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REFLECTIONS ON MARTIN LUTHER'S TEACHING ON HOSPITALITY TOWARD EXILES

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LEOPOLDO A. SÁNCHEZ M.

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The Church is the House of Abraham

Reflecting on Martin Luther's Teaching on Hospitality toward Exiles

Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.

According to the United Nations, more than 65 million people (about 23 million of them refugees) are counted as forcibly displaced due to persecution, war, and violence.[1] Only one percent are resettled each year, and over half of them are children. The numbers are staggering. Closer to home, about three-quarters of the US foreign-born population (33.8 million) are lawful immigrants, and some 11 million are unauthorized immigrants.[2] In a world experiencing the greatest transnational movement of refugees and immigrants in history, including those coming to our shores and their children, one is right to ask what Lutheran theology has to contribute to our current situation. As Lutheran churches around the world commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is appropriate to ask if Martin Luther, the Reformer himself, said anything specifically on exiles.

In the middle section of this essay, I explore Luther's own thoughts on exiles in his study of Abraham's hospitality in Genesis 18, a section of his *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545). I will preface Luther's teaching with some thoughts on the thorny issue of terminology when referring to migrant peoples today, focusing ultimately on what Luther means more specifically by the term "exile." I will conclude by suggesting how the Reformer's teaching might offer us some guide posts as we think about the shape of the individual Christian's, and the church's, ministry among immigrants in the right-hand realm, as well as the potential role of Christians or groups of Christians as residents of the left-hand realm in assessing immigration issues.

My goal in this essay is to argue neither for *the* Lutheran church's strategy for working or doing ministry among exiles nor for *the* Lutheran public policy for the state toward exiles. Nor is my primary intention to understand how Luther's commentary on Genesis 18 fits in the broader framework of all the *Lectures on Genesis* or, more broadly, his political or ethical writings as a whole. My main goal is simply to let the mature Luther's own voice be heard on Abraham's hospitality in order to understand how the Reformer frames biblically and theologically his thinking about exiles and what he seems to suggest Christians should do as a result. While Lutherans will typically agree on the what of hospitality toward exiles, they will often have various takes on how one should deal with exiles in both realms. Therefore, my concluding thoughts on ways Luther's thought can inform our thinking today are not meant to be read as exhaustive or normative, but as suggestive and as part of a broader and ongoing conversation.

Who Is an Exile? A Word on Terminology

A word on terminology will be helpful right from the start. One could make a case that, from a broad theological perspective, terms like exile, sojourner, stranger, resident alien, foreigner, and immigrant fall within the semantic field of the Hebrew word *gēr* and the Greek word *xenos*, and therefore, can be used interchangeably to refer to someone who lives in a land not his or her own. Broadly speaking, these terms would apply, for instance, to Abraham who left Ur of the Chaldeans and lived as a stranger in the land of Canaan; Israel which lived as an exile in bondage to Egypt; Ruth who was a foreigner in Naomi's land; Esther who became the foreign wife of a Persian king; Daniel who served Babylonian and Persian kings in exile; and even Jesus who fled to Egypt with his parents for a while during Herod's persecution. In his reflections on Genesis, chapter 18, Luther uses the Latin terms *hospes* (stranger) and *peregrinus* (foreigner) to render the Greek *xenos*.[3] As a synonym, Luther also uses various conjugations of the words *exul* for the person in exile and *exilium* for the experience of exile itself. For the sake of convenience and consistency, we will simply retain the translation of the American edition of *Luther's Works*, which renders Luther's Latin terms with the English word "exile."

From the perspective of modern nation states with their own laws and policies for migrant peoples, some or all of the terms above could mean entirely different things. In the US for example, *immigrant* is a technical term for someone who has been admitted to live in the country as a lawful permanent resident. There is even a category of *nonimmigrant*, which applies to people who are permitted to enter the US for a limited time (e.g., under a student, tourist, or religious visa). While *asylees* and *refugees* may share experiences of being forced to flee their homelands for fear of various kinds of persecution or misfortune, the former are already in the country hoping for asylum and the latter are outside the country they hope to be resettled in. Refugees in particular go through a strenuous vetting process which can take many years prior to resettlement. Then, there are immigrants who are in the country illegally, or without proper documentation or authorization, due to a variety of reasons. Having said all that, when terms like immigration law or immigration policy are used in everyday language, they are often employed as a broader umbrella term to designate any federal regulations dealing with the transit of people across national borders, including the status of nonimmigrant visa holders, permanent residents, refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented or unauthorized immigrants. At the end of the essay, we often make use of this broader sense of the terms *immigrants* and *immigration* to refer, in general terms and respectively, to persons and policies dealing with foreign-born people who have left their countries of origin for the US.

