

## **We Are All Immigrants! Imago Dei, Citizenship, and The Im/Possibility of Hospitality**

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### ABSTRACT

We are all immigrants! Some of us are more recent immigrants than others. In this time of nation-states, we forget that our true country, our true home, is in heaven and we are all moving around as migrants until we cross the Jordan River. While we live here among the nations, on this good earth, the oikos of God, we are all full-fledged members of God's realm, under the grace of God who makes us all equal. By this grace of God, we all carry God's image, like a passport, whatever our status as citizens or as stateless persons. Passports and legal documents speak to nations, but cannot be the final document within the Christian faith. Our Christian baptism attests to the fact that we are baptized back into the earth, God's body, and committed to care of each other. We too readily forget who we are and how we belong to each other. Indeed, , the colonization of the American land, the formation of U.S. exceptionalism and the consequential normativity of land possession by force and law have made us think that we have the final ownership of places and status by putting borders around others and impeding people's movement. The killing of the indigenous people continues to exist as ongoing forms of coloniality used by the state as we see it repeated in the history of black folks, and the ways of treating new immigrants now. National documents have taken the place of God's image so much so that we ignore the dignity of migrants and refugees and exiles – the stateless ones are rendered invisible by those of us who are claimed and protected by a nation. We are living in a daring situation where immigrants and refugees are moving around the globe due to so many drastic global conditions. Our task now is to learn how to regain a theology, a form of thinking, feeling, believing and relating to immigrants and immigration that will help us recognize them and respond appropriately to this current global crisis. This article challenges us to see all human beings as immigrant carriers of the Imago Dei, a truth more

important than any passport. We must acknowledge that many Christian churches have become class identity holders and complacent with state xenophobic discourses and private possessions. Most importantly, when our national identity is more important than our common humanity, we lose sight of the demand of hospitality shown in the gospels. We must continually struggle to recognize the breadth of the challenges we have today and reclaim a radical hospitality rooted in the gospel. All bear the Imago Dei. We are all immigrants!<sup>1</sup>

## **INTRODUCTION**

The haunting presence, body, figure and symbol of “immigrants/migrants” will continue to be a constant issue, and a fundamental companion of our times. Like drugs, poverty, violence and climate change, the problem or blessing of the immigrant/migrant in the world will only grow. Walls are being built in more than 70 places across the globe showing how difficult it is to deal with a figure who holds in itself much larger issues.<sup>2</sup> Immigration is a result not only of tourism, but also fundamentally of global concerns including economic disparity, droughts and floods, famine, slavery, and sexual trafficking; various forms of state, militia, and gang violence; and many other difficulties that emerge from the geopolitical-economic processes of uneven globalization and new forms of colonialism.<sup>3</sup>

Immigration also shows that movement is what keeps us alive, and the way we relate to it is significant not only to our own communities, but also to the very survival of the world. These movements and displacements create a complex system that challenges the ways countries and local communities form and offer their responses: some see immigrants and refugees as human beings and offer them hospitality, while others feel threatened, feeding xenophobic discourses and practices to keep them away.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I want to suggest a theological framework that will empower us to respond to the challenges of the immigrant/immigration and help us create feelings of proximity with the immigrant. This framework also exposes a moral that is expansive enough to offer a radical welcoming, feeds a social perspective that takes away the fear, and begins to envision a country with a political awareness that opens wide spaces for those in need. I will do this by reclaiming the Christian theological notion of the imago Dei, the image of God in all creatures so powerfully expressed in the Bible, which provides the background for a consideration of boundaries, practices, im/possibilities, and promises of hospitality.

I start from the ethical assertion and religious belief that all of us are immigrants. How? All of us begin elsewhere, not from states and nationalities but rather from a ground zero where we were all made with the same DNA, the same dust material of the stars, the same matter, the same earthly organic substance called humus. In that way, we are all animals<sup>5</sup> if we do not think of animals or the earth as something below us, but rather animals as another form of humanity and the earth as a full living being

just made of the same substances. Thus, we are all equal in deserve the same form of consideration and treatment. Thus, our common beginning is elsewhere from passports, identities and places. We are all immigrants wandering and wondering around the earth, inhabiting our common oikos, a common house for all forms of living and non-living things, be they rocks, mountains, the waters, the flora, the fauna and all humanities, including what indigenous communities call two-legged, four-legged, and winged forms of human beings.<sup>6</sup> In this common oikos, the earth, that some indigenous people from the Andes call Pachamama, and the Kuna people Abya Yala, we all have the same rights and responsibilities. No one is better than other, and no paper makes anyone legal or the lack of documents thereof illegal. No one is illegal on earth: it doesn't matter what one's civil, religious, or ethnic identity is! All these things come with our birth, but doesn't give more or less humanity to us or anything else. Thus, no particular form of social structure makes any group better than another.

