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# Life-Giving Migrations

Re-visioning the Mystery of God  
Through U.S. Hispanic Eyes

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## Introduction

The contemporary retrieval and revival of the Christian doctrine of God has been characterized by various theological attempts to underscore the relation between the life of God and the life of God for us, and between trinitarian theory and trinitarian praxis. Leading these attempts in Roman Catholic circles is the work of Karl Rahner. In his groundbreaking and thought-provoking trinitarian reflections, Rahner laments the marginalization of the Christian doctrine of God. He underscores that contemporary Christianity finds itself in a state of trinitarian timidity leading to the tragic conclusion that “should the doctrine of the trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.”<sup>1</sup> Rahner proposes the axiom “the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity” (and vice versa), as a way to overcome the marginalization of trinitarian theology and re-establish its utterly soteriological foundation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997), 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>Rahner writes: “The isolation of the treatise of the Trinity has to be wrong. There must be a connection between Trinity and man (sic). The Trinity is a mystery of salvation, otherwise it would never have been revealed.” Rahner, *The Trinity*, 21. Emphasis in original.

In proposing this axiom, Rahner opens the door to reflections on God's mystery "from below."<sup>3</sup> In particular, Rahner's emphasis on the humanity of Christ as a symbol of God's life, signals an important anthropological turn in contemporary reflections on the mystery of God.<sup>4</sup> Following this anthropological turn, and drawing upon various human experiences, theologians have proposed various ways to reconceive the Christian doctrine of God.<sup>5</sup> Their reflections suggest that if we are to construct more historically meaningful and practical approaches to the mystery of God, consideration must be given to the manifold human experiences that mediate God's self-disclosure.

Migration is a significant human experience in the life of most U.S. Hispanics. Migration will be understood in this paper as the movement of persons from one place to another in search of life. Not all forms of migration, however, are life-giving. In moving from one place to another, migrants often find themselves in life-threatening circumstances. The lives of migrating persons lost at sea in the Florida Straits or those lost crossing the Imperial Valley of Southern California more than witness this fact within the U.S. landscape.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as a number of U.S. Hispanic communities, and their ancestors exemplify, migration in the form of conquest and expansion negates life.

Migration as a life-giving human activity, however, can provide an appropriate theological source for raising and exploring answers to the following questions: What if we were to appeal to the metaphor of migration as a way to re-vision the mystery of divine personhood? Could we conceive the distinct but interrelated missions of Christ and the Spirit as God's personal and historical migrations? What

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<sup>3</sup>See the groundbreaking work of Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), especially 209-241.

<sup>4</sup>See Miguel H. Díaz, *On Being Human: U.S. Hispanic and Rahnerian Perspectives* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 91-94.

<sup>5</sup>See, Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992); Robert Schreier, ed. *The Faces of Jesus in Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1991); Manual M. Marzal et. al., *The Indian Face of God in Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996).

<sup>6</sup>For instance see, Daniel G. Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life: An Immigrant Journey of Heart and Spirit* (New York: Rowman Littlefield Publishers, 2002), especially 13-39.

arguments in Scripture and emerging U.S. Hispanic reflections on Christ and the Holy Spirit would support this vision? What would be some practical implications of this vision for persons and communities? In raising and seeking answers to these questions, this paper will contribute toward the ongoing revitalization and socio-cultural appropriation of the mystery of God.<sup>7</sup>

*The image of a migrating God, who crosses  
human borders and landscapes through  
Christ and in the Spirit, can deepen our  
understanding of divine and human  
personhood*

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This essay is organized in three sections. First, drawing upon key biblical texts in the Old and New Testaments, I will briefly explore the theological significance of migrating persons in the Bible. This section of the essay provides the biblical foundation for the present project. Second, the paper builds upon this biblical foundation and

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<sup>7</sup>See Hugo L. López who invites the creation of U.S. Hispanic theologies rooted in the fundamental U.S. Hispanic experience of migration. Hugo L. López, "Toward a Theology of Migration," *Apuntes: Reflexiones Teológicas desde el Margen Hispano* 2:3 (9182) 68. Note how López argues for this *locus theologicus* as the distinctive source for U.S. theology (*vis-à-vis* the experiences of economic poverty and oppression that ground Latin American liberation theologies). On the failure of medieval European cultural categories to convey adequately the Christian doctrine of God to the ancestors of U.S. Hispanic communities see Espín, "Trinitarian Monotheism and the Birth of Popular Catholicism, especially 33-34 and 57-59. For another Catholic U.S. Hispanic Trinitarian approach see Sixto J. García, "U.S. Hispanic and Mainstream Trinitarian Theologies," in *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). For a Protestant Systematic approach see Justo González, *Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 101-115; and Teresa Chavez Saucedo, "Love in the Crossroads: Stepping-Stones to a Doctrine of God in Hispanic/Latino Theology," in *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, ed. José D. Rodríguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 22-32.

explores how God's very migration across human landscapes can deepen our understanding of divine and human personhood. The image of a migrating God who crosses particular human borders through Christ and in the Spirit will anchor these systematic reflections. Finally, I conclude with a few practical reflections that address Latinos/as and their life-seeking migrations across U.S. borders.

