

Challenging Certain Assumptions About Political Concepts and the Responsibilities of States for Migrants and Refugees

Luke Glanville¹ © 2022

What follow draws heavily from ideas developed with Mark Glanville for our 2021 InterVarsity Press book, Refuge Reimagined: Biblical Kinship in Global Politics.

State sovereignty

Political authorities often claim that states have an absolute right to decide for themselves who enters their territory and the conditions on which they enter by simple virtue of their sovereignty. In 2018, for example, the then US ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Nikki Haley, responded to the UN's criticism of the Donald Trump administration's practice of separating children from parents entering the United States without documentation, including children and parents claiming asylum, with a typical appeal to sovereign prerogative: 'We will remain a generous country, but we are also a sovereign country, with laws that decide how best to control our borders and protect our people. Neither the United Nations nor anyone else will dictate how the United States upholds its borders'.²

Christian scholars are heard offering the same argument from time to time. Mark Amstutz puts it plainly: 'The sovereign authority of government is the primary basis for making and applying immigration policies, not the virtues of love and compassion that sustain the church'.³ In Amstutz's defence, he does elsewhere in his book offer an argument in defence of regulating immigration that is grounded in considerations of justice. However, throughout the book, he leans heavily on the claim that, since the sovereign state is the fundamental unit of the international system, it should not be restricted in how it chooses to regulate immigration, even though he acknowledges that, on such grounds, 'some states may inhibit migration altogether'.⁴

The assumption that states must, by virtue of their sovereignty, have a right to control the entry of outsiders—including forcibly displaced and other vulnerable outsiders—represents a certain habit of thinking that has come to be widely accepted over time. But it is incorrect for at least two reasons. First, it is a habit of thinking that implicitly reifies the sovereign state as the natural and inevitable model of political community. In fact, the sovereign state is historically quite novel. The idea of sovereignty—the idea that a political community should enjoy independence from external authorities and that the supreme authority within the community should have no internal rivals in making law or commanding

¹ Luke Glanville is Associate Professor in the Department of International Relations at Australian National University. December 2021. Co-Author of *Refuge Reimagined*.

² 'Press Release: Ambassador Haley on the UN's Criticism of US Immigration Policies', United States Mission to the United Nations, 5 June 2018.

³ Amstutz, *Just Immigration*, p. 223.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

allegiance—was constructed at a particular time and place, early modern Europe, gradually displacing the diverse and interwoven systems of social organization and political authority that had characterized the medieval period. Furthermore, sovereign statehood was held for a long time thereafter to be a privilege enjoyed only by Europeans and those non-Europeans that Europeans deigned to acknowledge as civilized members of the ‘family of nations’. Indeed, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century—only a generation or two ago—that Europe’s widespread empires were finally dismantled, self-government was granted to formerly colonized peoples, and the institution of the territorially bounded sovereign state was finally spread across the globe. The distribution of humanity among 190 or so sovereign states is a recent phenomenon and we should be careful not to present it as a natural and inevitable one.⁵

(In this context it’s worth noting that the demarcation of linear borders across the globe is also a modern phenomenon—a product, scholars tell us, of developments in the practices and technologies of map-making, the “rationalization” of territories and frontiers, and the emergence of the territorially-bounded sovereign state that displaced earlier, diverse, frequently overlapping, and often non-territorial conceptions of political authority.⁶)

Second, and more crucially, the meaning and implications of sovereignty have changed and continue to change over time. Sovereignty is socially constructed. It need not entail, and historically it has not entailed, an absolute right to regulate the movement of people in and out of one’s territory.⁷ We need to be careful, therefore, to not persuade ourselves that the particular constructions of the rights and responsibilities of sovereignty that happen to be widely accepted today are necessary and immutable principles inherent to the concept. And we certainly should not accept them uncritically as just. After all, up until the nineteenth century, states accepted each other’s sovereign right to participate in and benefit from the traffic of slaves and, up until the twentieth century, they maintained a sovereign right to wage war at their own choosing.⁸ Mere appeals to the concept of sovereignty to justify the exclusion of refugees, therefore, is morally unpersuasive. They might represent an accurate description of how things currently are, but they are hardly an argument for how things ought to be.

A side note about sovereignty: The hypocrisy of the West’s inhospitality in the light of history

A glance at history makes clear that rights and responsibilities pertaining to questions of asylum and hospitality have typically been constructed and reconstructed in ways that reflect the changing interests of powerful states. It is well-known, (even if often down-played), that

⁵ Daniel Philpott, *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Christian Reus-Smit, *Individual Rights and the Making of the International System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶ See for example Jordan Branch, *The Cartographic State: Maps, Territory, and the Origins of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Kerry Goettlich, “The Rise of Linear Borders in World Politics,” *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2019).

⁷ The Peace of Westphalia (1648), for example, which is often misrepresented as attributing absolute authority to sovereign states to govern their territories as they wish, clearly imposed upon signatory powers an obligation to grant rights of emigration to religious minorities.

⁸ Luke Glanville, *Sovereignty and the Responsibility to Protect: A New History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Oona A. Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York: Penguin, 2017).

the wealth of many European powers was augmented and the territories of their settler colonies beyond Europe were acquired by means of the violent conquest, subjection, enslavement, displacement, and sometimes eradication of indigenous peoples. What is less well-known is that a key justification for these practices offered by European imperial powers, at least for a time, was the indigenous peoples' violation of a supposedly natural and enforceable duty of hospitality.⁹

Contemplating the justice of the Spanish conquests in the New World in the sixteenth century, Spanish theologian Francisco de Vitoria asserted that the Spaniards would have had just cause for war if they had been unjustifiably denied the right to travel and dwell in the Native Americans' lands. "The Spaniards are the barbarians' neighbors, as shown by the parable of the Samaritan," he claimed, "and the barbarians are obliged to love their neighbors as themselves, and may not lawfully bar them from their homeland without due cause." The French could not lawfully prohibit Spaniards from living in France so long as they did no harm, he claimed, and so neither could the Native Americans bar them from the New World. He invoked Jesus' narrative of the sheep and goats: "'I was a stranger and you did not invite me in' (Matt 25:43), from which it is clear that, since it is a law of nature to welcome strangers, this judgment of Christ is to be decreed amongst all men."¹⁰

