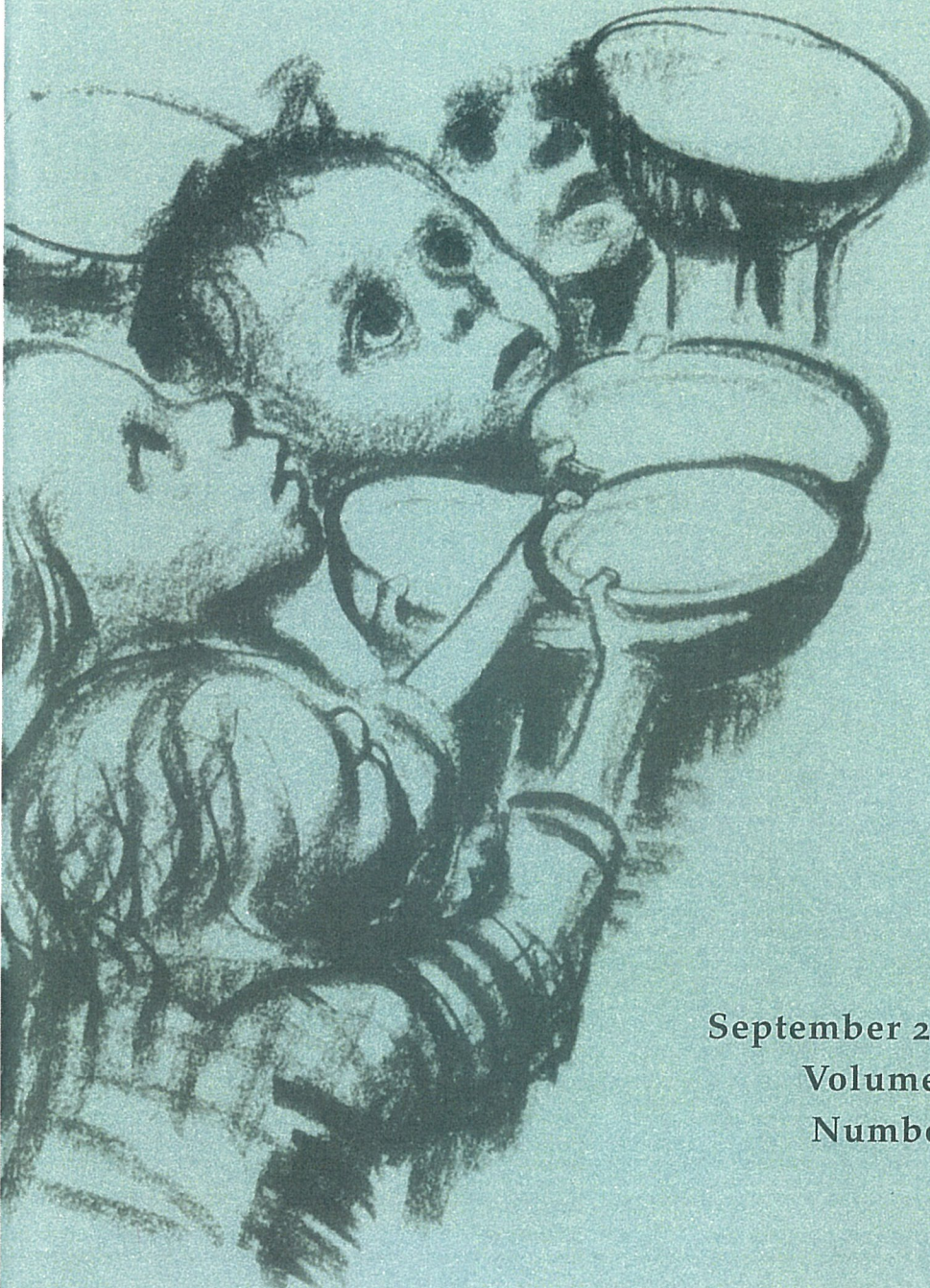


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Fruit of the Vine and Work of Human Hands: Immigration and the Eucharist¹

In November 2003, I attended a Mass in El Paso, Texas along the U.S./Mexico border. We celebrated Mass outside, in the open air, in the dry, rugged and sun-scorched terrain where the United States meets Mexico. This liturgy was a time not only to remember all the saints and all the souls of history but also the thousands of Mexican immigrants who died crossing over the border in the last ten years. Like other liturgies, a large crowd gathered to pray and worship together. Unlike other liturgies, however, a sixteen-foot iron fence divided this community in half, with one side in Mexico and the other side in the United States.

