A Biblical Ethic of Kinship for People On the Move

Dr. Mark Glanville[1], © 2022

Introduction

The great evangelical preacher and statesman John Stott urged Christians to practice what he called "double listening," as we discern the nature of Christian discipleship. We should listen with one ear to Scripture and with another ear to culture, Stott said. Double listening. Such an approach has never been more important than in relation to refugee and immigration issues. The problem today is not that Christians have failed to listen to culture, but that the church all too often echoes the values of culture, and then reads Scripture selectively in the light of these values. It is vital to listen again to Scripture, allowing the Bible as *a unified story that is fulfilled in the gospel of Christ* to guide our discernment.

This chapter seeks to do just that, reading the bible as a unified story. We trace the arc of the biblical narrative, revisiting key questions for biblical theology including: "What is the gospel?" And, "What is the nature of Christian witness?" On our journey through Scripture we will discern a biblical ethic of kinship for people on the move. This chapter is written cognizant of the pressing realities of global displacement today and also of the various political sensitivities within host nations that demand thoughtful advocacy and cultural sensitivity. It is the task of the following chapters to explore these realities—this chapter will delve deeply into biblical theology. As we go, we will pause from time to time to address some of the "But What About..." questions that arise in relation to refugee welcome. "But what about the Canaanites?" "But what about Romans 13?" people may ask. These are good questions, and we will take time to address some of them. But it is appropriate to start the journey at Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament.

Old Testament

We come to the Old Testament with two key questions: How does God see vulnerable people who are seeking a home, in the Old Testament? And, how was the Old Testament forming Israel to respond to people on the move? We will focus our exploration on the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy.

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Genesis

In Genesis 9, following the great flood God makes a covenant with *all* flesh, with every people group. As the curtain rises on the drama of the flood, human violence is corrupting God's good creation:

> "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence." (Gen 6:11, NRSV)

After the flood, God makes a covenant with all of humanity descended from Noah—"with you and your offspring after you." (Gen 9:9, cf. Gen 17:10) Don't miss the significance of the scope of this covenant: God makes a covenant of steadfast loyalty with *all* people, and even all animals, with "all flesh," a covenant for their ongoing life and flourishing. God declares this covenant no less than seven times in the narrative (Gen 6:18; 10:9–16).

Next Genesis 10 lays out genealogy of the nations, a family tree that includes all people groups. As this massive family tree unfurls like a fern frond, as the nations spread out over the earth, we see God's covenant with diverse people groups worked out at 10,000 feet. The family tree of humanity shows that God's covenant solidarity extends to people groups from Egypt to the Persian gulf, all of the lands of the great empires surrounding ancient Israel. And in the context of the flood, the covenant secures God's solidarity with and commitment to the life of these people groups.

For centuries, Black American theologians have considered theological significance of our common descent from Adam and from Noah, referring to our common descent as the "one blood doctrine."[2] Black preachers and writers have often drawn on the Apostle Paul's words Athens to establish to this doctrine:

> "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live . . ." (Acts 17:26)

Abolitionists grounded the abolition of slavery in the familial relation of all of humanity, among other biblical grounds.

[2] Lisa M. Bowens, *African American Readings of Paul: Reception, Resistance, and Transformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 28.

The divine covenant with all flesh is the vital (and often ignored) context for God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3. Here God promises to bless Abraham and his descendants, also promising to bless all people groups through Abraham's seed (Gen 12:3). Note the similarity in language between Gen 9:9 (God's covenant with Noah and his offspring) and Gen 17:10 (God's covenant with Abraham and his offspring). This similarly is communicating that God's covenant with Israel is made in the context of God's covenant commitment to every people group. God chooses one people group, Israel, as the chosen pathway though whom God will fulfill the divine covenant with every people group, the whole family tree of humanity.

So, from the very beginning of the biblical story God's loving solidarity with every cultural group and with every person is established by means of a covenant. When it comes to responding to people who are on the move, should we not take our cue from God, joining with those with whom God is already joined in covenant love?

Exodus

If you have ever imagined that the Old Testament dignifies Israel at the expense of the dignity of other people groups, then the second book of the Bible puts that idea to rest. Consider Zipporah, Moses wife, a daughter of Reuel the priest of Midian (Reuel is later referred to as Jethro). As Moses journeyed to Egypt along with his family the Lord sought to kill Moses in the night. Zipporah acted decisively, circumcising her son's foreskin with a flint and touching Moses' feet with it. Zipporah seems to work as a skilful priest, evident by her use of the flint, by her words (Exod 4:25), and by her knowledge of circumcision.[3] Zipporah was modelling for Moses the qualities of character required for his confrontation with Pharaoh and his leadership in Israel: namely a fear of Yahweh and a formidable boldness.

Consider, too, that in the exodus event Israel left Exodus as a mixed cultural group: "A mixed crowd also went up with them" (Exod 12:38). The author is stressing that God's ancient people were not identified by ethnicity or culture but by their covenant with Yahweh, by Yahweh's liberation and presence, and by their responsiveness to Yahweh's word.