## **Biblical Foundations: The Theological Significance of Migration in the Old and New Testaments**

The Old Testament paints a vivid picture of God's election of the people of Israel and their ongoing struggles to attain and maintain possession of the promised of land. In the midst of this struggle, God remains faithful even at times when Israel neglects its covenantal responsibilities. Various migrations map Israel's history. Among these migrations include: 1) The migration of the patriarchs, especially the call of Abraham to move into the land of Canaan; 2) The Exodus event in which God walks the people of Israel out of slavery and leads them into Canaan; and 3) The period of the Babylonian exile when Israel is forced to migrate out of the promised land, and rediscover in this exile the ongoing presence of God.

These "crucial moments in the history of Israel," argues Stephen Pisano, "are marked by journeys and migrations and by the experience of being uprooted from one place in order to travel to another."<sup>8</sup> Although not all of Israel's migrations occur as a result of God's initiative (e.g., some arise out of natural or socio political turmoil, such as the famine which led Jacob and his family to Egypt or the defeat of the southern kingdom by Babylonia), all migrations lead in one way or another to the recognition of God's ongoing life-giving presence.<sup>9</sup>

Israel's various migrations deeply shape personal as well as social identity and responsibility. A perusal of just a few key biblical texts is sufficient to exemplify how Israel's experience of migration shapes

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<sup>8</sup>Stephen Pisano, "Migration and the Religion of the Old Testament," *Seminarium* 25 (1985) 115-124.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 115-116.

relations with foreigners in its midst.<sup>10</sup> In Deuteronomy, God invites Israel to love the sojourner because Israel was once a sojourner in the land of Egypt (Deut. 5:15, 10:19). In Leviticus 19:33-34 God commands:

When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I the Lord am your God.

Various other laws also explicitly prohibit Israel from oppressing foreigners (e.g., Deuteronomy 24:14-15). Thus, as a general principle, Israel's experience as a migrant people and the care that God exercised over Israel during this experience, provides the foundation for Israel's laws in favor of migrants. Thus, Pisano writes:

Another aspect of the Law given on Sinai which is especially significant for our view of the migration of Israel is the status of the *ger*, the foreigner or sojourner. That this should be so important is a proof of Israel's concern with the condition of the wonderer and the stranger because of its own history. At least in certain periods in Israel's history, this recollection of its own condition led to a particularly sharp concern for the plight and condition of the foreigner. "You must not regard the Edomite as detestable, since he is your brother; you must not regard the Egyptian as detestable, since you were once a foreigner in his country" (Deut 23, 7). This is a clear attestation of the concern in what was once their own situation.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps one of the more well-known biblical stories of offering hospitality to strangers in the Old Testament is the visitation of migrating

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<sup>10</sup>The notion of foreigner (*ger*) undergoes an evolution in the history of Israel. It refers to the non-Israelite (2 Samuel 1:13), to the Israelites who live as resident alien in a foreign land (Exodus 2:22), and to the foreigners living on Israel's lands (Exodus 20, 22-23, 33). See Pisano, "Migration and the Religion of the Old Testament," 119.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid, 119.

strangers to the house of Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18).<sup>12</sup> Upon the arrival of these strangers, Abraham and Sarah hasten to prepare a meal and host them with their familial resources. "In the process of sharing the resources of their household, the identity of the visitors was revealed to be Yahweh and two angels."<sup>13</sup> This story conveys the central Old Testament idea that in migrating strangers, one can and often does encounter the presence of God. In Christian trinitarian traditions, the story has been used iconically and theologically as a signpost to affirm the relational nature of human and divine personhood.<sup>14</sup>

The New Testament radicalizes the theological significance of migration and its related notion of offering hospitality to strangers. It does so by directly linking these themes to the life of Christ. In the Gospel of Luke, the birth of Jesus comes after his parents' migration from Galilee to Bethlehem. While in Bethlehem, Jesus is born in a manger because there was no room "in the inn" (Luke 2:1-7). Matthew's Gospel dramatically represents the attempt to safeguard Jesus' life through his family's migration into Egypt. In so doing, this Gospel paradoxically sets Egypt as a place of refuge, recalling and paralleling in a Christian sense, Israel's captivity and liberation. More specifically, Matthew's Gospel evokes the memory of Hosea 11:1 in which Israel, God's "son," is called out of Egypt. Like Israel, Jesus too as God's unique Son will migrate from Egypt to the people of God to offer a new exodus and liberation. Thus, by the power of the Spirit in which he was conceived (Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:35), baptized (Mark 1:9), and empowered to proclaim the reign of God (Luke 18), Jesus becomes the fulfillment of God's name (Exodus 3:14). God's name amounts to a promise of tangible presence.<sup>15</sup> In continual ful-

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<sup>12</sup>For a brief but thought-provoking discussion on how this story summarizes Christian affirmation of the communal nature of human and divine personhood see Catherine M. LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us," in *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Catherine M. LaCugna (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 83-85.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, 84.