It should be noted that Vitoria doubted whether the Native Americans had in fact breached their duty of hospitality to the Spaniards, particularly since the Spaniards were strongly armed and gave the indigenous people good reasons to fear their intentions. Indeed, he worried that the Spaniards really had no other cause for war than "sheer robbery."¹¹ But his argument was enthusiastically taken up by European powers and their advocates to justify imperial expansion over subsequent decades. The Dutchman Hugo Grotius wrote of the "sacrosanct law of hospitality," and cited not only Vitoria but also Augustine's endorsement of Israel's war against the Amorites, a war said to be waged with justice since the Amorites had denied Israel the right of passage.¹² An anonymous tract commissioned by the Virginia Company even portrayed the colonizer as a peaceful seeker of sanctuary: "Is it not against the law of nations, to violate a peaceable stranger, or to deny him harbor?"¹³

This argument for an enforceable duty of hospitality was one item in an evolving grab-bag of justifications utilized by colonial powers to justify the mass killing of indigenous peoples, the extraction of wealth, the acquisition of territory, the mass migration of tens of millions of Europeans out of Europe, and the establishment of new sovereign authorities.¹⁴

⁹ For further discussion, see Luke Glanville, "Hypocritical Inhospitality: The Global Refugee Crisis in the Light of History," *Ethics & International Affairs* 34, no. 1 (2020).

¹⁰ Francisco de Vitoria, "On the American Indians," in *Political Writings*, edited by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 278-79.

¹¹ Vitoria, "Letter to Miguel de Arcos, OP Salamanca, 8 November [1534]," in *Political Writings*, 332. See also Vitoria, "On the American Indians," 282.

¹² Hugo Grotius, *Commentary on the Law of Prize and Booty*, edited by Martine Julia van Ittersum (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2006), 304-5, citing Augustine, *Questions on the Heptateuch*, IV.44; Numbers 21:21-25.

¹³ *A True Declaration of the Estate of Virginia* (1610), quoted in Andrew Fitzmaurice, "Sovereign Trusteeship and Empire," *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 16, no. 2 (2015), 453.

¹⁴ Achiume reports, "the European colonial project involved the out-migration of at least 62 million Europeans to colonies across the world between the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century alone" E. Tendayi Achiume, "Migration as Decolonization," *Stanford Law Review* 71, no. 6 (June 2019), 1517.

Put bluntly, not only is the wealth and territory enjoyed by many Western states today—both former centers of empire and former settler colonies—at least partially a product of the violent subjection of indigenous peoples, which is appalling enough, but this violence was at times justified with appeals to a duty of hospitality that these same states now refuse to so many who desperately need it.

The powerful once demanded hospitality from the weak. They now deny it to them. We should be wary, therefore, of allowing the biblical imperative to welcome the stranger to be trumped by mere appeals to sovereign prerogative.

The bounds of community

What of communal boundaries? What of borders? Don't communities need to be bounded in order for the concept to have meaning? And don't they need to maintain these boundaries and control these borders, in some way, if they hope to secure a measure of order and justice for the people found within? We have certainly taught ourselves to think this way. But surely the regulation of boundaries is justified only insofar as it serves God's vision for community.

What does Scripture tell us? The parallel accounts of Genesis 10:1-32 and 11:1-9 tell of God dividing the world into a multitude of separate political communities—described as “peoples” or “nations.” This division is portrayed in the second account as a product of both grace and judgment.¹⁵ When men sought equality with God by building a city with a tower that reached the heavens, God came down to them and prevented them from carrying out their plans by confusing their language and scattering them over the face of the earth. This act of dividing and scattering, of course, should not be read as establishing communities whose existence and boundaries were at that moment established for all time. But it does provide an early indication of God's interest in the distinct lives of distinct communities.

We are soon told that God provides nations with territory as a gift. Deuteronomy speaks repeatedly not only of the land that God gives to Israel (1:25, 2:29, 3:20, and many times thereafter), but also lands that he has given to others (2:5, 2:9, 2:19). The territories of nations are given boundaries by God (Deut 32:8), with valleys (2:14), gorges (2:24), rivers (2:37), and towns (2:37) marking their limits.¹⁶ Again, we should not read this as divine endorsement of permanent and unchanging communal boundaries. After all, Israel's territorial boundaries shifted many times during the period of the Old Testament.¹⁷

Were communal boundaries monitored and regulated in the Old Testament? Well, we do find examples of nations exercising control over who entered their lands, both in Scripture and in archaeology of the ancient world.¹⁸ But such records are of nations *other* than Israel (e.g. Gen 12:10-20; Num 20:14-21:35). We should be careful not to conclude from this, as

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation (Church Dogmatics, Volume III/4)*, edited by G. W. Bromley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 313-18).

¹⁶ Recall from chapter 3, however, that the clear demarcation of linear borders, in contrast to more fluid or overlapping boundaries, was universalized only in the modern era, and we shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that political communities have always conceived of strictly defined geographical limits to their territories, much less that they have always obsessed about the flow of people across these limits as they do today.

¹⁷ E.g. 2 Sam 5:1; 1 Kgs 4:21; 12:16; 2 Kgs 18:13.

¹⁸ James K. Hoffmeier, *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens and the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 38-44.

some do, that such control was intrinsically or always justified.¹⁹ As for Israel's own territories, the example of Ruth and Naomi's migration indicates that, at least at that time, there were little if any restrictions placed on entry. In considering borders, most important is Scripture's demand that God's people should welcome and enfold people who are seeking a home. God had given the land and its abundance as a divine gift, and there was more than enough to share (Deut 16:11, 14). And crucially, Israel's enjoying the gift was completely contingent upon their sharing the divine supply with displaced people (Deut 14:28-29). In a nutshell, according to Scripture, communal boundaries and borders must always serve not only those within the boundaries but also those who are outside and are seeking a place to belong. God desires that the governance of communal boundaries, like the rest of communal life, should be marked by a concern for the flourishing of all people, especially the weakest.

