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Leviticus 19: 33-34

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One of the most heartening things about the immigrants rights movement today is the involvement by U.S. citizens who are people of faith. Thousands turned out in the streets around the country -- side by side with immigrants -- to demand humane immigration reform and to express outrage at Arizona legislation that cracks down on immigrants. The concern for immigrants' rights is mirrored in migration theology, a growing area of scholarship that examines what the Bible has to say about how we treat "the stranger among us."

Migration theologians frequently cite Leviticus 19: 33-34. "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

The focus of migration theology is on the treatment of the "alien" in terms of charity and justice; they need our help and, according to the Biblical tradition of hospitality, we must respond. (See *NCR*, September 18, 2009, "Theology in the Age of Migration.")

But there is more to this story. What if we are the ones in need of help from immigrants? What if we need the presence of immigrants to aid us in the battle against ethnocentrism rooted in white supremacist attitudes?

This is the argument put forth by Jose F. Morales Jr. in the March issue of *Sojourners* magazine. Immigration reform -- bringing scores of immigrants out of the shadows -- will "allow the church to pray and worship in a new way" as immigrants and non-immigrants alike work together to build God's kingdom on earth, Morales writes. "In this light, it can be argued that the church must rise up in support of the immigrant ... in order to provide healing for a church and nation in need of repentance and reform. Diversity within the church will not only be liberation for a nation trapped in its own white skin, but it

will also serve as a crucial spiritual discipline for the white American church."

Morales's argument is one rarely heard. Hopefully, more and more scholars will integrate migration theology with an understanding of the history of racism in America. Such an understanding will require that we repent?and in so doing, renew our spirits and rebuild our churches on a firmer foundation, in the image of God.

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