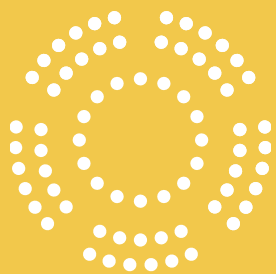




Logos Scotland Reports

Shake the Dust

Asylum, Immigration and a biblical perspective on policy



Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	9
The Theology	14
Conclusion	16

Foreword

For the last 10 years the issue of asylum and immigration has never been far from the top of the political agenda. It has been used by many as a key political argument to win over voters and appeal to the electorate, with some taking a hard line approach and others a softer policy position. During the Brexit referendum we saw it take centre stage with opposing sides using it as a key battle point. There is so much discussion around this topic that Logos Scotland felt it was timely to take a step back, ask what the Bible teaches us about this important issue and what foundations does it point to in order for policy to be developed.

This report looks at that question and suggests some principles upon which policy can be based, it does not take a party political position or say that one current policy is right or wrong, it is aimed at taking a strategic view and asking – “if we had a blank sheet of paper, when it comes to developing a policy on asylum and immigration, what would the founding principles be with a biblical world view at their core?”

Some of the key principles that will be drawn out in this report are:

- God himself has been on that journey; He was a migrant, his ministry was one of traversing. God recognises the journey that His people are on and understands that.
- We cannot simply make decisions based on a limited understanding or judgement of what we think we know; to truly understand and to make a fair and just decision we must be aware of the person, their experience and their story.
- God is a God of the refugee, with a deep understanding that we are called to follow and appreciate
- We should not judge or look down on anyone who is different to ourselves or comes from a different ethnic group of religion, they are not lesser.
- Work was important both for the respect of the community and to allow those who have travelled the dignity in providing for their families and contributing to the economy.
- Any system that is put in place should be based on the person, rather than the efficiency of the process.
- Here borders are seen as a place of meeting, they are places where nations and people come together and merge

We hope that this will add to the current debate in a winsome way, prompting communities, politicians and the media to think more deeply about this issue rather than simply looking at the right and wrongs of a particular party or policy position.

Shona and Stuart

Shona Haslam
Stuart C Weir

Introduction

It would not be an exaggeration to say that people we recognise as (i) refugees, (ii) those seeking asylum and, (iii) those migrating from one place to another constitute a complex, global issue. The *International Organization for Migration*, for example, reports that in 2020 there were 281 million migrants in the world, which was 3.6% of the world's population.¹

In order to fully discuss this issue we have to be clear about the definitions of the terms that we are using. Who do we mean by 'refugees', those 'seeking asylum' or 'immigration'?

- Refugees: those who have had to flee their country of origin due to (1) fear of persecution due to their ethnicity, faith conviction, social status or political stripe; (2) because of war; or (3) because of environmental devastation.
- Asylum seekers: those who arrive at another border and request asylum for their own safety and wellbeing.
- Immigrants: those who seek to move to another country for a whole myriad of reasons, but not under duress or extreme necessity.²

At the most recent census in 2022 the Scottish population was measured at 5,436,600 people, this figure represents a 2.7% growth (141,200) since the previous census on 2011.³



Migration is identified as being the main driver of population growth, with 27,800 more people arriving in Scotland than leaving. This can be broken down into UK migration and international migration, with 8,900 people arriving from the rest of the UK and 18,900 from abroad.⁴

That gives more than enough warrant for some theological discussion and analysis of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. From a British perspective these people movements are highly contentious in that

there is much disagreement over how they should be dealt with. Western Europe alone is struggling to cope with how best to address the huge numbers of human beings, sometimes literally, arriving on shores which are foreign/new to them.

1 <https://www.iom.int/data-and-research> [accessed 27.9.2023]

2 These definitions are found in M. Daniel Carroll R., *The Bible and Borders: Hearing God's Word on Immigration*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press 2020, 3

3 National Census of Scotland (2022) [Rounded Population Estimates](#)

4 National Record of Scotland (2022) [Mid-Year Population Estimates](#)

The Theology

On what theological basis, then, should we understand refugees, asylum seekers and those forced into immigration? Admitting that each group is defined differently they will be discussed as a cluster as to how they should be viewed within a Christian worldview.

Jesus

That our gauge of where we are in historical terms ('Anno Domini' – AD) is marked by the coming of Jesus and all He did is indicative of how world altering His earthly life was (as is His ongoing heavenly reign). Everything has changed because of Jesus' coming, teaching, miracles, and His being raised from the dead.⁵ Life is in a new epoch as a result. So when we come to any social issue we must consider it in light of Him as the revelation of God on earth and the redemption He has brought about in His person.

