

Apuntes: Reflexiones teológicas desde el margen hispano

Volume 41
Number 1 *Spring 2021*

Article 6

Spring 2021

Processing the Processes of Migration: Insights from Book of Daniel

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Recommended Citation

Carroll R., M. Daniel PhD (2021) "Processing the Processes of Migration: Insights from Book of Daniel," *Apuntes: Reflexiones teológicas desde el margen hispano*: Vol. 41: No. 1, Article 6.
Available at: <https://scholar.smu.edu/apuntes/vol41/iss1/6>

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Introduction

How can Christians reflect on the complexities and multiple dimensions of the processes of migration from “over there” to “over here”? Can the biblical text *inform* and *form* us as we think through and maybe experience border crossings and wrestling with a new life in a foreign land? As I am an Old Testament—or Hebrew Bible—scholar, I will do this in dialogue with a particular biblical text, but I will also weave in my own experiences as the son of a Guatemalan mother, who spent time in my youth in Guatemala and taught there many years and who has engaged immigrants from Mexico and Central America and their children for over a decade. We will ‘process the process’ by looking at how the Old Testament might function for Latino/a immigrants in their journey to this different world that is the U.S.

Because of social media, what most often comes to mind for many in relationship to the processes of migration are the dramatic journeys from a homeland to a new host country. For those who are not migrants or refugees,¹ this journey usually is conceived of as treacherous. Those on the move can die or be brutalized in route by the hazards of travel, criminal elements (usually drug related), or corrupt law enforcement officials. Then, there is the crossing of the border itself, which brings its own set of dangers. All of this is very true, of course, and resonates with the trials and tribulations of millions. In this country, this framing of immigration discussions is connected to the southern boundary with Mexico. There are journalistic accounts of the cruel, incredibly sad trek to the border through that country and into the Arizona or New

¹ For the purposes of this essay, I will not make a distinction between “immigrants,” “migrants,” and “refugees.” The literature debates whether to distinguish the terms (e.g., in regards to whether travel was voluntary or not). See the opening essays in Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Mexico deserts. Some of these reports are now iconic, such as Luis Alberto Urrea's *The Devil's Highway* and Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*. There is the gripping tale told by the Mexican journalist Oscar Martínez of the title *Los migrantes que no importan*.² More recently, Lauren Markham shares the touching tale of Salvadoran twins in *The Far Away Brothers*.³ To these could be added powerful fictional representations in books⁴ and film that are grounded in true-to-life stories. I mention accounts related to migration from Latin America, because of my own Latino cultural background and experience. These are among several that I have read, but one could just as well cite accounts of other people risking everything to reach refugee camps in Africa or Jordan, or getting on boats in the Mediterranean to reach Western Europe or in the South Pacific to get to Australia to seek refugee or asylum status. The tales of tears are endless.

This literature is impactful, but they are part of a larger, more complicated picture. For instance, in the United States, a sizeable percentage of those who are undocumented did not come in unauthorized (around 40%). They arrive on airplanes or cross the border legally with tourist or student visas, or enter with temporary work permits. Every year since 2007, the total of those who have not returned home at the expiration of their permitted time limit has been greater than that of those who did not come in through official ports of entry. In more precise jargon,

² This book was translated as *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* (trans. D. M. Ugaz and J. Washington; London: Verso, 2013), probably because of the nickname given to the infamous train, *la Bestia* ("the beast") that is central to the account.

³ Luis Alberto Urrea, *The Devil's Highway: A True Story* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2004); Sonia Nazario, *Enrique's Journey* (New York: Random House, 2006); Oscar Martínez, *Los migrantes que no importan* (sec. ed.; Oaxaca, MEX: Sur+ Ediciones, 2012), translated as *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* (trans. D. M. Ugaz and J. Washington; New York: Verso, 2013); Lauren Markham, *The Far Away Brothers: Two Young Migrants and the Making of an American Life* (New York: Crown, 2017).

⁴ Again, one can cite Luis Alberto Urrea (among many others). Note his *Into the Beautiful North* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2004).