One of the most astonishing windows into the place of diverse cultures in salvation history is Jethro the Midianite's counsel to Moses regarding the complexities of administration (Exod 18:1-27). Jethro, a non-Israelite, recommends a system for judicial reform (Exod 18:13-27). That is striking enough. What makes this narrative truly remarkable is that the very words of Jethro are then taken up within the Pentateuch itself, in the law of offices and the judiciary, Deut 1:8-18. The Midianite's words become the very words of Scripture![4] And recall that at this moment in salvation history, Israel themselves are a people on the move, akin to refugees.

[3] Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 63.
[4] See further Mark R. Glanville, *Adopting the Stranger as Kindred in Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: SBL, 2018), 118.

In sum, how does the book of Exodus conceive of the other nations, and of the dignity of all people groups? God's people are a cultural mix, a people who are on the move themselves. As those whom God has emancipated, Israel is utterly dependent on God and also deeply interdependent with strangers and neighbours. Without the stranger Israel wouldn't be Israel, and without the stranger Israel would have a different (and diminished) Pentateuch.

It is no surprise, then, that the book of Exodus twice forbids Israel from oppressing vulnerable outsiders (Exod 22:21; 23:9). Strangers were often employed on farms and in households as cheap labour, and Exodus insists that such people had to be treated with compassion and paid fairly. According to Exodus strangers, too, were to be included in the Sabbath rest (Exod 20:10; 23:9). In protecting the stranger, Exodus sets the reader up for the book of Deuteronomy where God's desire for the stranger comes into full focus.

Deuteronomy

The stranger in Deuteronomy was a vulnerable person who was not a member of the clan grouping in which they resided.[5] They were often exploited for cheap labour. And strangers were all too often enslaved, a tragic reality illustrated in Israel's own story—remember how the Hebrews dwelled as strangers in Egypt and were subsequently enslaved there (Deut 26:5–8)? The stranger appears no less than twenty-two times in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy provides protection for the stranger in legal proceedings (e.g., Deut 1:16–17). It provides for the stranger via various social and economic stipulations (e.g., Deut 5:12–15; 24:19–21). At the heart of Deuteronomy's response to forced displacement is a movement of adopting the stranger as kindred.

Divine Covenant With the Refugee in Deuteronomy 10:18–19

Deuteronomy 10:18–19 proclaims Yahweh's ongoing covenant commitment to the stranger:[6]

> Yahweh executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving them food and clothing. (Deut 10:18–19; NRSV, adapted)

[5] For a thorough analysis of the stranger in Deuteronomy see Mark R. Glanville, *Adopting the Stranger as Kindred in Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: SBL, 2018); M. Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 25–50; Mark Awabdy, *Immigrants and Innovative Law: Deuteronomy's Theological and Social Vision for the "gr,"* FAT 2.67 (Tübigen: Mohr Sieback, 2014).

[6] I provide a thorough analysis of Deut 10:18–19 in M. Glanville, *Adopting the Stranger as Kindred in Deuteronomy*, 214–221. See also M. Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 41–50.

The word "love" in this text refers to the steadfast loyalty of a covenant. For "love" is a key motif in ancient covenants. Subordinated kings were required to "love" the great king, demonstrating absolute loyalty.

But this isn't the only time the word "love" is used in Deuteronomy 10. The very next verse requires God's people to love the stranger, mirroring the love of Yahweh their God:

> You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deut 10:19; NRSV, adapted)

And, only a few verses earlier Deuteronomy has affirmed Yahweh's love for Israel:

> Yet the Lord set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. (Deut 10:15; NRSV, adapted.)

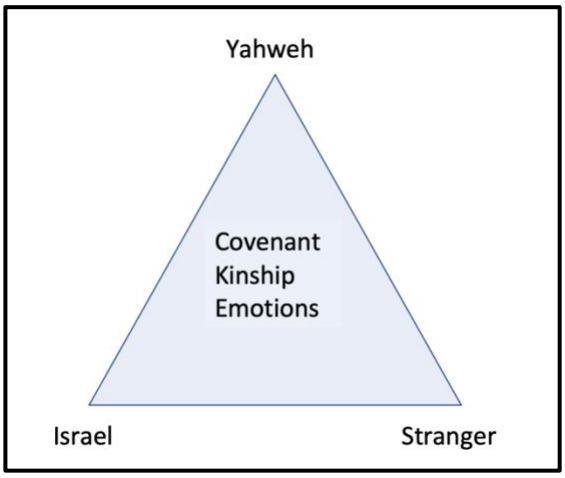
Here, then, are three loves: God loves Israel, God loves the stranger, and Israel is to love the stranger.

