecuador and one million to Colombia.⁹ (And note that most people consider these estimates to be conservative.) In 2018, Ecuador granted ninety thousand refugee visas to Venezuelans, and officials say the number of Venezuelans and Colombians entering the country continues to increase.¹⁰

The Reality of Churches in Venezuela

There are two main Anabaptist church groups in Venezuela. The leaders of these congregations are focused on building their churches—an extremely difficult undertaking. In the November 2018 Andean Anabaptist Gathering in Cali, Colombia, several church leaders shared about the difficult realities in their churches: One pastor in Caracas, for example, shared that in the past two

7 Alan MacLeod, "Who Is to Blame for Polarisation in Venezuela?" The London School of Economics and Political Science, Latin America and Caribbean Centre, February 12, 2019, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2019/02/12/who-is-to-blame-for-polarisation-in-venezuela/>.

8 "Venezuela Situation," UNCHR, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/venezuela-emergency.html?query=venezuela>.

9 "Se duplica el número de venezolanos que intentan llegar a Ecuador durante el fin de semana," *El Espectador*, August 24, 2019, <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/el-mundo/se-duplica-el-numero-de-venezolanos-que-intentan-llegar-ecuador-antes-del-lunes-articulo-877681>.

10 "Éxodo venezolano debe enfrentarse regionalmente," *La Hora*, October 14, 2018, <https://www.lahora.com.ec/noticia/1102193218/exodo-venezolano-debe-enfrentarse-regionalmente>.

years he had lost the entire governing board of his congregation due to people leaving the country, and, as a result, he has had to start over. Another pastor observed, “This is the history of our church council; the leaders that we train and rely on have always left.”

Meanwhile, other pastors expressed their hope for change and that their only wish was to stay in Venezuela. The churches have been blessed by showing solidarity and extending their tables to people in need. One church leader told the story of a man who had been living on the street and had started attending the church. Soon the man was baptized. A few months later, he passed away and the church held a memorial service for him. His sister and several of his friends from the street attended the service. We need to remember our afflicted and downtrodden brothers and sisters in Venezuela. Our commitment to them is embedded in our faith; as Gustavo Gutiérrez states, this is a “prophetic option that has its roots in the unmerited love of God and is demanded by this love.”¹¹

Christ’s Body Responds to the Reality of Migration

We must pray for Venezuela, but prayer alone is not enough; we must also grieve. As Walter Brueggemann explains in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*, the prophet Jeremiah grieved for his nation of Judah and allowed his nation to also grieve, cutting through their numbness; through his prose, Jeremiah was able to penetrate through to the “pain of God.” In this reality, God is not a powerful enemy or a liberating king but rather a “helpless parent who must stand alongside death.”¹² We must stand in solidarity with Venezuela, since pain can help us break through the numbness that is prevalent around the world, and embrace the future. If we stay complacent or rely only on prayer, we will not be able to feel God’s pain or the sorrow of the Venezuelan people. As Brueggemann says, “Pain and regret denied only immobilizes.”¹³ He goes on to explain Jesus’s sorrow. We must learn from that sorrow to help Venezuela in its desolation.

We must grieve with people who, because of lack of food, are eating only two, or, in many cases, one meal a day. We must grieve with families who pay for taxis or medical care with a few kilos of sugar or cornmeal. We must weep with the mother of the nine-year-old girl with epilepsy, who cannot find anticonvulsant medicine in the country. We must weep with the families who cry out in disgust that they cannot get medicine for their diabetic father and

11 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 14.

12 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2018), 55.

13 Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 56.

must wait and hope for friends to come from Colombia with insulin. We can recall the weeping Jesus, who knew, especially as complacent as we are in our realities of satiation, that “weeping must be real because endings are real” and that “weeping permits newness.”¹⁴

Finally, Brueggemann defiantly proclaims that Jesus’s “weeping permits the kingdom to come. Such weeping is a radical criticism . . . ; weeping is something kings rarely do without losing their thrones. Yet the loss of thrones is precisely what is called for in radical criticism.”¹⁵

As God’s church mourns with Venezuela in order to cut through the numbness, we must be amazed and moved by a hopeful doxology:

You who bring good news to Zion,
 go up on a high mountain.
 You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
 lift up your voice with a shout,
 lift it up, do not be afraid;
 say to the towns of Judah,
 “Here is your God!”
 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
 and he rules with a mighty arm.
 See, his reward is with him,
 and his recompense accompanies him.

(Isaiah 40:9–10)¹⁶

As members of the body of Christ, we must mourn with Venezuela so we can pass through grief and become hopeful. Doxology is the faithful embrace of God—the real and honest leader—and rejection of the imposter.¹⁷ God will carry Venezuela: “I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Is 46:4). And Venezuela will have a new song, a new hymn. Brueggemann suggests several texts from Isaiah that can be this new hymn:

“Forget the former things;
 do not dwell on the past.
 See, I am doing a new thing!
 Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
 I am making a way in the wilderness
 and streams in the wasteland.

(Isaiah 43:18–19)

14 Brueggemann, 57.

15 Brueggemann, 57.

16 All Bible verses in this article are quoted from the *New International Version*.

17 Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*.

Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

(Isaiah 40:30–31)

These words remind us that we are safe when we wait on the Lord and allow the Lord's timing to play out. If we try to go on our own, we will not succeed. Also, this is a "critique of every effort to reorganize on our own."¹⁸

The Quito Mennonite Church as an Example of Organizing and Waiting on the Lord

For many years, the Quito Mennonite church has walked alongside refugees in Ecuador who have fled from places like Colombia, Iraq, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, and now Venezuela. The church has offered a place to listen, a place to mourn, and a place of doxology in weekly worship services and other spaces. They have offered a gentle guiding hand in the complicated reality of being an undocumented person in Ecuador. The church has given blankets to children who are cold in their new reality of living at eight thousand feet elevation on the flanks of the Pichincha volcano. Cloth sustainable diapers and loving encouragement have been offered to mothers who have no other recourse for their nursing babies. Pencils and school supplies have been supplied for eager, bright children. And, of course, at least meager food supplies have been provided for families who are not satiated.

This work with refugees is a hope that God has given to the church. It's an opportunity for us as members of the body of Christ to be amazed. We must remember Luke 6:21: "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

Those who have truly grieved—Colombians, Venezuelans, and many other migrants from around the world—can share that grief with all of us and help us move on to amazement and a hopeful doxology, worshiping God and being carried from Bogota to Caracas to Damascus, on the wings of eagles.

18 Brueggemann, 72.

Paul: The Very Worst Missionary

ROBERT & ANNE THIESSEN

Jamie Wright, popular blogger and former missionary to Costa Rica, calls herself “the Very Worst Missionary.”¹ But I’m convinced Jamie is *not* the worst missionary ever.

Paul was.

Let me explain. I’m *not* saying Paul was a poor minister of the gospel; he’s likely the best we’ve ever had. Nor do I refute his message of God incarnate in Jesus come to redeem the world and establish his kingdom. For almost thirty years, my wife and I have lived and served among an unreached indigenous group in southern Mexico—the Mixtecs—learning their language and culture, sharing this gospel story, and helping them establish healthy churches with local leadership. My calling is as a cross-cultural missionary.

What I *am* saying is that Paul didn’t look much like the missionaries our agencies send out today: He didn’t go through a missionary training program. He didn’t study cultural anthropology or linguistics. And he never learned a new language as part of his ministry. He spread Christianity throughout an entire empire but never crossed any significant linguistic or cultural barriers. Many people today define mission work as crossing significant cultural and linguistic barriers, so where does that leave Paul?

One could argue that for a Jew to work alongside Gentiles was cultural barrier enough. The Jew/Gentile divide is possibly the greatest cultural divide ever experienced, considering that the cultural norms sacred to the Jews were instituted, as they understood it, by God himself. Nevertheless, the pagan culture and its variety of languages were not unfamiliar to Paul; in Tarsus, he would have been surrounded by such. Acts 2 lists fifteen native languages among the Diaspora Jews, and perhaps Paul spoke more than Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. He surely resembled today’s migrants and minority peoples who, through displacement or marginalization, learn by necessity how to broker cross-cultural interactions.

Using Ralph Winter’s scales, Paul’s evangelism would have been E-1 (within one’s own culture) or perhaps E-2 at most (reaching a similar but different

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1 Jamie Wright’s website, accessed September 9, 2019, <https://theveryworstmissionary.com>.

culture), while we (much of the missions movement of the past fifty years) seem to be highlighting E-3 (reaching an extremely different culture).²

Are we missing something? In the early 1900s, Roland Allen called our attention to the fact that the missionary methods of his day didn't match Paul's.³ We have come a long way from how mission was done a century ago, but is there more to learn from Paul's missionary methods? Have we exhausted what he has to teach us in our day?

Over the past fifty years or so, the great missiologists of the sixties and seventies—Donald McGavran, Jacob Loewen, Eugene Nida, William Smalley, Paul Hiebert, and George Patterson, among others—prepared many of us for cross-cultural ministry. McGavran taught us to look for bridges across caste and socioeconomic barriers by applying the homogeneous unit principle. Loewen taught us to resist paternalism by empowering indigenous leadership. Nida introduced us to “dynamic” equivalence in Bible translation, moving us away from literal, wooden translations. Smalley awakened us to the importance of valuing minority languages by developing a writing system for the Hmong. Hiebert used “critical contextualization” to enter into dialogue with people from other cultures—and with the Scriptures—about how the gospel becomes incarnate among them. Patterson introduced us to “church multiplication” through “obedience-oriented education” for pastors. We stand on the shoulders of these great teachers, and I am convinced that the principles they taught us were drawn from Paul.

And yet.

Paul Was Not a Cross-Cultural Missionary

Unlike missionaries moving into E-3 evangelism today, it seems that Paul never spent a moment worrying about his language proficiency in any of the places he went. And none of the stories in Acts portray him spending time learning about their cultures. He never refrained from sharing his understanding of the Good News until he had some comprehensive grasp of the local situation. He seemed comfortable being an up-front leader for a few weeks or a few years. He had no trouble quickly setting up doctrine and laying down instructions (not on his own authority but on the authority he had earned relationally). He ignored the advice of local elders at least once when he was determined to push on to Jerusalem.

2 Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 15–25.

3 Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: World Dominion, 1962).

If Paul were to attend one of our weeklong training sessions about pioneer missions, I imagine he would be somewhat mystified about all our elaborate concern for such issues. I can imagine him foreshadowing Nike, telling us, “Just do it.”

Was Paul’s experience as a migrant what best prepared him for ministry? Was it his ability to engage his own people in new places, creating a platform for reaching others? Did his time as a migrant in multicultural Antioch shape him as a cultural hybrid, a bridge across the Jew/Gentile gap?

God used Paul to catalyze the fervent start of the Christian church throughout the Mediterranean basin. Springboarding off the diaspora of Jews whom he encountered almost everywhere, he reached out to Gentiles, bringing them into this new social experiment and forming a new entity. The growth of this new movement was phenomenal, and, within a few decades, Paul himself stated, “There is no more place for me to work in these regions” (Romans 15:23 NIV). There is no parallel to this anywhere in the history of missions. Certainly we know of people involved in movements of bigger numbers but never anyone who covered such a diverse region with so few resources and so little background as Paul. And yet he didn’t follow some of our own best practices. What do I do with the fact that Paul is the Very Worst Missionary by today’s standards? What does he model in his world that we aren’t applying in ours? Could our globalized world be Paul’s Roman Empire . . . on steroids?

Migrants Start More Churches Than Missionaries Do

The New Testament mentions churches started by migrants. In fact, Pentecost incorporated three thousand such migrants into the Jerusalem church in one day. The Antioch church was started by men “from Cyprus and Cyrene, [who] went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks” (Acts 11:20 NIV). Paul and Barnabas took journeys that look very much like our globalized migrations, and they left churches established all along the way. Frank Viola in *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church*⁴ claims that at least eight men—Titus, Timothy, Gaius, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Tychicus, and Trophimus—migrated to and from Ephesus and started churches in other places. Epaphras is connected with the churches in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. And, finally, Paul mentions migrants in Rome (including Priscilla and Aquilla) who established home churches there. Persecution scattered these leaders even more; Acts 18:1–2 places Priscilla and Aquilla in Ephesus. Relying on migration to multiply the church seems to be a viable strategy. It worked for Paul and his companions, anyway.

⁴ Frank Viola, *The Untold Story of the New Testament Church: An Extraordinary Guide to Understanding the New Testament* (Escondido, CA: Oneclick Digital, 2012), 114–15.

In southern Mexico among rural populations, including indigenous people, most churches have been started by returning migrants. Mary O'Connor in *Mixtec Evangelicals*⁵ observes that the majority of evangelical churches in Mixtec villages in southern Mexico were started by returning Mixtec migrants. There are far more evangelicals among the Mixtec Diaspora than among those who have never left. O'Connor's research supports my own observations in southern Mexico; in some of the places where we have worked, churches started by migrants represent over 90 percent of all church starts. I believe reaching out to migrants is part of God's plan for the expansion of his kingdom and has precedence in Scripture.

Where Latin American Migrant Churches Go Wrong

But we need to be brutally honest about the state of Latin American migrant churches.

Many of the churches in southern rural Mexico, including those among indigenous people, are not healthy. This doesn't mean people aren't "saved," or that they don't love God, or that God does not love them. These people often face harsh resistance to their faith, sometimes even death, yet they persist. These are faithful Christ followers.

However, they often measure their success by how closely they have copied their distant parent or sending church. If they have no direct connection to a sending church, they inevitably attempt to imitate some urban church, even though their own context is so different.

Matthew 28 commands us to disciple—or redeem—the *etnes*. This brings honor to marginalized groups, as Jayson Georges's *The 3D Gospel*⁶ points out. Yet the gospel preached in Latin America rarely addresses this; while focusing often on God's power over evil spirits and on our salvation from personal sins—indeed a transformational message—it rarely addresses how God redeems culture. This is distressing when we consider how marginalized rural communities often are.

In our early years among the Mixtecs, we were part of a new church born from the work of a returning migrant. In its first year and a half of life, before we arrived, this Mixtec church witnessed the martyrdom of two leaders. The believers lived under the constant threat of further violence. Despite the danger, they joyfully persevered. One of the first songs they translated into Mixtec was "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus," and the line "no turning back, no turning back" made it a favorite. However, after we had lived among them

5 Mary O'Connor, *Mixtec Evangelicals: Globalization, Migration, and Religious Change in a Oaxacan Indigenous group* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2016).

6 Jayson Georges, *A 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Fear, and Shame Cultures* (n.p.: Time, 2017).

a while and could speak some Mixtec, we realized that in their church services they never prayed in their own language, only in Spanish. When we asked them why, their heart-wrenching reply was, “Wouldn’t God be offended if we talked to Him in our poor dialect?”

For many indigenous people in Mexico, self-worth and cultural identity are sorely lacking, and the Good News they pursue has yet to showcase a good Father who runs out to receive the returning child with acts and symbols of honor.

Other signs of weakness derive from the migrants’ common belief that their culture is inferior to what they have seen elsewhere, and, as such, is irredeemable. Indigenous churches are often reluctant to value local leadership; they allow outsiders to easily sway them, and they fall prey to all kinds of “winds of doctrines” that blow through the mountains. Their acute sense of poverty can make them prey to whichever spiritual authority from outside brings the greatest economic benefit. They are constantly bombarded by the prosperity preaching so prevalent throughout all of Latin America. They can be legalistic, homing in on a few borrowed rules of external behavior that they don’t truly understand. They can value physical signs of success such as buildings, furniture, and musical instruments. If the parent church in the city has a keyboard and a sound system, the indigenous church is tempted to have two keyboards and speakers the size of coffins. It does not matter that no one can play the instruments well or adjust the sound levels, or that there are only twelve people present. What matters is to be seen conforming to, or even bettering, the patterns established in the “better” world outside.

Especially harmful for these communal people is their acceptance of the traditional Latin American Protestant hostility toward “those idolatrous Catholics,” prejudices often passed on to them by North American missionaries of the past century. This alienates the believers from their social networks, diminishes their witness, and causes heartache and division in small communities, where everyone is dependent on everyone else. Not that the hostility goes only one way. Often it is the town authorities who provoke hostilities, but the situation is usually exacerbated by the attitudes of Protestant leaders.

The saddest part of all this is that second generations of believers rarely continue in a vibrant faith. Unfortunately, they don’t easily fit back into their parents’ former culture, either. They are caught in no-man’s land between the culture their parents rejected and the one they adopted. They fit in neither, because the beliefs and practices of both (folk Catholicism and legalistic evangelicalism) now seem to them outdated.

I do not at all believe that churches started by Mexican migrants must suffer these problems. I think these issues come from the weaknesses and misplaced emphases of our churches and our mission strategies. Again, somehow, we’ve got Paul wrong. For him, the migrant church-planting worked well.

Few Ever Do a Good Job at Being Incarnational

Perhaps a clue to how we are missing the mark in our mission strategy is the fact that very few people are effective at applying our prime mission strategy—E-3 evangelism. This is my observation in over thirty years of cross-cultural ministry in Central America and Mexico. Of the people who set out to live among an unreached people group and learn their language and live like them, perhaps 20 percent have managed to stay the course more than two years. Of those, another half have dropped out before five years. Maybe half of those left would be able to conduct a complex conversation in the local language. Of these, many have succumbed to pressure and taken on local leadership roles, skewing the group toward their own cultural backgrounds, especially if they were Hispanics relating to indigenous people within their own country.

Extrapolating from our experience with our own denomination and our extensive contacts with many other groups, I would guess that the numbers I've quoted are only somewhat better in the rest of the world. Maybe one out of ten missionaries, rather than Mexico's one in twenty, see healthy indigenous churches start up. K.P. Yohannan claims in *Come, Let's Reach the World* that up to half of all new Western missionaries do not last beyond their first term on the mission field and that it is local missionaries who do 90 percent of all pioneer mission.⁷ Another word for indigenous missionaries is . . . migrants.

I do not want to focus on how poorly any particular missionary has accomplished E-3 work. Rather, I wish to point out how incredibly few people are suited to this kind of radical break with the familiar. Considering that it is a very small percent of Christians who attempt long-term mission (I estimate roughly one in three thousand), the numbers translate into an infinitesimally small percent of Christians who successfully take the gospel incarnationally to people who are significantly different from themselves. This is so disheartening, from a modern mission perspective, that I can only conclude that we are missing something. How could it be that God gives us a mandate like the Great Commission but has created only a tiny fraction of us capable of following it well? Might we be interpreting something in the New Testament account incorrectly?

Conversations, Not Conclusions

I propose some ideas meant to spark conversations among cross-cultural workers:

⁷ K.P. Yohannan, *Come, Let's Reach the World: Partnership in Church Planting Among the Most Unreached* (Carrollton, TX: GFA, 2004), 45.

1. *Multicultural Centers*

The 1974 Lausanne Congress called the mission community to reach “gateway cities”—those mega cities that so attract migrants. I think we have yet to fully heed that call. Paul seemed to gravitate toward the “Antiochs,” the “gateway cities” of his day—the places where he, as a migrant himself, would have felt most comfortable. Where he could have ordered a coffee and struck up a conversation with at least one out of five other people in the place. Where the interplay of ideas was commonplace. And, in accord with the general topic of this issue of *Anabaptist Witness*, where migrants of all sorts made up the fabric of society—migrants who had contacts with their home regions, who received visits from the home-country family, and who lived in at least two worlds, like Paul himself.