To give expression to our common solidarity as a people of God beyond political constructions, the two communities joined altars on both sides of the wall. Even while border patrol agents and helicopters surrounded the liturgy and kept a strict vigilance, lest any Mexicans cross over, people sang, worshiped and prayed. People prayed for the Mexican and the U.S. governments. People prayed for those who died. And people prayed to understand better their interconnectedness to each other. I remember in particular the sign of peace, when one normally shakes a hand or shares a hug with one's neighbor. Unable to touch my Mexican neighbor except through some small holes in the fence, I became painfully aware of the unity we celebrated but the divisions that we experienced. In the face of the wall between us, it struck me how we could experience concurrently our unity in Christ but our dividedness in our current reality, for no other reason than we were born on different

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¹ This article comes out of a conference on Humanities and the Option for the Poor, University of Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria and a conference on Immigration, Labor and Religion at Harvard Divinity School called "Do This in Memory of Me: Anamnesis and Immigration."

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sides of the fence. It brought to a new level the insight of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., who said that "Sunday at 11:00 (is) the most segregated hour in America."

As I have reflected on this Eucharist at the border, I have been reminded of the integral link between social justice and the Eucharist and in particular between the option for the poor and the Eucharist. Gustavo Gutierrez says that, in the end, the option for the poor is about the Eucharist.² The Eucharist is the recollection of the memory of the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the option for the poor tries to make this connection between what we do in church and how we live in society. In this brief paper, I would like to look at the very complex issue of undocumented immigration in the United States and analyze it through the framework of the Eucharist. As a work of constructive theology, I seek to make this critical link between the Eucharist, immigration and the option for the poor.

A SOCIO-THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC OF A COMPLEX REALITY

For the last fifteen years I have been talking to immigrants, border patrol agents, *coyote* smugglers (who transport people across), ranchers, vigilante groups, educators, congressmen, medical personnel, social workers, human rights advocates and others involved in the complex drama along the U.S./Mexico border. I have spoken to ranchers who have seen their property trashed by immigrants who parade through their land and leave behind water jugs, litter and discarded clothing. I have spoken to educators and hospital administrators who feel increasing financial pressure from the influx of newly arrived immigrants. I have listened to border patrol agents tell stories of being pinned down by gunfire from drug smugglers of cocaine and marijuana. I have spoken to congressional leaders charged with the responsibility of safeguarding a stable economy and protecting the common good, especially since September 11th. I have spoken to *coyote* smugglers who have

² See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, revised edition with a new introduction (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1988, c. 1973); *We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis Books 1984).

tried to guide people across the treacherous terrain along the border and find some profit in doing so. But most of all, I have spoken to immigrants and heard hundreds of stories of what it is like to break from home, cross the border, and enter the United States as an undocumented immigrant.

In speaking with these different groups along the border, I have learned that each constituency believes they have certain rights that belong to them. Even the most fringe, radical group has a point to make, a truth to defend. Some speak of the right to "private property," "American jobs," "National Security," "Civil Law and Order," "a more dignified life," and other such rights. How does one begin to sort through such a complex issue as immigration and come to grasp what are the most important issues? Dare I even ask, what does God have to say about what is happening at the border? While I make no grandiose claims to be God's spokesperson, or even that of the migrants, I would like to offer a Christian framework through which to read the reality of migration. I believe the biblical option for the poor challenges us to give the first hearing to those who suffer the most, and one of the ways we might better be able to hear the voice of the immigrant is by analyzing their voices through the structure of the liturgy. I offer here then a eucharistic hermeneutic of migration and a migratory interpretation of the Eucharist. In other words, my approach to this essay is to offer a theological hermeneutics of a social reality and a social hermeneutics of a theological reality.