“overstays” have outnumbered those of “entries without inspection” (EWI).⁵ In other words, those impactful stories mentioned above do not apply to those cases. In addition, a percentage come not fleeing an evil *per se*, but enter putting their hopes in this “promised land” for a better life economically or educationally.⁶ These are very different stories, with their own complications.⁷ All, though, are part of immigrant realities in this country. In sum, there is no *one* way of migrating from there to here.

What role can faith play in that move and in the passage from that world *back there* into *this* sociocultural matrix?

The Turn to the Bible

Increasingly, religion is recognized as a fundamental component of the migration experience. Migration and diaspora studies are moving past an exclusive secular mindset to appreciate that to ignore religion is to misunderstand the life of the displaced—in their homeland, on their journey, and in their new context.⁸

⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/233150241700500107>

⁶ See, e.g., Eleazar S. Fernandez, “Exodus-toward-Egypt: Filipino-Americans’ Struggle to Realize the Promised Land in America,” in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (25th anniversary edition; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 291–308.

⁷ Since 2010 more Asians have immigrated to the US than from Latin America (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/11/30/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>), yet it is common to reduce immigration discussions to the border (and the wall) on the southern border. For many immigrants, though, that discussion does not apply.

⁸ See, e.g., Luca Mavelli and Erin K. Wilson, eds., *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (London: Rowan & Littlefield, 2017); David Hollenbach, “Religion and Forced Migration,” in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, 447–59; Diana L. Eck, “Religion,” in Mary C. Waters and Reed Ueda, eds., *The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration Since 1965* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 214–27.

Religion matters in the move across borders. No matter how they come, immigrants can have stories of profound religious experiences in their migration. Latino/a Roman Catholics may tell of protection by *la Virgencita (la Virgen de Guadalupe)* or San Toribio Romo González (1900-1928), a martyred priest from a small town in Jalisco, Mexico, who is believed to help migrants.⁹ Protestants will not name the Virgin or a saint but, in my experience, they will speak of God's guidance, provision, and protection. There also are ministries along the southern border that extend Christian witness to migrants in their journey through the borderland deserts (Humane Borders, No More Deaths, Samaritans; the Scalabrinian shelters, among others).¹⁰ Then, there are the churches and religious organizations that receive these immigrants, help them settle in, house their congregations, and in some cases offer sanctuary. Religion, therefore, is manifest at multiple junctures throughout the migration process.

These lived stories ground the faith of these people, as individuals, families, and communities. Though the stories recount particular *personal* incidents, nonetheless they are *common* experiences of urgent need, deep trauma, and sincere belief that allow for a collective identity and purpose beyond the shared language and cultural traits that immigrants bring from Latin America. *Religious stories matter*. The challenge—and the quandary—is to figure out how much of the stories (and which ones) to remember and how to communicate them well within one's family and in religious settings to peers, the next generation, and even the broader public.

⁹ E.g., Jacqueline María Hagan, *Migration Miracle: Faith, Hope, and Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Daniel G. Groody, "Jesus and the Undocumented Immigrant: A Spiritual Geography of a Crucified People," *TS* 70, no. 2 (2009): 298–316; Kathryn Ferguson, Norma A. Price, and Ted Parks, *Crossing with the Virgin: Stories from the Migrant Trail* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2010); Ben Daniel, *Neighbor: Christian Encounters with "Illegal Immigration"* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 3–12 (for St. Toribio).