But then we are related to the land through social groups and locations. These unsurmountable differences are also what we need to consider. While we inhabit this earth as soil, peoples, animals and spirits, we are marked by our social locations. Thus, our differences must be engaged based on this common sense of collectivity, of being together and sustaining both our strange commonalities and our irreducible differences.

As a Christian, I know that I can read the gospel in various ways: I grew up thinking that only those who were like me could participate in God's embracing love. Unless people believed as I did, I could not make them receive or have the full rights that I had as a Christian believer. Growing up in this particular faith community, I then came to realize that my life of faith was to make sure that everyone would be seen as a full human: it doesn't matter what religion one professes or from what part of the world one comes. Thus, baptism is not only a way to belong to a community but a commitment to care for the earth and every single human being. Daily, I was reminded, guided, challenged, chastened, enthused and blessed by these sacred texts:<sup>7</sup>

- Romans 12:13 – “Mark of the true Christian: “...Extend hospitality to strangers...”
- II Corinthians 8:13-15 – “It is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need...”
- Ephesians 2:11-22 – “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.”
- Philippians 3:20 – “But our citizenship is in heaven.”

By looking through these beliefs, I see myself in the world: no one has a country, for we all live on the earth, our common house; we must care as much for the earth as for all human beings; and we must offer a place for all who are in need, knowing that we are all passing by, preparing the way for others to live better. Since I am writing from the context of U.S., I am understanding “we” as the whole population of the United States knowing that I am also writing as a Christian. This Christian perspective must be aware

that while this country is in fact a very diverse religious country, it is much easier to write and live in this country as a Christian. Also, my Christian view must contend that the first inhabitants of this land were not Christians, but the indigenous people, the people who came before any sense of immigration of “right” or juridical sense of law. I hope to figure out how the Christian faith can help us build an alternative connection of mutuality and energy among our differences, one that goes beyond the self-righteousness of the Christian faith, the racialized use of religion by Christians, the coloniality of power of white and heterosexual supremacy, and the current relation between human dignity and economic values.

### **ARE WE REALLY ALL IMMIGRANTS?**

We are all a mix-match of peoples and places, a fantastic combination of sources and a plurality of identities. We all come from Africa, and since our beginning we have been moving across the globe. We can only be alive because we are always on the move. The Uruguayan musician Jorge Drexler has a beautiful song called *Movimiento* (Movement) that helps us understand our mixtures:

We're a traveling species  
We don't have belongings although we have luggage  
We travel with pollen in the wind  
We're alive because we're moving  
We're never still, we're nomadic  
We're parents, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of immigrants  
What I dream belongs more to me than I what I touch

I'm not from here  
But you're not either  
I'm not from here  
But you're not either  
From nowhere at all  
From everywhere a little  
We crossed deserts, glaciers, continents  
The entire world from end to end  
Stubborn, survivors  
The eye to the wind and to the currents  
The hand firm in the oar

The history of the history of people's movement over the earth made us all coming from elsewhere. I could say “I'm not from here,” but I can immediately say to you, whomever you are: “But you're not either.” This would speak powerfully to the case for immigration as to how we should understand early and new waves of immigration flows. But if we are to continue this conversation regarding rights to the land, the

conversation should start with the indigenous communities who first inhabited the land. They should be the ones to tell us, the non-natives, that we all are immigrants. Nonetheless, I encounter many people who do not know they are immigrants, or they are the descendants of recent immigrants. The place and time when people discover this truth is often an important teachable moment. When and how this discovery happens is as important for historical reasons as it is for ethical, interpersonal, and empathic expression. While European explorers claimed to “discover” America, many Euro-Americans have not “discovered” that this land was not theirs from the first place.

The United States is a composition of many people, the result of the deep wound of colonization and slavery. What is now the Nation State United is the composition of the first inhabitants of this land, the indigenous people; Africans stolen from their lands and forced into slavery; and those who had the U.S. national borders crossed over them in the struggles with the French, English, and Spanish imperial powers. It was the war borders that extended the lands stolen from Mexico, the 5 colonized territories including Puerto Rico, and those who came before us and continue to come forced by economic or political circumstances. If we are to sum the whole history of the U.S., it demonstrates that we are all descendants (on one side or another) of violent colonial legacies.