<sup>14</sup>See LaCugna, "God in Communion with Us," 83-85.

<sup>15</sup>A number of scholars have offered a dynamic and culturally sensitive translation of Exodus 3:14, the revelation of the sacred tetragrammaton (YHWH). For instance, John Courtney Murray offers the following arguments to translate the

fillment of this promise, Mary's child is named *Emmanuel* — a name that evokes God's life-giving presence among us.

The Old Testament describes God's presence in terms of the migrating people of Israel and in those migrating strangers who abide in Israel's midst. The New Testament depicts God's very journey into our world in what might be described as Jesus' migrant activity. Migrants, to use a more restricted sense of the term, are usually persons who move from their country of origin into a foreign country, oftentimes laboring to sustain families back in their homelands. Migrants usually do not remain in any one place, and oftentimes as a result of their temporary visas are expected to return home. Like exiles, migrants have a strong relation to and longing for the "fatherland."<sup>16</sup> Similar to migrants' experience, the Gospels portray Jesus on the move with "nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Like exiles and migrants, the Gospels give ample witness for Jesus' restlessness and longing for his "fatherland." Indeed, doing the will of and returning to the "Father" (Mark 14:36; John 16:17) constitute the core of Jesus' proclamation.

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divine name: "Thus, by its very enigmatic character, the total phrase opens awe-inspiring perspectives on the mystery that lies behind the promise to Moses and the people. To capture this full suggestion and to keep the paronomastic cadence of the original Hebrew, one might translate: 'I shall be there as who I am shall I be there.'" In other words, the revelation of God's name conveys God's promise to be always migrating toward God's people. See John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 10. Similarly, but arguing from the distinction made in Spanish between *ser* and *estar* (both translated as infinites of the verb to be), Latin American philosopher J.C. Scannone argues: "Por consiguiente 'estar' tiene un sentido más situado o circunstancial, un estar firme (de pie) pero dispuesto a caminar, y no expresa la esencia en sí de las cosas, como de suyo la expresa el verbo 'ser.' Quizás para traducir el bíblico 'yo soy el que soy' podría usarse la expresión: 'yo soy el que está.' Kusch dice que en el mito (also semejante se puede decir — mutatis mutandis — de la historia de salvación) Dios no 'es,' sino que 'está': está en cuanto por el relato simbólico y la acción ritual está mediando entre las oposiciones, está centrando o dando el fundamento al sujeto de relato y acción, y lo está salvando, aunque en forma no absolutamente definitiva, sino que ha de volver a ser reiterada." See J.C. Scannone, "Un Nuevo Punto de Partida en la Filosofía Latinoamericana," *Stromata* 36 (1980) 38-39.

<sup>16</sup>On the exilic longing for the "fatherland" see Timothy Matovina and Gerald E. Poyo, eds., *¡Presente! U.S. Latino Catholics from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 147-150.

Building upon Philippians 2:6-11, Hugo López argues for an understanding of Jesus in light of his migrant status. For López, God migrates from heaven to earth and becomes a servant in Jesus Christ. This self-emptying offers humans who have been exiled from God as a result of sin, their passport back to God. Thus López writes:

[God] consciously decided to leave behind “his country of origin” in order to fulfill his mission in this other “country.” Certainly, God’s motivation was not the result of hardships related to economic conditions, nor the political repression of his country of origin. Rather, it was uniquely the love God had toward the subjects who had exiled themselves from God’s reign in favor of a leader that promised to satisfy their ego-centric desires. In order to embark on his mission of rescue and reconciliation Jesus the Christ paid for a very expensive passport: the negation of all his powers and the renunciation of all his authority during his absence. The only power that he would use in executing his mission was precisely the same power that prompted him to initiate it: Love.<sup>17</sup>

As an itinerant preacher, the New Testament offers further resources for envisioning Jesus as a migrant. Jesus’ various movements primarily within but also outside of Galilee (e.g. Jerusalem) enable his work on behalf of the reign of God. His movement around Galilee supplied not only the imagery of Jesus’ teaching on the “kingdom,” but also the socio-political realities that shaped Jesus’ identity.<sup>18</sup> His movement outside of Galilee, especially his journey to Jerusalem, maps the climactic event that leads to Jesus’ ultimate life-giving migration, namely his passion and resurrection.

In recent times, much has been written on the location and socio-political realities that defined Jesus’ Galilean identity.<sup>19</sup> Among other things, understanding the multi-lingual, culturally diverse, religious and socio-political landscape of Galilee has deepened the understand-

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<sup>17</sup>López, “El Divino Migrante,” 16. My translation.