The Incarnation

'The Fourth Gospel', John, compels us to consider the 'journey' the Word took in becoming flesh. This "cosmic movement" from the heavenlies to earth indicates a means of travel by God.⁶ It is a radical transit by the Word of God coming from heaven to earth. The Apostle Paul describes this as Him 'taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness' (Phil. 2:7).⁷ In this 'descent' (kenosis) from heaven to earth He embarked upon a journey of great magnitude because the incarnation was something entirely new for and within God. "It is in that whole movement of descent ... that we are to understand *the movement* of the Word and Son of God into our human existence".⁸

The fact that a migration was undertaken by God in His becoming a man prior to His teaching and great feats is a striking theological reality. This was necessary for God because '[H]e had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect' (Heb. 2:17) so that humanity could be wholly redeemed. And so in this incarnation we see God in the Word becoming flesh, One who experienced the necessity of migration and how it inalterably changes the traveller. For when the Word (John 1:1-2) embarks on the return journey to the Father (Heb. 7:28-8:1) He returns not precisely the same, but as a God-Man, a form novel to heaven. The demands which migration impose upon those forced or compelled to leave their homes and homelands leave them profoundly changed forever. This reality is not something overlooked by the God who has compassion on unjust human circumstances, but who embarked on a challenging journey Himself.

Jesus the Refugee

As the story of Jesus unfolds in Luke's Gospel, the in-utero Jesus has no option but to leave Nazareth in Galilee with His parents to be registered in a national census at the home town of

5 Nick Spencer, *Asylum and Immigration: A Christian Perspective on a Polarised Debate*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press 2004, 99

6 Donald Senior, 'Beloved Aliens and Exiles: New Testament Perspectives on Migration' in Daniel G. Groody & Gioacchino Campese (eds.), *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2008, 23

7 All scripture quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from the NRSVUE.

8 Thomas F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (ed. Robert T. Walker), Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press 2008, 77 (my emphasis)

“

“At this stage in His fledgling human life, Jesus enters into the fragilities of life in the context of a displaced family forced to move a significant distance for safety. That in and of itself is significant for our focus.”

”

Joseph His earthly father even prior to His human birth, the existence of Jesus took place *on the road* (Lk. 2:1-7).⁹

As the story is told afresh in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is understood to be the new king of the Jewish people according to foreign visitors (Matt 2:1-2). This in turn creates terrible paranoia in the incumbent on the throne, King Herod. At the darkest moment he orders a systematic slaughter of baby boys of two years and younger in the region surrounding Bethlehem to ensure this new royal 'player' has no chance of usurping him (Matt. 2:1-12, 16-18). While this evil plot was being devised, during the REM sleep of Joseph, an angel appears to him and urges him and his family to flee the land of Israel to evade King Herod's furious infanticide (Matt. 2:13-15). This threat forces this young family into homelessness.¹⁰ They become refugees (according to our definitions above) in Egypt as guided by the angel and spend some time there (perhaps up to two years?¹¹) before being visited again in his dreams by an angel, who on this occasion notifies them that the coast has become clear. King Herod is dead and the special child is no longer under the same threat (Matt. 2:19-21).

At this stage in His fledgling human life, Jesus enters into the fragilities of life in the context of a displaced family forced to move a significant distance for safety. That in and of itself is significant for our focus.

The Genealogy of Jesus

The New Testament begins with a verification of Jesus' heritage as the Messiah the Jews had been yearning for. No better proof was there for the Jew than to show one's paternal lineage. It is a surprise, then, that Matthew's Gospel perforates Jesus' lineage with a selection of women. But these women are not the Jewish matriarchs you might expect. Rather, Tamar (Matt. 1:3) and Rahab (1:5) were Canaanites; Ruth (1:5) was from Moab; Bathsheba's ethnicity is undisclosed, but she was married to Uriah the Hittite (1:6).¹² Matthew's alarming point was surely that "the inclusion of these Gentile women in the lineage would have been shocking to most Jewish readers ... Matthew seems to highlight the mixed nature of Jesus's lineage purposely ... [perhaps to speak] to disciples of their responsibility to cross cultural boundaries to spread Christ's gospel."¹³

Picking up on the story of Ruth being incorporated into the life of Israel is particularly instructive because it takes readers to the heart of seeking asylum. There are two moments of migration which take place in this story: (i) Elimelek and Naomi leaving Bethlehem to go to Moab due to famine (1:1); and (ii) then Naomi and Ruth migrating back to Judah because they've received word that there is food there (1:6). Naomi who had become an asylum seeker in Moab was returning home as a widow, but her now dependent daughter-in-law who had originally married a Judean asylum seeker in Moab, but was also now widowed, had herself become an asylum seeker.¹⁴