What does it mean to love, in Deuteronomy? Firstly, love refers to covenant loyalty. And secondly, love also announces kinship connection. People who were bound in covenant referred to one another with familial terms.[7] Displaced people, both then and now are in need of protection and belonging. Yahweh adopts such people in covenant solidarity, becoming the divine kinsperson not only of Israel, but also of vulnerable immigrants who are seeking a home. Correspondingly, God's people are to step into the gap and enfold people seeking a home as family, following God's lead! Thirdly, love also has an emotional dimension (see Deut 10:15). God's people are to feel affection for refugees seeking a home. These three aspects of the word love—covenant, kinship, and emotion—provide a warm hearth within which the stranger can be enfolded as make-shift family.

We can represent these three loves pictorially as a triangle. Yahweh, Israel, and the stranger, in a network of belonging, are represented by the sides of the triangle. The three dimensions of the word "love," covenant, kinship, and emotion, are represented in the centre of the triangle:

[7] See D. J. McCarthy, "Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship Between Yahweh and Israel," *CBQ* 27 (1965): 144-147, at 145. See also Deut 1:31; 8:5; 14:1.

Triangle of Loves in Deuteronomy 10:15–19



God makes a covenant commitment of protection and belonging with displaced people! What a remarkable revelation! What a wonderful reason to worship our God, the God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! God calls the people of God to covenant with those with whom God covenants, to extend solidarity and kinship to vulnerable people (Deut 10:19). This theological reality should birth imagination and tenderness for responding to vulnerable immigrants.

Festive Kinship in Deuteronomy 16:1–17.

Deuteronomy 16:1-17 calls God's ancient people into celebratory worship at seasonal harvest festivals.[8] Yahweh's generosity in giving the land and the harvest in its season inspires the community to share in feasts of thanksgiving, and the refugee is right there with them! Deuteronomy's festival calendar is timed in sync with the agricultural seasons. It begins at the dawn of Spring as the community pilgrimages to the "chosen place" for the Passover meal and the feast of Unleavened Bread (vs. 1–8). Next, seven weeks after the wheat and barley harvest there is grateful celebration in the Feast of Weeks (vs. 9–11). Then, following the olive and grape harvest comes the most joyful celebration of all, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (vs. 12–15). Deuteronomy 16 is quite a *foodie* chapter! And yet last time you read it, you may be skimmed over it as dull!

The list of participants in the feasts are emphatic, occurring twice in all their detail:

[8] For a detailed analysis of Deut 16:1–17 see Mark R. Glanville, "'Festive Kinship': Solidarity, Responsibility, and Identity Formation in Deuteronomy," *JSOT* 44, no.1 (2019): 133-52, at 141–43.

> Feast, before Yahweh your God! You, your son, your daughter, your male slave, your female slave, the Levite who is in your gates, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow who is in your midst! (Deut 16:11; 16:14, AT).

When the family feasts before the Lord, it becomes a crowd, for the refugee comes right along beside them. Cultural anthropologists tell us that people are united as kindred at feasts, knit together as make-shift family.[9] Feasting before the Lord, the refugee is enfolded at the hearth of the community.

These rituals and feasts had one main purpose: to forge a worshipful, inclusive, and celebrative community responding to the generosity of God. There is a four-part movement in Deut 16:1-17, that takes us right to the heart of a biblical worldview: First, the festival calendar begins in lament, with Passover and Unleavened bread. The feasts of Passover and Unleavened bread lament the suffering of Egypt (Deut 16:3). It is remarkable that Israel's festal year begins with lament. Israel is reminded that it is only as Israel's faces its own story of displacement and slavery that it can begin to seek the world's healing. For us today, the feasts of Passover and Unleavened bread prompt us to ask: how can the church today lament the suffering of more than 82 million displaced people,[10] and how can we repent of our self-interested apathy and our failure to respond?

The second movement is divine gift: Yahweh gives the land and its produce (Deut 16:10, 13, 15). The life and worship of God's people starts with divine supply. This reminds us today that we, too, have received abundant blessings from God. Third, in light of the divine supply, God's people respond in thanksgiving with celebration. Thanksgiving and feasting is a Spiritual response to God's gifts. How can we teach one another to be thankful? Fourth, the other side of the coin of thanksgiving, as it were, the natural reflex of gratitude, is creative kinship. Thankfulness leads us to share our lives together as family, bringing the weakest among us to the centre of the community, namely the refugee, the fatherless, and the widow.

Note that the people of God are *at worship* in Deut 16:1–17. Before the Lord they share in food, laughter, singing, and dancing, as well as in thanksgiving and prayer. So, Deuteronomy 16:1–17 addresses the question: how should God's people come before God in worship? It's answer: with the refugee by our side. Worship that excludes the refugee or the vulnerable immigrant is not Biblical worship.

