A Biblical ethic of kinship for people on the move

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Abstract

The Christian Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, is calling and forming God's people to enfold vulnerable immigrants as their kindred. On the basis of the inherent value of every people group (Gen 9-10), and grounded in God's own covenant commitment to refugees (Deut 10:18-19), God's people are to offer a place of protection and belonging for people on the move.

Keywords refugee, immigration, kinship, hospitality, welcome, asylum seeker, illegal, ethics, biblical ethics, racism, covenant.

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. Such an approach has never been more important than with 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.

In this essay, I trace the arc of the biblical narrative, revisiting key questions for biblical theology that are relevant to discerning a biblical ethic of kinship for people on the move. I will start at the very beginning, with Genesis.

1. The Old Testament

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

1.1 Genesis

In Genesis 9, following the great flood, God makes a covenant with *all* flesh and every people group. As the curtain rises on the drama of the flood, human violence is corrupting God's good creation (Gen 6:11). After the flood, God makes a covenant

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with all 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* flesh (even the animals) for their ongoing life and flourishing. God declares this covenant no less than seven times in the narrative (Gen 6:18; 9:9-16).

Next, Genesis 10 lays out a genealogy of the nations, a family tree that includes all people groups. As this massive family tree unfurls like a fern frond and as the nations spread out over the earth, we see God's covenant with diverse people groups worked out on a global scale. The family tree of humanity shows that God's covenant solidarity extends to people groups from Egypt to the Persian Gulf, all 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 the theological significance of our common descent from Adam and from Noah, referring to it as the "one blood doctrine."[2] Black preachers and writers have often drawn on the apostle Paul's words in Athens to establish 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 humanity, among other biblical grounds.

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, as well as 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 similarity communicates 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 fulfil 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?

1.2 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

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

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, as evidenced by her use of the flint, her words (Exod 4:25), and her knowledge of circumcision.[3] Zipporah was modelling for Moses the character qualities required for his confrontation with Pharaoh and for leadership of Israel: a fear of Yahweh and a formidable boldness.

In the exodus event, Israel left Egypt 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. Jethro, a non-Israelite, recommends a system of judicial reform (Exod 18:13-27). That is striking enough. But 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] At this moment in salvation history, Israel itself is a people on the move, akin to refugees.

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 on the move themselves. As a people 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 Exodus twice forbids Israel from oppressing vulnerable outsiders (Exod 22:21; 23:9). Strangers, who were often employed on farms and in households as cheap labour, had to be treated with compassion and paid fairly. They were also to be included in the Sabbath rest (Exod 20:10; 23:9).

1.3 Deuteronomy

God's love for the stranger comes into full focus in Deuteronomy. In this book, the stranger is a vulnerable person who is not a member of the clan grouping in which they resided.[5] They were often exploited for cheap labour or even enslaved, a tragic reality

[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.

[5] For a thorough analysis of the stranger in Deuteronomy see Glanville, *Adopting the Stranger*; M.

illustrated in Israel's own story – remember how the Hebrews dwelt as strangers in Egypt and were subsequently enslaved there (Deut 26:5-8). The stranger appears no less than 22 times in Deuteronomy. The book describes protection for the stranger in legal proceedings (e.g. Deut 1:16-17) and ensures that the stranger's needs are met 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 towards adopting the stranger as kindred.

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" (NRSV, adapted). The word "love" in this text refers to the steadfast loyalty of a covenant. 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" (10:19). And only a few verses earlier Deuteronomy has affirmed Yahweh's love for Israel: "Yet the Lord set God's 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).

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? First, love refers to covenant loyalty. Second, love also announces kinship connections. 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 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! Third, 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 love – covenant, kinship, and emotion – provide a warm hearth within which the stranger can be enfolded as makeshift family.

