

Reflection
Preacher: Son-Mey Chiu
Date: July 22, 2018

00:00
A Reflection on Immigration

It is my habit to read the news every morning because I believe that being well-informed can help me orient myself in the world and in my faith. However, for almost 19 months to date, the news has become increasingly unsettling. It is indeed an extraordinary phenomenon that breaking news bombards us almost everyday. And breaking news has even escalated to heart-breaking news. In the morning of June 14, (2018) tears flooded my eyes when I learned from the Washington Post that the Attorney General confirmed the government's policies to prosecute anybody crossing the Mexican border, and to separate children from their parents. He cited Roman 13 to underscore that the Apostle Paul commanded us "to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for His purposes." However, whether by design or out of negligence, the Attorney General left out what the Apostle Paul said later in Roman 13: 9-10:

. . . and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." [b] 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

And it seemed also that the Attorney General, obviously a Christian, had forgotten how Jesus treated children with love and respect as recorded in the gospels. I would like to cite Mark 10:13-16:

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

In the days that followed, horrific images of young children kept in cages and of toddlers appearing unaccompanied in court flashed on the TV screen. All of a sudden, to my surprise, unrelated images from *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot surged in my brain, such as:

I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.

The Waste Land was the most difficult poem I had ever studied. But at that moment, what flashed on the TV screen helped me reach an epiphany of understanding. The jarring TV images actually echo the poem's jarring images of barren lands, of the death of culture and civilization after the First World War. All of these images are, in fact, symbols of the devastating effects of man's inhumanity towards man.

I have been contemplating on the issue of immigration since January 27, 2017 when the government announced the Travel Ban on Muslim people. As a member of the Hong Kong University Alumni Association, New England Chapter, I celebrated the Chinese New Year in a party in February 2017 with exchange students and graduate students from my alma mater, who were studying at MIT and Harvard. During the party the conversation concentrated

primarily on whether they should go back to Hong Kong during their spring breaks. Because of the Travel Ban, these brilliant innocent young people were wondering whether they could return to the U.S. to continue their studies if they took a leave of absence. They thought, as foreign students, they might be treated like their Muslim counterparts. Thus this joyous party turned into a counseling party. What a shame!

Then came the news about the debate on the passing of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Bill or the DACA Bill. Personally, I think that children of illegal immigrants who grew up as law-abiding adults in this country should be granted legal residency and citizenship. They should not be deported to pay for their parents' sins. In fact, they know no other countries other than the U.S. To send them back to where their parents came from was to sentence them to a dismal future in the countries they know little about. I hope the U.S. government is Christian enough to grant them clemency to stay.

Before the year 2017, I always regarded immigration in a positive light. Actually, I was an accidental immigrant to this country. I came here for my graduate studies, fell in love and married an American citizen. Joyfully, as newly weds, we went to Hong Kong to celebrate with my family. However, when we returned, we were detained in the Washington Seattle airport, the first port of entry. The reason was that I could not use my Hong Kong British passport to come to the U.S. anymore. Because my husband was an American citizen, the authority immediately issued a green card for me so that I could return to my new home in the U.S. as a legal resident. The immigration law at that time stated that husband and wife should not be separated. I did not mind having a green card because, even though I am Chinese by culture, I had never held a Chinese passport, since I was born in the then Crown Colony of Hong Kong. Holding a British passport or an American green card made no difference to me. Some years later, I even became an American citizen, exchanging my British passport for an American passport.

All these happened in the 1970s and the 1980s. It seemed to me that the U.S. was a much kinder and gentler nation who welcomed strangers and foreigners. During my interview for a student visa with the American Consulate General, I was treated with utmost respect. The consul welcomed me to study in the U.S. He also told me that I could work in the U.S. upon receiving my Master Degree. When I set foot in the U.S., a welcoming team from the university received me. In my first evening in the dormitory, many of the students greeted me in my room. The next morning, a Mr. and Mrs. Owen, missionaries of a local church, called me and invited me to their church on the coming Sunday. They asked me to wait in the dorm lobby and they would pick me up. Indeed they did, together with some other foreign students. Since then, I enjoyed going to church freely without fearing any objection from my autocratic father while enjoying the intellectual freedom as a graduate student. Every now and then hospitable families in the church community invited me to their homes for a Sunday dinner after church. I basked in the generosity and hospitality of the American people and thought America was a truly Christian country welcoming strangers.