<sup>18</sup>See Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 31-32.

<sup>19</sup>For a recent theological discussion highlighting the political and economic realities of Galilee see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 137-161.

ing of Jesus as a marginalized Jew.<sup>20</sup> Studies conducted on the Herodian city of Sepphoris have also been used to support Jesus' cross social and cultural relationships. In these instances too, the New Testament shows how Jesus' various movements "in-between" cultures, social classes, and religious traditions shape his identity.

Whereas Jesus can be envisioned as God's migrant worker, the Spirit can be envisioned as the "immigrant" life-giving presence of God. Immigrants are usually persons who as a result of social or economic unrest or as result of religious or political persecutions find it necessary to leave their homeland and permanently abide in a foreign land. In so far as the Spirit represents God's personal and permanent manifestation, this presence can be characterized as God's "immigration." To envision the Spirit as God's "immigrant" face, however, is not in any way intended to connote the kind of "necessity" associated with immigrants who as a result of various socio-political realities are forced to depart from their homelands. Rather, the "necessity" for the Spirit's immigrant journey has to do with the very mystery of God's self-communicating love, God's social and other-oriented personhood.<sup>21</sup>

Among the many images of the Spirit presented in the New Testament, one that is of particular interest in the present theological reflections is the Gospel of John's notion of the Spirit as a second Paraclete (second to Jesus).<sup>22</sup> In this Gospel, the Spirit is sent by Jesus to abide "in" the world with his disciples — the children of the light (John 12:35; 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 12-14). Fernando F. Segovia, commenting on Jesus' promises concerning the second Paraclete affirms that "unlike Jesus" the Spirit's presence "is described

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<sup>20</sup>See Orlando E. Costas, "Evangelism from the Periphery: The Universality of Galilee," *Apuntes* 4 (1982) 75-83 and John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

<sup>21</sup>Catherine LaCugna argues that "God's freedom means necessarily being who and what God is." In this sense the "necessity" of God's self-communication in Christ and the Spirit has to do with God's loving and ecstatic personal nature. God's love is necessarily self-diffusive. See LaCugna, *God For Us*, 355. See also Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), esp. 152-157.

<sup>22</sup>For a discussion of New Testament understandings of the Spirit see Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 1 (New York: Crossroad, 2003), 15-62.

as permanent.”<sup>23</sup> Moreover, “whereas the world cannot receive the Spirit-Paraclete because of its failure ‘to see’ and to ‘know’ the disciples will know the Spirit-Paraclete on account of its own ‘abiding’ (*menein*) among, and ‘presence’ in them.”<sup>24</sup> This focus on the Spirit as God’s abiding presence, combined with the characterization of the followers of Jesus as foreigners (disciples are “in” the world but not “of” the world), echoes the Old Testament affirmation of God’s life-giving presence, especially in the aliens and strangers of the world.<sup>25</sup>

By way of summary then, both the Old and New Testament provide evidence that invites a biblical re-visioning of God through the metaphor of migration. God’s migration in the Old Testament comes not only to the migrating people of Israel, but specifically as a result of this experience to the “strangers,” the oft-marginalized persons who inhabit Israel’s lands. The New Testament continues this theme and offers the possibility of envisioning Jesus as God’s “migrant” worker and the Spirit as God’s “immigrant” presence, especially among marginalized Christians within a hostile world. In both the Old and New Testament, God’s migrations are understood to be life-giving migrations. This biblical vision is succinctly captured and summarized by Gustavo Gutiérrez when he writes:

The God of the Bible is the God who comes to the people. Yahweh says: I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians” (Ex 3:8; see 18:20), and “I will come to you” (Ex 20:24). John the Evangelist says of the Word: “He came to his own house” (Jn 1:3, literal) and he “made his dwelling among us” (v.14). The Apocalypse begins (Rv 1:4, 8) and ends (Rv 22:20) with the promise of the definitive

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<sup>23</sup>Fernando F. Segovia, *The Farewell of the Word: The Johannine Call to Abide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 96.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>For a thought-provoking discussion relating this aspect of Johannine theology to the experience of U.S. Hispanic exile see Fernando F. Segovia, “In the World but not of It: Exile as Locus for a Theology of the Diaspora,” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Commitment*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), especially 212-217. For an early Christian document that continues to evidence this perspective see “The Epistle to Diognetus” (120-200 A.D.) in *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 144-145.

coming of the Lord. God is present where God's life giving plan takes flesh.<sup>26</sup>

## **Systematic Considerations: The Mystery of God as God's Personal Migration across Human Borders**

The task of the theologian is to "approximate, as Rahner never wearied of repeating, the inexpressible God as mystery of love... through the prism of the cultural (philosophical, historical) categories of the age."<sup>27</sup> The experience of migrating persons in the Old and New Testaments has offered a prism through which to begin this U.S. Hispanic re-visioning of the mystery of God. In accompanying the people of Israel during life-threatening circumstances, in caring and protecting strangers who abide in Israel's lands, and in God's very self-migrating presence in Christ and the Spirit God challenges persons to cross human borders in order to birth and protect life.