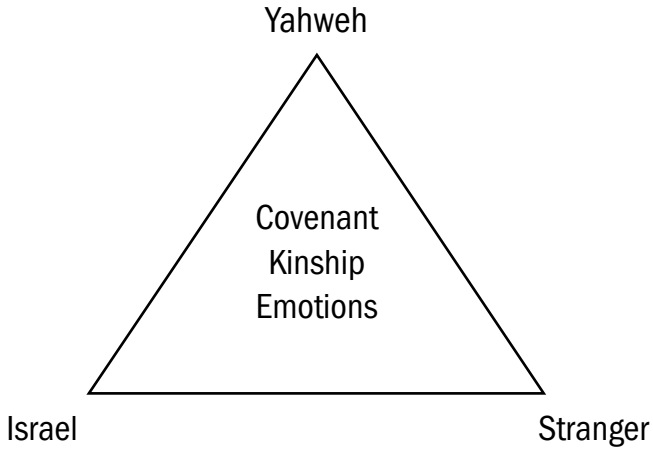
Glanville and L. Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 25-50; Mark Awabdy, *Immigrants and Innovative Law: Deuteronomy's Theological and Social Vision for the "gr,"* FAT 2.67 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

6 I provide a thorough analysis of Deuteronomy 10:18-19 in *Adopting the Stranger*, 214-21. See also Glanville and Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 41-50.

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):145. See also Deut 1:31; 8:5; 14:1.

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 love (covenant, kinship, and emotion) are represented in the centre of the triangle.

God makes a covenant commitment of protection and belonging to displaced people. What a remarkable revelation! What a wonderful reason to worship our God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! God calls the people of God into 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.

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 makes its pilgrimage to the "chosen place" for the Passover meal and the feast of Unleavened Bread (16:1-8). Next, seven weeks after the wheat and barley harvest there is grateful celebration in the Feast of Weeks (16:9-11). Then, following the olive and grape harvest comes the most joyful celebration of all, the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles

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

(16:12-15). Deuteronomy 16 is quite a foodie chapter, even though probably, the last time you read it, you skimmed over it as dull!

The list of participants in the feasts is emphatic, occurring twice in all their detail: "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, 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 makeshift family.[9] Feasting before the Lord, the refugee is again 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 Deuteronomy 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. These two feasts lament the suffering in Egypt (Deut 16:3). It is remarkable that Israel's festal year begins with lament. Israel is reminded that only as it faces its own story of displacement and slavery can it 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 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 a divine gift: Yahweh gives the land and its produce (Deut 16:10, 13, 15). The life and worship of God's people start 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 are 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 – the natural reflex of gratitude, as it were – 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. How, then, should God's people come before God in worship? With the refugee by our side. Worship that excludes the refugee or the vulnerable immigrant is not biblical worship.

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[9] Feasts can also function to divide communities and establish hierarchical arrangements; however, this is not Deuteronomy's goal. For further discussion, see Glanville, "Festive Kinship," 142, n. 51.

[10] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Global Trends* (2020). Available at: https://www.unhcr.org/flagship-reports/globaltrends/.

1.4 Pulling it all together

We have seen that God makes a covenant commitment to each and every people group, and that God's covenant and kinship tilt strongly towards vulnerable people who are seeking a home (Deut 10:18-19). Israel is chosen as God's people within that frame, towards the goal of God blessing every people group. God's people are deeply interdependent with strangers. People who are culturally non-Hebrew are a part of the people of God and even contributed 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.

1.5 But what about the Canaanites?

But if God commanded Israel to slaughter Canaanites, then maybe the Old Testament wasn't so inclusive after all, was it? For a full discussion of the so-called Canaanite destruction texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua, you can read either my extended academic analysis or a 2,000-word summary.[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 that had long ceased to exist in the land by the time of writing – a symbolic figure that in fact stands for unfaithful Israel. The message of these texts is that, should Israel be unfaithful to Yahweh and fail to be the community of tenderness that Torah is shaping them to be, then they have become Canaanite and 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.

2. The New Testament

2.1 Kinship in the Gospels

In the Gospels, Jesus established an eschatological people of God.[12] That is to say, Jesus was gathering a renewed Israel in fulfilment of the Scriptures (Mt 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 realized), 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

[11] Mark R. Glanville, "*Hērem* as Israelite Identity Formation: Canaanite Destruction and the Stranger (*Gēr*)," *CBQ* 83 (2021): 547-70; Glanville and 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 Glanville and Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 74-98.

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. First-century Judaism was deeply hierarchical, mirroring the honour-seeking practices of the wider Greco-Roman 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. Menstruants and lepers were excluded from worship and social engagement by virtue of their bodily impurity. People 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 the worshipping 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 makeshift family, teaching them to pray, "*Our* Father in heaven" (Mt 7). "*Our* Father" means that 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 people who put his words into practice (Mk 3:31-35). By their distinctive shared life, they were to live as a sign of Jesus' healing reign (Mt 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, and so on. And as we will see, a key feature of the makeshift family Jesus was forming is that it was composed especially of those who experienced marginality, the "least of these."

