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‘AM I MY BROTHER’S KEEPER?’

Searching for a Spirituality for Immigrants

Hung Trung Pham

Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He said, ‘I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?’ (Genesis 4:9)

IN NOVEMBER 2014 the Obama administration in the United States announced an extension of relief for immigrant families, prompting one cartoonist to caricature ‘an immigrant family climbing through a window to crash a white family’s Thanksgiving dinner’ with the ‘white father unhappily telling his family, “Thanks to the president’s immigration order, we’ll be having extra guests this Thanksgiving”.’¹ This controversial cartoon contained an unintended irony: Thanksgiving is a national holiday commemorating European settlers’ first harvest in New England in 1621 among the Native Americans. So, the first Thanksgiving could be depicted as white families crashing the Native Americans’ celebration. The European forefathers, however, were generously welcomed on that first Thanksgiving. This is one example of how some Americans have forgotten who they are and where they came from. More importantly, the divided opinions about President Obama’s policy announcement have once again stirred up the age-old debate concerning immigration.

Immigration has resurfaced as one of the most urgent issues on the political—and religious—agenda, not only in the United States but all over the world. According to the United Nations’ International Migration Report, there were 232 million international migrants globally in 2013. Among the continents attracting migrants, Europe and Asia ranked first

¹ Emma G. Fitzsimmons, ‘Newspaper Apologizes for Cartoon on Immigrants’, *The New York Times* (24 November 2014), A15. The policy of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) allows some illegal immigrants to the USA temporary, renewable work permits. See <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca>.

and second with 72 million and 71 million respectively, and North America came third with 53 million. Africa, South America and the Caribbean, and Oceania made up the remaining 36 million.² According to the Migration Policy Institute, the immigrant population of the USA alone reached 41.3 million in 2013. The US remained the most significant destination for immigrants, housing 20 per cent of all international migrants.³

While the numbers present important data, the experience of what it means to be an immigrant eclipses such statistics. If the experience of immigration is not taken into account, these numbers become inconvenient and faceless; they are often misused and manipulated in both political and religious debate. In responding to President Obama's most recent plan to provide relief for immigrants, US Jesuits and Roman Catholic bishops issued a joint statement 'urging elected officials to work together to craft a viable immigration system' that must be based upon 'family unity, human dignity, mercy and justice, transparency and accountability'.⁴ A viable immigration system must take in account the experience of what it means to be an immigrant and the underlying histories of immigrants.

I myself am one of these immigrants. I left Vietnam and migrated to the United States of America when I was sixteen years old. For Vietnamese Americans, like many other immigrant communities, issues of immigration touch on profound historical conflicts and tensions between the community and its host.

The long drawn-out Vietnam War ended with the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975. The communist regime in the North successfully defeated the US-supported regime in the South. As a result, the country was reunited under the banner of communism. For the USA, this ended a protracted, ambiguous and bitter involvement in the fighting in Vietnam. But as the new communist regime took control, a mass exodus took place. People began to flee the country. Some left for political reasons. Others fled because of economic hardship. And still others departed

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013), *International Migration Report 2013*, available at https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/migration/migrationreport2013/Full_Document_final.pdf. For the purposes of the report, 'international migrants are equated either with the foreign born or with foreign citizens' (1).

³ Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, 'Frequent Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States', *Migration Policy Institute* (26 February 2015), available at <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states/>, accessed 9 May 2015.

⁴ 'U.S. Jesuits Join Catholic Bishops in Welcoming Obama Administration's Plan to Provide Immigration Relief' (21 November 2014), available at <http://jesuits.org/press-detail?TN=NEWS-20141201030232>, accessed 9 May 2015.



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Vietnamese refugees waiting for resettlement at a camp in Hong Kong in 1975

owing to complex social and psychological circumstances. They used any means possible to bring them to what they saw as the land of freedom. They travelled on foot, then escaped in boats or by air. They relied on charity. They contacted sponsor organizations. Some used bribery to get transport. They were known as ‘boat people’.