This land has been stolen from its natives and became a place of immigrants. Sadly though, we have forgotten that we are all immigrants! The historical attachment to the “birth” of this country with white forefathers detached the indigenous people as the original inhabitants of this land. Moreover, we have forgotten, on purpose, through the coloniality of the writers and the teachers of history, that every inch of this whole continent, and this country is indeed a stolen inch of land, disputed land, contested land. Our churches sit on this stolen land! Our houses sit on this stolen land.

How lively and powerful are these contested claims in our consciousness, in our curricula, in our conversations? The very fact that indigenous peoples and their histories, their sacred places and cosmologies, are never on the horizon of our thinking about our place and our theologies shows, among other things, that we see the land as our legal possession. Thus, legal possession of land by primitive accumulation and possession by force create not only the idea of “don’t trespass,” but also the laws and feelings that come out of this sense of ownership. In this process, forms of currency turned into money in financial systems now continue expanding the possession of land in urban areas, as white people created ways to expel poor people through gentrification, which excludes minorities from some social spaces. When it comes to borders, this ideology is already in place and the disenfranchising of immigrants is already ideologically figured and socially practiced in urban areas. The diversity of peoples and identities gives space only for people who look alike and belong to the same social racial class. In other words, the homogeneity of white supremacy continues to operate as the universal system which simultaneously includes and excludes accordingly those who accepted the various impositions of power.

It is against this notion of exclusivity and human worth through owning money and thus land,

that the Christian message must offer an alternative voice. The love of neighbor in Jesus' words is also a demand to love God. This love means being an other's keeper; it means tearing down walls and offering a radical welcome to all, for we have all been immigrants. Christian communities are called to be part of this process of advocacy, accompaniment, and accommodation. Christians might even be able to realize justice in returning what was stolen from indigenous people and incur agrarian reform like the Jewish jubilee. This justice means reshuffling power and giving up our private properties, including our houses and churches so we can all get a piece of land. In this way, we will always be in flux, not owning anything but caring deeply for the earth, so that the future generations can take over and continue to offer the land to those who are coming.

### ***THE MISSION: TO DENY OUR IMMIGRANT STATUS BY ATTEMPTING TO OWN EVERYTHING***

Perhaps there is something about owning things that prevents us from recognizing ourselves as immigrants. In our neoliberal age, identities are shaped around the notion of buying and hoarding things, as our bodies have become private businesses of which we are the CEOs. This economic sense of the self affects citizens, immigrants and undocumented immigrants. Thus, a citizen already has economic blessings for having been born in the land of the brave. The same thing can be said of the immigrant who is accepted in the land of the free. And even the undocumented are supported by people who claim that they bring wealth to this nation. Everyone is financialized.

A proper documented citizen is measured by one's own possessions, including one's imaginary sense that one owns a country. And we express the private ownership of a country by connecting our stuff with our identity. This process goes from a denial of the indigenous rights and our own immigrant identity, to a totalizing entitlement to everything: land, resources and the people. Children and adults perform the same liturgy of ownership: my toys, food, space, cars, house, food, space, money, and choices. That includes religion as well: we own God, and all that this act of owning entails.

Flags and national anthems have often become symbols of our possession and a heavenly expression of our faith, but as Jonathan Z. Smith reminds us, map is not territory,<sup>8</sup> and symbols are not univocal, but polyvocal and polyvalent. Land and flag, peoplehood and identity, can engage transforming truth through rites of remembrance and reconciliation as much as through the reckoning required by histories of rejection and exclusion.

Christians have made the kingdom of God into the kingdom of this world, and in the process, we have traded our heavenly citizenship into demands and the coloniality of power. Everything beyond Christianity is racialized into "other" peoples and faiths. In this way, minorities are blamed for the derailing of security and economic success and eventually tamed as a "threat" through incarceration. In the

same way, the constant attack on Islam is nothing less than a Christian national security structure designed to keep the coloniality of power and white supremacy sugar coated in the Christian values of democracy and a love of God.