As far as Luther's use of the term is concerned, who exactly is an exile? In his *Lectures on Genesis*, exiles are first of all Christians who are persecuted for the sake of the gospel and are seeking refuge in German lands.[4] He also makes room for a broader category of exiles who migrate to German lands because of various misfortunes. We should, therefore, keep Luther's use of terminology in mind as we hear him reflect on Abraham's hospitality to the strangers at Mamre who were fleeing ungodly Sodom; the identity of Adam and the Old Testament church as an exiled community in the world; Abraham's own identity as an exile, as well as the identity of New Testament saints such as Protestants under persecution at the time of

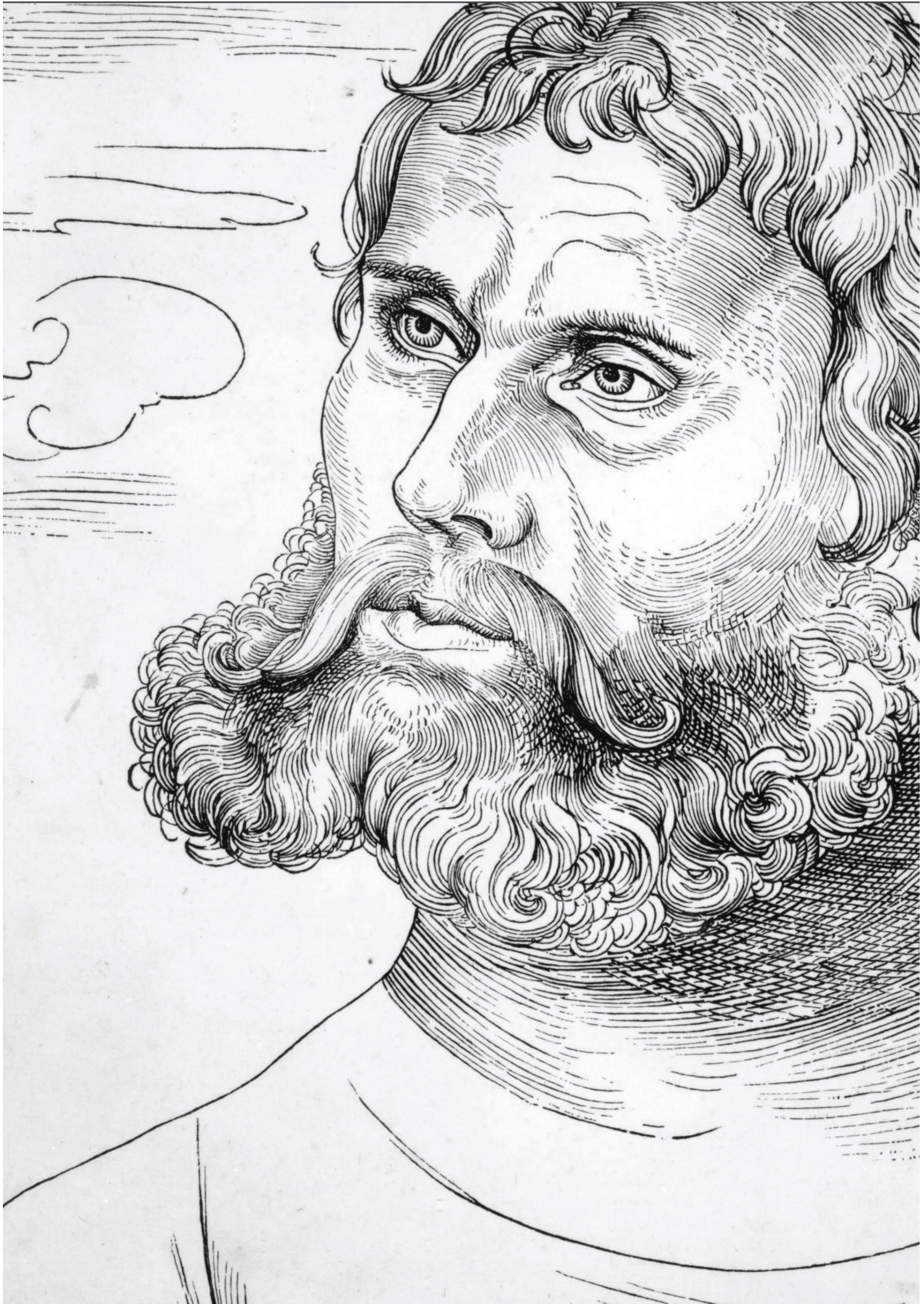

Image: Lucas Cranach the Elder's woodcut portrait (1522) of Martin Luther as "Junker Jorg," his assumed identity during his stay at Wartburg Castle as a "displaced person." (Credit: Metropolitan Museum of Art, via Wikimedia Commons)

the Reformation; and the status of other migrants who are not persecuted for their Christian faith but seek refuge from other types of hardships. All of these categories of persons and situations are included under the term "exile" in Luther's exposition.

Was Luther an exile himself? Strictly speaking, none of the terms suggested thus far would apply to Luther because they deal with persons who have left their homeland for another country. Although Luther faced persecution and death threats, spending ten months in hiding at the Wartburg Castle in 1521, he still remained under the protectorate of his prince in German lands. Luther was, at least for a while, what we call today a displaced person—one who is forced to move to a different area of his homeland due to persecution or misfortune. Here Luther differs from John Calvin, who was literally an exile in Geneva—a city where hundreds of Christians fled or passed by mostly due to religious persecution. Recently, Reformed theologians have argued that Calvin's identity as an exile shaped significantly his theological and practical approach to dealing with exiles flowing into the city from other lands. Rosario Rodríguez has shown that Calvin's experience as a refugee, exile, and resident alien in Geneva had an influence on his view of the church's call to practice hospitality towards strangers in society.[5] He suggests that Calvin's view of the diaconate as a divinely ordained office and his support of institutions of assistance to refugees and the poor in Geneva remain an example for us today of the need for the church's ongoing commitment to vulnerable neighbors in our midst.[6]

Even though Luther is not, technically speaking, a refugee or exile by today's terminology, he nevertheless knew at some existential level the hardships of the religiously persecuted and of living in a place not his own, apart from family and friends and his evangelical work. As far as the Reformer is concerned, his experience is one of exile from his Wittenberg "home." Indeed, Luther likens his experience to that of the Apostle John's by calling his time at Wartburg his "Patmos." There seems to be no indication in Luther's writings that his experience as an exile at Wartburg explicitly shaped his concern for exiles in his own day. Accounts of Luther's exile at Wartburg focus more on his spiritual struggles (Lat. *tentatio*, Ger. *Anfechtung*), and discuss his criticism of monastic vows or his translation of the New Testament into German.[7] Nothing is said on how Luther's own experience colored his outlook on the struggles of other exiles. While we cannot exclude the possibility that Luther's exile shaped his own thinking on exiles, we will simply seek a more productive venue and explore what Luther actually says on exiles in his *Lectures on Genesis*, focusing on his teaching on Abraham as our example of hospitality.