Certainly, boundaries are valuable. They usefully mark the territorial limits of a community, within which people can develop a shared sense of place, belonging, and care. There will often be good grounds for communities to monitor their boundaries. A vulnerable community may need to limit the entry of predatory or ill-intentioned outsiders in order to preserve the well-being of those within, and an impoverished community may need to prevent the entry of those who seek to extract their limited wealth and resources. But efforts to establish borders and limit entry must always be subject to the demands of justice—justice not only for current members of the community, but also for vulnerable outsiders who stand in need of community.²⁰

National identity

One justification commonly given for controlling and limiting the admission of outsiders is that excessive immigration, or the immigration of the wrong people, risks weakening the shared affinities and loyalties that bind a national community together and risks corrupting the community's shared identity and values.

The identities and boundaries of nations, of course, are not timeless and unchanging. National communities are imagined and constructed at particular points in time and they are re-imagined and reconstructed again and again over time.²¹ Even with respect to the boundaries of Old Testament Israel, exactly who qualified as "Israel" was sometimes unclear. There was ongoing uncertainty, for example, around the status of the tribes East of the Jordan, Manasseh, Gad, and Rueben, at the time when Joshua was written (see Josh 22).

Nevertheless, while communal identities may be continually re-imagined and reconstructed, the bonds that members of these communities share with each other are morally valuable and the customs that they cultivate, insofar as they embody particular expressions of universal human goods, ought to be cherished. Perhaps this provides good grounds for strictly controlling membership of the community?

Such arguments are widely heard today, including among thoughtful Christians. Some followers of Christ, it should be said, succumb to the temptation to embrace a pernicious

¹⁹ See, for example, *ibid.*, 32-35, 153-54.

²⁰ See also Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation*, III/4, 285-323. Barth's discussion of "near and distant neighbors" is insightfully treated in Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien*, 45-53.

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

understanding of communal identity, attributing the characteristics of God's chosen people in Scripture to their own nation—a chosen nation with a sacred land, a divine commission, and glorious destiny.²² Such a conception of nationhood is at times applied to justify the closing of borders, as well as the pursuit of reckless and unjust wars beyond these borders. Other followers of Christ refuse to mix their faith and national identity in such a troubling way, but nevertheless believe it is vital that the preservation of communal bonds, national culture, and shared values be central to deliberations about how many and which kinds of outsiders the community should be prepared to welcome.

Again, shared affinities and loyalties and the cultivation of a sense of belonging are valuable things. And national cultures and customs, insofar as they facilitate the pursuit and fulfillment of universal goods, are to be cherished. But there are good reasons to be wary of allowing our concerns for such valuable things to trump the needs of vulnerable strangers. Let's first consider a few reasons to be skeptical of the prioritization of communal bonds and national identities, before suggesting a way forward.

We should recognize that arguments for the preservation of national culture so often rely on a sanitized portrayal of that culture. The identity and character of each nation is a product of history. And while national histories may be marked by evidence of God's providential care and guidance, they are also so often stained by the violent expulsion and exclusion of others. Think of the United States, Canada, and Australia. Not only did European settlers in these territories first establish their communal ties and national cultures on lands stolen from indigenous peoples, but these ties and cultures have subsequently been shaped and sustained over generations, at least in part, by racially-discriminatory immigration controls—controls that are made more troubling by being introduced, in some instances, only once demand for cheap foreign labor has declined.²³ Consider the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the racial quotas established in the Immigration Act of 1924 in the United States, the Chinese Immigration Acts of 1885 and 1923 in Canada, and the White Australia Policy that remained in place from 1901 until the 1970s. The identities of these nations today are at least partly a product of such racist practices of exclusion. Recognition of this should lead us to pause before concluding that the preservation of these same identities might, yet again, justify the exclusion of outsiders.

We should also be wary of buying into pernicious myths that cast the existing identities of nations as homogenous and uncontested. Arguments for the preservation of a nation's culture and traditions are so often actually arguments for the preservation of the culture and traditions of one historically dominant group. The group claims ownership of the national identity and fashions this identity in its own image. In the process it excludes other groups within the community, just as it does those beyond the community. This has been a particularly troubling feature of the resurgent populist nationalisms that have proliferated

²² For an example that leans too far in this direction, see Stephen H. Webb, *American Providence: A Nation with a Mission* (New York: Continuum, 2004). For a critique, see John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015).

²³ On the fluctuations between hospitality and hostility in the history of American immigration policy, see Ali Behdad, *A Forgetful Nation: On Immigration and Cultural Identity in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005). See also Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien*, 65-94. There are a whole lot of other books from the past few years that we could also cite.

across the globe in recent years, and it gives us reason to be at least skeptical when cries of asylum seekers are met with calls to preserve national identity.

How then, should we think about national identity? National identity is to be affirmed so long as it is oriented toward a biblical understanding of community. This requires that it be disposed not only to the care of the poor and needy within the community, but also to the cultivation of kinship with vulnerable outsiders. To be sure, national cultures will always be diverse, and cultures are worth upholding. As Jonathan Chaplin helpfully puts it, cultures are “historically particularized collective human responses to the possibilities enclosed within creation. And since God sustains the goodness and flourishing of creation even in the face of human sin, we will always expect to find *something* of value in *any* culture.”²⁴ Just as we should enjoy the differences that we observe between families or between neighborhood communities, then, so too should we celebrate differences both within nations and also between nations, insofar as they express “the goodness and flourishing of creation.” But whatever else each particular national identity, culture, or tradition will be about, God’s desire is that they be about the pursuit of justice and flourishing for every person, including the stranger.²⁵

We ought to be wary, then, of the temptation to pursue prideful and uncritical preservation of national identity no matter what. We should instead contemplate our national identities with a posture of humility and a willingness to recognize where we have gone astray. Certainly, we should identify and celebrate what is good about our cultures and strive to maintain these characteristics, in all of their rich diversity. But, we should also seek to develop, as Chaplin says, “responsible, critical patriotisms based on national narratives suitably humbled by repentance and grace and always open to critique.”²⁶

Do we actually have obligations to non-citizens, to distant foreigners?

