

Study Guide

Asylum seekers and refugees: Scriptural, theological and ethical approaches

Social Responsibilities Committee



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Prepared for the Social Responsibilities Committee by the Anglicare Southern Queensland
Social Justice Research Unit.

Cover Painting by a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker
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More than half of the refugees are children and teenagers (Islahiya camp, southern Turkey) © Jodi Hilton/IRIN

Notes



Painting by a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker

Notes

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Introduction

In 2010 the Social Responsibilities Committee of the Anglican Church Southern Queensland (SRC) commissioned the Anglicare Southern Queensland (Anglicare SQ) Social Justice research unit to publish a series of discussion papers on the subject of refugees and asylum seekers. The first paper covered the context of current political issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers, including the operation of international law within Australia. The second paper researched statistical information concerning applicants for refuge and asylum in Australia and Australian policy responses. The third paper explored scriptural, theological and ethical issues which confront Christians particularly when seeking to engage with the public debate.

This study guide, prepared by The Reverend Gillian Moses, has emerged primarily from the third paper. It is designed to assist parish and other groups to explore the issues covered in that paper in more depth and through focused engagement with relevant scriptures. The questions which surround our engagement with those who come to our country seeking refuge are profound and continue to shape the political and social landscape of Australia. Our response to refugees and asylum seekers continues to be a hot topic in election campaigning. Ongoing conflict around the world continues to generate new sources of refugees at an unprecedented rate. The issues are not going away.

As Christians we have theological and ethical resources available which can inform and direct our personal and corporate responses to these issues. This guide will help Anglicans to utilise those resources so that they can contribute meaningfully to the public conversation.

Using the study guide

Each session of this study guide is designed to help groups engage with a critical issue concerning refugees and asylum seekers from a Christian perspective. Each session can stand alone and they need not be worked through sequentially. There will be some cross-referencing between sessions but these are not foundational.

It will be useful for members to read the background information and the bible passages ahead of time where possible. You may wish to assign one or two members to follow up linked material before each session or to have internet access during the study session if that works for the members.

There is also an introductory study session provided, "Who do you say that I am?" This short session may be helpful for setting the context for members of the group. The session focuses on the importance of language and naming in our conversations and the assumptions we make through our choice of words.

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Painting by a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker

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Each session consists of 4 parts:

- 1. **Background information:** This section gives some background to the subject matter of the session, including legislation, statistics, news reports and refugee stories. It aims to provide relevant contextual information for the theme and to illuminate how the theme is expressed in public conversation. There are links to further sources which can be explored as desired.
- 2. **Bible passages:** Each bible study includes passages from the Hebrew Scriptures and from the New Testament, together with background notes and some discussion questions. Groups may choose to study one or both passages, and to consider some or all of the questions. There are also references given to other scriptures which may inform the discussion.
- 3. **Casting the net:** This section provides further resources for groups who want to explore further. Groups may choose to use some or all of the material as appropriate for your situation. *Thinking* is the place for theological essays and reflections which go deeper into the theological issues raised by the theme. *Seeing* offers visual stimulus including videos, artworks and films. *Listening* includes links to music, suggestions for hymns and music videos. *Joining* offers suggestions for ways in which your group might like to get more involved with refugees in the local community or to become more informed about refugee advocacy groups. *Praying* offers liturgical resources for use by the group either during the study time or later in public or private worship.
- 4. **Going deeper:** This section offers links to full texts of items and suggestions for further reading on the theme. Most of the resources are available either on the internet, on the SRC website at <http://anglicanchurchsq.org.au/advocacy> or through any good theological library. It is not necessary to access this material before the session.

Session outlines

Session One:	The gift of hospitality: inviting the stranger to come in
Session Two:	The question of human rights: recognising the <i>imago dei</i>
Session Three:	People on the move: the experience of exile
Session Four:	Rendering to Caesar: Christians and politics
Session Five:	The limits of generosity: balancing self and others
Session Six:	A Voice is Heard in Ramah: the ethics of holding children in detention

A prayer for refugees and asylum seekers

(This prayer or another may be used to begin each session of the study.)

Almighty and merciful God,
whose Son became a refugee
and had no place to call his own;
look with mercy on those who today
are fleeing from danger,
homeless and hungry.

Bless those who work to bring them relief;
inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts;
and guide the nations of the world towards that day
when all will rejoice in your Kingdom of justice and of peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(from *Invitation to Prayer*, http://www.invitationtoprayer.org/prayers_refugees.html)



Introductory Session

Who do you say that I am?: Issues of language and naming

Opening Prayer

God, you are the source of human dignity, and it is in your image that we are created.

Pour out on us the Spirit of love and compassion.

Enable us to reverence each person, to reach out to those in need, to value and appreciate those who differ from us, to share the resources of our nation, to receive the gifts offered to us by people from other cultures.

Grant us the voice and courage to speak out against injustice, stand up for the oppressed, and embrace the marginalised.

Help us to remember that we are all one in the Body of Christ.

Amen



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Beginning to talk

Members of the group are invited to share any experiences you have had personally with people who have come to Australia as refugees. This may be people who came as the original refugees from Europe after World War Two, or in the 1970s during and after the Vietnam War, or as a result of other conflicts. If you have not had personal experience of meeting refugees you may want to share that also.

Story and context

Sometimes the hardest part of talking about refugees and asylum seekers is beginning the conversation. Many things can make it hard for us to express an opinion with family or friends who may strongly disagree with us. We may think that others won't share our opinions or will judge us for them. We may feel uncertain about facts. We may think that our private faith has little to do with public issues and debate. Sometimes we may find that we simply don't have helpful language to use. Plenty of words are spoken and written about those who come to our country looking for refuge. Some of those words do contribute to meaningful conversation and some of them seem to make any conversation at all impossible.

Telling the story: Khalil (Afghanistan)

Khalil fled to Australia at the age of eighteen, leaving behind his parents and five younger brothers and sisters. Eight months have passed since then, and he has had no news of his family in Afghanistan because it is impossible to contact them: "There is no postal service, no telephone, no electricity, no fax machine, no media, nothing", he says.

He relates how his family scraped together US\$5000 to send him out of Afghanistan because, as a young man of fighting age, he was particularly at risk from the Taliban militia who were then ruling Afghanistan. The Taliban had its support-base in the dominant Pushtun tribes, who are Sunni Muslims.

They targeted the Hazara minority, who are Shia, in reprisal for their association with opposition forces. It has been well-documented that in August 1998 Taliban forces massacred more than 2000 Hazaras in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif and there is no doubt that Khalil would have been at risk in his homeland.

The first time Khalil had ever been on a boat, or even seen the ocean, was when he made the smugglers' crossing from Indonesia with 26 other people. He was terrified. He could see water leaking into the vessel. "There was a 95% chance of death, and a 5% chance of life", he says. "But better to die on the way than to be killed by the Taliban."

On landing in Australia he was detained and then taken to Curtin. He says a DIMA officer addressed his group soon after their arrival at the detention centre and told them that Australia could do nothing for them. They were told that they had no invitation to come to the country, that they had broken the law and that they were 'queue-jumpers'. At that point Khalil was truly afraid that he would be sent back to Afghanistan...

Chilout Placing the issue of asylum seeking children into the realm of child's rights and child protection. The decision of whether a child is found to be a refugee is an immigration issue: how that child is treated whilst awaiting the decision, is a child protection issue. All children regardless of race, religion, class or immigration status, should be covered by child protection laws. There should never be a loophole for child abuse or neglect. <http://www.chilout.org.au>

Coalition to End Child Detention End Child Detention Australia believes that every child should be treated in full accordance with international law regarding child rights. Giving children and families seeking asylum a platform to be heard, by decision makers and the broader public, is essential to protecting their rights. <http://endchilddetentionoz.com/>

Praying

Meditations on child welfare written by Margaret Eletta Guider OSF⁴⁹

MEDITATION ON PERSONAL SAFETY

Cross: Consider Christ on Calvary, betrayed and abandoned by his followers, stripped of his garments and all that he owned, and made poor by the forces of evil, oppression, and domination.

Manger: Consider the Infant in Bethlehem, soon to become a refugee in Egypt, displaced as he is deprived of the cradle prepared for him in Nazareth, and made poor by the historical circumstances of politics and culture.

Children: Consider children who are abandoned or abused, forced into exile as refugees, unprotected as orphans. Consider how every child is entitled to personal safety and social security. Consider the Christian commitment to at-risk children locally and globally.

MEDITATION ON PRIORITY OF CHILDREN

Cross: Consider the spikenard and ointment that were poured out for Christ in Bethany in anticipation of his death.

Manger: Consider the gold, myrrh, and frankincense that were poured out for the Infant by the Magi who journeyed to visit him at Bethlehem.

Children: Consider the needs of children for comfort, compassion, and concern as they anticipate and face difficulties in their young lives. Consider how every child is entitled to be among the first to receive protection and relief. Consider the Christian commitment to make the well-being of children the highest priority of the congregation.



Paintings by a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker

Going Deeper:

Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce Report "All the lonely children: Questions for Policy Makers Regarding Guardianship for Unaccompanied Minors" <http://www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/AllTheLonelyChildren-Draft1.pdf>

Australian Human Rights Commission National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention 2014 Discussion Paper

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/national-inquiry-children-immigration-detention-2014-discussion-paper>

Our reading of Matthew and of our life context in terms of each other has just begun. We cannot pretend that our reading of Matthew is neutral. Either it contributes to the killing of the innocents, or it helps us to challenge the power-centred ideology that kills the innocents. Far from being inconsequential, pursuing our contextual reading of Matthew is a matter of life and death – the life and death of our children.

Seeing

Hear Our Voices

presentation to the UN in Geneva, 28 September 2012 by children who had been held in immigration detention. The event was held to discuss the increasing use of immigration detention, and more importantly, its impact on children around the world, as seen through the eyes of the children.

http://vimeo.com/55099054?utm_source=IDM+general+contacts&utm_campaign=9a56ca729b-DGD_video_and_end_of_year12_21_2012&utm_medium=email

Art Work

submissions to 2004 Australia Human Rights Commission Inquiry & report <http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/commission-website-national-inquiry-children-immigration-detention-0>

Out of Sight

These are real letters and drawings by children currently detained on Manus Island. They depict the struggles they face and the conditions they endure. They ask for our help and are grateful for the opportunity to have their stories heard.

<http://www.outofsight.org.au>



Antoni Gaudí, detail of the Joseph Portal, created c 1926, Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família, Barcelona

Listening

The Coventry Carol

The Medieval English “mystery plays” were local pageant cycles in which the common folk performed dramatized Biblical stories. The performances were mounted by various guilds and professions, and in the cycle for Coventry the play put on by the shearmen and tailors was The Slaughter of the Innocents. After the slaughter of the innocents in the play, the women mourn for their lost children by singing them a final lullaby, and this is the origin of “Coventry Carol.”

Lully, lullay, Thou little tiny Child,
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.
Lullay, thou little tiny Child,
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.
O sisters too, how may we do,
For to preserve this day
This poor youngling for whom we do sing
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.
Herod, the king, in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might, in his owne sight,
All young children to slay.
That woe is me, poor Child for Thee!
And ever mourn and sigh,
For thy parting neither say nor sing,
Bye, bye, lully, lullay.



Joining

#LoveMakesAWay -

A movement of Christians seeking an end to Australia’s inhumane asylum seeker policies through prayer and nonviolent love in action including civil disobedience actions, to publicly witness to the injustice of Australia’s asylum seeker policies, and also to a better way.

<https://www.facebook.com/LoveMakesAWayForAsylumSeekers>

Khalil’s response to the queue-jumper argument is more fundamental.

“But there isn’t any queue”, he says to me, again and again. He is right. The selection of refugees for resettlement is more like a lottery than an orderly process... As David Corlett argues in the University of NSW Law Journal (Dec 2000), a more appropriate metaphor is a “refugee heap” out of which very few are plucked for resettlement in countries such as Australia.

(Peter Mares, Borderline: Australia’s Treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Wake of the Tampa, Sydney, UNSW Press, 2002.)

Public and political discourse: from the media

Extract from media release (Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Scott Morrison)

Confirmation that charges for an alleged indecent assault of a young woman have been laid against a Sri Lankan man released into the community on a bridging visa pending assessment of his asylum claim after having illegally entered Australia by boat, should serve as a wake up call to the Government to review the policies and procedures, or lack thereof, for their community release program, Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Scott Morrison said today ...

“Labor should suspend further release of boat arrivals into the community on bridging visas and community detention, in all other than exceptional circumstances until Minister O’Connor has had his Department undertake a full review of the scheme and can give the community a clear guarantee that the lessons have been learned and there are clear community safeguards in place.

“Such a review must detail:

- the identification of accommodation types and locations that are not appropriate due to their proximity to populations deemed to be vulnerable, with such assessments to be made after consulting local police and other community service providers
- a requirement to consult and notify police in advance of the release of boat arrivals on bridging visas or into community detention in their jurisdiction
- a requirement for neighbouring residents to be alerted in advance of boat arrivals being located in their community on bridging visas or community detention
- the establishment of behaviour protocols for boat arrivals placed on bridging visas or in community detention, with clear negative sanctions for breaches of such protocols
- establishment of a complaints procedure for residents to contact the Department to advise of any concerns about the behaviour of boat arrivals on bridging visas and in community detention
- mandatory reporting procedures for the Department, associated service providers or accommodation providers for incidents involving boat arrivals on bridging visas and in community detention, including breaches of behaviour protocols and complaints received
- mandatory response protocols for the Department, associated service providers or accommodation providers for classified incidents involving boat arrivals on bridging visas and in community detention.”