Luther on Exiles: The Church as the House of Abraham in the World

In North America, a number of Christian writers and official church bodies have written on exiles, sojourners, or strangers, mainly from the perspective of Scripture and pastoral responses to ministry and justice work among immigrants today. Some work has also been done from the perspective of how theological traditions draw from their normative confessional documents, narratives, and/or frameworks to reflect on immigrants and immigration issues

Luther sees the virtue of hospitality as a mark of the church.

today.[8] Among Lutherans, some work has been done on the ways Luther's reflections on the two realms or kingdoms and his teaching on vocation can be used in part as a lens to discuss immigration reform.[9] Surprisingly, less has been done on what Luther's teaching specifically on hospitality toward exiles or strangers might offer to this ongoing discussion. Let us then turn to a place in his writings where he specifically deals with how Christians should approach these neighbors both as members of the church and as members of society in the realm of the state.

Luther was, at least for a while, what we call today a displaced person—one who is forced to move to a different area of his homeland due to persecution or misfortune.

In the *Lectures on Genesis*, Luther's commentary on chapter 18, where Abraham is visited by the three men at Mamre, extols the patriarch as "a beautiful moral example of hospitality."[10] When the letter to the Hebrews exhorts Christians, "do not neglect hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels" (Heb 13:2), the writer is alluding to Abraham's kind actions toward the three strangers whom he welcomed (LW 3:178). By asserting that "there is hospitality wherever the church is" (*Est autem hospitalitas, ubicunque Ecclesia est*) (LW 3:178; WA 43:2.29–30), Luther sees the virtue of hospitality as a mark of the church, "so that those who want to be true members of the church" (*Qui igitur Ecclesia membra vera esse cupiunt*) remember and are "encouraged" to practice it.[11] Since in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord commanded his disciples to "give to him who begs from you" (Mt. 5:42), the church possesses "a common treasury" through which members care for each other spiritually "not only by teaching" but also bodily "by showing kindness and giving assistance."[12] Such care makes the church a place of "refreshment" (*refectionem*) for the weary (LW 3:178).

Appealing to a representative Christology, according to which "whatever you did to the least of mine, you did to me" (Mt. 25:40), Luther reads Abraham's service to the three strangers as an embodiment of the church's hospitality toward the Lord himself who comes to us in the form of his needy disciples, "especially the strangers whose lot is rather hard."[13] Following the tradition of seeing the three visitors at Mamre as a theophany of the Lord himself, Luther argues that those who practice the "virtue" (*virtutis*) of hospitality like Abraham are not simply "receiving a human being but . . . the Son of God Himself" (LW 3:178; WA 43:3.1–5). Therefore, "even though we do not have the custom of prostrating ourselves, yet we should prostrate ourselves in our hearts before brethren because of Christ, who dwells in them."[14] Abraham thought of the three visitors as brethren of the Lord, exiles who had no safe haven in Sodom or surrounding nations, and he bows before them due to his "regard for the Lord, whom he is worshipping in the persons of these guests."[15] Since inhospitality towards strangers amounts to a neglect of the Lord, Luther refers to it as "hideous" (*foedius*), a form of "inhumanity or cruelty" (*immanitatem vel crudelitatem*) which will be punishable with eternal separation from the Lord when he returns on the last day and says, "I was a foreigner or a stranger and you did not receive me" (Mt. 25:43) (LW 3:178).

According to Luther, Abraham learned hospitality from two sources. First, he learned it from the practice of the church toward exiles persecuted on account of God's word; and second, from his own experience as an exile. It was Satan's hatred of God's word that led to his deceiving of godly Adam and his expulsion from paradise, making him the world's first "stranger and exile" (*peregrinum et exulem*).[16] Since then, Satan has made miserable the lives of God's people, making them objects of "the hatred of the world," driving them "out of their homes" into "exile by whatever means he could" (LW 3:179). Given that "persecutions and exiles" (*persecutiones et exilia*) are often common among those on whom the light of the word has shone, including persecuted saints at the time of the Reformation, the church has been at all times "a sort of refuge of the exiles and the poor" (*ceu asylum quoddam exulum et pauperum*).[17] Due to the oppression from "the pope, the bishops, and tyrannical princes," godly exiles suffer "misery, thirst, hunger," and thus "there should an Abraham, and . . . some little domain of a godly prince in which there can be room for such people."[18] Luther's frustration about believers being driven into exile by both church and state authorities convinces him that hospitality toward exiles must be the concern not only of godly Christians but also conscientious princes and other governing authorities.