2.2 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 already seen that meals can be kinship-forming rituals. Meals can join, and meals can also divide.[14] Both of these capacities are seen in the Gospels.

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[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.

[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), 77.

And Jesus had a reputation for *whom* he ate with. In the eyes of the religious elite, Jesus ate with all the wrong people – but they 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 (Lk 15:2). Jesus' meal with Matthew the tax collector and other "sinners" gathered at Matthew's house is a case in point (Mt 5:9-13). It was scandalous for Jesus to attend this meal, as sinners such as 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 occurs at a Pharisee's house in 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 maintain a deliberate tension in this regard. Although Jesus resolutely called his hearers to repentance, indeed to costly discipleship (e.g. Mt 8:18-22), nonetheless the edges of Jesus' kinship group were blurry, enfolding people in unexpected ways and always tilting towards the margins. To illustrate, consider the example of the rich young ruler. This young elite man wasn't willing to loosen his grip on wealth, and Jesus nonetheless "looked at him and loved him" (Mk 10:21). And as we have seen above, "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.

2.3 Healing miracles

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

> 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 commu-

[15] Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith*, trans. John P. Galvin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 13.

nity 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 own family could do. Following his healing, the leper was restored to the worshipping community via priestly examination and the requisite sacrifices (Mk 1:44). In healing people, Jesus restored them 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?

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 the lawyer's self-righteous question, "Who is my neighbour?" with a parable that 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 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? We object, "But what if they take our jobs?" and so forth. 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 put to shame many churches and many so-called Christian nations.

A related Lukan parable is that of the sheep and the goats, where Jesus identifies with the stranger with the famous words, "I was a stranger and you 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" (Mt 25:35-36). Another example is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31).

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[16] Glanville and Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 88.

[17] For a discussion of the impact of refugee welcome on the employment sector, see Glanville and Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined*, 171-174.

2.4 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 when he would be betrayed (Mk 14:1-11). And think of the festive and generous response of some tax collectors (e.g. Lk 19:8).

In *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 organization 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; rather, 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 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 to provide a home for people who are on the move. This ethic is for the church, but it is not for the church alone. For Christ's way of loving service, reflected throughout all of

[18] Anika Barlow, *Becoming Neighbours: Five Values for a World of Welcome* (Vancouver: Kinbrace Community Society, 2021), 36.

[19] Glanville and Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined,* 171-173.

Scripture, is in fact God's desire for all humanity. As Christians who are willing to make sacrifices for vulnerable people seeking a home, we should also advocate at a societal level for just and welcoming policies.

2.5 The Gospel

At this point, it is helpful to bring all that we have said about welcoming refugees into conversation with the gospel itself. This will help us 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]." (Mk 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 fulfilment 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 of 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 in the whole world and all 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 crucial, as one part of God's healing of creation and restoring human life to flourishing. The gospel encompasses refugee welcome.

2.6 The Pauline Epistles

The apostle Paul uses the word "gospel" in much the same way as Mark. I do not have space to analyse the texts in detail, but we might summarize that in the Pauline

Epistles the word "gospel" captures three themes: (1) the gospel is about Christ and his life, death and resurrection; (2) the Christ-event is the fulfilment of the Old Testament story, including all of 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, which Paul wrote 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. (Phlm 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 or brother in Christ.

Again, it is helpful to ask: to whom do Christians owe their care? To be sure, Paul envisioned that Christ-followers should be sisters or brothers 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 first-century 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).

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 terms of only

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

one (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 and children of Abraham. Christ-followers are "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:24-29).

In our journey through Scripture, we have travelled a full circle, for the unity of Jew and Gentile in Paul's Epistles fulfils 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 for which humanity was created in the first place can be realized. As US Hispanic leader Denae Pierre 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.

2.7 Witness

We conclude 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 when he was betrayed and recorded in John's Gospel: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you'" (Jn 20:21).

Jesus is teaching that his followers are a *sent* people. Christ sends us in witness, in much the same way as the Father sent Christ. This has to do with our very identity. Witness isn't just one thing on the church's agenda, or merely one of our many tasks. No, in the terms of biblical theology, witness is the very identity of the church: we have been sent by Christ to bear witness to his tender Lordship while we await his return to renew all things. One implication is that we bear witness to the gospel of Christ. Even as the gospel is comprehensive in its scope, embracing the

[21] Denae Pierre, "Pastoring through Polarization," *The Front Porch* (2020). Available at: https://thefrontporch.org/2020/10/pastoring-through-polarization/.