Even although those in the story never call Ruth by name (even Boaz calls her 'Ruth "the Moabite"' 4:5, 10), those working the land under Boaz's oversight quickly recognise her need to glean among the native threshers. Those employed field workers seem to naturally slip into the Torah's (the Jewish law shown in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy)

9 Senior, 'Beloved Aliens', 23

10 Stephen R. Holmes, *The Politics of Christmas*, London: Theos Think Tank 2011, 22 <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/archive/files/Reports/ThePoliticsOfChristmas.pdf> (accessed 27.9.2023)

11 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 88

12 Spencer, *Asylum*, 102

13 C.S. Kenner, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1999, 80. Quoted from Spencer, *Asylum*, 102

14 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 72

insistence on making space for foreigners who need to glean from the edges of the fields to scrape a living (Lev. 19:10, 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22). Ruth would have counted as *gēr*, a “foreigner” (Heb. (*gēr* or *gērîm* [plural] = to reside in a place not one’s own), someone precluded from Israel’s land-tenure system.¹⁵ To have been so integrated into Israelite life in this way was the ideal outworking of the Torah as it was set out. It is just what Naomi and Ruth needed to get a foothold to survive turbulent life circumstances. Here Jesus’ distant human relative was treated just the way God had outlined.

“Not an immigrant in His homeland, Jesus lived, however, in such a precarious manner which is not altogether unlike the vicissitudes of some modern-day refugees in Scotland.”

Nowhere to Lay His Head

It is worth noting that the pattern of Jesus’ ministry was so peripatetic that He wandered without any home or permanent base (Matt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58). He was a roving teacher and miracle worker who on one occasion once dissuaded an eager scribe from following Him because of the nature of His homeless existence. His way of life was so radical that possessions, lands and even family were to be left behind (Mk. 10:28-31).¹⁶ Not an immigrant in His homeland, Jesus

lived, however, in such a precarious manner which is not altogether unlike the vicissitudes of some modern-day refugees in Scotland.

Sojourning of this kind links back to the story of God’s people having to make their way out of an Egyptian nightmare many centuries before, where their enslavement in a mass building programme was taken to harsh extremes (Ex. 1:11, 13-14; 5:6-21). This scenario was a situation where God’s people had been living lives as foreigners in Egypt due to famine at home for some time prior to times becoming tough (Gen. 42:1-2).¹⁷ As a result of Israel’s cry for help in the gruelling construction site, ‘I AM’, as He names Himself (Ex. 2:23-25; 3:1-10), Israel’s God, delivers them from this woeful situation by helping them Exodus from Egypt as a people group.

The major consequence of this deliverance is that as a people they subsequently had to walk a great distance through desert. This detour was of the longest kind out of a divine imposition upon them because they were unfaithful to the LORD who saved them out of Egypt (Num. 13-14). They showed no faith where there should have been great trust given the kindness of their Deliverer, and the dramatic means by which He brought their escape about. In what should have been a much shorter sojourn, it took Israel forty whole years to arrive at their designated rendezvous in Canaan (Num. 20-25; Deut. 2-3). On the journey God’s people experienced disorientation, frustrations with spiritual and political leaders, coupled with acute hunger and thirst (Ex. 16:2-3). The circuitous movements of God’s people at this time reveal some commonality with refugees and immigrants today as similar cruel threats are imposed upon certain peoples for racial, religious, and social reasons.

15 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 64, 66

16 Senior, ‘Beloved Aliens’, 23

17 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 30

From Galilee to Jerusalem

Among many distinctives in the ministry of Jesus, we learn that from a particular point in time Jesus 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Lk. 9:51). It is worth noting the repetition of His awareness of the opportune time with the phrase, 'My hour has not yet come' (Jn. 2:4; 7:6, 8; 7:30; 8:20; 13:1; 17:1). Jesus' instinct to move the concentration of His work from Galilee and gravitate towards Jerusalem became more needful. This "geographical movement"¹⁸ from the north to Jerusalem in the south was because Jesus knew He must fulfil the world's grandest sacrifice in that location before rising again from the dead. This ultimate draw to Jerusalem reveals that the Son was compelled into action with what He had been tasked with 'from the foundation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). Once again we discover a Jesus who is *on the move* out of necessity, not unlike today's refugee and asylum seeker.

Jesus and the Samaritans

It wouldn't be overstating matters to say that to the Jews of 1st century Palestine, Samaritans were enemies who lived nearby. The feeling for Samaritans was mutual! They were understood as heretics of a distorted kind of Judaism because they only held the Torah and not also the Writings (Ketuvim) and the Prophets (Nevi'im) to be authoritative.¹⁹ In keeping with their disdain, the Torah's command to love the *gēr* ('the foreigner' or 'the alien') at this time was interpreted by the Jews of Jesus' day to exclude Samaritans.