When Luther defines "true strangers" (*veros peregrinos*) as "those who live in exile because of the Word" (*qui exulant propter verbum*), he does so in contrast to those monks who choose forms of self-imposed exile to show off and trust in their "own righteousness" (LW 3:179–80; WA 43:3.38–42). Since many "ministers of the churches . . . are now married and no longer live in impure celibacy," not only "single persons . . . but entire families are now in exile because of their confession of the Word," and it would be "a crime not to help these."[19] On account of "God's command" (*mandato Dei*), the church must never forget the plight of his saints and must be ready "to practice works of mercy, to feed the hungry and the thirsty, to receive exiles hospitably, to comfort prisoners, and to visit the sick" (LW 3:180; WA 43:4.6–8). Following the example of Abraham, whose "house was open to all" and who "joyfully received strangers," Luther exhorts Christians with these words: "Hence, if we want to be Christians (*Si igitur volumus Christiani esse*), let our homes be open to exiles, and let us assist and refresh them."[20] The church is the house (*domus*) of Abraham in the world,[21] "for where there is no house, there can be no hospitality."[22]

Second, Abraham learned hospitality from his own experience as an exile after leaving Ur and wandering through Canaan and several other places. As an exile, Abraham "often endured the rigors of the weather in the open country and under the sky; he was often troubled by hunger, often by thirst . . . for the term 'exile' includes countless hardships and perils" (LW 3:180). Such hardships, in Luther's estimation, make the patriarch more sensitive to the plight of sojourners and "enable him to be gentle, kind, and generous toward exiles" (LW 3:180). During his sojourn, Abraham encountered difficulties but also became the object of "the services of pious people" who welcomed him, and "from such experience he learned this rule, that he who receives a brother who is in exile because of the Word receives God Himself in the person of such a brother."[23] Luther expects various sectors of society to contribute toward the cause of exile relief, but is disappointed in the lack of generosity of "the nobles, the burghers, and the peasants" who in his estimation are not helping "the churches with a single obol to be able to be generous toward exiles."[24]

Luther's appeal to show hospitality to strangers under persecution is broad enough to include a spectrum of Christendom with various means of support and from all stations in life, including church, family, workers, the economic sector, and government officials.

In contrast to the papacy's persecution "against the ministers of the Word, against the heads of households, even against women and children," Luther highlights the hospitality of "our most illustrious Prince," Elector John Frederick the Magnanimous (1503–1554), who has offered his protection to "miserable exiles, who flee for refuge" (*miseri exules, quo confugiat*).[25] In 1533 the zealous Catholic Duke George of Saxony ordered the Leipzig city council to find out which citizens were not adhering to the Catholic faith and then force them to sell their possessions and leave.[26] When the Duke found out that Luther advised the Leipzigers not to cooperate with this request because he was acting like a Herod or Pilate bent on murdering God's people because of their confession of the word, the Duke complained to his relative John Frederick. Asking the Duke to stop acting like Saul and become instead a Paul, the Elector came to Luther's defense by arguing that, while he would not agree with rebellion against temporal authority, the theologian nevertheless had the duty to comfort Christians under persecution. Considering the magnanimity of the Elector's defense of Luther's own spiritual obligation to exiles, we see why the Reformer praised his Elector's hospitality toward them.[27]

In his commentary on Genesis 18, Luther also considers the matter of people who trick the church into giving them things even though they are not truly in need. In particular, he has in mind monks who beg for things without really needing to do so. He also speaks of other "idle hypocrites who are accustomed to begging [*ociosi hypocritae assueti ad mendicationem*]; and if you give them a handout, they at once spend it on gambling and carousing."[28] Just like some believing widows in Paul's day who burdened churches even though they had family members who could take care of them, there are also people who come to churches "under the pretense of being exiles in distress" (*sub nomine afflictorum exulum*) because of their faith or confession, but actually lack nothing and thus end up becoming "an unfair burden" (*iniquum onus*) on the churches.[29] Perhaps deeply disturbed by the universal problem of false beggars in his day, Luther notes that even hospitable Abraham must have come across people who abused his generosity.[30] Still, while benefactors waste their beneficence on such people, this should not deter them from being liberal in their giving since "the kind act which is lost on an evil and ungrateful person is not lost on Christ, in whose name we are generous."[31]

Luther seeks a balance between caution and kindness, a call for discerning *how* one extends hospitality without denying the *what* of hospitality, a call for prudent generosity without denying its character as a divine command. Luther notes, for instance, that just as "we should not intentionally and knowingly support the idleness of slothful people, so, when we have been deceived, we should not give up this eagerness to do good to others" (LW 3:183). If Christ healed the ten lepers even though he knew only one would return to give thanks, how much more should we "not on this account give up our eagerness to confer benefits on others" (LW 3:183). While Luther sees assistance to the needy as God's command, he also asks both churches and the state to discern whether the one asking for help is truly in need— a discernment that is especially prudent, in the realm of the state,

given the priority that should generally be given to needy citizens already living in the land over other neighbors.[32] Overall, Luther's main concern in Genesis 18 is not with exiles being a burden on others if the cause for assistance is legitimate, but rather with wasting kindness on impostors that could be best used toward others who are really in need.