[9] Feasts can also function to divide communities and establish hierarchical arrangements; however, this is not Deuteronomy's goal. For further discussion see M. Glanville "Festive Kinship," 142, n 51.
[10] *Global Trends*, UNHCR (2020). https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/

Pulling it all together

As we set out on this investigation of the Old Testament, we asked two questions: how does God see vulnerable people seeking a home in the Old Testament? And, how was the Old Testament forming ancient Israel to respond to people on the move? We have seen that God makes a covenant commitment to each and every people group. And we have seen that God's covenant and kinship tilts strongly toward vulnerable people who are seeking a home (Deut 10:18–19). Israel is chosen as God's people within that frame, toward the goal of God's blessing every people group. We have seen that God's people are deeply interdependent with strangers. People who are culturally non-Hebrew are a part of the people of God and may even contribute some of the words of the Pentateuch itself! Most significantly, Deuteronomy calls God's people into creative kinship with people who are seeking a home, sharing in bonds of familial love and protective solidarity.

But What About....?

Our first "But What About..." question is: "*But What about the Canaanites?*" If God commanded Israel to slaughter Canaanites, then maybe the Old Testament wasn't so inclusive after all, comes the challenge. For a full discussion of the so-called Canaanite destruction texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua, you can read either my extended academic analysis or our 2,000 word summary in Refuge Reimagined.[11] In a nutshell, the stranger and the Canaanite associate with the Israelite reader's reality differently. The stranger was a real person within the community in front of the text, a concrete person in need of protection and belonging. The Canaanite however was a figure who had long ceased to exist in the land by the time of writing. The Canaanite was a symbolic figure, who in fact stands for unfaithful Israel. The message of these texts is: should Israel be unfaithful to Yahweh, should Israel fail to be the community of tenderness that torah is shaping them to be, then they have become Canaanite. And they will lose possession of the land accordingly. The Canaanite destruction texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua are all about Israel, connecting Israel's faithfulness to their possession of the land.

New Testament

Kinship in the Gospels

In the gospels Jesus was doing little more and little less than establishing an eschatological people of God.[12] That is to say, Jesus was gathering a renewed Israel in fulfillment of the

[11] Mark R. Glanville, "*Ḥērem* as Israelite Identity Formation: Canaanite Destruction and the Stranger (*Gēr*)," *CBQ* 83 (2021): 547–570; M. Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 55–59.

[12] See further Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 26. For a detailed discussion of Jesus' ethic of kinship in the gospels see, M. Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 74–98.

Scriptures (Matt 5:1). We have already witnessed the ethic of kinship in the Old Testament, and so as we come to read the gospels (where Old Testament anticipation is realised) we could be forgiven for thinking that this ethic might somehow be fulfilled here. Indeed, that is exactly what we find in the gospels. Even as Jesus announced that God was at last becoming King through his own ministry, death and resurrection, Jesus was forming a community to live as a witness to that reality. We turn now to examine a biblical ethic of kinship in the gospels, applying this ethic to people on the move.

Jesus' community was by necessity countercultural. For first century Judaism was deeply hierarchical, mirroring the honour-seeking practices of the wider Greco-Romans culture. Everyone knew who was on the inside and who was on the outside of the community. The High Priest and other religious elites enjoyed their position at the top rung of the social ladder. The priests and scribes were not far behind. Tax collectors and sinners were, of course, shunned. Menstrants and lepers were excluded from worship and social engagement by virtue of their bodily impurity. People who were reduced to begging were customarily spat upon as a magical protection against the "evil eye," a supposed curse that unfortunate people could place upon the well-to-do.[13] Outside of the worshiping community, Gentiles and Samaritans were to Jewish religious society something akin to what Celine Dion is to jazz lovers.

Within this hierarchical context, Jesus formed his followers as a make-shift family, teaching them to pray, "*Our* Father in heaven." (Matt 7) "*Our* Father": God's people are a "we." And by addressing God together as "Father," Christ's followers learned that they existed not only as a group, but as a family no less. Jesus' sisters, brothers, and mothers were those who put his words into practice (Mk 3:31–35). By their distinctive shared life, they were to live a sign to Jesus' healing reign (Matt 5:14–16). The key point is that the Kingdom of God "drew near" just as much by the community Jesus was forming as by Jesus' healings, teachings, nature miracles, etc. And as we will see, a key feature of the make-shift family Jesus was forming is that it was comprised especially of those who experienced marginality, the "least of these."

Jesus' Meals

Jesus engaged in much of his ministry around meals. Some New Testament scholars have reflected that Jesus literally ate his way through the gospels! Jesus certainly seems to do as much eating as teaching in Luke's gospel, or more accurately Jesus teaches as he eats. Sharing in meals with one another shapes who we are together—meals rarely leave us untouched! We have

[13] See John H. Elliott, *Beware the Evil Eye: The Evil Eye in the Bible and the Ancient World, vol. 2, Greece and Rome* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 176.

already seen that meals can be kinship forming rituals. Meals can join, and meals can also divide.[14] Both the capacity of meals to join and to divide are found in the gospels.

