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Refuge Reimagined: Biblical Kinship in Global Politics

Emily Frazier

BOOK REVIEW

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Facing record-breaking displacement, how should individuals, faith communities, sovereign states, and the global community respond? Mark and Luke Glanville address this question by presenting a fresh approach to imagining refuge, anchored in a biblical ethic of kinship. **Refuge Reimagined** aims to bring biblical exegesis together with secular academic inquiry to defend a biblical “call to kinship with the displaced” (p. 22) and describe ways that individual Christians, communities, and even nations can (and should) creatively seek enact creative and radical kinship in response (p. 22).

Though Western Christians have tended to be “sympathetic to the plight of forcibly displaced people” in the past, “certain groups [of Christians] ... now tend to be less sympathetic toward refugees than their fellow citizens” (p. 5). Faced with this paradox, the Glanvilles address “an urgent need for a biblically grounded Christian perspective”

on displacement and how this ethic could be “applied faithfully and creatively” at the scales of church, nation, and world (p. 6). Expounding this argument is a weighty task; as the authors note, “Biblical arguments for compassionate welcome of strangers are often met with rebuttals: But you misunderstand politics,” while “political arguments are often met with different rebuttals: But you misunderstand the Bible” (p. 6).

The expertise needed to tackle these issues is vast, and the Glanville brothers bring an insightful combination of perspectives. Mark Glanville is an Old Testament scholar and former pastor, while Luke Glanville is a scholar of international relations with years of experience theorizing the responsibility of states to care for those inside and out of its borders (p. 7). Together, they have successfully woven their respective areas of proficiency into a cohesive tapestry, bringing together insights from diverse academic lit-

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eratures into a cohesive and visionary argument with radical implications, all the while maintaining an even tone and writing style throughout the work. Despite the sophistication and wide-ranging nature of arguments employed throughout the work, **Refuge Reimagined** is eminently readable. Unlike most academic tomes, the authors have successfully distilled key insights of diverse literatures for a common audience, drawing from fields as wide-ranging as anthropology, biblical ethics and theology, political theory, refugee and migration studies, geography, and beyond.

Refuge Reimagined begins with a powerful introduction, outlining the scope of global displacement and introducing author's approach to the concept of **kinship**, defined as "the ties of commitment that structure our individual identities and our belonging to others" (p. 9). The authors argue that this anthropological concept of kinship resonates with the biblical mandate that God's people "extend kinship to those on the margins" of society (p. 13). The ten chapters are divided into four parts, beginning with three chapters that examine the books of Deuteronomy (Chapter 1); Exodus, Leviticus, Joshua and the "Canaanite destruction texts" (p. 52), Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Jonah, and Job (Chapter 2); and words of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (Chapter 3). These three chapters "retrieve" the biblical ethic of kinship from the Old and New Testaments, arguing that God's vision for human community is one that encompasses the most vulnerable, including "the stranger" (p. 49).

Part 2 starts with Chapter 4, in which the authors address the role of the church in responding to global displacement. First outlining the possibilities of corporate lament, giving, grateful living, cultivation of diverse communities, and advocacy on behalf of the displaced, the authors argue that the global

Christian church plays various roles in alleviating suffering and responding to displacement, each of which can be enacted in some way at the scale of the individual and the local community of worship.

Part 3 (Chapters 5, 6, and 7) grapples with a variety of issues that arise when considering the implementation of biblical ethics at the scale of the nation, including the challenges presented by widespread fears about migration and issues of security and state sovereignty. In each instance, the authors conclude that the biblical ethic of kinship offers a more creative, life-giving, and "better way" forward (p. 168).

Part 4 brings the book's arguments to fruition. Chapter 8 argues that the church should act as a "norm entrepreneur" by setting a high standard for inclusion of the displaced; to illustrate how such work could be possible, the authors draw on the historical example of churches involved in the global abolition movement (p. 204). Chapter 9 outlines a vision for addressing global displacement, in which Western nations would increase their humanitarian aid and resettlement capacity to participate in "opportunity-sharing" as "a matter of justice, of repentance, and restitution for wrongs done to strangers, of restoration of relationship with our global kin" (p. 225).

Ultimately, the authors argue for a tenfold increase in the provision of resettlement slots by Western nations, alongside increased aid for displaced persons, until the need abates. While acknowledging that increased resettlement does not fulfill obligations of care and protection for all those in need, the Glanvilles do argue that resettlement provides Western nations with a tangible enactment of the biblical ethic of kinship as they work to enfold displaced persons into new communities.

Some readers may be inclined to discount the relevance of biblical arguments for addressing the challenges of modern displacement. However, biblical ethics do matter a great deal to many people—religion influences responses to displacement across the globe, as seen in the work of faith communities to “welcome the stranger,” as well as in the proclamations of politicians who invoke certain scriptures to support the exclusion of those seeking refuge.

Refuge Reimagined is a wide-ranging and creative piece of scholarship that will engage academic and lay audiences alike. For those grieved by the tragedy of displacement, this work offers an alternate vision of radical, expansive community beyond the confines of our current system. Perhaps a biblical ethic of kinship may enable “individual Christians and communities” to invite our

national and global communities to “reimagine themselves”—rejecting fear, embracing welcome, and enfolding “refugees as kin” (p. 245).

About the author

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