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From the Editor's Desk, "Theological Studies," March 2012

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From the Editor's Desk

As I write these lines, the Christian world is preparing once again to celebrate the fullness of time when God's Son migrated from the Godhead to become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. The phrase "fullness of time" comes from Galatians 4:4 where Paul, having just completed his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14), was offering his understanding of how the event of Jesus Christ completed the history of the Jewish people as the bearers of God's promise to bless "the nations" through Abraham (Gen 18:18), the father of faith. The phrase suggests a historical sense that creation evolves, and that the Judeo-Christian God is, in Jesus Christ, the Lord of history whose advent inaugurates the completion of creation, realized eschatology.

We Christians live against the horizon of realized eschatology, but in our state as evolutionary, developmental beings, we live also and most immediately in the throes of unrealized eschatology. As such, we regularly find ourselves surprised by the new, something that has been developing over time but now comes to a fullness of expression that slaps us into awareness—this "something" becoming perhaps for the first time a theological revelation that helps us incorporate the seemingly new into our conscious grasp of the Christian mystery.

In one way or another, all our articles are about the Divine Mystery. In this issue two articles—by Gioacchino Campese and Kristin Heyer—signal the fullness of time for migration as a *locus theologicus*. Certainly migration is not a new phenomenon—Princeton University has a website devoted to "The Genetics of Prehistoric Migration," and our Judeo-Christian-Islamic narrative begins with the migration of the Abraham-Sarah family from Ur that gave birth to the great religions of the Book. And ever after, this ur-migration has served the religious imaginations of billions of people who understand their lives as mysteries of migration.

Migrations come in many forms, some voluntary, others forced by disasters or pressured by fear of persecution and lack of state protection. Common to all migrations is that people leave their homeland and travel to a strange land where they are considered "foreigners"—as in the archetypal examples of Abraham-Sarah, the Exodus, and the Exile and return.

Throughout history believers inspired by the Abrahamic migration have often chosen to reenact migration in less dramatic, traumatic ways by going on pilgrimage or making retreats. The aim of such reenactments, however small in scale, is to change our environment radically from the predictable and dependable to one that casts us upon a "foreign shore," there to make our way in the acceptance of mystery, a mystery we choose to trust as benevolent rather than malevolent. Forced migrants tend not to have that choice.

As images of God, we are called to do humanly what God does. In creation God poured God's self out into creatures free in their otherness. This divine outpouring leaves human persons free in their otherness to enter into relationship with the Wholly Other, the Creator, and ultimately to return to "where we started / And know the place for the first time" (T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*). This is what Jesus did, undergoing the *kenosis* of which Paul speaks (Phil 2:7) and seeing his death as a "return to the Father" (Jn 16:28). The Christian vocation to "put on Christ" means allowing ourselves to be recreated in his image and patterning our lives after him, having in us "the same mind . . . that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). If he, the sinless

one, poured himself out in obedience to his Abba for the love of sinful humanity, we by grace must do the same, putting on Christ and becoming fully what we were created to become.

The process of being born, living for a time our earthly vocation, and completing it by rebirth to the fullness of life in God can be described as a migration. But this is an abstract, spiritualized way of describing what generally happens in and through wrenching suffering—endured by God in Jesus' birth, passion-death, and resurrection.

Actually, migration has been an arching pattern of human life from the outset. We have tended to consider it primarily as a geographical phenomenon, a displacement of people for all sorts of reasons, often involving violence. Heyer points out that 40 years ago one in 29 persons was displaced; today that ratio is one in nine, and largely for socioeconomic reasons. Those who suffer this displacement most assuredly experience it as violent. Yes, it is geographic, but it is also intensely personal, fraught with almost unimaginable suffering, a ripping apart of deeply identifying relationships, that leaves migrants at the mercy of forces often bent on exploiting migrants' powerlessness.

Theirs is a *kenosis* as raw as anything Jesus experienced, and case histories show that migrants are often driven to trust only in God who alone can ultimately save them. Their lives all too often are jeopardized by forces that are malevolent, not benevolent.

Those of us who do not directly suffer the trauma of migration might do so indirectly, as Jesus by compassion suffered the trauma of the marginalized he sought to befriend, heal, and restore to living human relationships. Compassion requires imagination, but imagination set free by love, enabling us to see human nature as imaging the Divine. Christian revelation tells us that God, rather than being purely simple, is essentially relational; so human images of God are by nature relational. Absent imagination set free by love, we can easily distance ourselves physically, psychologically, and spiritually from the many millions of migrants around our planet. But freed by love, our imagination recognizes all peoples as members of one family, our planet as a common home from which no one may be alienated, and those on the move as seeking welcome in our common home. Such an imagination comes from a *kenosis*, an emptying out of self-centeredness that occludes our imagination—a *kenosis* that makes our hearts capacious for the other, including migrants who become sacraments of the trinitarian God who entered time as a migrant for us, showing us the way to return home, not alone, but arm in arm with all our fellow migrants.

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