However, the personal, communal and national liturgy of possession, citizenship, and sovereignty has nothing to do with the central teachings of many religious traditions. For example, the liturgy of ownership has nothing to do with a poor peasant from Palestine who was born as an immigrant, a politically persecuted person and refugee. We need remember that Jesus never owned anything, and Jesus wanted disciples to rely on something else rather than possessions and belongings (Luke 9:3-4).

However, in this culture, to live with very little means to live in scarcity, and that fear feeds the soul of a middle class who sees immigrants as a threat to the frailty of what they have. There is an ideological battle we have to engage every day: while we are told that undocumented immigrants are dangerous and stupid, we must counter this narrative with a new narrative that they are simply like us: hard working people who struggle to make ends meet and give the best to their families and communities.

Thus, we need to return to the fundamental insight that most of us are still what we have always been: immigrants. Fundamentally we are all immigrants in search of a new homeland, this homeland being anywhere we are received with warmth. In the Hebrew Scriptures, we learn that it was God who set Abram and Sarai on a migrant's path, and also who warned the people of Israel time and gain to care for the resident aliens "because once you were yourselves sojourners and strangers" (Ex. 22:21; Lv 19: 33; Dt. 10:19). Don't forget you were once immigrants. If we come to understand ourselves as migrants, or at least in transit, then our view of permanence might also shift. If we are all migrants, traveling from one place to another, then we might recognize that all of us are undocumented, moving through things and moments, beliefs and doubts, fears and hopes and in need of shelter, food and warmth.

Christians say we do not belong to this world (John 17:14). The writer of Hebrews reminds us that "here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come." (Hebrews 13.14). And Peter challenges us to live "in reverent fear during the time of our exile." (I Peter 1:17)

Second century Jews and Christians knew this sense of being foreigners, and walking towards somewhere else, which is present in the ancient literature. The destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E., and the further havoc wrought following the uprising of Simon Bar Kochba echo through the literature. A letter to Diognetus, perhaps written in the second part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, mentions how Christians creatively dissociated themselves from place:

Christians dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country and every land of their birth as a land of strangers.<sup>9</sup>

Because most early Christians increasingly sought security by becoming “good Romans,” we may forget about our immigrant selves, and that we are traveling through this earth for just a very brief moment. Our lives are but a dream! (Psalm 103: 15-16) During this short time, we are to plant a garden where the future generations will come and eat from the fruits of the trees and sit under shadow. As immigrants, we know our lives are only valuable if given away.

### ***BUILDING FICTIONAL MANSIONS***

Due to our necessity for a place of shelter, we all create “permanent” homes as if we will live in them forever. In truth, we are transient beings who believe we will never die, and immigrants who think we will never be forced to move. The desire to conquer something and to control things seems to be near the human heart!

Thus, we often create battles to conquer somebody else, we create weapons to win over others, we build machinery in order to conquer the challenges of nature, and we create political fictitious places of belonging such as states and countries so that we can conquer a notion of identity and safety. And we create a way of living where money defines who we are. All of these fictional forms of conquering aim to elude our finitude. Material belongings and money give us a false feeling of eternity and power and we confuse possessions with feelings of happiness and domination.

The colonization process provided plenty for the well-being of a small dominant group of people called the forefathers of this country, who continue to own the country through power and financial domination. God’s providence is thus understood as the God who keeps providing for these people since they retain the same power and redirect the same oppression in the name of God and the sanctity of their faith aligned with weapons of destruction.

Since the power of ideology has always been on the side of the victorious, we have a hard time acknowledging that the “peopling of the New World” came through the wholesale destruction of indigenous peoples through bloodshed and diseases, under the guise of just law and white idea of justice.

Surely, it is difficult to accept the truth that our country was born out of bloodshed, so we create the “fake news” of harmonious “thanksgiving” and a certain life of peace. However, we have forced indigenous people to become immigrants of their own lands, refugees, dealing with so much death before they die: the natives become foreigners and foreigners claim to own the land.

### ***THE PARADOX OF OWNING EVERYTHING: EVERYONE LOSES!***

However, perhaps things are changing. Middle class whites are now losing their status, as their children cannot find jobs and live in precarious situations. Many people are starting to feel that the

country they thought was once for “all,” isn’t for everyone anymore. It has become more and more difficult for middle class people to feel as if they belong fully to this country. When the middle is challenged, the margins become more visible.

Can’t we see an irony here? People of color have lived in this country with “pre-conditions” that denied their full citizenship. The pre-conditions were the color of their skin, their culture, their history, and their very kind of humanity. Now the economic system is expanding the pre-conditions to other peoples, other colors, other classes. And all of it because the allegiance of this country is not with any color of people but with a certain class.