(“Assault charges should provide wake up call for Labor’s No Care No Responsibility community release scheme for boat arrivals” (27 February 2013) <https://www.liberal.org.au/latest-news/2013/02/27/assault-charges-should-provide-wake-call-labors-no-care-no-responsibility>)

Bible Passage

Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets”. He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”. Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”. And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will



Photo: Displaced Afghans inside Afghanistan.
aado.org.au/our-work/humanitarian-relief

not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Notes

This story appears also in Mark 8.27-30 and Luke 9.18-20. In all three gospels Jesus asks first who popular opinion says that he is, then he asks the disciples who they say that he is. The naming of Jeremiah as one of the options is unique to Matthew, who sees Jeremiah as a prefiguring of Jesus. It is also unique to Matthew that Peter confesses Jesus as the Son of the living God. Peter's confession is the first time in Matthew that one of Jesus' disciples refers to him as the Messiah or the Christ, although the author has already used the title from the first chapter. Elsewhere in Matthew Jesus is given other names or titles, including the Beloved (Matt 3.17), Son of David (Matt 9.27), Teacher (Matt 12.38) and King of the Jews (Matt 27.37).

Discussion questions

1. In this short passage Jesus and Simon are both referred to by a number of names and nicknames. Are they interchangeable or are some more appropriate/accurate than others? Who gives the names and who decides which name/s will be used?
2. Imagine you are in that group of disciples and for the first time Jesus is acknowledging the title of Messiah. What difference might it make to how you now regard your friend Jesus?
3. In speaking about refugees and asylum seekers, many different names or labels or even just numbers are also given by different groups. Which names do you think refugees themselves prefer? Which names or labels do you tend to use? Are these two lists different?
4. Theologian Daniel Groody suggests that "difficulty arises when migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are identified principally and primarily in terms of their political status rather than their human identity". Which of the names or labels you have listed promote human identity? Which tend to conceal it?

Further reflection

Think for a few minutes about what makes it challenging for you personally in talking about the issues involving refugees and asylum seekers. You may then like to share in pairs or small groups the challenges you have identified. Each pair or smaller group is then invited to share with the whole group those challenges you have in common.

What have you heard today that has surprised you or prompted you to think differently about refugees and asylum seekers? Again in pairs or small groups share anything you have learned or changed your mind about. You need not record these reflections.

Closing prayer

God bless our eyes, that we may recognise injustice.

God bless our ears, that we may hear the cry of the stranger.

God bless our mouths, that we may speak words of welcome to newcomers.

God bless our shoulders, that we may bear the weight of struggling for justice.

God bless our hands, that we may work together with all people to establish peace.

God bless our feet, that we may walk in the footsteps of Christ.

God bless our hearts, that we may be transformed into witnesses of truth, justice and love.

Amen

(Opening and closing prayers from Resources for Refugee and Migrant Sunday, South Australian Council of Churches.)

In Matthew's narrative, Herod's deceitful manipulation of others is condemned along with the similar behaviors of all the leaders and people in power throughout the gospel. When deceit and lies fail, the eruption of force and violence makes explicit the actual intention of the powerful. Herod's rage ("he was infuriated", 2.16) is contrasted to the great joy and happiness of the magi (2.10) when they find the child. This great joy, a breath of fresh air in this tense story, is shared by those who are persecuted in the Beatitudes (5.12) and by the shepherd who has found the lost sheep (18.13). This great joy is a sign of salvation and of discovery of "blessedness" (5.3-12) and the fact that God is with us. By contrast, rage ineluctably leads to desolation, to "they are no more" and to Rachel's lamentation (2.18).

The citation of Jeremiah 31.15 in Matt 2.17-18 is introduced as an indirect fulfillment ("then was fulfilled" rather than "this was to fulfill" in 2.15 and elsewhere) so as to mark that these killings did not happen according to God's plan, but according to Herod's plan and the logic of his power-centred ideology – a logic which is once again controlling the penultimate phase of Jesus story, the passion (Matthew 26-27). Yet this does not make this citation less important. Instead of being denied or ignored by those who do not assume responsibility for their use of scripture, this violence is assumed by scripture, assumed by God's word, assumed into God's plan.

Matthew provides us with tools to analyse the various kinds of confrontations we find in our societies. These are analytical tools that enable us to identify both in our societies and in the text the actors and their roles, and their different levels of responsibility for what is happening. From this identification we can therefore develop an appropriate social critique.



Painting by a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker

1. The killing of the innocents in Matt 2 shows that one must assume responsibility for one's use of scripture and of its symbolic power. One cannot claim neutrality when using scripture.
2. The biblical text gives to the church – the people of God – the means to:
 - a. Analyse their particular contextual situation;
 - b. Analyse the contradictory representations of Jesus that one finds on one's group and other groups; and more specifically,
 - c. Analyse the different representations of Jesus' resurrection and discuss those that are problematic;
 - d. Identify the modes of communication that either make visible or hide the presence of Jesus Christ in a situation;
 - e. Affirm that each community can and should formulate its own Christology and ecclesiology. The pluralism in the New Testament gives each community the right to do so;
 - f. Give us the hope that the righteous/just and the victims of injustice are those who will be resurrected. Matthew has brought together those righteous/just ones with all the little ones of his people who have been crushed by the powerful. In Matt 2, having hope is a political act of resistance against death-wielding powers.
3. Matthew opens a door towards an ecclesiology characterized by Christian life-practices rather than theological views. It calls into question the intentions behind the quest for a uniform, monolithic Christianity that does not make room for diversity.
4. The exodus and its violent connotations, together with the violence of Matt 2 are used to justify Christian violence against Jews.

The theme of the killing of children is a description and denunciation of what one sees in one's society. Is it not the case that our societies kill our children? Let us not forget how social disenfranchisement, unemployment, and marginalisation in the so-called first world engender violence and death, indeed, the death of our children. Are we not killing our own children in wars, even as we deny these murders in the name of power-ideologies? Do we not kill the future of our children by destroying the creation? This is not an hyperbolic statement, because the degradation of the planet will affect everyone and will help increase oppressive powers.

Discussion questions:

1. "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." In chapters 18 and 19 Matthew's Jesus uses the example of a child in speaking about the reign of heaven. Do you think the church should be involved locally, nationally or globally with issues that affect children? How do you think that involvement might look?
2. In the Jeremiah reading, God assures Rachel that "there is a reward for your work". How might we as Christian communities offer hope to those weeping for their children who are held in detention indefinitely by our country's authority? What work can we do? What difference might it make if we act as individual Christians or collectively as 'the church'?
3. "What if we were to allow the shadow of the Manger to fall across our lives with a power and intensity similar to the shadow of the Cross?"⁴⁷ What difference, if any, do you think it makes to keep the image of Jesus the at-risk child in view as Christians think about our responsibility to the children of the world? Are we in danger of simply sentimentalising children in the church?
4. Jesus warns his hearers, "Woe to the one by whom the stumbling-block comes!" It has been argued that people from all political and faith perspectives are at risk of objectifying children – 'using' children for a political point, rather than engaging with children as humans in their own right. How can we avoid being stumbling blocks in our conversations about and with children in detention?

Casting the net: theological and other resources for exploring the questions



An Iraqi woman from Mosul holds her daughter in one hand and empty water containers in the other.
UNHCR / S. Baldwin / June 2014

Thinking

*From Alejandro Alberto Duarte, "Matthew"*⁴⁸

Two life contexts focus my interpretation of Matthew. I was in Argentina during the period of the military dictatorship (1976-1983). During this very difficult time eleven of my close friends and companions were killed. I wept and still weep for my companions, as Rachel was "weeping for her children, refusing to be consoled because they are no more" (Matt 2.18). In both cases of the killings in Bethlehem and in Argentina, there is deep grief and a cry against these injustices. Most importantly these tragedies constantly remain with me as I reflect on the ways the "little ones" (10.42, 18.1-14) are exploited, marginalized, and excluded. Violence against the little ones can take the form of the direct violence that killed my eleven friends, but it can also take the form of the no less terrible structural violence of a neoliberalism that is totally unable to sustain any program of solidarity with the poor and the weak in our society. Survival of the strongest and of richest – social Darwinism – is the order of the day, while the large majority of the population remains socially invisible. The "little ones" and the "innocents" (as the murdered children in 2.16 are often called) are today the majority of the world's population. They are denied any social role, any prospect for the future, and are silenced by ideologies that mark their words as incorrect, inappropriate and pointless, because they do not conform to the hegemonic designs of the rich and powerful.

All those who oppose injustice must speak about the complicity of many in this injustice. Buenos Aires, which has the social means to protect its inhabitants, has become like Jerusalem in Matthew 2: it rejects those who come from 'outside' (like the magi) because they stand outside of its power structure and do not share its visions. While excluding those outsiders, they also exclude many others within our society such as malnourished children, neglected sick, underprivileged women, and elderly people without access to healthcare and other forms of aid. For me, Matthew 2 and the killing of the children is a mirror in which one can see present-day Buenos Aires.

Session one

The gift of hospitality: inviting the stranger to come in

Background: Australia's current legal approach to the question of refugees and asylum seekers

The international laws that are most often discussed in relation to refugees and asylum seekers are intended to provide protection for those members of the human community who are least able to protect themselves. They attempt to protect the human rights which the international community recognises as being essential to our humanity.

Because the rights contained in these documents are thought to be so essential to our humanity it might also be argued that the responsibility to offer protection of these rights to those in need is just as essential to our humanity. In other words, we recognise that states and their citizens need to be hospitable to vulnerable people in order to be fully human. It is telling that we often describe regimes that infringe on human rights as "inhumane".

In reality, the conversation about our obligations with respect to refugees and asylum seekers rarely centres on the ways in which those obligations can shape us positively. Instead the public is encouraged to focus on the dangers of hospitality and of inviting the stranger into our midst.

"Asylum seekers who arrive by boat present a security threat to Australia"¹

The majority of asylum seekers who have reached Australia by boat have been found to be genuine refugees. 70–90% have typically been found to be refugees, compared to around 40–45% of asylum seekers who arrive with some form of temporary visa (eg tourist, student or temporary work visa). In the 2012-13 financial year, the primary recognition rate for asylum seekers who arrived by boat was 67.5%, compared to 33.2% for asylum seekers who arrived on a temporary visa.

According to the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), of the 39,527 security assessments made in 2009–10 relating to visa applications (including Protection Visa applications), only 19 adverse findings were made across all visa categories. Understandably, every case is assessed on its individual merits; however, from these numbers it can be seen that the risks are very low.

The UN Refugee Convention excludes people who have committed war crimes, crimes against peace, crimes against humanity or other serious non-political crimes from obtaining refugee status. Any person who is guilty of these crimes will be denied refugee status. Additionally, all asylum seekers must undergo rigorous security and character checks before being granted protection in Australia. It is therefore highly unlikely that a war criminal, terrorist or any other person who posed a security threat would be able to enter Australia as a refugee.

It is also improbable that a criminal or terrorist would choose such a dangerous and difficult method to enter Australia, given that asylum seekers who arrive without authorisation or without valid travel documents undergo more rigorous security and identity checks than other entrants to Australia.

The international legislation offers recognised definitions of some of the key terms that are used in discussions about Australia's international obligations. As these terms are often used loosely in public conversations it is important to begin by defining them more carefully.

An **'asylum seeker'** is someone who has sought international protection and whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined by the country of asylum. The term refers to all people who apply for refugee protection, whether or not they are officially determined to be refugees (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*).

A **'refugee'** is "any person who ... owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (*1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees*).

An **'illegal immigrant'** is an individual who enters a country without meeting the legal requirements for entry (such as a valid visa). However, the Refugees Convention prohibits states from penalising migrants who enter 'illegally' and who come directly from a territory where their life or freedom is threatened. All asylum seekers are classified in the *Migration Act (1958)* as 'unlawful non-citizens'. The term 'unlawful' does not mean that asylum seekers have committed a criminal offence.

The international legislation which shapes Australia's obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers is contained in a number of United Nations Declarations, Covenants and Conventions:

The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)* states the basic rights and fundamental freedoms to which all human beings are entitled. It recognises that "the inherent dignity and ... the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world"; and includes civil and political rights, such as the right to life, liberty, free speech and privacy, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to social security, health and education.



Children at a brick kiln in Kabul, Afghanistan © Bethany Matta/IRIN

The *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951)* defines who is a refugee, their rights (for example, freedom of religion and movement, the right to work, education and accessibility to travel documents) and the legal obligations of states.

The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966)* is the primary international legal instrument on civil and political rights including the right to equality before the law; not to be arbitrarily deprived of life; liberty and freedom of movement; a fair trial, including criminal rights such as the presumption of innocence and the right to appeal a conviction; freedom from torture and other ill-treatment; privacy; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of assembly and association; and the right of self determination.

The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)* (ICESCR) is the primary international legal instrument on economic, social and cultural rights including the right to self determination; equality and non discrimination; work, and the right to just and favorable work conditions; social security; an adequate standard of living, including the right to housing; highest attainable standard of health (both physical and mental); education; culture and participation in cultural life.

The *Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984)* (CAT) includes prohibitions against cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, an obligation on signatories to conduct prompt and impartial investigation of allegations of ill-treatment, and an obligation to ensure redress and compensation.

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)* (CRC) enshrines the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. Its provisions include non-discrimination; the right to life; the right to family, and the right not to be separated from one's parents against one's will; the right to health; the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's development; the right to education; the right of the Indigenous child to enjoy his or her own culture, religion and language; and protection from violence, injury, abuse, or exploitation.