Interactions in a large city are mostly conducted in its trade language and in its marketplaces. There, everyone is used to relating to different peoples and finding ways to live together. In urban immigrant communities, people collectively find ways to bridge their native culture to the new culture. Of course, prejudices and mistreatments abound, but people learn to share their urban spaces. Paul entered this milieu and, perhaps unawares, conducted a socio-religious experiment that so easily could have backfired. But it did not backfire. It took off. And spread. Like nothing had ever done before.

Evidently, God used new believers in the urban centers of the Roman Empire, whether through their return to the margins of their world or through their arrival at the centers, to establish churches throughout the entire region. But unlike the migrant-birther churches of my experience, the churches mentioned in the New Testament thrived. What caused this difference?

Proposals:

1. Concentrate on gateway cities with many immigrants.
2. Look for situations where the exchange of ideas is easily accepted (third spaces?). Many immigrants attend educational institutions. They also almost always make up the unskilled labor class. Although those groups are harder to bond with, they are key to reaching immigrant populations.
3. Position yourself to be influential: teacher, culture broker, labor organizer, etcetera.
4. Be open to travel to migrants’ home regions.
5. Be hospitable to their visitors from those areas.
6. Recognize that migrants create hybrid or “third cultures.” They may be perceived as threats to local traditions or lifestyles, triggering rejection and trauma.

2. *Simplicity*

Whatever structures and beliefs Paul established in new churches had to have been simple, because new believers absorbed the basics quickly. When Paul had to leave, sometimes after only a few weeks, the group left behind could conduct its own affairs and multiply itself and its leaders independently. However you interpret Paul's injunction to avoid naming new believers as leaders (1 Tim 3), the reality is that those commissioned as leaders in the earliest churches were relatively new in the faith, maybe weeks or months old. That could only have been possible if both the doctrines and practices that Paul established were simple.

When doctrines and practices are simple, there is enough creative energy left over to adapt to local situations. Their original patterns, while necessarily being somewhat "foreign," can be overlaid with different languages and cultural manifestations. On the contrary, our experience of outside missionaries starting churches is that the ideas and patterns they first present are so complex and unfamiliar that the new believers spend all their spiritual energy just trying to imitate what they were given. They rarely adapt after that.

Proposals

1. Encourage local believers to shape a simple creedal statement based on the life and teachings of Jesus. Keep it simple enough that a semiliterate adult who speaks the trade language can grasp it in a few weeks if they come from such cultures.
2. Focus on the work of Jesus, who brings honor to the overlooked.
3. Prefer narratives to propositions—first Jesus, more Jesus, and only then a little Paul.
4. Gather people, but don't be the visible leader. Found a plurality of elders, and model sessions that can be imitated by the next gathering. Act as if you are going to die in three weeks.
5. Quickly entrust local leaders with all tangible roles, such as administering sacraments, public prayers, teaching, and worship (music).
6. Focus on simple obedience (love God and each other), not intellectual statements (Trinity, the three Omnis). Give practical examples. Model everything.
7. Focus on early church practice. (See George Patterson's summary of the seven basic commands of Christ, of New Testament practices, and of the authority these have in relationship to human tradi-

tions⁸).

8. Focus on teaching that can be imitated easily—based on narrative and openness to group interpretation.
9. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead believers to simply obey Jesus and creatively respond to him as they meet him in the Scriptures. Work together toward this primary goal.
10. Expect some new believers, especially heads of households, to effectively share the Good News with extended family and friends among the diaspora as well as in their hometowns. Encourage their leadership, showing them how God has gifted them to evangelize their own people.

3. *Ideal Ambassadors*

Mission agencies and sending churches could send missionaries who look more like Paul—multicultural and comfortable in our fluid world.

Proposals

1. Mentor and recruit individuals from churches that thrive in multicultural centers.
2. Provide all training for potential missionaries in multicultural settings.
3. Abandon traditional requirements that favor the dominant culture.
4. Strengthen bivocational skills useful in multicultural settings.

4. *Neither Jew nor Gentile*

Migrants are often the best positioned to take the gospel to their native culture. That does not mean they won't face challenges. Like Paul, they may experience rejection by both "Jews" and "Gentiles." Or they may adopt a dominant culture's negative attitudes toward the marginalized. Or they may try to "go back" and find, sadly, that home is no longer "home." There is no magic wand to make kingdom work easy. Just—sometimes—easier.

Proposals

1. Never assume migrants will move smoothly into "home" or "new"

⁸ George Patterson and Richard Scoggins, *Church Multiplication Guide Revised: The Miracle of Church Reproduction* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 10–16.

cultures.

2. Build trusting relationships through existing networks.
3. Actively expunge superiority attitudes (Phil 2:5–8)

I have no wish to discourage people called to extreme cross-cultural mission. What I say here shouldn't diminish their sense of calling. Those with such extreme calls can bear much fruit for the kingdom, and we need to mobilize the workers that God has gifted in this way. My wife and I continue a full-time ministry of training non-indigenous Mexicans for such ministry.

But I do wish to add options for serving in the kingdom that are more likely to succeed. I sense that for every missionary who makes the radical model work, there are hundreds more who could effectively join with God to establish his kingdom closer to home.

I believe that the narrative of Acts and the letters of Paul are meant to guide us, perhaps even direct us. We are not tied to the practices of the first Christian church, but we should certainly *know* those practices and have good reason if we abandon them. In other words, we should *know why*, in *today's* mission world, Paul is the Very Worst Missionary.

Compasión por el extranjero

REBECA GONZÁLEZ TORRES

La migración humana no es algo nuevo, ni es un tema de moda, es una realidad que se ha desarrollado a lo largo de la historia de la humanidad, trascendiendo límites de tiempo y espacio.

Reflexionar y hacer teología para responder a una necesidad como la migración, lo podemos hacer a partir del análisis del testimonio bíblico y con la ayuda de otras disciplinas que nos orienten. Sin embargo, también es importante analizar el texto partiendo de las vivencias humanas, desde las propias historias, pues a partir de ellas las reflexiones adquieren sentidos más profundos, porque no solo son datos e información teórica de lo que sucede a distancia, sino vida, emociones y decisiones. Por lo tanto, en este ensayo me enfocaré en la inmigración que sucede en el cruce de la frontera hacia Estados Unidos, específicamente en los inmigrantes que piden asilo político.

Ser testigo de la migración supera cualquier teoría y análisis académico, porque vivir en medio del movimiento humano conmueve todo el ser y hay multiformes e inimaginables maneras de realizarla. La conducta humana está condicionada por cambios económicos, sociales y políticos, que producen pobreza extrema e impulsan a multitudes a realizar desplazamientos humanos capaces de arriesgar la vida para luchar por su supervivencia y la de sus seres queridos.

Vivir nuestra fe, desde nuestras convicciones anabautistas, nos debe llevar a la relectura de la Biblia, motivados por las preguntas que nos provocan las nuevas realidades que vivimos hoy, para que podamos lograr una intervención pertinente que dé respuesta al fenómeno de la migración en nuestros tiempos. Si una persona sale de su lugar de origen para moverse a otra ciudad, pasa a formar parte de la estadística global de migrantes en el mundo. Una de cada treinta personas es migrante.

La migración es una fuerza que contribuye al crecimiento económico y el emprendimiento de las naciones, tanto del lugar receptor como del lugar de origen, con los que divide sus ganancias. Se han hecho intentos de regular la migración a través de diálogos y convenios. Por ejemplo, en 2016 varios países hic-

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ieron un pacto global de cooperación internacional para garantizar la migración segura, ordenada y regulada, respetando los derechos humanos.¹ Con esto, las fronteras quedarían abiertas para que personas de cualquier raza pudieran ingresar en forma legal y con el derecho humano de moverse. Sin embargo, en la práctica cotidiana, las personas sufren mucho por los procesos inhumanos y largos que realizan, dificultando una travesía más segura. El ejemplo de esto lo podemos ver en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos, que ha sido un claro ejemplo de injusticia donde se violenta la dignidad humana.

Así que resumiré este escrito en cuatro partes: en la primera, repasamos las posibles causas que producen la migración; en el segundo punto he observado dos dimensiones de la migración, una es cómo se recibe al extranjero y la otra cómo se instalan los que llegan de un país extranjero; en tercer lugar quiero destacar el rostro de Dios que nos presentan las Escrituras y cuál es su posición ante esta necesidad; por último, y no menos importante, unas líneas pastorales que se derivan de una práctica personal de migración.

I. Las causas de la migración.

Existe mucha información que documenta las diversas causas por las que se desplaza la gente, van desde los cambios climáticos que modifican el medio ambiente, los imperios y potencias mundiales que tienen más riqueza produciendo pobreza en los demás países, también los medios de comunicación que nos facilitan el conocimiento de caminos, transporte y condiciones de vida mejores en otros lugares. Las sociedades organizadas y sus sistemas favorecen a unos cuantos, sin importar pasar por encima de los demás. La violencia social es otra de las causas por las que las personas huyen para salvaguardar la vida, porque han sido despojadas de sus pertenencias y expulsadas de su pueblo. Otros experimentan violación (física y emocional) y violencia extrema, hay quienes experimentan persecución política y mucho más, en estas condiciones la gente se empobrece de tal manera que se ve obligada a salir en busca de recursos para vivir dignamente. Así que observo tres tipos de migración en la frontera entre México y Estados Unidos.

Cruce sin documentos: Los migrantes son personas vulnerables simplemente por ser de otro lugar, por desconocer procesos, y por exponerse a las mafias y delincuencia organizada. En la frontera de México/Estados Unidos, los «coyotes» son personas que crean maneras para cruzar la frontera de forma ilegal, que sorprenden pero que conllevan prácticas muchas veces inhumanas; estas personas, que han creado la industria del tráfico de personas indocumentadas, son poderosas porque conocen el lugar físico de la frontera y las dinámi-

¹ Sobre este Pacto Mundial sobre Migración ver el siguiente documento y video: <https://rosanjose.iom.int/site/sites/default/files/Pacto%20mundial%20sobre%20migracion.pdf>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzTypC1jblI&feature=youtu.be>.

cas sociales que les permiten crear estrategias para conducir a los inmigrantes en la frontera; hay coyotes que hacen su trabajo llevando a los inmigrantes hasta su lugar de destino, pero hay quienes solo usan a las personas para obtener grandes ganancias económicas y abandonan a los inmigrantes en el desierto a su suerte.

Cruce en busca de asilo: En la frontera de México/Estados Unidos vemos filas interminables esperando poder entrar a las oficinas de migración y solicitar asilo político. Esta gente huye de la persecución por la violencia social y estructural de sus gobiernos; por traficantes de droga; por el desplazamiento de sus tierras; por la corrupción de la narcopolítica que se vive en sus regiones de origen; otras personas buscan asilo porque han sido usadas para la trata de personas, han logrado escapar y buscan refugio en Estados Unidos; existen incontables casos en espera para conseguir el asilo.

Cruce con documentos. Este incluye a las personas que entran a Estados Unidos por la vía legal, tienen bien arreglados sus documentos y son personas con solvencia económica. Este tipo de gente transita en el país y son bienvenidos y respetados.

La migración en la historia de salvación.

Leer la Biblia también implica leer historias de migrantes que por una gran diversidad de motivos abandonan sus tierras, mencionaré solo algunas:

Dios llama a emigrar. Llama la atención el llamado de Dios a Abram para emigrar: «Yahveh dijo a Abram: “Vete de tu tierra, y de tu patria, y de la casa de tu padre, a la tierra que yo te mostraré”» (Génesis 12:1 BJ).²

Huida. Agar que huye de Sara y Abraham con rumbo desconocido, solo confiando en la gracia de Dios y la promesa de cuidar de ella y su hijo que están en total desamparo.

Hambre. Observamos emigración/inmigración al mismo tiempo en la historia de Noemí, que debido a la hambruna que produce la pobreza sale de su país y, después de mucho tiempo de estar fuera, regresa a su tierra al lado de su nuera por la misma situación: el hambre. Ahora Rut, la nuera de Noemí, se convierte en inmigrante asumiendo al pueblo y al Dios de su suegra.

Esclavitud. Otra historia es la de José que, desechado por sus hermanos y vendido, llega a otras tierras donde lo asedian el peligro, la muerte y la tentación. Sin embargo, la mano de Dios le preserva y logra establecerse y posicionarse junto con su familia en un país ajeno al suyo. Con el tiempo la familia se multiplica formando un pueblo fuerte, lo que produce miedo y sospecha en

² Todas las citas bíblicas han sido tomadas de diferentes traducciones y versiones, y provienen en su mayoría del sitio Biblegateway: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>.

los locales, que deciden convertirlos en esclavos. El éxodo de los hebreos es de gente explotada, que añora una vida mejor.

Exilios. A lo largo de las Escrituras vemos a un pueblo judío sometido por diversos imperios como los asirios, babilonios, persas, griegos y romanos. Estos imperios los obligaron a abandonar sus tierras, los deportaron lejos de su territorio, los usaron y los maltrataron.

Diáspora. Muchos judíos se dispersaron en diversas naciones y se adaptaron a las culturas que los acogieron. Decidieron no regresar y seguir así con su vida; Santiago y Pedro hacen un llamado a reconsiderar esta decisión y a no olvidar su identidad.

Dios mismo emigra. La máxima historia de la inmigración la vemos expresada en Jesús, al dejar su posición de Dios para venir a esta tierra, vivir como nosotros, y mostrarnos una forma de vida diferente e inspiradora.

La migración se vive en todas partes.

En la Biblia la migración es voluntaria e involuntaria, pues se emprende hacia donde está la abundancia, donde está el imperio y donde existen posibilidades de vida.

En nuestros tiempos es lo mismo, el movimiento humano se da en todas partes y en diferentes direcciones: de norte a sur y de sur a norte, de este a oeste y de oeste a este. La necesidad es mucha: hambre, violencia, guerra, persecución, criminalidad, están presentes en todas partes. Haciendo largos recorridos por el continente americano, la gente llega a Estados Unidos para lograr alcanzar el «sueño americano», como se le ha denominado a esta inmigración hacia Estados Unidos.

Pero también en la historia universal la movilidad humana ha sido parte de la existencia del mundo, pues comunidades, pueblos y naciones se desarrollaron con gente proveniente de todas partes por diversas causas.

La migración en la historia anabautista.

Los anabautistas del siglo XVI también vivieron y experimentaron la migración, principalmente movidos por su fidelidad a las enseñanzas de Jesús. Producto de sus furtivas y fugitivas salidas, la persecución religiosa, política, social y económica les permitió organizarse y vivir en comunidades intencionales donde aprendieron a convivir, para compartir, dialogar, acordar y cooperar. Estos valores fueron muy necesarios como una práctica cotidiana para lograr la conformación de una comunidad donde se sostienen unos a otros en tiempos de dificultad, a pesar del desarraigo de un lugar físico, y pueden sentirse apoyados y acompañados en su caminar. En la época del martirio y la persecución, su fe creció y se afianzó en la vida comunitaria y la ayuda mutua, rasgos característicos que les han distinguido con el correr del tiempo. El modelo de Jesús,

su muerte y resurrección, y la comunidad de fe, fueron su fortaleza, y por ello pudieron sobrellevar el martirio y la emigración.

II. Dos dimensiones de la migración.

En mi caminar de cerca con la migración en estos tres últimos años, he observado dos dimensiones muy importantes: por un lado están los que viven y experimentan la migración; por el otro lado, los que observan la migración y reaccionan de alguna manera, ya sea positiva o negativamente.

A. Los que viven la migración

Para los que viven la migración, las emociones están a flor de piel, les embarga la soledad de lo perdido o añorado. En Estados Unidos hay varios tipos de inmigrantes: unos son aquellos que están en forma legal con documentos en orden; otros son indocumentados que viven en la clandestinidad; otras familias están divididas porque algunos de sus miembros son indocumentados y otros ya nacieron aquí y son nacionales. Las familias inmigrantes más estables son aquellas que tienen documentos formales que los acreditan, llevan muchos años y han hecho una mezcla de culturas. Las familias que tienen algunos miembros indocumentados siempre viven con miedo de ser descubiertos, separados y deportados, así que hay un ambiente de inseguridad y desconfianza.

B. Los que reciben la inmigración

Los que reciben la inmigración y son personas nacionales que no han tenido una experiencia cercana a la migración, comúnmente son bastante intolerantes y severas, pues consideran a la inmigración como un mal de la sociedad que el gobierno debe resolver. Especialmente los latinos con rasgos físicos latinos, pero que son de segunda generación, es decir nacidos en Estados Unidos, tienen una actitud negativa, no quieren ser confundidos con los inmigrantes y no quieren hablar español. Mucha de la inmigración se usa para sacar provecho, ya que hacen los trabajos que los nacionales no quieren hacer. Hay mucha desconfianza en las relaciones interpersonales y se basan en la conveniencia. Por otra parte, hay ciudades y espacios en donde el inmigrante puede sentirse bien recibido, protegido, con esperanza de una vida mejor; estos lugares ofrecen desarrollo familiar y personal, son espacios de esperanza hacia un futuro prometedor en el que puede haber cambios.

C. Ejemplo bíblico: Salmo 137:1-6

Junto a los ríos de Babilonia, nos sentamos y lloramos al pensar en Jerusalén. Guardamos las arpas, las colgamos en las ramas de los álamos. Pues nuestros captosres nos exigían que cantáramos; los que nos atormentaban insistían en un himno de alegría: «¡Cántennos una de esas canciones acerca de Jerusalén!». ¿Pero cómo podemos entonar las canciones del Señor mientras estamos en una tierra pagana? Si me olvido de ti, oh Jerusalén, que mi mano derecha se olvide de cómo tocar el arpa. Que la lengua se me pegue al paladar si dejo de recordarte, si no hago de Jerusalén mi mayor alegría. (Salmo 137:1-6 NTV)

En este salmo escuchamos el lamento de los cantores y músicos que han sido deportados, y han experimentado pérdidas importantes en su vida: como su país, su comunidad, familia, y por supuesto su espacio de adoración, donde ellos siendo cantores expresaban su adoración a Dios; todo eso que les proporcionaba una estabilidad emocional, física y espiritual. El salmo refleja la melancolía y depresión que les ha producido el romper con su equilibrio cotidiano, algo muy difícil de superar para quienes experimentan la deportación y el desarraigo.

Por el otro lado, el salmo nos habla de los ciudadanos que reciben a los inmigrantes y que están cómodos porque no han perdido, sino más bien han recibido el beneficio que aportan los que llegan de otras tierras para usarlos a su parecer. El salmo nos da la sensación de que los que reciben no tienen sensibilidad hacia los inmigrantes, solo quieren usarlos para su beneficio.

III. El rostro de Dios ante la migración.

En todos los tiempos, por cuestiones culturales y sistémicas, las relaciones humanas favorecen siempre a los hombres, a los ricos y poderosos, convirtiéndolos en amos y señores de la existencia humana.

A. Compasión como rostro de Dios

Hablar del rostro de Dios significa referirnos a la personalidad o la esencia de lo que Dios es. A lo largo de las Escrituras vemos esa personalidad o esencia de Dios manifestándose en la justicia y compasión, siempre poniéndose al lado de los más pobres y desvalidos de la tierra, entre los que se encuentran mujeres, niños, enfermos, ancianos y extranjeros. La intervención de Dios se manifiesta con los débiles, el Salmo 113:7-9 dice: «Él levanta del polvo al pobre, saca al desvalido del estiércol... él da un hogar a la estéril, feliz al ser madre de hijos» (BLPH). La institución del jubileo pretende integrar el cuidado de los extranjeros, la institución de lugares de refugio es para cuidar del que huye y merece un justo juicio, pero también se incluye al extranjero (Josué 20:3, Números 35:10-15). Este es el rostro de Dios: justicia y compasión hacia el prójimo, que también es creado a imagen y semejanza de él. En el Nuevo Testamento vemos

el rostro de Dios reflejado en Jesús, que es la justicia y compasión de Dios hecho carne. Dios tuvo compasión de la humanidad y nos envió a Jesús (Juan 14:9-10; Filipenses 2:5-11), los Evangelios son testimonio vivo de ello.