IMMIGRATION AND THE EUCHARIST

While at first glance the connection between immigration and the Eucharist is not obvious, on deeper reflection there are many critical correlations between the structure of the eucharistic prayer and the process of migration. As one looks more closely at the dynamics of immigration and the structure of the Eucharist, one can observe many connections between the breaking of the bread and the breaking of their bodies, between the pouring out of Christ's blood for his people and the pouring out of their lives for their families, between Christ's death and resurrection and their own. Immigrants, I believe, offer a new way of looking at the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn gives many immigrants a new way of understanding their struggles.

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As we know, beneath the surface of the scriptures, there are often many social, political and economic struggles.³ The scriptures take shape within the context of these struggles, and one of the key themes that emerges in the biblical narrative is that of migration. The story of Israel and Christianity is in fact a story of a migration. Accordingly, I argue here that immigration is not simply a sociological fact but also a theological event. The people of God came into being through a migration experience when God called Abraham to leave his homeland and venture forth into new and unknown territory, where God's promises would be revealed to him.⁴ In times of famine, Jacob's sons migrated to Egypt in search of food.⁵ In times of slavery, God reached out to the Israelites and set them free.⁶ In times of persecution, Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus became immigrants themselves when they sought refuge in Egypt.⁷ In what some scholars consider to be one of the ancient creeds of faith and one of the cornerstones of early Israelite identity, the book of Deuteronomy also records, "My father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt with a small household and lived there as an alien. But there he became a nation great, strong and numerous."⁸ Their migrations were often marked by intense periods of hardship, hunger, disorientation, poverty, need, loneliness, uncertainty and tremendous vulnerability. In the process of movement, God revealed his covenant to his people.

In time, Jewish people would gather every year in Jerusalem to remember their oppression in Egypt, God's liberating action on their behalf, and their sojourn to the promised land as immigrants. Arguably one of the reasons why Yahweh called Israel to remember his deeds was because of the human tendency towards historical amnesia, especially as one becomes more prosperous. As such, the

³ See Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1985) and Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1997).

⁴ Gen 12:1-9.

⁵ Gen 42:1-2.

⁶ Exod 1-18.

⁷ Matt 2:13.

⁸ Deut 26:5. The notion that this is an early Israelite creed is Gerhard von Rad's thesis, even though its early origin is disputed among contemporary scholars. See Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1966).

core of Israelite faith revolves around Yahweh's command, "So you too must befriend the alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt."⁹

When we forget our personal and collective immigration stories, we easily repeat the same mistakes of the past. George Santayana once said, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This remembrance is a way of acknowledging God's saving activity in their midst. When this happens, immigrants easily become the target of social problems and are quickly typecast as a threat to the common good. Instead of hospitality and openness, many immigrants find scapegoating and rejection, hostility and fear. In contrast, the covenant opens an alternative way of viewing the stranger, perceived as "the other."¹⁰ The covenant not only acknowledges God's goodness to Israel but also calls Israel to respond to newcomers in the same way that Yahweh responded to them.

For Christians, the Passover narrative lays one of the major foundations for Eucharist; the liturgy becomes a time to remember God's saving deeds in history. This process of remembering is an "anamnesis," an ability to recall the extraordinary events of God, especially in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Eucharist recalls not only that we are migrating towards God but that God in the incarnation has first migrated towards the human race.¹¹ Only because of God's *apriori* migration to us can we Christians in turn "migrate" in faith into all that is the reign of God. The recalling of God's saving events in history, then, is not simply a historical exercise that recalls interesting information about the past, but it is a sacramental experience that makes these events effectively present to the Christian community today. This memory is ultimately directed towards the transformation — even the transubstantiation — of the people of God through love. In light of excessive nationalism and xenophobic attitudes in American culture, such a changing

⁹ Deut 10:19.

¹⁰ For more on this subject, see J. Caputo, "Adieu—sans Dieu: Derrida and Levinas" in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God*, ed. by J. Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press 2000) 276–312.

