

A THEOLOGY OF MIGRATION

*The Bodies of Refugees
and the Body of Christ*

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INTRODUCTION

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The Life-Death-Birth Process of Migration

When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. (Jn. 16:21 NRSV)

Shortly after I was ordained and began working at my first parish, I received an unexpected call at 5 a.m. I was still learning the ropes of ministry in a Mexican-immigrant community, and the ringing phone jolted me out of bed. Thinking it was an emergency at the hospital, I quickly answered, and a woman named Margarita was on the other end of the line. She was the eldest of fourteen children, and a few months earlier Margarita's family had immigrated to the United States. They were one of the first families I had met at the parish.

Margarita was in a panic because her car would not start, and she feared losing her job if late for work. She asked for help, and I told her I would come over to do what I could. Before we finished talking, however, she asked if I could talk to her sister Cristina, who also had something she wanted to tell me. Seventeen years old and nine months pregnant, she gasped when she got on the phone and said, "I think I am going into labor."

With those words, I was suddenly wide awake, and taking a deep breath, I said, "Be right down!" I was about to cross over into a whole new frontier. I rushed to the family's house, and when I got to the door, Maria—the mother of the fourteen children—said to her daughter, "Just be calm and relax, Cristina. It may not be time yet. Keep walking back and forth, and the

contractions may go away.” Since Maria had done this fourteen times before, I trusted her judgment more than mine. In the meantime, I took Margarita to work and came back about a half-hour later.

When I got to the house, Maria looked at me and said, “Cristina is ready to go! But I have to stay here with the other kids. You have to take her!” With those words, my heart sank; my pulse spiked; and I began sweating profusely. For a moment I frantically searched my background for some insight into what I should do next, but I found nothing in my personal experience, formal studies, or seminary training that prepared me for what was about to unfold. As I got closer to the border of this foreign territory, I realized I did not have much of a choice and that nature would have its say. So I joined arms with Cristina and slowly walked her out to the car.

As I got behind the wheel, she started struggling and then looked over at me with this pained look on her face and said, “*Tres minutos, Padre*. Three minutes!” “Three minutes what, Cristina?” I asked. “My contractions are three minutes apart,” she said. Then a flood of images started pouring over me: sacs breaking, fluid bursting, and a baby screaming. We were on the precipice of natal chaos—all on the front seat of my car!

So I hit the gas pedal, trying to reach the hospital as soon as I could. After arriving we got Cristina to a room, where she began to settle down. I sat beside her for a while, still at a loss for words. But then an idea came. I remembered something I had seen on a television show some time before, so I said, “Just breathe, Cristina. Just breathe.” She took it all in, then deeply exhaled. Then I said, “Take my hand.” She took my hand. When the nurse came in, she looked at me and asked, “Who are you?” I thought it might not be a good idea to begin with “father,” so I just said, “I am a very close friend of the family.” And I waited by Cristina’s bedside, holding her hand for some time.

A few hours later, we were still waiting for the baby, and I became fidgety. In addition to being present to Cristina, I also had to prepare my first funeral homily for the next day. It was a tragic case of a thirteen-year-old Hispanic boy who took his own life. Having no idea where to begin my reflections—especially one with such emotional heaviness—I looked over at Cristina and said, “Do you have any idea how long this process usually takes?” Realizing we might be there for a while, I turned my attention to this other work I needed to address.

As I held Cristina’s hand, I picked up the phone with my other hand and called a priest-friend who had preached at a funeral for a suicide the

year before. We talked for a while about what to say in the homily, but he had no idea where I was. In the middle of the conversation, and without warning, Cristina started going through painful contractions again and began screaming in the background. On the other end of the line, my friend said, “Is everything okay over there?” “Things are fine,” I said. “It’s just another day at an immigrant parish, and I am helping a woman give birth to her baby.”

A few hours later, Cristina gave birth to a little girl. They named her Crista. After a long time of waiting, struggling, and hoping, a “Christ-child” was born in our midst.