Before my naturalization in the U.S., I was referred to as a "native" Hong Konger, not a Chinese from China, because my ancestors had resided in this region long before the British colonization in 1842 after the Opium War. However, strictly speaking, my ancestors were migrants or political refugees from Northern China. They were the descendants of the last emperors of the Song Dynasty. In the year 1279, the last emperor, (Song Di Bing,) after fleeing from the pursuit of the Mongolian troops, jumped off a cliff into the sea in the Hong Kong area and this horrific event marked the end of the Song Dynasty, and the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty, established by Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan. So my ancestors, remnants of the Song dynasty, bearing the surname Chiu, (Zhao in China or Chao in Taiwan), became migrants and, later, settlers in the Hong Kong-Canton area. A big boulder carved with the characters Song Wang Tai, Terrace of the Song Kings, which is the focal point of a memorial

park in Hong Kong, marks this historical event. I reflected upon this event very often, thinking that if the villagers in Hong Kong had not welcome my ancestors and had them sent back to Northern China, all of them would have been killed by the Mongols and I would never have existed.

Hong Kong, under British rule, was lenient to immigrants too. After the Nationalist-Communist Civil War in China ended, tens of thousands of Chinese fled to Hong Kong because of the Communist Takeover in 1949. The Hong Kong government welcomed these political refugees. Actually, a lot of my friends were children of those immigrants who related to me horrendous stories of persecution by the communists. One friend told me about how his grandmother bled to death by kneeling on a heap of broken glasses simply because she was a rich landlord's wife. Another friend told me that her father had to run from one friend's home to another in order to escape from the harassment from or possibly political assassination by the communists or the nationalists. The Communists hated him because he had been a high-ranking Nationalist official. The Nationalists hated him because he did not follow them to Taiwan. He chose to live in the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong because it was politically neutral, favoring neither the Communists nor the Nationalists. If my friends and their families had been sent back to Communist China, they would have suffered death or a life worse than death. Fortunately, the Hong Kong Government legalized their immigration, which, later, had proven to be mutually beneficial. The refugees found a safe enclave in Hong Kong; and Hong Kong prospered from their professional skills, labor and capitals. Instead of being impoverished by the influx of refugees, Hong Kong became a rich international seaport, the Pearl of the Orient, in the 1960s, enjoying fiscal surpluses every year and the status of being the third largest financial center in the world. In 1997, Britain was reluctant to give back to China its goose that laid the golden egg, and China was too happy to take it back. So it can be said that Hong Kong is a success story of immigration.

It seemed that the present U.S. government has forgotten that this country is a prosperous country built by immigrants too. Some of the earliest immigrants were religious refugees who traversed boldly across the sea to America on the Mayflower. Imagine what would have happened if the Native Americans had sent these Pilgrims back to their Mayflower and to England, instead of teaching them how to prepare turkey dinners. (Hmm, that means NO sumptuous Thanksgiving dinners and NO spectacular July 4th firework display at the Esplanade.) Hospitality to strangers and foreigners is not just a Christian virtue. It is valued by the great civilizations in the West and in the East. There was a Greek myth about how a poor couple named Baucis and Philemon entertained strangers who were disguised by the god Zeus and the goddess Hermes. Later the gods honored and rewarded their hospitality shown to strangers in spite of their poverty. The story echoed the Christian teaching in Hebrew 13:2: Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

The Chinese, too, value hospitality which is a manifestation of love and grace. Confucius said that people within the four seas were our brothers or friends (even though they were strangers.) We should regard it a joyful event when such a friend/stranger comes to visit from afar.

Let us go back to the Mexican border and The Waste Land I started the reflection with. T.S. Eliot, in spite of his despair over the devastation of humanity and civilization caused by the First World War, as lamented in The Waste Land, reminded us of the hope for salvation by depicting the resurrected Christ traveling with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. He wrote:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you

He also ended the poem by repeating the word for peace from Sanskrit: "Shantih shantih shantih."

I hope sincerely that in revising the U.S. Immigration Law, the lawmakers can change the government's hostile, inhumane and unchristian behavior towards the migrants from the Mexican borders. I hope they can act civilly in peace as true Christians by following Jesus' two commandments on Love, which is the fulfillment of the Law. They are recorded in Mark 12:30-31:

30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'[a] 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] There is no commandment greater than these."

By: Son-Mey Chiu