¹¹ Teilhard de Chardin saw this "migration" as a movement towards the final consummation of humanity into what he calls "the omega point." See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper 1960).

of people's minds and hearts might even be more difficult than the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

THE DYNAMICS OF IMMIGRATION AND
THE STRUCTURE OF THE EUCHARIST

As we look at the relationship between the Eucharist and immigration, it is also helpful to look more closely at the underlying structure of the liturgy. The Eucharist, as we have mentioned above, has its roots in the Jewish Passover meal, when the people of Israel remembered their slavery in Egypt, their cries for deliverance, the sending of Moses, God's answer to their pleas, their wandering in the desert, the covenant at Mount Sinai, and the passover from slavery to freedom. The story of the Israelites in Egypt is an ancient story but it is also a recurring story; as the Word of God the passover contains an enduring metaphorical truth that speaks to all generations.

In many respects, we might say the passover narrative is the proto-typical migration story; it remembers the movement of a people from oppression to liberation, from the land of slavery to the promised land. Christian imagery takes the exodus imagery to a new level by saying that the Christian life is a migration from death to life. As John Chrysostom notes, "The Israelites saw miracles. Now you shall see greater and much more brilliant ones than those seen when the Israelites went forth from Egypt. You did not see the Pharaoh and his armies drowned, but you did see the drowning of the devil and his armies. The Israelites passed through the sea; you have passed through the sea of death. They were delivered from the Egyptians; you are set free from the demon. They put aside their servitude to barbarians; you have set aside the far more hazardous servitude to sin."¹² Many migrants,

¹² The translation of this text actually reads "The Jews" rather than "The Israelites." From the time of the Babylonian captivity, "Jews" became the name for the whole nation (2 Macc 9:17; John 4:9; John 7:1; Acts 18:2, 24). The original designation of the Israelite people was the *Hebrews*, as the descendants of Abraham, and I think the use of the word "Israelites" avoids this confusion. *St John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions*, trans. and annotated by Paul W. Harkins (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press 1963) 64, 240.

in particular, see in the exodus story their own stories. They experience themselves as a people who experience economic slavery in their homeland, who cry out for deliverance and who hope for a promised land where they can live with freedom and human dignity.

Beyond the narrative foundation of the passover in the Eucharist, Jesus also follows the rites of Israel. We see these rites in the passover narrative and the four verbs which shape the liturgy. These verbs have their origin in the scriptures, as brought out in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus says, "When the hour came, he took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for, I tell you, I shall not eat it (again) until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God.' Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you (that) from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he *took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them*, saying, 'This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me'."¹³

Some have claimed that the four verbs in the institution narrative came to form the structural core of the liturgy of the Eucharist, and many liturgists today continue to discuss theological importance of these verbs.¹⁴ Liturgiologists today have raised serious methodological questions about this.¹⁵ Nevertheless, these four action verbs from the Last Supper narratives — taking, blessing, breaking, giving — may still provide a hermeneutical key for assessing the process of migration, as a process in which a people take up the decision to leave their homeland, bless God for the gift

¹³ Luke 22:14-20; also, 1 Cor 11:23-25; cf. Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25.

¹⁴ For more on this subject, see Thomas Talley, "From Berakah to Eucharistia: A Reopening Question," *Worship* 50 (March 1976) 115-37; Paul Bradshaw, "Introduction: The Evolution of Early Anaphoras," in idem. (ed.), *Essays on Early Eastern Eucharistic Prayers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press 1997) 1-18; Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster: Dacre Press 1954, 1945).

¹⁵ Paul F. Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 2004); Bryan Spinks, "Mis-shapen: Gregory Dix and the Four-Action Shape of the Liturgy," *Lutheran Quarterly* 4 (1990) 161-77; Andrew B. McGowan, "First regarding the Cups: Papias and the Diversity of Early Eucharistic Practice," *Journal of Theological Studies* 46 (1995) 551-55.

of their lives and families (even in the midst of tremendous suffering), break themselves open so they can feed those they love, and give themselves away for the nourishment of others, even at the cost of their lives.

“HE TOOK THE BREAD”:

MAKING THE DIFFICULT DECISION TO MIGRATE

It is striking that bread is at the heart of the Eucharist and also at the core of the journey for many migrants.¹⁶ When people do not have enough bread to eat, they face the difficult choice of migrating. The bread of the Eucharist recalls the death of the Lord until he comes again. The bread the migrants seek entails undergoing many levels of death, until they can become something more than their current state, something more than their dehumanizing existence. Taking up the decision to migrate involves undergoing death on many levels. It means leaving behind a family, a culture, a way of life, a familiar language and many other things. To relinquish these is a sacrifice, a loss, a psychological death.