And Jesus had a reputation for *who* he ate with. In the eyes of the religious elite Jesus ate with all the wrong people—people who turned out to be the *right* people according to the Kingdom of God. "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them!" The scribes and Pharisees grumbled (Luke 15:2). Jesus' meal with Matthew the tax collector and other "sinners" who were gathered at Matthew's house is a case in point (Matt 5:9–13). It was scandalous for Jesus to attend this meal, as sinners like Matthew effectively possessed negative honour. And yet Matthew was grafted into Jesus' kinship group through this fellowship meal. It is curious to think that Jesus didn't invent these meals. We have already encountered this kind of festive kinship in the festival calendar of Deuteronomy. In effect, Jesus was being and doing what Israel was always supposed to have been and done, enfolding the weakest as family. Another meal, that we don't have time to analyse, is Jesus' meal at Pharisees' house, Luke 14:7–24, where Jesus challenges the honour seeking behaviour of the Jewish elite.

Yet what was the place of repentance at Jesus' meals? To be sure, Jesus' called for repentance throughout his ministry (Mk 1:14–15). And yet, repentance was not a prerequisite for sharing in Jesus' fellowship meals. Jesus seems to hold a deliberate tension in this regard. While Jesus resolutely called his hearers to repentance, indeed to costly discipleship (e.g., Matt 8:18–22), nonetheless the edges of Jesus' kinship group were blurry, enfolding people in unexpected ways and always tilting toward the margins. To illustrate, consider the example of the rich young ruler. This young elite wasn't willing to loosen his grip on wealth, and Jesus nonetheless "looked at him and loved him" (Mk 10:21). And you have probably worked out by now that "loved" is a term for kinship in first century Judaism! Jesus enfolded this man and loved him, despite his inability to truly follow Jesus. What might this mean for the church today, as we consider a biblical response to refugees? For one, as we come to embody the biblical ethic of kinship with people on the move ourselves, we must welcome not only other Christians but also those who are not Christians.

<u>Healing Miracles</u>

At first glance, Jesus' healing miracles may seem to have little to do with kinship and welcome. Yet as Gerhard Lohfink has asutely reflected:

[14] Michael Dietler, "Theorizing the Feast: Rituals of Consumption, Commensal Politics, and Power in African Contexts," in *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, ed. Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 65-114, at 77.

> Inseparable from the eschatological horizon of Jesus' miracles is their relationship to community: they served the restoration of the people of God, among whom, in the eschatological age of salvation, no disease is permitted.[15]

Consider, for example, Jesus' healing of the leper in Mark 1:40–45. From the day of his diagnosis, this leper would have been estranged from the worshipping community and even from family. Yet according to Mark Jesus "reached out his hand and touched him." In touching the leper Jesus was doing more for him then even his family was able to do. Following his healing the leper was restored to the worshipping community via priestly examination and the requisite sacrifices (Mk 1:44). In healing, Jesus restored people to community and to kinship, while also acting as their kin in order to do so. Jesus' healings can open our imagination: how can the church offer the healing of Christ and the kinship of Christ to people who are seeking a home?

Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25–37

Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan amplifies the ethic found in the golden rule: "Love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul... and love your neighbour as yourself." Jesus answers to the lawyer's self-righteous question, "Who is my neighbour?" with a parable. Jesus' parable undermines the question itself, for neighbours are defined not by self-serving social maps but in response to their need. The message of the Parable of the Good Samaritan is multidimensional:

> On the one hand, Israel's distorted piety is shown up by a Samaritan; on the other hand, Jesus implies that Israelites should welcome outsiders such as this Samaritan by virtue of the ethic that this Samaritan is exemplifying! Jesus is destabilizing his hearers, in their self-assumed piety.[16]

This story obliterates the boundary markers between those who should and those who should not receive our love, compassion, and service. How might this parable intercept the various "But What About..." questions that all too often drown out the Bible's call to welcome the stranger today? Questions like, "But what about if they take our jobs," etc. While we can and should give these questions due consideration,[17] Jesus' response to the lawyer in the Parable of the Good Samaritan should be a sober warning for us. Consider, for example, that one in every three people in Jordan and one in every four in Lebanon is a refugee. These majority Islamic nations are demonstrating the kind of Good Samaritan welcome that could shame many churches and many so-called Christian nations.

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[15]Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 13.
[16] M. Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 88.
[17] For a discussion of the impact of refugee welcome on the employment sector, see ibid., 171–74.

A related Lukan parable is the Sheep and the Goats, where Jesus identifies with the stranger with the famous words, "I was a stranger you're your welcomed me... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matt 25:35–36) Another is the Parable of the Rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31).

Mutuality

When we slow down and read the gospels for all they are worth we come to see Jesus' beautiful way with people. Relationships were a two-way street, for Jesus. He was both host and guest. He would serve *and* he was served (e.g., Lk 7:38). Jesus enjoyed a deep mutuality with those he shared life with. Think, for example, of the love Jesus received from the woman who anointed him on the night he would be betrayed (Mk 14:1–11). And think of the festive and generous response of some tax collectors (e.g., Luke 19:8).