Compasión es una palabra compuesta: *com-pasión*, esto quiere decir que puedo sentir lo que el otro siente, porque yo he vivido las mismas pasiones que el otro, tengo contacto con las mismas emociones que el otro y me hace empática. Las personas que han vivido la experiencia de la migración pueden sentir en carne propia lo que otros sienten al pasar por el mismo proceso de desarraigo y soledad. Sin embargo, como seres humanos, cuando estamos en condiciones de confort solemos olvidar el dolor y sufrimiento. Por tal motivo, en algunos pasajes se hace el llamado a no olvidar:

No opriman a los extranjeros que habiten entre ustedes. Trátenlos como si fueran sus compatriotas, y ámenlos como a ustedes mismos, porque también ustedes fueron extranjeros en Egipto. Yo soy el Señor su Dios. (Levítico 19:33-34 RVC)

Otra versión lo expresa así:

No maltraten al inmigrante que viva entre ustedes. Trátenlo como a un ciudadano más y ámenlo como a sí mismos, pues ustedes fueron inmigrantes en Egipto; porque yo soy el SEÑOR su Dios. (Levítico 19:33-34 PDT)

Un pueblo que vivió el destierro y fue inmigrante sabe lo que es vivir lejos de su tierra y puede llegar a sentir compasión por el extranjero. Así que las vivencias personales son las que nos pueden llevar a realizar prácticas de compasión con los que están pasando por la misma situación. Cualquier hábito se convierte en costumbre y viceversa, con las costumbres se enseñan los hábitos, que se alimentan y forman en las familias, y que, como consecuencia, se reflejan en la sociedad. De esa manera el cuidado del extranjero se convierte en una práctica cultural muy importante para el pueblo judío, pero también hay un frecuente llamado en el Nuevo Testamento para todo cristiano a vivir con compasión hacia los demás.

Estén listos para ayudar a los hijos de Dios cuando pasen necesidad. Estén siempre dispuestos a brindar hospitalidad. (Romanos 12:13 NTV)

No se olviden de brindar hospitalidad a los desconocidos, porque algunos que lo han hecho, ¡han hospedado ángeles sin darse cuenta! (Hebreos 13:2 NTV)

B. Nuestra propia historia

Lo pensamos mucho para decidirnos aceptar una invitación que nos exigía abandonar el confort e ir hacia un futuro incierto donde no sabíamos qué nos

depararía el porvenir. Fue hasta el 2016, que mi esposo y yo decidimos tomar nuestras maletas para ir como voluntarios a Aurora, Colorado.

Nuestro hogar de refugio fue «Casa de Paz»,³ un apartamento muy pequeñito de una sola recámara, ubicado a una cuadra del Centro de Detención GEO en Aurora, Colorado. No tuvimos ninguna instrucción previa, y al llegar esperábamos que la fundadora y directora nos pusiera al tanto de toda la dinámica del proyecto. Nuestra sorpresa fue que ni ella sabía exactamente qué deberíamos hacer, su frase favorita solo era: «Es tu casa, tú decides lo que quieres hacer...». Había un solo voluntario que manejaba una agenda a conveniencia personal y nosotros nos convertimos en personas no convenientes para la dinámica que tenía en «Casa de Paz». Solo fueron suficientes dos semanas para darnos cuenta de las necesidades que había en Casa de Paz y los grandes retos que teníamos por delante. La confianza que ganamos por el trabajo nos permitió involucrarnos a fondo en el proyecto, para establecer una identidad y un sistema de intervención que atendiera a todos los que llegaban, proveyéndoles lo necesario para su camino.

La directora depositó toda su confianza en nosotros e iniciamos la intervención, respondiendo a las necesidades que se nos iban presentando día tras día.

Fueron seis meses en los que cada semana recibimos de diez a doce personas de diferentes países provenientes de América Latina, África y Asia. Cada uno con sus historias, nos hacían vibrar de emociones, y esto era porque sus vivencias y la forma en cómo salieron de su país y toda la travesía que tuvieron que hacer para llegar a Estados Unidos resultaron increíbles, para después pasar por un proceso legal en el Centro de Detención, en espera de la decisión a su petición de asilo.

Así lo vivió un hombre joven llamado Mali, que en Senegal no encontró trabajo y no había para sembrar, tuvo que salir de su país viajando y trabajando en busca de sustento. Durante cinco años le costó llegar a Estados Unidos y solicitar asilo, fue hasta entonces que se comunicó con su familia, la cual lo daba por muerto al no tener noticias suyas. Lo mismo vivió otra mujer africana llamada Reina, que después de un año encerrada en el Centro de Detención de Aurora, Colorado, experimentó un milagro. Un desconocido la ayudó y lo imposible se hizo posible. En su narración, en cada dificultad y peligro que padeció, la única exclamación que tenía era: ¡Solo Dios salva! Y cómo olvidar a Yajaira, nacida en Veracruz, México. Después de que sus perseguidores le machetearon la cabeza y la mano, terminó huyendo a la frontera para solicitar asilo. Joseph Buda, y Abdul, que, por hambre y falta de trabajo en Burkina

³ Para más información sobre Casa de Paz visite <https://www.casadepazcolorado.org/>.

Faso, África, tuvieron que pasar por varios países hasta llegar a Estados Unidos, donde les concedieron el asilo.

Después de estar en Casa de Paz, viajamos dos años a diversos países: Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala y México. Nuestros ojos se fijaban en aquellos extranjeros que iban de paso, imaginábamos que podían llegar a Casa de Paz. Nuestras paradas en América Latina nos permitieron ver caminantes que se mueven en diversas direcciones. Ahora no pasamos por alto su vida, tenemos un corazón sensible y podemos ver diferentes injusticias cometidas hacia ellos solo por ser extranjeros.

Comprendimos que los movimientos humanos están determinados por los espacios geográficos más cercanos a los cuales las personas o familias pueden acceder, las ciudades son más buscadas porque se encuentran oportunidades de vida, pese a las grandes amenazas que pueda haber.

Que el amor fraternal permanezca en ustedes. Y no se olviden de practicar la hospitalidad, pues gracias a ella algunos, sin saberlo, hospedaron ángeles. (Hebreos 13:1-2 RVC)

Una parte cultural que la Escritura transmite tanto en el Antiguo como en el Nuevo Testamento, es la atención que se debía dar a las personas desplazadas, refugiadas o extranjeras, y tratarlas como a las más vulnerables de aquellos tiempos:

«Ámenlos como a ustedes mismos, porque recuerden que ustedes también fueron extranjeros...» (Levítico 19:34b NBV)

Este es un llamado que encontramos en la Biblia para recordar que ellos estuvieron en la misma condición de inmigrantes. Esto significa ponerse en los zapatos del otro, pues el que mejor puede entender una situación es quien ha pasado por ella, es lo que actualmente llamamos empatía. Un extranjero quedaba bajo el cuidado de los demás y su supervivencia dependía de la actitud del dueño o señor de la tierra. De ahí la importancia de ser empático con los demás.

Nosotros también estábamos en una situación de vulnerabilidad, nos sentíamos lejos de nuestra tierra y familia, y por ello procuramos identificar qué era lo que ellos deseaban al salir del GEO para poder cubrir esa necesidad y darles una pequeña alegría.

Comimos con africanos, asiáticos (chinos entre ellos), y toda una representación de América Latina. Escuchamos voces por teléfono de familiares que lloraban y gritaban de alegría al darse cuenta de que su ser querido aún vivía; memorizamos palabras de bienvenida en otros idiomas para decirles a nuestros huéspedes y cubrir sus necesidades básicas. Dejamos que cocinaran su comida deseada y favorita; cantamos y oramos juntos, en diferentes idiomas, con gratitud al Señor por la libertad.

En ese pequeño departamento llamado Casa de Paz vimos desfilar 120 personas que hicieron recorridos de su país de origen hasta llegar a Estados

Unidos, desde seis meses hasta cinco años, los africanos comúnmente se estacionaban por un tiempo en algún país para trabajar y juntar el dinero que les permitiera continuar su viaje.

IV. Líneas pastorales para atender al extranjero.

Pues tuve hambre, y me alimentaron. Tuve sed, y me dieron de beber. Fui extranjero, y me invitaron a su hogar. Estuve desnudo, y me dieron ropa. Estuve enfermo, y me cuidaron. Estuve en prisión, y me visitaron... Les digo la verdad, cuando hicieron alguna de estas cosas al más insignificante de estos, mis hermanos, ¡me lo hicieron a mí!

(Mateo 25:35, 36, 40 NTV).

Recibimos grandes lecciones de vida, que superan las ideas aprendidas en la academia y en diferentes foros de diálogo sobre migración, sobre cómo intervenir en situaciones de crisis. Seguramente en este ensayo no podría enumerarlas todas, sin embargo voy a aprovechar esta oportunidad para compartir algunos puntos importantes que fueron trascendentales para una intervención oportuna a los inmigrantes que llegaban a Casa de Paz.

1. Tener empatía: yo soy como tú, y tú eres como yo; tener compasión.

Al llegar a Estados Unidos en calidad de voluntarios por seis meses, el gobierno nos prohibió recibir un sueldo, porque podríamos perder nuestros documentos como voluntarios. Así que ese fue un primer factor con el cual nos identificamos con nuestros huéspedes. Estábamos en la misma condición y solo vivíamos con las donaciones de alimentos y ropa que nos proporcionaban en Casa de Paz. Esta situación, tan sencilla pero significativa, nos dio la sensibilidad para entender y saber exactamente las necesidades de los inmigrantes al salir del Centro de Detención: ropa, calzado, comida, artículos de aseo personal. Nos dimos cuenta de las carencias de Casa de Paz, pero también de lo que sobraba. Por ejemplo, una ocasión una mujer proveniente de Colombia pedía ropa interior, y al buscar en todas las donaciones no encontramos absolutamente nada de eso, y como consecuencia terminamos dando de lo poco que teníamos personalmente.

Otra ocasión encontramos en la puerta de entrada de Casa de Paz un donativo con una caja llena de paquetes de hilo dental y una enorme bolsa de 5 kilos de pasta para cocinar. Otra ocasión recibimos una gran cantidad de ropa para bebé y niños; otro día recibimos camisas y pantalones casi nuevos, de muy buena clase, pero que no eran útiles para nuestros huéspedes, que necesitaban lo más cómodo y práctico para viajar. En otra ocasión, llegó un donativo de mochilas y útiles escolares. ¡Recibimos muchos donativos como esos! Nuestro pequeño departamento no daba para más, era imposible tener tanta donación que nadie iba a usar, así que las palabras de la directora hicieron eco en no-

sotros: «Es tu casa, tú decides lo que quieres hacer...» Y decidimos sacar todo lo que no era útil para nuestros huéspedes, y lo donamos a los vecinos, pues muchos de ellos eran también inmigrantes y pobres.

2. Detectar necesidades reales y urgentes.

Aprendimos que hay muchos tipos de donadores, aquellos que solo quieren deshacerse de lo que les sobra; otros dan y apoyan para acallar la conciencia por la comodidad en la que viven; y también hay quienes quieren dar lo que a su parecer necesitan los demás, seguramente movidos por su propia experiencia de vida o condición en la que se encuentran. Un donador que desea ayudar, motivado por su fe y amor al prójimo, está dispuesto a dar lo que es necesario, pero los que piden deben saber qué pedir. Para esto hay que tener presente las verdaderas necesidades que un extranjero tiene según su situación actual. Esto nos llevó a solicitar donativos precisos que respondieran a las necesidades básicas.

Ser piel y brazos de Dios, hace que nuestra relación humana se convierta en una intervención sagrada.

3. Respeto a los usos y costumbres diferentes.

El tesoro más grande que un inmigrante trae consigo es su historia, costumbres, cultura y experiencias. Esto es lo que le da identidad y razón de ser, así que, cuando llegan al encuentro de otros en otras tierras, su proyección es en razón de su ser. Lo experimentaron los judíos, también los menonitas en la historia, y lo experimentan los migrantes en todas partes. Por tal motivo es importante considerar todo esto al recibir a un extranjero, ellos nunca actúan como uno quisiera.

En Casa de Paz nos tocó recibir musulmanes, para ellos era de suma importancia tener un pequeño lugar privado para poder hacer sus oraciones; otros no podían comer carne roja, o de cerdo, etc. Respetar sus personas fue muy importante para lograr relaciones de confianza y armonía.

4. Aceptar y servir incondicionalmente, porque todos son imagen y semejanza de Dios.

Servir incondicionalmente a los inmigrantes significa no mirar la condición en la que cada extranjero llega, sea por su religión, raza o condición social. La compasión se manifiesta amando al otro como a nosotros mismos, sin importar quién es el otro, simplemente por el hecho de ser imagen y semejanza de Dios.

Hemos regresado a Denver, Colorado, inmersos en una comunidad de fe que quiere ser una opción multicultural para una sociedad tan plural en la que nos encontramos, pero hay que crear condiciones para preparar a la iglesia y servir en un reto tan grande.

Reflexiones finales

Escuchamos de éxodos masivos, caravanas de gente que han salido de su país para llegar a Estados Unidos. La frontera se ha convertido en un campo de batalla, los caminantes solo se traen a sí mismos, vulnerables y dependiendo de la buena voluntad de los demás. El horizonte que los guía es el famoso imaginario del «sueño americano». Entre más se camina, más lejos se ve, pero unos a otros se animan y se desafían a seguir adelante. Nadie es de aquí, pero al final de cuentas a nadie le pertenece nada, todos somos pasajeros en esta vida.

¿Cuántos meses, cuántos días tendrán que esperar en la frontera? Todos los que se han incorporado a las caravanas migratorias requieren protección, son carne de cañón que están expuestos para ser usados con intereses personales, políticos, de corrupción y narcotráfico.

Muchos cristianos, movidos por su amor al prójimo y temor a Dios, extienden su mano y se convierten en refugio ante tanto dolor.

Pero también existen iglesias que se concentran en su liturgia local y son fieles a ella, la tradición les limita de salir de su rutina y confort, ven un involucramiento en estas necesidades como un gran sacrificio personal que les cuesta asumir. Ahora, en tiempos de globalización, la movilidad humana requiere que las comunidades de fe decidan no quedarse al margen del trabajo, sino involucrarse por completo en él. No es solo dando dinero y comida para que otros hagan el trabajo, sino creando programas y liturgias inclusivas que ayuden en la transformación de mentes conforme al corazón de Dios.

¡Ya se te ha declarado lo que es bueno! Ya se te ha dicho lo que de ti espera el Señor: Practicar la justicia, amar la misericordia, y humillarte ante tu Dios. (Miqueas 6:8 NVI)

The Immigrant—גֵּר (Ger)—in the Old Testament and the Formation of the People of God’s Identity

YAMIL ACEVEDO

Ninety million people have moved from south to north over the past twenty-five years, compelling governments and all kinds of organizations to respond out of their sense of responsibility, interests, and resources.¹ The church is no exception.² In 2010 the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization assumed a theological position to cast a strategy for Christian mission to immigrants called diaspora mission.³ The emphasis on diaspora as a response to the global realities of migration has stimulated numerous scholar discussions and led to the development of a theology of migration that is mainly centered on an evangelistic rhetoric.⁴

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1 “International Migration Report 2017,” United Nations, accessed November 10, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017.pdf>.

2 Caroline Nagel and Patricia Ehrkamp, “Immigration, Christian Faith Communities, and the Practice of Multiculturalism in the U.S. South,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 1 (January 2017): 190–208, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1229489>.

3 “Scattered to Gathered: Embracing the Global Trend of Diaspora,” 2010 Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (Manila, Philippines: LifeChange, 2010), 14.

4 See Jinbong Kim et al., *People Disrupted: Doing Mission Responsibly among Refugees and Migrants* (Littleton, CO : William Carey Library, 2018); see also Chandler H. Im and Amos Yong, eds., *Global Diasporas and Mission*, vol. 23, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014); and Enoch Yee-nock Wan,

However, there is more to the theology of migration than evangelizing the other among us. For instance, some scholars within the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement, such as Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, have nuanced the diaspora missiology conversation, arguing that reading Scriptures—in particular, the wisdom literature—from a diaspora perspective (i.e., placing ourselves as members of a minority group under a dominant culture) provides not only a better understanding of the text but also an approach for how the text “makes the most ‘sense.’”⁵ What Smith-Christopher suggests is not a new way to engage the Scriptures but an inclusive hermeneutic where the experience of the migrant community can inform our understanding of the gospel and mission of God. Much remains to be explored, however, in our theology of mission and the migration experience.

This paper aims to contribute to this dialogue by arguing that our theology of migration must seek to reflect upon and understand the migrant experience beyond evangelism and outreach. A more comprehensive theology of migration is needed that encompasses a broader spectrum of dynamics of what migration entails—such as its social, spiritual, cognitive, cultural, emotional, economic, and ethical implications—from both ends of the experience, hosts and aliens. The combination of experiences, both as hosts and aliens, is instrumental in the formation of the people of God’s missional⁶ orientation. Therefore, I argue that Israel’s engagement with the “resident aliens” (גֵּר, *ger*) as well as with their own diaspora experience shaped their identity, in particular their eschatological orientation of hope, and that such experiences must inform our missional identity today as well.⁷ For this reason, we will consider the following: 1) the experience of Israel in the Old Testament as hosts of resident aliens/*ger*, 2) their role as *ger* themselves in Babylon, and 3) the interpretation of *ger* by two

Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, Western Seminary, c2011).

5 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 168.

6 The word missional will be used, as defined by Christopher J. H. Wright, as “an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes or dynamics of mission” (Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 24).

7 The Hebrew term *ger* has been translated into English as alien, stranger, sojourner, foreigner, non-Israelite, temporary resident, resident alien, foreign resident, protected citizen, client, or refugee (see T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., “Ger,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch—A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003], 27).

prominent Old Testament scholars. I will conclude by suggesting some missiological implications.⁸

The People of God's Missional Identity and the *Ger*

Perspectives of the Ger in the Old Testament Land

Although our understanding of *ger* is probably mostly informed by the Old Testament narratives, it is important to also assess the term's meaning for and uses by other cultures and peoples outside the Israelites. It is reasonable to think that as Abraham migrated from Mesopotamia, others of his day would have done the same, meaning that the existence of *ger* was likely common within other nations as well. Christiana van Houten observes that in the Mesopotamian legal collections "the Laws of Eshuna, the Code of Hammurabi and the Middle Assyrian laws each contain only one law pertaining to the alien."⁹ This law, van Houten continues, was written "from the vantage point of the family left behind" and portrayed widows, orphans, and the poor as the objects of abandonment.¹⁰ In other words, the laws of Mesopotamia aimed to protect the weak as a consequence of an event where the paterfamilias migrated, leaving his family behind. Other than this particular mandate, there is no evidence of a law regarding the alien.¹¹ Van Houten stresses, however, that we should not conclude that the absence of a legal code regarding the alien evidences a lack of sympathy, since "hospitality to the stranger may have been one of the accepted mores of the culture."¹²

Egypt was another nation and culture of influence in Abraham's time. James K. Hoffmeier notes that Egypt's location and natural resources were

8 Although Israel's identity as *ger* began with the story of Joseph in Egypt, this paper focuses on the Judean Babylonian exile mainly for two reasons: (1) because the biblical accounts describe a stark difference of social status between the two experiences—the former as slaves and the latter as alien residents—and the Babylonian exile relates more closely to the subject under current scrutiny (for example, it relates to today's migration crises through the experience of dislocation, where people move from landownership to landlessness); (2) the composition—material—of the Old Testament is greatly influenced by the experience of Israel in Babylon. This does not imply that Israel's formative experience in Egypt should be disregarded or diminished, but because the Babylonian exile is a central theme for most of the prophets and historical books, it provides more insights for the topic at hand.