For some, migration also means physical death. Since 1994, when border enforcement strategies became more extensive along the U.S./Mexico border, migrants have been forced to travel more dangerous routes in order to enter the country. Trying to evade border patrol agents, infrared devices, motion sensors, aerial surveillance, impermeable walls and other deterrent strategies, migrants now cross the most treacherous terrain to make it into the United States. They will risk freezing to death as they climb ten-thousand-foot mountains, drowning in canals and rivers, and overheating in deserts that reach up to 120 degrees in the shade. They will risk all of these dangers in order to find a job in the United States that no one else wants; most will find work in the agricultural industry, where they will become disposable labor. Their low wages will enable us to have cheap food prices, but often at the expense of their own health and well being.

Most of them migrate not because they want to get rich but because they want to survive. Many will take up the decision to

¹⁶ See also Joseph A. Grassi, *Broken Bread and Broken Bodies*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2004) and Monika Hellwig, *The Eucharist and the Hunger of the World*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward 1992).

migrate in order to put bread on the tables of their families. As Francisco said, "Sometimes my kids come to me and say, 'Daddy, I'm hungry.' And I don't have enough money to buy them food. And I can't tell them I don't have any money, but we don't. I can barely put beans, potatoes and tortillas on the table with what I make. But I feel so bad that I sometimes will go into a store, even if it is two or three blocks away, or even three or four kilometers away, or even in another country in order to get food for my family. I feel awful, but nothing is worse than seeing your hungry children look you in the eyes, knowing you don't have enough to give them. The reason why I'm migrating is not because I want to get rich but because my family is hungry."¹⁷

J. B. Scalabrini said, "For the migrant, one's country is the land that gives them bread," and for many, this country and this bread is the United States. This struggle for the basic necessities of life has a built-in theological dimension. As John Paul II said, "The immediate reasons for the complex reality of human migration differ widely; its ultimate source, however, is the longing for a transcendent horizon of justice, freedom and peace. In short, it testifies to an anxiety which, however indirectly, refers to God, in whom alone man can find the full satisfaction of all his expectations."¹⁸ Like the Eucharist, the migrant journey revolves around the basic elements of life, around bread, around death, around hope, and around the longing for a promised land.

"HE SAID THE BLESSING":

PRAISING GOD IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS

Even amidst the trials of the immigrant, one sees not only hunger for bread but hunger for God. Not all immigrants have strong religious convictions. Not all have deep or profound insights into God. And not all pray or speak about their spiritual lives. They are vulnerable to the same seductions of life as anybody. But in my experience many immigrants experience such radical need that

¹⁷ Immigrant man (Francisco), interview by Daniel Groody, 23 June 2003, Tape Recording, Sasabe, Mexico.

¹⁸ John Paul II, "Message for World Migration Day," *National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic Conference*, <http://www.usccb.org/pope/wmde.htm:3/5/2004>.

they come to realize they have no one else they can depend on but God. Their governments have failed them. Their economies have failed them. And their financial resources have run completely dry. For many, such need opens them up to God in a way that pushes them way beyond the comfort levels of those living in more prosperous conditions. In the midst of the trials of many immigrants, one would expect to find, more often than not, sadness, suffering and pain. These do exist. And they exist in intense measures. But as one listens to these same immigrants one can also hear a deeper current of faith welling up in unsuspect places.

The compelling testimony of their faith emerges in their capacity to believe in a God of life, even when they face life-threatening dangers every day.¹⁹ In a similar way, Israel's most sweeping claims about Yahweh's fidelity are dated to the exile, and Jesus' most radical act of trust is uttered from the cross.²⁰

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider that Jesus praised God in his darkest moment. On the night before he died, Jesus took the bread, he blest God, even though he knew what lay ahead of him on the journey. He blest God even though he was going to be betrayed, even though he knew he was going to be rejected by the chief priests and elders, even though he knew he was going to be crucified. After praising God for his goodness, he sat down at table with his friends. He thanked God when he had every reason to curse him.