Although Luther focuses on exiles who flee to German lands due to religious persecution, he also calls Christians to be generous toward "those who are strangers in the state, provided that they are not manifestly evil" (*qui civiliter sunt peregrini, modo non sint aperte mali*) (LW 3:183; WA 43:6.28–29). For instance, if a "Turk or Tartar" came to us as a "stranger" and "in distress" we should not disregard him "even though he is not suffering because of the Word" (LW 3:183–184). Even if a Christian's first responsibility is to those of "the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10), "those who profess the same doctrine with us and for this reason suffer persecution," they are also called to help others "who experience misfortune" and, moreover, to follow Christ's teaching which includes showing "kindness also to our enemies" (LW 3:185). While Abraham's hospitality to the three visitors is explained by Luther in terms of assisting fellow believers, the example of Christ calls us to deal generously with other strangers outside the church who come into our lands, as long as they are not a danger to the citizens of the land, and their presence in our midst follows from legitimate misfortunes experienced in their homelands. Luther does not define what these misfortunes are, but they include events such as wars, famine, and fear of persecution or death for a variety of reasons.

Luther sees the Genesis account of Abraham's hospitality as unparalleled. Not only is this kind hospitality toward strangers hard to find in the world, but in the case of Abraham it is portrayed as a prime example of hospitality for the church in the New Testament.[33] Beyond these features, what makes the account unparalleled for Luther is that the patriarch welcomes his "unknown guests with such reverence, falls to the ground, and receives them." Not only does Abraham exalt the strangers but also takes a position of humility toward them in that "he minimizes his possessions" and does not adorn "his service with words" (LW 3:186). There is a self-effacing character to Abraham's hospitality. He does not attract attention to the gifts he shares with others and definitely not to the things he might lose by sharing with others. He does not publicize his good works. His kindness is entirely oriented toward the neighbor.

Faith and love go hand in hand in Luther's description of Abraham's hospitality. He calls the church to see Abraham both as "a father of faith" (*patrem fidei*) and as "a father of good works (*patrem bonorum operum*) . . . a most beautiful example of love, gentleness, kindness, and all virtues" (LW 3:185; WA 43:7.28–29). Even in Genesis 18 Luther presents Abraham "not so much as a father of faith as a father of good works" (LW 3:190); he also points out that "it is faith . . . that makes him so eager and ready" to be hospitable

What we learn from Abraham is a concrete way to live by faith in the world, one which happens to be filled with exiles among us because of the misfortunes of life.

(LW 3:195). When we look at strangers through the "eyes of the flesh" (*oculi carnis*), their "bodily appearance is a hindrance to us," but when we look at them with the "inner eyes of faith" (*internis oculi . . . fide*) we see our "truly present Guest" and that "God is coming" to us in his saints.[34] Acting according to the flesh that still clings to them in this life, Christians are often "slow" to be hospitable "and are either displeased or grumble when brethren arrive—these are signs of a faith which, if not altogether dead, is nevertheless asleep and very lazy" (LW 3:196). For this reason, the "examples" of Abraham "must be put before the churches and carefully impressed" upon the faithful.[35] What we learn from Abraham is a concrete way to live by faith in the world, one which happens to be filled with exiles among us because of the misfortunes of life.

Faith and love go hand in hand in Luther's description of Abraham's hospitality.

Embodying Abraham's Faith: Lessons for Hospitality toward Exiles Today

At the end of his study of second-century understandings of Christian identity through the lens of the biblical language of aliens or strangers in the world, Benjamin Dunning notes that the Christian's sense of being "other" raises the issue of how they should relate to people outside the Christian community who are also "other." The author notes that one option to deal with this issue lies in highlighting "the possibility that an identity rooted in an alien status may lead to greater concern for (and solidarity with) others who are marginalized."[36] This is precisely what Luther does in his own way by arguing that Abraham's own identity as a stranger taught him to be hospitable to strangers, and moreover, that by taking on the identity of the patriarch the church becomes an Abraham or the "house" of Abraham in a world filled with exiles. By faith, the church embodies Abraham's hospitality toward exiles as a mark of her Christian identity.

Luther speaks of the church's hospitality toward exiles suffering for their confession of the faith, but also toward all kinds of exiles suffering from various catastrophes and hardships. In Luther's language, Christians are called to imitate Abraham by exercising both "brotherly love" toward the saints and "general kindness" toward others.

> This is the historical meaning of this passage and an outstanding praise of hospitality, in order that we may be sure that God Himself is in our home, is being fed at our house, is lying down and resting as often as some pious brother in exile because of the Gospel comes to us and is received hospitably by us. This is called brotherly love or Christian charity; it is greater than that general kindness which is extended even to strangers and enemies when they are in need of our aid. Among our adversaries there is neither; for they hate us because of our confession, and for this reason they persecute, proscribe, and even kill us. Moreover, they have the utmost hatred for those who are their enemies in civil life. Therefore hospitality and brotherly love are found only among true Christians and in the church. (LW 3:189)

In this text, Luther elevates the church's "brotherly love, or Christian charity" (*Philadelphia, seu Christiana charitas*) for her own children above her "general kindness" (*generali beneficentia*) toward strangers and enemies outside her household (WA 43:10.12–13). The former love "is greater" (*maior est*) than the latter not necessarily in terms of the type of aid given to the needy, but in terms of the bond of hospitality that God's people have with persecuted ministers of the word, their families, and other Christians with whom they share a common faith.