Seen from this perspective, the mystery of God can be envisioned as a mystery that involves a border crossing. As a number of U.S. Hispanic theologians have suggested, God's border crossing entails God's journey into a particular human landscape. The journey into a particular landscape precipitates God's both/and ways of being in the world. In Jesus Christ, God can be identified as being both human and divine. In Jesus Christ, God assumes a cross-cultural face. This both/and way of existence overcomes unnatural separations between human and divine life, and unnatural separations among human persons. Thus, Virgilio Elizondo writes:

The eternal Christ, the Word of God crossed the border between the eternal and the temporal, between the divine and the human to become Jesus of Nazareth. As the New Testament affirms, Christ though in the image of God, didn't deem equality with God something to be clung to — but instead became completely empty and took on the image of oppressed

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<sup>26</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The God of Life* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1989), 69. Emphasis added. Also see María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 130-138.

<sup>27</sup>García, "U.S. Hispanic and Mainstream Trinitarian Theologies," 92.

humankind: born into the human condition, found in the likeness of a human being" (Philippians 2:6-7). Even stronger, the eternal Word which was God became flesh and dwelt with us. And the very geographical-historical place where this took place was in Galilee, a crossroads of the peoples of the world, a place whose people were considered impure and inferior precisely because here the boundaries of identity and belonging were constantly crossed if for no other reason than for basic survival.<sup>28</sup>

For Elizondo, God's journey among us is defined by Jesus' Galilean journey. Thus, the symbol of Galilee precipitates Elizondo's mapping of God's human migration. Elizondo views the Galilean journey of God in terms of a threefold process: 1) God's election of the Galileans as people who abide in the margins; 2) God's empowerment of the Galileans to confront the center and to proclaim life; and 3) God's ultimate life-vindication of Jesus as the marginalized Galilean Jew that breaks all margins.<sup>29</sup>

Elizondo's Christology implicitly rests upon the assumption that God's migration across and within human "borders" creates a new possibility for re-visioning human and divine personhood. A border is "by definition bi-directional."<sup>30</sup> "A border is the place at which two realities, two worldviews, two cultures, meet and interact."<sup>31</sup> The meeting and interaction of the human and the divine in Jesus Christ is mutually fruitful. It does not lead to death-like experiences that include among others, the forceful subordination or exclusion of one reality over another. The Incarnation serves as an invitation to con-

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<sup>28</sup>Virgilio Elizondo, "Transformation of Borders: Border Separation or New Identity," in *Theology: Expanding the Borders*, ed. María Pilar Aquino and Roberto S. Goizueta (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 29.

<sup>29</sup>Elizondo uses these three fundamental experiences to suggest three basic principles: 1) The Galilean principle in which he affirms God's choice to identify with the marginalized, 2) The Jerusalem principle in which he affirms God's will to empower the marginalized, and 3) The Resurrection principle in which he affirms God's victory of life and the challenge to embrace inclusive human existence. See Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Promise* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), especially 49-125.

<sup>30</sup>Justo González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 86.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

ceive God's mystery as a mystery of distinct human and divine "border" interactions. As a result of these interactions, human and divine realities now "literally 'exist' entirely with reference to each other."<sup>32</sup> To echo classical Christian teaching, "Jesus is the communion of divine and human, 'hypostatically' uniting two natures 'without separation, without mingling, without confusion (Chalcedon)'.<sup>33</sup> Contemporary Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas highlights that "the ontological question [what something is] is not answered by pointing to the 'self-existent,' to a being as it is determined by its own boundaries, but to being which in its *ekstasis* breaks through these boundaries in a movement of communion."<sup>34</sup>

*Ultimately, the question that defines and  
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Drawing upon Zizioulas' insight, LaCugna rightly argues that "[a] person is thus not an individual but an open and ecstatic reality, referred to others for his or her existence."<sup>35</sup> This approach to personhood resonates well with the U.S. Hispanic notion of Jesus' border-like identity. As evidenced by his human and divine identity, and by his human inter-relationships, Jesus is defined by openness to the other. In this sense, being a person in the image of the mestizo Christ means embracing a "border-like" openness that can be associated more with bridges and thoroughfares rather than with barriers

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<sup>32</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 296.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>John Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1975) 409. Also cited in LaCugna, *God for Us*, 260. Note also Zizioulas' affirmation that the church and every person is called to live as God lives, namely, as the event of communion. See his significant trinitarian contribution to theological anthropology in his *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 15.