In her book, *Becoming Neighbours: Five Values for a World of Welcome,* My friend Anika Barlow reflects on the mutuality of her relationships as she lived with refugee claimants. Anika formerly worked as Lead Host at Kinbrace Community Society, an organisation that supports refugee claimants in Vancouver that was birthed by our church. She tells a story of Leila, a mother from Lebanon with one daughter who lived at Kinbrace. Leila and Anika lived together in the Kinbrace community, and Leila quickly began calling Anika "my daughter." And Leila also embraced another Kinbrace resident from West Africa as her daughter. Leila now had three daughters, Anika explains.[18] The joyful mutuality of Jesus' welcome shows us how welcoming newcomers is far from a burden, it is a blessing. Newcomers shape us and enrich our lives. "Truly, in the stranger we meet Christ!" is the testimony of so many Christ followers who share in the work of hosting and supporting newcomers.

Newcomers are not only a blessing to those individuals who roll up their sleeves to do the work of enfolding and hosting them, but also for their communities. Newcomers greatly enrich our culture, and they even benefit our economies. Empirical evidence consistently shows that welcoming refugees is a net gain for the economies of welcoming nations.[19] And yet even if this were not the case, even if we had to bear a cost to welcome the stranger, the cross of Christ shows us that God it is right to bear a cost for the sake of another person. God's way is cruciform. At the Last Supper Jesus said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:27). With these words Jesus was teaching his disciples about the meaning of the cross for their relationships with one another. And according to John's gospel Jesus' sacrifice is given for the life of the *world* (John 6:51). As Christ followers we must follow in our master's footsteps, willing to go the extra mile in order to provide a home for people who are on the move. This

[18] Anika Barlow, *Becoming Neighbours: Five Values for a World of Welcome* (Vancouver: Kinbrace Community Society, 2021), 36.
[19] M. Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 171–73.

ethic is for the church, but it is not for the church alone. For Christ's way of loving service, reflected throughout all of Scripture, is in fact God's desire for all of humanity. As Christians who are willing to make sacrifices for vulnerable people who are seeking a home, we should also advocate at a societal level for just and welcoming policies.

The Gospel

At this point it is helpful to bring all that we have said about refugee welcome into conversation with the gospel itself. This will help us to grapple with how the biblical ethic of kinship for people on the move fits into Scripture as a whole. We take Mark 1 as our starting place, where the word "gospel" appears three times.

> The beginning of the good news [gospel] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah... Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news [gospel] of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news [gospel]." (Mark 1:1, 14–15; NRSV)

Reading this text carefully, you can see at least five aspects of the word "gospel" for Mark:

> 1. The gospel is about Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection.
> 2. The gospel is the fulfillment of Old Testament expectation. As such, the gospel is not removed from the ethic of kinship we have seen in the Old Testament, rather through Christ's death and resurrection this ethic is secured.
> 3. The gospel is about the Kingdom of God, God's sovereign and saving rule: now at last in Christ God is healing the whole creation from sin's curse.
> 4. The gospel requires people to repent from their sins and get on board with what God is busy doing in the world, in union with Jesus.
> 5. The gospel announces a new era, in which sin is defeated and God reigns in peace (incompletely for now).

Evidently, the gospel is comprehensive in its scope, taking the whole world and all of human life in its scope. So, a biblical ethic of kinship for refugees isn't a sidecar to the gospel. Rather, as the power of the gospel rides through the creation from end to end, God's desire for every person to have a home is a crucial, as one part of God's healing of the creation and restoring human life to flourishing. The gospel encompasses refugee welcome.

Pauline Epistles

The Apostle Paul uses the word "gospel" in much the same way as Mark. While there isn't space to analyse the texts in detail, we might summarise that in the Pauline Epistles the word "gospel" captures three themes: 1. The gospel is about Christ, his life, death and resurrection; 2. The Christ event is the fulfillment of the Old Testament story, taking all of the creation in its scope; 3. Christ is the long awaited Messiah of Israel (e.g., Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 15:1–5; 2 Tim 3:8). For Paul, not only the cross but also the resurrection is crucial to the gospel. For Paul, Christ rose from the dead as the firstfruits of the whole creation renewed (1 Cor. 15:20, 23).

The biblical ethic of kinship that we have traced through the Old Testament and the gospel accounts is also central to the Pauline Epistles. Consider, for example, Paul's letter to Philemon. Paul wrote this letter while in chains in Rome. Onesimus, Philemon's slave, had escaped and fled from Colossae to Rome. In Rome, Paul introduced Onesimus to Christ. And now Paul is sending Onesimus back to Philemon, carrying the letter that we know as "Philemon." Paul appeals to Philemon that, far from punishing Onesimus, he should no longer even consider Onesimus a slave, but a brother:

> For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. (Phil 15–16; NRSV)

In the punitive and hierarchical culture of the empire, Paul's request to Philemon creates a totally different sphere for human relations, that of family. People are no longer to be viewed in terms of what they deserve or their given lot in life, but as our beloved sister-brother in Christ.

Again, it is helpful to ask: to whom do Christians owe their care? To be sure Paul envisaged that Christ followers should be sister-brother to one another with a unique intimacy. But Paul nonetheless expected that the church would extend Christ's generosity and solidarity to those outside of the community (Rom 12:20; 2 Cor 9:13; Gal 6:10).

