
Emily Frazier
Refuge Reimagined: Biblical Kinship in Global Politics

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BOOK REVIEW

HISTORY Published 28 April 2022

Facing record-breaking displacement, how should individuals, faith communities, sovereign states, and the global community respond? Mark and Luke Glaville 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 Glavilles 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 Glaville brothers bring an insightful combination of perspectives. Mark Glaville is an Old Testament scholar and former pastor, while Luke Glaville 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 argu-
ment with radical implications, all the while
maintaining an even tone and writing style
throughout the work. Despite the sophistica-
tion and wide-ranging nature of arguments
employed throughout the work, Refuge
Reimagined is eminently readable. Unlike
most academic tomes, the authors have suc-
cessfully distilled key insights of diverse lit-
eratures 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 pow-
erful introduction, outlining the scope
of global displacement and introducing
author’s approach to the concept of kin-
ship, 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, begin-
ning with three chapters that examine the
books of Deuteronomy (Chapter 1); Exodus,
Leviticus, Joshua and the “Canaanite destruc-
tion 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 Testa-
ments, 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 out-
lining 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 allevi-
ating suffering and responding to displace-
ment, 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 consider-
ing the implementation of biblical ethics at
the scale of the nation, including the chal-
lenges 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 “bet-
ter 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 set-
ing a high standard for inclusion of the dis-
placed; to illustrate how such work could
be possible, the authors draw on the his-
torical example of churches involved in the
global abolition movement (p. 204). Chapter
9 outlines a vision for addressing global dis-
placement, in which Western nations would
increase their humanitarian aid and resettle-
ment capacity to participate in “opportunity-
sharing” as “a matter of justice, of repen-
tance, 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 reset-
tlement does not fulfill obligations of care
and protection for all those in need, the
Glanvilles do argue that resettlement pro-
vides Western nations with a tangible enact-
ment 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 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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**REFERENCES**


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