<sup>35</sup>LaCugna, *God For Us*, 260.

and gates.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, the question that defines and constitutes personal existence can be formulated as follows: Who we are we open to receive, and who is open to receive us? Those whom we receive will be shaped by our existence, as we are shaped by their existence. Those who receive us will shape our existence, as we will shape theirs. In the mutuality of giving and receiving from the other, of living constantly on the border of human lives, we become truly more catholic, more inclusive of inter-personal possibilities. Indeed, this “catholicity of the person enables us to embrace diversity enthusiastically instead of fearing it.”<sup>37</sup> Still, this inclusive vision of personhood remains to be fully realized as long as there are un-welcomed “strangers” in our midst.

As I argued earlier, borders can be places that mediate personal life giving relations. Yet, more often than not, they are places of death and marginalization. Jesus’ border-like migrations into marginalized places and with marginalized persons prophetically challenge unjust human boundaries. Through these migrations, Jesus demonstrates that while he was open to give and receive from God and other human beings, he was most open to give and receive God in those who were estranged, the marginalized of the *kin-dom*.

The invitation to welcome the marginalized is the key to understand the U.S. Hispanic preferential option for the poor. God’s migrates first and foremost to a foreign place (the “border” region of Galilee) to welcome the “strangers” (the Galileans) who abide in this place.<sup>38</sup> This preferential option, as Roberto Goizueta avers, “calls us to read the Christian faith, the Christian Scriptures, and the Christian tradition through the eyes of the poor.”<sup>39</sup> Rather than representing

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<sup>36</sup>Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, 1995), 203. On the relational notion of being a human and divine person see also esp. 65-76.

<sup>37</sup>LaCugna, *God for Us*, 290.

<sup>38</sup>For a Trinitarian discussion on how the theme of God’s presence in the “stranger” can be appealed as an argument for embracing various theologies and practices in the Church see Eugene F. Rogers, “The Stranger as Blessing,” in *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 265-283.

<sup>39</sup>Roberto S. Goizueta, “Why are you frightened?: U.S. Hispanic Theology and Late Modernity,” in *El Cuerpo de Cristo: The Hispanic Presence in the U.S. Catholic*

an exclusive choice, the term “preferential” points to what Gustavo Gutiérrez defines as a preference for those “who should be the first — not the only ones — in our human solidarity.”<sup>40</sup>

The preferential option associated with Jesus suggests his costly and prophetic migration. The migrant journey of Jesus is indeed the journey of the cross.<sup>41</sup> Like all who cross the border and know that they are entering life-threatening situations,<sup>42</sup> Jesus knows the consequence of his life-giving actions, especially on behalf of the poor and marginalized.

*To live in solidarity with the crucified  
Christ is to abide in his life-giving Spirit.  
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sojourner, and to extend hospitality to the  
foreigner and the sinner’*

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Jesus’ migration toward the center (Jerusalem), while carrying the margins in his body (Galilean identity) represents his most dangerous and life-giving journey. In Jesus’ passion, God becomes identified with all who suffer from life-threatening human experiences. Jesus’ undeterred Spirit-led migration to the human injustice of the cross manifests the mystery of God’s abiding presence on the margin of human history. From this margin, God rejects all margins. The cross prophetically denounces all human death-like attempts to self-exist or make others exist without God and neighbor.

Theological reflections on U.S. Hispanic popular Catholic celebrations, symbols, and narratives provide additional sources that parallel

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*Church*, ed. Peter Casarella and Raúl Gómez (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 55.

<sup>40</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Dónde dormirán los pobres?* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de las Casas-Rímac, 2002), 13.

<sup>41</sup>Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, 32-33.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

the aforesaid vision. For example, an answer to the central question of personal existence raised above is at the forefront of the celebration of *Las Posadas*. This ritual re-enacts the journey of strangers (Mary and Joseph) begging to be welcomed so that life could be born and sustained. The ritual, as Ana María Pineda has pointed out, fittingly relates to the migrant experience of U.S. Hispanics as strangers who seek to be welcomed in a foreign land. “When the ritual takes place in the Mission District of San Francisco, many of the participants — once refugees themselves — remember their own experiences as strangers. Through the ritual, the community affirms the goodness of taking people in, and those who once needed *posada* are reminded to offer it to others.”<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, other Latino/a popular faith expressions relate to and express the notion of God’s life-giving presence through communal accompaniment. In the U.S. Hispanic processions of the Triduum, the act of mutual openness to and welcome of the other is celebrated: Jesus walks-with the community and the community walks-with Jesus. This accompaniment mediates the life-giving need to “belong” and be counted among those who comprise the catholicity of the body of Christ.<sup>44</sup> Finally, in the icons of the suffering Christ, Latinos/as vicariously experience through Christ the “active expectation” of life and the end of all exclusion that must begin in solidarity with the victims of this world.<sup>45</sup>

To live in solidarity with the crucified Christ is to abide in his life-giving Spirit. To remain in the Spirit means to “love the unlovely, to care for the stranger and sojourner, and to extend hospitality to the foreigner and the sinner.”<sup>46</sup> Nowhere in U.S. Hispanic theology

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<sup>43</sup>Ana María Pineda, “Hospitality,” in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 31.