In many ways, this story is a window into the book that follows because it is an extended reflection on the experience of death and new life, especially in the context of the immigrant journey. On the one hand it speaks to the painful experience of death for many immigrants who leave from their homelands; on the other hand, it reflects on the experience of new life as they find their way in a new place. Through my own research and pastoral work, I have come to reflect not only on the outer migration of people but also on the inner migration of the soul. This work is an attempt to explore where the God of Jesus Christ is entering our midst, even amid the deadly challenges of immigration, and through it all is bringing new life to our world.

Twenty-five years after Crista was born, as I was writing this book, I presided over her wedding. I later celebrated with her family after their first child was born as well. My journey with her has reminded me that, when a woman gives birth, as they say in Spanish, she gives “light” (*dio luz*). While much of the narrative forged by politics and the media forges a dark narrative of immigrants seizing, stealing, and ruining all that is “native” to a culture and taking away all that we think is “ours,” another narrative of new life and light is at work in the world that is bursting in our midst.

This book seeks to closely examine the current divisive, operative narratives about migrants, but it also offers alternative narratives that foster human development and spiritual communion. At its core, the book asks, what if the struggles surrounding migration are not something to fear but are in fact the beginning of a birth process leading to new relationships with God, others, and even our very selves? This work reflects on such a process. As it explores the search for God’s presence amid the signs of our times, it offers a theological perspective on migration.

Approaching the issue of migration from a theological point of view opens a space to discern the light of God's presence amid the labor pains of the modern world. As the Vatican document *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* ("The Love of Christ Towards Migrants") so aptly puts it, "The suffering that goes with migration is neither more nor less than the birth-pangs of a new humanity, [and] . . . the inequalities and disparities behind this suffering reveal the deep wounds that sin causes in the human family. They are thus an urgent appeal for true fraternity" (13).

The Inner and Outer Journey of Migration

While the outer journey of migrants has been central to my research for more than three decades, my interest in the subject emerged above all from an inner journey into the human heart. It began while I lived in Uruguay and Argentina as a foreign exchange student in 1981. Amid the displacement I felt in leaving my own homeland, it opened up an honest search for God amid the loneliness and searching of the human journey. It also took shape in the context of the human rights abuses and military repression these countries were going through in the 1970s and 1980s. The family I lived with then was profoundly affected by these events, and their struggles inspired me to explore the integral relationship between spirituality and justice.

The relationships I formed since then have shaped much of my own perspective about migration. My perspective has also been informed and motivated by an interest in Christian spirituality. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola in particular have guided me in connecting the inner and outer journeys of life, and have shaped much of my core theological vision over the years. As they helped me explore the life of the soul, they also helped me discover a faith-based response to the challenges of the modern world. These journeys came together when I was ordained a priest in the Congregation of Holy Cross in 1993.

As a young priest I began working with Latin American immigrants in parish ministry, which taught me about not just their pain and suffering but also their faith and dignity. The beauty of their lives touched my heart, and the more I learned about their journey, the more my own journey became intertwined with their own. In response to a desire to understand more my own spirituality and theirs, I began doctoral studies in the field of Christian spirituality, and for several years I moved back and forth

between the academic world of northern California and migrant camps in southern California.

Migrating between these two worlds, I learned quickly that most migrants do not care what I know, but want to know that I care. In the universities where I studied, however, I found that most academics do not care that I care, but only care that I know. Even though this dynamic encouraged me to put up a wall between my mind and heart, I knew it would not help me better understand how to think about God from the context of the migrant experience. As I went between the academic world and the grass roots, it often meant feeling not completely at home in either world. Eventually I came to feel most at home on the border.

As I embraced the tensions of the border, and rooted my theological reflection there, it became a privileged place of revelation.¹ In this sense, the border is more than a geographical place. It is a space where worlds come together and new creation emerges. In my case it has involved building a bridge that enables me to move back and forth between grass roots and academy, heart and head, Church and the world. This process has led me to an interest in contextual theology that emerges from the life and soul of a people.