Scripture repeatedly commends the care of vulnerable people with whom individuals and communities come in contact. The Samaritan loves the beaten man that he happens upon. Israel is called to love the stranger that lives among them. But, while nations are condemned in Scripture for violent acts of injustice beyond their territories (Amos 1:3-2:5), they are not explicitly called to go in search of distant vulnerable people to whom they may offer care and community. Are the responsibilities of sovereign states toward refugees today limited by considerations of proximity? Are nations called to welcome only the stranger in their midst (Deut 26:11); the asylum seeker that approaches their border?

There is a long tradition of Christian theorizing that might be read as pointing in this direction. Augustine wrote of the need to ‘order’ one’s love. ‘All people should be loved equally’, he declared. ‘But you cannot do good to all people equally, so you should take

²⁴ Jonathan Chaplin, “Beyond Multiculturalism – But to Where? Public Justice and Cultural Diversity,” *Philosophia Reformata* 73 (2008), 195.

²⁵ On the perils of an identity that is not conformed to justice, see O’Donovan, “Deliberation, History and Reading,” 130-34. In this context, it is worth noting the incoherence of arguments that recommend excluding vulnerable outsiders in order to preserve a nation’s *Christian* identity. Such exclusion would be self-defeating since it would violate the biblical imperative to welcome the vulnerable as kin. The nation would thus be forsaking the very Christian identity that it seeks to preserve.

²⁶ Chaplin, “Beyond Multiculturalism,” 196.

particular thought for those who, as if by lot, happen to be particularly close to you in terms of place, time, or any other circumstances.’²⁷ Thomas Aquinas drew from Augustine’s reference to ‘place’ that ‘one is not bound to search throughout the world for the needy that one may succour them; and it suffices to do works of mercy to those one meets with.’²⁸ We hear clear echoes of such thinking today in the words of Christian writers who worry about the abstract nature of cosmopolitan arguments for the promotion of universal rights.

Contemplating a caravan of people fleeing Central America in search of a new home in the United States in 2018, Rod Dreher asserts:

The Bible tells Christians to love their neighbors as they love themselves. But who is their neighbor? The man next door? Yes. The people who live across town? Surely. Those who live in another part of their country? Okay. People from another country who want to settle in their country? Erm... .

If everybody is your neighbor, then nobody is.²⁹

Political theologian Oliver O’Donovan expresses the same point in more sophisticated terms, warning against ‘complacent forms of universalism ... which may amount to not much more than universal indifference, for ... to love everybody in the world equally is to love nobody very much.’ O’Donovan reads in the Parable of the Good Samaritan a clear rebuke of ‘racial or class self-love’ *within* any society, but he suggests that it also draws our attention to ‘an urgent form of contingent proximity’. The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan, after all, happened to be going down the road where the beaten man lay in need. It was this contingent proximity to the man that generated the obligation to help him. ‘Far from denying the significance of proximate relations, the parable discovers them where they are not looked for, nearer to us and under our very noses.’³⁰

However, without challenging in the least the ‘significance of proximate relations’, brief contemplation of today’s globalised world quickly makes clear that sovereign states are typically more relationally proximate to distant, displaced strangers than they tend to admit. Indeed, it turns out that, rather than having the effect of circumscribing the biblical call to welcome the stranger, as some would have it, consideration of the present realities of our international system of sovereign states actually amplifies this call.

First, in our globalized world today, many sovereign governments tend to be not only well aware of the suffering of many distant and vulnerable people, but also capable of offering them much needed neighbour-love. Displaced peoples may oftentimes be geographically far from away, but they are nevertheless in an important sense, to use

²⁷ Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), I.28.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), II-II.71.1 a.1.

²⁹ Rod Dreher, ‘How (Not) to Think about the Caravan’, *The American Conservative*, 25 October 2018.

³⁰ Oliver O’Donovan, ‘The Loss of a Sense of Place’, in Oliver O’Donovan and Joan Lockwood O’Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection: Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 296–320 at pp. 316–17.

O'Donovan's words, 'under our very noses'.³¹ Certainly, we should be wary of the temptation to espouse an abstract love of 'humanity' while neglecting to love those nearest to us. It would be concerning if we were to individually or collectively occupy ourselves with championing the plight of distant Rohingya people, displaced within or beyond Myanmar, for example, while caring little for indigenous peoples and others dispossessed and dishonoured within our own political communities. But we cannot pretend that we do not know of the persecution and suffering of the Rohingya, or of Syrian, or South Sudanese, or Venezuelan civilians, internally displaced within their countries of origin, or in refugee camps or urban centres in neighbouring countries, or on the move in continued search for asylum.

Second, we can usefully contemplate the Good Samaritan narrative a little further as a prompt to help us recognize how powerful and wealthy Western states are frequently proximate to the suffering of displaced strangers not merely in the sense of being aware and capable of providing succour, but often even being implicated in and culpable for their displacement—and thus they bear amplified responsibility for the provision of relief and refuge.

On being the priest and the Levite

In his useful treatment of the parable, legal philosopher Jeremy Waldron alerts us to the fact that the refusal of the priest and Levite to act as neighbour to the beaten man was not passive:

Those who fail to help the man who fell among thieves are portrayed in the parable as *going out of their way* not to help, or *going out of their way* to avoid a decision about whether to help ... Their not helping is an intentional doing: a decision to cross the road, a choice to go out of their way to avoid the predicament.³²

It is worth contemplating the ways in which Western sovereigns do not merely passively disregard the plight of distant neighbours, but actually *go out of their way* to keep them at a distance and to avoid an encounter that might require the provision of asylum. Consider, for example, the multi-billion-dollar deal struck by the European Union (EU) with Turkey in 2015, according to which Turkey would accept the return of asylum seekers who reached Greece by sea, use its security forces to prevent others from getting to Greece, and improve conditions for refugees in Turkey. The deal was justified on the grounds that it would reduce deaths of people seeking passage across the Mediterranean, but was actually accompanied by both an increase in deaths at sea (since asylum seekers now needed to take more dangerous routes to reach EU countries) and also a deterioration of conditions for those that remained in Turkey.³³ The EU subsequently struck an even more problematic deal with

³¹ For thoughtful deliberations on this theme of proximity, see Eric Gregory, 'Agape and Special Relations in a Global Economy: Theological Sources', in Douglas A. Hicks and Mark Valeri (eds), *Global Neighbors: Christian Faith and Moral Obligation in Today's Economy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 16–42; Esther D. Reed, 'Nation-States and Love of Neighbour: Impartiality and the *ordo amoris*', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 25:3 (2012), 327–45.