The narrator's telling line that Samaritans and Jews did not converse with one another because 'Jews do not associate with Samaritans' (Jn. 4:9 - NASB), indicates the great theological and therefore racial tension which existed. Jesus the Jewish rabbi, on the other hand, was more than content to break social convention by initiating conversation and requesting a drink from a Samaritan woman at a well in Sychar. Bear in mind that Jewish tradition held that Samaritan women were so impure that they were considered perpetual menstruators, even as babies(!), thus consigning them to being permanently and ceremonially unclean.²⁰ Consequently, the mere fact that Jesus asks her for a drink ritually pollutes Him by extension too.²¹ The return of His disciples from an errand and their awkward reference to this ill-advised exchange manifests how off-piste Jesus was in entering into social discourse with such a woman.

During their apprenticeship with Jesus, James and John are dressed down by Him for desiring to punish a Samaritan village when the Samaritans realised that Jesus favoured the orthodox Jewish priority of Mount Zion over the Samaritan replacement, Mount Gerazim (Lk. 9:51-56). In the political separation of the Promised Land into two entities, the northern kingdom was populated by Assyrians who brought their idolatrous practices with them into the land. Even after a settling period it was chronicled that the people of Samaria 'do not worship the Lord' (2 Ki. 17:34). Later on, an excommunicated priest from Jerusalem established a rival temple on Mount Gerazim in Samaria, which in time attracted other priests.²² And so the antagonism began. Jesus' instructions to His disciples had been to simply shake the dust off their feet when villages refused to welcome Him, not call upon heaven for their wholesale annihilation (Matt. 10:14). Such an overreaction speaks of a deeper resentment against Samaritans by these 'Sons of Thunder' (Mk. 3:17).

18 Senior, 'Beloved Aliens', 23

19 Nick Spencer, *The Political Samaritan: How Power Hijacked a Parable*, London: Bloomsbury 2017, 111

20 Darrell L. Bock and Gregory J. Herrick, *Jesus in Context: Background Readings for Gospel Study*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2005, 212

21 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 91

22 Spencer, *Samaritan*, 110-1

But Jesus, as His warm interactions with the Samaritan woman and His thorny rejoinder to His violent disciples exemplify, wishes to redefine relations with an historic theological and racial enemy. This is how you love your enemy: by not treating them as an enemy at all (Lk. 6:27). The Gospel accounts are punctuated with this point as is seen, for example, when only one of ten lepers who were healed of their disease responded with reverential gratitude to Jesus for His healing power in His life. It is recorded that when Jesus marvelled at the low percentage of gratefulness of this miracle that this one grateful respondent 'was a Samaritan' (Lk. 17:16). It is the impure heretic who models the appropriate response to Messiah.

Jesus turns the screw of Jewish discomfort even further with His parable about the Good Samaritan. The force of the parable shocks its Jewish legal questioner because the unclean, heresy-imbued, foreigner (the Samaritan) behaves more like the ideal Israelite than any of

the Jewish characters of the story (each of whom were of some spiritual repute by their station).²³ Perhaps even further, Jesus taught this Jewish expert in Torah that the exemplar of fulfilling the greatest commandments was found in following the example of an unclean, foreign, heretic.²⁴

Furthermore, that this story takes place on the Jericho road with a Samaritan as the hero is directly relevant: proximity and location are always integral to how we perceive

“This is how you love your enemy: by not treating them as an enemy at all”

stories because place matters.²⁵ Jesus does not have any bias towards the Samaritan's race nor his theological commitments. Rather, the Samaritan presented is the living epitome of how to love thy neighbour, the central ethic of Jews (and now Christians) after loving God.

For the longest time God's people had writhed out of their responsibility for Samaritans because they were deemed to be a category beyond the scope of *gēr* or *gērîm* (foreigner), therefore absolving themselves of the responsibility of loving them. Into this conveniently 'creative' understanding of *gēr*, Jesus upsets the apple cart by going entirely against this accepted interpretation of Torah. He viewed and related to Samaritans in a way contrary to His time and as a corollary of all He had been teaching, reimagining the foreigner as a fellow human, one capable of acting in wonderful ways for God.