9 Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 107 (England: JSOT Press Sheffield, 1991), 34.

10 van Houten, 34.

11 van Houten, 34.

12 van Houten, 36.

attractive for many nations and peoples in the vicinity, in particular those with a shepherding socioeconomic lifestyle.¹³ Although Egyptians generally accepted these peoples into their lands, they were selective and cautious in who they allowed to enter.¹⁴ For example, the author of Genesis records that the land of Goshen was assigned to Israel, his family, and livestock, because shepherds were “an abomination to the Egyptians” (Gn 46:34b).¹⁵ Also, Hoffmeier observes that archeological findings describe the entrance of foreigners into Egypt and the kind of jobs that they performed, such as “household servants . . . low-skilled laborers . . . [and] artisans.”¹⁶ Hence, Egyptians were not against immigrants or strangers in their midst but had a code of border administration as sovereigns over their land.¹⁷

These examples suggest four insights regarding aliens and strangers: (1) that migration was a reality for different peoples, either for lifestyle or socioeconomic reasons; (2) that nations were very aware of the dynamics that arise from the movement of people/aliens and that laws were necessary to address resulting issues; (3) that nations were vigilant to preserve a privileged social status of their citizens over the foreigner; and (4) that Israel was not the only nation with laws and ethics regarding the *ger*; however, the difference lies in the extension of these laws and ethics, and how they related to the *ger*.

Israel’s Cultural Ethic and the Law of Moses

Having *ger* in one’s midst was as common in the Old Testament times as it is today. Consequently, if Israel was to become a nation-state, they would need laws to instruct life in community with resident aliens. God provided such laws. However, biblical evidence suggests existence of a culture ethic before this regarding the *ger*. We must first look to the implications of this cultural ethic before addressing the law.

M. Daniel Carroll R. observes that there were “protocols and expectations for the host”¹⁸ and points us to several examples of hospitality in the Old Testament, such as Abraham greeting and serving food to the three strangers passing by, Laban providing hospitality to Abraham’s servant, and the widow

13 James Karl Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 38.

14 Hoffmeier, 38.

15 Unless otherwise specified, all Bible verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

16 Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis*, 42.

17 Hoffmeier, 43.

18 M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2013), 76.

of Zarephath hosting Elijah.¹⁹ He stresses, however, that the practice of hospitality within Israel was more than a mimic of the Ancient Near East cultural ethic. “To be hospitable is to imitate God,”²⁰ he observes. Carroll R. finds biblical support for this argument mainly in Psalm 23:5, where the Good Shepherd invites the psalmist into his house; “then,” Carroll R. adds, “graciousness toward those in need is revealed to be an attribute of the Lord himself.”²¹ Thus, for Israel, hospitality to strangers was more than a cultural responsibility; it shaped the identity of the people in relation to *יְהוָה*. Moreover, the law of Moses, as we will see, is another empirical example of God shaping the identity of his people through the *ger*.

The Pentateuch—the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy, in particular—contains the laws pertaining to the *ger*. Although these books share a common set of principles, there are certain nuances we should address here. Norbert Lohfink argues for the importance of understanding the gravity with which God addresses relationship with the *ger*, and he pointedly observes that the structure of the Exodus covenant does not include the triad of “alien, widow, and orphan” found in Deuteronomy.²² Although both books pay attention to the weakest among Israel, the particular emphasis in Exodus on the *ger* creates an early, marked distinction from other nations and cultures of the land.

Exodus 22:21 says in reference to the alien, “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” Van Houten observes the dual intentionality of the law; it first prohibits the oppression “of the weak by the powerful . . . [and] second it refers to the oppression of one people by another.”²³ God’s care and meticulous attention for both groups—host and alien, Israelites and non-Israelites—was not to be overlooked in the midst of his priestly nation. Furthermore, in Exodus 23:1–9 a reiteration of this first law prohibiting oppression is found, but this time it forms part of a legal argument aiming to establish the conditions in which the *ger* should be treated as an equal and when not.²⁴ Verse 9, however, includes this reminder: “You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” This remark seems to allude to the longings for justice that the oppressed carry regarding the structures and systems around them.

19 Carroll R., 76–77.

20 Carroll R., 78.

21 Carroll R., 77.

22 Norbert F. Lohfink, *Option for the Poor: The Basic Principle of Liberation Theology in the Light of the Bible*, Vol. 1, Berkeley Lecture Series (North Richland Hills, TX: D & F Scott, 1987), 7–9.

23 van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law*, 53.

24 van Houten, 55.

One final remark within this first iteration of the law is that it pertains not only to Israel's religious observance of the Sabbath (Ex 23:12) but also to a humanitarian cause that will guard against exploitation of the *ger*: "On the seventh day you shall rest . . . and the alien . . . may be refreshed." Here, van Houten notes, the social position of the alien is made clear as "members of the household . . . [that] rely on the charity of the patriarch."²⁵

Although Deuteronomy contains a reiteration of the law given by God to Moses in Exodus, certain nuances are observed. Hoffmeier suggests five categories in which these can be divided, all in relation to the *ger*: (1) general ethical considerations, (2) legal protection, (3) treatment of employees, (4) social benefits, and (5) religious participation.²⁶ Whereas the ethical rubric in Exodus simply prohibits oppression, Deuteronomy 10:19 adds, "Love the sojourner." Jesus is arguably referencing this passage from Deuteronomy in Luke 10:25–37 when he answers the religious scholar's question "Who is my neighbor?" by narrating the parable of the Samaritan with extraordinary mercy.²⁷ It is therefore an understatement to say that love for the *ger* elevates the *ger's* status. Rather, this commandment dignifies the *ger* for who he or she is in the eyes of the Lawgiver and captures the "ethos of what it meant to be the people of God."²⁸

These rubrics deal with the legal and social elements of life in community with the *ger*. God becomes the defender of the *ger* and demands fairness from the people and the judges of Israel by establishing a method of payment for labor (Dt 24:14–15).²⁹ Also, in terms of social benefits, Deuteronomy 24:19–22 prevents landowners from reaping all of the harvest by requiring them to leave behind provision for the *ger*, the orphan, and the widow.³⁰

Regarding the last category of this legal rubric, Hoffmeier stresses the religious participation of the *ger* among the Israelites. Exodus 12:48 allows voluntary inclusion of the *ger* in the Passover as well as with offerings and sacrifices (Lv 22:17–19) and the observance of the Sabbath (Ex 20:8–11).³¹ With this last category, God provides a holistic protection for the *ger* among his people. Moreover, as Christopher J. H. Wright observes, it reflects God's caring char-

25 van Houten, 58.

26 Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis*, 72.

27 Although the expert in the law in Luke 10 was quoting Leviticus 19:18, Jesus responded to the question "Who is my neighbor?" by narrating a parable where the protagonist was a non-Israelite. Therefore, it could be argued that Jesus was borrowing from Deuteronomy 10:19 to complement the understanding and application of the law.

28 Carroll R., *Christians at the Border*, 83.

29 Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis*, 79.

30 Note that the *ger* had no land of its own, nor kinship for social support.

31 Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis*, 89–96.

acter for his people and the *ger*—feeding and clothing both because he loves both.³²

God's righteousness demanded obedience and justice, and failure to comply with God's commands regarding the *ger* had serious implications for his people. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God conditioned Israel's habitation in the land by the justice of his people:

For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. (Jer 7:5–7)

Judah was judged on the basis of their love for God and for the *ger*. Moreover, the landowners—Israelites—were to become landless, as the *ger*, as a result of disobedience. The social status and security of the Israelites would be matched to that of those they oppressed when Judah was taken into exile in 586 BC.

Reconstructing Mission to the Ger

Robert Martin-Achard defined mission mainly as “the presence of God in the midst of God's people and the presence of this people in the midst of humanity.”³³ Although this definition is too vague for defining what mission precisely aims to achieve, it provides, in part, a better understanding of Israel's missional role in regard to the *ger* in the Old Testament in two ways. First, James Chukwuma Okoye argues (using Psalm 96) that Israel participates in God's mission by “worshiping and praise and by modeling a community of justice and righteousness.”³⁴ The people's obedience to the law of God, including all of the five legal rubrics pertaining to the *ger*, points to the glory and justice of God and brings blessing to the nations.³⁵ As a result, the nations discover who God is and his righteousness from within Israel contrasted with the cultural ethics of other nations.

32 Christopher J. H. Wright, “And You Are to Love Those Who Are Foreigners . . .” (Dt 10:12–19), in *People Disrupted: Doing Mission Responsibly among Refugees and Migrants*, eds. Jinbong Kim et al. (Littleton, CO : William Carey Library, 2018), 28.

33 As cited in James Chukwuma Okoye, *Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 6.

34 Okoye, 108.

35 Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 31.

Second, Israel's mission to the *ger* is perceived as centripetal, by attraction. Here Okoye borrows from Isaiah 2:3 to say that the nations come willingly to Zion, being "pulled toward it by torah issuing from there."³⁶ As we have observed, not only do the *ger* willingly submit to God's rules but these rules also bring them into proximity with the religious life, practices, and festivities from the Israelites that celebrate YHWH. As a result, the nations are drawn to Israel's *torah* and moral ethics. In their search to quench their inner restlessness, the *ger* come to Israel to satisfy "the deepest human longings for shalom."³⁷

Israel's Missional Identity as *Ger*

Formation through Displacement and Resettlement

We have looked at Israel's relationship with the *ger* in their midst, in their land. Now, in order to have a better understanding of God's people's identity and eschatological orientation, our perspective needs to be reversed as we consider Israel as *ger* in Babylon. Outside their land, thrown into exile amid a powerful Babylonian culture, the Israelites became the *ger*. Psalm 119:19 provides perhaps one of the few direct self-identifications of the Israelites as *ger* in Babylon: "I am a sojourner in the earth." Commenting on this Psalm, C. Hassell Bullock asserts that the author is "likely a victim of political adversity."³⁸

Although Bullock cannot argue a definite date for this psalm, he acknowledges that the circumstances the author describes point to "Israel's history from the exile in 586 B.C. down to the Hasmonean era, beginning in 142 B.C."³⁹ If this is so, the historical exilic Hebrew records that narrate the life and consequences of displacement imply self-ascription as *ger* in Babylon and also the internal ethos of Israel as *ger* holding tightly to the *torah*. This experience of becoming *ger* had various implications for the Israelites.

Political, Social, and Religious Consequences

Judah was taken into exile in Babylon between 597 and 539 BC. The experiences of such a dislocation, or catastrophe, as an oppressed minority—as aliens and refugees—are recorded in books such as Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lam-

36 Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 112.

37 Okoye, 113.

38 C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 222.

39 Bullock, 222.

entations, Hosea, and Amos.⁴⁰ Rainer Albertz argues for five consequences of this exile in Judah's history:

1. The Israelites lost their political and cultic institutions.⁴¹ The centrality of Zion's theology, the promise of the endurance of the Davidic monarchy, the priestly office, and even the power of YHWH came into question.⁴²
2. Israel lost their land.⁴³ Outside the land, the character of Yahwism developed differently among the migrants to Egypt than among the exiles in Babylon; the former became more syncretistic and the latter sought radical renewal.⁴⁴
3. Kinship was strengthened as a result of the loss of a centralized authority, giving birth to a form of "Judaism as a family-centered religion."⁴⁵
4. People derived identity not only from YHWH but also from the land, state, politics, and language; therefore, without a nation-state, their identity was deeply shaken.⁴⁶ This led to an intensification of religious practices as ethnic identifiers, such as circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath.⁴⁷
5. They became more susceptible to outside influence.⁴⁸

We should note that the legal rubrics given by the law of Moses regarding the *ger*—general ethics, legal protection, treatment of employees, social benefits, and religious participation—were all fractured by the exilic experience. The structures that "gave power to faith and life" were no longer present, and, with no control of these, Israel adopted a new stance—one intended to preserve their identity even when all of the previous components were absent.⁴⁹

40 Rainer Albertz, "More and Less Than a Myth: Reality and Significance of Exile for the Political, Social, and Religious History of Judah," in *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of Exile*, eds. John J. Ahn and Jill Middlemas (New York: T & T Clarke International, 2012), 27.

41 Albertz, 27.

42 Albertz, 27–29.

43 Albertz, 29.

44 Albertz, 29.

45 Albertz, 30–31.

46 Albertz, 31.

47 Albertz, 31.

48 Albertz, 32.

49 Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 8.

But these adaptations were not enough; moreover, these did not represent the missional character that God wanted to shape in the people. Therefore, the inward orientation of this identity preservation was eventually challenged by God himself.

God's Mission for His Displaced People

For the exiled community (Jer 29), the prophet Jeremiah was entrusted with a message from God that went in the opposite direction of what the people of Israel were expecting. Wright observes that Jeremiah's message carried a three-part "surprising mission for [the] exiles."⁵⁰ The first part of this mission dealt with their social status in Babylon; it was a move "from refugees to residents."⁵¹ Israel was familiar with such legal and political differences. Foreigners had no protection and did not adhere to the religious, legal, political, and ethical laws that had been given to Israel, while resident aliens—*ger*—were participants and contributors to the socioreligious contract—in other words, to the covenant. Now, in a similar way in which the *ger* had integrated into Israel's society, Israel was called to integrate into Babylon:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.
Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and
give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters;
multiply there, and do not decrease. (Jer 29:5–6)

It was a mandate to "settle, adapt and adjust to the life in Babylon, and yet remain the people of YHWH."⁵² Once, they had been commanded to help *ger* integrate into the Israelite society; now in exile they were being asked—by God—to adhere to the Babylonian laws and social life in general as *ger*.

Wright pointedly observes the deployment of such strategy in the book of Daniel, where Daniel and his friends adopted—with no evidence of resistance—new Babylonian names, went through the Babylonian education system to learn its customs and politics, and, finally, accepted official roles as king's administrators and advisors within the government.⁵³ But, at the same time, these young men remained faithful to God, restricting themselves from certain food and from worshipping idols (Dn 1–6).⁵⁴ In this regard, Daniel L. Smith-Christopher calls Daniel the "wisdom warrior," who epitomizes the exile ethics that

50 Wright, "And You Are to Love," 141.

51 Wright, 142.

52 Wright, 144.

53 Wright, 144.

54 Wright, 144–45.

hung in constant tension between loyalty and resistance.⁵⁵ By following God's orders, Daniel was able to live as a *ger*, honoring the laws of Babylon and the king, as long as these laws did not stand against the laws of God. Daniel's faithfulness to God was his submission to Babylon, and his loyalty to Babylon was filtered through his religious ethic—his fear of YHWH.

Wright continues with a second surprising element of God's mandate to the exiles, this time in the form of mission; God asked them to turn from being "mourners to missionaries."⁵⁶ "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer 29:7). Wright argues that this verse assumes God's missional character and his commitment to bless the nations through his people, even when they are the weakest of the land—the *ger*.⁵⁷

Once again, we turn to Daniel as an example of obedience to this command. Daniel became the *ger* mediator.⁵⁸ Through Daniel's prayers, God revealed the king's dream and many lives were spared, including lives of the Babylonians (Dn 2). But it was also Daniel's prayers to YHWH and objection to worshipping the state—and the king—that sent him to the lions' den (Dn 6).

Daniel embraced his missional role, and prayer was an integral part of it. His missional identity lay in the tension of adherence to the Babylonian laws as a good citizen and contributor, and his total commitment to YHWH—a constant state of adherence-objection to the law of the land. Prayer thus became the way in which two nations were prospered and blessed in God's economy, as well as the place where the identity of the people of God was bent outward in patience-subversiveness awaiting God's justice. This state of prayerful adherence-objection became Daniel's "missional responsibility"⁵⁹ while his service became a vehicle of "gradual, upward socio-economic growth" within the sociopolitical structures of the dominant culture.⁶⁰ The one to whom the stability of land, law, and temple had been denied became a king's counselor and statesman in a foreign land by uncompromisingly embodying a paradoxical tension. As Lee Beach puts it, Daniel "is depicted as a collaborator with the

55 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 182–89.

56 Wright, "And You Are to Love," 145.

57 Wright, 146.

58 Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 183.

59 Wright, "And You Are to Love," 146.

60 John J. Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations: A Sociological, Literary, and Theological Approach on the Displacement and Resettlement of the Southern Kingdom of Judah* (Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 141.

state but on Hebrew terms. His rise to prominence does not mean abandoning his religious commitments.”⁶¹

Lastly, Wright suggests a third surprise for the exiles through Jeremiah’s message as a hopeful invitation to change from “victims to visionaries.”⁶²

For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jer 29:10–11)

Wright argues that these verses are eschatologically dense with God’s hope, grace, and justice.⁶³ “That is God’s ultimate plan and purpose.”⁶⁴ The restoration of all things is imminent, yet not immediate. God was calling his people to embrace a new ethic of life in their current circumstances with a projection to a future that junctures on “a promise . . . for the coming generations of God’s people . . . [and] for the nations.”⁶⁵ Such vision of the future brought hope to these *ger* Judeans, helping them to endure their difficulties with passive confidence in God. Moreover, as Smith-Christopher puts it, it became their “alternative means of faithfulness and mechanism for survival.”⁶⁶

Chapters 9–12 of Daniel portray this visionary awareness. First, we see Daniel going through a period of fasting and confessional prayer, awaiting the fulfillment of the promise, and then receiving a powerful word of hope: “But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days” (Dn 12:13). This is the “hope for the future that turned victims into visionaries,” Wright continues, “[enabling the *ger*] to look up and look forward and believe.”⁶⁷ God surprised Daniel in exile at the end of his days with a hope of an inheritance after his death that included land for the landless, grace in the midst of judgment, and justice that carries shalom—moreover, an inheritance of land as promised in Deuteronomy 30, yet with an eschatological inclination. On this, N. T. Wright argues that Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9 is woven into Deuteronomy 29 and 30, first asking for God’s forgiveness and then

61 Lee Beach, *The Church in Exile: Living Hope after Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 87.

62 Wright, “And You Are to Love,” 148.

63 Wright, 148.

64 Wright, 149.

65 Wright, 150.

66 Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer-Stone, 1989), 137.

67 Wright, “And You Are to Love,” 150.

appealing to God's faithfulness to bring his people back to their land.⁶⁸ Daniel 12 is part of such conversation as well and provides us with a reminder that YHWH will not leave the *ger* destitute.

Reconstructing Mission as Ger

We may conclude two things out of this brief exploration of God's people as *ger* in Babylon and as agents of God's mission. First, change in social standing from a majority culture to minority does not dampen or hinder God's mission to bless the nations through his people. With no temple in which the presence of God dwelled, with no land of their own anymore, and with no legal protection provided by their laws, the exiled community had three choices: assimilate to Babylon culture, rebel and become recluses, or embrace the role of adherent-objectors. Although some Judean exiles took one of the first two options, God called the people to sustain their identity and become witnesses as adherent-objectors. His mission depends not on a particular socioeconomic status but on the voluntary participation of the faithful.

The second conclusion is closely related to the first. The hope of God's people strengthens as they embrace the role of being *ger* participants in God's plans. Ahn observes that even when the promise was given to the 1.5 generation, the hope was transferred through generations until its fulfillment was possible because of the present *golab*⁶⁹ hope that sought the welfare of Babylon.⁷⁰ "In an immigrant community, hope is always welcome; it always has a place in the home."⁷¹ The envisioning of God's promises embraced through immediate obedience is the transformational experience that gives eschatological orientation of hope to the *ger*.