The full text of all these conventions is available online and links to each piece of legislation can be found in the 'Going Deeper' section of this study.

Telling their stories: Yusuf Omar²

Yusuf Omar grew up in a small Somali village called Dhagabar. When he was eight, they moved to the capital Mogadishu to study and attain formal education. In 1990, Yusuf left for Sudan to complete a Bachelor of Education and during this time the civil war in Somalia erupted. Taking after his mother who was a poet, Yusuf became politically active and composed poems (in Somali and Arabic) condemning the war and warlords, and the dysfunctional social system and clan culture. In 1995, he received a scholarship to study a Masters of Arabic in Malaysia and continued his strong opposition and criticism of the war from there. When his studies were completed, he could not return to Somalia due to his outspoken condemnation of the conflict and the dangers associated with open armed conflict.

He has not been able to go back to see his family since he left in 1990. Seeking asylum in Australia was one of the few options left to him to survive.

Yusuf is currently engaged in Doctoral studies on Somali youth perspectives at the Refugee Research Centre at La Trobe University. Yusuf's PhD study entails international travel and keeps most of his time occupied. He is also very active in the community and was a founding member of the Somali-Australia Friendship Association to build bridges between these two communities and empower young Somalis to create positive role models, gain leadership skills and to assist them with their education. The Association also provides a platform for young Somalis to practice democracy and has created many young leaders who work at different sites.

Bible passages

Rachel's lament for her children

Jeremiah 31. 15-17

Thus says the Lord:

A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.

Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.

Thus says the Lord:

Keep your voice from weeping,
and your eyes from tears;

for there is a reward for your work,
says the Lord:
they shall come back from the land of the enemy;
there is hope for your future,
says the Lord:
your children shall come back to their own country.



Copper statue of Rachel weeping for her children by Linda Gissen

Notes:

Jeremiah Chap 40 tells us that Ramah was the gathering place from where the Babylonian exiles began their journey of separation from their homeland. While Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, this Mother Rachel expresses a more universal grief: "Mother Rachel grieves over the generations, for all the lost children who are so vulnerable and so brutalized ... The weeping of the uncomfortable mother easily traverses the generations, for all the lost ones are the same to this mother, regardless of their generation."⁴⁴

Matthew links this passage to the slaughter of the innocents by Herod who was looking for Jesus (Matt 2.7-18). Elaine Wainwright⁴⁵ observes that this intertextuality has Rachel's voice breaking into the narrative and filling the space where the mothers of Bethlehem should have been heard: "Their voices cry out to and against the intervening God of the infancy narrative ... It is the voice of Rachel that pierces the ... world of power, of slaughter, and of divine favour. She stands in place of the erased women, but she also stands in the place of divine compassion, likewise erased."

Children and the kingdom of heaven

Matthew 18.1-7

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling-blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling-block comes!

Notes:

The Greek word '*paidion*' (child, singular) is only used in Matthew in chapter 2 (to refer to the child Jesus) and in chapter 18 when Jesus discusses the child in relationship to the reign of heaven. This has the effect of linking the child in chapter 18 with the infant Jesus himself, as "one who lacks choice and is powerless ... a child in Matthew's narrative world is one who is vulnerable, threatened with death, and completely dependent on others, including God."⁴⁶ The common language of chapters 2 and 18 suggests that the example of the child whom Jesus brings before the disciples also implies the circumstances of the Jesus-child.



Painting by a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker

- Parents bring their children in the hope that the children will be released into community detention and so will their parents who would otherwise remain in detention (both of these claims assume a highly utilitarian approach to childhood on the part of asylum seekers that arguably says more about the inherent racism of the commentators than about the asylum seekers themselves. Around half of all asylum seekers worldwide are children – it seems very unlikely that all those parents are so unmindful of their children's welfare);
- The government and opposition are of similar policy minds on this issue and both represent the views of “most Australians” (on the narrative of border protection see session 4);
- Australia already has a quota for refugees and that should be sufficient (on the size of Australia's quotas and the scale of global forced migration see session 5).

For a thorough exploration of many of the myths surrounding refugees and asylum seekers the Refugee Council of Australia has a myths and facts page: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/f/myth-long.php>

Telling their stories: child detainees speak for themselves

I can tell you that things are very, very difficult for us. I can say that you can never call that place a detention centre. It was of course a prison and a gaol. Even in prison you know at least for how long you will be in prison, but in a situation like that we did not know what was happening next. We did not know how long we would be spending in this place. And most of the time our roommates and the people who used to live with us, they were getting changed every three weeks or every two weeks, the people that we were getting around for a while they used to go and then some new people would replace them. And sometimes they would put the new arrivals with the people who have been there for a quite a long time who have completely lost their minds and their ability to think and when you spend some time with people like that who have been out of their minds so of course you lose your mentality, and you lose your thoughts as well and this is what was happening to us. Sometimes I was looking at those people I was thinking that we'll all end up in the same place so in short, I can say life was very horrible.

Unaccompanied Afghan boy found to be a refugee



I am like a bird in a cage. My friends who went to other countries are free. [One of his drawings was of an egg with a boot hovering above it ready to crush it. Pointing to the egg he said,] These are the babies in detention centres.

16-year-old detainee who had spent three birthdays in detention

Drawings by some of the children held with their families at Manus Island processing centre ©OutofSight.org.au

It's just that I know that I have lots and lots of negative and better stories, I cannot finish all of them, it's just that I remember in Afghanistan when I was studying as a child, our teacher used to say that people of Australia were the most human and caring and loving people among the world and I was always thinking that they were, then as soon as I came to Australia in government detention centre my idea was completely changed. I found quite the opposite and I was just thinking if I had stayed in Afghanistan of course they would have killed me maybe in an hour or two but I ended up in here so physically they are keeping me alive but emotionally and spiritually they are killing me.

Afghan unaccompanied boy found to be a refugee

Child detainees Interviewed by Youth Advocacy Centre and Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma as part of a submission to the HRC. Included in A Last Resort? Report on the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention published in 2004 and accessed at

https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/human_rights/children_detention_report/report/PDF/alr_complete.pdf

Bible passages

Deuteronomic social security

Deuteronomy 24.17-22

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.



Jean-François Millet, "The Gleaners"

Notes

The theologian Walter Brueggemann calls this section of the Deuteronomic code “holy identity enacted concretely”. Its concern is justice and the way in which “the covenantal vision of social reality is brought down to the specificities of daily life”.³ Those in positions of power, such as creditors and land owners, have an obligation to protect the dignity of the vulnerable. When a creditor makes a loan to a poor person and takes the debtor's cloak as collateral, the cloak must be returned each night so that the debtor is not left coatless and exposed overnight. The more vulnerable a person is, the more the obligation of protection is invoked. The triad of the landless poor, the widow, the orphan and the alien are offered the greatest protection of all, to the extent that those in power are expected to restrain their own rights in order to permit greater rights to those in utter need. The creditor of a widow is not to take any collateral at all for the loan. The dynamic of restraint and permit is to be the paradigm for relationships between the powerful and powerless as neighbours.

The alien/stranger

It is now generally assumed that most of the ‘strangers’, that is migrants, who in antiquity left their own lands and went into foreign parts were refugees in the modern sense – if not from persecution and oppression, at any rate from famine or some other disaster...they were among the poor and needy.⁴

The parable of the sheep and goats

Matthew 25.31-46

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me”. Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?”. And the king will answer



The Parable of the Good Shepherd Separating the Sheep from the Goats, from Scenes from the Life of Christ, sixth century. Mosaic, Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna, Italy.



More than half a million people have fled Syria for neighbouring countries, even Iraq (Domiz camp, Kurdistan region, Iraq) © Jodi Hilton/IRIN

them, “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”. Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me”. Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?”. Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me”. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Notes

This judgment scene follows three parables about preparing for the coming of the Son of Man: there is the parable of the wise and faithful servant who is watching for the master’s return, the parable of the wise and foolish maidens with their lamps awaiting the bridegroom’s arrival, and the parable of the talents and the servants who prepare for the return of the unjust master. The theme of all these parables is that those who waited knew what to do, and some did it while others did not.

Daniel Harrington argues that those being judged are Gentiles, those outside the Jewish faith. The criteria by which they are to be judged are the deeds of mercy they have offered to the disciples of Jesus (cf Matt 10.40: “Whoever receives you (my disciples) receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me”). He argues further that if this is the standard of ethics to be expected from those outside the faith, how much more will be expected from those who call themselves Christian?⁵

Discussion questions

- 1. It is sometimes argued that the laws and codes of the Hebrew scriptures described a vision of what was hoped for rather than a description of how society actually functioned.⁶ What would be some of the practical implications of observing the provisions of Deuteronomy 17? How would this benefit or penalise the wealthy? What about the poor or the powerless?
- 2. Walter Brueggemann speaks about a paradigm of “restraint and permit” with regard to Israel’s obligations to those in need: landowners were to give up some of what they were entitled to in order to provide something for the landless. Can you think of any examples of how this expectation is at work today in relation to social security and welfare?
- 3. How would you describe Australia’s tradition of caring for “the least of these”? Can you give some examples of occasions when we have excelled at hospitality? What criteria do you use for judging excellence? How do these examples make you feel as an Australian?
- 4. The Matthew reading offers some specific examples of helping those in need, such as feeding the hungry and visiting those in prison. Think about how this responsibility might be understood to include challenging unjust systems. Do we have an obligation to address the causes of poverty, as well as an obligation to feed the hungry person at our door?

Other biblical texts: Genesis 18.1-16 (Abraham and the Three Strangers); Isaiah 25.1-9 (The Messianic Banquet).

The dangers to the wellbeing of children from holding them in mandatory detention

There are substantial ongoing risk factors for physical and mental health problems in people (and specifically children) held in detention on Nauru. These include:

- Children have limited meaningful play and reduced hours of schooling in difficult conditions without monitoring systems. Parenting is difficult, and the nature of the infrastructure fosters dependency. Together, these factors are likely to cause and maintain mental health problems and more generally, lead to widespread hopelessness and boredom with the potential for unrest. This [situation] is exacerbated [whenever] the welfare [is managed by] a stakeholder with limited experience in this area, delays in refugee status determination process, and the lack of clarity around settlement planning or risk minimisation following outcome delivery.
- Currently there is no child developmental surveillance, which is also an important form of mental health monitoring. The lack of child health screening means health issues and disability are likely to arise after transfer.
- Gaps in child health expertise and services – there is a lack of paediatric health expertise ... and lack of resuscitation support for infants and children ... Children deteriorate quickly when they are unwell, and the 24 – 36 hour timeframe for medical evacuation will not allow support during the critical early period of a severe illness.
- The risk of child protection issues and lack of child protection capacity - there is a significant and ongoing risk of child abuse, including physical and sexual abuse, in the detention environment where large numbers of children and adults are held in crowded conditions without normal social structure or meaningful activities.

Physical and Mental Health Subcommittee of the Joint Advisory Committee for Nauru Regional Processing Arrangements Nauru Site Visit Report 16-19 February 2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2014/may/29/nauru-family-health-risks-report-in-full>

Under the *Immigration Guardianship of Children Act 1946 (IGOC Act)* s4AAA, when a child arrives in Australia unaccompanied and without a valid visa, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship (the Minister) becomes legal guardian of that child, with ‘the same rights, powers, duties, obligations and liabilities as a natural guardian of the child would have’ s6(1). This creates a significant conflict of interest for the Minister in his/her role as decision maker in various respects under the *Migration Act 1958 (‘Migration Act’)*, and as legal guardian under the *IGOC Act*. The current understanding is that the specific powers of the *Migration Act* generally take precedence over the broad operation of the *IGOC Act* and therefore the Minister will not be penalised for failing to consider or act in the best interests of the vulnerable asylum seeker children in their care even though under law he/she has that obligation.

Under current legislation unaccompanied children are also relatively unsupported in navigating the refugee determination processing system and there is no provision as of right to legal assistance or advice. The Minister is not compelled, even as their guardian, to facilitate their applications for asylum, nor to ensure that children are made aware of their legal entitlements. Where independent observers are available, they often have limited capacity to assist. This leaves a child without the benefit of a support person who is able to actively monitor and advocate for their interests. Such children are unable to access legal assistance through the Immigration Advice and Application Assistance Scheme, yet evidence from any interviews conducted with them and the findings made remain on file and can severely impact upon a child’s subsequent application for protection.

Further recent changes to the *Migration Act* have allowed the Minister power to designate a country as a ‘regional processing country’ if in the ‘national interest.’ The *IGOC Act* provides that the Minister’s guardianship duties cease when an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is removed to such a processing country in accordance with the *Migration Act*. A designated processing country need not be scrutinised for their human rights record or capacity, they need only give (non-binding) assurances that asylum seekers will not be forcibly returned to their country of origin and demonstrate a willingness to assess protection applications. Certainly they are under no obligation to demonstrate care for the wellbeing of unaccompanied children.

There is of course no shortage of arguments in favour of keeping asylum-seeker children in mandatory detention in processing centres both in Australia and offshore. A scan through the comments section of any online report of conditions in processing centres will disclose claims that:

- Parents of unaccompanied children deliberately send their children on dangerous boat journeys in the hope that the children will be accepted as refugees and the parents can join them under a family reunion scheme;

Session six

“A Voice is heard in Ramah”: the ethics of holding children in detention

Background: The road to a policy on placing asylum seeker children in mandatory detention



South Sudan: A young mother and child register ahead of moving to Kaya. Many of the refugees are women and children. UNHCR / T. Irwin / May 2013



Urban Refugee in Jordan Jenna, shows off her prized possession: a flowery dress. UNHCR / J. Kohler / February 2014

The starting place for any legal consideration of the rights of the child is the 1990 United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*. The Preamble to the *CRC* notes that the UN has proclaimed that “childhood is entitled to special care and assistance” and recognises that children need, where possible, to grow up in “an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding”.