The Ethics of the Reconciliation at the Cross


To consider someone different from ourselves as inferior (also known as 'othering') opens the door to justifying ill will towards them. By prising such a door open at all, ill will germinates into legitimised violence and enmity. In order for people to shift their mindset and action from the exclusion of enemies to be able to embrace them instead, the imbibing and imitating God's befriending of a hostile human race in Jesus is the sole way of reversal and reconciliation.²⁶ 'God

23 Spencer, *Samaritan*, 125

24 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 94

25 Luke Bretherton, 'The Duty of Care to Refugees, Christian Cosmopolitanism, and the Hallowing of Bare Life', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19.1 (2006) 57

26 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press 1996, 100



“What this means is that race, socio/economic status, or gender should never be a hindrance to followers of Jesus becoming one people as they implement the ethics of reconciliation which stem from the implications of what He had to endure on the cross.”

proves his love for us in that *while we still were sinners* Christ died for us.' (Rom. 5:8 – emphasis mine). This merciful reaching out by God in His love through His Son is done despite humans being at odds with Him. Consequently, the onus upon followers of Jesus is, in a correlative manner, to bring about reconciliation in their fellow human relationships: 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, *not counting their trespasses against them*, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us' (2 Cor. 5:19 – emphasis mine). In heralding God's reconciliation of humans by the Son through the cross, humans are to simultaneously emulate what He has done in our horizontal relationships.

The seismic and cosmic restoration of human beings back into the heart of God through the cross of Christ, even though humans were not disposed or motivated to so participate, enables the healing of barriers between peoples. The Ephesian church is shown this by the Apostle Paul when he teases out the implications of what happened at the place of the skull. Rather than permanent separation there is a new and wonderful healing between Jews and all non-Jews.

“He levelled the playing field of human status, whether the matter was social, gender, ritual, moral, racial or economic”

There was clearly a racial/religious rift that had broken out between the two groups causing tensions or schism within that church (Eph. 2:11-12). And because of the reconciliation at the cross of Christ, both Jew and non-Jew alike can become one unified people without the dissolving of racial difference (Eph. 2:13-19). What this means is that race, socio/economic status, or gender should never be a hindrance to followers of Jesus becoming one people as they implement the ethics of reconciliation which stem

from the implications of what He had to endure on the cross (Gal. 3:28).

The clues of God's heart for the 'stranger' and those 'far off' (Eph. 2:12-13) were always there. Indeed, the Torah shows a particular regard for foreigners in Israel's land. It might be claimed that concern for outsiders is at the heart of God in the Old Testament.²⁷ Including the foreigner into life in Israel was the task of all. Whether it was observing Sabbath (Deut. 5:14), the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-30), the Passover (Num. 9:14), the Feast of Weeks (Deut. 16:11), the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:14), or the Feast of First fruits (Deut. 26:11), the invitation was for the foreigner to be included in the shape of their common life. The motivation for such warm integration was: (i) *Empathy* – for Israel themselves had been their through the Exodus and subsequent wandering in the desert (Ex. 22:21); (ii) *Solidarity* – to love your neighbour like you wish you had been loved whilst a foreigner in Egypt (Lev. 19:18); and (iii) because God loves the helpless wanderer, so God's people should exemplify such a heart towards others (Deut. 10:17-18).²⁸

Hospitality

Since Jesus' inauguration of the kingdom, hospitality to 'strangers' has been a treasured

27 Johanna W.H. Wijk-Bos, *Making Wise the Simple: The Torah in Christian Faith and Practice*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2005, 25-32

28 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 67-70

hallmark of the Church (Matt. 22:1-10; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; Jas. 2:14-17). Taking on this practice of old assumes the value of those coming to our table as a fellow image bearer (Gen. 1.26-28), refusing to view them “as an exception”, and comprehending that their invitation into our lives initiates a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven upon the earth.²⁹

The Church must continue to implement hospitality to strangers such as today’s refugees and those seeking asylum and immigration. In so doing, the Church would do well to anticipate that she might learn much about what she lacks in such service to the vulnerable.

The Sheep and the Goats

In this parable (Matt 25:31-46) the Son of Man is the main character who will one day judge the world according to human acts done and left undone. That this character is the Son of ‘my Father’ (25:34) quite quickly identifies this judge as Jesus Himself. In the parable there is a cluster of people who are in grave need of care and compassion – those hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked and imprisoned. In a catchall phrase they are ‘the least of these’ (25:40, 45). In particular, the ‘stranger’ of verses 35, 38, 43, 44 (‘*xenos*’ in Greek) could very well be rendered ‘foreigners’ (cf. Acts 17:21; Heb. 11:13 NRSVUE). There is not too much in the parable that is novel from the Old Testament despite the challenge posed here, for this could be described as God’s ‘preferential option for the poor’ from of old (Prov. 31:8-9; Zech. 7:10). This divine preference for the poor certainly sheds light on refugees, asylum and immigration seekers.³⁰