Many immigrants I have spoken to show a similar capacity to draw from deep spiritual wells when they face the most "godless" of moments. As immigrants stow away in box-car trains to move northward, suffer theft at the hands of *bandido* gangs or are left behind by *coyote* smugglers to die in the deserts and mountains, one would expect to see migrants cursing the darkness. Some do. But others reveal a different narrative unfolding, similar to what we see unfolding in the eucharistic narrative.

When Consuelo left home to search for bread for her family, she hired a *coyote* smuggler for \$2,000 to take her across the border. She tried to cross the deadly desert four times. On her first attempt,

¹⁹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells*.

²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2003).

she was caught by the border patrol. On her second attempt someone tried to rape her. On her third attempt she was robbed at gun point by border slugs. And on her fourth attempt, she ran out of food and water and almost died. After hallucinations and headaches, she started throwing up, until she could barely see straight. After she had a chance to recover, she wanted to try again, because she said her family at home depended on her. It was then that I met her, and I asked her about her life. To a great extent, I expected her to complain about how much she suffered, about how many problems she had, about all she has been through. What amazed me the most, however, was that throughout the conversation she never ceased blessing God for all he had done and for all she has received.

How does life's pain get transformed into such gratitude? We are left, really, with only two possibilities: such faith is either delusional in the Freudian sense or it is graced in the Christian sense. This phenomenon needs more sustained, critical yet humble reflection, or else I think we easily miss or dismiss the subtle traces of the Spirit. I believe there is much more going on here than meets the eye, than can be apprehended from the surface, than can be judged and easily dismissed from a "critical distance," as is also the case in the Eucharist. From the perspective of human observation, we can only see in the immigrants' journey a struggle for the ordinary elements of life, for bread, for drink. From the perspective of faith, however, one sees a far greater process going on, even, I dare say, a transubstantiation of this bread and wine of their struggles into an entirely new way of living and being in the world.

"HE BROKE THE BREAD":

BROKEN BODIES AND THE FRACTION RITE

At the Last Supper, after Jesus took bread and said the blessing, he broke the bread. The breaking of bread is also an important part of the liturgy of the Eucharist. We do this breaking at the fraction rite, and we remember how Jesus was broken for others so that they might be reconciled with God the Father through him. For the religious leaders of his day, Jesus was put to death because they believed he was disposable. It was better that he die than the whole people perish, even though his brokenness, sacramentalized

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in this bread, would give redemptive nourishment for all who believe.²¹

Like Jesus, in their efforts to nourish their families, migrants are broken on a daily basis. They are broken to the point of death in the deserts they cross, where they die of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. They are broken to the point of death in the canals they cross, where they drown because of strong undercurrents and the inability to swim. They are broken to the point of death when they freeze to death in the mountains, where they encounter freak snow storms along the treacherous migration routes. In the last ten years, more than 3,000 immigrants have died crossing the border, and each day an immigrant continues to die trying to cross into the United States.

In addition, an immigrant a day is broken to the point of death in the workplace. According to a recent study by the Associated Press, the jobs that lure Mexican workers to the United States are killing at alarming rates.²² Even though the U.S. workplace grows safer overall, it has become more dangerous for the undocumented, Mexican immigrants, and some have called these deaths "a worsening epidemic."²³ In the mid-1990s, Mexicans were about 30 percent more likely to die on the job than native-born workers; now they are about 80 percent more likely. In several Southern and Western states it is even worse, where a Mexican worker is four times more likely to die than the average U.S.-born worker. These accidental deaths are almost always preventable and often gruesome: workers are impaled, shredded in machinery, and buried alive. Many die in the prime of their lives, and some are as young as fifteen years old. They die cutting North Carolina tobacco and Nebraska beef, chopping down trees in Colorado, welding a balcony in Florida, trimming grass at a Las Vegas golf course and falling from scaffolding in Georgia.²⁴ In addition to those who die in the workplace, many more are maimed or disabled, and most are left without worker's compensation or health care benefits.

²¹ John 11:50.