Among those who fled were elderly people, frightened of retaliation by the new regime. The young also left, looking for opportunities for education and employment away from a country ravaged by war and political turmoil. Parents who dreamed better dreams for their families packed up and departed, taking with them their children, too young to understand but forced to leave anyway. They were women and men heading towards a promise of freedom and prosperity. Now, almost forty years after the fall, Vietnamese still look for ways to leave their motherland and seek refuge in the United States or in Europe. They resort to falsifying documents. They pay middlemen to transport them across borders. They fake marriage. All these efforts are directed toward the same goal, gaining safe passage to the imagined destination of prosperity and freedom.

Upon arriving in their host country, this idea of a journey to a better life often starts to seem distant, if not impossible. The reality of what it means to be an immigrant begins to take hold. The harsh and painful process of transition never seems to end; the dream remains distant and seemingly unattainable. They find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings

***Individuals
struggle with
their own
sense of
identity and
purpose***

instead of being settled in the new home they imagined. Rather than finding safe transport to a new country, they wake up floating in the middle of a vast ocean. Rather than being welcomed into the new neighbourhood and community they anticipated, they wait for settlement in a refugee camp. Social alienation, political instability, the fear of violence, loneliness, homesickness and depression replace the imagined life of freedom and opportunity. Their personal integrity is tested; their values clash with those of their new homeland; parents and children become divided by these new values, by language and by culture; and individuals struggle with their own sense of identity and purpose.

Though my own experience remains unique and personal, I am convinced that the struggle to negotiate cultural differences in a new land, and especially to integrate this experience into one's spiritual journey, lies close to the hearts of all immigrants. For Christian immigrants, how does this inner struggle for identity continue to shape the faith, not only of the immigrants themselves, but also of the whole community we call Church today?

Joseph, whose name was changed to Zaphenathpaneah, is one of the earliest immigrants in the Jewish biblical narrative: his story is found in Genesis 37–50. Joseph has been an intimate companion for me, with whom I identify closely. I share with him the struggle of what it means to be an immigrant, and he remains for me a constant source of inspiration and of hope.

The story of Joseph's journey to Egypt and the eventual migration of his brothers and father constitutes one of the longest novellas in the Hebrew canon. Told and retold in stories, books, musicals and films, it elevates Joseph as one of the heroic figures of Israel's biblical history. But a closer examination of the biblical tradition actually discloses the challenges, struggles and identity crisis of an immigrant. It narrates Joseph's unchosen transfer to a foreign land that was, likewise, not of his choosing. And it tells of the mishaps and threats to his life on his way to assimilation into Egyptian society.

Joseph was the second youngest son of Jacob, one of the three key patriarchs of Israel's ancestral tradition. Jacob's special love for Joseph prompted jealousy from his brothers. Reporting to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal, the brothers secretly sold him to a band of Ishmaelites, a group of traders heading towards Egypt. Thus Joseph's entry into another land and culture was not voluntary.

And when he arrived in Egypt the constraints on his freedom continued. He was sold as a slave to an Egyptian official. Though he carried out his duties with high praise from his master, as an outsider he was also an easy target for accusation of a crime that he did not commit. He was imprisoned; as an immigrant he had no legal recourse or personal credibility. During his time in confinement, Joseph interpreted the dreams of an official, and then the dreams of Pharaoh himself. His usefulness to those in power won him his freedom, and he eventually served as governor in Egypt. Many changes occurred as he became more and more embedded in Egyptian society. He married and had two sons. His name was changed, and he became part of the ruling elite.

However, when his brothers travelled to Egypt to find food, Joseph was obliged to confront his alienation from his original culture, his family and even his own identity. His brothers did not recognise him, and they spoke a different language. Moreover, they were all suffering from the economic deprivation of famine while Joseph was living among the wealthy Egyptian elite. Much of the remainder of the story focuses on Joseph's struggles to reclaim his place in his family, to reunite with his brothers and father, to bridge the cultural differences, to mend broken relationships and to find a way to belong to both worlds. Like the experience of the modern immigrant, the story of Joseph is charged with alienation, misunderstanding, identity struggles, false judgments and, even in the midst of apparent power and success, the constant, disquieting experience of liminality.