Contemporary readers of scripture, then, should understand these ‘foreigners’ as the modern-day equivalent of refugees, asylum seekers or immigrants. In the same way that those involved in prison ministry use this parable as their main motivation for caring for the prisoner, so should it compel followers of Jesus to act in concretely meaningful ways toward the ‘*xenos*’ foreigner whenever they can.³¹ What is novel is that to (sub)consciously ignore the ‘*xenos*’ foreigner will have severe consequences, because to ignore them is to ignore Jesus Himself. For Jesus chooses to be mysteriously present in the ‘*xenos*’ foreigner. (25:40, 45). In this teaching Jesus Himself is the stranger. Not only are followers of Jesus to take up the ancient Old Testament ethos of seeing themselves, or preceding generations of God’s people, in the stranger. There is no room for the follower to renege on their responsibility here: if Christ is to be followed above all others, there is no possibility of reducing Him to someone who is ‘other’ than us, someone who can be wilfully ignored. Pressing this ethic even further, “Christians are called not just to welcome

Christ the stranger but also to *imitate* Christ the welcomer.”³²

Jesus and ‘the People’

Throughout His earthly ministry Jesus is identified with marginal groups of people who were understood as outliers to Jewish racial, ritual and/or moral purity. Known as the ‘*ochlos*’ people, these misfits were not a social class, nor were they embarrassing Israelites, nor Gentiles, but those dominated and subjugated by those in power with no religious nor ethnic identity.³³ Jesus’

29 Bretherton, ‘Duty of Care’, 61

30 Gustavo Gutiérrez, ‘Poverty, Migration, and the Option for the Poor’, in Daniel G. Groody & Gioacchino Campese (eds.), *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press 2008, 79

31 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 95

32 Miroslav Volf & Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *Public Faith in Action: How to Think Carefully, Engage Wisely, and Vote with Integrity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press 2016, 126

33 Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, London: SCM Press 2000, 253, 255



“The Church must continue to implement hospitality to strangers such as today’s refugees and those seeking asylum and immigration. In so doing, the Church would do well to anticipate that she might learn much about what she lacks in such service to the vulnerable.”

association with the 'ochlos' people was verbalised in public by critics when they cried out, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' (Lk. 7:34)

Some have argued that this 'ochlos' people were displaced due to the sacking of Jerusalem in AD70. Likely homeless, scattered and deprived of rights, this 'ochlos' people made up the destitute and forgotten of this unpopular outpost of the Roman Empire.³⁴ Jesus taught this group (Mk. 7:14), had mercy on them (Mk. 6:34), healed them when sick (Mk. 1:34), fed them (Mk. 8), preached to them (Mk. 3:7ff), proclaiming the kingdom to them (Mk. 4:2ff). Whether it was demoniacs, the dead, the diseased, tax collectors or 'foreigners', as we have seen with the Samaritans, Jesus subverted the written and unwritten customs of Jewish culture with His reign in regard to those who were eschewed or chewed up by the system.³⁵ He levelled the playing field of human status, whether the matter was social, gender, ritual, moral, racial or economic. Kristin Heyer gets closest to the radical nature of Jesus' being identified with such 'ochlos' people: "Identifying with Jesus (of Galilean borderlands), by contrast, entails kinship: an embrace of human difference and of the border as a place of encounter rather than a frontier of conquest."³⁶ That there was this depth of relationship shows the commitment of Jesus to the most disenfranchised and forgotten in His time on earth.

Exiles and Strangers

The Romans sacked Jerusalem by AD70. During their four year bombardment upon the city, as well as because of the mission of the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit 'to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8), followers of Jesus were scattered across many nations. Some by forced displacement; others by intentional mission. Consequently, those in churches far from Judea were viewed as 'exiles' (1 Pet. 1:1) and 'aliens' (2:11). In the Greco-Roman world those who were foreigners were not granted full social and economic rights and status. They were outsiders, and like our focus cluster here, were frequently unwelcome.³⁷

Were the labels of 'exile' and 'alien' imposed upon these Christians because of their socio-political situation in life? If this were the case, it would not take much to imagine how foreign the taking on a new found faith from Judea would also feel, not least how such would be perceived by family, friends and employers.³⁸ The people of God found themselves feeling at sea and yet the Apostle begins to tease out theological meaning for them in the midst of their trouble.