¹⁰ See Amanda Rose, *Showdown in the Sonoran Desert: Religion, Law, and the Immigration Controversy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

The Bible can be an amazing asset for Christians in the immigration discussion, because so much of the biblical text reflects migration realities and was produced by people marked by migration.¹¹ Most are unaware of this fact. As I travel to speak on the Bible and immigration, almost always the response is one of surprise. Majority culture audiences will say, “Wow, we didn’t know that was in the Bible!” When I have been with Latino/a congregations or groups, the response is, “*¡Wow, no sabíamos que eso estaba en la Biblia!*” But as I tell the biblical stories *entre mi gente*, there are added dimensions of stunned silence, laughter, and tears. There is the additional surprise: “*Esas son nuestras historias. ¡Allí estamos nosotros!*” There is now the potential for a new **awareness** of the relevance of the Scriptures and of God’s **accompanying** them in their migration process. In this resonance, the Bible brings together immigrants from all over Latin America; its stories can nurture through these commonalities a community of shared migrant faith: *en la dispersión, el texto es patria*.¹²

I have learned many things in these encounters with Latino/a family, friends, church goers, and acquaintances that now stretch over a decade, but two stand out in relationship to our topic: the power of the biblical text (and of good storytelling), and the fact that different audiences process its migration material differently.

¹¹ Sources that cover the breadth of the canon include M. Daniel Carroll R., *The Bible and Border: Hearing God’s Word on Immigration* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020); Jean-Pierre Ruiz, *Reading from the Edges: The Bible & People on the Move* (Studies in Latino/a Catholicism; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011); Mark W. Hamilton, *Jesus, King of Strangers: What the Bible Really Says about Immigration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019). One also can explore how different theological traditions reflect on migration explicitly from their particular frameworks and history. See M. Daniel Carroll R. and Leopoldo A. Sánchez M., eds., *Immigrant Neighbors Among Us: Immigration across Theological Traditions* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015).

¹² This is drawn from the title of Hans de Wit, *En la dispersión, el texto es patria: Introducción a la hermenéutica clásica, moderna y posmoderna* (San José, CR: Universidad Bíblica Latinoamericana, 2002).

First, regarding the power of the biblical text, many may recognize the name of Walter Brueggemann. He, more than any other scholar, has attended to the language of the Scripture, especially the Hebrew Bible, and how it can function to expose and critique the dehumanizing social imaginaries that we inhabit and too often absorb as true. The biblical text also offers a vision of a way forward toward a new tomorrow, even as it admonishes us and depicts for us faithful, authentic living in this in-between time. The exile, with its attendant migration connections, has been a major theme of his work.¹³ Relating the dynamic of literature to the moral formation of the reader and to the broader public is not unique to biblical scholars, of course. One could mention works from different disciplines, both standard and controversial, ranging from Booth's *The Company We Keep* to Nussbaum's *Poetic Justice* to the contributions of Robert Coles (such as *The Call of Stories* or *Handing One Another Along*), to the rise of the human rights novel genre, and more.¹⁴ But, sacred texts can yield particular influence when embraced by the believer, as they are received as a word from God. A case can be made that the Scripture seeks willing and virtuous readers, who desire the transformation that it can offer.¹⁵

Second, this interface requires, of course, that we read the Bible with a certain lens, a particular set of commitments, and inescapably in light of our experiences and life-world. This

¹³ E.g., Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997); *Out of Babylon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010); "Faithful Imagination as Sustained Subversion," in Carolyn J. Sharp, ed. *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 296–315.

¹⁴ Wayne C Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Robert Coles, *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989) and *Handing One Another Along: Literature and Social Reflection* (New York: Random House, 2010); James Dawes, *The Novel of Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

¹⁵ E.g., Richard S. Briggs, *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

perspective suggests that immigrants can interact with the text in particular (and important) ways. I say “can,” because I consistently witness that immigrant believers go to the Bible for devotional insight or doctrinal definition (which is all well and good),¹⁶ but *not* for making sense of their migration journey or life through the biblical stories. Sometimes the messiness of the journey and integration process finds its most natural and embraced expression in song, in the Mexican *corridos* or the ballads of the Guatemalan Ricardo Arjona (*El mojado*) or the Nicaraguan Luis Enrique (*Autobiografía*) and others. This fact sets up that nebulous and tricky relationship between the scholar and the migrant reader: How to open up the Bible without imposing (however well-intentioned) one’s own sociopolitical agenda on migrants with whom we come in contact and for whom we advocate? Others have dealt eloquently with the challenge of the scholar—vulnerable relationship,¹⁷ so I will not, but I make two brief additional observations before going to my chosen text.

