



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE

WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

**Remembering our future
The response of Australian churches
to the recommendations of the Royal
Commission into Institutional
Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**

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Book reviews

Migration, refugees, religion and theology: crossing disciplinary boundaries

Jennifer B. Saunders, Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, & Susanna Snyder (eds). *Intersections of Religion and Migration: Issues at the Global Crossroads*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Paperback, xxii + 360 pages, ISBN 978–1–137–58628–5.

Luca Mavelli & Erin K. Wilson (eds). *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question*. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016). Paperback. x + 316 pages. ISBN 978–1–7834–8895–7.

While the Christian churches in Australia failed dismally in their handling of child sexual abuse, the response to refugees is one area of public policy in which, as Erin Wilson (now Director of the Centre for Religion, Conflict and the Public Domain, University of Groningen) noted in her survey in the *Journal of Refugee Studies* in 2011, there was “[m]uch to be proud of, much to be done.” Since then Australian churches have continued to be involved in the provision of practical support, while continuing to undertake public advocacy and to dissent from government policy on asylum seekers on an unprecedented scale. Though studies of the policy background against which the churches’ response have begun to appear, the task of any future historian of this involvement has been both simplified and made more complex by the two volumes that are the subject of this review. The simplification arises because these collections of essays provide a substantial account of the international policy horizon. The complication comes because these volumes ensure that any adequate Australian discussion will need to take account of the work of theologians and scholars of religion, as well as anthropologists and sociologists, if we are to arrive at a nuanced and in-depth account.

The research literature on the role of religion in the refugee and migrant experience published over the past decade is now both extensive and diverse in its disciplinary locations. The volumes under review, *Intersections of Religion and Migration: Issues at the Global Crossroads* (henceforth *Intersections*) and *The Refugee Crisis and Religion: Secularism, Security and Hospitality in Question* (henceforth *The Refugee Crisis*) both position themselves as the first in a projected series: *Religion and Global Migrations* and *Critical Perspectives on Religion in International Politics* respectively. Both provide access to a good range of research literature. Both volumes also illustrate the possibilities and rewards of not remaining constrained within narrowly defined disciplinary boundaries. Theologians who are committed to undertaking their work in engagement with the wider academic community will find here some examples of the shape such engagement might take, as well as themes that have important theological resonance.

The first chapter of each book provides an account of the scope, disciplinary and methodological issues of both the volume and intended publication series. Both volumes bring the cross-cutting

issues of sexuality and gender into the discussion of religion and migration. In terms of subject matter, the central difference between the two volumes is one of focus. *Intersections* covers the entire field of migration studies, while *The Refugee Crisis* restricts its attention to refugees, viz. those subject to forced migration. There is, perhaps not surprisingly, a degree of overlap with five authors contributing to both volumes.

I commence my discussion with *Intersections*. The starting point for its editors is the question of how to frame the relationship between migration and religion. What kinds of population movements and religious perspective should be included? And how should religion be brought into the analysis? Simply noting those questions highlights the potential scope of the volume in terms of both topics and diverse disciplinary perspectives.

The editors have chosen to include South-South as well as South-North migration flows, and both voluntary and forced migration. This allows consideration of the relation of migration to religion within a variety of transnational and national contexts. It also opens up the possibility of developing a comparative perspective in contexts where migrants do and don't share the religion of both other migrant groups, and that of their host societies. In dealing with the issue of religion, the volume focuses on the lived religious experience of migrants in both obtaining support from religious traditions and in adapting such traditions in new environments, rather than an approach which treats religious traditions solely as intellectual or institutional constructions. The other important emphasis in their approach is that religion is one of a range of diverse social factors that shape migrants' experience. The framework of "intersections" is used to bring into the discussion migrant experiences of discrimination and marginalisation, where a religious identity overlaps with those of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

The editors' introduction, powerfully illustrated by evocative black and white photographs, lays out the methodological assumptions and recent historical trajectory of research and academic debate on issues of migration and religion. While research has arguably been dominated by social science and anthropological frameworks, the editors stress that scholars of religion, theologians and ethicists have all become engaged in increasing numbers in exploring multiple connections between migration and religion. It is the malleability of religious traditions and practices, and the complex ways that they intersect with race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, that the editors wish to explore by examining migration with religion at the centre of the enterprise. The editors flag the difficulties associated with the use of the terminology of "religion" and its sprawling complex character extending as it does across both structures of belief and lived experience. Rather than requiring contributors to conform to a particular set of definitions, the approach taken by the editors was to encourage authors to use the terminology that most adequately reflected their discipline, thus emphasising the pluralist nature of research agendas across the disciplinary boundaries of religious studies, anthropology, theology and the sociology.

Beyond the introduction the contributions to *Intersections* are grouped under three thematic headings. The first heading is "Religion and experiences of migration." Chapters here cover religion as psychological, spiritual and social support, lived religious practices, the construction of religious identity, racialisation of religion, and the intersections of gender sexuality and religion in migration studies. The second heading is "Approaches to the study of religion and migration." The

contributions here venture onto ground trodden by theologians and ethicists, and include a discussion of the themes of diaspora and exile, the transnational character of religious spaces and networks, a theology of migration, and a discussion of the moral nature of borders. The final heading is “Religion and responses to migration.” These concluding two chapters explore issues in religion-sensitive policy-making and the role of religion in forced migration and humanitarian responses.