While the subject of migration is studied from the perspective of many different disciplines, this book is a theological exploration of the subject. This theology is more than an academic exercise, arising instead from a desire to understand the spiritual journey. Borrowing from Thomas Aquinas and Bernard Lonergan, I define *theology* as faith seeking understanding that generates knowledge born of love. It is a way of thinking about God from ordinary places, events, experiences, and relationships. As I became more interested in doing theological reflection from the social, cultural, political, and religious context of migrants today—and from their spiritual journey—a theology of migration began to emerge.

I started writing about the inner and outer journey in my first book, *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit* (2002). This work stimulated further conversations about this topic, which led me to organize conferences at the University of Notre Dame with the Scalabrinians (the Congregation of the Missionaries of Saint Charles

¹ In technical theological terms, the border became my *locus theologicus*. *Loci theologicus* refers to sources and context from which one does theological reflection. See James T. Bretzke, *Consecrated Phrases: A Latin Theological Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 79.

Borromeo) and others on theology and migration. Gioacchino Campese and I worked on these conferences together, and eventually we coedited *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (2007). This work prompted me to explore in more detail the theological foundations of this research, which resulted in *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating a Path to Peace* (2007, revised 2016).

Three of my closest thought partners in this research were Tim Matovina, Virgil Elizondo and Gustavo Gutierrez. We were working and teaching together at Notre Dame, and we collaborated on various research projects together. Tim, Virgil, and I explored themes related to Christology, devotion, and culture, and Gustavo Gutierrez and I collaborated on *The Option for the Poor in Christian Theology* (2007), *The Preferential Option for the Poor beyond Theology* (2014), and *Gustavo Gutierrez: Spiritual Writings* (2011). We also began producing films on related topics such as *Dying to Live: A Migrant's Journey* (2005) and *One Border, One Body: Immigration and the Eucharist* (2008). Together we sought to explore something of what it means to be Christian in the context of global poverty.

While Tim wrote on the history of US Latinos, Virgil wrote on a theology of US Latinos, and Gustavo wrote about a theology of liberation. I began writing on a theology of migration and refugees. Words cannot express the ways these three people shaped my own life and reflection, and they helped me discover that migration is not only a sign of our times but also at the very heart of salvation history and the work of the Church in our own times.

A Eucharistic Vision of Migration

In its broad contours, the present work explores the relationship between faith and justice, theology and migration, and Christian spirituality and the challenges of the modern world. It is about the God who first migrated to our world in the Incarnation and the God who calls us through Christ to migrate back with him to our spiritual homeland. It explores the body of Christ as encountered inside of a Church building in the sacrament of the Eucharist and the body of Christ as encountered outside of it in the least and the last of our world today (Mt. 25:31–46).

The heart of this book revolves around the outer journey of migrants, the inner journey of faith, and the divine journey into our world. In the context of the global migration and refugee crisis, it examines various ways in which the divine and the human intermingle on our earthly pilgrimage.

In addition to exploring the topic of migration throughout biblical history, a central focus of this work will highlight God's initiative to "leave" his homeland, to enter into our human territory, to journey through the borderlands of our broken existence, to lay down his life on the cross, and to give himself for the salvation of all in order to reconcile those who had become aliens because of sin. It seeks to understand the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, his "return migration" to the Father, the provision of the divine Advocate (Jn. 14:26), a pathway to "naturalization," and the gift of citizenship in his kingdom. Finally, it seeks to navigate the route of the return journey, to stand in solidarity with all on this earthly sojourn, to welcome the stranger, to guide the lost, and to strengthen especially the most vulnerable, until we arrive at last at our heavenly home.

In different ways this is also a book about stories. It looks at the stories we tell about ourselves, the stories we tell about others, and the stories we tell about God. Stories are critically important because they shape our imagination, which in turn shapes the development of our character. They influence our thoughts, identities, values, and decisions. They can either liberate or enslave us, connect or alienate us, draw us closer to God's image and likeness or move us away from it. As we tell narratives in this book, our purpose is not simply to offer more information about migration but to stimulate a new imagination that opens up the possibility of living out a different story.