To begin with, if the Hebrew Bible is comprised largely of migrant realities composed by migrants and their descendants, then we could start to appreciate the migrant perspective as *canonical*. That is, I propose that the more those who are not immigrants or who do not live within immigrant families understand the complexities of migration, get to know immigrants as people, and listen to their stories about life with God, the more we will comprehend the Scripture and God. The Christian church needs these readers to teach us to re-read the canon.¹⁸ It is a well-

¹⁶ It is not uncommon, for instance, to hear explanations of their migration according to the systematic theology category of the sovereignty of God. Sometimes the topic of the journey or legal status is avoided from the pulpit out of shame or because of the idea that coming without documentation is the unspoken sin of many present in a congregation.

¹⁷ Note Nando Sigona, “The Politics of Refugee Voices: Representations, Narratives, and Memories,” in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, 369–82. The works of Gerald O. West (South Africa) are especially helpful.

¹⁸ Note, e.g., Justo L. González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); M. Daniel Carroll R., “Latino/Latina Biblical Interpretation,” in M. Gorman,

known fact that the center of Christianity has shifted to what many label the “Global South.” One can add that we might do well to reorient Bible reading to what is arising from the “Global Diaspora.”¹⁹

My next observation follows on the first. First generation migrant circles and 1.5 and second-generation groups are beginning to articulate their faith in ways that must contribute to Christian theology, broadly understood. These theological gifts and challenges are not limited to institutions and academic books. They include the voices of the untrained and the vibrancy of the spiritually unchained in thousands of local churches around the country.²⁰ While there are strides being taken in terms of recruiting students, faculty, staff and administration in academic institutions, as well as in publishing contextual theology, several temptations need to be recognized and avoided. The voices of these migrants and their children can be domesticated through professionalization, as they are subsumed into new academic specialties among many in universities and seminaries, thereby muting and marginalizing their singular contribution. They also can be coopted by the agendas of others, who appropriate and celebrate what fits into the reigning theological ideologies of the academy but ignore or minimize the ‘unacceptable’ (e.g.,

ed., *Scripture and its Interpretation: An Ecumenical, Global Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 311–23; Timothy J. Sandoval, “Latino/a/x Biblical Interpretation Related to the Hebrew Bible,” *CurBR* 16, no. 3 (2018): 236–62. Also, valuable work on diaspora theological and biblical reflection is taking place in Spanish, both north and south of the border. Note, for instance, Oscar García Johnson and Milton Acosta, eds., *Conversaciones teológicas del sur global americano: Violencia, desplazamiento y fe* (Eugene, OR: Puertas Abiertas, 2016).

¹⁹ This trend is evident in missiological circles. See Sadiri Joy Tira and Tetsunao Yamamori, eds., *Scattered and Gathered: A Global Compendium of Diaspora Missiology* (Regnum Studies in Mission; Oxford: Regnum, 2016).

²⁰ This includes testimony literature—that is, personal accounts not theological treatises. There is no one model of Latino/a churches, either. See, e.g., J. F. Martínez Guerra and L. Scott, eds., *Iglesias peregrinas en busca de identidad* (Buenos Aires, ARG: Ediciones Kairós, 2004); Daniel A. Rodríguez, *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

belief in the miraculous or the powerful experiences of popular religion). Ironically, these immigrant voices can become siloed by the academy, which might socialize Latino and Latina students into ways of thinking that, at the end of the day, separate them from their familial and cultural roots and the life of their communities *en lo cotidiano*, even as they try to work out their *mestizaje* or *hibridez* and their appropriately authenticity.²¹ Their audience is now the academy and the applause that of an elite, who can control the migration theological process in our institutions. These are ongoing issues. How to help and empower these students rightly, and then listen and learn well? How to put the academy and the wider public into proper conversation with these voices? These are perennial questions. I speak in generalities of a few of many matters, but they must be kept in mind as we proceed. Perhaps the three-fold classification by Clodovis Boff can serve as a helpful reminder. He distinguishes popular theology from pastoral and professional theologies.²²