²² *The Associated Press*, http://customwire.ap.org/dynamic/stories/D/DYING_TO_WORK?SITE=LALAF&SECTION=HOME:3/21/2004.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Why is all this happening? It is happening because undocumented Mexican labor is cheap. It is happening because immigrant workers are disposable labor. This equation has benefits for consumers, who, unlike Europeans, enjoy inexpensive food prices. Yet the cheap price of food comes at a great cost, because it comes at the expense of the lives of many undocumented immigrants. Their labor is cheap because they are desperate. And they are desperate because they have neither jobs in their homeland nor papers in the foreign land of the United States. Their socioeconomic situation makes them vulnerable, and in their vulnerability they are often exploited and broken.

And if they are not physically broken, many others undergo another kind of brokenness. Ironically, taking up the decision to look for bread for the sake of the family often breaks up the family. While many begin with the intention of working in the United States for only a few years and then returning home, many end up staying in the United States, in part because of the difficulties of migrating and the challenges of returning. Many migrants make nothing short of a covenant with their families in Mexico that they will migrate north for a few years and then return home. Some manage to do so; others do not. Some maintain fidelity to their families over long periods of time and long distances; others do not. Some end up forming new families in the United States. Ironically, the desire to provide for the family, in many cases, ends up breaking up the families. The experience of migration is an experience of brokenness. Family brokenness. Cultural brokenness. Personal brokenness. And many other types of brokenness. The immigrant is left with a tragic irony: the one who brings bread to the table of the average American is the one who is broken open so that others may be nourished. What offers hope to migrants is that they recognize Jesus in "the breaking of the bread," they recognize in the narrative of Jesus their own narrative.

"AND GAVE IT TO HIS DISCIPLES":

POURING OUT THEIR LIVES FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS
After Jesus took bread, blest it and broke it, he shared it with his disciples. It is here that he offers his body and blood so that others can be united with him in a new covenant, a new relationship. In the giving of his own life he nourished his disciples, so that they,

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in turn, could give themselves in a life of service to others, whatever it cost them.

When we think of the Eucharist, we think of bread, we think of wine. We reflect on the words, "this is my body, this is my blood." But less often do we reflect on the words in the Order of Mass, less frequently do we think of the Eucharist in terms of "the fruit of the vine and the work of human hands." Given that the agricultural industry in the United States is sustained largely through immigrant labor, the bread and wine that come to the table is very often the result of immigrant labor.²⁵ And in many parts of the country, this kind of labor is a modern-day slavery.²⁶ And such slavery brings us face to face not only with the immigrant story but the passover story all over again.

Christ's ministry is institutionalized in the Eucharist; it tells the story of salvation, of freedom, and of liberation in ritual form. In our contemporary society we not only forget where we have come from but we also lose sight of where we are going and who we want to become in our journey through life. If our eucharistic celebration is not intimately connected to the larger liturgy of life, to the larger search for justice, to fighting to free those who are enslaved, then it has no meaning, and singing "alleluia," has no significance. Amos warns that worship without justice is idolatry.²⁷ If

²⁵ California Statistics are much higher than other states. According to the American Immigration Law Foundation, Mexican immigrants make up four percent of the U.S. workforce, and are located in key sectors of the economy. Meat-packing tops the list with a workforce of 26.8 percent Mexican immigrants. Agriculture comes next with 22.9 percent. Manufacture of apparel, plastics and furniture are in the 10–15 percent range. And Mexican immigrants now make up nearly 10 percent of the construction industry.

²⁶ As John Bowe notes, "Modern slavery exists not because today's workers are immigrants or because some of them don't have papers but because agriculture has always managed to sidestep the labor rules that are imposed upon other industries. When the federal minimum-wage law was enacted in 1938, farmworkers were excluded from its provisions, and remained so for nearly thirty years. Even today, farmworkers, unlike other hourly workers, are denied the right to overtime pay. In many states, they are excluded from workers' compensation and unemployment benefits. Farmworkers receive no medical insurance or sick leave and are denied the right to organize. "There's no other industry in America where employers have as much power over their employees." John Bowe, "Nobodies: Does Slavery Exist in America?" *The New Yorker* (23 April 2003) 122.

²⁷ Amos 5:21-27.

Christians hunger to receive the bread of life at liturgy but have no hunger to feed those whose life is threatened and who are in need of bread today, they ignore Christ.