The process by which immigrants assimilate themselves and adapt to their host culture is complex. Earlier theoretical approaches to how Vietnamese immigrants, such as myself, adapt to life in the USA presented US society as a 'linear hierarchy' consisting of 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Moving from the marginal position of 'outsiders', immigrants gradually lose their distinctive cultural traits and become transplanted into the circle of 'insiders' within the cultural and social structures of US society.⁵ However, recent studies have pointed out that, since society in the United States is itself divided or segmented, the process of immigrant assimilation and adaptation in fact follows a 'segmented assimilation' model, taking 'different pathways ... depending on a variety of conditions and contexts, vulnerabilities and resources'.⁶

⁵ Carl L. Bankston III and Min Zhou, 'The Social Adjustment of Vietnamese American Adolescents: Evidence for a Segmented Assimilation Approach', *Social Science Quarterly*, 78 (1997), 508–523, here 509.

⁶ See above, also Rubén G. Rumbaut, 'The Crucible Within: Ethnic Identity, Self-Esteem, and Segmented Assimilation among Children of Immigrants', *International Migration Review*, 28 (2014), 748–794.

Among the diverse contingencies affecting immigrants in the ‘segmented assimilation’ model two stand out: first, the social group to which immigrants belong—whether they are labourers, professionals, entrepreneurs, refugees or asylum seekers; and second, the context of their reception, specifically, the policies of the receiving government, the conditions of the host labour market and the characteristics of their own ethnic communities or the lack thereof.⁷ A detailed account of these factors and of the dynamic and interaction between them goes beyond the scope of this discussion. However I should like to elicit and to reflect on three general characteristics involved in the process of immigrant assimilation and adaptation, following the basic structure of the ‘segmented assimilation’ model and focusing on my own adoptive country, the United States, prompted by many years of studying the character of the biblical Joseph and his own struggle to negotiate cultural differences.

‘In the Society, but Not Yet of It’⁸

How Joseph struggled to fit in with Egyptian society remains one of the dominant themes of the Joseph novella. From his arrival in Egypt, Joseph proved to be the sort of person whose resourcefulness not only found ways through his difficulties but also enabled him to advance towards power and authority in society.⁹ As a slave and then a prisoner, Joseph found favour with his master and his chief jailer, since all things prospered in his hands (Genesis 39:3, 23). Joseph was entrusted with managing all of Potiphar’s household and possessions (39:5); he was deputed to run the prison (39:22–23) and, ultimately, to administer the whole of Egypt (39:45). In other words, Joseph seems to have successfully found his place in the land of Egypt. However, with all his power and authority, he remained an outsider—someone *in* but not yet *of* the society, vulnerable and marginalised.

In Potiphar’s house, despite being a faithful servant, Joseph was stripped and falsely accused (39:12, 17). As an outsider considered ‘not yet of’ the society, he had neither legal recourse nor any form of representation. No one bothered to ask his side of the story. He was simply described

⁷ Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: U. of California P, 1996), 14–18.

⁸ Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 118.

⁹ David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam Series: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003), 294.

as another ‘Hebrew slave’ who deserve to be thrown into jail without the due process guaranteed for Egyptians.

The story of Joseph is one of only three places in the Hebrew Bible where the word ‘Hebrew’ itself is used repeatedly. The others are in the first ten chapters of Exodus and the first half of the First Book of Samuel. In all three passages, the word ‘Hebrew’ appears where people’s ethnic identities are discussed and contrasted.¹⁰ In Exodus it is the ‘Hebrews’ versus the ‘Egyptians’, whereas in the first book of Samuel ‘Hebrews’ confront ‘Philistines’. In the story of Joseph, the word ‘Hebrew’ occurs five times: the first three when the Egyptians refer to Joseph (39: 14, 17; 41: 12), the fourth when Joseph speaks to Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer (40: 15), and the fifth in contrasting ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Egyptian’ customs (43: 32). In all five, Joseph is identified as a foreigner residing in a land away from his home.¹¹