<sup>44</sup>On the migrant’s need to belong see Groody, *Border of Death*, 79, 92, 109. On the celebration of the Triduum see Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 32-37.

<sup>45</sup>Espín, “The God of the Vanquished: Foundations for a Latino Spirituality,” in *The Faith of the People*, 28. See also Alicia Marill, ““To All Those Scattered Throughout” (1 Peter): Foundations for a Theology and Spirituality for Redemptive Ministry to Exiles, Refugees and Immigrants in the Archdiocese of Miami,” (D.Min. Project, Catholic Theological Union, 1998), 179-180.

<sup>46</sup>Samuel Solivan, “The Holy Spirit-Personalization and the Affirmation of Diversity,” in *Teología en Conjunto*, 63.

does this pneumatological mystery find a more fitting expression than in the various Marian symbols.<sup>47</sup> Properly understood, Mary is the hermeneutical lens through which in U.S. Hispanic landscapes we behold the immigrant face of God.<sup>48</sup> Whether we speak of devotions like Our Lady of Guadalupe or Our of Charity, Mary can be seen as the indispensable manifestation of God's ongoing border crossing into the particular human experiences that comprise U.S. Hispanic communities. As such, these Marian devotions are pneumatologically pregnant with meaning concerning God's "human" presence, especially among the poor and marginalized. Above all, U.S. Hispanic Marian devotions manifest our creedal affirmation concerning the Spirit that God is Lord and giver of Life. Commenting on the theological significance Guadalupe, Jeanette Rodriguez writes:

God's grace is universally and unconditionally offered; it is God's self-giving. Our Lady of Guadalupe becomes a symbol and a manifestation of God's love, compassion, help, and defense of the poor. She restores her people's dignity and hope and gives them a place in the world and in salvific history. The first manifestation of God's creative energy and creative power is creation — to give life, to bring something forth. To this extent, I believe that Guadalupe may be a symbol of the grace of God.<sup>49</sup>

The stories of our Lady of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Lady of Charity name two of the many Latino/a Marian devotions that manifest God's immigrant face. They represent culturally sensitive ways of describing the Spirit's ongoing life-giving presence. Juan

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<sup>47</sup>Note Congar's arguments relative to the "close bond" between Mary and the Spirit in Catholic theology and the worship life of the Church, especially in terms of ascribing to Mary functions normally attributed to the Holy Spirit. See Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, 163-164.

<sup>48</sup>See García, "U.S. Hispanic Trinitarian Theologies," 95-96 and Espín, "An Exploration in the Theology of Grace and Sin," in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 137-138.

<sup>49</sup>Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 150. See also idem, "God is Always Pregnant," in *The Divine Mosaic: Women's Images of the Sacred Other* (St. Paul: Yes International Publishers, 1994), 112-125.

Diego, the protagonist of the story of Guadalupe is a foreigner in his own land. This condition has come about as a result of a migration in the form of conquest. The story of Guadalupe tells us that he “sees” when it was “already beginning to dawn,” the woman who will mediate for him God’s offer of new life.

Similarly, *los tres Juanes* (the traditional Cuban characterization of the two natives and African slave that find a floating statue of Mary) discover “early in the morning” a floating image of the Virgin in the aftermath of a storm. As salt-gatherers they were searching for the most important life- preservative available to them. Interestingly enough, Our Lady of Charity is immediately found to be present among various persons who were seriously ill.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the story and the popular traditions that have unfolded surrounding this U.S. Hispanic religious expression witness her association with the Holy Spirit, the person who mediates God’s ultimate gift of life.<sup>51</sup> How fitting that these two stories should have as central figures persons named John. Juan Diego and Juan Moreno are prototypes of what the Gospel of John would characterize as foreigners who are “in” the world but not “of” the world.<sup>52</sup> They are also, as evidenced in both stories, persons who can found in the “light.” Being in the “light” makes them capable of “seeing” and “knowing” God’s life-giving migration. Juan Diego recognizes God’s presence in the

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<sup>50</sup>See Olga Portuondo Zúñiga, *La Virgen de La Caridad del Cobre: Símbolo de Cuba* (Santiago De Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1995), 81-105.

<sup>51</sup>On these two Marian stories and what follows in this part of the discussion see Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of New Creation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997) and on the story of Our Lady of Charity see *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Shrine in Miami* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), especially 18-26.

<sup>52</sup>Timothy Matovina historically documents an interesting connection between the Mexican people and “John the evangelist” (in Miguel Sánchez’s *Imagen de la Virgen María*). Matovina notes how Sánchez draws a parallel between John who stands at the foot of the cross (more accurately, the beloved disciple) and the Mexican people who as a result of their socio-cultural and religious reality also stand at the foot of the cross. In so doing, Matovina provides some evidence that supports how the Gospel of John may have served as a historical Christian source that inspired interpretations of 16th and 17th century Marian devotions in the Americas. See Timothy Matovina, “Guadalupe at Calvary: Patristic Theology in Miguel Sánchez’s ‘Imagen de la Virgen María’ (1648),” in *Theological Studies* 64:4 (2003) 795-811.

familiarity of his land. Juan Moreno recognizes God's presence in the familiarity of sea.