Approaching the Book of Daniel

I have finally arrived at the Bible itself! This prolegomenon is necessary to begin to consider the *what, why, and how* to reflect on migration processes in light of the Old Testament.²³

²¹ Cf. Néstor Medina, *Mestizaje: (Re) Mapping Race, Culture, and Faith in Latino/a Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009); Carmen Nanko Fernández, *Theologizing en Espanglish* (Studies in Latino/a Catholicism; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010); Daniel Orlando Álvarez, *Latin@ Identity in Pneumatological Perspective: Mestizaje and Hibridez* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016). The field of Latino/a theology is growing. An early compendium is Edwin David Aponte and Miguel A. de la Torre, eds., *Handbook of Latino/a Theologies* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2006).

²² Clodovis Boff, “Epistemología y metodología de la teología de la liberación,” in I. Ellacuría and J. Sobrino, eds., *Mysterium liberationis: Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación* (San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 1993), vol. 1: 93 [79–113].

²³ I say “Old Testament” instead of “Hebrew Bible,” as it is the label within Latino/a congregations. They speak of *el Antiguo Testamento*, not of a *Biblia hebrea*.

There are a number of passages that could serve the ends of this essay. Surprisingly, there are relatively few accounts of migration journeys in the Old Testament. The wilderness wandering narratives appear in Exodus and Numbers (cf. Deuteronomy, *passim*) and are mentioned in some psalms (e.g., 78:15–19; 105:37–43; 106) and verses in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa. 40:3–5, 9–11; 43:14–21; Jer. 2:2–8; Ezek. 20; Hos. 2:15 [MT 2:17]; Am. 2:10; 5:25).²⁴ What is called Second Isaiah (Isa. 40–55) promises divine help in the return to the land, but does not actually recount that journey (e.g., 43:16–21; 52:12). Instead, biblical texts concentrate on the precipitating causes of migration (usually famine or war) and the entry into or the experiences in a foreign land.²⁵

Recent Old Testament scholarship on the exilic and post-exilic periods has interfaced biblical material and archaeological data with various social science disciplines, such as diaspora, forced migration, and trauma studies that would be pertinent to our interests here.²⁶ These approaches have been employed to good effect in fresh approaches to the Joseph narratives in Genesis, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, along with other biblical portions. Another book that fits within this purview is Daniel, which is the one I have chosen.

²⁴ One also could mention Hagar and her son (Gen. 21:1–21). In that episode they wander aimlessly and are ready to die, instead of consciously migrating to a particular place.

²⁵ There also are incidents in border regions in the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen. 12:11–13; 29:1–14; 33; Num. 13; 20:14–21; 21:21–26).

²⁶ Especially important is the work of Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, e.g., *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002); “Reading War and Trauma: Suggestions Toward a Social-Psychological Exegesis of Exile and War in Biblical Texts,” in B. E. Kelle, F. R. Ames, and J. L. Wright, eds., *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts* (SBLAIL 10; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 253–74; “Reading Exile Then: Reconsidering the Methodological Debates for Biblical Analysis in Dialogue with Sociological and Literary Analysis,” in J. J. Ahn and J. Middlemas, eds., *By the Irrigation Canals of Babylon: Approaches to the Study of Exile* (LHBOTS 526; New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2012), 139–57.

A number of helpful publications look at Daniel as diaspora literature. They find that it contains, both in the narratives of chapters 1–6 (the so-called “court tales”) and the visions of chapters 7–12, an anti-imperial thrust that may have served as satirical “resistance literature.”²⁷ It has not always been so. In the past, scholars believed the book offered strategies for prospering in exile, in part by taking a benevolent view of the empire (at least in chapters 1–6 in relation to Babylon). These matters are wrapped up in debates about the book’s genre and composition, topics which do not occupy us here.²⁸ In what follows I take the determination of the book as “resistance literature” as a given.