Missiological Implications and Concluding Thoughts: Toward a More Comprehensive Theology of Migration

Who Is My Neighbor? Two Different Views

The old question posed to Jesus nearly two millennia ago still resonates today: Who is my neighbor? M. Daniel Carroll R. is an Old Testament scholar who has addressed this matter in the milieu of great political debates, in particular

68 N. T. Wright, *Exile: A Conversation with N. T. Wright*, ed. James M. Scott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 22–23.

69 The word *golab* is a reference to the Judeans exiled to Babylon (see Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, eds., "Golab," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament—Prophets* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012], 304).

70 Ahn, *Exile as Forced Migrations*, 144.

71 Ahn, 157.

during the 2008 elections. His perspective on the issues of immigration stands opposite that of James K. Hoffmeier, also an Old Testament scholar. This section aims to address both perspectives with succinct clarity; however, I am limiting these two positions to what corresponds to the argument of this paper. By no means will it represent their whole arguments, although I will attempt to present each with fairness.

According to Hoffmeier, the English language does not have words that capture the clear distinction between alien and foreigner found in the Bible.⁷² He argues that an alien was more of a “permanent resident . . . [and] the foreigner, on the other hand, was not.”⁷³ In other words, the *ger* in the Old Testament must be understood as someone who enters into Israel’s society and willingly decides to adhere to all of the laws that will guarantee legal resident status within the community with protection, rights, and responsibilities.⁷⁴ On the other hand, there exists a sharp distinction between the resident alien and the foreigner (*nokri/zar*). Hoffmeier explains that the foreigner in the Scriptures could be an invading enemy (Is 1:7; Ob 11) or people “who were passing through the land with no intention of taking residence.”⁷⁵ Thus, the law of Moses as given by God provided protection and community standing for the alien/*ger* and not the foreigner. That is to say that all the passages in the Pentateuch regarding the law for aliens are exclusively referencing the *ger*.

Therefore, regarding the differences between *ger* and *nokri/zar*, Hoffmeier concludes in application to today’s American context that “the legal alien ought to have most of the rights of citizenships.” Continuing, he adds that “illegal immigrants should not expect the same privileges from the state whose laws they disregard by virtue of their undocumented status.”⁷⁶ Moreover, he argues, countries have the right not only to protect their borders from immigrants that do not respect the laws of the land but also to determine who should enter and under what status they will enter.⁷⁷ In particular, he makes reference to the illegal immigrants that come from Central and South America. Being the case that most of them are from Catholic or Protestant background, Hoffmeier argues that they should ascribe to the Scriptures’ teaching and submit to whatever form of “imperfect government procedures to obtain legal status in the land to which they hope to immigrate.”⁷⁸

72 Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis*, 48–49.

73 Hoffmeier, 51.

74 Hoffmeier, 52, 73.

75 Hoffmeier, 51.

76 Hoffmeier, 156.

77 Hoffmeier, 153.

78 Hoffmeier, 157.

Carroll R. offers a contrasting perspective in his book *Christians at the Border*.⁷⁹ Here he not only presents a biblical exploration of the resident alien, the sojourner, and the foreigner but also challenges the reader to choose a position on the current migration issues in the United States “based on the Word of God or . . . ignore its teaching and defend our opinion[s] on other grounds.”⁸⁰ For Carroll R., this is obviously a crucial subject that Christians must engage in biblically.⁸¹

Carroll R.'s perspective in terms of the biblical definitions for *ger* and *nokri/zar*, however, is inconclusive: “Sadly, the picture offered by word studies is not altogether clear, so tidy definitions are simply not possible.”⁸² Instead, he emphasizes other biblical foundations in order to come to a conclusion regarding the immigrant. He argues that the law in the Old Testament

was to serve as a paradigm for other nations . . .
[and it] reflects an awareness that sojourners were vulnerable, and
so in it are found a series of mechanisms to help meet their physical
needs.⁸³

Two things derive from this argument: First, the law of Moses shows the character of God, in particular his inclusive care for the nations and for the weak. Second, the law presents an ethical component that must resonate with Christians today and that also applies to every nation—namely, “the imperative of caring for the sojourner”⁸⁴ The practice of hospitality and care for the sojourner, without regard for status, is a meta-narrative across both Testaments.⁸⁵

Additional Considerations: A Third Choice

These two perspectives on the undocumented immigrant leave several questions unanswered. If the nations were attracted to Israel's *torah* and moral eth-

⁷⁹ The first edition of *Christians at the Border* was published in 2008, a year before Hoffmeier's book *The Immigrant Crisis*. References in this paper are from Carroll's revised edition in 2013.

⁸⁰ Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, xxix.

⁸¹ Carroll, 132.

⁸² Carroll, 87.

⁸³ Carroll, 96.

⁸⁴ Carroll, 96.

⁸⁵ Carroll, 119–20. Carroll also responded to Hoffmeier's book shortly after it was published in 2009. His counterarguments would not be addressed in this paper, but for more information see M. Daniel Carroll R., review of *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible*, by James K. Hoffmeier, Denver Seminary, December 2009, <https://denverseminary.edu/resources/news-and-articles/the-immigration-crisis-immigrants-aliens-and-the-bible/>.

ics because they found in it “shalom,” then what are the implications for the church in America regarding immigrants?⁸⁶ Moreover, as John Walton argues, was legislation the aim of the Torah or was it order through wisdom?⁸⁷ Is it fair to transpose the cultural meaning of *nokri/zar* found in the Old Testament to the context of America in the twenty-first century? How are the social definitions and categories of immigrants informing and influencing the missional identity of the church in the United States? How is the church contributing to the dignity, humanization, or dehumanization of the immigrant in the United States?

Caroline Nagel and Patricia Ehrkamp ask a very appropriate question for our discussion at this point: “Who deserves to be welcomed into our communities?”⁸⁸ In their research, Nagel and Ehrkamp conclude that

faith communities, in sum, offer the possibility of a form of membership that breaks free from the strictures of national citizenship and that recognizes the worth and deservingness of people based not on legal status, talents, or qualifications, but based simply on their humanity.⁸⁹

Questions of worth, dignity, rights, responsibilities, and what it means to be human are at the center of this discussion.⁹⁰ In fact, according to sociologist Rodney Stark, one of the reasons Christianity grew dramatically during the first three centuries was because it “gave to their converts . . . nothing else than their humanity.”⁹¹ As Samuel Escobar argues, the church needs to find its “prophetic stance in the face of society’s unjust treatments to immigrants.”⁹² Therefore, the participation of the church in all issues concerning the worth of humans as image bearers is to be at the center of their proclamation and action. Acknowledging the potential of returning humanity to immigrants in

86 Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 113.

87 John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

88 Caroline Nagel and Patricia Ehrkamp, “Deserving Welcome? Immigrants, Christian Faith Communities, and the Contentious Politics of Belonging in the US South,” *Antipode* 48, no. 4 (September 2016): 1040–58, <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12233>, 1041.

89 Nagel and Ehrkamp, 1055.

90 Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 45–46.

91 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: HarperCollins, 1997), 215.

92 Samuel Escobar, “Migration: Avenue and Challenge to Mission,” *Missiology* 31, no. 1 (January 2003), 19.

the midst of current sociopolitical tensions, María Alejandra Andrade Vinueza concludes that it is possible for the church to be “inspired by the biblical narrative . . . [and] approach such a complex problem from an alternative perspective.”⁹³

If the church has the potential to return humanity to the alien, then what is holding her back? We must ask if this is an issue that requires the church to stand with or against the laws of the land that deport undocumented immigrants. If the answer is found merely within the semantics of the Old Testament law, then the tensions will hardly be resolved and the hurt will continue in our midst. But if the answer resides mainly in the character of God as Law-giver and Redeemer of all humanity as observed across the biblical text (i.e., God's justice and love), then we have a compelling, irrefutable obligation to do the same. In other words, the identity of God's people must be carved with an eschatological chisel that depicts hope—prophetically pointing out the injustices of the law of the land today while calling, reaching, and welcoming others to an expectant community—a future hope. This is the crux of the formative experiences of welcoming and being a *ger*, which results in a lifestyle of creative tension as adherent-objectors, as contributors to the welfare of the land but with a prevailing skepticism of its justice. These experiences resonate strongly with an Anabaptist kingdom theology and praxis of social nonconformity, a sense of differentiation and participation.⁹⁴

It is the church who should be providing the answer to the questions “Who should we welcome?” and “Who is my neighbor?” And the answer lies beyond our understanding of the *ger* as the other or as an object of our mission. The answer requires a reconfiguration of our theology of migration, one that removes the “us and them” binary language and incorporates a transformational ethos of becoming. As Anabaptist-Mennonite missiologist Paul G. Hiebert once suggested, “At the deepest level of our identity as humans, there are no others. There are only us.”⁹⁵ The church is called to become the expression of God's compassion for the nations where the *ger* finds shalom, and, at the same time, to be the *ger* embracing an exilic ethic of hope. The church's missional identity is formed by being both the inhabitants of the land and the *ger* of the land—an unsettled community within the structures of the land, belonging

93 María Alejandra Andrade Vinueza, “‘We Don't Want Them Here': From the Politics of Rejection to Sustainable Relationships with Immigrants,” *Journal of Latin American Theology* 12, no. 1 (2017), 99.

94 John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 95–96.

95 Paul G. Hiebert, “Are We Our Others' Keepers?” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22, no. 5 (October 1995), 334.

with restlessness and calling others to do so with hope beyond its borders. As Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon argue,

The church is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another. In baptism our citizenship is transferred from one dominion to another, and we become, in whatever culture we find ourselves, resident aliens.⁹⁶

The Immigrant beyond Missional Object

As stated in the introduction, when migration and mission are together in the same sentence, it usually means the latter in service of the former. Migration is mainly observed as a means of expanding the Kingdom and fulfilling the Great Commission.⁹⁷ However, when mission becomes an evangelistic method disconnected from the experiences that connect us as humans, it has lost its focus.

For example, recently hospitality has gained an upswing in Christian conversations as a means of mission.⁹⁸ However, this is more of a rediscovery than a new trend. In the Old Testament, hospitality was part of God's people's identity, as well as cultural ethic. Also, it was maintained by the disciples and the early church as depicted in Acts. Therefore, if hospitality is regarded merely as a method of evangelism, it diminishes the character of the gospel message and the dignity of the recipient. Christine Pohl argues that hospitality as a strategy or as an evangelistic program becomes wholly utilitarian and distant from the gospel.⁹⁹ Certainly "hospitality to the stranger is a virtue," and we must conclude that is closer to the identity of God's people than to the execution of a program.¹⁰⁰

In other words, our theology of migration should go beyond its outward orientation of reaching the immigrant as its objective and instead explore inwardly how to relate and be informed by the experiences of the immigrant. Embracing biblical hospitality today should not be seen only as means of missions to the immigrant but also as an experience that informs our theology,

96 Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1989), 12.

97 Jervis David Payne, *Strangers Next Door: Immigration, Migration, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 67–68.

98 See Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017); also, Tobias Brandner, "Hosts and Guests: Hospitality as an Emerging Paradigm in Mission," *International Review of Mission* 102, no. 396 (April 2013): 94–102.

99 Christine D. Pohl, "Biblical Issues in Mission and Migration," *Missiology* 31, no. 1 (January 2003), 11.

100 Carroll, *Christians at the Border*, 77.

challenging our identity as hosts and immigrants ourselves, removing the paradoxical relationships of distant inequality. Raising our awareness of the otherness of the other shapes our identity and honors the Almighty Creator of heavens and earth (as depicted in Psalm 146), who insists on using all his power on behalf of the weak and the *ger*.

In Summary: “Beloved, I Urge You as Sojourners and Exiles . . .” (1 Peter 2:11)

David Bosch pointedly observes that “everywhere the church is in the diaspora, in a situation of mission.”¹⁰¹ This implies the liminal state of the alien church; moreover, it points to its eschatological orientation of hope. We as Christians must learn from the combination of experiences, as hosts and aliens, that were instrumental in the formation of God’s people’s identities.¹⁰² As Pohl argues, the “experience of the people of God as aliens or exiles on earth . . . is normatively central to Christian identity.”¹⁰³ Therefore, to be a *ger* is perhaps more of an expectation for the here and now than a choice as God’s people.

The main argument throughout this article has been that Israel’s engagement in their land with the *ger*, and later their diaspora experience as *ger* themselves, shaped their identity with an eschatological orientation of hope, and that such experiences must also inform our missional identity today. In their land, as welcomers of *ger*, Israel embodied the justice, care, and love of the law-giver for the nations, and, as a result, the nations discovered who God is from within Israel. The law of God gave hope to the displaced *ger* through God’s people. Later in exile, the situation of Israel changed, and they became the *ger*. However, God also used this experience to shape the missional identity of his people as adherent-objectors who resisted through hope in God’s promises.

We should let these experiences inform our theology of migration and missional identity today as well. The question of “How should the Christian church relate to the immigrant in our country?” should not be disconnected from “Who are we as *ger* in our country?” Honestly grappling with these questions will inevitably place us in a position that returns dignity to the other and at the same time preserves our own. Moreover, it will incline us toward hope while we eagerly await the redemption of all things as a missionary community with a profound confrontation ethic.

101 David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 458.

102 Frank Ritchel Ames, “The Cascading Effects of Exile: From Diminished Resources to New Identities,” in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical Modern Contexts*, eds. Brad E. Kelle, Frank Ritchel Ames, and Jacob L. Wright (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 185.

103 Pohl, “Biblical Issues in Mission and Migration,” 5.

José Gallardo envisioned such a community from an Anabaptist perspective. His vision was for a community characterized by its “radical commitment to God, and [its] uncompromised voice of hope for the lost.” The church, as Gallardo puts it, ought to be “a bridge of dialogue and reconciliation, a platform of real and concrete salvation, a model of a new society, a source for change in life and structures.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ José Gallardo, “Ethics and Mission,” in *Anabaptism and Mission*, ed. Wilbert R Shenk (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 155.

Migración en la historia anabautista-menonita, con especial énfasis en Mesoamérica

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En este evento continuamos con celebraciones que el Congreso Mundial Menonita (CMM) realiza en diversos continentes con la mira en el gran aniversario de los 500 años, desde que se inició el movimiento anabautista en Europa.¹ Nuestras reflexiones giran en torno a la identidad migrante del mismo, el fundamento teológico que le dio vida, así como los desafíos que la realidad migrante del mundo de hoy presenta para el trabajo misionero, pastoral y social del Congreso Mundial Menonita.

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1 El 21 de abril del 2018 se realizó el evento Renovación 2027, bajo el lema «El Espíritu Santo Transformándonos» en Kisumu, Kenia, África. Un resumen y fotos del evento pueden verse en: Elisabeth Kunjam, «Una ráfaga de viento recio. Tres razones por las cuales el Espíritu Santo es pertinente para la Iglesia actual», *Correo*, [Revista del Congreso Mundial Menonita] ed. César García, vol. 33, No. 2, octubre 2018, 3-6.

El poeta brasileño Carlos Drummond de Andrade (1902-1987)² nos ha dejado un bello poema de ritmo modernista, con el cual deseamos iniciar y conducir estas breves reflexiones:

Camino por una calle
que pasa en muchos países...
He preparado una canción,
para despertar a los hombres,
y adormecer a las criaturas.³

Jesús el migrante perenne

Carlos Drummond de Andrade clama a los cuatro puntos del universo diciendo «Camino por una calle...». Sus palabras nos recuerdan la poesía náhuatl de Mesoamérica⁴, donde el poeta se ve así mismo caminando, alejándose de los espinales, y dando pasos hacia pétalos y flores, permitiendo que la luz de quien tiende flores blancas y rojas ilumine su camino.⁵ Las primeras rimas:

2 A través de su libro *Alguma poesia* (1930) Carlos Drummond de Andrade da inicio a la renovación del modernismo en Brasil. En donde, según Cassiano Ricardo, se expresa el verso libre distanciándose del verso polimétrico, se incorpora el subconsciente y predomina la libertad del ritmo que antes era esclavo de la métrica, recreándose la palabra en un nuevo dialecto lírico. Se caracteriza la libre investigación de la estética propia del movimiento renovación modernista. Véase: Afrânio Coutinho, *Introdução a literatura no Brasil*, (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria São José, 1966), 293-294.

3 Carlos Drummond de Andrade, *Antología*, Sel., trad. y pról. de Rodolfo Alonso (Bogotá: Alquitrave, 2005), 81, disponible en: www.alquitrave.com/alquitraveantes/libreria/librospdf/drummond.pdf. Véase también la trad. de Julio Moreno en: <http://hablamesilencio.blogspot.com/2013/06/cancion-amiga.html>.

La letra del poema titulado «Canção amiga» en portugués dice así:

«Caminho por uma rua
que passa em muitos países...
»Eu preparo uma canção
que faça acordar os homens
e adormecer as crianças.»

Véase «Canção amiga» en: <http://letras.mus.br/Carlos-drummond-de-andrade/1221849/> (Visitado el 28 de mayo 2019).

4 El término Mesoamérica tiene una connotación geográfica-cultural establecida por los antropólogos y comprende el territorio desde México hasta el norte de Costa Rica. Manuel Maldonado Koerdell, «Geohistory and Paleogeography of Middle América», en Robert C. West, ed. *Natural Environment and Early Cultures, Handbook of Middle American Indians*, vol. 1, (Austin: University of Texas, 1964), 3-32.

5 Véase el poema de Alfredo Ramírez, «Una flor blanca y una roja las hiciste llevar a mis manos», en: <http://forito.blogspot.com/2014/03/poemas-en-nahuatl-alfre->

«Camino por una calle», nos hacen presente también la poesía y la vida de Jesús en relación al camino. Pues Jesús se nos presenta en los cuatro Evangelios como el «migrante perenne», cuyo mensaje, vida y misión se encuentra siempre en el camino.

Juan el Bautista, es la voz de aquel que prepara el camino del Señor, de acuerdo con el profeta Isaías, predicando en el desierto de Judea: «Arrepentíos, porque el reino de los cielos se ha acercado» (Mateo 3:2 RVR1960). Cuando Jesús es bautizado por Juan Bautista en el río Jordán el texto bíblico dice que: «vio al Espíritu de Dios que descendía como paloma y se posaba sobre él. Y se oyó una voz de los cielos que decía: “Éste es mi Hijo amado, en quien tengo complacencia”». (Mateo 3:13-17 RVR1995). Jesús es el poeta que vino del cielo para predicar el evangelio entre pobres, enfermos y migrantes; sus pies y sandalias gastadas se llenaron de polvo en los senderos y caminos de este mundo.

Según el Evangelio de Mateo, Jesús vivió desde niño, junto con María y José, como migrante exiliado en Egipto. Jesús emigró a Egipto, y escapó de «los llantos de Raquel», aquella noche oscura en Belén, cuando los soldados de Herodes I, el Grande⁶ llegaron para matar a los niños (Mateo 2:13-18). El Evangelio de Mateo nos describe una escena común a muchos migrantes en Centroamérica: Jesús, María y José regresando a Nazaret con miedo, a hurtadillas del exilio en Egipto, después de la muerte del emperador Herodes I, el Grande.

La vida pública de Jesús se desarrolló en el camino, al recorrer las ciudades y aldeas, predicando el evangelio del reino, y curando toda enfermedad y toda dolencia (Mateo 9:35), sufriendo y riendo y haciendo fiesta con los pobres de Palestina. Él cruzó los caminos de Samaria, en medio de las culturas judía, sirofenicia, griega y romana, llevando pan, vida y paz. Haciéndose a sí mismo el camino reveló el camino: «Yo soy el camino, la verdad y la vida». (Juan 14:6). Su muerte ocurrió en Jerusalén, en el monte Gólgota, después de enfrentarse a las autoridades judías, religiosas y políticas, del templo (Mateo 21:12-17) y de ser llevado a juicio ante Poncio Pilato (Mateo 27:1-31). Después de su pasión y muerte, Jesús resucitado aparece caminando con los discípulos rumbo a Emaús, para confortarlos y explicarles las Sagradas Escrituras (Lucas 24:13-35).

