Introduction

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*Strangers in This World: Multi-Religious Reflections on Immigration* is a contribution to the ongoing discussions on The Immigration Question. While scholars have long reflected on the spiritual and religious meanings and significance of human pilgrimage and resettlement, it is especially timely in our Age of Migration.\(^1\) The collection of essays in this volume represents some of the ways that various religious and faith traditions interpret the theme of immigration. The rich diversity of perspectives presented here speaks to the different meanings of immigration, yet there is a common understanding of the important, if not essential, role that immigration plays in each of these faith traditions.

The diversity of cultures, religion, and faiths that is the result of the unprecedented movements of peoples—some by choice and others by degrees of force or necessity—have brought challenges as well as opportunities to our sense of individual, communal, national,

and religious identities. The question of “who is my neighbor?” is especially appropriate in light of the ever-increasing religious diversity of our communities. Though the question is specifically drawn from the Judeo-Christian-Muslim tradition, it is a question that other religious traditions have expressed in their own ways. Our nation, our communities, our workplaces, and even our families have witnessed the presence of “new” neighbors, who are “different” from “us.” They are “strangers” to us, most often because of their appearance, language, culture, and religion. Increasingly, the identity of “my neighbor” is someone who looks, speaks, and believes differently from us—they are strangers to us.

These strangers have been the subject of political, social, and economic reflections and debates, but less so in terms of religion. What does our religious traditions and beliefs teach us about the stranger? This collection of multi-religious reflections seeks to answer this question and in doing so, reminds us that we are all strangers in this world. Moreover, these reflections also challenges and inspires us to consider our shared concern for universal human flourishing and the hope that we can and should become good neighbors to all. This hope is expressed in our sacred greetings to

2. The addition of religious perspectives to the immigration debate are becoming more numerous, systematic, and organized. Leading the way, Roman Catholic scholars have a deep and long tradition of concern for immigrants, particularly to the most vulnerable and the poor among them. For a review of the recent growth of the Christian—primarily Roman Catholic—theological literature on immigration, see Gioacchino Campese, “The Irruption of Migrants: Theology of Migration in the 21st Century,” Theological Studies 73/1 (February 2012): 3–32. An excellent collection of essays by some of the leading Roman Catholic theologians, including Peter Phan and Gustavo Gutiérrez, are in A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration, eds. Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008). In 2013, Palgrave Macmillian launched the Religion and Migration Book Series, and several volumes are in print with more expected. Recent scholarly attention to immigration is also evidenced in the American Academy of Religion’s Religion and Migration Group, as well as the Interreligious Reflections on Immigration Seminar.
strangers: shalom, peace, as-salamu alaykum, and namaste, among many others.

The complexity and dynamism of the subject precludes any one answer to The Immigration Question. Theologies and faith perspectives on immigration as a formal topic of discourse are still in the process of development and refinement. Whatever the answer or answers may emerge, it must reflect the diversity and richness of the various religious and faith traditions—it must be ecumenical, inter-religious, and inter-disciplinary. There is much work to be done, both within our own respective faith traditions and in dialogue and engagement with others traditions and perspectives. Only with a “comprehensive” religious reform of our understanding of immigration can we move toward the answers to the question of our time, and must be included in any discussion on comprehensive immigration reform.

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The chapters in this volume reflect both the diversity and universality of religious interpretations of the phenomenon of immigration. We hope these chapters will contribute not only to the advancement of the academic study of immigration, but also to the current debate on immigration, about which religion and faith have much to declare, clarify, and critique. The sections and the chapters are arranged topically with a concern for chronology, but the diversity of religious traditions and perspectives does not easily lend itself to a well-organized and coherent presentation. In a way, the resistance to neat and clearly defined boundaries of organization and groupings reflects something of the immigrant experience and reflection. The editors made the necessary choices of the order of presentation and its divisions into sections knowing that the order and divisions are far less important than their inclusion in this single volume.
Section One contains chapters from the perspective of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, and begins with Reid Locklin’s chapter, “Migration and Spiritual Conquest: Emplacing Contemporary Comparative Theology in a Hindu Theology of the ‘Quarters’ (dik).” Locklin explores the Chinmaya Mission’s creative theological responses to the North American Hindu diaspora, and the problems created by the physical distance from India. In Chapter Two, John Thompson presents a Buddhist interpretation of immigration by noting its presence in early texts, its prominent theme in two Buddhist teachings: bodhisattvas and the “Pure Lands,” and interpreting nirvana as immigration from physical and spiritual suffering. Karma Lekshe Tsomo’s “Choices and Challenges: Tradition and Adaptation among Immigrant Buddhist Populations in North America” traces some of the history and adaptations of immigrant Buddhist communities in America. The section ends with Jonathan Seitz’s “Missionary and Immigrants, Missionaries as Immigrants,” written from the under-explored perspective of the missionary as the immigrant, and the challenges and opportunities for the missionary immigrant’s religion and faith in relation to the new home.