The reading that I offer draws from my experiences in teaching and preaching to Latinos/as. Insights into diasporic readings have been explored by Justo González, Luis Rivera Rodríguez, Gregory Lee Cuéllar, Francisco Lozada Jr., and Fernando Segovia, and others.²⁹

²⁷ See, e.g., John Goldingay, “The Stories in Daniel: A Narrative Politics,” *JSOT* 37 (1987): 99–116; Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, 182–88; David M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: A Satirical Reading of Daniel 1-6* (HBM 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008); Anthea E. Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), esp. 223–79; Brennan Breed, “A Divided Tongue: The Moral Taste Buds of the Book of Daniel,” *JSOT* 40, no. 1 (2015): 113–30; Fernando Milán Fitera, “Daniel, forastero en tierra extranjera: Las historias de Dn 1–6 en relación a José (Gn 39–45),” in “*Sal de tu tierra*”: Estudios sobre el extranjero en el Antiguo Testamento, ed. Guadalupe Seijas de los Ríos, Asociación Bíblica Española—Monografías Bíblicas 76 (Estella, Spain: Verbo Divino, 2020), 161–79.

²⁸ For surveys of research, see Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 6–37; Amy C. Merrill Willis, “A Reversal of Fortunes: Daniel among the Scholars,” *CurBR* 16, no. 2 (2018): 111–17, 121–23 [107–30].

²⁹ Justo González, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Luis Rivera-Rodríguez, “Toward a Diaspora Hermeneutics (Hispanic North America),” in M. D. Carroll R. and J. E. Lapsley *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 169–89; Gregory Lee Cuéllar, *Voices of Marginality: Exile and Return in Second Isaiah 40-55 and the Mexican Immigrant Experience* (American University Studies VII/127; New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Francisco Lozada Jr. and Fernando Segovia, *Latino/a Biblical Hermeneutics: Problematics, Objectives, Strategies* (SBLSS 68; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014); Francisco Lozada Jr., *Toward a Latino/a Interpretation* (RBS 91; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

What one can appreciate is that the text presents the space and the opportunity for conversation on the various aspects of the processes of migration, via situations analogous to today.

Reading the Book of Daniel, Chapter 1³⁰

The book of Daniel opens with the announcement of Judah's demise and a siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (1:1-2a). In the ancient mind, the removal of the vessels from God's temple in Jerusalem signaled the ultimate defeat of Judah's god. Their placement in the house of Marduk, the patron deity of Babylon and head of the pantheon of its gods, would have been shocking and crushing to the deportees (1:2b). The four young men were from well-healed families of Judah's nobility and educated, but now those sharp minds were to be retrained for service to the empire. To learn Chaldean literature also meant exposure to and indoctrination into Babylon's religion, as much of that literature would have been religious in nature. The work of interpreting visions and dreams also was inseparable from religion (1:3-5, 17, 20). The imperial renaming marked them as the property of the regime, but this, too, had religious undertones. The theophoric names identifying Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah as Jews belonging to YHWH now are replaced with names invoking Babylonian deities: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshah, and Abednego (1:6-7).

These first verses establish the situation of this group of young diaspora Jews. Everything had been taken away from them: their homeland, their socioeconomic status and wealth, and even their names; their religion, so foundational to their identity, was being submerged and

³⁰ I do not engage issues related to possible historical referents or ancient Near Eastern parallels. It also should be noted that the study of life in exilic Babylon is a growing field of research.

negated in multiple ways. Everything to assimilate them, as it were, was being put into place... for service to their conquerors. They most assuredly would lose family and friends in the Babylonian sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of their country. It was the end of the world, as they knew it. These four young men had traveled hundreds of miles (probably on foot) as protected prisoners, but they were political booty for the crown nonetheless. What words could capture their feelings in this situation: humiliation? Would there have been anger and resentment as well, a desire to strike back at their captors (cf. Ps. 137)? If so, how?