³² Jeremy Waldron, 'Who Is My Neighbor? Humanity and Proximity', *The Monist*, 86:3 (2003), 333–54 at 343, emphasis in original, cited and discussed in Gregory, 'Agape and Special Relations in a Global Economy', p. 41.

³³ Katy Budge, 'Refugees Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind Two Years On from EU-Turkey Deal', *The Conversation*, 20 March 2018.

Libya, funding, resourcing, and training the Libyan coastguard to intercept boats in the Mediterranean and return asylum seekers and other migrants to Libya, leaving them vulnerable to the well-documented possibility of arbitrary detention, torture, rape, enslavement, and murder.³⁴ Similar stories could be told about policies developed by other Western governments.

On being the robbers

Consider, furthermore, the ways in which powerful and wealthy Western states act not merely as the priest and Levite, but even as the robbers, not merely keeping vulnerable and displaced neighbours at a distance, but contributing to their vulnerability and displacement. Western states so often bear a measure of responsibility for the suffering of strangers. Consider the responsibilities of states with respect to the Syrian refugee crisis today. Numerous states are culpable in one way or another for enabling the outbreak, prolonging the duration, and increasing the severity of the civil war that has raged in Syria since 2011, claiming the lives of at least 450,000 people, and displacing eleven million more—over half the country's population. Consider, for example, the impact of the decision of the US-led 'Coalition of the Willing' to invade Iraq in 2003. The Iraq war not only amplified sectarian tensions in the region, but also led to an influx of one million Iraqis into Syria, straining resources and infrastructure and increasing social tensions in the country. These developments contributed to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war.³⁵ Consider also the culpability of Russia and China, who, once the war began, repeatedly exercised their veto power in the UN Security Council to impede the adoption of resolutions that were in various ways aimed at protecting civilians from violence. And consider the multitude of states that have supplied arms to either side or have themselves intervened militarily in the years since 2011, with the predictable effect of increasing the severity and duration of the violence.³⁶ None of these states can plausibly say that they are not implicated in some way in the suffering of distant, displaced Syrians.

Finally, and more generally, consider the ways in which powerful and wealthy states are responsible, both historically and also in ongoing ways, for contributing to and sustaining the poverty and fragility of others, leaving them vulnerable to displacement-generating crises. The European colonial project, for example, with its brutal subjugation of colonized people and extraction of human and natural resources from colonized territories, contributed to enduring global vulnerabilities and inequalities. Contemplating these historical injustices, legal scholar Tendayi Achiume goes so far as to suggest that the migration of formerly colonized peoples (typically in the global South) to former imperial powers and their settler

³⁴ United Nations Support Mission in Libya and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the Human Rights Situation of Migrants and Refugees in Libya', 20 December 2018.

³⁵ Alise Coen, 'Capable and Culpable? The United States, RtoP, and Refugee Responsibility-Sharing', *Ethics & International Affairs*, 31:1 (2017), 71–92 at 79–82.

³⁶ For research demonstrating the negative impact of supplying arms and intervening in the context of civil wars, see Idean Salehyan, David Siroky, and Reed M. Wood, 'External Rebel Sponsorship and Civilian Abuse: A Principal-Agent Analysis of Wartime Atrocities', *International Organization*, 68:3 (2014), 633–61; Katherine Sawyer, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, and William Reed, 'The Role of External Support in Civil War Termination', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61:6 (2017), 1174–202.

colonies that benefitted from these historic wrongs (typically in the global North), might be appropriately framed as part of an ongoing, just, and necessary process of decolonization.³⁷

These former imperial powers and settler colonies, moreover, which remain some of the world's wealthiest and most powerful states, have sustained their wealth and power in the post-colonial era, in part, through the establishment and perpetuation of global practices and structures that contribute to sustaining the weakness and poverty of others. The harms of exploitative economic bargaining practices, inequitable international trade agreements, restrictive intellectual property rights regimes, and the destruction of the global environment may be in a sense less direct than the past harms of colonialism or the present harms of foolish wars and the reckless provision of arms and finance to abusive regimes, but they have the effect of perpetuating poverty and oppression, heightening the risk of suffering, violence, and forced displacement in many parts of the world. In short, the affluence and security of some is inextricably connected to the poverty, vulnerability, and oftentimes displacement of others.³⁸

In short, states are often implicated in one way or another in the suffering and displacement of the distant vulnerable that they cannot claim to be responsible only for the care of those that they encounter directly or to whom they are geographically proximate. In a globalized system of sovereign states such as ours, the distant stranger is not so distant, and the state that claims a mandate to focus on the needs of its own citizens is commonly more implicated in the vulnerability of outsiders than it admits

The importance of seeing how Western policies of exclusion exacerbate the suffering of displaced people

We in the West often fear the security, economic, and cultural implications of welcoming refugees into our communities. Such fears can lead us to do great harm to vulnerable people. Reinhold Niebuhr famously observed how the fears and anxieties and, in turn, selfishness of individuals are amplified at the level of group, and particularly the level of nations. "All human life is involved in the sin of seeking security at the expense of other life," he claimed.³⁹ And groups are more ruthless in their pursuit of such security than individuals: "The larger the group the more certainly will it express itself selfishly in the total human community. It will be more powerful and therefore more able to defy any social restraints which might be devised. It will also be less subject to internal moral restraints."⁴⁰ We see this play out in manifold ways as states encounter asylum seekers. By "securitizing" displaced peoples, states not only justify their exclusion, but also enable and normalize the violence that they do to them.