The liturgy is one of the privileged places for telling these stories.² Originally, the term *liturgy* was used to refer to a public work in civil society directed toward the common good, but over time it became more commonly associated with religious worship. People from all the world's major religions

² The word *liturgy* comes from the Greek word *leitourgia*, which combines two other Greek words, *leitōs* [public] and *ergon* [work]. Originally coined in civil society, liturgy referred to work on behalf of the people or "public service," but over time, the early Church adopted the term to speak about liturgy as "service to God." Gradually, liturgy became known as the work of Christ on behalf of the people and the work of people in service to God. In its civil and ecclesial usage, however, liturgy, by nature, was understood as a social event directed toward the common good. When seen only as a place where one has a private connection with God without connection to the larger gathering of believers, all liturgy is diminished. For these reasons and many others, "the intrinsic relationship between liturgy and justice," as Anne Koester notes, "is critical to the ongoing renewal of Church life and the created world." See Maxwell E. Johnson, *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay between Christian Worship and Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), xi; and Anne Y. Koester, *Liturgy and Justice: To Worship God in Spirit and Truth* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), ix.

participate in liturgies because these are ways of mediating our relationship with sacred realities. They put us in touch with stories of salvation history and offer ways of understanding who we are before God and who we are called to be in relationship with each other. For many Christian communities, one of the foremost liturgies is the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist has been understood in various ways throughout history: as a meal that commemorates the Last Supper, a sacrifice that reflects Jesus' self-giving love for others, a memorial of Jesus' life and mission, a sacrament that unites others with Christ in communion, and a Mass that sends (Latin *missa*) people out to live the Gospel message. Common to all these interpretations is the belief that the Eucharist ritualizes the movement from alienation to communion with God and others.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the Liturgy of the Eucharist is considered the Church's most important activity. Vatican II described it as "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed [and] . . . the source from which all her power flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10).³ The Liturgy helps immerse us in the story of salvation history, and in the process gives us opportunities to understand, reframe, and transform our stories. Our focus here is to explore the ways the Liturgy of the Eucharist offers a privileged space to understand the story of God's migration to us, our return migration to God, and our response to those migrating today.

The flow of this work follows the flow of the Roman Rite of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It draws upon various theological threads that are woven through the Introductory Rite, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Concluding Rite, which I refer to here as the *Gathering Narratives, Biblical Narratives, Eucharistic Narratives, and Mission Narratives*.⁴ As we draw upon these narratives to reframe the operative narratives around migration, it is not intended to be a book for specialists in liturgy,

³ The word *Eucharist* comes from the Greek *eucharistein*, which means "to give thanks." Through the Liturgy of the Eucharist the Church gives thanks for God's action in the world, especially through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. As the summit, it is the vantage point from which to gain a panoramic vision of the rest of life. As the source, it is a living fountain through which God's transformative love flows out to the world.

⁴ The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are the two central parts. These parts, as noted in the General Instruction for the Roman Missal, are "so closely interconnected that they form but one single act of worship." See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), 28.

scriptural exegesis, or sacramental theology. Instead, it draws upon these elements and explores ways they can contribute to the framing of a life-giving vision about migration.

Chapter 1 offers a global overview of migration and looks at the long journey of human life. Following the sequence of readings in the Sunday liturgical celebration, chapters 2 through 5 explore the subject of migration in the Old Testament, the Psalms, the early Church, and the Gospels. Chapter 6 functions integratively, structurally placed as a “homily” that connects the message of the Scriptures with our own times. It does this by narrating one migrant’s journey and search for dignity and liberation against the larger background of the tradition of pilgrimage and the practice of storytelling. As these chapters highlight the hope for healing and brokenness of the human condition, chapter 7 offers a vision of solidarity and reconciliation. Looking more closely at the narrative of the Eucharist, the chapter explores various points of correlation between the bodies of refugees and the body of Christ. Chapter 8 then examines some examples of Christian mission that have emerged as faith-based responses to the challenges of migration today. The profiles of these organizations illumine some pathways toward communion as practiced through the works of mercy. Overall, this volume offers a Eucharistic hermeneutic of migration directed toward the redemption of the world. The central thesis is that, while the dominant political narratives have been moving the human community from oneness to “otherness,” the central focus of the Eucharistic narrative is centered on the movement from otherness to oneness or human and divine communion.