[do-ramirez-c.html](#) (Visitado el 1 de abril de 2019).

6 Herodes I, el Grande (ca. 73 a.C.-3 a.C.) gobernador de Judea durante el Imperio Romano, es considerado hasta el día de hoy como punto de partida para datar el nacimiento de Jesús. Sobre el contexto histórico de este personaje y su relación con Jesús y los relatos de la infancia de este último bajo la influencia del Midrash del niño Moisés véase: Charles Perrot, *Los relatos de la infancia de Jesús. Mateo 1-2, Lucas 1-2* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 1978), 5-35. Adrián Leske, «Mateo», en: William R. Farmer, Armando J. Levoratti y otros, dirs. *Comentario Bíblico Internacional* (Estella: Verbo Divino, 1999), 1144-1149.

El surgimiento migrante de las comunidades anabautistas-menonitas

El poema de Carlos Drummond de Andrade inicia diciendo: «Camino por una calle...». Y esa oración poética bien puede resumir la experiencia migratoria que ha caracterizado el surgimiento y la identidad de las comunidades anabautistas y menonitas desde el siglo xvi. Estas comunidades se formaron con el modelo del camino que presentó Jesucristo, y tomando el ejemplo de los primeros seguidores y seguidoras de Jesús en Hechos de los Apóstoles 9:2, se autodenominaron como «los seguidores del Camino».⁷ El anabautista alemán Hans Denck (1500-1527) describió la escena cuando manifestó: «Pero el camino es Cristo, el cual nadie puede conocer verdaderamente si no lo sigue en vida, y nadie le puede seguir si no lo ha conocido primeramente... Porque el que piensa que pertenece a Cristo tiene que caminar por la vía en que Cristo caminó».⁸

En medio de la corrupción de la cristiandad medieval del siglo xvi, que mantenía prisionero el cuerpo y el espíritu de campesinos, tejedores y mineros... en medio de los horrores de la inquisición, de los mensajes y predicciones de maldiciones, del miedo al fin del mundo —expresado en el arte, la danza, la teología y las celebraciones cúllicas⁹—, tuvo lugar el testimonio renovador de anabautistas y reformadores radicales.¹⁰ Para iniciar esa nueva experiencia espiritual era necesario reconocer a Jesucristo como el Camino que lleva a Dios. En segundo lugar, vivir la experiencia del bautismo en agua, como testimonio público del deseo de imitar a Cristo, de migrar con Cristo. En tercer lugar, recibir la fuerza confortadora del Espíritu Santo.

Seguidores y discípulas de Jesús se vieron estremecidos por la experiencia del Espíritu Santo, que les hizo salir del temor provocado por las fuerzas

7 Juan Driver introduce la historia de los «del Camino» a partir de la experiencia del pueblo de Israel en el Antiguo Testamento y luego a partir de Jesús en el Nuevo Testamento. Cuando se refiere a *la fe en la periferia de la historia* quiere señalar el carácter popular del movimiento de los seguidores de Jesús en la historia, no determinado por concilios, reyes, sacerdotes o biografías resonantes, sino por aquellos movimientos de personas marginadas que decidieron crear comunidades siguiendo las enseñanzas y vida de Jesús de Nazaret. Juan Driver, *La fe en la periferia de la historia. Una historia del pueblo cristiano desde la perspectiva de los movimientos de restauración y reforma radical* (Guatemala y Bogotá: Semilla-CLARA, 1997).

8 Hans Denck, «Lo que dicen que las Escrituras dicen», 1526, en *Selecciones Teológicas Anabautistas. Fuentes primarias seleccionadas*, ed. Walter Klaassen, trad. C. Arnold Snyder, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1985), 61.

9 Jean Delumeau, *Angst im Abendland. Die Geschichte kollektiver Ängste im Europa des 14. Bis 18. Jahrhunderts*, Band 1-2, (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985).

10 Guy F. Hersberger, ed., *The recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1957).

del mal, el poder romano de Poncio Pilato y de las autoridades políticas de los fariseos, que dieron muerte a su maestro Jesús. La promesa de Jesús, que enviaría al Espíritu Santo, al Paracleto, el Consolador, para acompañarlos, se manifestó con llamas de fuego sobre sus cabezas y hablaron en nuevas lenguas. La experiencia del Espíritu Santo dio lugar a las primeras comunidades anabautistas, que se formaron en el sur de Alemania, Suiza, Austria, Tirol y en los Países Bajos. La lectura de las Sagradas Escrituras de los reformadores Calvino, Lutero, Melancthon y Zwinglio resaltan el evangelio de la gracia y tuvo gran impacto entre los anabautistas. Pero lo propio y característico de anabautistas y menonitas fue el seguimiento de Jesús a través de la experiencia confortadora del Espíritu Santo. Nuestros antepasados anabautistas fueron perseguidos y desplazados de un lugar a otro, de una frontera a otra, migrando de las ciudades a la espesura de la selva, migrando de regiones y países intolerantes a otras regiones y países más tolerantes.

El carácter migrante de los anabautistas se gesta en la decisión de imitar a Jesucristo, de mantenerse firmes en sus convicciones de fe, y en su anhelo de buscar sustento para sus familias, escapar para defender su vida, buscar lugares de mayor tolerancia religiosa, en su anhelo de justicia y pago justo a sus labores, en la búsqueda de trabajo y subsistencia mínima, en la construcción de la paz. Históricamente hablando las comunidades anabautistas y menonitas del siglo xvi reflejan bien las palabras del poeta, migrando por innumerables caminos, siguiendo el ejemplo de su maestro Jesús, anunciando shalom (la paz) y el evangelio del reino, y creando comunidades solidarias con los pobres, campesinos y otros migrantes.

Expansión migrante del anabautismo en el mundo

El poema de Carlos Drummond de Andrade describe su camino con múltiples rutas, entradas y salidas que le permiten pasar por muchos países, en medio de múltiples pueblos, culturas, etnias y geografías:

Camino por una calle
que pasa en muchos países.

La identidad de las comunidades e iglesias anabautistas menonitas se conformó desde sus inicios en el siglo xvi hasta el día de hoy, bajo una constante experiencia migratoria a lo largo de su historia. El círculo inicial de anabautistas de 1525 en Zúrich, bajo el liderazgo de Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz, Balthasar Hubmaier, Margaretha y Michael Sattler (1490-1527) y Margret Hottinger¹¹, se vio en la necesidad de emigrar hacia Nikolsburg en Moravia debido a la intolerancia religiosa y la persecución. Esta fue una de las primeras

¹¹ Margret Hottinger, una importante líder anabautista en el pueblito de Zollikon en las cercanías de Zúrich. Véase: C. Arnold Snyder, y Linda A. Huebert Hecht, eds.,

migraciones masivas de 12 000 anabautistas, que se desplazaron para vivir en el condado de Leonhart de Liechtenstein. El reino de los anabautistas establecido en Münster, Alemania, en 1534, fue derrocado, y sus miembros sobrevivientes, mayormente mujeres y niños, emigraron a diferentes ciudades alemanas y condados de los Países Bajos. Dirk Philips y el exsacerdote Menno Simons (1496-1561) y su esposa Gertrudis acompañaron a muchos de estos migrantes que andaban como ovejas sin pastor. Sufrieron persecución y anduvieron errantes en búsqueda de tolerancia religiosa y de la oportunidad de sobrevivir en regiones de Frisia, que contaba con mayor tolerancia religiosa.¹² Uno de los poemas e himnos que mejor describe este tiempo de persecución, de migración desesperada, es el de Leonhard Schiemer, quien fuera decapitado por su fe anabautista en enero de 1528:

Estamos dispersados cual ovejas
que carecen de pastor,
abandonados nuestros hogares y campos,
somos como el cuervo
que suele buscar refugio
en las grietas de las rocas.
Los riscos y las grietas
nuestra morada son.
Se nos da caza
como a las aves del cielo.
Furtivos nos movemos por los bosques,
con perros nos buscan.
Nos llevan como a corderitos, mudos,
prisioneros y amarrados.
Nos exhiben
ante el mundo entero,
como a agitadores.
Se nos trata
como a la oveja que va al matadero,
como a herejes y seductores.¹³

Profiles of Anabaptist Women. Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1996), 43-51.

12 Diether Götz Lichdi, «An Overview of Anabaptist-Mennonite History, 1525-1800», en Claude Baecher, Neal Blough, James Jakob Fehr, y otros, *Testing Faith and Tradition* [Global Mennonite History Series: Europe], (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006), 1-32.

13 Leonhard Schiemer, «Cuán preciosa es la muerte de los santos», en *Textos escogidos de la Reforma Radical*, John Howard Yoder, cop., (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1976), 237-241.

Durante el reinado de Catherine II (1729-1796) en el imperio de Rusia se produjo la invitación para que las comunas de campesinos alemanes desarrollaran campos de cultivo en el gran imperio ruso. Un total de aproximadamente 30 000 campesinos alemanes del Palatinado y Hesse se desplazaron entre 1763 y 1765 a través del mar Báltico hacia Moscú, y se acomodaron en lugares cercanos al río Volga. Entre estos campesinos viajaron también familias menonitas. Posteriormente se fundaron las colonias menonitas en Chortiza (1786), Molotschna (1796-1801), Am Trakt (1840-1850) y Alt Samara (1859), formada por migrantes procedentes del oeste de Prusia.¹⁴

El surco migratorio de familias anabautistas y menonitas de origen europeo continuó hacia los Estados Unidos, iniciando con unas 200 personas que migraron de los altos del río Rin hacia Germantown durante los años 1683-1702. Otros menonitas de Suiza y el Palatinado migraron hacia el este de Pensilvania, alrededor de 4 000 personas durante los años 1707-56. Un grupo de 2 700 menonitas amish provenientes de Alsace-Lorraine (Francia), Hesse y Bavaria (Alemania) migraron hacia Ohio, Illinois y Iowa durante los años 1815-60. Entre otras migraciones a los Estados Unidos encontramos cerca de 10 000 menonitas rusos que se acomodaron en los estados con praderas durante el período 1874-80.¹⁵

En el caso de América Latina encontramos desplazamientos grandes y medianos, que incluyen familias enteras de menonitas de origen europeo, quienes, por diferentes motivos de orden político (guerras, decretos gubernamentales), económico (búsqueda de nuevas tierras) y tolerancia religiosa, se desplazaron a México (1922-1926), Paraguay (1926-1958), Brasil (1930-1931) y Uruguay (1948-1959). Desde 1953 Bolivia se ha convertido en lugar de migración para colonias menonitas de origen europeo, que se han desplazado desde diversos países de América Latina en búsqueda de nuevas tierras para vivir.¹⁶

El sufrimiento que produce la ruptura de un orden social, las grandes hambrunas y el sentimiento nostálgico de quien ha perdido su patria, y debe adoptar un nuevo entorno geográfico, social y cultural, ha sido un legado de las comunidades menonitas migrantes en muchas partes del mundo. Un ejemplo

14 John N. Klassen, «Mennonites in Russia and their Migrations», en Claude Baecher, Neal Blough, James Jakob Fehr, y otros, *Testing Faith and Tradition*, 181-232.

15 Una lista detallada de menonitas y anabautistas que inmigraron a los Estados Unidos por un total de 18 500 durante el período 1683 hasta la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, puede verse en «United States of America-General Groups», Harold S. Bender y C. Henry Smith, eds., *The Mennonite Encyclopedia. A Comprehensive Reference Work on the Anabaptist-Mennonite Movement*, vol. IV O-Z, (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1959), 776-782.

16 Jaime Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration*, [Global Mennonite History Series: Latin America], trad. and ed. C. Arnold Snyder, (Intercourse, PA: Good Books-Pandora, 2010), 27-66, 73-80, 161-171.

de ello es la poesía de Louise Nickel, que expresó el dolor de sus antepasados provenientes de Rusia, muchos que luego se asentaron en Suramérica:

Una vez más miro en todas direcciones
Ya no puedo encontrar la vieja patria.
Poco a poco, se oscurece el crepúsculo del cielo rojo,
la patria de mi juventud está muerta para mí.¹⁷

Las primeras migraciones de menonitas hacia el ámbito caribeño y centroamericano nos remiten a 80 familias de los antiguos colonos menonitas de México, que emigraron en 1958 hacia el norte de Belice y fundaron la colonia de Arroyo Azul (Blue Creek Colony). Las familias de la colonia de los Old Order Amish, provenientes de Ontario, Canadá, se establecieron en Olancho, Honduras, en 1968.¹⁸ Otras familias de los Beachy Amish, provenientes de Ohio, Virginia, Georgia y Maryland (EE.UU.) se establecieron en la Laguna de Arenal, Costa Rica, en el año 1968.¹⁹ La familia de Venus y Anie Kornelsen, es un ejemplo de la migración menonita a través del tiempo, con diversas generaciones y fronteras. Los antecedentes de sus antepasados se remontan a familias menonitas de origen dinamarqués, que se desplazaron en el siglo xvii hacia el sur de Rusia formando la «Pequeña comunidad» (*Kleine Gemeinde*). Desde entonces las diferentes generaciones de esta familia se desplazaron de Prusia a Kansas (Estados Unidos) y Manitoba (Canadá) en 1874, luego de Manitoba a Chihuahua en México en los años 1948-49, después de México pasaron a Belice en 1961-62, y finalmente llegaron a Santa Rita de Río Cuarto de Grecia, Costa Rica en 1977, donde viven actualmente.²⁰

En Asia y África no podemos hablar de migraciones de grupos anabautistas étnicos de origen europeo, como los descritos para el caso de Estados Unidos, Canadá y América Latina, donde extensos espacios geográficos —en muchos de ellos moraban familias indígenas—, sirvieron para el asentamiento de colonias étnicas menonitas. Sin embargo, podemos afirmar que los ideales anabautistas, el mensaje de Jesucristo, el establecimiento de iglesias, así como los servicios de paz, germinaron en el contexto de los poderes coloniales europeos

17 Harry Loewen, *Road to Freedom, Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 2000).

18 Entrevista del autor con Vernon y Katie Schmucker, Guaimacas, Olancho, Honduras, 11 de octubre de 2004. Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, op. cit., 228, 268-269.

19 Periódico *La Nación*, (San José, Costa Rica), 6 de junio de 1968, 24, citado en Wilton Nelson, *Historia del protestantismo en Costa Rica* (San José: INDEF, 1983), 291-293.

20 Entrevista de Jaime Prieto con Venus y Anie Kornelsen y la presencia de Anabelle González, San Josecito de Heredia, Costa Rica, 11 de febrero de 2019.

y norteamericanos²¹, y, migraron a Asia, África y América Latina a través de juntas misioneras y organismos de ayuda social como el Comité Central Menonita. Un ejemplo concreto de misión y colonización es el ofrecido por Adhi Dharma al contar la interesante historia del trabajo misionero de los menonitas en Indonesia en el contexto musulmán y animista de Indonesia en el siglo XIX.²² En el caso de África durante el colonialismo belga, podríamos mencionar la llegada del Rev. Lawrence y Rose Haigh, quienes se desplazaron a la región de South Kasai del Congo Belga a principios de 1912, para iniciar el trabajo misionero bajo la cobertura de la Central Conference of Mennonites y la Defenseless Mennonite Church, con la creación de la Congo Inland Mission (CIM)²³.

El Comité Central Menonita (CCM) fue fundado para dar respuesta a las grandes necesidades causadas por la primera guerra mundial, en especial para responder a las grandes hambrunas que experimentaban las colonias menonitas que vivían en la Unión Soviética y Ucrania a principios de 1920 por causa de la revolución bolchevique. El 27 y 28 de julio de 1920 se llegó a un acuerdo entre diferentes entidades anabautistas en Elkhart, Indiana, para fundar el «Comité Central Menonita. En el nombre de Cristo».²⁴ Esta entidad ha sido fundamental para hacer posible los desplazamientos de los migrantes anabautistas y menonitas de Rusia y Prusia a América Latina, Canadá, Estados Unidos y Europa durante la primera y la segunda guerra mundial.²⁵ El CCM también se ha hecho presente para apoyar a refugiados salvadoreños en territorios hondu-

21 Peter Penner, «The Westernization of History», *Conrad Grebel Review* 15-1/2, (Winter/Spring 1997), 119-127.

22 Adhi Dharma, «Las Iglesias menonitas en Indonesia», en I. P. Asheervadam, Adhi Dharma, Alle Hoekema y otros, *Iglesias en diálogo con tradiciones asiáticas*. [Colección de Historia Menonita Mundial: Asia], (Guatemala: Semilla-Clara, 2011), 23-53.

23 Jim Bertsche, *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace*, Indiana: Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 98-72866, 1998.

24 Orie O. Miller levantaría las notas que se tienen de esta reunión donde estuvieron presentes D. J. Regier de la General Conference Mennonite Church, Martín B. Fast de la Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, y Peter C. Hiebert de la Mennonite Brethren, oficiales de la Emergency Committee of the Mennonites of North America. Por parte de los menonitas rusos estuvieron presentes W. J. Ewert y H. H. Regier de la General Conference Mennonite Church y A. A. Friesen miembro de la Russland Mennonitische Studienkommission. Un reportaje y fotos de este evento en James C. Juhnke, «The polygenetic origins of feeding the hungry», en *Mennonite Historical Bulletin*, vol. LXXII, No. 2, (April 2011), 4-6. Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *The Mennonite Central Committee Story*, vol. I: *From the Files of MCC*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1980). Gerhard Ratzlaff, *Das Mennonitische Zentralkomitee in Paraguay 1930-1980* (Asunción: Asociación de Colonias Mennonitas del Paraguay, 2014).

25 Por ejemplo, la Evangelische Freikirche Mennonitische Brüdergemeinde Neuwied, Alemania fue fundada después de la segunda guerra mundial por refugiados

reños después de la guerra entre estos países colindantes en el año 1960. Otra de las enormes contribuciones del CCM ha sido en África, concretamente en Etiopía, apoyando los proyectos de desarrollo y paz en diferentes regiones. En términos eclesiales las iglesias anabautistas en África son las de mayor crecimiento en el CMM.

Por ese trabajo inicial de las sociedades misioneras anabautistas de Europa y Norteamérica hoy día existen muchas iglesias anabautistas y menonitas con miembros nativos en los diferentes continentes de Asia, África y América Latina. Ya fuese que la migración anabautista se realizara a través de desplazamientos masivos, medianos o pequeños, de familias étnicas de origen europeo, por trabajo del CCM entre migrantes y personas tremendamente afectadas por catástrofes naturales, hambrunas y guerras en los diversos continentes, o por el envío de matrimonios misioneros; personas, familias, comunidades, iglesias y movimientos anabautistas menonitas se expandieron pasando por muchos caminos, fronteras y países del mundo entero, incluyendo a nuevos migrantes, hasta conformar el Congreso Mundial Menonita en el año 1925. La primera gran asamblea mundial se realizó en Basilea, Suiza y tuvo el propósito de celebrar el 400 aniversario desde el surgimiento del movimiento anabautista en ese país en 1525.²⁶

Las canciones del migrante

Volvemos a leer el poema de Carlos Drummond de Andrade, que dice:

Camino por una calle
que pasa en muchos países...
Yo preparo una canción,
para despertar a los hombres,
y adormecer a las criaturas.