³⁷ E. Tendayi Achiume, 'Migration as Decolonization', *Stanford Law Review*, 71:6 (2019), 1509-74.

³⁸ Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); Richard W. Miller, *Globalizing Justice: The Ethics of Poverty and Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1941), I.194.

⁴⁰ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 48. See also Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, I.221-22; Kristin E. Heyer, *Kinship across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 14-17.

Consider the violence of our borders.⁴¹ The increased effort of Western states to secure their borders in recent years does not merely leave displaced people without a home, but forces them to pursue more treacherous journeys in search of a home. The International Organization for Migration recorded nearly 30,000 migrant fatalities worldwide between 2014 and 2018 and suggested that this was likely only a fraction of the real number of deaths on migratory routes during the period.⁴²

Consider the violence of our containment and deterrence policies. The European Union pays Turkey and Libya billions of dollars to prevent people on the move from reaching Europe, where they would be legally entitled to claim asylum. It funds, resources, and trains the Libyan coastguard to intercept boats in the Mediterranean and return asylum seekers and other migrants to Libya, knowing full well the “unimaginable horrors” that await them.⁴³ “If someone escapes hell,” Bamba, an asylum seeker fleeing the Ivory Coast justifiably asks, “how can you grab them and take them back to hell?”⁴⁴

Consider the violence of our detention practices.⁴⁵ For much of this century, vulnerable people who have sought asylum in Australia by boat have been warehoused indefinitely in offshore processing centers in third countries such as Nauru and Papua New Guinea under conditions that, according to the UN’s Special Rapporteur on torture, violate their right “to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.”⁴⁶ Numerous children detained in Nauru have been diagnosed with “resignation syndrome,” a rare psychiatric condition where patients withdraw from reality, stop eating, drinking, and talking, and require medical care to keep them alive.⁴⁷ “Yesterday I cut my hand,” said eight year old Sajeenthana, a Sri Lankan refugee who had been on Nauru since she was three. “One day I will kill myself. Wait and see, when I find the knife. I don’t care about my body.”⁴⁸

Strict border controls are cast by some as a compassionate means of protecting vulnerable people.⁴⁹ US President Donald Trump frames his policy of building a wall along the US-Mexico border as a necessary response to not only a “national security crisis,” but also a “humanitarian crisis” at the border.⁵⁰ The EU Commission’s High Representative and Vice President Federica Mogherini has justified the EU’s “cooperation with countries of

⁴¹ See also Reece Jones, *Violent Borders: Refugees and the Right to Move* (London: Verso, 2016).

⁴² See missingmigrants.iom.int

⁴³ United Nations Support Mission in Libya and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Desperate and Dangerous: Report on the Human Rights Situation of Migrants and Refugees in Libya,” December 20, 2018.

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, “No Escape from Hell: EU Policies Contribute to Abuse of Migrants in Libya,” January 21, 2019.

⁴⁵ Stephanie J. Silverman, “Detaining Immigrants and Asylum Seekers: A Normative Introduction,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 17, no. 5 (2014).

⁴⁶ Bianca Hall and Jonathan Swan, “Rudd Slams the Door on Refugees,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 20, 2013; Josh Butler, “All the Times the UN has Slammed Australia’s Asylum Seeker Policy,” August 25, 2017.

⁴⁷ Médecins Sans Frontières, “Indefinite Despair: The Tragic Mental Health Consequences of Offshore Processing on Nauru,” December 2018, 4-5.

⁴⁸ Mridula Amin and Isabella Kwai, “The Nauru Experience: Zero-Tolerance Immigration and Suicidal Children,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2018.

⁴⁹ For a sophisticated critique of the deployment of notions of “compassionate borderwork” to justify practices of exclusion, see Adrian Little and Nick Vaughan-Williams, “Stopping Boats, Saving Lives, Securing Subjects: Humanitarian Borders in Europe and Australia,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 3 (2017).

⁵⁰ “Remarks by President Trump on the National Security and Humanitarian Crisis on our Southern Border,” White House, February 15, 2019.

origin and transit” as necessary “to save lives, clamp down on smuggling networks, and protect those in need.”⁵¹ Australian politicians have long insisted that their border policies are necessary to put nefarious people smugglers out of business and prevent tragic deaths at sea. As former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott puts it, “stopping the boats and restoring border security is the only truly compassionate thing to do.”⁵²

But such policies of containment, deterrence, and detainment either consign displaced people to insecure and impoverished lives or compel them to take even more dangerous journeys elsewhere in search of asylum. So long as wealthy countries continue to offer resettlement to less than one percent of the world’s forcibly displaced people each year, and continue to impede asylum seekers from claiming protection in their territories, desperate and vulnerable people will continue to seek asylum some way or another: thus there will continue to be a market for people smugglers in one place or another. Preventing access to asylum and stopping people smuggling in one place does not protect the vulnerable. Rather, to borrow a line from refugee scholar William Maley, it sends vulnerable people a clear message: “Go and die somewhere else.”⁵³

Consider, moreover, how refugees, even when granted asylum, are so often demonized by Western politicians, scapegoated for pre-existing societal problems, and subjected to hate-crimes, all of which can have the perverse effect of producing the very social ills among migrants that we fear, by creating suspicion, isolation, shame, and resentment. And consider, finally, how our fearful pursuit of absolute security and economic advantage leads us to engage in or support the foolish wars, maintain the structural injustices, and perpetuate the climate destruction that helps ensure that people will continue to be forcibly displaced and in urgent need of protection and relief, in larger and larger numbers, into the future.

Pursuing a renewed vision for global relations

Since the mid-twentieth century, the clearest and most thoroughly-developed model for Christians—indeed for anyone—wanting to think about and contribute to global politics has been a tradition called Christian realism. This tradition emphasizes the reality of human sin, the perils of idealistic projects, the inevitability of international competition and conflict, and the virtue of each state’s carefully pursuing its national interest. It is an approach that has seeped into the Christian imagination today to such effect that, when confronted with the plight of the forcibly displaced, many feel that it would be imprudent, reckless, and even immoral for their country to make substantial sacrifices for the sake of strangers. To concerns about threats to national identity and state sovereignty, and fears of domestic insecurity and economic decline, Christian realists add worries about global threats, the obstacles to international cooperation, and the dangers of neglecting one’s own national interests.

