



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR  
**CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE**

WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

## **Welcoming the stranger: resources for the churches**

Dr Douglas Hynd

*Ekklesia*

23 December 2021



Charles Sturt  
University

---

If the government of the United Kingdom decides to follow the Australian policy of offshore processing refugees offshore, a strong theological response will be needed to underpin sustained practical resistance to such a policy.

Fortunately, churches don't have to wait around for something suitable to start helping their members to get oriented to the issues. A couple of really good resources have just been published.

How the Bible can Help Us Understand Welcoming the Stranger: A Bible study for individuals or groups by Denise Cottrell-Boyce is part of a series published by Darton, Longman & Todd. It is a great resource as she brings together her theological training with long experience as a volunteer at Refugee Women Connect. The presentation is accessible. The biblical passages are presented in the study book at the appropriate point in each chapter making it easy to use. In addition, at the end of each chapter the author provides a list of resources for further reading on the issues.

Chapter 1 "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" takes up the question of what it feels like as a group or an individual and looks at the parallels between the Jewish people's experience of exile in Babylon and the experience of people driven from their homes today by war, civil unrest and economic dislocation. The heart of the challenge of advocating for refugees is tackled head on in Chapter 2, "Who is not my neighbour?" where Denise Cottrell-Boyce explores why the fear of strangers is so visceral and how this fear is related to the instinct for community self-preservation.

The other issue classically harnessed by politicians in stirring up fear of refugees is explored in Chapter 3, "Fighting for scraps from the table". Cottrell-Boyce explores honestly and sensitively the competing needs in the host community of those people who already feel dispossessed and alienated, and the asylum seekers who arrive in such communities. The difficulties she names are ones that I clearly recognised from my own experience of involvement and advocacy. Living in a community in which affordable housing for those on low incomes is at crisis level how do you advocate for newly arrived refugees without being seen as pushing aside the claims of the homeless?

In Chapter 4, "Everything in common", Cottrell-Boyce explores the question of finding commonality across boundaries of difference. In the final chapter, "Old men dream dreams, young men see visions", she looks at generational differences in resistance to change and how a sense of loss can shape antipathy to migrants. The agenda in this study names difficult issues, recognises the power of personal and family experience and opens up scripture in a way that takes us beyond idealistic imperatives to a deeper conversation about shaping a Christian response beyond the fear generated by Government.

For those who want to engage with policy issues raised by the increasing movement of refugees, and asylum seekers in a way that is informed by both theology and political analysis, Mark R. Glanville and Luke Glanville, *Refuge Reimagined: Biblical Kinship in Global Politics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021) is a must-read.

*Refuge Reimagined* draws on interdisciplinary conversation between biblical scholarship and empirical accounts of refugee experience, and hospitality in refuge countries. The two authors advancing this interdisciplinary venture are brothers. Mark Glanville is an Old Testament scholar who has published on historical and ethical issues regarding displacement in the Pentateuch. Luke Glanville is a scholar of international relations who has spent the past decade researching past and present understanding of the responsibilities of states to care for the well-being of people, both within and beyond their borders. Mark also has on the ground experience of providing hospitality for refugees that earths the theology in practice. Kinbrace Community Society in Vancouver, British Columbia has been providing housing and support for refugee claimants for over twenty years. Kinbrace was founded in 1998 by Grandview Church where Mark was a pastor for seven years.

At the heart of *Refuge Reimagined* is an account of a biblical ethic of kinship: an ethic in which the people of God are called to embrace and enfold refugees and other displaced people as kin, welcoming into the protective centre of the community those who are without clan, without family, and without home. The authors begin by retrieving this ethic of kinship from scripture. They explore how such an ethic might be embodied today within church, national, and global communities respectively. Given the centrality of kinship to the social worlds of both Testaments, the authors emphasise that it is important to take a context-sensitive approach to reading the text that brings to light a response to the plight of the marginalised throughout scripture which might otherwise remain invisible to those of us in modernity, who give little thought to kinship. The authors devote a chapter to development of these themes in Deuteronomy where the stranger is someone who is vulnerable and seeking a home. As an outsider, they no longer know the protection that family and patrimony with its inheritance of land would provide. In Deuteronomy, the stranger is brought into sharing as kin through provisions for social solidarity, judicial protection, and feasting.

The authors then take up the theme of kinship in the church, discussing practices for nourishing worshipping communities toward creative kinship and laying out a biblical foundation for church-based advocacy for refugees. They finish the chapter with stories of people and churches that have lived and acted in solidarity with refugees in the hope that these examples will inspire fresh imaginings for worshipping communities. This chapter provides a transition point for the book, building upon the ethic of kinship retrieved from scripture to show how the church's mission

includes a responsibility both to model in its own life, and to advocate for compassionate and mutually transformative responses to forced displacement.

In Part Three, the authors move beyond the church to explore policy issues at a national level and articulate a stance that rejects the identification of Christianity with nationalism. They argue that nations should seek to regulate their borders and preserve their identities only insofar as this serves scripture's call to human flourishing, which includes the flourishing of vulnerable foreigners in need of a home. While sovereign states have a responsibility to care for their own citizens, states also have a responsibility to care for displaced people.

The authors identify opportunities for a collaborative global response to the forced displacement of people through rejecting a fear-based ethic and offering a renewed vision for international relations grounded in a biblical ethic of global kinship with the vulnerable. In drawing attention to the global dimensions of displacement, the authors have laid out a comprehensive approach to a theological ethic and practice of refuge shaped by both an imaginative reading of scripture and analysis of public policy issues at multiple levels.