The fundamental principles that underpin the *CRC* framework are non-discrimination, the survival of the child, his or her development and protection, the child’s participation in matters concerning the child, and above all things, the best interests of the child (see Art 3(1)).

The *CRC* speaks directly to the detention of children in Article 37 which describes detention as “a measure of last resort”. A child who has been detained should also:

- Be detained for the shortest appropriate period of time;
- be treated with respect and humanity;
- have the right to challenge the legality of their detention before a court or other independent and impartial authority;
- have a right to protection and assistance - because they are an especially vulnerable group of children;
- have a right to family reunification; and
- have a right to rehabilitative care.

Prior to 2005, the federal *Migration Act* made no distinction between unlawful non-citizens who are under or over the age of 18 (see ss 189 & 196) and the High Court held that it was lawful under that legislation for the federal government to keep children in detention.⁴³ In 2004 the Human Rights Commission released its report *A Last Resort?* which, together with medical evidence of the effects of detention on children’s wellbeing, led to amendments to the *Migration Act* in 2005 including a new s 4AA: *The Parliament affirms as a principle that a minor shall only be detained as a measure of last resort.*

The latest statistics from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) are dated 30 April 2014 and show that 1023 children are held in immigration detention facilities and regional processing facilities including on Nauru and Manus Island. It is not clear from the statistics how many of these children are unaccompanied minors.

Casting the net: theological and other resources for exploring the questions

Thinking

From Christine D. Pohl, “Hospitality as a Way of Life”⁷

Many people who practice hospitality describe it as the best and hardest thing they have ever done. In their experience, its difficulty and its joys lie close together. They find it to be the best thing because of how often they sense God’s presence in the practice, because it is filled with unexpected blessings, because it is richly satisfying, and because of the opportunities it provides to become friends with so many different kinds of people.

Hospitality is difficult because it involves hard work. People wear out and struggle with limits. Our society places a high value on control, planning, and efficiency, but hospitality is unpredictable and often inefficient. We insist on measurable results and completed tasks, but the results of hospitality are impossible to quantify and the work of hospitality is rarely finished. Hospitality is also difficult today because of our overwhelming busyness. With already overburdened schedules, trying to offer substantial hospitality can drive us to despair. Most of us have significant responsibilities and hospitality cannot simply be added onto already impossible agendas. To offer hospitality, we will need to rethink and reshape our priorities.

Understanding the church as God’s household has significant implications for hospitality. More than anywhere else, when we gather as church our practice of hospitality should reflect God’s gracious welcome. God is our host, and we are all guests of God’s grace. However, in individual churches, we also have opportunities to act as hosts who welcome others, making a place for strangers and sojourners.

Churches, like families, need to eat together to sustain their identity as a community. The table is central to the practice of hospitality in home and church. The nourishment we gain there is physical, spiritual, and social. Whether we gather around the table for the Lord’s Supper or for a church potluck dinner, we are strengthened as a community. Meals shared together in church provide opportunities to sustain relationships and build new ones. They establish a space that is personal without being private, an excellent setting in which to begin friendships with strangers.

Jean Vanier, founder of the L’Arche communities, writes that “Welcome is one of the signs that a community is alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we aren’t afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share.” He also offers an important warning: “A community which refuses to welcome — whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors—is dying spiritually.”⁸

Families shaped by deep Christian faith and strong love for one another can offer an extraordinary gift in welcoming people into their homes. In living their lives in front of their guests, they provide a model of a healthy family, warts and all. They allow people to see what the Christian life looks like in the daily give and take of loving and forgiving. Around a dinner table, family and guests share food and life, and talk of that which gives meaning to their lives.

Similarly, single people who live together in intentional community have important opportunities to welcome those who need a safe place and room for friendships to grow. A household can be modest, with little space and few amenities, but it can be the site for wonderful hospitality. Welcome does not require many resources; it does require a willingness to share what we have, whether food, time, space, or money.

Seeing

Feast: Radical hospitality in contemporary art (Smart Museum of Art, Chicago)

<http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/exhibitions/feast/>

Feast presents the work of more than thirty artists and artist groups who have transformed the shared meal into a compelling artistic medium. The exhibition examines the history of the artist-orchestrated meal, and addresses the radical hospitality embodied by these artists and the social, commercial, and political structures that surround the experience of eating together.



Mella Jaarsma, photo documenting performance of *I Eat You Eat Me*, 2002. Courtesy of the artist.

Joining

Australian Churches Refugee

(www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au)

This task force was established to promote a shared Christian vision among member churches and their agencies working for advocacy and support of refugees and asylum seekers.



Listening

The Key of Sea Volumes One and Two

(<http://keyofsea.com.au/>)

A musical partnership between some of Australia's best known independent and alternative musicians and refugee collaborators who are professional musicians in their own rights.

Praying

You may like to pray this litany as a group, to conclude your study time together.

A litany for hospitality (Christine Sine)⁹

God, we are aliens and sojourners in this world, but you invite us to be your guests. You lavishly offer us your hospitality and lovingly welcome us into your family, you invite us to share in the abundance of your kingdom.

The King is knocking. If you desire your share of heaven on earth, lift the latch and let in the King of kings.

God, you have shown us that providing hospitality to strangers opens a doorway into the Kingdom of God. Remind us that when we offer hospitality to others, we are receiving Christ into our midst and so fulfilling the law of love.

We open our hearts to embrace the stranger, the friend, the rich, and the poor, we open our lives to offer a generous heart toward all.

Pause to remind yourself of ways that God has extended hospitality to you.

God, we want to fulfill your law of love and be your hospitality to our world,
I open my heart to be the hospitality of Christ, to all those who come to my door.
 I open my heart to Christ in the stranger,
To Christ in the face of colleague and friend.
 I open my heart to the one who is wounded,
To Christ in the hungry, the lonely, the homeless.
 I open my heart to the one who has hurt me,
To Christ in the faces of sinner and foe.
 I open my heart to those who are outcast,
To Christ in the broken, the prisoner, the poor.
 I open my heart to all who are searching,
To Christ in the world, God's generous gift.

Pause to remind yourself of ways that you could extend God's hospitality.

God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.
 We want to take our everyday ordinary lives and offer them as pleasing sacrifices to you,
God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.
 We don't want to be so well adjusted to the culture around us that we fit into it without even thinking,
God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.
 God, encourage us to fix our attention on you so that we will be changed and renewed from the inside out,
God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.
 We want every part of our lives to be transformed so that we can mature and become all that you intend us to be,
God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.
 May we practice real love and allow it to flow out from the center of our being in friendship and compassion, particularly for the poor and disadvantaged,
God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.

Prayer

A meditation from Iona⁴³

It was on the Wednesday
 that they called him a waster.

The place smelt like the perfume department
 of a big store.

It was as if somebody had bumped their elbow
 against a bottle
 and sent it crashing to the floor,
 setting off the most expensive stink bomb on earth.

But it happened in a house
 not in a shop.

And the woman who broke the bottle
 was no casual afternoon shopper.

She was the penniless poorest of the poor,
 giving away the only precious thing she had.

And he sat still
 while she poured the liquid all over his head...
 as unnecessary as aftershave
 on a full crop of hair and a bearded chin.

And those who smelt it
 and those who saw it
 and those who remembered
 that he was against extravagance
 called him a waster.

They forgot
 that he was also the poorest of the poor.

And they who had much
 and who had given him nothing
 objected to a pauper giving him everything.

Jealousy was in the air
 when a poor woman's generosity
 became an embarrassment to their tight-fistedness...
 That was on the Wednesday
 when they called him a waster.



A woman and her baby wait to see a doctor at a health clinic in the district of Khan Kalacha, in Kandahar, Afghanistan on the 17th March, 2010 © Kate Holt/IRIN

Going deeper: further reading

Menadue, John, Keski-Nummi, Arja and Gauthier, Kate (2011) *A New Approach: Breaking the Stalemate on Refugees and Asylum Seekers*. Occasional Paper 13, Centre for Policy Development.
http://cpd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/cpd_refugee_report_2nd-run-WEB-VERSION3.pdf

UNHCR *Statistical Yearbook 2011*, 11th edition. (Country Data Sheets, 8 April 2013) Trends in Displacement, Protection and Solutions: Eleven Years of Statistics
<http://www.unhcr.org/516282cf5.html>

UNHCR Global Trends June 2013

<http://www.unhcr.org/52af08d26.html>

Go Back to Where You Came From

<http://www.sbs.com.au/goback/> This SBS documentary features six ordinary Australians who agree to challenge their preconceived notions about refugees and asylum seekers by embarking on a confronting 25-day journey. Tracing in reverse the journeys that refugees have taken to reach Australia, they travel to some of the most dangerous and desperate corners of the world, with no idea of what's in store for them along the way.

English language skills, strong family structures, and support for young people. Just imagine what we could achieve if we reallocated some of the \$800 million which is currently being spent on detaining about 6,000 people each year, towards further bolstering the provision of these basic areas of need. The Treasury's *InterGenerational Report 2* (IGR2) of 2007 showed that age matters in migration.

To harness the optimism and potential of the substantial youthful population that arrives here under the refugee resettlement program, we must help them swiftly. After years of interrupted schooling and living in camps where we know survival comes at enormous personal costs, we cannot condemn them to a marginal existence because at the time when they needed support most (on-arrival) it was not there. This can be better done by learning from what has worked in the past and making sure young people — too young to opt out of education but too old to be forced into a structured education system — are given access to programs that mentor them, link them into broader youth networks, and connect them with opportunities for work, with a focus on apprenticeships. Supporting employers to take the risk of training young refugees is also essential. As the last *InterGenerational Report* noted:

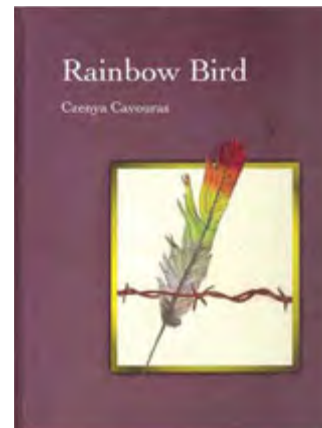
...well-being is enhanced if ... members of society have the opportunity to participate in economic and social activities. Education, quality health services and access to employment, for instance, contribute to higher productivity growth and higher labour force participation. They also contribute to the ability of Australians to be active members of society.

Seeing

Rainbow Bird

Cavouras, Czenya (2007) *Rainbow Bird* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press and Australians Against Racism) <http://www.wakefieldpress.com.au/>

Rainbow Bird is a deeply moving children's picture book written and illustrated by 14-year-old Czenya Cavouras, who is now in high school. It tells the story of a refugee journey from a destroyed homeland to a desolate detention centre and finally, to future of hope. *Rainbow Bird* is quietly harrowing, has a unique author voice, and is ultimately inspiring and uplifting.



Listening

Rise Music and Arts Project

<http://www.youtube.com/user/RISEMusic1?feature=watch>

This project aims to reduce social isolation within refugee and asylum seeker communities and help youth re-engage into wider society through various forms of artistic expression. The projects act as mediums for engagement with the wider community through events and festivals that enable refugee and asylum seeker communities to showcase the various talents and cultural assets that they possess.

Joining

Rural Australians for Refugees

<http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org/>

Rural Australians for Refugees is a rapidly growing grass-roots movement with enormous potential. They are under no illusions that a change in this country's policies will be quick or easy. But with the hard work and commitment of their nation-wide membership, Rural Australians for Refugees aims to make a substantial contribution to bringing about a more humane and welcoming policy towards refugees.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we can serve you joyfully and enthusiastically, praying continually especially when we encounter difficult situations,

God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.

Open our eyes so that we can see beauty in every face and practice hospitality, particularly to those we usually overlook or ignore,
God, we want to love you more and become your hospitality to our world.

Going deeper: further reading

United Nations Convention on Human Rights

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees

<http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm>

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>

Convention against Torture

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cat.htm>

Convention on the Rights of the Child

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

Newman, Elizabeth (2007) *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*. (Grand Rapids: Braizos Press). Available from the Roscoe Library at St Francis Theological College, Milton.

McNulty, Tracy (1999) "Israel as host(ess): Hospitality in the Bible and beyond." *Jouvert: A Journal of Post-Colonial Studies*, 3.

Bretherton, Luke (2008) *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Surrey: Ashgate).



A displaced persons camp in Vavuniya, Sri Lanka. Thousands of Tamil civilians continue to languish inside camps such as this more than five months after the Sri Lankan government officially declared the war over © Contributor/IRIN



IDP children in the east of Afghanistan © Ayub Farhat/IRIN

Session two

The question of human rights: recognising the imago Dei

Background: International human rights legislation and the rights of refugees and asylum seekers

Findings from the UNHCR mission to Manus Island Detention Centre, 15–17 January 2013¹⁰

UNHCR acknowledges the serious commitment and on-going efforts by the Governments of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Australia to put in place procedures and conditions of treatment for transferees that are consistent with their international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and other applicable international instruments.

Currently, the delays and uncertainty surrounding the commencement of the refugee status determination process are inconsistent with the primary and, arguably, sole purpose of transfer from Australia to the Assessment Centre on Manus Island, namely, to identify whether a transferee is a refugee in need of protection under Australia and PNG's obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

The current PNG policy and practice of detaining all asylum-seekers at the closed Centre, on a mandatory and indefinite basis without an assessment as to the necessity and proportionality of the purpose of such detention in the individual case, and without being brought promptly before a judicial or other independent authority amounts to arbitrary detention that is inconsistent with international human rights law.