For Joseph, the initial attack by his brothers ‘rendered him mute because, all of sudden, he was nobody, and a nobody has no voice’.¹² In Egypt, although he correctly interpreted the chief cupbearer’s dream and begged for help getting out of prison, once he was no longer needed Joseph was forgotten (40: 23). To forget him is to make him a stranger.¹³ Even after Joseph had done all he could to save Egypt from famine, his family had to be settled in a distinct, separate territory, the region of Goshen, to reduce fear and hatred from the Egyptians: ‘because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians’ (46: 34).¹⁴

Throughout the history of immigration to the USA there has been ‘a consistent thread of fear that the “alien element” would somehow undermine the institutions of the country and lead it down the path of disintegration and decay’.¹⁵ Historically, this fear has most often been disguised beneath the rubric of promoting a better democracy, or linguistic unity, or territorial integrity. For the native, the fear of the ‘alien element’ is grounded in the transitional status of the immigrant community as ‘in the society, but not yet of it’, a status which has left immigrants

¹⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, translated by John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster 1972), 367.

¹¹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 367.

¹² Cotter, *Genesis*, 288.

¹³ Walter Brueggeman, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1982), 167.

¹⁴ See Franz V. Greifenhagen, *Egypt on the Pentateuch’s Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel’s Identity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 34–44.

¹⁵ Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 94.



Chinese labourers working on the Transcontinental Railroad, 1860s

open and vulnerable to all sorts of cultural stereotypes and prejudices.¹⁶ Immigrant workers at the turn of the twentieth century were accused of ‘political radicalism’; they ‘transported the “virus” of socialistic ideas that threatened to undermine American democratic institutions’. Chinese immigrants ‘were portrayed as “half-civilized beings” who spread “filth, depravity and epidemic”’. Japanese labourers ““by reason of race habits, mode of living, disposition, and general characteristics are undesirable ... a great impending danger to ... welfare”’.¹⁷

More recently, a study of US immigrant children in Southern California and Florida shows that ‘three-fourths of the Jamaicans and two-thirds of the Mexicans, Haitians, Filipinos, and Indochinese have felt discriminated against no matter how much education they might earn’.¹⁸ Gerdenio Manuel, a US Jesuit priest of Filipino origin, describes ““innocent” insults, rooted in ignorance or mistaken attribution’, but he also admits that, even as a Jesuit:

Neither educational achievement, nor living in a religious community, nor holy orders made me immune from the stereotyping, entitlement, and rudeness that our kitchen and household help—many of whom

¹⁶ Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 94.

¹⁷ Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 97–98, citing *Mining and Scientific Press* (1860) and *Journal of the Senate of the State of California* (1905).

¹⁸ Rumbaut, ‘Crucible Within’, 770–771.

are Pilipino or Latino—sometimes experience from our guests or even from ourselves.¹⁹

Manuel, who is trained as a clinical psychologist, noticed that his experience of prejudice and stereotyping left him and other Jesuits of colour ‘feeling “invisible” and ... without legitimate claim to position or place, “guests” at the big house and without a voice’.²⁰

In their book *Immigrant America*, Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut observe that, when confronted with cultural stereotypes and prejudices rooted in fear, ‘immigrants often lack sufficient knowledge of the new language and culture to realize what happening and explain themselves effectively’. As a result, they tend to fall back on passive endurance rather than active participation or even opposition: ‘For the most part, the first-born generation lacks “voice”’.²¹ These immigrants do not realise that the combination of passive endurance and voicelessness opens the way to further fear and active hostility towards them. As they cope with these experiences, immigrants find themselves ‘torn between old loyalties and new realities’ and retain ‘an overriding preoccupation with the old country’. Even for the more educated, professional and entrepreneurial immigrants who demonstrate a higher level of active participation and linguistic ability, ‘old loyalties die hard because individuals socialized in another language and culture have great difficulty giving them up as their primary source of identity’.²² Their political concerns tend to focus less on the host country, and more on their countries of origin.²³

‘Betwixt and Between’: Individual Immigrant Identity

The phenomenon of being ‘in the society but not yet of it’ reflects a personal struggle within the identity of the individual immigrant. After thirteen years of grappling and wrestling with himself and others, Joseph, at the age of thirty, was named as vizier, second-in-command to Pharaoh throughout the land of Egypt (Genesis 41:42–44). ‘He became thoroughly assimilated, adopted the customs of his environment, changed his name, wore Egyptian clothes, swore by Pharaoh’s name (Genesis 42:15), and

¹⁹ Gerdenio Manuel, ‘Little Brown Brother’, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 33/5, ‘How Multicultural Are We? Six Stories’ (November 2001), 23–27, here 23–24.