The most basic lesson we can draw from Luther's teaching for the church today is that her children become the house of Abraham in the world by extending the hand of mercy to exiles, both Christians and others. This mercy can be extended to immigrants today regardless of factors such as their religious commitments or their legal status in the state. Such hospitality will often be exercised within the bounds of the law, and it can include assisting people with food, clothing, shelter, medical assistance, and psychological counseling; childcare and parochial school education; immigration legal services; and visiting immigrants in detention centers.[37]

This is, however, easier said than done. In his own day, Luther was appalled at how little Christians extended the hand of welcome to exiles and how little Christians working in various sectors of society actually supported the churches to assist them. Luther's suggestion to deal with this problem lies in instructing Christians in the examples of Abraham and others who did not let the offensive appearance of exiles and strangers distract them from their duty to show them hospitality. Today the appearance of many refugees and immigrants may be offensive among some Christians because they come from a religious background other than their own or because they have broken the law. While Luther admits that some exiles might have an evil intent, he also notes that not all are a danger to others or lazy opportunists. Although one must show wise discernment in dealing with various situations, he challenges the church not to retreat into a default position of fear, suspicion, or shaming of the stranger, but rather lead with hospitality even if at times they might be taken advantage of in doing so.

Luther's teaching on the priority of "brotherly love" suggests that Christians today must put a human face on the immigration debate with particular attention to the situation of refugees and immigrants of their own family of faith. This would include the difficult situation of Christians who are in the country illegally or without proper authorization. In various parts of the country, congregations have members who are undocumented, acknowledge and confess their sins, but also live with the fear of being separated from families or being deported to countries they fled from because of the fear of violence or lack of economic opportunities to take proper care of their families. A factor that often gets lost in abstract discussions on immigration law among Christians is the number of Christian exiles who have fled their countries because of various misfortunes and hardships, but never went through a formal asylum or refugee process. Of recent memory, one thinks of migrants (including unaccompanied minors) fleeing to the US from Central America—particularly from Honduras and El Salvador, places with some of the highest murder rates in the world—due to a legitimate fear of systematic gang violence, rape, torture, and murder. A number of these strangers are Christians who felt they had to leave their countries as a way to fulfill

God's command to protect the lives of loved ones. There are also Christians who, due to the backlog in processing family visas, have overstayed their visas to avoid separation from spouses, children, and other family members.[38]

Often these undocumented immigrants are lumped together with others who have broken the law. Yet the priority of love Luther calls the church to exercise toward Christian exiles suggests that such lumping is not good enough. While the state does not necessarily have to worry about distinctions between Christians and others in applying civil law, Luther suggests that Christians must think through how they might assist brothers and sisters who find themselves in difficult legal circumstances before the state. As we mentioned above, those circumstances today may include fear of violence, family separation, and unemployment upon return to the country of origin. Luther's teaching reminds us that when we deal with the least of these followers of Jesus, we are dealing with God himself. While lumping all undocumented immigrants without distinction under the category of illegality might make sense from the perspective of the state, Christians must personalize the immigration debate in a more nuanced way so that they can account for the struggles and hopes of their own brothers and sisters in Christ. They could ask more specifically, for instance, how decisions made about refugees, asylum seekers, temporary visa holders, or the undocumented will affect people of the household of faith in terms of the protection of their lives and their families. They can then make decisions about the types of support and advocacy for the least of these they can realistically undertake.

What about those exiles who are not of the family of faith? Luther notes that, unless one is dealing with exiles who are either tricking us into helping them in the church even though they are not in need, or have a manifestly evil intent to harm others in society, Christians should also show a measure of compassion toward them and assist them in any way possible. In the way Christians deal with both exiles belonging to the household of faith and other exiles of the state, they must act differently than "our adversaries" (i.e., the papacy and its representatives) who either unjustly go after their own for their true confession or hate "their enemies of civil life." In a sense, Luther is suggesting that Christians, by their actions, must also exceed expectations when it comes to treating strangers outside the church. At the very least, they must not hate them or speak hatefully of them. Moreover, they must not lump them together with those who have an evil intent to harm the residents of the city or abuse their generosity through idle begging. Luther's discernment concerning the particular situation of strangers suggests once again that Christians must put a human face on debates about immigration law. Not all refugees are radical Muslims bent on killing Americans. Not all illegal aliens are criminals, rapists, drug traffickers, or burdens on society. In our speech, we must be careful not to paint these strangers with broad strokes, making them paragons of sin or scapegoats for our societal ills. We must distinguish between the whole person and the particular act of illegality committed. We must also ask deeper questions about the kinds of misfortunes and sufferings these neighbors have undergone or are undergoing, which may have led to their unauthorized status. We must hear their stories, and consider whether there is in some cases, as Luther would say, "some little domain of a godly prince in which there can be room for such people." Going through this process of discernment will help us make decisions about advocacy or support for what Luther calls "exiles of the state."

We may want to press Luther further and ask, "What does exceeding expectations look like in institutional life?" Today, Lutherans have offered different views on or approaches to policy questions about immigration.[39] But in his *Lectures on Genesis*, the Reformer does not offer such details. For instance, Luther praises the Prince for his generosity toward strangers, but does not offer any particulars on the state's public policy. Further historical research on these questions might be beneficial to see how concerns for strangers are institutionalized in some concrete ways in Luther's time. We know, more broadly, of Luther's influence on poor relief initiatives such as the Leisnig *Ordinance of a Common Chest* (1523), which forbids using funds from the chest to assist any kind of beggars, including "nonresident, fictitious poor and idlers who are not really in need" (LW 45:185). More positively, the ordinance also allows for the assistance of Christian "newcomers . . . of whatever estate" through "loans and gifts," as long as they are willing to be productive members of society or the city "by their labor, toil, and industry," and "so that the strangers too may not be left without hope, and may be saved from shame and open sin" (LW 45:190–191). In these statements, we see how Luther does not lump all strangers in the same categories, but assesses each situation in which assistance and hospitality are called for depending on the circumstances. He also balances his concern for hospitality toward exiles with an equally valid concern for the needs of the residents of the state—an important consideration in discussions about public policy on refugees and immigrants today.