The temporary living conditions for most transferees at the closed detention setting remain harsh and, for some, inadequate. These conditions, coupled with the indeterminate nature and length of processing, are likely to have an increasingly negative impact on the psycho-social and physical health of those transferred, particularly vulnerable individuals including families and dependent children.

The situation of children transferred to Manus Island gives particular cause for concern. The lack of any appropriate legal or regulatory framework for their treatment (in what UNHCR finds to be a mandatory, arbitrary and indefinite detention setting), and on-going delays in establishing any procedures to assess children's refugee protection needs, and broader best interests, is particularly troubling.

The 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) was formulated in the aftermath of World War Two and the growing awareness of the scale of atrocities committed in the course of that conflict. Although the United Nations Charter made reference to human rights, World War Two demonstrated that those rights were insufficiently defined.

The Preamble to the Charter states:

We the peoples of the United Nations [are] determined ... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small ...

The first two articles of the UDHR make claims about humanity that would have surprised many people of earlier generations, even if today most of us in Australia would find them relatively uncontroversial.

Article 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

The seeds of the Declaration lie in the Enlightenment and the work of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. The English Revolution in the 17th century gave rise to the *Bill of Rights* in 1689 which attempted to restrict the absolute power of the monarch and to guarantee certain political and judicial rights to male citizens, although these rights did not extend to women and children.

Notes

This wisdom from Sirach seems to run counter to much of the teaching about hospitality in the scriptures. Whereas Abraham received strangers and was praised (Genesis 18.1-10, Hebrews 13.2), this advice is much more cautious. Christine Pohl suggests that the unwelcome stranger is the one who would tempt Israel to idolatry or who threatens Israel's faithfulness to the covenant.⁴¹ In other words the passage is advocating discernment in hospitality, as the people of God tread the line between caring for their own interests and cultural identity and yet reaching out to those in need who have come to them for assistance.

Discussion questions

1. Mary's gift of ointment was unquestionably extravagant, being worth around a year's wage for a peasant at that time. Think about some ways in which this debate has arisen in the life of the church, with regard to spending on different undertakings — for example, do we build a new church or give the money to charity?
2. What do you make of Jesus' link between the selfishness of some and the poverty of others? What about in relation to refugees: how might the selfishness or greed of developed nations contribute to the creation of more and more refugees in developing nations?
3. Much is said about the right of countries like Australia to be careful about who comes in and who does not. Even the UNHCR publicly supports the right of host countries to screen applicants for refugee status. On what grounds do you think Australia decides who can be admitted?
4. Sirach seems to be saying that there is an implied obligation on those seeking hospitality to seek the good of the host. This is certainly borne out elsewhere such as in Jeremiah 29:4-7. Talk about some ways in which refugees can "seek the good of the city" in which they find themselves in coming to Australia.

Casting the net – theological and other resources for exploring the questions

Thinking

From John Menadue, Arja Keski-Nummi and Kate Gauthier, *A New Approach: Breaking the Stalemate on Refugees and Asylum Seekers*.⁴²

Making sure refugees have early and intensive on-arrival services is the best way to ensure they are able to manoeuvre their way through an alien and often confronting new society. Early days are difficult for refugees. They come with little or no financial resources, their skills are often not recognised, and they will usually have language difficulties. These early challenges are reflected in higher levels of unemployment and concentration in low paid jobs, often roles that others do not want.

But their situation steadily and rapidly improves. Professor Graeme Hugo, ARC Australian Professorial Fellow, describes their contribution:

- Refugees are younger and have higher fertility levels than the Australian population as a whole.
- They are more likely than other groups to spend their entire life and raise their families in Australia.
- Refugee-humanitarian settlers are increasingly settling in regional Australia.
- Humanitarian settlers place a high store on education for their children. 48% of second generation Australian born people have post-school qualifications. For the total refugee-humanitarian groups, the percentage is much higher at 59%, with some refugee groups showing remarkably high levels of post-school qualifications, such as Estonia 65%, Latvia 65%, Slovakia 65%, Sri Lanka 61%.
- Humanitarian settlers are more likely to demonstrate entrepreneurial and risk-taking attributes and have a higher incidence of owning their own businesses than other migrant groups.
- The second generation of [humanitarian settlers] have a much higher level of labour force engagement than the first generation and in many cases the level is higher than for other second generation Australians.

Not surprisingly, refugees in their early years are 'takers' of Australian generosity. But year by year they increasingly become great 'givers'. They pay back manyfold the generosity they initially receive, contributing to Australia out of all proportion to their number. The swift transition of refugees to participating members of the Australian community is the greatest measure of success of our resettlement programs. There are three key building blocks which make all the difference —

Telling their stories: Imogen Bailey³⁸

The political nightmare that surrounds this issue is dark and murky and for me a disgusting reflection of what politics is all about today. It is political opportunism of the worst kind.

So I signed on the dotted line to be a part of this documentary and felt good about the fact that I was about to embark on not only a journey of education, but also one of the best kinds —firsthand experience.

In retrospect, did I really know what I was getting myself into? No, absolutely not. I knew this trip would be confronting and I knew it would be scary. What I couldn't prepare for was the emotional rollercoaster I was to experience (during and after the trip).

From men with guns, to tiny helpless babies who could be held in the palm of a man's hand, I was confronted and shocked at all points of my refugee journey. I couldn't help but wonder if Tony Abbott would feel differently about these issues if he was on the ground in Somalia and held a starving child in the palm of his hand? Figuratively speaking, he already does, as does Julia Gillard.

So, it makes you wonder how they would feel holding that baby, looking into the eyes of his mother while a translator explained that this tiny helpless child, smaller than what we would call premature, is actually 18 months old, his size due to severe malnutrition.

How would Julia feel when told that if that baby doesn't improve by a certain point his nutrition supplements will have to be cut off, simply because there isn't enough aid to go around? And what about the rest of us?

Bible passages

Mary anoints Jesus with perfume

John 12.3–8

Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me".



Mary washing Jesus feet: artist unknown

Notes

Central to this text is the fact that Mary has chosen to anoint Jesus now, rather than wait until after his death. By anointing him now, as opposed to after he's been put to death, Mary is giving her best (quite literally, the most expensive thing that she owns) to the living Jesus. The real waste would have been to devote her effort and her expensive gift to the dead Jesus.³⁹

Jesus' response to Judas is often used to minimise the importance of the Christian obligation to care for the poor and needy. Yet Jesus' response is a quotation from Deuteronomy 15:11: "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land'". Rather than minimise one's obligation to care for the poor, Jesus here quotes a verse which explicitly commands it.

Francis Moloney also suggests that Jesus, in stating "the poor you always have with you" is making an explicit link between selfishness (as demonstrated by Judas) and poverty, with the former being a direct cause of the latter.⁴⁰

A warning against hospitality to idolaters

Sirach 11.29-34

Do not invite everyone into your home, for many are the tricks of the crafty. Like a decoy partridge in a cage, so is the mind of the proud, and like spies they observe your weakness; for they lie in wait, turning good into evil, and to worthy actions they attach blame. From a spark many coals are kindled, and a sinner lies in wait to shed blood. Beware of scoundrels, for they devise evil, and they may ruin your reputation for ever. Receive strangers into your home and they will stir up trouble for you, and will make you a stranger to your own family.

The philosophy that underpinned the *Bill of Rights* in time also shaped the *Declaration of Independence* in the American colonies and led in part to the French Revolution and France's *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of Citizens*.

The UDHR offers an almost universally recognised secular basis for asserting the fundamental equality of all human beings. Universal human rights only arise from the notion that all human beings are of equal worth. Christians and Jews would recognise today that this idea is expressed in the creation story related in Genesis 1. However people outside the church keen to find non-theological bases for universal human rights often cite liberalism's pursuit of individualist concerns, or the right of people to pursue their own desires independent of the interference of others.

Telling their stories: Jean Bosco Munizikintore¹¹

As a young child, Jean Bosco Munizikintore dreamed of becoming a singer. He still enjoys singing and fondly remembers his childhood in Burundi, singing at church with his parents and six siblings.

"I like to sing, traditional songs from my country. I was really good in my country. I sang at church."

Sadly, Jean's dream would be frustrated by political unrest in his country. In the early 1990s, just as Burundi was beginning to rebuild after decades of civil war between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, violent conflict erupted once again following the assassination of the nation's Hutu president. In the ensuing years, the conflict would claim hundreds of thousands of lives.

"Politics in my country were not good. We have different ethnicity, some people wanted to represent and others didn't want them to."

In a desperate bid to survive, 20-year-old Jean fled to neighbouring Tanzania in 1996, leaving his entire family behind.

"I left my country by myself. I tried to find my family at the refugee camp, but nothing."

Jean found sanctuary in a Tanzanian refugee camp, which would become his home for the next nine years. As hopes of being reunited with his family faded, he attempted to make the best of his tragic situation. Having witnessed first-hand the devastating affects of war on children, Jean was motivated to use his time in the camp to help the people around him.

"I wanted to be a nurse ... I very much like to help people."

Specialising in maternal health, Jean eventually became the head of the camp's maternity unit. It was while working in this capacity that Jean met the woman who would become his wife. The couple married in 1997 and had two children.

Following the birth of his son and daughter, Jean began the process of seeking resettlement in a third country. The family arrived in Australia in 2005. Since his arrival, Jean has spent many hours assisting other members of the Burundian community to settle successfully in Australia. He has served as the cultural coordinator for the Burundian community in Sydney since 2006.

"As soon as I came, I decided to help my community ... I wanted to help people from my country that had moved to Australia, to teach them how to live here."

Jean has also undertaken studies at TAFE, completing his Certificate III in Community Services with plans to move on to Certificate IV.

Jean hopes to continue to serve his community, inspired by the generosity shown to him as a newly-arrived refugee.

"I like Australia because of the culture. Here I have freedom ... Here, if you need help, you can ask and someone will help you."

Bible passages

Creation of humans in the image of God

Genesis 1.26-31

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth". So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth



The Creation, God Introducing Adam and Eve, from 'Antiquites Judaïques', c. 1470-76, Jean Fouquet, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France

and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth". God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food". And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Notes

The word used in verse 26 and which is translated here as 'humankind' is *ha'adam* which can mean a proper name (Adam), a male human being, or humanity. Yet many translations offer only 'man' despite v27 going on to say "male and female he created them". This strongly suggests that the best translation is 'humanity' which comprises both females and males.

Amadi Ahiamadu addresses the challenge of the command to subdue the earth and have dominion over it, noting that the command historically was used to justify colonialism and the quest for resources undertaken so eagerly by western empires. It is perhaps no coincidence that many of the world's refugees have come from former colonies and are now seeking refuge in the former imperial powers.¹²

The Body of Christ

1Cor 12.12-26

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body", that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you", nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you". On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Notes

This passage comes in the context of Paul's reprimand of the Corinthian church for failing to show Eucharistic hospitality. Baptism and Eucharist are sacraments of unity and yet the Corinthians effectively were excluding some believers on the basis of their poverty. In addition they were applying a hierarchy of spiritual gifts to define who was a 'real' Christian. Paul is warning the church that there is no place for hierarchy and exclusion, but that every member of the body is essential, and often the more embarrassed we are by a body part, the more essential it turns out to be.

In this passage Paul discards any distinctions on the basis of being Jew or Gentile, slave or free. Elsewhere he also disregards distinction on the basis of sex (Galatians 3.28) and in the case of barbarians and Scythians (Colossians 3.11). Again the emphasis here is on the function of the Eucharist for creating unity not division.

Session five

The limits of generosity: balancing self and others

Background: The numbers game and how many refugees can Australia absorb?

Push v pull: The morality of offshore processing³⁷

There is a bitter irony to the idea that sending asylum seekers to Malaysia or to the desert hellhole of Nauru is a "moral obligation". That is not to dismiss the moral urgency behind calls to do so. Seeing footage of children drowning or hearing of body counts in the dozens is horrific. It has led many people who genuinely support humane refugee policy to question their position — to wonder whether any alternative is better than the current situation. Understandable as those doubts are, the argument that we must take strong deterrent action to save lives, no matter the human cost, is fundamentally problematic and ethically flawed.

The ethical argument for offshore processing assumes it will be a successful deterrent. That is far from proven. It is true that there has been a recent spike in boat arrivals. Nonetheless, there is a broad consensus amongst scholars and refugee organisations that so called "push factors" are far more important than "pull factors" in explaining refugee movements. The current debate has ignored the relatively low deterrent value of our domestic policy. But in fact it is not surprising. The whole logic of deterrence involves making a particular option so unbearable that the alternative becomes more desirable. For an individual fleeing persecution — an individual ready to risk their life at sea — it is doubtful that any Australian processing scheme will be the "most unbearable" option. If it was, that would constitute the strongest moral condemnation of this country possible. This logic applies particularly in the case of offshore processing in Nauru, which is most likely to lead to eventual resettlement. In fact, almost all asylum seekers held on Nauru under the "Pacific Solution" were resettled in Australia or New Zealand, or have returned voluntarily.

However, let's assume that offshore processing does work as a deterrent. The evidence on "pull factors" is not unequivocal and simply saying "it does not work" avoids grappling with the harder moral questions currently being debated. Working from that assumption, the ethics of offshore processing must depend on how it affects two groups of asylum seekers: those who will come anyway, and those who will be successfully deterred.

One of the major concerns voiced by those who advocate for tighter border control in Australia is the number of refugees we can accept. With a global refugee population of more than 10.5 million, and with countries such as Syria generating significant new refugee populations in 2013, Australians are rightly concerned about how hospitable we are expected to be. For this reason it is important to consider the statistics regarding refugee and asylum seeker populations in Australia. Are we realistically facing the prospect of thousands of boats heading to our shores?