In Section Two, “The Abrahamic Traditions,” Jewish, Muslim, and Christian perspectives are presented. Daniel Moaz begins this section with a reevaluation of and challenges to the traditional views of Israel, God, and exile in the context of the Promise Land. In the next chapter, “Immigration Theology in Islam,” Muhammad Shafiq introduces the Islamic understanding of immigration, drawing upon the Qur'an and the initial development of the Muslim theology of immigration in the Golden Age of Islam. Continuing on the theme of hijra, Hussam Timani’s “The Islamic Doctrine of Hijra (Migration): Theological Implications” develops a doctrine of hijra, noting that the Prophet Muhammad was an immigrant. Timani
locates the immigrant journey as a point of contact between the divine and the human, and relates it to the Islamic doctrine of tawhid ("oneness or unity of God or Being").

Craig Davis, “Gothic ‘Immigrants’ in the Roman Empire,” traces the migration of the Goths into the Roman Empire and the subsequent development of the distinctive adoption and interpretation of the Christian faith among the various Germanic-speaking immigrants. In chapter nine, “White Protestant Efforts to Convert Italian Immigrants: The Case of Constantine Panunzio,” Linda Mercadante examines the earnest, but largely unsuccessful, Protestant attempts to convert the mass of Roman Catholic-Italian immigrants who arrived in America at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The complexity of this long-forgotten episode in American history is highlighted by the well-documented case of Constantine Panunzio. This section ends with Kristine Suna-Koro’s chapter, “Journeying Before God with a Divided Heart: The Colonial and Postcolonial Migrations of Latvian Lutherans,” which explores some of the challenges of global migration through the history of Latvian Lutherans immigrants to North America, and offers a constructive reflection on migration.

Section Three, “Native Americans and the First Strangers,” reminds us of the relative and ironic nature of the current North American immigration debate. Often neglected in the current debate has been the perspectives and history of the relationship between indigenous peoples of North America and the “First Strangers.” This section contains reflections on the white strangers (Europeans) and the native peoples of North America who received them with generosity and hospitality. Randy Woodley begins this section with a chapter on “Welcoming the Stranger: Native American Hospitality,” which highlights the generous hospitality offered to the first white immigrants. Woodley points out the deep-seated concern for the
stranger and the native people’s tradition of hospitality to the stranger, which echoes the Jewish and Christian scriptures’ call to welcome the stranger long before they were introduced to European religion. In chapter twelve, “A Shared Narrative,” Ray Aldred advocates for the need of a shared narrative that will foster a shared identity for all Canadians. Aldred points to the tradition of the Treaty relationship, spiritually based, that could ultimately lead to proper relationships between First Nations, settlers, and new comers. In the last chapter of this section, “Immigration: From Borders to Boundaries under First Nations Tutelage,” Allen Jorgenson reflects on his own relationship to the land once occupied by the First Nations, and proposes that Christians can learn from the First Nations’ understanding of space and place which can lead to a reimagining of borders as boundaries.

The last section addresses issues related to traditional views on immigration. One reaction to the Age of Migration has been the focus on protecting and enforcing boundaries and borders, which the stranger’s presence challenges. The presence and movements of immigrants challenges the purpose and legitimacy of borders and boundaries. Yet at the same time, boundaries and borders rightly conceived and interpreted are also necessary for human flourishing. This is true of political and physical borders and boundaries, as well as our spiritual, emotional, and psychological boundaries. Laura Alexander begins this section with “Lutheran Thought, Civil Disobedience, and the New Sanctuary Movement,” which examines the New Sanctuary Movement in light of the Lutheran tradition. Alexander highlights and reminds us of the moral dilemma faced by morally conscious people who are “breaking” the law and those who support undocumented immigrants. While the Lutheran tradition emphasizes obedience to the secular law, Alexander posits that the thoughts of Luther and Bonhoeffer, taken together, sheds light on the
discussion of the movement’s shared concern for meeting all of our moral obligations—including the economic and political. Chapter fifteen, “The Morning After: The Role of Faith-Based Groups Post-Immigration Reform,” deals with the role of faith-based groups in the context of the eventual passage of the proposed “Comprehensive Immigration Reform” legislation. Aja suggests new and bold steps that inter-faith organizations and groups can take, that will help address the economic, social, and political injustices suffered by millions of migrants. Joseph Bracken and Marc Pugliese introduce Whitehead’s metaphysics to the immigration debate in “Blending Past and Future: Whitehead’s Metaphysics and Immigration Reform.” In this chapter, Bracken and Pugliese posit that the value of change, viewed negatively by both classical metaphysics and those opposed to undocumented and legal immigration, must be reformed to reflect reality that is defined by change. Changes, caused by immigration, are not to be feared, but appreciated as an expression of what Whitehead called Creativity, which provides hope for positive changes to our present societal forms, including reified borders and boundaries, that resist change. The final chapter is by Ronald Baard, who explores mental illness as a type of immigration, when one also becomes a “stranger in this world.” Baard details the immigration, physical and psychological, of his immigrant grandfather. “Immigration as/and Mental Illness: More than Metaphor” presents immigration as a rich metaphor for the experiences suffered by those afflicted with mental illness, and the various responses to that immigration in society and in religion.