Luther's thoughts on relief and hospitality can be explored in the broader context of his teachings on the two kingdoms and vocation. Such teachings offer frameworks for wrestling with questions about the limits of temporal authority in relation to matters of Christian conscience on the adequacy of immigration laws, or how Christian vocation shapes one's views of what issues and neighbors are given priority in immigration debates and advocacy.[40] Here we have only focused on the mature Luther of the *Lectures on Genesis*, who praises Abraham as the example for the church of a basic spiritual disposition or virtue in the heart and mind that *precedes* and *prepares* the way for practices of hospitality. Luther's call for the church to claim her identity as the house of Abraham in the world makes this much clear: as Christians discuss issues related to church practice and state policy toward strangers today, respectively as citizens of heaven and residents of the state, a hospitable disposition toward exiles must remain a constant in their lives and guide in a significant way their thinking on refugees and immigrants. Even though, as Luther himself allows, Christians exercise a certain priority of love toward those of the family of faith in the realm of the church and toward their fellow citizens and residents in the realm of the state, the basic virtue of hospitality toward all exiles remains one of her unique identity markers in the world.

Endnotes

1 For a brief version of this essay, see "The House of Abraham: Martin Luther's vision for a church of radical hospitality," *America*, November 15, 2017, 34–36.

2 http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/08/03/5-key-facts-about-u-s-lawful-immigrants.

3 In Luther's citation of Mt. 25:35, for instance, Christ says, "*Hospes fui, seu peregrinus, et non suscepistis m*e," that is, "I was a stranger, *or* a foreigner. . ." (italics mine). WA 43:18.2, 37.

4 "Thus in this passage praise is given chiefly to the hospitality we practice toward those strangers who are in exile because of the Word and their profession of the faith." LW 3:185.

5 Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, "Calvin's Legacy of Compassion: A Reformed Theological Perspective on Immigration," in I*mmigrant Neighbors Among Us: Immigration Across Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Daniel Carroll R. and Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), 44–62.

6 Ibid., 50–55.

7 See James M. Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 162–178; Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1955), 148–157; Orr argues that Luther's exile shaped more strongly his outlook on monastic vows. See Timothy J. Orr, "Junker Jörg on Patmos: Luther's Experience of Exile in the Wartburg," *Church History and Religious Culture* 95 (2015): 435–456.

8 For a pastoral contribution from Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, and United Methodist bishops, see Mark Adams et al., *Bishops on the Border: Pastoral Responses to Immigration* (New York: Morehouse, 2013); for immigration from the perspective of Christian theological traditions, see Carroll and Sánchez, *Immigrant Neighbors Among Us*; for a Lutheran approach, see Commission on Theology and Church Relations [here- after CTCR], *Immigrants Among Us: A Lutheran Framework for Addressing Immigration Issues* (St. Louis: LCMS), 2013.

9 Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., "Bearing So Much Similar Fruit: Lutheran Theology and Comprehensive Immigration Reform," in *Secular Governance: Lutheran Perspectives on Contemporary Legal Issues*, ed. Ronald W. Duty and Marie A. Failinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 182–203. For a more implicit use of Lutheran frameworks, see Meilaender's reflections in Mark Amstutz and Peter Meilaender, "Public Policy and the Church: Spiritual Priorities," *The City* 4 (Spring 2011): 4–17; and Peter C. Meilaender, "Immigration: Citizens and Strangers," *First Things* 173 (2007), 10–12.

10 LW 3:177; Lat. "*exemplum pulcherrimum morale de hospitalitate*" (WA 43:2.14–15).

11 LW 3:178; "*Qui igitur Ecclesiae membra vera esse cupiunt, hi hospitalitatem meminerint praestandam, ad quam non solum exemplo sancti Patriarchae, sed scripturae gravissimis testimoniis invitamur*" (WA 43:3.5–8); Luther lists seven marks of the church (Lat. *notae ecclesiae*) in *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), where he also notes that in addition to these (i.e., the Word of God, the sacraments of Baptism and the Al- tar, the office of the keys and the pastoral ministry, prayer, and bearing the cross), "there are other outward signs that identity the Christian church" as her members fulfill the second table of the law, such as "when we bear no one a grudge, entertain no anger, hatred, envy, or vengefulness toward our neighbors, but gladly forgive them, lend to them, help them, and counsel them." LW 41:166. In this latter sense Luther speaks of hospitality as an identity marker for Christians.

12 LW 3:178; "Those who are afflicted by spiritual persecution should be comforted and strengthened with the Word; but those who are afflicted by physical persecution should be assisted with bread and water, that is, with love and hospitality, everyone according to his need" (LW 3:184).

13 Ibid. (cf. LW 3:184); "*Praecipue autem peregrini, quibus fortuna iniquior est*" (WA 43:2.35).

14 LW 3:187; Abraham's bowing does not "present any difficulty, for he recognized God in them and listens to their words just as though God Himself were speaking. He is following the general rule that one should not consider who is speaking but what he is saying; for if it is the Word of God, how would God Himself not be present?" (LW 3:220).

15 LW 3:188. Welcoming strangers and angels, Abraham and Lot felt "unworthy of so great an honor that it should give lodging to God in the persons of the brethren" (ibid.); following Heb. 13:2, Luther notes that "even though Abraham does not know that they [i.e., the three visitors at Mamre] are angels, he nevertheless has the conviction that in these three . . . he was hearing God, who is one in His essence and trine [sic] in Persons" (LW 3:219-20).