This is not unlike the situation of the original sojourner of faith, Abraham. He became nomadic because God commanded him to migrate to another land (Gen. 12:1). Strangers in foreign lands, the story of Abraham and Sarah is that they had to follow the command to 'go' and have faith that one day they would arrive at the designated place decided for them. Until then, Abraham and family were on the move, 'not knowing where he was [they were] going' (Heb. 11:8). Theirs was a life of great uncertainty, a life 'in tents' (11:9), with the 'promise' that they would produce an heir one day (11:11), and that they would put down roots 'in the land he had been promised' (11:9). Knowing the way forward and how events would turn out would have been opaque, but they acknowledged, like those seeking asylum and immigration today, 'that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth' (11:13). They had only to grasp firmly the hope

34 Moltmann, *Experiences*, 255

35 Kristin E. Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration*, Washington DC: Georgetown University Press 2012, 142

36 Heyer, *Kinship*, 153

37 Benjamin H. Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity (Divinations: Reading Later Ancient Religion)*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania 2009, 25-45

38 Carroll R., *Bible and Borders*, 95

that there was 'a city that has foundations' to which they would finally arrive. This would be a true homeland 'whose architect and builder is God' (11:10).

Policy Perspectives

The Incarnation of God demonstrates to us the centrality of the concept of migration is in the Bible. The process of journeying changes the person and can be recognised and understood because God himself has been on that journey; He was a migrant, his ministry was one of traversing. God recognises the journey that His people are on and understands that.


As policy makers we too have to understand that journey and be cognisant of it when we interact with those who arrive in Scotland. We have to take account of the experiences of individuals, the road that they have travelled, where they have come from and their reasons for being here. All of those experiences matter and are part of who they are now. We cannot simply make decisions based on a limited understanding or judgement of what we think we know; to truly understand and to make a fair and just decision we must be aware of the person, their experience and their story.

The story of Jesus is one of fragility, born in a stable, within a displaced family with a seemingly uncertain future, forced to move long distances to find safety. Because of this story God is a God of the refugee, with a deep understanding that we are called to follow and appreciate.

The Genealogy of Jesus is a melting pot of Canaanites, Moabites, Hittites; this would have been shocking to the established society of the age. To be a spiritual and political leader would have required a lineage that demands respect, not a hotchpotch of ethnicities and tribes. Diversity is key to the lineage of Jesus and should be key to our lives today, we should not judge or look down on anyone who is different to ourselves or comes from a different ethnic group of religion, they are not lesser.

Also in the story of Ruth in particular we can see how migrants were treated in society in very practical ways. They worked the land to provide for their families, with people recognising the need to provide resources for those coming into their communities. Edges of fields were left for those to scrape together a living. Work was important both for the respect of the community and to allow those who have travelled the dignity in providing for their families and contribute to the economy. Provision was made within society to allow for that to happen. This should be a key element of any policy towards those seeking asylum and immigration. How can we ensure that we are providing the opportunity for them to be included in our communities and provide for their families in dignity and respect.

Jesus' movements throughout His life had purpose towards an end goal. All roads in the Bible led to Jerusalem and His death and resurrection. While it may have seemed that Jesus and His disciples wanderings were without purpose and random, there was a much greater purpose that remained unseen until the very end of the story. We don't know what the end story of those who come to our shores; we often don't know what brought them here or their reasons for travelling. Our process of asylum and immigration should take account of those stories and recognise the fact that there are many reasons people arrive in Scotland, many of which we might not know or understand. The "system" by which we decide whether they should remain must take account of these stories and should make decisions based on the human consequences of return. Any system that is put in place should be based on the person, rather than the efficiency of the process. At the moment in the UK it often seems like we are focused on how we deal with removing people, rather than how we deal with people who are here. Everything is based on making the system of removal efficient and the process for decision taking quick. Of course it is important to ensure that decisions are taken as quickly and efficiently as possible, but we must



“The process of journeying changes the person and can be recognised and understood because God himself has been on that journey; He was a migrant, his ministry was one of traversing.”

not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with individuals and families with a story to tell and a journey of what is often trauma and personal sacrifice.

One thing that we consistently see in the ministry of Jesus is the way He treats those who are considered outcasts in society. It often seems He went out of His way to be kind to those that society viewed as unclean, unpopular or untrustworthy. We see Him eat and drink with prostitutes, lepers, tax collectors and Samaritans. He always treated everyone with respect and acceptance, no matter where they came from or what their story was. He listened, understood, cared for and demonstrated an acceptance that was incredibly counter cultural for the time. This

“We have to take account of the experiences of individuals, the road that they have travelled, where they have come from and their reasons for being here. All of those experiences matter and are part of who they are now.”

has such resonance with today’s world where there is so much strife and division between so many groups whether that is based along ethnic or religious lines, divisions along the lines of sexual orientation or identity, political and constitutional disagreements. The example that we are given is one of respect and community. That is not to say that there is no right or wrong, but it is not for us to judge. We are called to love and honour each other in all of our failings and misgivings. We are called to uphold each other in faith, while speaking truth in our communities and society. We are called to shake the dust from our


feet when we are unwelcome in a community, and shake the ground when we face injustice and persecution.