In either case, the life-giving presence offered through Mary and her message, invites the protagonists to cross boundaries and invite others, especially the marginalized, into communion. The invitation to embrace life in the form of communion with the other is particularly evidenced in the story of Guadalupe. Juan Diego, we are told in the story is sent by Guadalupe to go to the bishop to request the building of a church. This "church" does not primarily refer to a physical temple, but to a living temple. As Elizondo suggests, the building blocks of this temple are persons who under the direction of God's life-giving Spirit are challenged to "migrate" toward others so as to create a world that reflects the personal, inclusive, and communal mystery of God.<sup>53</sup>

## **Conclusion: U.S. Hispanics and their Life-Seeking Migrations**

A survey conducted in August 2003 by the Latino Coalition in Washington shows that immigration has become the most crucial issue that unites all Latino/a communities in the United States. An overwhelming majority (91%) of Latinas/os included in the survey thought that immigration laws must improve to favor a more humane treatment of persons who "cross the border" into this country by sea or by land. Latino/a immigrants to this country not only suffer the agony of having to leave their homeland, but also experience multiple life-threatening socio-political realities during and after crossing over lands or streams.<sup>54</sup> The hundreds of lives lost at sea and in the desert, and the ongoing "traffic" of persons as commodities cries out to heaven for the establishment of more just and life-giving socio-political processes.

Not long ago, I was introduced to a Cuban college student who had recently arrived in this country. We sat down and I asked her to recount to me her story of migration. I knew that in hearing her story

<sup>53</sup>See Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of New Creation*, 131.

<sup>54</sup>See Groody, *Border of Death, Valley of Life*, 13-40; and Marill, "To all those who are Scattered," esp. 17-65.

I would be reminded of my own life-giving migration and cross-over from Cuba to Spain, and eventually, to the United States. In tears that she could hardly hold back, she spoke to me of her painful departure from Cuba on her way to the 2002 World Youth Day held in Toronto, Canada. She then told me how she and a group of Cuban University students had decided to cross the border into Buffalo, N.Y. She spoke to me of hopelessness sentiments of young Cubans in the island and life-threatening family circumstances that prompted her migration. She also spoke of life-giving expectations that accompanied her risk-taking venture. Upon crossing, she turned herself into authorities. She was questioned, arrested, imprisoned, and left alone in a foreign land without little advocacy for forty-eight days.

Like this young university student, there are thousands of others stories, which can be, as difficult as this may sound, even more troubling. Our borders, especially in the tragic aftermath of “9-11” have become barriers that keep us from offering life to and receiving life from the other. The U.S. re-visioning of God proposed in this paper challenges us to welcome the migrating presence of God in the stranger of our lands. As Pope John Paul II, on threshold of the new millennial celebrations reminded us, Christ identifies himself with foreigners in need of shelter: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35).<sup>55</sup>

In becoming persons, communities, universities, churches, and nations that receive others, we take on a “border-like” existence that allows for the mutually creative possibility of relating distinct world-views, cultures, and political realities. In turn, this openness to the other enables us to live our human personhood more in the image of divine personhood. To exist as God exists is to exist in personal communion, moving toward others, giving and receiving from others. As I have argued in this paper, an appropriate U.S. Hispanic image that captures this mystery of divine life is the metaphor of migration. God migrates to create and support human life. God crosses borders to give and receive from the other, especially the marginalized who live “in” the world but who are ultimately not “of” any particular

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<sup>55</sup>John Paul II, “I was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me,” *L'Osservatore Romano* 51 (Dec. 1999): 10. See also “Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity and Diversity,” (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 2000).

world. Perhaps, as Goizueta suggests, the most fundamental political act in the mystery of God is the “act of transgressing boundaries, the act of walking and living with the outcast where he or she walks and lives.”<sup>56</sup>

This initial re-visioning of the mystery of God began with a discussion of God’s presence in the migrating people of Israel and the laws that ensued that reminded Israel of the potential encounter with God in the face of strangers. The New Testament provided further support for our vision of God’s personal life-giving migrations. In the image of Jesus as migrant worker, and the Spirit as God’s immigrant guiding presence, we are challenged today to become co-workers who “see” and “know” the prophetic signs of the Spirit within our landscapes. In so doing, we are to become advocates of life, especially on behalf of the poor and marginalized. The risk-taking and faith-filled journey of migrants should model our human advocacy on behalf of lives that live on the margins. Finally, these systematic reflections invite us to prophetically build in the image of God, a nation and a world of permeable borders. May all of us as a nation of immigrants embrace the following invitation that our ancestors received in faith: “Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels (Hebrews 13:2).

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<sup>56</sup>Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús*, 203.