UNHCR statistics for 2012 estimate that out of a total global population of 11, 426, 183 refugees and asylum seekers Australia is host to 41, 134 or 0.36%. 1.34 people out of every 1000 in Australia is a refugee, compared with 1 in every 208 persons in Canada and 1 in 101 persons in Sweden which is now the largest host country among developed nations. Worldwide, Pakistan is host to a population of concern of 2.445 million people, including more than 1.6 million refugees and asylum seekers.

To express these figures economically, Australia hosts 0.7 refugees per US \$1 of Gross Domestic Product (Purchasing Power Parity) per capita. By comparison Germany hosts 15.31 refugees per \$1 of GDP (PPP) per capita and Pakistan hosts 550.45 refugees per \$1 of GDP (PPP) per capita. This statistic reflects both the number of refugees in Pakistan and its relatively vulnerable economic position. The higher this figure is, the higher the relative contribution and effort is being made by a host country in relation to its national economy. More than half the world's refugees are hosted in countries where the GDP (PPP) per capita is less than US \$5.

Developing countries host four-fifths of the global refugee population. UNHCR statistics again indicate that between 75% and 93% (depending on the region) of refugees remain within their region of origin, often moving only to neighbouring countries.



Listening

Redemption Song – Bob Marley

<http://playingforchange.com/episodes/40/>

How long shall they kill our prophets,
While we stand aside and look?
Yes, some say it's just a part of it:
We've got to fulfil the book.
Won't you have to sing these songs of freedom? –
'Cause all I ever had: redemption songs –
All I ever had: redemption songs:
These songs of freedom, songs of freedom.

Praying

Post-Election Day

Walter Brueggeman³⁶

You creator God
who has ordered us
in families and communities,
in clans and tribes,
in states and nations.

You creator God
who enacts your governance
in ways overt and
in ways hidden.
You exercise your will for
peace and for justice and for freedom.

We give you thanks for the peaceable order of
our nation and for the chance of choosing —
all the manipulative money notwithstanding.

We pray now for new governance
that your will and purpose may prevail,
that our leaders may have a sense
of justice and goodness,
that we as citizens may care about the
public face of your purpose.

We pray in the name of Jesus who was executed
by the authorities.
Amen.

Going deeper: further reading on the church and the state

Bullimore, Matthew. (2009) "The politics of resurrection: Responding to Carl Schmitt on law and sovereignty", *Theology* 112, pp. 425–434.

Burke, Anthony. (2008) *Fear of Security: Australia's Invasion Anxiety*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Excerpt available at <http://worldthoughtworldpolitics.wordpress.com/fear-of%C2%A0security/>

Cavanaugh, William T. (2002) "The Body of Christ: The Eucharist and Politics", *Word and World* 22(2), pp. 170-177. http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1066&context=william_cavanaugh

Discussion questions

1. Genesis 1 frequently raises the question of gender, especially in light of Genesis 2 where the woman is created from the man's rib. While this conversation is important it can also divert our attention away from thinking about what it means to be created in God's image and likeness. What does the diversity of humanity say about God? Which parts of the human being do you think reflect or allude to divinity? Which parts do not?
2. How might the act of labeling people as asylum seekers, boat people or illegal immigrants conceal their humanity? What words could be used instead to describe these people in ways that might emphasise both their humanity and their resemblance to God, the creator?
3. Paul wants to stress to the Corinthians that all the members of their community are important, even suggesting that "the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (v 22). Suggest some ways in which the weaker members of Australian society are indispensable to our community.
4. Multiculturalism is still a hotly debated subject in Australia. How do you think multiculturalism has benefited the country? How do you think it has made life more difficult?

Other biblical texts: Deuteronomy 10.17-19 (God's compassion for the poor); Psalm 146.6-9 (God's faithfulness to those in need).

Casting the net: theological and other resources for exploring the questions

Thinking

From Daniel D. Groody, *"Imago Dei: Crossing The Problem–Person Divide"*.¹³

One of the initial challenges in the immigration debate deals with language. A great divide exists between the problem of migration and migrating people, between those who are labeled and their labelers, between the political and social identities of migrants and refugees and their human and spiritual identities.

Scholars have recently attended to the categorization of the forcibly displaced. Terms like *refugee*, *migrant*, *forced migrant*, *immigrant*, *undocumented*, *internally displaced person* and *alien* are some of the most common ... The problem is that these labels are largely political, legal, and social constructions. As Roger Zetter notes, "Far from clarifying an identity, the label conveys, instead, an extremely complex set of values, and judgments which are more than just definitional". Although labeling may be an inescapable part of policy-making and its language, the difficulty arises when migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers are identified principally and primarily in terms of their political status rather than their human identity. The implications involve more than semantics.

Labels often generate asymmetrical relationships, leaving migrants and refugees vulnerable to control, manipulation and exploitation. Identifying immigrants in terms of political descriptors can unintentionally create new forms of psychological colonization. Referring to the problem of cultural labels, Virgilio Elizondo notes:

The most injurious crime of the conquest of Latin America, and there were many horrible things about it, was that the white European conquistadores imposed a deep sense of shame of being an indio, mestizo, mulatto.... Many today still experience shame regarding their skin color, their way of life, their way of being, their way of dress, their way of speaking, and their ways of worship. Such rejection brands the soul, in a way worse and more permanent than a branding of the master's mark with a hot iron on the face.



From the Conquest to 1930 (detail: conquistadors attack the Aztecs). 1929-30. Fresco. Palacio Nacional, Mexico City.

... In the book of Genesis we are introduced to a central truth that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6; 1 Cor 11:7; Jas 3:9). This is not just another label but a way of speaking profoundly about human nature. Defining all human beings in terms of *imago Dei* provides a very different starting point for the discourse on migration and creates a very different trajectory for the discussion. *Imago Dei* names the personal and relational nature of human existence and the mystery that human life cannot be understood apart from of the mystery of God. Lisa Sowle Cahill notes that the image of God is “the primary Christian category or symbol of interpretation of personal value”. “[This] symbol,” Mary Catherine Hilker adds, “grounds further claims to human rights” and “gives rise to justice”. One reason why it is better to speak in terms of irregular migration rather than “illegal aliens” is that the word alien is dehumanizing and obfuscates the *imago Dei* in those who are forcibly uprooted.

... *Imago Dei* is a two-edged sword that positively functions as an affirmation of the value and worth of every person, and evaluates and challenges any tendencies to dominate or oppress the poor and needy, or degrade them through various manifestations of racism, nativism, and xenophobia. The expulsion from Eden of Adam and Eve, the original *imagines Dei*, and their border-crossing into the land beyond, names the human propensity to move toward a state of sin and disorder (Gen 3:1-13). Sin disfigures the *imago Dei*, resulting in a fallen world that creates discord in relationships. The territory into which the Prodigal Son migrates and squanders all his worldly wealth (Lk 15:11-32) symbolizes this barren terrain; it is a place that moves people away from the original creative design into a place of estrangement from God, others, and themselves.

Seeing

The many faces of Jesus

<https://lh5.googleusercontent.com/-yCC96o7RHDM/T-jMh-3pxel/AAAAAAAARIY/z0CjFyL1cj0/ManyFacesOfJesus.jpg>



Many Faces Of Jesus

Visit a website such as the one above and look at the many faces of Jesus which have been collected from centuries of artistic impressions. Think about the images which attract you and those which don't. Think about what it is you are responding to in each case.

Between the Devil and The Deep Blue Sea

www.deepblueseafilm.com

An Australian documentary about 250 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.

Joining

Refugee Council of Australia

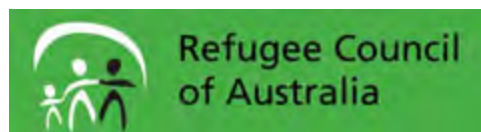
www.refugeecouncil.org.au

This is the national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who support them.

The Romero Centre

www.mercyfamilyservices.org.au/romero-centre

A Brisbane-based centre for the support and welcome of refugees, former detainees and Temporary Protection Visa holders and their families.



Listening/singing

Australian Hymn Book, Together in Song No 521 (Author William H. Turton):

Lord Christ, at your first Eucharist you prayed
that all your church might be forever one;
may at each Eucharist this prayer be made
with longing heart and soul, “Your will be done”.
O may we all one bread, one body be,
through this blest sacrament of unity.

In fact, civil society is not the natural source of the state, but both society and state are enacted artificially “from above”. The spontaneous life of traditional social groups from below tends to be de-legitimated because such groups tend not to be representative, that is, based in consensus. Interests from below will always need to be channelled through the state to achieve legitimacy, as only the state can gather the diversity of interests into a transcendent unity. ... Where there is a unitary simple space, pluralism of ends will always be a threat. To solve this threat, the demand will always be to absorb the many into the one. In the absence of shared ends, devotion to the state itself as the end in itself becomes ever more urgent. The result is not true pluralism but an ever-increasing directness of relationship between the individual and the state as the foundation of social interaction ...

At the same time, there is a gradual opening of the sphere of participation to the masses of people of whom the state had previously taken only sporadic notice. The rise of rights language goes hand in hand with the rise of the nation-state, because political and civil rights name both the freeing of the individual from traditional types of community and the establishment of regular relations of power between the individual and the state. Marx was wrong to dismiss rights as a mere ruse to protect the gains of the bourgeois classes. Individual rights do, nevertheless, greatly expand the scope of the state because political and civil rights establish binding relationships between the nation-state and those who look to it to vindicate their claims. The nation-state thus becomes something of a central, bureaucratic clearinghouse in which social claims are contested. The nation-state is fully realized when sacrifice on behalf of the nation is combined with claims made on the state on the basis of rights.

Alasdair MacIntyre alludes to this dual aspect of the nation-state in the following memorable quote:

The modern nation-state, in whatever guise, is a dangerous and unmanageable institution, presenting itself on the one hand as a bureaucratic supplier of goods and services, which is always about to, but never actually does, give its clients value for money, and on the other as a repository of sacred values, which from time to time invites one to lay down one's life on its behalf ... [I]t is like being asked to die for the telephone company.³⁵

The problem, as MacIntyre notes, is that the nation-state presents itself as so much more; namely, as the keeper of the common good and repository of sacred values that demands sacrifice on its behalf. The longing for genuine communion that Christians recognize at the heart of any truly common life is transferred onto the nation-state. Civic virtue and the goods of common life do not simply disappear; as Augustine saw, the earthly city flourishes by producing a distorted image of the heavenly city. The nation-state is a simulacrum of common life, where false order is parasitical on true order. In a bureaucratic order whose main function is to adjudicate struggles for power between various factions, a sense of unity is produced by the only means possible: sacrifice to false gods in war. The nation-state may be understood theologically as a kind of parody of the Church, meant to save us from division.

The urgent task of the Church, then, is to demystify the nation-state and to treat it like the telephone company. At its best, the nation-state may provide goods and services that contribute to a certain limited order—mail delivery is a positive good. The state is not the keeper of the common good, however, and we need to adjust our expectations accordingly. The Church must break its imagination out of captivity to the nation-state. The Church must constitute itself as an alternative social space, and not simply rely on the nation-state to be its social presence. The Church needs, at every opportunity, to “complexify” space, that is, to promote the creation of spaces in which alternative economies and authorities flourish.

Seeing

The Refugee Art Project

<http://therefugeeartproject.com/home/>

The contributors to this project are a diverse group of men, women and children, who come from such places as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Iran, the Kurdish regions of the Middle East, Nigeria and Indonesia. Whilst the work showcases a diverse range of styles, mediums and approaches, the exhibitions are unified by the common themes of trauma, exile, hope, and endurance that have marked the lives of refugees.



Joining

BRASS network (Brisbane Refugee & Asylum Seeker Support Network)

www.brassnetwork.org

Brisbane Refugee & Asylum Seeker Support Network includes representatives from many organizations working in the sector in Brisbane and offers plenty of opportunity for individuals to get involved.



Rembrandt - Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem

Discussion questions

- 1. Jeremiah's warnings about good leadership were made to a king who was supposedly anointed by God. Accordingly, the king's legitimacy was to be judged according to God's laws. How relevant should God's law be to a civil government such as Australia's parliament? Is there any basis for holding our government to a Christian standard?
- 2. Jeremiah also suggests that when a king is unjust and fails to uphold God's law, he will fall and bring the city with him (cf Jeremiah 22.8-9). Australia has come under considerable criticism from the international community for some of its policies concerning refugees and asylum seekers. What responsibility or ownership do you feel for our refugee policies? How important are they to you when you are voting for a government? What other issues play into your choices?
- 3. Paul's recommendation to be subject to civil authority seems at first to be a blanket endorsement of the authority of governments; even as he makes it clear that government is the servant of God. How far would you go in obeying the government? What sort of governmental actions would move you to civil disobedience, such as that advocated by Mahatma Ghandi or Martin Luther King Jr?
- 4. Politicians often cite the separation of church and state to suggest that churches have no right to comment on the actions of governments, especially when that comment is critical. Can you think of situations (historical or imagined) where it was/would be appropriate for churches to engage in public and political debate?

Other biblical texts: Isaiah 1.10–17 (The warning to the rulers of Jerusalem); Matthew 22.15–22 (Jesus' teaching on paying taxes); 1 Peter 2.13–17 (Fear God and honour the emperor).