One interesting aspect of Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman mentioned earlier in this report is His readiness to meet with the whole person and answer all of her needs both seen and unseen. Jesus provided physical and spiritual healing for those He met. Likewise in our dealings with the refugees in our communities we should be seeking to ensure that we are viewing the whole person, that we are meeting all of their needs not just putting them through the “system”.

We see the challenging of authority, the speaking truth to power, throughout the story of Jesus and His wanderings. He constantly challenged those in authority and we are called to do the same. If we see injustice, if we see people being treated unfairly, we should speak up. Jesus constantly challenged the accepted stereotypes in society, most starkly in the story of the Good Samaritan. The message here is clear that we should not be so quick to be suspicious of people and their motivations, they often surprise and confound our expectations.

Central to the message of the Cross is one of reconciliation. God has a heart for the stranger and so should we. Throughout the Bible we see the integration and acceptance of the stranger into society and communities. But what is also clear is that this is such a hard thing to achieve; we can only do it through the most enormous sacrifice. God recognises that this is such a huge thing for the human race to achieve that Jesus had to die on a cross to achieve it. It is clearly one of the hardest things for us as humans to achieve, to put aside our selfishness, greed and suspicion and focus on the person that has come into our community.

One of the biggest issues and key points around the discussion of Asylum and Immigration in



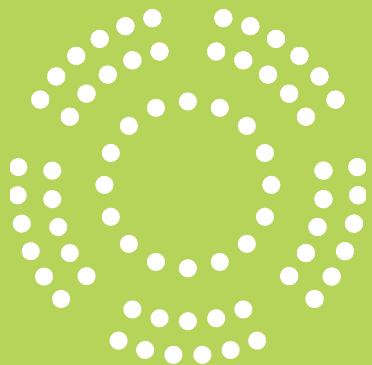
**“We are called to shake
the dust from our feet
when we are unwelcome
in a community, and
shake the ground when
we face injustice and
persecution.”**

the UK today is how we can secure our borders. As we left Europe and began to understand the implications of Brexit so the question of borders and the movement of people and goods became one of the biggest issues that we had to address. This is wholly based on the idea that borders are things we have to defend, they are the barrier between us and our neighbours; they are what keep us safe, a place of difference. Good fences make good neighbours is the phrase that comes to mind most in any discussion around borders and what they mean.

But the Bible has a different approach. Here borders are seen as a place of meeting, they are places where nations and people come together and merge, they are rarely lines on the ground or actual physical barrier but instead are porous where people move and traverse regularly. This is obviously an extremely radical concept for us to get our heads around in the period of time in which we are living, and indeed throughout modern history. We have lost the idea of empire or commonwealth where huge swathes of land were identified in a united area, recognising that this was rarely a consensual arrangement. But borders were more fluid, constantly changing as dynasties rose and fell. In the UK, as an island nation, we sometimes lose sight of the porosity of borders that others on larger land masses see. Language is blurred across border regions, people travel daily from one country to another without thinking about it, and yet here in the UK the conversation seems to be centred around controlling and ensuring safe and strong borders. So what if we changed that conversation and instead saw our borders as places of meeting, of collaboration, of diversity and a place of encounter? The radical, counter cultural message of the Bible again places a massive challenge to our thinking of today.

Conclusion

The world changing story of Jesus, whether novel or retrieving deeper themes from times gone by, manifests a solidarity with refugees and those seeking asylum or immigration by virtue of the necessity of movement in His life, in the incarnation itself and throughout His ministry. His view of those who did not fit racial, economic, gender-based, or a certain social status was to elevate those who were oppressed and forgotten in radical ways. This was entirely in keeping with the tenor of the Torah and all Israel were commanded to embody it. And because His reign upon earth has been initiated, His people are instructed to see in the stranger not only someone their equal, but to see Jesus Himself. For Jesus associates wholeheartedly with the disenfranchised, the homeless, the poor and the stranger. All this and more provides the motivation and spiritual apparatus for why today's refugees and seekers of asylum or immigration should be very much the recipients of the Church's care and advocacy.



“Logos seeks **to inform, influence and persuade those in the public sphere** to think deeply and in new ways, daring to challenge the accepted worldview”



“

“That there was this depth of relationship shows the commitment of Jesus to the most disenfranchised and forgotten in His time on earth.”

”



“

“Jesus lived in such a precarious manner which is not altogether unlike the vicissitudes of some modern-day refugees in Scotland”

”

“Logos seeks **to inform, influence and persuade those in the public sphere** to think deeply and in new ways, daring to challenge the accepted worldview”



www.facebook.com/LogosScotland/



[@logosscotland](https://twitter.com/logosscotland)



logosscotland.org