16 WA 43:3.21 (translation mine); see LW 3:179; "For wherever the Word is, there Satan, the enemy, is stirring up physical and spiritual persecutions. In Paradise itself he was unable to rest until he drove Adam with his Even into exile" (LW 3:184).

17 WA 43:4.27–30 (translation mine); see LW 3:179.

18 LW 3:179; "*Oportet esse Abrahamum, oportet ditiunculam aliquam pii cuiusdam principis esse, in qua talibus locus esse possit*" (WA 43:4.34–36).

19 LW 3:182; "*Igitur non singulae personae, ut olim, sed integrae familiae nunc propter verbi confessionem exulant, hos non adiuvare scelus est*" (WA 43:5.32–34).

20 LW 3:180; "*Patuit igitur eius domus omnibus. Ac cum gaudio suscepit peregrinos, sicut videmus. . . Si igitur volumus Christiani esse, pateant exulibus domus nostrae, foveamus et recreemus eos*" (WA 43:4.14–19).

21 "Thus the saints are not received in a kindly manner and treated generously anywhere except in the homes of Abraham and Lot, that is, in the church, which acknowledges that it is the servant of the servants of God." LW 3:188.

22 LW 3:179; "*Ubi enim non est domus, ibi non potest esse hospitalitas*" (WA 43:3.36–37).

23 LW 3:187; in his *Lectures on Hebrews* (1517–1518), Luther sees Abraham as a "stranger" on account of the Word, that is, of his faithfulness to follow God's command, and attributes his difficulties as an exile to his identity as a believer in God's promises. See LW 29:238.

24 LW 3:182; "*Non nobiles, non cives, non rustici uno obulo adiuvant Ecclesias, ut possint esse liberales in exules*" (WA 43:5.25–26).

25 LW 3:181–182; "*Nunc Dei benignitate sub nostro principe illustrissimo habent miseri exules, quo confugiant, et ubi tuti sunt*" (WA 43:5.22–23).

26 For an account of the event, see Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 261.

27 Luther thanks the Elector and others for their "hospitality" to persecuted ministers of the word. See LW 4:210–211.

28 LW 3:182; WA 43:5.36–37; for Luther's comments on the rampant problem of begging in his day, its impact on local resources, and the need for its abolition, see his address *To the Christian Nobility* (1520), in LW 44:189–190.

29 LW 3:182 (WA 43:6.4–7). Luther makes a reference to 1 Tim 5:16.

30 LW 3:183; for a study of Luther's influence on poor relief efforts, see Carter Lindberg, "'There Should Be No Beggars Among Christians': Karlstadt, Luther, and the Origins of Protestant Poor Relief," *Church History* 46 (1977): 313–334; for a more comprehensive treatment, see Carter Lindberg, *Beyond Charity: Reformation Initiatives for the Poor* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

31 LW 3:183; "*Deo tamen probatur voluntas nostra, et beneficium, quod in homine malo et ingrato perit, in Christo, cuius nomine benefici sumus, non periit*" (WA 43:6.19–20).

32 Because of the high number of "vagrants and impostors" in his day, Luther calls for discernment in hospitality on the part of churches, who should not "bestow anything on unknown persons who come running along without the testimonies of godly people." He also asks that "the government do its duty in this matter. It should keep robbers and thieves of this kind from its land and towns." He also acknowledges that even "fellow citizens" who want to help "do not have such abundant resources . . . to relieve the needs of all who flock to us. Besides, the number of needy citizens in our midst is not small. They must be supported ahead of the others." LW 7:337–338.

33 Luther notes how the King of Canaan and the people of Sodom did not extend a welcoming hand respectively to Abraham and his nephew Lot. See LW 3:188.

34 WA 43:15.40–41 (translation mine); cf. LW 3:196.

35 Ibid.; "Thus Abraham's example deserves to be set before us by Moses as a mirror in which true services and virtues of every kind are clearly seen, especially, however, that extraordinary faith which is shown by the fact that in these guests he recognizes, reveres, and worships God. This faith is the chief thing, but the flesh hampers it in us in various ways. Like an intervening wall, it obstructs our eyes and prevents us from recognizing God in our brethren, as Abraham did, and from worshiping Him so dutifully. ... We, too, could have such guests every day if our unbelief did not stand in the way. Therefore these events are record- ed for our shame and reproach, because we do not do the same thing in faith and do not conclude that as often as we show hospitality to exiled brethren and to those who are in distress because of their confession, the Son of God Himself and His angels—not flesh and blood—are lodging with us." LW 3:198–199.

36 Benjamin Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 115.

37 See CTCR, *Immigrants among Us*, 47.

38 For some examples of the relative failure of the current immigration system in addressing effectively issues such as family unification, unskilled labor demand, and humane treatment of low-risk immigrants (especially, in light of the increasing use of detention centers), see Stephen Bouman and Ralston Deffenbaugh, *They Are Us: Lutherans and Immigration* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 54–69.

39 For two contrasting approaches, see Peter C. Meilander, *Toward a Theory of Immigration* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), and Stephen Bouman and Ralston Deffenbaugh, *They Are Us*; for a discussion of these positions, see Sánchez, “Bearing So Much Similar Fruit,” 182–196.

40 See Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., “Who Is My Neighbor? Immigration through Lutheran Eyes,” in Carroll and Sánchez, *Immigrant Neighbors among Us, 29–42*; see also CTCR, *Immigrants among Us*, 29–46.

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