This nation-state is now clearly and unapologetically in the hands of a very rich transnational class turning democratic nations into plutocratic states. The difference between now and then is that billionaires have taken over the congress and are making rules for finance capital to regulate the market according to their own desires. In 2008, we saw it clearly: companies going into bankruptcy and the government fixing it, giving money to private companies with the alarming sound, “If we don’t do that the whole system will collapse!”

What the neoliberal market is doing now is kidnap this nation-state, turning almost the whole population into immigrants, into losers, into those who have little and those who have nothing. As a method, the government uses its ideology to place us against each other. Not only unaware but pressed by basic needs and minimal access to this society, we will certainly fight each other! The government throws us crumbs and we kill each other for those crumbs.

This same logic of owning/being owned by this country, serving and being a proud citizen, goes with the logic of war: “Go fight for your own country, your own people! Save us from the foreigners, the enemies!” However, what we are doing is fighting for the interests of a small renting elite that owns power and loves to tell us that this is the way we are measured as citizens. Civic symbols<sup>10</sup> colonize our minds, souls, and bodies, so that we can finally say: we belong here. But how can we think more honestly and faithfully about happiness, freedom, and bravery?

### ***IMAGO DEI: (RE)CLAIMING OUR IDENTITY AS PERPETUAL IMMIGRANTS***

Our present time puts all of us in this country at crossroads of shifting understandings of what it means to be human. Up to this point, we have lived on the somewhat unspoken certainty that, as God’s creation, we all carry the imago Dei, which means that we are all bearers of God’s image filled with an intrinsic value. The Imago Dei is often invoked but rarely enacted as a given for Christians, because it demands us to treat each other equally: no one is more important than anybody else. Understood plainly, that means we all have not only inner worthiness, but also access to the same resources and conditions of life. No race, class, gender, or sex can be accepted as means to treat people differently, even if the coloniality of the Christian

conquering project throughout the world has continuously carried different shades of human worthiness or levels of imago Dei in different people.

These various notions of humanity were also assumed in contrast with the earth and the animal world. Animals, plants and the whole ecological biosphere were never considered worthy to the point of having equal rights and dignity. Instead, the Christian interpretation of creation has almost placed humanity above all other creatures, which has given moral, theological and practical permission to make the whole world serve us and our desires. Killing animals and using natural resources for private desires are parts of our normal way of living. Our sense of the U.S. entitlement demands that the whole world must serve us: the United States has 4% of the world population and uses about 40% of the whole global resources. Such is our exceptional, manifest and God-ordained destiny.

Again, we are called to undo our history. We must keep the imago Dei on the horizon of our faith and not give in to the mercantilization of our beliefs, the monetarization of our lives, and the commodification of our bodies. We are the fullness of life, which is not found in what we produce, in our work or the profit we make.

According to our monetarized world, if we don't succeed in life according to the world's standards, then God is away from us because of our lack of faith. God's grace has been turned into expensive indulgences for which we sell our possessions to get included in the market where the lives of the poor are sacrificed daily, without mercy or compassion. Christians are tempted to think that the grace of God is not what is freely given and freely accepted, but something to be conquered and measured by social gains. The grace of God, if anything, is what makes us all the same, all equal! If anyone gets more it is already a sin, an imbalance of power! Thus, the grace of God cannot have a social price attached to it, and a monetary sign given to those who have earned it by their own efforts.

Also, this is the logic of the dual understanding of the immigrants and the citizens. The immigrants have to earn the grace of citizenship by the state, which possesses the land and decides whether or not to welcome the immigrant. In some ways, the citizens also have to earn the right to have access to the State. In an economy ruled by financialization, even citizens do not own the worthiness of their own patriotism. For if they don't produce value to the economy, they are not considered as worthy citizens.

It is against the ambiguity and paradox of this monetary/worthiness understanding of citizens and immigrants that the Christian teaching of the Imago Dei comes as a liturgical and social response and a political practice. Grace is power as James Cone puts it. This power given by God is what authenticates one's worthiness as the imago Dei. Immigrants are people on the go, passing, moving. They are worthy of honor not by their documents, passports or countries of birth but rather, in their humanity as such. The grace of God is an equalizer. Under the grace of God, we are all immigrants, foreigners and citizens of

this world. God is our grace, our common oikos, our shalom, our home, our beginning, our path and our destiny.