Their first counter-initiative is taken by Daniel in response to the daily rations that the four friends receive from the king. The text says that he found the food defiling. Scholars debate what may have been the profaning trigger,³¹ but perhaps his act should be put into the broader context of the entire chapter, which is laced with religious subordination. Taking the food would convey dependence on the Babylonian court and, ultimately then, allegiance to the king and empire. And *that* had religious connotations. Some commentators look at Daniel's refusal as an instance of resistance, one that is low-level and not threatening. Daniel's proposal is not really a "hidden transcript" (in Scott's terminology),³² however, because he is upfront about the motive with their minder Ashpenaz (1:8-9). Is this resistance? If so, how?

When I have spoken to Hispanic audiences, they resonate wholeheartedly with this issue of food. Food is a deep cultural marker. Each of our countries has its own *platos típicos* of which we are proud and which this host culture can have a hard time understanding, let alone savor as they are meant to be enjoyed (*no pueden saborear nuestra comida*). As I name examples from

³¹ It does not look like that the issue was violation of the Torah dietary laws. The wine would not qualify. For options, see the commentaries.

³² James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

our cultures (with the appropriate hand gestures!), people laugh and clap. Food is “our safe space”, “our shared space”—to give that up somehow is cultural betrayal. Even in those Latino/a homes where the Spanish language is no longer spoken or spoken well, the two things that remain as identity features are the sense of family and the food. Daniel could say, “You have taken everything I own, changed my name, and trained me for your benefit, but we have our faith and our food. We are still Jews.” A Latino/a could echo that in this country with, “You may have power, money, and prestige; and maybe you can’t pronounce my name (Peréz for Pérez), so you just ignore it (“hey, you”) or anglicize it (Joe for José); you may exploit my work, but *¡sigo siendo chapín!*” (I am still a Guatemalan!).

Another lesson springs from the statement that these foreigners are smart. In fact, they are the best of the entire lot, better than the native born chosen for the same training (1:4, 17–20). Within migrant communities a sense of inferiority dampens the spirit. It is reinforced all around them: in the shopping malls, because they may not be able afford to buy the same things—they can just look at the shopping windows, or are regulated to cleaning those stores; in the classroom, where their language skills may not be as sharp as other students’ or there is a hint of an accent, where the children serve as translators for their parents in teachers meetings; in many jobs, where they are the invisible ones; in the media, where Latinos are portrayed as narcos, and the Latinas as sexy and alluring. I have seen our young people ashamed of their parents, their homes, their language, and culture. The pull to assimilate into the Anglo consumerist world in which they study and move about is powerful. I see the confusion, ambivalence, and struggles in first generation Latino/a college undergraduate students, as they wrestle with their *latinidad* (How much Spanish does one have to know to be a ‘real’ Latino/a? Can I date an Anglo? Do I

want my friends to meet my parents or visit my house?).³³ But this text in Daniel cries out, “No! We are as smart as the Anglos! We can even be smarter!” I tell parents that we do not have to be ashamed; we are not inferior, and we need to get our children to believe that, too... even as we train them in wisdom and integrity.

A migrant reading incorporates the ‘resistance to the empire’ idea that scholars now write about, but it can play out differently than how those readers might value it. Because those academic readers have not felt the humiliation and the frustration of their status and station, of their very being, the natural move is to highlight the transcendent ideological element of resistance. Even majority culture Christians can understand the need to resist the reigning culture to some degree or in a few defined areas (politics, diet, recreation, hobbies, brands of clothes, and the like). This would be why, I believe, Brueggemann’s works gain wide acceptance.³⁴ But for migrants and their children the scenes of Daniel chapter one are scenes that they actually live and breathe; theirs is the never-ending challenge of negotiating daily their identity and self-worth. The retort by the majority culture might be, “But, we resist, too.” At one level this is true, but the resistance process (and it is a process) is more visceral and uniquely personal than what those who have not lived all of this can ever imagine and *feel*.