The Pauline Epistles bring the biblical ethic of kinship to its climax in the joining together of Jews and Gentiles in Christ. If Jesus challenged honour-shame structures in 1st C Judaism, then Paul challenged the ethnocentric covenantalism that infused many Jewish communities, eminent New Testament scholar Bruce Longenecker explains.[20] So Paul famously declares to the Galatian church:

> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

[20] Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Graco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 139.

Paul is pastoring and theologizing at a transitional moment in salvation history. For the first time, God's salvation is not expressed and embodied in the terms of only one culture (Israelite culture), but in the terms of many cultures. Transitioning and adjusting to a variety of cultural expressions of the gospel, along with their diverse cultural artifacts, was a giant step for the early Christians. Paul taught that their unity in Christ meant that Jew and Gentile alike were sons of God, children of Abraham. Christ followers are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:24–29).

In our journey through Scripture we have done a full circle, for the unity of Jew and Gentile in Paul's Epistles fulfills and embodies the beautiful vision of the human race that we saw at the beginning of the story. Finally in the church, the joy and kinship that humanity was created for in the first place can be realised. As a Hispanic leader Denae Pierre (Phoenix US) puts it, "This new humanity affirms, subverts and challenges the identity of the existing tribes by uniting them to those who think and behave differently and asking them to radically and tangibly love one another, most especially the weakest, poorest, and marginalized among them."[21] In the Pauline Epistles this ethic is displayed especially within the Christian community. And yet God's desire to heal the fragmentation of human community is also embodied as God's people extend kinship protection beyond the church into their neighbourhoods. Today, we who follow Christ must allow other people to break the surface of our lives, to enter the waters that make our lives meaningful, as rippled and turbulent as these waters can be. Indeed, as we share our lives with refugees, and as we call our societies to do the same, we are witnessing to the reconciliation of Christ, the kinship of God.

Witness

We finishing our discussion of the New Testament by revisiting the question of the mission of the church: what is the nature of witness? What is the mission of the church? Jesus shows us the nature of witness in his Farewell Discourse, his words given to his Apostles on the night that he was betrayed recorded in John's gospel:

> Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21)

Jesus is teaching that his followers are a *sent* people. Christ sends us in witness, in rather the same way that the Father sent Christ. This has to do with our very identity. Witness isn't just one thing on the church's agenda, it isn't merely one of our many tasks. No, in the terms of biblical theology witness is the very identity the church: we are those who have been *sent* by Christ be bear witness to his tender Lordship, while we await his return to renew all things. And what is the nature of this witness? We have been sent in the same way that Christ was sent. One

[21] "Pastoring Through Polarization," *The Front Porch*: https://thefrontporch.org/2020/10/pastoring-through-polarization/

implication of this is that we bear witness to the gospel of Christ. Even as the gospel is comprehensive in its scope, embracing the whole creation and the whole human person, so does the church's witness. Thus, we witness to Christ's healing rule though our lives, words, and deeds. We are to *be* the witness, *say* the witness, and *do* the witness, as Darrell Guder put it.[22] Because the witness of the church encompasses every aspect of God's creation, it certainly includes refugee welcome. As Christ followers offer protective solidarity with people who are seeking a home, as we are knit together as make-shift family with them, we are bearing witness to Christ our brother and to the Father our divine kinsperson.

At this point in our journey we have traversed vast territory. We have discerned a biblical ethic of kinship for refugees in the Old Testament and the New Testament. We have examined the gospel and explored the nature of witness. Sometimes it can be difficult to hold all of the moving pieces together in our mind. So let's take a moment to capture the biblical story in a nutshell to help us to synthesise all we have said. We might summarise the Biblical story in this way: *This is my Father's world (as the song goes). Broken and corrupted it may be, but it belongs to God. And in Christ the Father is recovering the divine purposes for the creation. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen." (Romans 11:36)*

But What About...?

We turn again to the But What About... questions. *But what about Paul's command to submit to the authorities in Romans 13?*[23] Former US Atorney General Jeff Sessions, for example, appealed to Romans 13 in 2018 to defend the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy – a policy that included separating children from parents or guardians entering the country without documentation, placing the children in shelters or foster care, and prosecuting almost all the adults for illegal entry, including those claiming asylum. Sessions declared:

> I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for his purposes."[24]

Of course, Romans 13:1–4 says nothing about border control or illegal immigration. In this text Paul writes:

[22] Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 91.
[23] For a full discussion see M. Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 141–45.
[24] Tal Kopan, "Sessions Cites Bible to Defend Immigration Policies Resulting in Family Separations," *CNN*, June 15, 2018. https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/14/politics/jeff-sessions-immigration-policy-defense-biblical/index.html

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God... For it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. (Rom 13:1–4; NRSV)

As this text is often cited by Christians in refugee and immigration debate, we should take some time to unpack it. Let me offer three thoughts on context. First, we must read this text in its first century imperial context. As renown New Testament scholar James Dunn states, "Here we must recall that [Paul's] advocacy of political quietism is in the context of the political powerlessness of most members of the ancient state."[25] The same restrictions may not apply today, in a modern democracy.