²⁰ Manuel, ‘Little Brown Brother’, 25.

²¹ Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 95.

²² Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 95–96.

²³ See Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 102–107.

married an Egyptian wife.’²⁴ The name of Joseph’s first-born son, Manasseh, signifies ‘to forget’, because ‘God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house’ (41:51).

When his brothers came to Egypt to buy grain, Joseph recognised them, but they did not recognise him. Having encountered them, Joseph realised that his identity as Zaphenathpaneah had been compromised. His brothers and their problems—his past—kept coming back. How long could he resist them? Not for long, since the brothers’ presence forced him to examine himself more deeply in both cultures with which he was associated and identified. Was he going to identify himself with the Hebrew heritage into which he was born or the Egyptian heritage into which he had married (43:32)? ‘He is Zaphenathpaneah, but not an Egyptian; he is Joseph, but no longer identified as a Hebrew as before (39:14, 17; 41:12).’²⁵ Was he Joseph or Zaphenathpaneah, ‘or would he remain in the limbo status of an alien?’²⁶

Peter Phan, a Vietnamese-born immigrant to the US, identifies this ‘limbo status’ as ‘betwixt and between’.

To be betwixt and between is to be neither here nor there, to be neither this thing nor that Politically, it means not residing at the centers of power of the two intersecting worlds but occupying the precarious and narrow margins where the two dominant groups meet and clash, and denied the opportunity to wield power in matters of public interest. Socially, [it] is to be part of a minority, a member of a marginal(ized) group. Culturally, it means not being fully integrated into and accepted by either cultural system, being a *mestizo*, a person of mixed race Paradoxically, being neither this nor that allows one to be *both* this and that. Belonging to both worlds and cultures, marginal(ized) persons have the opportunity to fuse them together and, out of their respective resources, fashion a new, different world, so that persons at the margins stand not only between these two worlds and cultures but also *beyond* them.²⁷

Other personal testimonies also witness how a variety of immigrants have confronted similar struggles in their ‘betwixt and between’ identities.

²⁴ *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, edited by W. Gunther Plaut (New York: UAHC, 1981), 271.

²⁵ Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 72.

²⁶ Mann, *Book of Torah*, 68.

²⁷ Peter C. Phan, ‘Betwixt and Between: Doing Theology with Memory and Imagination’, in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, edited by Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 113–134, here 113.

For Jung Young Lee, a foreign-born Korean American minister, a return trip to Korea aroused contradictory feelings:

I felt like a total stranger, wholly isolated from my motherland; yet, paradoxically, I also felt that I belonged there and was a part of it. I experienced simultaneously a sense of separation and unity, repulsion and attraction, alienation and belonging, rejection and acceptance.²⁸

María Teresa Gastón Witchger, a laywoman who came to the USA from Cuba when she was three years old, writes of ‘my unspoken sense of loss, my desire to find a missing part of me, that made me want to form relationships with people of different cultures’.²⁹ For myself, the experience of being a Jesuit and a Vietnamese immigrant to the USA has been an emotional roller-coaster, moving back and forth between the excitement of having lived in two cultures and the utter loneliness of feeling lost, belonging to neither.

At last, torn and unable to resist any longer his inner cultural and social tension, Zaphenathpaneah wept loudly in the hearing of all the Egyptians and Pharaoh’s household, proclaiming himself to his brothers: ‘I am Joseph’ (45:1–3). Thus he came to terms with his past: he is both Zaphenathpaneah, who is of Hebrew blood, and Joseph, who continues to embrace and embody his Egyptianness.³⁰

Reversing the Roles of Parents and Children

As Joseph-Zaphenathpaneah came to terms with his past and embraced his present, he reunited the family and became responsible for their welfare. Interestingly, the reappearance of his brothers instantly reminds Joseph, not of their cruelty, but of his own dreams. Consequently, he encourages them,

... to revisit and reinterpret their past in order to ensure their future. Only when they achieve the awareness that they must be their brothers’ keepers, the insight Cain so dramatically denied, are they qualified to forge a community—in peace, not in violence. And so while Cain is condemned to exile, Joseph’s brothers become the Sons of Israel.³¹

²⁸ Jung Young Lee, ‘A Life In-Between: A Korean–American Journey’, in *Journeys at the Margin*, 23–39, here 23.