Although the outer migration of peoples and the inner migration of the spiritual journey are central, this book is not primarily about policy, statistics, liturgy, or even doctrine, important as these may be. It draws from the wellspring of Catholic thought, teaching, and liturgy, but it is not addressed only to Catholics. My hope is that the universal message it contains also speaks to those working to create a new social order and integral human development. “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world,” note the bishops in *Justice in the World*, “fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”⁵ This involves more than physical

⁵ World Synod of Catholic Bishops, *Justice in the World*, 1971, 6, <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>.

movement because it is above all about migrating more deeply into the heart of God and seeing the world and each other in a new way.

Because this book is primarily about Christian spirituality and migration, it seeks to understand the different ways the Eucharist draws us into a “spiritual borderlands” of its own kind: a liminal space where earth and heaven meet, where the human and divine intersect, and where this present life meets eternity. As it draws us into closer union with God, it transcends borders and transforms us more fully into God’s own image and likeness so that we can also grow into communion with one another. Moreover, because it is a privileged place where one encounters the presence of Christ who offers Himself as a Sacrament of love, it also is the place from which God sends out his followers to become a living sacrament that reveals God’s love for the world.

Migration as a Personal Journey

I approach this topic as a human being, a Christian, a Catholic priest, a theologian, and a filmmaker. As a human being, migration speaks to me as the face of people on the move searching for more dignified lives. As a Christian, migration speaks to me as the gift and challenge of Christian faith and the claim that vulnerable and marginalized people make on the human conscience. As a priest, migration speaks to me as the path to reconciliation with God, neighbor, creation, and with our very selves. As a theologian, migration speaks to me as understanding how to think about God from the context of the challenges of the modern world. As a filmmaker, migration speaks to me as the need for a new imagination of who we are and who we are called to be to each other.

All of these dimensions play a role in the formulation of a theology of migration. My research draws predominantly on theology and the social sciences, but also emerges from reading the living texts of migrants around the world and the regional contexts in which they live. Rooted in my experience and pastoral work among immigrants, my research often emerges from the settings where they migrate, particularly the deserts, mountains, and canals along the Mexico-US border. It has been further enriched by my research and reflection with colleagues at the University of Notre Dame and others I work with in different parts of the world.

Over the years this research has led me into various countries in Central and South America, including El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru,

Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Colombia. It draws on work in refugee camps and border territories in the regions of Spain–Morocco, Slovakia–Ukraine, Malta–Lampedusa–Libya, Haiti–Dominican Republic, South Korea–the Philippines–Australia, South Africa–Zimbabwe, Rwanda–Uganda, Ghana–Western Africa, and various countries in the Middle East, especially those surrounding the areas of conflict in Syria–Iraq–Afghanistan–Turkey–Lebanon, Bulgaria–Greece, Egypt–Israel–Palestine, and parts of Asia including Thailand–Burma.

The people I have met in these contexts have grounded my reflection in the search for Christian hope amid the realities of acute human suffering. They have revealed to me the resiliency of the human person and gratuitous presence of the Holy Spirit, irrupting in places that most of the world has turned away from, except for God. My research continues to make clear to me that, as much as I have learned about this complex and controversial topic, I have blind spots of my own. I recognize that not every immigrant is noble or virtuous or spiritual or saintly. Some are crude and selfish, manipulative and merciless, criminal and cowardly, and even exploitative of their own. The places where migrants traverse are often profoundly marked by violence and the brutality of gangs, cartels, and criminals, who can bring out the worst in people. The challenges of global terrorism and religious extremism have only further complicated the conversation about migration, especially as it confronts us not only with issues surrounding national security but also human insecurity.