Y nos remite a la realidad migrante del mundo actual. Un total de unos 250 millones de personas, es decir el 3,4 % de la población mundial, se encuentran como migrantes realizando desplazamientos y cruzando las fronteras de sus países. Procuran encontrar trabajos, huyen de las injusticias y la violencia, buscan mejorar su situación económica, escapar de la muerte, llevar sustento a sus familias pobres. Buscan mayor tolerancia religiosa o esperan encontrar lejos de su patria mejores oportunidades sociales y esperanzas de vida. Se trata de los desplazamientos de un país a otro, como el caso de los migrantes venezolanos a Brasil y Colombia, por causa de la crisis política y económica que atraviesa

precedentes de Prusia Occidental (Polonia). Walter Jakobeit, «El amor abre los corazones para aprender más», *Correo* 31, No.1 (Abril 2016), 8-9.

²⁶ Harold S. Bender, «Mennonite World Conference», en Harold S. Bender y C. Henry Smith, eds., *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. III, I-N, 640-642.

su país.²⁷ De los migrantes nicaragüenses en Costa Rica, azotados por las acciones gubernamentales del gobierno de Daniel Ortega, especialmente desde las olas de protestas contra su gobierno iniciadas el 18 de abril de 2018, donde fallecieron 325 personas.²⁸

El caso dramático de miles de hondureños, guatemaltecos, salvadoreños y mexicanos, quienes procuran cruzar las fronteras y murallas de México, huyendo de la corrupción política, el desempleo y la violencia en sus países, en busca del «sueño americano»²⁹. Están desafiando las políticas inhumanas del gobierno de Trump hacia los inmigrantes mesoamericanos, que se manifiesta en la presión política y económica hacia los mandatarios de la región³⁰, leyes drásticas contra inmigrantes pobres³¹, construcción del muro en la frontera con México³² y la persecución de los indocumentados.³³

La realidad de los migrantes se expresa en una mujer hondureña con un rostro de gran preocupación, acompañada de una niña y tres niños pequeños totalmente agotados, tres de los cuales son transportados en un carrito plástico de cuatro llantas, ingresando a México a través de su frontera con Guatemala.³⁴

27 Una foto impresionante de una gran cantidad de venezolanos en el enorme puente Francisco de Paula Santander en la frontera entre Colombia y Venezuela enfrentados con los militares de Venezuela bajo una nube de gases lacrimógenos. Los manifestantes procuraban hacer ingresar a Venezuela ayuda humanitaria enviada por Estados Unidos y gestionada por el líder opositor Juan Guaidó. Por este puente fronterizo circulan muchos migrantes venezolanos que se desplazan a Colombia. Santa Elena de Uairén y Cúcuta, «Muertos y heridos con la llegada de ayuda a Venezuela», Periódico *La Nación* (24 de febrero de 2019), 16A. Caracas, AFP, «Maduro decidido a impedir “show” de ayuda humanitaria», Periódico *La Nación* (9 de febrero de 2019).

28 Washington, AFP, «Crisis podría llevar a expulsión de Nicaragua de la OEA», Periódico *La Nación* (12 de enero de 2019), 16A. Managua, AFP, «Poder de Ortega se resquebraja tras un año de crisis», Periódico *La Nación* (13 de abril de 2019), 19A.

29 Tuxtla Gutiérrez, AFP, «Parte de Caravana migrante ingresa a suelo azteca», Periódico *La Nación* (19 de abril del 2019), 19A.

30 Ciudad de Guatemala, AFP, «Pacto firmado con EE.UU. Molestia en Guatemala por acuerdo migratorio», Periódico *La Nación* (28 de julio de 2019), 18.

31 Solo en mayo de 2019 un total de 144 000 migrantes fueron detenidos en los Estados Unidos. Véase: Washington, AFP, «Suspensión indefinida tras compromiso para frenar “mara” de gente hacia frontera sur. Trump desiste de imponer aranceles punitivos a México», Periódico *La Nación* (8 de junio de 2019), 17.

32 Washington, AFP, «Trump podrá usar fondos militares para el muro», Periódico *La Nación* (29 de julio de 2019), 18.

33 Nueva York, AFP, «Migrantes con miedo ante redadas en EUA», Periódico *La Nación* (15 de julio de 2019), 18.

34 Véase foto en: México, «Migrantes con rumbo a Estados Unidos, México abre su frontera a mujeres y niños hondureños», Periódico *La Nación* (21 de octubre de

«Mario Castellanos, un niño hondureño de 12 años, intentaba cruzar la frontera entre Guatemala y México el viernes, cuando un policía lo tomó por el cuello y lo tiró al suelo, según la cadena británica BBC Mundo.»³⁵ Este niño, quien se unió a la marea de migrantes hondureños, viajó solo, sin ningún pariente y en las imágenes que recorrieron el mundo aparece con una camiseta blanca, con un rostro lleno de angustia y llorando.³⁶ John Moore retrató a la pequeña Yanela Sánchez con sus zapatitos y su suéter rojo, su pelo desordenado, en grito y en llanto vivo, mientras su madre hondureña, Sandra Sánchez, es registrada por oficiales fronterizos de Estados Unidos, en Texas el 12 de junio de 2018.³⁷

De las migraciones masivas de africanos agobiados por las sequías, las luchas internas entre sus pueblos, la destrucción de su hábitat, la violencia y el hambre en sus países. El continente africano no dejó de ser tierra de los poderes coloniales de occidente sino hasta después de la segunda guerra mundial, pero sus políticas de rechazo y contención de inmigrantes procedentes del Medio Oriente y África se han endurecido (Cumbre de La Valeta, 2015).³⁸ Hoy los migrantes prefieren morir en su desesperada huida, arriesgando sus vidas en endeble embarcaciones, como el caso de los 125 inmigrantes africanos, donde viajaban dos mujeres embarazadas, rescatados en el mar Mediterráneo, a principios de agosto de 2019 por el barco de la ONG española Proactiva Open Arms.³⁹ En todo este drama humano, mujeres, niñas, niños y familias sufren tremendas situaciones de injusticia e indignación. La dura realidad que viven estos millones de migrantes en el mundo ha hecho que sean objeto constante de las noticias nacionales e internacionales. En el mundo moderno ya no solo hablamos de xenofobia o de islamofobia, sino también, —como ha recalcado la filósofa española Adela Cortina— de aporofobia. Esto significa el rechazo con-

2018), 13A.

35 Christine Jenkins, «Con solo 12 años, Mario viaja solo en la caravana», Periódico *La Nación* (21 de octubre de 2018), 13A.

36 *Ibíd.*

37 Foto en Ernesto Rivera, «World Press Photo 2019 se expone en la Biblioteca Nacional. La conmovedora potencia de la imagen», *Semanario Universidad*, (San José: Universidad de Costa Rica, edición 2278, del 5 al 11 de junio de 2019), 21.

38 Aminata Traoré, ORIOL PULG/07/07/2019, «Europa subcontrata la violencia en África», *El País*, consultado en https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/07/04/planeta_futuro/1562239461_639682.html (Acceso el 19 de septiembre de 2019).

39 Valencia, 5 agosto 2019, «El alcalde de Valencia pide al Gobierno que abra el puerto de la ciudad a los 121 migrantes del “Open Arms”», *El País*, Consultado en https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/08/03/valencia/1564846732_123573.html (Acceso el 19 de septiembre de 2019).

tundente en los países europeos, los Estados Unidos y otros países del mundo al ingreso y atención al inmigrante pobre.⁴⁰

Poemas y canciones con ritmos populares, africanos, latinoamericanos, asiáticos e hispánicos están despertando a mujeres y hombres sobre la situación del migrante. Parte de una canción Folk Rock del grupo español Celtas Cortos, que recoge el dolor universal de los migrantes, nos hace despertar cuando entona:

Un dios maldijo la vida del emigrante
serás mal visto por la gente en todas partes
serás odiado por racistas maleantes
y la justicia te maltratará sin piedad.

Todos hermanos. Todos farsantes
hacen mentiras con las verdades
buscas trabajo y tienes hambre
pero no hay sitio pal migrante.

Si encuentras un destino
Si encuentras el camino
Tendrás que irte a ese lugar
El polvo del camino cubre tu rostro amigo
con tu miseria a ese lugar.⁴¹

La rima final del poema de Carlos Drummond de Andrade pone el acento en el elemento utópico de la canción migrante «y adormecer a las criaturas». Y nos hace pensar en la figura materna de Dios, que el profeta Isaías utilizó refiriéndose al exilio del pueblo judío en Babilonia en el siglo VI a.C. En la segunda parte del libro de Isaías (40-55) se describe el desmoronamiento de la potencia babilónica y simultáneamente el surgimiento de Ciro el rey de los persas. Su decreto del año 538, que concede la libertad y el retorno a sus países de los pueblos sometidos por Babilonia, es la esperanza que abriga el pueblo judío sufriente en esos bellos capítulos.⁴² Dios aparece como mujer en parto, que está delirando, agonizando por su hija Sión, quien sufre en el exilio, con la ilusión de regresar algún día a su patria. Y lo manifiesta con los sentimientos más profundos de una madre:

Decía Sión: «Me ha dejado el Señor,

40 Citado en: Sergio Ramírez, «¿Quiénes son esos?», Periódico *La Nación* (2 de diciembre de 2018), 19A.

41 Celtas Cortos, «El emigrante», en: <https://www.musica.com/letras.asp?letra=808599> (Visitado el 3 de abril de 2019).

42 Ildo Bohn Gass, *Exilio babilónico y dominación persa* (Bogotá: Linotipia Bolívar-Caminos, 2007).

mi Dios se ha olvidado de mí».

¿Se olvida una madre de su criatura,

deja de amar al hijo de sus entrañas?

Pues aunque una madre se olvidara,

yo jamás me olvidaré.

(Isaías 49:14-15 BLPH)

La rima final del poema de Carlos Drummond nos hace reflexionar también en las noticias de los medios de comunicación sobre los niños y niñas migrantes mesoamericanos que recientemente murieron en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México por falta de alimentación y atención médica. Meditamos en los cuadros desoladores de padres de familia atravesando con sus hijas a través de alambres de púas y cuchillas procurando cruzar los muros y la frontera para llegar a Estados Unidos. Recordamos niños y jóvenes migrantes nicaragüenses que se encuentran a ambos lados de las fronteras con Costa Rica, esperando algún día la unificación de sus familias. Las preguntas decisivas son: ¿Cómo contribuiremos desde las iglesias para ofrecer un futuro mejor a los migrantes, sus niños y niñas? ¿Será posible que podamos imitar y seguir a Jesús en el camino de los migrantes? ¿Seremos capaces de recoger lo más bello de nuestra tradición histórica anabautista migrante para recrear una utopía solidaria? ¿Cómo crear una nueva cultura, una nueva ética y una actitud amorosa que deseche la homofobia, la islamofobia y la aporofobia que carcome nuestras iglesias y la sociedad que nos rodea? ¿Permitiremos la unción de su Santo Espíritu para crear y cantar canciones a los niños y niñas migrantes, que les permitan soñar en paz?

Conclusiones: recomendaciones pastorales

Las enseñanzas de Jesús, las experiencias migratorias de nuestra tradición anabautista menonita, y los cantos del migrante, deben entonces, llevarnos a la acción pastoral. Para las iglesias menonitas y anabautistas del Norte significa fomentar la desobediencia civil fundada en la no-resistencia, fortaleciendo el Movimiento Santuario en los Estados Unidos y Canadá.⁴³ Las iglesias anabautistas en Mesoamérica, Latinoamérica, América del Norte, Europa, África y Asia, el Congreso Mundial Menonita, el Comité Central Menonita, todas las instituciones de educación y de servicio social, debemos orar, reflexionar y

43 «Las ciudades santuario son jurisdicciones donde las autoridades locales no colaboran activamente con los agentes del Servicio de Control de Inmigración y Aduanas (ICE, por sus siglas en inglés), negándose a dar a la agencia federal información o recursos que ayudarían al ICE a capturar a quienes viven ilegalmente en el país.» Sobre las políticas de Trump contra las ciudades santuario véase: Washington, AFP. «Tuit de Trump. Inmigrantes irían a ciudades santuario», Periódico *La Nación* (13 de abril de 2019), 19A.

tomar acciones concretas sobre la realidad migratoria de nuestros países y la región que vivimos.

Fortalecer la reflexión teológica y pastoral sobre el tema de las migraciones. Avivar la reflexión en nuestras iglesias sobre los derechos de los migrantes y las motivaciones políticas, económicas y sociales de las migraciones. Ofrecer espacios de amistad, apoyo psicológico-espiritual, ayuda y hermandad a los migrantes que visitan nuestras iglesias. Separar ofrendas en nuestras iglesias para financiar proyectos de apoyo a migrantes. Poner especial atención en la salud, alimentación, bienestar y educación de niños y niñas migrantes. Acompañar espiritualmente a los migrantes. Entrar en contacto con otras organizaciones internacionales, gubernamentales y no gubernamentales que están trabajando en el tema migratorio.

Estudiar, planificar, desarrollar y evaluar actividades y proyectos en torno a la migración junto con entidades, y otras organizaciones eclesiales afines a este trabajo pastoral. Poner a disposición de las iglesias en otros continentes las reflexiones y proyectos sobre temas migratorios, a fin de enriquecer la experiencia internacional y la tarea pastoral con migrantes. Recrear con cantos, relatos, juegos y risas la vida de niños y niñas migrantes. La realidad migratoria de nuestros días nos hace meditar en que Dios se presentó en la Torá y otros libros del Antiguo Testamento como el Dios de los pobres, de los huérfanos, de las viudas y de los extranjeros y extranjeras. El Nuevo Testamento nos remite a las palabras del juicio y promesa de Jesús en Mateo 25:34-36

Venid, benditos de mi Padre, heredad el reino preparado para vosotros desde la fundación del mundo. Porque tuve hambre, y me disteis de comer; tuve sed, y me disteis de beber; fui forastero, y me recogisteis; estuve desnudo, y me cubristeis; enfermo, y me visitasteis; en la cárcel, y vinisteis a mí.

(RVR1960).

Book Reviews

Asha Siad and Roda Siad, directors, *19 Days*, National Film Board of Canada, Montreal, Quebec, 2016. https://www.nfb.ca/film/19_days/.

As I watched the short National Film Board (NFB) documentary *19 Days*, I was carried back to discussions with my Opa (grandfather) about what it was like when his family lived in Russia. He would speak with a mixture of joy and sadness of the life he'd had and the life he'd lost. When he spoke of the events that forced his family to leave the farm, of being refugees and of the long trip to Canada, his tone changed from nostalgia and grief to determination and gratitude. He talked not only of the difficulties and the suffering but also of the hope and the help that his family received from others along the way.

In the wonderful palace of a child's mind, these stories became my stories. The sadness for a country lost was part of my understanding when I thought of Russia, though the events took place half a century before my birth and half a world away. These stories shaped not only my sense of geography but also my sense of identity; I was part of a people that moved. We are a people who are not rooted to a place but to an idea, or maybe better stated, a faith. Who we are is more important than where we are. Tied with this identity came a sense of humility; we had needed help and we had received it. Opa told me of the time that the family had received a bit of bread from Mennonite Central Committee while still in Russia. There was no shame in the telling but instead a gratefulness and a corresponding responsibility to help others who might be in need.

I had not thought about Opa's stories for a long time, but they came rushing back to me as I watched *19 Days*, directed and produced by two Somali-Canadian journalists—Asha and Roda Siad. The film gives a glimpse of new immigrants arriving in Canada and staying in a center for nineteen days to help with their adjustment to Canada; families of different sizes coming from different situations prepare for a new beginning in a new country. The film shows the extraordinary moments of transformation through the ordinary tasks of acquiring clothing, learning a new language, and talking to people back home. Viewers are offered a glimpse of the beginning of what must have been both terrifying and exhilarating life-changing experiences. While some families seemed excited, others were still touched by uncertainty; yet all had the determination that I imagine my great-grandparents and their children had. Despite different appearances, cultures, and faiths, it is easy to see the commonality of their story and my grandparents'.

I am reminded of my duty to my grandparents' memories and to the life they passed on to me—to pay it forward by helping others who are new to Canada. But even more, I am reminded of the calling of my faith to welcome the stranger, to

provide a space for those who have lost their own space, and to be the arms and hands and heart of Christ to new arrivals. As others helped my family when they were newcomers, so now I would like to see myself and the church giving aid to those who are new to this place. The church should be marked by the same excitement and fear that the film shows in the new arrivals, as we see before us the chance to be renewed in these new relationships.

In the past few years, our church has had a chance to partner with other churches in sponsoring a few families to come to Canada. Each time, though not without challenges, it has been a rewarding experience for us to extend hospitality and to receive it in turn. Though some in our country may question the value of immigration and refugee sponsorship, we have found it to be as much a blessing for us as we hope it has been for the families we've supported. This practice of hospitality answers the call of our faith, and, for me at least, is a meaningful way to remember my own history.

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Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*, Beacon Press, Boston, MA, 2019. 212 pp. \$25.95. ISBN: 9780807073780.

Lynne Davis, Jeffrey S. Denis, and Raven Sinclair, eds., *Pathways of Settler Decolonization*, Routledge, New York, 2019. 126 pp. \$140.00. ISBN: 9781138389816.

It's all about the land.

It's still going on.

Two new texts, *As Long as Grass Grows* and *Pathways of Settler Decolonization*, explore the ever-present structure of settler colonialism, its overarching goal—to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands—and its prime method—the erasure of Indigenous peoples. Both texts address the integral connections between environmental and Indigenous justice, why these pursuits require a decolonization framework, and how settler allies might practically center the Indigenous-led, anti-colonial project in collective action and personal ways of being.

For many, it's long been apparent that Indigenous peoples are on the bloody colonial frontlines, combatting the capitalist-industrial machine of our First World “throw-away culture.” We know that Original-Nations-made-poor endure relentless corporate pressure to collude and “sell-out” to state-induced “partnerships.” We

know that so many, nevertheless, stand up in courageous, nonviolent resistance to protect homelands and homewaters—miraculously so.

Yet what's now becoming more apparent in this age of eco-crisis is that a majority of settlers are being catapulted into challenges that are eerily similar to that of First Peoples. Indians *and* cowboys are now fighting for the survival of our one planet (Gilio-Whitaker). The challenge, then, is for a good many within that 99 percent to form integral alliances that mobilize the masses/the power/the moral authority/the Spirit(s) so that we can create new AND “traditional” economies that both honor “the commons” and decolonize it—miraculously so.

As Long as Grass Grows and *Pathways of Settler Decolonization* are substantive, courageous, and well-written texts that point communities of peace and conscience toward radical reconciliation with the land and all peoples (human and more-than-human). Clan mothers, water protectors, community organizers, and prophetic pastors/laity will find them encouraging, provocative, and rich conversation partners. The following is my attempt to respond to these readings in a personal, intentional way.

I live by the muddy and phosphorus-rich waters
of the Assiniboine, here in Treaty 1.

Called “traditional,” these are the unceded lands of many nations—
Anishinaabe and Nehiyawak, Dakota, Nakota,
and the Red River Métis.

Millennia old prairie lands, long lived with Indigenous law
and jurisdiction, only recently came under the occupying power
of the province of Manitoba and the state of Canada.

The water I drink—it's from a sweet large body, four walking days away,
stewarded by Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, a community
physically displaced four generations ago to make room for Settler well-
being.

The energy that powers my computer, my iphone and my TV—
that's from Cree Nation waterscapes. Manitoba Hydro
damned and dispossessed their homes, for Settlers said,
“Let there be light,” and
there was light.