For migrants, the process of integration into the culture—an ongoing, multigenerational process that began when they left the home country—is painful. It requires the *constant negotiation of loss*: the loss of language, of nonverbal communication (how we greet one another, are affectionate with our children, do friendships, romance our spouses, etc.), of certain

³³ The literature on minority higher education is vast. For Hispanic theological education, see, e.g., Edwin I. Hernández et al, *Spanning the Divide: Latinos/as in Theological Education* (Orlando, FL: AETH, 2016).

³⁴ Another important figure who speaks along the same lines, although in different ways and from another framework, is the theological ethicist Stanley Hauerwas.

social graces, of our sports teams, of family dynamics (such as the language of the home, respect for parents, hugs and kisses between parents and their children), and more. This, of course, raises the matter of transnationalism within diaspora communities, another huge area of research, but my point is that in this opening chapter Daniel's *resistance* also is fundamentally *affirmation* that we Latinos and Latinas matter and that our faith and culture matter, and that is OK to be who are. This line in the sand, so to speak, does not offer a blueprint, however, about how integration into the host country can be done well (it is distinct for every person and group). There is no one-size-fits-all Latino/a.³⁵ But this belief, grounded in this scriptural story, can be the start of processing diaspora life differently.

I return to the idea that this ongoing migration process takes wisdom and integrity. Wisdom, because one has to discern what can be negotiated and how. Daniel could not make any bargains about the fate of his family and country; he had no say in the choice of curriculum or in the changing of his name. He could make a bargain, though, about his food. This suggestion, perhaps innocuous to his captors and masters, was a profound cultural-religious statement from the deepest part of his being. To make that work, before them and his God, changed everything... and nothing. These young men still had to prove themselves before the king and others. So, when I have these conversations with immigrant audiences, what I say is that our circumstances mean that we must negotiate; but, we should try to be true to our identity as Latinos/as and as Christians as we do so, trusting in the sovereignty of our God. Like Daniel, what happens here is inseparable from *back there*, wherever "there" is. The process of migration is ongoing, as can be its faith basis and growth.

³⁵ Juan Martinez offers the taxonomy: "el latino nuclear o monocultural", "el latino bicultural", "el latino marginal", "el latino que huye" (de su cultura), "el latino asimilado" (*Iglesias peregrinas en busca de identidad*, 152–57).

What we negotiate and how is a discussion we can have *because of* this text and *around* this text. What is ironic about our food in this country is that the majority culture is now absorbing it and enjoying it (with some changes, of course).

In a wonderful collection of essays, the Argentine-Chilean-American author Ariel Dorfman has a delightful piece that ends with these lines. He describes a scene in a food market in North Carolina that caters to Latino/a immigrants. Permit me to quote the closing section in full.³⁶

How many of them [the Latino/a shoppers] are threatened with concentration camps and deportations and families sundered apart, how many of these compatriots of ours are adrift and in danger of living on the borders of legality? I dare not ask. But what is certain, what I can proclaim from the haven of this pungent paradise is that the men and women who make this country work, who build the houses and pave the roads, who clean the houses and cook meals and care for the children, coming from every one of our twenty-one Latin American republics and meeting only here in *los Estados Unidos de América*, what I can unequivocally declare is that they are not going away.

Your wall, Señor Trump, has already been breached, your wall has already been defeated by our peaceful invasion.

Along with our food, we are here to stay.

CONCLUSION

It is a daunting task to try to try to engage the process of migration, or better, the processes of migration with our faith. There are so many pieces one can explore. What I have tried to offer in this essay are a few reflections on aspects of that complex process that begins somewhere else

³⁶ Ariel Dorfman, “How Succulent Food Defeated Trump’s Wall Before It Has Been Built,” in Viet Thanh Nguyen, ed., *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives* (New York: Abrams, 2018), 64–65 [59–65].

and lands here. These processes are legal, economic, ethnic, cultural, gendered... and religious. In my Christian faith tradition, this means that we must be in conversation with the Bible. There is no *one* biblical story or model, though, to which one can appeal or appropriate. That reality makes the Bible a rich resource and an engaging conversation partner. What we need are discernment, wisdom, and courage for our migrant journeys and our reading of Scripture.