At the same time, my work compels me to resist the increasing rhetoric that dehumanizes and even demonizes migrants. This negative and recurring trend, which arguably is older than the Scriptures, is both transhistorical and transnational. Xenophobic attitudes have existed in every generation. Throughout the world the migrant is frequently targeted and scapegoated for a society's social problems. Nonetheless, so many of the immigrants I have encountered—even amid insult, injury, and rejection—have been courageous and selfless, grateful and generous, honest and honorable. For these and many other reasons, I consider these people not just subjects to be studied but brothers, sisters, and friends whom I love and admire—human beings whom I am grateful to accompany on a common pilgrimage of faith and hope.

These contexts have helped me understand the global scope of migration and the utter vulnerability of millions of economic migrants and refugees, internally displaced persons, victims of human trafficking, asylum

seekers, and genocide survivors. From these places, I have tried to listen to ways that people believe in the midst of unbelievable circumstances: how they find hope amid some of the most hopeless of situations, how they find life in the midst of death, and how they trust in God within some of the most seemingly “godless” of experiences. These are the frontiers—and places of revelation—of Christian faith and human transformation.

So the words that follow flow from who I am as a human being and sojourner in this world. I see myself as a Christian, Catholic, contemplative, priestly, pastoral, and practical border theologian who seeks to reflect on the inner and outer journey of people in an age of migration. My experience of accompanying migrants throughout the world compels me to speak about this issue in light of the dignity of the human person, the exigencies of the Kingdom of God, the gift of the Eucharist, the mission of reconciliation, the search for justice, the building of right relationships, and the call to journey through this land in solidarity with others en route to our eternal homeland.

Toward a Renewed Narrative on Migration

How is a Christian called to respond to this global challenge, this incendiary topic, and this pastoral need facing churches and communities around the globe?

Migration and the needs of migrants are pressing topics of discussion in our time.⁶ They are challenging and changing cultures everywhere. By the first two decades in the third millennium, there were more than 281 million international migrants around the world.⁷ This number could rise to as much as 405 million by 2050.⁸ At the end of 2019, there were approxi-

⁶ The terms *migrant*, *immigrant*, *refugee*, and *internally displaced persons* are often used interchangeably, although they carry different nuances. The United Nations uses *migrant* generally to refer to people living outside their homeland for a year or more, regardless of their reason or legal status and often includes international business people or diplomats who are on the move but not economically disadvantaged. Though some choose to make sharp distinctions among different types of migrants, here I use *migrant* as an umbrella term to refer to economic migrants, forced migrants or refugees, and internally displaced peoples. For more on this topic, see “Key Migration Terms,” International Organization for Migration, January 17, 2020, www.iom.int.

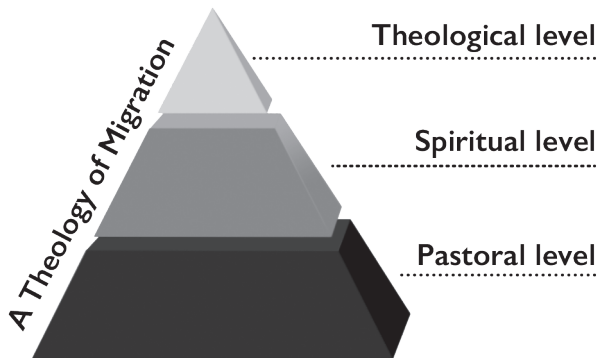
⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “International Migration 2020 Highlights,” January 15, 2021, www.un.org.

⁸ International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2010* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2010), 3.

mately 79.5 million forcibly displaced persons on our planet, including 26 million refugees, 45.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 4.2 million asylum-seekers.⁹ In 2019, as many as 40.3 million people around the world lived in “modern-day slavery” as forced laborers, bonded laborers, child soldiers, and sex-trafficking victims.¹⁰ My aim in this study is not only to highlight these numbers but to bring out the human faces behind them.