Yet here, where prairie grass breaks through concrete mass,
where gumbo cries and cracks through city
highways, alleys, and streets,
native peoples also resist and resist
and resist—as they've always done.

For as long as grass grows, as long as sun shines,
there will always be some (not all, but so, so
many) Indigenous peoples who will love their

nations, their neighbors,
their enemies, by defending
earth mother.

In this city, on this Friday night, in the racially capitalized and beautiful
North End, Strawberry Heart Protectors gather to share
stories of resistance from all across the Great White North.
Teenagers teaching us from the frontlines.

200 km to the north, in Wanipigow,
there's Camp Morning Star.
Indigenous resistance to fracking.

100 km south, on the Medicine Line,
there's Spirit of Buffalo Camp.
Indigenous resistance to the Line 3 pipeline expansion.

300 km east, in Grassy Narrows, the Clan Mothers and
youth are still fighting generations-strong resistance
for their forests, for their watershed,
for their right to heal from mercury poisoning.

And to the west.

Do we dare go?

Mass deforestation, babel-like tar sands projects, and so
many near-sighted cowboys who care about Indigenous "reconciliation"
(but only when First Nations want to join their
donkey pump dreams. And some do).

Indigenous resistance is hard. But it is there.

We lift hands to the Tiny House Warriors,
the Unist'oten', the Tsleil-Waututh, to Chief Phillip Stewart and
Kukpi7 Judy Wilson.

And now, more than ever, settlers are rising up
behind and alongside. Presently, youth around
the world (mostly non-Indigenous) are striking from
school and mobilizing teachers, parents, aunties,
and grandfathers for this planet that groans for the
revealing of true human being, and resurrection.

And these leading children, they know
that we need an economic revolution that honors
Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous sovereignty,
Indigenous treaties, Indigenous inherent rights,
Indigenous agency, Indigenous co-humanity.

“Environmental justice must acknowledge the political existence of Native nations and be capable of explicitly respecting principles of Indigenous nationhood and self-determination.”

Our lives depend on it.

The nations are our best hope, best example, and best teachers in this urgent fight to protect ecosystems and stay below 1.5 degrees.

“We are all on the reservation now.”
Our common enemies are corporate power and compliant states. What happened to the Indians is now happening to everybody not in the 1 percent.

“Welcome to the TRIBE.”

So how do we gain control of the commons and decolonize it?
How do we become accountable to Indigenous laws, worldviews, and political structures?

“The alternative to extractivism,” says Anishinaabe kwe, Leanne Simpson, “is responsibility, relationship, and deep reciprocity.”

“In its most robust sense, the subversion of settler colonialism” and the capitalism and environmental destruction that comes with it, means “the repatriation of Indigenous land and life.”¹

It sounds radical, far-fetched, impossible.
Who are we to seek such a path?
Yet if you listen to the cries of “Mni Wiconi!”—the water and life protectors in South Dakota and Minnesota, in Burnaby, Brazil, Kenya, and Kurdistan—
if we listen to the declarations of millions of Gretas & Munadiahs and the wild yet truly civilized gumbo of the Red River colony, we can also hear the elders and knowledge keepers in our own community call out.

Listen.

¹ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

1977. Mennonites in the United States and Canada resolve to embrace a stewardship that honors Indigenous lands and Indigenous rights. We call “for a moratorium on the construction of the proposed Mackenzie Valley pipeline pending a just settlement of Native land claims . . . and a full consideration of the protection of the particularly fragile environment.”

10 years later. Mennonites craft “A New Covenant” with ecumenical witnesses, calling the powers to recognize Indigenous rights to “self-determination” and “an adequate land-base.” It’s a Jubilee vision.

*These are our treaties.
And they’re ongoing.*

Most recently, 2018. Mennonite World Conference, moved by land defenders, by sisters and brothers in Panama, pens a declaration in solidarity with Indigenous peoples!

We will “follow Jesus’s example to respond to the cries of Indigenous peoples worldwide.”
And then this . . . read it slowly, and recall the blood of martyrs. “This response is not concerned only
With the caring for people suffering within unjust structures . . .”
But also—“includes efforts to disarm the structures of oppression,”
so that all of creation might rejoice.

*It is all about the land.
It’s still going on.*

We need to believe them—
those suffering, the Indigenous, the young, the poor,
the extinct, the earth. We need to re-orient and join
them. Together.

We have everything we need.
We have a chance. Together.
It’s about survival.
It’s all about the land.
It’s still going on.

But for how long?

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David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming*, Tim Duggan Books, New York, 2019. 320 pp. \$27.00. ISBN: 978-0-52557-670-9.

The Uninhabitable Earth by journalist David Wallace-Wells is a book no one wants to read. I bought a copy, then left it sitting on my desk for months. Each time I glanced at the book's stark title, I felt a lurch in my stomach. I piled other books on top of it and tried to think of other things.

The Uninhabitable Earth is a painstakingly researched and elegantly written book about a terrifying subject—the ecological crisis that encompasses our entire planet and threatens the future of human civilization. It includes sixty-five pages of end-notes and is based on the most rigorous and widely corroborated science about the state of the planet we live on. To call it apocalyptic would be fair. To call it frightening would be accurate. But it is neither reckless nor exaggerated. It is a clear and ringing call to action, and one that people of faith urgently need to hear. Once I mustered the courage to read the book, I found it grounded in a belief that human beings have the capacity to make the radical changes to our economy, politics, land use, and energy systems that will be necessary to avoid the complete degradation of the ecosystems we depend on for our survival.

The Uninhabitable Earth catalogues a cascade of consequences that have already begun and will only get worse as our planet continues to warm: rising seas that swallow cities, deadly heat waves, desertification, crop failure, dying oceans, an overwhelming rise in climate refugees, spreading pandemics, toxic air, economic collapse, and psychological despair. In my lifetime, humans have wiped out 40 percent of the wildlife on the planet, driven a million species of animals and plants to the brink of extinction, and burned enough fossil fuels to heat our planet more than 1 degree Celsius from preindustrial levels. We will soon reach 1.5 degrees higher, the threshold set by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) beyond which the catastrophes will really begin to compound, potentially triggering a domino effect of events such as thawing permafrost, melting arctic ice caps, and burning forests that feed into the heating cycle. Beyond 1.5 degrees lies a hellscape of even worse scenarios, the upper limits of which do indeed threaten the habitability of our planet.

And yet, beneath these grim facts, I encountered a current of optimism that pulled me toward action rather than despair. A single generation has brought us to the “brink of catastrophe,” Wallace-Wells writes. Avoiding that catastrophe belongs to another generation: ours. To do so, we must swiftly overhaul our economy, politics, agriculture, diets, and energy systems in a global effort that the IPCC has compared to the mobilization of World War II. The good news is that many of the technological tools necessary to transform to a low-carbon society already exist, and political maps for that transition have already been developed. Germany, for instance, has initiated a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 95 percent of

1990 levels by 2050. In the United States, climate activists and members of congress have proposed a Green New Deal, an ambitious blueprint to bring the economy to zero emissions in ten years while reducing inequality and creating millions of green jobs. A version of the Green New Deal is being created in Canada as well.

We know what needs to be done, and we have the tools to do it. What's lacking is the political will; here is work for people of faith. It isn't enough for us to make ethical choices in our personal lives. Wallace-Wells makes it clear that we're well past the point where individual consumption choices will make much of a difference unless they're accompanied by robust policy change and government regulation.

Imagine if people of faith across North America took up the climate crisis and the ecological degradation of our planet as the most urgent moral issue of our time. Imagine if we expanded our theology to include our relationship with the ecosystems upon which we depend. Imagine if climate change was mentioned from the pulpit in every church and synagogue and mosque and temple. Imagine if Sunday school classes invited climate scientists and green energy wonks to speak to them. Imagine if people of faith phoned their political representatives, made banners, and marched in the streets demanding a just transition to a low-carbon economy.

People of faith have done things like this before. During the abolition of slavery movement in Britain during the late 1700s and early 1800s, Christian apologists framed slavery as a moral and spiritual issue. Pastors preached compassion for the suffering of others and stirred up moral outrage among their congregations. Quakers created a network of activist communities across Britain that researched conditions of slave ships, published pamphlets, engaged in street theater, circulated petitions, lobbied parliament, and boycotted sugar. These actions did not make them popular; the movement threatened an economy that depended on the labor of enslaved people.

Climate change is the justice issue of our time—a crisis created largely by the most prosperous people on the planet, with its catastrophes borne—so far—by the poorest and those least responsible for its creation. But it is quickly becoming a matter of survival for all of us, rich and poor alike. We are characters in the most consequential story in human history, Wallace-Wells tells us. How it ends will be up to us.

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Michael Asch, *On Being Here to Stay: Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada*, University of Toronto, Toronto, 2014. 217 pp. \$27.95. ISBN: 978-1-4426-1002-6.

In *On Being Here to Stay*, Michael Asch explores whether it may be possible to legitimate the permanent arrival of Settlers in what is now called Canada. A Settler himself, Asch takes a critical look at the history of the Treaties and examines the ways that these covenants have been broken by the descendants of the Settlers who made them. Indeed, many of us with immigrant ancestry have become increasingly aware of the ways in which Settlers have mistreated Indigenous peoples over the centuries. Canada's legacy of residential schools and assimilation policies, for example, is shameful. And yet Asch suggests that we may be missing a significant part of the story. Without downplaying the enormity of the atrocities committed, Asch argues that many of the Treaties were actually signed in good faith—by both parties. It was in the implementation, and not the intention, that Settlers failed to act with integrity.

This historical interpretation is not Asch's attempt to ease the Settler's guilty conscience. Rather, he offers his findings as an invitation to live into the very relationships that were promised. Asch contends that the meaning of Treaty can be much more transformative when we acknowledge that our ancestors meant what they said. Instead of viewing these agreements as archaic documents that were signed with the sole purpose of deceiving Indigenous peoples in order to acquire their land, what would happen if we understood Treaties as living commitments that were sealed in good faith and entrusted to our fulfillment?

This past spring, I participated in the Walk for Common Ground in Alberta. This 350-kilometer trek from Edmonton (Treaty 6) to Calgary (Treaty 7) brought Settler and Indigenous peoples together in conversation about Treaties. Over the course of two weeks, church members, health-care professionals, Indigenous elders, and students fell into step with one another, bridging differences, telling stories, sharing teachings, and building friendships. In the evenings, we facilitated sharing circles, watched a Treaty documentary (see www.treatytalk.com), and invited members from the community to join us. Together we explored what it might mean to honor the Treaties in our present contexts.

One of the most powerful things I have learned from both the Treaty Walk and Asch's book is that Treaties are an invitation to an incredibly beautiful and life-giving reality. Treaties call us to recover a vision of mutual respect and sharing that was present at the time of their signings. The "spirit and intent" of the Treaties upholds the dignity and rights of the other. Not only is the covenant made between peoples, it also accounts for the well-being of animals, plants, and every other aspect of creation. Indigenous peoples are calling on us to return to the roots of these sacred agreements. This is an invitation worth honoring, and even celebrating. As

Settlers, we have never been asked by the first inhabitants of this land to go back to where we came from. We have never been asked to assimilate into Indigenous politics or ways of life. The problem is not that Indigenous peoples do not want Settlers here. On the contrary, Indigenous peoples have been extending the invitation of Treaty relationship to us for centuries.

Another theme that connects Asch's book with my experience on the Walk is a willingness to dream big and envision radical, structural change. Throughout his chapters, Asch makes it clear that Canada still has a long way to go in acknowledging Indigenous rights. He describes how the federal government has done everything in its power to avoid granting Indigenous peoples self-determination and sovereignty. What we need, writes Asch, is a reconceptualization of relationship "that falls outside the range of possibilities offered to us in contemporary political thought" (115). What we need is a nation-to-nation relationship in which our interactions are defined on the basis of shared understandings rather than individual interest.

In many ways, the Walk for Common Ground was a microcosm of what we walkers longed for in the world. We were many people from many places who had agreed to respect each other's differences and make space for each other's perspectives. Together we dared to envision a reality that many in society would deem unachievable. We dared to imagine Indigenous and Settler peoples being treated with equity and respect. As we carried the Two Row wampum belt, we considered what it might mean for two peoples to travel along the same river without steering one another's vessels. These were radical, unsettling thoughts that challenged the status quo. And I could not help but think of Christ's upside-down kingdom, in which I imagine tables turned, systems challenged, and justice prevailing.

The Walk for Common Ground was an attempt to raise awareness and expand the conversation. I was continually amazed by the people who showed up to our walks and sharing circles: there was the young family we met at the splash park in Millet, the mayor of Airdrie, and the woman who ran to greet us with cookies as we passed by her house. We were spreading the word and building the movement, little by little, step by step.

Asch writes that the "government will be persuaded to act only when it is pressured to do so, and the best way I know to bring government to change its mind on an issue is to gain public support" (163). And so we walked, because the invitation was too beautiful to pass up, too critical to ignore, and too exciting not to share. We walked to honor the promises of our ancestors and to demand that our government do the same. And we walked to honor the Creator, who loves justice and longs for a reconciled world.

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David W. Congdon, *The God Who Saves*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR, 2016. 340 pp. \$51.75. ISBN: 978-1-6089-9827-2.

The term *good news* as used in the ancient world was simply the news of an event that was assumed to be good in relation to those receiving it—news of a birth, wedding, victory, etcetera. In most Christian theology and church policies today, however, it seems we have traded the event for the message itself. With this shift, the church has historically positioned itself as the one who ultimately controls the script. Progressive, social, and critical theologians—wanting to dislodge the message from the hands of the church—have tended to relativize the role of the church in God’s mission, or render the message of salvation into fully material or social forms. Rather than try to wrest or rewrite the message, David Congdon’s ambitious *The God Who Saves* considers what it means to give primacy to the *event* of salvation, not its message. In charting this theological course, Congdon opens up neglected theological insights with far-reaching implications for the church and mission.

Congdon asserts that theology must be *soteriocentric*—God is known as the God who saves. That is, God is known in and through God’s saving action. Congdon then spends considerable energy describing what Christian theology *is not*; primarily, Christian theology is not metaphysical. Congdon uses the term metaphysics to refer to “any conceptual schema that secures the object of its inquiry . . . apart from and prior to the historical situation” (33). Jettisoned from authority are the eternal “essences” of God revealed in the “timeless” truths articulated theologically through Scripture, logic, or reason. With the theology of Rudolf Bultmann (and those influenced by and in conversation with him) as his guide, Congdon begins to work out a theology of salvation that is decidedly unfamiliar (and perhaps unacceptable) to most theological paradigms.

Salvation, according to Congdon, is neither defined by material expressions such as releasing the captives and feeding the hungry, nor by some notion of assurance of communion with God in heaven after one dies. Instead, “Salvation is an apocalyptic event” (64). What Congdon spends the rest of the book explaining is that the message of the gospel *spiritualized* the notion of salvation within its original Jewish context with Jewish salvation understood primarily in material and political terms. Yet, as mentioned, Congdon is not interested in “spiritual” as related to eternal life in heaven but in how the gospel works on any and every individual regardless of time or place. The gospel is an apocalyptic event, spiritualized and repeated within

each individual, breaking them away from themselves in whatever form and place that might be.

Evoking Pauline language, Congdon asserts that the self is formed by “the spirits of the age”—that is, the world. The gospel event is apocalyptic because it breaks the self from the world, “making us wholly insecure in ourselves but wholly secure in God” (83). Figuring salvation as a spiritualized event (not given to any meta-physical security) reflects Congdon’s existential/dialectical interests, seeing in the gospel something always at work, always unsettling us.

For Congdon, salvation is never stable enough to anticipate fully and thus control or manipulate. Throughout the book, then, are appeals to paradox, mystery, and contradiction (destabilizing events). Such events are necessary because we remain vulnerable to the sway of the world, which tends to sediment expressions of God into idolatry or take possession of the individual as in the “demonic.” Examples of such contradictions or paradoxes include God’s presence being best known in God’s absence (88, 128), or that God is known in our unknowing or unconscious (90–102).

Shedding the stability of metaphysical theology means that anyone who has experienced the event of being thrust out of themselves and into an otherworldly grace has experienced the gospel, however such experience might be articulated. Conscious Christianity, then, is at best a discipline in trying to render itself open again to the apocalyptic message of salvation. “Christians thus gather for the sole purpose of being interrupted and displaced by Christ so that their lives may correspond to his ever anew” (99).

The unfolding of this theology has tremendous implications for the church and for the church’s sense of mission. Perhaps most significantly, Congdon states that the church is *not* the site of salvation. Salvation involves the unconscious dislocation of the self into the being of God. This event repeats, differently, the apocalyptic event of the crucifixion and resurrection. Congdon thus reverses the ancient axiom from *there is no salvation outside the church* to *outside of salvation there is no church*. The church here has no lineage through tradition or orthodoxy but is a collective *becoming conscious* of the apocalyptic event of salvation within particular situations (189). This leads Congdon to a particular take on universal salvation that is neither simply “heaven for all” nor “all religions are equal.” This universalism is the logical conclusion of his theology, because theology cannot be grounded in any authority or community but exists only in the event of the individual rendered from themselves in relation to God. No privilege is offered for access to or distribution of such an event.

Congdon rejects a stable form of salvation, concluding that it is neither the spiritual benefits of an afterlife nor material benefits in this life. He questions the very idea of a personal, conscious afterlife, because the scriptural tradition is so vague and

inconsistent in its understanding. Congdon also rejects a straightforward material understanding of salvation because of his conviction that material goods alone are insufficient for salvation; one must also break with the world. While Congdon focuses on the individual, this does not mean that salvation is private. Rather, the individual is saved from the world to be free in God to participate in and repeat the apocalyptic event of Christ—namely, a revealing and rejecting of the demonic powers of the world that continue to keep people in bondage, with the result that we become open in new ways to love what is around us. The event necessarily has social, political, and material effects.

Congdon's theology will undoubtedly have its critics from progressive theologies for its lack of political agenda, from evangelical theologies for its diminishing of conscious decision (never mind a conscious afterlife), and from mainline theologies for his rejection of the church's tradition and liturgy as offering anything unique to the world or even needed for discipleship. My own criticisms push on how this theology leans toward valorizing the suffering of those who are already rejected (thrust from themselves) by the world (95–96). In addition, the particularity of Christ—his life, death and resurrection—remains a question. Congdon appears unwilling to fully follow through on this theology and name the arbitrary and contingent nature of his own encounter with Christianity and how the particular event of Christ may become completely unnecessary in his theology (or simply one witness of an apocalyptic event).

What then after these criticisms? Congdon's work offers a wager. The wager is that faith indeed is sufficient. The mission for the church remains one of moving out but not because the church *possesses* the truth—the message—of the gospel but because the church as church *cannot* possess the gospel and so each individual must allow themselves to be thrust out from the stabilizing tendency of the church (which has no inheritance to offer), to be ever open to the event of God's salvation whenever, wherever, and however it might happen. This is the Pentecost event. The curse of Babel becomes the blessing of the spirit in which faith has no predetermined cultural form to which one saved must conform to (169–70). The church exists as a confrontation with the world. The mission at its best is to stage the possibility of such confrontation.

Rejecting the metaphysical and re-positioning the material, Congdon has turned to the individual. He has done so without collapsing the gospel into personal individualism. Individualism in our age is more a herd mentality of capitalist culture (markets, brand identity, consumer choice, etc.). Congdon's appeal to the individual as the site of God's saving work offers a critical check and universal opportunity. That is, Congdon has articulated good news that there has been, is, and can be a break with the world from which life may be experienced—a life that is neither controlled nor distributed by any institution, nor limited by any creed or ideology.

There are questions that remain with the message as Congdon articulates it, but it is a message well worth considering.

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