²⁹ María Teresa Gastón Witchger, ‘Memories of My Hispanic Adolescence’, in *Así Es: Stories of Hispanic Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1994), 39–44, here 43.

³⁰ Cotter, *Genesis*, 319.

³¹ Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P, 1997), 167.



A Vietnamese American grandmother and her grandchildren

As the brothers depart for Canaan to take the good news to Jacob, Joseph-Zaphenathpaneah instructs them, 'do not quarrel along the way' (45:24). They are not only to give Jacob the news; Joseph insists that they should bring their father and the whole extended family to Egypt where he will provide land for them (45:9–11).

Like Joseph-Zaphenathpaneah, immigrants often feel the burden of being expected to take care of others in the family, whether sending money back home or helping to bring them to the new country. According to a recent Bloomberg report, since 2000, international migrants have sent more than 500 billion dollars back to families in

their countries of origin. As a result, according to a World Bank data, such remittances account for 8 per cent of the gross domestic product of low-income nations.³²

Within the family, immigrant parents often rely on their children for information and guidance, because the children have moved so far ahead of them in understanding the new language and culture. 'In these situations children become, in a very real sense, their parents' parents.'³³ This role reversal adds to painful struggle involved in the process of immigrant adaptation to the host society.

My Brother's Keeper

By contrast with the narratives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the patriarchs of the Israelites, in the Joseph-Zaphenathpaneah account God neither appears nor speaks directly. Instead God's voice is heard and known

³² J. McCormick, 'Global Immigrants Send \$500 Billion Back Home', *Bloomberg Washington Newsletter* (17 December 2013), available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-12-17/global-immigrants-send-500-billion-back-home.html>, accessed 28 March 2014.

³³ Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 239–240.

through the process of dialogue and interaction among the characters. Through dialogues and discernment, the narrative of Joseph presents a process of human transformation from a self-important and self-absorbed individual to a generous and forgiving immigrant. For immigrants, such human transformation may occur through the struggle of being ‘in the society and not yet of it’, the identity crisis of being ‘betwixt and between’, and the burden of role reversal within the family.

‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’ (Genesis 4:9), Cain’s response to God’s inquiry after his brother Abel, also serves as one of the themes of the Joseph novella. The Hebrew verb *hrg*, meaning to kill, is used to describe both Cain’s murder of Abel and the murder that Joseph’s brothers had intended before they decide to abandon him in a pit (Genesis 37:24) and, eventually, sell him to the Ishmaelites (37:28). Unlike Cain, the narrative account of Joseph-Zaphenathpaneah answers an emphatic ‘yes’ to this question. In revisiting and discerning the past to ensure the future, in telling his brothers and father to come to Canaan and providing them with lands, Joseph-Zaphenathpaneah has become their keeper. While this story concludes the book of Genesis in the Jewish Bible, it opens a new chapter in the history of the Israelites—of those who are chosen, and those who ‘have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed’ (32:28). As immigrant Jews living in Egypt, while their struggle continues, they are in position ready to journey towards the Promised Land.

Hung Trung Pham SJ currently teaches Ignatian spirituality as an assistant professor at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in Berkeley, California. He emigrated from his native Vietnam and attended high school in the United States. After graduating from Regis University in Denver, he entered the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus and taught chemistry and biology at St Louis University High School, as well as training maths and science teachers with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Mae Hong Son, Thailand. His doctoral thesis, from Comillas Pontifical Universidad de Madrid, is entitled ‘Ignatian Inculturation: Spirituality of the First Jesuits in Asia Exemplified by Alexandre de Rhodes (1593–1660) and His Catechisms in Vietnam’.

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