It is the lack of understanding of the Imago Dei that makes Christian communities lose the sense of their own belonging, and thus fail to give to others what they have received: radical hospitality to immigrants. To become a sanctuary to all immigrants is not a choice for Christian churches, out of their possible abilities or rights, but rather a full demand, a material and discursive action in order to counter the xenophobic, dis-graceful discourse of the State.

### ***HOSPITALITY AND THE IMAGO DEI***

We are followers of a God who came to us as an undocumented immigrant and refugee. That is the epitome of the Christian notion of incarnation. God made sure to show to the world God came to be with those who are at the bottom of society, among those we call losers, invaders, carriers of disease, stealers of our jobs, and undocumented.

Our history of faith starts in a smelly manger where animals bring the warmth to Jesus in an intertwined relation of soil, animals and God. From this borrowed place, we offer hospitality to others. To the point that one of our most crucial markers as believers, as Paul says in Romans 12:13, is to be hospitable. Hospitality not only to family and friends but fundamentally to strangers! We have nothing but what we have and give. Fully! As 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 tells our balance in life is to make sure we balance abundance with need. We live under the myth of scarcity, which is fueled by the myth of individualism. If we don't save for ourselves, we will not be able to give. That is the present logic of our times and the one that says: Let us give tax breaks to the rich so they can give us more jobs. This myth is grounded in the new form of thinking that says foremost I must work for myself and second, the rich will look upon us someday. This form of thinking crashes any idea of Imago Dei in all its possibilities. It makes hospitality an irresponsible task and the Christian faith a threat to the world. But, what we must do as Kevin Hart argues is "We freshen the imago Dei when we love without measure..."<sup>11</sup>

It is this love without measure that measures us, by way of our actions. The Christian faith and love without measure threatens the world for it breaks with the laws of our time, and offers different feelings to feel, different spiritual practices and alternative forms of welcoming all. For we know and we keep repeating with the Ephesians that we all "are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." (Ephesians 2:11-22)

Our hospitality is radical, difficult, and even impossible! We are not afraid of living without borders. We are not afraid of offering our churches as sanctuaries for immigrants. We are not afraid of saying all refugees come and stay with us for it is getting dark and the evening is approaching.

We are heirs of a gospel tradition that honors people to the point of its impossibility. As John Calvin wrote,

But here Scripture helps us in the best way when it teaches that we are not to consider that men merit of themselves but to look upon the image of God in all men, to which we owe all honor and love... Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, "he is a stranger"; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you, by virtue of the fact that he forbids you to despise your own flesh... Say that you owe nothing for any service of his; but God, as it were, has put him in his own place in order that you may recognize toward him the many and great benefits with which God has bound you to himself. Say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions.<sup>12</sup>

Such is the very im/possibility of our duty to offer hospitality. Because if we are to offer hospitality, we must go out and say to the stranger, "Come and stay in my house!" as in the story of the Levite in Judges 19.

Imagine if all of the churches went around the cities saying, "Peace be upon you. I will care for all your needs. Do not spend the night in the square. Tonight, you will be safe. Here. Tomorrow you will be safe. Perhaps here again but if not here elsewhere because there will be churches waiting for you!"

If we do that, our churches would be packed with people! However, in order to do that we must first be converted: from class and status. In other words, we no longer serve the middle and upper class but those at the bottom. And we will only become full citizens when they become full citizens as well.

Churches, however, get caught up in liabilities and proper laws to comply, which signifies that they cannot do anything else. And they don't contest anything since it is the law. That, however, is not real hospitality. For God of true hospitality demands us to go beyond, even beyond our fears, to take the risk of doing more, way more. Those who call themselves Christians are bound to the hospitality of the gospel that breaks down parameters and puts us at risk.

In our time, the situation of the refugees seems to be the situation that demands the most radical forms of hospitality, for the current scale of global refugee crisis is extremely high. Trinh T. Min-ha's definition of refugee, "Refuge, refugee, refuse,"<sup>13</sup> explains why we have this primal refusal of engaging

refugees. The same is the situation of the borders between Mexico and the U.S. We cry out loud: Calamity! Disasters! Violence! Death!