On the altar, then, we see not only the body and the blood of Christ, but we see in the bread and the wine the hands, the feet, the labor, the sweat of those who worked in the fields. We see those who toiled the land so grain could be planted under the hot sun. We see those who fumigated the vines, even while their eyes turned red, their lungs filled with pesticides and their children were born with birth defects because of it. We see those who harvested the grapes, even for less than minimum wage, so they could send what they earned to their families in Mexico. We see those who woke up at four o'clock in the morning, baked bread or worked in the wineries, those who drove trucks and finally brought the bread and wine to our doors, to our altars. In the Eucharist, we see not only bread and wine but we see the footprints of the immigrant. In the Eucharist, we see in faith not only the body and blood of Christ; we also see the body and blood of the migrant, the bodies of the crucified, who also poured out their families so that they might eat and that we might eat, so that they might drink and we might drink, even if it cost them their lives. It is in this spirit that the bishops of the United States and Mexico write when they seek to awaken their peoples to the mysterious presence of the crucified and risen Lord in the person of the migrant and to renew in them the values of the Kingdom of God that he proclaimed.²⁸

**"DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME": REMEMBERING THE
IMMIGRANT, OPTING FOR THE POOR**

In summary, then, as we look at the complex reality of migration, and see the various voices that compete for a hearing, one of the most neglected voices is the theological perspective. I offer here this eucharistic perspective of migration and this migratory perspective of the Eucharist precisely so that the debate might be re-framed in terms of human life and human dignity rather than in terms of the socio-economic and political forces which often govern the debate. In the narrative of Jesus we see how he "took the

²⁸ <http://www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.htm>, no. 3.

bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to [his disciples].” In the narrative of the immigrants, we see how they take up the difficult decision to migrate, bless God in the midst of adversity, break themselves open so they can feed those they love, and give themselves away for the nourishment of others, even at the cost of their own lives. Looking at migration through this Christian framework, I believe, can help us see more clearly a political dimension of spirituality and a spiritual dimension of politics and to see ultimately this integral connection between liturgy and life.²⁹

The Eucharist is not an escape from reality while it immerses itself in the realm of the Spirit but a challenge to enter more deeply into these struggles while the people of God wait in eschatological hope for the fulfillment of this reign of God in history. Politics is not an escape from the spiritual realm while it deals with the difficult affairs of “reality.” A political reality that creates a society where the richest prosper while the poor suffer in want is a society in need of conversion. In our globalized world, politics cannot be concerned with the interest of the few or even the interests only of a nation but must work for the benefit of all and particularly the most vulnerable in society. The true moral worth of any society, as noted in Catholic social teaching, is how it treats its most vulnerable members.

As Gustavo Gutierrez says, the “Eucharist is a resume of our lives and a summary of the Christian message.” He also says, “to remember Jesus is to remember his preference for the least of our brothers and sisters.” To this, Benedict XVI adds that the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is the beginning of our own transformation, from which we are called to go forth into the world until God will be all in all (1 Cor 15:28).³⁰ To remember in the abstract that Jesus entered our history is not difficult. It is much more difficult to understand Jesus’ memory of

²⁹ For more on constructive theology, see Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology* (New York: Orbis Books 2002); Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM 1985); Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. and expanded ed., Faith and Cultures series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2002). See also Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1994).

³⁰ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20050821_20th-world-youth-day_en.html.

the poor as rooted in our own day and age and our own concrete reality.³¹ Our memory of Jesus is a memory of those he had a preference for; in the end, our memory of God is intimately related to a memory of the God of life, who reaches out to everyone but especially those whose life is most threatened, especially those like the immigrants who risk life and death every day. The liturgy of the Eucharist is a place where we seek to develop a community that transcends all borders, that sees in the eyes of the immigrant stranger a brother, a sister and a real presence of Christ.

³¹ For more on reality as the foundational dimension of liberation theology, see Ignacio Ellacuría, "Historicidad de la Salvación Cristiana," ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, vol. 1, *Mysterium Liberationis: Conceptos Fundamentales de la Teología de la Liberación* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta 1990); Xavier Zubiri, *El hombre y Dios*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría (Madrid: Alianza Editorial Fundación Zubiri 1984).