⁵¹ Quoted in Little and Vaughan-Williams, “Stopping Boats, Saving Lives, Securing Subjects,” 535.

⁵² “Transcript: Tony Abbott’s Controversial Speech at the Margaret Thatcher Lecture,” *Sydney Morning Herald* October 28, 2015.

⁵³ William Maley, “‘Die somewhere else’,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 27, 2013. See also William Maley, *What is a Refugee?* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 94-100; Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano, *Migrant, Refugee, Smuggler, Savior* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Christian realists begin with a number of assumptions about the “reality” of international life. When contemplating global affairs, Christian realists like Reinhold Niebuhr add to this problem of national selfishness the problem of international “anarchy.” By this they mean that, whereas the harmful impacts individual selfishness can be mitigated to a degree by domestic authorities, there is no equivalent authority at the global level that can compel or constrain the behavior of states. “Try as he will,” Niebuhr observed, “man seems incapable of forming an international community, with power and prestige great enough to bring social restraint upon collective egoism.”⁵⁴ From this bleak description of international life, Christian realists derive a “realistic” ethic for how states ought to behave. The “realities” of international relations, they insist, excuse and indeed require in relations between states a degree of selfishness that is not acceptable in relations between individuals: since the selfishness of other states is unrestrained, our own states need to be selfish too.

When we look at the world today, it is easy to see the attraction of Christian realism and to understand why it remains persuasive to so many. The international community is riven with hypocrisy and mistrust, rivalry and conflict. The global crisis of forced displacement is itself a product of this “anarchical” condition. At its best, Christian realism offers vital insights. It reminds us of our fallen nature and the temptations of power, the limits of human understanding and the dangers of seeking to remake the world in our image. It calls us to humility.

But Christian realism risks encouraging complacency and moral compromise (and there’s plenty more that could be said here about this). These dangers of complacency and compromise are evident in the arguments of those who see the global refugee crisis through a realist lens today. Some observers draw from realism a belief that states cannot afford to sacrifice their interests and be more generous to refugees in a competitive and uncooperative world. Others take the insights of realism even further, to argue that generosity toward the displaced can actually *worsen* the global crisis.⁵⁵

We urgently need a renewed vision for global engagement with the plight of the displaced. Thankfully, it turns out that the relentlessly fearful description of international reality that Christian realists present is inaccurate. The possibilities for neighbor-loving behavior in global affairs are far greater than Christian realists tell us. As one international relations theorist rightly declares, “realists regularly, sometimes spectacularly, overstate the nature and significance of the ‘facts’ that constrain the pursuit of moral objectives in (international) politics.”⁵⁶ Another plainly concludes: “anarchy is what states make of it.”⁵⁷ States are free to seek cooperation over conflict, and shared moral projects over self-interested pursuits, if they choose to do so. The selfish ethic that Christian realists advance, therefore, is unjustifiable. The relentless pursuit of security and economic gain that we so often see in international relations is a choice made by political leaders. It is not a moral

⁵⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932), 48.

⁵⁵ E.g. Alexander Betts and Paul Collier, *Refuge: Rethinking Refugee Policy in a Changing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁶ Jack Donnelly, “The Ethics of Realism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, edited by Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 153.

⁵⁷ Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what States Makes of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992).

necessity. It is not a requirement of statecraft in an anarchic world. And we should not justify it as such.

There is nothing, therefore, about the nature of international relations that renders naïve or problematic the claim that states should pursue justice both for those within their borders and for those beyond. Certainly, state leaders should think and act with humility. They should be wary of pride and arrogance—both within their own hearts and the hearts of their nation—and resist the temptations of hypocritical and destructive moral crusades. But they should also recognize that the choice to pursue exclusively their own national interests, rather than also the love of vulnerable neighbors—a choice too often rationalized with an emaciated notion of justice that is all too comfortable with global injustice—is sadly unimaginative. The decision to respond to fears and anxieties by striving for *absolute security*, and to justify such a response as realistic and necessary, is tragically uncreative. It is also ultimately self-defeating, since the relentless pursuit of security fuels global cycles of fear and suspicion, antagonism and aggression: in a word, insecurity.

How much better would it be if states were willing to embrace a measure of vulnerability in their global relations rather than seeking ever greater measures of security? How much more beautiful would it be if states were willing to accept risks and costs for the sake of vulnerable strangers rather than constantly obsessing about their own vulnerability? As international relations theorist, Debra DeLaet, suggests, states have an opportunity to embrace vulnerability “as a universal, shared condition that can generate an openness to an expanded sense of community that, in turn, undergirds a broadened sense of ethical responsibility towards others.”⁵⁸ Accepting a degree of vulnerability, mutuality *with* others, and dependency *on* others, is surely more biblical than the selfish pursuit of security and advantage *over* others, even at the level of global affairs.

Christians realists do a good job of *explaining* the selfishness of states. States do commonly prioritize the pursuit of their security and economic interests.⁵⁹ But we know that this selfishness is not inevitable, we ought not to be comfortable with it, and wherever possible we should challenge it and point to a better way.

The church can play a vital role here. Individual Christian citizens and politicians, church communities and denominations, and faith-based domestic and transnational advocacy movements have a strong record of acting as “norm entrepreneurs,” to use a term from international relations theory, encouraging and shaping not only national, but also global change, through history—often, though sadly not always, in the direction of justice.⁶⁰ While

⁵⁸ Debra L. DeLaet, “The Ethics of Vulnerability in International Relations,” in Brent J. Steele and Eric A. Heinze (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Ethics and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 2018), 361. See also Caron E. Gentry, “Anxiety Politics: Creativity and Feminist Christian Realism,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* (2018 online first).

⁵⁹ Even this realist claim, however, is problematic insofar as the interpretation of these interests by states is not naturally given but shaped and reconstructed over time.