I also seek to offer a constructive theology of migration, for Christians to better understand their role and responsibilities. The theological exploration of migration interweaves three interrelated levels of action and contemplation: (1) the pastoral level (or the outer journey of migrants and the Church’s response to them), (2) the spiritual level (the inner journey of migrants and their integral development), and (3) the theological level (the divine presence within the migrant reality and reflection upon it). All of these are part of the tapestry of a theology of migration, which is woven together through reflection on Scripture, systematic theology, and the stories of migrants.

Migration and Theology: 3 levels of Engagement



Despite the enormous human costs associated with the migration of peoples, there are ways to offer some help to people navigating the conflict and controversy surrounding these issues. I have tried to understand not only triggers surrounding migration but also the unjust targets of people’s unrest. We have lost not only a sense of empathy but also of civil debate, intellectual dialogue,

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Figures at a Glance*, www.unhcr.org.

¹⁰ Walk Free, Global Slavery Index, “2019 Findings: Highlights,” www.globalslaveryindex.org.

and even humane discourse, and my hope is that we can find more constructive and life-giving approaches to the complex challenges migration poses.

The humanizing and demonizing rhetoric makes this work particularly necessary. Despite modest gains regarding undocumented childhood arrivals to the United States, Barack Obama's immigration policies still earned him the title of "Deporter in Chief." Donald Trump's toxic, anti-immigrant policies fanned the flames of xenophobia and brought anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States to the level of a cultural bonfire. President Joe Biden has prioritized this issue more than his predecessors, but little has changed under his leadership, and in many ways the problem has grown worse. The tasks of immigration reform are long and hard and demand more than policy changes. At present we have more than a migrant and refugee crisis: We have a leadership crisis. This work seeks to challenge the inadequate response of both the Democratic and Republican Parties in addressing the issue of immigration. It also challenges many foreign responses to the global crisis of migration. As Salil Shetty, secretary general of Amnesty International, put it, "With few exceptions, many world leaders failed to rise to the occasion, making commitments that still leave millions of refugees staring into the abyss."¹¹

Regardless of one's political loyalties, and however one evaluates the issue, virtually everyone can agree that the current approach in the United States is not working. I hope that a theological perspective can contribute to reforming our dysfunctional policies and to reframing how we think, respond, and structure our responses. The world needs more creative and compassionate ways to work toward a just and humane society.

Precisely because of the human suffering involved, many faith-based communities have tried to respond to migration issues through direct service, legislative advocacy, and education. In the United States, many immigrants are Roman Catholic, although increasingly they come from other denominations and other religions as well. Still, unfortunately, most churches are poorly equipped to meet the challenge of pastoral care. As pastoral workers reach out to these newcomers, more and more requests have come to understand the spiritual and theological bases that undergird this ministry, especially in the face of public criticism of such work. May this book help bring out the migrant's human face as well as Christ's face in the migrant.

¹¹ Amnesty International, "Refugee Crisis: 'Leaders' Summit' Fails to Show Leadership on Refugees," September 21, 2016, www.amnesty.org.

In the public forum, however, much of our operative imagination about migration leaves us stifled and stuck in our entrenched positions. We are not only building bigger, wider, and higher political walls, but too often we find ourselves at a binary impasse, a linguistic barrier, and a cognitive wall as well. The categories that shape much of our contemporary discourse of citizen/foreigner, native/stranger, and legal/illegal do not help us foster the creation of right relationships. Consequently, we not only exclude and reject others in need, but, as Bill Ong Hing notes, we deport something of our souls in the process and become less human as a result.¹²

These issues point to the need for a new framework that helps us think about migration in more comprehensive, creative, and integrated ways—grounded not in political pragmatism, economic efficiencies, or cultural self-centeredness, but in the search for a just and interconnected social order. Christian faith can help in this process, not because it offers easy answers to migration's complex issues, but because it keeps us in touch with the bigger picture of who we are before God and who we are called to be to one another.

¹² Bill Ong Hing, *Deporting Our Souls: Values, Morality, and Immigration Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).