The Refugee Crisis is focused directly on the refugee dimension of migration. The editors explain that the central theme of the book is that the “entanglement of ‘refugee’, ‘violence/conflict/terror’ and ‘religion’ is contributing to the production of narrow policy responses, exclusionary politics and a growing trend towards securitising forced migration rather than treating the global refugee crisis as a question of humanitarianism, or solidarity with fellow human beings.” The editors thus have both moral and policy dimensions in view, in exploring both how these categories are entangled and operate in current debate, and in opening up new approaches. The editors undertake an extended discussion of the complexity and indeed the mutual implication of the terminology of “religion” and the “secular”, tracing the movement of analysis beyond secularisation, through the recovery of interest in “religion”, through the binary of “good” and “bad” religion and the tropes of “good Muslim, bad Muslim”. The authors sketch a proposal for “postsecularizing” the refugee crisis as the “troubling” of these categories, which is to say that editors the do not treat either the “religious” or the “secular” as clearly defined predetermined, ahistorical, acultural categories, but as conceptual distinctions and social constructions deployed in the service of particular political and ideological agendas. The theme of the “postsecular” as discussed in this context overlaps in interesting ways with work being undertaken under this rubric in Europe on the role of “faith-based” organisations by Justin Beaumont and Paul Cloke (see, for example, their edited volume published in 2012, *Faith-Based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities*).

Beyond two introductory chapters that set out the conceptual issues and the international governance context of political realism and neoliberalism within which the refugee and migration crisis has emerged, the essays in this volume are organized around four themes. The first is “Questioning The Secular/Religious Divide.” Here the challenging of the secular/religious distinctions is contextualised with respect to refugee policy and the shifting terrain of discourse about humanitarian engagement with “faith communities.” An original contribution here is the case study of Praxis Community Projects, an agency in the United Kingdom, which grounds the conceptual debate about religion and secularity by demonstrating the difficulty of using this binary divide to categorise agencies involved with refugees.

The second theme is “Constructing and Deconstructing the Muslim Refugee.” The four studies here are diverse in character and geographical location. Anyone interested in a more extended account of the dynamics of the renegotiation of Muslim identity and racialisation would benefit from reading these chapters with reference to the literature in chapters 4 and 5 in the *Intersections* volume discussed above. The third theme is “Religious Traditions of Hospitality in Theory and Practice.” The essays here engage with theological issues, with three of the chapters explicitly taking up Muslim themes and practices. The chapter which offers a specifically Christian theological approach engages with themes from Augustine of Hippo and Pope Francis, and is in

contrast to a more systematic theological approach in the article by Goody in the *Intersections* volume. The final essay on this theme explores Christian, Muslim, and Jewish theological approaches to the situation of Palestinian refugees. The final theme is “At the Intersection of Faith, Gender, Sexuality and Asylum.” These concluding two essays explore what happens when issues of gender, sexuality, and faith come together in the context of the refugee experience, and can usefully be read together with chapter 6 in the *Intersections* volume.

These two volumes cover a large amount of common ground in the themes that they address, though with some differences in the form in which the material is presented and in the breadth of coverage on each topic. The essays in the *Intersections* volume tend to be longer and more comprehensive in their coverage of the research literature. The *Refugee Crisis* offers shorter essays and include several case studies. The differing scope and the presentation of the material in each make them largely complementary. Both volumes present compelling evidence for the relevance of theology to this area of academic inquiry and public policy. The editors of both volumes set out the field of refugee and migration studies in a way that opens the doors wide for involvement by theologians, whether Christian, Muslim, or Jew, an invitation that I hope will be taken up. Certainly, there is a rich field of possibilities open to Christian theologians who want to engage in the debates in this area, whether your background is in systematic theology, ecclesiology, Old and New Testament or political theology.

In closing this review, I want to gesture towards the possibilities for theological work that would engage in a cross-disciplinary way with issues of migration and refugees. I do so by way of noting some theological literature with points of connection to both of the volumes under review. The references reflect my own reading and interests in political theology and I do not pretend to be doing more than making some indicative suggestions of theological resources and starting points for research and debate. One very substantial and important monograph in Christian political theology published just this year, grounded in a normative account of political pluralism in the Reformed tradition, is Matthew Kaemingk’s *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear*. Kaemingk opens up the opportunity for conversation with both social and political scientists and theologians, whether Muslim or Christian.

The theme of diaspora has deep resonances both historically and theologically for those from the Anabaptist tradition. Alain Epp Weaver takes up this theme in some essays on political theology: *States of Exile: Visions of Diaspora, Theology and Return* (2008). It is a discussion that connects closely with issues facing Palestinian refugees while simultaneously engaging with Jewish theologians. From the Catholic tradition Michael Budde has taken up issues of identity and ecclesiology with reference to political controversies over immigration in the United States, in *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances and the Church* (2011), while William Cavanaugh raises some suggestive thoughts on questions of identity and the relationship of Christians to the nation state in his 2011 essay, “Migrant, Tourist, Pilgrim, Monk: Identity and Mobility in a Global Age.”