⁶⁰ The notion of “norm entrepreneur” is developed in Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998). For a powerful study of successful global advocacy by Christians in defense of vulnerable people, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, see Peter Stamatov, *The Origins of Global Humanitarianism: Religion, Empires, and Advocacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For more troubling examples of successful global advocacy by Christians opposing gun control and supporting oppressive regimes, see Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Lauren F. Turek, *To Bring the*

we may be tempted to think of foreign policy and international relations as realms over which the church can have little impact, it turns out that the church—as well as other grassroots and global movements—can and often does make a profound contribution. These entities can make a difference, scholars explain, by framing issues in particular ways and generating increased attention; bringing new ideas, information, and testimonies to public debates; challenging prevailing understandings of national identities, interests, and preferences; advocating the adoption of new policies, demanding implementation, and monitoring compliance.⁶¹ The church thus has a profound opportunity, faithfully and creatively to seek renewed engagement with the plight of the displaced not only at the national, but also at the global level.

Should we hope that asylum seekers stay where they are? On the distinctions we draw between “good refugees” and “bad refugees”

We in the West are often tempted to hope that displaced peoples will choose to remain in countries of first asylum in developing regions of the world. Sure, we acknowledge, they do not have a permanent home. But they are safe enough. Can't they just stay where they are? Why should we have to deal with them?

Certainly, many refugees find themselves in situations that are preferable to the conditions from which they have fled. Often, they find safety, sustenance, opportunities for work, and schooling for their children. But too often they don't. Reflecting on the horrifying detention centers in which most displaced people who enter Libya are placed without trial, the UN's High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, sympathized with those who seek to flee across the Mediterranean: “If I was a refugee or a migrant or anybody going into this center, I would opt for anything to get out of there, even if I knew the risk of death was very high.”⁶²

Western states can only do so much to protect refugees in a country verging on dictatorship such as Turkey or a failed state such as Libya. And even if these refugees were protected in these countries, they would still remain displaced, without a permanent home, without a durable solution. Where is the justice in insisting that they be content with their lot rather than continue to move in search of greater safety, opportunity, and permanency for themselves and their families? They are people for whom Christ was willing to die. How can we insist that they remain where they are for the sake of our own convenience and comfort?

Refugee scholars observe a troubling tendency of Western politicians and commentators to distinguish between “good” refugees and “bad” refugees. “Good” refugees are vulnerable victims who wait patiently where they are, in refugee camps or urban centers in impoverished countries, until they are rescued by benevolent Western saviors. “Bad” refugees are those who take matters into their own hands, pursuing their own strategies for

Good News to All Nations: Evangelicals, Human Rights, and U.S. Foreign Relations (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

⁶¹ Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 2-3.

⁶² Peter Beaumont, “UN refugee chief: I would risk death to escape a squalid migrant camp,” *The Guardian*, January 15, 2019.

survival, paying people smugglers, crossing borders, and taking advantage of all-too-generous laws that allow them to claim asylum in—and thus impose themselves on—the West. They come in “swarms,” they “flood” into Western countries, they are “queue jumpers.” (Never mind that, in most instances, there are no queues for them to jump!) When they die en route, it is a tragedy, but it is their fault for not staying put.⁶³

But people undertake dangerous journeys in search of asylum in the West because they perceive no other options. They can no longer wait for others to provide solutions for them. They need safety from violence and persecution, a way out of intractable poverty, an opportunity to send their kids to school. They need a home. Even if wealthy and powerful countries do a better job of caring for people temporarily displaced in the Global South, facilitating safe and dignified repatriation for as many as possible, and providing resettlement for many more, there will always be some displaced people who feel the need to continue to move in search of asylum. But, as was noted earlier, not only do we in the West fail to care for them “over there,” but we actively impede their efforts to claim and attain asylum “over here,” via policies of containment, deterrence, and detention.

How lamentable it is that the right to seek asylum, which was the foundation of the global refugee regime established in the wake of the Holocaust, is now being undermined by those with greatest capacity to provide home, as wealthy states erect ever more complex and costly legal and material structures to keep vulnerable people at a distance, to turn them back from their borders, and to detain for longer and longer periods those who manage to cross those borders.

Certainly, countries need to carefully assess the cases of those who apply for asylum. They should limit the entry of predatory or ill-intentioned applicants to preserve the safety and security of existing members of society. Impoverished or unstable countries and countries overwhelmed with massive numbers of applications may need to appeal for other countries to help share the responsibility and opportunity to extend kinship to the vulnerable. But no country should be in the business of containing desperate people in distant regions, deterring them from seeking safety, or detaining them for lengthy periods in the hope that they give up, go home, or seek welcome elsewhere. The provision of pathways and opportunities for desperate, displaced people to continue to move in search of more permanent safety and sustenance needs to be a part of any comprehensive response to our global crisis of displacement.

An opportunity, rather than a burden

There is a clear and urgent need for the global community of states—particularly its wealthiest and most capable members—to more meaningfully cooperate and do much more to care for the displaced. This is commonly framed as a need for greater “burden-sharing” among states. But the notion that refugees are a “burden” is troubling. In its place, many

⁶³ Erin K. Wilson and Luca Mavelli, “The Refugee Crisis and Religion : Beyond Conceptual and Physical Boundaries,” in Luca Mavelli and Erin K. Wilson (eds), *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 6-9; Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, “The Faith-Gender-Asylum Nexus: An Intersectionalist Analysis of Representation of the ‘Refugee Crisis’,” in Mavelli and Wilson, *The Refugee Crisis and Religion*, 209-11. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh notes the contrast with the Cold War in which asylum seekers from Eastern Europe and Vietnam were cast as courageous opponents of communism and welcomed by Western states.

suggest the label, “responsibility-sharing.” This is certainly better. But we prefer an alternative phrase that has been occasionally proposed by UN officials and diplomats in recent years: “opportunity-sharing.” By this, we do not mean to highlight the economic and strategic benefits that accrue to states that extend protection to refugees, as those who have used the phrase tend to do (though it is certainly helpful to note these benefits). Rather, we want to emphasize that the chance to love our neighbors as ourselves, to welcome Christ in welcoming the stranger, and to enfold the displaced as kin, should always be understood as an opportunity, not a burden.