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 welcoming refugees. As Christ-followers offer protective solidarity with people who are seeking a home, as we are knit together as makeshift family with them, we are bearing witness to Christ our brother and to the Father our divine kinsperson.

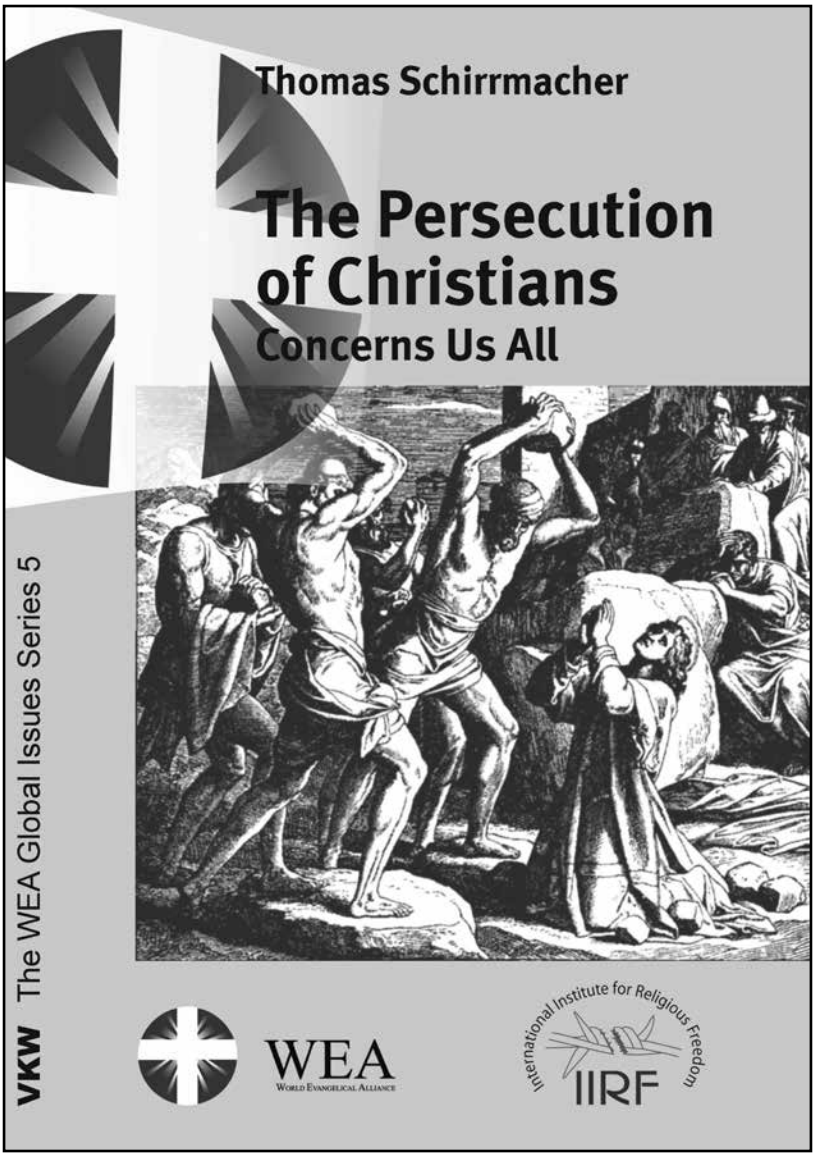
At this point in our journey, we have traversed vast territory. We have discerned a biblical ethic of kinship for refugees in the Old and New Testaments. We have examined the gospel and explored the nature of witness. Sometimes it can be difficult to hold all the moving pieces together in our mind. So let's take a moment to capture the biblical story in a nutshell to help us synthesize all we have said. We might summarize 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" (Rom 11:36).*

3. Conclusion

In this essay, 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 makeshift 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 encompasses all 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. Mt 9:9-13). Today, too, those of us who welcome refugees and vulnerable immigrants in our neighbourhoods and churches are deeply blessed by our new friends and their generosity, wisdom, ingenuity, humour, and cuisine!

[22] Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 91.



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