Casting the net: theological and other resources for exploring the questions

Thinking

From William T. Cavanaugh, *“Killing for the telephone company: why the nation-state is not the keeper of the common good”*.³⁴

Prior to the rise of the state, central authority was weak and associations strong. Rights, honours, immunities, and responsibilities were attached to communities, and not to individuals. The family, the village, the church, the guild, and the university were held to precede the individual both in origin and in right. Associations did not depend upon royal authority for recognition. Such associations could, of course, be oppressive, and often were. Central authority, where it existed, was severely limited in its ability to override local custom and law. The most significant law was no positive law given by a legislator but the customs and rules that provided the inner order of associations.

The state grew by absorbing the rights and responsibilities of this plurality of social groups. The state came to be seen as the sole source of law, and as the guarantor of property and inheritance rights. The state took over many of the civil functions formerly belonging to the church, such as the system of ecclesiastical courts. The state claimed a monopoly on the means of coercion and facilitated the enclosure of common lands. The state claimed that the lesser association itself was, in effect, a creation of the state. In all places, war was the principal means by which the growth of the state advanced. Nisbet writes, “If there is any single origin of the institutional State, it is in the circumstances and relationships of war. The connection between kinship and family, between religion and Church, is no closer than that between war and the State in history.” War requires a direct disciplinary relationship between the individual and the state, and so has served as a powerful solvent of the loyalties of individuals to social groups other than the state.

Praying

You may like to conclude your study time together by praying one or both of these prayers.

Eternal Father, you said, “Let us make humankind in our image and likeness”. Thus, you were willing to share with us your Own greatness. You gave us the intellect to share your truth. You gave us the wisdom to share your goodness. And you gave us the free will to love that which is true and just. Why did you dignify us? It was because you looked upon us and fell in love with us. It was love which first prompted you to create us; and it was love which caused you to share with us your truth and goodness. Yet your heart must break when you see us turn against you. You must weep when you see us abusing our intellect in pursuit of that which is false. You must cry with pain when we distort our wisdom in order to justify evil. But you never desert us. Out of the same love that caused you to create us, you have now sent your only Son to save us. He is your perfect image and likeness, and so through Him we can be restored to your image and likeness (Saint Catherine of Siena, 1347–1380).

Kikuyu Peace Prayer

Praise ye Lord,
Peace be with us.

Say that the elders may have wisdom and speak with one voice.
Peace be with us.

Say that the country may have tranquility.
Peace be with us.

And the people may continue to increase.
Peace be with us.

Say that the people and the flock and the herds
may prosper and be free from illness.
Peace be with us.

Say that the fields may bear much fruit
and the land may continue to be fertile.
Peace be with us.

May peace reign over earth,
May the gourd cup agree with vessel.
Peace be with us.

May their heads agree and every ill word be driven out
Into the wilderness, into the virgin forest.

<http://www.godprayers.org/Kikuyu-Peace-Prayer.htm>

Going deeper: further reading on human rights

Full text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

Catt, The Very Reverend Dr Peter (2013) “Asylum seeker “tracking” debate about political point scoring”, media release from the Chair, Anglican Church Southern Queensland Social Responsibilities Committee, on the language of discussions about refugees and asylum seekers (2 March).
<http://anglicanchurchsq.org.au/asylum>

Groody, Daniel D. (2009) “Crossing the divide: Foundations of a theology of migration and refugees”, *Theological Studies*, Sept. <http://www3.nd.edu/~dgroody/Published%20Works/Journal%20Articles/files/TSSeptember09Groody.pdf>

Perry, Michael (1998) *The Idea of Human Rights: Four Enquiries*. (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press).

Newlands, George (2006) *Christ and Human Rights*. (Oxford: Ashgate Publishing Group).

Session three

People on the move: the experience of exile

Background: Stories and statistics on homelessness and forced migration and the hope of return.



Many women and children have been living in the grounds of the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Brazzaville 2012 © Laudes Martial Mbon/IRIN



Since October 2009 more than 100,000 people from Democratic Republic of Congo's Equateur province fled clashes to seek sanctuary in Likouala province, across the Ubangui river in the Republic of Congo © Laudes Martial Mbon/IRIN

Telling their stories: Yves¹⁴

I am refugee from Democratic Rep of Congo. I fled my country when I was still young in January 2000, after my parents were assassinated. They were wrongly accused of spying and were killed by rebel soldiers. My Father's tribe is Mushi. Because of my father's tribe, my situation was dangerous. Gangs kept coming to our house to terrorise, rape and kill ...

Many of our people were killed because of ethnic and tribal hatred from those days. The soldiers started to attack our home again, then they killed my grandfather. From that day I was in great fear because they were looking for me. I left the house and hid myself in the bush. I could not even attend grandfather's burial ceremony because I was in danger. That day I start running without know where I am heading to, on my way I was just crossing the dead bodies of peoples, and that show me that anytime I will die too. After couple of months of walking and hunger, fortunately, with the help of the almighty God, some well-wishers assisted me, and I was carried like goods for sale in a truck which was carrying goods from Kenya to Bukavu. He took me up to the UNHCR officer Nairobi. I spent three days waiting outside. Then UNHCR took me to Kakuma refugee camp where I lived for 10 years under a shelter of plastic sheeting ...

Here people were living without hope of life because you cannot go back home, I could not go anywhere — don't have homeland, my parents are dead, our house burnt down, the same people who burned our compound, and did the raping are still there (even one among them was our neighbour). I was a victim of a bad politics, tribalism in a country where there is no respect of the human life, freedom of expression, social justice and democracy. Up to now, I still suffer psychologically from trauma and losses of both parents and members of my family and other innocent people ...

My first reflection is that Australia is a place of peace. We arrived here in Wodonga in March 2009. Really we were welcomed with every help for the start for our new life. Because as I was in refugee camp for that long period without education so when I have arrived here I join the English class at community college in level three for six month, and in the same year I started my Certificate Three in logistic at TAFE and I got my truck license and certificate. After that I did Certificate Four in Disability and Home and Community Care at TAFE. After that I went to Latrobe University doing University Bridging program for my preparation for Uni, and now I am heading to finish my Diploma in community services and welfare at TAFE, and doing my first placement at city council. When I finish this course I will go and finish my university in social work.

We pray for help for our brother and sisters families who are remaining and suffering in Kakuma refugee camp. When I remember about others still suffering there, I start crying in my heart, and tears come in my eyes.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees year books offer detailed statistics of the global population of forced migrants, displaced persons and populations of concern.¹⁵ The 2012 *Yearbook* cites a total "population of concern" of 35.8 million people, including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, returned refugees and returned internally displaced persons.

Therefore thus says the Lord concerning King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah: They shall not lament for him, saying, "Alas, my brother!" or "Alas, sister!". They shall not lament for him, saying, "Alas, lord!" or "Alas, his majesty!". With the burial of a donkey he shall be buried — dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

Notes

This passage is a lament on the failure of the monarchy in Jerusalem. The prophet's judgment of King Jehoiakim's reign is that he will die dishonoured, with no proper funeral and no real grief on the part of the people. The accusation against Jehoiakim is that he neglected justice and righteousness in the pursuit of his own self-aggrandisement, thereby violating the heart of what it means to be a king.

Verses 15–16 are particularly sharp: "Are you a king because you compete in cedar?". Is it to be visible luxury and conspicuous power that are the hallmarks of legitimate social power? Or is it care of the poor and needy? Sadly the outcome of Jehoiakim's neglect of kingly responsibility will be not only his own ignoble death, but the fall of the city itself.²⁹ There is some disagreement among scholars as to Jehoiakim's final fate: did he indeed die outside the city gates and without a proper burial, while being taken into exile a second time? Or did he die a natural death and receive an honourable burial?³⁰

Being subject to earthly government

Romans 13.1-7

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due to them — taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due.



St Sylvester of Rome meeting Emperor Constantine (The Donation of Constantine)

Notes

Paul's instructions about the duty of Christians to be subject to civil authorities are thought by some to be an addition to the original text of the Letter to the Romans.³¹ The passage seems to interrupt the flow of Paul's theme, and often contradicts what Paul has to say previously about the persecution of believers by secular authorities (Rom 8.36) and elsewhere when he argues that believers are citizens of heaven (Phil 3.20) and that all rulers and authorities are passing away (I Cor 12.24). Still these arguments remain controversial and are by no means universally accepted.

It may be that there was such a climate of civil unrest in Rome in the 50s CE that Paul was advocating prudence to the local Christian community, in order to avoid trouble with a government already suspicious of them. This is in keeping with Paul's overall presentation of Christian life as "involving a delicate balance between the realities of the present age and the demands of the new".³²

This passage does not justify the sins of the state but offers a limited endorsement of the state until Christ should return.³³ It is a commendation to the Christian community to honour the legitimate claims of the state upon them, including the right to respect and resources, when the state is operating in a fair and just manner.

“Behavioural protocols” for asylum seekers “fear-mongering”²⁸

A senior Anglican figure has accused Australian politicians of wielding words like “weapons” in the asylum-seeker debate.

The Very Reverend Dr Peter Catt, a member of the recently-formed National Council of Churches of Australia asylum-seeker taskforce, accused Opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison of “pure fear-mongering” after he demanded a range of “behavioural protocols” for asylum seekers.

Mr Morrison caused a furore earlier in the week when, among a raft of measures, he called for residents to be notified when an asylum-seeker on a bridging visa moved into the neighbourhood.

On Friday Fairfax revealed people on bridging visas were 45 times less likely to be charged with a crime than members of the general public. But Opposition Leader Tony Abbott defended Mr Morrison, saying asylum seekers who tried to get here by boat did so “illegally”.

Dr Catt said words like “illegal” and queue jumper” to describe asylum-seekers had a dehumanising effect.

“Asylum seekers are people seeking refuge, not criminals in hiding,” Dr Catt said in his capacity as chair of the Brisbane Anglican Diocese Social Responsibilities Committee. “Language is a very powerful tool and can become a very powerful weapon and for a long time we’ve been concerned with some of the language that’s used in the asylum seeker debate.”

Dr Catt revealed the NCCA taskforce would be lobbying politicians up until the election on this issue of language. He said improving community and public discourse on the issue would be the taskforce’s main focus.

“There are many issues that trouble us — children in custody, the time people spend in detention — but at the bottom line we see the problem of language,” he said. “If the language issue isn’t addressed, if people don’t start rehumanising refugees and asylum seekers then the other issues will never get addressed.”

Dr Catt said he was not advocating for an open-door refugee policy, acknowledging the “huge” number of people seeking asylum globally. But he urged Australian politicians to adopt a more “compassionate and nuanced” response to the issue.

The parliamentary debate in June last year after at least 100 asylum seekers died at sea should be the standard, he said.

“That tragedy really touched on hearts and I think what happens when some of the other language starts getting used our hearts start to get disengaged,” he said.

“And in the end if we start dehumanising any group of people we will start dehumanising other groups of people and eventually ourselves.

“That’s my deepest concern — what are we going to do to ourselves if we keep using this language?”



Jeremiah by Michelangelo: Sistine Chapel 1545

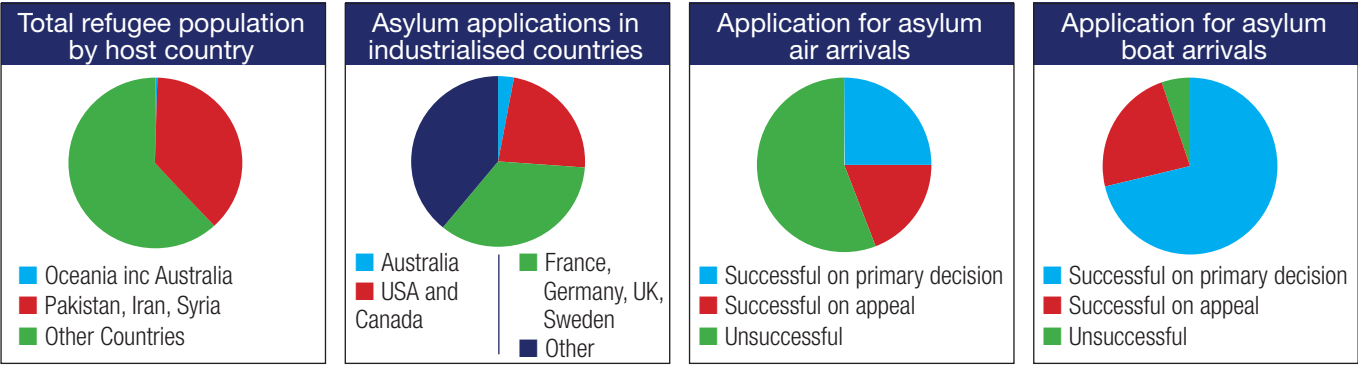
Bible passages

Judgment on corrupt governments

Jeremiah 22.13-19

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbours work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; who says, “I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms”, and who cuts out windows for it, panelling it with cedar, and painting it with vermillion. Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord. But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practising oppression and violence.

In Oceania there were 11,873 claims for asylum pending while most claims were lodged in South Africa (230 442) then Germany (85560).



The last mile¹⁶

The most commonly expressed motivation to live again in South Sudan arises from a feeling that there is a need, obligation or opportunity to assist the new country. While conflict is often associated with a ‘brain drain’, our participants show the potential for South Sudan to enjoy a ‘brain reclaim’ from the diaspora. For example, a doctor who has been practising in Australia for several years explained:

I believe we need to go back and serve our people, develop the country and help our country ... It's my home and I feel responsible towards South Sudanese. I feel sense of helping other especially South Sudanese. I believe God give us opportunities to help other and for that I would want to go and help.