But it is here in the death of immigrants and refugees, we can learn about hospitality. In the death of those unwanted and unwelcomed, there is the possibility of hospitality. As Silvio Pedrosa, a Brazilian historian writes,

“Hospitality and eternal death go hand and hand. It is in the experience of the eternal death that the sense of hospitality is constituted, that the task of the subject is transfigured. For it is in front of the corrosion of the dwelling of those who died, those who prepared a house for us, that we have now the challenge to build another dwelling place for those who stay.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus, in the same way we are under the shelter of those who welcomed us, we are to build another shelter for those who are here in need a place to stay. We don't need to have sympathy or empathy for the immigrants or the refugees but rather, we need to take a certain step,<sup>15</sup> a certain step to build a dwelling for all.

Then, how will we build this dwelling place? First, let us make our borders open to all, so that everyone can move anywhere they want!<sup>16</sup> People come first, borders after! Our demand is to build a dwelling anywhere and offer to anyone who comes to us. This call is a demand from our baptismal vows.<sup>17</sup> No more borders! No more walls!

May the memory of the death of those who prepared this dwelling of hospitality for us be a source of strength in our own work of hospitality. Let their light shine in our path as strength and guidance. Let us open all the gates and offer hospitality for all! For our dwelling is in each other's bosom. Our refuge is in each other's arms. At the same time, however, Freud writes, “It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness.”<sup>18</sup> How do we handle the borders of our own love and hatred as we work to dismantle the borders between Mexico and the U.S.? How do we deal with our hope for a new world without borders in today's context with such fear?

These internal questions are deep entangled with real immigration policies of nation-states and its increasing need for borders. Our task is to render them humane and open. We also need to be careful with those who cross when and where they need as we critically engage our own impulses to produce violence. This is called “borderless border,”<sup>19</sup> which demands the offering of radical hospitality in the midst of it all. Every time we create a border, we have to be challenged to go beyond it for life at this moment can give us the measure of our. Every time we act on our violent acts and intolerance, we must accept that our love also carries what is not love. As we try, we can begin to break and engage borders of

injustice, class struggles, gender and sexual disparities, racial schemes of death, walls of separation, hatred, aggressiveness, and intolerance. Under the plurality of our many social and pathological impulses, we must be aware of our own sense of love. Let us continue building borders to protect those who are vulnerable, and building a fortress for those who are weary and wounded, which also includes ourselves.

This might be a little difficult, even perhaps impossible. But what is impossible for the God who specializes in impossible things? After all, God resurrected Jesus Christ!

### **CONCLUSION**

Thus, to offer hospitality we must take a certain step.<sup>20</sup>

- A certain step towards ourselves.
- A certain step towards our own shadow.
- A certain step towards each other.
- A certain step towards somebody else.
- A certain step towards the immigrants, who are ourselves.
- A certain step towards the refugees, who are ourselves.
- A certain step towards the earth and all God's creatures.
- A certain step towards the well-being of somebody else.
- A certain step so we can all create a body, a full body!

A certain step in all we do! For our faith is a verb, an act, always a step towards somebody else. Building the body of Christ in the world from small to big actions, from the streets of our communities to the halls of power. What is it that can make us feel like a body? How can we have our bodies be, feel, and act like a body for the whole body of Christ?

In the present, we have legs jumping, arms waving, and heads shaking but they are detached from a full body. We need the miracle of the valley of the dry bones to put us all together! So we can create a body of the precariat, a body of the immigrants, of the refugees, of those who have little and the ones who have nothing, to become a full body of Christ on earth!

- It is this body of Christ that can take a certain step together and make demands!
- It is this body of Christ that can take a certain step together and say:  
equal salary for all pastors!
- It is this body that can take a certain step together and say: health insurance  
for all and doesn't matter any pre-condition!

It is this body of Christ that does not let the earth be destroyed and killed!  
It is this body that can take a certain step together and say we will pledge allegiance to the poor and marginalized people and not to a flag, a national anthem or a fictitious idea of a country.  
It is this body that can take a certain step together and reclaim the democracy: power to the people!  
It is this body that can take a certain step together and say: Let us make a dwelling for all who are living! And a refuge for those who are dying!

No need to fear, we are all foreigners, we all belong to each other to the earth. Indeed, we are all immigrants! Our country is nowhere to be found for it is in heaven. While we are here, on this earth, our precious oikos, as full-fledged citizens, living with ourselves as immigrants and refugees, pariahs and outcasts, we pledge allegiance to the Thy Kingdom come, so Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The Imago Dei will be spread out to all living creatures and bio-systems. And by the grace of God, our daily bread will be the endless work of justice, offering the infinite possibilities of the impossible hospitality of God to all, especially to the most vulnerable: the immigrants, the refugees, the economically poor, and the earth.