Second, we must read Rom 13:1–4 in the context of the whole letter. In the Romans 12, Paul calls the Christ followers in Rome to discern the will of God even as they live immersed up to the hilt in culture:

> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2)

And the guiding principle for Christian discernment in Romans 12 is compassion, solidarity, and humility: "Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor" (verse 10); "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." (15) "Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly" (16); "If your enemies are hungry, feed them" (20; NRSV) Family solidarity echoes through these texts. Thus, it is surely an outrageous imposition on the Letter to the Romans to cite its authority in order to deter vulnerable immigrants.

Third, we must put Rom 13:1–4 in the context of all of Scripture. Romans 13:1–4 certainly calls Christ followers to obey civil authorities in the normal run of things. Yet Scripture is also full of examples of god-fearing civil disobedience. Renown Near East scholar David Daube reflects that the first written example of civil disobedience in textual history is the Hebrew mid-wives who disobeyed Pharoah to preserve the lives of male Hebrew babies (Exod 1:15–21).[26] This example reminds us that laws can be deeply unjust, and may require a creative response from God's people. In fact, Jesus himself disobeyed the law, provoking the outrage of the Jewish elite of his day (Matt 12:1–14). And, the Apostle Peter twice disobeyed the authorities in the opening chapters of Acts. When prohibited from speak about Jesus, Peter and John responded: ""Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep

[25]James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 774.
[26]David Daube, *Civil Disobedience in Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), 5, 7.

from speaking about what we have seen and heard."" (Acts 4:19–20) And, was not Paul himself, the author of Romans, put to death in Rome for disobeying the governing authorities?!

John of Patmos offered quite a different picture of the Roman civil authority to the picture in Romans 13, that of a hideous sea monster (Rev 13). John's terrifying beast respresents Roman rule as despotic and brutal. John's beast illuminates the demonic forces that animate despotic rule today, too. Refugees today (many of them Christians) are often fleeing the brutal rule of corrupt governments who are themselves the pawns of evil forces beyond their control. Indeed, many refugees and immigrants are fleeing precisely to escape retaliation against them for their valiantly resisting corruption. Perhaps the political bravery of these asylum seekers exposes a level of self-interest and nationalism lying behind some narrow and exclusivist readings of Romans 13.

A tonne of other But What About... questions circulate among Christians when it comes to refugee and immigrant welcome. Let's ask two more But What About... questions, of our own. These questions aren't often asked, but they should be asked. Here's an important one: *What about if we read the bible for all its worth?* We have seen that the biblical story records God's redeeming work for the whole of the creation and for every aspect of human life, secured in the gospel. How can we imagine that welcoming refugees has no part in this redemptive story, especially given that God's call to kinship with such people is explicitly present in the story! Surely, this story doesn't leave us to stew in our self-interest! Rather, God calling us to play our part in this story, as we learn to mirror divine grace by the power of the Spirit!

This leads us to our final But What About... question. *But what about serving a God of grace?* Those who have received God's grace must necessarily extend this grace to others in turn! Jesus said to the twelve: "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mk 10:45) Jesus said these words in the context of agonistic jostling among the apostles, in order to call them into a posture of servanthood: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant." (Mk 10:43) Are we not called to follow in the way of our saviour and serve refugees?

Conclusion

In our journey we have discerned *a biblical ethic of kinship for people on the move*. God calls the church to enfold people who are seeking a home as make-shift family, extending protective solidarity within a context of mutual relationships. Because the Father of Jesus Christ is not a tribal God but the very God of Gods, and because the gospel takes all of the creation in its scope, God's desire for human flourishing extends beyond the church into every culture and every society. The biblical ethic of kinship in Scripture expresses God's desire not only for the church but also for nations and even for the global community of nations.

Enfolding outsiders as our kin is a matter of great joy. Think of the joy of Deuteronomy's inclusive feasts! The stranger is enfolded as family amidst eating and dancing, all before Yahweh who has provided the abundant supply of the harvest (Deut 16:1–17). And think of the joy of Jesus' feasts with tax collectors and "sinners"! Think of the conversation, the laughter, the stories, kinship! (e.g., Matt 9:9–13) Today, too, those of us who welcome refugees and vulnerable immigrants in our neighbourhoods and churches are deeply blessed by our friend, their generosity, wisdom, ingenuity, humour, and cuisine!

In the following chapters you will encounter stories of the creativity and kinship experienced by those who have hosted refugees, those who have been hosted *by* refugees, and those who have been hosted *as* refugees. And you will see ways in which the Spirit of Christ is powerfully at work in refugee and immigrant churches. It is no exaggeration to say that immigrant and refugee churches are being used by God to revitalize churches in host nations. And yet this should not surprise us, for we have just seen that God has been building the church through refugees and immigrants from the very beginning.