A participant in Western Australia, who had already visited South Sudan to assess options, expressed something similar:

I feel my contribution to the development of South Sudan is needed more than here. I feel that the skills or the education that I have acquired here can be utilised better in South Sudan. My first visit was to assess the situation — whether it is safe to live there, what do I need if I want to go back and what would I contribute? I did find out that life is not easy in South Sudan, but one can sacrifice time and contribute, even if I get nothing very much provided, I am helping my people.

Another participant in Western Australia suggested his social contribution to Australia could be better directed towards South Sudan’s development:

In regarding to South Sudan, because I have done something here for Australia, I have worked, paid taxes and I think South Sudan needs people to help in the development, I feel I should go and help.

From the ACT:

Yes I will go to [South Sudan] because that is where I do feel at home and I think that is where I would help most.

Bible passages

A song of exiled people

Psalms 137

By the rivers of Babylon — there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”



By The Rivers Of Babylon - Psalm 137
Michele Myers - Acrylics on Watercolour Paper



By the Rivers of Babylon by Hung Liu. This painting depicts war refugees sitting by a river. 2000 Image courtesy of Hung Liu

Notes

This psalm emerged from the exiled community in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. It “reflects the need of those who have been forcibly removed by the Babylonian imperial policies of relocation and yet who cling to their memory and hope for homecoming with an unshakeable passion”.¹⁷ It is a song of remembering and even a vow not to forget: to remember home, to remember pain, to remember hope.

Many Christians struggle with the venom of the last two verses of the psalm and in liturgical settings these are often omitted altogether. But for those of us who have never been exiled, who have never been oppressed, these verses give us a literary glimpse into the agony of that reality. To lay that grief and pain before God *and to leave it there* requires a depth of faith that comfortable Christians may never have had to call upon. It certainly prevents us from romanticising or spiritualising the experience of exile.

Anglican priest and liturgist Jim Cotter paraphrases the psalm’s cry to God like this:

We who have lost so much, hear us.
We who have been so much abused, hear us.
We who now live on the margins, hear us.
*We who are denied our own language, hear us.*¹⁸



Destruction of Jerusalem – relief sculpture from the Arch of Titus

Babylon. They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years.

How could we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,
if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy.

Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!”
O daughter Babylon, you devastator!
Happy shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us!
Happy shall they be who take your little ones
and dash them against the rock!

Session four

Rendering to Caesar: Christians and politics

Background: The politics of border security and sovereignty

Tony Abbott supports tracking asylum seekers living in the community²³

OPPOSITION Leader Tony Abbott said today that he supports the idea of ‘tracking’ asylum seekers in the community as he ramped up demands for tighter control of refugee claimants.

Mr Abbott endorsed Liberal immigration spokesman Scott Morrison’s proposals for asylum seekers on bridging visas to be subjected to “mandatory behaviour protocols”, which would include tracking.

He said asylum seekers were “just disappearing into the community” and claimed the Government no longer had control of the system.

At issue is an Opposition call for police registration of people released from detention centres into the community on bridging visas as they wait to see if they are accepted as refugees.

“At the moment we’ve got a situation that boats are coming in ever greater numbers, our detention centres are overflowing, thousands of people have been released into the community without any supervision and the Government has lost control of the system,” Mr Abbott told reporters in Brisbane.

“The Government has to maintain control of the system. This is a Government which has not only lost control of our borders, it’s lost control of boat people once they get into our country.”

Modern political theory has given rise to the tendency for nations to emphasise the separateness of themselves from other countries and cultures. This can be seen in the dominance of the theme of ‘border security’ in many of the conversations and debates about asylum seekers. In this conversation successive Australian governments have frequently argued that the approach to asylum seekers dictated by international human rights norms is incompatible with the government’s right to exclude.²⁴

As the impact of international human rights becomes more widespread the international community more frequently demands that the human rights of vulnerable populations such as refugees be protected, even to the extent of authorising incursion by international forces into sovereign states.

The humanitarian fallout of internal conflicts in states such as Rwanda and Bosnia led to the creation of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty which in 2001 issued its report, *The Responsibility to Protect*.²⁵ The central theme of the report was that each country is responsible for the protection of its own population from crimes against humanity, and if a state fails in this responsibility the international community has the right and obligation to act in its stead.

Unsurprisingly some nations view this as nothing more than a new form of imperialism, while others consider that appeals to humanitarian values on this scale are a “sweeping overextension”.²⁶ Some commentators have argued that maintaining the integrity of a state’s borders should be a defining characteristic of sovereignty. They argue that states are best able to provide for the individual well-being of their citizens.

Even if one accepts a definition of sovereignty as being the right to exclude or allow entry across one’s borders, or as John Howard once put it, “who comes here and the circumstances in which they will come”,²⁷ it seems that by signing on to international conventions and treaties such as the UN Refugee Convention Australia has willingly self-limited that right in the interest of humanitarian considerations. This is not unlike the “paradigm of restraint and permit” described by Walter Brueggemann in our first study.



One of many informal settlement areas for IDPs in Kabul © Mohammad Popal/IRIN



Sri Lanka, Small groups of migrants are crammed into 46-foot fibreglass boats such as these vessels, while bigger trawlers are used to ferry larger numbers © Lakruwan Wanniarachchi/IRIN



A displaced family stands near a tent in a camp in Diyala Governorate, 90km east of Baghdad © Contributor/IRIN

and reach out to those
who beckon us onward
and upward
beyond our comfort zones ...

+
Teach me to listen,
teach me to pray ...
+
You call me
to be present to the
tears,
and the anguish
as one life
gives way to
bring forth another
whose presence
will demand
change after change ...

+
Teach me to listen,
teach me to pray ...
+
You call me
to be transformed
by the transformation all
around me ...
+
To be present
in the temporary stillness
of this liminal space
and to catch Your whisper
on the wind ...
+
Come Holy Spirit,
help me to
walk this path
+
Teach me to listen,
teach me to pray ...

Going deeper: further reading on exile

Full texts of UNHCR year books are available on the internet

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a02afce6.html>

Statistical data on Australia's asylum seeker populations

http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/asylum/_files/asylum-trends-aus-annual-2011-12.pdf

Weaver, Alain Epp (2003) "On exile: Yoder, Said, and a theology of land and return", *Crosscurrents*, Winter.
<http://www.crosscurrents.org/Weaverwinter2003.htm>

Notes

There is a gap in the history of Israel as recorded in the Hebrew scriptures, which approximately covers the period of the Exile. It has been suggested that it was actually in this period that much of the literature covering Jewish history up to the Exile was composed. In other words the narrative that ends with exile may well begin with exile.¹⁹

There are several understandings of exile in the Hebrew scriptures. Exile may be the deprivation of God's gift of land as a consequence of failure to observe the covenant. Sometimes it is the land itself which rejects the people because they have defiled the land. Or, exile of the people is seen as a forced Sabbath for the land which has been deprived of its rest, and the exile lasts until the land is fully recovered. Exile then is "a necessary hiatus after which life will return to its normal course".²⁰

The experience of exile becomes fertile ground for creativity, and yet it never overcomes the pain and the longing for return. Rather, exile fosters creativity as a way of remembering what has been lost and as a spur to return. Although Jeremiah warns the people that they will be gone for generations (Jer 29.4–7), they hold fast to the idea of their homeland, for the sabbath of sabbaths to pass so they can return.

Discussion questions

1. The psalm asks how an exiled people can sing their songs in a foreign land. Often migrants, particularly forced migrants, are criticised for holding on to their own ways and failing to assimilate. Why do you think refugees and other forced migrants may appear not to better integrate?
2. Have you had any experiences of exile: from a country, from a family, from a culture? If you are comfortable, please share with the group what this experience was like for you. Include both positive and negative responses if you can.
3. In the Hebrew scriptures exile is commonly framed as a judgment against Israel's faithlessness. How do you think this affects the way we understand people who are exiled from their homeland for political or religious reasons?
4. The Jewish people were eventually able to return to Israel and begin again to live into their identity as people of the Covenant, living in the land promised to them by God. Most refugees say that, if it were possible, they would return home tomorrow. How relevant is this to our acceptance of them as refugees?

Other biblical texts: 2 Kings 25 (parallels the story in 2 Chronicles 25); Jeremiah 28.4-9 (The Jewish people in exile); Matthew 2.13-15 (Escape of the holy family into Egypt).

Casting the net: theological and other resources for exploring the questions

Thinking

From Edward Said, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*.²¹

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by something left behind forever.

But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture? We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern period itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement. Modern western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees. In the United States, academic, intellectual and aesthetic thought is what it is today because of refugees from fascism, communism, and other regimes given to the oppression and expulsion of dissidents....

In other ages, exiles had similar cross-cultural and transnational visions, suffered the same frustrations and miseries, performed the same elucidating and critical tasks ... but the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age — with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers — is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigrations.

Against this large, impersonal setting, exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism. On the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish



Women and children sitting at Atme camp near the Turkish border post. Atme, Syria. (Dec 2012) © Jodi Hilton/IRIN



Afghanistan, displaced children are particularly vulnerable to cold-related diseases © Khaled Nahiz/IRIN

and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand; but to think of the exile informing this literature as beatifically humanistic is to banalise its mutilations, the losses it inflicts on those who suffer them, the muteness with which it responds to any attempt to understand it as “good for us”. Is it not true that the views of exile in literature obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irredeemably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death, but without death’s ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography? ...

[E]xiled poets and writers lend dignity to a condition legislated to deny dignity — to deny an identity to people. You must first set aside Joyce and Nabokov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created. You must think of the refugee — peasants with no prospect of ever returning home, armed only with a ration card and an agency number. Paris may be a capital famous for cosmopolitan exiles, but it is also a city where unknown men and women have spent years of miserable loneliness: Vietnamese, Algerians, Cambodians, Lebanese, Senegalese, Peruvians. You must think also of Cairo, Beirut, Madagascar, Bangkok, Mexico City. As you move further from the Atlantic world the awful, forlorn waste increases: the hopelessly large numbers, the compounded misery of “undocumented” people suddenly lost, without a tellable history. To reflect on exiled Muslims from India, or Haitians in America, or Bikinians in Oceania, or Palestinians through the Arab world means that you must leave the modest refuge provided by subjectivity and resort instead to the abstractions of mass politics. Negotiations, wars of national liberation, people bundled out of their homes and prodded, bussed or walked to enclaves in other regions: what do these experiences add up to? Are they not manifestly and almost by design, irrecoverable? ...

Exile is never the state of being satisfied, placid or secure. Exile, in the words of Wallace Stevens, is “a mind of winter” in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable. Perhaps this is another way of saying that a life of exile moves according to a different calendar, and is less seasonal and settled than life at home. Exile is life led outside habitual order. It is nomadic, decentred, contrapuntal; but no sooner does one get accustomed to it than its unsettling force erupts anew.

Seeing

A short video about Iranian artist Shirin Neshat on being an artist in exile

http://www.ted.com/talks/shirin_neshat_art_in_exile.html

Joining

Refugee Welcome Zones

A Refugee Welcome Zone is a Local Government Area which has made a commitment in spirit to welcoming refugees into the community, upholding the human rights of refugees, demonstrating compassion for refugees and enhancing cultural and religious diversity in the community.

The majority of Refugee Welcome Zones have been declared after an initial proposal by a community or church-based organisation that is subsequently supported by an approach from the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). If you would like your local Council or Shire to become a Refugee Welcome Zone, here are some suggested steps:

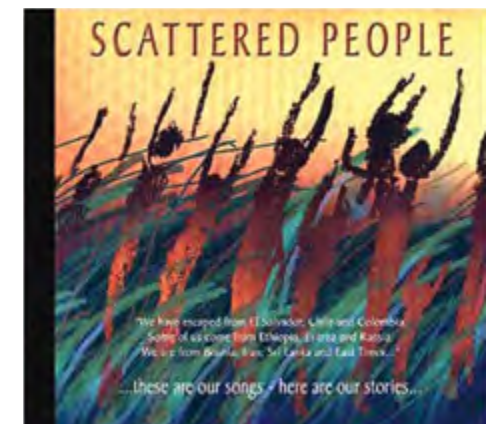
- Write a letter of proposal to your mayor and councillors. It is important to highlight the level of community support for refugees and asylum seekers, the benefits of becoming a Refugee Welcome Zone and opportunities to work with local groups and organisations and support groups. You should also enclose a copy of the Refugee Welcome Zone information sheet for councils. <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/doc/RWZ-Info-LGA.pdf>
- If you work for a local organisation or are part of a community support group which provides assistance to refugees invite your mayor and councillors to visit you. This provides a great opportunity to showcase the work you do.
- Request an opportunity to present the proposal at a council meeting.
- Contact RCOA to let them know about your proposal. They can provide further information and advice and approach your council to support the proposal.

Listening

Scattered People

<http://www.safecom.org.au/scattered.htm>

The Refugee Claimants Choir was created at the Brisbane Refugee Claimants Support Centre (RCSC). It started with refugee claimants sharing their culture by teaching one another the songs of their homeland and then, under the musical direction of Centre volunteers, developed into a choir. RCSC and Lifeline Brisbane worked with refugee claimants to identify generic themes common in their journey. It began with their homeland in peaceful times, the trauma and chaos of war or persecution, their escape to Australia, the difficulties of adjusting to a new environment, the frustration of seeking asylum, and their overwhelming desire for peace and acceptance.



Praying

Prayer and Calling (songs from the edge of exile 7)²²

Sally Coleman

You call me
to stand between
the past,
and a new becoming,
to midwife
new life
through confusion, and pain ...
+
Teach me to listen,
teach me to pray ...
+
You call me
to hold the hands
of those who cling to
what was,



Painting by a Sri Lankan Asylum Seeker