ENDNOTES

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1 A version of this paper was given at the Festival of Homiletics, San Antonio, 2017. I am grateful for Dr. Ken Sawyer, Church historian and theologian at McCormick Theological Seminary for helping me shape this paper in much better ways. I am grateful for his brilliant mind and compassionate heart.

2 Among other places, United States, Israel, Peru, Brazil, Somalia, Kenya, Serbia, etc. See “Um Mundo De Muros. As Barreiras Que Nos Dividem,” <https://arte.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2017/um-mundo-de-muros/>

3 More than 240 million people are in flux around the world. 740 million internal migrants and more than 65 million people all over the world have been forced away from their home due to the issues mentioned above.

4 “The spectacle of mass movement draws attention inevitably to the borders, the porous places, the vulnerable points where the concept of home is seen as being menaced by foreigners. Much of the alarm hovering at the borders the gate, is stoked, it seems to me, by 1) both the threat and the promise of globalization; and 2) an uneasy relationship with our own foreignness, our own rapidly disintegrating sense of belonging.” Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others*, Cambridge: Harvard Press, 2017.

5 Very recently, the president of the United States Donald Trump affirmed that immigrants are animals. In this calamitous enunciation, he dangerously implies at least two things: first, that since immigrants are animals, there is nothing “human” in them and thus, they can be beaten up, used, thrown away, reduced to nothing and killed. Just like slaves. This is fascist language that leads to genocides, as we have seen in the history of indigenous and black people in this country, or Nazism in Germany, etc; Second, he implies that animals are below us human being and are to be treated in whatever way we want, since animals were created for our dominion. This common interpretation of Genesis does not give us a black slate to do whatever we want with animals, or the earth. We are all part of God’s creation. No matter if Trump’s remarks were related “only” to MS-13, we cannot subsume any person under any form or circumstance in any lower sense of humanity. For Trump’s enunciation see here: <https://twitter.com/gavinnewsom/status/996884607558598657>

6 For a more in depth understanding as how indigenous people see various grades of humanities, see the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. See Álvaro Fernández Bravo, “Eduardo Viveiros de Castro: Some Reflections on the Notion of Species in History and Anthropology,” New York University, Buenos Aires, Conicet, <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-101/viveiros-de-castro>

7 Holy Bible, NRSV.

8 Smith, Jonathan Z., *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

9 Diognetus, *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, Chapter V: The Manners Of The Christians, <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diognetus-roberts.html>

**10** The flag, for instance, has become the cheapest thing we have to show our allegiance to our country, the fact that we convince ourselves that we are not immigrants anymore, that we now own a country, makes us fight against those who want to take it from us! Little do we know that the flag is a carefully crafted emotional symbol that hides the injustices a nation practices against its own people! In fact, the flag shows our complete lack of agency. We can't have access to power so we carry the flag. It gives us a sense of fighting for some kind of cohesive narrative that both conquers our allegiance and provides a sense of security. To raise the flag and to have it in our porches is to keep a country we imagine, not necessarily the country we have. For the country we imagine is fair to all, but the country we have is the country that belongs only to a small elite who owns all its riches and rents it to all of us. Colin Kaepernick took a knee to bring us awareness of the injustice of the country against black people and so many people criticized him, never considering what he was calling our attention to.

**11** Hart, Kevin, "The manifestation of the Father. Luke 15:11-32," in *Phenomenologies of Scripture*, Adam Y. Wells, Editor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 105.

**12** John Calvin, *The Institutes of The Christian Religion, Book III, chapter VII, paragraph 6*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960). Edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles.

**13** Trinh T. Min-ha, *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event* (London: Routledge, 2010), 47.

**14** Silvio Pedrosa, Facebook comment, <https://www.facebook.com/shgpedrosa>, March 2017.

**15** Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 11.

**16** Read the fantastic book by Kate Evans, *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2017).

**17** See Michael L. Buddez, *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church* (Oregon: Cascade, 2011).

**18** Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI (1927-1931)*, (New York: Norton, 1961), pp. 58-63

**19** This is a term I develop in my book: Cláudio Carvalhaes, *Sacraments and Globalization: Redrawing the Borders of Eucharistic Hospitality* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

**20** Derrida, Jacques. *Aporias*. trans. Thomas Dutoit. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 11.